

WILTSHIRE & SWINDON YOUTH COMMISSION:

FINAL REPORT TO THE

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

FEBRUARY 2022



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INTRODUCTION

The Wiltshire & Swindon Youth Commission (WSYC) was established in 2021 with funding from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC).

The WSYC is a peer-led project that is made up of **30 active members from a range of diverse backgrounds and experiences**. The Commission enables young people living in Wiltshire and Swindon aged 14-25 to have a voice on urgent issues around policing and crime.

The key objectives of the Youth Commission were as follows:

- **Recruit young people** from a diverse range of backgrounds and life experiences.
- Work with WSYC members to identify **key priority topics** which they wanted to tackle this year.
- Equip the WSYC members with the **practical skills training** required for the role.
- **Plan and deliver 1200 conversations** with young people from across Wiltshire and Swindon during the WSYC Big Conversation.
- **Present the Youth Commissions key findings and recommendations** at the Wiltshire & Swindon Youth Commission 'Big Conversation' conference to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Wiltshire Police, and partner agencies.
- **Work closely with Wiltshire Police Force** to provide WSYC members opportunities to influence policing strategies and decision making.

The Wiltshire & Swindon Youth Commission is facilitated by **Leaders Unlocked**, a social enterprise that has successfully delivered the Youth Commission peer-led model across 14 other PCC regions in England and Wales and is planning to expand further in the years ahead.

Leaders Unlocked exists to allow young people and underrepresented groups across the UK to have a stronger voice in their communities on issues that affect them. Accountability and fairness are paramount in helping organisations to adopt new ways of working with young people and the communities they serve. You can find out more by visiting www.leaders-unlocked.org

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is based on evidence collected through extensive engagement workshops – the WSYC has exceeded its target by reaching over **1400 young people** from across Wiltshire in the last year. The responses have been gathered in youth-led engagement events and workshops, targeted surveys and social media campaigns.

The 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 key recommendations based on the findings of the Youth Commission.

This report is intended to be a genuine, independent record of what young people have told us through the WSYC 'Big Conversation'. The report is intended to support any future actions by the Police and Crime Commissioner, Wiltshire Police Force and relevant partner agencies.



ABOUT THE WILTSHIRE & SWINDON YOUTH COMMISSION

The WSYC focuses on giving young people a stronger voice on police and crime issues within their local communities. The Youth Commission works closely with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to **challenge and inform** the work of the PCC and Wiltshire Police Force.

The WSYC engages through **peer-led workshops** that provide young people with a space to comfortably and confidently share their experiences and opinions. All the responses gathered during the Big Conversation are analysed by the WSYC members to create the key findings and recommendations. This is then presented to the PCC, the Police and local partners in this report.

A key element of the WSYC'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 information to be collected.

WHAT WE DID

RECRUITMENT

In 2021, Leaders Unlocked carried out a 2-stage recruitment process, which included distributing an easy to access recruitment pack consisting of an application form and information relating to the role. The second stage was to conduct telephone interviews with all the applicants. This process has been made possible by working proactively with local organisations from education settings, youth organisations and the voluntary sector. Our aim is to ensure that the WSYC members are true representatives of their communities be that by locations, backgrounds or life experiences.

The current member demographics are:

- **30% Male, 63% Female, 7% Other**
- **77% Aged 18 and Under**
- **23% LGBTQ+**
- **27% BAME**
- **37% have a disability**
- **80% in Education**
- **10% have experience of the Criminal Justice System**

IDENTIFYING PRIORITY ISSUES

The WSYC's inaugural meeting focused on members discussing **key issues and research ideas** for the next phase of the project. WSYC members decided to focus on the following key priorities:

1. **Mental Health**
2. **Drug & Alcohol Misuse**
3. **Social Media & Online Safety**
4. **Relationships with the Police**
5. **Abuse & Violence**
6. **Grooming & Exploitation**

CREATING THE TOOLS FOR THE WILTSHIRE & SWINDON YOUTH COMMISSION

During the member's meetings, **WSYC members co-designed workshops** and took an active lead in running activities on the day. This included **team-building exercises, designing interactive workshops and presenting their plans**. This meeting gave the members the opportunity to:

- Develop Big Conversation workshops
- Design engagement materials
- Practice presentation skills
- Identify key organisations where the Big Conversation should take place
- Learn new leadership skills
- Become a cohesive team of young leaders



The WSYC members have **received training for their role** and have developed their **active listening techniques, facilitation and leadership skills** throughout the project.

For the purpose of data collection, the WSYC members created **postcards** to help gather responses for their research. The postcards show each priority that the WSYC was collecting responses on, allowing young people to provide their opinions on all priorities regardless of the workshop they were attending. The postcards have highlighted real-life opinions and experiences that young people have faced but may feel uncomfortable discussing. The postcards were purposefully designed to **remain anonymous to help encourage open and honest responses from young people**.

The WSYC also used **social media polls and surveys** to increase the reach of their conversations in Wiltshire and Swindon.

JOINT WORK WITH WILTSHIRE POLICE

WSYC members worked with Wiltshire Police Force on Operation Sceptre, a national campaign focused on tackling knife crime. WSYC members were invited to give their perspectives on Amnesty Bin locations during a virtual meeting with representatives from Wiltshire Police Force. These perspectives were beneficial in identifying places where the Amnesty Bins would be most effective by using the unique view of young people who are a large percentage of their target audience. It also offered the WSYC members the opportunity to challenge current ideas around amnesty bin locations, stigma and safety which were explored during this meeting.

Our members have also been involved with the Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel to provide a young person's views on the process. The role of the scrutiny panel is to monitor the policing teams in Wiltshire and Swindon to ensure all stop and searches are carried out in line with the law. Our discussions have highlighted the potential benefits of a Youth Scrutiny Panel to assess how young people would assess the credibility of police searches. We argued that regular reviews from a youth-based board would help the police to understand how they are perceived by young people and could benefit police training on interacting with young people.

WHO WE'VE REACHED:

The WSYC have actively engaged with **1469 young people** across Wiltshire. In total, the WSYC has delivered **16 events** in a wide range of localities across the city and Wiltshire county.

This year the WSYC focused particularly on engaging with young people from underrepresented and more marginalised backgrounds. To achieve this the members conducted **targeted workshops and 1-to-1 interviews** with young people from supported living accommodations, alternative education, young people with experience of the criminal justice system and young people with disabilities.

The breakdown for each priority is as follows:

Priority	Responses
Mental Health	269
Drug & Alcohol Misuse	178
Social Media & Online Safety	223
Relationships with the Police	253
Abuse and Violence	312
Grooming & Exploitation	234
Grand Total	1469

OUR PARTNERS

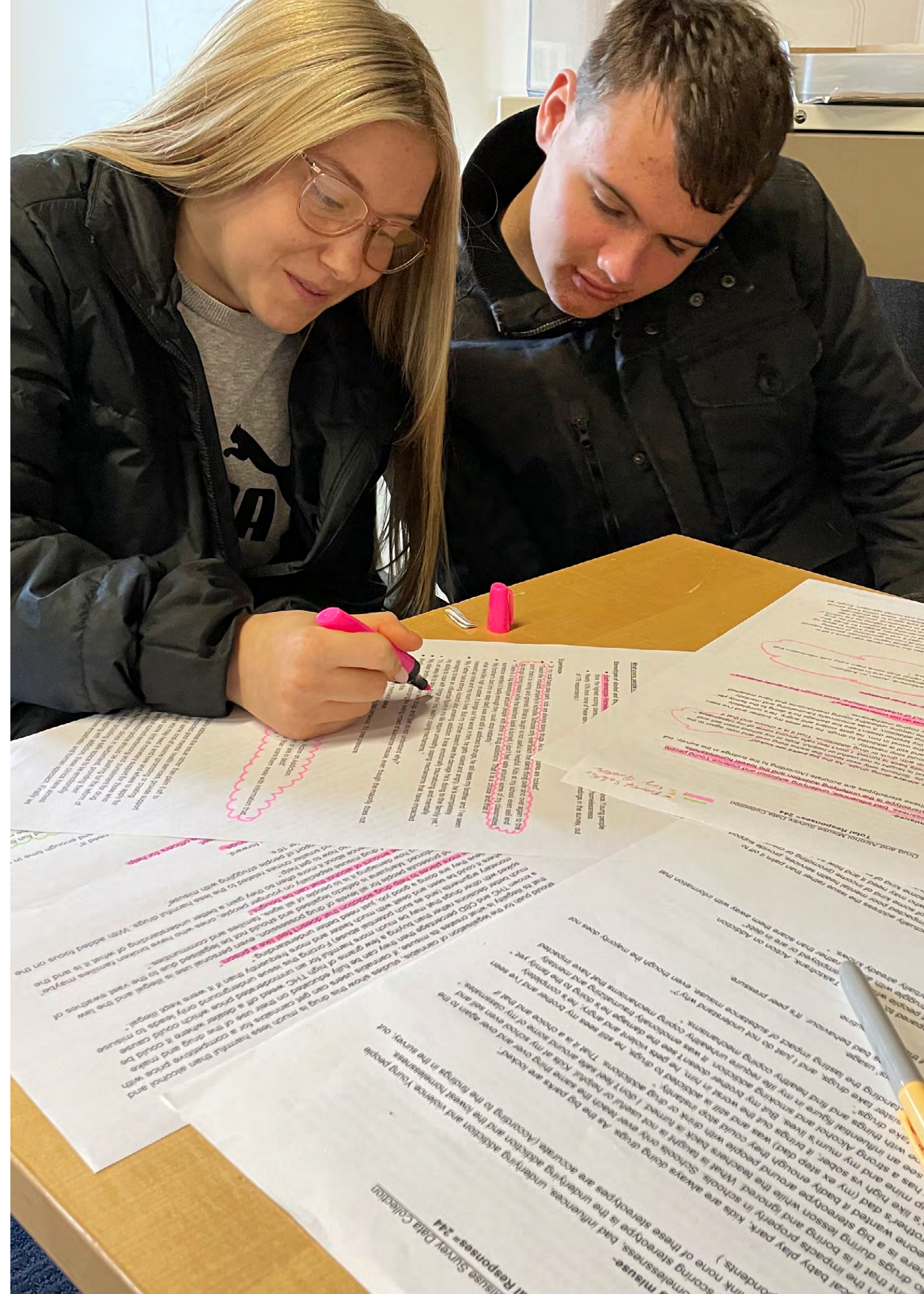
WSYC members are very grateful to everyone who has supported us by allowing the members into their organisations, and would like to **say a very big thank you to the following organisations:**

Community First	Sarum Academy	Wiltshire and Swindon OPCC
Hardenhuish School	Splash	Wiltshire Council
Haydon Wick Parish Council	Swindon Borough Council	Wiltshire Police
Melksham Oak Community School	Swindon Town FC	Wiltshire Youth Offending Team
One Chippenham	Swindon Youth Justice Service	
Saint Lawrence School	UWE Bristol	

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

Alex McDermaid	David A Hunt	Megan Goff
Amelia Simpson	Georgia Ellis Wall	Nadine Packham
Areesha Hassan	Georgia McDougall	Natasha Hirst
Ben Shears	Imogen Lee	Reuben Miles
Bethany Harford	Jack Strange	Rianna Newman
Bethany Vince	Jessica Whyte	Sophia Keeling (Huggins)
Charlie Coupe	Kate Taylor Smith	Susie Foster
Daniela Roberts	Kene Grobbelaar	Taniqua Thomas
Darcey O'Neil	Kiera Burrows	

A final thank you to this year's co-ordinator **Beth Harford** for her assistance in bringing the project to fruition.





PRIORITY 1: MENTAL HEALTH



The WSYC spoke to **269** young people in Wiltshire and Swindon about mental health. Our survey findings suggested that nearly half of the young people we spoke to were struggling with their mental health. Young people feel that access, communication and consistency of services are important for their mental health and wellbeing. The consensus found in the discussions with young people in Wiltshire and Swindon is that these three categories are not meeting the required standards, and as such, they would like to see improvements. The WSYC set out to listen to the honest opinions of young people on how mental health provisions need to be designed in order to best suit their needs.

WHAT WE FOUND

Our conversations highlighted that young people in Wiltshire and Swindon are increasingly uncertain about how to approach the topic of mental health and how to improve the services offered by mental health facilitators. Our findings suggest that factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the requirements for isolation have led to a decline in young people's mental health. 49% of the young people surveyed rated their mental health **between 3 and 5 on a scale of 1-10**, which shows that urgent improvements are required.

Young people in Wiltshire and Swindon have suggested that there is a lack of consistency in how mental health cases are handled in their region. As mental health issues are not a visible condition it is suggested to be harder to be taken seriously. Young people have said that this is partly down to a lack of education into the variety of mental health disorders, their symptoms and how to identify them:

"Make them more aware of the different types (e.g. body dysmorphia) instead of just depression."

"Take a bath does not work. So why are they promoting this?"

"An updated system is required with better treatments based on science."

"Look at trending problems and fix those issues rather than focusing on the problem that comes from the teens' brains."

"Increased outreach - make more interactive programmes, workshops and services available to all so that young people are able to notice the signs and red flags should they find they arise in their relationships. For instance, this could be delivered via school."

"Encourage people to speak up without judgement. I don't mentally feel the same I did pre lockdown for a number of reasons, but I don't really feel like I can always talk to someone."

Young people said that the key to tackling poor mental health is early and consistent intervention, as this would reduce the impact and intensity of mental health issues in later life. However, the current system in Wiltshire and Swindon to receive help includes long waits for access which negatively impacts the mental health of people who are already struggling. The services provided by CAMHS have been highlighted by a number of young people as a system that is failing to provide adequate support. Young people would like to see easier access to appropriate support:

"The CAMHS support system is shocking, places children in danger of their mental health in situations where they're not safe. I was put in hospital for a night due to an attempt and was let out the next day after saying I wasn't safe. Mental health practitioners need to listen to us."

"Long waits for GP, so people give up."

"Support services such as childline could do better to pick up phone calls as people are often put on hold for an hour or two before the call ends and nothing happens."

"NHS CAMHS service is not helpful."

Young people said current mental health support schemes are not listening to them. As mental health disorders are often part of a spectrum, it has been suggested that as young people know what is needed to help them, mental health practitioners should be adapting to the individual needs of each person. The current opinion is that the schemes are too bureaucratic and lack human impact:

"Antidepressants don't work, you need to find the cause."

"The support we are given should be less forced, it seems like people have only started doing this because they have to; for example, schools use it as an advertisement and to get a good reputation, "we value our students' mental health".

"Mental health should be taught in a way that really explores the reality of mental health, rather than as if it is a textbook definition that can be gotten over if we 'talk to a friend'"

"Listen to what they have to say and help them out till the end. Don't just help once and thats it, it's all about repetition."

In terms of the police, a large number of young people in Wiltshire and Swindon spoke positively about their interactions with the police and their effect on mental health. Police officers have been noted to humanise themselves and show compassion in crisis episodes as well as in non-crisis episodes. However, others have suggested that this is not consistent among all officers in the region. In some cases, young people have suggested that there is a lack of understanding around mental health issues from police officers in Wiltshire and Swindon:

"We had a small discussion and they humanised themselves by discussing their experiences with loss."

"They made me feel safe and happy and it's good to talk to them when you're on the right side of the law."

"Was questioned by them to make sure I was alright, made me feel bad at the time but much better now."

"He thought I was on drugs but I was actually having a meltdown, now I'm scared of police men."

"I was at a nightclub on New Year's Eve in 2019/20. Myself and a friend (both female) were leaving and a guy followed us out of the club and was harassing my friend trying to get her to kiss him and go to a hotel so he could hook up with her and wouldn't leave us alone even though we repeatedly shouted at him to leave us alone. There were 5+ police officers and bodyguards stood a few feet away who could see and hear what was happening... they turned their backs and no one made an attempt to help us - this impacted my mental health as this along with all of the recent spiking has made me not want to go out it doesn't feel safe for women to go out especially when we don't have the police to back us up and help us"



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

WILTSHIRE POLICE:

Police should have more in-depth and consistent training to understand different mental health issues and how these can impact a situation involving young people and a police officer.

PCC & PARTNERS:

Work with **Wiltshire and Swindon Youth Commission** members to create a campaign that promotes and support organisations outside of traditional 'CAMHS' services that can help and support young people more quickly.

Encourage schools to take a more **proactive and positive** approach to 'Good' mental health, including introducing more counselling support in education settings.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Raise awareness of **how to support and maintain good mental health** through WSYC workshops and social media platforms.

Spread **awareness** of youth-focused mental health support services.

Create a campaign, removing the stigma around talking about mental health.



PRIORITY 2: DRUG AND ALCOHOL MISUSE



The WSYC spoke to **178 young people** in Wiltshire and Swindon about drug and alcohol misuse. Our findings suggested that young people believe drug and alcohol misuse is a heavily stereotyped topic. Stereotypes include homelessness, bad influences, underlying addiction and violence. 90% of the young people we spoke to believe these characteristics accurately represent drug and alcohol users. The WSYC set out to understand how young people in the area would like to see drug and alcohol measures adapted to suit their needs.

WHAT WE FOUND

Young people are aware of the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse but have argued that the negative portrayal of those who abuse substances as 'drug addicts' creates wider social disruptions - its status as a taboo subject has made access to services difficult and limits an overall understanding of how an individual may be feeling at that time.

Young people have felt overlooked in their communities when they are living with family members who have addiction problems. The negative effects of drug and alcohol use have been heavily documented, but young people have suggested that increased measures need to be in place to protect those living with people who abuse drugs and alcohol. As family members do not always recognise the problems they are facing, these can often go unaddressed:

"My brother's dad (my ex step dad) was and still is addicted to drugs, he still sees my brother and I've seen what he's like high vs sober, it brings out the worst in him, he gets violent and angry, he's completely messed up mine and my mum's lives. But my brother doesn't see the damage he's doing to the family yet."

"My father has a strong alcohol and smoking addiction. It was emotionally traumatizing and mentally damaging to see an influential figure in my life require unhealthy coping mechanisms that have impacted my ability to cope with things and find healthy coping mechanisms."

"My older brother and sister take drugs, and I just do not understand why?"

Equally, young people have argued that both drug dealing and usage is often overlooked in educational environments. Young people have referenced times where drugs were visibly being used in schools and colleges and claim that the educational system turns a blind eye to these events. Peer pressure plays a key part in many young people initially using drugs or alcohol – instead of tackling this, schools and colleges tend to address the issue through lecturing and portraying all drug users as 'addicts' or 'criminals'. Young people have argued that these methods do not work:

"Schools believe they are doing a good job, just need better understanding."

"Put their attention of drug misuse especially on younger people, ones who have broken families maybe."

"Lecturing and punishment is not the way forward."

"Forcing this issue underground only leads to misuse where it could be seen and dealt with much faster and more frequently than if it were kept illegal."

Young people have argued that support services for drug and alcohol misuse do not focus on youth addiction. In Wiltshire and Swindon, many young people have reported having to seek advice online which is unreliable and ineffective in most cases. Young people with addiction concerns are often signposted to CAMHS, who as previously mentioned have significant waiting lists. Our findings suggest young people should be offered alternative methods of support to provide them with more options and specialised support:

"Childline was widely known. Compared to, The Mix, Talktofrank, Action on Addiction."

"Support homeless people, support people who are unemployed or are in debt"

"Offer more support to people who struggle with alcohol rather than scare them away with information that says alcohol is bad which everyone partially already knows. "

"Past offenders need more support".

"Provide much better mental health services that actually address the issue rather than palm it off to CAMHS, studies show that drug abuse is a direct impact of poor mental health services, provide support to young people who may be seeking jobs or in need of some kind of income."

In our conversations with young people in Wiltshire and Swindon, we have often heard reference to self-medication. Where young people have felt left behind, overlooked or unsupported with their mental health concerns, there has been an increasing trend toward the misuse of drugs and alcohol in order to cope. This usually happens outside the home, alongside peers in areas of the community such as parks or play areas. Those who misuse drugs and alcohol for such reasons are often treated as problematic. Young people should not be punished when the support systems required to assist them are inaccessible and ineffective:

"It's a form of self-medication when we cannot get sufficient support"

"Addiction should not be made a crime."

"Help drug addicts, not just leave them on the street."

"Drugs provide support and consistency for those who need it".

Many of the responses from young people have suggested potential benefits and negatives of legalisation of lower classification drugs such as cannabis. Whilst some argue that making these legal would result in lower rates of addiction and increased monitoring of usage similar to alcohol, others have suggested that the damage caused to families is too significant and that legalisation does not prevent abuse. These types of youth based debates could be used to inform future support schemes in order to understand the perspective of users and those around them.:

"We should push for the legalisation of cannabis, studies show this drug is much less harmful than alcohol and that its illegality is what creates its misuse, if cannabis users can get cannabis for a competitive price with a known THC and CBD percentage then they can be fully educated on their use of the drug and make much better decisions rather than buying a few grams of high THC weed off a dealer where it could be spiked with other drugs that may be much more harmful for an unmoderated price which could cause monetary arguments."

"Decriminalisation of minor and smaller crimes related to the less harmful drugs. With added focus on the rehabilitation, education and support of people struggling with misuse"

"The law does not stop recreational use of drugs."

"Marijuana is defacto legalised and should not be legalised due to the vast swathes of evidence saying how damaging it is to people of all ages, families and communities."

"Needs to be a higher punishment, to deter and most importantly spend enough time in person to learn the consequences."

"Each sentence should be at least doubled."



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

WILTSHIRE POLICE:

Monitor parks during the evenings for drug and alcohol use and **signpost users to safe spaces**.

Ensure all members of a household are offered adequate support whenever arrests are made.

PCC & PARTNERS:

Offer rehabilitation, education and support to young people involved in drug and alcohol offences.

Ensure drug and alcohol misuse on school and college premises is **taken seriously and approached sensitively**.

Create more safe spaces to help drug users that have a welcoming atmosphere.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Through WSYC peer-led workshops **educate young people** on the lasting impact that drug and alcohol misuse can have on yourself, your future, family, friends and the community.

Promote youth-focused support services in areas where young people can go without feeling shame or stigma.

Raise awareness of safe alcohol consumption and how to say no when being pressurised by peers.



PRIORITY 3: SOCIAL MEDIA & ONLINE SAFETY



The WSYC spoke to **223 young people** in Wiltshire and Swindon about social media & online safety. Our survey findings suggested that young people link social media to poor mental health. Despite some benefits of social media and the increased connectivity provided by the internet, the pressure set by social media platforms increases levels of depression and anxiety in young people in Wiltshire and Swindon. 80% of young people who completed our survey argued that the negative effects of online use outweigh the positive aspects. The WSYC set out to understand young people's opinions on online safety and how they believed they could feel better protected.

WHAT WE FOUND

Online predators, hate crime and hackers frequently came up as reasons for increased anxiety whilst online. In order for young people to feel safe, they have suggested that several measures need to be implemented by social media companies and by the police.

Young people believe that the standards set on social media platforms for young people are unachievable. The idea of perfection portrayed on social media leads to addictive behaviours that can often be harmful. It is harder to know who can be trusted online, and young people feel that more action needs to be taken to protect their mental health on social media:

"Biggest risk is the negativity being spread."

"The idea of haven't to be perfect and live up to standards including photos of you being drunk or so for likes and acceptance."

"It is a chain reaction, how we act is already played out on social media so we copy. Influencers need to be squashed."

"Being exposed to posts of self harm/violence on social media and being exposed to fake news/misleading content from social influencers."

"As a student rep/promoter being sexually harassed for free tickets to events and stuff."

Young people have argued that it is rare to see or hear about punishments for crimes such as online hate speech, harassment or online bullying. With the exception of high profile cases, publicity and awareness of online crimes are limited. As a result, young people are often unclear about the definitions and criteria for reporting online crimes, meaning many would be unlikely to report an online crime as they do not know if they will be taken seriously:

"Many have reported online crimes- racial slurs directed to them."

"I know how to press a report but not how to report or if I should report to the police."

"I'm not sure anything is ever done as I don't see or hear anything about it"

In terms of reporting online criminal behaviour, young people are split on whether they would report it to the police. Some young people have suggested that they do not know how to report online crimes to the police, whereas others do not believe reporting will result in a resolution. It has been suggested by young people in Wiltshire and Swindon that online abuse and hate speech is not taken seriously by the police, and they often feel dismissed in the early stages:

"I know how to press report on Instagram but do not know what is being done or if anything at all or if I should report to the police."

"Law is restricted to not punish bullies, they just get a telling off, but getting bullied can change your whole life."

"Once reported, further follow up is not done. Needs to be a better reporting system."

"It's never a big enough scale for them to care."

"I was bullied via social media and a phone call so I contacted the police and a really nice officer came to the house and I reported the incident - however because I didn't know who did it no one got in trouble... it badly impacted my mental health as I never knew who did it and continued to get bullied at school."

"I was cyber bullied and contacted the police they sent an officer to take a statement and try to help but nothing was really done other than the initial statement that was made... even though initially I felt supported as the issue wasn't resolved I had heightened anxiety around going to school as I never knew who had done it."

"Many are not sure what actually amounts to crime, due to the sheer volume of offences and never been taught in detail."

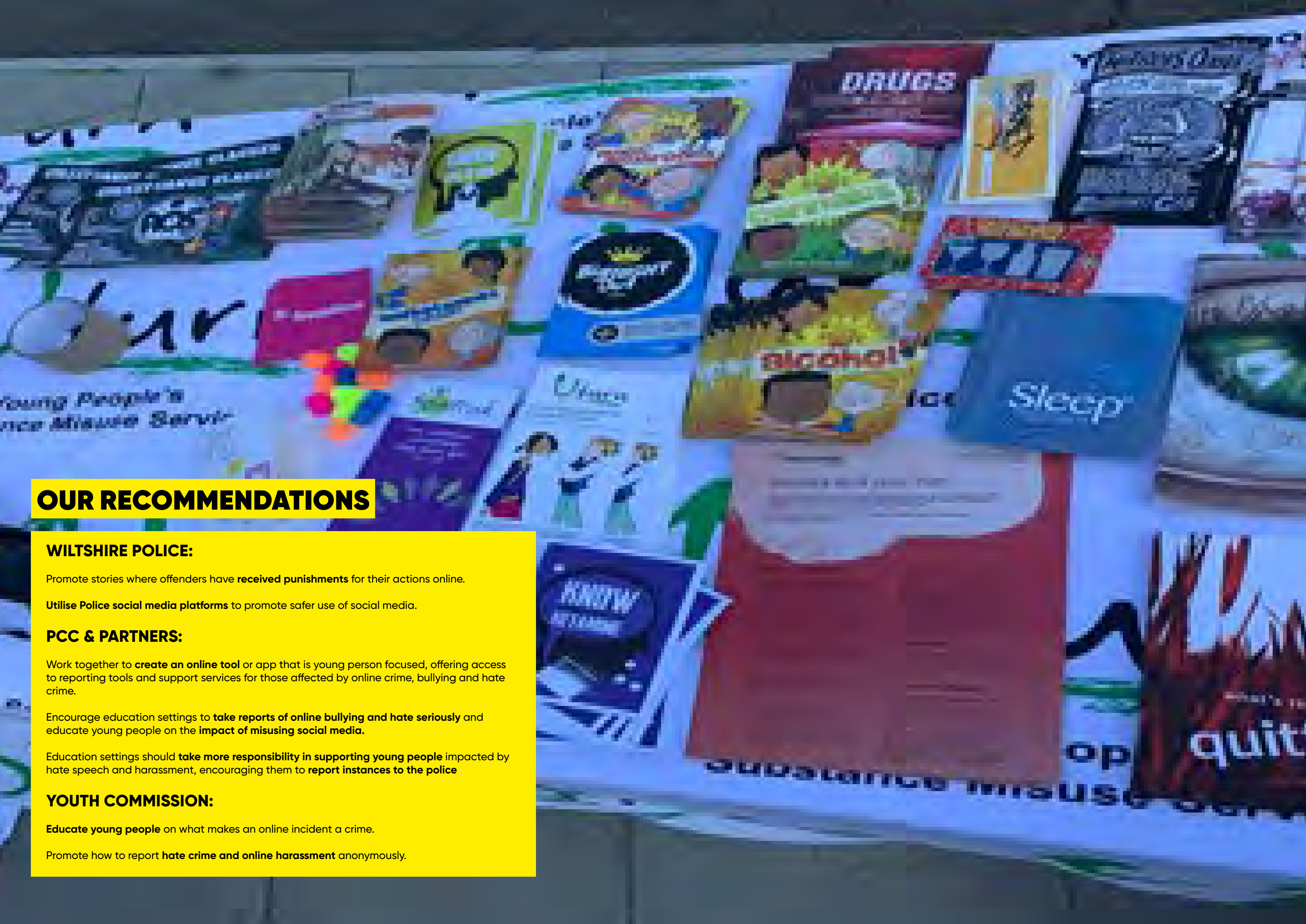
Additionally, young people have suggested that education and family settings have a limited understanding of the degree to which people can be bullied or attacked online. Reports to schools and colleges are often treated as one-off cases which are brushed under the carpet and ignored. Reports to parents are not addressed effectively often due to a lack of understanding from adults on how social media is used. Young people have said that the education sector needs to take more steps to address online safety and help parents ensure young people can feel secure on social media platforms:

"There is only counselling in schools, why is there not 24 hour support services available from the school, that we can access with no shame."

"We need big events in schools that are non-uniform. Attract large numbers of people to get involved in charity events."

"Education on social media for parents. As they have a bad perception that is not correct."

"Better home environment for support."



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

WILTSHIRE POLICE:

Promote stories where offenders have **received punishments** for their actions online.

Utilise **Police social media platforms** to promote safer use of social media.

PCC & PARTNERS:

Work together to **create an online tool** or app that is young person focused, offering access to reporting tools and support services for those affected by online crime, bullying and hate crime.

Encourage education settings to **take reports of online bullying and hate seriously** and educate young people on the **impact of misusing social media**.

Education settings should **take more responsibility in supporting young people** impacted by hate speech and harassment, encouraging them to **report instances to the police**

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Educate young people on what makes an online incident a crime.

Promote how to report **hate crime and online harassment** anonymously.



PRIORITY 4: RELATIONSHIP WITH THE POLICE



The WSYC spoke to **253 young people** in Wiltshire and Swindon about their relationships with the police. Of the people we spoke to, 30% have had an encounter where they felt that the police treated them unfairly. Whilst many of our conversations highlighted the strengths of police officers in Wiltshire and Swindon, who have helped young people to 'get out of a bad place', it is equally apparent that the relationship between the police and young people in Wiltshire and Swindon could be improved. The WSYC set out to understand how the current relationship between the police and young people has been established and recommend methods to begin strengthening the trust on both sides.

WHAT WE FOUND

Young people have suggested that the missing element in the relationship is trust. They felt police officers stop young people because they do not trust or believe that they aren't breaking the law. Young people suggest that they do not trust the motives of the police while they are interacting with them.

The majority of young people argued that they would not report a crime as they did not believe the police were on their side. Those who had interactions with the police in the past felt they couldn't report a crime when they were a victim. This is further compounded by the fact that less than half of the young people we spoke to know their rights with regards to police interactions:

"Made me feel like the police are not on your side as they are white male dominated/ biased."

"Swindon has let us down, constant judgement, singled out."

"They are not approachable."

"I always have the urge to run even if it's not going to be a bad outcome. Affected fight or flight due to bad experience."

Despite the above, where young people have reported crimes to the police, many spoke positively about their encounters. Young people have referenced how the police officers they spoke to humanised themselves and have supported them during difficult times. It is beneficial for the PCC, police, and supporting services to highlight stories like this in order to rebuild trust with police:

"Late at night out with a friend quietly sat on a bench, two officers approach us ask what were doing and for our info, we oblige and they chat with us for a while, we talk about their experiences and our own and overall have a lovely time, they move on and we are left alone again. This experience humanised them and made them so much more approachable"

"Arrested. Some were nicer and fairer but some gave me a bad impression. Some judge more easily and don't try and relate to you."

"The crime had left some psychological and emotional effects, the police did a good job with being supportive and helpful in the difficult time."

Young people have argued that they feel targeted by the police based on a number of factors; these include clothing, race, gender, area in which they live and family connections. The two factors that are discussed the most are clothing and race. Young people spoke about being stopped specifically for the clothing they were wearing, whilst others have highlighted the negative interactions BAME individuals faced with the police. Young people have suggested that the profiling of the police based on these characteristics makes it hard to trust them:

"I was tackled to the ground by an officer, for wearing all black. 5 times in a day."

"As a black person I feel targeted as soon as I walk out the house. The things we see in the media just bring more fear and fright."

"More education surrounding stereotypes, disabilities. More support from other services to support victims and people rather than police"

"Stereotypes, due to clothes, should not exist".

"Even if innocent they felt at blame, it was humiliating."

Young people believe that in order to improve their relationship with the police, both sides need to have a better understanding of each other. By tackling the stereotypes and humanising the other party, it has been suggested that both sides would be more willing to help and trust each other. Young people have recommended introducing positive police interaction through community events and youth engagement with the police through youth boards. Having youth representatives included at every scrutiny panel would be beneficial in building this relationship.

"Ensure that police get involved with events supporting marginalised communities such as LGBTQ+ and People of colour by holding charity events for these groups."

"How officers present themselves to the public, they should be closer to the community."

"Training for police on issues such as mental health and autism. Better PCCS. Better public awareness of police activity"

"Youth Board is extremely important to us. As we have been directly affected by crime and humiliation our whole lives, this gives us more support now. But the services should be more readily available as I was only recommended this through my support worker but had no idea previously."

"Communicate more. Certainty when making the call to take action"

"Ring fences funding, to allow greater work on community intervention. More funding to police cadets for young people who are interested"

"Young people to be involved in policy making."



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

WILTSHIRE POLICE:

Increase training and education for police around unconscious bias and prejudice.

Listen more closely to what victims of crime need when they are reporting an incident.

Promote the different ways to report a crime, including anonymous reporting tools available to young people.

PCC & PARTNERS:

Produce campaigns to educate young people on their rights, including stop and search.

Promote evidence through social media and campaigns that the police are improving and are not targeting based on race, age or someone's life experience.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Raise awareness of young people's rights in partnership with the PCC and Police.

Support and promote positive stories of Wiltshire Police Force.



PRIORITY 5: ABUSE & VIOLENCE



The WSYC spoke to **312 young people** in Wiltshire and Swindon about abuse and violence. Our survey results suggest that young people believe that cases of abuse and violence are often dealt with poorly by the surrounding support bodies such as the police and education settings. Around half of the young people we spoke to have an understanding of the long term effects of abuse and violence – our conversations identified that young people have more to learn about the different types of abuse and the importance of reporting. The WSYC set out to identify how young people felt about abuse and violence and to identify what would make them feel more comfortable reporting.

WHAT WE FOUND

A high percentage of the young people we spoke to were not sure if they had been a victim of abuse or violence, with around half knowing where they would direct someone for support. It is concerning, that where young people believed they were victims of abuse or violence, 90% did not contact the police. This suggests that there is an element of fear and a feeling of shame felt by victims of abuse.

One of the key reasons that young people in Wiltshire and Swindon would be unlikely to report abuse or violence to the police is the low prosecution rates. Complications and difficulties around evidence, during abuse and violent crime cases means that a large proportion of cases do not reach court. Where a report is made and there is no prosecution, victims are often left feeling unsafe and disbelieved:

"Arrested my rapist but he wasn't prosecuted due to lack of evidence."

"They found the person who did it but we dropped the case because I was scared."

"The phrase 'guilty until proven otherwise' gives the victim no support."

Where young people have reported instances of abuse to the police, it has been suggested that the follow-up procedure was inadequate. Young people have argued that they do not feel reassured by the police and there is little element of aftercare. It has been suggested that this process leaves victims feeling that reporting abuse is not worth the risk:

"They said they would handle it and call me and my friends in to give statements but then they just never did and there was no follow up and this guy still just lives in Bassett and we see him all the time."

"I think people should actually believe the person who comes out with the allegations as most of the time they are brushed off and told to not be stupid and make things up out of spite or whatever ever else, it's like the phrase believe the victim until proven otherwise."

"The core of every single interaction with a victim of abuse should be empathy, they should have their choice on what happens in their situation and shouldn't be forced to address the situation if they don't desire, they should be provided ACTUAL SUPPORT not pointed toward mental health services with 2 year wait lists"

Fear of abuse and violence has increased among young women in Wiltshire and Swindon following high profile cases such as the tragic murders of Sarah Everard and Ashling Murphy. Many young women have argued that the streets are not safe, as cases such as these show that violent acts can occur to anyone at any time regardless of the location. The publicity of these events has also highlighted the fear that young men and people from LGBTQ+ communities live with across the region. Young people have asked that more places are made available for victims of abuse and violence, as well as those who are fearful of potential abuse and violence:

"Abuse and sexual assault is the biggest issue. We see it everywhere."

"Create more spaces for teenagers to hang out and enjoy"

"Make shelters and support more accessible to people without worrying about the impacts or potential of going back to seeing them."

"Make contact numbers well known for places people can contact or what to do if they are ever in a situation."

"Create easier methods of communication. Find ways to help people being exploited to safely get help or tell people. Such as the hand sign trend I saw online in case they are in immediate danger"

"Signs on toilet doors, supermarkets are not looked at, we need something bigger and better."

Young people have argued that education settings do not understand the extent to which abuse, and violence can affect victims and how harmful it can be to them physically, mentally and emotionally. Schools and colleges need to have more effective safeguarding measures in place in order to protect students from abusive behaviours. However, some young people said that whilst they are less likely to report abuse to the police, they would be more willing to speak to a trusted adult, such as a teacher:

"An individual in schools who is always there should be the first point of call."

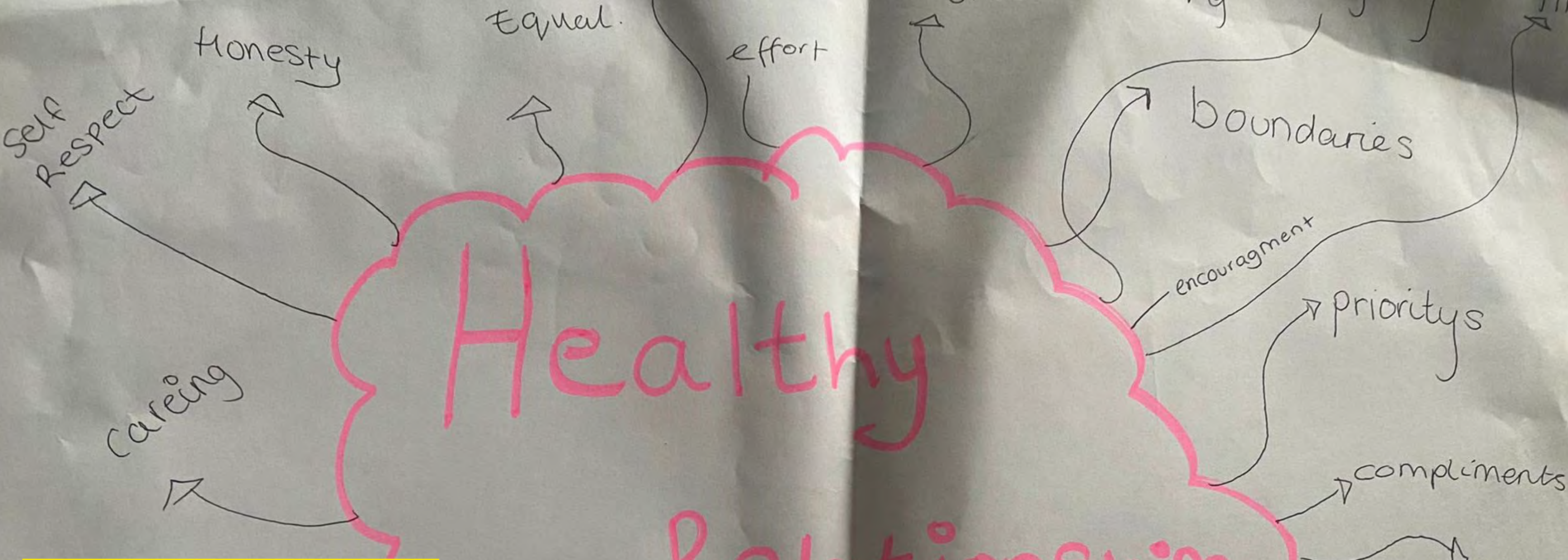
"Let people know the red flags."

"Educate young people in schools. Help them learn the legal definitions, and how they can recognise it. Have people come in and talk about what it was like for them when they experienced it."

"Early interventions in school, so it does not progress into a worse crime."

"Even Though some schools teach about violence and abuse and who to contact. Sometimes it is hard for them to reach out or know when something like this is taking place. I believe that if someone if someone is in this situation they should know of other ways of reaching out to the police or support services without needing to call them. A lot of young children and teenagers have anxiety around talking on the phone and so may be out of having to contact someone that way."

Healthy Relationships



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

WILTSHIRE POLICE:

Ensure there is a **victim-centred approach**, with clear communication throughout the process.

Promote the **different ways young people can report** abuse and violence, including anonymous reporting tools.

Educate young people on **safe routes** at night and promote **'Street Pastor' schemes or similar organisations** that support young people leaving pubs and clubs.

PCC & PARTNERS:

Produce a campaign and promote within education settings on the importance of reporting abuse and violent crimes to the police.

Have clear conversations with education settings on the importance of **taking complaints of abuse and violence seriously** and highlight their responsibility to keep young people safe.

YOUTH COMMISSION:

Include people with lived experiences in **'Big Conversation' workshops** for more impact and relatability.

Raise awareness of what healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships are, including how to access support services, and promote the **'Ask for ANI'** national initiative and other support services.



PRIORITY 6: GROOMING & EXPLOITATION



The WSYC spoke to **234 young people** in Wiltshire and Swindon about grooming and exploitation. Our survey findings suggest that young people commonly define grooming and exploiting behaviours as someone gaining their trust in order to achieve an ulterior motive. The key principle identified by young people is manipulation, by telling young people what they want to hear and making them feel good about themselves, a dynamic is created in which the young person will be more likely to do what is asked of them because they have been made to feel valued. The WSYC set out to identify how young people felt about grooming and exploitation and to identify what would make them feel more comfortable reporting.

WHAT WE FOUND

Around 75% of young people understand the basic definitions of grooming and exploitation. However, when asked for more detailed information, many young people were less clear on what grooming is. Young people were able to identify the type of grooming related to sexual exploitation, such as sharing explicit images and online grooming, but were not as aware of other common types of grooming such as exploiting young people into dealing drugs. Education systems should ensure that all different forms of grooming are covered in as much detail as online grooming.

Young people have identified that manipulation plays a key part in the process of exploitation. Some examples of ways in which young people can be manipulated include monetary incentives, compliments and reassurance. Young people have said that in order to reduce the effectiveness of grooming methods, the anxieties of young people need to be tackled:

"Predatory behaviour towards a person (usually minors), in which the predator will gain the victim's trust, then exploit them for personal gain."

"Poor mental health leads to unhealthy or unusual behaviours, making them vulnerable."

"Make it as easy for the victim as possible to return to normal life without feeling targeted or viewed differently due to what happened."

Young people need education regarding the signs of grooming and exploitation. Many young people have suggested that without education on how to identify grooming, it would be much harder for them to help their friends out of potentially dangerous situations. By identifying the key signs at an early age, young people have suggested that cases of grooming would likely reduce as potential victims and their wider friendship circles would be able to identify groomers and report them:

"Teach young people the meaning and signs of grooming and where they can report suspected grooming and ways they can protect themselves from grooming."

"More awareness around it, often in school we are taught about abuse, alcohol, drugs etc but grooming isn't really touched upon."

"The majority of people do not know how to report safely."

"Display HOW people are groomed and what tactics are used in order to gain ones trust and exploit them and the tactics used to hide and rationalise this."

The onus for this does not lie solely on the education sector. Police and support services should utilise social media to publish detailed guides to identifying victims of exploitation. Young people have argued that support and intervention is not readily available in many instances and to all those effected by grooming. It is important to consider that families often need support when their relatives are exploited. Young people have said that support provisions need to be less narrow in their focus:

"Invest in destigmatising campaigns to remove the idea of a 13 year old girl on the internet being asked for nudes by a creepy old man."

"It's not just the person who was a victim who needs help and support - parents with a child in this situation can often feel guilt for not knowing or helping sooner and should also receive support"

"Create easier methods of communication. Find ways to help people being exploited to safely get help or tell people. Such as the hand sign trend I saw online in case they are in immediate danger"

"Target areas where young people may be more exposed to people who could be dangerous towards them"

On a national scale, officials in Wiltshire and Swindon should campaign for social media platforms to introduce measures to protect young people from being messaged by strangers. Age restrictions and private account settings should be made more visible on all platforms, and young people have argued that there should be measures in place to prevent people with no connections from messaging them:

"Have stronger settings on social media making it more difficult for strangers to message and talk to young children and give more information to children on parents on the different types of grooming and exploitation"

"They can set a website where young children can anonymously say they have been a victim and then police can further contact them for the details."

"Someone random becoming close friends with you, them trying to find out more information about you than a normal person would, trying to meet you but only want to meet you alone, don't want you to tell people about them, becoming manipulative - making you feel bad if you don't do something they ask you to. Facebook shouldn't allow this."

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

WILTSHIRE POLICE:

Avoid victim-blaming and adopt more empathetic approaches to young victims of grooming and exploitation.

Anonymous reporting tools should be better promoted to enable young people to report instances safely.

Work alongside external, independent intervention providers who can offer a 'detached' approach to situations involving young people to gain their trust.

PCC & PARTNERS:

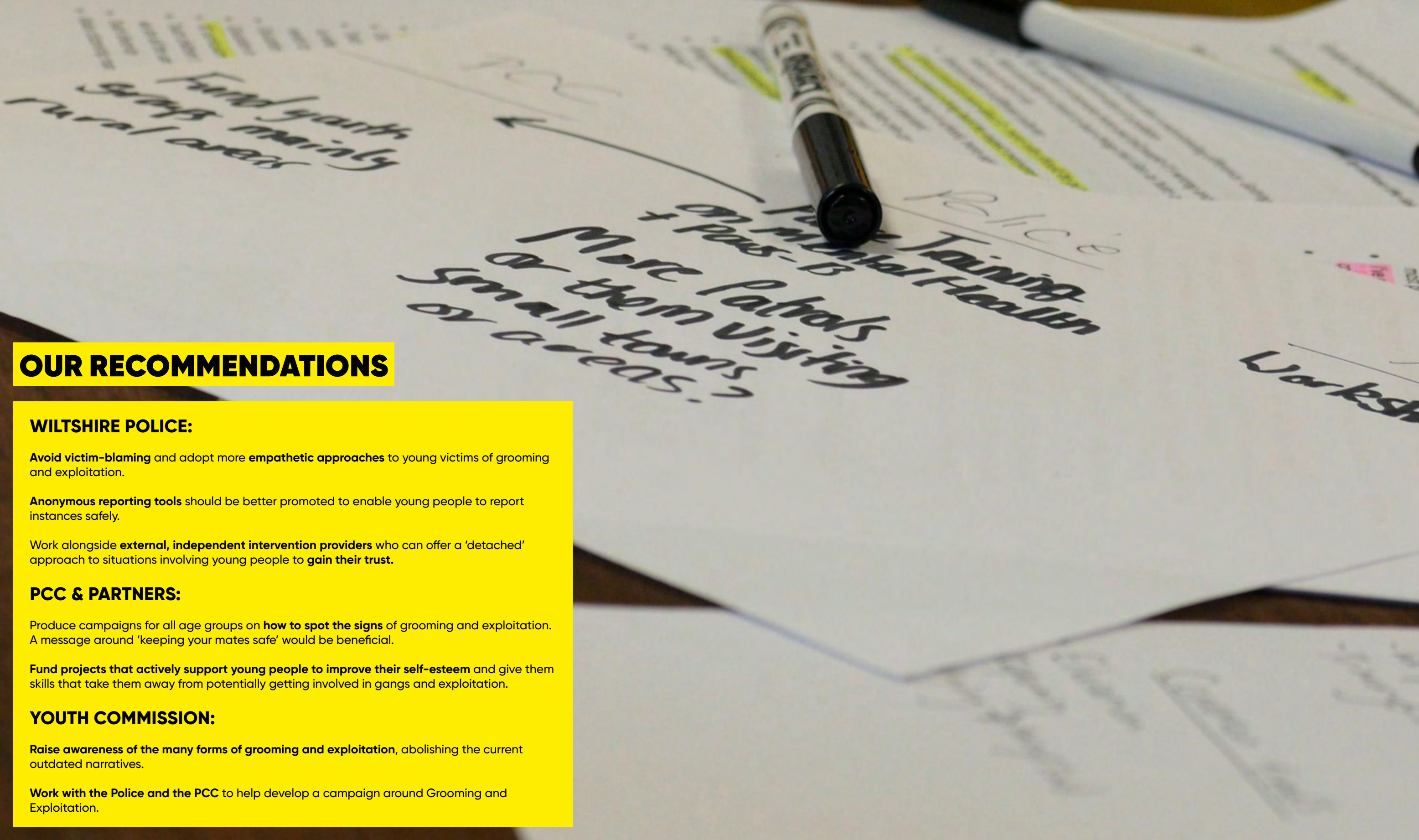
Produce campaigns for all age groups on how to spot the signs of grooming and exploitation. A message around 'keeping your mates safe' would be beneficial.

Fund projects that actively support young people to improve their self-esteem and give them skills that take them away from potentially getting involved in gangs and exploitation.

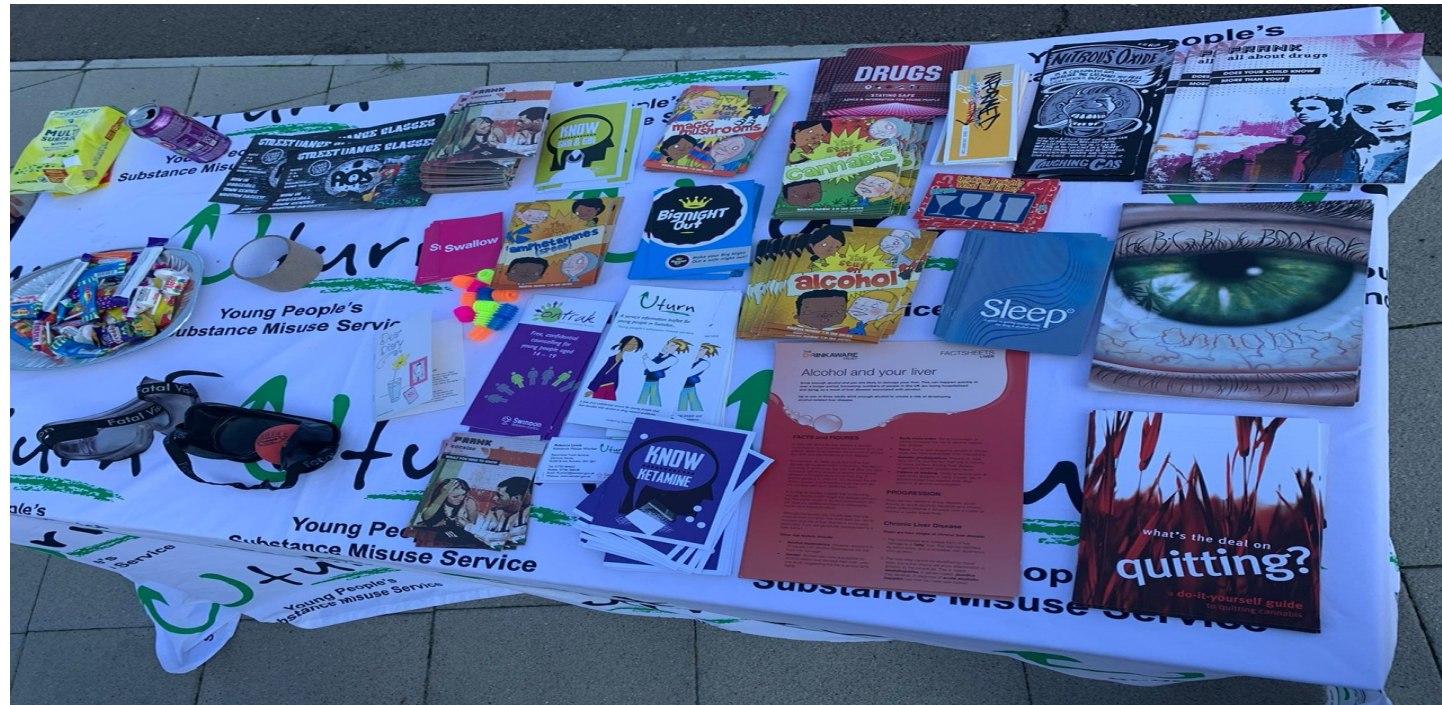
YOUTH COMMISSION:

Raise awareness of the many forms of grooming and exploitation, abolishing the current outdated narratives.

Work with the Police and the PCC to help develop a campaign around Grooming and Exploitation.



CONCLUSION: TAKING THINGS FORWARD



The WSYC members have worked extremely hard and we are thankful for all the dedication they have shown. We are also extremely grateful to all the local partners who have been involved in making this piece of work a success.

Moving forward, the Wiltshire and Swindon Youth Commission will be further developed as a channel for engaging young people in the work of both the PCC and Wiltshire Police Force. As shown through the project, the WSYC can help bridge the gap between young people and police, through ongoing engagement with the youth population. They provide youth-centred advice on a range of police and crime matters affecting young people. WSYC also have an important role to play in the development and evaluation of the recommendations they have set out in this report. Over the year ahead, the WSYC will work with the OPCC, Wiltshire Police Force and partners, to develop an action plan for the delivery of the recommendations set within this report.

TESTIMONIALS

I joined the Youth Commission to highlight problems faced by young people that the police can deal with. The thing I have enjoyed the most was working with an amazing group of people who have all been working hard to present the issues and situations that are faced by the youth of today and passing it onwards to the PCC. These are a group of wonderful people whom have not stopped working tirelessly and deserve their hard work to not go unnoticed and for it to be acted upon. The WSYC is highly important as it gives young people a chance to be heard and taken seriously by the police, instead of their problems and beliefs being downturned or ignored.

Jack, Wiltshire and Swindon Youth Commission member

I really enjoyed being part of the Youth Commission as it allowed me to meet and interact with young people of all backgrounds and discuss our views on issues we all face. I also enjoyed being around people who were genuinely concerned about the lives of young people instead of the ignorance I come across in my every day life. Being able to discuss my issues has really opened me up and allowed me to feel validated and heard. I know I'll be able to take skills I've learned with the group and apply them to help me tackle issues.

Taniqua, Wiltshire and Swindon Youth Commission member

The Youth Crime Commission is an invaluable platform for young people from all backgrounds to express their views on crime in their local area. It allows for wider conversations discussing issues that are paramount to the next generation, something essential for progression in policy to adapt to social change.

I have enjoyed meeting all the other members of the group and hearing so many opinions. It has been a real eye opener in terms of diversifying my understanding of how different groups of young people perceive the police force and the current criminal threats.

My key crime priority surrounded 'Abuse and Violence' especially against women and girls. It's an issue I am very passionate about and something I focus on in my academic work. This research is essential to understanding young women's, in Wiltshire and Swindon, experience of sexual abuse and violence and their contact with the police as a result. The results showed a worrying state, with many young females feeling unsafe on the streets while many who had been a victim of this crime didn't report to the police. Those who did felt that it wasn't followed up sufficiently by police or with compassion or assurance. This leaves space for policy to address these issues and the Youth Commission has produced a clear example highlighting the specific concerns.

Megan, Wiltshire and Swindon Youth Commission member

I'm hugely impressed by the Youth Commission and the work they do. From the first meeting I had with them, I was taken by their problem solving attitudes and their motivation to make Wiltshire a better place to live.

They've definitely given me some food for thought about my Police & Crime Plan.

Their maturity surpasses that of many adults and they're a huge credit to society.

Philip Wilkinson, Police and Crime Commissioner for Wiltshire and Swindon.

Participation is a strategic priority for Swindon YJS, so working in partnership with Leader's Unlocked to engage our children in the Youth Commission has been fantastic. We see participation as central to supporting desistance and believe that participation opportunities provide children with interactions and roles that will support with developing pro-social identity.

Michael O'Connor, Youth Justice Services Manager Swindon.

Fearless.org is a site where you can access non-judgemental information and advice about crime and criminality. What makes this site different is we also provide you with a safe place to give information to us about crime - 100% anonymously. We believe young people have the right to speak up and feel safe. Locally, we support the fantastic work that Leaders Unlocked is providing to local young people - enabling them to have a voice and shape decisions that will benefit not only them and the wider community

Emily van der Lely, Crimestoppers.

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