



Reimagining justice for children and young people

Alliance for Youth Justice
Strategy 2023-25



Alliance
for Youth
Justice



Introducing the Alliance for Youth Justice

The Alliance for Youth Justice (AYJ) brings together over 70 organisations, as a movement to drive positive change in youth justice for the benefit of children, young people and society. Our work is shaped by children and young people with lived experience of the youth justice system, and the organisations working with them – we amplify their voices to develop solutions, share learning and influence change.

Guided by our members and those they work with, this strategy seeks to reimagine youth justice and ensure those who shape and create policy recognise how criminal justice intersects with a broad range of multiple and complex drivers experienced by children and young people. We're clear that there is a need to challenge the racial disparity so evident in our justice system, as well as the disproportionality of those children and young people who have been let down by education, health and other systems.

This strategy aims to do this building on our cornerstones of youth voice, research and evidence, and practical expertise, whilst strengthening our own footing as an organisation. Our aim for this strategic period is to reimagine 'justice' for children and young people.

Only by hearing from those who are impacted, and listening to their experiences of opportunity and change – can we create a system which looks for the good, the positive, and the ways in which we can work together – across services and systems – to create real, lasting change.

Our Vision

A society that promotes social justice and enables all children to reach their full potential.

Our Mission

We advocate for and with children to drive positive change in youth justice.

Our Purpose

We bring together the expertise of our members and provide ways for them to collectively shape decision-making.





Our Values

We put our values into practice in all that we do at the Alliance for Youth Justice, providing the foundations for our relationships with children and young people, our members, partner organisations and all those we engage with. Across all of our work we strive to be:



Collaborative

As an alliance, we believe that our collective influence is far greater than the sum of its parts. Our network is underpinned by a collaborative approach and aims to develop new partnerships to further our objectives. We recognise that there is not a level playing field when it comes to delivery of services.



Child-centred

We amplify the views of children and young people and centre their interests, rights, and wellbeing. Rather than promoting a particular service or intervention, we press for change in the best interests of children and young people. We recognise difference and that not all under 18's are impacted in the same way and that racial disproportionality exists in criminal justice system.



Anti-discrimination

We work to ensure that equity and anti-discrimination informs all thinking about youth justice and our own work as an alliance. We recognise the impact of discrimination and stand up against the oppressive structures, attitudes and actions that create disadvantage in society.



Credible

Our work is informed by robust research, data, and analysis. We work with our networks to develop the evidence-base to inform long-term solutions, rooted in the experience of our members and the children and young people they work with.



Independent

We believe in the importance of speaking truth to power and holding the government to account. We do not accept government funding or deliver government-commissioned work. We recognise the lack of trust that many of our communities have in institutions that have continued to fail them.



Tenacious

Strongly committed to our principles, we have courage in advocating for change and we don't give up. Our principles around anti-racism and youth justice are non-negotiable.

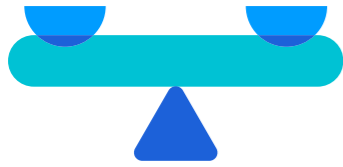


Our Approach

The Alliance for Youth Justice is built on the strength of its membership, supported by independent research and evidence of good practice. By placing these, along with the voices of children and young people, at the heart of our approach, we are able to create real, lasting change across the youth justice sector.

Our approach to all our work is to:

- Have a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion and in particular tackling racial injustice
- Develop our evidence base, informed by research, data and lived experience from a variety of sources
- Nurture and support our members, identifying opportunities for their benefit, especially smaller and grassroots organisations
- Listen to the voices of children and young people, particularly those who are most disproportionately impacted by youth justice
- Prioritise children and young people from marginalised backgrounds in our work



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

As an organisation, over the past few years, we have worked to diversify both our Board and membership base, bringing together expertise from marginalised groups and those with lived experience of the issues across the youth justice system. The Board has established a sub-committee to support the AYJ to consider equity, diversity, and inclusion through the delivery of its work to improve the youth justice system, to act as a consultative group in the development of policy and strategy, and provide lived experience insights.

We know that children in the youth justice system face multiple forms of discrimination with regard to a range of characteristics such as race, age, gender and sexuality - and often these factors intersect to exacerbate the challenges they face.

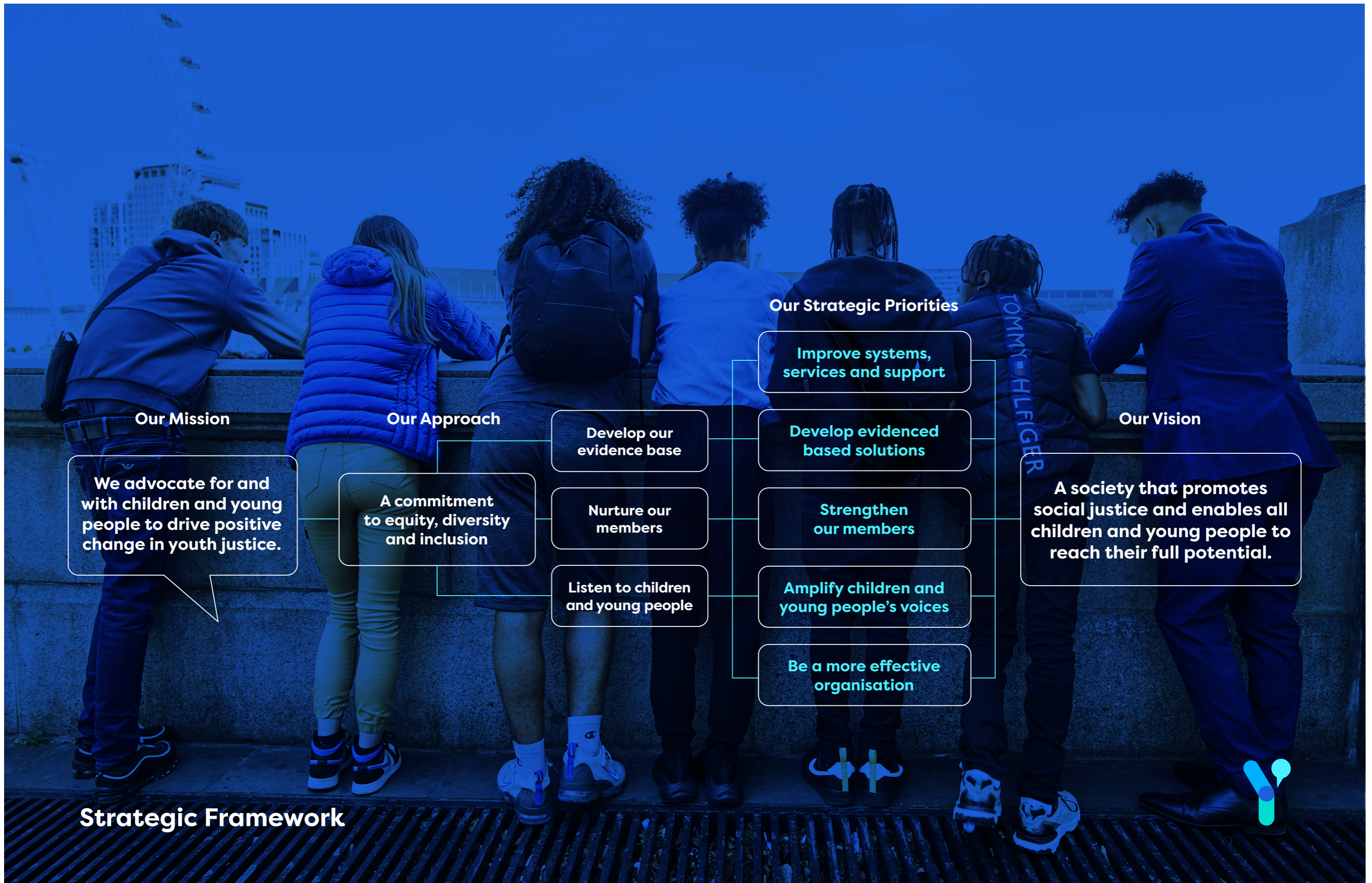
We have worked with members and cross-sector partners, to raise the profile of the treatment and experiences of, and outcomes for, marginalised communities. This has included policy influencing work alongside organisations such as Action for Race Equality (ARE) and the Traveller Movement; drawing on the expertise of a range of specialist and grassroots organisations; as well as partnering with Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk, to develop the **Young Women's Justice Project**.

Additionally, we are extremely proud to have established the Young Advocates for Youth Justice Project, amplifying the voices of children and young people with experience of the justice system to be part of a movement to drive positive change around issues that are important to them – with stereotyping of young people being a priority topic in their **recently published first report**.

We will ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion in our approach through:

- Adopting an anti-racist perspective when delivering policy work
- Ensuring our evidence base captures a diverse range of voices, providing platforms and opportunities for more organisations – proactively seeking out grassroots or community groups, beneficiary-led organisations, or those who are representative of minoritised communities
- Providing targeted support to groups with less experience of sharing their work, making opportunities accessible to all, and creating space for a wide range of voices
- Expanding our work directly with children and young people, capitalising on our members work with them, to ensure we hear from diverse voices across demographics, geographies, and experiences
- Developing our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion sub-committee, so that our work in this area is held to account.





Our Mission

We advocate for and with children and young people to drive positive change in youth justice.

Our Approach

A commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

Develop our evidence base

Nurture our members

Listen to children and young people

Our Strategic Priorities

Improve systems, services and support

Develop evidenced based solutions

Strengthen our members

Amplify children and young people's voices

Be a more effective organisation

Our Vision

A society that promotes social justice and enables all children and young people to reach their full potential.

Strategic Framework

Our Strategic Priorities for 2023–2025

As we enter our next strategic period, we have identified five priorities that will help us deliver our mission, bringing together and supporting the strength, knowledge, and skills of our members to drive positive change for children and young people.

1. Improve systems, services, and support
2. Develop evidence-based solutions
3. Strengthen our membership
4. Amplify young people's voices
5. Be a more effective organisation

Priority 1:

Improve systems, services and support

We want to bring together the expertise of our members, the voices of children and young people, and research evidence to create a reframed, asset-based narrative around children and young people and youth justice, focused on hope and opportunity. By sharing this with those who design and deliver systems, services, and support, we will seek to find ways to improve their offer, helping them reimagine what these could look like and the impact this can have.

By proactively countering punitive and deficit-based approaches, we will seek to promote racial justice throughout the youth justice system, highlighting the work of our members and demonstrating what could be, not just what should stop or change.

We will:

- Develop new and creative ways of reaching different audiences
- Work collaboratively with our members to share their collective experience and influence policy
- Identify and share opportunities for collective impact and influence with decision-makers and government departments
- Use localised approaches to influence youth justice, specifically in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion issues
- Promote changes to policy and practice to ensure that fewer children and young people, particularly those experiencing racial inequity, come into contact with the youth justice system
- Develop a consistent message and language for describing issues of racial injustice and an AYJ position on how we talk about issues of race and inequality in the YJS (similarly to the NHS).¹

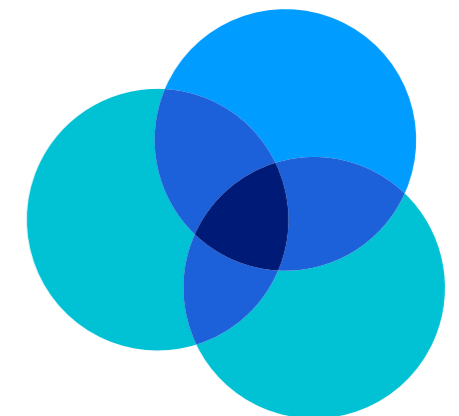


The Alliance for Youth Justice provides a very helpful and effective mechanism for collating and disseminating the views of the sector as well as a forum where voluntary sector organisations can engage in discussions to help formulate their views. Their role is pivotal in terms of having a focus for communicating with stakeholders in a consistent manner.

National Association for Youth Justice
(AYJ Member)

The Alliance for Youth Justice is brilliant at bringing together a wide-range of organisations who offer rich insights and perspectives across the youth justice and wider youth system.

Centre for Mental Health
(AYJ Member)



1. https://www.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NHS_RaceHealthObservatory_Terminology-consultation-report-NOV-21-1.pdf

Priority 2:

Develop evidence-based solutions

The Alliance for Youth Justice brings together organisations of all sizes and shapes from across youth justice. From grassroots community groups to national charities, to our academic Associates; all have powerful messages, and shared experiences which the Alliance for Youth Justice can promote as a strong, evidence-based collective voice.

We will continue to work collaboratively to learn from each other as well as conducting our own research, creating robust recommendations to support our mission. This is where our power lies - enabling members' individual and collective experiences and evidence to be heard and seen by policy and decision makers across social justice.

We will:

- Promote findings and recommendations from research by the Alliance for Youth Justice and our members, and facilitate connections between members and the wider research community
- Give a voice to research evidence and findings from a range of critical perspectives to tackle systemic injustice and inequality
- Identify gaps in knowledge and additional areas of potential research related to equality, diversity and inclusion and prioritise where relevant
- Develop a member 'Research Advisory Group' to provide opportunities for collaboration and to embed the Alliance for Youth Justice's work in the wider evidence base
- Develop opportunities for funded research projects and collaborations

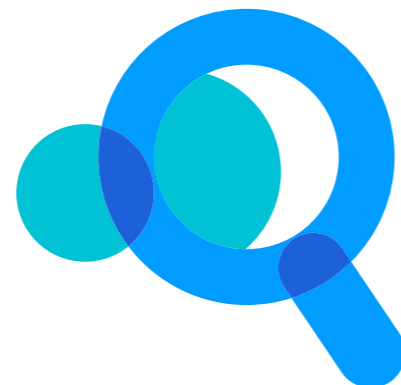


[The Alliance for Youth Justice's work is always reliable, clear, comprehensive and trustworthy. They are experts in the field. They seek collaboration with relevant others and are clearly committed to supporting and promoting young people throughout the sector and organisation. They have a clear and evidenced intention to provide critique and proposals for change.]

Safe Ground (AYJ Member)

Cuts to funding, capacity and size sometimes mean that many charitable organisations are unable to influence policy alone. By bringing together so many organisations and engaging the sector in developing policy positions, the Alliance for Youth Justice amplifies the voice of so many of its members.

Khulisa (AYJ Member)





Priority 3: Strengthen our membership

We are committed to supporting our network of members to be mobilised for positive change – both in their own work for and with children and young people, and as part of the AYJ. Only as strong, effective organisations working together can we ensure that we create the changes we want to see for all those that we work with.

Over the next few years, we want to highlight the work of our members, creating spaces for them to learn from each other and share their experiences and achievements. We will sustain and develop our members' meetings and communications, ensuring that partnerships and collaborations have real impact.

We will:

- Support members to influence policy and practice and to tackle systemic inequalities, by convening voluntary sector organisations to advocate and influence and share the views of the children and young people they support
- Increase diversity of the membership, reviewing gaps in expertise, particularly in areas of inequality, and actively targeting organisations for better representation of the communities most impacted
- Provide opportunities for smaller grassroots organisations, particularly those with a focus on racial injustice, to share specialist knowledge, build capacity and influence
- Promote collaboration and shared learning between members through meetings, forums, events, and newsletter, including convening issue-specific expert groups and consultation events
- Create collaborative initiatives, partnerships and coalitions aiming to influence policy change
- Address structural inequality in terms of voluntary and community sector service providers in the youth justice system

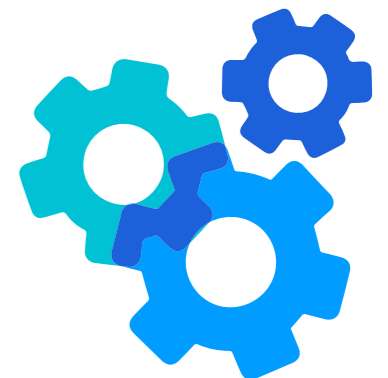


The policy updates and member forums are really engaging to attend and read as a member, [creating] opportunities for frontline delivery staff to take a much needed step out of their day jobs and have space to use their experience to influence policy through a clear evidence-based approach that is respected by all stakeholders. [The Alliance for Youth Justice has] plays a crucial influencing role in the sector.

Sector partner

Being an Alliance for Youth Justice member, you are provided information in an accessible way on what can be complex policy and practice areas. The Alliance for Youth Justice brings partners together to have more of a voice, particularly those who may not be big enough to have a full policy and communications function.

Safer London (AYJ Member)



Priority 4:

Amplify children and young people's voices

We are committed to strengthening the voices of children and young people being heard by policy makers across social justice and are working towards becoming an organisation in which participation of children and young people is central to all our activities.

This strategic period will see us build on the establishment of our young people's participation group, placing the participation of those with direct experience of the youth justice system at the heart of our work. We will work with them to create a movement for positive policy change to benefit all those at risk of entering, or within, the youth justice system.

We will:

- Grow and expand the reach and influence of the Young Advocates project, providing opportunities to engage with decision-makers and share findings and recommendations from their peer research
- Support children and young people to amplify their voices where they might face challenges, in order for them to impact positively and shape decision making processes
- Ensure the AYJ is engaging with children and young people with marginalised voices on their terms, making opportunities as accessible as possible to enable them to engage effectively
- Give children and young people the opportunity to gain useful experience and/or qualifications through engagement with AYJ work
- Engage children and young people in the development of our work and strategic approach to challenging the existing issues in the youth justice system
- Develop increased opportunities for AYJ members to amplify the voices of children and young people they work with



Being involved in the Young Advocates has definitely grown my confidence, given me better hope and opportunities for the future, opened new doors for me with a lot of amazing opportunities that I never thought in a million years I'd be involved in. Overall, I'd say it's been an absolutely amazing experience, I would recommend to any young person who wants their voice to be heard or anyone looking for a purpose, a meaning and contribution to society.

Young Advocate

A great illustration of the power of young people- particularly those with lived experience of our services - to be part of the solution. After all, who understands the Youth Justice system better than they do?

Claudia Sturt, Chief Executive
Youth Justice Board





Priority 5:

Be a more effective organisation

We are committed to developing not only our members, but also the way we work. The last couple of years have seen us significantly strengthen the organisation, with a new name, brand, and internal system. We now want to build on this and share our impact more widely with our members and other stakeholders.

As we move into this next strategic period, we will be working to improve our financial sustainability and explore new partnerships to build our foundations and allow us to work in the way that best supports our members.

We will:

- Be an anti-racist, anti-oppressive organisation
- Celebrate our impact with others through an annual report, with a focus on impact and learning
- Develop and implement an income generation strategy
- Implement recommendations from our governance review
- Review our equity, diversity and inclusion practice within the AYJ and develop strategies to address inequalities
- Ensure that our board is diverse with relevant sub-committees – including young people, to be reflective of our values.



The Alliance for Youth Justice team has an absolute wealth of knowledge about their priority policy areas - their extensive evidence-base, and commitment to producing well-evidenced work is real strength.

Agenda (Delivery partner)

Our Funders:

Barrow Cadbury Trust
Children in Need
Economic and Social Research Council
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
Lloyds Bank Foundation
Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Our Members:

1625 Independent People
Abianda
Article39
Association of Youth Offending Team Managers
Barnardo's
Become
Black Learning Achievement and Mental Health
Care Leavers Association
Carney's Community
Catch22
Centre for Justice Innovation
Centre for Mental Health
Centrepoint
Chiltern Way Academy Trust
Criminal Justice Alliance
CLINKS
Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services
CRAE
Depaul UK
Devon Young People's Trust
Diagrama Foundation
EQUAL
Howard League
Intermediaries for Justice
Just for Kids Law
Justice
Justice Studio
Juvenis
Khulisa
Kinetic Youth
Leap Confronting Conflict
LifeLine Projects

Listen Up
MAC-UK
Michael Sieff Foundation
Nacro
National Appropriate Adult Network
National Youth Advocacy Service
NAYJ
NCB
New Horizon Youth Centre
NSPCC
Oasis Charitable Trust
Office of the Children's Commissioner
Peer Power
Prison Reform Trust
Prisoner Education Trust
Project 507
Reach Every Generation
Redthread
Safe Ground
Safer London
Secure Accommodation Network
SHiFT
Solve: The Centre for Youth Violence and Conflict
Spark Inside
Street Doctors
The Children's Society
The Enthusiasm Trust
The National Literacy Trust
The Skill Mill
The Traveller Movement
Transform Justice
Unitas
Unlock
User Voice
Volteface
We Are With You
Wipe the Slate Clean
Wipers
Why Me?
Youth for Christ
Youth Practitioners' Association
YSS
Zahid Mubarek Trust