



# PAC Briefing

# Report on

# Community

# Impact

**Learning from the Peer Action Collective**

March 2023



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All quotes are from peer researchers unless otherwise stated. In order to protect anonymity, we have not reported age, ethnicity, gender and location.

# Introduction

The Peer Action Collective (PAC) is a £5.2 million programme, which aims to give young people the chance to make their communities safer, fairer places to live. It is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Co-op Group.

PAC was set up in 2021 to create a network of young people resourced to lead research and take action on issues related to youth violence. They worked in 10 areas of England and Wales, each supported by a Delivery Partnership.

The University of Central Lancashire's Centre for Children and Young People's Participation, and associates from the University of East London, collaborated with this network, as learning partners, to learn from and share experiences, and to co-create resources<sup>1</sup>. This briefing report has been prepared for YEF to help highlight and describe the **areas of community impact of the PAC research and social action** in neighbourhoods across England and Wales.

The report defines 'communities' in two different ways. We consider 'communities of place' and 'communities of interest'. These aspects of 'communities' are not mutually exclusive, and both elements intersect in YEF pathways to creating safer communities for children and young people.

In PAC, young people in all ten delivery partnerships spent time researching and gathering evidence on specific themes/topics relating to the structural causes of youth violence, before embarking on a period of social action. We know that more time was needed to see tangible changes in policy and practice resulting from stakeholders' pledges. Consequently, this briefing report provides emerging evidence of PAC's pathways to impact, with the realisation that achieving the desired changes across the whole system will take more time.

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<sup>1</sup>Data for this report were generated from the quarterly monitoring form stakeholder engagement information submitted by nine DPs (one did not provide any stakeholder data); stakeholder surveys returned by 22 stakeholders who engaged with three of the delivery partnerships. Some data is also drawn from surveys completed by peer researchers (129) and changemakers (178); reflective repeat focus groups in with PRs in every DP (online and face to face). A sample of young people (26), including young people who were less vocal in group situations, were interviewed in the last two months of the programme. 24 young people took part in a creative evaluation activity at the closing event. Delivery partner coordination staff (20) engaged in monthly repeat interviews.

The backdrop to the PAC research and social action programme has coincided with Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter, serious cases of youth violence/deaths and now the cost-of-living crisis, which have all negatively impacted social cohesion and tested community resilience in England and Wales. Children and young people have not escaped the effects of these social challenges, and they have often been at the centre of the trauma, and been agents of change.

**On average, the Peer Researchers and changemakers worked on this social action programme for 29.2 hours (PRs) and 11 hours (CMs) per quarter, respectively. Whilst being involved in PAC, they continued to be involved in school, college, and university, as well as in other volunteering opportunities in the community.**

## **1. Strategies for community impact**

### **Overview of aims for impact**

Young people involved in PAC engaged with stakeholders, usually local government, charities, and public sector organisations (e.g., education and health), through sharing research evidence and insights and taking action guided by their findings.

#### **Across the ten PAC delivery partnerships, a strong focus was aiming to:**

- change young people's behaviour in relation to violence (in 9 DPs)
- change adult stakeholder (SH) understanding of the issues and needs (in 9 DPs)

#### **In nine DPs young people were also aiming to:**

- Change community provision (in 9 DPs)
- Change community behaviour (in 7 DPs)
- Change policy or strategy (in 5 DPs)
- Create a movement (in 3 DPs)
- Change their own delivery partner organisation (in 2 DPs)

## How to seek impact

To achieve these aims and changes, young people in PAC engaged in a wide range of activities, including:

- **Engaging with key stakeholders** (including policymakers, public sector institutions, third sector organisations, health, and research organisations).
- **Delivering workshops** for other young people.
- **Raising public awareness** of youth violence causes and solutions (through podcasts, exhibitions, drop in shop, event stalls, website and social media campaigns, songs and videos).
- **Raising awareness of research findings amongst decision makers** (MP, police, police commissioner, teachers, Crime Reduction Partnerships and units) including through conferences, meetings and advisory groups
- **Educating teachers, youth workers and other professionals** (to understand violence and signs of young people being exploited or experiencing bullying or other forms of violence) and getting their commitments to run workshops on these issues
- **Raising parental awareness** of impact of domestic violence on young people
- **Getting stakeholder buy in** so that young people can speak out about violence in the services they use

These activities led to scrutiny and/or refinement of organisational policies, systems, or practices. They also took part in social action to increase understanding or enable delivery of community provision.

### **In the rest of this report, examples of impact and change are explored in relation to:**

- Connections between stakeholders and young people
- Place making (changing community understanding and provision);
- Young people's understanding and perspectives
- Adult stakeholders' understanding, policies and provision

## 2. Change achieved: Connecting with stakeholders

Reported change achieved through connecting with stakeholders included:

- **engagement**
- **building bridges with the police**
- **intra and inter-generational collaborations**

### Stakeholder engagement

Enabling young people to engage with stakeholders was a key strategy for impact within the PAC programme. Making these connections was itself a big step for many young people.

“  
The Council was like starting to take us seriously ... Our project actually decides to step up. ...go, all the way [to the Council] ... and we were like “You know, this is our project, this is what we found out. This is what the Council needs to do. This is what young people want.” And I feel like that was one of our biggest steps being taken.

Young people in PAC engaged with a total of 264 individual stakeholders, of which 40 (15.1%) were engaged repeatedly, over more than one quarter.

The types of engagement with stakeholders with PAC (see Table 1.1) show an increasing variety in the engagement types as the programme progressed and more and more stakeholders became involved. The most common type of engagement was provision of information, followed by Consultation through workshops. In the initial stages, provision of information, when Peer Researchers were involved in stakeholder engagement by talking about the project, collecting data through organisations or presenting their findings, was more prominent.

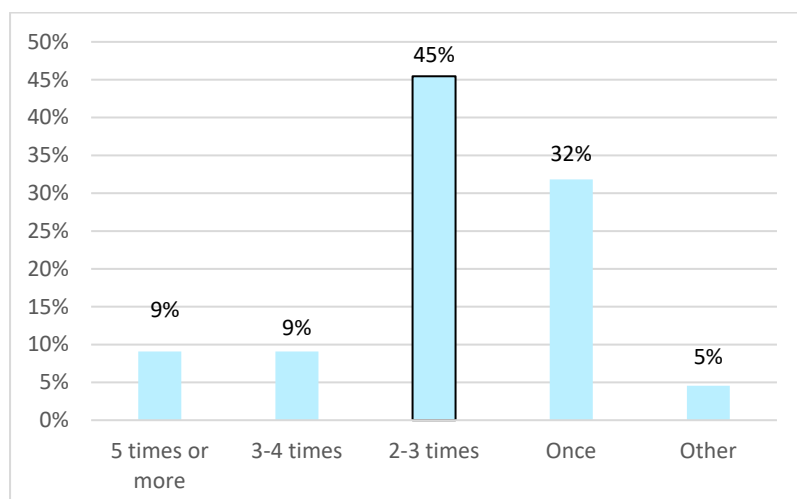
**Table 1.1 - Stakeholder engagement types over the quarters**

Type of engagement	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Total
Provision of information	10	19	12	32	24	10	107
Public hearing or conferences	0	1	1	2	16	13	33
Consultation through workshops	0	6	8	19	15	24	72
Collaboration through advisory groups	1	3	6	9	11	8	38
Delegation (Community operatives/development trusts/local councils)	0	0	0	3	3	15	21
Self-management (Local communities/individuals)	0	1	0	1	0	4	6
Missing data on type of engagement	0	1	35	2	0	6	44

Whilst provision of information continued throughout, in the later social action stages, the number of workshops, public hearing and conferences, advisory group memberships and delegation visits grew substantially, as changemakers started to engage in greater dialogue with the stakeholders and their communities.

Most of the stakeholders reported that they engaged with young people 2–3 times (45%). While 32% engaged only once 9% had repeat engagement over 5 of more times.

**Figure 1.1 – Frequency of contact between young people and stakeholders**



The stakeholder survey responses also provided insight into the types and topics of engagements they had with young people. The topics of engagements were:

- Young Adults' views about knife crime, youth violence
- Discussions on crime and safety in the local community
- Awareness raising about weapons and antisocial behaviour
- Discussions on (and with) police, and policing young people
- Awareness raising on bullying
- Mental health and healthy relationships
- Youth-designed social action projects
- Sports sessions
- Youth violence and social media
- Providing safe spaces and non-judgmental environments

Working with the police, engaging in intra- and inter-generational collaboration, promoting migrant and refugee voices and all featured significantly.

## **Building bridges with the police**

With mistrust of the police emerging as a key finding across several peer research projects, many groups responded by attempting to build bridges between young people and their local police force. PAC teams were invited to contribute to events and processes run by the police. Young people from one PAC attended a Police Youth Cabinet event, which included as guest speakers the Police Crime Commissioner and the head of the Violence Reduction Unit. Other young people signed up to an Independent Advisory Group with Police.

// Having young people on the police advisory group means that the local police are listening to young people and the Peer Researchers are gaining insight and knowledge in this area. Schools are seeing the benefits of young people coming in to engage with their pupils and ask them questions on subjects that will impact their learning and the school. (DP)

In some DPs, engagement with the police was a long-term activity:



“

We met with colleagues [in the] police over the summer to inform the community profile in specific hotspot areas across [city 1 and City 2]. We have also hosted workshops designed for operational police officers working across four police forces .... The workshop has provided an opportunity for facilitated open discussion between members of Peer Action Collective and operational Police Officers. The workshop focused on topics such as existing interventions to support the prevention of youth violence, how operational Police Officers can inform the development of the Framework and the types of initiatives and programmes police officers believe will best support the prevention of violence among children and young people. (DP)

## **Intra- and Inter-generational collaborations**

The teams engaged in intergenerational collaborations with variety of youth services, charities, and voluntary organisations, as well as health and research organisations. Many of these engagement opportunities came about because of strong core partnerships within the PAC teams, which spanned multiple sectors and had embedded regional presence, with links to key organisations and decision-making processes.

The majority of stakeholders were community and voluntary sector organisations, and trusts and foundations focusing on specific activities (e.g., art, dance, mentoring), specified issues affecting the local community (e.g., mental health), or specific groups of minorities (e.g., prisoners, specified ethnic minority groups).

A cumulative total of 650 young people were engaged with stakeholders. This number includes the majority of Peer Researchers in each quarter (repeatedly in contact with different stakeholders). The number of young people who were engaged with stakeholders gradually increased over the quarters: in the beginning Peer Researchers were in contact with stakeholders once they had collected primary evidence, while by Quarter 6, many changemakers collaborated with external organisations while delivering the social action projects.

Some collaborations involved linking with other young people in positions of influence (intragenerational collaboration):

“ In [City 3] PRs, have held a meeting with the Youth Council, influencing their agenda around safety for young people and the Peer Influencers from [a safety promotion team] talking about ways to work together and learn from PAC and continue work post project. (DP)

Inter-generational working (between adults and young people) was with the following groups of stakeholders:

- Police departments, constabularies and prisons
- Local authority or council departments (including youth services linked to local authorities, children’s social services and missing children and young people team)
- Politicians (i.e., 3 named MPs, 2 mayor offices, and 1 government minister)
- Multi-agency violence reduction/ safety partnerships and regeneration teams

In some settings connections with young people and with adults were built through a combination of inter- and intra-generational collaborations

- Youth and community centres and clubs
- Community Groups
- Youth councils
- Educational establishments (e.g., schools, colleges, academies, and universities): *n.* = 36 stakeholders

### 3. Change achieved: Place Making

Reported change achieved through place-making included:

- **Addressing local issues**
- **Mapping Community Opportunities**
- **Increasing Community Provision**

## Addressing local issues

Some groups, responded to serious youth violence that happened locally during the project, and engaged with others in the community to hold events and contribute to local campaigns. Others focused on place-building through exploring local safety, and developed ideas and recommendations with local organisations.

For many groups, youth-led community engagement was central to their social action. Peer Researchers and changemakers developed 'demands' and 'calls to action' with local partners that focused on changes to local communities. Groups shared these, and held community engagement events and stakeholder meetings. These sessions were often a space to trial ideas and co-produce solutions with the local community.

“ the work we're doing with them is helping them develop their strategic framework to preventing youth violence with a public health approach. And we are part of that, we've been helping them facilitate these online workshops for different professionals. So like teachers, police, healthcare professionals looking at like across agency approach to preventing youth violence.

“ Unfortunately, youth violence is still a huge problem but in the initial work we have completed so far, and through collaborating with other organisations working with young people, I have noticed that more and more people are adopting our vision of creating an integrated strategy for tackling youth violence and supporting young people more generally.

## Mapping Community Opportunities

Some peer researchers and changemakers developed regional maps to signpost young people to existing services and facilities, or to highlight the gaps in

provision. For example, building on their peer research which identified 'lack of opportunities' as a key contributor to youth violence, one PAC group mapped the opportunities for young people across city 4. They took these maps into schools across the region, and promoted them on bus shelters and, for two weeks, on a digital billboard.

Mapping activities also identified space-based barriers and divisions, as well as opportunities for disrupting these. For example, peer researchers in City 5 were conscious of the postcode-based gang wars around the youth centre. In response, a residential event was held to bring together young people from across the divide to help break down barriers, and was used as an early intervention tool for locality-based youth violence.

## **Increasing Community Provision**

Within their communities, many groups developed social action that improved their neighbourhoods, or provided increased access to safe spaces or services to support more marginalised residents. For example, young people engaged with community work such as litter picking, helping older people, and volunteering some of their time at foodbanks and warm Hubs.

“

We set a record for attendance for at least one youth provision venue, resulting from us raising awareness among young people of the services and spaces available to them. (DP)

Some PAC teams trained young people themselves to play inspiring roles and/or provide key services in their community. One group trained as peer mental health support workers, offering guidance around mental health first aid and early interventions. Other Peer Researchers were trained in emergency first aid, and several groups developed mentoring schemes.

Creating new sports-based opportunities for young people was also a popular action across the PACs. Free sessions, events, and activities were offered, as well as free gym programmes and clubs. Within this, some projects actively engaged with the inequalities that distinct groups face in sports. For example, a Red Card Gender-Based Violence project is working to explore the differences that men, women, and transgender people face in sports. Two Peer Researchers from City 7 created a Refugee Football Team to provide a safe space for asylum seekers to play football together on a weekly basis.

“ We started our football team for refugees during this quarter as a piece of social action. Young people having a space to spend time recreationally, and without any fees attached, was something that came up in the research. This has provided an important safe space for around 15 local young people to play football and socialise each week.

PAC teams also collaborated with community hubs to improve services and facilities, or even to create new sites. Groups created drop-in youth clubs and took over existing spaces as pop-ups.

## 4. Change achieved: young people's understanding and perspectives

Reported change achieved through place-making included:

- **Feeling like you are making a difference**
- **Young people changing their perspectives about their communities**

### Feeling like you are making a difference

“ You feel like you've made an impact within society ... Even if you made a difference or one person out of like 100 is still made a difference.

A large number of Peer Researchers said in the survey that they felt they had positively helped to improve outcomes for children and young people living with, or exposed to, violence and this increased from the beginning of the project to the end.

“ I've just been able to see like that children can actually take part in that, you know, like seeing their eyes lit up when they realise you know the grant to be able to put in place what they want to do.

The vast majority of the changemakers reported that they felt that the social action projects were only just getting started, or that they were at the start of longer-term work in their communities. Out of 173 changemakers, 95.95% (N=166) stated that they felt prepared and motivated to act for social change, with a number of changemakers (N=63) identifying a range of short-term individual and community outcomes achieved to date:

- Increased confidence, motivation, and inspiration for change
- Increased awareness of youth violence, knife crime, and drug misuse
- Increased teacher awareness of youth violence
- Giving young people a voice and platform
- Opened conversations in communities about youth violence
- Young people more aware of their rights
- Young people feeling safer in their communities
- Providing knowledge and strategies for young people of what to do when they experience violence, and the confidence to speak up about violence in their communities
- Increased participation in youth activities/organisations
- Has brought people together in the community (amongst young people and between young people and older people)
- Young people have formed new friendships
- Celebration of positive role models and s/heroes

## **Change young people's perspectives about their community**

Peer Researchers report that they have increased other young people's feelings that there are community services which are on hand to help:

//  
Even just going into schools, for example, with like LGBTQ-related projects, that would probably in my opinion be positive for LGBT youth. And like young people, seeing that there is this project that is sort of looking out for them, by using their voices. So maybe just confidence in the community that there are people that support them.

In some instances, peer researchers and changemakers were able to provide spaces in which other young people could learn from other young people's perspectives. As one peer researcher described, this sometimes involved facilitating discussions between young people, to help them think differently

about options that may be open to them when dealing with difficult family and community circumstances.

“ I think that was really strong to be honest, and we've seen the change from just the start ...in just one little point of two lot 2 girls meeting each other

In another example, a peer researcher described changing young people's perspectives about older people in their community.

“ I think there's one important change that's happened is that the young people have become more open minded. So the other day they went to an old man's home and they went to fix his garden. And usually if you tell them like for example like a few months ago, I think they would be really weirded out .... But I think there's after the bingo event and stuff they've been more open to like such opportunities

## **5.Change achieved: Stakeholders understanding and perspectives**

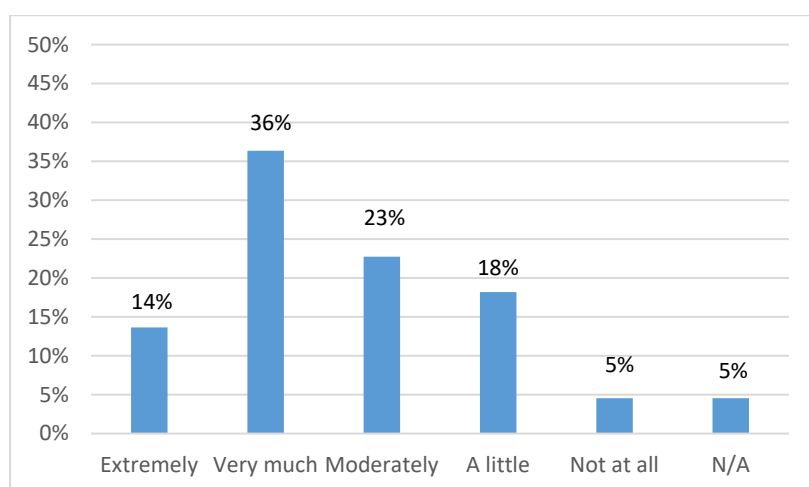
Reported change achieved in stakeholder understanding and perspectives included:

- **Increased understanding of youth violence**
- **Increased understanding of young people and their participation in public decision making**
- **Changes in policies, strategies and practices**

## Impact on stakeholders' understanding of youth violence

73% of stakeholders felt that contact with young people changed their perspective on youth violence and its causes, out of which 14% reported that their perspective has changed extremely, 36% said it has changed very much, and 23% experienced a moderate change (see Figure 2.2).

**Figure 1.2 – Degree to which contact between young people and stakeholders has changed stakeholders' perspective on youth violence and its causes**



The stakeholders' responses highlighted a number of ways in which their understanding of the structural causes of youth violence increased. They gained insights about young people's lived experiences, circumstances, and needs, including some difficult topics, such as experiences of bullying and its impact on young people's lives, and young people's insights about and perceptions of domestic abuse. They reported a better understanding of youth violence and the causes of youth violence (e.g., lack of activities available for young people), and of how quickly issues can escalate and become violent between young people. They also mentioned that appreciation and improved perception of other young people from neighbouring areas from different ethnic backgrounds was a positive outcome for their own CYP community.



Peer researchers also reported that adult stakeholders gained greater understanding of the causes of youth violence and the the circumstances in which some young people are living.

“ having conversations with like professionals and like parents of young people and kind of speaking with them ... almost having like you see like you know like light bulb moments where they're like, “Oh my God, yes, that makes complete sense. ... It doesn't feel good because obviously it's an issue that needs to be solved, but it feels good in the sense that people are recognizing [signs of exploitation] and people are able to kind of look out for those signifiers

Examples of some of the changes in their thinking about young people and violence that stakeholders have reported include:

Meeting the PAC group has informed my views through lived experience and understanding of how young adults see the world around them. (Stakeholder)

Gained a better understanding of youth violence and some of the triggers and causes for their behaviour. Also, helped to understand young people's needs and lack of accessible activities to do. (Stakeholder)

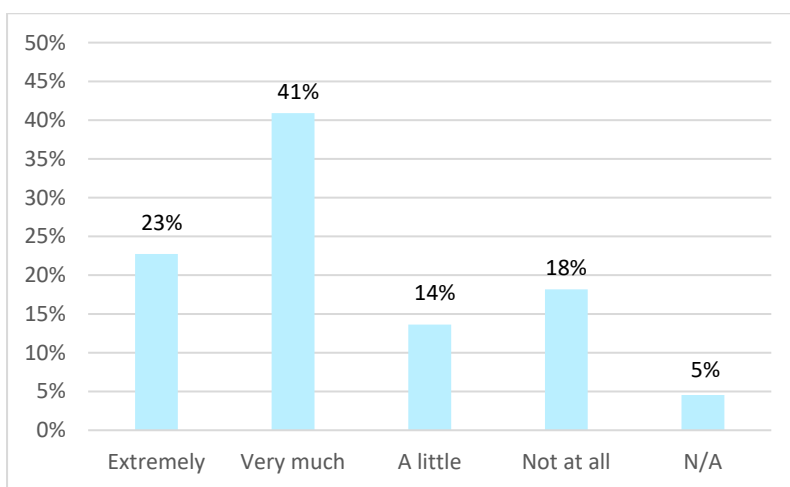
It has opened my eyes to why young people choose to get involved in anti-social behaviour. Lack of oppounirty, lack of education, turbulent home life, lack of places for young people to go during the evenings. Also, why they may want to carry weapons, mainly for protection. (Stakeholder)

## **Impact on stakeholders' understanding of young people and their participation in public decision making**

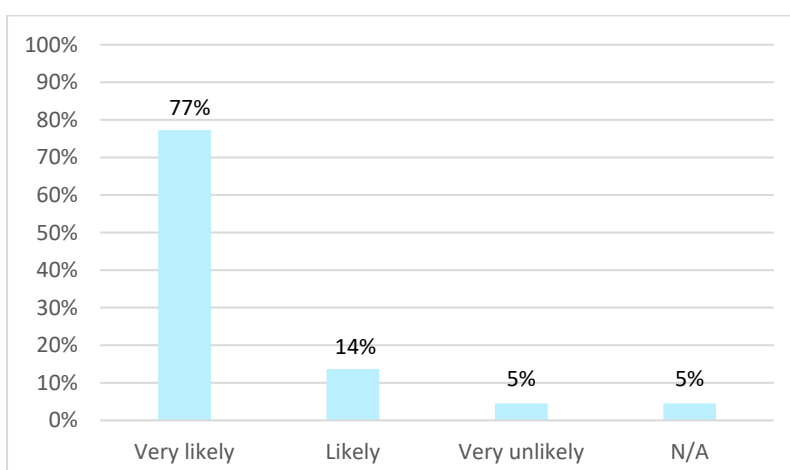
The collaborations between stakeholders and young people also resulted in a changed perspective on how stakeholders thought about young people's

involvement in decision making: 23% of the stakeholders said that their perspective changed extremely, and 41% respondents said that it changed very much (see Figure 1.3). Furthermore, most of the respondents (77%) expressed that they were very likely to engage young people in decision making in the future (see Figure 1.4), implying that the programme has contributed to a change of attitudes towards promoting youth participation on a wider scale, and potentially facilitating new processes within these organisations to give young people a platform to have their voices heard.

**Figure 1.3 – Degree to which contact between young people and stakeholders has changed stakeholders’ perspective on young people’s involvement in decision-making processes**



**Figure 1.4 – Degree to which it is likely that the stakeholder will engage young people in decision-making processes in the future**



One stakeholder summed up the impact on the thinking of a police committee, about how it is possible to involve young people in discussions around youth violence:

“ I just wanted to say a huge thank you on behalf of the [police committee] to [the peer researchers] for their fantastic presentation and discussion at the seminar yesterday. Everyone was blown away with how they engaged with the audience and how confident they were when presented with some challenging topics, and some contentious views, around the perceptions of young people and violence. The team made a huge impression on both the Cllrs and police and committee colleagues and we will no doubt be in touch soon ". (Stakeholder)

## **Impact on policies, strategies and practice**

There are signs that PAC research and social action are leading to:

- Research evidence playing a role in shaping local policy debates by confirming existing policies, leading to changes in policy direction and implementation.
- The research having an impact on the operations of NGOs, charities, and other public organisations.
- Research recommendations being taken up by policymakers through young people’s membership of local government advisory committees.
- Decisionmakers make using research-based critical evidence synthesis in developing policy and practice.
- Research helping to highlight issues of concern to parliamentarians, and contributing to new analysis of existing issues.
- Police departments being influenced by the findings of peer research, and by the collaborative social action delivered for and with police forces.
- Some public officers expressed eagerness to refine their policies and practices considering PAC evidence. Public officers are keen to continue their dialogue with PAC to ensure that the voices of young people are heard in safety strategies.
- PAC members feeling valued and motivated to continue their work.

Some public officers expressed eagerness to refine their policies and practices considering PAC evidence. They were keen to continue their dialogue with PAC members to ensure that the voices of young people are heard in safety strategies.

PAC members remained motivated to continue their work.

“ I think that's a slow project for grassroots work, but I definitely know that some people do feel safer in my city”

It is still early days in terms of assessing the extent to which these dialogues and commitments will be translated into widespread changes in policy and practice, but there are example of on going collaborations which are moving in this direction.

For example, young people in one DP described an ongoing collaboration with a multi-agency body responsible for violence prevention. Peer researchers described feeling genuinely heard and that they were influencing policy that was going to make a difference for children in the future. They were able to coauthor a definition of youth violence, using their research to inform a draft policy document, and then consulting with other young people about the suitability of the proposed new strategy.

## Concluding summary

To conclude, the PAC partners' pathways to impact is ongoing, and whilst partners have demonstrated a range of high-quality knowledge exchanges/transfers with key stakeholders, and public engagement activities with peers, more work needs to be done to create change. Nonetheless, their outreach and dissemination of empirical evidence and insights has already started to inform, influence, and shape local and regional policy and practices to help keep young people safe in the community.

Finding an answer to the structural causes of violence towards young people is complex; however, the PAC partners have skillfully focused on community of place and communities of interest to gather insights and find solutions to this systemic problem. Both dimensions have often featured in PAC research and social action. For example, High Trees led a South London consortium of youth services, and aimed to produce a young person manifesto. To achieve this end, the research question has explored both the safety impact on young people living in hyper-urban tower block estates and the influence of 'elders' (e.g., young adults) on their wellbeing and safety.

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