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with



Keele
UNIVERSITY



 **University of
Staffordshire**

Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire City Wide Youth Consultation Report



Executive Summary



Here for young people
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Introduction

This report presents the findings of a wide-ranging consultation with children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.

In 2024, **YMCA North Staffordshire partnered with University of Staffordshire and Keele University** (Keele Institute for Social Inclusion) to explore young people's lived experiences, aspirations, and concerns regarding their future and the city they call home. The project aimed to centre young voices in conversations about policy, planning, and community development, providing a platform for young people to express what matters to them. In collaboration with 50 young people, the project designed **a questionnaire and a creative activity** to make the project youth-friendly, inclusive and accessible. **2838 children and young people, aged between 10 and 24 participated.**

Key Aims

- To understand what young people like and dislike about living in Stoke-on-Trent.
- To explore their hopes and worries for the future.
- To identify barriers and enablers in areas such as safety, opportunities, transport, community life, and well-being.
- To inform youth-centred policy and practice in Stoke-on-Trent.

Findings

How Do Young People View Stoke-on-Trent and Surrounding Areas?

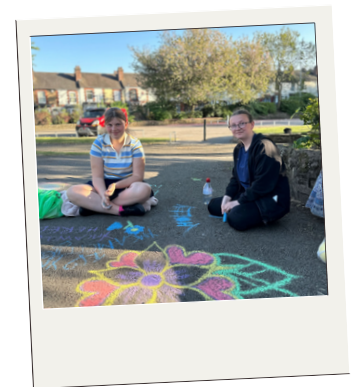
- Young people appreciate Stoke-on-Trent's **friendliness and community spirit** but **feel judged and excluded in public spaces**.
- **Cultural diversity** is welcomed in urban areas, though rural parts show less exposure, leading to mixed views on inclusion.
- Many feel **bored and underserved**, with few youth-focused leisure or creative spaces, leaving them reliant on commercial venues.
- Green spaces are valued for mental wellbeing, but issues like **poor maintenance and safety concerns** limit their use.

- Stoke's relative **affordability** is a benefit, yet **financial insecurity and fears about future** independence remain widespread.
- A **lack of local opportunities** in work, training, and creative industries drives aspirations to leave the city.
- **Education** is criticised for not preparing young people for real-life challenges or offering flexible, practical paths.
- **Safety** is a major concern, especially among young women, both offline and online, affecting daily freedom and wellbeing.
- **Declining public spaces and local services** fuel feelings of being neglected and lower young people's sense of self-worth.
- **Unreliable, expensive transport** limits access to education, work, and social life, despite good rail links to larger cities.



How Does Being Online Make Young People Feel?

- Online platforms are essential for **connection**, helping young people maintain friendships, express themselves, and access peer support— especially where offline spaces are limited.
- The internet offers critical **emotional relief**, with humour, games, and entertainment providing a sense of escape, control, and comfort from everyday boredom and stress.
- Digital spaces support **identity development**, allowing young people to explore who they are, find community, and gain inspiration and validation in ways not always possible offline.
- **Cyberbullying and online harassment** are serious threats, with many young people reporting emotional harm, exclusion, and fear caused by anonymous cruelty and unchecked hostility
- Many feel **unsafe online**, citing grooming, impersonation, and data privacy concerns. A lack of trust in platform moderation and protection fuels a sense of vulnerability.
- **Online addiction** is a common concern, with young people describing compulsive scrolling, disrupted routines, and feeling emotionally drained by screen overuse.
- **Toxic content and unrealistic ideals** are widespread, with misinformation, edited images, and harmful influencer culture causing insecurity and lowered self-esteem. There's a tension between inspiration and pressure, as even positive role models can reinforce narrow, often unachievable standards of success, beauty, or happiness.



What Support Are Young People Getting and What Is Missing in the Transition to Adulthood?

- **Relational support is vital, with 86% of young people feeling supported mainly by family, trusted educators, and peers.** These informal networks provide stability, life skills, and emotional guidance in the absence of strong formal systems.
- **Supportive educators make a big difference,** especially when they go beyond academics and show care for students' personal growth. However, this isn't a universal experience and depends heavily on individual staff capacity and engagement.
- **Peer relationships are lifelines,** offering daily emotional support, practical advice, and shared understanding—especially when young people face challenges that professional services are slow or unable to address.
- **Access to positive community involvement varies,** with volunteering, jobs, and faith-based groups offering purpose and confidence. Yet many young people miss out due to lack of awareness or encouragement.
- **Youth spaces are lacking,** with young people often “hanging around shops” due to the absence of safe, inclusive places to socialise, relax, or be creative. This contributes to feelings of boredom, exclusion, and negative public perception.
- **Life skills education is insufficient,** leaving many unprepared for adult responsibilities like budgeting, renting, or job-seeking. Schools are seen as overly focused on academic paths and neglectful of real-world preparation.
- **Mental health services are inaccessible or unresponsive,** with long waits and impersonal interactions driving many to rely on friends or cope alone. Some feel that help only arrives once things are too severe.
- **A sense of invisibility** prevails, with young people feeling ignored unless they are seen as a problem. Many believe their voices are not valued or heard in decisions affecting them.

How Do Young People See the Future?

- **Young people are ambitious and eager to grow, with 81% saying they enjoy learning new things.** Many dream of university, entrepreneurship, or developing skills that lead to independence and self-fulfilment.
- **Personal freedom and autonomy matter,** reflected in goals like moving out, driving, and earning their own income. These milestones represent more than adulthood—they signal control, confidence, and self-definition.

- **Stoke-on-Trent is both a springboard and a stepping stone**, valued for its educational and work opportunities, but often seen as a place to grow beyond. Young people want Stoke to feel like a place where they can thrive, not just pass through.
- **Connection and belonging are essential**, with young people craving emotional closeness, meaningful relationships, and a sense of being understood and valued in their communities.
- **Civic-mindedness is strong, with 94% enjoying helping others.** Many express a desire to contribute through volunteering and community support, not just receive help.
- **Financial insecurity is a major concern**, with worries about affording housing, getting stable jobs, and managing rising costs already weighing heavily—even before adulthood fully begins.
- **Global threats feel personal**, with climate change, war, and political instability sparking fear and uncertainty. While young people remain hopeful, their desire for change is tempered by a sense of powerlessness.
- **Mental health struggles are widespread**, as academic stress, economic uncertainty, and social comparison take a toll. Young people speak openly about burnout, anxiety, and the need for better support.
- Despite fears, **young people remain hopeful**, dreaming of meaningful careers, close relationships, and a better world. Their visions for the future are deeply tied to how Stoke supports, or fails to support, their present.

Conclusion

The young people of Stoke-on-Trent have a nuanced and hopeful vision for their futures. While they face real challenges, they also offer valuable insights and a strong desire to improve their communities. Listening to them is not only a matter of inclusion, it is essential for shaping a city where all young people can thrive.

This report calls on local leaders, service providers, and institutions to take these voices seriously and work collaboratively to make Stoke-on-Trent a better place for its youth.

Recommendations

1. Develop safe, clean, and inclusive public and green spaces
2. Embed life skills and vocational pathways into mainstream education
3. Improve youth mental health services
4. Reimagine cultural and heritage sites through youth-led and inclusive programming
5. Create more youth-specific, safe, and accessible digital spaces
6. Foster shared cultural understanding across communities
7. Address environmental and structural neglect in neighbourhoods
8. Shift societal attitudes to see young people as assets, not problems
9. Expand access to opportunities for skill-building, hobbies, and volunteering
10. Establish ongoing youth participation and feedback mechanisms



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Foreword

This report is the largest consultation of young people living in a city we are all proud to be from—despite the obvious challenges of growing up in a place that has experienced massive underinvestment for over 40 years. The previous government’s decision to cut youth funding by 100% due to austerity in 2018 was catastrophic. Imagine how it feels when your own government chooses to ignore an entire generation.



Daniel Flynn - CEO, YMCA North Staffordshire

As we read in this report, young people are bright, capable, and full of potential. They can make endless contributions—if we allow them to shape their futures. They are key to a thriving city.

Yet, young people still describe their city as kind, friendly, welcoming, and helpful. I was deeply encouraged when every Year 8 student we spoke to rejected the hatred of the 2024 race attacks that took place in the city. “That’s not us. It shames us all.”

In a city blighted by poverty, young people are searching for life chances. Sadly, they often see those opportunities in other thriving cities like Manchester or London. This report is a call to those with adult power and authority: invest in the rising generation. Equalise opportunity so that young people in Stoke can access the same life chances as those in thriving geographies.

This report is a call from our city’s young people to the adults who have agency and power.

**It’s time to invest in our children,
and in our shared future.**

Foreword

At YMCA North Staffordshire, we believe that young people are the experts in their own lives. Their voices and experiences are vital in shaping services that are truly meaningful and effective. That's why we are proud to have led the largest city-wide youth consultation ever undertaken in Stoke-on-Trent & North Staffordshire.

This year, in celebration of Stoke-on-Trent's Centenary, we partnered with the University of Staffordshire and Keele University (Keele Institute for Social Inclusion) to deliver a consultation that not only captured the voices of young people but put them at the heart of its design.

While we worked with schools and colleges, we also reached youth groups, community organisations, sports clubs, SEND and NEET young people, and refugee communities such as ASHA; this allowed us to ensure the voices gathered were representative of Stoke's diverse youth population.

Young people raised concerns about litter, personal safety, crime (particularly knife crime and gang activity), and a lack of youth enrichment opportunities. Many expressed fears about the future, especially around artificial intelligence and job insecurity, reflecting the decline of traditional trade-based employment in the city. These fears are compounded by the city's low academic outcomes and being in the bottom 10% nationally for youth investment.



Amy Murray - Youth Gov Team Member

In a city where 18.1% of pupils have experienced suspension, the need for positive, engaging, and supportive services for young people is more urgent than ever. This consultation has reinforced what we already believed: that young people want to be heard, and they have clear and insightful views on how to make their communities better.

We want to thank all the young people who took part, and the partners who helped us deliver this ambitious project.

Now, it's time to turn listening into action.

Introduction

This report sets out the key findings and recommendations following a wide ranging consultation with 3000 children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.

In 2024, YMCA North Staffordshire partnered with University of Staffordshire and Keele University (Keele Institute for Social Inclusion) to carry out a consultation with children and young people. The aim was to inform future services, legislation, and practices that affect young lives in Stoke-on-Trent and surrounding areas. The consultation sought to:

- Improve understanding of how young people perceive life in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire
- Improve understanding of how young people access opportunities
- Identify existing barriers to engagement
- Improve understanding as to what young people find important and/or relevant to them
- Understand what issues need addressing to engage young people in positive opportunities

YMCA North Staffordshire entered this research partnership with a clear and passionate commitment to putting young people at the heart of everything. From the very beginning, the aim was to make sure children and young people weren't just participants but active partners—shaping the questions, co-leading the sessions, and helping share the findings. This approach aimed to promote empowerment, a strong sense of identity, and support among young people, helping to shape a consultation that was both meaningful and inclusive. Creativity was key whether it was through playful, hands-on activities or youth-friendly videos that made the project more accessible. The YMCA team also embraced the challenge of working within formal ethical frameworks, taking the opportunity to reflect on and strengthen their own practices. They worked side-by-side with university researchers and students, learning from one another and adapting as the project grew.

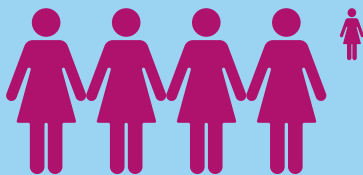
This spirit of collaboration, openness, and respect for young people's voices shaped every stage of the journey— and ensured the consultation wasn't just about gathering data but about creating real opportunities for leadership, learning, and lasting impact.

Demographic Data

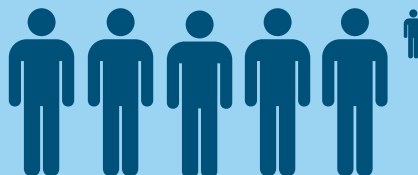
Demographic Information Stoke-on Trent & North Staffordshire Youth Consultation

2838 Children and Young People
aged between 10 - 14 participated

GENDER OF PARTICIPANTS



43.2% Female



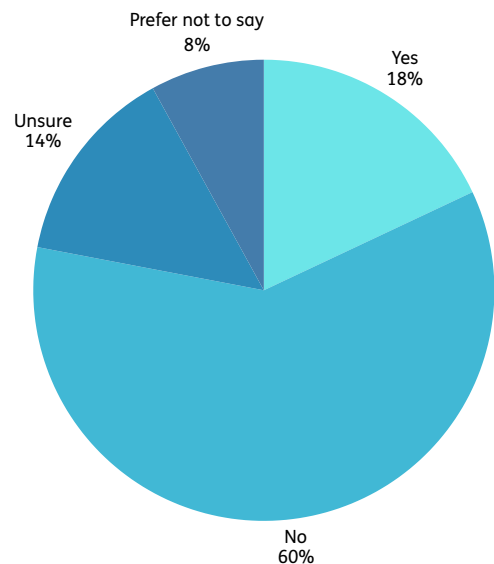
54.3% Male



2.5% prefer not
to say / Other

Do you receive free school meals?

● Yes ● No ● Unsure
● Prefer not to say



The topics explored in the consultation were guided by the Search Institute's Developmental Assets Framework—a leading model in positive youth development. The Search Institute identifies 40 developmental assets that help young people thrive. Half of these are external assets, focusing on supportive relationships and opportunities available through families, schools, and communities. The other half are internal assets, centering on the values, skills, and social-emotional strengths nurtured within young people. Research shows that the more of these assets a young person possesses, the more likely they are to succeed, demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges, and avoid harmful behaviours.

To ensure the consultation reflected the diversity of young people's experiences across the region, several factors were carefully considered:

- **Geographic reach** – Consultation to take place across both urban and rural areas in North Staffordshire
- **Age range** – Participants to include young people aged 10 to 24
- **Settings** – Consultation to be conducted in various settings e.g. primary schools, secondary schools, youth clubs, asylum-seeker organisations etc.
- **Inclusivity** – Activities to be designed to be accessible to all, regardless of background or ability

Before launching the consultation, questions have been co-designed by young people. These were designed to capture how they currently perceive their lives and explore ideas for collective improvement. The process aimed to generate themes that could guide action to help young people thrive. In collaboration with University of Staffordshire, the YMCA piloted an initial questionnaire with approximately 50 young people aged 10 to 24. During this pilot phase, valuable feedback was gathered from participants regarding the clarity, relevance, and language of the questions. Based on this feedback, the YMCA adjusted both the delivery and the wording of the questions to ensure they were more accessible and aligned with the needs and perspectives of the young people involved.

As a result, two consultation tools were developed:

- **Questionnaire:** Comprised of 19 open-ended and single-choice questions, the questionnaire was also adapted into four shorter, more accessible versions to support young people with limited attention spans or different learning needs.
- **Creative activity – Tops and Pants:** In this activity, young people were invited to reflect on the positives and negatives of one of the open-ended questions. Each participant received outlines of a T-shirt and a pair of shorts. On the T-shirt, they noted what was “Top” (great) about their experiences; on the shorts, they highlighted areas they wanted to see improved. They were encouraged to use drawings, doodles, or written words, making the activity especially accessible for young people who are not confident in English or who struggle with writing.

Communities could either deliver the consultation themselves or schedule a session with the YMCA team for support. If they preferred to manage the consultation independently, the YMCA provided them with a comprehensive toolkit. This toolkit included step-by-step instructions and resources to guide them through the process, ensuring a smooth and effective engagement with local communities. Alternatively, if they preferred hands-on assistance, fully DBS-checked YMCA staff members who are trained in safeguarding and professional boundaries facilitated the consultation. Staff and partners alike found that the tools were easy to integrate into lesson plans and youth club activities. Some young people completed the activity independently while others worked on their sheets in peer groups.



All consultation materials were reviewed and approved by the Keele University Ethics Committee. Participants were shown an informational video explaining the purpose of the consultation, their rights, and how their data would be used. The video emphasised that all responses would remain anonymous and that findings would be shared through publications and community events



How Do Young People View Stoke-on-Trent and the Surrounding Areas?

Young people in Stoke-on-Trent hold a deeply nuanced view of the city. Their reflections highlight a blend of appreciation for local assets such as green spaces and affordable food while also expressing strong concerns about safety, lack of opportunity, and urban decay. These insights offer a complex account of what it feels like to grow up in Stoke-on-Trent and its surrounding areas. They reveal a city filled with community spirit and local pride, yet one that also grapples with crime, under-investment, and social neglect.

THINGS I LIKE ABOUT STOKE-ON-TRENT



Shops
Parks
Football
People

THINGS I DON'T LIKE ABOUT STOKE-ON-TRENT

Litter
Drugs
Homeless



1. Community and Friendliness: A Social Anchor in a Changing City

Many young people deeply value the strong sense of community in Stoke-on-Trent. They describe the city as a place where people look out for one another and where informal support networks, especially among friends and family, play a vital role in making everyday life feel manageable. This sentiment often serves as a counterbalance to the more negative aspects of life in the city. While material resources or structural opportunities may be limited, emotional and social support remain key strengths. In a context where young people often feel uncertain about the future, this sense of belonging acts as an emotional anchor. The city's familiarity and friendliness provide a sense of stability, offering a form of "social wealth" that is often harder to find in larger, more anonymous urban centres.

**"People here are friendly and will help you
if you need it."**

“There’s a real sense of community, especially in the smaller areas.”



Interestingly, young people in more urban areas of Stoke-on-Trent describe the city as culturally diverse, where difference is often celebrated and accepted. This is especially notable given recent challenges, such as the far-right riots in 2024, which created fear among minority communities and projected an image of division. Despite this, many young people maintain a hopeful view of multiculturalism, speaking positively about inclusion. In contrast, those living in rural areas of North Staffordshire report limited exposure to cultural diversity. In these predominantly White communities, fewer opportunities exist to learn about or interact with people from minority backgrounds. This results in more negative perceptions of immigration, with some young people framing it as a negative aspect of living in the area.

Across both urban and rural contexts, some young people described experiencing or witnessing racism, sexism, homophobia, and social exclusion. Others expressed frustration at being judged, stereotyped, or feeling they could not fully be themselves.

“There’s a lot of racism and no one talks about it.”

“You can’t be yourself without getting judged.”

These reflections reveal the emotional toll that exclusion and discrimination can have on young people’s daily lives and sense of self-worth. The differences between urban and rural experiences echo wider research findings that show contact with people from different backgrounds can reduce prejudice and promote acceptance. As such, future efforts in the region should consider creating opportunities for shared activities and cultural exchange, particularly between more homogenous and diverse areas.

Encouraging mutual understanding and the celebration of different cultural traditions could play a valuable role in building stronger, more inclusive communities across Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.

2. Green Spaces and Nature: Breathing Space in a Compressed Life

Access to parks and green spaces is one of the most valued aspects of life in Stoke-on-Trent for young people. These areas offer vital moments of escape from stress, boredom, and the feeling of being “trapped” in a city that can otherwise feel limited in opportunities and stimulation. Young people don’t just see these spaces as areas for physical activity, they recognise them as important for mental and emotional wellbeing, providing room to relax, reflect, and unwind.

“There are **green spaces** all over the city, which makes it feel less cramped.”



This appreciation highlights a deeper desire for balance. While Stoke may lack some of the vibrant cultural or recreational offerings of larger cities, access to nature helps fill this gap. It gives young people space to feel calm and be social, contributing positively to their mental health.



However, this benefit is not equally experienced. Many young people pointed out that some parks feel unsafe or poorly maintained, with issues such as litter, broken glass, and vandalism discouraging their use.

When green spaces become unusable, it removes not only a place to gather socially, but also a critical outlet for managing stress and feeling connected to the environment. Given that access to safe, clean, and welcoming outdoor areas is a known protective factor for mental health, their neglect represents a missed opportunity to support young people's wellbeing.

“There’s glass everywhere—you can’t even sit down.”

“Some parks are too dirty to hang out in.”



3. Entertainment and Leisure: Small Joys in a Limited Menu

A lack of engaging, youth-oriented activities is one of the most emotionally charged issues raised. The sense of boredom is not just about having nothing to do, it’s about feeling forgotten, overlooked, or ignored. The city, they argue, doesn’t offer the kinds of cultural, social, or creative outlets they want. This reinforces the feeling that Stoke-on-Trent isn’t a city that’s designed with young people in mind. It’s not just boring, it’s alienating.

Although many young people express frustration at the limited range of things to do in Stoke, they still acknowledge and value what is available—cinemas, shopping centres, and leisure facilities offer moments of normalcy and escape. These places become important sites for maintaining social life and giving structure to weekends or evenings, even if they feel somewhat repetitive or underwhelming. The way young people talk about these venues often blends gratitude with a quiet plea for more—to be entertained, to feel seen, to have spaces that reflect their tastes and needs more dynamically.

“There’s just nothing to do here—same old, same old.”

“There’s stuff to do if you know where to look, but I wish there was more.”

“The shopping centre is decent, and the cinema is a good place to hang out.”

The frequent mention of brand names as highlights of the city, such as McDonald's, Primark, and Asda, also reveals how urban environments are increasingly shaped by consumer brands rather than community spaces. While these venues are valued, their dominance points to a lack of free, inclusive, communal areas where young people can spend quality time together without having to spend money. Even though historic sites are held in high regard, the shift in attention toward mainstream, global brands raises questions about how young people relate to Stoke-on-Trent's local heritage. It prompts a reflection on the future: Will the next generation feel connected to the city's cultural roots, or will corporate spaces entirely define their sense of place? Perhaps it is time to reconsider what social functions branded environments could serve. How these familiar historical spaces might be reimagined to include more youth-led, culturally relevant, and inclusive activities, ensuring they remain meaningful for young people in years to come.

4. Affordability: A Practical Advantage Amid Emotional Costs

For many, the relatively low cost of living in Stoke-on-Trent is one of its key strengths. Young people recognise that the city is more financially accessible than many others in the UK, and this plays a big role in decisions around housing, going out, or saving money. But affordability also has an emotional dimension—it allows a degree of freedom and spontaneity that might not be possible elsewhere. Still, this benefit is often presented with an underlying tension: being able to afford to stay doesn't always mean you want to stay.



At the same time, the national cost of living crisis has not spared young people in Stoke-on-Trent. Despite being cheaper than other regions, many young people report rising prices, particularly around housing, food, and transport. This mirrors broader national economic pressures and contributes to growing concerns about whether they will be able to afford adult independence at all.

"You can actually **afford** to go out and do things without being broke."

“Even here, prices keep going up—it’s not like it used to be.”

“Getting your own place feels impossible now.”

While budget-friendly options in the city help soften some of these anxieties, the struggle to make ends meet remains a top future worry. Young people are increasingly caught between two realities: one where Stoke-on-Trent is more affordable than elsewhere, and another where basic security still feels fragile due to wage stagnation, housing shortages, and rising living costs. This duality of relative affordability amid rising insecurity reveals a wider dilemma. It's not just about being able to survive in a place, it's about whether that place offers a future worth staying for.

5. Limited Opportunities: Dreams Delayed or Deferred

Perhaps the most dominant negative theme is a widespread sense that Stoke-on-Trent lacks meaningful opportunities for young people to grow, thrive, or build futures. Whether it's jobs, apprenticeships, or creative industries, young people feel they must leave to “make it.” This belief fuels a sense of personal and collective stagnation, where the present feels uninspiring and the future uncertain. It's not just frustration, it's resignation. The city, in their eyes, is failing to keep up with their ambitions.



From the perspective of many young people, the odds feel stacked against them when it comes to earning money and building a career in Stoke-on-Trent. A shortage of entry level jobs in the area leaves them feeling disadvantaged from the outset.

Although they strongly believe that education should be the key to unlocking their future, they feel that the current system is not equipping them with the practical skills they need to thrive in the real world.

"There's nothing here for young people who want to get ahead in life."

In particular, young people highlight the lack of life skills and limited access to vocational pathways, such as apprenticeships, as major gaps in their educational experience. Because these alternative routes are rarely embedded into the mainstream curriculum, they often feel that education is failing to prepare them for employment, leaving them ill-equipped to compete in the job market. As a result, many view education not as a springboard into independence, but as another barrier—disadvantaging them rather than setting them up for success. This disconnect between education and employability contributes to a deep sense of frustration. Even when job opportunities do arise, they are often mismatched with young people’s existing experience or qualifications, creating a feeling of being stuck in a cycle of unpreparedness and exclusion.

**“It’s hard to get a job without experience,
but you can’t get experience without a job”**

**“You leave school and you’re not ready
for anything—no one tells you how to
do life stuff.”**

The combined effect of limited opportunities and misaligned expectations has left many young people feeling disillusioned about their future prospects in the area. What emerges is not just concern about employment but a broader sense of hopelessness around whether the systems in place are truly designed to help them succeed.



**“We need more apprenticeships,
not just talk about uni.”**

6. Crime and Safety Concerns: Constant Vigilance, Constant Stress

Feeling unsafe is a recurring concern among young people in Stoke-on-Trent, especially among young women. Stoke-on-Trent is perceived as a place where crime and anti-social behaviour are common, and where the threat of harm - physical, emotional, or digital - is always lurking. These fears limit how young people move through their environment: where they go, when they go, and how they interact. For many, the city does not feel like a place where they can move freely or confidently and this constant vigilance gradually erodes trust in public spaces and local services.

"Crime seems to be getting worse, and no one really does anything about it."

"There are some places I just wouldn't go alone at night."

One of the most frequently raised safety concerns is the risk of sexual violence and harassment, particularly among young women. Many shared experiences of being catcalled, followed, or harassed by older men in public spaces such as the city centre. Fears of rape and becoming trapped in abusive relationships were also named as serious concerns for the future.

“Strange men shout stuff at you in town—it’s scary.”

However, experiences of sexual harm are not exclusive to girls. Young people of all genders reported being groomed or receiving inappropriate messages online, particularly through social media. This reflects a broader vulnerability in both offline and digital environments, where support systems and protections often feel inadequate.

“I’ve had random people message me gross stuff online.”

For young men in particular, fears were also tied to street violence and knife crime. Several expressed anxiety about being attacked or murdered since they see the city as an area where gangs, drug use, or alcohol abuse are visible. Public spaces often feel unsafe due to the presence of homelessness, substance misuse, and a general lack of oversight or support from authorities.

These lived realities extend beyond immediate fears. They contribute to deeper anxieties about the future—including whether young people will be able to afford secure housing, maintain good mental health, or avoid turning to substance misuse as a way of coping with stress and instability.

In short, safety concerns are not just about danger in the moment; they shape young people's broader worldview, influencing their trust in institutions, and hopes for adulthood. Addressing these issues will require both environmental improvements and systemic investment in youth safety, housing, and well-being.



7. Decline in Facilities and Services: A City in Retreat

Young people notice and are affected by the visible decline in shops, venues, and local services. Empty storefronts, run-down areas, and closed community centres aren't just eyesores, they symbolise neglect. To them, it feels like the city is slowly being abandoned, not only by businesses and governments but by any sense of long-term vision. This lack of investment chips away at civic pride and contributes to a narrative of decay, making it harder for young people to imagine staying here by choice.

"They don't seem to care about making things better here."

“Shops are shutting down, and there’s less and less to do.”

The visible neglect of buildings and public spaces in Stoke-on-Trent is often interpreted by young people as a symbol of social decay. More importantly, it has a profound psychological impact. Derelict areas and poorly maintained infrastructure do more than signal economic stagnation, they can negatively shape how young people see themselves and how they believe others perceive them.

For many, their physical environment becomes a reflection of their worth. Living in a rundown area can lead to feelings of being overlooked, undervalued, or forgotten, particularly when the city's public image can be perceived as one of decline. This can result in reduced self-esteem and a sense that they are growing up in a place where their potential is not recognised or invested in.

Almost 1 in 4 young people feel that they are not valued in their local community

Moreover, young people can feel that the state of their surroundings reflects how much decision-makers and institutions care about them. When neighbourhoods are left to deteriorate, it sends an unspoken message that they are not a priority. This perceived lack of care or respect can reinforce the idea that they are not seen as valuable members of the community, ultimately compounding feelings of alienation and hopelessness. In this way, urban neglect is not just a visual or practical issue—it becomes deeply personal, shaping identity, belonging, and ambition.

8. Transport Issues: A Pathway Out and a Daily Source of Frustration

Young people frequently cite Stoke-on-Trent's transport links, especially to larger cities, as a major plus. However, it does not add to the appeal of the city but it is praised in the context of giving people the ability to escape the city. The ability to access places like Manchester or Birmingham provides a sense of mobility and freedom, especially for those who feel creatively or professionally constrained within the city. In this sense, transport becomes more than just a service - it represents access to possibilities, new experiences, and broader horizons. It's a way to feel less isolated, less "stuck," and more in control of their own lives.

**"At least we can get to Manchester easily,
which is good for gigs and shopping."**

**"Buses can be a pain, but at least there's
some public transport available."**

Although some transport links are praised, local transport is often a major source of irritation. Buses are seen as unreliable, overpriced, and poorly coordinated, making it difficult to get around for work, school, or social life. This limits independence and can deepen feelings of social isolation, particularly for those who don't drive. For many, the daily hassle of poor transport becomes symbolic of wider dysfunction in the city's services.

**"Public transport is expensive for what it
is."**

**"If you don't drive, getting around is a real
pain."**

The Bigger Picture: A City at Crossroads

Together, these themes sketch a portrait of a city suspended between possibility and disappointment. Young people recognise and value the emotional resources Stoke-on-Trent offers, like community and affordability, but feel boxed in by its structural limitations. The recurring tension is between feeling at home and feeling held back. They don't dislike the city as a place, they dislike that the city doesn't seem to be changing with them. It is a place that nurtures social connection but withholds future prospects. This contradiction makes Stoke-on-Trent feel, to many, like a place to grow up but not a place to grow into adulthood. Addressing these tensions will require more than infrastructure; it will require a shift in how the city sees its youth not as a problem to manage, but as a potential to nurture.

How Does Being Online Make Young People Feel?

The digital world is an inescapable part of young people's lives, shaping their friendships, identity, and understanding of the wider world.

According to Ofcom's 2023 report on children's media use and attitudes, 98% of UK children aged 12–15 go online daily, with TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram being the most-used platforms. This constant connectivity offers both opportunity and risk. Recognising the need for stronger safeguards, the UK Government introduced the Online Safety Act (2023), placing a legal duty of care on tech companies to remove harmful content, strengthen age verification, and increase accountability. This reflects mounting concern about how digital spaces impact children and young people's wellbeing.

Findings from this youth consultation with the YMCA in Stoke-on-Trent reflect the national picture: online life is a complex landscape, offering joy, empowerment, and self-discovery while also presenting significant challenges around safety, manipulation, and emotional harm. For many, the internet is not just an extension of the offline world, it is where their identities are actively formed and re-formed.

A 2023 UK Safer Internet Centre report found that 62% of young people had encountered upsetting content online in the past year, and over a third had experienced cyberbullying. These statistics are echoed in the consultation responses, which highlight the harmful effects of unrealistic body standards, hate speech, misinformation, and exposure to inappropriate material, all of which contribute to anxiety, low self-esteem, and the fear of missing out. And yet, young people also described the online space as a lifeline - a space to feel connected, entertained, supported, and understood.

1. Social Connection and Friendship: A Lifeline to Others

For many young people, online platforms are the primary means of maintaining and growing relationships. Especially in contexts where real-world spaces for socialising are limited, platforms like Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram, and online games offer vital avenues for connection. They help maintain friendships, reconnect with distant relatives, and form new bonds.

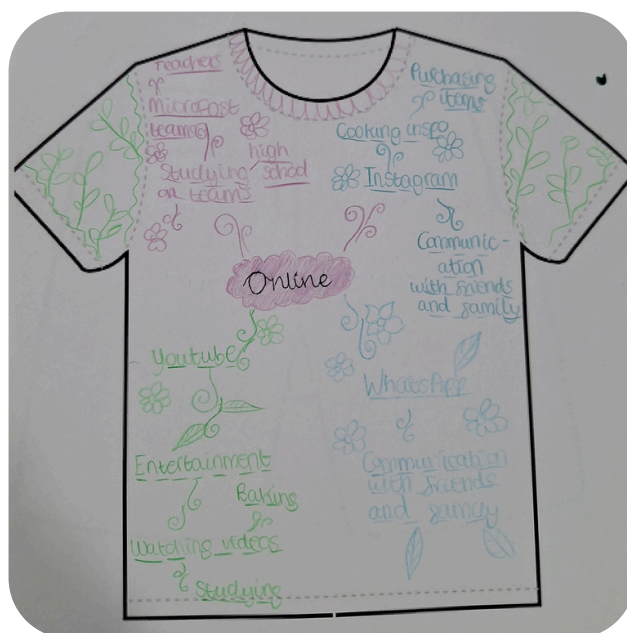
“I love speaking to people on games... it makes me feel understood and included.”

In an increasingly fragmented world - and particularly in cities like Stoke-on-Trent, where public spaces for youth socialising may be limited - online platforms are essential for emotional closeness, social bonding, and peer support.

2. Entertainment and Escapism: Relief from Boredom and Reality

The internet provides a steady stream of entertainment that helps young people unwind, laugh, and escape the stresses of daily life. From funny videos to games and TikTok trends, online platforms are celebrated for their ability to offer distraction and joy.

For many in Stoke-on-Trent who feel that offline entertainment options are limited or unaffordable, the internet becomes a key emotional outlet. It often becomes a stand-in for youth clubs or communal hangouts. It functions as a coping mechanism offering emotional relief and a sense of control over how and when to engage with others.



“It makes me happy, joyful, entertained.”

“Takes away my boredom.”

3. Identity and Support: The Freedom to Self-Expression

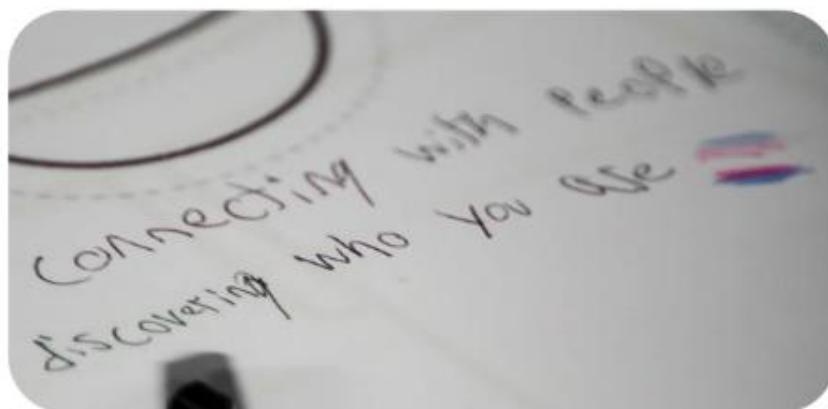
Online platforms are also spaces where young people explore identity, share views, learn new skills, and find creative inspiration. Many express appreciation for how the internet helps them express who they are, pursue hobbies, or find positive role models that encourage them to develop themselves.

“It helps me feel proud of my transgender identity.”

“I’ve learned so much about hair, makeup, animals, different cultures.”

“You can find people who share your interests and beliefs.”

Digital spaces allow young people to define themselves in ways that may not be possible offline. This is especially significant for those facing bullying or marginalisation in their immediate environment for their identity. Online communities broaden the scope of validation, increasing resilience and offering an expanded support network.



Feeling connected to others and understood are pillars of good mental health. Young people turn to the internet to access support, seek guidance, and understand themselves and the world. They reference using it for homework, life hacks, emotional validation, or exploring difficult topics they may not feel comfortable asking about in person.

“It’s a way to ask questions you’re too embarrassed to say out loud.”

“When I’m down, seeing a positive video or message makes a difference.”

These experiences highlight how digital spaces can act as informal mental health support networks, particularly when traditional services are inaccessible or carry stigma. The internet functions not only as a tool but as a companion - one that offers answers, encouragement, and guidance. When used in healthy ways, it helps to combat loneliness, build self-esteem, and provide coping strategies in emotionally challenging moments.

4. Crime Without Boundaries

However, social media communities often mirror real-life dynamics, meaning young people can become targets of unsupportive or hostile behaviour. Unlike offline environments, the boundless nature of digital spaces - unrestricted by time or location - can intensify emotional harm, leaving young people more vulnerable to lasting impacts on their mental well-being.

“Cyberbullying makes people suicidal—it’s really serious.”

“People say mean things online they wouldn’t say in person.”

“There’s too much hate... and no real consequences for it.”

This reflects a profound sense of emotional vulnerability. For many young people, the online world is experienced as a space where cruelty is amplified, and the usual systems of support - whether parental guidance, school safeguarding, or platform moderation - feel either absent or ineffective. The anonymity of online interactions heightens this insecurity, as the inability to verify who is behind a screen can make every message or friend request feel potentially threatening. While some young people view these issues as a nuisance, for others they provoke anxiety, especially around the possibility of being targeted by strangers.

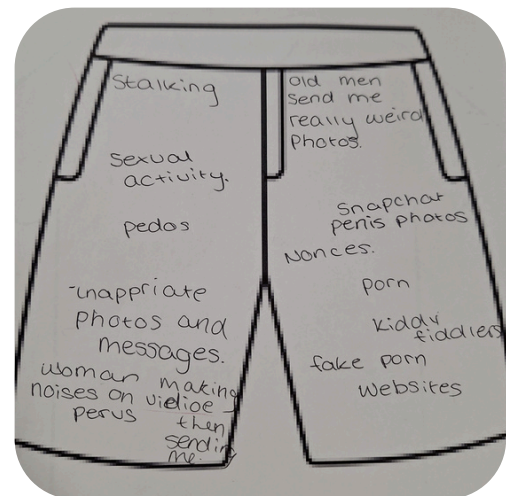
Many reported feeling unsafe or exposed in digital spaces where threats such as scams, impersonation, grooming, and identity theft are not just theoretical risks but lived experiences.

“It’s scary how easily people can get your information.”

“Sex bots and paedophiles try to add you.”

“Someone pretended to be a person from school, it was creepy.”

These concerns point to a widespread lack of trust in platform safety and moderation. For many young users, being online feels like entering an unprotected environment where danger can lurk in the form of strangers, tracking, or manipulation. Some describe being contacted by adults posing as peers within online games or social media, often resulting in them feeling afraid, confused, and violated. As a result, several young people call for stronger age verification and content restrictions, particularly to prevent children and teenagers from unintentionally accessing inappropriate, unsafe, or predatory content. These reflections highlight an urgent need for digital spaces to be more accountable, transparent, and youth-centred in their design and moderation practices.



5. Addiction, Overuse, and Mental Exhaustion

Although online presence can be a source of joy and fulfilment for some, other young people also express frustration with how addictive and time-consuming being online can be. Excessive screen time, comparison with others, and algorithm-driven distractions are cited as factors that damage well-being.

“People just sit on their phones like zombies.”

“I end up scrolling for hours and feel worse after.”

This theme underscores the conflict between enjoyment and control where pleasure can easily turn into dependency, disrupting sleep, focus, and social habits.

6. Unrealistic Expectations and Bad Influences: Breaking the Spirit

Some young people find inspiring role models on social media—figures who motivate them to work harder at school, explore new hobbies, or embrace their identities. These online influencers can have a positive impact by modelling ambition, creativity, or authenticity. However, many young people also express serious concerns about the prevalence of misinformation, distorted realities, and toxic content online. From deepfakes to heavily edited images and unattainable beauty standards, the internet is often viewed as a space where deception flourishes and unrealistic ideals are normalised.

From deepfakes to heavily edited images and unattainable beauty standards, the internet is often viewed as a space where deception flourishes and unrealistic ideals are normalised.

**“You can’t trust what you see—
everything’s photoshopped or fake.”**

“People post lies, and it spreads so fast.”

This suggests a growing media literacy among young people but also a deep concern that online platforms reward falsehoods and manipulation more than truth. Yet, even with this awareness of online self-branding, many still feel influenced by the constant exposure to curated and idealised lifestyles, particularly those presented by influencers. The pressure to live up to these standards can be especially harmful to young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who may not have access to the same resources, support systems, or opportunities. Even when role models are seen as “positive,” they can inadvertently reinforce narrow definitions of what success, beauty, or happiness should look like. Over time, this can foster feelings of inadequacy or failure among those whose lives do not and cannot mirror those online ideals. The belief that success must follow a specific, polished formula, often tied to wealth, appearance, or constant achievement, can be emotionally damaging. When young people internalise these ideals and later struggle to meet them, it can result in disillusionment, low self-worth, and broken confidence at a formative stage in life.

Online Presence: A double-edged sword

The voices of young people in Stoke-on-Trent paint a picture of online life as a double-edged sword - rich with connection, fun, and possibility, yet laced with risk, harm, and emotional complexity. Digital spaces are where many go to feel seen, heard, and inspired but also where they are most vulnerable to judgment, exploitation, and burnout.

This duality highlights a clear call to action: young people do not want to be removed from the online world, they want it to be better. Safer, more inclusive, more honest, and more supportive. They ask for spaces that celebrate who they are without putting them at risk. Supporting young people's digital lives means listening to these nuanced views and co-creating online cultures that protect as much as they empower.



What Getting Trans



In navigating the journey to adulthood, young people in Stoke-on-Trent consistently highlight the importance of informal, relational support systems. Families, educators, and peers often act as the first line of guidance and reassurance, shaping young people's capacity to manage challenges, take risks, and imagine a future for themselves.

86% of young people feel supported

“My mum and my nan are like really, really strong women... and it’s kind of helped me know what it means to be strong.”

“Learning how to cook, parents and family members teach me life skills.”

Yet while family support is invaluable, it also underscores gaps in broader community provision. Not all young people can rely on strong home environments, and when formal systems fail to step in, this can leave some isolated.

In educational settings, supportive teachers and college staff often make a lasting impression. Educators who show genuine care and invest time in students’ personal and academic growth can significantly shape their self-belief. Several young people shared how positive relationships with staff in college helped them feel understood in ways they hadn’t experienced at school.

“My tutor actually listens. She helps me think about what I want, not just what I ‘should’ do.”

This kind of support goes beyond academics, offering emotional reassurance and encouragement at key decision points in young people’s lives. However, this experience is not universal, and where staff are overstretched or disengaged, young people can feel overlooked.



Peer support is another critical pillar. Friends provide day-to-day emotional backing, practical advice, and a shared sense of understanding. These relationships are especially valued for their non-judgmental nature and relatability.

“I talk to my mates when I’m struggling because they get it. We’re going through the same stuff.”

“If I didn’t have my mates, I’d have no one to talk to.”

For some young people, involvement in local groups, such as churches, charities, or job opportunities, offers structure, purpose, and a sense of belonging. These opportunities help foster skills, routines, and positive identities, particularly for those struggling in other areas of life. Being active in the community can reduce feelings of loneliness and reinforce a sense of being useful or needed.

“I did some volunteering through church that really helped me feel useful.”

“Having a job teaches me the value of earning money, driving lessons get me ready for independence.”

“My part-time job (people I work with, work experience and wider community) helped me with my confidence.”

However, awareness and access to these opportunities are uneven. Those who benefit from them often do so because they were encouraged by a trusted adult or stumbled upon it by chance. In the absence of wider systems, peer groups often function as informal safety nets helping each other navigate mental health, school stress, and personal problems. Still, the quality and depth of this support varies, and peers are not always equipped to deal with more complex or serious issues.

Together, families, educators, and peers form a web of everyday support that many young people depend on. These relational networks can be protective, empowering, and deeply affirming. But they also highlight the limitations of existing formal structures reminding us that where systemic support is absent, the burden falls on personal relationships to fill the gap.

2. Lack of Safe and Engaging Youth Spaces

Participants repeatedly mentioned the lack of places to go where they can relax, socialise, or be creative in a safe and supportive environment. Public areas often feel hostile or monitored, while youth clubs or community centres are either unavailable, underfunded, or unknown to them.

“We just hang around the shops because there’s nowhere else to go.”

“I wish there was a place we could just chill, not get judged or moved on.”

As a result, young people end up in public places like shops or parks where they may be unfairly judged or moved on. The absence of welcoming spaces contributes to boredom, isolation, and sometimes conflict with authority. It also signals a wider neglect of youth in public planning and investment.

3. Inadequate Career and Life Skills Guidance

There’s a strong feeling that education fails to prepare young people for the real-world challenges of adulthood. Topics like budgeting, renting, job applications, and managing stress are rarely taught, leaving many to figure things out through trial and error. Traditional academic paths dominate school curriculums, sidelining practical skills and vocational routes like apprenticeships. This gap leads to anxiety about the future and contributes to a sense of being unprepared. Young people are asking not just for education, but for life preparation.

“No one teaches you how to be an adult, you just kind of guess.”

“We need more real-life stuff in school. Like, how to pay rent or get a job.”

4. Gaps in Mental Health Services

Mental health support is perceived as slow, impersonal, or completely inaccessible. Many young people feel that by the time services respond, their needs have either changed or become worse. Long waiting times, lack of youth-specific support, and stigma all contribute to a reluctance to seek help. There is also a sense that mental health struggles are not always taken seriously by professionals. These gaps leave many to manage overwhelming stress or anxiety

alone or through friends who may not be equipped to help.

“I tried to get help but it took months...by then I didn’t want it anymore.”

“It’s hard to talk to someone when you feel like they don’t take you seriously.”

Beyond individual services, some young people express a broader disillusionment with how they are seen and treated by society. The questionnaire shows that

22% of young people feel that their voices don’t matter.

There is a strong sense of being overlooked until they are seen as a problem or in crisis. This lack of consistent recognition and investment fuels mistrust in institutions and discourages help-seeking behaviour. The expectation to become “responsible adults” is not matched by the tools or opportunities offered to make that transition successfully. This theme underlines the need for youth services that are proactive, not reactive, and designed with young people rather than for them.

“It feels like they don’t care about us unless we’re causing trouble.”

“We’re expected to grow up quick but not given the tools to do it.”

How Do Young People See the Future?



Top exciting things about the future

1. Future Opportunities: Pathways to Growth and Independence

81% of young people enjoy learning new things

Young people across Stoke-on-Trent expressed a strong sense of ambition and hope for the future, particularly in areas of education, employment, and personal development. Many spoke enthusiastically about “going to university and studying something I love”, “starting my own business and being my own boss”, or learning skills that would open up new career paths—clear indicators of a desire to succeed on their own terms. This drive toward autonomy was equally reflected in everyday aspirations like moving out, owning a home, driving, and earning their own income. These goals aren’t just practical milestones; they symbolise a deeper longing for freedom, control, and self-definition.

“I want to drive, have my own car, move out, and just be free.”

“Having my own place and job sounds exciting, it’s about being my own person.”

While Stoke-on-Trent is recognised as a valuable starting point, with its colleges, apprenticeships, and job centres, it is also frequently seen as a place to grow beyond. For many young people, independence is not only about personal freedom but also about mobility, both geographic and social. The idea of a “life bigger than Stoke” often runs beneath the surface, suggesting that for all their excitement about what’s to come, some young people feel that the city’s current opportunities may not fully match their ambitions. Nonetheless, the willingness to engage, contribute, and build a future remains clear whether in Stoke-on-Trent or beyond.

From “I want to be a vet and help animals” to “pursuing my passion for art and music,” these statements reveal a generation that is ready to invest in itself, if given the right support. Investment in accessible skill-building, cultural initiatives, and youth programming could transform Stoke-on-Trent into a place where young people don’t just dream of leaving but of thriving where they are. Because ultimately, they’re not just asking for opportunities, they’re asking for a life that feels meaningful, inspiring, and true to who they are.

2. Connection and Contribution: The Heart of Belonging

Throughout the consultation, young people expressed a powerful and heartfelt desire for connection, both emotionally and socially. Whether it was through forming friendships, building relationships, or being part of a supportive community, the message was clear: young people want to feel seen, understood, and valued. Hopes of “making new friends,” “being happy in a relationship,” or “just having people around who get me” reflect a need for emotional safety and belonging that runs deeper than surface-level socialising.

94% of young people enjoy helping others

At the same time, this longing to belong is paired with a strong civic spirit in some cases. Aspirations to “volunteer and help people who are less fortunate” and to be “part of a community where everyone supports each other” reveal young people’s desire not just to receive support but to actively contribute. Many envision themselves in roles that help strengthen the social fabric, especially in a city like Stoke-on-Trent where communities have faced challenges due to economic changes and social fragmentation.

These findings highlight the importance of investing in youth-led spaces, peer support networks, and participatory programmes that empower young people to shape the communities they're part of. Building belonging isn't only about physical spaces or services, it's about creating environments where young people can connect, contribute, and feel at home.

3. Financial Insecurity: The Cost of Living

Financial insecurity was one of the most consistent worries expressed. Concerns like “being able to afford to live comfortably,” “rising housing prices,” and “finding a stable job after graduation” point to a deep awareness of economic precarity. For young people in Stoke-on-Trent, these are not distant adult concerns, they are already part of everyday life. While Stoke-on-Trent may be more affordable than other urban areas, many young people still feel the pinch. Family struggles, limited local job opportunities, and the lingering effects of deindustrialisation all contribute to a sense of economic precarity. Even those still in education are already burdened by fears of not being able to keep up suggesting that the emotional weight of financial planning is falling on their shoulders early. Stoke's industrial past has left behind a complex legacy, and young people are clearly grappling with what comes next. They want to work, earn, and live well—but the pathways to doing so feel uncertain and uneven.

“Prices keep going up, even here—it's hard to imagine affording life.”

“I worry I won't be able to buy a house or even rent one day.”

These anxieties are further amplified by the lifestyles showcased on social media and a wider societal focus on wealth and status. The constant promotion of a polished, often unattainable image of success can create intense pressure for young people to measure up. Insights from the consultation reveal that many aspire to a certain standard of living appearing glamorous and financially secure but the fear of falling short can be overwhelming. From “going on vacations all the time”, having sports cars to “a house with a spiral staircase”, young people are setting themselves high standards for the future.

This gap between aspiration and reality risks fuelling long-term stress and could have a lasting impact on young people's mental health and sense of self-worth.

4. Global Concerns

Young people in Stoke-on-Trent are deeply aware of the challenges facing both their local environment and the wider world. Climate change, pollution, war, and political instability are pressing anxieties that shape how young people see their futures. Fears about “the future of our planet and the resources we depend on” or “pollution and its impact on our health” reveal a generation that is ecologically conscious and emotionally attuned to environmental crisis. In a city still marked by the physical remnants of industrial decline, concerns about air quality, litter, and neglected public spaces are tangible reminders of broader global issues.

At the same time, there's a growing unease about unpredictable global threats from war to government control. This sense of powerlessness contrasts sharply with their otherwise proactive, hopeful mindset. Many still express excitement about technology and innovation, suggesting that their worry is not rooted in apathy, but in a yearning for change that feels just out of reach.

“What if there's a war or something happens? You just don't know anymore.”

“I think the planet will be messed up by the time I'm older.”

5. Mental Health and Well-being Anxiety

Mental and physical well-being emerged as one of the most urgent and heartfelt themes throughout the consultation. Young people in Stoke-on-Trent are facing a complex web of pressures, academic expectations, economic uncertainty, and social comparison, all of which take a toll on their health. Whether it's the looming fear that “if I mess up my GCSEs, I won't get a job,” or the sense that “everything is just too much sometimes, I don't know how adults do it,” it's clear this generation is carrying a heavy emotional load.

Young people are not simply overwhelmed; they are also self-aware. They speak openly about burnout, stress, and the feeling of falling behind in a world that demands constant progress. Many link their mental health struggles to wider structural issues like unsafe environments, a lack of engaging activities and the absence of meaningful support systems. They want to thrive, not just survive, and they need the right tools, spaces, and social support to do so.



Top worries for the future

5. Mental Health and Well-being Anxiety

The future, as seen by young people in Stoke-on-Trent, is rich with ambition and shadowed by uncertainty. They are hopeful about education, relationships, personal passions, and making a difference. But they are also anxious about money, global crises, and health. Crucially, their visions of the future are not detached from their immediate surroundings; rather, they are deeply intertwined with how they see the city today.

The message is clear: support their aspirations, address their anxieties, and co-create a Stoke that reflects the hopes they so clearly hold.

Recommendations

1	<p>Develop safe, clean, and inclusive public and green spaces</p> <p>Investment in welcoming parks and accessible communal spaces offers young people essential outlets for stress relief, social connection, and physical well-being. As many youth feel alienated or judged in existing public areas, enhancing these environments signals that they are welcome and valued. This could help tackle boredom, reduce conflict with authorities, and support mental health by providing safe spaces to simply exist without fear or stigma.</p>
2	<p>Embed life skills and vocational pathways into mainstream education</p> <p>Participants repeatedly highlighted the lack of practical life preparation in schools, particularly around finances, housing, employment, and mental health management. By integrating vocational options like apprenticeships and lessons on everyday adult responsibilities, the education system could better prepare students for independence. This would not only reduce future anxiety but also help counteract the feeling that education is a barrier instead of a launchpad.</p>
3	<p>Improve youth mental health services</p> <p>Long waiting times, inadequate youth-specific support, and stigma prevent many from seeking or receiving appropriate mental health care. Creating proactive and accessible services designed in collaboration with young people could foster trust and earlier intervention. Such support would also relieve the burden placed on peer and family networks, which are often over-relied upon in the absence of formal care.</p>

4	<p>Reimagine cultural and heritage sites through youth-led and inclusive programming</p> <p>While young people appreciate Stoke's historic legacy, they often feel more connected to global brands than local culture. Revitalising iconic sites like the Potteries with youth-led events and contemporary relevance could strengthen local identity and civic pride. It also allows young people to feel ownership of their cultural spaces, ensuring these places remain vibrant and inclusive for future generations</p>
5	<p>Create more youth-specific, safe, and accessible digital spaces</p> <p>Young people expressed concern about exposure to harmful online content and a lack of control in digital environments. By enforcing age verification and involving youth in the co-design of online platforms, digital spaces can become both safer and more empowering. This helps ensure that online engagement supports rather than endangers their development.</p>
6	<p>Foster shared cultural understanding across communities</p> <p>Divides between more homogenous and diverse areas were identified as barriers to social cohesion. Supporting initiatives that bring together young people from different backgrounds can build empathy, reduce prejudice, and foster a stronger sense of shared community identity. These efforts are vital in addressing both perceived and actual fragmentation within Stoke-on-Trent.</p>
7	<p>Address environmental and structural neglect in neighbourhoods</p> <p>Derelict streets, poor air quality, and litter send a message that communities are neglected and unworthy of care. For young people, this contributes to low morale and a lack of hope for the future. Systemic investment in local infrastructure would not only improve daily living but also signal that youth lives and futures matter.</p>

8	<p>Shift societal attitudes to see young people as assets, not problems</p> <p>Many young people feel overlooked in public discourse and policy. Changing this narrative through meaningful inclusion in planning and service delivery fosters belonging and confidence. By seeing youth as contributors rather than risks, Stoke can unlock their potential and promote shared responsibility for community wellbeing.</p>
9	<p>Expand access to opportunities for skill-building, hobbies, and volunteering</p> <p>A lack of accessible extracurricular opportunities contributes to feelings of isolation and underdevelopment. Investment in youth programming that offers practical, creative, and social engagement would enhance personal growth, career readiness, and civic participation. This is especially important for those who do not thrive in traditional academic settings.</p>
10	<p>Establish ongoing youth participation and feedback mechanisms</p> <p>One-off consultations are not enough to sustain meaningful involvement. By embedding regular feedback cycles and participatory decision-making structures, young people can remain engaged in shaping their communities. This long-term inclusion helps ensure services remain relevant and responsive to evolving needs and concerns.</p>

Special Thanks

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the young people and partner organisations who took part in the youth consultation. Your support, insights, and collaboration were invaluable in shaping the design and delivery of the project. By opening your doors and sharing your time, you helped us create a more meaningful and inclusive consultation process. We are truly grateful for your commitment to amplifying young people's voices and contributing to changes that can make a lasting difference in their lives for decades to come.

Amity Hub

Asha

Birches Head Academy

Buxton & Leek College

Clayton Hall Academy

City of Stoke-on-Trent 6th Form
College

Collab Training Academy CIC

Co-Op Academy Stoke-on-Trent

Dizzy Heights

Engage Communities CIC

Excel Academy

Haywood Academy

In2 Health & Wellbeing CIC

Keele University

Keele Institute for Social Inclusion

Kidsgrove Secondary School

Madeley School

Martec Training

Middleport Matters

Moorside High School

Newcastle & Stafford College Group

North Staffordshire
Combine Healthcare
NHS Trust

Ormiston Horizon Academy

Painsley Catholic College

Port Vale Football Club

Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Stoke-on-Trent College

Stoke-on-Trent Youth Collective

Trentham Academy

Ulysses Youth

University of Staffordshire

Urban Wilderness

Waterside Primary

YES - Youth Employment Skills

YMCA Go!





94%

enjoy helping others

86%

feel supported

81%

enjoy learning new things

22%

feel their voices don't matter

We engaged over




3000

young people, aged between
10-24

Thank You

to everyone who supported us in the undertaking of this consultation, and to everyone who took part, we could not have done this without you!

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