



PATHWAYS TO HEALTH

THROUGH CULTURES OF NEIGHBOURHOODS



Project Report



UK Research
and Innovation

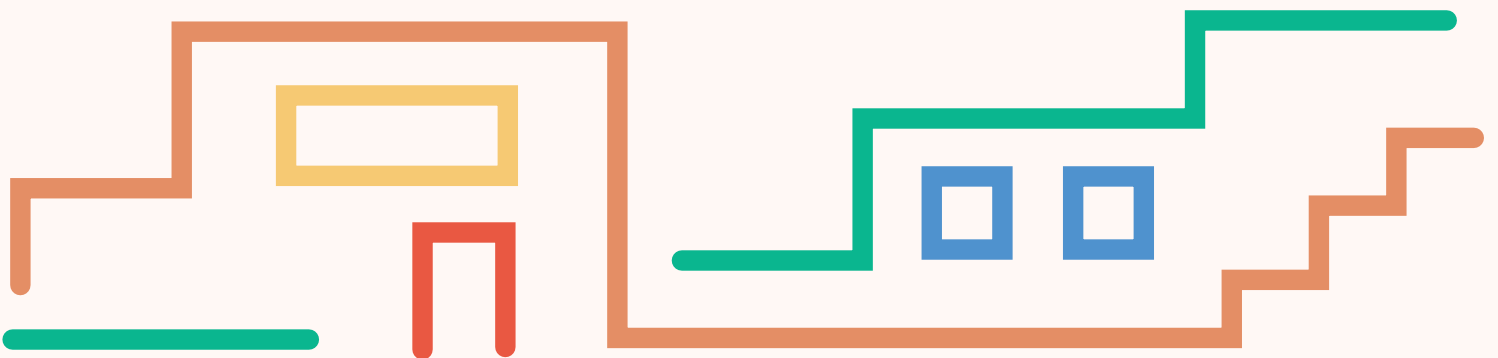


SLAH
Southampton Institute
for Arts and Humanities



Contents

Authors and Project Team / Consortium Members	3
Overview	5
Setting	6
Purpose of the project	8
Description of the project	10
Why was this approach taken?	12
Who took part?	14
How was data collected?	16
Project impact and outcomes	20
Enablers and barriers	24
Key learning	26
Next steps and sustainability	27
Further information	29



Authors

Authors

This report has been written by Prof. Joanna Sofaer, Prof. Mary Barker and Dr Kath Woods-Townsend on behalf of the Pathways to Health Consortium.

Project Team / Consortium Members

Principal Investigator:

Prof. Joanna Sofaer, Professor of Archaeology and Co-Director Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities, University of Southampton.

Co-Investigators:

Prof. Mary Barker, Professor of Psychology and Deputy Director Institute for Life Sciences, University of Southampton; Chris Brown, Head of Service Stronger Communities & Hayden Collins, Stronger Communities, Southampton City Council; Dr Debbie Chase, Director of Public Health & Kate Harvey, Consultant in Public Health, Southampton City Council; Dr Louise Govier, CEO Artsworld; Prof. Pathik Pathak, Professor of Sociology, Director of Social Impact Lab, University of Southampton; Natalie Webb, CEO & James McCombe Service Manager, No Limits; Dr Kath Woods-Townsend, LifeLab Programme Director, University of Southampton.

Academic and Community Researchers/Facilitators:

Lisa Bagust (University of Southampton); Cara Black (University of Southampton); Frances Breen (University of Southampton); Ben Cowley (In Focus); Kristianne Drake (In Focus); Zoie Golding (ZoieLogic Dance Theatre); Neelam Kalita (University of Southampton); Prof. Craig Hutton (University of Southampton); Pujitha Kanakam (University of Southampton); Naomi Leonard (University of Southampton); Prof. Jo Lord (University of Southampton); Donna Lovelock (University of Southampton); Dr Joseph Owen (University of Southampton); Dr Laila Khawaja (University of Southampton); Sarah Oresnik (McMaster University/University of Southampton), Luke Newman (Testlands Wellbeing Hub); Jo Proctor (SO18 Big Local); Abdoulie Sanneh (Southampton City Council); Michelle Smith (Theatre for Life); Antosh Wojcik (Artful Scribe).

Young Researchers:

Rayda Almohaimed; Owen Callaway; Suheera Fatima; Lacey-Paige Gascoigne; Kemi Hussain; Zulkifl Ibn-Masood; Jesmeen Kaur; Matuesz Kociolkowski; Zarka Masood; Afsar Miah; Halle Miles; Marina Peivani; Marley Quinn-Parker; Midlaj Rahman; Reyhan Rizwan; Zaynab Shafi; Mohammad Shere; Ethan Way; Charlie Veal.

Consortium Participants:

Greg Baker (Saints Foundation); Samatha Barnes (Southampton Education Forum); Samantha Cairns (Southampton Cultural Learning Alliance); Leigh Chalmers (Wessex Archaeology); Louise Coysh (University of Southampton); Dan Crow (aspace arts); Lynne Dick (Hansard Gallery); Giles Giles (Public Policy Southampton); Mark Gittos (Vivid Homes); Prof. Keith Godfrey (Professor of Epidemiology and Human Development, NIHR Biomedical Research Centre Theme Lead for Nutrition, Lifestyle & Metabolism); Emma Golby-Kirk EnergiseMe); Dr Ronda Gowland-Pryde (University of Southampton); Anne Hendon-John (Headteacher Polygon School); Alex Ivancevic (Southampton Voluntary Services); Dr Chandni Jacob (Public Policy Southampton); Dahlia Jamil (Art Asia); Siobhan McGarrigle (Southampton City Library Service); Prof. Julie Parkes (University of Southampton and Wessex ARC); Dr Sanjay Patel (Healthier Together); Matt Salvage (SoCo Music); Sarah Shameti (PEEER Youth Service, Southampton General Hospital); Lizanne Smith-Head (ZoieLogic Dance Theatre); Dr Ravita Taheem (Public Health Southampton City Council and NIHR Biomedical Research Centre); Matthew West (Artful Scribe); Sallie White (Southampton City Council); Giles Woodhouse (Athena Coaching and Mentoring); Ruth Yoxon (Wessex Archaeology).

Advisory Board:

Carolyn Abel (Head of Culture, Southampton City Council); Adam Gent (Arts Council England); Dr Linda Monckton (Historic England); Claire Whitaker (CEO Southampton Forward).

Administration and Website Support:

Anoushka Alexander-Rose; Jayne Flew; Josie Phillips; Claire Wilkins

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of more than 200 young people from across the City of Southampton who participated in practice-based research during creative workshops.



Overview

Pathways to Health Through Cultures of Neighbourhoods (www.pathways-to-health.org) reimagines how we co-create and design pathways to health by bringing together a trans-disciplinary team of academics from the University of Southampton, civic leaders, health professionals, charities, cultural and creative partners from more than 30 organisations across the City of Southampton to learn from young people (age 11-16). Positive cultural engagement is associated with protective factors. We have been working together to understand what culture means to young people, how they use place-based cultural assets (strengths), and how they feel about the places where they live. We are using these understandings to reimagine cultural provision within an integrated care system in order to reduce future health challenges, and to empower young people to shape their own pathways to health.



Figure 1. Young researchers at a Pathways consortium development day

Setting

Contrary to the view of Southern England as 'well-off', coastal southern communities include some of the most deprived areas of the UK. Southampton has some of the most disadvantaged wards in the country. Across England, 29% of young people live in poverty, but in Southampton this is 35.8%, more than 1 in 3 young people. 18% of the population aged under eighteen live within 10% of the most deprived areas nationally. Southampton is also a young, diverse city; 19% of the population is under the age of 18 and 32% comprise minority ethnic groups.¹

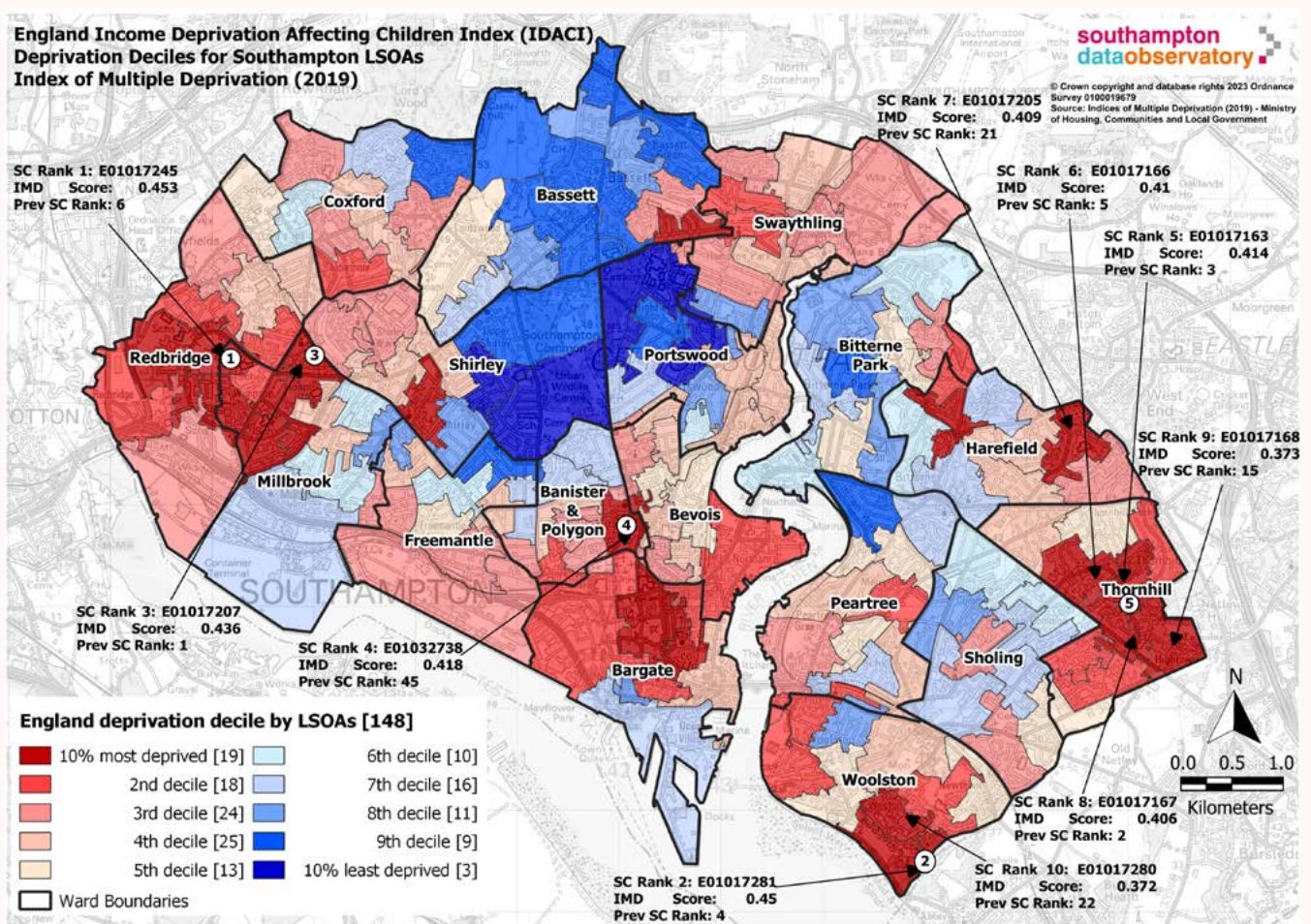


Figure 2. England Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), Deprivation Deciles for Southampton LSOAs and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for wards in Southampton. Southampton Data Observatory.

¹ Southampton City Council (2022) Southampton Children and Young People's Strategy 2022-2027; Southampton Data Observatory <https://data.southampton.gov.uk>

Southampton faces substantial health challenges. There is an alarming rise in mental health disorders in young people, reflecting issues seen across the rest of England. One in five children and young people in England aged 8 to 25 had a probable mental disorder in 2023.² Young people from the poorest 20% of household incomes are three times more likely to have common mental health problems than those in the richest 20%. Young people living in poverty and deprivation are also more likely to have poorer outcomes in adulthood, particularly those relating to health, education, employment and crime.³

Pathways to Health brings together more than 30 organisations and decision-makers across the City of Southampton to learn from young people age 11-16, an age group whose voices are seldom heard. The project is led by a multi-disciplinary team from the University of Southampton, together with Southampton City Council (Public Health and Stronger Communities Teams), Artswork and No Limits. Together we have created a consortium where everyone has an equal voice. The project has worked with young people across the city with a particular focus on 3 disadvantaged wards in the east, centre and west of the city: Harefield, Bevois (Newtown/St Mary's), and Redbridge.

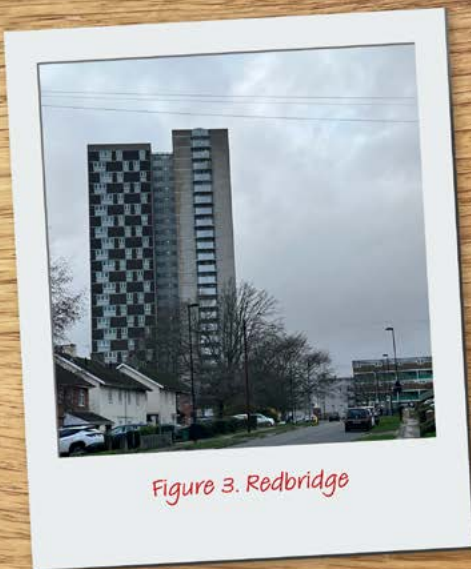


Figure 3. Redbridge

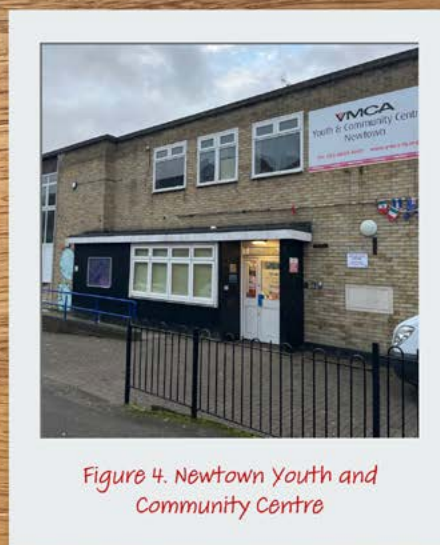


Figure 4. Newtown Youth and Community Centre

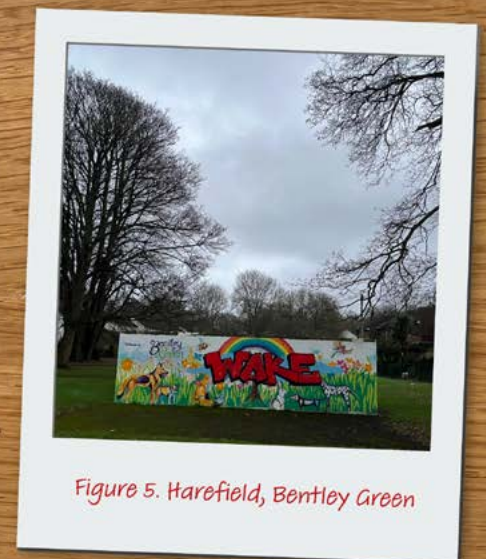
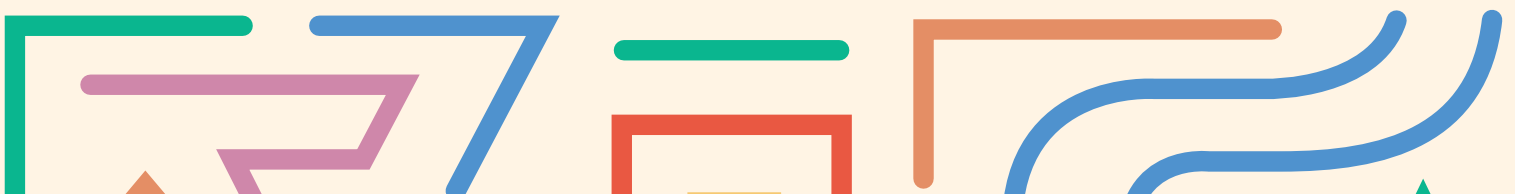


Figure 5. Harefield, Bentley Green

² <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/11/one-in-five-children-and-young-people-had-a-probable-mental-disorder-in-2023/>

³ Marmot, M., Allen, J., Goldblatt, P., Boyce, T., McNeish, D., Grady, M. and Geddes I. (2010). Fair Societies, Healthy Lives. The Marmot Review. Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post-2010. The Marmot Review; Marmot, M., Allen, J., Boyce, T., Goldblatt, P. and Morrison, J. 2020. Marmot Review 10 Years On. Institute of Health Equity. <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/marmot-review-10-years-on>



Purpose of the project

The scale of health challenge facing young people in Southampton – as across the country – has long-term implications for individuals and burden on the NHS. Serving 1.9 million people, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), local councils and communities have identified a critical need to improve the health of children and young people. We know that early intervention can prevent adult health inequality but there is a gap in the provision for and understanding of adolescent needs.

Positive cultural engagement is associated with protective factors and forms part of the wider determinants of health.⁴ We aim to reimagine young people's cultural provision within an integrated care system in order to reduce future health challenges and to empower young people to shape their own pathways to health. We want to devise culture-led routes to health for young people that can be adopted nationally. There are, however, structural inequalities in young people's access to culture and community capital. These impact on health, wellbeing and opportunity for young people in disadvantaged areas. Mapping of Southampton as part of its bid to be UK City of Culture 2025, shows that the areas of greatest need have the lowest density of 'authorised' (official) cultural assets. In addition to lack of opportunity, young people in disadvantaged communities also experience barriers to 'authorised' culture because they are poor in money and time.⁵ However, young people tell us that culture is important to their identities and their lives. This includes performing arts, literature, film and television, visual arts, music, cultural heritage, architecture, fashion and digital culture including gaming and social media. Young people are involved in all parts of the cultural cycle – creation, circulation and consumption – incorporating their preferences, values and attitudes.

An alternative to the perceived exclusivity of 'authorised' culture lies in understanding the relationship between culture and a wider anthropological view of culture as 'who we are and what we do' that shapes identity, belonging and resilience – concepts fundamental to health and wellbeing. Young people's routes to culture are closely related to other aspects of their lives. They experience culture through schools but also in places and social contexts that are dynamic, informal, and elude official recognition.⁶ Cultural engagement can be determined by family attitudes and behaviours and can take place at home. And it is linked to young people's expression of their growing autonomy through cultural choices, which can, amongst other things involve choices of food and physical activity which impact immediate and long-

⁴ Fancourt, D, Bone, JK, Bu F, Mak HW, Bradbury A. (2023). The impact of Arts and Cultural Engagement on Population Health. Findings from Major Cohort Studies in the UK and USA 2017-2022. London: UCL.

⁵ ART31 2018. Young People and Arts Engagement. What we Need. Arts Council England.

⁶ Interarts Foundation. 2010. Access of Young People to Culture. Final Report. EACEA/2008/01 (OJ 2008/S 91-122802).

term health.⁷ Not all cultural engagement is necessarily positive and young people's choices are often exercised in 'unauthorised' liminal spaces, beyond adult control. These constitute significant assets for young people.

We have been working with young people aged 11-16 from disadvantaged communities that are often identified as 'invisible' or 'disengaged' to better understand the relationship between young people's 'authorised' and 'unauthorised' cultural assets, and their health choices. We ask:

- What culture means to young people?
- Where and how do young people experience culture?
- How do young people feel about their place-based cultural assets and how do they think these assets support or hinder their health and wellbeing?
- How can adults in the city work together with young people for happier, healthier lives?

We aim to:

- **Build Capacity in Assets** by working with young people to unlock 'hidden' or unofficial cultural assets in their communities that can foster positive outcomes.
- **Build Capacity in People** by engaging young people in research so that their voices are heard and they can become community advocates shaping the future of integrated care. We bring different services and providers together to learn from young people and from each other to develop best practice and tools for using cultural engagement to improve young people's life chances.



Figure 6. Dance workshop at Woodlands Community College, Harefield

⁷ Neufeld LM, Andrade EB, Ballonoff Suleiman A, Barker M, Beal T, Blum LS, Demmler KM, Dogra S, Hardy-Johnson P, Lahiri A, Larson N, Roberto CA, Rodríguez-Ramírez S, Sethi V, Shamah-Levy T, Strömmer S, Tumilowicz A, Weller S, Zou Z. 2022. Food choice in transition: adolescent autonomy, agency, and the food environment. *Lancet*. Jan 8;399(10320):185-197. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01687-1.

Description of the project

Funded through the AHRC Mobilising Community Assets Programme (Nov. 2022-Dec 2023), with additional support from Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities (SIAH) and NIHR, the project has built a vibrant consortium in Southampton involving civic leaders, health professionals, NGOs, cultural and community partners, and academics from more than 30 organisations across the city (Figure 7). At its heart was an equal partnership with a diverse group of 19 young people aged 11-16yrs from schools and youth organisations in Southampton, meeting each month to participate in a paid, young researcher training programme. They shared their experiences and priorities, co-produced research, asked questions about issues that matter to them, and shaped the consortium's work.

Alongside this, more than 200 young people from a variety of youth settings in disadvantaged areas of the city participated in creative workshops, interviews and focus groups to share what culture is to them, identify and map young people's cultural assets, to find out how young people feel about the places that they live, and how they think these affect their health and wellbeing.

We also talked to adults including parents/carers, youth workers and community volunteers to find out what they think are the cultural assets in their communities. Together we mapped these cultural assets.

We compared the results of our research with young people with those from adults, and with existing data for 'authorised' (officially recognised) cultural assets from Southampton City Council and Southampton's City of Culture 2025 bid. We also compared what young people told us with existing services provided through children and young people's commissioning in the city and data for crime in Southampton. This enabled us to understand the differences between young people's views of the city and those of adults. It also allowed us to identify 'hidden' or 'unauthorised' assets and thus suggest new opportunities for health improvement through cultural engagement.

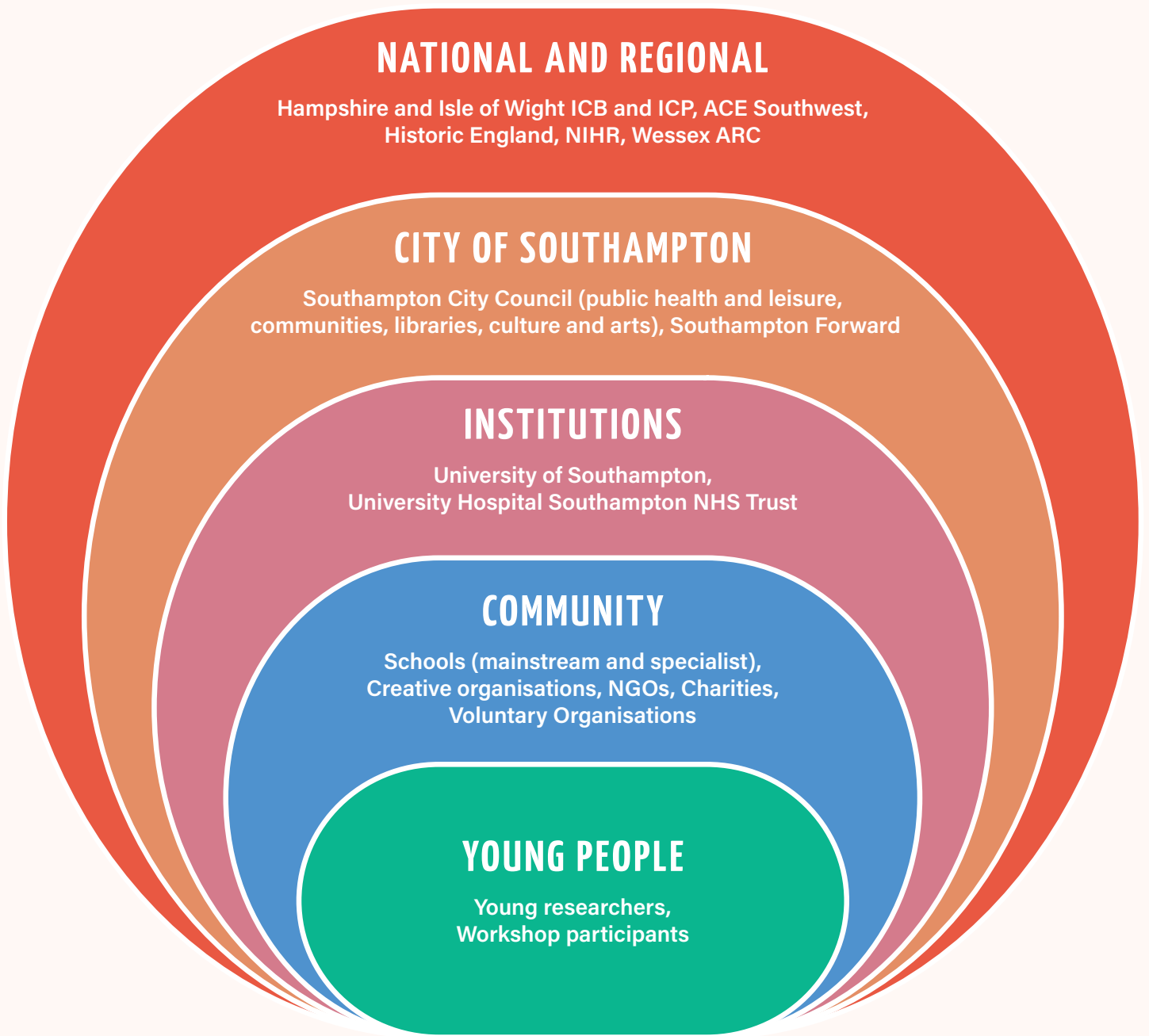
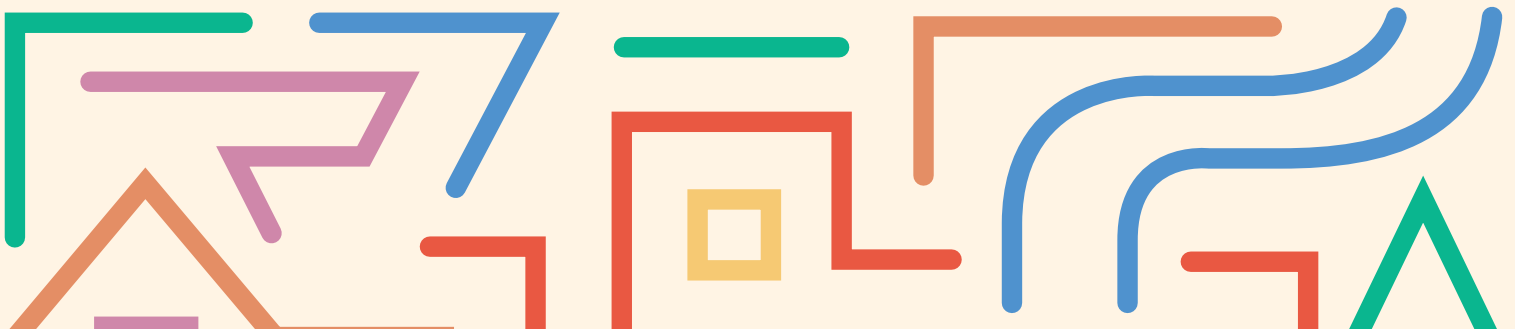


Figure 7. Pathways to Health Consortium Structure



Why was this approach taken?

Our approach places young people at the heart of the research. Too often, programmes to reduce inequalities experienced by young people in disadvantaged areas are done to, not with, young people. In order to understand young people's needs, devise routes to health through cultural engagement that work for them, and shape the development of an integrated care system so that it takes account of these, the first step has to be understanding young people's experiences and needs as told by them. Furthermore, research in adolescent psychology shows that top-down, didactic approaches to health promotion may not be effective as they conflict with young people's need to express autonomy and agency.⁸ By recruiting and training young people with experience of inequalities to work with their peers in a paid programme, our approach recognises their agency, values their research insights, co-creates solutions that will work for them, and gives back to the community by developing transferable skills that improve participant's life chances



Figure 8. Consortium development day at Testlands Wellbeing Hub

⁸ Yeager, D.S, Dahl, R.E, Dweck, C.S. (2018) Why Interventions to Influence Adolescent Behavior Often Fail but Could Succeed. *Perspect Psychol Sci.* 2018 Jan;13(1):101-122. doi: 10.1177/1745691617722620.

Pathways creates opportunities to engage young people in the functioning of the integrated care system so that their voices are heard and they can become community advocates for health. Our consortium brings different services and providers together so that stakeholders and decision-makers in different parts of the system can learn from young people, and from each other, what a healthy Southampton looks like for young people, and to develop best practice in working with young people.

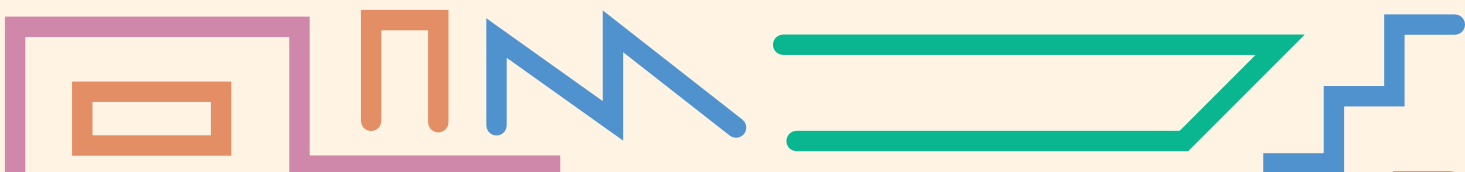
It has been important to create a co-ownership model. The consortium has a flat structure so that young people are brought into dialogue with decision makers in an environment where all members of the consortium have an equal voice. The consortium combines expertise and insights to create a shared theory of change. This is being used to understand the next steps that we need to take to improve young people's health outcomes and life chances in Southampton as a national model.



Figure 9. Debbie Chase, Director of Public Health and Kate Harvey, Consultant in Public Health at a consortium development day led by Southampton City Council Public Health team at Testlands Wellbeing Hub.



Figure 10. Consortium development day led by No Limits at Barclays' Eagle Labs



Who took part?

“I really like the idea that it will make a difference. Like my research is actually gonna go towards something.”

(Young researcher interview)

Young people see the world differently and their lived experiences have been central to this project. An ethically, gender and neurodiverse group of 19 paid young researchers age 14-16 were recruited from schools and youth organisations in Southampton. The young researchers were keen that young people’s voices should be heard in decision-making.

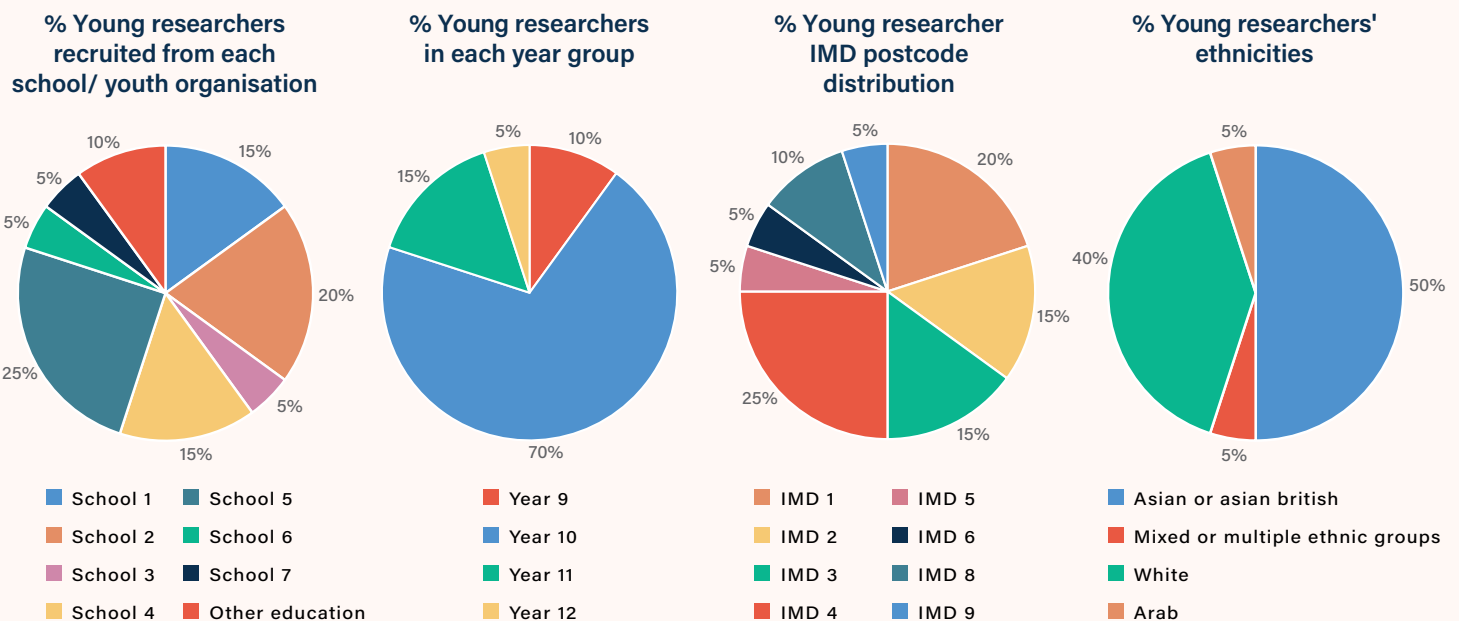


Figure 11. Demographics of the young researchers

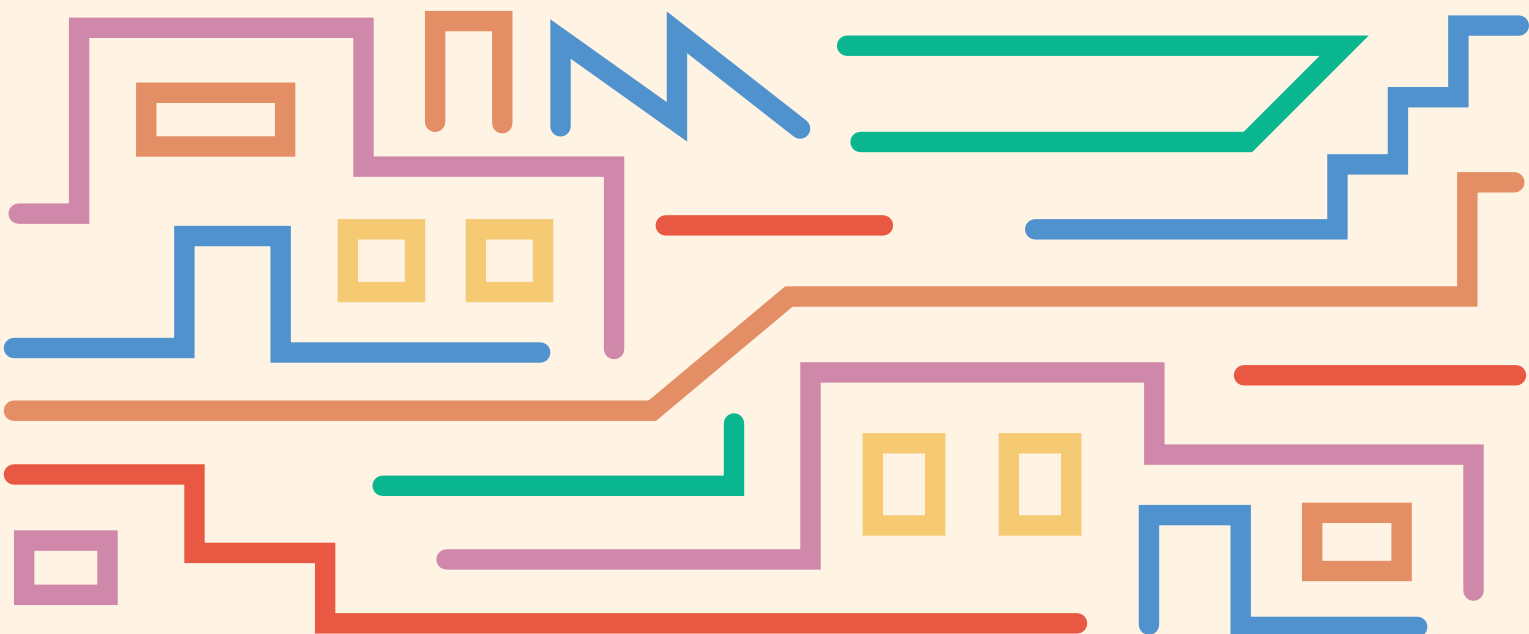
The more than 200 young people who took part in creative workshops included young people in school and excluded from school, young people entering the youth justice system, young carers, young people with long-term health conditions, looked after young people, LGBTQ+, home schooled, neurodiverse and ethnically diverse young people. They were given vouchers to compensate for their time. This was an incentive to take part.

Adult community members who were representative of their communities in disadvantaged wards also took part in community asset mapping events and interviews. They wanted a better future for young people, to support opportunities for young people's health and wellbeing, and to ensure that decision-makers understood the needs of communities at a hyper-local level.

Over the course of the project the consortium has more than doubled in size. Interest in the project has grown as stakeholders see the value of youth-informed research to help them make better, more informed decisions about strategy, policy and commissioning of cultural provision, health and wellbeing services for young people. They also appreciate the opportunity for knowledge exchange with organisations that they would not otherwise come in contact with. The consortium has developed a shared vision and priorities for culture-led health and wellbeing for young people in the city. It has also explored what research we need to do next in order to improve the health and wellbeing of young people.



Figure 12. Creative workshop during consortium development day led by Artswork at University of Southampton.



How was data collected?



Figure 13. The Pathways young researchers' conference

The project used a range of accessible mixed methods to collect data. These were designed to facilitate participation of diverse young people whose voices are rarely heard, as well as those of parents/carers and community members. Different strands of data were collected by different members of the team, ensuring that young people, adult community researchers, project partners and academics co-owned the research. Research methods included:

Participatory action research (PAR): Nineteen young researchers shared their experiences and priorities, asked questions about issues that matter to them, co-produced research, analysed the results, disseminated them through scientific posters at a Pathways conference, and shaped the consortium's work at consortium meetings

Creative workshops: Creative partners who were also consortium members worked as community researchers to engage young people in disadvantaged areas in Southampton in practice-based research using creative writing, theatre, dance, photography, games and game design. Young people told us about what culture is to them, where they experience it (their cultural assets), and how they feel about their neighbourhoods. The latter included where they do or don't feel safe, assets they prefer or don't use, and how places they live could be made more friendly to young people. This work unlocked 'hidden' or unofficial cultural assets in their communities, which cultural assets are associated with positive and negative experiences, and helped us to understand the qualities of young people's experiences in order to be able support those that can foster positive community outcomes. We created ward-level maps of cultural assets identified by young people.

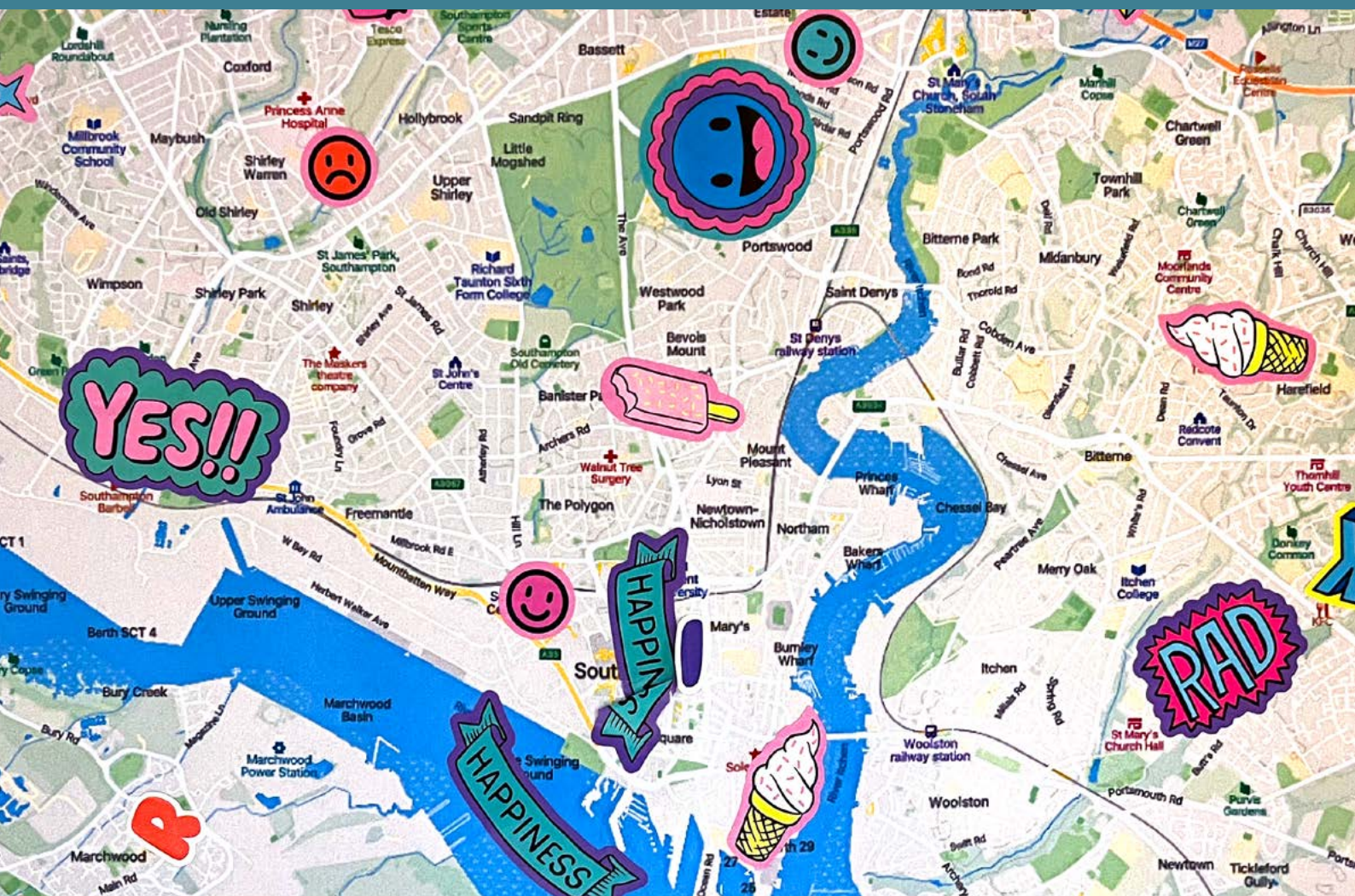


Figure 14. Young person's emoji map of Southampton from workshop at Newtown Youth and Community Centre.

Emoji mapping: Pathways researchers worked with young people living in disadvantaged wards to emoji map their neighbourhoods and the wider city. From this we created a map of how young people feel about Southampton and their perceptions of the city.

Focus groups: Researchers worked with young people to map the places they use in their neighbourhoods (their cultural and community assets). Together they explored how young people think these affect their health and wellbeing. Pathways researchers also supported adult focus groups to map the assets that parents/carers and community members identify in their communities

Plausible futures exercises: Led by academics, this method was pioneered in Pathways as a means of crystalising young people's views on what support they need to achieve their aspirations, including how they perceive the role of culture in their future health, wellbeing and life choices.

Interviews: We conducted interviews with the young researchers and adult consortium members to understand their experience of the project, as well as barriers and enablers to participation in future research.

My Mates, At Mine, After School

We listen to music,
we watch movies,
we do hair,
we do make up,
we do Tik Toks,
we bake cakes,
we stay up late,
is this great?

The Loners

At home, 4pm.

Watching TV - our reality is boring.

I want a zombie apocalypse
to happen - it will be fun

Something different.
I'd probably die

in 10 minutes,
but at least it'll be exciting.

The Woods

Avoid the woods by myself -
the woods behind my house
when it gets dark; stalkers,
foxes, on the rare occasion
arsonists. Fires and missing animals.
You never go in alone.



The woods, Harefield

The academic team also analysed a range of existing data sets including interviews from the Connecting Culture project (funded by Arts Council England), asset mapping conducted as part of Southampton's City of Culture 2025 bid, and qualitative and quantitative data held by Southampton City Council, No Limits and Artwork. This included IMD data, Police and Crime Commissioner data, Child Friendly Southampton surveys, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment reports, local children and young people's commissioning data, and local evaluation reports. Spatial data was layered using GIS to enable the identification of similarities and differences in the perception of the city and its assets between different groups and in areas of the city.

Knowledge exchange was embedded throughout with the consortium acting as a knowledge exchange hub. The consortium met monthly throughout the project in a series of 10 themed development days together with the young researchers. The consortium has been a forum to share ideas, evidence, and expertise. It created the framework and environment for iterative drawing together of insights, with everyone working towards shared understandings of what the data tell us.



Figure 16. 'Culture to Me' from workshop at Harefield Community College.



Project impact and outcomes

The Pathways project is now an established research and knowledge exchange architecture in the city that underpins policy, strategy and decision making. It has created new relationships and increased opportunities for collaboration through construction of a city-wide consortium. Its flat hierarchy draws in stakeholders at all levels from young people to the Director of Public Health, moving the city from a culture of consultation to one of youth-driven research. It has created a new community of practice pulling towards shared goals. It innovates and inspires through an ethos of shared ownership and commitment to a youth-centred, evidence-based vision for Southampton that foregrounds the role of young people in creating and shaping their future.

“Nobody listens to young people. This was different. I felt like what we said mattered and the adults really cared about what we had to say”.

(Young researcher, Consortium Development Day 10)

“My support network has been massively extended by participating in the Pathways to Health, and I’ve worked in Southampton for 19 years and thought I’d got a pretty tight network of people that I could refer to... the Pathways to Health research consortium widened that even further into a lot of people in academia as well. So for me that was really enlightening. ... [I] talk to young people and involve their advice and guidance in my daily practice... But peer researchers being respected and employed took it a step further and I was really, really impressed by that”.

(Adult Consortium Member, AHRC Focus Group)

The project has created challenge for change – a new vision for the city with joined up thinking that hears the voices of young people and brings them into decision-making across the ecosystem. Our mapping of young people’s cultural and community assets, combined with young people’s insights, told us that **despite living in the same places as adults, young people experience places differently. Their understandings of place-based strengths and opportunities are different to those of adults in their communities and to ‘authorised’ assets** documented by the City of Culture and Southampton City Council. Young people have not only told us about ‘hidden’ assets but also about ‘hidden’ barriers to accessing cultural and community assets. **Young people challenge existing approaches to health improvement and point to other ways of doing things. These have significant implications for service provision, including its form, location and uptake.**

Partners tell us that **our evidence and understandings are being used to influence policy and strategy** in their organisations including No Limits strategy; Southampton City Council Child Friendly Southampton and Southampton City Council Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. Consortium members are involved in developing Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICS Children and Young People’s Strategy and Southampton’s new Children and Young People’s Commissioning Strategy which identifies co-creation of provision with young people as a priority. The project has represented the Southampton area as a case study in a presentation at the Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICP meeting on social connectedness. We are currently in talks with the ICP about constructing an ongoing programme of youth assemblies or juries whereby young people interrogate service commissioners and providers, and make recommendations for improvements to children and young people’s health and social care services.



Building on expertise in LifeLab (<https://lifelabonline.org>) the project has created a **Young Researcher Training Programme (YRTP)**. This programme supports the delivery of the ‘Higher Project Qualification’ (HPQ) and ‘Extended Project Qualification’ (EPQ) which are L2 (GCSE) and L3 (A level) qualifications. We have secured additional funding, including from NIHR, University of Southampton and LifeLab, to create shareable, open access training resources, including session plans, powerpoints, videos and

worksheets. These training resources have been developed with young people who took part in a ‘Young Researcher Training Programme’ development week to create a series of videos, as well as with the LifeLab Youth Panel. The resulting 12-week training programme, by young people for young people, covers the research cycle including: ‘What is Research’, ‘Being a Reflective and Reflexive Researcher’, ‘Research Methods’, ‘Research Ethics and Safeguarding’, ‘Data Collection’, ‘Data Analysis’ and ‘Dissemination’. The programme empowers young people to develop questions, collect meaningful data in an ethical way, and to use it to advocate for their needs. We aim to enable young people across the country to engage in research to reduce health inequalities and inform decision-making in their communities.

Participation in the Young Researcher Training Programme has transformational effects on young people. Teachers report greater confidence and intrinsic motivation. Young people tell us they feel more confident and empowered. We are still evaluating the programme but our work suggests that involving young people in research not only reveals structural solutions for health improvement but may itself also be a pathway to reducing health inequality.

In addition to the YRTP, to date **the project has yielded a large number of outputs** including blogs, conference papers, posters, reports, publications including a submission to the Prevention in Health and Social Care Inquiry, data sets, maps, strategy documents, a board game called 'Lemonade' and many creative outputs by young people.



Figure 17. Young Researcher Training Programme video.

“I found being part of the YRTP development team a highly beneficial experience. Not only has it allowed me to develop skills in producing resources and working digitally on projects, but it has also equipped me with knowledge and skills that I found to be very relevant to my life...”

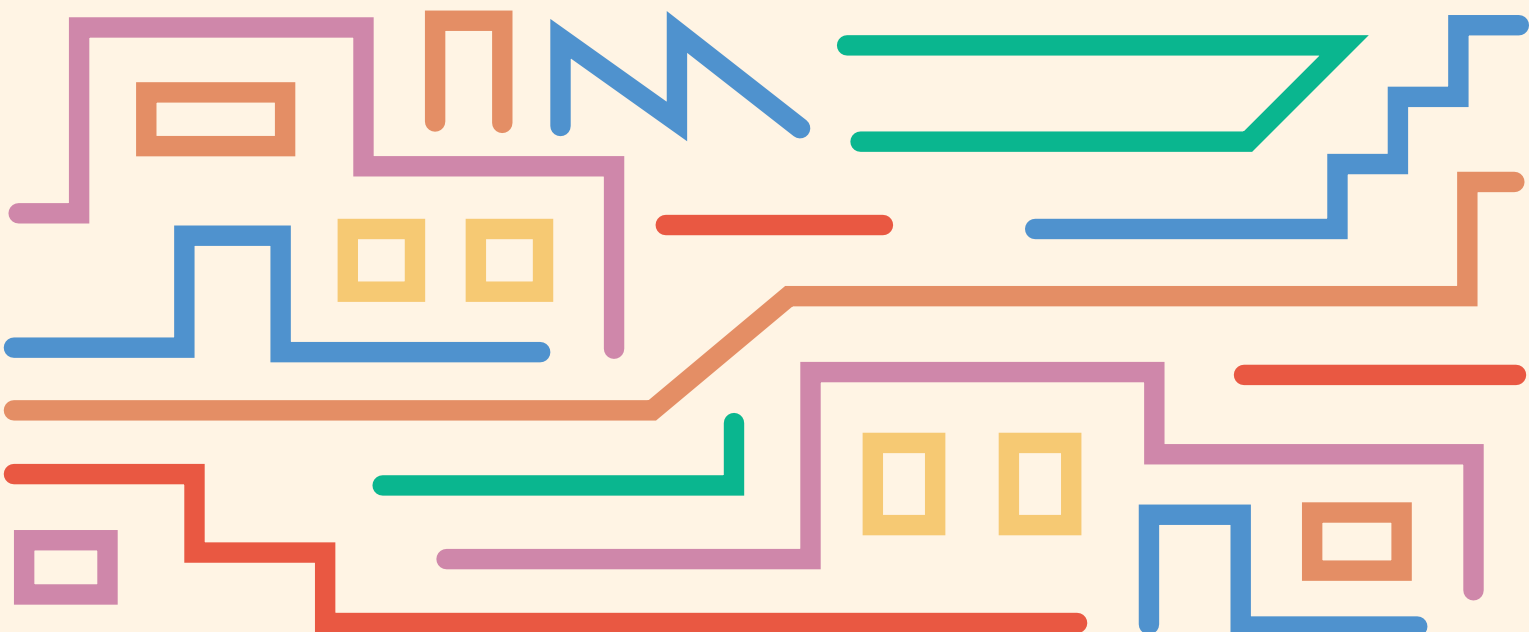
(Young researcher, Interview)

“My confidence has been developed... By providing young people with a genuine voice LifeLab created an empowering space that I am proud to be involved with. Due to the independent nature of the majority of the work, I didn't expect my team work skills to improve, however the weekly discussions and October half term project have meant I am now a much more successful team player”.

(Young researcher, Interview)

“Overall it was a good experience and I would definitely do it again”.

(Young researcher, Interview)



Enablers and barriers

We conducted exit interviews with young researchers after they completed the YRTP to find out about their experiences of the YRTP, what they enjoyed and what we could do better. We also interviewed adult members of the consortium to understand their experiences of the project.

Shared vision:

Young people and adults agreed that it was vital to support the health and wellbeing of young people and that this can only happen if young people themselves are involved in research, advocacy and decision-making. The substantial commitment to a shared vision of all consortium members, and the access they provided to their networks, meant that the project was able to move at pace, include young people and communities who would not normally engage in research, and achieve a great deal in a short time.

Reward and recognition:

The young researchers were employed by the University of Southampton. They told us that this created a professional framework in which their work was valued. It placed them on an equal footing with adult members of the consortium who were also paid for their time.

Adult consortium members told us that paying for their time to attend meetings and to carry out research enabled them to fully embed the project into their day-to-day work and thus created the conditions for effective knowledge exchange. Project participation is a commitment that takes time away from other core functions of an organisation and research has to be brought into this business in a sustainable way. Paying for time enabled Co-Investigators and project partners to participate in ways that would not otherwise have been possible for their organisations.

All young people who participated in creative workshops and focus groups were given vouchers but also gained new skills from the experience. These rewards increased willingness to participate and engage fully in the research. Investing in people through an equitable framework altered the relationship between the project and the community such that Pathways was seen as contributing to it rather than extracting from it.

The ability to build a funded consortium has thus been vital to the success of the research in being fully co-produced and co-owned by young people, community members, and organisations across the city.

Day-to-day support:

Early career and community researchers worked closely with the young people as facilitators. They developed rapport and trustful relationships. The project had a designated safeguarding lead and a project phone held by researchers so young people could freely access the project. Communication and liaison between project team, project partners, schools and youth organisations, and parents/carers were further important to facilitating strong and continuing engagement and effective cross- disciplinary working.

Logistics:

Consortium meetings were organised at times that facilitated the involvement of young people after school. The project paid for safe travel to and from sessions as well as providing refreshments.

Complex institutional processes:

Academics are used to complex institutional processes but these can be tricky for young people and other community members to navigate. We worked closely with colleagues in Human Resources/Uniworkforce, Ethics panels and the Research Integrity and Governance Team at University of Southampton to find solutions that facilitated young people's participation in the project. This included supporting young researchers in registering for work, creating a young person friendly ethics process and documentation, alongside robust safeguarding. This support was vital to the success of the project.



Key learning

- We point to the power of involving young people in research in thoughtful ways, listening to what they have to say, and bringing them together with decision makers on equal terms. These are vital means of encouraging young people to think differently about their futures, and adults to think differently about solutions for the city. Young people are agents for change in their communities. They both offer, and are themselves, pathways to health.
- Involving young people in research and knowledge exchange creates challenge for change. Their pathways to health point to different approaches to health improvement, including the form, location and uptake of services. Young people's experiences and perceptions are geographically distinct to those of adults. 'Authorised' cultural provision doesn't tend to align with the needs and hyper-localism of young people.
- Placing equity at the centre of research, whether through flat hierarchies, compensation, or participant skills development positively influences knowledge exchange dynamics, establishes an environment for co-ownership, and provides example and opportunity for the reduction of health inequalities.
- Complex institutional processes can present barriers to the involvement of young people as community researchers. Close communication and joint working is vital, and can create innovative new pathways to collaboration.

Next steps and sustainability

Our strengths-based salutogenic (health promoting) approach creates the conditions for sustainable outcomes by identifying what communities have, rather than what they lack. It is directed towards achieving long-term change, where young people and their communities can draw on culture-led solutions that work for them to affect the wider determinants of health and develop resilience to meet future challenges.

The Pathways consortium is now established as an important part of the city's research infrastructure, creating new transdisciplinary links between people and organisations. It is recognised for its extensive expertise in engaging with diverse groups of young people who would not normally have their voices heard, for its work with communities in disadvantaged areas of the city, and providing challenge for change. Our partners are keen to maintain the consortium following the official project end. We continue to be approached by organisations who want to join us and to feel the benefit of youth-led insight. In recognition of its important civic role, University of Southampton is providing bridge support via Policy and Regional Innovation funding to maintain the consortium, deliver skills development and best practice in working with young people, and to train a new cohort of young researchers.

Our young researchers now form a legacy group who continue to be involved through their work in developing YRTP resources and mentoring a new intake of young researchers. We are making the YRTP freely available online as a model for national uptake.



Figure 18. Pathways consortium members present at the Southampton Forward conference, February 2023 (left to right Pathik Pathak, Matt Salvage, Zoie Golding, Debbie Chase, Kath Woods-Townsend).

Pathways is also pursuing initiatives to enable research to move into the next phase. These include bids to the UKRI Accelerator Fund (£2.5 million) and an application to become a study site for the new UKRI £62m Adolescent Health Study. Organisations across the city have already leveraged consortium membership, Pathways expertise in working with young people and project insights for successful grant applications. These include project support for Southampton City Council's successful Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) application (£5 million) and Testlands Wellbeing Hub's SNG #iwill Fund Wellbeing Champions Programme (£10,000). We continue to work with our partners to support their ambitions and to realise our joint vision.



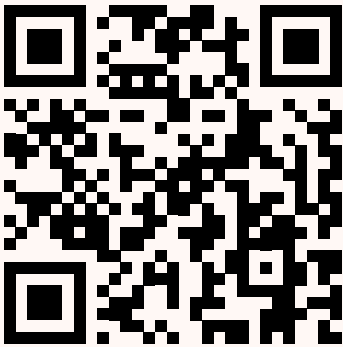
Further information

Pathways to Health project website (includes links to publicly available outputs):

<https://www.pathways-to-health.org>

YRTP resources:

<https://bit.ly/LifeLabYRTPCourse>



Woods-Townsend, K., Taheem, R. and Sofaer, J. 2023. **Change the beginning and you change the whole story; why adolescence is a window of opportunity for prevention of non-communicable disease.** DOI: 10.5258/SOTON/PP0032. Submission reference ANI238870 <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/118060/pdf/>

Contact:

Pathways to Health: P2H@soton.ac.uk

Prof. Joanna Sofaer (Project PI): jrsd@soton.ac.uk

Participating Organisations



Historic England



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



Joanna Sofaer, Mary Barker, and
Kathryn Woods-Townsend

Pathways to Health Through Cultures of
Neighbourhoods: Project Report

ISBN: 978-1-912431-24-3

Published by the University of Southampton, 2024



Supported By



UK Research
and Innovation



University of
Southampton



Young Person's Professional Advisory Group

NIHR

Research Support
Service

NIHR

Southampton
Biomedical Research
Centre



SIAH
Southampton Institute
for Arts and Humanities

PATHWAYS TO HEALTH

THROUGH CULTURES OF NEIGHBOURHOODS

