

spunout

Pre-Budget Submission 2027

What young people
need to thrive



June 2026

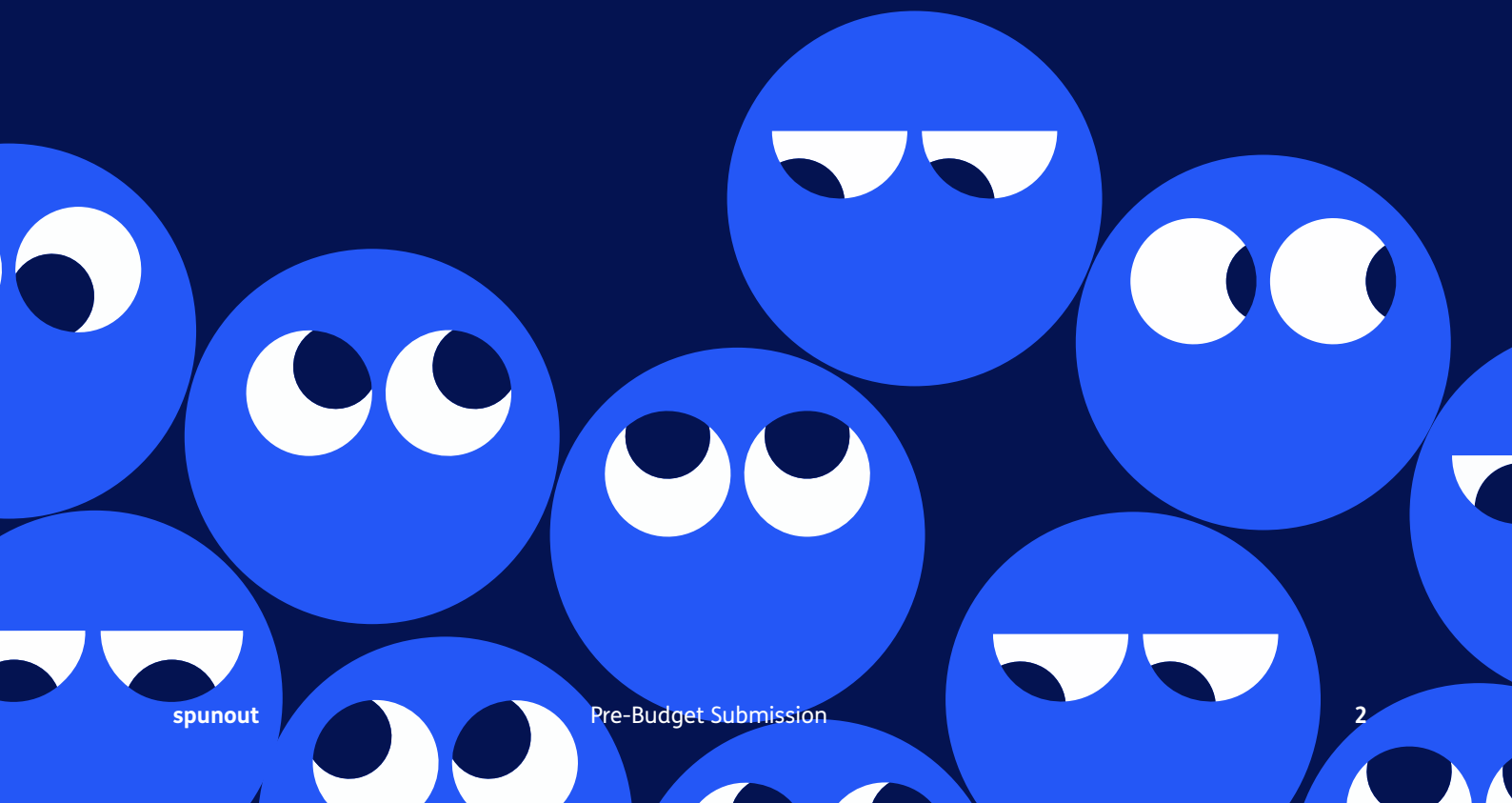
About spunout

spunout is Ireland's youth information and support platform, working towards an Ireland where all young people are empowered and supported to thrive.




We work collaboratively with young people to support mental health and wellbeing by creating evidence-based, person-centred digital solutions and safe, validating support spaces.

spunout has been supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing since 2004, and connects with more than 4,000 young people every day across its services.

Young people are increasingly facing pressures relating to mental health, loneliness and isolation, housing insecurity, education costs, and the rising cost of living. Through our work with young people, spunout understands firsthand the urgent need for accessible support, early intervention and prevention, and greater investment to shape the conditions young people need to thrive.



Budget Priorities at a Glance

Priority area	Budget 2027 Ask	Impact
 Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing		
Mental Health Supports	+€250 million increase in national mental health funding to move towards 10% of the health budget by 2030	Promote prevention and early intervention
Digital Mental and Health Innovation	+€704,000 to grow spunout services	Ensure early, accessible information and support
 Youth Infrastructure and Connection		
Youth Work	+€27.3 million investment in the youth sector	Increased service provision
Youth Hubs and Infrastructure	+€75 million Young People's Spaces, Facilities and Services Fund	Support connection, service provision, and prevention
 Cost of Living Supports for Young People		
Education Costs	+€68 million to reduce fees for students and apprentices	Reduce financial stress and barriers to education
Rental Crisis	+€20 million to establish Rent Arrears Scheme and Deposit Protection Scheme for private renters	Reduce housing insecurity and financial stress
Public Transport	+€40 million to reduce the cost of public transport for young people	Promote climate action and lower the cost of living

Our Ambition for Budget 2027

Budget 2027 is a timely opportunity for the Government to invest in the conditions that young people need in this country to be supported and empowered to thrive. Young people in Ireland are facing the impact of multiple overlapping crises. Whether in the area of mental health, loneliness, intergenerational inequality, access to housing, the climate emergency, or the cost of living, it is clear that young people are faced with a social contract strained to breaking point.

As a youth-led organisation, spunout's role is to amplify the voices of young people and empower them to advocate for meaningful, positive change in their own communities. This submission has been drawn up through consultation with young spunout volunteers, and in collaboration with partners across the youth and health sectors.

We have also included proposals to enhance our day-to-day operations, to ensure that spunout can reach and support more young people than ever before in 2027.

Current Context: the Landscape of Need

At spunout, we connect with more than 4,000 young people every day through our digital support services. We have a unique level of insight into the landscape facing young people in Ireland.

Between 2020 and 2025, 30,087 individuals reached out to spunout with thoughts of suicide. The most common mental health concerns among our service users are anxiety (27.6%), stress (19.4%) and isolation or loneliness (17.6%). spunout's research report 'Loneliness: What Ireland's Young People Are Telling Us' has shown the growing impact of loneliness among young people, with 5.6% of 16-24 year olds reporting feeling lonely "most of the time."

These figures offer some idea of the scale of the crisis young people are facing in mental health and wellbeing in Ireland, and the opportunity Budget 2027 has to tackle the underlying issues and deliver for the good of young people all across our country.

Policy Context

These proposals represent practical investments the Government can make in delivering on its existing commitments to young people across mental health, youth development, education, social inclusion and housing. Our recommendations align with a range of existing national policies and strategies, including:

Securing Ireland's Future, the 2025 Programme for Government

Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028

Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone

Ireland's Strategy to Reduce Suicide and Self-harm: Connecting for Life 2026-2035

National Digital Mental Health Strategy 2026-2030

Path to Universal Healthcare: Sláintecare & Programme for Government 2025+

Opportunities for Youth: National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services

Housing for All: A New Housing Plan for Ireland

1.

Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing



1.1.

Prioritising mental health supports for young people

Young people should not need to reach a crisis point before support becomes available. Equally, young people should have access to the information, skills and tools needed to understand and manage everyday mental health challenges before they escalate. Supporting young people's wellbeing requires a continuum of support, from mental health literacy, prevention and early intervention through to specialist clinical care when needed.

According to the My World Survey 2 by Jigsaw, the peak age of onset for mental health conditions is between 15 and 25, precisely when young people are completing their education, entering the workforce and navigating complex social transitions. While many young people experience stress, anxiety, loneliness and other challenges as part of these transitions, too many lack access to the support, information and practical tools needed to maintain good mental health and wellbeing.

The My World Survey 2 also found that 58% of young people aged 18-25 reported experiencing levels of anxiety and depression above the normal range. The same survey found that 38% of this cohort had engaged in self-harm, and one in ten had made a suicide attempt.

Data from the ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ study found that 25% of 25-year-olds reported having been diagnosed with depression or anxiety. Amid this mental health crisis, Red C polling has found that 87% of the public support increased investment in youth mental health services.

In recent years, spunout has welcomed the Government’s commitment to reforming mental health policy and increasing investment in mental health services. The 50% increase in national mental health funding since 2020 represents significant progress. However, continued cross-party support will be required to achieve the Sláintecare target of mental health accounting for 10% of the overall health budget by the end of the decade.

spunout is calling on Budget 2027 to take a meaningful step toward this goal by increasing mental health funding to 7.5% of the total health budget. Based on 2026 figures, this would represent an additional investment of approximately €250 million in mental health services and supports.

This additional funding would provide for greater resourcing of existing Government mental health strategies, increasing investment both in reducing CAMHS waiting lists, but crucially also in early intervention and prevention systems for youth mental health. This should include a focus on adequately resourcing the community and voluntary sector as an essential part of the national mental health system, promoting inter-service integration and multi-annual funding models for mental health organisations.

Budget Ask	Additional Investment 2027
Increased national mental health funding	€250 million

1.2.

Supporting young people with digital mental health and information

Trusted digital supports are now an essential part of Ireland's mental health infrastructure. As recognised throughout the National Digital Mental Health Strategy 2026-2030, digital platforms are increasingly the first place young people turn for mental health information, support and guidance on engaging with services. However, young people also face an increasingly complex online environment, with misinformation and barriers to accessing trusted support.

spunout provides young people with accessible, evidence-based information and support. Our work strengthens mental health literacy, informed decision making, and early help-seeking behaviour. Each day spunout connects with over 4,000 young people all across Ireland through our digital services. This is a vital form of early prevention, serving as a protective factor for youth mental health.

To further improve our reach and impact, spunout is calling on the Government to provide an additional recurring investment of €704,238 in Budget 2027 to expand our national digital youth information and mental health supports.

Our Impact in 2025



908,324

site visits to trusted information



52,748

individuals supported through Text About It



38,400

uses of Navigator to access mental health information and resources*



972

young people enrolled in Academy to develop their mental health literacy skills

*data from launch in July 2025

Greater investment in digital prevention and early intervention will enable spunout to reach more young people earlier, strengthen mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviours, improve pathways to trusted supports, and reduce pressure on overstretched services by connecting young people with the right information and resources before challenges escalate into crisis.

This 20% uplift in our core funding would significantly strengthen Ireland’s digital prevention infrastructure for young people. The investment would expand access to trusted mental health information and support, strengthen mental health literacy, enhance youth participation, improve signposting pathways, and increase support for underserved young people. Additional funding would also strengthen spunout’s Insights function, generating real-time evidence on emerging youth issues through service data, youth voices, research and consultation. This would support more responsive, evidence-informed policymaking and service design across Government and the wider youth sector.

By reaching young people earlier and connecting them with trusted supports, investment in spunout represents a cost effective investment in prevention, early intervention and youth wellbeing.

Budget Ask	Additional Investment 2027
20% uplift in spunout’s core funding	€704,238

2.

Youth Infrastructure and Connection



2.1.

Supporting national youth work services

Youth work changes the lives of young people, and saves money for the taxpayer by unlocking the full potential of young people in the long term. Properly funding youth work is one of the best ways we can invest in stronger communities. This insight is central to the ongoing work of spunout and our partner organisations throughout the youth sector.

As a member of the National Youth Council of Ireland, spunout fully endorses NYCI's call for the Government to secure the foundations of youth work services through an additional investment of €27.3 million in Budget 2027. This would include a €13.5 million investment, to fund a 15% increase in Existing Levels of Services, and €13.75 million additional capital funding for youth spaces (including €4 million already committed in the National Development Plan).

Crucially, this funding would secure existing levels of service provision, avoid cuts to essential youth work programmes, and maintain current levels of access for those who rely on youth services as foundational to their wellbeing. Meaningful funding is essential to facilitate the sector to work with Government in achieving the aims of 'Opportunities for Youth: National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services 2024-2028'.

Investing in youth work makes long-term economic sense for the State: the NYCI report ‘Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work’ gives strong evidence that, for every Euro invested in youth work, the State receives a €2.20 return within ten years.

Budget Ask	Additional Investment 2027
Increased investment in existing levels of youth work services	€13.5 million
Additional capital funding for youth spaces	€13.75 million
Total	€27.3 million

2.2.

Investing in youth spaces

Investment in youth infrastructure is an investment in prevention, connection and belonging.

A major challenge to young people’s wellbeing has been the decline of ‘third spaces’ in which they can congregate, socialise and access services in a safe environment. At spunout, we understand that this absence has contributed to the rise of loneliness and disconnection among young people in Ireland, as documented by UNICEF and the EU Loneliness Survey.

spunout’s own ‘Addressing Youth Loneliness’ Insights Report analysed 194,000 support conversations on ourText About It service, finding that one in five texters aged 12-34 mentioned loneliness, often with a strong link to mental health. A third of these young people reported anxiety and loneliness, 32% sadness and loneliness, and 29% stress and loneliness.

Tackling youth loneliness means investing in youth spaces. spunout strongly endorses the call by the National Youth Council of Ireland for the Government to create a €75 million Young People’s Spaces, Facilities and Services Fund. This fund would modernise aging youth facilities and kickstart investment in one-stop-shop Youth Hubs.

The concept of State-supported Youth Hubs is not new, but it is more timely than ever. In 2015, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs published a report, commissioned from NUIG, on the benefits of these spaces. The goal of providing Youth Hubs has been consistent in Government policy in the years since: greater investment in young people’s spaces can deliver on this goal.

State funding of Youth Hubs would support the Young Ireland Framework’s commitments on participation, belonging and wellbeing, by providing:

Safe social and community spaces

Youth work and wellbeing supports

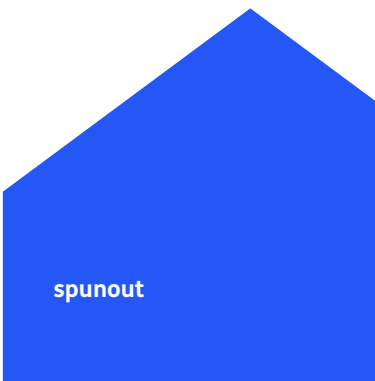
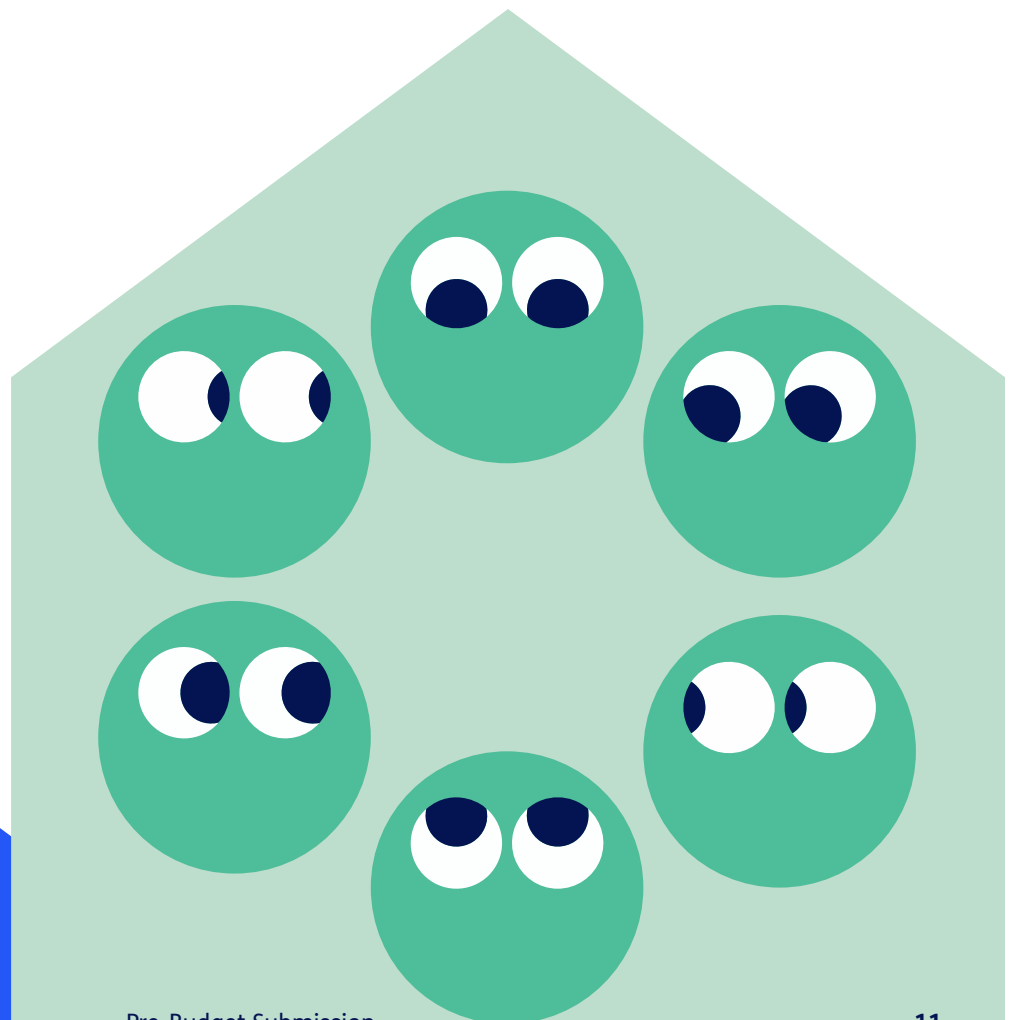
Provide support to pathways to mental health and social services

Provide opportunity for connection and belonging

Access to trusted information and support

As Ireland's youth information and support platform, spunout can support Youth Hubs through trusted information resources, digital mental health support, help-seeking supports, and youth participation initiatives that connect online and community-based supports.

Budget Ask	Additional Investment 2027
Establishment of a Young People's Spaces, Facilities and Services Fund	€75 million



3.

Cost of Living Supports for Young People



3.1.

Reducing barriers to higher and further education

‘Securing Ireland’s Future, the 2025 Programme for Government’ contains a welcome commitment to reduce the Student Contribution Fee “to ease the financial burden on students and families”. It is clearly in Ireland’s interest to promote educational attainment for young people, to develop a highly-skilled workforce, and promote personal development and attainment for young people.

spunout is calling on the Government to deliver a permanent reduction in the Student Contribution Fee to €2,000 per year and to remove student contribution fees on apprenticeships. This would cost an additional €68 million through a €53 million investment to cap the Student Contribution Fee; and €15 million in permanent spending to abolish fees on apprenticeships.

Reducing these costs would have a huge impact on students and apprentices, reducing the cost of living and taking a meaningful step towards ensuring that access to higher and further education is free from stresses around money and means.

As a highly open global economy relying on a skilled workforce, it is clearly in Ireland’s collective interest to remove barriers to further and higher education. We fully back calls by Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (AMLÉ) for the State to take real steps towards reducing and ultimately abolishing the costs of higher and further education to individuals.

Budget Ask	Additional Investment 2027
Capping the Student Contribution Fee at €2,000	€53 million
Elimination of fees on apprenticeships	€15 million
Total	€68 million

3.2.

Tackling insecurity in the rental market

The housing crisis in Ireland has become one of the defining social issues of our time, with more and more young people living in unsuitable accommodation and being pushed to the margins. This crisis is reshaping the trajectory of young adulthood with a profoundly negative impact on young people’s long-term wellbeing.

From June 2020 to June 2025, spunout’s Text About It service provided support to almost 4,000 individuals in housing distress. Young people between the ages of 14–25 made up approximately 31% of these help-seekers: highlighting the profound and worrying impact of the housing crisis on younger generations.

We know that the cost of living is impacting young people in the private rental market. High rental costs and the threat of eviction lead to worsening mental health outcomes, and damage young people’s ability to develop and grow outside their childhood homes. Tackling rental insecurity is therefore an important protective factor for youth mental health.

spunout’s own Housing Survey of 1,000 young people in 2023 revealed that four out of five respondents had seen their mental health significantly harmed by the housing crisis. Alarming, 87.6% of respondents told us they have considered moving abroad due to high housing costs in Ireland. These figures highlight the serious and ongoing

impact of the housing crisis on young people’s wellbeing and future prospects.

spunout therefore endorses the call from Threshold for Budget 2027 to invest €20 million to establish a Deposit Protection Scheme and a Rent Arrears Scheme.

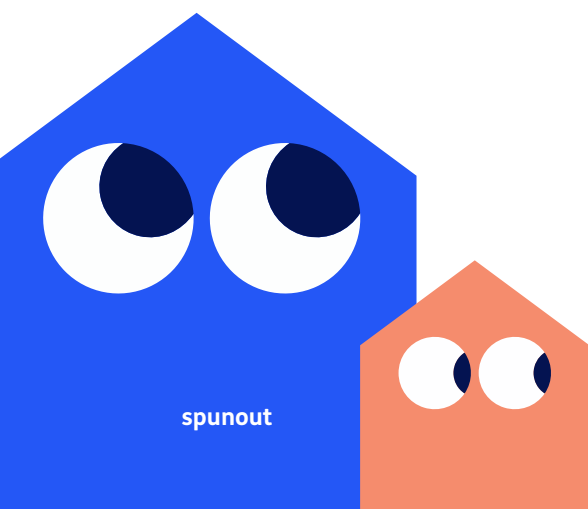
A Rent Arrears Scheme would help young people in the private rental market who are experiencing financial difficulties, by extending some of the rights available to owner-occupiers to young renters. This scheme would provide financial support for renters to pay off their arrears where needed to avoid eviction and homelessness.

A Deposit Protection Scheme would tackle the issue of illegal deposit retention by landlords by establishing an independent custodial scheme to handle and return private rental deposits.

Under Threshold’s proposed Tenancy Deposit Scheme Bill 2025, the cost to the State of establishing this scheme would be minimal, as an independent provider would be selected via public tendering process.

While enormous investment is required to solve the housing crisis, these two comparatively low-cost schemes would massively reduce financial anxiety and distress among young people engaged in private renting.

Budget Ask	Additional Investment 2027
Establish a Rent Arrears Scheme	€20 million
Establish a Deposit Protection Scheme	Cost of tendering



3.3.

Reducing the costs of public transport for young people

The climate crisis is no longer a distant threat, it is a lived reality with profound implications for young people in Ireland today. At spunout, we are seeing the profound growth of climate anxiety among our peers: research from ECO-UNESCO, carried out in partnership with spunout, has found that more than half of young people feel anxious or fearful about the climate crisis, and 75% feel that not enough is being done.

In order to meet the climate challenge while also reducing the cost of living, spunout is calling on the Government to invest an additional €40 million to further reduce public transport fees for young people aged 19-25. This would extend the current scope of the Young Adult Leap Card from 50% of normal fees to 25%.

This measure would ease the cost of living for young people. With the housing crisis ongoing, many students and young workers cannot afford to live close to their places of education, employment or socialisation. Additional prohibitive costs in accessing these crucial locations harm wellbeing and place barriers to young people's ability to progress their lives and make meaningful connections.

It would also put Ireland on the path to meeting the call of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action to deliver free public transport by 2030. Achieving goals like this would be the best antidote to the rising level of climate anxiety and the damaging effects on wellbeing among young people in Ireland today.

Budget Ask	Additional Investment 2027
Decreasing public transport fares through the Young Adult Leap Card	€40 million

References

All costs throughout this document are estimates based on publicly available information. The following is a non-exhaustive list of documents referenced throughout this Pre-Budget Submission.

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By young people, for young people

if it matters to you,
it matters to us

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