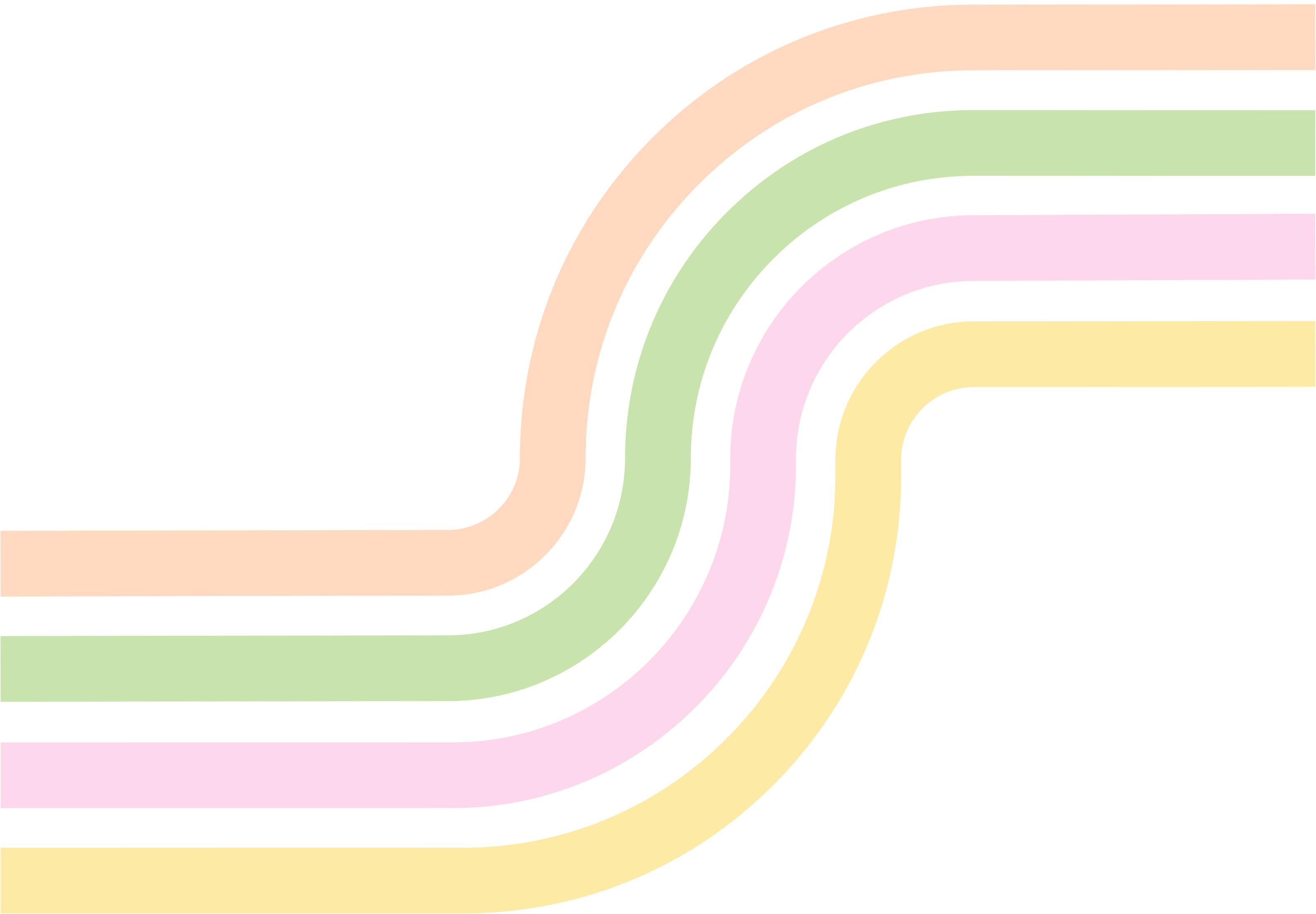




**Impact Report April 2025 – April 2026**

**Youth Advisory Group (YAG)  
Year in Review**



**Funded by  
the European Union**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM**

# Foreword

Hello reader!

For those who may not know me, I'm Sophia and I'm the Youth Involvement Officer for YOUTHreach :) I'm also a former member of the Youth Advisory Group (YAG)! I've really enjoyed my transition from YAG member to becoming a member of staff and I've learned a lot since I started at the University of Birmingham in December 2025. Despite being a proud Brummie\*, I also lived in The Netherlands for four years and I feel deeply European, which shapes my passion for culturally competent mental healthcare and research. I'm really excited to see where this role takes me, and to grow the Youth Advisory Group into a safe and meaningful peer-led space.

This past year, our YAG members have brought honesty, insight, creativity and lived experience into every stage of the YOUTHreach project. They've challenged ideas, shaped discussions and reminded us why research about young people must involve young people from the very beginning.

I don't need to write about how pressing an issue youth mental health is, but meaningful youth participatory research helps us to better understand young people's experiences, improve support and services and influence policies that can create real change. Young people are experts in their own lives and their perspectives are essential in shaping research that is relevant, inclusive and impactful.

I'm incredibly proud of everything our YAG has contributed this year and grateful to every member of the YOUTHreach consortium for the passion and openness they bring to working with our Youth Advisors. I hope this report reflects not only the progress of our project, but also the value youth co-production in research and creates further opportunity for collaboration as we move into the second work package.

Thank you for taking the time to read the YAG Year in Review - we look forward to hearing your ideas and feedback!

Sophia Kaur Badhan  
Youth Involvement Officer, YOUTHreach



\*Brummie is a colloquial term for people from Birmingham!

# What is the YAG?

At YOUTHreach, we believe that mental health solutions for young people should be **shaped by young people**. Our Youth Advisory Group (YAG) sits at the heart of everything we do, ensuring that youth voices from across Europe are heard, valued, and acted upon.

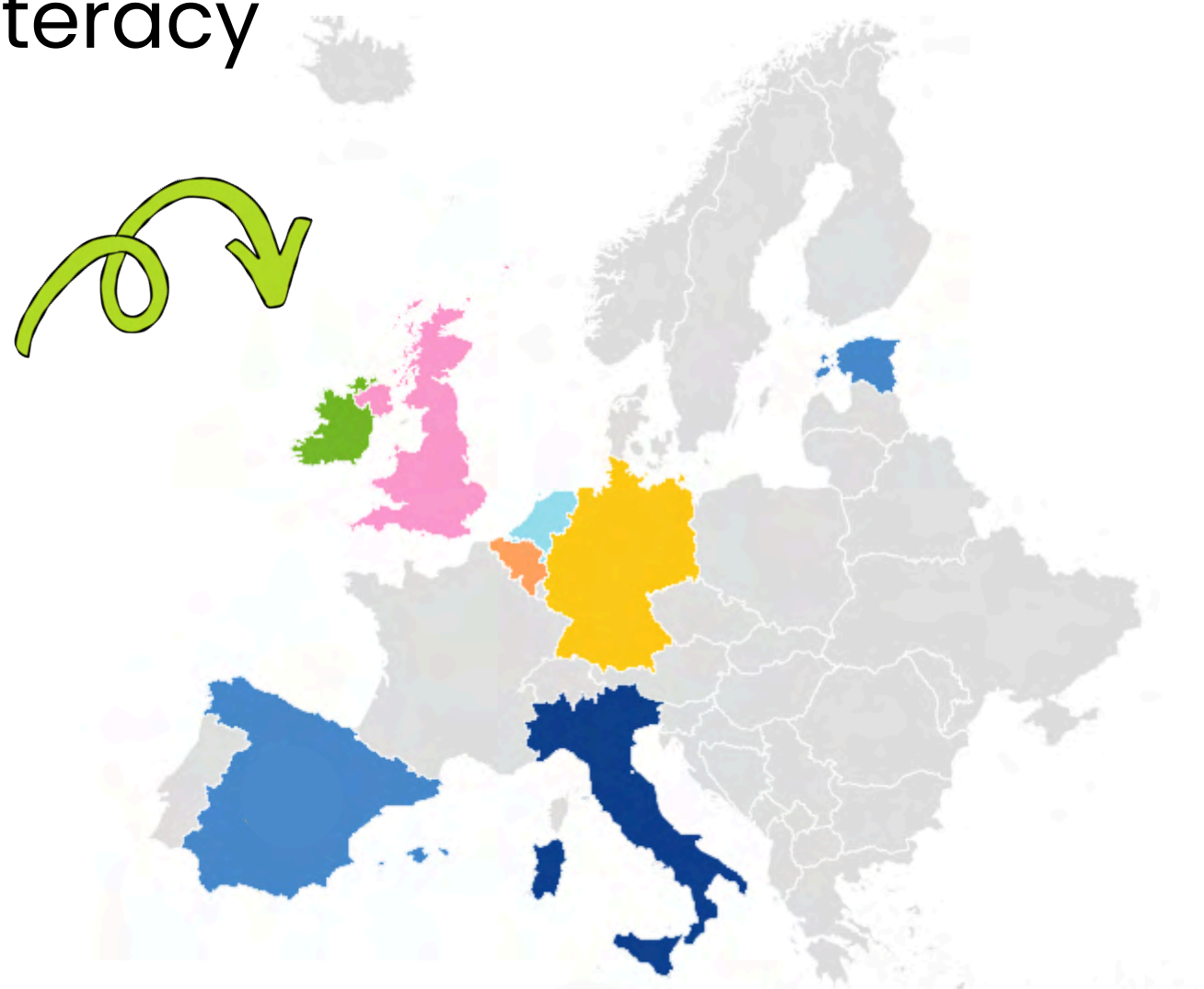
The YOUTHreach YAG includes young people across Europe, aged 18–25 with lived experience of mental health challenges, or who have supported another young person with their mental health.

Our youth advisors:

- Shape research by sharing what truly matters to young people
- Co-guide ethical discussions and promote inclusivity
- Act as an ambassador through social media, podcasts and events
- Engage with policymakers to influence mental health policies that reflect youth experiences
- Develop new skills through training in public speaking, advocacy and scientific literacy

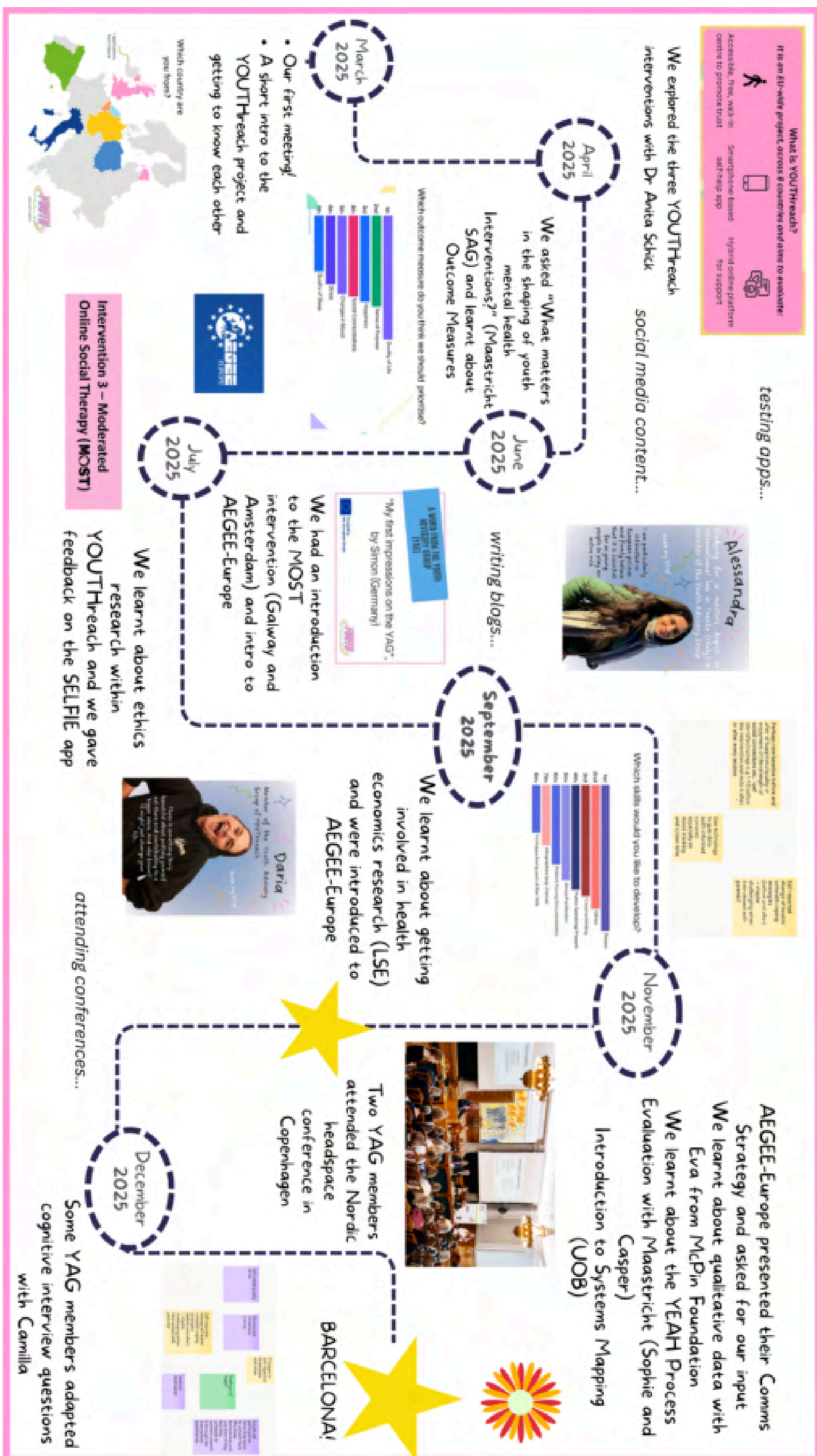
The YAG originally consisted of 13 young people from Ireland, UK, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and Estonia.

We now have 16 members!



# Year in Review

This map shows all the incredible work we have achieved over the past year, since we initially set up the YAG in March 2025.



# Recruitment and Launch

We began recruitment in February 2025, starting with designing a flyer. We then shared this flyer with the leads of all participating countries in the YOUTHreach project, for them to share with young people. Expressions of interest were collected via a Microsoft Form.



**JOIN US!**

CLOSING DATE - 30TH MARCH  
OPEN INFO SESSION VIA ZOOM - 31ST MARCH



## YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP (YAG)

We aim to provide a platform for young people with lived experiences of **mental health** challenges to influence policies, services and awareness initiatives across Europe.

### What is YOUTHreach?

An exciting EU-wide research project tackling the growing challenges around youth mental health. Together with young people we will evaluate 3 mental health services:



Accessible, free, walk-in centres



A smartphone-based self-help app



A hybrid online platform for support

### Welcome to join us!

- If you are a person aged 18-25 years, with lived experience of mental health.
- If you can be active in our group for at least 6 months. We meet every two months.
- If you want to help shape youth mental health support!

### What will you do?

- Co-produce materials.
- Analyse and review current mental health services.
- Provide recommendations to European policymakers and mental health organisations.
- Advocate for improved youth mental health services and reduced stigma.

**HAPPY TO MEET YOU!**



[www.youth-reach.eu](http://www.youth-reach.eu)

For further information, or if you would like to join us, please scan the QR code or follow

<https://forms.office.com/e/NNZLGZgjHC>



**Members of our YAG receive a compensation for their valuable contribution!**



Funded by  
the European Union

#### Funding statement

YOUTHreach is funded by the European Union under grant number 101156514. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Health and Digital Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

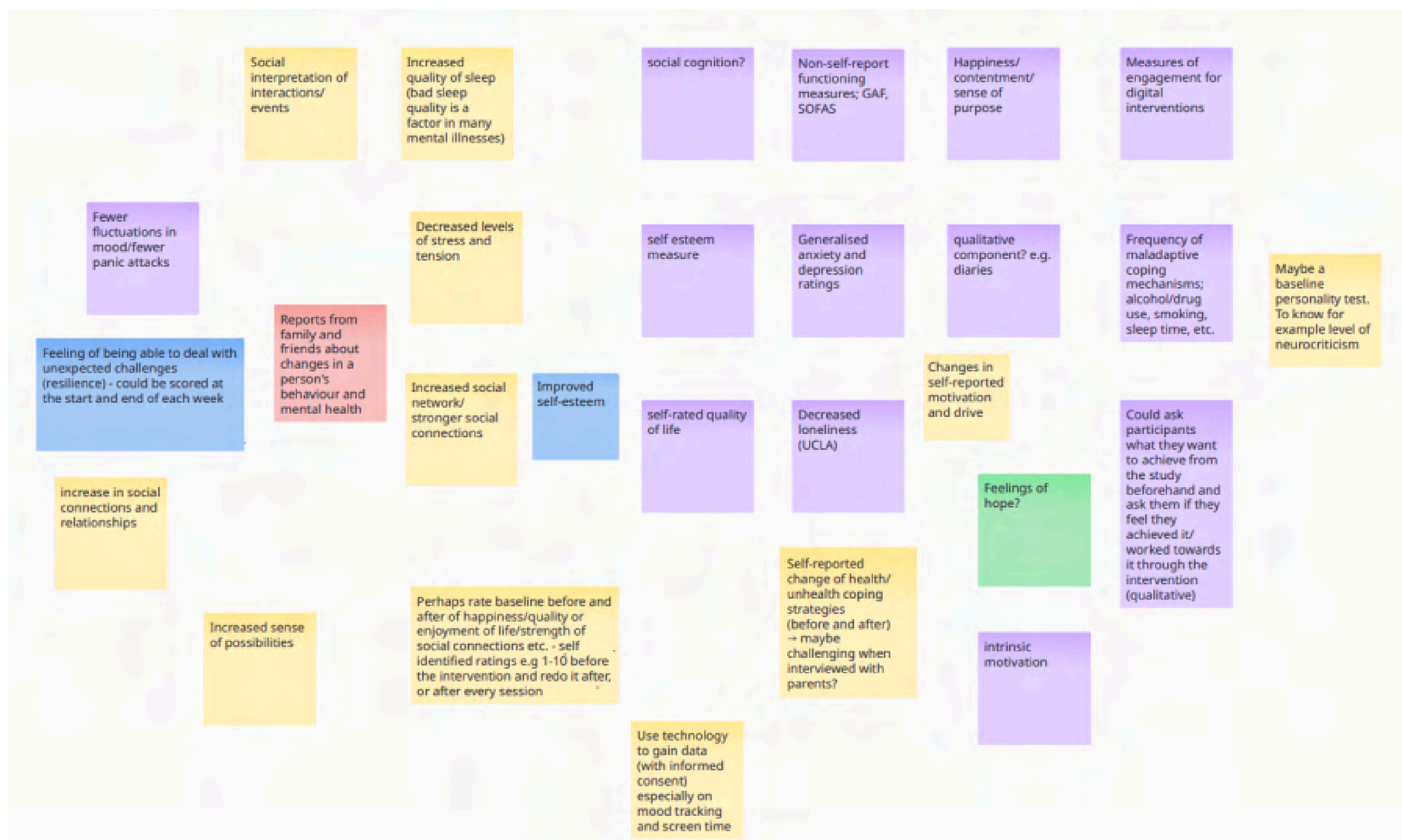
# YAG Session Overviews

Over the past 12 months, we have welcomed **19 members of the YOUTHreach consortium and external partners** to our monthly sessions. They have shared insights on different aspects of the project and worked with the YAG to help shape how key elements of the project are developed and run. Overall, **7 sessions** were delivered over the past year on topics such as health economics, process evaluations, measuring loneliness and even Artificial Intelligence!



# April 2025

**Dr Anita Schick** from the Central Institute of Mental Health in Mannheim, Germany, joined us to explore the **three interventions** at the heart of this project. We asked young people to share their ideas on what measures could best capture the changes sparked by these interventions (e.g., happiness and social connectedness). Their insights have formed the basis of our **youth co-created outcome measure**.



This session was attended by **10 youth advisors** representing **seven countries** across the consortium (Ireland, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Germany, Estonia and Belgium)

# June 2025

In June, **Dr Dorothee Horstkötter** and **Dr Ricky Janssen** from Maastricht University joined us to explore **ethics research** in the context of YOUTHreach, sharing valuable insights to help shape interventions in youth mental healthcare. The session also gave our youth representatives a chance to reflect on what matters most to them, and to consider how they could contribute their voices to other advisory groups across the project. We also had initial discussions over **outcome measures**, and which out of the ones suggested in the previous meeting should be prioritised. Positive outcomes were the main findings from this discussion.



Which outcome measure do you think we should prioritise?



Which skills would you like to develop?



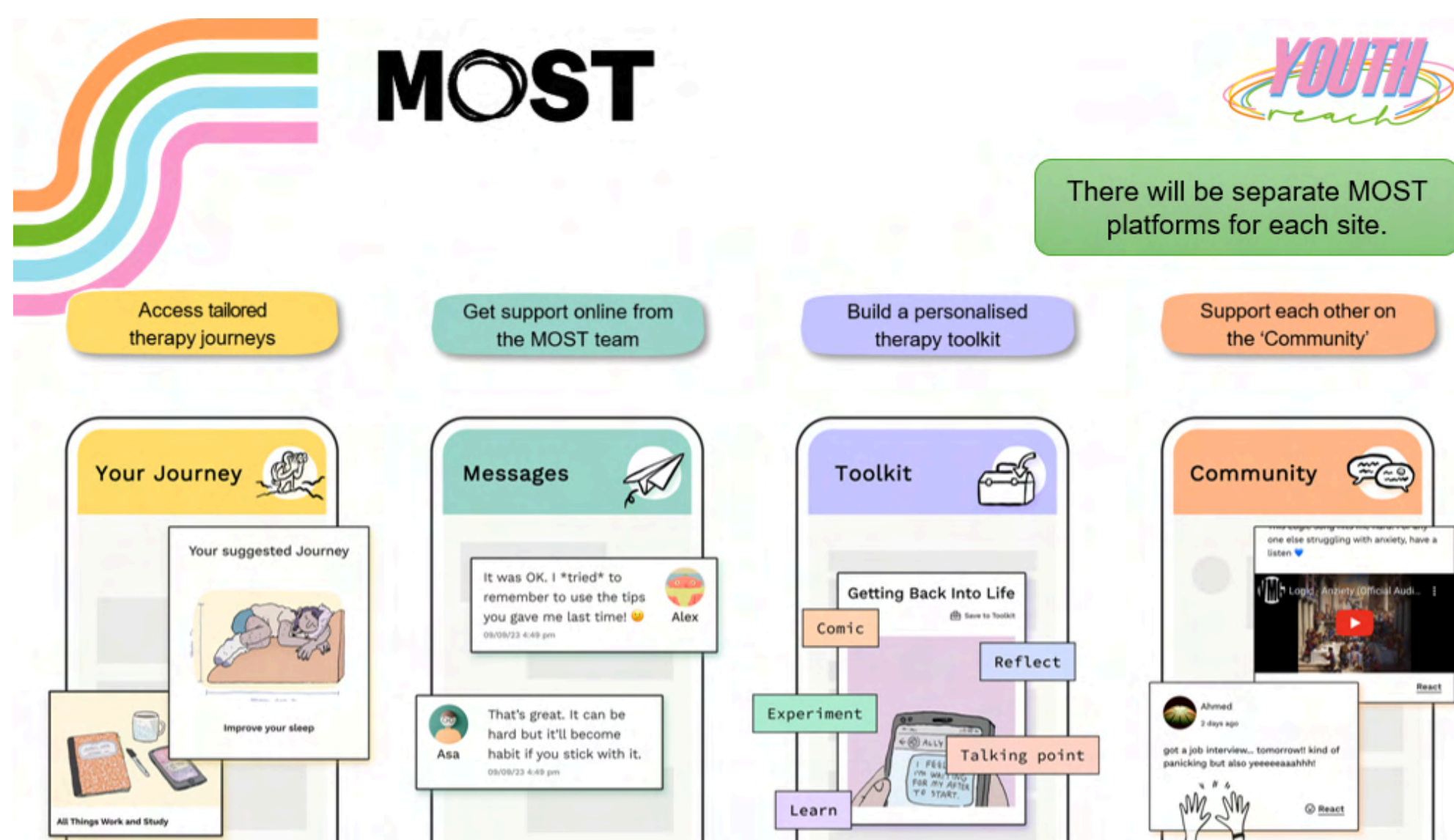
This session was attended by **10 youth advisors** representing **seven countries** across the consortium (Ireland, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Belgium)

# July 2025

In July we were joined by **Dr Maeve Dwan-O'Reilly** (University of Galway) and **Fenna Hellegers** (UMC Amsterdam) who gave an overview of the **MOST Intervention**. They asked for volunteers for a MOST steering group and translation of materials, plus strategies for engaging the community and recruiting via social media.



**Leon Vreling** from AEGEE-Europe also joined to give an overview of AEGEE and how they will be supporting the project.



There will be separate MOST platforms for each site.

This session was attended by **9 youth advisors** representing **six countries** across the consortium (Ireland, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and Belgium)

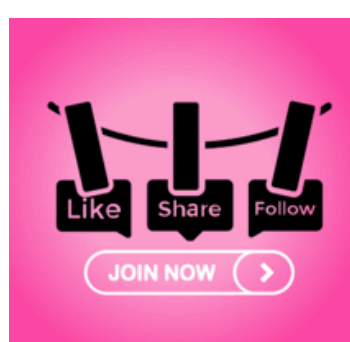
# September 2025

We had lots of guests in September!

**Prof. David McDaid** joined from The London School of Economics to discuss **health economics** and its role within YOUTHreach.

The new president of **AEGEE-Europe**, **Petra Gombár**, also introduced the new AEGEE team and their plans for the project going forward.

**Flore Joskin** (Maastricht University), and **Anna Kessler** and **Dr. Anita Schick** (University of Mannheim) joined to discuss **social media and recruitment** and why it matters for this project. They incorporated our feedback into the official YOUTHreach **communications plan and social media strategy**.



## Recruitment strategy via social media: the big picture



### Key elements

- Youth-friendly
- Accessible language + translations
- Co-created with you(th)!
- Trusted messages + medical ethical commission
- Organic and paid advertising
- Multiple platforms
- Partner with researchers, schools, clinicians
- Connected to other recruitment materials like flyers and posters.

### Recruitment per intervention

- Walk-in Centres (YEAH) = local & visible
  - App (SELFIE) = trust + peer buzz
  - MOST Platform = safe online space + peer stories
- Specific content ideas to be developed together!

This session was attended by **9 youth advisors** representing **six countries** across the consortium (Ireland, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium)

# November 2025

In November, we were joined by **Sophie Leijdesdorff and Casper Crombach** (Maastricht University) who explained process evaluations through an analogy: making cupcakes ! They shared how they're applying this approach to the YEAH intervention.



**Eva Asiedu-Addo (McPin)** delivered a flash talk on quantitative vs. qualitative research, and how creative methods like photovoice can make research more inclusive and reduce power imbalances.



**Mónica Romão (AEGEE-Europe)** joined us to explore how we can shape a social media approach that actually works for young people.



**Rebekah Amos (UoB)** introduced our systems mapping work. We looked at how young people access mental health support, with the goal to create mental health care pathway maps for all countries involved in the project.



This session was attended by **8 youth advisors** representing **seven countries** across the consortium (Ireland, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Belgium)

# December 2025

December was a busy month! Our Youth Involvement Officer for YOUTHreach, Sophia, began her role at the University of Birmingham.

We also **launched the application process** for YAG members to attend the Annual YOUTHreach Consortium Conference in Barcelona.



We held an online information session for YAG members who were interested in applying and then opened the application process, which focused on three main questions:

Why would you like to attend?

Why are you a good fit for this opportunity?

How would your lived experience contribute to the conference?

Ultimately, we were able to take four YAG members to Barcelona for the conference! We also received the wonderful news that Raquel, one of our Youth Advisors, was accepted onto a PhD programme with YOUTHreach at Maastricht University.

Please see the Barcelona Impact Report (Appendix 3) for more information about our trip to Barcelona!

# February 2026

Our February YAG meeting was, as always, jam-packed! We were joined by **Jule Leickert** (Charité Universitätsmedizin, Berlin), who taught us what a **Delphi study** and a **fidelity scale** are in relation to the YOUTHreach walk-in centres (YEAHs).



We then heard from Isaac who attended the **Nordic headspace conference** in Denmark, and from YAG members who attended the **Annual Consortium Meeting in Barcelona**.

Rebekah Amos (UoB) also updated the YAG on the **Co-created Outcome Measure and cognitive interviews**, and Carla introduced us to the idea of the **'baby YAG's** asking for feedback on how the YAG could be involved.

## Let's Discuss

1. What do you think about this idea?
2. What challenges or concerns do you see?
3. How do you feel about being a bridge between the two groups (if you're from one of these countries)?
4. What would help you in this role?

x 4 cognitive interviews conducted with you folks!

- UK x2
- Italy x1
- Netherlands x1



This session was attended by **8 youth advisors** representing **seven countries** across the consortium (Ireland, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Poland)



# Developing a Fidelity Scale for a YEAH/Walk-in Centre

## 1 | Identify Key Ingredients

### Literature Review

- ✓ Barrier-free
- ✓ Welcoming
- ✓ Free
- ✓ Confidential
- ✓ Whenever needed
- ✓ Supports any concerns (mental/physical/social/financial)



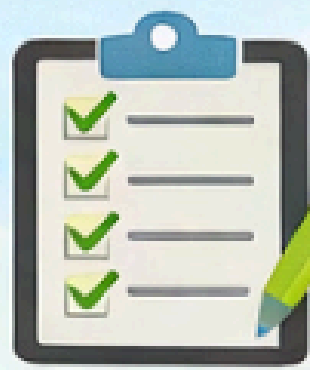
## 2 | Draft Fidelity Scale



Create first version of the scale based on the literature



## 3 | Delphi Study with Experts

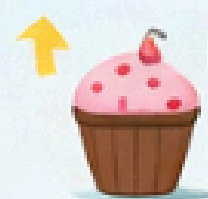


Experts + youth rate items, comment on relevance & completeness, adapt draft after each round until **consensus**



### Draft Fidelity Scale

Create first version of the scale based on the literature



Delphi rounds

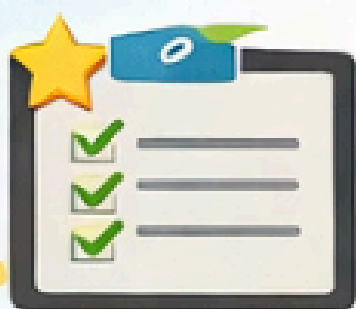


Round 1, Round 2 ...

- ✓ Adapt based on ratings & comments



## 4 | Final Fidelity Scale



Scale is finalized based on Delphi rounds.



## 5 | Implementation & Testing

Implement at sites, check which components link to effectiveness



## 6 | Translation & Country Adaptation



Compare centres across countries, capture differences, improve implementation

# March 2026

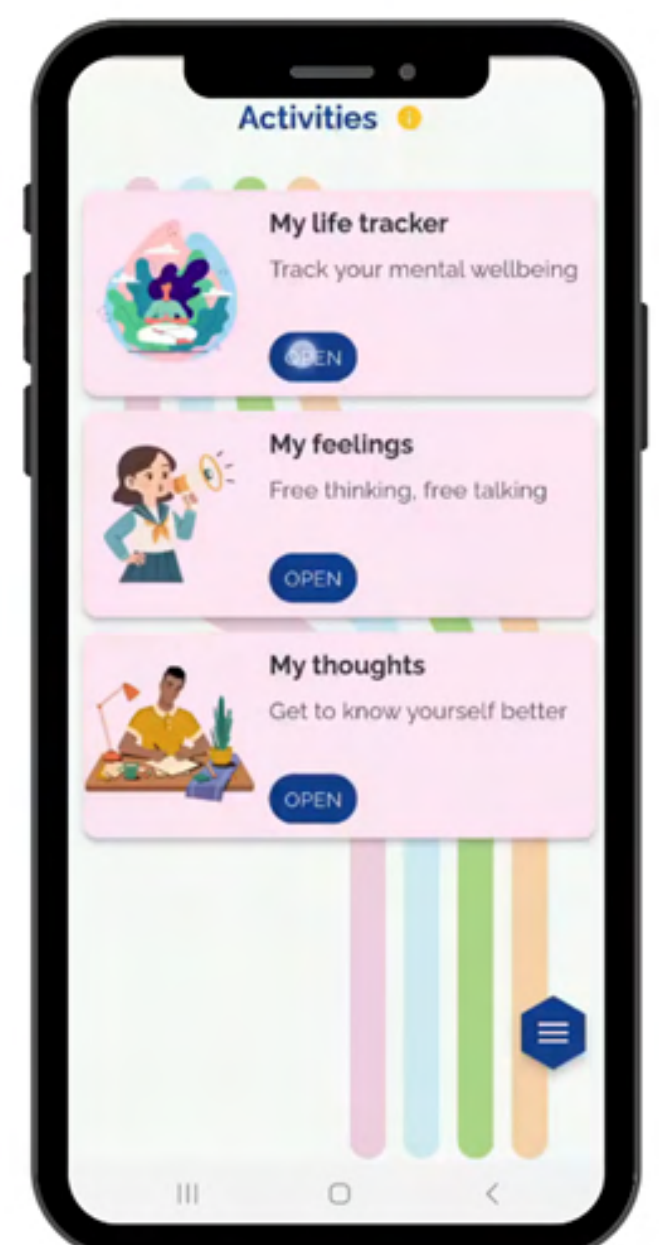
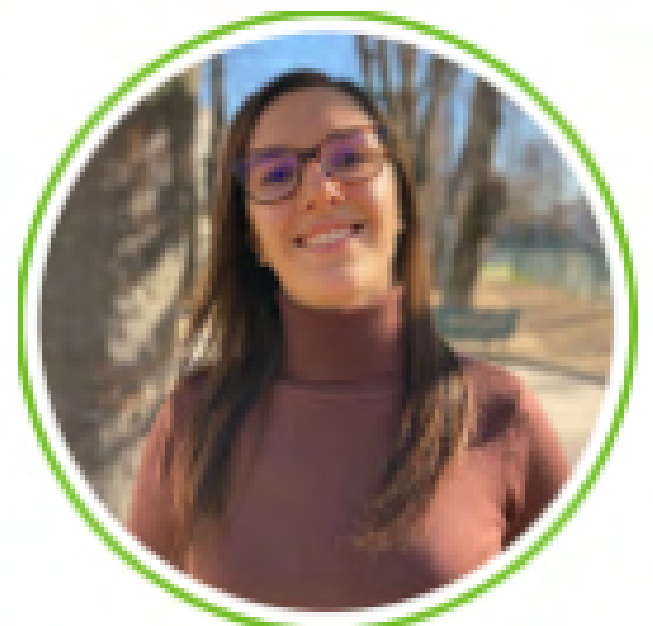
In March, we began a **recruitment drive** for new YAG members, which was supported by AEGEE and *headspace* Denmark.

We also held our YAG meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> March, welcoming:

- **Karim Lekadir (ICREA Professor, University of Barcelona & Director of BCN-AIM Lab)**, who gave an intro to AI, from how neural networks mirror human learning, to the real-world implications of bias in medical AI.
- **Elena Novelli and Maria Bulgheroni (Ab.Acus srl)**, who then walked the group through the YOUTHreach App, a smartphone-based tool designed to help track mental health patterns in young people through both passive sensor monitoring and active check-ins.

We also had visitors from the UK 'country level' YAG to see how it works when bringing new young people into the established YAG meeting space.

This session was attended by **8 youth advisors** representing **five countries** across the consortium (Ireland, UK, Italy, Netherlands, and Belgium)



# April 2026

April 2026 marked one whole year of the YAG!

As part of our annual recruitment drive, we held an **information session**, which was recorded, to provide context to the YOUTHreach project and inform potential applicants about the processes involved.

Following this, we received **8 new applications** to join the YAG.

As of April 2026, we have successfully recruited **6 new YAG members**, including young people from Spain, Italy, Germany and Estonia.

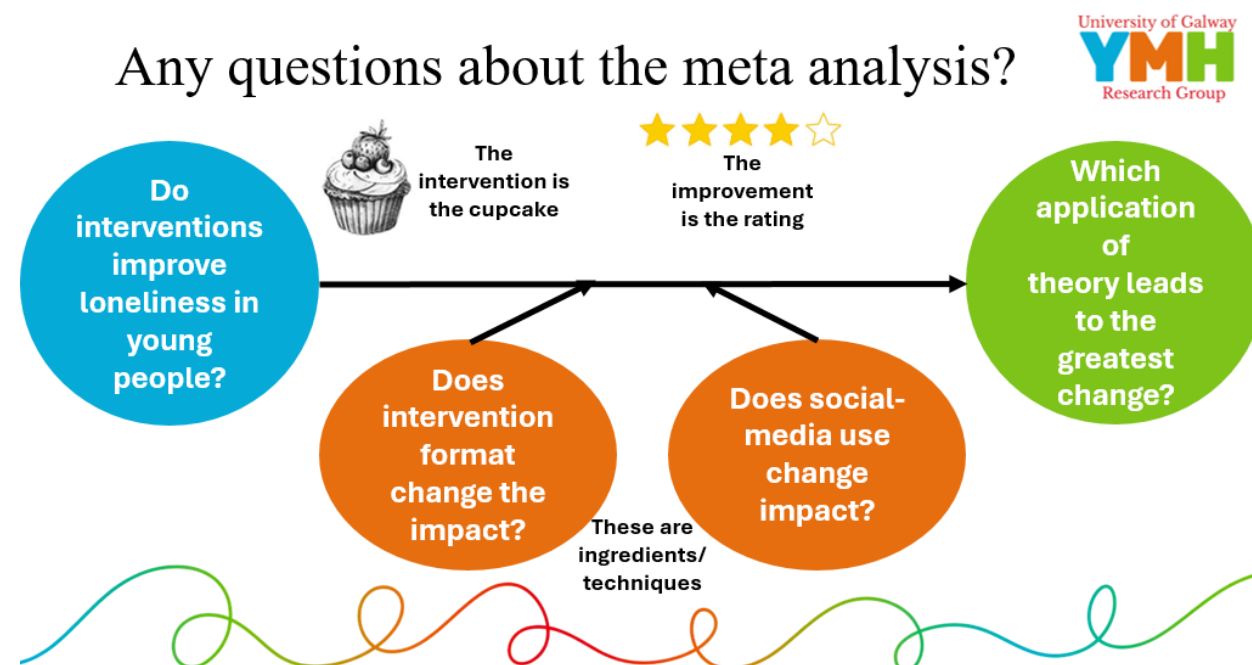


# April 2026

In April, we were joined by **Dr Laura Roldán and Raquel Rodríguez** from the Institute of Psychiatry and Mental Health at Gregorio Marañón Hospital, Madrid, Spain. They are both involved in the set-up of the new walk-in centre in Madrid.

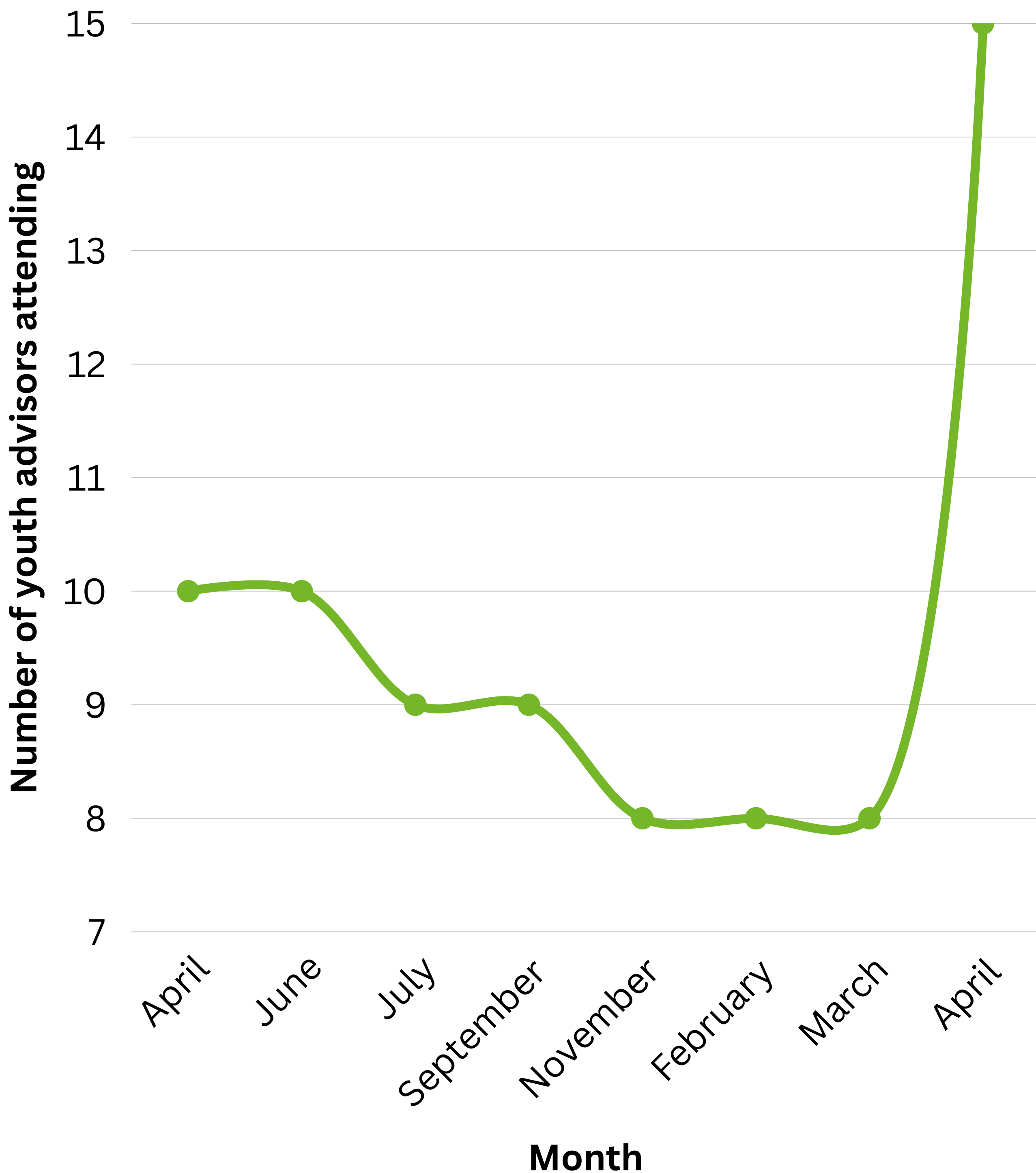


**Thomas Freeney**, a PhD candidate at the University of Galway, also spoke to the YAG about his doctoral research on **loneliness in young people**. He introduced the method of **meta-analysis** to the YAG and explained the complex nuances of current definitions of loneliness.



This session was attended by **15 youth advisors** representing **nine countries** across the consortium (Estonia, Ireland, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Belgium)

# Engagement over the past year ...

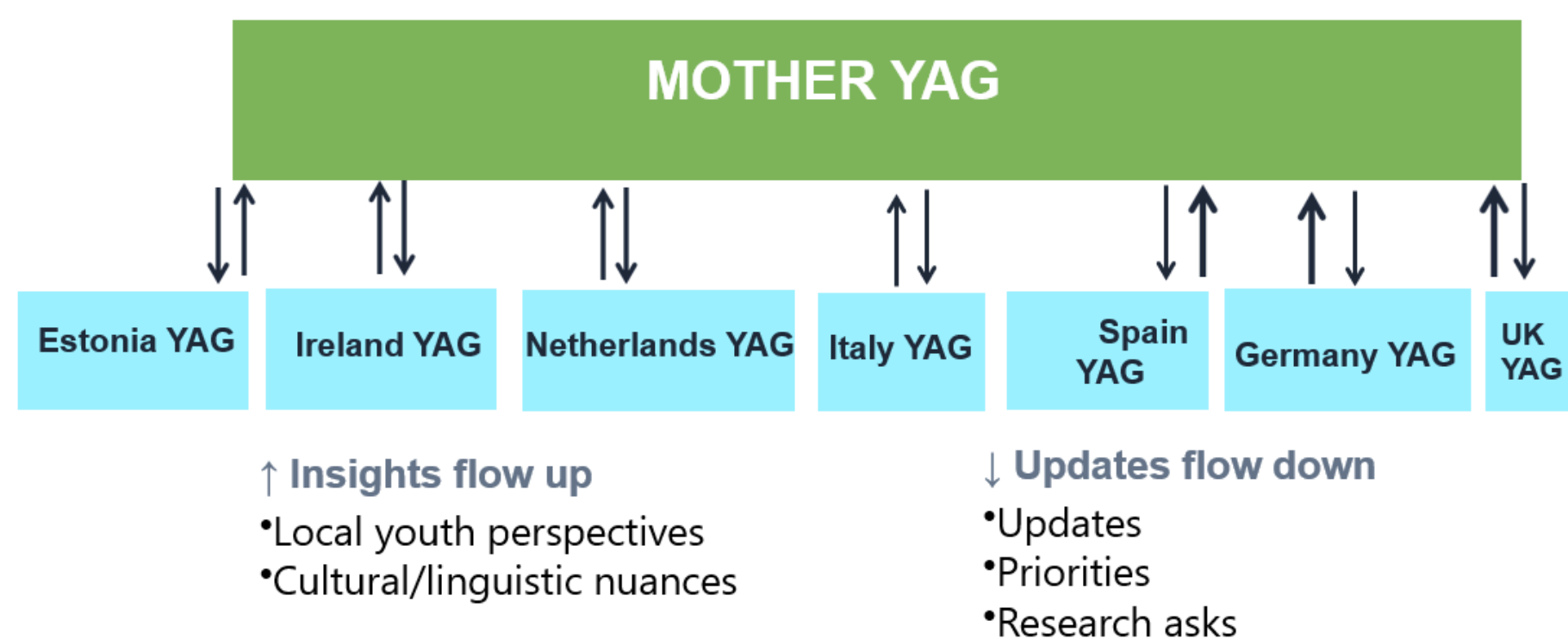


# Looking to the future...

The YAG has consistently maintained high levels of retention and engagement. As our Youth Advisors approach the age of 25, we are keen to retain their valuable experience and insights and are therefore developing a transition pathway for our 'older' young people.

We have also recently developed country specific YAGs to ensure that young people who may not be confident speaking English can contribute to a YAG in their native language.

## How the Groups Connect



In terms of additional opportunities our YAG have taken, Isaac was invited to present at the EU 'Siblings Projects' meeting in Brussels and Alessandra has designed a comic strip about the YOUTHreach project, which you can find in the appendix!



# Final Words...

What a brilliant first year of the YOUTHreach project we have had! We have achieved and learned so much – from deep dives into research methods to paper submissions, international conferences and even co-creating an outcome measure!

We want to thank all of the researchers and clinicians who have taken the time to come to our monthly meetings and talk to us about the work they are doing.

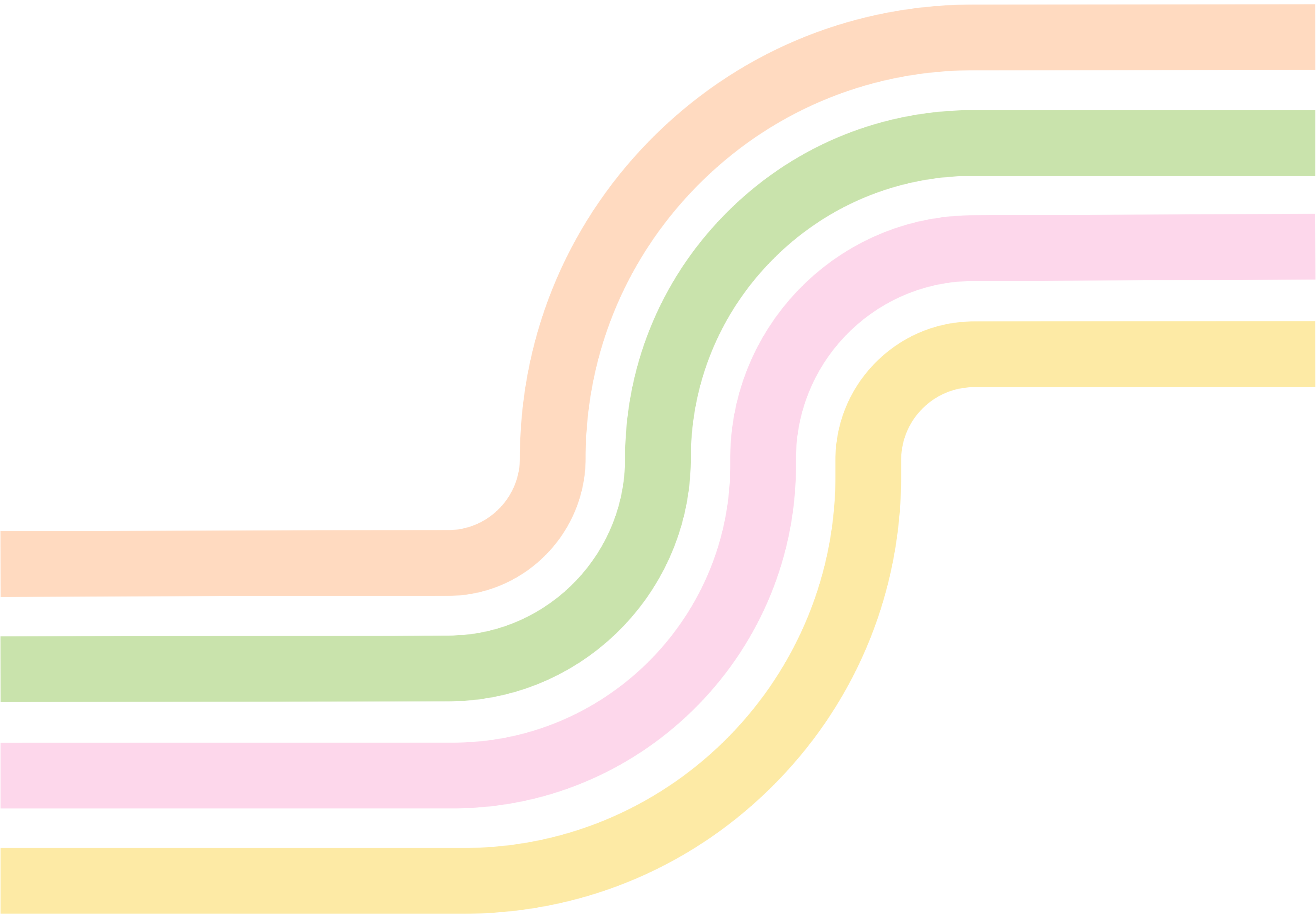
It is wonderful to be a part of a project where everyone has a genuine passion for youth mental health and, more specifically, youth participation in mental health research.

We have also created an international community of young people who are interested in youth mental health research. Our Youth Advisors constantly bring their time, energy and expertise to every meeting they attend, engaging with policymakers to influence mental health policies that reflect youth experiences.

Thank you to the University of Birmingham PPI Team, who have worked incredibly hard to build a Youth Advisory Group from scratch, coordinating international communication and still ensuring youth voice remains at the forefront of the project.

And, of course, thank you once again to the whole YOUTHreach family – we can't wait to see what the next few years bring!

# YOUTH reach



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#### Funding statement

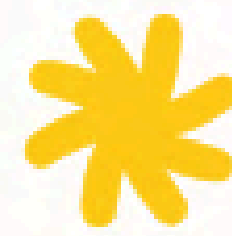
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# Appendice 1 & 2

Barcelona Consortium  
Day 1 & 2 YAG Itinerary


# Appendix 1

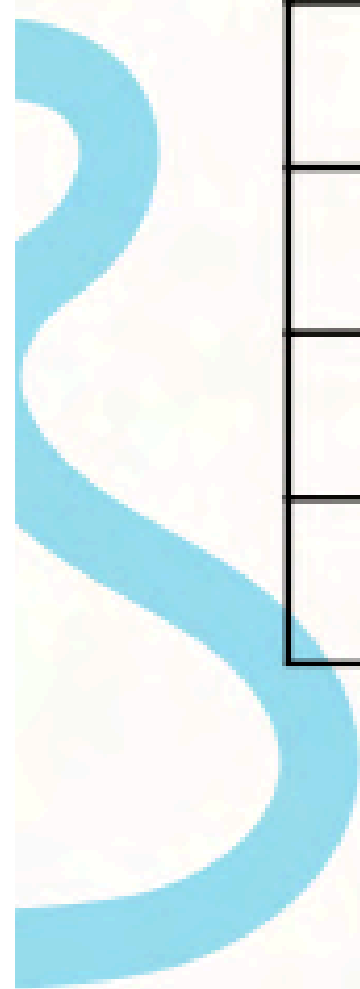
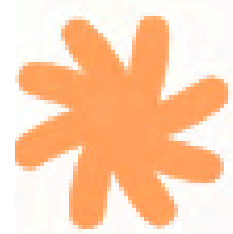
 **Day One**  
Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> Jan 



## Venue

Barcelona  
Biomedical Research  
Park (PRBB)  
Room: 077 Ramon y  
Cajal  
C/ del Dr. Aiguader,  
88 08003 Barcelona,  
Spain

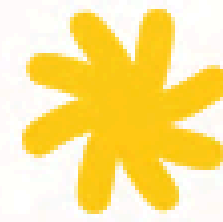
Time	Event
10 AM	Meeting to run through the YAG presentation
12 PM	Arrival at venue (PRBB)
1 PM	Welcome by Thérèse van Amelsvoort
1.30 PM	Introduction to Headspace Denmark
2 PM	Stakeholder Engagement (UoB, LSE and HTA)
3 PM	Coffee Break!
3.30 PM	YAG Session 
4.30 PM	Clinical Studies (ZISG & SERMAS)
5.30 PM	Summary and Discussion
7 PM	Consortium Dinner - Restaurant Centfocs



# Appendix 2

## Day Two

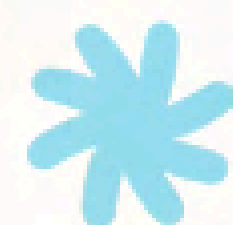
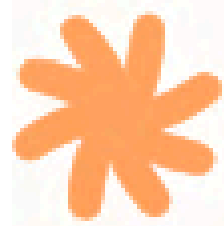
Wed 21st Jan



### Venue

Barcelona  
Biomedical Research  
Park (PRBB)  
Room: 077 Ramon y  
Cajal  
C/ del Dr. Aiguader,  
88 08003 Barcelona,  
Spain

Time	Event
8.45 AM	Walk-in and Welcome
9 AM	Open Data and Methods (Uni of Barcelona)
10 AM	Management, Dissemination, Communication and Exploitation (Maastricht University, Ab.Acus and Catalyze)
11 AM	Coffee Break!
11.30 AM	Introduction, observations, and feedback by External Expert Advisory Board (EEAB) members
12.45 PM	Final discussion and closing meeting
1 PM	Lunch



# Appendix 3

Barcelona Consortium Conference  
YAG Summary Report



# YAG Summary Report: Getting the Recipe Right

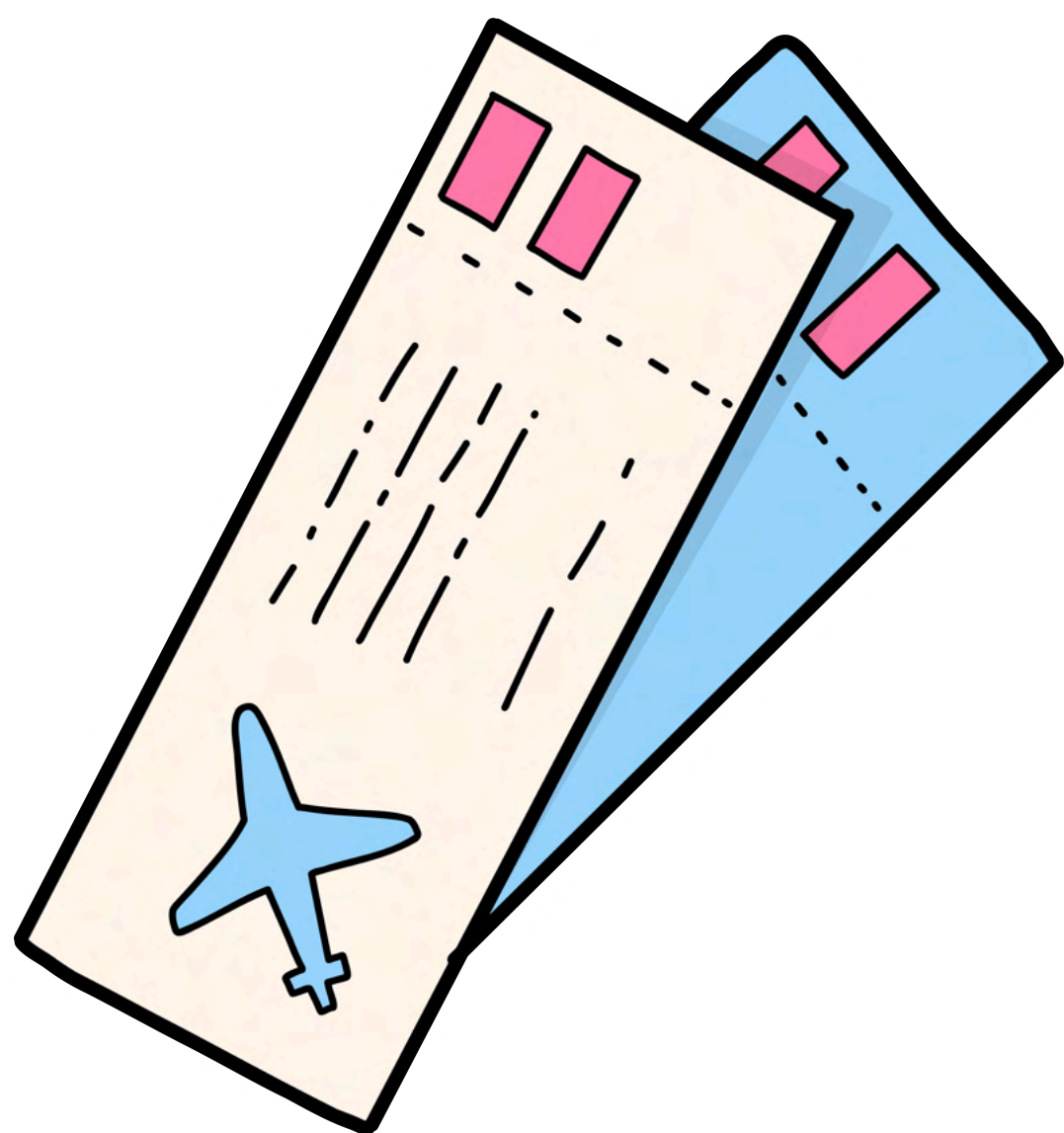


Second Annual  
Consortium Conference

PRBB Barcelona  
21 - 22 January 2026



Funded by  
the European Union



# THE ROAD TO BARCELONA



Over the past 11 months, YAG members have worked alongside researchers across the project, contributing their **lived experience and insight** to strengthen the design, delivery and relevance of the three YOUTHreach interventions. From reviewing materials and shaping engagement strategies to advising on language and accessibility, young people have played an **active role** across multiple workstreams.

The Second Annual European Mental Health Consortium Conference in Barcelona marked an **important milestone**. It was the first opportunity for many YAG members to meet researchers and partners **face-to-face** after months of online collaboration. The conference offered a space to reflect on progress, celebrate achievements and consider how youth voice can continue to shape the project in the years ahead.

For the YAG, this was a chance to step onto an **international stage** and demonstrate the value of **meaningful** youth co-production in action.

*"It was such an incredible opportunity to meet everyone in person and get to know each other, and also to get to know the project better."*



# THE CUPCAKE ANALOGY

At the conference, YAG members delivered a presentation outlining the projects they had contributed to so far, the **changes they had influenced** and how researchers can continue to strengthen youth engagement moving forward.

They shared **practical examples** of how their input had shaped research methods, improved accessibility and challenged assumptions. They also spoke openly about what **meaningful involvement** looks like from a **young person's perspective**, including the importance of early engagement, clear communication and shared decision-making.

The presentation was about **shifting the conversation**. By speaking directly to researchers and partners, YAG members reinforced the message that youth voice is not an add-on, but a core component of **effective and ethical** mental health research.





# TRAVEL DIARIES

Supporting young people to participate in an international consortium conference requires careful **planning, flexibility and trust**. University of Birmingham staff worked closely with YAG members in advance of the trip to coordinate travel, prepare presentations and ensure everyone felt confident and informed.

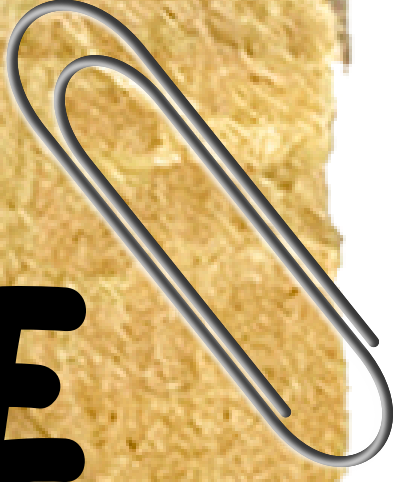
Throughout the conference, staff focused on creating a **supportive environment** that **balanced professionalism with wellbeing**. Regular check-ins, clear communication through a Whatsapp groupchat and visible support helped young people navigate new experiences, from international travel to presenting in front of academic audiences.



"The booking process was very seamless. Camilla and Sophia did it for me on a quick call which was extremely helpful and I didn't have to stress!"  
-YAG Member



# MESSAGES OF HOPE



As part of the YAG session, we invited people in the room to share a **message of hope** to the young people in Europe, in their **native language**. This is what they said...

## Mannheim, Germany

Denke daran, was du schon alles geschafft hast... **du schaffst das, was vor dir liegt!** Sei gut zu dir <3



## Madrid, Spain

Que nadie te haga sentir mal porque eres maravillosa simplemente por ser tú



## Amsterdam, Netherlands

Hoe slecht je je ook voelt of hoe uitzichtloos de situatie ook lijkt, hulp is altijd dichterbij dan je denkt. Je vrienden, familie, buren of in een vreemd op straat, mensen zijn in staat om elkaar veel beter te helpen dan het...



## Oxford

You are so much more capable than you think. We're all just figuring it out as we go and you're going to impress yourself over and over again with what you're capable of.



## Maastricht, Netherlands

Kijk eens rond, een kamer vol mensen helemaal gefocust op het werken naar een gezondere jeugd en maatschappij - wauw!



## Milan, Metropolitan City of Milan, Italy

il mio messaggio di speranza e' di non pensa te che la propna voce non sia importante. c'e' sempre una via d'usaita, una seconda strade o soluzione!



## Copenhagen, Denmark

Det er okay at sejle. Det gør dig stærkere! Du skal nok klare det.



## Galway, Ireland

Tabhair aire duit féin <3



# FEEDING BACK



Following the conference, YAG members completed a feedback survey reflecting on the full experience, from booking forms and travel arrangements

"It makes such a difference to meet people in person."

"[I enjoyed] meeting other Youth Advisors in person, also meeting YOUTHreach professionals in person, because they're actually all lovely and treated us as equals."

Seeing how the project is managed at the EU level on such a wide scale, as a student of European policies, was really interesting. I believe it also demonstrated all the effort that all the sites and partners have been making and plan on making for the next years.

"The whole team was really kind and understanding from the beginning, and my initial nervousness quickly faded. In addition, I believe that the audience itself was genuinely interested in what the YAG had to say, which made me feel truly listened to and understood."

"Getting time to see historical landmarks and experience the culture was also amazing, and I really appreciate that this was treated as a priority."

"I thought everything was organised and handled well"

## NEXT TIME, WE WILL...

- Try to book all YAG members in the same hotel
- Assign and run-through the slides beforehand
- Implement coffee breaks!
- Different seating arrangements for the conference room itself (eg. tables instead of rows, more space)
- Allocate dedicated time for extra, interactive activities, such as interviews

# SUMMARY

The Barcelona Consortium Conference marked the first occasion on which the Youth Advisors had the opportunity to meet one another, as well as the wider group of researchers, in person. This was an invaluable experience to all those involved and really brought the YOUTHreach project to life for our Youth Advisors.

Logistically, it was quite a challenge at times! Strict university protocols and the complexity of getting four young people to and from Barcelona safely required a lot of thinking and careful planning. We also learned some hard lessons about expenses and we will always photograph our receipts for future conferences!

Ultimately, the event fostered a strong sense of community and highlighted the value of meaningful youth engagement in research and decision-making processes. It was a joy to meet everyone in person and we are very much looking forward to engaging with more members of the Consortium in the future!



Group photo from the Second Annual YOUTHreach Consortium Conference in Barcelona, 20 - 21 January 2026

# Appendix 4

Blogs from our YAG Members

# My first impressions on the YAG

Simon's first experiences in the Youth Advisory Group  
06/06/2025

I unexpectedly became a part of the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) after receiving an opportunity through a forwarded call for applications. Initially, the idea of bringing together young people from across Europe to discuss shared challenges and contribute to youth mental health topics intrigued me.

As someone with personal experience of mental health challenges, active involvement in queer youth work, and currently training as an intensive care nursing student, I saw this as an excellent opportunity to **gain diverse perspectives** on mental health issues across Europe.

From the very beginning, I felt a sense of **openness and inclusivity** within the YAG. It connects individuals from various backgrounds, which is evident in the topics we discuss and the collaborative approach we adopt. Personal experiences are valued and given equal space as other viewpoints, fostering a more open and **meaningful exchange**.

**"It's not about seeking perfect answers; it's about being honest, actively listening to each other, and learning together."**

What I particularly appreciate about the YAG is its emphasis on fostering meaningful exchange. Everyone is encouraged to contribute in their own way, and the atmosphere is **supportive and inclusive**. Everyone's needs are respected and taken into account. It's not about seeking perfect answers; it's about being honest, actively listening to each other, and learning together.

In the coming months, I'm excited to continue **learning and contributing** within the YAG. The experience so far has broadened my understanding of youth mental health in different contexts. I'm looking forward to further discussions and new insights that not only connect young people across Europe but also bring our shared experiences into action.

***Simon is a member of the YOUTHreach Youth Advisory Group and is based in Germany.***

# Nordic *headspace* Conference: Day 1

Isaac's reflections on day one in Copenhagen

## Learning from Early Intervention Models Across Europe and Beyond

A month ago, I travelled to Copenhagen on behalf of the University of Birmingham to attend the Nordic *headspace* 2025 conference. The first day was a pre-conference workshop focused on a critical question: what works in early intervention for youth mental health, for whom, and where?

Held at *headspace* Denmark's offices, the workshop brought together practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and young people from across Europe and further afield. The format was refreshingly hands-on and collaborative, it was less about presentations and more about **genuine discussion** and **shared learning**.

## Understanding the Landscape

The morning began with an overview of *headspace* Denmark's model before moving into a situation analysis. What became clear very quickly was that while the challenges young people face are remarkably **similar across countries**: loneliness, social disconnection, stress about the future, the systems meant to support them vary wildly.

The heart of the workshop came in the afternoon sessions exploring what's working and what isn't. Hearing examples from so many different countries was eye-opening and the themes that emerged painted a **complex picture**.

### **What's Not Working**

Perhaps the most consistent barrier mentioned was funding instability. Across nearly every country represented, organisations delivering youth mental health services are **fighting for sustainability** year after year.

**“Even when services prove effective and are clearly needed, long-term funding remains elusive. You can't build trust with young people or develop effective interventions when you're uncertain whether the service will exist next year.”**

Stigma also varies dramatically across regions. While some Western European countries have made significant progress in normalising conversations about mental health, there's still **a notable divide**. We heard from young people in Eastern Europe that the stigma attached to seeking help remains a major barrier to accessing support.

The sheer variability in service provision was striking. In some countries, comprehensive early intervention services exist in major cities but not elsewhere. In others, services are available but difficult to access, or they simply don't meet young people where they are.

## Visiting headspace Lyngby

The day concluded with a visit to *headspace* Lyngby, one of Denmark's local youth mental health centres. This was one of the most valuable parts of the entire workshop.

We heard directly from volunteers and staff about what they do, and perhaps more importantly, what they don't do. They're not there to diagnose or treat. They're there to **listen, without judgment**, whenever a young person walks through the door. It's a safe space where you can talk about what's going on in your life, whether that's stress about school, relationship problems, worries about the future, or just feeling overwhelmed.

The **simplicity** of the model is what makes it so powerful. Young people know they can show up, no appointment needed, and someone will be there to listen. It's anonymous, low-stakes, and free from the stigma often attached to "seeking help." For some young people, it's a bridge to more intensive support. For others, it's exactly what they need in that moment. You can come once and that's enough, or you can come back as many times as you need. The service is there to be used as you need it.

**“When young people have access to safe, non-judgmental spaces where they can talk about what's going on in their lives, it makes a genuine difference. The evidence is there. The model exists.”**


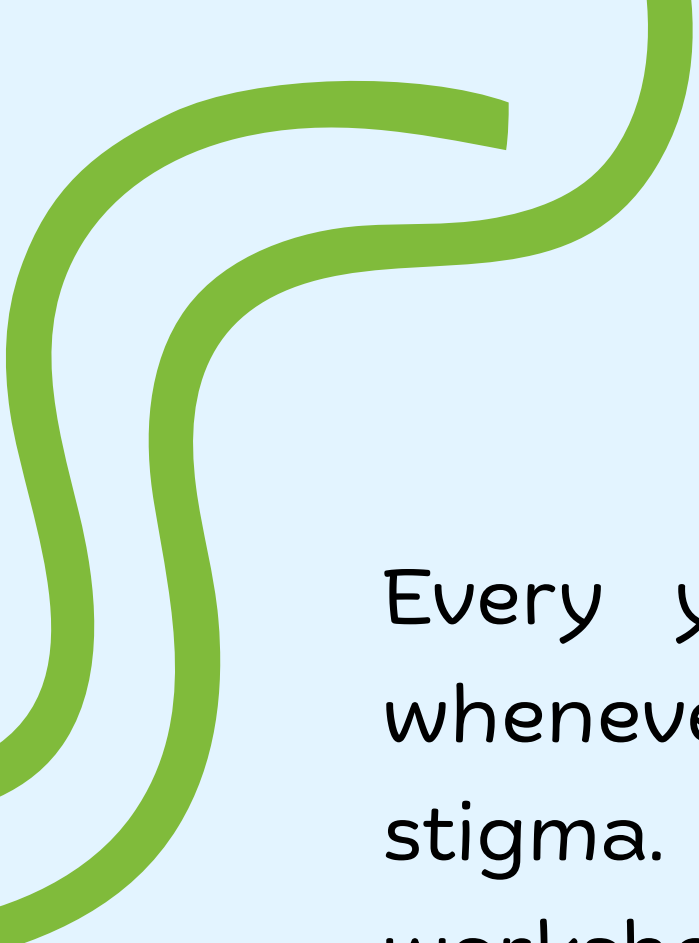
## The Takeaway

What struck me most about the day was the contrast between what we know works and the barriers preventing it from being widely available.

*headspace* Denmark, along with similar models in Norway, Iceland, Australia, and beyond, demonstrates that low-threshold early intervention works. When young people have access to safe, non-judgmental spaces where they can talk about what's going on in their lives, it makes a genuine difference. The evidence is there. The model exists.

The question isn't whether we know how to support young people's mental health early, before they reach crisis point. We do. The question is whether we're willing to roll the model out further and fund it **properly and sustainably**.









Every young person **deserves** to have someone there whenever they need it—just to listen, free from judgment or stigma. Not everywhere has a headspace centre, but the workshop reminded me that the solutions exist. Now we need the political will and the funding to make them accessible to all young people, regardless of where they happen to live.

The conversations at the Danish Parliament the next day would only reinforce how urgent this work is.

***Isaac is a member of the YOUTHreach Youth Advisory Group and is a British student in Social Sciences studying in Brussels, Belgium.***





# Nordic *headspace* Conference: Day 2


Sophia's reflections on day two in Copenhagen

## Turning the Tide for Youth Mental Health







Attending the Nordic *headspace* Conference in Denmark with fellow YAG member Isaac was an eye-opening experience. I expected a lot of formal, academic research and clinical speak, but instead I found myself in practical, hands-on conversations about the challenges young people face today. From sharing stories over a smorgasbord with volunteers to hearing about innovative ways to make mental health support more accessible, it became clear that the focus wasn't on policies or reports, but on **real experiences**. The Nordic *headspace* Conference focussed on what actually matters to young people: fostering meaningful connections, getting support early and not having to jump through a million and one hoops to get help.

## Making Mental Health Simple and Human


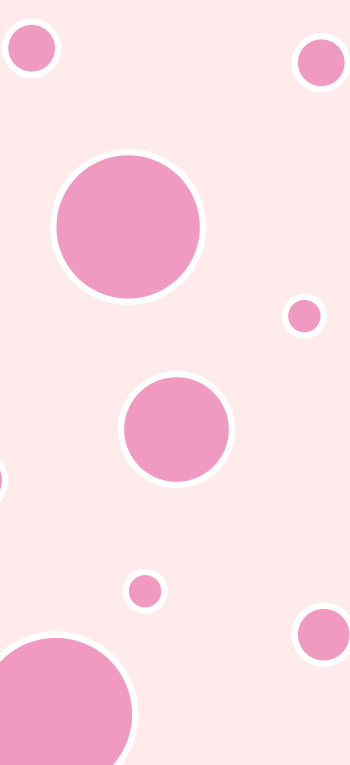


I was really struck by how simple the *headspace* approach is. It is largely **volunteer-led** instead of relying solely on overstretched professionals, which changes the dynamic straight away, because the volunteers **genuinely want to be there**.







Young people can literally walk in, grab a hot chocolate and have a relaxed chat with volunteers. All the volunteers are trained and supported, and many of them are also older people or pensioners, which brings a fantastic **intergenerational perspective**. So many mental health services feel clinical, formal and intimidating, but *headspace* offers allows young people to have **real conversations** with **real people**.

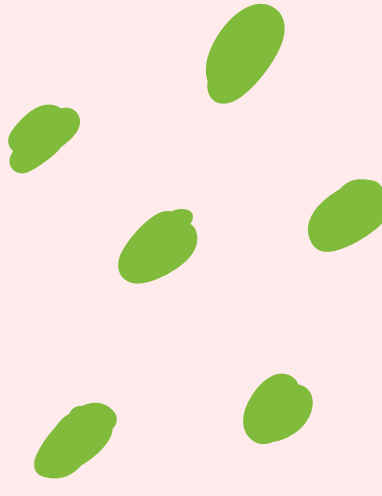



**“At its heart, the headspace model is about young people being able to access support that feels friendly, meets their needs and doesn’t make them feel like a problem to be solved.”**

### **Real Connection in a Digital World**



In an age where everyone is constantly online, you would think that the young generation – having grown up with the internet and social media – would be the most socially connected generation in history. The reality, however, is much different. Whilst digital validation is as important feature of modern life, likes, comments and endless notifications cannot replace **genuine human connection**. Young people are more isolated than ever. Behind the screens, loneliness is growing.

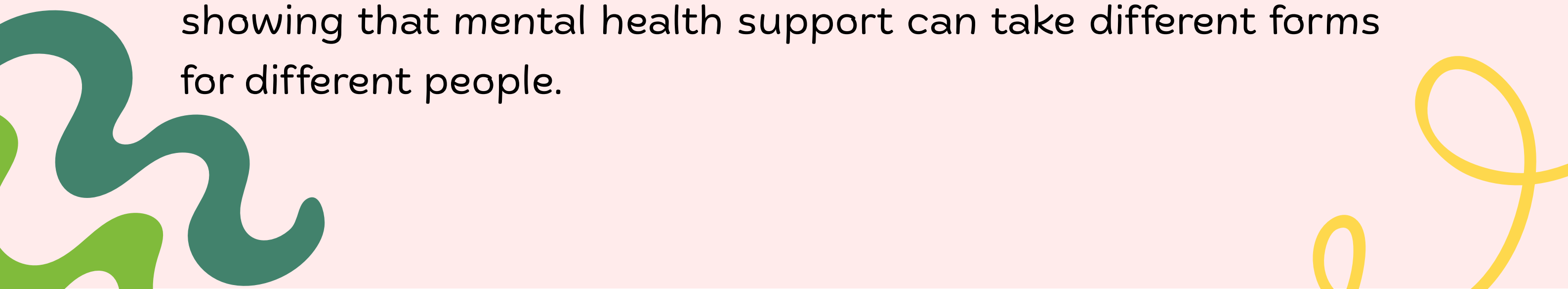




**“We need more physical spaces to share our stories, hold honest conversations and simply be present with people of all different ages and backgrounds. headspace is creating these spaces in an increasingly digital world.”**

### **Honouring Culture and Community**

During the conference itself, one thing I was very conscious of was that I was one of only a handful of people from a minoritised ethnic community in the room. Whilst the Nordic countries have stricter policies relating to immigration, I know that minoritised people still live here – from the indigenous Sami population in the north, to the sizeable immigrant and refugee populations across the region. I raised this and thankfully, it was acknowledged by representatives from all Nordic countries as being a challenge that they are **actively working on**.

We also reflected on the limits of purely Western mental health models. In many cultures, wellbeing is **rooted in community**, family and shared responsibility, rather than individual struggle. Framing mental health solely as an individual issue can deepen stigma and deter people from seeking support. Even as a Western organisation, *headspace* is challenging overly clinical, one-size-fits-all approaches by creating **culturally relevant spaces** for connection and care, showing that mental health support can take different forms for different people.



## From People to Policy

Having these conversations inside the Danish Parliament was surreal. The grandeur of the building made the discussions feel even more significant, and it was incredible to see youth mental health being taken seriously at such a high level. I was also lucky enough to interview **Poul Nyrup Rasmussen**, the former Danish Prime Minister and founder of *headspace*, who shared the vision behind the organisation and why he thinks young people are the best investment for policymakers. Keep an eye out for the interview on the YOUTHreach socials!

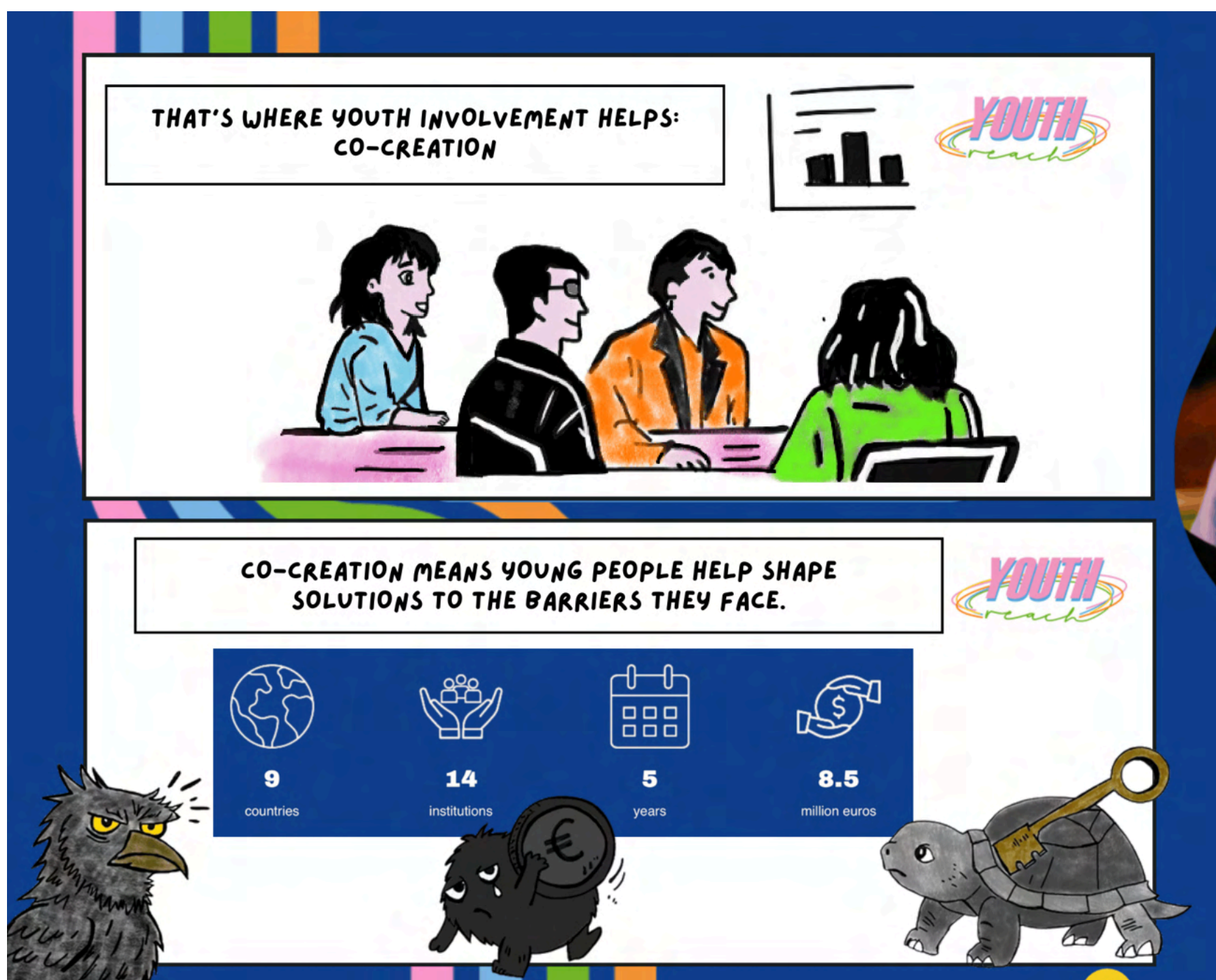
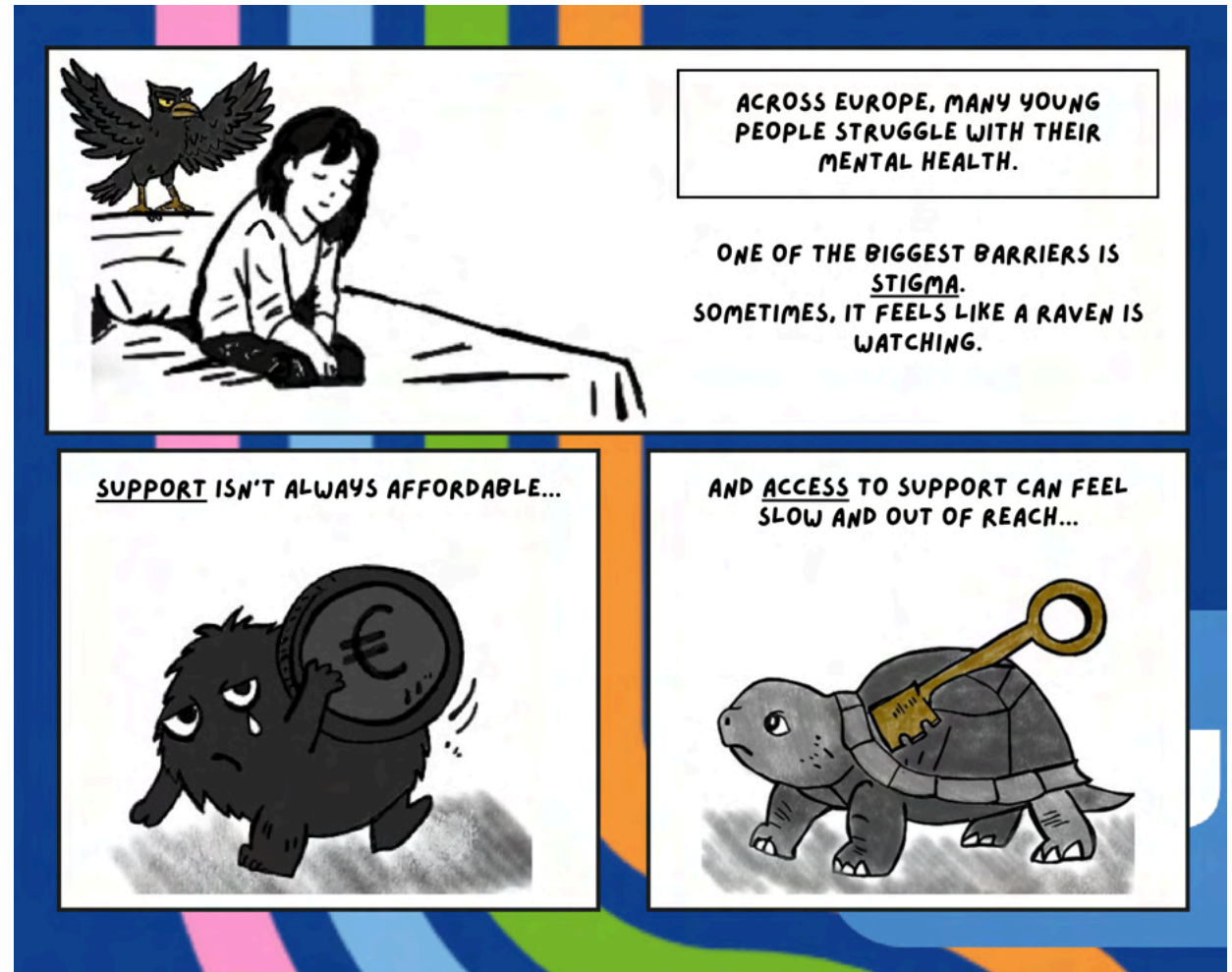


**Sophia is the Youth Involvement Officer for the YOUTHreach Youth Advisory Group and is based at the University of Birmingham.**

# Appendix 4

YOUTHreach comic created by Alessandra  
(YAG member)

# COMIC STRIP



Designed by our wonderful youth advisor, Alessandra