

# Creating Systems Change via Youth-Led Commissioning

*Easy read  
research report*



# Authors



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NIESR is a research institute studying how the economy and society affect people's lives and how policies can make things better.

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# About the project and what we did



Connected Futures was a £16 million programme funded by Youth Futures Foundation to help young adults move from school into work.



Connected Futures supported eight partnerships across the country to find out why young adults struggle to find jobs and to help solve these problems.



The Connected Futures in East Midlands Combined County Authority partnership was created in 2022 to help young adults with learning disabilities and autism find jobs.



The partnership hired five young adults with a lived experience of learning disabilities and/or autism spectrum conditions as Youth Voice Ambassadors.



Youth Voice Ambassadors decided how to use the partnership's resources to help young adults with learning disabilities and autism in Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, and Nottinghamshire find good jobs.



This process is called youth-led commissioning.



NIESR conducted research on the partnership's work to help them understand how well they were helping young adults with learning disabilities and autism.



This is an Easy Read summary of the research that looked at youth-led commissioning and the difference it can make in young adults's lives.

# What is youth-led commissioning?

Commissioning is a process made of four main steps:



Find out what people need.



Decide how to use money and resources to meet those needs.



Pay someone (an individual or an organisation) to deliver services that meet people's needs.



Make sure that the services are delivered well.

## Youth-led commissioning is when:



Young adults are involved in **all** steps of the commissioning process.



Young adults are given the power to decide what services are needed to help young adults.



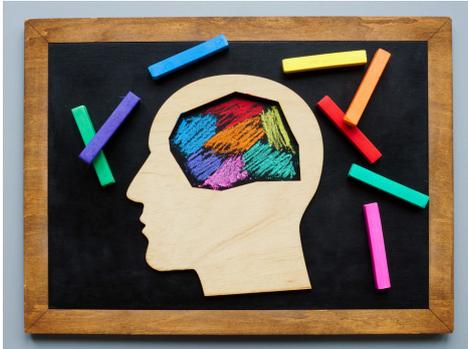
Young adults can decide how to spend the money and on which services.



Facilitators support young adults to make decisions, and experienced professionals trust their decisions.

# The big questions we asked

NIESR asked four big questions as part of the research:



Why should young adults with learning disabilities and autism lead commissioning?



How can young adults be supported to lead commissioning?



What is it like for young adults to lead commissioning?



How does youth-led commissioning affect young adults and others?

**NIESR answered these questions by collecting data.  
This means that we:**



Read documents produced by the partnership and Youth Voice Ambassadors.



Interviewed Youth Voice Ambassadors and people from the partnership.



Asked Youth Voice Ambassadors to write diaries to reflect on their experiences.



Observed the partnership's meetings.

# Why should young adults with learning disabilities and autism lead commissioning?

We found out that it is important that young adults with learning disabilities and autism lead commissioning because:



It ensures they are involved in decisions that affect them.



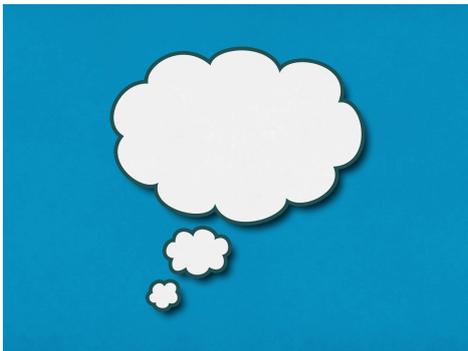
It can lead to new ways to meet the needs of young adults with learning disabilities and autism.



It creates jobs for young adults leading commissioning.



It allows them to drive social change.



It changes how people think of young adults with learning disabilities and autism: by interacting with them, people realise they have potential, skills and ability.

“I thought it was the best opportunity for me to grow as a person, to also accept my learning difficulty, and also have the opportunity to help others that have probably got the same disability as me, or if not, a different one, and empower them, and teach them how they can use it to the best of their ability”

**Youth Voice Ambassador**

# How can young adults with learning disabilities and autism be supported to lead commissioning?

We found out that the partnership did many things to enable and support young adults with learning disabilities and autism to lead commissioning:



The partnership involved organisations that had experience working with and supporting young adults with learning disabilities and autism.



The partnership recruited young adults with learning disabilities and autism in the role of Youth Voice Ambassadors by adjusting the language of the job description to sound less formal.



The partnership promoted the role of Youth Voice Ambassadors among companies and job coaches hosting young adults with learning disabilities and autism.



The partnership held a selection day instead of a formal interview, where candidates were aware of what to expect.



The partnership enabled parents and carers to attend the selection day.



The partnership provided transport and made other reasonable adjustments during the selection day.



The partnership employed a Youth Voice Facilitator to support the individual needs of the Youth Voice Ambassadors.



The partnership helped Youth Voice Ambassadors apply for Access to Work, a government scheme that provides support to help people with disabilities start or stay in work.



The partnership advanced all transport and equipment costs for Youth Voice Ambassadors struggling to receive support from Access to Work.

“I think the support I get is very helpful. [...] sometimes we have one to ones where [the Youth Voice Facilitator] sometimes tells me, he's like, 'If you need a break, have that break. You can have it, it's not mandatory that you don't have this break when we do this work.' [...] the support I get is very simple, very helpful with, like anything from technology all the way to figuring out what this word means and what definitions of some parts of employment. It's very helpful”

**Youth Voice Ambassador**



The partnership provided training to Youth Voice Ambassadors to learn about the process of commissioning.



The partnership used Youth Voice Ambassadors' strengths and skills strategically in the various steps of the commissioning process.

# What challenges can young adults with learning disabilities and autism face when leading commissioning?



Processing large amounts of information such as long texts and technical language.



Hybrid work schedule where individualised support is missing when working from home.



Applying for Access to Work, which can be stressful and confusing, with long waiting times.



'Masking' their needs which can lead to needs not being recognised and met.

# What helps young adults with learning disabilities and autism lead commissioning?



Large chunks of information and tasks are broken down.



The provision of individualised support, for example guidance around time management and organisational skills.



Using their skills strategically.



They are given time and support to grow into their role.

# How does youth-led commissioning affect young adults and others?

**We found out that when young adults with learning disabilities and autism lead commissioning:**



Young adults develop new skills, learn new things, become more confident, feel they can contribute to real changes, and become role models.



Parents and carers feel proud and see positive changes in their children's work and abilities.



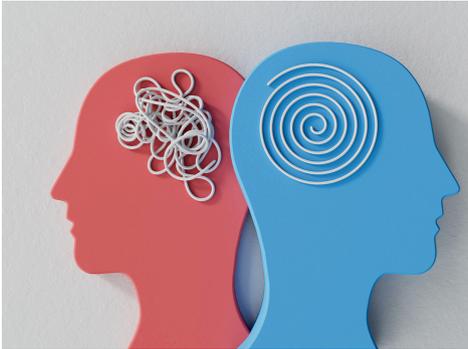
Service providers, local authorities, and employers change their perception and beliefs about the skills and abilities of young adults with learning disabilities and autism.



It sets an example to other service providers and local authorities that youth-led commissioning can be beneficial and successful.

# Things that need to change

## Local authorities should:



Establish programs that allow for young adults with learning disabilities and autism to lead commissioning and make decisions on how to solve issues that affect them.



Advocate for youth-led commissioning in local government.

## Employers looking to hire young adults to lead commissioning should:



Build workplace cultures that are inclusive.



Make recruitment accessible.



Provide individualised support and reasonable adjustments.

## The Department for Work and Pensions should:



Simplify the application process for Access to Work.



Make job coaches more accessible and available to young adults with learning disabilities and autism.



Support employers to become more inclusive of employees with learning disabilities and autism.

**[Find out more about this project.](#)**

“Loads of decision-makers never really go and meet a young person that their decision-making has impacted... Through the YVAs they are getting to know them...

The whole mentality is, if they're in a room making a decision, we want them to stop and think, 'Can I actually legitimately make this decision on my own, or do I need to share that decision-making power?' And that's what we want to change, that's the reason for centring them and elevating them on the programme”

**Partnership Stakeholder**

# Acknowledgements

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And the partnership's partners:



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