

Young Lives

In the spring of 2007 we ran a questionnaire survey of young people, aged 13-14, in schools across Leeds and surrounding districts. The survey is about young people's experiences, attitudes and expectations for the future.

The survey links to two other pieces of research. One is a national level survey which is following a cohort of (15000) youngsters over time, to see how things change for them. The other is a study we are running in which we are talking in-depth with over 30 young people from around the Leeds area, and seeing how things change for them over their teenage years. They are telling us about their lives, taking photos, writing diaries and giving us a detailed picture of teenage life in the early 21st century, and how it changes as they grow older.

We will use the information from this research to try and provide resources for young people themselves, and for others who care about young people's well being, including those who work with young people, and those who make decisions that affect young people.

This leaflet describes some of the information you gave us in the questionnaire survey. A total of 489 young people, from 10 different comprehensive schools, completed the survey. Because it was all voluntary we cannot say the respondents are exactly typical of the population of 13 and 14 year olds as a whole (those of you who did the survey might not have the same views as people who did not do it). However, we are addressing this leaflet to 'you' – that is to all early teenagers who read it – because the survey gives a good general picture of a lot of issues. We hope your teachers, and perhaps your parents, will read it too. We hope you find it interesting.

Who are you?

What words would you use to describe the person you are? In the questionnaire you were asked to imagine you were describing yourselves, in a letter, to someone you have not met, but who might become a friend. Here are some examples which give a flavour of what you said:

'Funny, kind, happy';

'Friendly, trustworthy';

'I am kind and helpful but can be moody at times. I won't tell other people's secrets. I'm there to listen';

'Gobby, stick up for myself, smiley, giggly, dopey, popular, fun';

'Quite happy, intelligent, open, honest, trustworthy, understanding, strong in my views';

'Bubbly, funny, friendly, caring, loud, has a laugh';

'Quiet but funny, good at keeping secrets, likes making conversation, imaginative but not at all confident';

'A good shoulder to cry on, friendly, caring, loyal, trustworthy, loving'.

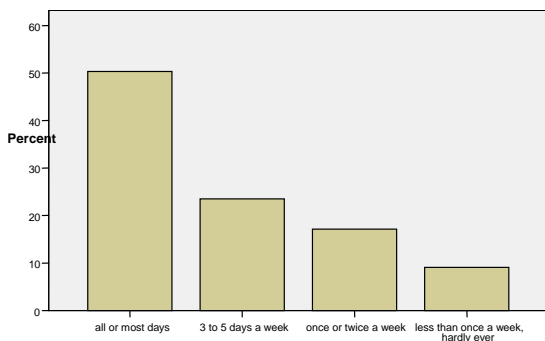
Who do you spend time with?

Do young people cut themselves off from their families? In the media we sometimes hear that young people tend to shut themselves away, watching TV in their bedroom and communicating with friends over the internet. We also often hear a different view: that young people spend a lot of time in the company of their family, talk with them about things that matter, and enjoy spending time with their friends face

to face. The Young Lives research shows that most young people are very sociable, and interact a lot with their families, and with friends, and to a fair degree, with adults in their local neighbourhood.

For example, nearly three quarters of you (73%) eat a meal together with your family three days a week or more often, and half of you eat a meal with your family all, or most, days.

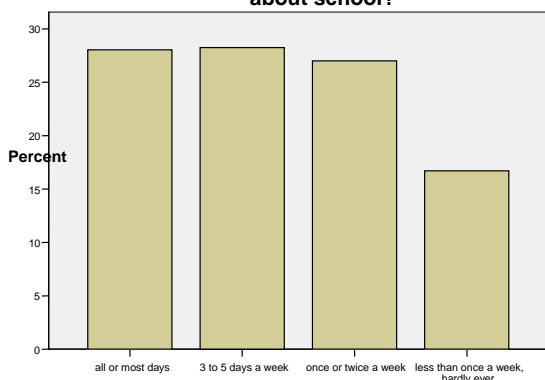
How often: do you eat a meal together with your family?



Being together is one thing but how much do young people talk with their families, and what about?

The vast majority of you discuss school with your mum or dad. In fact over four fifths of you discuss school once a week or more, with well over one quarter of you discussing it most, or every, day. Most of you (nearly 80%) discuss what you are *learning about* at school at least once a week. 63% of you discuss what is happening in the news at least once a week.

How often: do you talk with your Mum or Dad or main carer about school?



Outside of school time the vast majority of you (92%) see friends at least once a week, and over a third of you see friends most days.

Who do you turn to?

Friendship is an important part of teenage life. In fact, best friends can be more important than family in some areas. You would be equally likely to turn to your mum or best friend in sharing good news, but if you 'felt upset or worried about something' 45% of you would turn first to a best friend whilst 29% of you would turn to your mum.

What does a good friend mean to you?

'A person who will always be there when you need them and someone who cares for you'

'Being there for you or getting you out of trouble'

'A lot because you can tell them anything and they wouldn't tell anyone else'

'Who doesn't judge me and who messes around with me'

'That I can trust them and that they will be there when I need them'

Recently there has been a lot of discussion about the **role of the internet** for keeping in touch with friends. Asked about the main way in which you keep in touch with friends outside of school time, over half of you (53%) said that seeing them in person is the most important way in which you keep in touch with friends, and nearly one third of you (31%) said that computer chat rooms and MSN are most important.

Family support

Family support is clearly extremely important in the lives of many young people. *Can you talk at home?* Nearly half of you 'always' feel that you can talk to an adult at home about things that matter to you, whilst a similar proportion 'sometimes' feel you can talk. **How supported do you**

feel by your families? 72% of you say you feel supported by your family in all or most of the things you do while 27% feel supported in some of the things they do. Whether or not this means a sizeable minority want more support is not something that can be answered by this survey, but it is an interesting question.

What matters for doing well in life?

What does 'doing well in life' mean? To give a feel for what you have in mind when you think about 'doing well in life' here are some of the things you said in the questionnaire:

'Being successful in your career and having a supporting family who love each other very much. Not having to worry about financial problems';

'It means getting the job I wanted living in a nice neighbourhood and having a family of my own';

'Getting good GCSEs, A levels and a degree. Then get a good job with a big house and flash car';

'Enjoying what you do and not struggling for money';

'Living up to your best ability and enjoying yourself. Living up to your dreams'

Most of you (83%) think that having a good education is very important to doing well in life. Most of you (70%) think that working hard is very important to doing well in life. In contrast relatively few respondents think that being lucky (12%) or being clever (21%) are very important.

When asked about the importance of family, over half of you (54%) think that the emotional support of families is very important to a person doing well in life. Over one third of you say that having good

connections and people who can help you is very important.

What do you think about school?

On the whole young people in the survey see school work as valuable and work hard – just over half (52%) say they work as hard as they can in all or most of their lessons. A lower percentage (41%) feel they get good marks in all or most of their lessons.

Many of the young respondents think teachers make them work as well as they are able. For 59% this applies to all or most of their teachers. 87% say that some, most or all of their teachers praise them when they do their school work well. However, teachers are not uniformly praised. 30% of young people surveyed say that some of their teachers make them feel bad if they don't understand. Whilst for almost all of you, your teachers know *who* you are, nearly one in five of you say this applies to some of your teachers only. 14% of you say that hardly any of your teachers 'know you as a person'.

What about the future?

What do you think you will do after year 11? 88% of you say you will stay on in school, or go to college, when you are 16. How many expect to go to university? 37% of you think this very likely, and another 37% think it fairly likely. (This is higher than the national picture).

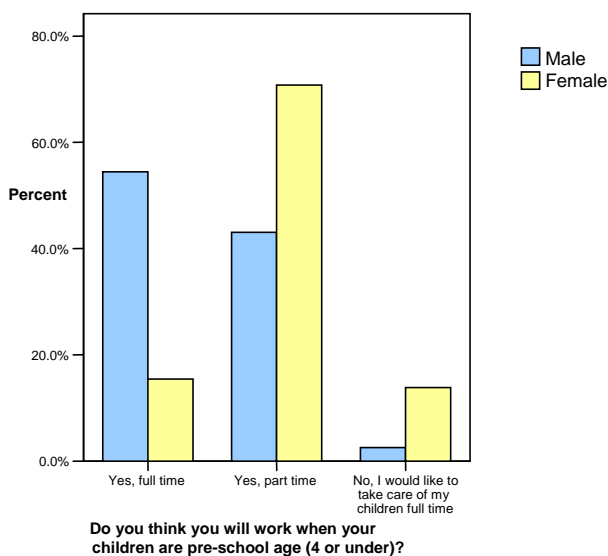
What sorts of jobs do you say you would like to do when you are adults?

Midwife, model, plumber, architect, carpenter, fashion designer, hairdresser, doctor, video games designer, police officer, choreographer, football player, stockbroker, rugby player, electrician, child psychologist, primary school teacher. These are just some of the sorts of jobs you mentioned.

Does whether you are a girl or a boy matter for the kind of job you would like to do? After you said what job you would like to do in future, you were asked if this would change if you were the opposite sex. **One third of you said that this would make a difference.** More girls than boys said it would make a difference. This suggests gender affects what many young people see as realistic expectations for the kind of job they want to do. This might be something they are content about, it might be something they have come to accept, or it might be that they feel their choices are restricted. What are your views?

If you have children of your own one day, how will you manage paid work and childcare?

85% of you said you think you will have children of your own one day; only 1% did not (the rest were unsure). Amongst those of you who do expect to have children, quite a lot of you expect to work part time whilst the children are aged 4 or under.



Amongst girls, 15% expect to work full time when they have young children, 71% expect to work part time and 14% expect to be full time carers. That is, more of you expect to be working than is currently the case amongst mothers of young children. Amongst boys, 54% expect to work full time, and 43% expect to work part time when they are fathers of young children (and 3% expect to be full time carers). This suggests that boys see more part time

work for themselves as fathers, and girls see less full time care for themselves as mothers, than is currently the case amongst parents of young children. It appears, then, that you expect to share childcare much more evenly in the future. Will this change when you reach the realities of the job market, or will you be authors of a different way of working and caring for children?

What matters in the world today?

What do you believe is the most important thing happening in the world today? Climate change, war, terrorism and global poverty were issues that dominated your answers to this question, although some of you identified personal relationships and hobbies as most important to you. The quotes below show the range of things you identified as most important to you:

- 'Football'
- 'Your family and friends'
- 'Iraq'
- 'Terrorism and bombings'
- 'I think the world is getting stupider, more self obsessed and greedier'
- 'Global warming. It's ruining our world'
- 'In the world I think the most important thing going on is trying to stop climate change'
- 'Poverty in poorer countries. Poverty and famine'

We hope you have found this pamphlet interesting. The Young Lives Survey is part of Young Lives and Times, one of 4 projects being carried out by 'Real Life Methods'. Further information about this ESRC funded project is available at the website <http://www.reallifemethods.ac.uk>