

MOVEMENT  
TO WORK



# Youth Action Forum #2

2022 November

CREATE  
FUTURE

## THE CHALLENGE

How can we help combat the emerging “**mental health emergency**” affecting young people today?



September 2022 saw the release of the [Youth Employment UK \(YEUK\) Youth Census](#) which surveyed 4,000 young people and showed that “young people are in an escalating state of mental crisis”.

Combined with research on post-pandemic recovery, the lasting effects of Covid-related lockdowns and the intensifying cost-of-living crisis within the UK, Movement to Work believed this was the most pressing matter to bring business leaders together to ideate on.

Some participants were able to share live insights, experiences and action they are already undertaking within their organisation in relation to this topic, whereas others were able to share their current concerns and challenges, within the landscape they operate, for support.

A big thanks to everyone who took part, we received representation from **IBM, M&S, Salesforce, Manpower, Thames Water, Diageo, BT, Tesco, London Youth and Springboard**. We have anonymised feedback in order to create a truly safe space for authentic discussion and debate.

# THE YOUTH ACTION FORUM PRINCIPLES

## *Peer-to-Peer*

*Respectful and open sharing of challenges and opportunities related to youth employment*

## *Action-oriented*

*Helping more young people access quality work experiences by solving the problems employers are facing and maximising collective success*

## *No formal presentations*

*Short stimuli will be sent ahead of each session*

## *No formal speakers*

*The speakers and content will be shaped by those in attendance*

## *Intimate and meaningful*

*No more than 5-10 individual attendees, ideally representing diverse business sectors*

## *Invitation only*

*Sign up / Registration process - first come, first served*

## DISCUSSION POINTS

**We started the session with an open discussion for the attendees to share their experiences and to ask questions.**

**A number of observations and key comments came from that discussion.**

*“We’re focused on mental health, and anything else we can do to help young people.”*

## THE CONTEXT

The Kickstart programme has been helpful in providing colleagues with guidance on how to handle mental health topics, but they’ve seen double the dropout rate with Kickstart interns versus the regular internship intake.

Three practical things this organisation has implemented: **A mental health module as part of induction; Reduced the number of people on the programme, recognising they need more support per head; Funded lunch for interns as it’s one less thing they need to worry about.**

They’ve observed that young people are still struggling to sign up, and can feel overwhelmed. They chose to initially introduce interns to their stores at quieter hours to help avoid this.

*“The conversation around mental health is much more open these days.”*

## THE CONTEXT

While they've been delivering webinars on mental health wellbeing since 2014, this organisation have also recently reviewed their provision, which has seen them **introduce mental health first-aiders, add additional support content, and get feedback on candidates' mental health.**

Young people (and their mental health) are assessed at the beginning of any programme, and if it's not felt that this is the right time for them to take part, they're signposted to a network of specialist partners.

They have recently developed a 'first of its kind' partnership with a specialist organisation which allows participants **24/7 emergency access to mental health and wellbeing support which includes 6 weeks worth of counselling** – just like an employee assistance programme.

*“While there’s less of a stigma now, people are still worried about sharing mental health issues, they’re concerned it might affect their later career journeys.”*

#### THE CONTEXT

Post-pandemic, this organisation is seeing a significant increase in drop-outs for the first time in a while. They aspire to offer interns the same support as full-time employees.

Resources offered to participants include **therapy, information on coping strategies and journaling**, all of which appear to have had a positive impact.

*“There’s possibly a generational thing at play: managers in their 50s and 60s are not as aware, and never had this kind of support as they came through the workforce.”*

#### THE CONTEXT

Mental health considerations not currently forming a large part of leadership training was noted on a couple of occasions, but as leaders are now seeing mental health issues across the workforce (and not just younger intakes) it is being taken more seriously.

One organisation previously launched a well-received ‘**cuppa catch up**’ initiative where they sent a tea bag and a biscuit to every employee and encouraged them to reach out to one another for peer support.

*“We need to find a way to treat this [offering mental health support] as a skill.”*

## THE CONTEXT

Mental health issues are just one important part of the challenges and lessons that young people entering the workforce are facing, e.g. managing their finances, workplace relationships. Practical support needs to be offered on a wider range of topics.

**Lack of social skills and anxiety around engaging other people is having an impact on the quality of customer care that they're able to offer.**

It was felt that mental health and practical support can result in improved retention and performance and translating these into metrics that show the impact to the 'bottom line' can be helpful in securing the support and resources needed.

Nowadays, people are expecting their employer to help with life issues. Previously people would look to their bank, the government, their doctor etc to help but now people are bringing those issues to work. Line managers are key in making or breaking relationships between employers and employees..

*“There’s no one-size-fits-all approach.”*

## THE CONTEXT

This organisation has also learned from the Kickstart programme, and they have mental health first-aiders across the business. Senior leadership also lead by example, sharing their own personal experiences with colleagues.

**Mental health support for young people is strong, but is not necessarily as well considered or easy to access to the rest of the workforce.** In particular, a few noted that there’s disparity between the attitudes and also resources available to office-based workers and those in the field or in operational roles.

Typically, in male-dominated environments, colleagues tend not to talk about personal issues or wellbeing and so bottle how their feeling up inside.

Mental Health and Wellbeing awareness training should be made mandatory, so you are engaging those who don’t think it’s for them. At present this organisation finds that they are only engaging those who are already interested in this topic.

Confidence is the single biggest issue young people reported during the period of Kickstart. Their lack of education and work life exposure has made them hesitant about going into the workplace for the first time.

**There are challenges around hybrid working too. Young people feel a workplace offers them work space, role models and observation not ‘just being on their laptop’.**

Social media comparisons – observing the lives of others, or what they put out over social media – does not help with feelings of anxiety, comparison and low self-worth.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

**We then asked the attendees to add post-its with any suggestions, actions, initiatives or further research that they felt are worth considering to help tackle this issue.**



### Addressing mental health issues related to hybrid working

The pandemic has driven a massive change to how we all work. Hybrid and remote working can create feelings of isolation and disconnection. Companies can address these by tailoring onboarding, reviews and other initiatives to the working style of colleagues.

### Outreach & low participation

Enabling the sharing of experiences & support and normalising asking for help by creating networks of colleagues at a company level, or by creating community groups focused on interest areas or common ground that are open for young people to join.

### 1-2-1 meetings

Creating safe spaces, and normalising behaviour that can make young people feel psychologically safe to have difficult conversations.

### Training

Dedicated training on mental health and wellbeing for people managers, buddies, or mentors.

### Workshops

Creating and running workshops that help young people explore and understand what mental health and wellbeing is, and what general things they can do to build resilience.

### Getting feedback from young people before, during and after induction, internships

The changes organisations make need to be monitored by asking young people to feed back their experiences, to ensure any changes made are positive and can be continually improved.

### Mental health ambassadors, including young people and senior leadership

Creating specific roles that can be applied for, trained and rolled out to focus on driving awareness of mental health, and pushing for change at all levels of the organisation to improve how the company creates, maintains and responds to colleague wellbeing. Ambassadors should include young people, so that they feel represented.

### Storytelling and sharing of experiences

Incorporating the sharing of experiences from senior leaders into the employee experience to demonstrate the values the organisation is advocating for, by leading from the front.

### Integrating mental health conversations and personal awareness into regular reviews

To remove barriers for wellbeing conversations, and build organisational muscle memory, set regular times for young people to meet with their mentor, manager or buddy and have time dedicated to discuss and work through mental health.

### Integrating mental health conversations into onboarding

Taking a step back and looking at how and where in the joining process mental health conversations and initiatives can be incorporated - making mental health & wellbeing feel like an integral part of how the company works.

### Specific training for supporting young people of colour

Rates of mental health problems can be higher for some ethnic minority groups. Specific awareness and training around how different backgrounds are associated with mental health issues will help managers have better, more informed and relevant conversations.

### 'Buddy' systems

Setting up pairing programmes that help young people when they first start in the company or in a new role, to help them avoid unnecessary stress factors and to set them up for success.

### Training on basic life skills, including budgeting and managing relationships

There are many factors that can contribute to poor mental health or that can support and improve a person's mental health. Providing training and support for these factors can help the whole person. Training for topics such as Finance, Relationships, Health, Physical Activity, Community can all help.

### Signposting to specialist services

Employers can provide access to in-house help, but also by signposting to specialist services - charities, public bodies, and subsidised or private services that young people can access.

DEEP DIVE

**We then voted on which areas  
we wanted to discuss further**



## The Apprenticeship Levy

Mental health is a critical component for a young person's success, and self-awareness and management should be treated like a skill. It was felt that the cost of mental health support could potentially be covered by the Apprenticeship Levy.

## Peer networks

The resources are often available, but young people don't feel comfortable opening up to discuss their mental health. 1-2-1 sessions with peers a couple of years older are seen as more approachable than older, senior colleagues.

That said, it's appreciated when senior leaders open up about mental health. One organisation shared that their US business arm also created cross-generational support groups.

Different cohorts within the workplace have different attitudes and propensity to discussing mental health, i.e. office-based vs. field / construction / operational workers. There's a need to connect people within each of these cohorts.



## Supporting ethnic minority groups

Young people from minority backgrounds feel dissuaded by a lack of representation and role models in the industries they are joining. They have also been more disproportionately affected by the cost of living and other societal factors.

Greater representation, contextualising mental health support and practical as well as emotional support would all help.

## Line manager training

It was recognised that the expectation of businesses to support employees (with finances, health and mental health issues) is relatively new. As this was less the case in previous generations, many older line managers are unprepared (~~or undisposed~~) to support young people with a range of issues 'outside' of work.

It was felt that greater training for line managers, ~~making it mandatory and~~ built into their onboarding for example, would be useful, as would integrating mental health conversations and checkpoints into regular 'BAU' reviews.



## Normalising mental health

As well as training, and building mental health conversations into regular check-ins, it was proposed that businesses should advertise their mental health support as an important benefit (in recruitment, job descriptions etc.). Joining a considerate employer, and expecting the promised support from day one, should be as attractive as wanting to join a Living Wage employer.

## Social anxiety and confidence

Confidence appears to have taken a big hit post-pandemic. Young people have spent their formative years in relative isolation. The lack of exposure to workplaces is a cause of anxiety when they do.

The hybrid model is compounding this, with new joiners finding it hard to form healthy bonds and develop confidence through interactions with their peers.

The lack of 'empathy' or awareness of appropriate social interactions is having an impact on some organisations' customer service delivery and impacting on their NPS (net promoter score)

# Next Steps



## NEXT STEPS

01



### **Our Youth Summit will also tackle this topic**

Outputs from our Youth Summit, being held in Birmingham on 10th November 2022, will also address this topic and will be shared with our network in time.

02



### **Save the date for the next Youth Action Forum**

The next Youth Action Forum will be held on Friday 10th Feb 2023 at 10.00-11.30am – please give an indication of attendance by responding to the placeholder invite that has been sent out.

03



### **The topic we'll cover at the next Forum**

Our next topic will be: *How to better engage and recruit young people onto work experience and job placements.*

We look forward to discussing this with you in February!