

EURO

YOUTH

MENTAL
HEALTH

EYE 2023

Engagement Report Speak your mind v2.0



Event delivered by
Tj Dairo & Nick
Morgan

**Report written &
designed by**
Nick Morgan

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Introduction

Introducing Euro Youth Mental Health, Europe's Only Mental Health NGO Devoted to Young People.

Euro Youth Mental Health is an exceptional mental health NGO that focuses solely on youth in Europe. A group of passionate and enthusiastic young volunteers operates the non-profit organization, sharing their expertise and experiences to improve mental health support among young people across Europe.

We aim to elevate young people's voices and ideas to promote mental health, and support those affected by mental illness throughout Europe. Currently, we are in the second year of our three-year strategy, which you can find out more about [here](#).

We act in order to raise up, the voices of young people to promote mental health and support those impacted by mental ill-health across Europe.



Executive Summary

Mental health is a prolific issue of the 21st century. It's not new, but now we are more aware, more interested, more educated.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, mental health illness was high, with great impacts on health and wellbeing for young people. Approximately half of all mental health conditions are started by age 14 and suicide was the second lead cause of death amongst young people 15-20. Poor mental health and well-being costs the countries of the European Union over €600 billion a year.

We ran this same workshop at EYE 2018 ([report can be found here](#)), with the top 3 themes that impacted young people's health being

1. **Relationships**
2. **Equality**
3. **Expectations.**



We wanted to run the same workshop again, but after a worldwide event that impacted everyone in so many ways, but especially in their mental health.

Young people had so many experiences taken away from them due to the pandemic. Learning to drive, university, erasmus, travelling, gap years, birthday parties of significant transitions were all ruined for a generation of young people. We are bouncing back now, but the toll will be significant as we move into the next stage of life.

At EYE 2023, we were lucky enough to deliver not just one but two workshops! Over the 2 days we spoke to approximately 170 young people from across Europe and beyond. These young people gave their time, ideas and inspiration to talk about what mental health meant to them and what impacted their mental health the most.

“Mental health is a complicated term, really full of things.” Young Person

This work didn't focus on diagnosis or clinical themes, but the day to day impacts young people experience that can impact their lives and could potentially lead to diagnosis at some point in the future.

This report will be sent to Members of the European Parliament Coalition for mental health and wellbeing to respond and ideally action from.

What were the key themes you ask?

On day one, the top 3 were:

- 1. Relationships**
- 2. Expectations**
- 3. Employment**

Day two wasn't that different:

- 1. Relationships**
- 2. Social media**
- 3. Finances**





Methodology

As mentioned, this workshop was based on the same workshop we did in 2018, but with slight differences. Our team of Youth Engagement Facilitators reviewed this session and changed only small themes of it to ensure we create a harmonious and safe space for young people to talk about this sensitive topic.

Part 1

Led by the fabulous TJ, this is where we built our safe space. Using both technology and face to face interaction we invited participants to share their favourite food from their country of birth on a 'padlet' online program as they entered. We've always found food to be something of a talking point when it comes to international conversation, however we also noted and referenced this part of the conversation at the start for anyone that might get triggered by food. We then ran through some of these pictures that people submitted on the big screen and asked some people to elaborate on what these amazing looking dishes entailed and why they held such warm memories for them. As well as this, we then lent into physical high fives, 5 by 5, five high fives with five people you've never met before, again with a caveat that you do not have to do this if you do not wish and that this is perfectly okay.

Part 2

Once warmed up, we invited our rather large groups to break into three smaller large groups to discuss 'what mental health meant to them', with the challenge to ensure that every member of their group's was involved (each group was between 20 - 30 people large).

There was a lot of creativity to ensure inclusion of everyone, as well as people being comfortable in creating smaller sub groups to help the larger group. This exercise was to enable us as facilitators to gauge a base line of the groups understanding of mental health and what it meant to them.

After which we shared 3 different definitions of mental health for their consideration..

insert explanations here

These were rightly challenged and thought of as outdated and in need of renewal.



Definitions used

Mental health is the process of psychological and behavioural adjustment in face of unknown situations.

[National Institute for Health \(UK, 2015\).](#)

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community

[World Health Organisation \(2022\).](#)

The condition of being sound mentally and emotionally that is characterised by the absence of mental illness and by adequate adjustment especially as reflected in feeling comfortable about oneself, having positive feelings about others, and the ability to meet the demands of daily life; also: the general condition of one's mental and emotional stateface of unknown situations.

[Merriam-Webster \(2023\).](#)



Methodology cont...

Needless to say, these were rightly challenged and thought of as outdated and in need of renewal.

Part 3

After a brief energiser to help check in with the room we moved on to an exercise to gain insight into what they felt 'impacted their mental health the most'. With a small group chat, followed by large group consensus we came up with between 10 - 20 different topics which we stuck around the room.

We then gave everyone three 'votes' to use to vote for what they felt impacted their individual mental health the most. Participants could use all three votes on one topic if they wished, or spread all three out over three topics or anything in between. After this we counted the votes and shared the top 3.

Part 4

Dividing the group into three separate teams, we requested solutions and ideas on what the European Parliament or the EU could do to mitigate the effects of these issues on the mental health of young people.

Who took part?



The European Youth Event (EYE) is a gathering of young people aged 16–30 from or living in Europe at the time of the event. They often participate through association with a type of youth group, such as school groups, general youth groups, activist groups, or political groups.

Our team hosted two sessions that spanned both days of the event. To participate, attendees needed to sign up in advance using the event app. We had an impressive turnout of young people from around the world, with approximately 70 participants on the first day and around 85 on the second. We were thrilled to welcome participants from as far away as Bolivia, Taiwan, Mexico, India and the Philippines, with large portions of our groups hailing from Spain, Germany & Italy.

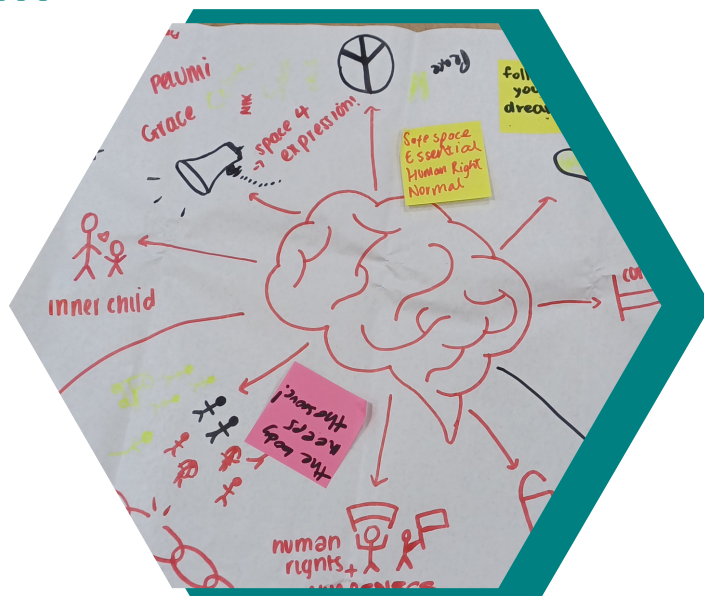
In addition to these participants, we had the privilege of hosting Brando Benifei, Member of the European Parliament from Italy, who shared his insights on the discussions that young people had during the day. Mr. Benifei joined us for our second session on Saturday, making it a truly memorable event.

What young people told us

What is mental health?

Over the 2 sessions, this exercise was very much to garner a mutual understanding of what we as a group understand by the term 'mental health'. As an international organisation, we are very aware of the impact culture, language and history can play when it comes to defining or even discussing complex topics like mental health.

“Good mental health gives you the power to change yourself and/or accept yourself, overcome challenges, just be you.” Young Person



Our conversations and discussions were incredibly varied. One group chose to sing a short song, another, did a performance piece. Below are some of the flip charts that young people presented as part of this question.

What impacts young people's mental health?



There are obviously a variety of themes that impact young people's mental health. Over the 2 workshops, we started this work with a baseline of themes that we know impacts young people's mental health, these were: Education / Employment / Covid 19 (health) / Social Media / Equity, Diversity and inclusion / Green Environment. The group added a variety of themes to this work, from 'transport' to 'exercise' to 'isolation'.

What impacts young people's mental health?

We then got them to vote on their top 3, the results we will discuss further below.

1. Relationships (came top in BOTH workshops!)

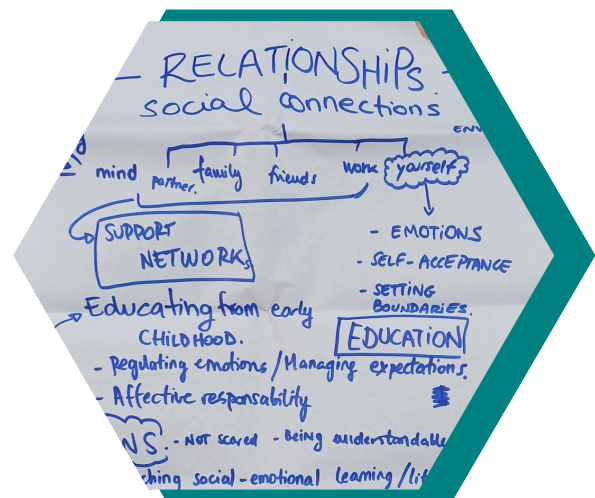
Relationships were also the top theme that impacted young people's mental health in 2018!

Relationships came top on both days, surprising in some sense, but not so in others. Relationships, as a broad term, covered a variety of other themes that were discussed, but not voted high, such as family, friendships, personal connections and relationship with ourselves.

"We need to begin with ourselves, setting boundaries, actions etc." Young Person

Some of the larger conversations circled around, not what we generally think of when we hear the word relationship (romantic, family etc), but more on isolation and support networks, all of which, we believe are interconnected.

Many of the young people in the group recognised that unless you have a healthy relationship with yourself, it's hard to have meaningful connections with others and to live a life that makes you happy. Our general self-esteem, self-image and self-worth are huge determinants of how we and young people in particular are able to interact with the world and handle difficult situations as and when they arrive.



Isolation has seemingly become something that young people are talking about more as lives go on.

"Social connections are fundamental for individual well-being." Monitoring and tackling loneliness in Europe, Joint Research Centre (2023).

What impacts young people's mental health?

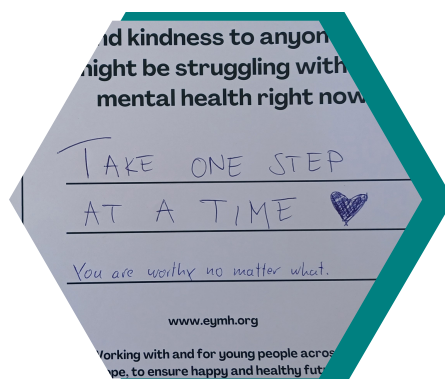
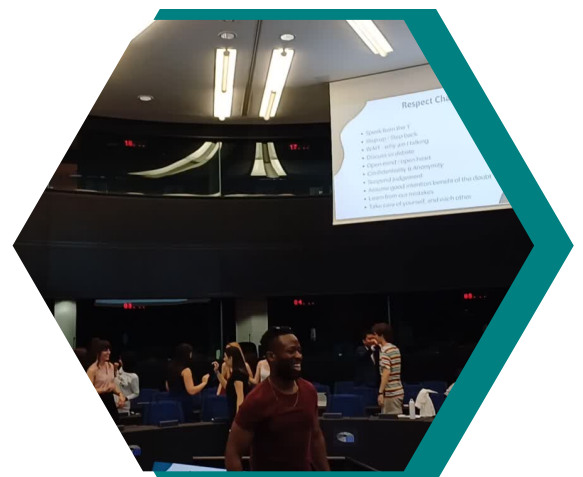


The young people in these sessions talked about how covid-19 impacted this, stating that unless you had an already strongly established group of friends or support network going into the pandemic, it became very difficult to interact and engage with others.

“Young people have actually a higher incidence of loneliness compared to older generations.” Monitoring and tackling loneliness in Europe, Joint Research Centre (2023).

At least before the pandemic, even young people who felt isolated interacted with others, going to school, or at social clubs. Young people spoke of the importance of a ‘support network’ for young people and that without this, your relationship with yourself can be quite low and this in turn inhibits your ability to connect with others. Below is a quote from a young person on how they believe this work can be implemented to help young people manage their relationships to support their mental health:

“Main thing is around education. Social and emotional learning literacy. How to say no, set boundaries, Teach other people to accept people saying no. Implement safe spaces, active listening training, and empathy.” Young Person



What impacts young people's mental health?



2. Expectations

2nd on day 1

This was a very specific conversation on the expectations young people have of them. From family, friends, school and society, it felt that for young people, it is hard to avoid. The group shared that often, unrealistic expectations, caused them to become anxious and stressed, as they strive to achieve these expectations.

“60% of young people (aged 18 to 24) have felt so stressed by the pressure to succeed that they have felt overwhelmed or unable to cope.” 60% of young people unable to cope due to pressure to succeed, Mental Health Foundation, 2018

There is growing concern in the mental health professional community, that perfectionism, expectations and the pressure to succeed, is having a negative impact on young people.

Social media was talked about a lot in relation to this theme (which is touched on later in the report). With the ability to see, find, watch people from across the world, doing different things, it sets certain expectations of ‘the perfect’ to achieve for young people, which is again, unrealistic (and as young people pointed out, often fake when it is on social media).

Young people accepted that this is a tricky theme to do anything directly about, but stated that maybe it is a string of things that could make a positive change.



3. Social Media

2nd on day 2

Ironically, this is something that, at EYMH, we believe has a big role to play in relation to unrealistic expectations set on young people, so it was interesting to find this theme is having the 2nd biggest impact on young people on day 2.

We know this is a big agenda, not just in Europe, but across the globe and many people are trying to find the right balance between young people's health and their right to engage in digital platforms.

“The EU has its own sweeping plans. It's taking bold steps with its Digital Services Act (DSA) that, from the end of this month, will force the biggest online platforms — TikTok, Facebook, Youtube — to open up their systems to scrutiny by the European Commission and prove that they're doing their best to make sure their products aren't harming kids.” The EU wants to cure your teen's smartphone addiction,

PoliticoEU, 2023

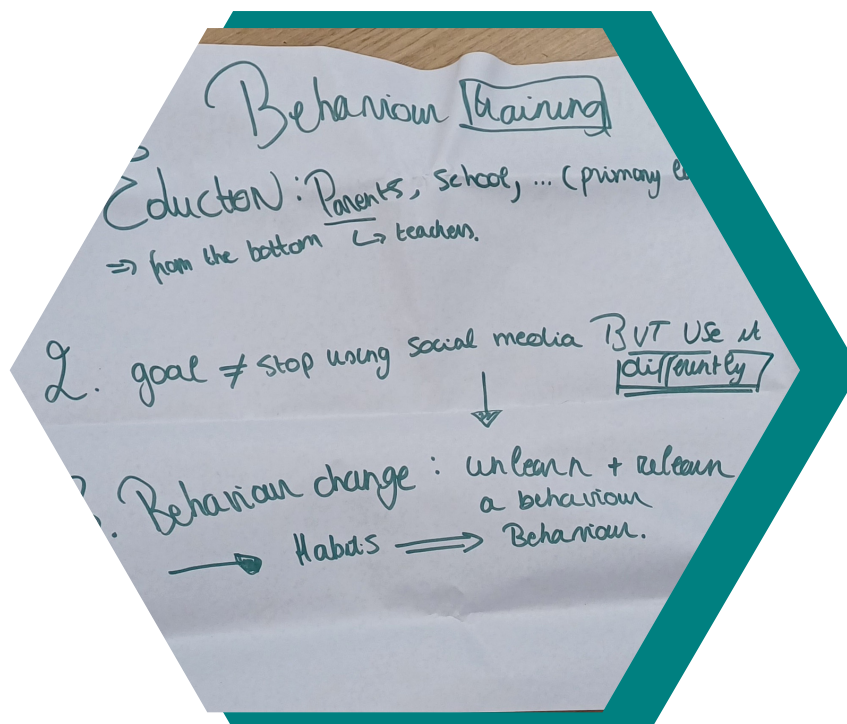
What impacts young people's mental health?



Young people's general take on this is that they are aware that the EU, their government and other institutions are 'doing something' they just want to be more involved as it is something that will directly impact them in the future.

"Every year thousands of young people report cases of bullying and harassment, sexual content, violence, self-harm or suicidal content and hate speech. This is the world that young people live in and they need to have a voice to shape it." Do tech companies care about young people's wellbeing, European Youth Forum, 2023

The group knew that this isn't something that can be changed easily, but that may be better education, better safeguarding, more responsibility taken from social media providers, all whilst including them in this process.



4. Employment

3rd on day 2

At EYMH, we have spoken at various events and with various young people across the continent on the impact work, jobs, and employment has on their mental health, even before this session. Our CEO, Nick Morgan, represented young people, as a Technical Advisor to WHO Europe on the impact of Covid-19 on mental health, and often stressed this issue, time and time again.

What impacts young people's mental health?

EYMH

“Young people already found it hard to get, or maintain a job. Covid-19 has created further uncertainty and for many young people, they were the first people to lose their jobs, as the hospitality sector and other short-term jobs were terminated. Young people see employment as having a sense of worth, financial security and future safety. However, young people, especially those with mental ill-health already face barriers to employment, and Covid-19 has added extra barriers to that.” Nick Morgan, EYMH CEO



During the event young people talked about the difficult circle of not being unemployed, leading to low self-esteem, which leads to a lack of motivation, which then of course means young people stop applying for new jobs and so it continues. This experience can lead to more severe mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety if not dealt with.

“Amid growing inequality and repeated economic crises, young people who were not previously vulnerable are now at greater risk of poor mental health and well-being due to the prevalence of atypical and insecure work and higher numbers of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) (18,19).” Mental health, social inclusion and young people aged 18-29 in the European Region (Draft), World Health Organisation Europe, 2023

5. Finances

3rd on day 3

There were two different sides to this coin for the group, some referring to being in difficult financial circumstances personally and others reflecting on the lack of finances available in their countries mental health systems.

What impacts young people's mental health?



There are financial worries from a personal point of view from young people. In regards to the cost of living crisis, which seems to actually be the way the world is going to be for a long time. Young people are concerned about housing, healthy living/eating and earning enough to subsidise activities that benefit their wellbeing (self-care).

Secondly, there was then also a recognition that there were not enough mental health professionals for young people. With the COVID-19 pandemic again, influencing an already shortfall in youth specific mental health practitioners (in some conversations we have had with ministers in the past, there have been as little as 2 youth psychologists in some countries), the pandemic created a new problem.

“The mental health of young people across many European countries has taken a particular hit; in a number of countries, young people reported symptoms of depression at rates nearly double those of the general population, ” she said.

The pandemic's impact on mental health services was a double-whammy: it simultaneously drove up the need for the services, all the while eroding an already short-staffed, burnt-out health workforce.” [Europe's growing mental health care gap. PoliticoEU, 2022](#)



Conclusion & recommendations

1. DO MORE TO ADDRESS YOUNG PEOPLE'S SELF-ESTEEM & UNDERSTANDING OF RELATIONSHIPS IN SCHOOLS
2. MONEY NEEDS TO WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR MENTAL HEALTH
3. SUPPORT, TRAINING AND POLICY ON DIGITAL SOCIALISING

Conclusion

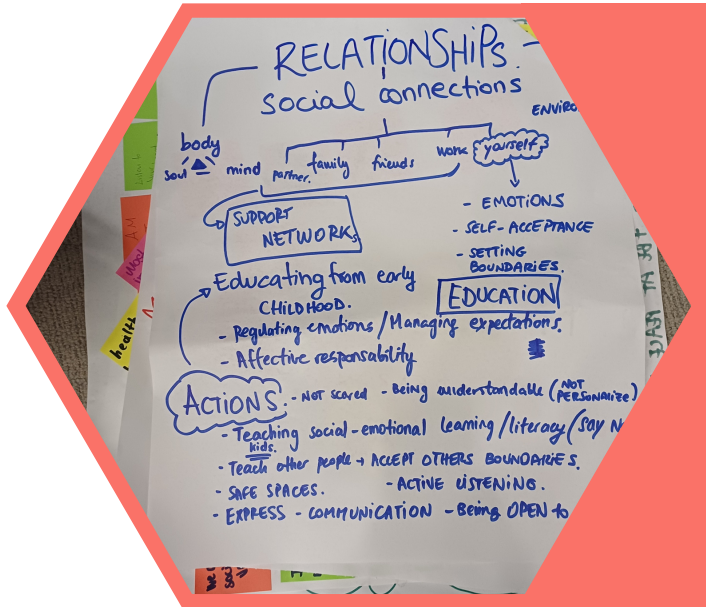
We at EYMH work with all young people, to engage them in the conversation about mental health and their own mental health. Occasionally we conduct work looking at specific diagnosis of mental ill-health and work with young people from those communities and experience and other times we work more broadly on the topic, like we did at EYE 2023.

These two workshops show us that young people, no matter where you are from in Europe, all have an awareness of mental health, their mental health and it can be impacted. How we manage it, of course, will always be different due to history, culture, family dynamics and so on, but the themes that impact it will often be the same.

We were not surprised to be in the top 3, on either day, with arguably big links between 'expectations' and 'social media', and 'finances' and 'employment'. Relationships was the most important theme back in 2018 and was again at 2 different sessions at EYE 2023. Did the pandemic have something to do with the fact that relationships have maybe become an even bigger priority in people's lives? Possibly not, but relationships and true connection with people, we know, has a huge role to play in people's mental health.

This was a very fun, exciting and insightful piece of work and I believe that by doing so, will hopefully have started more conversations across Europe, to support young people's health.

Recommendations from young people

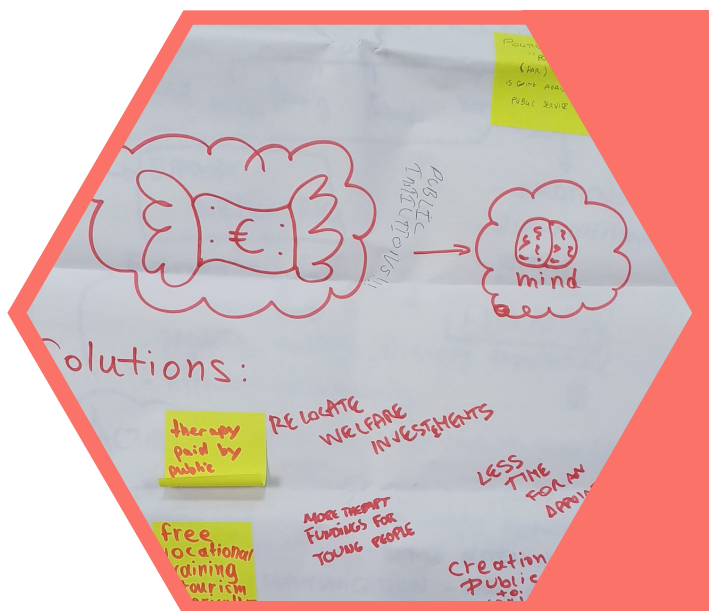


DO MORE TO ADDRESS YOUNG PEOPLE'S SELF-ESTEEM & UNDERSTANDING OF RELATIONSHIPS

“Results emphasising the importance of the school environment for explaining adolescents’ loneliness suggest that school-level initiatives may be most appropriate in tackling loneliness when compared to wider and less contextualised national policies that focus on adolescents outside of school.” Adolescents’ Loneliness in European Schools: a multilevel exploration of school environment and individual factors, V.Schneph, M. Boldrini & Z. Blasko, 2023

‘Relationships’ are not taught. We as a society are expected to navigate and learn about relationships with ourselves and others ourselves. With a disturbing lack of guidance across the continent on what makes a healthy relationship, our young participants were clear that this is something that needs addressing. Especially as we enter a period of time where a vast population of young people that missed out on many key developmental and social milestones due to the COVID-19 pandemic start to mature and grow into young adults.

Recommendations from young people



MONEY NEEDS TO WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

Young people were very vocal about the impact money had on them not being able to get the help and support they needed. In the below poster, there were some ‘pleas’ from young people of ideas to create more funding, that would in turn improve the availability of support and shorten waiting times by having more workers, such as ‘relocating welfare investments’ and maybe having ‘therapy paid for by the public’

As well as these, there were other great ideas where vocational training can help people develop skills to earn their own money, as well as the possibility of working with institutions, maybe such as universities, to provide free services to young people as part of students training.

We are all aware of the complexity that money, public funding and government has on the impact of young people’s mental health, but the first step is speaking to and involving young people themselves in prioritising money that impacts them.

Recommendations from young people



SUPPORT, TRAINING AND POLICY ON DIGITAL SOCIALISING

The digital age and the use of social media channels has taken us by storm. The COVID-19 pandemic made us reliant on these platforms to connect, have fun and engage, especially for young people. Young people are aware of the pitfalls social media can bring, but want adults and professionals to understand the potential for positive influence it can have for young people.

Not only for these purposes, but for future proofing their lives, almost all professional roles now require an adequate understanding of these platforms and mediums, however young people do not believe that adults and professionals quite understand this yet.

“...traditional issues such as burnout and post-graduation pressures also contribute to this problem. Notably, the new age of digitalisation is detrimental to youth.” The silent crisis of youth mental health, EPPgroup, 2023

We know institutions across Europe are working on this, with policies and more. We ourselves are working with Hertfordshire University and Instituto de Investigación Biomédica de Bellvitge, in Barcelona investigating ‘problematic use of the internet’ and we know there are other programs such as ‘BIK+’ , as well as the Digital Youth Work platform.

However, our young participants felt that A LOT more was needed to be done in schools and youth work. Training them up, first, so they understand what young people are doing, then being able to offer support, advice and guidance across the space.



Contact Us



info@eymh.org



www.eymh.org

A huge thank you to the European Youth Event coordinating team. to all the young people that took part. A big thank you to our volunteer Young Leaders who came with us to help out, volunteer and promote the work we do. A massive thank you to the workshop Lead Facilitator Tj Dairo, and lastly a thank you to MEP Brando Benifei

