



# Power Up Youth

**The Foyer Federation's Youth  
Influence and Involvement  
Strategy**

# Power Up Youth

**This year, the Foyer Federation will begin working under a new three-year strategy – the Home for Advantaged Thinking.** One of its four focuses is youth involvement, renewing our commitment to enable young people to find power and purpose through leadership. The Power Up Youth plan is our 2021-25 roadmap.

As an infrastructure organisation, there are two important areas for us to consider:

1. Ensuring the Foyer Federation has the right culture and plan in place to ensure young people's involvement at all levels of the organisation.
2. Supporting our members to take positive risks and implement new ways of working that put more power into the hands of their residents.

Often, the structures and hierarchies in supported housing are an unfavourable environment for youth leadership – and one that's hard to challenge. There's an implicit power imbalance in the fact that the housing provider holds a license agreement or tenancy contract with the young person. We have started to unpack the complex issues that exist at a local level, and we will further develop this as part of this strategy in partnership with Foyer staff and residents.

Young people in Foyers are often not represented at youth forums, conferences and across youth events. We realise our need to provide opportunities and amplification for the young people in our network so that their ideas, insights and experiences are heard by people in power.

To begin this journey with accountability and objectivity, we partnered with a trusted youth involvement expert to audit our culture and practices. We scored each area of our work and created an action plan to build youth involvement into every level of our organisation. This audit forms the basis for this strategy, alongside our conversations, consultations and data from young people and Foyer staff.

## The Home for Advantaged Thinking – rooms and objectives

### A. Leadership and activism

1. Ensure young people are fully represented in positions of power across the organisation, inc governance
2. Develop opportunities for young people to use their skills and lived experience to achieve the aims of the vision
3. Challenge others to do the same

### B. Capacity and quality

1. Validate and accredit Advantaged Thinking approaches
2. Mobilise and resource effective local staff leadership for Advantaged Thinking services
3. Evidence the value and impact of Advantaged Thinking for young people

### C. Leadership

1. Connect and amplify positive voices for young people into a united Advantaged Thinking campaign
2. Challenge policy and decision makers to listen to young people and act on their knowledge and experience
3. Create and maintain a brand for the Home of Advantaged Thinking that is accessible and useful to others

### D. Community

1. Support and develop communities of practice that bring different organisations and people together to act as a force for Advantaged Thinking
2. Signpost and disseminate examples of best practice in Advantaged Thinking
3. Encourage peer-to-peer support and learning



# Our Five Touchstones

To ensure this plan produces real, tangible change and genuinely positive impact for young people, there are five touchstones that all decisions and actions are tested against to ensure the integrity of our work.

## **1. INCLUSIVE: We want to hear from all young people with experience of homelessness.**

We acknowledge that many existing youth voice initiatives are taken up only by young people with the confidence to put themselves forward. This will also be true of some of the activities we undertake. It's crucial that young people without that same confidence, motivation or self-assuredness have the opportunity to influence strategy and decision-making. We are committed to creating these opportunities, maintaining these channels and presenting the results to our board.

## **3. FAR-REACHING: We want to embed young people's influence in every level of the organisation.**

All of the work we do is for young people, and in line with our Advantaged Thinking philosophy, we want it to be with young people too. This includes everything from the decisions made at board level to how programmes are designed and run, and from assessing Foyers as part of our accreditation process to training Foyer staff. Sometimes this might feel uncomfortable. If the action positively and meaningfully embeds youth voice into our organisation, it is worth experiencing this discomfort.

## **4. NURTURING: We want to create the right conditions for young people to flourish with the Foyer Federation.**

Assuming a position of power can feel intimidating, especially when you may not have experience of your actions affecting change. A previous attempt to recruit a young trustee to the Foyer Federation board did not have the wraparound support needed to make it a positive, meaningful experience. We have learned from this and are committed to putting the right support in place to make our approach sustainable, accessible and successful for the young people we work with.

## **2. GENUINE: We want to meaningfully shift power in favour of young people.**

Our goal is to put real power into the hands of young people and create real, lasting change – whether that's to services, to our organisation's running, or to public perceptions. For every proposed action, we must be confident that the result will be meaningful. We want to steer clear of tokenistic actions, which can undermine trust. To ensure we're accountable to young people, we will make sure to close feedback loops and share the changes we make as a result of their influence.

## **5. AMBITIOUS: We want to embrace discomfort and encourage radical thinking and approaches.**

Giving power over to young people can be challenging for organisations with multiple layers of management and embedded ways of working. Taking steps in this direction will feel uncomfortable at times. As the Foyer Federation, we want to live up to our values of being brave and being maverick, knowing that championing our beliefs isn't always the easy route to take, and will lead by example. We appreciate that this is a complex challenge. By innovating with young people and our network, experimenting, collecting data and building an empirical case for activating lived experience, we aim to build an equitable future with young people leading the way.



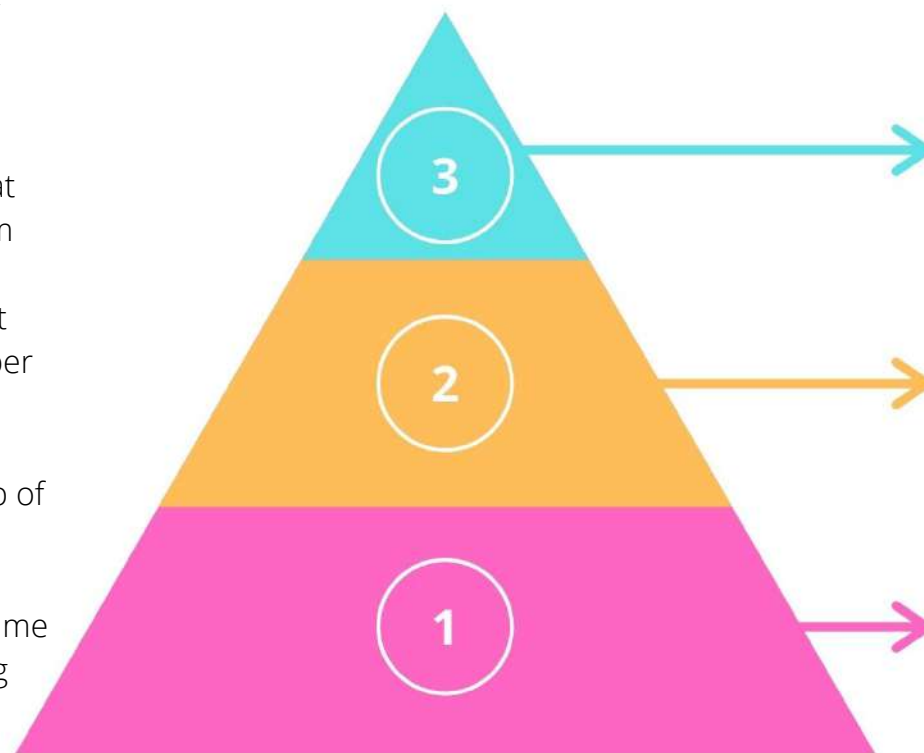
# The Power Pyramid

## Three levels of engagement

The Power Up Youth plan describes three levels of engagement and youth power that will embed young people's influence into every level of our organisation.

Each layer of the pyramid offers a different level and type of engagement, ensuring that there's a route for every young person from our network to have an impact:

- Power Level 1 – quick, low-commitment opportunities available to a large number of young people.
- Power Level 2 – local, medium-term opportunities available to a small group of young people per Foyer.
- Power Level 3 – long-term, high-profile commitment and opportunities to assume real power for a small number of young people on a national scale.



### **Power Level 3**

Approximately 20 young people  
Engagement with a national focus  
Hold positions of power within the  
Foyer Federation

### **Power Level 2**

Approximately 50-100 young people  
Engagement with a local focus  
Hold positions of power within Foyers

### **Power Level 1**

Approximately 10% of young people in  
Foyers  
Engagement focused around our digital  
platform  
Influence the Foyer Federation through  
surveys and conversations

The Power Pyramid illustrates how these levels work.

# Power Level 1

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**Aim: To regularly engage with 10% of all young people in Foyers (250-300 young people a year)**

The first level of the Power Pyramid is about building trust and engagement with a diverse group of young people from the Foyer network. It is about inclusivity, accessibility and ensuring all voices are heard – not just those who are confident to push themselves forward and in a position to commit long-term.

## What this looks like in Y1

### 1. Digital community hub

Most of the activity in Power Level 1 is focused around our digital peer support and skill-sharing platform, Pass It On. This acts as a central hub where young people can connect to each other and to the events and opportunities offered by the Foyer Federation. It can be downloaded as an app for accessibility and enables quick, personalisable engagement.

### 2. Feedback through Youth Speakers

Through interacting with young people in Power Levels 2 and 3, we will appoint Youth Speakers from around the network. These young people will gather the views and ideas of others from their Foyers and represent them through the Foyer Federation's channels, ensuring that more young people are heard.

### 3. Regular opinion surveys

Every six months, we will share a survey asking young people to share their views and experiences, hopes and concerns about the things that matter to them. We will seek as many responses as possible to this, and it will be presented to our board and will influence our direction and decisions. We will feedback to young people about the changes made as a result.

### 4. Access to talent bonds

We will continue to seek funding for talent bonds for young people and will offer the opportunity to apply for them as regularly as we can, providing an opportunity for young people to take ownership of the direction of their lives and make a financial investment in it. These are small grants given directly to young people to build a skill or a talent, and they are available to every young person in the network regardless of their previous or future levels of engagement with us.

### 5. Youth Development Coordinator

To increase our regular engagement with young people, we will hire a young person as a Youth Development Coordinator. They will work with staff in Foyers to embed the Pass It On platform and develop the leadership structures described in Power Level 2, and will focus on engaging with young people day to day through Pass It On.



# Power Level 2

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## **Aim: To embed listening, involvement and youth power into the culture and delivery models of local Foyers**

The second layer focuses on listening at the local level. It aims to build confidence in young people who want to make change happen by providing a structure in which to act and the experience of affecting positive change in their immediate environment. This level is about identifying the barriers to listening in local Foyers and working with a group of young people and staff in each region to build new practice models and challenge existing systems that limit young people.

## What this looks like in Y1

### **1. Develop a youth leadership national and local framework**

Working closely with Foyers and young people, we will create a youth leadership framework within local services that connects to a national network. The young leaders, staff and Foyer Federation will identify local barriers to leadership and power, and build new, sustainable practice models that work with the natural movement of young people through the Foyer. We will look to embed this into our FOR Youth accreditation criteria.

### **2. Appoint staff Youth Champions**

Part of the leadership framework will include Youth Champions, selected from the staff teams within Foyers. Youth Champions will support young people and Foyers in building and maintaining the leadership framework and will hold services and the Foyer Federation to account against the Five Touchstones.

### **3. Appoint and support Youth Speakers**

Youth Speakers will be an integral part of the leadership structure, ensuring that other young people from their Foyer have a way to be heard. We will support these young people to work as part of the team and to represent the views of others to those with decision-making power.

### **4. Deepen engagement in Foyer Federation events**

We will make involving young people in Foyer Federation events the norm rather than the exception. The young people who are taking on local leadership roles will be involved in our innovation events, quarterly meetings, Investor meetings and the Room for Young People awards.

### **5. Formal consultations on strategy and organisational decisions**

During times of change or planning, we will hold group consultations with the young people to understand their views on our suggestions. This will enable us to delve more deeply into their ideas than we can with a survey. The results will be presented to our board and will impact our decision-making.



# Power Level 3

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**Aim: To build a small community of national influencers who represent young people in Foyers and can sway decision makers and challenge existing power structures**

We want to upend the tables of power by enabling young people to lead positive change. We will do this by working with young influencers through our Advantaged Thinking approach. This core group (around 20 young people every six months) are already becoming part of the Foyer Federation team. They will directly influence our ideas, be involved in our project delivery and some will hold trustee positions on the board. Our ambition is for young people to take full ownership and build the confidence to speak on a wider platform. The group will hold the board, staff and Foyers accountable in listening to young people at every level.

## What this looks like in Y1

### 1. Training in the skills needed to make positive change happen

We will offer training in the skills young people will need to affect change and advocate on behalf of young people who have experienced homelessness, as well as championing the Foyer approach. Training areas will include leadership, campaigning, community organising, ideas creation and public speaking.

### 2. Creating and running campaigns

Using the skills learned in the training, young people will run campaigns with the Foyer Federation focused on the issues that affect the lives of young people who experience homelessness. We hope to influence and challenge policy-makers, commissioners, funders and young people's services on key issues, and on the way they involve young people with lived experience in their decision-making.

### 3. Young people advising and taking trustee positions on the board

The young people in this group will meet with the board and provide guidance from their positions of lived experience. In time, we will look to appoint two trustees from this group, who will receive training and mentoring from our new Youth Involvement Trustee. This will ensure that board-level decisions will be discussed with and approved by people from the group our services are designed for.

### 4. Working with the Foyer Federation to accredit services and train staff

To ensure young people are embedded at every level, we will engage young people from this group to be part of the accreditation process, visiting Foyers to assess their progress on their FOR Youth journey. We will also train young people as trainers and co-run our coaching, Advantaged Thinking and resilience training with them.



# Future Aims and Impact

The work we do in the next year (2021-22) will create a formidable structure built to stand the test of time – much like those in Giza. In year one, we will directly reach 440 young people, and the work has the potential to positively impact the 2750 young people who live in Foyers every year. What happens next is intentionally flexible, as it will be decided and designed in collaboration with young people who have ideas and insights that might never occur to our current team of over 30s.

**Within the Foyer Federation**, we will work with our team of young people to ensure we're always listening and closing feedback loops so that contributors can see the impact their voices are having. We aim to identify any gaps in our listening and involvement practices and to actively work to close those gaps so we hear from, and are led by, as many young people as possible.

We will continue to be mindful about how we keep young people at the centre of our work and decision-making. We will set ambitious targets and test ourselves against the Five Touchstones before taking any new action or setting a new path.

We will work closely with our **member Foyers** to understand the evolving challenges they face and to co-create the conditions that will enable them to continue building their youth leadership practices. Their expertise, close relationships with young people and knowledge of what works are invaluable in ensuring youth leadership at the local level is a success, and we will ensure our approach is tailored to each service's circumstances.

A commitment to youth leadership will be embedded in our **FOR Youth accreditation**, as we believe services that activate lived experience are better positioned to provide a high-quality offer.

After our first year, we will be in a position to share knowledge and experience of embedding lived experience in leadership with other **Advantaged Thinking services** seeking to make this change, positively impacting our peers and potential members, and the young people that interact with them.

To **the wider public, the media, corporate businesses and policy-makers**, we want to shine a light on the incredible wealth of talent, energy and experience young people with experience of disadvantage bring to the table. Through successful youth leadership, challenging campaigns and personal storytelling, we want to shape positive perceptions of young people who have experience of homelessness and make sure they are defined first by their untapped potential and unique talents.

Finally, we call on **young people with lived experience** to share their views and ideas by engaging with us in whatever way suits them best. We want to be questioned, challenged and pushed, and we need young people with experience of the services we work with to make sure we're on the right track.

*We want to hear from potential partners and allies – those who stand in solidarity with young people. Contact [homeforadvantagedthinking@foyer.net](mailto:homeforadvantagedthinking@foyer.net) for a conversation.*