

it's like that

Research Summary

Over the past 25 years, The Prince's Trust has provided practical and sustained help to disadvantaged young people throughout the United Kingdom. To do this, we need to understand the views and hopes of those young people who need our help most. Many organisations are doing things for young people. But rarely does anyone ask them exactly what they worry about and hope for.

There is real cause for concern about the lives of a substantial minority of young people in Britain. A recent study of children from five major European cities found that British teenagers were most likely to use cannabis, shoplift, fight in the street and vandalise buildings.

At the same time, we learn that Britain has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe. That amongst young British men aged 15-14, the suicide rate has doubled in the past 25 years. And that unemployment among 18-24-year-olds runs at almost double the rate of the population as a whole. It's estimated that at least one in eleven 16-17-year-olds are not in education, work or training.

It is clear that some of our young people face profound difficulties, that these difficulties are in some way linked, and that these young people need greater support and understanding.

Yet if services for alienated young people are based on misconceptions, they will fail to meet their needs. This research attempts to give a voice to young people who are often 'done to' but rarely listened to. It seeks to find out what young people really need – by listening to what they say about their lives.

It's Like That is the first product of an in-depth research programme investigating the attitudes and aspirations of young people on the margins of mainstream society. It is our greatest hope that this study will help the media, policy makers and those who deliver services to listen and respond to their voices.

Key findings

This research suggests that many of the young people most alienated from society – including offenders and the unemployed – feel that nobody listens to, understands or respects them. Much of what the young people have to say challenges the media myths that have sprung up around disadvantaged young people:

- Most young fathers feel great love and responsibility for their children – including those who do not live with them.
- Most young mothers feel able to cope with and enjoy motherhood, despite the very real problems they face, such as money worries, social isolation and relationship difficulties.
- Most unemployed young people want to work – but lack positive adult role models to motivate them. They usually have difficult school careers, leading to truancy and a 'rut' of low self-esteem.



- The majority of young offenders come from unstable families with a history of trouble with the police. Many have severe literacy problems, most have been excluded from school - and many desperately regret their past when they reach their early 20s.

Our research also found that many young people were trying hard to make a success of their lives despite the tough circumstances they faced. Those young people with a stake in society – through a job, a loving relationship or a home of their own – felt most positive about the future.

Parents

- While many young mothers felt their lives were empty before having a baby, some also regretted that they had not waited until they were older.
- Many of the mothers and fathers experienced extreme difficulties in their relationships with each other and with their families.
- Young parents felt proud of their achievements and resented being patronised or stigmatised.
- Many had money worries and felt they would value more training opportunities and affordable childcare.

Unemployed

- The majority of young unemployed people hated their situation, highlighting boredom, isolation and lack of money.
- A lot of the young people regretted wasting opportunities at school and were demotivated, lacked confidence and were unable to see how the future might be different.
- Among those who have never worked and whose families have never worked, there is little work ethic.

Offenders and those at risk of offending

- Many of the young people we spoke to distrust authority and are heavily influenced by their peers.
- Most expressed a desire for someone to guide them – ‘mentors’ who are on their wavelength.
- Many young people felt ‘labelled’ and pre-judged because of their environment, background past record or status.

This study points to some crucial ways in which our society can help young people to take their place in society. For example:

- Underachievement at school – such as leaving without any GCSEs – is closely associated with single parenthood, unemployment and criminality. Initiatives to tackle underachievement could pre-empt many of the problems experienced by young people.
- Young people feel most comfortable turning to peers (89%) for advice, followed by parents (79%) and doctors (78%). They do not feel comfortable talking to social workers or helplines.

- Many young parents admit that they needed guidance – not in parenting skills, but in dealing with complex adult relationships, which cause them tension and conflict.
- Young unemployed people need positive role models to motivate them, raise their self-esteem and give them a more realistic expectation of the world of work. They would benefit from 'apprenticeship' opportunities, which combine training with paid employment.
- Young people at risk of offending need help to prevent them from falling into a downwards spiral of truancy and crime before the crucial ages of 14-16. And young offenders need mentoring and training to help them develop the skills and confidence to get into work and out of crime.
- 60% of young offenders come from families where someone has a police record. Many grow up learning by example to resolve situations with violence. Anger management should be taught at an early age.

It is these disadvantaged young people that The Prince's Trust aims to help – through programmes that enable them to develop confidence, learn new skills and get into work. But to continue to do so, we need to understand the barriers they face.

Who we spoke to

Researchers spoke to over 3,000 young men and women aged 14-25. Researchers specifically surveyed young people who face difficulties that The Prince's Trust consider define disadvantage:

- Exclusion and truancy from school
- Low basic skills and educational under-achievement
- Unemployment
- Leaving care
- Disability
- Offending or those at risk of offending
- Coming from a minority ethnic community
- Lone parenting

The research programme was conducted in England, Wales and Scotland in both rural and urban locations. It found its respondents on some of the worst estates of Great Britain.

The main study, carried out by Headworks, a specialist youth research consultancy, focused on those affected by three key issues:

- Parenting
- Offending (and those 'at risk' of offending)
- Unemployment

This study allows young mothers and fathers to talk frankly about being parents; it looks at young offenders and their attitudes to the criminal justice system; and it investigates the beliefs of young people trapped in a cycle of unemployment and benefit-dependency. There proved to be a great deal of overlap between the three key areas, so findings from each module were fed into the others.

The researchers asked young people what had influenced them; how they felt about their lives now; and what they hope for the future.

A further study conducted for The Prince's Trust by MORI looked specifically into young people's attitudes towards self-employment. All these findings were underpinned by a pro-bono research study into the lifestyles and concerns of disadvantaged young people, carried out for the Trust by BRMB International. Findings from this study have been fed into the report.

Investing in young people

Since it was set up, The Prince's Trust has helped 400,000 young people to succeed. For example:

- 40,000 young people have started their own businesses.
- 35,000 have completed our personal development programme which uses teamwork in the community to help people gain confidence and skills and improve job prospects.
- thousands of individuals and groups have received financial assistance and taken part in confidence-building courses.

The Trust needs to raise thousands of pounds every week to continue its vital work. Without generous support, The Trust would be unable to continue giving young people the chance to succeed.

Which of the following would you like to do in the future?

	parents %	unemployed %	offenders %	total %
get a (better) job	64	67	70	66
earn more money	57	59	72	61
get (more) qualifications	50	43	51	53
learn new skills	41	34	52	43
move to a better area	44	44	52	42
settle down with a partner or get married	33	33	47	42
have (more) children	28	30	40	31

'It's Like That' is available at £17.50 including postage and packing

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