

Hertfordshire Young People's Survey Summer 2020

Executive Summary

Introduction

The survey aimed to engage with and capture the voices of young people across Hertfordshire during the Covid19 pandemic, to understand their priorities or concerns during the lockdown period; and what had changed for them since the YCH Services for Young People (YCH) survey at the end of 2019. The survey was anonymous, and questions were aimed at young people between the ages of 11-17. 2,608 surveys were fully completed.

A separate survey was produced for young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (up to the age of 25) in an easy read format (four young people completed it).

The objectives of the survey were to:

- Provide a comparison of young people's needs and concerns pre Covid19 and during the lockdown period.
- Identify the challenges and opportunities experienced by young people during lockdown.
- Identify whether young people knew and understood rules on social distancing.
- Identify whether young people felt that there was enough support on offer across the county, or if they knew how to access it.
- Understand the impact of the pandemic on young people's health and wellbeing.
- Understand how well YCH services have been received, while delivering predominantly online and via various digital methods.
- To identify areas of improvement for YCH provision and overall support in Hertfordshire, during and after the pandemic.

Key Findings

Lack of social interaction & impact on mental health

It is evident that young people's needs and concerns reflected the impact of the pandemic. Most concerns were focussed on a lack of social interaction and isolation from peers, friends and wider family; and missing school or struggling to cope with schoolwork at home – all impacting on young people's mental health. This was considered as a significant issue in our last survey and continues to be foremost in young people's considerations.

There appears to be a high level of resilience among young people in Hertfordshire, with 72.5% of respondents saying that they felt 'Good' or 'OK' today. Only 4% felt that they needed extra support. As found in this and the previous YCH survey, around half of young people do not know how to access mental health support, or do not know what is available.

Covid19 challenges and opportunities

92% of respondents said that they understood social distancing rules; 74% felt that the rules were quite or very easy to stick to. Young people were overwhelmingly looking forward to increased social interaction when lockdown eased.

It appears that young people tend to turn to perceived trusted sources for Covid19 information including news websites, news feeds to their phones, TV news (the top choice at

51.5%) and parents / carers (second most popular choice at 48.5%). This is despite a high rate of social media use (45%) which will vary in the quality and accuracy of content provided.

Young people have used many coping tools and strategies to deal with lockdown, primarily replacing face to face interaction with online socialisation opportunities (62.1%). However, many respondents noted that there were sometimes issues with technology that can create barriers to accessing virtual tools or to ensuring a seamless experience, such as finding meeting platforms problematic, issues with bandwidth or difficulty in reading non-visual signals. Many also commented that while online communication is better than nothing, face to face interaction (especially with friends and family) is better. Conversely, this differs to some young people with LD or those with anxiety, who state that they prefer the online alternatives.

Many respondents took advantage of the time available to develop and take up hobbies (60.2%) that they might not have tried during the normal school term; and commented about the positive impacts of lockdown such as:

- Getting more / better sleep
- Having more time to myself / doing things that I like – cooking, gardening, gaming
- Living a healthier lifestyle – diet / exercise / walking and exploring local area
- Feeling less pressurised

Concerns

While most young people agreed that the priority issues identified in the previous YCH survey¹ were still important, some new issues were highlighted.

Unsurprisingly, a large number of young people had immediate concerns about friends or family catching Covid19. Respondents were less concerned about catching the virus themselves.

This was followed closely by Black Lives Matter as the next largest area of immediate concern. The top five current concerns for respondents were:

- Family or friends catching Covid19 (1657)
- Black Lives Matter (1474)
- Mental health and emotional wellbeing (879)
- Catching Covid19 (826)
- My education e.g. school / college / university (726)

Concerns for the future were largely centred on young people's prospects. The knock on effect of disruption to education for several months, appeared to make respondents question the impact that this will make on their lives. The top five future concerns for respondents were:

¹ Top five concerns in the YCH 2019 survey:

- Climate Change
- Mental Health
- Being Bullied
- Knife Crime
- Body Image and Appearance

- My education e.g. school / college / university (1469)
- Getting a job / my future career (1342)
- Black Lives Matter (924)
- Money (832)
- Family or friends catching Covid19 (728)

YCH

YCH quickly developed online projects and one to one sessions to respond to young people's ongoing needs through lockdown. On the whole, participants enjoyed the virtual sessions and content, with the majority saying that it gave them something to look forward to and kept them in touch with friends.

Young people engaging with these projects felt that Youth Workers and Personal Advisers helped them to think about their future and were happy to have someone available to listen to them. Most respondents felt that the sessions were easy to join and available at the right times of day / evening. The only negative points raised about the sessions focussed on the limitations of technology and IT. Some young people specifically asked for virtual projects to continue, even after the Covid19 pandemic has subsided.

Some young people were unaware of the services offered by YCH. This may be because they fall outside of the 'vulnerable' cohort targeted by the service. Of the young people who requested additional help or support, this was predominantly for mental health, confidence & self-esteem and education / careers.

Recommendations

1. Agencies including Youth Strategy Groups continue to work together to ensure that young people know how to access mental health support at whatever level they require.
2. Agencies including Youth Strategy Groups continue to work together to ensure there is sufficient mental health services available for young people and that these are accessible.
3. Partners continue with and improve their Covid19 social media messaging for young people, reinforcing factual information provided by trusted sources; and articulating in a way that is understandable and in plain English.
4. Organisations look to provide a blend of face to face (as legislation allows) and online services, making best use of technology to improve and embed communications during periods of lockdown; and where possible, this is related to the young person's preference.
5. Organisations consider the positive aspects of lockdown highlighted by respondents and ensure that what young people have found to be important is nurtured, valued and respected in terms of future planning.
6. Building on the actions taken from the last YCH survey, opportunities for young people should continue to be developed and co-produced with them, to allow for involvement across a range of social justice issues.

7. Schools, colleges and partner organisations should consider young people's concerns about their education and future prospects on an individual basis, to ensure that they are reassured and supported in achieving their desired outcomes.
8. YCH should continue a blended approach to services, utilising technology when appropriate and necessary. Projects and programmes should be developed for easy transfer to online activity, should Covid19 restrictions be re-imposed; co-producing with young people wherever possible.
9. YCH should increase digital and social media communication to reach more targeted young people and inform parents and practitioners to further increase awareness of the local offers.