



Cheshire Youth Commission: Final Report to the Police and Crime Commissioner April 2020

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Introduction

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire (PCC) established The Cheshire Youth Commission in 2016. The Cheshire Youth Commission (CYC) aims to enable young people aged 14-25 years to inform decisions about policing and crime prevention in Cheshire, working in partnership with both the PCC and Cheshire Constabulary.

Following three successful years, the PCC decided to further develop and expand CYC in 2019/2020. Over this period, the key objectives of the project were to:

- Recruit 25-30 new members from across Cheshire to join the CYC alongside existing members who decided to continue on the project. We placed particular emphasis on engaging those from 'hard to reach' groups and those in new localities.
- Work with CYC members to identify the key priority topics which they wanted to tackle this year.
- Provide CYC members with the practical skills training they need for their role.
- Continue the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) as a subgroup of the CYC to work closely with Cheshire Constabulary to inform decisions around policing and undertake collaborative work. We have continued to involve guest speakers in the YAG meetings.
- Plan and deliver a 'Big Conversation' to enable The CYC to gather meaningful views from at least 2,000 young people across Cheshire in relation to the chosen priorities.
- Support the CYC to turn their research into key findings and recommendations to be presented at a final conference with the PCC, Chief Constable, Cheshire Constabulary and partner agencies.

The CYC is delivered by Leaders Unlocked, a social enterprise which aims to enable young people to have a stronger say on the decisions that affect their lives. Leaders Unlocked has established Youth Commissions, working with PCCs in 9 other regions and is planning to expand further in the years ahead.

For more information about Leaders Unlocked please see: www.leaders-unlocked.org

About this report

This report is grounded in an extensive research base of over 2,000 conversations with young people across Cheshire during 2019-20. The findings from these conversations have been recorded using a range of methods including Youth Commission postcards and through detailed notes from one-to-one interviews and workshops.

The report is structured into 6 key sections that outline what the CYC has found out about each of their priorities. Each section features comprehensive analysis of young people's responses, verbatim quotes from individual participants, and the key recommendations that have been put forward by the CYC as a result of their findings.

This report is intended to act as an honest, independent record of what young people have told us through the 'Big Conversation' process. It is also intended to be a basis for further action on the part of the PCC, Cheshire Constabulary and relevant partner agencies.

About Cheshire Youth Commission

Cheshire Youth Commission aims to give young people across Cheshire a voice on policing and crime. The CYC supports, challenges and informs the work of the PCC and Cheshire Constabulary.

A key part of CYC's role is to gather the views of other young people through peer-to-peer research. This research process provides a safe environment for young people to talk to their peers about the issues. The views gathered from young people are analysed by the CYC in order to create a set of recommendations to present back to the PCC, Cheshire Constabulary and partners.

What we did

Recruiting CYC members:

In April and May 2019, Leaders Unlocked carried out a rigorous two-part recruitment process. This included an accessible application form and a second-stage telephone interview, to select a diverse group of young people to join the CYC.

As a result, we recruited 19 CYC members, in addition to 16 members who were retained from the 2018/2019 cohort. These young people were recruited with the support of a wide range of local organisations to ensure they came from a diverse range of backgrounds and life experiences. These include:

- 3 - Looked-after children and care-leavers
- 2 - BAME young people
- 7 - Young people with disabilities, and/or young people with mental health conditions
- 9 - Identifying as LGBTQ+
- 2 - Young people who have personal experience of the justice system and/or are victims of crime

Identifying priority issues:

At their inaugural meeting in July 2019, The CYC worked together to identify 6 urgent issues they wanted to tackle through the project.

The 6 priorities they chose to focus on were:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1) Social Media and Hate Crime | 3) Mental Health | 5) Substance Misuse |
| 2) Relationships | 4) Stop and Search | 6) Knife Crime |

Skills training:

CYC members took part in practical training sessions to acquire the key skills and knowledge needed for their role. This training included active listening, interview skills, communication and public speaking. It also included a briefing on safeguarding and staying safe online. These skills were further developed through practical experience throughout the project.

Creating the tools for The CYC:

Cheshire Youth Commission 'Big Conversation' Conference



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A unique opportunity to hear youth commissioners present the findings and recommendations from their 'Big Conversation' with over 2000 young people from across Cheshire.

4th March 2020
5pm to 6:45pm
Arrivals from 4.30pm

Cheshire Constabulary
Headquarters
Clemonds Hey
Oakmere Road
Winsford
CW7 2UA

@YouthCheshire
@CheshirePCC
@LeadersUnlocked

CYC members were actively involved in creating the tools that they used for their peer research. They co-designed workshop plans to address each of their 6 priorities, which were reviewed by OPCC and Constabulary leads, to ensure relevance and validity.

To capture young people's responses, we developed a CYC postcard depicting the 6 priorities and providing young people with a structure to record their views and suggested solutions anonymously. We used this method as the CYC members felt that young people would provide more honest opinions if they knew that the responses could not be attached to the individual, allowing them to speak more freely.

Cheshire Youth Advisory Group (YAG):

In July 2017, we worked with Cheshire Constabulary and the OPCC to set up the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) to allow CYC members to inform, advise and challenge the Constabulary on matters concerning young people and the community.

The YAG continue to meet regularly, allowing CYC members to come together with Cheshire Constabulary and partners to have focused discussions in relation to priority topics including: Digital Crime, Knife Crime and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Joint work with the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner and Constabulary:

4 CYC members have been out as **'lay observers' on police operations at night-time**, in order to facilitate two-way learning between young people and the Constabulary. **The feedback from these operations has been hugely positive.**

1 CYC member now holds a seat at the **Independent Advisory Group (IAG)** and feeds back from a **youth perspective** into this influential panel.

1 CYC member sits as a youth representative on the **Police & Crime Commissioner's Anti-Bullying Commission**, regularly feeding back discussions to the wider CYC group and looking for **recommendations and suggestions to take forward** to the Anti-Bullying Commission

2 CYC members sat on the **'I Will Campaign' Panel** to offer their **views on funding bids and monetary allocations**. They both found this a **very valuable experience**, especially one CYC member who has autism and has expressed they can sometimes feel undervalued by the community.

4 CYC members worked with **'The Fatal Five' team** and gave a youth perspective on 'The Fatal Five' presentation. They enjoyed experiencing **powerful virtual reality**, which they thought was a **fantastic modern tool to emphasise dangerous driving**.

2 CYC members supported PC Amy Fletcher and Cheshire Safer Schools & Young Peoples Partnership with **filming at Safety Central** for a new film aimed at young people in Cheshire.

CYC members continually attended the Public Accountability meeting which was a useful experience and **emphasised value in youth voice** representatives.

Following The CYC Conference in 2019, it was suggested that a new Policing and Young People Task Force would be established, and 6 CYC members regularly attend. They feed back directly to Superintendent Peter Crowcroft on how the Constabulary deal with local young people and highlight specific areas of concern.

CYC members have continued to be invited to key events in the Constabulary diary such as Diversity in the Force event and the Black History Celebrations. This provided an insight into the work being done around inclusivity within policing in Cheshire.

HMP Visits:

CYC members were invited to attend both Category B and Category C prisons to speak directly to inmates about their experiences of crime and life inside. At both HMP Thorn Cross and HMP Altcourse members heard powerful stories from young offenders. CYC members had the opportunity to talk to young prisoners and find out what rehabilitation and restorative justice provisions are available to young offenders. The young offenders offered invaluable insights to our Big Conversation work, and CYC members said the visits were a powerful and valuable experience.

Running the 'Big Conversation':

To tackle their 6 priorities, Youth Commission members delivered a range of peer-led workshops and outreach stands with young people across Cheshire.

Between August 2019 and February 2020, this youth-led 'Big Conversation' reached a wide range of local voluntary organisations, education institutions and statutory partners across the county. As a result, the CYC was able to talk to **over 2,000** other young people about their priorities.

Final conference and recommendations:

On 4th March 2020, CYC members hosted their 'Big Conversation' conference at Cheshire Constabulary Headquarters. The conference consisted of open panel discussions with CYC members, round table discussions between all attendees, and a presentation of findings and recommendations for change. The PCC David Keane, Chief Constable Darren Martland and senior Constabulary members joined over 70 partner agencies and organisations who attended the conference. These partner agencies included education, public sector, criminal justice and youth services.

Who we reached:

During the Big Conversation, the CYC gathered views from over 2,000 young people across Cheshire. This was achieved by carrying out a range of different peer-led consultation events and activities – including small scale workshops, larger consultation events, and outreach stands on college and university campuses. In total, The CYC delivered 21 consultation events in a wide range of localities, across the breadth of the county.

The CYC put particular effort and energy into engaging with harder-to-reach groups of young people; in order to gather vital insights from those who are most affected by some of the priority topics. We are delighted that the CYC has succeeded in engaging those from underrepresented and minority groups – including: LGBTQ+ young people, those in supported housing and homeless, young people with disabilities and learning difficulties, those most at risk of committing crime and young carers.

The table below gives a breakdown of the sample reached:

Students at Further Education Colleges and Sixth Forms - 663

Students at Secondary Schools - 961

Students at Universities - 152

Young people in community settings including youth clubs, youth centres, young people in supported housing, LGBTQ+ youth groups, disabled young people's groups, young carers and CAMHS service users -228

TOTAL 2,004

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the support of a wide range of local partners who have allowed the CYC to consult with the young people in their organisations. We would like to give our special thanks to:

- Bishop Heber High
- CAMHS
- Cheshire College Chester
- Cheshire College Crewe
- Cheshire College Ellesmere Port
- Chester Pride
- Chester University
- Chester Students Union
- Live Jubilee Hub
- Middlewich High
- Proud Trust
- Queens School
- QueensberryAP
- Reaseheath College
- Sandbach High
- Warrington Disability Awareness Day
- Warrington and Vale Royal College
- Warrington VPX
- YMCA Crewe
- Young Carers
- Youth Parliament

A special thank you also goes to the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner and Cheshire Constabulary, who have worked closely with the CYC throughout this project. In particular, we would like to thank Sarah Tilling, PC Amy Fletcher and Supt Peter Crowcroft for their invaluable time and support.

Finally, we'd like to congratulate all the young people who have worked so hard as members of the Cheshire Youth Commission including:

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Alexandra Hilditch | Harry Hallett | Lorant Vazan |
| Amber Farrell | Harry Hughes | Ludovica Lunogiani |
| Annie O'Brien | Jade-Louise Regan | Megan Earps |
| Beau Kennedy | James Oddie | Nazmun Nahar |
| Callum May | Jasmine Malyon | Sam Bromley |
| Catherine Dermody | Jessie Owens | Sophie Hillier |
| Charlotte Collins-Jones | Joseph Brown | Thomas Chappell |
| Chloe Roberts | Joseph Vale | William Davies |
| Claire Barlow | Josie Pordes | William Price |
| Ella Redmond | Katie O'Reilly | |
| Ewan Nichols | Lewis Gleave | |

Priority 1: Social Media and Hate Crime



What we found

Through the Big Conversation, the CYC set out to raise awareness of the effect **hate crime and bullying** can have on mental health. We wanted to explore young people's perception of bullying and hate crime and what impact it can have. The CYC also wanted to understand who young people believe are the victims and how social media is used to bully and discriminate. We wanted to explore young people's understanding of the laws relating to hate crime and bullying, whilst ensuring young people are aware of support services available.

The Youth Commission gathered a total of **312** responses on this topic from a range of education and community settings including: Chester Pride, Chester University, Proud Trust, Warrington Disability Awareness Day, Reaseheath College, Sandbach High School, The Queens School Chester, and Young Carers.

What we found:

Social Media and Hate Crime are an ongoing concern for young people across Cheshire. CYC members felt that Hate Crime via Social Media is often **overlooked or underestimated**, with little understanding about the topic.

During the Big Conversation, we found that young people felt there was **little point in reporting hate crime** as they feel there is no follow up by the Constabulary. Young people felt there were little or no consequences for perpetrators of hate crime and that hate crime isn't taken seriously by police.

"I don't think I've ever heard of the police doing anything about hate crime online"

"I reported a hate crime from a troll and never heard back from the police. I'm now not sure if online hate crime is a thing"

"No one tells the police about stuff like this online"

"The police have more important things to do than look at online hate crime"

"Hate crime is acceptable online. No one says anything when it's bad"

"They do nothing about people shouting abuse at Pride so they aren't going to take it seriously online are they?"

"I think people take online abuse personally. It's not even a big deal and people need to chill out"

Many young people felt that **schools may not be reporting hate crimes** to the police due to concerns over their reputation. They felt that education providers would **brush problems under the carpet** rather than facing up to hate crime, which could lead to many crimes going unreported to the police.

"I got bullied by a girl but the teachers didn't do anything because they just say 'don't do it again' and it's not a big enough thing to go to the police about"

"School don't want to know or care about this"

"School don't want hate crime spoken about if it's happening in their school. I think it puts people off talking about it"

"I told school about a homophobic comment and nothing was really done"

"We were told to not speak to police about bullying that ended up in a really bad situation. School only care about their reputation"

"I feel police deal well with hate crime however when they occur in schools, the school is reluctant to report to the police meaning they go undealt with"

"The issue is schools don't report hate crime to the police when students make a complaint"

We found that **social media** leads to many young people **feeling threatened and unsafe**. Young people suggested that it is easier to get away with hate crime online rather than face to face, even when you have clear evidence that a hate crime has taken place.

"General hate towards minority groups such as LGBT and disability. Comments thrown around without knowing how harmful they can be 'go kill yourself if you are that ill'"

"Getting threatened online. Makes people scared to leave their home"

"I think anxiety and depression is mostly caused by social media and hate"

"I think the majority of bullying is online and that there should be more protection in place. Messages can be deleted and young people might not feel as though anyone will believe them"

"I don't feel comfortable in the community as I get shouted at. So I just don't really go out"

"Police didn't react very quickly to an online hate crime. Things can escalate quickly"

Young people feel **unclear on the laws** around online hate crime, resulting in many cases of hate crime not being reported to the police. We also found that some schools **actively discouraged pupils** from reporting hate crime and bullying to the police which made **young people feel confused, conflicted and isolated**.

"Is online hate crime against the law?"

"I was bullied and hit outside school. I told school and asked if it was assault. They told me not to report it to the police"

"School don't want to be known to have bullying"

"School don't want to know about bullying. It ruins peoples lives and ruins exams"

"When does bullying become a crime"

"I'm not sure when or if you can report this to the police? It's not clear"

"School don't want a bad rep"

The solutions suggested by young people included:

- Make it easier to report bullying to the police;
- Publicise hate crime cases more;
- Schools to take hate crime and bullying more seriously and support reporting;
- Make it clear when bullying becomes a crime;
- Make schools more responsible for encouraging reporting hate crime and bullying;
- Ensure young people know where they can receive help and support around bullying and hate crime.

Our key recommendations for Cheshire Constabulary

For prevention:

- **Promote diversity** within the Constabulary to the wider community
- For PCSO's and PC's to **educate** young people and teachers around **what hate crime is** and when this should be **reported and how**

For the PCC & Partners:

- Utilise **social media** as a platform to raise awareness of hate crime cases and how these have been **positively dealt with**
- Work in **close partnership with education settings** to encourage and support them to **report hate crime** to the police
- **Promote easy access to support services available** to young people

For the Youth Commission:

- **Continue to run peer-to-peer education workshops** on **what hate crime is**, the consequences and how to report or get support and feel safe
- Continue to be the **voice of young people** and highlight concerns to the PCC and Constabulary

For support services for Social Media and Hate Crime:

This is a small selection and not an exhaustive list of support services

- **Cheshire CARES:** (Cope and Recovery Enhanced Service) is the Commissioner's dedicated service providing support to all victims of crime in Cheshire based on individual needs.
Email Cheshire.cares@cheshire.pnn.police.uk
- **Cheshire Constabulary pages:**
www.cheshire.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/hco/hate-crime/how-to-report-hate-crime/
- **Childline:** Childline helps anyone under 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through.
www.childline.org.uk Call 0800 1111
- **Directory of Victims Services for Cheshire:** www.victimservicescheshire.co.uk
- **Remedi** "Got Your Back" service supporting victims of crime in Halton

Priority 2: Relationships



What we did

Through the Big Conversation, the CYC set out to raise awareness of the different types of abuse including **victim shaming and bullying**. We wanted to raise awareness of the **signs of a toxic relationship** and where a young person can go for help. The CYC sought to explore what young people believe abuse looks like and their perceptions around gender bias and physical boundaries. We wanted to highlight what **healthy relationships** look like and how to **recognise unsafe situations**. We wanted to support young people in understanding how they can receive help safely and **report concerns** to the police. The CYC wanted to better understand what support the Constabulary and local organisations offer to victims and explore what could be done differently.

The Youth Commission gathered a total of **298** responses on this topic from education and community settings including: Middlewich High, The Queens School, Chester University, Chester Pride, Sandbach High, Bishop Heber High, Live!Jubilee Hub, Chester Pride and Reaseheath College.

What we found

In previous years through the CYC's Big Conversations, abusive relationships and sexual assault were often discussed. CYC members felt a focus on relationships in general was important for the Big Conversation this year, with a **broader outlook** on how other aspects of life can impact a relationship.

Many young people said education settings focus on the **negative aspects of relationships** without any **emphasis on positive** relationships. We found that some young people felt so overwhelmed with negative stories surrounding relationships that they had become reluctant to be in a relationship at all. Young people spoke about feeling on constant 'high alert' around assaults and toxic relationships as they feel overwhelmed with these types of stories.

"Scare tactics by school and uni makes me feel unsafe"

"We always hear about bad relationships but never hear about good relationships. We should learn about what a healthy relationship looks like, what to expect such as respect, friendship, understanding and happiness"

"I've grown up in a single parent home. I don't know what a healthy relationship looks like and feel like I just get bombarded with negativity!"

"Stop being so negative about everything. Some people can be happy in a relationship"

"I know there are lots of assaults around uni and it's common knowledge. I carry a weapon and feel so stressed walking home late at night"

*"We are told about how relationships **SHOULDN'T** go, about how to notice an abusive relationship but we aren't told about how to love and relationships should happen"*

University students continue **to be unwilling to report** serious sexual assaults to police due to fear of repercussions based on their own drug use and/or being intoxicated. Students also stated that the current process to report these crimes is strained and feels very invasive both via the police and University.

"Girls are getting assaulted regularly in uni. I don't think they report it as they may have been on drugs or really drunk at the time so feel they are to blame. Or they feel there may be implications around drug use"

"Feeling like you can't be alone in freshers week as its unsafe. Assaults happening daily. I don't think it's reported"

"I don't think assaults are reported. I know the process of going to the police about it is horrible and you have to travel really far for examinations. Your body is treated like a crime scene"

"Assault is always happening at uni. I don't think people are reporting this as much as they should be"

"Spiking, drugs, sexual assault, I have been the victim - don't blame the victim"

Young people said they **felt bullying needs to be taken more seriously** by schools and the police, as the issue continues to be a concern. They said that **bullying can massively affect a young person's learning and mental health**, however it feels ignored or overlooked. Some young people explained that they had tried to talk to school or report bullying to the police, but that nothing came of this and it made them **feel silly and isolated**.

"A lot of the time people don't realise how much they affect others. Sometimes people hurt others feelings without realising it. This affects mental health and relationships"

"Bullying is happening all the time but it gets ignored"

"Made to feel silly about bullying like its not a big deal"

"Bullying - people don't really have anyone to rely on when it comes to the issue and I feel people should be able to speak up"

"I rang 101 about bullying and nothing happened. I think it was just not as important as other things"

"Tried to talk to school about bullying but then it just got worse as I was a grass"

"School don't realise how bad bullying can get"

Young people feel that **discussions in education settings aren't up to date** and don't reflect current local issues such as **stalking, same sex relationships, exploitation, gangs and county lines**.

Some young people felt schools and colleges shy away from these topics and that they need to be discussed in an open and honest way rather than a lecture-style approach.

"Being called a dyke on the street and asked for sexual favours from men in cars when they see us holding hands"

"I don't think same sex domestic abuse is talked about enough and it's a real issue that affects gay men and women"

"Get catcalled outside school all the time"

"They don't take stalkers seriously enough saying people are hysterical and don't safeguard them well enough"

"Stalking happens and it's not really treated like a crime"

"We learn about relationships and sex a lot but we need to know more about gangs"

"Hearing about gangs and sexual exploitation but we don't learn about this in school. It makes me worried about speaking to people outside of school as I'm not sure who they are and what they want"

"I'm not sure about county lines and gangs. Surely if you get involved in that sort of stuff you are a criminal and should be treated like one"

"It's so easy to get involved in gangs. My friends are and I can see why as it's all about the money and safety"

The solutions suggested by young people included:

- Education to be focused around what an healthy relationship looks like;
- Education to be positive rather than focussing solely on negativity;
- Clear information that feels more local (rather than 'London based') around gang crime and exploitation;
- Highlight how to report concerns to police anonymously;
- Education to be geared towards younger people and communication to be on their level;
- Open conversations with perpetrators to have more of an understanding of what is going on;
- Bring in other organisations to talk about gangs, exploitation, county lines.

Our key recommendations:

For Cheshire Constabulary:

- **Take reports of bullying more seriously**, ensuring the police contact room processes reports fully and sharing statistics of how many reports made to police about bullying are **followed through**

For the PCC & Partners:

- **Encourage education settings** to include 'healthy relationships' within PSHE
- Ensure current local issues are discussed with young people on a **regular basis**, with **clear signposting** of how to access support or report

For the Youth Commission:

- Head up a **campaign** on relationships, with a specific focus on college and university settings and **signposting** young people towards support services for **victims of assault**

For support services for Relationships:

This is a small selection and not an exhaustive list of support services

- **Body Positive North West** – 01270 653150 www.bpcnw.co.uk promoting healthy sex and relationships in Cheshire and North Wales.
- **Directory of Victims Services for Cheshire:**
www.victimservicescheshire.co.uk
- **Pan Cheshire Local Safeguarding Children Board Links:**
www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/homepage.aspx
www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk
hcypsp.haltonsafeguarding.co.uk
www.warrington.gov.uk/warrington-safeguarding-partnership
- **RASASC** (Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre) provide an ageless sexual violence support service across Cheshire, Warrington & Halton including counselling and ISVA provision. Can contact for advice and support without having reported to the Police. 0330 363 063 www.rapecentre.org.uk
- **The LGBT Foundation:** National Charity delivering advice, support and information services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) communities. lgbt.foundation 0345 3 30 30 30
- **The Proud Trust**, the home of LGBT & youth. 0161 660 3347 www.theproudtrust.org
- **Womens Aid:** A range of services including training, consultancy, online training and helpline (0808 2000 247) and links to other information.
www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/useful-links
- **Young Addaction Child Exploitation Service** 01928 240406 cheshirewest@addaction.cjsm.net

Priority 3: Mental Health



What we did

The CYC set out to explore how **bullying can impact mental health** and an individual's everyday life. We also wanted to raise awareness of mental health and **stamp out the stigma** surrounding mental illness, including **exploring what support is currently working** and what could be improved. The CYC aimed to educate young people on mental health issues and how they can help each other, including highlighting how poor mental health can lead to vulnerability such as substance misuse.

The Youth Commission gathered a total of **478** responses on this topic from education and community settings including: Cheshire College Chester, Cheshire College Ellesmere Port, Cheshire College Crewe, CAMHS, Reaseheath College, Sandbach High, Young Carers, Proud Trust, Bishop Heber High, Queens School, Chester Students Union, Live!Jubilee Hub; Warrington and Vale Royal College.

What we found

Mental Health continues to be an **overwhelming concern** for young people in Cheshire with many finding it difficult to discuss openly. CYC members felt this was an ongoing priority of importance for the Big Conversation. The Big Conversation revealed that pressure from schools and the education system were felt to be **a largest factor negatively impacting** mental health in young people in Cheshire. Young people felt they were **constantly pressured in a results-driven environment** with little regard for mental health and happiness.

"There is a lot of pressure that is put on us by the school to meet deadlines and get good grades. I know people whose school situations harmed their mental health"

"Needs to be less stress from schools and our school try with power points and well being walks but they don't help"

"In the run up to GCSEs, revision time and other commitments can prevent me from going to my local mental health and wellbeing group. I am afraid that this will eventually take a toll on my mental health"

"I feel that it is a greatly overlooked in general your mental health is just as important as your physical health and a lot as the time school can cause a lot as strain on your mental health"

"I tried to end my life during school hours and I went to the school nurse for help but she only helped me with physical aid not really supporting me mentally or asking what happened. I later returned to class while my parents were called from the office. I felt really alone and isolated and misunderstood, and I couldn't talk to my friends in fear of being made fun of"

The young people we spoke with felt there was **a lack of accessible support services**, which results in young people **looking online to untrustworthy sites** for support and guidance. They felt that utilising online sites for support was easier and more private than reaching out for support to schools and national organisations. They knew of **little or no local support groups** for young people. Those young people who had accessed support felt it was flawed and could often make the situation worse. Many felt you had to be in a **critical situation to receive the care** you had required for a long time.

"At the doctors there is only 1 doctor that helps with mental issues and has a very big waiting list. There isn't any help unless you have self harmed or have suicidal thoughts"

"A lot of people are going through difficult times and don't know how and where to seek help from or what to do if a friend is going through a tough time"

"I look online for help around mental health and stress. I think this can sometimes get confusing and you can come across really horrible sites that try and get you to kill yourself"

"I am on the waiting list for CAMHS but I don't know where I can go for help while I'm waiting"

"I have had 2 counselling sessions organised through the doctors and they've made me feel worse. I've tried to tell the doctor but he said he cant offer anything else"

"I don't know of anywhere near where I live to help with this. Online is the best place to look"

Young people with family and friends affected by mental health often felt **overlooked and forgotten** and that the **impact it has on their lives is underestimated**. Young people felt there was a general lack of understanding of mental health within communities and between young people. This makes it hard for people to speak out when they need help.

"My sister is in uni now and she struggles but she has a stone face and doesn't tell anyone. She talks to me when I push her a little but then it starts to scare me to the point that I start crying. I wish parents would understand that it's not all in your head and you don't want to be bullied or have a bad relationship with your family"

"A few of my friends and family suffer from mental health issues so I have to focus on them instead of caring for my own mental health. There is also added pressure of GCSEs"

"My mum needs help with her mental health. Young carers is the only support I have"

"When your parents have issues and you feel bad yourself you cant tell them as then they'll worry and it'll make them worse. It can make you feel really lonely"

"I feel too young to be the only person my mum has"

Bullying has a significant impact on the mental health of young people, with many saying they **feel alone or that they are not taken seriously**. Those with friends who had mental health issues wanted to help and support them, but didn't know how and feared they may make the situation worse.

"I had to move school as they weren't supporting my mental health issues and I tried to take my own life in school"

"Bullying is the biggest thing in school that affects mental health. It is so bad"

"My friend cuts herself and tells me not to tell anyone and the teachers know she does it and they ask me as she done it again and it makes me feel horrible"

"My friend cuts herself and tells me not to tell anyone and the teachers know she does it and they ask me as she done it again and it makes me feel horrible"

"My friend is bullied and I'm too scared to help her as I think I'll end up getting bullied too"

"Horrible posts online and people saying things in school. It makes everything really hard and I've tried to tell school. I feel like nothing can be done to stop it"

The solutions suggested by young people included:

- Reduce the pressure on students with support around exam stress;
- Encourage parents to support young people with their mental health;
- Streamline processes within schools around support and mental health guidance;
- Support services for those in crisis should be easy to access, local and clearly advertised;
- Raise awareness of how young people can support their friends with mental health issues;
- Schools to clearly signpost safe and trustworthy online support sites;
- Awareness around young people whose loved ones suffer with mental health issues and ensure they are supported;
- Ensure young people know how to report bullying and that it is taken seriously.

Our key recommendations:

For the Constabulary:

- Be **more open** about mental health within the Constabulary, **utilise social media** and visit education settings to talk about mental health

For the PCC & Partners:

- Encourage schools to **promote positive mental health** through well being classes and **exam stress relieving sessions**
- **Positively promote online support services** that can assist those in **immediate mental health crisis**
- Promote support services that can assist those immediately in a mental health crisis
- Support CYC members in Mental Health First Aid training

For the Youth Commission:

- Keep **having open discussions through workshop settings** with young people that helps **support good** mental health and signposts them to the correct services

For support services on Mental Health:

This is a small selection and not an exhaustive list of support services

- **Bodygossip:** Body Gossip is a charity that combines Arts and Education to empower everybody to be the best and rock their own brand of gorgeous. www.bodygossip.org/what-we-do
- **Cheshire CARES:** Cheshire CARES (Cope and Recovery Enhanced Service) is the Commissioner's dedicated service providing support to all victims of crime in Cheshire based on the individuals' needs. cheshire.cares@cheshire.pnn.police.uk
- **Cheshire and Wirral Partnership (CWP):** CWP provides mental health, substance misuse, learning disability and community physical health services. These services are provided in partnership with commissioners, local authorities, voluntary and independent organisations, people who use our services and their carers. We also provide specialist services within Liverpool, Sefton, Bolton, Warrington, Halton and Trafford. www.cwp.nhs.uk
- **Directory of Victims Services for Cheshire:** www.victimservicescheshire.co.uk
- **Headmeds:** Advice specifically for young people about medication, treatments, general information and contacts. www.headmeds.org.uk/general-advice
- **North West Boroughs Healthcare:** www.nwbh.nhs.uk
- **Pan Cheshire Local Safeguarding Children Board Links:**
www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/homepage.aspx
www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk
hcypsp.haltonsafeguarding.co.uk
www.warrington.gov.uk/warrington-safeguarding-partnership

- **The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust:** Working with young people, parents, Royal College of Psychiatrists and Young Minds, this Trust has produced 3 short films concerning self-harm. Cheshire & Wirral Partnership Trust: www.cwp.nhs.uk/
- **Time to Change:** Works to counter stigma and discrimination. Information, downloadable resources, quiz, films & personal stories. www.time-to-change.org.uk/mental-health-stigma
- **Young Minds:** Information and support for children, young people, parents and professionals www.youngminds.org.uk/about

Priority 4: Stop and Search



What we found

Through the Big Conversation, The CYC set out to understand young people's perception of **stop and search** and their rights. We wanted to explore how police officers can make young people feel more comfortable in a stop and search situation. We also wanted to raise awareness of an **individual's rights** when being stopped and searched and highlight how they can make a complaint if they feel they were treated unfairly. In 2018 The CYC created a Stop and Search '**Know your Rights**' film. As part of our Big Conversation, we wanted to educate young people on their stop and search rights using this film, together with peer-to-peer discussion about experiences and feeling able to question police officers.

Link to CYC 'Know your Rights' film: www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-eVgqq9GGc&t=1s

The Youth Commission gathered a total of **202** responses on this topic from education and community settings including: Cheshire College Chester, Chester University, Reaseheath College, YMCA Crewe.

What we found

Following the creation of the Stop and Search 'Know your Rights' film, CYC members were keen to continue educating young people about their rights and **feeding back experiences** to the police and PCC.

Many young people feel targeted by police officers for stop and search. They feel they are more likely to be stopped and searched **based on their clothing, race, gender, area they live or family connections**.

"Stop and search targets a race in my area"

"I was stopped and searched. I'm black and none of my white friends were"

"Police make out they aren't stereotyping but we all know they are. You don't see a female in a posh

area being stop and searched"

"I know I'm stopped based on the fact I live at the YMCA and I have a criminal history"

"They say they are stopping you for one reason but they just make that up in the hope they find something"

"Lies lies lies all about stop and search"

"The police just stop people for no reasons or reasons that irrelevant because someone looks dodgy or because they're wearing certain clothing"

"In my area stop and search happens a lot for teenagers who wear all black"

Those who had experienced stop and search felt officers were too **authoritarian and lacked respect** or fairness towards them as young people. They also felt that police officers use **too much jargon** when conducting a stop and search, making young people feel **confused and pressurised**.

"Police started talking about sections and stuff and I don't know what that is. I think they do it to make you feel intimidated and not question things"

"I was stopped and checked and nothing was really explained to me"

"They need to be more polite when they are doing it"

"Do police treat older adults like this? I don't reckon they do"

"I just don't like the way they speak to me"

"Police misuse the stop and search act by searching innocent male teenagers"

Young people explained they **currently feel very unsafe** on the streets. Therefore many young people welcomed stop and search, saying that it may reduce the issues around knife crime in young people. They also explained that more stop and searches **may reduce** substance misuse and dealing in the region, and would deter young people from carrying drugs in and out of education settings where deals often take place.

"I think knife crime is a big issue around here and maybe if more stop and searches were done this would help"

"If you aren't carrying anything you shouldn't worry about stop and search"

"There should be more police and searches around college as loads of drug deals are done here"

"It's not safe late at night and loads of people get knives pulled on them. More searches might make people feel safer"

"There should be more of these searches because so many boys carry knives and do deals around here"

The 'Stop and Search Rights' film has had a **positive impact** on workshop participants, most of whom said they felt **more empowered** after the workshop. Young people said if they were in this situation in the future they would know what to expect and said they **felt more comfortable** around stop and search. This highlighted the importance of young people's awareness of their rights, empowering them to ask questions and feel informed.

"The film has helped me understand this more"

"I didn't know anything about this before"

"I wasn't sure what stop and search was before. I thought it was something done in London"

"It's made me realise that I haven't been treated right in the past. More people should see this"

"Young people need to know more about their rights. Films like this help us understand how things should be done"

The solutions suggested by young people included:

- We should hear more about our rights and how to go about making complaints;
- There should be more stop and search carried out in areas surrounding education settings;
- Police should work hard to ensure they aren't stereotyping young people when carrying out stop and search;
- Jargon shouldn't be used by police officers in any situation involving young people;
- The positives of stop and search should be spoken about more within the community.

Our key recommendations

For Cheshire Constabulary:

- Ensure they are **less intimidating** when approaching a young person for a stop and search
- Be clear **without using over complicated jargon**, as to the reasons why the stop and search is taking place

For the PCC & Partners:

- Supply **education settings** with the **Stop and Search film** to ensure young people in Cheshire are aware of their rights
- **Promote the positives** of Stop and Search, releasing stories and stats of why **communities are safer** as a result of stop and search

For the Youth Commission:

- Continue to make young people **aware of their rights**, promoting the stop and search film through our **social media and blog channels**
- **CYC members to continue** to be part of the Policing and Young People's Task Force group, a forum that discuss areas of concern Constabulary leaders

For advice and guidance around Stop and Search:

This is a small selection of support services and not an exhaustive list

- **Cheshire Constabulary:** provides web pages containing information about Stop and Search rights, how to feedback and how to make a complaint. www.cheshire.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/
- **Directory of Victims Services for Cheshire:** www.victimservicescheshire.co.uk
- **Pan Cheshire Local Safeguarding Children Board Links:**
 - www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/homepage.aspx
 - www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk
 - hcypsp.haltonsafeguarding.co.uk
 - www.warrington.gov.uk/warrington-safeguarding-partnership

Priority 5: Substance Misuse



What we did

Through the Big Conversation, the CYC set out to understand how drugs can lead to a young person being involved in crime and its effect on the local community. We wanted to have a more thorough understanding of how **exploitation and county lines** can affect young people. The CYC wanted to raise awareness of the different types of drugs and the possible legal implications of using them. We were keen to understand the **impact peer pressure** has on substance misuse and how to effectively tackle this. We also wanted to raise awareness of the **effect substances can have on families and home life**, as well as raising awareness of where young people can go for support and help.

The Youth Commission gathered a total of **413** responses on this topic from education and community settings including: YMCA Crewe, Chester University, Reaseheath College, Cheshire College Crewe, Cheshire College Chester, Cheshire College Ellesmere Port, Queens School, Chester Pride and Sandbach High School.

What we found

Substance misuse is a growing concern for young people in Cheshire, with drug and alcohol use **becoming normalised** in the community.

During the Big Conversation, we found that drugs are **easily accessible** throughout Cheshire with social media becoming the simplest way to acquire drugs. Young people felt concerned about the ease of **accessibility via social media**, and how dealers **utilise this platform** to target the most vulnerable in society. They spoke about their worry of others being **exploited by county line drug dealers**.

"I think drugs are seen as 'cool' and misused in the wrong circumstances and for 'fun' not just medical reasons, it's ruining their body and makes people act with aggression which can scare other people"

"Drugs can be got everywhere"

"Snapchat and Instagram – get drugs there. Makes its really easy"

"Drug dealers don't care who is using social media to get drugs. People with issues and kids contacting dealers"

"I've seen them on snapchat saying they are outside schools if kids want to buy and I don't think its right"

As drugs become **more and more accessible** through county lines, young people are experimenting with different types of substances and openly discuss **mixing drugs** as a way of 'chasing a high'. Young people we spoke to admitted to using drugs on a **daily basis** and feeling that society has created an allowance for drug use.

"Mixing drugs on a night out makes it a better night"

"Friends of mine don't see the issue with mixing drugs as they think its better than just one"

"I've seen kids in school taking drugs in the toilet like it's normal"

"I don't know why people make a big deal out of weed, it's better than fags"

"Drugs are being sold and taken every day. Its normal and part of the world now"

Young people turn to drugs for entertainment due to boredom and having very little access to **affordable or interesting activities**. Young people also spoke of feeling **generally stigmatised** by their communities and **feeling unacceptable**, so they use drugs to fit in with society's negative perception of them.

"I think kids go on drugs as it's so boring around here"

"There is literally absolutely nothing to do!"

"Nothing going on. Nothing to do. If we just hang about we get told off"

"Everyone says kids are bad, telling us to move on or shouting at us when we aren't doing anything. Anything bad happens we get blamed and people say we are all on drugs. So we may as well just do that if that's what everyone thinks"

Young people felt that the **police should focus** on tackling the county lines issue, as well as the online trade and promotion of drugs locally. They felt that **currently police target** small scale teenage drug use, which can make young people feel stereotyped and loses sight of the bigger picture.

"Police need to do more to tackle online drug crimes"

"Dealers should be dealt with. They use kids to sell drugs and it's wrong"

"Police care about numbers saying they've arrested kids over weed when they should be doing more about the bigger deals"

"Use their intelligence to target online drug deals and dealers promoting drugs and having brands really blatant"

"I don't see the use of going after kids"

More should be done to help young people who have **family members with addictions issues**, as they feel **stigmatised, overlooked and isolated**. These young people also admitted to being bullied as a result of their families addictions and that they were **judged and forgotten** as a result.

"Children from families who are dealers or addicts are bullied and treated horrible"

"There is no support for kids who have parents who are addicts. These people are looking after their

parents and also having to look after themselves but everyone treats them like scum bags because of who their parents are"

"I get bullied because of who my dad is even though I don't live with him anymore"

"I know my friend has to look after her mum who is on drugs. She hasn't got any help"

The solutions suggested by young people included:

- Utilise youth intelligence to target online drug trade;
- Ensure young people who live in homes with addiction issues are classed as young carers and offered the same support;
- Utilise police digital intelligence to focus attention on local online drug trade;
- Police should build better relationships with young addicts with a more supportive attitude;
- Police should be more aware of local places young people can go if they are bored;
- Ensure youth activities reflect the local demographic of young people;
- Ensure education around drugs is up to date and includes online drug slang/trade
- Educate and support young people who are worried about friends who may have addiction issues and/or are involved in exploitation.

Our key recommendations

For Cheshire Constabulary:

- **Promote** the work the **Constabulary** are doing to tackle drug trade including on social media
- Develop ways that help young people to **anonymously report exploitation, county lines and drug crimes**

For the PCC & Partners:

- Work together to ensure young people **have accessible safe spaces** to go that offer affordable positive activities
- Work with partners to support young people from homes with addiction issues and are **classed as carers** and offered **similar support**
- Work towards a **change in legislation** that looks at harsher punishments for those **who exploit children and vulnerable people** into drug and county lines crimes

For the Youth Commission:

- Continue **peer-to-peer workshop discussions** with the **most diverse** young people in the community
- Keep the PCC and Constabulary up to date on **current social media platforms** and jargon used by local dealers

For Substance Misuse support services:

This is a small selection and not an exhaustive list of support services

- **Change, Grow, Live:**
www.changegrowlive.org/?gclid=EAlalQobChMI973QkcrW6AIVCbLtCh2_8A9tEAAYASAAEgKwU_D_BwE
- **Directory of Victims Services for Cheshire:** www.victimservicescheshire.co.uk
- **Drinkaware:** Provides advice about reducing drinking and staying safe while drinking
www.drinkaware.co.uk
- **Drugwise:** Promotes evidence-based information on drugs, alcohol and tobacco.
www.drugwise.org.uk
- **Home Office NPS Resource Pack:** New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) resource pack for informal educators and frontline practitioners. www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-psychoactive-substances-nps-resource-pack
- **Pan Cheshire Local Safeguarding Children Board Links:**
www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/homepage.aspx
www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/
hcypsp.haltonsafeguarding.co.uk/
www.warrington.gov.uk/warrington-safeguarding-partnership
- **Talk to Frank:** Provides user-friendly information for young people on substances and their effects, including the A to Z of drugs: www.talktofrank.com
- **WDP** www.wdp.org.uk/find-us/cheshire-west-and-chester

Priority 6: Knife Crime



What we did

The CYC aimed to explore why young people may feel they need to carry a knife. We wanted to raise awareness of the **implications of carrying** a knife and how this can affect family and friends. We aimed to explore whether young people knew how to support an individual who had been stabbed. We also wanted to educate young people on **local knife amnesties** and where to **seek support** if they feel pressurised into carrying a knife.

The Youth Commission gathered a total of **301** responses on this topic from education and community settings including YMCA Crewe, Reaseheath College, Cheshire College Ellesmere Port, Cheshire College Chester, Chester College Crewe, Chester University.

What we found

The biggest theme from our research was that young people from across Cheshire feel **unsafe on the streets**, particularly after dark. They feel carrying a knife has **become normalised** and that young people do not reflect on the **risks associated with carrying a weapon**. We found that there was a lack of understanding and education around the **lasting implications of carrying a knife** for personal safety. Young people felt education should be delivered by organisations rather than schools. These should have **hard-hitting messages** alongside looking at, and having conversations around, **the root causes** of knife crime.

"People carry knives for self-defence but they might use it in situations they might not of had to, but some people carry knives and to just hurt people"

"People getting stabbed in parks which makes it scary walking in the dark"

"I think everyone will know someone who has been stabbed"

"Carrying a knife is normal now"

"I get anxiety when I'm walking home as I don't know who can hurt me and if I'm next"

"Too many people are carrying knives and lots of people are getting hurt"

"My opinion on this is that it needs to stop, it is not good for the town because everyone is scared to go out. I was at the fair and was too scared to go"

Young people said the reasons why they carry a knife is that they **feel vulnerable**, rather than with a view to using it. It was suggested that an increase in stop and search would make communities and young people feel safer and less threatened by the risk of knife crime.

"I think most people carry knives because they are worried about one being pulled on them"

"Carry a knife for protection but would use it if I felt I had to"

"If someone carries a knife people feel like they have to carry them, if no one carries them then no need to carry them at all"

"My opinion is that if police searched people then less would carry them"

"Searches would stop them being carried so much"

Young people felt the community needs to be more involved in tackling knife crime and that this **isn't solely the police's responsibility**. They felt that knife **amnesties need to be destigmatised**, carrying no shame and being present in more communities.

"There should be amnesties but they shouldn't just be at police stations. It would feel embarrassing going there"

"I reckon the police keep an eye on who's using knife amnesties. I don't think many young people use them"

"People should come together as a big effort to stop knife issues"

"I don't think this is just up to the police. If everyone tried to stop this then it might have a bigger impact. At the moment I think it's out of control"

"Make it easier to get rid of knives"

Many young males in Cheshire admitted to being threatened and/or harmed with a knife, however **very few reported** these instances to police due to the stigma of being a 'grass'. These young males felt knife crime was part of youth culture. They explained that reporting instances of knife crime to the police would **pose further risks to them**, rather than make them feel safer.

"I have been involved in gang crime, I've been sliced by a blade and other weapons, I have decided to come away from that sort of life"

"Every person in this room has been threatened with a blade. I don't think any of us have reported it. Being a grass is the worst"

"Someone brought a blade into college and was proud to have it, kept showing people. College dealt with it but I don't think any students would've told police"

"I was robbed and the lads had a knife. They tried to steal my phone and a passer-by stopped them but then he got stabbed"

"I don't completely agree with knife crime but it's different if it means your life"

"Snitches get stitches is a thing and you cant be a grass"

"People think its sick carrying knives but they are just muppets that are scared"

The solutions suggested by young people included:

- The Constabulary should make anonymous reporting easier;
- Knife amnesties should be available at places other than police stations;
- Education around knife crime needs to be more up to date and delivered in a forward thinking way;
- Education needs to be on a youth level and not reactive;
- Look more at the root causes of knife crime and why young people are carrying weapons;
- Communities need to work together to deliver a message that knife crime isn't acceptable.

Our key recommendations

For Cheshire Constabulary:

- When visiting education settings to discuss knife crime, **encourage** young people to become involved in **local knife sweeps**
- **Help tackle the stigma** of reporting knife crime to police by promoting **anonymous reporting tools**
- **Continue and increase** the engagement with communities, community leaders and local organisations to tackle knife crime and empower the public

For support services:

- Encourage an **inclusive approach** to knife crime by ensuring knife amnesties are **available throughout the community** and not just police stations
- Make **anonymous reporting** of knife crime easier to access and **clearly outline** there **being no repercussions** on the person reporting

PCC & Constabulary:

- **Promote the anonymous reporting** tool within colleges and schools as part of our Big Conversation
- CYC members to become **involved in knife sweeps** and promote these experiences via our social media and blog channels

For Knife Crime support services:

This is a small selection and not an exhaustive list of support services

- **Cheshire CARES** (Cope and Recovery Enhanced Service) is the Commissioner's dedicated service providing support to all victims of crime in Cheshire based on individual needs.
Email Cheshire.cares@cheshire.pnn.police.uk
- **Crimestoppers** www.crimestoppers-uk.org 0800 555111
- **Directory of Victims Services for Cheshire:** www.victimservicescheshire.co.uk
- **Fearless** www.fearless.org
- **Pan Cheshire Local Safeguarding Children Board Links:**
www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/homepage.aspx
www.cheshirewestscp.co.uk/
hcypsp.haltonsafeguarding.co.uk/
www.warrington.gov.uk/warrington-safeguarding-partnership
- **Remedi** "Got Your Back" service supporting victims of crime in Halton.
- **Young Addaction** addaction.org.uk 01928240406
- **Your Choice Your Future** www.ycyf.co.uk

Conclusion



We are extremely grateful to the members of the CYC and all the partners who have been involved in making this piece of work a success.

Through their 'Big Conversation' with over 2,000 young people, The CYC has managed to reach and engage a hugely diverse cross-section of the youth population across Cheshire. They have made particular efforts to hear from those young people whose views are seldom heard. The insights and recommendations contained in this report represent a very significant contribution to the work of the PCC and Cheshire Constabulary.

On 4th March 2020, over 70 key stakeholders came together at the Cheshire Youth Commission conference. Delegates included the PCC, Chief Constable, statutory agencies, and VCS organisations. At the event, delegates were actively involved in roundtable discussions about the future of the CYC. Some of the key messages arising from these discussions were:

- Mental health and bullying were mentioned as a general concern within the priority topic discussions
- That there should be more focus early intervention, specifically around knife crime and substance use.
- Communities and local businesses to be more aware of local crime issues and how to report these.
- Funding and schools ability to cooperate are seen as potential barriers
- Many organisations were keen on collaborative work with other partners and the CYC
- Working together to get key messages across to young people in the community, specifically around safety and reporting crime/support services
- Partners were keen to utilise outside organisations to bring the most effective learning to young people.

Moving forward, Cheshire Youth Commission will be further developed as a channel for engaging young people in the work of both the PCC and Cheshire Constabulary. As shown through the project, The CYC can help bridge

the gap between young people and policing, through ongoing engagement with the youth population. They can provide youth-centred advice on a range of policing and crime matters affecting young people. They also have an important role to play in the development and evaluation of the recommendations they have set out in this report. Over the year ahead, The CYC will work with the OPCC and Cheshire Constabulary, to develop an action plan for the delivery of the recommendations within this report.

Testimonials

David Keane, PCC for Cheshire

I am really proud of the work of our Youth Commission. Once again, they have done an outstanding job capturing the views of a diverse range of young people across our communities.

The conversations they have directly with young people allow me to ensure the decisions I make in policing and criminal justice have young peoples' best interests at heart.

I'm looking forward to receiving the Youth Commission's final report and working with partners to implement the recommendations so we can ensure the services we provide are relevant and accessible to all young people across Cheshire

PC Amy Fletcher - Police Youth Engagement Coordinator Cheshire Safer Schools and Young Persons Partnership

I'm continually impressed with the dedication and commitment of the members of the Youth Commission. From the first scoping meeting I attended in Crewe, it was clear that the group would focus on the issues that matter to young people in Cheshire and were passionate about capturing a wide variety of opinions and voices.

Over the year it has been a pleasure to spend time with the group, supporting them in finding more out about policing in Cheshire and how the work the commission are doing will positively influence future policing engagement. The conference was well presented and informative. The recommendations the commission presented offer our team an excellent opportunity to maintain and improve youth engagement across the county. Members of the commission have directly supported our youth engagement activities and have proved themselves to be valuable points of contact and real assets in the work that we do.

Joanne McKiernan, Queens School Chester

Engaging with the Youth Commission has given our pupils a chance to see that important public services like the Police are interested in what they have to say and that their opinions and ideas can help shape strategies and initiatives at a local level. The focal topics of the sessions have always been very relevant to our young people and delivered in a sensitive way allowing them to feel they can safely open up and talk about what can be done to address the issues for them and other young people.

Catherine Burnett, Personal Development Tutor, Cheshire College South and West

The Youth Commission are always welcome guests in classes and interact exceptionally well with the students, particularly those who display behaviours which can be challenging. Because of their approach and interaction they are able to have open and frank discussions with individuals and groups who were often unusually forthcoming about their own experiences.

The feedback from groups afterwards is always positive and they reported feeling as though they had been listened to and their opinions mattered. It is so important to bridge the gap between young people and the Police; some of the students have had negative experiences and are well placed to comment on how things could be improved. This is an invaluable service in helping to build bridges.

Sarah Maile, Sandbach High School and 6th Form College

It has been fantastic working with the CYC.

It has give all of our young people a voice, and got them thinking about issues which directly affect them and how to tackle them.

It is inclusive and exciting and I am really honoured to be involved.

I am also so very proud of my three students who have been directly involved in the work of the CYC and seeing their passion and skills develop as a result.

Josie Pordes, Youth Commission member

I have thoroughly enjoyed every single bit of this experience, from the workshops in knife crimes to the YAG groups and speaking to an ex offender. It has opened up my opportunities for the future massively gaining a wider knowledge about the policing tactics and intervention strategies. It is something I would encourage every young person to do whether they have an interest in policing or not, it gives a vivid insight into the importance of the police and breaks down the stigma surrounding them. I have had numerous opportunities like working with young carers and gaining their opinions, being on the young people task force and weapon tackling in Chester. I would definitely join again, without a doubt it has solidified my passion for policing whilst meeting new people and forming new friendships!

Beau Kennedy, Youth Commission member

I joined the Cheshire Youth Commission in July 2019 during the summer following my first year of university. I am a Law student at the University of Chester, so I saw this as an opportunity to put something useful on my CV. However, I have gained much more than that.

For me, I have enjoyed the workshops the most, they have been very interesting and have given me the opportunity to meet new people from very different backgrounds. It has been very interesting to learn about the different relationships these different groups of young people have with the police and other bodies. This makes the project so important to the young people we meet, also to the police as the youth commission have a unique approach to improving or establishing these relationships.

The experience has been extremely useful for me, not only for the new perspective it has given me, but I have also been able to meet some people that have offered me numerous opportunities. Leaders Unlocked have offered me the opportunity to attend an event in London with a very well established law firm, at the CYC conference I was able to sit at a table with the Chief Constable of Cheshire and meet with a very experienced judge who worked in Chester Crown Court and he offered me the opportunity to attend court one day to watch first-hand what happens in a courtroom.

So, for me I have numerous personal gains from this experience, but I have also found the work we do very rewarding and I enjoy that we are able to make a difference in young people's lives. I am grateful to have the opportunity to volunteer for another year, and excited to see what projects we will be taking part in!

Alexandra Hilditch, Youth Commission member

My experience on the CYC has been nothing but eye-opening & meaningful. I thoroughly enjoyed the meeting where we sat with Peter Crowcroft & other police officers and PCSO's in Macclesfield, talking about how to help the police work together with young people in Cheshire. I also enjoyed working together with the most talented young people I've ever met before, who all wanted to make Cheshire a safer place. Personally, I believe that this project is so important because it gives young people all across Cheshire a voice. Other young people struggle to talk to police officers however because of the CYC we are able to get young people's views as it is easier to speak to another young person than an officer. The CYC has given me relative experience for my later career, whilst also improving my confidence & communication skills. Whilst being part of the CYC you genuinely are making a difference and that's what I love most.

Ali Roberts – Project Coordinator

The CYC provides a unique platform for young people across Cheshire to have a voice on issues that matter most to them. These trail blazing conversations with the most diverse young people in the community offer a real insight into life as a youth in Cheshire. Without the CYC members, The CYC Big Conversation wouldn't be the success that it is. These young volunteers are passionate about youth voice and their peer to peer hard work and dedication mean those who are often forgotten feel listened to and considered. CYC members sit at the heart of the project and drive it forward with fierce determination. Watching them grow in confidence, gaining new experiences and skills is fantastic and shows the value of such an opportunity.

Get in Touch

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