



**Knowsley**  
**Young People's**  
**Commission**

independence mates  
challenge CONFIDENCE  
alltime DREAM  
apprenticeship FAMILY  
like to TALK to someone  
MENTORING deal with it  
gigging MINT go places

**Unlocking the potential of  
young people in Knowsley**





# **Knowsley Young People's Commission**

## **Unlocking the potential of young people in Knowsley**

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# About the Knowsley Young People's Commission

The Knowsley Young People's Commission brought together a group of academics, policy analysts, media representatives and creative thinkers to develop new perspectives in the complex area of public policy for young people in Knowsley. The Commission was commissioned by Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and delivered by 4Children.

Consulting with young people, families, communities and professionals who work with young people, the Commission has sought to find new approaches to age old problems – presenting far reaching recommendations to improve and support key aspects of young people's lives.

This report aims to inform decision makers in Knowsley at a crucial time for services for young people.

The Commission set out to understand and analyse:

- What life is like for young people in Knowsley
- What are young people's values, aspirations, dreams and achievements?
- How family, friends, communities and professionals shape young people's lives
- What are the challenges young people in Knowsley face?
- How those challenges can be overcome to unlock young people's potential
- What lessons national and international experiences can offer us in identifying potential solutions

In considering these subjects, a number of issues have been at the forefront of our minds. These are:

- The views of young people – at the centre of all our thinking throughout
- The impact of families and friends as role models and mentors and the impact of strong intergenerational ties
- The role of professionals and their attitude to young people

- Young people's sense of place and community in Knowsley and the strengths and limitations this can bring
- The historical context of Knowsley and the impact of economic decline
- Views on crime, gangs and guns and the impact of this on young people
- Young people's attitude to education, skills and broader achievement and advancement
- Young people's rights and responsibilities as set out in the UN Charter of the Rights of the Child
- How we can build confidence, creativity, ambition and a sense of agency in young people
- How public bodies and public funding can help support young people in a tight fiscal climate

This report highlights challenges for decision makers who are seeking to unlock the potential for young people in Knowsley. It sets out far reaching recommendations which the Commission believes have the potential to transform life chances. However, the Commission is realistic and accepts that change will only be achieved if the recommendations are embraced and implemented within the Knowsley context, with all the demands for change in wider services and opportunities that this will imply. Increasing aspiration and confidence demands an outlet for those ambitions through public services, communities and employers. We have therefore identified some 'key challenges' at the end of each set of recommendations which will need to be overcome. These will form the basis of deliberation and discussion at a 'report back' conference for young people in Knowsley which we are proposing to take place in autumn 2010.

The Knowsley Young People's Commission is grateful to Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and all of those who have informed and inspired our thinking.

## The Knowsley Young People's Commission



**Phil Redmond CBE**  
**Chair of Commission**  
Television producer, screenwriter  
and Chair of the National  
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**Yvonne Roberts**  
Journalist, Author and  
Broadcaster



**Jeremy Vine**  
Assistant Editor, *The Times*

# Foreword

**The worst ward in Britain is Page Moss in Knowsley. That is where I was born and where I was brought up. I went to school in Kirkby. Then, it was a place of hope. Part of the tapestry of new towns and estates springing up in post-war Britain. Today, the perception has changed. At least for older generations who have seen the vast industrial estates and manufacturing centres that paid their wages and offered a brighter future than the city slums from which many came.**

For young people, unfettered by industrial strife, the future in Knowsley – as everywhere – appears as bright as their own burning aspirations. This is the main finding of this report, that despite a sense of pessimism in the older generations, a pessimism often reinforced by the pressures that frontline staff come under in helping some communities to cope, the young people of Knowsley are no different than anywhere else. They are bright, ambitious, talented and simply want realistic opportunities to make their own way in the world.

That is what this report is about. It is a snapshot, or cucumber slice in time, illustrating what life is like for young people in Knowsley, what they want and how they may be helped in achieving their ambitions.

At the age of 12, educational attainment of young people in Knowsley sits alongside or above the national average.<sup>1</sup> By 18 it is below, meaning that both individual ability and potential community social capital is being lost. It also means that the way we, as a wider society, measure ‘success’, through rigid national educational benchmarks may be throwing up false echoes in places like Knowsley. It is those false echoes we need to address.

That has not been possible within the scope and remit of this particular report, but it does provide the evidence to start the process. The report then should, perhaps, be read as the first step toward unlocking the real potential of Knowsley’s young people. The next steps should then be to move from a point of better understanding, toward what should be done and, more crucially, how and when it could be done.

The statistics set out in the report may often appear as daunting as they are uplifting, but I urge you to read them. The optimism of the young is infectious. I urge you to absorb it. Their hopes are inspiring. I challenge you to reward them.

**Phil Redmond CBE**

Chair of the Knowsley Young People’s Commission

1. Knowsley MBC Key Stage 2, 3 and 4 attainment data, Office for National Statistics, Neighbourhood Statistics datasets, [www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk)



# Chantelle, 19

"Me name is Chantelle. I'm 19. I've lived here for about a year, it's nice where I live, pretty quiet like. Not that I spend much time there, I'm usually at me boyfriends. I live with me mam and dad and little sister. I've got a brother as well who has a fiancé and baby and we see them every other week or so.

When I'm at home and we're having tea we sit on the couch in front of the telly. We watch whatever's on - usually the news but it's normally boxing or football that's on the telly, watch Crime Watch, the Simpsons, but if Shameless is on we all watch that. It's alright watching Shameless with me mam and dad there, it's like life.

Me parents have really shaped me life, like. They've always worked hard and encouraged me to be good. Me bessie mate lives round the corner. So I might go round there, have a chat and a cuppa tea. Or just stay in. I love everything about me new boyfriend. He's just so different to anyone else I know.

I don't do that much at night. I don't really drink. Only very rarely. I don't like getting drunk and I don't like being out of control. I do smoke, but only about seven a day. I started smoking when I got with me last boyfriend who was very controlling and made me feel bad about myself. I've never done drugs. I never hung out on the streets and I've always done me work whilst at college. I text me mates and use Facebook. If I'm not working I'll stay in or go shopping.

Most of me mates are on the dole. At the moment, I don't think I pay tax, so I don't think I have a say. I've got mates who are on the dole, who go out every night getting wasted, having a proper 18 and 19 year old's life, and I'm going to work, coming home and going to bed. I'm basically paying for them to have a good time. They won't get a job because they'll get less money than they do for sitting around and doing naff all. If they have a baby they get a house for free and they have a ball. I'd never give up work and I refuse to go on the dole.

Independence is really important to me. Me mam and dad have always worked. Me mam's never had a day off sick. At the end of the month I can say, "I've worked for this", it's not like I'm sitting around being bored and doing nothing.

I'd like to be a volunteer and I've been asking if I could do this, really enjoyed it when I did it before. I feel like I'm doing something worthwhile when I'm at work. I'm doing youth work level 2 at college... it's going good. I sometimes come up with silly things and people think I'm kinda stupid, but I ain't and I work hard and I get As."



# 1. Executive summary

**Young people in Knowsley represent both the present and the future. Their hopes and aspirations show us what the future could hold, and their values and beliefs give a sense of the world we could live in. This will be the next generation of neighbours, work colleagues and decision makers – and as they make up 14% of the local population, they are an important consideration for all of us.**

However, young people in Knowsley are growing up in a world vastly different to that of their parents and grandparents. Dramatic changes in the economic fortune of the borough led to the disappearance of the industry based jobs that could once have been taken for granted. The move to a service based economy demands a new set of skills and qualifications that few have been able to keep up with. The high level of worklessness and underemployment that have resulted casts its long shadow in every aspect of young people's lives – from underachievement in education, to unemployment, involvement in risky behaviour and health concerns.

These changes also inform a dominant narrative that we often heard from the older generations, and in some cases professionals in the borough – a narrative of decline, failure and pessimism for the future. This narrative contrasts markedly with the views of young people themselves, but has a pervasive influence on all aspects of young people's lives. From the way that services are designed and delivered to the expectations and aspirations of young people themselves. These factors have a powerful and often negative effect on young people at a time of crucial development in their lives when long lasting attitudes and capabilities are formed – limiting options and chances in life forever.

The Knowsley Young People's Commission set out to change this: to understand what life is like for young people in Knowsley today, what their future holds and how we can best support them to fulfil their potential. This report is not about trying to fit young people into a 'box' or 'process' in order to achieve. Rather, it is about understanding and accepting the realities of growing up in the borough and designing an approach that truly gets behind young people. A key principle of our work has been to listen to young people themselves and we have talked to and heard from hundreds throughout the borough. Every one of our conclusions and recommendations are rooted in what young people have told us.

And young people's messages to us were clear. They have high hopes, aspirations and dreams for their future but they need help from us all to get there – at home, in school and in the community. From new approaches to learning, to more say over what goes on locally; better access to new experiences, to more help to get ahead 'their' way, young people in Knowsley are indicating solutions.

Young people have demanded that we rethink our assumptions to reflect the realities and the ambitions of their lives today. This includes challenging the predominant focus on academic achievement as the only measure of success – with a new thrust to value and develop creativity, enterprise, and the practical crafts and skills that will take young people confidently into adult life, whether in Knowsley or beyond. We believe that the proposals we set out in this report offer a bold new approach to helping young people succeed in all aspects of their lives.

Our recommendations have sought to turn the world of services and support for young people in Knowsley 'inside out' – with a new starting point of young people themselves as leaders, shapers and, with support, deliverers of their own opportunities and support. Inherent in the recommendations is a new focus on raising and delivering on young people's aspirations, with new approaches to capture and positively support the interests and realities of young people's lives. Our recommendations put a great emphasis on young people as champions and advocates for their own community, with the support in place to make things happen. Ensuring that others are able to accept the impact of this will be crucial.

It would be wrong to suggest that this could all be achieved at no cost. But we have been mindful of the current economic situation and firmly believe that with creativity, good leadership and genuine engagement with young people, the results can be achieved largely through refocusing and reprioritising resources rather than investing in large amounts of new spend.

We are advocating a stronger emphasis on help for young people early as problems develop, thus saving the more expensive cost of dealing with crisis. We hope that involving young people in shaping and delivering their own activities and support will build a self-sustaining infrastructure, improving effectiveness whilst building valuable skills and experience. On every aspect, we believe these proposals offer the smarter approach that

everyone is searching for, making this as valuable as a blueprint to other areas as it is to Knowsley itself.

Some key themes have emerged from our research about young people in Knowsley to inform our thinking and underpin our recommendations:

- The vast majority of young people in Knowsley are positive and ambitious for their future, and their parents say they want to support them to achieve their goals.
- Positivity and aspiration is strongest in younger children and then appears to dissipate throughout the teenage years.
- However, many young people live in circumstances of significant disadvantage and this has a damaging and limiting effect on their life chances.
- Young people are growing up with the consequences of the rapid economic decline of the area and a subsequent dominant and widespread negative narrative of expectation and achievement from communities, and often professionals.
- A significant minority of young people and families engage in risky, anti-social and criminal behaviours which have an impact on the wider community.
- This affects how young people, parents and professionals view the communities in Knowsley.
- Parents want the best for their children but are not always able to effect change and offer the support needed to succeed.
- The sense of community in Knowsley is strong but professionals fear that this holds children back and limits ambition.
- The current focus of resources is on the 'challenging minority'. This tends to create a focus on the deficits of a few, rather than building the capacity of all young people.
- Many young people have entrepreneurial abilities but they struggle to channel these through the formal educational system.
- A significant proportion of young people see skills and talents beyond the purely academic as valuable, but the system appears not to give them credit for that.
- Those who work with young people in schools, youth clubs, specialist services and in the community have a key role to play in helping to lift and realise aspirations.

**These are the challenges we have therefore identified and the proposals for change we put forward:**

## Challenge 1

### **To build the aspiration and resilience of young people in Knowsley to raise expectations and help young people realise their dreams**

From all we have learnt, it is clear that young people in Knowsley are positive and aspirational but that for a variety of reasons it appears this is difficult to unlock. Young people set out with high hopes of university, travel, good jobs and even fame which begin to fall away and shrink as they get older and the reality of their limited choices post-16 set in. Poor academic results and a lack of knowledge about the wider world restrict young people's options when school finishes, with some already becoming trapped with the consequences of their risky behaviour. Time and time again, the Commission saw how young people had seemed to accept compromises on leaving school, often reaffirming a negative and fatalistic narrative of low expectation that we found in some families, communities and professionals.

The Commission believes that raising aspiration and achievement is a top priority for young people in Knowsley, with an explicit challenge to young people to set sights high, backed up by a promise from the local authority and other bodies to help make this happen. The promise would be supported by all those who work with young people in schools, youth clubs and the community to reinforce a positive 'can do' spirit. The Commission has recognised the importance of role models and champions in supporting this and wants to recruit members of the community and a Young People's Champion to advocate for young people in every aspect of their lives.

Building resilience to achieve this will be key and we want to see a wide range of activities, including 'mental toughness' programmes, to support this – particularly targeted at those young people living in families who are 'just coping' and known to be particularly fragile. These activities will seek to build interests, skills and self-confidence through both new evidence based approaches to learning, and practical, vocational and experiential routes to attainment that build on young people's interests and skills.

## Challenge 2

### To broaden the horizons of young people in Knowsley to open up opportunities and options for their future

Throughout our report we demonstrate the benefits but also the limitations of living in such a close knit community as Knowsley. Young people are clear that their family and community are important but also want to be able to consider branching out to study, travel and work outside their area. A lot of parents we spoke to want this too for their children but often feel unable to help them get there.

But there is also a feeling from a lot of parents that young people should be like them and it is no surprise therefore that with few options present when school ends, that is exactly what a lot of young people find themselves doing. The Commission has been impressed by some of the initiatives to broaden horizons and open up opportunities that are already underway in the borough and has seen that they are having a positive impact on the way that young people view their futures. We want to build on these to give all young people a better understanding of what adult life might offer them.

We are therefore proposing a wide range of activities to extend young people's access to, and interest in, a wide range of sports, arts, and learning and employment options. This would broaden horizons and build interests, skills and enjoyment of new experiences. This proposal would tap into young people's current interests to open up opportunities for dance, non-traditional physical activities such as extreme sports, fashion and music – drawing on the rich cultural and sporting resources of the region. Many of these activities could take place in and around Knowsley's new Centres for Learning and we are also keen to reach out to the wider community both in terms of young people who may be more difficult to engage and the wide variety of other experiences on offer.

We want young people to get an insight into higher education and employment options first hand through visits and placements. We also want the local authority and travel companies to play their part in helping young people to get around the borough and wider region, through subsidised travel and accessible routes. And we want to build on young people's extended family links and community involvement by considering a new young people's engagement scheme. Ensuring that young people can get around and take part in activities safely will be essential and we want the police to build greater engagement with young people and to raise awareness of the negative impact of crime.

## Challenge 3

### To support young people to become agents of their own change

Raising aspiration, improving resilience and broadening horizons will be crucial in encouraging and supporting Knowsley young people to consider a wider set of goals. But we also need to empower young people to be able to make it happen and become agents of their own change.

Too many young people we talked to felt unable to change or influence the world around them, trapped by their circumstances and with few options to go forward. Enabling young people to become agents of change is therefore a central priority for the Commission.

We are recommending that schools, youth clubs and wider activities join forces with the local authority to help put young people in the driving seat. We have seen the impact of the positive experiences of the Young Advisors and believe that there are major opportunities to use this experience to help all young people develop their influencing and decision making skills to improve their confidence in being able to make choices and effect change.

We have been impressed by the work already going on to consult with young people and are recommending that this is extended into a major programme of engagement to review, design, plan and co-deliver services for young people in the borough. This new young people led approach would be a major shift. It would tap into the wider move to localise services and increase community ownership by giving young people explicit responsibilities for their services through management structures and involvement in local boards. We want young people to experience confidence and belief in their own abilities to make things happen and are recommending that small grants are made available through a new Community Youth Fund to support good ideas and activities.

## Challenge 4

### To ensure that parents are able to offer positive support to young people

Everything we read and hear reaffirms the importance of the family and home environment as one of the strongest influencers of children and young people's life chances, and young people in Knowsley have backed this up in all they have said to us. As we highlight in the report, whilst most parents are supporting their children to do their best, it is clear that too few have the capacity and reach of more affluent families to provide the bridge needed for opportunities to be realised.

We have sought to understand the route map to adult life of young people in Knowsley and the impact that low expectations of some parents, communities and those working with young people have on it. We must accept that a lot of families are only just coping themselves and so have little capacity left to help their teenagers through these important yet challenging years. This is particularly the case for times of higher risk – transition to secondary school, from 11–14 and then when leaving school. We have seen how help and support at these times can help young people avoid the dangers of risky behaviour and poor choices, and want to help parents support their children during this period as much as we can.

We are therefore recommending more support for parents as their children grow up. For some, this means help through offering better advice and support on qualification and employment options; for others this will mean help with parenting skills. Some families will need more intensive parenting support when things go wrong.

We are recommending a major extension of support for parents that is taken out to the community, to be available in Centres for Learning, Children's Centres and in other local community buildings and estates. This will mean expanding on the existing peer to peer support and training, with more intensive help extended to all those who need it in the borough. We want to ensure that we get help to the parents who need it most – specifically the large number of parents who are 'just coping'. We hope that this means we can get in early before problems spiral out of control, to give young people and their families the help they need.

A key aspect of this support should be to open up opportunities for parents to take up training and education and so realise their own potential.

## Challenge 5

### To harness the entrepreneurial skills of young people in Knowsley

Whilst some young people in Knowsley have struggled to improve their educational achievement and qualifications, their interest and abilities in enterprise is obvious.

The Commission has been impressed by young people's appreciation of enterprise and of its creative application. However, we also believe that there are great opportunities to make better and more sustainable use of these skills and interests. This is particularly the case for more challenging young people – many of whom have shown us that they are still ambitious and prepared to work hard if they can find a path which suits them.

That's why we are recommending nothing short of an enterprise renaissance to be led by young people in the borough.

We would like to see enterprise given a high priority from primary school onwards, with small grants and loans on offer through a 'Dragon's Den' of young people to get young people's great ideas up and running. We want the programme to be designed by young people – a Youth Entrepreneurship Group – and tap into their interests, encouraging bright new ideas for business and creative ventures from IT support services and recycling to pop-up fashion shops.

## Challenge 6

### To change the perception of young people and communities in Knowsley by showing new measures of success and achievement

The statistics of life in Knowsley paint an uncomfortable picture of widespread deprivation and deficit and as we have recognised, the impact of such disadvantage is far reaching and can be felt in every aspect of young people's lives. It is therefore important to stress that the drive to reduce inequalities and poverty rests behind all of our proposals and the Commission believes that it needs to remain an area of utmost priority nationally too.

The Commission found that the negative impact of such a constant narrative was ever-present, convincing us that a change in perception and attitude would only be achieved if we devised new ways of measuring success. This isn't to question the validity of existing statistics – indeed, it is important that we continue to carefully consider them at all times – but it is to acknowledge that there is also a much more positive story which isn't being told.

For these reasons we are recommending that additional metrics are established to measure the things that young people consider to be signs of success. These include their achievements in arts, music, sports and performance as well as their involvement in the community. By doing this we hope that young people in Knowsley can begin to be portrayed in a different light – once again encouraging confidence and positivity. Awards of achievement would celebrate these successes, getting the message out clearly that young people in Knowsley do great things.

## Challenge 7

**For those who work with young people in Knowsley to be among the best in the country and for Knowsley to become a leader of national and international practice**

We believe that the proposals outlined in this report have the potential to create a new impetus and energy for young people in Knowsley to raise aspirations and achievement with unprecedented success.

The Commission has huge belief in this bold strategy but knows that it can only be achieved with the support of everyone who works with young people in the borough – with a new drive to raise aspiration and achievement, working with the strengths of young people to challenge a negative and fatalistic attitude. That's why we are recommending a major new workforce development programme for all young people's workers, including teachers in the borough.

This programme would induct and train staff on the new young people led approach and on new ways of working together to help young people succeed. We believe that there is great potential in reaching out to the community itself to recruit and train youth workers and community champions – raising the status of working with young people in the borough and encouraging new people (including those who may have been disengaged themselves) to apply. We recognise that these can be tough jobs and that working with the most challenging young people can be stressful. That's why we are recommending more back up support for frontline workers to help them deal with pressures of the job. To reflect the importance of workforce development we are recommending a new Academy of Youth Leadership and Community Regeneration and Engagement in Knowsley.

If implemented, we believe that these proposals could have a remarkable impact as a catalyst for positive

change in all aspects of Knowsley young people's lives – raising aspiration, opening up opportunities and vastly improving life choices. As a result, the levels of poverty and disadvantage will, we believe, drop substantially in the years and decades to come. Understanding how and what works will be essential and we are recommending careful evaluation throughout. This work will be central to the Academy which will take forward work on many of the Commission's themes.

However we are also aware of the national and international significance of such change, which makes this a blueprint for action for every area of disadvantage in the country and beyond. In an unprecedented move, the new Academy would capture and disseminate this knowledge, influencing and informing policy and practice for young people everywhere and creating a world first.



# Amy, 14

"My name's Amy and I'm 14 years old. Where we live is quite quiet and we have woods behind us. There ain't much to do here apart from youth club which is about 15 minutes walk away. It's only open one day a week and not many people go as it gets a bit boring. I don't know that many people by my house as nobody talks to each other.

I s'pose I've had an ok upbringing. My parents work a lot and don't really have time for me and aren't interested in any of my life. I've felt a bit lonely since my brother left home.

I live with me mam and dad. I have a brother who I'm dead close to but he is away at university. I really miss him, like, and sometimes go visit him in Wales. I think visiting him has made me realise that I wanna go university when I'm older. As soon as I'm 16 I'm moving out – off to do A Levels to study geology in Wales. I don't wanna live in Knowsley as there is nothing here and I want to get away from me mam too.

I don't really get on with me mam. She says she doesn't like me and keeps telling me to move out. She doesn't get me which makes me sad. Luckily I have a bessie mate that I can talk to. We really support each other and she lives close by. I mainly have male friends though, I don't seem to get on with lasses as much – they always talk about you. There are about ten of us that hang around. We don't really do much – just go into town, go to youth club once a week or hang out on the streets.

I wish I had someone else to talk to though as me mam won't talk to me about stuff. I can't speak to anyone at school – you have to make an appointment with the learning mentors. If it was drop in I would probably go there but what's the point and they mainly just work with people that have really big problems. I'm doing ok at school but would like to talk to someone about my home life.

Bad kids get rewards, even though we know this is to try and reform them. The good kids get mixed messages about seeing bad kids getting rewarded for bad behaviour.

I sometimes drink but have never done drugs and don't think I ever would. Me and me mates hang out on the park and drink – especially in the summer when there's nothing better to do. When I visit me brother at university he takes me out and we use someone else's ID to get me in to the clubs which is sound. All his mates look after me too.

My average day is quite repetitive and not very exciting like. I wish there was more things for young people to do. We sometimes walk to Asda and that is as exciting as it gets. I would like to go in to Liverpool more but the bus takes over an hour and it is dead expensive. I love music, art and drawing, it would be mint if we could do more of these things at school as they are more enjoyable and it's more me."

## 2. Statistics and findings

### About Knowsley – what the statistics say

This report is about young people in Knowsley, one of the five boroughs of the district of Merseyside.

The Young People's Commission has set out to understand the lives of young people in Knowsley – the concerns of young people, their views on their local community and their aspirations for the future. To achieve this, we have spent a considerable amount of time talking and listening to young people themselves. We have also talked to their parents, their teachers, youth workers, the police and others who work with young people in the borough. Our task is to apply the knowledge we have gained and analysed into a set of recommendations to improve the environment, support and ultimately the life chances of young people in Knowsley.

Our starting point is to consider the statistics and data about Knowsley, its communities and its young people. It is against this backdrop that our deliberations and calls for action are set.

### Growing up in Knowsley

There can be little doubt that growing up in Knowsley presents some significant challenges for many young people. The statistics show that the vast majority of young people in Knowsley live in hard pressed families:

- **64.5%** of 10–16 year olds educated in Knowsley in 2008-09 are classified as coming from 'hard pressed' families according to ACORN social classification data<sup>2</sup>, compared with **23%** nationally
- **20.4%** are classified as coming from 'comfortably off' families, compared with **27%** nationally
- **8.2%** are classified as coming from 'moderate means' families, compared with **15%** nationally
- **6.7%** are classified as coming from 'wealthy achievers' families, compared with **25%** nationally

Knowsley is not a large borough, with a population of 151,000 – down by 13% since 1981. Children and young people make up approximately 26% of that population (39,500). The significantly largest group are aged 10 to 19, numbering 21,200.<sup>3</sup> The population is predominantly white British – with just 4% Black or minority ethnic groups.

The level of financial hardship in the borough is stark. Fifty eight per cent of children and young people (under 16) in Knowsley live in poverty. Eight of Knowsley's wards have more than twice the national average of children living on

benefits. In one ward, 70% of children live in households living on benefits – the highest rate in the country. Almost half of Knowsley's population (46%) live in the 10% of the most deprived wards.<sup>4</sup> Only 6% of the population live in areas of the borough that fall outside of the 50% most deprived communities in England.

Just over 17% of households are classified as lone parent families; this is considerably higher than the national average of 9.5%. Twelve per cent of lone parent households have dependent children, almost double the national figure. The proportion of lone parent households is particularly high in North Huyton (23%), North Kirkby (20%) and South Kirkby (21%). Thirty per cent of Knowsley residents live in social housing; 5% live in private accommodation defined as 'not fit'.<sup>5</sup> Knowsley also has a higher percentage of carers (11.5%)<sup>6</sup> than the national average.

It is also clear to see that the high levels of disadvantage have a pervasive effect on every element of young people's health and wellbeing. Life expectancy for Knowsley residents is three years lower than the national average; with lung cancer, liver disease, respiratory problems and heart disease the main causes of death.<sup>7</sup> The most recent data from the 2001 census shows that over a third of residents have multiple needs.<sup>8</sup> The borough also suffers from high rates of crime, particularly theft of motor vehicles and crime against businesses.<sup>9</sup> The statistics show that one in five children from families in which parents and carers have never worked is likely to develop a mental health disorder, compared with one in twenty from a professional background.<sup>10</sup>

Ongoing research from Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (KMBC) gives further insight into the profile of families in the borough by behaviour and need<sup>11</sup>:

- Around 30% of families in Knowsley are judged to be 'thriving'
- Around 15% are 'coping' – they are vulnerable to economic changes but resilient, with good social networks and extended family
- Around 45% are 'just coping' – they are struggling, live week by week, just beyond the reach of social workers and other agencies, and are often single parents in extended families, with aspiration but not sure how to take things forward, low resilience, limited networks
- Around 10% are 'chaotic' – these families are within the scope of agencies, living outside of social norms, anti-social, anti-community, with strong extended family, sometimes criminalised

It is significant that around 45% of families fall into the 'just coping' category. In this group, a simple change in



circumstances such as a bout of illness, the loss of a job or the changed behaviour of one of the children, can lead to an accelerated downward spiral. Evidence shows that if the right services – often provided peer to peer – had been available at the right time, such a decline might have been prevented and the resilience of the family regained.

The local authority's ongoing research is anticipated to find that large amounts of time, money and attention of public services are focused on the around 10% of 'chaotic' families, often with not very productive results, while the needs of the around 45% who are 'just coping' are often unfairly neglected. A new strategy has subsequently been developed which aims to rebalance this focus, supporting families who are on the edge of crisis to improve their coping skills.

## Risky behaviour

Statistics go on to suggest that young people's involvement in risky behaviour in Knowsley is disproportionately high.

Figures show that in 2007 32.6% of the adult population in the borough smoked. This is considerably higher than the national average of 24%. Evidence for consumption among young people is limited, though data show that among Year 10 pupils (ages 14–15) the proportion of girls who smoke is 17%, slightly lower than the national average of 20%, and the proportion of boys who smoke is 9%, which is consistent with the national average. It is recognised that smoking rates generally increase with age.<sup>12</sup> The figures reveal that the supply of cheap counterfeit and non-duty tobacco in Knowsley is considerable (17% of the whole supply) and that a higher proportion of economically inactive and underage consumers buy tobacco from these unregulated and black market sources.<sup>13</sup>

The most significant recent trend in alcohol consumption in Knowsley is the doubling of young females (aged 16–24) drinking above the weekly recommended limit – from 15% in 1988 to 30% in 2008. It is reported that there has been no significant increase in the proportion of young people in Knowsley consuming alcohol; however, for those that do drink, rates of consumption are thought to have doubled to an average of 10 to 11 units per week. Consumption among young females is thought to be approximately five percentage points higher than that of young males.<sup>14</sup>

In 2008, the teenage conception rate per 1,000 females aged 18 and under was 43.3 against a national average of 40.4. The Knowsley rate fell even further in 2009, to 35.4. Encouragingly, in Knowsley this rate has fallen by 11.5 points over the past decade whereas nationally the rate has fallen by 6.2 points.<sup>15</sup>

## Education and employment

Educationally, a lasting consequence of the industrial history of the borough's economy is the persistence of comparatively low attainment. Although rates of attainment have improved in recent years, the skills base has not kept pace with the scale of transition towards a service based economy. Among some families, the decline of manufacturing industry has left a legacy of low educational attainment and low aspiration for young people in the borough.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst attainment levels are moving in the right direction, education and qualification levels are still worrying:

- Attainment at Key Stage 3, GCSE and A Level is consistently below that of the national average
- Pupils who live in the borough and who go to school elsewhere had a five percentage point lead in 2006 over pupils educated in the borough's schools
- Schools in Knowsley are 'underperforming' relative to those of England as a whole
- Only 14.5% of people living in the borough are qualified to degree level or an equivalent qualification in comparison to 29% nationally<sup>17</sup>

Whilst the overall increase in the proportion of people of a working age with qualifications has kept pace with that of Merseyside and nationally, the overall gap has not narrowed during the period.

It is recognised that Knowsley has a particular problem of persistently high rates of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). A 2009 report of the Learning and Skills Council placed Knowsley at the top of national NEET 'rankings', with 14.4% of 16–18 year olds in the borough recorded as NEET. The national average was 6.6%. A 2008 report suggested that the figure for NEET 16–19 year olds in Knowsley could be as high as 20% once those young people with unknown status are also factored in.<sup>18</sup>

The most recent data for September to December 2009 show a marked fall in the NEET rate to below 10% and then to below 9% for December. These falling figures – down from 600 to 400 – suggest that sustained improvements are being made. They are especially encouraging given that unemployment among young people at the national scale has become a problematic feature of the current recession.

## Access to transport

Car ownership levels in Knowsley are low, with 56% of households in the most disadvantaged areas having no access to a car. This compounds a national trend of a

falling proportion of young people living in disadvantaged areas who have a driving licence.<sup>19</sup>

For young people under 16, the cost of using public transport is typically half of the adult fare and for education journeys on dedicated school transport it is a flat fare. However, once a young person reaches the age of 16 they have to pay the full adult fare. Figures show that commercial bus fares in Merseyside rose by 10% over 12 months and continue to rise at a faster rate than associated rail and motoring costs.<sup>20</sup>

The cost of travel as a proportion of weekly income is often high for young people. The high cost of transport is cited as a major reason why young people don't continue in further education after age 16.<sup>21</sup>

Together these statistics demonstrate the level of challenges to overcome.

## Knowsley – a changing economy

Knowsley experienced rapid growth during industrialisation; manufacturing industry expanded with the development of the region's railways and enjoyed good links to Liverpool's ports. Manufacturing industry continues to be an important sector for the borough's economy (for example, car production at Jaguar and Land Rover factories represents the single largest area of employment in Halewood) though the manufacturing base of Merseyside has declined rapidly since the 1970s.

Employment within banking, finance and insurance, public administration, education and health professions accounts for the majority of service sector growth in real and relative terms, and represents approximately half of total employment in the borough.<sup>22</sup>

The latest data for earnings by residence show that the average gross weekly pay of full-time workers living in Knowsley is £413. This is 16% below the national average of £491. Longer-term data show that the average income of Knowsley residents consistently lags behind the national average. Data for earnings by workplace location are somewhat different. The average gross weekly pay of full-time workers working but not resident in Knowsley is £465, £52 per week higher than that of those living and working in Knowsley – indicating that higher paid jobs in the borough are taken by outside commuters.

This socio-economic disadvantage brings with it the associated characteristics, behaviours and outcomes associated with many deprived communities. These are what the Commission is seeking to overcome.

## What the statistics don't say ...

The statistics outlined above in brief, and the thousands more figures available, demonstrate what those who live and work there already know – that Knowsley is a place of real socio-economic disadvantage which has a damaging and limiting effect on the lives of too many of the people who live there, especially children and young people.

In recent years, both national and local Government have made clear commitments not to passively accept that the challenges faced by communities like Knowsley are insurmountable or that nothing can be done. Tackling poverty and social exclusion have been high on the political agenda, and this looks set to continue under the Coalition Government elected in May 2010 as this report was being drafted.<sup>23</sup>

KMBC has demonstrated its commitment to act through the development of a comprehensive range of activities and interventions aimed at tackling inequality and reducing poverty – this work has gained the council national recognition.<sup>24</sup>

Young people in Knowsley inherit a pattern of decline which began in the 1960s. It is only in the last decade that the negative trajectory has begun to be reversed:

- Over 15,000 new jobs have been created in the borough over the past decade, taking the employment rate from 55% to almost 68%, a rate of growth that has been far higher than that of Merseyside and the national average.<sup>25</sup>
- The proportion of pupils attaining 5 or more GCSEs at A\*–C has increased by over 15 percentage points and stood at 57.5% in 2008; the gap in attainment between Knowsley and the national average has decreased year on year over the period.<sup>26</sup>
- Unemployment has decreased from over 15% to just over 8%, closing the gap with the national average to 1.5%.<sup>27</sup>
- Rates of NEET young people appear to be falling year on year and over the September to December 2009 quarter they fell to below 9%, which is below the national rate of approximately 13%.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst the gains have been notable, it is important to note that recovery is still in its infancy with many of the local authority interventions still in their formative stages. The local authority has embarked on a major programme of improvement with some success but is itself on a journey.

These initiatives include:

- The establishment of seven new Centres for Learning in place of ten secondary schools. This strategy aims to replace inadequate buildings and facilities with state of the art design at the centre of community regeneration.
- A wide range of programmes to offer young people positive places to go and things to do outside the school day including youth projects, arts, sports and faith groups. It includes a flagship new 'Our Place' scheme which has been recognised as a national exemplar of youth involvement bringing together a wide range of opportunities and services for young people.
- Innovative participation schemes such as the Knowsley Young Advisors scheme, Young Inspectors and Youth Council.
- Targeted youth provision for young people at risk.
- Innovative approaches to education and employment, including creative approaches such as an Apprentice Scheme.
- A Knowsley Youth Passport Scheme which gives every young person an annual opportunity to try a range of experiences.
- A focus on resilience and 'bounceability' including work to develop mental toughness.

Knowsley also has a high number of initiatives and strategies that are aimed at improving children's health, to tackle the obesity, teenage pregnancy and emotional health and wellbeing all identified as causes for concern in Knowsley. The strategies' aims are preventative rather than curative, hoping to encourage less reliance on inpatient services. Whilst their overall approach is universal, they also target pockets of severe deprivation. At the time of writing, a unified children's health strategy, an emotional health and wellbeing strategy and a teenage pregnancy strategy were due to be finalised by the autumn and implemented by the local authority. These are indicative of the proactive approach that Knowsley takes to tackle the deep rooted problems that are affecting the children and young people in the borough, which is hoped to have a long lasting and profoundly positive impact on children's health.

A significant infrastructure has been developed to deliver support and services for children and young people in Knowsley. The Children and Young People's Partnership is one of five thematic partnerships within the Knowsley Strategic Partnership and now operates as the Children's Trust. It is supported by the Children and Young People Executive (CYPE) with representatives from all relevant service providers, the independent and faith sectors, schools, and children and young people. The CYPE is supported by the Children and Young People's Joint Commissioning Board.

A recent Ofsted inspection stated that the commitment to equality and inclusion in the borough is good and is narrowing the performance gap on a wide range of indicators at a faster rate than found nationally and in other similar neighbouring boroughs.<sup>29</sup> This commitment is already translating into improved outcomes including an increase in educational attainment, a decrease in NEET young people and a fall in teenage pregnancies.<sup>30</sup> In the long term, the ability of Knowsley to address issues related to inequality and its effects upon family life and young people in the borough is also related to wider trends, some of which go beyond the influence of the local authority.

The success or otherwise of the new Centres for Learning and wider community engagement across the borough is likely to play a vital part in future success in raising levels of attainment and achievement in Knowsley. However, while formal education is an important element, it is only one part of a much larger strategy – embracing economic, social and cultural changes – that is required to tackle the impact of deprivation; an historic ambivalence to a 'traditional' education system; the sometimes negative influence of the extended family; and a deeply entrenched sense of territory that appears to hold some young people back (more on each of these topics later).

Local authority policies have achieved a remarkable rate of improvement since 2000 on a range of indicators. This clearly demonstrates the council's determination to reduce inequality and maximise the talent in the borough which has lain fallow for too long. It also shows the motivation of many young people, parents, carers, teachers and frontline workers to respond positively to initiatives that will help young people. In 2009, for instance, over 1,500 young people applied for a scheme offering 100 apprenticeships in the borough.

These developments take place against a longer-term strategy of renewal which aims to improve the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the area – which, if successful, will in turn benefit the prospects of all young people in the borough. The Sustainable Community Strategy is seeking to build vitality in communities to tackle deprivation poverty. The authority has also taken significant steps to devolve powers to local communities by establishing six Area Partnership Boards. Community Champions are also being recruited.

So whilst the Commission is in no doubt that there is still much to be done, our proposals seek to build on a foundation already laid in Knowsley. They are designed to accelerate many of the changes already underway – drawing on national and international research – widening and embedding their impact, and set out a framework that other communities throughout the country may choose to follow.

## What young people say

### Knowsley Young People's Commission Research Findings (part 1)

"We hope to start gigging next year – like just little gigs and then maybe move on and get bigger gigs, maybe do a festival. It would be my all time dream to do a major festival."

Hearing and understanding young people's interpretation of the reality of these statistics has been crucial.

A number of key questions were the focus of our research and form the basis of our proposals and recommendations throughout the report. We asked:

1. What is it like for young people living in Knowsley and the three areas of Huyton, Kirkby and Halewood?
2. What are the impacts and influences on young people living in Knowsley?
3. What do young people understand and feel about school (education and skills), its importance and its relevance to what they want from a job, career and their future lives?
4. What do young people think will help them to achieve their ambitions and what might stop them achieving these, how do ambitions and aspirations combine/set off education and work?
5. Where do young people look for help and support; how could this be developed, expanded, made more accessible, more relevant, more understandable, more effective?

To gather this information we consulted with a representative sample of young people, families and communities within the borough during 2009, through

questionnaires, focus groups and one to one interviews. We also talked to parents and those who work with young people to get their views. Further information on the methodology of our research is provided in the Appendix.

Whilst some young people living in Knowsley are clearly facing challenges in their lives, the majority said that they are generally happy, that they have got ambition and that they want to do well at school. In terms of aspiration, they said they can go on and get the jobs they want. They also have a very strong sense of loyalty and pride in their immediate neighbourhoods and communities.

### Sense of place

There is a strong sense of place and belonging among young people, and this is rooted in their immediate local area rather than any particular identification with Knowsley. It was noticeable that in debate and discussion with young people, Knowsley was very rarely mentioned; young people talked about the place they live in and about Merseyside and Liverpool but very rarely did they refer specifically to Knowsley. The sense of place is reinforced through intergenerational impact across the extended family, with many extended families living in the borough. For example, one teacher said there are six core families in her primary school. This sense of place is not related to social class but does describe the 'lived' area where people feel safe and lead their lives – it's their territory.

Most young people see their community as everyone who lives in their area (71%), and just over a quarter said they get involved with their community. Community is recognised at street or estate level by young people (19.5%) and their communities (30% of parents). Twenty nine per cent of young people recognise everyone who lives near them as their community. For the 71% of young people who said they understand that their local area

*We hope to start gigging next year – like just little gigs and then maybe move on and get bigger gigs, maybe do a festival. It would be my all time dream to do a major festival.*

is their community, their local areas are described as Huyton, Halewood, Kirkby and, for those who live there, Prescot and other areas such as Whiston and Cronton.

It is therefore reasonable to assert that Knowsley is a collection of communities or urban villages rather than a community as a whole. Whilst this may bring challenges to strategic decision makers, it also brings the positive ownership and territorialism of belonging to a small village – albeit in an urban environment.

In our consultation most of the young people scored well on their claimed level of engagement with their community. They appreciate their families and the people in their neighbourhood. However, they perceived negatives in the level of anti-social behaviour they are aware of, and the lack of care for the streets, parks and other facilities which are the areas they use most. It is the young people in a neighbourhood who actually see what is going on in the streets and parks, because that is where they are, their territory. When these are neglected then this feeling of lack of care is personalised.

## Positivity, aspiration and resilience

When asked about their future, young people showed significant levels of ambition:

- 47% said they want to stay on at school/college when they are 16 and maybe then go to university
- 28% said that they definitely want to go to university
- 70% said that having a good job is one of their main ambitions in life

The great majority of young people the Commission talked to (over 70%) also said they feel self-confident, adaptable and good with change and that they are good at bouncing back from difficulties.

When asked to rate how they feel on a series of attitude statements about themselves, more than seven out of ten consistently agreed with positive ways of feeling and doing:

- 70% of young people said that they feel self-confident
- 70% said that they are people who get things done
- 72% said that they like to try new ways of doing things
- 74% said that they adapt quickly to new ways of doing things
- 70% said that it is important to do well at school

Ambitions and horizons are high:

*"I want to have a fun life. I'd like to travel a lot and be well paid. Mostly I want to have good friends and be happy."*

*"I'd like to start my business in America. I'm interested in travel and in managing projects, so I'd like to be involved in all aspects of running a business. I also want a family and to have my own house."*

*"I'd like to go travelling and maybe climb Kilimanjaro, I'd also like to go diving, maybe in Florida."*

In terms of employment options, young people showed similar levels of determination, although expectations were slightly more varied:

- 32% aspire to a professional or managerial career
- 26% aspire to a skilled or semi-skilled career
- 21% aspire to an unskilled mundane or routine occupation
- 20% aspire to some kind of celebrity career
- 14% aspire to a sports career

*I'm interested in travel and in managing projects, so I'd like to be involved in all aspects of running a business. I also want a family and to have my own house.*



“I want to become a solicitor, so I’m going to learn another language as that can help you get on the right course. I want to become financially secure, work hard at school and get the right GCSEs then go to college and university to study Law.”

“I’d like to work in a community engagement role, so I’m going to go to college and do a youth work degree. I’m going to study art at college and I’m working on a portfolio of photos and videos. I’d like to make art about the local community.”

These findings reflect trends and aspirations of young people across the country.<sup>31</sup> On this basis, life as a teenager in Knowsley seems to be much as it is for teenagers elsewhere.

Inevitably, a varied scale of optimism emerged from young people, from those who are highly motivated and achieving to those who are disillusioned and gloomier about their lives.

All of our research showed that those involved in activities as part of a local authority Young Advisors scheme were generally the most optimistic and positive group. Young Advisors tended to be particularly articulate. They feel very lucky to have been included in the programme and said that it has positively changed their lives. They are highly motivated and believe that they will succeed. They also share a history of engagement with public services in the borough which provides important knowledge on how services work and how change can be effected.

However, even they realise that there are many barriers to achieving their goals. A Young Advisor told the Commission how difficult it would be for him and his friends to go to university. First, the costs involved and the burden of student debt are perceived to be too great; second, it may not appear as a practical option in comparison with entering paid employment:

“I think that a lot of people here are put off going to university because of the costs and the idea of finishing it with massive debts. Maybe people here are a bit more practically minded – for me, I don’t see any point bothering to go to university if I can work as I am now and earn about £15,000 per year and gradually build a career. Many people here do seem to value experience over qualifications.”

And young people also told us that they would value more help in making informed and long-term decisions:

“I don’t think there is enough support offered to people who have to choose their GCSE subjects

– I think there’s too much expectation placed on young people to know what they want from an early age.”

“There needs to be more pupil mentoring for 12 to 14 year olds – most of it seems to be for 15 and 16 year olds. And I think it needs to be offered long term, not just in response to problems when they happen.”

Whilst the majority of young people we heard from were positive about their future, a significant number were less so:

- 27% of young people said that not being clever enough might stop them from getting the job they want
- 20% thought that not getting a good education might stop them getting the job they want
- 36% thought that not having enough opportunities might stop them getting the job they want.
- 10% of young people wanted to leave school at 16 and 7% said that they would wait to see what their friends did before they decided

Our research points to the existence of a small but significant group – of between 10% and 20% of young people – who were not as positive as the majority on a range of factors. Interestingly, this was a fluid group, not always made up of the same young people on every measure of confidence or self-esteem. Deeper analysis showed that the less positive group tended to be from the older age group and were more likely to be male.

In line with national trends, young people tend to adjust their aspirations as they reach age 14–15:

- 20% of young people aged 14–15 told us that they want to leave school early and get a job, compared with 4% of 12–13 year olds
- 20% of 14–15 year olds do not know what type of job they want, compared with 10% of 12–13 year olds
- 60% of 14–15 year olds said they feel self-confident with a healthy sense of themselves, compared with 90% aged 10–11
- 10% of 14–15 year olds aspire to a sports career, compared with 25% of 10–11 year olds

Another group of young people that we found to be less positive were those already disengaging with school and becoming involved in offending. More challenging, 30% of those the Commission spoke to were not fully engaged with or were not attending school.

Some of the boys interviewed, who had been excluded from school or were already offending, told us that they feel that they have nothing to aim for and that there is nothing for them once they finish their education.

However, most of the young people in this situation still maintain ambitions to 'get on', with many citing plans to get jobs in the future. One young person who had been involved in robbery and petty crime told us:

"I would like to do something with me life. I have applied to the local college for a tree-surgery course. I got interested in this through my older brother's friends; they set up their company after doing this course. It seems a good company and they work in Denmark a lot. Be sound to travel out there with them."

There was also evidence of young people who had changed their attitude and were turning things around:

"I wish I had no friends and kept my head down in school rather than get involved with the group I did and the trouble it brought me."

Despite his past record of offending, the young man quoted above had passed his GCSEs in English, Maths and Science at a Pupil Referral Unit. He was attending college and doing plastering and bricklaying, and hoping to get an apprenticeship soon.

Another young offender told us:

"I was on a work based learning programme, but was excluded as I was unwilling to go to work and not get paid for it. I applied to a local college to do a course in tree surgery which I got interested in through some friends of my older brother."

Finally, there was a group who were particularly struggling with their education. A few young people told us that school is a difficult and harsh environment for them. Some said how they feel written off as failures too readily and think that the things they see as achievements are not recognised by the school as they do not fit with the 'academic' focus.

Some young people told us how important a practice base for learning is:

"I actually wanted to be a chef, but I didn't like the sound of the College – doing the NVQ – too much paperwork. It would have been alright doing the practical side of it, but ... I think that's what Gordon Ramsey would have done, the practical side. I might do it later on, more likely I'd just go to the restaurant of a chef and ask them if I could work there, I'd be sorted then."

"I just want to get out of Kirkby and I'm gonna go into the army to do mechanics. I got the form from the little shop thing in town. I just popped in. I just inquired and they gave me a date to come back and do the test and join."

Indeed, when asked about their main achievements in life, the majority of young people do not count academic success alone:

- 32% cited exam results/GCSEs
- 20% mentioned a sports achievement – winning a race or a medal, completing a contest
- 10% cited an arts or creative achievement like dance, singing in a band, drama
- 8% counted a volunteering or community effort
- 9% mentioned some kind of personal goal

Whilst education is clearly important, its limitations are also clear in terms of embracing and supporting the aspirations of young people in Knowsley. Young people are demanding more and the education and wider support system is challenged to respond.

Enterprise and financial reward were also clearly valued and in some cases dominated decisions:

"I was doing a course at school – a work based learning thing but got kicked off because they

I just want to get out of Kirkby and I'm gonna go into the army to do mechanics  
I just inquired and they gave me a date to come back and do the test and join.



# THIS THING ABOUT GANG CULTURE IS MOSTLY IN THE MEDIA. IT IS THERE IN SOME PLACES BUT IT'S NO WORSE THAN IT'S EVER BEEN BEFORE.

wouldn't pay me for the work. I spend most of me time hanging around with mates."

Others stressed the importance of finding a job or training that reflected their interests:

"I'm not sure what I want to be. I've been to college and done me level one in hairdressing and while I was pregnant I did catering. I do want to do something but I don't know what will interest me. I get bored so I need something that will make me interested."

## Influence of family

The influence of family and family history is recognised as being one of the, if not the most, major influences on how a young person's aspirations take shape and change. This influence is strong in all areas of Knowsley and across all social groups.

Many young people in Knowsley told us that they live near to their extended family and see them often:

- 39% said that they live near their grandparents
- 44% live near an aunt
- 40% live near an uncle
- A significant 80% said that they see or talk to their grandparents 'quite a lot' or 'more often'

These findings reaffirm earlier research which demonstrated young people's belonging and involvement with communities, and positive interaction across the generations. The figures contrast sharply with a 2009 YouGov poll carried out for 4Children's Family Commission which showed that 50% of Britons see their extended family just three times a year or less.<sup>32</sup>

Young people also recognise the influence of family and the majority said that they believe that this is positive. Seventy three per cent said they believe that having a good family is important and 71% said that their own parents helped them to do well at school. However, we

should also be aware that such strong intergenerational ties make any negative narrative from the past much harder to break.

There appears to be strong family loyalty, with only a minority who want to leave the area and their family, although 53% did say that they want to travel the world. There was also a suggestion that leaving Knowsley is seen as 'selling out', especially among the more challenged young people. This was often based on a reluctance to leave their mates.

However, whilst most parents were supportive of their children, some for a variety of reasons were not:

"Most days I just like to stay out of the house – the longer the better. I don't like to be in the house, getting nagged at every day by me mam, she just says, 'I hate you, you were a mistake'. I just get on with it. She's not joking."

"I don't really get on with me mam. She says she doesn't like me and keeps telling me to move out. She doesn't get me which makes me sad."

One 19 year old acknowledged the problems his own family had and the impact that had on their ability to care for him:

"I've been in and out care most of me life, I've not really known me family. I see 'em now, but growing up there was issues with me mum who had a nervous breakdown and it was dead hard at the time but I have a good relationship with her now. I went into foster care as me mum couldn't cope with all of us and didn't have much support. Me real dad left me before I was born and then me stepdad died when I was 13."

## Young people and risk

Despite statistics showing relatively high levels of risk-taking in the borough, young people demonstrated that

The new school looks as though it has great facilities - I'm excited about going there. There will be lots of opportunities I think.

the majority have a good understanding of risk. When asked to identify risky behaviour:

- 66% identified taking drugs
- 66% said carrying guns or knives
- 68% identified unprotected sex

Also, 65% thought it was important for young people in their area to avoid risky behaviour if they could.

The identification of risk is one of the measures used to define wellbeing for young people and is a significant indicator.<sup>33</sup> It is clear from our research that most young people in Knowsley are able to articulate risk and its dangers and are therefore likely to have improved resilience as a result. It should be noted, however, that a significant minority of over 30% did not identify each of the risky behaviours.

Following high profile shootings in the area over recent years, we were interested to see how big an issue this is for young people. As is usually the case, nearly all young people feel that they are more likely to be victims of gun and knife crime than commit gun and knife crime themselves.<sup>34</sup> In consultation workshops 'gun', 'crime', 'violence' and 'drugs' together made up 13% of the words used by the young people. This compares with 16% using 'park', 15% using 'school', 11% using 'shops' and 10% using 'friends'. 'Gangs' alone accounted for 8% of the words mentioned.

Whilst the fact that gangs are mentioned to this extent is, of course, very serious, it does mean that this is just one of several issues concerning young people and is not the uppermost concern for them. Some also said that the mythologising of gangs and gun culture and the profile that incidents have in the media contributed to their perception. Others gave the impression that they were knowledgeable about where the more dangerous areas and were able to stay away from them:

"This thing about gang culture is mostly in the media. It is there in some places but it's no worse than it's ever been before."

"There are hot spots but people know where they are so you just don't go there. There will always be some people doing crime; they can't really change that, they can deal with most of it though."

However, some young people told us that they feel under pressure from their peers to get involved in dangerous behaviour. One 17 year old told us:

"Saying no is very difficult 'cos that often means that you stand out. Standing out, looking different, behaving different is very difficult 'cos it makes you a target. So it can be difficult to stay out of trouble for this reason."

High levels of substance misuse is identified in statistics<sup>35</sup> but is not always backed up by young people themselves:

"I wouldn't say I drink that much, at most once a month I'll have a drink. I smoke about 7 cigarettes a day. Me mam and dad don't know, like. They'd kill me. I don't do drugs. I've got mates that do marijuana but they try and get me to do it, but it just doesn't appeal to me. I've tried it once but I didn't like it, so I was, like, never again."

Where some young people do drink it seems to be related to boredom and lack of other opportunities:

"I sometimes drink but have never done drugs and don't think I ever would. Me and me mates hang out on the park and drink – especially in the summer when there's nothing better to do."

Some young people demonstrate how their circumstances have taken a different turn to what they thought:

"I was 17 when I got pregnant. I was shocked and I was going to get an abortion but I didn't go. The clinic people made me an appointment. I don't regret having her now because she's the best thing. My ex told his mum I was having a baby and I asked him not to – I didn't want everyone to know. Then his mum told everyone

so I felt like I had to keep her. It wasn't my choice. But now she's here it's hard but she's worth it."

## Role models

The Commission recognises the importance of positive role models in young people's lives and was keen to explore who young people in Knowsley look up to in this way. We were told that young people do look for role models in Knowsley, but don't always find them beyond their immediate family.

Encouragingly, mentors and School Police Officers were cited as positive role models by some of the more challenging young people as well as those who are more engaged. It was also interesting that in one to one discussions, young people mentioned local community figures rather than the expected celebrities. Young people talked about the 'guys in the boxing club' and secondary school pupil volunteers as well as their favourite youth workers. This suggests that there are some useful opportunities to grow this role for those who are working with young people. Parents, older siblings and extended family members are also viewed as role models by many young people.

These workers play an important part in young people's lives and have a key role in raising aspiration and supporting young people to take positive decisions in their lives. Young people told us that they would value someone to talk to:

"I wish I had someone else to talk to though as me mam won't talk to me about stuff. I can't speak to anyone at school – you have to make an appointment with the learning mentors. If it was drop in I would probably go there but what's the point and they mainly just work with people that have really big problems. I'm doing ok at school but would like to talk to someone about my home life."

## Young people's engagement and sense of agency

The Commission was also interested to determine how engaged young people are in their local community and whether they believe that their local services reflect their own needs and aspirations. Again, the ability to influence the world around us is seen as an important factor in health and wellbeing. We knew from our initial research that a lot of consultation with young people had taken place in Knowsley but we weren't clear about the impact of the work and whether young people feel empowered to be agents of their own change.

KMBC has gained national recognition<sup>36</sup> for its work in engaging young people in a civil conversation, and many of the young people interviewed by the Commission recognised that significant consultation had taken place. However, there remains a significant degree of scepticism from young people about whether their voices are heard and, if they are, whether they are acted upon.

"I can't be bothered to get involved. What we say won't make any amount of change. We asked for changes to the local youth club but what they did with it was nothing like what we had asked for or expected from them."

"I've done loads of these before and nothing ever changes."

"We said we wanted one colour on the walls of our youth club, and they painted another. It doesn't sound like much but it sends out a signal. And it's typical."

It was noteworthy that even though some young people had experienced disappointments in trying to influence change in their youth club, many still see them as a positive source of engagement locally.

Some young people also told us that they feel too many of the projects that are designed to support them are only

WE SAID WE WANTED ONE COLOUR ON THE WALLS OF OUR YOUTH CLUB, AND THEY PAINTED ANOTHER. IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE MUCH BUT IT SENDS OUT A SIGNAL. AND IT'S TYPICAL.

able to provide a short-term fix. Many also feel that the local council doesn't properly understand what they want – particularly their desire to feel in control of their own lives. It seems that amongst some young people and their families there is a resentment of the local authority which is felt to intrude into their lives but still ignore their wishes:

“The council do not really do anything to help and constantly let people down by saying that they are going to do things and then don't. They said that we were going to have an astro pitch near here – this never happened.”

This also shows through in the ratings young people give the services that affect them, with a request from a significant number of young people for more and better help:

- 46% said that the help and advice they get on a range of topics is good
- 29% said that more or better help is needed
- 37% want more advice on jobs and careers

One of the most significant and high profile developments for young people in the borough over recent years has been the development of new Centres for Learning. Our research suggests that many young people are very positive about the new Centres and the enhanced facilities and opportunities that each will provide. It was also clear that the consultation that had taken place to inform the development of the Centres had given many young people a sense of ownership:

“The Centres for Learning will be very good. We were consulted on the designs of the new schools and we think that we have had a positive effect on planning them. They will be more ‘student friendly’ places with much better facilities.”

“The new school looks as though it has great facilities – I'm excited about going there. There will be lots of opportunities I think.”

However, some young people who were not engaged were less enthusiastic, with some expressing a desire for alternatives:

“I would like things to do where you don't have to go back into school or go to a youth centre. We don't always want to be hanging out at school, we want a range of things and cooler things to do. Also, with the new schools everything seems to be about the buildings, but most of the problems are with the teaching and sometimes the teachers – a new building isn't really going to change that.”

Whilst the Centres for Learning are clearly an exciting development for Knowsley, with enormous potential, they cannot be seen as the only source of activity or support for all young people.

## Access to activities and transport in Knowsley

“My average day is quite repetitive and not very exciting like. I wish there was more things for young people to do. We sometimes walk to Asda and that is as exciting as it gets. I would like to go in to Liverpool more but the bus takes over an hour and it is dead expensive. I love music, art and drawing, it would be mint if we could do more of these things at school as they are more enjoyable and it's more me.”

Access and transport is regularly cited as a problem by young people in surveys and we wanted to find out what Knowsley young people feel about it.

The availability of transport is important and often identified by young people as a barrier to accessing services and opportunities. However, an analysis of the transport links to main destinations for work, learning, healthcare and shopping show that for the majority of trips, public transport is generally available.

We have strong community networks but we don't have the kind of networks that give you the knowledge and confidence to go out there and achieve something.

With the reliance on public transport and walking for the majority of trips, young people are concerned that the existing transport network does not adequately cater for their needs. They have identified a number of barriers to travel:

- The cost of public transport – this is, by far, the biggest single issue identified
- The availability of public transport
- An unwillingness to consider travelling far from home
- Safety on public transport

However, young people are often frustrated over the lack of public transport in the evenings, with some services stopping too early – one consequence being that young people may have no means of getting home from leisure or social facilities. This will also have an impact on the distance young people are prepared to travel.

The local authority's own research with young people in Huyton highlights the concerns that young people have about their safety on public transport. In asking about their experiences of public transport, young people indicated that they were less likely than adults to feel secure on public transport and felt particularly vulnerable after dark. The majority of young people also felt unsafe at bus stops and on vehicles.<sup>37</sup>

## Crime and policing

Evidence suggests that crime features in the lives of many young people and that half of all young people have been involved in crime in some way.<sup>38</sup> However, young people told us that the involvement of their family in criminal activity was lower, with the majority saying that they had not been involved. Whilst this may be true, we must also bear in mind that some young people may have been slightly economical with the truth to protect their families.

Violent crime, anti-social behaviour and damage offences were the main 'criminal offences' the young people reported being involved in. This compares to violence, drugs and robbery as the criminal activity that their families have most been involved in.

The main reason young people gave for being involved in this 'crime culture' was bravado. Also high on the list was avoiding the threat of harm by doing what they were told and thus keeping safe.

Sixty six per cent of young people had not been personally affected by gun or gang crime, but over 80% had heard about it on TV and 72% had heard people talking about it. Whilst 48% of young people were not worried about gun and gang crime in their area, a huge 44% were.

Whilst young people want to see wrongdoing tackled, many also told us that they feel 'hassled' by the police. Many young people we heard from in Knowsley had considerable issues with the police, feeling that they were constantly being moved on, stopped and harassed. This was leading to a sense of resentment.

The following comments are from young people across the borough, not only from the most challenging:

"We hate the plod they're in our faces too much, kids can't even stand on their own door steps without getting nicked, teenagers aren't all the same and give a bad example of us."

"The papers say that police send 500 young people under dispersal powers, but there are thousands of teens. That 500 are a minority and creating a teen stereotype from."

"Police – government should change law, shouldn't get narked on, neighbours complain but no neighbours get narked on."

On the other hand, young people also feel that the police could be more effective and complained that whilst the 'problem families' are known, there is no perceived effective strategy in place from the police, criminal courts or Local Strategic Partnerships to deal with them:

"Bad kids get rewards, even though we know this is to try and reform them. The good kids get mixed messages about seeing bad kids getting rewarded for bad behaviour."

The majority of young people stated that they thought custodial sentences may help reduce gun and gang crime. Young people also viewed more activities, youth clubs and disruption of gangs as key in stopping involvement in crime.<sup>39</sup>

In a bid to reduce to reduce serious violent crime, a youth forum in each Merseyside police Basic Command Unit has been established to engage young people in discussing issues relating to guns, knives and involvement in gangs.

In discussion with the Youth Advisory Panel in March 2010 focusing on gang and gun crime, Knowsley young people displayed mixed feelings about reporting crime. Some said that it would depend on the seriousness of the crime (i.e. they wouldn't report low level crime) and others said that they would only report crime if it affected their family.

Young people expressed concerns that police don't do enough to resolve the issue and some were worried about social services getting involved. Some were also worried about recriminations and revenge and were not convinced



that Crimestoppers is anonymous. There were also fears of being labelled a 'grass'.

Some young people said that they would talk to their parents first but some also acknowledged that parents need to be more aware of the implications of their children's actions. A number of young people said that they would report a crime if someone's life was in danger. And some did say that they would speak to Safer Schools officers about bullying and crime.

Young people were also clear about what would help them. They said that they need better information from the police on how to report crime and about the procedures. They also believed that there should be more awareness raising about the consequences of using guns and knives, more education for parents and better enforcement.

## What parents say

### Knowsley Young People's Commission Research Findings (part 2)

"I have a 14 week old baby. I live on my own and I've just got my new house. I have always had my mum and dad together and always lived with them – it's just like normal really."

The Commission wanted to understand young people's lives from their parents' perspective to see whether parents share the views and values of the young people or whether there is any generational divide on key issues. The Commission surveyed and interviewed parents from across the borough.

Parents told the Commission that they:

- Are ambitious for their children's futures, with the majority wanting their children to go on to further and higher education
- Are concerned about the impact of crime and the ready availability of drugs and alcohol on their children
- Recognise the provision of services for young people but don't feel they are all either accessible or well designed
- Want to help their children but often feel ill equipped to do so
- Want to think positively but are influenced by their own experiences of growing up and living in Knowsley which are often negative

The Commission and young people themselves acknowledge the importance of the family, and it is important to note that 76% of the Knowsley parents surveyed see themselves as a good influence on young people.

The parents surveyed have generally high aspirations for their children's education, despite the finding that nearly half of them (46%) had themselves got a job at 16. Only 7% want their children to leave school at 16 and get a job, while 90% want their children to do well at school and gain qualifications, at least to get A Levels (72%) or go to University (76%). These are very positive statements from parents; 70% think that their children are likely to do the job they want to do.

It is an often used cliché that the most prevalent ambition of parents is for their children to have a better life than they did. There is a strong sense of the intergenerational nature of the challenges facing families in Knowsley, including poor health outcomes, teenage pregnancy and economic inactivity, and the Commission was keen to develop an understanding of whether this was true.

Many parents certainly reflected negatively on their own stifled ambition, echoing a prevailing narrative of failure and failed expectations that we refer to throughout this report:

"If you're in a class that's told it's bottom in ability in everything, you stop thinking that education is going to save you."

"I wanted to be a pilot at school. They said, 'People like you don't become pilots' – so that was it. If we see talent as only the talent of those people who are at the top does that mean there's nothing left for our children? They should have told me about jobs around being a pilot."

"All my life I've been called dumb. I'm dyslexic ... A lot of parents I know can't read or write but we still want the best for our children."

One mother explained how the parenting mentor at her child's primary school had persuaded her to take an NVQ Level 1 as a teaching assistant. She agreed "because I didn't have to do a written exam". Then the parenting mentor persuaded her to take Level 2 that did require a written exam:

"I was scared to death. I had a very bad attitude to education but I always wanted to work with children. I took the exam and I passed! It was the first exam in my life that I passed. It was brilliant and now I'm going to do more. It's never too late."

A key issue raised by some of the workers with young people is the predominant trend for generations to follow each other's patterns in the borough. Certainly parents appeared to support this argument, with 67% of parents saying that they want their children to be like them and 17% of parents say they want their children to live in

*We'd get a couple of sandwiches and a bottle of orange and we'd be off. We made our own adventures. They can't do that now.*

Knowsley. 24% of parents did say that they don't mind if their children leave the area to live elsewhere.

Crucially, some parents recognise the limitations of the support that they can sometimes give their children:

*"We lack confidence and our children lack confidence."*

*"We have strong community networks but we don't have the kind of networks that give you the knowledge and confidence to go out there and achieve something. We know what our children need; we just don't know how to get it."*

A significant minority of parents are concerned about crime, guns and drugs. Many are worried that their children may fall under bad influences, and they make a clear association between this and the fact that they live in a poorer area with a higher crime rate linked to unemployment. Many feel that there is not enough available for young people to do to keep them safe:

*"Drugs are readily available and cheap. Peer pressure is greater. Young people get their sense of belonging from their peers, and are more influenced by their peers than their parents when they get to 14."*

*"There are more gangs/groups around that are very threatening, and intimidating that I am afraid to let my children play out. There is not enough punishment for crimes that are committed by anti-social behaviour by minors. They do not fear the system/authority."*

*"There is too much crime around here and the kids are suffering, no one will stand up to them."*

*"I think there are more gangs and also relationships seem to count for nothing. Some children are set bad examples by parents and it is sad to witness that."*

*"Low self-esteem, poor housing, breakdown in family, shops are dreadful places for them to hang out but there is no alternative."*

And one parent echoed the intolerance of 'difference' mentioned by a young person earlier when she said that some parents want to leave the area for 'somewhere better'. A significant minority feel that conditions in similar areas elsewhere will be the same – it's UK wide:

*"Same all over I would think in this climate."*

## Services for families and young people

Whilst acknowledging that the borough of Knowsley has a reasonably good reputation and that there is generally a good range of services on offer, one parent felt that more could be done to ensure consistency across the borough:

*"Services are very patchy and things don't seem to be consistent and ongoing."*

*"The girls have got a lot. They've got dancing and what have you. The boys don't have enough rugby, football, boxing. Give the kids a bit of land and some bikes and they respect themselves. The lads get something, and then it gets taken away."*

Another parent highlighted that access to facilities and transport is a problem:

*"Although they provide these things, they don't seem to be able to accommodate everybody who they need to. One problem is transport for all these [youth clubs], if transport was provided the clubs would be much better attended."*

Building good links with the community is key for another:

*"It's fine to have the new facilities and the new buildings [the Centre for Learning], but they also need to provide the social links so that*



it's viable. Otherwise ... it looks brilliant that Knowsley provides this and that club, but it will falter within a short space of time unless people can feel part of it."

Whilst parents can see the obvious benefits of new Centres for Learning, some are worried that the Centres will be too large to accommodate the needs of their children:

"I have a daughter with special needs for learning and I think if she ends up going to a school like that she would be a target ... Because I think it's too big for her to deal with, no matter how much support is put in place."

In addition, there are also some reservations about becoming overly reliant on Centres for Learning to provide all facilities and activities for young people. As one senior KMBC official explained, there is an issue about providing a range of sociable spaces for young people that are not linked to school settings, as young people often need access to places in which they may feel a greater sense of freedom from authority and control.

"Some of the stuff that's available isn't hitting the right buttons for what young people want. It's fine to say 'we'll offer things in the Centres for Learning', but [young people] don't necessarily want to be in the Centres for Learning after core school hours, they want to go and hang around in community centres, clubs or wherever because they feel that that's their space. But I think this comes back to social marketing as a tool, we haven't marketed properly the facilities that we do have out there for young people ... I think it's a very tough nut to crack – how do you make sure you've got the right offer? And how do you sell the offer that you've got?"

Others feel a higher premium should be placed on less structured or supervised activities and lamented the freedom they had in days gone by:

"We had nothing, but we had freedom. Now, they have everything but no freedom. We could

roam, now there's so many cares. And Tom and Jerry cartoons 24 hours a day and game stations and the internet ... Most youths don't want supervised activities and nor did we."

"We'd get a couple of sandwiches and a bottle of orange and we'd be off. We made our own adventures. They can't do that now."

The vast majority of parents in Knowsley are clearly very committed to their children and believe that they are doing their best, and to a large extent succeeding, against a backdrop of hardship, poor experience and networks, and variable support. The Commission will seek to build on these commitments in any recommendations it makes.

## What the professionals say

### Knowsley Young People's Commission Research Findings (part 3)

As a result of the major investment and focus on young people and families in recent years, Knowsley now has a significant workforce in this sector. The Commission therefore wanted to understand the 'professional perspective' on the lives of young people.

Local policy makers, professionals and frontline staff told the Commission:

- Whilst young people – especially in younger age groups – have ambitions, these too often dissipate as they get older
- A significant minority of young people are involved in gangs, drugs and crime and this risks impacting the wider community of young people
- The influence of families and communities is viewed largely negatively – as a suppressant of ambition and aspiration
- Young people don't look up to positive local role models and are too influenced by local criminals or celebrities
- Local services need to intervene early to prevent young people falling into negative behaviours

If you're in a class that's told it's bottom in ability in everything, you stop thinking that education is going to save you.

These comments reinforce a dominant narrative that emerged from many of our discussions with parents and wider community in the previous section. We go on to analyse this in more detail in the next chapter of this report.

## Professionals on positivity

Whilst the young people who gave their views as part of the Commission are generally positive about their lives, there appears to be a different narrative built up by older generations or those that view young people's lives from a distance. This account was relayed to the Commission by policy makers, professionals and frontline staff.

Some professionals talked about young people being influenced by a benefits culture and about how young girls qualify for social housing by getting pregnant. In their opinion this is widespread – particularly for those families experiencing long-term unemployment and subsistence on benefits. One doctor reported seeing a number of young men with sports injuries. He felt a few young men saw the sports injury as access to benefits and 'providing a meal ticket for life'.

This negative narrative also portrays young people as being influenced by drugs and the drug culture, describing young people as being involved in crime and as the perpetrators of crime connected with guns, drugs, gangs and violence.

One senior frontline professional described a sense of extreme social disaffection amongst the most challenging young people they work with:

"The young people we are working with in Knowsley appear to be more difficult and more disaffected – socially disaffected – than pupils I've worked with in other similar settings. There's another setting in the borough where the pupils are ... very difficult and extremely disaffected young people, extremely challenging and the great majority of them have long criminal records ... I would say that this proportion of young people is high in comparison, it's not as high as say 10%, but it is high. The problem is the impact they have and the pull they have on other young people, it is significant enough to make a negative difference at times."

Whilst acknowledging that the number of young people involved is a minority, some professionals see the wider pervasive impact:

"It is a small minority. In general, most people are not affected by crime, though there is a perception I think that it can get out of control in some places – this is what we need to get

much better at addressing, responding to such issues before they begin to affect the general community."

Some professionals told us that they feel this negative influence becomes particularly problematic once it begins to disperse among a young population who are otherwise ambitious and who view their local area and its opportunities in a relatively positive light. Social disaffection is likely to increase as horizons and opportunities appear to narrow rather than widen:

"I think that their ambitions drop off when they go to secondary school, because all of a sudden they lose the support structure that is in place in primary school. They have to become more independent but it is like going from the swimming pool to the ocean. They mature at different times and we have to get better at recognising that their needs are not all the same."

"A particular group of young people stand disaffected, who do have low expectation and low aspiration ... If you find your sense of purpose in the pecking order of the estate then that's a really dangerous scenario. For some young people that's the sum total of their aspiration."

A local secondary head teacher was concerned that young people often do not appreciate the importance of making the right choices in their teenage years and that too much was put on young people at this time:

"I think this notion that you can get to 16 or even 19 and 20 and that the world's your oyster and you've got loads of choices and things are dead easy is just not the case ... I think it is a lot to take on your shoulders – to start thinking about what's going to happen to you over the next ten or fifteen years when you're 14 and 15. It is very difficult to 'teach'."

A head teacher also confirmed his view that intervening early was the only way that negative outcomes could be averted:

"We're looking to stop what we describe as the 'NEET conveyor belt' and the way that we do that is to empower people through opportunity, guidance and quality teaching from as early as possible. We can identify potential NEET youngsters very early on, potential NEET families very early on, and what we are trying to do is work out pathways and packages to change that

profile before they get to 16 or 19 and fall off the edge.”

Professionals and stakeholders agreed that the 11–14 age range is a time when young people increasingly rely on peer groups or the family unit for support. A local youth worker observed that young people's ambitions seem to ‘fall off’ as they enter and progress through secondary school.

## Conflicted views of the influence of family and communities

Local key workers and frontline staff told us that they believe a strong family influence can have a negative impact in certain circumstances, particularly in deprived areas where access to jobs is minimal. In such circumstances, strong family bonds may outweigh any motivation to seek out employment and opportunity beyond the confines of the neighbourhood or Knowsley. In the worst cases this then manifests as a self-perpetuating cycle of worklessness and a dependence on welfare.

As a local councillor said:

“It's one of our greatest challenges in raising outcomes and attainment. There is a low skills and low wage trap in this area and a severe concentration of issues around low economic welfare. So we have low entrepreneurship and low diversification, we're seen as a monoculture. Knowsley is not a borough of choice to many employers.

“After the industries closed down Knowsley was left with a demoralised society. Now we face a society that anticipates failure. It is not proactive and many people have just forgotten how to find work. Of course, this tends to get passed on within families. Some young people lack the capacity to build their own futures because for many of them the experiences and stories of their parents is all they know of the wider world.”

One local youth worker suggested that there is a reluctance to leave friends behind or move out of the borough even though many young people say living in Knowsley is boring because there is not enough to do. Another professional said:

“This issue largely stems from what I would term ‘intergenerational disaffection’. Our children come from families that come from generations of disaffection basically and a cycle of disaffection and poverty. No one has really got to grips with breaking this cycle in some of the families.”

Many professionals also recognised that some parents may need support to help them in their parenting role. A community worker reflected:

“I think the influence that parents have needs to be much better understood. It's like it's just seen as being either positive or negative depending on how well the kid does at school or when they've been in a gang. I think there needs to be more support for parents over the long term and understand that things can change quite quickly – between 10–14 is probably the most difficult age when things might go wrong.”

A head teacher commented:

“[Parents] really do care, no question about that, they really do care and they really wish for their youngsters – the vast majority of them, of course – to do well. But what seems to go wrong maybe because of lifestyles, maybe because of their own experiences – enough of them don't seem to be able to feel empowered or able enough to actually be a part of [their child's education]. That's an issue for us to address as a Centre for Learning and as a system – we've got to engage our parents and empower them and educate them to help.”

Frontline workers also reported that positive influences of parents can often be overridden by that of older siblings, friendship groups and extended family networks:

“We often work with families where the children are engaging and doing well, and then you find that usually just one child gets involved in the wrong crowd and things can go pretty bad for the whole family very quickly. They don't know how to handle it and things can spiral – especially for the other children.”

“A lot of the young people we see are hanging around with an older crowd – say 19 and 20 year olds – and that places an immediate pressure on them to act bigger than they are, to show off and prove themselves because they do tend to look up to this older crowd, they aspire to their lifestyles which are often supported by criminal activity.”

And a support officer at a local Pupil Referral Unit said:

“If the young people have proper rules, if they have a routine and if there is consistency in their home life, then we do see an improvement. If you take those three things away, which I think it's what's happening in many families ... if they haven't got routines and they haven't got rules

*[If] just one child gets involved in the wrong crowd ... things can go pretty bad for the whole family very quickly. They don't know how to handle it and things can spiral – especially for the other children*

and rules are not applied consistently within families and within the extended family, then ... [young people] are affected. Those three things are what's missing in many communities.”

A number of Councillors and frontline staff expressed an interest in engaging with communities more to improve outcomes for young people. At the same time, they acknowledged this would require a profound change of culture which would also challenge entrenched welfare dependency in some areas. A local Service Director commented:

“The integration across council directorates is phenomenal. It wins awards and is recognised nationally. But there is a real understanding between council members and staff that we can't do this in isolation. I think the area working is the next stage. We need to enter more communities.”

Many frontline workers also told the Commission that they needed more freedom, flexibility and discretion to operate at a pace set by individuals and communities, in order to offer more customised and responsive support that focused on outcomes not outputs.

## Role models

There is consensus among frontline professionals that there are very few appropriate role models at neighbourhood level for young people. For example, one youth club worker stated that:

“There aren't enough positive role models in the communities, or the kids don't recognise who they are. A lot of them seem to admire friends who may be slightly older than them – say 19 or 20 – and people they see on TV who are distant, like a lot of footballers. But they don't seem to admire many people in between – and there is

certainly a problem of respect between young and older people on the estates. And there is a peer pressure to be cool as well, so everyone wants to be the bad boy with the cash and fast car and they don't show respect to those young people who do try hard at school or work in local jobs. It happens to the girls as well – they all want to be ‘wags’.”

This was echoed in the comments of staff at a local Pupil Referral Unit, who suggested that some young people may lack the confidence to make independent choices and are then too easily sucked into a gang like mentality:

“A lot of our young people do not have the confidence to make choices independently of their peers. The pull of their peers in the community – often older peers – is far too great and we know a lot of these people are involved in criminal activity.”

A head teacher suggested that there could be more realistic and appropriate male role models:

“I think for young men in particular there needs to be role models of people who have followed structured employment or pathways that youngsters can follow.”

And a youth worker suggested that ‘normal’ adult lifestyles need to be given greater respect:

“One thing is that [young people] often don't look up to ‘normal’ adults with much respect. Role models tend to be their mates or the guys who don't go to work but still seem to drive around in fast cars – very often they don't associate having money with being educated and having a decent steady job. So there is a perception that crime is an easy way out, and for those who don't want the hassle they all seem to end up on benefits.”

A community support worker felt that there is a negative 'tribal mentality' in some places and that this is most pronounced in areas where deprivation is highest:

"There is a bit of a tribal mentality in some places, especially Kirkby and Huyton which are the most deprived areas. People won't travel between areas, even for simple things like going to a supermarket."

"There is a reluctance here to leave friends behind – so many don't go university and many don't leave the area for work. Some have a very low attitude of the local area but they'd never leave it."

"They are very proud of their area and have no aspiration to move."

This tribal mentality is believed to discourage young people from wanting to leave their communities to seek education and employment opportunities. It can lead to a reinforcing of territorialism through gang culture.

## Views from the police

Given the conflicted views expressed by young people about the role of the police, the Commission sought out the views from police officers working closely with the community. A Police Community Support Officer recognised the concern that more targeted policing, for example by drug squads, did have an impact on the positive work being undertaken to build relationships with young people in schools.

Another School Officer with the local police identified very clearly that the 'enterprising spirit' of young people often goes unrecognised and is therefore often not translated into positive outcomes. As a result there is a strong perception amongst some communities that young people tend to put their energies into criminal activity and 'troublemaking':

"Young people I work with are incredibly imaginative and there is an enterprising spirit. The problem is that very often it's not channelled into education or there aren't enough opportunities for them to apply themselves in the ways that they want to. If they want to make some money, that should be encouraged in the right ways."

"We had to deal with a kid recently who was found selling fruit and vegetables at break times and after school – apparently he'd been digging it up from some allotments nearby. So something had to be done, but that's an example of them spotting an opportunity and taking the initiative."

If we don't work with them so that they can put their initiative to good use then very often they will end up sooner or later selling drugs or stolen goods. There is a black market economy here and we need to take all that creativity and give them something better to do with it."

## Engagement and young people's opportunities

Professionals working most closely with young people see the value in engaging and providing opportunities for all young people, rather than focusing entirely on the minority with most challenging behaviours. Many emphasise the importance of a preventative approach with early intervention before problems get out of hand.

A Development Officer said:

"Young people from all backgrounds have a real hunger to be involved across the borough, if they believe it's really going to make a difference. On the 'Our Place' project both Councillors and young people have shown a tremendous willingness and enthusiasm to make it work."

And a church based community worker said:

"I constantly try and underline the important role of things like the Air Training Corps, the Sea Cadets, the Scouts, which are full to bursting in many of our areas, and the Church. Of course they're not going to be for everybody, but they are fairly representative. It's not just the – if I can use that term – 'middle class' kids with very supportive parents, there are a lot of young people from very disadvantaged backgrounds in those groups. Public sector stuff that's provided seems to be targeted wholly at the young people who are perceived to be problematic ... And this is where they miss a trick I think."

The Chief Executive of Knowsley Enterprise Academy said that he believes passionately that there are significant opportunities to involve young people in small and medium sized business.



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# Josh, 18

"Me name's Josh - I'm 18 from South Dean. I was born just down the road from Sheldham Walk. It's not that good a place to live. I went to high school, but I left when I was in Year 9 and got sent to tech college till Year 11. Then I come to the Connexion service.

I live at home with me mam and her husband, and me sister who is 15, I think. I get on well with her, it's not the best place to live but it's not far from the shops and not far from the park. I come from a big family with load of cousins from all over the area.

Most days I just like to stay out of the house - the longer the better. I don't like to be in the house, getting nagged at every day by me mam, she just says, "I hate you, you were a mistake". I just get on with it. She's not joking, she says it seriously as well. You could be just sitting there doing nothing and she'll say it. It's just me mam.

I've been trying to find somewhere to move for ages but I can't find anything, like. I just want a flat or something, but there's a three year waiting list. It's not that expensive. It's just the deposit you've got to pay that's expensive. I'm still at college and they haven't started paying me yet. Me nan said she'll help, but she ain't got much.

I hang about with me mates, but we're not in a gang. There are lots of gangs and they need something, I dunno... give them all a park - that would be something. That would give them something, coz they've got nothing to

do. They don't scare me, no, it's just when you see them all, and see the young ones ... too scared to walk past. Townies are the worst. There's loads of them, but I just put up with it.

I used to hate going to school. At first I enjoyed it, I used to have a right laugh and that, but then I hated it. During my time at school I was getting victimised by a teacher, I ended up getting really wound up, and nearly hitting him, and then they kicked me out. Every lesson, I'd go in to his lesson and he'd put me in the corner of the room and give me paper and say copy on to that and he'd teach the full lesson and I'd have to stand there. I never had a chance, coz when I tried to ask him he'd kick me out.

Only the last year, I've been doing cars, I did mechanics, it was alright. It's good - you could have a laugh with them teachers. That's what I was doing at Kirkby College. I've passed all me exams at Kirkby College, then I've come here (Rathbones) and I feel like I'm doing nothing ... because I'm dyslexic. The stuff that I get stuck on is maths, like decimals and percentages. I feel like I'm improving, I couldn't do decimals when I came here first and I can now.

I want to pass my driving test and get a car. Go find somewhere to live. I just want to get out of Kirkby and I'm gonna go into the army to do mechanics. I got the form from the little shop thing in town. I just popped in. I just enquired and they gave me a date to come back and do the test and join - which is mint!"

# 3. What does this mean for young people in Knowsley?

**S**ome key themes have emerged from our research about young people in Knowsley to inform our thinking and, going forward, underpin our recommendations in this report. From our evidence the following is clear:

- The vast majority of young people in Knowsley are positive and ambitious for their futures, and their parents say they want to support them to achieve their goals.
- Positivity and aspiration is strongest in younger children and then appears to dissipate through the teenage years.
- However, many young people live in circumstances of significant disadvantage and this has a damaging and limiting effect on their life chances.
- Young people are growing up with the consequences of the rapid economic decline of the area and a subsequent dominant and widespread negative narrative of expectation and achievement from communities, and often professionals.
- A significant minority of young people and families engage in risky, anti-social and criminal behaviours which have an impact on the wider community. This includes how young people, parents and professionals view the communities in Knowsley.
- Parents want the best for their children but are not always able to effect change and offer the support needed to succeed.
- The sense of community in Knowsley is strong but professionals fear that this holds children back and limits ambition.
- The current focus of resources is on the 'challenging minority'. This tends to create a focus on the deficits of a few, rather than building the capacity of all young people.
- Many young people have entrepreneurial abilities but they struggle to channel these through the formal educational system. A significant proportion of young people see skills and talents beyond the purely academic as valuable, but the system appears not to give them credit for that.

## What the evidence tells us

### Growing up in Knowsley with a long shadow of the past

It is impossible to start any analysis of the lives of young people in Knowsley without reflecting on the economic and social context of the area. Our research found two different narratives about Knowsley. The dominant narrative tends to be told by older generations and is also reflected in the views of some professionals. It is more negative and is very clearly rooted in a troubled history which plays out both as a strong cultural legacy and memory in material and social disadvantage for a significant number of families living in the borough.

The alternative narrative is more positive. It tends to be told by younger generations and by those whose voices are yet to bear influence upon the collective culture of the area. This narrative is stoical and pragmatic but it is also optimistic. It wants things to be better and it finds meaning in the future, as well as in the past and present. These two narratives provide sometimes conflicting starting points to all of our deliberations. Our challenge is to move as many young people as possible from the constraints of the negative to the possibilities of the positive.

The statistics speak for themselves and are a stark reminder of the challenges that young people face on a daily basis. Knowsley has experienced devastating changes in the labour market, from a time of expansion of industry in the 60s to decline and then change to a service based economy over recent decades. These changes have put a high premium on academic qualifications at one end of the spectrum and offer poorly paid insecure work for the traditionally unskilled and semi-skilled at the other. Over half the children and young people living in poverty<sup>40</sup> in the UK live in households in which one adult is in full or part-time work.<sup>41</sup> Fifty eight per cent of young people live in poverty in Knowsley, while eight of Knowsley's wards have more than twice the national average of children living in families on benefits.<sup>42</sup>

Knowsley also has a unique history of loss, bound up in the way in which it was created as a metropolitan borough, in class and in the monumental impact of the loss of skilled and semi-skilled jobs not long after it was created. This has led to generations of worklessness in some families and a dependency on the state as the main provider.

The consequences of these changes cast a long shadow over the lives of all who grow up in Knowsley, affecting their ambition, hopes and expectations. This is reflected in the disproportionately high levels of risky behaviour, low academic achievement and youth crime in the area. The Commission recognises that a wide range of interventions have been put in place over recent years to tackle these issues, with good and sometimes outstanding levels of success. However, whilst these trends are reassuring, the scale of the ever increasing inequality and the stalling of social mobility indicate that recent policies and interventions have not yet been sufficient to tackle the root causes.<sup>43</sup> In the long term, the ability of Knowsley to address issues related to inequality and its effects upon family life and young people in the borough is also related to wider trends. Distrust, isolation and a lack of engagement is a nationwide pattern. Nationally, only 31% of people agree that 'generally speaking most people can be trusted', for instance.<sup>44</sup>

The Commission has spoken with many individuals working with young people in Knowsley who recognise that there are particular problems around social disaffection among some young people in Knowsley. The ways in which issues of disengagement and disaffection are spoken about often reveal concerns that young people feel their identity is increasingly without value in affluent contemporary society; social and economic exclusion manifests itself as a sense of cultural disenfranchisement and increasing disengagement with state and society.

In this respect it is important to recognise that the relationship between individuals, families, communities and the state has been transformed within the context of the broad political economic thrust of the past three decades, creating much of the negative narrative around expectations that we have referred to throughout this report. The effects of this are perhaps more likely to be acute in Knowsley and Merseyside where there has been a greater reliance among individuals and families on the state as a provider throughout much of this period. Some residents have become accustomed to the local authority acting in a paternalistic role – 'doing to' rather than working with them. This is reflected in the fatalistic viewpoint we heard so often from parents and young people in trouble. "This is just the way it is here" – things are bad but we are "just getting on with it".

Young people in Knowsley are navigating a world that has changed substantially from that experienced by their parents' and grandparents' generations – yet they may be strongly influenced by those experiences, views and expectations. To succeed they need the self-confidence, resilience and skills to take on the new world that they now inhabit.

## Despite the statistics young people in Knowsley are positive

Whilst the statistics tell a story of deprivation and low attainment, the aspiration and ambition of young people in Knowsley shines through. The Commission discovered that many young people in Knowsley have similar aspirations and ambitions to those of their peers elsewhere. The majority of young people work hard at school, get results and go on to study further or find a job. A very broad range of ambitions were expressed in our discussions with young people and highlighted in the previous chapter.

Knowsley, its families and communities are living evidence that deprivation and disadvantage are not deterministic, by which we mean that they do not guarantee that all young people who grow up in disadvantage will always do badly. That is not to underestimate the challenges faced in communities like these. The reality is that in Knowsley and other deprived areas the hurdles that must be overcome by young people who want to succeed are higher and more plentiful than in more affluent areas.

It is essential to understanding the pathway that takes young people from childhood to adulthood. Given the levels of social dislocation, deprivation, welfare dependency and worklessness in some families, making these dreams a reality can mean facing barriers that are insurmountable without access to appropriate support from family, school and the wider community. This includes an introduction to a range of experiences that introduce a young person to a wider world and encourages them to develop resilience and life skills such as self-discipline, determination and motivation.

We have heard from young people, parents and professionals that life and career ambitions seem to become less certain as young people mature through the 11–16 age range, with self-doubt, peer pressure and the 'lure' of [low] paid work pulling young people off course. Understanding and supporting the pathway to adulthood to enable more young people to break out and reach their potential has to be a key ambition for the Commission.

## Understanding the road map to adulthood in Knowsley

It is therefore important to grasp how the high hopes, goals and aspirations of so many of Knowsley's young people are confounded by the limitations of poverty and disadvantage in every aspect of growing up.



In more affluent homes, research tells us that parents begin to develop a road map for their children from an early age. One that gives a sense of direction, fuelled by expectation and assisted by practical, emotional and material support such as an interest in school work; regular routines; frequent experiences of the wider world; fostering a sense of agency; and a strong belief that what the adults do will make a difference to their children's future.<sup>45</sup>

The absence of such a road map and a poorer home learning environment, plus often lower expectations from teachers and other professionals, means that an underachievement gap begins to open up very early in a child's life if he or she lives in a low income family. By the time young people take their GCSEs, only 21% of the poorest fifth gain five good GCSEs grades A\*–C, including English and Maths, compared with 75% of the top quintile.<sup>46</sup>

However, we know from research that there are factors that can mitigate these potential obstacles. Motivation is a vital element in attainment for all young people. The work of American academic Carol Dweck<sup>47</sup> indicates that 40% of children develop a mindset very early on in their school careers that dictates future progress or lack of it. If they learn from adults that they are labelled dim, they will behave accordingly.

Analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England found that young people are more likely to do well at GCSE, regardless of background, if the young person:

- Has a belief in his or her ability at school
- Has a sense of agency – believing that events result primarily from his or her own actions
- Thinks it is likely she or he will get in to higher education
- Avoids risky behaviour such as truancy, cannabis use, anti-social behaviour
- Does not experience bullying<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, according to research by Leon Feinstein and others<sup>49</sup>, the development of individual life skills such as self-regulation, behavioural management and social and communication capabilities mean that those people are less likely to smoke, commit crimes and be depressed. The research goes on to indicate that a child's dedication and capacity for concentration at the age of 10 has a much bigger impact on earnings 20 years later than his or her ability in maths.

In short, once again, it is important to understand that the impact of disadvantage is not immutable.

These findings provide an important framework for us to consider how we can best help Knowsley young people to succeed, but it is also important to test and challenge their assertions. Young people we talked to in Knowsley are clear that the traditional set of values and metrics around educational achievement are not adequate to meet their own aspirations or to support their own pathways to success. Whilst accepting that the factors outlined above may strengthen young people's chances of success, they are not the whole picture and run the risk of giving false echoes on ability and talent – missing out on the potential of many, if a broader value system is not embraced.

Similarly, whilst it is valuable to understand the importance of developing life skills such as resilience and self-determination in early childhood, we should not 'write off' the potential for young people to develop these characteristics as they grow up. Many young people we heard from who had found themselves in trouble in their teens retained a strong aspiration to succeed – if they could find a way to do it that suited them. Challenging assumptions and finding a creative new framework of positive support and values to unlock that potential is at the heart of our recommendations.

Building the resilience and capacity of young people in Knowsley to have the self-confidence and ability to take advantage of new opportunities to overcome the challenges of disadvantage will be key. Building a constant narrative that tells young people that effort, creativity, motivation and persistence can often achieve as much as academic ability – a narrative supported by a growing mass of international research<sup>50</sup> – will be a vital aspect of this. Some young people seem to lack the necessary application to succeed. It will therefore be important to stress the need to 'stick with it' – to meet goals even when the situation becomes hard going. The Commission understands that the services for young people need to reinforce the expectation that all young people will achieve their potential and that if professionals make negative assumptions based on a young person's background it can dilute a young person's chance of success.

Young people also need first-hand experience of the world outside Knowsley. The Commission visited an outstanding primary school in a very deprived area. The children had recently spent the day at The University of Liverpool, had their photos taken in gowns, attended a lecture, ate lunch with students and had returned with their ambitions reshaped. One visit can't shape a destiny but as part of a concerted and sustained strategy beginning in primary school and extending into higher education, it could help a young person, parent or carer to radically alter their view on the value of education. There is also enormous scope



to broaden horizons through links and visits beyond the North West.

A number of young people relayed stories of disillusionment and disengagement with school, giving the strong impression that the system was not able to respond to their needs.

Around the world there are a plethora of innovative educational initiatives such as Studio Schools<sup>51</sup>, the American 'Everyone Graduates' Center<sup>52</sup>, the Career Academy<sup>53</sup> and different models of pre-apprenticeship schemes such as Working Rite<sup>54</sup> and My Life is My Business<sup>55</sup> which provide new approaches to learning to develop the skills and know-how required to succeed in life. Based on the development of practical application in the real world, these approaches recognise the limitations of a narrow academic approach to learning for many young people and seek to value practical, vocational and craft skills. These programmes offer valuable experiences which could be considered in the Knowsley context.

Such an approach also appears to support the career aspirations of young people in Knowsley. A 2008 Safer Knowsley Partnership report<sup>56</sup> found that 'tradesperson' was the highest desired career for young people, followed by 'sports person' and 'hairdresser'. When broken down, the tradespeople they most want to be were plumbers, bricklayers and electricians. Apart from a vet, none of the jobs the young people selected are traditional 'professional' jobs such as teachers, lawyers or accountants.

## The impact of the local community

Communities are of great significance in forming aspiration, especially where deprivation and social disadvantage appears as a long-term, entrenched problem. Analysis of the national MOSAIC dataset shows the types of deprived neighbourhood with the lowest aspiration to be those classified as 'Low Horizons', 'Families on Benefits' and 'Ex-Industrial Legacy'; all three types are prominent in Knowsley.<sup>57</sup>

Low population mobility within communities is also strongly associated with reproducing low aspiration among young people. Isolated areas, disconnected from wider social and economic circuits, tend to exhibit the lowest educational aspirations among young people. Again, a lack of social mobility is reported as a defining feature of some communities in Knowsley.<sup>58</sup>

If the dominant view in such a community is hostile to education, qualifications and paid work, research on social capital and attainment in deprived communities<sup>59</sup> tells us that the horizons of a young person are likely to

shrink to the size of his or her immediate neighbourhood and their own family life.

As one mother and grandmother reflected:

"I wanted to be a joiner. My mum said it was a man's job and that was that. I did nothing at school and came out of school with nothing. Then I had a baby, and then another baby and now I'm a grandmother and I still haven't done nothing. I regret that, I don't want my grandchildren to have that attitude."

A significant number of frontline workers in Knowsley feel that this is the case and said that they could also see the limiting effect these negative attitudes had. Youth workers and teachers talked of young people's reluctance to move from their local area and leave their friends behind even though they had a poor attitude towards it. Others talked of low aspiration which saw rising up on the 'pecking order' of the estate as their main goal in life. These are extreme examples that do not relate to the majority of young people in Knowsley but they do give a sense of the strong negative narrative that is in place in some sections of the community.

The Commission found that the sense of community and the belonging in localities in Knowsley is strong. Young people have a clear sense of their local community which they often see as very local to their home or street, and they feel that the community is helpful to each other and a good place to live.

Young people clearly feel a strong sense of bonding and ownership with their community, which is often seen as an important indicator of wellbeing. Sense of place is also important; imbuing young people and their communities with strong roots, mutual understanding, pride and commitment.

Some deprived communities are rich in social capital – the networks, relationships, social bonds, social resources and civic norms that allow us all to function and flourish – while in others this is severely depleted. Research tells us that the richer in social capital a community becomes, the more likely it is that its residents are 'housed, healthy, hired and happy'.<sup>60</sup> Bonding in a community can subsequently lead to bridging – encouraging people to strike out further afield.

However, while there are benefits to a strong sense of belonging, some bonding can become so constraining that striking out is consciously and unconsciously discouraged. There is some evidence that this is the case with some young people in Knowsley; as stated, a number of professionals said that they believe this to be true. A small number of young people also told us that they feel that

their community might hold them back, reaffirming the professionals' view.

Evidence and experience shows how inward looking localities can be limiting – perpetuating the status quo and narrowing choices. Our conversations with young people and their families indicated that this was a familiar pattern in many areas in Knowsley. Invigorating communities to lead and shape their own change has the potential to change the experience and aspiration of the neighbourhood as a positive place to live and grow up in forever.

As a report of the Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Taskforce states: “Strong social networks are often a source of empowerment, strength and support. However, they can also constrain individuals to familiar choices and locations. Bonding networks may predispose individuals to eschew experiences that might build other forms of social capital and precipitate change.”<sup>61</sup>

This ‘mental geography’ can drain aspiration and limit opportunity. It can also undermine resilience and capabilities since only the familiar is entertained, and the risk of failure is avoided – but it is risk that in some circumstances can help to build resilience. The life experiences of parents over the long term often form the basis for much of a child’s outcomes in early life and impact on their outlook in later years. In Knowsley, that inheritance can be toxic in terms of attainment.

It is important to recognise the difference between local neighbourhoods, necessitating localised responses. A 2004 report by the Social Exclusion Unit, *Jobs and Enterprise in Deprived Areas*, found that the immediate neighbourhood has a stronger influence on forming aspiration than wider areas or regions. For example, rates of unemployment among the 500 people living nearest to an individual has a stronger effect on their likelihood of escaping poverty than unemployment rates among the population of the wider surrounding area.<sup>62</sup> It recommended a localised neighbourhood based approach to intervening in raising aspirations.

As we have stated, the local authority has already put in place a wide range of measures which are designed to build and revitalise local communities, including the long-term Sustainable Community Strategy, the establishment of Local Area Boards and the recruitment of Community Champions. If successful, these developments are likely to have a positive impact on communities, increasing involvement and participation in all aspects of civic life and thus helping to improve positivity and a ‘can do’ spirit.

We support these developments, and believe that a more localised approach to budgets and outcomes also has

the potential to enable frontline workers to have the great discretion and flexibility to respond to individuals and local communities that they told us they want.

From our discussions, we are aware that some local Councillors are keen to support these moves and can see how they can also play a key role in championing their local community, working with young people and frontline staff.

## The impact of peer groups

Friends and peer groups become increasingly important sources of social influence during teenage years, especially around age 15 when self-identity can take on more significance and behavioural norms (both positive and negative) often linked to those of peer groups begin to take hold.<sup>63</sup> 11–14 is a key age group, as aspirations develop from idealistic to more realistic in nature.<sup>64</sup> The Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England in 2004<sup>65</sup> reported that two-thirds of 14 year olds intending to leave school at age 16 said that they were influenced to do so because their friends intended to do the same.

These trends are reflected in Knowsley, with a significant adjustment of aspiration during this time. The immediate environment in which social interaction takes place during the 11–16 age bracket – local neighbourhood, family homes, schools and youth clubs – has, therefore, much influence upon the development of a sense of self and individual and collective aspirations.

## Views of frontline workers

We were concerned that our conversations with professionals sometimes seemed to undervalue their important role in lifting aspiration and positively changing behaviour. For frontline workers, often dealing on a daily basis with the most ‘chaotic’ families, there is a risk that this skews attitudes towards a negative discourse about young people in general.

Some professionals said that they believe that young people’s low aspirations are not often sufficiently challenged, even by them, to best support the young people to fulfil their potential. Whilst acknowledging an improvement in services and outcomes, many professionals tended to focus on the negative legacy of disadvantage rather than discuss a more positive future. For many, this seemed to be a way of explaining the issues that they face in working with some young people who clearly are disadvantaged.

One local senior practitioner said:

“Our children and young people come from families that come from generations of disaffection. There is a strong cycle of

disaffection and poverty and no one has really got to grips with breaking the cycle in some families ...”

Professionals were generally careful not to apportion blame on young people and many concerns were raised that young people have become demonised through negative and usually exaggerated representations in the popular media, locally and nationally. There were also concerns that for those young people who are already socially disaffected, these representations become the stereotypes against which they struggle to define themselves, hence for some ‘the hoody’ and ‘the ASBO’ become ‘a badge of honour’.

## Young people as agents of change

The ability to influence and effect change has been identified as a key indicator of wellbeing and a key factor in overcoming disadvantage. Research shows that a sense of personal agency – the belief that what you do can and does make a difference – at the age of 10 is more important than reading skills.<sup>66</sup>

We have seen how a range of interventions designed to improve life skills and resilience are in place in Knowsley, which recognise that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not appropriate. The Commission welcomes the commitment to providing and testing a range of interventions, including the local authority’s innovative work in increasing mental toughness.

Our evidence clearly shows the importance of involving young people in decision making. Young people told us they recognise that a lot of consultation is now taking place in Knowsley. For some, especially those most involved as Young Advisors, this is a very positive move which they can see is making a difference. However, there are some who are not engaged and who feel that the consultation process has had little effect. Whilst some of this conviction may be rooted in an historical view of the council as a poor deliverer of services, some of these views may also reflect the difficulties that local authorities have in devolving power, even where the commitment to participation is strong.

A significant number of young people said that they do not feel included or listened to, and that services do not deliver what they asked for or what they said they needed. Young people told the Commission that a number of the projects that are designed to support them suffer from an over-concentration of effort to realise results in the short term, without enough attention being paid to sustainability.

Some young people, for instance, referred to dissatisfaction with a youth club where what had been asked for was not provided; the loss of a velodrome and its

replacement with a leisure centre which is too expensive for most young people; the loss of other sports facilities; the locking of some allotments so that young people could not access their project; as well as the imminent closure of a sports club. Whilst these are the kinds of complaints that can be heard in communities up and down the country when popular local amenities are closed, in Knowsley the lack of co-ordination around many local youth projects, the often ad-hoc nature of provision and failure to respond as requested to some consultations is perceived within the community as a lack of understanding and feeds their sense of powerlessness. Trust and promises are seen to have been broken, with little apparent concern for the impact of this on young people.

Disconnection therefore seems to have arisen between the official recorded performance of the local authority according to policy targets and the perception amongst some local communities that their needs are misunderstood, ignored or felt to be unimportant. At its worse, this can compound the negative narrative that we found within the community.

Young people have been increasingly consulted about their services and communities in Knowsley as part of a wider strategy of engagement. These initiatives offer young people the opportunity to develop important skills as well as the positive experience of seeing how they can influence and make change happen. They include:

- The Knowsley Participation Standards, building in participation to all young people’s services
- Knowsley’s Youth Parliament – Shout4Knowsley – for people aged 13–20 in the borough, which also feeds into the national UK Youth Parliament
- Knowsley Young Advisors, a group of 25 young people aged 16–22, who advise and guide community leaders and decision makers. This programme has been recognised nationally (through the Big Lottery) for its collaborative work on the ‘Our Place’ scheme and locally for its interviewing skills with key posts such as the Head of the Youth Offending Team.
- Young Inspectors, part of a national pilot to improve local services

The Centres for Learning and the Our Place Youth Centre being developed in Huyton<sup>67</sup> are two examples of positive engagement which young people told us about. These developments were seen to have involved young people in a meaningful way, through listening to their views and developing services accordingly.

These approaches offer a positive springboard for future developments in young people’s engagement in the borough which have the potential to bring two benefits.

First, they support the endeavour to build the confidence and ambition of young people by developing their sense that their actions have consequences and that their views, ideas and visions are legitimate and can be influential. In addition, the considerable resources invested in youth services are likely to be better targeted and achieve greater impact.

Recognising this, the Commission encourages the local authority and other service providers in Knowsley to embrace a new level of young people's involvement as part of a wider strategy to build young people's confidence and experience in decision making and influencing. This move could aim to build the needs and views of young people into policy, planning, design and delivery of services and support. In effect, young people would begin to co-produce their services with the local authority.

All of our research shows that young people's sense of place and belonging in Knowsley is strong, with many young people having very clear ideas as to how their neighbourhood might be improved. Changing the nature and relationship of services to become locally owned and shaped has the potential to regenerate communities, raise aspiration, improve effectiveness and, importantly in the current economic climate, be more cost-effective. However, this bold move will need commitment at the highest level with a long-term plan to succeed. Such a move would also fit well within the wider aims of the local authority to devolve more services locally.

Such a move towards more localised audit of services, budgets and priorities would enable communities, including young people, to play an effective part in decision making and provision. This would give a sense of agency to local communities in which autonomy has been drained by unemployment and deprivation. It would offer opportunities for training and volunteering. It would also counter criticisms that the local authority and its strategic partners sometimes go against the grain of local needs or that the choices they make don't take sufficient account of conflicting interests.

Other local authority areas are following a similar approach which has provided the Commission with food for thought. We are impressed by plans of the Croydon Total Place pilot<sup>68</sup> which has learned lessons from reshaping of services in Birmingham<sup>69</sup> and the Neighbourhood Management Schemes<sup>70</sup> in seeking to involve people of all ages; to streamline and devolve budgets; set priorities; encourage behaviour change; and determine outcomes.

Many of these trends are embraced within the new Coalition Government's 'Big Society' approach which is likely to get significant attention over coming years. The Area Partnership Boards we have described and new

Centres for Learning have the potential to be a focus for this kind of change in every area.

The Commission is interested in the idea of a Young People's Champion for Knowsley. The UN Rights of the Child cover material wellbeing, housing and environment, educational wellbeing, health and safety, risky behaviours and quality of school life. A local Champion, fully empowered and working within the local authority at senior and cabinet level, would not be out of step with the growing groundswell for accountability in the UK. He or she would ensure that the talent, enthusiasm and knowledge of young people are not overlooked in the decision making process and the operations of some services. The new post, looking at how local services perform on the UN framework, would require someone with the relevant expertise and commitment, supported and informed by young people drawn in innovative ways from across all networks and groups.<sup>71</sup>

## Broadening horizons and opening up opportunities for young people

There is a plethora of services and support for young people in Knowsley, with a distinct move to broaden the range of activities on offer to include the voluntary sector, arts, sports and faith groups. However, the Commission repeatedly heard the view that there was still too little for young people to do – especially for boys.

This is supported by national consultations with young people such as the Make Space Youth Review which found that 70% of young people felt that there weren't enough places to go and things to do in their neighbourhood. One girl talked of spending evenings walking to and from the local supermarket being 'as good as it gets'.<sup>72</sup> Whilst the perception may not match the reality of the range of services on offer, it is also important to remember that services will not be valued if they don't offer young people activities that they want.

On a number of occasions the Commission was reminded that some young people do not want to take part in supervised activities but do need a safe and positive environment. Many parents yearned for the simple pleasures and freedoms they had as entertainment when they were young. Whilst they recognised that expectations and the local environment have changed significantly since that time, they lamented a past simpler existence.

But participants were also clear that a greater effort is required to reach both the disengaged and also those young people who are not 'joiners' and who are 'no trouble', who would benefit from having broader horizons. There is an important role for public services to play in supporting young people whose families may have

limited resources to have the opportunity to travel, go to the theatre and be taken out of their comfort zone and challenged by new experiences. The Commission is impressed by the Knowsley Youth Passport Scheme, which gives every young person an annual opportunity to try a range of experiences backed up by discounts, and believes that this has great potential.

Developing the range of both formal and informal activities on offer will be key to raising aspiration and achievement, and we are convinced by the research and examples that we have seen that these will be more likely to be effective if they are designed in conjunction with and co-produced by young people. A wider range of activities will also provide positive alternatives to boredom and the temptation to become involved in anti-social behaviour or petty crime.

It will also be important to co-ordinate these activities with wider support and opportunities for young people. Research shows how schools, businesses and local communities can combine their efforts to raise aspirations

and attainment. It also shows how important it is to bring policy agendas and interventions together to offer support in all aspects of a young person's life – from improving the local environment to improving confidence and educational achievement.<sup>73</sup>

The range of interventions, programmes and associated factors developed around the needs of young people, families and communities could be displayed as shown in the diagram below.

As already discussed, Knowsley's Centres for Learning are a major new resource with the potential to transform the level and range of activities on offer for young people and the community. There are some important opportunities to build and co-ordinate a wide range of support for young people around Centres for Learning – these have the potential to become hubs within the community.

However, it is also clear that the development of new centres will not be an instant fix for all. It will be important to ensure that whilst the Centres may take a lead in

## Influencing factors to build resilience





co-ordinated activities in the area, a wide range of opportunities are made available outside of these. This will be important to ensure diversity and reach – and will be crucial in engaging those young people who are not comfortable in a school environment, albeit a transformed one. The Commission believes that the involvement of young people in decisions about the delivery of the Centres needs to be a top priority. Only in this way will young people feel that they have the mandate and ‘permission’ to own and populate the spaces.

This report has highlighted the high level of interaction and involvement of Knowsley young people with their extended family who live locally. This is a much higher involvement than the national average and places Knowsley in a good position to consider some kind of community engagement scheme. This could enable young people to mix with a range of people, engage with different role models, test their abilities and build confidence.

As well as physical access, limitations in opportunities were also viewed in terms of their geographical accessibility. Many young people in Knowsley have said that they feel that they are unable to get around easily. This limits their access to opportunities and activities and is likely to compound any misgivings they may have about taking part in things that are going on outside their direct community. A number of young people talked about missing out on the culture and entertainment of Liverpool because of poor transport.

In-borough and out-of-borough transport appears to be an issue. Very few young people talked of spending time in the surrounding countryside, with all the health benefits that that could bring. Effective, reliable transport will therefore be an essential element in opening up opportunities for young people in Knowsley and in broadening horizons.

Many areas have established subsidised transport schemes and report positive results. The introduction of the well-known London Child Oyster Card was found to have widespread backing, with 80% of young people agreeing that the scheme made travelling better for them.<sup>74</sup> Other schemes have also taken steps to encourage young people to take up cycling. An innovative scheme<sup>75</sup> in South London worked with disadvantaged young people to build their own bike which they were then able to keep. Others have introduced cycle routes and cycle training. Such a move in Knowsley might have the potential to link with the wider drive to harness entrepreneurialism.

Ensuring that young people feel confident and safe in getting out and about is essential, and it is clear that many young people are concerned about their safety.

Whilst young people displayed some concern about their relationship with the police and felt that more could be done to help them feel confident in reporting crime, they also had positive suggestions about ways to change the culture of acceptance of crime.

Most of the young people agreed that the ‘aftermath’ of gun crime should be advertised in order to stop young people becoming involved or to put them off it. As part of the Safer Schools Partnership, the local authority and police are planning to involve young people from Knowsley in making a crime awareness film/advertisement and having it as widely advertised as possible. Further plans are in place for a bus stop poster – designed by Knowsley’s young people as part of a competition.

Building on these proposals will be essential if Knowsley young people are able to feel confident in a safe environment.

## Getting help early before crisis develops

The importance of early intervention to support families before problems develop into full blown crisis is one that is consistently advocated to support children and young people’s health and wellbeing and to overcome inequality.<sup>76</sup> Knowsley young people who had got into trouble in their teens consistently told us of the ‘trigger’ points that had increased their risk of vulnerability. These included exclusion from school, the break up of their parent’s relationship, death of a family member or their initial involvement in petty crime.

In 2008, research by the British Chamber of Commerce<sup>77</sup> highlighted a number of reasons why young people become NEET, including: educational disaffection, family disadvantage and poverty, being in care, teenage motherhood, special educational needs, becoming a young carer, belonging to certain Black or minority ethnic groups, and participating in crime and risky activities. An analysis of 6,000 young people who had been through the New Deal for Young People found that 80% had at least one of these markers of disadvantage; 40% had experienced multiple disadvantages. It is a tribute to the capabilities of young people and their families and local policies that, given the scale of deprivation in Knowsley, the rates of NEET young people, now at just below 9%<sup>78</sup>, are not much higher.

There are some periods during which risks are also increased. Young people and professionals talked of their concern over the pressure on and lack of support for young people at key times of transition and decision making – as they move from the security of primary school to the bigger secondary school and as they consider their

options post-16. Providing support to young people at these key points of vulnerability has the potential to help them cope with their situation without it escalating. At a time of tight budgets, this approach is also likely to save money in the long run.

The benefits of early intervention and prevention are increasingly recognised across the political and social policy spectrum. The move to a new localised system of co-production of services would support this in a number of ways:

- By developing personalised services which are better suited to need and more effective
- By developing capacity, resilience and ability to cope
- By reducing the long-term pressure on high cost services, thus freeing up funds to support families before problems become crises

Consistent evidence shows that this is the approach that most families would value and one that would help them solve their problems most effectively.<sup>79</sup>

Around 45% of Knowsley's families are thought to be 'just coping' at present and are in receipt of very little support in proportion to their need.<sup>80</sup> The Commission welcomes the Council's move to a preventative approach which focuses on these families. The previously cited SILK research revealed that these 'just coping' group are more than willing to be helped but too often they are not prioritised, with the focus on families in a permanent state of 'chaos'. Without help, the 'just coping' families feed into the 'chaotic' group to the detriment of children, young people and the community.

## Building confident parenting

The benefits of such a 'whole family' approach to improving the wellbeing and capacity of families is increasingly recognised. This is particularly the case for those families who are struggling to cope or in a cycle of crisis.

There is wide recognition that some families and some parents struggle to provide their children with the positive support that would help them navigate the pathway from childhood to adulthood. One of the recurring themes encountered by the Commission was the negative experiences expressed strongly by many parents and carers of their own time at school – although that did not undermine the value that many place on a good education for their own children. Enabling more parents and family members to have the opportunity to take up training opportunities themselves is crucial in building confidence in the education system, creating a culture of aspiration and improving the economic outlook for struggling families.

However, whilst most parents that we spoke to were clearly doing their best for their children, we should recognise that a significant minority of parents were less supportive and more likely to have an overall negative effect. Young people we talked to who were already in trouble often reported that their parents had not supported them – some spoke of their parents showing an open dislike for them as well as recognising more broadly that their parents were not coping.

A growing body of research confirms the vital role parents play in the wellbeing, resilience and educational attainment of their children – if they have the resources.

A report published in 2010<sup>81</sup> by Goodman and Gregg, for instance, says that young people are more likely to do well at GCSE if their parents:

- Think it likely that the young person will go on to higher education
- Devote material resources towards education, including private tuition, computer and internet access
- Spend time sharing family meals and outings
- Quarrel with their children relatively infrequently

In order to address this deficit, Goodman and Gregg proposed major areas where policy might help to reduce educational inequalities:

- Improve the home learning environment in poorer families (e.g. supporting pre-school reading; access to computers in teen years)
- Help parents from poorer families to believe that their own actions and efforts can lead to higher education
- Raise families' aspirations and desires for advanced education from primary school onwards

Young people stand a much better chance of succeeding in life if they have the experience of a positive and supportive family life. There are a number of programmes already underway in Knowsley to support families. These include:

- A 'Parent Pals' scheme in which coping parents and carers mentor those 'just coping'
- Activities to encourage positive behaviour change
- Intensive targeted help for families in crisis and 'chaos' through Family Intervention Projects. The Commission has been impressed by the strengths based approach of Family Support Teams which build the capacity of families to create their own solutions.

Establishing preventative and targeted support for parents and families with very young children has been a key priority of Sure Start Children's Centres. Knowsley has 15 Children's Centres that offer parenting support,

parenting classes, specialist family support and access to wider vocational training. This is a valuable resource which has the potential to make a long-term positive impact on parents' confidence, parenting skills and employment opportunities.

## Fostering entrepreneurialism

Knowsley has a strong tradition of entrepreneurial activity, not all of it legitimate. The Commission has been told of the strengths and skills many young people have that are currently under-utilised in their formal education but which, with support, training and a modest investment, could create a route to a productive future or spark an interest that might lead to higher education. A school officer with the local police identified very clearly that the 'enterprising spirit' of young people often goes unrecognised and is therefore not often translated into positive outcomes.

Knowsley has a promising Enterprise Academy<sup>82</sup> which has the potential to help more young people develop their entrepreneurial skills. There is also the potential for schools and Centres for Learning to be much more involved. In the US, entrepreneurship education adheres to one core principle: the value of experiential learning – learning by doing, not being talked at.<sup>83</sup> The late Jeff Timmons of Babson College, a leader in the

teaching of entrepreneurial management, summarised entrepreneurship as: "It is initiating, doing, achieving and building an organisation rather than watching, analysing or describing one. It is a knack for sensing an opportunity ... It is the ability to build a 'founding team' to complement your own skills and talents." This is an approach that the Commission feels has real value.

In Knowsley, the Centres for Learning have yet to establish themselves but international research indicates that experiential learning that encourages problem solving, collaboration, team work and flexibility of thought are more likely to shape entrepreneurs and the kind of qualities that suit them.

## Recognising achievement and progress

Statistics show that young people in Knowsley have achieved some remarkable results in a 12-month period – and over the course of a decade – in a number of areas: increasing their GCSE A\*–C results, gaining employment, reducing benefit dependency and reducing teenage pregnancies.<sup>91</sup> In addition to these national indicators, the Commission believes that young people also achieve much that is not noted – from involvement in the local community to attainment in sports and arts.

## Enterprise education

Enterprise education is a growing theme in education in a range of areas including the work of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust<sup>84</sup>; world class enterprise education in Scotland<sup>85</sup> and schemes such as the Young Enterprise Company Programme<sup>86</sup> that gives around 35,000 students aged 15 to 19 the experience of running their own company with support of staff and volunteer advisors from business.

Since Young Enterprise launched in 1963, over a million students have taken part. A survey of 1,000 alumni discovered that they earn a third more than their peers; they were better equipped with the necessary skills to make a start on their own working lives and 77% felt 'fulfilled and engaged in their jobs' compared with 59% of the control group.<sup>87</sup>

Enterprise and entrepreneurship in education can help to re-engage young people alienated from education and can generate jobs via small ventures. In the US where one pupil drops out of high school every 29 seconds<sup>88</sup>, a number of highly effective

groups have been established to stimulate enterprise among young people and establish best practice. The Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Group, for instance, consists of 35 partners including the Goldman Sachs Foundation and the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship.

Other initiatives include Marketplace for Kids in North Dakota<sup>89</sup> and schools that employ local entrepreneurs as mentors, coaches, speakers and role models as well as entrepreneur 'pots' available in schools and communities to fund small-scale sustainable ventures no matter how young the entrepreneur (as the Prince's Trust has successfully done for years).

Robert Balfanz of the Centre for Social Organization of Schools at John Hopkins University<sup>90</sup>, Maryland's world leader in research and teaching, has four simple reasons why entrepreneurship in education works effectively:

- It is a reason to come to school
- It is an avenue for short-term success
- It helps to provide a clear pathway to adult success
- It is a way to develop neighbourhood assets

As we have consistently noted, young people place high value on non-academic achievement as major milestones – including volunteering, sports and arts awards, and helping members of the community. This presents a great positive to build upon in challenging the false echoes around individual potential thrown up by national academic attainment targets.

Longitudinal studies following young people from a cohort born in 1958 and 1970 show that in just over a decade, personal and social skills became 33 times more important in determining life chances.<sup>92</sup> American economist and Nobel Prize winner James Heckman says that social and behavioural skills haven't been sufficiently valued in the past because, unlike IQ, they can't be measured. Drawing on a large scale collection of data on skills and education, he argues that there is evidence that these competencies bring a clear economic return when invested in early in children, particularly disadvantaged children. He claims a return as high as 15% to 17%.<sup>93</sup> In some circumstances, these competencies may have a greater value than IQ to an individual.

## **A coherent approach which builds a strong knowledge base**

A number of young people and their parents told us how current initiatives feel like quick fixes that are here today and gone tomorrow. Some of this has been due to the level of programmes from Government, which is almost certain to slow down if not stop altogether when current budget reductions come into place.

However, there is a broader issue about the coherence of the approach across professionals and the importance of a long-term and co-ordinated strategy if young people are to get the support and encouragement they deserve. Training and support for all those working with young people to deliver such an approach is likely to be key.

We have been impressed by the Croydon Total Place plans for an Early Years Academy<sup>94</sup> to deliver training of this kind and to develop the skills and capacity of the workforce, and believe that similar opportunities may be possible in Knowsley.

We are also aware that a significant amount of work is taking place around the world focusing on engaging young people; improving life skills; behaviour change; and ways to bring deprived communities back to life – with wellbeing as a measure of improvement, not just jobs and wages. These are just the issues that the Commission has been grappling with.

Throughout our deliberations it has become clear that the plethora of activity underway in this country and

abroad is often piecemeal, local and developed from a very particular perspective and therefore hard to apply in other contexts. The Commission has therefore concluded that there are significant gaps in skills, tools and training available for all of those who are seeking to find new solutions to social and economic problems.

## **Looking for answers**

The Knowsley Young People's Commission will argue in the following chapter that the appropriate response to the evidence in this report is to:

- **Support young people to develop the ambition necessary to drive them forward, including a wider knowledge of life beyond their immediate communities**
- **Help young people to build the resilience necessary to avoid and overcome setbacks and to see themselves as 'agents of change'**
- **Ensure that all parents have the skills and confidence to be positive and encouraging parents**
- **Build an entrepreneurial society which values all the talents of its young people**
- **Create and promulgate a positive narrative about Knowsley and its successes**
- **Give all those working with families and young people the positive support, vision and confidence to avoid slipping into 'deficit' based approaches**

**Our proposals – to be set out in the next chapter – will set out ways for KMBC and its partners to make this happen.**

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# Ben, 17

I'm Ben, I'm 17. It's alright where I live. It used to be always mayhem but it's calmed down recently. Mayhem being all sorts of idiots knocking about the street up to no good. You don't see them as much anymore. They're getting picked up by the police and moved on. They've also got cameras on lampposts. I only really felt safe because I knew everyone. But if I was a stranger walking down and seeing the big groups, I'd be a bit scared. They used to rob cars, rob stuff. It just never appealed to me.

I've left school. I'm on an apprenticeship and it's nearly complete. I'm administrating in a company - making sure everything's packed and correcting any errors. It recycles household goods like washing machines. It also helps people get back into work. We bring them in, train them and then try and find them a job. I got me apprenticeship through the Council. The interview was pretty sound, because I'd been to the interview techniques at Connexions before. I had stuff going through me head about what I was going to say, so I had a bit of confidence as well.

I live with me older brother, me mam, me dad and me little sister. My oldest brother's moved out. He's always round at ours though. I'm never at home. I go to work, and then I'll get in, have me tea and then go out straight away and stay out till about 11, and then go home and just go to sleep. And then the whole weekend I'll stay at mates all weekend, and then go home on Sunday. Me cousins live about eight doors away from me and me nan lives just across the road. I've always lived there. My nan's always lived nearby.

Music is important to me. I love playing the bass. We're not playing gigs at the minute, just practising and working on songs. I went to Halewood College, a performing arts college. I did music up until Year 9, coz I didn't like the sound of the course at GCSE. We hope to start gigging next year - just little gigs and then maybe get bigger gigs. It would be my all-time dream to do a major festival.

Me family and me bird are important to me as well. I met her in school. I like everything about her. She doesn't live far away. Hopefully we'll be together for a long time. In the evenings, usually I'd go round to mates or me girlfriend's and we'll sit in. Or we'll go out with some mates, play some music or X-box or have a go on the laptop and watch telly, or sit with her mam and dad.

I wouldn't say I drink that much, at most once a month I'll have a drink. I smoke about seven cigarettes a day. My mam and dad don't know. They'd kill me. It's hard hiding it from them sometimes. I don't do drugs. I've got mates that do marijuana but they try and get me to do it, but it just doesn't appeal to me. I've tried it once but I didn't like it, so I was, like, never again.

I actually wanted to be a chef, but I didn't like the sound of the College - doing the NVQ - too much paperwork. I might do it later on, more likely I'd just go to the restaurant of a chef and ask them if I could work there, I'd be sorted then.

# 4. Proposals for the future

## Challenge 1

### **To build the aspiration and resilience of young people in Knowsley to raise expectations and help young people realise their dreams**

Our research has shown that young people in Knowsley are not short of aspiration but for a variety of reasons it appears difficult to unlock. In the early teenage years many young people say that they would like to go to university, travel around the world or indeed be a sports or pop star when they grow up. But it is also clear from our analysis that, in common with young people everywhere, aspirations shrink as they get older and the reality of options about post-16 life begins to kick in.

The report has revealed how many young people have limited choices when they leave school because of poor academic achievements, low horizons and aspirations, and often a lack of appreciation of the wider world around them. Some young people will have become teenage parents. A small but significant minority have already embarked on a negative trajectory by this stage – being excluded from school and often becoming involved in crime and the criminal justice system.

We have seen how many young people seem to accept compromise at this stage, which appears to relate to wider issues of low expectations from family and community members, and in some cases professionals, that we have referred to throughout this report. Whilst longer-term aspirations about travel and dream jobs continue for some, they appear increasingly fragile and less likely to happen. We also know from our research that many parents in Knowsley feel ill-equipped to help their children navigate new opportunities and choices.

The report has demonstrated the benefits of ‘horizon broadening’ opportunities to help raise young people’s aspirations and counteract the negative narrative that surrounds them. It has also demonstrated how important the years between 11 and 14 are in influencing young people’s life choices. The Commission is therefore keen to ensure that young people get as much support and positive inspiration as possible during this time.

#### **We are therefore proposing:**

1. That aspiration and achievement is made a top priority for young people in Knowsley – with Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council making an explicit challenge to young people to set their sights high, backed up by a high profile promise to work with them to help them succeed and do their best.
2. That all those who work with or have an influence on young people in the borough reinforce these positive ‘can do’ messages. For schools, youth clubs and other services and support this will mean a new and co-ordinated focus on raising aspiration and overcoming inequalities and challenges. For others, it might include local role models and champions which we know young people value and look for, drawn from the community and local area.
3. That young people are championed in every sphere of public life – led by a Young People’s Champion who has access to decision makers at every level.
4. That the local authority recognises the importance of resilience for young people to meet the challenges of growing up in disadvantage, and develops a range of activities to support this – particularly focusing on the young people living in the around 45% of families who are ‘just coping’ and known to be particularly fragile. This would build on existing programmes already outlined, such as ‘mental toughness’, to encourage young people to ‘stick with it’ to meet their goals.
5. That young people are engaged in a range of projects from primary school onwards which are designed to generate the interest, skills and self-confidence needed to unlock aspiration. This would focus on practical, vocational and experiential routes to attainment that draw on the assets, interests and skills young people already have, for instance in digital media, music and sport.
6. That a pool of mentors and advocates are recruited to support every young person not in education, employment or training (NEET).
7. That schools explore a range of evidence based approaches to learning that are able to respond to the needs and demands of more challenging young people in Knowsley.
8. To offer facilities and support for those young people whose parents do not support their education, through Saturday schools, homework clubs and mentors.

## KEY CHALLENGE

**Focusing energies and investment in building aspirations demands an outlet for those aspirations to be fulfilled.**

**How do we start building or shaping an environment in Knowsley in which these dreams and expectations may be met?**

## Challenge 2

### To broaden the horizons of young people in Knowsley to open up opportunities and options for their future

Throughout our report we have demonstrated the benefits but also the limitations of growing up in such a close community as Knowsley. Young people we have spoken to have regularly talked about the importance they place on their family, friends and community but also about their wish to travel, to take part in activities and to consider employment and other opportunities beyond their local neighbourhood.

In our report we have recognised that many parents feel unable to adequately help their children realise their ambitions. We have also highlighted the fact that many parents want their children's lives to 'be like theirs'. These issues compound the general trend of 'shrinking' horizons and options that we have discussed.

Whilst some young people clearly go on to achieve their ambitions, a large number of young people do not. Many young people go on to settle locally, often accepting as inevitable employment and a pattern of adult life that mirrors their own parents' and family's lives. Whilst this can offer a continuity and stability in family and extended family life that many people increasingly miss out on, it also has the potential to limit employment and lifestyle options, with many young people struggling to see how their parents' lives and values translate in a rapidly changing world.

The Commission recognises that the reasons behind these trends are complex and can be both positive as well as negative in their impact. However, we would like to see a greater emphasis on broadening horizons for young people to enable them to make positive choices about their future.

More broadly we discovered that whilst some young people are in bands, few are actively involved in the cultural activities in the region. We also found little evidence that young people are involved in much sport or physical activity apart from football. The report recognises that poor and inaccessible transport is one reason for this.

The Commission has been impressed by a number of existing small-scale schemes which are having a significant impact on the way children and young people view their futures. This should be a priority area for further development, offering every young person in Knowsley a greater understanding of what adult life might offer them.

We are therefore proposing:

1. That a wide range of activities are introduced to encourage and support young people to positively consider their learning and work options post-16. This might include peer to peer higher education and careers advice in Centres for Learning as well as more of the sponsored visits to universities we heard about. Vocational fairs and work experience for all young people including those who are not working or in training will also be important.
2. To extend the Knowsley Youth Passport Scheme which we highlighted earlier in the report, that gives every young person an annual opportunity to try a range of experiences. With no cinema or theatre in Knowsley the Passport Scheme, backed up by discounts for young people, could provide a powerful catalyst to try new experiences.
3. To extend access to and interest in a wide range of sports and arts activities in and around Knowsley, responding to create the wider and more appropriate range of things to do that young people told us they wanted. This should seek to make the most of the rich culture of activities in the region to build and encourage young people's creative enjoyment and talents. It could also broaden interest in non-traditional sports that are popular youth activities such as dance and extreme sports.
4. That young people's needs are taken into account by travel companies to improve travel around the borough and the region. We also think that the local authority and travel companies should consider a subsidised transport plan for young people.
5. To build on developing engagement between young people and the police in order to raise awareness of the negative impact of crime and ensure young people feel safe in their community.
6. To build on young people's extended family links and community involvement by considering a new young people's engagement scheme, to develop a sense of citizenship, open up access to new skills and experiences and build confidence.

## KEY CHALLENGE

**The move to broaden horizons demands that opportunities for young people exist in and outside of Knowsley.**

**It may also mean that young people migrate from Knowsley, Liverpool and the North West. Are young people and the wider community prepared to accept that moving out of the borough is OK?**

## Challenge 3

### To support young people to become agents of their own change

We have shown how the majority of young people in Knowsley set out bright and full of life. But we have also seen many examples of how this can quickly drain away as they grow up and as the limitations and reality of everyday existence take over. We talked to too many young people who feel unable to change or influence the world around them and too many who feel trapped by their circumstances with few options to go forward.

We have talked about our proposals to build the resilience of young people to help them better navigate and overcome the challenges that they face as they grow up. We have also set out proposals to broaden the horizons and aspirations of young people and to encourage and support them to consider and work towards a wider set of goals. We now want to find ways to empower young people in Knowsley to make it happen as agents of their own change.

The report has highlighted how the views of young people in Knowsley have increasingly been sought as part of a wider strategy of engagement and empowerment by the local authority. Many young people told us that they had been particularly involved in the development of the Centres for Learning and that they could see the positive influences that they had. Youth engagement around the Our Place scheme is seen as an example of national good practice. The Young Advisors have had a lead role in many of these developments and it is clear that this is a well thought out scheme which is producing an articulate and influential group of young people.

These developments are very positive and provide a strong platform to build upon. But we know that there are still many young people who do not yet feel involved and many who are not yet able to recognise the kind of changes that they would like to see in their own neighbourhood. This is particularly the case for some of the more challenging young people in the borough.

The Commission understands the importance of young people being able to become masters of their own destiny and is convinced of the positive effect that could have on all aspects of their lives. We therefore want to build on the positive examples of activities that are already in place in the borough to give all young people the skills and confidence to effect change and the experience of what that can mean. We want to reach out to all young people in Knowsley to truly involve them in influencing and shaping the world around them, becoming active agents of change.

We have been mindful of the research which demonstrates the importance of local ownership of services and the benefits such an approach can have in both improving services and as a catalyst for wider engagement and empowerment. We were impressed by some of the Total Place pilots which are planning to localise decision making and budgets to achieve this. They draw on the experience of other successful developments and are delivering many of the 'Big Society' goals of the Coalition Government.

#### We are therefore proposing:

1. That services and support for young people are redesigned and rethought around the needs of local areas in Knowsley – to localise planning and delivery of activities – backed up by local decision making and local budgets.
2. That young people are at the heart of this approach, influencing all aspects of the strategy. We are recommending that the local authority works with the Young Advisor Team to review and redesign how services are run with an ongoing role in decision making, possibly through local boards that include young people to steer and manage local services.
3. That young people get a clear message that their good ideas for activities are important and will be supported, with small grants available through a new local Community Youth Fund to help make them happen.
4. That the effective training which has been developed for Young Advisors to help them develop their influencing and decision making skills is made available to other young people in Knowsley. This might be through schools and the Centres for Learning, as well as youth clubs.

## KEY CHALLENGE

**Shouldn't young people simply be asked what they want and if they could actually run and manage things themselves?**

**For instance, an area identified where there would be a lighter policing policy to allow some activities that may be regarded by some as 'anti-social' – such as free running (Parkour) and motorbike scrambling. Not 'our' space but 'their' space?**



## Challenge 4

### To ensure that parents are able to offer positive support to young people

We know from national research that the family and the home environment is one of the largest influencers and determinants of children and young people's life chances. Knowsley young people have consistently told us that their family and community are very important to them and are supporting them to do their best. However, our analysis demonstrates that few families in Knowsley have the capacity and reach of more affluent communities to provide the bridge to the wider world of opportunity and realisation.

We have sought to understand the route map to adulthood of many young people in Knowsley. We have also highlighted the negative narrative that has developed around the changing economic fortune of Knowsley and the far reaching impact that this has had on attitude and expectations of work, education and lifestyle. It is clear to see how parents' own experience of growing up in Knowsley, combined with that of the community around them, continues to fuel this.

Life can be unmistakably tough for a lot of parents in Knowsley and statistics show that around 45% of parents are 'just coping' and often categorised as struggling, living week by week, just beyond the reach of social workers and other agencies. Our research has given us an understanding of the challenges that many families face: coping with financial hardship, poor quality jobs, relationships and the demands of parenting itself.

We are clear about the negative impact that these challenges have in limiting every aspect of family life and on children and young people at all stages of development. For all of the reasons we have discussed, this is likely to be particularly apparent at times of higher risk as children grow up. We are therefore convinced of the need to help parents develop the necessary skills to provide positive support to their children at these crux times as well as on a day to day basis. All of our evidence has shown that this support will be most effective if it can be offered early to intervene as problems arise and so prevent greater difficulties escalating.

As we have demonstrated, there are a number of programmes already underway in Knowsley to support families which range from mentoring schemes and parenting classes to very intensive family support for those families on the edge of 'chaos'. The Commission has been impressed by the strengths based approach of the intervention programmes which build the capacity of families to create their own solutions. The Commission

wishes to build on these activities to improve life skills and parenting skills. However, we are also aware that more needs to be done to reach out to families who are less keen to engage with formal services yet have high levels of needs.

We also wish to improve levels of education and access to training opportunities for parents to raise both expectations and levels of confidence. This approach will be crucial in establishing a road map early on in life that leads to higher expectations, qualifications and attainment for young people later on.

#### We are therefore proposing:

1. That the local authority extends its successful 'Peer to Peer Parenting Programme' into a borough wide scheme to support parents in improving their parenting skills, raising their own levels of attainment and investing their time in supporting their children in education and life choices. This would include advice on key transitions in children's lives.
2. That there is a distinct move to turn services and support for parents in the borough 'inside out' in order to take support for parents to the community. We would like to see a genuine attempt to reach to parents through new community based initiatives – established as satellites to the Centres of Learning and Children's Centres in local neighbourhoods and in empty shops, as the first point of entry for parents who need parenting support.
3. That opportunities for education and training are promoted to parents through these initiatives – backed up by a fund that is explicitly for parents facing financial hardship to help them take up training and education.
4. That an early intervention and prevention strategy is developed that puts plans in place to provide greater support and engagement for parents with teenagers in the around 45% of families who currently 'just cope'.

## KEY CHALLENGE

**This is not going to be an overnight solution. Our overriding need is to engage parents in developing a supportive road map for their children which acknowledges the historical context of Knowsley. Acknowledging and developing the option of migration as a position option will need to be part of this process.**

**Acknowledging the importance of employment as the most powerful method of support will be equally important.**



## Challenge 5

### To harness the entrepreneurial skills of young people in Knowsley

The Commission has been impressed by the entrepreneurial skills and abilities of many young people in Knowsley. From small-scale business ideas to less conventional and not always positive money making ventures, it is clear that enterprise is in no short supply and is viewed as very positive by young people. This fits with a wider spirit of enterprise across the region which can be seen in the richness of music, arts, culture and sports. This has often emerged from the adversity of unemployment and lack of traditional progression, defying national trends and projections.

As we enter one of the most economically austere periods of the last 50 years, these skills and experiences will be in much demand. As we have described, there are already a number of enterprise initiatives underway in Knowsley which can be built upon, including the Enterprise Academy. We are also impressed by some of the experiences of enterprise education and enterprise development demonstrated in the US. It is clear from their experience that this can be an effective tool in reaching out to those young people who are not comfortable or able to engage with traditional learning approaches. We also know that these programmes are more likely to succeed if they are able to tap into young people's existing interests and priorities. With young people in Knowsley displaying such an interest in and approval of enterprise already, there seems to be enormous potential to embrace such an approach.

The Commission wants to find ways to release this potential to create a new young people led entrepreneurial renaissance in Knowsley. From primary schools onwards, we believe there is a major opportunity to establish enterprise and entrepreneurial attributes, working with and involving local businesses. The Centres for Learning are well placed to help make this a reality and we believe that it will be important to have a specific priority to use enterprise to re-engage young people alienated from education.

#### We are therefore proposing:

1. That the local authority brings together schools, Centres for Learning, enterprise organisations, young people and businesses to establish a bold enterprise strategy for young people in Knowsley to include new learning approaches.
2. That young people's interests in fashion, music, sports, film, media, business and performance are at

the centre of the strategy which should aim to lead a new entrepreneurial renaissance in the borough.

3. That a new Youth Entrepreneurship Group is established to help encourage and support young people to grow their entrepreneurial skills and ventures. The Group could work with small and medium sized businesses to provide both mentors and opportunities.
4. That young people are encouraged and supported to make their good entrepreneurial ideas a reality through the availability of small local enterprise funds to help get their enterprises up and running.
5. Support and encouragement to promote young people's bright new ideas, such as pop-up shops in venues in and around the Centres for Learning and in the wider community.

## KEY CHALLENGE

### Are we being entrepreneurial enough?

Is the challenge for us to not simply to say "The world's your oyster" – but, actually, to say "You are the grit in the oyster – create the pearl"?

How do we build entrepreneurship to exploit opportunities in Knowsley and grow the kind of specific entrepreneurial skills that local businesses and the local economy require rather than for generalised national needs?

## Challenge 6

### To change the perception of young people and communities in Knowsley by showing new measures of success and achievement

As our report has shown, the indices of deprivation and disadvantage show that life in Knowsley can present some tough challenges. The comparison with national averages and success rates is often poor and despite real gains and improvements, the overall perception and narrative that surround the borough and those who live in it is often negative. The Commission found that this perception has far reaching influences, from limiting the expectations and aspiration of young people to the sometimes fatalistic attitudes of those who are working with young people.

Yet much of this relates to what we choose to measure as success. The Commission believes that there would be great benefits from a new focus on measurements to unveil a story of young people's achievement that the current statistics just don't tell.

Young people are clear about the kind of things that they see as achievements – success in sports, music, getting involved in the community and helping each other out. Yet these have no place in the current set of metrics which we currently count and by default value. We would therefore like to see the development a new set of metrics (in addition to those already established nationally) that would establish an asset based rather than a deficit narrative about young people – measuring the rate of improvement rather than the continuing gap between the national average and local indicators. This would contribute to a more positive narrative about Knowsley that might help to boost a sense of civic pride. It may also have the potential for further application in other communities described as deprived and 'failing' according to national averages.

Achievement of year-on-year improvement has the potential to be a cause for reward and celebration for the staff who have contributed to that success and, to incentivise further effort, to the young people and their parents.

#### We are therefore proposing:

1. **The development of a new set of metrics to measure young people's achievement which include a wide range of non-academic indicators including social skills, music, arts, sports, entrepreneurship and community involvement.**
2. **That an annual set of statistics for young people in Knowsley is considered – The Knowsley Indicator –**

**that reflects the new metrics and measurements for achievement.**

3. **That a new programme of Awards for young people is established to celebrate their achievements in and out of school, and communicated throughout the borough and beyond.**

## KEY CHALLENGE

**But what will all this do for employability? In Knowsley it might bring benefits – but elsewhere, what, apart from developing confident young people?**

**This element should perhaps be linked back to the real demands of the local economy and public sector employers.**

## Challenge 7

### For those who work with young people in Knowsley to be among the best in the country and for Knowsley to become a leader of national and international practice

We believe that the proposals outlined in this report have the potential to create a new impetus and energy for young people in Knowsley to raise achievement and aspiration with unprecedented success. This new approach focuses on young people as leaders and drivers of change, backed up by a new system of support which is geared to their interest and needs. On every level, the potential to map out a new approach to support young people that is fresh, relevant and sustainable is vast. This new approach could in turn have the potential to become a valuable blueprint for other areas around the country.

However, the Commission is clear that this vision will only be achieved with a concerted and combined effort from everyone involved. It will require a consistent approach from schools, youth workers, health professionals, the police, social services and community organisations. Strong leadership will be vital, with a clear role for the local authority to set out a positive vision and route map for change.

At the heart of this change will be the attitude and approach of the staff that young people come into contact with. This report has already shown how some staff can begin to adopt a fatalistic attitude when surrounded by a narrative of failure and decline – and this will need to be addressed head on. If we are to truly offer a new future for

young people in Knowsley, we will need to maximise the skills and experiences of all those work with young people in order to inspire, support and challenge young people to 'go for it' and succeed.

We believe that the lessons learnt and the experiences gained will be of national and international significance. Evaluating evidence and progress and sharing that expertise will be vital.

### **We are therefore proposing:**

1. A borough wide workforce development programme to induct and train all those working with young people into a new 'young people led' approach.
2. Back up support for staff – recognising the stress and pressures experienced by those working with the most challenging families.
3. An enhanced focus on training and skills for youth workers – reaching out to communities to raise the status of the workforce and make working with young people a high employment choice in the borough.
4. The recruitment of community 'Champions' for young people – to encourage members of the community to share their skills and get involved to support young people.
5. Annual Awards for those working with young people in Knowsley to celebrate achievements and outstanding performance.
6. A new Academy of Youth Leadership and Community Regeneration and Engagement in Knowsley to continue the work of the Commission as a dynamic process. The Academy could have international status as a training provider; an assessor of best

practice; a research unit – developing new metrics; with interventions and methods exemplified in the changes taking place in Knowsley on a daily basis.

The Academy has the potential to deliver and support all aspects of workforce developments. It could also share and embed good practice and challenge traditional approaches to service design and delivery. In this way it would act as an incubator for fresh thinking, encouraging young people and families to become actively involved in the learning and development process. A world first.

7. That a 'Next Steps' conference is held in Knowsley in the autumn of 2010 to enable Knowsley Council to report back on its response to the report and its plans for next stage implementation within the context of future spending restrictions.

## **KEY CHALLENGES**

**How can we ensure that the Young People's Champion has real authority and access to decision makers?**

**Do the resources exist to implement these recommendations, and if not, how will they be found? If this entails a reshaping of strategic priorities for young people in the borough, how will it be achieved?**

**STOP PRESS: What are the implications for these proposals in the light of the Coalition Government's emergency June budget and the expected subsequent reduction in spending locally?**

**With thanks to the young people of Knowsley, their families and communities, for their inspiration.**

# Jake, 17

"I'm 17 years old and I live in Stockbridge village with me grandparents and have done since I was five years old, I don't see me mam but see my dad now and again, like.

I was doing a course at school - a work based learning thing but got kicked off because they wouldn't pay me for the work. I spend most of me time hanging around with mates. There's a group of us that I've known all me life - but we are not a gang, like. I do sometimes hang around with some people who I know are in a gang. I avoid people I know have guns and stuff - I don't wanna get into anything more serious. I am not interested in that side of things, I prefer fishing and going mountain biking with mates - sometimes out of Knowsley which is sound.

I am quite easy going and most people know I am respected because I'm friendly and not a grass - so that keeps me out of trouble. I have no enemies and try to avoid making any.

I don't do a lot of crime other than robbing with my mates - some of them have gone to jail. I was arrested for breaking into a house because I was told they were growing cannabis. I was gonna sell it but me and me mates were caught and arrested. I am fed up of being pulled up by the police and being searched, this happens to us all the time because our faces are known.

I would like to do something with me life. I have applied to the local college for a tree-surgery course. I got interested in this through my older brother's friends, they set up their company after doing this course. It seems a good company like and they work in Denmark a lot. Be sound to travel out there with them."

# Appendix

## Consultations: research methodology, samples and timeframe

### Research methodology

Respondents were accessed through consultation using existing systems in formal settings, i.e. schools, colleges, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), and in informal community settings such as festivals and youth groups. For example, to engage with the hard to reach young people we worked with the Youth Offending Service (YOS) and faith groups, the outreach teams and 4Children's Make Space Youth Clubs. We also accessed the Knowsley Youth Parliament and Young Advisers.

We used:

- Unstructured moderated and facilitated face to face consultations to provide a qualitative in-depth understanding
- Unstructured discussion in a less formal environment such as at fetes and fairs
- Self completion questionnaires online and in hard copy format to provide a robust quantitative sample

The facilitated consultations with young people were held in informal environments using a qualitative format, with youth worker trained facilitators and researchers. A range of facilitation exercises were administered, usually in the time frame of up to an hour.

Young people were also encouraged to access the Knowsley Young People's Commission through a tailor made website where there was an online questionnaire and information about the Commission. The web survey complemented the face to face consultation, as did also

a paper based questionnaire, so that we achieved a quantitative measure of the lives and ambitions of young people in the borough in addition to the qualitative data from the facilitated in depth discussions.

The questionnaires were publicised through secondary schools, the local Youth Parliament and Connexions and the local young people's radio station, KCC Live. They were modified throughout the consultation with input from young people and youth workers.

In addition, the Knowsley Big Brother Diary Room allowed the young people and some parents to be videoed as they responded to five broad questions, assisted by the Commission team where needed.

We are grateful to Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council for their assistance in undertaking the research.

### The data

The methodology produced two sets of data – one derived from the survey questionnaires and one derived from the comments and writings of the young people in the workshops and focus group events.

There were five overarching question areas used to frame the consultation with the young people. The facilitation exercises in the face to face workshops and focus groups were designed to elicit response to these question areas, as was the framework for the self completion survey questionnaires.

### Face to face consultations by format of consultation

Face to face consultations	Numbers attending	Number of focus groups	Number of workshops	Number of in depth interviews	Total hours
Young people aged 10 to 19	786	7	29	7	43
Parents and families	100	4	0	0	6
Employees/partners/stakeholders	93	11	0	10	25.5
Strategic decision makers and elected representatives	18	0	0	18	18
Total face to face interviewees/consultees	997				



This was to allow the responses to the two forms of survey methodology, namely qualitative in the face to face and quantitative in the self completion surveys, to be used to complement each other and for the data collected to be analysed by age, gender, area and at least one indicator of deprivation.

The five question areas were:

1. What is it like for young people living in Knowsley and the three areas of Huyton, Kirkby and Halewood?
2. What are the impacts and influences on young people living in Knowsley?
3. What do young people understand and feel about school (education and skills), its importance and its relevance to what they want from a job, career and their future lives?
4. What do young people think will help them to achieve their ambitions and what might stop them achieving these, how do ambitions and aspirations combine/set off education and work?
5. Where do young people look for help and support; how could this be developed, expanded, made more accessible, more relevant, more understandable, more effective?

The data from the facilitated consultations was content analysed by broad topic categories:

- Importance rankings
- Achievement/ambitions
- Life maps
- Impacts and influences
- Schools/jobs/careers
- Things liked about living in Knowsley
- Things disliked about living in Knowsley

1,500 lines of data were produced from the young people facilitated discussions.

## Sample: Young people aged 10–19

Responses from 1,165 young people aged 10–19 were achieved – 786 through the face to face consultations and 379 through self completed survey questionnaires (both paper questionnaires and online). This means that 5.5% of the young people in the 10–19 age group living in Knowsley were consulted.

### Age of young people by facilitated and self completion type of consultation



## Profile of young people in the consultation

### Spread of age of young people

As the chart on the previous page shows, three out of ten of the young people in the consultation were aged 10–11 (32%), still in primary school; four out of ten (43%) were aged 12–15, in secondary school; and two out of ten (23%) were aged 16 or over, some still in school, some in work and some in college.

The chart also shows that there was a greater proportion of young people in the older age groups in the face to face consultations (52% were aged 14 or over) and a greater proportion of young people in the younger age groups (66% were aged 10–13) who completed the questionnaires.

The self completion sample reflects the Knowsley young people's socio-demographic profile of age, gender and working households. In the self completion sample, 71% of the sample lived in a 'working' household and 10% lived in a 'non working' household. The remainder included 20% where the household head 'looks after the home', 5% where the household head was 'self employed' and 3% where they were 'other'.

The young people in the facilitated sample were recruited to provide an overall sample with over representation (23%) of targeted groups, such as young people in the YOS, PRUs, not in education, employment or training (NEET), young people with special needs and Young Advisers.

### Profile of young people in the self completion sample

The profile of the young people who completed the self completion questionnaires showed us that 58.8% lived with their mum and dad in a two parent family, 31% lived with their mum as a single parent, 4% lived with their dad as a single parent and 1% lived with their grandparents in the parental role (see chart overleaf).

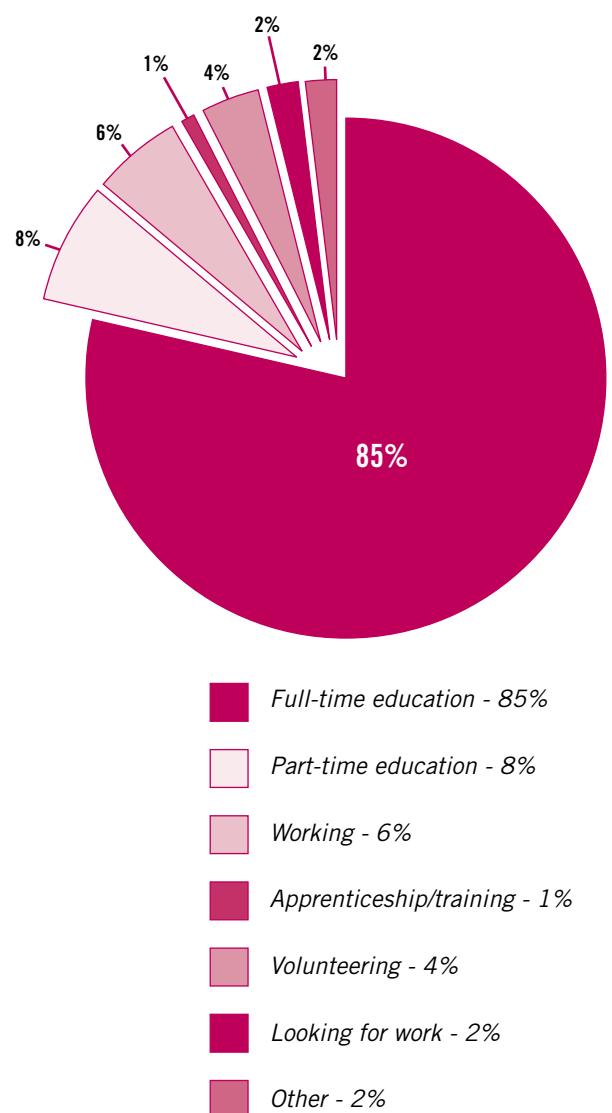
### Educational status of young people in the self completion sample

In the self completion sample 85% of young people were in full-time education, 8% were in part-time education, 6% were working, 1% were in apprenticeship or training, 4% were volunteers and 2% were looking for work. The total was 108% because young people could answer yes to more than one of these, namely they could be in part time education and working or working as a volunteer. The survey results showed 84% had access to the internet.

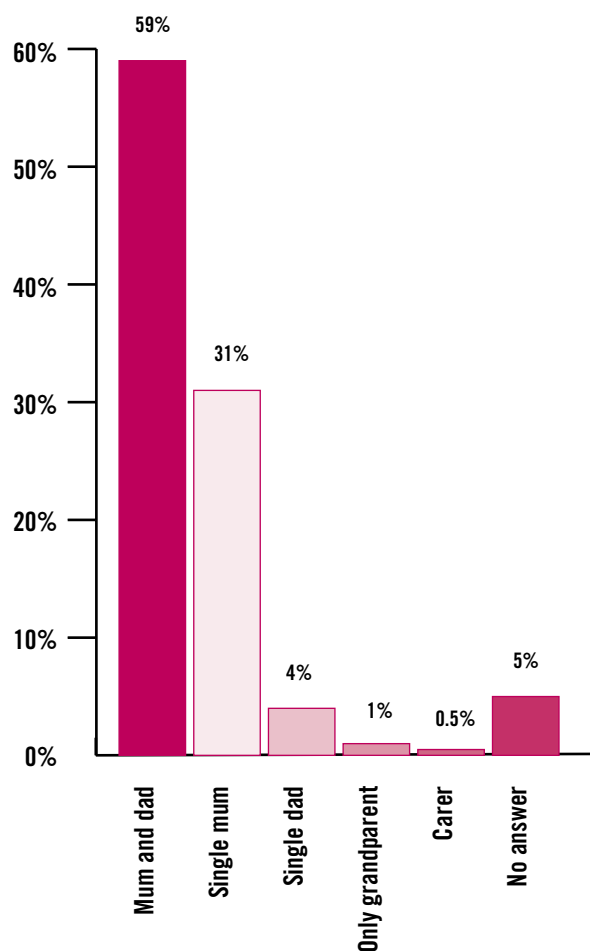
### Proportion of children with special needs in the self completion sample

In the self completion sample, 22% said they were receiving extra help at school with their learning or behaviour and this turned out to be slightly more boys than girls.

### Educational status of respondents



## Who young people live with in Knowsley



## Sample: Parents and families

Around 100 parents were consulted either face to face in facilitated focus groups or completed a questionnaire (53) or participated in the Big Knowsley Diary Room. The parents came from across Knowsley, Huyton, Kirkby, Halewood (face to face) and others including Prescot, Knowsley Village and Whiston. These included some engaged with the parental mentoring programme and some who had children with special needs or more severe disabilities.

### Profile of parents in the self completion sample

The self completion sample showed that 75% of the parents/carers were mothers, 10% were fathers, 6% were carers and 11% were 'other'. The number of children per respondent was 2.2. Analysis of age showed that 13% were aged 16–24, 13% were 25–34, 43% were 35–44 and 31% were over 45. Ethnic group wise, 94% were white. Thirteen per cent had a child with severe disabilities, and 35% said their children were receiving extra help with their learning and behaviour at school. In terms of employment, 56% were working in a paid job, 11% looked after the home, 4% were self employed, 17% were unemployed and 11% responded 'other'.

## Timescale

The consultation took place during June, July, August and September 2009.





**Knowsley**  
**Young People's**  
**Commission**