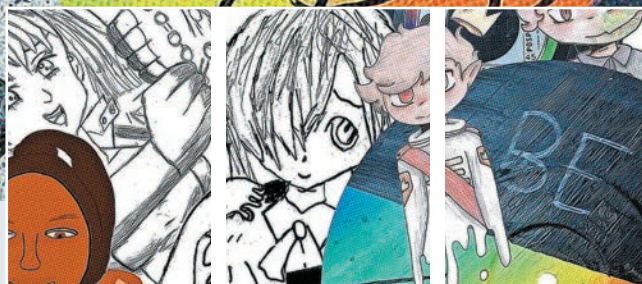
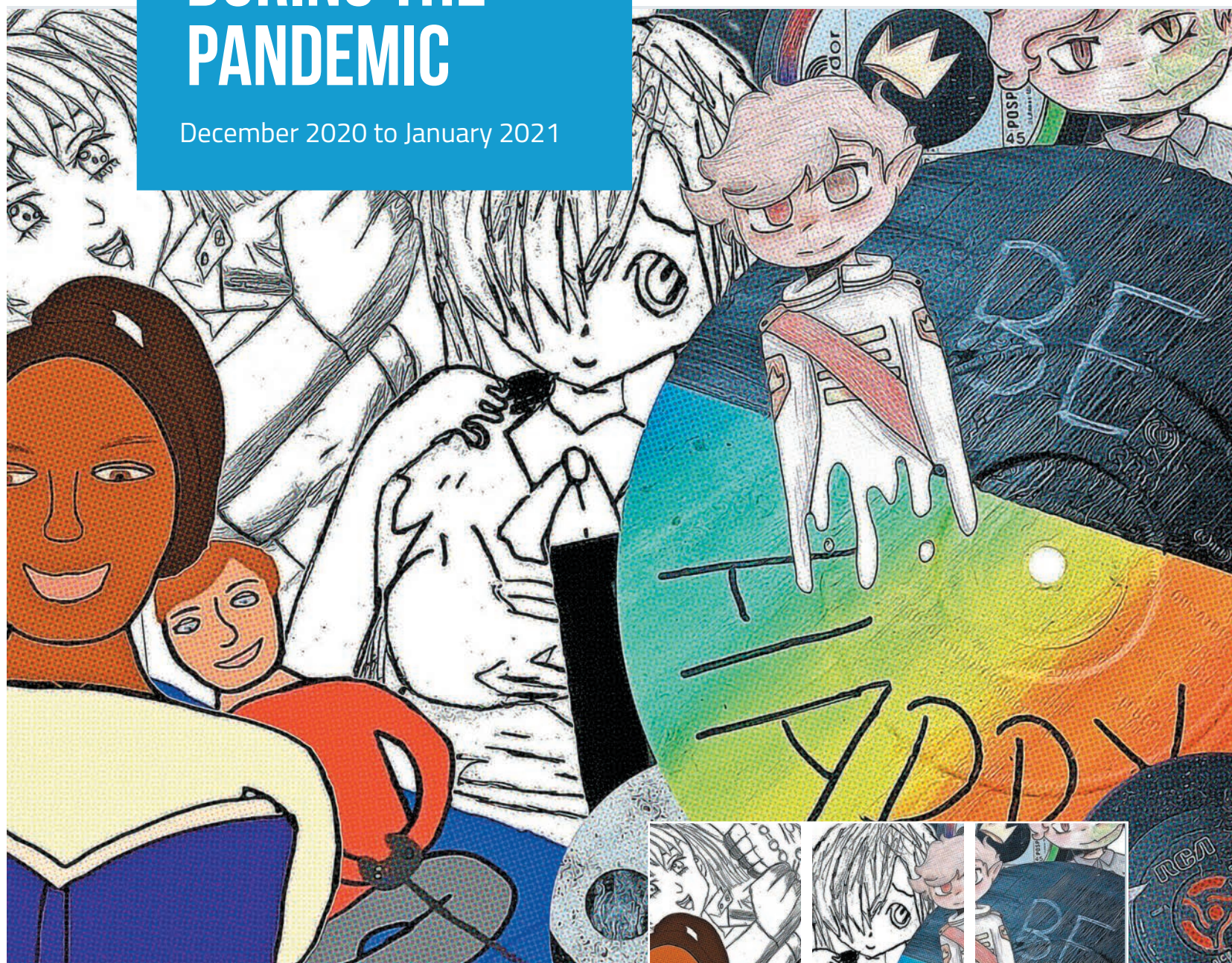
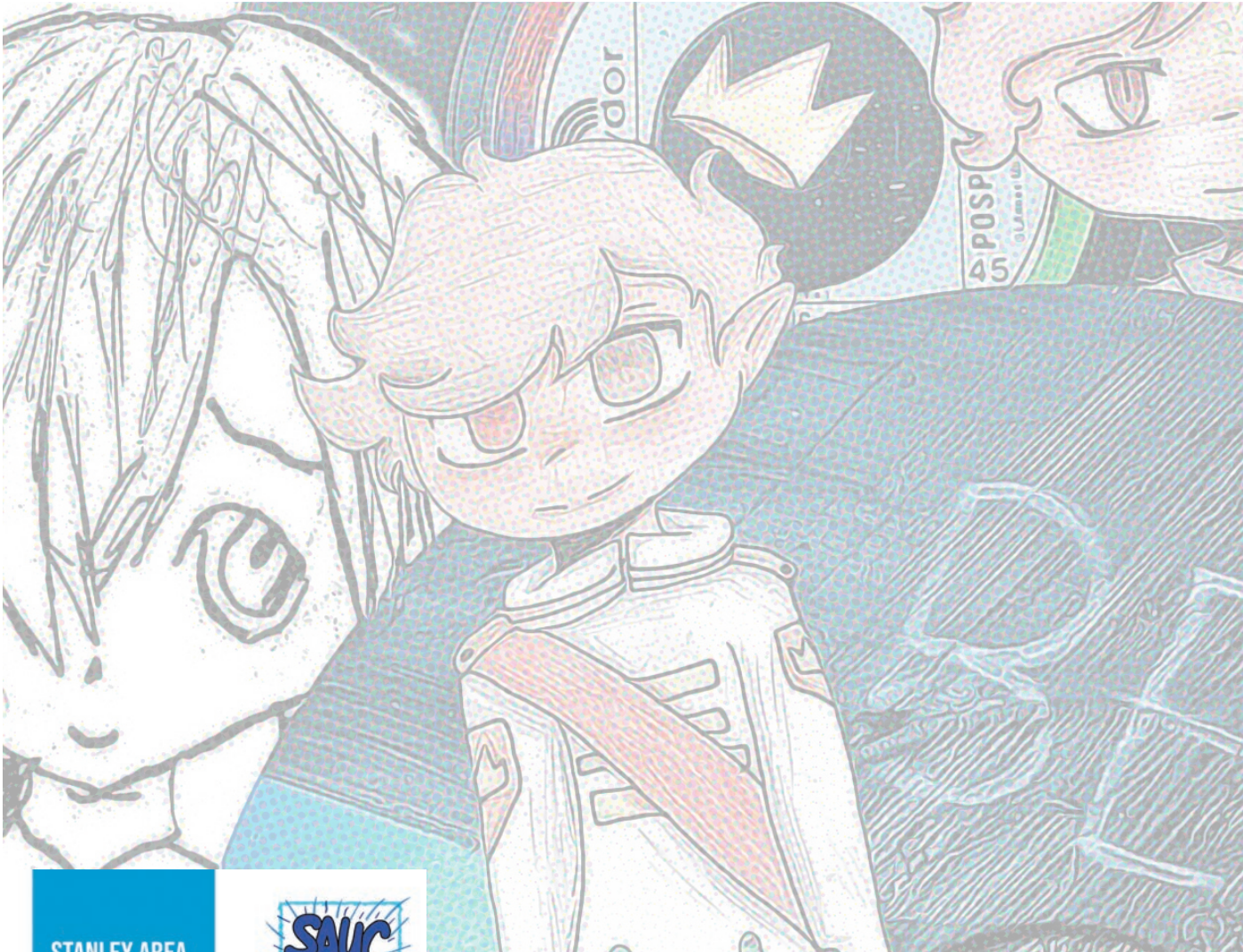


# STANLEY AREA CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DURING THE PANDEMIC

December 2020 to January 2021



STANLEY AREA YOUTH CONSORTIUM - SAYC



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CHILDREN AND  
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# STANLEY AREA CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DURING THE PANDEMIC



## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, four youth organisations - The Activity Den, Oxhill Youth Club, Stanley Young People's Centre and Stars Youth and Community worked in partnership to find out how local children and young people fared during the pandemic. Over 4 weeks from December 2020 to early January 2021 under the banner of the Stanley Area Youth Consortium, they promoted a questionnaire to 7-18 year olds from across the Stanley area. Due to the pandemic, differing levels of lock down restrictions had been in place since March 2020.

Two questionnaires were produced, a slightly shorter version for the 7-11 age group and a more detailed version for the 12-18 age group. There were a number of common questions between the groups, as well as unique questions relevant to each age group. Questionnaires were completed online, or through face-to-face interviews in schools and at youth clubs sessions, to ensure that children and young people who haven't got online access could also participate. All responses were anonymous.

## 2. WHO TOOK PART?

In total, 231 children and young people completed the survey.

- 87 completed the 7-11 age group survey
- 144 completed the 12-18 age group survey

86 boys and 133 girls took the survey (including transgender boys and girls). Two people described themselves as non-binary, gender-fluid or agender and ten preferred not to say.

12 year olds were the highest represented age group (38 respondents), with the 12-15 age group the highest represented range (114: 49%); 18 year olds had the lowest representation. 48% of survey responders (out of a sample base of 183) attended a youth club. Respondents were drawn from across the Stanley area. Overall completion rate was 79%.

## 3. LIMITATIONS OF SURVEY DATA

As the survey was anonymous, analysing respondents by deprivation levels defined by residence was not possible, although all were residents within the Stanley area. We also did not ask questions around disability or ethnicity.

Care was taken in face-to-face survey completion to ensure that answers were given freely and without bias.

*"I feel lonely being in the house with my family.*

*It is making me so sad and angry. I need to be out with friends but of course they can't really do that but they're not even texting me which is making me feel worthless and even more lonely."*

# CASE STUDY

At the beginning of the pandemic Sam\* (aged 16) became homeless and ended up in supported accommodation. They had felt misunderstood and let down for most of their life. Disenfranchised from their family, signed off by their social worker as hard to contact and shut off from their friends and support network, they were facing issues around their sexuality and gender, drug use and an undiagnosed autistic disorder.

We made contact and supported their move back to Stanley, guiding them through the process of finding a property as they turned 17. Rebuilding their support network wasn't easy due to their heavily chaotic and unpredictable lifestyle but over time, our staff gained their trust. In Sam's own words, "you are patient and don't just sack people off".

We helped Sam see their worth, realising skills they didn't know they had – and that they could help other people experiencing problems like themselves. Sam's support included help with budgeting, cooking, managing a home and a whole host of life skills; we helped them achieve a diagnosis for autism and come to terms with their life and identify ways to move forward. They are now looking to the future – potentially including college and understand that they should 'be here', that they are needed and valued as both a friend and a colleague.

**Stars Youth & Community support during the pandemic**



\*not their real name

## 4. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

### ARE CHILDREN WORRIED?

33% of children and young people were worried all or most of the time. A further 32% were worried some of the time.<sup>1</sup>

In the older age group, 52% worried about lots of things in their life and 49% worried about their future.

*"I am more anxious, worried and feeling like everything around me including myself is falling apart."*

### HOW ARE CHILDREN FEELING?

The majority of children and young people (68%) were sad at least some of the time, with 25% sad all or most of the time.

57% were happy all or most of the time. 28 children and young people (12%) however, said that they weren't happy very often.

*"I can't wait for it to be over because everything can be normal again."*

### CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Across all ages, boys showed a higher degree of confidence in their own abilities and self-esteem than girls. 92% of boys knew they are good at things, whereas only 79% of girls thought that they were. Boys equally had more pride in what they can do (83%:76%).

### MENTAL HEALTH

47% of older young people thought their mental health had got worse during the pandemic. 47% of them were worried about coronavirus and 47% felt anxious.<sup>2</sup>

These responses indicate a worrying upward trend for young people's future mental health.<sup>3</sup> According to the Mental Health Foundation, 20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year<sup>4</sup> and 50% of mental health problems are established by the age of 14.<sup>5</sup>

38% of young people aged 12-18 often felt lonely.

*"I'm OK. I just miss my routines and seeing people."*

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

57% of all age groups and both sexes had done less exercise during the pandemic. 55% of them exercised over one hour each day (including whilst at school). More of the older age group realised that this wasn't enough and stated that they had less energy than the younger people.<sup>6</sup>

## WHAT HAS IMPACTED THEM MOST?

The lack of social contact featured highly in the changes that impacted the 12-18 age group the most. Not being able to spend time with friends (64% frequency responses), not being able to visit family (56%) and not being able to leave the house (47%) were the most chosen factors.

The older age group did not rate school closures as significantly as their peers in other areas, had less interest and spent less time on schoolwork and other academic related pastimes such as reading.

44% of children aged 7-11 said that they had played less during the pandemic.

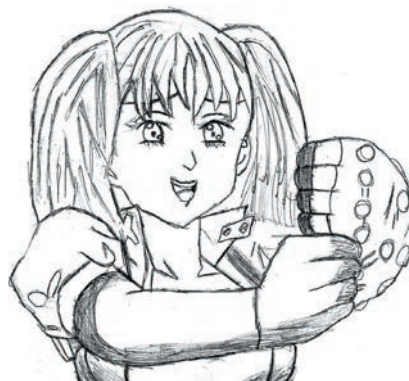
*"It's just school. It's been isolation, back to school, more isolation and I don't think I'm doing enough work."*

## ON A POSITIVE NOTE

Unsurprisingly most children and young people were spending significantly more time with their family at the time of this survey (59%). This is particularly true of boys who spent 67% more time with their family than girls (54%). There is less disparity between genders in the younger age group.

Young people that attend a youth club appeared to have considerably higher levels of self-esteem and confidence. In addition, they said that they actively enjoyed learning new things in comparison to those that did not attend.

*"...I don't want anyone to die."*



*"I just like being with people."*

<sup>1</sup> Base 231 responses all age groups.

<sup>2</sup> Strongly agree or agree responses. 47% (49) responses out of 105 completed questions. Age 12-18.

<sup>3</sup> Strongly agree or agree responses. 47% (49) responses out of 105 completed questions. Age 12-18.

<sup>4</sup> WHO (2003). Caring for children and adolescents with mental disorders: Setting WHO directions. [online] Geneva: World Health Organization. Available at: [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/media/en/785.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/785.pdf) [Accessed 14 Sep. 2015].

<sup>5</sup> Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. (2005). Lifetime Prevalence and Age-of-Onset Distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. Archives of General Psychiatry, 62 (6) pp. 593-602. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.593.

<sup>6</sup> Weighted average questions 1 strongly agree 5 strongly disagree – the lower the score the more agreement with the question. I think I get enough exercise (weighted average 12-18 age 2.9: 2.27). I have plenty of energy (weighted average 2.58:1.71).

*"My mental health has changed because I have less things to do and I can't leave the house as much."*

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

- Children and young people's **mental health has deteriorated significantly** since the start of the pandemic, with signs of heightened anxiety and worry, particularly about their future, exams and their families. Given that 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14, this indicates that a high level of intervention is necessary to avoid a mental health crisis in the area. There is some indication, although further research is required, that children and young people living in the Stanley area have significantly higher levels of negative feelings, are feeling more worried, sadder and less safe than their peers elsewhere.
- **Physical health has also taken a hit**, with over half the children and young people from all age groups doing less exercise during the pandemic. Children and young people from the area already had the highest level of obesity in the County Durham area and one of the highest nationally.
- **Girls' mental health seems to be harder hit than boys** across all ages, but particularly the 12-18 age group. They are showing signs of not coping as well as the boys, in particular their self-esteem and confidence in their abilities is considerably lower than boys of the same age group. They also feel less listened to. In addition, their levels of physical activity are significantly lower than the boys. Girls spend considerably more time on social media than boys.
- All ages are feeling sad more than they are feeling happy. **A small but significant proportion are feeling sad all the time.**
- Unsurprisingly, **the lack of social contact featured highly in the changes** that impacted the 12-18 age group the most. The younger age group were more content at home. School closures were not rated as significantly as their peers in other areas<sup>7</sup>, and they had less interest and spent less time on schoolwork and other academic related pastimes such as reading than other activities.
- The majority are spending **considerably more time with their families** at home.
- Young people that **attended a youth club** seemed to have **considerably higher levels of self-esteem and confidence**. In addition, they actively enjoy learning new things in comparison to those that do not attend and see youth clubs as a **trusted and safe place** to seek **emotional and mental help** from.

*"Due to how much I did before all this to having no purpose or focus, I did struggle for a while, but I think now I'm adjusting and finding myself."*

<sup>7</sup> See Section 9, Comparison to other studies.

**47%**  
thought their  
mental health  
was worse and  
felt anxious

## 6. STANLEY AREA CHARACTERISTICS

Situated in the north of County Durham, the Stanley area covered by this survey is the same geographic area as the Stanley Action Area Partnership (AAP). This stretches from Quaking Houses in the south to Tanfield in the north, and is centred on the town of Stanley. The area is bordered by Gateshead Borough to the north and by Chester-le-Street & District, Derwent Valley and Mid Durham. The Stanley area is predominantly 'urban' in nature with a population of over 33,700 and density over three times that of the rest of the county.

It is one of the most deprived areas in the North East. County Durham is ranked as the most deprived local authority in the North East for both income and employment and the Stanley area is one of the most deprived areas in County Durham. 8.4% of the Stanley area population live in the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) top 10% most deprived Low Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England and 74.8% live in the top 30%. The number of working age people in receipt of unemployment and worklessness is even higher, with 39.8% in the top 10% most deprived nationally and 89.9% in the top 30%. This results in 41.6% of children and young people in the Stanley area (0 to 15 age group) living in the top 10% most deprived areas nationally.<sup>8</sup> 1,806 children under 16 live in families with Relative Low Income (27.7% compared to the North East 23.7% and England wide 18.4%).<sup>9</sup>

The Stanley area has a high dependency of children, young people and older people compared to working people, with levels significantly higher than in both the North East and wider England and Wales. It is the only area in County Durham to see a net increase in the children and young people age group.

The proportion of residents from a Black and Minority Ethnic background is low at 1%. Educational attainment is the lowest in the North East, with 53% achieving GCSE (5A\* - C including Maths and English). 32.4% of the 16+ population have no qualifications (average England and Wales 22.7%).<sup>10</sup>

In addition, children and young people statistics from 2017 show that:

- 27.3% of children aged 5-16 are in receipt of Free School Meals;
- 16.5% of children live in lone parent, low income families;
- 26% of children have excess weight in reception; 41% in Year 6 (the worst levels in County Durham).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Quick Profile, Stanley AAP, Durham Insight, Durham County Council 2021 [https://www.durhaminsight.info/quick-profiles-all-geographies/report/view/2016524d9d7a4d469e8b33830a49a8ed/AAP12;The Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\) 2019 and The Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\) 2019 – Employment Domain](https://www.durhaminsight.info/quick-profiles-all-geographies/report/view/2016524d9d7a4d469e8b33830a49a8ed/AAP12;The%20Index%20of%20Multiple%20Deprivation%20(IMD)%202019%20and%20The%20Index%20of%20Multiple%20Deprivation%20(IMD)%202019%20-%20Employment%20Domain).

<sup>9</sup> As 8. above.

<sup>10</sup> Sub-county Statistical Profile Summary Sheet, Stanley AAP, Durham Insight, Durham County Council 2017

<sup>11</sup> As 10. above.

# CASE STUDY

Logan\* had a difficult life before lockdown and the pandemic made it much worse. He struggled with his home life, school and his social, emotional and mental health. He was out at all hours carrying weapons, smoking and inevitably getting into trouble with the police. Influenced by young people much older than him, he was surrounded by drugs, alcohol and neglect. His mam, who had her own problems, was reluctant to let anyone support her and often refused to accept that anything was wrong. He was at serious risk of being excluded from school.

We were contacted by Logan's school to see if we could help, we met with Logan and his headteacher at school in an environment he felt the most comfortable in. We wanted to connect with Logan and gain his trust. In our first session together, we encouraged him to talk about things he liked doing and things he didn't, his family and school life. We wanted to know what he found difficult.

Before Logan's second session, Logan's headteacher informed us that there had been a safeguarding incident with the family. Logan came to his second session, this time at our youth club and opened up about what had happened. We supported Logan through a difficult conversation with the police, which left him embarrassed, upset and silent and he stayed with us until his home situation was sorted out.

Our youth club provided a trusted and safe space for Logan to talk to us and confront his problems. We encouraged him to develop friendships with other children his age and attend youth sessions when he can. He's started to address his antisocial behaviour and mental health issues and his headteacher has reported that his general attitude and behaviour at school has improved and that he is no longer at risk of being excluded. We've kept his mam in touch, who is positive about his engagement with us and our youth club.

Logan is just 9 years old.

**Oxhill Youth Club**



\*not their real name

## 7. IN DEPTH

### 7A. MENTAL HEALTH

We asked the 12-18 age group more specific questions on their mental health. 47% of young people thought that their mental health had got worse during the pandemic. 47% of them were worried about coronavirus and 47% felt anxious all the time.<sup>12</sup> Table 1 below shows that they were worrying about lots of things (52%).

*"I don't have my laptop anymore because my dad destroyed it when he was angry at me when I ran away. My dad doesn't live with me that's why I feel safe but the reason I don't feel safe is because of my siblings because I can't go in the same room with them without one of them starting an argument."*

**Table 1: Do you feel healthy and well? Age 12-18 n 105**

Strongly agree or agree	%
I worry about my own health	36
I feel anxious all the time	42
There are lots of things I worry about in my life	52
I am worried about coronavirus	47
I often feel lonely	38
I am worried about my future	49
I think my mental health has got worse during the pandemic	47
Even if I am having a difficult time, I feel I will be okay	56

Over all age groups, 68% worried about their families health, with girls worrying significantly more than boys (74%: 62%). Girls stated that they were worried about lots of things in their life (weighted average 2.27:2.91); that they were more worried about their future (weighted average 2.41: 2.88) and less felt that, if they were having a difficult time, they would be OK (2.67: 2.15).<sup>13</sup>

#### DO YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW WHERE TO GET HELP FOR THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

Young people would be most confident in getting support for their emotional or mental health from their friends or family (weighted average number 1.63) followed by their youth club (2.14) and teachers or other school staff (non-counsellor) (2.17).

Girls were less likely to seek support from their friends or family than boys (1.72: 1.38), but this was still their most preferred route. Girls were also less likely to seek help from their doctor (2.36: 2.06), a mental health professional (2.45: 2.08) and a school counsellor (2.36: 2.04).

*"No, I don't want to know any more about it, all anyone talks about is corona and its stupid. No one can do anything about it, and no one is. Why should we be stuck in the house, we shouldn't, there's no point in filling this survey in no one's going to look at it ..."*

*"I can't volunteer at PACT or help Mum at craft fairs and do fund raising or the community meal which is where I felt comfortable as I don't really get on with the people my age. PACT HOUSE made me happy and safe when I helped out because I don't get bullied there and I don't get treat different."*

<sup>12</sup> Strongly agree or agree responses. 47% (49 responses out of 105 completed questions).

<sup>13</sup> For this set of questions, the lower scores for 'worried about a lot of things in their life' and about 'their future' indicate a higher level of concern. For the, 'if they were having a difficult time they would be OK' question, the higher the score the more the respondent disagrees with the statement.



## WHAT HAS IMPACTED THEM MOST?

Unsurprisingly, the lack of social contact featured highly in the changes that impacted young people the most. Not being able to spend time with friends (64% frequency responses), not being able to visit family (56%) and not being able to leave the house (47%) were the most chosen factors. Not being able to take part in activities or hobbies was also a popular choice (34%). Schools closing did not feature particularly highly (25%) or physical exercise (2%).<sup>14</sup>

Boys were more concerned about not being able to leave the house (22%:17%) and taking part in activities or hobbies (17%:12%) but girls were more concerned about spending time with other people (spending time with friends: 28%:22%).<sup>15</sup>

*“I feel lonely sometimes because my brothers and sisters are all younger and they seem to get the attention and I just have to get on with it.”*

## HOW ARE CHILDREN FEELING?

The majority of children and young people were sad at least some of the time (68%), with 25% sad all or most of the time. They could still be happy however, with 57% of them happy all or most of the time. 28 children and young people (12%) said that they weren't happy very often.

Girls seemed to be feeling worse than boys. They felt sadder (73%: 59%) and were more worried (68%: 58%), at least some of the time. More girls felt unhappy all the time (14%) compared to boys (10%). A large majority (78% girls: 80% boys) reported feeling safe at least most of the time.

There was a significant number however, that felt unsafe (22%) across all age groups at least some of the time. Young people of secondary school age reported feeling less happy and sadder than the younger age group (see Table 2 and Table 3 below).

Girls don't appear to have more fun as just 63% said that they had fun things to do, compared to 72% of boys. Boys appeared to get bored more easily (72%: 63%). The younger age group felt less bored than the older group.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 2: How do you feel All age groups (%) n 231**

Age	7-18	7-11	12-18	7-18	7-11	12-18	7-18	7-11	12-18	7-18	7-11	12-18
	All the time			Most of the time			Some of the time			Not very often		
Happy	13	15	11	44	48	41	32	26	35	12	10	13
Sad	6	5	6	19	17	20	43	45	42	32	33	31
Worried	10	11	8	23	20	24	32	36	30	36	33	38
Safe	42	48	38	37	30	42	16	14	17	6	8	4

<sup>14</sup> What changes had the most impact on how you feel by frequency % i.e.,% of 144 respondees that picked that choice, (choose up to three).

<sup>15</sup> What changes had the most impact on how you feel by frequency % i.e.,% of 144 respondees that picked that choice, (choose up to three).

<sup>16</sup> I often feel bored – base 231 questions; 2.56 weighted average (1 strongly agree to 5 strongly disagree) age 7-11 compared to 2.17 12-18 age group.

*“I like to do arts and crafts and watching movies with my older sister.*

*I like planting flowers in the garden and playing.”*

# CASE STUDY

The pandemic has been difficult for lots of families. During the summer after the first lockdown, we were contacted by Dan's\* older brother who suddenly became a carer for him after their dad's death. He wanted Dan to mix with other young people from the area, have people outside the family to talk to and have something positive to look forward to.

Dan responded well to the youth club, joining in lots of sessions and engaging well with the other young people. He really opened up, making friends and meeting up with them outside the club. On the anniversary of his dad's death, he joined in our group WhatsApp chat and he was obviously upset, feeling fed up, and that he had no one to turn to or care for him. We immediately contacted him and arranged for him to visit us, talk through his feelings and lose some steam playing footie with us in our sports hall.

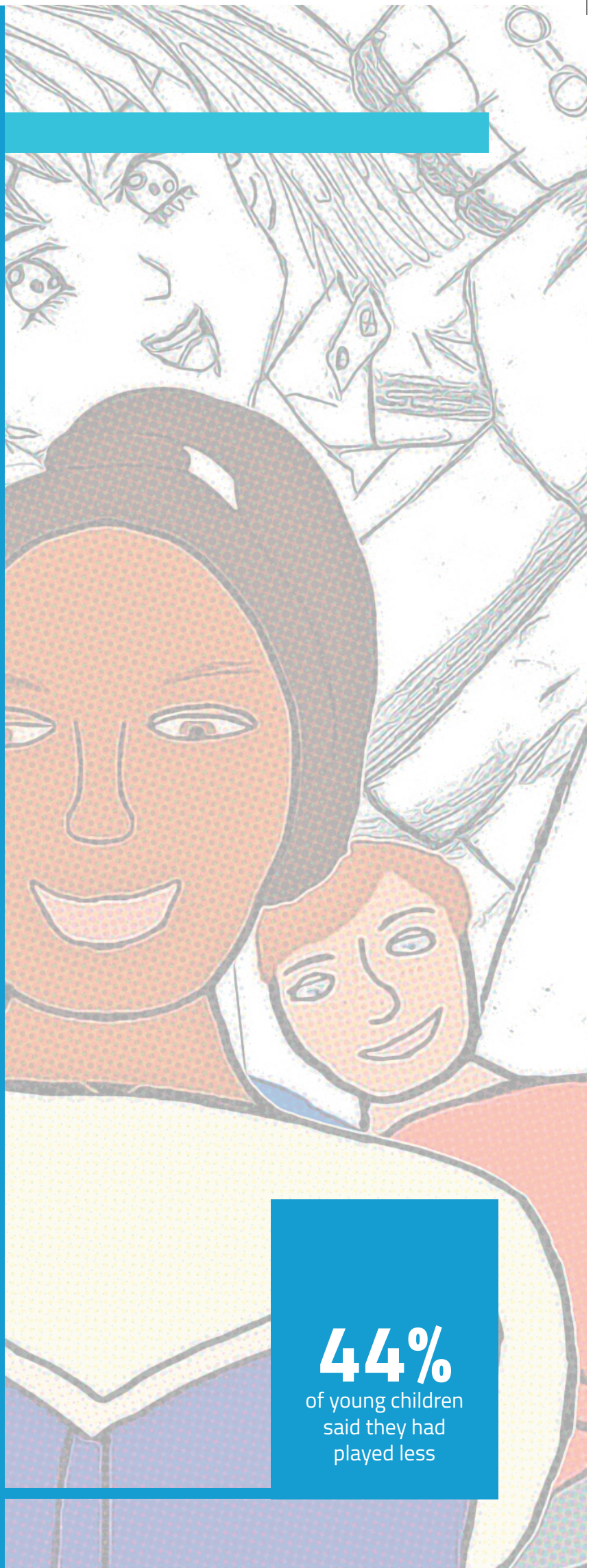
We have continued to help Dan in our support groups and often check in on him to make sure that he's ok.



**Oxhill Youth Club**

\*not their real name

**44%**  
of young children  
said they had  
played less



**Table 3: How do you feel All age groups (%) n 231**

Happy	Girls	Boys	Worried	Girls	Boys
All the time	10	15	All the time	9	7
Most of the time	47	42	Most of the time	27	17
Some of the time	29	33	Some of the time	32	34
Not very often	14	10	Not very often	32	42
Sad	Girls	Boys	Safe	Girls	Boys
All the time	6	2	All the time	41	40
Most of the time	21	16	Most of the time	38	40
Some of the time	46	41	Some of the time	18	13
Not very often	27	41	Not very often	3	8

*"It's just boring at the minute it's all the same things."*

### CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Across all ages, boys showed a higher degree of confidence in their own abilities and self-esteem. 92% of boys knew they are good at things, whereas only 79% of girls thought that they were. Boys equally had more pride in what they could do (83%: 76%).

Generally, the younger age group (7-11) felt more engaged, tried harder, enjoyed learning new things and took pride and knew they were good at more things than the older age group (12-18).

in the older age group, girls felt less able to freely express their ideas and opinions than boys (weighted average 2.5: 1.79).<sup>17</sup>

Overall, most young people felt able to express ideas and opinions freely (72%) and felt their rights were respected by others (75%).

*"Yes, I would want to know more about coronavirus because I worry about people around me."*

*"Feeling like I can't do anything and it's never going to end."*

### THINGS WE WORRY ABOUT

The majority of all children and young people worried most about the future (57%), their family (52%), exams (50%), doing schoolwork (43%) and what their friends were doing (40%).

There were some discrepancies over what worried people the most between the age groups. The 12-18 age group were most worried about exams (64%), getting a job (42%) and learning at home (29%) compared to the 7-11 year olds. The younger children did not see these areas as much of a worry, although they shared concern over their families (54%) and their future (54%).

*"I get worried if my mam coughs and if someone comes to the door. I want to make a big sign on Christmas, so no one comes to my house."*

By gender, there were considerable discrepancies between girls and boys in the younger age group over doing schoolwork, where boys were more worried (50%: 36%) and about their pets (47%: 17%). Girls were more worried about how their friends were doing (52%: 35%).

The gender difference widened in the older age group, with girls worrying significantly more about exams (77%: 41%) and the future (71%: 41%). They also showed more signs of social anxiety, citing how their friends were doing (61%: 35%); having someone to talk to (30%: 12%) and having enough friends (27%: 15%) compared to boys. 26% of boys stated that they had no worries at all, compared on only 8% of girls.

*"At school I used to do peer mentoring supporting other children with their mental health. I did sponsored litter picks, I was in Green Leaders which was maintaining the grounds, I did SNAG which was for the menu and how we can improve the school. I was also on the school Council and a House Leader. Because of COVID, I have lost all of these and feel like there's nothing that makes me special. I have struggled to find ways to stay who I am."*

<sup>17</sup> 'I feel free to express my ideas and opinions' Weighting 1 strongly agree, 5 strongly disagree.

## 7B. PHYSICAL HEALTH

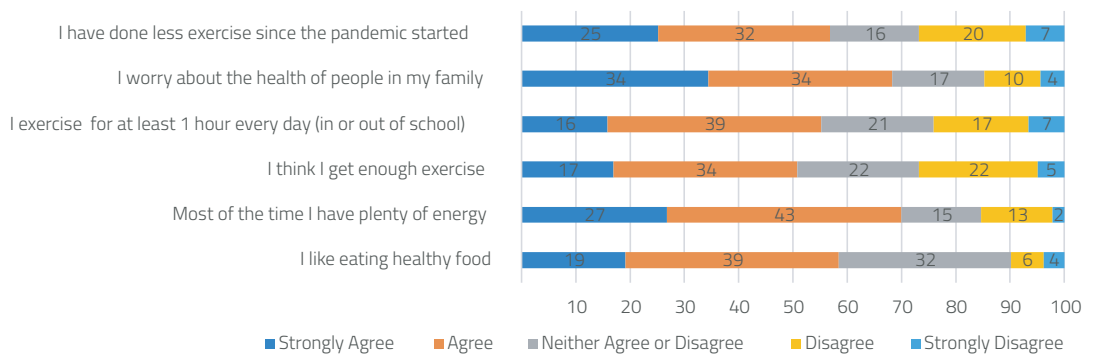
57% of all age groups and both sexes had done less exercise during the pandemic (see Graph 1: Do you feel healthy? below). 55% of them exercised over 1 hour a day (including whilst at school). More of the older age group realised that this wasn't enough and stated that they had less energy than the younger people.<sup>18</sup>

Boys rated themselves higher than girls on the physical health questions. They liked eating healthier foods (63%: 53% girls). They had more energy (76%: 67%) and did significantly more exercise than girls (57% boys exercised for over an hour each day compared to just 32% of girls).

*"I miss my weekly football and swimming sessions."*

*"I eat too many sweets."*

**Graph 1: Do you feel healthy? n 183 (%) All age groups**



## 7C. PLAY AND RELAXATION

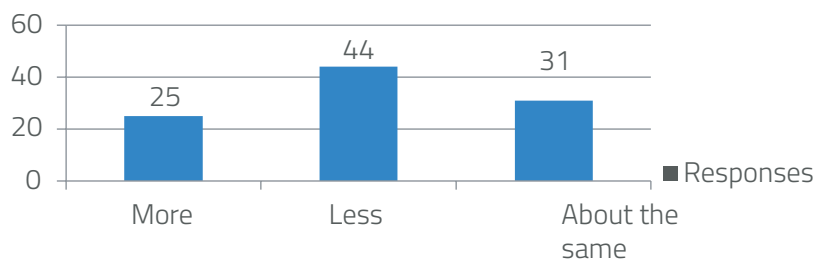
### ARE CHILDREN ABLE TO PLAY OR RELAX?

We asked the younger age group whether they had played more, about the same or less during the pandemic. 44% of children aged 7-11 said that they had played less during the pandemic, compared to 31% around the same, and 25% more. The contrast was more apparent in girls, where 53% of them said that they had played less compared to 32% of boys. Boys also stated that they had played more (29%: 22%).

We asked the older age group whether they were able to relax more during the pandemic. The responses showed that 52% of boys and 33% of girls had been able to relax more, with 29% of boys and 47% of girls able to relax about the same as pre-pandemic.

Play is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as their social, emotional, intellectual and physical development.

**Graph 2: Are you playing more or less since the start of the pandemic? (%) n 87 Age 7-11**



*"The leaders are helpful and friendly in and out of youth club and also do everything they can to help me feel safe."*

<sup>18</sup> Weighted average questions 1 strongly agree 5 strongly disagree – the lower the score the more agreement with the question. I think I get enough exercise (weighted average 12-18 age 2.9: 2.27). I have plenty of energy (weighted average 2.58: 1.71).



33% were worried all or most of the time

38%

of young people often felt lonely

# CASE STUDY

Having moved from Kent shortly before lockdown, Jane\* felt scared to make new friends. During summer she'd met a few friends near where she lived, but couldn't see these when lockdown restarted.

Jane felt lonely and sad. She understood the problems the pandemic was causing, which made her a little scared. Not seeing her friends didn't help. She found home learning hard and confusing.

After reaching out to her local Youth Club, Jane joined in their activity sessions on Zoom. She felt happier and was able to talk about how she felt. She could also talk about everyday things like "what's for dinner", which helped her to be more positive, to stop worrying about home learning and the virus. When Jane first joined in she was nervous and turned her mic and camera off. After encouragement from the youth workers she began to join in, turning her camera on. She felt a lot happier and really welcomed.

Jane is excited to meet people face to face but is a bit scared that she won't recognise her online friends. She is positive however and explains, "everyone has made me feel welcome, so I won't have the normal first day nerves. It will be more like seeing my friends for the first time over the summer holidays."



## Activity Den Case Study

\*not their real name

## 7D. POSITIVE NOTES

### HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU SPEND WITH YOUR FAMILY?

Most children and young people were spending significantly more time with their family (59%). This was particularly true of boys, who were spending 67% more time with their family than girls (54%). There was less disparity between genders in the younger age group.

All age groups enjoyed spending time with their family and said they got along well.

*"I want to know when it's safe to go back to normal when it's going to end."*

### WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD?

All age groups were asked what makes them feel good (see Graph 3 below). Top response was 'their friends' (71%), followed by a wide range of activities. The most popular group activities were meeting friends 55%; going to school 51%; pets 48% and brothers and sisters 43%. More individual pastimes included listening to music 55%; playing computer/console games 54% and watching TV or films, although most of these activities could also be shared with others as well. The 12-18 age group put more emphasis on meeting friends and getting out of the house.

By gender, the younger girls chose watching TV or movies (69%: 44%); being involved in a youth club or group (60%: 32%) over the boys. They also chose being with parents/carers (61%: 41%) and their siblings (57%: 35%) more. They also preferred dancing (45%: 12%) and doing school work (31%: 21%). These gender discrepancies were mirrored in the older age group apart from the doing school work, where the % of girls that chose school work fell to 14%. Interestingly, meeting friends in the older age group became much more important to the boys (74%: 47%).

Most young people found it easy to talk to people outside school or college and felt supported by their friends.

*"I don't want to know more because it sometimes makes me feel sadder and I don't like that."*

### WHAT DO YOU ENJOY DOING OUTSIDE SCHOOL?

We asked what the children and young people enjoyed doing outside school. They were mostly doing what made them feel good, with the exception of doing schoolwork (30% spend time frequency compared to 19% feel good). Interestingly, both individual and team exercise didn't make people feel particularly good and young people and children therefore spent less time doing this.

The younger age group played on computer and console games more than the older one (77%: 53%), and more boys (7-11 age) played than girls (85%: 69%). Girls watched a lot more TV and movies than boys in this age group (69%: 85%), but this was still the activity that both girls and boys spent the most time doing. All other activities in the 7-11 age group were split evenly across each gender.

The older age group however, spent more time talking to friends on social media (65%: 35%) and listening to music (56%: 35%). Boys spent considerably more time playing computer and console games than girls as they got older (79%: 38%) and girls spent more time talking to friends on social media (68%: 53%), with their family (52%: 38%) and listening to music (61%: 44%). This higher interaction with social media could be a factor in girls worsening self-esteem and confidence.

Reading was not a particularly popular pastime in either age group, but more popular in the younger one (23%: 15%) and by girls in both age groups (age 7-11, 29%: 18%; age 12-18, 18%: 12%).

*"I'm not allowed on social media as Mum thinks it's bad for me, so I hear what my parents say and the kids and teachers at school. We don't watch the news as it's confusing and changes all the time."*

*"I like my lego and marvel stuff."*

*I like food and cooking but we don't do much baking at the minute because of my behaviour and temper."*

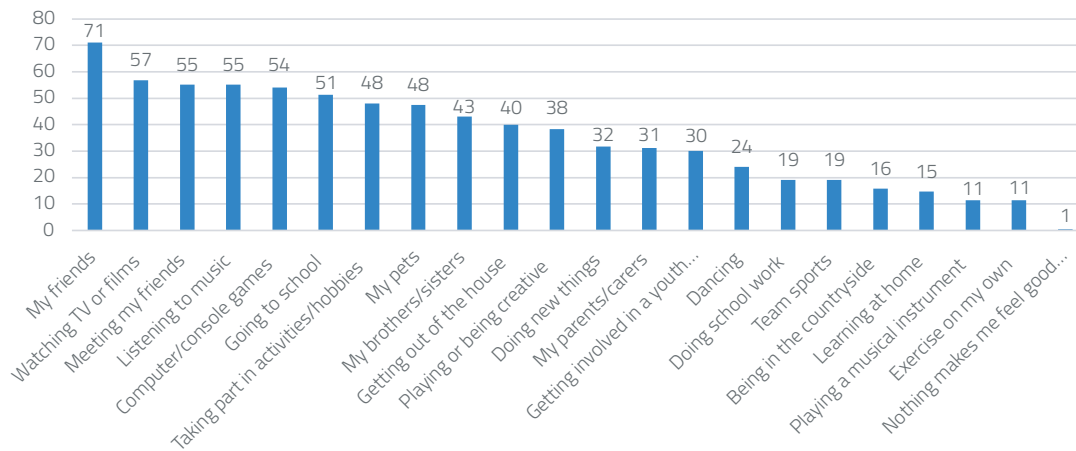
Most (68%) were sad at least some of the time

## AT HOME AND ONLINE

Most people felt safer at home than they did going outside. They said that they could have privacy when they needed to be alone, have access to a laptop when they needed to do their homework and most had their own equipment. It should be noted that, as this questionnaire was predominantly completed online for the older age group, this may mean the survey was not completed by young people who had internet access difficulties.

*"We have been going out on more walks as a family."*

**Graph 3: What makes you feel good at the moment? (frequency %) n 183**  
All age groups (tick as any as you like)



## 7E. GETTING INFORMATION

### HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU SPEND WITH YOUR FAMILY?

- The older age group girls and boys largely got information on the pandemic from the same sources (with parents or family and TV being the highest sources).
- The younger age group had more diversity, with girls gaining more information from parents or family (33%: 26%) and school (18%: 9%), with boys receiving more information from TV (34%: 31%) and talking to friends (10%: 5%).

*"I don't want my family to get COVID, so I try to be careful."*



**12%**  
were not happy  
very often

*"My bsf is my rock. She listens to everything and all my problems and anything I'm worried about and helps me as much as possible."*

## 8. ATTENDING A YOUTH CLUB

49% of respondees attended a youth club. The following bullet points show the different responses to key questions from those that attended youth clubs (yes), to those that did not (no).

*“Lynne has helped me with my confidence which has made me more comfortable around crowds which I struggled with before I started going to youth club.”*

### PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Young people who attended youth clubs didn't like eating healthy food as much (52% yes, 65% no).
- They did however, feel that they had more energy (74% yes, 67% no).
- Both said they had done less exercise since the pandemic started (56% yes, 57% no) and only 55% exercised for at least one hour a day in or out of school – there was no difference between either group for the amount of physical exercise undertaken.
- People who attended youth clubs overall felt that their physical health had deteriorated during the pandemic slightly more than people who didn't attend (40%: 32%). This could, in part be due to lack of access to their regular physical team activity whilst the youth clubs were closed.

*“The leaders, the people that come here, now we're like a big close family and we all get along.”*

### MENTAL HEALTH

- There was little difference between categories for the older age groups' perception of their mental health deteriorating during the pandemic (46% yes, 48% no).

*“I like that all people there are friendly and make me feel comfortable and welcome.”*

### HOW ARE THEY FEELING?

- Young people who attended youth clubs generally felt more cheerful and in a good mood (60% yes, 49% no). They were less sad (62% yes, 72% no) at least some of the time and less worried (57% yes, 68% no) at least some of the time.
- Both groups felt happy at least some of the time (90%) although that means that 10% were not happy very often from both groups.
- Young people from all age groups that didn't attend a youth club often felt more bored (64% yes, 70% no). They also felt they had more fun things to do (70% no, 64% yes), again a possible reflection on youth clubs being closed or activities curtailed due to the pandemic.

*“The fact that the adults care about us and they make the times fun.”*

*“Meeting my friends hardly happens so when it does it makes me extremely happy.”*

Boys were more confident

and had higher self-esteem than girls



# CASE STUDY

## CONFIDENCE AND SELF ESTEEM

- Young people who attended youth clubs also had considerably higher levels of self-esteem (they knew that there were things that they were good at) (yes 91%, no 76%) and that they were proud of the things that they could do (82% yes, 71% no).
- Both groups tried their hardest when they did something (77% yes, 73% no).
- Both groups felt safe (95%, 96%), at least some of the time.
- Young people who attended youth clubs significantly enjoyed learning new things more (83% yes, 44% no).

Young people who attended youth clubs valued the personal interaction with youth workers and were confident that they could get help from them about their emotional or mental health (85%), the second highest choice after family and friends. A number of unprompted comments were made about the approachableness of youth club staff, and that youth clubs offered a safe and supportive environment for young people to talk about issues that concerned them, try out new activities and socialise with their peers.

*"They ... do an amazing job and make everyone feel welcome."*



**57%**  
had done less  
exercise during  
the pandemic

Children and young people are very reflective of their home life and family issues. Their right to support and their need for it didn't go away during the pandemic, but was amplified. The enforced lockdown, with its limits on socialising, lack of engagement, home schooling and increased financial strains took their toll. We adjusted our youth work delivery to compensate, offering zoom 1:1 and group sessions, distanced face to face meetings, and outdoors support within COVID guidance.

We supported 3 sets of siblings over lockdown and their families:

Family One: is a large family. Financially the situation was dire. Christmas and a close birthday caused parents a huge amount of stress. Whilst we connected parents to additional support, we made sure the children had presents and activities designed to deal emotionally from the families strain. We introduced fun exercises and physical activity, allowing them to burn off excess energy and give them something to focus on. As a result, family life became much calmer.

Family Two: single mam. Home schooling was a huge issue as the only digital device available was an old smart phone. We helped the family print homework packs, gave mam time out and worked with the children to complete assignments. Through a local charity, we found them a laptop and internet access. Having the internet at home gave the children the ability to join online youth club activities and link with other young people.

Family Three: married with children. Mam contacted the youth club for support. She was worried about the children and could see their mental health failing. The two siblings closer in age would fight and physically hurt each other. We spoke to the children via zoom and pulled together a collection of well-being exercises and a craft pack. We created a diary for the children to log their feelings each day, then explored these with them. Setting goals and challenges for the children and the family together helped diffuse tension and gave them tools to work together.

**Stanley Young  
People's Club**



\*not their real name

## 9. COMPARISON TO OTHER STUDIES

The results of this survey broadly reflect other surveys undertaken during the pandemic. In some responses, the Stanley area data shows that children and young people are faring worse than other areas, although it should be noted that most available comparable survey data is from the first period of lockdown, and potentially not with the same lockdown conditions. It would be expected that some deterioration in young people's responses would be apparent due to the lengthening lockdown period.

An article in Lancet Psychiatry considered the clinical and policy implications of a follow-up to England's Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) survey. This showed that children and young people reported disrupted sleep and one in ten children and young people often or always felt lonely. These factors were more common in those that had existing mental health problems. Where children and young people had a parent in psychological distress, they were more likely to have a probable mental health problem. They were also more than twice as likely to live in households newly falling behind with their bills, rent, or mortgage payments compared with those whose families were able to pay their bills. One in ten children and younger people reported that during the pandemic their family did not have enough to eat or had increased reliance on foodbanks compared with before the pandemic.<sup>19</sup> Given the levels of deprivation in the Stanley area, the economic impact of the pandemic on local jobs and the economy could well continue to impact on children's mental health well into the future.

A survey 'Coronavirus and me' by the Children's Commissioner for Wales produced during the first lockdown period in Wales showed similar results for young people feeling happy.<sup>20</sup> Comparing the responses of the two surveys however, there were significantly higher levels of negative feelings from young people and children in the Stanley area, which showed them feeling more worried, sadder and less safe (see Table 4 below). Although this report drew from a much bigger data set the questions and format were the same.

**Table 4: How do you feel All age groups (%)**  
**Comparison Stanley Area Youth Consortium children and young people survey (S)**  
**(n 231) and Coronavirus and me, Children's**  
**Commissioner for Wales (W) (n 22,817)**

Age	7-18		7-11		12-18		7-18		7-11		12-18		7-18		7-11		12-18	
	All or most of the time						Some of the time						Not very often					
Area	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W
Happy	57	58	63	66	52	50	32	34	26	29	35	40	12	8	10	5	13	10
Sad	25	12	22	10	26	14	43	39	45	37	42	41	32	48	33	53	31	44
Worried	33	11	31	7	32	16	32	58	36	35	30	41	36	31	33	59	38	43
Safe	79	84	78	90	80	78	16	13	14	8	17	18	6	2	8	1	4	4

The same Welsh survey showed that not being able to spend time with friends or visit family members were the top two factors that had the most impact on how young people aged 12-18 feel, the same as this survey. After that, however the results changed significantly. Welsh young people rated 'school or college being closed' as their third highest impact (at 42%), whilst only 25% of the Stanley area young people chose this option. In addition, physical exercise was rated higher by Welsh young people (20%) compared to just 2% in Stanley.

*"Because we are a big family and everyone wants to do different things its hard."*

Young people aged 12-18 from the Stanley area were less confident on seeking help about their emotional and mental health from a website or social media (38%: 53%) but were more likely to seek help from friends or family (93%: 83%), teachers or other school staff (66%: 53%) and school counselling (51%: 39%).

The Welsh survey did not offer youth clubs as an option to seek help from, but this featured highly (42%) overall in the Stanley area survey and for young people that did attend Youth Clubs, this was their second highest choice (85%) after family and friends.<sup>21</sup>

According to the Mental Health Foundation, 20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year<sup>22</sup> and 50% of mental health problems are established by the age of 14.<sup>23</sup> This survey shows a significant increase in the number of young people showing signs of mental health issues against this baseline of 20%.

Given that 47% of Stanley area young people between 12-18 thought their mental health had got worse during the pandemic and 47% felt anxious all the time, this indicates a worrying trend for local young people's future mental health.<sup>24</sup> The Office for National Statistics (ONS) young people aged 16-19 data collected during the pandemic (April – September 2020) showed that levels of anxiousness rose from a weighted average of 3.4 to 4.6 (peaking at 5 from the period 11th June to 26th July 2020).<sup>25</sup> This national trend is mirrored by Stanley young people.

The Health Foundation's Young People's data shows that young people's mental health has worsened substantially during the pandemic through their Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) and that young people aged 12-24 are one of the worst affected groups, particularly with regard to employment and mental health outcomes.<sup>26</sup> Their research shows that young people in the north of England and young people from poorer households have been more likely to lose work. Anecdotal and personal knowledge of this by Stanley young people could well be fuelling their concerns over future jobs, exams and employment prospects.

These views are mirrored around the world, and in part are reflective of how, 'young people have different goals and relationship behaviours ... tending to focus on knowledge-seeking goals, like investing in a long-term purpose or project. These type of commitments tend to be more emotionally taxing.'<sup>27</sup> Add a pandemic to the Stanley area levels of deprivation, economic outlook and low income levels, it's not surprising that Stanley young people view their future as particularly bleak.

There is fairly consistent evidence across the board that girls, particularly older girls, have fared worse than boys during the pandemic. This is mirrored in the results of this survey. Scottish surveys have shown that boredom, isolation, uncertainty and lack of control continue to be factors for many young people during the pandemic, particularly disadvantaged young people. Remote schooling (in particular), an overload of screen time and limited access to outdoor play have also been cited as taking their toll on children's wellbeing.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The Lancet Psychiatry Child mental health in England before and during the COVID-19 lockdown, January 11 2021, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30570-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30570-8/fulltext)

<sup>20</sup> Coronavirus and Me, Children's Commissioner for Wales, <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/coronavirus-our-work/coronavirus-and-me-results/>

<sup>21</sup> Frequency choose up to three options.

<sup>22</sup> WHO (2003). Caring for children and adolescents with mental disorders: Setting WHO directions. [online] Geneva: World Health Organization. Available at: [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/media/en/785.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/785.pdf) [Accessed 14 Sep. 2015].

<sup>23</sup> Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. (2005). Lifetime Prevalence and Age-of-Onset Distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. Archives of General Psychiatry, 62 (6) pp. 593-602. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.593.

<sup>24</sup> Strongly agree or agree responses. 47% 49 responses out of 105 completed questions.

<sup>25</sup> ONS Individuals aged 16-19 wellbeing measures 3rd April to 13th September 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/adhocs/12287/coronavirusandwellbeingofyoungpeoplethroughoutthepandemic>

<sup>26</sup> The Health Foundation, 2. Impact of the pandemic on young people's wellbeing, 7th Feb 2021 <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/generation-covid-19>

<sup>27</sup> Carstensen, L. L. (1991). Socioemotional selectivity theory: Social activity in life-span context. Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics, 11, 195-217, sourced from [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-981-287-080-3\\_110-1](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-981-287-080-3_110-1) Laura L. Carstensen, 12 Feb 2016

<sup>28</sup> Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on children, young people and families – evidence summary September 2020, sourced from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-covid-19-children-young-people-families-september-2020-evidence-summary/>, 12 Feb 2021

*"I don't have real friends and I have to be watched when I'm on technology because of my behaviour and temper."*

# CASE STUDY

Tilly\* has learning difficulties and doesn't have many friends her age. As her developmental age is lower than her actual age, she finds it easier to interact with people younger than her. During lockdown she didn't have many positive things to focus on and was finding it difficult. As she hasn't got a job, we signed her up for various courses to help her in gaining employment, qualifications and knowledge. Tilly is now a popular volunteer at our club, getting involved in all activities including our lock down support groups.

Unfortunately, Tilly tested positive for COVID 19. As she is in the virus high risk category she was very upset and scared. We supported Tilly and her family during this time, contacting her and her family daily and were delighted that Tilly has fully recovered. She has now returned to volunteering at our support sessions. Her ICT skills have developed considerably, and she now uses Zoom confidently and effectively.

Tilly is an active Committee Member of our Youth Club.



**Oxhill Youth Club**



**47%**  
were worried  
about coronavirus

\*not their real name

Stanley Area Youth Consortium

# MEMBERS



The **Stanley Area Youth Consortium** has evolved over the past 4 years, offering staff training, joint activities, support sessions and trips to children and young people across the Stanley area. It is about to employ its first Mental Health Worker.

All consortium members offer trips and activities open to other youth club members and children and young people in the wider Stanley area.

They also offer volunteering opportunities for children, young people and adults and encourage peer support and engagement. Despite being severely affected by the pandemic lockdowns, all members have continued to offer a more limited range of support and activities in accordance with social distancing guidance.



## Oxhill Youth Club

supports children and young people supports children and young people aged 8 to 21 in Oxhill. Open four nights a week, they offer a wide variety of activities from their centre including The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, pantomimes, drop in sessions and sports activities.



## Stars Youth and Community CIC

supports young people aged 11-19 across the Stanley area. Through session work they offer drop in youth work sessions, detached youth work, project work, residentials, mental health support, sexual health education, general information, advice and guidance plus careers advice.



## Stanley Young People's Club

supports children and young people aged 6 to 16 from the South Moor and South Stanley areas. Open two nights a week, they offer centred based youth activities including general drop in sessions, cooking, arts/crafts, music, dance and sports activities.



## The Activity Den

The Activity Den also participated in this survey. They support children and young people aged 6-19 in Tanfield Lea. Open three nights a week, their centre based activities include The Woodcraft Folk, Sound Hub music project and drop in sessions.



For further information about this report or the Stanley Area Youth Consortium please contact [stanleyayc@outlook.com](mailto:stanleyayc@outlook.com).



# STANLEY AREA CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DURING THE PANDEMIC



County Durham  
Community Foundation



Supported by County Durham Community Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund

## STANLEY AREA YOUTH CONSORTIUM - SAYC

For further information about this report or the Stanley Area Youth Consortium please contact [stanleyayc@outlook.com](mailto:stanleyayc@outlook.com)

