

EARLY ACTION SYSTEM CHANGE

How can we prevent coercive control
within adolescent relationships and
improve emotional wellbeing?

**Reflections from 500+ young people and families
across Renfrewshire**

July 2020



Acknowledgements

A tremendous thank you to all the young people and families who took the time to participate in the sessions sharing their experiences and ideas around the priority areas of coercive control and emotional wellbeing. A special acknowledgement to all our voluntary sector partners and their hard work designing and successfully delivering a range of inclusive and creative workshops.

We would also like to thank the National Lottery Community Fund for the funding and guidance to make this work possible.

This insight brief contains reflections shared by young people, families and practitioners gathered as part of the place-based, system reform initiative – Early Action System Change.

Across the first year, our voluntary sector partners collectively delivered over 50 sessions, engaging with more than 500 young people and families across Renfrewshire (including a small practitioner group).

These workshops focused on:

- Young people's understanding and experiences of coercive control within adolescent relationships and emotional wellbeing;
- Young people's perceptions and experiences of service or community responses supporting or hindering emotional wellbeing and/or coercive control and;
- Identifying potential target groups and young people's ideas for further development.

The purpose of this brief is to help inform the co-design of responses grounded in the realities of communities and informed by evidence.

For charities, social innovators and others interested in partnering with us to advance this co-design work with young people and families, further information about the **Early Action System Change Co-Design Commission** and/or the **Collaboration Commission** can be found [here](#).

Contact details are also provided below for each of the voluntary sector partners who delivered the workshops.





Action for Children – Moving On service



Contact
Russell Hamilton, *Children's Services*
Russell.Hamilton@actionforchildren.org.uk

Action for Children (AfC) ran a focus group with six members of staff who had experience of supporting young men with a history of offending as part of the Moving On service.

Themes identified from the staff focus group

- **Young men do experience coercive control:** staff feedback highlighted this was an issue for some of the young men they supported, but how it was experienced, and the impact of coercive control, may be different from young women.
- **Permissive and/or minimising attitudes towards young men experiencing coercive control:** There was concerning level of feedback that showed coercive control experienced by these young men may be perceived as 'for their own good' due to their previous history of offending. Workers were clear these attitudes were unacceptable.
- **Staff found it challenging to identify coercive control:** Workers advised warning signs of those experiencing coercive control were difficult to spot. For example, some workers cited the young men were always on their phones, left events or sessions early and/or sudden change in mood. However, these are not distinctive features of those experiencing coercive control.
- **Coercive control was a feature in other family relationships** (not just romantic relationships): Workers reported that some young men had experienced control and manipulation from other family members (e.g. mothers, fathers and grandmothers). For example, in one case this included pressure from family members to engage in illicit activity.

- **The role of coercive control on disrupting meaningful relationships with young men's children:** This is a particularly complex issue raising questions of child protection and wellbeing. For example, one young man had not seen his child for over a year. The impact being described as 'mental torture' and impacting on desistance from offending.
- **Types of coercive control:** Behaviours experienced by some of these young men included: partners dictating when and where they went; proof from the organisation about what the young men were doing to allow them to continue working with AfC and; threats to destroy personal property in an attempt to control behaviour.
- **Developing trust, reinforcing acceptable relationship norms and role modelling were identified as features of helpful practice:** Staff grappled with how to help these young men, and highlighted building trust over time was an important element. They also felt having female workers to say 'this behaviour isn't right' was a useful feature.
- **Recognising staff's own experiences of coercive and controlling behaviours in past (or current) relationships:** Experiences of coercive control are pervasive and unfortunately far reaching. It is important to recognise that training staff to support others should carefully consider staff/professional's own experiences of these issues – as it will likely trigger or necessitate further support.

Themes identified from the AfC Review of the existing literature also highlighted

- **Suggested increased vulnerability for LGBTQ+ groups:** Gay or lesbian individuals were found to have greater odds of experiencing domestic abuse than heterosexual respondents.
- **Suggested increased vulnerability of disability groups:** Individuals reporting disabilities were found to have greater odds of experiencing domestic abuse than those who did not report having disabilities ¹.
- **What and how professionals ask impact on abuse disclosures:** This requires further exploration but the final AfC evidence review cited questions such as 'what has he/she done?' are less helpful compared with more 'lifestyle' questions such as 'what is life like for you?' and 'Tell me about what you would do in this relationship that you would not normally do?'.

Action for Children highlighted the need to hear *directly* from these young men who had experienced coercive and controlling behaviours. Future research should plan on engaging with young men who engage with/use/access the service on the subject of coercive control and the impact of their experiences of it.

¹Note: this increased vulnerability was also identified by youth engagement workshops designed and delivered by YMCA Paisley.

Active Communities



Contact
Cheryl Thomas
Cheryl@activecommunities.co.uk

Active Communities have been working with young people in schools through their Hearty Lives project (mental health peer education) and in community youth work programmes in Ferguslie Park and Johnstone.

Findings/Reflections

Concerns about sources/avenues for discussing and seeking information about healthy and unhealthy relationships, and opportunities to empower existing social supports, and provide alternative education

- **A minority of young people had talked about what un/healthy relationships may look like with adults.** Of the young people (14-18) Active Communities asked, just 32% had talked about healthy and unhealthy relationships with an adult. In almost all cases this was a family member (most notably their mum), with just two young people saying they remembered discussing these topics with a teacher. It also highlights opportunities to work with and support parents to discuss these issues with their children.
- **Normalisation of pornography:** This normalisation, coupled with the lack of discussion about what healthy and unhealthy relationships looks like is particularly concerning when it comes to issues of consent and respectful behaviours. There was an awareness about pressure to be physically intimate with boyfriend/girlfriend from a young age.
- **Lack of confidence in professionals' ability in knowing how to respond to disclosures by young people:** It suggests workforce development is needed to support professionals including teachers to appropriately respond to and engage with these issues young people are experiencing.

Barriers to changing acceptable relationship norms, and help-seeking behaviours

- **An even smaller minority of young people would know how to get help if they or someone they knew was in a controlling and abusive relationship.** Just 24% said they would know who contact. The only two sources of help mentioned were: ChildLine and the Police.
- **Even if young people knew who to contact, discussion highlighted they didn't feel comfortable or able to seek help due to perceived potential repercussions.** Knowledge was not sufficient to translate into practice or help seeking behaviour. Further discussion highlighted that while Childline and the Police were cited, young people wouldn't necessarily approach them if they were concerned. There was also concerns about repercussions if they did disclose, particularly if it led to social work involvement.
- **Normalisation of violence, control in communities:** In particular, AC observed prevalence of violent language and violence.



Contact
Ruby Whitelaw
Ruby.whitelaw@kibble.org

Kibble engaged with 11 young people aged 14-18 years identified as at risk of experiencing and/or perpetrating abuse. They ran three workshops with young people in secure care and those accessing Kibble on an open basis.

Findings / Reflections from workshops with young people

Kibble suggested they are seeing an increase in referrals for issues related to peer-on-peer abuse, and child sexual exploitation.

Mixed group, under 16 who were shown a video involving grooming

- **'Othering' young women and girls who experience abuse:** Comments in response to coercive control included: 'I'm not that stupid'; 'I knew that was going to happen so that wouldn't happen to me'; 'I wouldn't get involved with someone I didn't know'. These perceptions from young women may contribute to victim-blaming behaviour, and potentially minimise help-seeking behaviours if someone experiences abuse (including increasing levels of shame and stigma), as well as not seeing self as at risk.
- **Permissive attitudes to intimate partner violence from a young age:** Two of the young women believed it was alright for their partner to hurt them.
- **Expectation and normalisation of male control in relationships from a young age:** The young men believed they had 'a right' to know where their partner was, and what they were doing. Note: potential intervention or messaging opportunity here to shift emphasis to a 'right' to privacy.
- **Reinforcing norms/belief that men 'can't control their feelings':** Amongst other functions, this also works to minimise blame on the part of male-perpetrators.

- **Difficulties in identifying supports that would help if they or others experience coercive control and abuse:** Young people were unclear who they should approach for support and help (similar to workshops by other organisations).

Male group, over 16

- **Uncertainty about acceptable and respectful behaviours in relationships:** Although all vocal that violence was unacceptable, there was less certainty about behaviours (i) two of the young men were unsure about whether they had 'a right' to know where and what their partner was doing and; (ii) all unsure about the role of sending naked pictures whether it was healthy or unhealthy
- **Young men's values focused on appearing 'dominant':** Young men used phrases like not appearing 'pure whipped' and 'like a bitch'. Note i: opportunities here for value-based leadership amongst males that doesn't privilege 'dominance' and 'control'. Also potentially linked with barriers to seeking help amongst men who may experience emotional abuse and control. Competing views about whether young men could 'control' their emotions. Note ii: interesting language about the need to 'control' emotions.

Female group, over 16

- **Vocal that violence wasn't acceptable:** All these young women were clear violence was unacceptable (which was different from the younger group).
- **Complex role of peer relationships that included experiencing coercive control from friends, as well as offering a vital support mechanism:** The young woman felt coercive control featured more in friendships and included jealousy from peers about having a boyfriend and fear of losing friendships. Conversely, they also spoke about the value of supportive friendships and being 'there for each other'. Note: reflects an important opportunity to help young women navigate changes in relationships, respect each other, and know how to seek support for others.
- **More concerned about coercion and emotional abuse than violence:** Example given was 'stopping you from having male friends'.
- **Pressure to be compliant and act a certain way:** Girls found it 'really hard to say no' and felt pressure from peers 'to drink and have a good time'.
- **Importance of psychological safe spaces to reflect:** Having time to reflect and 'figuring things out' was mentioned as important by the girls

Other considerations

- As ever, there is 'no one size fits all' approach to tackling and preventing coercive control.
- Almost all had been educated about healthy and unhealthy relationships at school.
- However, despite education at school (i) there was still uncertainty about particular behaviours in relationships (ii) emphasis on young men appearing dominant and in control (iii) lack of empathy for those experiencing or at risk of abuse for the younger age group (iv) uncertainty about where to go for help if they or someone they knew was experiencing abuse
- Age was viewed as a vulnerability factor. This is particularly concerning in light of the ChildrenCount data and experiences of those as young as 13 years.

Areas identified by young people that they'd like to see

- **Emotional support *for* family members**
- **Having family members to talk to**
- **Preference for groups than 1:1s**
(Important note: Facilitators felt that despite this preference, for some of the young girls, they found the topic difficult to discuss in a group format, and would benefit from 1:1 discussions)
- **Younger people being taught how to deal with coercive relationships**
- **Peer education to teach from their own experiences**
- **Friends supporting each other**
- **Awareness sessions and guidance on how to speak up**
- **'Anger management' for those who need it**
- **Youth service to provide support to young people on relationships**
- **More educational input on what is healthy and what is not**
- **Emotional and practical support from professionals**
- **Mixed groups to give people opportunity to hear from the perspective of others**
(Important note: this came from the female only group. The facilitator for the males-only group felt that the group were able to explore what masculinity meant, and why males act in particular ways).
- **'Stranger danger' input**

Linstone 20/20



Contact
Bryan Dando
Bdando@linstone.co.uk

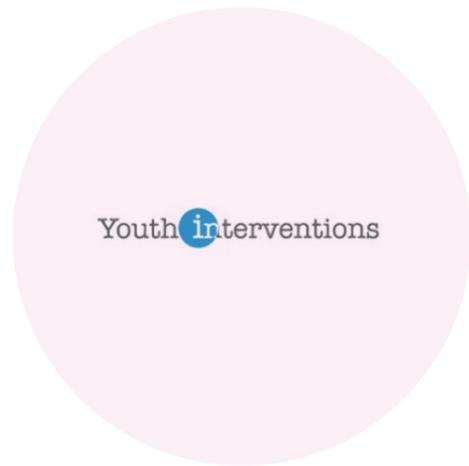
The Linstone 20/20 project is about building community capacity, increasing resilience and addressing the social determinants of health inequality. Dedicated Community and Youth Engagers practice detached youth engagement; seeking to reach those young people who may feel socially excluded through circumstance or choice, and therefore least likely to actively engage. The Linstone 20/20 project was delivered as part of Linstone Housing Association's ongoing Community Engagement.

Linstone 20/20 delivered a combined total of 15 classroom workshops (13-15 years) with 100 young people, and pop-ups within schools/ community ups that engaged around 100 young people (11-18 years).

Reflections / Lessons Learned

- **Coercive control is multi-faceted with a range of different behaviours, experiences and societal influences to discuss:** Through creative and interactive workshops and exercises with young people, Linstone explored interconnected factors under Coercive Control which included: Consent, Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships, Gender Stereotyping, Slut Shaming, Suicide, LGBTQ+ Rights, Body Impact, Peer Pressure and Self-Esteem. Important note: meaningfully addressing coercive control shouldn't be viewed as a one-off module that is 'ticked off' once delivered.
- **The positive power of peer influence - building male understanding and empathy for the female experience:** For example, in one of the mixed sex groups, girls shared their experiences of being 'slut-shamed', which the boys hadn't experienced. In the group they were able to explore how to build male allies to challenge female harassment. Important note: it's one thing professionals challenging such behaviour, it's more powerful for peers to challenge concerning behaviour.
- **Challenges around progressing sessions with parents around the topic of coercive control:** Sessions were offered with a group of mums from emerging communities involved with Pachedu. However, there was a lack of engagement about having discussions around the subject of coercive control and relationships. At the time of writing the report, Linstone were also looking to schedule sessions for young mothers alongside the Family Nurse Partnership.
- **The power and value of increasing participation in experiences that challenge 'traditional' gender stereotypes in engaging, creative and fun ways:** As a thank you for participating, Linstone took pupils to Hampden to see the Scotland's Women's Team play against Jamaica. The facilitators felt it was important to affirm the importance of supporting genders equally across sport and other male-dominated workforces/ activities in light of the sessions regarding gender-based differences.
- **Skilled, responsive and empathetic facilitator is required to explore the complexity and nuance of relationships:** Groups were able to list of characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships. However, it requires a skilled facilitator to discuss what this looks like in reality. For example young people began discussing the difference between a 'strong personality' and 'dominant' person where the facilitator used casual decisions about what to have for dinner being different from someone telling you what to have for dinner every night.
- **The need for LGBTQ+ inclusive material was identified**
- **Many of the young people were also not aware of the change in law around coercive control as an offence.**

Youth Interventions



Contact
Louise Dempsey, *Service Manager*
07799952937

Youth Interventions was created to meet the emotional wellbeing needs of young adolescents and provide practitioners who are able to offer young people emotional support and guidance, to assist them in positive behavioural changes and personal empowerment.

Youth Interventions ran 12 workshops at Linwood High, Johnstone High, and Park Mains High with around 130 young people aged 12-17 years. This also included individual sessions with six young people with more intensive psychosocial interventions.

Reflections / Lessons Learned

- **A lack of a common language around 'coercive control':** many of the young people were not familiar with the term 'coercive control'. They also described knowing what it 'felt like', but didn't know how to describe it, or recognised it as 'a thing'.
- **Difficulties leaving controlling relationships once feelings of powerlessness set in:** Emphasising the importance of early intervention and prevention, young people shared once a feeling of powerlessness starts to develop, it becomes really difficult to find a way out.
- **Reluctance to seek help and the importance of having embedded local organisations fostering relationships with young people:** young people shared they didn't necessarily know who to turn to when experiencing these difficulties (i) they shared they wouldn't necessarily seek support from some of the 'big organisations' who they didn't know/have a relationship with and; (ii) Reluctance to seeking support from parents as they 'didn't want them to know'.
- **Opportunities to develop refusal skills:** Young people shared difficulties again in saying 'no' to peers.

RISE

Respect, Inclusion, Strength, and Empowerment via Children First



Contact
Fiona McBride, Assistant Director Children 1st
07799952937

RISE are a group of young women aged 14-18 who are accessing/have accessed Children First Abuse and Trauma Recovery Service. The members share common themes particularly in relation to their experiences of abuse, coercive control, unhealthy relationships and inappropriate gender expectations of young people with the aim to take action and, raise awareness and influence policy.

Seven young people aged 14-18 attended a banner-making workshop to discuss the '16 days of action' and design a banner for the Reclaim the Night event in Paisley. All of them had experienced gender-based violence, and as a result, they formed the RISE group.

This is their open letter to Renfrewshire:

RISE

by the girls and young women of RISE group

Dear Renfrewshire,

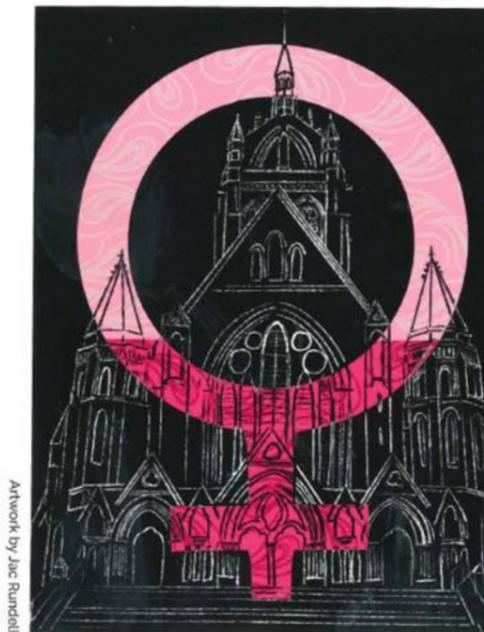
You said 'If we talk, you will listen', as a group of girls and young women living in Renfrewshire we thank you for the invitation and ask for you to hear our voice.
We have come together and discussed the difficulties girls and young women face and agree that when issues are ignored, problems only get bigger.
Please know our actions aren't without reason, if we are upset or angry don't make us feel punished for it. Be curious and kind. We want this from you.
If we are groped or sexually harassed don't tell us to wear 'appropriate clothing' or 'less make up' or tell us that's just 'boys for you'. Rape happens regardless of age, clothing or lifestyle. We need to be challenging unhealthy attitudes towards females, and we need males to take responsibility for this. If you want to teach us about healthy relationships, guide us and be a role model for us. Show us our own worth is so strong that nobody deserves to break it. Know that we can and have experienced coercive control in our own relationships. All we want is to be safe and free from harassment in our everyday lives. Is that too much to ask?

Here is what we need from you:

Respect us; we have a voice and we want to use it.
Include us in conversations and allow us to be part of decisions that will affect our lives.
Strengthen us to know we can build ourselves up each time we feel broken.
Empower us to know we can overcome challenges.

I am 14; **protect me**
I am 15; **guide me**
I am 16; **support me**
I am 17; **hear me**
I am 18; **learn from me**

We are RISE.



STAR Project



Contact
Heather Kay
Heather@star-project.org.uk

STAR Project delivers sustainable and positive social outcomes utilising creativity as a platform for change, and creating a positive impact across hard to reach/disengaged individuals, families facing disadvantage/likely poor outcomes. Their community hold deeply negative perceptions of themselves, their relationships, society. Substance misuse, mental ill health, gender-based violence, poor relationships and chaotic lifestyles are presented daily; issues commensurate with living in disadvantage, experiencing poverty, associated stigma.

Significant barriers to seeking help

"I felt stupid, so I just kept it to myself", "I'm embarrassed I didn't do anything", "I didn't know it wasn't normal" "By the time I had gone through the stuff with [my boyfriend] I didn't want help, I wanted to forget."

- Lack of understanding about coercive control increases the risk young people will remain in unhealthy relationships for longer ²
- Reluctance amongst young people to talk to family members if experiencing coercive control due to shame and embarrassment
- Uncertainty amongst parents and caregivers about how to discuss coercive control with children, and what coercive control looks like for their children. Parents shared they are 'of a different generation, so were unsure how it affects them [their children]'. (Note: important resource development for parents). *"It's so different for young people. I don't want it to happen to my kids but I really don't know how to check in with them"*.
- Parents felt even after reading the literature about what coercive control involved, they felt unsure about what constituted coercive control, and how difficult it would be to discuss with their children.
- Despite young people *knowing* about potential sources of support (although places cited were CAMHS and Police), there was a clear reluctance to reach out "Even now I know there are places to go, I wouldn't go..."

² Important dimension when considering the feedback about 'helplessness' once it setting in, harder to leave the relationship.

Opportunities for change and intervention points

- **Importance of early intervention:** "You need to deal with stuff before it happens, not after!"
 - **Map out 'key moments':** STAR's innovative approach thinks through 'key moments' in the journey, and what suitable intervention points might look like. They focused on **"Starting the Conversation"**.
 - **Characteristics of effective practice:** Young people were clear about how they wanted to explore these issues. They **did not** want to be lectured or talked down to on the subject. Instead, 'games' should encourage an open, honest dialog that would be beneficial for both parties.
 - **Examples of STAR's innovative and therapeutic practice:** Two co-produced conversational tools (i) Jenga (each coercive statement takes a little bit more away from someone's confidence and self-respect until they crumble) and (ii) The Game of Life (irrespective of what path you take, you will encounter coercive control and it will hamper you from succeeding in life if support is not made readily available).
 - **Nature of the support:** Recovery should involve forward-facing, future-focused components, (as well as a therapeutic dimension). *"By the time I had gone through the stuff with [my boyfriend] I didn't want help, I wanted to forget"*
- **Embedding approaches around coercive control into existing, trusted community supports and services (not necessarily creating a separate, new service):** *"They indicated that frequent, proactive conversations needed to be happening within the **family home**, at **school** and in the **community** to highlight that coercive control is not okay"*
 - **Reconceptualising the role of Police, and the type of support and intervention Police provide in relation to coercive control:** Police were cited as a potential source of help, but with negative attitudes towards Officers "police don't care" – reduced the likelihood of young people approaching them. (Note: in separate sessions with Police it was highlighted there is already significant work underway helping Officers understand and identify coercive control. Opportunity for further workforce development here).
 - **Increasing parental capacity:** Parents were unaware of the ways in which young people had experienced coercive control (i.e social media, texts, in game chat). The group identified the need to raise awareness of the way new technologies are affecting their children but stated they wanted to learn this alongside their children.

Paisley YMCA



Contact
Claire McGinley
claire.ymcapaisley@gmail.com

Paisley YMCA has worked with generations of young people within the Renfrewshire community for 186 years and continue to seek out new ways to support and connect with young people. Paisley YMCA has been paying close attention to the issues around coercive control within adolescent relationships in particular and address these issues in an accessible and relatable way using digital technologies.

Paisley YMCA felt passionately that the initial work around Early Action System Change did not seek to understand the experiences of coercive control amongst those with significant learning needs. They sought to address this by delivering workshops with 45 young people from Learner Development at West College Scotland.

Young people with significant learning difficulties were one of the most vulnerable groups to this type of relational abuse:

Paisley YMCA found this group of young people were extremely vulnerable, with past experience of coercive control within their relationships as well as experience of violence and sexual assault. This included victimisation and perpetration.

Barriers to seeking help

- **Maintaining relationships at all costs:** Staff and young people explained relationships were the most valuable thing in their lives and were unwilling to report coercive control for fear of losing that connection.
- **Difficulties identifying coercive control:** Due to the additional support needs of this group, it was often difficult to understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. Indeed, they could be perpetrating this behaviour, and not be aware. *“that’s just how relationships go” or “that’s what everyone is like”.*

- **Priorities of and pressure on existing services limit support:** The Learner Development department were aware coercive control was a significant issue for their students. However, pressures to deliver a curriculum placed boundaries around the support/advice the College was able to offer.
- **Relationships with Police:** Some of the young people were described as known to the Police, with at risk of ‘not being believed’.
- **Negative past experiences of disclosure, including minimisation of the abuse:** Young people felt they were not always listened to when they told an adult about unhealthy behaviour within a relationship – being told that was ‘just teenage drama’.

Identified opportunities

- **Bespoke reporting system for those with significant learning difficulties:** Staff felt a reporting system would be beneficial, but it would need to be relationship based and in person (or via an app which has a video calling function).
- **Significant and concentrated effort to develop materials about healthy and unhealthy relationships suitable for this population:** It was felt some of the materials that other partners had developed and used in workshops within mainstream settings, wouldn’t be suitable for those with significant learning needs. There needs to be a concentrated and sustained effort to help support this population to understand healthy and unhealthy relationships, laws around coercive control and how to report.

Renfrew YMCA



Contact
Kimberley Logan, Youth Development Worker
kimberley.renfrewymca@gmail.com

Renfrew YMCA is a need led youth and community organisation based in Renfrew, supporting young people's health and wellbeing through allowing them to learn, develop and take action on issues that affect them. They support young people through the 2 existing national YMCA campaigns; Be Real and I Am Whole; exploring mental health, body confidence and relationships.

Renfrew YMCA designed and delivered a youth consultation day working with 163 young people aged 12-14 years of age. Over the course of the day, four workshops were delivered covering body confidence, physical and emotional wellbeing, I Am Whole – breaking the misconceptions around mental health, No Means No – sexual exploitation, sexting, online bullying and sessions on how to talk to key adults and peers in their lives. Workshops discussions were facilitated through music, photography, video recording and youth led approach to make young people feel they are in a safe and relaxed environment so that they could open up and fully participate.

Coercive control workshops: Although young people were able to define coercive control, they weren't able to clearly articulate how they might seek help and what this would involve.

- There are existing coercive control workshops delivered in the school with 12-14 (S2) pupils to help them understand the behaviour.
- Young people aged 12-14 (S2) had a very good understand of what coercive control is and how to define it as well as what physical abuse involved.
- Young people understand friendships can also involve coercive and controlling behaviours.

- Young people were able to list how they could go to for help, but no explanation about what this would involve.
- Mental health workshops: The sessions on mental health revealed important contradictions and nuance about the way mental health is perceived and treated by young people
- Workshops highlighted a concerning level of stigma around mental health, with negative associations (e.g. 'attention seeker' etc).
- Young people associated mental health issues with a specific group of people, even though they know mental health issue can affect anyone.
- Young people were able to produce some statements of support '*No matter what anyone says be yourself*', '*You're not alone*', '*I'm always here to talk*', '*Tell someone and they can help you*'.

Body confidence workshops: Again, these sessions revealed important contradictions and nuance – importantly that knowledge doesn't translate into behaviour and the positive and negative elements of social media.

- Young people knew what needs to be said about supporting body confidence, but struggled to act on positive statements (e.g. love yourself; wear what you want; don't feel pressured; be who you are; be a pineapple, stand tall, wear a crown and be sweet on the inside)
- Long discussions about the positive and negative aspects of technology and social media (e.g. if used correctly its good, but if not its harmful; can be fun but can put you down; photoshopped; you can be stalked).

Opportunities for intervention: Increasing partnerships between voluntary sector and schools / embedding voluntary sector activities within schools

- Several young people asked for Renfrew YMCA to come back and deliver workshops during lunch, and specific girls groups.

Renfrewshire Youth Voice



Renfrewshire Youth Voice is a group with a specific focus on mental health and young people.

Renfrewshire Youth Voice are developing a toolkit focused on how to access safe and secure information around mental wellbeing. Included within the toolkit is the top 10 apps identified by young people and activities that can be used within groups. All activities were coproduced, including the design of promotional materials, and these will then be rolled out to professionals as well as young people. The commission sought to engage with over 200 young people with help from their consultation bus, particularly visiting lesser reached geographical areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS EXPLAINED

- 45% of young people surveyed expressed that waiting times were too long. Young people believe there needs to be quicker access to Mental Health Services in Renfrewshire.
- 50% of young people surveyed speak to their parent or carer about their experience of Mental Health. Young people believe that parents and carers should have more information and training to understand their young person's behaviour.
- Only 14% of young people reported they would speak to a teacher about their Mental Health. Young people believe that Mental Health Awareness sessions should be delivered to pupils as part of PSHE classes.
- 35% of young people surveyed reported that they believe school would be the best place to access information on Mental Health. Young people believe that Advanced Mental Health Training should be offered as part of Leadership Training to Senior Pupils.
- 49% of young people surveyed believe there should be a drop-in at school for young people experiencing poor Mental Health. Young people believe all youth work providers and Mental Health services should work together in order to provide better services and guidance for young people.
- 57% of young people surveyed found the best place for information is online. Young people believe they should have a Mental Health Directory with links to credible sources, apps and services within Renfrewshire.
- 48% of young people surveyed reported they would speak to a friend if they were experiencing poor Mental Health. Young people believe Youth Work providers should work in partnership and offer training and guidance to young people; providing young people with the tools, confidence and understanding to speak to their peers who experience poor Mental Health.
- Young people believe an app should be developed relating to Mental Health and be used to signpost them to services in Renfrewshire. Digital Skills training should be provided for young people in order for them to be able to update the app with relevant information. The app should also have a trigger sending young people to relevant services when their searches are similar over a short period of time.
- School apps can link to relevant information and inform young people, parents and carers of services and resources available to them throughout Renfrewshire. These can also provide a link to any information given out in school and give tips on dealing with stress and anxiety.
- 35% of young people surveyed believe there should be a Young Person Guide to Mental Health. Young people reported finding credible sources a problem and believe they should be supported to create and promote an Online Guide highlighting sites and apps they feel are appropriate. This guide should be available anywhere including Schools, Colleges and Universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Young people in Renfrewshire have identified that waiting lists are too long. Mental Health Services need to review how they allocate appointments and services for young people.
- Youth work providers should engage with and support parents and carers with young people experiencing poor Mental Health.
- More emphasis needs to be placed on Health and Wellbeing as part of Curriculum for Excellence to encourage cross curricular discussions in learning and tackling stigma when understanding Mental Health.
- Mental Health Training must be delivered to young people and all school staff in High Schools with an option for advanced training for senior pupils and young leaders.
- Youth Work Providers and Mental Health Services should work in partnership to provide a consistent, joined up approach to ensure the best outcome for all young people in Renfrewshire.
- Mental Health Services should bring resources into the 21st Century by using Apps and Multimedia resources.
- Young people should be given the tools and knowledge to help their peers who may experience poor Mental Health.
- Young people in Renfrewshire should be supported to create, maintain and promote an app for young people relating to Mental Health.
- Mental Health Services should liaise and collaborate with schools for better signposting via the school apps.
- Better signposting for credible online Mental Health Services within Schools, Colleges and Universities.

2018 has been the Year of Young People in which we asked for your views on mental health and mental health services. You responded, we listened and have made these recommendations with the views of young people in mind.

These recommendations have been given to services who work with young people and were made to improve mental health services across Renfrewshire for all young people.

We want the professionals to take these recommendations on board & implement them within their respective services. We will continue to ensure services engage with young people when implementing these recommendations and any future developments.

Six months on from presenting the recommendations & asking services and professionals to adopt them we will meet again in the summer of 2019. This will be to see the progress they have made, if any, and find out if the recommendations have had an impact on their service.

If you would like to join the Youth Commission you can do so by attending our weekly meetings. You can also follow the work of the Youth Commission and find out information about our meetings on Twitter.

@RenYouthCommis
#FollowYourFeet
#RenYCMH

PACE Theatre Company



Contact
Jenni Mason, Artistic Director
Jenni@pacetheatre.co.uk

PACE believe in the power of the arts to change lives and positively impact on the personal development and mental health of young people. They believe that using creativity can help young people express themselves, process feelings, tell stories and explore complex issues such as mental health plus it can also empower young people, increase self-esteem and provide a creative outlet and a meaningful platform for their voice to be heard.

PACE ran a four-week creative writing programme with 10 young people (11-21 years) in partnership with CREATE encouraging young people to express their ideas and thoughts about mental health, relationships and emotional wellbeing. Families of the young people were invited to watch an informal showcase/sharing of the work, and scripts, poems and monologues at the end during an 'Open Mind' event.

- **Young people formed supportive bonds during the programme**
- **Feelings of loneliness and sense of belonging were key themes**
- **Importance of a neutral space (away from school and home) to discuss what was important to them, helped them feel less alone**
- **Primary concerns included:**
 - Transitioning from primary school to high school and the impact this had
 - Feelings of loneliness, and not feeling comfortable / able to talk to family, friends or teachers
 - Worrying about the mental health of family members
 - Being able to deal with change

CREATE Paisley



Contact
Alan Clark
info@createpaisley.org.uk

CREATE Paisley has engaged thousands of young people over the last 11 years through youth arts programmes, and creates safe environments for them to talk with support of trained youth workers. They believe arts and creativity are one of the best ways for young people express their needs and their perspectives around the support systems available to them.

CREATE delivered four sessions over two days as part of a young writers' programme plus showcase event with PACE Theatre Co. They ran masterclasses around mental health and creative writing/poetry as a tool of expression for 17 young people aged 12-18, from the Active Communities' Quarry Street Hub in Johnstone along with around 5 family members.

"Good emotional wellbeing isn't about always feeling good, it is natural to feel every and any mood. Some will be bad, some will be good. Remember it'll pass, just like a bus would..."
Workshop participant

Main themes

- Fitting in at school, bullying, relationships (with friends and parents)
- Identity, self, expression
- Depression and anxiety
- Sense of belonging and loneliness

Opportunities for intervention

- Creation of more safe and creative spaces to explore mental health
- Connection points to showcase creative work around mental health

Select poetry from young people

"Changes"

What's good mental health?
Well surely I'd know!
I've been at rock bottom,
But had the opportunities to grow.

I love myself for who I am,
And if you don't like me,
The door's right there.
I'm not going to change for someone else, So go on and stare!

I have amazing friends,
And thanks to them,
They've got me through the hard times, The chaos, the mayhem.

Happiness may run in my veins now, But it surely didn't before.
I was always the weirdo loser,
That everyone would ignore.

I'd cry myself to sleep,
And cut my skin very, very deep.

I was alone, depressed.
I couldn't get out of bed,
Let alone get myself dressed!

But as I said,
That was in the past.
But I am truly grateful,
That the hard times didn't last.

I love my family,
My friends,
My home,
And now I know, that I'm never alone

I've learned that life's too short, not to sing and dance, And every life is worth living,
If you give it a chance.

Going out for a run, Watching candles burn. Hanging out with friends, Always wanting to learn.

Gazing at the stars,
Being content with my life. Thinking only of cooking, When I see a knife.

I love my friends,
My family,
My home.
And I know thanks to them, That I'm never alone.

I'm happy with what I'm doing, Who I am,
Who I know,
I only wish my former self, Would let their colours show.

"Why"

Looking out the window, Raindrops pouring from the sky, Curled up in bed,
Simply asking "why?"

Why am I this way? Why am I here? Why can't I go to sleep,
And gently disappear?

Nobody would miss me,
Hell, they wouldn't even realise I'd gone. They'd still rest happily,
Awaiting a new dawn.

How can I be peaceful, Careless,

Or free,
When the whole world seems to want, to get rid of me?

People are ticking time bombs, Ready to explode.
Their furious screams and shouts, Only fuel my want to erode.

It's always the same thing. "Get up and deal with it." "You should be grateful!" How can I do that,
When everything's so painful?

You're happy, Loved.
Life isn't a race.

Promoting young people's emotional wellbeing and addressing emotional coercive control in adolescent relationships.

Working collaboratively with the voluntary sector to build capacity of young people and families to co-design responses.

Implementation and rigorous testing using rapid cycle testing techniques to inform adaptations and ongoing improvements.