



North Wales Youth Commission:

**Final Report to the Police and
Crime Commissioner for North Wales**

April 2020

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**



Contents

Introduction	3
About This Report	3
About the North Wales Youth Commission	4
What We Did	4
Our Partners	8
Priority 1: Mental Health	9
Priority 2: Drug Issues	12
Priority 3: Anti Social Behaviour	15
Priority 4: Relationship Between Young People and the Police	18
Conclusion	21
Testimonials	22

Introduction

The North Wales Youth Commission was established in 2019 by the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales, Arfon Jones. The project was facilitated by Leaders Unlocked.

The North Wales Youth Commission (NWYC) allows young people aged 14-25 years to work in partnership with the Police and Crime Commissioner and North Wales Police to tackle urgent issues. The project represents a new approach in engaging young people across North Wales to shape future policing and crime prevention strategies, and support the development of the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan. For more information, please see www.northwales-pcc.gov.uk

The key objectives of the project were as follows:

- Recruit 20 – 25 members from across North Wales to join the North Wales Youth Commission, with a particular emphasis on engaging those from 'hard to reach' groups and communities.
- Work with the North Wales Youth Commission members to identify the key priority topics they most wanted to tackle through the project.
- Equip the North Wales Youth Commission members with the practical skills training they needed for their role.
- Plan and deliver a 'Big Conversation' to enable the North Wales Youth Commission to gather meaningful views from at least 1200 young people across North Wales in relation to the priorities.
- Support the North Wales Youth Commission to turn the evidence into key findings and recommendations to be disseminated at a final conference with the PCC, Police and partner agencies.

Through this project, a group of 28 young members have been recruited from across North Wales. Our members have worked in partnership with the PCC and North Wales Police to prioritise areas of concern. These priorities have been decided by our members.

We would like thank CWVYS and the Urdd for their collaboration on making the Welsh Language Facilitation and Support to allow the work of the NWYC to be accessible to Welsh speakers.

The North Wales Youth Commission is being 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 with PCCs in 9 other regions and is planning to expand further in the years ahead.

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

About this report

This report is based on evidence collected from over **1200 conversations** with young people from all regions of North Wales. The results were collected in youth-led engagement events and outreach events with various organisations throughout North Wales, primarily targeting educational facilities, youth groups and other youth organisations. Our findings have been collected using NWYC postcards, which allow young people to record their opinions and suggest feasible solutions.

The report allocates each priority its own section, which consists of a comprehensive analysis of young people's opinions using exact quotes from individual participants, and the key recommendations that have been developed by the Youth Commission through careful consideration of the findings.

This report is intended to act as a genuine, independent record of the opinions of young people that have been provided to us through the 'Big Conversation' process. It is also intended to be the basis for further action on the part of the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales and relevant partner agencies.

About the North Wales Youth Commission



The purpose of the North Wales Youth Commission is to support, challenge and inform the work of the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner Arfon Jones.

The North Wales Youth Commission is based on a youth-driven model which allows young people to put forward solutions to key problems that they identify in their communities, as opposed to traditional consultation models which do not harness the leadership and opinions of young people to such an extent. This is a 'Children's Rights Approach' which is vital part of the North Wales Police & Crime Commissioner's Children and Young People's Strategy.

A key element of the North Wales Youth Commission's role is to gather the views of young people through peer-to-peer engagement. This is a strength of the project, as it provides young people with a safe environment to talk to their peers about issues in their communities. This approach allows for more honest information to be collected.

What we did

Recruiting new members

During June and July 2019, Leaders Unlocked recruited 28 NWYC members. All Youth Commissioners were selected through a two-stage recruitment process, including an initial application form and a telephone interview with representatives from Leaders Unlocked. Through proactive contact with local organisations, we ensured the opportunity was widely promoted to young people from all communities throughout all regions of North Wales. This involved working closely with professionals and organisations across the education, statutory and voluntary sectors. The group includes looked-after children and care-leavers, disabled young people, LGBTQ+, those with experience of the criminal justice system and young people with mental health conditions.

The diversity breakdown of the membership is as follows:

11 Male (40%), 15 Female (53%), 2 Prefer not to say (7%)

5 Identify as (BAME) Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people (17%)

7 Identify as (LGBTQ+) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (24%)

4 Identify as (LLDD) Learner with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities (14%)

Identifying priority issues

At their inaugural meeting in July 2019, the North Wales Youth Commission members worked together to identify 4 key priorities that affected their peer groups and communities. These choices were based on individual experiences and were solely influenced by the members, rather than being led by the PCC or Leaders Unlocked staff. Their choices were as follows:

1. Mental Health
2. Drug Issues
3. Anti-Social Behaviour
4. The Relationship between Young People and the Police

Skills training



Leaders Unlocked provided the North Wales Youth Commission members with skills training to enable them to be successful in their role and supported members with their personal development. The training took place at several team meetings, and incorporated a wide range of skills. These skills included but were not restricted to:

Workshop skills and techniques – training the members to engage with young people in discussion in a manner which allows their audience to feel safe to share their honest opinions

Presentation skills – by providing a platform whereby our members could discuss how they feel each priority should be tackled, the Youth Commissioners were able to increase their confidence in speaking to large audiences. These skills were further enhanced throughout the various workshops completed through the duration of the Big Conversation process.

Debate skills – the Youth Commissioners were given the relevant skills to form strong arguments in a variety of debating situations. These skills were utilised in the 'Big Conversation'. NWYC members also received ACE's training which further expanded their skill set and prepared them for conversations with some of the most vulnerable young people in the community.

Creating the Tools for the North Wales Youth Commission

North Wales Youth Commission members worked together to design a workshop to address each of their priorities based on how they felt young people would best engage with the topics. These workshops were designed in such a way to ensure the flow of conversation with the young people in order to collect relevant results on each priority topic.

For the purpose of data collection, the North Wales Youth Commission created postcards to collate the relevant information for their research. The postcard shows each priority that the North Wales Youth Commission was collecting responses on, allowing young people to provide their opinions of all priorities regardless of the workshop they were attending.

The postcards have highlighted real-life opinions and experiences that young people may feel uncomfortable discussing – the postcards are designed so that the response cannot be attributed to a specific person.

Working with the Commissioner's Office

Throughout this project, the North Wales Youth Commission has been linked with key officials from the Commissioner's Office and North Wales Police. They have shown their support through attending meetings and keeping up to date with the North Wales Youth Commission's progress. The interaction of these officials allows the North Wales Youth Commission to spread its voice further and provide a positive representation of our work to the communities of North Wales.

Running the 'Big Conversation'

Through reaching out to a wide range of community organisations and education institutions, the North Wales Youth Commission has gathered over **1200** constructive responses from young people across the region in relation to their four priorities. The Youth Commissioners have delivered a total of 35 workshops in a very diverse range of settings. The young people attending these workshops were encouraged to provide their own opinions throughout the experience in order to stimulate honest debate – this strengthened the results provided in each workshop as their thoughts were based on in-depth conversations and not simply an initial thought.

The table below shows a breakdown of responses for each priority:

Mental Health	418
Drugs Issues	311
Anti-Social Behaviour	349
The Relationship between Young People and Police	212
Total	1290

Presenting our findings and recommendations at the 'Big Conversation' conference

At the 'Big Conversation Conference' on 27th February 2020, North Wales Youth Commission members presented their key findings and recommendations to the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales, key officials from North Wales Police and partner agencies. The event included a presentation of our findings, an open panel for questions and round table discussions between Youth Commissioners and representatives including local authorities, public sector partners, educators, senior police and youth workers.

Our Partners

We are grateful for the support we have received from a wide range of local partners who have played a key role in hosting the Youth Commission's Big Conversation activities and assisting in the recruitment process:

CDS Youth Service	Rhyl College	Youth Support Group at Denbigh High School
Coleg Llandrillo – Rhos-on-Sea	Ruthin Youth Service	Ysgol David Hughes
Conwy Youth Service	WCD Young Carers	Ysgol Glan Clwyd
Elfed High School	Wrexham Glyndwr University	Ysgol John Bright Fitness Group
Flintshire Sorted	YJS Wrexham	Ysgol Treffynnon
Friday Fitness	YJS Ynys Mon	
John Lynns Black Belt Academy	Youth Shedz	

A special thanks to the individual Youth Commissioners who have offered their time and efforts into making this project a success:

Adam Vallely	Emily Jones	Lima Dos Ramos
Alexandra Wilson	Erin Gwyn	Louise Edwards
Allana Edwards	Gethin Rogers	Mair Williams
Anna Catherine Jones	Grace Coulman Williams	Nathan Butler
Bethan Jayne Rogers	Hanna Roberts	Niamh Drummond-Welsby
Bradley Williams	Jacob Riddle	Sara Jones
Charlie Parry	Joel Ramos	Sarah Goodsir
Claudia Maria Soares	John Lloyd-Williams	Seren Hughes
Daniel Dain Dodd	Joshua Taylor	
Ella McDowall	Kieran Hughes	

Thank you to this year's co-ordinator Ali Roberts and project assistant Jade Walsh who were instrumental in bringing the project to fruition.

Priority 1: Mental Health



Mental wellbeing includes a person's social, physical, psychological and spiritual health – it is more than just the absence of ill mental health. Mental health is required in order to cope with the normal stresses of life, but in recent years there has been a global move to strengthen support for people with mental health issues. According to the young people we have spoken to across North Wales, mental health support often falls short of their requirements.

Mental health has become a cause for concern for many young people in their day-to-day lives. Mental health affects young people in various stages of their development, from education, employment and social lives.

The North Wales Youth Commission set out to listen to the experiences and views of young people who may have struggled with mental health issues. We aimed to explore what support needs to be in place in order to help young people feel mentally well, and to outline how the police and other agencies could do things differently.

In total, the North Wales Youth Commission had **418** conversations about mental health with young people across the region.

What We Found

Young people have indicated that mental health support is **hard to access**, or not advertised on a large enough scale. This is especially apparent in more rural communities where people feel increasingly isolated:

"Some of us struggle by ourselves and have no one to talk to the people around us don't understand what we go through I struggle with bad thoughts and I don't know what's wrong with me."

"As someone who suffers from mental health and lives with family members who also struggle I believe that it should be easier to get help everyone who talks about mental health say to talk to others but they are completely unapproachable and it is extremely difficult to talk to a counsellor at school."

"I have had issues with mental health and one of the biggest issues I found was that I didn't know where to go for help and I wanted it."

"A lot of help is geared to 'mild to moderate' issues and doctors have excessive waiting times for 'severe' issues that aren't life threatening and sometimes are."

Young people feel that mental health issues are **not taken seriously** enough by the general public. The stigma towards people with mental health issues is a main factor as to why young people do not discuss their issues:

"No one cares about others mental health and they do not address their issues like I have stress anxiety and depression and no one cares or tries to help me."

"People can be taken as a joke for opening up it is not taken as serious as it should be it is pathetic that people believe it's not something to look deeper into two more things needed to happen rather than just discussing this common matter every needs to act on helping improve people's mental health."

"Mental health affects many people that are close to me, and I feel there is a lot of stigma regarding the subject."

"Treated as a joke by some people."

The young people we have spoken to have indicated that mental health issues have an **impact on their family networks** – seeing relatives struggle with their mental health can be detrimental to their own mental health:

"I have had many experiences with mental health as my own sister has a mental health disability. Many people think that it only affects the effected person but it also affects the family. In our family, over the years we've had hundreds of arguments because of my sister's mental health."

"I have PTSD due to the exposure of a lot of death like my mum and ex girlfriend + friends."

Young people told us that one of the key factors for the rise in mental health concerns in young people is the **increasing pressure of education** systems and the requirement to excel. There is too much focus on the academic side of schooling – lessons, exams, etc – and **less focus on enrichment** sessions that should be utilised to support young people's wellbeing:

"More young people are suffering from mental health issues, often when they feel they are alone or are stressed about different things such as school."

"I have anxiety school triggers at most of the time it makes me anxious because of the pressure and the lack of support here"

"Mental Health can really affect pupil's education and I think that schools have to give more support to the kids that need support. But, I see that schools are trying to do more lessons on the subject of Mental Health."

"The matter is increasing in schools + education in many ways than we think. There's people suffering and they don't even realise."

Young people have also suggested that the increase in mental health issues in recent years coincides with the growth of **social media** platforms. People judge themselves based on other people and can often chase validation, and when this is not received their mental health is affected. It can also be a method of spreading hate, which negatively affects minority groups:

"I feel social media is a big problem for a lot of teenagers. You can get trolled online for having mental health issues."

"I think young people these days use the term "depressed" because of social media!"

"Everyone wants likes on social media and when they don't get them, they don't feel like they are good enough."

Importantly, young people told us that they want to see more **education** on mental health issues. According to the young people we spoke to, stigma and hate are based in a lack of education, so the most effective way to counter this is to provide the **educational resources** required for mental health. This should apply to **both young people and adults**, particularly in the police and education system:

"Mental health and ways to talk about how you're feeling to be taught in primary school so you can open up in high school."

"Teachers should address the situation with an open mind and understanding the conditions. Get educated!"

"It feels like the police don't truly understand mental health - as it feels like we get punished for 'lashing out.'"

Our Recommendations

For North Wales Police:

- **UTILISE SOCIAL MEDIA** as a platform to raise awareness of mental health issues and how the police approach them
- **INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE** in mental health training and future mental health training modelling

For the PCC and Partners:

- Encourage the 'I CAN' service to **INCLUDE YOUNG PEOPLE**
- Ensure **SUPPORT SERVICES** are **READILY AVAILABLE** and **EASY TO ACCESS**
- Encourage schools to offer more **SAFE SPACES** for students to relax

For the Youth Commission:

- Continue to assist agencies with **PEER TO PEER EDUCATION** and inform young people how to **ACCESS SUPPORT & FEEL SAFE**
- Design posters to **RAISE AWARENESS** of safe spaces and support services available locally
- Continue to **ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE** to discuss their mental health concerns in safe environments

Priority 2: Drug Issues



Drug abuse can often lead to further criminal activity such as anti-social behaviour, vandalism, violence and burglary. The North Wales Police website shows that, on average, between April 2019 and January 2020, there have been 125 drug related crimes each month in North Wales, which is above the national average. As such, it is positive to see that the Police and Crime Commissioner is now offering rehabilitation services to those found to be in possession of drugs as opposed to prosecution and imprisonment. However, NWYC believes that more can still be done to tackle drug use.

Young people across North Wales told us that drugs are extremely accessible, even from a very young age. This creates an unsafe feeling in the younger community and puts young people at risk of exploitation through drug related crimes. Young people do not feel safe being out on the streets and feel they cannot go out without being peer pressured into drinking and taking drugs. They are also worried about getting mixed up in rival gang conflicts and gang related crimes.

The North Wales Youth Commission set out to establish the concerns that young people had regarding drug and alcohol abuse. These concerns are to be used as a template for engaging with young people with addictions and to encourage people to have conversations about the negative impacts of drug and alcohol abuse.

In total, the North Wales Youth Commission had **311** conversations about drug issues with young people in the region.

What We Found

Young people have noted that drug use is more prominent in **rural areas**, as there are fewer **recreational activities** available for young people. There is also a belief that drug use is higher in rural areas as the **police presence** is lower:

"Drugs are a big thing in the countryside because no police ever look there for anyone."

"People don't get caught having drugs in countryside."

"Police should think about how to tackle drugs in the countryside."

"Never see anyone getting arrested for it in the countryside so maybe make news like this go in the media."

Young people have become increasingly aware of the **exploitation** of young people by drug dealers and are concerned for their safety. The young people we spoke to discussed how increased drug use has made them **scared** in their local community:

"People just off their face on spice in town and have to walk past them and they ask for money - makes me feel really worried and not safe at all."

"I believe that too many young children are using legal and illegal drugs access to search drugs while underage they abuse the substances."

"Youngsters including smart and intelligent people are mentally ill in today's generation accepting anything in their path like drugs more and more young people in Denbighshire are drug addicts."

Young people in North Wales have indicated that they do not feel the police are doing enough to combat the rise in drug use involving young people. They feel that drug abuse is **widely ignored** until it is too late:

"People as young as 13 are selling fags and using drugs and it feels like it's being ignored."

"I think too many kids are taking and selling drugs. And police aren't doing much."

"I know people who live in homes where there are drug deals all the time and police visiting and they just get ignored or overlooked."

"There are way too many people in the streets that have been on drugs and the police just walk past and don't do anything. They are intimidating."

"If police see a group of people that have been using then they should move them to an organisation that can help them instead of them being in the streets."

Young people have also suggested that **traditional schooling** does not do enough to tackle drug abuse – they believe that the effects of drug use need to be discussed further in a format that does not feel like a lecture:

"Teachers asking questions and anonymous note box for notes by students."

"Honest talks please, interventions in affected areas, penalties that temporarily punish individuals."

"Drugs are bad. Children smoke drugs to look cool but they are destroying their lives."

"I think there is not enough being done in the school."

"Drug issues is an issue with teenagers to hide mental health."

As mentioned previously the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales is providing a more **rehabilitative approach** to drug crimes rather than punishment. However many young people are **unaware** of this, and others feel that this response is limited and should be going further:

"Be able to seek support without parents having to know. This puts people off sometimes."

"When someone is arrested for drugs they should be offered support straight away."

"Make sure they (police) check people are ok if they live in a house with a drug user."

"I live in Rhyl and I see a lot of drug deals so I think more patrols are needed."

Young people have noted that it is **easy to access** drugs in North Wales. It is clear that there are a number of factors that contribute to the high rate of drug issues in the area, but young people argue that the access to drugs needs to be tackled in order to reduce the number of cases:

"It's really easy to get drugs in the countryside and towns."

"They are easy to get hold of and people are so bored that it seems fun."

"Have random checks in school."

"Stop them doing drugs. More fun activities to keep them off the streets."

"Have more police actually looking for crimes in countryside as they just drive through for effect."

Our recommendations

For North Wales Police:

- **ATTEND LOCAL YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AND SCHOOLS** on a more regular basis
- **POLICE RURAL AREAS ON A REGULAR BASIS**, encouraging community members to report concerns

For the PCC and partners:

- Ensure there are **RECREATIONAL AREAS AND SPACES** available for young people to spend time on a regular basis
- Education on drugs should be delivered in an empathetic way in contrast to the current 'us versus them' portrayal

For the Youth Commission:

- Continue **PEER TO PEER RESEARCH** and workshops, raising awareness of exploitation and support services
- Create a **YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP**, feeding back concerns and 'hotspots' to the police force on a regular basis

Priority 3: Anti Social Behaviour



According to the North Wales Police website, anti-social behaviour covers a range of actions that result in people feeling threatened, the creation of public nuisance, or a negative impact to the environment and quality of life of the community. Anti-social behaviour has been a large problem in many areas in North Wales – between February 2019 and January 2020, there were 459 cases of anti social behaviour reported in Rhyl West, which accounts for 15% of crime in the area. The young people we have spoken to do not believe that the problem is adequately dealt with across the county.

Young people who had been involved in the criminal justice system spoke to us about having a negative attitude towards education. Young people expressed that the lack of opportunities to aspire to leave them feeling demotivated. The combination of easy access to drugs and alcohol, and the lack of anything to do, often draws them into anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour is being committed by younger and younger people with the encouragement of peers and groups of older people. Young people said peer pressure played a large role in anti-social behaviour and, if they didn't comply, they feared the repercussions.

At our meeting at Police HQ around anti-social behaviour, we became aware of the very few officers available to cover the number of schools in the region. Young people said they rarely see Police Officers in their area. This gave them plenty of opportunity to be involved in anti-social behaviour without the fear of being caught.

In total, the North Wales Youth Commission had **349** conversations about anti-social behaviour with young people in the region.

What We Found

Young people have made it clear that they believe anti social behaviour is an **issue in their communities**. The general consensus from the young people that we spoke to have stated that they have witnessed a number of cases of anti social behaviour in their area:

"Disrespectful/ Inconsiderate behaviour is rising around the area I live in (Prestatyn/Rhyl), and it seems not much is being done about it."

"My opinion is that antisocial behaviour is taking over our communities and it needs sorting out."

"Cars sat outside McDonalds and beeping horn and making noise late at night."

"Happens in too many places. People have an invalid definition of ASB. Nobody is targeted people just 'Public order' anyone and everyone. Punishments are not harsh enough."

"I feel like there is a lack of respect amongst teenagers & young adults, for example individuals from a large group shouting /saying things, whilst passing in the street. I've also noticed an increase in the use of drugs & alcohol in the area (Prestatyn)."

Young people have suggested that anti social behaviour is a direct impact of **boredom** – as there is not much for young people to do in their area, young people believe that **gang activity** and anti social behaviour spreads more quickly:

"I tend to get in trouble when I'm on my own. I get bored, just start looking for stuff to do. It's not great."

"We get accused of ASB we haven't even done so you just think we may as well do it."

"Although the issue is clearly being tackled the volume of incidence is simply too much to handle many are simply bored and causing issues seems to be a hobby."

"Teenagers are bored and acting out causing trouble."

"More places young people can go to release their energy and just a place where they can go and feel safe."

Young people have also stated that they feel **unfairly targeted** by the police and PCSOs for anti social behaviour. They believe that adults that are behaving antisocially are not treated in the same way, and that the negative opinions of adults often lead to further anti social behaviour:

"I see ASB in the streets all the time with adults like drinking in the street or being drunk and they aren't told to move on. If we just sit in the park then we are told to move for no reason."

"Kids are targeted and misunderstood constantly."

"Too many adults have negative opinions of young people which cause them to act that way."

"Police think that because we are young and in groups of friends that we are going to do something bad. We are normally just having harmless fun not doing anything wrong."

Young people have stated that the high levels of anti social behaviour in North Wales makes them feel **unsafe** in their communities. They argue that being alone in public feels **dangerous**, especially considering that there is a reduced police presence:

"Slightly panicking do not feel safe walking in the streets at night sweating."

"Do not feel safe walking in the streets at night."

"I would like more police on the streets it would make me feel safer."

From our conversations, young people have suggested that the **education** system needs to do more to tackle anti-social behaviour. They believe that schools need to **interact with the police** and external agencies to a greater degree in order to address the factors which create anti-social behaviours:

"Introduce police officers into school to talk about the effects and consequences of their actions if it continues."

"Address children of both genders at a young age, to have a lasting effect on their behaviour in the future. Make sure to impress upon them why it is wrong, and the effect it will have on their lives going forward."

"Begin an organisation/group that get ex prisoners or people with similar past to antisocial individuals and let them be asked questions."

"Possibly, additional support for individuals through emphasising/ raising awareness of the problem through education."

The young people we spoke to also believe that in order to tackle anti social behaviour involving young people, there needs to be a developed relationship between police officers and the local young community. They argue that young people often act out as a defence mechanism to the pre-emptive assumptions from the police and other adults about what they are doing:

"Talk to teenagers like people and don't treat them like some sort of baddies."

"Talk to us and find out if we have done anything bad first, rather than having a go at us."

"PCSOs and police should talk about what may work better with young people."

"Make sure police treat adults and young people the same or at least make it clear that ASB isn't ok regardless of age."

Our Recommendations

For North Wales Police:

- **DISCUSS SITUATIONS OPENLY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE** and be aware of local organisations they can **SIGNPOST** to
- **EDUCATE YOUNG PEOPLE** about the consequences of anti social behaviour within schools

For the PCC and Partners:

- **LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE** regarding recreational facilities and local activities
- Collaborate with external agencies to **CREATE INCENTIVES** specifically for young people
- **PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE** initiatives where services are **ACCESSIBLE** for minimal charge

For the Youth Commission:

- Raise awareness and inform young people of their rights through **PEER-TO-PEER WORKSHOPS**
- Work with education organisations to **PROMOTE CURRENT INCENTIVES** available

Priority 4: The Relationship Between Young People & The Police



A recurring theme throughout the previous priorities is that young people are concerned that the police are either not doing enough or do not have young people's interests in mind. We found that many young people across North Wales feel there is a divide between young people and the police. Young people mentioned they would not report a crime to a police officer, as they felt they would not be taken seriously. They believed there are misconceptions with race and ethnicity towards young people; they spoke about feeling judged and marked as 'trouble-makers' by police officers.

Young people commented that police officers do not always handle situations involving young people positively. Some stated that police officers lacked respect towards young people, regardless of the situation. Young people with experience of the criminal justice system spoke of police officers bringing up family connections, for instance by stating, 'I've locked up your mum and uncle and you'll be next'. This unfair bias made young people feel worthless and of no value. Young people said police officers lacked manners or positive attitudes towards them.

However, we received overwhelmingly positive feedback in relation to local PCSO's. Young people felt a much closer connection with Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's). They expressed that PCSO's were prepared to listen to what they were saying and take on board any concerns or issues they may have.

In total, the North Wales Youth Commission had **212** conversations about relationships with the police with young people in the region.

What We Found

According to the young people we have spoken to, the police are too quick to **stereotype** young people as gangs and deviants. This negative stereotyping is detrimental to young people as it creates a natural **distrust** in the police:

"You can't avoid your past when you get it for things you didn't do just because of your past. They also harass when they have nothing to do."

"The police have a lack of respect for young people and no understanding of young people's culture ie) talking to young people."

"They discriminate people in poverty and with bad reputations."

"My opinion is that the police stereotype young people and other members of the public from what I have seen the relationship between young people and the police is not the best."

"My current opinion is police should not judge young people on how they look or behave."

Young people have suggested that the police need to **interact** with young people to a larger extent. As many young people do not see the police on the streets or have any reason to interact with them, young people can be just as guilty as the police for stereotyping – having a greater level of interaction between young people and the police will work to **reduce negative stereotyping**:

"Would be for the police to hold more community events to encourage young people to participate in police-run activities and events, to show that the police is willing to help younger people."

"Need to understand more why people do the things they do instead of judging people for how they dress or who they chill with."

"If more events like this are to happen more frequently, with young people and police communicating and liaising, then young people may respect them more and if police treat young people equally it may cause more of an understanding between them."

"It could be resolved by the police handling it in different way and young people reacting to police in a more respectful manner."

Young people have suggested that the poor relationship between the police and young people is due to the police's **demands for respect**. However, young people have argued that this is an **abuse of power** and needs to be addressed further:

"Police approach children in an aggressive manner so kids react back and that's what causes the bad relationship between police and children."

"Police think about the words they are using and stop DEMANDING respect."

"Police to be held accountable for abuse of power for explicit language intimidation and use of unnecessary force and complaints by young people to be handled by a specific person who understands young people."

Further to this, young people have stated that the police approach towards them have made many young people **fearful** of the police. However, young people have suggested that they feel a **greater connection to the PCSOs**, stating that they are much friendlier and actively try to build relationships with young people:

"Youths often feel afraid or frightened to talk and deal with the police, as there is a stigma around it."

"I believe that the police don't want to listen to us. They believe what they want and are too aggressive and quick to judge that we have done something wrong."

"They are pigs and treat us badly, speak horrible. Only local PCSOs are nice and find out about us as people."

"A PCSO came over to speak to us and I thought she was going to be arsey with us but she was really nice and said I should have a coat on."

"PCSO's in the area are much better than the police at dealing with young people. They actually speak to you like a normal person. Police just shout at you and act like they are more important than anyone else."

Young people have stated that they are not opposed to the police, but they want the police to **do more to support** and help them in their daily lives. They also suggest that young people should be trying to **help the police** more in aspects such as training and maintaining public decency:

"Should help them instead of punishing them if needed help. And be there for them."

"Give us more stuff to do and maybe spend time with us rather than just being nasty."

"Think of things for us to do like places to go and get a drink and food."

"That they need more training to understand young people with mental health issues and ailments."

"The police should be willing to communicate with young people on their level rather than looking down on us."

Our Recommendations:

For North Wales Police:

- Take part and attend more **COMMUNITY SOCIAL EVENTS** where young people are likely to be present
- Take time when approaching young people to have **A MORE CONVERSATIONAL APPROACH** with them

For the PCC and Partners:

- Educational organisations & partners to **WORK COLLABORATIVELY** with the North Wales Youth Commission, alongside the Police & PCSO's
- PCC to promote **AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE** with emphasis around the NWYC work

For the Youth Commission:

- **CONTINUE TO BE A VOICE** for those from the hard to reach and diverse areas
- **NWYC** members to be included in **POLICE TRAINING EXERCISES**

Conclusion: Taking Things Forward



Thanks to the continued support shown by our partner agencies, the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales, and North Wales Police, we are confident that the findings and recommendations included in this report will help to inform and contribute towards future work.

On 27th February 2020, a wide range of stakeholders heard the North Wales Youth Commission's findings and recommendations and directly engaged with our members through an open panel and roundtable discussions. The key messages arising from the discussions were as follows:

- Partners from different sectors want to be involved with the North Wales Youth Commission's work to develop their priorities. Representatives from North Wales Police suggested ways for an open dialogue between the police and young people to allow for a greater understanding of one another.
- Partners are enthusiastic to work alongside the North Wales Youth Commission in order to ensure a better future for young people and improve the work of North Wales Police.
- Stakeholders were impressed by the NWYC members and how the conference was an interesting and engaging event.
- Stakeholders from the Police and Crime Panel and the Youth Parliament for Wales would like to see membership of the NWYC increase and for members to interact further with their respective groups.

Testimonials

Arfon Jones – Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales

The young people of North Wales are a very diverse and vibrant group of people. As Police and Crime Commissioner, it is important that I understand the policing needs and challenges they face. I therefore commissioned a piece of work with the participation of young people to inform me of what I need to know.

I am very pleased with the work of the North Wales Youth Commission. They are a group of dedicated individuals from different backgrounds and with different experiences of policing and the justice system. Their work in consulting and engaging with their peers has been excellent.

They have produced a challenging report for myself and colleagues in North Wales Police to consider. Their work also goes further to challenge wider services including health and education. I am keen to work with partners to address the key issues they have raised. I will continue to work with young people in the future and support their active participation in youth engagement and consultation.

Ann Griffith, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales

Working alongside Leaders Unlocked every stage of the process was an inspiration and a pleasure. Due to their vast experience working in the field of participation and engagement with young people, and in particular their knowledge and confidence of having policing as a focus to their work, they made the whole process flow with ease.

Leaders Unlocked welcomed collaboration with the Urdd in order to ensure a bespoke methodology shaped to the unique requirements of the North Wales Police force area. The Youth Commission, the Big Conversation, the Conference culminating in the final Report reflected the Children's Rights Approach which underpinned this project from its inception.

Carl Foulkes, Chief Constable for North Wales Police

It is often over used but accurate, that young people are our future. They make up a key part of our society, though they are often not listened to and marginalised.

This exceptional piece of work has given the police and partners open, honest and unfiltered feedback from a wide range of young people on how they feel, their concerns and how those in power make them feel.

We will continue to work with young people to ensure we learn the lessons from this report and also use the ethos of youth engagement and participation going forward to continually challenge how the service we offer meets their needs.

I was so impressed by the passion and honesty of those that presented to us and their willingness to share their stories was truly inspirational.

Dawn Ashton, Flintshire Sorted

I have been working with a group of four young females, who have been discussed at several MET meetings and are a big concern for the local police in regards ASB and safeguarding. The group were enthusiastic about being asked to share their thoughts on the police service. The group met with Ali, who was able to provide a calm environment and was very patient whilst the group quietened down. The session was young person led and the group were very honest about the positives and negatives that they experienced. The young people discussed how empowered and listened to they felt.

I attended the NWYC and was very impressed by the honesty, professionalism and research findings that were presented by the young people. I heard a lot of the points being shared that the group I had worked with had discussed. This was such a revolution, to see young people being asked on how best to work with so of the key issues in policing. The group delivered, as did all the young people who had taken part. On my return I fed back to the group that I had worked with, on how their information had been shared, they were surprised and very happy that their views had been told to the police force (good and bad). They said that they would attend, if another conference was organised and would like to be involved in the future.

The NWYC is so important on all levels. To see the diversity of the young people involved in this project and to see the life skills that they are building from involvement is outstanding. It is a true testament to North Wales Police on their empathy, holistic and commitment to working in partnership with young people to enable us to live in healthy, safe communities.

Joshua Taylor, Youth Commissioner, 16

Being a part of the Youth Commission has made me a more confident person and has opened my eyes to the bigger world. I've had the chance to travel North Wales and hearing people's views, I've had the chance to go on different courses as well as the amazing opportunity to go on BBC Radio Cymru. Working alongside a team of amazing people has made me a more open-minded person and a better listener and team-player.

Before I became a member of the Youth Commission I never had the confidence to speak openly in front of people, step up as a leader, and certainly not tell the PCC and Chief Constable how they can do their job better. The Youth Commission has changed me for the better and I hope to use the skills it has taught me in the future and hopefully make a safer North Wales for everyone.

Sarah Goodsir, Youth Commissioner, 17

Hi my name is Sarah Goodsir and I am 17 years old and I would like to tell you all about my journey, experiences, what I've gained, the memories I will cherish and how the experience has changed my life within the Youth Commission. My journey has been eye opening and unique. It has been eye opening regarding the responses we have received, the real life experiences we've heard other people share and unique because there is no other scheme like this, it's new here in North Wales and will most definitely will be staying. The experiences I have gained are life changing, for instance, I have participated in a mental health training meeting regarding the training that regular police officers get and how we can make a change to it for the better, also, I have had experience in ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences Study), which I think was phenomenal to listen to!

I have gained useful factors, such as, these different types of training, opinions and further knowledge in different areas. I have also gained heartfelt things like friends, a relationship with different police officers and most importantly the power to make a difference. Our voice is finally being heard! These memories, the photos, the laughs, the giggles even the serious chats we've had I will cherish always and this has been a massive stepping stone for me as a individual and has changed my perspective on many things in life. The Youth Commission is going to help me in my future steps to becoming a successful police officer and I really hope I continue to voice my opinion not only as a young person but an adult too.

I will always encourage the youths voice to be heard and this project I hope will keep going, as it is truly life changing. I hope other young people get the same amazing opportunity we have had and experience the things we have also.

Louise Edwards, Youth Commissioner, 22

I applied to join the North Wales Youth Commission on Police and Crime for the opportunity to have a voice in matters that affect my community and to ensure the voices of a diverse range of young people are listened to. I believe it is important to create a trusted and sustainable structure that allows young people to have a real influence on policing and crime in North Wales while highlighting the potential of what policing could look like with a higher engagement with young people all over Wales. This is a trail blazing project where for the first time young people in North Wales have had the opportunity to do this. I feel it is essential that young people from a diverse range of backgrounds should have the opportunity to have their opinion and voices heard focusing on marginalised communities such as homeless, BAME, low income families, care experienced young people and those in offending services as statistically they are more likely to have or have had experience of the police and criminality.

Coming from a council estate facing modern poverty I grew up surrounded by criminality and slowly but surely became heavily involved in crime alongside many of my friends and family as this was a normal way of life, where violence was used to solve everything, and police were rarely involved as the culture of 'snitches get stitches' played a large part; and still plays a large part in many communities. This mind set for me was adopted from my mother and older family members. I only began to change my beliefs about the police when while I was in care away from my family and their expectations of normality, and for the first time in my life a police officer had a conversation with me. She wasn't there to make life hell she wanted to understand why I was behaving like I was and she wanted to know how she could help! She helped me realise what I was doing was leading me in a downward spiral that I didn't see, but most importantly she helped me see that the police are there to help. Rather than fighting back or seeking revenge I would phone the police and let them do their job.

Building a strong, positive relationship with young people is essential to understanding each other. We live in two different worlds. Young people are still learning and will make many wrong decisions in their lives. That is a way in which all people learn and people should be allowed to move on from these mistakes. Not continue to be labelled and expected to repeat your actions. When someone is not learning from their mistakes and patterns are emerging, it's important to understand why! From this we can begin to prevent further spiralling into crime.

Appendix

Organisation	Region	Number of responses
WGLA Youth Service	Abergele, Colwyn Bay	51
Conwy Youth Service	Conwy	12
Elfed High School Ysgol Uwchradd Elfed	Buckley	160
Elfed High School Ysgol Uwchradd Elfed	Mold	32
Friday Fitness Rhyl	Rhyl	38
Ysgol Glan Clwyd	St Asaph	366
John Lynns Black Belt Academy	Rhyl	2
Coleg Llandrillo	North Wales wide incl Rhos on Sea, Rhyl, Menai	111
Ruthin Youth Service	Ruthin	11
WCD Young Carers	Llanrwst/Llandudno	27
WCD Young Carers	Wrexham	175
YJS Wrexham	Wrexham	41
YJS Gwynedd Mon	Anglesey	15
Youth Shedz	Abergele	41
Youth Support Group at Denbigh High School	Denbigh	37
Ysgol David Hughes	Anglesey	30
Ysgol John Brights Fitness Group	Llandudno	10
Ysgol Treffynnon	Holywell	71
Ysgol Gatholig Crist y Gair Christ the Word	Rhyl	60

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**

