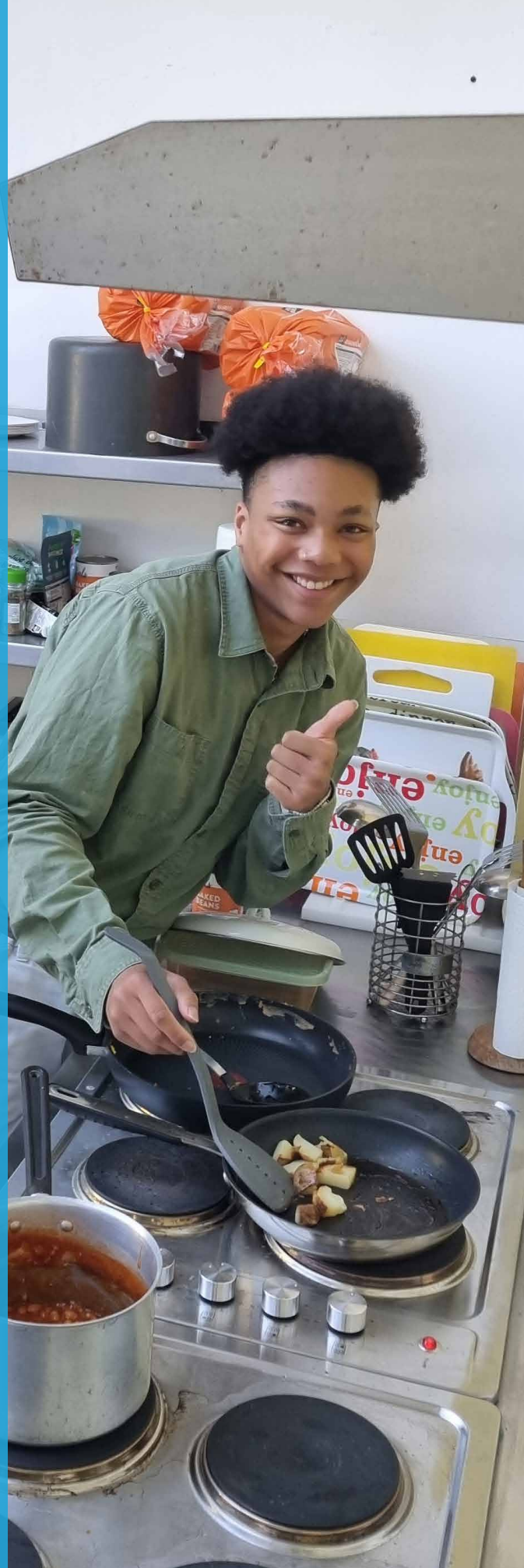


Peer Evaluation 2025

Peer research into
interdependence,
and how this works
across the House
Project community



CARE LEAVERS
NATIONAL MOVEMENT



NHP

Living connected and fulfilling lives

**Partnership
for Young
London**

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Introduction

Care Leavers National Movement (CLNM) is comprised of care leavers, from Local House Projects (LHPs), who come together in regional and national forums to share our insights and draw on our lived experience to improve the way that young people leave care and live connected and fulfilling lives. We do this in a number of ways with one of our aims being to carry out a biannual Peer Evaluation.

This year's Peer Evaluation, designed and conducted by us, the CLNM Peer Evaluation Group, looks at what young people do in their LHPs, and how the activities and experiences support them to live interdependent lives.

We found that young people have a positive view of their LHPs and that LHP facilitators make a big difference to the lives of young people. Facilitators help with life experiences including arranging work experience, setting up bank accounts and obtaining a passport.

For lots of young people, their LHP is their main community and this year we saw the development of parent-baby classes which young people really valued. We found that LHPs can play a powerful role in helping young people go out and meet new people. This helps broaden our support networks.

We found that there are different understandings of interdependence amongst staff and young people. As representatives (reps) we feel that if we help others, we are more likely to be confident in asking for and receiving help. We found that there are barriers to people asking for help, but we are confident LHPs can support young people to overcome these barriers. Supporting us to find out what we are good at means we know we have things to offer others, which makes it easier when we need to ask for support. This helps to build connections and to develop our communities, within LHPs, across the wider House Project community and in the wider communities where we live.

We have really enjoyed meeting young people and staff from across different LHPs and hearing about their experiences and ideas. We want to thank everybody that contributed to making this evaluation happen and the fantastic young people who have contributed to this evaluation. We couldn't have done it without you.

The CLNM Peer Evaluation Group





Key findings

- 1. Overwhelmingly positive experience of LHPs and their facilitators** - Almost all young people (90%) would recommend their LHP to others. In the survey and interviews, young people consistently (95%) described facilitators as helpful and dependable, but some staff noted the emotional toll of the role, reflecting on how support could be sustainable.
- 2. Stronger mental and emotional well-being** - Most young people (85%) said being part of their LHP improved their mental health, crediting regular check-ins and peer support. However, young people can still face challenges accessing mental health services.
- 3. Progress in Safety Plan awareness** - Compared to 2023, more young people (75%) have safety plans and are involved in shaping them. There is work to do to make this consistent across all LHPs.
- 4. Growth in independent living skills** - Nearly nine in ten young people reported improvements in managing their home and budgeting, though a few admitted they still feel unprepared for unexpected challenges like major repairs or sudden bills.
- 5. Interdependence is inconsistently understood** - Although many facilitators actively encourage peer connections and mutual support, it was clear from interviews that the understanding of the term interdependence is not uniform across LHPs. Some staff see interdependence as focusing on practical independence skills, while others define it narrowly as encouraging young people to ask for help.
- 6. Varied awareness of their Local Offer** - While some young people knew what they could access, others were unsure or confused, and a small number confused it with the Leaving Care Grant, suggesting communication needs to be clearer and more accessible within local authorities (LAs).
- 7. A strong culture of peer support** - Many young people frequently help others, fostering community spirit. Yet, some mentioned feeling they give more support than they receive.
- 8. Barriers to asking for help remain** - Reluctance to ask others for support is still common, particularly among those with negative past experiences in care, highlighting an area where change is needed to see asking for help as positive.





Recommendations

1. Increase understanding of interdependence for young people, staff and the wider sector.

Interdependence is part of the ORCHIDS (Ownership, Responsibility, Community, Home, Interdependence, Directions, Sense of wellbeing) practice framework, which is central to the House Project approach. NHP and LHPs will:

- Review and enhance ORCHIDS to develop a holistic approach for the House Project community, including for young people who have moved into their own homes.
- Develop resources that define interdependence clearly for staff and young people, including clear indicators and tools for reflection as part of personal and professional development.
- Reframe asking for help as a strength, fostering a 'help-friendly' culture through staff modelling and positive reinforcement.
- Provide care experienced young people with opportunities to share with others, including politicians and LA corporate parents, what interdependence means to them, what it means to feel connected to the community, and how this can be improved for all young people leaving care.

2. Develop stronger links for young people within their LHP community.

Young people feel more fulfilled when they are connected to their community. LHPs will:

- Provide opportunities for young people to do more things together so that they can find out what they are interested in and connect with other young people with similar interests. Connect with local clubs to offer 'supported first sessions', or young people to try new things together. Hobby clubs, arts clubs, sports clubs, could provide taster activities for LHP young people with a view to providing opportunities to join local groups. This could include making use of apps that link people together to take part in hobbies.
- Identify young people's strengths and develop a 'skills list' in each LHP for young people to support each other. For example, young people might be great at painting and decorating and offer to help with that. Others might be great cooks and offer to teach someone how to cook a particular meal.
- Ensure the ongoing offer to young people who have moved in is meaningful through regular communication and invitations to community events.

NHP and LHPs will:

- Strengthen our approach to ‘peer support.’ Peer support is highly valued. We will co-develop a framework approach informed by CLNM’s previous work on peer mentoring, enabling LHPs to have a structured but flexible approach to peer support.

3. Develop stronger links for young people across the House Project community.

The House Project community currently covers England and Scotland. Young people have said they like meeting young people from other LHPs. NHP and LHPs will:

- Organise more activities and events across LHPs to encourage young people to spend time together, develop connections and participate in a new hobby or develop skills. For example, we might run a photography competition across all LHPs.
- Support the development of regional or national social events or activities (cinema, trips, sports) that bring cohorts from different LHPs together. Young people and staff value being part of a community.
- Support CLNM to run a CLNM-led community day in each region for LHPs to invite all young people from that region to come together.

NHP and LHPs will:

- Develop the CLNM Alumni offer so that reps can stay connected through community events, WhatsApp groups, invitations to conference and newsletters.

4. Develop stronger links alongside young people with the wider community.

When young people move into their own homes, it’s important that they feel connected and part of their neighbourhood. A strong community is one where people support each other and feel they belong. LHPs will:

- Actively support young people to discover and connect with their community through local resources and networks.
- Support young people to develop skills and confidence to start conversations and maintain relationships with their neighbours and community. Staff should support and role model communication with others.
- Encourage young people to contribute to their community. All young people have good things to offer. Recognise and celebrate them. Support young people to identify their strengths and recognise what they can offer to their communities.



Methodology

This evaluation is all about hearing directly from young people in LHPs - what's working well, what could be better, and how the experience is helping them get ready to live on their own and be part of their community. This research followed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, meaning the people most affected by the issues explored were directly involved in shaping and delivering the research. One peer researcher explained, *"It's not just adults telling us what they think is important - we decide what matters and how to ask about it."*

The work was led by 9 CLNM reps from LHPs across England and Scotland, all of whom were trained as peer researchers. Their lived experience supported the research to reflect the realities of young people's lives.

We combined surveys, interviews, and discussions with staff to build a full picture. The survey reached a wide range of young people across 19 LHPs, while interviews gave space for more personal stories and detail. The approach was guided by four core principles:

- 1. Power sharing** - CLNM reps led the design of interview guides and survey questions, and had final say on key decisions throughout the process.
- 2. Mutual respect for expertise** - Reps brought a depth of knowledge from their journeys through LHPs, whether just starting out or already settled in their homes. Their perspectives shaped the research focus and approach.
- 3. Informed decision-making** - Reps received training in research design, ethical fieldwork, and data analysis to ensure they could contribute confidently and critically.
- 4. Maximum involvement** - Reps played an active role at every stage: setting research aims, designing methods, conducting interviews, analysing findings, and co-authoring this report.



Building skills to research Interdependence

CLNM conduct a peer evaluation every 2 years. On 14th March 2025, CLNM reps came together for a residential weekend to develop their skills as peer researchers and co-design the 2025 Peer Evaluation. This year, their focus was exploring interdependence - how young people build and sustain supportive relationships, contribute to their communities, and balance self-reliance with mutual support. The evaluation aims to understand the role interdependence plays in helping care-experienced young people thrive before and after they have moved into their own home.



Over the weekend, participants deepened their understanding of the ORCHIDS framework and how its principles link to interdependence, reflecting on findings from previous evaluations. They considered why research is important and explored the value of young people leading the process. Sessions covered the differences between qualitative and quantitative data, common research methods, and how to design effective surveys using a variety of question types, from multiple choice to Likert scales. Using these skills, they collaboratively created their own survey focused on interdependence.

The group also learned how to design and conduct interviews, write their own interview guides, and understand the importance of asking open, respectful, and purposeful questions. A strong emphasis was placed on research ethics and safeguarding, ensuring peer researchers knew how to keep themselves and their interviewees safe. By the end of the weekend, CLNM reps had not only built confidence in their research skills but had also shaped a study that places young people's voices at the heart of understanding how interdependence can strengthen the journey to adulthood.

Stage 2: Fieldwork

The fieldwork took place between May 2025 and July 2025, with a total of 225 young people in LHPs either taking part in an online survey or interviews conducted in person by peer researchers.

- **Age:** Participants were aged between 16 and 25. Most commonly, participants were aged 16 to 17 (44.4%), followed by 18 to 19 (33.8%), and 20 to 21 (14.7%). A smaller minority (7.1%) were aged 22 or older.
- **Gender:** The survey had a strong representation of both women (56.4%) and men (40.4%), with a small minority (2.7%) identifying as Non-Binary or Third Gender. This highlights a balanced gender representation but a limited inclusion of non-binary or other gender identities.
- **Ethnicity:** Just over seven in ten (71.1%) respondents were White young people, with the rest being most commonly Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (11.1%), Mixed/Multiple ethnicities (9.3%), or Asian/Asian British (6.2%).
- **Moved into their own home:** Just under half of respondents (46.2%) had already moved into their own home, while a small majority (53.8%) had not yet moved.
- **LHPs:** The survey had participants from 19 different LHPs across England and Scotland. Most commonly, participants came from Stoke-on-Trent House Project (16.0%), West Sussex House Project (12.0%), and Islington House Project (8.9%), followed by Bury, Rochdale and Oldham House Project (8.4%) and Warwickshire House Project (6.2%).

Alongside the survey, a total of 57 interviews were conducted across LHPs, involving both staff and young people.

- **Staff Interviews:** Fourteen members of staff participated, representing a range of roles across the House Project network. Each interview lasted on average 40 minutes, generating approximately 9 hours of audio.
- **Young People's Interviews:** Forty-three young people took part, representing a wide cross-section of LHPs. These conversations were designed to be concise and accessible, lasting around 20 minutes each and 14 hours of audio overall.

Together, the interviews produced an estimated 23 hours of recorded material. With the exception of around five interviews conducted online, the majority were carried out in person. All recordings were transcribed and anonymised to protect confidentiality, and the transcripts were shared with the peer research team who analysed the material to draw out key themes and select representative quotes.







1. The experience of being part of a LHP

"If you'd told me two years ago, I'd be living on my own, managing my money, and actually feeling positive about the future, I wouldn't have believed you."

The House Project didn't just give me a flat - it gave me a chance to figure out who I am, what I'm good at, and that I deserve good things. I'm proud of how far I've come, and I want other young people to get the same chance."

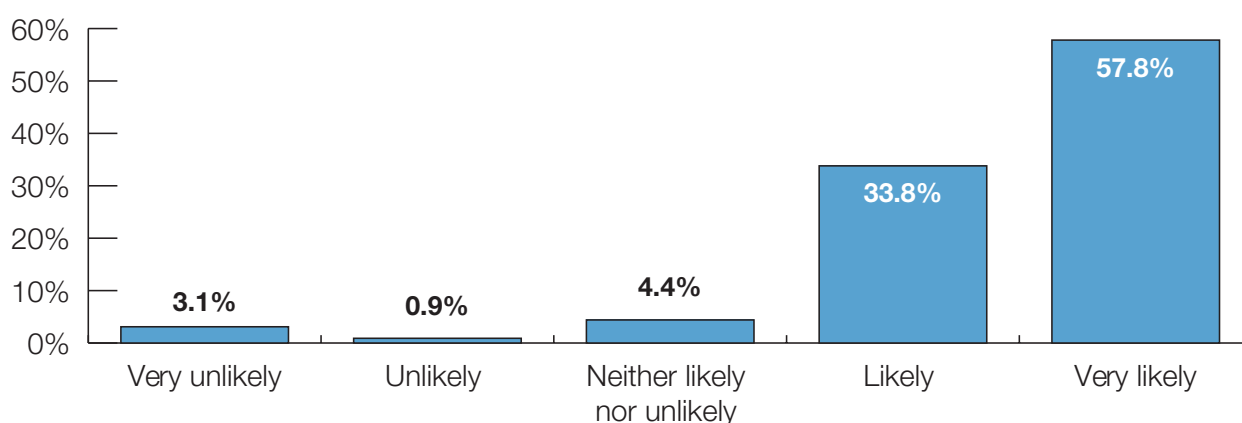
A positive experience of their LHP

Many young people join their LHP because it's recommended by a social worker - but many soon realise that getting their own home is only part of the LHP offer. As one participant reflected:

"At first, I joined because my social worker recommended it, but I ended up getting so much more than just a flat. I learned about budgeting, met new people, and got more confident."

In 2025, feedback was overwhelmingly positive. A total of 91.6% of participants said they were very likely (57.8%) or likely (33.8%) to recommend their LHP to another young person, with only 4% saying they would not. This is a small rise from 2023 (90.4%).

How likely are you to recommend being part of a LHP to another young person?



For many, the experience is transformative – taking them from a sense of uncertainty to a sense of stability.

"Before I joined, I thought I'd be on my own. The House Project showed me I could be independent but still have support."

Staff recognise this as the defining strength of the House Project approach:

"Community is our top priority now - it's what makes our project strong. Even little things, like making each other laugh, builds the sense of belonging."

The House Project approach represents more than a route to a physical house, it builds connection and community. For some, the LHP is the first place they have truly felt they belonged:

"The House Project gave me a place where I actually belonged. Before that, I never felt settled. Here, you're part of a group - there's always someone to talk to or just hang out with, even if you don't feel like talking."

“Growing up in care, I never really felt like I fitted in anywhere. I’d move schools, change families, and always felt like the outsider. Being part of House Project was the first time I really felt like I belonged somewhere. People actually get you, and you don’t have to hide your story. I started to see myself differently - not just as a ‘care kid,’ but as someone with strengths and a future. I’m proud of what I’ve achieved and who I’m becoming.”

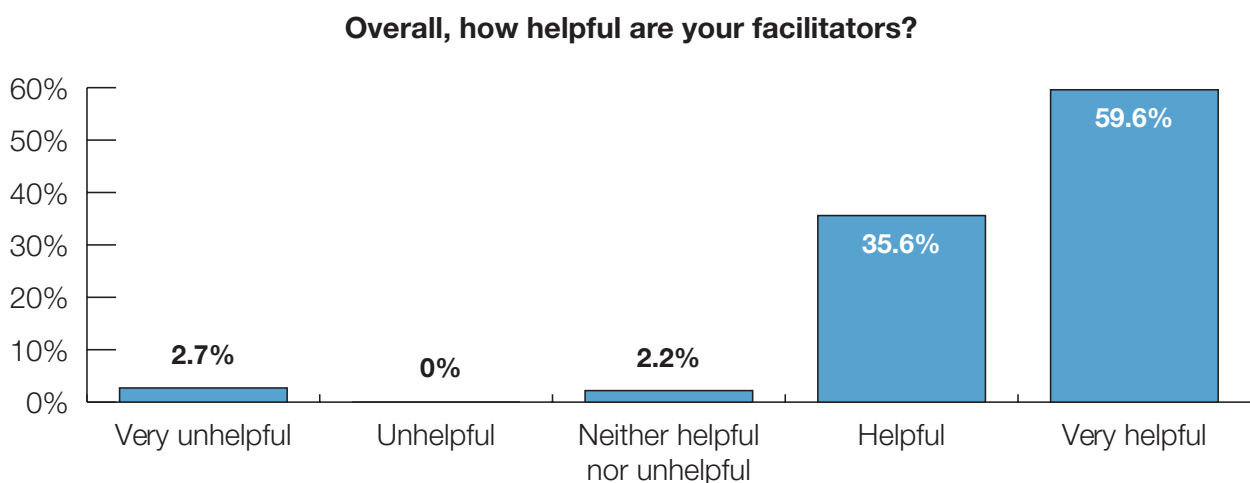
Importantly, that sense of connection often lasts well beyond young people moving in:

“When I finished, I thought that was it, but you’re still part of the project. Even now, I know I can reach out to staff or to other people from my cohort.”

Staff actively nurture this culture through group activities, peer connections, and a non-judgemental approach, ensuring that the bonds formed are both genuine and enduring.

Supportive and helpful staff

Purposeful, consistent relationships with facilitators remain at the heart of why young people view their LHPs positively. In 2025, almost all young people rated facilitators as very helpful (59.6%) or helpful (35.6%), with only a small minority describing them as very unhelpful (2.7%) or neutral (2.2%).



This reflects the value participants place on staff as a trusted and dependable source of support. For many young people, facilitators were supportive and helped them feel like individuals:

“It’s such a community; you always feel part of it, and that’s really special. Even if you go a long time without seeing or speaking to people, you just pick up from where you left off. I never really felt like I belonged anywhere before, but now I do. The staff don’t just care about you as a number - they want to see you do well, and you actually believe it.”



Many described facilitators as approachable, committed, and willing to go the extra mile:

“The staff really go out of their way to help. If I needed anything - bank account, passport, advice - they were there.”

“The staff really listen. If you’re struggling, they encourage you or check in.”

Facilitators themselves highlight the importance of these authentic relationships, and meeting young people where they are:

“It’s genuinely so good working here - the banter with the young people keeps things light, but the support is real.”

“What I’ve learned: stop putting people in boxes, meet them where they’re at.”

Facilitators are not simply delivering a programme; they become trusted figures, making it more likely that young people will seek help early and remain engaged. Interviews with both young people and staff showed that this combination of relational support, skill-building, and peer networks is often transformative - boosting confidence, developing practical skills, and creating a strong sense of belonging. This is particularly important for many young people coming from negative experiences of care:

“To be honest, I found it really hard to trust anyone at first. My experience in care wasn’t great - lots of different placements, lots of promises that never came true. When I joined the House Project, I kept waiting for something to go wrong or for people to give up on me. But over time, I saw that staff meant what they said and actually showed up for me. It took me a long time to believe that I could be safe here and that people wouldn’t just leave.”

This was reinforced by the sense from young people that this support would continue, in some form, after they moved into their property:

“Support doesn’t end when you leave the project. That makes it different.”

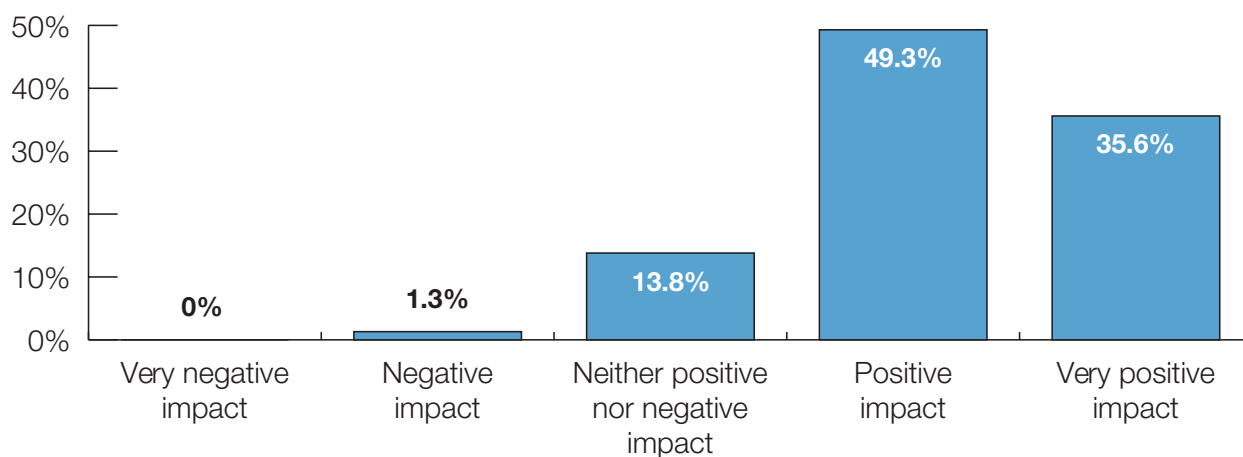
When asked who they would turn to for help with living independently, most young people put LHP facilitators (64.9%) in their top three. We heard about this from young people themselves, with facilitators going above and beyond to support young people with decorating, moving in, and a variety of non-emergency home tasks. Staff themselves saw authentic, trusting relationships as the foundation of effective support, with young people valuing genuine engagement over purely transactional interactions.

Staff noted that *“the most progress happens outside of formal sessions - when you’re giving someone a lift home, or just having a real conversation about life,”* and that *“if you only see young people as service users, you miss the bigger picture. They pick up quickly on whether you’re genuine.”* Everyday moments - *“a joke shared, a cup of tea made”* - were described as creating the foundation for real support, while *“sometimes just listening, really listening,”* was recognised as one of the most valuable skills staff could offer.

LHPs improve emotional well-being

In 2025, most participants (84.9%) reported that being part of their LHP had either a positive (49.3%) or very positive (35.6%) impact on their mental health, with only 1.3% reporting a negative effect.

What impact has your LHP had on your mental and emotional health?



This marks a notable improvement from the 2023 Peer Evaluation, when 75.6% said the project had a positive or very positive impact. For some young people, the LHP has been life-changing for their mental and emotional well-being:

"It got me back out in the community. I started seeing people again, attending important groups, and even learning the simplest things had a huge impact on my mental health. It made me feel more confident and safer in myself."

We heard how everyday emotional support helps young people feel noticed and cared for:

"When I was struggling with my mental health, they noticed and checked in on me. I've had other workers before, but nobody's ever gone the extra mile like they do here. I always know I can come back for advice or just to talk. That's made all the difference."



Demand for mental health services is increasing

While young people place high value on the emotional support offered by their LHP, many feel that formal mental health provision still falls short of what they need. Long waiting lists, limited counselling options, and uncertainty about where to access specialist help were recurring concerns:

“HP support is great, but I need therapy too.”

“Sometimes I need more help than just talking.”

Staff echoed this concern, noting the strain on their capacity:

“We’re stretched meeting emotional needs. Specialist support is still limited, and demand is increasing beyond our capacity.”

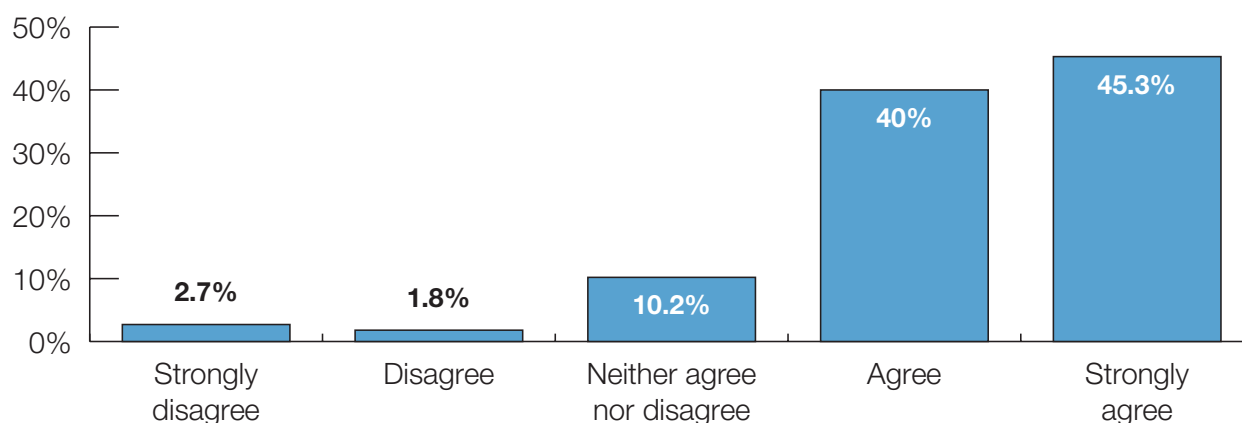
They emphasised the importance of building stronger partnerships with external mental health providers to ensure young people can access timely, appropriate support. Without this, there is a risk that LHPs’ informal, relational care - a key part of its success - could become overstretched. Expanding access to professional mental health services, alongside the trusted, day-to-day support already embedded in LHPs would ensure young people receive the full range of help they need to maintain their well-being and thrive.



Young people feel involved in decisions

In 2025, most participants (85.3%) felt involved in decisions affecting their lives, with 45.3% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing that they were included. A smaller group were neutral (10.2%) or felt excluded (4.5%), suggesting there is still room to strengthen engagement for some.

Do you agree or disagree with the statement: “I am involved in decisions about me”?



For many young people, their LHP is one of the few places where their voices genuinely shape what happens:

“For once, I felt like my opinions mattered. Staff actually asked what I thought - about activities, rules, even changes to how the project runs. Sometimes it feels like decisions get made over your head, but here they try to involve you and take your views seriously. That’s not something you get everywhere.”

While overall feedback was highly positive, the main areas identified for improvement were greater involvement in decision-making, especially in choosing a greater range of activities:

“Sometimes I felt like decisions were made without asking us, but most of the time, staff listened and included us.”

“I wish there were more activities, but I know everyone’s busy. When we do get together, it’s always worth it.”

Staff acknowledged these points but emphasised the practical realities:

“When young people ask for more activities or community, we listen, but there’s only so much we can do with limited money.”

“I think what makes our project work is the constant back and forth with young people—we’re always asking for feedback, even if we can’t always give them everything they want. The biggest thing they’ve asked for is more activities

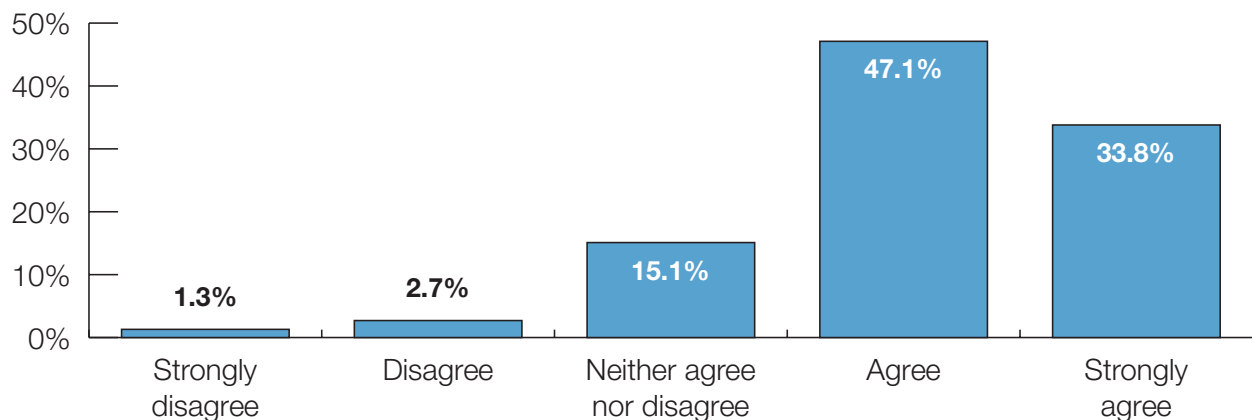
and opportunities to build community, but with the budget we've got, that's a challenge. Still, seeing them light up on group outings, or just being together, is worth all the extra effort."

These challenges have been raised in previous evaluations and appear to be structural - linked to funding and capacity - rather than a lack of willingness from facilitators. Despite these constraints, LHPs continue to place a strong emphasis on listening to young people and involving them in shaping their LHP wherever possible.

Designing a Safety Plan with young people

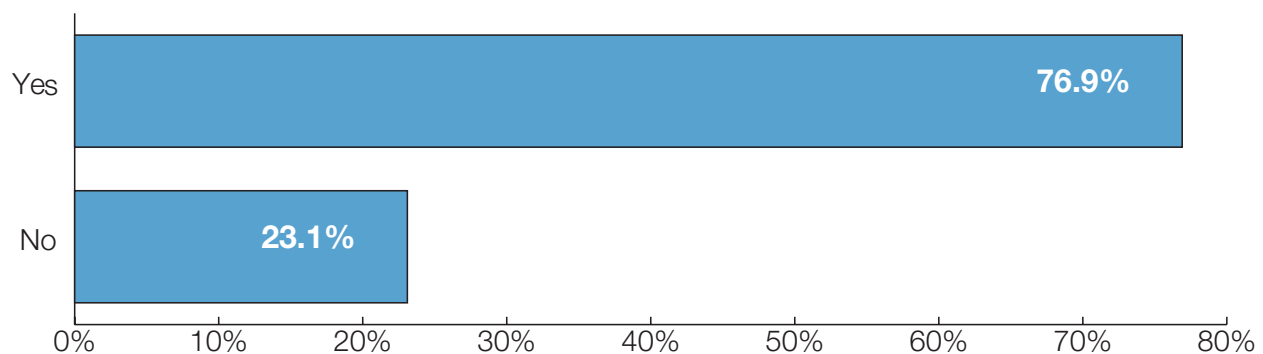
A Safety Plan is a core part of the House Project approach, which should be designed with young people when they begin with their LHP, revisited during their time with the LHP, and again when they move into their home. While the majority (80.9%) of respondents agreed (47.1%) or strongly agreed (33.8%) that they felt safe in their homes, about 4% felt unsafe, highlighting the importance of a safety plan.

Do you agree or disagree with the statement: "I feel safe in my home"?



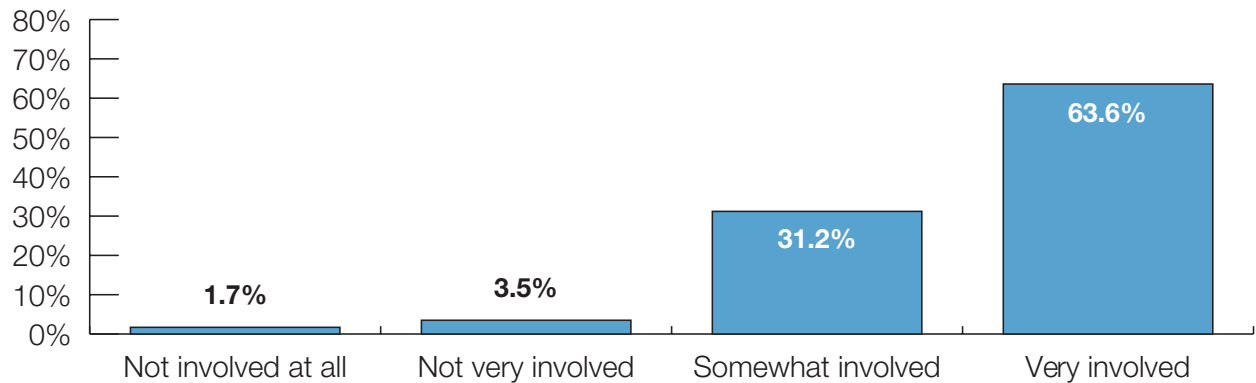
A safety plan should be tailored to meet each young person's individual needs. As one young person said: "I don't use my safety plan every day, but it's good to have."

Do you have a safety plan?



Most young people in 2025 said that they had a safety plan (76.9%), This marks clear progress over previous years. In the 2023 Peer Evaluation, safety plan awareness and involvement were identified as inconsistent and in need of greater emphasis.

For your safety plan, how involved were you in creating it?



In this Peer Evaluation the majority reported being very involved (63.6%) or somewhat involved (31.2%) in its creation, reflecting strong engagement in safety planning. Only a small proportion reported minimal or no involvement, highlighting an area for potential improvement. This evaluation confirmed an improvement in both uptake and participation.

“We do have these safety plans and usually when you’re in one-on-one sessions with your facilitator, you can be open and honest and I’ve been involved with all my safety plans and it’s great to be part of something where I have a say.”





2. From Independence to Interdependence

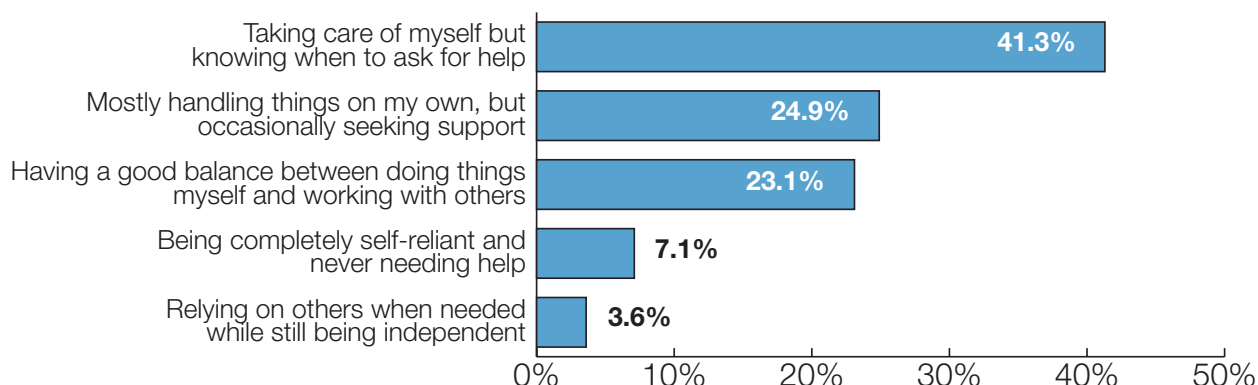
“Independence to me means more than just living on your own. It’s being responsible for everything: paying the bills, making sure the flat is clean, budgeting for food and emergencies, and deciding what you want to do with your life. At first, it was overwhelming.

But with support, I learned to budget and make better choices. I still mess up sometimes, but I feel a lot more in control. It’s scary, but it’s the most rewarding feeling when you realise you can handle it.”

The meaning of independence

Interdependence in the ORCHIDS framework was originally independence until the Peer Evaluation in 2021, which found that aiming for Independence could be a barrier to young people asking for support. To understand a young person's journey to interdependence, the peer researchers first wanted explore how young people and staff understood the term independence.

What statement below best describes what independence means to you?



Young people across the LHP community hold a broad but shared understanding of what independence means, with most rejecting the idea that it requires complete self-sufficiency. Most commonly (41.3%) young people described independence as being able to take care of themselves while knowing when to seek help, while others defined it as mostly managing alone but occasionally asking for support (24.9%) or finding a balance between self-reliance and cooperation (23.1%).

"Being independent doesn't mean being perfect. It just means taking responsibility for yourself."

"You can't do everything alone all the time, even if you want to. There are things - like dealing with the boiler or big bills - that you need help with."

Only a small minority (7.1%) saw independence as total self-reliance without ever needing support, suggesting that interdependence and openness to receiving help are widely valued. Young people were highly aware that independence was a journey, a continual process of trying to do things yourself but making mistakes and asking for help:

"I still get things wrong, but I learn from it. That's part of being independent."

"I learned that it's OK to try and fail. The House Project helps you get back up."

This perspective is reflected in how the House Project approach frames independence: as a step-by-step journey supported by guidance and safety nets, rather than a sudden leap into full autonomy. Young people expressed how this approach eases pressure, saying:

"Independence doesn't mean you're on your own," and "I like knowing I can still ask for help."

Others noted how their mindset had shifted: *"I used to panic, now I know it's okay to get support,"* and *"It's a step-by-step thing, not overnight."* Staff reinforced this philosophy, with one explaining, *"We teach independence as supported growth,"* and another adding, *"Gradual steps stop young people feeling overwhelmed."*

Staff noted that *"Scaffolding makes independence sustainable"* and that reassurance plays a key role: *"They thrive when reassured that help is there."* By embedding support into the process, the House Project approach not only builds skills and confidence but also reduces anxiety around failure, helping young people see independence as achievable.

Staff understanding of independence

Staff in LHPs reported a clear and thoughtful understanding of what independence means, seeing it as more than simply *"doing everything on your own."* They described it as a mix of self-reliance and knowing when to reach out for support, challenging the common misconception that independence means never asking for help. As one explained, *"Independence is being able to solve a problem without relying on someone else, using your initiative."* This mindset was paired with what they often referred to as *"tough love,"* where they gradually stepped back while still being available when needed. Another staff member put it simply:

"It's tough love sometimes - you can't always do things for them, but you can't leave them to sink or swim either."

They celebrated small milestones - such as making a phone call or completing an online shop - as significant progress, recognising that everyone's journey was different.

"Even little steps - like making a call or going shopping - are huge milestones."

"There's this misconception that independence means doing everything by yourself, but in reality, most of us rely on others in small ways. I try to break that down with the young people, so they know it's okay to ask for support, even if they're technically 'living independently.'"

Staff also said independence is key to preparing young people for adult life - but the way it's understood can sometimes hold them back. For some, independence means doing everything alone, which can make it harder to ask for help when it's needed.

"Some young people are fiercely independent, but that can mean they're afraid to reach out when they need to."

"There's this misconception that independence means never asking for help; we try to break that idea down."



The shift to Interdependence from Independence is one that is already reflected in the practice of facilitators, who often already reframe independence as being able to handle challenges while also recognising when to seek support.

"We have to teach them it's okay to ask for help, even if the goal is independence."

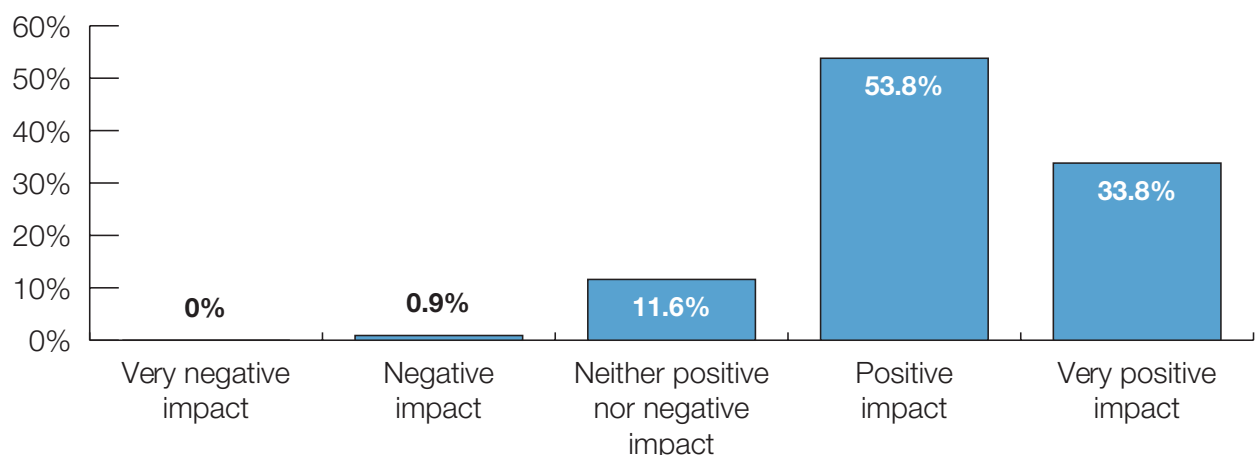
Skills development equips young people for independence

Many young people talked about how daunting living independently could be, and the amount of learning it required of them. One person reflected:

"I knew living alone would be hard, but I didn't realise how many little things you have to figure out - like reading gas meters, sorting out Wi-Fi, or just knowing when to take the bins out. The first time my boiler broke, I panicked and thought I'd have to move out!"

A significant majority (87.6%) stated the LHP positively impacted their independent living skills, with many experiencing positive (53.8%) or very positive (33.8%) changes.

What impact, if any, has the LHP had on you living independently?



This demonstrates the effectiveness of the programme in preparing young people:

"Living independently means handling your own finances, pay your own bills, and work things out without relying on carers or social workers. I think I'm finally at that stage."

The learning and support for young people from their LHP often spoke to the challenges that they face living alone. This was reflected by the variety of comments by young people about what they found most useful:

"I got advice about tenancy agreements and what to do if things went wrong."

"The most useful support has been sorting out my bank account and dealing with the council."

"My facilitator listens and helps me with anything I need - passport, bank account, even just a chat."

Survey responses indicate that the House Project approach extends beyond practical skills - it also builds self-confidence. Many participants described feeling more capable of handling challenges on their own. This self-assurance was often linked to having successfully navigated tasks they had previously found intimidating.

"I was terrified of moving out, but the House Project gave me the skills I needed. It's not as hard as I thought once you know what to do."

"Before, I'd have panicked if I had to deal with a bill or a problem with my flat. Now I feel like I can sort it, and if I get stuck, I know who to ask."

"I learned not to panic. There's usually a solution if you give it a minute."

Staff recognised this support as a crucial part of their role, not just teaching practical skills but being there to troubleshoot and build confidence in young people. A facilitator noted:

"It's not just about them being able to do something - it's about them believing they can do it, even if it's the first time."

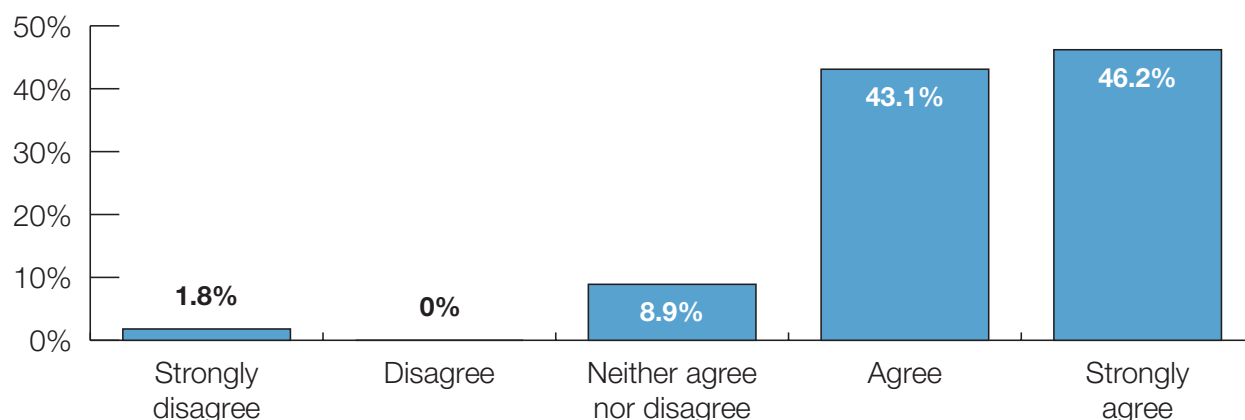
Several young people spoke about how completing the House Project Programme (HPP) felt like a rite of passage. Moving into their own home was a tangible marker of independence, and doing so with the LHP's support made the process less overwhelming.

"I'd be lost without the practical support. There's so much you have to deal with - letters from the council, bills, finding out about grants or benefits. The staff explain everything and help you do it, instead of just doing it for you. That way, I actually understand it for next time. It's made me feel way more confident about handling things on my own."

Regarding preparation for independent living, young people (89.3%) overwhelmingly recognised the LHP's positive role, with nearly all participants agreeing (43.1%) or strongly agreeing (46.2%) that it helped them prepare effectively for living independently. As one person reflected:

"I used to think I'd never manage on my own. I was scared to even cook for myself, let alone sort out rent and bills. The House Project gave me the chance to practice - staff were always there to explain things, but they also let me try and make mistakes. I know now that being independent doesn't mean never needing anyone, but being able to sort things out, or know where to get help, when you really need it."

Do you agree or disagree with the statement: “Completing/doing House Project Programme has helped me/is helping me to prepare for my own home”?



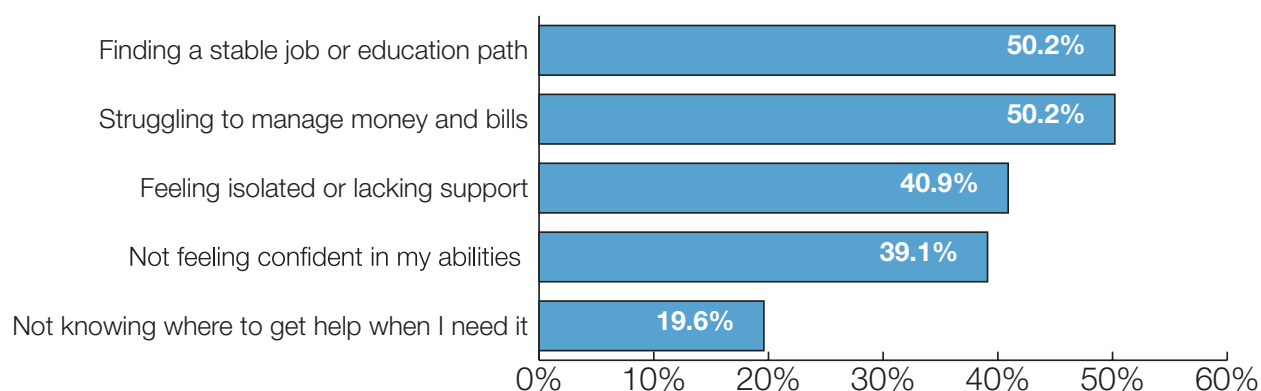
The House Project approach was most effective for young people when it combined these practical skills to live independently with a holistic approach to supporting young people:

“The support I’ve had from House Project staff has been life-changing. They helped me sort out my bank account, benefits, and tenancy, but it’s more than just the practical stuff. When I was struggling with my mental health, they noticed and checked in on me. I’ve had other workers before, but nobody’s ever gone the extra mile like they do here. I always know I can come back for advice or just to talk. That’s made all the difference.”

The challenges to independence

When asked about the biggest challenges they might face when living on their own, young people most frequently highlighted two areas of concern: finding a stable job or education path (50.2%) and struggling to manage money and bills (50.2%). These equally high response rates suggest that both financial stability and secure employment or training are seen as fundamental to sustaining independence.

What are the two biggest challenges you think you may face when it comes to living on your own?



A significant proportion also expressed worries about emotional well-being, with 40.9% anticipating feelings of isolation or a lack of support, and 39.1% not feeling confident in their own abilities to manage independently. This indicates that challenges are not solely practical or financial but also rooted in self-belief and connectedness.

“Living by yourself can make you feel lonely. That’s the hardest part, especially if you don’t know anyone nearby.”

A smaller yet still notable group (19.6%) reported uncertainty about where to access help when needed, highlighting potential gaps in awareness or accessibility of support services. Taken together, these findings suggest that preparing young people for independence requires not only financial and career readiness, but also building resilience, confidence, and awareness of support networks to reduce the risk of isolation and crisis.

Systemic housing delays and issues can undermine progress

Getting a safe, stable home is an integral part of the House Project approach - but in many areas, long waits and limited housing options are slowing young people down. Staff stressed how these structural issues shape the journey:

“Structural things make a big difference - here in [Local Area], it can take ten months just to get a flat. Some young people get frustrated because they feel ready to move forward, but the system holds them back. All these factors make the journey...more complicated.”

Young people shared the same frustrations. *“I waited ages to get my place - it was stressful,”* said one, while another told us, *“I felt stuck and couldn’t move forward until I had my own home.”*

Staff recognised that these issues weren’t about motivation or skills - they were about the wider housing shortage. *“Housing in [Local Area] is awful - some wait up to ten months for a flat, which delays their independence,”* said one practitioner. Another noted, *“Frustration grows when young people feel stuck - especially if they’re ready but external barriers slow them down.”*

As one staff member put it, *“We support them but can’t fix systemic delays.”* These delays mean motivated and prepared young people are often left in limbo, unable to take the final step towards living in their own home.

For the one LHP that provides shared housing, living arrangements didn’t match their readiness:

“Living in shared housing didn’t help me practice what I learned.”

Others observed that *“shared housing can create conflict”* and *“motivation can dip while waiting.”*







3. Interdependence at LHPs

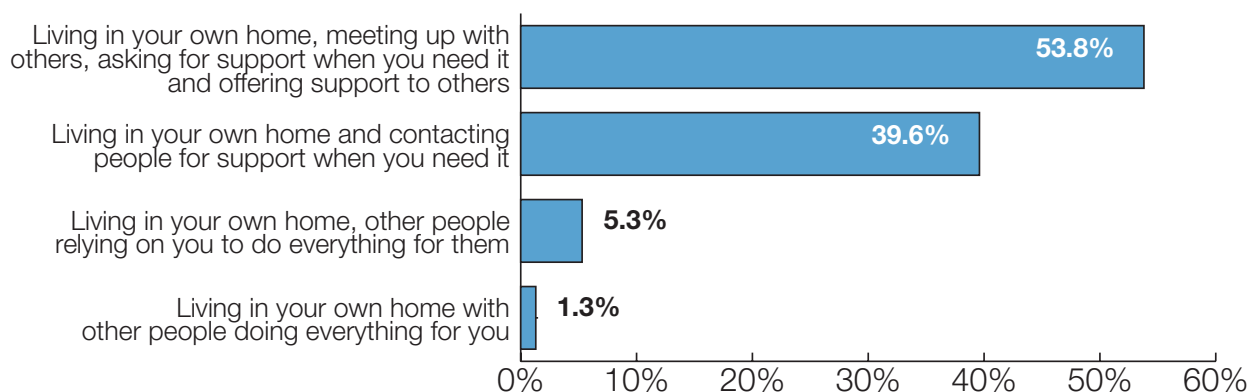
“I’d never heard the word ‘interdependence’ before, but now I get it. It’s knowing that you don’t have to do everything alone, and that’s not a weakness.”

I support other people - helping them figure out budgeting or just listening if they’ve had a bad day. Other times, I’m the one asking for help, and nobody judges you for it. We’re all learning together, and it’s normal to need advice or backup. I think it makes everyone stronger.”

Young people understand interdependence

Most respondents (53.8%) described interdependence as living in their own home, meeting up with people regularly, asking for support when needed, and offering support to others. This reflects a balanced and reciprocal view, where autonomy is paired with ongoing social connection and mutual exchange.

When you think of interdependence, which of the following best describes it:



Another 39.6% saw it as living independently while contacting others for help when required, highlighting the importance of having a safety net but without explicitly including the act of providing support to others. Only a small proportion held one-sided perspectives: 5.3% defined it as others relying on them for everything, and 1.3% as others doing everything for them. These minority views suggest that most young people do not associate interdependence with dependency, whether giving or receiving.

Young people sometimes found the term “interdependence” harder to understand, being less straightforward and layered compared to other ORCHIDS. One facilitator noted:

“Most young people know what independence means, but interdependence takes more explaining.”

However, in interviews, we found that young people’s understanding of interdependence was often far more nuanced and expansive, extending beyond the LHP into wider community connections. As one young person explained,

“At first, I thought asking for help meant you’d failed at being independent, but now I realise that even adults need each other. Sometimes, it’s just practical - like when the boiler breaks, or if you’re confused about council tax. Other times, it’s about having someone to talk to, so you don’t get lost in your head. I’ve learned that being able to ask and give help is part of growing up.”

Young people spoke about interdependence not just as a willingness to ask for help, but the connections they had beyond the LHP - with neighbours, friends, and their local community.

Staff understanding of interdependence

Facilitators at LHPs commonly understood interdependence as the ability to rely on others when needed, framing it not as a weakness but as a normal and essential part of life. As one put it:

“Interdependence is relying on others when you need help - it’s not weakness, it’s reality.”

Understandably, staff often focused on interdependence in practical terms, relating it to their practice - namely ensuring that young people felt comfortable to reach out for help. Staff often worked to challenge the “blurry line” some young people saw between asking for help and failing at independence, encouraging them to reach out “whether to peers or staff” and emphasising that “everyone needs help, and giving help makes the group stronger.”

Their focus was frequently on tangible acts - helping with tasks, resolving disagreements, or sharing knowledge-rather than the deeper emotional or reciprocal connections some young people described. Staff reflected that “not all young people stay in touch or support each other after moving out, but the group sessions lay the foundation,” and that role-modelling by both facilitators and older young people was key to embedding the idea. As one summed it up:

“We could do more to teach what interdependence really looks like.”

Staff also noted that interdependence overlapped very closely with other elements of ORCHIDS, like community and that it was “hard to separate in practice.” One facilitator said that they did not know what the word meant, and could not define it, while one described it as more “academic” and “harder to understand” than the other ORCHIDS elements. There was also a lack of consistency between facilitators, and between LHPs about what interdependence meant in practice:

“Even among staff, there are times when we debate what independence or interdependence really means in practice. It’s not always clear cut.”

“Having a common language or set of definitions would make training new staff easier and help us support young people more consistently.”

There was often a practical consideration for staff - how to successfully shift from independence to interdependence, without young people becoming dependent. However, most understood the steps needed, as one facilitator explained:

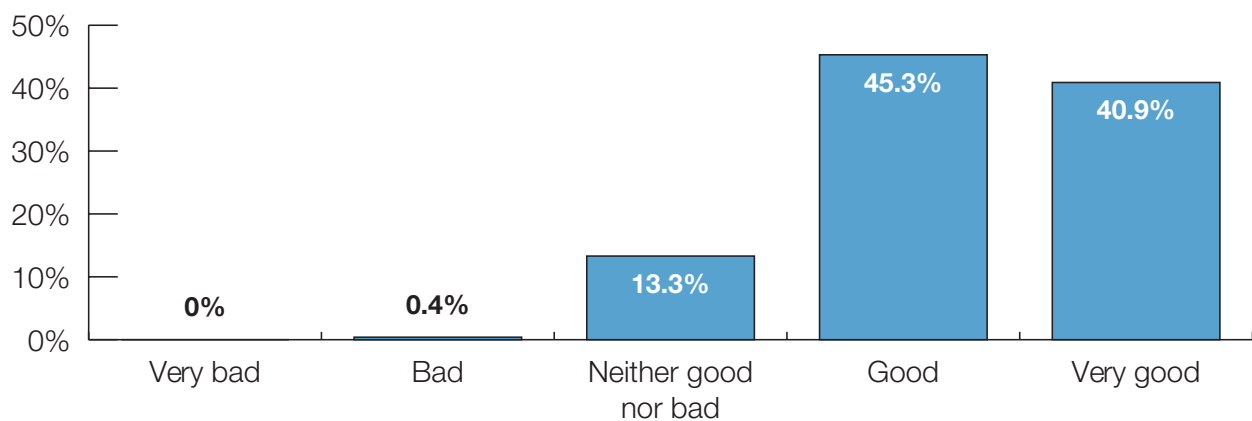
“One of the biggest challenges is helping young people move from depending on us for everything to being confident enough to try on their own. We never push someone further than they’re ready for, but we do encourage them to stretch a little. It’s not about ticking boxes; it’s about building confidence and resilience.”



Building interdependence between peers

Most young people (86.2%) rated the support they receive from their LHP facilitators in connecting with other young people as either good (45.3%) or very good (40.9%), showing a strong overall endorsement of facilitator-led connection building.

Rate how LHP facilitators help you connect with other young people in your LHP:



A smaller group (13.3%) rated it as neither bad nor good, indicating a neutral experience, while only one respondent (0.4%) gave a negative rating, and none rated it very bad.

“The biggest thing I’ve learned is that it’s okay to ask for help, and that failing doesn’t mean you’re finished. The staff and other young people here pick you up and help you try again. I wish there were more projects like this, because it actually works. I’m more confident, more independent, and I know I can face whatever comes next.”

These results suggest that facilitators are highly effective in fostering peer connections, with over four in five participants giving a positive rating. The almost complete absence of negative ratings highlights that facilitator efforts are not only well-received but also consistent across the participant group, making peer connection a clear strength of the House Project approach.

In interviews facilitators saw building interdependence between young people as one of LHPs’ greatest strengths. They worked to create relationships where participants relied on, motivated, and learned from each other.

“The young people motivate each other - when one gets a job, others want to follow.”

Group activities - especially cooking sessions, shared meals and trips - were used to encourage collaboration and mutual support. Facilitators often used activities to *“let connections develop naturally.”* For example, in the one LHP where there is shared housing a facilitator cited house meetings as *“crucial”* for *“airing feelings and sorting*

out issues.” In the LHP, staff also paired housemates carefully, mixing cohorts so older members could mentor newer ones, and encouraged participation in activities beyond the house. Residential were also repeatedly cited as pivotal moments by both facilitators and young people. One young person described how they transformed group dynamics:

“The residential brought everyone closer. Even people who didn’t get along before ended up being friends.”

Others emphasised the practical life skills they had gained at a residential:

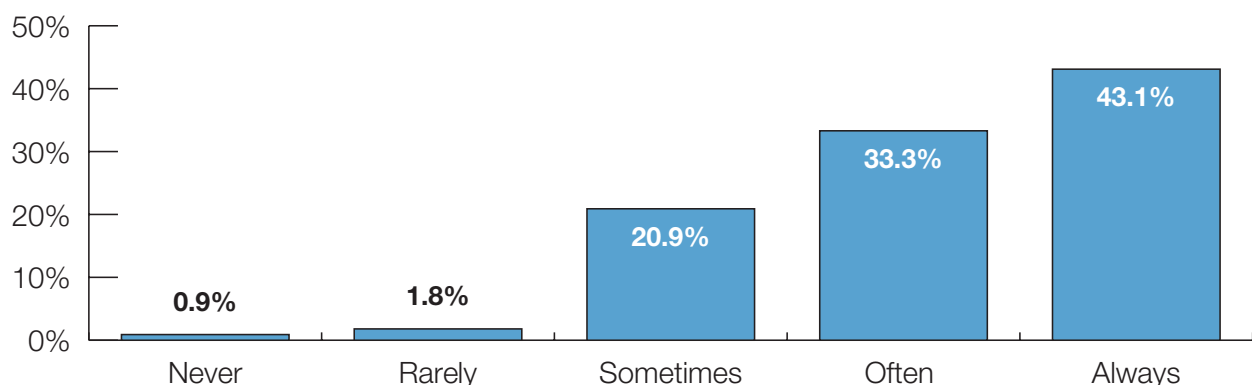
“I made a lot of friends. It was very helpful - I got to learn how to cook and try new experiences. The residential was probably one of the best parts.”

Peer support builds mutual confidence

Most young people (76.4%) reported frequently offering support to others, with 43.1% saying they always do so and 33.3% saying they often do. A further 20.9% provide help sometimes, while very few said they do so rarely (1.8%) or never (0.9%).

We found that young people have a huge willingness to support others. Young people

How often do you support/help others (friends, family, peers) when they need support?



would often say that it “feels good” to support others. One participant explained:

“I know I can message people from my group if I’m stuck with something. Sometimes they’ve had the same problem, so they know what to do.”

Another highlighted the emotional side of peer support:

“It’s good to talk to someone who’s been through the same stuff. They get it in a way other people don’t.”

This culture of young people supporting each other led to the development of skills like confidence and leadership, with many taking either formal or informal leadership roles - supporting younger people entering their LHP for the first time.

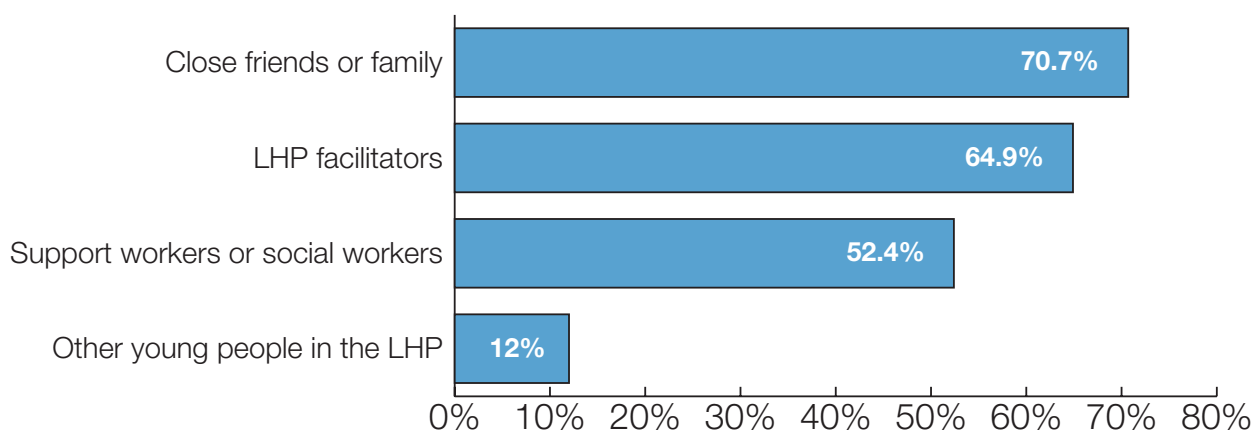




“After joining, I started to notice new people coming in and looking lost-just like I was at first. I remembered how much it helped me when someone explained things, or just said hi. Now, when someone joins, I try to check in on them, show them around, or let them know they can talk to me. It feels good to be that person for someone else. It’s not about being a leader, just about making sure nobody feels left out or like they have to do everything alone.”

However, while young people often support each other, they were less likely to turn to each other for help related to their own home. Close friends or family were the most likely source of help (70.7%), followed closely by LHP facilitators (64.9%) and support or social workers (52.4%). Fewer young people said they would turn to other young people in the LHP (12%).

If you needed help living in your own home, who are you most likely to ask for help from?

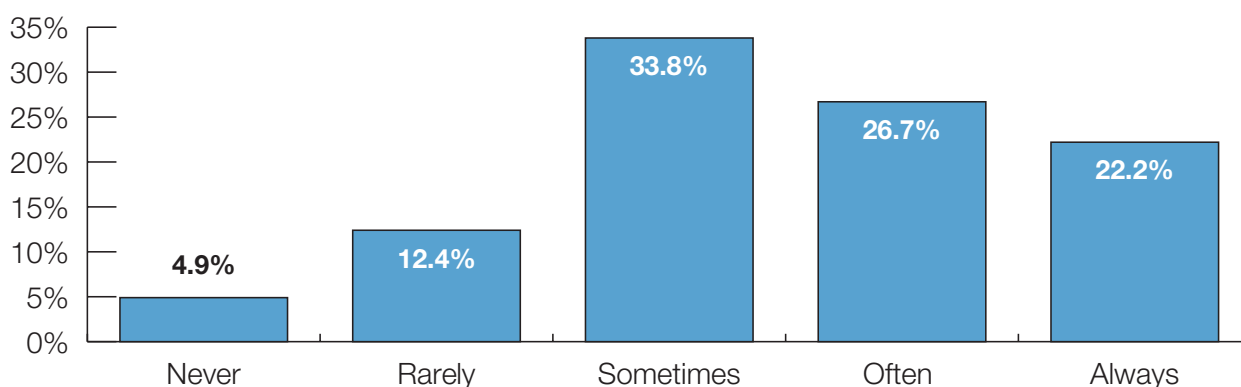


Staff also spoke about the peer-to-peer relationship between staff members, describing a strong culture of shared learning, where informal exchanges are often as valuable as formal training. As one staff member put it, *“some of my best strategies have come from chatting with colleagues or watching how they handle challenges - formal training is great, but real-life sharing is better.”* This ongoing exchange of tips and experiences reflects the belief that *“no one has all the answers, so we rely on shared wisdom,”* with young people’s perspectives also recognised as a vital resource: *“they often teach us new ways of looking at things, or come up with solutions we’d never consider.”* Ultimately, *“it’s a team effort, and the more we collaborate, the better support we can offer.”*

Barriers to asking for help

Most young people (86.7%) reported feeling comfortable asking for support at least some of the time, with 33.8% saying sometimes, 26.7% often, and 22.2% always. A smaller proportion were less confident in seeking help, with 12.4% saying rarely and 4.9% saying never.

How often do you feel comfortable asking others for support/help when you need it?



These results suggest that while a majority are open to seeking support, comfort levels vary significantly, and only around one in five consistently feel confident doing so. As one young person explained:

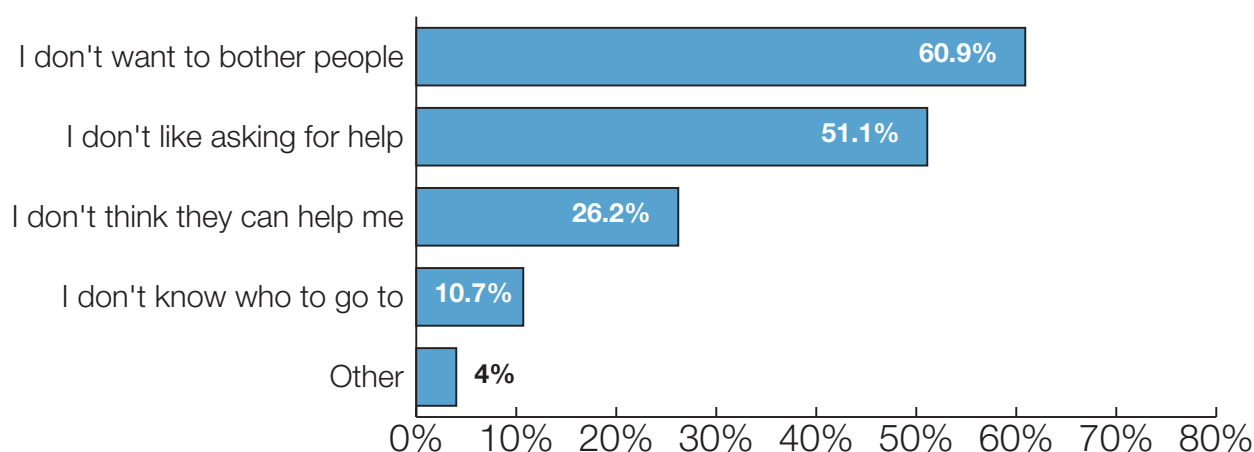
"It's hard for me to ask for help, but I'm learning that it's better than bottling it up."

Those in the 'sometimes' category may be selective about when and whom they approach, which could reflect varying trust levels, past experiences, or a desire to remain self-reliant. The minority who 'rarely' or 'never' seek help may face barriers such as stigma, fear of burdening others, or a lack of trusted relationships. This was often a challenge with young people who had recently joined their LHP and who had a negative experience of services in care:

"Sometimes it's not about not wanting help-it's just too hard to ask. Like, there's so much paperwork, or you don't know who to go to, or you've tried before and got nowhere. After being knocked back so many times by services, you stop bothering. Even with House Project, it took me ages to trust that if I asked for help, I'd actually get it, and not just get sent away with a leaflet or told to wait. If things were simpler, I'd probably reach out sooner."

When asked to select the reasons that might prevent them from asking for help, young people could select more than one answer. The most common answers were not wanting to bother others (60.9%), and disliking asking for help (51.1%).

What might prevent you from asking for support/help when you need it?



Over a quarter (26.2%) said they might not ask because they don't think the person could help, while 10.7% said they don't know who to go to. A small proportion (4%) cited other reasons.

"I was embarrassed to ask for help at first, but now I see everyone needs it sometimes."

"There's pride in doing things yourself, but also in knowing when to get support."

These findings highlight that reluctance to seek support is more often tied to personal attitudes and perceptions rather than an absence of available help. The two most common barriers suggest strong concerns about burdening others and discomfort with the act of asking itself, which may be rooted in past experiences, self-reliance values, or stigma around needing help. The perception that potential supporters may not be able to help could reflect low confidence in others' skills, reliability, or understanding of their situation. Meanwhile, those unsure who to turn to may have smaller or less accessible networks.

Addressing these barriers could involve normalising help-seeking as a strength, promoting reciprocal support so asking is seen as part of a balanced relationship, and building trust in available support networks. Facilitators and peers could model and reinforce positive experiences of seeking and receiving help, while also ensuring young people know exactly who they can approach for different types of needs. This would help shift attitudes from *"I'm burdening someone"* to *"I'm part of a mutual support network."*



4. Interdependence with Local Services

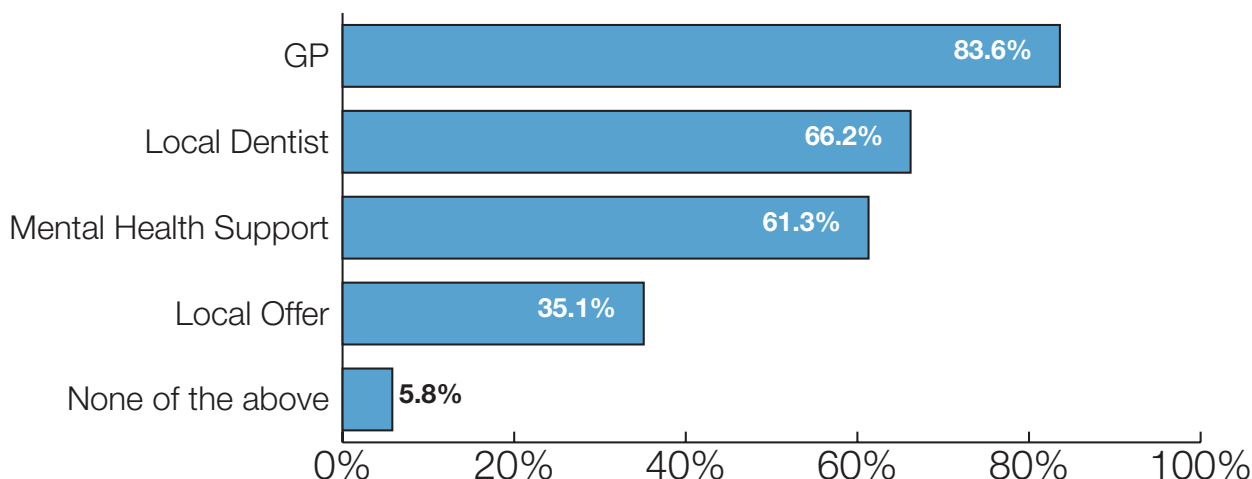
“If you’d told me two years ago, I’d be living on my own, managing my money, and actually feeling positive about the future, I wouldn’t have believed you.”

The House Project didn’t just give me a flat - it gave me a chance to figure out who I am, what I’m good at, and that I deserve good things. I’m proud of how far I’ve come, and I want other young people to get the same chance.”

Accessing key services and support

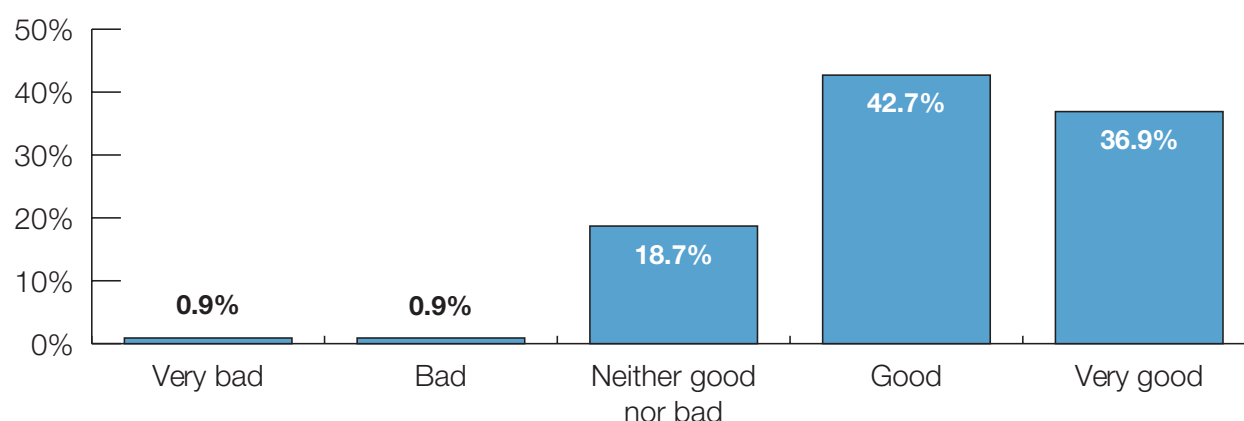
Young people understood interdependence as their ability to access support from key services locally. Confidence in accessing key local services was generally strong, with the majority of young people reporting that they knew how to connect with essential professionals. Most felt confident in accessing a GP (83.6%), a dentist (66.2%), or mental health support (61.3%).

Which of these could you confidently access if you needed them?



Most young people rated the support from LHP facilitators in helping them connect with professionals such as GPs, dentists, and social workers as good (42.7%) or very good (36.9%). Nearly one in five (18.7%) gave a neutral rating, while only 1.8% combined rated the support as bad or very bad.

Rate how well facilitators help you connect with professionals (GPs, Dentists, Social Workers):



Facilitators work with young people to build their confidence in accessing these key services, emphasising that their support is always highly individualised, adapting to the needs, confidence levels, and starting points of each young person. *"We adapt to what each young person needs - no one-size-fits-all,"* one facilitator explained.

For some, this meant offering step-by-step guidance on basic tasks like making a phone call, shopping, or registering with health services. One facilitator said:

“Support is always tailored to the young person’s needs. Some come in confident and independent, others need step-by-step help with things like making phone calls or going shopping. We use role-play a lot - if someone is nervous about calling the GP or dentist, we’ll practice together, or I’ll make the first call while they listen in. It’s about breaking things down into manageable steps and being there as backup if they need it.”

Mental health support was seen as equally important to practical skills, with lists of services kept in many LHP bases and a constant effort to normalise asking for help.

“Mental health support is always on our minds; we have lists of services in every house,” explained one facilitator from the one LHP that uses shared housing, adding that sometimes progress started with something small, like getting out for a walk or tidying a room together. However, feeling confident about accessing services didn’t always mean young people could use them easily. Many were dissatisfied with the services they did reach, particularly mental health support. One young person explained:

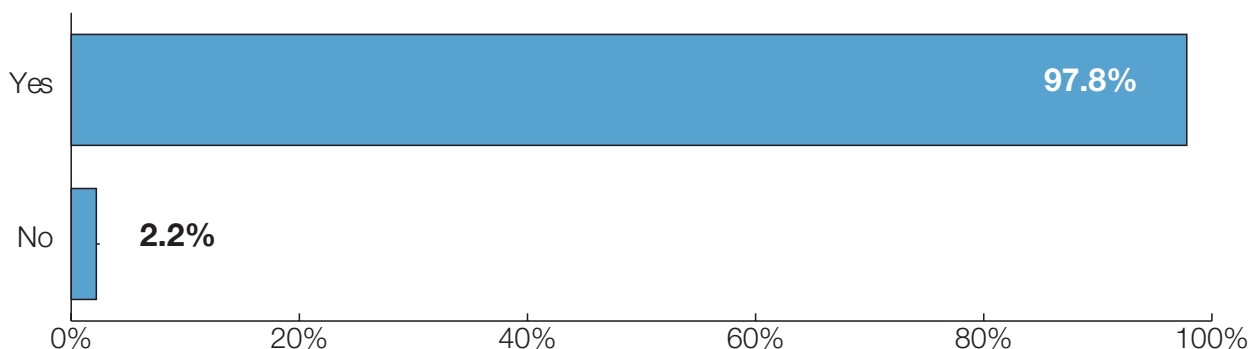
“I know how to get the support, just sometimes it’s hard to access or gain that support because...it’s hard to get on waiting lists...the doctors, it’s hard to actually get through to them.”

This sentiment reflects a common frustration: knowledge and confidence in how to access services is not enough when structural barriers, such as long waiting times or difficulties contacting professionals, remain in place. As one facilitator said:

“We often have to explain to young people why things are slow or why certain support isn’t possible, even when it seems obvious it should be. It’s disheartening when bureaucracy gets in the way of progress.”

It highlights the importance of not only ensuring that young people know the right channels to access help, but also advocating for systems that are responsive, timely, and easier to navigate. However, awareness of how to reach social workers or personal advisers was almost universal, with 97.8% saying they knew how to obtain this support – reflecting that young people have a strong understanding of the formal systems available to them.

Do you know how to get support from your social worker/personal advisor?

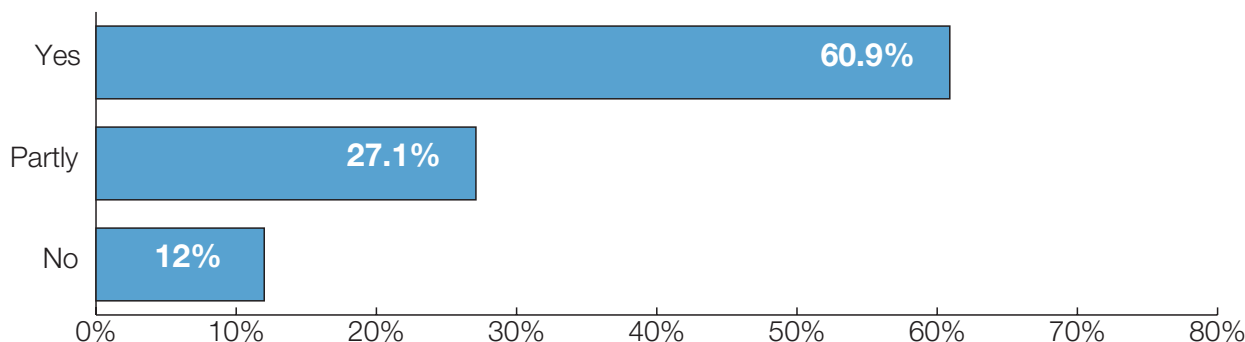




Understanding the Local Offer

Making the Local Offer available and understood by young people is a LA requirement and is a key focus of Ofsted inspections. LHPs help young people live connected and fulfilling lives by sharing their Local Offer and supporting young people to access it.

Have your facilitators explained what your Local Offer includes?



Facilitators had explained the Local Offer in full to just over half of young people (60.9%), partly explained it to 27.1%, and 12% of young people could not recall it ever having been explained. Many young people might have had a facilitator explain the Local Offer but forgot or mistook it for something else. Even when information was provided, engagement with it was inconsistent. One young person said:

"I got sent a link from my leaving care worker when I moved into my flat. I can just sort of go off whatever it says on there. I've not actually read it, to be fair."

Some young people also confused the Local Offer with other forms of support, such as the Leaving Care Grant. As one admitted, *"I know that there's money. That's all I know."* In other cases, there was no recognition of the term at all, as shown in one exchange:

*"Have you heard of your Local Offer and do you know how to access it?"
"A local what..? I don't know what that is."*

While most young people had at least some awareness, over a third had only partial or no understanding at all - highlighting the need for clearer, more consistent communication to ensure all young people are fully informed about the support available to them. One facilitator admitted:

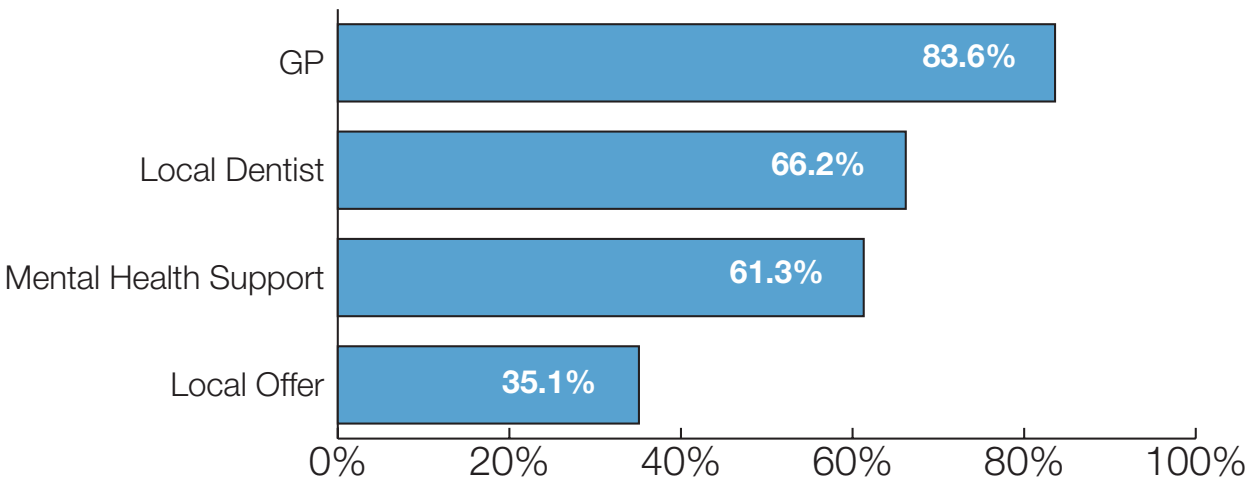
"I don't think young people are that aware of the Local Offer. It's something that we should probably discuss more within the House Project as well, if I'm honest. Yeah, I think it's something that we could work on. I mean, what they get offered - for example, the free gym membership - that's brilliant. A lot of young people can benefit from it. But I think it's something that we need to be more vocal about, so that young people do have an awareness of what things are available to them."

The Local Offer also varied in different LAs on quality, variety, and accessibility. This was reflected in the variety of facilitators’ experiences - made harder by the constantly changing and updating nature of the Local Offer. However, there was a clear desire from facilitators to improve this:

“If I could change anything, it would be the way entitlements are explained and shared. Most young people don’t know what they’re allowed to access when they move in. We do our best to tell them, but the process could be clearer and more consistent.”

Only 35.1% felt confident accessing Local Offers independently, with most being far more confident accessing GPs, Dentists, and even mental health support. We found that often young people were overwhelmed by the complexity and variety of Local Offers. One young person admitted, *“I’ve heard of it but don’t know how to use it.”*

Which of these could you confidently access if you needed them?



This gap leaves entitlements underused and highlights the need for guided practice. One facilitator wanted to work with the LA to design a clear guide on how to access the Local Offer, while others wanted more support from the council to engage young people.





5. Interdependence with the Community

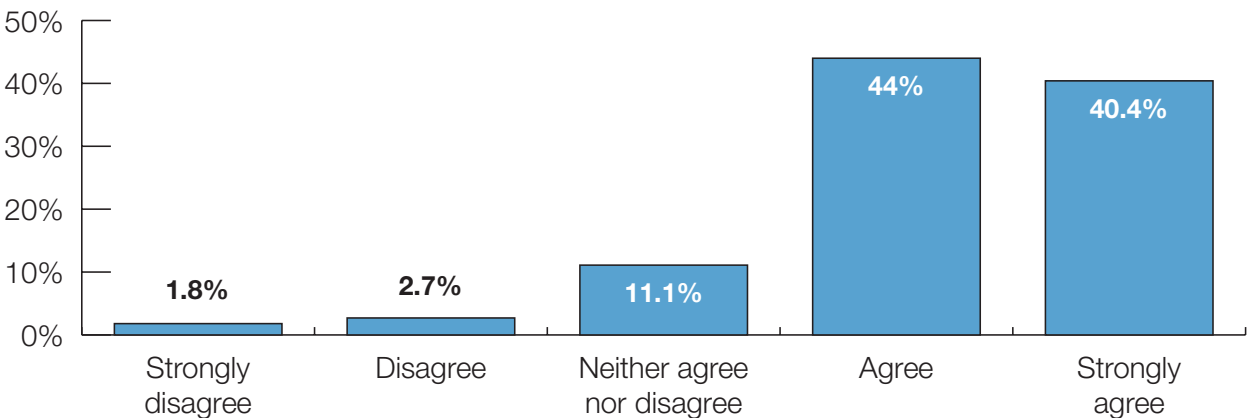
“Moving into my own place was a massive change. I had to leave my old friends behind and start again. At first, I only talked to people from House Project, but over time, I started saying hello to neighbours and joined a group at church.”

It’s still hard sometimes, especially when you don’t know anyone, but the staff encouraged me to get involved. Now I have people in my life from outside the project too, and that’s helped me settle in more.”

Support outside of LHP

Most young people (84.4%) agreed (44%) or strongly agreed (40.4%) that they have people outside of their LHP they can turn to for support when needed, showing that the majority feel they have external networks they can rely on.

Do you agree or disagree with the statement: “I have people outside of my LHP that I can turn to for support when I need it”?



A smaller group (11.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting uncertainty or mixed experiences, while only 4.5% combined disagreed or strongly disagreed.

This reflected that some young people in LHPs may not have people to support them, especially if they move to an area that is far from their friends or family. One young person shared their experience of isolation, but also the importance of having connections outside of their LHP:

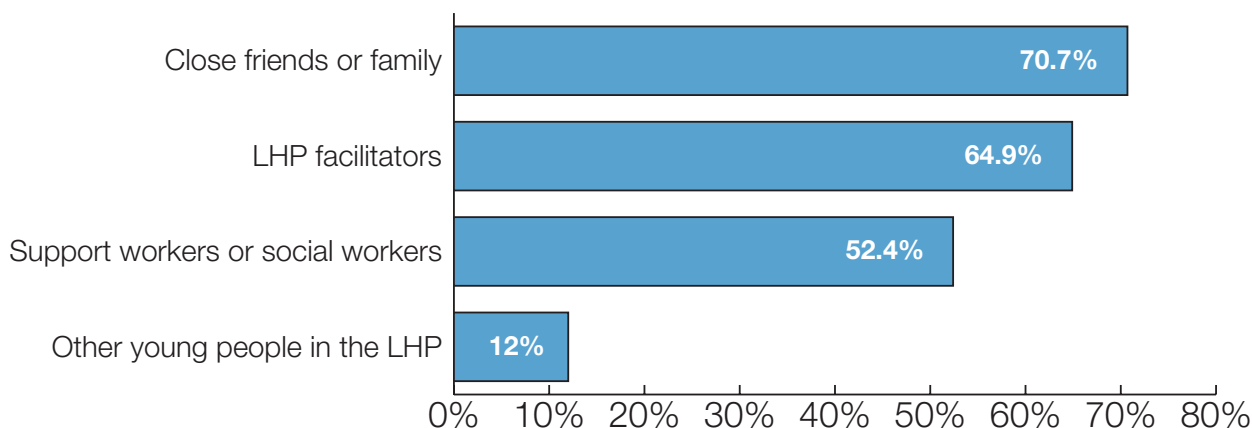
“I’m close to my family, but they live in a different town, so most of my support comes from the project and the friends I’ve made here. I’ve tried to make connections locally, like joining football or going to community events, but it takes time. Sometimes I feel a bit isolated but having even one or two people to talk to outside of House Project makes a big difference.”

We found that many young people are still developing these wider networks or have limited trust in external sources of support. Strengthening pathways to community groups, peer networks, and trusted adults outside of the LHP could help ensure all participants feel confident in their ability to access support from people in their community.

Family and friends

Close friends or family were the most common source of help (70.7%), followed by support or social workers (52.4%). Far fewer young people said they would turn to other young people in the LHP (12%).

If you needed help living in your own home, who are you most likely to ask for help from?



This suggests that while professional support is valued, trusted personal relationships outside formal services play the most significant role when young people need help at home. The low reliance on peers within the LHP may indicate that these relationships are more social than practical, or that young people feel peers are in similar situations and may not have the capacity to help. As one young person explained:

"It depends on the issue. If it's something small, I'll probably ask my friends or family if it's something I know House Project can't help with. I'll ask a social worker or support worker or something. Yeah, but if it's something to do with the flat or anything that, the House Project can help with. I'll go to them."

These findings suggest that, while the LHP plays a significant role, family and long-term friendships remain central in many young people's lives. However, interviews revealed a more complex picture - for some, family support is limited or inconsistent, while for others, friends have taken on a family-like role. One young person reflected:

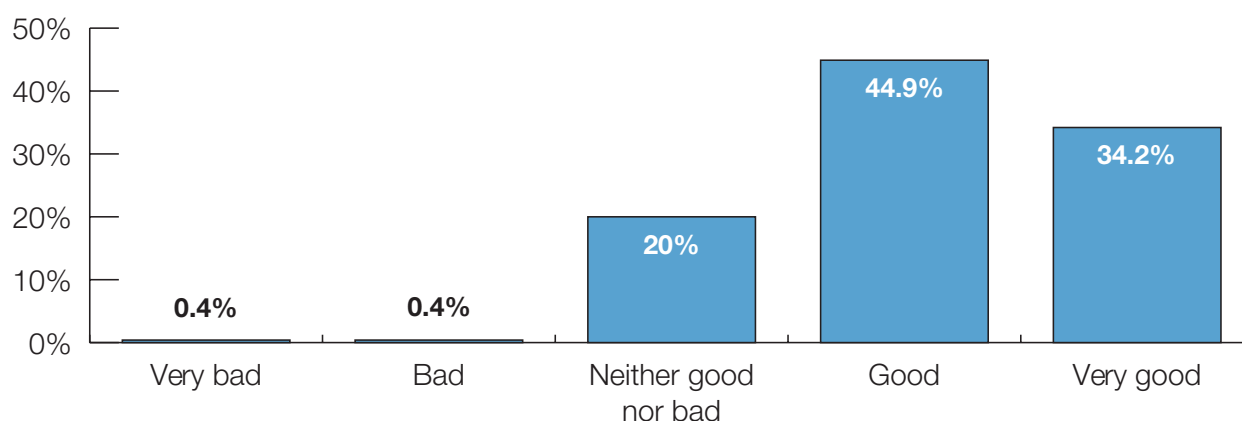
"I don't really talk to my family much, but I have a couple of close friends I've known for years. They're the ones I go to first."

Others described a more mixed experience:

"Sometimes my family's there for me, sometimes not. That's why I like having the House Project too - it's another place I can get support if things go wrong."

Staff recognised that for some participants, the LHP was filling gaps left by strained or absent family relationships. In such cases, the LHP's role in building alternative support networks was seen as vital.

Rate how LHP facilitators help you connect with people in the wider community:



The most common way that staff felt they could support young people to gain connections outside of their LHP was through supporting them into employment or education, where they could make friendships. Young people spoke about facilitators helping with job applications, college enrolments, and interview preparation.

"I'd never done an interview before. My facilitator practised questions with me and gave me tips. I got the job."

Community participation

Beyond family and friends, facilitators provide support for young people to make connections in their local community. Most young people (79.1%) rated the support from LHP facilitators in helping them connect with people in the wider community as good (44.9%) or very good (34.2%), showing that the majority experience this aspect positively.

One in five (20%) rated it as neither bad nor good, suggesting a more neutral impact, while only two respondents (0.8% combined) gave a negative rating. Many young people cite their LHP as their community: *"House Project is my main community, really. Most of my friends are from there"*. However, some young people only make connections within their LHP, and have fewer connections with people in the wider community:

"Community events through House Project brought us together, but outside of that, I don't do much."

There is a clear desire from many to make those connections, but young people often feel anxiety about meeting new people and entering new spaces, and therefore need support to do so:

"I'd like to get more involved in my community but need support to do it."

Beyond work and education, LHPs encourage young people to engage in community life. This might mean joining local clubs, volunteering, or simply becoming a familiar face in the neighbourhood. For those who became involved in local activities, the benefits went beyond meeting people:

"I started volunteering...It gave me something to do, and I met loads of people."

"Volunteering gave me a sense of purpose and something to look forward to."

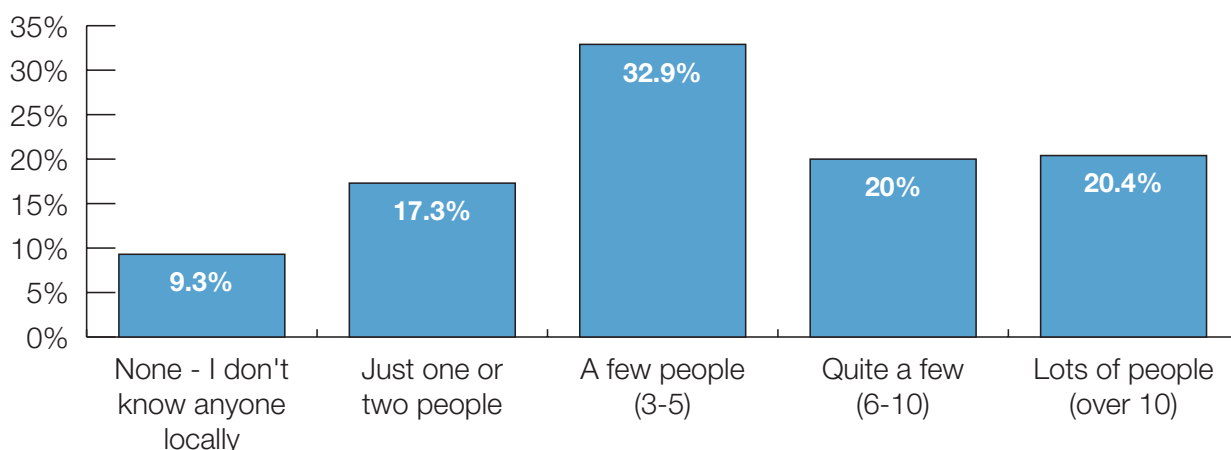
"I do litter-picking sometimes with my church group. It's a small thing, but it makes me feel useful."

Staff recognised that not all young people were immediately ready to dive into community engagement, especially if they had experienced frequent moves or felt unsafe in their area. Building confidence and identifying activities that genuinely interested each individual were seen as key strategies.

Knowing neighbours

When asked how many people they know well enough to greet in their local area, 32.9% of young people said they knew a few people (3-5), 20.4% knew lots of people (over 10), and 20% knew quite a few (6-10). Smaller proportions knew just one or two people (17.3%) or no one locally at all (9.3%).

Thinking about where you live now, how many people do you know well enough to say hello to when you see them?



Some young people, often with the support of facilitators, had reached out to their neighbours when moving in and made connections where they lived:

"I have a chat with my neighbour every time he comes down and tries to take the bins out, and I just have a chat with him because he'll take the bins out, he'll take both our bins out and then I'll put the bins back in. I'll just talk to him, ask him how his day is, if he's went to work. It's good to do it as well."

Even these small interactions could provide huge benefits, allowing young people to feel safer and more comfortable where they live, and a greater sense of belonging:

"Just saying hi to my neighbours makes me feel more part of where I live."



For some, moving to a new area for their tenancy meant starting from scratch socially, which could be isolating. This can be compounded by a lack of opportunities in their local area, and practical issues like transport costs. For a few, social anxiety or past negative experiences made it difficult to trust new people. One young person shared:

"It's hard to make friends when you've moved so much. You don't know if you're going to be here long enough to make it worth it."

"When I moved, I left all my old friends behind. It's hard making new ones in a different area."

Staff emphasised that building community ties is not always straightforward for young people with care experience, who may have moved frequently in the past or been placed in areas without existing support networks.

"When I first moved, I didn't know anyone. It took a while, but through House Project events and just getting out in the area, I've met more people."

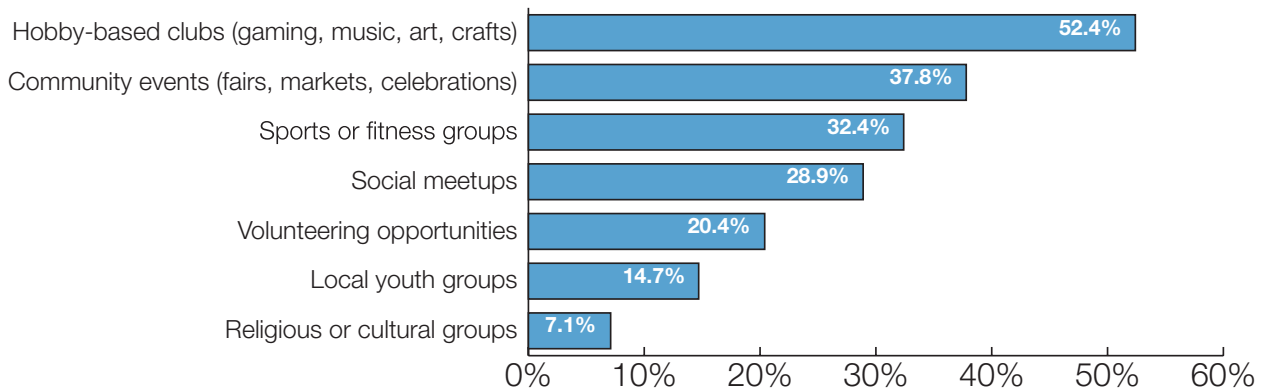
There was recognition that supporting young people not just to know their immediate neighbours, but to be familiar with the physical environment around them had huge benefits to their confidence and sense of belonging. This was especially important for those who were new to the areas they were living in, as one facilitator explains:

"A lot of our young people say that just knowing where things are - like the local shops, bus routes, or leisure centres - makes them feel more part of the community. For unaccompanied minors or those who've just moved here, it's even harder. But I've seen some beautiful things happen, like a group of unaccompanied young people finding each other through their faith and forming their own little support network."

Young people want a wide variety of community activities

One way to build connections beyond their LHP is for young people to participate in activities in the community.

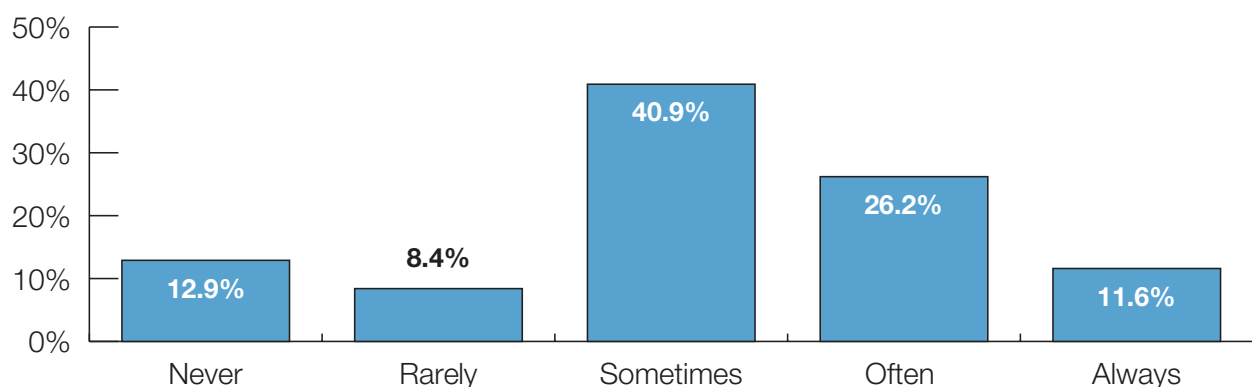
Which two community activities or groups interest you most?



The most popular community activities for young people were hobby-based clubs (52.4%), followed by community events such as fairs and markets (37.8%) and sports or fitness groups (32.4%). Smaller but still notable interests included social meet-ups (28.9%) and volunteering opportunities (20.4%). Less interest was shown in local youth groups (14.7%), religious or cultural groups (7.1%), and other activities (6.2%). The strong preference for hobby-based clubs and events indicates a desire for spaces where they can connect through shared interests, develop skills, and enjoy themselves without heavy commitment.

Young people described wanting a richer mix of social, cultural, and recreational experiences. As one explained, *"I'd love more trips, like cinema or sports - things that get us out together,"* while another said, *"It's not just about learning skills; doing fun things helps you feel part of something."* Others spoke of wanting opportunities such as *"art classes or volunteering - stuff that connects you to the community"* and shared that they feel more confident trying new things with LHP support: *"I feel braver trying things if HP is there to support it first."*

How often do LHP facilitators sign-post or accompany you to local activities?



Most young people (78.7%) said LHP facilitators sometimes (40.9%) or often (26.2%) signpost or accompany them to local activities, while 11.6% said always. Smaller groups reported rarely (8.4%) or never (12.9%) receiving this type of support.

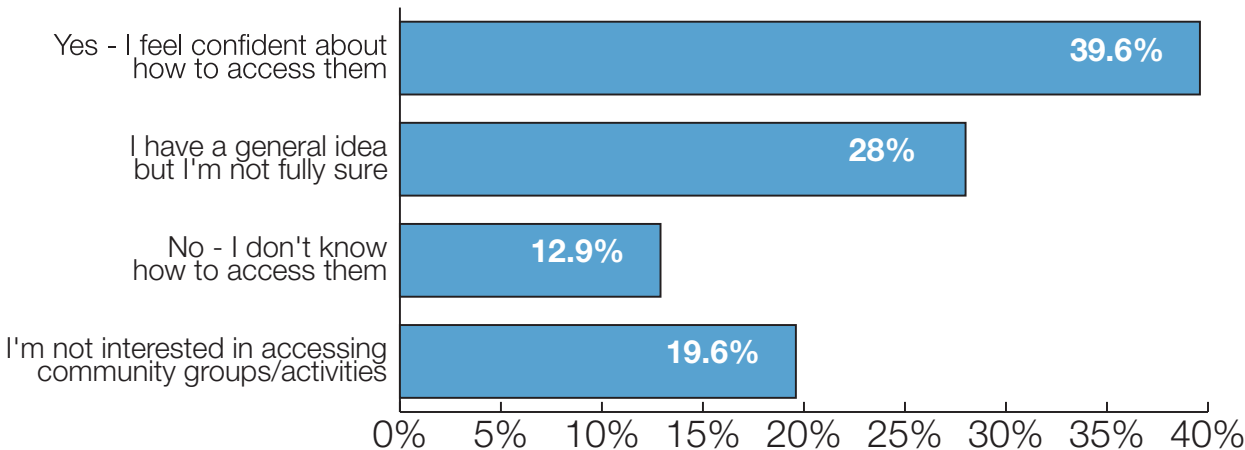
“I look online or ask staff what’s happening in the area.”

These findings suggest that facilitator involvement in connecting young people to local activities is relatively common but not universal. While over three-quarters have at least occasional support, the proportion who never or rarely receive it indicates there may be missed opportunities-either because the young person does not seek or want it, or because facilitators prioritise other forms of engagement.

The barriers to accessing activities

Most commonly young people said that they felt confident (39.6%) that they knew how to access local community groups or activities. However, a further third (28%) were not fully sure, and 12.9% did not know how to access them.

Do you know how to access local community groups or activities that interest you?



This suggests that while young people may be signposted to activities and groups, many of them lack confidence to access them. One in five (19.6%) also did not have interest in accessing them, but in interviews this was often about young people not yet finding something that they were interested in. As one person reflected:

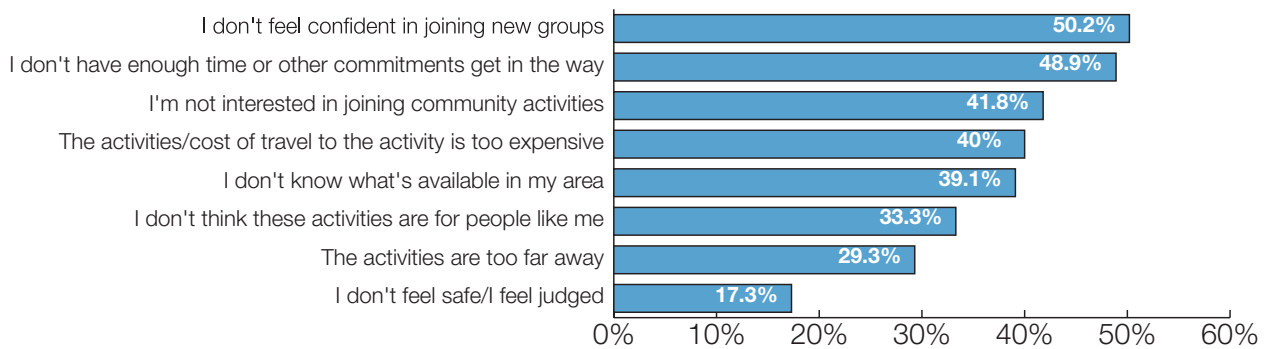
“I don’t take part in any groups at the moment, but I’m looking for something that fits me.”

Not feeling confident in joining groups was the most common barrier (50.2%) for young people not wanting to participate. This was often about confidence to meet new people:

“My confidence is getting better, but I still worry about meeting new people.”

“It’s hard to join clubs when you don’t know anyone.”

What are the top three reasons for not participating in community activities?



This lack of confidence was sometimes related to not feeling safe or feeling judged (17.3%), and not thinking activities were for people like them (33.3%). As one young person reflected:

“Most of my social life is still through the House Project, but I want to get more involved in the community. The problem is I’m not very confident, and sometimes the groups are full of older people or people who already know each other. It would help if there were more things aimed at people my age or if staff could introduce us to local activities.”

Other significant barriers included lack of interest (41.8%), cost of activities or travel (40%), and not knowing what's available locally (39.1%), while smaller proportions cited activities being too far away (29.3%).

“There aren’t many activities for young people where I live.”



The role of staff building connections outside LHPs

Staff recognised that helping young people build relationships beyond the LHP was both essential and one of the most challenging parts of their role. As one explained:

“Helping young people build connections outside the project is one of the hardest things we do. Many are anxious about joining new groups or activities, especially if they don’t know anyone or feel like they don’t belong. I often end up Googling clubs or community groups with them, because I’m not from the area either. Sometimes I’ll go along to the first session to help them settle in, but even then, it’s a big step. Success stories are rare - most stay within their networks of care-experienced friends or people from the House Project.”

While they regularly encouraged participation in community activities, volunteering, or local clubs, these efforts were often met with hesitation, and successes were usually small but meaningful. *“A lot of our successes are small - just helping someone attend an event is a win,”* said one facilitator. Staff emphasised that these moments mattered because they represented an important step toward confidence and independence.

A recurring theme was the importance of familiarity with the local area in building a sense of belonging. *“When they know how to use public transport, find the shops, or know the area, they start to feel at home,”* one staff member noted, adding that even simple knowledge - like where the bus stops are - could make a big difference. For some young people, forming connections happened naturally through work, college, or neighbours, as another LHP facilitator explained: *“Some form strong bonds with neighbours - borrowing tools or just chatting outside the flat.”* However, for unaccompanied minors or those new to the area, the process was harder, though there were positive examples: *“Our unaccompanied young people often find their own communities through faith or cultural groups.”*

Barriers were consistent across different contexts. Financial costs were a significant hurdle, with staff noting that *“if clubs or activities aren’t free, most can’t go.”* Social confidence was another factor: *“The fear of the unknown is often the biggest barrier to connecting outside the project”* and many young people preferred to stay within networks of care-experienced friends. Staff often had to take a proactive role in finding opportunities, sometimes researching alongside young people: *“Sometimes (as) staff (we) have to Google clubs and groups ourselves - we don’t always have all the answers.”* They also recognised the value of accompaniment in easing nerves, saying, *“It’s easier for young people to join activities if they can go with a friend or someone they know.”*

The sense of belonging varied widely between individuals. Those with family or established roots in the area tended to integrate more quickly - *“For some, having family nearby makes all the difference in feeling like they belong here”* - while others required ongoing encouragement. As one staff member reflected, *“Belonging isn’t automatic - it’s something we all have to work on, together.”* Overall, staff agreed that stronger, more formalised pathways to community involvement were needed, not only to expand opportunities but to ensure young people could maintain these connections beyond their LHP.



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