

Written evidence submitted by The Friendly Development Charity (BYC043)

Executive Summary:

- I. Mostly girls experience, tell someone and ask for help regarding poor body image, however it is not a girl only problem - increasingly boys are speaking up about this issue.
- II. Poor body image and body dissatisfaction is increasingly reported and discussed as an important issue, however more needs to be done in order to improve and increase provision including acknowledgment and recognition from funders.
- III. Social media trends can have a catastrophic impact on body image and increase body dissatisfaction, however we run social media projects that can minimise this negative effect.
- IV. There is evidence of good practice improving body positivity and helping individuals to be proactive, joining in with positive social action.

About us:

1. About us: The Friendly Development Charity aims to improve self confidence and self worth, while creating an opportunity to learn vital life skills which will equip young people to make positive choices, increase aspirations, live healthy lifestyles and lead a more fulfilling life. The Friendly Development Charity designs and delivers a variety of personal development programmes in North East England.
 2. We have pioneered a body image campaign called Beautiful is ___ which has risen as our response to a growing culture of body dissatisfaction in an image dominated world. We have launched peer-mentoring, empowerment programmes and young volunteer projects. In addition we have piloted and rolled out a school roadshow which we take into schools and communities. The roadshow includes assemblies and workshops with all students, staff and parents. Our base is in the centre of Newcastle where we have space for group sessions and drop-in's. We are currently developing this element of our delivery, which is allowing us to continue and sustain our objectives with groups of people that have completed one of our previous programmes or have been referred to us for additional, specific work with body image and confidence issues.
 3. Most recently we have launched our network of body-image Champions, who we recruit through our programmes, roadshows and via our social media networks. The Champions can register via our website and will be invited to join in with online training and hangouts, in order to become advocates for building body-image in their communities throughout the country.
1. Are particular groups of young people particularly prone to poor body image, or less likely to be offered or seek help with poor body image? What causes these trends?
 - 1.1. We have found through the delivery of our projects both in schools, the community and directly through our outreach, that poor body image is not always experienced by particular groups of

young people but more vastly across a variety of groups. We have found it is mostly girls that identify with the issue, however boys and men that we have worked with, would also articulate their own feelings towards poor body image. We have worked with a diverse group of young women struggling with body image issues, who face disadvantage and social barriers, who might mask their lack of body confidence with challenging attitudes and poor behaviour. We also work with young women from affluent areas and private schools with less social disadvantage and are high achievers, who suffer from poor body image and struggle to manage the symptoms it can cause e.g. eating distress, lack of engagement in physical activity, low self worth, poor relationships, social anxiety, as well as inadequate mental and physical health.

- 1.2. Unfortunately, we are also finding that despite body image being talked about more, there is still some distance to be travelled before people consider it to be an issue which on its own is detrimental to someone's potential, and that with the right support, can be reversed and managed. Therefore, in our opinion help is not offered enough to individuals suffering from poor body image. Some individuals have told us that they are less likely to ask for help as it is not deemed "serious enough".
 - 1.3. The consistent trend that we see contributing significantly to poor body image currently is social media and the wide spread tendency to post edited, filtered images that appear to be perfect but are actually unrealistic.
 - 1.4. We have also found that the ongoing influx of images that are consumed on a daily basis, which are again disproportionately representing people in real life, lead us to place value on people's appearance more than on their characteristics, achievements and personalities, sending the worrying yet strong message that what we look like is the most important thing and that alone can generate popularity and success.
2. In relation to young men and boys, minority ethnic groups and those who self identify as transgender: what are the specific challenges facing young people in these groups? How effective is existing support?
 - 2.1. Through our work we do engage with young men and boys, mostly in schools with our roadshow and some via our social media platforms. The specific challenges they face include: pressures to live up to a perception of being healthy is to be muscular; to be strong emotionally, to be a "macho" or "man-up" guise. Reality TV and other social media platforms, alongside advertisements for fashion, health and beauty promote this idea that being physically defined and attractive will lead to prosperous life.
 - 2.2. We hope to extend our current provision to include specific targeted work with boys and men. This needs to be improved in other areas also.
3. Do existing campaigns and initiatives to promote positive body image sufficiently take into account the different challenges faced by young people with particular characteristics?
 - 3.1. As an organisation with a youth and community background, we are constantly identifying current needs and challenges that face young people who represent different groups.
4. Has the growing use of social media and communications platforms amongst young people encouraged practices and attitudes that entrench poor body image? What is the link between "sexting" and body dissatisfaction?
 - 4.1. We see notable and ever changing trends amongst young people and their use of social media which has a catastrophic impact on their body image. This often includes constant comparisons to

accounts that they follow, including people known to them as well as people of social status (celebrities, bloggers, vloggers, tv and music etc). In a small survey we did as part of one roadshow in a secondary school, we discovered that the older students (14 - 18 year olds) were more likely to make compare their bodies to others, over their younger peers. For e.g. the older students were three times more likely to compare themselves to models 'most of the time' and almost twice as many older pupils always compare themselves to celebrities.

- 4.2. Some more findings specific to social media use was with regards to selfie taking and posting. There were some disparities between the younger and older students. Although a similar amount of younger to older students acknowledged that they always retake selfies, more than three times as many under 14's claimed they never do this, with more than 90% of older students retaking selfies at some point. Very similar numbers of students in each age group admitted to using apps to add filters and significantly edit their photos before posting on social media platforms. More than twice the amount of younger students never apply a filter and approximately 60% of under 14s, compared to just under 40% of 14 - 18's , use editing apps on their selfies. These results corroborate with another survey we do in most schools we work in, which highlights an upward trend in removing unpopular selfies from social media platforms, because of either low 'like' achievements and negative comments made, contributing further to body dissatisfaction.
- 4.3. We have increasingly found the trend of individuals seeking validation from others, even strangers, through social media, posting selfies and sexting is having a significant impact on body image and self image. Interestingly, we discovered through some of our work that students would not feel comfortable complimenting other students. They felt it was not "cool" to do so, and if someone did pay a compliment, it is because they are being "sly", "unkind" or "manipulative". However these same individuals recognised their own need to receive such compliments about their appearance, and so resorted to doing so via social media. Validation about their appearance was more valuable to them than about their character, achievements and personality.

5. Can the internet and social media be used as a tool to promote positive self-image? What examples are there of this happening?

- 5.1. Yes. There are many examples of bloggers and vloggers, who use their social media platforms to demonstrate, encourage and reaffirm body positivity. It is notable that many bloggers do so by embracing all sizes and shapes, and perhaps not always encouraging healthy living, physical activity and balanced eating habits. On the contrary, there are some bloggers who do promote positive self-image which is embracing being real, which seems to be a more balanced view when it comes to healthy lifestyles.
- 5.2. Our very own body-image campaign, Beautiful is ___ uses many social media platforms to promote positive self-image. We are careful to use photos that represent 'real' life, without filters or edits. The intention with our social media accounts is also to reaffirm individuals who view our pages, placing value on them for who they are along with their characteristics and achievements over appearance. We aim to challenge social media users perception of what beautiful is, ensuring there is a positive and meaningful representation on their feeds. through our social media, we are also able to promote the positive things that can be done to improve self-image and to be engaged in some kind of social action, for those who wish to be more proactive. This has includes many individuals joining in with a regular No Make up day, posting selfies with no make up and no filters. This has helped people with their own confidence, knowing they are valued for who they are not just what they look like, changed mindsets around what makes someone beautiful and putting the

focus onto the whole person, not just what's not the outside. We were also able to encourage self care, including educating about skin care.

5.3. One of our projects within our Beautiful is ___ campaign, are our body image Champions. This is a network of individuals who have registered via our website to become social action volunteers, spreading body positivity, connecting with us via social media and online hangouts, so that they can be trained and empowered to change body image in their local communities. This is a pioneering piece of social action, which is in the very early stages, but is already demonstrating good practice and positive change.

6. Do internet companies, social media platforms or other platforms have a responsibility to tackle trends which entrench poor body image? What are they already doing in this area? What more should they be doing?

6.1. We are not aware of such companies taking any positive action to tackle such trends (see paragraphs 4.1 - 4.3), so our response has been to encourage and empower individuals to begin their own positive trends and to stand against some of the negative trends.

7. Does the Government have a responsibility to discourage the use of social media, the internet and communications platforms in ways which promote poor body image? What should it be doing in this regard?

7.1. In our opinion, the government has a responsibility to ensure schools are equipped and able to teach about body image and healthy use of social media and the internet consistently throughout the curriculum. Also, older generations should be able to access training in this matter also.

8. What examples are there of schools integrating the promotion of positive body image into school subjects across the curriculum, particularly physical education? How successful have these been? How can success best be measured?

8.1. We have worked with many schools in North East England who have used general funds, or sought specific funding to pay for us to take our body-image roadshow into school. The one week roadshow has allowed us to work with the whole school, including a session for staff and a session for parents. The one day roadshow has enabled us to do some targeted work with a specific year group, usually Year 9, as well as shorter assemblies with other year groups. Through this work, we have been able to encourage teaching staff to consider ways to promote positive body -image across the curriculum.

8.2. A recent survey in a secondary school we worked in, found that approximately two-thirds of the students declared that their body-image influences their participation in physical activity. Whether how they look motivates or discourages their engagement, this is a significant number of young people and demonstrates the relationship between exercise and appearance. A conversation with a teacher encouraged us to explore opportunities to remove these barriers and increase participation in physical activity. We were able to do this via some more of our school workshops.

8.3. We have found that body-image is a big issue for many girls especially in school. A good amount of schools use the marketing in their PE departments from the Sport England campaign This Girl Can.

9. What examples are there of youth organisations and peer education programmes outside of schools promoting positive body image? Are there examples of programmes focusing on different groups of

young people? Are they focusing on different aspects of body image? How effective are these? How should they be evaluated?

9.1. We are an voluntary sector organisation promoting positive body image. Please see the box About Us and our answer in paragraph 5.2 and 5.3 for some examples of how we achieve this.

9.2. We would welcome our work being evaluated, however as small charity with restricted funding, we have been unable to do so far.

10. To what extent is dissatisfaction with body image contributing to the increase in mental health problems amongst children and young people?

10.1. In our experience, we are first hand dealing with increasing numbers of young people, who identify themselves as having a negative body-image and who also suffer from anxiety, feel lonely and isolated and some living with mild symptoms of depression due to poor body image. We have found that higher use of social media, specifically posting of photographs / selfies the more likely the individuals are to face some level of anxiety.