



Somerset Youth Volunteering Network

YRN Project

Findings

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The conclusions reached in this report are made by Somerset Youth Volunteering and are not necessarily the views of The National Youth Agency

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this research project was to look at the way in which young people in the Glastonbury and Street areas of Somerset believe that they are viewed by other members of their community and whether or not this affects their opinion of themselves i.e. becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Following on from this the research will look at a smaller group of young people and address the question of whether becoming involved in youth action and voluntary work has changed both the way in which they believe that they are viewed by other people and the way in which they view themselves. This is an important piece of research because we live in a society which is often seen to vilify young people in the media and to lump young people into easy to define stereotypes.

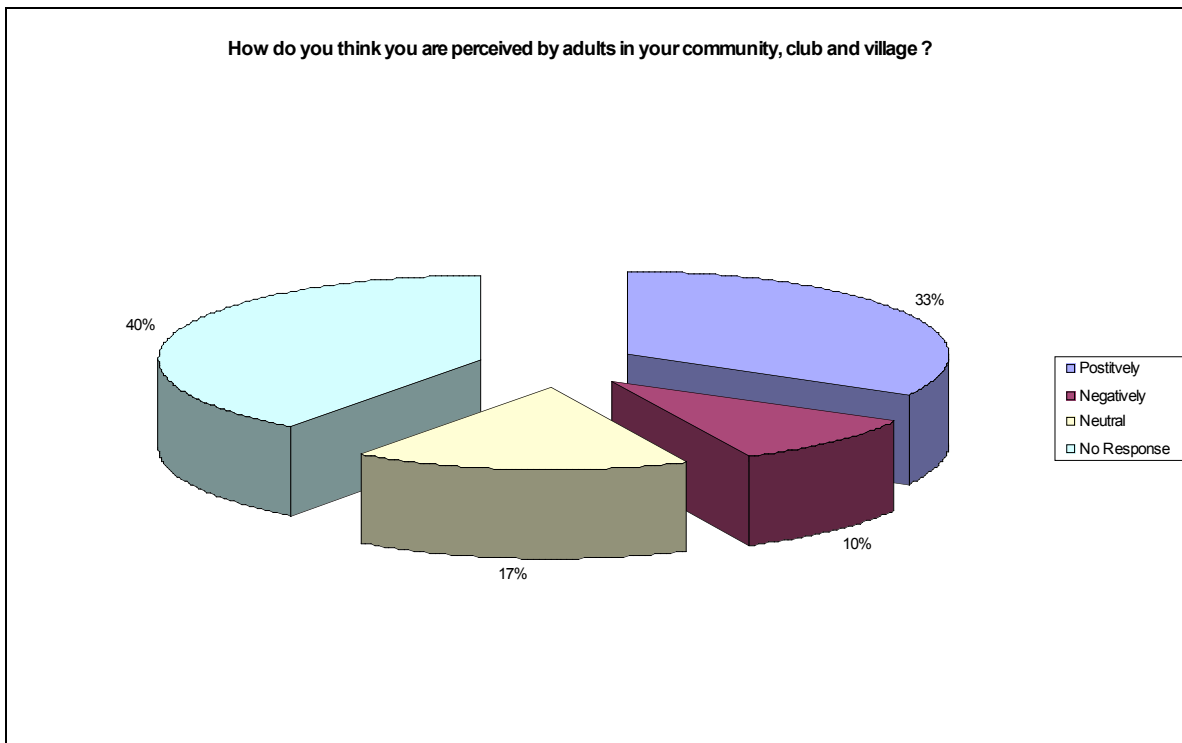
There will be two distinct elements to the research. The first is to take a sample of 100 young people who are not currently engaged in volunteering and to ask them a series of questions via a questionnaire designed to discover how they believe they are seen by others, particularly older people and authority figures. Out of this original group of 100 young people we will identify 30 who state that they would like to undertake some voluntary work or get involved in one of our youth action teams. We will then provide them with relevant opportunities to become involved with various charities and activities across Somerset, and in particular within the Glastonbury and Street area. Finally a selection of 10 young people from this second group of 30 will be taken to meet with two local Members of Parliament, David Heath and Ian Liddell-Grainger, to discuss the ways in which young people are currently being portrayed by the media.

The second element of research will be to take a more direct questionnaire and for use with this sub-set of 30 and to ask them a series of questions designed to identify how, if at all, the way in which they believe they are viewed by others and the way in which they view themselves has changed as a result of the activities, voluntary work and meetings which they have been a part of.

The hypothesis behind this research is that the majority of young people will feel that they are viewed negatively within their own community and that this will then have a negative impact on their self opinion. It is further hypothesised that once young people have had the opportunities to take part in voluntary work or similar activities and to meet with older people who are in positions of authority then they will believe that they are now viewed differently by their community and will therefore have a more positive self image. These hypotheses will be tested by the following research findings.

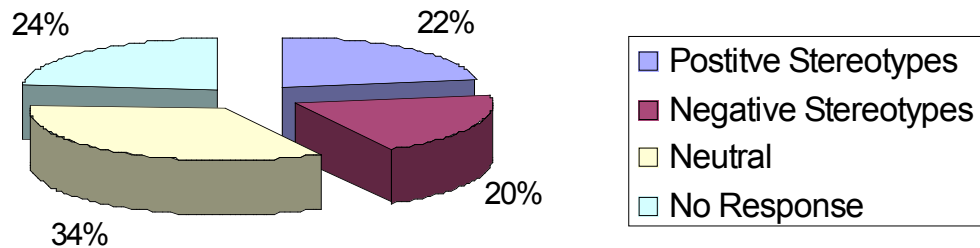
Findings

Over the following pages are the findings from the first survey, conducted with a sample of 100 young people:



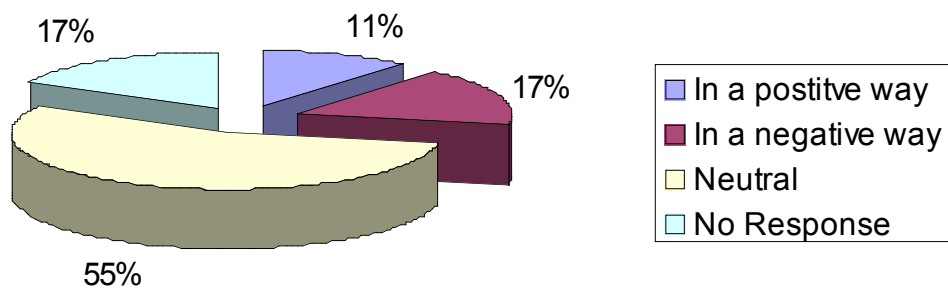
One third of the respondents replied that they already felt themselves to be viewed positively by adults within their local community, compared to only 10% who felt that they were viewed negatively. This could immediately jeopardize the hypotheses behind this research, except that here the findings must be considered skewed by the large number of nil responses to this question. In fact the interesting point raised by this question is 'why were there such a large number of nil responses?' This isn't a particularly tricky, controversial or thought provoking question; indeed it is a simple request for the respondent to provide an opinion where there is no possibility of a right or wrong answer. One can surmise that possibly the 40% of respondents who did not complete this question did so because they did not want to admit the answer, whether positive or negative; or possibly they did not understand the question. Either way it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the data provided by this question.

What Stereotypes do adults put onto you ?

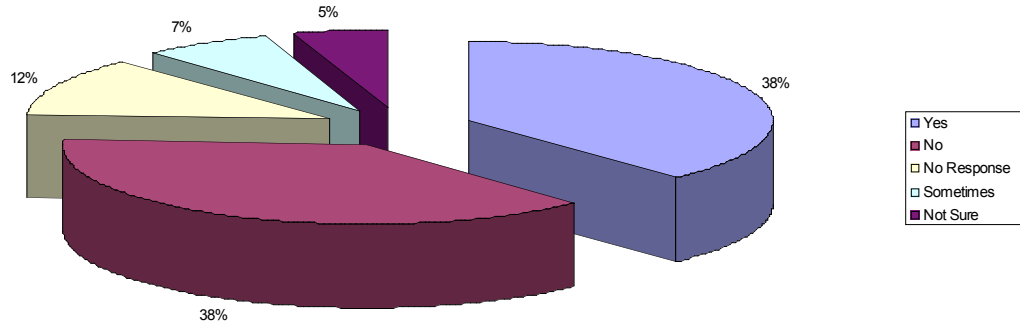


There were fewer nil responses to this question but again it is impossible to draw any great conclusion as the difference between positive and negative responses is just 2%. It is however interesting that 34% of respondents felt that adults put neither positive nor negative stereotypes upon them. This is even further in the responses to the next question where 55% of respondents said that the judgments and stereotypes placed upon them by adults had no affect upon their lives, either positive or negative, with only 11% feeling that adult's opinions affected them positively.

How do adult judgements affect your life ?

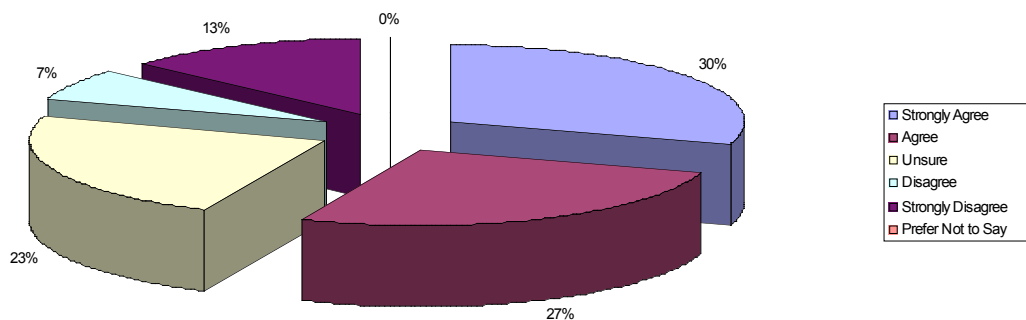


Do you feel that young people are praised and celebrated for what they do in society ?



Findings are further muddled by the responses to this question. Here one finds that 38% of respondents felt that young people were praised and celebrated for what they do in society and a further 38% felt that they weren't, again making it very difficult to draw any meaningful conclusion. The final chart however does allow for a conclusion to be drawn which is that 57% of respondents agreeing that they would not like to change something about themselves, and over half of that 57% strongly agreeing with the statement. Only 7% felt that there was anything about themselves that they would like to change.

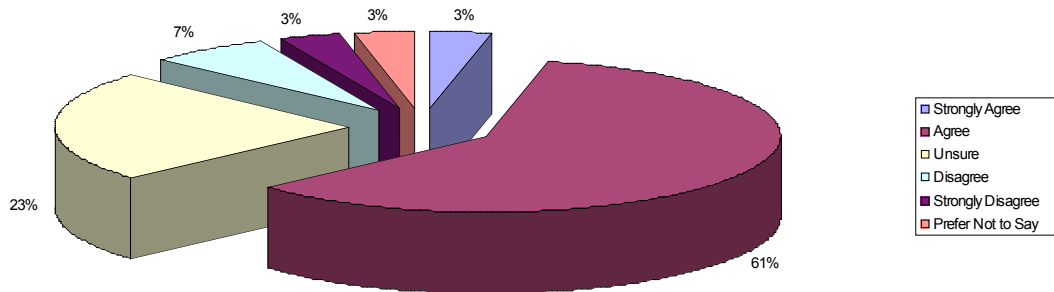
I would not change anything about my personality at present



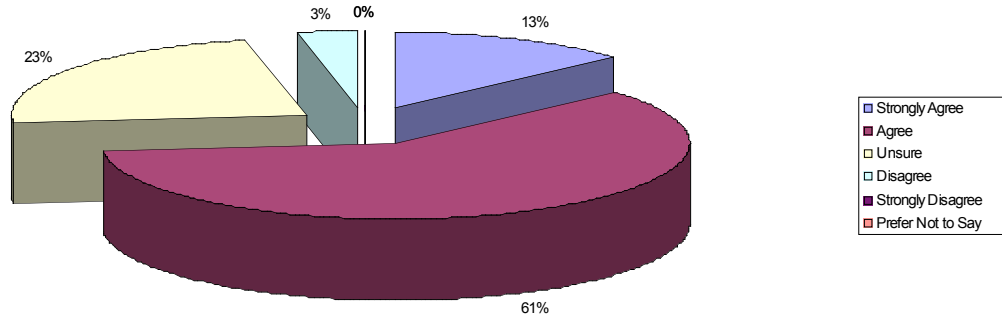
The only real conclusion which can be drawn from all of this is that only 7% of the young people surveyed would like to change something about themselves, though the reasons for them wishing to do so are unknown and whether or not this is as a response to a lowering of self perception as a result of being viewed negatively by other people in their community is unclear.

The following charts form responses to the second part of the research. In the first chart it is clear that 64% of respondents felt that they were valued by other members of their community with only 10% stating that they did not feel valued. This pattern is then followed by the next three charts which show that 74% of respondents felt that they were respected by their peers or friends and 66% by people older than themselves with only 10% and 8% respectively feeling that they were not respected. This is a far more clear cut response than those given to the first set of questions where the responses were far closer together.

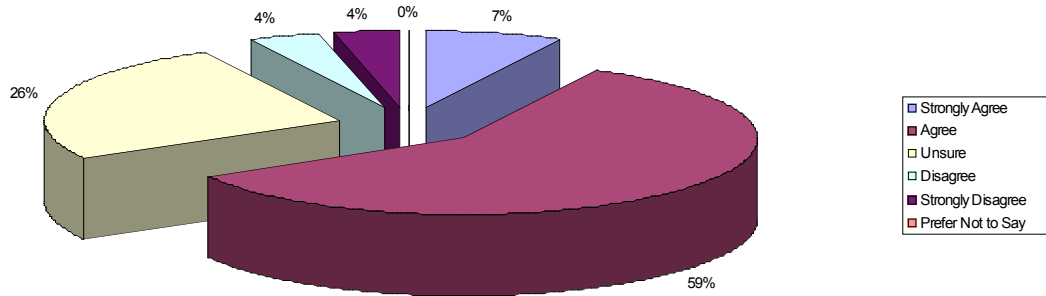
I feel I am valued by other members of my community



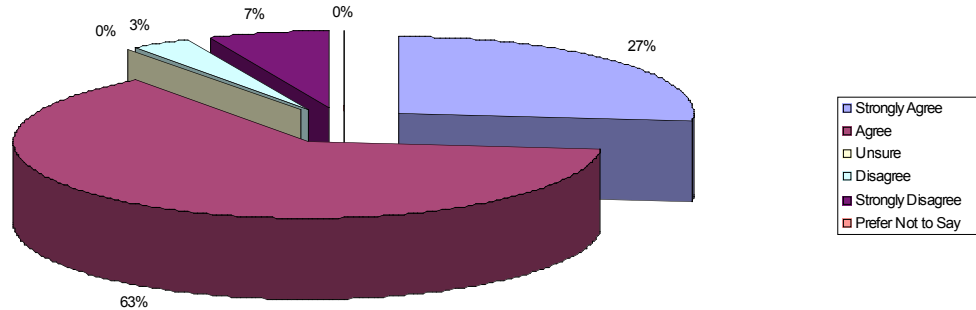
I am respected by my peers / friends



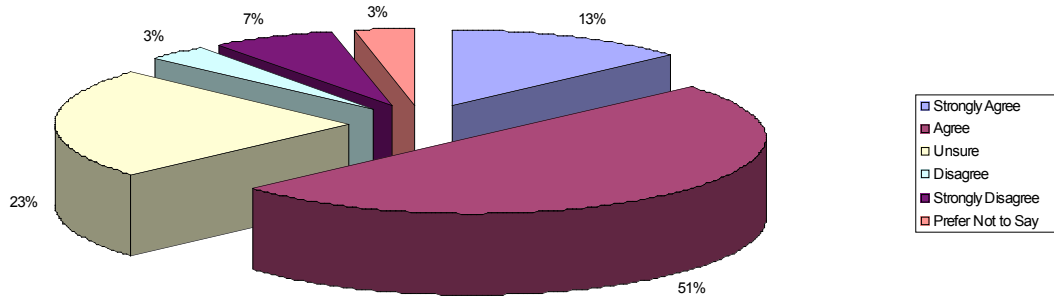
I am respected by people older than myself



My views are taken into consideration by my friends / peers

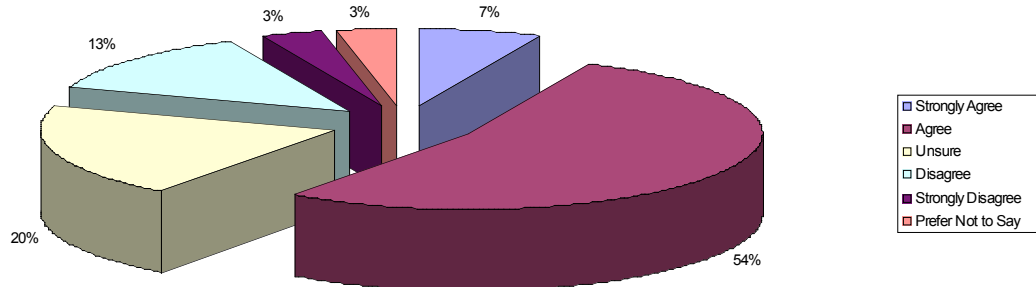


My views are taken into consideration by people older than me

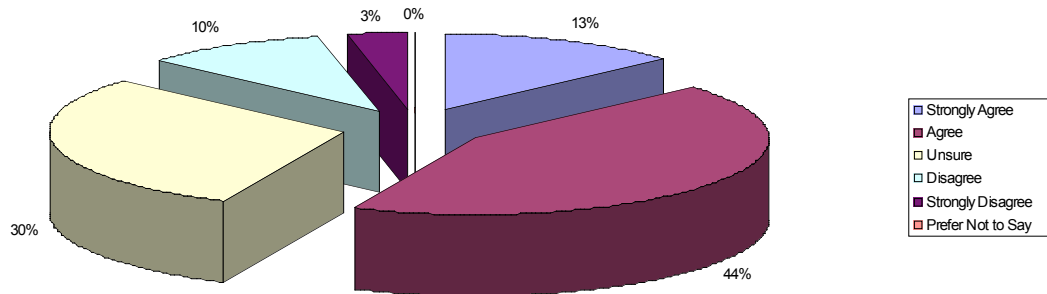


These two charts and the following chart show that 90% of respondents felt that their views are taken into consideration by their peers and friends, 64% felt that this was the case by people older than them and 61% felt this was the case with people in a position of authority. Again this is a dramatic difference to the findings from the first survey.

My views are taken into consideration by those in a position of authority

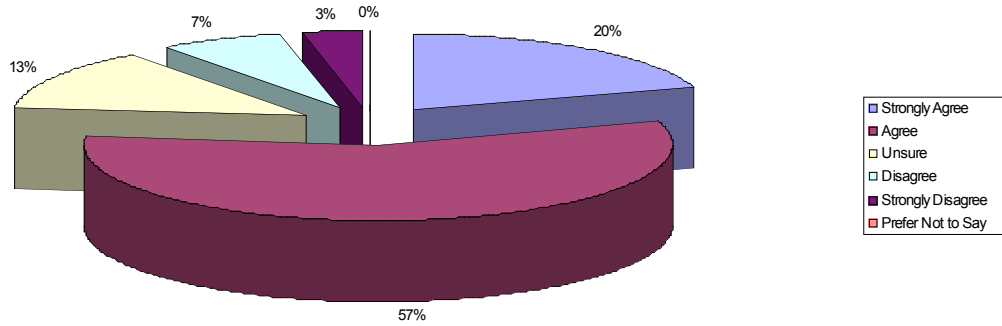


I feel that I make a positive contribution to my community



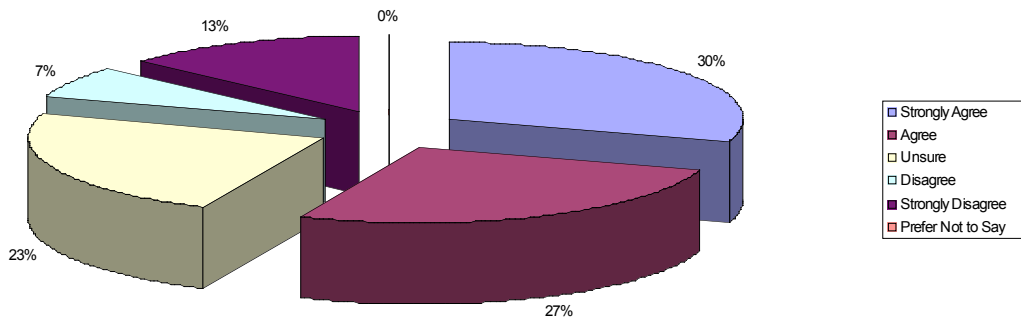
Again it is clear that 57% of respondents felt that they were making a positive contribution to their community and that 77% felt a part of their community. These responses show clearly that the young people in the second survey felt far more positively about their local community and their position within it than those who completed the first survey.

I feel that I am a part of my community



In the final chart it is interesting that once again 57% of respondents state that there is nothing about themselves which they would wish to change and 7% who state that there is. This is exactly the same percentages as the first survey.

I would not change anything about my personality at present



Conclusion

In conclusion it is possible to make three statements.

- 1) From the initial survey it is impossible to draw any conclusion about the way in which young people feel they are viewed in the Glastonbury and Street area, other than to state that approximately equal numbers feel that they are seen and treated positively and those who feel that they are seen and treated negatively.
- 2) Once young people undertake some voluntary work and are given the opportunity to meet with various authority figures from within their community then they feel far more positive about the way in which they are being viewed and the fact that they believe that their views and opinions are being listened to.
- 3) From this research there is no demonstrable link between either the perception of young people by others or the undertaking of voluntary work and young people's self perception and self esteem.