

# 2024 Hope Hack Reflection Report

**Revisiting results from the 2023 Hope  
Collective Project**



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## Introduction

Following the 2023 Hope Hack events that were delivered by the MVRP, YPAS's Peer Researchers have consulted with young people in Merseyside in 2024 to see whether their views have differed, whether there are new concerns, and whether they are able to see the impact of work being carried out.

In 2023, the MVRP and key partners engaged with children and young people aged 14-24 around issues relating to the levelling up agenda, such as poverty and inequality. Part of a national program of Hope Hacks led by the Hope Collective, the MVRP engaged with over 400 children and young people and 70 professionals in Merseyside. Discussions were held around 7 themes, including: Poverty and Inequality, Media, and Marketing, Mental and Physical Health, Racism and Division, Youth Work, Community Safety, and Education.

In order to compare with the 2023 findings, the Peer Researchers within YPAS Participation Team employed 6 similar themes when consulting with young people in 2024. However, we broadened the theme of Racism and Division to cover Hate Crime and Discrimination and did not explore the theme of Media and Marketing. During a four-week period, 90 young people were consulted across Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens, and Knowsley. We spoke to young people aged 12-24 and ensured that we reached young people with a range of protected characteristics both in person and online. Consultations were held across the following organisations:

- YPAS Young Ambassadors Participation Group.
- Camhelions CAMHS Group, Sefton.
- Chattin 4 Action Young Carers Group, St Helens.
- Conquer Life @ Vibe, Sefton.
- Positive Futures, Walton.
- Unity, Toxteth.
- LFC Foundation Apprenticeship Programme, Liverpool.
- Knowsley Youth Cabinet, Our Place, Knowsley.

A focus group was planned for Wirral CAMHS but was cancelled the day before delivery due to unforeseen circumstances. We also tried to connect with various other Wirral organisations, but they sadly did not respond to our requests.

Methods for engaging with these groups included focus groups and surveys, some of which young people were supported through 1-1 interviews to complete. This helped to provide an extra level of support and clarity around answering questions, which was welcomed by young people who were less confident to complete the task independently.

## Introduction

Our questions were carefully written and reviewed to ensure that we were not causing young people to reflect on any incidents of trauma, and we did not ask young people to share with us the content of any experience of discrimination or hate crime. This was for two reasons: firstly, to reduce the risk of young people revisiting any traumatic experiences and potentially being without immediate support or after care. Secondly, we did not want to open discussions about contextual safeguarding issues within their local communities. So, we simply asked if young people had witnessed or experienced discrimination and hate crime, to understand how prevalent it was within their lives, but we did not ask them to share the narrative around those experiences. All surveys included a page advising where young people could seek help to report a hate incident or crime, and all focus groups were conducted within existing groups where the young people had the staff teams that they had existing relationships with to provide any follow up support needed.

Parental consent was sought from all young people under 16 and anyone 16-24 was able to self-consent. Initially, due to the timeframe, it was difficult to engage groups at the end of Feb and early March, as the cohort of young people in the age range targeted were sitting mock GCSE and A Level exams, which delayed us in gathering our data. We moved our deadline to the end of March for data collection, which allowed for the Easter break and then gave us two weeks in April to analyse the data and two weeks to write up the report. We negotiated with MVRP to return the report in full by the end of April, giving us two additional weeks to complete the project.

## Poverty and Inequality

Young people were asked what the terms poverty and inequality meant to them and were able to expand on this further by exploring in what ways this can have an impact on their lives. They were prompted in a survey and in person to consider poverty and inequality in relation to their mental health, the cost of living, public transport, food poverty, school uniforms, education and employment, accessibility, and anything else they considered important. After this, young people were encouraged to consider what could make a difference to poverty and inequality in relation to any of the aforementioned issues.

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### What is poverty?

When asked to define poverty, money and wealth were mentioned frequently. Many responses focused on what individuals may lack because of financial issues, such as food, clothes, electricity, good housing, etc. This closely ties in to young people's understanding of inequality, as when discussing what someone may lack, this was often compared to what others have more of. For example, one young person's understanding of poverty is 'having less than others and because of this being treated differently, in a negative way.'

The phrase 'not having enough' was repeated in young people's understandings of poverty, whether this be enough 'money,' enough 'resources,' or enough to 'live on.' This extends an understanding of poverty simply from being about money, but to people being in need. A similar understanding was shared by young people in 2023, who raised the issues of not being able to afford sanitary products, or 'not having enough to sustain yourself.'

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## What is inequality?

When asked to define inequality, young people largely understood this to be when someone is treated differently to another. Some young people gave reasons for this, such as being treated differently because of your gender, sexuality, race, religion, disability, or economic situation. Being treated differently because of these categories involves being 'judged for being different,' being 'segregated,' and 'suffering more' than others. This ties into how young people involved in the 2023 Hope Hack understood inequality, especially around being respected, and accepting others regardless of difference.

Overlapping with how young people understood poverty, the consequences of inequality were also seen to affect what opportunities individuals have and whether these are fair. Examples given were experiencing equal pay or hate crime. Poverty and inequality are therefore presented as reinforcing one another.

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## Impact of poverty and inequality on young people

The impact of poverty and inequality on young people was overwhelmingly focused on mental health implications, with 97% of 49 young people surveyed answering 'mental health' as being affected. The impact on young people's mental health was often seen to be caused by bullying, neglect, isolation, and discrimination due to their experiences of poverty and inequality. As one young person stated, poverty and inequality 'disrupts [a young person] from having a normal life and having the opportunities and happiness other children do.'

Another young person noted that 'poverty and inequality can affect every part of a young person's life from education and work to health and wellbeing. A young person living in poverty may not be able to keep up with their peers through paid opportunity exclusions. A young person suffering with inequality may suffer with their self-esteem and self-worth if they can see they aren't being treated fairly.'

In particular, 26 out of 44 young people surveyed said that their own mental health is affected by poverty and inequality, while 19 out of 44 said that it affected their cost of living.

## Solutions and recommendations

### Mental health:

In 2023, young people involved in the Hope Hack called for more counselling and therapeutic support tailored to individual need. This was in the context of poverty and inequality causing feelings of social isolation and embarrassment.

When asked in the 2024 Hope Hack what could make a difference to young people struggling with their mental health as a result of poverty and inequality, answers overwhelmingly suggested talking to someone. This can be facilitated through:

- ‘More accessible and quick mental health support.’
- ‘More mental health support in schools.’
- ‘More peer support and groups.’
- ‘More funding for mental health services.’
- ‘Shorter wait times.’

Compared to 2023, the young people spoken to in 2024 suggested more ways of reaching out and speaking to someone, rather than just 1-1 mental health support. By increasing access to services and support, it becomes possible to improve awareness surrounding issues young people are facing and therefore reduce stigma as a result. Young people also believe education can play a part in reducing stigma and increasing forms of support. This education would not just be for young people, but for ‘everyone, especially parents’ around mental health issues, causes and solutions.

As well as increasing access to mental health support and education, young people noted the importance of everyday activities such as being with friends, watching football, going to youth centers and clubs. Such changes can give young people more opportunities to ‘focus on goals’ and be themselves in difficult circumstances.

## Cost of living

Providing assistance with the cost of living, various forms of financial support were mentioned by young people. Some examples include:

- ‘Teaching young people how to save money.’
- ‘Sign-positing financial support.’
- ‘Subsidies in energy and food – necessities.’
- ‘Free school meals.’

As mentioned, when discussing poverty, a lack of money or stable finances can lead to a lack of necessities such as food, heating, and clothes. Many responses to tackling the cost of living therefore surrounded providing food and cutting prices to make such necessities more accessible. This includes ‘normalising that help is ok.’ Compared to the findings from the 2023 Hope Hack, where it was noted that the burden of poverty manifests itself differently for children and young people than it does for adults, the 2024 findings reveal young people’s awareness and experience of poverty in the cost-of-living crisis.

## Food Poverty

Providing assistance with the cost-of-living links closely to young people’s recommendations for tackling food poverty too. Like in the 2023 Hope Hack, free school meals were discussed frequently, as well as when discussing the cost of living, suggesting the pertinence of this to young people. One young person felt that free school meals should be ‘for everyone as everyone should have the same support to get the same meal.’

Extending this from schools, young people often suggested cheaper food, ‘readily available (free) food for certain groups in the public.’ One way of achieving this is through food banks, pantries, and the involvement of charities in the community. Other initiatives such as wonky fruit and veg boxes were also proposed by young people. Suggestions made in 2023 reflect this, but also included the benefits of having nutritionists at foodbanks and ensuring the food donated is culturally appropriate.



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However, the rise of food banks across the country can be viewed as a consequence of poverty and inequality itself, and so this means tackling the financial issues at the heart of food poverty. With young people suggesting things such as ‘going hungry’ and training ‘your body to survive longer periods without food,’ it appears there is little hope or confidence in the situation improving positively for them. This places emphasis on the need to not just offer food where needed, but to support financial stability in the long term so that people don’t need to think about these alternatives. A similar sentiment of needing systemic change rather than a short-term fix was shared in the 2023 Hope Hack findings.

### Public Transport

Making public transport more affordable and accessible to reduce issues caused by poverty and inequality was recommended by young people. This can be achieved in multiple ways:

- ‘Free travel passes such as Greater Manchester.’
- ‘24-hour busses.’
- ‘Cheaper fares and better bus timetables.’
- ‘Have more schemes for those who can’t access public transportation.’
- ‘Help from school/work.’

As highlighted in the 2023 Hope Hack, more affordable transport can ‘reduce barriers to accessing education, training, employment opportunities and recreational activities.’

### School Uniforms

As in 2023, young people recognised the cost of school uniforms. Similarly to the topics already mentioned, to reduce inequality in school settings for young people facing poverty, young people would like support from schools and other organisations to make their uniform more accessible. Suggestions include:

- ‘Making uniform free for struggling families.’
- ‘Vouchers for uniforms to be cheaper.’
- ‘Free uniforms if you’re under a certain income.’

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- ‘Not having so much pressure to wear exactly the right uniform.’
- ‘Second-hand uniforms to be made available.’
- ‘Ask the school for any spare uniform that they have.’

While many young people provided alternatives to the expense of school uniforms, others’ ideas again represent a lack of confidence that things can be different. Implying resourcefulness to ‘buy sizes bigger’ or use ‘hand me downs,’ it becomes evident through their responses how young people are already coping and finding their own solutions to not being able to afford a uniform. Support should be in place to ensure this does not have to be a concern for them.

## Education and employment opportunities

In 2023, young people discussed the problem of not feeling prepared for life outside of school, especially in terms of life skills. Many felt that they were not being adequately prepared for employment and that they weren’t being given opportunities to build their skills and experience in the workplace. This sentiment was shared by the young people spoken to in 2024, who explored how accessibility can restrict these opportunities further.

Not all young people will have the same access to education and employment opportunities for various reasons. This can be because of, but not limited to, not knowing the opportunity is there in the first place, not being able to get to a certain place due to transport links or expenses, or because of a disability. Telling young people what is available to them is the first step in reducing this knowledge gap, and not ‘just the small circle who can be accessed easier.’ This means services and organisations going out of their way to reach young people, rather than waiting for young people to come to them or relying on existing contacts and relationships.

Then, it is important to make these opportunities accessible to young people once they know what is there. This includes helping them to ‘find education or a job that is near to them’ and ‘creating more finding schemes for students who are struggling.’ Others suggested engaging with young people who have ‘gone down different paths.’

Higher education was also highlighted, particularly the cost of this and how it can be inaccessible to some as a result. A response to this would be to have free university courses ‘like in Scotland and more places taking on young people for paid apprenticeships.’ Moreover, young people stated that ‘it’s difficult to get jobs nowadays when under 18 but over school leaving age.’ As a result, jobs ‘should be more open to hiring younger people.’

## Accessibility

Accessibility can mean different things for different young people, which can mean tailoring things ‘based on the person’ and having ‘more awareness of different disabilities.’ Increasing accessibility can reduce levels of inequality.

Improving physical accessibility includes ‘having more places with wheelchair access ramps and lifts,’ having ‘more handicap spots,’ ‘more benches for people to sit down, especially for those struggling with their health,’ and ‘having affordable ways to have food delivered.’

But not all disabilities are visible, which can mean having more activities available for a range of different needs. More free sensory spaces were recommended for young people on the spectrum to use, ‘especially in therapy.’

Affordability, availability, and accessibility are strongly linked, as mentioned when discussing public transport. For one young person, it is important that ‘everything is accessible to everyone without having to pay extra for it.’ However, it could be a case of having more youth clubs or more transport links, for example, so there are more opportunities to access.

“The phrase ‘not having enough’ was repeated in young people’s understandings of poverty, whether this be enough ‘money,’ enough ‘resources,’ or enough to ‘live on.’”

## Poverty and Inequality



## Other:

Young people were given the opportunity to say any more around what could make a positive difference to those experiencing poverty and inequality. Seeking support was frequently referred to, whether this be from 'teachers or youth workers,' which implies the significance of a trusted adult. This was closely related to people being kinder to one another, 'coming together, helping and accepting others more.' This could include organisations creating 'discreet care packages.'

Safe spaces also appear as important as trusted adults, which can be achieved by funding youth organisations or having more education around diversity, for example. This can involve free or cheaper transport, free cultural excursions and healthcare that is easier to access.

Many suggestions included references to the government, such as the 'government helping out' or 'government investment.' As in 2023, young people recognised the importance of the political landscape in adding to poverty. Finally, young people discussed changes to social policy, including more social housing, more funding going 'into institutions like the job centre,' and 'higher minimum wages,' as some felt it is unfair that 16-year-olds can do the same job as those in their 20s but be paid less.

## Community Safety

On the theme of community safety, young people were asked where in the community they do and don't feel safe, and why. They were then asked to consider what would make them feel safer, with the opportunity to offer recommendations on how to achieve this.

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### Safe locations in the community

In analysing the data, it's evident that young people perceive certain locations within the community as safe havens. These include homes, youth clubs, schools, and specific community centres. For one young person who identified home, college and Our Place as their safe spaces, this was because of 'people who make [them] happy,' are 'supportive,' and make them feel that they can be themselves.

Homes are particularly valued for the protection and support offered by family members. Young people feel safe at home due to the presence of family members who offer protection and support. The familiarity of the environment contributes to a sense of security, allowing individuals to be themselves without fear of judgment or harm. This can also be extended to other family members' homes, such as a grandparent's or aunties.

As well as homes, youth clubs and community centres provide a supportive environment with caring staff and opportunities for socialization. For young people, these spaces are valuable due to the supportive staff, opportunities for socialization, and the sense of belonging they offer 'because there is a diverse range of people who are usually friendly and accepting.' Staff members are perceived as caring and attentive, providing a safe environment for personal growth and interaction.

Although it was mentioned less than other places, for some young people, schools are trusted environments where individuals feel supported by teachers and peers. Trust in the school community, including teachers and peers, fosters a sense of safety. The young people concerned feel comfortable expressing themselves within this environment, knowing they are surrounded by supportive individuals.

When considering why young people feel safe in these spaces, it appears to be closely tied to the presence of supportive people, a sense of belonging, and familiarity with the environment. In other cases, diversity and identification can offer feelings of safety. One young person, for example, said that they mostly feel safe with 'other black people' because 'they will have experienced most of the stuff I have experienced.' This differs to 2023, where young people said it was important not to 'rely on others to feel safe.'

## Unsafe locations in the community

Conversely, individuals also identify several locations within the community as unsafe. These include streets at night, specific areas known for criminal activities, schools, and parks. Feelings of unsafety are attributed to concerns regarding crime, harassment, and the presence of intimidating individuals or groups.

In 2023, young people did not feel safe at night or where it was dark. Similarly, this year, streets at night evoke fears of robbery, harassment, encountering gangs, and feeling more 'vulnerable because there's less visibility.' Harassment at nighttime has involved homophobic and transphobic incidents where young people 'don't feel protected,' especially around bars and pubs. Harassment relating to someone's identity was cited multiple times at parks and in the city centre as well, in both the day and night, with feelings of vulnerability being compounded when alone.

Moreover, for young people with sensory issues, spaces associated with the nighttime can be overstimulating because of crowds and can be 'too loud,' making them 'uneasy.' Concerns about rising crime rates, including knife crime, also contribute to feelings of insecurity, as 'you are always told to watch out for that, and you hear bad stories about it.' It is the uncertainty related to this which promotes fear in young people, as they 'feel unsure of [their] safety.'

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## Community Safety

While some young people see schools as safe spaces because of supportive teachers and peers, for others, schools are associated with bullying and lack of support. Mentioned more frequently than in 2023, instances of bullying, lack of support from peers or staff, and incidents of harassment or intimidation contribute to feelings of unsafety within the school environment. Issues with inadequate security measures, such as unlocked doors in school toilets, also contribute to perceptions of unsafety.

Specific areas with criminal activities are perceived as unsafe due to the presence of individuals engaging in illegal behaviour. Areas known for criminal activities, such as Lodge Lane, North Park, Concert Square, and County Road, are perceived as unsafe due to the presence of individuals engaging in illegal behaviour, such as 'paedophiles roaming around' on Lodge Lane. For young people in 2023, attacks, verbal abuse, knife crime and gangs were noted as issues which make them feel unsafe. Similar concerns about encountering gangs, drug users, and potential harassment contribute to feelings of insecurity in 2024.

Bringing many of these places together, one young person stated they don't feel safe in 'places where I haven't been before, or towards the north side of the city, town at night, and by myself.' The ability to trust or not to trust people, as already indicated, determines whether this young person feels safe or not. For example, they do not like being in town at night 'due to people being under the influence and them burring boundaries' which become harder to enforce. They also mention their disability, and the need to be able to rely on someone to support them in public spaces, so they would 'rather be with family as I know they will look out for me.'

## Factors contributing to feeling safer in the community

Various suggestions were provided to improve feelings of safety within the community. Commonly repeated suggestions include more streetlights, greater police presence, and more community centres and youth spaces.

Infrastructure improvements such as increased street lighting and security cameras were suggested by young people to improve feelings of safety when in public places. By increasing lighting and installing more CCTV cameras in streets, parks and alleys, young people feel that this visibility and enhanced surveillance will deter criminal activity. Others considered more 24-hour shops to increase activity and surveillance in the community.

## Community Safety

Furthermore, increased community engagement through initiatives like more community centres and youth spaces can provide safe spaces for socialising and recreational activities, something recommended by young people in 2023. Young people raised the importance of these centres being 'free or affordable,' so that more young people have opportunities to come into contact with trusted adults, such as youth workers, who can offer guidance and support. This also helps to 'keep... people off the streets.' Other forms of community engagement could take the form of having a greater police presence to address issues of crime and anti-social behaviour. Discussion of the police did not extend to building trust between them and young people as a way of breaking down barriers, which was promoted by young people in 2023.

Community engagement can also take the form of social interventions such as community events, where a sense of community engagement and cohesion can be fostered. Education and training as a form of social intervention were suggested by young people as well, with the aim of preventing bullying and anti-social behaviour. This could involve 'people being aware of additional needs' and knowing about 'safety plans.' Campaigns to reduce stigma and promote inclusivity within the community were encouraged by young people, too. This could be a 'pushback against misinformation' as there are 'stereotypes around young people.'

Away from the community, young people considered what they could do individually for their own safety and the safety of others. Several respondents mentioned feeling safer when accompanied by someone they know, highlighting the importance of social support networks. However, one young person stated that they feel safer 'not going out by myself,' which can become isolating and exclusionary if they are not made to feel confident in public spaces on their own.

## Solutions and recommendations

Young people provided a range of solutions and recommendations to address safety concerns. These include increased community engagement through initiatives like more detached youth workers and community events, enhanced security measures, awareness-raising efforts, and addressing underlying social issues such as poverty and inequality.



## Community Safety

Increased community engagement, as already discussed, can involve raising awareness of safety issues, having more detached youth workers, and holding more community events, something raised in 2023. Young people raised the need for more detached youth workers who engage with young people to provide support and guidance as a preventative approach to anti-social behaviour. Creating more community events can equally be a form of prevention, by enabling a supportive environment where ‘people look out for one another.’

Enhanced security measures such as improved lighting and awareness raising efforts were suggested by young people as a way of improving feelings of safety, both explored in the previous section. Further to this, some young people highlighted the importance of addressing poverty and inequality, as well as ‘access to education and employment opportunities as these factors can contribute to feelings of insecurity.’ This was discussed further in 2023 than it was this year, as young people then called for the importance of high-quality employment and training to improve wellbeing and economic prospects for young people.

Addressing these suggestions requires collaboration between local authorities, community organisations, and residents to implement effective strategies that meet the diverse needs of the community. By prioritizing safety and fostering a sense of belonging, communities can work towards creating environments where all individuals feel safe and supported.

Overall, one young person concluded, ‘there are several things that can help people feel safer in the community, it’s just if people are willing to do the effort.’



## Education

In relation to the wider theme of education, young people were asked about what the terms education and learning meant to them. In addition to this, the education section of the survey covered the topic of barriers to education and learning as well as the top issues young people believe should be prioritised in education. This part of the survey also asked young people about what made them feel safe or unsafe in their school or other educational setting, as well as what an ideal school would include.

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### What is education?

When asked about the meaning of education, most young people saw the two things as intrinsically linked. There was a sense that young people viewed education as something beneficial which would provide them with a level of opportunity they could otherwise not access. A number of responses picked up on the theme of opportunity, referring to the power of education to 'improve' their lives or create a better future. This was a sentiment captured in approximately 20 responses, with others referring to education as a place of knowledge in addition to being a 'safe space'.

The majority of responses to this question were positive, with some noting that although they consider certain aspects of their education 'boring,' they acknowledge its value and the fact it will 'help' them. As one young person stated, 'education means to me the facts in life that can be boring but help you.' However, in the small number of negative responses, there was a sense that education is perhaps not always engaging or relevant to young people and that it provokes a lot of pressure or stress in some young people.

In comparison to the 2023 Hope Hack, the responses seem slightly more positive, however some themes apparent in both surveys are education being stressful, as well as being a 'one-size fits all' system which does not work for everybody.

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## What is learning?

Similarly, when asked about the definition of learning, a lot of responses cited education, suggesting the two go hand in hand. Numerous responses referred to the idea of improvement both in terms of knowledge and skills as well as on a broader personal basis.

Others picked up on the theme of learning not being limited solely to education, with some responses referencing 'life lessons' and emphasising that things can be 'taught by anyone - teacher or parent'. This implies that whilst young people recognise the link between education and learning, they also view learning as a valuable aspect of their general lives which can be carried across into different settings.

There was an emphasis on the importance of discovery and 'learning new things' in a number of responses as well as having access to education and gaining the opportunity to practice newly acquired skills.

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## Barriers to education and learning for young people

When asked about barriers in education for young people, there was quite a variety in responses in terms of the issues raised. It was quite striking that in comparison to the first two questions which seemed to produce answers that at least alluded to themes present in the majority of other responses, this question appeared to prompt answers which presented different problems as the most significant barriers to education.

The issue of bullying was mentioned in a significant number of responses, with others similarly alluding to harassment and general feelings of intimidation. There was a notion in many of the responses that safety was a major concern, with some highlighting that travelling to school felt unsafe, one example of this being 'fights on the school bus'.

## Education

Furthermore, identity was mentioned in various forms, particularly regarding protected characteristics. Some responses expressed the need for more opportunities for disabled people in education, noting that their disabilities may result in them being treated unfairly or being taken advantage of.

Neurodiversity was also mentioned several times, with the consensus being that both neurodiverse students and those perhaps experiencing mental health difficulties are not adequately supported. Other themes of inequality discussed were the issue of some students having language barriers and the idea that schools are ill-equipped in adapting to the needs of students from refugee or asylum seeker families.

As highlighted in the 2023 Hope Hack, wealth inequality and the pressures associated with financial difficulty were mentioned, including the cost of essentials such as school uniforms and how this can be a difficulty for all young people to access. Some responses extended this further, indicating that the education system is divisive and that people who are privileged can access a better standard of education and learning. Some also noted that the cost of higher education is unaffordable, and that this may discourage or at least evoke a sense of reluctance in students who are academically able in progressing or taking these opportunities.

## Top issues in education

Themes of mental health and bullying were raised when young people were asked about the top issues in education. In addition to this, there was a feeling that young people believe the education system can be too 'strict,' or can be difficult to navigate for neurodivergent students as well as those with disabilities. Equally, young people can face challenges in education regarding both their learning and bullying from other students because of protected characteristics such as race, gender, and class. Issues such as racism, bigotry ('prejudice towards someone based on their personal appearance') and a lack of diversity were similarly highlighted in the 2023 Hope Hack.

Moreover, young people acknowledged the 'lack of funding' in education noting that there are not enough teachers and that class sizes are often too large. This can be complicated when there are 'loud people' and 'favouritism' in class, or staff who are 'undertrained.'

## Education

Additionally, there was a sense that young people feel change is needed in education to ensure it feels reflective of the world around them with some feeling that a lot of their learning is not relevant to them.

In 2023, young people cited there being ‘too much pressure’ in school, that ‘exams aren’t a true reflection or prepare students for the real world,’ and the absence of free travel. This year, young people also noted the pressure associated with education both for exams and homework but also more generally. For example, one young person noted the lack of universal free school meals and that ‘too much stress put on young people’ which ‘affects their mental health a lot.’

## Feelings of safety in school/college/university

When asked about what made them feel safe in education, a large proportion of responses expressed the importance of teachers and other members of staff who were approachable and able to ‘offer the right or suitable support for you.’ Young people also mentioned having ‘trustworthy friends’ around them as a major factor in them feeling safe in education. Having the option of good friends and staff around them ensures that young people know ‘there is always someone to talk to’ when in school.

Also important to young people is the environment and atmosphere in schools. Some mentioned fences and gates, as well as having ‘security employed,’ which can contribute to their feelings of safety. Knowing that they are ‘being protected’ in this way, while by teachers against bullying and judgement too, can be a source of relief for young people. Others recommended the need for schools to be a ‘peaceful environment’ for them to feel safe.

Some young people mentioned specific forms of intervention or support such as being able to access sensory rooms, break-out rooms, or quiet areas to calm down if they need to do this. Others mentioned extra-curricular activities which contribute to a feeling of safety such as an LGBTQ+ club or student union. This is due to ‘inclusivity that is visible’ and the encouragement of ‘openness to different people.’

## Feelings of unsafety in school/college/university

When asked about what made them feel unsafe in education, bullying, peer pressure, 'mean people,' and forms of discrimination such as racism or homophobia were mentioned frequently, as in 2023. This could involve 'being treated differently,' being made to sit 'next to a bully,' being around 'aggressive people,' and having people 'threatening you.' Some young people expanded on this by expressing that there were no safe spaces in their place of education.

Furthermore, some responses mentioned the gendered nature of school toilets and uniforms as a cause of anxiety for them. However, it is also important to acknowledge that other responses mentioned mixed toilets as something which made them feel unsafe.

Surrounding uniform, some young people mentioned the cost of uniform as a source of anxiety, with others expressing the view that uniform policies are too strict.

The pressures involved in school as a student can be complicated further by 'teachers expecting too much' and feeling 'unsupported' by staff. While some young people expressed the importance of teachers to making them feel safe in school, others stated that teachers had been aggressive or were perhaps ignorant to certain challenges facing young people or aspects of their identity. Compared to 2023, where there was mention of 'communication training and more mental health support for teachers,' this year young people did not consider what support should be made available for teachers and staff.

## Suggestions for what an 'ideal' school would include

When asked about what an 'ideal' school would include, young people had a range of responses. Several responses addressed the topic of bullying, saying that an ideal school would be free of bullying, or at least have significantly reduced instances of bullying.

## Education

One young person felt that schools often ignore ‘issues with bullying and discrimination because they don’t want to ruin their image.’ To counter this, an ideal school would have ‘good policies against bullying’ and ‘safety plans shared with pupils.’

The importance of having access to positive safe spaces was equally raised multiple times. Safe spaces could be promoted by having ‘a good mental health team and all teachers trained in children’s mental health,’ as well as the ability to access therapy. For other young people, a safe space could be a smaller classroom or a gender-neutral restroom.

What young people can engage with when in school was raised too, as young people shared a desire for:

- ‘Loads of sports facilities.’
- ‘More educational trips.’
- ‘Culture days.’
- ‘Good food.’
- ‘Arts programmes.’
- ‘More clubs.’
- ‘Theatre.’

For young people, an ideal school seems to extend beyond typical classroom-based, academic focused learning to allow for ‘more access to different types of learning.’

## Education

For young people, an ideal school seems to extend beyond typical classroom-based, academic focussed learning to allow for 'more access to different types of learning.' This can come from 'teachers and external services,' indicating the multifaceted collaboration required between services to provide young people with an education they find valuable. Not 'one size fits all,' as already raised, but 'basing things off the individual needs and skills of students,' and 'changing their system based on what the students want.' There was a sense that young people feel there should be a greater level of diversity in terms of the way lessons are taught or perhaps the options that are available in schools as learning is not geared towards all learning styles and does not suit some young people.

A desire for accessibility was apparent in many responses, with some expressing the need for specific accessible facilities such as more wheelchair ramps, lifts, and sensory spaces. Further, young people expressed the need for equality of opportunity. Some feel that 'smarter students are prioritised' and that not all students are treated equally or given the chance to get involved in certain activities.

Some young people stated that uniforms should be free - others suggested that uniform should be banned altogether. A middle ground encouraged by one young person was to have 'no uniform or very basic uniform.' Furthermore, a similar issue of cost was raised when young people raised that their ideal school would have 'free meals and transport,' providing support for every student.

## Solutions and recommendations

When asked about specific solutions and recommendations to address the issues raised surrounding education and learning, young people had several suggestions involving raising awareness of support, accessibility improvements, and more education around diversity.

While young people would like more support available in schools, there needs to be a greater level of awareness around where this support can be accessed. Young people also commented on the importance of safe spaces for students so that they can have somewhere to 'safely voice their issues and... talk to someone,' as young people in 2023 recommended the importance of freedom of expression and space to talk.



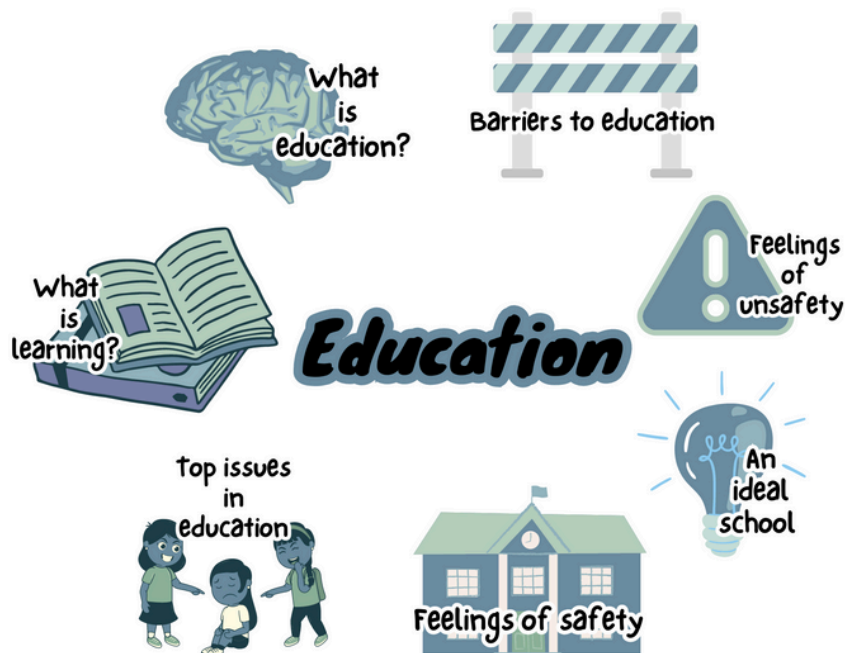
## Education

Extending this supportive atmosphere further, young people raised the need for more teachers in schools, and for these teachers ‘not to be horrible’ or ‘be able to shout in our faces.’ Treating students with respect is the first step in providing them with a safe space and trusted adults.

Helping young people feel safer in school also involves creating an accepting atmosphere, where there is education and training on diversity and ‘social issues.’ This can involve teaching young people to ‘accept others for who they are’ and to be ‘more open minded in teaching.’ Additionally, young people recommended tougher consequences for bullying and hate crime in schools.

Moreover, as raised in 2023, schools should be more accessible for all students. One young person noted that ‘schools can be more accessible like providing ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms for students with mobility challenges. Schools can be more understanding with mental health, poverty, and dyslexia.’ They go on to say that not many teachers are understanding of learning difficulties and assume that things such as overlays are ‘optional’ when they aren’t. Instead, resources and support should be provided for students with disabilities, ‘such as laptops, support staff, and 1-1s.’

Finally, young people would like education to have a focus on ‘life skills’ which will help them in their adult lives. Young people in 2023 believed there should be ‘more opportunities for practical learning,’ while this year the same desire was expressed. For example, one young person would like to learn ‘how to live alone.’



## Hate Crime and Discrimination

In relation to the broader theme of Hate Crime and Discrimination, young people were asked to define these terms, in addition to whether they had any personal experience of Hate Crime or Discrimination they felt comfortable to share. Following this, respondents were asked about spaces they considered either safe or unsafe, and why these may prompt feelings of either inclusion or exclusion respectively. Finally, young people were asked about specific recommendations or solutions to the issues of Hate Crime and Discrimination discussed throughout this section.

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### What does discrimination mean?

We asked young people to describe what they thought discrimination was, in order to gain an insight into how much knowledge they have. From the responses we received, it is evident that many young people have a strong understanding of the basics of what discrimination is, with many focussing on it being the mistreatment of others who are different from them. The themes of difference and judgement repeatedly came up in responses, with young people predominantly being able to explain a strong definition of diversity and demonstrating a high level of empathy.

Some examples of these definitions include:

- ‘Making judgements or comments about people because they are different.’
- ‘Treating someone unfairly based on something out of their control.’
- ‘Discrimination is when someone is treated unfairly purely because of the other person’s hatred of a characteristic such as race, age, class, gender, sexuality.’
- ‘When you are treated different than the other people coz they treat you not right coz you are different to them.’
- ‘To be rude to someone due to something about someone like their gender, race, religion, and sexuality.’

The following definition: ‘To leave someone out based on a physical feature’ highlights a reoccurring theme throughout the question’s responses, with some young people saying that it was the physical characteristics of someone’s appearance that could lead to discrimination occurring.

## Hate Crime and Discrimination

As a result of this, despite the overwhelmingly strong level of understanding, it is significant to note that there may be opportunity for further learning regarding the diverse range of experiences in society, and how it is not only physical characteristics that can lead to hate and prejudice.

In the report published for Hope Hack 2023, discrimination was looked at specifically through the lens of racism and social division. We decided to extend the scope of our research to include all forms of discrimination and hate crime, to obtain a broadened understanding of the subject. Whilst these are different topics, we believe there are still some important considerations to be made when reflecting between the two sets of findings.

Young people demonstrated a high level of understanding throughout both research projects when it comes to what different forms of discrimination mean. Young people also expressed a desire to learn more about other cultures throughout the 2023 report, which is replicated in our findings, and many recognised that social division was often because of judgement of differences, a theme that was also prominent in our conversations.

## Experiences of discrimination

We asked young people if they have ever witnessed or experienced discrimination. Over 70% of respondents declared that they had, indicating that a large proportion of young people are being exposed to discrimination, with many respondents also being in a younger age category (12-16). Whilst it does suggest that more younger people in Merseyside are gaining an understanding of what discrimination is at an earlier age, which can be seen as a positive step to creating a more understanding and inclusive society, it also demonstrates that many young people are seeing this happen in their lives more regularly. This could potentially be due to a multitude of reasons including the rise in unmoderated discriminatory behaviour on social media platforms and an increase in stereotyping and negative bias towards certain groups, particularly in the media.

## Hate Crime and Discrimination

### What is hate crime?

We also asked young people about their understanding of what a hate crime is. Upon reflecting on the results, the level of knowledge towards this topic, whilst still strong in a portion of responses, is less widespread than when asked about discrimination. There is a very wide range of understanding between responses, and they vary in their accuracy. This suggests that, especially compared to discrimination, there is less comprehension on what determines an act of discrimination to become a hate crime. As a result, there may be a risk that young people, especially those that are younger, may not understand how or when to report acts as a criminal offence, even if they know they are wrong or discriminatory. There may be an opportunity for learning when it comes to this, and it is recommended that there is awareness raised around what a hate crime is, and how to report one.

Below are examples of definitions from young people:

- ‘Bullying someone for their appearance or beliefs.’
- ‘Someone being offended by someone being rude to them for something about them.’
- ‘Hate crime is a crime due to hate.’
- ‘People being made fun of.’
- ‘An act of disrespecting an area.’
- ‘To commit a crime due to someone’s race, sexuality, religion, gender etc.’

As can be seen within the definitions above, there is a wide range in levels of understanding, and a lack of focus on the criminal aspect of a hate crime. Whilst some young people do associate hate crime being a negative thing, many definitions appeared to learn more into the ‘hate.’ Only a minority of responses described hate crime as a physical act, which may reinforce that young people are associating discrimination and hate crimes as a verbal, social or online act rather than a form of physical violence towards a particular group.

## Hate Crime and Discrimination

### Experiences of hate crime

When asked if they have ever experienced or witnessed a hate crime, 54% of respondents answered 'yes.' Whilst this is less than the 73% who responded yes to witnessing or experiencing discrimination, it is still a concerningly high percentage of young people who engaged. However, it is important to be aware that due to the wide range in levels of understanding demonstrated in responses to the previous question, this figure may not be accurately representative of young people's experiences, due to a lack of understanding. As aforementioned, it is important to ensure all young people are aware of the differences between discrimination and hate crimes, the impact on both victims and perpetrators and how to report an incident.

### Spaces that make young people feel safe and included

Young people were also asked what spaces they felt safe, and the reasons why. Many of the responses we received indicated the idea of a 'safe space' for young people primarily depended on the people and atmosphere within it, rather than the physical location of the space. Young people described how they felt safe in these spaces due to an inclusive, welcoming, and accessible atmosphere with opportunities to speak with professionals and peers who will listen and understand them. A few examples of these responses are:

- 'Because everyone understands each other.'
- 'To talk to people.'
- 'Because they have people to speak to.'
- 'They include you in all activities.'
- 'Depends on the people.'
- 'Just a judgement free space that's welcoming.'
- 'Gives young people a safe space to be themselves.'

When asked what specific places promote and foster these atmospheres, many responded with youth centres, clubs, or groups with other young people. These responses reinforce the significance of providing the opportunity for all young people to access accessible youth spaces in their area, regardless of age and their postcode.

## Hate Crime and Discrimination

These spaces are critical to the development of many young people, allowing them to feel safe in a space when, as indicated by the responses to the following question, they do not feel safe at school, at home or other areas. Engaging in these spaces may be the only times when young people can speak to a trusted adult and be safeguarded from risk, meaning it is critical that funding and resources are provided to these spaces across Merseyside, and training is given to youth workers to ensure they are able to support all young people.

Safe and unsafe spaces were also explored within the 2023 report. Parallel to our findings, young people revealed that they felt safer when they were with people who they felt would understand them, and when they felt listened to, included and a sense of belonging. This reflects the findings in the 2024 research, with most responses indicating the feeling of safety is more dependent on the people and atmosphere within it, rather than the physical characteristics and locations of the spaces.

## Spaces that make young people feel unsafe and excluded

Young people were also asked where they felt unsafe and excluded, in addition to why these spaces make them feel that way. Many responses from young people were that schools/education settings do not feel safe to them. Young people described how these were often places where bullying and discrimination was common, making them feel unsafe. It is evident that the education system is not fit for purpose for all young people, specifically those who may be from diverse backgrounds.

To tackle this, it is recommended that there are more opportunities for young people in Merseyside to learn about a diverse range of people's experiences, both inside and outside of education, to attempt to improve understanding and build respect towards different backgrounds, beliefs, and identities. One way to achieve this is through a peer support/learning programme, where young people can interact with others and learn from those who may have a different background to them. This can help to improve visibility and create a more tolerant and inclusive environment in education settings, which would reduce bullying and discrimination.

## Hate Crime and Discrimination

There is also a requirement for further support for those who may be victims of bullying and discriminatory behaviour, as evident from the research, as it is clear those young people are still feeling unsafe attending these settings now, even if the event(s) occurred a long time ago, creating lasting damage for the individual and their mental health, which needs to be addressed. All staff working with young people in education settings should be able to identify signs of bullying and know how to correctly respond to these incidents and support the young people involved.

Below are some examples of responses from young people who felt unsafe at school, specifically, the reasons why they felt unsafe:

- ‘In schools’ people can be ableist and homophobic.’
- ‘The teachers think they know best they don’t listen they don’t care.’
- ‘Because people get bullied for being different.’
- ‘Bullying.’
- ‘Fights.’
- ‘Harder to include people.’

In addition to education settings, some young people also stated that online spaces were places in which they felt unsafe and excluded. One individual said that: ‘In online spaces, people can get away with most things as they are anonymous, meaning bullying and hate crime can happen,’ with another explaining how ‘bullying...all carries over onto online spaces and social media.’

When asked if they have ever experienced or witnessed a hate crime, 54% of respondents answered ‘yes.’

## Hate Crime and Discrimination

It is important that all young people should be informed about online safety and how to report online content and incidents, especially with the rise in social media apps such as Tik-Tok, a video platform where young people could easily be exposed to inappropriate and harmful content without sufficient precautions. There may often be hateful and dangerous messages conveyed to young people on these platforms who could be impressionable and vulnerable, further reinforcing the need for both young people, and their parents/carers to be aware and knowledgeable on the dangers of these sites and how to keep themselves and others safe.

When it comes to unsafe spaces for young people, in the 2023 report, school was also a prominent theme, with young people suggesting that racism wasn't understood or taken seriously by staff, and that there wasn't enough awareness being raised to the issue. Whilst our findings did not explore racism explicitly, there was a reoccurring theme of young people feeling unsafe at school due to overall discrimination, and a consensus that a lack of awareness, education and understanding towards diverse groups often contributed towards facilitating an environment where bullying towards those who are 'different' to their peers could occur.

Contrasting to our findings, in the 2023 report, there was a lack of focus on the online aspect of hate and discrimination. Throughout our research, young people brought attention to this issue, and explained how online spaces can often be unsafe and dangerous due to discriminatory language. Whilst this could suggest this issue has been escalated by the rise in social media use amongst younger generations in the last two years, which may have resulted in a higher percentage of young people being aware and/or exposed to these issues, due to the relative short timeframe between the two reports, it is also important to note that this may be due to the difference in subject matter discussed, despite their similarities. However, this is a topic that is still worth exploring further.

## Solutions and recommendations

Some other recommendations on how to tackle the issues surround discrimination raised by young people are as followed:

- 'More support and awareness!'
- 'Educate people on people different from themselves so they can realise that they aren't bad in any way and are actually very similar.'



## Hate Crime and Discrimination

- ‘Teach children about being different and help them understand we are all different.’
- ‘Having an online space for young people to use to talk to people that can help them, it would be only for young people and people that can help.’
- ‘More visibility around people's differences, people with lived experience coming in to speak rather than teachers.’
- ‘Try and do more culturally different events.’
- ‘Just raise awareness.’
- ‘Tell them it’s not just offensive but an offence.’

As can be seen by these recommendations suggested by young people, many of the responses centre on the awareness and understanding of their peers. This suggests young people believe that a lack of awareness and knowledge is the primary cause for young people to exhibit hate and discrimination towards their peers, and that the main method of challenging this is to improve visibility, normalising people’s differences to create more inclusive, accepting, and respectful environments. Young people specify that this should be done through people with lived experience, rather than teachers, and that cultural events should be embedded throughout the curriculum and entire school year, to ensure they are not tokenistic, and allow all young people to learn about a diverse range of backgrounds.

It is also evident from the responses throughout our research that young people we spoke to predominantly want to learn more about different cultures and have displayed a high level of empathy and understanding to those who may be different from them. Therefore, it may be beneficial to upskill young people themselves to be the ones mentoring and educating their peers. By creating a peer mentorship/learning programme, this would not only empower young people by giving them responsibility and the opportunities to develop, but also improve the chances that their peers may listen to their experiences and have a positive impact on their behaviour and tolerance, reducing the likelihood of discrimination and hate.

Any organisation working with young people must also regularly undertake training in diverse backgrounds and experiences. This should include Neurodiversity, gender identity and sexuality, race, religion, and disability, ensuring any individual working with young people has up to date knowledge of diverse backgrounds and the skills and knowledge of how to support all the young people they work with.

## Hate Crime and Discrimination

Looking at the solutions and recommendations raised by young people in both sets of findings, it is apparent that many remained the same or similar. Young people throughout both discussed raising more awareness to issues surrounding discrimination, suggesting more cultural events, education, and representation. Many of the solutions raised in the 2023 report were associated to improving education settings, in relation to reducing racism and improving visibility. These included: Posters and shows on different topics, cultural events within school, and training teachers on how to effectively respond to incidents.

Whilst in our findings, we explored a wider topic of discrimination, we also learned that many young people believe that improving awareness, for both young people and professionals, on a wide range of differences was a primary factor in reducing discrimination and hate crime. However, it was evident from many of the young people we spoke to, that they wanted these to be implemented not just in education settings (as primarily focussed on in the 2023 report's solutions), but also in youth clubs, mental health settings and other spaces where young people may frequently be, to ensure all young people can benefit from them.



## Physical and Mental Wellbeing

In relation to Physical and Mental Wellbeing as a theme, young people were asked what their understanding of these two terms are. They were then asked to consider where they could access support relating to their physical and mental wellbeing, as well as to indicate the barriers that may stop them or other young people from receiving this support. Finally, young people were asked to come up with solutions to the problems they raised throughout this section.

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### What does physical wellbeing mean?

From the responses we have gathered it's quite clear to see that young people really care for their physical wellbeing. There are common themes that show a clear understanding of what physical wellbeing means, such as:

- Being responsible surrounding hygiene.
- Caring about physical appearance/how you view yourself.
- Practicing self-care to look after yourself/listening to what your body needs.
- Keeping fit/going to the gym/partaking in sports/going on walks.
- Eating well/consuming good foods and drinks.
- Being physically safe/not hurting yourself.

These common themes tell us that the young people who answered the question have a solid grasp on the overall importance and maintaining of good physical wellbeing. One quote from a young person illustrates this: 'Physical wellbeing refers to the overall health and condition of your body. It includes factors such as maintaining a healthy weight, eating a balanced diet, getting regular exercise, and taking care of your physical health through activities like getting enough sleep and staying hydrated. It also involves taking care of your body by avoiding harmful substances.'

## Physical and Mental Wellbeing

### What does physical wellbeing mean?

Reviewing the data given for this question tells us that young people have a clear understanding that mental wellbeing, whilst connected to physical wellbeing, takes place in our thoughts, feelings, and mind. There are common themes that show a clear understanding of what mental wellbeing means, such as:

- Emotional regulation being key to a positive mental wellbeing.
- A positive mindset relating to a healthy mind.
- Outside stresses leading to a decline in mental wellbeing, such as college life and personal life.
- Outside positive influences leading to a positive mental wellbeing, such as making sure others are doing well and being a source of comfort for others, getting out in nature, having a routine, and following the five points of wellness.

There is a focus here on inner peace, coping mechanisms, and young people having the ability to rely on themselves for positive stimuli and the maintenance of mental wellbeing. Good relationships and embracing who you are were also responses from our survey. An overall summary of this was reflected in one young person's understanding of mental wellbeing: 'On the other hand, mental wellbeing refers to the state of your emotional and psychological health. It involves having a positive mindset, managing stress effectively, and being able to cope with the challenges and ups and downs of life. Mental wellbeing also includes having good self-esteem, feeling a sense of purpose and fulfilment, and maintaining healthy relationships with others.'

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## Physical and Mental Wellbeing

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## Finding support for physical wellbeing

When young people were asked where they would find support for their physical wellbeing, the responses fell into very clear categories:

- Doctors/GP surgeries/school nurse/NHS.
- Youth worker/youth centers/youth clubs.
- Family/friends/partners/guardians.
- School clubs/college.
- Gym/fitness centers.
- Mental health organisations/therapist.

Not only were urgent physical wellbeing issues addressed by young people with answers such as A&E and doctors, but also preventative measures such as going to the gym and fitness clubs. Again, this would suggest that the young people taking part in this survey have a clear understanding of where to find support for their physical health. As seen in the 2023 Hope Hack, managing a healthy, active lifestyle seems to be just as important and relevant as dealing with issues that may need medical attention.

## Physical and Mental Wellbeing

### Finding support for mental wellbeing

When young people were asked where they would find support for their mental wellbeing, the responses fell into clear categories:

- Mental health organisations.
- Youth centers/individual youth workers/youth clubs.
- Family/friends/partners/guardians/trusted adult.
- NHS GPs.
- School mentor/staff.

The two most common answers for this question are family and friends, as well as youth spaces and youth workers. This shows that young people place high value on support coming from familiar places, we know a bond and trust are a vital part of a relationship working with young people, affirming that youth spaces hold great value to our young people.

### Barriers to accessing support

42 out of 49 responses show that young people can easily identify barriers to accessing support. The main barriers young people suggested are:

- Not being validated/not being believed by adults.
- Parents not agreeing that they need support.
- Barriers such as age, language, or finance.
- Unable to form trusting relationships with those offering support.
- Stigma around accessing support.
- Long waiting lists and lack of funding.
- Lack of proactive support from medical practitioners.
- Not knowing where to access support.
- Fear of doctors.
- Poverty and inequality.

## Physical and Mental Wellbeing

Similarly to issues raised in the theme of Poverty and Inequality, accessibility to physical and mental health services can be hindered by price, location, ability, and attitudes of others. As one young person stated, ‘not having access to public transport, technology to access support or neurodiversity means some therapy isn’t suitable for young people and they may need different types.’ Adding further to these barriers can be ‘stigma around receiving support.’

Levels of accessibility can also be reduced because of the quality of the service being provided. One young person highlighted that ‘a lot of GPs don’t know how to handle mental health issues and young people are often dismissed.’ This suggests that some professionals aren’t equipped to deal with certain problems and can therefore produce additional barriers as a result.

Moreover, sometimes it can be the service which is not equipped to meet certain needs and can become exclusionary to particular groups of young people – something which wasn’t raised in the 2023 Hope Hack. As one young person noted, ‘due to how some people identify, mental health services are not accessible to certain groups (such as BAME) as these services were not designed with these groups in mind. But these groups suffer the most with mental health due to the discrimination they face.’

## Solutions and recommendations

Solutions from the 2023 Hope Hack overwhelmingly focussed on access to mental health support in schools to improve levels of accessibility. This included ‘mental health days in schools,’ having ‘animals in schools,’ and increased ‘training for teachers and professionals to provide the capacity and capability to implement support.’ In 2024, there have been some suggestions of the role of education, such as making mental health a ‘subject in schools,’ having ‘signposting in schools,’ and ‘having doctors’ days in schools.’

However, the need for more support outside of school was also highlighted by young people in 2024. This could be ‘more local youth hubs,’ ‘more centres for young people to talk about their mental health,’ or ‘more safe spaces.’ Wherever a young person chooses to access support, they should feel safe and able to open up. Organisations, services, and professionals should ensure that ‘young people feel safe wherever they are’ as a first step in improving accessibility when receiving support. It is important to be ‘open minded and actually listen to what young people have to say, rather than just telling them their feelings are invalid.’

## Physical and Mental Wellbeing

This year, young people also discussed the importance of ‘shortening waiting times for support’ and having ‘more free support.’ One way in which this could be achieved is through securing ‘more funding,’ a sentiment shared by young people involved in the 2023 Hope Hack.

Mentioned less frequently this year than it was in 2023, is the ability to access sports, arts and other activities as a way of supporting physical and mental wellbeing.





## Youth Work

Regarding the wider theme of youth work, young people were asked more broadly about what youth work meant to them personally, as well as whether they knew how to access their local youth service and why they think youth work is important. Respondents were also asked about what their dream youth service would include and whether they had any recommendations that would improve or enhance the youth provision available in their own area.

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### What does youth work mean?

In this question young people talked about how youth work meant a lot to them. Several young people talked about youth services being a safe space and giving them resources and opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have, developing skills for the future and working intermetal health. Although we had so much positive feedback, it was highlighted that some areas, e.g. St Helens, didn't have any youth hubs or services to give them these experiences.

Young people spoke about the role of youth work as being an outlet for young people to express themselves, with numerous responses alluding to this theme of building young people's confidence and self-esteem:

- 'Working with young people to help them.'
- 'Engaging and supporting young people. To promote and empower young people to feel safe and play an active role.'
- 'Youth work is about allowing a safe space for young people to go and express themselves and try new things, learning things in an extracurricular sense outside of a school setting.'
- 'Youth work to me means supporting the community through empowering and providing a safe space for the youth.'

## Accessing local youth services

When asked in a survey, 85.42% of young people said they knew how to access their local youth support services. However, 14.58% said they felt unaware how to access these services. This shows we need to improve our accessibility so there isn't a percentage of young people being left out.

## Importance of youth work to young people

When talking about why youth hubs were important, young people talked about how these spaces made them feel safe. It was an alternative to being on the streets, and this was also seen to be a good way to educate young people in a different way than they are traditionally used to. Young people stated it gave them different opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have been aware of, helping them 'develop in an ever-changing world.'

As well as this, a lot of young people also talked about the friendly atmosphere of youth clubs, and how this provided them with a way to make friends with different people. A space where they can talk to people, be themselves and be heard whilst growing and developing in confidence and learning new skills.

Direct quotes from young people include:

'It gives them somewhere to go no matter their parent's income.'

'It gives them a trusted adult who isn't a parent who they feel safe to talk to and they can also have 'banter' with who again isn't their parent.'

'I have learnt how to recognise red-flags and how to spot good relationships and negative behaviours.'

'Youth workers could be the only point of support in a young person's life.'

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## Suggestions for a 'dream' youth service

When asked what a 'dream' youth service would look like, many young people mentioned wanting more variation in spaces and activities. This included the possibility of having different rooms dedicated to different activities, as well as the idea of having trips be more accessible. Some mentioned the addition of sensory spaces to improve the accessibility of the space. As in 2023, young people wanted 'well-funded and 'well-staffed' youth services, while some young people named their youth clubs as the dream youth service.

Compared to the 2023 Hope Hack, our results were very similar in themes and topics brought up. Young people want a place that is well funded with staff who can take the time to know and support them and who will take the time to know them. They want more spaces to go within their youth centers and to have their clubs be more accessible to more young people, this includes, age, region, and disabilities/neurodivergence. As well as still wanting more facilities and opportunities. Although some differences were that less young people talked about bullying as an issue in hubs, meaning that the environment these young people are in is getting better. People also mentioned food and not being able to afford meals less, which is also a positive sign.

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## Opportunities that youth services offer

When asked about what a youth service can do for young people, the majority mentioned having opportunities to learn new skills and to get a better education - one separate to the education they receive in schools. They mentioned that this can lead to job opportunities and work experiences, helping them to 'expand their horizon.' This also gives them alternative places to hang out and socialize with each other, where they can make new friends, learn better social skills, and 'turn their life around.' They are able to stay safe, have better health and happiness, while also giving them access to participation opportunities they might not have been able to access otherwise.

“ Young people stated youth work gave them different opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have been aware of, helping them 'develop in an ever-changing world.' ”

## Suggestions for a 'dream' youth service

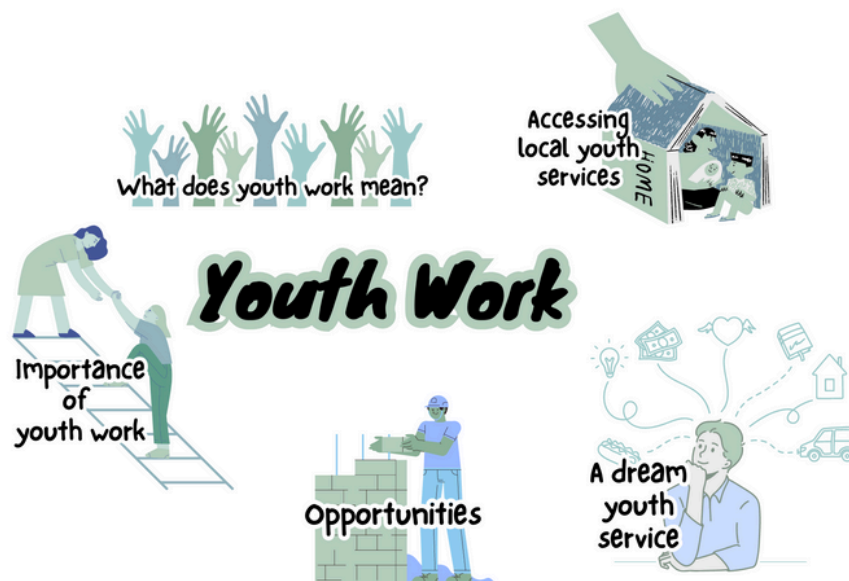
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## Solutions and recommendations

We need to improve the amount of youth services, with young people noting for example that there is little to no youth provision on offer in St Helens. Young people viewed increased funding for youth hubs as essential to ensure they can have well-trained and experienced staff whilst also being able to pay for more opportunities for young people. These spaces need to be more accessible for all these young people, whether that pertains to distance to their nearest hub or accessibility for those with disabilities or who are neurodiverse.

Compared to the 2023 Hope Hack, less young people talked about bullying as an issue in hubs, meaning that the environment these young people are in could be getting better. However, when asked about youth services in their area young people mentioned wanting a higher level of funding and more staff. On top of that, they mentioned some small things that would make their services better such as better accessibility and support for all young people including those with disabilities or who are neurodiverse, more access or options available for different age groups, having more locations available to access. Furthermore, they wanted to see an end more generally to the stigma which some attach to youth services. This was similar to the findings in 2023, as young people highlighted the need for these spaces to be more accessible for young people of different ages, backgrounds, and abilities, or from different regions. For example, as already raised, we need to improve the amount of youth services so there is a hub in places such as St Helens.



## Conclusion

We were asked to compare the data from a small sample of young people's responses, compared to the issues raised over the Hope Hack consultations in 2023. Overall, the findings show many similarities in the themes raised by young people. Where we see minor differences, they are in areas such as a broader response to where feels unsafe – e.g. young people spoke about the online world. No significant emerging issues were raised, it was overwhelming how similar the issues that young people experience remain close to those from the previous year.

Lastly, we were asked to explore whether young people could see the impact of work being carried out. This was difficult to establish without providing young people a list of initiatives. What we can conclude is that young people are confident and know about and are comfortable to talk about the services in which they access. Young people are less aware of and therefore speak less about wider provision or initiatives. This may indicate that young people may benefit from a central point to access information of both services available to them and initiatives that have been driven by the voice of young people. Services may wish to have a “you said, we did” space that informs young people about initiatives that directly respond to their feedback. By closing this feedback loop with young people, you ensure that young people really understand the impact of sharing their views and it would be more visible that changes happen as a result of listening to children and young people.

