



Signposts



“Are they Bovvard?”

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**The conclusions reached by Signpost Young Person’s Skateholder’s group
are not necessarily the views held by the National Youth Agency**

Stakeholder Group Research Report

Introduction

The young person's stakeholder group is exactly what it says on the tin. A group of young people with a stake in their community, which is precisely why they decided to get involved in the Young Researcher Network, under the week of the National Youth Agency.

Our over-arching aim was, in many ways really quite simple. We wanted to know what local policy makers, and young peoples' perception of activities available for young people in the West End of Morecambe. More importantly, as a group, we were interested in how those views differed. In short, we had begun to plan our first piece of comparative research.

The regeneration project in Morecambe is well under way, and it is an established fact that the place has sadly turned from Victorian seaside Mecca, to a community that has become run-down, de-motivated, and for some, seemingly lost its heart. The money has begun to come pouring in, so why ask this question, why research it? Well on the surface there are local policy-driven stories about the transformation of Morecambe, particularly the West End, but our concern is of those who exist at ground-level, the people. What do they think? What's their day-to-day experience of the place, have their lives actually been touched by regeneration yet, or not?

Literature Review

When we looked into the current state of affairs of the West End of Morecambe and how that is documented, we found that there were plenty of positive reports, mainly media-generated, of the 'changing face of Morecambe'.

What there was not an abundance of however, was the views of young people who lived in and around the West End of Morecambe. We felt that the literature out there that documents those aspects of Morecambe that are positive, such as the regeneration project, are definitely good for the area. The absence of literal stories and experiences of young people however, left us begging the question of 'exactly how consultative has the regeneration project been during its planning phase?' are the regenerative measures taken so far meeting a need? Or are there a team of

policy-makers out there somewhere arbitrarily deciding what's right 'for' young people?

Research Aims

In order to break our weighty question down into bite-sized chunks that would produce meaningful data, we came up with three succinct aims:

- What do you define activity as?
- Where are the locations for potential activity, and how often are these activities available?
- How aware are policy-makers, most importantly, and also young people of the provision of activity in the area?

Methodology Chapter

Once we had decided what we considered to be the burning issues, we set about trying to test our hypothesis. We decided almost from the start that the best research method to deploy in measuring experience is the qualitative-based, semi-structured interview.

We interviewed 65 young people aged between 13 and 19 years old, using a series of seven open-ended questions about the West End of Morecambe, and what it's like to live there. We also interviewed 10 professionals working in the youth and community field, using the same set of questions. In total, twelve of the interviews were digitally recorded.

Research participants were informed of the aims of the research before questioning commenced and understood that they could refuse to continue taking part at any stage during the interview, without giving a reason.

Analysis

Following the collection of the data the group agreed to use a method of analysis referred to as *analytic induction*, a method which enabled us to draw out the key emerging themes, in order to categorise the data and begin 'read' it.

As themes began to emerge we re-categorised the data until we had refined it to such an extent that we felt we had a solid understanding of the 'messages' within the data.

Findings

Out of a total of 75 semi-structured interviews, 65 of which were carried out with young people, the data can be broadly categorised into three main groups.

The first group, consisting of around seventy per cent of young respondents, spoke about the West End as a place where there's not a huge amount for young people to do, although they did acknowledge the fact that the regeneration scheme has made a difference in some areas, such as the new parks, and the architectural changes along the promenade.

They identified the high level of drug and alcohol misuse, and the occurrence of unprovoked violence as a big issue in their lives, stating that it had a negative impact on them. The majority of this group identified the same hotspots for violence and public substance misuse, as well as identifying the same places for positive activity, such as the Superbowl, cinema, More Music, Regent Park Studios and the skate park, to name but a few.

Interestingly, the majority of these respondents cited the lack of 'safe' places for young people to congregate and socialise with one another as an issue.

Approximately twenty per cent of the respondents held extremely negative views about the West End, and really struggled to cite examples of places to go for young people that are positive. Almost two-thirds of this cohort recounted personal experiences of physical violence, and/or an acute awareness of a high level of danger in certain areas of the West End, commonly attributable to the discriminatory attitudes of local residents, namely other young people.

The remaining ten per cent of the sample reported having very little knowledge of the area, or stated that they simply 'didn't know', when asked questions about the location and accessibility of activities, and also their experience of life in the West End.

The eight interviews with adults who worked in the area of youth, community and the local authority produced findings that were in contrast with many of the views of young people. All the responses for this group were remarkably similar. The professional's views can be summarised as generally positive, based on an expected acute awareness of local policy and the regeneration project, and generally comparative in their style of description, in that the majority of them cited the West End as being 'not that bad, compared to some places'.

They identified the same places of activity as the young people, although they showed an almost complete lack of insight into the impact that violence and substance misuse can have on young people.

Conclusions

We set out at the beginning of the project trying to gather the views of young people and policy-makers alike, in an attempt to see if their views differed in any way.

From the responses that we received, it is clear that there does seem to be differences, but there are also similarities. Young people did identify activity in a similar vein to professionals, although they tended to go a step further and describe the importance of the security that can accompany feelings of safety.

In contrast, professionals tended to place far more value on aesthetic aspects of the local environment, such as open spaces and architecture for example. For the majority of young people, what seemed to be important is the option to hang-out safely together, in an environment that accommodates their needs.

A general consensus among the researchers involved in this project is that the West End is a community that does care about itself, and that the local authority amongst others, are trying to make much-needed improvements. Where the tension seems to lie however, is in the planning process. Our findings suggest that what has been provided so far is not necessarily what many young people actually want.

A key recommendation of this research arguably, is that perhaps the people in charge of the purse strings in local government may need to be more proactive in the process of consultation with the residents of the West End, young people in

particular, in order to improve on some of the good work they've already done, perhaps making it more targeted, and indeed tailored to local need.