

# The London Youth Involvement Project

**End of project evaluation report**



**May 2013**

The London Youth Involvement Project (LYIP) concludes after fulfilling on the project outcomes ensuring young people were at the centre of the work. This report details the nature of their involvement and the difference their participation has made to them and to the wider context of drug and alcohol education and prevention.

From the outset young people were interested in paying particular attention to the quality and quantity of drug and alcohol education they and their peers receive in schools. Their extensive research in the form of interviewing young people and professionals, holding focus groups, speaking with politicians and policy makers was partnered with literature reviews and the dissemination and collation of questionnaires. The project culminated in two young people-led conferences. By their own reports, the young people involved were central to developing the content and delivery of these conferences receiving high acclaim from professionals and policy makers who set and deliver the drug and alcohol agenda to young people in London and the UK.

## Background of the Youth Advisors

The Youth Advisors were recruited from a variety of organisations and self-referred (often as a result of having heard about the project from their friends). A range of organisations were informed about the opportunity for young people to be involved and spoke individually to those young people who showed interest. Several Youth Advisors were involved in their Youth Council where they heard about the opportunity. Others were actively engaged with other youth organisations, for example Army Cadets. While many Youth Advisors were active participants in youth voice projects before joining Mentor, some of the young people who became involved in the project were less engaged in formal activities and the LYIP was a way for them to become involved in their society and to influence change.

In total, nine males and eight females participated in the project over the duration of the three years. (A total of 20 Youth Advisors were involved, 10 young men and 10 young women.) At the end of the project, they were aged between fifteen and nineteen years old and came from the following London boroughs:

- Barking and Dagenham
- Westminster
- Lambeth
- Haringey
- Brent
- Ealing
- Hounslow
- Southwark

The scope of this report focuses on the young people's engagement in the project and will be divided into three sections; young people's participation, the impact of the project on the Youth Advisors, the impact of the project on policy and practice. There

will be an additional section that describes the Youth Advisors involvement in and contribution to evaluating the project itself. The young people who participated in the project (known interchangeably as Youth Advisors) have been interviewed and nine young people's responses inform the content of this report.

### Young people's involvement in the evaluation process

The evaluation strategy was informed by the needs of Mentor (which wanted to measure young people's participation, the impact of the project on the Youth Advisors, the impact of the project on policy and practice) and an early consultation with the Youth Advisors.

The evaluation consultant explored the ways in which this information could be captured with the young people. After a discussion about research methods, the young people chose the following ways to capture the information required for the yearly evaluations:

- Case studies
- Questionnaires
- Focus Groups
- Interviews

The consultant then set up a series of workshops to train the young people in how to undertake research using each of these methods. This involved them acquiring the following skills:

- The ability to understand the theoretical principles related to the social sciences of how to undertake questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and case studies
- Experience of undertaking case studies, questionnaires, focus groups and interviews
- Knowing how to match the type of data being gathered with the most appropriate research method
- How to construct questions for questionnaires and interviews and issues related to interviewing
- Training in researcher responsibilities and experimental design including researcher bias, forming hypotheses, leading questions and how to appropriately record answers and responses
- Ethical considerations when conducting research
- The differences between qualitative and quantitative data
- How to transcribe and analyse interview data using content analysis

When asked what they got from learning about research methods in terms of adding value to their lives, they gave the following answers:

*"It helped me with my psychology A Level"*

*"It helped me understand my maths homework better"*

*“I learnt something new... I kind of heard qualitative and quantitative before but never knew what they meant”*

*“I would never have had the opportunity to learn about how to transcribe and analyse an interview transcript [if I hadn't learnt it at Mentor]”*

*“I didn't know there were so many potential problems or things to consider when asking interview questions or questions on questionnaires”*

The young people clearly benefitted from the process of being involved in evaluating the project. It gave them additional skills and ensured that Mentor's commitment to young people's full participation at all levels of the project was maintained.

### **Young people's participation**

The young advisors were asked the following questions to ascertain the extent to which they felt they participated in the LYIP and a summary of their responses are presented below each question with supporting quotes:

#### ***How much do you think the LYIP was informed and driven by your views and ideas?***

Every young person who was asked this question responded that they felt centrally involved in the the project. The Youth Advisors said that they were surprised about the extent to which they were able to put forward by their views and ideas and favourably compared their experience of their participation in the LYIP to other projects they had been involved in. Several young people commented that they could not think of how else they could have been more involved.

The following quotes support the general belief the young people had about their participation in the project:

*“The majority of it was driven by our ideas and all the conferences were planned by us young people. The research was done by the young people too”.*

*“We were involved to a great extent – the Mentor team let us run with what we wanted and from the first meetings we decided where we wanted to go with the project. We had help from adults and but we led it rather than it being the other way around”*

One young person made a suggestion related to how the project might be improved in terms of young people's participation:

*“It would have gone a bit better if young people came from across all of London – I think I'm the only one from East London”.*

***How much do you think the research was driven, collated and analysed by you and the other Youth Advisors?***

Young people reported that they always had the opportunity to be as involved as they wanted to be. Many young people appreciated the understanding that the project officer had for the demands of school work and other commitments. They agreed that they never felt pressured to participate but were fully involved and given the opportunity to lead and inform the research data gathering and analysis.

One young person clearly described how some of the data collecting and analysis was a genuine partnership between the project officer and the young people themselves. This young person appreciated the support of the project officer who followed the young people's instructions to approach the data collection in the way they decided but could not do themselves because of school exams.

Several young people said that they believed that the training they received in how to analyse information had helped them in their school work.

One young person commented:

*“When I was active in the project it was solely for us to work together more and analyse the research ourselves. Young people did the majority of the research”.*

***What opportunities were there for young people to deliver your views, findings and recommendations to policy makers, practitioners, commissioners, Mentor and other stakeholders?***

The young people who responded to this question unanimously agreed that there were many opportunities to deliver their views, findings and recommendations to the individuals and organisations identified above. They particularly identified the two conferences which reported their findings and commented that they were impressed that so many influential people were able to attend.

One young person was able to use the information and training he received from his work on the LYIP in other projects he was involved in.

## Impact of the project on the Youth Advisors

The young people were asked the following questions in relation to how were affected by their participation in the project in order to ascertain how their participation in the project has impacted them:

- What skills have you developed as a result of your participation in the project?
- What have you learned as a result of your participation?
- What do you know now that you did not know before?
- Now the project is ending, what will you take with you?

The young people's responses below have been grouped together under the specific skills they identified as having developed.

### *Skills*

**Confidence:** Young people unanimously reported that their confidence had grown as a direct result of participating in the project. Several young people commented that they felt more skilled and able to speak in front of large groups of people and three young people said that they *“now were able to speak in front of adults”* in a way they were not able to do before. They went on to comment that this confidence meant they were better at negotiating their position in individual conversations and were quicker to identify what they were asking for and stating their case more clearly.

**Motivation to do more than just schoolwork and sport:** Many of the young people were already involved in extracurricular activities but several who were introduced by their friends already participating in the project had not been involved in a project like the LYIP before. Two young people commented that before they were involved they did not know that young people could have such a strong voice on topics that affect all young people. They described their surprise at enjoying project work because at first they thought it would be more like school but were surprised that it was a lot of fun and was interesting.

One young person said the experience of being on the project gave him the skills and confidence to put himself forward to become chair of his Tenants and Residents Association. He went on to explain,

*“more local decision makers take you more seriously when you participate in local as well regional projects. I am now chair of Health Ward Tenants Group (the youngest chair there has ever been – I was 16 when I became chair)”*.

**Listening to others:** The majority of young people who responded reported that they were better at listening to other people's points of view. They went on to acknowledge that they were also better able to respond appropriately when another person's point of view was in opposition to their own. Young people took a lot of pride in acquiring this skill and saw clearly how its use translated into making them more successful in life outside of the project. One young person said that before his involvement, if someone disagreed with him he would *“just stop speaking”*. Now he

said he knows that *“I’m not wrong if they don’t agree, it’s just we have different ideas and that’s alright”*.

**General knowledge and how to find things out:** Young people reported unsurprisingly that their general knowledge about drugs and alcohol and drug and alcohol education had increased dramatically. They also reported that they were more skilled in finding out information and knew where to go to, for example, government policies, the Department for Education website and other drug and alcohol charities. It appeared that the process of researching the topic of drugs and alcohol has provided a process template for the young people to engage in should they need to find out information on any topic in the future. One young person commented, *“It’s been amazing and I have learnt so many things – my general knowledge about drugs education is much greater than before”*.

**Teamwork:** All the young people questioned reported unanimously that their team working skills had improved and many recognised that being part of a group allowed them to contribute and be contributed to. One young person commented, *“I like to work alone and the project helped me to talk to more people. I considered myself a lone wolf but now I’m more about the team”*. Several young people commented that although the project officer had overall responsibility for the project, they felt that they led the team themselves and had the support of the Mentor’s staff.

**Presentation skills:** The two conferences were central to the responses related to the young people developing their presentation skills and ability to speak in public in front of a large audience. Many young people commented that they had spoken at school in front of other pupils and teachers but presenting at the conferences was more daunting because of their perceived long-term ownership of the project and they wanted to do it justice by performing well. Several young people said that they felt their presentation skills and confidence had increased in the time between the first and second conference.

It is worth acknowledging separately some quotes from the young people when asked what they would be taking with them:

*“My overall experience was really good – we’ve had fun while doing it all too. That was really important to me – if you do something you might as well enjoy it and I will be taking that with me”*.

*“I will never forget this experience and I will miss it”*

*“Before I joined Mentor I was really shy about speaking in public. I didn’t know much about drug education – I’ve learnt about making presentations and about research and data and video editing. I’ve become a lot more confident to go to a group of people and talk to them about their views and it has had a big impact on my life. I’ve really enjoyed it but it took a while for the group to gel – we all have big personalities and now we’ve all become really good friends. Unexpectedly I didn’t think we could have got so much research in*

*and do two conferences – we did so much research based work. I will take the memories away with me”.*

*“I will be taking a lot more confidence with speaking in front of large groups of adults with Mentor, and my team work has improved and general communication has improved massively”.*

### **Impact of the project on policy and practice**

Young people commented that they believed that they had both a genuine and significant impact on policy and practice in the area of drug and alcohol education. The main way they identified doing this was through the two conferences they designed and delivered. They strongly believed that the attendees who heard their findings reactive positively to what they saw and heard. This belief was supported by comments made by the feedback gathered from professionals attending the conferences:

*“Informative and thought provoking. Lots for me to think about as a parent and as a youth worker” (Youth worker)*

*“It showed how important it is to work in partnership between schools, parents and the police. This cannot be disassociated.” (Healthy Schools Co-ordinator)*

*“Very informative and I look forward to any future presentations” (police officer)*

*“An excellent opportunity to interact with young people” (Drug and Drink Driving Expert)*

*“This event was very worthwhile, very interesting and forward thinking” (DAAT worker)*

Many of the young people thought that it would make a difference in schools, with one young person commenting

*“It has made decision makers and teachers think that young people want better from their drug education and the difference it could make. Helped young people voice the issue so they could be heard. Hopefully they’ll get better drug education in the future”.*

Several of the young people commented that they thought it was important that young people were able to lead on a project of this nature.

Mentor’s CEO and Head of Programmes both further commented that *“it is essential that young people led on all aspects of this project in order for it to be wholly legitimate in the eyes of policy makers... it is hard to ignore something young people have said directly themselves”.*

Two young people said that they had delivered presentations to external groups to promote the work of the project which included a presentation to the Girl Guides and one young person did an interview with 'Talk to Frank'. A young person commented *"it all came together to make two really good conferences which gave Mentor a platform to get more people and policy makers involved in drug education"*.

The young people said that they knew their findings had been shown to Diana Johnson MP and to the London Drug and Alcohol Policy forum which they believe will have a strong impact on the way policy can be developed in the future as it related to drug and alcohol education in schools.

## Conclusion

The content of this evaluation reports on the success of the young people's work in the area of drug and alcohol education and prevention as part of the LYIP and also acts as evidence of a project which has allowed for the genuine and meaningful participation of the young people themselves. Credit was continually given by the young people to Nicola Strivens who coordinated the project and has consistently safeguarded young people's involvement which was strong enough to withstand her break half way through for her maternity leave. Simon Claridge was also acknowledged by the young people for keeping the project going in Nicola's absence.

It is clear from the comments of the young people that this project has been overwhelmingly satisfactory to them. They have not been paid for their participation and have remained engaged for a significant proportion of their lives during a time where school work and exams have been important considerations in their lives.

The questions of 'how the project could be improved' or 'is there anything you would like have done differently' were asked to every young person during this evaluation. Only two young people responded to this question commenting that it would be better if the project could continue and they would like to see more young people involved in it for the future. All of the other young people said there is nothing they would change.

It can be concluded that the combination of the young people's unwavering satisfaction with their participation and with the outcomes and outputs of the LYIP - combined with the measureable project outputs, the London Youth Involvement Project was an overwhelming success. According to the responses of the young people involved, the project has arguably over delivered in the areas of young people's participation, the impact of the project on the Youth Advisors and the impact of the project on policy and practice.

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