



# **NORTH YORKSHIRE YOUTH COMMISSION**

**FINAL 2025 REPORT TO THE YORK  
AND NORTH YORKSHIRE DEPUTY  
MAYOR FOR POLICING, FIRE & CRIME**

**NOVEMBER 2025**





## INTRODUCTION

The North Yorkshire Youth Commission (NYYC) was established in 2015 and is funded by the York and North Yorkshire Deputy Mayor for Policing, Fire and Crime (DMPFC)

The NYYC enables young people aged 10–25 to inform decisions about policing, fire and crime prevention in York and North Yorkshire, working in partnership with the DMPFC, North Yorkshire Police (NYP) and North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (NYFRS).

## ABOUT THE NORTH YORKSHIRE YOUTH COMMISSION

The NYYC gives young people across York and North Yorkshire a voice on police, fire, crime and community issues and supports, challenges, and informs the work of the DMPFC, the Combined Authority (CA) and partners.

A key part of NYYC's role is to gather the views of other young people across the county through peer-to-peer research in the form of a 'Big Conversation'. This peer-led research process provides a safe environment for young people to talk to their peers about relevant issues. The views gathered from young people are analysed by the NYYC in order to create a final set of key findings and recommendations to report back to the DMPFC, NYP, and partners.

For more information about the NYYC, please see: Youth Commission – **York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority – Policing, Fire and Crime Team** or visit [yc\\_northyorks](#) on Instagram

The North Yorkshire Youth Commission is facilitated by Leaders Unlocked, a social enterprise that enables young people to have a stronger voice and influence on the decisions that affect their lives. Leaders Unlocked has established Youth Commissions in 21 regions in England and Wales and continues to grow. For more information about Leaders Unlocked, please see [www.leaders-unlocked.org](http://www.leaders-unlocked.org)

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is grounded in extensive peer-to-peer research and engagement with **1875 young people across York and North Yorkshire** between July 2024 and August 2025. These conversations were conducted through interactive workshops, one-to-one interviews, and outreach stands.

The report is structured into six key priorities that outline the NYYC's six areas of peer-led citizen research. Each section features a comprehensive analysis of young people's responses, verbatim quotes from individual participants, and the recommendations that have been put forward by the Youth Commission as a result of their findings.

This report is intended to act as an honest and independent record of what young people have told us through the 'Big Conversation' process. It is also intended to be a basis for further action on the part of the DMPFC, North Yorkshire Police, and partner agencies.



## THE 'BIG CONVERSATION':

This year's key priorities, chosen by Youth Commission members were :

1. Gender Violence & Safer Streets
2. Inclusivity
3. Online Safety
4. Youth Rights & Police Respect
5. Healthy Relationships
6. Drugs, Gangs & County Lines

To tackle the six priorities, NYYC members delivered a range of **peer-led workshops and outreach stands with young people** across York and North Yorkshire. At these engagement events, members utilised their co-designed resources. This 'Big Conversation' was taken to a wide range of local voluntary organisations, educational institutions, and statutory partners across the region.

In order to gather vital insights from those who are most affected by some of the priority topics, the NYYC put particular effort and energy into engaging with underrepresented and more marginalised groups of young people. NYYC carried out workshops and consultations with young carers, those with first-hand experience of the criminal justice system, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and non-mainstream education settings.

In total, the NYYC engaged in peer research with **1,875 young people across 91 consultation** events (See acknowledgements below for the full list of organisations engaged with).

## JOINT WORK WITH THE YORK & NORTH YORKSHIRE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR POLICING, FIRE & CRIME

The NYYC have continued to act as a sounding board and youth voice for the DMPFC. Some highlights of joint work have included:

- One member interviewing the DMPFC on Inclusivity and Hate Crime to produce a blog article.
- Taking part in a consultation event and discussion with the DMPFC to support the development of the new Police and Crime Plan.
- Reviewing, taking part in, and promoting the Violence Survey to ensure more young people have their voice heard.
- Joining the Police, Fire and Crime Directorate at the Great Yorkshire Show to hear from other young people.
- One member attending a tour of the Police Fire and Crime Directorate-funded Acer House Victims' Centre.
- Establishing regular Youth Commission input to the Independent Scrutiny and Oversight Board.

## JOINT WORK WITH NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

This year NYYC has worked closely with NYP on a number of young people's issues and campaigns. Some highlights include:

- Co-producing two officer training animation films on victim-blaming language and barriers to engagement.
- Co-producing a lived experience officer training document on 'missing from home'.
- Establishing the 'Race Action Youth Voices' Sub-group to provide young people's inputs on the North Yorkshire Police Race Action Plan.
- Holding Youth Independent Advisory Group meetings on the use of tasers, the 2024 summer riots, mental health in policing, and more.

## PARTNERSHIPS:

The NYYC has developed strong partnerships with local and national organisations. Highlights here have included:

- One member attending the Domestic Abuse Commissioners National Survivors Summit to represent the NYYC and share lived experiences.
- Taking part in reporting training with Crime Stoppers.
- One member undertaking training to become the NYYC's Hate Crime Champion and also co-producing a Hate Crime Awareness training video, sharing his lived experiences.
- Reviewing and providing feedback to North Yorkshire Horizons on their new Drug Hub Training resource 'Talking to Young People about Drugs.'
- Working with the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership to ensure their Being Young in North Yorkshire Strategy is young person accessible and takes a child-first approach.
- One member completing work experience with the York Youth Justice Service.

## THE GOOD CITIZEN AWARD

The Good Citizen Award, designed by the NYYC in 2021, recognises the positive impact young people have on their communities. The award allows young people to pick a cause they are passionate about and take action on it. The award is jointly presented by the NYYC and DMPFC.

So far, 83 young people have received the award. Projects have included: Litter picking, drug and alcohol awareness raising, mentoring, demonstrating community spirit, and charity fundraising stalls.

For more information on the Good Citizen Award please visit: [Good Citizen Award - York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority – Policing, Fire and Crime Team](#)



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NYYC are grateful for the support of a wide range of local partners who have allowed the members to consult with the young people in their organisations and supported the work of the NYYC. Thanks go to:

|  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Scalby School                          | Scarborough Pupil Referral Service |
| Door 84                                | Askham Bryan College               |
| York College                           | Archbishop Holgate's School        |
| York College Additional Support Centre | Millthorpe School                  |
| SELFA                                  | Scarborough Pride                  |
| All Saints School                      | York Pride                         |
| Bentham Youth Group                    | Great Yorkshire Show               |
| Selby College                          | Ripon Grammar School               |
| Settle Youth Club                      | Carers Plus                        |
| York Youth Justic Service              | Scarborough Pride                  |
| Scarborough Sixth Form                 | Fulford Show                       |
| Inspire Youth                          | Malton School                      |
| Carers' Resource                       | Gallows Close Centre               |
| Welburn Hall School                    | North Yorkshire Youth              |
| North Yorkshire Sport                  |                                    |

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

|                           |                    |                |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Angus Gatus               | Kitty Hutchinson   | Erin Holgate   |
| Dawid Badowski            | Elinor Bevan       | Billy Simmonds |
| Sophie Sabin Lulu Halloum | Georgina Bell      | Tara Fearn     |
| Matthew Davies            | Matthew Lomax      | Seren Dunning  |
| Ben Blaxal                | Benjamin Lyman     | Aoife Swaffer  |
| Noah Smee-Brown           | Findlay List       |                |
| Samuel Binder             | Ruby Young         |                |
| Hana Karanxha             | Isabelle Oflynn    |                |
| Olivia Sanderson          | Hattie Daisy Berry |                |

\*Some NYYC members names have not been published.





## PRIORITY 1: GENDER VIOLENCE & SAFER STREETS

The NYYC engaged with a total of **279 young people** about this topic.

### WHAT WE FOUND

Young people overwhelmingly reported that sexism and misogyny are still too normalised, and that incidents such as 'catcalling' are wrongly considered harmless. These actions, sometimes committed by adult men against girls and young women, made them feel unsafe and disrespected. There was also concern from young people that normalised 'smaller' incidents lead offenders to think more extreme behaviours are acceptable.

*"I was catcalled in school. My friend has also been catcalled outside of school. I don't think catcalling is recognised as much as it should be, as it can be very common."*

*"I've been whistled at by middle-aged men in my school uniform. It's disgusting."*

Online gender violence was highlighted as a growing concern for young people. They shared that online spaces facilitate harassment and abuse directly, but also provide space for extreme sexist and misogynistic ideas to reach boys and young men and promote violence and misogynistic hate crime, both on and offline.

*"I think there's a real problem, especially with sexism, because of the misogyny spread through social media personalities."*

*"I think that an issue that needs to be dealt with is people on Snapchat or any social media platform asking if you send nudes. It's normalised for people to ask others if they send nudes even if they've only just added them."*

Young people felt that solutions to gender violence still focus too much on what girls and women should do to protect themselves instead of how to stop perpetrators. Young people wanted to see more education on what counts as gender violence and its harmful impacts. They felt that victim-blaming towards girls and women is still too common.

*"More education on the impact of sexism and gender violence. Educate boys instead of just protecting girls."*

*"It shouldn't be our responsibility to stop men attacking us. It should be a given."*

Victim blaming was a key reason why gender violence is still heavily underreported by young women. They felt that reporting would increase trauma, while not being likely to have any outcomes for offenders in most cases. Many were also unsure how to report non-emergency gender violence issues. Many young people shared statistics they were aware of that demonstrated how rarely gender violence is successfully prosecuted.



*"They will just say it's the girl's fault for sending the photos" (Image-Based Abuse)*

*"Ensure all possible people of every gender are educated about this issue and what actions they can take to stop it. For example, police should be taught how to effectively help."*

*"Police didn't do anything anyway. Made me feel stupid for even saying anything to start with."*

NYYC found that attitudes towards gender violence were regularly linked to other forms of discrimination. Young people who had a stronger understanding of violence against women and girls were also more aware of issues such as racism and homophobia in their communities. This demonstrated a growing divide on social issues that should be addressed.

*"We are influenced to pick a side by social media, further aggravating the issue."*

*"I think it's all got more extreme, like racism and homophobia as well as sexism- It's like it's all just accepted nowadays. But my opinion is that it all needs to be stopped. And that it's all our responsibility."*

*"One of my class members was quite racist and he had no consequences. The same student also said something sexist."*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Hold a Youth Independent Advisory Group with the Youth Commission to better **understand how online gender violence impacts young people**. Then include what is learned in future work.

Ensure that front-line officers are educated on non-victim-blaming practices and how to reduce further harm for victims who come forward.

**Promote successful prosecutions of gender violence crimes**, to both encourage reporting and deter perpetrators.

Even when police can't take a gender violence case further, ensure victims are always signposted to further support services.

### FOR THE DMPFC & PARTNERS:

Raise more awareness amongst young people of alternative reporting options, such as Stop Hate UK's Start Safe Stay Safe App, and online reporting. Also promote relevant support services, such as **Supporting Victims**.

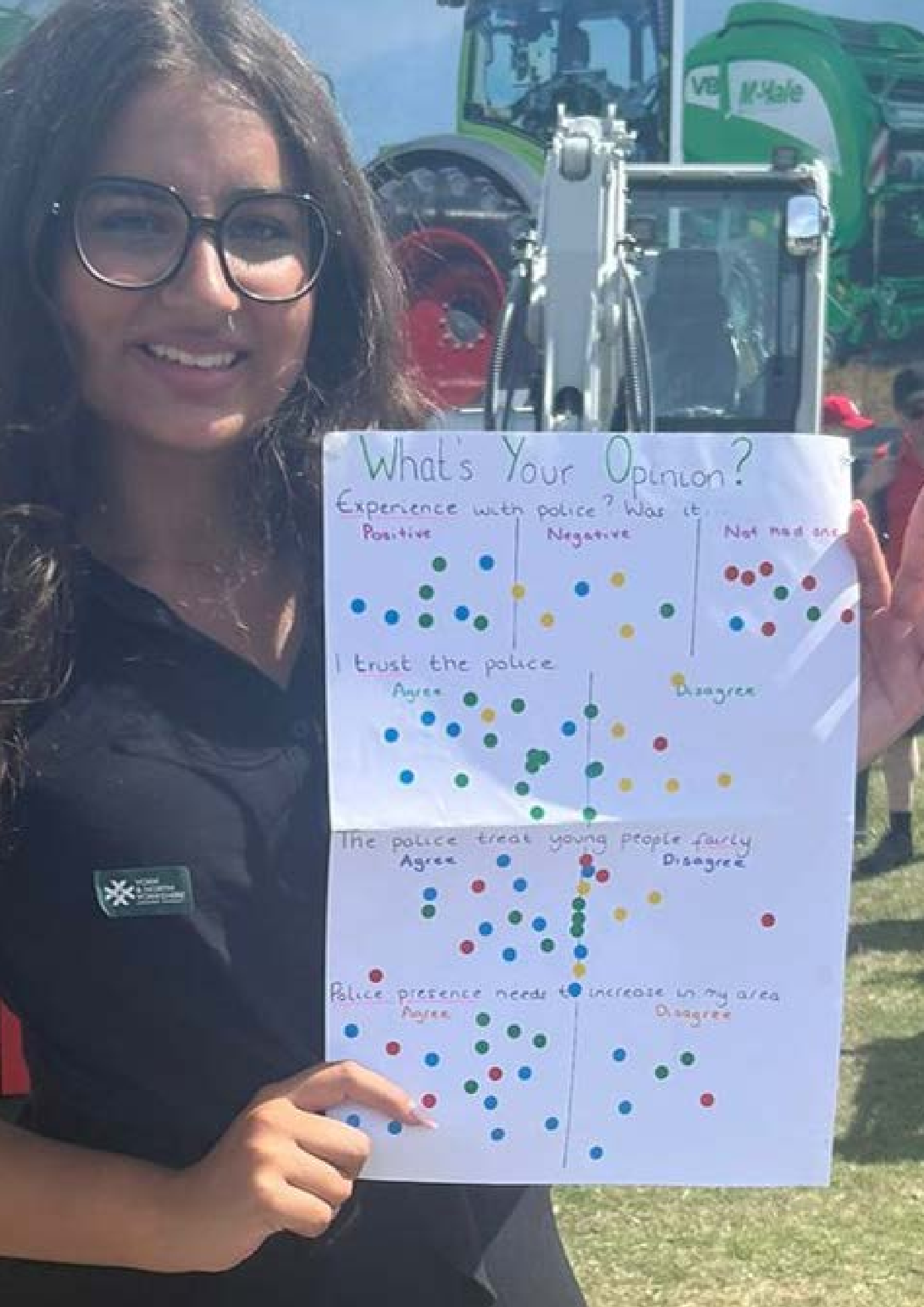
Consider the impacts of and how to **tackle online gender violence** in future VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) strategies and work.

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Hold a Youth Independent Advisory Group with North Yorkshire Police on how gender violence is promoted to young people online.

Use the Big Conversation and social media to promote alternative reporting options and support, such as Stop Hate UK's Start Safe Stay Safe App, **Supporting Victims**, and online reporting to young people.

Investigate **growing social divides amongst young people** on issues of discrimination, including their causes and solutions for resolving them.



## PRIORITY 2: INCLUSIVITY

The NYYC engaged with a total of **294 young** people about this topic

### YOUNG PEOPLE SAID:

NYYC found that there continues to be a **lack of understanding** and knowledge around what discrimination is. Both hate crime and discrimination were often confused with standard bullying or 'banter'. While actual hate crimes were, at times, wrongly dismissed as not being a matter for the police. **More education is needed.**

*"Discrimination isn't talked about enough; there also isn't enough education on discrimination."*

*"Difficult to say who you'd report it too - depends on who, what and where of the situation. Depends on age and the severity of the situation. If it's something a bit more minor can just brush it off."*

**Discrimination and hate incidents are very normalised**, with children and young people seeing them as part of everyday life and something they have to accept. Children as young as 11 years old told NYYC they expect to face discrimination. This perception that discrimination is a common occurrence and not taken seriously was the biggest barrier to **reporting amongst young people**. They felt nothing would be done and that it happened too often to report.

*"Police are more likely to take other crimes more seriously/prioritise them over discrimination."*

*"Discrimination isn't often reported. It's normalised and you're told to just get on with it and ignore it. Why should I have to just ignore it?"*

Communities most likely to face discrimination had a **lack of trust in authorities and questioned if police were on their side**. This was due to historical events, but also personal experience. This included a feeling from young members of the LGBTQ+ community that only showed solidarity during PRIDE month and were not there for them the rest of the year.

*"It's generational mistrust. We've seen and heard the stories about how police treated people in our community in the past so why should we trust them now?"*

*"Improve communication between LGBTQ and police by attending meetings with groups(e.g. trans groups) and ask them what input they need."*

Young people felt that **disability hate crime, in particular, was not acknowledged or taken seriously enough**, and that invisible disabilities, such as neurodivergence and ADHD, are regularly discriminated against, but that offenders do not face equal consequences. **Disabled communities of young people also faced unconscious bias, leading to further discrimination.**



*"As a neurodivergent person, I'm scared of police because when I've had meltdowns in the past, when I was a bit younger, they were intimidating and treated me like I chose to do it and was a criminal."*

*"Adults who say ADHD is just being naughty."*

Hate crime and discrimination has led many young people to feel isolated and struggle with their mental health. Victims described feelings of low self-esteem, depression, and anger at the situation. Young people want more **support in dealing with the emotional effects of discrimination and hate crime.**

*"I always have an escape plan, no matter where I am, especially when I'm dressed more feminine. I don't feel safe and I'm always alert. I have to dress more androgynously if I want to feel safer. I was wearing a skirt, guy staring at me. I said, "what are you looking at?" and he started to run at me. I had to hide in a shop. It makes you feel unsafe and impacts how you feel internally."*

*"Feel unable to talk to anyone or trust anyone. Feeling like you're by yourself and everyone will turn on you. Makes you feel sad and cross knowing you can't do anything."*

*"Feel upset and make you feel like they don't wanna try and they don't belong there."*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Where possible, offer a plain clothed response for victims of hate crime and when attending events with marginalised communities. This will help victims feel less afraid of authorities.

Show more public support for discriminated against communities online and in day-to-day operations (Rather than just in special months/ at specific events).

Better publicise when police take part in training that helps them to support marginalised communities. This will **build trust and show police care about discrimination.**

### FOR THE DMPFC & PARTNERS:

Assist a range of support services and charities to link up to create a network of more joined-up support for young victims of discrimination and hate crime.

Fund more youth and community groups that act as **safe spaces for marginalised and discriminated against young people.**

Work with the Youth Commission to develop online resources to **educate young people about the law surrounding discrimination and hate crime.**

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Deliver more Big Conversation workshops in schools and colleges to inform young people on hate crime and better understand their experiences.

Support the DMPFC with developing **online educational hate crime and discrimination resources** aimed at young people.

Take the Big Conversation to more community-specific events, such as PRIDE and black history month events, to hear directly from those most affected.





## PRIORITY 3: ONLINE SAFETY

The NYYC engaged with a total of **296 young people** about this topic

## WHAT WE FOUND

Despite identifying some positives online, such as connecting with friends more easily, young people described many challenges. Some key issues they frequently discussed were: **cyberbullying, exposure to distressing content, online scams and harmful contact from strangers** through apps and gaming sites.

*"Someone had posted a lot of things on social media and it really affected my mental health and they kept bullying and harassing me till a certain point, I couldn't cope."*

*"People talking to you when you don't want them too. Young people are unaware of the dangers on video games."*

*"People have less self-esteem and worry about looking as good as a person with a filter on."*

Young people acknowledged that **age restrictions on apps are not strict enough**. Damaging content relating to **extremist beliefs** and unrealistic body images were **specifically highlighted as harmful** and too easily accessible.

*"People are always on their phones now really young and I don't think there is enough restrictions on videos that are inappropriate and it's really damaging to young brains."*

*"I think some of the things in TikTok is inappropriate content. Some young people could see it and it's really damaging. I think TikTok should put more barriers in young people faking their age and inappropriate content."*

**Social media has a significant impact on mental health and quality of life.** Young people told us they experienced addiction, disruptive sleep and, at times, isolation from their friends and family. Some told us they didn't enjoy being online but felt a pressure to 'keep up'.

*"There's a pressure to be on it."*

*"Social media impacts friendships. There's drama online as well as in person."*

*"Get distracted and not get enough sleep or social time with friends and family."*

Young people told us that **high amounts of misinformation online has resulted in uncertainty around what sources to believe and trust**. Some felt able to identify false sites and AI images, but almost all agreed that **'fake news' was hard to identify**.

*"Taking everything you see on the internet and automatically thinking it's true."*

*"When you see something, it makes people think it's real."*

**Receiving and being requested to send explicit images is a common event for lots of young people.** Participants in the Big Conversation as young as 11 years old, have experienced peer pressure to send nude images. Many also, why not agreeing with it, felt that having private images shared publicly was to be expected. **This normalisation has resulted in underreporting and victim-blaming.**

*"In my area there's a lot of boys that want you to send them nude photos and if you don't you make them mad."*

*"Random boy adding me on Snapchat and asking for nude photos and for you to do stuff with them or for them."*

The law around explicit images, as well as other online behaviours, is not well understood by young people. **Many expressed feeling confused about what is illegal,** and also **did not think online crime was taken as seriously as in-person crime.**

*"Explain to children what is illegal and legal."*

*"Young people do post things online unaware of the dangers. They could be exposed to hate, judgement and predators without knowing and it can all start with a silly photo or video of them with friends."*

*"If someone reports something, it doesn't get handled."*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Hold a Youth Independent Advisory Group with the Youth Commission on young people's experiences and behaviours online. This will help police to **understand how young people are affected by online crime.**

Promote to young people, and parents/ guardians, the seriousness of sharing explicit images underage, and of image-based abuse. Include education on potential sentences for these crimes.

### FOR THE DMPFC & PARTNERS:

Raise awareness of how young people can **report online crime and promote support services** that are relevant to online harms.

Further promote the opportunities, clubs and youth groups that exist within York and North Yorkshire to encourage young people to take time away from the online world.

Work with support services and educational organisations to ensure all professionals working with young people are aware of the dangers online and are **equipped to support young people.**

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Hold a Youth Independent Advisory Group with Police to provide insight on young people's experiences and behaviours online.

Through the Big Conversation, **support the police's efforts to raise awareness of the law around explicit images and the seriousness of sharing other people's images.**

**Promote the 'YourPolice.uk' Instagram account,** which shares valuable knowledge on online harms and the law to young people.





## PRIORITY 4: YOUTH RIGHTS AND POLICE RESPECT

The NYYC engaged with a total of **327 young people** about this topic

### WHAT WE FOUND

The young people continue to **feel stereotyped by police** because of their age. They told NYYC they believed police treated them differently to adults, and unfairly found them suspicious or anti-social. Additionally, traditionally marginalised groups, such as those from minority **backgrounds or those with invisible disabilities, felt further discriminated against and unfairly criminalised due to stereotyping.**

*"Feel stereotyped as disrespectful youth."*

*"I think the police are okay; however, sometimes they do things that are unfair based on people's religions, race, etc. They are also sometimes unfair to young people because they think we're all bad."*

*"They assume all teenagers are the same. I feel that they disrespect us because we are kids."*

Stop and Search remains a key issue causing tension between police and young people. **Too many children NYYC spoke to had experience of stop and search.** It should not be a common occurrence for under-18s. Lots of young people also did not fully understand their Stop and Search rights, or had misconceptions about their rights, which led to further mistrust in authorities.

*"I think that it can be used badly as some police officers do use it to be prejudice to a group of people and it's harder to know about it because they can just stop you for anything which has happened before with my friend who is black."*

*"Educate children on their rights, make sure police understand and comply. Make sure police are tested on how to respond in certain situations."*

*"Makes you not trust them when the same people get stopped all the time. And it's always the same types of people."*

Young people had mixed views on police presence at protests. But many felt that when a protest is peaceful and non-violent, any **police presence should be supportive and aimed at protecting people's rights.** Some believed that police saw all protestors as criminals, which broke down trust and confidence.

*"Distinguish who are peaceful protesters and violent before getting involved."*

*"Sometimes too many police for what is needed. Maybe got told the wrong information and sent too many police officers for a peaceful protest."*

Young people told NYYC about the **barriers they face in reporting crime.** Most said they didn't think they would be taken seriously by police and would prefer to speak to friends, family or teachers. Many also wanted alternative reporting options, but were **unaware they could report online or to independent groups like Fearless.**

*"Young people can often be dismissed; we should listen more. We don't feel taken seriously."*

*"Some are intimidating. You can't trust them."*

*"I think that I was not listened to because I was young, they didn't think I mattered as much and could brush over it."*

Overall, more **young people agreed that police care about young people than disagreed**, and they wanted **more opportunities to engage positively with local officers and build more trusting relationships**. They wanted more chances to interact with officers regularly, face-to-face, such as in school or in the local community as well as online.

*"No connection between police and the youth. We need more school visits etc. to bridge these differences."*

*"I think that the police in my area are doing good work but may not be easily approachable for young people when an incident has occurred."*

*"Small voices. Police do come into school but don't feel like we can talk to them. They should come in and chat to us more. Learn more about young people's behaviour."*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

As much as possible, give local officers and PCSO's more time to visit schools and local community groups to conduct positive engagement and build more trusting relationships with young people.

Ensure front-line officers **don't hold unconscious biases or discriminatory views**. Achieve this through more training and swifter action and scrutiny when incidents occur.

Use **lived experience stories to demonstrate to officers the impacts of interactions like stop and search on young people**. It might be an everyday event for police, but it shouldn't be for children.

### FOR THE DMPFC & PARTNERS:

Work with the Youth Commission to better engage with young people online. This could include content designed to **build trust in police and authorities, as well as informative content**.

Place a stronger emphasis on **scrutinising police Stop and Search and use of force against those under 18**. These should be held to an even higher standard than when used against adults.

Promote alternative methods for reporting crime, including online options like **NYP Report a Crime, True Vision, Fearless and Supporting Victims**.

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Promote to young people different reporting options, including online reporting, Fearless, Supporting Victims and speaking to trusted adults such as teachers.

Assist the DMPFC in **designing social media content that is engaging and informative for young people**.

Continue to **raise awareness of Stop and Search rights amongst young people**.





## PRIORITY 5: HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

The NYYC engaged with a total of **318 young people** about this topic

### WHAT WE FOUND

Lots of young people said they, or someone they know, had experienced an unhealthy relationship. This included young people from the age of 10 years old. Many also said the signs of unhealthy or abusive relationships were often normalised.

*"I was in an abusive relationship 3 years ago and he didn't like my friends and controlled me a lot and bribed me with money and he took pictures of me without my knowledge. I was so angry."*

*"Lots of people don't realise the relationships unhealthy and some don't know how to leave or are scared."*

*"I think there are a lot of abusive relationships especially with teens but people don't recognise the abuse and think it's normal."*

Young people felt a lack of education and knowledge on the signs of unhealthy relationships exists. Some young people recognised behaviours as unhealthy but said they still accepted them within their relationships. Many felt that more opportunities to have **open and honest conversations discussing signs and boundaries** would be helpful.

*"I definitely think it should be spoken about more in schools and colleges. There should be more options for support regarding abuse and it doesn't have to be just for romantic relationships."*

*"There are many uneducated people when it comes to the rights and wrongs of relationships and people aren't taught how to know the basic etiquette of relationships."*

*"Education in schools from younger ages should be put into place as some people may not have role models to help them and people should be told what is good and what isn't."*

**Social media is impacting young people's perceptions of healthy relationships** and respect, with negative social media personalities, normalising toxic and abusive behaviours. Additionally, social media has played a role in **normalising controlling behaviours such as checking a partner's phone**.

*"Young relationships set the mould for how we view future relationships and the internet can also mould unhealthy views/unhealthy expectations."*

*"Social media can sometimes stop people having a healthy relationship - too influential and idealistic."*

*"Healthy relationships are hard to come by and dating apps I think harm people's confidence in finding a compatible partner."*



Young people raised concerns that too many **boys and men who experience unhealthy relationships don't feel confident reporting** or asking for help. They felt shame and thought that their reports would not be taken seriously. **Re-emerging unhealthy ideas of masculinity made this fear worse.**

*"Peer pressure is very common among teenagers because they do not want to feel ashamed or look weak."*

*"Talk about situations where men are the victims too, because basically all the time we are seen as the abusers but we can be victims too."*

*"My girlfriend was controlling, but people saw it as banter and a laugh. If she hit or shouted at me, it's fine, but I can't do it back or I'm the violent one."*

Support services and methods to report unhealthy relationships were unknown. **Young people expressed a lack of confidence in the authorities.** Many felt they would be too scared to report, that their age might mean they wouldn't be taken seriously or that there would be no consequences for the offender anyway.

*"Not enough support to reach out to. Not enough help. Not spoken about enough for young people to know. People may not believe them."*

*"It needs to be talked about much more, as it is so easy for students (mainly secondary students) to fall into bad relationships and get taken advantage of. Explain what support there is and how to access it."*

*"There are lots of people who are in unhealthy or unsafe relationships and don't report it due to not having the proper education on what a healthy relationship should be like as well as not knowing whether or not to report any major issues."*



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Ensure, as much as possible, that young people reporting abuse are seen by officers who have received specific training on abuse and supporting victims.

Display a 'visible crack down' on abuse on social media and local news channels. Showcase successful stories of supporting victims and charging offenders.

### FOR THE DMPFC & PARTNERS:

Work with education settings to encourage more **open conversations and safe spaces to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships.**

Support the Youth Commission's 'anyone can be a victim' message to **destigmatise young and male victims coming forward.**

Support North Yorkshire Police in efforts to publicly promote their positive work in tackling abuse, online and in local media.

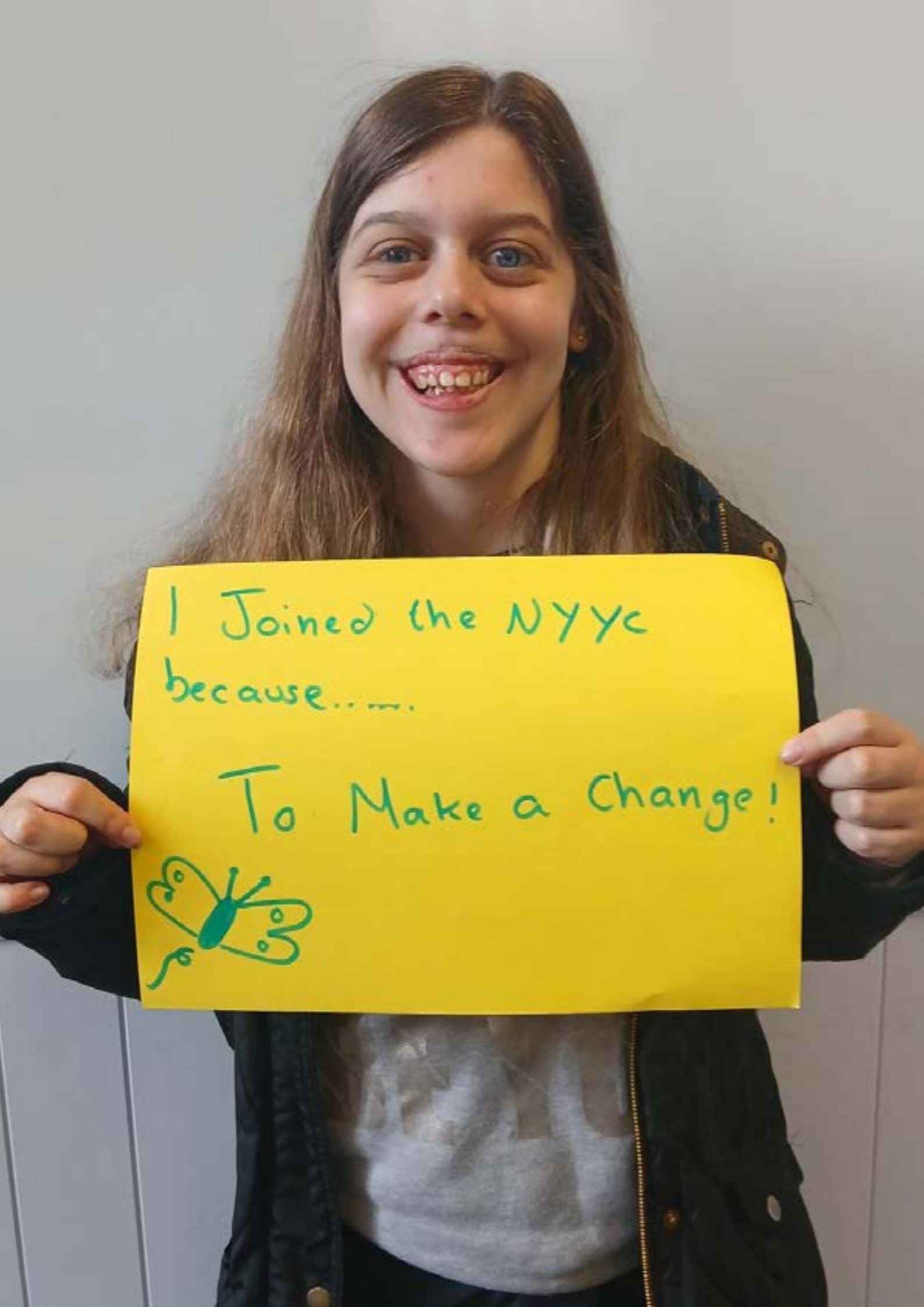
### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Through the Big Conversation, **hold open and honest discussions with other young people** on the signs of unhealthy relationships and how to access support.

Collaborate with support services, such as IDAS, to support the development of resources designed specifically for young people.

Promote a message that anyone can be a **victim of abuse, regardless of age or gender.** This will help to break down barriers to reporting.





## PRIORITY 6: DRUGS AND COUNTY LINES

The NYYC engaged with a total of **361 young people** about this topic

### WHAT WE FOUND

Young people reported that **harm reduction approaches to drug education in schools would be more effective**. They said that 'Just say no' style lectures would not deter some young people, and that this approach makes it hard for those young people to understand the real dangers and how to keep themselves safe.

*"Education and awareness in school for young children like primary age and secondary school. This may help some children be more aware of the signs."*

*"Educate more in schools and have people who have experienced things in real life to talk to younger people."*

NYYC heard that the concept of **young people selling or running drugs was very normalised**, even amongst those who had no involvement. Lots of young people had experience of or knew someone who had been asked to become involved in some form. This **often happens online on sites such as Snapchat**.

*"They'll add you on Snapchat and start by asking if you will hold something for some money. Think everyone's had that message."*

*"My younger brother, who is 10 was approached by a new group in our village and asked to transport cocaine."*

*"Everyone probably knows who to go to if they want something round here."*

Some young people see **county lines as an alternative, easier way to make money**. This attitude has increased along with the cost-of-living crisis. Some shared that their families may be desperate for the extra income.

*"I think it is more of a problem in poorer areas as children in poverty would be interested instantly by a way to make easy money."*

*"Some people don't have a choice they have to fend for themselves and get money where they can to survive this is the only thing they know."*

*"More opportunities to make money legally from a younger age."*

A need for the money was raised as a key barrier to not reporting county lines exploitation. However, the biggest barrier discussed was a **belief that police would view them as criminals, not victims**. This view was intensified by young people's **existing feelings of being stereotyped by authorities**. Even when explanations of the police's view of Child Criminal Exploitation were shared, many still did not believe they would be treated as such.

*"When people report it sometimes police don't believe them because of how young they are and they think they don't know what they are talking about."*

*"More communication on how to report it properly and any advice what to do once you notice something."*

*"Most young people hate police, and anyone involved with police are seen as bad automatically even if they're trying to help. I think there needs to be a bit more help put in place rather than punishment."*

Vaping was raised by young people as a growing concern, with those as young as eleven feeling they are addicted. Young people reported how **peer pressure and a need to fit in have led to many young people vaping**, despite being worried about the health risks and legal age.

*"It's like seen as an aesthetic, more than even people wanting to actually do it. They just think it's the thing to do"*

*"It's not healthy, but for me it's a coping mechanism, but it shouldn't be."*



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Ensure victims of exploitation feel safe to come forward by recognising and promoting the view that **children involved in county lines will always be considered victims first.**

Signpost and refer vulnerable young people who interact with police to relevant support and services early on, before they can be exploited.

Place greater **focus on online and social media as recruitment spaces for county lines.**

### FOR THE DMPFC & PARTNERS:

Prioritise supporting interventions that **take harm reduction approaches to drug and county lines education.**

Promote alternative reporting options, including anonymous reporting via services such as Fearless.

Work with public health partners and the Youth Commission on a campaign to address underage vaping. Particularly focus on the lower years of secondary school.

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Work with and promote partners and resources that take harm reduction approaches and share valuable knowledge on keeping safe with young people.

In Big Conversation workshops, **signpost to services for both reporting and support.**

Support the DMPFC to develop a campaign addressing and discouraging vaping by children and young people.



CONCLUSION:

Leaders Unlocked are extremely grateful to all the members of the North Yorkshire Youth Commission, the DMPFC, York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority and partners who have been involved in making this piece of work a success.

Through their 'Big Conversation' peer research with 1875 young people across 2024-2025, the North Yorkshire Youth Commission has managed to reach and engage with a hugely diverse cross-section of the youth population across York & North Yorkshire. They have made particular efforts to hear from those whose views are often overlooked. This peer-to-peer process is of enormous value, both as a piece of research and as an engagement exercise.

Our hope is that the North Yorkshire Youth Commission will be further developed as a channel for engaging young people in the work of the DMPFC. Over the next phase of the project, the NYYC hope to work closely with the DMPFC, NYP, NYFRS and partners to implement and address the recommendations in this report.

TESTIMONIALS:

"Our North Yorkshire Youth Commission continues to help the police and fire services, as well as our partners, understand the perspectives of young people across our region. They offer advice and direct experience to help both services in their interactions with young and vulnerable people in our community.

This year they've engaged with over 1,800 other young people on police and crime priorities as part of their 'Big Conversation', which is a fantastic effort. Some of the key findings include the importance of safe spaces, supporting young people to build healthy relationships, the need to make it easier to report crime and improve online safety.

Their findings need collaborative effort, so it was great to see and hear the conversations with partners at this year's 'Big Conversation Conference' on how to do that. Ultimately by all working together, we can help make the people of York and North Yorkshire be safe, and feel safe.

Thank you again to all the brilliant members on producing this report to help us understand the needs of young people across our region."

York and North Yorkshire Deputy Mayor for Policing Fire and Crime, Jo Cole

At North Yorkshire Police, we recognise the vital role young people play in shaping safer communities. Through our partnership with the Youth Commission, we've listened and we're actively working on young people's recommendations, whether it's tackling online gender violence, promoting non-victim-blaming practices, or ensuring victims are signposted to support even when cases cannot proceed.

We have and we continue to deliver awareness, education, and training to improve our understanding and competence in many issues such as cultural awareness, using appropriate language and identifying what might be a barrier for someone engaging with us. We're embedding lived experience into officer training to challenge unconscious bias and improve engagement. Our Neighbourhood Policing Teams deliver targeted education on issues like county lines, coercive relationships, and image-based abuse, helping young people stay safe and informed, including in online spaces.

We're proud of our joint work with the Youth Commission, which has led to real change, from initiatives to tackle abuse and exploitation to increased school visits and community engagement. Together, we're building trust, promoting inclusion, and ensuring that every young person feels heard, protected, and empowered."

North Yorkshire Police Assistant Chief Constable, Catherine Clarke

"Our strong partnership with the Youth Commission helps increase our knowledge and understanding of the challenges young people are experiencing. The Commission allows young people a platform and a voice to explore issues that matter to them and access peer-led support and advice. This approach helps young people make informed, positive life choices. The Youth Commission plays a pivotal role in enabling NYFRS to shape and design our range of youth education, engagement, and local initiatives to ensure they are relevant, current and address the challenges young people are facing."

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service Chief Fire Officer, Jonathan Dyson

"As part of the North Yorkshire Youth Commission, I have been supported to challenge myself and do things I didn't think I was capable of. I've met amazing people and had the chance to dive into topics I really care about. Most of all, I feel like we're all making a difference."

North Yorkshire Youth Commission member, Hattie Berry

"Working with the Youth Commission helps keep the police accountable and improves the service both young people and the wider public receive across the county. Throughout the year, I have met a range of individuals from various organisations involved in policing, which has provided valuable insight into how the police service works."

North Yorkshire Youth Commission, Matthew Lomax

## CONTACT US

**Leaders Unlocked**  
**@leadersunlocked**  
**info@leaders-unlocked.org**  
**www.leaders-unlocked.org**

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