

## Richmond youth needs analysis Final Report

A report by Rocket Science UK for  
oneRichmond including:

- Youth needs analysis
- Impact of Covid-19 research



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# 1. Executive summary

## 1.1 Introduction and methodology

In Autumn 2019, [Rocket Science](#) were commissioned by oneRichmond (a partnership between [Richmond Parish Lands Charity](#) and [Hampton Fund](#)) to conduct a **youth needs analysis** in Richmond. This work explored the needs of young people and provision of youth services in Richmond through an initial evidence review; a workshop with 43 Richmond-based youth practitioners and policymakers and 222 one-to-one interviews with Richmond youth, conducted by 14 peer researchers.

The conclusion of the peer research project coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore a **subsequent phase of research** has focused on the impacts of Covid-19 on Richmond youth, specifically the ways in which Covid-19 has impacted young people since March 2020; how young people are expected to be impacted by Covid-19 over the coming 6-12 months; and the types of support and services which are needed by young people at this time. This second phase involved a desk review looking at the impact of Covid-19; follow-up interviews with peer researchers from the initial youth needs analysis; focus groups with 27 youth practitioners and school staff; and direct consultation with 26 young people.

This executive summary outlines headline findings and recommendations from these two research phases. Detailed findings can be found in the main body of Rocket Science's report in two subsections:

1. [Phase 1: Richmond Youth Needs Analysis, November 2019-February 2020](#)
2. [Phase 2: Covid-19 Impact Research, March 2020-November 2020](#)

## 1.2 Phase 1: Richmond Youth Needs Analysis, November 2019-February 2020

The youth needs analysis gathered perspectives from Richmond youth and stakeholders around issues facing young people and access to youth services. Prior to Covid-19, a range of issues were identified and are summarised below:



Issue	Findings
Community services	Local parks, gyms and libraries were the most commonly used <b>community services</b> amongst young people, however young people wanted a wider variety and more affordable activities
Mental health	Over half of young people were ' <b>somewhat satisfied</b> ' with their lives and a further 30% were 'mostly satisfied'
	Despite this, 84% of young people felt that mental health issues amongst their peers were either 'somewhat common' or 'very common', and 70% of young people were <b>worried</b> about the level of mental health issues amongst their peers
	Young people were most frequently worried about <b>doing well in school/exams</b> and <b>getting a job/having a successful career</b>
Physical health	Young people most frequently described themselves as feeling ' <b>somewhat healthy</b> ', however it was felt that access to affordable gyms would boost physical health
	61% were either 'somewhat' or 'very worried' about <b>drug use amongst peers</b>
Crime and safety	Young people were most concerned about <b>being mugged</b> (69%), <b>sexual harassment or assault</b> (53%) and <b>knife crime</b> (46%) while out during day or night in Richmond
Education, training and employment	Young people were most frequently 'somewhat positive' about their <b>future career prospects</b> (64%)
The internet and social media	Young people most frequently felt that the <b>impact of social media</b> on their lives was 'neutral' (34%). A larger proportion of young people felt that the impact of social media was 'somewhat' or 'very positive' compared to those who felt the impact was 'somewhat' or 'very negative'
	Young people were most frequently concerned with a 'fear of missing out' and 'body image pressures' in relation to their use of social media. 91% felt that they <b>did not</b> need additional support to manage pressures on social media.

## 1.3 Phase 2: Covid-19 Impact Research, March 2020- November 2020

Through follow-up interviews with peer researchers, stakeholder engagement and direct consultation with young people, Rocket Science identified impacts of Covid-19 on young people in Richmond in seven core areas:



- Mental health
- Physical health
- Employment, education and training
- The internet and social media
- Youth voice and action
- Home life
- Friendships and socialising

The impacts within each of these themes are summarised in the table below:

Issue	Findings
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased rates of anxiety and isolation and decreased independence</li><li>• A lack of available mental health support for young people due to high demand and lack of resources</li><li>• Worries about mental health of young people continuing to worsen due to Covid-19</li></ul>
Physical health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Food insecurity increased throughout lockdown</li><li>• Concerns about increased rates of STIs and pregnancies amongst young people due to closure of sexual health services</li><li>• Some young people being pushed to extremes in relation to exercise; either doing none at all or over-exercising</li><li>• There have been challenges around access to physical health services for some young people with disabilities</li></ul>
Employment, education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• During lockdown, the quality of delivery and access to schoolwork varied greatly across schools depending on whether lessons were being given online and whether students had access to technological devices</li><li>• Many young people lost interest in schoolwork and fell behind</li><li>• Students in transition periods, for example those going from primary school to secondary school, were impacted by the closure of schools</li><li>• Young people living in less stable home environments struggled with feelings of isolation and loneliness as a result of school closures</li><li>• Returning to school has been a mixed experience for young people; positive impacts include improved teaching and being able to see friends and negative impacts include the confusing nature of the new rules and the increased infection risk</li><li>• Youth unemployment is high and hopes for future job prospects for young people are low</li></ul>



<b>The internet and social media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The pandemic led to all aspects of life moving online including school, socialising and mental health support</li><li>• Young people spent more time online throughout the pandemic which had negative impacts on mental health for some</li><li>• Some young people were reluctant to engage in activities online meaning they missed out on education and socialising</li><li>• Youth services had to spend time developing online safeguarding and social media policies</li><li>• There has been some push from youth practitioners for face to face support to return in a safe way rather than moving all services online completely</li><li>• Online delivery meant some services were able to reach and support more young people, in comparison to previous face to face services</li><li>• Speaking online was more accessible for some young people because they did not have to engage with people in person</li></ul>
<b>Youth voice and action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many young people engaged with social and political issues during Covid-19. This has included involvement in online campaigns and information sharing around the Black Lives Matter movement, increased engagement with local politics such as council community outreach sessions and high response rates to local surveys about youth mental health.</li></ul>
<b>Home life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Young people's wellbeing has been impacted by those they were living with meaning some benefited from the lockdown e.g. if they were living with supportive families, while others struggled</li><li>• Parents' worries about money, access to food and health were passed on to young people</li><li>• Family breakdown, domestic abuse and increase in homelessness have been negative impacts on young people during Covid-19</li></ul>
<b>Friendships and socialising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being unable to socialise throughout lockdown was difficult for young people</li><li>• Over lockdown young people kept in touch online via social media, however many wanted to return to face to face socialising</li><li>• Even when Covid-19 regulations allowed socialising, some young people were not allowed to do so due to rules set by family members</li></ul>



## 1.4 Recommendations

This section outlines recommendations for both oneRichmond and for the wider landscape of youth provision in the borough. These recommendations have been produced in conjunction with oneRichmond.

### Recommendations:

1. Collaborate with the existing panel of peer researchers and reach out to new young people through local schools and youth organisations. Gather and share youth insights and enable Richmond youth to have a continued voice in shaping local support and services.
2. Support local initiatives which strengthen youth mental health and wellbeing. Identifying and addressing gaps in service provision and providing training for youth practitioners on how best to support young people to manage stress and build resilience.
3. Support initiatives which improve guidance in schools and youth organisations on risky behaviours and address the lack of sexual health advice and concerns around drug use.
4. Support youth worker forums where youth focused organisations can come together to share learning; better understand one another's service offer; and develop programmes.
5. Encourage and support youth organisations which provide affordable opportunities for young people to connect, feel safe and develop confidence,
6. Encourage and support local provision of affordable, youth focused activities and where appropriate raise awareness about available spaces. Identify a partner to develop, maintain and update a 'what's on and where website' so that young people know what services and activities are available in Richmond and have access to information on key topics.
7. Prioritise practical support and activities for the following groups of young people:
  - Young carers – through developing respite and educational support.
  - Young people involved or at risk of becoming involved with the criminal justice system – through developing long-term 1-1 support and mentoring.
8. Encourage sports organisations and businesses that have access to or run sports facilities to offer free spaces and taster sessions to youth organisations/young people.



9. Encourage schools to proactively address educational inequalities through tailored learning support and the provision of 'catch up'.
10. Encourage partnerships to develop programmes of work between employers and schools to provide work experience and opportunities and develop Careers Advice services which emphasise the range of post-school options for young people.
11. Publicise and engage local companies in the provision of apprenticeship and Kickstart programme opportunities for young people.
12. Support organisations to build on the learning from the pandemic around the ways in which they can extend their reach and provide inclusive online activities (e.g. for young people with disabilities or young carers).



# **Phase 1: Richmond Youth Needs Analysis**

**November 2019-February 2020**



## 2. Introduction and methodology

In Autumn 2019, [Rocket Science](#) were commissioned by oneRichmond (a partnership between [Richmond Parish Lands Charity](#) and [Hampton Fund](#)) to conduct a youth needs consultation in Richmond. This work aimed to explore the needs of young people and provision of youth services in Richmond.

An initial desk-based evidence review and workshop with Richmond-based youth practitioners and policymakers preceded the recruitment and training of 14 peer researchers who conducted a total of 222 one-to-one interviews with Richmond youth aged 16-25 in early 2020. These peer research interviews gathered wide-ranging insights about the needs and experiences of young people in the borough. These methodological steps are explained in detail below.

### 2.1 Desk-based evidence review

In October 2019, a desk-based evidence review was conducted to explore:

- The demographic and socio-economic context of the borough, as well as an overview of the challenges young people in the borough face
- An overview of service provision directed towards young people in Richmond
- A review of good practice examples in youth work and services focused on four themes emerging from the research around youth needs in Richmond: improving health and wellbeing, addressing drug and alcohol related harm, addressing gaps in educational attainment, and reducing violence and improving safety.

The findings from the desk review are outlined in [Chapter 3](#).

### 2.2 Stakeholder information event and workshop

On 14 November 2019, Rocket Science held an information event and workshop at Vestry Hall with 43 youth practitioners from the statutory sector and voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Richmond (see full list of organisations in [Appendix A](#)). Rocket Science presented desk research findings and outlined the proposed methodology for the peer research element of the consultation.

Structured discussions were facilitated amongst attendees on the following topics:

- What are the big issues facing young people in Richmond?
- What are the gaps in service provision for young people in Richmond?
- What approaches and interventions are needed?



Participants also provided their views on the methodology for upcoming stages of the youth needs consultation including:

- How to recruit peer researchers?
- Who to consult and how to recruit vulnerable youth for consultation?
- Who to consult for stakeholder focus groups?

The main findings from the stakeholder information event and workshop are presented in [Chapter 4](#).

## 2.3 Peer research

Those who had attended the stakeholder information event and workshop were asked to nominate young people as peer researchers who they felt would be well-suited to a peer researcher role. Short introductory phone calls were held with each nominated researcher to explore their motivations for taking part and current participation in local activities.

Each researcher was required to be aged 16 or older (for safeguarding) and living in Richmond. A diverse sample of peer researchers (in terms of location, occupation, gender etc) was sought and it was specified that each young person would ideally:

- Have an interest in finding out about the perspectives of other young people
- Feel comfortable engaging in informal consultation with other young people
- Benefit from gaining research and communication skills e.g. if this aligned well with their studies.

A total of 14 young people from varying backgrounds and areas of Richmond were recruited as peer researchers in November-December 2019. This group of 16-18 year olds attended two three-hour training sessions in December 2019 and January 2020. The training sessions included the following elements to ensure that the young people were well-equipped to conduct one-to-one interviews:

- An introduction to the oneRichmond youth needs consultation and peer research as a research method
- An exploration of the main research themes which had emerged from the desk review and the workshop with practitioners (including relating to health, crime, education and the internet)
- The development of a co-designed interview topic guide to be used in the peer research: peer researchers were invited to suggest questions and ensure that the language of questions would be easily understood by peers
- Practical interview techniques and practice interviews: including where to conduct interviews, how to manage emotive interviews and who to approach for interview



- Social research ethics training: including safeguarding, consent, confidentiality, data protection, diversity and inclusion and ensuring accuracy.

Following the training, peer researchers were given five weeks to each conduct 20 30-minute interviews. Interview responses were submitted by peer researchers using an online survey platform. A total of 222 interviews were completed and gathered data was analysed by Rocket Science – the analysis of responses is presented in [Chapter 5](#).

## 3. Background and context

This chapter outlines findings from Rocket Science’s October 2019 evidence review which explored pre-Covid challenges faced by young Londoners; the wider Richmond context; youth services in Richmond and good practice in youth services. This evidence review informed initial research areas for exploration by recruited peer researchers.

### 3.1 Challenges faced by young Londoners

Over one quarter of London’s population is under 25<sup>1</sup>. In recent years there has been increasing recognition that if London is to meet challenges - such as population growth, pressures on housing and public services, rapid political change, growing health and wellbeing concerns – young people’s voices and views need to be listened to and acted on.

Research around the priorities and needs of young people has demonstrated several pressing social and economic issues for young people including<sup>2</sup>:

- **Mental health:** Mental health is a growing concern amongst London’s young people as an increasing number suffer from at least one mental health issue. Young people are both aware and vocal about these issues but feel that service provision is inadequate and that schools do little to raise awareness and provide support.
- **Crime:** Young people in London are concerned about rising levels of crime in the city, in particular youth crime and youth knife crime.
- **Education:** Education is viewed as an important issue by London youth and a central part of their daily lives. However, young Londoners feel that school curricula do not cover important themes to help them transition to adulthood, such as money management, environmental issues, democracy and active citizenship.

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<sup>1</sup> [Trust For London, Demography - London's population and geography](#)

<sup>2</sup>This section provides a summary of insight drawn from the two reports [Young People’s Capital of the World? Understanding and responding to young Londoners changing needs](#) and [Young Londoners Priorities for a Sustainable City](#)



- **Poverty and inequality:** Some of young Londoners most pressing concerns are around poverty and inequality. These issues impact on other areas of concern including mental health, crime and community cohesion.
- **Housing:** Young people in London are concerned about the lack of affordable housing across all areas of the city. The lack of inexpensive and reliable private renting is also a pressing issue, as is the impact of regeneration in areas where the young people live. Young Londoners are concerned about the impact of these issues on their ability to continue to live in the communities where they grew up.

## 3.2 The Richmond context

Richmond upon Thames, with its growing population of 201,000 residents and the fifth lowest population density of all London boroughs, is a prosperous and wealthy borough<sup>3</sup>. However, the overall affluence in the borough masks several challenges (detailed below).

Richmond is a borough with a high proportion of young people - just under a third (30%) of residents are aged 0-25.<sup>4</sup> Over half of school pupils in Richmond are White British (59%) and around one quarter are from a Black or minority ethnic group (26%)<sup>5</sup>. There are a notable number of vulnerable young people living in Richmond, including looked after children (105 children in 2018), care leavers (50 children in 2016), young carers (970 in 2018), young people in the criminal justice system (33 young people in 2017), and unaccompanied asylum seekers (30 children in 2016).<sup>6,7</sup>

The borough is ranked lowest out of all London boroughs for emotional and conduct disorders amongst children, child poverty, and rate of domestic violence and abuse<sup>8</sup>.

Despite its affluence, Richmond faces **challenges** impacting youth including:

- **Income inequality:** There are no areas in Richmond ranked in the most deprived decile of local authorities in England and the level of child poverty currently stands at around 9%, the lowest rate out of all London boroughs<sup>9</sup>. However, Richmond displays the fifth highest rate for income inequality amongst all London boroughs.<sup>10</sup> This is as a result of

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<sup>3</sup> [London living 2018 A borough by borough review](#)

<sup>4</sup> DataRich, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Richmond Transformation Plan for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2018

<sup>6</sup> Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2017/18

<sup>7</sup> [Richmond Carers Needs Assessment 2019](#)

<sup>8</sup> A Public Health Approach to Serious Youth Violence, 2019

<sup>9</sup> DataRich, 2019

<sup>10</sup> London's poverty profile - Poverty and inequality data for Richmond, 2019



the wide variations in affluence between areas, with for example only 2% of children living in low income families in Teddington and 29% in the adjacent area of Hampton.<sup>11</sup>

- **Educational inequality:** Richmond displays higher than London average educational outcomes amongst its more advantaged young people. However, Richmond is also one of the London boroughs with the highest educational inequality amongst its young people, an issue that is evidenced across educational stages.<sup>12</sup> During early years education, the rate of children eligible for free school meals in Richmond achieving a good level of development<sup>13</sup> (57%) is lower than the London average.<sup>14</sup> Richmond is ranked 6th lowest of the 32 London boroughs for GCSE attainment of free school meal pupils and displays the highest GCSE attainment gap of all London boroughs between disadvantaged school children and those not facing disadvantage (31% point gap).<sup>15</sup>
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Richmond displays the fourth worst average mental wellbeing score for 15 year-olds in London and the third highest rate for hospital admission due to self-harm amongst those aged 10-24 years<sup>16</sup>. Richmond has the highest proportion amongst London boroughs, and tenth highest nationally, of young people engaging in three or more risky behaviours (including smoking, drinking, and drugs) (21.5%).<sup>17</sup> In Richmond the proportion of 15 year-olds who have tried cannabis (19%) and of those who binge drink (25%) is the highest in London, while smoking amongst 15 year olds (14%) is twice the London average.<sup>18</sup>
- **Crime and safety:** The borough of Richmond is one of the safest boroughs in London, displaying the third lowest crime rate (122 per 10,000 population), with the top three crimes being theft, violence against the person, and vehicle offences.<sup>19</sup> Despite the overall low levels of crime in Richmond, youth crime has become an increasing concern in recent years. In 2014 only 1% of public opinion perceived gangs to be a problem in the borough, while in 2017 9% did, and the rate of people who perceive knife crime to be a problem increased from 3% to 17%.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> DataRich, 2019

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> The Good Level of Development (GLD) measure describes the expected level of educational achievement in the prime areas of learning and in the specific areas of literacy and mathematics at foundation stage

<sup>14</sup> DataRich, 2019

<sup>15</sup> London's poverty profile - Poverty and inequality data for Richmond, 2019

<sup>16</sup> Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2017/18

<sup>17</sup> Children and Young People's Needs Assessment, 2017

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> DataRich, 2019

<sup>20</sup> Gang Crime and Serious Youth Violence Dashboard, 2017



### 3.3 Youth services in Richmond

This section provides an overview of service provision for young people in Richmond, including in music and arts, sports, physical and mental health, and coaching and mentoring.

**Youth clubs:** There are six principal council-funded youth clubs around Richmond which offer a mix of sports, music and creative activities, workshops, and health and employment support services. The majority of youth clubs are concentrated in the more deprived areas of the borough (Ham, Hampton, Barnes and Mortlake)<sup>21</sup>:

**VCS services:** Several VCS organisations provide services for young people in Richmond. These services provide both practical support and information and cluster around four main themes:

- **Skills and learning:** For example, [Spear Coaching and Mentoring](#) is a 6-week coaching programme to help 16 to 24 year olds who are not in education, employment or training get into work by improving their confidence, motivation and communications skills and providing intensive employability support. [HITZ](#) is a sports-based programme supporting young people to improve their maths and English, develop life skills and get qualifications and work experience
- **Disabilities and additional needs** – For example, the Richmond and Kingston [‘BuddyUp’](#) programme by the charity AID for young people with disabilities or additional needs matches clients with a young volunteer (‘buddy’) to enable them to develop independence and confidence through socialisation and involvement in community activities
- **Mental, sexual and emotional health** – For example, charities [Off the Record](#), [Mind](#), and [Loved Valued Able](#) provide various activities and workshops. Off the Record provides a drop-in counselling, information, and sexual health service for young people aged 11–24 in Richmond, while Loved Valued Able teaches relationship and sex education (RSE) in schools and other youth settings. Mind provides a series of workshops and peer support training to support young people struggling with anxiety, low mood and self-esteem or anger management issues in schools, colleges and youth centres
- **Recreational and creative activities** – For example, [The Basement Door](#) is a charity founded around musical events to provide a safe space for young people to socialise while developing the skills and confidence to transition to adulthood. [Kick Academies](#) are a church-based initiative delivering football and dance coaching with the aim of helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds fulfil their potential and access opportunities.

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<sup>21</sup> [https://www.richmond.gov.uk/youth\\_clubs](https://www.richmond.gov.uk/youth_clubs)



## 3.4 Good practice in youth services

This section provides evidence on good practice in youth services including relating to improving health and wellbeing, tackling addictions, addressing gaps in educational attainment, and reducing violence and improving safety.

A range of UK projects were reviewed and good practice examples were selected based on the following criteria<sup>22</sup>:

1. Evidence of impact and positive outcomes amongst young beneficiaries
2. Relevance to the challenges young people in Richmond face
3. Active engagement of young people in designing and delivering the project
4. Adaptability to other contexts outside the areas where the projects were implemented.

Common approaches to youth work and engagement emerged across projects, and good practice examples have been grouped according to each type of approach as follows:

### Sports-based projects

Sports-based projects engage young people through sports and physical activities with the aim of providing wider positive outcomes. These can be around improved learning and skills, confidence and wellbeing, or reduced risk for vulnerable youths to get involved in harmful behaviours such as violence.

From the review, it emerged that key features of successful sports-based projects are:

- Providing an activity that resonates with young people's interests and lifestyle
- Linking the sport to a set of activities with a wider purpose – e.g. employability support, literacy, socialisation, learning new skills
- Developing diverse engagement methods, which are not limited to sports but encourage young people to engage through learning, discussion, and workshop activities
- Making participation voluntary to empower young people and help them build motivation
- Recruiting inspirational coaches and mentors with a deep understanding or lived experiences of the issues that resonate with young people.

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<sup>22</sup> Good practice case studies can be found in Appendix B



## Community outreach projects

Community outreach projects deliver interventions outside the traditional settings of schools, youth clubs, and youth services to engage with young people in the places where they feel most comfortable and are more likely to engage.

From the review, it emerged that key features of successful community outreach projects are:

- Identifying the places that matter most to young people, where they feel comfortable, socialise, and are less likely to feel defensive or hostile
- Providing initial engagement that is quick and effective, to minimise risks of young people feeling overwhelmed or threatened
- Co-designing interventions together with the young people, listening to their views around their needs and what they feel is lacking in the community
- Delivering interventions in community settings and through informal means – eg art, music, interactive workshops, apps, brief interviews
- Developing activities that take place in the community, to improve young people's understanding of the community and encourage them to reconnect with it.

## Peer-led projects

Peer-led projects engage young people by training other young people to deliver interventions with the aim of encouraging peer learning and support.

From the review, it emerged that key features of successful peer-led projects are:

- Focusing on issues and themes with high stigma or where it is felt communication with adults is difficult or conflictual – eg sexual health, mental health, drug use, crime
- Ensuring all young people are involved as equal partners and beneficiaries in the project
- Providing training and activities that develop confidence, skills, and knowledge in an interactive and engaging way – eg public speaking, event design and management, conducting fieldwork
- Empowering young people to design, deliver, and manage a project independently to encourage a sense of ownership of the project and deeper understanding of the issues it addresses
- Deliver projects in settings that are familiar to all young people involved and where they feel comfortable to socialise, share experiences, and support each other.

## Alternative learning projects

Alternative learning projects deliver educational projects in settings outside of school, through alternative teaching beyond school subjects, as well as through extra-curricular activities, to improve educational outcomes amongst vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.



From the review, it emerged that key features of successful alternative learning projects are:

- Developing strong partnerships with schools, to identify students in need and map their needs
- Creating a partnership network with local VCS organisations to coordinate interventions, activities, and specialist support for the young people
- Providing learning resources that schools and families cannot provide – eg skills workshops, specialist books, technology
- Focusing on knowledge and skills development beyond traditional school subjects – eg leadership skills, critical thinking, IT skills, creative skills
- Providing individualised, person-centred support tailored to each young person's differing needs.

## 4. Stakeholder engagement

### 4.1 Information event and workshop findings

On the 14th November 2019, Rocket Science facilitated an information event and workshop at Vestry Hall with youth practitioners and other stakeholders. The purpose of this event was to share findings from Rocket Science's desk review, gather views on the needs and experiences of Richmond's young people and allow attendees to shape the upcoming stages of the research (peer research, consultation with vulnerable youth, stakeholder focus groups). There were 43 attendees from a range of organisations from both the statutory sector and VCS (a full list and description of these can be found in [Appendix A.](#))

Discussions were then facilitated amongst attendees on the following topics:

- What are the big issues facing young people in Richmond?
- What are the gaps in service provision for young people in Richmond?
- What approaches and interventions are needed?

#### 4.1.1 Issues facing young people in Richmond

Stakeholders suggested there were several key issues facing young people in Richmond relating to mental health, school, the internet and social media, family life, crime, disabilities and LGBTQ+ focused spaces and service provision:

- **Mental health:** Mental health issues were considered to be prevalent amongst young people in Richmond, including in relation to school and their experiences using the internet and social media



- **School:** Young people experienced heightened anxiety in relation to feelings of pressure to achieve educational success. There was a perceived lack of one-to-ones between school staff and pupils to consider their emotional needs
- **Internet and social media:** Young experience several challenges in relation to their use of the internet and social media. As the internet is so easily accessible, this could lead to young people preferring to stay at home rather than going out to socialise. Despite this, there was awareness amongst attendees that there can be a lack of understanding amongst adults about the positive elements of internet and social media use for young people
- **Family life:** Attendees identified issues impacting young people in relation to family life such as dealing with family breakdown and a lack of support for young carers. There was perceived difference in the extent to which parents and families were in a position to identify and enable access to youth services for their children.
- **Crime:** There can be a gap between perceptions of crime and levels of crime. Some attendees expressed that campaigns such as knife crime awareness projects could create fear amongst young people. When discussing local issues relating to muggings, it was suggested that young people were experiencing boredom and that this could lead to engagement in anti-social behaviour.
- **Disabilities and/or additional needs:** Issues with public service provision to support young people with disabilities and/or additional needs were raised, and it was suggested that some families were turning to private services. Young people with disabilities and/or additional needs may have needs relating to their mental health and it was emphasised that services should consider this when designing provision.
- **LGBTQ+ provision:** There was a general lack of LGBTQ+ focused provision and as a result, a lack of spaces where LGBTQ+ young people feel they belong and are valued.

#### 4.1.2 Gaps in youth services in Richmond

Workshop attendees explored gaps in service and support provision in Richmond, outlining the following perceived gaps and suggested interventions:

- **Spaces for young people:** One of the main points highlighted in this discussion was a lack of spaces for young people to go to 'hang out' – to spend time with other young people without structured activity. Due to this young people often spend time in parks, however due to the lack of lighting this could be dangerous
- **Support and outreach work:** A lack of one-to-one support and mentoring (including informal peer support) for young people in Richmond was perceived by attendees. Youth support workers should ideally have lived experience of the issues being explored with young people and understanding around how young people communicate. A lack of outreach work for young people with disabilities was raised as a gap in services, as was a lack of benefits advice. It was hoped that one-to-one support with a focus on wellbeing would help young people to develop emotional resilience and understand methods of self-care



- **Mental health:** Attendees commented on long waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), suggesting that this could lead to gaps in service provision for young people with mental health issues.
- **Sexual health:** Attendees felt there was a gap in education on sexual health, as well as limited sexual health services available to young people
- **Support for families:** It was highlighted that there were gaps in services and support for parents with children experiencing mental and/or physical health issues and those with children who have involvement with the criminal justice system
- **Knowledge-sharing about local services and support:** Improvements to knowledge-sharing about local services were sought, for example organisations using one online database to provide information about youth-related services
- **Support at school and college:** Tailored support was particularly important for pupils at key transition points including year 6, final year of primary school; year 11, GCSE year; year 13, final year of secondary school. Support could help with the pressure pupils experience at these stages including exam stress and having to make decisions about their next steps. It was also suggested that schools and colleges in Richmond could usefully strengthen their relationships with one another to enable the sharing of good practice in relation to understanding and addressing the needs of young people.

Issues facing existing services were also explored. Some services were seen to be experiencing reduced funding due to budget cuts and a decrease in statutory provision of services was discussed. It was also said support was often only provided at the point of crisis, rather than preventatively through early-intervention initiatives. There was a perception that young people could usefully be supported to have a greater say in the design and delivery of youth services. Attendees expressed that there could be duplication of services between the statutory sector and VCS and this could waste resources and time.

Stakeholders were asked to input into the methodology for upcoming research stages. Information on this can be found in Appendix C.

## 5. Peer research findings

This chapter includes findings from 222 30-minute peer research interviews which were conducted in January-February 2020. Throughout this section, the following frequency terms are utilised:

- 'Few' means between 5 and 9%
- 'Some' means between 10 and 19%
- 'Many' means between 20 and 49%
- 'Most' or 'majority' means 50 to 74%



- 'Large majority' or 'broad agreement' means 75 to 89%
- Consensus means 90%+

## 5.1 Respondent profile

This section outlines the profile of the 222 peer research respondents:

- All respondents were aged between 16-25, 68% (150) were under 18 years old
- 28% (63) of respondents were from an ethnic minority<sup>23</sup> background, this compares with 14% of Richmond residents identifying themselves as being part of an ethnic minority in the 2011 Census<sup>24</sup>
- 65% (145) of respondents identified as female and 32% (72) as male, with 1% (2) indicating they are non-binary and a further 1% (3) preferring not to say
- 14% (32) of respondents identified as having either a disability or long-term condition. Of this group, 54% (19) had dyslexia, dyspraxia or dyscalculia
- 85% (188) of respondents lived with their parents, 8% (18) lived independently, and 3% (7) each lived with their grandparents or with carers respectively
- 87% (193) of respondents were studying, of which 55% (121) attended school or sixth form.

## 5.2 Community services and activities

### Young people most frequently access local parks, gyms and libraries in their community

A local park was the most commonly cited community activity or service used by both male and female respondents in the previous 12 months with 83% (184) of respondents having accessed these. This was followed by a gym (52%, 116) and a library (36%, 80).

Figure 1 below illustrates that there was a noteworthy gender gap (larger than 10% difference) for only two activities: 12% more females selected a library than males, and 23% more males chose sports grounds when compared to females. In contrast to the gender gap in use of sports grounds/centres, the gap for using a gym was only 2%.

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<sup>23</sup> Ethnic minority background includes; Any other Asian background, Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, Arab, Asian / Asian British – Bangladeshi, Asian / Asian British – Chinese, Asian / Asian British – Indian, Asian / Asian British – Pakistani, Black / Black British – African, Black / Black British – Caribbean, Mixed/Multiple-White & Asian, Mixed/Multiple-White & Black African, Mixed/Multiple-White & Black Caribbean, Other (please specify) and White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller'

<sup>24</sup> London Borough of Richmond upon Thames census Borough Profile – April 2013 - [https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/14639/census\\_borough\\_profile\\_2013.pdf](https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/14639/census_borough_profile_2013.pdf)



### A large majority of young people had used a local park in the last 12 months

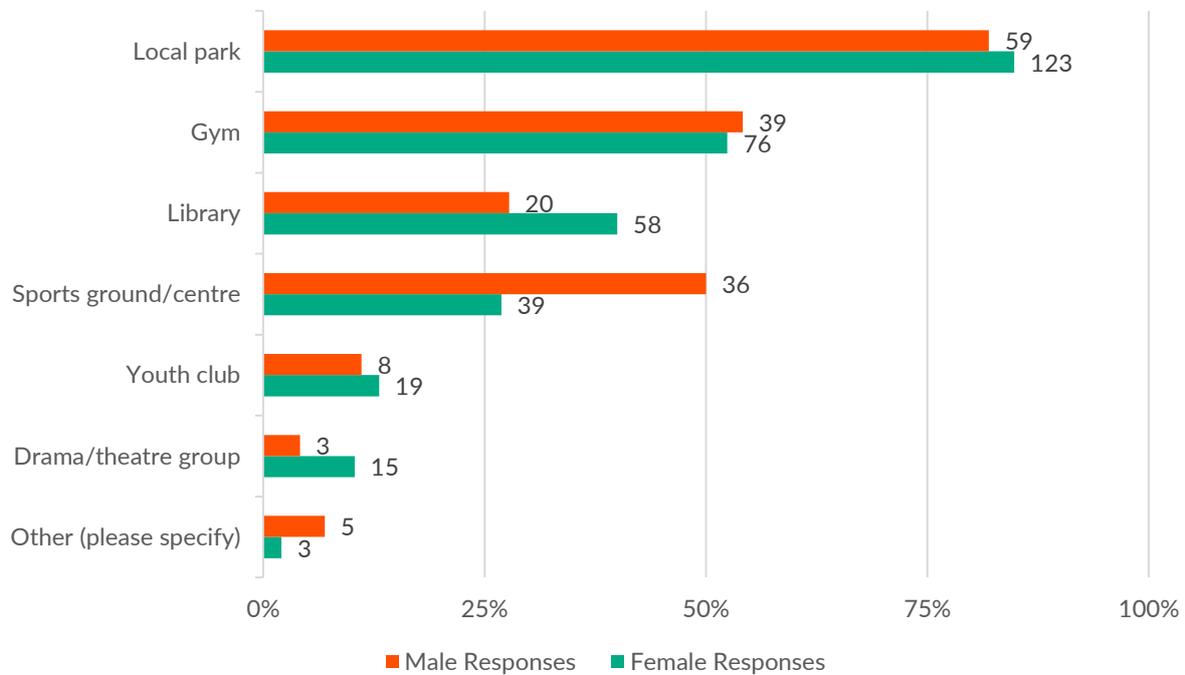


Figure 1: 'What local community activities/services have you used in the past 12 months? (Please select all that apply)'

Young people sought improved access to affordable activities including sports facilities and gyms

23% (51) of respondents reported that there was something they wanted to do in their community in the last 12 months but **could not**. The mostly commonly given reason for respondents not being able to do what they wanted in the community was that the **activity or facility was not available**. When respondents were asked what they would change about the community activities/services available in the borough of Richmond, key themes included improved access to sports facilities and gyms, increasing the availability and affordability of youth services and activities, and improving the advertising of existing services including information about what's on and where.

## 5.3 Mental health

Mental health issues were perceived as common amongst young people and a majority were worried about their peers' mental health

81% (179) of respondents described themselves as either 'somewhat satisfied' (51%, 113) or 'mostly satisfied' (30%, 66) with their lives. When asked how **common** they believed mental

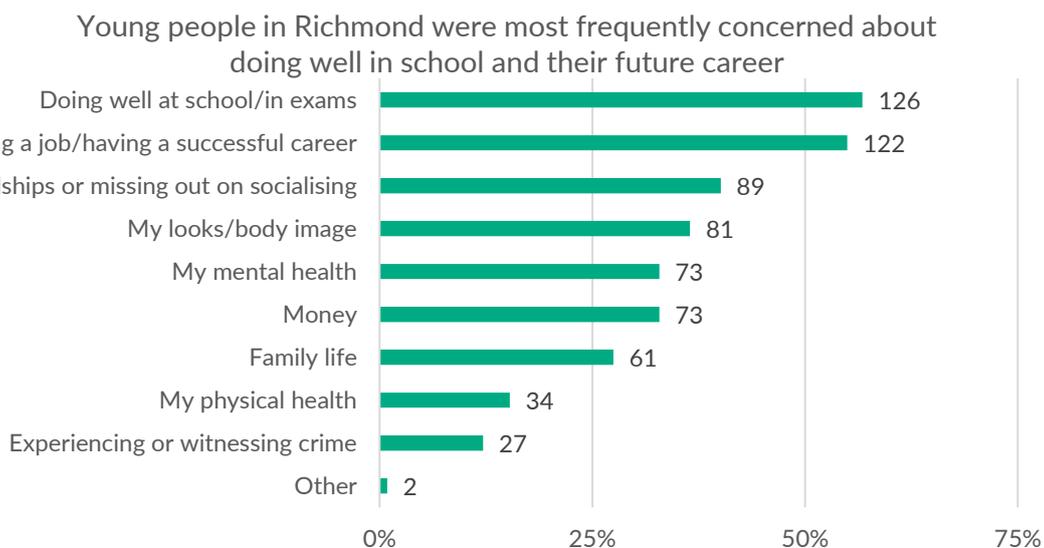


health issues were amongst their friends/peers, 85% (186) responded either 'somewhat common' (43%, 94) or 'very common' (42%, 92). 70% of respondents expressed that they were **worried about the level of mental health issues amongst their peers.**

During the training sessions, peer researchers expressed a view that more than half of their peers experience mental health issues, but that some would not disclose this. Peer researchers felt that there was still a stigma around mental health and young people might be reluctant to utilise mental health services in school as there was a perception that accessing professional help was an acknowledgement of a more serious problem. It was explained that amongst peers, a common coping mechanism was laughing and joking about issues relating to mental health – this could make it hard to know when professional help was needed.

When asked about their **main worries**, respondents most frequently identified 'doing well at school/in exams' (60%, 126) and 'getting a job/having a successful career' (56%, 122). Only 33% (73) identified their mental health as a concern compared with 70% (153) who were concerned about the mental health of their peers.

During training, peer researchers outlined exam stress as particularly impactful on mental health – for example, one peer researcher stated: "we shouldn't be crying from stress over our GCSEs." It was felt that pressure for school success came from both teachers and families. In line with 'getting a job/having a successful career' being a concern for interviewees, peer researchers explained their subject choices at university were often shaped by future career prospects and potential earnings, rather than enjoyment or interest.

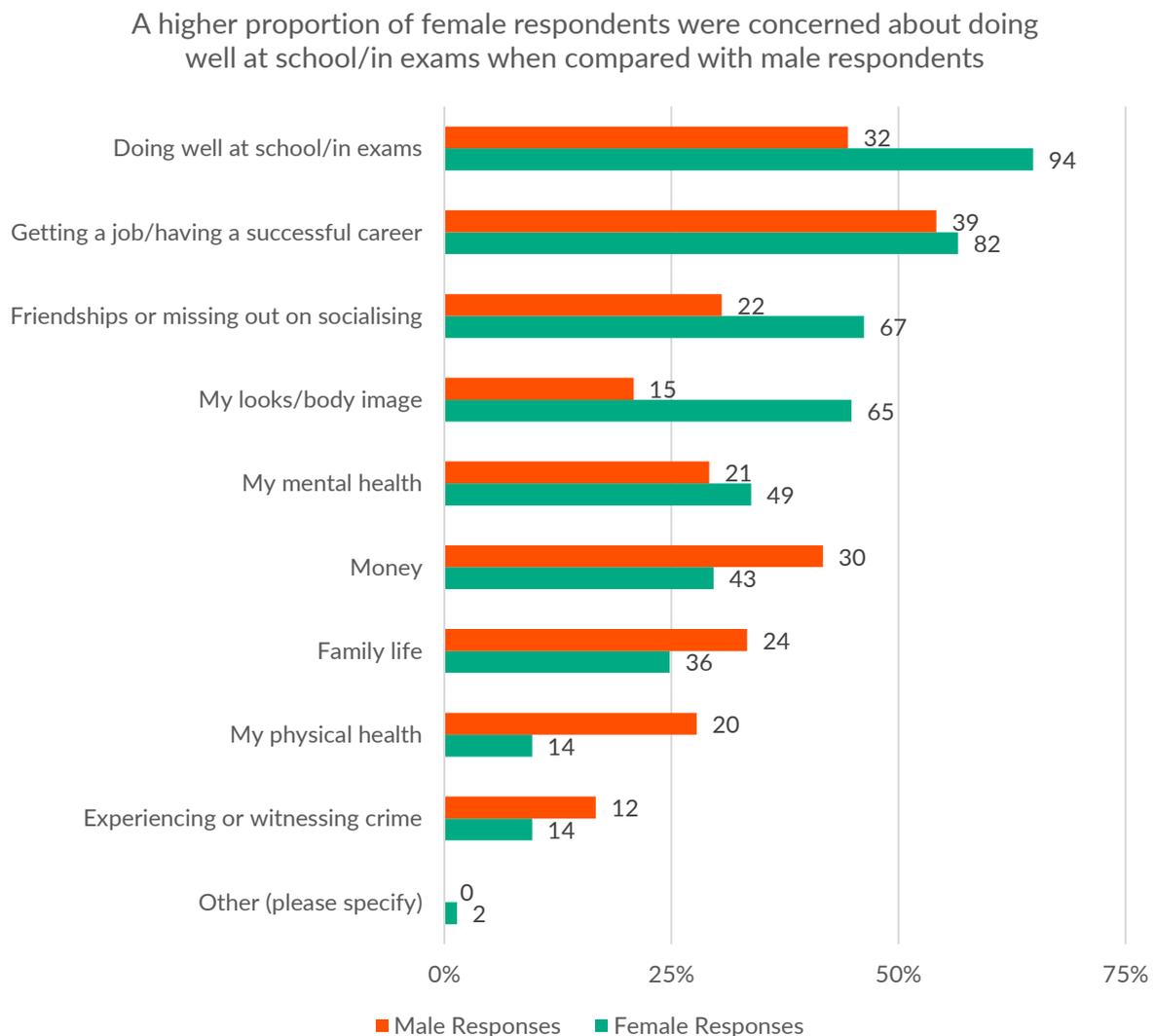


**Figure 2: 'Which of the following, if any, do you worry most about? (Please select up to, but no more than, three options)'**

When broken down by gender identity there were some differences between male and female responses (see Figure 3 below). A larger proportion of female respondents selected 'doing well



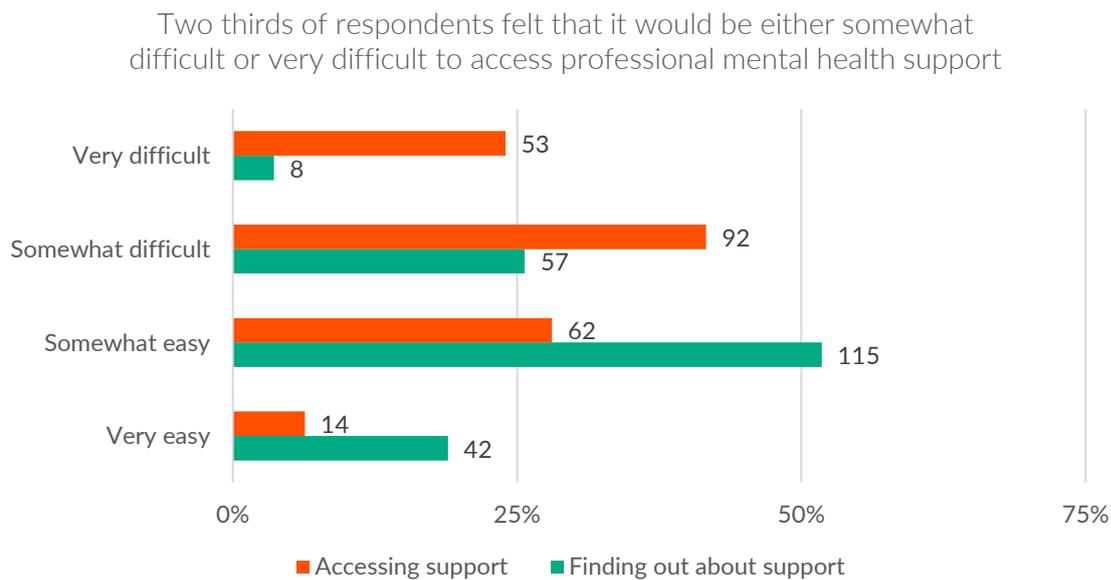
in school' and 'my looks/body image' as concerns compared with male respondents. A larger proportion of male respondents selected 'money' and 'my physical health' as concerns when compared with female respondents.



**Figure 3: 'Which of the following, if any, do you worry most about? (Please select up to, but no more than, three options)' by gender identity**

Respondents felt that finding out about mental health support was easier than accessing it

Respondents were asked about how easy they felt it would be to **find out about** and **access** professional mental health support should they need to. While 70% of respondents felt it would be either 'very easy' or 'somewhat easy' to **find out about** support, 66% felt that it would be 'somewhat difficult' or 'very difficult' to **access** support.



**Figure 4: 'How easy do you think it would be to find out about and access professional mental health support if you needed to?'**

## 5.4 Physical health

### Young people are generally positive about their physical health

When asked about how physically healthy they felt, 73% (161) responded with 'somewhat healthy' (55%, 122) or 'very healthy' (18%, 39). Many respondents (38%, 85) felt that there **were** activities or services that they would like to gain access to which could improve their physical health – suggestions included free and affordable gyms or sports facilities, and age-specific exercise classes.

### A majority of respondents were either somewhat or very worried about young people's drug use

Young people in Richmond were most frequently **worried about drug use**, in comparison to alcohol use, vaping or smoking cigarettes. Despite this concern, over half of respondents (51%, 114) indicated that they had received either 'somewhat' or 'very helpful' information/advice relating to drugs. Peer researchers reported during training that although they had received advice around drugs at school, this was lacking in certain aspects. It was felt that education was overly focused on urging young people not to take drugs rather than equipping them with knowledge to improve safety should they or their peers choose to use drugs.

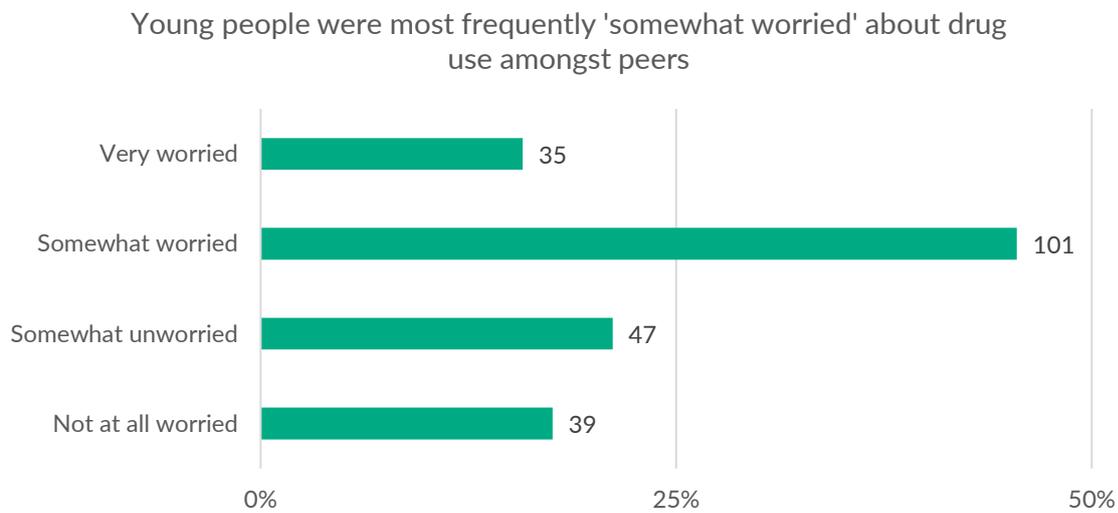


Figure 5: 'How worried are you about young people in your area engaging in the following: Drug use'

During training sessions, peer researchers expressed that drug use was common amongst their peers, with people being seen as “innocent” if they had not taken drugs by the age of 16. Peer researchers stated that taking drugs, drinking alcohol and smoking was normalised and that drugs were easily accessible as they were sold on social media platforms such as Snapchat. As put by one peer researcher, drugs are “one text away”.

In contrast to worry about drugs, 43% (94) of respondents described themselves as ‘not at all worried’ about **vaping**. 68% (151) of respondents stated that they had **not received any information or advice** about vaping.

This was supported by the views of the peer researchers who expressed in training sessions that the impacts of vaping on health were relatively unknown amongst young people.

## 5.5 Crime and safety

### Young people felt safer when in Richmond compared to other parts of London

97% (215) of respondents stated that they felt safe when out **in Richmond** during the day, while 62% (138) felt safe at night.



### Young people feel more safe in the day and in Richmond

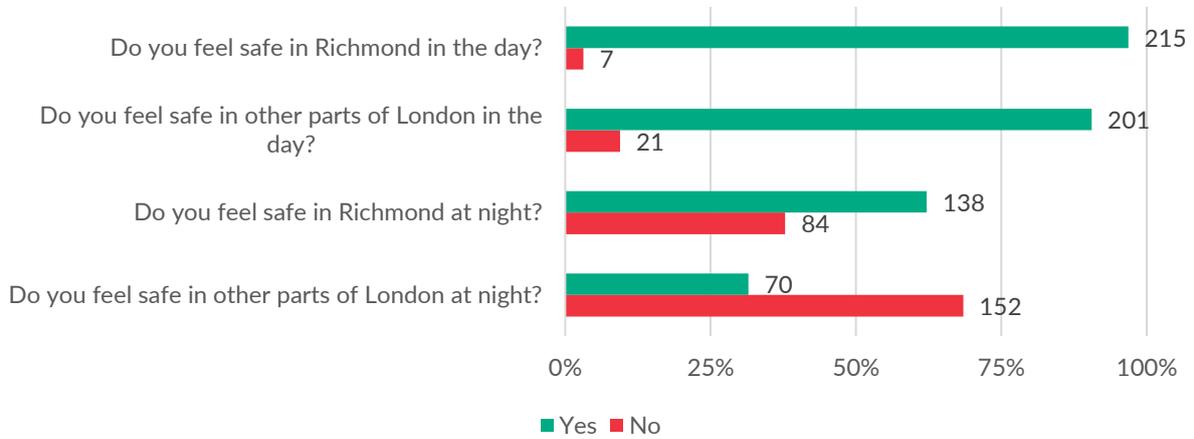


Figure 6: 'Do you mostly feel safe when you're out in Richmond Borough?' and 'Do you mostly feel safe when you're out in other parts of London outside Richmond Borough?'

When broken down by gender identity, female respondents less frequently stated that they 'mostly feel safe' in Richmond when compared to male respondents, both during the day and night:

### Females less frequently described mostly feeling safe, when compared to male respondents

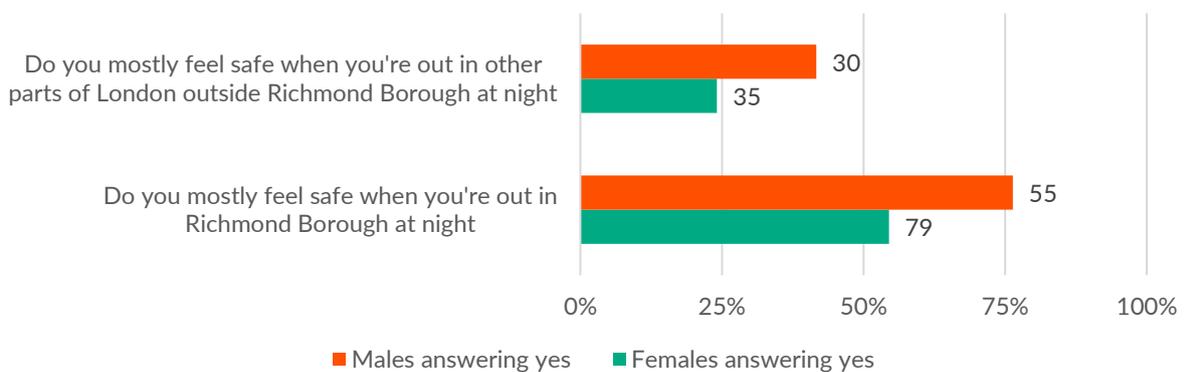


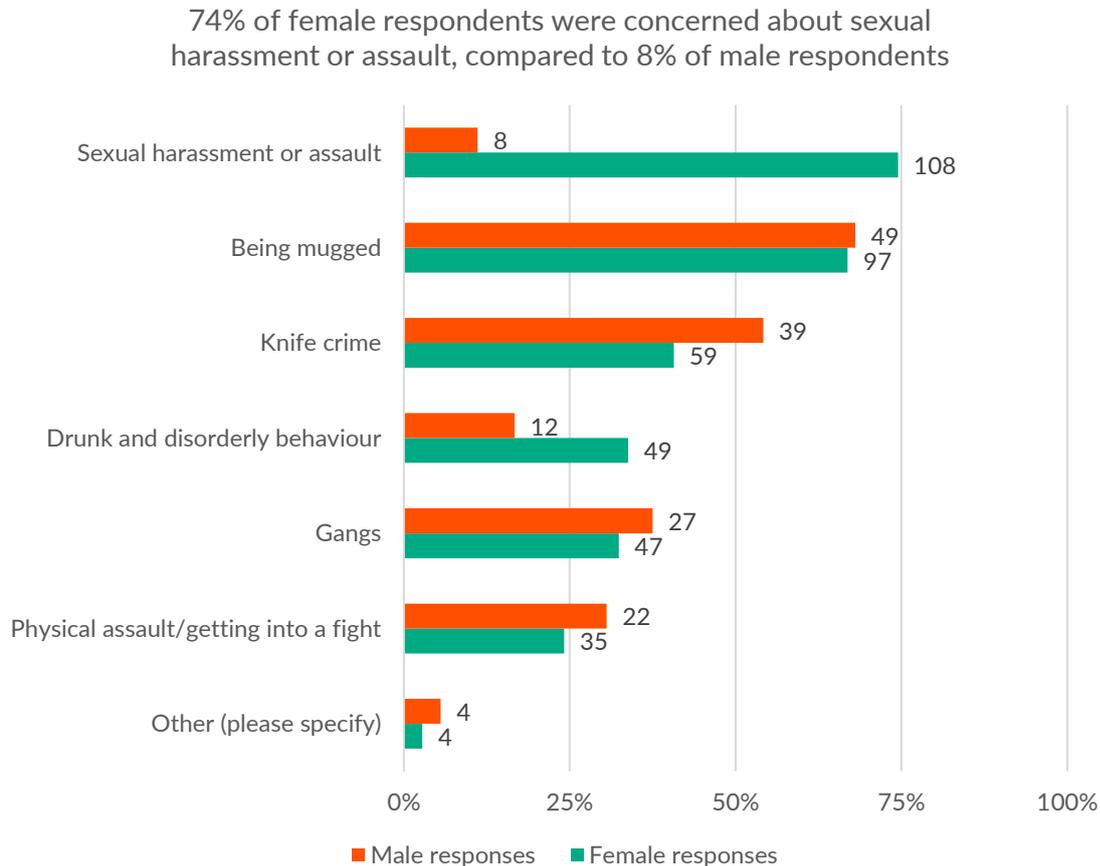
Figure 7: 'Do you mostly feel safe when you're out in Richmond Borough?' and 'Do you mostly feel safe when you're out in other parts of London outside Richmond Borough?' at night by gender identity

### 'Being mugged' and 'sexual harassment or assault' were the most frequent concerns of young people when out and about in Richmond

When asked about what they were concerned about when out and about within the borough of Richmond, 69% (149) identified **being mugged** whilst 53% (116) said **sexual harassment or assault**. When broken down by gender there was a difference between male and female



concern regarding sexual harassment or assault: 74% (108) of female respondents identified that they were concerned about sexual harassment or assault, whereas 11% (8) of male respondents expressed this concern.



**Figure 8: 'Which of the following, if any, are you concerned about when you are out in Richmond Borough during the day or night? (Please tick all that apply)' by gender**

When discussing knife crime, a peer researcher stated during training: “people don’t fight with fists anymore”, alluding to the prevalence of young people carrying knives.

### A majority of young people knew someone who had been a victim of crime in the past 12 months

65% (145) of respondents stated that they **knew someone** who had been a victim of crime in the last 12 months but only 26% (57) identified that they had **personally been** a victim in the same timeframe.



## 5.6 Education, training and employment

Young people were generally positive about their future career prospects and described feeling pressure

Respondents felt positive about their future career prospects: 78% (174) described feeling either “somewhat positive” (64%, 143) or “very positive” (14%, 31).

Respondents expressed **feeling pressure to achieve success**: 72% (158) of respondents described the level of pressure to achieve education, employment or training success as ‘somewhat high’ (38%, 85) or ‘very high’ (33%, 73). When asked what could help to reduce pressure, respondents described a desire for:

- More support with revision
- Improved advice on how to cope with exam-related stress; mental health support; and help to achieve a good work/life balance
- Access to work experience opportunities
- More information about a wider variety of post-school career/training options.

Schools and colleges were **mostly considered supportive**. 64% (142) of respondents described feeling ‘somewhat supported’ (44%, 97) or ‘very supported’ (20%, 45) when making decisions about education, training or employment. Respondents most frequently found out about education, training and employment opportunities through their school or college’s careers advice service (43%, 95) or an online search (38%, 85).

During training sessions, peer researchers highlighted the need for personalised careers advice which considers individual circumstances and ambitions (in contrast to general information and support).

**A majority of young people felt it would be either somewhat or very easy to secure a place at college, while only 8% felt this way about getting a full-time job**

When asked how easy they felt it would be to **secure access to various opportunities**, a higher proportion of respondents felt it would be either ‘somewhat’ or ‘very easy’ to attend college when compared to other opportunities. Only 8% (18) felt that it would be ‘somewhat’ or ‘very easy’ to gain a full-time job.



72% of respondents felt it would be either somewhat or very easy to secure a place at college

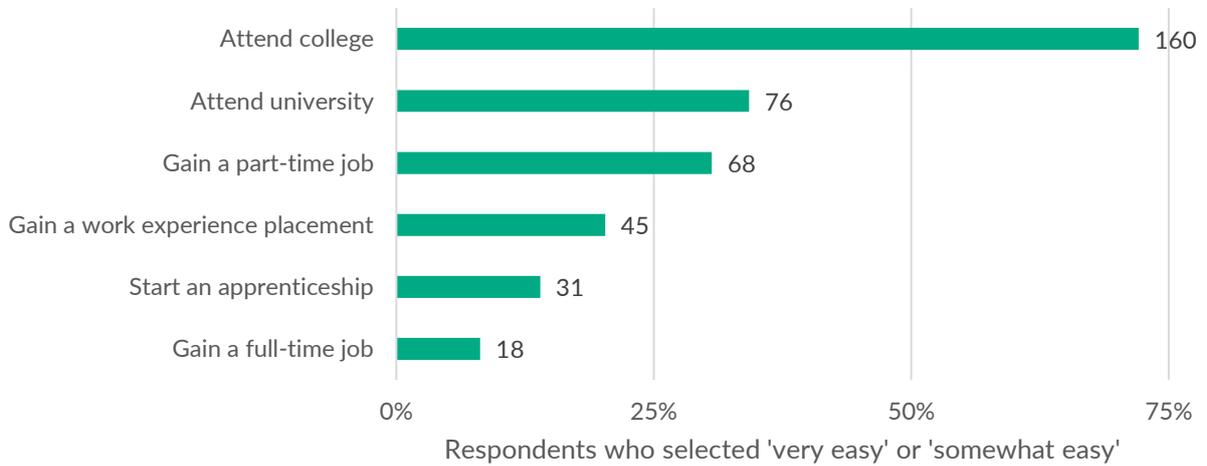


Figure 9: 'How easy is it to secure a place to: attend college, attend university, gain a part-time job, gain a work experience placement, start and apprenticeship, gain a full-time job?'

## 5.7 The internet and social media

Young people are, on balance, more positive than negative about the impact of social media on their lives

When asked about the **impact of social media on their lives**, around a third of respondents described this as 'neutral' (34%, 76).

A third of respondents describe the impact of social media on their lives as 'neutral'

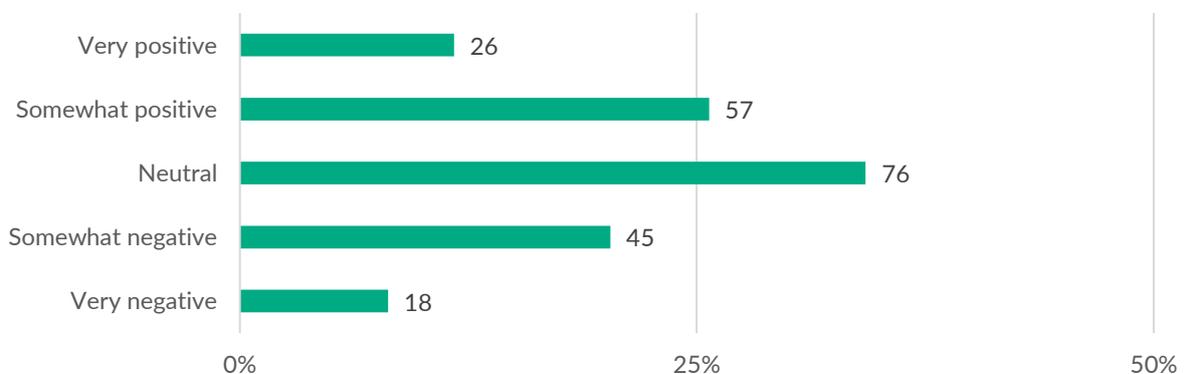


Figure 10: 'On balance, how would you rate the impact of social media on your life?'



However, when asked about the **time they spend on social media**, 56% (124) stated that they “want to spend less time on social media”.

When asked about concerns relating to the use of social media, respondents most frequently described a ‘fear of missing out’ (64%, 143) and 57% (127) specified ‘body image pressures’. A smaller proportion of respondents described concern around:

- Having enough followers/likes (21%, 45)
- Online bullying (19%, 40)
- Seeing explicit/offensive/inappropriate content (15%, 32).

Peer researchers explained during training sessions that seeing extreme content on social media was normalised amongst some of their peers, for example one peer researcher voiced that despite social media platforms “blurring out” extreme content, it just takes “one tap” to see it.

A large majority described feeling confident that if they had a negative experience when using social media they **would know what to do about it** (82%, 181). Peer researchers expressed during training that young people are used to social media and are “smart with it” despite its use being often seen as somewhat problematic by adults.

## 5.8 Living in Richmond

Respondents were asked to describe the best thing about living in Richmond as a young person and one thing they would want to change about living in Richmond. Prominent themes in responses are summarised below:

### The best thing about living in Richmond as a young person:

- Parks and open spaces e.g.:
  - “Lots of open spaces and parks e.g. Richmond Park and the river”
  - “Love being close to nature”
- Living in a safe area e.g.:
  - “Relatively safe compared to other London boroughs”
  - “Generally a safe place to be”
- Ease of access/proximity to central London e.g.:
  - “Being ‘outside’ of London but still being able to easily access central London”
  - “Close to central London without the same pressures”
- Good public transport e.g.:
  - “The transport – can get anywhere”
  - “The train stations and buses”



- Things to do e.g. restaurants, pubs and shops e.g.:
  - “Close proximity to different opportunities, shops, entertainment, lots of services”
  - “Good places to go for coffee and shopping, good variety of leisure activities”

#### One thing to change about living in Richmond:

- Increased **affordability** of places to eat, shops, accommodation and gyms e.g.:
  - “More gyms that are cheaper”
  - “Cheaper places to eat and drink for people my age”
- More help and support for people experiencing **homelessness** e.g.:
  - “Action and support countering homelessness”
- More **events and activities** which are targeted at young people e.g.:
  - “More events tailored to teenagers, that don’t involve alcohol/drugs”
  - “More less expensive activities for young people to do such as theatre groups”
- Improved reliability and frequency of **transport** e.g.:
  - “Make public transport more reliable”
- More **local spaces** for young people to hang out e.g.:
  - “More places for young people to also hang out safely, not only in the day, but also at night”.



# **Phase 2: Covid-19 Impact Research**

**March 2020-November 2020**



## 6. Introduction and methodology

The conclusion of the peer research project coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore a subsequent phase of research has focused on the impacts of Covid-19 on Richmond youth, specifically:

- The ways in which Covid-19 has impacted young people since March 2020 e.g. impacts relating to health and wellbeing; access to education, training and employment; and time spent online
- The ways in which young people are expected to be impacted by Covid-19 over the coming 6-12 months
- The types of support and services which are needed by young people at this time.

These research areas were explored through a continuation of previous research themes and new themes where relevant including:

- **Previous research themes:** Mental health; physical health; education, training and employment; the internet and social media
- **New themes relevant to the Covid-19 context:** Home life; friendships and socialising; youth voice and action.

Covid-19 has impacted many different elements of youth experience. To capture these impacts, the following methods were utilised:

- A desk review of Richmond specific, London-wide and national literature looking at the impact of Covid-19 on young people
- Follow-up interviews with five of the peer researchers from the initial youth needs analysis
- Focus groups with 27 youth practitioners and school staff from the local council, Achieving for Children, twelve youth organisations and three local schools
- Direct consultation with 26 young people through focus groups and interviews. This aspect of the consultation aimed to include vulnerable young people, particularly groups that were not included in peer research findings including young carers and young people accessing local mental health services.

These stages are explained in detail below.

### 6.1 Desk review

Rocket Science conducted a desk review of Richmond-specific, London-wide and national literature on the impact of Covid-19 on young people. The key themes that were explored were:



- Youth physical health
- Youth mental health e.g. anxiety, eating disorders, isolation
- Education, employment and skills
- Crime and safety
- Sleep and routines
- Access to the internet/social media
- Poverty and access to food

Sources included:

#### Richmond data:

- [Healthwatch Richmond: Health, Care & Wellbeing Experiences in Richmond During Coronavirus](#)
- [London Borough of Richmond upon Thames: Coronavirus residents survey feedback](#)
- [London Borough of Richmond upon Thames: Richmond Coronavirus Survey for Businesses](#)
- [London Borough of Richmond upon Thames: Annual Report of the Director Public Health](#)

#### London and national data:

- [UK Government: COVID-19: mental health and wellbeing surveillance report; Children and young people](#)
- [National Youth Agency: Vulnerable Young People: COVID-19 Response](#)
- [UK Youth Movement: The impact of COVID-19 on young people and the youth sector](#)
- [Institute for Fiscal Studies: COVID-19 and the career prospects of young people](#)
- [Business in the Community: COVID-19 and youth unemployment](#)
- [Young Minds: Coronavirus: Impact on Young People with Mental Health Needs](#)

## 6.2 Consultation with peer researchers

In August and September 2020, Rocket Science interviewed five peer researchers who had been involved in Phase 1 to ask them about the ways in which Covid-19 had impacted their lives. Interviews focused on the following themes:

- School and work
- Social life and spare time
- Living in Richmond
- Family life
- Mental health
- The future

The topic guide used in this consultation can be found in [Appendix D](#).



## 6.3 Consultation with youth practitioners

Rocket Science held seven focus groups in October 2020 with 27 participants. Where possible the groups were themed meaning people who worked in similar areas were group together. Examples of themes included: practitioners working with young carers, practitioners working to support youth mental health and practitioners working in education settings. The topic guide used for this consultation can be found in [Appendix E](#).

The youth practitioners worked in a wide range of focus areas including working with:

- Young people with mental health issues
- Young people with disabilities
- Young people with special educational needs
- Young carers
- Young people experiencing homelessness
- Young people who have had contact with the criminal justice system

## 6.4 Consultation with young people

Rocket Science conducted a direct consultation with 26 young people. The aim was to reach young people that had not been included in the peer research element of the research, in particular vulnerable young people such as young carers and young people accessing mental health support, The format of the consultation depended on the needs of the young people involved, including:

- Telephone interview with young people accessing mental health support
- Focus groups with young carers
- Focus groups and interviews with young people at Richmond-based youth clubs.

# 7. Mental health

## 7.1 Context

The impact of Covid-19 on mental health was widely recognised from the outset of the pandemic, with concern about issues such as isolation and loneliness, alongside more general anxieties caused by the global pandemic and the disruption to people's routines. UK Youth Movement research found that **'increased mental health or wellbeing concerns'** followed by **'increased loneliness and isolation'** were the two most common responses by youth leaders



when asked their main concerns about lockdown.<sup>25</sup> Despite mental health providers reporting higher levels of need, HealthWatch Richmond found that mental health care providers reported **lower levels of service during the pandemic.**<sup>26</sup> This was the case across the UK, with the Young Minds Coronavirus Impact Report finding that 31% of young people who had been accessing mental health support before lockdown are now no longer accessing it (a rise of 5 percentage points since the previous survey).<sup>27</sup>

Young people's mental health can be impacted by feeling that they **lack control over their future**, and this has been exacerbated by Covid-19<sup>28</sup>. Young people often face unlimited exposure to news via their smartphones which can increase stress levels and exacerbate fears about the future.<sup>29</sup> Covid-19 has also impacted young people's routines in substantial ways - UK Government research to better understand mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19 found that there is emerging evidence showing that children and young people are experiencing disrupted sleep patterns.<sup>30</sup>

Unsustainable and unstable living arrangements have had an impact on youth mental health during the pandemic. Three in four councils surveyed (78 per cent) had seen increases in homelessness in their area since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, with more than four in 10 reporting significant increases in people seeking help<sup>31</sup>. Homelessness as a result of family breakdown had increased – being asked to leave accommodation by family and friends is the biggest reason for youth homelessness with almost half of the 110,000 young people seeking help in 2018/19 doing so for this reason.<sup>32</sup>

## 7.2 Experience of mental health issues during the pandemic

Youth practitioners reported varying impacts of Covid-19 on mental health. Some young people experienced an **increase in anxiety and isolation and a reduction in independence**, while mental health improved for others due to a reduction in pre-pandemic stressors. Mental health varied depending on factors such as home life, school, friendships and accessible support. One youth practitioner expressed that:

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25 UK Youth Movement, The impact of COVID-19 on young people and the youth sector, 2020, pp. 5

26 HealthWatch Richmond Wellbeing Survey, 2020, pp. 8

27 Young Minds, Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs, Summer 2020, pp. 1

28 HealthWatch Richmond Wellbeing Survey, 2020, pp. 8

29 Young Minds, Coronavirus and Mental Health

30 UK Government, COVID-19: mental health and wellbeing surveillance report, 7.3 Children and young people: Worries, September 2020

31 Centrepoint, Locked Out: Youth homelessness during and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020

32 Centrepoint, Locked Out: Youth homelessness during and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020



*“Lockdown has had a positive impact on many people, more time to reflect and relax, those who were meant to have exams seemed to have relaxed. However, more time is more time to think, catastrophise or worry about the future. More time with families that they aren’t happy with. More time thinking about body image, on social media. [It’s] two-fold, [the] same things can be very positive and very negative for different young people.”*

*Youth health practitioner*

## 7.2.1 Stress and anxiety

Uncertainty around lockdown led to **heightened levels of anxiety amongst young people**; they did not know when they would be returning back to school, college or university; when they would be able to see their friends; or if they would be able to get a job in the near future:

*“The not knowing is what’s stressful. Mental health took a hit, lots [of young people] are anxious because of all this.”*

*Youth practitioner working in the arts and culture sector*

Pandemic-related stresses were seen to be an additional burden for young people. Particular cohorts of young people were seen to be at greater risk of experiencing anxiety, for example:

- Young people who had just **left school and started university** were often in new cities with few people they knew around them

*“Especially those at 18 moving to university, they are locked down in a strange place where they don’t even know their neighbours. It’s your first time outside of a school setting (even college students) and there’s lots of pressure about your future. Your whole life feels like it depends on those decisions.”*

*Community engagement practitioner*

- For young people who were still **at school or college**, returning into these institutions led to anxiety because of the wide range of new Covid-19 related rules (see [section 9.3 Returning to school](#) for more detail)

*“There is lots more anxiety at the point where they are going to school. It’s everything, the bubbles, not being with school friends, not being sure if they will go back into lockdown, academic worries, people being left out of rule of six, social anxiety.”*

*Youth mental health practitioner*

- Young people were experiencing stress and anxiety in relation to **exam results** including those who were given grades based on the predictions of their teachers

*“There was stress leading up to exams and results, there was lots of anxiety around that, it was out of their hands, it was the unknown for them. They hoped their teachers would be kind to them.”*



### Youth club worker

- For young people who had **vulnerable or older family members** there were high levels of anxiety around passing on Covid-19

*“There were young people with anxiety and guilt about potentially taking something home to their parents or grandparents. The biggest thing is anxiety. We are trying to get them to do things, more focused stuff. Some of them do not want to come out, for some of them it’s a comfort zone thing or they are worried about bringing something home to their parents or grandparents.”*

*Youth club worker*

## 7.2.2 Isolation

Being required to stay at home and not being able to engage in regular day to day activities left many young people feeling isolated. Young people and youth practitioners felt that there was momentum at the beginning of the pandemic to keep in touch with people online via messaging on social media or arranging video calls. However, as the pandemic progressed some young people became tired of this mode of communication which increased isolation.

For many young people, even if they did get on well with their families or people they lived with, there were topics of conversation that they would not want to discuss with them:

*“[Young people experienced] isolation, they were struggling with the mental health side [of things]. Youth can find it difficult to speak to family about certain issues e.g. relationship issues.”*

*Youth club worker*

For some, feelings of isolation had a negative impact on mental health, leading to individuals feeling low or developing depression. Mental health services in Richmond were seen to offer effective support, however they have struggled with increased demand.

Relaxed Covid-19 distancing requirements over the summer were beneficial for young people as this meant young people could meet their friends before going back to school.

## 7.2.3 Independence

Independence was impacted while young people were less able to go out and engage with activities alone or with their peers. This particularly affected older teenagers who would typically be gaining greater independence at this age. Practitioners spoke of the intensity of stress for these young people of constantly being in the same room as their parents or carers, which was often the case for families with limited working space if all family members were working from home.



*"They felt their life was put on hold. This should have been their time to learn to drive or move away from home."*

*Community engagement practitioner*

## 7.2.4 Positive impacts

Some young people **thrived doing online learning**, despite many challenges around this. This appeared to be the case for young people who struggle with socialising in school, who do not like the physical school environment or who experience a lot of pressure at school. One school staff member estimated that around 15-20% of the students they worked with had found lockdown helpful. Although, this is quite a large number, this means that the large majority of young people did not benefit from lockdown. One young person who preferred online learning explained that this was because they were more able to be in control of their own time:

*"I massively preferred online schooling to actual school, there is more time to do other things, there isn't a teacher nagging you, I'm not a big fan of school."*

*Young person, aged 13*

There were also a number of young people who said the most positive thing about lockdown was not having to go to school, but also recognised that they had fallen behind in work. These students did not thrive academically whilst doing online learning, but seemed to find it better in terms of their mental health giving reasons such as not having to wake up early and not having to see unsupportive school staff.

## 7.3 Access to mental health support

Despite an increase in mental health issues, **there was a low rate of referrals to mental health services over lockdown** while schools were closed. This was because a large proportion of referrals to both statutory and community and voluntary run mental health services are made through schools. Youth practitioners spoke of increased numbers of calls from parents once school had started again and explained that with the current amount of time and resources they have it will not be possible to meet the needs of young people in Richmond.

*"Schools have always been the main link for finding out about youth health needs. There will be an increase in referrals, [due to] four months of hidden damage. Will the system be swamped at some point? Funding will reduce in two years times... we need to pre-plan for that."*

*Criminal justice practitioner*

There was also a **reduction in external support** for young people such as youth clubs and sports clubs over lockdown, due to services having to close because of Covid-19 regulations. This left young people, particularly those without support at home feeling left behind:



*“There is an abundance of varying stories, the biggest difference is the loss of external support for those who are living in families that cannot offer that support. This lack of external support [has left] young people feeling isolated and vulnerable and a little bit hopeless.”*

*Youth sexual health and relationships practitioner*

Practitioners and school staff sought changes to the **short-term nature of statutory mental health support** – it was felt that the six, eight-week series of counselling on offer was often not enough to fully support young people with their mental health. Some young people will not engage with counselling when they know that support will end in six weeks. Research and resources can be usefully directed at identifying forms of long-term support that are financially viable.

*“This has all been unsettling for them on top of existing issues, they are concerned that support suddenly comes to an end. [They] want something ongoing. They have eight weeks of support and then they are told ‘you are on the way to recovery’.”*

*Youth mental health practitioner*

Although some mental health services offered **virtual support online**, many young people **were not able to access this for fear of their families or the people they live with overhearing their conversations**. This offer of virtual support only seemed to suit people who had the sufficient private space to be able to speak freely without being interrupted or overheard, e.g. young people with big enough homes and private bedrooms. This meant it was often young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds who missed out on virtual mental health support.

*“Clients went on hold because they didn’t want online counselling. Counselling is an incredibly intimate communication, if you share rooms with siblings or someone might burst in, it didn’t feel safe to access counselling. We had almost no phone calls in the beginning.”*

*Youth mental health practitioner*

## 7.4 Concerns for the future

Practitioners expressed concern that over the next year there will be a **continued rise of mental health issues amongst young people** as a result of Covid-19; both for young people with existing mental health issues which may get worse and for young people who have not experienced mental health issues before. As young people are now back at school there is a sense that mental health issues will become apparent and referrals to statutory and community services will increase again:

*“Locally, lots of services that do support children with mental health are drowning with referrals. There is no extra resource.”*

*Youth mental health practitioner*



## 7.5 What's changed? A view from peer researchers

**Spending a lot of time inside:** Being inside for a long time was negatively impacting the mental health of young people leading to increased anxiety.

**More effective mental health support online:** Many young people were struggling with lockdown and there could have been more effective online mental health support. One peer researcher explained that services were offered at school, but these had very long waiting lists and when you are able to see someone it is often for a short period of time e.g. six weeks. To combat these long waiting times, it was felt more should have been done to offer intermediary support online before young people were able to access more intensive support through school, statutory or VCS support.

# 8. Physical health

## 8.1 Context

Youth physical health has been impacted during the pandemic due to restrictions on movement and activities, particularly when individuals have been required to only leave the house for exercise once a day.

Most services and facilities which support fitness have been forced to close during the pandemic, including sports facilities, gyms and leisure centres. While 59% of students living in Richmond feel Physical Education (PE) lessons within schools are either 'very good' or 'good',<sup>33</sup> school closures have meant that they cannot benefit from structured PE activities. While face to face activities have been limited, online classes (run on platforms like Zoom and Instagram) have become much more accessible, for example 'Joe Wicks PE classes' has amassed 80 million views on YouTube.

Fears of contracting the virus has meant that many refrained from visiting GPs or community services during the pandemic.<sup>34</sup> Covid-19 resulted in many treatments and operations deemed non-essential being postponed. As a result, waiting lists are now at a 12-year high and the number of patients waiting over one year for treatment in 2020 is over 100 times greater than what it was in 2019.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Annual Director Public Health Report - Richmond On Thames, 2020, pp. 36

<sup>34</sup> HealthWatch Richmond Wellbeing Survey, 2020, pp. 9

<sup>35</sup> British Medical Association, Pressure points in the NHS, September/October 2020 analysis



Lockdown led to reduced access of the morning after pill which to obtain for free requires a consultation with a pharmacist. The British Pregnancy Advisory Service and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists have advocated for the morning after pill to be made available in supermarkets to remove barriers to women accessing this emergency contraception. Additionally, surgeries have been advised not to fit intrauterine devices or contraceptive implants due to the risk of spreading Covid-19.<sup>36</sup> The combination of these factors leads to a higher risk of pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections amongst young people.

At the outset of the pandemic, concerns about access to food and other resources surfaced as many people stockpiled supplies. Over one quarter of people in Richmond (26%) have stated they feel access to food supplies will only be negatively affected by the pandemic, with a further 10% feeling worried about their own access to food more specifically.<sup>37</sup> One in six HealthWatch Wellbeing Survey respondents referenced issues relating to accessing food during the pandemic.<sup>38</sup>

## 8.2 Exercise and fitness

Exercise has been important for the physical and mental health of young people during the pandemic. Many children and young people have been pushed to extremes in relation to eating and exercise during Covid-19; some were over-eating and not exercising while others were under-eating and exercising a lot. Many innovative methods for indoor exercise emerged since March to combat requirements to spend extended time indoors. This was particularly important for children and young people who lacked access to outdoor spaces. Looking ahead, youth practitioners felt it was important to encourage young people and children to exercise outside. This would be beneficial because it exposes young people to fresh air, keeps them active and reduces time spent online.

*“Joe Wicks hit it off big time during lockdown but now things are opening up it’s about transferring these things to also allow young people to get fresh air and go outside to do some form of exercise, whatever it is! And then having time to chat afterwards. Providing a bit of structure [for them].”*

*Community engagement practitioner*

When young people were asked about what support and services they would like to see become available in Richmond, there was a strong feeling that the reopening of sports clubs and sports pitches was important. Young people commented on football pitches still being locked as a result of Covid-19 and activity centres still not offering sessions because of the risk of groups mixing without social distancing.

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<sup>36</sup> BBC News, Coronavirus: Morning after pill access hit by lockdown

<sup>37</sup> Richmond Council - Residents Survey, 2020, pp. 5-6

<sup>38</sup> HealthWatch Richmond Wellbeing Survey, 2020, pp. 10



*"I want boxing to start again, it still hasn't opened. We've got a really big group and they can't let that many people in because it's quite a small place [so it's not happening at all]."*

*Young person, aged 12*

## 8.3 Accessing physical health services

While young people were generally able to access necessary physical health services (e.g. GP appointments) during the pandemic, some young people with disabilities faced challenges around appointments being postponed or cancelled. These appointments were often important for young people to feel that they were having ongoing contact with trusted professionals. Even where appointments were not deemed to be urgent, being unable to access them created feelings of anxiety:

*"A young disabled person explained that all her appointments were cancelled. They might seem ok to be postponed, but the young person's body is changing quickly. If they are using a harness this needs to be changed, they look forward to appointments, if they miss one it can create anxiety, for example around being able to walk because their harness is not working."*

*Youth health practitioner*

## 8.4 Sexual health

Some youth practitioners were worried about increased rates of STIs and pregnancies among young people because of the closure of sexual health services over this time. Youth practitioners working in this area predicted that we would see the impacts of this over the next six months or so.

*"Lots of young people haven't been locked down. The shutting down of sexual health services [could lead to an] increase in teenage pregnancies and untraced STIs. Teenagers take risks."*

*Youth sexual health and relationships practitioner*

## 8.5 Access to food

Food insecurity has been a worry for young people during the pandemic, including in relation to access to free school meals over the half term and winter holidays of 2020. While the Government have now agreed to fund free school meals, prior to this decision there was anxiety amongst families – to address this, civil society and the hospitality industry offered to provide free meals. This uncertainty further contributed to negative impacts on mental health of Covid-19 and worries about physical health of young people.



*“There was a concern that children wouldn’t be getting meals when schools were shut. Teachers would be concerned about vulnerable children, without the [school] setting there is worry these things won’t get picked up and there will be less referrals to support.”*

*Partnership officer*

These issues around food are of course primarily causing stress for the young people who are on free school meals and their families, however, their peers who are not on free school meals themselves are also worrying about the dangerous position that these young people are being left in.

*There are kids who can’t afford food at home... their only decent meal is at school and because of Covid they’re not getting it.”*

*Young person, aged 12*

## 9. Education, training and employment

### 9.1 Context

The degree to which young people have been able to engage with online learning and employment has varied during the pandemic. Some young people saw an improvement in their wellbeing during school closures as some of their school-induced stressors relating to workload and friendships have been alleviated by a more flexible learning environment. Youth Out Loud!, a Richmond and Kingston based group of 13-17 year olds, found that many of their peers have gotten used to the ‘new normal’ of home schooling through their research.<sup>39</sup> Despite this, other school children have struggled with the move to online learning.<sup>40</sup>

Research by Richmond Council has shown that many parents are concerned about the prospect of home-schooling their children, with a total of 23% of residents raising this as a concern.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, 23% felt that the impact of coronavirus on children’s education and school would be wholly negative, compared to 11% who felt it would be positive and negative and just 1% who felt it would be wholly positive.<sup>42</sup>

Businesses operating in Richmond have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Furlough schemes, which have been introduced nationally to try and help with job retention, have been

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<sup>39</sup> Annual Director Public Health Report - Richmond On Thames, 2020, pp. 18

<sup>40</sup> HealthWatch Richmond Wellbeing Survey, 2020, pp. 10

<sup>41</sup> Richmond Council - Residents Survey, 2020, pp. 6

<sup>42</sup> Richmond Council - Residents Survey, 2020, pp. 6



disproportionately applied to younger people in employment, with teenagers the most likely to be furloughed, in particular 17 year old girls.<sup>43</sup> Across the UK, under 25s are approximately 2.5 times more likely to work in a sector which was forced to shut down compared to any other age group, with youth unemployment predicted to reach 27% by the end of 2020.<sup>44</sup>

An estimated 63% of businesses across Richmond have already furloughed staff under the governments Job Retention Scheme, with a further 16% having been made redundant and a further 37% considering reducing staff in the coming months.<sup>45</sup> The same report found that, looking forward, almost half of businesses (46%) claim to be 'very likely' or 'fairly likely' to have to reduce staff numbers in the coming months, with 80% fearing lost income and 29% fearing staff redundancies more specifically. For those who stay in work or find work, wages are expected to be 7% lower two years post-education due to the COVID-19 induced recession.<sup>46</sup>

Overall, there is evidence that economic downturns have 'scarring' effects on young people, particularly on their pay and their employment. The Institute for Fiscal Studies outlines that the two main ways this is happening as a result of COVID-19: firstly, the sectors which had effectively shut down during lockdown are those with high proportions of young people starting their career; and secondly, recessions have a drastic effect on early career progression, particularly wage growth and opportunities to move into higher-paying occupations.<sup>47</sup>

## 9.2 Impact of studying from home on education

### 9.2.1 Quality of delivery and access to schoolwork

During lockdown, the **quality and quantity of work** provided by schools varied significantly across schools. This had an impact on the education of young people in the borough and has the potential to widen the attainment gap. This variation depended on various factors including whether work was being delivered by primary school, secondary school, or college; whether devices were made available and whether schools provided online learning or physical work. Young people explained that they were struggling because they could not ask teachers for help.

*"There was less work than normal, but it was much harder to do it. It was harder to do it because in school you get help, not just a video of 20 minutes of someone talking at you."*

*Young person, aged 11*

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<sup>43</sup> BBC News, Coronavirus: Teenagers most likely to have been furloughed, July 2020

<sup>44</sup> Business in the Community, COVID-19 and youth unemployment, 2020, pp. 1-3

<sup>45</sup> Richmond Coronavirus Business Survey report, 2020

<sup>46</sup> Business in the Community, COVID-19 and youth unemployment, 2020, pp. 3

<sup>47</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies, COVID-19 and the career prospects of young people, pp. 7



This disparity in delivery of schoolwork resulted in some young people **feeling anxious, disappointed or frustrated** that they were not receiving a high quality of education. Feelings of anxiety came from students worried about a lack of education, missing exams and not knowing what this would mean for their lives and progression. Feelings of disappointment and frustration often came when young people who were not receiving a good standard of schoolwork saw that their peers who attended different schools were being better supported.

*“Young people were feeling like ‘why am I not getting the same standard of teaching?’”*

*Youth engagement practitioner*

This disparity in schoolwork was partly caused by a **digital divide because access to devices to facilitate online learning varied** across and within schools. This divide impacted the ability of staff members to deliver schoolwork and the ability of students to access schoolwork. **Some schools were handing out devices**, however in most cases these were limited meaning some children were able to receive devices though some were left without.

*“There were children turning up at school and all devices had gone.”*

*Youth club worker*

In some cases even if schools were offering online learning, if an individual student did not have a device needed to access the work, they were required to go in person to school to pick up a pack of work or were sent this in the post. **Some schools did not hand out devices at all**, therefore access to online learning depended on whether an individual student or their family had the device needed. This inevitably favoured young people coming from affluent families because they had access to devices, often their own. Often more disadvantaged youth would either have no device or a shared device - youth practitioners described families of six sharing one or two devices. This caused issues such as young people having to work late at night or in the early hours of the morning because this is when they had their allocated time slot on the shared device.

Some students were given a physical pack of work rather than online lessons. Being given a pack of work to complete at home without online supervision often resulted in young people having an **unstructured daily routine**. Young people spoke of **losing interest, feeling demotivated and falling behind** in their schoolwork. Some explained that they were not doing it at all, and others explained that they were doing their work, but not to the best of their ability. One young person felt that one of the reasons for this was because they could have their phones with them while doing school work which meant they were “easily distracted”, another explained that online lessons were just not fun or enjoyable.

*“It was a lot more stressful doing online school than normal school, I got really behind. It lacked depth and discipline. I don’t have anyone to look over my shoulder.”*

*Young person, aged 15*



Young people explained that their sleep had been impacted, with one young person reporting that they would **spend all day in bed**, often asleep and another explaining that their “sleep pattern got a bit messed up” because they didn’t have to wake up and do anything. Given school staff were so busy at this time, the responsibility to ensure that young people were getting up at a reasonable time and completing their work often fell on youth workers.

*“The education that schools provided was really mixed. Some had a structured day online, others emailed out a printout. Some lost all structure to their day, getting up at 1pm. It was us trying to persuade them to get up early.”*

*Youth club worker*

It is also worth noting that even for schools which developed relatively structured and engaging home learning plans, there were still **some students who did not take part at all** during lockdown, despite school staff repeatedly trying to reach them and their families via different forms of communication. Even when school staff were able to contact families and students it was difficult for them to actually know if students were engaging because they had “no way of knowing if people are interacting with the work you put in”. Another school staff member explained that they were “worried about [the] academic level” of these students because on their return to school it was clear that some of them had “forgotten how to do things they know they should [be able to] do.”

University students also explained that their online teaching was difficult, especially because some teachers did not know how to deliver lessons online.

## 9.2.2 Students in transition periods

Covid-19 impacted students differently depending on their age and year group. It was felt that Covid-19 had a particularly large impact on **students in transition periods**:

Moving from **year 1 to year 2** was described as an important transition point for children as it encompasses much of the move to more formal learning. Therefore, interruption to this year group could potentially have long-term impacts. Additionally, for younger students in primary school, communication typically went through parents rather than directly through young people. This meant that young people were often left feeling isolated.

*“Communication was generally with parents or carers rather than the children and young people so they wouldn’t hear the voices or see the faces of teachers or other support systems.”*

*Youth practitioner working with young people with special educational needs and disabilities*

There were also challenges for students who finished primary school (year 6 in academic year 2019-20) and **began secondary school** (year 7 in academic year 2020-21). Young people spoke



of the relief of not having to complete their SATs and the disappointment of not being to say proper goodbyes to friends, school staff and the physical place:

*“Some kids had been there [at the primary school] their whole life so were very emotional leaving... We tried to make their leaving as special as possible but still year six were feeling sad missing out on big experiences.”*

*School staff member*

Students who were meant to be doing their **GCSEs in the academic year 2019-20** were stressed about what was going to happen with their exams, their results and how this would impact their further education options e.g. going to college. Students who were meant to be doing their **GCSEs in the academic year 2020-21** experienced concerns around whether they would be expected to take their exams ‘as normal’ next year after despite significant interruptions to their education.

*“The main stresses that came up were the worries about the ‘in-between stage’ e.g. receiving mixed GCSE results or things happening that they didn’t expect and then having to leap to taking A-Levels.”*

*Youth practitioner working in the arts and culture sector*

Young people who finished school and **started university in 2020** were also in a difficult position often living in new places with little support. Online teaching created stress around living situations and whether to move home, as well as whether the academic year would finish. One young person explained that the counselling service at their university just stopped when teaching went online meaning young people were being left without mental health support.

*“[The government] sent everyone to Uni and locked them there, there was no pre-thought for that. For the people in secondary school that ended their secondary school year and are starting something new there was no extra support for them. There is loads of kids that have been in really hard difficult transitions, now there’s even more restrictions, there needs to be more thought behind how this would affect people, or if they can’t change the rules then put in more support.”*

*Young person, aged 23*

### 9.2.3 Impact of school closures on health and wellbeing

For some young people, not being in school impacted **their health and wellbeing**. Safeguarding teams at schools have had to check up on vulnerable children or children of key workers throughout the pandemic. Three of the key elements that safeguarding teams were checking up on were:

- Whether schools were in contact with young people
- Whether young people were emotionally well
- Whether young people were eating properly



School closures had a severe impact on young people for whom school was their safe place. School staff and youth practitioners spoke of **neglectful home environments** that impacted youth wellbeing and heightened feelings of **isolation and loneliness**. Often children and young people would not disclose this information to school staff meaning they were unable to provide help, despite being willing to do so. One staff member explained that:

*"It's sad for everyone and schools want to help as much as possible. If the children don't share any information they can't help as Covid-19 has left them isolated. Isolation is the problem as it raises the question 'how do young people and children practice self-care?' Some people do it well and some have struggled more."*

*School staff member*

## 9.3 Returning to school

### 9.3.1 Challenges relating to returning to school

**Returning to school with new rules** in place including year group bubbles, mask wearing in corridors and one-way systems has been confusing for young people, particularly when different rules are in place elsewhere. For example, siblings may be in different bubbles at school despite living together, or friends might be in the same bubble at school but not be allowed to spend time together at each other's houses after school. For some young people it has felt inconsistent and unclear:

*"[There's been] mixed messages; kids can go to school, they can be in their year group bubble, but when they come to youth club they cannot play football, even if they are in the same bubble."*

*Youth club worker*

School staff also expressed that it is **difficult to implement the rules** in school, for example it is "logistically hard to keep kids apart". The **rules are changing** so often that school staff have found it **hard to keep up** - it was felt that the Government seemed to create policies and not follow through with the infrastructure required to deliver these which has put schools and school staff in a difficult position. For example, the requirement for all schools to provide virtual learning for students who are studying from home or self-isolating while laptop allocations have been limited. The expectations of schools to **deliver learning in person and online** has put pressure on school staff who in many cases do not have the time or resources needed to deliver both effectively.

*"[It feels like we are] living in two worlds; are we doing virtual or in person"*

*School staff member*

School staff spoke of the excitement that young people had around returning to school and the expectations they had of it feeling 'like it did before', but for some their return was not as positive as they had hoped leading to **disappointment**:



*“There was a struggle of coming back to reality and what that looks like, being expected to behave in a certain way and stay in bubbles, it had an impact on friendships. If you don’t get on with people in your bubble, school becomes difficult.”*

*Youth sexual health and relationships practitioner*

The risk of getting Covid-19 and having to **self-isolate** was also raised as a concern in relation to returning to school. Youth practitioners reported that “not knowing if or when you may need to isolate or not go to school makes it difficult” to have a fully positive experience of returning to school. The change from being told throughout lockdown to socially distance from others and then going to school where **social distancing is not being enforced** has also been anxiety-inducing for some young people:

*“It has been drummed into us to keep away from people, don’t touch your grandparent, don’t go into someone’s house. Now they [young people] are going into school; for months they have been terrified about the nearness of other people and now they’re back to school”*

*Youth safeguarding practitioner*

### 9.3.2 Positive impacts of returning to school

Despite these negative impacts, for many young people and school staff the **return to school has been very positive**. One representative from the youth sector was keen to point this out:

*“We need to be careful to not put out the message that all young people are not happy to be back in school. Headteachers were saying that lots of children were absolutely delighted to be back in terms of being able to be together. For lots of them, it’s a positive thing to happen, it means they’re not living in an artificial online world all the time.”*

*Youth practitioner working in a VCS coordination role*

There was a sense that school provides an **important social environment, daily routine and sense of normality** for young people. These views were also shared by young people, one of which explained that going back to school had been very beneficial for their mental health, in particular because of having small social interactions.

### 9.3.3 Young carers

Young carers experienced specific challenges, as well as positive impacts, of returning to school as follows:



### Challenges

- For some young carers the return to school has meant having to **spend time away from the people they are providing care for**. A youth practitioner explained that *“those who enjoy being around who they care for and knowing they are ok can struggle being back at school.”*
- Limited **implementation of Covid-19 regulations in schools** e.g. lack of social distancing and hand washing caused extra stress for young carers who were often worried about taking Covid-19 home. This increased level of responsibility has had an impact on their mental health and wellbeing. It has led to young carers feeling frustrated about their peers not taking the pandemic seriously
- Young carers also spoke of the difficulty of finding out at school that friends were **socialising and not being able to take part** because it would increase the risk of infection of Covid-19.

### Positive impacts

- School provides an important **break or respite** from caring duties for some young carers
- School provides an important **social environment for young carers** who in some cases had hardly seen anyone during the first lockdown due to care taken to avoid Covid-19
- Some young carers were not able to access any educational support from their families when working from home so to be able to go back into school meant a welcome reintroduction of support for schoolwork.

## 9.3.4 Young people with special educational needs

Young people with special educational needs experienced specific challenges, as well as positive impacts, of returning to school as follows:

### Challenges

- Some young people with special educational needs were relieved to not be going to school throughout lockdown and the return to school led to **increased stress levels**.
- The first lockdown rules were felt to be clearer and therefore easier to follow in comparison to **subsequent Covid-19 distancing requirements**
- Some young people had been advised not to go back to school because of **under-resourced staff teams**. Without staff (such as learning support assistants or teaching assistants) that can be there to offer one-to-one support, young people with special educational needs can be left without appropriate support.



### Positive impacts

- Some young people with special educational needs struggled during Covid-19 without the pre-pandemic routine of school and this had negative impacts on their home lives. The return to school provided a **reinstatement of this structure** that many of the young people were missing
- Some young people with special educational needs struggled with virtual learning, especially video calls meaning they were **more engaged when face to face teaching restarted**.

## 9.4 Youth unemployment

Employment and training programmes were ended prematurely for many young people during the pandemic. Covid-19 has had a monumental impact on unemployment across all groups of people and all age ranges, however the impact has been particularly great for young people. This impact has been heavily sectoral, with hospitality and the arts suffering greatly and young people are more likely to work in these sectors when compared with other age groups. One youth practitioner from an arts organisation commented that it was becoming more and more difficult to offer opportunities to young people:

*“Arts are cut enough as it is, but now there’s even less opportunity to help young people.”*  
*Youth practitioner working in the arts and culture sector*

Youth practitioners explained that **future job prospects for young people feel like they have disappeared**. Due to the ongoing closure or heavily regulated opening of the hospitality industry, employment prospects that young people would have typically taken up part time while at school or college, during the holidays, or after leaving an educational institution (such as bar and restaurant jobs) are no longer available. Vacancies in almost all sectors have reduced meaning the number of people applying to each job has increased. As a result of this young people may be left with no access to money and it will be the first time for many young people to have to access benefits. The government [Kickstart Scheme](#) was felt to not provide a long-term solution to youth unemployment:

*“Kickstart is only six months, it could have been twelve months. It has to be a solution rather than just filling a hole. Blink and you’ll miss it.”*  
*Youth club worker*

This is especially worrying for **young people with no support system**. For those who left school in year 11 or year 13 all contact with school is typically ended meaning school staff are often not aware of what is happening to their previous students. Young people who have left school and were working who have lost their jobs as a result of Covid-19 may not be linked into any careers services to help them in this situation. School staff were worried that these young



people could be left with no support due to leaving one institution and not yet joining another e.g. a further education institution or an employer.

However even for those who are linked into careers services, the landscape does not look too hopeful, with one youth worker explained that they “went to see careers services, and they said they don’t have any jobs.” A university graduate explained that they were unemployed and living with their parents again, and that this was probably the case for many recent graduates:

*“I graduated earlier this year... obviously that was a bit messed up by Covid, I don’t have a job , I’m unemployed, I moved back in with my parents, it’s probably the same story for a lot of young people.”*

*Young person, aged 23*

## 9.5 The changing nature of employment

Concerns were raised over the shift to **online virtual working** and that this may be difficult for some young people, particularly those coming straight from school. In relation to apprenticeships it was felt that they were typically a great learning experience for young people to prepare them for the work place, however with them moving online there was some doubt over whether they would still be as effective for young people. Youth practitioners also raised concern over whether organisations would have the capacity, capability and resources to train up an apprentice or new employee online at the moment because of other financial pressures that many organisations are facing:

*“Can you replicate learning that happened in offices online? You could but it would require a lot of work. Is it viable or effective for a team?”*

*Partnership officer*

There were particular worries raised for **young people with special educational needs** including:

- Typically, young people with special educational needs need more support when starting new jobs or careers which may be harder to provider virtually. Given this, youth practitioners felt that employers will not be as willing to employ these young people suggesting that they could be harder hit by the changing nature of employment and experience longer term unemployment
- For young people with hidden needs or a hidden disability it will be harder for them to decide whether or not to disclose this to potential employers. One youth practitioner felt that despite this always being an issue, it will become increasingly difficult during the pandemic.



## 9.6 Concerns for the future

### 9.6.1 Worries relating to education

Students are worried that school, college or university may close again as a result of strict lockdown rules. They expressed concerns relating to having to do work at home again, falling even further behind and negative impacts on mental health e.g.:

*"I'm worried about school closing because I have noticed that it was better for my mental health being in school."*

*Young person, aged 15*

They are also worried about exams and whether they will be expected to perform at the same standard as students in previous years given changes in lessons and reduced timetables for some schools. This is a particular worry for young people who have been dealing with safeguarding issues over this time:

*"I think the stress of next year's A-levels and GCSEs is a big unknown. It is difficult to predict."*

*Youth practitioner working with young people with special educational needs and disabilities*

### 9.6.2 Worries relating to education and employment

Youth practitioners were worried about students who had been made unemployed because of the uncertainty around when they would be able to get back into employment. Recent graduates and university students were worried that they would not be able to get jobs and would also have to compete with future cohorts of university students for the same jobs when the job market does begin to recover.

## 9.7 What's changed? A view from peer researchers

**Transition to online working:** There were mixed experiences about the responses of schools; one school was already using online platforms pre-Covid and as such able to shift quickly and smoothly to online working, alternatively another did not have live online lessons until June.

**Studying from home:** Most of the peer researchers explained that they struggled with motivation and ability to focus when doing schoolwork from home, however one reported that they found online lessons more engaging because there were no distractions e.g. other students to talk to. It was reported that it was difficult to manage time and stay on top on work from home due to not being around other students and staff.



**Communication with staff:** Peer researchers reported a lack of communication with their schools, in some cases making the work feel “meaningless”. It was also reported that some staff were setting a lot of work but had a lack of understanding that studying from home did not mean that the students had extra time to spend on their schoolwork. It was felt that this was the case for students in sixth form, but not for younger years.

*“They were pressured to set work and overdid it... [there was a] long period of difficulty where we felt like we were drowning in work”*

**Working from home:** One of the peer researchers was working from home (not studying) and explained that they were able to enjoy it due to having the space for an office and feel that “it’s becoming the new normal”. They also reported that they were feeling more supported in their work as a result of more regular check ins and assessments that were only made possible by virtual working. Despite this, they found it more difficult to separate work and home life because they did not get the feeling of coming home from work.

**Concerns about going back to school:** There was a general feeling of unpreparedness regarding the return to school. Peer researchers reported feeling behind, confused and worried. One peer researcher expressed concern that they were going to be expected to work at the same rate as they would have pre-Covid. Another explained that they were worried that a second wave of Covid-19 would be triggered by young people returning to school, even with the new regulations in place.

*“Going back to school, we will have different timetables, the communal areas are closed (I spent half my timetable there previously). I’m feeling stressed about it. I don’t know how my subjects will change... it’s unknown, I don’t know what it will be like, the uncertainty is making it even more stressful.”*

**Worries about future plans after finishing school and current jobs:** Peer researchers expressed concerns about their next steps after they finished school or their current jobs. One peer researcher described that they were planning to go to university next year but were unsure if they wanted to because it “looks miserable at the moment”. Another peer researcher expressed concerns about the difficult job market and that coming to the end of their job brought with it anxieties about whether they will be able to find something new in such a competitive time:

*“[It’s] hard looking for a new job, job vacancies are opening and then closing early because too many people are applying and also employers are putting job openings on hold until further advice from government... It would be good to have more job opportunities for young people with less need for high level of education qualification (e.g. people with less experience who just left school) and longer contracts (e.g. over a year) to provide stability”*



# 10. The internet and social media

## 10.1 Context

Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of technological devices and internet access for staying connected. According to the Children's Commissioner, 9% of families in the UK do not have a device they could use for online learning or working e.g. a laptop, desktop computer or tablet.<sup>48</sup> Issues with internet connectivity are experienced across Richmond, with almost one fifth of residents (19%) claiming to be worried about broadband within the home.<sup>49</sup> The closure of schools and the need for young people to complete schoolwork and employment online has increased demand on home broadband. Unreliable or limited access to the internet or IT infrastructure has been outlined as a barrier for young people during the pandemic, particularly in relation to their ability to engage with youth services; while 31% of youth services say they do not have the infrastructure necessary to provide their services digitally.<sup>50</sup> A study looking at remote learning and internet access found that the teachers identified one of the biggest challenges of remote teaching to be that "their ability to communicate with students and their families was often constrained by student's lack of internet or appropriate technologies at home".<sup>51</sup>

Prior to Covid-19, research into digital access, skills and confidence among 11-18 year olds in the UK found that:

- "Three quarters (76%) of those aged 11-15 say they would find it difficult to complete their schoolwork at home without the internet
- Two thirds (66%) of young people rely heavily on digital access to ensure they aren't missing out on being with friends and feeling left out
- Three quarters (76%) of 16-18 year olds use the Internet to help them achieve their career ambitions."<sup>52</sup>

Social media presents concerns in other respects, with the UK Youth Movement finding that 'increased social media or online pressure' was the sixth most frequently mentioned concern regarding lockdown<sup>53</sup>. According to the Global Web Index, young people are spending more time on social media; despite 47% of people surveyed using social media as their main source

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48 Children's Commissioner, Children without internet access during lockdown, 2020

49 Richmond Council - Residents Survey, 2020, pp. 5

50 UK Youth Movement, The impact of COVID-19 on young people and the youth sector, 2020, pp. 7

51 RAND, The Digital Divide and Covid-19, Teachers' Perceptions of Inequities in Students' Internet Access and Participation in Remote Learning, 2020

52 Lloyds Bank and the Learning Foundation, Digital access, skills and confidence among 11-18 year olds in the UK, 2019

53 UK Youth Movement, The impact of COVID-19 on young people and the youth sector, 2020, pp. 5



of news, only 14% believe it to be the most trustworthy news source.<sup>54</sup> Covid-19 has brought with it a constant stream of news updates about the pandemic, named by the World Health Organisation, amongst others, as an “infodemic” due to the large amounts of misinformation being spread which has been said to lead to increased anxiety and uncertainty.<sup>55</sup>

## 10.2 Shift to online life

Throughout the pandemic **many activities moved online**: schoolwork, socialising, support and services. This had both negative and positive impacts for young people.

### 10.2.1 Negative impacts

Throughout the pandemic **young people were spending more time online**. One young person explained that because school had moved online it made them **want to spend more time online generally**:

*“I absolutely spent more time online. School was online, which made me want to play more games online, it was convenient. At the end of school, I could easily play games.”*

*Young person, aged 15*

This was emphasised by a youth worker who expressed that “all structure and boundaries about time online had gone”.

There was a sense from young people and youth practitioners that **spending more time online was damaging to youth mental health**. One young person explained that they had been tracking their screen time with how they had been feeling and noticed a correlation between high rates of screen time and feeling low, however they noted they were not sure which one caused the other:

*“I’ve got a weekly screen report on my phone, I’ve noticed if it’s a week where I’ve felt really stressed about what’s going to happen and what’s going to happen this year, it shoots up.”*

*Young person, aged 21*

Youth practitioners explained that whilst **some young people were willing to try online sessions, some did not engage at all**. One youth worker felt this was because “some [young people] felt too exposed”. Another youth practitioner explained that many young people got sick of communicating via video calls because they had to look at themselves on the screen as well as the other person:

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<sup>54</sup> Global Web Index, Coronavirus Research, April 2020

<sup>55</sup> LSE, Despite concerns, Covid-19 shows how social media has become an essential tool in the democratisation of knowledge



*“There are issues getting access to young people who don’t want to be on Zoom... Young people have been saying they were tired of turning their camera on because it was like looking in the mirror all day. [One young person said] ‘I’m uncomfortable looking at myself for 5 hours a day’. Young people were scrutinising themselves.”*

**Youth engagement practitioner**

A practitioner working with **young people experiencing homelessness** explained that those they worked with **did not want to engage online**, either for education or for accessing support and services. The practitioner explained that they typically provide confidence-building sessions which prepare young people for socialising and work, however these have not been able to take place because of Covid-19. There is concern that not having any of this face-to-face interaction may have longer-term impacts on this cohort of young people.

*“Online learning doesn’t suit them, the idea that a teacher is on the screen, they won’t do it. There were young people planning to go to college who won’t go because its online.”*

**Youth practitioner working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness**

There are also various **safeguarding concerns** in relation to offering support online. Youth practitioners spoke of the increased amounts of administration and logistics that came with offering services online to ensure that services were safe for young people. They had to develop online safeguarding policies and social media policies, create secure systems, and develop educational tools to teach young people about staying safe online. One service spoke of having to hire new staff to assist with these developments to enable service delivery:

*“When you isolate families, and young people become increasingly isolated, there are safeguarding concerns about use of social media. [That is why we are] introducing social media and safeguarding policies. While we are making use of it, we have a responsibility to educate young people around safe usage.”*

**Youth practitioner working with young carers**

Practitioners and young people have expressed **the need for face to face support to return in a safe way**, rather than attempting to shift all services to be online. The importance of in-person interaction was consistently reported with youth practitioners explaining that because some young people will not engage online it is key to engage them face to face as soon as possible. The young people who do not engage online often have vulnerabilities e.g. anxiety about family overhearing them or no access to digital devices.

This desire for services to stay open for face to face engagement was also reflected by young people. In talking about the introduction of Tier 2 restrictions, one young person explained the importance of the youth club staying open:

*“We still have the youth club, it’s so great it’s open.”*

**Young person, aged 11**



It was recognised that this would have to be done in a safe way and activities could not just open as they were before. Youth practitioners seemed to be more in favour of being open with regulations that operating only virtually.

*“Youth work is about making connections and relationships, [that] isn’t possible online.”*

*Youth club worker*

## 10.2.2 Positive impacts

For some services, **the shift to online delivery was relatively simple**, and in some cases allowed for **more individual support**. One youth worker spoke of being able to offer music lessons over Zoom which worked far better than in person sessions because the young people were in their own personal space with no distractions (unlike in the youth club).

*“We shifted work directly to online and it was a reasonably smooth transition. We had lots of 1:1 sessions with young people – we had only nine the previous year but this year there were many, many, many times more (and that was in April alone!).”*

*Youth practitioner working with young people with special educational needs and disabilities*

Even for those services where the switch to online was challenging, virtual communication has brought about a range of positives including the **ability to see and support more people and the ability to be more flexible**, for example in relation to timing of sessions. Youth practitioners spoke of using social media to increase their reach meaning they were able to help many young people who they would not otherwise have been in contact with.

*“As a service, social media has been a godsend, it is how we are reaching young people.”*

*Youth practitioner working with young carers*

For some young people **not having face to face interaction was beneficial because it felt more accessible and was easier to speak freely**. Online sessions were more accessible for:

- Young people who might have felt nervous or anxious attending sessions in person
- Young people with busy schedules for example including part-time work or caring responsibilities
- Young people with disabilities who may not have been able to attend certain sessions in person due to e.g. the accessibility of a building.

It was also felt by youth practitioners that they tend to think of the online world as very separate to physical ‘reality’, whereas for young people, the online and offline worlds are completely interlinked. Therefore, it was felt by practitioners that it was important to connect with young people on their own terms:

*“The online world and real world for young people is one and the same. It is not good enough as parents or professionals to say ‘oh I don’t know about the internet or social media’. It’s a bit of a*



*taboo subject but it is important to take an interest. We need to build conversations so that young people feel comfortable coming and asking for help.”*

*Youth practitioner working with young carers*

## 11. Youth voice and action

### 11.1 Online engagement

Shifting social and political information, campaigns and research online meant **young people felt able to take part and ensure their voices were heard.**

*“Reaching out to young people during this time was highly effective, this time around we had a lot more responses [compared to the last engagement], a lot more young people wanting to get involved. In questionnaires we asked ‘do you want to be involved with the youth council/focus groups’ and there were hundreds ticking yes. Previously that number wasn’t so high.”*

*Youth engagement practitioner*

Representatives from the local council explained that community conversations held in person would normally be “adult affairs”. However, **by using online platforms to host these, more young people of a range of ages attended.** Reasons for this included:

- Easier to take part because you can do it from home
- More frequent events because they are being held virtually meaning there is more choice over when to take part
- More accessible for people who struggle with travelling to events and accessing particular buildings
- Not such a big time commitment to attend an event virtually and easier to fit around other commitments.

Young people not only attended these sessions, but brought up topics that were important to them, for example issues relating to young transgender people not being able to access support. The Council were then able to follow up on this with local services demonstrating how the youth voice in Richmond was having a real and immediate impact.

*“Young people came to community conversations, which are usually adult affairs. Transgender issues were coming out, they had not got to their counsellors, they hadn’t got to medical appointments. It became a big topic in a general conversation. We followed up with Achieving for Children.”*

*Community engagement practitioner*



Though, as mentioned in the internet and social media section (see [section 10.2](#) above) it was raised that it is harder to hear from young people who do not want to be or cannot be on video calls. There was also a concern from youth practitioners working in the area of youth voice and action, that although online sessions led to increased engagement it also led to less active engagement because it is harder to encourage someone to get fully involved in a movement or activism without being together in a person.

### 11.1.1 Black Lives Matter

During the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement gained increased public recognition and was an example of youth voice and activism. **Many young people engaged with the movement and became actively involved through online or in-person actions.** One youth practitioner expressed that for young people of colour there is a large amount of emotional labour that comes with this work and explained that the onus should not be on them to provide solutions:

*“The Black Lives Matter movement is great, but there is a real emotional labour, just because people are ready to listen doesn’t mean people are ready to share. There is frustration amongst young people, one global majority person does not represent another. It’s not their job to improve society, it is not their problem to fix.”*

*Youth practitioner working in the arts and culture sector*

Youth practitioners spoke of the **lack of representation of Black people in leadership roles in the borough** which meant a lack of leadership role models for young Black people. It was also commented that racism in schools was not being dealt with appropriately, in particular in relation to recording instances of racism:

*“Racism is something that young people do experience, and it hasn’t been recognised properly. Schools should be recording the number of racist incidents.”*

*Youth safeguarding practitioner*

## 12. Home life

### 12.1 Context

In their research on how families have been spending their time throughout the pandemic, the IFS importantly point out that “while the Covid-19 crisis has affected all families with children, it has not affected them all equally. In almost all aspects of family life that we look at, we see



important differences between households of different socio-economic status”.<sup>56</sup> Factors such as whether parents were working from home, how many technological devices one household had, access to outside space and private space within houses all had an impact on the experience of family life for young people throughout the pandemic. This was exacerbated by the fact that from April to May children and young people spent an average of four and a half hours per day on schoolwork. This is equivalent to a 25% reduction in time spent on school work from primary school students and 30% reduction for secondary school students compared to pre-Covid.<sup>57</sup> This meant young people had more spare time that they had to spend at home because of the Covid-19 regulations.

Safety concerns have been raised around the requirement for children and young people to stay at home during pandemic lockdowns. The National Youth Agency’s COVID-19 response report estimates that over one million young people are at risk of the ‘toxic trio’ (addiction, mental health and domestic abuse). Despite this, over the past few months child protection referrals have fallen by up to 50% in some areas of the UK.<sup>58</sup>

Alternatively, for some families lockdown led to improvements in family dynamics and wellbeing with the British Families in Lockdown report stating that of the families they surveyed “most parents enjoyed the opportunity offered by lockdown to work from home and build stronger bonds with their children”.<sup>59</sup>

## 12.2 The impact of home life on youth wellbeing

There was a recognition that young people “don’t exist in a vacuum”, their **lives are shaped by the people around them**, in particular their families or the people they live with. As a result of this “some families benefited from the lockdown”, however for others the worries of parents and carers were directly impacting on young people. The importance of supportive families has been exacerbated because of the amount of time spent at home during this time. Youth practitioners explained that it can be harder to contact and support young people who are feeling isolated at home.

Covid-19 and lockdown caused a range of challenges for families, including increased rates of unemployment, higher levels of debt and increased need to access food banks. This in turn led to more children and young people themselves **worrying about money and access to food**. There were also **health-related anxieties** amongst families that heavily impacted children and young people, particularly if they had vulnerable family members:

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<sup>56</sup> IFS, Family time us and home learning during the Covid-19 lockdown, 2020

<sup>57</sup> IFS, Family time us and home learning during the Covid-19 lockdown, 2020

<sup>58</sup> National Youth Agency, COVID-19 Response, 2020, pp. 12

<sup>59</sup> Leeds Trinity University, British Families in Lockdown, July 2020



*“Parents’ fear of schools going back resulted in a 300% increase in requests to home educate children. In some cases, it is because children are afraid, in some cases the parents are afraid.”*

*Youth practitioner working in a VCS coordination role*

**Mental health issues amongst parents** have increased as well as amongst young people which impacted children and young people. Youth practitioners and school staff spoke about the importance of parents recognising how their own emotional wellbeing impacts their children’s wellbeing. Mental health professionals also added that some children are “not safe to talk freely at home”, for example if they wanted to attend therapy virtually to talk through these family related issues.

*“It is alarming the number of children with parents with significant parental vulnerabilities (e.g. mental health, domestic abuse). Are these children on our radar? There are lots of children with three vulnerabilities, not just one. There is a need for support for parent vulnerabilities. Who is picking up these young people that are living in these situations?”*

*Youth safeguarding practitioner*

Youth practitioners explained that for some young people the levels of distress at home had serious consequences, with **family breakdown** leading some young people to move out of home. Homelessness amongst young people has increased throughout the pandemic, partly because young people who may have been staying with friends or family members were no longer able to do this during lockdown.

*“[There were] able kids experiencing parental breakdown and family relationship strain. Quite a few of them moved to their grandparents because it was too unbearable at home.”*

*Community engagement practitioner*

**Domestic abuse** increased throughout the pandemic. Youth practitioners explained that in Richmond the need for support in relation to domestic abuse had gone up, despite reporting not increasing at the same rate. The perpetrators were abusing both adult partners and children at home during this time. It was felt that the **rates of domestic abuse amongst young people had not yet been recognised** due to low rates of disclosure. There was a feeling that the return to school would enable young people to speak out about these experiences, something that it is hard to do online without support.

*“[There is an effect of] domestic abuse on young people, figures are going through the roof. It is hard to target help and assess need online so we need to think of new outreach ideas and find new insights [to support these young people].”*

*Community engagement practitioner*

Young people also explained that they wanted to be able **to talk to people outside of their family about how they were feeling**, for example their friends or people from youth services, without just having to do this online:



*"I was really frustrated that I couldn't see anyone, I couldn't do the things I liked, I was getting tired of my family, I wanted to express my feelings to other people but I couldn't do that, and [talking to people] online was getting tiring."*

*Young person, aged 10*

## 12.3 Concerns for the future

Both young people and youth practitioners were concerned about the impacts of family-related issues, including domestic abuse and drug and alcohol use, and that these might increase again in a second lockdown. Despite this, there was also optimism that organisations supporting families and young people have learnt from the first lockdown and would be better prepared to offer support a second time round<sup>60</sup>.

*"[There needs to be] support for young people if they are going to have to quarantine. There are increasing safeguarding concerns such as domestic violence, anti-social behaviour and drug and alcohol use. That will be coming out over the next 6-12 months. We should have seen an increase in referrals over the past few months, but we have had a massive reduction [because of] schools being closed."*

*Youth practitioner working with young carers*

## 12.4 What's changed? A view from peer researchers

**Enjoyment of being able to spend time with family:** Some of the peer researchers described enjoying being at home because they were able to spend more time with their families.

**Not being able to see family members:** One peer researcher explained the difficulty of not being able to see both their parents because they did not live together; they could not follow their normal routine of moving between homes and had to stay with one parent. Not being able to see grandparents was also reported as a negative impact of Covid-19

# 13. Friendships and socialising

Covid-19 regulations have heavily impacted how young people are able to **socialise and see their friends**. It seemed that young people, regardless of their home environment, missed their peers and being able to spend time with them after school and at the weekends. The outdoor spaces in Richmond (e.g. parks) were highlighted as important when restrictions on socialising

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<sup>60</sup> Comments were made before a second national lockdown had been announced.



were in place. School staff expressed that some young people had lost friends over this time due to not seeing them in lockdown. This was also raised by young people themselves with one of them explaining that lockdown made them become less sociable:

*"I started becoming a little bit non-social, I stopped trying to talk to people for a while and then started again. I was just alone for most of the time, I didn't think it was worth trying to build on any of my friendships."*

**Young person, aged 11**

The closure of youth clubs and youth services also meant the closure of spaces in which young people socialised.

*"When this place (the youth club) closed down for beginning of Covid that really upset me because I wasn't able to socialise."*

**Young person, aged 12**

Even in times when socialising was allowed and rules were relaxed, some young people explained that they were not able to 'go back to normal' because their **parents were still being cautious**. One young person explained that they were only allowed to go out for a short amount of time before their parent got worried. A university graduate explained that it was difficult to see friends when the rules were relaxed because they and their friends were **unable to get jobs after graduating and as such had no money** to fund travelling to see each other. They went on to explain they spend time online instead which is dissatisfying because it is out of touch with the outside world:

*"I've spent more time sitting at home online anyway. I'm starting to see why people don't like it, it's too repetitive, I don't see enough with my eyes, like real things. I don't feel and touch and see and explore enough to go to bed."*

**Young person, aged 23**

Young people kept in touch with friends via social media. This was also facilitated by youth services setting up **groups where people could chat and catch up**. One young person explained that their youth club facilitated an online session for the girls group they would normally have in person which provided a helpful and supportive space to talk about how things were going and meant they did not have to wait until lockdown was over to see each other. However, another young person explained that it was hard to concentrate in youth club sessions or when socialising online because of having to look at the screen and because of having temperamental Wi-Fi connection. Another young person reported that their phone and tablet both crashed in lockdown and they have not been able to get another one since, meaning they are unable to keep in touch with friends and extended family:

*"It's really difficult not talking to them (my extended family) and I still haven't seen them in a really long time, it's very frustrating... Talking to the mirror gets lonely."*

**Young person, aged 10**



Some young people were more positive about this break from socialising as they explained that they didn't have to deal with gossip and drama:

*"I guess it was a good thing because I could take a break from dealing with friends' drama, it was kind of nice."*

*Young person, aged 15*

Interestingly, despite many young people saying they lost friends over this time, a few mentioned **forming new relationships**. One youth practitioner explained that their youth group was the first time the young people they were working with had seen other people their age since the beginning of lockdown which led to new friendships developing:

*"For some of them we were the first people they had seen other than their parents since Covid started. For them to come together in a group was really important. [They're] WhatsApping each other now, they have really bonded."*

*Youth mental health practitioner*

Not being able to socialise has been particularly difficult for certain groups of young people including **LGBTQ+ young people**. For young people who are LGBTQ+ having a sense of community and understanding and being around other LGBTQ+ people is important. Young people may be living with others (e.g. family members) who do not fully understand their needs and experiences or hold discriminatory views.

## 13.1 Concerns for the future

Young people were concerned about losing friends because of struggling to stay in touch virtually and **missing out on important social experiences**. The need for physical contact with other young people was also raised as important. Given the current rules, this means either young people will not yet be able to experience their friendships in this way, or that they will and therefore will not follow the Covid-19 regulations.

*"Young people have got fed up of Zoom over time, [they are] wanting physical contact with a human being, [they are] desperate to have contact with other young people."*

*Youth club worker*

## 13.2 What's changed? A view from peer researchers

**Socialising with friends moved online:** All peer researchers reported staying in touch with their friends online using various platforms including Zoom, House Party and online gaming. Peer researchers explained that throughout lockdown their group of friends did online



activities such as weekly Zoom quizzes, virtual film nights, attended online comedy nights and played online multiplayer video games.

**Making plans and saying in touch became less natural:** One peer researcher explained that it is more difficult to connect with people due to not having natural environments in which you come together with others. It takes more effort to make plans and arrange to see people when you have to take the initiative to call or message them directly:

*“Because I’m not at school there’s not a natural environment for conversations to start and plans to be made. You have to approach someone directly to go and see them, I feel more isolated because of that... I have fewer friends now but it’s alright”*

Peer researchers also explained that not seeing people in real life, or not seeing people as much has been difficult and in two cases has led to some of their friendships ending:

*“Things have changed, some relationships have deteriorated because we’re not seeing each other, [it’s] harder to keep in touch”*

**Keeping up hobbies was only possible if they could be done from home:** Peer researchers who were able to continue their hobbies at home (e.g. producing music) explained they had more time to do this which was enjoyable, whereas those who were not able to continue from home (e.g. organised sports) explained that they were missing taking part. One peer researcher described the following in relation to her sports centre closing:

*“That’s normally a place where I can relax, it’s been a shame [not having that]. We’ve had online zoom classes, but it’s not the same. I mean they’re better than nothing but still not really the best.”*



## 14. Recommendations

This section outlines recommendations for both oneRichmond and for the wider landscape of youth provision in the borough. These recommendations have been produced in conjunction with oneRichmond.

The effects of Covid-19 on young people are expected to be long-lasting. Unemployment, mental health issues and educational disruption are likely to impact young people across ages and parts of the borough throughout 2021 and beyond. Young people face a range of concerns that were present prior to Covid-19; cumulative impacts of disruptions to their lives during 2020; and uncertainty about the future. Despite these challenges, Richmond benefits from having a strong and diverse youth sector, with practitioners who are passionate about supporting, connecting and encouraging young people.

Within this wider context, it will be important for oneRichmond to work closely with youth sector partners to develop connected services which support youth resilience, confidence, social connection and mental wellbeing. **Young people should expect to have a bright future and aspire to achieve their individual goals.** Funders, schools, youth clubs, mental health providers and other partners can collaborate to make this a reality in Richmond.

### Recommendations:

1. Collaborate with the existing panel of peer researchers and reach out to new young people through local schools and youth organisations. Gather and share youth insights and enable Richmond youth to have a continued voice in shaping local support and services.
2. Support local initiatives which strengthen youth mental health and wellbeing. Identifying and addressing gaps in service provision and providing training for youth practitioners on how best to support young people to manage stress and build resilience.
3. Support initiatives which improve guidance in schools and youth organisations on risky behaviours and address the lack of sexual health advice and concerns around drug use.



4. Support youth worker forums where youth focused organisations can come together to share learning; better understand one another's service offer; and develop programmes.
5. Encourage and support youth organisations which provide affordable opportunities for young people to connect, feel safe and develop confidence,
6. Encourage and support local provision of affordable, youth focused activities and where appropriate raise awareness about available spaces. Identify a partner to develop, maintain and update a 'what's on and where website' so that young people know what services and activities are available in Richmond and have access to information on key topics.
7. Prioritise practical support and activities for the following groups of young people:
  - Young carers – through developing respite and educational support.
  - Young people involved or at risk of becoming involved with the criminal justice system – through developing long-term 1-1 support and mentoring.
8. Encourage sports organisations and businesses that have access to or run sports facilities to offer free spaces and taster sessions to youth organisations/young people.
9. Encourage schools to proactively address educational inequalities through tailored learning support and the provision of 'catch up'.
10. Encourage partnerships to develop programmes of work between employers and schools to provide work experience and opportunities and develop Careers Advice services which emphasise the range of post-school options for young people.
11. Publicise and engage local companies in the provision of apprenticeship and Kickstart programme opportunities for young people.
12. Support organisations to build on the learning from the pandemic around the ways in which they can extend their reach and provide inclusive online activities (e.g. for young people with disabilities or young carers).



# Appendices

## 14.1 Appendix A: Organisations represented at the information event and workshop

Theme	Organisation	Description
Statutory sector and partnerships	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council	Local authority in Richmond
	NHS Kingston & Richmond Clinical Commissioning Group	Local clinical commissioning group
	Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children	Ensures that everyone working in Kingston and Richmond with children and their families are working together
	Richmond CVS	Independent infrastructure organisation, providing dedicated support to the many Voluntary and Community Sector organisations in the borough of Richmond upon Thames
Range of youth services	Achieving for Children	A social enterprise company created by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to provide their children's services
	St Giles Trust	Uses expertise and real-life past experiences to empower people who are not getting the help they need – show people there is a way to build a better future
	MTV Youth Hampton	Local youth project set up in response to concerns raised in the local community over a lack of support for young people and rising anti-social behaviour
Young people with disabilities and/or	Action Attainment	Works to enable children with speech, language, communication and sensory needs to achieve and have active lives



additional needs	Richmond AID (Advice and Information on Disability)	Run by and for disabled people in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames – aim to support disabled people to live independent lives and to have the same opportunities as non-disabled people
	Richmond Mencap	Work with and for children, young people and adults with learning disabilities and their families in the London Borough of Richmond
	Skylarks	Provides activities and therapies for children with disabilities and additional needs
	TAG Youth Club	Youth club for disabled young people delivers a programme of personal, social and educational opportunities to young people with disabilities or additional needs
Carers	Crossroads Care Richmond and Kingston upon Thames	Provides high-quality home and community respite care services to Carers and the people we care for – babies, children, young people adults and the elderly
	Richmond Carers Centre	Supporting unpaid carers in Richmond
Sexual health	LVA Trust	Teaches young people about positive sexual health, self-esteem and relationships
	Spectra	Provides free sexual health and wellbeing services
Mental Health	Off the Record Twickenham	Provides the only drop-in counselling, information and sexual health service for young people aged 11-24 who live, work or study in the Borough of Richmond Upon Thames
	The Wild Mind Project	Nurture the wellbeing of people experiencing mental health or coping challenges through engagement with nature and purposeful creative activities
Young people facing homelessness	SPEAR London	A charity for people experiencing homelessness in SW London including Richmond
	Street Invest	Supporting organisations to build their capacity to conduct street work with detached children in the UK and to strengthen their organisations



	YMCA St Paul's Group	Provides accommodation for young people who face homelessness. Offer gyms and family and youth activities in communities.
Sport and entertainment	Kick London	Mission is to transform young people's lives with God's love through sport and support
	Richmond Theatre	Local theatre providing services for young people
Campaigns	Mothers against Muggings	Local community group that works to keep children safe

## 14.2 Appendix B: Good practice examples from desk review

### Sports-based project good practice examples

[Fight for Peace](#) – An evidence-based intervention that uses boxing and martial arts to steer young people away from violence and crime. The project focuses on combat sports as these can attract young people for whom violence is normalised. Support lasts for up to two years and provides education and employability support in addition to martial arts coaching. Young people are engaged through workshops delivered in schools, are referred by peers and youth services, and are identified by outreach workers in collaboration with the police in 'hot spot' areas of crime.

[London Football Journeys](#) – A charity with the purpose of both improving resilience to negative peer pressure and reducing negative attitudes amongst young Londoners towards neighbourhoods outside their own. Football Journeys brings together young people from diverse areas of London to play football, socialise, break down barriers and share stories and experiences. Participants on the project are taught how to produce a short video that introduces their lives and the area they live in. Then participants from each team watch and discuss the opponent team's video, before the football exchanges take place in each team's postcode.

### Community outreach project good practice examples

[The Street Talk Programme](#) – A programme delivered in partnership by the charities Addaction and Mentor UK across five communities in England. The programme trained and supported staff from 20 grassroots groups to identify appropriate settings in which to conduct outreach work with young people, use an app-based screening tool to identify young people vulnerable to substance misuse and deliver low intensity interventions based around motivational interviewing. The programme delivered 800 interventions, with more than two thirds of young people saying their knowledge (72%) and confidence (71%) in



making informed decisions about safer levels and methods of alcohol and drug use had increased, and most (70%) demonstrated a positive intention to change their behaviour.

[Gallery Youth](#) – A small charity based in Alnwick, Northumberland which carried out targeted outreach with young people who ‘hung around’ the local bus station and asked them what they would like to be involved with. The young people said that the bus station was an ugly and unwelcoming place and it did not seem as if anyone cared about what happened to it. Over the summer of 2013, Gallery Youth, a group of young people and a local artist, designed and painted six boards with images that reflected life in Alnwick. After the work with young people in the bus station, reports of anti-social behaviour around the area fell by over half. The artwork remains at the bus station and the bus station has not been vandalised or damaged since.

#### Peer-led project good practice examples

[The Immortals](#) – A project created by four young people from Barnsley delivered through a partnership between Creative Recovery and Young Addaction. The project identified that the young people found youth club environments ‘boring and uncool’ and therefore provided alternative nights out for people aged 14-18. The Immortals trained young people to provide peer mentoring, make information about drugs and alcohol accessible to other young people and provided alcohol-free events involving music, art, crafts, food and a safe place to socialise and have fun.

[No Knives, Better Lives](#) – A Scottish Government initiative working with a range of local partners to educate young people about the dangers and consequences of carrying knives and promote positive life choices through a peer education programme. The programme supports young people to deliver tailored interactive anti-violence education to their peers. The programme has trained 461 peer educators in the past five years, and 98% of the young people trained said the training was worthwhile and would recommend it to their peers. All the young people involved on the project reported feeling more educated on the causes and effects of violence and more aware of risk and ways of keeping safe.

#### Alternative learning project good practice examples

[West London Zone](#) – A charity that works in partnership with schools and local charities across four London boroughs. It provides a two-year personalised support programme to young people aged 3-18 who would benefit from additional support and opportunities to succeed at school. Each participant on the programme is assigned a Link Worker who coordinates an individual support plan for them, informed by the school and parents. The first cohort of participants who took part on the programme between 2016-18 showed improvements in emotional and mental wellbeing (65%), positive relationships (53%),



confidence and aspirations (48%), as well as progress at school in English (71%) and maths (55%).<sup>61</sup>

[Inspirational youth](#) – A social enterprise that engages young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their attitudes towards learning. The initiative uses game-based scenarios to engage young people and raise their self-awareness and resilience. One of their programmes, the Pathfinder, trains young people to be effective leaders for the younger students and in the community.

## 14.3 Appendix C: Involvement of stakeholders in upcoming research stages

Participants were given the opportunity to provide their views on the methodology for upcoming stages of the youth needs consultation including:

- How to recruit peer researchers?
- Who to consult and how to recruit vulnerable youth for consultation?
- Who to consult for stakeholder focus groups?

**Peer research:** Diversity and incentives were raised as key points when asked what it would be important to consider when recruiting peer researchers. Regarding diversity, it was said to be important that peer researchers come from diverse backgrounds e.g. in terms of ethnicity and gender. When commenting on incentives, attendees suggested providing food and drinks at training sessions; enabling young people to document taking part in the peer research for their UCAS applications and CVs; and making the process fun for the young people.

**Consultation with vulnerable young people:** In discussion around the recruitment of vulnerable young people for the consultation, diversity and incentives were again raised as key points, along with a careful approach to recruitment. It was felt that recruitment should involve utilising existing trusted relationships between youth practitioners and young people. Conversation around incentives focused on positive recognition for the young people involved with an emphasis on their empowerment. Regarding diversity, representation of the following groups was thought to be particularly important:

- Young carers
- Young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- Young people with mental health issues
- Young people in care
- Young people not in employment education or training

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<sup>61</sup> [West London Zone, Collective Impact in Practice, 2018](#)



- Young people involved in gangs
- Young people in the criminal justice system
- Young people who are rough sleepers

**Stakeholder focus groups:** When asked who to consult for the stakeholder focus groups, attendees of the workshop identified various types of stakeholders e.g. school wellbeing officers, local churches, youth workers, community safety organisations, and rough sleeping and homelessness outreach workers.

## 14.4 Appendix D: Peer researcher topic guide

1. What has happened/changed over the past few months?
2. What aspects have you found challenging?
3. What aspects have you found positive
4. Have you accessed or are you accessing any support/services/online activities?
  - What would you like to access?
  - Who has been providing support/services/activities?
5. How have you found being in Richmond during the pandemic?
  - Is there anything that would improve the borough?
6. What are your plans for the coming months? Do you have any worries about these?
  - What would help with these plans?

## 14.5 Appendix E: Practitioner focus group topic guide

### Impact of Covid 19 – Issues and needs

1. In what ways have Covid-19 most significantly impacted the young people that you work with?
2. Which issues have been exacerbated by Covid-19?
3. What are the main concerns/worries for young people for the next 6 months/1 year?

### Support and services

4. What have been the main support needs of the young people you have worked with throughout lockdown?
  - a. How these changed over time?
5. In an ideal world, if funding wasn't an issue, which types of support and services would you like to see become increasingly available for young people?
  - a. Have there been any types of support or services that young people have sought over the past year that have not been easily accessible?

### Living in Richmond

6. Have there been any particular advantages or disadvantages for young people living in Richmond during this time?



### **Education, training and employment**

7. We know that education, training and employment has been disrupted for many young people this year. In what ways has this disruption impacted the young people you have worked with?
8. What the main concerns for young people in this area over the next six months?

### **Health and wellbeing**

9. What are the main (mental and physical) health and wellbeing concerns for young people?
  - a. Isolation
  - b. Physical health
  - c. Anxiety/depression
  - d. Sleep and routines
10. Which types of health and wellbeing support and services do young people need?

### **Crime and safety**

11. Are there any types of crime or safety concerns that have increased during this period?

### **Internet and social media**

12. Do you see time on social media as mainly positive or negative during this period?
13. Do you feel that young people have access to reliable information about Covid-19?  
How could this be improved?

### **Youth voice and action**

14. Do you see Covid-19 as having an impact on youth voice and action?
  - a. Do young people feel that they have a say in issues that impact them?
  - b. What is your impression of the most pressing social and political issues for young people?

### **The future**

15. What do you see as any potential positives emerging from youth experiences of Covid-19?
16. Any other comments around the impact of Covid that we haven't covered?

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