

The importance of listening to children

In 2018, I started working with the Youth Independent Advisory Group (YIAG) at Waltham Forest council. I heard about the role through a similar programme that was being run at my secondary school. It seemed like an amazing opportunity to get involved as a young person in my local area and make changes that would improve life for me and my friends.

I was excited about getting involved in the group as I felt like it was doing a lot of important work around getting young people's voices heard. Since joining the YIAG I have taken part in some interesting initiatives. The Streetbase programme began soon after I joined, and this has been one of my highlights of my time in the YIAG. Streetbase involves members of our groups going out onto the street and engaging with young people we see in our area.

We ask for their opinions on current events and about their interests, so that we can refer them to services which provide the opportunities they are looking for. Some of the interactions I have had on various Streetbase patrols have been incredibly eye-opening and have helped us, as well as helping young people find support and positive things to do.

Another part of YIAG work I have enjoyed has been delivering workshops in schools and youth centres. Interacting and engaging with the young people around issues that affect them is important: it gives them a chance not only to learn from us, but to teach us about their lives, and how they view things. On top of this, being able to attend scrutiny meetings in the local council has enabled us to relay some of the things we learn on Streetbase patrols, or in workshops, to relevant authorities within the local area.

Our work is genuinely helping young people to get their voices heard, which is important, especially as they often feel that they are being left out of certain decisions. Working with other groups that support young people, such as the Youth Justice Board and the Young Women's Board with the charity Abianda, commissioned by the council, has also been insightful. Making connections with other organisations that support young people is useful, and gives us the chance to explain our opinions, as well as gaining information about the work of other groups.

My work with the YIAG has also inspired me to take a deeper look at the Youth Justice System. This year, I wrote an article called ['Knifepoint'](#) which won the Orwell Youth Prize*. In the article, I described the causes of youth violence and how it can be prevented, using research. I have also now been employed as part of the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit on the Youth Action Group.

In the future, I hope to continue to advocate for young people and help those that are the most vulnerable in our society.

Jess, WF YIAG member