



# GENERATION ISOLATION

ON-SIDE YOUTH RESEARCH  
NOVEMBER 2022



 [onsideyouthzones.org](https://onsideyouthzones.org)

# CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Methodology	4
Key Findings	5
Katie's Story	6
Part 1 - Young people's lives	7
Free time	8
Trusted adults	14
Out of school opportunities	15
Wellbeing	17
Part 2 - Young people and youth services	18
Youth club exposure	19
Youth club impacts	20
The positive difference	21
Youth centre considerations	23
Andrew's story	24
About OnSide	25



# FOREWORD

OnSide exists to empower young people to lead positive, fulfilling lives by providing access to incredible spaces and exceptional youth workers in communities where they are needed the most.

It is vitally important that organisations like ours deeply understand young people's reality and respond to their needs.

That's why we have conducted new research to give us fresh insight into how they live their lives. We wanted to learn more about what their time outside of school looks like, who they trust and connect with and what they know about and want from services designed to support them.

Our research paints a picture of a generation of young people that are incredibly connected digitally, with high levels of online interaction. However, it is also clear that young people today have lives predominately spent at home, with limited opportunities to meet new people, make friends and build rich social connections, and high levels of anxiety.

Across our growing Network of 14 Youth Zones we see first-hand the powerful impact that access to trusted adults, inspiring safe spaces

and opportunities to try new things and socialise can have on young people from a range of backgrounds and communities.

The data supports this, showing that youth centres have a proven, positive effect on young people's lives, enhancing their experiences and opportunities, skills and ability to overcome difficulties. Young people also told us that making new friends is by far the most popular reason for going to youth centres. For many thousands of them, their local youth centre is a vital hub of belonging and connection, helping them build rich social lives, develop and grow in safe spaces designed to support them.

Yet despite these proven benefits, the reality is that very few young people nationally attend youth centres, just 8% according to our survey, meaning there is significant disconnect between the potential of youth centres and this potential being realised to benefit young people at scale.

Face to face social connections with peers build young people's confidence, self-esteem, resilience, empathy, communication and team working skills - supporting their health and wellbeing and laying crucial foundations. At OnSide we believe that

every young person, in every community should have access to high quality youth centers and that this will play a crucial role in helping a generation of young people create the vital connections and skills to help them achieve their potential and develop into happy, healthy thriving adults.

We hope the learnings from this survey will inform policy and practice, drive public debate, help us collectively do more for young people and more compellingly make the case for all parts of society to prioritise and advocate for the support they need and deserve.

**Kathryn Morley**

CEO, OnSide



# METHODOLOGY

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 5078 11-18 year old's in England. Fieldwork was undertaken between 31 August-16 September 2022. 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 well-being scale developed and reported by the ONS.



# GENERATION ISOLATION: KEY FINDINGS

To empower and enable young people at scale we need to deeply understand the reality of their lives and respond to their needs.

To do this, we asked 5,000 young people aged 11-18 in England 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:

**73%** of young people spend most of their free time on screens\*.



**19%** spend most of their free time alone.



**92%** of young people do not attend a youth centre.



**25%** spend most of their free time playing computer games.



**29%** have had to stop out of school activities because of the rising cost of living.



**81%** of young people that attend a youth centre say it has a positive impact on their lives.



**77%** of young people spend most of their free time at home.



**64%** of young people report high or very high feelings of happiness\*\*.



**31%** 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.



**56%** of young people reported high or very high feelings of anxiety\*\*.



**41%** of young people do not have opportunities to meet new people and make friends.



\*73% of young people surveyed spending most of their free time on screens (watching streamed content like Netflix/YouTube, gaming, spending time on their phone or watching TV).

\*\*Wellbeing measure based on an existing well-being scale developed and reported by the ONS.

# KATIE'S STORY

Meet Katie, a 16-year-old member at Future, Barking & Dagenham Youth Zone.

“

*Before I came to Future I spent a lot of time at home, I was quiet and I didn't really socialise much. I've always loved music, so I spent a lot of time doing that, and gaming. I started coming to Future as soon as it opened.*

*I knew I wanted to make friends, and the music room became my favourite place. I love Future Fridays, it's all good vibes – especially singing with Clinton! Since then I've got to know the youth workers really well and made lots of new friends.*

*Lockdown was really hard for me. Being stuck in my house again was my worst nightmare. I started gaining weight, I was really unhappy and found myself crying most days. The Zoom sessions and check in calls from Future really made my day being able to talk to a youth worker. I've grown my music at Future, and it's really helped*

*me gain confidence – I've performed at 100 Becontree Festival and with Barking Abbey.*

*Future's introduced me to a lot of new things like football, rock climbing and arts – before I was just interested in music. Youth workers are really good for your mental health – someone to talk to who you know won't judge you, they're always there to help.*

*I would rather talk to a youth worker than my family, if you build a relationship with a youth worker you can trust, you know they are there for you. Before starting Future I had no clue where I would end up.*

*I always loved music but I didn't know what I wanted to do with it. Now I know I want to be a youth worker and get other people into music. If I could, I would work here and do what Clinton does.*

*This place means a lot to me – it's made me realise what's really important. One of*

*my highlights is being an ambassador for OnSide. Future has done a lot for me and being an ambassador makes me feel like I'm representing them – I want to do a lot for them too.”*

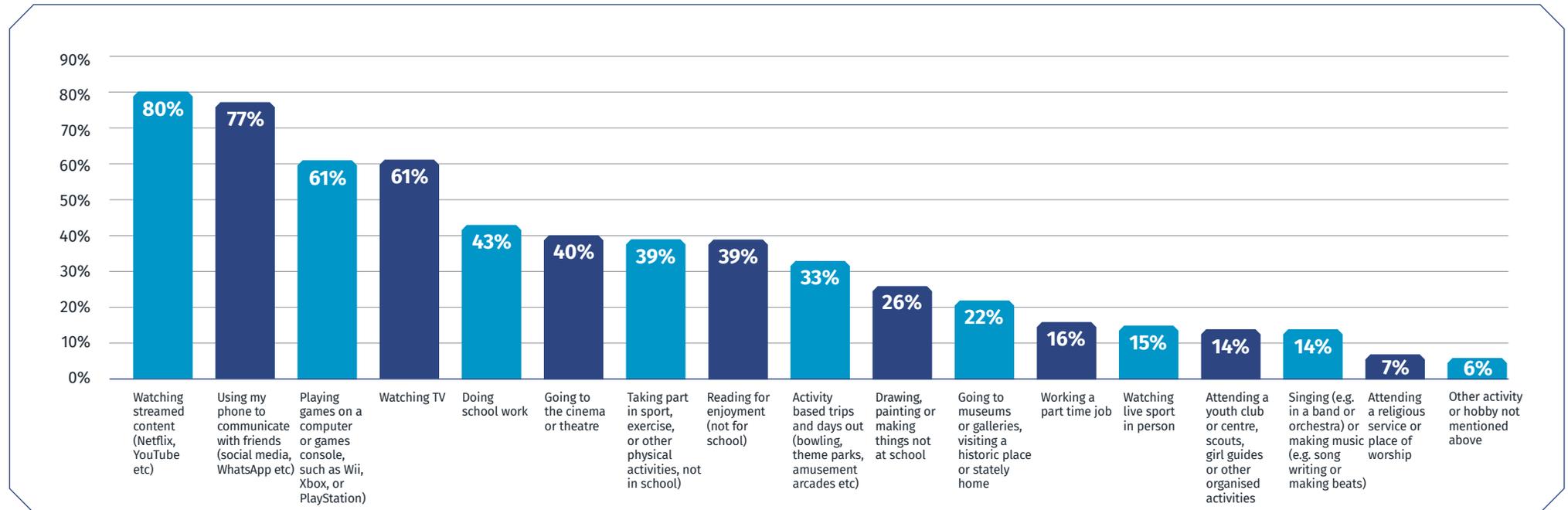


**PART 1**  
**YOUNG**  
**PEOPLE'S**  
**LIVES**



# 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 3 free time activities

**80%** of young people spend time watching streamed content outside of school.



**77%** of young people use their phone to communicate with friends outside of school.



**61%** of young people watch TV and play computer games outside of school.



### Going up

---

**32%** of young people say they are watching more TV now than before the Covid-19 pandemic.

---



**37%** of young people say they are doing more gaming now than before the Covid-19 pandemic.

---



**17%** of young people surveyed say they are working at their part time job more now than they did before the Covid-19 pandemic.

---



### Going down

---

**34%** of young people are going to the cinema less now than they did before the Covid-19 pandemic.

---



**26%** of young people read for enjoyment less now than they did before the Covid-19 pandemic.

---



**28%** of young people are having less activity based trips or days out (e.g. bowling, theme parks and amusement arcades) than they did pre-pandemic.

---

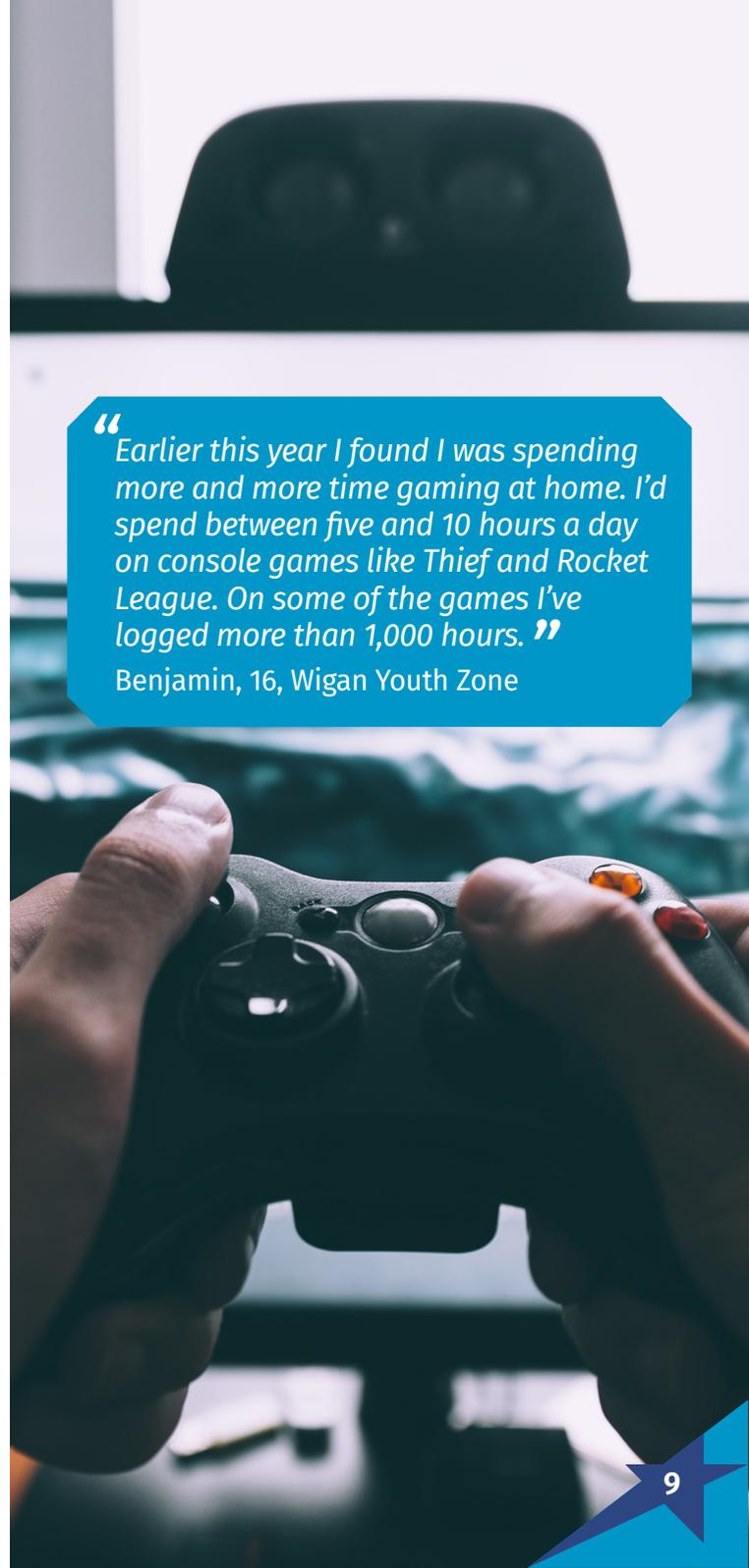


## COST OF LIVING

**29%** of young people have had to stop out of school activities because of the rising cost of living.

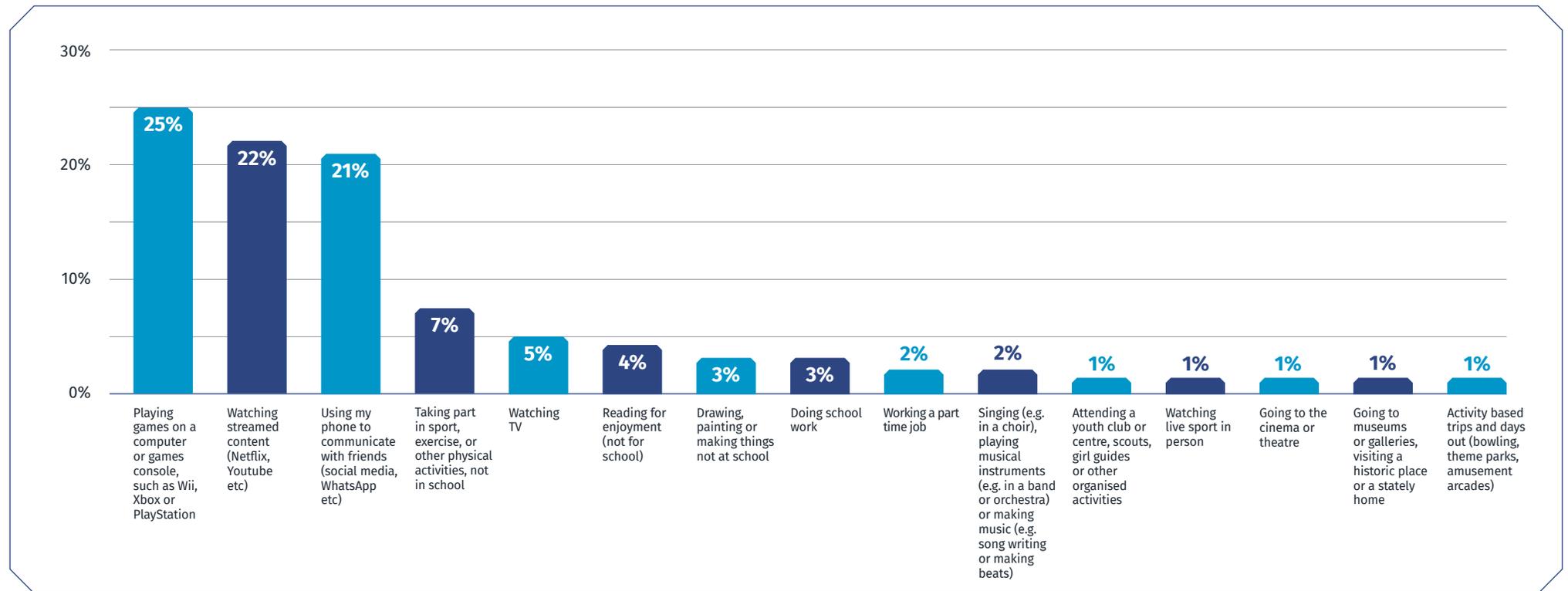
**76%** of young people are concerned about the cost of living.

*“Earlier this year I found I was spending more and more time gaming at home. I’d spend between five and 10 hours a day on console games like Thief and Rocket League. On some of the games I’ve logged more than 1,000 hours.”*  
Benjamin, 16, Wigan Youth Zone



# 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

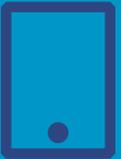
**25%** of young people say they spend most of their free time outside school playing computer games.



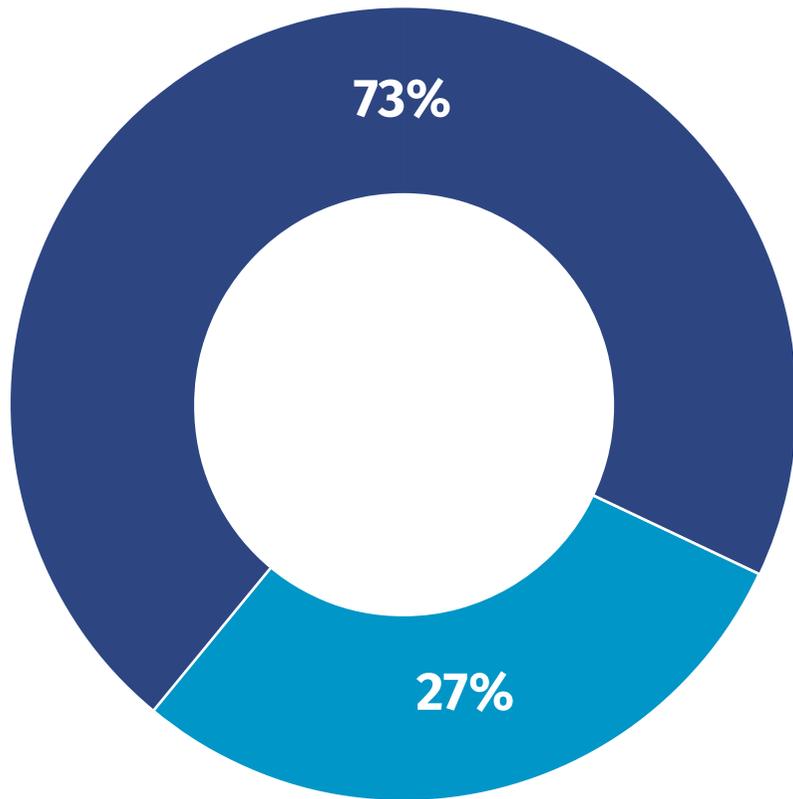
**22%** of young people say they spend most of their leisure time watching streamed content (e.g. Netflix, YouTube).



**21%** of young people spend most of their leisure time using their phone to communicate with friends online.



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCREEN TIME



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

**73%** of young people spend most of their free time on screens.



**94%** of young people play computer games most days.

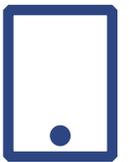


## Gender differences

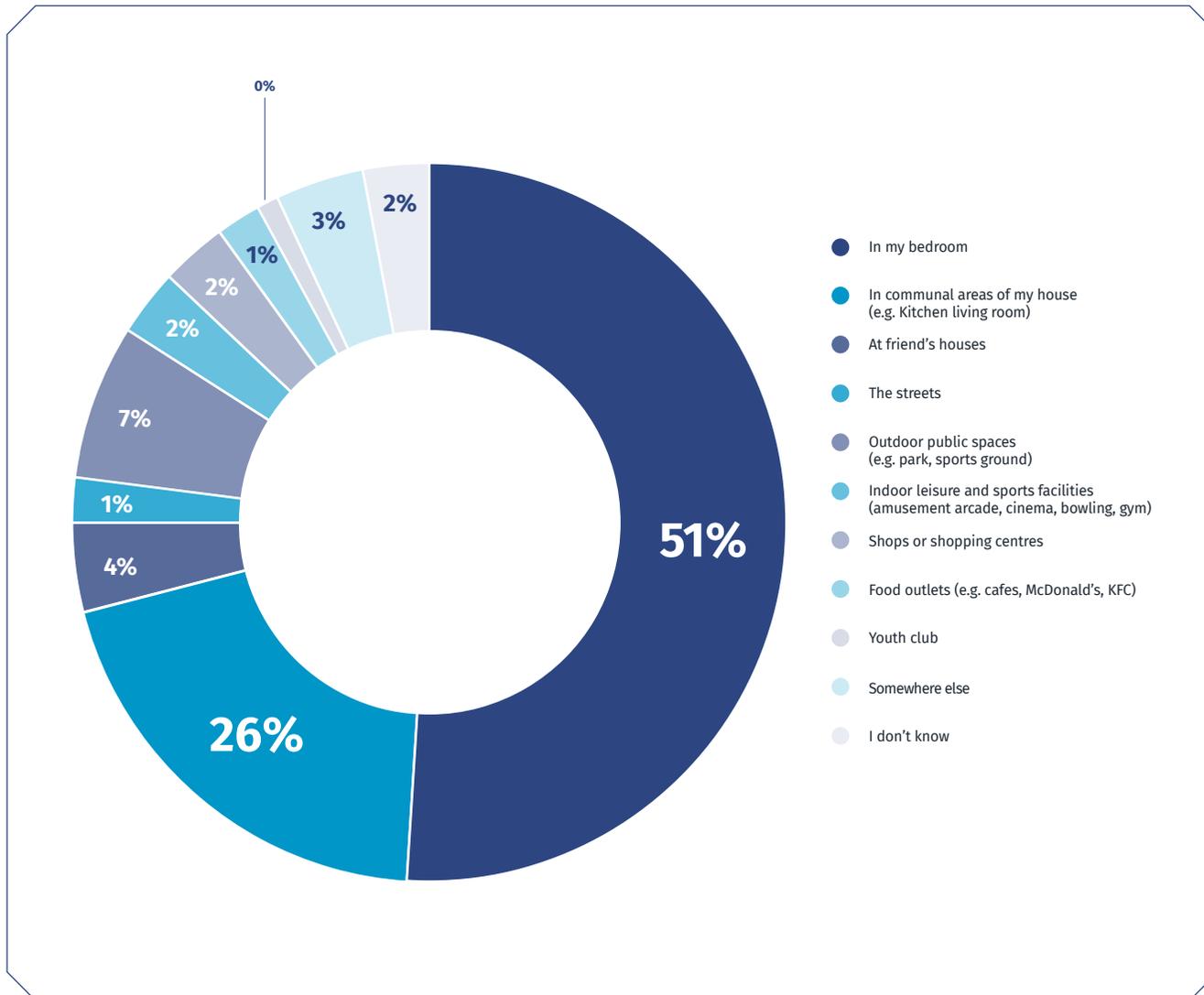
**41%** of boys say they spend most of their leisure time gaming, making it the most time consuming leisure activity for boys.



**31%** of girls say they spend most of their leisure time using their phone to communicate with friends, making it the most time consuming leisure activity for girls.



# WHERE DO YOUNG PEOPLE SPEND MOST OF THEIR FREE TIME?



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



**77%** of young people spend most of their free time at home.



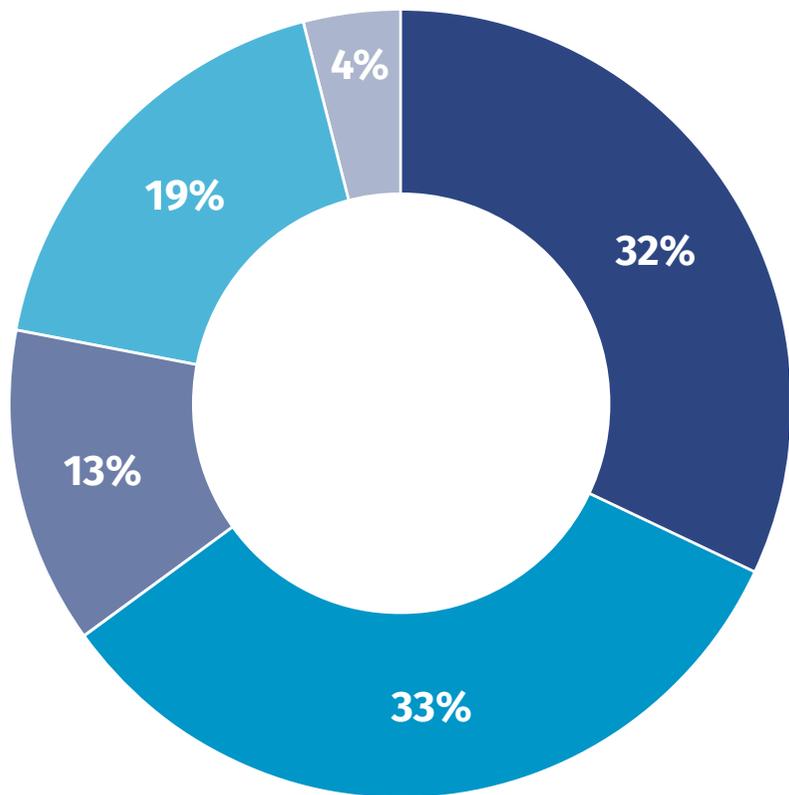
**4%** of young people spend most of their free time at friends' homes.



**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 (20%) than those that don't (12%).

- 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

## Gender differences

Girls spend most of their free time with their family, parents and/or carers with **35%** saying this compared to **29%** of boys.



Boys spend most of their free time online communicating with/talking to friends (**37%**) compared with **29%** of girls.



**19%** of young people spend most of their free time alone.



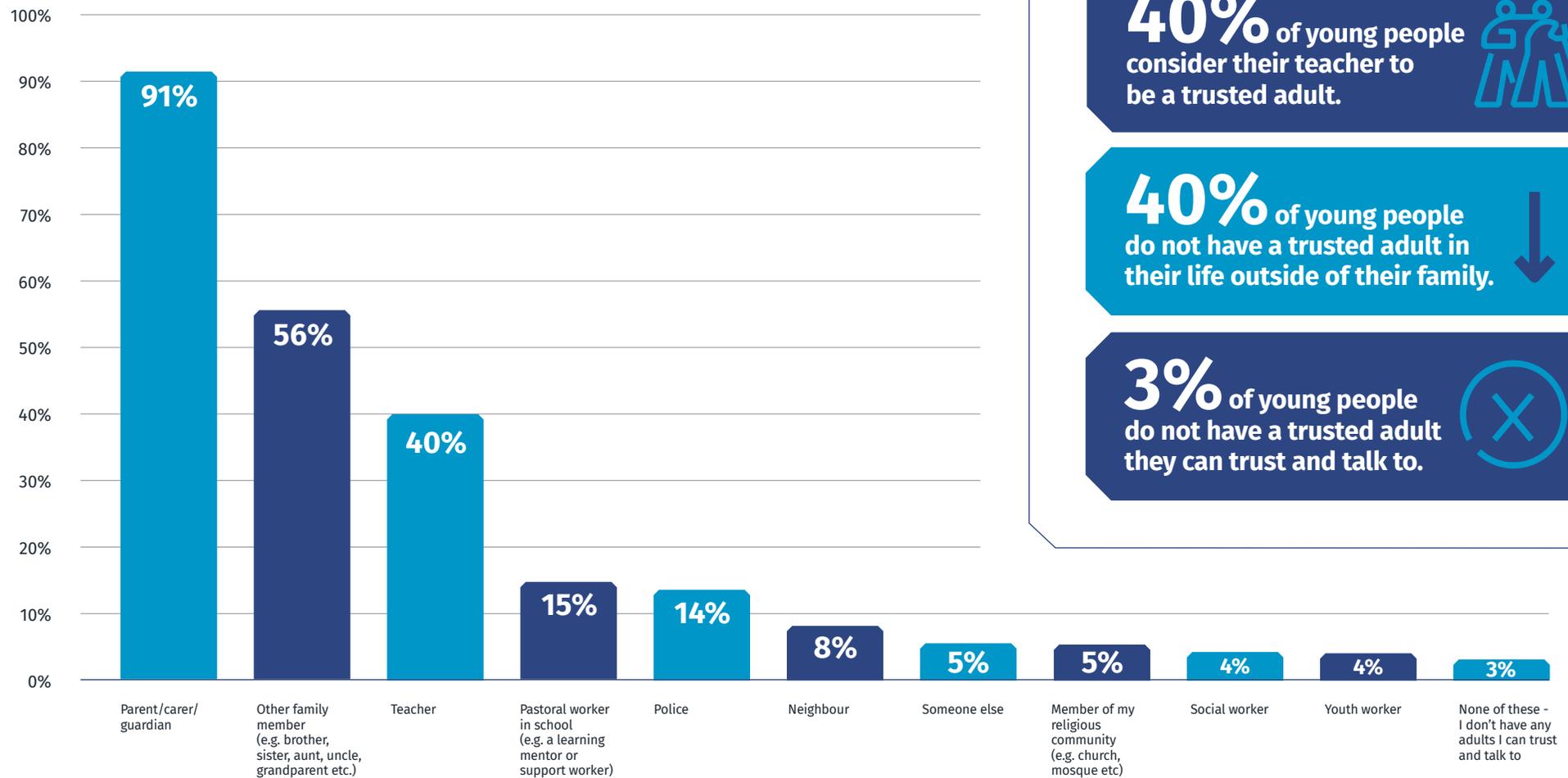
**13%** of young people spend most of their free time in person with their friends.



**33%** of young people spend most of their free time online communicating with friends.



# WHO ARE YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRUSTED ADULTS?



**91%** 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.



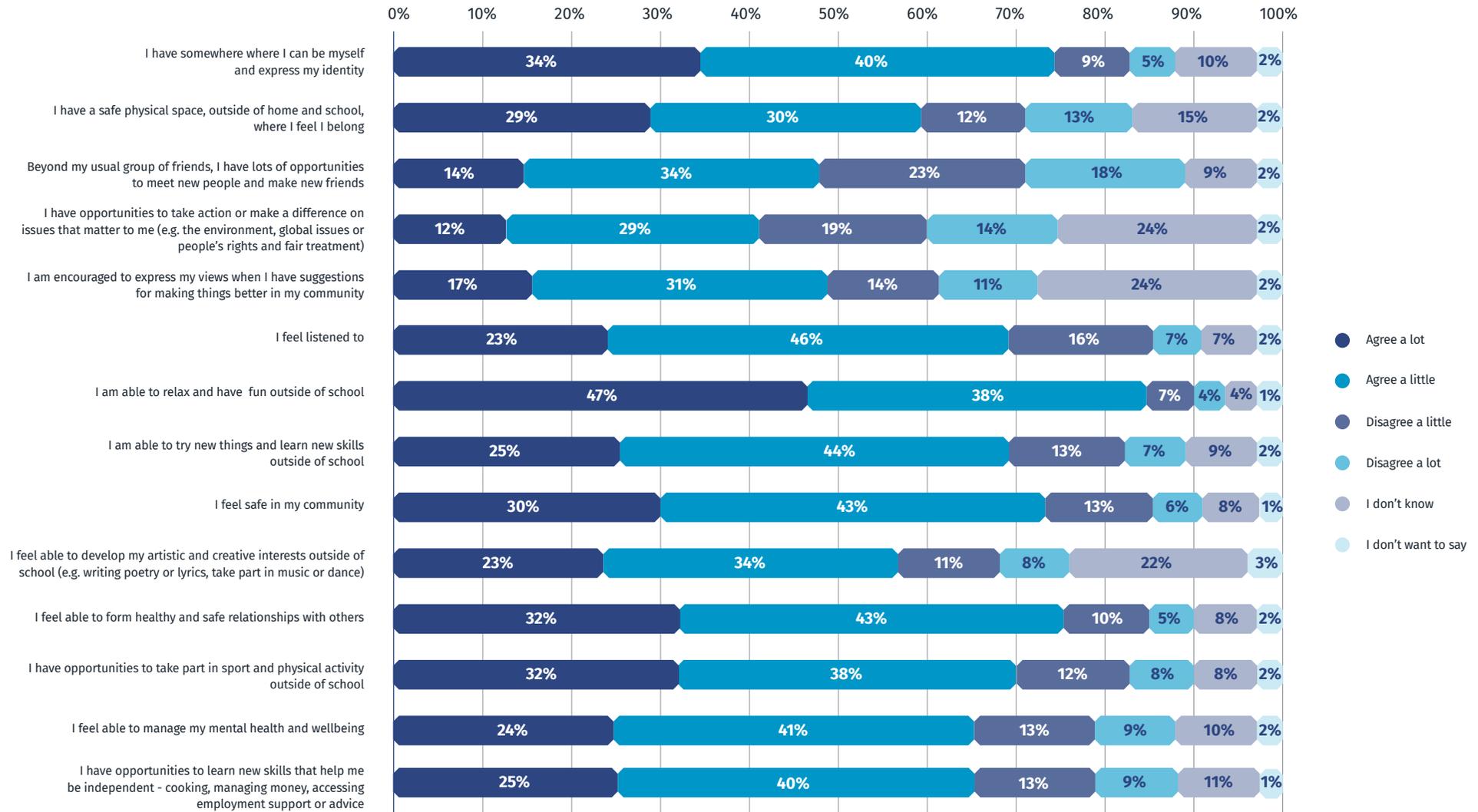
**40%** of young people do not have a trusted adult in their life outside of their family.



**3%** of young people do not have a trusted adult they can trust and talk to.



# OPPORTUNITIES OUTSIDE SCHOOL



We asked young people if they agree or disagree with several statements (outlined on p15) about their lives outside of school. Their answers show that:

**85%** of young people feel able to relax and have fun outside of school.



**26%** of young people say they do not have a safe space where they feel belonging.



**75%** of young people feel able to form healthy relationships with others.



**20%** of young people do not have the opportunity to learn the skills to prepare them for adulthood (e.g. cooking, managing money, accessing employment).



**72%** of young people say they feel safe in their community.



**41%** of young people do not have opportunities to meet new people or make friends beyond their social group outside of school.



**22%** of young people do not feel able to manage their health and wellbeing.

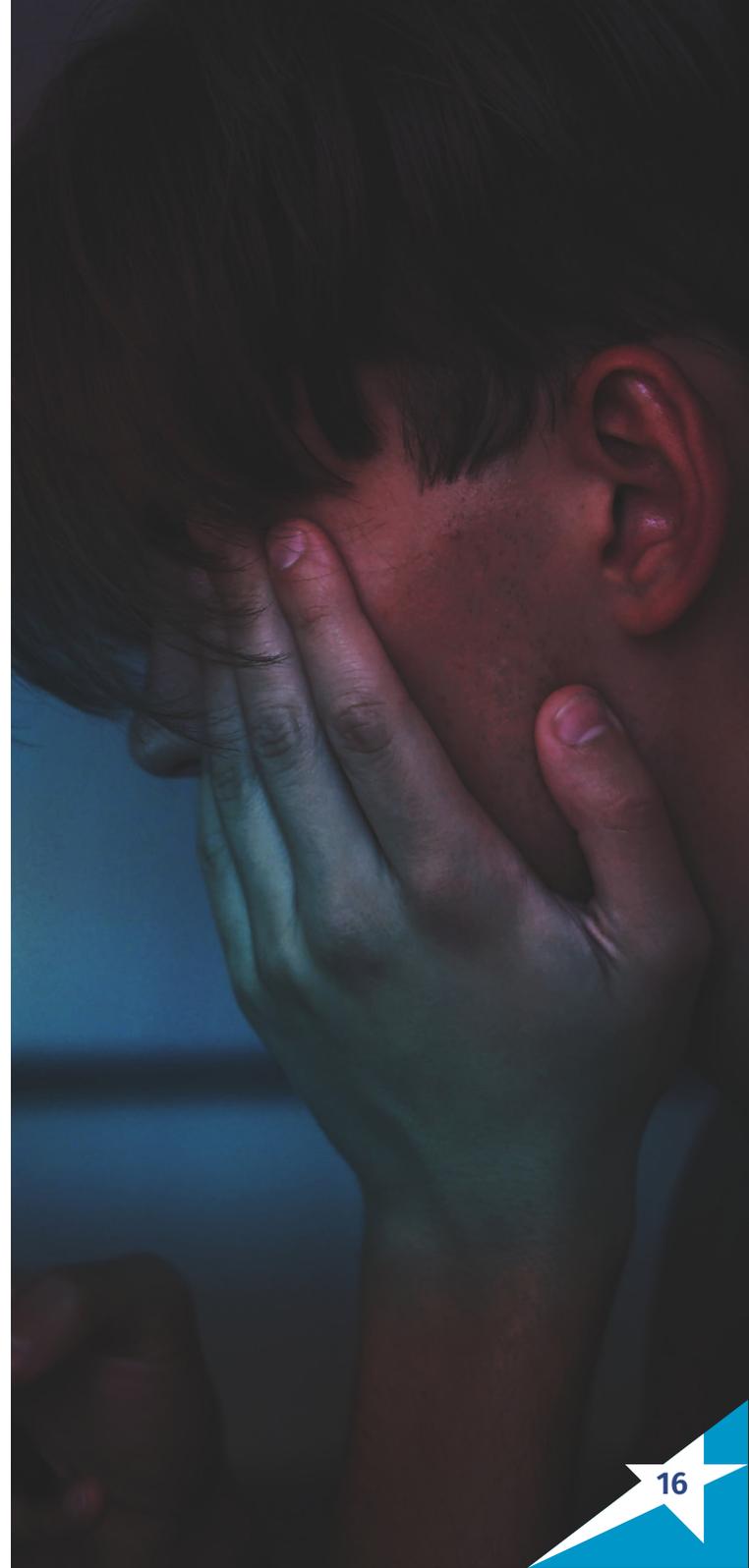


**69%** of young people that attend youth centres say they have lots of opportunities to make new friends.



“The support from youth workers has helped me out of difficult times in my life, I am reassured and comforted knowing there’s always someone at Inspire to talk to”

Ellie, 16, Inspire Youth Zone, Chorley



# 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?

**63%**

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

**14%**

reported low levels of satisfaction.

## HAPPINESS

How happy did you feel yesterday?

**64%**

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

**13%**

reported low levels of happiness.

## LIFE IS WORTHWHILE

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

**62%**

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

**14%**

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

## ANXIETY

How anxious did you feel yesterday?

**56%**

of young people reported high or very high feelings of anxiety.

**22%**

reported low feelings of anxiety.

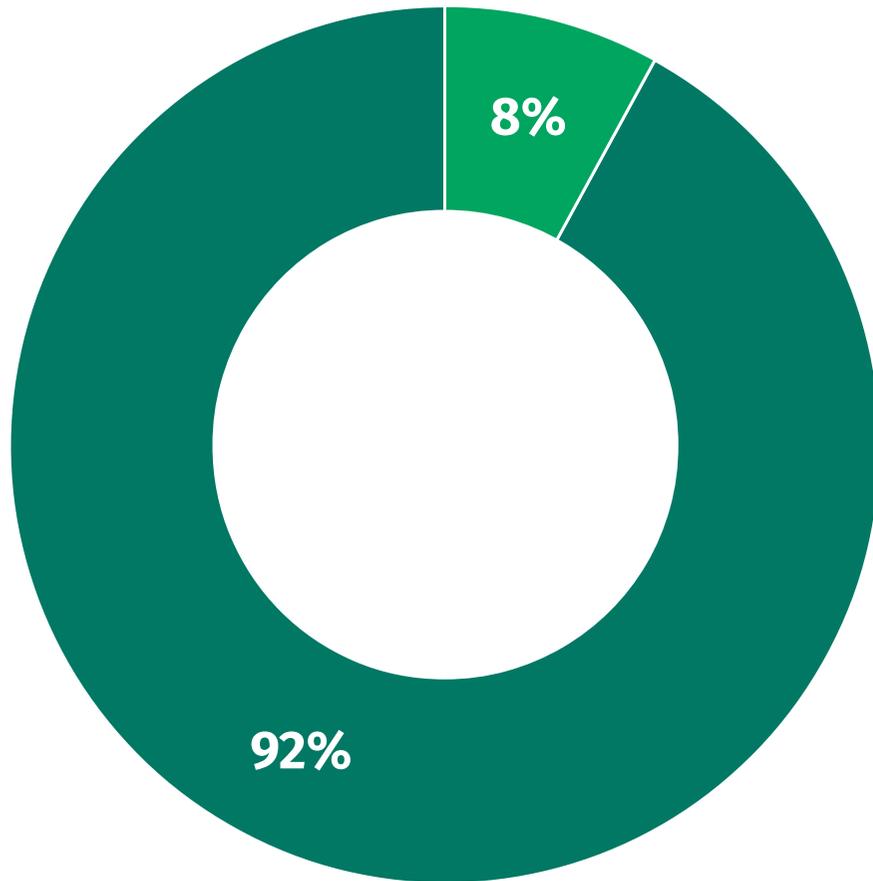
\*Wellbeing measure based on an existing well-being scale developed and reported by the ONS.

# **PART 2** **YOUNG** **PEOPLE** **AND** **YOUTH** **SERVICES**



# YOUTH CLUB EXPOSURE

We asked young people if they attend a youth centre.



- Yes, I do
- No, I do not

**92%** of young people do not attend a youth centre. 

**75%** of young people do not attend and have never been to a youth centre. 

**46%** of young people do not know what youth work is when asked to define it. 

**43%** of young people do not know what a youth worker is when asked to define this. 

# YOUTH CLUB IMPACTS

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

**81%** of young people that attend a youth centre say it has a positive impact on their lives.



**80%** of young people that attend a youth centre say going to a youth club has offered them new experiences and opportunities.



**75%** of young people that attend a youth centre say going to a youth club has given them new skills.

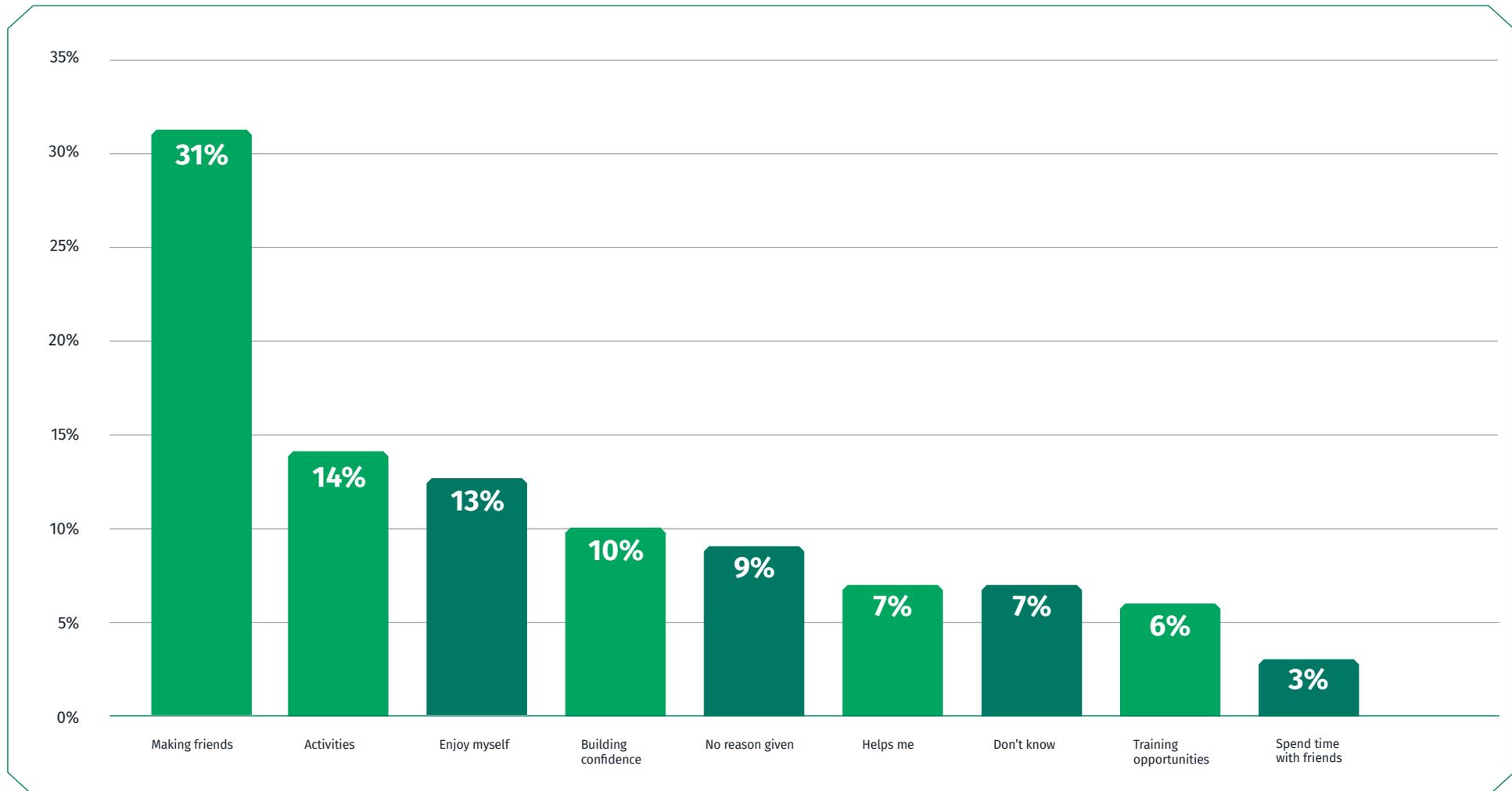


**66%** of young people that attend a youth centre say going to a youth club has helped them overcome the difficulties they face.



# YOUTH CLUBS – POSITIVE DIFFERENCE

Of people who said that youth centres have had a positive difference on their life, 31% of them said that making friends was their reason for thinking this, making it the most popular reason.





# YOUTH CENTRE CONSIDERATIONS

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

## Top 3 most important considerations

**90%** of young people say it's the friendliness of staff.



**90%** of young people say it's the friendliness of other young people.



**90%** of young people say feeling safe in the youth centre.



## Other factors

**87%** of young people cite being able to attend the youth centre on the days and times that work for them is important.



**84%** of young people cite having friends to attend with.



**80%** of young people cite the range of facilities.



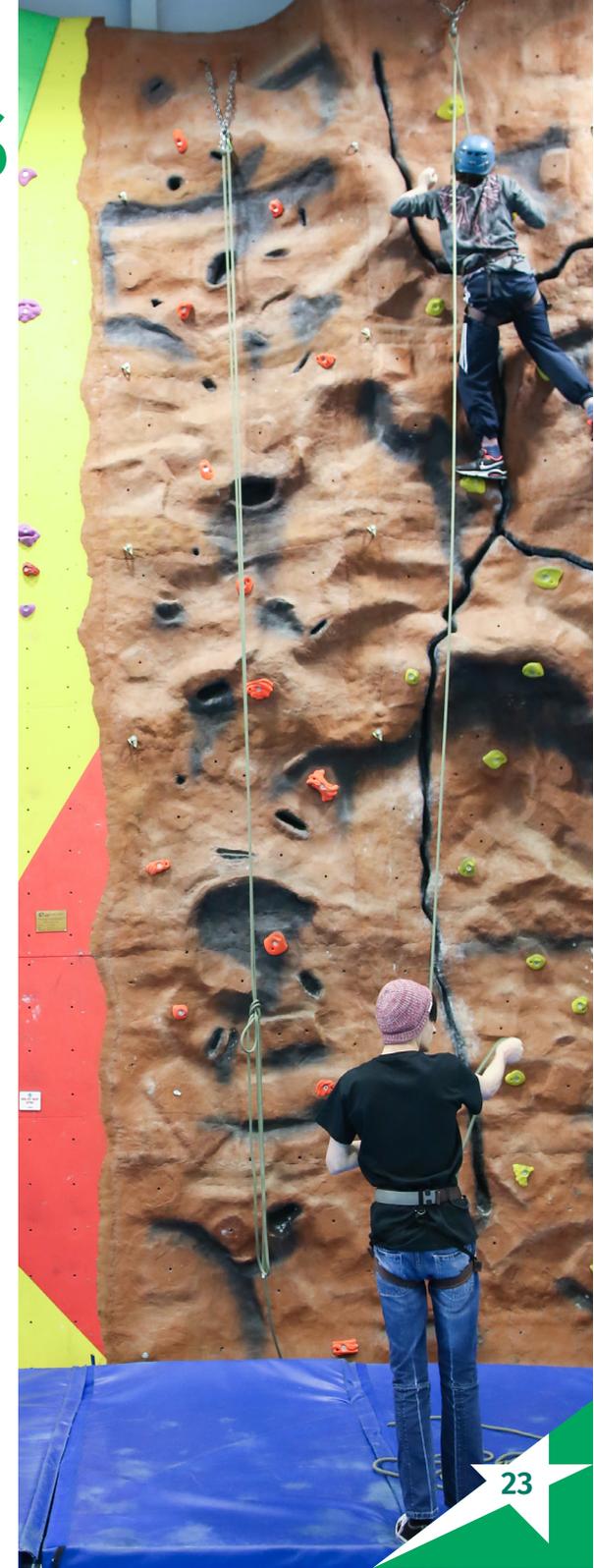
**85%** of young people cite the mix of activities on offer.



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



**58%** of young people cite what the building looks like.



# ANDREW'S STORY

Andrew, 18, member at Inspire Youth Zone, Chorley

“

*I initially joined Inspire for the wellbeing support and the mentoring they have available. I was in an unproductive routine and had an inactive lifestyle. I became a recluse, after school I would come home and stay in my room. It didn't help my friendships.*

*My deputy head at school recommended Inspire as he thought it would improve my confidence and I haven't looked back since. When I first joined Inspire, I was unconfident, unsociable and anxious. I would regularly avoid social situations. I could probably pin-point the moment there was a turning point and it was during the Lake District residential. We did a lot of team-building activities that enabled me to socialise with new people. My confidence and ability to talk to people has improved so much since then.*

*Off the back of this confidence I started getting involved in more of the Inspire*

*projects. This includes – Youth Voice, Debate Club and UK Youth. I've also been involved with the mentoring programme and that has helped me talk confidently and openly about my problems and if my mental health is struggling.*

*Since attending Inspire, my potential has grown, and I feel more grown up. I see the help to the community that Inspire has and I want to do the same. I never used to be like that.”*



# 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.

