

# Engaging young people

Lessons from Citizens Advice  
Manchester's Switched On project.

From August 2020 - November 2021, we ran the Switched On project aiming to help young people in Manchester to deal with energy issues. This booklet contains our advice for engaging and supporting young people, based on our experience.



**Manchester**



## 1. Provide services in familiar locations.

- Young people lack the time and resources to travel frequently for different services. By targeting them in places that they already visit, they are more likely to be able to participate. This can also help to build trust, which is shown to improve engagement and outcomes as well.



## 2. Utilise partnerships to provide holistic support

- Collaborate with other services to provide all-encompassing support to YP. This means recognising and addressing their full needs, whilst managing their expectations and assisting them to act upon the support that they receive.
- YP want transferable skills and learning, so work with other providers to offer opportunities beyond your own service.

## 3. Incorporate co-design and reflexive practice.

- Involve young people in the co-design of services, and learn from their feedback and experiences to continually re-evaluate and improve service provision.
- What do young people want to learn? Does this balance with what you think they need to learn? Involving YP in the design of services allows for discussion to align these expectations.
  - i. For example, with regard to energy advice, saving money tended to be a priority, but environmental considerations were also a concern for some (if both goals could be achieved in tandem).



#### **4. Ensure that options for accessing the service are flexible.**

- Young people can be busy during the day with work, childcare, studying, etc., therefore providing support only at single times of the week/day will always exclude many YPs.
- Offering multiple or flexible options for accessing your service is best to maximise the number of YPs able to engage.

#### **5. Make the most of digital platforms, but be mindful of digital exclusion.**

- Digital service provision is great for removing physical accessibility barriers, but introduces new challenges for those without access to the necessary technology or internet connection. To overcome this, either provide equivalent services both online and in-person, or work with local organisations to provide access to technology for YP.
- Anticipate 'digital exhaustion' - if YP are spending a lot of time accessing education or work virtually, it is unlikely that they will voluntarily join virtual workshops in their free time.



#### **6. Use social media effectively**

- Platforms such as Instagram and Twitter are great for reaching large audiences to promote services and events. However, do not depend on them as methods of engagement or advice provision - YP tend not to interact with social media content from services.

## **7. Recognise the abilities of YP and empower them to help themselves where possible**

- Young adults tend to have a positive outlook on the situation. Fuel poverty interventions designed for young people should recognise this positive attitude and be based on empowerment rather than seeing service users as vulnerable. Rather than framing service users as vulnerable people, energy advisers can help to empower people to bring themselves out of fuel poverty and improve their own physical and mental wellbeing.



## **8. Group sessions, such as workshops, should be interactive.**

- Recognise the value of peer-to-peer education and sharing of experiences. The role of the service provider should be to facilitate discussion between attendees, not just dictating information. Conversation will help to contextualise the advice being given, and therefore make YP more likely to remember and act upon it.

## **9. Be mindful of the impact mental health has on Young People.**

- There are many things in our lives that can impact our mental health. For example, studies consistently suggest that living in cold and/or damp conditions has a negative impact on mental health. Be mindful of what young people you engage are experiencing and its effect on them.



## **10. Highlight successes but manage expectations**

- Show off your successes and what has been achieved previously. This will boost a young person's confidence in engaging with you