



Youth voices project in Essex, 'A curriculum for life' Dec-March 2020

This youth voices project was funded through the #iwill fund and Essex Community Foundation, and was in partnership with The Young Essex Assembly. The YEA were instrumental in choosing the topic and questions so that they can listen to a large range of young people's voices across Essex around the theme. A curriculum for life is something that the YEA members passionately believe in and they will use the data from this project to help them with campaigns in the future to show funders what young people in Essex are saying they want.

The project was aimed at young people in voluntary youth settings so that young people would feel relaxed in their own environment, with their own youth leaders, on a normal group night. The questions that the YEA wanted to engage young people on were written into a flexible session plan that included games and activities produced to encourage discussion, fun and engagement around the topic. The session plan could be shaped to fit the young people in the group, the space that the group had access to, the amount of time they had to run the session and the type of group it was (i.e open youth club, Faith based, Uniformed, SEN etc). This flexibility meant that we could be as inclusive as possible and hear from lots of different groups across Essex (including Southend & Thurrock).

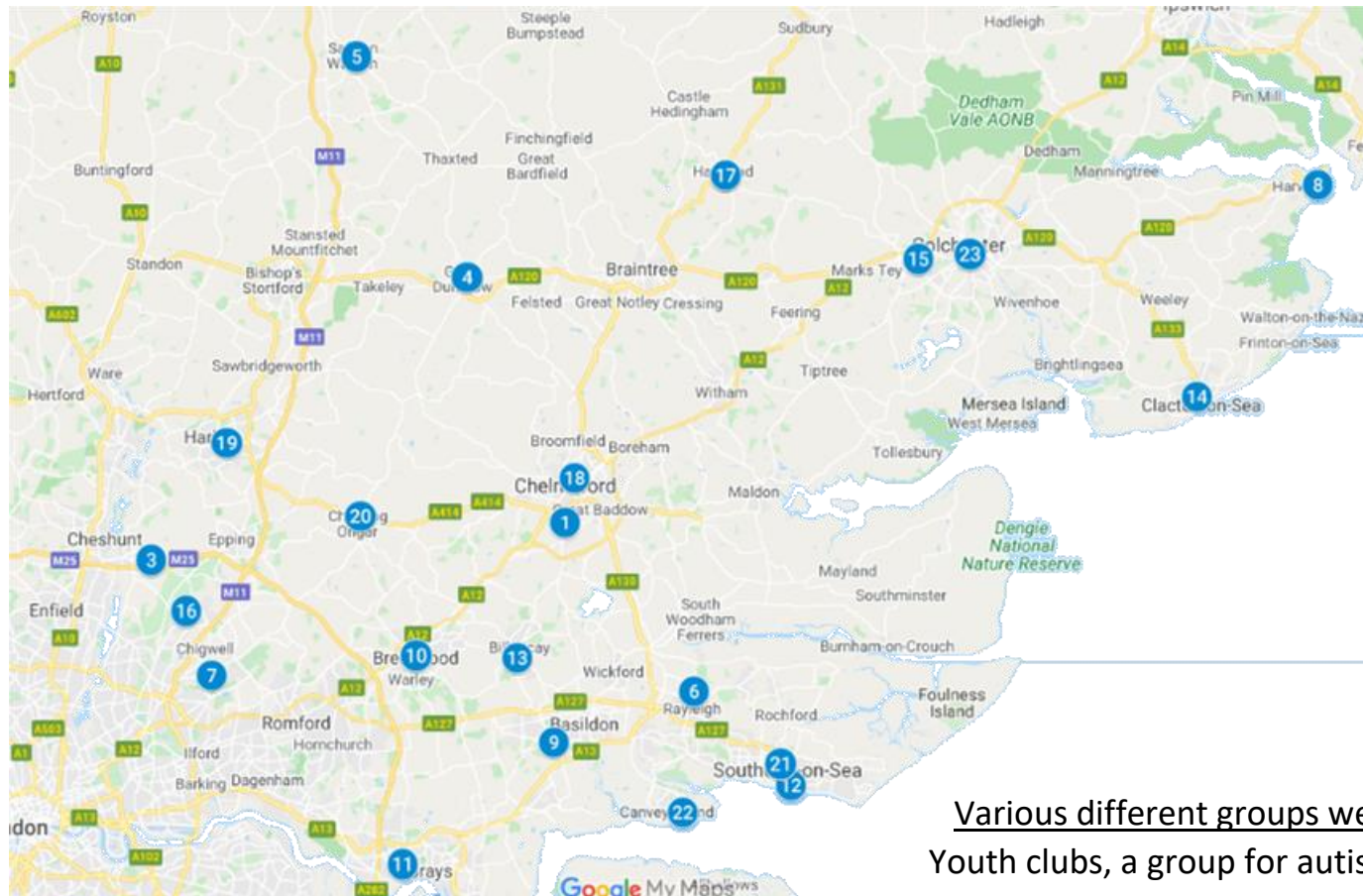
Most sessions were run for between 1-2 hours and were in depth pieces of work with groups because the young people enthusiastically engaged with the session material and topic.

ECVYS are proud that we were able to **re-invest into the sector over £2000** by offering youth groups a £90 donation for taking part (Donation based on estimated costs of staff time/ venue costs & pizza). This has meant we can show voluntary youth groups that we value them, and also help groups raise some much needed funds for their youth work.

Questions that formed the basis of our youth session & research findings

- **Do you know what Curriculum for Life means?**
- **Which parts of curriculum for life do you know most and least about?**
- **What issues are you most worried about after leaving school?**
- **What are the key things that are not taught at school as part of the national curriculum that you feel you would like to learn in order to be prepared for your future?**
- **Should a 'Curriculum for Life' be part of the National Curriculum?**
- **What do you think would be the most effective way for you to be taught about curriculum for life issues?**
- **Do you feel teachers currently have enough experience to teach PSHE?**
- **Do you feel comfortable talking to your PHSE teachers about sensitive topics in the classroom?**
- **Is there someone else you would prefer to teach you about sensitive topics? What is the role of that person? (i.e family/youth worker/friend etc)**

Who took part & where were they from?



318 young people
from **23** youth clubs in Essex
(inc Southend & Thurrock)

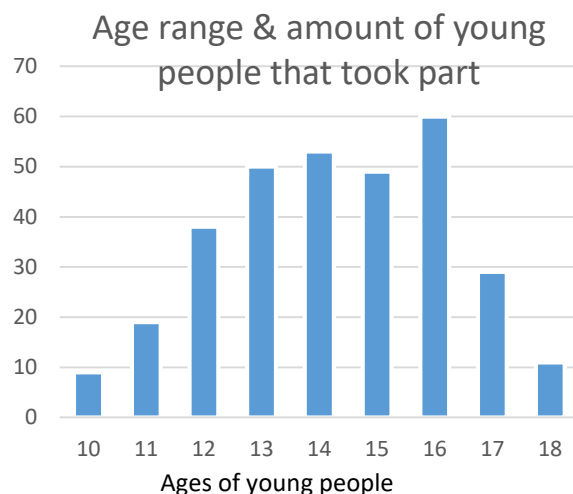
- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1 Tile Kiln Church Youth club | 13 Chantry Rangers |
| 2 H.A.P.P.Y youth club | 14 Clacton police cadets |
| 3 Ninefields youth club | 15 2nd Lexden Guides |
| 4 Old skool youth club | 16 The Limes youth group |
| 5 Saffron Walden youth outreach project | 17 Halstead youthy |
| 6 3rd Downhall Guides | 18 Essex Youthbuild |
| 7 The Limes youth club | 19 Harlow police cadets |
| 8 Teen Talk | 20 Ongar Ranger unit |
| 9 Basildon police cadets | 21 Youth Links, Trustlinks |
| 10 Endeavour youth club | 22 Yellow Door youth project |
| 11 Chafford Hundred Community Church Yo. | 23 African families in the UK |
| 12 Triple T's youth club | |

Various different groups were all able to take part and share their views:
Youth clubs, a group for autistic young people, an LGBT group, Faith groups, GirlGuide groups, Police cadets, a Peer support group, a BAME youth club, an SEN youth club, & a youth training and employment group.



(and other smaller groups who don't have their own logo)

What were the ages of the young people that took part?



Q: Have you heard of 'A Curriculum for Life' before?

82% of young people said NO



What issues are you most worried about after leaving school?

Top 10 answers from young people:

1. Finances (Bills/ Budgeting/ Banking/ Taxes)
2. Getting a job (C.V's/ interviews/ job preparation)
3. Becoming independent [cooking/ cleaning/ shopping/ laundry]
4. Keeping up friendships/ making new ones/ loneliness
5. Applying for, or transition into College, Apprenticeship or University
6. Where to live/ Buying a house/ getting a mortgage
7. Mental well-being
8. Leaving home and family
9. Political issues
10. Crime

Key comments from young people



'In Clacton there is a real lack of local employment. We live in an area with no major companies so a few of us are worried about finding work'

'There don't seem to be as many opportunities for SEN young people after college, and that worries us'

Finances and getting a job were mentioned more than twice as much as the other answers

Which parts of curriculum for life do you know most and least about?



MOST

1. Sex education (The biology, not healthy relationships)
2. Environmental issues & sustainable living
3. Healthy living
4. Cultural awareness
5. Politics
6. Drugs
7. Relationships
8. Practical life skills
9. Finance (saving/ paying bills/ taxes/ insurance)
10. Technology & online safety

LEAST

1. Finances (saving/ paying bills/ taxes/ insurance)
2. Politics
3. Relationships
4. Practical life skills
5. Community cohesion
6. Sustainable Living
7. Sex education
8. Cultural awareness
9. Jobs
10. College

Finance & Politics were mentioned over three times more than the other answers (in the 'least section')!

What are the key things, not taught at school as part of the national Curriculum, that you would like to learn in order to be prepared for your future?

Top 10 answers from young people:

1. Finance (budgeting/ saving/ paying bills & taxes)
2. Life skills like Shopping, Housework, DIY, Washing, cleaning & cooking
3. Mental health & stress
4. C.V's/ interview techniques/ careers advice & how to get into further education
5. Sex and healthy relationships (not just physical bits!)
6. Driving
7. Living independently
8. First aid
9. Understanding disabilities
10. Politics



Learning finance skills was almost twice as popular as the other answers!



Key comments from young people

'It would be useful to learn a lot more life skills at an earlier age'

'We don't learn life skills at school, but we learn them at our youth club and it's great'

'We get taught lots about the mechanics of sex at school, but not nearly enough about healthy relationships'



Should a 'Curriculum for Life' be part of the National Curriculum?

The overwhelming answer from young people was YES!

What do you think would be the most effective way for you to be taught about curriculum for life issues?

Top 10 answers from young people:

1. Practical demonstrations and hands on experience (inc workshops)
2. By outside professionals who have first-hand experience
3. In School lessons
4. School trips (i.e to finance firms/ banks)
5. Roleplaying/ case studies/ Drama/ Video
6. Dedicated regular days to focus on life skills
7. Make it fun!
8. Teach us in smaller groups
9. Provide us with mentors from the community/ ex pupils
10. Don't teach us things we don't need to know



**The overwhelming top answer was that they
Would like to learn more life skills in a 'hands on'
way, outside of the classroom setting**



Key comments from young people

- 'We would love to have more practical demonstrations and work experience outside of the classroom. PLEASE take us on more trips to keep learning interesting'
- 'Relationship and sex education needs to be better and more frequent, rather than just every now and then.'
- 'Some schools teach it in PSHE and other schools squeeze it into tutor group time which means it's not thoroughly taught. Weekly lessons would be best.'
- 'I think we should turn PSHE into a personal development programme for all young people, with someone to work with them as a specialised mentor.'
- 'We learn life skills at Cadets & GirlGuides and it's an amazing learning environment for us.'



Do you feel that teachers currently have enough experience to teach PSHE?

67% of young people said NO!



Key comments from young people

- 'It depends upon the teacher, but generally none of the teachers are qualified to teach PSHE, and it often feels like they don't even want to teach it'
- 'It would be embarrassing to be taught sensitive and personal topics by teachers'
- 'Learning this stuff in our classroom with the usual teachers is not the best way for us to learn life skills (especially the sensitive topics)'
- 'Teachers can't do everything, they already do a lot'



Do you feel comfortable talking to your PHSE teachers about sensitive topics in the classroom?

77% of young people said NO

(of the 21% who said yes- they all said it depends upon the teacher)



Key comments from young people

- 'Some of the teachers wouldn't know how to talk to you about sensitive issues'
- 'Depends upon the teacher'
- 'Teachers get awkward talking about relationship and sex education and the classes do not take them seriously'
- 'Teachers often teach PSHE as a secondary subject but aren't specialised in it. They often seem disinterested.'
- 'PSHE should be taught in smaller groups to make it more personal and less distracting'

Is there someone else you would prefer to teach you about sensitive topics? What is the role of that person?

Top 10 answers from young people:

1. Someone with life experience from outside of school
2. Pastoral/school nurse/
3. Parents/ Family
4. Youth worker/ volunteers at youth organisations
5. Trusted teacher
6. Friends
7. 'Not a teacher'
8. The internet (inc youtube)
9. Older peer educators at school
10. Classroom assistant in smaller groups



The majority of young people said that they would like to be taught about sensitive topics by someone with life experience, from outside of the school setting

Key comments from youth leaders:



'The young people felt that by having someone from PSHE specialisms to teach them specific things (someone that they don't know and won't see again) then they won't judge the young people and they are more likely to take it seriously and ask questions.'

'Our young people definitely felt that teachers who they see every day and deal with other elements of their school life are not the right people to teach PSHE!'

'This was a thought provoking exercise and the girls had so much that they felt was not taught at school. They realised how much they got from GirlGuiding that others would not get.'

'The young people mentioned that there is so much emphasis put on formal education that you could be an 'A star' student but not able to look after yourself. We then put some of these things that they wanted to learn, into our programme for the term.'

Summary

Although the majority of young people had not heard the phrase 'A curriculum for life' at the start of the session, they were actually very passionate about making sure that their learning should encompass all aspects of life skills rather than be limited to what is currently on the national curriculum. Many felt that topics like finance and running your own home were just as important as learning about algebra (if not more!)

It was interesting to see how strongly young people feel about having a 'Curriculum for life', and that it should definitely be a part of the national curriculum. They would love to see the national curriculum developed in such a way to allow more teaching of life skills, in a more practical way (outside of the classroom) and with outside speakers who are professionals/specialised in each topic. They felt that this was key to helping them become prepared for independent living once they leave school.

Young people felt that they really needed to understand finance issues more and were concerned about how to pay bills, budget, save, pay taxes, take out insurance and use the bank.

On the flip side the young people said that they get taught a lot about the mechanics of sex, but would really like to know more about how to have healthy relationships.

The young people said that they were embarrassed to talk about sex and relationships with teachers who taught them other subjects, and often felt that the teachers didn't want to teach them about sex anyway.

A BIG thank you to all 318 young people in 23 youth clubs who took part, to their leaders for taking the time to run the session and to the #iwillfund & Essex Community Foundation for allowing this project to take place. The Essex young Assembly are excited to learn together from the views shared, and keen to put that learning into future campaigns and projects.

Thank you *Rachel Brett*
(ECVYS CEO)