

National
Volunteer
Management
Conference



Volunteer
Ireland

Obair Dheonach Éireann

Effective engagement of younger volunteers

Mikayla Morton (*She/Her*) and **Jenny Lavin** (*She/Her*), Jigsaw The National Centre for Youth Mental Health



WE ARE JIGSAW...

jigsaw.ie

Mikayla Morton (she/her), Jigsaw Youth Advocate

Jenny Lavin (she/her), Youth Voice & Engagement Coordinator

30th April 2025

Body


Jigsaw is a registered charity.
Our charity (revenue) number is CHY 17439. Our Registered Charity number is 20064846.



Follow us on:



Time to Reflect



What is working with youth
volunteer engagement in
your organisation?



What questions do you
have?



What challenges are you
facing in engaging youth
volunteers?

Objectives:

Participants will:

- Reflect and learn about the rights-based approach to youth volunteer engagement
- Learn practical strategies for engaging, involving, and retaining these volunteers
- Consider how to implement these practices within their own volunteer involving organisations



Overview:

- What is Jigsaw
- Rights-based approach to engaging young people
- Volunteering at Jigsaw
- Call to action



Ice-breaker



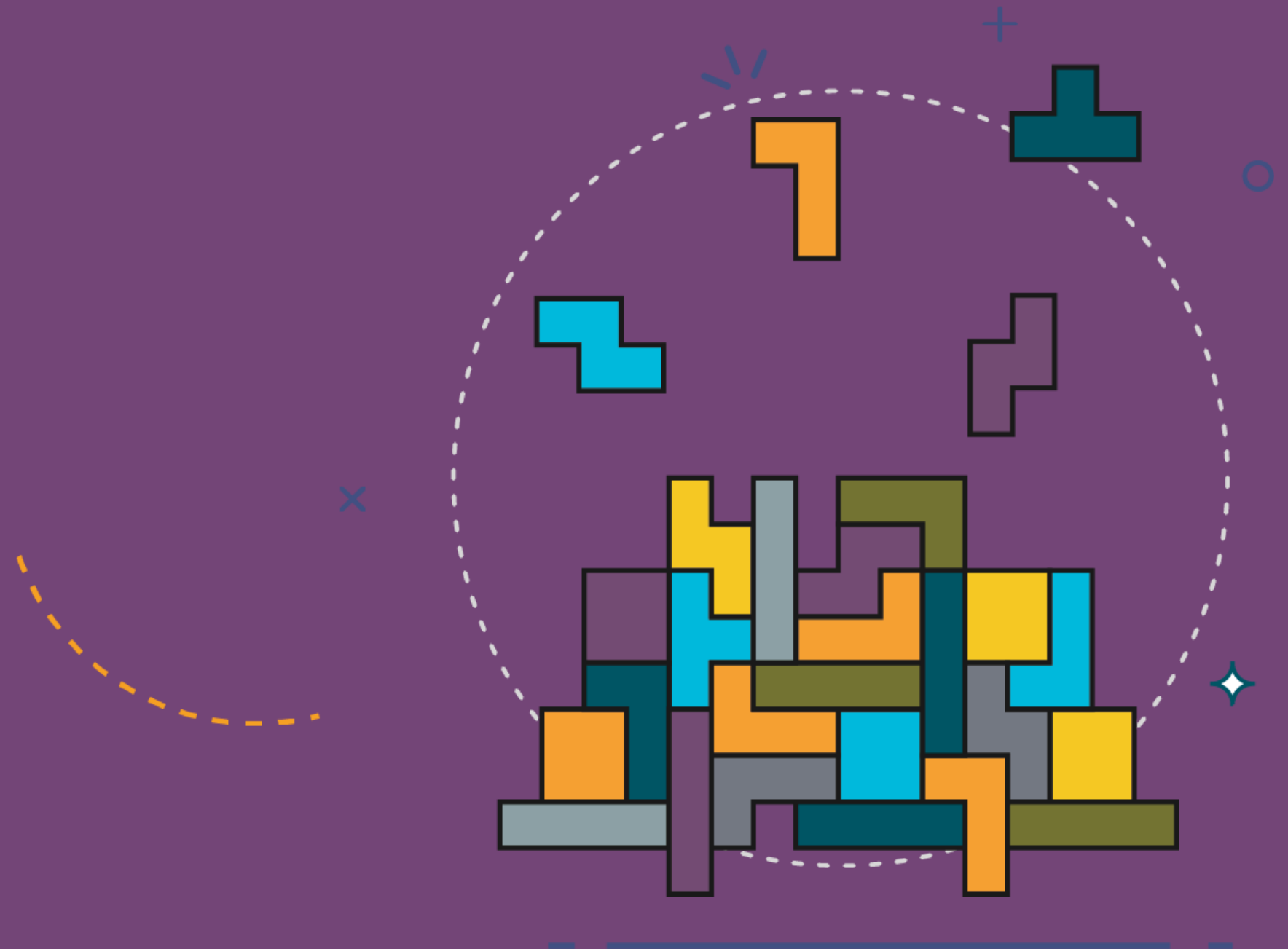
**NAME &
ORGANISATION**

**FAVOURITE
CHOCOLATE
OR SWEET TREAT**

**PREFERED
PRONOUNS**



What is Jigsaw?



We are Jigsaw...

Our vision and mission

Our Vision

An Ireland where every young person's mental health is valued and supported.



Our Mission

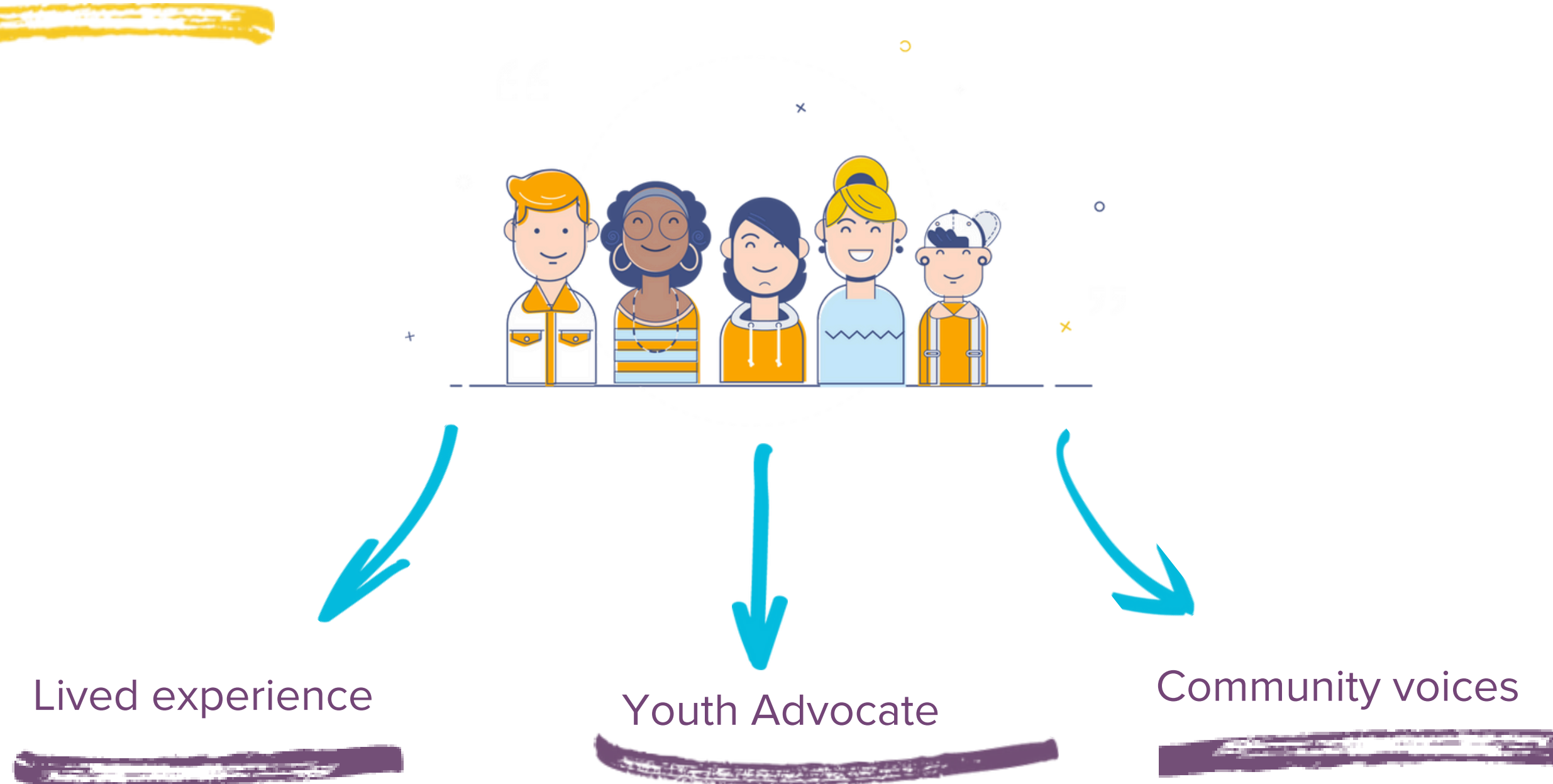
Together, we will achieve better mental health outcomes for young people (aged 12-25) by delivering therapeutic services, promoting youth mental health and mobilising community and societal change, while ensuring our organisation evolves to support all aspects of our work.

Jigsaw's Services & Support

- Provides primary care youth mental health services for 12 to 25 year olds for mild to moderate mental health difficulties
- Online support
- Workshops, trainings and community support
- Advocacy and youth participation
- Research and evaluation

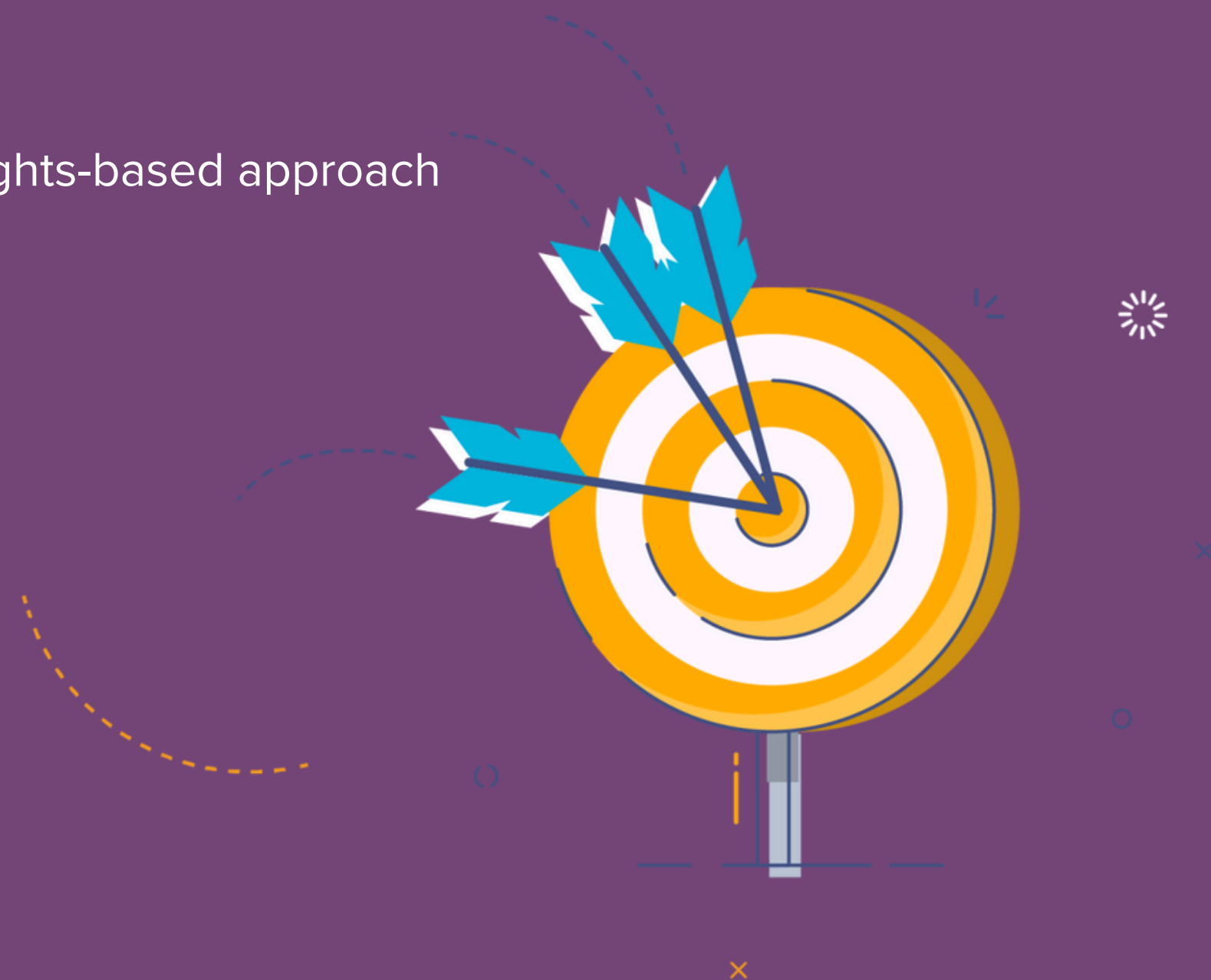


Our model



Youth Voice & Engagement

To understand our volunteers you have to understand our broader rights-based approach



Turn and Talk

How do you engage youth volunteers at your organisation?



Rights-based Approach to Youth Engagement



Jigsaw's evolved approach to youth voice and engagement is underpinned by several international agreements, strategies and practice-based frameworks including:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
- The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2015-2020)
- "Sharing the Vision - A Mental Health Policy for Everyone"
- National Framework for Recovery in Mental Health (HSE) 2018 – 2022
- Together | Jigsaw's Organisational Strategy 2022 -2025

These underpinnings support Jigsaw's rights-based approach to youth voice and engagement.

UNCRC



Article 12:

Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.



Youth Voice

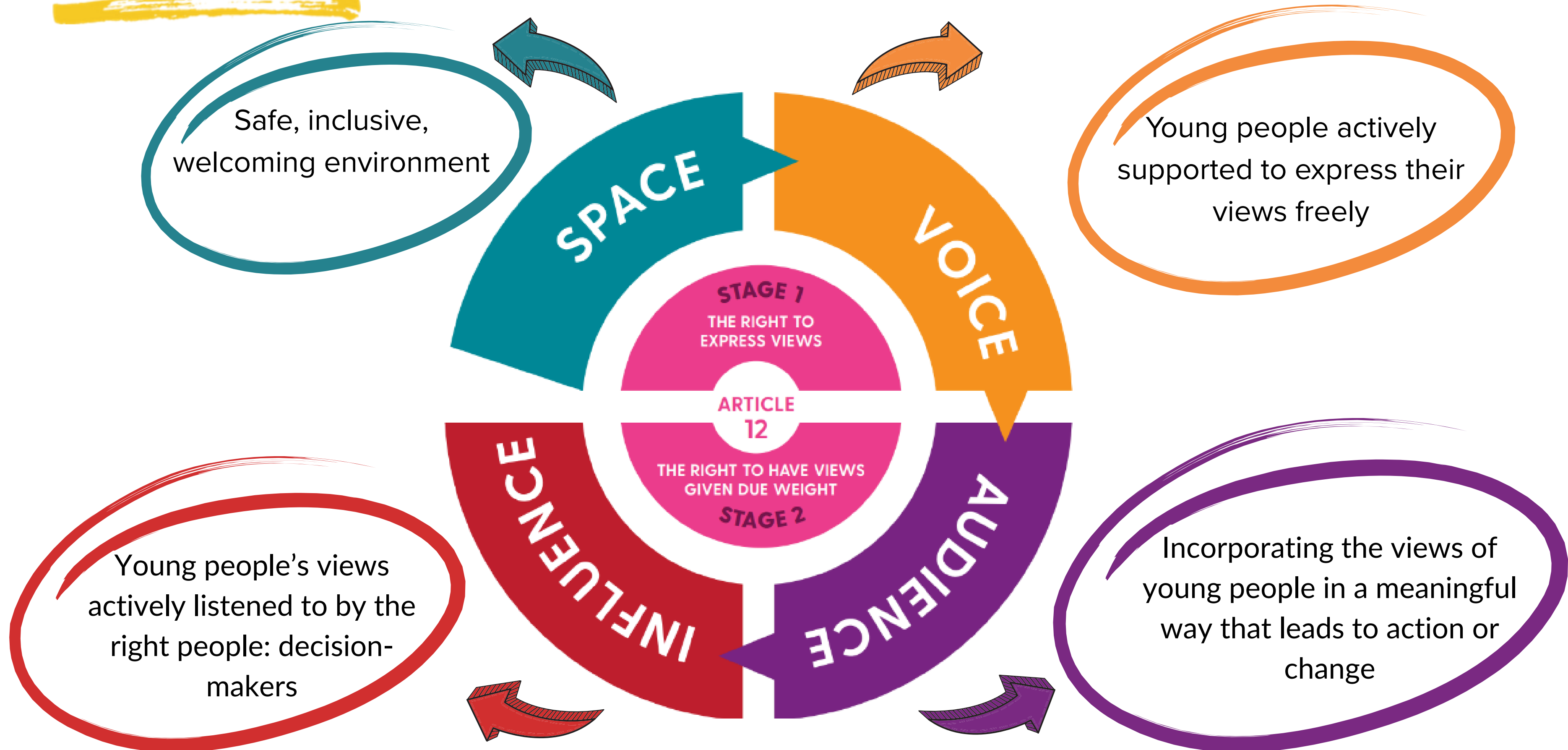
At Jigsaw, we believe that young people should be involved in decision-making at multiple levels. Decision making is an ongoing process, which include information-sharing and dialogue between young people and Jigsaw as an organisation.

These include:

- At an individual level
- At a services level
- At organisational level
- In everyday spaces



Youth Voice: Lundy Model of Participation



Youth Voice: Everyday Spaces Checklist

Everyday Spaces Checklist

This checklist is designed as a guide to help you ensure that children and young people have a voice in decision-making. It can be applied in many everyday situations including in classrooms, hospitals, childcare settings, child and youth services, youth and sports clubs, youth projects, arts and creative initiatives and other spaces.

Please do not use this checklist for developing policies, plans, services, programmes, governance, research and legislation – use the Planning Checklist on page 18.

Please make sure that the ways you involve children and young people in decision-making are age-appropriate and accessible for all, whether in person or online.



Youth Advocate Volunteers



Who are our Youth Advocates?

- Young people aged 16 - 25 years old
- Most are assigned to local service hubs and live or study in those communities
- Passionate about youth mental health
- Change makers
- Two-thirds are young people with a lived experience of mental health



Jigsaw Youth Advocates



National Examples - 2025

Keen to help **young** people with their fears

Charity Jigsaw's volunteers are aged 16 to 25 and they use their own experience to advise peers who struggle with their **mental health**, says **Helen O'Callaghan**

ACHES instead, more than 100 **youth** advocates nationwide, themselves teens or **young** adults, are joining for change in our **youth** mental health system. Aged between 16 and 25, they are volunteers with **Jigsaw**, the charity that offers a free and confidential **youth** mental health support service for 16 to 25-year-olds.

The volunteers are on their first experience to support **youth** voices in national conversations. They advocate for more accessible and **youth**-centred services, and they create awareness and challenge stigma.

"At a time when the **youth** mental health system is under pressure, their efforts are not only inspiring, but essential," says David Kennedy, **Jigsaw's** **youth** voice and engagement manager.

Here, we talk to three of the volunteers, asking how **youth** mental health has touched them personally, why they wanted to be an advocate and what lessons their peers are highlighting.

They also suggest tips for parents eager to support their children.

Opening up a conversation

Dylan Kelly, 20, is in his second year of a counselling and psychotherapy degree at Griffiths College, Limerick.

"The end of primary school, preparing to go to secondary, is a transitional time and was a bit of a struggle for me. Suddenly, primary school is ending, where you know everybody, and now everyone is moving on, and so are you. It was a lot of unknowns. Nervousness, anxiety came up for me. I was going to get more independence and I wasn't sure what that would be like."

"It was probably those months, before I talked to my parents – they noticed I was a bit down and asked, 'What's going on?' and I opened up. Regularly was the main thing they got right. A lot of parents don't realise little things can really affect a child. From then, **mental health** became an open conversation in our house."

From now, we talk about whether it's a good **mental health** time for us. It's important to start these conversations early.

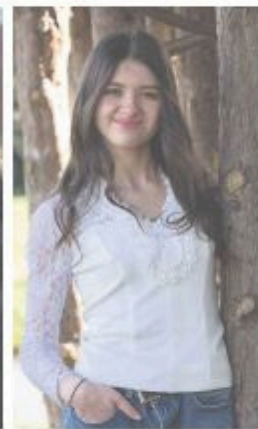
I became a **youth** advocate volunteer with **Jigsaw** when I was 17. I wanted to be the person I needed when I was younger. As volunteers, we create things on social media or in person to bring people together to open up conversations about **mental health**. We do lots of workshops, and we've done videos. In Limerick, we did the Three Kings walk and 25 people turned up. It was an open invitation, so people brought their parents, their dogs. We walked for an hour and talked a lot about what made us feel good.



Dylan Kelly volunteers to be the **ambassador** he needed when he was **young**. Picture: Ben O'Leary



Volunteer Aoibhe Smyth says parents should wear the signs of a troubled teenager. Picture: Sarah Conroy



Volunteer Alexandra Gira says the transition from child to adult is confusing. Picture: Moira Nolan

A big thing for **young** people is the end of living with. It's leading them to feel everything's a bit out of reach. We've talked to 16, 17-year-olds who want to go away to college, but it's not easy. They talk themselves down, because they know they're not going to be able to do it.

My advice for parents is to look inside, because the way your kid is reacting could be affecting your child. You could be having a really stressful day and then be angry with the parent next to you. So what are you carrying and putting out that's not helpful to anyone?

And, also, look outward. If your child is struggling, it's crucial to connect with others who are having a similar issue with their child. Sometimes it's about finding an outside source, even a therapist, someone you and your child are comfortable with.

Give your children a break. Kids are definitely messy people, which is normal. It's not that they're being affected, that it can really knock people back. If you don't get help early on, it can prevent you getting so many opportunities.

I think body image is a big issue. I think it's a lot of girls and a lot of boys who are worried about how they look. And anxiety, too. Secondary school can be tough – it's a lot of classes, the group, who you're going to sit with. If you're not very vocal or quiet, it can be easy to get picked on.

"Around 10, I struggled a lot with **anxiety**. I was always sensitive as a child, but now there were hormonal changes, too. Transitioning from a child to a **young** adult, changing your identity, it's definitely a confusing time. I want to do psychology. I was looking for a work experience opportunity online and found **Jigsaw**, being a volunteer."

There's a lot of social anxiety around being with other people and talking. It's common for teens not to enjoy answering the phone

Young minds vulnerable

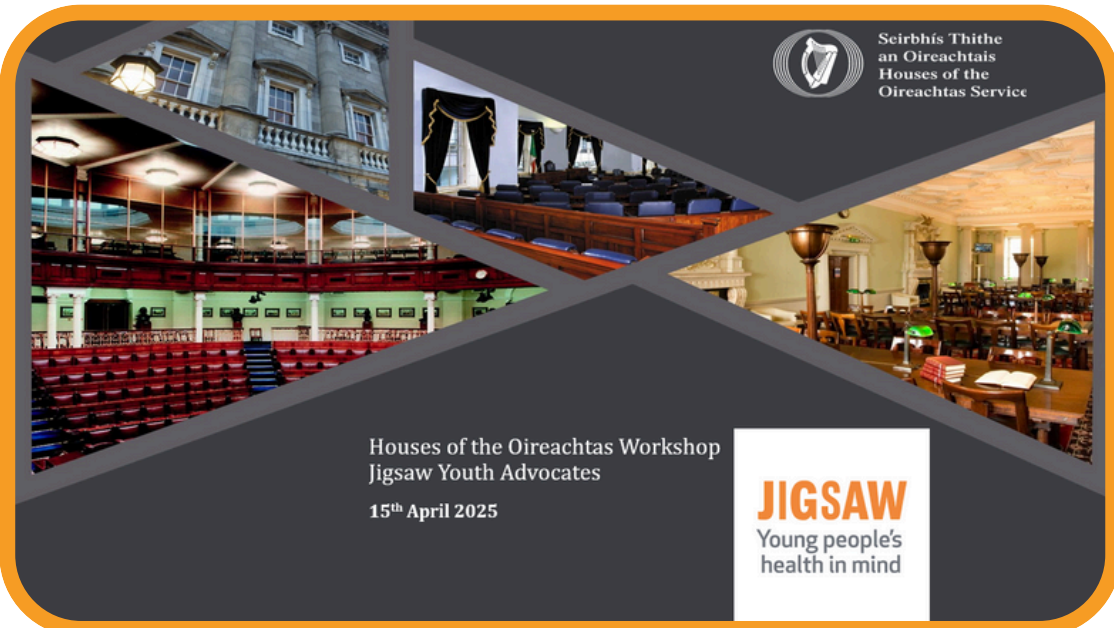
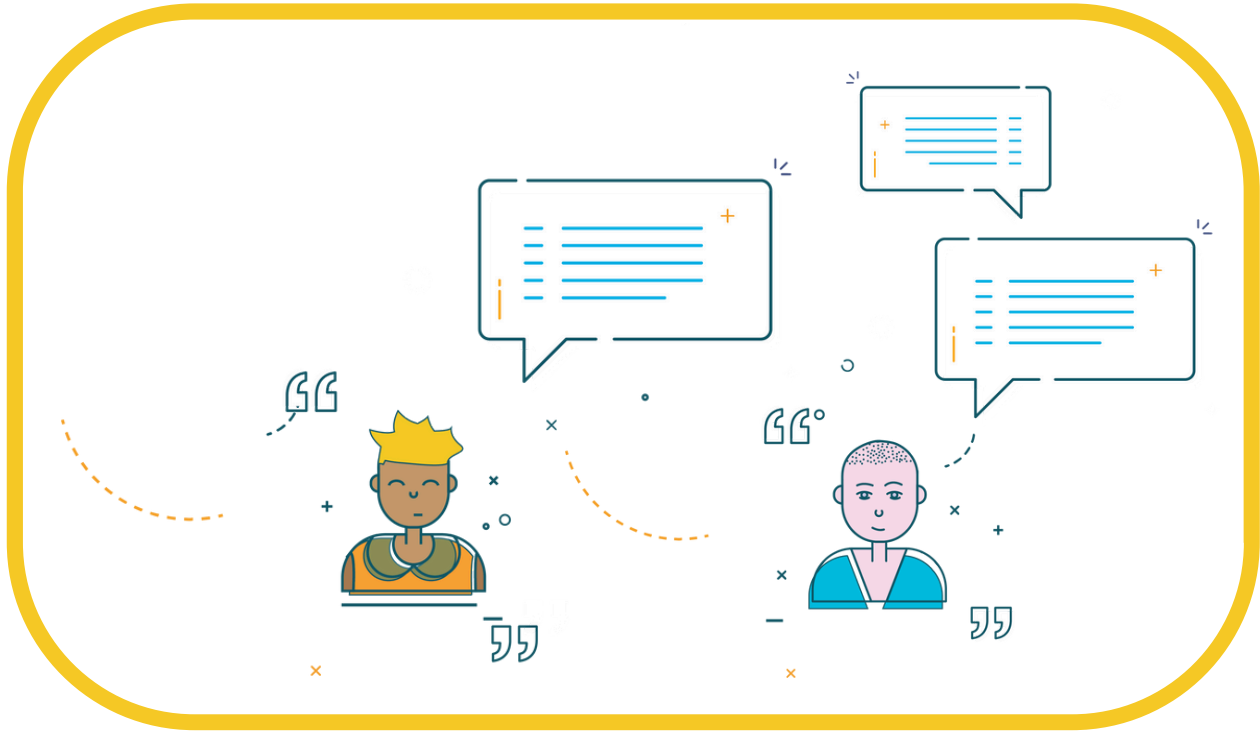
Aoibhe Smyth, 19, is a first-year law and politics student at Dublin City University.

"I was in second year when I started. I was big and sporty and doing things at school. In lockdown, there was a lot of pressure to complete the work. It was a difficult time. I felt very lonely, and not seeing my friends. Being in the house, we'd make friends online, but in second and third year, we were out of from them. I definitely drifted and felt awkward when we went back after lockdown, and we were behind."

reconnected with me. The top concern among **young** people is anxiety. I hear it all the time. If they have to give a presentation, or before an exam, it's always, 'I'm so anxious.' There's a lot of social anxiety around being with other people and talking to them. It's a way more common now for teens not to enjoy answering the phone, even among friends. It's, 'Phone, just message me.' It's an indication of social media, where it's easier, less pressure, to think of an answer. We've seen a lot of this type of socialising, but social media's a fake connection. It's pulling us far from real, worthwhile connections. When I connect (in real time) with people, I see positive effects on my **mental health** and wellbeing, so I try to do that more often than texting."

Something that resonated with me was when I was studying music, a friend said, 'If you don't give your mind rest, it'll do it for you by shorting physical responses.' I've seen it play out, especially in sixth year, when so many people get sick. It has really made me take my breaks."

To parents, I'd say be a safe space, a non-judgmental person, so even if your child has done something really wrong they'll know they can come to you regardless. And it's not what you say, it's how you say it: you can get your message across without being harsh. Encourage your child to take space from social media and to have real-life connections. If there's a rule or boundary – like a set time to be away from their phone – it can help them manage it better. And have your child form a routine – three meals a day, enough time for sleep."



Houses of the Oireachtas Workshop
Jigsaw Youth Advocates

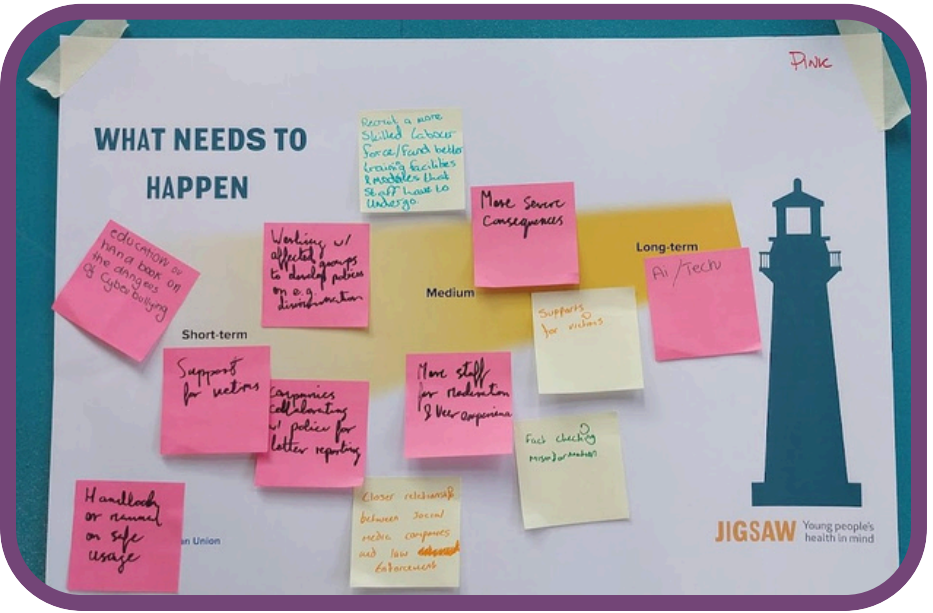
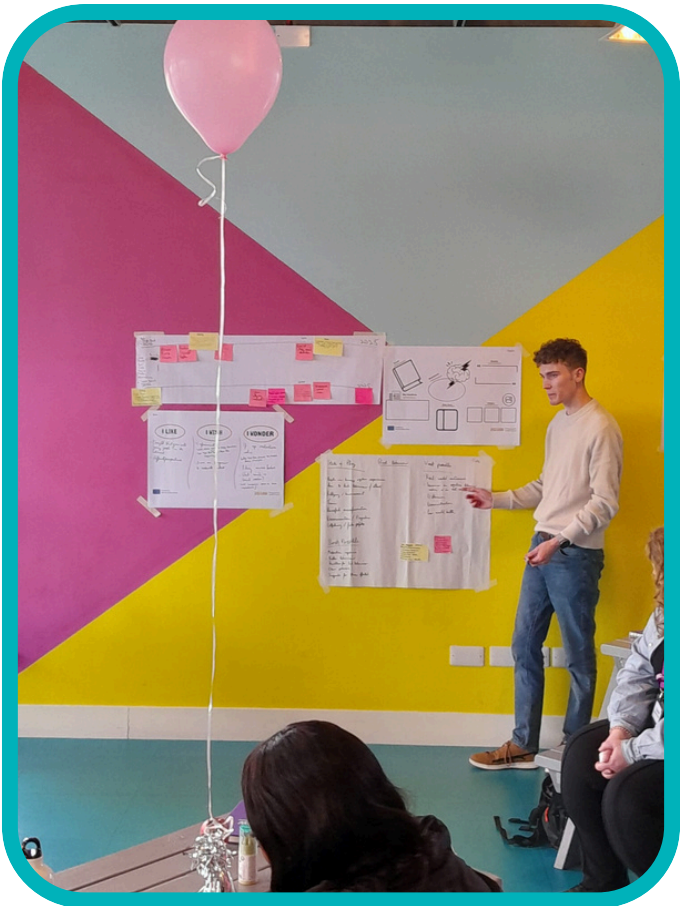
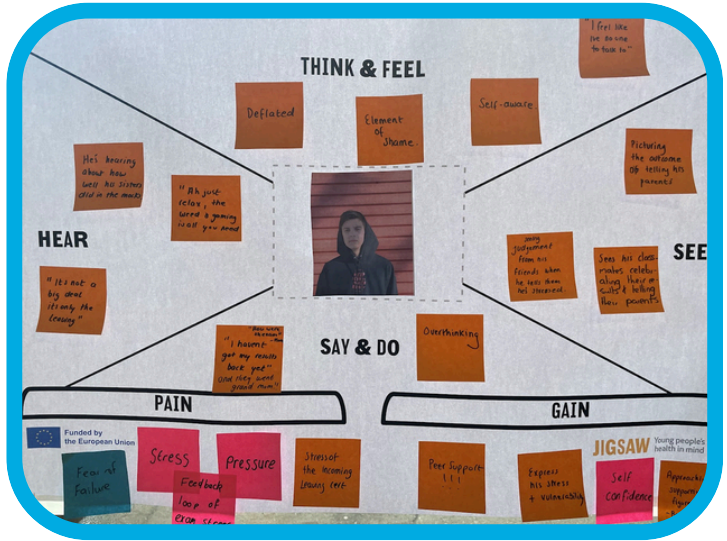
15th April 2025

Seirbhís Thithe an Oireachtais
Houses of the Oireachtas Service

JIGSAW
Young people's
health in mind

JIGSAW Young people's
health in mind

National Examples - 2025



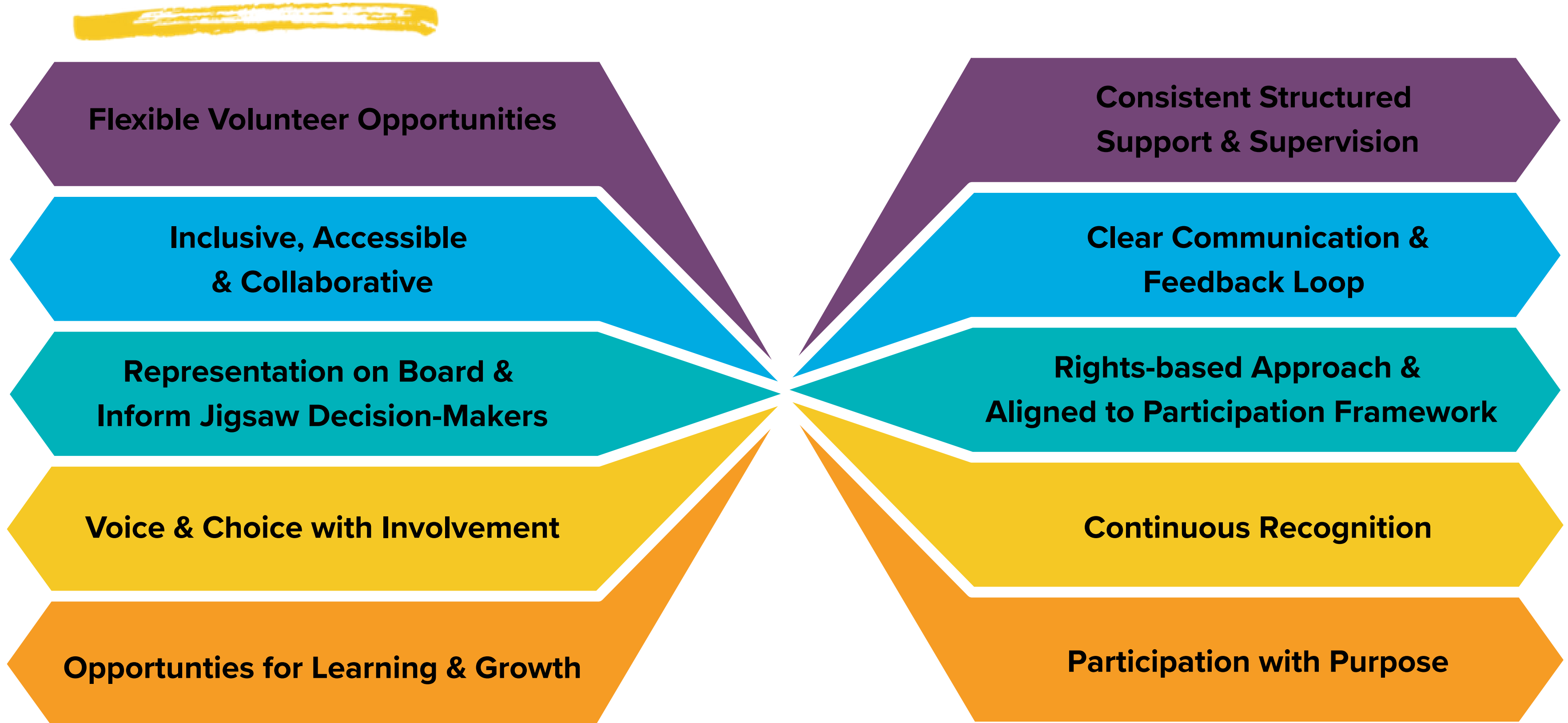
Jennifer from Jigsaw Online

JIGSAW
Young people's
health in mind

**Who are you and how long have
you been a youth advocate?**

JIGSAW
Young people's
health in mind

Youth Volunteer Engagement - Best Practices



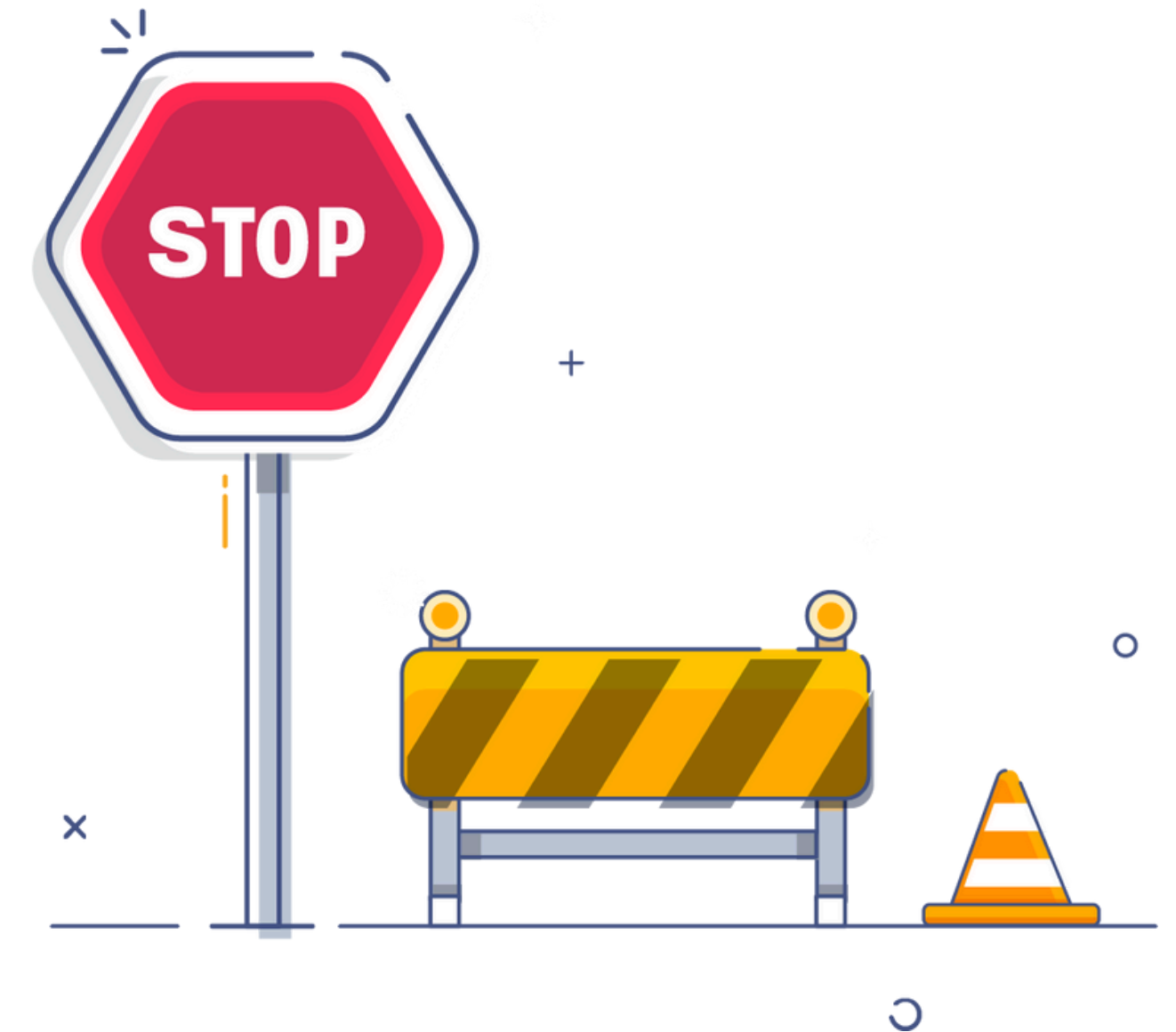
Turn and Talk

What challenges or barriers are you facing when engaging youth volunteers?

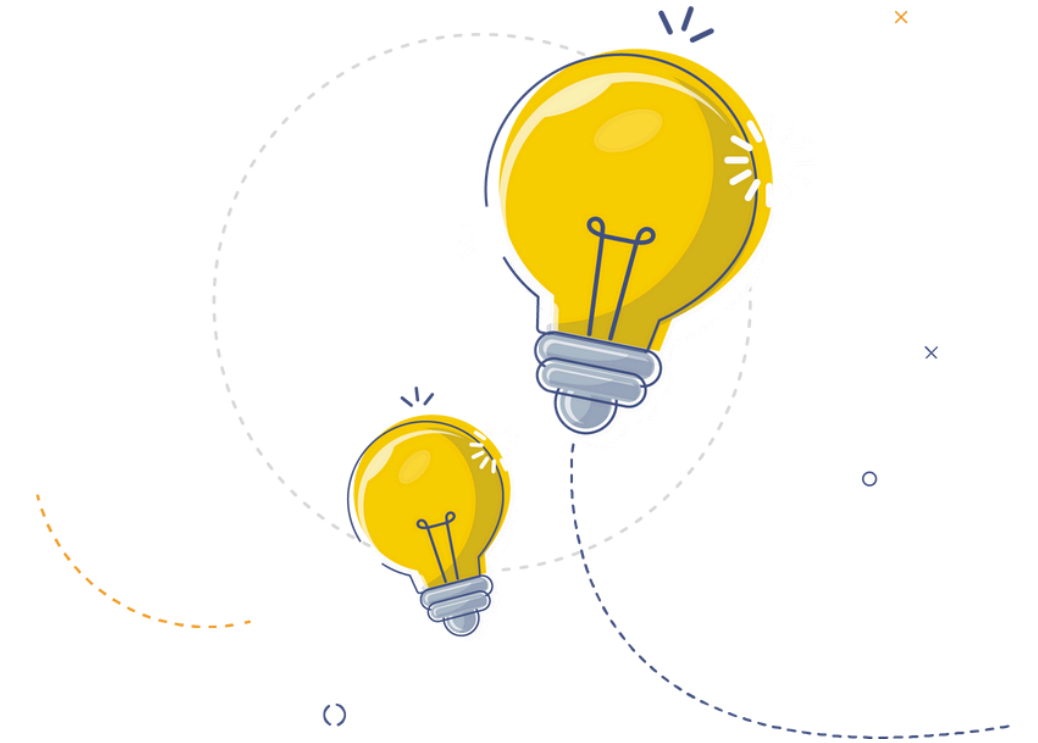


Barriers & Challenges

- Time and resources
- Sustaining engagement
- Staying on focus to organisation's mission - "Participation with Purpose"
- Being flexible to meet young people's needs and availability
- Staying relevant to young people
- Meeting staff capacity and capabilities
- Overcoming staff transitions
- Maintaining consistent communication and completing the feedback loop
- Sustaining meaningful connection



Plus One Approach: Reflection & Action Tool



Identify the
Barrier

Decide on
Plus One

What Difference
Has It Made?

What is
Next?



Based on template from
the National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

Questions & Answers



Young people's health in mind

WE ARE JIGSAW...

jigsaw.ie

Thank you!

Go to [Jigsaw.ie](https://jigsaw.ie) for more

