Hot Report
Public Health Scotland
Young People's Panel

EXPLORE Session | 19th October 2021

Introduction

The Public Health Scotland Young People's Panel met for the second time on 19th October 2021 5-7pm via Zoom. The Panel is made up of 23 young people aged 14 to 17 years spanning over 14 different local authority areas. All Panel members are first time volunteers at Young Scot, with 7 declared BAME young people and 3 who live in SIMD 1-2 areas.

Out of the 23 young people, 17 of the Panel members attended, including 2 young people from the Young Scot Health Panel. The Panel also had the opportunity to meet Claire Sweeney, Director for Mental Wellbeing at Public Health Scotland (PHS).

During the session, the group did a warm-up characterisation activity using the online interactive tool, Mural, to encourage them to consider different factors that impact a young person's mental health. Following this, the group learned about Public Health Scotland's research on mental health construct areas and indicators by a presentation from Dr Ross Whitehead. The group then split into 5 groups to participate in a smaller group activity, where they discussed the significance of the areas and indicators, prioritised them and identified any gaps missing.

Session objectives:

- To explore factors that impact the mental health and wellbeing of young people

- To learn about the mental health construct areas and indicators proposed by Public Health Scotland

- To reflect on the significance of these areas, prioritise them and identify any gaps missing

The insights from the young people will help guide the development work that PHS are doing towards their mental health strategic framework and shape their ambitions for the future of the organisation's engagement with young people.

Insights

Characterisation activity

Before beginning to work through the mental health construct areas and indicators, the young people split into four groups to explore factors that impact a young person's mental health through a characterisation activity.

Each group used a Mural template to develop a young person character and filled in four sections to make up their character:

- Personal details (age, background, what they do)
- Personal life (what their home life is like)
- Their interests and why they're important
- Their major worries / pain points

The purpose of this activity was to encourage the young people to begin considering factors that impact young people's mental wellbeing before delving into more detail. The young people spent 15 minutes on this task before returning to the main space to share their views.

All four groups identified that the stress of exams is a key pain point for their young person characters. Three of the groups highlighted the impact of family relationships; two groups gave weight to relationships with friends and peers; and two groups highlighted the perception of ourselves. Other pain points that were mentioned were environmental dread; religious parents; social stress and existentialism.

Smaller groups activity

Having heard a presentation from Public Health Scotland around their research on mental health construct areas and indicators, the group split into five smaller groups to participate in a focus group activity.

Each group were allocated a construct area to explore:

- Ourselves
- Family and Friends
- School
- Neighbourhood and Community
- Wider society

The groups were asked to discuss five questions which focused on significance and impact, common issues, prioritisation of areas and identification of missing factors.

Each group was asked to consider:

- Which indicators do you think have the most significant impact?
- Which issues do you think are the most common for young people?
- Are there any indicators that you feel are not as significant?
- Do you think there are any indicators that are missing in this area?
- Out of the five areas, do you think another area is also, or more, significant? Why or why not?

The discussions generated in this activity are intended to inform and shape Public Health Scotland's mental health strategy and provide the organisation with insight into which indicators are the most significant amongst young people.

Ourselves

Which indicators do you think have the most significant impact?

1. **Social media:** The young people expressed that there has been a shift in mentality since TikTok came into the mainstream. From Tiktok culture, there is too much pressure on being "cool" and "different" that it results in taking away from individuality and places too much focus on trends.

2. **Healthy behaviours:** The group also expressed that the way healthy behaviours are taught in schools places too much pressure on young people to act as if they never engage in these types of behaviours, such as drinking alcohol or having sex. They felt that there is no common ground or practicality.

3. **Sleep:** One young person in the group expressed that there are many young people they know who go to sleep in the early hours of the morning. This negatively impacts their mental health but the cause is not primarily obvious. For others in the group, they expressed that it is common amongst young people to brag about their lack of sleep.

Which issues do you think are the most common for young people?

The group did not identify any key indicator in the Ourselves construct area as most common because they felt that it depends on where the young person lives. For example, they felt that unhealthy behaviours, especially the issues of drugs and alcohol, are more of a common issue for young people living in more deprived areas.

The young people did place a particular emphasis on **social media** and **sleep** as issues they had observed amongst friends and peers.

Are there any indicators that you feel are not as significant?

There were three indicators that the group identified as not very significant. Firstly, the indicator **play** felt confusing and not suitable when discussing factors that impact young people's mental health and they suggested that this be re-worded. They therefore felt that play was not significant regarding the mental wellbeing of young people.

Another indicator they felt was confusing was **learning and development**. The group stated that this is misleading as they interpreted it as meaning educational development, or overcoming barriers such as dyslexia. They stated that the term is not suited to what it intends to be and therefore does not make sense to them.

Finally, they felt that **long-term illness or/ and disability** is an indicator that belongs more in the Family and Friends area. The group felt that this indicator isn't a very common issue experienced amongst young people themselves, whereas it is seen more amongst family members, particularly within older generations.

Ourselves

Do you think there are any indicators that are missing in this area?

The group identified that the impact of video games was missing from PHS' mental health indicators. The amount of time playing, and the type of content they're engaging in, can have a negative impact on young people's mental health. The group also referred to the lack of social interaction and connection that playing video games can have and the negative impact this can result in.

The group also raised the point that body image is an indicator that belongs in the Ourselves area more than Wider Society. Although body image is impacted by wider society, through social media and magazines etc., body image varies from person to person and stems from how we perceive ourselves.

Out of the five areas, do you think another area is also, or more, significant? Why or why not?

The young people felt that Neighbourhood and Community was significant as they highlighted two main reasons as to why the area a young person grows up in has a profound impact on their mental wellbeing. Firstly, the group

felt that growing up in more deprived areas tend to have less access to opportunities and education, causing mental health issues. Secondly, they identified that young people growing up in more remote areas, such as the Highlands, also experience a lack of access to opportunities, compared to young people growing up in the Central Belt. Areas of deprivation and remoteness therefore should be considered as key indicators within Neighbourhood and Community.

Out of all the areas, the group felt that Ourselves, Family and Friends and School were the most important. Although they recognised that Neighbourhood and Community and Wider Society have a significant impact and could completely change a person's mental health, they believe that the first three areas have more of a direct effect on young people, as loneliness and isolation can be felt more significantly within these areas.

Family and Friends

Which indicators do you think have the most significant impact?

The Family and Friends group emphasised that **family relationships** are of huge importance. The group highlighted that many young people have a different mentality to their parents and this can cause frustrations. They expressed that many family members are matter of fact and stubborn with a 'the world isn't fair' mentality, which can cause tension. For them, the family dynamic needs to be understood more from the young person's perspective. The young people also noted the impact that having religious parents can have, and the pressure placed on them to follow certain traditions.

Which issues do you think are the most common for young people?

The group highlighted that the most common issue facing young people today is growing up in a **digital age** and feeling **raised by the internet.** The group felt that young people learn who they are and their personality through the internet, and this puts a lot of pressure on young people to be older, in terms of how they act, look and feel.

Are there any indicators that you feel are not as significant?

The Family and Friends group expressed that societal view of the **family structure** is an unnecessary cause of tension. For example, young people are taught that to have divorced or single parents is not the "normal" family unit, when it's increasingly common and does not automatically result in negative mental wellbeing. Due to this, the young people did not perceive family structure as significant as other indicators.

Do you think there are any indicators that are missing in this area?

The group did not identify any missing gaps in the Family and Friends construct area, but they did emphasise there needs to be a real focus on getting to the root of issues, rather than attempting to manage them once they occur. They gave the example of channelling more energy into making young people more secure in themselves.

Out of the five areas, do you think another area is also, or more, significant? Why or why not?

Out of the five areas, this group felt that Family and Friends was the most significant area as it can lead to pressure to saying the right thing to please people which can result in boundaries not being respected. The group expressed that they have witnessed an extensive amount of bullying amongst friends and that bullying awareness in schools is not thorough enough.

School

Which indicators do you think have the most significant impact?

The School group expressed that **exam pressure** was both a significant and common indicator that they had observed in themselves, their friends and their peers. The young people also conveyed that **relationships with peers** at school is extremely significant as it shapes the classroom environment, such as when young people are doing group work. Relationship with peers can also have a negative impact on wellbeing when young people fall out and are in a negative headspace all day. The group also highlighted that teachers do not provide enough support with friendship fallouts.

Which issues do you think are the most common for young people?

Three indicators were highlighted as the most common: **Lack of motivation, pressure on post-school choices and the pressure of extra-curricular activities.** The group emphasised the common issue of becoming unmotivated when a young person is not performing well at school and they begin to feel overwhelmed. This can lead to a cycle of finding it difficult to get up for school, especially if the young people no longer enjoy attending.

Post-school choices was also highlighted as a common issue as the group felt that there is a pressure placed on young people to know what they want to do after school. According to the young people, they felt that schools push the choice of university too much; for example, they dedicate too much time to university applications but do not inform students of other options, such as college or apprenticeships.

Finally, the group noted that in schools there is extra-curricular pressure to join various clubs which results in having a negative impact on your mental wellbeing as well as schoolwork.

Are there any indicators that you feel are not as significant?
As the School construct area consists of fewer indicators, the group did not highlight any as less significant.

Do you think there are any indicators that are missing in this area?

The group identified that there was a lack of emphasis on the **influence of peers at school**. The group gave examples of peers influencing how a young person may act, and post-school choices, such as going to university.

The group also highlighted having to **look a certain way** at school adds pressure onto young people, especially if the young person already does not feel confident. The group felt that there were expectations to be a certain way if you are in a certain group.

Finally, the group noted that the responsibility of **caring for a family member** was a missing indicator and noted the impact it can have if a young person ends up missing some days at school and becomes behind on their work and attendance.

Out of the five areas, do you think another area is also, or more, significant? Why or why not?

For the young people in this group, School was a major construct area due to the direct impact that the school environment has on young people.

Community and Neighbourhood

**Which indicators do you think have the most significant impact?**

1. **Belonging:** The group expressed the importance of a feeling of belonging to the community and how engagement in local activities can build this connection.

2. **Engagement in local activities:** If access to these activities is limited due to a young person's location, not having access to WIFI, or for other reasons, the group felt that this can have a detrimental effect on a young person's wellbeing. The group also acknowledged the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown had on the ability to engage in local activities.

3. **Support Services and Social Support:** The group felt that these two indicators were closely linked as the main consideration here is having a trusted adult who a young person can open up to. Many young people do not feel comfortable confiding in their parents about some matters, so having an external adult presence is hugely important.

4. **Safety:** The group recognized that safety is an obvious and important indicator for both physical and mental wellbeing.

Which issues do you think are the most common for young people?

The group identified two issues as being the most common for young people: **engagement in local activities** and **access to support services.**

Like the Ourselves group, these young people highlighted that access to local activities and opportunities is limited to young people living in more remote areas, which can lead to feelings of isolation. Another facet identified as part of this indicator is that some clubs can become too serious, leading to young people dropping out and so there needs to be a space where young people can relax and wind down.

This group also discussed that they find access to support services limited, such as through increased waiting times, which has only been exacerbated over lockdown. There is also the concern that many young people do not have the confidence to access more formal services, such as GPs, by themselves.
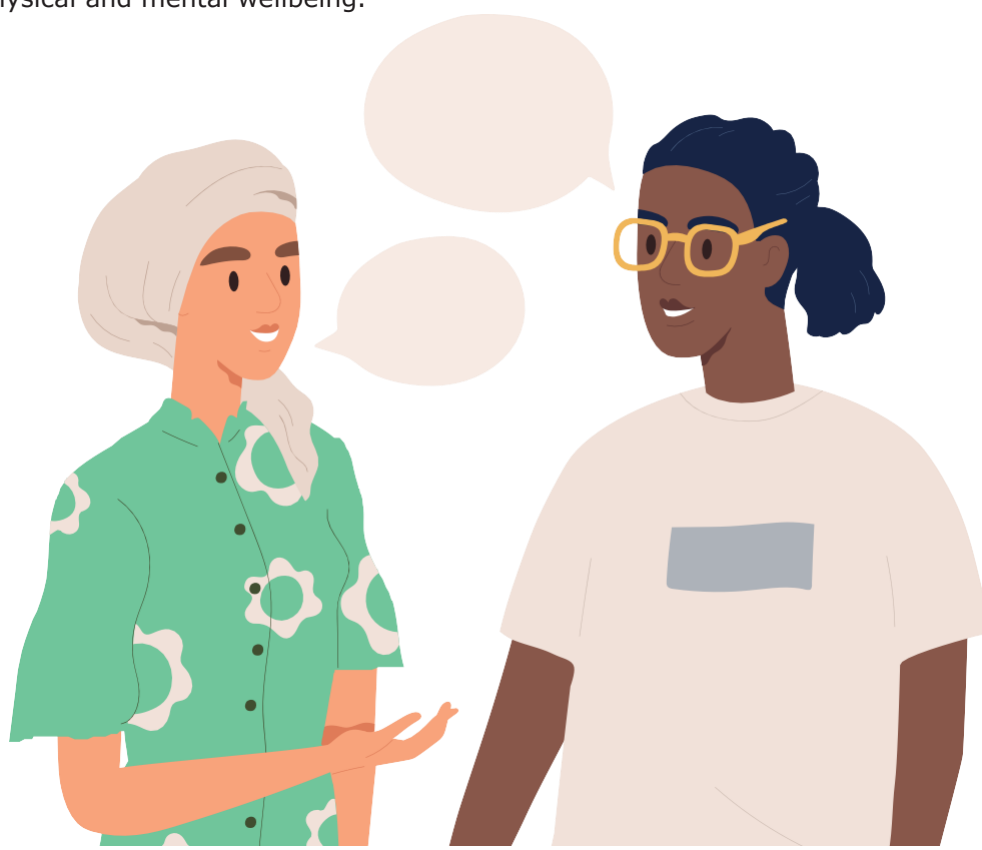
Community and Neighbourhood

Are there any indicators that you feel are not as significant?

The Community and Neighbourhood group provided three recommendations. Firstly, 'belonging to neighbourhood' should be reworded to 'belonging to community'. The group expressed that neighbourhoods are continually growing and so it is natural to not feel a sense of connection to them. It more significant to feel belonging to a community, either through local groups or school for example.

In addition, the group felt that neighbourhood trust was not a very significant indicator as although a young person wants to feel safe where they live, trust in their neighbourhood does not equate to positive mental wellbeing. Again, they emphasise that it is more important to feel trust at school or local groups.

Lastly, the young people suggested that the respect of young people might be better suited in the School category.

Do you think there are any indicates that are missing in this area?

As highlighted above, the group felt that a 'sense of community' was missing from the Community and Neighbourhood construct area. They also stated that 'connection' was a more suitable term than 'belonging'.

They also identified that access to community services such as leisure centres, transport and even local job opportunities are considerations that are missing.

Out of the five areas, do you think another area is also, or more, significant? Why or why not?

For this group, the Ourselves, Family and Friends and School construct areas are of equal importance in the lives of the young people because they are all interlinked. The young people also expressed that your own mental wellbeing is important to accessing other areas of life. The group acknowledged that mental health issues can stem from family and friends and that they are vital for support.

The group expressed that Community and Neighbourhood is less significant on the impact of young people's mental wellbeing.

Wider Society

Which indicators do you think have the most significant impact?

The Wider Society group highlighted that both poverty and deprivation and social inclusion are of major significance because they both have a detrimental effect on a young person's ability to learn, study, and participate in school activities. They also emphasised the impact of the COVID19 pandemic and lockdown on highlighting and creating a larger poverty gap, creating social exclusion. They gave the example of the increase of people using foodbanks.

Which issues do you think are the most common for young people?

Like the Ourselves group, the young people expressed that common issues depend on where a young person lives as poverty and deprivation are common indicators for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, growing up and experiencing your parents struggle for money can affect a young person negatively.

The group also noted the impact of lockdown on the crime/violence indicator due to the rise of domestic abuse reports and that, although there was more funding during the second lockdown to tackle these instances, it is still a prevalent issue. The group conveyed that domestic abuse may be more of a common issue due to the lockdown effects.

Are there any indicators that you feel are not as significant?

The young people discussed that climate change is a less significant indicator because although it is a concern and many young people feel passionate about this issue, they felt that it does not have a detrimental and personal effect on their mental wellbeing and does not impact their everyday lives.

The group did emphasise though that all indicators are important; it was just the case of choosing what is most relevant to them.

Do you think there are any indicators that are missing from this area?

The group raised an interesting point that there is a lack of effective communication when it comes to differing views or political stances, such as anti-abortion protestors verbally attacking people outside clinics. They expressed that not enough is done to address the intimidation used to communicate their views.

Out of the five areas, do you think another area is also, or more, significant? Why or why not?

The group felt that Family and Friends had a more direct and personal impact on a young person's mental wellbeing. They provided the example of the negative effect of someone you know saying something negative towards you, as you value their opinion more.

The general consensus across all groups is that the Ourselves, Family and Friends and School categories are the most significant areas that impact the mental health of young people. There was also a lot of reference made to the impact of where a young person grows up and lives, with deprived areas and remote areas being the two major concerns.

Feedback

The participants were emailed a Menti Evaluation to complete in their own time following the session taking place. As well as getting a chance to say what they liked about the session and what they would have improved, they were also asked what they had learned from the workshop and what they would like to see happen from their involvement. 10 participants responded.

The young people were asked to rate the session on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all and 10 being 100% yes.

- When asked if they enjoyed the sessions the average score received was 8.9 out of 10
- When asked if they found it useful, the average score was 8.9 out of 10
- Finally, when asked if it was relevant to them the average score was 8.6 out of 10

The participants stated a variety of things they enjoyed about taking part in the session, including working with others in smaller breakout groups and the discussions these led to.

The group also highlighted that they enjoyed hearing everyone's different opinions and experiences and discussing various factors that impact the mental health of young people.

When asked if there was anything that could be improved about the session, they pointed out that, although they understood the need for smaller groups discussing an allocated construct area, they felt like some of the group may have had more knowledge of another area that they were not allocated. The group also reiterated that they would like more regular sessions.
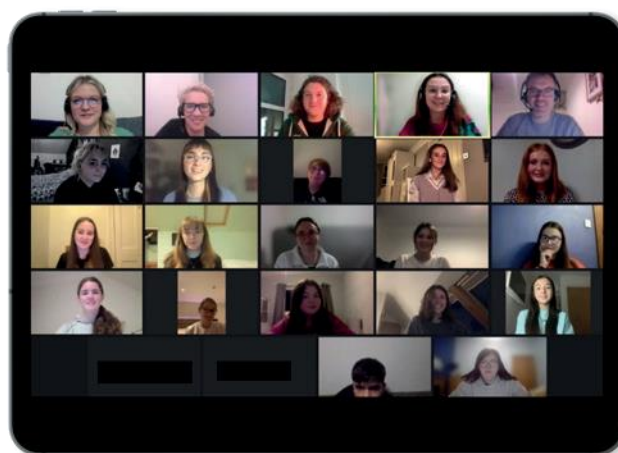
Most of the young people shared that they had learned more about mental health indictors and how they fit into everyday life; how mental health affects people in different aspect of life; about other people's experiences and how to be more considerate of that.

When asked if they had anything else to share, one young person stated that they really enjoyed the session, whilst three young people reiterated that they wish there were more regular sessions.

Next Steps

The Public Health Scotland Young People's Panel met again for their CREATE and DISRUPT sessions. The group created ideas for Public Health Scotland's proposed mental health strategic framework. The young people also provided recommendations on how the organisation can continue to engage with young people in specific areas of work, strategy and decision-making and as an organisation overall.

The Panel will meet with Public Health Scotland staff in the new year for their final session as part of the ACT stage of the #YSHive process.

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