



Research Report

Young people 11-25

By Lucy Spielberg



Introduction

Gympanzees is a charity that offers play, exercise and social inclusion opportunities to children and young adults with any disability. From mild to profound physical disability, learning difficulties together with sensory and behavioural disorders.

Currently we offer this support through our free Lending Library, online resources and our Pop-Up events which happen twice a year. We have recently launched our campaign Project Home, to open the UK's first fully inclusive play and exercise facility in 2023.

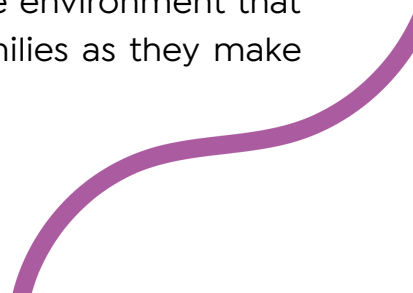
Prior to this research, we found we were not reaching the older age category. For example, 86% of our Lending Library loans are to children aged eleven or under, with occasional loans to teenagers and young adults; similar figures are true of our Pop Up events.

The purpose of this research is to learn what Gympanzees could offer young people and their families once our main centre has been built. We were also keen to find out where the gaps were in provision for young people and what some of the barriers were to accessing current services.

We interviewed twenty four different disability services and groups, and fourteen parents, carers and PA's. Online surveys were sent out via social media and through the disability groups, we received forty three responses. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and Team's calls, or in person. We visited 3 established youth groups which were in South Glos, and BANES.

We have begun plans to set up our own youth council within our charity. This council will be made up of a diverse group of advocates who will assist in the shaping of Gympanzees' services for themselves and their peers. These will be people aged 16+, from a range of backgrounds, with a variety of disabilities.

Through this research we hope to find out what young people need in order to thrive in our community. We want to provide an inclusive and accessible environment that both enriches and supports children, young people and their families as they make their way into adulthood.



Themes from interviews

The following themes were identified as being the most prevalent across all the research.

What are the gaps in current provision? What are the barriers in accessing services?

What can Gympanzees offer as a venue?

TRAINING - Disability services and parents are asking for more opportunities for young people to develop their independent and social skills. Calling for more training and classes to encourage goal setting and employment opportunities.

SUPPORT - 21% of parents and 28% of disability groups noted lack of support for parents as being a gap in current provisions. Noting that transitions into adulthood left some parents feeling "helpless and confused".

EQUIPMENT - 61% of parents and carers struggle to find age-appropriate equipment for their young adults to use. They enjoyed parks and softplay but found them inaccessible due to height and weight restrictions.

VENUES - 61% of parents and carers expressed how inaccessible most venues and activities are in Bristol. With 61% also finding activities are not as inclusive as described. Parents asking for better understanding of disabilities.

TRAVEL - 80% of young people do not like using public transport and would rely on their parents or the youth group to provide it. 37% of parents and carers said that parking issues would put them off going to venues. And 7% of disability services cited transport as a gap in their provision.

CHANGING BEHAVIOURS - 30% of parents and carers felt "shame and embarrassment" and felt like they were being "judged" when out and about with their children. 28% of services also recognised a need for more integration between schools and local communities.

COLLABORATION - 33% of disability groups wanted more collaboration between services, in regards to funding opportunities. 21% said there is a lack of funding from local councils, which stops them being able to provide more support for their families.

DESIGNATED YOUTH SPACE - Just under 50% of parents, carers and disability services would like Gympanzees to provide a separate space specifically for young adults, to go alongside the other activity rooms. Current over-crowded youth clubs and Covid related closures being a current barrier.

Summary of online survey results

AGE

- 26% (11-15 yrs)
- 40% (16-19 yrs)
- 9% (19-24 yrs)
- 26% (25 & over)

Disability

- 58% are Autistic
- 14% with complex, physical and learning disabilities
- 12% with sensory and behavioural disabilities

Gender

- 61% male
- 32% female
- 7% transgender

Location

- 47% - Bristol City Centre
- 23% - South Glos
- 9% - North Somerset
- 9% - BANES
- 9% - Wiltshire

Visiting our Centre

- 53% would stay up to 2 hours
- 67% would visit with their family
- 63% would bring a carer or PA
- 42% would like to come with their friends
- 83% would like to hang out with people their own age
- 53% have not heard of Gympanzees prior to this research



Do you agree or disagree with these statements?

Agree -

- I like to be independent - 78%
- I like to try new things - 59%
- I enjoy meeting new people - 63%
- I like going to new places - 57%

Disagree -

- I like getting public transport- 80%

Observations – Visiting Youth Clubs

Activities offered –


Arts and crafts, puzzles, playgrounds, TV's with DVD's, pool tables, music, cooking skills, gaming consoles, reading corners, indoor halls.

Clubs ran from 6.50pm-9.15pm, with 2-4 support staff. Each setting could accommodate up to twenty young people, ages ranging from fourteen to nineteen. Autism was the most common disability across all youth clubs, as was sensory and behavioural disabilities.

There was a good balance between pre-organised and young person led activities. Themes for each session had been discussed prior to the start of each term. Most young people chose to 'hang-out' with their friends, or play on their own iPads and phones. The pool tables, televisions, gaming consoles, arts and crafts and the empty open spaces were most popular. One of the youth clubs had a recently refurbished outside space which the young people loved. Others used their indoor empty space to make videos together on their phones.

Food played an important part for each club. One session offered a cup of hot chocolate and a biscuit on arrival and it was heart-warming to observe how this brought the whole group together straight away. Some young people chose to help prepare the food or dessert, and it was nice to hear compliments given to them by other young people as everyone gathered together like one big family for the meal.

At one youth club session we were able to play games as a way of asking some survey questions. Seven of the fifteen who attended this session joined in with this activity. From the notes made afterwards, all participants wanted to use the café in our main centre and play in the different sensory rooms. Almost all agreed that they wanted to come to the centre with either their friends or family.



Reflections

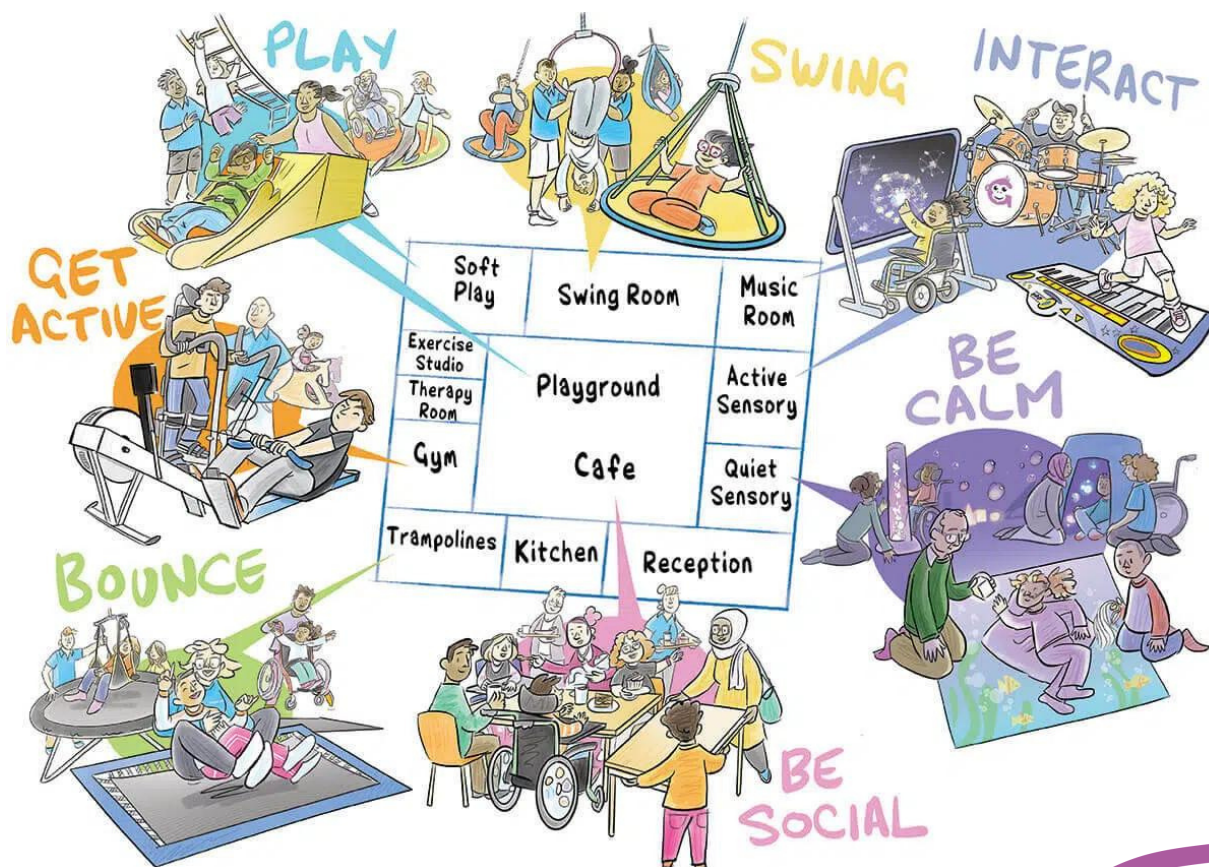
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Creating spaces that can be owned by young people, allows adults to step away to allow growth

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These youth clubs were just like any other youth club. A place where young people can relax with their friends, that is somewhere away from the routine of school and parents.

Relationships and friendships are formed at these youth clubs. This is a space to test their identities, how they feel towards others, how they wish to be treated by others, what they like and dislike, what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This is a place they can speak for themselves without their parents being around. Young people can use these spaces as testing grounds which will in turn prepare them for adulthood. We need to create the right environment that supports this journey in a safe and nurturing way, considering all the diverse and rich lives that young people have and bring to these spaces.



Discussion

Many young adults with disabilities still find pleasure in going to parks and playgrounds regardless of their age.

Sadly, 61% of parents and carers find that the equipment is not suitable for their children. They want "bigger versions of small equipment" or "accessible play equipment". Disability services would like to see more "specialised equipment rather than a one-size-fits all approach".

Parents also want a place where their children "can meet other children like them that suits both siblings with polar opposite needs".



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This would bring some sense of normality to a world that can be very isolating.

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Survey question (forty-four responses) - What would you like to do at our main centre?



Conclusion

As young people transition into adulthood, it is important to recognise the steps needed for this to be achieved successfully. Not only as they move through school or into further education but also in their personal aspirations too.

Parents, carers and disability groups acknowledge this with 40-42% wanting to see more opportunities for their young people to practice skills needed for adulthood. The Bristol Belonging strategy also supports this by stating "systematic approach is needed to manage the transition between life as a child and as an adult which can be sudden and unsupported".



It would be nice to see more places in the community that offer young people stepping stones to gain skills to independence.



What Gympanzees could offer

- Volunteer placements at our centre.
- Hiring out of the venue to groups and other disability services.
- Disability experience and support for visiting clubs.
- Work experience in our café or in our sensory rooms.
- Young person to have their own membership card.
- Develop a youth council to help shape our future.
- Independence skills that incorporate EHCP targets or personal goal setting.
- Short courses and training held at our studio and run by other disability services (sexual health, cyber bullying awareness, assistive tech, mental health, LGBTQ+ support).
- Trained staff to allow communication skills to be practiced in a safe environment.
- Drop-in support sessions for parents to assist in EHCP writing, further education options, work placements.
- A regulation space near the entrance to the centre.
- A chill-out/ hangout space for young people to develop interpersonal skills and promote "positive relationships".
- Collaboration with other disability services to deliver a quality provision.
- Age-appropriate equipment.

By working with other services we can provide a richer, more meaningful experience and the best possible start into adulthood for our young people. Echoing this, the Bristol Strategy states "it is the people, the venues and the offer within a child's community that helps them to find their sense of belonging".

With special thanks to

“A whole city feeds into a child. What's required is a process of constant communication to build a picture of that person”

A special thank you goes out to all the participants who took part in this research. To the parents, carers, PA's, Direct Payment Workers, all the young people who filled in a survey, and the youth clubs who let us observe their sessions.

With thanks to -

