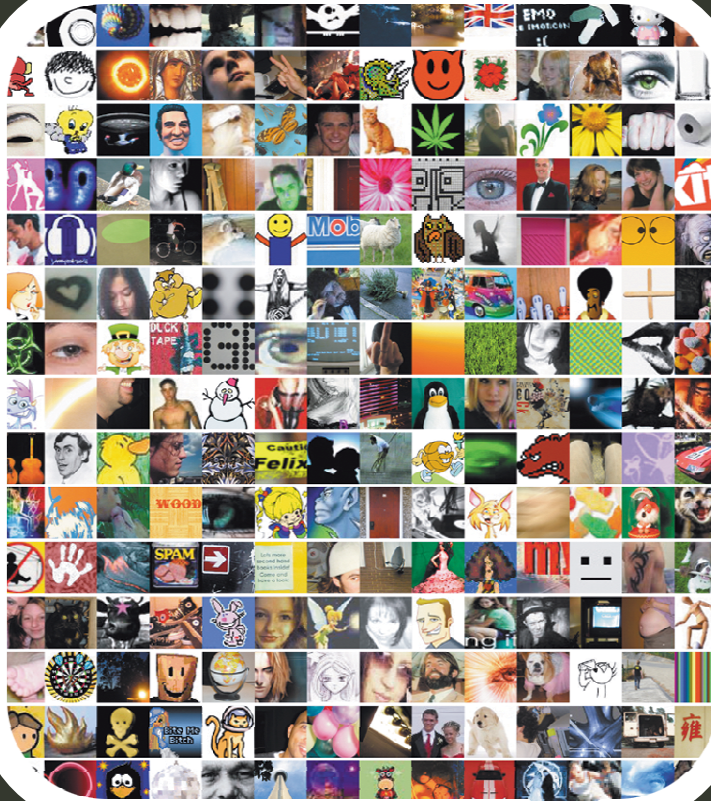


YouthNet



A pilot social return on investment study: askTheSite

June 2008

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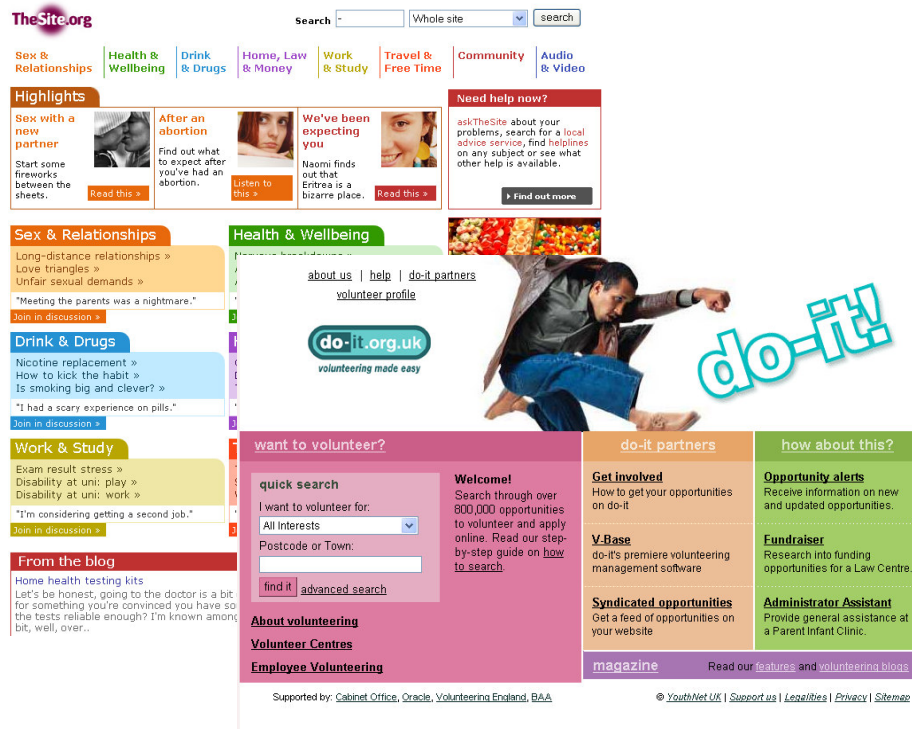
Introduction

In May 2007 YouthNet was invited to take part in a pilot project commissioned by The Vodafone UK Foundation to explore the practical application of an evaluative approach known as Social Return on Investment (SROI). SROI is a popular metric used to quantify the positive impacts charities (and other types of institutions) generate per £ invested. The Corporate Citizenship Company worked with YouthNet and a small group of charities to explore the potential for measuring the social impact of their activities. This report describes the SROI process and summarises the findings of YouthNet's pilot project.

1. Background information

About YouthNet:

YouthNet's mission is to engage, inform and inspire young people aged 16-25 to achieve their ambitions and dreams. We do this through two websites: www.TheSite.org, a one-stop-shop for young people seeking advice and guidance on a whole range of issues and www.do-it.org.uk, the central place on the internet for finding out about volunteering.



YouthNet is a virtual charity, we provide our services using new and emerging technology through the internet and mobile phones. This approach allows us to reach young people at any time, wherever they are.

The SROI pilot project focused on YouthNet's work with young people delivered through TheSite.org.

TheSite.org and askTheSite:

TheSite.org

TheSite.org is a 'guide to life' for young people seeking information, advice and guidance on a range of subject areas: sex & relationships, alcohol & drugs, health, home, law & money, work & study, travel & free time. TheSite.org aims to be the first place for young people to turn to when they have issues or problems in life.

Visited by 500,000 young people every month, TheSite.org supports young people whenever and wherever they need it through a unique blend of information, advice and support:

Straight-forward information

Over 2,000 fact sheets and articles provide straight-forward facts on all the key issues affecting young people's lives.

Support from peers

TheSite.org's online community of over 20,000 young people on moderated discussion boards allows young people to support, learn and advise each other, based on their own experience, in a safe environment.

Expert advice

TheSite.org's askTheSite service enables young people to anonymously and confidentially ask personal questions and receive bespoke answers.

askTheSite

Integrated into TheSite.org, askTheSite provides answers to a range of issues affecting young people, from self-harm to debt problems to work and study related issues. The service is unique because young people in crisis can ask a question anonymously and in confidence, knowing it will be answered by a team of trained advisors within three days. Advisors from organisations such as Addaction, Shelter and Citizens Advice answer questions from young people, ensuring that they receive the best-qualified advice on their situation.

Young people asking relationships questions benefit from peer-to-peer advice from young people aged 18-29 years who volunteer as trained askTheSite peer advisors, as well as advice from 'agony aunts and uncles'.

The askTheSite service is safe and secure – all young people who ask a question are given a unique ID reference which they need to use to view their answer:

The screenshot shows the askTheSite service interface. At the top, there's a search bar and navigation links for various topics: Sex & Relationships, Health & Wellbeing, Drink & Drugs, Home, Law & Money, Work & Study, Travel & Free Time, Community, and About Us. Below this, a breadcrumb trail reads: You are here: Home > Community > Need Help Now > askTheSite > Ask a Question. The main heading is 'COMMUNITY NEED HELP NOW' with sub-links: NEED HELP NOW, BE HEARD, THE SOCIAL, REAL LIFE, WASTE TIME, and THE STAFF ROOM. On the left, there's a sidebar with 'askTheSite' links: Ask a Question, Get Your Answer, Search the Archive, Help in a Crisis, Small print, and Cover your tracks. Below this is 'LOCAL ADVICE FINDER' and 'GET HELP NOW'. The 'Last 10 Questions' section lists three questions: 'Sick pay swindle', 'Scared of the psychiatrist', and 'Spice up my life'. The main content area shows a 'Thank You' message: 'Thanks for submitting your question to askTheSite, it will now be passed on to one of our advisors who will respond within the next three working days.' It indicates 'Stage 3 of 3' and 'How to pick up your answer'. A unique ID is provided: 'Unique ID: 46465671'. Instructions follow: 'Below is a unique ID. You MUST remember this to retrieve your answer. So please, please, please remember it and keep it safe if you write it down. When you want to retrieve your answer, go to Get Your Answer, enter your unique ID into the box and hit submit. You'll then be taken to your answer.' It also states: 'Questions are currently being responded to within three working days. If you entered an email address, we will email you to tell you your answer is live. This email won't contain your unique ID.' At the bottom, it says: 'If you feel you're having a crisis and need help now you can contact Samaritans here.'

The unique ID number ensures that the askTheSite service remains secure and that only the young person who has asked the question can view their answer.

When the answer is ready, young people are alerted by email or SMS (if we have their email address or mobile number), enabling young people to pick up their answer, and get support, as quickly as possible.

askTheSite also provides young people with an archive of previously asked and answered questions. These are a rich resource for young people seeking advice and guidance, sharing support and information originally provided to young people. We seek young people's permission before publishing their questions and answers and make sure that any personal information is removed.

The archives can often answer young people's questions before they ask a question on askTheSite, so they ensure sustainability of the askTheSite service. The archive section also reassures young people that they are not alone, that other young people their age face similar problems.

An example of an archived 'work and study' question is shown below:

The screenshot shows a web page from TheSite.org. At the top, there's a search bar and navigation links for various topics like Sex & Relationships, Health & Wellbeing, Drink & Drugs, Home, Law & Money, Work & Study, Travel & Free Time, Community, and Audio & Video. Below this, a breadcrumb trail reads: 'You are here: Home > Work & Study > askTheSite Q&As > Work & Study Q&As > Drama queen'. The main heading is 'Drama queen'. Under 'Question', a user asks for advice on pursuing drama school. The 'Answer' section provides detailed advice on entry requirements, research, and contacting specialist schools. On the right, there's a 'do-it.org.uk' logo and a 'Quick Search' box. Below that, a 'Latest articles' section lists topics like TV production and Maternity leave. At the bottom, there's a 'Take part' button for a survey.

TheSite.org Search Whole site

[Sex & Relationships](#) [Health & Wellbeing](#) [Drink & Drugs](#) [Home, Law & Money](#) [Work & Study](#) [Travel & Free Time](#) [Community](#) [Audio & Video](#)

[Study Choices](#) [Studying](#) [Getting a Job](#) [Working](#) [askTheSite Q&As](#) [Need Help Now](#)

You are here: [Home](#) > [Work & Study](#) > [askTheSite Q&As](#) > [Work & Study Q&As](#) > [Drama queen](#)

Work & Study Q&As

- [Course crisis » Becoming a counsellor » Passionate about media »](#)
- [Wrong course woes » Time to quit? » Give me a break » Depression holding me back » Super CV » Saturday job search » Drama queen »](#)

Related links

- [Problematic parents » When parents won't let go » Actor »](#)

Drama queen

Question

I'm 16 years-old, half way through my GCSEs and always thought I'd just go on to A-levels afterwards but recently I've been thinking about going to drama school. It's really become a dream for me but I don't know where to start, how to get into it, or even how to tell my parents it's what I want to do. What would be the best path for me and how to I ease my parents into the idea?

Answer

It sounds like you are keen to follow your passion to go to drama school, but are unsure which path to take and how your parents will react to this news.

According to the [National Council of Drama Training](#), "some drama schools have specific entry requirements (typically five GCSE and two A-level passes or successful completion of a relevant BTEC course) so research into courses at an early stage is important". It sounds as though you are already looking into your options which is great and a positive step towards your goal.

As entry levels may differ from institute to institute, it might be worthwhile contacting the [specialist schools](#) you are interested in attending to find out what their entry requirements are. You may find that some of the specialist schools you'd like to attend charge high fees. If this rules these schools out you could consider studying drama at university instead. If you study Theatre Studies A-level it will boost your university application for these courses. You could talk to your careers advisor at school to find out more about the universities offering drama degrees. Then you can compare their syllabuses to see which courses would suit you best.

If you have done your research before [approaching your parents](#), it is much more likely that they will take your seriously and understand that this is the direction you want to take. Perhaps sitting down with them and explaining the options and how much you want to pursue your dream of acting. It may reassure them to know that you are aware of the [potential pros and cons](#) of such a profession and that you are aware of the routes into acting.

There are [many different skills](#) that you can focus on whilst studying at a drama school, and it's not clear whether there is one particular skill that you wish to develop, but getting some experience before applying, could help you to get a foot in the door. For example, you can [get involved](#) with local drama or theatre groups. You can also back up experience with reading plays, film scripts, and books about acting and the theatre.

Good answer? Bad info? Want to tell us what you think? We'd really like to hear what you've got to say about this answer so please [click here to take the survey](#). Your feedback is confidential and as anonymous as you like.

Question answered by [bss](#)

do-it.org.uk
volunteering made easy

Quick Search
Want to volunteer?
Town or postcode:

Worried about work? Studies getting you down?
[askTheSite for advice](#)

Latest articles

- [TV production](#)
- [TV Producer](#)
- [Appealing against bad grades](#)
- [Maternity leave](#)
- [Childcarer](#)
- [RSS](#) [Pick and Mix RSS](#)

Complete our Britain and beyond survey and you're guaranteed to receive a **£5 amazon voucher**.
[Take part](#)

***The advice I
received has saved
my life. I felt like I
didn't want to live
anymore, now I
know there is light
at the end of the
tunnel. Thank you
so much.***

2. The planning process

Objectives:

YouthNet agreed the following objectives for its SROI pilot project:

- To understand more about how to measure impact using the 'social return on investment' (SROI) technique.
- To understand if/how YouthNet can use the SROI technique and identify the challenges/opportunities it raises as a method of impact measurement.
- To support the development of an SROI 'toolkit' by working in partnership with The Corporate Citizenship Company and a range of UK charities.
- To explore the effectiveness of YouthNet's work, according to the SROI model.
- To investigate whether the results of an SROI study can be used as a tool to attract further funding for YouthNet's work with 16-24 year olds.

Scope:

In order to deliver a final report within the required timescale, YouthNet opted to carry out a pilot project. We selected the askTheSite service and agreed that we would assess SROI over a six month period – July to December 2007. We agreed this specific scope for the project because:

- As a medium-sized organisation, YouthNet did not have the resources available to assess the SROI of the entire organisation's activities;
- There were internal benefits of assessing the askTheSite service – both operationally and from a fundraising perspective;
- Input and output data was readily available;
- Whilst *askTheSite* is an anonymous service, YouthNet had been already gathering strong outcomes data via web monitoring software and an optional online 'exit' survey.

Stakeholders:

We agreed the following stakeholders for the pilot project:

- Young people (aged 16-24)
- YouthNet Operations, Development, Senior Management Teams & Trustees
- askTheSite partners (Addaction, Brook, bss, Citizens Advice, Shelter)
- The Corporate Citizenship Company (TCCC)
- The Vodafone UK Foundation
- YouthNet's funders and potential funders

Resources:

The following resources were allocated to the project:

- Project Team (x 3 incl. YouthNet's Research Manager)
- Project Support – The Corporate Citizenship Company, Oxford Economics, JS2 (YouthNet's Accountants)

Timeline:

A detailed timeline for delivery of the project was developed.

3. Inputs

The total cost of the askTheSite project was £221,714.40 over 6 months. The cost breakdown is highlighted below:

Input	Cost
Staff time	£41,631
askTheSite partners	£100,000
Overheads including rent and office costs	£5,893
Peer volunteering programme overheads	£3,750
Peer volunteers – value of volunteer training	£11,122
Peer volunteers – value of volunteering	£59,318.40
Total	£221,714.40

This data was gathered in a number of different ways.

Staff time :

Staff involved in the askTheSite project were asked to estimate the percentage of time they spent working on askTheSite every month. We used this percentage per staff member to calculate how many days they spent over a six month period on the askTheSite service, working on the basis that there are 260 working days in the year.

Staff cost was determined by dividing each staff member's annual salary by the number of working days in the year and then multiplying by the number of days spent working on askTheSite.

askTheSite partners:

YouthNet contracts a range of charity partner to provide answers to young people's questions through askTheSite. The partner costs detailed reflect the six month expenditure budget for working with: Addaction, Brook, bss, CAB, SANEline, Shelter and five individual expert relationships advisors.

Overheads:

All overhead costs for the running of YouthNet, including rent, rates, service charges, office costs and office supplies are clearly detailed in our annual budget.

The overheads associated with running askTheSite over a six month period were calculated by applying the askTheSite staff costs as a percentage of the total YouthNet salary bill (4.6%) to overheads. Therefore, the figure represented above is 4.6% of YouthNet's overheads in a six month period.

Overheads for the peer volunteering programme were broken down into:

- Expenses
- Training
- Publicity

Again, a clear breakdown of annual overheads for the programme is highlighted in our annual budget so we simply divided the amounts by 2 to determine the 6 month cost.

Peer volunteers:

A YouthNet Development Manager runs the peer volunteer programme, in which trained young volunteers aged 18-29 years answer relationships questions from other young people.

Each volunteer in the programme spends half a day every month on training, hence 3 days in 6 months. Over the 6 month period, 30 volunteers were trained, making a total of 90 training days.

To value volunteers' training time over 6 months, we used the average daily wage amount in the UK, £123.58 for every 7 hours/day volunteered, and multiplied this figure by 90 to calculate the value of volunteer training for 90 volunteers over 6 months.

40 volunteers actively answered questions between 1st July and 31st December 2007 and spent 2 days a month volunteering, therefore 80 days a month and 480 days over 6 months. To calculate the total time spent by volunteers each month, we once again used the average daily wage figure of £123.58 for every 7 hours/day volunteered and multiplied by 480.

4. Outputs

The outputs of the askTheSite project can be classified into two groups: those associated with answering questions, and those associated with making previous questions and answers available for other young people via the archived Q&A section.

Answering questions:

For each question answered through askTheSite, various data is collected and stored within a central database. This includes the age, gender and geographical location of the person asking the question (where this data is available), the date the question was asked, and the length of time before a response was issued. Questions are also classified into one of the categories listed below. This data is also stored.

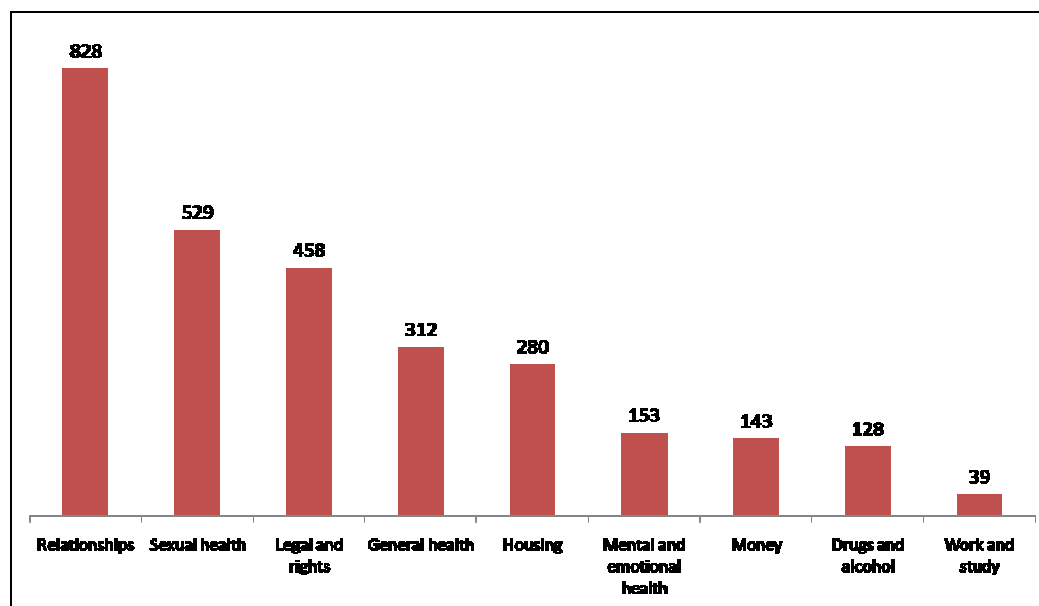
- Sexual health
- Relationships
- General health
- Mental and emotional health
- Housing
- Legal and rights
- Money
- Drugs and alcohol
- Work and study

A web-based tool has been designed, which accesses the database to report on questions asked and answered during a specified date range. The tool also enables data to be filtered by question topic, age, gender, geographic location or the type of alert requested (SMS or email).

Chart 4.1 askTheSite reporting tool

Between 1st July and 31st December 2007, a total of 3,518 questions were asked on askTheSite. However, some of these were either from outside the UK, from people under 16, or out of remit for some other reason. A total of 2,870 questions were answered during the period. These questions were categorised as follows.

Chart 4.2 Number of questions asked by subject (1st July 2007 to 31st December 2007)

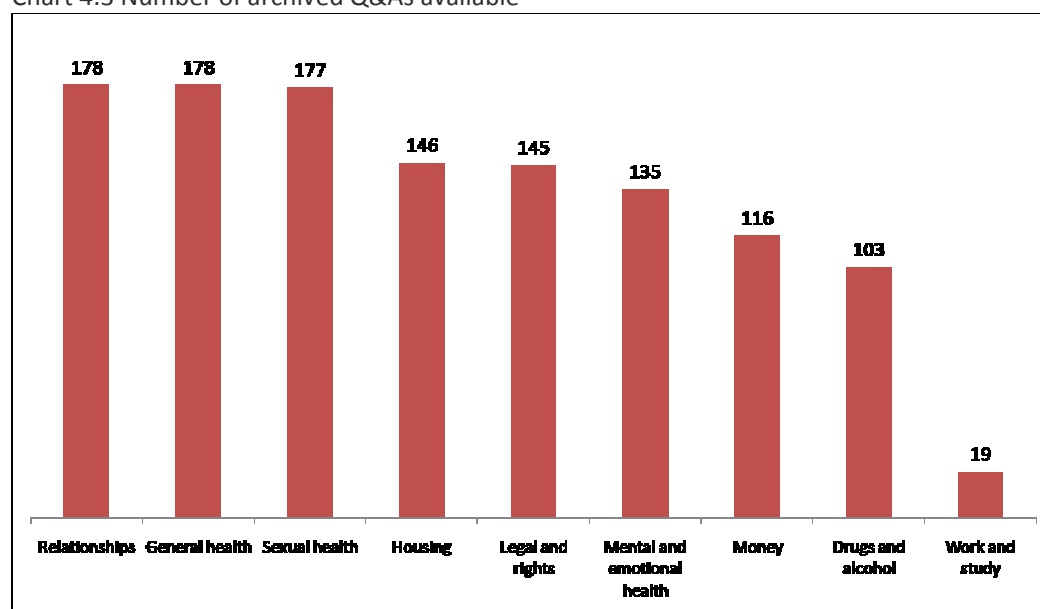


When asking a question on askTheSite, young people can choose whether to be alerted to the fact their question has been answered by email or SMS. A total of 1,583 SMS alerts were issued during the period relevant to this project.

askTheSite Q&A archive:

Approximately eight in ten young people who ask questions on askTheSite give permission for anonymised versions of their questions and answers to be published on TheSite.org. We do not monitor the number of Q&As on the website on an ongoing basis. However, at the time this report was produced, 1,197 Q&As were available and this can be used as an approximation for the numbers available during the reporting period. The archived Q&As were divided between topics as follows:

Chart 4.3 Number of archived Q&As available



Using the website tracking software, NetRatings, we are able to monitor the number of unique visitors to archived articles as well as the number of times articles are viewed. The following table shows this data for the reporting period by subject area.

Table 4.4 Unique users and page impressions – askTheSite archives

Topic	Unique users	Page impressions
Sexual health	139,556	281,450
Relationships	67,848	135,911
General health	95,258	120,706
Mental health	58,359	92,959
Housing	41,121	74,446
Money	42,397	60,445
Legal and rights	33,097	59,571
Drugs and alcohol	19,292	31,359
Work and study	2,686	4,940

5. Outcomes

The information provided through askTheSite, either in direct response to a question or through archived Q&As, helps young people make more informed decisions regarding their specific circumstances and their lives in general. Due to the almost infinite scope of the information and advice given, the outcomes of the project are enormously varied. While some young people ask questions in response to which very specific suggestions can be made, others have very complicated problems, or are simply in need of reassurance or comfort.

To increase YouthNet's understanding of both the range of outcomes brought about by askTheSite, and the proportion of the young people who experience such outcomes, we have an ongoing impact measurement programme in place which comprises both quantitative and qualitative research.

Quantitative research:

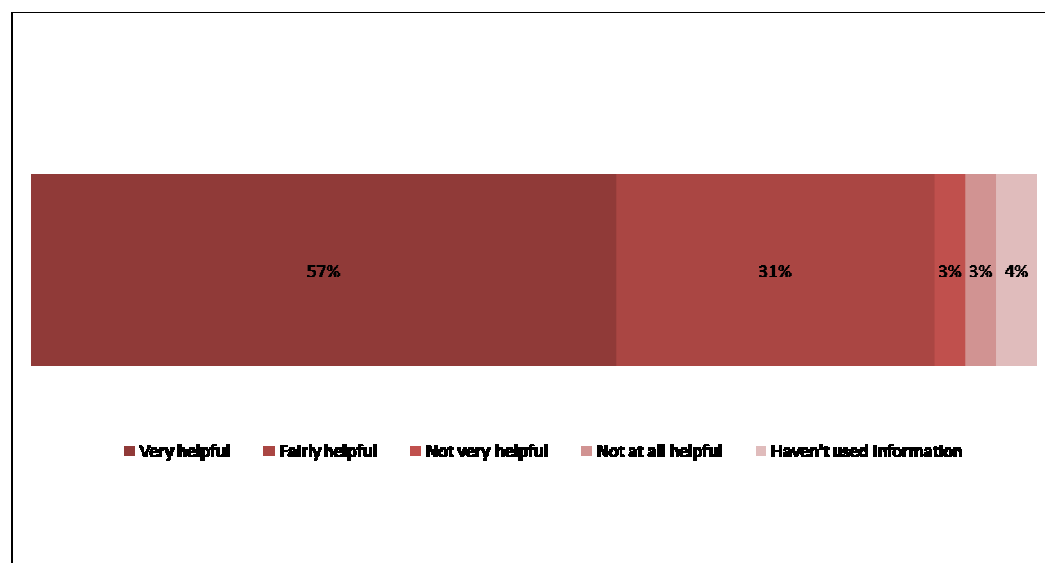
We conduct two ongoing, largely quantitative, surveys to measure the impact of askTheSite: an 'Exit survey' and an 'Archive survey'.

The 'Exit survey':

The Exit survey is a short feedback survey which all those who ask a question on askTheSite are invited to complete when they receive their answer. The main aims of the survey are to measure the short term impact of the information provided through askTheSite, as well as to measure the usability of the service and monitor how it is accessed. The full Exit survey questionnaire can be found as Appendix A.

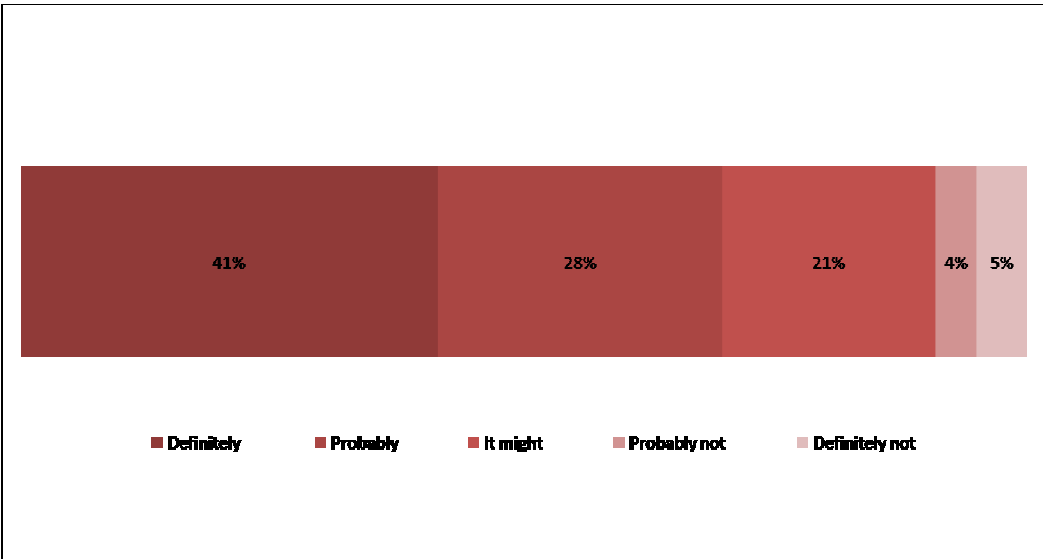
The questions within the survey that are most relevant to this project are questions 9, 13 and 14, which show how helpful young people found the information they received, whether young people believe the information will help their situation, and the impact of the information on the way young people feel. The results for these questions for the period relevant to this report are shown in charts 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.

Chart 5.1 Helpfulness of information in askTheSite response



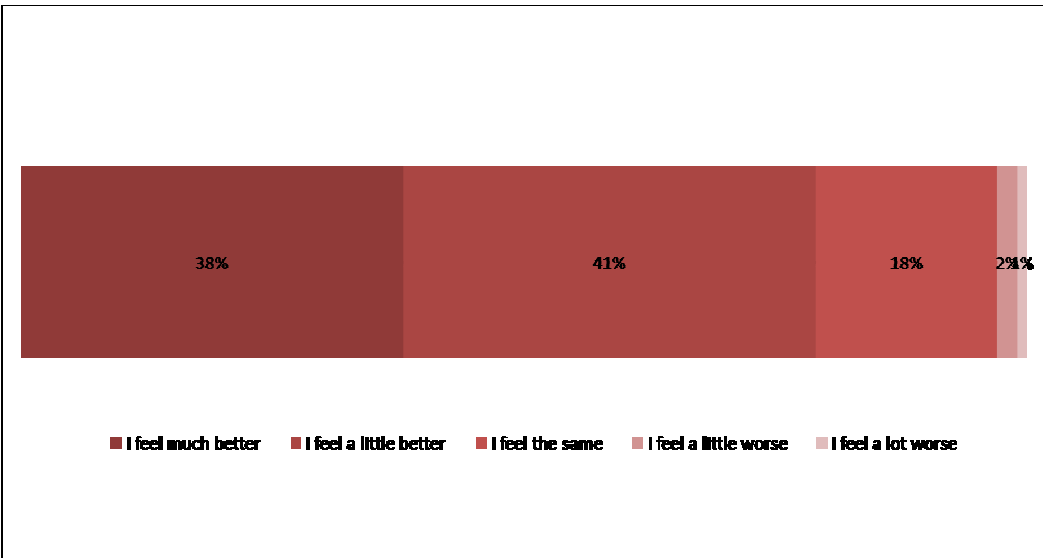
Base: All respondents (120)

Chart 5.2 Whether askTheSite response will help situation



Base: All respondents (120)

Chart 5.3 How askTheSite response changed feelings about situations



Base: All respondents (120)

The vast majority (88%) of respondents considered the information they received to be helpful, demonstrating the worth of the service. However, for the purpose of SROI, it is necessary to estimate the proportion of young people who will experience positive outcomes as a result of using askTheSite. We have used an average of the proportion of respondents who thought the information they received would help their situation (69%), and the proportion of respondents who felt better about their situation (79%), as a proxy for this – 74%. We have included the latter of these measures in this calculation as YouthNet considers a young person feeling better about their situation to be a positive outcome.

The 'Archive survey':

The Archive survey is also used to measure the impact of askTheSite, but this time with regard to the archived Q&As that are available on the website. As shown below, a link to the survey is provided at the bottom of all archived Q&As so all those viewing the section have the opportunity to contribute.

Chart 5.4 Link to Archive survey

The screenshot shows a webpage from askTheSite. The main heading is 'Unpaid and displeased'. Below it is a 'Question' section with the text: 'How long do you have to wait be able to take an employer to court for unpaid wages?'. The 'Answer' section follows, providing advice on resolving wage issues. To the right, there are several sidebar widgets: 'askTheSite' with a 'Ask a question' button, 'Local advice finder' with a 'Search now' button, and 'Latest articles' with a list of topics. At the bottom of the main content area, a purple oval highlights a text block that reads: 'Good answer? Bad info? Want to tell us what you think? We'd really like to hear what you've got to say about this answer so please click here to take the survey. Your feedback is confidential and as anonymous as you like.' Below this, there are links to 'Print this page', 'Email this page to a friend', and 'Add to favorites'. At the very bottom, there are social media sharing options for Delicious, Facebook, StumbleUpon, and Digg.

The full Archive survey questionnaire can be found as Appendix B.

Despite the Archive survey being a very useful tool for us to measure the worth and usability of our archived Q&As, it is of limited value when calculating SROI. While responses to some of the open-ended questions have helped YouthNet to identify positive outcomes brought about by the archived Q&As, there are no questions that give an indication of the proportion of young people reading the Q&As that experience such outcomes. If we are to conduct SROI work in the future, we will consider this and make revisions to the survey as necessary.

Representativeness of quantitative research:

The quantitative data collected via the two askTheSite surveys could only be assumed to be a representative reflection of the views and behaviour of all users of askTheSite if the young people completing the surveys were a random sample – and therefore representative – of users.

askTheSite is a completely confidential and anonymous service. To ensure that this fundamental promise is not compromised, choosing to provide feedback through our surveys is completely voluntary. This has implications for the representativeness of our data because the sample of young people completing the surveys are unlikely to be representative of all young people using askTheSite - those who choose to complete the survey are likely to have less serious problems, or have particularly strong feelings about askTheSite.

Although this means that some of the data we are using to calculate SROI is not perfect, it is the best data available to YouthNet in the circumstances. While the process we have gone through to calculate the SROI of askTheSite has been rigorous, it is important that this issue is highlighted and taken into account.

Qualitative research:

To compliment the quantitative research, a series of online discussions were held in a private section of the discussion boards of TheSite.org. During these discussions, users of askTheSite were asked to provide feedback about the service and discuss the impact of the information they received.

As those taking part had used askTheSite several months before the discussions, it was possible to get a sense of the long-term impact of the service as well as the short-term impact. Whilst only 20 young people took part – too small a sample to be used as a basis for estimating the proportion of people experiencing positive outcomes as a result of using askTheSite – the discussions allowed us to understand in detail the impact askTheSite had on participants specific situations. A full report of the results of the discussions can be found as Appendix C.

Example outcomes:

The quantitative and qualitative research described above, as well as analysis of questions and answers provided through askTheSite (stored electronically), gave YouthNet a thorough understanding of the type of positive outcomes experienced by young people as a result of using askTheSite. The following table shows example outcomes as well as the type of information that might lead to such outcomes.

Outcome	Example of information which may lead to outcome
Reduced likelihood of teenage pregnancy	Signposting to local GPs or Family Planning Clinics supplying the contraceptive pill
Access to benefits	Information regarding benefit entitlement and instructions for how to claim
Improved family relationships	Advice which increases communication between family members
Increase self esteem	Reassurance and empathy
Prevention of suicide	Signposting to specialist partners such as the Samaritans
Improved skills through volunteering	Signposting to available volunteering opportunities
Prevention of homelessness	Information about tenancy rights
Access to Legal Aid	Information about entitlement and instructions for how to claim
Improved financial circumstances	Explanation of financial terms
Prevention of STI contraction	Signposting to local GUM clinic
Reduced likelihood of mental health problems due to stress	Stress management skills
Better exam results	Revision techniques

6. Monetatisation

As the possible outcomes of askTheSite are so varied, monetatisation was challenging. YouthNet overcame this problem by using case studies. Diagram 6.1 (see page 16) shows the process we used to monetarise the impact of askTheSite and calculate the benefit (cost saving) to society per question answered.

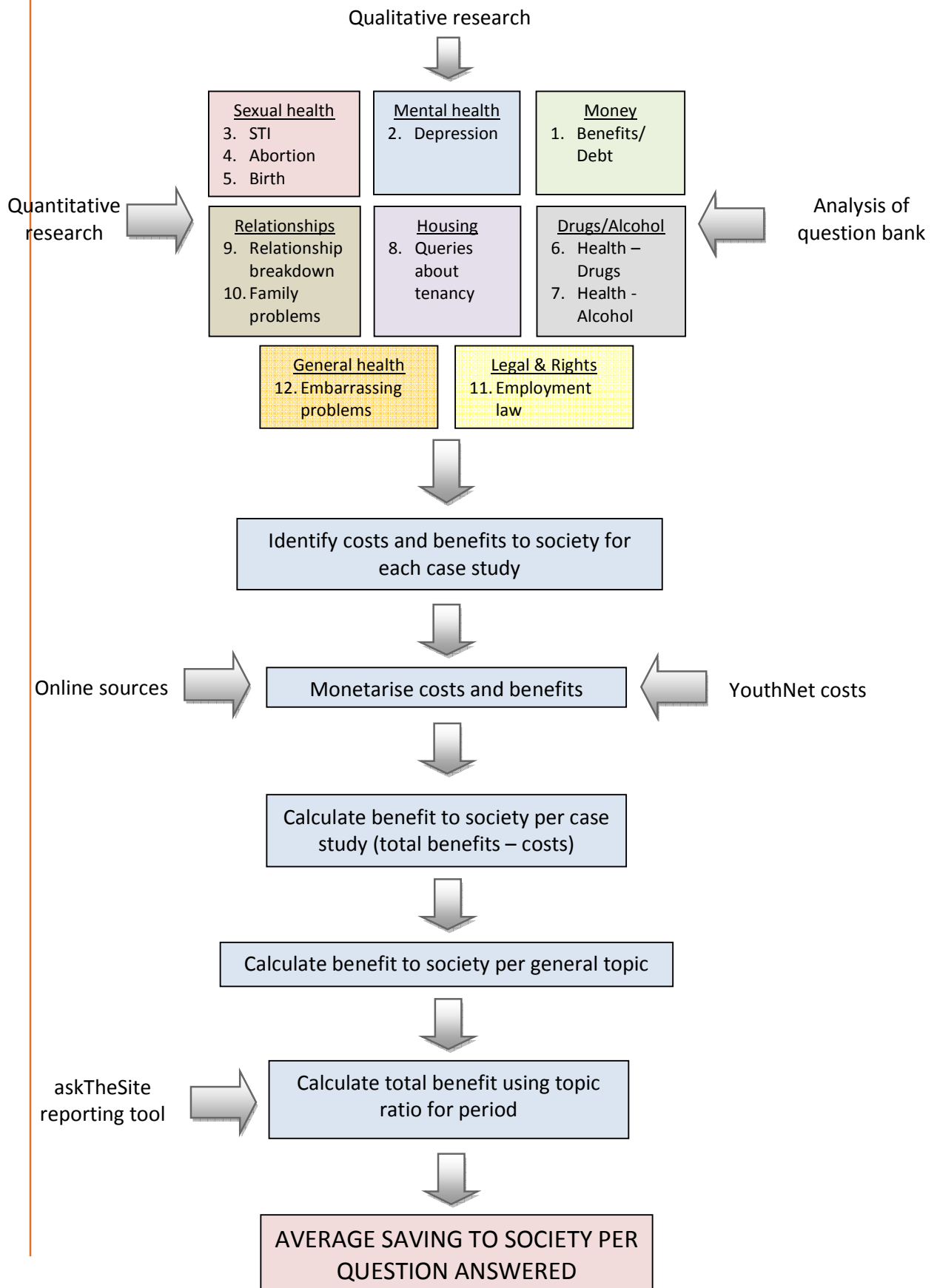
Case studies:

With reference to the quantitative and qualitative research described in section 5, and to our electronic bank of questions asked and answered between 1st July and 31st December 2007, 12 case studies were written.

One case study was written per general topic, with the most common issue for each topic being used as the basis for that case study. If there was more than one prominent issue, more than one case study was produced for that topic. For example, whilst there was only one case study produced for 'Housing' as the majority of questions relate to tenancy queries of some description, there were three case studies produced for 'Sexual health' because STIs and unplanned pregnancy (resulting in birth or abortion) are both common – and very different – issues. The case studies can be found as Appendix D. As there were so few questions asked about work and study during the relevant period, the questions were not included in the SROI calculation.

The questions received through askTheSite are very different and young people using the service benefit from their experience in a variety of ways – some more than others. However, in order to make the monetatisation task possible, YouthNet made the assumption that the experiences described in the case studies for each topic represented the average situation and experience of all those asking a question about that topic. This is a grand oversimplification, but a necessary one to make the measurement the SROI of askTheSite possible. YouthNet views this required simplification as a key 'flaw' in the calculation of SROI and would therefore encourage caution when reviewing the results of an SROI study.

Diagram 6.1 Monetisation process



Identifying costs and benefits:

Each of the 12 case studies were analysed and the main costs and benefits to society identified. These have been summarised in table 6.2. At this stage of the process, we made considerable assumptions regarding what would have happened to the characters in our case studies had they not received help from askTheSite. We made our assumptions based on YouthNet's experience of working with young people, and on anecdotal evidence from young people themselves.

Table 6.2 Costs and benefits to society per case study

General topic	Case study	Costs to society	Benefits to society
Sexual health	STIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of treating STI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevention of spreading STI to multiple partners
Sexual health	Pregnancy - Brith	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Costs of ante-natal medical care• Cost of post-natal medical care• Pregnancy and childcare benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saved cost of abortion• Saved cost of mental health treatment• Saved income support benefits
Sexual health	Pregnancy – Abortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of abortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saved costs of ante-natal medical care• Saved costs of post-natal medical care• Saved pregnancy and childcare benefits
Mental health	Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of GP visit• Cost of medication and counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saved cost to the NHS of treating self harm injuries• Saved income support benefits
Money	Benefits & debt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Benefits issued	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saved cost of treating mental health problems• Prevention of homelessness
Relationships	Relationship breakdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of GP visit• Cost counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saved costs of treating ongoing mental health problems• Saved costs of treating physical health problems• Saved income support benefits
Relationships	Family problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of a call to Youth2Youth or other similar helpline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saved cost of rent• Saved cost of treating mental health problems• Saved income support benefits
Housing	Queries about tenancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of visit to Citizens' Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saved cost of legal aid (if legal battle started)• Prevention of homelessness (if home was lost)• Saved cost of moving (if new flat was found)
Drugs and alcohol	Health implications: Drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of call to Frank	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saved cost of drug rehabilitation• Saved cost of treating health problems brought on by drug use
Drugs and alcohol	Health implications: Alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of visit to doctor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saved cost of alcohol rehabilitation• Saved costs of treating major health problems that may have developed

General topic	Case study	Costs to society	Benefits to society
General health	Embarrassing problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No cost to society as visited a commercial clinic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saved cost of treating mental health problems
Legal and rights	Employment law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of call to Acas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saved cost of legal aid • Saved cost of treating mental health problems • Saved income support benefits

Monetaring costs and benefits:

With help from the Corporate Citizenship Company and Oxford Economics, YouthNet put together a list of costs to use as proxies for the costs and benefits shown in table 6.2. A monetary value for each cost was then found through internet searches or by reference to YouthNet's costs, which were used as proxies for the costs of other information and advice-offering services.

Table 6.3 shows all costs that were used to calculate the SROI of askTheSite. There may be fewer costs than expected in this table. This is because many of the costs have been used in multiple case studies. For example the 'Average cost of treating mental health problems' is a cost saving in reference to five of the case studies: Benefits and debt, Relationship breakdown, Family problems, General health, and Employment law.

Details of how all costs have been calculated, including the sources used, are available on request.

Table 6.3 Costs used as proxies for costs and benefits

Cost description	Cost
Average cost of treating GUM problems	£438.24
Average cost of abortion	£400.00
Cost of baby delivery	£267.00
Cost of ante-natal, obstetrics, gynaecology health care	£732.26
Benefits relating to pregnancy and childcare	£1,352.60
Average cost of treating self harm	£842.00
Income support benefits	£4,506.32
Housing benefit	£2,899.00
Council tax benefit	£627.12
Average cost of treating mental health problems	£818.50
Average cost of homelessness	£24,500.00
Average cost of treating general health problems	£1,061.00
Average cost of treating minor general health problems	£424.40
Average cost of treating major general health problems	£1,697.60
Average rent in the UK	£6,804.00
Cost of visit to Citizens' Advice Bureau	£15.59
Average cost of legal aid	£4,934.00
Cost of relocation	£300.00
Cost of call to Frank	Negligible ¹
Cost of call to Youth2Youth	Negligible ¹
Cost of call to Andrea Adams Trust	Negligible ¹
Average cost of drug/alcohol rehabilitation	£1,324.16

¹ Whilst the additional cost to society of one young person using these services is negligible, we recognise that there is considerable cost associated with the existence of the organisations concerned. We have, however, decided not to include such costs in our calculations as we believe it would misrepresent the SROI of askTheSite.

Calculating the benefit to society per case study:

Using the above cost approximations, the net benefit to society for each case study was calculated by subtracting the total costs society would incur in each situation from the total benefits to society (i.e. the cost savings).

The net benefit for each case study is shown in table 6.4. Details of calculations, including the assumptions behind the calculations in each case, can be found in Appendix E.

Table 6.4 Net benefit to society per case study

Case study	Total cost to society	Total savings to society	Net benefit to society
STIs	£438.24	£1,314.71	£876.48
Pregnancy – Birth	£2,351.86	£5,724.82	£3,372.96
Pregnancy – Abortion	£400.00	£2,351.86	£1,951.86
Depression	£818.50	£5,348.32	£4,529.82
Benefits & debt	£3,526.12	£25,318.50	£21,792.38
Relationship breakdown	£818.50	£6,385.82	£5,567.32
Family problems	Negligible	£12,128.82	£12,128.82
Housing	£15.59	£3,183.40	£3,167.81
Health implications: Drugs	Negligible	£477.03	£477.03
Health implications: Alcohol	£424.40	£3,021.76	£2,597.36
Embarrassing problems	Not applicable	£818.50	£818.50
Employment law	Negligible	£10,258.82	£10,258.82

Calculating the benefit to society per general topic:

In cases where only one case study was used for the general topic, the net benefit shown in table 6.4 was taken to be the average benefit for *all* questions answered through askTheSite relating to that topic. If more than one case study was used, an average of the benefits associated with each was found and this average was then be taken as the average benefit for all questions answered through askTheSite on that topic.

The average net benefit to society for each question answered, broken down by general topic, is shown in table 6.5.

Table 6.5 Net benefit to society per general topic

Case study	Net benefit to society
Sexual health	£3,372.96
Mental health	£4,529.82
Money	£21,792.38
Relationships	£8,848.07
Housing	£3,167.81
Drugs and Alcohol	£1,537.20
General health	£818.50
Legal and right	£10,258.82

Calculating the benefit to society per general topic:

In order to find the average benefit (or cost saving) to society per question answered, regardless of the topic, we calculated a *weighted* average of the benefits per topic (as shown in table 6.5), based on the distribution of questions between topics during the relevant period. This had the effect of giving, for example, the £8,848.07 saved per relationship question answered greater weighting than the £21,792.38 saved per money question answered, because there were 838 relationship questions answered during the period compared to only 143 money questions.

An Excel-based tool was developed to aid our calculations. Figure 8.6 is a screen shot of this tool, and shows the final approximation of the benefit (or cost saving) to society per question answered through askTheSite. Please note that, as shown in section 5 (Outcomes), we are aware that not all users of askTheSite experience positive outcomes. Before calculating our final SROI figure, adjustments were made to reflect this (see section 9). The issues of attribution and deadweight, considered in sections 7 and 8 of this report, also have a bearing on the social return of askTheSite.

Chart 6.6 Average benefit to society per question answered – Excel tool

Topic	Measure	Saving to society per young person helped	Number of questions	Saving per topic
Relationships	A	£8,848.07	828	£7,326,201.96
Sexual health	B	£3,372.96	529	£1,784,295.84
General health	C	£818.50	312	£255,372.00
Mental health	D	£4,529.82	153	£693,062.46
Drugs and alcohol	E	£1,537.20	128	£196,761.60
Money	F	£21,792.00	143	£3,116,256.00
Legal and rights	G	£10,258.00	458	£4,698,164.00
Housing	H	£3,167.81	280	£886,986.80
Number of questions for period (exc. Work and study):			2831	
Total saving to society:				£18,957,100.66
Saving to society per question:				£6,696.26

Assuming 100% attribution and 0% deadweight, each question answered through askTheSite, which results in a positive outcome for a young person, saves society **£6,696.26**.

7. Attribution

Attribution is defined as “the thought process determining what share of an outcome is due to the charity’s intervention”.

The support provided through askTheSite consists of a considerable amount of signposting to other organisations and websites. This signposting helps young people find the help they need. Because the organisations young people are signposted to often provide a considerable amount of the relevant support, they are therefore at least partially responsible for the positive outcomes young people experience as a result of using askTheSite. YouthNet, therefore, can not take 100% of the credit for the positive outcomes described in sections 5 and 6 of this report.

We have decided to take a two-tiered approach to calculating attribution.

askTheSite is the first step in the process young people take towards resolving their problems. We can, however, only claim responsibility for the actions of the proportion of young people who take direct action as a result of using the service.

As part of the askTheSite Exit survey, young people are asked whether they used any weblinks provided, or contacted organisations suggested, in the response they received (or if they intend to do so). We consider this to be an action to help themselves, and one that askTheSite can take the credit for. Two thirds (66%) of respondents who completed the askTheSite Exit survey between 1st July and 31st December 2007 took an action to help themselves as a result of the information and advice they received through askTheSite.

It would be unrealistic, however, to claim that we are responsible for all positive outcomes experienced by young people that take direct action to help themselves as a result of using the service. This is because subsequent organisations provide a substantial proportion of the help needed. On the basis of askTheSite being the first step in the process, and anecdotal evidence, we have assumed that we are responsible for 35% of the positive outcomes experienced by the 66% of those taking direct positive action to help themselves as a result of using askTheSite. This is 23% of all positive outcomes experienced (23% of 66%).

8. Deadweight - what would have happened anyway?

It is very possible that the young people receiving information and advice through askTheSite would have found this help in another way had they not asked their question. They would then have experienced the same positive outcomes described in section 5 and 6 of this report, but without askTheSite. We refer to proportion of young people that would have experienced the positive outcomes we have described without using askTheSite, as deadweight.

To help us to estimate deadweight when calculating the SROI of askTheSite, we referred to the data collected via the Exit survey and the online discussions.

To measure the long-term impact of askTheSite, we ask those who have used the service before about their experience since they asked their previous question and the impact the information had on their situation. Those who said their situation had positively changed since they asked their question are asked the following:

'To what extent do you think the change in your situation was down to the response you received to your question?'

- *The change was totally down to the response I received*
- *The response made some difference to my situation*
- *The response made no difference at all to my situation*
- *Don't know*

Unfortunately, the proportion of those completing the askTheSite Exit survey during the relevant period that were returning visitors was very small. Of the 11 respondents that were asked the above question, 9 said the response they received was at least in part responsible for the positive change they experienced (82% of respondents).

From this data, deadweight looks to be very low (approximately 20%). However, because this is such a small sample, it would be unwise to assume the responses of these 11 young people were representative of all askTheSite users. In light of this, and the fact that several participants of the discussion groups noted that they may have found the help they needed in another way if they had not asked their question on askTheSite, we have decided to be fairly conservative and settle for a deadweight proportion of 50%.

Sensitivity checks:

In order to get an independent assessment of YouthNet's assumptions relating to monetarisation in particular, Oxford Economics were asked to review and check the information.

9. SROI evaluation

For every £1 invested in askTheSite, YouthNet created a social impact of £7.38

As highlighted in section 3, the total financial inputs to askTheSite over a six month period (July-December 2007) were **£221,714**.

As outlined below, the total monetarised impacts of YouthNet's askTheSite service over the same six month period were **£1,635,628**

	Value
Number of (within remit) questions answered between 1 st July and 31 st December 2007	2,870
Proportion of questions leading to positive outcome for young person	74%
Number of questions during period leading to positive outcome for young person	2,124
Benefit per question (assuming 100% attribution, 0% deadweight)	£6,696.26
Total benefit for period (assuming 100% attribution, 0% deadweight)	£14,222,856.24
Attribution	13%
Deadweight	50%
Total benefit (accounting for 13% attribution, 50% deadweight)	£1,635,628.47

Total benefit	£1,635,628
Total input	£221,714
Total impact / Total input	1:7.38

As highlighted above, the SROI is calculated by dividing total impacts by total outputs, giving a return of £7.38 for every £1 spent. The SROI ratio would be 7.38:1.

10. Sensitivity analysis

In order to measure the social benefit of the information provided through askTheSite, considerable assumptions have been made. It is likely that the true SROI figure for the service would differ to some extent from the one we have calculated in this report.

The assumptions that were based on the least statistical evidence were those of deadweight and attribution. It is very likely that, in reality, the proportion of young people that would have experienced the benefits we have described *without* our help would be greater or less than 50%. It is also very likely that the proportion of the societal benefit described that askTheSite is responsible for is greater or less than 23%.

As an illustration of how the figure would change if deadweight and attribution were different from our assumptions, the following is a calculation of the SROI of askTheSite assuming deadweight of 60% and attribution of 15%.

	Value
Number of (within remit) questions answered between 1 st July and 31 st December 2007	2,870
Proportion of questions leading to positive outcome for young person	74%
Number of questions during period leading to positive outcome for young person	2,124
Benefit per question (assuming 100% attribution, 0% deadweight)	£6,696.26
Total benefit for period (assuming 100% attribution, 0% deadweight)	£14,222,856.24
Attribution	15%
Deadweight	60%
Total benefit (accounting for 50% attribution, 60% deadweight)	£853,371.37

Total benefit	£853,371
Total input	£221,714
Total benefit / Total input	1:3.85

As shown, these adjustments reduce the benefit to society by £782,257 and the SROI ratio to 3.85:1.

11. Conclusion

As this report demonstrates, askTheSite makes a huge difference to the lives of 16-25 year olds by providing them with personal and confidential answers to their anonymous questions and represents a cost effective model of support for young people.

The SROI project proved a challenging exercise for YouthNet but the results are both informative and encouraging. In addition to quantitative analysis of impact, YouthNet also places huge value on the qualitative feedback it receives from young people about the askTheSite service, some of which is included below.

"i just seemed to come across it, but thank god i did find it, u gave really good advice, its like having a second best mate, the advice u gave was exactly the same as my best mate! thanx a million, wish u all the best for the future!"

"i was happy with the info you gave me and i want to research what you suggested"

"The person who replied was extremely understanding and offered re-assurance, was like receiving advice from a long-time friend."

"I found it very comprehensive and I believe that getting objective guidance from an unrelated source has helped me to get a better perception of my problem."

"I do feel better for this and it has made me feel more positive and given me a couple of ideas as well. Thank you so much..."

"The site is very easy to use & the received information very much appreciated - thank you. Also I would like to add it is the best site I have used for this kind of help."

"very nice to get a personal reply. Nobody wants to feel like their relationship is the same as everyone elses, and can be answered by a default answer."

"It was amazing! It was so easy to understand! And the best thing was that it was so much better hearing advice [from askTheSite] instead of hearing it from people involved in my life. It was fantastic seeing it from a different point of view."

Thank you for helping me. I'm much more confident. And it's put my mind at rest. This is much better than asking anyone face to face, to save embarrassment. It's the best advice you can get.