

MAKE YOUR MARK 2022

Understanding Our Communities Report



Make
Your Mark

The biggest annual
of tea

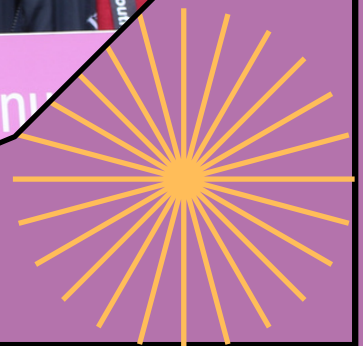


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The final report of our focus group project, consulting 2858 young people.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR 2022 REPORT



In February 2022, [over 430,000 11-18 year olds voted as part of Make Your Mark](#). Health and Wellbeing was voted the most important. Since then, Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) have been working tirelessly to conduct focus groups with their constituents to get a deeper understanding of what Health and Wellbeing means to the young people they represent.

The majority of MYPs have held two focus groups, some individually and some as a group with their fellow MYPs and deputy MYPs from their Local Authority. Overall, **190 focus groups took place** and **2858 young people were consulted across the UK**. This is a staggering number, the level of depth and nuance which has come from these conversations is so valuable.

Focus Groups took place in formal education settings, such as schools and colleges and informal settings such as support groups and youth clubs. MYPs ensured their focus groups captured seldom heard voices by hosting focus groups with young people from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans* communities, Special Education Needs and Disability groups and Children in Care. They also recognised that the opinions of young people who do not engage with traditional education structure may be less amplified, therefore reaching out to the home-educated.

We would like to thank all MYPs, Local Authority Workers and Youth Reps who have put their time and energy into making this possible. Finally, we would like to thank the focus group participants, their honesty and sincerity has given MYPs information which will be used to design the national campaign of the UK Youth Parliament and hopefully go on to create tangible change within our Health and Wellbeing structures.

In this report, we have analysed all young people's responses to find out the top five Health and Wellbeing issues across the UK, as well as regional/national breakdown of issues and themes. We want young people to use this report to lobby decision makers on a local, regional and national level, as an advocacy tool to help ensure the voices of these 2858 young people are heard by those in power.



EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY



Ensuring our programmes are diverse is an essential element of the UK Youth Parliaments ethos, therefore this project was no different. We asked Members of Youth Parliament to gather anonymous equality and diversity data from the young people who took part in their focus groups. This data allows us to see which voices have been amplified through the process, by consulting a wide range of young people with a range of lived experiences we can ensure our findings are representative of young people across the UK.

By consulting a diverse cohort of 11-18 year olds, this report will touch on issues which impact so many young people, making it an effective and persuasive lobbying tool no matter who you are or where you live in the UK..

It was not mandatory for participants to leave diversity data when they took part in a focus group. However, we were able to gather the following insights from the data we received:

1 in 3 identify as Black, Asian or from Minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

21% have previously or are currently receiving Free School Meals.

10% would consider themselves to have a disability.

27% of participants identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Asexual.

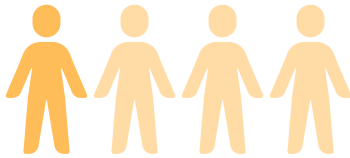
1/4 of participants have been a victim of bullying.



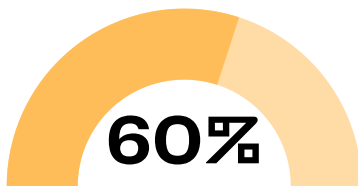
TOP FIVE UK ISSUES

1. School, Exams and Health

85% of our Focus Groups discussed how issues stemming from school and exams impact upon their health and wellbeing. **161 out of 189** groups directly identified a correlation between pressures of exams and school and a decline in their mental wellbeing.



1 out of 4 focus groups said there was too many exams.



60% of focus groups said GCSE students neglect their mental health during exam season.

Almost all of the groups which raised this issue stated exam pressure was not discussed enough in their schools or colleges.

THE FACTS

Young people participating in these focus groups are not alone. A recent study shows 81% of school leaders across the UK worry more about pupils' mental health during assessment periods than they used to be. In addition, Childline have revealed the number of young people who rang with concerns about exam stress rocketed from 861 between April and June in 2020 to 1,812 over the same period this year.

2. Funding, Resources and Health

96% of Focus Groups across the UK stated that a lack of health and wellbeing funding and resources was one of the biggest issue impacting their communities welfare. **181 out of 189 focus groups** mentioned at least one issue relating to the funding of services, lack of resources and spaces for young people.



50% indicated that existing healthcare services were understaffed and underfunded.

Over 60 Focus Groups highlighted that young people had no accessible, affordable and safe spaces to gather in their local area whether it be youth clubs, affordable gyms, well-lit and safe playing fields or activities. They also said healthcare services are not equipped to deal with neurodivergent young people.

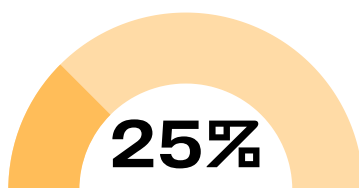
Participants also frequently mentioned that they were unaware of the mental health services available to them; or said that the waiting list was too long. **63%** of responses mentioned the negative impacts of waiting lists on wellbeing.

THE FACTS

Again, our focus group participants' feedback reflects wider issues amongst young people across the UK. On lack of knowledge of services: a recent survey by YoungMinds also concluded that 53% of young people are unaware of the support facilities available apart from seeking help from their GP. On waitlists, found that 76% of parents believed their child's mental health deteriorated while waiting for support which shows how important timely support is for young people's wellbeing.

3. Barriers, Accessibility and Health

41% of focus groups raised at least one barrier which impacted upon young peoples ability to access health care services in their local area. Participants identified a broad range of barriers, however the most common themes were transport (including proximity to services), stigma around conditions (specifically sexual and mental health conditions) and the lack of confidence or knowledge to access services.



raised the issue that they did not know how to access support.



of whom said school would be a good place to start but nurses and support staff were overwhelmed with referrals.

THE FACTS

Data from the NHS England shows that young people are not currently receiving sufficient mental health support; Just over 1 in 3 young people with a diagnosable mental health condition access care and treatment.

1 in 4 groups which discussed barriers to accessing support highlighted the impact of Covid-19; stating that care no longer feels continuous and they are forced to retell their 'issues' to multiple support workers.

4. Bullying, Discrimination and Health

1 in 5 focus groups (38%) discussed how discrimination impacts young people's health and wellbeing. Young people shared personal accounts of the long-lasting effects of homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism and ablistm they had experienced both in school and when attempting to access healthcare.



of responses highlighted the impacts of racism on health and wellbeing.

18%

of responses stated there needed to be a greater understanding of LGBTQ+ identities.

Focus groups proposed that integrating these topics into the national curriculum may minimise the discrimination and subsequent health and wellbeing issues these young people face.

5. Social Media, Online Safety and Health

35% of groups stated that social media had a direct impact on the wellbeing of them and their peers. **4 out of 5 groups** which raised social media as an issue discussed the link between harmful content and eating disorders. Young people also highlighted feeling overwhelmed by Instagram and Tiktok, with a staggering **10%** of focus groups saying they feel addicted to social media.

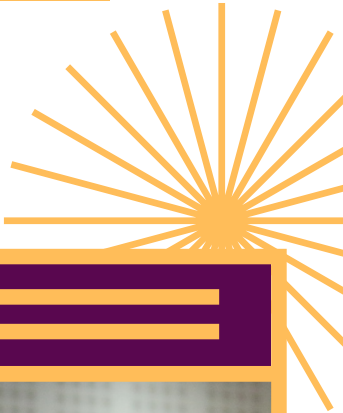
15%

of responses which discussed social media said that there is too little regulation on social media and responsible adults should be better trained to understand its impact.

10% of responses identified social media as one of the most influential factors which impact upon young peoples health and wellbeing.



10%

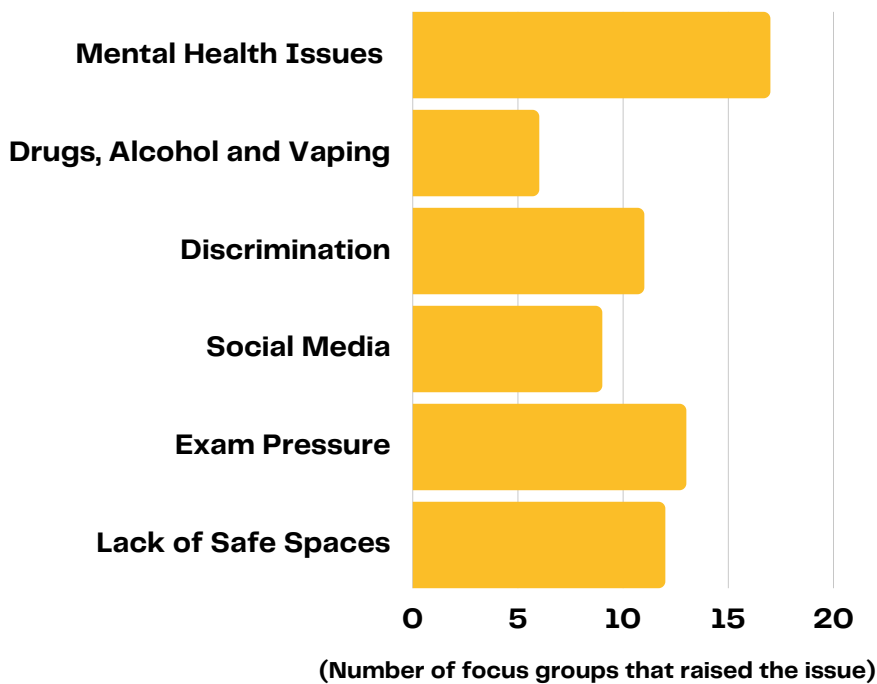


EAST OF ENGLAND

THE STATS

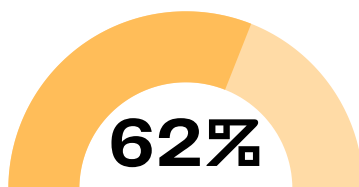
- 24 FOCUS GROUPS
- 225 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

THE TOP ISSUES



90% of focus groups in East of England called for better education for students, teachers and professionals around themes which impact their health and wellbeing. Young people are calling for more time to be spent on:

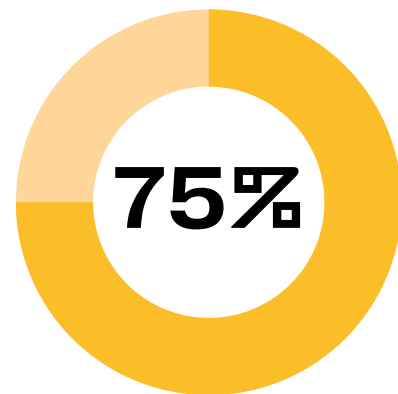
- Healthy Relationships and Sex
- LGBTQ+ communities
- Periods
- Racism
- Addiction and Mental Health



said that Health and Wellbeing services were inaccessible in some way.



half of Focus Groups said the people in power need to invest more money into children's and young peoples services and spaces.



said that there is a 'one sized fits all' approach to mental health which is failing young people.

"Improved education in schools from a younger age will help to prevent those in positions of power from overlooking the needs of young people."

"It's a postcode lottery whether you're able to access services or not".

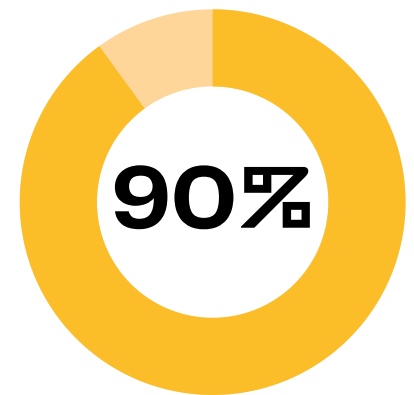
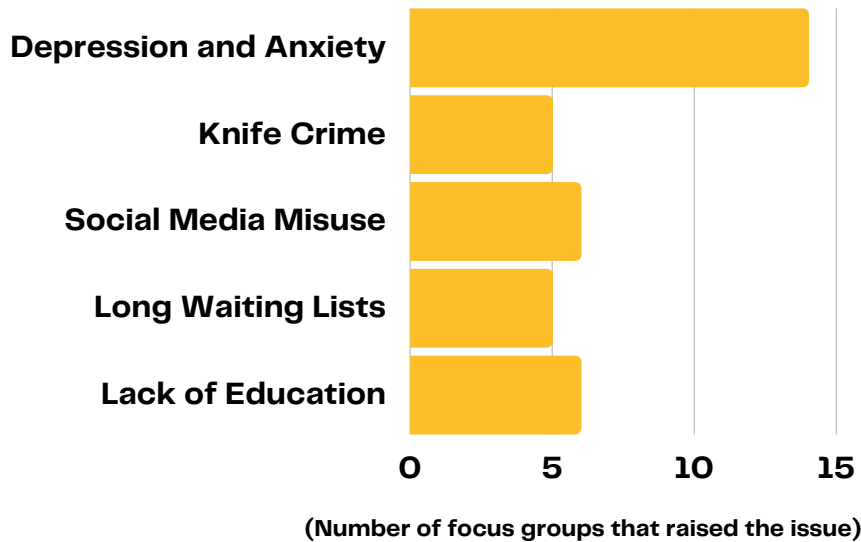
"After five sessions with CAHMS I was supposed to be fixed. There was no follow up"

LONDON

THE STATS

- 24 FOCUS GROUPS
- 285 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

THE TOP ISSUES



said that health and wellbeing services were inaccessible in London



2 out of 5 said poverty and social inequality impacted a young persons ability to access care.



said crime in their local area impacted their physical and mental wellbeing.

SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

On Knife Crime:

Young people need to be educated about knife crime by people with lived experiences. They also need things to do and safe places to go to avoid meeting the wrong people.

On Social Media Misuse

Better restriction and guidance and education around social media.

On Inefficient Mental Health Services

Build bridges between young people and decision makers to ensure they are effectively helping young people.

On Exam Stress

More teacher intervention and support around exam season

"Young people struggle to ask for help when they see they are getting overlooked"

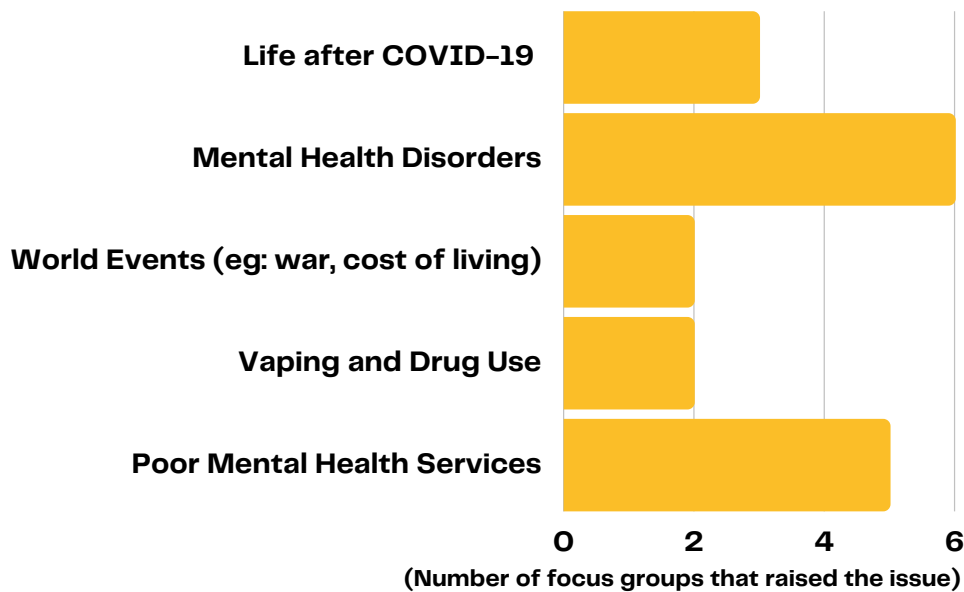
"Listen to what we say"

MIDLANDS

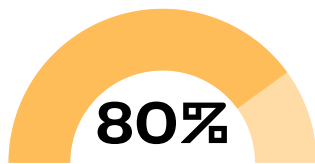
THE STATS

- 7 FOCUS GROUPS
- 848 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

THE TOP ISSUES



of groups said they worried about their future



said they were scared of the rising cost of living and poverty

20% of participants in thought health and wellbeing services were available, but a lack of education and information made them inaccessible. 75% thought they were totally inaccessible.

SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

Five out of seven groups said greater collaboration between young people and local mental health services would improve treatment and help young people in need.

Suggestions on how to do this were things like:

- Ensuring there is diversity amongst therapists so young people feel seen,
- A youth-led city wide initiative to de-stigmatise accessing help,
- Education resources for teachers and parents so they better understand the problems young people face today.

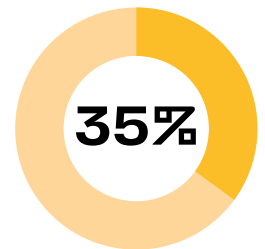
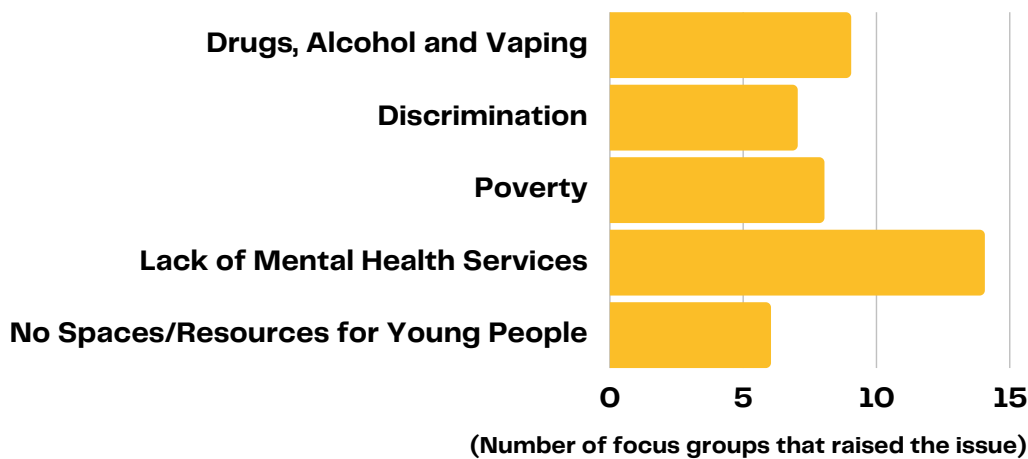
"The majority of Politicians don't know what it's doing when it comes to us [young people], and we are left disappointed and dissatisfied."

NORTH EAST

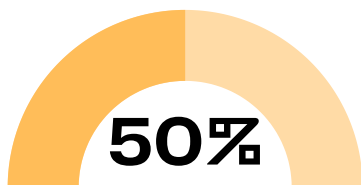
THE STATS

- 17 FOCUS GROUPS
- 171 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

THE TOP ISSUES



said a lack of opportunities and increasing poverty rates impacts their wellbeing



said their areas were not "Youth Friendly" with poor transport links, no safe areas to meet friends and no youth clubs. They said residents would get frustrated if they are "hanging around" even when they were not causing trouble..

40% thought Health and Wellbeing services were fairly accessible saying that its easy to speak to an understanding GP or Nurse, but there is little immediate follow up care and waiting lists are too long.

The other 60% thought Health and Wellbeing services were not accessible. Many said they are not tailored to young people, difficult to refer into and over subscribed.

SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

50% of groups said a solution to deteriorating Mental Health was to give young people more accessible spaces, free activities and opportunities to get active and do good. They said this was a good way to prevent bad mental health and to get people talking.

6/17 groups discussed how a more inclusive curriculum which aims to educate people about all LGBTQ+ identities being taught from Year 6 would reduce negative stereotypes and improve communities.

Almost all groups called for there to be more mental health professionals in schools.

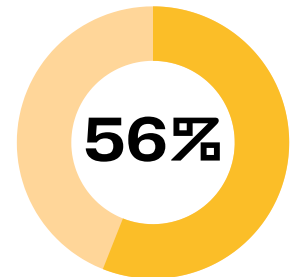
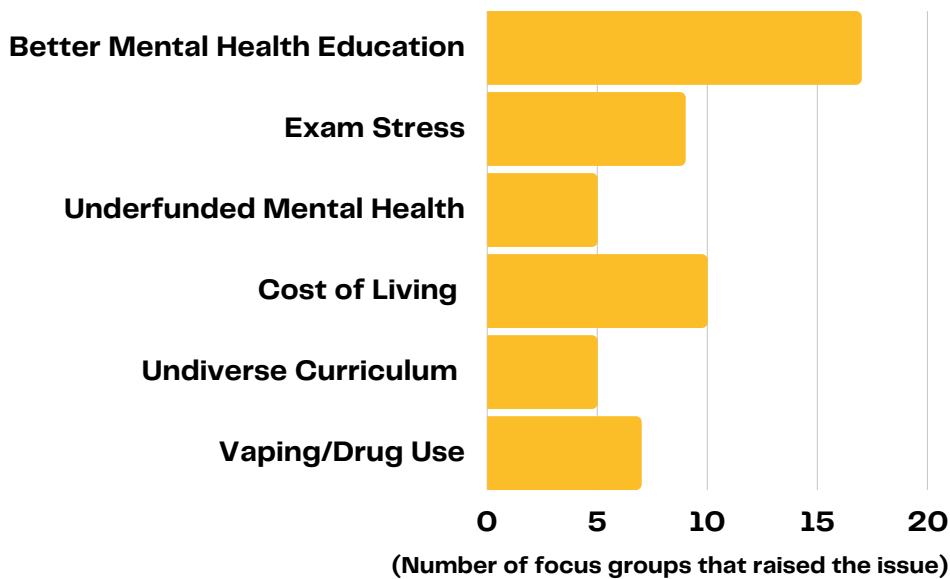
"I wish the people in power also knew that there are likely thousands of kids who are anxious, stressed and paranoid about whether they, their family or their friends will receive the care they need when they require it".

NORTH WEST

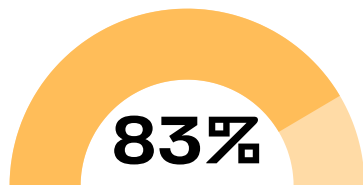
THE STATS

- 30 FOCUS GROUPS
- 352 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

THE TOP ISSUES



thought mental health is often misunderstood, which leaves people feeling helpless.



thought health and wellbeing services were **inaccessible**. Young people stated that waiting lists, lack of transport, stigma and complicated referral processes were among the top reasons.



thought poor mental health had been normalised due to a lack of action by the people in power.

SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

19 Focus Groups stated a more diverse curriculum would improve health and wellbeing.

- 7 groups said – Better understanding around LGBTQ+ education, this should be integrated into the curriculum to ensure a permanent change.
- 4 groups said –More discussions around sexual education including harassment, periods and healthy relationships would help people recognise red flags.
- 15 groups said – More open conversations in school about mental health would benefit students and teachers.



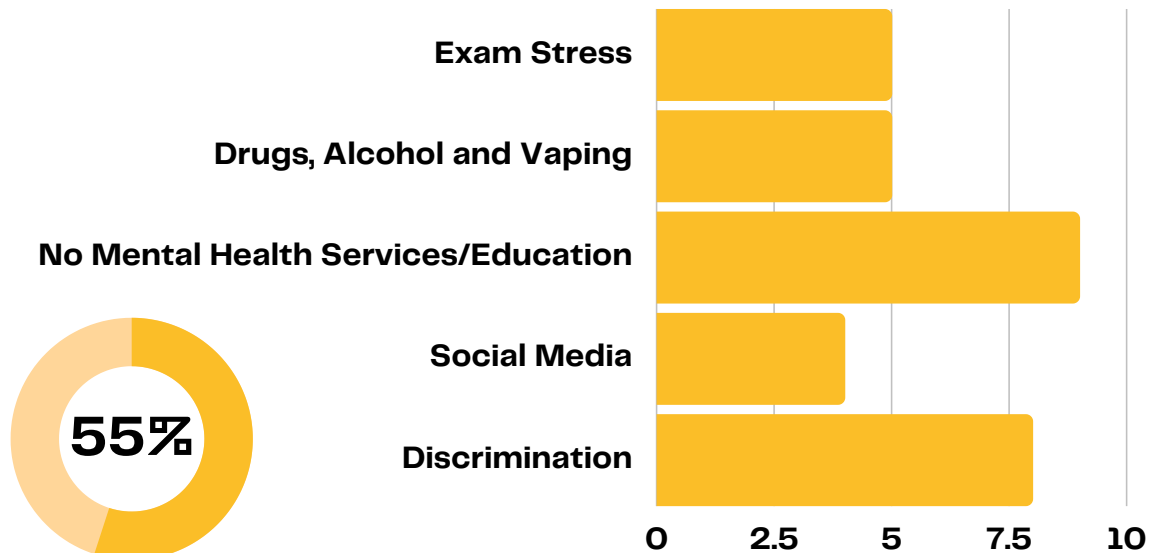
"The misunderstanding around mental health also reinforces the stigma around it"

NORTHERN IRELAND

THE STATS

- 9 FOCUS GROUPS
- 64 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

THE TOP ISSUES



(Number of focus groups that raised the issue)

55% felt that health and wellbeing services were not accessible in Northern Ireland. They thought that geographical location may impact a young person's ability to access the support they need.

SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

Five out of nine focus groups said they wish the people in power would update the education system. Participants said that young people need comprehensive sexual health education and more understanding about mental health.

Two out of three participants stated there needed to be more mental health training for teachers, educators and those who regularly come into contact with young people.



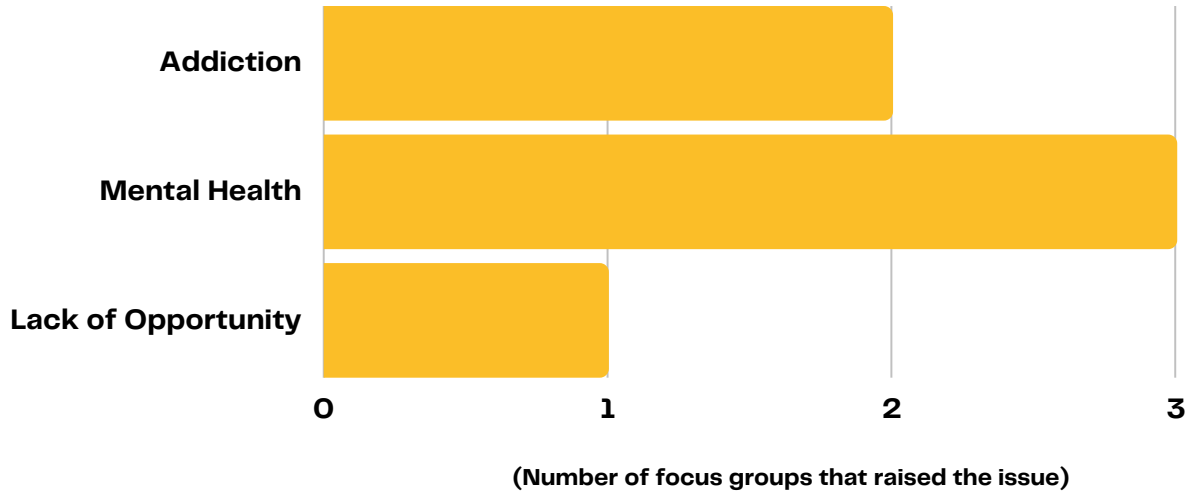
"Training teachers in mental health first aid and about the symptoms of disabilities and poor mental health will mean they can spot it and offer help and advice."

SCOTLAND

THE STATS

- 1 FOCUS GROUPS
- 3 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

THE TOP ISSUES



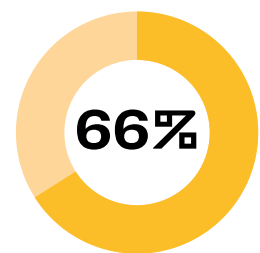
SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

Focus group participants discussed some solutions to the most common Health and Wellbeing issues:

Cheaper travel and more investment in local infrastructure.

More extracurricular activities for young people .

Better collaborative community approach towards mental health so that early interventions and solutions can be identified.



of participants believe that health and wellbeing services are inaccessible for young people in Scotland.

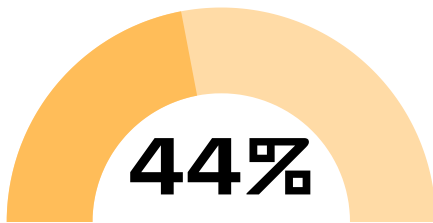
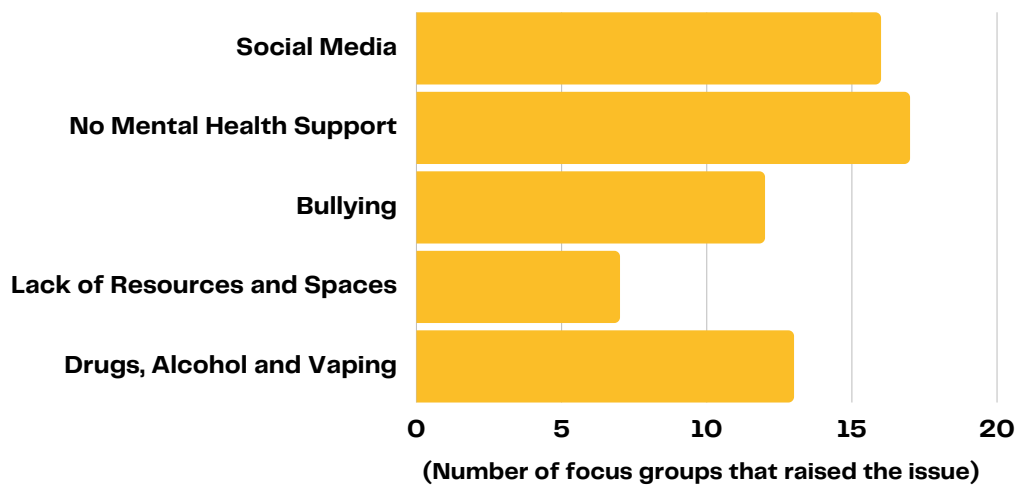


SOUTH EAST

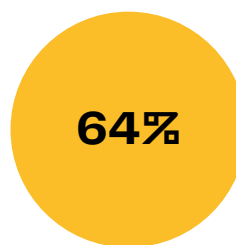
THE STATS

- 25 FOCUS GROUPS
- 194 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

THE TOP ISSUES



said how detrimental social media is to their wellbeing.
Participants highlighted social media gives unrealistic body images and decreases self esteem..



didn't think enough was being done at schools and in communities to prevent mental health issues.

33% thought the referral processes to health services were too long and complicated – making them inaccessible. **50%** specifically said that waiting times for services were too long.

Groups also spoke about the lack of extra support for neurodivergent young people who need to access care. .

SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

Social media companies taking more accountability for content on their platforms, as well as 'No Phones in Schools', more vigilance from staff and parents on warning signs of Eating Disorders and other Mental Health illnesses.

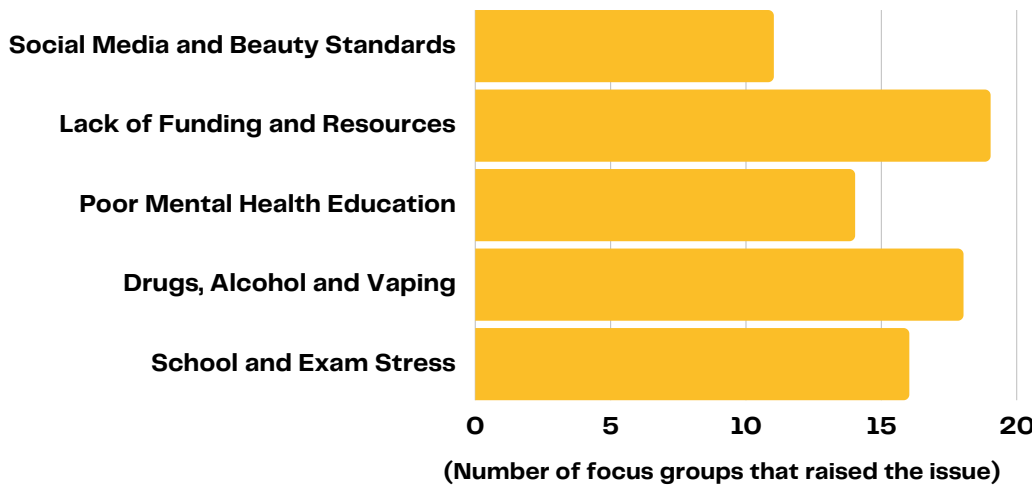
Increased funding for existing mental health services and introduce social hubs to encourage young people to go out and meet people their age in a safe and accessible way.

"People in power need to listen to young people, and our voices should be heard by decision makers. Involving young people in mental health legislation and allow us to feedback on frameworks"

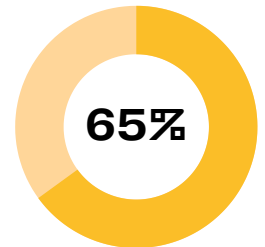
SOUTH WEST

THE STATS

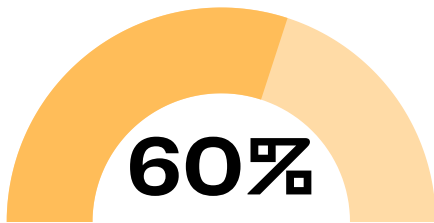
THE TOP ISSUES



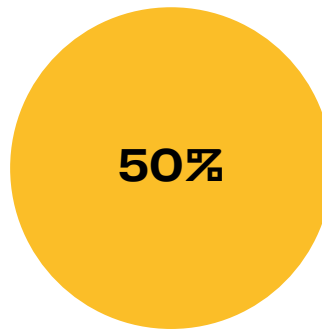
- 26 FOCUS GROUPS
- 458 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED



said a lack of funding and resources is impacting upon young peoples health and wellbeing.



said how detrimental social media is to their wellbeing. Young people discussed unrealistic body images increased eating disorders and peer pressure online influencing people to use vapes.



of the focus groups did not think health and wellbeing services were accessible for young people.

Participants in the South West discussed how rural young people were often more marginalised and how accessing therapy was more difficult for poorer young people.

SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

Over 70% of focus groups discussed the idea that people in power were too quick to judge young people rather than trying to understand the problems they are facing. Respondents believed adults should have a more education around difficult topics like sexual assault, body dysmorphia, social media and transphobia.

70% of groups discussed the impact drugs, alcohol and vaping were having in their communities. Young people proposed more education and tougher punishments for shops selling these items to under 18s.

60% groups highlighted that having a designated mental health worker within schools would benefit young people. They recognised that young people would face fewer barriers trying to locate/travel to services and they may receive early intervention.

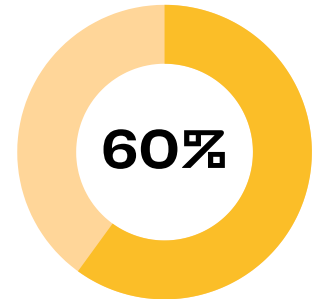
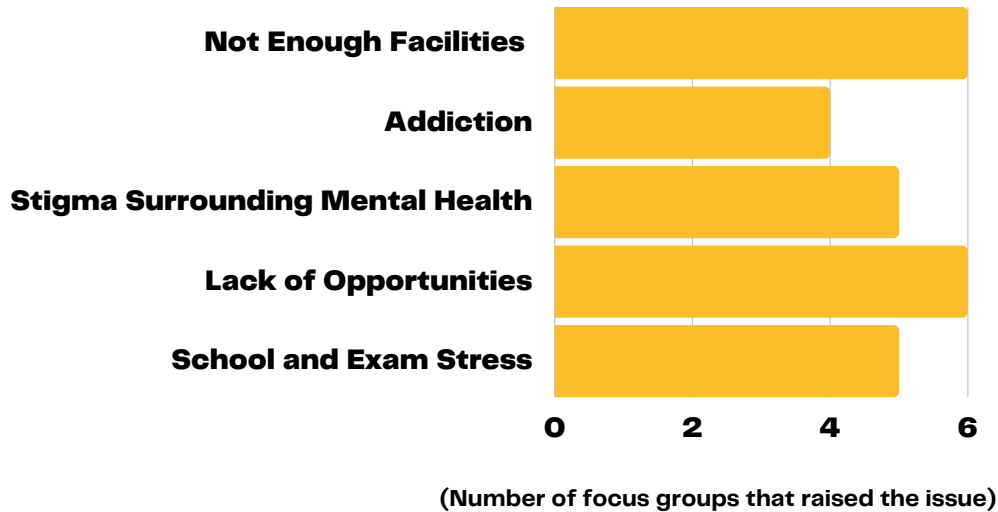
"There is nowhere for school aged students to go that doesn't cost money"

WALES

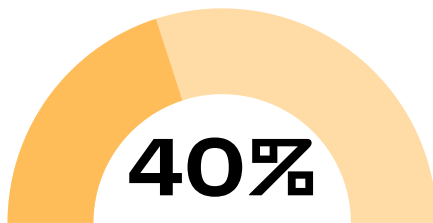
THE STATS

- 10 FOCUS GROUPS
- 118 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

THE TOP ISSUES



of focus groups said there were not enough facilities and opportunities in their areas.



talked about stigma surrounding **Mental Health**. They wanted to see it talked about and taught earlier in Schools to try and reduce this.

Some groups said this problem was worse in rural communities other said that this was due being from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

Groups came up with several solutions to the issues that they raised, such as:

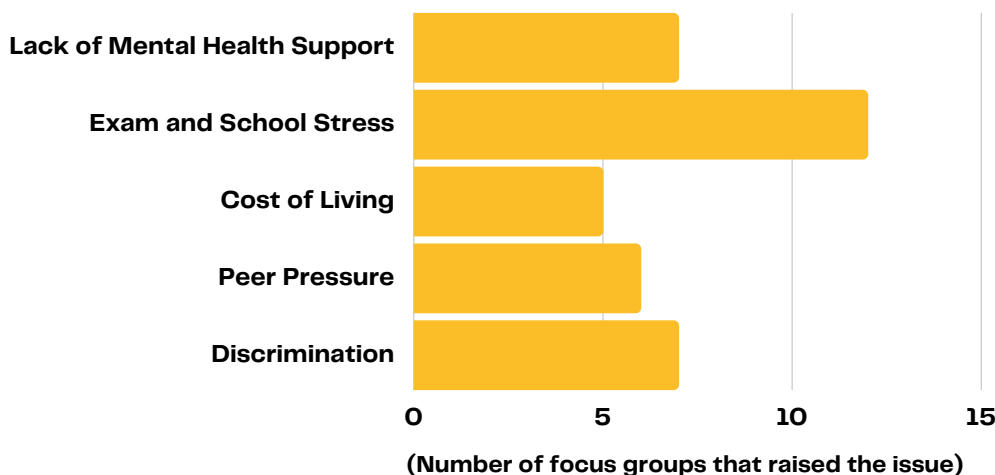
- Training for Teachers and Parents on Mental Health issues in young people.
- Consulting young people on Health and Wellbeing issues and when designing services.
- Raise awareness and educate young people on the places they can access help, such as from medical professionals or some charities.
- Increasing access to Mental Health support through increased funding and advertisement.

"It's (Youth Voice on Health and Wellbeing issues) is important and not just a criteria that someone needs to meet. It isn't a formality, it is about real young people and it is important that there is action from their words."

YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER

THE STATS

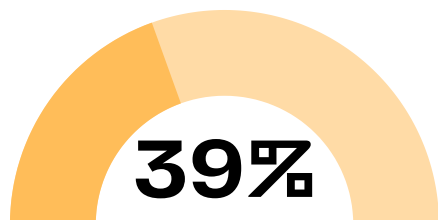
THE TOP ISSUES



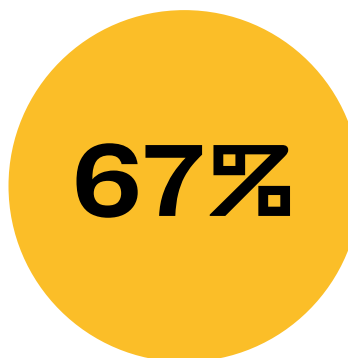
- 18 FOCUS GROUPS
- 115 YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

5

groups directly mentioned the cost of living and food poverty as issues of concern.



talked about a lack of Mental Health support; specifically in Schools and because of overstretched services.



talked about exam and school stress/pressure, and the anxiety and mental health issues this can cause.

SOLUTIONS GIVEN BY THE FOCUS GROUPS

Groups came up with several solutions to the issues that they raised, such as:

- Early LGBTQ+ Education
- A more diverse curriculum
- More open/obvious Mental Health support in Schools
- Less Exams, more classroom based work to get your final grades
- Cheap and healthy food options in School

"School is a great platform to start providing support for young people. They need more funding to be able to do this."

"I think that young people should be given more clarity on what services offer what things, which would build confidence to go forward and get help with an issue on your mind."

NEXT STEPS

AFTER THE RESEARCH



This report, alongside the November's UK Youth Parliament House of Commons Sitting 2022, will help guide young people's campaigning and advocacy work over the next 18 months.

Use the information in this report with your peers, school and youth councils to show decision makers what young people in your area think. The statistics and findings in this report can be used to create real change in your local area – young people have spoken now local and national leaders need to listen.

Stay connected the the UK Youth Parliament's social media accounts to see what campaign is chosen at the annual Member of Youth Parliament House of Commons Sitting.

