Young people’s perceptions of provision and opportunities in Suffolk

Katie Tyrrell, Research Associate

March 2019
FOREWORD

Growing up as a young person is challenging in every generation. For the young today some of the challenges may be familiar to any of us, whatever age, while others maybe new, generated by social and technological changes specific to our time and context. Many organisations and people want to help, to enable young people to have a good experience of growing up, with support, guidance and positive opportunities. Many people in Suffolk are concerned that there are not the services and provision that young people need, and that more needs to be done.

A group of us who want to help recognised that it would be a mistake for us to presume we know what good provision means without asking the young people themselves what would improve their quality of life. I am grateful to those who joined me from the Suffolk Community Foundation and the Ipswich Opportunity Area, who enabled us together to commission the research described in this report. I am grateful to the young people who were so willing to take part, and to Katie Tyrrell of the University of Suffolk and Darren Oxbrow of Volunteering Matters who undertook this substantial project.

The results and recommendations are challenging to all of us. They are challenging because of the world they describe that young people experience in our county. They are challenging too because making a difference that would benefit the young of Suffolk is achievable, with determination and coordinated effort.

I hope this report is widely read. But much more than that, I hope we can act upon it together and quickly.

Martin Seeley, Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reflects the voices and perspectives of 77 young people from the ages of 11-18 years old across communities living in both urban and rural areas of Suffolk. Recent research\(^1\), which sought to identify young people’s perceptions of engagement and opportunities in Ipswich, revealed that young people have a vast array of concerns about their local communities. In particular, the influx of gang violence within their local areas (having negative implications for their sense of safety and well-being) as well as the provision of mental health support and employment opportunities. Prior to engaging in county-wide responses to community issues, it was considered important to identify what were young people’s perceptions of their local community across different geographic locations in Suffolk, to develop an evidence base and inform the future developments of youth provision.

Table 1: Summary of the qualitative findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ‘There isn’t anything for us here’</td>
<td>Young people were frustrated by the lack of things to do within their local communities. Particularly, young people living in rural communities, for which travel to alternative destinations was crucial</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Prospects and perceived opportunities</td>
<td>The perceived lack of things to do within communities was compounded by the view that this was also a barrier in gaining work experience and employment opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Community safety</td>
<td>The fear of crime, violence and gang activity within local communities is negatively influencing young people’s movements and perceptions of space. Discussion of gang activity was more likely in areas outside of Ipswich</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Disconnect and social exclusion</td>
<td>Young people described feelings of disconnect and social exclusion, regarding a lack of accessible transport, the cost implications of engaging in activities as well as perceived inaction when voicing their concerns and opinions on matters which directly affect their everyday lives</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Supportive, safe and social spaces</td>
<td>Most consistently, young people described the need for safe indoor social spaces to belong, spend time with friends and seek additional support if needed</td>
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Overall, young people describe a complexity of different challenges and issues they face within their local communities and across wider Suffolk. In particular, young people expressed a feeling of overall exclusion and a lack of social and employment opportunities. Furthermore, limited accessibility to public transport routes but also the cost of travel and activities were key issues for young people, particularly within rural areas of Suffolk. The most consistent message was a lack of access to safe social spaces where young people have a sense of ownership and can relax among friends. Moreover, it appears that there is a lack of coherent, targeted messages toward young people themselves to raise awareness of opportunities. Subsequently, a number of recommendations are suggested (please see Section 6: Recommendations).

Table 2: Summary of the recommendations

| 1. Coherent and consistent marketing of opportunities |
| 2. Addressing social exclusion: Travel and finances |
| 3. Development of safe, supportive social spaces |
| 4. A focus on youth voice |
| 5. Knife crime and youth gangs: Changing the narrative |

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In undertaking this project, the research team would like to thank the individual schools and organisations that worked collaboratively with us to arrange focus groups. We would also like to thank Darren Oxbrow, Volunteer Manager at Volunteering Matters, who provided significant support by coordinating and facilitating focus group discussions. Most importantly, we would like to thank all the young people who engaged in the discussions, allowing us into their lives, and sharing their perceptions with us. Without their participation, this project would not have been possible.
1. INTRODUCTION

Young people are frequently excluded from decision making, even in matters that impact directly on their lives. Therefore, recent efforts in research have been made to ensure that young people have an active participatory voice in shaping programme development and service provision. However, this is still a work in progress.

Recent research conducted by the Suffolk Institute for Social and Economic Research for the Ipswich Opportunity Area, sought to identify young people’s perceptions of engagement and opportunities in Ipswich. The research revealed that young people have a vast array of concerns about their local communities – particularly the influx of gang violence within their local areas, which impacts negatively on their sense of safety and well-being, as well as the provision of mental health support and employment opportunities. For example, young people frequently referred to the problem of violent crime and youth involvement in gang crime unprompted during discussion, also reflecting upon potential solutions to the problems from their perspectives.

Prior to engaging in county-wide responses to community issues, it was considered important to identify what young people’s perceptions, living in different geographies in Suffolk, were of their local community. Focusing particularly upon young people’s perceptions of safety, provision and opportunities within their community, the research aimed to build an evidence base to enhance service development, inform future investment into youth provision and help forge resilient communities. This report reflects the voices and perspectives of 77 young people from the ages of 11-18 years old, captured within focus group discussions, across communities within urban and rural areas of Suffolk from November 2018 - March 2019.

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2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Young people's voice

Children and young people have too frequently been excluded from research, evaluation and policy decisions because adults are considered to have superior knowledge and understanding. Moreover, if children and young people are involved in policy decision-making this is often met with tokenistic gestures and low priority, as opposed to true participatory inclusion of children and young people. Researchers have criticised this approach in devaluing young people’s perspectives, as in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC,1989)\(^5\) (Figure 1), children have the right to be listened to and taken seriously as experts in their own lived realities. Additionally, adults do not have sufficient understanding of children’s lived realities to be able to make informed decisions on the policies and programmes directly affecting children and young people’s everyday lives\(^6\).

The UNCRC (1989) has made significant impact emphasising the importance of children and young people’s consultancy and involvement in activities affecting their lives\(^7\). Since the ratification of the UNCRC in the UK, there have been increasing consultations and participatory initiatives working alongside children and young people to gain their perspectives on topics surrounding education, health and social care\(^8\). Furthermore, following the publication of Every Child Matters: Change for Children (DfE, 2004), and the appointment of a children’s commissioner, children and young people have played a more active part in public life, policy development and service provision, although this is still a work in progress\(^9\).

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2.2 Young people in an age of austerity

Since the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent recession, there has been a period of austerity in which children and young people’s services have experienced significant decline due to government budget restrictions\textsuperscript{10}. For example, between 2010 and 2016, it was estimated that a total of around £386 million has been cut from youth services across the UK, based on local authority spending\textsuperscript{11}. Additional reports also suggest a reduction in health provision and welfare reforms for children and their families\textsuperscript{12}. Predicted increases in child poverty, in addition to a reduction of services for children and young people and limited mobility, has led to a focus on social recovery in addition to economic recovery\textsuperscript{13}. While some developments have been made, with reductions in national youth unemployment rates compared to historic standards\textsuperscript{14}, there are still challenges relating to youth across the country.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure1.png}
\caption{The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12 and Article 13 (UNCRC, 1989)}
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\begin{table}[h]
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\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Article 12} & \\
\hline
1. State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. & \\
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law. & \\
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\begin{table}[h]
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\textbf{Article 13} & \\
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1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice. & \\
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\textsuperscript{12} BMA (2016). Cutting away at our children’s futures: how austerity is affecting the health of children, young people and families. [Accessed: 16/03/19] https://www.bma.org.uk/-/media/files/pdfs/working_for_change/improving_health/child

-\_summary_document.pdf

Furthermore, recently there has been an increased media and public interest in young people’s involvement in gang-related knife crime. Some have suggested that a reduction in youth provision and lack of long-term investment, alongside social exclusion and inequality, is likely to be linked with increases in young people’s involvement in violent crime\(^\text{15}\). The relationship between youth provision and crime is not clear cut\(^\text{16}\), and there are several extraneous influencing factors and a lack of longitudinal research investigating the impact of reduced provision. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that well-organised, structured activities and youth services are valuable resources for local communities, as well as positively influencing young people’s well-being and quality of life.

The current figures and reports regarding young people’s mental health, social media usage and involvement in gang-related crime for example, have sparked national media interest, generating what appears to be ‘moral panic’\(^\text{17}\). This has increased the likelihood of reactive approaches to interventions as opposed to making a formulated, coherent and effective response to tackle root causes. Young people’s opinions are critical in influencing the reformation of youth provision, as they are experts in their own lived realities. Interventions, programmes and service provision designed as solutions to national and localised community difficulties revolving around young people should therefore identify and embed youth voice from the outset.

“Knife crime is a social problem – its causes, not its symptoms, must be treated, and austerity is one of its causes. The UK needs to refill local communities with positive services and activities for young people. Children are part of the solution to knife crime, not part of the problem.”

Case and Haines (2019)\(^\text{18}\)


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2.3 Young people in Suffolk

Suffolk is a coastal county in the East of England, with an estimated population size of around 120,200 children and young people aged between 10-24 years (ONS, 2017). Despite having pockets of wealth, Suffolk has some of the country’s most deprived neighbourhoods, including those within urban areas of Ipswich and Waveney, as well as hidden rural areas of deprivation\(^9\). According to the Suffolk Hidden Needs report (2016) the rates of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), is higher than the national average, with these individuals being at significant risk of disadvantage and social exclusion as they enter adulthood.

Overall crime rates in Suffolk appear to be slowly decreasing, with figures that are below the average across wider England and Wales\(^20\). However, recent figures released by Suffolk Constabulary suggest that there has been an increase in knife crime in Suffolk from 2017-18 (in parallel with the rest of England and Wales), albeit suggested to be one of the counties with the lowest levels of knife crime offences according to Office for National Statistics (ONS) data\(^21\). Nonetheless, the recent exploitation of young people within Suffolk to run county lines, involving organised gang-involved drug crime and subsequent violent knife crime has caused great unrest among communities. The implications of living in gang-affected areas for non-gang involved young people is evident in previous research, with negative repercussions regarding restricted use of space, social mobilisation, interaction with authorities and potential marginalisation\(^22\). Multi-agency approaches to tackling these issues, for example supporting communities and providing social intervention and opportunities for young people, have been suggested in response\(^23\).

It is, therefore, unsurprising that in Suffolk, there has been an increased emphasis on improving the lives of young people across the county, including attempts to

enhance educational and employment opportunities to improve social mobility. Increasing programmes, interventions and positive responses are also emphasised in response to the recent youth gang crime incidents across the county, with a predominant focus upon Ipswich as the county’s most populated and urbanised area.

The purpose of this research was to capture a broad range of perspectives from young people themselves; discussing how they identify with their local community, the provision and opportunities they’re looking for locally, and their perceptions regarding safety. It is hoped that this broader perspective from a variety of young people within different contexts across the county will help inform the development of interventions and allocation of resources to improve the lives of Suffolk’s young people.

3. METHODOLOGY

Various methods of engaging young people in research, evaluation, programme and policy development have been created, moving away from more traditional methods used in isolation, which have been criticised for researching on children as opposed to with children. Instead, child-centred methodological techniques are utilised, emphasising young people's strengths in the research process, involving mediums which can enable children to communicate in various ways, promoting inclusivity and reducing social exclusion.

3.1 Qualitative Focus Group Interviews

A qualitative approach to the research was employed to encourage young people’s participation and voice in a way most appropriate for them. The session included a warm-up exercise in which young people were asked to draw or write down words which they associate with their community. We then engaged young people in a mapping exercise of their local community and Ipswich, in which they identified areas of safety and areas which they considered as being somewhat unsafe, in addition to their use of youth provisions within the town. Following this we engaged in

discussion about what young people believed would enhance their local community and Suffolk more generally (for a full outline of questions and session plan, see Appendix 1). Young people were given the choice as to how they would like to express their thoughts and perceptions during the session, via talking, writing or drawing as well as engaging in the mapping exercise, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate should they wish to do so.

Focus groups were used as the qualitative method to engage young people in discussions. Focus groups facilitate in altering the adult-child power dynamics in favour of the young person to lead discussions and determine what is disclosed and shared in the group25. Focus group discussions can also be empowering for sharing ideas with others who can relate to their experience and for considering the extent to which their rights and needs are met within their everyday environments and contexts26.

3.3 Ethical considerations

The young people who engaged in the focus groups as part of the project all volunteered to participate. All participants were provided with information about the project being undertaken by the University of Suffolk alongside Volunteering Matters, as well as how the findings would be circulated. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and they were informed about their rights to anonymity, confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study. All sessions were audio recorded with the permission of the young people for later transcription and analysis. Participant’s answers were anonymised with an appropriate pseudonym to protect identity. The research team are highly experienced researchers, working with individuals across the lifespan, have enhanced DBS certificates and have all undergone appropriate safeguarding training.

The research design outlined was subject to ethical approval from the University of Suffolk and complied with the British Sociological Association and the British

Psychological Society’s Guidelines. Adherence to guidelines set out by the United Kingdom Research Integrity Office’s Code of Practice for Research ensured that the research followed the principles of the Singapore Statement of Research Integrity:

- Honesty in all aspects of research
- Accountability in the conduct of research
- Professional courtesy and fairness in working with others
- Good stewardship of research on others’ behalf.

The verbatim data from the audio recordings was subject to thematic framework analysis, as devised by the National Centre for Social Research.

### 3.4 Participants

Young people engaging in focus group discussions were of mixed gender, age and ethnicities. A total of 77 young people aged between 11 and 18 (36 males and 41 females) engaged in eight focus group discussions with the researchers. Each focus group took place within schools or services for young people and included between 6-9 young people per session. The young people were based within five different regions across the county of Suffolk, including Ipswich, Leiston, Lowestoft, Felixstowe and Haverhill.

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4. FINDINGS

The young people presented to the researchers a broad range of perspectives, including narratives around their lived realities within their communities and experiences of wider Suffolk, points of concern regarding safety, access and opportunities as well as the desire for safe support spaces to belong. These themes cover a wide range of issues from their perspective, reflecting local as well as wider cultural issues, and are explored in-depth throughout this section.

4.1 ‘There isn’t anything for us here’

This was a consistent theme across all focus group discussions, with young people suggesting that there wasn’t anything for them in their local community or town. Young people describe a frustration with the lack of things to do within their locality, suggesting there is ‘not much to do’, a ‘lack of out-of-school activities’ and places to go with friends during their spare time (Figure 1).

![Figure 2: Sophia’s responses (aged 13) when asked to describe what it is like to live in her local community.](image)

Figure 2: Sophia’s responses (aged 13) when asked to describe what it is like to live in her local community.
When asked about what it is like to live in their town, village or community, young people consistently suggested that there was a lack of things for them to do, which generated frustration and a lack of connection, belonging and attachment to the areas in which they live. This is particularly evident in the extracts from Kieran and Preston below, which suggest that Ipswich, as a town, lacked activities and opportunities for them, including chances:

“Lack of things for us, dirty parks, don’t give young people a chance, lack of stuff to do.” (Kieran, aged 17, Ipswich)

“There isn’t even nothing good about Ips man, it’s dead.” (Preston, aged 17, Ipswich)

Similar narratives were also evident across other wider areas of Suffolk, including Haverhill, Leiston and Claydon, in which young people frequently described a lack of things to do, boredom and a desire to travel further afield to reach opportunities and activities that appeal to them. This combined with a frustration regarding the lack of travel options within more rural areas leads to feelings of disconnect (see Disconnect and social exclusion). The impact of reduced youth organisations and scheduled bus services within rural Suffolk\(^{30}\) is, therefore, having significant detrimental effects upon its young people living in these areas.

“Boring, I’d rather get on a train and go to London, there’s nothing to do.” (Jacob, aged 17, Haverhill)

“Yeah it’s true; there is nothing really to do.” (Liam, aged 11, Haverhill)

“Or they [young people] just go home and lie on the sofa for the rest of the day.” (Ryan, aged 13, Leiston)

“That’s literally my life, because there is nothing to do.” (Shannon, aged 15, Leiston)

“I think most of what we’ve got is that either there isn’t much of stuff, there isn’t many things to do around here… most of the activities, if you want to do anything you have to go to Ipswich, but there is no actual transport into Ipswich.” (Sam, aged 13, Claydon)

Figure 3: Group A’s thoughts about their local community in Felixstowe.

Figure 4: Group B’s thoughts about their local community in Claydon.
4.2 Prospects and perceived opportunity

Frustration with a lack of things to do was compounded by the view that this may also act as a barrier in obtaining work experience and employment opportunities. Furthermore, there was a perception that current options, opportunities and advice focused on jobs and work experience that were not of interest to the young people themselves, particularly within school settings. Instead, there is an apparent desire for a focus on vocational courses, apprenticeships and creative subjects.

“Yeah, that’s what they mostly focus on… It mostly revolves around maths, English and science.” (Jermaine, aged 14, Ipswich)

“Maybe more places that give work experience, so you’re getting prepared for the future.” (Chanel, aged 12, Ipswich)

“I guess it’s also job opportunities as well, people our age are all trying to get jobs so we can get money to go places, like if there were job opportunities in our area.” (Latisha, aged 15, Haverhill)

“I think they need to have more opportunities, and a lot of places ask for work experience and qualifications, but how can you get those at 14?” (Ellie, aged 14, Felixstowe)

Some of the young people interviewed suggested that they wanted to access apprenticeships to become plumbers, electricians and mechanics; others expressed desires to become social workers, get involved in theatre production, as well as photography. It was considered that additional provision was needed to provide these opportunities outside of educational environments. Despite the variety of positive interventions, activities and programmes relating to youth engagement and employment seemingly on offer for young people across Suffolk by both voluntary and public sector, the messages are not necessarily filtering down, as suggested by the young people themselves. Subsequently, adding further to the perception of a lack of or blocked opportunities.

“There are opportunities here, but they’re not advertised enough, like football and netball, but no-one really shouts about it.” (Charlotte, aged 15, Haverhill)
“No one really talks about them [opportunities] really, so I don’t know about them” (Jermaine, aged 14, Ipswich)

“There might be things, but they don’t spread the word enough, they keep it quiet.” (Aaron, aged 15, Lowestoft)

“There’s nothing really to do is there…” (Tariq, aged 16, Ipswich)

“We don’t get told about them.” (Preston, aged 17, Ipswich)

“Whoever owns the council and that, they need to let us young people know.” (Kieran, aged 17, Ipswich)

### 4.3 Community safety concerns

While engaging in the mapping activities, there were various perceptions regarding safety. However, the majority of young people tended to feel unsafe within their local communities, in particular parks, specific parts of Ipswich town centre and surrounding areas. Most young people suggested this was due to what they had heard within their local community or through peers regarding gang activity. Thus, the influence of gang activity and violent crime is negatively influencing movements, perceptions of space and social inclusion of non-gang involved young people31.

“It makes you feel unsafe going places like you don’t know what’s around you.” (Louise, aged 13, Ipswich)

“As well like the park situation, the park is supposed to be for younger children and if you were like a parent you wouldn’t feel safe taking your child there knowing any of that stuff has been happening.” (Chris, aged 14, Ipswich)

“I recently moved over to [location] and some things that I’ve noticed there is like a lot of litter on the streets, there’s nothing to do, so it’s quite unentertaining. There has been a load of stabbings in the park near me so I feel quite unsafe there. There are good people in the community, but some of the people are quite rude to you, so there are the good and the bad in the community.” (Jasmine, aged 11, Ipswich)

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Young people were also asked about the places where they feel safe, the majority of which suggested home, but also for those who did engage in out-of-school activities or sports, they suggested it was these which encouraged feelings of ‘comfort’ and subsequent safety. A more varied response was given regarding places in which young people felt safe depending on the area, but also the school environment in which they reside in. Interestingly, discussion around gang activity and knife crime was more likely in areas outside of Ipswich, including Felixstowe, Lowestoft, Claydon and Haverhill, referring to individuals within their local area, but also their concerns of areas surrounding Ipswich.

“It’s kind of unsafe, because mostly what’s going on, the murders that are going on around here could affect other people in the area ‘cause they might be worried, like if they’re out at night or something. I know people older age could be trusted: it’s mostly younger kids that could be targeted pretty easily.” (Jake, aged 15, Ipswich)

“Christchurch Park is okay, but any other park is a no go, like Chantry Park. I only went there when I was young and even then I saw a lot of drug use and gangs. I wouldn’t go there now.” (Ollie, aged 13, Claydon)

“It might seem like a little town where nothing happens, but people are scared to go out late at night just in case something does happen.” (Charlie, aged 12, Leiston)

Some young people referred to local groups of individuals considered to be in gangs, and the negative influence this has upon them as a young person living within that community. This included feeling unsafe within local areas and parks, limiting young people’s desire to enter those areas, and feeling as if they are judged as a result of increasing public attention, presence and accounts of groups of younger people engaging in antisocial behaviour, further facilitating community divides.

“They’re like nice but there are a lot of dodgy kids and drugs around the parks now, it’s like not where we can just go.” (Jacob, aged 13, Haverhill)

“The park is meant to be somewhere where everyone can go if they want, and feel safe and stuff, and sometimes it’s not always.” (Farris, aged 14, Haverhill)
“They’re people that like everyone knows, but not for good reasons obviously, and there’s like apparently some mafia and people from this school who are a part of it.” (Sophia, aged 15, Haverhill)

“We’ve got people in the town who get really scared. They think people walking round in the gangs and that are just going to attack them. I think people get really scared about that. I’ve got friends who don’t come up to where I live because they’re scared if they see someone they’ll go after them, or whatever.” (Jacob, aged 13, Haverhill)

“Because there are a lot of people in gangs… teenagers are seen in a bad light because people always assume they are up to trouble, and they are not necessarily, and the gangs in town make it worse for teenagers.” (Haiden, aged 14, Lowestoft)

Specific reference to gangs within Ipswich was a concern for those living outside of Ipswich, which had a negative impact on their desire to travel to the town, despite describing it as essential due to lack of provision, shops and activities for young people within their local area.

“There are a lot more attacks in Ipswich.” (Jake, aged 13, Felixstowe)

“In the summer there was like gangs going around and a lot of stabbings.” (Ryan, aged 12, Felixstowe)

“Like when you listen to Suffolk radio, if there is something that has happened it is normally in Ipswich, that’s [where] attacks happen.” (Alice, aged 11, Felixstowe)

“Yeah someone got stabbed at Nando’s.” (Corey, aged 14, Felixstowe)

Interestingly, despite feeling unsafe, some young people suggested that there is actually a sense of community within some of the areas affected by drug-related gang crime. Furthermore, some commented on the reduced likelihood of being a target of violent crimes as a non-gang member, suggesting it may be useful to focus the narrative upon prevention. For example, addressing and identifying risk factors of drug use at early ages, in addition to increasing opportunities, activities and support for those considered vulnerable but also the wider population of young people across Ipswich and wider Suffolk.
“Well I live in [....] which is like the council estate down the road and to put it nicely, is quite dodgy. There is decent transport into town and there’s the sports centre, supermarket, parks, although they’re not maintained. It’s kind of got a bit of a drug problem I think. You hear it from all the kids at school that are smoking and all that. It’s quite dirty, but the people are nice. Sometimes I feel like it’s more of a community than Claydon is, which is weird, because it’s only a small estate, but you know each other and you’ll help each other out. Like I remember there was this boy who had a brain tumour and all the community gave donations to his parents.” (Mikayla, aged 16, Claydon)

“I think for someone to attack you there has got to be a purpose, they must be like owing them drug money, you kind of put themselves in that situation, well most of the time someone isn’t going to stab you for no reason.” (Keisha, aged 14, Felixstowe)

*Figure 5*: Mapping activity: Young people were asked to consider where they do and do not feel safe, as well as the facilities used and unused within their locality.
4.4 Disconnect and social exclusion

There is no clear and concrete definition of social exclusion as it is complex and multi-dimensional, but broadly, it refers to the lack of or denial of resources, rights and benefits available to the majority of people within society (for example, employment and access to services)\(^{32}\). The young people throughout the project described feeling excluded, financially, spatially and socially as a result of limited options, accessibility, employment and reliance on caregivers for income. This was reflected upon significantly among the young people living within rural communities, who felt at a disadvantage due to accessibility issues compounded by low financial independency. Not only this, but young people within rural areas described their localities as ‘unnoticed’ or ‘neglected’. Some young people described being purposefully excluded from some community facilities within their area. However, accessibility issues were largely a consequence of inadequate transport services. Lack of accessible transport not only reduces the access to services and activities, but also to further education and employment opportunities, disabling agency and autonomy for young people across rural Suffolk.

“You have to get on a bus to Saxmundum and then you have to get a train if you want to go anywhere further.” (Jordan, aged 15, Leiston)

“I think most of what we have got is that either there is not much of stuff [or] there aren’t many things to do around here. I think out of all of us four we’re in different areas. You two are in Ipswich aren’t you? Erm, I live in […] so I applied it to this, most of the activities if you want to do anything you have to go to Ipswich, but there’s not transport into Ipswich.” (Ollie, aged 13, Claydon)

“Yes, it’s more that I feel like I am a burden on them [parents], like they’re happy to do it, but I have to give them so much notice cause I can’t just go ‘oh, I need to go out now I’ve just been invited’, and there isn’t even a bus; you have to walk for a mile to find a bus stop. I have to plan everything in advance and I can’t just be like ‘you know what, I’m going out’.” (Freya, aged 15, Claydon)

“I wanted to go to sixth form; it’s going to cost me £900 a year for transport, wherever I go.” (Amelia, aged 16, Leiston)

Perceived poor transport links were further aggravated by high costs for public transport for young people, particularly from those with lower parental financial income.

“It’s like £6 for a train ticket to Ipswich, that’s there and the way back.” (Branden, aged 13, Leiston)

“And it costs money for the bus pass, and then you have to pay for the buses as well.” (Sam, aged 13, Claydon)

“I live in Ipswich. It’s easier to get around, but buses are expensive. My mum works, my dad doesn’t (he has an illness) so he can’t take me places so I have to get myself around. And I have to rely on my parents for money when they might not necessarily have the money to give me. I end up walking everywhere, and if you walk into the wrong area you just feel unsafe.” (Mikayla, aged 15, Claydon)

Cost also considerably hindered participation in activities, events and social opportunities among young people. Yet again, reliance on parents and caregivers with low financial income further enhanced feelings of social exclusion, frustration and guilt.

“Sometimes… if there is something you really want to do but your parents can’t afford it then like you feel a bit upset and stuff.” (George, aged 13, Ipswich)

“Sometimes people can’t access them because of money and that… The clubs up the sports centre cost like £30 a month which is quite expensive… Things are too far as well…” (Jermaine, aged 14, Ipswich)

“Everything you do needs money.” (Troy, aged 13, Felixstowe)

In addition to accessibility issues, young people feel as if their voices are excluded with regards to the development and formation of provision within their communities. There is an apparent perceived disconnect between decision-makers and young people’s perceptions and ideas, extending from school councils to local councils. In particular, young people feel as if there is a lack of action based upon their perceptions, ideas and requests. This was particularly evident among young people within Ipswich. As mentioned earlier in the report, it is a basic right for young people to be listened to, be taken seriously and have the freedom to express themselves
and their opinions, young people’s voices are crucial in influencing the development and sustainability of service provision and delivery, as it affects their everyday lives.

“It is sometimes annoying, if you have got something that you think could help a lot of people and they don’t listen then you kind of feel a little bit left out, like you can’t really do much.” (George, aged 13, Ipswich)

“You want to make things better, but sometimes they just don’t listen.” (Alyza, aged 12, Ipswich)

“There is no point in having a say at school council if they don’t do anything about it.” (Kaydan, aged 13, Ipswich)

“The thing is, like with this school, we have a say… but they won’t do it. They’ll tell us to join this – I don’t know what it’s called now – in base group. You have one or two people where you come into a room with a teacher and you have your say, like if you said have a new football pitch or something. But it won’t happen, so there is no point having a say in school when there is no chance it’s going to happen.” (Chris, aged 14, Ipswich)

“The council doesn’t do much anyway, someone has their say, you expect the council to do something about it but they don’t, it’s a waste of time.” (Jake, aged 15, Ipswich)

“Anything we do say, it’s not going to matter to them, this has happened so many times, it won’t change.” (Kieran, aged 17, Ipswich)

4.5 Safe and supportive social spaces

The most consistent theme throughout the interviews with young people was the desire for a safe social space – young people desiring ownership over indoor areas in which they can socialise with friends. Therefore, instead of focusing specifically on interventions that put the onus on young people to think critically and make decisions, it may be beneficial to provide spaces in which young people can feel safe and supported, fulfilling their basic needs.

“They wonder why young people turn out how they do; they don’t do fuck all to support them.” (Preston, aged 17, Ipswich)

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When asked what could be done within their community, young people frequently referred to more ‘activities’, ‘social events’ and ‘youth clubs’, predominantly so they have a space to meet others, places to go and a location to call their own.

“We need more like youth clubs, and like skateparks for teenagers because they don’t really have too many places to go.” (George, aged 13, Ipswich)

“There is nowhere indoors for you to like hang out, unless you go to a friend’s house, and this time of year it’s hard to go out, go to the park and things.” (Shannon, aged 15, Leiston)

The desire for additional spaces for young people may reflect a lack of awareness of existing provision. However, some young people did make specific reference to youth clubs and support that were considered an effective model, although there is no one-size-fits-all approach. When asked what this space would look like to them, most young people suggested an indoor space, broadly reflecting a youth centre with activities, computers, games room, refreshments and space to mix socially.

“Somewhere that feels safe, like it’s yours” (Amy, aged 11, Lowestoft)

“It will help us, say if you don’t have many friends and you have no-one to rely on then maybe going to like a youth club would help that and give you more confidence and make you feel like you have someone that’s there for you.” (Jasmine, aged 11, Ipswich)

“Inside will be game rooms, cinema, tuck shop and its age range young to old people, sport-type activities and some can be run by older children so they can have the responsibility of like the teacher and that.” (Tegan, aged 12, Ipswich)

“Under 18 café with loads of seats and good snacks that aren’t pricey.” (Chantelle, aged 14, Leiston)

“A place to just sit down, hang about and talk, like a living room.” (Lottie, aged 13, Leiston)

“I call it internet café, so it’s the same place, in or around school which you can go at the weekends and evenings and stuff. It is quite a big room with PCs and internet connection and stuff, soft chairs, it’s like a library…” (Jacob, aged 13, Haverhill)
“We build some building and then inside every activity in one building... we put like boxing, ping pong, table tennis... Just like a little building innit, like a hall... I think it’s a good idea.” (Kieran, aged 17, Ipswich)

Young people described a space open and available to all ages, based within their local communities and outside of school, to eliminate the issues of social exclusion, by means of accessibility and low costs.

“It should be free to everyone, socialisation, socialisation is key.” (George, aged 13, Ipswich)

“It’s got to be a place for everyone innit, free of charge.” (Myles, aged 16, Ipswich)

“Maybe a bit of both because, local community it can be really popular and everyone goes there, but not in a local community it could be remote and then not many people go there.” (George, aged 13, Ipswich)

**Figure 6:** Example of Group C’s ideas and perspectives on what a youth activity or centre might look like to them.
Figure 7: Example of group D’s ideas and perspectives on what a youth activity or centre might look like to them.

The need for spaces that provide additional support was reflected upon by some young people, particularly with regards to young people living with mental health difficulties and members of marginalised groups, such as the LGBTQI community. Given the recent Healthwatch Suffolk findings\textsuperscript{34}, it is not surprising that young people in Suffolk, particularly those who are members of already marginalised groups, require additional support.

“I feel like there isn’t enough things for young people who are different from everyone else, like LGBT, there isn’t specifically a safe space.” (Jade, aged 15, Felixstowe)

“Like there’s rooms for different stuff, like stress anxiety, self-harm, because a lot of people are living self-harming…” (Sasha, aged 14, Ipswich)

“We need areas for people who suffer with mental health.” (Eliza, aged 15, Lowestoft)

5. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, young people across Suffolk describe a complexity of different challenges and issues they face within their local communities and across wider Suffolk. More specifically, there was a perception that living within their town or village is ‘boring’ with a lack of things to do for them including activities, youth centres, age-appropriate shops and safe places to be themselves with friends. In addition to a lack of perceived opportunities, young people felt as if there were not enough relevant employment opportunities, including apprenticeships, vocational courses and creative subjects. It is likely that this could reflect a lack of consistent and coherent messages filtering down to young people regarding what is available or may highlight the need to invest in appropriate services and activities which appeal to young people themselves. The idea that places in which young people used to be able to spend time with friends, such as parks, are no longer safe generated a sense of frustration, compounded by fear, linked with ongoing reports of youth gang cultures, particularly among those living in more rural areas of Suffolk.

Young people described a sense of disconnect and social exclusion, with a predominant focus on lack of transport, creating feelings of isolation, in addition to financial factors impeding their ability to afford public transport and participate in activities. Young people’s narratives also reflected on the importance of youth voice, as feelings of exclusion were exacerbated by perceptions that their views were not taken seriously and acted upon. More needs to be done to ensure young people within Suffolk are involved and engaged in the process of developing services which impact directly upon their everyday lives. Young people should be respectfully acknowledged as key contributors to positive youth development and a system change\textsuperscript{35}. The most consistent message was that young people felt that to make their lives better within their community, they needed accessible, safe, and supportive social spaces. With an increasing focus upon improving the welfare of young people in Suffolk, the findings of this report provide further evidence to

enhance service development, inform future investment into youth provision and assist with forming resilient communities.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with young people’s perceptions across Suffolk, and as with projects of this nature, some factors needing further consideration were identified during the research process. The researcher has therefore devised the following recommendations to guide future developments:

1. Development of safe, supportive social spaces

The most consistent overarching theme was that young people suggested that they need safe social spaces, to be with friends, socialise and engage in activities. Young people described the idea of a café or an indoor space, much like a youth centre, which has games and resources available to them – a sustainable, accessible place to belong, with the ownership placed on young people themselves. Many also suggested that they would like the opportunity to receive additional support, in the form of youth workers, mental health advice, and places to obtain information regarding careers and employment. It would be useful to consider models of youth provision already in place, to develop similar services within local communities, which could facilitate community cohesion, increase the likelihood of desistance and provide opportunities for young people to access provision and supportive role models. For example, young people within Ipswich suggested that instead of focusing primarily upon town centres, areas in which young people can reside within their local community would be of benefit. Not only will this provide safe spaces for young people to belong, but it will also offer them services and support which aid in developing protective factors\(^\text{36}\) and fulfilling basic needs.

2. Coherent and consistent marketing of opportunities

While there are several positive opportunities and activities for young people across Suffolk provided by both voluntary and public sector organisations, young people feel as if they are unaware of what is on offer to them, and these messages are not conjoined in a helpful, interconnected way. This lack of awareness highlights the need for an overarching cohesive response with coherent and consistent marketing of opportunities in Suffolk. There are many ways in which this could be done to encourage engagement with young people and there is no one-size fits all approach\textsuperscript{37}. However, it would initially be of use to map the current provision for young people across the county. Using a variety of different mediums would be useful to ensure there is maximum reach, including social media advertising, website directory of activities by area, school visits, community group visits, letters home (as suggested by one young person), creation of a geo-location application as a central source of activities and events for young people. Whatever multitude of approaches are utilised, the critical factor is that marketing is consistent and developed alongside young people, with the purpose of using current resources effectively to meet the needs of young people across the county.

3. Addressing social exclusion: Travel and finances

Feelings of social exclusion and disconnect was frequently referred to by young people, with regards to accessibility issues. These predominantly took the form of reduced travel opportunities to access activities and further education, in addition to financial restraints in using public transport, but also deploying current provision. Organisations may benefit from working together toward more affordable activities, which reduce the exclusionary divide. Additionally, local travel companies within Suffolk should be consulted regarding the cost of travel for young people to see if this can be altered, specifically within rural areas (for example, Leiston, Claydon, Haverhill, in which access to youth provision, further education and facilities are limited), for those facing economic inequality\textsuperscript{38}.


4. A focus on youth voice

Provision should be developed and delivered alongside young people, as well as ensuring that actions taken as a result of their participation are reported back to the young people themselves. Further engagement with young people to decide how to develop community social spaces, youth provision and activities, to determine their key attributes would be useful. Additionally, consulting further with other youth groups and young people within various organisations across other areas of the county (e.g. Bury or Sudbury, areas which has also been influenced by county lines), including those that are NEET to ensure additional perspectives are heard, would be beneficial. Young people are part of the solution to community issues, so we must ensure we are doing our upmost to include them in the development, design and delivery of youth provision across the county.

5. Knife crime and youth gangs: Changing the narrative

Current local narrative regarding county lines in the county reported by the media, for example, may be considered unhelpful, further glamorising gang membership and generating fear in an already established ‘risk society’. These narratives are influencing the free movement of young people within and between different localities in their county and generating fear, which impacts upon their views of their local community. Voluntary and public sector organisations may benefit from working positively and collaboratively alongside media outlets to ensure that the most effective messages are disseminated, including the support available for those who are gang-involved, or gang-affected, and positive actions taken to improve the lives of all young people in Suffolk.
APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Youth Interventions Session Plan

**Individual Activity – Your Community**

**Group Activity – Mapping Activity**

- Ask young people to colour code areas where they feel safe and where they feel unsafe, also facilities used and not used within their area and Ipswich.
- Add post-it notes or discuss to describe reasons as to why you don’t or do feel safe and reasons as to why these facilities are used or not used.

**Group Activity – Discussion**

**Focus Group Schedule**

1. **What is it like to be a young person living in [Location]?**
   - What do you like most/least about living in [location]?

2. **Are you aware of any programmes/groups for young people taking place within your local community?**
   - Are you taking part in any of these, if so/not, why is that?

3. **From your perspective, which types of intervention/programmes/activities would be most effective or beneficial in your local community for young people?**
   - What does an effective intervention/programme/group/activity for young people look like to you?

4. **What else do you think young people need within your area?**
   - What would increasing opportunities for young people in your area mean for you?
   - What are your hopes/aspirations for the future?