



# *Research Summary*

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*By: Frontier Youth Trust, Impact  
& 'Youth work Matters' (Churches Together England)*



## **Research Summary of “Labels R4 Jars” - Not Young People**

### ***Introduction:***

This research was carried out by Frontier Youth Trust, Impact (YCW) and Churches Together England. It is based on findings from 165 questionnaires and 3 focus groups and was conducted across England. Our intention was to explore adult perspectives of young people and to look at where those attitudes come from. Appendix one offers a summary of findings relating to the questionnaire. Appendix 2 offers the supportive findings of research by Impact, amongst 3,000 young people, that underlines their concern about the way in which they are portrayed by the media.

### ***The main findings of our questionnaire are that:***

- When adults are thinking of young people as ‘perpetrators’ there is an overestimation relating to levels of anti social and criminal behaviour (in some cases very significantly).
  - Adults overestimate the amount of crime committed by young people by a factor of 100%.
  - 75% of adults assume youth crime is rising, when the actual rate is falling year on year.
  - 80% believe crime committed by young people is getting worse. However, there has been no growth in the level of serious crime committed by young people.
  - Adults overestimate the level of teenage pregnancy rates (over 5 times the real level).
  - Adults overestimate the use of drugs young people by a factor of 33%. In many cases this overestimation is very significant (over three times the real rate)
- Adults overestimating the number of young people who experience violent crime against them. Nevertheless this shows adults are perceptive in realising that young people are one of the main groupings who are victims of violent crime.
- Adults overestimate the levels of psychiatric problems among young people.
- Adults overestimate the amount of spending by Local Authorities on average very significantly and there is a high degree of ignorance about Local Authority spending (many said nothing was spent on young people and some said £20,000)
- Adults overestimate, by a factor of 100%, how much it costs to keep a young person locked up
- 58% of adults said that they had not been intimidated in the last year by young people and only 3% replied ‘often’ or ‘regularly’.
- An overwhelming number of respondents stated that their opinions of young people were most informed by the media (61%).
- An underwhelming number of respondents (8%) explicitly stated that direct contact with young people informed their view of them.

### ***The main findings of our focus groups were that:***

- There was mixed opinion about whether or not young people lack a ‘moral compass’. Most felt that young people did have a moral compass but it was often different from others in society.

- There was reasonably strong agreement that differing generations will find it hard to understand each other as a matter of inevitability.
- There was a sense of concern across all groups that young people are at risk of being judged by the poor behaviour of a minority. All young people are 'tarred with the same brush' and that the media are responsible for this.
- There was a strong suggestion that young people have more opportunities than previous generations, but that there are still problems that they face – e.g. availability of love, employment opportunities, stability and educational pressures. The inference is that there may well be more material benefits for young people but emotional needs are not catered for adequately.
- All groups felt that the media gives young people a bad deal overall.
- The fragmentation and diverse nature of 'family' is cited frequently as an important factor in relation to adult perceptions of young people's development.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Government, agencies and the media have a responsibility to present a more holistic view of what it is to be a young person. We recommend that a mechanism be established to receive feed back on how this responsibility is exercised. This could be done through Local Authority, Voluntary and Faith based youth work. Frontier Youth Trust will contribute to this process by the development of the 'young people as prophets' programme and web site which enables young people to express their opinions about contemporary issues via a web site and other PR outlets used by Frontier Youth Trust
2. Develop mechanisms whereby young people can influence the way that they are portrayed in the media. We would suggest that this should include their active involvement in media planning, delivery and evaluation. Impact (Young Christian Workers) are launching 'Ambassadors of the Young', a project to train young people to be journalists, using their video mobile phones to produce news worthy material portraying young people in a fair, positive light. This footage can be used online or distributed to Television News Programmes for use in their ever growing 'user generated material' slots such as the BBC's 'Your News'.
3. FYT, YCW and YWM today launch the 'Labels R4 Jars' Campaign to raise public awareness that offers accurate perceptions of young people and their behaviour. This will be done alongside the promotion of information about the costs and benefits of Local Authority, Voluntary and Faith based youth work. Youth Work Matters will specifically recruit more organisations to be involved, and will be collecting good news stories about young people (and youth work) that will be published on our web sites and released via press and wider media.

### **Stories from Practice:**

**A further element of this research was to collect and collate stories from youth workers that might illustrate the way in which stereotypes impact young people and are sometimes broken through youth work experience. Firstly a story from Sheffield that illustrates the way in which negative stereotypes can lead into a**

**negative spiral whereby young people live up to the worst fears of those that distribute labels. The other important point about this story is the way in which it illustrates how stigma, stereotypes and negative attitudes run the risk of being amplified in the personal perception of young people by the use of alcohol and drugs:**

*I experienced a lot of negative responses from the public to a group of young people I was working with over the last year or so. They were "chavs" and wore baseball hats and designer clothes. The police were often "interested" in them and the group obviously responded to their suspicions. To be fair they were often antisocial. I noticed that nearly everywhere that we went, on the bus, in shops, people would stare, responding with wariness and a suspicious attitude. The police especially in London were very hard on them. Walking down the Mall we leaders were in front of the group. The cycling police stopped as they passed us and immediately started confronting the group. When we turned around and joined them the attitude of the policemen changed considerably, initially they were very disrespectful and challenging to the group, afterwards quite civil! Both this and my friend's attitude tell me that young people pick up very quickly on peoples fear and attitude. There is a real need for advocacy today.*

*The group didn't help themselves however and generally enjoyed the extra attention. One lad genuinely asked me why I thought people "treated us differently". He was showing signs of reflecting on his behaviour and relationships and getting fed up with being in trouble. 'Bud' or 'weed' played a large part in their lives and didn't help their situation, paranoia contributing to their already heightened sense of injustice and egocentricity. All part of the relative normality of teenage life but magnified by the attention they received. Some of them were genuinely fearful, ready for trouble and the excitement of the chase around the corner. We did loads of positive activities with them and after a year or so had very little trouble when in public. Mistrust and barriers had gone and we continue to keep in touch.*

**A couple of stories that illustrates well the opportunity for youth work to act as a stabilising influence when stereotypes and generalisation are dominating across generations:**

*We had a joint youth club - church and local council. They closed it for one night for the local Community Action Team meeting. The area (like most small towns) has a lot of perceived trouble with gangs hanging around, so to close the only night the club ran is crazy. The youth were hanging around outside playing football on the field but as it got darker they moved onto the car park and kicked the ball against the wall. Everyone tutted every time the ball hit the wall - was it actually doing any harm? No! The youth leaders went outside to chat with them and people kept coming out to see if we were alright! What did they think the young people were going to do? We eventually persuaded the young people to come into the meeting to say what they wanted, and persuaded the older people to let them in and listen!*

*Llandoverly YMCA rented an entire Youth Hostel in Devon but were told that unfortunately a couple had already booked one room for the first two nights of the week. We said we wouldn't mind but that the couple should be warned! They weren't warned and there was a stunned look of horror on their faces as we all arrived with lots of sound/music/video equipment! When the couple left after the 2 nights they had booked they said to me, "When we saw all those kids arrive with brightly coloured hair, strange fashions and looking like youngsters we would not like to meet on the street - particularly at night, we were horrified. However, we have had a wonderful couple of days. The young people were really polite and patiently introduced us to all sorts of technology we had never heard of! We would happily share a hostel with you lot any time again!"*

**A couple of short but tragic stories that illustrate how Christian groups run the risk of perpetuating and re-enforcing negative labels comes from the South West and the Midlands.**

*The Diocesan Youth Officer (DYO) went to a parish in the South West – he was delighted to sit down with villagers to discuss young people and youth work. In opening the Vicar prayed, "Dear lord we pray for the dreadful young people who hang around our village green". The DYO was devastated – as were several villagers, thankfully. This DYO could tell "hundreds of similar stories".*

*In our church in the Midlands there is a young woman, aged 14 who comes along with her Mum to church more often than not. Sadly her attendance has begun to drop off ever since an adult criticized her for spending the service doing art. If you were to look at her art you would see that it related to the service, was usually overtly Christian and was an expression of her worship to God. We asked her to share her art from the front to try and reinforce that we worship in different ways but words wound and sometimes lots of positives don't cover a negative.*

**And finally a cautionary tale from the Wirral that illustrates how young people themselves are influenced by the stereotypes and generalisations about them:**

*Whilst teaching a series of lessons on Respect & Prejudice in Wirral's secondary schools our teams were shocked by the stereotyping of young people... by young people themselves. Classes were split into small groups and shown a number of photographs of young people; some in large groups and some on their own, some dressed one way and some dressed another, some taking part in activities and some simply sitting or standing. Feedback from each group was then taken for each photograph and almost every group came up with the same 'negative' conclusions for each photo. Those in tracksuits were up to no good, those in hoodies (An Oxford English Dictionary word now I see) were probably about to steal something, those in a school uniform were swats, those who looked tired were drugies and those in large groups were probably getting drunk at the weekend. Afterwards when asked for a show of hands virtually every young person had worn a track suit and a hoodie at some point but hadn't stolen anything whilst wearing it, most had gathered in a large groups and hadn't got drunk at the time and every single one of them had a school uniform on, I can assure you, the word 'swat' did not apply for most. It was as if young*

*people themselves couldn't avoid drawing upon the prejudicial stereotype in their own minds despite the fact that these stereotypes were contradicted by their own experiences. This begs the question 'where did these stereotypes originate'*

**This research was developed and written by:**

**Dave Wiles of Frontier Youth Trust (FYT).** FYT is a registered charity working with young people at risk towards justice, equality and community. Based upon direct experience of youth work and research FYT also supports, resources, informs, advises and trains those working with and on behalf of disadvantaged young people. FYT believes that the most effective youth work is built upon Christian principles. Frontier Youth Trust, Unit 208b, The Big Peg, 120 Vyse Street, Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham, B18 6NF, 0121 687 3505. [www.fyt.org.uk](http://www.fyt.org.uk)



**Danny Curtin of Impact.** Impact is part of the Young Christian Workers (YCW), a registered charity, and an organisation of young people run entirely by young people (under 30 years). It is committed to promoting the dignity and worth of each young person. The YCW believes that each young person is worth more than all the gold in the world and seeks to be at the service of all the young, by enabling young people to grow as leaders in their own lives and the lives of others. YCW and Impact members gather in groups to reflect on life and to plan action, often campaigning for change on issues concerning young people. YCW HQ, St Joseph's, Off St Joseph's Grove (Watford Way) Hendon, London, NW4 4TY. 020 8203 6290. [www.ycwimpact.com](http://www.ycwimpact.com)



**John Baxter Brown of 'Youth Work Matters' (YWM).** YWM is part of Churches Together England and it brings together a wide range of different Christian agencies and Churches which have a specific focus on young people and youth work. The Network engages with the wider voluntary and statutory youth work sectors, commissions research, promotes best practice and collaboration within the Christian youth work sector. The Network is a co-ordinating Group of Churches Together in England, the body created by the Churches in England to foster greater collaboration and unity between the Churches. Churches Together in England, 27 Tavistock Square, LONDON. WC1H 9HH, 020 7529 8135. [www.churches-together.org.uk](http://www.churches-together.org.uk)



## Appendix 1

### Research findings: Adult attitudes to young people

**Overall sample: 165 adults from a range of locations around England**

Overall results are entered in each question that was asked below:

1. *Do you think that crime by young people has gone up in the last five years?*

- 125 (75.75%) respondents said yes
- 40 (24.24%) respondents said no

**While young people are often identified with crime (particularly black and working class young men) government statistics tell a different story.**

**The most recent available research, which displays offenders by age, shows that youth crime appears to have been falling for some years. Between 1992 and 2004, 10-17 year olds convicted or cautioned fell by 21%. From 2002-2004 the percentage of total detected crime committed by young people fell from 12% to 11%. (*Criminal Statistics 2004*, Home Office)**

2. *What percentage of crime do you think is committed by under 18's in a year?*

The average of the percentages offered by respondents is 23%. Some respondents went as far as saying that 85% of crime was committed by under 18's and many suggested that 30–60% was committed by this age group.

**The actual percentage is 11% (*Criminal Statistics 2004*, Home Office)**

3. *Is crime by young people getting worse? yes/no (delete as appropriate)*

- 131 (79.39%) respondents said yes
- 34 (20.60%) respondents said no

**Despite nearly 80% of adults suggesting crime by young people is getting worse, the most recent Home Office youth crime statistics show that young people's involvement in serious crime from 2003-2005 has not increased. "The proportion of young people who reported committing an offence remained stable. The proportion of young people who were serious offenders, or frequent offenders also remained at the same level." (*Young People and Crime: Findings from the 2005 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey*. Home Office 2006)**

4. *5% of 25–70 year olds report an experience of violent crime committed against them – What do you think is the percentage of 16–24 year olds who experience violent crimes?*

The average of the percentages offered by respondents is 18.95%.

**The true statistic shows that although adults overestimate the percentage they are correct in identifying young people as the main victims of violent crime. “Young men, aged 16 to 24, were most at risk, with 13.8 per cent experiencing a violent crime of some sort in the year prior to interview. For women the risk of suffering violent crime was lower overall; 6.5 per cent for women aged 16 to 24.” (Crime in England and Wales 2006/2007, Home Office)**

5. *About what percentage of 11-15 year olds will have said that they used drugs in the last year?*

The average of the percentages offered by respondents is 24.22%. Many suggested that 30%–65% would have said that they have used drugs.

**Statistics indicate that 18% boys and 17% girls between 11-15 years of age said that they have used drugs in the last twelve months. (Department of Health, 2004)**

**More recent statistics available for 16-24 year olds show that reported use of drugs has dropped from 32% in 1997 to 24% in 2007. (Crime in England and Wales 2006/2007, Home Office)**

6. *Each year how many girls in every 1000 girls, aged between 13 15 year old, will conceive a baby?*

The average number of conceptions in every 1000 girls aged 13 – 15 offered by respondents was 38.5. Many suggested that the numbers would be well over a 100.

**The latest quarterly teenage pregnancy statistics from Office for National Statistics show that for the first quarter of 2006 the under-16 rate of conceptions was 7.0 per 1000 girls aged 13-15. This is the lowest quarterly rate (for any quarter) since the start of the statistical series in 1993 and 8% lower than the same quarter in 2005.**

7. *About what percentage of 11-15 year olds experience diagnosed psychiatric problems in the UK?*

The average percentage of the percentages offered by respondents is 15.83%.

**Of the 11 to 15 year age group 12.6% of boys and 10.3% of girls experience diagnosed psychiatric problems. (Office of National Statistics - updated 2004)**

8. *How much on average do you think is spent on each young person per year in terms of youth work services by Local Authorities?*

Despite the fact that many people did not think the local authority spent anything on LA youth work the average answer to this question was near £1100 per young person.

**“It is too early to comment with any real authority on the likely picture following Youth Matters Next Steps but unless serious steps can be taken by Government to change the current inequitable availability of resources for this age range for example in 2004-5 a young person living in Rutland enjoyed an annual spend of £43.28 per head compared to a City of London spend of £611.02” (Association of Principal Youth and Community Officers Comprehensive Spending Review 2007)**

9. *How much do you think it costs to keep a young person locked up for a year?*

The average answer to this question was just above £88,000 per young person

**It costs about £40, 000 to keep people in prison for a year (Prison Reform Trust)**

10. *In the last year have you felt threatened or intimidated by young people – never/sometimes/often/regularly ?*

Respondent’s responses were:

- Never - 96
- Sometimes - 64
- Often - 4
- Regularly - 1

11. *Where do you think that your image of young people comes from? What most informs your opinion about young people?*

**There were a number of differing responses to this question. However the one response that stands out is that 61% of people said the media. The next nearest response was ‘family’ (6%). Direct contact with young people (including several different types of contact) was mentioned in 8% of responses.**

## Appendix 2

# “Seeing the real story”

*An enquiry by young people into their portrayal in the media*

by ‘Impact’ (Part of the Young Christian Workers)



This report is the culmination of 18 months of research and activity by 3000 young people across England. Over 3000 young people were surveyed as to the issues in their lives which concerned them most. The issue of most concern was how young people are perceived in society. At a gathering of over 100 young people in November 2005 the issue of the image of young people in the media was chosen to develop further.

This report presents the findings of the research stage of the resulting National Campaign of Impact and YCW, entitled *New Media – New Image?*. Impact and YCW members surveyed the opinions of young people on how they perceive the image of young people in the media. The results presented here are collated from a sample of questionnaires and postcard survey responses received from Impact and YCW groups. This sample includes 202 questionnaires and 130 postcards from the North West, the Midlands and London.

### **Research Summary**

Young people throughout England feel that they are portrayed negatively in the news media. They feel this is largely untrue and therefore unfair. The news media concentrates on bad news and on a very small number of young people without due attention to perfectly good newsworthy examples offering a positive image of young people. The feeling from young people that they are treated unfairly in the media was confirmed in our assessment of one week's press which showed that 74% of stories in the national press, about or including young people, portray a negative image.

At the same time the entertainment media presents images of young people which give the message that they should be good looking, have a good job and place value on money as a sign of their success. There is a clear conflict in the media, with the news media apparently using young people as a means to scapegoat society's problems and the entertainment media promoting a so called positive image of young people pressurising young people to live up to a celebrity image.

Sadly only half of young people receive an image from the media which portrays young people as having something to offer. This is further reinforced by the findings that only 5% of young people feel they have a voice in the media. This means that even when young people are being reported, they are not being given the opportunity to speak up for themselves or voice their opinions.

Perhaps this is why a small but significant number of young people openly express apathy towards the media, either not engaging at all, or not caring whether anything changes (20%). The media has alienated a fifth of young people to the point of not caring about what the media says about them.

However, there is still a very large number of young people, over three quarters of respondents (76%), who feel that something needs to change within the media to address these issues.

With this groundswell of opinion from young people across England, Impact and YCW are confident in the need to invited the media and related agencies and organisations to work together to promote a more balance image of young people within society and to cease to blame young people for so much of society's problems.

### **Recommendations**

There is a need for young people to be given a voice. Many organisations already aim to give young people a voice, but more resources and cooperation between statutory, voluntary and faith organisations should be brought together. We recommend funding, training and support for a **Youth Media Response Team**, made up of young people who can be available to journalists to represent their voice on stories concerning young people.

Impact are launching 'Ambassadors of the Young', a project to train young people to be journalists, using their video mobile phones to produce news worthy material portraying young people in a fair, positive light. This footage can be used online or distributed to Television News Programmes for use in their ever growing 'user generated material' slots such as the BBC's 'Your News'.