

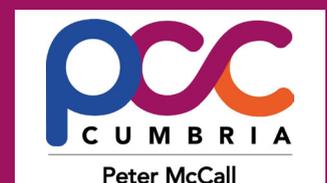


Cumbria Youth Commission:

Final Report to the Cumbria Police and Crime Commissioner

March 2020

LEADERS UNLOCKED



Contents

Introduction	Page 3
About This Report	Page 3
About the Cumbria Youth Commission What We Did	Page 4
Our Partners	Page 8
Priority 1: Mental Health	Page 9
What We Found	Page 9
Our Recommendations	Page 11
Priority 2: Hate Crime	Page 12
What We Found	Page 12
Our Recommendations	Page 14
Priority 3: Abuse	Page 15
What We Found	Page 15
Our Recommendations	Page 17
Priority 4: Drug and Alcohol Abuse What We Found	Page 18
Our Recommendations	Page 20
Conclusion: Taking Things Forward	Page 21
Testimonials	Page 22

Introduction

The Cumbria Youth Commission was established in 2017 by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cumbria, Peter McCall. From April 2019, the Cumbria Youth Commission was facilitated by Leaders Unlocked.

The Cumbria Youth Commission (CYC) allows young people aged 14-25 years to work in partnership with the Police and Crime Commissioner and Cumbria Police to tackle urgent issues. The project represents a new approach in engaging young people across Cumbria to shape future policing and crime prevention policies, and support the development of the Commissioners Police and Crime Plan. For more information, please see <https://cumbria-pcc.gov.uk/>

The key objectives of the project were as follows:

- Recruit 20 – 25 members from across Cumbria to join the Cumbria Youth Commission, with a particular emphasis on engaging those from ‘hard to reach’ groups and communities.
- Work with the Cumbria Youth Commission members to identify the key priority topics they most wish to tackle this year.
- Equip the Cumbria Youth Commission members with the practical skills training they needed for their role.
- Plan and deliver a ‘Big Conversation’ to enable the Cumbria Youth Commission to gather meaningful views from at least 1500 young people across Cumbria in relation to the CYC priorities.
- Support the Cumbria Youth Commission to turn the evidence into key findings and recommendations to be disseminated at a final conference with the PCC, Police and partner agencies.

Through this project, a group of 28 young members have been recruited from across Cumbria. Our members have worked in partnership with the PCC and Cumbria Police to priority areas of concern. These priorities have been decided by our members.

The Cumbria Youth Commission is being delivered this year by Leaders Unlocked, a social enterprise which aims to enable young people to have a stronger say on the decisions that affect their lives. Leaders Unlocked has established Youth Commissions with PCCs in 9 other regions and is planning to expand further in the years ahead.

For more information about Leaders Unlocked please visit: www.leaders-unlocked.org

About this report

This report is based on evidence collected from over **1500 conversations** with young people from all regions of Cumbria. The results were collected in youth-led engagement events and outreach events with various organisations throughout Cumbria, primarily targeting educational facilities, youth groups and other youth organisations. Our findings have been collected using CYC postcards, which allow young people to record their opinions and suggest feasible solutions.

This report allocates each priority its own section, which consists of a comprehensive analysis of young people’s opinions using exact quotes from individual participants, and the key recommendations that have been developed by the Youth Commission through careful consideration of the findings.

This report is to act as a genuine, independent record of the opinions of young people that have been provided to us through our pilot year of the ‘Big Conversation’ process. It is also intended to be the basis for further action on the part of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cumbria and relevant partner agencies.

About the Cumbria Youth Commission



The purpose of the Cumbria Youth Commission is to support, challenge and inform the work of the Cumbria Police and Crime Commissioner Peter McCall.

The Cumbria Youth Commission is based on a youth-driven model which allows young people to put forward solutions to key problems that they identify in their communities, as opposed to traditional consultation models which do not harness the leadership and opinions of young people to such an extent.

A key element of the Cumbria Youth Commission's role is to gather the views of young people through peer-to-peer engagement. This is a strength of the project, as it provides young people with a safe environment to talk to their peers about issues in their communities. This approach allows for more honest and sincere information to be collected.

What we did

Recruiting new members

Between April and June 2019, Leaders Unlocked recruited 28 CYC members. All Youth Commissioners were selected through a two-staged recruitment process, including an initial application form and a telephone interview with representatives from Leaders Unlocked. Through proactive contact with local organisations, we ensured the opportunity was widely promoted to young people from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds throughout all regions of Cumbria. The group includes looked-after children and care-leavers, young people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, those with experience of the criminal justice system and young people with mental health conditions. This involved working closely with professionals and organisations across the education, statutory and voluntary sectors.

The diversity breakdown of the membership is as follows:

9 Male (33%), 17 Female (63%), 1 Prefer not to say (4%)

7 BAME (26%)

5 identify as LGBTQ+ (19%)

2 identify as LLDD (8%)

Local organisations actively involved in the recruitment of these members include:

Appleby School

Furness College

Trinity School

Carlisle Scouts

Kendal College

Ullswater Sixth Form

Carlisle Youth Zone

Newton Rigg College

University of Cumbria

Cumbria Youth Offenders Services

Rock Youth Project

William Howard School

Identifying priority issues

At their inaugural meeting in July 2019, the Cumbria Youth Commission members worked together to identify 4 key priorities that affected their peer groups and communities. These choices were based on individual experiences and were solely influenced by the members, rather than be led by the PCC or Leaders Unlocked staff. Their choices were as follows:

1. Mental Health
2. Drug and Alcohol Abuse
3. Hate Crime
4. Abuse

Skills training



Leaders Unlocked provided the Cumbria Youth Commission members with key skills training to enable them to be successful in their role and support members with their personal and professional development. This training took place at several team meetings between July 2019 and February 2020, and incorporated a wide range of skills. These skills include but are not restricted to:

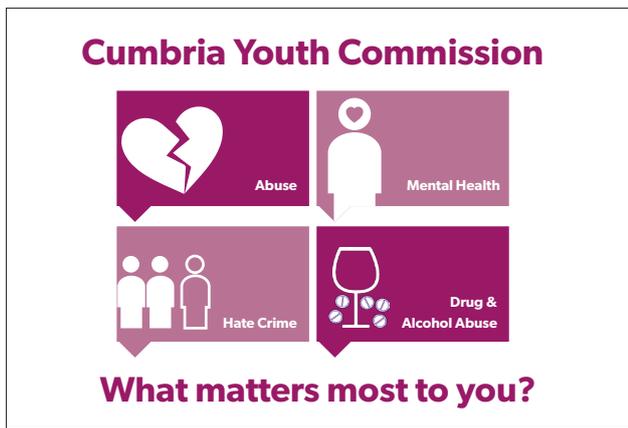
Workshop skills and techniques - training the members to engage with young people in discussion in a manner which allows their audience to feel safe in sharing their honest opinions

Presentation skills - by providing a platform whereby our members could openly discuss how they feel each priority should be tackled, the Youth Commissioners were able to increase their confidence in speaking to large audiences. These skills were utilised and further enhanced throughout the various workshops completed through the duration of the Big Conversation process.

Debate skills - the Youth Commissioners were given the relevant skills to form strong arguments in a variety of debating situations. These skills were utilised in the 'Big Conversation' following a successful pilot year to effectively argue their case for each priority with various partner agencies.

Creating the tools for the Cumbria Youth Commission

Cumbria Youth Commission members worked together to design a workshop to address each of their priorities based on how they felt young people would best engage with a topic. These workshops were designed in such a way to ensure the flow of conversation with the young people in order to collect relevant results to each priority topic. The young people attending these workshops were encouraged to provide their own opinions throughout the experience in order to stimulate honest debate – this strengthened the results provided in each workshop as their thoughts were based on in-depth conversations and not simply an initial thought.



For the purpose of data collection, the Cumbria Youth Commission created postcards to collate the relevant information for their research. The postcard shows each priority that the Cumbria Youth Commission was collecting responses on, allowing young people to provide their opinions of all priorities regardless of the workshop they were attending. The postcards have highlighted real-life opinions and experiences that young people have experienced but may feel uncomfortable discussing – the postcards are designed so that the response cannot be attributed to a specific person as the name of the individual is not requested.

Working with the Commissioner’s Office

Throughout this project, the Cumbria Youth Commission has been linked with key official from the Commissioner’s Office and Cumbria Police. They have shown their support through attending meetings and keeping up to date with the Cumbria Youth Commission’s progress. The interaction of these officials allows the Cumbria Youth Commission to spread its voice further and provide a positive representation of our work to the communities of Cumbria. Our hope is this report will encourage further conversations throughout Cumbria relating to policing and crime prevention in the wider community.

Running the ‘Big Conversation’

Through reaching out to a wide range of community organisations and education institutions, the Cumbria Youth Commission has gathered over 1500 constructive responses from young people across the region in relation to their four priorities. The Youth Commissioners have delivered a total of 35 workshops in a very diverse range of settings.

Anita Lytollis	Ella Purdy	Myfanwy Sequeira
Ben Rutherford	Elsbeth Dennison	Natalie Harbach
Cerys Rhiannon Townsend	Emma Kenyon	Rebecca Dodd
Charlie MacGregor	Isobel Fayers	Samantha Johnson
Charlotte Hail	Jade Ainsworth	Shane Blaycock
Cimony Sequeira	Jamie Scurr-Rayson	Sophie Madden
CJ Birchall	Jane Chapman	Thomas Proctor
Dakota Muhlbacher	Jenson Barlow	Tia Mason
Daniel Brown	Lizzie Coulthard	William Stuart

The table below shows a breakdown of responses for each priority associated with the collected data:

Mental Health	569
Drugs and Alcohol	521
Abuse	270
Hate Crime	269
Total	1629

Presenting our findings and recommendations at the Big Conversation Conference:

At the 'Big Conversation Conference' on 12th February 2020, Cumbria Youth Commission members presented their key findings and recommendations to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cumbria, key officials from Cumbria Police and partner agencies. The event was held at The People First Conference Centre and included a presentation of our findings, an open panel for questions and round table discussions between Youth Commissioners and Cumbrian representatives from backgrounds including local authorities, public sector partners, educators, senior police and youth workers.

Our Partners

We are grateful for the support we have received from a wide range of local partners who have played a key role in hosting the Youth Commission's Big Conversation activities and assisting in the recruitment process:

Annual Festive Lunch 2019	Cumbria YOS	Kerkby Stephen Grammar School
Appleby School	Cumbria Youth Council	Newton Rigg College
Carlisle Scouts	Furness College	Rock Youth Project
Carlisle Youth Zone	Inspira	Trinity School
Christian Head	Inspira NCS	Ullswater Sixth Form
Cumbria LSCB Youth Summit	Kendal College	University of Cumbria
Cumbria Pride	Kendal Emergency Services	William Howard School

A special thanks to the individual Youth Commissioners who have offered their time and efforts into making this project a success:

A special thank you is deserved to this year's co-ordinator Katie O'Reilly who was instrumental in bringing the project to fruition.

Priority 1: Mental Health



Mental wellbeing includes a person's social, physical, psychological and spiritual health – it is more than just the absence of ill mental health. The World Health Organisation, as quoted in Cumbria's '**Mental Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment**', argues that mental wellbeing is a state "in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community." However, the results of our findings suggest that in Cumbria, mental health provisions fall short of the requirements.

It is apparent that mental health has become a cause for concern for many young people in their day-to-day lives. Mental health affects young people in various stages of their development, from education, employment and social lives. The young people of Cumbria have indicated that there are shortfalls in support services and police training related to mental health.

The Cumbria Youth Commission set out to listen to the experiences and views of young people who may have struggled with mental health issues. The aim of this research was to explore what support mechanisms young people feel need to be in place in order to help them feel mentally well, and to acknowledge how the police and support networks should be doing more.

In total, the Cumbria Youth Commission had **569** conversations about mental health with young people in the county.

Our Key Findings

From our conversations, it was clear that most of the young people in our sample admit that they suffer with their mental health on a day-to-day basis. There is an overwhelming feeling that provisions for mental health support are not widely available to those who need it until they have reached a 'crisis point' or they are a threat to their own life:

"Teachers at school didn't notice my mental health or self-harm. But students would bully me for it too, making me feel worse."

"I have no idea where/who to turn to, to get the help I need and find it so overwhelming."

"People aren't getting the help they need quick enough."

"Personally, I believe that mental health issues can be the root of all problems for any individual, which can lead to alcohol and drug abuse and other forms of abuse such as domestic abuse. Suicide is one of the biggest killers amongst young men within the UK. I think this may have something to do with unemployment rates and lack of activities that are available to young people, such as getting involved with sports and clubs."

It is apparent that young people in Cumbria do not feel confident in the current support services being provided and their **ability to cope** with mental health support. Long waiting lists for existing services work towards a feeling that they are **not cared for** in their local communities and their conditions are largely ignored:

"There isn't enough support for young people in Cumbria around mental health and more awareness needs to be raised to stop the stigma. I've been let down many times by services in South Cumbria and we need to put a stop to this before it gets worse."

"I'm being left out with no support because of no funding, I'm given no help. Funding is a postcode lottery."

"It can take over a year to get into a place to get help and that can cause people a year of worse struggling- causing their problems to develop further, a sibling has experienced this and CAMHS was recommended over a year ago - nearest one is Carlisle and she hasn't been seen"

Young people told us that one of the key factors for the rise in mental health concerns in young people is the **increasing pressure of education** systems and the requirement to excel. There is too much focus on the academic side of schooling – lessons, exams, etc – and **less focus on enrichment** sessions that should be utilised to support young people's wellbeing:

"School putting stress on students as they are getting lots of homework due for deadline and tests no one asks if you're ok, young people aren't getting the help they need because they are afraid or embarrassed to ask."

"Personally, I feel pressure to succeed in my A-levels so puts stress on me, however this is nothing in comparisons to some of my friends who feel the stress a lot more and putting them in a very hard situation."

"Schools are usually the only place that most students go to consistently, and the most qualified to offer mental health support and advice, but it is not done enough in schools."

Young people have indicated that those who suffer from mental health issues are often the victim of **harassing and bullying behaviours**. Due to a lack of education on the subject, Mental health sufferers are often **targeted** by people who do not understand the impact of their actions, which only enhances the deterioration of young people's mental health. A link between mental health and **social media** is clearly apparent in this region:

"I think mental health and bullying is a big issue in today's society driving younger people to self-harm and doubt themselves all happening behind closed doors."

"No consequences done for the bullies that start MH issues to others."

"Massively effects lot of young people around me. Caused mainly by things like social media and family problems. I think its not talked about enough."

Young people have told us that mental health issues are often **misdiagnosed**. As mental health has only garnered the recognition it required in recent years, those who grew up before its widespread recognition are quick to associate anxiety and sad feelings with depression. This can have a detrimental effect on young people's confidence in opening up about their mental health issues:

“Sad and anxious feelings being made out to be bad mental health.”

“Mental Health as a whole in the UK isn’t taken seriously and it feels very undermining for those who have suffered with problems in the past. The lack of exposure of mental health to the larger majority makes people feel like they are alone in dealing with their problems and this stops us from feeling safe to talk about it to the people we care about as we are too scared of being judged.”

“Young people claiming to have mental health issues but misusing terminology so when the issue becomes more serious, their cries for help are not listened to and they don’t access any help.”

Young people have stated that the mental health training for police is **ineffective** as it is too narrow and officers regularly disregard or do not notice mental health issues. As such, **young people would not feel safe** discussing their mental health with police officers as they do not believe there is a tangible benefit:

“I feel there aren’t enough mental health team in order to provide the best care and those in custody or those who get visits from police. Lack of training in the police force.”

“Three years involvement in the criminal justice system involving interviews with police from the age of 13. First interview was a surprise and by an old friends’ parent (this made me feel very shocked and uncomfortable) developed mental h.earth problems as a result and got help. It was a confusing process that I did not always understand.”

“Mental health is same as physical health, police and nurses can be horrible which stops people reaching out for help when they need it most.”

Our Recommendations

For Cumbria Police:

- **RAISE AWARENESS** with the community of the importance they place on mental health and training that is taken place within the Police Force.
- Invite young people in to **ATTEND POLICE TRAINING** on mental health and encourage feedback from them.
- Continue to foster good relationships across education organisations and Youth groups to **BUILD BETTER ENGAGEMENT** between young people and the Police.

For the PCC and Partners:

- **CREATE AND SUPPORT MORE YOUTH CLUBS** for young people to spend time at outside of school and home with regular engagement from the PCC.
- The PPC and partners should **RAISE AWARENESS AND PROMOTE EXISTING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT NETWORKS** and the support directory through youth events, including, community events, Career fairs, National Citizen Service (NCS) and education settings.

For the Youth Commission:

- We will continue **TO RUN WORKSHOPS** on mental health first aid, enabling young people to have more access to self care information and sign-posting to support services.
- We will continue to **ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO TALK** through running small peer led workshops in youth setting as well as large workshops in education settings.

Priority 2: Hate Crime



Hate crime has been on the rise in Cumbria since 2015 – statistics suggest that racial hate crimes have increased by 28%, religiously motivated hate crimes have increased by 26% and homophobic hate crimes have increased by 29%. According to Cumbria’s **Crime and Community Safety Strategic Assessment** for 2018-19, Cumbria faced 810 strands of hate crime at the last yearly recording. Evidently this priority is a large concern in the region despite the lack of clarity of the definition of a hate crime in the area.

Young people feel unsafe on the streets because of the fear of hate crime and being targeted for their sexuality or their race. Concerns over violence towards young individuals of hate crime have affected their confidence, self esteem and mental health.

The Cumbria Youth Commission set out to assess how young people in Cumbria are affected by hate crimes on the basis of faith, race, sexuality, disability, transgender identities and other protected characteristics. This information was used to inform the police and other agencies about how young people have experienced hate and how they would expect changes to occur.

In total, the Cumbria Youth Commission had 269 conversations about hate crime with young people in the county.

Our key findings

Our conversations with young people have established a connection between hate crime in Cumbria and the **understanding** of what hate crime actually is. There is a lack of good information available and the definition provided on the Cumbria Police website is **vague**, so it is unclear what the law on hate crime is and who the victim is:

“Because I don’t have any information about it I am unable to know if it is going on round me”

An important factor to consider regarding the definition is the **multiple strands of hate crime** that can be identified by the protected characteristics – disability, race/ethnicity, religion/belief, sexual orientation and transgender identity. As a result it is hard to provide a singular definition and young people have found it **hard to identify** hate crime:

"I haven't had an experience with a hate crime, but I know that in my area that hate crimes are a problem and it can affect people very badly."

"People just shouting things."

"It's not pursued or there is a perception that crimes that come under hate crime aren't a crime."

Young people told us that schools in particular do not provide the support for young people for verbal abuse. Young people have been subject to **bullying** for their sexuality, race, or disability and have noted that as a result, their **attendance** has been negatively affected:

"Not enough acceptance starting from primary school."

"Racial abuse happens in colleges and schools, this happens between 13-25 age range, and in public when young people are in groups being anti-social."

"I have a friend who experienced racial abuse in school, and she refused to come to school."

Young people **do not feel safe** on the streets and have concerns over violence towards young individuals. Hate crime can affect people in any location, but as young people believe there are less police on the streets they feel threatened in public places:

"There isn't enough done to combat hate crime in the town centre, there are times when preachers incite hate and youth groups form to intimidate on a regular basis."

"See a lot of it in back alleys/even in town people using hate crime."

"There is a backlash if you open up about bullying."

"I used to be beaten up at school for being gay and our preacher at church would say it's sinful."

"I'm transgender, I'm too scared to report incidents to the police because I feel like it won't be taken seriously or it's a waste of their time. It's made me too scared to be who I am even around my own parents."

Hate crime also links together with other priorities like **mental health**. The result of harassment and violence towards young people has been detrimental to young people and their psychology:

"It increases MH issues due to bullying and racial remarks that don't belong in the community."

"Hate crime causing self-harm because of bullying."

"People are getting bullied for having mental issues."

"Lack of support and awareness of mental health issues, types, support and facilities."

"A friend of mine took their own life due to hate crime, police were aware they were in crisis before it happened and did not interview or question the individual who did it."

Young people claim that **diversity** is something that should be widely encouraged across the Cumbria region. This should be done through various **community campaigns** which would raise awareness across different settings and councils:

"I think people should have their own opinion on a subject that's fine but if they may express this in a certain way towards someone that may be that this is a bad and it really affects people and how they are. It may make people feel even more insecure than they may already do."

"Hate crime can be a big issue in Barrow but it isn't spoken about a lot, I've had no experience however, in football you see fans being racist towards different players."

“Nothing done about hate crime, no call backs to victims to support either as reassurance.”

Our sample has also concluded that **the police do not do enough** to prevent hate crime in Cumbria – there is a feeling that the police do not make them feel **protected** in the community and this has contributed to a rise in hate crime:

“Police can certainly do more with this as when I and multiple people I know have been victims of hate crime, nothing done about it, no help afterwards.”

“Abuse - the police in the area are reactive rather than proactive in the loud community which can lead to large amounts of conflict”

“There are people that target the youth groups in Penrith, I’ve had rocks thrown at me whilst at cadets, the police did nothing when the staff rang them.”

“People feel uncomfortable to be outside after dark.”

“People have disrespect for other people, there is a lack of respect in this community.”

Our recommendations

For Cumbria Police:

- To ensure there is **EQUALITY THROUGHOUT THE POLICE FORCE** and actively encourage this to be shared with the community.
- **PRESENCE AT BOTH SMALL AND LARGER COMMUNITY EVENTS** and actively engage with young people attending in a necessity.

For the PCC and partners:

- Get involved in more **COMMUNITY PROJECTS** and **INCREASE INVESTMENT** in local projects e.g. youth clubs.
- The PCC should actively support approaches to **IMPLEMENT EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY** throughout policing.

For the Youth Commission:

- We will continue to **RAISE AWARENESS** of hate crime in the communities and increase knowledge of the law.
- We will **ENCOURAGE MORE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY DISCUSSIONS** throughout educational settings, youth clubs by involving young people in peer led workshops.

Priority 3: Abuse



According to the [Cumbria Police website](#), Cumbria Police deal with 17 incidents of abuse every day, with an annual increase of over 100 reported incidents between 2016 - 2019. Of these, almost half of these incidents involve physical violence aimed at people who have been victims of abuse in past relationships. Many young people felt that abuse and unhealthy relationships can be present in all types of relationships but primarily in marriages and sexual relationships. Abuse is incredibly damaging and does not solely affect the victim of violence – abuse affects people surrounding the victim, including young children and relatives.

Young people commented that police officers don't always take young people's accounts of abuse seriously enough and don't seem to consider the fact that young people feel vulnerable.

The Cumbria Youth Commission set out to speak to young people about what Cumbria Police need to recognise about abuse – our findings have been used to identify opportunities to improve police procedure and recommend ways in which abuse can be approached differently in the future. We hope that our findings and recommendations will help to encourage people to speak out about abuse in the future.

In total, the Cumbria Youth Commission had **270** conversations about hate crime with young people in the county.

Our key findings

Our conversations with young people across Cumbria have indicated that abuse of all forms is **not widely spoken** about within the community. It has been made apparent that young people either do not know where they should go to when they are victims of abuse or **do not feel confident** in the current support systems available:

"I don't think enough awareness is risen about this subject. I know a girl who has grown up with a verbally abusive parent and doesn't know who to speak to, or where to look for help. Obviously, she has the support from her friends, but that can't always be sufficient enough to get her through it."

"As someone that previously suffered emotional and psychological abuse, it isn't widely spoken about and there is little support."

"In schools and at home young people are beaten and abused by bullies and parents, the police handle this by going into schools and talking in assemblies, although this helps people come out and tell the police of abuse, I believe there is more to be done."

Many of the young people in our sample have indicated to have been **witnesses** to or **victims** of abusive relationships of various origins, from friends and families to marriages and sexual partners. Young people have tended to establish a connection between abuse and **family members** to a greater degree:

"I have experienced abuse from a family member and involve police following a counsellor getting involved. Police put a storm alert on the property."

"My dad used to belt me whenever I did something wrong."

"I don't think enough awareness is risen about this subject. I know a girl who has grown up with a verbally abusive parent and doesn't know who to speak to, or where to look for help. Obviously, she has the support from her friends, but that can't always be sufficient enough to get her through it."

An interesting result found from the sample relates to **Cumbria Police's reactions to abuse**. There is a common trend in our feedback that the police provide minimal support to victims of abuse and can often be **abusive** themselves to people, which young people have associated with the **low rate of abuse cases being reported**:

"I have no protection from my abuser, so I feel scared every day and the police do nothing about it."

"We've been victims of excessive force used by police when arrested and targeted by police. There are different treatments depending on who you are, they don't protect us they rule us. Bag wearers are targeted for drug dealing with no proof needed."

"Police don't do much for child abuse."

"People scared to report abuse."

The young people in our sample believe that in order to tackle abuse, **education** needs to be a priority. Abuse has multiple strands and knowledge on each strand varies from person to person. In order to ensure that abuse victims are recognised, the **gaps in people's knowledge** needs to be addressed:

"If people know the signs of a toxic relationship and you teach young people about the signs then you could save so many people from being trapped and then they may reach out for help."

"We should be informed more at school and get taught about abuse and what to do when you are dealing with it and what it actually is."

"More workshops for parents and teachers to help understand young people's needs More awareness of White Ribbon Campaign."

The young people in our sample have indicated that the current support services provided in Cumbria are **insufficient**. The services are **underfunded, not properly advertised and too rigid**. Services need to be funded effectively and the funding needs to go towards advertising and a more welcoming and accessible framework:

"More group therapy alongside individual therapy to get people socially involved again, drop in centres."

"Get to the victims, signposting to health services, not just talking to experts encourage to talk to friends and make it an open subject."

"Live chats and contact numbers that are known to get message across anonymously if need to be."

“More funding should be allocated to organisations such as youth groups, care facilities, mental health services and pastoral care. All staff working with vulnerable populations should be fully trained in safeguarding, (mental health) first aid, self-harm and suicide alertness and would therefore be able to recognise indicators of abuse and intervene swiftly and appropriately.”

The Cumbria Youth Commission has also found that young people expect more action from the police than the previously mentioned reactions. Young people believe that for such a diverse subject, the response from the community should be between **a diverse number of organisations** and partnerships:

“Positive working with both police, college and counsellor helped to stop the abuse. I realised we were safe after telling somebody.”

“Act on reports instead of just leaving them, my cousin now suffers from PTSD and anxiety because he was jumped daily and not enough was done about it.”

“Make it more known that things are done about these issues, it would build a positive outlook on the police in our area.”

“Establish more free helplines that are easily accessible and alert the police immediately of the situation; location and name of the abuser.”

“The police could deliver educational sessions to children to build rapport and trust between young people and the police. This could help ensure more people come forward and report abuse. The community need to be addressed by professionals and taught about the dangers and risks of abuse and how to respond in an abusive situation. Children should be taught this at school. Also, awareness campaigns can open up discussion and reduce stigma and misinformation in people of all ages and backgrounds.”

Our Recommendations

For Cumbria Police:

- **PROVIDE MORE REHABILITATION** programmes for offenders of abuse to prevent reoffending.
- Officers and PCSO's should **INVOLVE THEMSELVES IN LOCAL YOUTH SERVICES AND YOUTH GROUPS**. This will help young people to form better and positive relationships with Police officers and PCSO's.

For the PCC and Partners:

- **FUND NEW SAFE PLACES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS** e.g. youth zones / youth groups, where they can talk about concerns.
- **DEVELOP SAFE DROP-IN SESSIONS** for victims and include young people in the planning process.

For the Youth Commission:

- We will **CONTINUE PEER LED WORKSHOPS** in educational settings that raise the awareness of the different types of abuse.
- We will **PROMOTE VICTIM SUPPORT AND HELP LINES** available to young people and encourage young people to speak out about their experiences of abuse.
- We will continue **TO CHALLENGE CUMBRIA POLICE TO REVIEW THEIR CURRENT APPROACH TO ABUSE CLAIMS** in order to create a safer environment for people to report abuse.

Priority 4: Drug and Alcohol Abuse



According to Cumbria's Crime and **Community Safety Strategic Assessment** for 2018-19, in the recorded year of 2018-19 there were 1376 new referrals to Unity, the Alcohol and Drug Recovery Service for Cumbria. Of this figure, 331 referrals (24.1%) were for people under 18 years old. Whilst this is a significant decrease in young people affected by drugs and alcohol than the previous recorded years, the figure for Cumbria is still considerably higher than the national average of recorded youth substance abuse.

Young people across Cumbria told us that drugs and alcohol are extremely accessible, even from a very young age. This creates an unsafe feeling in the younger community and puts young people at risk of exploitation through drug related crimes. Young people do not feel safe being out on the streets and feel they cannot go out without being peer pressured into drinking and doing drugs. They are also worried about getting mixed up in rival gang conflicts and gang related crimes.

The Cumbria Youth Commission set out to establish the concerns that young people had regarding drug and alcohol abuse. These concerns are to be used as a template for engaging with young people with addictions and to encourage people to have conversations about the negative impacts of drug and alcohol abuse.

In total, the Cumbria Youth Commission had **521** conversations about hate crime with young people in the county.

Our key findings

The young people in our sample have indicated that drug and alcohol abuse is a result of **a number of linked factors**. The two most important factors that have been identified are **access and boredom**. One does not create an addict without the other, but together these factors can be detrimental to a young person's lifestyle:

"As Kirby Stephen is so small, there is nothing for young people to do which turns them to drugs or alcohol."

"There isn't anything else for other young people to do in the area apart from drink or do drugs."

"Alcohol and drugs are easily accessible."

"Everyone just sits and if people are bored then it causes issues like vandalism and drug and alcohol issues."

"Accessed too easy, shops sell it without challenge."

Another important factor that has been identified by our sample is the impact of **peer pressure**. Young people often first take a substance, whether it is alcohol or a type of drug, as a result of their friends also taking it. It has been suggested to us that in order to avoid being seen as different, young people often feel **obligated** to take part in drinking and drug use:

"I think the opinion in youth is that its cool as shown by music artists locally."

"I think they may be put into pressure or forced into it, so I think that anyone is underage drinking who is being forced to should talk to a parent to give them support so they can find better friends who don't force them into something. I also think therapy could be a good idea for underage drinking."

"I know a girl who started dating someone who was into drugs and then she began to get into them too because of him."

Young people told us they feel the police's strategy to prevent drug and alcohol abuse is **ineffective**. The current approach does **little to prevent** the distribution of drugs or the excessive use of alcohol, and as a result young people feel unsafe in their communities due to the risks posed by crimes related to intoxication:

"The police weren't very effective in stopping distributing drugs."

"Police forces don't do enough to ensure teenagers are kept away from heavy and dangerous drugs which can cause many to become addicted and even suffer from overdose."

"I called police to assist due to a service user being intoxicated and needing medical attention. They arrived but didn't do anything because he refused to go."

"I believe that stopping the rise of drug and alcohol abuse is number one priority and should be dealt with in a more serious manner."

Young people believe that drugs in particular can be associated with **gang activity** – many people in gangs are dealing drugs as well as taking them. In order to tackle the rise of drug and alcohol abuse, there needs to be a focus on the reduction of gang crime:

"Local drug dealers, dealing in public places, people interested in drugs because it's so common around here, peer pressure, easily accessible, drug and drink way too much."

"Drugs, gangs, drinking on parks."

"There is a lot of drugs being sold and taken in town, young people have started to do drugs as well."

Drug and alcohol abuse is damaging to the **mental stability** of a person according to our sample – they have established a direct link between substance abuse and mental health disorders. Young people have suggested that substance abuse should be treated as a mental disorder as opposed to a criminal offence, focusing on **rehabilitation** over punishment:

"This isn't treated as a mental illness so people struggling with alcohol and substance abuse don't receive enough support to get them out of the awful cycle."

"Young people turn to drink and drugs to hide their mental health issue."

"I think drugs and alcohol is easily accessible and creates mental scarring/physical injuries which harms you and others."

Young people have suggested that **schools** should provide further **extra-curricular activities** to provide young people with the stimulation to avoid boredom. With the reduced number of youth centres and services across the country, it should fall on the education system to provide young people with the engagement and education required to prevent them from turning towards substance abuse:

“Extra-curricular activities need to be encouraged more within schools and outside of them to keep kids busy, if youth groups don’t work there needs to be more activity-based places around so that there are things to do.”

“Schools helping students understand things about crime, we need to be taught about how to avoid or get away from drugs and alcohol, how it can destroy your life.”

This does not mean that the sample does not believe that youth services are crucial in tackling substance abuse. Young people have suggested that the crisis of substance abuse requires young people to be provided with spaces in which they can engage with other young people to avoid being led towards drugs and alcohol. For those who have engaged with substances, similar groups should be created in order to help to **rehabilitate young people** rather than punish their behaviours:

“If there were things to do there would be a lot less drugs going around with children.”

“We need more youth clubs in Appleby so the police should not go around Appleby all night and should be on more crimes.”

“Have support groups for children and young adults who suffer with these problems and maybe more family therapy to help the families involved.”

Our Recommendations:

For Cumbria Police:

- Cumbria Police should **FOCUS ON THE HIGH-RISK AREAS** and **WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH REHABILITATION ORGANISATIONS** to support users/offenders.
- **MORE OFFICERS SHOULD BE VISIBLE ON THE STREETS** – particularly in ‘Hot-spot’ areas as these are where young people felt most vulnerable and at-risk.

For the PCC and Partners:

- In areas where drugs and alcohol abuse is a common issue, **INCREASED FUNDING** should be used to **PROVIDE YOUTH GROUPS** that help prevent young people from becoming a victim of exploitation of gangs
- **YOUTH SERVICES AND EDUCATION SETTING TO WORK TOGETHER** to put in place early intervention plans that help to prevent young people from being exploited

For the Youth Commission:

- We will continue **TO RUN PEER LED WORKSHOPS** that encourage young people to discuss the issues of drugs, alcohol and the exploitation.
- We will continue to **RAISE AWARENESS OF SUPPORT SERVICES** that offer support groups to young people living with a parent/s or family members who has a drug or alcohol addiction.

Conclusion: Taking Things Forward



Thanks to the continued support shown by our partner agencies, the Cumbria Police and Crime Commissioner, and Cumbria Police, we are confident that the findings and recommendations included in this report will help to inform and contribute towards future work.

On 12th February 2020, a wide range of stakeholders heard the Cumbria Youth Commission's findings and recommendations and directly engaged with our members through an open panel discussions.

The Cumbria Youth Commission's future will be decided by the next Police and Crime Commissioner following the result of the upcoming elections. We look forward to the opportunity to further expand on our work in each priority topic.

We are extremely grateful to the members of the Cumbria Youth Commission and all the partners who have been involved in making this project a huge success.

Testimonials

Cumbria's Police and Crime Commissioner, Peter McCall:

"The Leaders Unlocked Youth Commission event in Carlisle gathered meaningful views from over 1,500 young people in Cumbria.

"The 'Big Conversation' conference saw some amazing presentations from the Youth Commissioners delivering young people's views on 4 key priorities: abuse, mental health, drugs/alcohol and hate crime, and certainly gave us lots of issues to consider.

"Thank you to all the volunteer Youth Commissioners who contributed to make this a really constructive session and produced some very useful and interesting perspective, opinions and ideas about their local communities, the police and public safety of young people in the county."

Chief Constable Mrs Skeer:

"The Cumbria Youth Commission 'Big Conversation 2020' event represented the views of over 1,500 young people aged between 14 and 25.

"These views were presented by Youth Commissioners in a way that captured, not only what is important to young people, but also that it is essential that young people are listened to.

"It is heartening to see that the Constabulary's key priorities mirror what young people considered as most important. These priorities being abuse, mental health, drugs/alcohol and hate crime. All such important issues to be addressed in order to improve the safety of all our communities.

"Thank you to the Youth Commissioners who made the event such a professional, thought-provoking and constructive occasion. It is vital that police work, in partnership, with all sections of society in order to keep people safe."

University of Cumbria Social Sciences Lecturer Kate Mukungu:

It was a pleasure to hear members of Cumbria Youth Commission outline the views of the 1,500 young people they consulted in Cumbria about four important themes.

Some aspects of the event that stood out for me:

- The seriousness shown by Youth Commission members who clearly wanted to do justice to the views expressed by their peers. This is commendable and they are a credit to themselves as individuals and Cumbria Youth Commission as a collective.*
- The information and access needs of young people to equip them handle everyday situations, interactions and concerns. These needs were apparent across all areas but stood out in terms of hate crime -how to handle inappropriate exchange that is badged as "banter" and, mental health issues – how to know the line between going through a bit of a bad time and needing help for mental health issues.*
- In the big conversation, it emerged that services already exist about which young people are widely unaware. Some participants identified the importance of ensuring young people know what exists, but young people also reminded all present that lack of accessibility serves as barriers, even when young people know about services. This is starkest for rural young people.*
- The clear and sensible calls to action to effect change. The Youth Commission asked what the Police Could do, What the Police and Crime Commissioner Could do, but Youth Commission members were also willing to place expectations on themselves. We would collectively do well to support those endeavours.*

Cumbria Youth Commission Coordinator Katie O'Reilly:

As the Coordinator for Cumbria Youth Commission, I have been able to interact and communicate with so many amazing young people. The project has been one of my biggest achievements and so rewarding to see all members of the Commission grow in confidence and grow their skills. There were challenges along the way, however the project was extremely successful. The biggest highlight for me was working with so many brilliant volunteers that were passionate about the voice of young people in Cumbria being heard. This project has been amazing, seeing the Cumbria Youth Commission members grow in confidence and enjoy presenting their findings and key recommendations at 'The Big Conversation' Conference filled me with enormous pride. I hope the work continues and I'd definitely work with them in the future.

Youth Commissioner Daniel Brown:

I think the Cumbria Youth Commission on Police and Crime is important in involving young people in decision making relating to and addressing crime. This can help ensure that their views and experiences are taken into account. So that the problems they face can be handled in a way that they think would most help. Youth involvement in this way is important to further educate young people on these issues so that they can better understand how crime affects others. It's important that they feel more like they have a say in what gets done about the relevant issues. Personally, I thought it was nice to be involved in more group activities with other young people because I don't get that as much anymore. This is because I'm not in education anymore or in employment at the moment so in a way it may have helped with any feelings of isolation and it helps with having something to do.

Youth Commissioner Myfanwy Sequeira:

As a girl from a small village it was difficult for me to raise issues which I thought were supposed to be dealt with. Elders, leaders of the country and other important and experienced people were given priority. It was because of Youth Commission of Police and Crime I felt like there was someone to hear what I want my country to work like. I also felt important which helped me take a better approach on decision making and I can assure the feeling was mutual for youngsters who I spoke to while collecting the data. I wish these kinds of projects are carried out every year so that the younger generation are involved in the decision making process because at the end we all are working to make life better for our children, therefore let's ask them what they want.

Youth Commissioner Dakota Muklbacher:

The Cumbria Youth Commission has been an amazing opportunity to engage with other young people, find out what's important to them and share ideas with one another. I'm very grateful for the chance to represent young people in Cumbria and help them be heard. Overall, the experience has also been a fantastic way of gaining confidence and has given me the chance to use vital group work skills.

Youth Commissioner Isobel Fayers:

Taking part in the youth commission was an eye opening experience. Hearing other young people's experiences and opinions throughout the local area and surrounding locations in the county was an enriching experience. Being able to have a voice and speak on behalf of other young people was a rewarding experience and I am grateful for the opportunity that I had. I think that it is important for young people to have a voice as I feel we are often all categorised together and existing stereotypes about people our age can cause barriers between adults and ourselves. Speaking to members of the police and their partnerships was additionally rewarding and being able to experience this again would be a truly wonderful experience.

Youth Commissioner CJ Birchall:

The reasons we need things like the Youth Commission is because it gives a strong, powerful platform to discuss issues in Cumbria that affect young people and let's young people help to shape their future. This gives young people a chance to voice their points of view on what they feel close to. Other reasons that we need the Youth Commission is that it develops skills in young people that they will use for the rest of their life such as speaking to members of the public, working in a team and public speaking, this experience has helped me to improve my confidences levels.

Written by Joe Roughley

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**

