

Executive Summary

**LIVING  
THROUGH  
A LOCKDOWN**

Reflections and  
recommendations  
from young people at  
risk of serious violence

# Introduction

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Our research – devised and conducted jointly between MAC-UK, Redthread and StreetDoctors – focuses on one group’s specific experiences of lockdown. We surveyed young people who were already in touch with our organisations, those victims of, or at risk of, experiencing youth violence. We looked not only at the safeguarding implications of lockdown, but at their fears for the future, and the positive elements of this strange time in society. Yet even within this focused demographic, experiences and responses varied greatly.

Despite these differences, what is quickly apparent when looking at the responses is the key priority areas for young people. It is important to acknowledge and understand individual experiences, but we also hope these can inform some wider themes to learn from and take action on. They can be grouped into the four following areas: communication and community, support, safety and mental health.

In this report we will look in detail at these themes, examining youth perspectives on them through the prism of these extraordinary circumstances. We will draw out what problems have emerged during lockdown and the change that young people would like to see in the future. What emerges is insightful and urgent, with much to be concerned about and to act upon. But most strikingly throughout the results is a clear thread of hope – of a renewed focus on community, of a cohort who care and want the best for society.

# Method

We asked young people at risk of youth violence who have received support from one or more of our organisations to share their experiences of lockdown.

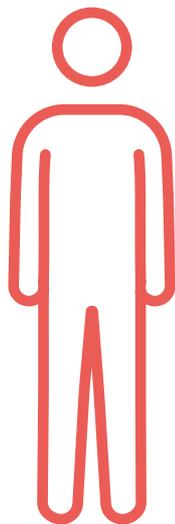
Responses were collected between 6/5/2020 and 15/6/2020, and were coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel.



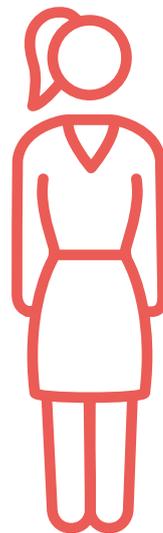
**41 young people completed the survey**

Of those who specified their gender ...

## Respondent profile



**61%**



**39%**

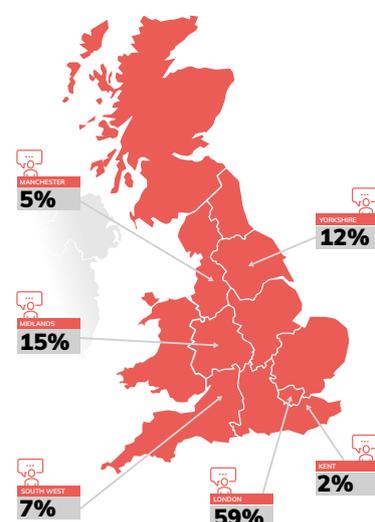
**27%**  
were aged 20+

**39%**  
were aged 17-19

**34%**  
were aged 14-16

## Map of Respondents

59% of respondents were from London, 12% from Yorkshire and 15% from the Midlands (10% from Birmingham, 5% from Nottingham). The remainder were from Manchester (5%), Bristol (5%), Bath (2%) and Kent (2%).

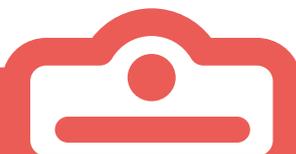


## Key findings

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- **83% have encountered difficulties during lockdown**, with isolation, boredom, and inability to access services key concerns.
- **Many feel lockdown has negatively impacted on their mental health, with 76% noting a negative impact.** Anxiety, depression and loneliness are key contributors to this decline.
- **Many young people are concerned about lockdown's impact on their education.** 33% mention school or college in their responses, rising to 64% of 14-16 year olds.
- **Young people generally feel lockdown, and reduced mobility, has increased or had a neutral impact on their personal safety.** 83% feel their safety levels have been maintained or increased over lockdown. Of those that felt their safety has decreased, this is predominantly due to their fear of contracting coronavirus. While still overall positive, those aged 20+ were least likely to rate their safety as increased or neutral: 64% of over 20s did so, compared to 93% of 14-16 year olds.
- **However, respondents in all age ranges feel slightly nervous about the situation**, with 63% expressing concern. This was particularly the case outside of southern England, with 85% of those in the Midlands and north expressing concern compared to 54% of respondents from the south.
- **10% of respondents have been directly affected by COVID**, with a close friend or family member dying of the disease.
- **Support is key.** As well as the essential support of friends and family, over a third of respondents note the support of youth work and counselling services in getting them through lockdown.
- **Support is lacking.** More than half of respondents identified specific deficits in the support they receive. As well as the support they would receive through school or college, health services, employment and social care were particularly highlighted. Those aged 20+ were most likely to identify unmet support needs
- **Young people are proud of how communities are coming together, and many are an active part of this community response.** 39% identified ways they were getting involved.

# Key Themes



## Communication and Community

**Informed:** Young people want to be informed.

**Inspired:** Young people were inspired by community action and are keen to take on meaningful roles.

**Transparency:** Openness from the government and people in positions of power is important and valued by young people.

**Co-production:** Involving young people in the design and dissemination of information would be key for reaching them effectively.

## Safety

### **Safety on the streets:**

Despite being at home and physically away from peers and risk, lockdown did not increase feelings of safety for the majority of young people

**Safety in a pandemic:** The threat of the virus made day-to-day life feel unsafe for young people, and caused increased anxiety.

**Safety in the home:** Family trouble caused increased pressure at this time for young people, and this is supported by national domestic violence statistics.

## Support

The young people surveyed show many statutory services have been delayed or cancelled, leaving them worried and alone.

Counselling and youth work is an extremely important source of support for young people; those who have been able to access this have talked of the benefits. But it is also clear that many young people are falling through the gap. The upending of support structures and networks has had a negative impact on young people's lives, and will continue to do so.

There needs to be a concerted effort to ensure that young people are provided with the resources and support they deserve and need, in order to ensure both their safety if there is another local lockdown in their area, and that they are able to maintain their wellbeing after the impact of the first.

## Mental Health

**Loneliness:** Young people felt isolated by lockdown and the lack of physical and social connection it brought.

**Boredom:** Out of education and out of employment, young people struggled to keep themselves meaningfully occupied.

**Lack of support:** With services stretched or shut, young people felt they had to deal with these issues on their own.

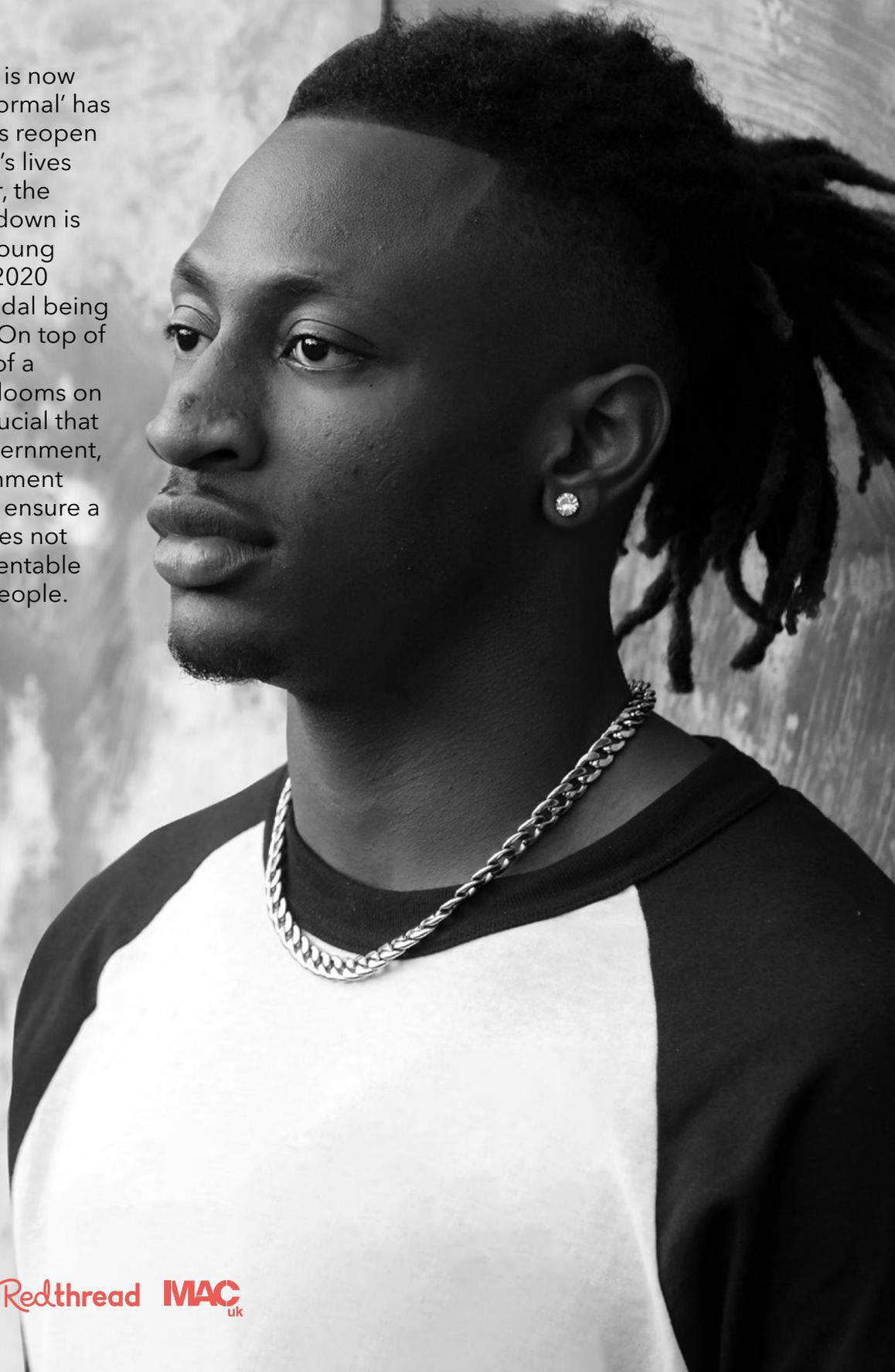
**Fear of loss and the future:** With both the virus and societal change looming, young people felt anxious about what post-pandemic life would look like for them.

# Recommendations

## Planning for a local lockdown

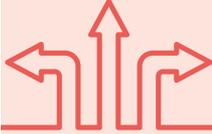
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The first lockdown is now over, and a 'new normal' has seen many services reopen and young people's lives continue. However, the impact of the lockdown is still being felt by young people - with the 2020 A-Level result scandal being just one example. On top of this, the prospect of a second lockdown looms on the horizon. It is crucial that charities, local government, and central government take action now to ensure a local lockdown does not cause further preventable issues for young people.



## Based on the research we recommend that:

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**1** Authorities should consult with young people to produce targeted messages around any upcoming local lockdown restrictions. Plans for changes in delivery should be shared with young people currently being supported by services.
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**2** Pathways to ongoing opportunities for community engagement and active citizenship should be created, publicised and managed in conjunction with local grassroots organisations.
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**3** Schools, colleges and youth services must receive ongoing support to act as anchor institutions during local lockdowns, particularly for those known to be at risk of youth violence.
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**4** Service delivery organisations must prepare clear digital engagement strategies to ensure consistency through any lockdowns, and practitioners should receive additional training on this where possible.
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**5** Funders should distribute small grants to local organisations who can help ensure consistent lower level support during local lockdowns – to support local authorities, schools and health services.
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**6** Referral criteria for support services should be temporarily relaxed during lockdown to self-referrals from young people or parents during lockdown, particularly those struggling with mental health.
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**7** The government must co-create and publish a long-term plan for young people to ensure they do not suffer disproportionately as a result of the lockdown. These plans should prioritise access to work and training opportunities for young people.

# Concluding Comments



*While the national lockdown might be over, many communities know restrictions could imminently be imposed at a local level. It's vital we are ready. This time, it won't be unprecedented, and all agencies must have plans in place to protect the younger generation. This report gives an invaluable insight into the lives of those at risk of youth violence during a time of nation-wide crisis. We can all learn from it to keep the young people in our own communities safe in the next phase of tackling the pandemic, and in years to come.*

John Poyton OBE CEO, Redthread



*This report lays bare the feelings and experiences of young people at risk of or involved in violence during lockdown. It powerfully demonstrates their pain, confusion and loneliness, their lack of support, their fears for their safety and their feelings of loss. But it also highlights their amazing active citizenship during the crisis, and their hopes for a more positive future, one that they desperately want to make a positive contribution to. StreetDoctors is thrilled to have been a part of empowering these young people to amplify their voices. Alongside our partners Redthread and MAC-UK we will be doing all we can to ensure their thoughts and opinions are heard by both regional and national decision makers, and acted on as a priority.*

Lucie Russell CEO, StreetDoctors



*At MAC-UK, Redthread and StreetDoctors, we work with some of the most marginalised and excluded young people in the country, who are experiencing violence, or the threat of violence, in their daily lives. These young people are often presented as one-dimensional, as a monolithic group who are a danger to each other and wider society. What this report shows us is something people who work with them already know: that these young people are among the kindest and most compassionate in society, who are willing and eager to help out their communities as much as they can. It also shows us where we failed them as a society during the first lockdown, leaving young people feeling isolated and confused; provides us with a warning about the imminent and ongoing local lockdowns. If we are going to support these young people as they deserve to be supported, we need to truly co-design services with them, provide their communities with adequate resources and enable them to participate in acts of mutual aid by facilitating community engagement.*

Jake Lake Policy, Public Health and Prevention Lead and  
Dr Samantha Rennalls Trainee Clinical Psychologist, MAC-UK