



Summary Report:

From Barriers to Positive Activities to the Normalisation of Drugs





About the Bradford PAC Team

The Bradford Peer Action Collective (PAC) is a group of young people working with Bradford City FC Community Foundation to lead research into issues that matter, including youth crime and violence, safety and barriers to accessing positive activities. Using their lived experience and local knowledge, the team connects with young people across Bradford to listen, learn, and lead change.



Through the Peer Action Collective (PAC) young people are working to make their communities safer, fairer places to live. The PAC team is here to support young people to take the lead.

This project is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Co-op.





Methodology

Our Research Approach: Youth-Led Research Driving Change

This research was guided by a central question:

What barriers prevent young people from accessing positive activities that protect them from violence?

Through this lens, the research in phase two explored the significant and often overlooked impact of drugs on young people in Bradford.

Using a youth-led, qualitative methodology, the project was carried out by trained Peer Researchers and a Social Action Lead, who facilitated one-to-one interviews and focus groups across two research phases. Each phase was designed not just to gather insight, but to activate meaningful social actions, ensuring that findings directly informed solutions co-created and led by young people.

Ethical integrity was at the core of the process:

- Participation was entirely voluntary
- Informed consent was obtained from all contributors
- Anonymity and confidentiality were respected
- Robust safeguarding protocols ensured a safe, inclusive, and respectful research environment





Phase 1: What Stops Young People from Accessing Positive Activities?

For our first phase as a PAC delivery partner, we began exploring a key question:

“What are the barriers that prevent young people from accessing positive activities that could protect them from violence?”

Through this first round of research, we engaged with a diverse group of young people across Bradford, using a combination of 1:1 interviews and group discussions. The conversations revealed several consistent themes:





Our Initial Research Findings



- **Cost:** Many young people simply couldn't afford to access clubs, events, or transport to safe places.



- **Safety:** Feeling unsafe was a major barrier to going out or engaging in community life, particularly for girls and young women.



- **Distrust in Services:** Young people described poor relationships with institutions like the police and council, reporting they felt unheard and overlooked.



- **Lack of Opportunities:** There was a widespread feeling that “there’s nothing for us” especially in areas like BD3 and central Bradford.



- **Mental Health:** Ongoing anxiety, trauma, and low self-esteem stopped many from getting involved, even when opportunities existed.



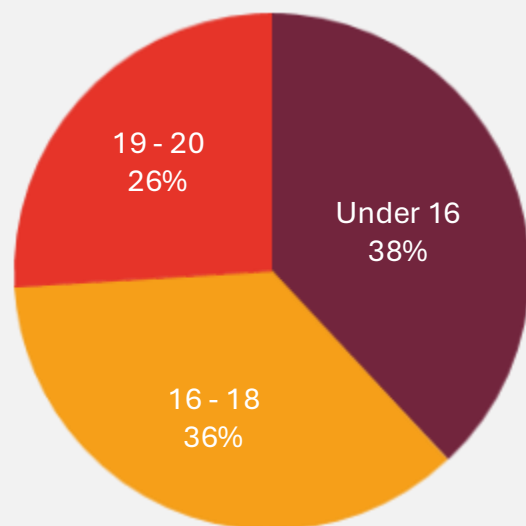
- **Lack of Role Models:** A recurring issue was the absence of trusted, relatable adults to guide and inspire positive life choices.



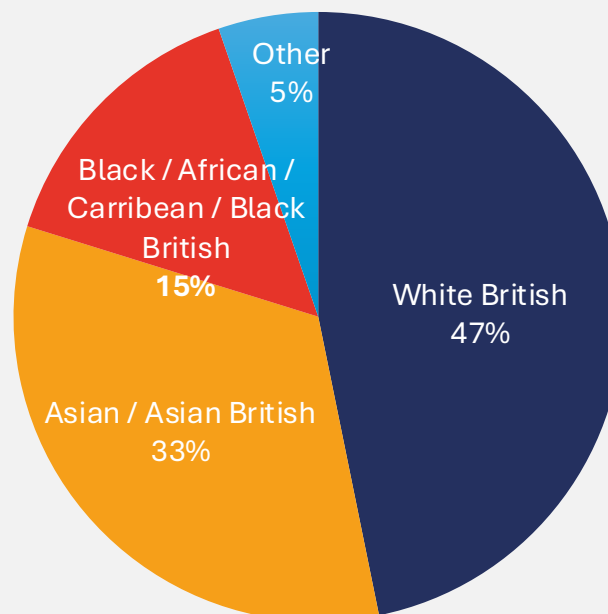
Breakdown Of Research Participants

AGE BREAKDOWN

■ Under 16 ■ 16 - 18 ■ 19 - 20

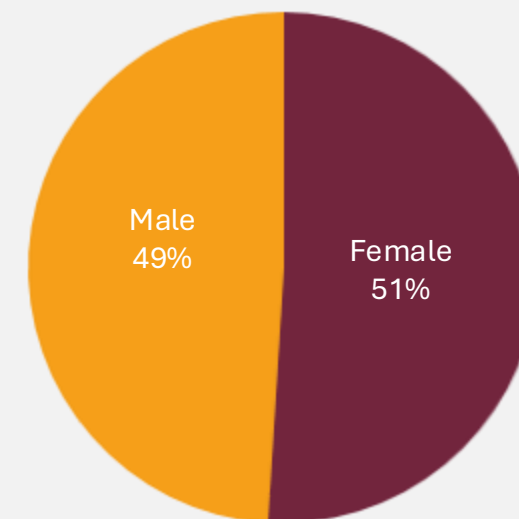


ETHNICITY BREAKDOWN



GENDER BREAKDOWN

■ Female ■ Male



■ White British ■ Asian / Asian British ■ Black / African / Caribbean / Black British ■ Other



Case Study 1

Lived Experience of Youth Crime and Barriers to accessing Positive Activities

20-year-old | White British, Male

A young man from BD6 shared his experience growing up in a deprived, high-crime area. He described Bradford as underfunded, unsafe, and “forgotten.” Youth centres were inaccessible due to cost or danger, and positive spaces like parks had become hotspots for violence.

Despite a passion for sport, financial hardship blocked opportunities, rugby club fees and travel costs were unaffordable. Attempts to escape the cycle of poverty led to drug dealing at a young age, driven by the desire to “stop being skint” and feel a sense of pride and independence. Violence became normalised.

He spoke of a lack of visible policing and youth workers who “just follow orders,” highlighting a broken system. Most young people, he said, “don’t leave the estate.” Key deterrents to youth participation include cost, travel, safety, peer conflict, and poor advertising.



Key Insight:

The young man said young people need accessible, safe spaces, trusted adults, and visible local investment. Solutions must be flexible, community-informed, and relationship-driven. Above all, they need to feel seen and valued.



Drugs Emerged... Without Us Even Asking

What surprised us during this phase was that many young people mentioned drugs, even though we hadn't directly asked about them.

They spoke about:

- Seeing drugs used or sold daily.
- Friends or family affected by addiction.
- Drugs being “just normal” especially weed.
- The link between drugs, gangs, money and survival.
- The pressure to fit in by using or dealing.
- It became clear that drug use and its impacts were deeply woven into the lives of young people in Bradford, and this couldn't be ignored.





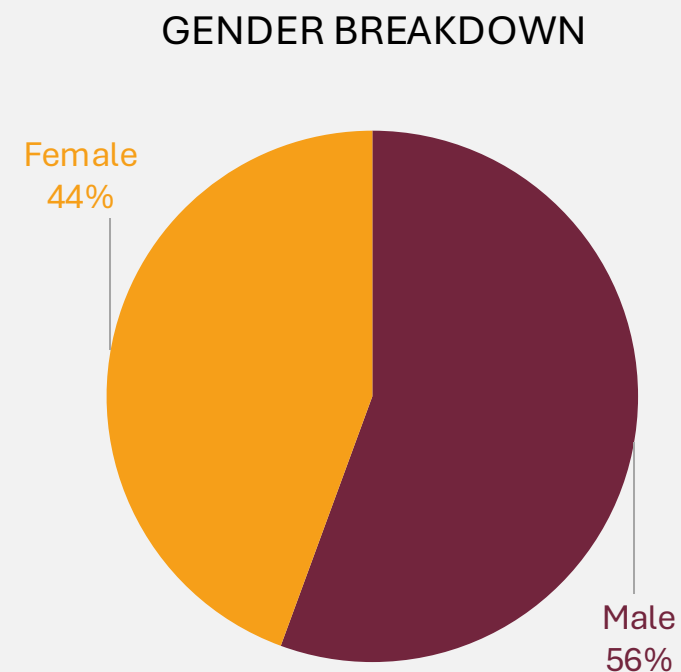
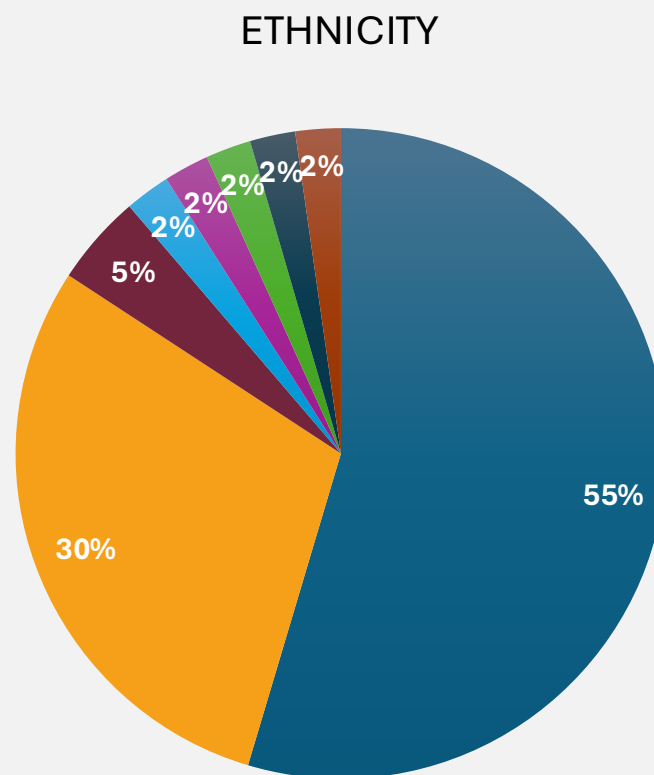
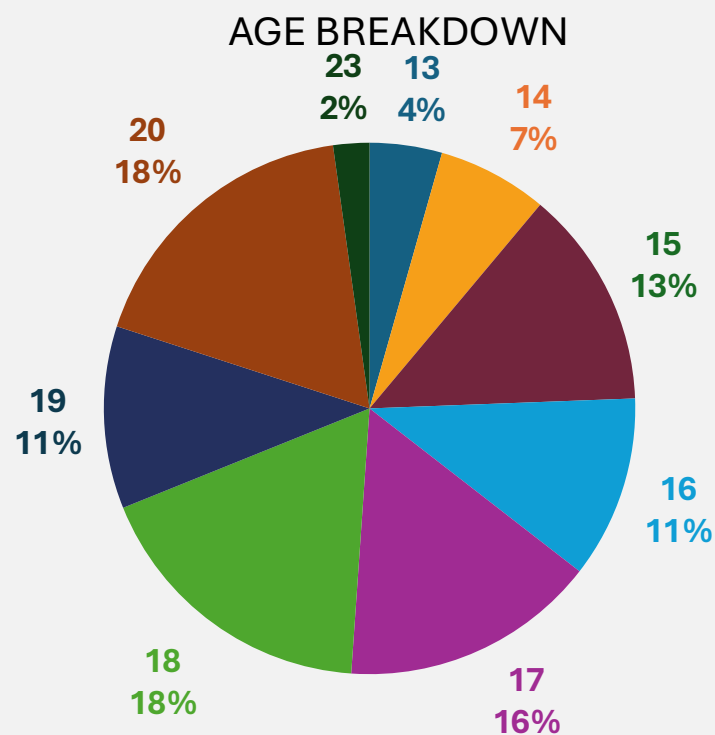
Phase 2: How Are Drugs Affecting Young People's Lives?

Following on from this initial phase, we launched a second round of research, specifically focused on drugs and their impact. This involved 45 young people, all interviewed through peer-led methods, by young people, for young people.





Breakdown Of Research Participants



White British Pakistani African Mixed
Black British Caribbean Arab Indian



Our Research Findings



- **Peer Pressure & Normalisation:** Weed and other drugs were often seen as a normal part of life. Saying no wasn't easy.



- **Social Media Influence:** Drugs, partying and risky behaviour were being glamorised online.



- **Addiction & Family Strain:** Several shared stories of addiction tearing families apart, creating cycles of poverty and instability.



- **Lack of Role Models & Guidance:** Young people said they needed adults, parents, teachers, mentors, who would set boundaries and offer support.



- **Drug Dealing as “Easy Money”:** In areas with little opportunity, dealing was often seen as one of the few ways to make fast cash.



- **Links to Violence & Gangs:** Drugs weren't just a personal issue. They were tied to fights, weapons, and fear in the community.



- **Safety & Vulnerability:** Young people, especially girls, felt unsafe in areas where drugs were openly used or sold.





Case Study 2

“Too Expensive a Life” The Reality of Drug Dealing

Young person speaks about Drugs in Bradford

20-year-old | White British, Male

Growing up in BD13, this young person recalls drugs being part of life from as early as six years old: “My mum smoked weed... sold drugs to feed us.” By the age of ten, he was using cannabis himself, drawn in by normalisation and lack of adult guidance. “Weed was everywhere... it was cool,” he said, explaining how it led to harder substances and eventual dealing.

He described how easily drug use and selling intersect: “Your dealer becomes your mate... next thing, you’re running for them.” This “trap” fed a cycle of exploitation, violence, and emotional fallout. “I’ve been smashed with bats, shot at... I’ve done damage too. Broke a guy’s jaw. I still feel guilty.”

While he acknowledges fault, he criticises structural failures: “School knew I was off for weeks. No one cared.” He stresses prevention over punishment: “Consequences aren’t real until they are.”

Today, he’s left that life behind but says support is lacking: “No systems help you restart. I was lucky I met my partner.” His message to youth is clear: “It’s too expensive, mentally, physically, emotionally. Just get a job. Pay your taxes.”

Despite challenges he faced growing up, he still finds hope in Bradford’s increasing unity: “People from all backgrounds are mixing now. That’s progress.”





Case Study 3

“It Never Ends Well”

A Young Woman’s Perspective on Drugs in Bradford

20-year-old | White British, Female

Growing up in Bradford, this young person witnessed drug culture, evolving from casual experimentation into addiction and danger. “At first, it was just joints at parties. It felt cool. But by 18, I started seeing the consequences, addiction, psychosis, even death.”

Though she has never used hard drugs, her proximity to others who did deeply impacted her. “I was 14, seeing a boy who got arrested with bags of coke and weed. Suddenly people were looking for me. I didn’t even know them, it was terrifying.” She later learned he had unknowingly smoked weed laced with spice and ended up in psychiatric care.

Violence, too, came close. “Guys booted in our car door. He was calm, I was nearly crying. You wonder, do people get desensitised?”

She believes early intervention and role models are crucial: “Positive adults are everything. I always had my mum’s voice in my head: ‘Don’t touch it.’” She calls for drug education to begin in primary school, not just high school, and urges investment in youth services.

Her message is clear: “Whether you’re directly involved or just the girlfriend, it never ends well. Don’t get involved.”

She ends with hope: “Bradford’s youth are passionate. They know what they want and they’re going for it.”





Conclusion: From Barriers to a Bigger Picture

- Our research began with a question about access to positive activities, but young people led us to something much deeper. We learned that the lack of safe spaces, trusted adults, and meaningful opportunities doesn't just leave young people bored or isolated, it leaves a gap that drugs, gangs, and violence can fill.
- This journey from “nothing to do” to “why drugs feel unavoidable” has shaped a clear message:
- If we want to reduce drug use and violence among young people in Bradford, we must invest in safe spaces, youth-led opportunities, early education, and trusted relationships. Young people know what's missing, and they're ready to be part of the solution.





Our Social Action Work

Following on from our research, we decided to implement numerous social action projects addressing the issues that young people had shared with us in our research.





Digital Map For Local Youth Activities

- In response to lack of knowledge of positive activities, one of the first initiatives that emerged from our research was the **Bradford Digital Map**, created to help young people easily find local positive activities in their area. This map was made accessible via mobile phones and desktop devices to ensure that young people could engage with it on their preferred platforms.



- Bradford Council's Support:** After its creation, Bradford Council played a key role by distributing the map to all schools in Bradford and uploading it onto Bradford Schools Online. The map was officially launched on 3rd February 2025 at Bradford City Hall, which was well attended by key stakeholders and young people who had been consulted during the research process.



- Current Efforts:** We are now conducting surveys to gather feedback from organisations listed on the map to assess whether their footfall has increased. In addition, we are running surveys for young people to determine whether the map has been a useful tool in finding and accessing local activities, and the impact this has had on them.





Our Quarterly Roundtable With First Buses To Discuss Travel Issues

- In response to transportation challenges faced by young people, Bradford PAC hosted a roundtable event in March 2025, where youth, local service, and transportation providers discussed the lack of awareness around available public transport deals. Young people expressed that they were unaware of cheaper public transport options available to them.



- **Transport Providers Involvement:** Representatives from LNER, Northern Rail, and First Buses expressed interest in setting up a youth forum with Bradford PAC. This forum will allow young people to share their experiences and provide input on public transport services.



- **Quarterly Meetings:** A significant outcome of this roundtable is the decision to hold quarterly meetings with the First Buses marketing team. These meetings are providing a platform for continued consultation and collaboration with young people.



Tackling
Barriers 2



Transport
roundtable



Our Peer Action Collective Toolkits

Real Voices | Real Change | Youth Leading the Way

This resource has been developed by the Bradford PAC team as a practical guide for organisations working with young people. It captures our learning from youth-led research and social action, with real insight into what's happening on the ground and how to respond. From understanding barriers to taking action, this toolkit supports others to involve young people meaningfully in shaping safer, more supportive communities.

Creating Youth Forums That Matter

At Bradford PAC, we believe young people should be at the heart of the decisions that affect them and not on the sidelines. Through our youth-led research, one key issue kept coming up:

Young people don't feel heard, especially when it comes to the barriers they face such as travel, safety, or access to opportunities.

We've included what's worked, what we've learned, and how our growing partnership with First Buses and the Bradford PAC team is evolving into something much bigger than a youth forum – it's becoming a platform for real transformation.

If you would like any further information, please contact:
Pavan Sembi: office@bcfccommunity.co.uk





Transforming Lives: A Collaborative School Workshop with Mark Stevens

About the Programme

We are proud to partner with Mark Stevens, a powerful and inspirational voice for change. Mark shares his deeply personal story with honesty and vulnerability, drawing on a journey that spans early fame, personal downfall, and remarkable transformation.

Once a celebrated actor on the Australian hit series *Neighbours*, Mark's life spiralled into addiction and crime, leading to a period of incarceration. Following his release, Mark experienced a profound personal awakening. Through faith and purpose, he rebuilt his life and committed himself to using his experience to inspire and guide others, especially young people.

In collaboration with Mark's organisation, **Sound of Change**, we are delivering an engaging workshop programme for secondary schools. These workshops address key themes of mental health, substance misuse, identity, and resilience, providing students with both insight and tools for personal growth.

Programme Highlights

- Evidence-Based Insight – Led by PAC's research-informed approach
- Lived Experience Storytelling – Through Mark's compelling personal journey (SOC)
- Guided Reflection – Space for students to process and engage
- Creative Expression – Activities that empower personal response
- Holistic Engagement – Emotional, mental, and creative connection

Together, this model delivers powerful impact while creating space for long-term growth and dialogue.





Our Targets & KPIs

Bradford City FC Community Foundation	Final Targets	Actual Figures
Peer Researchers (recruited)	5	7
Social Action Leads (recruited)	1	1
Research Participants	75	82
National survey participants - Yorkshire & Humber	350	269
Changemakers	40	51
SA Participants	100	163
Total Participants	396	573



Bradford Peer Action Collective



Proudly supporting
youth social action



Department
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COMMUNITY
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