CYZ
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CUMBRIA YOUTH CO-RESEARCH COLLECTIVE

"HOW CAN PETTERIL COMMUNITY AREA BE MORE YOUTH FRIENDLY?"

Petteril
Community Panel

A report for Cumberland Council Petteril Community Panel

SEPTEMBER 2025

WHO WE ARE

We are Cumbria Youth Co-research Collective (CYCC)! We have come together as Youth Co-researchers (young people aged 12 – 17yrs), Peer Youth Co-researchers (young adults aged 18 – 24yrs), Community Co-researchers and Academic Co-researchers. We share an interest in how research can be more genuinely inclusive of different backgrounds, ideas and priorities. We think this is important because research happens every day but doesn't always authentically include the people it is about or is seeking to help. This is especially true when research is focused on young people and through the new CYCC we hope to disrupt this pattern.

Since November 2024, we have been building our knowledge, confidence, and skills in research through a new capacity-building programme titled "Get Research Ready With Me". The programme was launched with two seed funding grants secured alongside Professor Amanda Taylor-Beswick of University of Cumbria. Alongside inviting young people and community co-researchers from across Cumbria, the programme enlisted the support of established youth and peer co-researchers employed through the charity Boingboing Foundation, a community co-research hub working as and alongside people facing unfair systems to co-produce change. Embedding youth peer learning and knowledge exchange from the outset has been essential to the integrity and authenticity of this co-research programme and the meaningful development of CYCC.

This research engagement project is our first funded project. We have applied what we know or have recently learnt to the delivery of it, alongside learning lots of new things along the way. Having started our own journey to getting 'research ready' we are even more convinced that it has the chance to help us change things and is actually more FUN than we thought! If you are interested in what we are doing, we would love to hear from you and to join with other young people involved in research. Please do be in touch.

And a note about photographs and images used in this report, which we felt were important to share in order to bring to life some of the descriptions we give. We want to acknowledge that not all of us like having our photo taken or are in a position to be seen in this way, and so they will never capture everyone and the entirety of contributions as a whole.

Co-research contributors for this project:

We recognise the wide range of contributions it takes to deliver a meaningful co-research project. This includes facilitation, administration, research design, research delivery, research analysis, publication, graphics and creative outputs. For this project, the contributors are:

- Ash, Charlie, Sophie, MF, Oriel and Hayleigh - Youth Co-researchers (aged 12 – 17yrs)
- Ro Borgia, Peer Youth Co-researcher (18 – 24yrs) hosted by CYZ
- Lauren Wyatt, Co-production Worker, BoingBoing Foundation
- Emily Hopley, Community Co-researcher, BoingBoing Foundation
- Georgia Denham, Community Co-researcher (Senior Youth Worker), CYZ
- Joey Castle, Insights and Impact Officer, OnSide Youth Zones
- Alende Amisi, PhD student and Lecturer, University of Cumbria
- Dr Laura Snell, Research and Development Fellow, University of Cumbria
- Professor Amanda M.L. Taylor-Beswick, Professor of Digital and Social Science, University of Cumbria and volunteer at CYZ

Acknowledging participants

We want to acknowledge the time and contributions given to the project from each of the 244 young people who chose to take part. Your participation has informed recommendations that we hope will go on to shape future decision making and demonstrated how willing and able young people are to take part in research and community activity. We also want to acknowledge the adult supporters and community groups who have enabled and welcomed our research engagement visits.

Funding for this project was received from Cumberland Council Petteril Community Panel.

How this report should be referenced

Cumbria Youth Co-research Collective (2025). *"How can Petteril Community Area be more Youth Friendly", A Report for Cumberland Council Petteril Community Panel.* Published online.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cumbria Youth Co-research Collective (CYCC) undertook this research engagement project to support Petteril Community Panel better understand how their priority of 'Children and Young People' should be progressed and actioned. Between April – July 2025, Youth (12 – 17yrs), Peer Youth (18 – 24yrs), Community and Academic Co-researchers worked together to design, deliver and present findings that answer *how can Petteril community area be more youth friendly?*

Using the Lundy Model of Participation to underpin the research design, a mixed methods approach was applied, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative data generation and analysis. A survey was used as the primary method of data generation; opportunities for independent survey completion were available, alongside significant fieldwork undertaken by youth and peer youth co-researchers across a range of youth focused sites. Six peer research workshops were also facilitated to enhance participant inclusion. A total of 244 young people took part.

The findings show a mixed experience of Petteril community area being 'youth friendly' overall, with younger children (5 – 11) reporting more positively than teenagers (12 – 15). The principles of safety and fun were frequently intertwined as priorities and are important considerations within a context of evolving capacity, agency and independence through childhood. Where young people attend youth friendly spaces and groups, their experiences are positive, but there is a clear need to improve knowledge of them, increase access, and expand on them in order to improve 'youth friendly' experiences. Young people show a clear desire to be part of imagining and co-creating plans for the future of their communities, with time and action needed to (re)build trust that their contributions will be taken seriously. Inclusivity is felt strongly by young people and there is consistent narrative aligned to boosting inclusivity.

Alongside new knowledge and insight relating to the research focus, the project has demonstrated the potential of high-quality youth co-research in bringing unique, purposeful, robust and authentic engagement from often overlooked voices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Cumberland Council came into existence on 1st April 2023 following local government reorganisation. As part of establishing the 'Cumberland Approach', it set up eight Community Panels as a way of listening to communities and directing investment where it is needed most. The Petteril Community Panel is one of the eight Panels set up, and it covers the wards of Botcherby, Currock, Harraby South, Harraby North and Upperby.

Petteril Community Panel set three initial priorities:

- Children and young people: *supporting new and existing groups delivering provision for children and young people; supporting and encouraging children and young people to thrive; supporting intervention and prevention; supporting inclusivity and diversity.*
- Emotional wellbeing and mental health: s*upporting community facilities and groups; supporting sports groups and improving physical activity; supporting intervention, prevention, and signposting.*
- The environment: *promoting pride in our local area and improving safety; enhancing parks and natural spaces; identifying and promoting cycle routes.*

Carlisle Youth Zone (CYZ) is a youth charity located in the Botcherby ward, delivering youth work with and for circa 3000 young people (aged 7 – 17 and up to 25yrs with additional needs) from across Carlisle and surrounding areas each year. They have a strategic priority focused on youth participatory practice, including embedding a Children's Rights based framework through an initiative called "Our Right to be Heard". One of the projects in this initiative is to co-lead the development of a Cumbria Youth Co-Research Collective (CYCC), alongside University of Cumbria and Boingboing Foundation, to bring youth and adult researchers together to develop skills in, and undertake research on, issues which are important to them. CYCC applied for funding via a Cumberland Council Community Investment Application to deliver a research engagement project which would assist Petteril Community Panel with understanding how their priority of 'Children and Young People' should be progressed and actioned. The application was successful, and the project was delivered between April 2025 – July 2025.

This report is a key output from that project. It seeks to capture both how the co-research project has been developed and delivered, and present the new knowledge and insight the co-research project has generated. An outline of the project timeline, which provides an overview of co-research activity and engagement, can be found in Appendix 1. It follows a presentation given to the Petteril Community Panel on 23rd July 2025 where initial findings were shared. CYCC also intend to publish in academic formats and forums from this project.

Significantly, the project has not only sought the views and insights *of* young people but has been designed and undertaken *with* and *by* young people as co-researchers. This approach is anchored in our understanding that young people are experts in their own lives, yet they are rarely given meaningful roles in shaping research or policy about the issues that directly affect them (Williams, 2024). By involving youth as co-researchers, we aim to move beyond tokenistic consultation and towards genuine participation and empowerment. Through this project, young people are not only helping to define what a youth-friendly community looks like, they are actively shaping the methods, tools and questions used to explore it. This approach reflects the need for research that is foregrounded in lived experience, and grounded in place, honouring the voices and agency of young people in the design, delivery, and interpretation of research findings (Khawaja, 2024). It also works to build confidence, promote local and place-based leadership, and ensure that findings reflect real community concerns (Macauley et al., 2022).

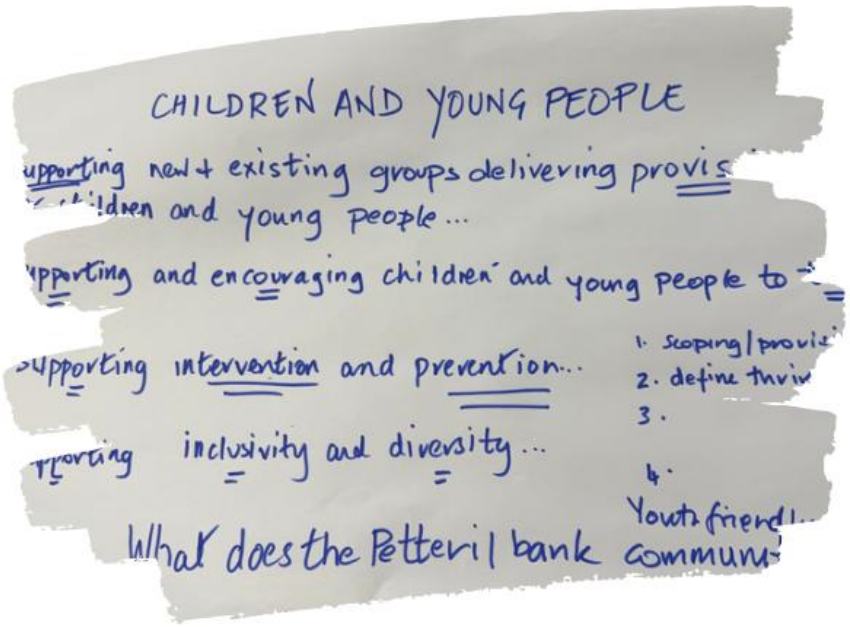
1.2 Research aim

CYCC spent focused time considering the project brief, and decided the overarching research aim was to ask *how can Petteril community area be more youth friendly*?

To fulfil this, we planned to:

a) Survey and critically analyse current knowledge and perceptions about youth participation, youth-friendly communities, and co-research methods in the Petteril community area.
b) Ground the CYCC in established theory, contemporary practice and relevant policy context.
c) Identify successful strategies for youth engagement, relative to localised need and want.

d) Highlight gaps in current research, especially relating to marginalised voices and localised youth experiences (such as those in Petteril Bank).



1.3 Research Questions

The research questions for the project were created in alignment with the four themes set by Cumberland Council Petteril Community Panel about the key areas of interest for them:

Theme 1: Supporting new and existing groups delivering provisions for children and young people

Research questions:
(a) What youth groups are available to you in the Petteril Bank area?
(b) What is your experience of youth groups in the Petteril Bank area?
(c) What youth groups are needed in the Petteril Bank area?

Theme 2: Supporting and encouraging children and young people to thrive

Research questions:
(a) How do we support young people to thrive in the Petteril Bank area?
(b) How have you been supported to thrive in the Petteril Bank area?

Theme 3: Supporting intervention and prevention

Research questions:
(a) Do you know of any interventions and preventions in the Petteril Bank area?
(b) What are your experiences of interventions and preventions in the Petteril Bank area?

Theme 4: Supporting inclusivity and diversity

Research questions:
(a) What is your understanding of diversity, inclusion, and equality in the Petteril Bank area?
(b) Do you know how to access diverse and inclusive spaces in the Petteril Bank area?

Exploring and setting the research questions surfaced the need to unpack and translate some of the language used in the Community Panel priorities. At times, we had to begin by working through together, a translation of that language into accessible terms and youth and community friendly frames of reference. This translation was balanced with a shared quest to not oversimplify what are sometimes complex ideas and concepts alongside a desire to learn new terms and framing. What was important was creating space in the research process and taking time to ensure all co-researchers had opportunity to offer explanations, insight and examples, and to sense check our individual and collective understanding of the terminologies being used.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Lundy Model

CYCC chose to utilise the Lundy Model of Participation to underpin the research design and methods. This model aided us in maintaining rights-based and value-based co-research practices and shaped how we have conducted our analysis of the data, and the presentation of the research findings.

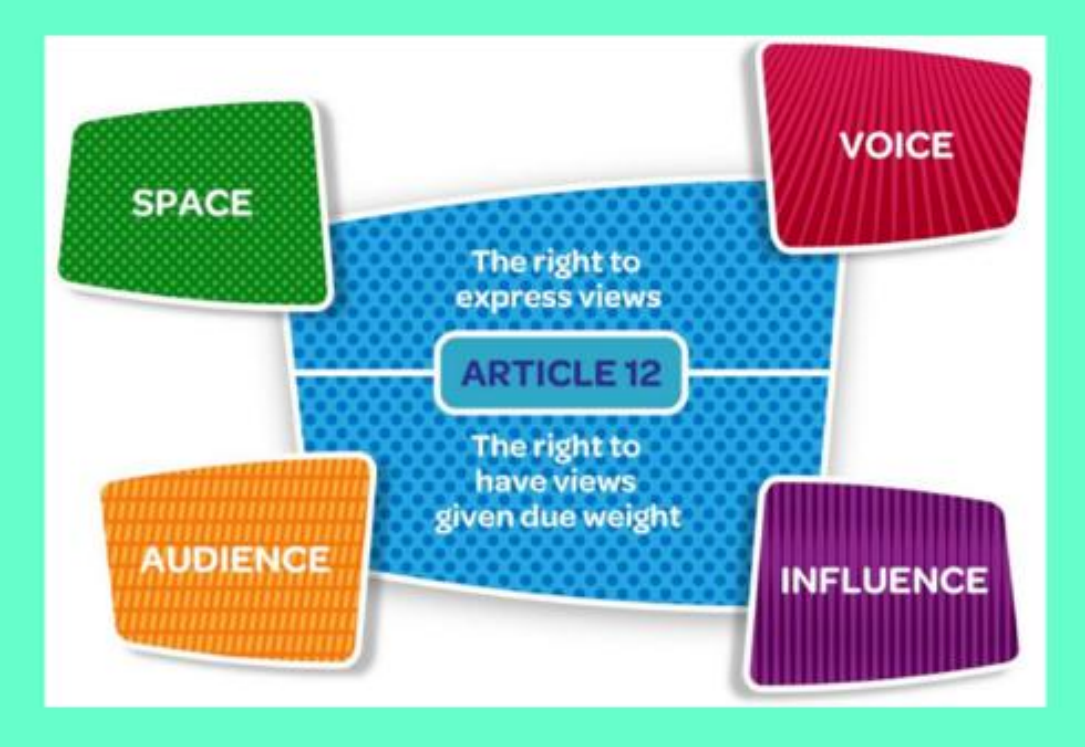


Figure 1: The Lundy Model of Participation

Throughout the research project, we sought to answer these questions:

Space

- *Have children's views been actively sought?*
- *Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?*
- *Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?*

We were mindful that in order to establish a fair representation of the views of young people within the Petteril community area, we needed to take the research to the places

and spaces where young people choose to “hang out.” We acknowledged that some young people might struggle to feel comfortable in more formal environments. These places included schools, parks, green spaces, youth clubs (both in and out of Carlisle Youth Zone), and even the local McDonalds!

Voice

- *Have children been given the information they need to form a view?*
- *Do children know that they do not have to take part?*
- *Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?*

A survey method design, predominately facilitated in-person (with the option to complete online), was chosen because of how we believed it to be the most appropriate for supporting Petteril community area young people to share their thoughts, experiences, insights and feelings about their community. The survey method took into account language and young people friendly visuals and device features to ensure that it was as engaging and accessible as possible. At the start of the survey there was an explanation as to what the survey was and was for, and how responses would be used. We made sure to explain that participation was voluntary. To increase opportunities for young people to contribute, we also offered a QR code to the survey, so that young people could complete the survey in their own time.

Audience

- *Is there a process for communicating children’s views?*
- *Do children know who their views are being communicated to?*
- *Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?*

Before initiating the field work it was decided that an evening event would be organised, to which members of the Petteril Community Panel and organisations would be invited. This event was included in our communications with those we invited to participate. The need to feedback to the young people contributors was also given significant

consideration, through a request that the report should be circulated and made accessible to the whole Petteril community. An acknowledgement to young people who have contributed is made clear at the beginning of this report.

Influence

- *Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?*
- *Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?*
- *Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions that have been taken?*

CYCC have developed creative methods of sharing the survey data, alongside more traditional presentation formats. It was agreed that verbatim poems (page 48 of this report) would be constructed from research field notes and observations, and from notes made at the data analysis workshop. Utilising various, including digital, presentation modalities, such as the circulation of online versions of the research outputs, including the report, is aimed at serving as a reminder of the collective voice of Petteril community area young people, accessible to a broader audience, and after the Listen Up event. On the evening of the event, each person in attendance was asked to offer a pledge as to what they and their organisations can do to take forward what the young people of Petteril community area told them.

2.2 Literature search process

A literature review was conducted to ground the research engagement project in established theory, contemporary practice, and relevant policy context. The literature review search process began with a broad search of the key terms in the overarching question '*How can Petteril community area be more youth friendly?*', with a specific focus on the 'youth friendly' and 'community' aspects. Most of the literature sources were identified through Google Scholar and materials that are publicly accessible via the

internet, with some additional academic journal articles accessed through University of Cumbria databases.

After initial searches, which mostly returned sources from more recent literature (within the last five years since the global pandemic), we expanded the search terms and interchanged vocabulary such as 'youth-friendly vs child-friendly', 'community vs perception'. This produced a broader range of resources and case study examples relevant to this project. Whilst there is a range of material from international sources, the chosen literature largely related to UK policy and specially the region of Cumbria, to ensure the most relevant material was included in the review.

An overview of literature on youth friendly communities was produced, looking at literature covering a range of academic and policy lenses, including rights-based participatory approaches, sociological modelling, and political/governance frameworks. The review drew on literature and examples of how approaches and actions have grown and changed since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified in the United Kingdom 1992, recognising children's rights on a global scale for the first time (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), progressing to the landmark development of the Lundy Model (2007) and the gradual uptake over the following decades, leading towards the appetite for, and action towards, engaging youth voice in projects such as this.

2.3 Methods

2.3.1 Methods design

The CYCC approach brought significant benefits in the methods design as we united knowledge and experience of robust research methods, with knowledge and insight of when and where it would be best to engage young people as participants and how to harness their contributions meaningfully through method design and format. A mixed methods approach was applied, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative data

generation and analysis. Crucially, and as captured in detail below, a flexible approach to the engagement needs of young people was taken, resulting in six Peer Research Workshops in addition to, and complimentary of, the primary survey design.

A survey was created using Microsoft Forms (within the CYZ digital and data ecosystem) as the primary method of data generation. The survey question formats included short and long form qualitative answer boxes, Likert scale numerical responses, and drop-down lists with single and multiple option questions. The structure and format were designed to be accessible and non-burdensome, with most respondents taking less than 10 minutes to complete the survey. The survey design included four main sections, which mirrored the four research themes outlined in Section 1.3 of the report.

During the survey fieldwork, a number of young people identified challenges in understanding the survey questions and/or with completing it through a digital format. The majority were within the younger (5 – 11yrs) age category and/or had additional learning needs. Owing to a commitment made by CYCC at the outset of the project to support a wide range of voices, perspectives and backgrounds to be included, and especially those who often get overlooked, an additional data generation approach was implemented. This was via Peer Research Workshops facilitated by the Community Co-researchers and/or Youth Co-researcher. The workshops (facilitated 6 times) took a semi-structured approach, with group discussion linked to the four research question themes.

Allowing this flex in research methodology during the fieldwork was unanticipated but congruent with the co-research approach. With fieldwork undertaken by and with youth and peer co-researchers, youth friendly and engaging spaces were created and allowed the co-research team to be responsive to the realities presented within the fieldwork setting. The opportunity to maximise inclusive research engagement is a resulting strength of this project and approach more broadly.

All methods were designed for anonymous data generation, and analysis was undertaken in accordance with CYZ's Privacy Notice (https://www.carlisleyouthzone.org/privacy-cookie-notice/).

2.3.2 Data Generation

The survey was advertised widely across the Petteril community area through posters and social media posts containing a QR code. This provided young people a choice of when, where, and how they wanted to engage with the survey.

The survey welcome message focused on the purpose of the project and encouraged engagement through a message of empowerment through participation.

Figure 2, provides an example of a poster used to advertise the research online.

Figure 2: Example of poster used to advertise the research (source: Carlisle Youth Zone's LinkedIn page)

Fieldwork was undertaken by the CYCC team visiting locations where young people are known to be and/or choose to 'hang out' in the Petteril community area, for example:

- Richard Rose Central Academy
- Trinity School
- The Gillford Centre
- The Rock Scalegate
- The Rock Petteril Bank
- Top Park
- Carlisle Youth Zone (multiple Junior, Senior and Inclusion Youth Club sessions)

- Harraby 3G Pitches
- Upperby Gala
- Hammonds Pond
- Denton Holme River
- Melbourne Park
- Kennan Park
- London Road McDonalds

Figure 3, below, provides an example of the fieldwork locations across the Petteril community area:

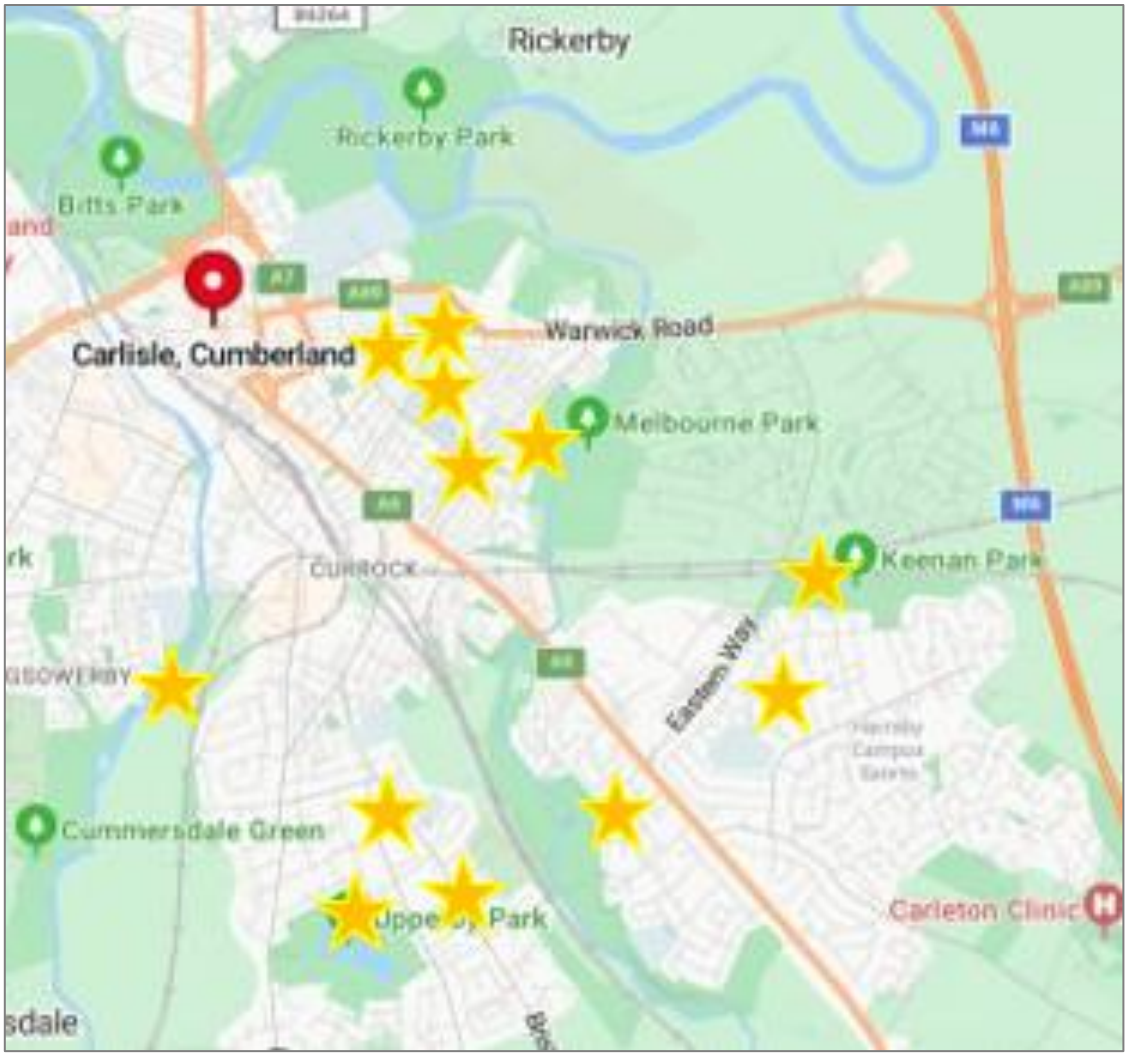


Figure 3: Example of fieldwork locations in the Petteril community area

During the fieldwork, young people were able to engage with the survey either by scanning the QR code on their smartphones or completing the survey using CYZ iPads. Support was provided by the CCYC team to ensure that young people understood the purpose and wording of the questions, and to mitigate any technical issues experienced whilst completing the survey.

Six Peer Research Workshops were facilitated:

- 4 x separate workshops in CYZ Junior Youth Club sessions
- 1 x workshop in CYZ Inclusion Youth Club
- 1 x workshop at The Gillford Centre (primary provision)

Data generated during the workshops was recorded cumulatively on a flipchart and via visual prompt cards.

This research involved a total of 244 participants as shown in Table 1:

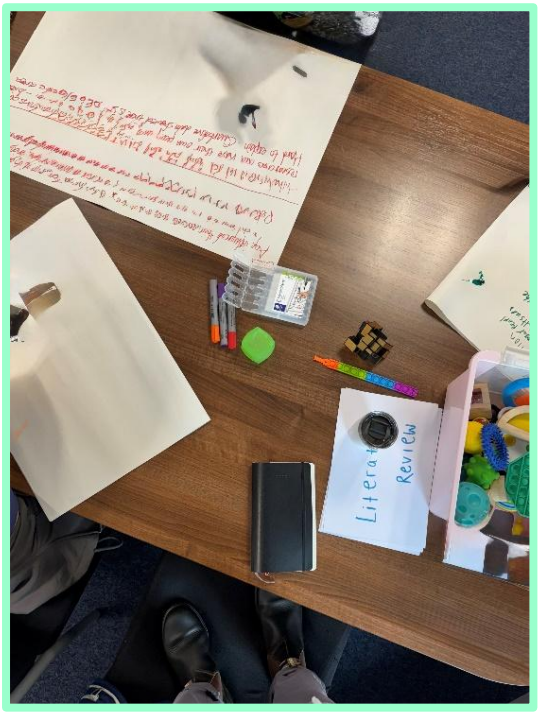
Data generation method	Number of participants
Online survey	199
Four workshops in CYZ Junior Youth Club	36
Workshop in CYZ Inclusion Youth Club	5
Workshop at The Gillford Centre	4
Total	244

Table 1: Summary of research participants

2.3.3 Data analysis

Data analysis commenced with an in-person day with CYCC members. Key activities included a reminder of the research project aims, objectives, and intentions; a review of the theoretical context; an overview of the quantitative and qualitative data; and then a longer period of time to deep dive the data. The in-person day provided the opportunity to reflect on key trends within the data and to draw out insights and considerations, alongside ensuring youth voice was foregrounded and active throughout the analytical process.

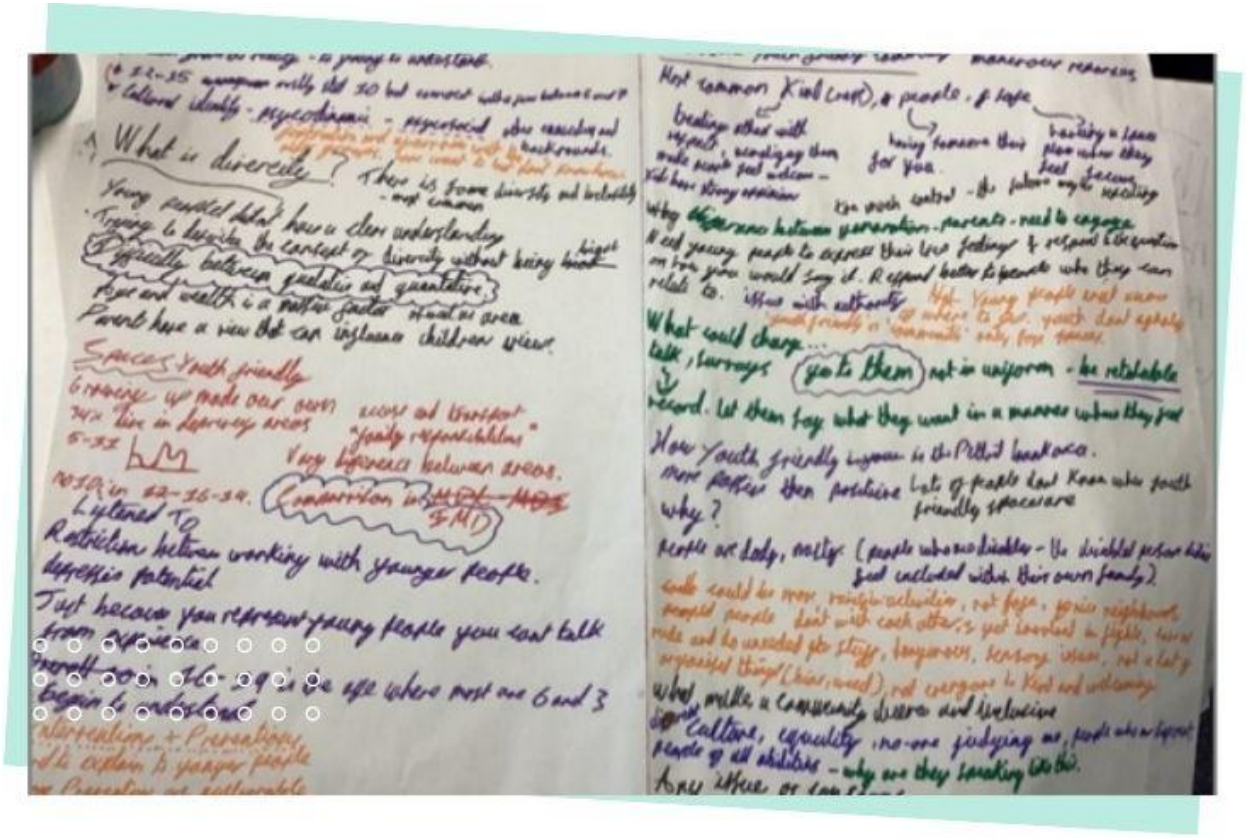
The quantitative survey data was initially analysed using PowerBI, a tool within CYZ's digital organisational infrastructure and governance arrangements, which was used to create visual segmentation of the quantitative data collected through bar graphs and pie charts. In addition, Microsoft Forms' Net Promoter Score measures and cloud mapping were used as a basis for thematic analysis of the quantitative responses.



The qualitative data generated through the survey and the six Peer Research Workshops were analysed using a pragmatic approach informed by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For the 199 survey responses, all open-text answers were manually reviewed to identify recurring patterns and ideas. Similar responses were grouped together into emerging themes, such as *youth spaces*, *barriers to access*, and *inclusion*. This process allowed the data to be synthesised into meaningful categories that reflected the lived experiences of young people in Petteril Bank.

During the in-person day with CYCC members, the team engaged in collaborative activities to explore the data further, sense-check emerging themes, and contribute their own insights into how the findings should be interpreted. After the headline trends were presented, discussions took place on the format and limitations of the data generation process, the implications of the findings and how they reflect on the Petteril community area, and core challenges or barriers to youth engagement there. This participatory process ensured the data analysis remained grounded in the perspectives of young people and allowed them to take an active role in shaping the narrative of the report. The youth co-researchers' written notes from this in-person day formed core aspects of the findings and conclusions presented in this report.

The data analysis discussions involved an “iterative process of collective sense-making and co-writing" which “built stronger shared narratives” and “identified the barriers and tensions encountered” in the collaborative process of analysing the survey data (French et al., 2023).



Some of the challenges of data generation from a broad age range of young people were also discussed, for example: some of the survey questions were interpreted differently by respondents in the youngest age groups as they were not familiar with terminology such as diversity and inclusion.

Sections 4 – 9 of this report present the findings from the online survey and Peer Research Workshops. The findings presented in sections 5 – 8 are drawn from the 199 survey responses only, and the findings displayed in section 9 are based on the qualitative data generated through the six Peer Research Workshops and CCYC's in-person data analysis day.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The unprecedented international recognition of children's rights within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified in the UK in 1991, established legal obligations that cover all aspects of a child's life, including a right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,1989). However, despite this, evidence suggests that young people remain marginalised in many formal decision-making contexts. For instance, recent UK polling shows that only 1 in 10 young people believe politicians prioritise their needs, reflecting a persistent gap between the rhetoric of rights and the lived reality of political exclusion (UK Youth & Opinium, 2024).

Historically, policy responses to youth have been less about empowerment and more about increased organisation and monitoring of children's actions within systems that had not been designed with their rights in mind. This was accompanied by public attitudes shaped by growing fear around youth crime and a heightened desire for regulation and restrictions on young populations, despite evidence disputing these fears (Gillespie and McLaughlin, 2002; Walton, 2001; Halsey and White, 2008). Heightening this climate was the highly visible policing approach of distributing Anti-Social Behaviour (ASBOs) to young people, following the crime and disorder act passed in the UK in 1998. Over 25,000 ASBOs were distributed between 1999 and 2013 (Ministry of Justice, 2014), which helped achieve political aims in addressing public fears but also permeated societal culture. This approach set the tone for controlling and unwelcoming public spaces for youth communities, despite the earlier adoption of UN legislation recognising their rights. As corroborated by Reece (2004), such policing was unnecessary and exacerbated community fear while further marginalising young people.

Lundy's widely applied Model of Participation (2007) offered a shift in narrative and approach through a foundational framework that challenges adult-led notions of engagement by emphasising four core dimensions: space, voice, audience, and influence. This model is particularly influential in shaping ethical and practical guidelines for youth involvement in research and policymaking today. There remained a significant lag

between the Model of Participation's inception and its broader use, with public perceptions (and accompanying policy) slow to adjust away from previous perceptions. However, through the 2010s, with growing international acceptance of incorporating youth participation in public policy and growing evidence of its benefits, adoption of the model's approach grew (Alias et al., 2023). While conceptually robust, it remains more often cited than implemented in grassroots contexts, especially in marginalised communities. Luttrell's (2020) Children Framing Childhoods expands the methodological conversation by advocating for visual and narrative forms of inquiry, their work powerfully evidences how children's perspectives emerge through creative modes - an approach echoed in the co-research structure at CYZ, which includes games, drawing, and interactive sessions. However, their focus on the American context and younger children suggests a gap in equivalent UK-based studies involving adolescents in community research.

Complementing this child-centred approach is the sociological lens offered by France et al.'s Youth Sociology (2020), which critiques the structural factors shaping youth marginalisation, particularly within post-industrial and under-resourced areas. The text is vital for contextualising our research in the Petteril community area but lacks direct application to participatory or place-based inquiry. The Youth Futures Foundation (2024) offers a more applied synthesis through their review of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), identifying both the promise and pitfalls of embedding young people in research cycles. Though practical in orientation, the review admits to a dearth of long-term evaluations, limiting its evidence on sustained impact.

Broader frameworks such as the Child Friendly Cities and Communities report (Powell, 2024) provide useful international benchmarks for measuring youth inclusion across infrastructure, services, and governance – incorporating minimum standards into the approach. Yet, these models often prioritise urban innovations and may overlook rural and semi-rural dynamics like those found in the Petteril community area. Likewise, Collins (2024) examines how urban design affects mental health in young people and offers compelling empirical insights, but its focus on large-scale global cities presents challenges

for translation into small community contexts. Finally, the GRRWM Blog adds a reflective, practice-based layer to this literature. It offers first-person insight into how young people were prepared to lead research, from ethics and method design to language decisions, by filling a common gap in academic reporting: how co-research is lived (Taylor-Beswick et al., 2025).

In the context of youth focused research, there is a growing body of literature that underscores the potential of clearly planned participatory approaches having significant impact for knowledge production that informs meaningful change, and yet its support and implementation remain inconsistent (Rowland et al., 2024). Taken together, the literature reveals strong theoretical and ethical support for youth co-research, alongside methodological innovations that have developed over the past 30 years. However, there remains a persistent gap in longitudinal and community-specific evaluations of how youth-led research shapes place-making and service development, particularly in non-metropolitan UK contexts.

Addressing this gap is especially important given the challenges faced by local communities. For young people in Carlisle, situated within Cumbria and encompassing the Petteril area, this includes growing mental health issues, fear of crime, increasing child poverty and more children with Education and Health Care Plans (Cumbria Community Foundation, 2025). At the same time, The Good Childhood Report (Chollet et al., 2024) found that young people across the UK are experiencing declining wellbeing and satisfaction, with 11% reporting low wellbeing. Furthermore, data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed that 15-year-olds in the UK have the lowest average life satisfaction in Europe (OECD, 2023). These pressures highlight the urgency of community-specific responses. The CYCC project, grounded in youthwork, authentic relationships, and lived experience, is therefore well positioned to contribute new and much needed insights into how youth-led research can inform both local service provision and broader debates on youth inclusion.

4. FINDINGS: DEMOGRAPHICS FOR PARTICIPANTS

This section of the report presents the demographic data for the 244 young people who participated in the research.

4.1 Age groups of participants

The age group of all participants (n = 244) is presented below. 89% of participants were aged between 5 – 15yrs, which was the primary focus of the research project.

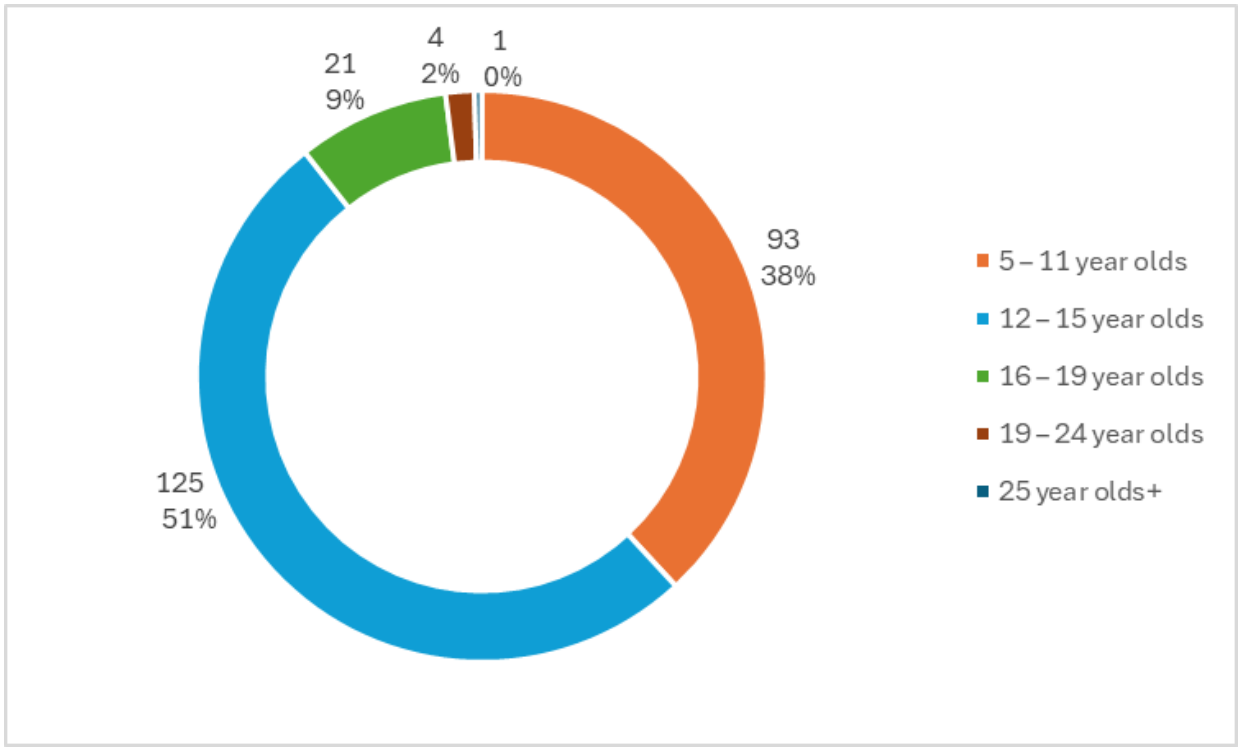


Figure 4: Age group of survey respondents

The breakdown of participant ages across the survey and Peer Research Workshops are as follows:

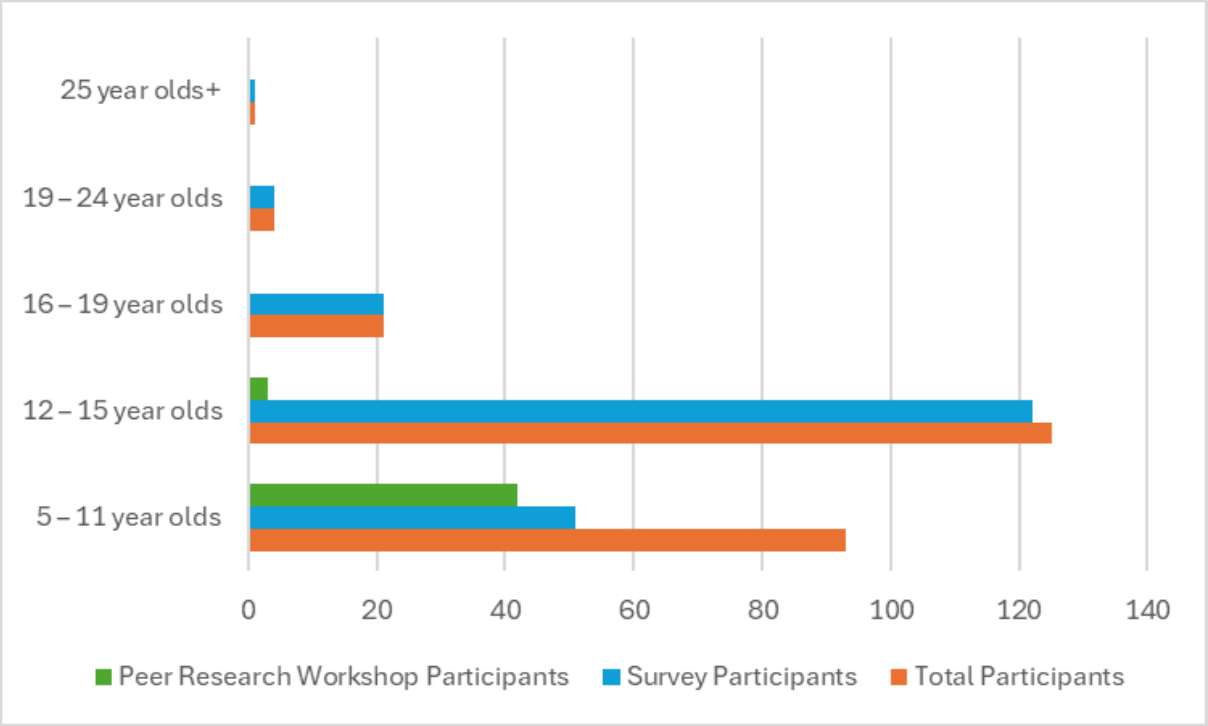


Figure 5: Age group of survey respondents

4.2 Areas in which participants live

All responses were collected within the Petteril community area, showing respondents spend time there. Figure 6, below, illustrates the areas in which the participants live:

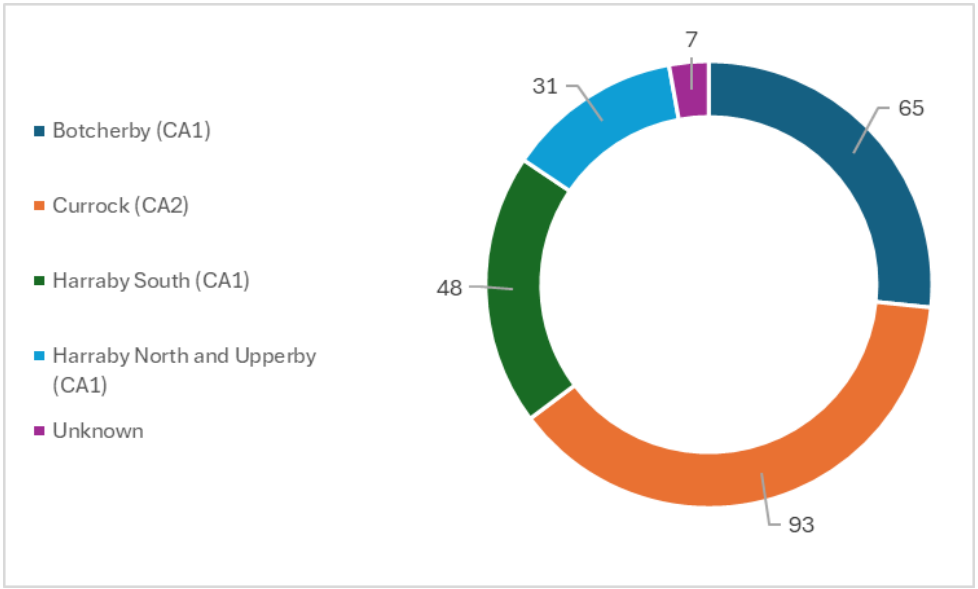


Figure 6: Areas in which participants live

5. SURVEY FINDINGS – THEME 1

Supporting new and existing groups delivering provision for children and young people

This section of the report presents the survey data relating to theme 1, presenting responses focused on the awareness and experience of youth friendly spaces in the Petteril community area, along with their views about what type of youth groups are needed.

The findings show that 25% of respondents are promoters (scoring 9 or 10 out of 10) of the statement that there are enough youth friendly spaces and places in the Petteril community area currently. In contrast, 53% of respondents are detractors (scoring 6 or below) of the statement that there are enough youth friendly spaces and places in the Petteril community area currently. The data displayed in Figure 7 was calculated on a net promoter score scale.

Figure 7: Responses to the question 'Overall, do you feel there are enough youth friendly space(s) and place(s) in the Petteril community area?'

The data shows a clear difference in responses between age groups: as age increases, young people feel less positively about the youth friendly spaces in the Petteril community area. This is demonstrated clearly between Figures 8 and 9, below, where the modal category shifts from 10 out of 10 to 6 out of 10, as well as there being far higher responses proportionally between 1-5.

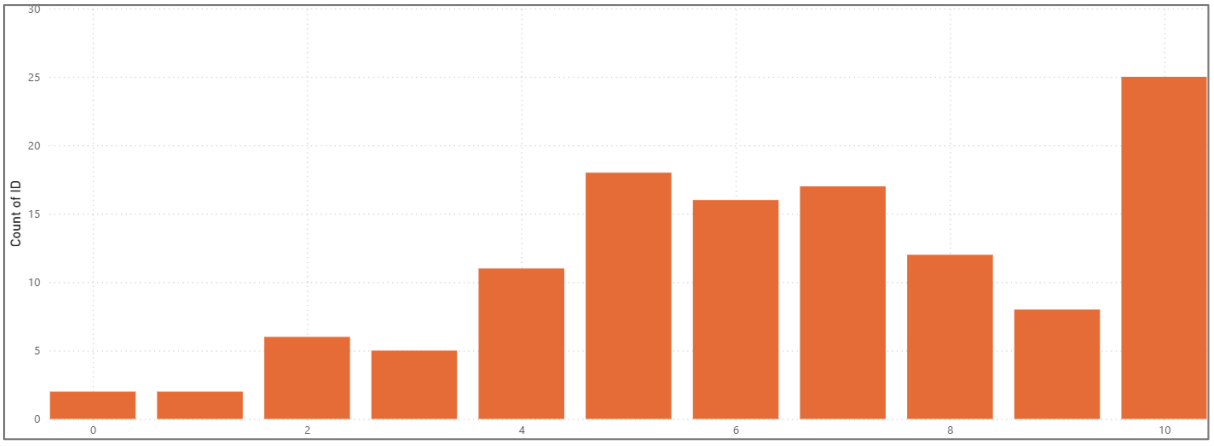


Figure 8: Bar graph of responses from the 12-15 age group about their views of youth friendly spaces and places in the Petteril community area

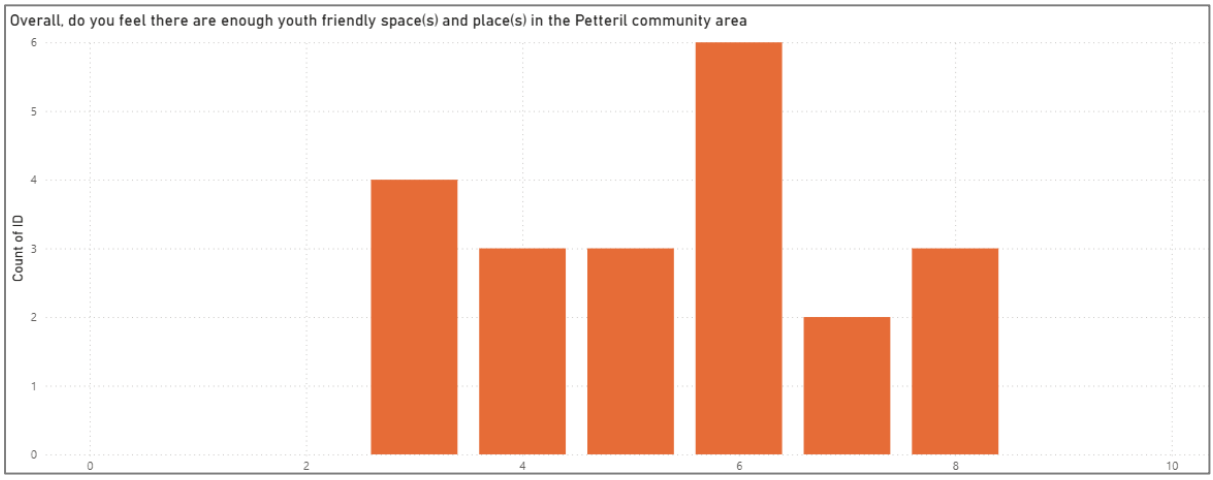


Figure 9: Bar graph of responses for the 16–19-year-old age group about their views of youth friendly spaces and places in the Petteril community area

Figure 10, below, shows that a significant number of respondents refer to already attending specific youth clubs or groups. It is important to note that this is likely an over-representative response rate as survey collection was conducted in specific youth groups at points. This is furthered by the responses in Figure 11, which show 78% of those who have experienced a youth group had a positive time overall (either 'very' or 'generally positive').

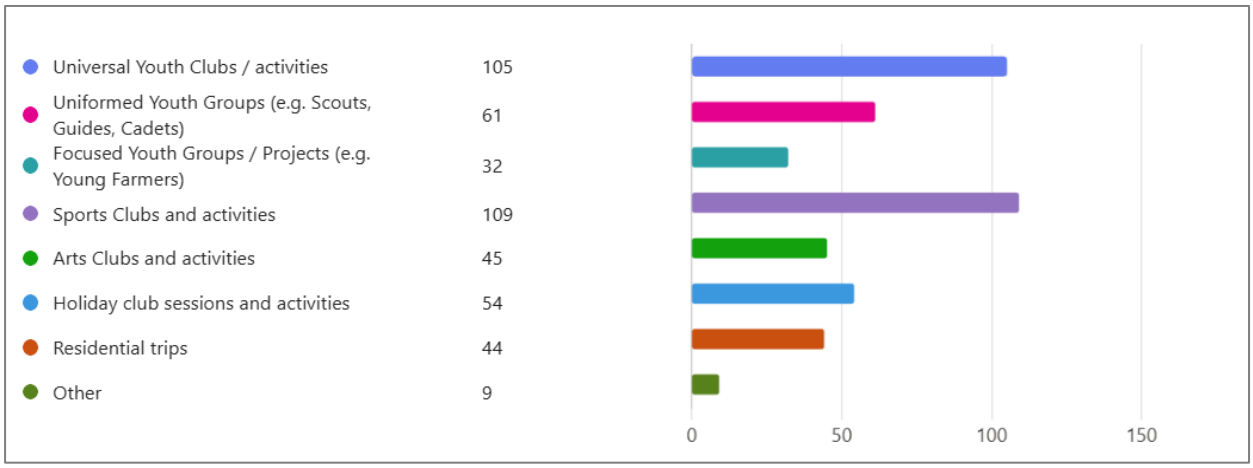


Figure 10: Grouped responses to the question 'What activities and/or groups do you know of that are available to children and young people in the Petteril community area?'

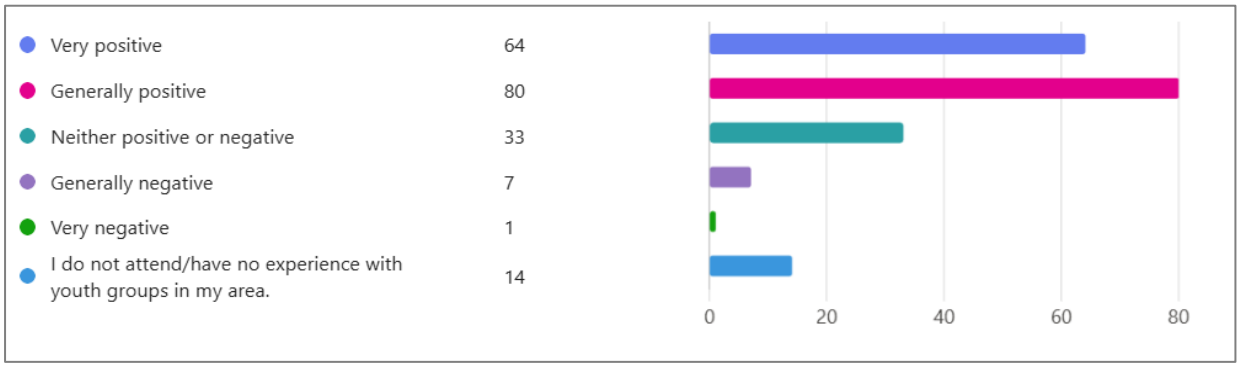


Figure 11: Grouped responses to the question 'What is your experience of the youth groups / activities in the Petteril community area?'

When considered together, the fact that many respondents are already shown to be engaging in youth friendly spaces and yet do not feel there is enough offered in the area, highlights a need and opportunity to provide more clarity about the range already available, and to enhance and expand on what is already well established.

Figures 12 and 13 below, present the qualitative thematically analysed maps with increased frequency of responses and centrality of themes represented in the size and centrality of the terms of the word map. Both figures show a mixture of suggestions and a lack of clarity about what exactly should be offered to enhance the available youth friendly spaces and groups:

Figure 12: Thematic mapping of qualitative responses to the question 'What new or different youth groups / activities do you feel are needed in the Petteril community area?'

Figure 13: Thematic mapping of qualitative responses to the question 'What else do you like to have opportunities to do after school and on a weekend in your local area?'

A substantial proportion of respondents were unsure what they wanted with over 15 respondents stating *"IDK" (I don't know), "not sure"*, and *"i don't know" (Q5, 15 respondents).* This suggests young people may need support to imagine, or reimagine, new and alternative provisions in their area. This aligns with existing research which shows that young people often experience difficulties in decision-making when faced with abstract or unfamiliar choices, particularly when they lack prior exposure or confidence in their ability to influence outcomes (Halpern-Felsher, 2016).

Recent literature in youth development further posits that exposure to diverse environments and participatory experiences is key to helping young people imagine alternatives and engage meaningfully, a phenomenon described as imagination poverty (Seo et al., 2025); while their study focuses on academic settings, the underlying principle

that structured, supportive environments help young people articulate goals, remains relevant in community contexts where young people may lack similar scaffolding.

Furthermore, several participants highlighted the importance of spaces where they feel safe, welcomed and free to socialise, for example:

"More fun and safe areas for young people to hang out" (Q15, Respondent 17)

This quotation reflects a broader sentiment across responses, which frequently tied safety and fun together as intertwined priorities. For many, the perception of safety extended beyond physical security to include emotional comfort and freedom from judgement. This aligns with recent research highlighting that young people's sense of wellbeing in community spaces is shaped not only by physical safety, but also by relational and emotional dynamics which includes feeling respected, included, and free from stigma (Sciola et al., 2025). These findings are further corroborated in studies of residential and community care, where perceived safety is strongly associated with the quality of relationships and the presence of trusted adults (Vis et al., 2020).

A strong emphasis on sports emerged as a central theme across the data, with young people highlighting physical activities as vital for fostering connection and positive engagement in the community. Requests ranged from traditional team sports such as football and rugby to alternative activities like skateboarding and gymnastics, showing the importance of diverse and accessible provision.

One participant expressed the need for "*More inclusive clubs*" (Q15, Respondent 139). This comment illustrates an important aspect of the theme: while many young people expressed enthusiasm for sporting opportunities, there was also an awareness of barriers to participation for underrepresented groups. Inclusivity was not raised as often as sports themselves, but where it did appear, it suggested a critical perspective among respondents about ensuring these spaces are welcoming for all. Volfe et al. (2022) stipulate that inclusive sport environments, particularly those that offer a range of activities and reduce structural barriers, are more likely to engage young people from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities or marginalised communities. This

is further supported by the Sport Participation Pathway Model (SPPM) by Eime et al. (2022), which outlines how participation in community sport typically follows a pathway from initial exposure to sustained engagement. The model emphasises that early positive experiences and a strong sense of belonging are key to retaining young people in sport. In this context, inclusive and varied provision is not only desirable but essential for ensuring that all young people feel they have a place in community life.

When discussing this theme as a co-research collective, two hypotheses were presented for the duality and separation of desiring more youth spaces without specificity of how to provide this:

1) Simply that more provision of what already exists, focusing on providing safe and fun spaces for young people to socialise and engage with sports, arts and other day-to-day services is desired. Although many of the participants engage in these activities currently, they simply desire more access to quality provision in these areas.
2) There is a paradox in engaging youth voices in imagining new/different opportunities and the making decision-making processes required to realise them as many young people engaging are doing so within a historical context of being marginalised, overlooked and unheard. Even when young people are aware of their feelings and desires towards opportunities, due to them being minimised previously, many may choose not to, or struggle to, explicitly put forward solutions to their challenges, despite being best placed to do so.

These hypotheses match the data that reflect a greater need/less satisfaction among older respondents who both may have outgrown some youth specific groups/spaces and are gaining independence and autonomy in defining their needs but still exist within a system where they are not accustomed to being heard and listened to in decision-making forums. The Lundy Model of participation offers an opportunity to restate a commitment to ‘audience’ and ‘influence’ alongside ‘voice’ and ‘space’, and to (re)build trust amongst young people that their involvement and participation is not tokenistic.

6. SURVEY FINDINGS – THEME 2

Supporting and encouraging children and young people to thrive

This section of the report will present the findings relating to the survey questions about supporting and encouraging young people to thrive in the Petteril community area.

The findings indicate a greater feeling of dissatisfaction vs satisfaction amongst young people about the availability of support to help them grow up and develop well. This is shown through a negative net promoter score of –16 and 44% being marked as detractors on the NPS scale (scoring 6 or below out of 10). This compares to 28% being marked as promoters (scoring 9 or 10 out of 10) and an equal percentage (28%) being marked as passive.

Figure 14: Responses to the question 'Overall, do you feel the support you need to thrive (to us that means to grow up and develop well) is available to you in the Petteril community area'

Like in theme 1 (Section 5), there is a significant difference between responses from different age groups, as shown in Figures 15 and 16, with the modal response for 12–15-year-olds being 10 and a large cluster of this group falling between 5-8 out of 10. However, for 16–19-year-olds, the modal category is 4, with a negatively cascading pattern shown on the bar graph and very low responses from the 8 and 9 scorings (none for 10 out of 10). This highlights the increased complexity of supporting young people as they enter young adulthood and is a consistent theme throughout this analysis. Whilst the data

presents this as distinctly an issue for 16-year-olds and above, this is likely due to classification rather than a significant shift here, and it is suggested this is a growing issue in supporting teenagers as they age and develop more generally.

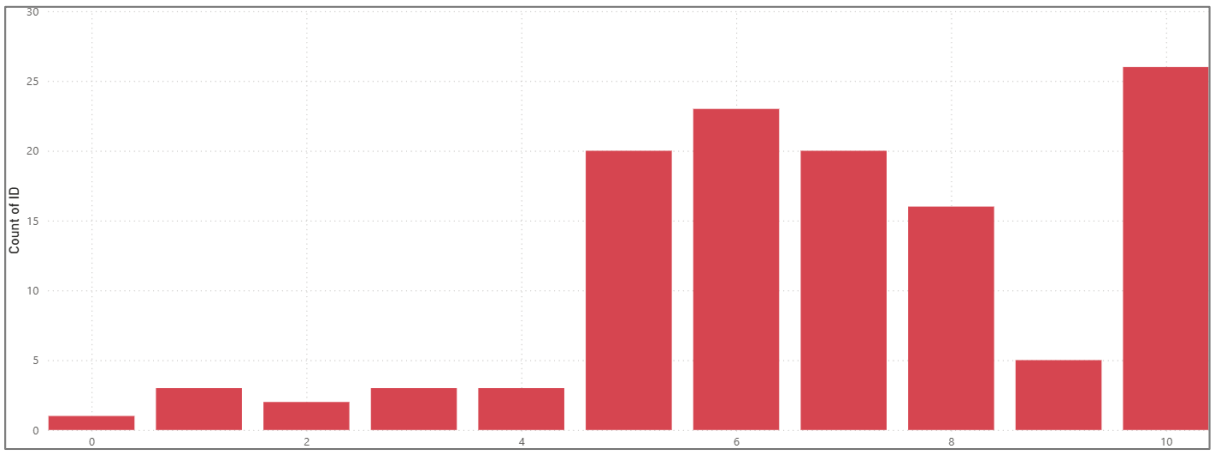


Figure 15: Bar graph of responses for the 12–15-year-old age group about the support needed to thrive being available in the Petteril community area

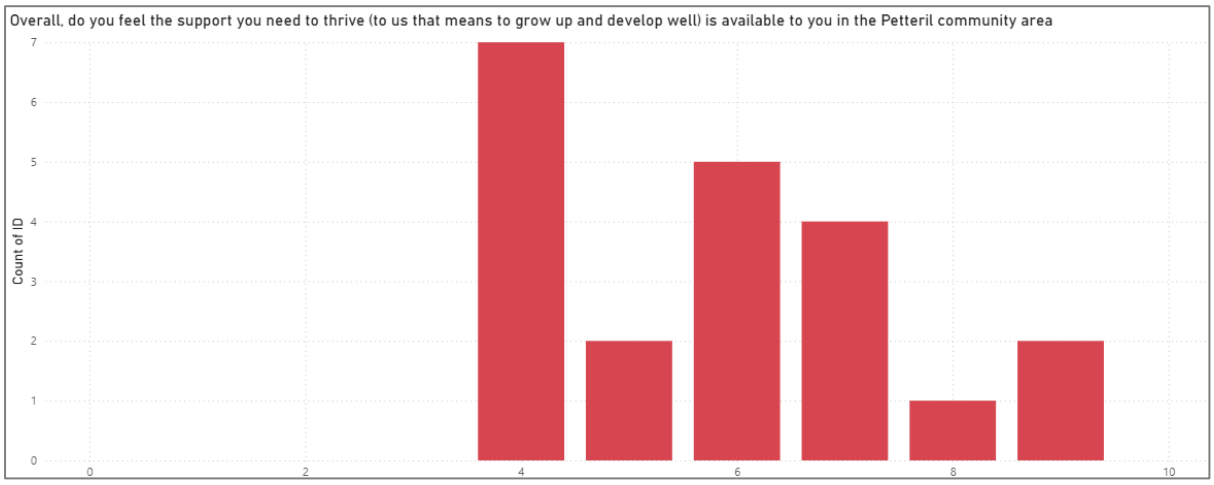


Figure 16: Bar graph of responses for the 16–19-year-old age group about the support needed to thrive being available in the Petteril community area

Figure 17 shows that young people are being primarily supported through conventional societal structures such as school, family groups and friends (the three most common responses). However, Figure 18 indicates a desire for greater support through targeted intervention and space, such as accessing youth groups and events, as well as significant

desire for opportunities not often associated with children, such as a job, volunteering and health related support.

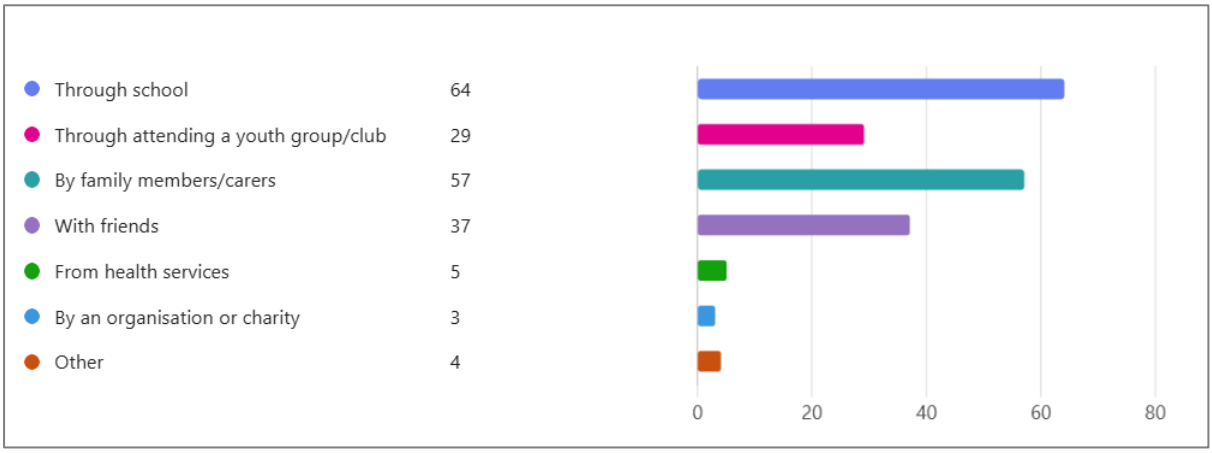


Figure 17: Grouped responses to the question 'How have you been supported to thrive (grow up and develop well) in the Petteril community area?'

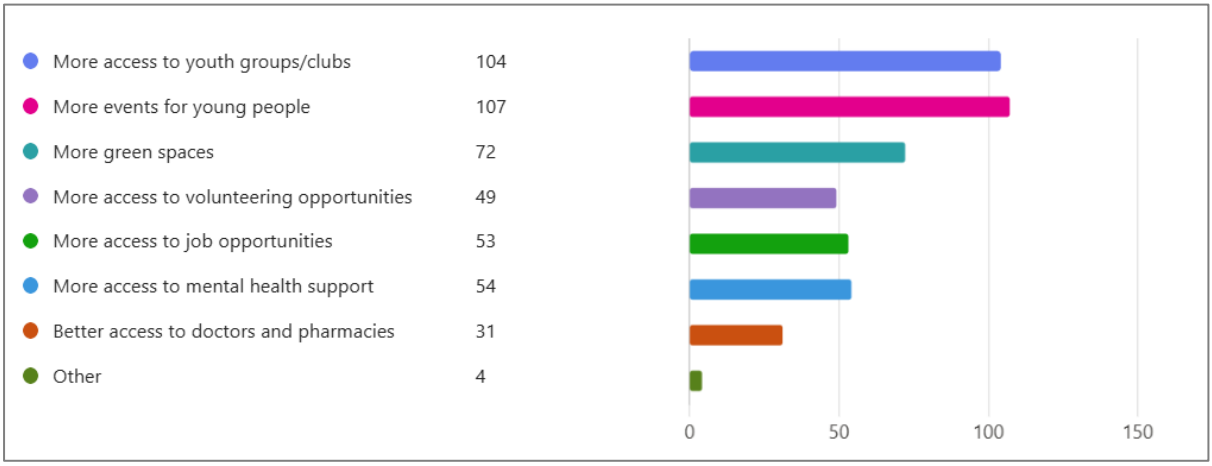


Figure 18: Grouped responses to the question 'How can children and young people be supported more / better to thrive (grow up and develop well) in the Petteril community area?'

Building on section 5, where young people were asked what new or different activities they would like to see, when given a list of options the desire for structured events and activities comes through strongly. This particularly speaks to the repeated instances of 'safe' and 'kind' which appeared in participants' responses to the broad question 'what

does a youth friendly community mean to you', with the ability to define and monitor these facets in intentional and structured spaces a potential opportunity.

7. SURVEY FINDINGS – THEME 3

Supporting intervention and prevention

This section of the report focuses on the survey data relating to young people's awareness and experiences of interventions and preventions in the Petteril Bank area.

This theme received responses that were consistent across both age and location. Awareness of existing interventions and preventions was notably low across all age groups. As shown in Figure 19, only 24% of respondents reported knowing about interventions or preventative initiatives in the Petteril community area.

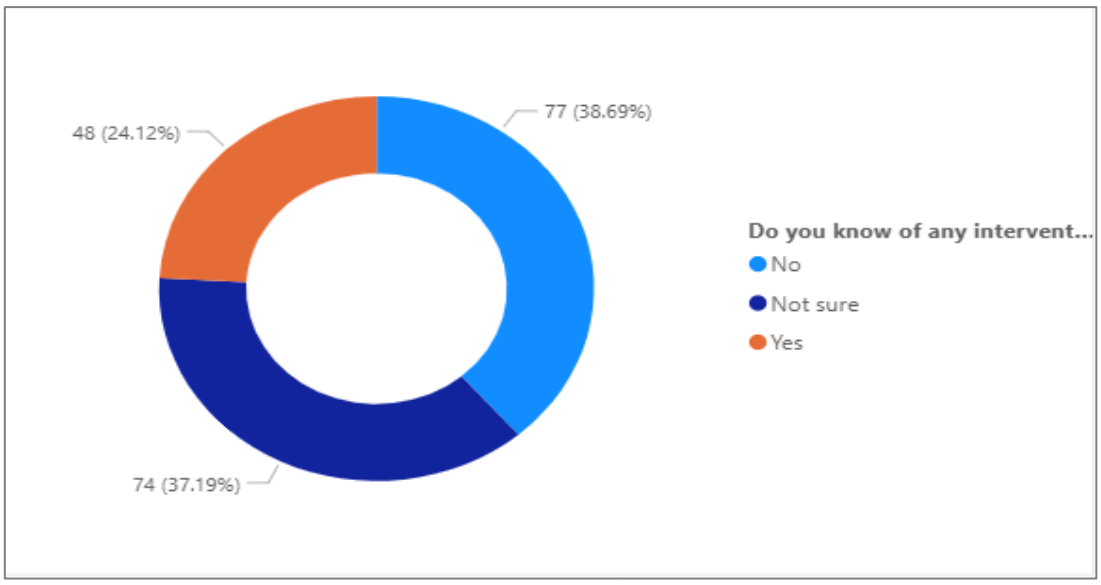


Figure 19: Group responses to the question 'Do you know of any interventions and preventions that are currently happening in the Petteril community area?

However, attitudes shifted when participants were asked about their interest in learning more. Figure 20 reveals that a significant proportion expressed either a desire to know more about interventions and prevention (48%) or a curiosity about knowing more ('maybe' 35%). Similarly, Figure 21 shows that 83% of respondents a interested (yes and maybe) opportunities to get involved in addressing community challenges and preventing future issues.

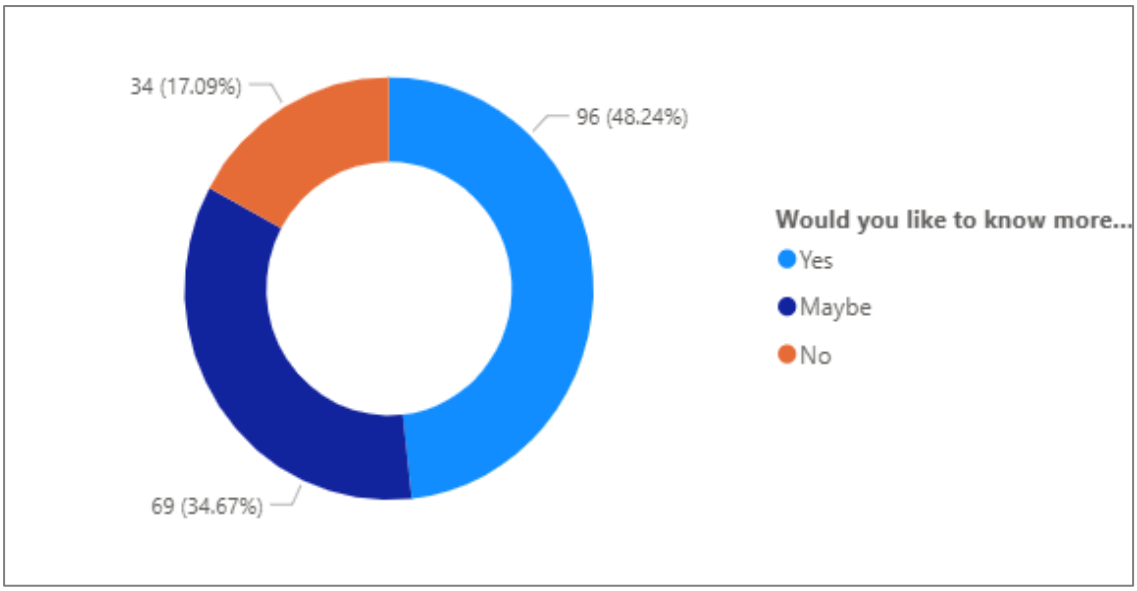


Figure 20: Grouped responses to the question 'Would you like to know more about any interventions or preventions that are happening in your area?

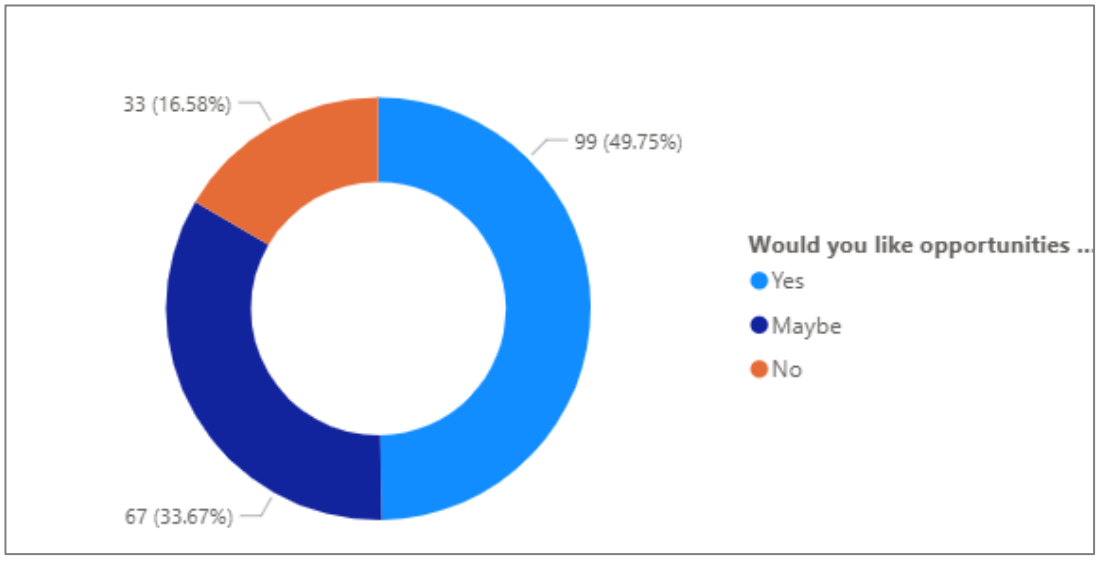


Figure 21: Grouped responses to the question 'Would you like opportunities to be involved in activities and action towards addressing issues or preventing issues?'

This pattern suggests that although young people currently lack awareness, there is strong potential to foster engagement if information and opportunities are presented effectively.

When reviewing the qualitative responses to survey question 27, which asked respondents to share any issues or concerns they have about their local community, the frequency of 'no' responses is highlighted, as shown in Figure 22:

Figure 22: Thematic mapping of qualitative responses to the question 'Share with us here any issues or concerns you currently have about your local community'

Many respondents provided minimal or negative responses such as: *"No" (Q27, Respondent 5).* This frequent brevity may reflect a broader sense of disengagement or a perception that their voices may not lead to meaningful change. It highlights the need for sustained efforts to build trust and encourage participation. Fredricks et al. (2019) identified that disengagement among urban youth is often linked to a lack of respect from adults, limited opportunities for meaningful input, and environments perceived as unresponsive or unsafe. Where issues or concerns were shared, they centered on themes of safety and antisocial behaviour. For instance, one respondent noted:

> *"There are a lot of people who are adults and my age who are doing drugs and drinking. Sometimes I hear people carry knives. If people stopped feeling scared, then it'd be safer." (Q23, Respondent 54)*

This comment illustrates how fear of crime and unsafe environments impacts young people's perceptions and willingness to engage in community life. Research by Fox et al., (2024) highlights how intersecting vulnerabilities, such as exposure to substance misuse, exploitation, and inadequate safeguarding, can leave young people both overexposed to harm and underserved by protective systems. These conditions contribute to a climate

of fear and mistrust, which in turn discourage youth and community participation and limits young people's access to safe, supportive spaces. This is echoed in regional research from the University of Cumbria, which found that despite relatively low crime rates, young people in Carlisle and surrounding areas often feel unsafe due to visible anti-social behaviour and limited access to trusted services (Mecinska et al., 2024). Similarly, the Cumbria Community Foundation (2025) report highlights rising mental health pressures and youth disengagement, noting that fear and inequality are key barriers to participation in community life.

Figure 23mirrors the responses presented earlier in Figure 17, with predominant sources of support for young people coming through family and school. Others pointed to existing sources of support they value, including schools, friends, and local youth groups. One participant commented: *"Therapists, friends and youth clubs" (Q26, Respondent 65).*

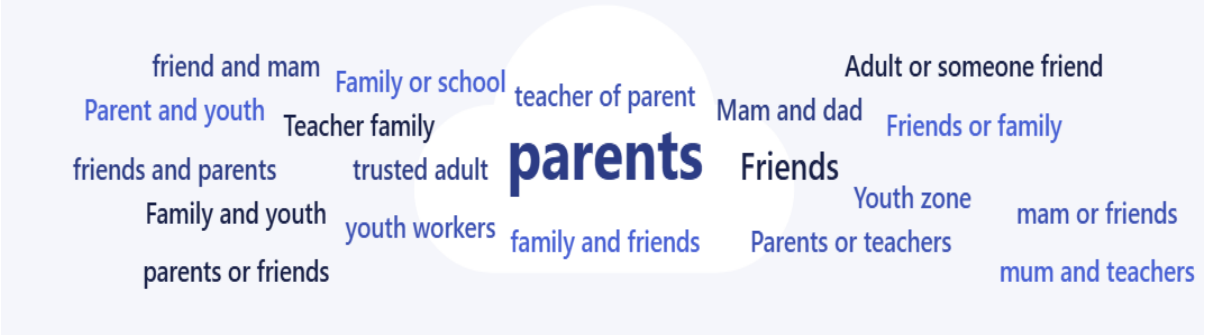


Figure 23: Thematic mapping of qualitative responses to the question 'Who would you most likely talk to if there was a problem or issue you wanted help with?'

This reliance on familiar networks suggests that while traditional support systems are important, there may be limited access to independent, youth-led spaces where young people feel safe to express concerns and contribute ideas for community improvement. Burr (2025) determines that many UK mental health and support interventions for young people are adult led, and shaped by deficit-based models, which can mute youth voices and limit their agency. In addition, their longitudinal research found that when young people are given space to co-create support environments such as peer-led group work, they report increased emotional safety, empathy, and self-worth. These findings

reinforce the importance of creating youth-centred spaces that go beyond institutional support and foster genuine participation and trust.

There appears to be a contradiction between the quantitative and qualitative responses for this theme – with a clear desire for engagement and participation shown in the quantitative data vs a more distrusting and disengaged set of responses in the qualitative feedback, particularly in relation to sharing concerns. Despite this, there is also clear appetite from young people for empowering agency and engagement in addressing the challenges the community faces.

8. SURVEY FINDINGS – THEME 4

Supporting inclusivity and diversity

This section presents survey data relating to young people's understanding of diversity, inclusion, and equality in the Petteril community area, along with their awareness of how to access diverse and inclusive spaces.

Respondents' perceptions of inclusive and diverse spaces varied based on where they lived, with locality determining the context and relativity of diversity and inclusion. For example, respondents living in Botcherby felt there was a higher rate of diversity in the Petteril area compared to Currock, with the modal response from those living in Botcherby being 'there is a high level of diversity, inclusion and equality' compared to it being the third most common choice for those living in Currock (as shown in Figures 24 and 25). Currock is reported to be a more ethnically diverse area, with 7.6% of the population not being 'White British' compared to 3.1% in Botcherby (ONS 2022), which is more than double proportionally, highlighting the importance of accounting for local feeling and experience when seeking to understand diversity and inclusion in communities.

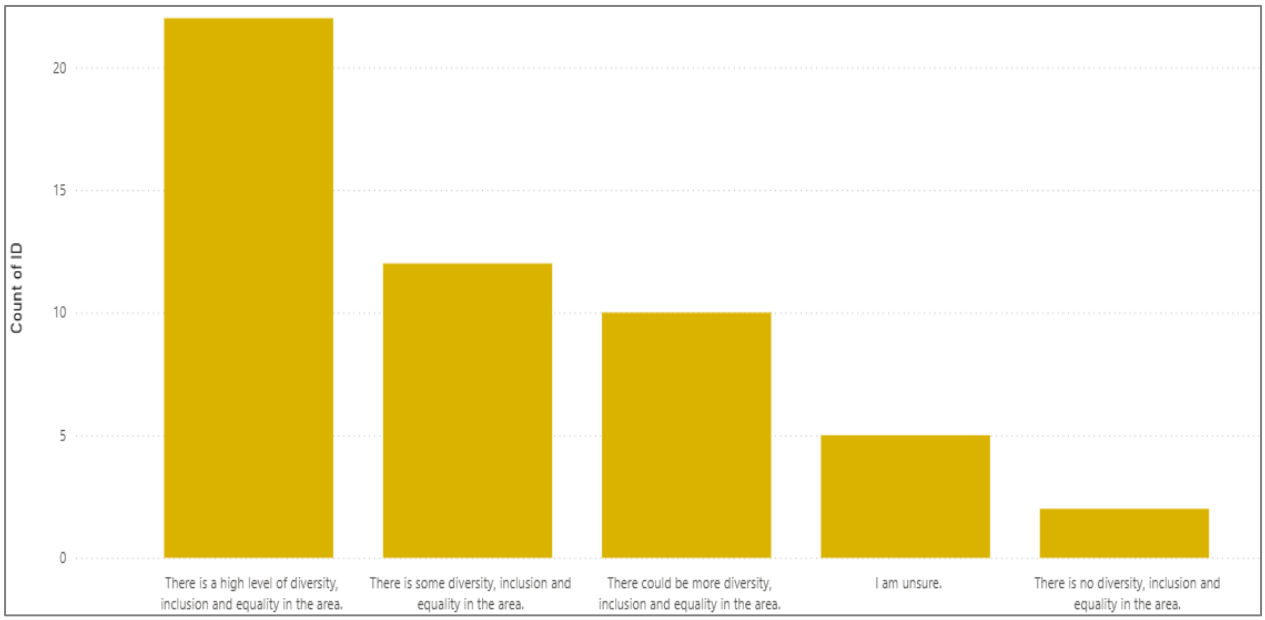


Figure 24: Bar graph of responses for the question 'How would you describe the Petteril community area in terms of diversity, inclusion, and equality?', for respondents living in the Botcherby area (CA1)

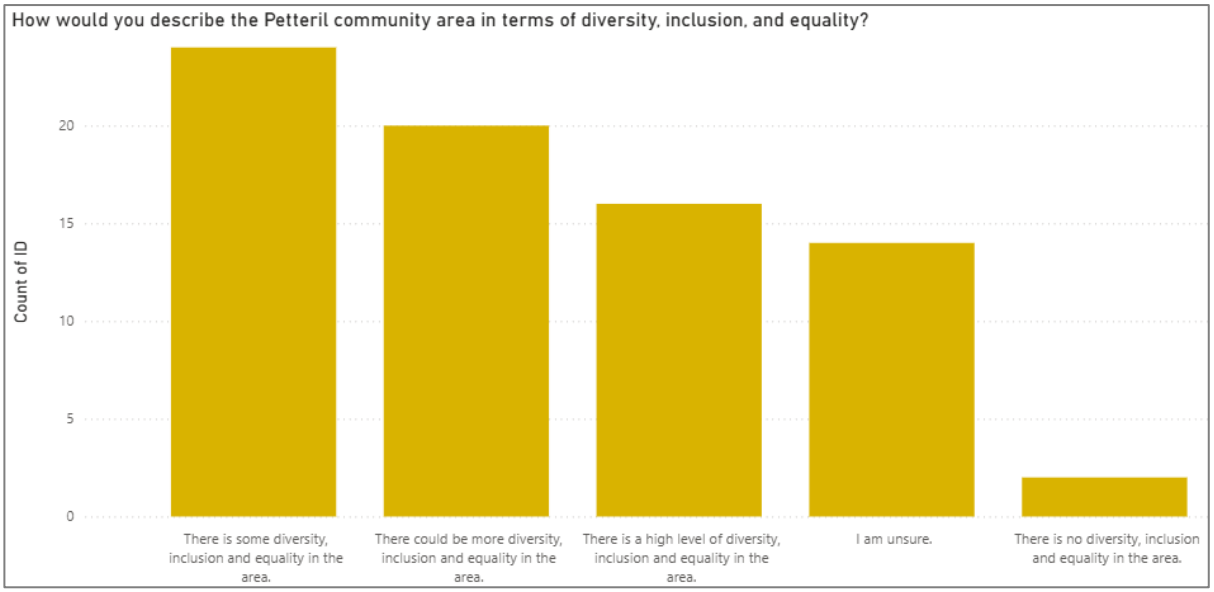


Figure 25: Bar graph of responses for the question 'How would you describe the Petteril community area in terms of diversity, inclusion, and equality?', for respondents living in the Currock area (CA2)

Figures 26 and 27 contain insightful qualitative responses to perceptions and feelings on diversity and inclusion. Unlike the previous free-structured qualitative questions, where there was uncertainty in the responses, there is clarity both in theme and content of the answers given here. Through both figures 'people' features centrally:

Figure 26: Thematic mapping of qualitative responses to the question 'How could diversity, inclusion, and equality be improved in the Petteril community area?'

Figure 27: Thematic mapping of qualitative responses to the question 'What do you think makes a community diverse and inclusive?'

Young people frequently described inclusive communities as those where everyone is accepted regardless of background, ability, or identity. Their comments suggest an understanding of diversity as active inclusion rather than passive representation. As one participant stated:

"Including everyone no matter backgrounds, nationality, sexuality." (Q6, Respondent 28)

This response reflects a common belief that acceptance and openness are fundamental to an inclusive community. Others echoed the need for safe spaces and opportunities where "*everyone is supported*" and "*people are treated equally*." These perspectives align with recent UK research showing that young people increasingly view inclusion as a lived, relational experience shaped by everyday interactions, not just institutional policies. It is understood that this will be included in the UK Government's co-production of a new National Youth Strategy, which seeks to engage over 20,000 young people nationwide, as part of the "Deliver You" campaign; young people will share their lived experiences, hopes and mental concerns, which are intended to form the basis of a 10 year ambition for youth policy, which foregrounds that youth voices are central to shaping inclusive environments for the future (Department for Culture, Media and Sports, 2024).

A recurring theme in the data was the importance of kindness and mutual respect. Many responses focused less on structural interventions and more on interpersonal behaviours that foster belonging. For example, one young person shared:

"Making sure that everybody is supported and treated the same and nobody is being left out." (Q6, Respondent 86)

This suggests that young people view inclusion as something built in daily interactions and cultural attitudes, rather than relying solely on formal policies or initiatives.

The specific responses noting disability and racism, including racism to specific ethnic groups shown in Figure 22 as well as Figure 27, show these concepts are understood and felt by young people. Although there were some challenges around exact language and framing when collecting the survey responses, this demonstrates young people's ability to grapple with nuanced and challenging concepts. This was demonstrated consistently throughout the processes and workshops with the youth co-researchers involved in this project.

Participants identified community events, group activities, and shared spaces as vital for encouraging relationships across diverse groups. They expressed that these opportunities could help bridge divides and build trust, as one respondent suggested: *"By bringing more communities together"* (Q9, Respondent 19). This reflects a desire for initiatives that foster connection and dialogue between people from different backgrounds, reinforcing the idea that diversity is lived through engagement.

Furthermore, the frequency of synonymous words such as '*kind*', '*better*' or '*nice*' in Figure 26 shows young people's desire to enact positive change around diversity and inclusion in the Petteril area. The lack of youth-focused responses in these figures suggests potential further benefits to including youth groups in strategic diversity and inclusion planning to wider populations as well as youth communities.

9. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Youth perspectives on Petteril community area

This section presents the qualitative findings from the six Peer Research Workshops and the data analysis conducted by CCYC members.

9.1 Findings from the Peer Research Workshops

This section presents the thematic analysis of data generated from the six Peer Research Workshops involving 45 participants. As noted in section 2.3.1, the workshops were designed to engage children and young people who preferred group discussion, or who found the survey format challenging, and particularly included those at the younger end of the age range (5–11 years), along with those with additional learning needs.

Access to Local Places

When asked what places are available near where they live, participants mentioned a small number of familiar locations: parks and shops were the most frequently cited, followed by cafés, churches, gyms, and youth clubs. For example, one participant commented: *"Youth Zone + clubs".* This quote highlights the presence of youth-specific provision, though its limited mention suggests that awareness or access may be uneven. The repetition of general amenities like "*Park*" and *"Shops*" across multiple responses points to a lack of variety in youth-oriented spaces. A youth-friendly Petteril community area would benefit from expanding and promoting accessible, inclusive spaces that reflect young people's interests and needs.

What Would Make the Area Better

Participants offered a wide range of suggestions for improving their local area. These included environmental improvements, better infrastructure, and more opportunities for recreation and social connection. For example, there were several comments about the desire for *"Cleaner streets".* Other suggestions included "*More bins*," "*More trees*," "B*etter*

transport links," "*Safer streets*," and "*More parks and green spaces*." The inclusion of ideas like "*Gymnastics club*" and "*Moving clubs*" points to a need for more structured activities and youth-led spaces. These responses show that even younger children have clear, practical ideas for how their community could better support them.

Feeling Heard and Who Listens

Participants were asked whether they feel listened to by decision makers and who they feel listens to them in general. While some responded positively, most identified personal relationships, particularly family and friends, as their primary sources of support and validation. For example, the simple but powerful response *"Mum"* was common throughout the workshops and reflects the central role of family in young people's lives. While some participants did say "*Yes*" to feeling heard by decision makers, there was little mention of specific roles, such as council staff or school leaders. This suggests that formal systems may not be perceived as accessible or responsive. A youth-friendly Petteril community area will need to build trust and create visible, meaningful opportunities for young people to engage with decision-making processes.

What Makes a Place Feel Friendly

Participants described friendliness in terms of social connection, kindness, and opportunities to interact. The most common responses included *"Friends*," "*Nice people*," and "*Kind*," alongside mentions of trusted environments like "*CYZ*" (Carlisle Youth Zone) and "*School*." This quotation - *"Getting to make friends"* - captures the importance of relational experiences in shaping how young people perceive their environment. Friendly places are those where young people feel welcomed, included, and able to build relationships. This finding reinforces the need for spaces that foster social interaction and emotional safety.

Sources of Support in the Community

When asked how they feel supported in their area, participants overwhelmingly pointed to family and close personal relationships. "*Mum*," "*Dad,*" "*Parents*," and "*My family*" were the most frequent responses, followed by "*Friends*," "*Neighbours,*" and occasional mentions of "*Police*" and "*Town zone*." The dual importance of peer and familial support is reflected in this quotation: *"Friends and family".* While these relationships are clearly vital, the limited mention of formal or community-based support structures suggests that young people may not feel connected to wider systems of care. Strengthening these systems through youth work, community outreach, and inclusive services would be a key step toward making Petteril community more youth friendly.

Summary of Peer Research Workshops

The Peer Research Workshops offered a vital complement to the survey, enabling the inclusion of younger children and those with additional needs who may not have engaged through traditional formats. Delivered in youth clubs, these semi-structured discussions provided a space for participants to share their experiences in a more accessible and supported way. The findings reveal that young people in Petteril community value clean, safe environments, strong personal relationships, and opportunities for social connection and recreation. Their responses consistently emphasised the importance of family, friends, and familiar spaces like parks and youth clubs. While formal systems of support and decision-making were less frequently mentioned, the desire for improvement through better infrastructure, more activities, and inclusive spaces was clear. This section reflects the commitment of the Cumbria Youth Co-Research Collective to include a wide range of voices and perspectives, and reinforces the central research question: *How can Petteril community area be more youth friendly?* The answer, as expressed by these young participants, lies in creating environments that are welcoming, responsive, and shaped by those who live in them.

9.2 Findings from CCYC

This section presents the thematic analysis of data generated through CCYC's in-person data analysis day, where youth co-researchers reflected on the findings from the survey and shared their own perceptions of what would make Petteril community area a more youth-friendly community. This provided a platform for collaborative sense-making, enabling the youth co-researchers to explore themes such as mental health, identity, community safety, and youth participation from their lived experiences and critical perspectives.

The discussions revealed key areas where young people feel both supported and marginalised, highlighting the nuanced relationship they have with their community and services. The analysis below draws out these insights, contextualises them in relation to the overall research aim, and reflects on how these findings can shape more inclusive youth-focused interventions in the Petteril community area.

Self –perception, mental health and identity

Youth co-researchers reflected on how young people begin to form their sense of self from an early age, particularly between 5 and 15 years old. They described how this process is shaped by social expectations, peer comparison, and internal pressure to meet perceived standards. Many young people feel they must always get things "*right*" and this pressure can lead to anxiety and fear of failure. These feelings are compounded by a lack of understanding from adults and limited access to mental health support, as stated by Co-researcher A: "*They are constantly under pressure about being judged*". This insight conveys the emotional toll of growing up in environments where young people feel scrutinised or misunderstood. In the context of Petteril community area, a youth-friendly community would need to provide spaces where young people can express themselves without fear of judgement, and where emotional wellbeing is actively supported.

Barriers to Participation and Expression

A recurring theme was the difficulty young people face in having their voices heard. Co-researchers described how distractions in everyday life, combined with adult influence and systemic barriers, often prevent young people from participating meaningfully in decisions that affect them. There was a sense that even when young people want to engage, they are not always taken seriously or given the tools to do so. For example:

> *"Some people struggle to get their voices heard due to far too many distractions in life." (Co-researcher B)*

> *"...lots of bureaucratic hoops at council level" (Co-researcher C)*

These quotations reflect a broader frustration with the lack of focus on what matters to young people. For Petteril community area to become more youth friendly, it must create intentional opportunities for young people to speak, be listened to, and influence change especially in spaces where decisions are made about their lives. Secondly the mention of bureaucratic obstacles such as planning permission and funding applications suggests that even when young people have ideas or initiatives, they face structural challenges in bringing them to life, thus a shift towards participatory governance and simplified pathways for youth-led action may contribute to a more youth-friendly community. In conclusion this theme highlights the disconnect between youth voice rhetoric and realities as experienced in practice. While frameworks like the Lundy Model advocate for meaningful participation (Kennan et al., 2018), young people often encounter tokenism or procedural complexity. The UK Government's Youth Review (2022) similarly found that young people want more influence over decisions but lack accessible pathways to do so. This suggests a need for simplified, youth-led governance mechanisms that prioritise co-production over consultation.

Safety, Public Spaces, and Community Infrastructure

Safety in public spaces was a major concern, and the co-researchers discussed how parks and other communal areas are not always perceived as safe, particularly for younger children:

> *"People want safety in parks, especially for children." (Co-researcher A)*

They noted that the presence of police can be reassuring for some, but that safety also depends on the design and maintenance of these spaces, and whether they feel welcoming and inclusive. This finding suggests that a youth-friendly Petteril community area must prioritise the development of safe, accessible, and well-maintained public spaces. These spaces should be co-designed with young people to ensure they meet their needs and reflect their lived experiences. Addressing these concerns is essential for fostering a sense of belonging and wellbeing in the community. UK Government (2022) emphasises the importance of spatial justice. Safety is not only about policing but about design, maintenance, and inclusivity as well as the need for investment in youth spaces, particularly in underserved areas. Co-designing these spaces with young people can enhance both physical safety and emotional belonging.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Cultural Awareness

The co-researchers explored how diversity is understood and experienced by young people. They noted that younger children often have limited awareness of inclusion, while older youth are more likely to recognise and articulate issues related to identity, culture, and belonging, as shown in this comment:

> *"Diversity is less evident in younger children (less understanding)." (Co-researcher C)*

Cultural differences were seen to influence how behaviours are interpreted, and LGBTQ+ visibility was acknowledged as increasing with age and confidence. These findings point to the need for early and ongoing education around diversity and inclusion. Inclusivity

must be actively cultivated, especially among younger age groups. A youth-friendly community must actively foster understanding across age groups and create spaces where all identities are respected and affirmed (University of Birmingham 2024).

Education, Learning Styles, and Youth Culture

The discussions amongst the co-researchers surfaced a strong desire for education that is more practical, relevant, and reflective of how young people learn today. The co-researchers challenged stereotypes about their generation and called for learning environments that support individuality and real-world preparation. Example comments included:

> *"Millennials are seen as lazy but want it in writing." (Co-researcher A)*

> *"Get them involved not just in classrooms but relatable settings" (Co-researcher B)*

These quotations capture a broader call for reform in how education is delivered. In addition to that, they also demonstrate a disconnect between traditional education systems and the realities of youth culture. Young people are calling for learning that is relevant, practical, and reflective of their lived realities. UCL's 'Creativity for All' study (2024) found that community-based creative education significantly improves mental health and engagement, particularly when it validates youth culture and supports diverse learning styles. In a youth-friendly Petteril Community, learning would be flexible, engaging, and tailored to young people's strengths and interests preparing them not just for exams, but for life, which includes recognising the value of creativity, technology, and self-expression in education.

Violence, Vandalism, and Social Disengagement

Concerns about violence and vandalism were raised as barriers to participation and wellbeing. Co-researchers described how these issues disrupt daily life and prevent young people from accessing spaces or opportunities that could support their growth:

"Young people can't get on with their lives." (Co-researcher B)

"Issues of violence- lots of fighting" (Co-researcher C)

These statements reflect the impact of unsafe or neglected environments on young people's ability to thrive. Furthermore, these concerns point to a need for targeted interventions that address the root causes of anti-social behaviour and provide constructive alternatives. Addressing these issues through prevention, community investment, and youth-led initiatives is essential to building a more supportive and inclusive community (UK Government, 2022).

Summary of Peer Research Workshop findings

The in-person data analysis event provided a rich, youth-led space for reflection, analysis, and visioning. Across all themes, co-researchers highlighted the emotional and social pressures young people face, the barriers to being heard, and the need for safer, more inclusive spaces. They called for education that reflects their realities, support systems that are accessible and responsive, and public spaces that are co-designed, welcoming and secure. Underpinning all these themes was a shared desire not just to be consulted, but to be actively involved in shaping their community. This was most clearly expressed in their reflections on how research itself should be shared and sustained. As one co-researcher put it: "*Building a culture of research*." This comment captures the collective aspiration for long-term, embedded youth participation in community development. A youth-friendly Petteril Bank is not only one that listens to young people, but also one that equips them to lead, to question, to create, and to continue shaping the future of their community through inclusive, creative, and accessible research practices.

10. CREATIVE ANALYSIS

Two Youth Co-researchers chose to collate their reflections of the research analysis through poetry.

Poem 1:

When people wish to hang out
where should they go?
To the abandoned building?
To restricted zones?
Or to nowhere.
You could say why don't you hang around the
parks or outside like everyone else?
Yet you get mad at them being there
In reality there is nowhere for them.
Youth spaces are sparse.
Knowledge of them is low.
So people look out to where they shouldn't go.

Poem 2:

Why is there change in perspective we all
live in the same place. Shouldn't we have the same experience?
Generation after generation nothing can
change that drastically can it.....
The young are sheltered by parents while
the teens begin to feel the reality of what their area truly hides.
Who makes the decisions the old or the influenced young.
No young person fully understand freedom
as there is always someone hiding the right
answers awaiting their response.

11. CONCLUSIONS

The Cumbria Youth Co-Research Collective have successfully designed and delivered a co-research engagement project to explore how Petteril community area can be more youth friendly. Using a mixed-methods approach, involving a survey and six peer research workshops, data was generated from a total of 244 young people in the Petteril community area, with the majority of respondents being in the 12 – 15 age group. Alongside generating new insight and knowledge to inform the Petteril Community Panel going forwards, the project has demonstrated the potential of high-quality youth co-research in bringing unique, purposeful, robust and authentic engagement from often overlooked voices. The process and the outcome of this project are both noteworthy.

In preparation for the 'Listen Up!' event held on the 23rd July 2025, where initial findings were shared with the Petteril Community Panel, Youth and Peer Youth Co-researchers summarised a number of opportunities and challenges specifically from their perspective. This conclusion section begins with those, staying true to ensuring youth voices and perspective are at the forefront of our learning, insight, and future actions.

Opportunities

- ✓ Younger age groups feel more positively about Petteril community being youth friendly.
- ✓ Young people don't always know what is available already – so we need to start with better knowledge, communications and the creation of more opportunities.
- ✓ SPACE is as important to teenagers as much as activities.
- ✓ *"More fun and safe areas for young people to hang out" (Q15 Respondent 17).*
- ✓ Young people want to know more about their community and want to have opportunities get more involved.

Challenges

- Diversity can have different interpretations - a shared understanding would be better.

- Young people don't always feel they have agency or that they are listened to by authority - they are therefore creating their own spaces to meet, sometimes in illegal/dangerous places.
- Young people can't always express true feelings to adults and parents, who have influence over our choices but without having the experience.
- Racism, stereotyping and violence is real.
- Bad smells (weed) and litter are problems.
- We just want to have a childhood not feeling rushed to grow up.

In summary, the data shows:

- Young people report a mixed picture of their experience of Petteril community area being 'youth friendly', with younger children (5 – 11) feeling and expressing more positively than teenagers (12 – 15). There is scope to improve this experience for all, with a clear need to pay particular attention to the experience of teenagers and young adults.

- Where young people attend youth friendly spaces and groups, their experience is overwhelmingly positive. Young people are particularly seeking structured/semi-structured spaces, where a breadth of activities is made available. The need to ensure safety and fun are essential underpinning principes.

- There is a need for more access to youth provision and youth friendly spaces. The need for expansion of existing services and the addition of new ones are both suggested. This is particularly true of older age groups where independence, agency, and need are more, and increasingly nuanced and sophisticated.

- Young people want and need to be part of imagining and co-creating plans and strategies for the future. Past experience has created some mistrust about how meaningful they will be involved. Taking time to build trust and use approaches

that work in the 'co' and genuinely include are essential for meaningful participation.

- There is strong desire to understand more and engage with interventions and preventions to support young people and their wider communities. Young people want to be more actively involved in their communities. Barriers of communication, youth perception, feeling safe, and access need to be addressed.

- Young people don't know enough about what opportunities and support is available to them locally. Youth friendly and accessible communication with and for all young people as a valued and distinct groupings in the community needs to be improved.

- Inclusivity is felt strongly by youth communities. There is consistent desire shown to engage with and boost inclusivity in the Petteril community area. This is recognised as an intentional process by young people and highlights the potential benefits of engaging youth groups in planning and governance, possibly beyond just youth communities and impacting upon wider inclusion across other groups.

Recommendations

For the Petteril Community Panel to:

1. Take the views and insights shared by young people through this research engagement project seriously. Review all current plans, priorities and funding commitments within the context of what has been shared, refining plans and approaches as needed.

2. Share and platform the views and insights shared by young people through this research engagement project with all those who need to hear it. This includes people responsible for community safety, clean streets, transport, inclusion and equity (and others).

3. Adopt the Lundy Model of Participation as your approach to youth participation, signalling a commitment to (re)build trust between young people and adult decision-making forums for the whole community moving forwards, and for the long term.

4. Establish routine opportunities for young people to be involved in decision making about issues that directly affect them and their wider community. This may include establishing a 'shadow' Petteril Community Panel with and for young people, giving due weight to the ideas, insights and contributions they bring.

5. Build on the strengths of what already exists and work with established groups and networks to better promote the range of youth friendly spaces and groups already available. Make a commitment to ensuring any future youth focused developments and funding in our area are clearly co-created with and by young people.

Strengths of the co-research engagement project:

- CYCC adopted a flexible approach to mixed-methods data generation with the addition of six peer research workshops to compliment the survey design - this ensured that the research was inclusive and met the needs of all participants, and also increased engagement with the project.
- The co-research method has moved beyond tokenistic consultation with youth and towards genuine participation and empowerment. The co-research approach has ensured that young people have had the opportunity to define what a youth-friendly community looks like and shape the research we have used to explore it.

Limitations of the co-research engagement project:

- Whilst the survey was an efficient tool for collecting data with young people in the Petteril community area within the relatively short timeframe available, further funding would have enabled the facilitation of focus groups to gather more in-

depth data from the young people about their experiences and views of the local community.

- As noted in section 2.3.3, during the data analysis workshop it became evident that the language used for some of the survey questions was interpreted differently by some respondent groups, which may have limited their responses. In particular, the younger respondents were not familiar with terms such as diversity and inclusion. This is a learning point for CYCC that will be inform the design of future youth co-research projects.

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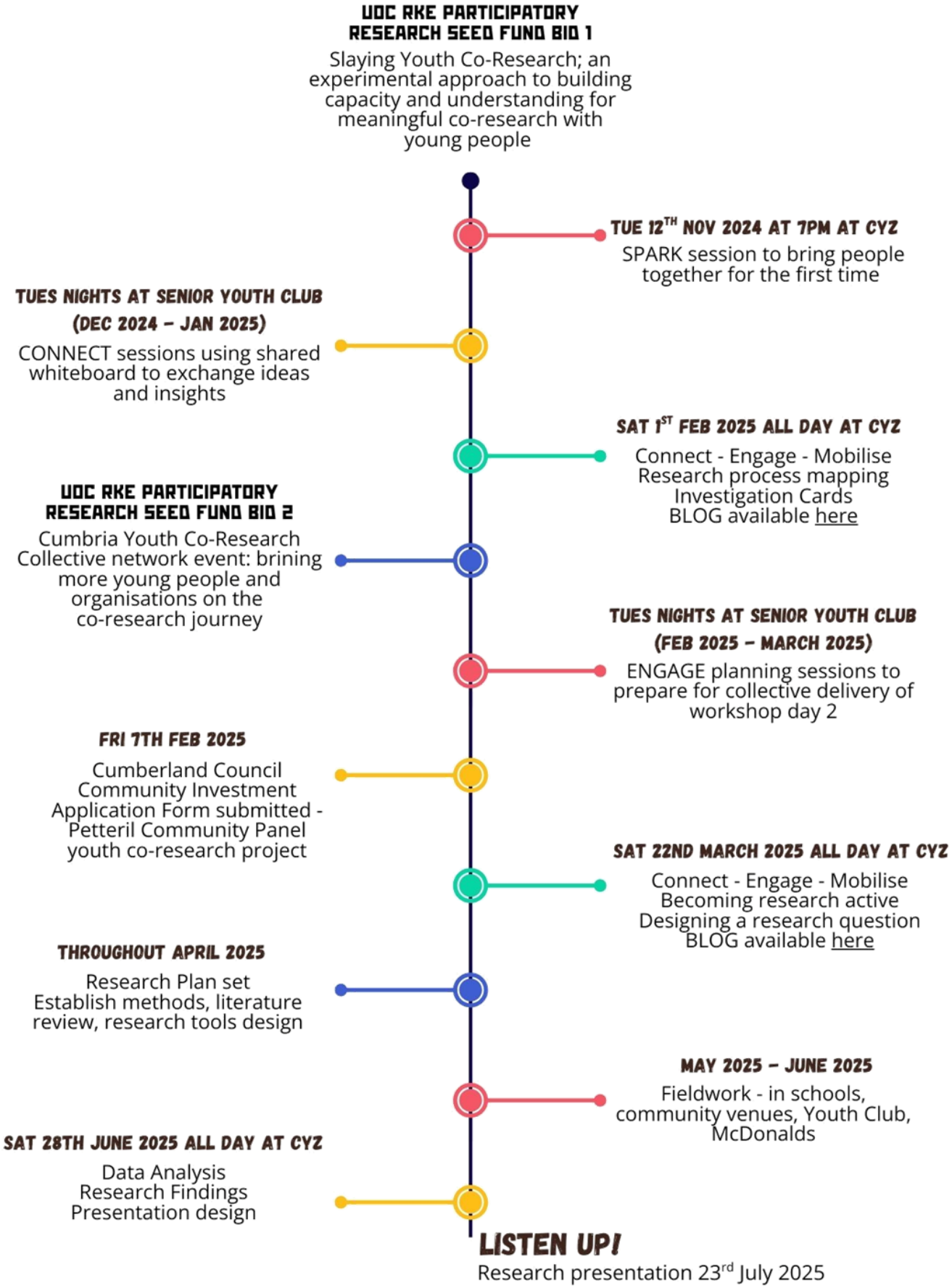
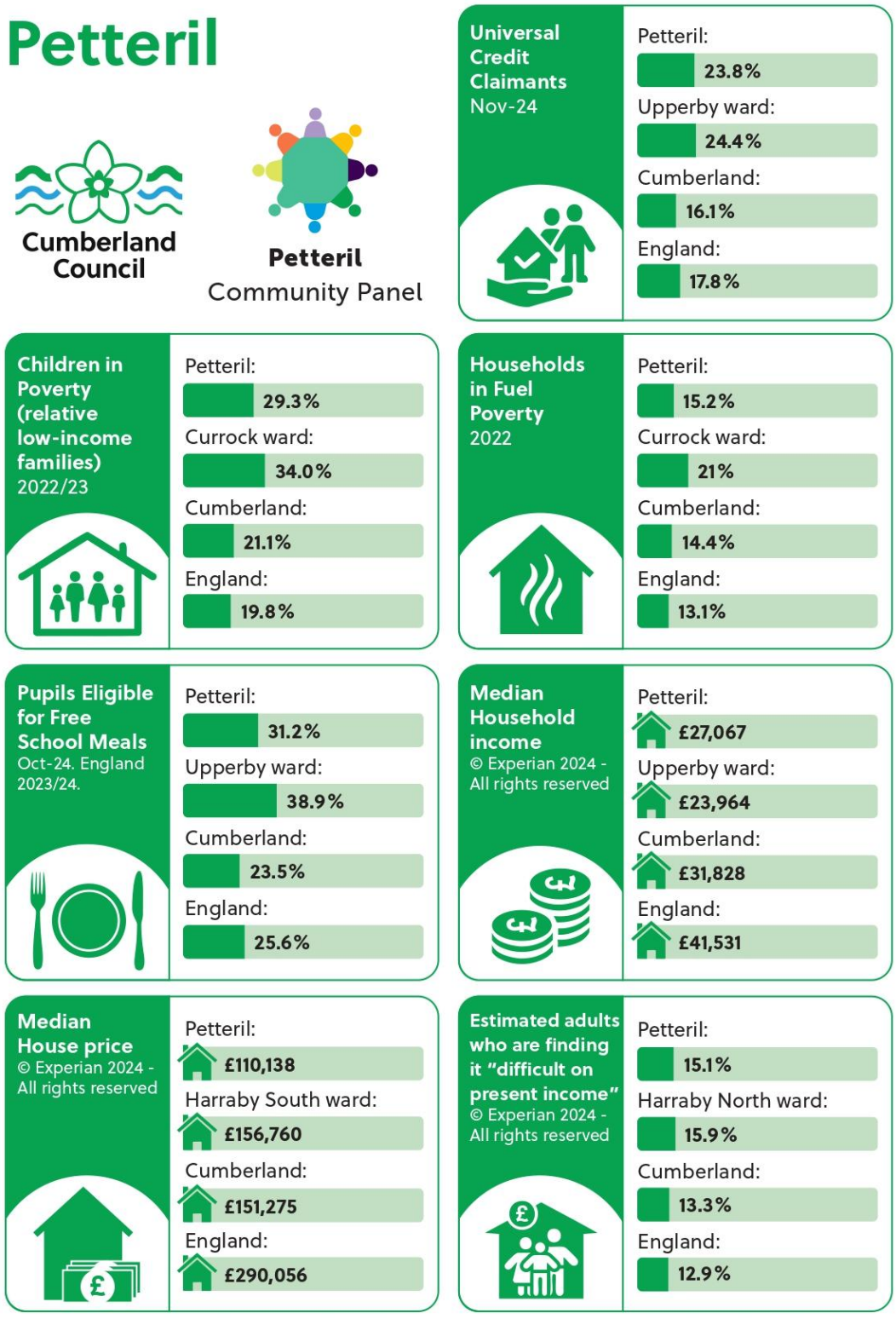
Appendix 1: Cumbria Youth Co-research Collective Timeline



Appendix 2: Petteril Community Panel Infographic



Some estimates have been calculated locally; some are provisional and may be subject to revision therefore they should be used with care and caution.