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IN THE COMMUNITY



# Research Report!

## 24/25

## Building Better Safe Spaces

If you've found this, you've reached the Hull Peer Action Collective (PAC) Team's Research Report 24/25

We're so excited to have you here. In Hull, the impact of youth crime and violence deeply affects our younger generation. For the past two years, the Peer Action Collective (PAC) has been right here, working tirelessly to tackle this challenge head-on. Our approach is simple yet powerful: we create spaces where **young people** come together, speak up, sharing their experiences in an environment they are listened to. We empower them to uncover the root causes of the issues affecting their communities and explore how these challenges show up in their own neighbourhoods. We are **young people**, looking out for our youth. Using our voices to amplify the issues that we are facing to those who hold power in government and local councils.

We've spent these two years connecting with **young people** across Hull, truly listening to their stories. Our goal is to bridge the gap between their experiences and the obstacles that stand in the way of the life they truly deserve, a life filled with economic stability, opportunities to grow, and, most importantly, safety.



Proudly supporting  
youth social action



Department  
for Culture,  
Media & Sport



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## What is the Peer Action Collective?

PAC is a ground-breaking network of Peer Researchers, Social Action Leads and Changemakers.

Through the Peer Action Collective (PAC) **young people** are working to make their communities safer, fairer places to live. PAC is made up of a number of teams of **young people** across England and Wales, all with this shared goal. We are the Hull PAC team.

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, the PAC is here to support **young people** to take the lead.

Thanks to their funding, we've been able to launch two research projects that interconnected with each other. "Addressing Barriers to Positive Activities" and "Building Better Safe Spaces."

Our projects originally started out as research projects, this means using qualitative data gathered from **young people** to understand their thoughts and any issues that arise within the community. After this phase is done we move onto social action, this is where we present our findings and recommendations to stakeholders and put plans in place to make change!



# Who are we?

We are a team of 4 **young people** who live in, or are connected to Hull and have a shared desire to improve their area for all **young people**.

Our team of **young people** are supported by the Tigers Trust, an independent charity linked to Hull City Football Club. Tigers Trust is a self-funded charity, placed right at the heart of the city. Through their work, the Tigers Trust promote the values linked with sporting success and help up-skill participants through practical activity as well as running courses, events and promoting their work in schools across the Hull and East Yorkshire region. Involvement in community projects can help tackle a wide range of issues including health, youth crime and unemployment.

For more information about the Hull PAC team scan or click here



**PAC in Hull is also supported by EFL in the Community**

**EFL in the Community is the charitable arm of the EFL (English Football League). EFL Football Clubs are based in the heart of 72 communities located all across the country;**

- **Over 47.6 million people live within 15 miles of an EFL Club**
- **Over 40.4 million live within 10 miles of an EFL Club**
- **This represents 80% and 68% of the population of England and Wales respectively.**

**The Clubs' associated Community Organisations use the power of Football and the affinity people have to their team, to deliver a wide range of community initiatives focusing on raising people's aspirations and quality of life.**

**EFL in the Community is the main advocate for all EFL Club Community Organisations.**



# What is peer research?

The research was designed and delivered using a peer research approach, in which **young people** with lived experience of youth violence and marginalisation acted as researchers. This approach ensured that participants felt safe, understood and empowered to share honest and meaningful insights.

## Reflections of A Peer Researcher

### Lewis Doyle, 24

When I first encountered PAC, I was immediately struck by the opportunity it offered. As a criminology student, I had studied the impact of community on individuals, and the project seemed like a perfect chance to see those ideas in action. I eagerly arranged an interview and spoke passionately about my love for Hull and the experiences I had gathered during my time here.

I began my journey as a peer researcher, learning the ropes and gaining insight into how community initiatives can shape lives. Over time, I grew more confident and eventually became a social action lead, taking on leadership responsibilities and supporting others in their roles.

I had always been reserved and quiet, but PAC transformed my confidence. Through collaboration, public speaking, and active involvement, I developed a sense of self-assurance that extends far beyond the project. Looking back, I see a completely different person - more confident, engaged, and connected to both my community and my own potential. PAC has been a truly transformative experience, shaping not only my skills but also my perspective on the impact one individual can make.



*"I have been the Chair of the Tigers Trust Youth Voice Group alongside my PAC role since it began and it has been really inspiring to hear people's stories and experiences. I feel like this role has allowed me to grow as a person, teaching me skills such as presentational and interactive skills. It's been great to see people find solutions to problems and have young people's voices heard" Kieran Thorn, 18*

## Abbie Brown, 18

I joined the Peer Action Collective in October 2023, at the start of the second project. I joined this job because I wanted to make a change to my area, with youth violence being something I had seen firsthand and not seen any efforts to tackle the challenge in a creative way. This job has been all about getting information from the source of **young people** and then making our social action plans based on what we have learnt from our **young people**, rather than making our own assumptions and plans.

We wanted to do our best to get **young people's** voices heard, so after we conducted several interviews and focus groups to collect valuable input from our **young people** of Hull, we created our youth voice which expands further than PAC and we hope to carry on even after the project ends, **young people** need a long lasting voice, and we have tried our hardest to make this dream become reality.

My personal journey with PAC has been the most impactful thing in my life, it is my first and only job, which has given me the vital tools I have needed to go further in life including going to university to study politics, and hopefully continue work within this sector. The work we have done will be long lasting, and forever make an impact into the way other projects go forward, the peer research method has proved to be extremely effective and all of the techniques and methods we have used are such a vital thing to learn and take forward into the future. I am very thankful to have been a part of such a great project, and I am excited to see where this project goes in the future.



# Why do we do it?

## Reasech Question One

*'How can we address the barriers that prevent young people from feeling comfortable, safe and confident to access positive activities in Yorkshire that could protect them from violence?'*

Yorkshire is the area with the second highest rate of children and **young people** receiving cautions and court sentences in the country, and the highest outside of London.

In Hull, 32% of **young people** live in income deprived households, with 27% of that living in 'absolute' deprivation, which include many where parents and/or carers are working, along with youth employment being 2% higher than the national average.

It's also reported that **young people** in Hull have poorer health and wellbeing than the regional and national average. With increased levels of deprivation, there is a clear need for support in this area.

We know that positive activities can help children and **young people** improve their physical and mental health, develop positive behaviours and build confidence.

Our first round of research highlighted the need for more accessible safe spaces for **young people** in our area.

*"There used to be loads of youth centres, lots of clubs, but because of budget cuts, government cutbacks and stuff, there's hardly any left now. I think those used to be really good at keeping young people off the streets and teaching them skills and getting them into different hobbies and making new friends. But now they've got nowhere to go in the evening, so they just hang about in packs at bus stations, getting mixed in the wrong crowd. So I think that's how people sort of get drawn in. I think that's what causes a lot of issues.*

*It's poverty, its budget cuts, its lack of opportunities". -Male, 20*

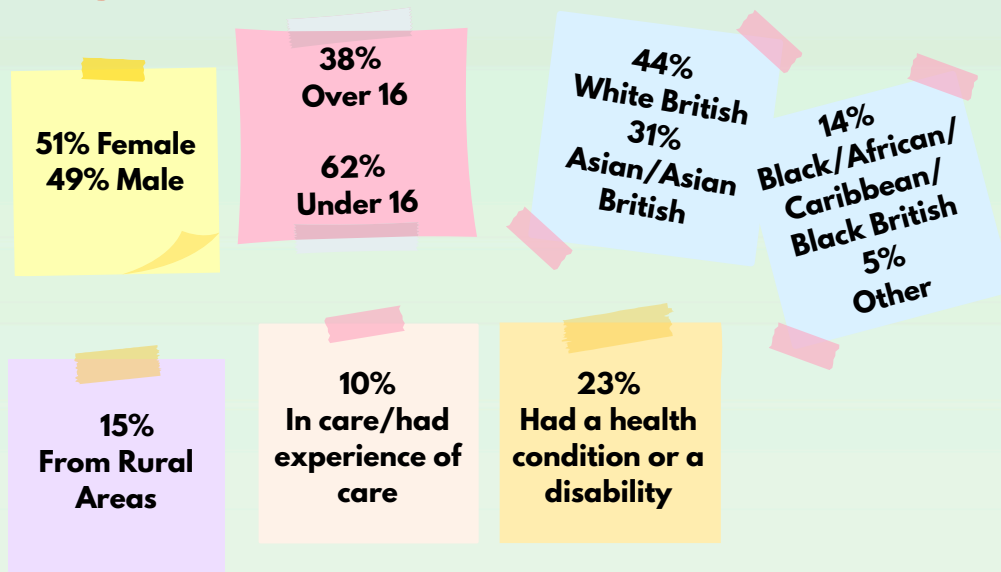


"A lot of youth centres have been shut down. There used to be one near where I live, and that's been shut down recently... It's got no funding going into it anymore and it's run by volunteers or with very little money. And there's not a lot of outreach to people". -Female, 19

"A lot of the activities cost a lot of money. I chose dance. So when I used to dance, it cost thousands of pounds a year for costumes, lessons, things like that. There's not a lot of options out there as well". -Female, 19

Overall, 77 research participants took part in this first round research which consisted of interviews and focus-groups. To take part in the research **young people** had to be between the ages of 10 and 20 be at risk of being involved in violence (attending school or youth provision) in East and West Yorkshire.

## Q1 Demographics

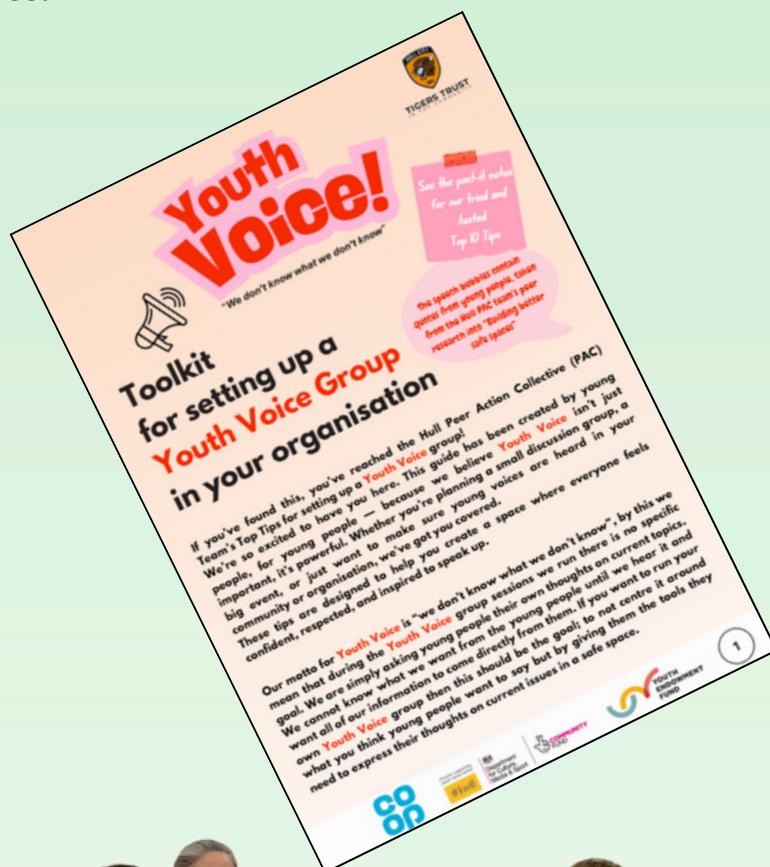


As a team we decided that a good course of action would be to open up a Youth Room at the Tigers Trust arena with free access for **young people** in the area. The Youth Room was an existing provision in need of a revamp.

We also expanded on the need for **young people** to have their voices heard by starting up a Youth Voice group at Tigers Trust. This completely youth led initiative at Tigers Trust emphasises how vital it is to hear from **young people** around the effectiveness of services and how things can be improved to meet the needs of **young people** across the city.

Creating a Youth Voice allows young people to have their voices heard on things that matter to them. It also creates a space where young people can make a change through their voices.

We have developed a comprehensive toolkit designed to guide other organisations through the steps of establishing their own Youth Voice groups. This toolkit not only outlines practical steps but also highlights lessons learned, best practices, and key considerations to ensure long-term success. Ultimately, our overarching goal is to expand opportunities for young people to be heard, fostering inclusive platforms that amplify as many young voices as possible and encourage meaningful engagement across communities.



To access a copy of our Toolkit please scan or click here



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## Research Topic Two "Building Better Safe Spaces"

After finding evidence that **young people** need access to safe spaces in Hull, we decided to explore exactly what it was that **young people** wanted and needed from these safe spaces. We believe that safe spaces for **young people** should be informed by **young people**. **Young people** need to have their voices heard on things that directly effect them.

The research conducted by Hull PAC at Tigers Trust explores **young people's** perceptions of safe spaces and the characteristics of trusted adults. This phase, which was built on the participatory and youth-led methodology established in the initial research, prioritising lived experience and co-produced inquiry.





# Method

We spoke to 32 **young people** aged between 12 – 18 years old in Hull and East Yorkshire. We decided to focus on gathering our research participants from alternative provision schools. Typically **young people** who attend these settings are more likely to have knowledge or experience of violence and are a group of **young people** who are often under represented. We wanted to give these **young people** a chance to have their voices heard.

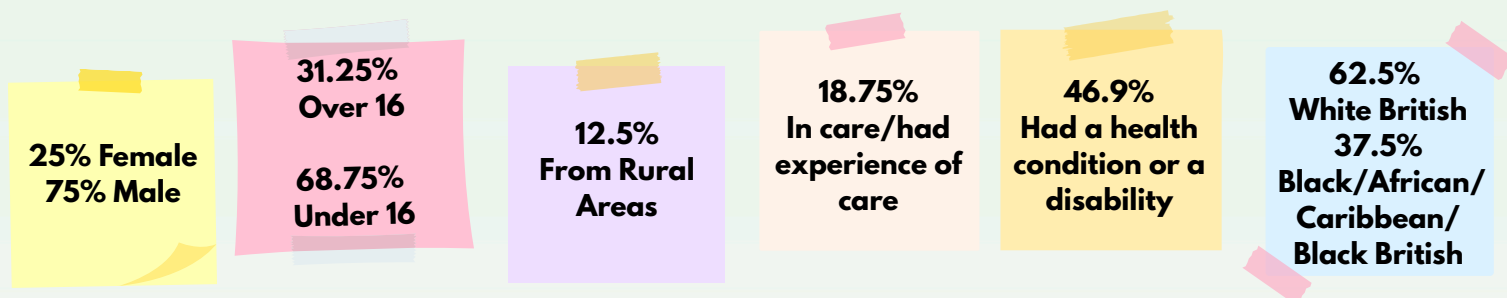
The method we used for our research was an interactive workshop (7 workshops in total). Designed by our Peer Researchers this workshop focused on structure, activities, rules and trusted adults in safe spaces. The workshop included activities with post-it notes, Jenga blocks and group discussions around scenarios in a safe space.

Each workshop was preceded by an icebreaker visit. During this informal visit the team introduced PAC, played some games and developed positive relationships with the research participants. This led to an environment of trust and comfort for the workshops, allowing the research participants to open up in a safe space.

Informed consent was recorded for all participants before data collection commenced, with parental consent collected for participants under 16 years of age. Our procedures were externally reviewed for ethical considerations prior to data collection by members of the Young Foundation.

All workshops were recorded and then transcribed with the transcripts used to spot themes and patterns regarding **young people's** views on “Building Better Safe Spaces”

## Q2 Demographics



# Our Findings



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# Trusted Adults

When talking about staff and ultimately trusted adults in a safe space, there was a lot of proactive engagement from the **young people**! The main reoccurring theme was that **young people** want someone they can relate to, someone they can treat more like a friend or older sibling! Here are a few quotes from our **young people** on what a trusted adult is and what sort of person they want in a safe space.

"-anyone that you can talk to about anything really"

- Male, 14

"the thing you want to see in a staff member is that they're there to keep you safe. They're there to make sure you have someone who you didn't have" -Female, 16

"If you have good staff people can relate to them"

-Male, 14

"Yes, I think staffs definitely a good one because its like... it's just like someone that you can relate to is really good... someone who can play video games with us" -Male, 14

Other frequently used words by our research participants when discussing trusted adults in safe spaces were

- kind
- fair
- understanding
- reliable
- patient

Having staff around, especially when it comes to safe spaces for **young people**, can be a tricky and often touchy subject, sometimes getting strong reactions.

"I hate staff members with a passion - I hate them judging you." Male, 15

This raw outburst really shows a big hurdle in creating environments that are supposed to feel safe and supportive.



At the heart of this participant's issue is the feeling of being judged. When **young people** feel like they're being constantly watched or assessed by adults who are meant to be people they can trust, it messes with the whole point of a safe space. The role of adults in these settings is actually pretty complex: first and foremost, it's to make sure **young people** are safe and well. But often, that responsibility goes hand-in-hand with needing to enforce rules, which is common in places like schools.

## Rules

The problem starts when enforcing rules feels too strict or like punishment. This rigidity can accidentally break down the trust that's super important for **young people** to open up, ask for help, and feel secure. If the line between guiding them and judging them gets blurry, it can lead to them feeling cut off and not wanting to deal with staff, no matter how good the adults' intentions are. So, the challenge is finding that sweet spot: keeping necessary boundaries and order while also building a vibe of empathy, understanding, and non-judgmental support that genuinely builds trust and helps **young people** feel truly safe and respected.

Overall what we found within one key theme, rules, was that **young people** do actually want rules in a safe space, but that it was quite dependent on how the rules were enforced and linked in heavily with the qualities they wanted in a staff member as to how they wanted bad situations to be dealt with.

*"It's like a sanction system. The first one is a warning, the second one is a second warning, and then the third one is removing you to the room and you sit there quietly, and then the fourth one is detention"*

*-Male, 16*

This explains something similar to a school warning system structure, and how they want there to be a fair system within warnings instead of doing one thing wrong and being kicked out of the group fully. By acknowledging mistakes and giving chances it helps with the bond between staff and **young people**, making it even more of a safe space.

One other young person spoke about this very well, and how staff enforcing rules helps the **young people** improve their character.

*"I feel like you choose your own path, you chose your own way, you'd talk to them to see what would be a matter from you changing and to improve that to make you the better person you are"*

*-Female, 16*

Throughout the workshops there was a clear emphasis on the need for fairness of rules and sanctions. A lot of participants appeared to have had negative experience of adults treating them unfairly or jumping to conclusions. A lot of **young people** spoke about the need for adults to discuss issues away from the group in a calm and supportive way before any sanctions were imposed. A number of **young people** highlighted that when conflict between two **young people** in a safe space occurs then it is important to hear out both sides of the event before any actions are taken.

*"Pick them out away from everyone else and discuss what happened and what you would do to avoid it and then make them shake hands" -Male, 13*

*"I feel they need to be tolerant so that they can learn to take the mistakes easily instead of just overreacting and escalating the situation" - Male, 13*

The **young people** we spoke with seem to feel that because they didn't attend main stream education they found it difficult to shake the "naughty kid" label and were often unfairly treated because of this.

# Structure

While participants valued freedom and choice, they also recognised the importance of structure in creating safe environments. Many **young people** suggested that too rigid a structure would limit choice, whereas a light structure - such as a flexible schedule of activities, clear ground rules, or a booking system to manage numbers - would help things run smoothly and prevent conflict.

*"I'd say that's the main thing you need, structure. You need young people to go there and you need members of staff to talk to them young people who need help." -Male, 13*

**Young people** have consistently stated that safe spaces must be more than just places to go; they must be welcoming, inclusive, and comfortable. For many, this meant having a calm and relaxed environment in which they could "chill" without feeling compelled to perform or behave in overly formal ways.

*"It's gotta be a nice atmosphere. An atmosphere where I can talk to people, I can connect with people instead of having everyone sided to themselves and not really communicating. So, I feel like atmosphere that's important."*

*-Female, 15*

*"It needs to have a good atmosphere. Otherwise the most of them's gone."*

*-Male, 16*

The atmosphere was frequently described as something that could be influenced by both the physical environment (comfortable furniture, good lighting, and even outdoor access) and the social environment (music, activities, and staff members' attitudes).



# Our Recommendations



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# Trusted Adults

**Trusted Adults are really important to young people!**

Involve young people in the application and interview process for adults working in safe spaces. Young people could suggest interview questions or even be on the panel.

Young people want adults who will interact positively with them, a trial session could give a chance for them to show this. Young people suggested playing board games or video games together could help the interaction.

# Rules

**Young people do want rules!**

Get young people to make a list of their own rules, give some prompts if needed but ultimately let them talk together and decide.

Creating rules together is good for starting group conversations and for young people to get to know each other as a sort of icebreaker, as something like this would be done at the start of making a youth group.

Rules should also go alongside a behaviour system, so that young people who don't follow rules are aware of the consequences. This should be fair and consistent like a warning system. This should be in the initial discussion and let the young people decide what they want to be in place for consequences.

# Structure

**Young people say they need structure!**

Prioritise a welcoming atmosphere, young people need to feel like they are welcomed and belong. Very simple but always greet them with a smile.

Include fun and varied activities from reading corners to gaming stations, there should be an activity for all personalities to engage and have fun.

Let young people in when it comes to decision-making - this is a space for them, give them space to shape and own it.

# The Future

One thing is evident from our research: youth spaces must be designed with youth voices front and centre, because they know what they need to feel safe and supported. For them, safety is more than just avoiding trouble; it's about having spaces where they can unwind, chill and connect with others in a way that feels natural. According to them, the best places strike a balance between structure and freedom; they have clear rules and reliable adults to help them, but they also allow for flexibility, choice and a warm environment that is genuinely theirs.

Our work also puts a focus on the impact of years of underfunding and the closure of youth centres, which have left many **young people** with “nowhere to go”, was also brought to light by our research. When their ideas are taken into consideration and acted on, whether it's through activity selection, layout design, or helping set rules, engagement increases, trust is strengthened, and the space becomes something they value and protect.

Moving forward, meaningful co-design and consultation with **young people** shouldn't be an add-on; it should be the foundation of any safe space established in their communities.

## Toolkit

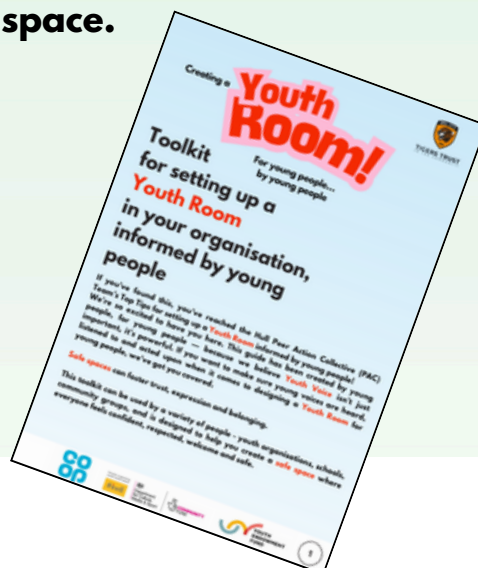
We believe that establishing such spaces can play a key role in reducing youth crime and violence. Wanting to share our approach, we reflected on the steps we took to design a Youth Room shaped by the voices of **young people** themselves. From this, we developed a set of do's and don'ts for others to follow, which we compiled into a practical toolkit.

Our hope is that other organisations use this toolkit to discover what **young people** in their communities want from a safe space.

To access a copy of our Toolkit please scan or click here



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Thank you for reading our report, please share, feedback and let us know if we can work together in any way to help tackle youth violence and crime by giving **young people** a voice!



<https://www.tigertrust.co.uk>



<https://www.peeractioncollective.com>



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