Hate Crime Awareness Week – discussion event with young people.

This report reflects on the Hate Crime Awareness Week event held by YouthLink Scotland as part of the Action on Prejudice programme to discuss young people's experiences of hate crime and what changes they think could be made to reduce this and improve community experiences. We were grateful for the attendance of Siobhian Brown MSP, Minister of Victims and Community Safety and the young people were very vocal in their discussions with the Minister about what they saw as challenges in communities as well as their own experiences.

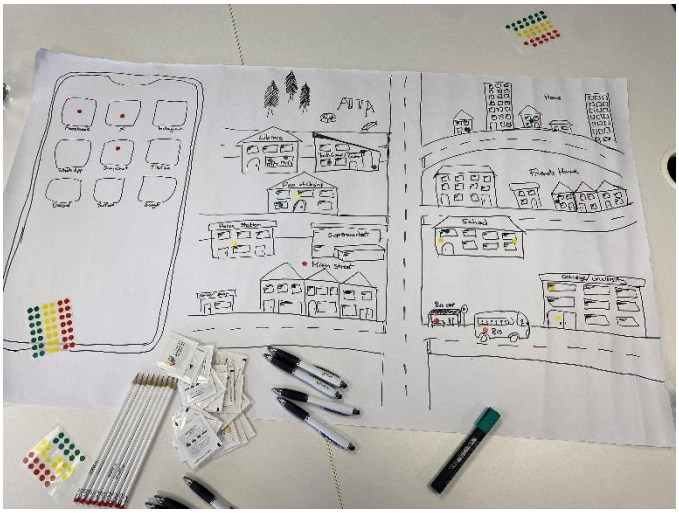
Please note there is some language in this report that is unsavoury and considered racist. This is taken directly from something participants have written and has been kept in to provide a true reflection of what they themselves wrote.

In attendance were 10 young people from across Scotland, with the support of their youth groups who are members of the United Voices network at YouthLink Scotland. The groups included the Sudanese Community Edinburgh, Passion4Fusion. SCOREscotland, Interfaith Scotland and Touch of Love Outreach.

Community map activity

In this activity we asked young people to use stickers to identify where they felt safe and where they felt unsafe. Red indicated unsafe, green safe and yellow somewhere in between. It was very clear almost immediately that for the majority home was a safe place as well as their friends' homes. Although some did indicate they did not feel safe at home due to experiences of people looking through their windows.

School was one that clearly did not feel like a safe place, the young people went on to explain that the reason for this was the sometimes hateful behaviour of their peers and the lack of engagement on this from teaching staff. They did say



that not all the teachers were awful but those who had power to make changes did not do it and those who would if they could were not in a position to do so.

University campuses were in the middle as it depended on the University or College and the support they provided students. The police station was also an interesting discussion as the young people's responses were clear that while it was in the middle in regards to safety they felt better reporting an issue to the police than to their school. Although it was made clear that they felt nothing really happened after a report was made so they didn't really see the point in reporting hate crime.

It is also notable that the youth groups were indicated as a safe space and it was highlighted that these are spaces that for the young people are cultural spaces with people like themselves in attendance. They also felt that where their groups are more diverse they would still consider them to be safe as they are youth led spaces with different relationships to youth workers than teachers. They felt that youth workers were more likely to call out racist incidents or be open to being called out themselves and adapt their behaviours accordingly.

Problem solving group discussion.

The group had identified issues in their communities and experiences they themselves had and the discussion explored possible solutions to these. The problems were picked out at random and anonymously.

The first to come up was.

"The nature of the job application process whereby I am afraid to put my name as it isn't a traditional British/Caucasian name. I am afraid I will be rejected on this basis."

This raised the issue of possible past experiences of family and friends leading to this outcome and instilling fear and concern in younger people for their job prospects. One of the solutions discussed was about how we can normalize differences in naming and make it less unusual to hear varied names. Another young person talked about adapting their name to make it more palatable for white people to use as their name wasn't seen as 'Black'.

The next issue to be picked was.

"The normalization of micro-aggressions inside of schools that are majorly white. What students say and how teachers can almost brush it over."

This was a very passionate discussion where the young people identified this as being a frequent occurrence. They commented that often the micro-aggressions would be things like racist jokes told by other pupils, inappropriate language used, or inappropriate questions asked. Teachers would hear this but not do anything, not call it out leaving young people feeling unsupported.

This also led to a discussion around different consequences for young people depending on their protected characteristics, for example a group of young people caught vaping. If they were white they would face less consequences to their black peers. It was highlighted that this is often the case with their families rather than necessarily in school but that this also stemmed from parental experiences of hate and prejudiced treatment they themselves had experienced and wanting to prevent this happening to their children.

The solutions from schools tend to be to have an assembly to address the issue when a racist incident has been reported but the young people were very vocal that not only did assemblies not work but actually put more of a target on their backs as everyone would know that it was about them. They felt that it was much better to have anti-racist practices and discussion built in throughout the curriculum and that one to ones with young people displaying hate behaviours was a more appropriate measure. They called out for actual consequences for actions that impacted those causing harm than those experiencing it.

It was highlighted that during the maps activity young people had indicated that school was not a safe place for them, but youth groups were. Asked to expand on this they explained what has been mentioned above that other young people's actions were not called out or addressed by teachers or that reporting within the school system made it difficult for things to change. When asked why they then felt safe in youth group settings they said that most of the ones they attend are black led and for black young people so they didn't face micro aggressions there at all. They also commented though that they felt that in a 50/50 or majority white setting they felt they wouldn't have the same issues as in school as the focus there is on young people coming together, having fun and that it is a different more informal environment where they can be themselves. They felt that youth workers are better placed to talk to young people demonstrating hate behaviours one to one and to address the issue right away.

One young person described their situation to YouthLink Scotland staff after the main event where they talked about experiencing racist bullying, being told by other pupils they smelt badly and that maybe if they showered and cleaned 'the brown' off then they wouldn't smell so bad anymore. When asked what the school did when this was reported their process was to give the young people causing the harm 10 verbal warnings, 5 written warnings, a letter to parents and then isolation for 1 hour. The young person described this as them being given more than 15 chances to change their behaviour followed by no real consequences.

"The fear of potentially being a victim of a hate crime. How do some people feel (racial) hate crime more than others? Does their social standing/status make more superior/less susceptive to hate crime?"

This discussion was a little slower but most of the young people felt that they did not always worry about potentially becoming a victim and focused more on what they felt they would do if they experienced it. They agreed that class could impact on their experiences of hate but often feeling fear or concern depending on where you were and what the situation was.

One young person discussed the fact that in public experiencing hate was something they would internalize, not engage with, but if it were something impacting their education or work prospects, they would be more active in taking steps towards addressing the issue. They felt that there was little point in engaging in or directly addressing incidents that happened in public as it wouldn't stop them. Another young person iterated that someone having a charge on their criminal record made no difference to their own life moving forward.

"When walking into shops being followed & watched"

Most of the young people felt that this happened to them, and it was because staff were suspicious they might steal something. Some felt it was more likely to happen if they were part of a bigger group of young people, however, a lot also said that as Black young people they were more likely to be watched when alone as well. One young person also explained that as a young woman it has made them feel very uncomfortable when someone would walk back and forth across a shop aisle obviously keeping an eye on her.

Through the topics above other things came up as well in relation to their confidence in calling out hate crime when it happened and whether their friends would feel able to do so. The majority felt that they would be confident to speak up, for example from the last discussion point, say 'What are you looking at?' Some felt that as part of a group their friends were more likely to intervene but were unsure when on their own.

Further issues that were raised by young people but that we didn't get time to discuss included:

"In schools that are not mainly in the city where there are less black people racist behaviour becomes normalized because black children want to fit in with their white counterparts so they just allow this behaviour."

"Important to address causes before going on to symptoms. The biggest single group targeted by hate crimes are Muslims. – Race riots cause such anxiety in Muslim community, especially to those who look visibly Muslim. How can you even "focus" on "general" / "normal" hate/aggressions when you have that going on. Systemic reason: "Muslims don't matter" – see Baroness Warsi."

"A sense of fear when going to the mosque, with more mosques increasing security."

"Aggressions in hospital (as a medical student) coming from patients/staff."

"Universities not catering to student experience as a religious minority."

"My last year English teacher walked up to me and ask if "I was enslaved". I was obviously confused but he proceeded to say it again a couple more times and made a silly lie to cover it up."

"The issue of racism is not addressed properly in school."

"Black people don't really have a say, they aren't allowed to make decisions."

"Teachers do not attend to me when I need help even if I raised my hand first."

"White people in my school call most black people the 'n' word."

"Racism isn't addressed properly. It's not handled and some of the problems aren't taken into consideration."

"I got hit by a food tray in the bus and when I notified the school, they claimed they removed the boy 'temporarily' but the very next day he was on the bus."

"My English assessment had the word 'Nigger' on it – microaggression."

"When white people smile unnecessarily to me for no reason."

"When I was a child and whenever I speak, they are like 'your English is so good.' – but I've been speaking English my whole life."