



Young  
Westminster  
Foundation



**TotalMedia**  
The Behavioural Planning Agency

**behave**

# North West Westminster Serious Youth Violence Consultation

**Research Report**

April - June 2021

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# Background & Summary



City of Westminster



QUEEN'S PARK  
COMMUNITY COUNCIL



WESTBOURNE PARK  
FAMILY CENTRE



FUTURE  
men



THE AVENUES  
YOUTH PROJECT



**TotalMedia**  
The Behavioural Planning Agency

Young Westminster Foundation worked in partnership with member and partner organisations to conduct a consultation with the local community to understand the main themes around serious youth violence in the localities, the impact of serious youth violence and to inform community projects to alleviate this.

The consultation aimed to provide a snapshot of the local picture, taking a two pronged approach:

- Quantitative survey with parents and adult members of the local community
- Short focus groups with young people within the borough

The following slides show the findings from both parts of the research. Analysis was conducted by the Behave team at Young Westminster Foundation's corporate partner **Total Media**, a behavioural planning agency.

## Summary of key findings:

- Serious youth violence is a complex issue with many contributing factors.
- Generally, there was a lot of overlap between what the adults and the young people reported. Although the adults interviewed seemed to know a lot less about peer culture that young people are living in.
- Young people in these areas are living in a really nuanced world, where their **safety depends on their understanding of a complex web of hierarchies** and rules of interactions. Heightened alertness may be causing a constant state of stress.
- **Youth organisations and youth workers** provide absolutely vital safety and support for young people.
- Suggestions on how to help young people stay away from violence largely centred around giving them **safe places and activities to spend their time**, supporting them in their education and their personal lives, providing opportunities and inspiration for their futures.



- **Opportunities to work and be productive and constructive are seen as key** to preventing youth violence. The young people interviewed want to work and earn money honestly. Getting involved in crime was linked back to money almost unanimously.
- Time and time again, by adults and young people, provision of hobbies and activities was mentioned. **Giving young people things to do was seen as vital** in keeping them occupied and away from trouble.
- Many young people cannot afford to take part in sport and music etc. and therefore **investment** in providing these things would give them access to pursue their interests
- It highlighted the belief that **intervention needs to start young**. Whole families need support, as parents need support so they can in turn support their children.
- A suggestion widely mentioned by the adults, and a few times by the young people, was **more joined up elements of the community**, e.g. schools and youth clubs working together, involving parents and **relatable mentors**, along with the police and religious institutions.
- A few adults mentioned that more police presence would be good for reducing violence. However, young people did not share this view at all, with some feeling that the police make matters worse by adding tension to an already tense environment. It was clear that, on the whole, the young people didn't feel any sense of safety or protection from the police and **most would not turn to the police in a time of crisis**.

## Context:

Following an unsuccessful application to the Violence Reduction Unit for MyEnds funding in North West Westminster, YWF looked to undertake additional consultation in partnership with its members and partners to gain a greater understanding of the local context for young people.

This insight would be used to inform future programme design and funding applications. The informal consultation looked to prioritise hearing from people who may have been harder to reach in previous consultations, for example young people attending PRUs and parents, through leaning into existing relationships between Westminster's youth organisations and the young people & families they work with.

## Scope:

This local snapshot is not intended to be representative of the wider borough, or indeed of all young people and their families. It aims to contribute to a growing body of evidence and anecdotal understanding in the locality of NW Westminster.

Phase 2 of the research targeted young people already known to youth services. We prioritised qualitative understanding through focus groups, building trust and rapport to gain insight from young people who may be traditionally harder to reach by consultation.

# Methodology:

- Fieldwork was conducted from **April to June 2021**. The consultation was framed around serious youth violence, with participants asked questions specifically related to violence and safety.
- **Parents and adults in the community** were invited to take part in **an online survey** where they were asked about serious youth violence
  - 203 people took part in the survey
- **Young people aged 16-25** took part in **small group interviews in their youth clubs**, where participants were incentivised with vouchers. The sessions were:
  - 4th June at Churchill Gardens Youth Club
  - 11th June at Amberley Youth Project
  - 2nd July 2021 at Avenues Youth Project
- Young people who participated were already attending youth provision within the borough, which is a limiting factor when applying the findings to wider cohorts of young people
- The aim was to conduct rapid research from which to move quickly into testing solutions



**What did parents tell us?**



## In summary, adults in the community feel young people need to:

- Be seen and understood
- Be valued by their community
- Be supported by the many elements in their lives: at home, at school, by the police/authorities, by youth centres
- Contribute to their community and surroundings
- Be constructive and productive in their work and leisure pursuits
- Have investment in them and inspiration of what they can achieve
- Have inspirational role models that they can relate to
- Have safe places they can go to spend their time
- Have physical and artistic activities to take part in
- Have the opportunity to learn both at school and via training/apprenticeships

The consultation showed awareness from parents of underlying factors at play, such as poverty, government funding, policy and exclusion from society:

***“Child criminal exploitation and grooming by gangs flourishes when young people are experiencing poverty and exclusion. Projects which provide support for young people are important, as is advocating for tackling the root causes of exploitation.”***

## ▶ **It takes a village to raise a child**

The importance of community came through strongly. Connecting different elements, including parents, families, schools, youth clubs, religious organisations, was seen as crucial for successfully supporting young people.

*“Have people that young people can relate to (i.e. Community based people who have a broad knowledge and good understand of serious youth crimes - youth workers, etc.). People that young people can recognise within their surroundings will allow them to build a trust with them and engage with them. People who have a passion for young people”*

## ▶ **Education on consequences**

Educating young people on the consequences of serious youth violence is seen as key. Both from the perspective of offenders and the implications on their lives, as well as from the point of view of victims and their families.

*“Educate young people of the consequences of such violence, due to the decisions and choices that they make at such a young age”*

## ► Relationship with the police

There is a really strong assertion from the adults interviewed that there should be more surveillance through police presence and CCTV. Punishment for violent crime or even carrying a weapon should be made harsher.

A smaller number of adults felt the opposite of this; less racially driven stop-and-search to start to repair trust in the police system.

*"More police with better training"*

*"Bigger police presence in areas where violence has or is likely to occur"*

*"CCTV cameras everywhere"*

*"A project to tackle police racism so youth feel able to turn to them for support"*

## ► Safe spaces

Adults recognised the need for safe places for young people to go to for support, education and pleasure. There were mentions of involving them in the running of these spaces. Investment in places such as youth centres and community facilities is also seen as critical. The importance of youth clubs cannot be overstated.

*"More after school and out of school youth provision with emphasis on positive role models and experienced, empathetic workers."*

*"More free, safe, monitored places for teenagers to go to learn a skill, sports, stay off the streets and feel positive about themselves"*

## ► Opportunities

Providing opportunities for training and employment, and legitimate ways to earn money is important.

Adults support the feeling of being a part of the community and taking pride in it. Physical activity is also seen as very important, providing a multitude of benefits from physical health, mental health, team work, feeling valued etc. They also want to allow young people access to music and art to nurture their talents and interests.

*"More opportunities for young people to focus and gain skills and support especially if they feel isolated or trapped in there life"*

## ► Responsibility, inspiration and opportunity to contribute

Providing role models, mentors and counselling is seen as a useful way of positively influencing young people. There were some suggestions of ex-offenders or gang members taking on these roles.

The key is that young people can relate to the mentors and identify with them, to young people their potential and that there are possibilities for them in life outside of what they may currently see.

*"A 6-week CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) course for young people to create space between thought and action"  
"Overall, the goal should be to give them a new perspective, a new hangout place, new circle of friends and show them how much bigger the world, and how beautiful life is"*

## ► **Supporting and educating families**

Supporting parents and families as a whole is important – whether with their own issues and difficulties or advice on how to provide support for their children. Alongside this, helping parents to recognise signs that their children may be being bullied, getting involved in gangs or violence. Adults recognise the importance of early years, and support for families from the start.

They also feel that education and schools supporting young people is a big component in keeping them away from serious violent crime.

*“Serious youth violence is a symptom of a family that is either struggling, misinformed or not able to make good choices for many different reasons. Until families are listened to about what they need and are supported children will continue to suffer. We need support mental health support for adults and lots in schools”*

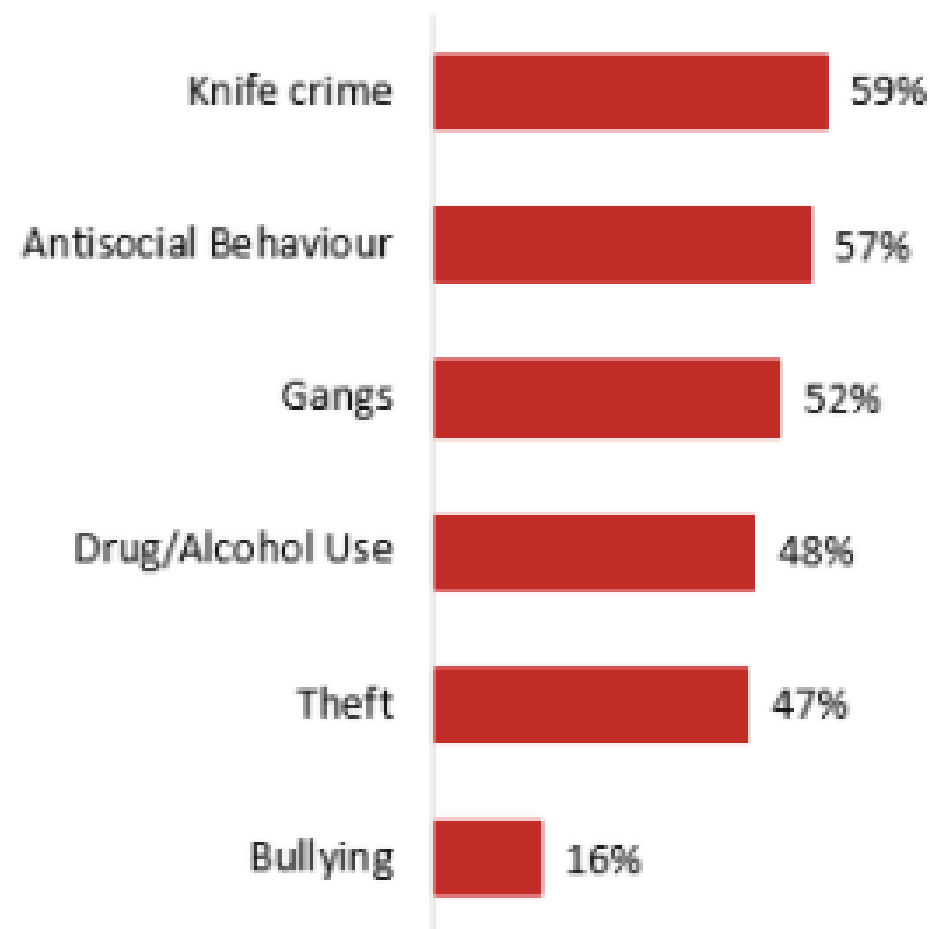
## ► **Gangs, drugs and peer culture**

Adults are aware that dealing in drugs can be a pathway into gangs and violence. they showed some understanding of the culture of young people and manifestations of masculinity/bravado, but this knowledge seems quite limited. This links back to supporting families who might be experiencing domestic violence.

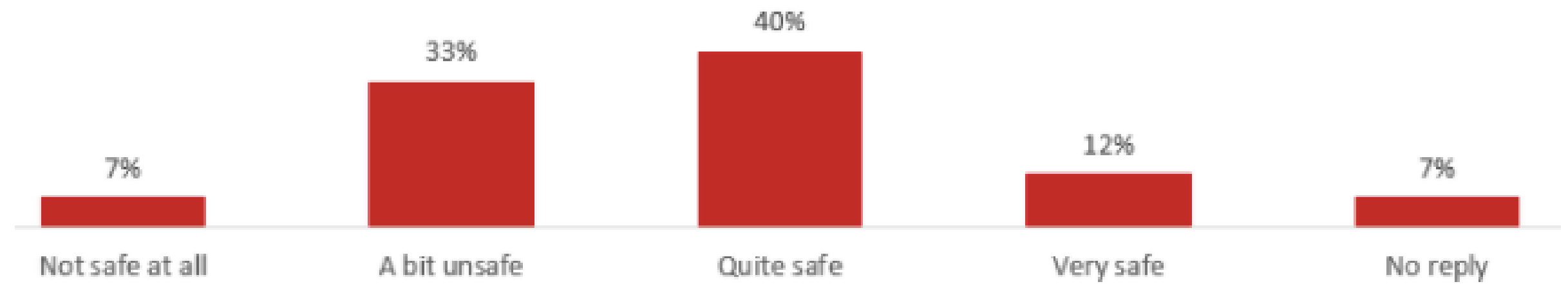
*“Better understanding of toxic concepts of masculinity and how they impact on reactions to being 'slighted' and how being 'tough' not weak gets girls etc (including female reactions)”*

*“Deeper understanding of the drugs and funding it provides underlying the gangs and turf wars”*

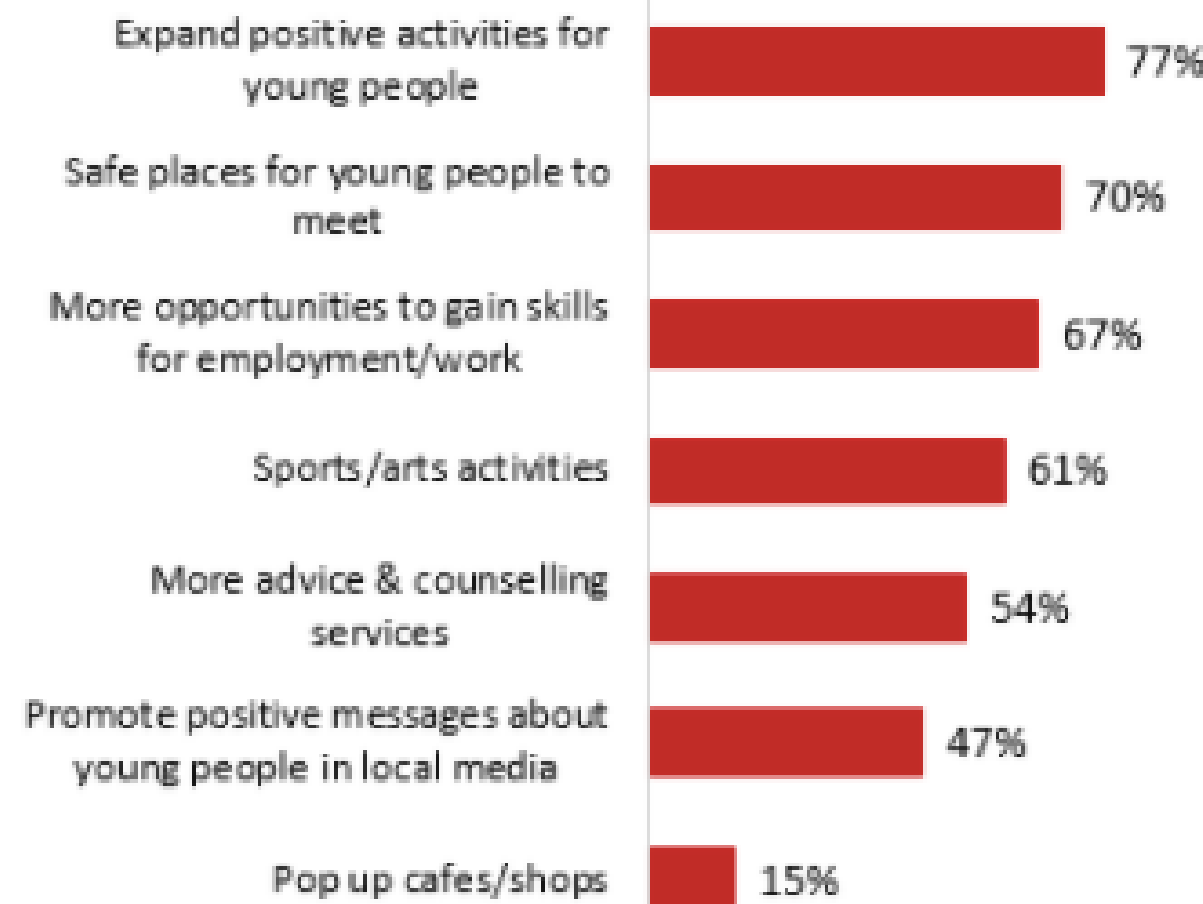
### What worries you about where you live?



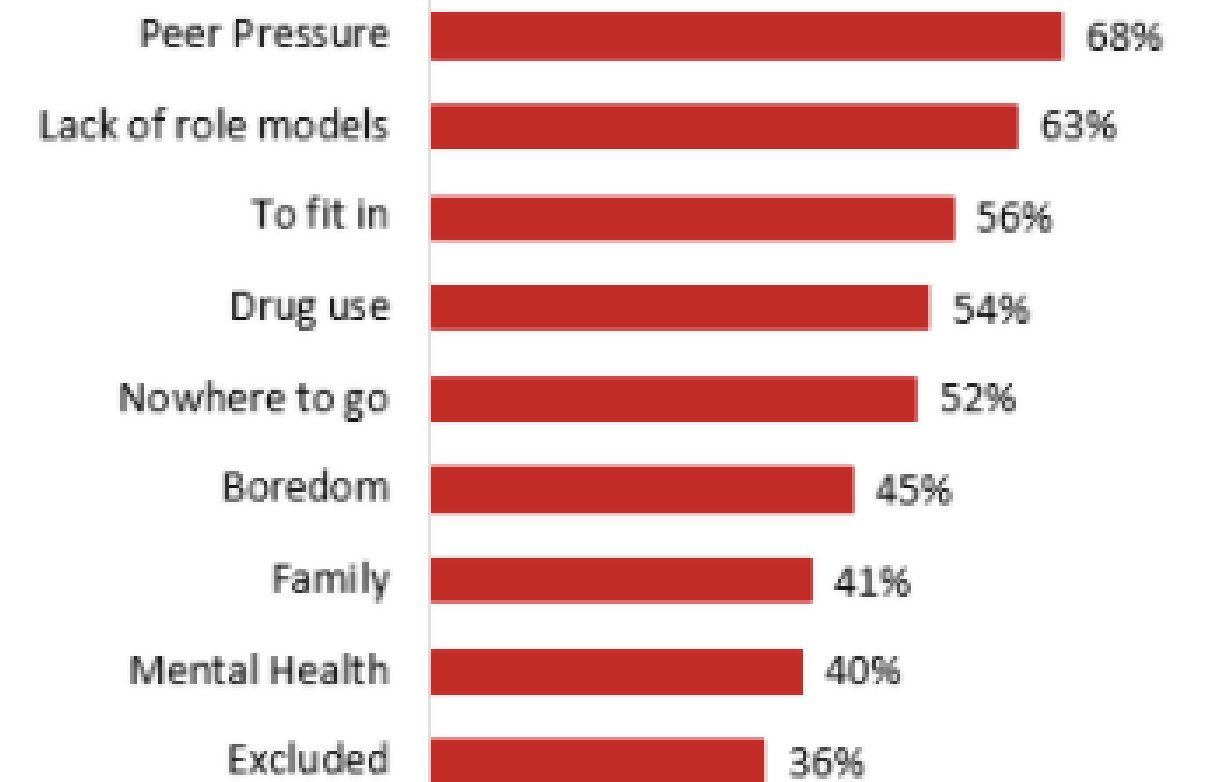
### How safe do you feel where you live?



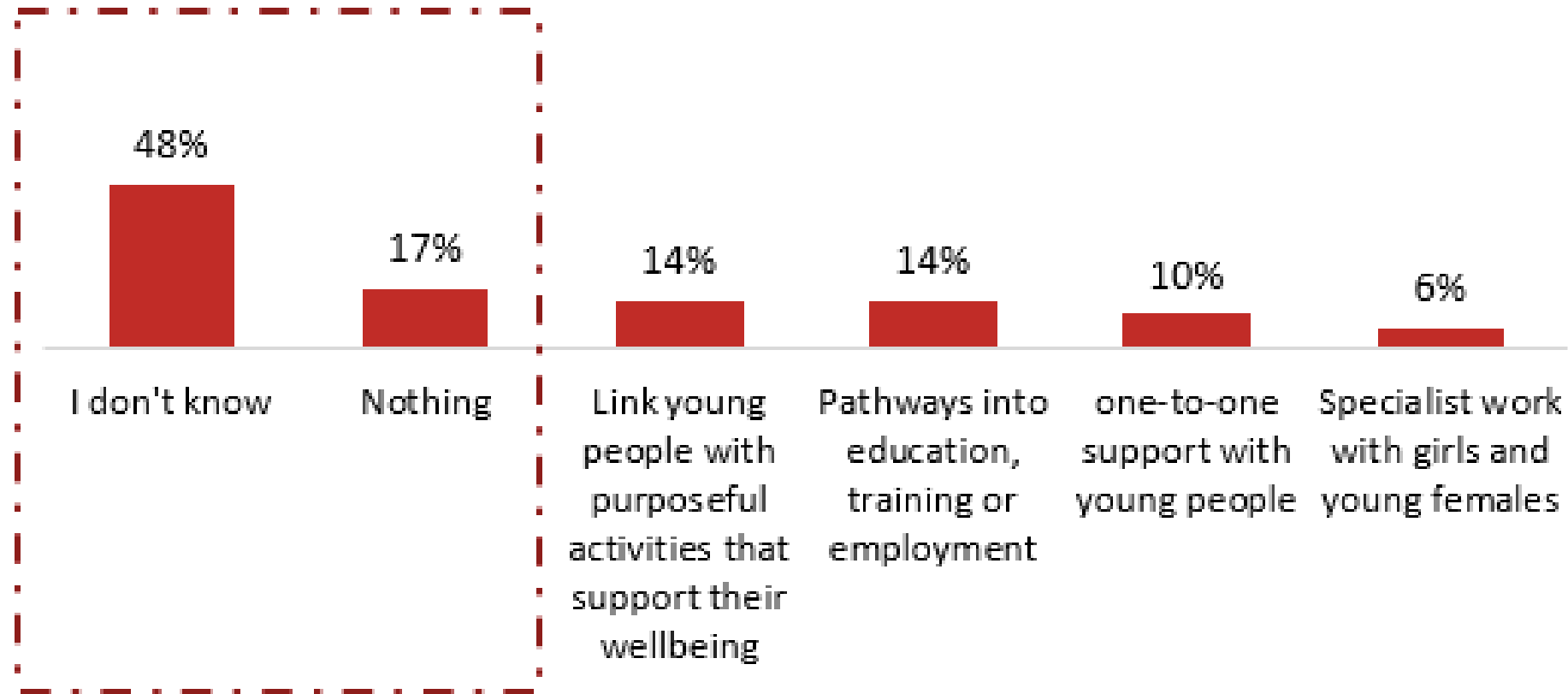
### What additional support do you think your immediate community would benefit best from?



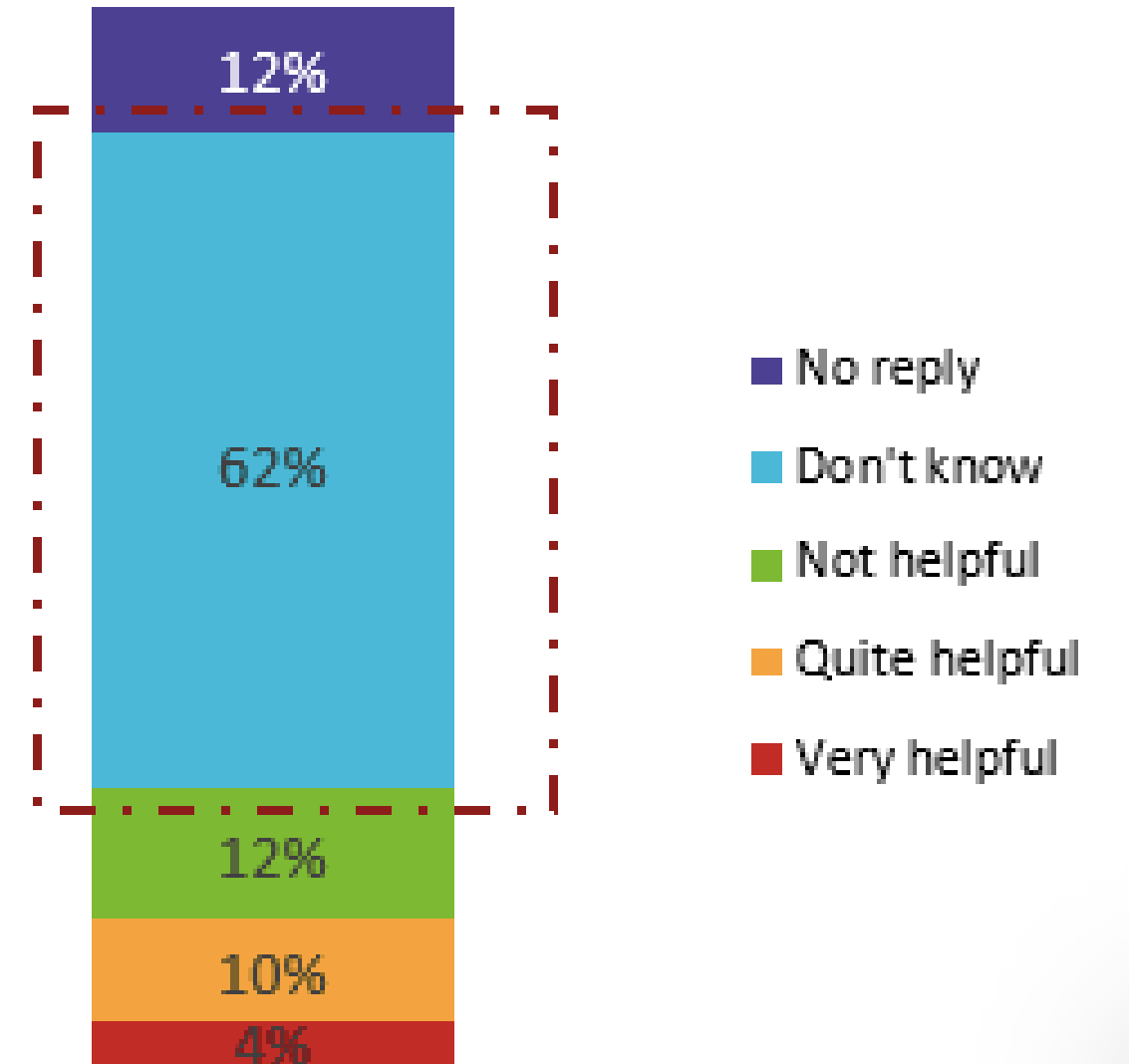
### Why do you think some young people commit a crime or anti-social behaviour?



Are you aware of any current community initiatives in your local area that are in place?



In your experience are schools discussing or addressing knife crime in ways that are:





**What did young people tell us?**



## ▶ Living in Fear

- On the whole, the young people we spoke to do not feel it is safe in their area
- They live constantly surveying their surroundings, looking out for signs of trouble
- They are finely tuned to what to wear, how to walk, how to speak, where to be seen, where not to be seen, how to carry themselves etc
- Their safety can depend on getting these things just right, and it's a delicate balancing act of not being too timid but not too 'with it'
- Admitting to feeling unsafe was difficult for some, and there was a sense of bravado and not wanting to be seen as fearful
- **Also elements of fear and self-image leading to involvement in the wrong things or with the wrong people**
- Young people discussed carrying drugs and/or weapons out of fear and intimidation from older people
- Involvement in violence can also be for self image – to look (and feel) tough

## ► Territories

- Young people spoke about living in micro-territories, where they know where they can and cannot go, and when they can and cannot go somewhere
- This filters down to road and postcode level
- **'Postcode wars' were described by young people, and knowing who is who within an area is very important**
- Young people shared big, convoluted descriptions of who can go where, who can cross into different blocks or small areas and who can't
- They feel it comes down to who you are and also who you are associated with
- It is important to be known and familiar to 'elders' so as not to be mistaken for someone outside of the area

*"Young people don't just follow one map, there's a map within a map innit, within a map, within a map"*

## ► Money

- **There is a strong assertion that money is the root cause of the problems leading to involvement in violent crime**
- Needing money is described as the start of getting involved in gangs
- Even needing as little as £2 to go to the corner shop and get themselves something... some parents can't provide that and the young person starts to find other ways of making their own money, which leads to getting involved in bigger things
- Talk of bullying if you do not have the right clothes, shoes etc. and how money is needed to fit in, as well as for sports and other interests

*"When you don't have money, that's what makes most people go outside and do the stuff that doesn't need to be doing"*

## ► Normalised weapons

- Carrying weapons was described by young people as necessary, not to do harm, but for protection
- The youngest people interviewed stated that they would rather live in prison than be dead
- They shared alarm that young people aren't worried about people carrying weapons, and that it is so normal now
- There was some debate over whether it is possible to know if someone is carrying a weapon; assertion from some that you can tell, but many others believe it is impossible to know
- Again, a lot of this discussion seemed to focus on the idea of keeping face

*"It's worrying that it doesn't worry people. It's so normalised that it doesn't worry young people that someone might be carrying a weapon"*

## ► **Police don't appear offer protection or support**

- On the whole, young people shared that they are not trusting of the police
- They are highly unlikely to contact the police at signs of trouble; some of the youngest people interviewed said they would contact the police in a time of crisis, but none of the older people interviewed would
- There is a feeling from some that the police's involvement in these issues make matters worse

*“A lot of young people, even if they're legit, they've got nothing on them, they still feel intimidated by the police”*

*“If a group of boys see the feds somewhere, they're gonna run, they're gonna do something, they're gonna react because they've seen the police.”*

Feedback from youth workers suggests that young people have engaged well with long-standing ward officers who regularly engage in local projects such as sports and bike mechanic workshops. They believe initiatives like this to be helpful in overcoming an intital lack of trust .

## ▶ Youth clubs provide safety & security

- After family and friends, almost everyone would seek help from their youth club or youth worker first and foremost when in need
- The feeling of security, protection and support they feel from their youth clubs was palpable
- The absolute confidence and certainty that they would be helped in whatever way they needed by their youth club was striking
- **The importance of the youth clubs to these young people cannot be overstated**
- Responses were almost unanimous that investment in youth clubs would be the most beneficial thing to young people



# Recommendations

## Recommendations:

- Hold Community Roundtable event in September 2021 to reflect findings
- Second phase of consultation to understand experiences of young people who currently do not attend youth services, this could be conducted by IGXU or Detached Outreach Team (Future Men)
- Testing solutions with Member & Partner organisations
- Further supporting Police teams to grow positive impact from Y.I.A.G (Youth Independent Advisory Group) to co design best engagement methods with communities and young people and local projects e.g. bike mechanic workshops
- Secure funding to undertake a time-bound project in the NW of Westminster employing a community outreach team to develop a community network, gain buy-in from stakeholders and develop solutions to tackle SYV.





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