"LOST SHEEP LOOKING FOR SOMEWHERE TO GO"

A study into young people in the transition from school to employment, education or training

Fiona McHardy

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LETTER TO THE READER

Hello

We are a group of young people from the Stirling area who have been working with the Poverty Alliance. We have been working on this research project for a year now.

Through the work we have been doing we have found out a range of different views and opinions on our topic 'transitions for young people'. Young people have told us their personal experiences and views.
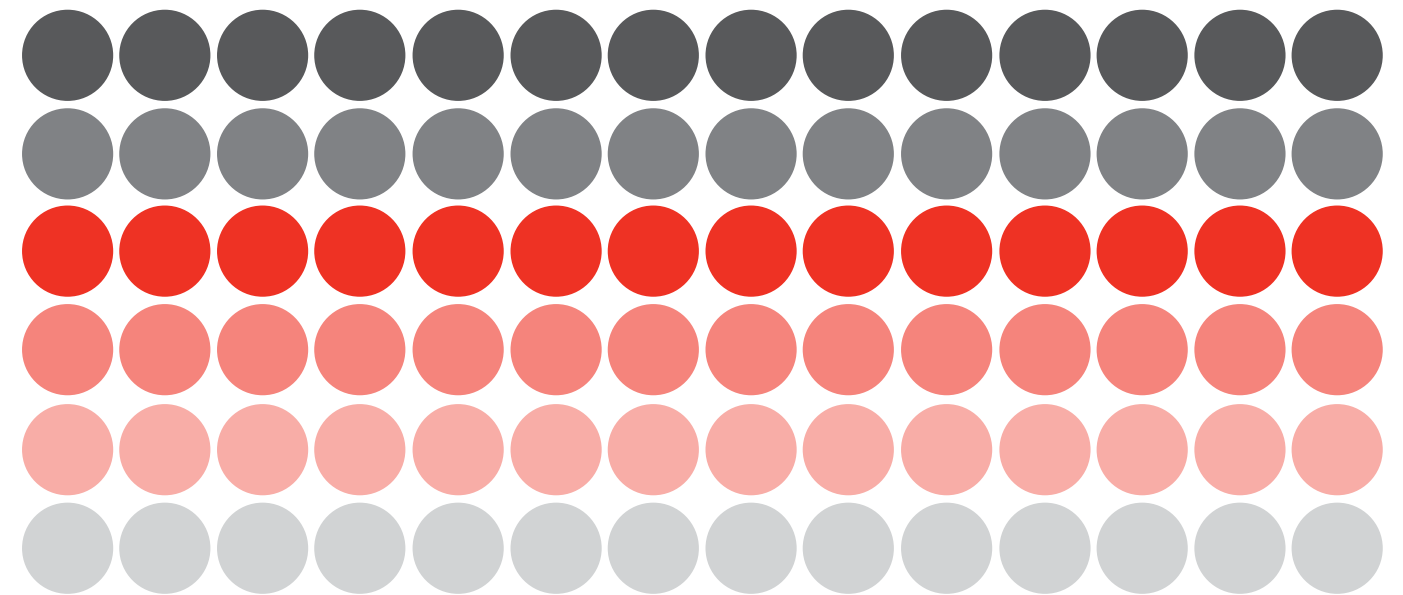
This has been important as it has allowed us to see what is important to young people, and has helped us understand the world around us.

We hope that people reading this will have a better understanding of what is important to young people.

The YT Youthspace Research Group

INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on the experiences of 14 young people. It is a result of research conducted using participatory methods into the experiences of young people from Stirling and their transition from school to post-school. It focuses on the opportunities and challenges facing young people in these areas against a background of economic crisis and reduced public spending. It also provides an insight into the issues facing government, education services, employers and service providers in supporting young people towards positive outcomes. The research set out to:

- Provide an understanding of young people's views on their experiences and the opportunities available to them locally within regeneration areas.

- Contribute to understanding the perceptions and experiences of the provision available of services related to opportunities, such as employment services, within regeneration areas.

- Provide an examination of community views in regeneration areas on service provision in relation to education, employment and training for young people.

- Gain an understanding of best practice in service delivery of provision and provide policy recommendations.

The report, while providing a snapshot of the views of young people within two community regeneration areas in Stirling, also makes the case for maintaining support for young people at this crucial stage of their lives.

The key findings from the research were:

- Young people highlighted the importance of making a secure and stable transition.

- A wide range of factors affected whether young people made successful transitions including provision within schools, support networks and the qualifications of the young person involved.

- Getting support that was accessible and tailored to their needs was seen as vital to an effective transition.

- Barriers that affected opportunities included financial ones such as low pay and transport costs.

- The recession had a key impact on young people, with many perceiving increased competition for jobs and further education as a barrier to accessing opportunities.

- Experiences of services accessed for support showed the importance of services being 'youth-friendly', particularly for more disengaged young people.

SECTION 1:
METHODOLOGY
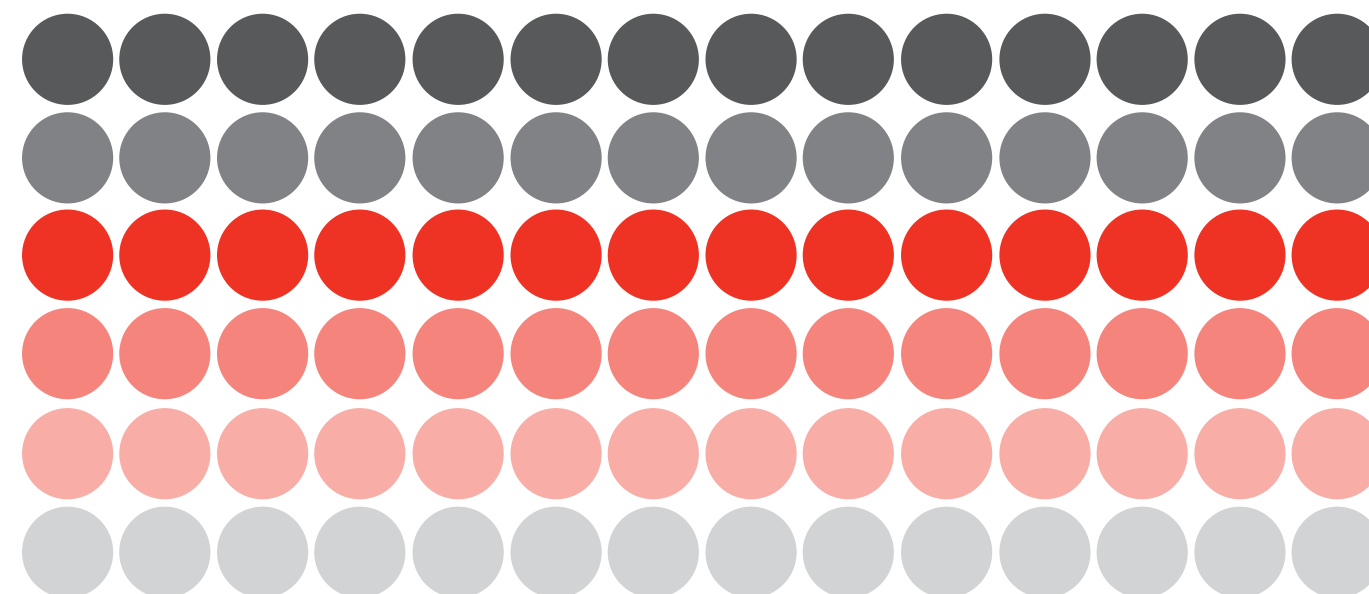
Research Questions and Objectives

The research set out to discover the views of the local community on opportunities (employment, education and training) for young people in the local area. The objectives of the research were to:

- Provide an examination of community views in regeneration areas on the service provision regarding education and employment for young people.

- Provide an understanding of the views of young people aged 16 and above on the experiences and opportunities available to them locally within regeneration areas.

- Contribute to understanding the perceptions and experiences of the provision of, within regeneration areas, of services related to opportunities such as employment services.

- Gain an understanding of best practice in service delivery of provision, and provide policy recommendations.

Approach

The research involved a participatory approach. Participatory research seeks to "de-elitise and de-mystify research thereby making it an intellectual tool which ordinary people can use to improve their lives."[1] This approach was important as it provided the opportunity for young people to be involved in research rather than merely being its subject, and it provided an opportunity for the young volunteers involved to generate knowledge on the issues they identified as being crucial to young people and the wider community. There are many key benefits to involving young people at all stages in the research process and the participation such methods bring.

- Young people can identify research issues and questions that professional researchers may either miss or not prioritise.

- They can help to ensure that research tools (e.g. questionnaires, interview schedules, leaflets, reports, etc.) are worded in language that is clear to their peers.

- It can help to ensure that practitioners are more accountable to young service users through accessing research that is more relevant to them.[2]

The use of participatory research draws upon a wider culture of participation involving young people and the right for young people's views to be acknowledged. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC), in particular Article 12 clause 1, asserts that "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."[3]

The young people involved took part in an extensive training programme, and in the design stage of their exercise drew upon methodologies such as mapping issues, through community walks and other initiatives.[1] On selecting the initial topic, a consultation exercise took place with young people at a youth activity day in the local area. This exercise engaged other young people and was used to help refine their topic and gain broader engagement skills.

The young research volunteers collected data in three ways. Fourteen 'one-to-one' interviews in a structured format were conducted by young researchers. These were conducted with other young people across two regeneration areas in Stirling: Cultenhove and Raploch. Young people were recruited through the Youth Club within each area. Young people aged 16 onwards and living in the local area took part in the interviews.

Postal surveying of 200 houses was conducted in each area. Surveys were returned to 'Youth Voice Post Boxes' that were stationed at an open point in the community such as local shops. Surveys focused on gathering the views of adults aged 18 and over.

Five stakeholder interviews were conducted with key figures from the local community. Sampling was determined by working with the young researchers on who they considered to be the key stakeholders in the local community.

Breakdown of interviewee data

Gender of participant	% of sample (n)
Male	35.7% (5)
Female	57.1 % (8)
Didn't answer	7.1% (1)

Age of Participants	% of sample (n)
16	21.4%(3)
17	21.4%(3)
18	21.4%(3)
19	7.1 %(1)
20	7.1%(1)
21	14.3%(2)
Response not given	7.1%(1)

Gender of participants	% of sample (n)
Male	40% (8)
Female	60% (12)

Household Composition (No. of persons)	% of sample (n)
Male	40% (8)
Female	60% (12)

1 Caledonia Centre for Social Development (1990) A Short Note on Participatory Research, [online] Available at: http://www.caledonia.org.uk/research.htm [Accessed: 8/4/2011].

2 Kirby, P. (2004). A Guide to Actively Involving Young People in research for researchers, research commissioners and managers. [online] Available at www.invo.org.uk/.../Involving_Young_People_in_Research_151104_FINAL.pdf pages 6,7

3 Scottish Centre for Regeneration (2010) Learning point 61 Involving Children and Young People as activeresearch participants in community regeneration and tackling poverty in Scotland, [online] Available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/94257/0113610.pdf [Accessed: 3/4/2011].

SECTION 2:
POLICY CONTEXT
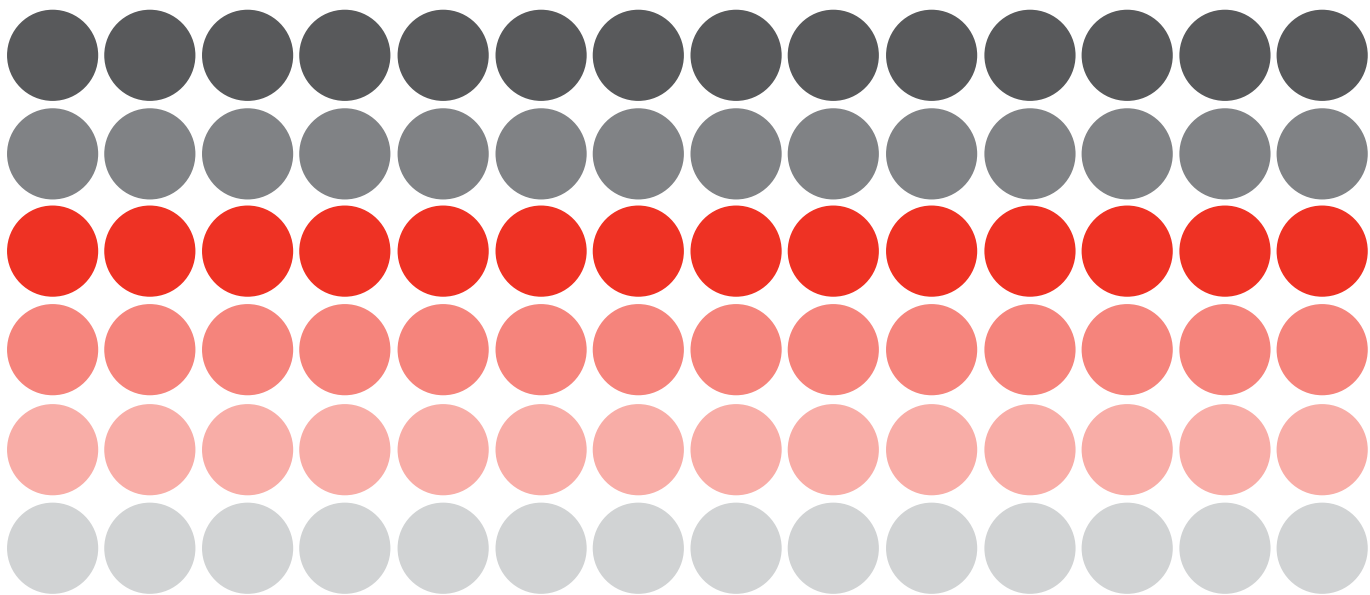
The transitional stage between leaving school and entering work, training or education marks an important life stage for young people. This is a stage when young people are making choices and decisions that can affect their progression through life. This transition can be affected by a wide variety of factors including:

- Experience of school and the skills and qualifications achieved there.[1]

- The influence of support networks.

- Their engagement with service providers and their ability to access services.

- The impact of the recession and financial matters generally.

- The availability and nature of employment.

- Stability, both at home and in the wider community.

The current economic climate and cuts to public spending are leading to increased pressures on young people and the services supporting them. Unemployment, especially for those under 25, is still rising. Demand is rising for a diminishing number of higher and further education and vocational training places. At the UK level, figures from the Office of National Statistics show that from January to March 2009 the unemployment rate for those aged 16 and 17 was 29.3 per cent, compared to an adult rate of 7.1 per cent.[4]

Within Scotland, figures published in April 2010 showed an 89 per cent rise in youth unemployment over the last ten years.[5] Such alarming trends have serious implications for supporting young people and for their experiences of engaging with the labour market.

The national situation, however bad, masks even greater problems at local levels. For young people from low-income families and deprived areas these pressures are even greater. Research shows that poorer children have lower levels of educational attainment, impacting on social mobility in later life.[6]

Across Scotland, figures from the 2009 Annual Population Survey showed that 36,000 young people aged16 to 19 (13.8 per cent) were not in education, employment or training.[7] National and local policy focus is aimed at assisting young people with the transition from school to ensure a positive outcome such as gaining employment, or accessing further education or training. This has taken on greater significance in the light of the economic situation and its impact on young people in particular.

The key policy framework for tackling poverty and social exclusion amongst young people is 'More Choices, More Chances' (MCMC). This is the Scottish Government's strategy to reduce the proportion of young people who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).[8]

The MCMC strategy aims to do this by:

- Ensuring that the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE 3) provides opportunities to young people under 16 that are tailored to individual need, with flexibility and appropriate support for every young person.

- Ensuring that every young person has a clear pathway from school into learning beyond the age of 16, with supported transitions and sustained opportunities.

- Ensuring that learning is a financially viable option, by considering the financial support and incentives available to young people.

- Ensuring that the right support is available to young people to find out about, engage with and sustain learning and employment.

- Making a joint commitment to action between central and local government, employers, learning providers and support agencies to develop the service infrastructure required to meet the needs of

- vulnerable young people.

The main aims of the MCMC Strategy are to:

- Stem the flows into NEET – emphasise prevention rather than cure.

- Have a system-wide (pre- and post-16) focus on, ambitions for, ownership of – and accountability for – the NEET group.

- Prioritise education and training outcomes for the NEET group as a step towards lifelong employability, given their low attainment profile.

- Make NEET reduction one of the key indicators for measuring the success of pre- and post-16 education.

In addition, MCMC is supported by the 'pipeline employability model'[9], which involves the development of employability-related interventions, including skills development, to be delivered by a range of service providers.

Until it was cut under the UK government's 'efficiency savings' in May 2010, the Futures Job Fund (FJF) also provided an opportunity to tackle youth unemployment and connect young people with the labour market. Targeted mainly at young people aged 18 to 23 who had been out of work for over six months, the FJF provided much-needed short-term employment opportunities for young adults. Started in 2009, by March 2011 it had created an estimated 100,000 jobs across the UK.[10]

In February 2011 the Scottish Government committed £10 million to the Community Jobs Scotland Fund. The Community Jobs Scotland model will follow the same pattern as the original Future Jobs Fund. Operating throughout 2011 and 2012, the Fund will primarily help those aged 16 to 24, who have been unemployed for six months or more, obtain a job within a voluntary and community organisation in their community.[11]

At a local level, Stirling Council has participated in the 16+ Learning Choices with a range of learning opportunities for young people, including the pilot of Activity Agreements and Get Ready for Work Lifeskills programmes, and Vocational Access Programmes.[12]

In addition, a range of private and voluntary sector organisations are also operating employability and training initiatives within the Stirling area, such as the Scottish Electrial Charitable Training Trust (SECTT), the Raploch Urban Regeneration Company, First 4 Skills, and the Lagata Group.[13]

4 Office of National Statistics (2009) Young People Labour Market Statistics, [online] Available at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/ nugget.asp?id=2205 [Accessed: 7/1/2011]

5 Scottish Trade Union Congress (2010) STUC on claimants to vacancy ratios, youth unemployment and underemployment, [online] Available at: http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Media%20releases/STUC%20on%20Employment%20Stats%20160410.doc

6 Goodman, A. Gregg, G. (2010). Poorer Children's Educational Attainment: How important are attitudes and behaviour . York : Joseph Rowntree,p11

7 Scottish Government (2010) Local Labour Markets in Scotland: Statistics from the Annual Population Survey, [online] Available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/07/29103916/19 [Accessed: 5/1/2011].

8 Scottish Executive (2006). More Choices, More Chances: A framework to reduce the number of young people mnot in education, employment or training in Scotland'

9 Scottish Government (2011) Skills for Scotland: Accelerating the Recovery and Increasing Sustainable Economic Growth, [online] Available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/10/04125111/5. [Accessed: 26/1/2011].

10 The National Archives (n.d.) Direct.Gov Future Jobs Fund., [online] Available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Jobseekers/LookingForWork/DG_184167 [Accessed: 19/4/2011].

11 Scottish Council For Voluntary Organizations (2011) Community Jobs Fund, [online] Available at: http://www.scvo.org.uk/training-employability/community-jobs-scotland/ [Accessed: 14/4/2011].

12 Stirling Council Youth Services (2010) 'Curriculum for Excellence, More Choices, More Chances and 16+ Learning' in Stirling Council Economy Employment and Youth, Stirling : Stirling Design and Print

13 Young Scot (2011) School Leavers' Event 30th March 2011, [online] Available at: http://www.youngscot.org/images/imageGetr.asp?id=17535 [Accessed: 19/4/2011].

SECTION 3:
EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO LEAVING SCHOOL
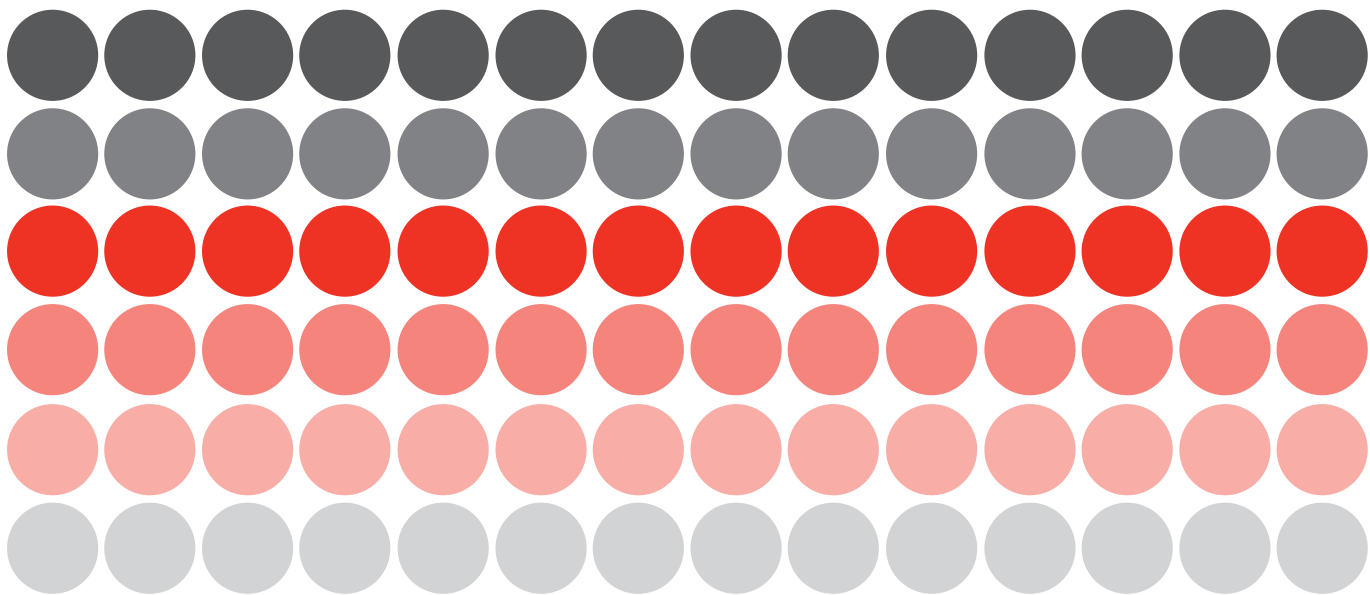
Summary

- Young people identified the importance of choosing secure life paths and routine during their transition.

- Experiences of support prior to leaving compulsory education were mixed. For those who had difficulty accessing appropriate support, a period of inactivity upon leaving school followed.

- Work experience was seen as crucial in providing a chance to learn new skills and experience life outwith the school environment.

Importance of a positive transition

The young people within the sample were from a variety of backgrounds, and factors such as parental influence, work experience and personal circumstances affected the transitions they made. The importance of making correct choices was emphasised within the sample. Young people indentified the importance of choosing secure life paths and finding routine during their transition.

Being unable to access an appropriate transition route was viewed as negative and harmful to young people. Some discussed the possibility of young people who have been unable to make a successful transition being forced onto benefits, and would therefore find it difficult to move on from this. Participants were acutely aware that failing to make a positive transition could adversely affect a young person's life.

Participants highlighted the stress and anxiety about this stage in their lives. All of the young people within the sample highlighted the importance of guidance and support in assisting with the transition to further education, employment or training.

Experiences of School Provision

Structured support played a key role for many of the young people within the study in determining the transitional paths. Young people discussed their experiences of the support within the school environment. In Scotland, young people between the ages of 5 and 16 must, by law, receive full-time education.[14] Within the study several interviewees had continued to 'stay-on' at school beyond 16, i.e. past secondary level four (S4).

Opinions on the support provided by schools in preparation for leaving school were mixed. Some said that their school had provided them with clear guidance and direction, and felt they had been shown the way to appropriate choices. Core features of a positive experience were strong personal relationships with teachers or advisors, and access to appropriate information resources.

In one interview, a young person discussed a specific teacher being a clear source of support. The importance of having a personalised service and being made to feel comfortable was highlighted as integral to the transition. Several in the sample discussed the importance of the careers resources within school and of the service having provided signposting.

One participant highlighted the Careers Service facilities, such as IT facilities, as being useful for support and guidance on career options. Other examples of good practice included having the opportunity to visit colleges when they were still at school, allowing them to gain information about future college choices.

However, there was disagreement about the effectiveness of support provision at school. It was felt by several interviewees that there was a lack of clear support and preparation conducted within the school, which meant that several had felt unprepared for leaving. Worryingly, several participants gave examples of young people who had not been provided with appropriate support, and as a result had been left isolated from opportunities on leaving school. The effect of this was that they were left unsure about where to access guidance and support.

Several interviewees discussed their personal experience of this.

> "For a while I did not know what to do or where to go for advice or help." (Research interviewee)

> "At school there wasn't really any support." (Research interviewee)

It was argued by research participants that young people who presented challenging behaviour within the school environment were less likely to get assistance than those who did not exhibit such behaviour. One participant who had engaged in challenging behaviour at school felt they had not been given effective support, and had been limited with their access to careers guidance. For those who had highlighted a lack of support at school this was then followed by a period of non-activity after leaving school, such as not being involved in training, education or employment.

Other research also highlights the experiences of young people who display challenging behaviour being excluded from work experience.[15]

Another key issue raised within schools was work experience provision. In Scotland this currently takes the form of a one-week work placement organised during a pupil's 4th year.[16]

Within the study, young people recognised the importance of work experience as a crucial step in their preparation for employment, and the insight it provided into the expectations of employers and the work environment. Many young people welcomed this opportunity.

> "I did work experience at school and I thought it was really good as it gave you a realistic view of what a job actually means." (Research interviewee)

> "Work experience was a really amazing experience." (Research interviewee)

The perceived benefits of work experience were that it provided a positive opportunity to ease the transition into employment and other routes after leaving school, and an opportunity to experience new environments outwith the traditional school setting. Young people within the sample also recognised that employers were more likely to provide employment for those with work experience, and that this was an important requirement for gaining access to employment and other broader opportunities in post-school life. Such views are supported by research into the views of employers. A survey undertaken by the Charted Institute of Personal Development found that 73 per cent of employers believe that providing work experience can improve the quality of school leavers and improve their employability.[17]

> "I think it's good because people take on people if they have work experience … I know a lassie that did not finish school but she had loads of work experience and she got into university with her work experience." (Research interviewee)

The options available for work experience were also discussed. The majority of the sample interviewed expressed satisfaction with the options provided for work placements. However, some participants raised concerns about the choice available to them and how the options were presented to young people. Some young people expressed preference for a particular placement but were unable to obtain it, as schools were restricted in the numbers of pupils they could send to a placement.

> "I done work experience and I got left with the only thing that was on the table. When I was at school they put wee cards out on the table, with job titles on it, and it was 'first come, first served'." (Research interviewee)

The quality of the work experience placement was also raised. Several interviewees spoke of not being provided with a positive work experience, as the work they had been given had not provided them with the opportunity to learn new skills.

As one participant argued,

> "You are running about doing everything, all the menial jobs, rather than the fun and exciting jobs the other workers are doing." (Research interviewee)

A recent review of work experience within Scotland identified the importance of work experience for young people, and the positive benefits gained for many young people taking part. However, it acknowledged that there were gaps in provision, and in many cases a lack of undefined learning outcomes for young people taking part.[18]

14 Citizens Advice Education - In Scotland – Starting and Leaving Dates
    http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/scotland/your_family/education_index_scotland/problems_at_school_scotland.htm

15 Scottish Government (2008) Research Report on Work Experience in Scotland,[online]
    Available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/27092915/2 [Accessed: 12/4/2011].

16 Scottish Government (2008) Research Report on Work Experience in Scotland, [online]
    http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/27092915/4 [Accessed 12/4/2011]

17 Labour Market Outlook: Quarterly Survey Report (Summer 2006). KPMG/CIPD. In Confederation of British Industry (2007) Time Well Spent Embedding Employabilty
    in Work Experience, [online] Available at: http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf [Accessed: 11/3/2011].

18 Scottish Government (2008) Research Report on Work Experience in Scotland, [online]
    Available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/27092915/2 [Accessed: 12/4/2011].

SECTION 4:
EXPERIENCES AFTER LEAVING SCHOOL
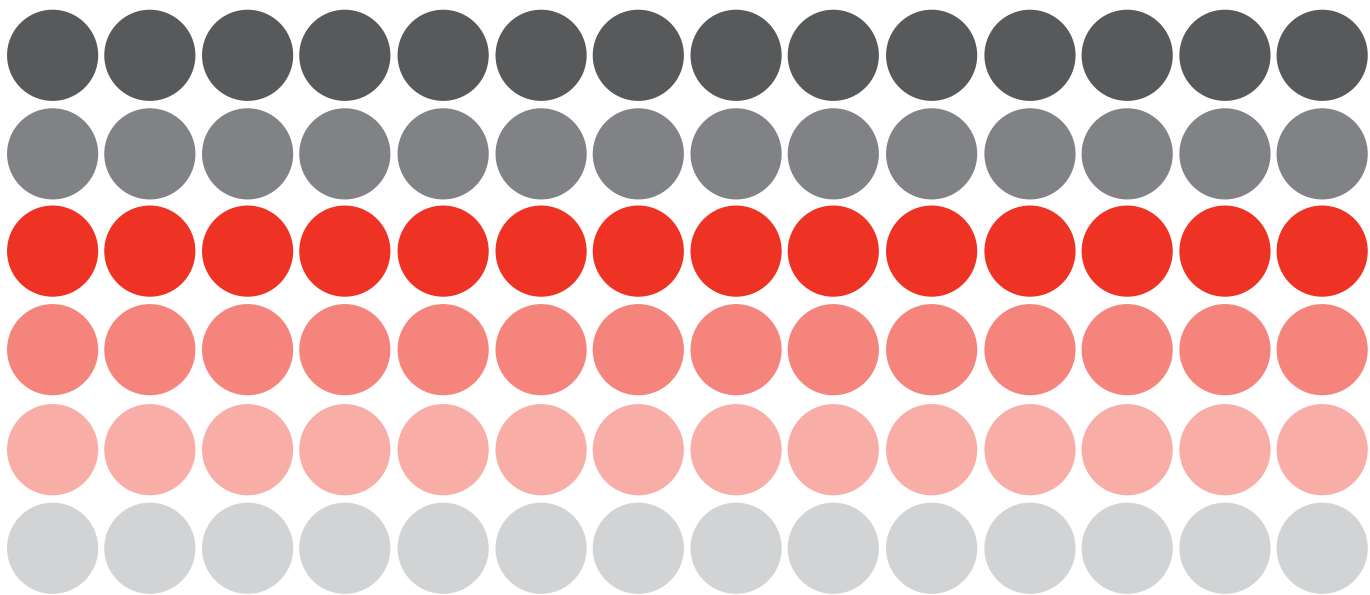
Summary

- The post-school transition is a crucial period for young people. A range of services engage with young people to support them at this time.

- Access to advice services and support are critical in assisting young people with making an effective transition.

- Young people respond well to services that are personalised, accessible and youth-friendly.

- Support networks played a pivotal role for some young people in the study.

Engaging with service providers

The post-school transition period is a critical time for young people, and their available destinations can be wide-ranging. Concerns have been raised recently regarding the importance of ensuring that this transition is well supported, so that young people are able to access choices and services and improve their life chances. This is particularly true for more vulnerable young people.[19]

Various agencies exist to assist young people access opportunities after leaving school. Support is provided from both statutory and non-statutory organisations such as Youth Work Services, work preparation programmes, Jobcentre Plus and advice organisations. These were discussed within the research.

The findings indicated that young people were predominately willing to engage with support services in order to shape choices on the transition they made. Engagement with support services had taken place on a voluntary or referral basis dependent on the service engaged.

Accessing Work Programmes

Work programmes are offered by both statutory and private providers. Courses provide participants with assistance to access the labour market and other opportunities. Several participants within the sample had attended 'accessing work' courses. One young person within the study spoke of their experience of courses provided by both private and statuary agencies. They perceived that this support had been a positive experience, and had allowed them the opportunity to gain core skills to access the labour market, and for them to gain crucial skills such as interview skills.

"I have been on that many job courses that an interview process seems second nature now…. they gave me a better idea of what I was doing rather than diving right in so I knew how to prepare for it afterwards and they helped with CV-building as well." (Research interviewee)

Another interviewee had found it a more negative experience. They had accessed this work programme through a referral and found it be ineffective for their needs as they felt unable to fully engage with the course. They indicated that the course had been subject to disruption by other people attending, and this had impacted on their experience of it.

"There were folk in my courses who were chucking things about so I kept myself to myself."(Research interviewee)

Another participant mentioned a course by a private sector provider as being of limited use. They felt that it was duplication of learning they had acquired during another course. This example highlights and raises questions about the appropriateness of repeat engagement of young people with similar courses offered by different providers.

Accessing advice services

A range of specialist advice services exists to support and assist with transitional periods. Participants discussed use of advice services as a source of accessing support. Findings indicated that a predominately positive experience was obtained from advice services. Participants welcomed the fact that services could provide detailed information on options available to young people, for example, being informed of course choices that were previously unknown to the participants. Specific services were highlighted as being particularly valuable, as the following interviewees describe:

"Careers Scotland is what I would use, just cause I knew them from school and they helped me get from school to college." (Research interviewee)

"They were good; with the support I got into college and got supported again to get into this training programme." (Research interviewee)

Two participants discussed the help they provided in terms of supporting young people to avoid a period of inactivity. One example of this was assisting them to apply for a training programme after they had been too late in applying to college.

Another young person spoke of the assistance they had provided in them with options after a period of being isolated from opportunities.

" I was meant to be starting college in January and I wasn't accepted for that … I was just looking for work for about four or five months." (Research interviewee)

However, although young people generally praised being offered a range of options this was not the case for all participants with one individual discussing the stress and anxiety they experienced when trying to make decisions based on the limited options presented.

"Careers got me a course but going along to Careers was stressful when looking at my options." (Research interviewee)

Engaging with Youth Work services

Almost all of the participants within the sample had engaged with youth work services as a source of support. The nature of the relationship with this service was highlighted as a crucial factor for young people, in particular the importance of trust. For some young people this was especially important if they were engaging with a range of other services. Some young people said they had trust in this service over other sources of support. Previous experiences of youth services helping with support needs or issues were viewed as useful, and therefore young people were more likely to use this as a source of support for other issues.

Another important factor was the accessibility of the service and the engagement it offered to young people. Spatial factors were raised here with the example of outreach (detached) youth work in providing a key mechanism for getting advice and building a relationship.

"Detached workers do a lot of good when they are about cause it goes into the young person's environment instead of young people going to their environment." (Research interviewee)

One of the key findings from the sample was the 'youth-friendly' approach of the youth services. Participants strongly felt that youth services offered quality support, and were targeted with young people's needs in mind.

"I can talk to any member of the team within youth services …they help me on training and learning and development in general." (Research interviewee)

"They have got great resources for young people ...what young people need to know they have the answer." (Research interviewee)

Other key findings around this also indicated the importance of the accessibility of the engagement being in language that young people could relate to. It was felt that these provided youth work services with advantages over other agencies offering support, and provided young people with the opportunity to engage on their own terms.

Although the vast majority of those interviewed reported positive experiences, some areas for improvement were raised. The specific worker the young person was dealing with was perceived to have a role, and some staff were felt to have more expertise in this area than others. Criticisms were raised by some participants that they preferred to deal with specific workers on this issue who they perceived to be more effective at supporting them.

Engaging with Jobcentre Plus

Some participants had experience of using Jobcentre Plus. Analysis suggested predominately negative experiences of the job centre. One key factor the research revealed was that the formal nature of the job centre environment was off-putting for some of the young people, as some participants highlighted feeling uncomfortable with it as a service. Jobcentre Plus was also a focus of discussion in terms of the quality and personalisation of the service. Some participants perceived that the service was not tailored to individual needs in comparison with other support services they had used.

"They are quite structured to 'one size fits all', so if you don't fit that shoe you are buggered." (Research interviewee)

Another participant expressed a lack of trust in the service the jobcentre provided. Some young people described the jobcentre as a pressurised environment to access and indicated that they were provided with less information on what options in terms of employment were available to them.

19 HMIE (2010) ' Count us In We Are Still Here: Successful Transitions from Secondary School ' [online] Available at: http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/cuiwsh.pdf [Accessed 30/3/2011]

16 Scottish Government (2008) Research Report on Work Experience in Scotland, [online] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/27092915/4 [Accessed 12/4/2011]

17 Labour Market Outlook: Quarterly Survey Report (Summer 2006). KPMG/CIPD. In Confederation of British Industry (2007) Time Well Spent Embedding Employabilty in Work Experience, [online] Available at: http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf [Accessed: 11/3/2011].

18 Scottish Government (2008) Research Report on Work Experience in Scotland, [online] Available at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/27092915/2 [Accessed: 12/4/2011].

As one participant described,

> "Find a job, any job don't care, just get it, that is the kind of mentality." (Research interviewee)

> "Jobcentre are a bit too pushy saying you need to do this and that." (Research interviewee)

Issues were also raised about the support worker within the service and the level of support received at visits. One participant spoke about the variation of service received and that engaging with the jobcentre was dependent on the worker they had during their visit.

> "She was great, she would do anything, ken she would sit you down and would be there for an hour sometimes, she would actually try and get you a job, then I got papped over to the other side and the wife was 'sign here and on you go." (Research interviewee)

However, it was felt that the job centre had been a useful point of contact in terms of accessing benefits advice.

Influence of support networks

Informal sources of support, such as family members and friends, also played a critical role. Many discussed the role and influence of family members' career pathways as being important. As one young interviewee surmised,

> "It's my mum's personal experience and it has rubbed off on me." (Research interviewee)

Several interviewees discussed the support from family members in helping them access work experience. Friends and older peers were also seen as a source of career advice.

Personal circumstances were also a determinant in choice. Some participants said that being a young carer had influenced them in looking at options in the care sector for a career.

SECTION 5:
BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES
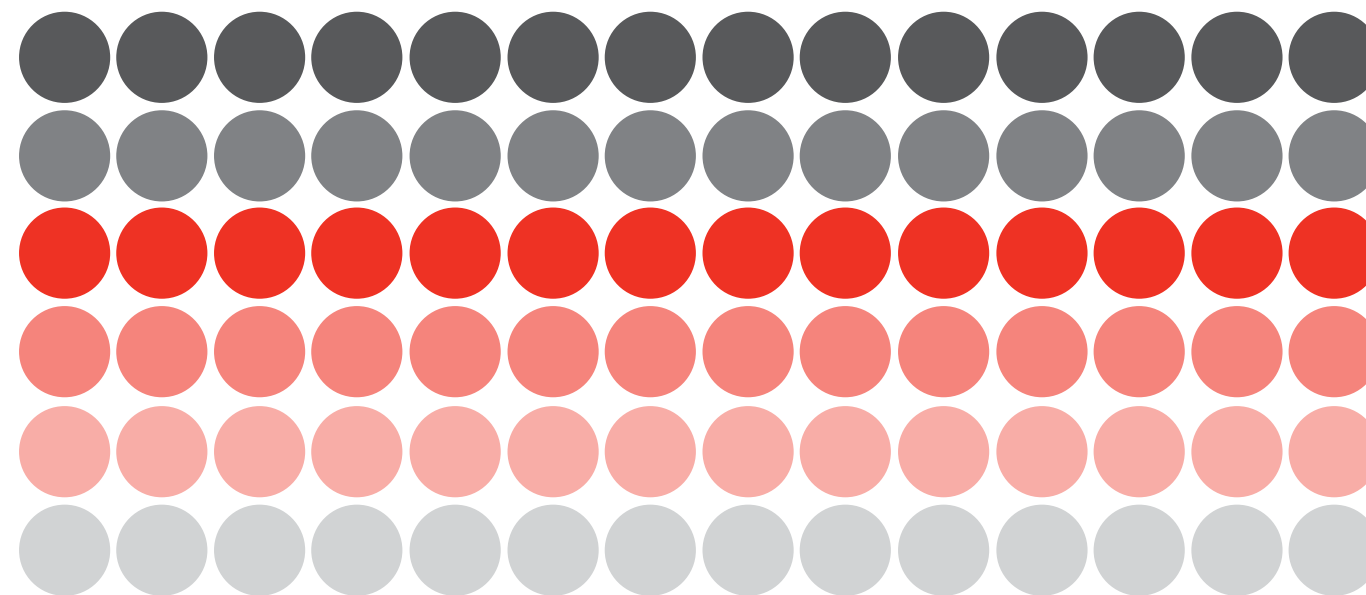
Summary

- A range of factors and barriers impacted on young people such as financial barriers, and geographical issues.

- The recession impacted on young people as a group in terms of increased competition for jobs and training places.

- Young people spoke of the broader life skills gained through unpaid work and the need for greater recognition of this.

In the study young people were asked about their current activity. Responses showed that the majority were in training, with others in employment or taking part in volunteering activity. A strong theme emerged on the importance of being engaged in positive activity, with several discussing how this could influence future progression, for example access to a better-paid job. One key issue that emerged was the barriers young people faced in trying to access careers advice. Findings showed that awareness of services, geographical barriers and transport all affected young people's engagement.

Some spoke of challenges in overcoming personal issues, others spoke of structural barriers such as the changing labour market. This next section will go on to discuss this in more depth.

There were specific barriers that young people raised in terms of accessing support services. A key determinant that was seen as crucial was awareness of services, as lack of knowledge could adversely affect young people's transition, through missing opportunities to progress onto employment or training.

> " I know folk that have left school and they have not really been guided right and they are like lost sheep looking for somewhere to go."
> (Research interviewee)

> " I think it's alright if they know about it. If they don't then they are flung in the deep end. For a while I did not know what to do or where to go for advice or help. It is not that it's not available, it is that sometimes it is not seen, there is not enough awareness about it." (Research interviewee)

Some young people highlighted how geographical barriers affected their knowledge of services and how they worked. It was felt that service provision focused on young people living centrally and missed out those who, while they may wish to use services, lived in outlying areas.

> "I didn't know about this service until I went to the careers office and a lot of folk I know didn't even know about the careers service, so if people were made more aware about that."
> (Research interviewee)

> " I think there is a lot of stuff going on out here that I didn't know that this was going on."
> (Research interviewee)

Use of social media, such as internet-based methods, was an example given by a participant as a possible solution to this problem. Services that provide information by text were seen a useful tool for accessing young people providing information directly to young people.

> "The Info Text is really useful as everything is confirmed straight away …I think it is helpful."
> (Research interviewee)

One young person argued that although services were actively promoting themselves, some people were failing to access them due to motivational reasons.

Another crucial barrier that emerged through this study was transport. Nearly all of the young people within the study were dependent on public transport. The cost of transport and frequency of service were viewed as problematic.

One participant described the challenges of this

> "Didn't have money to get into career service. £15 to get into town, coming in and out."
> (Research interviewee)

> "I live out in a wee village and it's quite hard to get to places." (Research interviewee)

> "Transport is a big one as obviously I am limited with places I can go." (Research interviewee)

Lack of confidence was another barrier that was highlighted. Young people indicated that leaving school was a time of change, and that for those with lower levels of confidence and self-esteem, accessing opportunities could be more difficult. Many discussed fears about going into environments that were unfamiliar.

> "If they have loads of confidence, its really easy, if they haven't its hard." (Research interviewee)

It was suggested that more confidence-building in school could assist with this issue. One participant discussed that having a high level of confidence had helped them in terms of accessing opportunities.

> "If I wasn't outgoing I would have struggled to find opportunities because other than the careers office which is very busy and that, you don't have vey much support other than youth services."
> (Research interviewee)

The impact of the recession

The recession was viewed by many young people within the study as having heavily impacted on their community and the opportunities available to them. Participants showed great awareness of the impacts within their area and the wider social changes the recession had brought about for young people and others within their community.

> "Myself and a lot of friends haven't been able to get jobs." (Research interviewee)

> "A lot of people I know have been made redundant." (Research interviewee)

In particular, young people noted the impact of the additional competition in accessing college or university, with the view that popular courses would be even more difficult to access due to higher numbers of people applying.

> "The way everything is going with employment and everything, everybody's kinda fighting to get into the colleges and uni's …If I don't get in then that's me kinda scuppered." (Research interviewee)

> "I didn't get into college …the course was far too full." (Research interviewee)

One participant described not being able to access courses due to the limited places available. They sought alternative training , as they were keen not to be left in a situation where they were unable to access education. Support accessed by the participant during this time had enabled them to find an alternative.

> "If it wasn't for him, I would just be sitting in the house…he told me what course I could go onto."
> (Research interviewee)

Participants also discussed the heightened pressure within the labour market. Many of those interviewed were seeking employment for the first time, and there was some discussion on the increased competition that young people faced, especially against people who had more experience.

> "There's a lot of folk have been working for a long, long time …and they are getting made to leave their jobs." (Research interviewee)

> "The job market is very scarce just now."
> (Research interviewee)

> "They were looking for experience but you are not going to get experience unless anybody gives you a job… you have got to try harder for what you want." (Research interviewee)

> "Everything is 'You must have experience' - well how can you get that experience if you can't get a foot in the door, you need that and there is nothing that will give you that bit of the experience, so you are not going to get that job."
> (Research interviewee)

One participant discussed how the recession had impacted on specific sectors of work such as the construction industry. Another spoke of the limitations of the short-term nature of some employment even when it was available.

However, this did not totally deter people from seeking employment. Some participants spoke of the measures they had employed in trying to get jobs. Participants had employed tactics such as seeking support from family members, making extensive job searches and actively trying to promote themselves to potential employers.

> "I was on the Jobcentre website every day and the situation with jobs just now (is that) you are looking for anything that you fit the criteria (for)."
> (Research interviewee)

One participant described giving their Curriculum Vitae to as many workplaces as they were able to access in order to broaden their chances. Others spoke of family support, such as trying to get jobs through working with a family member, or seeking their assistance when applying for employment.

In addition to lack of experience, young people faced barriers such as age, gender and qualification levels. For example, participants under 18 years old described being unable to get jobs in retail such as supermarkets as they were below the age to sell alcohol unsupervised. Some of the jobs advertised involved nightshift work that cannot be done by people under 18 years of age. One participant described how job advertisements could often be unclear regarding any age restrictions on the post available.

"Most of the jobs is eighteen and over …age is a barrier." (Research interviewee)

"It's restricting you, something that you wanna do the now and you're not wanting to do in a couple of years time." (Research interviewee)

"There was a job, I had the right qualifications and more and they told me you will have to wait another six months until I was 18." (Research interviewee)

Other barriers such as gender were discussed. It was perceived by some participants that gender discrimination played a part in sectors such as care and construction.

"Cause sometimes it's more men's jobs than women's, cause men get like construction sites and women haven't always got that, women are more restricted with what they can do." (Research interviewee)

"Men face restrictions in care work, women can get in but guys get pushed away, (I) know it happens a lot due to discrimination." (Research interviewee)

Qualification levels were also seen as key transitional barrier. Many said that the qualifications they possessed were inadequate to enable them to gain employment, and for some it impacted on their ability to access other avenues such as college. Participants discussed that some sectors of work were asking for higher qualifications that were required for the job, or for experience that the young person would be unable to obtain.

"(Some employers) ask for different qualification(s) and (others) don't ask for any, like for the same job." (Research interviewee)

One participant argued that there was a lack of recognition for experience gained through other channels such as volunteering.

"Because I have had quite a few knockbacks because of this, and I don't see why if you have got the experience then you shouldn't have to have a bit of paper." (Research interviewee)

Some of the participants within the study highlighted the impact on their mental health as a result of the barriers they were facing. Participants reported feelings of stress and anxiety about the uncertainty they faced. Some spoke of feeling frustrated at their lack of progression due to factors outside their control.

Participants also discussed a negative impact on their confidence.

"I was stressed from being on the dole …Every time I woke up in the morning, like I didn't want to get up, no motivation." (Research interviewee)

Some participants discussed the importance of ensuring young people are able to access support services with regards to building their confidence, for example courses.

Financial barriers

Financial factors also played a role in the choices young people made. Several participants identified low-paid work as a constraint. Current UK minimum wage legislation is age-dependent: £5.93, the main rate, for workers aged 21 and above; £4.92 for workers aged 18-20; £3.64, the 16-17 rate, for workers above school leaving age but under 18; and £2.50, the apprentice rate, for apprentices under 19 or 19 or over and in the first year of their apprenticeship.[20]

Low pay was seen as a barrier to accessing employment, as additonal costs and the hours of employment meant the job did not provide financial benefit. Participants discussed having to do a cost/benefit analysis of the potential employment post, and in some cases the financial limitations prevented them from applying for jobs.

"Sometimes you do look at things and think that is quite far to go and you start thinking about bus fares and it's not worth it …By the time you get your wage half it is away on bus fares." (Research interviewee)

Some placed an emphasis on needing to access well-paid employment due to family needs. One participant discussed financial constraints a friend had experienced in regards to having problems with payment of a bursary, and this affected their ability to finish the course resulting in a huge impact on their housing situation.

Other financial constraints were raised about the adequacy of benefits that some young people had accessed. One participant discussed the challenges with adapting to life on benefits after having been in employment. Another participant discussed the challenges of accessing benefits and being left living on a limited amount of money.

"When I became homeless, had no money then I was getting paid £20 for two weeks." (Research interviewee)

Skill Sets and Life Skills

Participants felt that self-esteem, life skills and confidence can be increased through unpaid work. It was felt that there should be greater recognition by agencies and society of the benefits that could be gained from this. One participant spoke of the opportunities and benefits that volunteering had brought but felt angry at the lack of recognition of this.

"I am working in a different capacity and this is where I think young people get ripped down, because I am showing that I am working in a different capacity …I am working but the government does not see it as work as it is only voluntary." (Research interviewee)

It was argued that unpaid work could provide valuable life skills and assist young people with the transition to education, training or employment.

"It's like getting all the extra curriculum stuff and learning about your environment and society and all different kinds of things." (Research interviewee)

"I would not be involved in half the things I have done, do you know what I mean, and I would not be as confident as I am just now." (Research interviewee)

One participant spoke of the need for the continued resourcing of volunteering, in particular for young people who may have additional needs. Fears were expressed for young people who may be deprived of such support in the future due to funding constraints or cuts.

"It annoys me when they people see young people don't need this and that and the next thing, well for a young person that's homeless ... it's actually quite a scary thing." (Research interviewee)

Flexibility of employment

Analysis showed that the flexibility of employers was a key determinant in accessing employment. It is important to report that participants with additional needs, such as a disability, had found this to be a barrier to securing employment.

Stability

For many within the study, the transitional period had been one of instability in their lives. It was argued that stability in their homes and communities were crucial to making informed and appropriate decisions about their futures. Participants described various support needs such as support with mental health, sexuality, financial issues, and accessing housing.

One participant described the nature of short-term employment they had been able to access, and the need for obtaining something that could provide them with long-term stability.

20   DirectGov (2010) the national minimum wage

SECTION 6:
VIEWS OF STAKEHOLDERS
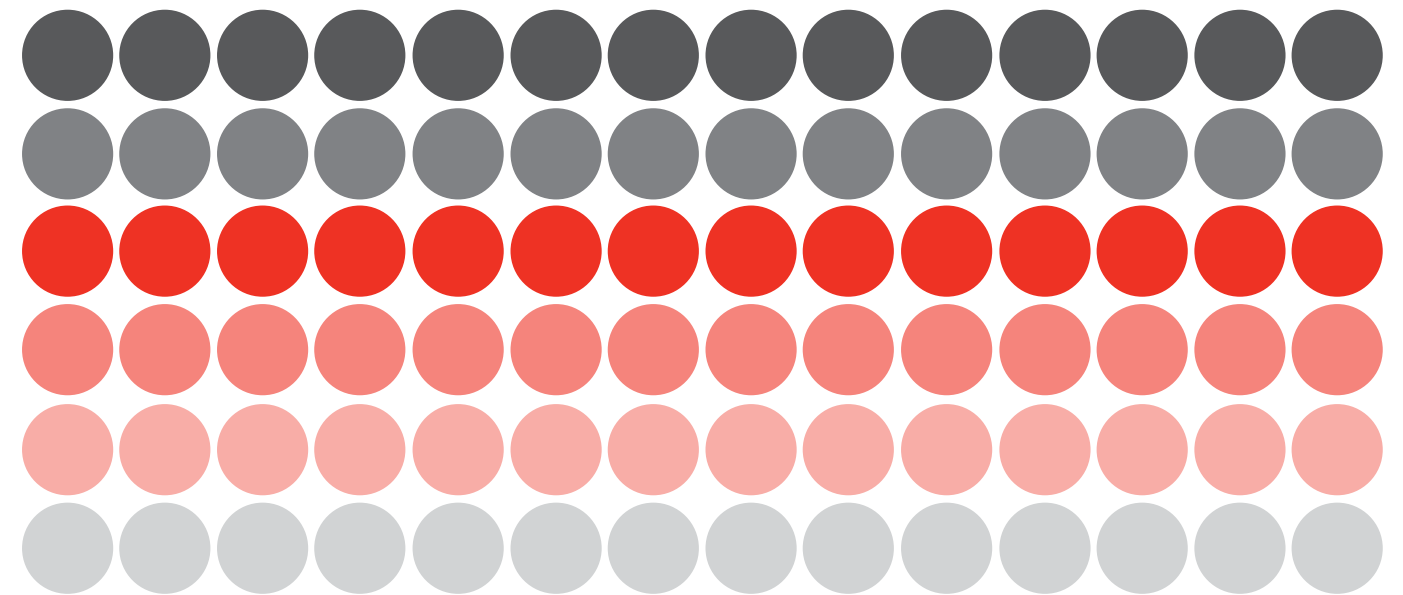
Young researchers interviewed local stakeholders to provide a perspective from those who were providing support during this transitional stage in their lives. The stakeholders were key figures who delivered frontline services to young people. Stakeholders identified the impact of the economic downturn, and broader issues that shaped young people's transitional experiences post-school. Stakeholders broadly supported the issues identified by young research interviewees, and outlined other issues such as welfare reform.

Service providers

Among the stakeholders sampled there was a key emphasis on the impact the recession had on young people, in particular those who were affected by social disadvantage. One stakeholder highlighted how the changing labour market had a disproportionate impact on young people.

> "Obviously it has (become) harder for young people to get into jobs … they tend to look for people with more experience rather than take someone straight from school … it is harder on them and it has had an impact on them getting jobs." (Stakeholder)

It was noted that the labour market had seen significant shifts in the type of employment available and that some sectors, such as retail, which had traditionally provided entry-level jobs, had suffered significantly during the economic recession and were now slow to recover. In addition, stakeholders highlighted the pressures within the labour market, such as those who had been previously employed, high numbers of graduates, and other young people all competing for jobs. One stakeholder spoke of their concern about further competition for employment due to cuts within the public sector.

The stakeholders supported the views of young people and discussed the implications of competition on further and higher education, and on other vocational training routes such as apprentice schemes.

> "The likes of electrical, plumbing apprenticeships they are still out there but they are more competitive to get." (Stakeholder)

> "Because of the current employment scheme there a lot more people going to college or university and places are filling up quicker and they are cutting places at university." (Stakeholder)

The impact of this increased competition was discussed. It was felt that young people who have been unable to access opportunities may be more vulnerable to a poorer quality of life. Research on young people has found that not taking part in education, employment or training can have adverse social effects and costs. For example, young people who are in the NEET category are three times more likely to get involved in crime and suffer from poor health.[21]

> "(It) has had a big impact – (it's) horrendously hard to get jobs, from a young persons point of view it's more and more difficult to move on." (Stakeholder)

> "In terms of jobs, experience is letting young people down although they can come across as enthusiastic and keen, employers can be picky." (Stakeholder)

In addition, stakeholders discussed the effects on young people's well-being, with mental health problems being a key factor. Demands placed on young people, such as pressure from parents to access training or employment, were contributing to stress and anxiety, and those who were suffering from low confidence and low self-esteem were seen as being more vulnerable.

One stakeholder discussed young people often being subject to additional pressure from parents who were anxious about ensuring their children were able to access a suitable career.

Low confidence was highlighted as a barrier for many young people, and it was suggested that more needs to be done to help young people build their confidence and other skill sets.

> "They lack confidence because of their age and so on but they have to become confident and use their people skills and interpersonal skills." (Stakeholder)

The impact on mental health has been highlighted by other research studies. Research by the Princes Trust You Gov Youth Index found a risk of the "psychological scarring" of unemployment, leaving young people at risk of lower levels of happiness and poorer health.[22]

There was consensus amongst stakeholders on the need for continuation of agencies and services which provide support in assisting young people with confidence and self-esteem. One stakeholder emphasised the need for this to be targeted at young people prior to leaving compulsory education.

Other service provisions were also discussed, and it was stressed that there were many initiatives and significant multi-agency work taking place to assist young people with this period. It was argued that for this to be successful there was a need for resourcing and investment in education, job creation and vocational training routes in order to assist and develop young people. Failure to do so, stakeholders argued, would result in a 'lost generation' of young people. Consistency in funding for such services was also highlighted as an issue.

> "There are difficulties faced when funding runs out for a post, people are left high and dry and that's crucial at the early stages as it's harder to re-engage." (Stakeholder)

One stakeholder spoke of future challenges facing young people. They advocated ensuring that financial support was there for young people, in particular those facing social disadvantage. They indicated it was unclear what impact the proposed changes to the Educational Maintenance Allowance were going to have. In addition, they expressed concerns about proposals for changing university fee structures. Concerns were raised about the changes to the welfare system and the administration of benefits and the adequacy of the income that young people looking for work were forced to live on. Such concerns have been supported by other research. A recent report by Citizens Advice Scotland found evidence of young people struggling on the lower levels of benefits to which they were entitled.[23]

Views of the wider community

As part of this work, surveying took place in two regeneration areas in Stirling. In addition, surveys were conducted within a local support group. Outreach work was also conducted as part of winter warmer events to engage local people. Opinions of the wider community were sought about access to opportunities, the impact of the recession, and what services were available locally to assist young people.

The responses were mixed, indicating a range of viewpoints. Some surveys highlighted the challenges young people were facing in accessing opportunities. In particular, there was a focus on employment being more difficult to obtain.

> "Very much limited, it's who you know." (Community survey)

Evidence from the wider community supported the views of the young people and stakeholders interviewed. This evidence identified barriers such as qualifications, and the lack of availability of training courses, as examples of this. One barrier not previously raised was the additional pressures faced by young people who had a criminal record. This has been supported by other research which highlights that ex-offenders may face barriers in gaining employment. A survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development showed that people with a criminal record are part of the 'core jobless group' that more than 60% of those surveyed exclude when recruiting.[24]

One survey response provided suggestions that young people may benefit from the introduction of a peer mentor scheme to allow skill sharing within the community.

21 CBI (2008) 'Towards a NEET Solution Tackling Underachievement in Young People', [online] Available at: http://www.cbi.org.uk/ndbs/press.nsf/0363c1f07c6ca12a8025671c00381cc7/3e9985514a66fce4802574e40039570b/$FILE/CBI%20Towards%20a%20NEET%20 Solution%20October%202008.pdf [Accessed: 13/4/2011]. Page 7

22 Princes Trust (2010) The Prince's Trust You Gov Index 2010, cited in The Princes Trust (2010) The Cost of Exclusion: Counting the Cost of Disadvantage in the UK., [online] Available at: http://www.childpovertysolutions.org.uk/UserFiles/file/Princes%20Trust_Cost%20of%20Exclusion_011210.pdf [Accessed:10/4/2011].

23 Citizens Advice Scotland (2011) Being Young Being Heard Briefing Sheet, [online] Available at: http://www.cas.org.uk/Resources/CAS/Migrated%20Resources/Documents/CAS%20briefing%20papers/Being%20Young%20Being%20Heard%20briefing.pdf [Accessed: 13/11/2011].

24 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Labour Market Outlook, Summer 2005 cited in Prison Reform Trust (2010) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile, [online] Available at: http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/FactfileDec10small.pdf [Accessed: 12/4/2011].

In terms of the recession and its impact on young people, responses indicated that there was agreement about fewer opportunities for young people, in particular the lack of employment opportunities. Concerns were also raised about access to college or university with the potential changes to tuition fees and in terms of increased competition for places. One survey mentioned the potential for new approaches in assisting young people.

> "The present contraction will make things worse for the young as there are fewer opportunities available. Perhaps this will provoke looking for new ideas, new ways of thinking about working which (are) not purely focused on money."
> (Community survey)

On a more negative note, criticism was raised within one survey that money was being wasted on services unnecessarily, while another raised concerns about a dependency culture preventing people from accessing work. Within the data collected, one survey raised concerns about people being removed from benefits but being unable to access employment.

In terms of knowledge about services to assist young people accessing opportunities, a wide range was listed. These included youth services, careers, local community centres and advice organisations dealing with issues such as housing. Only one survey respondent indicated they were unaware of services.

Additional comments

Those taking part in the survey were asked to provide any additional comments they felt were appropriate. One highlighted that the recession had impacted on all groups, not just young people. Barriers were highlighted that supported other evidence obtained within this research process.

One survey described barriers with childcare, and argued that there was a need for wider information-sharing on access to childcare support. The financial cost of childcare was also highlighted as problematic.

Issues were also raised about housing, in particular the barriers that young people face in managing a tenancy. Disability was also stressed as a key issue for young people accessing employment. It was argued that some employers are inflexible towards the requirements of people with a disability, such as the need for additional breaks during the working day. Much research has been undertaken to explore employment for disabled people. Recent research conducted by the Equalities and Human Rights Commissions into its telephone helpline has indicated that employment issues are significant for disabled people, with over half of the calls in 2008-09 related to employment.[25] Lack of confidence was also highlighted in one survey as a barrier for young people.

SECTION 7:
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
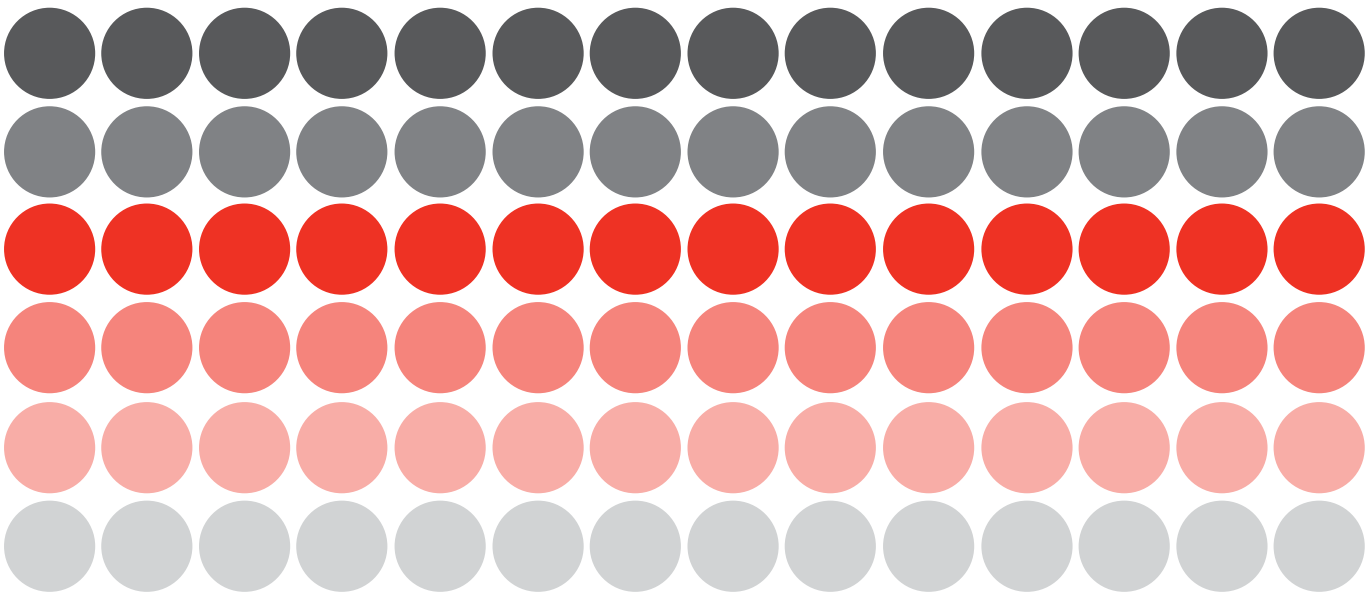
25 Calls received by the Equality and Human Rights Commission 2008-2009 cited in Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2011) Executive Summary of How fair is Britain? The First Triennial Review, [online] Available at: http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/key-projects/how-fair-is-britain/online-summary/ [Accessed: 12/4/2011].

The research report provided a snapshot of the issues faced by young people in two regeneration areas in Stirling. It took place against a background of economic downturn and cuts to public spending and services. Young people across the country face an uncertain future. Evidence shows that they experience higher levels of unemployment than adults, with a significant number still not in training or education. As we have seen, for many within the study the transitional period was one of instability in their lives. Part of this was the result of uncertainty around the jobs and educational opportunities available to them as well as uncertainty around the future of support and services upon which they rely.

The research provided them with the opportunity to explore how these issues were impacting on their lives, and to demonstrate the pressures involved in accessing employment or further education or training. A range of issues and barriers outside their control affected their experiences and the choices they made in the transition from school to employment, education or training, for example, the location of services and employment, low pay in jobs that were available to them and the increasing pressure on service providers. These barriers are also recognised by policy makers and service providers. And while there exists positive examples of policy and practice, they are in danger of being undone through public spending cuts and economic downturn.

Yet evidence from the study showed that young people were keen to make successful transitions despite sometimes being unable to do so. This challenges many commonly held assumptions about lack of ambition amongst young people, especially those from deprived areas. The research showed that the young people involved were acutely aware of their situation and how some of the barriers could be overcome.

While some young people felt they were not receiving effective support within school (with consequences of being left isolated from opportunities on leaving school), advice provision within schools was generally supported and appreciated by them.

Post-school, a range of agencies from both statutory and voluntary organisations worked to assist young people access opportunities. Youth work services, work preparation programmes, Jobcentre Plus and advice organisations were all discussed within the research. And while experiences of services were mixed, young people once again appreciated and saw the importance of the support, especially when it was explained to them in accessible language and where they were made to feel comfortable. Stirling Youth services in particular were highly appreciated for this approach.

The views of stakeholders and the wider community reinforced the experiences of young people, with both groups indicating more should be done to assist young people.

The current context makes the research findings timely and important reading for policy makers and service providers. In addition, by highlighting what kind of support young people need, the research has demonstrated the importance of young people contributing to this debate themselves. Young people living in disadvantaged areas have a vital contribution to make in identifying both the problems they face and the solutions to them. On the basis of these findings, the researchers make the following recommendations for policy makers and those working in the field of providing support to young people to access positive destinations beyond compulsory education.

The key recommendations to emerge from the research are:

- Individualised and person-centered approaches to working with young people, ensuring that specific needs are recognised, must be at the heart of local and national policy responses to the challenges young people face.

- There is a need to remove the barriers that young people face while engaging with support services, for example, reducing the cost of travel.

- Young people's views on policy and service delivery must be sought to ensure that service provision can be tailored more effectively.

- The resourcing of provision designed to assist young people with the transition from school to adult life should continue at appropriate levels.

- Services that can help address the lack of confidence that many young people experience must be supported.

"LOST SHEEP LOOKING FOR SOMEWHERE TO GO"

A study into young people in the transition from school to employment, education or training

This report is based on the views and experiences of young people in Stirling who took part in a participatory research project throughout 2010. The report highlights, in young people's own words, the continuing challenges that many young people face in making a successful transition from school, challenges that are likely to increase in the years to come.

This report has been produced as part of the Big Lottery funded Evidence, Participation, Change (EPIC) project which aims to put participation at the heart of anti-poverty policy making in Scotland. It brings together people with experience of poverty, community and voluntary organisations and policy makers to discuss and find better solutions to the problems

www.povertyalliance.org/projects