



NORTH YORKSHIRE YOUTH COMMISSION:

FINAL 2022/2023 REPORT TO THE

**NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE,
FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER**

MARCH 2023

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**

 North Yorkshire
Police, Fire & Crime
Commissioner



INTRODUCTION

The North Yorkshire Youth Commission (NYYC) was established in 2015 with funding from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC).

The NYYC aims to enable young people aged 10–25 to inform decisions about policing and crime prevention in North Yorkshire, working in partnership with the PFCC, North Yorkshire Police (NYP) and North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (NYFRS).

ABOUT THE NORTH YORKSHIRE YOUTH COMMISSION

The NYYC aims to give young people across North Yorkshire a voice on issues of crime and policing. NYYC supports, challenges, and informs the work of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and North Yorkshire Police.

A key part of NYYC's role is to gather the views of other young people across the county through peer-to-peer research in the form of a 'Big Conversation'. This peer-led research process provides a safe environment for young people to talk to their peers about relevant issues. The views gathered from young people are analysed by the NYYC in order to create a final set of key findings and recommendations to report back to the PFCC, NYP, and partners.

For more information about NYYC please see: www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/for-you/young-people/youth/about-the-youth-commission/ or go to @NorthYorksYC on Twitter.

The North Yorkshire Youth Commission is facilitated by Leaders Unlocked, a social enterprise that aims to enable young people to have a stronger voice and influence on the decisions that affect their lives. Leaders Unlocked has established Youth Commissions in 16 regions in England and Wales and continues to grow. For more information about Leaders Unlocked please see www.leaders-unlocked.org

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is grounded in extensive peer-to-peer research and engagement with over **1400 young people across North Yorkshire** between March 2022 and January 2023. These conversations were conducted through interactive workshops, one-to-one interviews, and outreach stands.

The report is structured into six key priorities that outline the NYYC's six areas of peer-led citizen research. Each section features a comprehensive analysis of young people's responses, verbatim quotes from individual participants, and the recommendations that have been put forward by the Youth Commissioners as a result of their findings.

This report is intended to act as an honest and 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 Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, North Yorkshire Police, and partner agencies.

IDENTIFIED KEY PRIORITIES AND AIMS:

At their inaugural meeting, the NYYC members worked together to select their key priorities to ensure they remained up-to-date and relevant to young people. The group then developed a set of aims to underpin the priorities and help guide the project, providing a focus for the Big Conversation.

Key priorities chosen were:

- 1) Mental Health and Emotional Well-being
- 2) Gender Violence & Safer Streets
- 3) Discrimination
- 4) Online Safety
- 5) Relationships with Police & Authorities
- 6) Drugs Gangs & County Lines

SKILLS TRAINING:

NYYC members took part in practical training sessions to acquire the key skills and knowledge needed for their role. This training included how to successfully plan workshops and interview techniques as well as targeted training from external partner organisations, including Media Literacy Training with Shout Out UK and Spiking Awareness Training with North Yorkshire Horizons. These skills were further developed through practical experience throughout the project.

CREATED YOUTH COMMISSION RESOURCES:

NYYC members were actively involved in creating the tools that they would use for their peer-led research. They co-designed **interactive workshops** to address each of their six priorities, which included presentations, quizzes, videos, and discussions.

To capture young people's responses, we developed a **Youth Commission postcard** depicting the six priorities and providing young people with a structure to record their views and suggested solutions anonymously.

DELIVERED THE 'BIG CONVERSATION':

To tackle the six priorities, NYYC members delivered a range of **peer-led workshops and outreach stands** with young people across North Yorkshire. At these engagement events, members utilised their co-designed resources. This 'Big Conversation' was taken to a wide range of local voluntary organisations, educational institutions, and statutory partners across the region.

In order to gather vital insights from those who are most affected by some of the priority topics, the NYYC put particular effort and energy into engaging with underrepresented and more marginalised groups of young people. NYYC carried out workshops and consultations with young carers, those with first-hand experience of the criminal justice system, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, women's support centres, non-mainstream education settings, and young people identified as 'at risk' such as those taking part in NYFRS intervention programmes.

In total, we engaged in peer research with **1,412 young people across 67 consultation events**.

JOINT WORK WITH THE POLICE FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER:

We have continued to act as a sounding board for the PFCC by submitting questions to the Public Accountability Meetings, taking part in the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy consultation, helping to co-produce a spiking awareness leaflet and joining five Community Review Group meetings, scrutinising the use of Stop and Search and use of Force.

JOINT WORK WITH NORTH YORKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE:

We worked alongside North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to embed our Big Conversation workshops within their LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education) course, focussing on priority topics most relevant to the individual groups of young people. This helped us reach a more diverse range of young people and listen to voices that may often be underrepresented.

JOINT WORK WITH NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

This year we have worked closely with NYP on a number of young people's issues and campaigns. One particular area we have been involved has been the focus on custody initiatives. NYYC involvement has included visiting and reviewing York Custody suite and co-designing a new AWARE (Appearance, Words, Activity, Relationships & Dynamics, Environment) document for custody officers, highlighting both safeguarding and the voice of the child. We also co-produced a custody officer training film to ensure stronger safeguarding for young people and attended an officer training session to support its implementation.

NYYC members met with NYP officers to review and discuss a selection of real-life (anonymised) Public Protection Notice forms, focussing on whether the voice of the child had been considered greatly enough. Adding to this, we joined a Gold Command meeting to hear how NYP are improving their care of young people, and followed this up with NYYC members questions to both NYP and the OPFCC.

The NYYC collaborated with the local police team in Scarborough to review new approaches to Anti-Social Behaviour. This has included assisting in redesigning Youth Encounter forms and awareness leaflets.

This year the NYYC and NYP jointly established a Youth IAG (Independent Advisory Group) to ensure young people's voices are heard directly. Our themes of discussion have included: use of tasers, hate crime awareness and police attendance at crimes. We have also established representation at the newly formed Strategic IAG meaning young people's voices will be heard at all levels of NYP decision-making.

PARTNERSHIPS:

Throughout this period, the NYYC participated in a range of relevant partnership forums to develop relationships and actively promote the Commission, enabling opportunities for joint delivery and influence. These forums included: The North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) Emerging Drug Trends group, The Inclusive Communities Joint Coordinating Group, and the Positive Communities Steering Group.

We have also developed strong partnerships with local organisations. We took part in the York 'Our City' festival to celebrate and promote diversity; reviewed Drink Drug Hub, a substance harm reduction website, for NY Horizons; helped to design new young people's resources with IDAS and reviewed a North Yorkshire Youth mentoring scheme.

THE GOOD CITIZEN AWARD

Following peer-research in the Summer of 2021, the NYYC designed the 'Good Citizen Award' to recognize the positive impact young people have in their communities. The award allows young people to pick a cause they are passionate about and take action on it.

The award is jointly presented by the North Yorkshire Youth Commission and The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. So far, 18 young people have received the award and 5 more projects are underway.

For more information on the Good Citizen Award please visit: www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/for-you/young-people/youth/good-citizen-award/

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Scalby School

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The Island

Door 84

York City Council

NYFRS (LIFE Course)
- York College

York Youth Justice Service

Kyra Women's Project

York St. John's University

SELFA

All Saints School
- Harrogate High School

Balby High School

Bentham Youth Group

Harrogate Young Carers

Education Strive

A special thanks to the individual Youth Commission Members* who have offered their time and efforts to make this project a success:

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Olivia Sanderson

Kitty Hutchinson

linor Bevan

Zara Pratt

Matthew Morran

*Some NYYC members names have not been published.





PRIORITY 1: MENTAL HEALTH & EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING



The NYYC engaged with a total of **330 young people** about this topic across 17 workshops and engagement events.

PRIORITY AIMS:

- Reduce the stigma and stereotypes still surrounding mental health and promote positive mental wellbeing.
- Start open, non-judgmental conversations with young people about their experiences of mental health.
- Raise awareness of support services available to young people, including non-referral-based support and how to access them.
- Investigate the mental health support available for young people in the criminal justice system, particularly on release from custody.

WHAT WE FOUND

Covid-19 lockdowns have had a significant and long-lasting impact on young people's mental well-being, with effects still ongoing. For example, students said they felt overwhelmed by school and social interactions after long periods of 'school from home'.

This was especially true for young people who had missed significant transition years such as moving from primary to secondary school or college to university. Young people in these groups referenced feeling a lack of transitional support and guidance.

"I've seen quite a few people struggle over the years a lot with mental health. I think it's been a big impact with a lot of people."

"Covid and not being able to go out to make friends has had a big impact on mental health I think because you could be lonely or stuck in a bad situation."

"Isolation during lockdowns, but now it's being back in school again that is the stress."

Young people highlighted a number of barriers to accessing help and support services. Long waiting lists and slow referral processes combined with high costs for private services acted as significant barriers to accessing support when needed. We also heard that many young people felt their mental health deteriorated further during these waiting times.

"Let me put it this way, I applied for help in 2019 and six months ago I got a call saying I'd reached the top of the list."

"By the time you get help, it's probably too late and you're too far gone or past it to want the help anymore."

An additional barrier discussed was the perception that mental health is still not taken seriously enough by parents/carers, professionals, or young people's organisations. Many reported being given 'poor' and insufficient advice such as 'go for a walk' when seeking help for serious mental health struggles. This also made them less likely to reach out again in the future.

"At school, there is no support. Maybe there's one lesson where it's clear the teacher is just reading from a textbook and doesn't really know or care. Take mental issues way more seriously."

"Mum and dad shouting at them making it worse. Not understanding the mental health struggles that people our age deal with."

"Teachers don't care about mental health and tell you off for the slightest thing which makes your mental health worse. You can be quiet and obviously sad all lesson with your head down and the teacher just sends you out to isolation saying 'there's no sleeping in my lesson'. When they could ask you why you're upset. They don't care about it."

A repeated source of anxiety impacting mental well-being was the cost-of-living crisis. Young people from across the age spectrum of 10- 25 reported that money worries were negatively affecting their mental health and personal relationships.

This included personal finance issues as well as worrying about family and household struggles. Young people, of school age, reported pressure to find work and make additional money.

"Money worries that you shouldn't have to deal with at our age but it stresses people out if they know their family is struggling."

"Even though it's not a young person's issue, if your parents are worried about money it affects you and you feel their stress and maybe they can't afford things for you."

"Poverty and finance and living conditions. Work and school together are just too much. It's stressful."

When discussing the police's relationship to mental health and well-being, young people said that too often, mental health crises are mistaken for criminal behaviour. While recognising that police may need to be involved to protect people, many would like to see more referrals to appropriate support services rather than police intervention wherever possible.

"I think that police aren't the right ones to deal with someone struggling with mental health because that will just make you feel more nervous at an already difficult time."

"There is already stigma if you have mental health issues, if police are involved that will be even more and much worse. It will make you more conscious and less likely to speak out for help."

"Others like therapists will have better training and be more equipped to deal with mental health."

In mental health cases where police intervention is needed, it was highlighted that there is a need for stronger training on how to recognise and handle mental health conditions sensitively and effectively, without causing further harm.

"I think when police deal with mental health they need to understand it more. Lots probably see someone having an episode and think they're a bad person when they aren't. They just need help."

"Not being sensitive to mental health needs. Police should have a better understanding of autism and medication."

"They need training on mental health because they deal with criminals all day so that's what they're used to but they should treat mental health cases differently."

A photograph of a man in a North Yorkshire Police uniform and a young boy sitting at a table. The man is on the left, looking towards the boy. The boy is on the right, looking towards the man. They are in a room with other people and chairs in the background. A yellow text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Provide stronger mental health awareness training for front-line officers to ensure they are equipped to handle mental health crises in a non-damaging way.

‘Show you care’- actively demonstrate to the public that NYP takes mental health seriously. This should include signposting to support and advice, both through campaigns and in everyday interactions when appropriate.

Ensure officers are referring mental health related cases to appropriate services and avoid criminalisation/ police intervention whenever possible.

FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Conduct new research and engagement to better understand the long-term effects of the pandemic on young people’s mental health and well-being in North Yorkshire.

Support the provision of more mental health services for young people, with a focus on offering care in a reduced timescale.

Help NYP, mental health services and other support resources to work more effectively as a network to improve referrals, and to ensure young people have better access to the most appropriate type of support for them.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Utilise this year’s research findings to further develop our mental health and wellbeing workshop to ensure it remains relevant and useful to young people.

Raise awareness of both mental health and other relevant support services in all big conversation events.

PRIORITY 2: GENDER VIOLENCE & SAFER STREETS



The NYYC engaged with a total of **207 young people** about this topic across 11 workshops and engagement events.

PRIORITY AIMS:

- Investigate and voice young people's experience of spiking, harassment, and violence in public spaces, including views on police and authorities' responses.
- Educate the OPFCC and partners on young people's experience of gender violence.
- Challenge 'lad culture' and other environments that may accept and minimise the impacts of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
- Ensure a non-victim blaming approach throughout conversations specifically on women and girls' safety.

WHAT WE FOUND

We found that gender violence and sexual harassment are extremely common and a big concern for many young people. Young females, of all ages, were the most affected. **Almost all girls and young women we spoke to had been a victim**, with experiences ranging from catcalling and verbal harassment to more serious crimes.

"Catcalling, being touched, even just being stared at, every single one of my female friends has experienced something."

"Gender violence is occurring more often than I originally realised. I think that people don't know it can be minor things too, they think it's just physical/ serious attacks."

"Catcalling from older men on your way to school."

Young people told us that gender violence and violence against women and girls is significantly under reported. Young people were reluctant to report gender violence for a number of reasons. We were told that victims often felt embarrassed to discuss incidents due to victim blaming.

Additionally, fear of not being believed by authorities and a mistrust of police in relation to gender violence were also highlighted as key reasons for not reporting or seeking support.

"Arrest/ prosecution rates for rape are some of the lowest ever. It's disgusting. Why would you come forward and put yourself through all of that if you know it won't lead anywhere anyway."

"Many people may feel embarrassed to report to police. They could also feel scared that they could face potential discrimination from some officers and feel unsafe."

"We feel as young girls a male officer going into schools, talking to us and contributing to the community makes it easier to feel less uncomfortable to speak or approach them as you kind of know them. However, if it's a male officer you never saw before you could feel scared as you don't know them."

"I put gang crime down as a reason why people might not report gender violence because the police are like a gang. When you see the police all covering for each other when they do gender crimes, it's like they're a gang and people won't feel safe to tell them if they might be doing it too."

Amongst a wide range of VAWG issues and concerns, spiking and sexual violence in the night-time economy was a significant worry for lots of young people. Even those who hadn't experienced it were fearful and changed their own behaviour because of it. We also found that media coverage, while important, may have increased fears.

"I don't even go out into town or nights out anymore. It's not worth me having to worry about spiking or getting home safely."

"The other month I'd been out with friends and I got a taxi home to be safe. I made the mistake of sitting on the wrong side, and the driver made me feel really unsafe and uncomfortable. He kept asking loads of questions like 'do you have a boyfriend?' I didn't want to be rude, but it started to make me feel really scared."

"Spiking is the main issue and worry at the moment. If you went into the student bar at 7 on a Friday everyone would want to speak about spiking."

"I think that, even if you or someone you know has never actually been spiked, there's still a constant worry about it. It affects your enjoyment and freedom on nights out with friends. You shouldn't have to constantly be aware and on guard."

While young women were overwhelmingly the most affected by gender violence, young people highlighted that all genders are affected by abuse and sexual violence and are fearful of street safety.

Risk to other genders is often overlooked and we also found that boys and young men would be resistant to report or seek support.

"People forget that it can be both ways round. Yes, it does happen more to girls, but it can happen to boys, and they won't tell anyone."

"It might not be gender related but as a boy walking home you can still get attacked or mugged so you still might not be safe."

"I feel like all genders should be taken into account and after they have told or reported something they would get more support. Have more police officers and when they are training, teach them to be respectful and also to have extra support."

When asked about how to improve gender violence and street safety young people wanted to see a **combination of short-term, safety-focused solutions such as more police patrols in rural areas, self-defence classes and anti-spiking devices offered in bars.**

"Maybe have police stationed at the clubs to act as a deterrent."

"Make sure people are safe at night, more streetlights and police officers checking quieter areas. And maybe things like cup covers ."

However, many young people also emphasised a need to **avoid solutions that place the onus on victims**. They wanted to see longer-term cultural shifts including re-education and better support for victims.

"Teaching everyone from a young age that it's wrong, in school and at home etc."

"Stop blaming things like what we are wearing or have we had a drink. It doesn't make a difference."



RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Where possible, as best practice, send female officers to speak with female victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

Improve communication with victims who report gender violence, including providing more regular case updates, explanations for decisions made, and signposting to support services. This is equally important for cases that don't result in prosecutions.

Highlight to the public that Misogyny is recordable as a hate crime in North Yorkshire. This will increase confidence in reporting.

FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Challenge any cultures of victim blaming and Misogyny within NYP and all professional environments.

Engage in open conversations with the Youth Commission and partners and provide honest statistics on the policing of VAWG to help inform future work.

Continue to work closely with partner organisations, and the private sector to improve safety, particularly in the night-time economy and relating to spiking. Where necessary, provide funding for training and safety initiatives.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Raise awareness of how to report gender violence and where to access victim support services. Place particular focus on schools and colleges, where young women may be less confident to report.

Continue to develop stronger working relationships with partners such as IDAS and Supporting Victims and help to make services accessible to young people.

Engage in meaningful conversations with the OPFCC and NYP to provide young people's views and hold a gender violence Youth IAG with Police to continue the conversation.



PRIORITY 3: DISCRIMINATION



The NYYC engaged with a total of **137 young people** about this topic across 8 workshops and engagement events.

PRIORITY AIMS:

- Explore the impacts of discrimination and unconscious bias within the police and authorities on young people, with a particular focus on marginalised and underrepresented groups.
- Raise awareness of hate crime, mate crime, and the discrimination faced by young people, with a particular focus on marginalised and underrepresented groups.
- Encourage both victims and witnesses of discrimination and hate crime to report their experiences to Police or independent reporting centres.
- Work directly with, and share the voice of, young people with lived experience of discrimination to support and empower others.

WHAT WE FOUND

We found that discrimination is extremely common, manifests in many forms, and affects a large majority of the community. Young people highlighted that many varied characteristics and lifestyle choices are subject to discrimination. Because of its prolificness, it often goes unchallenged, unreported and sometimes even unrecognised by victims.

"I've experienced homophobic slurs, but then I think, most LGBTQ people have at some point. Or they've heard the comments at least."

"If someone says something sexist, I don't feel it's important enough to report, but it scares me."

Young people rarely feel confident reporting incidents to police. One significant reason for this was the feeling that police are too busy to deal with 'minor incidents'. In fact, lots of young people told us they wouldn't report a hate crime until it became violent in nature.

"I haven't reported things before because I felt that police would have other important stuff to do. I just don't think they can deal with every sexist or racist comment."

"When you make a report, and nothing gets done it makes you lose hope and think I won't bother next time because nothing will be done."

"Friends have not wanted to report race-based hate crimes because they thought that police would do nothing."

"I'd maybe go to the Uni if it happened on campus or involved another student. It would have to be really serious, like hospitalised to go to police."

An additional factor making reporting less likely is confusion around what can be reported to police. We learned that young people were often unclear about what hate crimes and hate incidents are and would like more education on the topic as well as reassurance that reporting of hate incidents is valid.

"What hate crimes, discrimination and hate incidents are isn't explained. So, you may not know if you can even go to police or not."

"I had heard of hate crime but I didn't know exactly what it was. It's not really explained to us. And hate incident I hadn't even heard of ever. Have more education for young people"

"It would be good to know the police's opinion on it. They should advertise how they feel about it and what they think is okay."

When they were willing to report discrimination and hate crimes, many young people didn't know who to go to, how to make the report or where to go to access support. There was a perception that **reporting needs to be simplified**. More education on the varied reporting methods available is needed.

"Reporting hate crime and discrimination should be made easier and more accessible."

"Educate people of all ages how to report a crime. I don't think anyone here would know apart from 999."

"Help services aren't very well known, even teachers don't know them so they can't point people to them."

As well as within the community, young people spoke about potential discrimination within policing itself. A combination of recent highly publicised national incidents and personal experiences contributed to a distrust of police in relation to discrimination.

Such fear and distrust of police amongst some marginalised communities made victims of hate crime less likely to report it or seek support.

"How can you see child Q and not say police discriminate on race."

"The police do stop discrimination as much as they can, but they also could be the ones doing it, with things like racism."

"It's hard to go to police or think they'll take it seriously when a lot of them might be guilty of it themselves."

While having a diverse police force that is reflective of the community is important, we found that it is just as important to ensure all officers are aware of minority issues and the potential for discrimination and unconscious bias. This is because young people wanted to see organisation-wide change.

"Encouraging the police to introspect and evaluate whether they hold any prejudices or unconscious biases."

"Police to be nicer to young people and minorities, that way if we get discriminated against, we won't be afraid to go to them and it might make us more confident that they will do something about it."

"Disability awareness for police."



RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Demonstrate to the public that all hate crimes and hate incidents will be taken seriously by police when reported.

As well as developing a diverse police force, invest in education for all officers on diversity and minority issues.

FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Work alongside the Youth Commission and support services, such as Supporting Victims, to raise awareness on how and when to report hate crimes.

Support NYP to educate and train all officers on diversity and minority issues. Where possible, facilitate relevant interest groups to offer their expertise and lived experience in police training.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Develop a campaign to raise awareness of how to report discrimination and hate crimes, particularly highlighting alternative reporting methods such as online and reporting centres, for those who don't feel confident going to police.

Explore how discrimination is tackled in educational settings and highlight positive examples of when it is challenged effectively.

Act as a critical friend and sounding board for NYP when developing diversity training specific to young people.



PRIORITY 4: ONLINE SAFETY



The NYYC engaged with a total of **297 young people** about this topic across 13 workshops and engagement events.

PRIORITY AIMS:

- Raise awareness of the various forms of exploitation and risks young people are exposed to online and the impact this can have.
- Investigate and increase awareness of the dangers of misinformation online, and how young people can spot, and protect themselves from it.
- Work with partner organisations to develop an online safety campaign.
- Highlight the true harms of online crime and promote the importance of reporting to police or independent reporting mechanisms. Promote appropriate support services.

WHAT WE FOUND

When speaking with young people, we found that they experience a wide range of negative impacts online, however, feel an obligation to remain on social media and the internet as it's become an essential part of both learning and socializing.

"You can't win because you can experience something awful online, but there's still a pressure to feel like you have to be on social media. You can't just come off."

"I don't have social media because my parents won't let me have it. I find it harder to make friends because I can't talk about social media. Everyone else has it so I feel left out."

We heard experiences of a wide range of online crimes, including exploitation, fraud, scams, hate crimes & online bullying. As well as the severe negative impacts of peer pressure and online comparisons on young people's mental health.

"Trying to live up to other people's expectations on social media can affect your mental health a lot- address this more in schools but mostly primary before it has a chance to get worse."

"Hate accounts, for example, making a TikTok about someone saying mean things. They have come up all year at school. School gets them taken down but then a new one is made a few weeks or months later."

"When online there can be positives to it for your mental health- you can talk to your friends and find new hobbies but there can also be negatives too like pressure to look as good as someone else."

A significant issue raised by young people of all ages was 'Revenge Porn' and the leaking of explicit pictures. Many were unaware of the laws surrounding these actions and didn't know what would amount to a criminal offence. Additionally, those who were victims consistently told us that not enough action was taken against offenders and that 'just taking the pictures offline' didn't solve the problem.

"A friend of mine sent pictures and they got passed around the school. People don't know that it's actually illegal to send naked pictures and they always get spread around."

"Police should take it further, it's not enough just to take down the pictures. It makes people think they can get away with it. If someone robs a shop, they don't just bring back the stuff and not arrest the person do they."

"Raise awareness that it's illegal to send or share nudes because people just think it's something that happens and it's not serious until it happens to you. It's sort of just accepted. And also show the impact it has on victims and it's not just banter."

Regardless of the nature, **all forms of online crime are very rarely reported by young people.** It was felt that in-person crime is dealt with more effectively, while online offences are seen as less serious. They felt that there was little action police could take to help them and that adults in their lives often underestimated the impacts of being an online victim. As a result, they did not seek support.

"When I see someone getting bullied or harassed online, I don't tell anyone."

"Sometimes just blocking them isn't enough, they will also get their friends on you. When it gets to that stage you should go to either a teacher or the police for help, but the police might tell you off for wasting their time."

"School don't go about the situation in the right way. They don't seem to realise the effect. I have been bullied about my height and my voice and it took me a long time to go to my family or teachers and still it is happening."

We spoke with young people about the topic of media literacy and how what they see online impacts their perspective. Overall, young people are becoming increasingly aware of media literacy and the need to think critically about what they see online. Many said they had received education on the subject, were able to reference signs of misinformation and said that lessons on the subject had been useful. However, they also highlighted the need for further and increasingly up-to-date education.

"Fake news is dangerous because it can make you behave differently if you believe something that's not real. In primary school, we had a lesson where we looked at pictures and had to see which is the edited one because that is probably the one that is fake."

"I know more about it than my parents- They will believe something if they see it but I will check or ask my friends."

"There can be negative influences online like Andrew Tate, who promote bad attitudes and Misogyny."

A young woman with blonde hair and glasses is standing and speaking into a microphone. She is wearing a black shirt. Behind her, two other young people are seated. A young woman with dark hair and glasses is looking towards the speaker. A young man with brown hair is looking towards the camera. They are in a room with grey acoustic panels on the wall.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Ensure that online offences are treated with the same weight and victim care as in-person cases.

Call attention to the role of Digital PCSOs. This will increase young people's confidence in seeking online safety support.

Work with educational organisations to ensure cases involving sharing of explicit images are reported to police, further action is considered where appropriate and strong victim support is provided.

FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Further develop support services to offer specialised support for victims of online crime.

Further promote clear messages on how to report online safety issues and where to access support.

Develop educational resources for professionals and parents/carers on how to effectively support young people online.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Utilise Big Conversation workshops to raise awareness of the dangers and laws surrounding sharing explicit images.

Promote ways to report online crime and where to go to access support.



PRIORITY 5: RELATIONSHIPS WITH POLICE & AUTHORITIES



The NYYC engaged with a total of **266 young people** about this topic across 10 workshops and engagement events.

PRIORITY AIMS:

- Act as Ambassadors to support police and young people in building new, positive relationships, and break down negative stereotypes on both sides.
- Raise awareness of Stop and Search rights amongst young people and scrutinise North Yorkshire Police's use of Stop and Search and Use of Force.
- Campaign for better support and more opportunities for young people with experience of the police or criminal justice system.
- Represent the voice of young people to NYP and NYFRS and investigate the treatment of young people by authorities.

WHAT WE FOUND

When discussing relationships with authorities, many young people told us that they often felt stereotyped by police, and that they felt young people were viewed as ‘trouble makers’ because of their age, what they are wearing, the area they’re from, or their friends and family ties.

They highlighted that behaviours acceptable by adults, for example, congregating in large groups, or accessing public spaces, such as parks, were viewed as anti-social or suspicious for young people and teenagers.

“Why don’t they ever arrest men in jeans coming out of pubs, not young lads in tracksuits. It’s because of how you look/ what you wear”

“If I see a police officer, even if I’m not doing anything I feel nervous like I’m going to get in trouble for something even though I know I’m fine.”

“They won’t take someone our age as seriously. No way.”

The media, current affairs, and highly publicised events like Sarah Everard, Chris Kaba, and Child Q have heavily impacted young people’s views on police, with fear and mistrust increasing. While these cases were outside of North Yorkshire, some young people felt the root causes were present in police forces across the UK and that similarly motivated, if less serious, incidents occur frequently.

Additionally, although such serious cases of discrimination and abuse of power may be rare, unwillingness to admit mistakes, and organisational defensiveness only increased negative perceptions.

“It (Sarah Everard) did change the way I trust police because you’re supposed to trust them, if you can’t then who can you go to.”

“There is always going to be good and bad police, just like there’s good and bad people. But what makes a difference can be if something happens, police need to own up to it so that it stops looking like they are defining each other. Otherwise, people won’t trust police, even the good ones.”

“ Of the Police I see, I have good opinions, but it’s more the system and the police as a whole I don’t trust.”

Throughout the Big Conversation, we learned that Stop and Search continues to be another significant factor in young people’s relationship with police. A significant number of young people who had been stopped felt they were treated unfairly.

Many young people were unsure of their rights, which further increased distrust. **More education on Stop and Search rights as well as what to expect within police interactions was highly requested.**

“Stop and Search happens to too many young kids, and it makes them distrust police when they get stopped constantly.”

“Everyone should know what Stop and Search rights are. Most don’t, or they don’t know them correctly which could get you in more trouble if you refuse.”

“No one really knows what their rights with police are. There’s a lot and it’s confusing sometimes, especially for kids younger than us.”

Despite the discussed strains on young people’s relationships with police, we also heard positive experiences, where officers had made beneficial impacts on young people’s lives. Most young people we spoke with had at least one positive police interaction and in some cases, they named local officers and PCSOs who had built meaningful and trusting relationships with their communities.

“At the moment, I’ve got nothing but good things to say about police, my mum was having real problems with my younger brother, especially after lockdowns, because he’s only just turned 13, so that was two important years that he missed school for. Police came and spoke to him and put him on a programme to help and he’s back to normal again now. He almost went down a bad path, but I think they helped stop him.”

“I have a good opinion of Police because he helped me with social media problems and social problems. He offered me support and helped me feel more safe when out in public.”

Young people welcomed the opportunity to engage further with police and build positive relationships. Many said they would like to see more police in schools and the local community.

“It would be good if we had a PCSO or police come back into our group. Maybe to do a talk or just meet us all so we have a contact or someone to go to.”

“Police should meet with the international students to make us feel more confident in them. Like for example with cultural differences, some things here are a big deal and at home they’re fine, and some things you can’t do at home but are okay in England. To make them feel more confident and at home, they can meet with foreign students and explain the law.”

“Check up on us more in public. I don’t mean to get you in trouble or check what you’re doing. I mean checking if you’re okay and being friendly, maybe if it’s late or someone looks upset.”

A photograph of three young men standing in front of a brick building. The man on the left is wearing a blue jacket and red-rimmed glasses, looking towards the other two. The man in the center is wearing a dark blue sweater and light blue jeans, looking at the man on the right. The man on the right is wearing a dark blue hoodie and large black headphones with orange accents, looking back at the man in the center. They appear to be in a casual conversation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Increase positive engagement with young people in the community and in educational settings. Interactions should feel equal and focus on trust and relationship building.

Recognise and duplicate examples of good practice, where local officers successfully develop positive relationships with young people.

Address young people's fears and mistrust of police openly and be willing to work collaboratively with the Youth Commission and other groups on solutions.

FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Work to engage a wider range of young people in community consultations and public scrutiny groups such as the Community Review Groups for Stop and Search and Use of Force. There should be a particular focus on hearing from those with lived experience of the police.

Facilitate opportunities for police to engage positively with young people in community and educational settings to help break down negative stereotypes on both sides.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Work more closely with both NYP and the PFCC to represent young people's voices consistently throughout the year. Continue to hold regular Youth Advisory sessions with Police and also the OPFCC.

Develop a campaign to educate more young people on their rights and what to expect in police interactions including Stop and Search.



PRIORITY 6: DRUGS GANGS AND COUNTY LINES



The NYYC engaged with a total of **175 young people** about this topic across 8 workshops and engagement events.

PRIORITY AIMS:

- Highlight and promote the voice of young people with lived experience of drug abuse, gangs, or county lines to support others.
- Promote harm reduction approaches on the topic of drug use amongst young people, and work with partner organisations to improve education on the impacts of drug use.
- Encourage police and partners to offer more diversion away from gangs and county lines, and better support for young people escaping the cycle.
- Raise awareness of the impact of county lines and gang exploitation amongst young people.

WHAT WE FOUND

We heard that drug use is highly common, widespread, and often open within communities. Most young people we spoke to, across the age spectrum, had been exposed to drugs in some form. This ranged from seeing and smelling drug use in public spaces to knowing friends and family involved with drugs, to having used them themselves.

"I think it's a large problem in this area. You hear people of a few people in every year that do drugs."

"I live in a highly drug populated area and I know this because I smell it all the time. It makes you feel like you don't live in a nice or safe area. Like it's rough."

"Everyone I know has done drugs or can get them easily."

"I've seen it, County Lines, before because my friends was involved in it as well as a family member. It's more serious than lots of people think."

When discussing County Lines, we found that a significant number of young people had not heard of the issue before, and many struggled to distinguish gang involvement and county lines from personal drug use. This made it harder for them to identify warning signs and protect themselves.

While some education around drug use exists, more is needed focusing specifically on County Lines and criminal exploitation. These conversations should be had with young people earlier, to pre-empt typical county lines recruitment age.

"Talk to younger kids about the issue. By 16 or 17 it will be far too late for some."

"I haven't heard of it before today, but the lesson was very useful."

"It can ruin lives. Warn children when they're young, even before secondary school, so they don't fall for the trap. We should teach younger kids aged 10-11 about this because by the time you are 12 or 13, it could be too late."

"Not being taught about it, because a lot of adults don't take young people seriously and think talking about drugs will scare them. But young people should be given a chance to speak up."

When asking about the causes of young people's involvement in County Lines, along with lack of education, we heard that growing up around normalised drug use and cultures of substance misuse made young people more likely to be criminally exploited through County Lines.

"If your family and neighbours all do drugs you won't know any different and think its okay. Not a big deal."

"People could get involved in this because they might start to see friends doing it and might want to seem 'cool'."

Other key reasons that were discussed as causes of young people becoming involved in County Lines were a need for money, particularly in the context of the cost-of-living crises, and a lack of alternative opportunities for young people.

"Stop the cause of it. If a family doesn't have anyone, for example, if they've just moved to this country, or don't have money, help them before the child thinks they have no choice but to do County Lines."

"If there was more jobs or training for younger people. My sister is 16 now and had better things to do at 13 and it's kept her out of trouble."

"A kid might see their mum struggling with money and feel a pressure to get help. Like they might think I need a quick way to make money, so they can't stop because their family depends on it for an income."

After learning about County Lines in Big Conversation workshops, most young people recognised county lines as exploitation. They wanted more reassurances that police would treat young people as victims and said this would make them more likely to seek help. Fear of legal repercussions was a significant barrier to reporting involvement in gangs or county lines.

"I think it's unfair to punish people who are forced to sell them. Some people don't know how bad it will affect them if they are young. Just get them help to stop it."

"If you send a teenager or someone our age to prison they aren't going to deal with it as easily as an adult, it will have a bigger effect on them and affect the whole rest of their life probably, so police should think about that and be more lenient to young people."

"Offer more support to young people. The reasons they get involved might be because they have family to feed or not just through their own choice, so they need support."

When young people had a key positive adult in their lives, they were more likely to speak out and ask for help if they or a friend became involved in drugs or County Lines. Having a trusted adult outside of the police available to young people was highlighted as a positive solution to tackling child criminal exploitation.

"I would tell XXX here because she won't just give you a lecture, she'll give actual advice for how to get out of it safely."

"Don't like the police in general, so not going to go to them for help. Maybe a teacher if they're decent."



RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Work with the NYYP to co-produce an education campaign on County Lines(CL) aimed at young people and potential victims. Provide advice and support on legal elements of CL.

Wherever possible, utilise diversionary schemes and out-of-court disposals over criminalisation for young people involved in County Lines and promote this approach within community outreach.

FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Assist the Youth Commission to produce a County Lines education campaign. Promote key campaign messages amongst the public and partners.

Support a greater range of alternative activities and development opportunities for young people who may otherwise see gangs and county lines as their only option.

Advocate for gang and County Lines education at an earlier age.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Work with the PFCC and NYP on an education campaign to raise awareness of County Lines, the dangers and the warning signs.

Promote the view that young people engaged in County Lines are victims of criminal exploitation, not criminals.

In the next Big Conversation, speak directly with more young people with lived experience of County Lines to better understand their experiences and support needs.

CONCLUSION:



We are extremely grateful to all the members of the North Yorkshire Youth Commission, local partners, NYP leads and the OFPCC who have been involved in making this piece of work a success.

The insights and recommendations contained in this report, together with the extensive joint work that has been done between the NYYC, the NYPFCC, NYP, NYFRS and many other partner organisations represent a very significant contribution to the work of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and North Yorkshire Police.

Through their 'Big Conversation' peer research with over 1400 young people in 2022/2023 the Youth Commission has managed to reach and engage with a hugely diverse cross-section of the youth population across North Yorkshire. They have made particular efforts to hear from those whose views are often overlooked. This peer-to-peer process is of enormous value, both as a piece of research and as an engagement exercise.

Our hope is that the North Yorkshire Youth Commission will be further developed as a channel for engaging young people in the work of both the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner and North Yorkshire Police. As shown through the project, the NYYC 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 next phase of the project, the NYYC will work closely with the NYPFCC, NYP, NYFRS and partners to implement and address the recommendations in this report.

TESTIMONIALS

"The North Yorkshire Youth Commission gives a vital insight into the views of young people relating to our emergency services, partner organisations and commissioned services.

As Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, I am wholeheartedly committed to ensuring their voices and recommendations are listened to and have had the pleasure of meeting the members at their meetings, speaking at their Big Conversation conference, and awarding the Good Citizen Award to the first group to achieve this positive contribution award.

I thank them all for what they continue to achieve and I want to tell them that, as Commissioner, they will always have my support. I look forward to continuing to listen and working with this inspirational group in the months and years ahead."

Zoë Metcalfe, North Yorkshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner

"Our Mission in North Yorkshire Police is to "keep people safe and feeling safe" across North Yorkshire and the City of York, and we will do this through our Vision to "Deliver an Exemplary Service". This means that our service has to be bespoke to the people we serve to best meet their individual and community needs; every part of the organisation has to deliver to the highest standard; and we must work in partnership to prevent harm. Understanding the views and needs of local young people is vital to delivering an exemplary service and the Youth Commissioners have been helping and advising North Yorkshire Police since 2015 and their achievements since then have made real and important improvements to our service.

Their ongoing work has led to valuable recommendations across policing and community safety which is so important because our actions can have dramatic effects on children and young people both now and the legacy it creates for their futures and that of their friends, family and society. We will continue to give the Youth Commission our full support so that their excellent work carries on, helping us to keep people safe and feeling safe."

Lisa Winward, Chief Constable North Yorkshire Police

"We retain a close working partnership with the Youth Commission across a series of local interventions, including LIFE courses. The commission continues to have a hugely positive impact. It provides young people with a voice to discuss and understand issues that concern them and offers peer led support and advice allowing young people to understand and identify the right life choices. The Youth Commission is pivotal in helping us to engage in an effective way with young people from across North Yorkshire."

Jonathan Dyson, Chief Fire Officer, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

“The last year on the Youth Commission has been really successful. I’ve been lucky to not only be a part of it but to have the opportunity to take part in multiple workshops that have influenced my opinions and given me the skills to share information to other young people. I especially found the spiking training workshop fascinating, especially after it being a topic that was so prominent in the news and relevant to the situations I am in as a uni student. The workshop made me look at spiking differently, both by emphasising the consequences and dangers but also showing how just looking after your friends can go a long way.

Being a part of the Youth Commission Conference was just as awesome an opportunity as it always is. Having the chance to speak to senior members of police and staff really makes you feel heard and highlights just how important the work we do is. The conference always shows how much people want to support young individuals as well as highlighting our role in building relationships between the police and young people and supporting them.”

Tyler Anthony, Youth Commission Member

“Being involved with the film with the Youth Commission and the police was an amazing experience as it really opened my eyes to what happens to young children in custody. I found making this film was a fantastic experience which is hopefully going to help train police officers on how a young person will feel going through custody!”

Hana Karanxha, Youth Commission Member

“Leaders Unlocked provided valuable feedback on the design and development of Drink Drug Hub, helping us tailor this new North Yorkshire harm reduction resource for a younger audience.”

North Yorkshire Horizons

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