



NATIONAL YOUTH VOICE SURVEY 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

Listening to the voices of young people

In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, The Diana Award, with the support of The Big Lottery Fund, sought to capture young people's voices and bring them to the forefront of crucial conversations around strengthening communities. Most young people surveyed felt the public perceive them negatively and that decision-makers do not listen to their ideas, so this work is crucial in driving youth-led change.

Against a backdrop of increasing knife crime (Office for National Statistics, 2019), we wanted to understand the impact this was having on young people, and seek their opinions on solutions that could disrupt these patterns and improve the lives of young people and their communities.

Our findings are clear: feeling safe in their community is no longer a given for young people, and knife crime and gang violence is a source of serious concern.

Only 55% always feel safe in their area, with crime and gangs the most significant contributors, while engagement with local services is low. COVID-19 has brought feelings of unsafety to the forefront of all our minds and but is especially predicted to bring insecurity to young people and the UK's most vulnerable communities, so this is an issue that needs to be tackled head-on.

We should listen to young people's voices for solutions. Strong support systems and community connections were seen to be hugely beneficial to their sense of safety, while access to green spaces, a variety of leisure activities, fully funded youth-focused services and mental health support, as well as educational & mentoring programmes were considered good options for combatting feelings of having 'nothing to do' and for improving prospects within their communities.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

Listening to the voices of young people

To ensure all feel safe and connected to their communities, The Diana Award recommends investment in developing networks and spaces where young people can access personal and professional support, and centring youth voices in these community development projects so that services are appealing and utilised by young people.

At The Diana Award, we see how strong positive, supportive relationships can be forged through working together towards a common goal. No matter whether we're bringing together mentors and mentees to develop new skills, championing the progression of young changemakers around the globe, or supporting whole schools to shift towards a culture of kindness, we see the change that be achieved when young people have access to a safe and supportive network.

Giving young people the opportunities and tools to engage in youth social action allows their needs to be listened to while simultaneously building connections, increasing in agency, and improving their sense of self-efficacy. The youth social action project ideas showcased here demonstrate their desire to tackle the issues of violence and community tension and show that they have the passion and commitment to take the lead.

We hope this report uplifts youth voices and motivates the youth sector to work collaboratively with young people. We all need to invest time, energy and funds in coming together to create safer communities in which all young people can thrive.



YOUNG PEOPLE SAID_

Feeling unsafe

Gangs and knife crime is a major factor in feeling unsafe

Critical support systems

Family, friends and knowing where to get help increase feelings of safety

Mental health

Supporting better mental health is a key priority in improving life chances

Invest in public spaces

Parks, green spaces and leisure centres should be increased to give structure to free time

Using services

Although local services for young people are important they rarely or never attend

Funding services

More funding needs to be allocated to local services which support young people in particular

Public perception

They feel negatively viewed by the general public and that their voice is not heard by decision-makers

Voting age

Overall, the majority think they should be able to vote at 16



METHODOLOGY & DEMOGRAPHICS

Phase 1 – Sample Survey

We approached students in Birmingham, Leeds and London, who had completed The Diana Award Mentoring Programme, to complete a 12 question survey and give their feedback on the experience. Most had lived locally for more than 6 years.

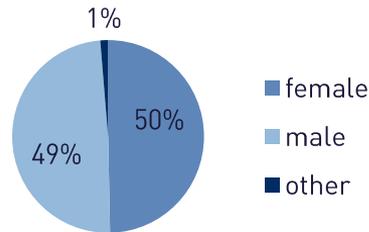
SAMPLE SIZES

Phase	N
1 – Sample	82
2 – Open	274
3 – Instagram	641
4 – Focus Groups	259
Total	1256

Phase 2 – Open Survey

Using this feedback we developed the survey and then opened it out nationally, using schools and social media to promote.

GENDER



Phase 3 – Instagram Survey

We then focused specifically on youth voice and used Instagram to poll more widely. At the time, The Diana Award had 20K+ followers, including young people, professionals and supporters.

AGE



Phase 4 – Focus Groups

Through The Diana Award Mentoring Programme, we engaged 10 focus groups in London schools, gathering opinions on the issues which affect young people most. We then trained these young people and supported them to develop their own social action projects, addressing the needs they had highlighted. The synopses of their progress have been collated by the project facilitators.



“We should not have to worry as we walk around our neighbourhood thinking we will get stabbed on the next corner. There should be no need for curfew as people should not have to fear for their lives and parents should not have to fear for their children's lives”

“There needs to be community support not only to those who are victims of knife crimes or drugs but the people that are behind that knife should be given the support that they need to make this community equal and safe for all.

All this community needs is for people to stand together young or old, black, white or dual heritage, straight, gay, trans or any part of LGBTQ – everyone should be equal and feel safe in the area they live in”



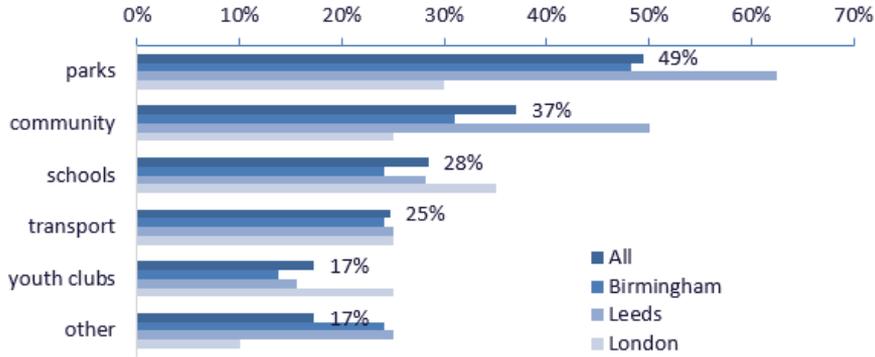
POSITIVES ABOUT LOCAL AREAS

Community spaces and connections

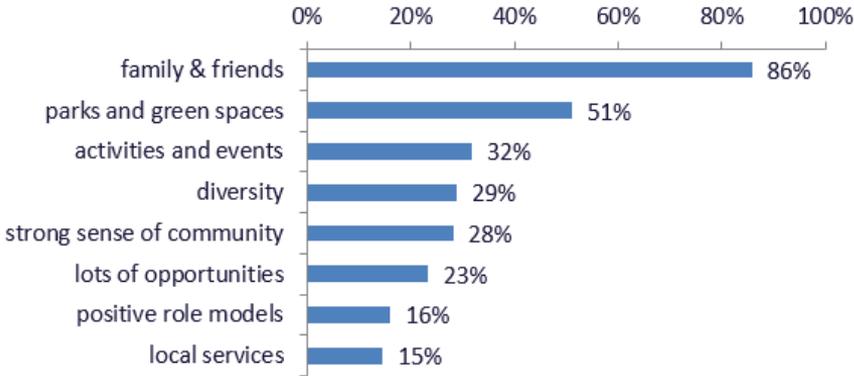
Positive interactions with people in their local area are highly valued by young people, whether that be at a personal level with close family and friends (86%, P2), or through a greater sense of community (37%, P1; 28%, P2). Mechanisms by which a sense of community is fostered, such as activities and events (32%, P2) or schools (28%, P1) were seen as positives as well.

In particular, young people also strongly value parks and green spaces within their local communities (approx. 50% across P1 & P2). This was especially recognised as a positive feature in Leeds, and much more so compared to the more urban area of London.

Phase 1



Phase 2



NEGATIVES ABOUT LOCAL AREAS

Crime, gangs and a lack of options

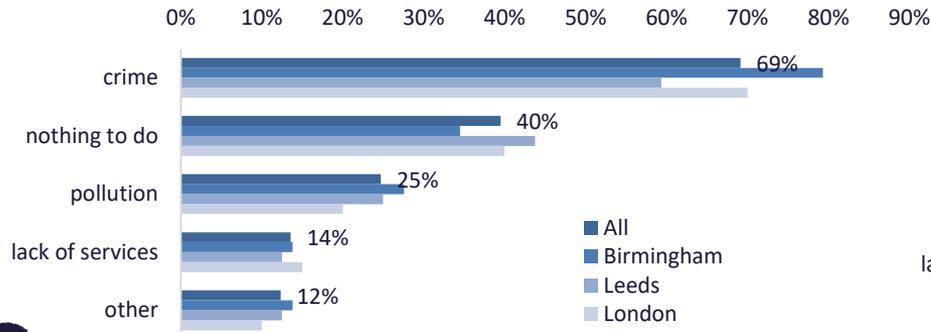
When asked what the worst things about in their areas were, young people overwhelming responded with 'crime' (69%, P1; 73%, P2) and 'gangs' (65%, P2).

Perhaps relatedly, in phase 1, having 'nothing to do' was also a significant downside of their area (40%), while in phase 2, half didn't like the bad reputation of their area, and a further third found the 'lack of opportunities' as a negative feature of growing up there.

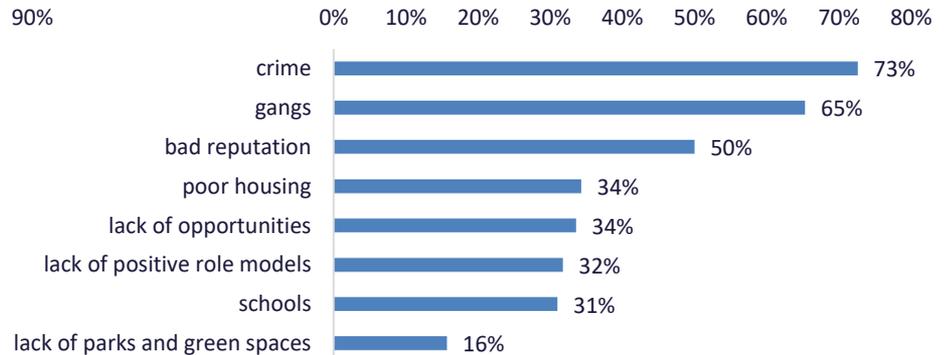
A quarter to a third of young people were concerned with the environmental features of their area, such as pollution (25%, P1) and poor housing (34%, P2).

A third also found that they lacked positive role models while growing up in their local community.

Phase 1



Phase 2



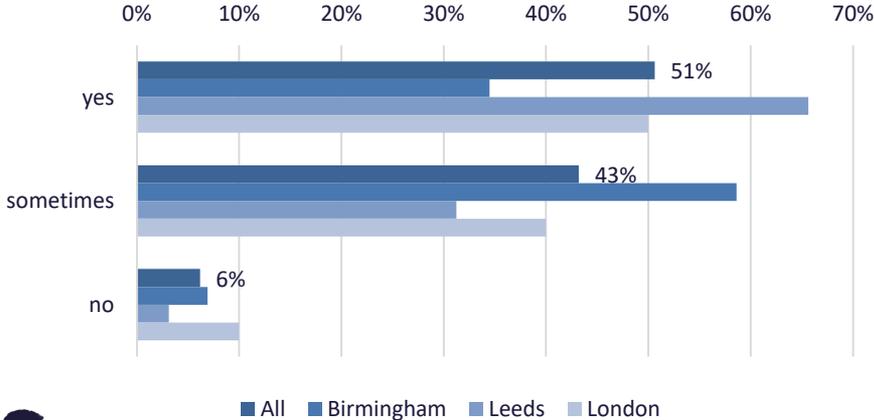
FEELING SAFE IN LOCAL AREA

Young people only feel safe “sometimes”

Only 51% of young people in the initial survey (P1) felt safe in their local area all the time, with 43% only feeling safe sometimes while 6% never felt safe. Young people felt most safe in Leeds, somewhat safe in Birmingham and least safe in London.

This pattern was seen nationally, as phase 2 showed that young people on average only sometimes felt safe.

Do you feel safe in your local area?



FACTORS INFLUENCING SAFETY

Crime and gangs vs. family, friends and community

When asked what makes them feel safe and unsafe, once again, the presence of criminal activities and groups were shown to be the most significant areas of concern for young people, with 76% feeling unsafe due to 'crime' and 65% due to 'gangs'.

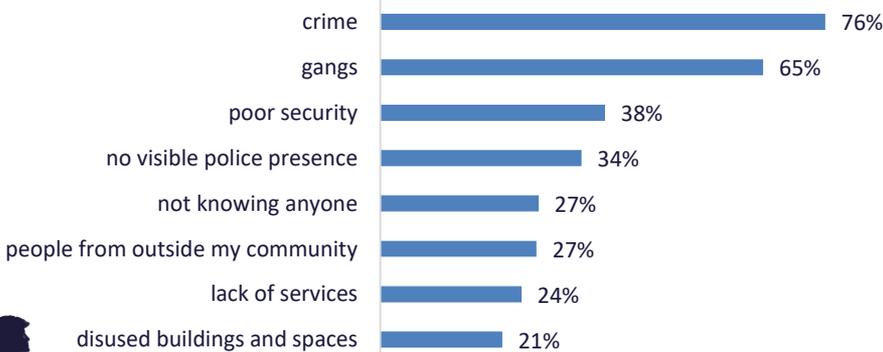
A third felt the police made them feel safe and a third found the lack of police presence caused them to feel unsafe.

In contrast, family and friends were strong contributors to feeling safe (74%), which may explain why they were one of the most positive features of their area. Again, a community feel was important, with familiarity with the local area (59%) and its people (54%) supporting young people to feel safe.

A third felt safe knowing where they could get help, while 1 in 10 felt security by having positive role models.

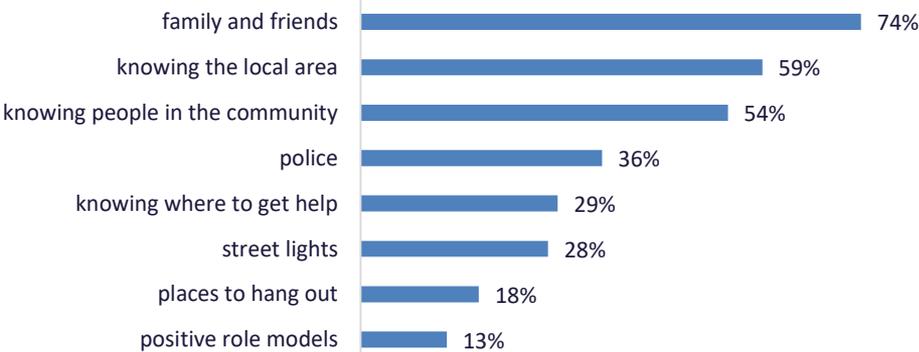
Unsafe

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%



Safe

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%



ISSUES IN THE MEDIA

Crime, climate and costs

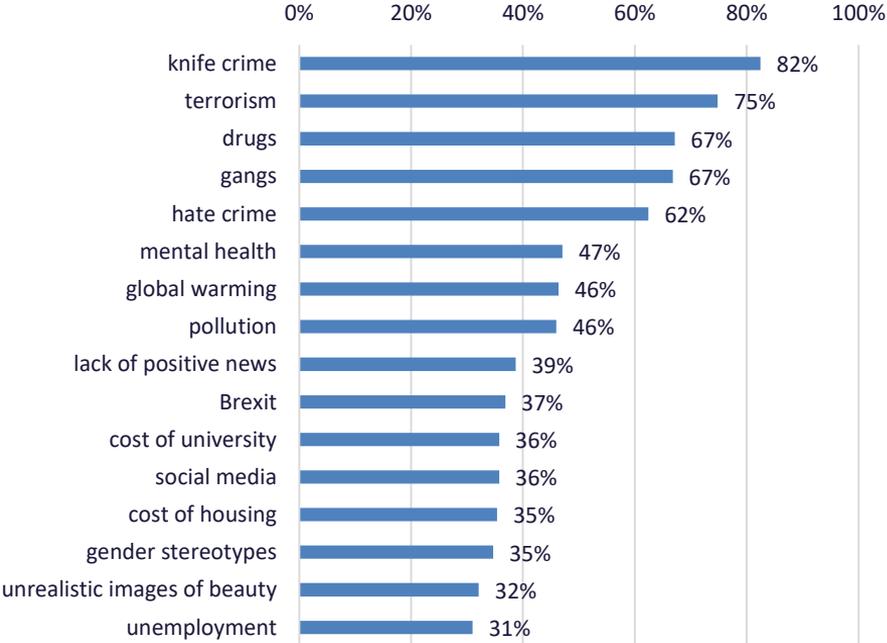
Before COVID-19, the top 5 media issues that young people worry about were all different types of criminal activity, which further supports the fact crime is a significant worry for young people. These worries expanded to include knife crime, drugs and gangs, as well as hate crimes and terrorism, and were reported by 62-82% of participants (3-4 in 5 young people).

Even before the pandemic, nearly half (47%) of young people were finding it worrisome to read about mental health in the media.

Environmental issues in the media were also significant causes of concern, with 46% worrying about global warming and pollution.

Around a third worried about issues related to work and finance, such as the cost of university (36%), housing (35%) or unemployment (31%).

Worrying About Issues in the Media



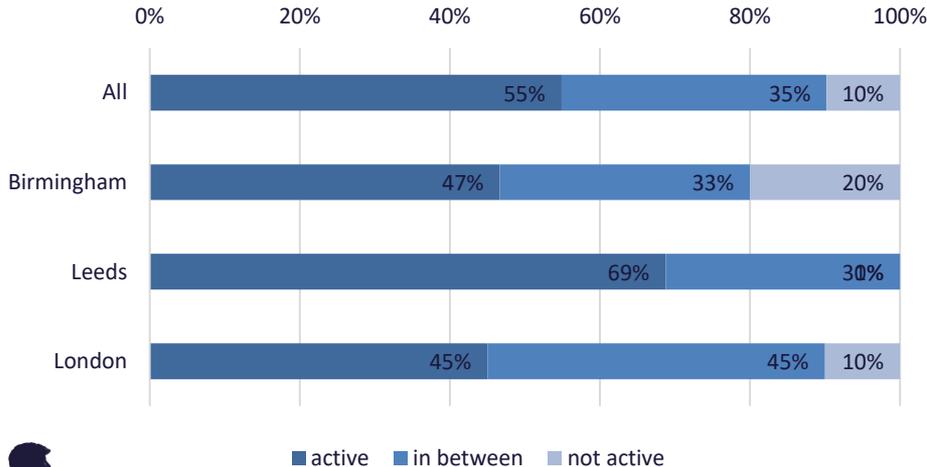
YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL LIFE

55% have an active social life

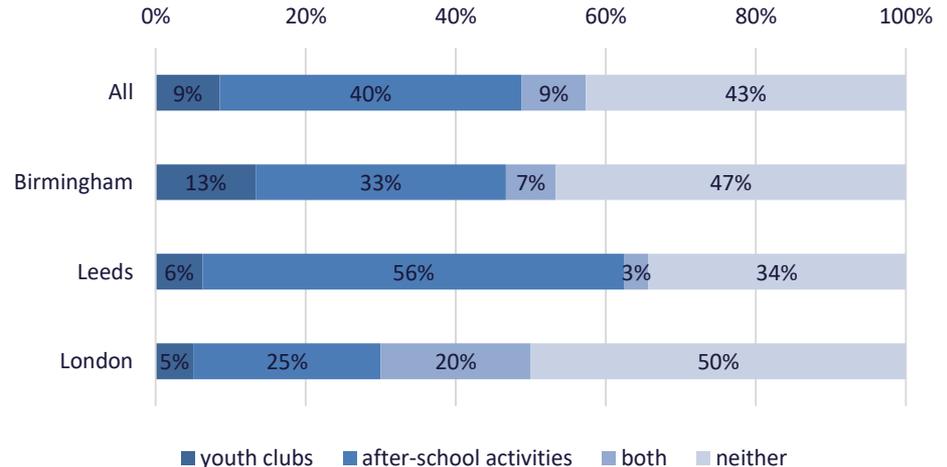
Despite friends and family being such a strong source of safety, just 55% of all young people in phase 1 reported having an active social life in their local area, with a third reporting it being somewhat active.

Few young people made use of youth clubs in their area, with more preferring to use after-school activities provided through their education setting. Still, 43% did not make use of either of these opportunities to socialise within their communities.

Social Life



Use of Activities



SERVICES USED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Few services utilised, except parks and green spaces

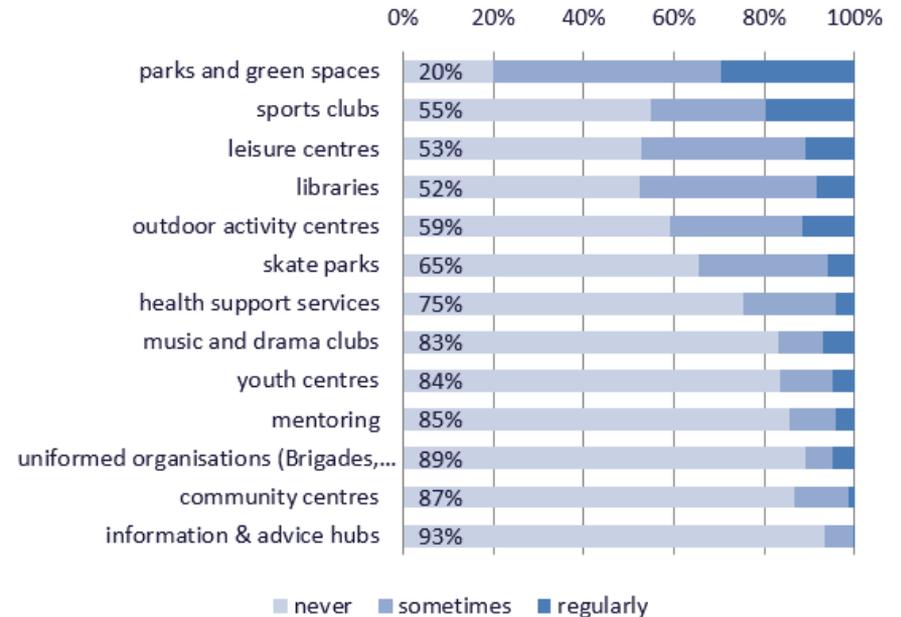
As 'parks and green spaces' was considered a strong positive feature of their local area, it is unsurprising that young people in phase 2 utilised these services the most (80% 'regularly' or 'sometimes'), further highlighting the importance of such spaces for young people.

However, overall use of local facilities was fairly low, with most never being used by 50-90% of young people.

In particular, youth centres and community centres are never used by 84% and 87% of young people (respectively), despite these being places where they could interact with and get to know the community – one of the factors that makes them feel most safe.

Similarly, despite the potential power of building mentoring relationships for feeling connected and safe within one's community, mentoring was only utilised by 15% of these young people.

Young people use...



SERVICES USED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Few services utilised, except parks and green spaces

These patterns may be explained, in part, by which services young people are aware of in their communities. Overall, awareness levels are generally less than half of young people, which suggests more needs to be done to show them how and where to access services.

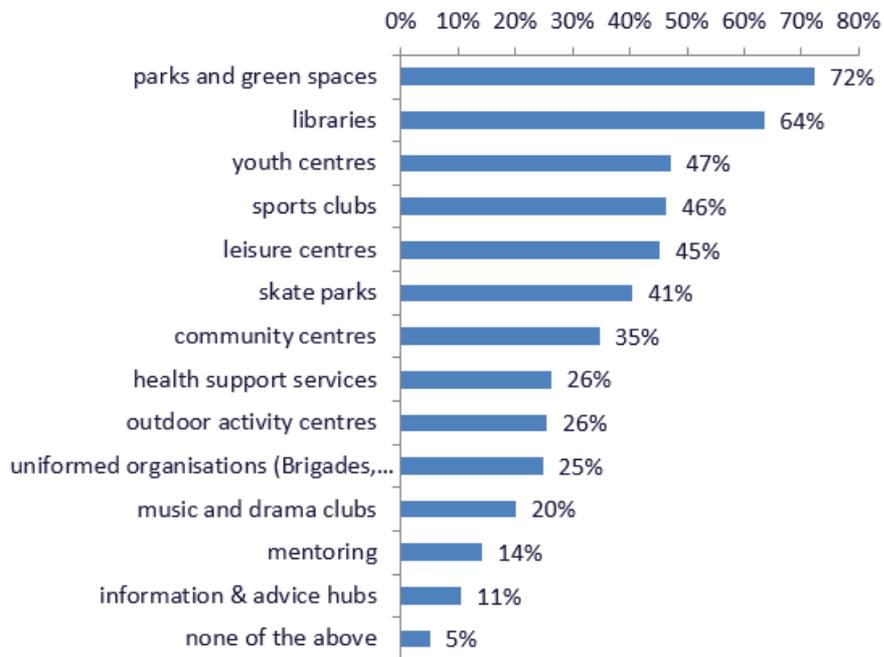
They are highly aware (72%) of the parks and green spaces available which in turn they use regularly, but are much less aware about opportunities for mentoring (14%) or information and advice (11%) which may account for why such support is so heavily underutilised.

The explanation is less simple for youth centres and community centres, who see awareness rates of 47% and 35% but uptake of only 16% and 13%, respectively. This may be due to a lack of promotion or appeal of these services.

Ensuring young people have awareness of and easy access to these opportunities is therefore key in increasing community engagement, and consequently their sense of safety.



Young people are aware of...



SERVICES TO SEE MORE OF

Leisure activities and health support

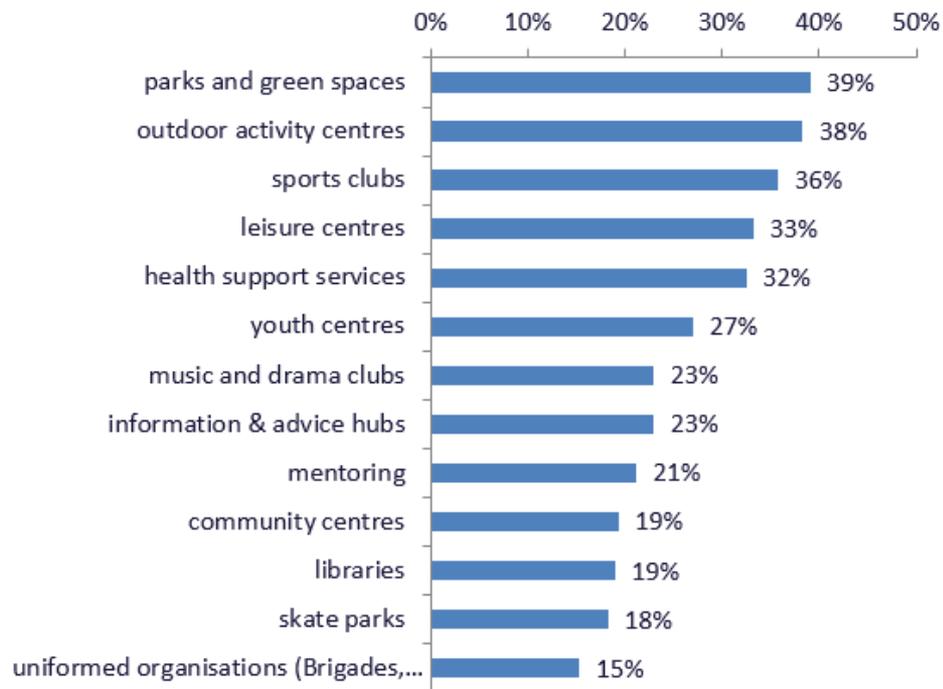
In line with their preference for using outdoor spaces and well as activity-based centres (sports, leisure, music and drama), these are some of the most common services young people that would like to see more of in their areas (with the exception being skate parks which showed less popularity).

When thinking about spaces for local people to come together for socialising and support, it is important to note that young people showed a preference for youth centres (27%) over general community centres (19%). On an individual support level, 1 in 5 young people wanted to see more mentoring services.

While 64% utilised their libraries, only 19% thought there should be more of them, suggesting there is somewhat adequate provision.

Importantly, a third felt there should be more health support services.

Young people would like to see more of...



YOUTH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Activities, outdoor spaces and youth centres

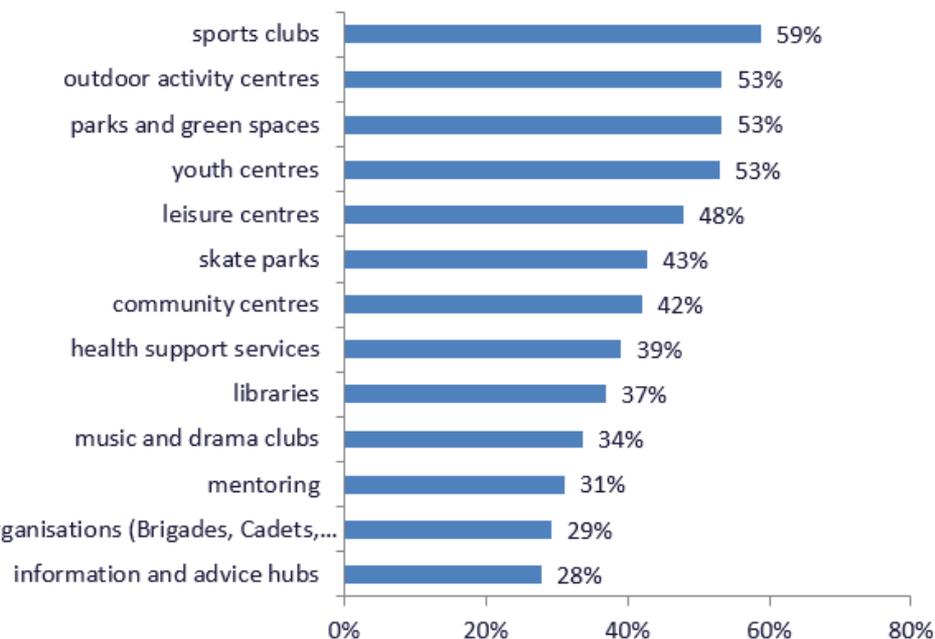
Similar services came out on top when young people told us what they think would allow young people to engage more in their local communities.

Group social activities, particularly being active and outdoors, were again considered the most important, this time with specific youth centres featuring more prominently (53%). Engagement seems to be more likely in these more informal settings compared to formal, uniformed organisations (29%).

Again youth-specific services were preferred over general community spaces (53% vs 42%), which supports additional phase 1 data showing 60% would like the government to increase funding of youth services, compared to 30% calling for increased funding of community centres.

For individual support, a third of young people felt that mentoring opportunities would help them to engage more within their local communities.

How to engage young people in their communities



IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

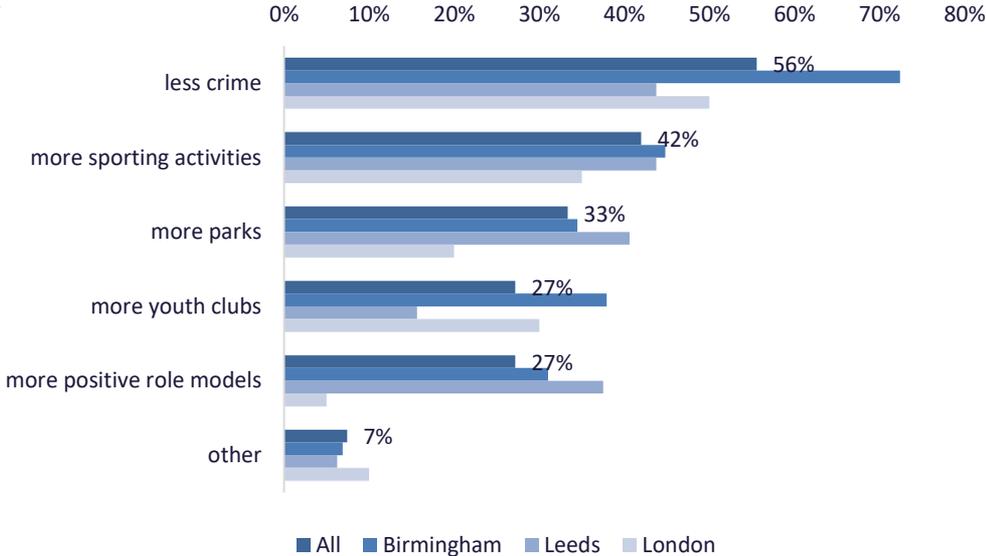
Less crime and more entertainment

When asked what they would change to improve the lives of young people, over half (56%) of P1 participants said that 'less crime' would bring this positive change.

Young people's call for more spaces for sports and leisure services in phase 1 seems to be underpinned by one of the main improvements phase 2 participants would make in the lives of young people in their community: more entertainment (P2: 57%). Alongside a change towards less homework (P2: 59%), this suggests a desire for self-directed free time that they can spend doing engaging and productive things.

Approximately a third in phase 2 would give more funding to youth services, as well as increase arts and mentoring programmes.

Changes to improve young people's lives (P1)



IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

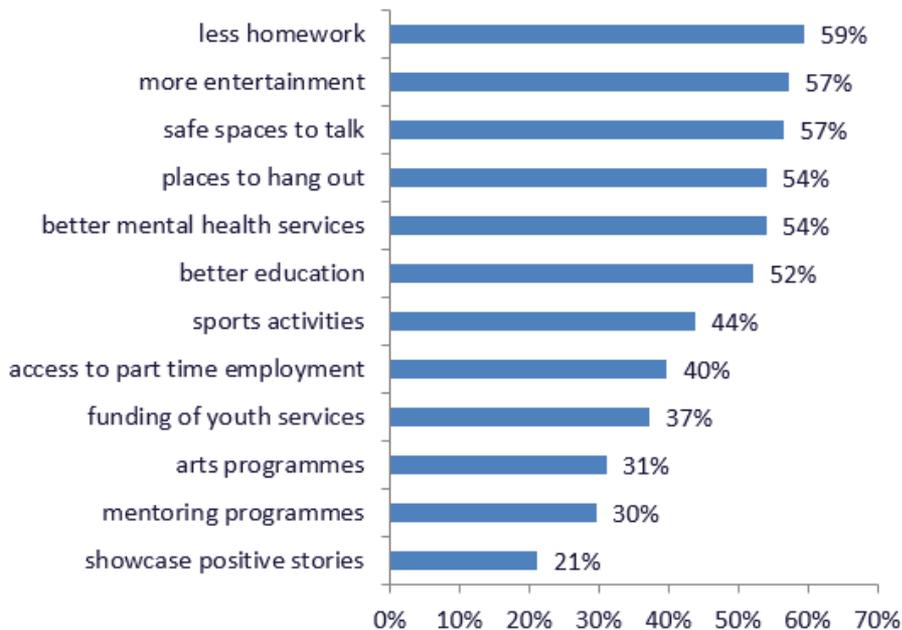
Better opportunities and increased support

Half of phase 2 participants (52%) would also push for improvements in education, and 40% for part-time work opportunities, suggesting a general dissatisfaction with the work and educational experience they are receiving and an awareness of the impact this has.

Another strong theme is improved support for mental health, both from professional services (54%) and within safe spaces to talk (57%). In phase 1, more than a quarter (27%) also said that 'more positive role models' could bring about positive change in the lives of young people.

With three quarters (74%) feeling safe with family and friends, and nearly a third (29%) feeling safe when they know where to get help, strong support systems are clearly critical for young people's sense of safety and belonging in their communities.

Changes to improve young people's lives



IMPROVING THE COMMUNITY

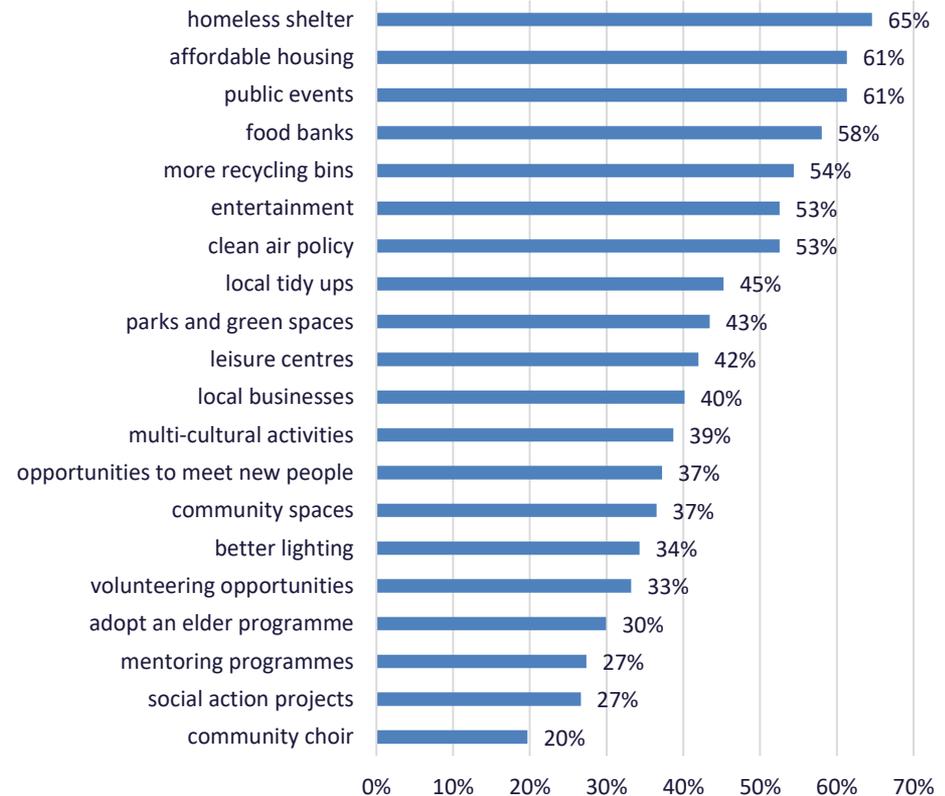
Housing, entertainment and the environment

When asked about what could improve the lives of those in their wider community, young people had a clear focus on improving the lives of those who are vulnerable and in precarious living situations, through initiatives such as homeless shelters (65%), affordable housing (61%) and food banks (58%). More than 1 in 4 recognised that social action projects could improve the community.

Again, entertainment came up as a top priority (53%), such as in public events (61%), or through outdoor (43%) and indoor leisure spaces (43%). Improving the environment was also seen as a mechanism to change the lives of the community, with calls for more recycling bins (54%), clean air policies (53%) and local tidy ups (45%) receiving support.

Opportunities to connect with others, through community spaces or on mentoring programmes were also championed by a quarter to a third of young people.

Changes to Improve the Community

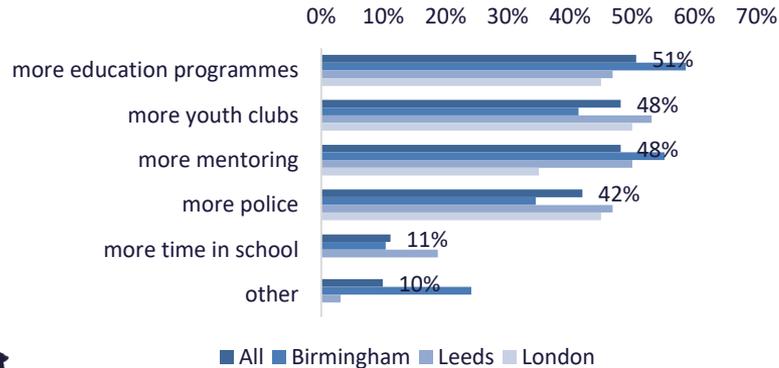


REDUCING YOUTH CRIME

Education, mentoring and policing solutions

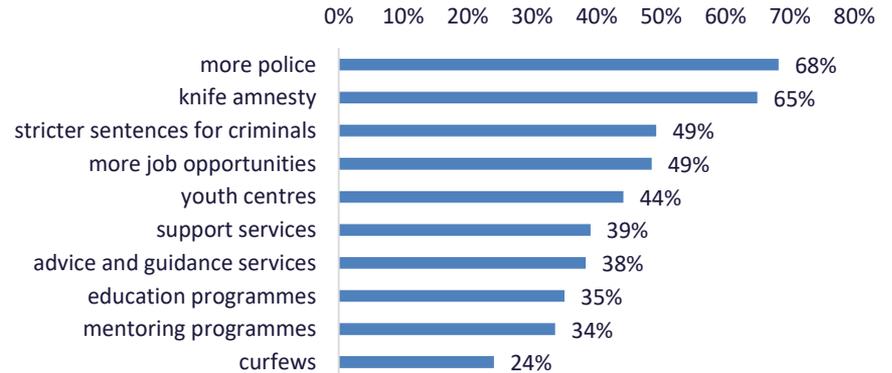
As knife crime and gangs were such strong sources of negativity for young people, we wanted to know what they thought would help to reduce crime among young people.

In phase 1, where participants had benefited from a structured mentoring programme, around half championed youth-focused education and mentoring programmes, as well as youth clubs, with a little less support for increased police.



In contrast, the wider youth population of phase 2 who had not yet experienced a dedicated mentoring programme, showed a preference for more legal solutions – through increased police presence, a knife amnesty and stricter sentencing.

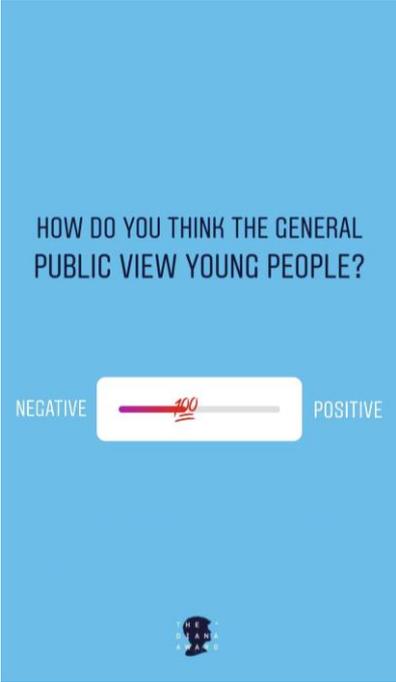
Still, half recognised the benefit of improved future opportunities in the world of work, and felt youth centres would help. A third were also supporters of the power of education and mentoring programmes.



PERCEIVED TO BE VIEWED NEGATIVELY

By the general public

Given The Diana Award's belief that young people can change the world, and the evidence of this provided by our numerous beneficiaries, we were sad to see that young people in both our Phase 2 survey and Instagram survey believe the general public view them negatively overall.



INCREASED YOUTH VOICE WANTED

Recognition of ideas and voting power

It is also disappointing to see that, on average, they don't feel like the ideas and opinions of young people are listened to.

This desire for youth voice representation may explain why the average suggested voting age in our phase 2 survey was 16, and why aged 16 just beat aged 18 on an Instagram poll.



AVERAGE

16
AVERAGE

DO YOU THINK DECISION MAKERS LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE?

NO SOMETIMES YES

A slider control with a red-to-white gradient bar and a grey square button with an upward arrow icon.

THE UK IS GEARING UP TO HOLD A GENERAL ELECTION ON THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

AT WHAT AGE DO YOU THINK CITIZENS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO VOTE?

16	18
52%	48%



YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION PROJECTS

Moving forward to increase community safety

In the final phase of the project, young people came together in groups to plan a social action project on a topic they felt passionately about and believed would improve the lives of those in their communities.

Mirroring the survey results, knife crime and gang violence was the most important topic that young people wanted to lead on. It was one of the shortlisted topics in 7 out of 10 groups, and was ultimately picked to be the focus of half of the projects. Other projects focusing more on mental health or bullying also recognised the positive impact that this strategy could have on reducing crime and violence in their communities.

To solve this issue, young people focused on raising awareness, sign-posting support and creating safe spaces for recreation and talking. These are all reflected in the survey results as well, where young people call for more investment in leisure activities and youth services.

These, and other projects on tackling bullying behaviour and promoting community cohesion all share a common thread of strengthening the positive interpersonal interactions within their local area, and ensuring that everyone in the community feels valued, listened to and ultimately, safe.



Group	1	2	3	4	5
Shortlisted topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More youth clubs for teenagers • Safe youth clubs • Homelessness • Supporting people to become more confident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knife crime & spaces for young people • Mental Health • Environment • Government Austerity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knife Crime and Gang Violence • Mental Health • Drug and Alcohol addictions • Homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gang violence & Knife Crime • Bullying • Littering • The journey home from school feeling unsafe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knife Crime & Gangs • Mental Health • Environment / Our future • Homelessness & Poverty
Social Action Project idea	<p>The ideas about youth clubs were voted two highest so they decided to campaign for ‘More safe youth clubs for young people our age’.</p>	<p>Prevention of knife crime through spaces for young people was top (with MH a close 2nd), so they planned to encourage their peers to come to the after-school boxing club, to channel their frustration or anger into boxing and feel mentally and physically empowered. They hoped would combat the need some young people feel to carry a knife.</p>	<p>The group agreed that poor mental health contributes to and is tied in with knife crime, drug and alcohol abuse and homelessness, and felt more could be done in school to raise awareness of the importance of looking after your mental health. They decided to create a display board in school with messages of advice and support for anyone who might need it.</p>	<p>Gang violence/Knife crime and Bullying received equal votes but the Lead Teacher influenced the decision to choose bullying. The group decided to deliver presentations during tutor time and ask everyone in the school to sign an ‘Anti-Bullying pledge’.</p>	<p>Mental Health won, so ideas included a mental health awareness day in school, movie club, and introducing de-stressing activities in tutor time. They wanted to use one of the school podcasts (usually written and delivered by the head teacher) so wrote a script and assigned roles. Unfortunately, a lack of support from the school and time before the Summer Holidays, meant the group could not complete their social action project.</p>

Group	6	7	8	9	10
Shortlisted topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gang Violence and Knife Crime Racism Homelessness Bullying & Mental Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knife Crime - The group were particularly focused on this topic from the beginning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knife Crime – chosen as some were personally affected i.e. feeling scared to walk home at night/ avoiding areas due to fear of being attacked with a knife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bullying – chosen through a facilitated game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Cohesion – chosen after discovering that they liked living in the borough and enjoyed the carnival which brings people together
Social Action Project idea	<p>Around Gang Violence and Knife Crime, their idea was a ‘social movement’, campaigning for more dedicated lesson time for PSHE and more secure knife bins in the local community. They explored the idea with their Mentors, through an activity around how choices you make when now affect you when your older. The group then presented their ideas on ‘How to keep our community safe’ to members of staff in school.</p>	<p>The group honestly discussed whether they could have a positive impact on knife crime, as they worried peers would not listen to them. They shared that many young people in the school are at risk of being involved in gang activity, but extra-curriculars and strong support network i.e. family can help. They decided to raise awareness and create posters to sign-post safe spaces and organisations that people could go to if they felt they were at risk.</p>	<p>The group wanted to raise awareness amongst peers about the consequences of carrying and/or using a knife to hurt someone, through a poster campaign, including information on how people can get help. With their Mentors they decided where to place posters to ensure they were visible to students. One student said that he “learnt that there are many problems in the community, and they should stop the violence.”</p>	<p>They worked together to create an anti-bullying workshop, to be delivered in pairs to forms groups and including an identification game around bullying behaviour and what students can do if they are being bullied. “I learnt that we are all passionate about bullying and want to make a change that in this programme.” “I learnt that bullying affects a lot of people and bullying also leads to being in a gang.”</p>	<p>The group organised an event called Hackney Speak Out which aimed to increase community cohesion and bring people together to discuss and highlight issues in Hackney. They set it up like a funfair, where the students, staff and The Diana Award could engage in student-led activities, ranging from a quiz to a rapping game about Hackney. The audience were given a raffle when they entered the space and prizes were given at the end.</p>

MOVING FORWARD

To increase youth safety in their communities

“Being part of this community means a lot to me and I want to make sure I do whatever possible to help young people and adults feel comfortable with who they are.”

Taken in the context of the rest of our findings, it is clear that social action projects such as these, which are youth-led and stem from the issues most impacting them, need to be supported and championed by all stakeholders.

It is critical that everyone, from teachers, youth workers, charities and governments, recognise the issues that young people care about, and then ensure their voices and ideas are listened to in the solutions.



