LEADING RESEARCH, DRIVING CHANGE

Youth insights and solutions from the Peer Action Collective

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund and the Co-op joined forces to empower young people to live a life free of violence and make communities safer and fairer for young people. The Peer Action Collective (PAC) is a ground-breaking network of Peer Researchers and Changemakers. Young people are in charge of asking questions and finding out what needs to happen to make their area a better and safer place to live in – and then turning that research into social action.

The Problem

The prevalence, perceptions and experiences of serious violence experienced by young people today should alarm everyone. 14% of teenage children aged between 13-17 have been a victim of violence in the last 12 months. 39% have been witnesses to serious violence in the same period. 69% of young people are changing and modifying their lives to keep themselves safe, with 14% resorting to staying out of school due to fear of what awaits them[1] . This is set against an estimated reduction in youth service funding or approximately £1.1bn between 2010/11 and 2020/21[2].

Serious violence is impacting a whole generation of children growing up who are bearing witness to or experiencing it. The impacts are manifest – for the children themselves, for their communities and society at large. It impacts the physical and mental health of children, their behaviours, their education and their life chances. The work of the Peer Action Collective has revealed in its rawest form, the stories and experiences of just some of these young people.

Why the Peer Action Collective

All too often, young people who experience violence aren't heard, and are not seen as co-producers of social action and change to create safer and fairer communities. But change won't happen if they're not at the heart of it. The Peer Action Collective has involved over 6,000 young people in research and social action on the issues they see as fundamental to making their worlds a safer place.

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1 Youth Endowment Fund, Crest Advisory (2022) Children, violence and vulnerability 2022

2 YMCA (2022) Devalued. Available: https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ymca-devalued-2022.pdf

What kinds of issues

The research undertaken by young people, who in turn engaged with thousands of young people who have been involved in, victims of, or witnesses of serious violence has yielded further insights into the complexity and inequality of experiences of young people. It is clear **social media** plays a profound and negative role in **normalising** serious violence for many young people who otherwise have not encountered it. It reinforces our understanding of how social media can escalate and sustain experiences of violence, leaving young people with **few spaces to feel safe**, let alone mentally well and happy.

Peer pressure is seen as a key driver of violence, while a strong **support system at home** is identified as vital in combating it. **Racism and victimisation of LGBTQ+ young people** were in evidence across much of the data uncovered by Peer Researchers. It is an ongoing and serious problem that Black children particularly, while being disproportionately higher victims of violence, are often cast as perpetrators, and receive less support than their white counterparts.

Research conducted by young people, with young people shows a sophisticated understanding of these issues. This makes the work of the Peer Action Collective distinctive both as a process, and as a route to different kinds of policies, activities and change. The Peer Action Collective want to see the following recommendations carefully considered and enacted:

1. 'We want you to deal with the small stuff.'

Young people want to see us stop ignoring 'low level' bullying and homophobic, racist and sexist remarks online or in-person.

2. 'We need access to and knowledge of opportunities that are accessible to us.'

The cost-of-living crisis has only increased the urgency of needing access to meaningful employment.

3. 'More youth friendly spaces would contribute to how safe we feel.'

Having access to appropriate physical space contributed to how safe young people feel. Young people need more places to go where they are not competing for space and are supported by adults that they trust.

4. 'Schools need to feel like safe spaces and should help prevent violence.'

Young people want their education system to help build a more tolerant society and prevent violence early on.

5. 'Mental health support should be easy to access.'

Young people need access to mental health services that are responsive and offer early intervention.

6.'Young people should feel safe online.'

Young people want to feel safe and protected, especially on social media. They want to know that they can report inappropriate content and it will be managed appropriately and quickly.

7.'We need you to consider the inequalities and lived experiences of young people to find solutions to youth violence.'

Young people's identities shape the way they experience youth violence and inequalities and must be recognised when working to reduce it.

8.'Young people should be partners in developing solutions to change'

Engagement needs to be genuine, with a commitment to implementing change.

What kinds of activities

The Peer Action Collective has a national audience and seeks to use this data and evidence emerging from young people interviewing young people to support and advocate for policy change at a regional and local level. From informing national violence reduction policy in Wales, to campaigning for a local model for violence reduction in Merseyside, young people are using their insights for change. There are some clear and simple recommendations within this report. But it also sees the power in young people forging their own solutions, through their own efforts and agency to make local changes, often in partnership with local organisations and creators. Creating projects and campaigns through their eyes, based on their experiences and through knowing what will resonate and have traction with people their own age.

Through the work of PAC, the range of social action projects has been phenomenal. From the professional production of music videos, films and podcasts, we've seen members of the PAC tackle issues of school exclusion, drinks spiking, sexual assault, domestic violence and championing positive alternatives to violence. They have created practical, locally rooted new activities for young people, such as setting up a refugee football club, and new safe spaces for Muslim girls to talk about their experiences of violence. There has also been useful mapping of existing provision of places and activities for young people to have a sense of what is available to them locally. Education workshops and awareness raising campaigns have also featured in the work of the Peer Action Collective, on topics of knife crime, first aid, educating teachers on how to spot the subtle signs of bullying and violence, and creating different spaces for the police and young people to interact and improve trust and relationships. The power of research and social action in combination has been clear, with those involved in the Peer Action Collective able to see that their voices, agency, ideas and influence are valued in tackling serious violence in their lives, and all our communities.

What next?

The breadth and depth of research findings and social action that have taken place across Peer Action Collective is unique and is already leading to change and action across communities. As a movement for change, the Peer Action Collective is set to continue into 2028, with backing from the Youth Endowment Fund, the Co-op and the #iwill Fund.

INTRODUCTION

Why does the Peer Action Collective exist?

Experiencing serious violence can be life altering for children and young people, their families and communities.

Research by the Youth Endowment Fund in 2022 found that 14% of young people have been a victim of violence in the last 12 months and 39% have been witnesses to serious violence in the same period. 69% of young people are changing and modifying their lives to keep themselves safe, with 14% resorting to staying out of school due to fear of what awaits them and 16% avoiding social activities[3].

While the lockdown years saw a drop in violence, some kinds of violence have now returned to pre-pandemic levels. The report also highlighted how experiences of violence are closely interlinked with other social inequalities. Young Black children are over-represented in the criminal justice system and are more likely to be stopped and searched, arrested and charged[4]. Two million children in England have not returned regularly to school since lockdown[5]. The rising cost of living unsurprisingly makes life harder for children in families on lower incomes[6]. This is set against an estimated reduction in youth service funding of approximately £1.1bn between 2010/11 and 2020/21[7].

Preventing children and young people becoming involved in violence involves understanding their experiences and building evidence about what works, so that appropriate and effective action can be taken. However, all too often, young people who experience violence are not a part of this conversation.

The Peer Action Collective (PAC) exists to support a move towards empowering young people to be an active part of research and change. PAC is a unique opportunity to engage young people in building evidence, not just of what works, but also why things work, how they work, and for who. The findings presented in this report offer an in-depth

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3 Youth Endowment Fund, Crest Advisory (2022) Children, violence and vulnerability 2022
4 Youth Endowment Fund, Crest Advisory (2022) Children, violence and vulnerability 2022
5 Centre for Social Justice (2022) Lost but not forgotten: the reality of severe absence in schools post-lockdown
6 Resolution Foundation (2022) Inflation Nation. Available: https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2022/03/Inflation-nation.pdf
7 YMCA (2022) Devalued. Available: https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ymca-devalued-2022.pdf

and unique insight into how youth violence affects young people across England and Wales and shares ideas and learning that young people themselves have developed to help reduce violence and improve the safety of their communities.

The Peer Action Collection has trained young people in peer research and supported them to create their own research questions, carry out high quality qualitative research and analyse their findings to inform the design and delivery of social action projects focused on driving change.

Peer Researchers have been supported by local Delivery Partners and national project partners. Across PAC 120 young people, aged between 16 and 25-years-old, have been working as PAC Peer Researchers. They have engaged with 4,600 participants (aged 10-20) who have shared their experiences of violence and what they want to see change in their communities through interviews, focus groups, surveys and creative workshops. PAC is focused on conducting research that supports young people to act and create meaningful change; to this end over 1,600 Changemakers (aged 10-20), have been working to take the learnings from the research process and turn them into meaningful action.

Young people have been supported to work together to understand what their research means and develop innovative social action based on their findings. Young people across England and Wales have developed campaigns, delivered workshops, written toolkits and information packs, they have disseminated findings in articles, at events, on social media, on billboards and showcases. Young people have engaged with schools, youth groups, MPs, councillors, police forces, prison service and museums among many groups. Creative outputs have included films, animations, spoken word events, music, dance and art installations. These examples highlight how young people have been making changes in their communities to make them safer and fairer places.

Why peer led?

Peer research is a participatory research approach that is about doing research with people, rather than to them. This approach strongly aligns with PAC's aim to empower young people and center their experiences in research and action. The fundamental principles of participatory research are that the subjects of the research become involved as partners in the process of enquiry, and that their knowledge and capabilities are respected and valued.

When people conducting research have experiences in common with the people that they are researching, it reduces the risk of misunderstanding and increases the likelihood that the findings will be relevant to the people involved. This can be seen in the way research questions are developed, how the research is carried out and how findings are understood and actioned.

In a practical sense, people may be more likely to engage in research and share their thoughts and feelings with someone who is part of their community and is seemingly more likely to understand their experience. This understanding can support the development of in-depth and nuanced findings. Campaigning and social action plans are more likely to be meaningful to young people when young people themselves have been involved in developing appropriate research questions, carrying out research and have been able to bring their worldview to the analysis process.

PAC Peer Researchers are young people who have been affected by violence. They have been trained in research and drew on that training and their experience to develop relevant research plans and connect with other young people in their community. This approach led to the development of research questions, findings and action that are important to young people themselves and are grounded in their world views.

The PAC peer research and social action approach recognises the expertise of young people and values their experience, it's based on the belief that young people are ideally placed to generate new knowledge to make changes that matter about the issues affecting them.

THE PEER ACTION COLLECTIVE PROCESS

Why does the Peer Action Collective exist?

The Peer Action Collective is a £5.2 million programme, which aims to give young people the chance to make their communities safer, fairer places to live. It is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund and the Co-op Group.

The Youth Endowment Fund

is a charity with a mission that matters. They exist to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. They do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

The Co-op

is one of the world's largest consumer co-operatives, owned by millions of members. They are a recognised leader for their community-led programmes, investing £117 million since 2016. They exist to meet members' needs and stand up for the things they believe in through the community missions of fairer access to food, fairer access to mental wellbeing support and fairer access to opportunities for young people.

The #iwill Fund

is made possible thanks to £66 million joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.

Proudly supporting youth social action
#iwill

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

COMMUNITY FUND

A number of partners have worked across PAC to support the peer research process, develop the technology to collect data at scale, support learning and help young people develop innovative, research-informed social action and campaigning activities.

The Young Foundation

is a PAC National Partner, who helped to set up the network, design peer research training, support fieldwork and analyse the research that young people produced.
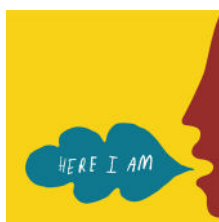
UK Youth

is a PAC National Partner that worked to bring young people and Delivery Partners together from across the PAC network, including the national PAC Conference.

Beatfreeks

have developed a curriculum to help young people in PAC tell their stories and create campaigns for their social action projects.

Here I Am Studio

provided a research tool that enabled young researchers to capture safe, insightful interactions with their peers. The chosen solution was **Fatima**, Here I Am's ethical research platform.

The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation

at the **University of Central Lancashire** (UCLAN) have partnered with **the University of East London (UEL)** as the PAC Learning Partner. They have worked with young people and Delivery Partners to learn more about the best approaches to conducting peer research and social action on youth violence related topics, as well as gather impact data.

PAC worked across England and Wales, with a lead organisation in each region below, often collaborating with a bigger consortium of local youth services. These partners supported the young people who are leading PAC. They include:

- **Youth Focus North East** in the North East

- **YPAS** in the North West

- **Young Devon** in the South West

- **Volunteering Matters** in the South West

- **StreetGames** in the East Midlands

- **Media Academy Cymru** in the Wales

- **The EFL Trust** in Yorkshire and the Humber

- **Birmingham Youth Service** in the West Midlands

- **Artswork** in the South East

- **High Trees** in London

Young people were at the heart of the Peer Action Collective and were engaged as Peer Researchers, Changemakers and respondents:

120
PEER RESEARCHERS

(aged 16-25) were responsible for designing, conducting, analysing and actioning research.

1,600
CHANGEMAKERS

(aged 10-20) were trained and supported to deliver meaningful research-informed social action and campaigning.

+4,600
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

(aged 10-20) were involved in PAC as respondents, sharing their views and experiences across the research projects.

What did the Peer Action Collective do?

The Training Model

A train-the-trainer model was used to deliver training to the PAC Delivery Partners. The Young Foundation trained Delivery Partners in research methods who in turn trained the Peer Researchers they were working with. Between July and August 2021 six sessions were delivered by The Young Foundation covering: skills and values of peer research, bias and active listening; co-creating research questions; qualitative research methods; ethics and safeguarding; trauma-informed research; and data protection. Later training, at appropriate stages, focused on social action and data analysis. Ongoing tailored support was delivered through monthly meetings hosted by The Young Foundation and UK Youth for each Delivery Partner between July 2021 and December 2022.

Pilot Project

Between November 2021 and January 2022 Delivery Partners and Peer Researchers were supported to design and conduct pilot project fieldwork to trial new methods, consider the ethics of their research, build their research confidence and put training into action. It also provided an opportunity to scope topics of interest and explore local relevance for the main research project.

Through the pilot, researchers and Delivery Partners were able to test the scripting and data collection options available on Fatima - the tech data collection tool used across the research. Fatima was designed to create a safe and comfortable research experience, the Fatima App was created by Here I Am to enable Peer Researchers to conduct in-person research on the go or remotely feature, via a phone call in the app.

Main Project

In early 2022, Peer Researchers were supported to analyse their pilot project findings and draw out key themes, quotes and areas of interest for further exploration. Groups developed plans for further research and social action from their findings.

Each partner completed an ethical review process reflecting on their research focus, methods, participant recruitment and any ethical risks/concerns alongside mitigation strategies. Each group shared an ethical review form with the Young Foundation and received feedback from a member of the Young Foundation and a member of the Young Foundation's Youth Peer Research panel.

As part of this review, and as part of their usual local practice, all young people and Delivery Partners developed robust local safeguarding systems for young people engaged in the research and action. This included providing support mechanisms around revisiting traumatic or triggering experiences which could arise when participating in projects centring on youth violence.

Research panel

Fieldwork began for most Delivery Partners between March and April 2022. The research and action developed by Peer Researchers is detailed, by Delivery Partner, in the following section. Young people carried out one-to-one interviews; in-person, by phone and online, they organised focus groups and developed workshops, events, creative sessions and qualitative surveys.

Research quickly identified areas to focus action on, and in turn action supported greater research engagement and development. Young people worked on a wide range of different questions, exploring aspects of youth violence that mattered to them.

Research fieldwork

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Social Action

Social action and campaigning work were supported throughout the process by the Young Foundation and Beatfreeks. Delivery Partners were supported to recruit dedicated Changemakers from Summer 2021 onwards. In total, 1,600 young people were involved as Changemakers by January 2023.

From the start, the Changemaker role was devised to ensure a diverse and large group of young people could get involved in innovating solutions to the insight identified in the research process. Changemakers were involved either on a one-off basis or through longer-term projects.

As the programme unfolded, Peer Researchers grew in their passion and commitment to ensuring that the insights they uncovered translated into meaningful solutions to prevent youth violence as well as address wider issues and inequalities facing young people in England and Wales. As a result, many Peer Researchers delivered beyond their roles to turn their research into social action and stay in a leadership position for the social action phase of the project. Young people involved on longer-term projects received social action training to build their confidence and develop skills.

Social action led by Changemakers across England and Wales largely focused on 3 strands: education and awareness raising regarding youth violence, engaging local stakeholders such as community organisations, police and policy makers and community building events.

Data Analysis

A process for analysing data was shared with Delivery Partners at an online training event. Peer Researchers were working with large numbers of interviews, focus groups and qualitative surveys and exploring multiple and diverse research questions; an important consideration was to devise a system that could support the identification of hyper local insights and nationally applicable findings. The approach developed was drawn from the six stages of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke. Each peer research team was asked to come together as a group to work through a process that supported them in reviewing and analysing the research data they had collected.

Peer Researchers were asked to share three to five themes from their data analysis with the Young Foundation. Findings were then explored collectively at a national event where Peer Researchers came together for a residential in Summer 2022. At this event findings were shared and an interview study was developed with Peer Researchers to explore the themes identified in detail across all regions. These interviews were carried out by Peer Researchers across PAC.

Following this, all PAC data (from the collective project and each individual partner) was analysed centrally by the Young Foundation. To enable analysis at a whole project level, data from across peer research projects, and the subsequent collective interview study, was reviewed, transcribed and imported into an analysis platform, **Discover.ai** by the Young Foundation.

The longlist of themes developed by Peer Researchers was used as a framework to guide central analysis. This process led to the identification of key themes across the data which can be found in Section 4 of this report.

DELIVERY PARTNER JOURNEYS

This section shares the research and social action carried out by each Delivery Partner involved in PAC. In the following pages we outline the research question and methods, findings and social action undertaken by each partner.

This is not an exhaustive account of research findings or social action but is presented as a snapshot to demonstrate the work undertaken by young people in each PAC regions and illustrate how their research findings led to social action.

EAST MIDLANDS,

StreetGames

StreetGames worked with several sub delivery partners to produce research on youth violence: **Waterfront**, **Freedom Foundation**, **St. Matthews Big Local**, and **Go-Getta**

Research Questions & Methods

The role of social media: Peer Researchers from Waterfront, Freedom Foundation and St Matthews Big Local conducted 129 interviews asking young people aged 11-25 about their views on social media apps, youth violence and if there is any relationship between the two. The final question asked respondents if they thought there was anything that could be done to prevent youth violence.

Lived experience and understanding: Peer Researchers from Parkside High conducted 90 interviews with young people aged 11-25 asking about their personal experiences of youth violence, what they knew about it already and how it could be prevented.

Findings

The role of social media: Young people are overwhelmingly exposed to violent content through social media apps. Viral videos of fights, stabbings and in a handful of interviews, suicide, meant that young people across the research had witnessed violence online even if they may not have encountered it in real life. Respondents largely felt viewing violent content did not influence them, but it would influence their peers, although Peer Researchers reflected this may be because respondents would not want to admit if social media had influenced them to behave negatively. Respondents suggested social media distorted young people's ability to resolve conflict in a healthy way because of a lack of official repercussions if threats and

verbal abuse took place online as well as becoming desensitised to a constant stream of violent content. This meant that confrontations online are constantly sustained and, as a result, can rapidly spill over into violence when two people who are having a dispute meet in real life.

Lived Experience and understanding: The most common experiences of youth violence mentioned by respondents taking part in Parkside High's research were bullying (physical and verbal) and knife crime. Respondents talked at length about how a lack of safe spaces for young people to go to that are facilitated by trusted adults meant they were being targeted by organised criminal groups, where they may be pressured into carrying a knife or participating in knife crime as part of an 'initiation'. Many respondents also recognised that marginalised groups of young people- such as disabled people- are more likely to be targeted by youth violence.

Social Action

To address what they felt was a trivialisation of youth violence through widespread violent content on social media, Go-Getta in Leicester have supported Changemakers in the professional production of **music videos** and **rap** that raises awareness of the effects of youth violence, with the aim of dispersing this on social media to challenge the glorification of violence. Three other delivery organisations have also created music videos championing positive alternatives to violence as well as stressing the wider importance of being able to address negative emotions in a healthy way.

To address issues raised in the research regarding a lack of safe spaces for young people to socialise, which could put them at risk of being targeted by organised criminal groups, Changemakers at Parkside High cleaned and refurbished a run-down multi-use games area in Derbyshire. The wider availability of free sports facilities is hoped to be instrumental in enabling young people who may not have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities due to the cost-of-living crisis develop their skills in relation to a specific sport or activity. In Loughborough, Changemakers led a photography and **social media project** to explore the town's history and their identities, challenging a perceived negative misrepresentation of young people in the area.

Finally, in response to the finding that youth violence disproportionately impacts disabled young people as victims of youth violence, Chesterfield FC Community Trust Changemakers organised and delivered a Christmas disability sports event for local disabled young people and the wider community. This provided fun engagement and raised awareness of the harassment, bullying and social isolation disabled young people spoke of frequently experiencing.

EAST OF ENGLAND,
Volunteering Matters

Peer Researchers from **Volunteering Matters** decided to conduct research across two different topics. The research took place across Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex. Peer Researchers liaised with **Ipswich Town Football Club** and **Christchurch Mansion** to deliver their social action projects.

Research Questions & Methods

LGBTQ+ Experiences of Violence:

Peer Researchers from East England spoke to 159 young people aged 10-25 in interviews and focus groups about how they believed youth violence impacts young members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Causes of Youth Violence:

The other group of Peer Researchers chose to focus on what young people believed to cause youth violence, personal experiences of youth violence and what young people feel would prevent youth violence occurring. They spoke to 256 young people aged 10-25 using interviews and focus groups.

Findings

LGBTQ+ Experiences of Violence: There was a consensus throughout the data that education on LGBTQ+ relationships and sex education needs to be improved. Respondents consistently stated they believed homophobic and transphobic behaviour was normalised because of a lack of understanding of what it means to be LGBTQ+ as well as the tendency for mainstream media to encourage the 'othering' of young, LGBTQ+ people. A majority of respondents felt youth violence in the form of physical attacks and hate speech was experienced more frequently by LGBTQ+ young people and not taken as seriously by the relevant authorities.

Causes of Youth Violence: Many of the young people that Peer Researchers spoke to believed youth violence mainly concerned knife crime, and that this was motivated by organised criminal activity and the sale of illicit drugs. However, Peer Researchers were quick to note that some young people's perceptions of youth violence were largely based on headlines across mass media rather than personal experience. Other common forms of violence that respondents had personal experience with were physical fights and bullying, as well as some experiences of gender-based violence. Young people felt that the main causes of youth violence were a lack of safe spaces to socialise with their peers, feeling powerless to enact political and institutional change, poverty and social media. Characteristics such as race, gender and identity all play a role in determining where young people feel safe.

Social Action

In response to the lack of safe spaces to socialise identified by young people in the research as a central cause of youth violence, particularly marginalised groups of young people, two Changemakers in Ipswich who were previously refugees, partnered with Ipswich Community Football Club to create the community's first refugee football club. This has given young refugees in the area the opportunity to get involved with football at grassroots level and provide them with a vital safe space to socialise in the hope that this will challenge racist attitudes towards refugees identified in the research. Through this work, the team now have a space at local 5-aside centre Goals and train every Monday evening. ITFC have also provided a coach for the team, and the team is hoping this arrangement will be extended.

In response to the lack of education regarding the LGBTQ+ community, local Changemakers have designed and created an educational workshop to be delivered to young people of secondary school age in the local area and are currently organising delivery logistics. Changemakers hope this will challenge the common stereotyping and prejudice against LGBTQ+ young people identified in their research and promote equality for LGBTQ+ young people at secondary schools, leading to a decrease in hate speech and crime. Changemakers from Volunteering Matters have been developing a podcast 'Teenage Talks' which will give young people from different backgrounds the opportunity to share their views on current issues and debates in the U.K, addressing the lack of opportunity for young people to feel heard by UK institutions and policymakers.

Changemakers are also developing a 'PAC Exhibition' which will showcase the Peer Researchers individual and collective journeys throughout PAC using local artwork, videos and spoken word poetry and how their research led them to create sustained, impactful social action. The exhibition will take place at Christchurch Mansion from the 25th March 2023.

NORTH EAST,

Youth Focus North East

Youth Focus North East (YFNE) led the North East PAC working with local organisations to facilitate several projects exploring different aspects of youth violence. These organisations were: **Youth Focus North East**, **NE Youth**, **Mortal Fools**, **Linx Youth Project**, **Actes**, **Jack Drum Arts**, **Bright Futures**, **Northumberland Pride**, **Children North East**, **Auckland Youth and Community Centre**, **The Key UK** and **Northumbria Coalition Against Crime**.

Research Questions & Methods

Peer Researchers across the organisations investigated five different aspects of youth violence: links with drugs/alcohol, racism, gender, cyberbullying and education (focusing on exclusions). They used one-to-one interviews, focus groups and workshops to conduct research with over 200 young people.

YFNE, North East Youth and Mortal Fools worked to investigate the impact of drugs and alcohol-use among young people on youth violence and how this could be tackled. Linx Youth Project, Actes and Jack Drum Arts explored young people's experiences of racism, including working with refugees to understand their experiences of youth violence, investigating if racism is a factor. Bright Futures, Northumberland Pride and Children North East explored the impact of gender on youth violence and where there are opportunities to address this. Auckland Youth and Community Centre explored the role of social media in youth violence and how cyberbullying might be linked to youth violence, as well as asking respondents for advice

to give to victims of cyberbullying. Northumbria Coalition Against Crime investigated education and the impact of school exclusion as both a driving factor and a consequence of youth violence.

Findings

All the research projects by North East PAC produced insightful findings around their focussed subjects, which were identified as factors of youth violence. However, a few themes were identified by Peer Researchers as underpinning the various aspects of youth violence.

Across subjects, Peer Researchers identified that young people felt lack of education was a large issue, particularly on drugs/alcohol, sexual violence, and racism/cultures, and that there was a desire to know more or to have known more about these topics and youth violence, feeling that more education would have a profound impact on young people's trajectories in life. Mental health as a cause and consequence of youth violence was also brought up across projects, with insight into the mental health impact of school

exclusions as having an especially significant impact on involvement in youth violence, as well as the mental health impact of low self-esteem/ worth in victims of gender-based violence or harassment and racism. Finally, peer influence was prevalent across the subjects, for instance in cyberbullying where it was observed that cyberbullies used pressure to grow the scale of the cyberbullying or with excluded students who expressed they faced more negative influences and higher social pressure in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

Social Action

The North East PAC created many social actions across the region to address the different aspects of youth violence they focussed on, including a large event to bring together North East PAC and showcase their work to stakeholders.

One example of their social action is a short educational video produced to raise awareness of spiking and the creation of information packs on drugs and alcohol distributed in schools, aiming to challenge the stigma around drugs and alcohol as well as taking a proactive approach to harm reduction if young people do encounter drugs and alcohol. In another example, a Peer Researcher with his own experience of exclusion produced a **film** on school exclusion with young people in a PRU to be shown in mainstream schools. This aims to challenge negative stereotypes of young people who are excluded and highlight the residual inequalities they may face as a result of exclusion, advocating for fairer treatment of those struggling with behaviour at school. An example of social action developed in response to gender-based violence included a project on violence against men which sought to challenge the widespread, societal stigma of male victims identified in the research, and a project to educate people about internalised misogyny and identifying sexism, hoping to create better gender equality in UK secondary schools. Another example is an event held to increase cultural awareness and cross-cultural unity, and a song and animated music video created about the refugee experience and desire for peace and acceptance.

WEST MIDLANDS,
Birmingham Youth Service

The Birmingham Youth Service (BYS) PAC worked across the various youth spaces that come under their service as well as working in some Birmingham schools.

Research Questions & Methods

BYS PAC focused their research on determining the causes and drivers of youth violence and asked what deters young people from becoming involved in youth violence, seeking to answer the following question: What is it that children and young people experience that influence them to become involved in youth violence? BYS aimed to use this research to identify supportive models of prevention that could be replicated to further prevent becoming involved in youth violence. They engaged 306 young people aged 11 to 25 through a combination of one-to-one interviews and small focus groups.

Findings

The BYS PAC research identified that factors driving youth violence across social relationships included peer pressure or coercive behaviour, as well as family relationships and home environments, which hold a lot of weight in determining a young person's future path. Additionally, BYS noted the importance of failing support systems particularly in the form of school exclusions, which were described in the research as a poor response to struggling students pushing them further toward a negative path. Across the themes, BYS found that young people felt there were a lack of positive role models across social, family and school settings, which they felt was a significant factor. These findings suggest that this could lead to young people becoming exposed to and eventually involved in youth violence. Similarly, the findings describe a lack of support for young people across school and this was particularly illustrated in the focus on school exclusions as a failure to adequately support young people.

Social Action

BYS focused their social action on positive community relations, awareness, education and support. In response to the lack of positive role models and young people in schools feeling that positive actions go unrewarded, BYS launched the Birmingham Heroes and Sheroes Award, which identifies positive role models in the community in order to recognise and celebrate their work, incentivising young people to become more proactive in making their community safer as well as encouraging more widespread community engagement with young people. Changemakers researched these local heroes, nominating them and presenting them with awards at a recognition event, sharing their inspiring stories with other young people.

BYS at Concord Youth Centre also launched a podcast for young people to share their experiences of growing up on three estates in Birmingham, which began as a way to share experiences and for young people's voices to be heard but evolved into an opportunity to bridge gaps in the community, bringing together young people and other community members, including police officers, business owners and teachers, to discuss the issues at hand, ensuring young people's voices were not left out of discussions on how to improve their community. One Changemaker shared how this experience helped her shift her own perspectives and existing views on police and hoped that it would do the same for other young people in the community.

BYS created several awareness campaigns such as the Clifton Road Youth Centre's youth brand with an anti-violence message, responding to young people's concerns that too many people carried knives and had become desensitised to

it, seeking to challenge this with thought-provoking designs on posters and hoodies. BYS also launched an awareness campaign addressing online grooming and sexual violence, creating awareness posters also informing of support services that were distributed in schools and youth centres. By educating young people to recognise the signs of grooming and highlighting support available to them, Changemakers hope to promote better online safety and provide vital signposting for those affected by grooming and sexual violence to access support. BYS created the Naseby Centre Young Women's Mosque Group, collaborating with a local mosque to create a safe space for discussion of experiences and for young women to understand risks and harms of violence while also connecting them to opportunities to get involved with their local community to ensure their voices were heard. On another education and support social action, after finding that students wanted to be able to save a friend's life, BYS worked with the Edge Academy to deliver an emergency first aid training to equip young people with life-saving skills should they ever be faced with an emergency. Providing young people with these skills is crucial to promoting community safety as they are equipped with the skills to prevent fatalities in a medical emergency. The training was also an opportunity to facilitate discussion around risks and consequences of youth violence.

LONDON,
High Trees

High Trees leads the **Lambeth Peer Action Collective** (LPAC) in South London who work across eight Lambeth youth organisations which are part of the **Building Young Brixton** partnership including **Juvenis**, **Spiral**, **IRMO**, **St. Matthews Project**, **Baytree Centre**, and **MLCE**.

Research Questions & Methods

LPAC chose to focus on the impact of young people's environments, specifically living on or around social housing estates, on youth violence. LPAC conducted 138 one-to-one interviews and creative workshops in schools with a further 231 young people.

Findings

While the findings were extensive, a few key insights stood out. For many young people in Lambeth, violence was seen as an inevitable experience and normal part of life indicating high levels of desensitisation and a sense of hopelessness. The research identified how poor housing conditions on and around estates made young people feel unsafe and heightened experiences of youth violence. Many young people in the research felt unprotected and unsupported by public services such as police and school, with young people describing both institutions as making them feel unsafe.
Young people described feeling cut-off from important

opportunities due to several factors including lack of safety when moving through the area and discriminated against due to their background. The research found that there is a lack of safe, affordable and youth-friendly spaces, which are important for young people to find connection, opportunities and belonging. Peer Researchers also found that there is a mental and emotional burden young people carry to keep safe and avoid potential harm while going about everyday activities where a small decision could prove fatal. Peer Researchers also identified that many young people feel they don't have control over their lives and futures, and often feel they do not have many options.

Social Action

LPAC concluded that the experiences shared by young people across the findings were underpinned by inequalities across our systems, driving the Peer Researchers toward wanting to create long-term impactful change that would challenge these systems and respond to the issues in the research.

The Peer Researchers identified three key areas as the sites of greatest impact. These are opportunities (and lack of), housing and education. These became the basis for 'Talk It Out' solutions sessions where young people across the LPAC partnership offered their insights based on lived experience on how these feed into youth violence, what needs to change and how. A graphic artist attended the sessions to capture the conversations visually on boards which were also used to facilitate findings and social action discussions with Changemakers to make the sessions as visually accessible as possible to young people across the area.

Peer Researchers and Changemakers then underwent three weeks of intensive campaign development and training with the High Trees Community Action Team, working to create specific and achievable demands around housing, education, and opportunities that would generate long-lasting change and working on practical aspects of a campaign such as developing a power analysis, refining the campaign pitch to communicate effectively and developing varied tactics for the campaign.

194 young people were engaged in co-developing the LPAC manifesto over the four successful social action events. With stakeholder meetings already taking place to implement the demands and the LPAC findings and manifesto beginning to inform priorities in Lambeth and London, LPAC welcome enquiries from funders, policy makers and others who would like to engage in the team's social action and who are keen to commit to working with young people to make real change for good.

The LPAC **manifesto** and campaign videos can be found at **lambethpac**.com

YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER,

EFL Trust

EFL Trust worked with two sub-delivery partners, **Bradford City Community Foundation** and **Sheffield Wednesday Community Programme**, to produce research and create social action on youth violence in Bradford and Sheffield.

Research Questions & Methods

Bradford's PAC team conducted one-to-one interviews and group sessions to understand young people's views on knife crime in Bradford, and what can be done to make young people feel safer and reduce the number of young people carrying knives.

Sheffield Peer Researchers chose to research the key factors which influence a young person to become involved in youth violence and positive changes can be made to overcome these challenges, engaging participants through focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

Findings

Both Bradford and Sheffield PAC teams found that young people felt strongly about the need for more positive opportunities and positive role models for young people to steer them in the right direction. They found that boredom and peer pressure are factors that drive youth violence, and these are exacerbated by the lack of youth-friendly, accessible spaces causing young people to spent time in settings that make them vulnerable to poor influence.

Bradford and Sheffield also identified troubled relationships with police, particularly in more deprived areas, as an obstacle in the ability of support services to intervene in youth violence early on. Bradford PAC noted how the Bradford riots still has a lingering presence amongst the younger generation, and the role that generations of racism and police brutality play in deteriorating trust between police and the community. Bradford PAC emphasised the racial tensions in

police/community relations, where they found most Asian males that they interviewed had very low trust in the police and that the police in Bradford is seen as a largely White and homogenous group which many feel do not represent the community they serve.

In Sheffield, Peer Researchers found that young people felt that there was a connection between social media and youth violence, also finding that females are more negatively impacted by both depictions of violence and unrealistic beauty standards set on social media than males. The research also found that videos of youth violence circulating on social media can lead to poor public perception of the local community and lead to a more widespread demonisation of young people across Sheffield. Finally, Bradford PAC also identified that drug issues

were a large concern for young people for the impact it has on the community from drug-usage to dealing, and the violence and gang-warfare associated to it.

Social Action

Sheffield PAC aimed to tackle young people's desire for more opportunities to access support for young people who may be concerned about violence and partnered with the Sapphire Project to deliver workshops on youth violence to various youth clubs in the area. Bradford PAC mapped existing youth provision and opportunities, producing and distributing the maps in schools, community centres and organisations across Bradford to help young people find positive opportunities to engage with other young people and their local community near them. Sheffield PAC also worked with Sheffield Wednesday FC to hold an awareness match-day and published an **article**.

Bradford PAC has worked with Bradford Police and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to deliver knife-crime awareness workshops in schools and worked with **Street Angels** to provide lifesaving first aid training. They have also had productive conversations with Bradford police about ensuring the perspectives of young people in the local community are heard and three Peer Researchers have joined the Independent Police Advisory Group. Sheffield PAC also brokered relationships with local police, finding ways to promote trust between the police and young people through mutual understanding and communication. Sheffield PAC also launched a sexual abuse and sexual violence **awareness campaign** on social media, receiving excellent feedback and addressing issues of misogyny raised by the research, promoting gender equality in the area.

Bradford and Sheffield PACs, united by EFL trust, worked together to deliver weekly workshops for boys and young men 15-18 who could benefit from extra support and encouragement at HMP Young Offender Institution Wetherby and have delivered a number of engaging social actions together.

In February 2022, seven young people from Bradford and Sheffield held meetings with their local MPs at the Houses of Parliament, where they shared the story of the project, their research methods and findings, social action activity, and left some MPs with the question of making youth provision a statutory funding source for local councils from the Government's central funding.

SOUTH EAST,

Artswork

Artswork worked with consortium partners **Unloc** and **Youth Options** to deliver the project in Portsmouth and Southampton.

Research Questions & Methods

The South East PAC aimed to understand the impacts of youth violence in local communities and to explore the impact of social media on youth violence. They primarily conducted one-to-one interviews and focus group interviews, with a supplementary online survey implemented later in the project to explore emerging findings across the area. The research was conducted through various community centres and youth groups and engaged a total of 380 participants.

Findings

Findings included that boredom, socioeconomic status and home influences are key contributors to youth violence. They also found that many young people felt police are not equipped for many situations involving youth violence.
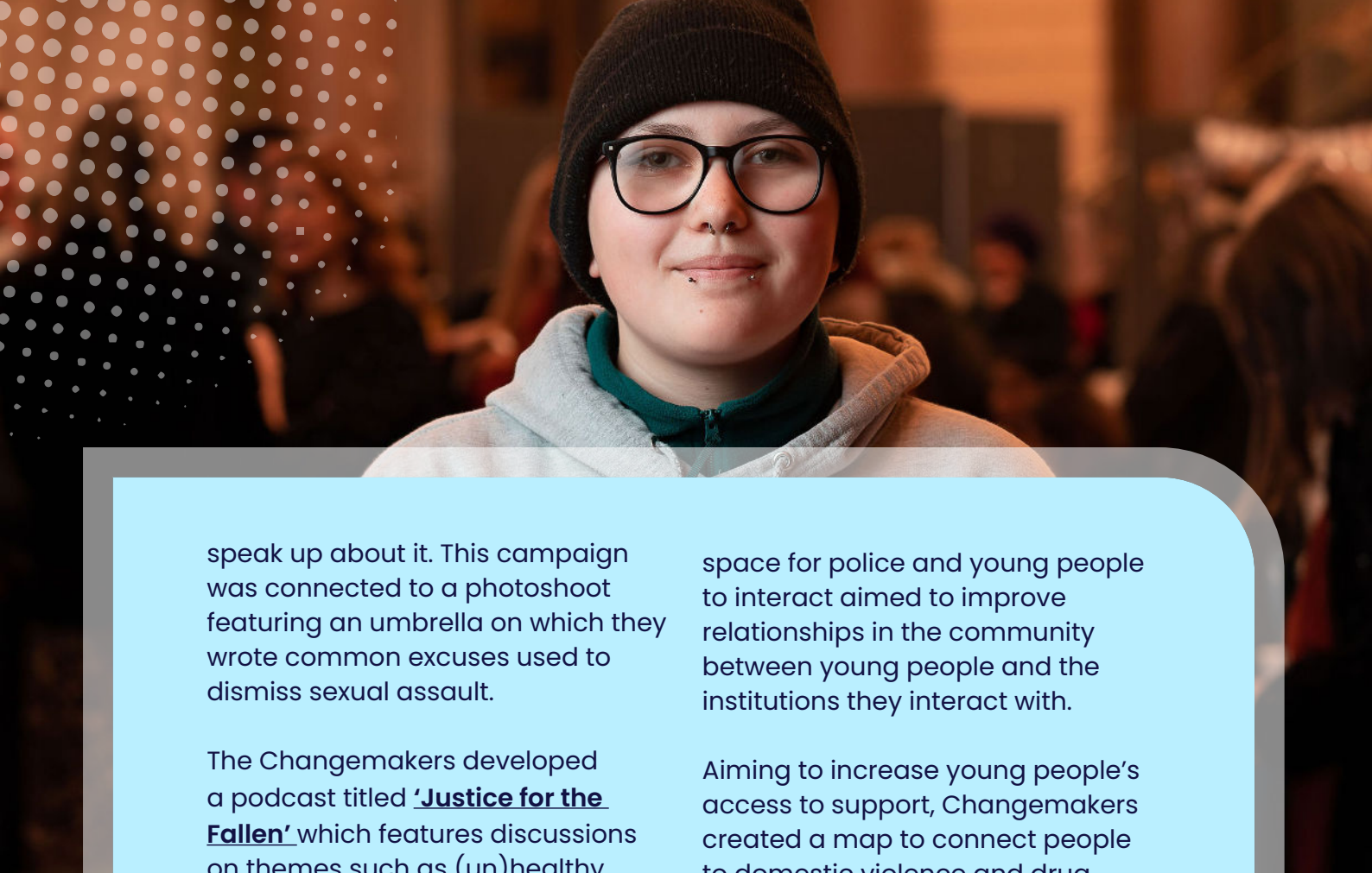
The South East PAC focussed in on mental health, finding that young people felt police lacked training and did not adequately respond to mental health issues, calling for more education and training.

Bullying was also frequently raised by young people and formed much of their views of youth violence. Women and girls also raised sexual violence and harassment as a particular concern and felt that there was a significant lack of support from adults, schools and police in this regard.

South East PAC found that social media may not necessarily be a primary cause of youth violence, but it amplifies how young people view and consume violent content. Young people told the team that reporting systems on social media platforms were inadequate, with girls in particular highlighting that safeguarding procedures were insufficient.

Social Action

South East PAC developed several awareness raising campaigns with their Changemakers. One campaign targeted at teachers and school professionals titled **'See the Difference'** aimed to alert teachers to the subtle signs of bullying to encourage early response and the prevention of it escalating to violence. They also launched a social media campaign to raise sexual assault awareness and encourage young people to

speak up about it. This campaign was connected to a photoshoot featuring an umbrella on which they wrote common excuses used to dismiss sexual assault.

The Changemakers developed a podcast titled **'Justice for the Fallen'** which features discussions on themes such as (un)healthy relationships, domestic violence and sexual assault. Another social media **campaign** aimed to raise awareness of domestic violence. Changemakers produced a **short film** about cyberbullying that aims to encourage young people to reach out for support, and a **short film** showing how young people can be exploited into county lines and the consequences, hoping to use this as an educational tool so young people in their community can recognise the signs of exploitation and further prevent them from being recruited into organised crime.

South East PAC Changemakers also hosted **youth beat surgeries** in Gosport and Fareham in collaboration with local police, aiming to remove barriers and challenge stereotypes between young people and police. Providing an informal and youth-friendly

space for police and young people to interact aimed to improve relationships in the community between young people and the institutions they interact with.

Aiming to increase young people's access to support, Changemakers created a map to connect people to domestic violence and drug misuse services in Southampton, hoping that the signposting will lead to early intervention for these issues, protecting vulnerable young people's safety at the earliest opportunity. They also designed a website with useful links to local youth clubs, activities, colleges and charities to showcase what their community could offer young people who may not know of the services otherwise. Changemakers partnered with Portsmouth Football Club to design t-shirts with the logo **'Put the Knives Down'** worn during warm-ups with awareness messages shared throughout the day. South East PAC held productive conversations with the Violence Against Women and Girls team at Southampton City Council, speaking on their findings.

WALES,
Media Academy Cymru (MAC)

Media Academy Cymru (MAC) delivered the PAC Cymru project in Wales in partnership with **YMCA Swansea** across the areas of Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham. regions.

Research Questions & Methods

Peer Researchers in Wales set out to research how young people define or understand youth violence and how equipped young people are to respond to youth violence in the immediate instance and in accessing general support. They engaged research 647 participants in total with a variety of methods, including one-to-one interviews at Pride community events and at the YMCA Swansea building. They also held short street interviews in all four geographical regions.

Findings

In response to the question of how young people define or understand youth violence, the most common answers given by respondents included knife-crime, fighting, anti-social behaviour, assault (jumping) and verbal violence. Many respondents also included sexual assault.

Peer Researchers found that young people were more likely to report youth violence to trusted people in their lives, primarily their friends and family, with police and school support as secondary.

Finally, the research indicated that young people generally did not feel that schools and educational settings do enough to raise awareness or prevent youth violence, and that what is currently done is inadequate. Assemblies or talks by teachers or police were the most common intervention, but respondents who had witnessed these interventions felt that they were entirely ineffective.

Social Action

PAC Cymru have worked in partnership with the Welsh Violence Prevention Unit (VPU), where they have spent significant time developing a strategic framework for youth violence prevention, feeding in their research findings to inform progress. As part of

this work, PAC Cymru developed an innovative **pop-up shop** in a popular shopping centre in Cardiff. The pop-up shop was held as a part of the **Wales Without Violence consultation**, which is the product of collaboration between the VPU and PAC Cymru. It allowed passers-by to be engaged in both learning more about youth violence and the research findings, as well as get involved in sharing their views and experiences as part of the Wales Without Violence consultation.

The Changemakers developed several creative campaigns focussed on raising awareness. Changemakers worked with MAC to produce a documentary about experiences of violence which was showcased in local cinemas in the four delivery regions. PAC Cymru also worked with artists who were brought on to visually capture young people's ideas and turn them into thought-provoking posters that were distributed. Changemakers launched the Pavement Project where they used graffiti to explore the research themes and communicate young people's quotes on how to tackle youth violence. The product is on display in Swansea town centre. Another creative project aiming to increase young people's engagement with their local communities saw young people design t-shirts which they wore in a fashion show in the town centre.

PAC Cymru worked with Cascade, a research organisation, to create a **Youth Charter** aimed at helping adults better understand young people's thoughts on a range of important topics. Finally, Changemakers also started a youth club called The Hangout which provides a safe space for local young people, providing an alternative place for young people to socialise, who may otherwise hang around in unsupervised areas where they are more vulnerable to danger or poor influences.

NORTH WEST,
Young Person's Advisory Service

The Young Person's Advisory Service (YPAS) delivered the Merseyside PAC project in Merseyside.

Research Questions & Methods

Merseyside PAC set out to understand youth violence from the perspective of young people, gathering insights that would inform policy change to reduce youth violence and to determine how to best increase feelings of safety for young people. They conducted primarily one-to-one interviews but also hosted several focus groups and used some creative methods, as well as qualitative surveys, reaching 515 research participants in total.

Findings

A strong theme in the Merseyside research was how identity impacted young people's experiences. Issues of racism and gender in relation to safety and youth violence were shared by respondents, as well as experiences of homophobia/ transphobia and ableism. These experiences also impacted young people's perceptions of support, for instance not going to police over concerns of discrimination or not speaking to parents if they are homophobic, leaving young

people isolated. The Merseyside Peer Researchers found that many young people feel unsafe.

Merseyside PAC identified a number of factors raised by participants as contributors to youth violence namely home environment and influences, media, normalisation of violence, emotional regulation, intoxication, mental health, lack of positive role models and socioeconomic position. The research found that many young people were unaware of many support services, while others were dissatisfied with the services available. Merseyside PAC also identified hope(lessness) as a theme in the research, finding that young people's experiences impacted their perception of their futures and the future of youth violence.

Social Action

Merseyside PAC had a strong partnership with the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) who began working with PAC early-on in the project and had many conversations with Peer Researchers around their findings. Merseyside PAC contributed to the MVRP three-year strategic plan, sharing the research findings

and influencing strategy to reduce violence perpetrated and experienced by young people across the area. This was the first time young people had been involved in creating the plan, and set Merseyside PAC and the MVRP as a positive example for youth involvement in decision-making that affects young people.

Merseyside PAC Changemakers also launched several awareness campaigns. They created a podcast **'The PAC-Cast'** to discuss the research and youth violence and give young people a platform in order to combat the hopelessness felt by many participants in relation to influencing change in the local community. They also worked with the Hope Collective and the Museum of Liverpool to host a pop-up event around making a change which featured a hope tree and encouraged participants to write to their MPs about issues in their local community, giving young people in the area a platform to be heard. Merseyside PAC hosted a series of sessions with Year 6 pupils to explore their thoughts on youth violence and supporting them to articulate these thoughts clearly. These were recorded during the final session and turned into a

multi-functional soundbite to be shared to highlight young people's views.

YPAS ran a wellbeing stall which showcased the PAC research and social action at the Now Festival where the theme was mental health and violence. Merseyside Peer Researchers also spoke at a Co-op fringe event during the Labour Conference in Liverpool.

Merseyside PAC also responded to the prevalence of mistrust of police in the research by breaking down barriers and including police as part of the Changemaker's training schedule, involving police officers in the group activities. This helped to help create a less intimidating environment for engagement which allowed for a productive pizza and Q&A session going both ways between police and young people, aiming to address negative perceptions of each party from both sides and promote a better relationship between the two groups to ensure greater community safety.

SOUTH WEST,
Young Devon

Young Devon (YD) in Plymouth was the lead partner delivering PAC in the South West, in collaboration with sub-delivery partners **SPACE** in South Devon, **Youth Moves** (YM) in Bristol, and **Young Gloucestershire** (YG) in Gloucestershire.

Research Questions & Methods

The four South West delivery partners, with three Peer Researchers each, tackled different themes and research questions, engaging 455 research participants using focus groups, interviews and creative sessions.

SPACE looked at perceptions of local safety, asking what would help young people feel safer in their local area. Young Devon chose to focus on the role of education, investigating whether there is enough education on youth violence. Youth Moves focused on postcode wars and aimed to determine whether they were real, and to understand conflict between communities. Young Gloucestershire researched the main causes of youth violence, which ages are most involved and how it can be reduced.

Findings

South West PAC had various findings across their delivery groups and regions. SPACE, YD and YG, where young people predominantly spoke about bullying, all strongly featured young people's experiences of not feeling heard and lacking adequate support from educational staff in their research findings. SPACE and YD noted a loss of trust caused by various factors in the school environment and behaviour management approach as well as young people feeling stigmatised, all dissuading young people from seeking support from adults. YG found that young people wanted more education for young people, parents and professionals about youth violence after expressing that they don't feel teachers and other adults put in place to support them have sufficient training on these issues.

In Bristol, YM's research focused more on other forms of youth violence such as gangs. They identified several social factors which push people toward youth violence. Peer pressure, in the form of negative repercussions (being made fun of), push young people to become involved in things they may not want to be a part of, while negative role models also influence young people through a desire for positive repercussions, such as gaining respect which could feel like a reward for being involved in youth violence.

Social Action

Changemakers across South West PAC created social action around awareness, education and support. In Plymouth, the PAC team worked with an organisation called Exim Dance. They created a youth-led dance project exploring emotions and wellbeing through choreography, encouraging young people to feel less stigmatised in expressing their emotions in a healthy way. In Bristol, YM Changemakers produced a music video and mini-documentary responding to their findings regarding media and youth violence by challenging typical stereotypes of music videos and portraying a positive message, aiming to address the absence of positive role models for young people that they identified in their research.

To address a lack of mental health support from trusted adults, YD and Off the Record trained young people to be mental health peer support workers. Changemakers also created an online educational campaign for professionals to inform them about the research findings - particularly those centred around the lack of appropriate support and knowledge on bullying from educational staff, providing them with resources detailing better guidance and support.

There is also a renovation project in Gloucestershire which will see community centres reflect what young people need/want, through providing more youth-led spaces and activities, Changemakers hope this experience of being heard will encourage young people in their area to engage more with the local community. Changemakers hosted a successful community fun day in Newton Abbott with young people, police, school staff and councillors, totalling over 100 attendees. South West PAC have also held a number of meetings with stakeholders and have developed a strong regional partnership including councils, youth workers, education leaders, young offending services, community arts leaders, and more, hoping to improve community cohesion in the area between young people, adults and institutions.

PAC FINDINGS, ACTION AND IMPACT

This section brings together the PAC research findings and the social action young people have developed from across the regional projects and considers emerging impact.

4.1 Research Findings

The findings shared in this section are based on the analysis undertaken by young people themselves within PAC teams which in turn informed analysis of the research data across projects by The Young Foundation.

Findings presented in this section focus on the following four questions identified by young people:

- **What is youth violence?**

- **What causes youth violence?**

- **What is the impact of youth violence?**

- **How does identity impact on youth violence?**

Quotes from across the data are shared to answer these questions and illustrate findings, quotes are all examples of strong patterns in the data. All names in this report are pseudonyms, gender is reported as (M) Male, (F) Female and (GNC) gender non-conforming. Ages and locations of respondents are provided where they were available.

What is youth violence?

Across interviews, as young people talked about their experiences of youth violence, they considered how it was defined and perceived.

How do young people define youth violence?

'Youth violence' clearly has different meanings for different young people. Factors such as place, peers, exposure, and identity all impact how a young person defines youth violence. Maya, 18, from Lambeth defined youth violence as: *'There's been a lot of stabbings recently near my area, a lot of 'oh this gang threatened this area, so don't go here', even up until recently. There's been two shootings near my area and I didn't even know there were guns. So that's crazy and I'm pretty sure young people have been involved, so that's what I'd say youth violence is. I feel like youth violence is age 12 up until 20, 22, and I feel like that's the age range you see struggling with these things more.'*

Respondents across projects talked about whether violence needed to be 'serious' and if so, what that meant, and who got to define what was or was not serious violence. There was a strong sense in data from all the projects that youth violence was only taken seriously when it became 'visible' to the public but that this only represented the tip of the iceberg of what young people consider to be youth violence.

Many respondents were keen to express that youth violence is not something confined to the fringes of society. Young people, across all areas, talked about how youth violence can occur at any time, to anyone and in any setting whether in real life or online. Rowan, a focus group participant from Devon said:

> I have a friend that watched someone get stabbed in city centre, and that's such a populated area and people are walking around all the time. You expect youth violence to be in dark alleyways and it's not. These are children being attacked in broad daylight in a city centre

(Devon focus group)

Who are the perpetrators of violence against young people?

Across the data most young people supported the perception of youth violence as peer-on-peer. George, 18, from Southampton summarised:

> "My understanding of youth violence is any kind of violence towards or perpetrated by a young person under the age of 24.
>
> (George, 18, Southampton)

Youth violence was often described as cyclical, with perpetrators of violence having previously been victims of violence from adults and having to continuously engage in peer-on-peer violence because of the perception that this will prevent them from being victimised by other young people, this is shown during this exchange between respondents during a focus group in Wrexham, Wales:

> "I feel like a lot of people use violence as a coping mechanism, I've seen it a lot, especially like alcoholic parents and stuff. I mean, I've heard a lot of cases where people like dads, they'll get drunk and just take their anger out on their kids. The kind of cycle of abuse, that happens to a lot of people's families, in that case, the abused becomes the abuser.
>
> (Wales focus group).

Adults were talked about in a minority of examples of youth violence, for instance in cases of violence against members of minoritised groups, violence related to drugs and organised criminal activity. Locating adults as perpetrators was also particularly prevalent for vulnerable young people, particularly in association with county lines drug dealing, with Riley from Middlesbrough explaining:

'Adults can commit violence against youths…because obviously a lot of drug dealers are adults and a lot of people who use drugs are kids and there's, as [name] said, there's a power dynamic there, especially if you've come from a difficult home, if there's an adult drug dealer who will take care of you and will, you know, be nice to you but will ask you 'can you take these drugs to so and so and bring me back the money and I'll give you some', it's really a toxic relationship that you're having with that person, you're being manipulated and it is a form of violence against youth I think' (Middlesbrough focus group).

Lived experience and perceptions of youth violence

Young people who took part in the research differed on their degree of proximity to violence. Some young people had first-hand experiences of youth violence while others experienced it as witnesses, through a close relationship or from the media and social media. Leah, 16, from Brixton in London, had relational and geographical proximity to the murder of a young family friend near her home, *'It's very close to home, it's touching you, in fact. Someone that you were just talking to yesterday suddenly is dead.'*

Often, young people described knowing of youth violence from their peers or through social media. It seemed to Peer Researchers that social media could serve to distort young people's perception of their proximity to violence by frequently witnessing incidents that they might not have otherwise encountered in real life.

'I think it's quite bad, just from videos you see online. I wouldn't say I've experienced it myself, but just from seeing videos and stuff online on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram you see all kinds of violence especially of knife crime, obviously knife crime's quite bad. Yeah, I wouldn't say I've experienced it but from talking to people that I know, my friends and things like that, it's definitely a big issue' (Naz, 24, M, Yorkshire).

Many of the young people who had greater proximity to violence, either through first-hand experience, close relationships or the prominence of violence in their area, perceived violence as an inevitable experience everyone goes through. *'I feel that [youth violence] is an experience that everyone has had, is having, or will have. And yeah, I really feel like it's inevitable I'll be real'* (Aidan, 19, M, London).

Young people with more proximity to violence said they felt exhausted by constantly feeling like they had to be on their guard and protect themselves. *'It worries me that one day, like God forbid, that one day something bad will happen to my family members which is concerning. It's not good to like, always have that at the back of your head, 'oh are they okay are they okay' you just want to like, this is your neighbourhood you just want to be safe, happy, live your best life'* (Hari, 16, M, London).

What causes youth violence?

Across the data young people discussed the causes of youth violence, they ascribed causes primarily to:

(1) social deprivation and lack of opportunity, (2) availability of physical safe spaces, (3) relationships with family and friends, (4) engagement with and expectations of different institutions (5) poor mental health support and (6) social media.

SOCIAL DEPRIVATION AND LACK OF OPPORTUNITY

Respondents often suggested that youth violence was caused by and linked to poverty and social deprivation. This was discussed regarding the cost-of-living crisis, and how increasing financial challenges were likely to lead to increased crime and violence. Young people also reflected on how in a more general sense social deprivation in their areas contributed to a lack of opportunities. Payton, 15, from Sheffield stated:

'I think youth violence, people get involved in it because, within this area, there's such a high poverty rate some of these people might think that getting into crime, especially drugs and stealing, are the only way that they can provide for their families and get money 'cos some of them may feel like they don't have a chance to succeed in life because of their environment.'

This was supported by many, including Frankie, 14, from Wales who suggested: *'The jobs crisis definitely impacts it a lot because if you can't find a job, you are probably going to get into a spiral of gang violence, because you have nothing else to do. It's like why would I work when I can just mug someone?'*

Some suggested that judgement and stereotypes perpetuated through classism, racism and other prejudice led to young people feeling permanently labelled as perpetrators of youth violence, regardless of their involvement in it, which could have long term impact on their ability to engage with meaningful opportunities.

Young people also often identified their experience of living on or around particular areas, estates or postcodes as a key factor in their experiences of youth violence, influencing their risk-level and freedom of movement. In Brixton, South London, young people felt that experiencing or witnessing youth violence is inevitable, even a rite of passage growing up in the area. *'I feel that [youth violence] is an experience that everyone has had, is having, or will have. And yeah, I really feel like it's inevitable I'll be real'* (Aidan, 19, M, London).

Similar sentiments were shared by young people in most regions who were able to pinpoint specific postcodes, areas or estates that felt more unsafe. It is important to note that in areas where there has historically been violence between different groups, such as gangs in the area, these divisions were maintained by young people and can escalate to violence. Joel, 17, from Bradford explained: *'There's a lot of these gang wars and post code wars that's been going on for years and years and it's just getting out of hand if I'm honest.'*

AVAILABILITY OF PHYSICAL SAFE SPACES

There was a strong consensus across all projects that a lack of safe spaces for young people has contributed to youth violence increasing across England and Wales. Young people across all regions shared that while they previously may have been able to meet in youth clubs and through other organised activities where they are supported by trusted adults, reduction in funding for these services have led to a limited number of places for them to socialise. Having nowhere safe to hang out with other young people was seen as a catalyst for bullying and fights, which then occur in places where there is no formal adult supervision and support.

The lack of spaces for meaningful socialisation was described by many: *'There's not a lot of after school clubs anymore, but when I was at school, I was doing something every day... I couldn't really mess with my friends to say let's go do this because my friends were already at the club with me or we were playing basketball, playing football, playing table tennis, there was something going on every day'* (Anthony, 22, M, Ipswich).

Young people explained that this is exacerbated by having to compete for general community spaces with adults. Young people consistently described feeling routinely demonised by adults in their communities for socialising in public areas:

"They don't have many places to go because if they go to a park, then they're judged by five parents with young kids at the park, but if they go to a shop, they're stereotypically obviously saying that they might want to steal something but if they ran around in the street, then they're overseen by the police so it kind of feels like they might not have a place to go.

(Isa, 17, M, Sheffield).

This can lead to young people feeling forced to socialise in public areas that are not being used by adults, which can place them in dangerous situations. This also leads to competition for spaces to socialise, upping the risk and reward of finding a space for themselves.

Imani, 17, from Brixton said: *'I feel like if you're in the wrong area at the wrong time, I feel like you get dragged into something that you're not meant to be in. Like for example Brixton is a big hot spot for like young teens. Like today, I just walked past Brixton and there were like police stopping people for just being outside McDonald's.'*

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS AND FRIENDS

Another factor many young people believed caused youth violence involved their relationships with their peers, friends and family. Wanting to be liked by peers was a strong driver of youth violence as discussed during this interview in Liverpool with Morgan, 14:

'Say if there was a person in a group of people and they were like 'oh we're carrying knives'. If someone was carrying around knives, and you were the only person not carrying around knives, people would look and think why isn't he? And then obviously you want to be liked. They want to get on with people and because most of the lads who do carry around knives or do stuff like that because they'll actually do stuff, they're quite popular. They just want to be popular and they want to be seen as cool.'

Many young people spoke about the need to fit in with their peers and how this contributes to an environment, particularly in schools, where young people feel pressure to fit in and go along with others. Violet, 18, from Ipswich explained she thought youth violence occurs because:

'I think it is to fit in, obviously to fit in with the right crowd, having them people be near you and you want to act like them, you want to be them, so you have to go one step further... I was pressured into doing something which inflicted me to face the consequences of my actions and got put onto community service and probation because of it.'

This was echoed by Rosie, 20, from Southampton who described how peer pressure can push individuals into violence because they feel like they need to fit in with their peers: *'The whole scenario is kind of being egged on by peer pressure and especially in, you know, when you're young you feel like you have to fit in and if the people around you are being violent, often you feel like you have to follow.'*

Young people across regions often shared that they were concerned about losing the friendship and protection of a lead perpetrator because this could also lead to them becoming a target for violence.

Blake, from Devon said: *'I've heard of people jumping others when they get into an argument. So people would wait outside bus stops and stuff, and know where someone will be and they'll send a couple of friends to jump them and beat them up. I've heard of that and I know of people who have been involved with that. I suppose it's peer pressure in that sense cos it's like 'are you not gonna fight her?'*, or: *'you're a wimp' etc, and 'are you not gonna jump her for me? You're my friend'* (Blake, Devon focus group).

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY

Across the research projects many young people described how their family offered a vital support system for them if they were struggling with youth violence. Most felt safe in their home and described their family as a safe space and a protective factor. Lauren, 13, from Devon said she would always turn to her family for support saying, *'My family, my friends; they're all feisty and they protect each other.'*

Other respondents felt the impact of experiencing and witnessing violence at home offered a good explanation for why some young people perpetrate youth violence and others do not as Autumn, 19, from Liverpool explained: *'If the people who are raising you or the people who are around you a lot of the time when you are younger are doing these sorts of things then you're going to get the impression that that's just normal and that's how life works and obviously not everyone who's been in that situation does carry a knife or does you know resort to violence all the time but a lot of the time it will be 'ah where did you get that'? – my mum' 'Where did you get that?– my dad?'*

While young people discussed the importance of families, boundaries and backgrounds across projects it is important to state that some young people questioned this and contested how much parental influence caused young people to engage in youth violence. Jodie, from Wrexham reflected on this point: *'I don't think that's [parental relationship] the only deciding factor though, because I mean honestly, I had a great childhood. I love my parents to death and, I mean I've definitely been dragged into a few instances'* (Jodie, Wales focus group).

ENGAGEMENT WITH AND EXPECTATIONS OF DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS

Across the research projects young people reflected on the way in which the institutions they engaged with enabled and exacerbated violence, through activity and non-activity. Primarily young people discussed this in terms of the police and schools.

Police: Across the research projects young people talked about the police as both a complex cause and solution to youth violence. Generally young people wanted the police to engage more positively with them and complained that they seemed out of touch with young people's experiences and needs. As Josh noted; *'There needs to be a bit more police, but they also need to be understanding of young people's minds'* (Josh, 15, M, Devon).

Encounters with individual police officers clearly affected how young people felt about them; some people described a wariness; 'Every now and again you get that you know that police officer that is a bit weird and they like try to abuse their power' (Jon, 13, Devon).
Others reported positive experiences with the police and suggested that attitudes towards the police also needed to change for relations to improve. *'We also need that culture of the police are our enemies out of that, I think that's not just for young people, I think that's in general because in the UK the police are great, they're community orientated'* (Asif, 26, M, Bradford).

For some people a police presence could be reassuring, particularly in public places that might otherwise feel unsafe:

> **I feel safest in the Broadway Center because there's a lot of security, um it feels very safe, there's quite a high police presence and just generally a lot of people so you feel like a lot less exposed and a lot less vulnerable because people protect you and just keep you safe at all times.**
>
> (Faisal, 21, M, Bradford).

Often, young people expressed a lack of confidence in any positive outcome of going to the police. For some, going to the police to report violence just seemed pointless, *'I've seen like a lot of people get hurt and they never got like in a lot of trouble because there's like more other day this boy beat up another boy…and the police don't do anything yeah'* (Esha, 12, F, Devon).

The sense of distrust was impacted by identity. For instance, some girls expressed that they would not feel comfortable going to police over incidents of sexual violence. *'The thing with police, I have friends um that have experienced sexual violence and assault and stuff like that, and they want to go to the police but it's that issue of like the perpetrator gets arrested and they get taken into questioning, one in seven of perpetrators are convicted of rape and sentenced. So like, basically all of the time they're getting off, and they're walking the streets again, and they're gonna know who's reporting that'* (Angela, Devon focus group).

Moreover, young people felt that they would face victim-blaming when trying to report an incident. **‘Some have gone through that [sexual violence] then having to do a police report then being told oh the clothes I'm wearing is down to it, it's not something you really want to be told’** (Valerie, Portsmouth focus group).

Young people, and particularly young people of colour, talked about racism and profiling that either they had experienced, or that their family and friends had experienced. Young Black respondents reported that racist stereotypes and profiling left them exposed to increased violence. **‘Yeah, but obviously I'm pretty sure you've heard for Black people it usually don't go well’** (Josiah, 17, M, London).

There was a strong awareness of needing to be informed of individual rights and become an advocate for yourself when dealing with the police. Zach, 16, in London said he had been stopped and searched and later found out he was not treated in line with proper protocol: **‘I was worried because I've never been stopped and searched before and how they stopped and searched. When I searched online it wasn't the correct way. They put me in handcuffs first before asking questions.’**

For some respondents the challenges of engaging with the police related more to their community and fears of being seen as a 'snitch'. Respondents reported a fear of going to the police **‘Like I've heard it so many times, someone won't go to the police because they're scared the persons gonna come after them and they've threatened his family’** (Imogen, 23, F, Bradford). A focus group in Wales described the social aftermath of being perceived a snitch: **‘It'd be safer for you to go to jail than to come back out of that police station’** (Wrexham focus group).

Schools: Young people consistently identified schools as the most common setting for youth violence. This included organised fights and gender-based violence. Many respondents told of their personal experiences of youth violence within schools, and their disappointment when staff did not appropriately resolve issues: **‘I mean like I've seen people fighting and the teachers don't rush they just take their time slowly walk towards it, enjoy their walk and then sort it out’** (Jon, 13, Devon). While not seen as a direct cause, schools are seen a common setting for violence, with more needing to be done to prevent it.

The presence of police in schools was discussed in some interviews and focus groups. Rather than creating feelings of safety and comfort, this could make these spaces feel hostile and unwelcoming; **‘I mean no one should have to worry about having to be searched at school searching for any kind of knives or weapons’** (Denise, 16, F, London). Some respondents felt that relationships should be built and maintained through police engaging with schools and in youthwork activity. However, this suggestion seemed to change with age. Younger respondents felt this might reduce and prevent violence whereas older respondents were less likely to see the possibility of police engaging with them as a positive experience.

Young people throughout the research explained the impact on their sense of wellbeing and mental health of being educated in spaces where they did not feel safe. Aaliyah from the North East said:

> ## I've literally ended up having panic attacks because of how I was treated in school.
>
> (North East focus group).

Many young people felt that the combination of school as a recurring setting for youth violence as well as poor responses and management of violent behaviour by staff has led to a climate of violence, as Khalil from Yorkshire explains; *'In school I felt most unsafe and that's because a lot of people in school were rambunctious...they didn't want to do anything that they were told'* (Khalil, 17, M, Yorkshire).

A few respondents discussed how having additional educational needs impacted on experiences of youth violence. Carrie from Wales described her struggle with mainstream education saying, *'I got dyslexia and stuff uh, I've got a lot of stuff, it just didn't work for me at all and that's why I was gonna be put in a bad situations'* (Carrie, Wales focus group).

A particular issue that was prevalent in the data related to the use of exclusion by schools. Young people felt that exclusions make youth violence worse, rather than having a positive impact on behaviour. The impact of exclusion was often related to missed opportunities:

'If someone acts bad, they're punished for it when it might not necessarily be their fault, so they might end up getting kicked out of school, out of college, just because they don't act in a certain way and I don't think that's necessarily the right way to deal with things so because of that they end up missing out on opportunities' (Naz, 24, M, Sheffield).

The negative impact on long term educational and employment opportunities was also seen as a factor that may lead to an individual engaging in further youth violence after exclusion. Sonya, 22, from Devon described: *'I know people would get stuff like suspended or expelled, I don't think it would create a safe or comfortable environment and it would almost build even more hostility and the young people involved so it doesn't lead to that child or person improving in their behaviour.'*

POOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Across regions people talked about the challenges of finding and accessing appropriate support for mental health. Young people described feeling that their mental health was not taken seriously, culminating in frustration and resentment. The role of adult attitudes to young people's mental health was cited as contributing to youth violence. Many described situations where their mental health was ignored or minimised by key adults in their life and explained that this could lead to increased volatility and lashing out at their peers. Young people often suggested poor mental health as a reason for violent behaviour which was then exasperated by a perceived lack of support.

Young people reflected on how people might become frustrated with their own mental health issues were more likely to feel they have nothing to lose and participate in more violence. Shamza, 18, from Bradford stated: *'You're much likely to as a young person to have some sort of mental health issues, and if you're not getting the support that you need it's much harder for you to kind of get out of that mindset and to actually do something to improve your life and not get involved in crime.'*

Respondents reflected on how mental health issues young people experienced were exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic, both from a lack of ability to socialise and the halting of many face-to-face mental health appointments. This was described as leading to frustration, especially when young people feel like their mental health has been ignored despite feeling the same impact of the pandemic as adults.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Young people discussed the importance of social media in relation to youth violence. They mostly talked about using Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram. Facebook was mentioned less but some young people used it to scroll through local news stories or to view livestreamed content via Facebook Live.

Young people suggested it was hard to determine the true scale and severity of youth violence because of the alarming frequency with which acts of youth violence were displayed on social media, leading many respondents to suggest violence feels inevitable:

'I think you can definitely influence people into thinking that kind of thing is kind of normal and it kind of might make people more scared and kind of make people believe that their environment and their community and neighbourhood is less safe especially in these videos' (Milly, 18, F, East of England).

Peer pressure was seen to be a by-product of social media, particularly in relation to photo and video sharing apps like Snapchat, Tik Tok and Instagram. Social media was seen as encouraging violence through introducing young people to others who might be considered 'bad influences' and go on to pressure a young person to get involved in violence. Sohail, 17, from the East Midlands commented that young people become engaged in violence online because *'they need to be perceived as like cool or desirable.'*

Across regions young people explained that social media plays a significant role in escalating 'real life' youth violence. Young people believed that altercations started online, where it was easier to get into fights as the consequences felt less significant. However, they often then escalate into violence in real life.

Social media was also seen to play a role in prolonging conflicts, where previously a fight may have been settled or ended at school, young people might now continue their dispute online from home. Participants felt that this has led to an increase in bullying, with victims having fewer places to escape from it and, in the worst cases, being exposed to violence at all times of day and night. *'Anyway… it can explode really quickly yeah, I've had it in my school something came out about this girl, and it went round the whole school, and she ended up moving to another school sadly'* (Angel, 10, Southampton).

Young people reported that violent content is very easy to come across online, even if you aren't seeking it out. Snapchat, which only shares pictures or messages for a short period of time, was seen as the social media platform where violence was most likely to be shared. Most often the violence involved school fights which had been filmed and shared either as livestreams or after the event. As Akbar explained *'Yeah, seen things such as fights and like school brawls and people just attacking one another'* (Akbar, 15, M, Leicester).

At the most serious end, some young people said they had witnessed stabbings, suicides or murders that were streamed live on Facebook. Hakim, 15, from the East Midlands said: *'Actually that was a phase on Facebook live innit, people were killing themselves on that which is shit.'* Young people reflected across interviews that seeing content like this could normalise it, leading to young people believing that lots of people are involved in violent acts either against others or in the form of self-harm.

Other forms of violence experienced by young people online included hate speech and racial abuse, particularly on popular gaming apps, such as Discord. Young people reported that it is very easy to get access to age restricted content, usually by simply clicking that you are aged over 18. Many believe that social media platforms should do more to control the content that is shared on their platforms, including removing or censoring harmful or violent content. Whilst 'block' and 'report' functions are available on all platforms, young people across the research suggested that reporting content rarely results in the content being taken down. In the rare instances that content like a video is removed, it often quickly pops up on other platforms.

Whilst social media is not seen by young people as a primary cause of youth violence, it is consistently seen to have a role in amplifying violence, both through normalising it and by encouraging fights and bullying to continue in person.

What is the impact of youth violence?

The impact of violence was discussed by young people in two main ways. First young people talked about managing the threat of violence and navigating difficult situations, and second young people talked about the impact of youth violence on their mental health.

BEING PREPARED AND MODIFYING BEHAVIOURS

As noted in previous sections, many young people felt that violence was inevitable and talked about the threat of violence always being present. Respondents recognised that this had an impact on individuals, families and the wider community: *'No one should have to leave home knowing their son or child might not come back and it's very upsetting I know like as a community we mourn but also individually you can also mourn too'* (Leah, 16, F, London).

They talked about the long-term impact of this and described the trauma of past experiences and loss as something that stays with them: *'It's happened before in the past and I've had to deal with it... witnessing that...the experience and that so seeing it again, I won't say it's like I've gotten used to it, obviously I've seen it before so just had to deal with it the same way'* (Chris, 16, M, London).

Young people talked about managing the threat of violence by being hyper-vigilant and thinking carefully about their actions. Young people talked about having to consider the possibility of violence when making mundane decisions that could ultimately lead to life-or-death situations, they explained this leaves them exhausted, often searching for the place where they can relax and let their guard down. For many young people this was either home or

a local youth club. *'It's always good to have that place where you don't have to be out on the streets or out on the road ... you can just be calm down here [the local youth club]'* (Rafael, 16, M, London).

It was apparent that the way young people navigate the space around them impacted their sense of belonging, connection to the local community and access to resources and opportunities. Some boys in several different regions described no longer being able to attend certain youth clubs or sporting activities and teams after the age of 12 or 13 because they took place in a rival territory to their own, limiting the support and opportunities available to them.

Many young people talked about planning their daily journeys carefully with an acute awareness of territorial tensions and their own positions relative to them to mitigate their risk. For instance, young people explained that they arranged to travel in groups if they had to visit 'high-risk' areas to protect themselves, which in turn increases their risk of being considered a 'gang' by rival gangs and the police alike.

Young people talked about staying at home and avoiding going out, thinking carefully about where they can go, planning how they travel there, identifying where safe exits are in public spaces, avoiding being out at night, being aware of unspoken gestures or the tone of someone's voice, and wearing cheap clothes/not carrying around expensive items:

> "There's youth violence, but me, I just don't get involved in that. Just the other day, my friend got jumped by 20 guys... I did not put my hoodie on that day, I did not wear my tech. I wore the cheapest stuff I own that day.

(Isaac, 14, M, London).

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Young people spoke of the impact of youth violence on their mental health across all projects. They talked about the complexity of the relationship between mental health and violence. Many attributed violence to poor mental health and Imogen, 23, from Bradford felt addressing this would be key to reducing youth violence: *'People getting the support that they need from a young age to say I have self-worth, I am more than this, I don't want to hurt people'* (Imogen, 23, F, Bradford).

Ethan, reflected on how his previous experience being involved in gang violence against other young people had impacted his own mental health now as an adult: *'I've gone home and had nightmares and night terrors, you know, I've had like sleep paralysis from these kinds of experiences. I believe it's contributed a lot to like my mental health over the years without a doubt. It's really a lifelong experience that you never forget. You know I can see it as clearly now from when I was 13 as it was back then and these thoughts don't leave your mind'* (Ethan, 22, M, Bradford).

Many also reflected on the burden of feeling unsafe in their local area after witnessing youth violence. Drew from Devon said: *'I think if you're like feeling unsafe in your local area, sometimes people don't want to go to school, go outside at all, but if they don't want to be around friends, that can cause really poor mental health...a fear of being attacked, isolation'* (Devon focus group).

How does identity impact on youth violence?

It was clear across the data that the ways in which young people experience, manage and understand violence depends on their individual backgrounds and identities. When they were analysing their findings, young people discussed how different aspects of their identity impact on experiences: people talked about disability, neurodiversity, class, and most commonly gender, sexuality and race.

GENDER AND YOUTH VIOLENCE

The data collected by Peer Researchers suggests key differences in the ways in which different genders perceive and experience violence.

Women and Girls: Female respondents often discussed their personal experiences of youth violence being closely linked to their gender. However, an important caveat to note is that female respondents were often not sure if this explicitly counted as youth violence because experiences of gender-based harassment are **‘true for a female anywhere really’** (Zoe, 23, F, Bradford).

Young people overwhelmingly talked about young males being physically stronger, more dominant than females: **‘Females can also get targeted because they’re like a lot easier kind of because men are naturally stronger and bigger’** (Gwen, Wales focus group). Arjun, 13, from Wrexham summarised how young girls are generally seen as targets by young people while young boys are stereotyped as perpetrators: **‘Females are more targets of things like rape whereas males are usually peer pressured into more things like stabbing and violence.’**

Across interviews, girls and women talked more about safety and actively considered how to travel and where to go. Coping mechanisms include travelling in groups and trying to stay in well lit, busy places. Girls avoided areas where they had heard that these places might be unsafe and felt violence against them is so normalised that their behaviour is scrutinised more than those who perpetrate violence against them. Chelsea, 17, from Southampton said: **‘All I got was carry your keys in your hand, yeah, don’t wear your earphones, look up, don’t look down, don’t walk where, walk where there’s light, walk where there’s cameras. That’s all we’ve been taught. Don’t go out after 4. Come in when the street lights are on. That’s all I’ve ever been taught. And now, I stick up for myself, and I do stick up for myself against these men, I get accused of being violent and stuff when in reality all I’m doing is sticking up for myself.’**

Some girls disclosed that they had carried a knife before as protection from sexual violence, preferring the added layer of security this provided to them when they were travelling alone around their local area. They largely felt if gender-based violence against them was appropriately addressed, they would not feel the need to resort to such extreme measures for safety. Krista, 17, from Ipswich, said:

'There's some young women who carry pepper sprays or some kind of knives at night or even during the day because they're worried about getting assaulted and things like that. It's really important to take everything into consideration because it's not just about people, the youth, having a weapon; it's more about what is this weapon used for? And is it just used for committing crimes or is it about protection, to protect yourself?'

Girls reported disappointment with the way adults deal with gender-based violence and harassment. Many described frustration in the way schools were seen to normalise violence against girls by not taking issues of gender-based violence seriously. Emilia, 13, from Derby said: *'You'd see him at school like at school hitting girls and stuff, and the thing is if you told the teacher they'd just give him a warning and that's it.'*

Men and Boys: Overwhelmingly respondents shared the view that men and boys were the primary perpetrators of youth violence. Alongside this, most experiences of youth violence were shared by male respondents and the incidents predominantly consisted of a male victim. Respondents talked about both social factors in the form of expectations of masculinity and biological factors such as testosterone when discussing male involvement in violence.

'I think violence is definitely more prominent in men, just because I think there's just a sense of wanting to be dominant at that moment, masculine in a way, but I don't know, I feel like that's just a natural human trait' (Jodie, Wales focus group).

> I think males are more likely to be like you know perpetrators of violence, cos you know testosterone and stuff is you know proven to be like aggression and stuff like that.
>
> (Luca, 18, M, Wales).

Male involvement in violence permeates across roles of perpetrator, victim and witness, with many boys existing in all three roles at some point, and even falling into a victim-perpetrator cycle. A Wales focus group discussed this explaining, *"I think there's also a cycle where it's like, if you get jumped by someone then you want, like, you want to go after them."* (Wales focus group) But also noting that once you become a perpetrator, it can be hard to stop. *'It's a ladder of people [...] and you've got to fight to get to the top or they just get you and you're just going to be fucked'* (Wales focus group).

Respondents talked about the challenges of avoiding violence, they reflected that as much as a boy may attempt to modify behaviour and change factors within his control, a mundane situation can quickly become fatal due to anything from mistaken identity, involuntary affiliation, or simply wrong-place-wrong-time.

Junaid, 20, from Yorkshire expressed feeling a need to defend himself, *'I've had a couple altercations where I've had to you know defend myself and I didn't want to, I'm not proud of it […] because I was aware of my area and I was like if stuff like that does happen to me um then I need to know like how to defend myself and how I can get out of that situation when I need to.'*

Some boys described situations where being targeted by a group of other boys did not necessarily become violent immediately, rather the group of boys would attempt to assert dominance over the other boy(s) by forcing them to do different things such as requiring them to give them their belongings, like in Micah's case above, or subject them to humiliating acts like requiring them to dance or even denouncing certain areas on video. Resisting this would give the group reason to become violent. For some, it is less embarrassing to risk becoming a victim of violence than to submit to what is asked. Cyrus, 18, from London, discusses resisting these confrontations:

'I like to stand my ground if you get what I'm saying. It's tried to happen a lot of times but just because I'm not affiliated doesn't make me a nerd or a neek or whatever if you get what I'm saying, so if I feel like someone's talking to man [me] in a pressurised way tryna make man [me] look like some nerd or something, I'm going to retaliate or something cos I'm not gonna take it.'

LGBTQ+ IDENTITY AND YOUTH VIOLENCE

Some of the peer research teams focused on the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people and both within these projects and across the wider dataset young people said that their LGBTQ+ peers were likely to face bullying, hate speech and assault. Young people who identified as LGBTQ+ said their identity was key to their experiences of violence and therefore how they defined violence.

Theo, a focus group participant from Middlesbrough, explained that: *'Every woman I've talked to, every gay man and everyone who's transitioned, they've all told me stories similar to that, or their own thing where, you know, someone said something or someone along these lines has harmed them in some way'* (Ipswich focus group).

Throughout the data LGBTQ+ young people expressed feeling they were more at risk than their non-LGBTQ+ peers from youth violence. Young people reflected on why this may be, with many suggesting they felt 'othered' because they do not fit in with their heterosexual, cisgender peers. Many respondents felt a refusal to accept LGBTQ+ young people came from historic attitudes towards the community, as well as a general lack of positive representation of the community. Sam, 17, from Ipswich said:

'Lots of people think conforming is the key to security, and when they see someone living differently, who are different to this heavily defined norm, they act out against it. Being LGBTQ goes against what is established in society and obviously for many, many years, homophobia has been completely normalised and engraved into the public sphere of knowledge...I think the most likely group of people to perpetuate this type of negative behaviour is, and it's kind of been trivialised, is most likely straight white men. They're often the most privileged group and often, a lot of the time they retain a lot of negative bias towards minority groups because they're the most represented.'

Others felt that they were perceived as an easy target for abuse and violence by other young people, because of stereotypes that they are weaker and more vulnerable than their non LGBTQ+ peers. Overwhelmingly young people who are LGBTQ+ felt that youth violence against LGBTQ+ young people is normalised across the UK.

Tiegan, from Middlesbrough explained: *'Even within those groups people have seemed to start to give up hope like getting help for it or it stopping because it's so prevalent, like everybody probably has a situation like this and it's because so many people are willing to harm someone for being different and I don't really know how to fix that, apart from like stricter punishments... I think as well like, I think there's thing whole thing around like if you get help, then like that's just going to make everything worse, which sometimes it actually will, because if people find out then they'll come after you and all bad stuff happens.'*

RACISM AND YOUTH VIOLENCE

Across the research racism was heavily intertwined with how young people of colour conceptualised and experienced youth violence. Experiences of youth violence and racism formed the research questions for several projects in the North East and also appeared as a theme identified in data across several locations. Like many young people in the research, Ahmad, 18, from Bradford, described how as a young person of colour, widespread racism in his local area made him a more likely target for youth violence: *'A lot of people that I know that live there are very racist to Black people, South Asian people, anyone who's not white and there's a lot of hate crimes around that area.'*

Other respondents felt that as well as being directly targeted for their race, this aspect of their identity became immediately targeted if conflict arose between young people over a different issue. Honor, 15, from Liverpool explained: *'My friend, she's like mixed...but a classmate said that she would beat the Black out of her and I think that's very not nice...for example someone from your school could be trying to be like - you got in an argument with them and they can be saying racist stuff to make themselves look cooler to their friends. It makes themselves look like they're so good at arguing with people and they can just say racist comments to you'* (Honor, 15, Liverpool).

Similarly, frequent experiences of racism and a frustration at the apparent lack of repercussions for young people being racist to their peers leads young people of colour to feel they have to take matters into their own hands to defend themselves, perpetuating a cycle of victims of youth violence becoming perpetrators. Jordan, 18, from Derby said: *'A lot of people think that 'because I'm Black, I get a lot of hate and racism' so I'm going to fight back against that myself.'*

Similarly, Rahma, 18, from Bradford explained: *'Because you have a lot of diversity in Bradford and a high population of like especially South Asian people who are involved in thinking they experience a lot of racism, using things like knives can be like self-defence.'*

Haaniya, from Middlesbrough gave a personal account of how this has occurred for her, when her and her friends reacted violently after being a target of racist hate speech at their school: *'So I went to school right, basically there was me and some Czech girls were with me, and obviously there was English people, they were calling us Pakis and everything and then I was like, we went in a fight with them. So, then we jumped them and the police got involved.'*

Many young people felt that racial stereotypes played into how the public view youth violence and meant that, while young people of colour felt they were disproportionately victims of youth violence, they are still labelled as perpetrators. Maya, 18, from Brixton shares her thoughts, posing that even when a young, Black person was a victim of youth violence, they were still not given the same amount of public support or sympathy as a young, white person because of racial stereotypes attached to them by UK institutions:

'I feel like Black young boys in this area are definitely a target, in a sense that they're maybe the ones impacted by gang violence and drugs related issues... I definitely feel like race has a big part to play with that, especially with the police's treatment of youth violence. I feel like when you see issues of like a white, rich boy somewhere who's stabbed someone, say 50 times, everyone's like 'oh he must be mentally ill, what's wrong' but I feel like as soon as it's someone here, it's still bad, but it's always like 'oh that's how they all are, they all carry knives, they all do things like that and are probably in a gang', even pegging the victim as probably being involved...the impact is mostly felt by Black young boys, when they are victims, the police are like 'oh it's just gang issues', but it's not when it's on your doorstep.'

4.2 Social Action

The research findings were used by Peer Researchers and Changemakers to inform the development of local social action plans to make meaningful change. Peer Researchers took their findings and shared them with Changemakers to help them come up with projects responding to key issues identified by the young people they spoke to.

Social action across the delivery partners has focused primarily on three areas that were consistently identified in the findings of the research as needing improvement to address the causes of youth violence and create fairer and safer communities: (1) education and awareness raising about youth violence, and support, (2) engaging with key stakeholders to ensure young people's voices are heard and taken seriously and (3) place-based community-building.

This section is not an exhaustive review of social action taken by PAC projects but is rather an overview of the work young people have been driving to make safer, fairer communities. Further details are provided in the Delivery Partner Journeys section.

Education and awareness raising

Much of the social action undertaken across PAC focused on translating research findings into informative resources or learning materials that could be used in schools, youth clubs or other educational spaces. These materials have often focused on educating people about different identities and backgrounds, that research identified as critical in young people's experiences of violence. It is hoped that by educating young people and professionals about young people who are the most likely to face violence and discrimination on the basis of their identity: such as ethnic minority, disabled and LGBTQ+ young people, this will create greater equality and tolerance in the local community, preventing further discrimination and violence.

Young people have developed and delivered workshops to explore gender-based violence and have written sessions on racism and homophobia. Online safety has been a focus for several groups who have developed resources for school workshops and assemblies, as well as posters and toolkits in response to repeated concerns throughout the research regarding the impact of social media and cyber bullying on mental health. In addition to educating young people, much of this work through schools has also focused on educating teachers, parents and carers aiming to break down barriers to communication and understanding that were highlighted during the research.

Outside the school system, young people have delivered educational campaigns including web articles, **podcasts** and calls to action for professionals supporting young people. Campaigns have aimed to raise awareness of the signs of sexual assault and violence and encourage young people to speak up about it, encouraging young people, professionals and institutions to challenge harmful sexual behaviour and misogyny. This is hoped to create a safer environment for young women and girls who, as the research indicated, are disproportionately affected by sexual violence.

Most groups developed creative outputs to educate their audiences and raise awareness in a visual and accessible way. This included an animated video on cyber bullying and a documentary about experiences of violence. Another group produced a video about county lines, hoping that through educating young people on the process of exploitation, it will enable them to recognise the signs this is happening and lead to greater safety for the most vulnerable young people. Music was also seen as a valuable medium, with many groups writing songs and producing music videos. Through these tracks and accompanying videos, many of the young people sought to undo the stereotypes associated with drill and rap music. Some groups created performance pieces through dance and spoken word while others created artworks and public installations.

Peer Researchers and Changemakers showcased their work at a range of public facing dissemination events to engage with as many community members as possible and ensure the impact they made was sustained. As well as the national PAC conference in Liverpool, regional initiatives have included showcases, small conferences, invited talks and public engagement activity.

Stakeholder engagement

As well as disseminating findings and showcasing actions through events, the PAC Peer Researchers and Changemakers have also raised awareness by engaging with key stakeholders to share their findings and advocate for long term change. These included policy-makers, public sector institutions, third sector organisations, health and research organisations. With mistrust of the police emerging as a key finding across several peer research projects, many groups responded by attempting to build bridges between young people and their local police force, so young people feel they can turn to the police for support if needed. PAC teams were invited to contribute to events and processes run by the police. The team in Sheffield attended the South Yorkshire Police Youth Cabinet event, which included as guest speakers the Police Crime Commissioner and head of Violence Reduction Unit, while Peer Researchers from Bradford have signed up to an Independent Advisory Group with West Yorkshire Police. In Devon, young people have presented to the Serious Violence Duty Task and Finish Group with Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Partners, which has led to opportunities to conduct further peer research in the area. It is hoped that through brokering stronger relationships between young people and the police, young people will feel safer in their communities as well as having the opportunity to challenge negative stereotypes they indicated were associated with them by police throughout the research.

The teams also engaged a variety of charities and voluntary organisations, as well as health and research organisations. Many of these engagement opportunities came about because of strong core partnerships within the PAC teams which spanned multiple sectors and had embedded regional presence with links to key organisations and decision-making processes.

Community-building

A third set of social actions relate to community building through engagement with specific contexts: responding to and strengthening community-based relationships and extending communities through new or improved facilities, services and infrastructure.

Some groups, including those in Merseyside and the North East responded to serious youth violence that happened locally during the project and engaged with others in the community to hold events and contributed to local campaigns. Others focused on place building through exploring local safety and developed ideas and recommendations with local organisations.

For many groups, youth-led community engagement was central to their social action. Peer Researchers and Changemakers developed 'calls to action' with local partners that focused on changes to local communities in order to address the voicelessness many young people articulated during the research. Groups shared these and held community engagement events and stakeholder meetings. These sessions were often a space to trial ideas and co-produce solutions with the local community, allowing young people to feel involved and heard by their local community, rather than demonised or ignored. Many Changemakers felt this was vital to ensure young people felt included and engaged with their local community.

Peer Researchers and Changemakers also developed regional maps to signpost young people to existing services and facilities or to highlight the gaps in provision. For example, building on their peer research which identified 'lack of opportunities' as a key contributor to youth violence, Bradford PAC mapped employment, education and personal development opportunities as well as available support services for young people across Bradford's 30 wards. They took these maps into schools across the region, promoted them on bus shelters and for two weeks on a digital billboard. Not only was this intended to highlight where services are or how they can be improved, it also aims to offer the most vulnerable young people, who either may not be in schools or have access to these opportunities otherwise, a way to access a range of support services.

Mapping activities also identified local barriers and divisions as well as opportunities for disrupting these. For example, Peer Researchers in Bristol were conscious of the postcode-based gang wars around the youth centre. In response, a residential event was held to bring together young people from across the divide to help break down barriers and use as an early intervention tool for locality-based youth violence. Events such as these were held to promote long term methods for healthy communication and conflict resolution, making the area safer for all young people in it.

Within their communities, many groups developed social action that improved their neighbourhoods or provided safe spaces or services to support more marginalised residents. For example, young people engaged with community work such as litter picking, helping older people, and volunteering some of their time at foodbanks and warm hubs.

Some PAC teams trained young people themselves to play inspiring roles and/or provide key services in their community. One group trained as peer mental health support workers, offering guidance around mental health first aid and early interventions, using their position as young

people to offer this in a relatable and accessible way to other young people who may either be disengaged or not have access to mainstream mental health support. Other Peer Researchers were trained in emergency first aid and several groups developed mentoring schemes improving the overall safety of the local community.

Creating new sports-based opportunities for young people was also a popular action across the PACs. Free sessions, events and activities were offered as well as free gym programmes and clubs. This was done to provide fairer opportunities to all young people who may otherwise not be able to engage with extracurricular activities that the research identified can be costly or only available in schools. Within this, some projects actively engaged with the inequalities that different groups face in sports, for example, the Welsh Red Card Gender-Based Violence project is working to explore the differences that men, women and transgender people face in sports. Two Peer Researchers from Ipswich created a Refugee Football Team to provide a safe space for asylum seekers to play football together on a weekly basis. By providing safe spaces for marginalised groups of young people to engage in sports opportunities they may feel uncomfortable to otherwise participate in, this highlights how through social action PAC's Changemakers are providing fairer opportunities to vulnerable groups of young people.

PAC teams also worked with community hubs to improve services and facilities or even create new sites. Groups created drop in youth clubs and took over existing spaces as pop ups, affording young people in their area safe spaces to share their feelings and worries and access practical support, reducing the opportunity for them to become engaged in violence if they feel there is no other alternative.

4.3 Emerging Impact

Much of the social action shared is still in progress, and meaningful change will take time. However emerging impacts have already been observed by young people and Delivery Partners.

Impact on young people involved in PAC

"I know a lot of us probably weren't the people we are now with when we started, because a lot of our confidence and a lot of our ability to do things has been heightened and increased by being involved in the project. ...The project has definitely giving us confidence to talk about what we think.

(Peer Researcher, from Learning Partner Young People's Outcomes report).

In writing this report we asked Delivery Partners to reflect on the impact of PAC and for many a significant impact to date has been on the young Peer Researchers and Changemakers themselves. Delivery Partners talked about the numerous examples of how young people had developed new knowledge, skills, friendships and networks, as well as pathways into education, employment and campaigning through the programme.

To achieve impact Delivery Partners acknowledged the importance of strong support system with regular mentoring as well as a dedicated link for the young people to oversee the pastoral support. Good communication including regular contact was also seen as essential and host organisations provided a range of monthly one-to-one sessions and fortnightly group meetings with the use of WhatsApp chats in between.

All the partners reflected on the importance of 'ending well' to ensure both appropriate closure or continuation pathways for their young people and the sustainability of their social actions. Many networks held celebration events to bring together the different cohorts. Some were able to employ some of the Peer Researchers and others have established alumni networks. Many partners already had networks of young people embedded in their organisations and so it was relatively easy to include the Peer Researchers and Changemakers, enabling them to keep engaging and access opportunities for training, employment and participation in events.

In addition to the positive impact on young people, partners described the benefits of working in partnership with other organisations in their region to address a common issue of concern. Many of the partner organisations had never before worked together and are now collaborating in multiple ways even beyond PAC.

Young people were asked to reflect themselves on what they gained from being part of PAC; people talked about increased confidence and learning new skills relating to research, public speaking and group work. They also talked about learning to navigate tension and awkward moments and reflected on how hearing from others had helped shape and change their opinions. Young people talked about the value of meeting other young people from different cultural backgrounds and reflected that the research process had given them a greater understanding of other people's situations and life journey.

Young people also shared how through their social action and campaigning they had recognised their opportunity and ability to make change happen and empower others. Many young people shared that they expected to continue the work they had started on PAC by engaging with local communities, policy makers and organisations to educate and facilitate positive change.

> "I really wanna continue working with young people, so I feel like a youth group or something where like we could like talk about changes that need to be done, making those connections ...And then getting like a plan together, taking it to parliament or something. Really getting these young people to get involved and get their voices heard to make this country a young person first place.
>
> (Peer Researcher, from Learning Partner Young People's Outcomes report).

Broader impact

A significant piece of learning from this project has been that 'process is an outcome'. In peer research impact and learning happens throughout the process and beyond. Learning and action are diffuse, iterative and cyclical. There is an immediate ripple effect as people come together to research something and take action that goes beyond a traditional model of undertaking research to develop an intervention. It is clear across PAC that the process of convening and empowering young people around the issue of youth violence has an effect in and of itself. A large strand of work across PAC has been undertaken by the Learning Partner at UCLAN/UEL who have been working with young people and Delivery Partners to look at personal and wider impacts, as well as best practises in conducting peer research and social action. Their reports examine impact in more detail.

While it is too early to identify tangible social impact, the educational and cultural activities, examples of stakeholder engagement and community-based developments described above all have the potential to benefit the lives of individuals, groups, organisations and environments. As shown in the UCLAN/UEL report, stakeholders described an increase in understanding of how young people become victims and perpetrators of violence and high levels of commitment to engage with young people to work together on solutions. In many cases, benefits have already been felt by the recipients of services and facilities and the organisations that serve them.

Beyond the communities in which local partners and Changemakers were embedded, impact was also observed in the development of more spaces and processes through which young people can share their views and seek change, including Derbyshire's PCC Young Commissioners and the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership's two-year strategy and the Welsh Violence Prevention Unit's strategic framework, which actively involve young people in decision-making processes.

" I think because it comes across that they actually care about what they're saying and they value what we're saying. I think that's instilled a lot of confidence in us and what we're doing and who's really helped our project along. So I just want to add that like having that relationship with [policy unit] has been really like beneficial.

(Peer Researcher from Learning Partner Young People's Outcomes report).

Peer research findings and recommendations have also been integrated into entities such as Callington Town Council's Youth Services (South West) and the Erewash Local Children's partnership in Derbyshire, while the East Midlands Youth Mental Health group are developing criteria for funding applicants around the research findings. In the South East, the Delivery Partner has been able to advise Southampton's Pathways to Health initiative on the benefits and challenges of using peer research as a strategy.

Sustainable societal impact was maximised by strong multi-stakeholder regional partnerships embedded in key sectors and with strong links both to relevant power-holders and to the participants that the projects hoped to engage. Since developing these relationships takes time, the most successful partnerships started with these relationships in place. However, strong new relationships (e.g. with the police) also emerged from some of the projects. Many of the strongest examples of social action tended to be those that engaged communities and other stakeholders in a meaningful and sustained way, building on the work of embedded organisations and developing lasting opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Young people worked together within their regional teams and then across PAC with other Peer Researchers and project partners to think about the action that needed to happen based on their collective research findings.

Young people told us that the following need to happen now to create safer, fairer communities:

01

We want you to deal with the small stuff

What needs to change:

✓ Ignoring 'low level' bullying and homophobic, racist and sexist remarks online or in-person creates an unhealthy environment from which more serious violence can grow. Tackling this negative behaviour early on through education was a priority for young people.

✓ Young people want these seemingly 'low-level' negative behaviours that they manage daily to be taken seriously, particularly by the adults in their lives.

02

We need access to and knowledge of opportunities that are accessible to us

What needs to change:

✓ It is important to recognise that the cost-of-living crisis has increased the urgency of needing access to meaningful employment pathways that deter young people from violence.

✓ Young people do not always know where to find opportunities, so these need to be made more accessible.

✓ Young people need to understand how their skills can be used in the real world. More needs to be done to show young people how to identify and articulate the transferability of their skills

03

More youth friendly spaces would contribute to how safe we feel

What needs to change:

✓ Having access to appropriate physical space contributed to how safe young people feel. Young people are asking for more youth provision that can act as welcoming, where they are not competing for space and are supported by adults that they trust.

✓ Young people want to play a key role in designing social and physical infrastructure, so that initiatives to keep them safe are in the right place and genuinely responding to their needs.

04

Schools need to feel like safe spaces and should help prevent violence

What needs to change:

✓ Young people do not feel that teachers are appropriately equipped and trained to deal with preventing and dealing with violence in schools. Young people want an education system which prevents violence in schools and responds swiftly when it arises.

✓ Young people want to feel safe and welcome and want sanctions and behaviour management to be clear, fair and supportive.

✓ Schools need to intervene earlier on when they see violence and engage with pupils to get to the root of the issue.

✓ In-school mentoring would help young people access services where they need them.

✓ School exclusion should be used as a last resort, and not as a punishment but a support strategy.

✓ Young people would value increased pre and after school activity, in the form of sports and arts activities and space to work and complete homework.

05

Mental health support should be easy to access

What needs to change:

- A lack of mental health support can lead to violence. Being exposed to violence has an emotional and mental toll. Young people want a better, more holistic, understanding of the importance of mental health and wellbeing from those around them as well as from services.

- Young people want mentoring, guidance and support that helps prevent them becoming involved in violence.

- Young people impacted by violence want faster and easier access to appropriate support services when they need them.

06

Young people should feel safe online

What needs to change:

- The amount of violence young people see on social media is shocking and impacts their sense of safety; it needs to be better regulated.

- Young people want to feel protected online. They want to know that they can report inappropriate content and it will be managed appropriately and quickly.

- They want safeguards and they want those around them to understand the challenges that they face online, recognising that the online and in real live worlds are often blurred.

07

We need you to consider the inequalities and lived experiences of young people to find solutions to youth violence

What needs to change:

✓ Young people are clear that youth violence is experienced unequally, and their individual experience, background and identity affect the way they experience violence. This must be considered when working on solutions, developed with appropriate communities of young people.

✓ For groups that have been let down by institutions the first step is to rebuild trust which should be prioritised.

✓ Respect for young people and their lived experience is crucial when they are approached on topics of youth violence, including sexual violence against girls and people who identify as LGBTQ+ and racialised experience of violence.

08

Young people should be partners in developing solutions and change

What needs to change:

✓ Young people want to be part of the discussion to create safer, fairer communities, so invite them to community consultations, and to join committees and boards.

✓ Engagement needs to be genuine; this means respecting what they have to say as you would any colleague.

✓ Respect also means that young people are involved at a time when they can have real input, not once most decisions have been made.

CONCLUSION

The breadth and depth of research findings and social action that have taken place across PAC is unique and is already leading to change and action across communities. Young people have been working with other young people, they have been campaigning, setting up new services and talking to people who can make change happen. PAC has created an opportunity for young people to define their priorities within research into youth violence; they have defined research questions, carried out the fieldwork, analysed their data and acted on their findings.

PAC research and action has been successful because it has explored local neighbourhood contexts and bought findings together to consider the bigger picture across regions. Taking a localised approach is vital to making meaningful change. Reviewing findings across PAC, it is clear that young people have a great deal of passion and ideas for change that add new perspectives when considering solutions to existing challenges. So much of what young people experience is outside of the experiences of those who are making policy, it is essential that young people are heard and empowered so that genuine change can happen.

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