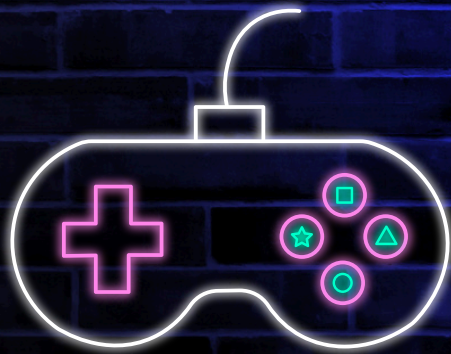


Young people have spoken, now they invite you to

# LISTEN...

*prevent violence*



## YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK

Evidence Base Report  
October 2024



Over 200 young people in Cornwall used their voices and lived experience of serious violence to co-produce recommendations for practitioners and services to better involve them



*Hear what they have to say.*

**SAFER  
CORNWALL**

Kernow Salwa



**PREVENTING  
SERIOUS  
VIOLENCE**  
BREAKING THE CYCLE

# Young People's Participation Framework

## Evidence Base Report

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## **1. Executive Summary**

In 2024, the Serious Violence Prevention Programme (SVPP) Steering Group commissioned Young People Cornwall to research and co-design strategies for effectively integrating young people's voices and feedback into violence prevention services. The research was led by Kate Sidwell, Youth and Community Work Manager.

Through collaboration with both young people and partners, a comprehensive framework was developed. Offering practical, evidence-based tools to promote the meaningful participation of young people within violence prevention services. This framework is directly informed by the lived experiences of young people affected by violence, as well as research on local and national best practices.

The framework presents a range of recommendations for how the SVPP, and partner organisations can better engage with young people. To truly understand their perspectives, participation must occur at multiple levels and in trusted relationships and spaces where young people feel safe to speak. Anonymous reporting mechanisms are also required.

Young people were committed to this process as a way to prevent violence; even if they were sceptical initially if organisations would really listen to them in a sustained and long-term way. Young people want their practical ideas – outlined in the Framework – to be received as ways to increase how young people's voices are heard. And then acted upon.

## **2. Key Achievements**

- Engaged 293 young people in the project. 48% of those reporting in the questionnaire had a lived experience of violence. 57% replying to the questionnaire stated they wanted to stay involved.
- Subsequently ran 30 groups – delivered by Young People Cornwall or other organisations and networks. Please see Appendix 1.
- The project engaged both young people who have been victims of serious violence, and young people involved in serious violence.
- Of those who remained involved to the end of the project (34 young people) 94% had a lived experience of violence.
- Young people with a lived experience of violence across Cornwall had similar ideas about how organisations could embed youth voice in their delivery.
- Many young people shared similar outcomes from their lived experience. They stated they had reported harm a number of times at various ages, and their view of how agencies responded was not what they thought it should be. This now affected how they dealt with serious violence incidents.
- Young people were and are committed to creating change and reducing violence through organisations hearing them.

### 3. Young People's Participation Framework

#### HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN HEAR YOUNG PEOPLE TO PREVENT VIOLENCE



**CONTRACTS** with organisations so they stick to what they say they will do. Reward the ones who do good. (Reward schemes, badges, extra holiday, gift cards, meet the king.)



**VOICE BOXES** - Anonymous (protected) reporting for all young people.



**COMMUNITY SCHEMES** - More safe spaces to report. (youth centers, wellbeing hubs, specific places within schools, hospitals and other communal areas.) Posters, stickers, QR codes and links in and around these places.



**TRAIN WORKERS** - Every worker asks each young person who uses a service 'what was good, what could be better with the service you got.'



**REWARD** young people for time given – food, money, vouchers, opportunities.



**PARTICIPATION WORKER** - Specific youth worker works with young people with lived experience. They meet once a month or meet young people where they are at.



**TRUSTED WORKER** - Young people go to a trusted worker in a service they know. They tell that worker 'what was good, what could be better.' ... Sent to a central point and then passed to organisations.



**PEER TRAINING** - Participation worker trains young people to hear other young people's voices.



**EDUCATION** - More education alongside all these ideas.

*Image created by project participant Sian from Bodmin.*

#### 4. Recommendations

- All SVPP organisations **recognise** the value of, and **invest in adopting Framework suggestions**, enabling them to embed youth voice and ensure long term commitment to a Participation Framework.
- SVPP organisations **fund further work** with young people to explore how their organisation can adopt Framework suggestions.
- **Recognise** that **to hear the voices of young people** who services **struggle to engage** and are often described as **'hard to reach'**, takes **resources** including **skilled youth work staff time**.
- Young people involved in this study present the report **in person** to the SVPP Steering Group.
- **Reward** young people for their time and input with a range of options to suit young people.
- At the presentation event, SVPP **create a contract** with young people to demonstrate their **commitment** to **embedding** youth voice structures in their individual organisations.
- To successfully hear young people, participation needs **to take place on many different levels**, which could be achieved by **adopting several suggestions** in the Framework.

## **5. Background**

Cornwall's Serious Violence Prevention Programme (SVPP) is a key component within the Safer Cornwall Partnership Plan 2022-25, alongside the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy and the Safer Towns Programme.

The SVPP aims to reduce violence in Cornwall's communities and improve the health, safety and wellbeing of local people. With a particular focus on young people under 25 years of age, as the most at-risk group, and has three central objectives that focus on People, Partners, and Places.

Cornwall's SVPP is a collaboration across a range of statutory, voluntary and community sector partners and centres on a proactive multi-agency approach to working with young people who we know are vulnerable both to involvement in offending and to exploitation by others.

In particular, the SVPP seeks to strengthen our local approach through involving people with lived experience and hearing and acting on the voices of young people and supporting wider community engagement in developing solutions.

The SVPP Scoping Report, commissioned in 2022, provided supporting evidence to inform the commissioning of a young people's participation framework, as part of Cornwall's SVPP.

The lack of lived-experience perspectives from young people was identified as a limitation of the research project. Reflected in the difficulties experienced by the research team in gaining access to, engaging, and conducting qualitative research with young people as part of the study.

Local practitioners also identified, "The voice of children and young adults is not utilised sufficiently in the forming and provision of services and support for them." In response, the SVPP Steering Group commissioned Young People Cornwall, an agency experienced in delivering youth engagement, to research and deliver a participation framework on behalf of the Partnership. This intervention positioned young people as assets and experts by experience in the future development and review of programme interventions.

## **6. Methodology**

Young People Cornwall carried out a mixed-method and iterative research study within a Human Learning Systems approach. Initially, a questionnaire was co-created with young people and partners and had a QR code to enable young people to respond easily and anonymously if required. Please see Appendix 2.

197 young people, aged 11 to 25, replied to the questionnaire. 50% were age 16 to 20. 25 focus groups (through detached youth work, open access drop-ins, targeted groups and 1 to 1 both within YPC and partner organisations) enabled young people who needed additional support to engage to reply to the questions.

48% reported they had a lived experience of violence and 57% stated they wanted to stay involved with the project.

Many young people – especially those vulnerable young people who reported being currently or previously involved in violence, needed various ways to engage. Including a worker they already knew, multiple reminders, encouragement, rewards including Domino's pizza, other food, vouchers.

From responses to the questionnaires, and feedback from focus groups, there were similarities in the suggestions young people made about what would increase young people's voices being heard in the future about violence prevention. 25 groups of young people met and spoke about their experiences and shared their ideas. 64 young people gave contact details to remain involved in additional follow up groups, emails and texts to compile the draft framework.

Young people developed the framework ideas, and then subsequently the framework was sent again to young people and groups who said they were interested in staying involved. 34 have fed back on the final draft. These young people are still in contact with the Researcher, and some are still interested in being involved.

## **7. Primary Research Findings**

### **7.1 Lived Experience**

Young people appreciated the opportunity to talk about, and highlight, their lived and living experiences of violence and of the organisations that work in violence prevention. They understood that the focus for this piece of work was about youth voice systems in the future, however their lived experience influenced how they felt youth voice structures should be designed and delivered.

48% of young people who replied to the questionnaire said they had been involved with an organisation that supports with issues around violence. It was clear that young people with lived experience wanted to feedback about their previous and existing experiences. Sharing how the organisations they had come into contact with had dealt with them around incidents of violence.

Violence is a part of young people's everyday lives. Young people fed back that they had experienced having fights, sexual assaults, have made threats of using a knife, carried a weapon, getting caught carrying a weapon, arrested after assault, experiencing threats at school, physical assault, verbal assault, online threats, witnessed peer on peer fights, been spat on, witnessed violence at home, seeing weapons and fights on social media (TikTok and snapchat), being excluded from school, removed from home and becoming involved in selling and buying drugs.

### **8.2 Trauma Awareness**

Young people talked about the trauma of being a victim and how that affects more than the victim and perpetrator – e.g. being a witness, being in the close family, still being pursued by the abusers. They reflected upon the system being so traumatising they would not report again. In their experience the system adds to the trauma through; length of time it takes, the lack of information, support, updates.

Similarly young people talked about being the accused and again how the system adds to the trauma; the time taken to be charged, being called the offender (without being charged), the lack of information, support and updates.

Years of system failure was a consistent theme from older young people (over 18's). "Not being believed, or no action by social care, school, CAMHS, police when we were 11 and 12, then older, and then again when the serious violence occurred". Sometimes young people shared they have learned to be wary of services and the promises they make.

When asked what it would take to stop their involvement in violence young people said a, "Re-set button? I can't I'm too far in". Participants stated, "I wouldn't

bother reporting” as “Snitches get stiches” and, “I like that there is justice (in the fights)..it’s ok as long as no one is carrying a knife”.

### **7.3 Feeling Heard**

Responding to questions in the survey, feedback from young people ranged from “They listened to me and gave me a safe space to speak my mind” to, “My voice wouldn’t have made a difference anyway”. They wanted to highlight where they had received a positive and supportive service naming the police, Youth Justice Service (YJS), youth work and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). They outlined that, “Feeling heard and actively listened to”, was the main response to the question – what went well? “It could have been better if I was talked to calm...you lot talk to me calm”.

Some young people felt that due to the incidents they had experienced, “It’s not safeguarding if it is not safe to tell”. Many felt sceptical that anything would change. “I think nothing will happen or change as the issues run so deep”. Many believed they had not been listened to multiple times, which affected how they now viewed participating in future reporting and structures.

### **7.4 Safe to Speak**

In identifying what would help them feel safe to speak up, the common themes were, “Being listened to by someone who is empathetic, actively listening, relatable, who cares”. In a, “Safe space that is a comfortable, quiet, calm, kind, informal environment”.

Young people identified that different approaches would be right for different young people:

- “Being able to trust someone to talk to about things without feeling judged or pressured”.
- “I prefer to remain anonymous when stating my opinions, makes me feel safe”.
- “I think having the ability to communicate in different ways helps too like having written ways for feedback as well as spoken for example”.

Young people were honest that, “fear of judgement, people’s opinions, repercussions of peers, being shut down and people thinking I’m stupid”, had prevented them from previously being involved in saying what they think. “When I’ve previously asked for help, I’ve felt invalidated and unimportant”.

For some young people, who currently have a living experience of serious violence, they were clear that fear played a big part in not speaking up. “Police not understanding what could happen from us telling the police” and, “We know the limitations of professional confidentiality”.

This project demonstrated the need for services to identify ways to resolve how young people can feel safer to speak up. Findings highlighted the investment of resource and worker time it took to engage this group of young people to the point they felt confident to speak out. Those young people who had already experienced quality skilled youth participation work demonstrated they were more 'ready' to engage.

### **7.5 Listen...Prevent Violence**

Young people had many ideas for how to prevent violence, which reinforced the need for youth voice to be embedded in organisations. They all highlighted that having skilled workers that they trusted and had relationships with enabled them to be honest. Factors that helped which included, "Understanding from people I already know". Reinforcing the importance of existing relationships with workers and, "Relaxed safe environments including youth clubs".

Those young people who had received good youth work and been involved in participation work previously were more confident to engage, reply to texts, emails and continue to be involved. Other young people from different groups, it took much longer to encourage and support them to speak out and was dependent on their experiences of and trust in organisations. "Past experience is stopping me report again". Young people fed back they had answered many surveys, and didn't hear back on the outcomes. Not only surveys in Cornwall, but other national ones.

Although young people identified that, "Rewards like money, food, sweets" would help make their ideas worth sharing it was more important to feel they were, "Being listened to, being taken seriously, and my ideas being acted on". Young people needed to feel they were, "Making a difference and seeing a real meaningful change for myself and others".

## **8. Secondary Research**

The project looked at examples of local and national good practice.

The new 'Youth Voice Observatory' – George William College and Centre for Youth Impact – funded by Big Lottery, captures and collates youth voice data. It is a resource hub, creating diagnostic tools, resources, training. It is also a meeting point for Youth Voice Ambassadors; practitioners who are participation workers from across the country sharing good practice.

Much of the research studies focused on a 'board' style of participation. Young people are recruited or apply to sit on a group and advise organisations or look into a specific issue. Nationally these include NSPCC Voice of Online Youth, SOS Safe Lives, Anna Freud, Plymouth Young Safeguarders, Co-op Foundation, Esmee Fairburn Foundation. They highlight the investment that organisations make to ensure there is worker support to enable young people to engage, be trained and remain committed and involved.

Locally there are several groups and structures; including Cornwall Youth Council, Speak Up Cornwall NHS, Youth Ambassadors (managed by Cornwall Youth Work Collective (CYWC) a National Youth Agency Lottery funded project), Attune Trauma research (national project managed by Oxford University) Sowenna participation, YEW young women's centre. Practitioners facilitate these groups to ask young people about various issues and provide training.

In addition, there are national examples of 'contracts' or 'manifesto's' where young people can point to the commitment from services to hear their voice.

The Cornwall multi-agency Children and Young People's (CYP) Participation Network is developing an 'Involvement and Participation Framework', based around the Lundy Model. This document will establish intentions for participation and identify practical ways to increase the ways young people's voices are heard and used.

Professionals in health services and Our Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP) are making suggestions on how to improve getting young people's views into decision making. Ideas include a quality mark displayed on documents that are co-produced and/or, having organisation-based Young People Voice Champions.

However young people talked to in this piece of work were not interested in documents or strategies, they wanted to know professionals are listening and believing them. They contributed practical ways to improve how this happens and ensure this practice is embedded so there is a consistency of opportunity.

Young people want to go to someone they trust or have a safe way to report anonymously, and they want processes to be simple, understandable and accountable.

## **9. Limitations**

Using youth work review and human learning systems, the proposed methodology was adapted. It became apparent that to maximise the resources available it was better to make the most of the existing relationship that most young people had with youth workers.

This approach also facilitated the widespread inclusion of young people's views geographically and from a variety of backgrounds and lived experience.

The majority of young people did not want to meet the Researcher individually as we did not have the time and worker relationship it takes to enable young people to trust enough to answer questions. Focus groups became a mix of the Young People Cornwall Researcher attending established groups with Youth Workers there, and also Youth Workers leading groups.

Another challenge involved the wider demands that some projects and organisations have. Despite several contacts via email, in person, phone it was not possible to run focus groups with young people attending some provision. With more time we could have included the views of other young people with lived experience of being involved in serious violence.

## **10. Outcomes**

1. Young people who stayed involved in the project, and who did not have lived experience of violence increased their knowledge of serious violence, and the drivers that contribute to it.
2. Young people who have lived experience as victims of serious violence increased in their awareness and knowledge of the drivers contributing to young people being involved in serious violence.
3. Young people who have a lived experience of being involved in serious violence increased their awareness and knowledge of the impact on young people.

## **11. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the project successfully sparked an ongoing dialogue among young people about serious violence prevention. Their enthusiasm to continue these conversations highlights the necessity of sustaining this work. Most young people surveyed were acutely aware of the risks of serious violence in their communities. Many have developed personal strategies to navigate violent situations, often feeling that reporting incidents is ineffective.

The long-term and traumatic nature of their experiences has led some to emotionally disengage from the issue, yet they hold invaluable insights that could shape future violence prevention efforts. Young people's commitment to contribute and be part of the solution is clear, though many express frustrations with the current system. Believing their reports often lead to inaction.

It is crucial to acknowledge the trauma young people experience when sharing their stories, requiring ongoing support. The recommendations and framework suggestions reflect this.

If we want to hear young people, and for their ideas into how they can work with organisations to prevent violence, there will need to be investment of resources. Increased worker time, changes in systems, improved education and a commitment to working together.

The SVPP Steering Group has responded positively to the idea of young people presenting their ideas, showing promise for future collaboration.

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## **Appendix 1 – Participating Groups and Networks**

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## **Appendix 2 – Young People’s Survey Questions (co-designed)**

1. What is your age?
2. What is your current gender identity?
3. How would you describe your ethnicity?
4. Have you ever been involved with an organization that supports with issues around violence? E.g. police, youth worker, school, youth justice
5. Thinking about the way an organisation / professional supported you at the time. What worked well? What could have been done differently?
6. What helps you to feel safe and / or comfortable to say what you think?
7. What would make sharing your ideas worth your time?
8. What has helped you or stopped you getting involved in saying what you think?
9. Are you interested in staying involved?
10. If yes, please provide the following details – Name, Age, Number, Email, Youth group.