

YMCA Exeter FAQs

Who are YMCA Exeter?

YMCA Exeter is a Christian charity. We are part of the YMCA federation which is made up of 116 local YMCA's across England and Wales. We all work independently to support young people, children and local communities.

Why does YMCA Exeter exist?

We support young people and communities so that they can experience fullness of life in body, mind and spirit.

That means we are committed to seeing communities becoming a place of love, joy, peace and hope; places where young people can become everything they were created to be. And central to all our practical work is our Christian faith.

When did YMCA Exeter begin?

YMCA Exeter is one of the oldest YMCAs in the world, founded in 1846. Our story begins with local Exeter philanthropist John Dinham, who caught the vision of the national YMCA movement and was passionate about creating an Exeter expression. The very first meeting was held in Gandy Street and our vision remains the same as during that mid-Victorian era, to share God's love whilst practically responding to changes in social, economical and cultural contexts.

What services do YMCA Exeter offer?

We offer a variety of services, each tailored to supporting young people, children and families in our community.

1. Supported accommodation and Support and Advice:

We have over 100 homeless young people a year, coming to stay in our supported accommodation. Some stay for a few months, some for a few years. Each resident is given the time they need to journey with us.

We have three stages of accommodation across the city where young people can become part of a family.

- Stage 1 is a 31 bedroom residential centre in St David's Hill and is the entry point for all young people
- Stage 2 is a set of four shared houses in Newcourt, near Ikea and the Sandy Park Stadium
- Stage 3 is currently one five bedroom house in Stoke Hill and four, two bed shared homes in Exwick.

Each stage offers a varying degree of one to one and peer support and give young people, between the ages of 18-29, the opportunity to make a fresh start. We can also accommodate 16-17 year olds via a referral through Social Services.

There isn't really a set time that young people can live at the YMCA, some stay with us for one year, others for several years as they move through our stages of accommodation before finding a permanent home of their own.

Our accommodation is specifically for young people who are coming out of homelessness and would like the support of a loving community to move forward. Some of our residents have been sleeping rough and others may have been sofa surfing or living in a tent or car. YMCA isn't just a place to stay though. Our Link Workers support residents during their stay at YMCA so they can develop their own potential in body, mind and spirit. These areas include:

- finding a GP
- counselling
- employment advice
- emotional & physical wellbeing
- managing debt
- money advice
- managing disabilities
- maintaining accommodation

2. Children and youth services

Through Open Access Clubs, Targeted Interventions and Schools' Work, we provide safe spaces where children and young people feel valued and we equip them with the tools they need to thrive.

From sports and games, to arts, crafts and residentials, we strive to inspire each young person to play a positive role in benefitting their local community. We also have informative conversations about mental health, drugs & alcohol, sex, crime, racism, money, employment, education, social media, and world issue and young people can have one to ones if they want to talk about things they are struggling with.

3. Mental health and wellbeing projects

Did you know that approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year? Even closer to home, 87% of our young

people at YMCA Exeter recently told us they struggle with self-harm, depression and anxiety.

Mental health intervention is crucial for young people to thrive.

At YMCA Exeter we are committed to helping children and young people build resilience so they can cope during mental health challenges and experience fullness of life in the future. Across our projects, including supported accommodation, youth and schools work, and work with offenders, we increasingly do this by running mental health activities that improve our day to day wellbeing, develop our support networks and bring individuals out of crisis.

Our **Resilience Project** is enhancing the mental health and wellbeing support we can offer for children and young people in Exeter and East Devon. By enabling children and young people to build their personal resilience at the earliest possible stage we are ensuring they all have the utmost ability to thrive in adult life.

Resilience uses four keys ways to support mental health and wellbeing:

- Social prescribing: Giving people time, focusing on 'what matters to me' and connecting them to existing community groups for practical and emotional support. This is delivered in partnership with [Wellbeing Exeter](#).
- Targeted short-term clinical intervention: CBT and evidence-based interventions for mild to moderate anxiety, low mood and behavioural difficulties. This is delivered in partnership with the [University of Exeter](#).
- Community groups: Local support groups with socials, activities and spaces to talk. This includes running a weekly lunchtime session in [St James' School](#) and drop-in brunch sessions across our housing projects in Exeter.
- Therapeutic activities: Including horticulture; counselling; music; movement and art as a means of resolving problematic behaviours, issues, beliefs and feelings.

4. Opportunities after prison

Our ground-breaking **Perspectives Project** exists to *empower, educate* and *mentor* young men caught up in the Criminal Justice System. Inspired by our Christian faith, our support encourages them to make positive choices, lead crime free futures and experience fullness of life in body, mind and spirit. We believe in developing relationships with every individual, supporting healing and restoration and speaking freedom into their lives.

We work with young men on community orders, suspended sentences or post-sentence supervision. There are three key strands to our work:

- **Learning:** We run small group community based courses for ex-offenders that focus on personal and interpersonal skills. These courses are accredited through the National Open College Network and teach core skills including decision making, action planning, interacting with others, body language and positive communication.
- **Mentoring:** In association with Dorset, Devon and Cornwall CRC, we offer one to one mentoring support for young men on probation as part of their community order. Through mentoring we address key areas: housing; food and finance; mental health and wellbeing; purpose and identity; support networks and contributing to society, including employment.
- **Therapeutic activity:** Every week we run group activities that support young men as they re-integrate into the community. These activities enable them to connect with nature, experience personal enrichment and build community, and include running our popular allotment project and taking part in cooking groups.

We believe wholeheartedly in **collaborative working** across the community and we work closely with numerous other agencies on the development of a Criminal Justice Pathway at **CoLab** – Exeter’s multi-agency wellbeing hub. We are also members of the **South West Mentor Alliance**.

5. Community Cafe

Every Thursday morning we run a café at **Newcourt Community Centre** with support from Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI) and Newcourt Community Association. The café is open between **10am and 12pm** and welcomes people of all ages to enjoy a natter and take part in any number of activities.

The café is hosted by a small team of YMCA staff and volunteers. They are also supported by a group of our YMCA residents who live in the community at Newcourt and who have all been trained to greet you and provide hospitality. The drop-in café and all refreshments are completely free of charge. You are welcome to come for all of it or just a part.

What advice would you give to a young person who is struggling with depression, anxiety or self-harm?

There are some really simple steps we can all do to improve our mental wellbeing and feel more positive about life. The NHS call them the '5 steps to mental wellbeing' and we recommend giving each of them a try.

- **Connect** – Meet up regularly with people in your life. They could be your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spending time developing these relationships is a great first step.
- **Be active** – Walk, run, dance, cycle, boogie... Whatever your choice, staying active and exercising will increase your endorphins and make you feel good.
- **Keep learning** – Learn new skills, rediscover old hobbies and trying new things will give you a real sense of achievement and boost your confidence.
- **Give to others** – Putting other people before yourself can be incredibly rewarding. Whether a smile, a kind word or a volunteering commitment supporting your community can be incredibly rewarding.
- **Be mindful** – Take notice of what is happening around you. Noticing your personal thoughts and feelings as well as those things surrounding you in nature can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

What advice would you give to someone who called you in a mental health crisis?

- If you are struggling with your mental health and don't feel you can get through the night alone, call 999 or take yourself to your local A&E.
- If you are struggling and don't feel you can get through the next 24 hours, then contact your GP or go to A&E.
- If you are feeling suicidal or you are worried about someone else, then contact your GP or call the Samaritans on 08457 90 90 90 anytime, 24/7.

Other useful places that give a listening ear are:

- 1-2-1 online counsellor chat run by Childline for children and young people up to the age of 19

- Out of hours mental health support for anyone aged 16+ at The Moorings, Devon (available in Exeter, Barnstaple and Torquay)
- For adults, YOUNGMINDS offers confidential online and telephone support to anyone worried about the emotional problems, behaviour or mental health of a child or young person up to the age of 25. The helpline is 0808 8025544 and is open Monday – Friday, 9am – 4:30pm

Does your faith impact who you work with?

Our Christian faith is central to our work. We support young people and communities of all faiths and none. Who we support is not dependent on belief.

- We actively look for opportunities to make a transformative impact on young lives in the communities where we work, and believe that every person is of equal value.
- We offer people the space they need to feel secure, respected, heard and valued; and we always protect, trust, hope and persevere.
- We strive to inspire each person we meet to nurture their body, mind and spirit and to realise their full potential in all they do.
- We stand up for young people, speak out on issues that affect their lives and help them to find confidence in their own voice.
- We are committed to the wellbeing of the communities we serve and believe in the positive benefit of participation, locally and in the wider world.

Do you share your Christian faith with the communities you support?

Our Christian faith is the essence of who we are and the young people and communities we support are aware of our faith distinctive.

- We believe God deeply cares about us, our work and those we serve, so we trust him and prayerfully seek his help in all we do.
- We do all we can in God's strength, challenging injustice and overcoming obstacles to bring positive change in the communities we serve.
- We seek to provide the best possible service in every aspect of our work.
- We treat our clients and the way we behave towards each other in an attitude of compassion and service.
- We are committed to truthfulness, honesty, transparency and accountability in everything we do

How are you supporting your residents during covid-19?

In a global crisis young people need us more than ever.

At YMCA Exeter we are supporting our residents and all the young people and communities we support in a variety of ways. Lockdown is a testing time for everyone and our focus has been on helping the people we support to thrive during this season. We've created a designated area on our website with resources and information that anyone can access.

Specific support for residents in shared accommodation:

- We have clear guidelines in place for our residents living in shared accommodation. This includes steps from cleaning rota's, to washing stations and clear guidelines on bathroom isolation if residents show symptoms and need to isolate. We have seen great success with this as residents have shown symptoms and gone into isolation but we have been able to stop the spread internally.
- Collecting food and prescriptions for isolating residents
- Goody bags for residents that are isolating.
- Daily calls from support workers to residents
- Encouraging residents to direct questions to us, rather than rely on the endless news reports and potential fake news on social media
- Our aim during this season is to keep our residents distracted from the situation. From competitions, to impromptu concerts from staff, games through the houseparty app, online Xbox gaming parties, silly gifts, online lego building sessions and using Facebook groups to share lovely pictures and messages. We are trying to keep our residents active and engaged.
- Providing blogging opportunities for young people to share their experiences.

Specific support for youth clubs and community connecting services:

Our youth clubs and community connecting services are now being delivered online and through mobile technology. This includes:

- A weekly Zoom video chat on Wednesday evenings at 7pm for our Broadclyst older youth club
- A weekly Zoom video chat on Thursday evenings at 6pm for our ISCA youth club
- Discord gaming voice and text chat with our community connectors

How can I donate to YMCA Exeter?

- On our website - <https://www.ymcaexeter.org.uk/i-would-like-to-help/donate/>
- Bacs payment - we can provide our bank details. (Please find details below)

Account name: City of Exeter YMCA

Account number: 00982170

S/C: 12-13-55

- Over the phone by card - 01392 410530
- Make a cheque payable to 'YMCA Exeter' and post to YMCA Exeter, 39/41 St David's Hill, Exeter, Devon, EX4 4DA

Can I volunteer with YMCA Exeter?

YMCA Exeter has lots of volunteering opportunities. Please contact Sue Wilson, our Volunteer Coordinator. Sue will find out about your strengths and key skills and discuss the various types of volunteering roles currently available. Sue will also guide you through the application process and be your first point of contact for any volunteering related queries.

Call **01392 410530** or email sue.wilson@ymcaexeter.org.uk to arrange a chat

Does YMCA Exeter accept clothing/goods donations?

We occasionally accept donations, but we usually put out a special request when we need specific items.

There is a YMCA charity shop in Newton Abbott that supports the work of YMCA South Devon.

Or you could try donating to other local charities – British Heart Foundation charity shop on Fore Street.

Do you have any jobs available?

You can check our jobs page on the website for updates or subscribe to our jobs mailing list: <https://www.ymcaexeter.org.uk/tell-me-about/jobs/>

Do you provide help with searching or applying for jobs?

Unfortunately, we only provide support in this area to people who are living in our accommodation. But the Co-Lab in Exeter provides some great resources and courses:

<https://www.colabexeter.org.uk/courses>

What accommodation is available through YMCA Exeter and how can I apply for it?

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What is the status of my housing application?

Please contact our housing manager, Jeremy Theeten, by calling 01392 410530 or emailing jeremy.theeten@ymcaexeter.org.uk.

Please note: details of an application can only be given to the applicant (or their Social Worker/Support Worker). If you are a friend or family member we will be unable to share these details with you without permission from the applicant.