

tilia

"So why *is* society structured in a way that makes it almost impossible for us to live and feel well?"

Voices from emerging adults, collected by Tilia since 2012



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Why we are sharing this now

As Tilia launches a new brand and a new website, we want to clarify something that has always been at the heart of our work:

**Emerging adults already have the answers.
What's missing are structures that listen.**

Since 2012, we have been present where emerging adults are; in conversation, in crisis, in everyday life, and in times of change.

This report is a way of gathering, making visible, and taking young people's voices seriously. Not as side stories, but as essential knowledge.

What this report is:

- A collection of voices, experiences, and quotes from emerging adults
- A distillation of what emerging adults have shared with us over time
- A foundation for reflection, understanding, and change

What this report is not:

- It is not a manual
- It does not present a method
- It does not offer quick fixes

These are voices.

Voices that deserve to be at the centre.

How we use emerging adults' voices

Emerging adults' stories are not examples for us, they are the starting point.

We listen, gather, reflect, and pass on what young people say, without filtering out what is uncomfortable or hard to hear.

The voices are used to:

- shape our support for emerging adults
- influence public discourse and decision-makers
- develop services that actually respond to real needs

We do not explain away or oversimplify. We steward these voices with respect.

That is our promise.



Where the voices come from

The voices in this report come from encounters with emerging adults in many different settings:

01.

our chat and email support

03.

campus, in schools, and during workshops

02.

conversations that have continued night after night, year after year

04.

in trust, frustration, hope, and resignation

These are voices from emerging adults who have lived inside what is often described but rarely understood.



What emerging adults say

Emerging adults' voices have always been, and continue to be, the backbone of all of Tilia's work.

The conversations, stories, and quotes that recur here are not isolated experiences, but patterns that have emerged over time.

When the same experiences are repeated, in different contexts, they become knowledge.

Four key insights

We have heard thousands of stories, over the years.

There are more insights than these.

But this is where we begin.



1. The thresholds



We experience high barriers to accessing support; we are expected to prove our suffering in order to be taken seriously.

Young people describe needing to be “unwell enough” to be believed.

That words are not enough.

That pain must be measured, weighed, and compared.

Many say they wait too long to seek help, out of fear of not being believed.

...it feels pretty hopeless when they never take me seriously, and say 'you're not sick enough yet', how sick do they want me to become? It makes me so angry.

When I mentioned how terrible I was feeling, the support line ended the call. I was told that they don't talk to people who feel like this. That made me lose trust in seeking further support.

2. The gap



We fall between the checklists and templates of systems.

Young people talk about not fitting in.

Not being the “right” age, the “right” diagnosis, the “right” problem, or being both too much and too little at the same time.

When support is divided into silos, real life needs become hard to meet.

"After I turned 18, I was discharged from BUP and have now waited months for new care. In the meantime, it feels like I'm alone in my trauma. The school counselor tries to help, but we meet too rarely and there's so much that needs to be addressed."

Yeah. And it's like things just keep getting worse and worse for me. Healthcare keeps passing me around. No one can help. I'm too 'complex' for everyone. I don't want to be ill anymore. I want to be well and have a normal functioning life. But no one seems able to help me, and I can't help myself either.

3. Rejection



We seek help, but are often left alone without the right support.

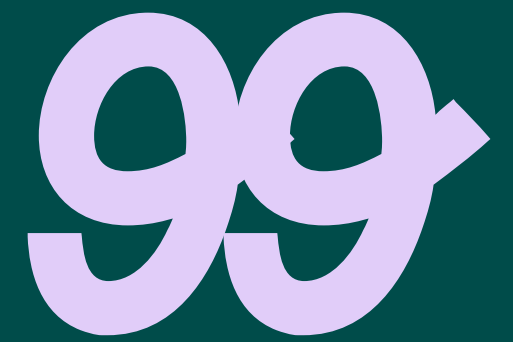
Emerging adults are encouraged to seek help. But when they do, they are met with waiting lists, rejections, being passed along, or silence.

The responsibility is placed on the individual, even though it is the systems that are failing.

"I don't know how many times I've had to hug myself, pretend there was one fully grown adult who could at least behave properly. I've had to 'play' that adult for myself."

Yeah, the systems as they exist today are completely messed up. Especially if you often end up between all the checklists and templates. You're supposed to tick every box or you're out. If you still need help, more than those who actually meet all the criteria, it doesn't matter at all. And you always have to prove why, you have to expose yourself completely just to most likely be denied. You're absolutely supposed to seek help if you need it, but you don't get it.

4. The encounter



We do not feel believed or respected.

How young people are met is decisive.

Choice of words, tone of voice, body language, and assumptions leave marks long afterward.

Many describe having stopped seeking help, not because they are feeling better, but because they have lost trust.

Yeah, at the same time I can't demand that someone likes me, when not even the healthcare system, which is actually paid to help me, can't be bothered.

She said that only people who are dumb do things like that, and that it was unnecessary to waste the healthcare system's time on my nonsense. I didn't want to create any drama, I just wanted to escape the anxiety.



What is at stake

The patterns are clear.

Emerging adults face high thresholds, fall into the gaps between systems, are rejected when they seek help, and lose trust when encounters fail.

This does not happen because they don't try.
It happens because support is not designed around their reality.

The knowledge already exists.
It has been shared in thousands of conversations, in reports, in meetings, and in young people's own words.

What has been missing is not understanding—but action.

That is why we are sharing three actions to act upon.

These actions do not come from theory.
They come from young people's collective experiences.

1. Measure what young people actually experience and govern by it

As long as quality is measured in number of contacts, waiting times, or closed cases, we miss what determines whether support actually works.

What needs to be measured is:

- whether emerging adults feel listened to
- whether the encounters with support offered creates a sense of safety
- whether the support actually helped

Services that systematically reject, lose, or mistrust emerging adults should not be rewarded. They should be changed.

What does not work for emerging adults should not be allowed to continue working on paper.

2. Make emerging adults' experiences binding governance, not input

Emerging adults' stories should not be collected as dialogue, inspiration, or "perspectives."

They should be used as a basis for decisions.

That means:

- interventions are not approved, funded, or scaled without emerging adults having been involved in testing them
- barriers, thresholds, and shortcomings identified by emerging adults lead to real change
- emerging adults' experiences carry equal weight to other quality measures

When emerging adults say something does not work, systems need to listen and act.

3. Shift responsibility from the individual to the systems – provide early support without conditions

Emerging adults should not have to become more ill, more acute, or better at articulating themselves in order to receive support.

Support needs to be provided:

- based on experienced need, recognising that it is already hard enough to feel unwell as an emerging adult
- before requirements for diagnosis, severity level, or the “right entry point” arise
- with responsibility to follow emerging adults over time, especially during transitions such as turning 18

**Early support should be a right.
Not an exception.**

Another story is possible



When emerging adults' experiences are allowed to guide,
when responsibility is shifted from the individual to the systems,
and when quality is measured in what emerging adults actually
experience,
emerging adults can be reached in time before they hit rock
bottom.

What remains is to do what is required.

And then the future can carry a different story:

**I love being young today, and living in a
society that is structured in a way that
makes it easy for me to live and feel
well.**