YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

Qualitative Research with Young People in Glasgow: September 2022

Glasgow
Centre for
Population
Health

The Lines
Between

Contents

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Executive summary

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) is a partnership between NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Glasgow City Council and the University of Glasgow, sponsored by the Scottish Government. GCPH commissioned The Lines Between to conduct research with young people aged 16-20 in Glasgow to explore factors that support or hinder their transitions into adulthood.

The Lines Between developed a research approach and methodology which obtained ethical approval from the University of Glasgow. The study launched in March 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic changed life in Scotland; timings meant that the study presented a unique opportunity to capture young people's thoughts and experiences of transitions to adulthood during the pandemic.

Young people were recruited to participate in the research through engagement with various partners across the city. The research team aimed to spark conversations with young people about transitions and encouraged them to reflect on and describe their experiences, hopes and concerns.

Key themes in the research included:

- Perceptions and experiences of transitioning to adulthood.

- Factors that support or hinder progression to independent adult life.

- Factors that affect young people's decision-making processes.

- What support do young people need to transition to adulthood successfully.

This report presents findings based on a thematic analysis of interviews and focus group transcripts from research with a sample of 31 young people living within the Glasgow area.

Discussions with young people about their perceptions of adulthood centred on the journey into adulthood, which they associated with greater freedoms, responsibilities, expectations, and consequences. Young people suggested adulthood ranged from 16 years to mid-20s, but views on the timing of transitions were not clear-cut, with ideas differing by person.

Four interrelated themes emerged in discussions on transitions: a sense of readiness, moving on from school, social changes, and increased independence. There were differences in participants' sense of preparedness for this transition, especially regarding increased financial responsibilities.

Discussions about challenges and barriers in the transition to adulthood spanned mental health and wellbeing, pressures and expectations, community concerns, and poverty.

Participants described the supportive and influential figures in their lives and how they affect transitions to adulthood. Important role models include family members, friends, staff in education settings, youth workers, child protection officers, community police officers, university lecturers, third sector organisations, and counselling services. Experiences were not universal across participants.

In discussions about the progression from school, research participants had low awareness of government or local authority-led schemes for young people. Some suggested that career advisors influenced their decisions about planning their next steps; a few felt that their decisions and future planning were based on their intuition. Advice about transitions for other young people included seeking support and resisting pressure.

Young people described the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their transitions to adulthood. These included restricted life experiences and reduced opportunities for social connections, such as an inability to make new friends as they entered new environments, like university. They told the researchers that the pandemic affected their learning opportunities, university readiness, and future employment prospects. Some felt their wellbeing had been impacted by the restrictions they experienced during the pandemic. This included barriers to accessing support, difficulties in engaging resources usually used as coping methods, and lack of pathways to help with decisions about their next steps and future choices. In contrast, a few felt the pandemic had not changed their lives.

Participants shared their views on additional support needed to help transition to adulthood. Mental health support was often highlighted, including one-to-one support and peer-to-peer initiatives. Other suggestions included sexual health interventions at school, financial support, and learning life skills through the school curriculum. A few felt there should be more support for students who did not want to continue to university, including access to career services after leaving school, and help with confidence building.

Through open, flexible and young person-centred discussions, valuable insight has been gathered into young people's perceptions of adulthood. This report captures the challenges they face, their support networks and additional support that would be beneficial as they continue their transition into adulthood.

As might be expected, the experiences, views and challenges that young people shared in this research varied significantly; each person is unique. However, some important common themes emerged: young people's definitions of adulthood are wide-ranging but include milestones that might be met at different ages. Significant steps include finding employment, paying bills, moving out of home and starting their own family.

The findings provide a useful evidence base for GCPH and its partners to consider. They informed the development of recommendations presented on the next page, which are grouped into four overarching themes: health and wellbeing; finance; community services; and education.

Recommendations:

Health and wellbeing

1. Monitor whether young people's responses to pandemic restrictions have lasting health implications.

2. Improve access to young people's mental health services.

3. Involve young people in the design of mental health support services.

4. Build a culture of support and understanding of mental health in schools, higher education settings, and community levels.

5. Champion the importance of accessible community facilities in supporting mental health.

Economic opportunities and resources

6. Consider economic support for young people from disadvantaged areas to increase their further education choices.

7. Funding for other unmet support needs.

8. Support to help young people access existing resources.

9. Monitor whether young people's experiences in the pandemic have lasting employability implications and take steps to redress this.

Community services

10. Increased provision of measures to improve community safety.

Education

11. Support schools to adopt inclusive approaches to teaching.

12. Education to help young people prepare for life after high school.

13. Enhanced support for those who do not access higher education.

14. More targeted awareness-raising in schools and youth settings of existing Scottish Government and Local Authority support.

15. Consider ways to address employability barriers caused by a lack of access to work experience opportunities during COVID-19.

16. Universities should ensure that support for mental health, life skills and learning is available and accessible for students.

01

Introduction

Background

1.1. The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) is a partnership between NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Glasgow City Council and the University of Glasgow, funded by the Scottish Government. Founded in 2004, the GCPH aims to understand the patterns and causes of Glasgow's enduring poor health and support new approaches to improve health and tackle inequality in the city.

1.2. In recent years, there have been growing concerns about the impact of public spending cuts, austerity measures and welfare reforms on young people. The GCPH recognised a lack of evidence about the lived experiences of young people during their transition from childhood to an independent adult life amid this challenging economic climate.

1.3. Responding to this lack of evidence, the GCPH commissioned The Lines Between to undertake exploratory research with young people aged 16-20 in Glasgow. The study aimed to explore factors that support or hinder young people's transitions into adulthood, focusing on important transitions like leaving school, moving out of the family home, and moving into higher education or employment. The GCPH were also keen to understand how these transitions are experienced differently across different socio-economic groups.
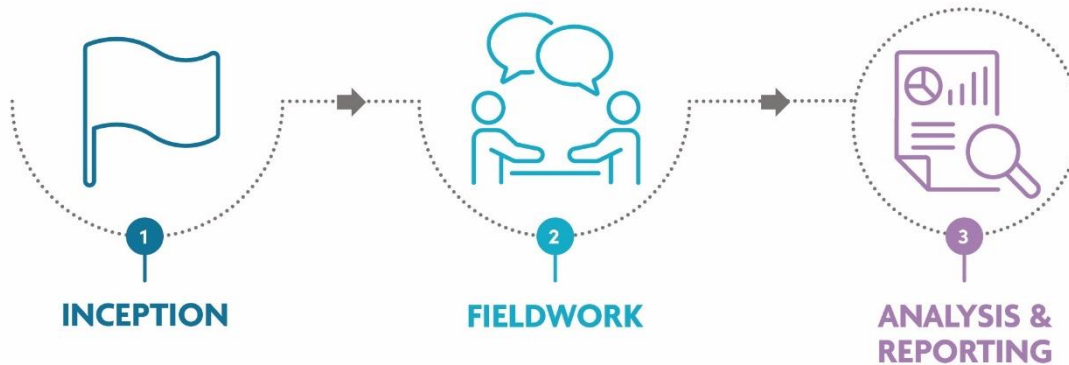
Methodology

Research Advisory Group

1.4. The research was guided by an Advisory Group, established to offer expertise, support and advice. This group met regularly via Zoom with representation from:

Research approach

1.5. A three-stage approach to the research was set out:

INCEPTION → FIELDWORK → ANALYSIS & REPORTING

1.6. The research was commissioned in early 2020, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some initial scoping work by the GCPH identified several factors that contribute to young people's transitions to adulthood, and the intention was for the researchers to deliver face-to-face focus groups with young people across Glasgow to explore transitions in detail.

1.7. With the onset of the pandemic, the study was paused until there was more certainty over how to carry out the research safely and effectively. The shut-down of services and organisations for several months had a significant and lasting impact on the ability to recruit participants. There were also limited opportunities for face-to-face fieldwork due to restrictions on in-person gatherings.

1.8. In late 2020, the decision was taken to conduct virtual fieldwork. With a shift in methodology to use online platforms for fieldwork, the study obtained approval from the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. As the pandemic restrictions eased in mid-2021, an amendment to the ethical approval was granted to allow face-to-face fieldwork to take place.

1.9. In parallel to the ethics application, The Lines Between worked with the Advisory Group to develop research questions and a proforma to gather qualitative data on:

- Perceptions and experiences of transitioning to adulthood.
- Factors that support or hinder progression to independent adult life.
- Factors that affect young people's decision-making processes.
- What support do young people need to transition to adulthood successfully.

1.10. The discussion guide was designed to spark conversations with young people about transitions. However, the GCPH was keen to allow free discussion and encouraged young people to describe any relevant experiences and raise concerns that mattered most to them. Researchers sought to establish a trusting, open tone in their engagements so young people could be candid and felt supported to engage with complex, personal conversations. As expected, the impacts of COVID-19 became part of the discussions.

1.11. Young people were recruited through different pathways, including various Glasgow-based youth work services, local colleges and universities and broader professional networks. Researchers designed and shared a flyer with members of the Advisory Group to encourage participation in their areas of work. Each study participant received a £20 Amazon voucher as a thank you for taking part.

1.12. In total, 31 young people participated in this study, as set out in Table 1.1.
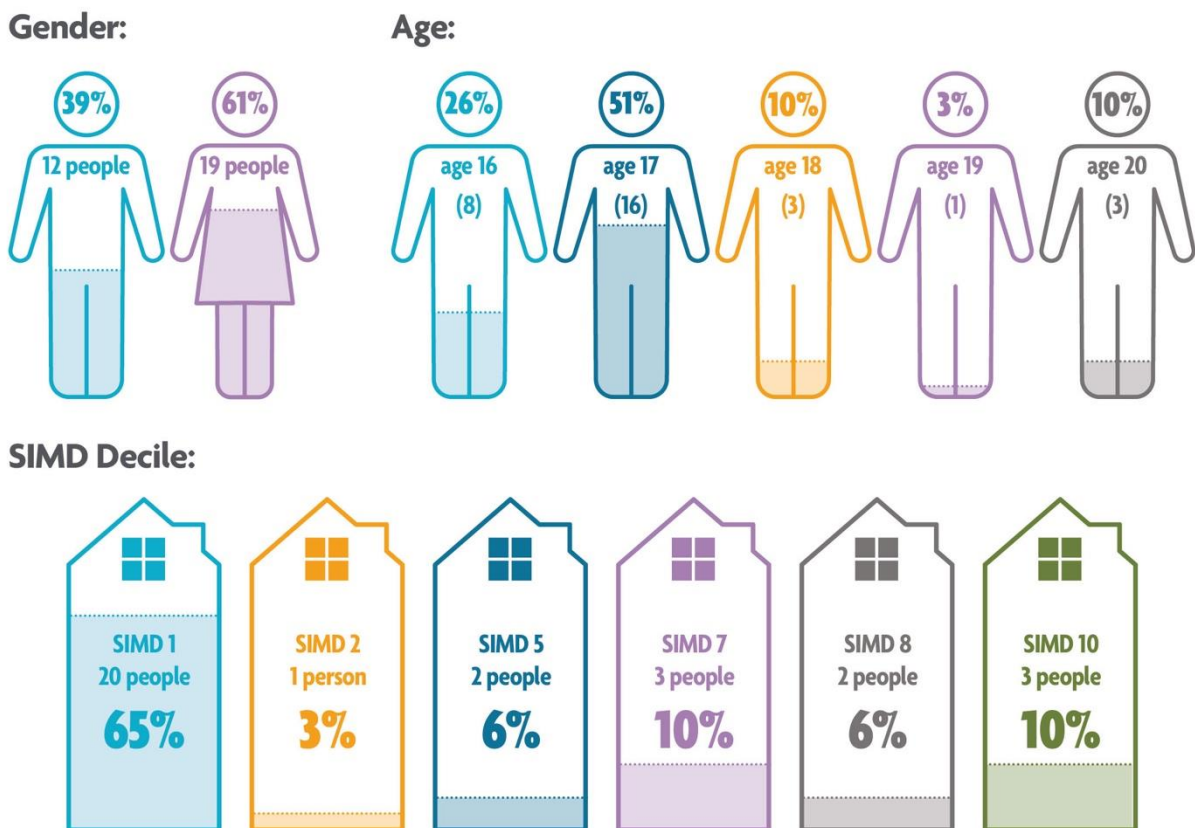
Table 1.1: Research activities

Method	Number	Total participants
In-person focus groups	4 focus groups, each with 3-5 participants	17
Online focus groups	1	7
Telephone interviews	3	3
Online video call interviews	3	4[*]

1.13. Profile data for the young people is presented in Figure 1.1. Key details are:

- More young women took part than young men (19 compared to 12).

- Over three-quarters of respondents (24, 77%) were aged 16 or 17.

- Nearly two-thirds of participants (20, 65%) lived in SIMD decile 1 postcodes, among the 10% of most deprived areas in Scotland[†].

- The sample somewhat reflects the socio-economic profile of Glasgow (see Figure 1.1). Glasgow has the highest percentage of children living in poverty in Scotland[1] and there are significant levels of deprivation: nearly half of Glasgow's residents – 280,000 people (44%) – reside in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland[2]. Despite best efforts to recruit a broad sample, the profile of participants is more heavily skewed towards those from the most deprived SIMD deciles and there was no representation from those from deciles 3, 4 and 6. A higher proportion of females (two-thirds) took part than the overall population of Glasgow (one-half[3])

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[*] One was a joint interview with two participants.
[†] According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, which provides a relative measure of deprivation based on different indicators including income, employment, health, education, housing and crime.

Figure 1.1: Profile data

Gender:

39% — 12 people

61% — 19 people

Age:

26% — age 16 (8)

51% — age 17 (16)

10% — age 18 (3)

3% — age 19 (1)

10% — age 20 (3)

SIMD Decile:

SIMD 1 — 20 people — 65%

SIMD 2 — 1 person — 3%

SIMD 5 — 2 people — 6%

SIMD 7 — 3 people — 10%

SIMD 8 — 2 people — 6%

SIMD 10 — 3 people — 10%

Data limitations

1.14. The findings are based on a thematic analysis of interviews and focus group transcripts from research with a sample of 31 young people living within the Glasgow area. They are not to be interpreted as representative of the wider population.

1.15. Focus groups as a method to gather data have many benefits; they allow people to share experiences, identify points of consensus or mixed views, and develop ideas in an iterative process. However, this forum limits the time each person has to talk about themselves and may influence how much personal information participants choose to share.

1.16. Discussions with young people spanned personal and emotive topics such as mental health, family life and personal safety, and some chose not to describe their personal experiences with their peers in any depth. Those who participated in one-to-one interviews went into greater detail about their experiences and challenges.

1.17. While efforts were made to recruit young people from a broad socio-economic spectrum, 65% of those consulted were from postcodes in the SIMD decile 1. This was because youth work partners were a key recruitment driver in this study, and they work mainly with young people in areas of multiple deprivation. Over half of the sample were from a concentrated geographic area in Glasgow (Castlemilk).

Structure of the report

1.18. This report aims to amplify the voices and experiences of the young people who participated in the research. So that the reader can hear from them directly, quotes and excerpts from their interviews are included throughout the report. Some quotes have been lightly edited for readability[‡]. Each quote is followed by a basic demographic profile of the young person who contributed; their gender, age and SIMD decile are noted.

1.19. The terms 'participant 1' and 'participant 2' are used in quoted excerpts from conversations between participants. These excerpts are drawn from focus group discussions or dyad interviews (interviews with two participants). Both participants are quoted if the inclusion of different voices provides useful context or adds depth to a point covered in the report.

1.20. This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 explores young people's perceptions and experiences of transitioning to adulthood.

- Challenges and barriers to transitioning to adulthood are explored in Chapter 3.

- Chapter 4 presents findings about young people's support systems and influential figures in their lives.

- Chapter 5 discusses the impact of COVID-19 on young people.

- Chapter 6 describes the different types of support young people said they needed.

- Chapter 7 contains a discussion of the findings.

- Recommendations are set out in Chapter 8.

[‡] For example, repetition, interruptions or digression within sentences have been removed for ease of reading, but no words have been added and the context and meaning have been retained.

02

Perceptions and experiences of transitioning to adulthood

> ❝ *Yeah, I've always thought an adult [is] someone like my mum and dad, like responsible and stuff… I find like the whole word 'adult' really scary because I'm 18 but I'm nowhere near being an adult - but in the eyes of the law I am an adult."* – Female, 18, SIMD 7

2.1.   This chapter outlines what the young people told us about their perceptions of adulthood and their experiences of transitioning into adulthood.

Perceptions of adulthood

2.2.   Responses about perceptions of adulthood are discussed first. During the analysis of comments about adulthood, three inter-related themes emerged:

- Journey into adulthood
- Greater freedoms
- Responsibilities, expectations, and consequences

Journey into adulthood

2.3.   In reflecting on when adulthood is reached, some participants identified a specific age (ranging from 16 years old to the mid-20s). Others discussed key stages of life they associated with adulthood, such as starting university, leaving home, getting a full-time job, or having children.

> ❝ *Participant 1: "I feel like 21. At 21 you're a full adult. Because when you're 18, you're still a teenager, even if you are older." – Female, 16, SIMD 1*
>
> *Participant 2: "People could say 16 considering that you can do certain stuff like have your own house or have a kid or something but 21 is definitely... yeah." – Female, 17, SIMD 1*

Participant 3: "I would say mid 20s because some people still live with their mum and that... I'll probably still be living with my mum at that age." – Female, 17, SIMD 1

Participant 4: "I don't know, everybody's different aren't they? Everybody matures at different ages. Like look at [Participant 2], she's more mature than most adults." – Female, 17, SIMD 1

2.4.   As illustrated by the discussion presented at 2.3, views on the timing of reaching adulthood are not clear cut; young people expressed a perception that the state of adulthood can differ from person to person. A common theme was that adulthood is, in fact, a *process* that occurs over time.

> *I suppose that's the sort of stereotype, when you turn 18, you're officially an adult… but you could still stay at home or moving out, as I say, a supportive bubble in where you stay, like that sort of helps you move into adulthood." – Male, 20, SIMD 5*

2.5.   These conversations triggered discussions about how far participants felt they were in their journey to adulthood. They compared this to their own – or others' – expectations of what it means to be an adult. Some described not yet feeling like an adult. Others viewed themselves as sitting between childhood and adulthood due to having the 'safety nets' of home or university support. One felt they had been in an adult role for a long time, due to their responsibilities at home.

Greater freedoms

2.6.   Increased freedoms and an ability to make your own decisions were often associated with adulthood. However, a few young people expressed frustrations at the limits to these freedoms, feeling that they face restrictions in important decisions that will shape their future.

> *Like where you want to live and that, like where you go. Even though we get they responsibilities, when you're an adult you have full freedom." – Female, 17, SIMD 1*

> *You're treated like an adult in some situations and like a pure wean in others... So for example, you get to pick your own classes and all that, but then I'm not allowed to pick what classes I'm allowed to drop... They'll tell you you're independent; you're a leader, you need to think for yourself. But I'm not allowed to pick what I want to do?" – Female, 17, SIMD 1*

Responsibilities, expectations, and consequences

2.7.   A common theme in conversations about adulthood was that it brings an increase in responsibilities, expectations and consequences. In these conversations, issues like money, employment, having dependants, looking after yourself and acting more maturely were described. There was a strong sense that some participants interpreted adulthood as being a sole individual with absolute responsibility.

> *When you start to kinda look after yourself, maybe provide for other people instead of just getting provided for." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

> *Being an adult is when you're the only one responsible like for your life. Like you have to make your own decisions and you have no one telling you what to do. Like kind of all on your own. Like when you're let's say like a learner driver, you have someone sitting next to you telling you where to go what to do, how to do it. And as soon as you pass, you're kind of thinking for yourself. And I think it's kind of the same as being an adult." – Female, 19, SIMD 7*

> *As you get older there are more consequences. Like for the stuff you do, decisions you make and things like that. When you're younger, you just kind of get told off and that's it. But when you're an adult, it's kind of different. I think you should think more about how you act and the decisions you make." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

Transitions

2.8. During the analysis of comments about transitions, four inter-related themes emerged:

- Sense of readiness

- Moving on from school

- Social changes

- Increased independence

Sense of readiness

2.9. There were mixed comments about how ready young people felt about moving towards adulthood. Some young people felt ambivalent, unprepared or scared about this transition. Others described excitement or becoming more confident over time.

> *I'm 16 and you think you can't wait to be 18, I'm going to be officially an adult. But actually, it sort of scares me to think that I'm going to university next year. I'm hoping to move to Dundee, so my support in school and in Glasgow will be gone as I move city, quite far away actually. So, I mean, I am quite scared for that. 16-year-olds are scared to become 18 and an adult." – Female, 16, SIMD 8*

> *I found that it hits me on a level where all the experience that I had in the last year, just finally sinks in, and you're like, 'woah, this is what I can do. This is what I've done. This is what I'm gonna do'". – Male, 20, SIMD 1*

Moving on from school

2.10. Leaving school or moving on to further or higher education was a standard transition that participants were preparing for or had already experienced. Some who had stayed in post-school education mentioned enjoying their new course or explained that they preferred this to the school environment.

2.11. Many of the young people we spoke to had specific careers in mind, spanning sectors such as IT, administration, business, tourism and travel, health and social care, and arts and entertainment. A few, however, were unsure about their next steps. Some suggested this was a big decision and described a sense of pressure about what to move on to. Others spoke of resisting this pressure and being more relaxed about decision-making.

> *I feel like everyone just thinks that they have to know what they're doing by the time they leave school, but I don't agree with that at all. I think you can know what you're doing when you're like 20, you don't need to know right now." – Female, 17, SIMD 1*

> *Participant 1: "Being 17 and getting asked all this and getting it flung at you, it's a bit of a big hit… At one point I didn't know what I wanted to do. And it was like, 'oh you're 17, you're leaving school soon, you need to know what you're doing', and it felt like it was being pushed on to me. And it's a big weight to carry at 17 because you might not know what to do but you're like, 'well I have to do something, because I've not got long'." – Female, 17, SIMD 1*

> *Participant 2: "You're getting 'what do you want to do when you leave school?', all the important stuff about being an adult, but you want to just be 17." – Female, 17, SIMD 1*

Social changes

2.12. Changes in socialising habits, friendships and status within the family were commented on by some. Examples shared by young people included engaging more in adult social activities (like drinking and going to nightclubs), being consulted in important family decisions, and growing apart from friends.

> *I feel like the older people in my family... They've included me in conversations that they wouldn't have before because I was younger." – Female, 16, SIMD 1*

> *You change a lot as a person. Quite a lot of my pals from school who like I grew up with, they changed too. And it's like you just kind of outgrow each other and move on your separate ways. And that was something that I found quite difficult at first. It was just weird, I'd never experienced something like that before, it's just like these people I've been talking to every single day. They were my best pals but then taken outside of a school context it's like we're not really the same people, which is fine, it's just one of those things but it was, I think just coming to terms with that understanding. Just understanding that it's just natural. That was quite a shock." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

Increased independence

2.13. Several participants described experiences of increased independence and associated responsibilities. Some connected their independence with being employed and managing their money, while others discussed this in relation to independent study. A

few described moving out of home, managing their self-care, or having greater autonomy around daily activities, such as shopping and staying in the house alone.

> *I've had my own flat for about a year and a half now, so I feel the responsibility of not wasting your money on stupid stuff and keeping it for actual important stuff, that's being an adult. Because apparently, the front of your brain is the last bit to develop and that's your reasoning… because as a wee guy, you're like, oh, let me just do that, let me skip school or let me not sleep and sleep is important, all that kind of stuff. So I feel like that's being an adult, taking care of yourself and staying in check, I guess." – Male, 20, SIMD 1*

2.14.   Again, there were differences in participants' sense of readiness for this transition. While some looked forward to independent living, others said they were not ready to move out of home or to a new place. A few noted the benefits of continuing to have the 'safety nets' of their parent's care at home.

2.15.   While some spoke of enjoying working and related social benefits, self-reliance, and the ability to save for the future, others discussed not wanting, or feeling ready for, increased financial responsibilities. A few participants also mentioned financial struggles, difficulties with budgeting, or the competing pulls between spending and saving.

> *When I'm sober, I'm very much concerned about how much I've spent, figuring everything out. But on a night out, in the morning or like the next day I'm gonna be like 'I've spent too much money last night!' It's always painful to check the bank account the next day... I'm trying my best with the money but like I said, when you're out with your pals or something or it's kind of easy just to… you know, you want to have a good time." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

03

Challenges and barriers to transitioning to adulthood

> " *I mean, thinking about challenges, probably the most like universal one is… this whole thing with mental health… of all the people that I talk to, even on nights out, or people you talk to in the union or something. Like, that's like the one constant thing, which comes up all the time. To be honest, I think it is incredibly difficult to deal with at a young age for sure." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

3.1.   This chapter outlines what the young people we spoke to told us about the challenges and barriers they faced in transitioning to adulthood. During the analysis of challenges, four inter-related themes emerged:

- Mental health and wellbeing

- Pressures and expectations

- Community concerns

- Poverty

Mental health and wellbeing

3.2.   Young people commonly raised mental health concerns. They spoke about experiencing or knowing others living with: social and general anxiety, panic attacks; depression; anger; paranoia; low self-confidence; and body image insecurities. A few highlighted relationship issues which had affected their own or others' wellbeing and described these as barriers to transitioning to adulthood. Struggles with socialising, carer responsibilities and complex family dynamics were mentioned.

> *"When I was younger, I had many responsibilities very early in my life... And so that took a toll on a couple different things, especially my mental health... I had to mature in different senses early on, because my mum had to go to work. And I had to sit with my little siblings, which, honestly, you could call that being an adult, because I had to make them food, I had to change them, I had to do all that kind of stuff… Oh my goodness, I swear, when I was younger, my brain was like in different places, like, constantly sad. Depression was a hard one as well. I feel like most people go through it and not a lot of people get the help that they need... being the kind of introverted person that I was, I wasn't talking about my problems and they were all just sitting inside which takes a toll on you, of course." – Male, 20, SIMD 1*

> *I wasn't the happiest at my mum's house. Just different ideas and different opinions on stuff. Clashing heads… I'm with people that love me now. Moving in with my gran has helped a lot and just saying that they're proud of me and stuff, just having people mare involved in my life... I didn't realise how bad my old situation was until I moved out and I realised how much better off and how much more confident I felt." – Male, 16, SIMD 8*

3.3. Difficult life experiences such as trauma, bullying, school-work pressure and discomfort in the school environment were mentioned in discussions about struggles with mental health. A couple, for instance, shared they found it hard to be, and learn in, busy classrooms.

> *I couldn't sit in a classroom with people, I would have to sit all by myself. But when I tried to say to the teachers, I can't work in a classroom, I need to work all by myself, they said I couldn't do that." – Female, 16, SIMD 1*

3.4. One person who acknowledged that he was experimenting with recreational drugs/marijuana was worried about the impact of this on his mental health in the longer term.

> *I'm only 20 and I swear to God, I'm gonna have dementia by the time I'm 30. Which is honestly frightening and sad... it definitely gets you more anxious if I do stuff that I don't want to do... But I really enjoy it. You can socialise with it and you can literally be yourself. And what I mean by that is like being by yourself with it is okay, you don't need other people around you, which can be taking away from all your good aspects of life, you know, socialising, relationships". – Male, 20, SIMD 1*

3.5. Another felt their prospects could be hampered by mental health difficulties which limited their capacity for independent travel or obtaining qualifications. Others reflected on the stigma associated with poor mental health and medication.

3.6. The barriers to accessing mental health support – such as therapy waiting lists and discomfort about using available supports – were also highlighted by some young people.

> *It [school] just wasn't really… how can I say it… it wasn't really comfortable. Because I have anxiety, so it just didn't work for me and I just decided to leave… But I left with no qualifications, so that's a bit harder for me… I don't have any so it's going to be hard to get places, like where I want to go." – Female, 16, SIMD 1*

> *Because I think a helpline… there's an uncertainty. So they'll give you the number, but they won't say what happens if you use it or what to expect. Whereas if I knew then maybe I would consider using them." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

3.7.   Fears for the future were also talked about by a few participants. They described a growing sense of social responsibility as they transitioned to adulthood, which brought increased worry. Issues such as the climate emergency, COVID-19, increasing violence in society, and specifically against women, were highlighted.

3.8.   Some reflected on the powerful and negative influence of social media in their lives; noting it encourages comparisons with perfection, hampers the development of social skills, and spreads fake news. In these conversations, some also expressed concern for future generations due to these issues.

> *Things that I worry about would be like ecological breakdown of the climate process like more climate refugees… I care about, like for future generations and like our children and stuff." – Female, 17, SIMD 1*

Pressures and expectations

3.9.   Increased pressure and expectations during transitions to adulthood were raised by some participants. Examples included school workload, time pressures, understanding technology and the increased responsibility/reduced support in higher education. One person shared a difficult experience of being given many responsibilities, without adequate training in a new job, which knocked their confidence. Another explained that while they were managing to 'deal with it' and keep up with the university workload, they were not enjoying it as much as they had expected and knew of friends who were falling behind. A few reflected that while they initially felt overwhelmed by the changes, they felt these were necessary or described a process of adaptation to them.

> *I think at Uni, a lot of the time they expect you to know or expect you to just work it out yourself. Whereas at secondary you're spoon fed a bit more, but you get a lot more help on stuff. But they just sort of expect you to work it out yourself at Uni. I think that's just part of it but it's like a lot of problem solving, just figuring out how to do stuff." – Male, 17, SIMD 10*

Community concerns

3.10.   Concerns about situations in their community were expressed by some participants, most of whom were in SIMD decile 1. These included the prevalence of drugs, violence and lack of resources in their area.

> *Drugs are everywhere, drug dealer in front of me, behind me, to the right, to the left, and the fact that it gets offered to little children is disgusting, and I don't know if it's becoming worse or better. However, it's still prevalent as it was when I was younger."* – Male, 20, SIMD 1

3.11.   A few young women spoke of not feeling safe in the streets, in their houses or in their community due to concerns over harassment or violence.

> *Participant 1: "I think it gets worse when you get older. Like, it's mainly... I'm not being sexist, but you hear more stories about men just harassing women for just like walking home and they say it's because they were wearing this and that, but you could be wearing like joggers and a jumper and they'd do the exact same."* – Female, 17, SIMD 1
>
> *Participant 2: "I feel like when I'm in the house, now we have more responsibility like staying yourself in the house overnight, I need to do all 3 locks on the door and put the buzzer on silent so that nobody can actually get in, nobody's gonna try and get into my house... Sometimes if it's like 11 o'clock at night, I don't really want to answer the buzzer in case it's like a random person trying to get into houses."* – Female, 17, SIMD 1

3.12.   In conversations about life in their community, some disadvantages were raised; one young person highlighted the underfunded sports facilities, saying lack of access to physical fitness affected their mental health.

> *Participant 1: "There's not really much fitness or sport places. The main pitches have been shut down by the City Council."* – Male, 17, SIMD 1
>
> *Participant 2: "I think the sport and fitness thing, a lot of people rely on that, especially for mental health. Some people go to the gym if they're not feeling too great, or they go to Barlia if they want a game and I think the fact that they're shutting down one of the most busiest places in Castlemilk, just because it doesn't make the council money is ridiculous."* – Male, 17, SIMD 1

Poverty

3.13.   Financial pressures were highlighted by some participants, mainly by those from SIMD 1 areas. They discussed facing additional barriers to accessing higher education in that their choices for college and university were limited by the cost of student accommodation or travel expenses, meaning they were restricted to applying for local opportunities only.

3.14.   A few reflected on other financial difficulties they were facing, with one participant expressing frustration about the injustice of economic inequalities faced by those from disadvantaged areas.

> *There's the free dental care for the under 27s. That fixes my smile, right? And I smile a lot. But that doesn't affect that I don't have a pair of shoes for college, or I don't have the money to pay my bills... I feel like it's a widespread issue. I mean, anybody here, because this is a poor area, everybody's like working class.*

And we should be getting way more money than we are given, of course, because our work, our labour is worth something. And that labour is not getting justifiably rewarded." – Male, 20, SIMD 1

What happens if they've got like, let's say no money, or not enough money. As in, they can't, I don't know how to put it, can't go to a job interview, they don't have enough money to get to that job interview or maybe buy a new suit or a new dress for that interview. Stuff like that, they might not have enough money to pay for the bus or the train to get there." – Female, 16, SIMD 1

3.15.   In discussing socio-economic background, a few young people reflected on the negative stereotypes associated with living in a deprived community, and how this can affect people's expectations of them.

Participant 1: "Not many grand people come from Castlemilk. It's not the nicest place in the world… I think some negatives are because of where you come from, people don't look at you twice. And I think it's definitely one of those places." – Male, 17, SIMD 1

Participant 2: "Yeah, like I say I want to join the police, and they all go 'but you're from Castlemilk, everybody must hate you for that!' And I'm like, no, nobody does, no one is like, 'why do you want to join the police?'. Nobody cares. Everybody thinks just because I live in Castlemilk, I shouldn't want to join the police." – Male, 17, SIMD 1

04

Existing support and influences

> " *My mum is supportive... I feel like she's one of the main driving forces for me." – Male, 20, SIMD 1*

4.1. This chapter describes the supportive and influential figures present in participants' lives and how they affect their transitions to adulthood.

Support systems

4.2. All of the young people consulted said they had someone in their life who acted as a supportive figure. For most, this was a member of their family, with the most common source of support being their mother or father, followed by siblings and grandparents. A small number mentioned wider family including aunts and cousins.

4.3. The type of support provided by families was mixed; some discussed practical matters like financial support and domestic tasks; others described emotional support.

> *I don't have to worry about getting the laundry done or like having to worry about the heating or anything like that." – Female, 20, SIMD 1*

> *I've got a really supportive mum. We've went through a lot and so she loves me and she's like, 'if you need any help, or if you're struggling with something, come to me.'" – Male, 20, SIMD 1*

> *My dad... If I'm not sure about something, he'll give me his input on it, and I'll think about it from his point of view." – Male, 16, SIMD 8*

4.4. Some described their family as a key source of advice and guidance when making important decisions. For example, many talked about how their parents helped them decide their next steps for the future by talking through and evaluating different pathways with them.

4.5. In conversations about the influence of family, a few young people noted that they felt they could rely on their close relatives to be honest with them, have their best interests at heart and challenge them if they thought they were making poor decisions.

> *My mum - she would encourage me if she thought it was a good idea and if it wasn't she would tell me the truth."* – Female, 17, SIMD 1

4.6. Participants also discussed how they relied on their friends for support.

> *My friends. We go out walking quite a lot and talk about what we think would be best for each other."* – Female, 17, SIMD 1

> *Football and all that, I think it helps. It takes you away, even if it's just for 90 minutes, it takes you away from your problems. Especially going on to the pitch and playing with your pals, it's brilliant, the whole world around you shuts down. The pitch is the place to be, you're playing with your pals, you're enjoying your time and every problem just fades away for however long you're there."* – Male, 17, SIMD 1

4.7. Many young people described having access to a broad range of support through education settings, such as school, college and university. Participants in secondary school shared examples of being supported by staff within the school, including class teachers, pastoral care teams and careers advisors. They were able to access support for academic needs, planning future steps and other personal issues.

> *My careers advisor, she really helped me figure out where I want to be after school. I asked for an appointment, and she was like yeah, just come see me, and we talked about the different unis and stuff, the different things you enjoy doing."* – Male, 16, SIMD 1

4.8. One suggested that accessing support had become relatively normalised in their school.

> *I know that there are people to talk to in school. They're always telling you that you can talk to the pastoral care team, the youth workers. When you're in class, it's quite common for someone to get a phone call and they'll say, 'pastoral care want to see you', and no one really questions it, it's just kind of expected. And whenever you walk by the youth work room, there's always someone in there, and you just kind of, not ignore it, but you just expect it and just keep going and not hang around to see what's going on."* – Male, 17, SIMD 1

4.9. One group noted that, in addition to staff based within the school building, they had access to support from a broad range of other professionals through school, including youth workers, child protection officers and community police officers.

4.10. Participants in higher/further education described lighter-touch support, noting that support at college or university was usually offered in response to emailing a lecturer to ask for help with an assignment. A few mentioned receiving emails to their college or university email account with helplines or strategies for dealing with stress, but most did not find these to be particularly meaningful or helpful gestures. One noted that because there were so many students at the college, it felt like there wasn't a lot of individualised support available.

4.11. Other sources of support mentioned by young people included:

- Third sector organisations – some young people were supported by youth work services, including Princes Trust, Castlemilk Youth Complex and MCR Pathways, a mentoring programme for young people. Support included help to build confidence and employability-based activities, e.g. writing CVs.
- Counselling services – two young people said they had previously received counselling for personal issues. They had mixed experiences, with one suggesting it was unhelpful and another saying it helped to build their confidence.

4.12. Some young people had a combination of people in their lives to turn to for support. They noted the choice of where to go for help usually depended on the situation.

Support from government-funded schemes

4.13. There was low awareness about government or local authority-led schemes for young people. When prompted with different examples, including the Youth Guarantee[4] and Kickstart scheme, most had not heard of them; a small number said the phrases seemed familiar, but they could not describe the services.

4.14. One group mentioned using Skills Development Scotland's My World of Work service as a tool used for exploring career options.

4.15. One young person referred to a Developing the Young Workforce practitioner at their school, noting that this staff member supported pupils both in school and after they had left education.

Role models and influences

4.16. When questioned about role models and influences, young people essentially reaffirmed comments about their support networks, with many saying they looked up to and were influenced by family members.

> *I did biology for six years because of my mother... she was like, 'go be a doctor'. My mum wanted me to be that because they make a lot of money… my mum always said 'go to university, go to college if you can, so you don't have to work like me.' I feel like she's one of the main driving forces for me." – Male, 20, SIMD 1*

4.17. Similarly, some reiterated that careers advisors within the school had influenced their decisions about planning their next steps after school.

4.18. A few explained that different people had influenced their plans. For example, one said that many people in her life worked as carers, which shaped her decision to pursue a career in health and social care.

4.19. One young person revealed that they had been inspired to pursue a career as a paramedic after watching a documentary about 999 call handlers and emergency services.

4.20. A few felt that their decisions and future planning were not influenced by anyone else; instead, they had made decisions based on their own intuition.

Advice for other young people

4.21.   We asked participants if they had any advice for young people yet to embark on the transition to adulthood. Some suggested talking to somebody for support and ideas about next steps, including: a trusted adult, peers and support services at school, or in the community. Others encouraged embracing change or not "overthinking it".

> *Just don't worry about it too much. I feel like the thought of it is always worse than when it actually happens. I thought it was gonna be a massive change, when you hit that age, that's you. But it's mare just keep your calm with it and don't stress about it too much. Take it as it comes." – Male, 16, SIMD 1*

> *Go like head on into it and just embrace it fully, it makes it easier to deal with in the end… if I just tried to avoid at all costs, and almost like just pretend I was like 16/17… It'd make this whole idea of growing up, and this change even more terrifying." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

4.22.   A few participants advocated for resisting pressure to follow certain career paths or rush decisions about the next steps. They felt it was okay not to know yet, to make mistakes and change plans. The importance of taking time, trying new things, and taking risks was emphasised.

> *If you can take a risk, just do it… if you can find something that you love, and truly say that you find enjoyment when you're doing it, and it's not a chore, you should strive for that." – Male, 16, SIMD 8*

4.23.   Ways of earning the trust of adults were also suggested by one person.

> *Like, give adults the opportunity, ask them 'do you want me to go and do this?', and then if they ever need something done again then like, they can be like, 'Oh yeah, actually I do trust you, you can go and do that if it's something big.' Like respecting as well, just in general." – Male, 17, SIMD 1*

Impact of COVID-19

> **"** *I feel like the normal things a 16 or 17 year old would be going out, doing, we couldn't. We missed that prime teenage whatever. So, I feel like now we're all trying to catch up on what we missed, like festivals and concerts and all that. We literally missed all of that." – Female, 17, SIMD1*

5.1. This chapter outlines what young people told us about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives and their transitions to adulthood. During the analysis, five overarching themes emerged:

- Limited life experiences
- Reduced learning opportunities
- Wellbeing impacts
- Choices affected by COVID-19
- Positives of the pandemic

Limited life experiences

5.2. Most young people described restricted life experiences as a result of the pandemic. They spoke of reduced freedoms and being unable to do the activities that they wanted to, such as dancing, football, festivals, clubbing, shopping and using public transport. One person, who was shielding, explained they spent a lot of time indoors. A few spoke of missing out on events that people of their age and stage of life expect to be able to experience.

> **"** *Yeah, I missed that a lot with the restrictions, like the whole social side of football and the gym, we used to go to that and quite good for like relieving stress or whatever." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

5.3. Reduced opportunities for social connection was a common theme in responses. Some participants described difficulties maintaining their friendships. For instance, one person explained that vaccine passports had caused their friend group to 'split down the

middle', because some weren't able to go clubbing. Another said they were prevented from engaging in social rituals associated with moving on from school, such as a year group holiday.

5.4.   Others shared that their ability to make new friendships as they transitioned to university was hampered by the online nature of their classes and wider restrictions in society. Similarly, a small number of young people who had not yet left school reflected on their relatively advantaged position: they were able to re-establish social connections at school once the restrictions had lifted; pupils in the year above had not had that opportunity.

> *Participant 1: "I think it'd be a lot more natural kind of meeting people on your course if you're in a classroom as well, instead of like, over social media." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*
>
> *Participant 2: "Yeah. Just, you don't really know what the person's actually like, over just text, chat sort of thing. And you're never going to be best friends with someone over a group chat or whatever so, it's a lot harder." – Male, 17, SIMD 10*

Reduced learning opportunities

5.5.   Young people told us that the pandemic affected their learning opportunities in school and higher education. The shift to online learning, the lack of work experience and exam practice were repeatedly mentioned. They identified a range of negative impacts including reduced motivation, increased academic pressure and confusion about next steps. One person said that they stopped going to school altogether due to fear of getting COVID-19.

> *We didn't get work experience in school. When they send you away for a week somewhere, what you're interested in just to give you a clue, you're in that environment working with people. But because of COVID, we missed out this year. And I think that's left a lot of people still confused." – Male, 17, SIMD 1*

5.6.   Specific challenges associated with the shift to online learning were discussed, such as: less engaging learning materials/environment, difficulties concentrating and maintaining motivation, lack of structure/consequences for not finishing work, increased academic pressure (due to having to catch up on uncompleted work), lack of immediate support from teacher/tutors and reduced opportunities for peer support.

> *Participant 1: [On online schooling during lockdown] "It was like, I had a lot of distractions so I didn't really get any work done". – Female, 16, SIMD 1*
>
> *Participant 2: "We both have hunners [lots] of siblings, so sometimes the teacher would ask us a question but we wouldn't want to go off mute because your sister's screaming in the background or something like that and it's just embarrassing." – Female, 16, SIMD 1*

> *It's like I'm doing my whole Uni degree so far, completely online, which makes it feel more isolated because you can't really be asking questions or talking to people who are in the same position. Also, just the actual experience of going into a lecture and sitting in a big class and stuff like that, I've not really had that at all. We get some live videos, but most of them are just pre-recorded. So it's like watching a really boring YouTube video." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

5.7.   A number of participants raised concerns that the pandemic, and associated reduced learning opportunities, had disadvantaged them in terms of exam success, and future university or employment prospects. A few felt underprepared for their sixth year at school or their first year at university because they had never sat exams before. One person spoke of perceived injustice related to the alternative grading system adopted by the SQA during the pandemic, whereby pupils from disadvantaged areas were more likely to have their predicted grade marked down. A few explained that they, or others they knew, were retaking subjects/courses because of reduced learning opportunities. One person highlighted the financial implications of this.

> *Young people haven't actually been given an opportunity to do work experience than someone above me would have - jobs, apprenticeships, internships, paid work, paid work experience, unpaid work experience, voluntary work… Say a young person done paid work experience online. Do employers actually look at that as the same sort of standard as an in-person work experience in the year before COVID?" – Male, 20, SIMD 5*

> *I've had to resit a course and use an extra year of funding, which I wouldn't have had to use... it's like college isn't very secure at the moment; I don't think any higher education is because most of it is online... Before, you'd learn all the practical stuff, get skills that you need to go on to a career in the media industry, but now I'm missing out… the college like to say 'oh it'll be worth the same' but I… won't have the most extensive knowledge of the equipment that I need to get a job in the industry because I've simply not been able to get in to do it." – Female, 18, SIMD 7*

Wellbeing impacts

5.8.   Some participants conveyed that their wellbeing had been impacted by the pandemic and the restricted life experiences associated with this. In addition to exacerbating difficult home situations or pre-existing mental health struggles, participants linked the pandemic to experiences of fear, guilt, worry, and uncertainty about the future.

> *I'm living with my granny, who's pretty old. And you're starting to feel like pretty guilty socialising now. When you're always looking at the news and the cases and stuff. So, I think that is probably going to be a problem for quite a while now."– Male, 18, SIMD 10*

5.9.   The pandemic was highlighted as a barrier to accessing support or using their usual coping strategies. While one person commented that COVID-19 had made therapy waiting lists 'an awful lot worse', others referenced restricted activities or facilities.

> *Participant 1: "The Sport Centre, there's currently a vaccination centre inside of it, so half of it is cut off. It's quite limited because there's people getting jabbed next door. The main pitches, Barlia, have been shut down by the city council. Now they're used as testing sites, so no one's really using it." – Male, 17, SIMD 1*
>
> *Participant 2: "Fitness and football and all that, I think it helps. You're playing with your pals, you're enjoying your time and every problem just fades away for however long you're there. Taking it away is gonna make people struggle even more". – Male, 17, SIMD 1*

Choices affected by COVID-19

5.10.   For some, the COVID-19 pandemic influenced, or made harder, their decisions about next steps and affected their current lifestyle and choices. A few spoke of 'making up for lost time' and trying to compensate for having missed out on the 'youth experience'. Some acknowledged this may have negative repercussions for them in the future. For instance, one person said they knew a lot of young people who were taking on too many clubs and activities at school, another reported drinking more alcohol than they would have, another referenced financial implications of excessive spending.

> *I might have moved away for Uni, and I've stayed at home right now because I feel that that's just easier… I think the whole idea of COVID, I want to be close to my family, like if something happens, I'm not like miles away." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

> *I turned 17 and 18 both in lockdowns, I feel like I'm making up for lost time. I basically have no money because I spend all my money on you know, like, I want to have as close to an experience as I'm gonna get so like going out to nightclubs and going to concerts, going to events. That's basically where all my money goes… I want to just enjoy being young and being a bit carefree and being reckless instead of having to worry about things." – Female, 18, SIMD 7*

Positives of the pandemic

5.11.   A few young people discussed areas of their lives that had not changed because of the pandemic (such as preferred activities or plans for the future); others described the positive developments that they associated with COVID-19. A couple of young people said the pandemic did not affect them as much as it did others because they had already disengaged from school anyway or were pleased that they were no longer required to attend school (due to this being a difficult environment for them). One young person said the pandemic helped them to save money for a mortgage. Another said it gave them motivation to make changes in their life.

> *I realised when I was living in the proper lockdown that my life isn't much different to when the lockdown didn't happen. And that kind of hit me. That hit me hard. And that's when I started making that transition. Like, you've got to get a grip of yourself. I think honestly, as weird as it can be, I feel like COVID was such a positive thing for me." – Male, 20, SIMD 1*

06

Support needed

> **Just check up on people once in a while, even if they look fine, they might not be. Just with mental health… ask them how they feel, how they are." – Male, 16, SIMD 8**

6.1. In this chapter, we explore participants' views on what additional support is needed to help young people successfully transition to adulthood.

Mental health

6.2. Mental health was referenced in almost every interview and focus group. Many young people discussed the need for more support, with some directly referencing the lengthy waiting lists that young people face when accessing counselling and mental health services. Two participants had knowledge of other young people ending their life as a result of mental health struggles.

6.3. Participants suggested different ways to best provide young people with support for their mental health. A few called for greater investment and resource to tackle waiting lists for accessing counselling services. Some advocated for a more casual, informal approach to support, for example having regular check-ins at school, college and university where young people can voice how they are feeling.

> *I think there should be more support out there for people that have got mental health issues. Maybe some people should get daily check-ins or something because there are far too many people my age passing away, struggling with mental health but they're just not speaking about it." – Female, 16, SIMD 1*

> *Definitely more investment. The way they do certain things could be different to actually help young people because young people don't always open up as easy as adults. So I think it would be good to invest in more mental health services. I just think that you know, if there was more services added into schools and colleges, unis, I think that would be better. And for it to be mandatory for them to check with people how they're doing and stuff." – Male, 16, SIMD 1*

6.4. A few noted that face-to-face contact would be their preferred method of receiving support for their mental health. They thought that speaking to someone online or over the phone would feel impersonal and they wouldn't feel as comfortable sharing how they were feeling.

> *There are these phone numbers, like Samaritans is the one name that comes to mind, I can't remember what the other ones are, but they [the university] gave us a big list of phone numbers and helplines. But meeting someone and having a chat and seeing their face, I think that's quite a big thing. Whereas if you're on the phone, it feels like you don't know who you're talking to, you don't know how they're reacting to what you're saying… just the idea of it just puts me off. I just think I would feel quite uncomfortable talking to someone on the phone, who I can't see." – Male, 18, SIMD 10*

6.5. One suggested having peer-to-peer support initiatives, noting that young people would be more willing to talk about their mental health to people of a similar age who are going through the same experiences as them.

> *If you can get a student to somehow represent an association about mental health, that would do so much better than people coming into the school and talking about mental health, because you can relate to your peers. Everybody's got problems, everybody's struggling with mental health, everybody's struggling with relationships, all that kind of stuff, and if you can get an 18-year-old to talk with an 18-year-old about mental health, it becomes a heart to heart and that's really valuable." – Male, 20, SIMD 10*

Financial support

6.6. The lack of state financial support available for young people was highlighted by a few young people, who felt it should be easier to access Universal Credit or other financial support.

> *At our age group, like, we don't get any money, unless it's off family or something. We don't get money in our bank or anything… What happens if they've got no money, as in, they don't have enough money to get to a job interview or maybe buy a new suit or a new dress for that interview. They might not have enough money to pay for the bus or the train to get there." – Female, 16, SIMD 1*

> *Universal Credit… they're not giving me any money anymore. As a young person I'm struggling with that. I'm sure other people will be as well." – Male, 20, SIMD 1*

6.7. One questioned the priorities of where current financial support for young people is allocated, noting that he could access dental care, but was struggling financially and didn't have enough money to buy basic necessities.

6.8. Two participants recommended financial support for young people to travel by bus and train, with one noting there had been occasions in the past where she had been stranded somewhere without the means to get back home. These interviews took place prior to January 2022 when free bus travel for under 22's was introduced in Scotland.

Practical life skills

6.9.   As noted earlier in this report, several young people described feeling unprepared for the transition to adulthood. In response to this, some suggested it would be helpful if learning about life skills was incorporated into the school curriculum. The most common suggestion was for lessons on financial literacy, for example approaches to being financially responsible, advice on making significant purchases and managing income and expenditure.

> *Participant 1: "I feel like there's a lot of things that we don't really get taught in school. Like how to pay your bills and taxes and stuff." – Male, 17, SIMD 1*
>
> *Participant 2: "Yeah, finance skills. Your mum and dad can teach you, but I feel like it should be taught more in school." – Male, 17, SIMD 1*
>
> *Participant 3: "I know where you're coming from. I feel like - I'm not saying it's a bad thing - but I feel like we focus more on like the different types of pronouns, different types of people, but we don't get taught what comes after school, like how to pay bills, how to pay taxes, how to pay off a mortgage, like wages and all that. We don't get taught that." – Male, 17, SIMD 1*

Other types of support needed

6.10.   Other suggestions for additional support to aid transitions to adulthood included:

- Some young people agreed that support with transitioning to adulthood at school is overwhelmingly focussed on getting a place at university and asked for more support for those who do not want to follow this path.

- A few respondents noted that more help with navigating the job market would be useful, for example having continued access to careers advisors after leaving school.

- One young person felt that many young people need help to become more confident and reduce their social anxiety but was unsure what the best medium for this support would be.

07

Discussion and conclusions

Discussion

7.1.   In this chapter we discuss the learning and overall research conclusions. We consider the methodology and learning generated through the research, how young people transition to adulthood and their awareness of existing resources and support, the impact of COVID-19, and the mental health crisis facing young adults in Glasgow.

Reflections on the methodology and learning generated through the research process

7.2.   This was an innovative piece of exploratory research, in which young people were given an opportunity to share their experiences of transitions to adulthood and reflect on changes they were going through. The research team used a proforma to prompt discussion but entered the project with an open mind and no fixed expectations about what we might learn, nor the extent to which young people would be willing to participate or engage in frank conversations.

7.3.   Based on the research team's extensive research of engagement with young people, we highlight the significance of the evidence presented in this report. An unforeseen value of this project was that it captured the lived experience of young people during a tumultuous period – the COVID-19 pandemic – that may have a lasting influence on the direction of their life.

7.4.   The COVID-19 pandemic caused some issues throughout the research process, such as difficulties in recruiting young people and limited opportunities for face-to-face fieldwork due to restrictions on in-person gatherings. However, conducting research during the pandemic had unexpected benefits:

- Difficulties in organising focus groups meant that one-to-one interviews were incorporated into the research approach. These were a valuable addition to the methodology – interview participants often went into greater detail about their individual experiences and challenges than those who took part in focus groups.

- The research presented a unique and well-timed opportunity to capture insights from young people about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic while they were experiencing it. Participants described the pandemic's impact on their schooling, social lives and formative social experiences, and the lasting effect they believe this will have as they continue their transitions to adulthood.

7.5.   Conversations with research participants took place in a period of significant uncertainty, and young people themselves expressed apprehension about the impact of

the pandemic on their transitions and future opportunities. Tones and mood varied within these conversations; some were matter of fact about their experiences and concerns; others expressed sadness and anxiety; a few were angry and animated in discussions about the pandemic, climate change and social justice. It was not possible to explore reasons for these personal differences in how young people responded to the conversations; in some cases, it appeared that the strength of response corresponded with young people's levels of self-confidence, and sense of agency.

7.6.   Some interesting strands of discussion arose with young people which may, or may not, link to socioeconomic background. Examples include the extent to which young people believe COVID-19 may hinder their life chances, their sense of agency and choice, and positive impacts linked to COVID-19. These areas are worthy of further research given their significance for transitions. We feel unable to draw strong conclusions about whether SIMD postcodes are influencing factors, given the small number of young people in our sample from more affluent areas, the flexible nature of the discussions, and the different styles of research participation (one-to-one conversations were opportunities for more detailed, personal conversations). This is worth considering in future research - sample sizes and methodology have a bearing on the type of analysis that can be performed.

7.7.   Many young people remarked that they found taking part in the research enjoyable, thought-provoking and rewarding. The evidence generated through this research is rich and captivating. Based on this experience, we would encourage other researchers and those working with young people to create spaces for young people to step back from their day-to-day lives and reflect on their histories, influences, and the changes they are going through. The conversations provide an opportunity to connect with young people, engage with them on important issues, understand their needs and help them develop critical learning skills.

Navigating transitions to adulthood, the importance of trusted adults, and awareness of existing support

7.8.   Reflecting across interviews, the range in views, perceptions and experiences points to the challenges in developing strategies and policy solutions to support successful transitions. The young people who took part in the research were at different stages and faced vastly different circumstances; undergoing many changes within the window of a few short years. Some feel anxious or unprepared for their transition to adulthood; others are excited about greater independence and autonomy. They have a mix of experiences and responsibilities; some continue to be supported at home long after others have started living independently.

7.9.   Our finding on the low awareness about government or local authority-led schemes for young people, including the Youth Guarantee and Kickstart scheme, is of concern. It points to the challenge of ensuring that young people have access to existing support and resources. No matter how well designed a policy may be, if young people are not aware of it or do not engage, then it will not be effective. This has been seen recently with the low take up of free bus passes by young people[5]; a policy designed to tackle transport poverty and address social inequality. The finding suggests that strong consideration is needed on how to successfully communicate and engage with young people.

7.10. Building on what we learned about how to support transitions, it is clear that trusted adults, school staff, and youth workers play a crucial role in shaping decisions and behaviours. These known and trusted sources of advice, information and support could be considered a key resource in the delivery of any strategies to support transitions. Social media and relatable stories, for example case studies about peers' experiences, also resonate with the target group. Young people indicated that they look for and would be receptive to help with transitions to adulthood, with many acknowledging that they feel underprepared and lack important practical life skills and knowledge, including poor financial literacy.

The impact of COVID-19

7.11. COVID-19 disrupted education and formative employment opportunities, including work experience. The pandemic also hindered participation in many of the personal development activities that feature in CVs or applications for further or higher education. These missed opportunities may have lasting impacts for this cohort of young people – the starting phase of an employability pathway is a crucial foundation step[6]. COVID-19 also affected experiences with exams, and for some, the extent to which young people were able to concentrate on school work and stay engaged with education.

7.12. This raises questions about the legacy of COVID-19 for the generation affected by lockdowns – do they face particular challenges, and does specific consideration need to be given on how to introduce them to the world of work or further education and better prepare them for the future[7]? In this context, The No One Left Behind strategy[8] – which helps people of all ages build confidence and skills in preparation for education, employment or volunteering – could provide a useful support framework for those struggling with confidence issues who are not currently accessing education.

The mental health crisis facing young adults in Glasgow

7.13. Mental health struggles in relation to the transition to adulthood were mentioned in nearly every interview or focus group. This theme was more evident than any discussion of socio-economic barriers. We suggest that mental health is a cross-cutting social issue; it may be a leveller, or compound socio-economic disparities, and is worthy of more investigation[9].

7.14. Several shared examples of experiencing or knowing others who had experienced: social and general anxiety; panic attacks; depression; anger; paranoia; low self-confidence; and body image insecurities. Very sadly, two knew of other young people who had ended their lives due to mental health struggles. These findings are consistent with previous research[10] which has highlighted the mental health crisis for teenagers and young adults; there is a high risk of developing mental health problems during these life stages and growing awareness of the adverse impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of young people in Scotland[11].

7.15. The withdrawal of physical fitness facilities was highlighted by young people in an area of multiple deprivation as having a detrimental impact on their mental health. These findings lend weight to The Mental Health Foundation's[10] call for more children and young people from deprived backgrounds to participate in extra-curricular sporting opportunities. They have proposed Scotland pilot the 'Youth in Iceland' model, by

providing parents with £500 to spend on sporting activities and investing in community sports facilities.

7.16.   Some young people described existing mental health services as not being accessible or appealing and more widely, this barrier to engaging with services is compounded by gaps in availability of support. With growing waiting lists, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Scotland are struggling to keep up with demand[12]. There were calls for greater resource to be allocated to tackle lengthy waiting lists for counselling and mental health services and ensure young people have timely access to support if struggling with poor mental health.

7.17.   The fact that the majority of respondents openly discussed their mental health, may reflect an intergenerational shift in openness to talking about mental health struggles[13]. One person shared it had become normalised to access mental health support in school, which could indicate a reduction in stigma associated with this. However, mental health stigma was still raised as a concern by another young person, suggesting the need for continued mental health education and anti-stigma work. Given the understanding generated through this research of the crucial role that trusted adults play in supporting young people's transitions, there may be scope to consider how adults who engage with young people can help them to access mental health support if needed.

7.18.   The Mental Health Foundation[13] identified risk factors of relevance to the mental health of young people, a number of which were raised by the current participants. These are discussed in more detail below.

- **Stressful life experiences.** The link between mental health difficulties and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – such as experiences of abuse, neglect, bullying, and witnessing community violence – is well established[14]. In line with this, some of the participants described negative impacts of such experiences, including trauma and bullying, on their mental health. In addition, some mentioned feeling unsafe in their local community due to concerns about harassment and violence, and in particular violence against women. One participant also raised the prevalence of drugs in their community. Other stressful life experiences such as difficult family dynamics, carer responsibilities or fears about climate change were discussed by participants as negatively impacting wellbeing. These findings lend support to the call by the Mental Health Foundation[10] for policies and services to be informed by an understanding of what threatens positive mental health, and for preventative work to reduce ACEs and stressful life experiences, to promote young people's wellbeing. Support to help young people cope with such experiences may be especially important during transition to adulthood, given participants described these as barriers to them moving on.

- **The COVID-19 pandemic.** Previous studies into the impact of COVID-19 on mental health found 18-24 year-olds to be at particular risk of experiences of stress and loneliness[15], depression and anxiety, and suicidal thoughts[16]. The mental health of 13-19 years olds was also found to be adversely affected with experiences of anxiety and loneliness being common[10]. In this research, participants described how the pandemic had negatively impacted their well-being and life opportunities in a variety of ways. These included: increasing fears and worries about the future, exacerbating difficult home situations or pre-existing mental health struggles, preventing them

from accessing support or using their usual coping strategies, limiting their learning and work experience opportunities and future prospects, increasing academic pressure, impacting their current lifestyle choices, and, of particular relevance to young people transitioning to adulthood, making decisions about next steps harder. These findings support the Mental Health Foundation's suggestion that teenagers missing out on schooling were particularly vulnerable to mental health issues during the pandemic[10]. They also echo the wider experience of young people, with 18 -24 year olds identified as having been *"especially badly hit during the pandemic, with a triple whammy of curtailed education, diminished job prospects and reduced social contact with peers"*[15].

- *Academic pressure.* A further risk factor for psychological distress amongst young people is the challenge of managing academic stress[10]. Consistent with this, increased academic pressure was a feature of their transition to adulthood for some of the current participants. This seemed to be exacerbated by COVID-19, with participants discussing the added pressures linked to: the shift to virtual learning; the reduced learning experiences associated with this; and the inequalities associated with the non-exam based SQA grading system during this time. This initial downgrading of predicted marks has been highlighted as generating elevated levels of stress and uncertainty for affected pupils across Scotland who were more likely to come from the most deprived backgrounds[10]. The findings point to the importance of education policies and supports which attend to the pressures faced by young people and the way these interact with wider social inequalities.

- *Inequalities and poverty.* It is well known that Scotland evidences a 'social gradient' for mental health, where living in the areas of highest deprivation increases your risk of experiencing a mental health problem[17]. The unequal distribution of stressful experiences, coupled with reduced protective factors, are thought to underpin these inequalities in mental health[18]. Consistent with this, some participants highlighted the detrimental impact of inequalities on their mental health and their transition to adulthood. This included financial struggles or unequal access to university or employment due to economic disadvantage, and one shared that their domestic responsibilities, because their mum had to work, had taken a toll on their mental health. Others raised the underfunding of sports facilities in the disadvantaged area they lived in as a barrier to accessing physical fitness as a coping strategy. With Scottish Government estimating that 34% of children in Glasgow live in relative poverty[19], urgent action is required to ensure Scotland meets its target of reducing child poverty by 2030/31[20] in order to support young people with their mental health and increase their chances of making a successful transition to adulthood.

7.19. There was broad agreement among young people that more should be done to address mental health concerns, either through schools, further education providers or health services. Supportive adults play a crucial role in young people's lives and they rely on family, friends and school staff for practical and emotional support and help with decision-making about the future. There are different sources of support and advice; but beyond the family unit, they lie, typically, within institutions and may be harder to access for those who do not have support from trusted adults or thrive in a formal learning environment.

Conclusions

7.20. GCPH commissioned this study to better understand the factors that support or hinder young peoples' transitions into adulthood. With support from the Research Advisory Group, researchers from The Lines Between conducted interviews and focus groups with 31 young people living in the Glasgow area.

7.21. Through open, flexible and young person-centred discussions, valuable insight has been gathered into young people's perceptions of adulthood. This report captures the challenges they face, their support networks and additional support that would be beneficial as they continue their transition into adulthood.

7.22. As might be expected, the experiences, views and challenges that young people shared in this research varied significantly; each person is unique. However, some important common themes emerged: young peoples' definitions of adulthood are wide ranging but include milestones that might be met at different ages. Important steps include finding employment, paying bills, moving out of home and starting their own family.

7.23. These findings provide a useful evidence base for GCPH and its partners to consider.

08

Recommendations

8.1. The research provides valuable insights about young peoples' experiences at a crucial life stage. The findings have informed recommendations, which reflect the aim of improving support for young people as they transition to adulthood. These are grouped into four overarching themes: health and wellbeing; finance; community services; and education.

8.2. We recognise that GCPH is not a funder nor a service provider; therefore, for each recommendation, we suggest GCPH consider:

- Advocating for this change.

- Sharing this research with those in a position to influence this change.

- Working in partnership with those in the field to develop or enhance the support.

- Enhancing the evidence base through further research.

Health and wellbeing

1. **Monitor whether young people's responses to pandemic restrictions have lasting health implications.** A few young people described harmful behaviours such as binge drinking, which they linked to 'making the most of' the social opportunities they were denied during the pandemic. Changed behaviours or missed interventions may have lasting impacts for this cohort of young people.

2. **Improve access to young people's mental health services.** This was reflected in the current findings with many young people discussing the need for greater support for young people's mental health. Increased funding should be provided to both child and adolescent and adult mental health services to ensure those transitioning to adulthood do not fall through gaps in service provision at a vulnerable time.

3. **Involve young people in the design of mental health support services.** Some young people described existing mental health services as not being accessible or appealing. Helplines, leaflets and talks/lectures were felt to be less helpful than face-to-face contact or peer support. Insight from young people can be used to design services which are more attractive to young people, making them more likely to engage with and benefit from support.

4. **Build a culture of support and understanding of mental health in schools, higher education settings, and community levels.** Young people highlighted the importance of being asked about their mental health and of opportunities to have conversations about mental health with people they trust.

5. **Champion the importance of accessible community facilities in supporting mental health.** Local Authorities should ensure that sport and leisure facilities in the community are maintained to support mental health. The withdrawal of physical fitness facilities was highlighted by young people in an area of multiple deprivation as having a detrimental impact on their mental health.

Economic opportunities and resources

6. **Consider economic support for young people from disadvantaged areas to increase their further education choices.** Young people from disadvantaged areas told us that their choices for college and university were severely limited because of their financial circumstances, as they could not afford to travel long distances or pay for student accommodation. Since this research started, free travel for under 22s has been introduced, which may go some way to addressing transport barriers.

7. **Funding for other unmet support needs.** There may need to be a discretionary element to reflect different needs and circumstances, but scope to cover costs such as clothing requirements and student accommodation would further support equality of opportunity for students from low-income families.

8. **Support to help young people access existing resources**. Raising awareness of existing support such as the Kickstart scheme, supporting access to it, or advocating for the expansion of financial support for young people would help those struggling to identify opportunities or to support themselves financially. For example, statutory services could introduce information and resources designed for and targeted at young adults.

9. **Monitor whether young people's experiences in the pandemic have lasting employability implications and take steps to redress this.** Young people described lack of access to work experience opportunities and an inability to take part in activities to boost their CVs for employment, college or university application, due to pandemic restrictions. Given the clear links between employability, socioeconomic status, health, and wellbeing, we suggest this is monitored closely. Linked to this, partnership between industry and higher education to offer delayed work experience could be beneficial.

Community services

10. **Increased provision of measures to improve community safety.** Some participants raised issues of drug use and safety. Promoting awareness of organisations offering support with women's public safety, such as Wise Women and Glasgow Girls Club[21] is recommended.

Education

11. **Support schools to adopt inclusive approaches to teaching.** Some young people felt that classes at school are tailored to support pupils who are confident and enjoy social interaction. The research findings indicate there is a need to consider more inclusive approaches which identify and support young people with social anxiety and confidence issues. Examples include avoiding the traditional teaching method of asking and answering questions in front of a class, implementing learning strategies to support the involvement of socially anxious young people, and making oral presentations optional.

12. **Education to help young people prepare for life after high school**. Some young people discussed feeling unprepared for the future and said it would be helpful to have more learning at school which focuses on preparing them for future responsibilities. For example, incorporating 'life skills' classes (e.g. financial literacy) or work-based learning into the curriculum would help prepare young people for future financial responsibilities and decision-making. Additionally, incorporating more independent learning exercises into the senior phase at school would better prepare pupils for college and university and lessen the extent of the 'culture shock' young people experience when making this transition.

13. **Enhanced support for those who do not access higher education**. Some young people described a bias towards helping those transitioning to university and asked for increased support for those not following higher education pathways. This would require resourcing support for young people who do not engage with higher education; for example, continued access to careers advisors after leaving school for young people who need help to navigate the job market.

14. **More targeted awareness-raising in schools and youth settings of existing Scottish Government and Local Authority support.** Examples include Skills Development Scotland, Youth Guarantee and the Kickstarter Programme.

15. **Consider ways to address employability barriers caused by a lack of access to work experience opportunities during COVID-19.** Work experience plays a significant role in employability, and a lack of formative opportunities can potentially have lasting negative impacts. This may widen inequalities for young people who missed out during the pandemic. Efforts to address gaps could fall under the remit of the No One Left Behind strategy.

16. **Universities should ensure that support for mental health, life skills and learning is available and accessible for students**. Participants described a stark contrast between the availability of support at school and higher education in terms of the accessibility of pastoral support and their level of engagement with teachers at school - with those in university settings finding the support harder to access.

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