

FOCUS GROUP STUDY



YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES
OF VIOLENCE IN THE HUMBER
REGION.





Focus Group Study

Young People's Experiences of Violence in the Humber Region

Authors:

Norman Richards

Donna Hamlett

September 2023



Contents

Executive Summary	1
Methodology.....	3
Young people’s experiences of violence.	7
How do young people feel about where they live?	20
Services	28
How can young people feel safer?	36
Key findings and recommendations.....	39

1

Executive Summary

The Humber Violence Prevention Partnership (VPP) is one of twenty Home Office-funded Violence Reduction Units across England and Wales. Launched in 2022 the VPP currently includes the Police and Crime Commissioner, Humberside Police, the four Humber local authorities, Youth Offending Teams, the local NHS Integrated Care Board, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities and the Probation Service. The aim of their work is to prevent violent crime in communities across the Humber region.

Humber Learning Consortium (HLC) was commissioned by the VPP to deliver a series of focus groups with a diverse range of young people from hotspot areas, across the Humber sub-region, identified using data from the VPP's Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA). These sessions explored:

- How safe do young people feel and the reasons why.
- How young people feel about their local area and community, including the support, activities, and facilities available to them.
- How young people feel about their future, their hopes, fears, and what change they want to see.

40 participants aged between 11 and 25 took part in 10 focus groups across the region. Two individual semi-structured interviews were also completed with young people involved in weapons carrying.

Key Findings:

Young People's Experiences of Violence.

The data revealed numerous Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences, with several participants having experienced more than one.

Participants related numerous examples of serious violence seen **online and in social media**. The evidence suggests a lack of supervision regarding social media, with difficulties arising around this where young people understand the technology better than their adult care givers. **Violence seen online is perceived as less serious than in real life**. Viewing violent content from a safe space, such as young person's home, creates a distance to the harm involved for the young person viewing the content.

Schools emerged as significant finding. Participants reported many instances of bullying, including examples of serious violence and weapon carrying on school grounds. Young people felt that schools failed to address bullying, with ineffective measures against bullies or lack of intervention from teachers.

How do young people feel about where they live?

Participants living in Hull had very varied experiences. Young BAME females (11-16) living close to the city centre conveyed a high sense of vulnerability, as well as high levels of anti-social behaviour from older males in the area. Young BAME males (11-16) living in a different, more multi-cultural area, described it as safe and welcoming, with a strong sense of community.

In the East Riding, participants related a **lack of employment opportunities and amenities**. In Bridlington, particularly, young people were concerned about rising levels of violence and drug dealing.

Young People in North East Lincolnshire (Grimsby) expressed concern at **high levels of drug use, drug dealing and gang activities**. They related multiple examples of knife crime and conveyed high levels of poor mental health among their peer group.

Participants in North Lincolnshire (Scunthorpe) related a strong desire to leave. They conveyed a lack of employment opportunities, with **low aspirations and wages** encouraging young people to remain on benefits. Young people related gangs and postcode wars in the area, with some neighbourhoods being described as no-go zones.

Services

The data suggests young people taking part in the focus groups had **poor relationships with schools and teachers**, with current consequence systems further distancing already disengaging pupils.

Young people's confidence in the police force was low. They were seen as unavailable and ineffective, or when they did attend, focusing on the wrong issues. However, individual officers were viewed more favourably and were regarded as trusted adults.

Participants reported difficulty accessing mental health services. When they were able to access services participants recounted that they were of poor quality.

Feeling safer

The young people conveyed a need for **more safe spaces for young people**, with a particular need among the 17-25 age group who are no longer able to access youth provision.

The data suggests that building **stronger communities** would make young people feel safer, although the participants had few concrete suggestions as to how this could be achieved.

Several participants called for **more effective policing** in their communities, with better response times and more visible policing on the streets.

Recommendations

The findings suggest there is a need for **more trauma informed practice in schools**. Moving from isolation and consequences to **nurture rooms** where staff are on hand to help pupils regulate their emotions would retain the benefits to other pupils by removing dysregulated pupils from class, while enabling those young people to manage their emotions and return to class faster.

The need for **more safe spaces for young people** emerged as a strong theme. The evidence suggests that more resources or capacity, such as increased operating hours, for organisations and groups that already have existing relationships with young people would be more beneficial than creating new ones to address gaps in provision.

Greater opportunities for volunteering or enrichment activities within existing employability schemes could be utilised to create safe spaces for young people who are too old to access youth services.

More needs to be done to **make sport sessions accessible to girls and LGBTQ+ young people**, who avoid sessions due to a lack of skills and body shaming.

Participants were not aware of the VPP and what it does. One suggestion was for **the VPP to go into schools for question-and-answer sessions**, which would raise its profile with young people and make further engagement easier.

2

Methodology

Research Aims

This research was conducted by Humber Learning Consortium (HLC) working with the Humber Violence Prevention Partnership (VPP)

The aim of the research was to build a more nuanced understanding of what it's like for young people to be living in different parts of the Humber region, recognising that not every place or young person is the same. We wanted to understand:

- How safe do young people feel and the reasons why.
- How young people feel about their local area and community, including the support, activities and facilities available to them.
- How young people feel about their future, their hopes, fears, and what they want to change.

This may include:

- A young person's definition of violence.
- Views on how the VPP can best represent young people's views going forward.
- What, if anything, the young people would like to see changed to make them feel safer.
- How young people feel about facilities, groups and positive activities in their local areas and suggestions of what interventions could be commissioned.
- Whether young people have positive role models/mentors in their lives, and how the presence of a trusted adult can help support them.
- Young peoples' experiences and perceptions of public services (e.g., the police, schools, criminal justice system) and voluntary sector organisations (e.g., youth groups, sports clubs).

Approach

Opportunities to co-produce the study with young people were specified in the original specification for the study from the VPP. Co-production was also undertaken with staff from the VPP who wished to learn more about the qualitative research process:

- The topic guide for the focus groups was developed with both young people and VPP staff. Key locations in the region and areas of interest were developed and targeted for focus groups.
- VPP staff were invited to observe the focus groups for their continued professional development.
- VPP staff were involved in the analysis of the data produced and writing this report.

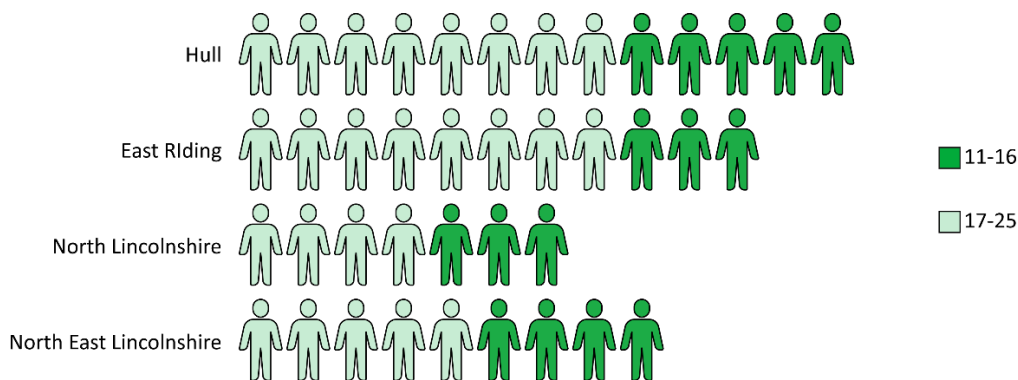
Interactive activities were included in the focus group design to prompt discussions among the groups and keep young engaged:

- Photo-elicitation was used to aid discussion on how young people felt about their local areas. Participants were asked to select one image from a set of 'Dixit' illustrated cards. Some young people selected more than one to represent different aspects from their neighbourhood. The maximum selected was six, and the minimum none.

- A post-it note exercise was used to identify what services, facilities and activities young people were aware of, which they used or did not, and the reasons behind this. This will support the Humber VPP to ensure the right interventions and services are available in the right areas.
- A mentimeter interactive presentation was used for young people to answer the question 'How are young people exposed to violence?'. Participants were asked to enter up to five words or phrases at a time describing where they had witnessed, been a victim of or perpetrated violence. They could submit answers multiple times. Mentimeter was used to safeguard young people's anonymity within the group as participants would be unable to tell who had submitted which answers. It was anticipated that some may choose to input information that they would not want to discuss openly, for example regarding abuse at home or sexual assault.
- Visualisations on flip-chart paper were used with some groups to aid discussion around how young people can feel safer, and possible solutions to the issues they had raised. A decision was made depending on the composition and attitude of the group as to whether visual aids would be beneficial.

HLC reached out through their own partner network and the VPP's to identify organisations that would be willing to facilitate groups. A maximum of five participants was set for each group to ensure that each young person taking part had opportunities to speak and prevent groups becoming too chaotic. A member of HLC staff was on hand in each group to support young people should they become upset by the discussion, and to deal with any signposting or safeguarding that arose.

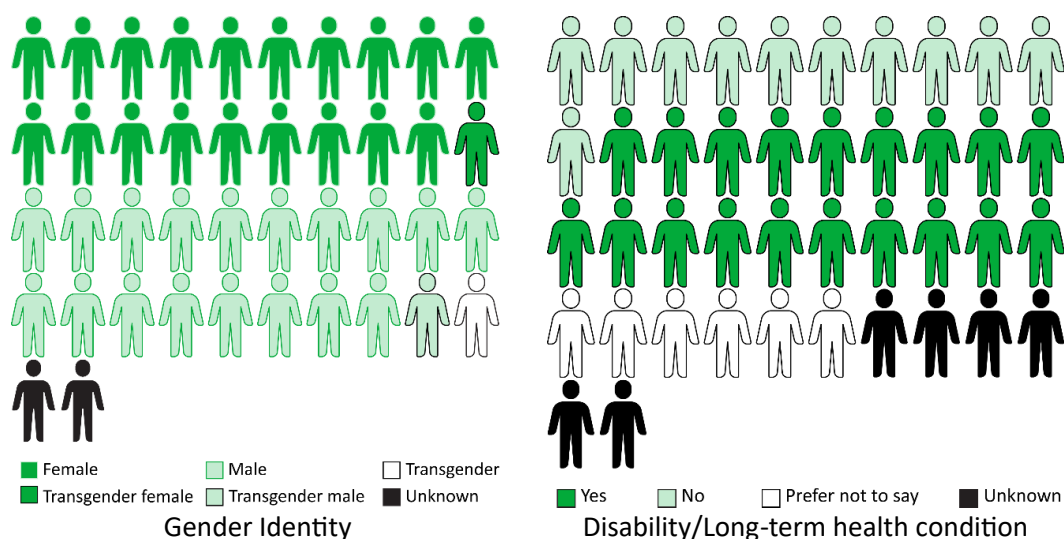
Ten focus groups were conducted with a total of forty-two participants. The groups were divided into two age ranges, eleven to sixteen and seventeen to twenty-five, spread across the North and South Bank.



Groups in the East Riding took place in Bridlington, Driffield and Beverley. Groups in Lincolnshire all took place in Grimsby and Scunthorpe. In the eleven to sixteen age range two groups in Hull and the East Riding were composed entirely of females and one group in Hull was all male. The eleven to sixteen age group in Scunthorpe was comprised entirely of children in care.

Two one-to-one semi-structured interviews were also conducted with young people that were involved with Youth Justice and weapons carrying. It was identified that this would be more appropriate than a focus group format and enable participants to speak more freely. A further two hoped for interviews with young people involved in the HU6 gangs in Hull fell through as both interviewees failed to attend on two separate occasions. Unfortunately, due to deadlines for the delivery of the research, there was not time to reach out to further groups.

Participants were each asked to complete an Equality & Diversity monitoring form at the end of the session. This was voluntary, and not all the young people completed, or fully completed, a form.



- 19 participants said they receive free school meals.
- 12 told us they were LGBTQ+.
- 9 told us were from BAME backgrounds.
- 5 told us they were in care/care leavers.
- 3 told us they were NEET.
- 2 were involved in Youth Justice.

Challenges

Arranging the focus group sessions was more difficult than anticipated. Reaching out through HLC's partner network several of the organisations contacted were unable to help with the eleven to sixteen age group as their current funding meant they were not running any provision for that age range. Contacts helping to arrange the focus groups often worked part-time leading to long wait times to confirm dates and times, occasionally to find at the last minute they were unable to help.

Conversely, the need to gain parental consent for participants under sixteen years of age proved to be less of a barrier than anticipated. Youth workers and groups leaders at the facilitating organisations assisted the research team to gain consent prior to the focus group. There occurred only one instance where a group had to be delayed due to participants not having their completed parental consent forms.

The participants, particularly those in the eleven to sixteen age group used a lot of slang in their speech, some of which was not understood by the researchers and required clarification. Where necessary definitions will be provided in this report for slang used in verbatim quotes.

It is a limitation of the focus group format that it was difficult to probe into the backgrounds and home life of the participants, and the extent to which violence has been normalized for the young people taking part. It was evident at times that young people were holding back when issues around family were being discussed. As part of gaining informed consent participants must be told that anything they say that is a safeguarding concern will be passed on to the relevant agency. It was clear that some participants were guarded in their comments to avoid this process. It was confirmed by a youth worker after one session that

this was indeed the case as the participants had all been through the safeguarding process before and understood it very well.

Analysis

The data gathered from the focus groups and two semi-structured interviews was analysed using the principles of thematic analysis. A staff member from the VPP interested in learning more about qualitative research assisted in the analysis and the writing of the report.

Where possible verbatim quotes are used to best represent the voices of the young people that took part in the study. This includes first-hand accounts of violence and abuse that may be difficult or triggering for some readers. Some of the quotes include strong language, which has not been censored in order to convey the participants' strong feelings about the subject on which they are speaking.

The term participants and young people are used interchangeably when referring to individuals taking part in the study. All the young people taking part in the study were given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym for themselves to preserve their anonymity. Although some of the participants chose names at odds with their identified gender, their chosen names have only been changed in two instances, for clarity - one where two young people in different groups chose the same name, and one where the participant chose the name of one of the researchers. These pseudonyms are used throughout the report to bring the participants' experiences to life.

3

Young people's experiences of violence.

The illustration below shows the combined results of all the mentimeters created during the focus groups, where the participants' wide-ranging responses have been grouped into categories for clarity. Online, social media and various references to streets in their localities were the most frequently mentioned. This was closely followed by school and domestic violence and parents. Unexpectedly, some groups included concepts or doctrines such as sexism, discrimination, or stereotypes alongside real and virtual locations.



The group discussions suggest that bullying was of much greater importance than the mentimeter results would indicate, as participants returned to the topic in various forms frequently. Conversely, despite the prevalence of references to violence and abuse within the home, many participants were understandably reluctant to discuss this in a group setting.

The data suggests that any perceived difference from a young person's peers may form the basis of **bullying**, such as living in care or a one-parent family, being less successful academically, body shaming or being viewed as weak or vulnerable, an easy target. Participants recounted threats to beat them up, bang them out and curb-stomp them. Mary-Anne recalled an incident where she had been threatened in school *"she came up to me with a knife and threatened to stab me with it, like a proper knife."*

Luigi described how he had bullied a boy in year seven, shooting him with a BB gun simply because he was annoying him. When asked if he recalled what the boy was doing do irritate him so much he recalled *"Existing. He was a really annoying kid... I can't actually remember why I hated him so much; I just hated him."*

Dave, Eddie, and JB discussed the selfish nature of bullying; how it may stem from feelings of insecurity and using other people to make oneself look good or cool. Dave gave an example of the sort of prank which can become bullying, if taken too far, beyond the point where it is no longer funny and you have been asked to stop:

I don't know why but, like, sometimes I do, like, my friends are just walking, right, and I don't know why but I just get the urge to, like, slap the back of their necks. Like, and I just go behind and just slap it and just run away. (Dave)

Ethyl recalled how she received **transphobic** abuse, such as catcalling, whistling, and physical threats, from other young people and occasionally adults. Steve also relayed how confusion about his gender while at school led to bullying comments such as *"is it a boy or is it a girl?"* (Steve). In another example Stephano described how stigma around his **sexuality** had led to

bullying for himself. He also recounted a particularly violent episode that happened to his friend after coming out as gay at school:

I don't know how they got away with it, but they were carrying knives in their bags, and he was like, you know sometimes when you see on like a tv movie and you got like a big like school fight? One person's in the middle and everyone else is, like, centred around, it was like that... and these people or these kids, these students, got their knives out and slashed his, here and here [indicates two places on his face]. I saw it happen... And it was like watching a horror scene. Where you, there's like blood dripping down the face (Stephano)

Besides trans- and homophobic bullying, young people also recounted incidents of bullying due to **disabilities and learning differences**. Amira stated that in her school “people with disabilities they get bullied a lot... people bully them on a daily”. Evidently, some participants experienced bullying for multiple reasons, as Ethyl shared how she was also bullied for being autistic as well as trans. In another example Xavier explained how he is contradictorily picked on for both not showing symptoms of Autism and showing symptoms:

I'm autistic and people think I'm faking it. But because I was born female, my symptoms won't be as showable as a male, so they think I'm faking it. So [I've been called] spaz, fake, everything. And I tick sometimes, but I don't do it all the time, but kids don't bully me unless I'm sat there like swearing and all that. (Xavier)

Racism emerged as another source of discrimination experienced by participants. Sabrina recalled hearing racist language at school from “these kids who think being racist is funny”. Tamara described how someone threatened to pull off her headscarf, which she wears for religious reasons, in an instant message thread. In another example, Lia remembered an incident at a local park that led to her mum pulling her out of school for a couple of days. Even as she prepared to return to school, it was with the threat of further violence:

The girls were being racist... and they were just hating me because I was obviously a different colour to them. They jumped on my back and started trying to bang me out... I got pulled out of school for a couple of days by my mum because of it. She was like, you're not going back cos they threatened to bang me out and all that lot and then, so [XXX name] at our school are gonna bang me out when I don't know it. (Lia)

In another example JB recalled how, when speaking Swahili with his friend on the bus, a girl accused them of sexual harassment. She told the bus driver that they had “ask her to show her private parts when we didn't say anything about that” (JB). This resulted in the bus driver asking them to leave the bus- “I was so surprised. We didn't even talk to her” (JB).

Young people who were not from a BAME background discussed the difficulties they felt in navigating matters around language and race. Rob recalled how he was accused of racism by a teacher at school after swearing at them, although he felt he had treated them no differently than he would anybody else in the same circumstances “it's the person and how I see it as, it's how they treat me for how I treat them.” (Rob). Crazy expressed confusion about perceived double standards in the use of certain words “a darkest coloured person will go around saying the n word to like other people but if we say it, we're out of order”. Sarah conveyed how she felt bullied and judged by the women working in her local nail salon “Because like they speak a different language, and they always talk and start laughing when I get my nails done... like I never know what they say”. Gracie-Mae explained how she felt words and intentions can sometimes be deliberately misconstrued by the recipient:

They literally pull the card and say its summat about racism and its actually not it's just the way you are and how you're speaking. No one cares you got a headscarf on; no one cares how you look or what you're wearing. No matter what colour you are, it's how you speak to people. (Gracie-Mae)

The focus groups revealed **online bullying** taking place through on social media platforms and group chats. Stephano recalled how a friend had private information revealed on a public account on Instagram “And people have been commenting saying go kill yourself, go drink bleach everything... go overdose” (Stephano). Participants explained how bullies choose to use online communication methods, such as group chats, to isolate someone from their peers and any adults that might support them in real world confrontations. Although it is possible to simply leave a group chat, Amira expressed that rather than do that, she would “get my girls to fight with me”, which, conceivably, could escalate the situation further.

Gracie-Mae, who was from the older age group, reflected on how new technology has enabled young people to carry on disagreements from school well beyond the school gates, continuing past the point where they would otherwise have been forgotten:

There was hardly no cyberbullying because, socially, the amount of people, they had them little blackberries and that. And then if they were gonna have a fight they'll be like come meet me at three o'clock after school and I'll just have it out instead of carrying it on for days. No weapons as well, that's how it used to be. It should be like that now. (Gracie-Mae)

Xavier recalled several occasions where he had **reacted violently and injured other people in response to being bullied**. Although he acknowledged that violence isn't a good thing “it's just my first reaction” (Xavier). Ethyl recounted how she started boxing in order to be able to stick up for herself, due to being picked on in school. Similarly, John recalled how he got into a scuffle with a bully that tried to steal his bike. He explained how he felt he had to stand up for himself after efforts to resolve the situation with the bully's mum and teachers at school had failed:

I know violence isn't always the answer, and my grandma always says you're a greater man for walking away, but I feel like sometimes if you're picked on, you're gonna set an example. Because if you don't stick up for yourself, I feel like, that person bullying you is gonna see you as a coward, and the people who are around you are also going to see you as a coward. (John)

Failure to address bullying in schools was echoed by a number of participants in the focus groups that had experienced bullying. Although some young people had a favourite teacher they felt they could talk to, many conveyed that teachers either didn't care or didn't believe them when they reported cases of bullying. Even in cases where action was taken, nothing changed, and the bullying continued or got worse:

No, nothing happens they just say we'll see what happens next time. But normally they say we'll have a mediation, and nothing happens. It just, they do it again and again (Mary-Anne)

But teachers tell you off and the kids just get worse and [you] get called snitch. (Xavier)

Young people identified a number of ways they were exposed to violence online: through **social media** (including Tik-Tok, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), Viral Videos, Online Games, cyber bullying, Instant Messaging, and group chats. It is important to note in discussing social media that three of the participants involved in the focus groups were twelve years of

age. As most social media platforms have a minimum age requirement of thirteen this, along with some of the content being discussed, suggests a lack of supervision from adult care givers.

Participants provided a number of examples of **viral videos** they had seen covering themes such as suicide, violence against animals, pornography, torture and terrorism. These were accessed through social media accounts as well as being shared on groups chats. Tik-Tok and Instagram were prevalent as sources for videos and live streams:

- Lia* *There's people on Tik-Tok, like, on social media. They do these challenges that's like the Chapstick challenge and you use the lip balm every day and once it's run out they kill themselves...*
- Xavier* *It's given them a reason to live a bit longer that's why.*
- Xavier* *I saw a man get stabbed in the guts.*
- I* *Where was that?*
- Xavier* *Instagram. And on Tik-Tok I saw someone chop someone's head off and then play around with it... I think it was this woman, she was really religious, I think she was Muslim... She was in a certain, not this country but was somewhere.. and it was like the wilderness part of the country. So, all really rough country. And then she got taugt when she was young, if your child does something wrong that is against your religion, you should chop his head off. So, she did.*
- Tanya* *And there was that guy on Tik-Tok that shot his head off.*
- I* *So this was live stream?*
- Xavier* *Oh yeah it was on live, and he was arguing with his wife and then she was like, you know what I'm done with you and then, he had a shotgun next to him and he was on live, and he just went, you know what I'm done bye-bye, he played some music, and he shot his head off and then his dog ate it.*

Other examples included stabbings, a woman being burned by a kettle, a young man that fell from a rollercoaster because the safety harness had not been fastened correctly *and "a cat getting blended, and then put in a microwave"* (Milly).

One group talked at some length about the case of Kirra Hart, an autistic teenager, who was invited to a fake party where she was held and tortured for several hours by three other girls. Parts of the attack were live streamed on social media before going viral. The discussion highlighted how outrage about events seen online can spill over into real world violence, as the house where the events took place was later burned down:

- Xavier* *So, literally everyone around the world, there's people who came in from like the opposite of the world and like torched, broke into that Rhynisha's house, smashed the windows and everything. So, she's coming to England thinking that she's gonna be safe.*
- Bob* *She's in more danger coming over here, then she is in Australia.*
- Xavier* *Even though it's happened a few months ago people are still gonna remember it and she's still, either way she's gonna get hurt.*
- Tanya* *I'll hurt her...*
- Bob* *She's not gonna live long here. She'll get stabbed.*

The group's own response to news that the girl responsible was coming to England was an expectation, or threat of violence. It may be relevant that some participants in this group

were themselves autistic, and their reaction comes from a desire to see justice or revenge for someone they viewed as a peer.

Ethyl recounted how she had become **radicalised** by far-right posts and interactions on social media. Although she has now left the ideology behind, she described how the echo-chambers created by social media platforms reflect and distort users' views, showing more content based on their previous interactions:

You don't realise until you're very, very far in. And it's so easy, cos you can go on, you can say I'm annoyed by this one thing, and then they say, are you by these other things? Well, this happens in society nowadays, it never used to happen. And you go further and further until it's like hating on groups of people. (Ethyl)

She went on to describe how 'dog-whistles', symbols and insignias which appear inconspicuous to a casual observer, are used by radical groups online to recognise each other. Symbols such as '88' "is supposed to be something like Heil Hitler. Cos it sounds like haitch haitch" (Ethyl) and 'gnome-hunting' "what they mean [is], they'd like to start a holocaust" (Ethyl).

In another example Dottie recalled how she had been the subject of an attempted **grooming**. 'Daniel' initially followed Dottie on Instagram and Tik-Tok before one of her friends added him on Snapchat:

And then he started chat, like talking to me and that. Saying like I'm sixteen, I'm leaving school soon, I'll come and see you like this weekend and I'll buy you stuff. And I was like I don't really want you to buy me anything, didn't want him coming to see me, and that... he said he didn't want anything in return, but he wanted a hug and a kiss and that... Apparently one of my friends told school and they were worried, so they informed the police and that... apparently I was his girlfriend, apparently I'd been dating him for two months. I didn't even know him for that long, I'd only known him for, like, three days at this time. (Dottie)

Police intervention meant 'Daniel' never met Dottie in person, and the attempt went no further, but Dottie described the effect the episode had on her and her family:

I was like really anxious and that. Cos I didn't know, like, what he was gonna do... And my mum was very, like, you're not going out on your own. I'm gonna take you there if you want to see Emmie. You have to wear your watch. Cos when I have my apple watch on... my locations on it. Even though my locations on my phone, she said if you lose your phone or anything. But she's very overprotective. (Dottie)

Information shared and posted online between the participants' **peer groups** were also found to be a source of violence. When Lia described a time she happened upon a young woman contemplating suicide from a road bridge and intervened by calling the police, it was assumed by Tanya that this was one of their peers who posted on Facebook the previous night "she's off to go kill herself" (Tanya). When asked if these sorts of posts were a rare occurrence Tanya responded "Not with [XXX name]. That's like all the time. Think you see it every day to be fair".

The younger groups who were still of an age to be attending school discussed **fight videos**, whereby fights at school or in local parks are filmed and later shared on social media. Videos are shared on Privs, or private stories/chats and participants explained they save the videos on their phones "When you get bored, you just have to watch them" (Aiden). The videos can be secured with passwords so adults, such as teachers cannot access them. This also gives the young people plausible deniability should a teacher ask them if they have the video.

Evidently fights may start over relationships or minor disagreements. The participants described how fights break out in the school grounds at break time and in the classroom. Aiden and Jo relayed a classroom fight between two boys because one fell off his chair but thought the other had pushed them, recalling “*that was actually so funny*” (Jo).

In another example Xavier described how a video of a serious assault on an autistic boy circulated on social media.

He went up to this random kid, knowing that he was autistic and had no money on him, and started like calling him a retard and everything, was like so have you any money on you? ... And they was beating him up and everything. They knew he was autistic and everything and he’s denying it... Someone videoed it. There was, like, fifteen people all, like, smashing that one kid. (Xavier)

Evidence from the focus groups shows that the violence experienced by young people at schools is not limited to the bullying and fighting amongst peers described in the previous passages. Brenda relayed an instance of **sexual assault** from one female pupil against another:

Basically it happened to my mate but basically she was in PE, and she was looking up at her, like at her bra, when they was getting changed. And then she went and, like grabbed her, in sexual place. And they didn’t, the school didn’t do nothing about it. (Brenda)

This was reiterated by McConnell, who described sexual assaults at a school he attended as happening “*on a daily*”. He also recounted a physical **assault** on him by a teacher:

I got assaulted by a teacher... Didn’t wanna come in school one day, literally just stood outside, he came outside, he was like oh come in McConnell, didn’t go in, walked away from him and he pushed me straight into the fence. (McConnell)

In another account, Sarah conveyed how male teachers made her feel uncomfortable by physically adjusting her clothing:

Sarah *Yeah, at our school if you’re skirts too high sometimes they even go up to you and like, pull your skirt down. So, like, at a length. Yeah.*
I *So you feel that’s inappropriate?*
Sarah *Yeah. Cos they shouldn’t even be going, like, anywhere near... like, that part of a student.*

Participants in the focus groups also reported fights breaking out on **public transport** as pupils attempted to board buses without paying, leading to confrontations with the driver, or start fights that spill out to impact on bystanders. John relayed that “*year sevens are probably the worst year group, that there is. Cos it’s just, like, their attitude and behaviour.*”. Ethyl recalled threatening behaviour from this age group such as fighting, shouting, and carrying weapons which, as an adult, she found intimidating enough to avoid using buses at peak school time:

It’s just, it creates this unsafe environment, because if you tried to defend yourself, against these people you’d be effectively hitting a kid. Which, and then you’re thinking well you’re scared of kids, what on earth? You know, when there’s enough of them it’s enough to feel a little bit intimidated. (Ethyl)

Evidently young people witnessed numerous examples of violence related to **pubs and the nighttime economy** as “*people... take it too far and then they just like. Like some people they even start fights*” (Sarah). Participants recalled drunk adults indecently exposing themselves

or harassing them in the street. Several incidents they related were linked to football fans in pubs or leaving stadiums after a game. Ethyl explained how she no longer drinks in bars due to “the risk of getting punched by some drunk guy or getting hit on and groped... and getting spiked or that”. In the following account Luigi relayed a serious fight in his local pub, involving himself and his brother. Clive recalled that when the police arrived, someone had wiped any CCTV evidence:

Luigi Well I don't exactly know what happened, but I was, I was ordering a drink and I turned around and, somebody was on top of my brother, with his thumbs in his eyes. And then... my other friend glassed him and then, my brother was getting beaten up, so I had to jump in, it was a whole fucking story. But I don't know, people and alcohol, just turns you violent.

Clive It was really funny. It was really, really funny. He, he got bit, this guy bit his arm, and it was like bleeding everywhere. And then he had like, black eye cause someone put his thumb in his eye.

The focus groups revealed alcohol and drugs are both factors fuelling **violence within families** experienced by participants. From family feuds and bust-ups at celebrations described by Crazy, to violence within the home and more serious sustained **abuse** described in the following accounts:

When I was little my mum and my dad used to argue a lot. And one time, my dad tried to hurt my mum with a knife. And the next day he killed himself in prison. And ever since from that day... I got abused by my mum... She used to pull me by my hair, used to hit me. But I was the only one in the house that she used to really hit. She used to like, drink a lot of alcohol and like if I did one thing wrong I'd get, like, proper beat up for it. (Mary-Anne)

My dad used to be a drug addict. He used to hit my mum. He used to be an alcoholic. My mum was an alcoholic, my mum was a drug dealer as well. She's seventeen years clean. Don't know about him... Yeah, my stepdad, when I've only been on two holidays abroad. He ruined both of them cos of alcohol. (Tanya)

My dad, he was never physically abusive to me, but he was to my little brother and mum... Like beat him and everything. Same with my mum. And then, he was really mentally abusive to me, but then when he found out I was transgender he cut contact completely... I saw him again and I had my hair cut short. And he started, like, neglecting me, so he wouldn't like, bother buying food for me in the house, cos he knows I don't eat certain foods... So now I won't see him. But my older brother lives with him, which obviously ain't the best thing cos like he comes home drunk and everything. Cos my dad's alcoholic. And he comes home drunk and, like, have a go at everyone, like, he has a – he pushed his current girlfriend outside the house saying get out of my home all this and that. Just cos he was drunk. (Xavier)

My mum used to be under the influence of drugs and alcohol and a lot of situations... my mum had got like a kitchen knife, for instance, up to my throat and pinned me against the wall. Was literally about to stab me through, like, this bit here [indicates under his chin]. And somebody saw it, cos we was living on like a main, like road. Somebody walked past and so they knocked on the door, so my mum dropped me... And then, one time I had been thrown down the stairs and up the stairs by not my mum, but my mum's boyfriend at the time. He was under the influence of drugs and alcohol (Stephano)

Conversely, Xavier related from his own experience living with a schizophrenic and alcoholic mother, that just because someone is alcoholic, it doesn't necessarily make them violent "I think it just depends. It just, it's on the actual person... It can, make people violent but, most of the time it's people using alcohol as an excuse for how they are."

Violence within families was evidently more prevalent than just the accounts from young people would indicate. When Bob mentioned she was creeped out after receiving a text message from her dad, she declined to discuss it any further. In another example, after relating the following account regarding their father, this participant needed reassurances of anonymity from the researchers, for fear that their father might see it and recognise them. To protect the anonymity of the participant the following account is not attributed:

I don't really trust my dad... He lies about a lot of things. A lot of things. And like, one time he tapped my shoulder it was like a family holiday, and he started drama. And I ended up crying myself to sleep and the police came knocking on our tent... and my dad was like, it's fine I've bit someone's ear off before... And he's been in jail before, so it's like, they was like watch out and stuff like that. Cos you know how he is.

Although the participant did not explicitly relate any experiences of intimate partner violence, or violence against themselves, it can perhaps be inferred from this reaction and the narrative that they may have experienced violence within the home.

The influence of parents and family on young people's behaviour was conveyed by participants; John recognized that young people with unstable home lives are more likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour and violence. Luigi related how having an older sibling that is violent increases the likelihood of violent behaviour in an individual. Bob and Tanya spoke of the frustration of having close family members in prison, or excluded from school, and how this meant they were labelled as troublemakers themselves.

A few participants also related stories of **fight**s between siblings, some of which ended in injuries serious enough to require medical treatment. Clive related how her brothers used to gang up on her and she would retaliate; she popped a balloon in one brother's face which split his eyelid, requiring stitches; one brother slammed her in a door, breaking fingers and toes and she flicked a hair bobble at one of her brothers which he dodged, splitting his head on the stair banister. Luigi responded to these recollections with "That's not exactly, that's just kids", which suggests a certain level of violence may be normalized, or perhaps even expected between young children.

It emerged that young people were also exposed to **violence in the streets and other residences around their homes**. Participants recalled encountering murder crime scenes, stabbings, attempted child abductions, beatings, and fights. Mike recalled witnessing a **drug raid** in which the local residents, including very young children, were inciting violence against the police. In another example Clive recalled seeing a fatal **traffic collision** in which a little girl was hit by speeding van. In this account from Vanessa, she conveys her fear and confusion as she witnessed police arrest a person for stabbing someone in the flat next to hers:

Someone got stabbed, in my flat [block]... I was at home alone, and I hear loads of dogs, I hear loads of like police sirens... there was like this lady and this guy were, they was, it was like you know my flat, the one next to it. And everyone was like locking the doors and it was like police open up and what happened was, walk out and like someone arms blood in everywhere and apparently, he got stabbed and then... They started arresting him, they started like pushing him to the floor. It was so scary to watch. And then like loads of neighbours come and watch, and then like,

*they knocked the door down then, the actual window that gets smashed up and like.
(Vanessa)*

Participants relayed examples of **threatening and intimidating behaviour from neighbours** such as verbal abuse directed at children playing in their own gardens or drug dealers kicking off outside their homes. Vanessa recalled how drug users from a hostel near her flat shelter in the stairwell, using it as a place to smoke, drink alcohol and sleep, sometimes starting fights outside. *"I always go and tell my mum to open the door for me, and it's just scary, cos, I mean... You never what you're gonna see"* (Vanessa). In the following narrative from Northern and Jo, they tell how not just a local bully, but the bully's father intimidate their neighbourhood:

Northern So there was this kid... on my street that lives, like, opposite him [Jo] but on my road... I was walking with my brother, and basically he dragged my bag and started shouting in my face... So, we got away from him, I got into my house... into my back garden locked it. He got, he came up with his friend and basically, basically kicked my gate... told his daddy whatever he told him cos his dad he started well...

Jo He's a bit of, like, he does drugs... He's off his head... I remember, like, he was threatening to slap my dad. Threatening to like, bash my doors down and that... So yeah, it is a nightmare on our street being violence. Especially the kid's dad, cos he is quite, jacked, if you know what I mean. So, it is quite scary as well.

The focus groups revealed **street harassment** and **street violence** was something many of the young people taking part had experienced. Much as with the examples of bullying discussed earlier, young people may be subjected to name-calling for the way they dress, the way they look and sexist, trans- and homophobic comments from strangers on the street. Lia, who is aged under sixteen, recalled an uncomfortable comment made to her and one of her friends- *"you know what when you grow up you're gonna be beautiful you know"*. In the following accounts Crazy and Tanya relayed how such confrontations may escalate into physical violence:

Well, I've had a lot of it really, because I was just walking through town once, people were just snarking and laughing and pointing and then came up to us and just. Start pushing us around and that, it got to the point where I was that mad, I ended up punching one of them. (Crazy)

See a crack head. He tried to, what's it called, you know with a smack needle, he tried stabbed one of my mates.... Cos he called me a fat cunt, so my mate said you what? And then, cos my mate was sticking up for me he pulled out this needle, this crackhead, tried attacking my friend. (Tanya)

In the following accounts young people recount how they were attacked by strangers in the street. The first account, from Janine, is of an apparently sexually motivated attack on her when she was seventeen. In the second, Crazy described a case of mistaken identity the previous night that ended in a beating:

I was walking home once from my friend's house. And this random guy wanted me to get in his car. And I said no, so then he got out of his car and battered me... and then he tried to run me over in his car. (Janine)

Some people were asking me if I'm this person... cos they obviously got it wrong, so I corrected them, saying look this is who I am, sorry I don't know who you're on about. Then they're looking at their phone, they're just like yeah it is so next thing you know

I'm getting fucking jumped by these two lads. I end up having to call an ambulance to get me into hospital cos I virtually couldn't walk properly. (Crazy)

It emerged that young people taking part in the focus groups had been exposed to weapons carrying, either through witnessing fights involving knives, being threatened with a knife or in one case, witnessing "a guy running around with a gun" (McConnell). Despite the statistical evidence showing that young people are more likely to be a victim of knife crime if they carry a weapon themselves, McConnell conveyed how being around people with weapons actually made him feel protected:

McConnell When I used to be around people who used to deal drugs, yeah, when they carry like knives and the machetes and shit, it makes you feel safe because you're with people who honestly don't offend you.

Gracie-Mae Yeah, I know what you mean, actually. They wouldn't start on you.

McConnell Like Grimsby's such a shit place... it's just such a bad place, like, you're probably going to get stabbed or you're going to get jumped if you do summat wrong... But if you're with other people who are obviously gonna be there for you, it's just a safer feeling. Like if you're with people. If you're not with people then it's the loneliest place in the world.

Conversely, Rob's limited experience with drug deals and dealers was frightening for him, perhaps due to not being in control of the situation or the inherent risk involved:

I've not like dealt with drugs or anything like that but I've been around when people have been dealing and been in the vehicle when a deal has gone... To be honest I was scared. Knowing what was going on but I didn't have a word to say. (Rob)

In this narrative from Gracie-Mae, she conveyed how she is vigilant not to put herself in dangerous situations. She considers whether there is an escape route in case a fight begins, not just for her own personal safety, but also with an awareness of Joint Enterprise law and the risk of getting caught up as a bystander:

Because sometimes, at a house party, there's only a flat as well yeah. The only way in is the only way out sometimes, and there's no backdoor, like a house or summat, where you can just get out the front door or the back door... Yeah, I do go out I'm a sociable person, but when it comes to, like, places what I know it'll put myself at risk, I won't go. Like if I've got a feeling of it, or I've got a dodgy thing of it... I need to think about it, do you know, like, before I go I can't just say yeah, because you never know. Someone else might be fighting. They actually might kill each other and that's all of us getting done for manslaughter. Not a chance. (Gracie-Mae)

Case Study - Jeff

At aged fourteen Jeff was arrested for carrying a knife after he fell out with another boy who had been flirting with his recently ex-girlfriend. The other boy challenged him to a fight at which point Jeff took the knife from his kitchen at home and went to meet him.

The evidence suggests Jeff was not thinking clearly at this point. He emphasised that at the time "I didn't know what was going on". When asked about his reasons for picking up the knife he relayed "I weren't thinking straight... it was just all blank I think", although he later stated "I think it was protection, and to scare him".

On seeing Jeff with the knife, the other boy called the police. Evidently remorseful Jeff went home and put the knife under his pillow before returning to apologise to the other boy. At

this point the police arrived, and Jeff was arrested and put on Youth Offending. Jeff made one more attempt to apologise to the other boy concerned, which resulted in his order being extended:

Went to go see that person the next day... cos we were sound, yeah. I weren't starting on him, I said sorry to him, went to go see him the next day and then they found out when I finished my youth offending that I went to go see him, through messages... And then I got put back on it and I didn't see him until I was off it. Cos I saw him once, I saw him in the street or something, I was walking,.. I weren't looking or anything like that, I just keep walking forward.

When asked what interventions the Youth Offending team had done with him, he recalled one punch kill, education about knives and weapons and “*reasons not to carry and that, because you could kill someone. And mess up their full family's life and that.*” He relayed that at first, it didn't have a lot of impact on him, but then he searched on the internet “*cos I wanted to know what would actually happen, yeah? So, I searched it up, and it was just like, like that's when it all sunk in.*” The account from Jeff suggests that prior to this he had been unaware of the damage that knives can do.

Jeff described his actions as stupid and related that he had stopped carrying after his arrest and had advised his friends not to carry weapons either:

Cos then whilst I was on youth offending I could of got a stop and searched at any point, yeah. And they probably search everyone else I'm with... So, I stopped carrying then, like soon as I got arrested I stopped. And then, everyone I chill with, if they carried I just walk off.

Jeff described a culture among his friends of wanting to be ‘hard’ and prove they're not scared because they are not aware of the reality of the life they aspire to:

Cos they wanna be big, they want, they think living the dealer's life is good... They don't know the fear of your house getting raided every two seconds, yeah? And getting arrested? They don't know the fear of your family getting stabbed... They don't know any of that.

Case Study – Jimmy

Jimmy's second arrest was for possession of an offensive weapon “*Which was obviously a bladed article.*”. He had previously received a Youth Conditional Caution for offenses relating to Graffiti.

His arrest came after he got in ‘beef’, meaning a disagreement, with some other young people who were “*trying to pressure me. Like, they start trying to make me feel belittled*”. Jimmy relayed feeling disrespected and needing to respond quickly in order that the other parties not think he was an idiot or a target for bullying. The next day he confronted them with a knife. He described that at the time of the confrontation he “*was looking for blood. I was ready to, like, I was ready to do some serious damage*” and had he not been caught earlier he “*would have hurt someone bad*”.

Although Jimmy recognized that he had done wrong, the account suggests he was not remorseful as he relayed what he perceived as the benefits of his actions:

And that's why I done it. I don't get bullied now. No one talks to me like that now I've done that. I've got, I know it sounds stupid, but I've got no beef with anyone in this... town because they know. And I know it's not a good thing, but I feel like that's

a positive thing. That now, because I got no beef and it's all squashed, I don't have to be scared to leave the house.

He described a culture of violence in which people look for ratings on the streets “*If you do something to someone, people are gonna rate you around the area. People are gonna know, know your name*”. He also felt Drill music had influenced his actions, glamourising violence and making him feel tough:

Drill music is, it came from gangs, it came from young people repping their sites. Their areas... You'll hear gangs that will start with the postcode. Because it's like postcode wars, and then, they'll make music about their ops. Ops are like, ops are like people that you don't like. People on the other areas. It's all turf wars. Drill music is just full of turf wars, violence. And that kind of, when you listen to that music it makes you feel, like part of them.

At the time of the interview Jimmy had just got out of court. He conveyed feeling relieved not to have received a custodial sentence. Although he had been tempted to carry a weapon again he had not due to the realisation that “*if I get caught with another bladed article I'll get, I'll go to a youth detention centre.*”

Territorial gangs or postcode wars emerged as a source of anti-social behaviour and violence in accounts from participants. Young people in Grimsby spoke about the East Marsh and West Marsh Massives, while in Scunthorpe Everest Road and Westcliff were highlighted as hot spots for gang activity. Young people associated gangs with fighting, stabbings, anti-social behaviour, drug use and no-go areas. Kira recalled how a previous relationship had involved her in gang activities she had not wanted to be a part of, and her difficulties in escaping from it:

When I was very young, I hung around the wrong people and ended up [accidentally] joining one of the gangs... Westhill Mafia they were called... And there was one day, really late at night, they all decided to have a big, they called it a War, but it was just a big fight in the Queensgate Park, and we were all there and I didn't know what was going on and someone got stabbed and then everyone ran away... I broke up from a relationship I was in, that forced me to be part of that community and just escaped it... There was a lot of harassment about it. It was a very long and complicated procedure for a bit. I wasn't safe, had to escape, and then they didn't like the fact that I was leaving. There was a lot of harassment, on not just me, but my family and a lot of threats until we put a stop to it. 9 Kira)

Participants conveyed how **drug dealing** spreads violence in their communities as dealers compete for territory or collect on bad debts. In this account from Kira, she recalled her neighbour's son who was drawn into drug-dealing through his job leading to addiction and, it seems, regular beatings from his employers:

So, my neighbour has a very young son, and he was working on the boats. But the people he was working with on with on the boats, got him to deal drugs for him. I don't know what happened, something about blackmail and now they deal drugs and their young son, who's now seventeen, is very addicted to drugs.... the crew he was with, they weren't very nice to him. They always showed up at his house and- Not all of them, just like one or two people he worked with. And then he was always like going off with them and them coming back looking black and blue. 9 Kira)

Several participants conveyed that drug use is commonplace among their peers “*I've never met like one person who hasn't like, ever touched, like, weed*” (Bob) and recounted seeing

children perhaps as young as twelve both using and dealing drugs. The data suggests young people use drugs to **self-medicate** for depression and other mental health issues. Mike relayed a process of **addiction** through which young people may eventually turn to crime:

But people take the drugs to help their mental health. They get addicted to them; they get into more hardcore stuff. So, it'll start off with weed, then you'll go on a night out and your mate will get you to do cocaine or ketamine, then it's like, oh, got some heroin or whatever... And then it will just go through the loop, and you won't have the money so then you'll go to violence, car theft, breaking and entering and all that and then it just goes from there. (Mike)

In another example Kira recounted how family member became addicted to prescription antidepressants "We don't speak to that family member anymore and we don't know if they're alive or not, what they're doing. They've gone straight off the plot." (Kira)

The young people taking part in the focus groups described how **mental health issues** may cause unpredictable, or even violent behaviour in those affected. Justin recalled a woman living nearby to her who "thinks that she's getting better because, like, she's supposed to take special medication and she thinks she's getting better so she doesn't take it. And then she just ends up shouting verbal abuse at people and threatening them."

Difficulty in controlling anger emerged from the accounts, as participants conveyed anger issues, sometimes lashing out, or acting without thinking- "I get real angry and then, like, hit them... I don't really think about it. I just get infuriated" (Justin). Isaac, who has Asperger's recalled how he would act violently in response to provocation when he was younger, and the consequences this had for him- "I had to essentially move schools a couple of times." In another example Tanya relayed using violence as a means to save face in confrontations:

I can't control my anger... when someone says summat to me, I get angry, and I'll start shouting back at them. If they shout back at me I just swing for them. Don't have it, eh. Can't let anyone disrespect you. (Tanya)

The evidence suggests that referrals to mental health services to help young people manage their anger were ineffective "But, my anger has just never gone away, like it's still the exact same as it was when I was younger." (Steve)

4

How do young people feel about where they live?

Hull

Participants living close to Hull City Centre described it as scary “it it’s like really scary, like, you hear random noises and like, cars and like police just turn up for no reason” (Vanessa). They relayed high levels of violence, including murders and knife crime, anti-social behaviour and instances of drug and alcohol misuse. They pointed to certain locations and buildings associated with particular events as scary. For example, Tamara recalled a murder which took place in the ‘pink flats’. In this exchange between Amira and Tamara, they convey a sense of vulnerability about walking down certain streets, especially in the dark:

Amira It’s basically like, I think it’s like, in the night when you’re walking there, you just hear dogs barking, and then like, like when you’re walking, yeah, it’s like you feel like someone’s behind you.

Tamara It’s quite, like, closed in.

Amira It’s like it’s all in your head, and like did I just hear footsteps? [turns to look over her shoulder]

During the photo elicitation exercise Tamara picked out a card depicting a face with multiple eye stalks, which she chose to represent the feeling of being watched or looked at all the time.

It’s just everyone just looking at us, and just can’t get [their] eyes off us, and it’s just really scary. Do you see how scary this person is? ...I will put this person, cos every, there’s like multiple eyes just looking that represents people staring at people. It’s like really scary when people stare at people. And they get claustrophobic. (Tamara)



The group spoke a lot about ‘olders’ – other younger people from the area, especially boys, aged sixteen and upwards. The evidence suggests these olders can be an unpredictable influence as the participants described them at various times as scary, intimidating, and funny.

The participants relayed that the olders were responsible for **anti-social behaviour** in the area, such as fights and setting a local youth club on fire. During the focus groups session someone identified by the participants as an older, scaled the fence to get into the venue and was asked to leave by the youth workers present. The group described an incident on bonfire night, when the olders were playing with fireworks, running inside a local shop with the fireworks and letting them off. They then started shooting them at each other “And then they started coming for us, and we’re like. We haven’t done anything, why are you coming for us? We started screaming” (Amira). In another example, Amira relayed how sometimes the olders can be funny. She recalled another fight they started, this time with water guns, which brought the young people in the community together on a hot day “everyone got involved, even little kids and like, it just all, it made it, like better.”

Steve had only recently moved to his area, about a mile out of the city centre, “so I think it’s just like, all new to me.” He conveyed that, although the area has a bad reputation, and he was sceptical when he initially moved there, it’s actually been OK. Conversely, Dave described his time living on a street in the same area as **dangerous** with drunk people and anti-social behaviour causing problems for residents. He recalled people banging on doors and screaming in the middle of the night, and drunk people shouting and fighting in the

streets. *“It was like a very bad house. The council give us a bad house... we just had to survive in that until we moved.”* (Dave). He relayed that his current home is much safer, in a residential area away from the city centre. He described it as **comfortable**- *“I don’t feel like there’s like a threat or a danger coming towards me.”* (Dave)

This feeling of comfort was reiterated by Eddie and JB. They described the area they live in as **multi-cultural**, with people from many different countries. They relayed a strong sense of safety and **community**, with friendly and helpful neighbours- *“It’s welcoming. You don’t need to feel afraid, because people is gonna be there when you need them”* (JB). Esme also spoke of a sense of community, and the importance of trusted neighbours she can go to in case of trouble.

Amira conveyed that even in her neighbourhood, with the problems previously discussed, *“if you find the right people in this area to stay with, it can be very cosy sometimes”* (Amira). When asked who the right people are, she replied friends and family.

East Riding

Kira described **Bridlington** as a tourist trap and retirement town- *“There’s nothing here for the young people.”* (Kira). Short-term seasonal work, lack of experience, vocational courses preparing students for roles which aren’t available locally and poor transport links to jobs in other towns all emerged as **barriers to employment**:

I’ve trained for three, four years to become a teacher and then was denied the position because there were no roles. and then I went into nursery childcare, and I got a job for a year and then I was taken out of it because someone more experienced came along. So, it’s a lot like, everyone who’s older, who’s more up the ladder in the town, gets their jobs first. whereas I’ve trained for most of my life to be in that position and I can’t. It’s just very, very difficult and I know people that are looking for jobs now and can’t find a job because it’s just tourist trap jobs and seasonal jobs and for young adults that are trying to make their way in their life and trying to put their own life first. You can’t get a full-time job working in a seasonal business. (Kira)

Young people relayed a **lack of leisure facilities** for people their age (seventeen to twenty-five). What amenities are available are for tourists or *“the very young people and the new families and babies... or the elderly community”* (Kira). Kira expressed frustration that any investment in the town is geared towards making improvements for tourism. When asked what they do with their time, Mike responded *“Nothing, try and look for a job.”*

The focus groups revealed the participants were concerned about **rising crime**, especially **drug dealing**, and **violence** in the town. Kira described the drug use in her neighbourhood as ‘toxic’- *“dealers are getting younger and some of the users and it’s spreading”* (Kira). Mike concurred *“It’s rising. It’s all over Brid, it’s not just in one place. I’ve been here for seven or eight years now and there hasn’t been a single time where there hasn’t been violence”*. Kira went on to relate how lack of opportunities for young people was contributing to the problems, with nothing to divert them away from criminal activities:

There’s just, there’s not a lot to get kids or young people or anyone that’s doing a crime and violence out of that. It’s either you go about your boring life, or you do something to make it interesting and that’s pretty much it. (Kira)

Ethyl lived rurally on the **Holderness Coast**. She also related a lack of job opportunities locally *“you’ve got to go all the way to Hull if you have any chance of getting a job”* (Ethyl).

She described her locality as run down, yet with a strong sense of community, because of its rural location.

Ethyl recounted gangs of local school children vaping and causing trouble on the buses and older teenagers in her village carrying knives. She also described drug paraphernalia “a couple of grams of weed once... Needles, syringes” littering a shelter in a children’s play park, which was also covered in racist graffiti. When asked if she could speculate as to the cause she explained “Boredom. Purely boredom. There’s nothing to do, it costs money to get a bus, people can’t be bothered to wait, like, go into an hour into Hull.”

When asked to characterise how they felt about **Driffield** the focus group participants responded **angry, fed up and sad**.

I just, I feel angry in Driffield. I don’t like Driffield. I hate it. (Northern)

Cos like, where I live there’s a lot of stuff going on, in lot of, like, things that make you kind of feel stressed out and fed up. (Jo)

I don’t like it, I just like going abroad. (Aiden)

In a contrasting account, Emmie relayed “I don’t really mind it. It’s not really, like, that busy... It’s got plenty of pubs. Dunno, it’s just fine innit. Don’t go outside that much, so I don’t really mind.” Conversely, pubs were highlighted as a source of violence, particularly on football match days.

Problems at school emerged from the young people’s accounts as they related clashes with teachers, time spent in exclusion and regular fights. The young people were aware of **drug dealing** on local council estates, which they described as ‘dodgy’ and places to be avoided if possible.

The participants conveyed a lack of amenities, having to travel to Bridlington or Hull for things such as arcades, cinema, and leisure shopping. Young people recounted **making their own entertainment** with what’s available, such as bus and train spotting and the riskier sounding ‘river-jumping’.

Young people relayed how they are **stereotyped** by other residents in town as troublemakers, shoplifters, or drug dealers. They described how a local supermarket does not allow young people to loiter outside because “they think you’re gonna do drug dealing... they’ll think you’re broad daylight robbing” (Northern), although if it’s older people “they’ll just go oh it’s fine [they’re] waiting for taxi” (Jo). Jo recalled a woman in a local park warning her child away from him because he was wearing a raised hood:

Jo I went to a park once, on my bike, I was wearing a well black shoes and a black coat. And I saw this kid who came near me, and the parent just said stay away from that man. I was literally sat on the swings, what the? Like, bloody hell

I So why do you think she said that about you?

Jo Cos I had my hood up. If these people who live in Driffield and surrounding areas that think if you’ve got a hood up, you’re like illegal. You’re like an illegal person and you’ve committed something really like bad, like, murder or something

In another example Emmie, who is into metal and emo music, conveyed how she is stereotyped because of her the way she dresses, particularly some of her t-shirts. “People won’t want me near their kids. Or they’ll just cross the road then cross back over after they’ve gone past me.” (Emmie). She described her shirts as depicting “skulls and stuff, like

dragons” and one “with a guillotine, with wings on it. Like angel wings”. She reiterated how young people are treated differently as her father, who shares a similar fashion sense, does not get avoided in the street:

My dad looks like it. People don't normally cross the road when he goes by and he's got like slipknot shirts on, pinhead and everything on it. But then I'm just like wearing my school t-shirt and like old grannies will cross the road to cross back over, so they don't walk past me. (Emmie)

Anti-social behaviour and vandalism emerged as concerns for participants in **Beverley**. They relayed feeling intimidated by adults drinking in local pubs on the weekend due to language used by them and the threat of fights breaking out. The group relayed fights among their peer group as a result of **underage drinking** and **drug use** such as vaping, marijuana and cocaine. Gangs of youths loitering around a local shopping centre “thinking they're hard and they're really not” (Brenda) intimidate older people shopping there. “Like, some people say they're scared to go into shops if there's like a gang outside.” (Sarah). Sarah related young people are no longer allowed in the area due to teenagers setting off fire alarms and messing around in the car park.

Participants recalled how gangs had vandalised a local park, setting fire to play equipment with homemade flamethrowers made using aerosol sprays and lighters. The gangs “start mad scraps everywhere” (Brenda), fighting and using unacceptable language. Justin conveyed a dark mood which is only lifted by her family “cos they make me happy, and they brighten my day.” (Justin). Sarah conveyed the difficulties of keeping out of trouble, when presumably there is **peer pressure** to get involved:

I chose this one, cos like, the black could like... That means all like, the bad shit. And then like, it, like, slowly like tries and get, to get you involved. But like, you have to try and get away from it. (Sarah)



Northeast Lincolnshire

The data suggests participants living in **Grimsby** were highly dissatisfied with the area. Although this was evident from both focus groups, the older participants were most vocal, repeatedly referred to the town as a ‘shithole’. “I'm actually ashamed to be from Grimsby” (Gracie-Mae). The young people conveyed living in a claustrophobic community where “everyone, like, knows everyone's business” (Bob) and residents “thinks that they're better than everyone” (Tanya). This was reiterated by McConnell as he described life on a local council estate:

They're all like oh wow we all care about community. They don't. They're the ones who start the shit in the first place. (McConnell)

Drug dealing and **drug use** emerged as the biggest issue participants were concerned about, fuelled by problems such as poverty, mental health, family issues and school. They conveyed heroin, crack, marijuana, and spice as being common among users. Several of the younger participants related having at least one drug dealer living close to them, and instances of violence associated with dealing such as stabbings. McConnell summed up what he saw as the bleak prospects for young people in Grimsby:

If you're not like buying drugs or summat, there's nothing here for you, you're literally all by yourself, just living in shit. (McConnell)

Participants relayed family members who are or had been in prison. While some related family, notably mums, they could talk to, Tanya recalled *"I speak to drug dealers more than I speak to my mum"*.

Other issues which emerged from the data included discrimination, suicide and suicide attempts among the participants' peer group, violence, abuse and neglect in the home, territorial gangs, and anti-social behaviour. The younger participants recalled people setting fires in the local parks, territorial gang fights and people climbing on roofs in town at night. Xavier described this as therapeutic and a means of escape *"[it] was like a little abandoned roof. And we used to just climb on top of it to get away from like everyone else"*.

The focus groups revealed a lack of amenities for the seventeen to twenty-five age group, who conveyed **a lack of both leisure and life opportunities**. When asked what jobs are available locally they relayed 'Clee jobs', presumably seasonal work in Cleethorpes, teaching, factory, and agency work. Gracie-Mae related her ambition to become a TV actress, and how she felt constrained by living in Grimsby- *"if you wanted to go big in life then this is not the place to be."* (Gracie-Mae). She related how lack of opportunities, boredom and poor self-esteem can lead people to start trouble in the town:

If you're that sad with your life and you ain't got no career purpose and... you're just one of these people who just sat on your arse all day, don't go to school or whatever... then they will find a reason to actually argue with you, so they make themselves feel good... They want something to do. They'll put your life in misery which I don't agree with. (Gracie-Mae)

#The older participants conveyed that the **problems in Grimsby are getting worse** *"it's just getting more of a beat dead end town each day"* (McConnell). Conversely Xavier relayed a more optimistic hope for a future Grimsby, without the drugs and violence:

Xavier *That in the middle, is what Grimsby could be. The outside bit is what it is, cos it is... Terrible.*

I *So, it's terrible now, what could it be?*

Xavier *Brilliant. It could be brilliant.*



North Lincolnshire

Young people in the seventeen to twenty-five age group described **Scunthorpe** as *"a horrible place to live... It's just not a nice area"* (Luigi). Clive and Luigi both conveyed a strong desire to leave *"I'm gonna go to a big city and then never come back."* (Clive). Jake selected a card depicting a goldfish astronaut *"Cos it's like looking at the world through like a tiny, like a tiny perspective or something like that."* (Jake), suggesting his world feels small and constricting, or a sense of being trapped.



Participants highlighted **lack of experience as a barrier to employment**; Luigi recalled the difficulty he had in finding employment, and how he volunteered for three years with his current employer before they offered him a paid role:

It seems like there's a million jobs going but nobody ever gets hired for it. Like you can apply for a million jobs, but you won't get one. Like it took me for three years to start working here. Volunteered here for three years... it's just people want more experienced people... it's like you want people with experience but you can't get experience. (Luigi)

Clive conveyed how this combined with **low wage jobs and a lack of aspiration to encourage young people to stay on benefits:**

there's nothing here, like how are you supposed to make enough money? So, I feel like, people just, live on dole, don't they... Cos what's the point in working, when you don't get paid much? You probably get paid more from like universal credit and stuff, it's pointless. (Clive)

When asked what opportunities there are in Scunthorpe the group identified the Steelworks and higher education at the local college, relating available courses such as animal management and health and social care "You wanna do anything interesting, you've got to go to a big city" (Luigi). Lack of opportunities again emerged as a driving factor for violence in the town, as Clive explained "Something to do isn't it. And then, if you get like a reaction from it as well, then you're going to be less bored. Because that's going to be something to do."

Participants related problems with **drugs, territorial gangs, and poverty**. Westcliff, town, and Everest Road were highlighted as hot spots for gang activity. Clive recalled Everest field being littered with used needles, while Luigi reflected "You're probably going to get stabbed if you go in Westcliff after like nine o'clock." The young people conveyed the perception that things were getting worse, with more dealers on the streets and younger children carrying weapons:

Everybody's just always in like a gang mindset... Well, it's usually, the, like poorer areas, they're conditioned to feel like they have to do that cos you see it all growing up, and then, you're like oh we'll do that... it's getting worse now though cos there's like actually twelve-year-olds running around with knives, it's weird, weird place. (Luigi)

Young people in care

Loneliness and isolation emerged a strong theme for young people in care, living in **North Lincolnshire**. The participants conveyed difficulty in communicating and making friends, presumably due to their past experiences. They related specific **problems maintaining friendships** outside of school, as they live further away from the school than their friend groups. This means that they miss out on news and gossip, further isolating them from the lives of their friends. Sabrina described how, although she was able to hang out with her friends, she felt she missed out on news and gossip due to not having as much access to social media as they do. Evidently moving around between foster placements also had an impact on young people's ability to maintain friendships.

The young people relayed a **stigma around being in care** that affected their ability to form social bonds- "when I was at school, no one wanted to be friends with a care kid." (Janine). In the following account from Stephano, he recalls how his friend group deserted him after it became known throughout the school that he was in care:

But, like, just at my school when like I told one of, like, my bestest friends that I was in care and then, all of a sudden, the next, like week or so... everybody found out. It was like a wildfire spread across the whole school. And it was like, oh you're in care,

don't wanna be friends with you, and all the friends that I did have before that day I'd lost them afterwards... Because they're like, you don't live with your mum and dad. I don't wanna be friends with you. (Stephano)

The data suggests these experiences had resulted in **difficulty trusting people**. Janine described people as 'snaky'. When asked what this meant she replied "Like, I don't know, like your friends and stuff. Then they're not actually your friends". Stephano concurred that "you can't really trust anybody" but also expressed hope that the situation at school will improve as he gets older:

I think, you only really find out, like, who your true friends are when you get further up the school, I think. Because people start taking you more seriously for who you are, rather than who you live with, where you live, why you live with certain people. (Stephano)

Despite these challenges, the participants expressed that there are **positives to being in care**. They related plentiful opportunities to engage in fun, diversionary activities as well as getting involved in informing policy and influencing council recruitment. Perhaps, most importantly the young people conveyed happy and stable foster placements:

I find it a lot better than my old, like, not my old family... the ones that gave birth to me. I don't know how to explain it. Biological. (Mary-Anne)

Participants with experience of being in care in **Northeast Lincolnshire** conveyed less satisfaction with the experience. They related feeling **powerless** as decisions were made for them and about them by social services "Because sometimes they don't even know what even best for, sometimes they'll just go by what's written on a piece of paper they don't even know fuck all half the time" (Gracie-Mae). Rob's experience of being a care leaver and also having worked in the care industry enabled him to see the system from two perspectives. He relayed a system in which staff were not valued and young people did not benefit:

Staff get treat like shit and then you get, like, then you see what happens with all the youths with drugs or fighting just don't seem to be getting anywhere even when they're in the care system. It seems to just screw with them even more than what they did when they went in. (Rob)

He described his time in what he called an 'unauthorised' care home. Presumably by this he means a privately run, unregulated home. In an account sounding more like a prison than a children's home, he recalled long periods of isolation and strict discipline:

I was only really in care for a year. [In] what they would class as unauthorised care home, two unauthorised care homes cos I got put in one where I was by myself for ages. Wasn't allowed to have any social contact with anyone except one carer at a time. And when they was doing what they classed as handover, I wasn't allowed anywhere near them, I had to be locked up in my room out the way and just couldn't really do much. They'd limited it in what I could eat, drink, when I could watch tv, when I couldn't, like and all that kind of stuff, when I left the house. Then they had to log every little thing down, someone knocked on the door, oh who was it, they've got to, it's all got to be logged and every little thing. you coughed, you got a bollocking for it, cause that happened to me. (Rob)

Gracie-Mae concurred that in her experience care homes are an isolating experience for young people as they lack the family lifestyle of a good foster placement. She went on to relate the impact that the care and stability of her current foster placement has had on her:

The placement where I'm at now you wouldn't even think I was in foster care, I was lit, I've got the most amazing foster... carers you could ever have... they'll look after me how they'll treat their own kids... I've lasted in like seven years and that... yeah they've changed my life. (Gracie-Mae)

The participants related having to **fight to prove themselves**, inside the care system and outside of it. Gracie-Mae recalled how she would “*continue to like ring the professionals and tell them what you want, and don't take no for an answer and don't ever let them like overpower you*”. Despite the difficulty she conveyed in getting her voice heard by decision-makers, she related “*there's actually social workers who does care and that, there's people who does want to do well*”. She conveyed prejudice against children in care from a local community, who complained about the placement of a children's care home in the neighbourhood:

And then all the kids was getting slated and everything like the care kids and the children's home and I was just like, can't really judge a book by its cover can you really? (Gracie-Mae)

Rob recalled the extra hoops he had to jump through when seeking employment “*to prove that you're not a horrible person just because you've been in care*”. He relayed having been discriminated against due to his status as care leaver as employers “*don't want to know*”. Conversely, the depth of information required by employers, in what could be interpreted as well-meaning attempts to support care-leavers, also left him feeling discriminated against:

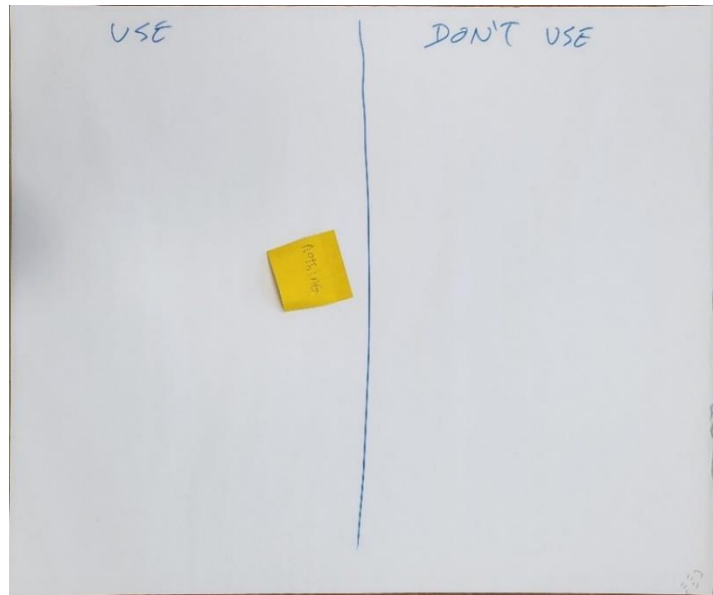
Some of them want you to explain like why you was in care or want you to go into further depth of what you can or can't do, like give you, give them extreme detail of basically your entire life, rather than just, accepting that you've been in care. (Rob)

5

Services

Participants in the seventeen to twenty-five age group evidently **struggled to think of activities and services that they access**, with the Grimsby group in particular identifying none at all. Those that the other groups did list tended to be council services, such as leisure centres, colleges, and commercial enterprises such as shops and private sports facilities.

Participants discussed the **high** cost of activities and entertainment, such as going to the cinema, while others recalled services and activities that have been closed due a lack of funding and resources in the area. Gracie-Mae reflected on the impact of a lack of available activities- *“People make their own entertainment, that’s why they’re all troublemakers.”*



Despite these barriers, most participants were able to give examples of **free resources** such as local parks and areas to go for walks. The younger age group identified activities they can participate in through the various youth groups and voluntary community organisations they are accessing.

Sports featured heavily in the lists of services young people were aware of and used in their local area. These included leisure activities such as swimming, walking, and ice-skating, to more organised team sports such as football and basketball. Participants at the Hull FC group expressed that for them, sport is a way of releasing stress and rewarding themselves for working hard at school.

Me, personally, I enjoy them...To like, release you from all...the stress. Especially when like, in year eleven, doing your GCSEs it's just...stress for just revising every day. But like Friday basketball just give us a, a break. (Dave)

Some young people in the eleven to sixteen age group disclosed taking part in apparently **risky or risk-taking activities** such as underage drinking, climbing on roofs in Grimsby and river jumping in Drifffield. When further questions were asked around why people river jump and whether it is an illegal activity, the participants were unsure, but were aware that there had been a police presence patrolling the area. It was evident from the way this group spoke about river jumping, that they did not consider it to be a risky activity.

Northern I don't river jump but, I can see the point...it's hot they wanna cool off, they probably wanna show off in front of their friends...

Dottie Because it's fun

Young people conveyed that boredom, and a lack of other available activities was a main driver for underage drinking, as they gathered in parks with friends. Clive had been drinking

in pubs since she was fifteen. She recalled with fondness the people she met and the sense of community she felt in one pub that has since been shut down:

It was just so good, I don't even know how to explain it, it's like family, everyone there like we're all still really good friends... I wouldn't be doing any gigs if it wasn't for... the landlord, she used to let me just play there and it was great. (Clive)

Schools

After school clubs featured in most of the group's lists of activities that they don't use. Participants relayed that the other people attending the clubs were not people they would normally associate with, and they did not feel comfortable around them. They conveyed a judgmental attitude from other young people:

Basically, I go to a school...that's not really cultured and have a lot of ethnicities. Yeah, so I ain't staying after school to witness a lot of things...I don't like the girls at my school. There are like three girls...I completely despise, and the girls that do after school clubs. (Amira)

Right, I would go to the school gym after school, cos we like to do that, but all the, like, popular, straight lads...would, like, take rip out of me. And try and... dip me and everything. (Xavier)

When asked further about what would make a good after school club, participants expressed that they would want to be with their friends or like-minded people "Like, just chilling." (Amira). However, they were able to offer no clear ideas as to what specific activities these clubs might include.

The focus groups revealed that young people had very **poor relationships with teachers and staff at school**. The participants conveyed indifferent or apathetic teaching staff that "don't care" (Crazy) or "don't do anything" (McConnell) about young people struggling with mental health and bullying. Young people from BAME communities related that they are treated by teachers, as Vanessa and Amira recalled rules around dress code and behaviour in class seemed to apply differently to them:

Our schools got like a really strict dress code, and our skirts have to be all the way down here... And I was walking with my white friend... and her skirt was way shorter than mine... And there was this teacher she comes up to me and she's like, Vanessa, pull your skirt down... And I was stood right next to my mate...And she was like, her skirt is fine. (Vanessa)

I don't know why I got my phone out in lesson; I just got my phone out in lesson. And I got it took off me by teacher... cos I'm the only black person in my class, there were all other students were getting their phones out but were only given a warning. (Amira)

That participants felt **teachers are too strict** emerged strongly from the data. They conveyed feeling victimised or picked on by certain teachers and recalled examples of teachers shouting and 'screaming' at students with what was perceived as little provocation.

He does my head in. In just, picking on me... Like, I was talking to the person in my class, and everyone else was talking but he always just picks on me and, like, this person in my class. (Sarah)

I walked in that classroom she would immediately start snapping at me even if I was in a good mood, and I'd just have a massive grin on my face she would just start

shouting at me, snapping at me then accusing me of not wanting to do my work even though I'd done it, like, two weeks ago. (Rob)

For Jake, who is a neurodiverse young person, the unpredictability of what to expect from lessons and teacher responses at times had a negative effect on him, causing him to feel anxious and overwhelmed:

But sometimes I like couldn't hold my lunch down cos I was so scared of like the lesson next, like, what's gonna happen next, still, like, line up and getting shouted at by teachers. (Jake)

In another example Dottie recalled a teacher who she considered to be “really strict. Like she shouts at you for literally the littlest things”. Conversely Northern relayed that this teacher was alright with him because they know what he’s like and how best to deal with him “She treats everyone with respect. That’s what I think” (Northern).

Consequence systems within schools emerged as a theme, with participants conveying a negative impact on their experience of school as a whole “you’re at school you’re thinking, it’s a prison.” (Northern). The young people explained some of the consequence processes such as ‘Subject Remove’, where staff remove a student from the class and place them in another class, IE (Internal Exclusion), where the student is told to come in to school an hour later, and then stay after school an hour later, ‘Writtens’, referring to a written warning, ‘Pastoral Centre’ and ‘ISO’ referring to isolation.

The evidence suggests isolation in particular was viewed negatively by participants. When asked how it felt to be in isolation, Dottie responded “Like I wanna kill myself.. it’s so bad”. The accounts revealed little evidence that isolation actually worked as a consequence or teachable moment for young people that received it:

Right, you have to sit in there for a whole day, in a cubical facing a wall... and you have to be silent for the whole day. It’s really, really boring. Like, you when you get, you get sent out and you sit in iso for, like, a sanction it’s like it don’t help. It’s just worse. (Dottie)

Punishments don’t change me, that’s the thing. I just [get] put in isolation or suspended, walked out of school and everything. The punishment I get for it, it doesn’t fuss me. (Xavier)

Conversely, Dave relayed how consequence systems had benefitted his school as pupils misbehaving in class “distracted the learning for the kids that actually wanted to be serious” (Dave). Removing difficult or disruptive pupils to another class has enabled the pupils that remained to concentrate on their learning.

Participants relayed **low opinions of school and college institutions**, with those in Grimsby particularly saying there are no good schools. They shared concerning accounts of one school, in which they referenced drug use, bullying, self-harming behaviours and eating disorders. Crazy recalled being forced to eat when he attended the school for a brief period:

Everywhere, was right, you have to eat and at times, if it was like you’ve just gotta force it in, you go to toilet, you’re throwing it up again. Cos there’s people there that just can’t eat during the day. Not because of the religion, not because of nothing like that just because, it’s all because they don’t feel comfortable eating in front of people. Like myself, I don’t, I hate it. (Crazy)

Contrastingly however, Kira and Jake recalled how they had been provided with **wellbeing support** from their school and college. Kira described how the support offered to her while

she was a student continued after she left the college. In the latter account Jake relates how we was provided with a safe space to decompress when he became overwhelmed by the school environment due to his Autism:

They have a guidance officer that you can book there, to help with anything really. I've been going to her since I went to the college and sometimes I still do...I was able to do it because I was a student...it was offered to me, when I stopped becoming a student... I was going through a very rough patch, and I needed the extra support back then. (Kira)

Can be overwhelming sometimes like just like large crowds of people and like teachers strict, horrible... I think they like tried to make me feel better about it... I used to hang out a lot at like the councillor's office at lunch and... I think it might've been the best place to be. (Jake)

Participants expressed **frustrations with their college experience** and how little it prepared them for finding employment opportunities either due to a lack of relevant course at their college, or a lack of available jobs once they had completed their course. Young people living in Bridlington particularly conveyed a lack of resilience, and unrealistic expectations with regards to seeking employment. This raises the question about how young people are prepared for adulthood, and who's responsibility is it to prepare them?

College just hasn't worked out for me... I did about a course with them for about 3 years, and it's got me nowhere. I've tried doing jobs off the back of the course I did but it just hasn't worked out... 'cos the college just didn't give me the right resources to go and get that job. (Riley)

Conversely Luigi, was able to reflect on his experiences and the negative things he had witnessed, realising what his own future might look like and actively making positive changes:

I was in a really weird college that let us shoot guns and ride motorbikes and stuff... it changed me, a lot... Well, I was in year eight and the kids in year eleven I saw how they were and how bad they were with like drugs and violence, and I was like I don't wanna do that, so I sorted my life out. (Luigi)

Police

The data suggests that **young people's confidence in the police and police response is low** – “Well, I just think that you can't really, like, trust police nowadays. Is like better to trust family and friends.” (Milly). In some cases, this originated from first-hand experience, while in others young people referred to things they had seen or heard about in the media, from their peers and family influences.

Ethyl and Steve recalled recent events in the media such as protests in America and the UK and the government's response to them. They relayed an element of fear that young people would be treated unfairly by the police and a fear of an abuse of power. “If I go protest it and they just shut us down, it's like they're ripping our rights, freedom of speech.” (Steve) However, no evidence emerged of them having experienced this directly.

Participants described the police as useless and ineffective. Young people conveyed that police were not available or accessible when they need them to be, citing slow response times to emergency calls - “they took stupid amounts of time to respond to actual crimes. So, like there's drug use, which is like marijuana... they'll come to that instantly, but if there is a fight they can take any time” (Mike). Where police did respond participants relayed that the

response was inadequate. Kira recalled a time when her little sister was assaulted by a neighbouring child, and the police did not attend because the injury was not deemed serious enough:

There's been a case where on my street there's a family who are very violent. They have very young children who are all very violent and they stabbed my little sister with a glass bottle in the eye and the police said well, the glass didn't go in her eye, she's not bleeding. She's fine. We're not going to bother; they've never come they never bothered. (Kira)

In another example Rob remembered when he encountered a police car after he ran away from home following a domestic incident when he was sixteen years old. He had intervened in an argument between his mother and stepfather, who had both been drinking, and they both strangled him. Evidently distressed and intending to kill himself, the officers returned Rob to his home, where they focussed not on the assault on a minor, but on physical damage to the garden gate. Of concern, at the end of the narrative Rob alludes to further incidents of abuse following this:

I then ran off, to go kill myself... I'm gonna jump in front of the first car I see. Turned out it was a pissing police car. The wrong time for that to happen, but obviously they stopped realised that something was up by the way I was acting. I told them, they took me back to where it's just happened they went Oh do you wanna go in so we can discuss it? Hang on I've just told you everything what's happened so why you taking me back to the [place] where it's happened?... They went in, spoke to them come out oh we're not gonna be charging you for the gate you broke. The gate which was rusty and fell off the hinges when I shut it behind me? They just, like, they've ignored the abuse side of things and went for the physical damage, rather than something which I was actually trying to get help for... two days later I was back at my mums. And history repeated itself. (Rob)

In a further example Mike conveyed the need for better training and resources for officers called to respond to people dealing with mental health crises:

I have a friend who has really bad mental health and she's tried to unalive herself quite a bit, so I've had to get the police involved to restrain her. But they can take anywhere from, they can be there within 10 minutes, or you could be waiting four hours. It's just, they are very useless... they haven't got training for it. They think, oh, let's restrain them, handcuff them, throw them in the car. That's just how it works. That makes it worse. So, they need better training with that. (Mike)

Participants conveyed a belief that the police could not, or would not, act on reports of criminal behaviour by people under the age of sixteen. Luigi questioned how seriously local knife crime by young people is taken by the police and a lack of consequences for those involved:

Start taking it a bit more seriously. Rather than just going he's got a knife, we'll just take him in for a night and give him a warning... nothing really happens they just go ha-ha I've been in a prison cell, I'm cool now, not a prison cell. Ah they just find it cool to be arrested. (Luigi)

Northern related how he had been threatened by a neighbourhood bully, and the police had done nothing. This was contradicted by Jo, who explained that both his mum and his neighbour would be appearing in court shortly *"They're gonna speak right in front of him, they're gonna show footage of cameras that my mum's got, doorbell and all that"* (Jo). This suggests that perhaps young people's perceptions or understanding of police processes is at

odds with their need to see immediate consequences for actions, or a need for clearer communication with young victims of crime regarding the progress of any investigation.

In a few cases, **individual police officers were conveyed as trusted adults** in the community “For this place... they’re like, more like your family. Like, not like related... but like your friends and stuff” (Amira). Bob recalled a local police officer greeting her whilst out and about, this simple interaction led her to conclude that the police officer was ‘sound’.

Voluntary Community Organisations (VCO)

The data from the focus groups suggest that the participants **felt positive about the VCO’s** they are involved in and the people they meet there. Participants relayed a sense of pride in their local VCOs, acknowledging what they are achieving for young people in their area and how they are bringing communities together:

It used to be in May which is when kid had not started yet going to school yet... used to bring a lot of things that we play and as a community... so everyone can, like, meet each other and make friends... and people will be there to help you with everything like you need, and there’s a lot of fun. (Eddie)

Everyone’s hanging round. Everyone’s near each other. And yeah, and like, this is just our place. (Amira)

Evidently Youth Workers were seen as **trusted adults** young people could share their fears with. In several focus groups youth workers remaining in the room were a reassuring presence for young people. Luigi recalled how he had seen the youth workers at Café Indie help other people in his peer group “they’re obviously making a difference. Which is good”.

Young people conveyed the wide variety of activities they could take part in, such as sports, skateboarding, animal care, music, cooking and growing their own food. Tanya conveyed how a group he attended gave young people the opportunity to try new things - “went to group yesterday and I ate crickets”.

When asked about the services they did not attend participants relayed discomfort with the people either running or attending the sessions. Vanessa conveyed feeling too intimidated by boys attending a local football session to go and join in “we would never play with loads of boys cos like we’re all a bit shit they’re like, better than us”. Tamara concurred that “they would make fun of us”. Participants gave examples of young people attending a group asking others for money or stealing other people’s belongings. Ethyl recalled a visit to a youth centre in Hull “but, I encountered people who I don’t really tend to mix with. With, like, criminal backgrounds and stuff. I just felt really uncomfortable” (Ethyl).

Participants in the eleven to sixteen age group conveyed distrust of the Childline service. They worried about consequences for their family and breaches of confidentiality as they evidently believe that anything they say is reported back to their parents:

Because you could go ring ChildLine, you could be scared about ringing them and, you could drop yourself, your parents in the shit. Or cos you, or you’ve gotta think to what you’re gonna say to them. (Northern)

I could tell them I fell over and then they’d tell my mum like I’ve just like, told them that I’ve been doing hardcore drugs for 5 years. No, I haven’t, I fell over. (Xavier)

Parks

The young people relayed that they use parks in and around their areas, either for socialising with their peers or for playing sports. They discussed which parks were renowned for being 'bad' parks or in some cases, were related to specific gangs. Participants conveyed having access to well-maintained green spaces for walking and play areas for children as a positive factor in their environment.

Participants related several examples where anti-social behaviour and vandalism had rendered their local green spaces unusable. Glass, litter, graffiti, and faeces deterred them from using the parks. Groups of people engaging in drinking or partaking in drugs were also conveyed as reasons for avoiding certain areas.

Mental Health

It was evident from the information shared in the groups that a significant proportion of the participants had experienced or were experiencing some sort of mental health concerns at some point in their young lives, with some participants having accessed a number of different services.

Participants relayed **difficulty accessing mental health services**, with long wait times for treatment, having to travel long distances from rural locations in order to receive support, or repeated appointment cancellations. Tanya relayed being "*put in CAMHS, never had a meeting got took out*" because he was not deemed ill enough. Having accessed a mental health service for support with anger management, Xavier developed a self-harming issue. When the service found out about this he was told "*we can't help you anymore, so we're gonna discharge you*" (Xavier). He also recalled a friend who had been waiting for a staff member to return to work to be able to access the medication they needed, without which they had been unable to return to school.:

My friend had a suicide, had two suicide attempts while in school, so he's done it school building and they've taken him out of the school building and he's meant to be getting put on anti-psychotics, anti-depressants and some sleeping pills. But, because there's this woman at young minds who's been on holiday for about three months now he can't get the meds so he can't go back into school. (Xavier)

Conversely, Mike relayed that where he lived, services were not difficult to access but "*they just don't work at all. It's basic stuff that just doesn't work, that they tell you. Or at least, or they just put you on drugs, which then don't work and can make you worse.*" (Mike)

Other participants relayed having received **poor quality services** when they were able to access them. Luigi explained that CAHMS stands for "*Can't Actually Help Mate Sorry*". Mike concurred that the service has a reputation for being unhelpful "*they will say oh you're having a rough time, have a bath, have a cup of tea, you'll be fine*" (Mike)

In speaking about different services available in their areas, participants conveyed there is a lack of understanding between services and young people about the therapies and treatments they are given.

It didn't really help me. They just like, we always used to do arts and crafts, but we never used to really speak about my situation. (Mary-Anne)

My two carers who I had, my carers, one said to me if you're gonna cut yourself at least use a clean blade. I was like, whoa, you're not meant to be saying that to me. And then another who didn't talk about my problems we sat there chatted, I thought it was a normal conversation, I was sat there like, I have mental problems, can we

*not talk about my weekend? Like get on with it, so it's not very helpful really.
(Xavier)*

In both accounts, participants relay how, what are presumably attempts by therapists to build rapport with young people are taken for irrelevant chit-chat. In the second, Xavier relates how advice from his carer to enable him to cut in a safer manner by using a clean blade was misunderstood. Clive reiterated this when she recalled her own therapist's suggestion for alternative self-harming behaviours with drawing pin:

One time they was like No don't cut your arms, stab yourself [with a drawing pin]... I will not stab myself, ever again. (Clive)

6

How can young people feel safer?

The young people taking part in the focus groups found it difficult to answer this question. Where they did have some idea of the end goal they wanted to achieve, such as ending violence or vandalism they were unable to articulate or explain how the goal might be achieved. In some cases, this was possibly due to age as younger participants perhaps lack the life experience to be able to conceptualise how they might achieve this aim. Some of the older participants demonstrated a lack of aspirations or belief that things could be made better. They related lack of will to effect change from local councils, politicians, and society at large.

In many cases it was hard for the groups to move on from talking about the problems they encountered in their everyday lives. Several of the solutions that were generated during the discussions were framed in the negative, as 'there is a lack of...' rather than 'we need more of...'

Ethyl felt that criminal justice systems should focus on **reform and rehabilitation** rather than punishment. She related how a criminal record, for something stupid a person once did because they were drunk, can go on affect their entire life. She also described how custodial sentences may only serve to teach young people how to be better criminals.

Conversely, harsher punishments were evidently viewed as desirable by other participants. Several older participants conveyed that police were ineffective in dealing with offenses by younger people- "you just get away with everything don't you, when you're a kid" (Gracie-Mae). Sarah suggested, perhaps not entirely seriously, that "For every bad thing they do just chop off a finger".

Participants suggested **changes to regulation** around substances; both Ethyl and Dave wanted to see more regulation around alcohol, while Tanya wanted less around marijuana. Xavier relayed what he saw as the consequences of legislation further restricting substances to young people, pushing them towards harder drugs:

I know that kids vape, and they're not meant to. But if they don't have the vape they're going to turn on to cigarettes and if you take away cigarettes they go onto weed. Take away weed... (Xavier)

At a more grassroots level, the discussions revealed a lack of **safe spaces for young people**. Participants related that the venues and organisations hosting the focus groups, which they evidently regarded as their safe spaces, had limited opening hours. In the case of the Beverley Youth group, they also lacked a venue of their own, meaning some weeks they had to find alternative locations such as a local playing field. Some of the participants were able to reflect on what these safe spaces might look like:

Just have like one big building. Even if it's just one block. Could have like gaming park, communal park like...Even if its communal, you can just have like what, pool tables, darts, just summat like that do you know what I mean? (Crazy)

It was a way to get them out of trouble, and they would go for a pound for three hours. There would be board games, pool tables, food, drinks, video games, and help centres. (Kira)

So I think what we, I think what we need is, is another club. That's open Monday to Sunday. Where you can just go chill out so. Because, or if you get angry you can go talk to someone. (Northern)

In an example of a project that is working, Gracie-Mae explained the **Ask for Haven** project in Northeast Lincolnshire. This project provides safe places for young people to go to if they need someone to talk to or safeguarding. Each venue displays a logo in their window so young people know it is a place they can go to for support and guidance.

Justin conveyed a less positive attitude towards the impact that safe spaces and diversionary activities can have on reducing violence near her. Once such places close their doors, young people in the area would once again be left to their own devices:

But they stay out 'til like, really late. So, obviously there won't be youth groups or places they can go opened and accessible to them, like really late. So, that's when they'll probably end up causing more trouble because there's less people out. So, if they're like, trying to break in somewhere or vandalise something, then... there'll be less witnesses out. (Justin)

Young people expressed a desire for one off **events and activities**, such as art days and music festivals, as well as more opportunities for **entertainment** near them *"We need just things to do. Things to see. So, we're not bored and violent."* (Clive). Gracie-Mae suggested supervised underage nightclubs or raves, separated into suitable age groups *"cos if I was sixteen I wouldn't wanna be raving with fourteen-year-olds"* (Gracie-Mae).

Keeping young people in school emerged from the focus groups as an important means of keeping young people out of trouble. Participants suggested making schools a more welcoming environment, making lessons more entertaining, and providing better support for pupils who are struggling. Justin wanted to see more of a focus on life skills and real-world problems such as money management. Interestingly, given how little they appeared to be used when participants were asked about the services they accessed, some participants suggested more after-school clubs.

Sarah conveyed how consequence systems in school further alienate already disengaging pupils, describing the disciplinary staff at her school as *"horrible"* and saying the pastoral team were *"not very nice either."* This was reiterated by Gracie-Mae who relayed, in very strong words, that schools should try and understand where a pupil's behaviour stems from instead of merely handing out consequences:

There's always a story behind every young person's backstory of why they don't want to do things. It's like they don't wanna go to lesson, why do they not wanna go to lesson? Not just because they're a little twat, because they can't be bothered, there must be another reason behind that. You should get to the bottom of it and fucking sort it out. (Gracie-Mae)

Stephano also questioned how effective school disciplinary practices are regarding bullies. He related how, in his experience detention and behaviour points only encourages bullying. One thing he did think was effective was police presence in school:

The police have come to school and they've done like assembly... about like, bullying and what are the consequences of it. And I do think the police should more of them because I think it helps. (Stephano)

Several participants called for **more effective policing** in their communities, with better response times and more visible policing on the streets.

A number of participants wanted to see **stronger communities** because “Knowing people are there for you anytime you need them. That’s good because you’re gonna feel safer” (JB). They conveyed the roles that reducing poverty, being considerate of other people, neighbourhood watch schemes and upstanders can play in building stronger communities. However, participants conveyed low aspirations of success due to the society-wide, inter-generational nature of such an undertaking:

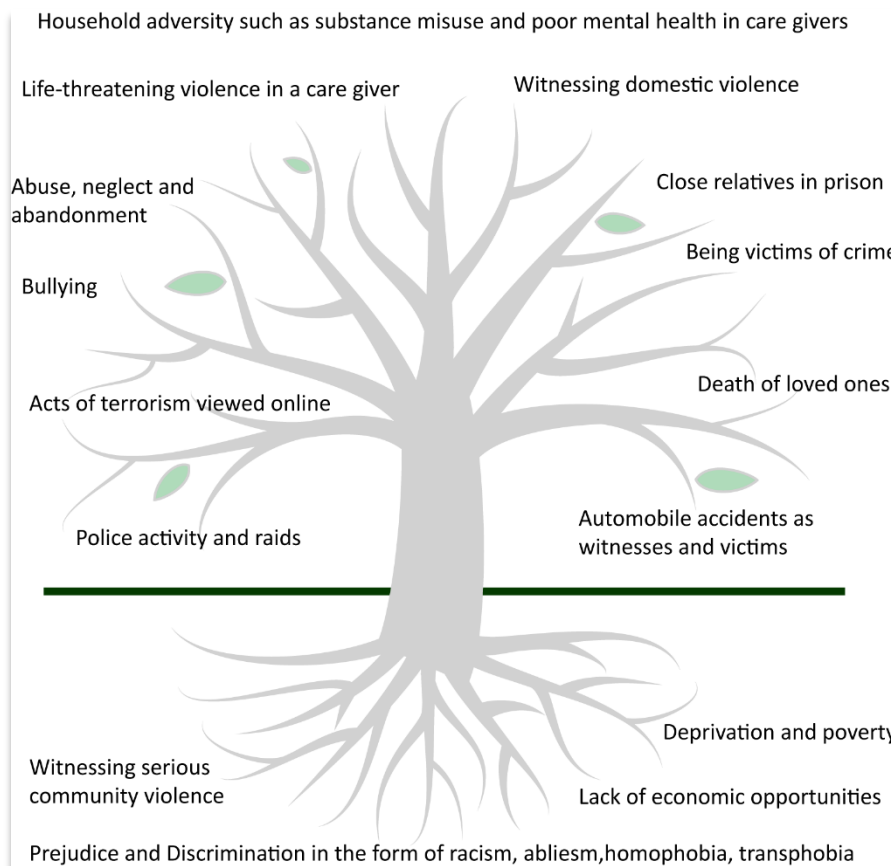
But even if you do try though yeah, even if you do try and like solve and help everything, I know it sounds a bit negative what I’m gonna say but even helping and that is just gonna make yourself even more drained when no one else want to do it with you.... Like it don’t just take a couple of people or a group to actually to do it, it takes like a whole society to actually make the change to make the next society change then the next generation. (Gracie-Mae)

Kids nowadays, obviously, they’re probably got some things from their parents. But then when the kids nowadays become parents it’ll get passed down to them and it will just a never-ending cycle. There is no perfect solution to any of it. (Janine)

7

Key findings and recommendations

1. The accounts from young people taking part in the study revealed a number of **Adverse Childhood Experiences** and **Adverse Community Experiences**, with several participants having experienced more than one. The evidence suggests participants lacked consistent and engaged care givers to enable them deal with such adversities in a healthy way. Young people’s need for protective relationships and to belong to a group can be evidenced in their vulnerability to exploitation and radicalisation, and formation of relationships with inappropriate adults such as drug dealers. Evidence of young people existing in a ‘survival state’ can be seen in their accounts of ineffective punishments and mental health interventions, as punishments, talking therapies and CBT all require a degree of self-reflection that cannot be achieved when cognitive functions are shut down.



2. Evidently young people taking part in the focus groups applied a **wide-ranging definition of violence** as they discussed many examples of both physical and nonphysical violence. Examples of physical violence included interpersonal harm to people, self-harm and suicide, harm to animals and property as well as sexual assault. Nonphysical forms included neglect, threats, sexual harassment, hate speech, discrimination, and prejudice.
3. Evidence from the focus groups suggests that, **among the younger age group, violence viewed online is perceived as less serious than violence seen in real life**, with several viral videos being related as compulsive viewing. Online violence became unacceptable when it crossed the line into bullying and the participants were not viewed as equals, and the perpetrators were seen to be ‘kicking down’, as is the case with the Kirra Hart video. Equally, violence between peers in real life was conveyed as funny or entertaining, unless bullying was again involved.

Viewing violent online content from a safe space such as a participants' homes evidently creates a distance to the harm involved for the young person viewing the clip. Conceivably this distance from the viewing material could lead to young people seeking out more extreme content.

While there is evidently a need for greater adult supervision over use of social media, difficulty arises where young people understand the technology better than their adult care givers.

4. The research found that although participants do have trusted adults in mothers, youth workers and teachers there was a **lack of positive male role models**. In particular the accounts from young people in Grimsby revealed a strong theme of toxic masculinity and a culture of violence. Even where participants related trusted adults, they were not seen as effective for dealing with issues such as bullying, or participants only trusted them so far, guarding against comments which could cause trouble for their families or trigger safeguarding procedures.
5. The data suggests that **building stronger communities where young people feel valued** would be an important factor in making them feel safer, although the participants themselves had few concrete ideas as to how this could be achieved.
6. The focus groups revealed a lack of confidence in public services such as police, schools, and mental health services. The police force was viewed as unavailable and ineffective, while individual officers were viewed more favourably. This raises the question as to **whether confidence in police could be raised through increased visibility within communities**.

The data suggests there is a need for **more trauma informed practice in schools**. Current consequence systems risk shaming and retraumatising pupils leading to disengagement and low attainment. The accounts revealed instances where staff have taken pupils' behaviour personally, rather than dealing empathetically with the situation and recognising that young people are doing their best with the tools they have available. **Moving from isolation and consequences to nurture rooms** where staff are on hand to help pupils regulate their emotions would retain the benefits to other pupils of removing dysregulated pupils from class, while enabling those young people to manage their emotions and return to class faster.

Where one mental health service cannot explicitly meet the support needs of the young person, there is a perception that they a **shifted 'pillar to post' to find the most suitable service**. There is evidently a need to better manage young people's expectations when entering therapy, and better communication between young people and practitioners regarding treatment plans and therapies.

7. The need for **more safe spaces for young people** emerged as a strong theme in the research. The evidence suggests that more resources or capacity, such as increased operating hours, for organisations and groups that already have existing relationships with young people would be more beneficial than creating new ones to address gaps in provision.
8. **Limited opportunities for entertainment and diversionary activities for young people aged seventeen to twenty-five** was also revealed by the focus groups. The high costs of leisure activities, combined with lack of job opportunities and low aspirations means young people are at risk of becoming isolated at home. A trauma informed approach tells us that young person's emotional age may be well below that of their physical age, suggesting this age group may also need safe spaces. Greater opportunities for volunteering or enrichment activities within existing employability schemes could be utilised to create these.

9. **Participants were evidently unaware of the numerous events, activities and services provided by local councils**, particularly during school holidays. The exception here was the younger Scunthorpe group, who referenced numerous examples through their close association with the Children in Care Council. This raises questions about how the level of communication, engagement and advertisement of services and activities varies across local authorities and different cohorts within communities.
10. Although sports featured heavily in the services and activities young people were aware of and used, more needs to be done to **make sport sessions accessible to girls and LGBTQ+ young people**, who avoid sessions due to lack of skills and body shaming.
11. Participants found it difficult to engage with the question of how their voice can be heard by the VPP, perhaps partly due to low aspirations and partly due to a lack of understanding of what the VPP does. One suggestion was for the VPP to go into schools for question-and-answer sessions, which would **raise the VPP's profile with young people** and make further engagement easier. Other suggestions included social media, face-to-face discussions, and suggestion boxes.