

S.O.S. Voice of Youth

Hackney youth workers' cooperative VOY will close... unless you can step up and take it on?

After six wonderful years of cooperative youth work in Hackney, we are now looking for the right team of youth workers to take Voice of Youth forward.

What is Voice of Youth (VOY)?

Voice of Youth is a special organisation. We do things differently: we work co-operatively without bosses, we are inspired by radical and anti-oppressive practice, our work is rooted in young people's needs and wishes, and we avoid funding that involves meeting targets or defining young people as problems. We were set up in 2011 by local young people and youth workers, and have been doing estate-based youth work, detached youth work, and projects on social issues. Our recent work in Upper Clapton, Hackney, has had around 30 fantastic young people aged 8-18 taking part each week (over 100 each year). We have received funding from a variety of sources, have a good track record in managing our funding and running projects, and currently have around £16,000 available for a project using creative activities to get young people talking about social issues. Our overheads are very low, so even when our income is low, we are still reasonably financially stable.

So, why would VOY need to close?

We have always had a committed group of co-operative members (some paid as part-time sessional workers where funding allows) and volunteers, who run the organisation cooperatively. Sadly, the current workers and volunteers (apart from one of us) will need to move on over the next few months, for a variety of work-related and personal reasons. We all still love VOY and working together, and we are all sad to leave, but we will need to plan for closure unless we can find a new group. We are keen and happy to hand over to you and help you get started - and then it's all yours!

What we can offer a new group:

- Funding for a 6 month youth project, including sessional paid work for three workers, using creative methods to discuss and challenge inequality.
- Current co-op members will hand over and provide support to the new group over the next few months. One of us - a young woman from the local area who is an experienced youth worker - plans to stay on long-term as part of the co-op.
- Several years of relationships with young people, parents and carers, and organisations in the area.
- All legal documentation, policies, working procedures, financial records,

financial procedures, a website. You can choose to amend these, but at least you're not starting from scratch! We are registered as a non-profit company and workers' cooperative, and have developed a widely respected 'How we Work' pack for our volunteers and co-op members.

- Established processes for insurance and DBS (criminal record checks) - these are currently paused while our work is paused, and will need to be reinstated before starting face-to-face work.
- Access to free community venues.
- Freedom to work together to take the organisation in new directions - once you get up and running, there are few restrictions to what you can do.

What does it mean to be a co-op member?

Co-op members work together without bosses to run the organisation. The idea is that those working with young people make the decisions about how the organisation is run. Between them, they share out all the tasks such as working with young people, organising activities, buying resources, supervising and supporting each other, keeping financial records (one member needs to be the treasurer), and ensuring meetings happen and conform to certain procedures (one member needs to be the secretary). All the co-op members also share legal responsibilities - including for safeguarding, financial management, and accountability to funders. Have a look at our website to find out more about our work and our principles: www.voice-of-youth.org. So far, some of our co-op members have been unpaid, and others have been contracted sessionally as self-employees. We don't yet have long-term funding or PAYE systems - the new coop could, of course, choose to change all of that.

Who can be a VOY co-op member?

Anyone who supports and commits to working towards our co-op principles and policies! Our work relies on trusting relationships with young people and within the staff team, so we ask for commitment and working well with others and sharing tasks and responsibilities. Anyone aged 16+ can join the co-op (you need to be 18 to be officially on the committee, but we will still involve 16-17 year olds in all decisions). We aim to reflect the community we work in and we particularly encourage local people, and EVERYONE of ANY background and identity who is keen to work with young people on their terms, valuing their views and perspectives. All co-op members and volunteers will need a DBS (criminal record) check - an unrelated criminal record is no problem, but please discuss this with us in advance. Travel expenses may be available, ask for details.

**Come to an open meeting to find out more: 6pm Monday 5th March (venue tbc).
Contact voyhackney@gmail.com by 19th Feb to let us know you're coming.**