Voice of Children & Young People

Regional Assessment of Need 2026



Education Authority



Agenda

1. Methodology
2. Demographics of Responses (Focus Groups and Survey)
3. Priorities for Young People
4. Findings from the 8 Themes
5. Summary of Conclusions
6. Supporting the Priorities
7. Recommendations for Planning
8. Public Consultation



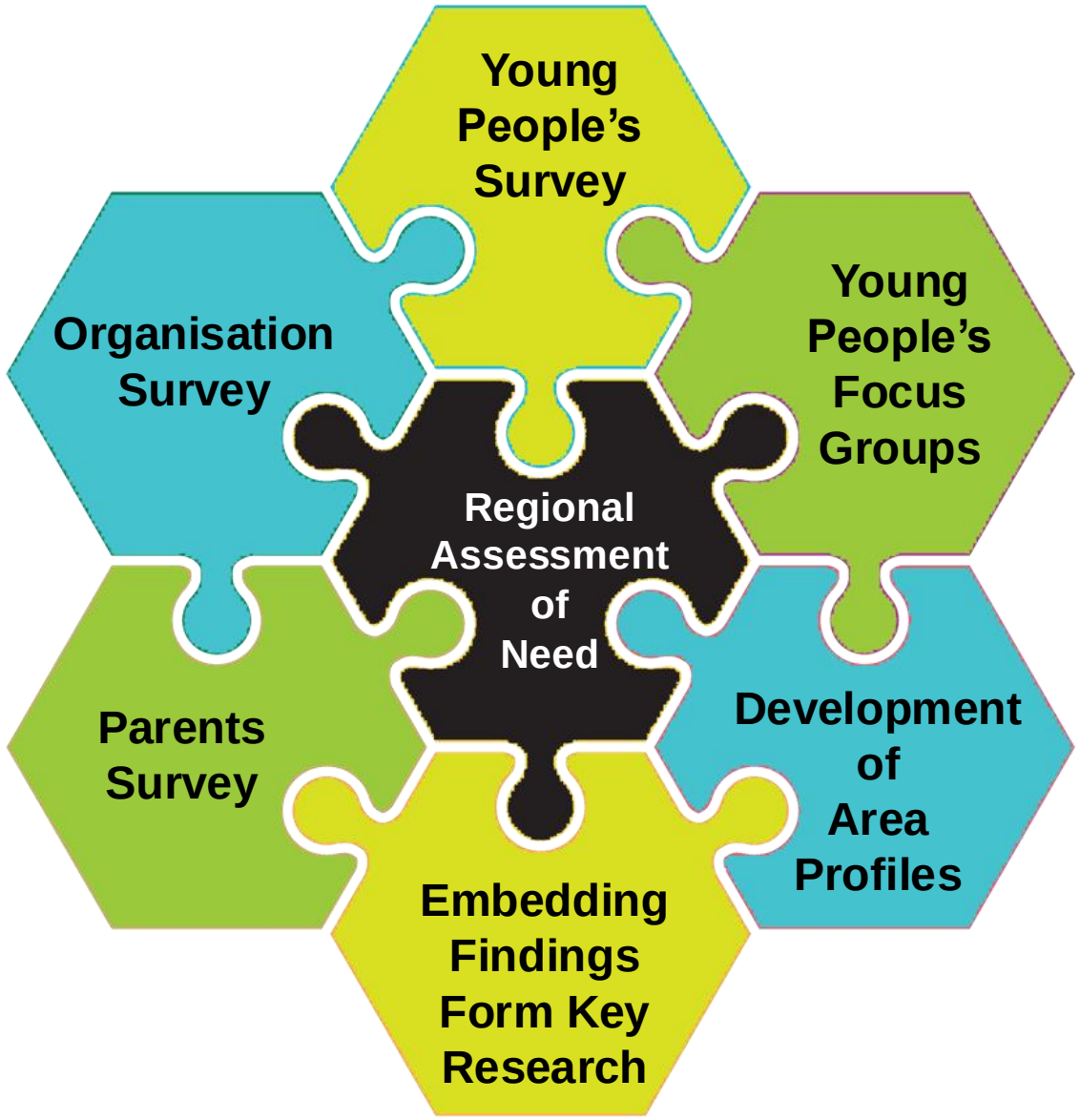
01

Regional Assessment of Need

Methodology

Education Authority

Methodology





02

Survey Demographics

In Response to the Regional Assessment of Need

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Survey Responses

5451

Children and Young People Responded to the Survey

5288

Responded to the Survey in English
97%

163

Responded to the Survey in Irish
3%

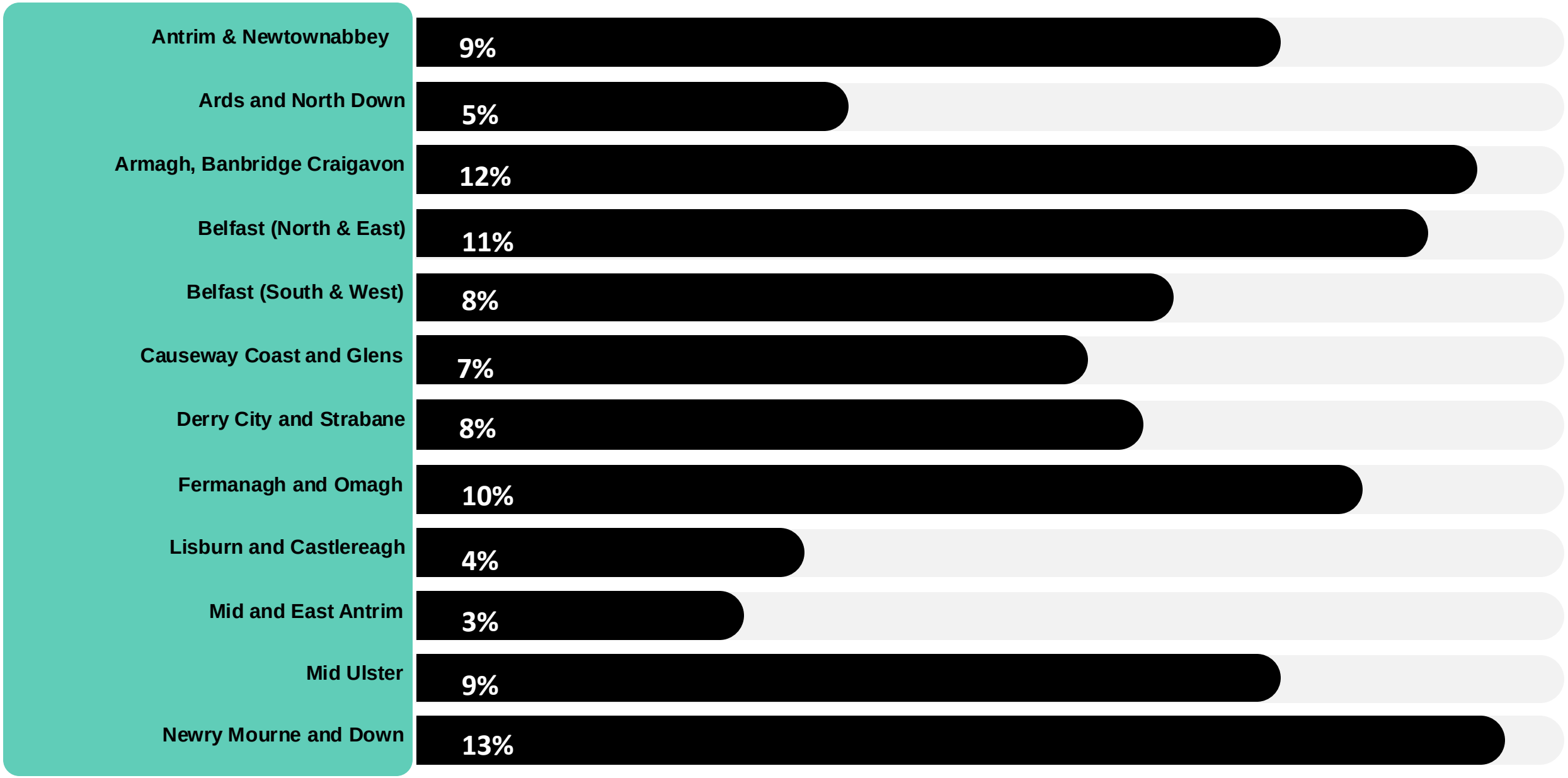
1579

Responded to the Survey from Rural Areas
29%

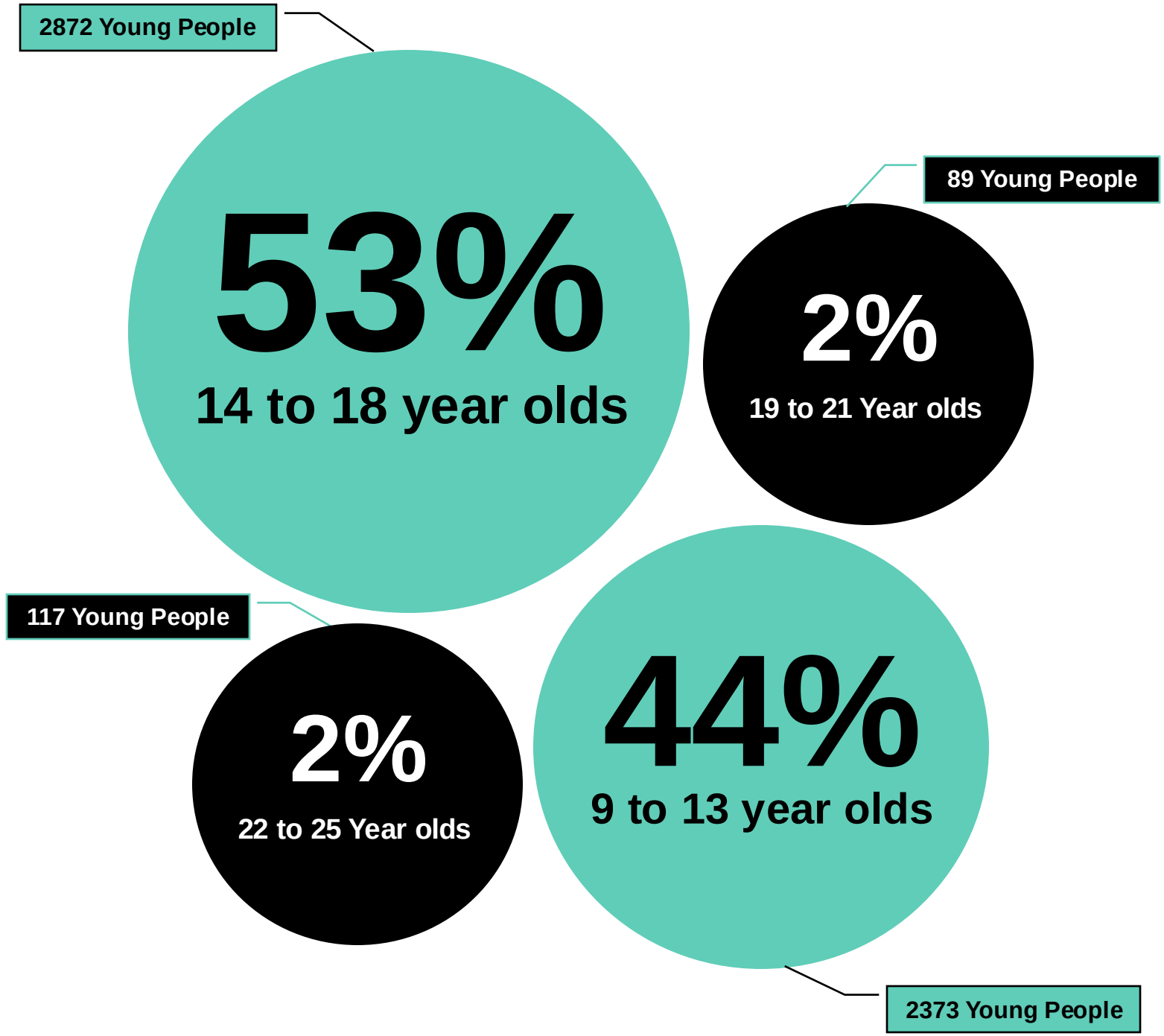
3872

Responded to the Survey from Town/City Area
71%

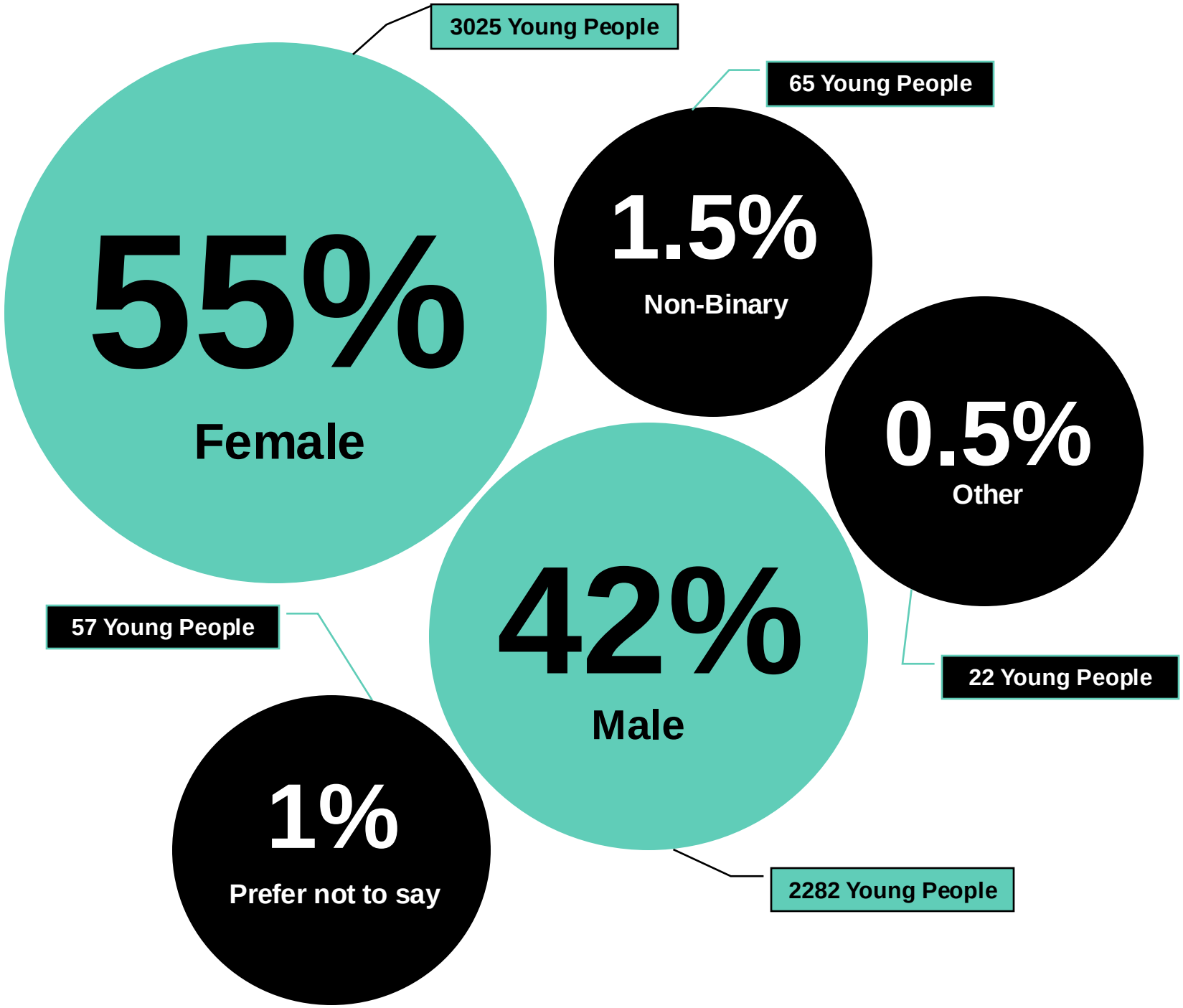
Survey Responses



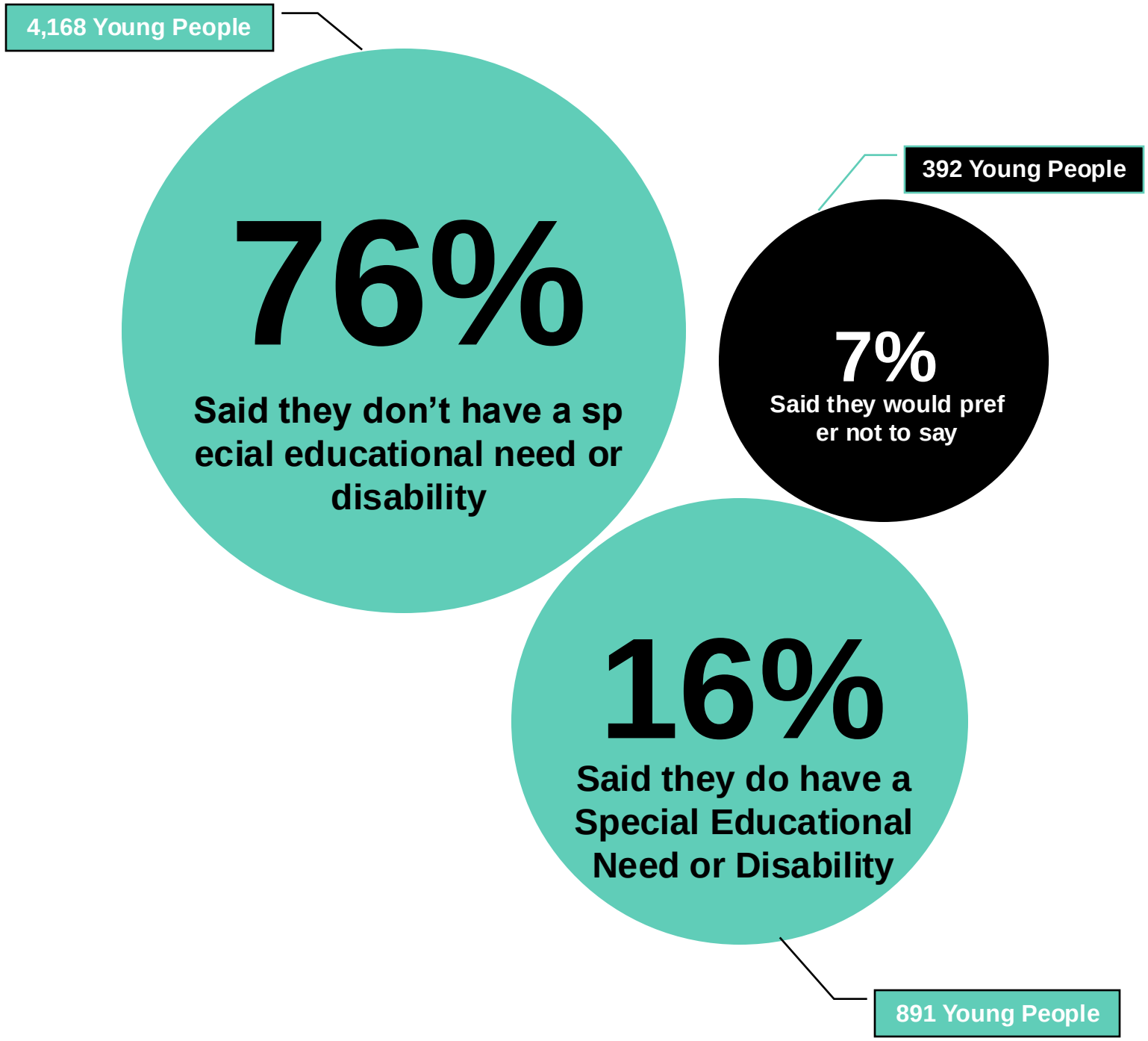
Age Range of Survey Responses



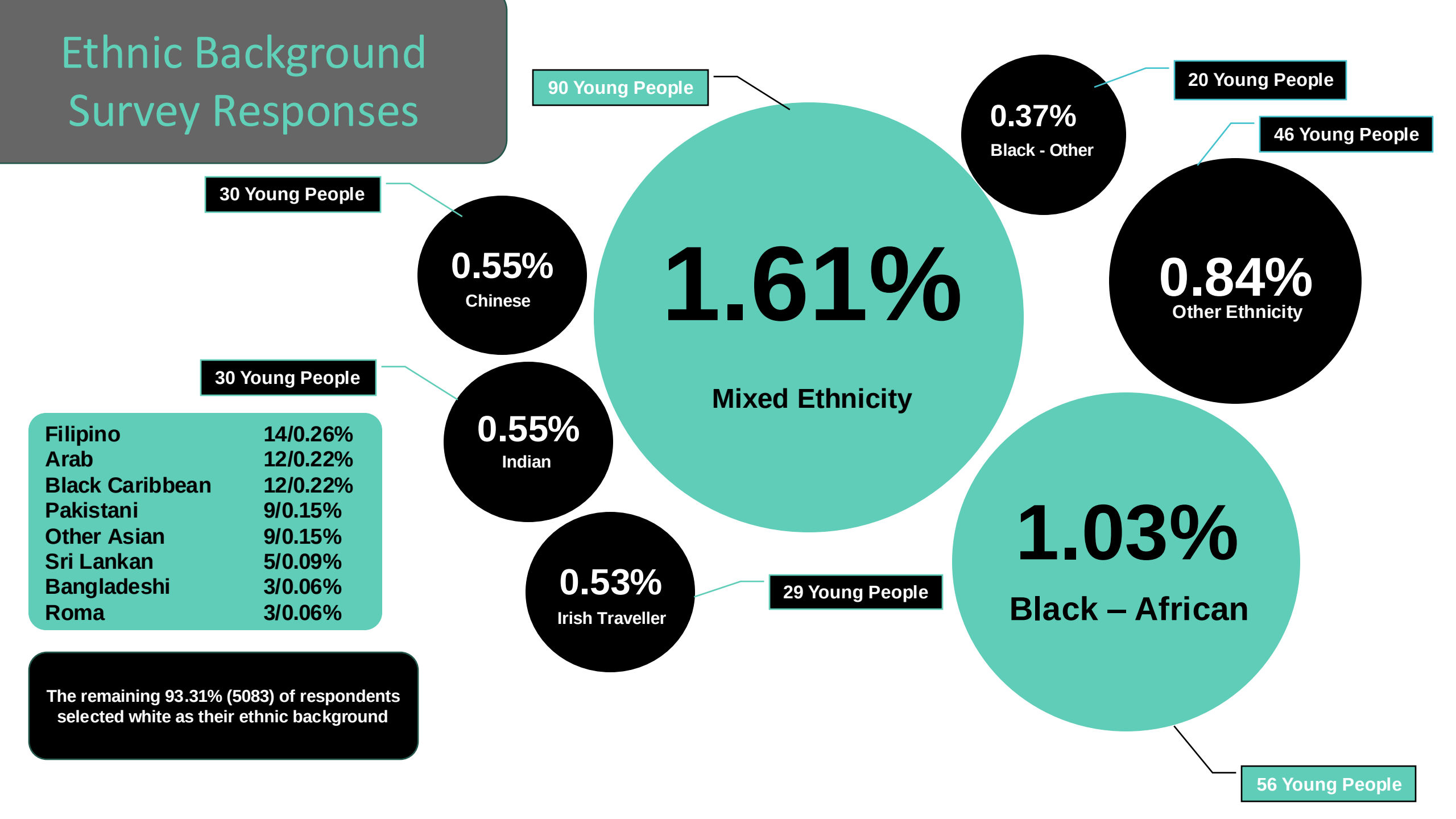
Gender Breakdown of Survey Responses



Educational Need Survey Responses



Ethnic Background Survey Responses



Filipino	14/0.26%
Arab	12/0.22%
Black Caribbean	12/0.22%
Pakistani	9/0.15%
Other Asian	9/0.15%
Sri Lankan	5/0.09%
Bangladeshi	3/0.06%
Roma	3/0.06%

The remaining 93.31% (5083) of respondents selected white as their ethnic background



02

Focus Group Demographics

In Response to the Regional Assessment of Need

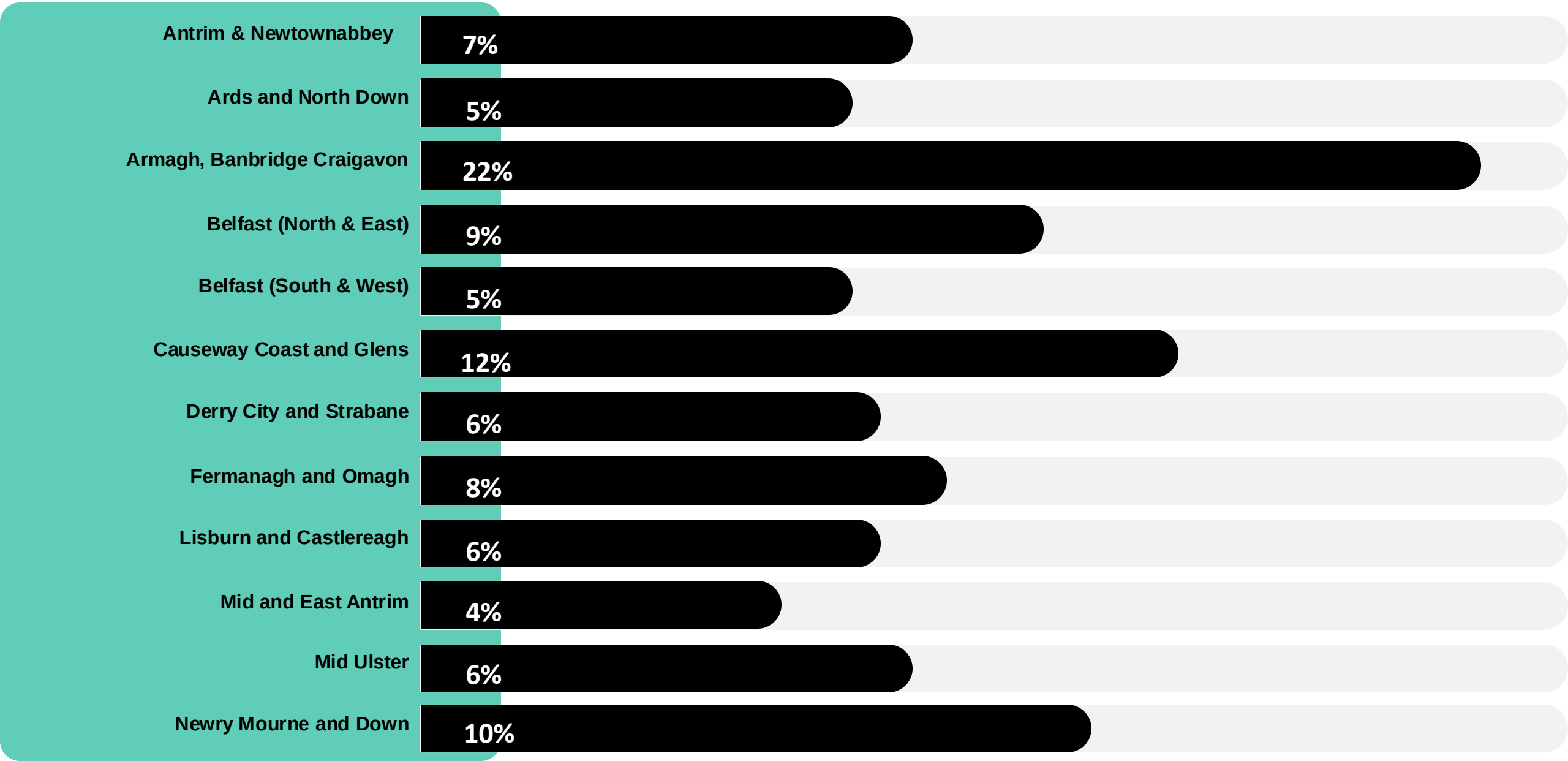
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Focus Group Engagement

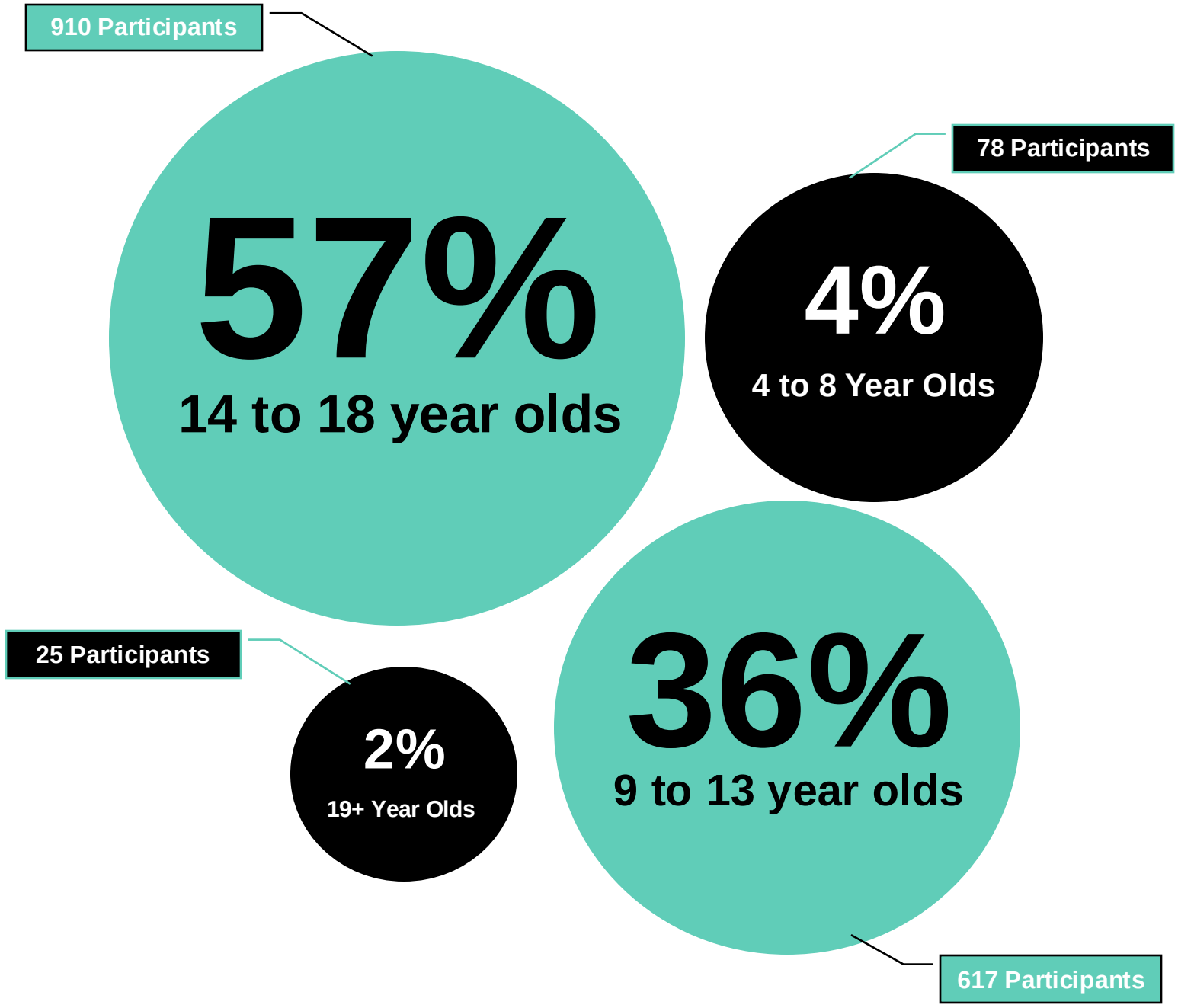




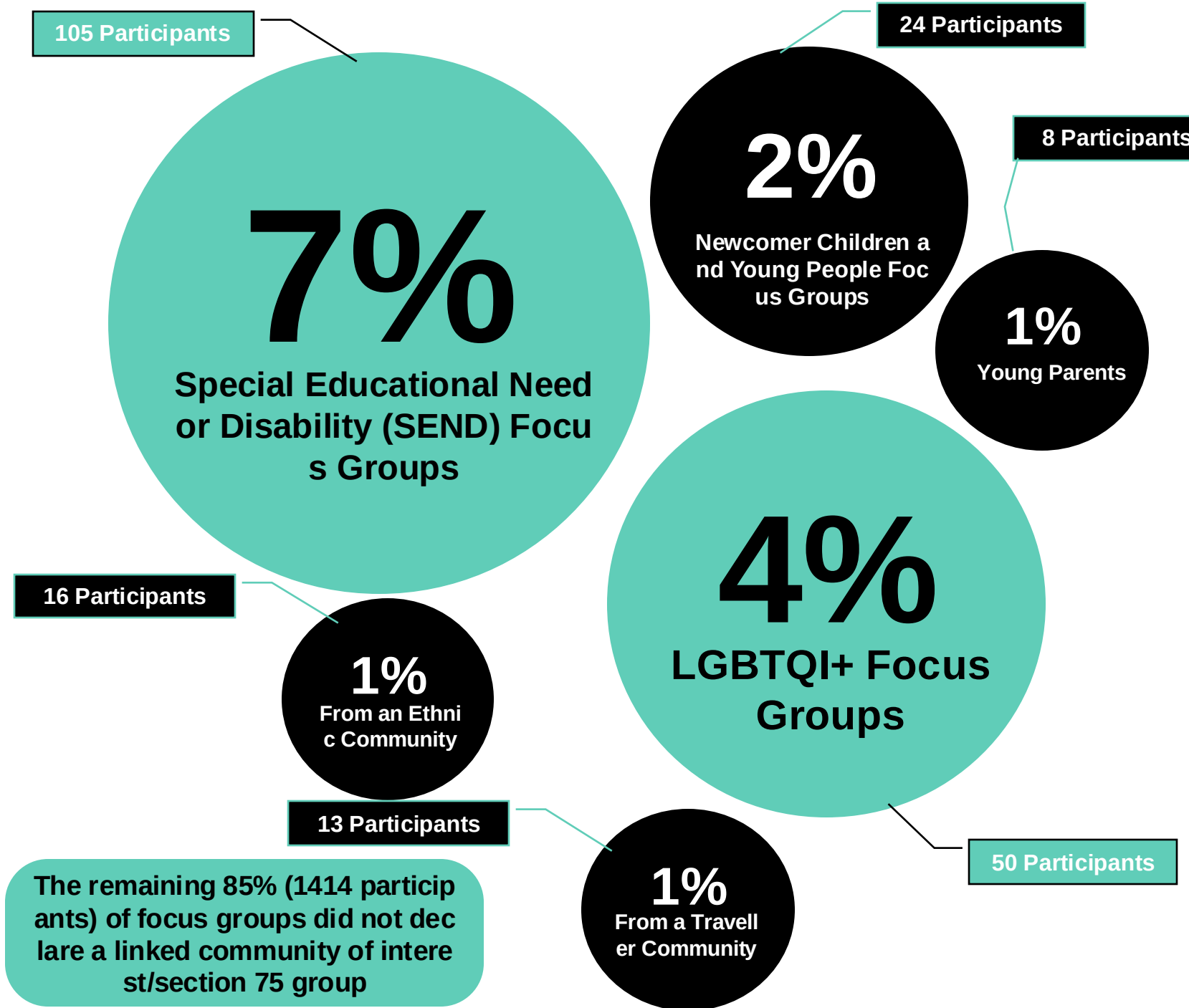
Focus Group Responses by Council Area



Age Range of Focus Groups



Communities of Interest Background of Focus Groups





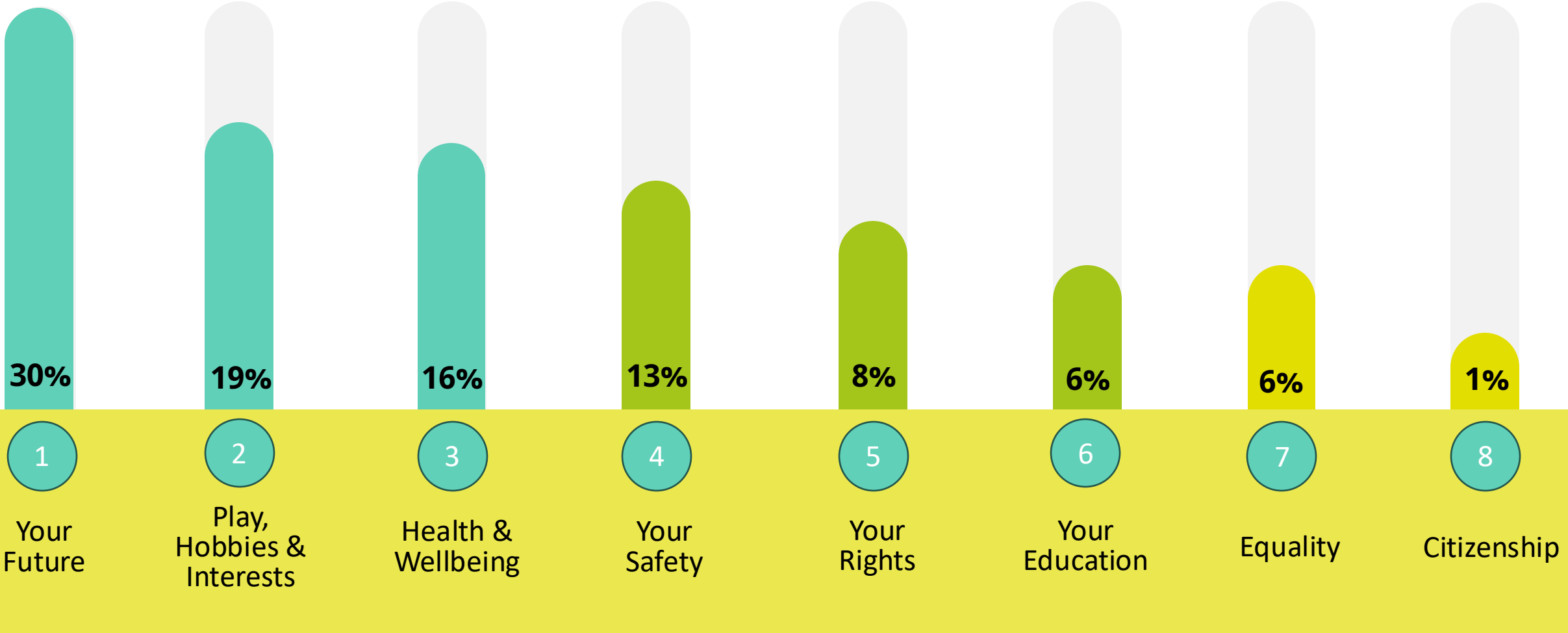
03

Assessment of Need Survey

Young Peoples Priority Themes

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The most important things for young people are …





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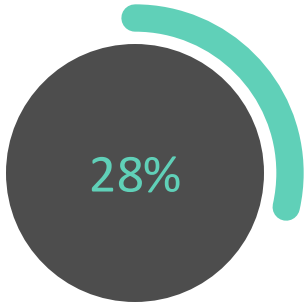
Assessment of Need

Your Future

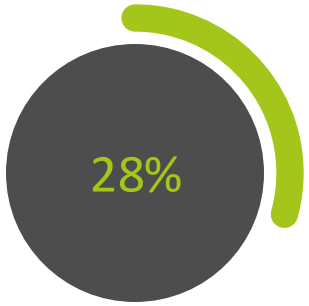
Education Authority

Through the survey and considering their future…

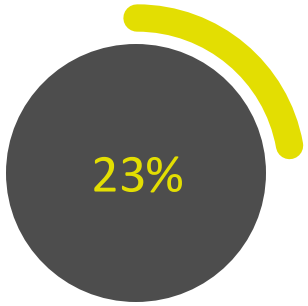
Young People Told Us that…



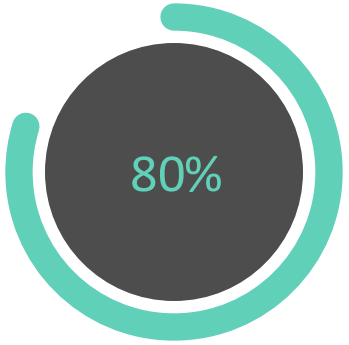
Said they do not think there will be opportunities for them in the future



Said they do not see themselves being able to get a job in the future



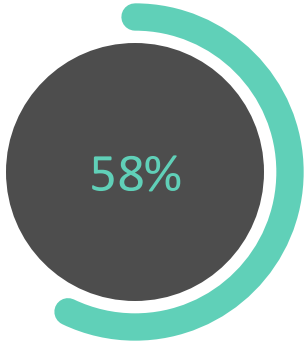
Said that their family do not have the money for them to take part in things



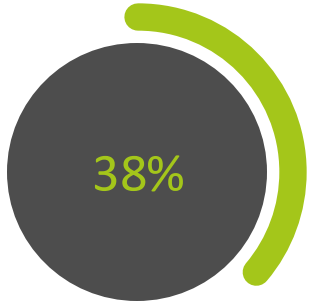
Said they believe poverty is other affecting children and young people

Through the survey and considering the environment…

Young People Told Us that…



Said they are worried about climate change



Said they do not get the opportunity to learn about climate issues



Said they do not believe enough is being done about climate change!

Young Peoples Focus Groups

Your Future

The children and young people voiced their concerns regarding their future, employability, climate change and the environment and the impact of poverty on them, their families and communities. Young people wanted access to vocational programmes, apprenticeships and environmental programmes and support for those struggling with formal education.

They appreciated the relaxed, supportive learning environments offered by Youth Services. Young people were increasingly concerned about climate change and its impact on their future, calling for more action and education on environmental issues. They recognised how poverty affects children and young people by limiting their access to clothes, hygiene products and food, leading to bullying and health complications. It was also suggested that poverty drove some young people towards drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms.



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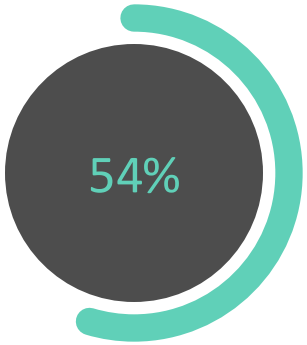
Assessment of Need

Play, Hobbies & Interests

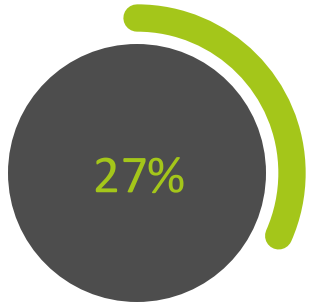
Education Authority

Through the survey and considering play, hobbies and interests

Young People Told Us that…



Said they do not feel there are fun things for them to do in their area



Said they do not feel they have safe spaces to hang out with their friends

Young Peoples Focus Groups

Play Hobbies & Interests

Many young people believed that there are insufficient leisure facilities, especially in rural areas. They reported that there is a need for more varied sports, arts and cultural activities and that transport and cost are significant barriers to accessing existing facilities. Youth Services can support by providing safe environments, organising events and partnering with local stakeholders. They can also address barriers to participation, ensuring activities are accessible to all children and young people.

Young people reflected that there is a need for comprehensive support from Youth Services to enhance play and leisure opportunities, ensure safety and promote the wellbeing of children and young people in their communities. They noted that play and leisure activities are crucial for physical and mental health, helping to reduce stress, improve mood and foster social connections. Young people value activities that keep them active, engaged, and provide opportunities to meet with friends, socialise and have fun.



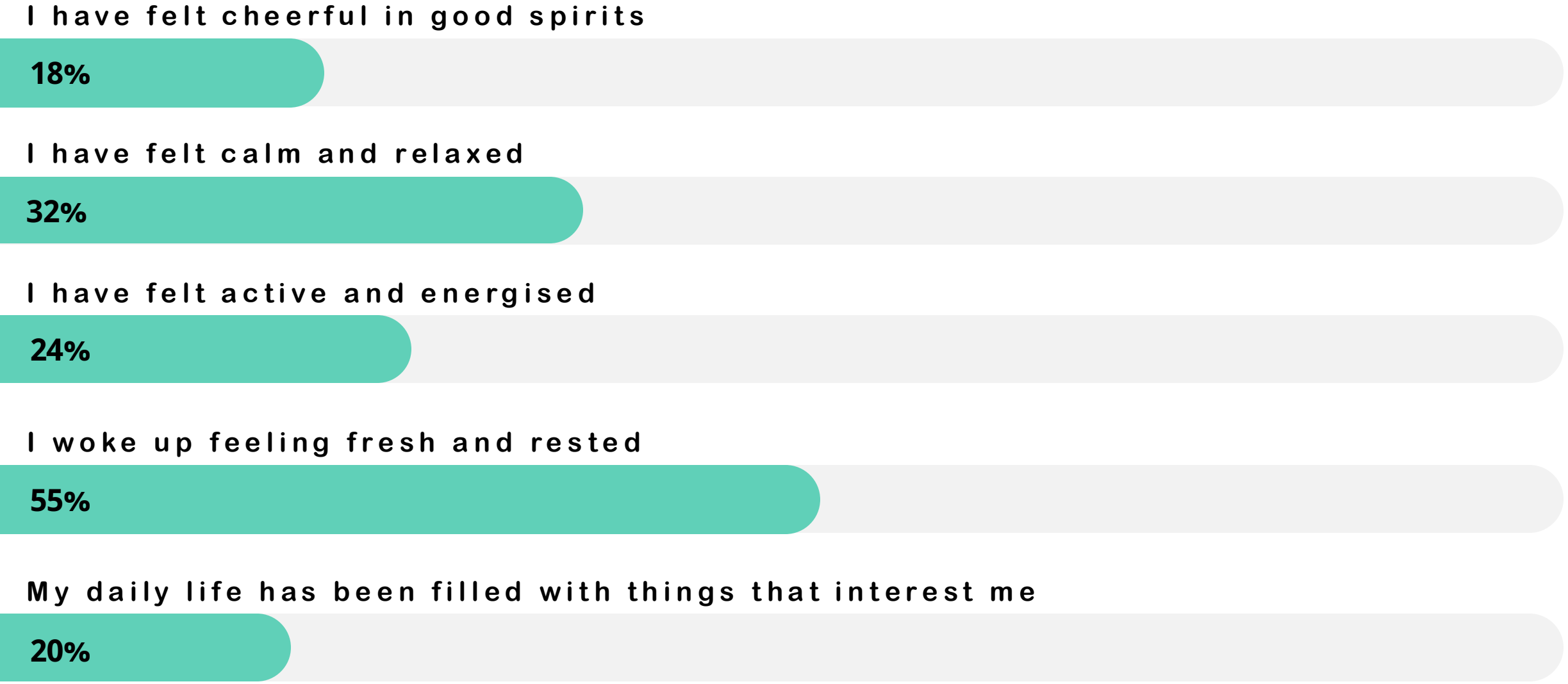
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Assessment of Need

Your Health & Wellbeing

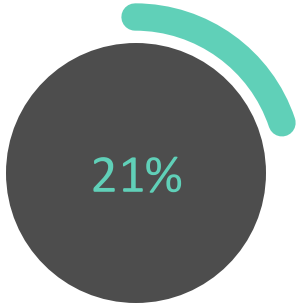
How Young People feel in the following areas…

Below is the total of responses where young people said they feel: “some of time”, “less than half the time” or “at no time”

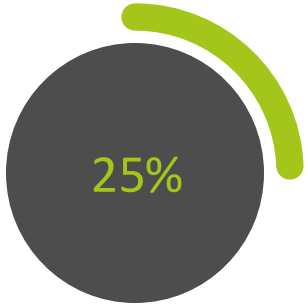


Through the survey and considering health and wellbeing

Young People Also Told Us that…



They do not feel there is opportunities for them to do physical activities



They do not feel there is any where to go and get support for their emotional wellbeing

Young Peoples Focus Groups

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Children and young people emphasised the need for comprehensive support from Youth Services to address mental and physical health issues, ensure safe and accessible facilities, and promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people in their communities.

In terms of their mental health, young people noted that they face issues like anxiety, stress, bullying, and body image concerns. They want more mental health support, including counselling, peer support groups and workshops on stress management and emotional resilience. They also suggested access to safe spaces to talk and relax and mindfulness and relaxation activities.

They wanted Youth Services to provide safe, inclusive environments and listen to and support their health needs. Youth Services should offer practical support like transport, healthy meals, educational programmes and provide additional funding for mental health and physical health initiatives.

The young people were concerned about vaping, substance misuse, lack of exercise facilities and poor diet. Suggestions to meet their needs included more varied sports programmes, outdoor activities and healthy eating education. Access to gyms, fitness classes and sports competitions were also suggested.



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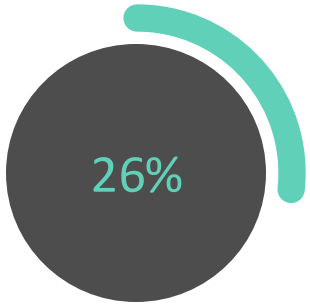
Assessment of Need

Your Safety

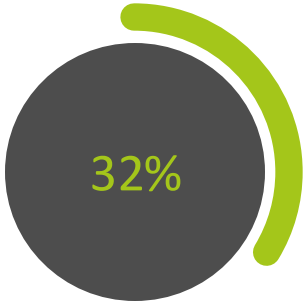
Education Authority

Through the survey and considering safety

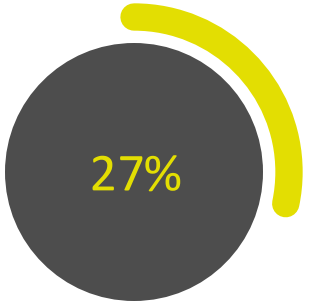
Young People Told Us that…



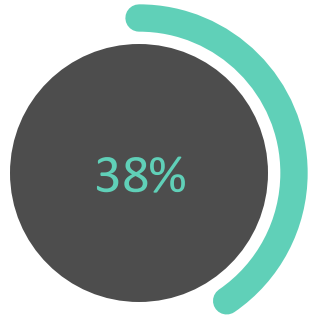
They do not feel safe in their local area



Social media is having a negative impact on them



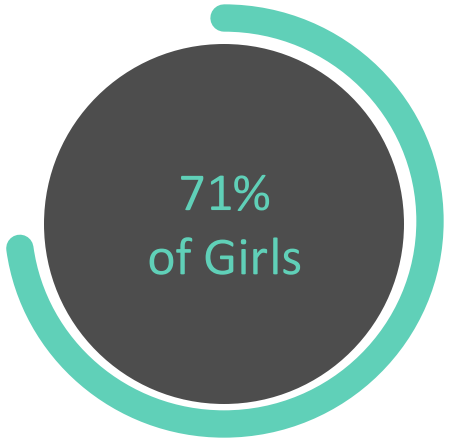
They feel pressure to take part in activities that might be harmful to them



They are worried about crime in their local area

Through the survey and considering your safety

Young People also Told Us that…





They are worried about the safety of women and girls

Over two thirds of girls and over a half of boys who responded to the survey are worried about the safety of women and girls in their local community. Overall based on all responses 63% are worried about the safety of women and girls

Young Peoples Focus Groups

Your Safety

Children and young people recognised the importance of creating safe, supportive, and inclusive environments for them through inclusive Youth Services and by promoting collaboration with community stakeholders.

They wanted access to more programmes on self-defence, safety and respect. They wanted to access safe, inclusive spaces where they felt welcomed and valued. It was also suggested that boys and young men should have greater access to respect and healthy relationships support programmes.

The young people outlined various concerns regarding their safety and wellbeing in different environments, including home, school and their local communities. Key concerns included domestic violence, violence against women and young girls, substance abuse and anti-social behaviour.

Youth Services could also do more to promote community engagement and positive engagement through awareness campaigns and peer support.



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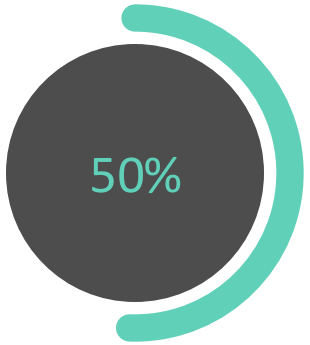
Assessment of Need

Your Rights

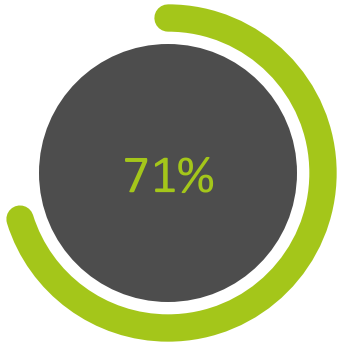
Education Authority

Through the survey and considering young peoples rights

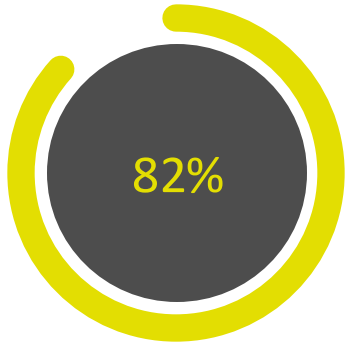
Young People Told Us that…



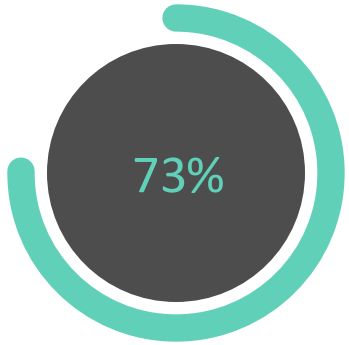
They do not feel that young people are listened too



They know what their rights are



They feel their rights are respected in youth work programmes



They feel confident in fighting for their rights

Young Peoples Focus Groups

Your Rights

The children and young people valued Youth Services in respecting, educating, and advocating for their rights, while also indicating areas for improvement and the need for more accessible information and guidance.

Suggestions for improvement included better education on children and young people's rights, more freedom for young people to express themselves and take on responsibilities and leadership roles and more support in recognising the rights of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Young people agreed that Youth Services can support and advocate for children and young people's rights by listening, organising events, creating effective policy changes, providing educational opportunities and teaching young people.

Many young people believed that their rights are not fully respected in society, and they face discrimination and stereotyping from adults, teachers and other authority figures.



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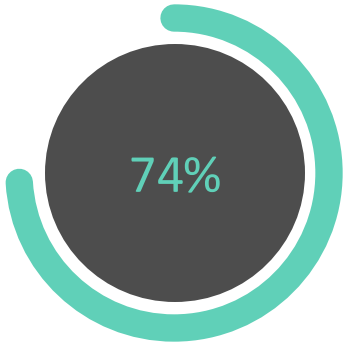
Assessment of Need

Your Education

Education Authority

Through the survey and considering education

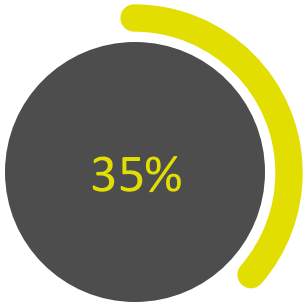
Young People Told Us that…



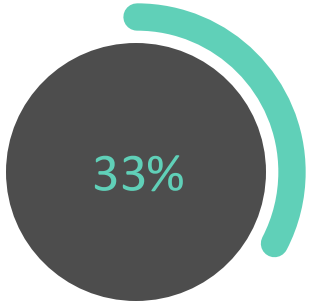
They learn a lot through their youth work programme



They get qualifications through Youth Work programmes



They have barriers that hold them back from succeeding



They don’t feel supported through big changes in education

Young Peoples Focus Groups

Your Education

Young people understood the importance of education as it allowed them to develop a range of skills and discern right from wrong and and empowers them to contribute to and understand their place in their local community and society.

The young people valued the accredited qualifications offered through youth work which provided alternative learning opportunities outside of school. These help those who struggle in traditional school settings by offering practical and enjoyable learning experiences.

Children and young people highlighted the positive impact of Youth Services on skill development and the need for more comprehensive and inclusive programmes to support children and young people's education and personal growth for those facing barriers accessing education or the curriculum.

Youth Services, they reported, help develop teamwork, communication, leadership, listening, cooking, sports, emotional management and relationship-building skills.

Youth Services also helped children and young people understand identity, manage their emotions and make better decisions.

They did recognise that some vulnerable groups school was not always a positive or enjoyable experience. These young people faced barriers with their learning and were not always supported a school.



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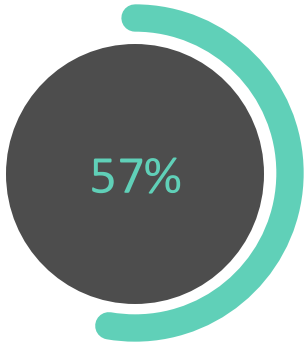
Assessment of Need

Equality

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Through the survey and considering equality

Young People Told Us that…



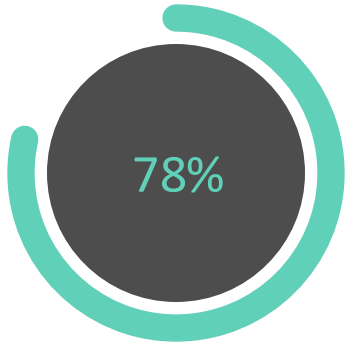
They think everyone is included and no one feels left out



Their youth work programmes support young people from different backgrounds



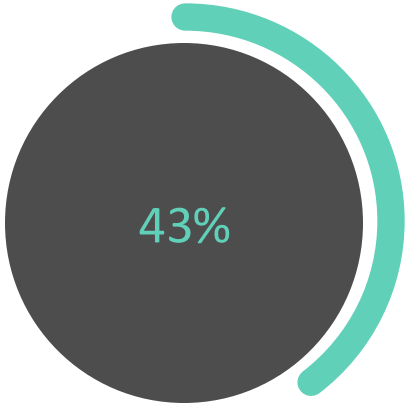
They feel their youth work programmes are accessible to everyone



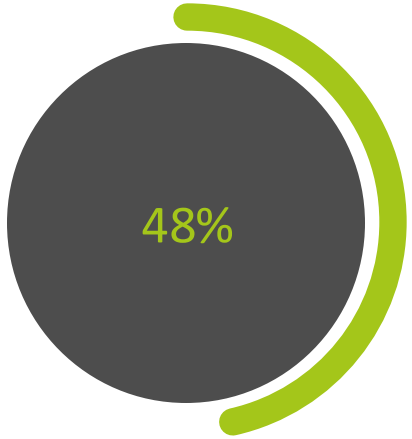
They get the chance to spend time with people who are different than them

Through the survey and considering equality

BUT! Young People also Told Us that…



They think young people are not treated equally in their area



They think other young people do not respect those who are from a different background

Young Peoples Focus Groups

Equality

Children and young people highlighted how Youth Services can promote inclusion and diversity, address discrimination, and provide equal opportunities for all children and young people to foster better relationships and improve their well-being.

Youth Services should develop policies and programmes that celebrate cultural diversity and promote equality and provide targeted support for marginalised groups, ensuring all activities are accessible and open to all.

Discrimination and lack of inclusivity they reported lead to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and mental health issues.

Young people reported experiencing or witnessing bullying, prejudice and discrimination based on socio-economic status, religion, race or disability. They wanted more support and information on equal opportunities for marginalised and vulnerable groups, including LGBTQA+ young people and those with disabilities.



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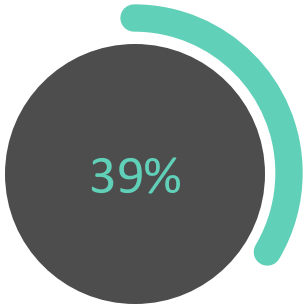
Assessment of Need

Citizenship

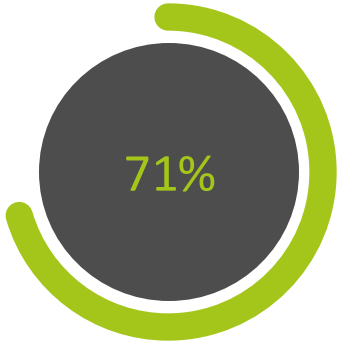
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Through the survey and considering citizenship

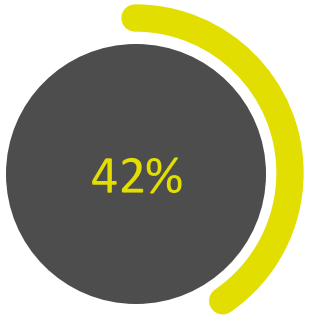
Young People Told Us that…



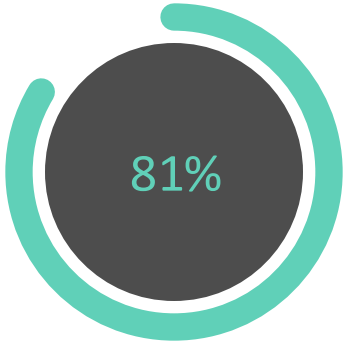
They do not have the opportunity to make a difference in their school or community



They do not have the opportunity to tell others what they think



They do not feel listened too and taken seriously



They believe young people can change things for the better

Young Peoples Focus Groups

Citizenship

Children and young people appreciated Youth Services for providing safe, inclusive spaces and opportunities for leadership and social action. They wanted more diverse programmes, better funding and more workshops on various skills and cultural education.

Young people indicated that they wanted to be more involved in decision-making processes, the importance of Youth Services in their personal and social development and the need for more inclusive and supportive environments.

Young people believed they make a difference by helping others, participating in school and youth councils and engaging in community projects. They valued making positive contributions as it made them feel heard, valued and respected.

Many young people however feel excluded from community decisions and wanted more opportunities to be involved. Suggestions included creating youth councils, offering civic engagement training and involving young people in planning events.



05

Assessment of Need

Summary of Conclusions

Education Authority

Summary Conclusions

- Greater access through youth work settings to information and guidance and resources to support their needs.
- Embed within universal youth work programmes the opportunity to discuss and explore themes relevant to their needs.
- Ensure that youth services provide a welcoming, safe, warm and nurturing environment which is provided consistently
- Ensure youth services are provided at the right times and in the right places for children and young people, which should include longer opening hours, availability on weekends and during holiday periods.
- Develop more targeted approaches to support those who are disproportionately impacted or have barriers in accessing youth service support
- Materials and information should be made available in formats that are accessible to those whose first language is not English or who are visually impaired.

Summary Conclusions

- Develop innovative and creative curriculum resources and training for paid and volunteer youth workers in response to the needs articulated by children and young people.
- Continue to use and promote the use of trauma informed practice.
- Support young people to access various services, such as mental health support, educational opportunities and employment resources.
- Provide additional educational support and help bridge learning gaps.
- Access to Social Action programmes to support and empower them to make positive changes in their communities.
- Increased access to support their transition to employment and independence.

Summary Conclusions

Early intervention and prevention youth work programmes on more pressing concerns highlighted by children and young people through the survey and focus groups which include:

- Support to address ending violence against women and girls,
- Community relations and equality beyond traditional Northern Ireland community backgrounds,
- Political education, citizenship and civic engagement
- Understand and exercising their rights,
- A youth work response to address poverty and food hunger,
- Increasing access to those section 75 groups,
- Managing their emotional wellbeing in particular sleep and rest,
- Addressing risk taking behaviours and
- Supporting young people for employment and further or higher education.



06

Assessment of Need

Supporting the Priorities

Education Authority

Supporting the Priorities

Raising Standards

- Quality Assurance & Monitoring
- Planning that reflects the strategic intent of youth services
- Planning that is dynamic in assessing and responding to needs on an ongoing basis

Developing the Non-Formal Education Workforce

- 94% of the workforce is made of of volunteers
- 86% of the organisations registered with the Education Authority deliver through generic/non-targeted funding
- Training needs to be based on the needs of children and young people
- It requires bespoke approaches to support volunteers, part-time paid and professionally qualified staff
- Training needs to hand in hand with curriculum resource development

Supporting the Priorities

Improving the Non-Formal Learning Environment

- Curriculum should reflect the needs expressed by children and young people
- Curriculum develop needs to hand in hand with training
- Participation of children and young people

Transforming Governance and Management of Non-Formal Education

- Partnership and collaboration
- Funding Scheme for Regional and Voluntary Youth Organisations



07

Assessment of Need

Recommendations For Planning

Education Authority

Recommendations for Planning

Raising Standards

- Dynamically Assessing the needs of children and young people on an ongoing basis
- Revise the structure of the Regional Youth Development plan to focus on the strategic intent of youth services
- Reduce bureaucracy and administration associated with reporting and evidencing of youth work delivery

Closing the Gap, Increasing Access and Equality

Universal Youth Services

- Focus on access to play and leisure
- Focus on providing information young people want access to
- Focus on increasing access and barriers to participation, in particular those from Section 75 groups
- Overall, Concerted effort to increase opportunities for children and young people to access universal youth work programmes

Recommendations for Planning

Closing the Gap, Increasing Access and Equality

Early Intervention and Prevention

- Continued delivery of group work programmes based on emerging needs regionally and locally
- Focus on more pressing concerns from children and young people which include:
  - *support to address ending violence against women and girls,*
  - *community relations and equality beyond traditional Northern Ireland community backgrounds,*
  - *political education, citizenship and civic engagement*
  - *understand and exercising their rights,*
  - *a youth work response to address poverty and food hunger,*
  - *increasing access to those section 75 groups,*
  - *managing their emotional wellbeing in particular sleep and rest,*
  - *addressing risk taking behaviours and*
  - *supporting young people for employment and further or higher education.*
- Maximising other ear-marked funds outside of the Youth Service Budget to add value to supporting early intervention and prevention programmes

Recommendations for Planning

Developing the Non-Formal Education Workforce

- Focus on Volunteers
- Development and Delivery of Effective Training Based on the Needs of Children and Young People

Improving the Non-Formal Learning Environment

- Developing the Curriculum based on the Needs of Children and Young People
- Connecting Curriculum Development to Training Development
- Ensuring the Voices of Children and Young People is central to delivery of youth services

Transforming Governance & Management of Non-Formal Education

- Defining Guidance for Partnership and Collaboration
- Monitoring and Quality Assurance of Partnerships and Collaborations
- Funding and Resourcing through the Funding Scheme for Regional and Local Voluntary Youth Organisations to enable Partnership and Collaboration



08

Assessment of Need

Public Consultation

Education Authority

Public Consultation



8 Week Public Consultation

Open from the 10 March 2025 to 4 May 2025

Published for Consultation
Draft Regional Assessment of Need Report
Equality Screening

The consultation will seek views on:
The Conclusions
The Recommendations for Planning

Response by

By Individual or Group/Organisation
Online Survey
Written Response by Post or Email


Assessment of Need
THANK YOU!
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