

Youth work consultation response

What is the role of youth work in addressing the needs and opportunities for young people?

Teenage Cancer Trust exists to ensure that no young person has to go through cancer alone. Seven young people are diagnosed with cancer every day in the UK. We are the only charity dedicated to providing specialist care and support when they need it most. We have built world-class specialist facilities in 28 hospitals across the UK, providing a home away from home for young people while they receive treatment. We also fund specialist nurses and youth support coordinators (YSCs) to support young people with cancer and their families from the point of diagnosis to the end of treatment into survivorship. Our staff are experts in caring for young people with cancer and receive ongoing professional development and education.

Teenage Cancer Trust has pioneered the development of specialist youth work roles within Teenage and Young Adult cancer care and, as such, the organisation is well placed to comment on the specific contributions that youth work can make within clinical health environments. Teenage Cancer Trust fundamentally believes in the importance of standing with young people with cancer to help meet their specific needs, and give them the best possible opportunities in their future. This is why an integral part of our core services is our Teenage Cancer Trust Youth Support Coordinators (YSCs).

Teenage Cancer Trust currently funds 36 Youth Support Coordinators across the UK, working across our units in non-clinical roles. We recognise the crucial need to support young people throughout their cancer journey, as well as creating a social environment, and giving them the tools to get back on track after cancer. Youth Support Coordinators are there to provide a range of emotional and social based support, and to advocate for young people at all times.

It is clear that our Youth Support Coordinators have a tangible long-term impact on the lives of young people. The Teenage Cancer Trust General Survey 2017 revealed that:

- 96% (n=82) of young people said that their Youth Support Coordinator had kept them motivated throughout treatment
- 97% (n=83) of young people surveyed said that their Youth Support Coordinator was important to them after treatment
- 81% (n=69) of respondents used Teenage Cancer Trust Youth Support Coordinator as the person who they would speak to about their feelings

There are various ways that Youth Support Coordinators support the needs and opportunities of young people with cancer.

Activities encouraging peer support range from pizza nights for all the patients on the unit, to group pampering sessions and art therapy. Young people consistently report to us the benefits of being able to be surrounded by other young cancer patients, who they can share experiences with. Having a Youth Support Coordinator who is there to facilitate this, helps young people to feel that those around them when they are having treatment actually 'get' them.

Youth Support Coordinators will also facilitate support tailored to the unique needs of young people with cancer, such as body image workshops, bereavement support, and one-on-one psychosocial support to young people and their families. We ensure our Youth Support Coordinators understand how to

communicate with young people and can tailor communication styles in different situations and levels of understanding. They are there to listen to young people's concerns and support them with their lives both during and after treatment. Teenage Cancer Trust research shows that up to 8 in 10 young people experienced poor mental health as a result of their diagnosis, and many report that this impact on them can be as difficult, if not more difficult to deal with, as the treatment itself. We believe it is imperative that young people do not go through cancer alone, and Youth Support Coordinators help us to achieve this. One young person said: "I think its great how you always have someone there who knows how you might be feeling, who understands and who is always there."

When treatment finishes, we want to give young people all the support and opportunities they need to help them get back on track. Youth Support Coordinators will continue to support young people for around two years, assisting them with the transition away from cancer. They offer consistent support to young people when they begin to think about their life beyond cancer, and how they will find 'their new normal'. They are able to facilitate support on a range of post-treatment related concerns such as mental health, fertility, body image, disability, returning to education, and future careers. Youth Support Coordinator support is a key element of the recovery package which Teenage Cancer Trust provides for young people with cancer. One young person told us that "Without the help and support of my Youth Support Coordinators my whole cancer experience would have been much harder to deal with."