PROJECTS 4 CHANGE

YOUNG CHANGE MAKERS

Change Maker Volunteers Consultation

Listening to the Young People of the North East of England
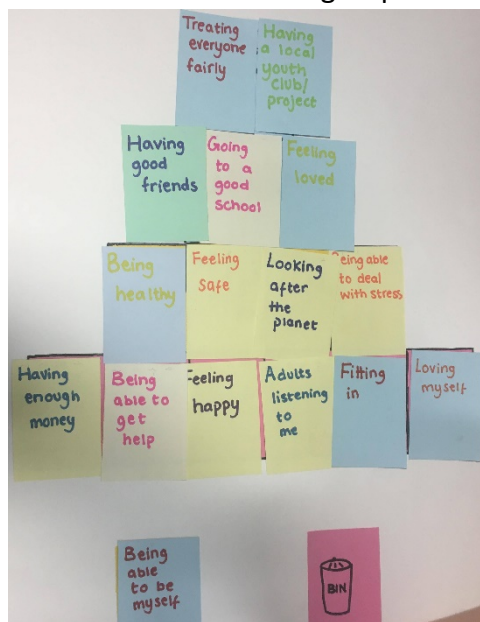
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Who we are

Projects4Change was established in January 2018. As a new project we understood the need to work with young people as partners, embedding the voice and needs of young people within our work from the very start. Developing the Change Maker Volunteers Programme was our way of listening to young people and helping them to act on issues they care about. The young volunteers deliver peer-led consultations and social action projects that can create genuine change for themselves and other young people.

We started by recruiting across Newcastle, working with young people to develop their understanding of social action and democracy. The group were then trained up to deliver peer-led consultations. These have been carried out with groups across the North East as our volunteers have sought to reach as many young people as possible.

Our volunteers wanted to know about young people's lives, the things that are important to them, their issues and potential barriers to success.

Methods

The Change Maker Volunteers went into multiple youth groups to carry out an interactive consultation. Briefly, it consisted of three games; Pyramid, Corners and Barriers. Pyramid consists of pyramid outline (which can be seen below) and a set of cards with topics such as 'feeling loved' 'having enough money' and 'being drug free'. The 'bin' was used for topics which are not important at all and the 'freezer' was used for topics the young people wanted to come back to. The group was then tasked with ranking the topics in terms of their importance to themselves. Following on from Pyramid, Corners was used to discuss 3-4 of the topics in more depth. Four statements regarding the topic were read and young people stood near the number which was most fitting to how they feel on the matter. From there, discussion about the topics developed further. The final game was Barriers. This entailed reading out a series of potential barriers, and the young people picking up a sweet if they agree with the statement in their lives. The full list of statements and results can be seen at the end of the report. There were two versions of the face-to-face consultation, adapted to an older and younger age range. The format was also adapted into an online survey, to allow some participation from those who may not have access to youth work organisations. We altered the consultation to different formats to make it as accessible to a wide range of young people. We believe this is essential for ensuring equality of access to having their voice heard. A final evaluation activity was also carried out with each group. The results of which can be seen at the end of the report.

An example of the Pyramid exercise

Who we spoke to

We worked with numerous organisations in the North East including Newcastle Community Asset Trust, Hattrick, Children North East, Girls Friendly Society, Basement Project, NE Youth and Patchwork Project. Below is an outline of the sample of young people which we spoke to[1].

Young People	Female	Male	Total
Age 11-19	53	27	80
Age 5-11	26	8	34
	79	35	114

We acknowledge that we spoke to more young women than young men in our research, in the future we would aim to rectify this by speaking to a more even number of young men and women.

Carrying out the consultation as a group in a youth project had its benefits, such as giving us the easiest access to young people. Working in a group allows discussions to be stimulated, young people to learn from and about one another and encourages young people to think critically about their own and others' point of view.

The main respondents being those who access youth provision can impact the results too. For example, a high percentage of the young people we spoke to said they had a youth club or project they could access. This is great, but, is to be expected if we are in one. We expect the response to this amongst young people, as a whole, would be much less. Being in a group setting may mean young people are less honest, as their answers may be impacted by their peers. However as one of our Change Maker Volunteers pointed out: 'Young people being influenced and changing their answers because of their friends tells us something in itself' (Female, 16). It may impact the results, but it is also a result. The impact of peer pressure could demonstrate a lack of confidence from young people in their own answer, or a pressure to 'fit in' with others.

Approximately 80 young people interacted with the online survey to varying degrees. Of these 80 young people, only 17 fully completed the survey. This shows that young people wanted to complete the questionnaire and be heard, but that the format of a basic questionnaire is not always successful in engaging young people. This confirms our suspicions that a consultation that is peer-led and based upon conversation and fun activities is much better

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[1] When looking at the raw data at the end of the report, you will notice that the table for under 11s adds to 42 rather than 32. This is because at one of the consultations we used the questions for the younger age range, however the group included 10 young people from the 11-19 category. In addition, 2 young men aged under 11 completed the online version of the questionnaire, which used the question set for the older age range. This is reflected in the above table.

at engaging young people. Even when the topic is already of interest to young people and they wish to participate, the format of a questionnaire could be a barrier to engagement.

The low completion rate also demonstrates that simply putting something online does not instantly make it young people friendly. Completing the survey in isolation can make it difficult for thoughts to be stimulated. The face to face interactive group consultation had a much higher level of participation and gave us much greater and richer insights into young people's lives. We see that a lot of local council consultation has moved online via Let's Talk Newcastle, but we encourage people to think deeper about the effectiveness of this in including young people.

Introduction to Main Findings

The consultations gave us a lot of rich information about young people's lives. We have drawn four main themes from our findings:

1. Not feeling listened to
2. Mental health
3. Personal safety
4. Environment

As may be expected, the issues contained within each do not stand alone and many aspects overlap.

Three of our Change Maker Volunteers ready to deliver a consultation

'It's all a big game and we're not in it' (Male, 17)
(Not feeling listened to)

64.1% of the 11-19 year olds and 40.5% of under 11s we spoke to told us they felt as though their opinions didn't matter to adults or that adults didn't listen to them. Many told us it depended which adults they were speaking to. The most common adults that young people told us didn't listen to them were teachers and government. 'Children are the future but no-one wants to listen, we're never the priority, they just care about Brexit and terrorism' (Female, 14). During the Pyramid game, the topic of politics was often put into the bin or very low on the pyramid, which prompted a lot of discussion around the topic. A common response from young people was that they didn't understand or care about politics. Probing deeper we found however that all the young people we spoke to had something political they cared about. Young people are political, but the political system is alienating to them. A particularly good example of this was the group who put 'politics' straight in the bin, but when asked if there was anything we had forgotten to include on the prompt cards, they quickly turned to discussing the NHS, human rights and free education as things they value. The group spoke very openly about their values, many of them related to politics, yet they had previously turned down a session from the Parliamentary education team. Young people are politically aware, but not necessarily in the way society expects them to be. They all may not know who the leader of each party is, they all may not know the definitions of left or right wing, but they all know what they care about and what kind of future they want for themselves and others.

'Our teachers want to help but they're too busy' (Female, 9)

In addition to expressing feeling isolated by the political system, a large section of young people spoke passionately about feeling let down by the education system. Many told us they felt teachers didn't listen to them, with some young people making the connection between teacher's workload and their availability to support students; 'There's too many of us and not enough teachers' (Female, 9). Young people expressed not feeling listened to within school with many quickly linking this to their mental health and wellbeing.

'We're all stressed' (Female, 14)
(Mental health)

Our findings around young people's mental health were stark. Almost half of the 11-19 year olds we spoke to said that feeling depressed had stopped them from getting on in life.

92.2% of under 11s and 70.3% of 11-19 year olds said they felt anxious or worried in life.

When discussing feelings of anxiety many tied this into pressure from education. Common concerns related to too many tests and too much work. Some young people's sense of self-worth was closely tied to academic achievement; 'I feel bad about myself when I get the wrong answer' (Female, 9). There were a lot of comments about the pressure imposed on young people by schools to achieve well in GCSEs and constantly being reminded of the importance of them in future life. Young people expressed schools were more concerned with academic achievement than personal wellbeing. Personal achievements and qualities which can not be measured by tests were not valued.

Young people had lots of suggestions about structural changes to the system they would like to see:

- Choosing GCSE options later in their school journey
- The school day starts too early and is poorly structured, particularly mentioning having only 25 minutes for a dinner break
- Moving away from exams as a primary method of assessment as they aren't reflective of real life; 'What if you have an off day?' (Male, 12)
- Better retention of teachers – one young man from a school in special measures had had 4 science teachers in one academic year

A shocking number of young people spoke to us about how stressed school makes them, some were as young as 6 years old. Most young people we spoke to had expressed feeling stressed. Of course, some levels of stress can be positive and encourage young people out of their comfort zone. The issue is caused when there is too much stress and young people don't know how to deal with it. When asked how they deal with stress, responses were very varied. A small number of young people had positive strategies for dealing with stress such as listening to music, reading or going for a walk. Some young people had negative ways of coping such as smashing things, starving themselves or harming themselves; 'We get in trouble for smoking but people don't know it's a type of self-harm' (Female, 14). The most common response from young people was that they didn't know how to deal with stress. We need to consider the long-term implications of this.

'If you can't deal with stress how are you supposed to get a good education?' (Male, 14)

Another factor contributing to young people's mental health is that of bullying.

60.9% of 11-19 year olds and 66.6% of under 11s told us they worry about bullying.

Recent discourse seems to suggest we are moving towards focusing on cyber-bullying. Whilst this is an important issue to tackle, more young people spoke to us about concerns of face-to-face bullying in school than they mentioned bullying online. It is important that in the conversation of cyber-bullying, we don't lose sight of the reality of young people's lives and experiences. There were major variations in how well young people believed their school dealt with bullying. Some thought their schools were helpful and supported them if they had been bullied. Others spoke very passionately about being let down, or feeling unsupported by their school following bullying; 'It took me a year for my school to get me counselling' (Female, 14). Some told us of actions schools had taken in an effort to support them after bullying which felt restrictive, rather than supporting. For example, being kept in isolation so their bullies couldn't get to them. These were short term solutions to underlying causes. One young person mentioned that support not only for victims but also for perpetrators or bullying was lacking. Bullying could be a contributing factor to the next theme from our findings, personal safety.

Two of our Change Makers Delivering a Peer-Consultation

['If you don't feel safe, how are you meant to feel happy?'](#) (Male, 14)
(Personal safety)

Of the young people we spoke to, 42.2% of 11-19s said they didn't feel safe going about their lives in their local area, compared to 26.2% of under 11s. This suggests that as young people grow older, they are feeling less safe.

One group of young men we met spoke at length about many different issues relating to personal safety, and gave some worrying examples relating to their relationship with police. This particular group's relationship with police in their area is detrimentally damaged. They spoke of the prejudice they hold towards each other; 'Police have their view of us and we have our view of them' (Male, 17). They felt they were targeted by police for smaller issues once they were known to them. The group had a lot to say around recent issues such as knife crime and suggestions on how to tackle it. One young man told us schemes such as knife amnesties don't work because being seen to be with the police makes people perceive you as a 'grass', which in turn puts you at risk. The group told us one of the biggest barriers to the police in dealing with these issues is the negative use of authority; 'You need people who don't have authority to speak about it, people like you [pointing to his youth workers], or other role models' (Male, 15). The young people demonstrated an inherent mistrust towards police, due to the power and authority they hold over them. The impact of a poor relationship between police and young people is one which seems missing from recent conversations around issues such as knife crime.

'They do something to you, you do something back, you can't grass and it escalates, that's how knife crime happens' (Male, 17)

Whilst 42.2% of young people told us they didn't feel safe going about their lives in their local area, even more suggested feeling unsafe outside of their immediate communities, where they might not know people, or how they would react to them. Some young people told us of potential changes in their local environment which would make them feel safer, which leads onto our final theme: environment.

'Animals are losing their homes, they have feelings too' (Female, 11) (Environment)

Young people's environmental concerns fell into two general categories; their local area and provision in it and wider global impact.

78.1% of young people said they had a local youth club they could attend. This figure is quite high but we believe it reflects the sample of young people we spoke to rather than young people's access to youth clubs as a whole. Of these 78.1%, some said they had to travel into the club rather than it being in their local area; 'Everything where I live is for old people, I have to travel here'(Female, 14). Young people told us of things they had lost from their local area, such as their leisure centres, or things which had been built but were inaccessible to them; 'They say they're giving us stuff but it's too expensive to get in' (Male, 13). Other changes young people wanted to see were very practical things:

- Lights in their parks and green spaces
- Grass being levelled near their goalposts
- Not being locked out of their local community football pitches

A common concern for young people was a lack of things to do and places to go, and often this was linked back to mental health. One comment particularly stood out during the Pyramid game; 'Having a youth club helps with the other things' (Female, 13).

'Places like here help because there's other people my age, we all help each other' (Female, 13)

Another common concern expressed by the young people we met was the human impact on the wider environment, animals and their habitats. Many young people spoke passionately about issues such as littering, deforestation, burning of fossil fuels and excessive meat consumption; 'Humans are animals, other animals are crucial to our survival, so we need to help the environment' (Female, 12). We heard lots of great suggestions as to what we can do to help including:

- More bins on beaches
- Reusing old buildings instead of building on green space
- A move towards electric cars
- Increasing the use of solar power
- Planting more trees

One group even told us of their successful campaign to get recycling bins in their school.

Conclusion

Speaking to young people about the level of distress they feel within their lives was shocking. As youth workers and Change Maker Volunteers we were aware of some of the issues young people faced but listening to them speak so frankly about their experiences was very different.

What is clear from the report is that young people are affected by government policy and outside control in many aspects of their lives. What was also clear was that young people have very few opportunities to express the impact this has on their safety, education, mental health and opportunities.

'It amazes me how different the lives are of other young people who live so close to me, they are practically my neighbours. We live so differently and have different problems but are still part of the same community and share the same thoughts about it.' (Change Maker Volunteer, Female, 16)

Young people report being negatively impacted by an educational system which prioritises academic achievement above all else, leaving out issues which young people say they struggle with like personal safety, mental health and coping with high stress levels. The result means that young people feel their self-worth is equated to academic achievement only, while other valuable personal qualities which cannot be measured by tests are being overlooked.

Young people are facing barriers to success in many areas of their lives and they have told us that they feel powerless to change it. When young people are discussed, or policy is created for them they feel:

- Frozen out of the debate
- Not a part of seeking solutions
- That their needs are side-lined

'I think the consultations was a real eye opener for me. I didn't know what kind of mindset people my age had. The consultations showed that even though the type of hardships varied from person to person they all looked at life in a similar way. At the end of the day there were more similarities than differences' (Change Maker Volunteer, Female, 17)

This word cloud demonstrates young people's answers to the question 'Can you give us one word which you think sums up todays activities?'. The size of word is proportional to the number of times the word was given; The larger the word, the more young people chose it.

Thank you for reading, special mention goes to our Change Maker Volunteers who are 12 young people from across the North East who have given their time freely and for the good of their peers. They cared enough to listen and write it down with the help of Chesley Conlin our dedicated youth work student.

Young people on…

A collection of quotes from young people on the things that matter most to them

Not feeling listened to

'The councillor came here to take some pictures but we've never seen him since' Male 13

'We have a right to speak' Female 15

'We're not old enough to vote and even when you can it doesn't matter' Male 15

'Teachers don't always listen' Female 8

'We don't have enough time to talk to our teachers' Female 9

'I'm sick of hearing about Brexit' Female 13

'Kids have an opinion and we need a voice in Parliament' Female 14

'We can't vote but we still care' Female 14

'My opinion should matter to adults but it doesn't' Female 13

'Adults have an image of what they want us to be' Female 15

'We don't matter' Female 15

'Having a voice is basically equality' Male 14

'Children are the future but no-one wants to listen, we're never the priority, they just care about Brexit and terrorism' Female 14

'It's all a big game and we're not in it' Male 17

'Our teachers want to help but they're too busy' Female 9

'There's too many of us and not enough teachers' Female 11

Mental Health

'Some people just breakdown' Male 17

'It's important to have a healthy mind too' Female 12

'You have to wait a long time to get help' Female 15

'They care more about OFSTED than they care about us' Female 14

'When you feel happy you give that back to everyone else' Female 13

'Places like here help, people my age, we can all help each other' Female 14

'People take their own lives because they feel like they need to be a man' Male 17

'We're all stressed' Female 14

'I feel bad about myself when I get the wrong answer' Female 9

'What if you have an off day?' Male 12

'We get in trouble for smoking but people don't know it's a type of self-harm' Female 14

'If you can't deal with stress how are you supposed to get a good education?' Male 14

'It took me a year for my school to get me counselling' Female 14

'I think about who we are going to turn into, what job I will have, what type of life I will have and about my family' Female 9

Personal Safety

'You divvint see two cows killing each other, we're all a part of the same species' Male 17

'Police think theyre better than us' Male 17

'Feeling anxiety around people is not good' Male 16

'If you don't feel safe, how are you meant to feel happy?' Male 16

'Police have their view of us and we have our view of them' Male 16

'You need people who don't have authority to speak about it, people like you [pointing to his youth workers], or other role models' Male 15

'They do something to you, you do something back, you can't grass and it escalates, that's how knife crime happens' Male, 17

Environment

'I miss the leisure centre' Male 17

'The rubbish round here is shocking' Female 14

'When I have kids I probably wouldn't let them out the house' Female 13

'All the parks are burned out' Female 13

'Animals are dying' Female 13

'We're cutting down too many trees' Male 13

'Humans are animals, other animals are crucial to our survival so we need to help the environment' Female 12

'Animals are losing their homes, they have feelings too' Female 11

'Humans think they can do things to animals just because we're here, it's their planet too' Female 13

'Everything where I live is for old people, I have to travel here' Female 14

'They say they're giving us stuff but its too expensive to get in' Male 13

'Having a youth club helps with the other things' Female 13

'Places like here help because there's other people my age, we all help each other' Female, 13

Barriers Game Results

11-19

Statement	Number who agreed	Number who disagreed	% who agreed	% who disagreed
1. I can afford to travel to places I need to go (school, college, work, interviews doctors etc)	58	6	90.6	9.4
2. I don't feel anxious in life	19	45	29.7	70.3
3. I know how to send an email	56	8	87.5	12.5
4. Feeling depressed never stops me from getting on in my life	33	31	51.6	48.4
5. My family can afford to give me money for clubs/activities/trips	47	17	73.4	26.6
6. I always have everything I need for school/college/work	51	13	79.7	20.3
7. There is a local youth club I can attend if I want to	50	14	78.1	21.9
8. My house is always warm and well heated	52	12	81.3	18.8
9. I am always able to be myself without fear of harm	33	31	51.6	48.4
10. I feel safe going about my life in my local area	37	27	57.8	42.2
11. I feel like my opinion matters to adults	23	41	35.9	64.1
12. I feel confident out late in the evening by myself	22	42	34.4	65.6
13. I regularly attend school, work or training	59	5	92.2	7.8

14. I could afford to go to university or college	37	27	57.8	42.2
15. The local youth club listens to me and provides projects which meet my needs	45	19	70.3	29.7
16. I feel good about myself	33	31	51.6	48.4
17. There are opportunities for me in my local area	43	21	67.2	32.8
18. There is always food in my house to eat	60	4	93.8	6.3
19. I have a quiet space to do my school work	36	28	56.3	43.8
20. I feel that I have a supportive family around me	58	6	90.6	9.4
21. I feel respected by local people in my area	32	32	50.0	50.0
22. I never feel the need to take drink or drugs to cope with my problems	57	7	89.1	10.9
23. I have an adult in my life that I can talk to	55	9	85.9	14.1
24. I believe that I will end up with a good job	40	24	62.5	37.5
25. I never worry about bullying	25	39	39.1	60.9
26. I never worry about online abuse	40	24	62.5	37.5
27. I am able to access all the places in my area that I want to	43	21	67.2	32.8

Under 11s (plus ten young people aged 11+)

Statement	Number who agreed	Number who disagreed	% who agreed	% who disagreed
1. I can afford to travel to places I need to go (school, doctors etc)	38	4	90.5	9.5
2. I don't feel worried in life	3	39	7.1	92.9
3. My family can afford to give me money for clubs/activities/trips	26	16	61.9	38.1
4. I always have everything I need for school	29	13	69.0	31.0
5. There is a local youth club I can go to if I want to	42	0	100	0
6. My house is always warm	29	13	69.0	31.0
7. I am always able to be myself	26	16	61.9	38.1
8. I feel like adults listen to me	25	17	59.5	40.5
9. I feel safe to play out in my street/area	31	11	73.8	26.2
10. I regularly attend school	41	1	97.6	2.4
11. The local youth club listens to me	40	2	95.2	4.8
12. I feel good about myself	30	12	71.4	28.6
13. There is always food in my house to eat	37	5	88.1	11.9

14. I feel that my family support me	37	5	88.1	11.9
15. I have an adult in my life that I can talk to	41	1	97.6	2.4
16. I believe that I will end up with a good job	35	7	83.3	16.7
17. I never worry about bullying	14	28	33.4	66.6

Equality

Good mental health | Self-confidence

Having a voice | Good Education | Having good friends | Feeling Safe | The environment | Having opportunities

Being able to get help | Feeling loved | Feeling happy | Having ambitions | Being able to deal with stress | Being able to be myself

Being alcohol free | Being Independent | Having a local youth club/project | Having control | Having enough money | Being drug free | Self-love

Being healthy | Being able to talk about sex

Being able to be myself | Feeling loved

Being able to get help | Getting a good job/apprenticeship/training | Good Education | Having a voice

Having a local youth club/project | Being healthy | Good mental health | Feeling Safe | Having enough money | Being able to deal with stress | Being drug free

Having ambitions | Equality | Self-Confidence | Having Opportunities | Feeling happy | Having good friends | Being Independent | Having control

Being alcohol free | Self-love | Being able to talk about sex | Being a parent | Less Important | Less Important

The environment | Politics

Being able to get help | Something else ???

Adults listening to me | Treating everyone fairly | Feeling Safe | Being healthy

Feeling happy | Feeling loved | Loving myself | Being able to be myself

Looking after the planet | Having enough money | Having a local youth club/project | Less Important | Going to a good school | Having good friends

Being able to deal with stress | Fitting in

Feeling Safe | Being able to be myself

Treating everyone fairly | Looking after the planet | Having good friends

Fitting in | Being healthy | Feeling loved | Being able to get help | Being able to deal with stress

Having a local youth club/project | Adults listening to me | Feeling happy | Going to a good school | Less Important | Having enough money

Loving myself | BIN

Having good friends

Loving myself | Being able to get help | Feeling Safe | Going to a good school | Looking after the planet

Feeling loved | Fitting in | Being able to be myself | Treating everyone fairly | Being healthy

Having a local youth club/project | Being able to deal with stress | Less Important | Having enough money | Feeling happy | Adults listening to me

FREEZE | Something else ???

Self-love

Equality | Having | Feeling Safe | Good mental health

Self-Confidence | Feeling happy | Being healthy

Having good friends | Having Opportunities | Being able to get help | Being able to deal with stress

Feeling loved

Getting a good job/apprenticeship | Being drug free | Being Independent | Good Education | Having control | Having a local youth club/project | Having enough money

FREEZE | The environment