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# COMING BACK STRONGER

Putting young Londoners first in a post-pandemic landscape

*OUR STRATEGY FOR 2022-2025*



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NEW  
HORIZON  
YOUTH  
CENTRE

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# 01

## COMING BACK STRONGER

Covid has changed everything, but a central truth remains in the capital. **Far too many young people find themselves unhoused, unsupported and unsafe.** Worryingly these numbers are growing and may continue to grow. According to the Centrepoint Databank, nearly 122,000 young people in the UK approached their local authority in 2020/21 as they were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Against this challenging backdrop, New Horizon Youth Centre has been reflecting on how we can best respond to these uncertain and rapidly evolving times. Through the summer and autumn of 2021, we spoke with national and local government, the wider homelessness sector, staff and, of course young people to consider the challenges faced and the solutions our new strategy needs to address.

As well as constant adaptation, the last two years have required a fast moving, almost adrenalin fuelled pace. There has been a sense of urgency to our work each day and there is a sense of urgency to find the longterm solutions too. Our strategy review has forced us to pause and reflect, to step off the wheels of change and consider our next steps. As Desmond Tutu, who sadly passed away recently, famously said;

***“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.”***

In the case of youth homelessness it’s not so much about falling as pushing. **Young people, disproportionately those from marginalised communities, are being pushed into situations of crisis.** The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequities and cracks in the system that are meant to protect our most at-risk community members. We’ve been fighting that for over 50 years and we’re ready

to keep doing so with renewed energy. We continue our work to prevent young Londoners ever facing a night on the streets, helping them to unlock the lives they deserve and fulfil their potential. We’re also working to change the systems that forced them into such risky and desperate situations in the first place.

As we all emerge into the ‘new normal’, it is critical that we ensure that young people, especially those experiencing homelessness, those who have been systemically denied a voice, are front and centre of thinking and investment. The severity of the situation demands a bolder and bigger response than we might previously have conceived necessary, and this response will require us to grow – in every sense of the word.

We need to grow our staff headcount so that we can keep up with demand. We need to further invest in our policy and comms work so that we can campaign even harder. We need to invest more in our staff and look after them as they take on this challenge. And we need to do more to bring young people and all of our partners with us on the journey. As we emerge from the pandemic, the words of Najma, one of the young people we have supported this last year, reminds us:

***“we need to come back and come back stronger”.***

***FOR AS LONG AS YOUNG PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS AND UNSAFE IN LONDON, WE WILL BE ON A MISSION TO GIVE THEIR POTENTIAL A HOME.***

## OUR WORK IS GUIDED BY FOUR VALUES:

**We see the best in everyone**



We all have strengths and the potential to make the best of our life and work, when given a fair chance

**We are dynamic in our approach**



We are always adapting because the world changes and what young people need and want changes

**We collaborate on solutions**



We trust and work with diverse people and organisations so that we can achieve more together

**We are our word**



We do what we say we will because the young people we support, our team and our partners deserve nothing less

# 02

## “IT JUST DOESN'T WORK FOR THEM” – THE CHALLENGES IN FRONT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Vast numbers of young people face significant challenges around finding and keeping appropriate and safe accommodation. There is a lack of understanding in the UK as to exactly how many young people do not have a safe home. The data we have shows an ever-escalating crisis and even these numbers do not paint a full picture.

The Covid-19 pandemic has hit young people the hardest, especially those already experiencing disadvantage. Young people were the most likely to lose jobs, due to many in work being on zero-hour contracts. They lost out on a year's worth of education and employment, with many not being able to learn or work from home due to digital exclusion. We know that some of the most desperate situations came out of communities that have been severely let down, with overcrowded, poor-quality housing and extreme pressure being put on people living in poverty with little additional support offered. These challenges were compounded for the majority of young people we support, as it has been widely documented, the pandemic disproportionately impacted minoritised communities.

Not only did the pandemic create and exacerbate some of the main drivers of youth homelessness, but it also restricted young people's ability to stay off the streets. At the same time that young people's risk of homelessness was increasing due to loss of employment or income, strained family relationships and overcrowding; lockdown restrictions made it

difficult or illegal to stay with friends or extended family. As a result, more young people were left without anywhere to stay at all. Despite successful government policies such as the 'Everyone In' hotels offered to all rough sleepers, the £20 weekly increase to Universal Credit and the furlough scheme, by the winter of 2020-21 we reported a 20% increase in young people with no other option than sleeping rough. This was during the coldest months while Covid-19 infections were at an all-time high.



### PROPORTION SLEEPING ROUGH



increase of young people sleeping rough in 2020 compared to 2019

The pandemic also affected the support that was available to young people. The closure of youth clubs and youth centres took away a lifeline for many young people who rely on these for emotional wellbeing and connections to other providers. The shift to remote working meant that waiting times for many other services increased and accessing assistance from councils and social services became more difficult. Young people often have to interact with multiple organisations at once and doing this all remotely whilst navigating complex processes is extremely challenging. Our Winter Snapshot research tracked an increase from 42% to 65% in young people who had already contacted their council before finding us, the vast majority of whom were not offered support or accommodation.

Despite the hard work of numerous agencies and the energies of committed families, loved ones and services, young people continue to lose their lives to violent crime on our streets, in London and elsewhere. When young people are perpetrators of such violence, they have often been a victim of such violence first – often they are both.

This is a difficult picture to come to terms with and it highlights how young people must be central to Covid recovery planning and Government strategies. Although the situation is bleak, we are not without solutions. Although the barriers for young people are many, they are not without ambition. Things can change in 2022. We need them to.



**Sometimes you gotta go through the darkness to get to the light**

**Covid slowed life down at a time when it was moving too fast**

**It gave me time to figure out our next steps**

**Our time is now.**



**– NEW HORIZON WOMEN'S GROUP, '2021 IS OUR SONG'**

# 03

## INSIGHTS DRIVING OUR NEW STRATEGY

### Community

The effects of Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement have driven dramatic changes in who is coming to us for support and what they need and want. We need to continue to ensure our offer remains relevant, accessible and inclusive for everyone whilst adapting to specific and growing needs from certain groups.

### Care

We know that the last 12 months have caused unprecedented challenges for our staff and partners, and it has been and will continue to be tough for the team. We will need to do more than ever to look after our employees and each other to ensure we are all supported and connected as we adapt to newer ways of working and changes ahead.



“

**New Horizon.**

**It might not be your home.  
They might not be your parents.  
They might not be your family.**

**But they want you to win in this world.**

”

### Choice

Lockdowns have forced us to open up our services in entirely new ways. We know that this has enabled more people to access New Horizon but stopped others from engaging. As we emerge out of the pandemic, we will continue a mixed service model so that young people can engage in the ways they want, on the solutions they prioritise, whether that be housing, safety, life skills or health.

### Collaboration

Unprecedented challenges have led to the need for unprecedented ways of working. More than ever the need and desire to work in partnership has come to the fore, as we share resources, spot gaps and come together to design solutions. We need to invest in the resources to deliver quality partnership work and nurture a culture that sees the value in this.

### Consistency

As services have evolved, new and often different ways of working have emerged. This has allowed us to pilot new solutions and innovate as never before. However, it has also meant that as multiple young client journeys have opened up not all young people are able to access the same level of service. We need to do more to ensure that need – and not chance dictates the opportunities that young people get.

### Campaigning

The pandemic has only exacerbated the preexisting challenges that young people faced. More than ever, we believe the best way of helping the most young people is to get decisions makers to better understand and invest in the issues they face. We will continue to ramp up our policy and campaigning work so that we can help many more young people, including those we never meet.

# 04

## OUR PLAN FOR CHANGE

We are not going to end youth homelessness or stop the violence that affects young people in our communities in the next three years.

These are unprecedented, difficult times for anyone experiencing poverty, but the young people we see are systematically disadvantaged at every step towards their independence. This we also know is especially true for young people from minoritized communities. We do not accept that this is how it has

to be, but we know that changing it is a long-term battle and one that we have to fight together with others.

We believe that every young person is filled with the potential to do whatever they choose and so we want to work towards a society that ensures every young person in London can use these strengths whilst living a life that is safe, full of health and opportunity in a home that they deserve.

To achieve our vision, there are three problems we must solve:

### 01

Too many young people cannot access any form of support when in crisis or about to be.

### 02

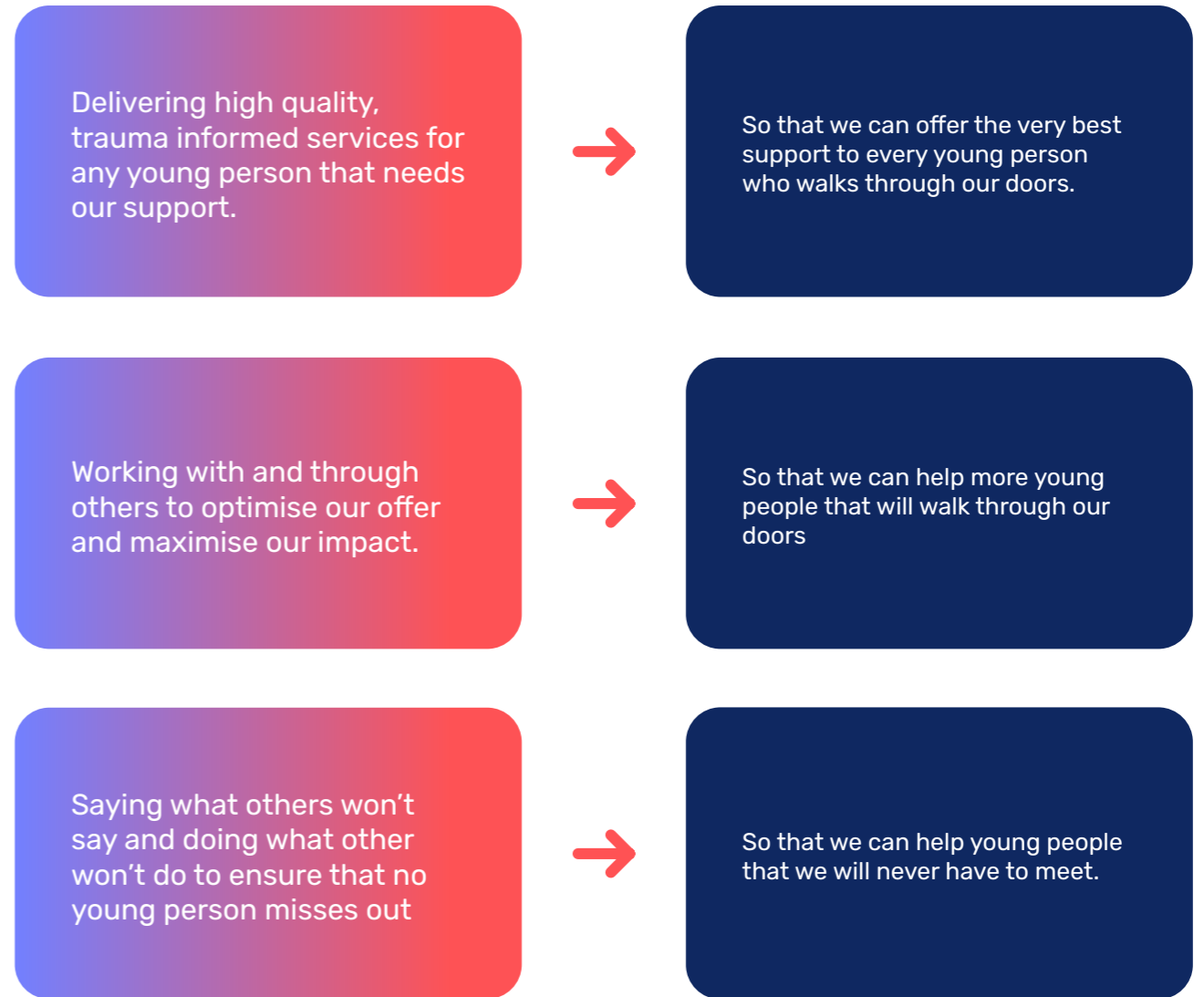
Because too many of the services that should be providing this either don't or cannot provide the appropriate and youth-specific help when it is most needed.

### 03

Which stems from the fact that young people, especially those facing disadvantage, are being systematically ignored by policy makers and commissioners.

FOR AS LONG AS **YOUNG PEOPLE** ARE HOMELESS AND UNSAFE IN LONDON, WE WILL BE ON A **MISSION TO GIVE THEIR POTENTIAL A HOME.**

And so, through 2022 to 2025 we are committed to:





# 05

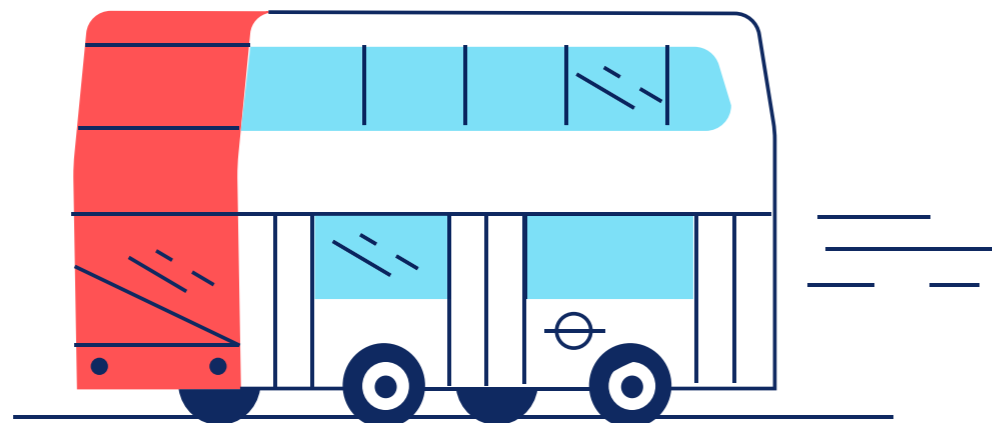
## OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

THROUGH 2022-2025 NEW HORIZON YOUTH CENTRE WILL FOCUS ON:

### 01

#### Delivering high quality, trauma-informed services for any young person that needs our support

- Refocusing our services around four key outcome areas (Housing, Safety, Life Skills, and Health) to help us specialise further and grow our impact.
- Redefining the welcome into our services so that we can build trust and ensure young people get the support they want and move on.
- Creating a brand-new health offer and optimising the scale of our housing offer to address these continued areas of significant need.



### 02

#### Working with and through others to optimise our offer and maximise our impact

- Continuing to invest in the London Youth Gateway youth homelessness partnership, scaling its reach and finding more ways to collaborate.
- Revitalising our centre as a hub that provides both drop-in and specialist services via our team and a network of committed partners that share our values.
- More deliberately sharing best practice with partners and statutory agencies so that more professionals are equipped with the skills and knowledge to help.

### 03

#### Saying what others won't say and doing what other won't do to ensure that no young person misses out, even the young people we will never meet

- Prioritising services where needs exist without solutions, working with others to innovate and bring these issues to public attention.
- Redoubling our policy work and building our evidence to put 'grit in the system' and ensure that the issues affecting young people are understood and acted upon.
- Reframing the narrative around youth homelessness to change the understanding of its drivers, realities, and solutions, working closely with young people to ensure that they have the right platform to campaign for change.

### 04

#### Sustaining a well-run organisation that invests in staff and celebrates the diversity that makes us a success

- Making good on our commitment to be anti-racist, embedding diversity across our work and practice.
- Renewing our staff care and investing in our technology and facilities so that the team have the practical and emotional support they need to thrive.
- Setting ambitious goals for our fundraising so that we have the resources and financial security to be ruthless in the pursuit of our mission.

# 06

## OUR SERVICE STRATEGY

From humble beginnings in a church basement in Soho, into a now 50 strong multidisciplinary team, for 55 years we have been at the forefront of delivering services to young people in the capital. We are proud of our history and services remain the beating heart of our mission, with 75% of our resources channelled into direct support for young people.

### Delivering high quality, trauma-informed services for any young person that needs our support

As the demand for our services grow, we want to use the coming years to refocus our work around four key outcome areas (Housing, Safety, Life Skills, and Health) to help us specialise further and grow our impact. Each department will focus on the delivery of their key outcome and work cross-team to support young people with other outcomes. This will mean some changes to the Outreach Team and see us create a brand-new Health Team, who will also drive forward our work towards becoming a traumainformed organisation.

As part of this we will move to using a central point of referral and use this to have a common assessment for all young people ahead of initially referring to one team for support, getting clear on quick wins to build trust and the young person's end goal so we know when they are ready to move on. As well as redefining the welcomes into our services we will create and pilot user profiles so that we can better identify service offers, intended length of support and in turn help us to learn and benchmark for future planning.



### Housing

Deliver a smooth end-to-end assessment process and high-quality housing service for young people. Work collaboratively to maximise our housing partnerships and open up new accommodation for young people.

### Safety

Continue to develop our outreach offer and specialist casework model to ensure tailored support for young people impacted by the criminal justice system or serious youth violence.

### Life Skills

Deliver a varied and multi-faceted youth work programme on and off-site for young people facing homelessness or in unsafe circumstances. Enable young people to build on their skills needed to live independently.

### Health

Develop and deliver an effective health and wellbeing service to young people, and open up new referral pathways with specialist health providers externally.



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**@NHyouthcentre  
nhyouthcentre.org.uk**

**68 Chalton Street, NW1 1JR**

**General Info:  
020 7388 5560  
info@nhyouthcentre.org.uk**

**Registered Charity No. 276943  
Company No. 01393561**

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