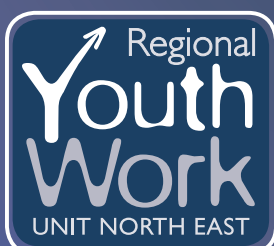




TRUTH ABOUT YOUTH

**Perceptions of Young People in
Society: June 2010**



Commissioned by the
Regional Youth Work Unit - North East

Truth About Youth – Research Report

Executive Summary

Key Findings:

- Young people generally feel that other young people are friendly, helpful and welcoming.
- Young people feel that society perceives them as intimidating, unfriendly and rude.
- The media was identified as the major source of information in the shaping of peoples opinion of young people.
- Young people are unhappy about the perceptions and stereotypes of young people held by society.
- Gang, Alcohol, Anti-Social, and Chav/Charver were the most common words linked with young people.
- Young people were split in their opinion of whether there was a positive communication and respect between young people, middle aged people and older people.
- The young people surveyed believe that the media promotes a mostly negative image of young people.
- Young people are willing to help change the negative perceptions and stereotypes held about them.
- One Young Researcher stated “We are one, but not the same!”

Contents:

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Context	4
3. Aims	5
4. Methodology.....	5
5. Findings:.....	7
i. Perceptions and Experience.....	7
ii. Reasons for Perceptions and Experience	7
iii. Key Outcomes	8
6. Recommendations	8
7. References and Acknowledgments	10
8. Appendices	11

1. Introduction

The Regional Youth Work Unit – North East commissioned this action research project to investigate the opinions of young people on how they are perceived in society. This research will inform their Truth About Youth project.

The Truth About Your project is a response to growing concerns about how society perceives and stereotypes young people, and how these perceptions are encouraged by the Media.

A stereotype is a set of characteristics or a fixed idea considered to represent a particular kind of person or an idea or convention that has grown stale through fixed usage. (bbclic.com)

It is often quoted that young people feel that they are demonised by the media, the coverage is usually biased towards a negative image, and young people are not involved or given the opportunity to challenge the media perspective.

This research project was an opportunity to find out what young people thought about these perceptions and stereotypes of held about them, how and why these thoughts were shaped and what, if anything, can be done to challenge these perceptions and stereotypes.

The research would empower young people to investigate the source of such perceptions, provide evidence to support or challenge the stereotypes, and an opportunity to formulate a response.

2. Context

The Truth About Youth is a two year initiative funded by the Cooperative Foundation. There are seven charities across the United Kingdom that are running Truth About Youth projects, including the Regional Youth Work Unit – North East for the Tyne and Wear area.

The aim of the Truth About Youth is to challenge negative perceptions of young people in society and support them in making a positive contribution in their local communities.

The Regional Youth Work Unit – North East were interested in finding out what young people thought about other young people, their understanding of the relationships with people around them and the perceptions of young people held by society. The study would enable young people to ascertain whether the stereotypical views portrayed in the media have any truth in them.

The following are the findings sourced from a Mori report (2005) and are from an investigation into how the press reports on the actions of young people.

- one in three stories about young people were about crime
- only 8% of stories celebrated teenagers' positive achievements
- young people were only quoted in 8% of the stories about themselves

The report reinforces the stereotype, or general view of young people being involved in criminal activities and the lack of positive activities or achievements. It also shows the absence of opportunities for young people to participate or be involved in reports involving young people.

3. Aims

The aim of this research project was to find out:

- How young people feel they are perceived in society
- The source of these perceptions
- The accuracy of these perceptions
- Whether some groups of young people are perceived worse than others
- How young people can challenge these perceptions

4. Methodology

i. Pre-Delivery

A team of 10 peer researchers aged between 16 & 25 years were recruited from across the North East and came from a range of diverse backgrounds. The peer researchers worked closely with 3 research support workers to plan the design of the research project. The research team were quite ambitious in their approach and a variety of research methods were chosen to ensure a wide range of young people were engaged with in various settings.

The young researchers were particularly keen to establish the reasons behind stereotypes and perceptions of young people, and they had a positive focus on what could be done to challenge or change such perceptions. The young researchers introduced a statement or hypothesis that they wanted to evidence:

The stereotypes and negative images of Young People are not a true reflection of youth culture...We are one, but not the same!

The research team attended information sessions on the various tools and techniques available for action research projects. The training helped the team decide on their preferred methods of consultation and analysis.

The selected methods of investigation were:

Prep-research

The research required the team to make some enquiries in preparation for the research project. They started with identifying some of the stereotypes people held about young people, and also information and statistics regarding the portrayal of young people in the media. Identifying the stereotypical views allowed the group to formulate the options in their questionnaire. Finally, they discovered previous reports with general statistics on young people's attitudes, and activities. This helped them to formulate the hypothesis they were attempting to prove, or disprove. See appendix 1.

Questionnaires

The young researchers attended a workshop to help them develop a young person-friendly questionnaire, and decide on aspects including the layout, number of questions, types of questions and the structure for recording the responses.

H-forms

Some participatory appraisal techniques were presented to the young researchers, including spider diagram, impact ranking and H-forms. The team felt that spider diagrams were difficult to interpret for this project and impact ranking too complex. They felt that the H-form was the best technique to extract positive and negative attitudes towards young people, and also opportunities to change these attitudes.

Video Interviews

Three young researchers in the research team had media interests and were keen to record the responses and create a short visual aid to present the findings.

ii. Delivery

The research was conducted over a period of 3 months. The team of 13 researchers engaged with over 100 young people aged between 13-19 years.

The team completed questionnaires with 100 young people on an individual basis. The forms were completed by either the interviewee or the interviewer. No third parties were involved. This allowed the young researchers to separate the young person, or the interviewee from the influences of friends, family or youth workers, and ensure they got an accurate response and minimised cross referencing.

The settings for the questionnaires included town centre sessions in Newcastle and Gateshead, project visits to CultuRISE, Dance Factor Gateshead, FUSED Fashion, the Youth CHOGM young people steering group and the Urban Games & Hip Hop Project. They also attended events like the Volunteer Celebration event, Young People's Got Talent, Green Festival, and the CRUNK event. Questionnaires were also completed in educational establishments of the young researchers, including Newcastle College, Tyne Metropolitan College, Gateshead College, Excelsior Academy in Newcastle and Thomas Hepburn School in Gateshead. In addition to the above settings, the young researchers also completed questionnaires with friends and family.

H-forms were used to gather information from groups of 5 – 9 young people. The tool allowed more than 1 person to be engaged at anytime. The use of large flip paper, with marker pens provide opportunities for the whole group to be actively making responses on the H-Form, often in informal arrangements like the floor, or a table, with young people surrounding the form. H-forms were used to consult with young people from the Urban Games and Hip Hop project, ethnic minority Volunteers (emV) project and the young researchers themselves.

Video interviews were actually chosen by the young people to make the delivery and presentation element fun and entertaining. Some of the group are enthusiastic about media, and were excited about storyboarding a short movie, with some background information, interviews and footage of the researchers at work. Interviews took place at various settings including venues such as Dance City, Sage Gateshead, Eldon Leisure.

5. Findings

(see appendix 2)

i. Perceptions and Experience

- Young people generally found other young people to be friendly, helpful, and welcoming
- Young people believe that society thinks that they are intimidating, unfriendly, and rude
- The media was identified as the major source of information in shaping peoples' opinions of young people
- More than half of the young people interviewed felt unhappy about the perception of young people held by society
- Gang, Alcohol, Anti-Social, and Chav/Charver were the most common words linked with young people
- Less than 15% linked words like creative, community and achievement to young people
- Young people consuming alcohol is perceived to be the most negative image of young people
- Wearing hoodies and groups of males were also perceived in a highly negative way

ii. Reasons for Perceptions

- There was a difference of opinion in response to the question of communication and respect between young people, adults of a middle age and older people.
- Almost half of the young people interviewed felt that the 3 age groups communicated well with each other
- Almost half thought that communication was not very good between the 3 age groups
- Almost two thirds of the young people felt that the media portray young people as bad, or very bad

iii. Key Outcomes

- An effective method of changing the negative image of young people would be through promotion of positive examples and images of young people
- Celebrating the success of young people and their achievements or efforts is an ideal way to both challenge stereotypes, and encourage other young people to become active
- Involve young people in participation and the decision-making process. This will help raise the profile of young people, provide an opportunity for young people to represent themselves, and improve communications between young people and adults
- Young people have identified a lack of understanding between young people and adults and suggest the need for some inter-generational activity. This will enable the young people to build a rapport and dismiss the myth about all young people being 'troublemakers'
- Youth projects need to be more creative, attractive, and engaging. Young people require fun diversionary activities and cannot often afford the rising costs of leisure and entertainment
- There needs to be some dialogue with the media, to challenge their negative attitude towards young people, and provide them access to the 'normal' young people, and their opinions and actions

6. Recommendations

The young researchers were very passionate about the issue of perceptions, and believed that it affects them in their daily life. They would like to see a change in how young people are perceived in society, and are committed to helping make that change.

The research team propose:

1. Positive images campaign – A multi-media project to capture the positive images and stories of young people and challenge the common negative stereotypes of young people.
2. Youth Media Team – A group of young people, trained in media and media communications to act as 'roving reporters', working with youth and community projects, volunteers and young people, recording and collecting the many positive activities and contributions. The Youth Media Team will then support the groups in publicising their programmes.
3. Inter-Generational Project – A project to facilitate contact and communication between younger and older people in the community. It is important to deliver such projects on a small scale and locally. This helps sustain positive interactions between the two age groups, especially when they share the same locality and often 'bump' into each other.
4. Youth Talent Show – A great opportunity to build the confidence of young people, whilst encouraging other young people, and involving

parents or families. The 'Unique Selling Point' of a talent show is the wider benefits on many groups within society. As the contestants are young talented people, and the audience is a mixture of parents, families, locals, organisations, businesses and media, then it becomes the platform of opportunity to promote a positive image. A youth steering group would enable the young people to raise their profile, and provide valuable experience and make a positive contribution to enhancing the image of young people.

5. Public Relations Expert – An established organisation such as the Regional Youth Work Unit – North East, to host a PR expert who can liaise with the media, improve communication links and develop an agreement where the local media will provide balanced reports in the matter of young people.
6. High Profile events – Large, quality, youth and community events to attract good publicity, to better community cohesion through positive interaction
7. Youth-Led projects – Young people leading on youth, community or volunteer projects is always a good reason to shout about. Young people are the future, and if they learn leadership qualities now, they can help lead young people in positive activities and opportunities... including a career in the media!!

7. References and Acknowledgements

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www.nya.org.uk

TNS Media Intelligence UK

Presswatch

TNS Media Intelligence - Positive Images Survey 2007

CHILDREN NOW MAR2004

Acknowledgements:

Lead Researchers: Monjer Rashid, Eleni Venaki , Tasbiha Mukhtar, Shelley Charlton, Aaron Brownlees

Young Researchers: Ripa Begum, Anfaal Mohamed, Arwa Mohamed, Shuva Papaya, Mihi Kay, Natasha Leslie, James Chilvarz, Amier Gany, Abbie Javed Mirza, Tahmina Begum

8. Appendices

Appendix 1

Truth 'bout Youth: Prep-Research

Task : Identify words or stereotypes that are used to describe young people. These can be words used by people in society, or common stereotypes in the media

The words most commonly used to describe young people in regional and national papers in 2008 were “yobs”, followed by “thugs”, “sick” and “feral” .

Other terms often used included “hoodie”, “louts”, “heartless”, “evil” “frightening”, “scum”, “monsters”, “inhuman” and “threatening”.

The young people could not find any reports or surveys for commonly used words to describe young people in the regional and national papers...except one!

They discovered a surprising report that conducted some research to find the use of positive words in describing young people. The report found that a death of a young person attracted the use of ‘glowing terms’ such as ‘model student’, ‘angel’, ‘altar boy’ or ‘every mother’s perfect son’. The research, which was commissioned by Women in Journalism, concluded that ‘...these were reserved for teenage boys who met a violent and untimely death.’

We asked local people, both young and old to tell us what words come to their minds when describing young people:

nice	happy	friendly	welcoming	intimidate
unhelpful	annoying	unfriendly	intimidating	creative
knife	achievement	gang	community	alcohol
work	underage	contribute	anti-social	talented
hoody	participate	chav/charver	reliable	crime
volunteer	helpful	polite	bad	rude
cushty	great	scary	cool	

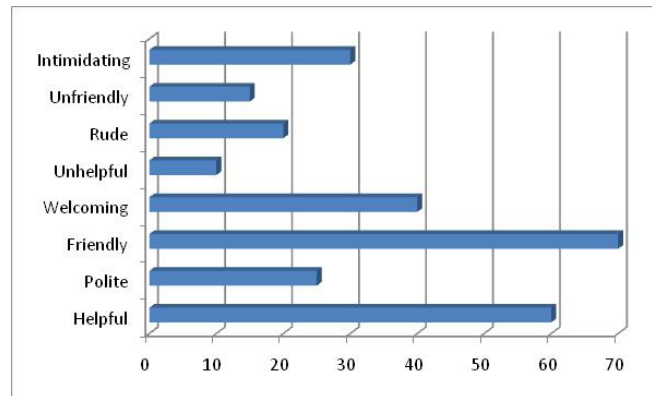
The group of researchers then chose a selection of words that would reflect their findings, and fall into groups of words that could be offered as prompts for the interviewees.

Appendix 2

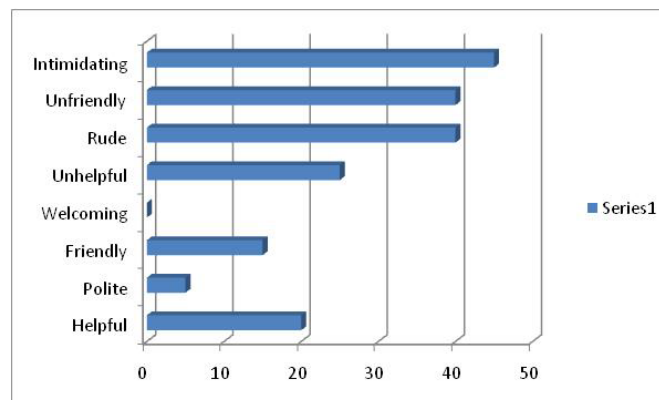
Survey Results

PERCEPTIONS and EXPERIENCE

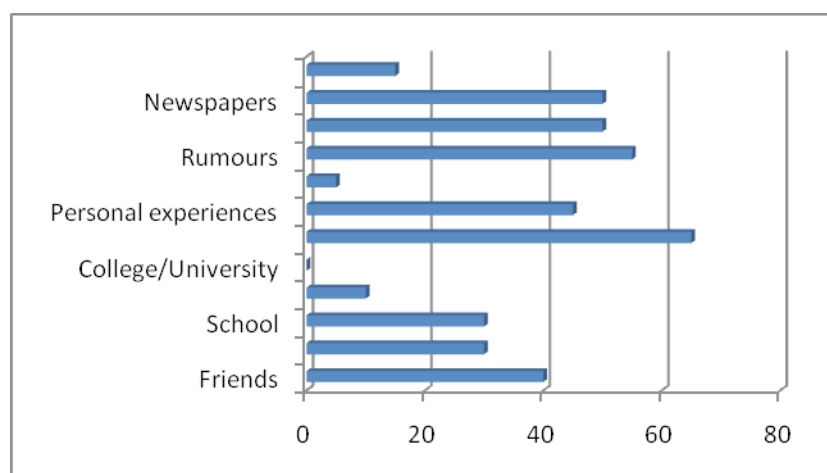
Q1- In your experience of young people, have you found them



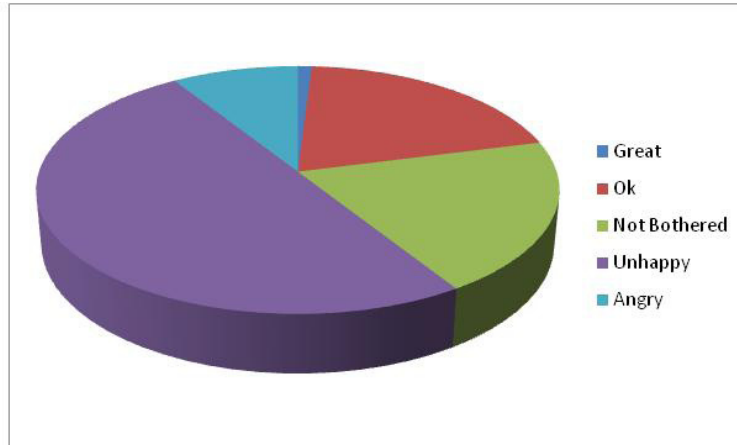
Q2- What do you think societies opinion of young people is?



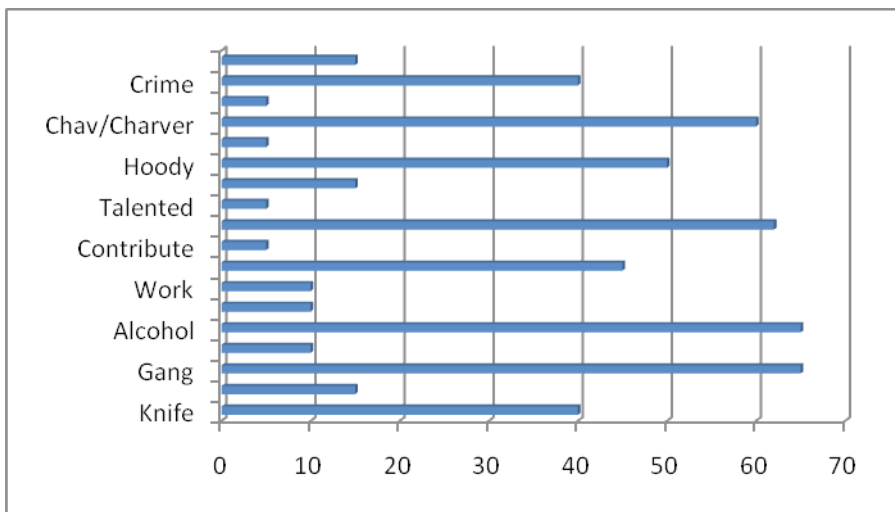
Q3- Where do you think people's opinions come from?



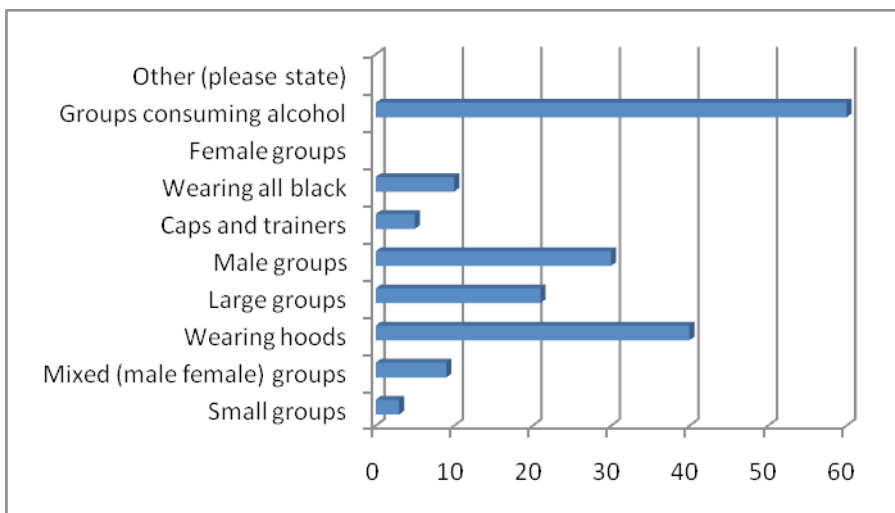
Q4- How do you feel about these opinions?



Q5- Which words do you feel are often linked with young people (either experience or in media)?

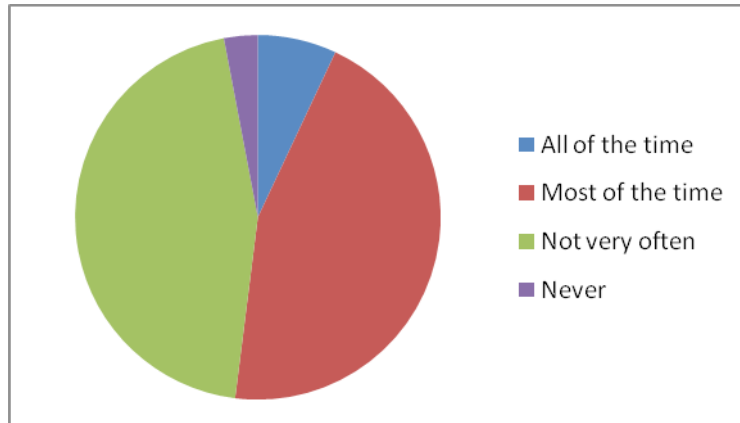


Q6- Are certain groups of young people thought to be worse than others?

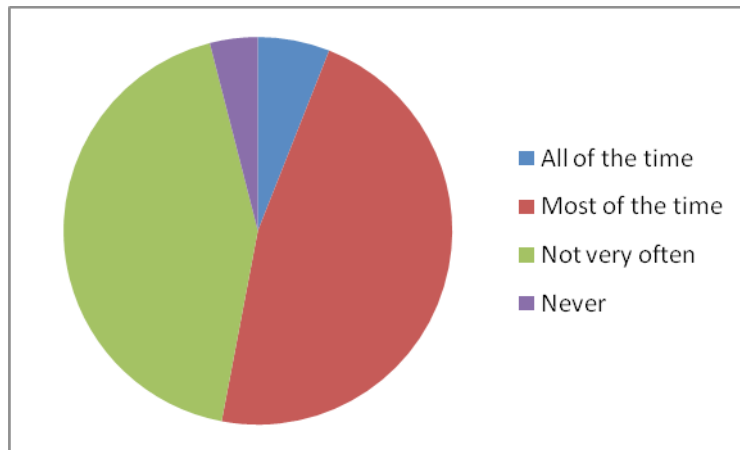


REASONS FOR PERCEPTIONS and EXPERIENCE

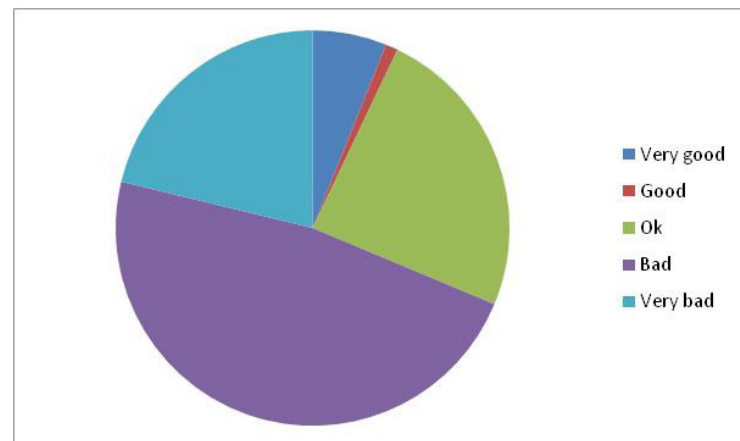
Q7- Do you think young people, Middle aged people and older people communicate well with each other?



Q8- Do you think young people, Middle aged people and older people have respect for each other?



Q9- How do you think the media shows young people?

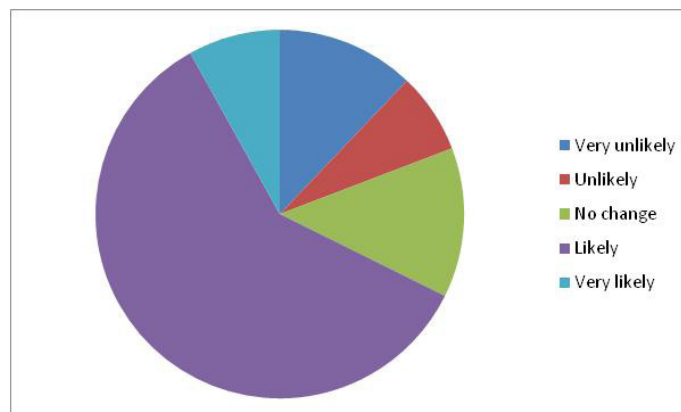


YP Comments:

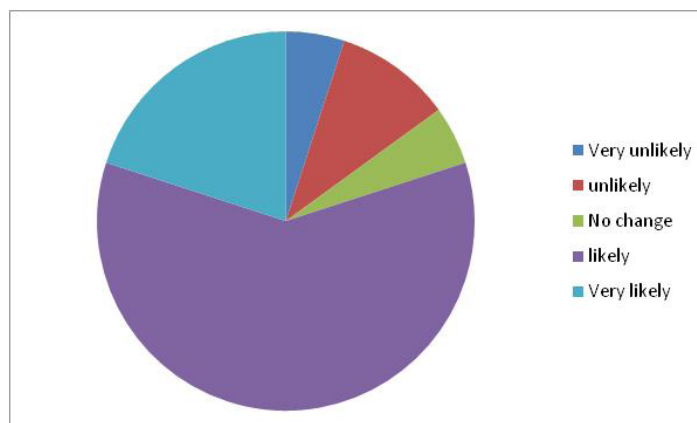
- The reports on YP are always bad
- It is what it is
- We could get noticed a bit more
- Paris Hilton! enough said
- Sensationalisation of negative activities by YP is a wrong approach by media
- They think everyone is the same, but consume the worst
- The media either shows the best or worst examples of YP
- The media shows YP to be Very rude and impolite
- Because YP are stereotyped to be bad but this is based on other people's actions in the past.
- Always say we do bad
- Saying everyone is a trouble maker and have ASBOs
- ASBOS reported on regularly
- Bad Stereotypes YP
- Crimes are always in the papers, committed by YP
- Because they think everyone is all bad, because a few people are
- Most stories about YP are negative, linked to crime, rather than positive achievement
- Most TV programmes show kids as crime-committers
- In the news and magazines, YP are always shown in a bad way.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE

Q10- Do you think young people involved in community projects make a positive change in the opinions of young people by the adults?



Q11- Do you think young people involved in community projects make a positive change, or difference in the community?



Q12- What do you think can be done to improve people's opinions?

Ideas for improving positive opinions

- Showing the achievements and impact young people have on the community.
- More looking at the good things young people do.
- Changes need to be made in the way the media portrays young people.
- Getting young people off the streets and give them activities. Getting to know them.
- Getting to know the young people before judging!
- Target creative groups where young and older people work collaboratively and share ideas & experiences
- Advertise the good things young people do.
- Good participatory work can make life different. Better places to go.
- Less troubled stories on TV
- Keep kids off the streets.
- More people standing up for young people
- Get young people doing more in youth projects.
- Show support in community
- Collaborative project can change perspectives.
- More youth projects.
- Involving parents.
- Involve young people more.
- Make young people stand out.
- Don't know.
- YP should start their own newspaper

Q13- If you could do 1 thing to help young people or your community, what would it be?

- Get rid of stereotypes that make young people sound bad
- Help young people have a better view on respect.
- Volunteer work within the community.
- Target creative groups where young and older people work collaboratively and share ideas & experiences
- Ask them what to do.
- Make collaborative films with young people.
- Put more money into helping
- Help them to get noticed
- Good youth projects
- Cheaper sports or leisure stuff so we don't get bored
- Cheap and good community cafe, anything
- Get all the bad people away.
- Be helpful.
- Get young people help.
- Start my own newspaper, full of good examples of YP
- Free travel and cinema for under 16
- Get more young people to help.
- Set up more youth projects
- More youth projects!
- Better housing for young people
- Just listen to them properly
- Volunteer and help in my community

Any other comments?

- Young people are cool
- Young people have a voice too, so listen.
- We are all young people, but we are not all the same
- There are reasons why some YP are worse than others, so we need to see the reasons

Survey Results – Analysis

Perceptions and Experience

Q1 In your experience of young people, have you found them...

- YP generally found other YP to be friendly, helpful, and welcoming.
- Almost a third of YP did declare that they often found some YP to be intimidating.
- An overall positive image of YP

*The continued to explain that the YP in question were often large groups of YP, both mixed or only male, or dressed in a certain fashion. There is a general fear of crime, and YP are affected by this. In the interviews, some YP claimed that they did feel intimidated by certain groups of YP, although many had never actually had any negative experiences from such groups.

Q2 What do you think societies opinion of young people is?

- The survey found that YP believe that society thinks that they are intimidating, unfriendly, and rude.
- A minority of YP believed that societies perception of YP was helpful, friendly and polite
- An overall verdict is that our society holds a negative impression of the YP

Q3 Where do you think people's opinions come from?

- Television was the most popular reason behind people's opinion of YP
- Rumours scored very high and was the second most popular factor in shaping people's opinions.
- Newspapers and internet were the third and fourth popular reasons.
- Friends, family and schools were also significant contributors
- Community and Youth groups made no significant impact on people's opinion of YP
- The media was identified as the major source information in shaping peoples opinion of YP.

Q4 How do you feel about these opinions?

- More than half of the YP interviewed felt unhappy about the perception of YP held by society
- 39% were ok or not bothered,
- only 9% were angry

*YP who were ok or not so bothered about the Media's position and influence in the perceptions of YP often commented that they; felt powerless, unable to challenge the

media, and any counter-actions would be pointless.

- The conclusion is that most of the YP surveyed were either unhappy or disappointed with the media promoting a negative image of YP.

Q5 Which words do you feel are often linked with young people (either experience or in media)

- Gang, Alcohol, Anti-Social, and Chav/Charver were the most common words linked with YP
- Hoody, Underage, Crime and Knife were also very popular in association with YP
- Less than 15% linked words like creative, community and achievement.
- Negative words are commonly associated with YP, with an alarmingly low use of positive words.

Q6 Are certain groups of young people thought to be worse than others?

- Nearly 60% of the responses identified that YP consuming alcohol are seen to be worse than other YP.
- Wearing hoodies and groups of males were also perceived in a negative image.

Reasons for Perceptions and Experience

Q7 Do you think young people, Middle aged people and older people communicate well with each other?

- Almost half of the YP interviewed felt that YP, Middle Aged people and Older People communicated well with each other
- while most of the other half thought that communications were not very well.
- The results show a great difference of opinion!

Q8 Do you think young people, Middle aged people and older people have respect for each other?

- Almost half thought that all 3 parties had respect for each other
- The other half believed that there was a lack of respect.
- Similar to the response in Q7, YP had a difference of opinion, with nearly equal camps on either side

Q9 How do you think the media shows young people?

- Almost two thirds of the YP felt that the media portray YP as bad, or very bad.
- A ¼ of the YP feel that the media provide a balanced picture.
- The general consensus is that the media promotes a negative image of YP, with a lack of reporting on positive activities or achievements by YP

The YP Comments highlighted:

- Media coverage of YP is commonly biased and negative
- Negative actions by YP are sensationalised, and reported as stereotypical action
- The media brand all YP in the same, negative image

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE

What do you think can be done to improve people's opinions?

- Challenge the media's culture of promoting a negative image
- Celebrate positive actions and achievements of YP
- Promote positive examples of youth action, locally, and nationally, through the media
- Provide positive and engaging youth projects, services and facilities for YP to prevent excessive 'hanging' around, or 'intimidation'.
- Inter-generational projects to help people of all ages communicate with, and understand each other, and build a rapport.
- Involve the media, YP and parents in the opportunities and activities for YP

If you could do 1 thing to help other young people or your community, what would it be?

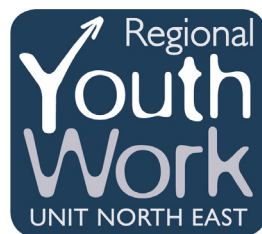
- Offer to help people
- Volunteer
- Set up creative youth and community projects or facilities, including media or intergenerational projects, and community cafes.
- Challenge the negative images and stereotypes of YP, and replace them with good positive images, examples and role models.
- Affordable social activities and travel

Any other comments?

- Young people are cool
- Young people have a voice too, so listen.
- We are all young people, but we are not all the same
- There are reasons why some YP are worse than others, so we need to see the reasons

This research was funded and commissioned by the Regional Youth Work Unit.

For further information: email mail@rywu.org.uk, tel (0191) 4404410



The **co-operative** foundation