



# GENERATION ISOLATION

ONSIDE'S ANNUAL  
STUDY INTO YOUNG PEOPLE'S  
LIVES OUTSIDE SCHOOL

October 2023



# CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Methodology	4
Key Findings	5
Kenzie's Story	6
Part 1 - Young people's lives	7
Free time	8
Trusted adults	14
Cost of living	15
Out of school opportunities	17
Wellbeing	19
Finlea's Story	21
Part 2 - Young people and youth services	22
Youth club exposure	23
Youth club impacts	24
The positive difference	25
Youth centre considerations	26
Youth centre perceptions	27
About OnSide	28



# FOREWORD

## We developed Generation Isolation to help us better understand young people's lives in the time they spend outside of school.

Last year's research painted a picture of a post Covid generation whose lives were predominantly spent at home on screens, with limited opportunities for real life interaction.

One year later, sadly, not much has changed for the better. In fact, the data shows us that even more young people (80%) spend most of their free time at home than we reported last year (77%).

In addition, the survey lays bare the consequences of the cost of living on young people's lives outside school. Worryingly, 26% of young people told us they have had to stop doing the things they love, like sports, dancing, music lessons and hanging out with friends as a direct result of the cost of living.

That's 1.3 million young people missing out on the crucial, character-building impact of activities and opportunities outside of school. Furthermore, it is our least affluent young people that are being most impacted, with 30% of them reporting stopping activities because of the cost of living.

Combine this with the wider impact of the cost of living, with 69% of young people saying they are worried about it, many having real concerns that their families won't be able to buy food or pay the bills, plus the 50% of young people that report high or very high anxiety, and it is clear we are in a time of unprecedented challenges that makes it a hard time to be young.

But this report isn't about admiring the problem; it's about finding solutions that work, and I genuinely believe that youth centres and youth workers are a vital untapped solution to many of the challenges it highlights.

That's why it was heartening to see the report affirm our belief in the power of youth work and the positive difference it makes on young people's skills, friendships, resilience and preparedness for the future. Yet only a small minority of those surveyed attend a youth club (9%) and get the chance to reap these benefits.

It's critical that we start to value young people's time outside of school as much as we value the time they spend in the classroom –

and enable many more young people to have access to youth clubs.

And the only way to make this happen at scale is through proper collaboration between businesses, local authorities, government and communities. By working together, we can make sure that all young people have the chance to do the things they love, have fun, learn new skills, and rebuild their confidence in their future.

**Jamie Masraff**  
Chief Executive, OnSide



# METHODOLOGY

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 5,072 11-18 Year Olds in England.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 23 August - 7 September 2023.

The survey was carried out online.

The figures have been weighted and are representative of all 11-18 year old's in England.

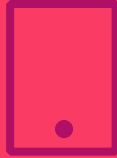
Wellbeing measure based on an existing wellbeing scale developed and reported by the ONS.



# GENERATION ISOLATION: KEY FINDINGS

To empower and enable young people at scale and continue to advocate for the best support for them, we need to deeply understand the reality of their lives and respond to their needs. To do this, we asked 5,072 young people aged 11-18 about their lives outside of school, their perception of the opportunities open to them and awareness of services designed to support them. These are the key findings:

**76%** of young people spend most of their free time on screens\*.



**18%** spend most of their free time alone.



**91%** of young people do not attend a youth centre.



**27%** spend most of their free time playing computer games.



**69%** are concerned about the rising cost of living.



**89%** of young people that attend a youth centre say it has made a positive difference to their lives.



**80%** of young people spend most of their free time at home\*\*.



**26%** of young people have had to stop out of school activities because of the cost of living.



**33%** of young people who say youth centres make a positive difference say it is because of making new friends.



**1%** of young people spend most of their free time hanging out on the streets.



**50%** of young people reported high or very high feelings of anxiety\*\*\*.



**40%** of young people do not have opportunities to meet new people and make friends.



\*76% of young people surveyed spend most of their free time on screens (watching streamed content like Netflix/YouTube, gaming, spending time on their phone or watching TV).

\*\*80% of young people spend most of their freetime at home (in my bedroom or other communal area of my house)

\*\*\*Wellbeing measure based on an existing wellbeing scale developed and reported by the ONS

# KENZIE'S STORY

**Kenzie joined Legacy, Croydon Youth Zone to access its sports facilities for 50p but went on to grow his own clothing business there too...**

“

*Sports was what drew me to Legacy – imagine going to the gym or using a climbing wall and only paying 50p for unlimited access that session! But, I soon realised it was more than just a sports or music facility, the youth workers really valued me and took an interest in what I wanted to do with my life.*

*The vibe I got from youth workers and members was positive and inspiring. I was kind of nervous, it was quite busy but once I introduced myself to other members, I found that we shared similar interests and ended up getting along. Next thing I knew I was here every day.*

*I was approached by a staff member who introduced me to the employability programme 'Empowered', which offers a six-week workshop providing the skills and tools needed to find work or access further education. Around this time, I was looking for a job, so I felt like this opportunity came at the right time.*

*Over six weeks, the Empowered team helped me with my CV, punctuality at the workplace, support with employment searches, my work experience,*

*and so much more. I am pleased to say that I now have a job in retail – which I think is a good first step in the industry that I'll soon be starting my fashion business in. One of my main changes is that it taught me to step outside my comfort zone which led to improving my confidence.*

*I was given the opportunity to showcase my brand's identity and mission at Legacy's Annual Senior Showcase in front of hundreds of members. This was a great chance to present the new and improved brand that I worked on. Following that event, I was invited to Legacy's Supporters Dinner. I got to introduce myself and my brand to community businesses and supporters.*

*That evening I learnt so much about how to conduct myself on a professional level and how communication is key if you want your business to be recognised because you really don't know who you're going to meet. It was a great night!*

*For anyone who is unsure or feel like they have hit a barrier in their dream job or life goals, give a Youth Zone a try... you'll never know what opportunities might come your way for 50p.”*

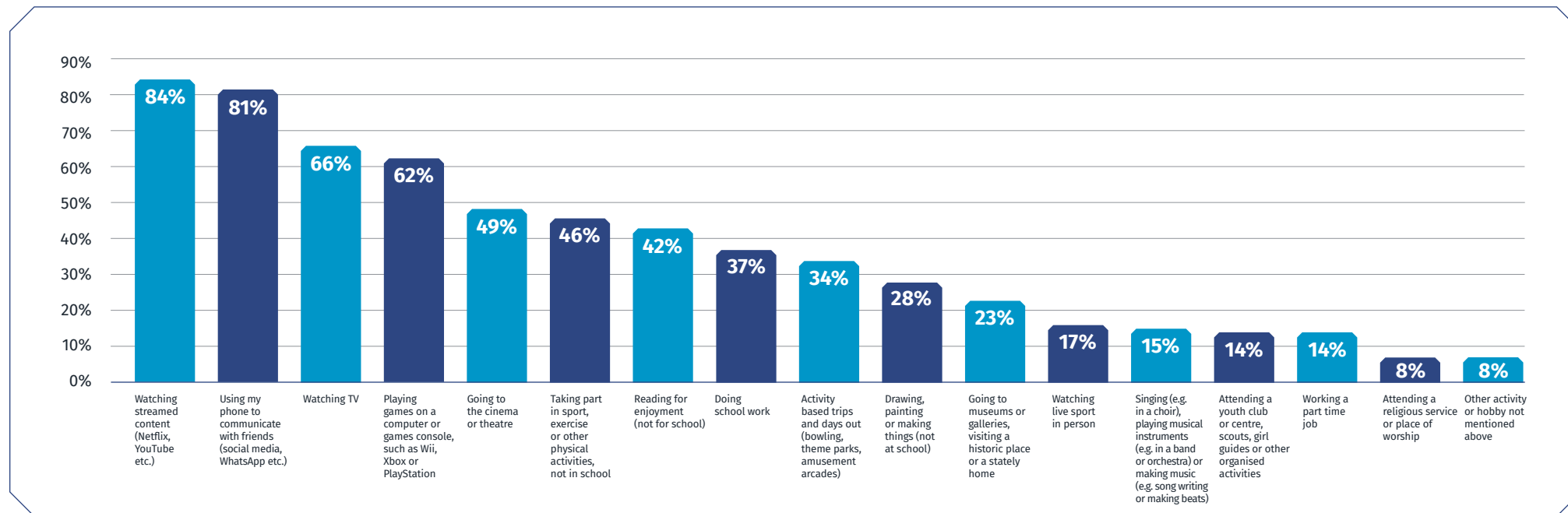


**PART 1**  
**YOUNG**  
**PEOPLE'S**  
**LIVES**



# HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE SPEND THEIR FREE TIME?

We asked 'Which of these activities do you do in your free time now (i.e. the time when you are not in school?)'



## Top 4 free time activities

**84%** of young people spend time watching streamed content in their free time outside of school.



**81%** of young people use their phone to communicate with friends in their free time outside of school.



**66%** of young people watch TV in their free time outside of school.



**62%** of young people play computer games in their free time outside of school.





## Going up

More young people  
**(84%)** are watching  
streamed content now  
than last year **(80%)**.



More young people are  
spending time using their  
phone to communicate  
with friends now **(81%)**  
than last year **(77%)**.



More young people are  
watching TV in their  
leisure time now **(66%)**  
than last year **(61%)**.

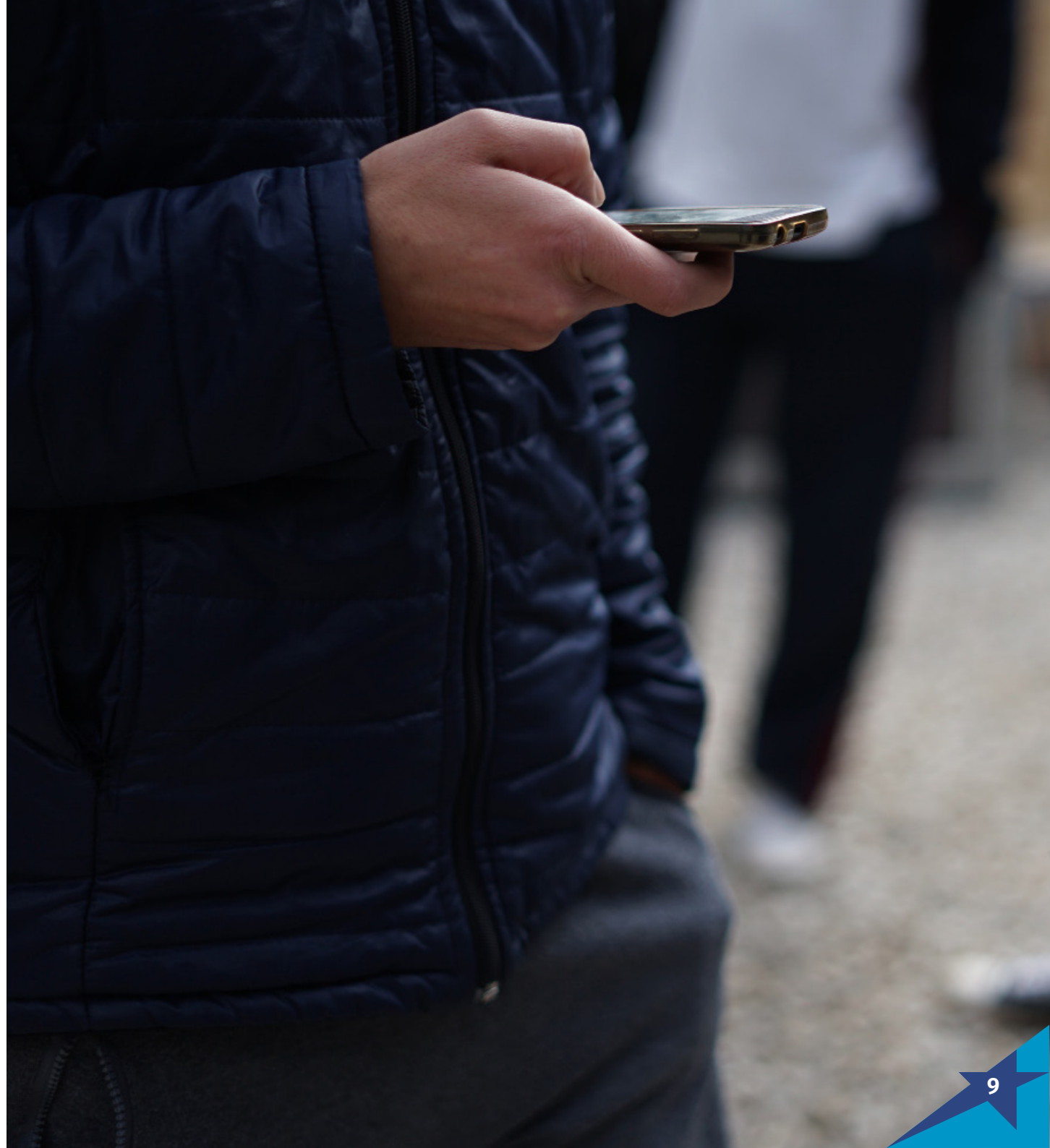


## Going down

Less young people are  
working a part time job  
now **(14%)** than last  
year **(16%)**.

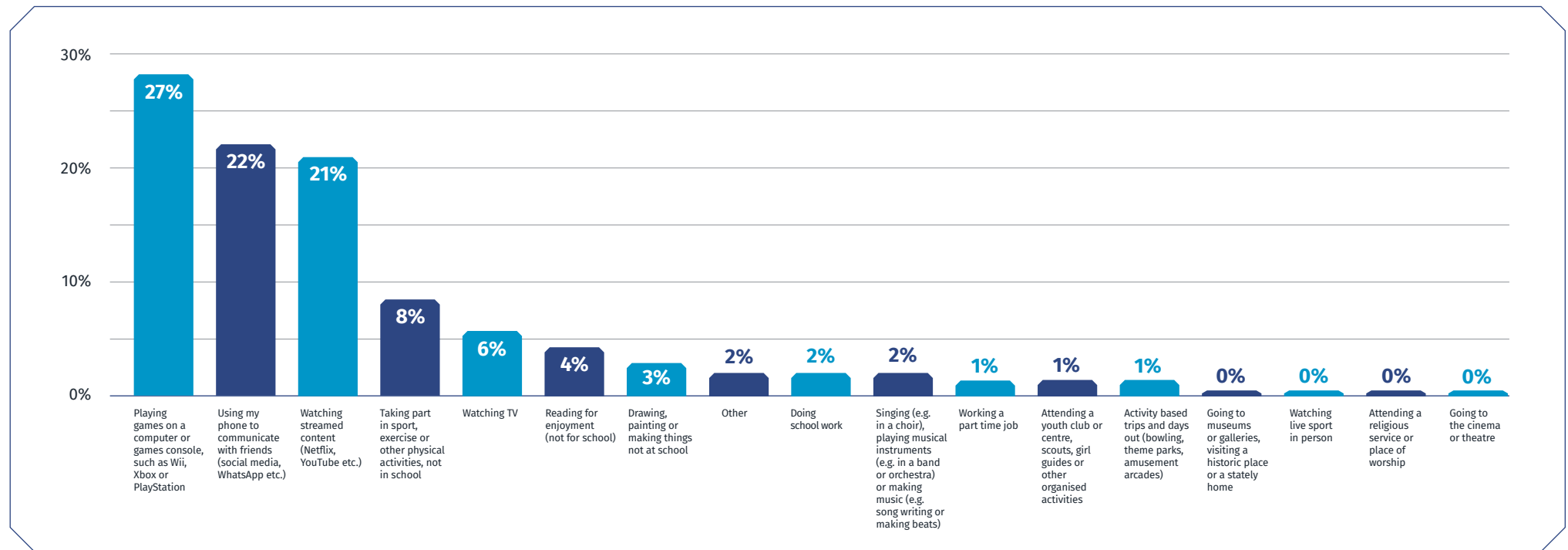


Less young people are  
spending time doing  
school work now **(37%)**  
than last year **(43%)**.



# WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE'S MOST TIME CONSUMING FREE TIME ACTIVITIES?

We asked 'Which one of these activities do you spend most of your free time (i.e. the time when you are not in school) doing?'



## Top 3 most time consuming activities

**27%** of young people say they spend most of their free time outside school playing computer games.



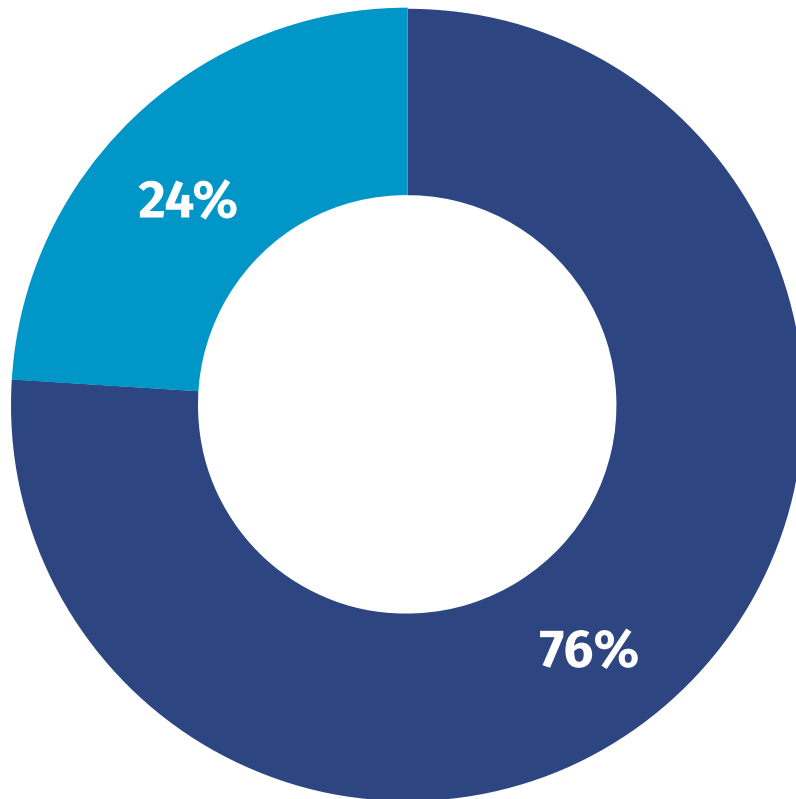
**22%** of young people say they spend most of their leisure time using their phone to communicate with friends.



**21%** of young people spend most of their leisure time watching streamed content (e.g. Netflix, YouTube).

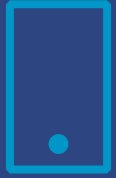


# YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCREEN TIME



- Spend most of their free time on screen
- Spend most of their free time on non-screen based activities

**76%** of young people spend most of their free time on screens (compared with 73% in 2022).



**96%** of young people who cite gaming as their most time-consuming activity do this most days.



## Gender differences

**42%** of boys say they spend most of their leisure time gaming, making it their most time-consuming leisure activity.



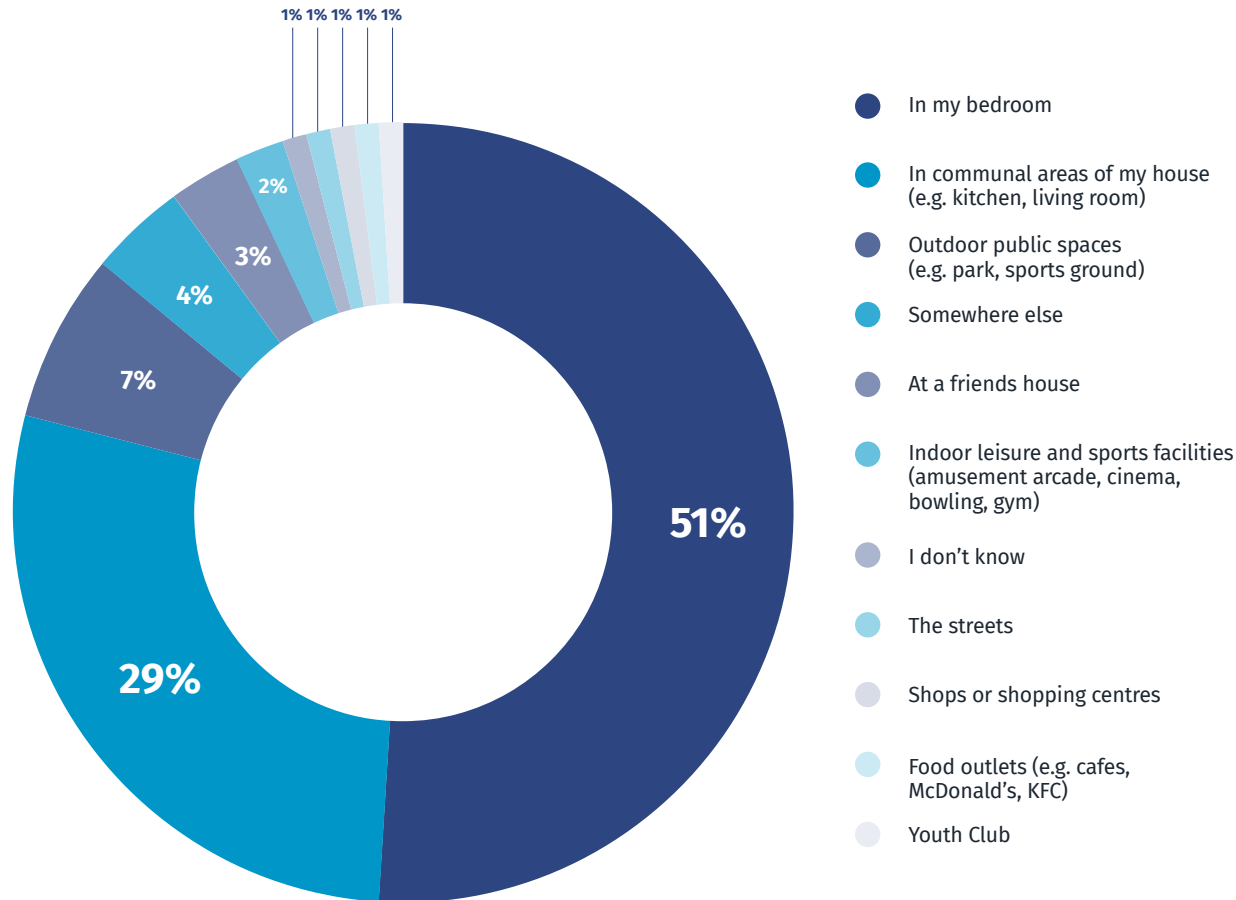
**32%** of girls say they spend most of their leisure time using their phone to communicate with friends, making it their most time consuming leisure activity.



**77%** of boys play computer games most days.



# WHERE DO YOUNG PEOPLE SPEND THEIR FREE TIME?



**51%** of young people spend most of their free time in their bedrooms.



**80%** of young people spend most of their free time at home.



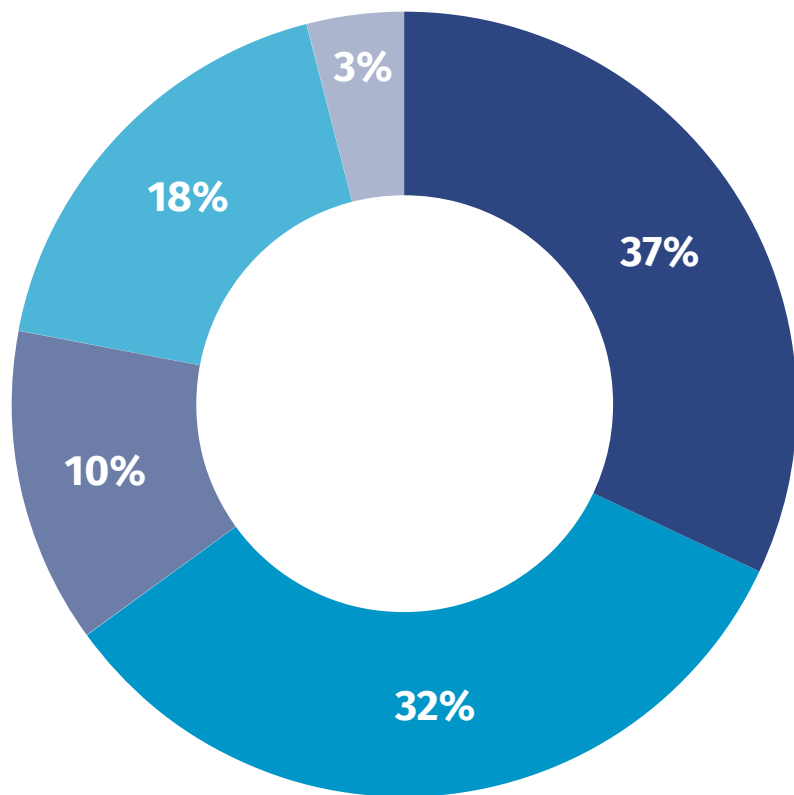
**3%** of young people spend most of their free time at friends' homes.



**1%** of young people spend most of their free time hanging out on the streets.



# WHO DO YOUNG PEOPLE SPEND THEIR FREE TIME WITH?



Young people that attend youth centres are more likely to say they spend most of their time with their friends in real life (**15%**) than those that don't (**10%**).

- I spend most of my free time with family/parents and/or carers
- I spend most of my free time online communicating with/talking to friends
- I spend most of my free time in person with my friends
- I spend most of my free time alone
- I don't know

Almost a fifth of young people (**18%**) spend most of their free time alone.



Just **10%** of young people spend most of their free time in person with their friends.



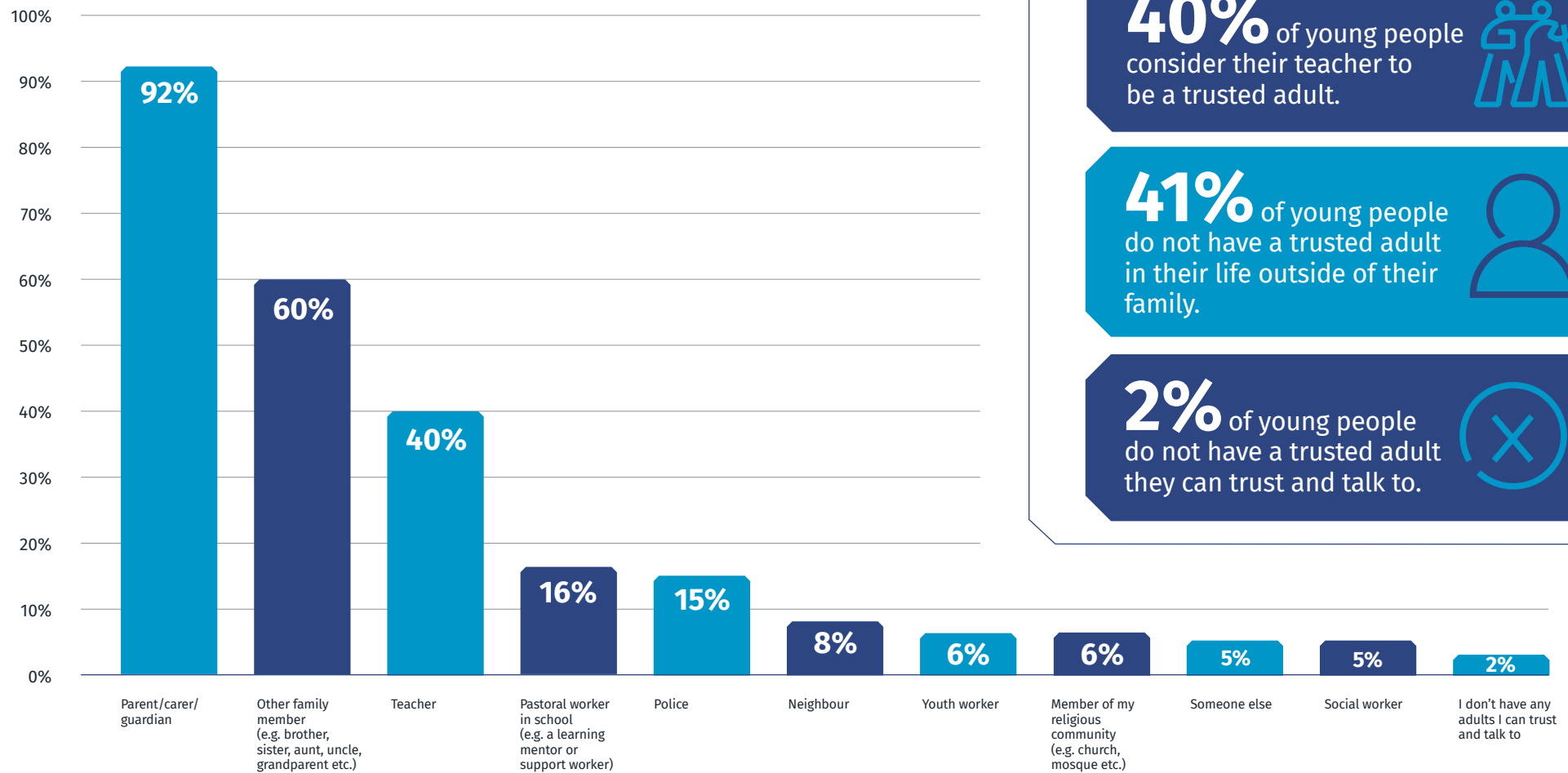
Almost a third of young people (**32%**) spend most of their free time online communicating with friends.



Almost twice as many young people spend most of their time alone (**18%**) as those that spend most of their time in person with their friends (**10%**).



# WHO ARE YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRUSTED ADULTS?



**92%** of young people name their parents as people they feel they can trust and talk to.



**40%** of young people consider their teacher to be a trusted adult.



**41%** of young people do not have a trusted adult in their life outside of their family.

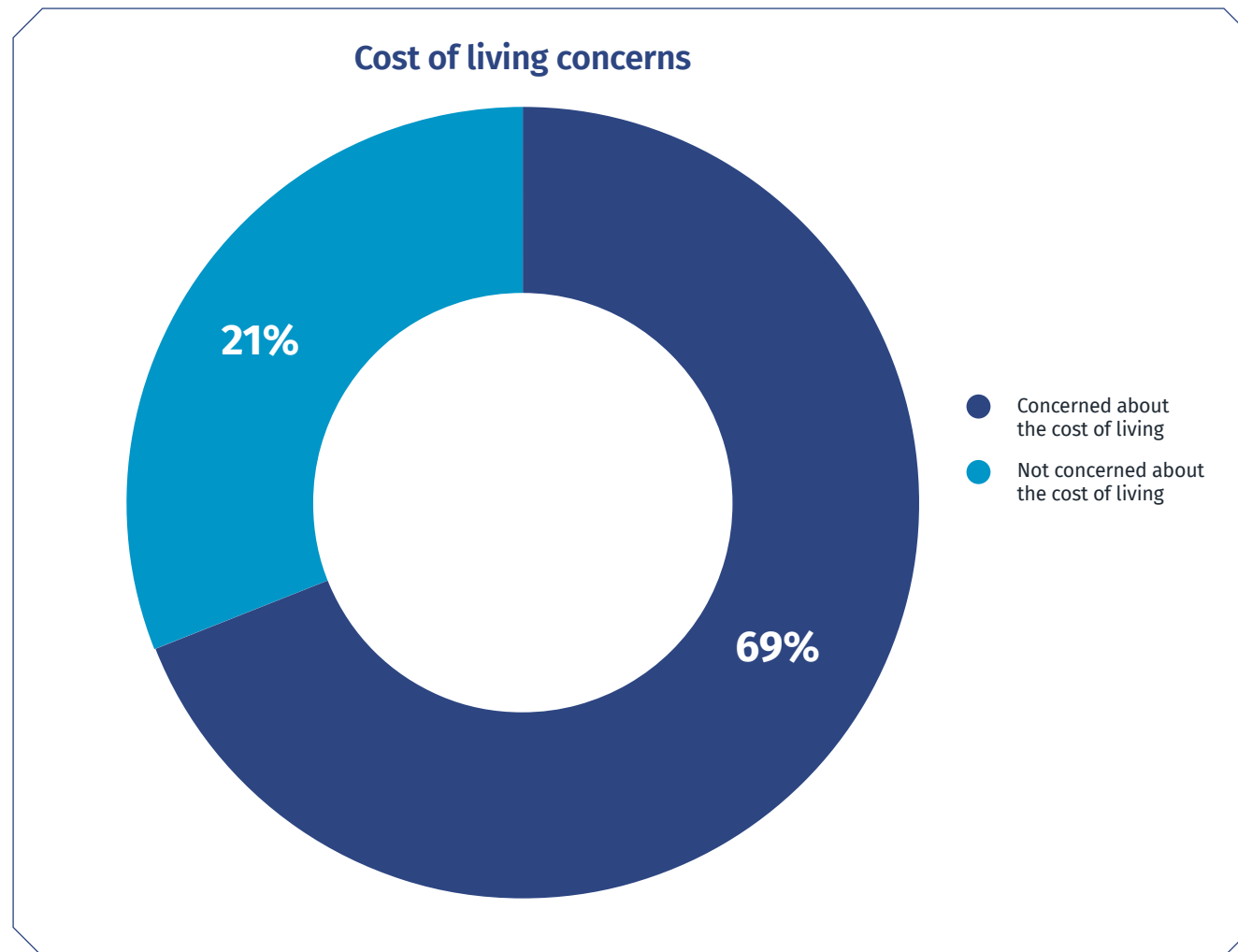


**2%** of young people do not have a trusted adult they can trust and talk to.



# HOW IS THE COST OF LIVING AFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE?

We wanted to understand more about how the cost of living is impacting both young people's lives out of school today, and how they feel it might impact them in the future.



**69%** of young people are concerned about the cost of living.



**72%** of young people from the least affluent households are concerned about the cost of living.



“During the summer holidays because of cuts to tax credits my parents have not been able to take me out on day trips as they did last summer and I've spent most days at home.”

# COST OF LIVING IMPACTS

## Activities and the cost of living

**26%** of young people have had to stop out of school activities because of the cost of living.



### Activities stopped because of the cost of living include:

Sport and fitness (30%).

Trips and days out (26%).

Dance and music lessons (9%).

Holidays and weekend trips (9%).

“I’ve had to give up sport because we can’t afford for me to carry on doing it.”

## Cost of living concerns

### Young people’s cost of living concerns are:

The long-term effects on the price of goods (62%).

Parents or carers experiencing stress (59%).

Family not being able to pay bills (40%).

Family not being able to afford food (29%).

Not being able to afford further education like college or university (24%).

The cost of digital services like WiFi and Broadband (23%).

Not being able to learn to drive (21%).

**74%** of young people’s cost of living concerns are related to worries about their families.



**30%** of young people from less affluent households have stopped activities because of the cost of living.

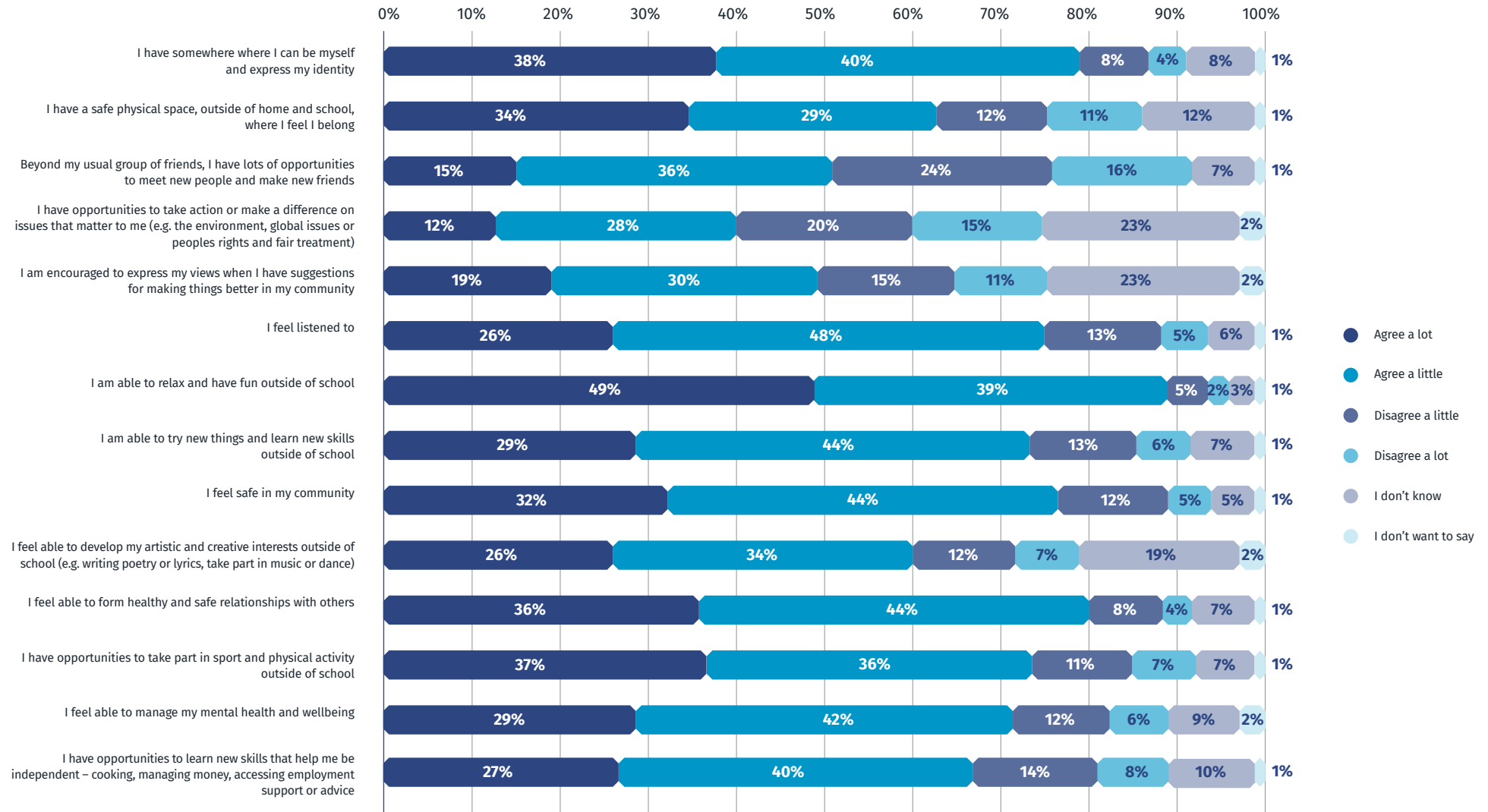


“I have stopped going to my football club as we can’t afford it or afford to get there. We can’t afford fuel to take me to see my friends and we can’t walk as my dad is disabled and my mum is really ill.”

“I usually get new school uniform every year, but this year I’m wearing mine from last year.”



# OPPORTUNITIES OUTSIDE SCHOOL



We asked young people if they agree or disagree with several statements (outlined on page 17) about their lives outside of school. Their answers show that:

**88%** of young people feel able to relax and have fun outside of school.



**24%** of young people say they do not have a safe space where they feel belonging.



**80%** of young people feel able to form healthy relationships with others.



**22%** of young people do not have the opportunity to learn the skills to prepare them for adulthood (e.g. cooking, managing money, accessing employment).



**77%** of young people say they feel safe in their community.



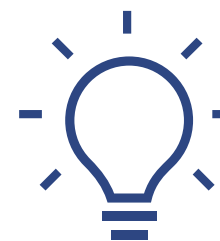
**18%** of young people do not feel able to manage their health and wellbeing.



**40%** of young people do not have opportunities to meet new people or make friends beyond their social group outside of school.



**18%** do not have opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity outside of school.



### Youth clubs and opportunities

Young people that attend youth centres have greater levels of social connection. Just over half (**51%**) of young people overall have lots of opportunities to meet new people and make new friends - by contrast **77%** of young people that attend youth centres say they have lots of opportunities to make new friends.

Youth club members report feeling better equipped for adulthood than those that do not attend youth clubs. **75%** of young people that attend youth clubs said they had opportunities to learn new skills for adulthood and be independent compared to **67%** of all young people.

# WELLBEING

We asked young people to rate their feelings against four wellbeing\* measures ranking their feelings on a scale of 0-10 where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely'.

## SATISFACTION

Overall how satisfied are you with your life right now?

**67%**

of young people reported high or very high levels of satisfaction with their life.

**11%**

reported low levels of satisfaction.

## HAPPINESS

How happy did you feel yesterday?

**71%**

of young people reported high or very high levels of happiness.

**10%**

reported low levels of happiness.

## LIFE IS WORTHWHILE

To what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

**66%**

of young people reported high or very high feeling that the things they do in their life are worthwhile.

**11%**

reported low feelings that the things they do in their life are worthwhile.

## ANXIETY

How anxious did you feel yesterday?

**50%**

reported high or very high feelings of anxiety.

**26%**

reported low feelings of anxiety.



**The top 4 causes of anxiety among young people are:**

.....  
Concerns about their future  
(university, college, jobs etc)

**51%**

.....  
What people think of them

**46%**

.....  
Exam pressure

**35%**

.....  
The cost of living crisis

**26%**

*“ I suffer from anxiety so having youth workers and other young people like myself to talk to there really helps me.”*



# FINLEA'S STORY

Joining Carlisle Youth Zone helped Finlea meet new friends, learn new skills and seek support from dedicated youth workers...

“

*Hi I'm Finlea, I'm 14 years old and live with my mum, dad, four brothers, two sisters and our dog Bonnie.*

*I've been a member at Carlisle Youth Zone (CYZ) for six years. My mum signed me up as a member and joining CYZ gave me a place to meet people socially.*

*When I first started at CYZ I was quite shy, and my behaviour was very bad, I often got into trouble during club. Now I feel more confident, my behaviour is better, and I enjoy helping the staff during the sessions.*

*I now want to become a Young Leader at the Youth Zone to help other members who might be in the same place I was when I first started, as well as to help staff run activities.*

*I like attending the Youth Zone because it helps me to get out of the house. Being able to talk with staff and other members helps my communication skills and helps me avoid fights with my siblings.*

*The staff are the same each week, which has helped me get to know them and they've been*

*able to get to know me and help me.*

*I've learnt to cook and bake and can now do it independently. I love the arts and crafts area with Mark, the Arts Coordinator, where I can make whatever I can think of.*

*CYZ has helped me become more tolerant in social situations and has helped me learn how to control my emotions.*

*Being able to talk to staff when I'm struggling has helped me develop coping strategies for when I'm angry. The staff always explain why I can't do something and the boundaries CYZ has set has helped me learn what I can and can't do.*

*This has helped me improve my behaviour at school. In year seven I had 100+ behaviour logs. In year nine I had only 16 and my aim this year is to get no more than five.*

*CYZ has helped me improve my behaviour and understanding of what I can and can't do. I can speak to people now and my confidence has improved.*

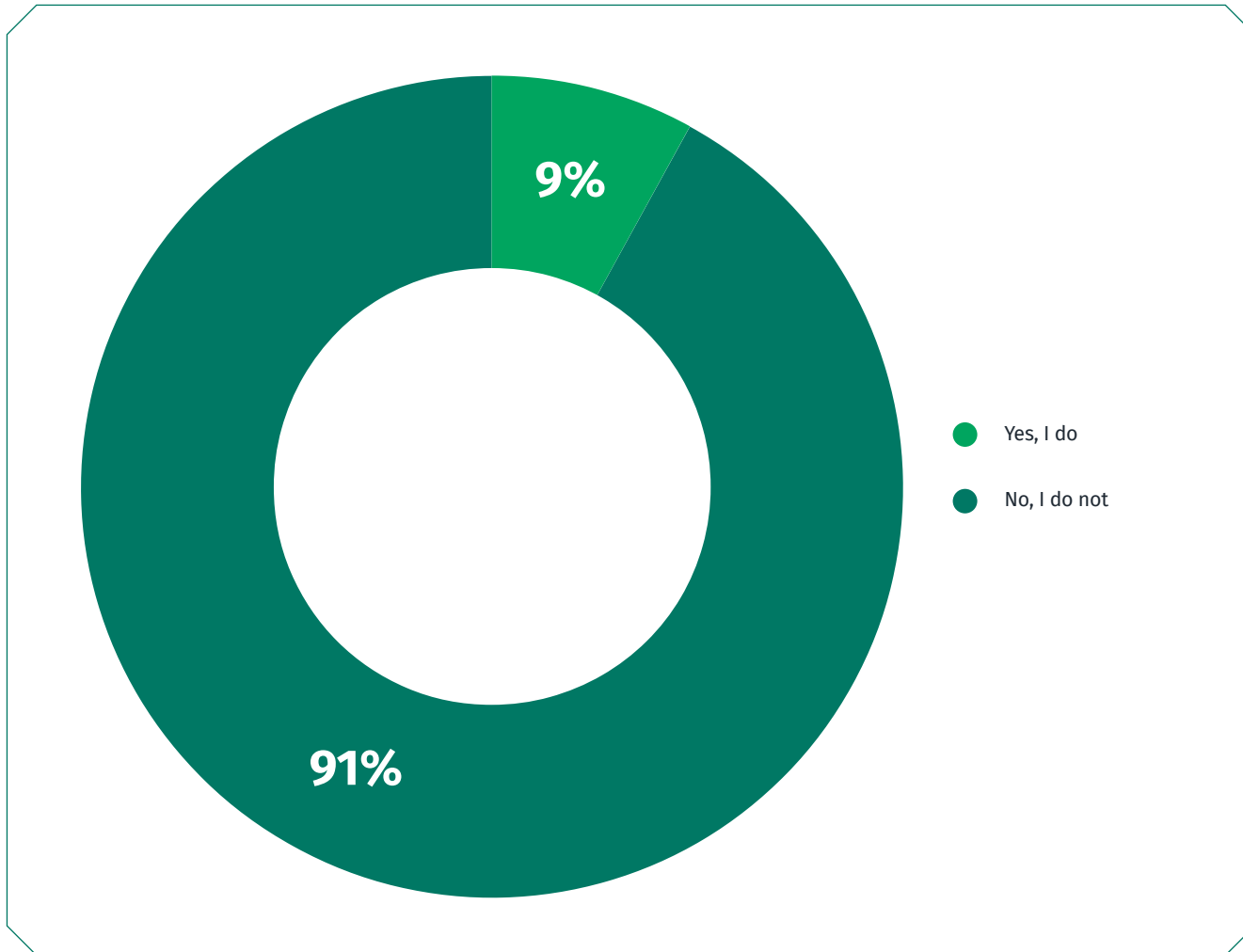


# PART 2 YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUTH SERVICES



# YOUTH CLUB EXPOSURE

We asked young people if they attend a youth centre.



**91%** of young people do not attend a youth centre.



**43%** of young people do not know what youth work is when asked to define it.



**37%** of young people do not know what a youth worker is when asked to define it.



# YOUTH CLUB IMPACTS

We asked young people that attend youth clubs about the difference it makes.

**89%** of young people that attend a youth centre say it has a positive impact on their lives.



**86%** of young people that attend a youth centre say going to a youth club has offered them new experiences and opportunities.



**83%** of young people that attend a youth centre say going to a youth club has given them new skills.



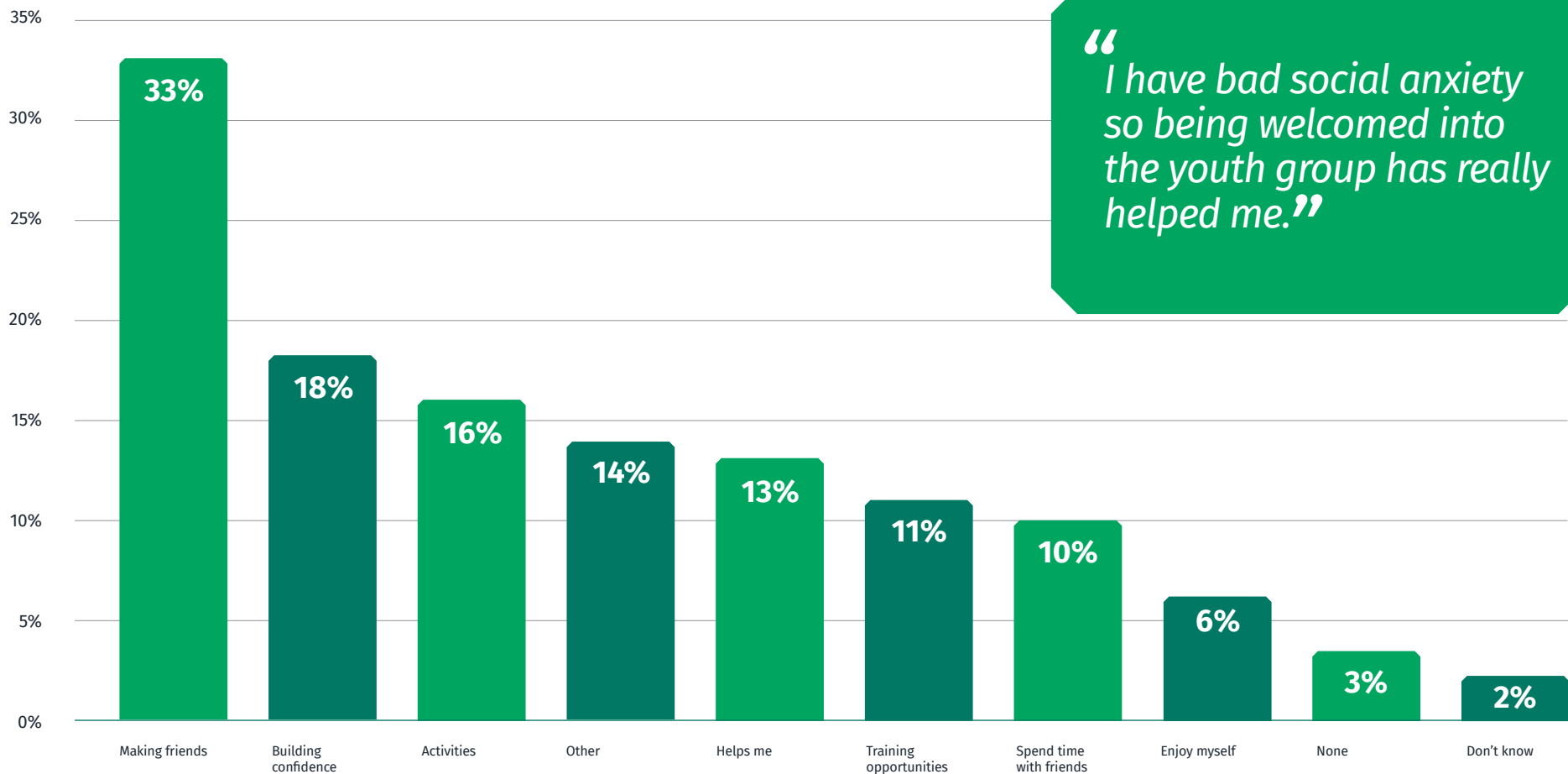
**72%** of young people that attend a youth centre say going to a youth club has helped them overcome the difficulties they face.





# YOUTH CLUBS – POSITIVE DIFFERENCE

Of young people who said that youth centres have had a positive difference on their life, 33% of them said that making friends was their reason for thinking this, making it the most popular reason.



# CONSIDERATIONS

What is important to young people when considering a youth centre?

## Top 3 considerations

**93%** of young people say it's the friendliness of staff.



**93%** of young people say feeling safe in the youth club.



**92%** say the friendliness of other young people.



*“It gets me out of the house to meet with friends but in a safe environment, not on the streets.”*

## Other factors:

**89%** of young people cite being able to attend the youth centre on the days and times that work for them is important.

**86%** cite having friends to attend with.

**88%** cite the mix of activities on offer.

**84%** cite the range of facilities.

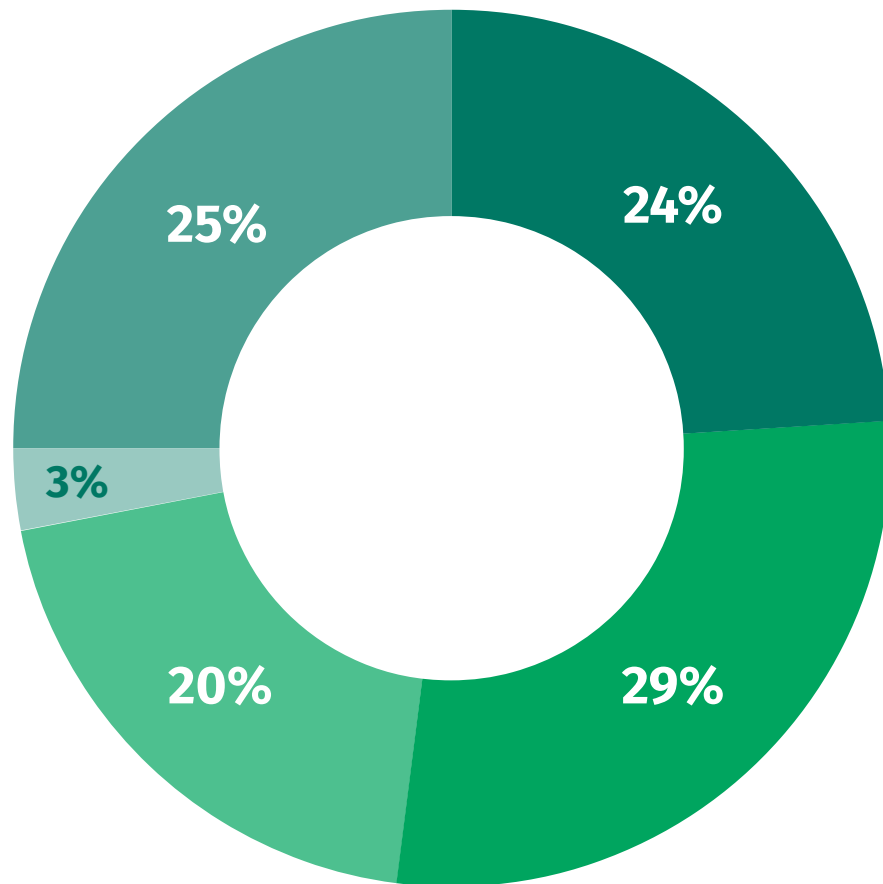
**77%** of young people cite the cost.

**61%** of young people cite what the building looks like.



# YOUTH CLUB PERCEPTIONS

We wanted to understand more about how young people that don't attend youth clubs perceive them.



- There is a youth club/centre near me but I don't want to attend
- There is not a youth club/centre near me, but I would not attend one anyway
- There is not a youth club/centre near me, but I would attend one if there was
- There is a youth club/centre near me and I would want to attend, but it's difficult to get to/travel to it
- I don't know

## Key findings

.....  
A fifth (**20%**) of young people who don't currently go to a youth club would attend a youth centre if there was one near them.  
.....

.....  
Almost half of young people that don't currently attend (**49%**) say there isn't a youth club near them.  
.....

.....  
Almost a quarter of young people that don't currently attend (**24%**) do not want to attend their local youth club.  
.....

## Other perceptions

- **22%** of young people think youth clubs are fun.
- **38%** of young people perceive youth clubs as 'not for me'.
- **18%** of young people think youth clubs are safe.
- **16%** of young people think youth clubs are old fashioned.
- **9%** of young people think youth clubs are cool.

# ABOUT ONSIDE

**We are a national charity that believes every young person should have the opportunity to discover their passion and their purpose.**

To achieve this, we fund, build, launch and support a national network of state-of-the-art, multimillion-pound youth centres called Youth Zones in the UK's most economically disadvantaged areas.

Youth Zones are staffed by skilled and dedicated youth workers who truly believe in young people helping them see what they could achieve, and giving them the skills, confidence and ambition to go for it.

We believe passionately in the power of Youth Work to transform lives and provide young people with a breadth of opportunities to help them thrive, overcome challenges and transition positively into adulthood.

