



# THE LOZELLS AND NEWTOWN YEF COMMUNITY RESEARCH PROJECT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# INTRODUCTION

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) aims to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence, by finding out what works, for whom and why. The Neighbourhood Fund is one of the programmes that YEF is funding. Its aim is to understand if and how empowering people to make decisions about their local neighbourhoods prevents children from becoming involved in violence.

BVSC Research and their partners University of Birmingham and University of Wolverhampton, were commissioned to undertake community research and co-design activity. This activity sat across three phases, Feasibility, Discovery and Co-Design. The first phase saw Lozells and Newtown identified as the 'hyperlocal' area of focus for the Neighbourhood Fund. This report sets out the findings from the second phase, the Discovery Phase.

The Discovery phase was led by the University of Birmingham, employing the Use-It model of Community Research. The research focused on exploring the ideas of local people in relation to the needs of the area and potential solutions. The aim was to seek the views of individuals from the community who would not usually have a voice. To achieve this, the University of Birmingham recruited 29 individuals who live and work in Lozells and Newtown and provided accredited community research training. 13 individuals went forward to complete 38 interviews with individuals from the area. Interviewees came from a range of different communities and included individuals who had personal experience of youth violence, having been victims of violence, spent time in prison, witnessed the aftermath of stabbings, experienced police brutality and lost close friends to knife and gun crime.



# THE FINDINGS

The individuals that were interviewed were clear about the changes that are needed in the area and proposed a range of solutions:

---

## **01.** Create more safe spaces for children and young people

As more parents (particularly single parents) are faced with working longer hours, leaving children to their own devices outside school hours, the lack of safe (indoor and outdoor) spaces results in young people spending time on the streets where they are vulnerable to exploitation. There are particular risks for young people when they come out of school and make their way home. Local open spaces such as the parks are viewed as areas that are unsafe. There were significant concerns about the lack of youth services (youth centres and detached/outreach youth workers), particularly in Newtown. Individuals that had been brought up in the area, described the closure of youth clubs and centres that had played a key part in their lives.

---


## **02.** Provide more diversionary activities for young people

There was considerable concern that the lack of diversionary activities places young people at significant risk. It was also recognised that it is important for young people to have interests that they enjoy, make them feel proud and ideally give them something to look forward to.

---

## **03.** Educate young people about keeping themselves and others safe

Young people need to be made fully aware of the risks in relation to carrying a weapon, county lines and gang membership. Individuals with lived experience were considered to be the most appropriate people to undertake this work. Parents need more education about the potential signs of exploitation.



---

## **04.** Provide more trusted individuals/role models

Young people need access to trusted individuals within the local community, that will be available to them on an ongoing basis. Too often these relationships are time-limited, as a consequence of people being employed to do specific pieces of work. The cuts in youth services and closure of youth and community centres have had a significant impact in terms of removing those key individuals who could have developed a trusted relationship.

---

## **05.** Provide more outreach/detached workers

Outreach workers are provided in the area by the Youth Service, from the Lighthouse and the LRG Centre, however, concerns were raised that the level of service does not meet the level of demand.

---

## **06.** Provide more mentoring/counselling

Many young people have faced significant trauma in their lives and need access to mentoring, counselling and support from individuals trained to support those affected by trauma.

---

## **07.** Prepare and support young people in accessing employment

Individuals raised the many difficulties experienced by people in the area in getting a job, with few employment possibilities available and a feeling that giving a Newtown or Lozells address deters employers from offering an interview. Concerns were also expressed that there is insufficient support from schools to prepare young people for the world of work, from completing job applications and writing a CV through to identifying appropriate employment.

Attempts need to be made to identify with each young person leaving school, what routes they can take that are tailored to their particular talents. Local businesses that are committed to the area could be linked to the local schools with the aim of providing apprenticeships and paid work experience placements that can lead to employment. Opportunities could also be explored in relation to supporting individuals to set up their own businesses.

---



---

## **08.** Improve the environment

Residents believe that their area is being neglected and that they are not accessing the same level of service in relation to refuse collection, street cleaning and dealing with fly-tipping as other more affluent areas of Birmingham. The 'Broken windows theory' was referred to, whereby visible signs of crime, anti-social behaviour and civil disorder create an urban environment that encourages further crime and disorder, including serious crimes. Local people do not feel ownership of their local streets or their local parks and green spaces.

---

## **09.** Provide/improve support for parents/carers

Parents did not know where to go for help if they felt their child might be vulnerable to or already involved in exploitation. Support needs to be available for parents at every stage of a child's life from ante-natal care through to young adulthood. The loss of Sure Start schemes was a major concern and there was a lack of awareness of any family centres in the area. The importance of access to advocacy for parents was recognised.


---

## **10.** Address the relationship between the police and the community

The Police are perceived extremely negatively by many people in the area. They were described as intimidatory with accounts of harassment, abuse, assault and searching without reason, because of ethnicity. Some incidents had taken place many years previously, but were still vividly recalled, others were more recent. When incidents have been reported, residents described a lack of, inadequate or slow response. This has resulted in a significant lack of trust, fear, a reluctance to report incidents and a feeling of not being protected. The relationship with young people is particularly difficult, with the Police being criticised for having negative assumptions about them.

There was recognition that the Police do not have the staffing to address the challenges, but given the high crime levels, it was felt that Lozells and Newtown should be priority areas when it comes to the allocation of resources, and there should be greater visibility of police on the streets. Whilst some criticised the lack of community engagement, others, acknowledged that the Police are working hard to build relationships with young people and the community, with relations improving thanks to the presence and bridge-building at community forums and in particular, the work of some key individuals.

---



---

## **11.** Engage the whole community

The issue of youth violence affects the whole community, and it was recognised that the whole community needs to play its part in addressing this. Some of the gaps impact on everyone, including the lack of community spaces that enable people to come together to increase inter-generational understanding and engagement.

---

## **12.** Work with schools to explore their approaches in relation to exclusion, trauma-informed practice, the development of life skills and keeping young people safe.

Many concerns were expressed in relation to schools, including the lack of empathy and cultural sensitivity of staff; a focus on academic standards at the expense of life skills; teachers being 'burnt out'; failure to deal with drug dealing on school premises and knives being brought into school. There were particular concerns about exclusion policies. Excluded children are more exposed to all the risks 'on the street'. It was felt that alternative support and mentoring should be provided on-site by youth workers and trauma-informed practitioners.

Teachers and local youth workers need accredited training in working with gangs and youth violence and to work in collaboration with relevant organisations and individuals, including Community Police Officers and those with lived experience, who can share the risks of carrying a knife. They also need to bring in individuals from the local community who have been successful in different walks of life and can provide positive role models. Teachers need greater access to pastoral support for pupils.

Many children in the area are living in poverty and coming to school hungry. It was felt that steps needed to be taken to ensure that every child has access to food whilst at school, if they are to maximise their potential in relation to their education. Teachers need to be fully aware of the home circumstances of each pupil and attempt to work in collaboration with parents.

Residents felt that schools could do more to support local communities, including staff attending community forums to hear the concerns of local residents and be part of identifying the solutions and using buildings as a hub, bringing local people together. Schools need to work with transport companies and the Police to ensure that the journey to and from school is a safe one.

---

---

### **13.** Ensure young people know their rights

It was felt that young people do not have a voice and it is vital that every organisation that is working with them in any way ensures that they are listened to. There were particular concerns about them being fully aware of their rights, particularly in relation to 'Stop and search' and having access to appropriate advocacy when needed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Decisions will need to be made about which of the above areas to prioritise, what role the steering group might take in relation to taking them forward and which areas should be the focus of funding.

It was felt that this project is an opportunity to support the ideas and creativity of local people and to put financial resources into the local economy. The number of individuals and organisations (particularly CICs) that are working to achieve change in the area is significant. It was felt that they should be encouraged and enabled to come up with their own solutions and proposals to address the needs that have been identified in the area. A more flexible funding approach, based on a less prescriptive specification would encourage innovation and provide the opportunity for individuals and organisations to put forward their own creative ideas, whilst identifying what funding would be required to make it happen and how the work could be sustained once the funding ceased. The option of creating a new organisation could also be considered, to enable the objectives to be met and for additional funds to be sought e.g., Lozells and Newtown CIC.

Local people have the answers if people are willing to listen.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

---

**We would like to thank all those individuals who gave their time and were willing to share their personal stories and ideas about the way forward.**

