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'HEALTHY WEIGHT': SYA'S CONSULTATION CONTRIBUTION

YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUALITATIVE RESPONSE TO 'HEALTHY
WEIGHT'

SYA – ALL ABOUT YOUTH

New Lodge, Upton Lane, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 5RR

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Introduction

As part of Shropshire Council's engagement work to '[reduce] obesity [as] a priority for Shropshire's Integrated Care System (ICS) [and maintaining a] healthy weight to physical and mental health and wellbeing, youth workers have engaged with young people in various youth clubs using activities to initiate conversations around healthy weight amongst young people. This report will focus on the qualitative responses young people gave during this consultation as key data with some corresponding quantitative data.

Methodology

Youth workers originally took Shropshire Council's survey, that was designed for adults and their families, to SYA's Youth Forum to analyse the appropriateness for young people as professionals had questioned whether this topic may cause emotional distress and discomfort for some young people. The group of eight young people reviewed this survey and found that the topics of the questions were not 'triggering' for them and felt the language 'healthy weight' was the most appropriate term. The questions from the original survey were reviewed and young people narrowed down questions they felt were most relevant or could be merged to gather similar information. The youth forum then shared ideas on how the information could be asked in ways they would find engaging, which shaped the activities the youth workers designed. One part of the consultation aimed to gain quantitative data on general issues young people face in relation to healthy weight, and with the youth forum's feedback, the questions chosen were:

1. I have a good understanding of what 'healthy weight' means
2. What would further help your understanding of how to successfully achieve and maintain a healthy weight?
3. Keeping a healthy weight is important to me
4. It is easy for young people to manage a healthy weight
5. What would you say the greatest challenges for young people eating a healthy diet?
6. What would you say are the greatest challenges for young people and families in being physically active?
7. When you want to make a lifestyle change (e.g. healthy eating or becoming physically active), what would you say the greatest challenges that young people and their families face?

8. What have you and/or your family found helpful when making a lifestyle change before?

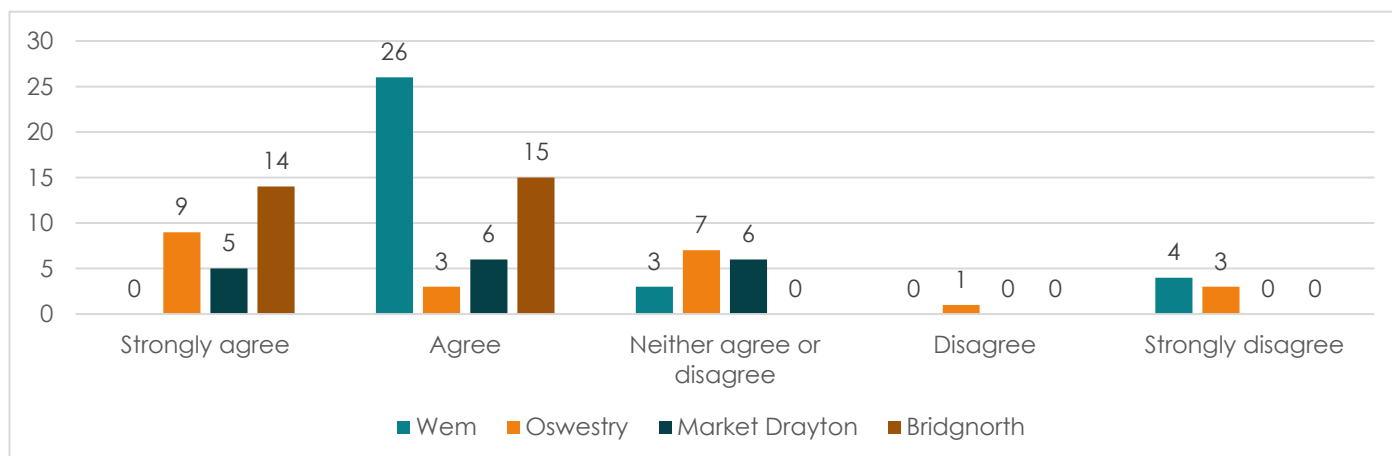
The second part of the consultation was designed to gather more qualitative data with the young people leading the conversation and tone of topic more so they could highlight any specifics they felt were important to the issue. Eight youth clubs were chosen from around the county (Wem, Oswestry, Market Drayton and Bridgnorth) were chosen to be consulted as these locations have both junior and senior sessions and gave more opportunity for a greater amount of young people to be involved in this piece of work. In total, 102 young people aged 8 – 16 years were involved in the consultation.

Findings and discussions

Quantitative data findings:

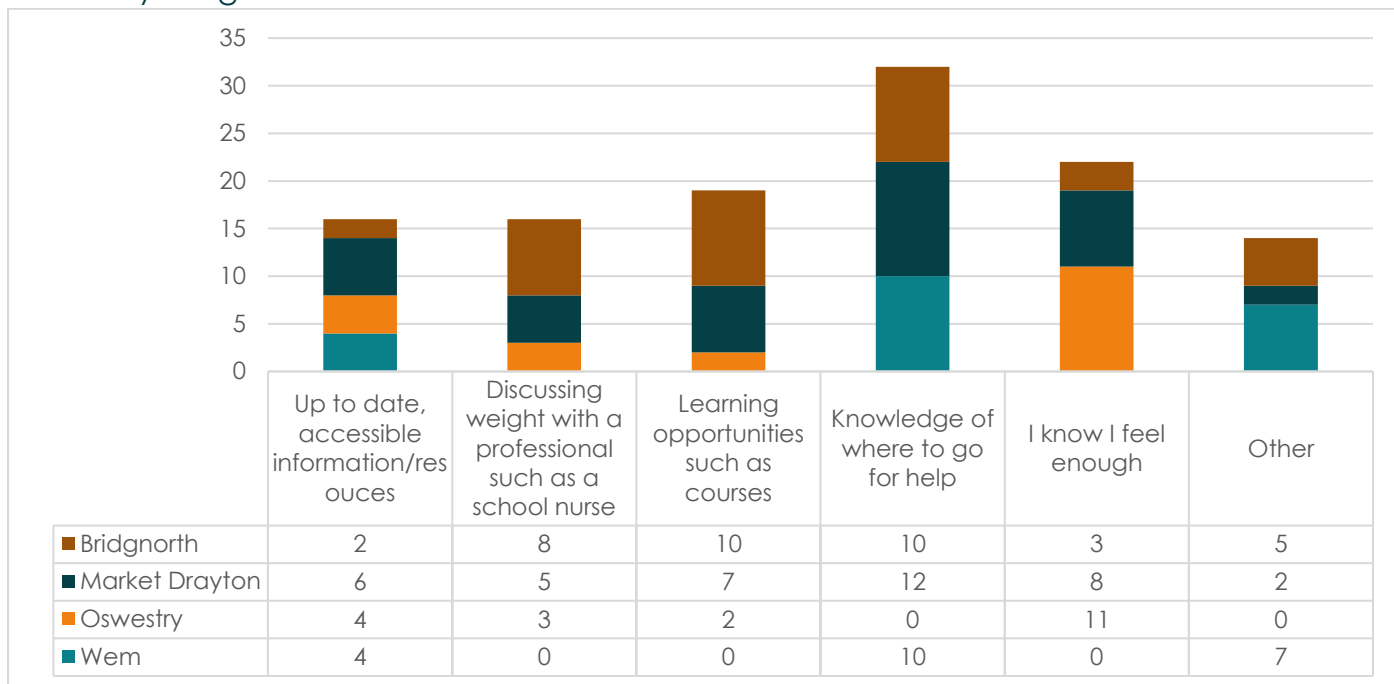
To gather the quantitative data, the answering scheme was categorised into two groups – questions where young people were given a scale to answer from strongly agree to strongly disagree which gives us a percentage answer to these questions, and optioned questions where young people could give multiple answers with the opportunity to build upon them if they wished to in hopes this would add another level of descriptive data.

I have a good understanding of what 'healthy weight' means



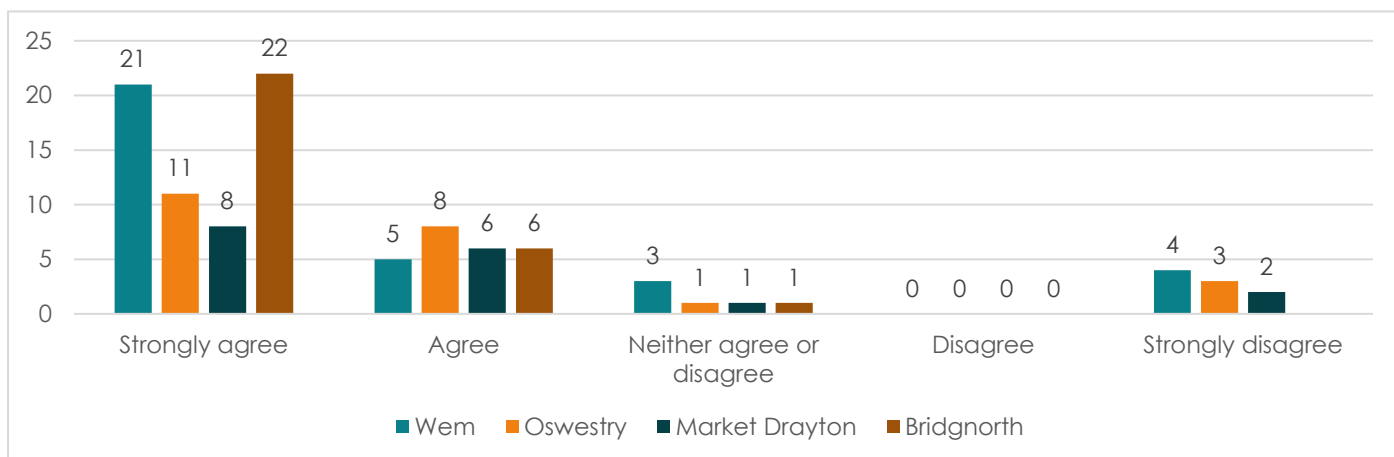
- 76% of young people generally agreed that they had a good understanding of what 'healthy weight' meant to them.
- All of the young people that fell under 'neither agree or disagree' expressed that they didn't know what 'healthy weight' meant to them

What would further help your understanding of how to successfully achieve and maintain a healthy weight?



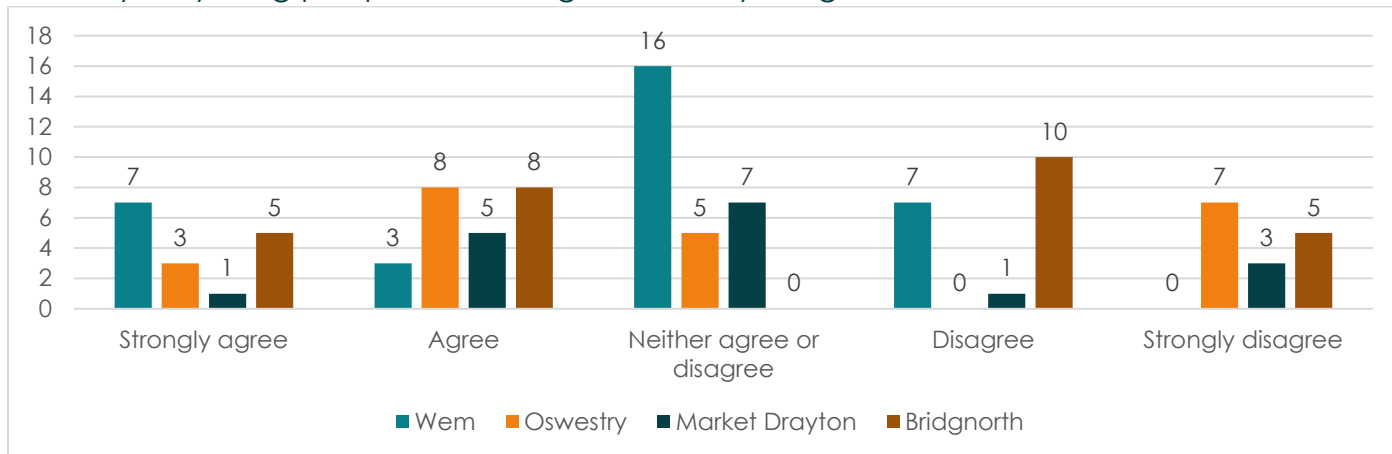
- Some young people could not establish if they had seen or met the school nurse present in their school so wouldn't go to them for help.
- The young people who answered 'other' said that they would not go anywhere or to specific people for help managing their weight.

Keeping a healthy weight is important to me



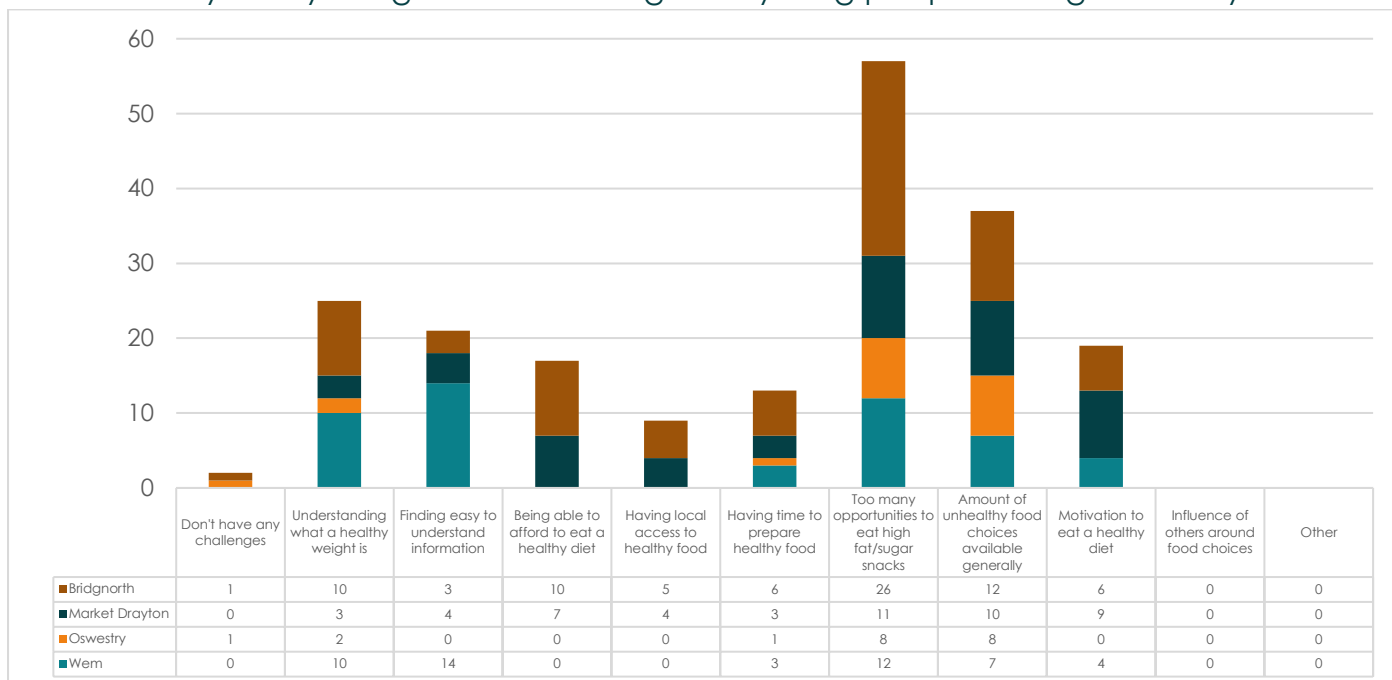
- 85% of young people questioned generally agreed that keeping a healthy weight was important to them - a small group of young people in this demographic expressed that they did not want to become 'too skinny'.

It is easy for young people to manage a healthy weight



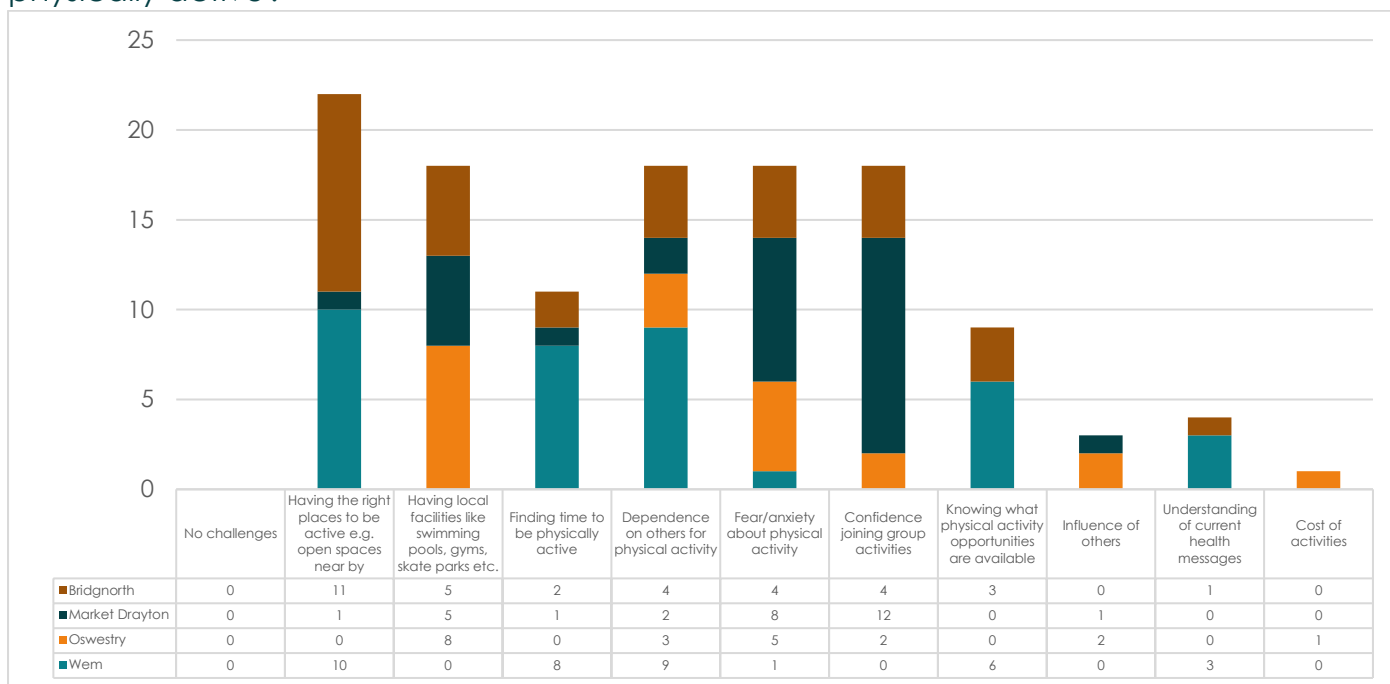
- 32% of young people generally agreed that it is easy for young people to manage their weight with having a faster metabolism and going out with friends contributing to this.
- Similarly, 32% of young people generally disagreed that it is easy for young people to manage their weight. With one young person stating they do not shop or contribute to their family's grocery shop so therefore has no say in what food is available in their home.
- 27% of young people neither agreed or disagreed that it is easy for young people to manage their weight. Some reasoning for this includes personal circumstances may be different for each person and there being reasons that young people have opportunities to manage their weight but may not use them.

What would you say the greatest challenges for young people eating a healthy diet?



- Young people expressed how easy it was for them to get access to unhealthy food with some using the example that they had brought confectionaries with them to these sessions.
- The topic of fast food became apparent as more establishments selling 'unhealthy' food were appearing in towns that may not have previously been there in the past. In addition to this, there is an increase of 'fad' foods that come into popularity, with 'Prime' drink being used as an example.
- Some young people expressed the importance of personal choice when deciding to eat unhealthy food as 'they wanted to do' this.

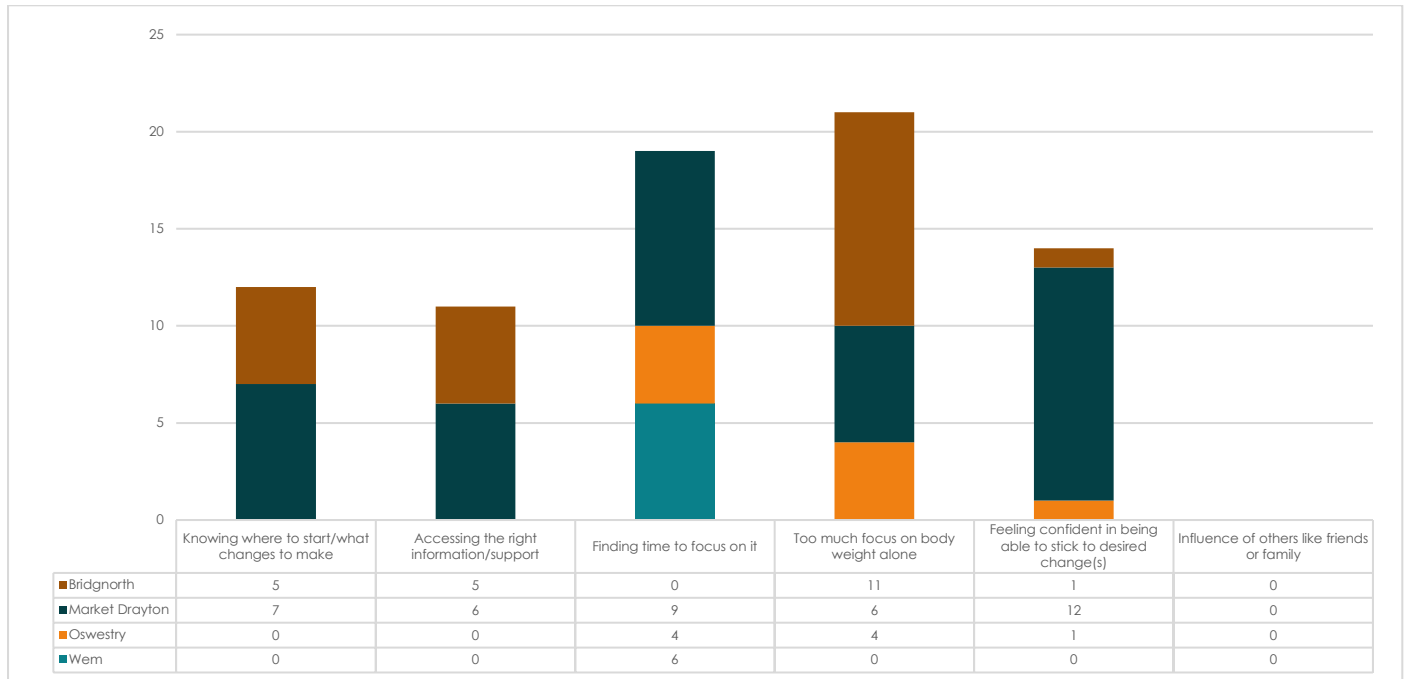
What would you say are the greatest challenges for young people and families in being physically active?



- Although young people could identify facilities they could access to help increase physical activity, they stated that they were actually too young to attend and therefore cannot access them.
- Young people found it relatively easy to list open access areas they could take part in physical activity in like open fields and nearby skate parks, as well as attending their local youth clubs, although nine young people described them as 'rubbish'.
- Young people brought up the fact that they lacked time to do physical activity due to school pressures like homework and coursework. Alternatively, those who didn't identify this as an issue were likely to be part of a sports team like football or gymnastics, so their commitments that may stop them accessing local parks already incorporated physical activity in them.
- Young people recognised that they had a high dependence on others like family members to either pay for attendance for sports clubs or facilities or to transport them there.
- The majority of young people who said healthy messages were not helpful in them managing their weight could not name any examples; a few could remember schemes once prompted like the Eatwell guide, and one young person said they had seen healthy messaging on television adverts and social media but they were aimed at adults and not people their age or they were not about weight.

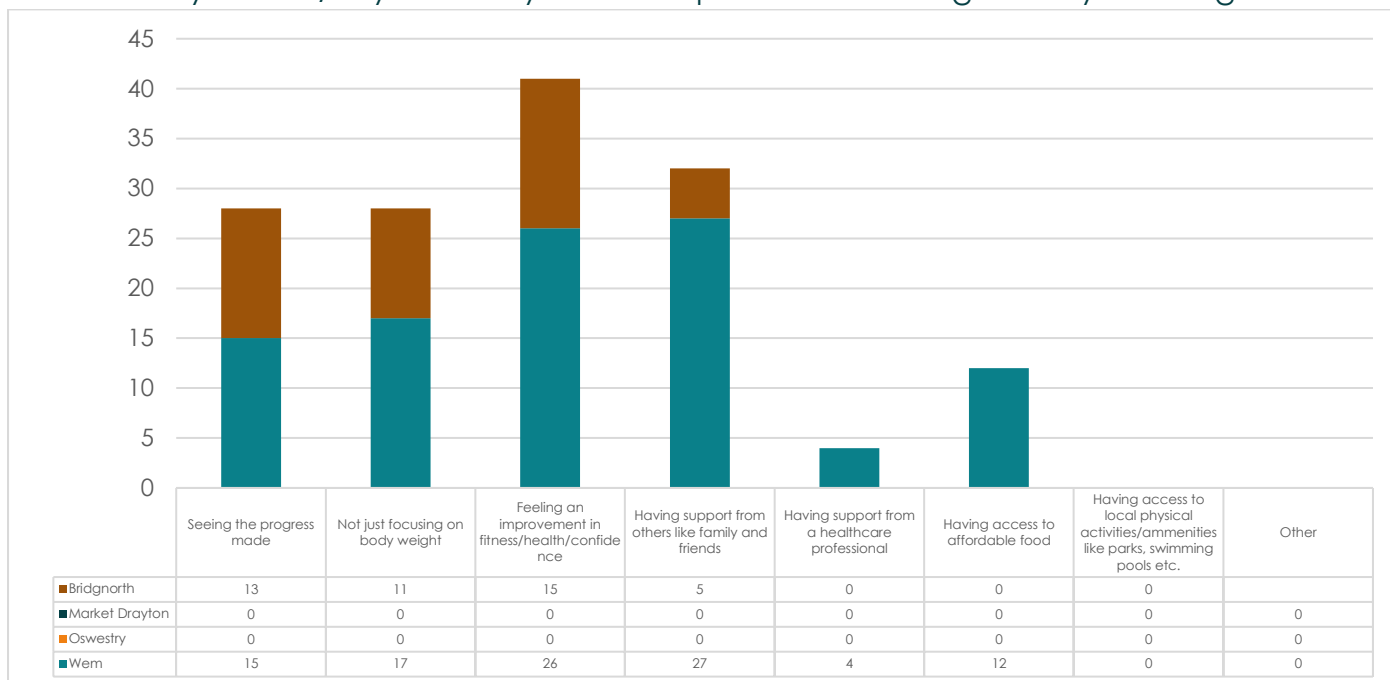
- Young people who said healthy messages did encourage them to manage their weight tended to name advertisements for products like smart watches or weight loss specific apps.

When you want to make a lifestyle change (e.g. healthy eating or becoming physically active), what would you say the greatest challenges that young people and their families face?



- The most popular answer here was 'too much focus on body weight alone' as this made young people feel uncomfortable and insecure about their weight.
- Young people who felt they could access information about managing their weight said they would go to Google or YouTube to find information if they wanted help.

What have you and/or your family found helpful when making a lifestyle change before?



- The most popular answer to this question had the theme of feeling more confident helping to keep a healthy lifestyle change which then filtered not focusing on their weight so much and being happier with their image.
- In relation to having support from a professional, young people mentioned professions like personal trainers rather than medical professionals.

Qualitative data findings:



An anonymised image of young people at Market Drayton Juniors Youth Club contributing to their canvas

Young people were presented with a blank canvas and various images of different body types and sizes, celebrities, diagrams, social media posts etc and encouraged to create a collage with the theme of 'healthy weight'. Youth workers used the images the young people chose as conversation starters and questioned why they chose that image, or compared it to alternative photos available. From this, expressive data was disclosed by young people and themes became more apparent. The themes listed are ordered in most recurring to least but all matters in this report were mentioned enough by young people to be highlighted by youth workers.



h a P P Y
h e a l t h
b e a u t y

Shine on

DERS * RAVISHING!

GOOD



Wem

W H A

healthy eating isn't just eating fruit and vegetables it's about what you want to eat. *brodie*

You're perfect the way you are!!!

You can eat whatever you want.

S H E



BEAUTIFUL IS everyone

If you work hard enough you might get what you want! *gracey*
deserve!

don't let anyone judge you by your look's



B E U
Y O U



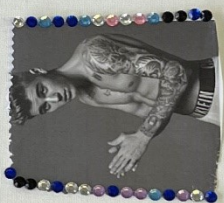
I think that it is fine to eat a little bit with a box of it.

THY



E G E A B E

It don't matter how fat you are no one should feel like you to fat.



Be you

S A

O

LIVE LAUGH LOVE!

R

F



BE YOURSELF

CONFIDENCE

be yourself!

be beautiful!

love yourself!

your amazing!

Everyone is beautiful!



Y
A
L
S



you Beautiful in your own body

CLICK Confidence is Key &

Be Beautiful in your own body

No matter how you look like your beautiful

PERFECT

Don't try and be someone your not

Be your self takes every one is taking



ALWAYS

HAPPY

your own

Be Yourself



Love your Self

BE YOU

BEAUTIFUL

PERFECT



LOVE YOU

you can feel how you want to feel and be who you want to be



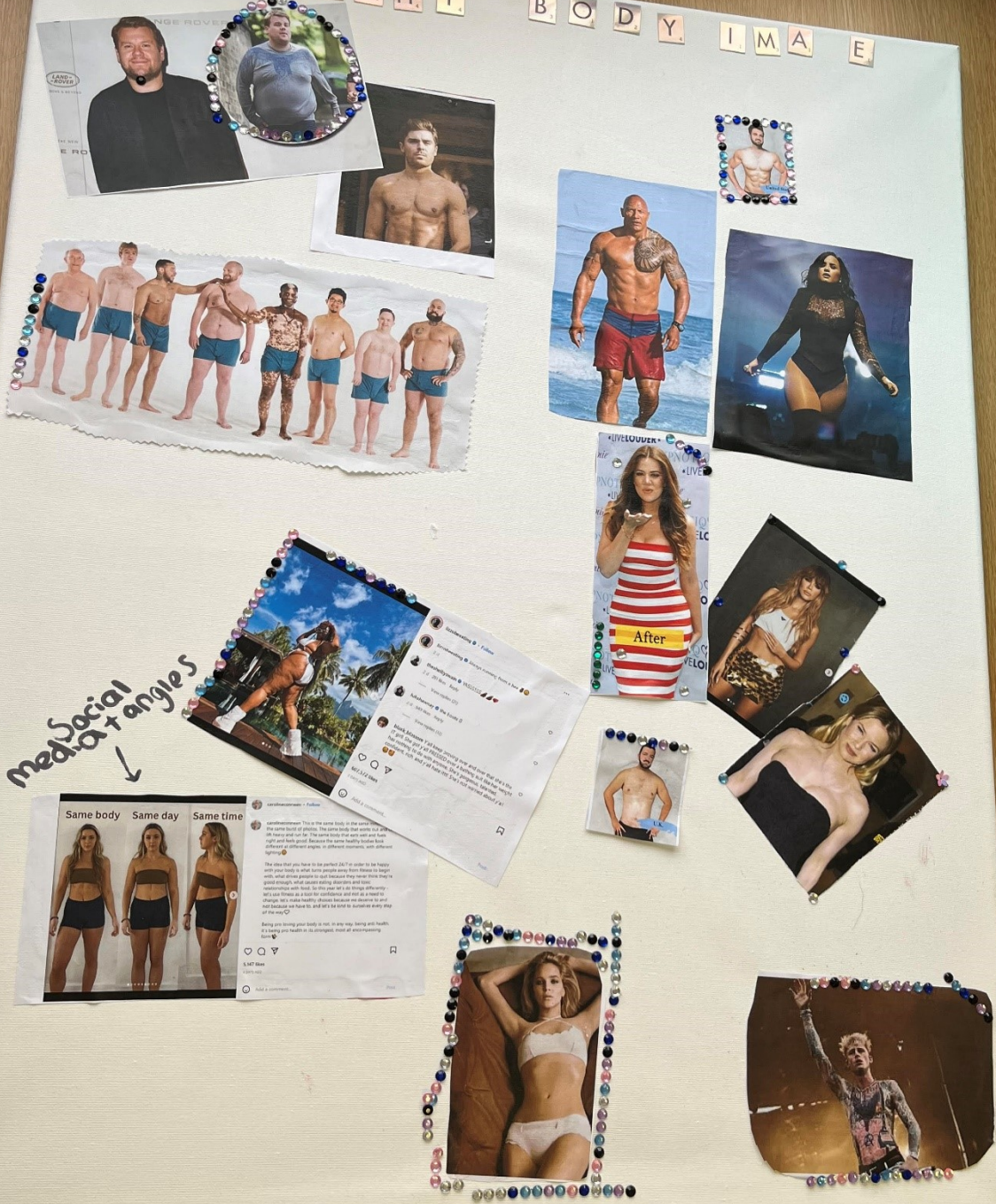
begin You are the best



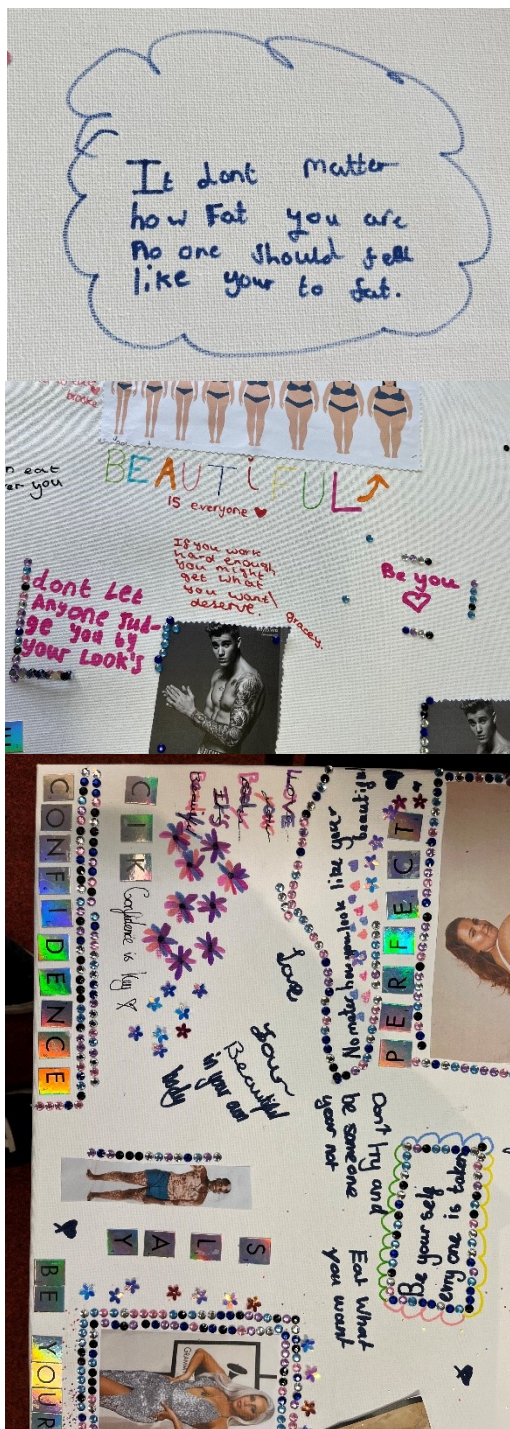
Your Beautiful the way you are don't let anyone change that

Market Drayton

HEALTHY BODY IMAGE



Theme: Body image



From all the youth club sessions youth workers visited, the biggest trend apparent was how young people interpreted 'healthy weight' as body image and describing what a 'beautiful' body is. Young people found it difficult to depict what an unhealthy weight would be as they were aware they didn't want to ostracise people and promoted a more inclusive view on what healthy weight could be. Bullying came up under this as young people did not want to be 'made fun of' for being too 'skinny' or too overweight, with one young person in Market Drayton stating 'it's hard to be healthy because people have different relationships with food'. There was more conversation around people being unhealthily underweight, with young people speaking of hearing stories about mental health issues like eating disorders. Young people discussed how men having issues with their weight and body image is more commonly talked about now than in the past when this type of messaging would be targeted at women. A group of young men in Oswestry spoke about their own issues with weight and body confidence with the youth worker and described wanting to become healthier to 'lose weight'. Young people used images of people looking 'more confident' as having a healthy weight as these pictures showed people happier with themselves

The seniors argued this and discussed the importance of focusing on fitness and stamina in exercise rather than making weight the emphasis in having a healthy body. Older young people distinguished unhealthy weight as being underweight and overweight, with one young person saying 'they're as bad as each other' but if they had a focus, it would be not becoming underweight. Contrasting this, conversations took place about the fine line in promoting body confidence and promoting obesity. The young people acknowledged the health issues overweight people may face like an increased chance of disease and

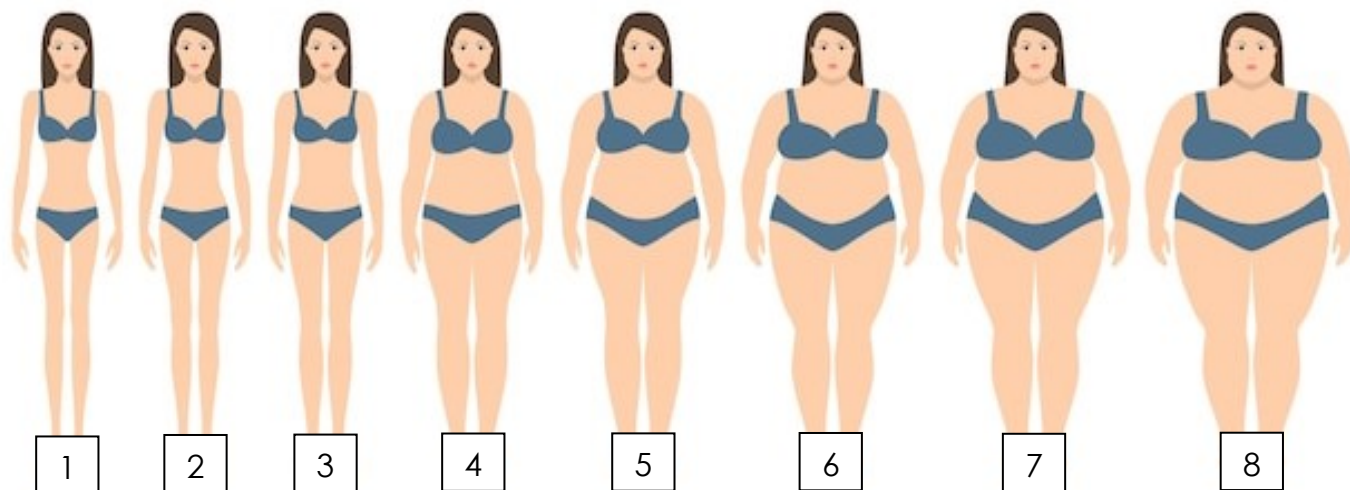
shortened life expectancy but stated if people are happy with themselves, it should not matter.

Theme: Celebrity vs. Average person: where are healthy bodies seen?

The members in Bridgnorth Youth Club Juniors felt that being overweight was a key indicator of having an unhealthy weight and described a healthy weight for men as having a muscular physique, using celebrities like Dwayne Johnson and Zac Efron as being exemplar models of healthy weight. Young people acknowledged they wanted to look like the people they see on their social media feeds and on television and films even though they were aware that although they 'looked better', they may not have healthy bodies or weight. This led to discussions about fitness supplements, the promotion of these products and the reality that some public figures may use illegal substances to enhance their bodies without disclosing this. The young people were not naive to the fact that lots of images were edited or 'photoshopped' which eradicated natural, healthy fat in body parts like arms, thighs and face. One young person in Bridgnorth said they felt 'blindsided' by social media trends like 'what I eat in a day' videos. In these videos, influencers show their audience the meals they eat that day – the young person explained that their food looked healthy and delicious, but they don't have a standard daily routine to uphold as making these meals is 'part of their job' and as a young person, they have not got time to recreate this lifestyle. In addition to this, the singer Lizzo, who is an obese person, was brought up as a positive influence on social media. Although they receive negative comments for their weight, they are known for living a healthy lifestyle by being plant based and sharing their work out routines online which includes cardio, bodyweights and yoga, with their following which then promotes healthy behaviours despite their weight. A young person said they felt 'lucky' as they did no exercise but maintained a healthy weight and accredited the fact not everybody has this same experience.

One image included in packs for young people was a graphic of a scale of different body sizes from an underweight body to an obese body (see following image which includes the image being numbered for the purpose of this report). In two of the youth groups, young people pointed out that they see more of the number five and six when walking around their communities and stated that both ends of the scale were examples of unhealthy weights. Building upon this, young people said when viewing media, they typically saw figures similar to number one, two and three; they explained to youth workers that celebrities are held to a different standard than a 'normal' person but they see more of

these types of bodies and therefore sometimes feel that this is what they should strive towards.



The pressures for celebrities to maintain a healthy weight also impacted young people's perceptions as they witnessed comments made about these bodies by tabloid media and internet 'trolls' - a person who posts or makes inflammatory and insincere messages online and sometimes anonymously.

Theme: Diet and exercise

Diet and exercise were repeatedly mentioned by young people in the various youth clubs. Linking back to the quantitative data, young people said they would probably go to somebody like a fitness trainer or personal trainer before going to a medical professional. A few young people expressed that they did not realise that general practitioners would help people with their weight as they normally only see 'sick or injured' people so they would try a new routine by themselves by walking more. On top of this, young people generally said they would not speak with school nurses about this topic either. In relation to exercise, a group in Market Drayton said they would like to do exercise that does not feel like they are doing anything strenuous and would like to use gym facilities but cannot at the moment.

A huge barrier young people faced was the amount of sugary food available to them that tended to be cheaper and 'tastier' than healthier alternatives. There was some discussions around how healthier food can be affordable but it took more work to make it taste as good as other foods which the young people did not have time for and the more flavourful, healthy options that are quicker to prepare tended to be more expensive. Preservatives were also brought up as even food that seems healthy and quick to prepare may have

other aspects to them that make them 'not good for us'. One young person said 'to have a healthy weight, you have to be on a diet'.

Theme: Cost of living

As with many areas of interest currently, the cost of living crisis was brought up by young people. They explained they were more aware of the cost of food increasing in general and their families changing their shopping habits to accommodate this. A young man in Oswestry said 'I don't do the food shop, my mum does, so I don't decide what I'm [going to] eat that week'. As mentioned repeatedly throughout this report, young people are aware that, on the most part, 'healthier' food is more expensive and more affordable 'healthy' food takes more time and input to make more tasteful.

The young people in these locations did mention that their communities had amenities like swimming pools that they could use, and many of them said they would like to use the gyms nearby but couldn't afford it. They also considered factors that may have an overall negative impact on young people as a whole, such as parents' inability to pay for gym memberships or their lack of availability to drive their children about because of their demanding work schedules.

Theme: School life

A group of five young women in Bridgnorth were particularly enthusiastic in sharing their experiences of eating healthily in school. One young woman was quoted saying 'people think the main problem is what you eat at home and although it is a big problem, no one's looking at what you eat in school [because] that's where we spend most of our time eating'. They emphasised that as they spend five days out of seven at school, most of their time is in this environment and therefore, they probably ate more there than at home. They shared that the meals provided to them do not fit their idea of a healthy, balanced meal - 'pizza, pasta and it's the same thing every day... they've added a salad... but I don't think that's nice'. The young people felt it was hypocritical that schools were pushing the message of eating healthily but not providing healthy and tasty meals while there, saying the salad option available is not of a good quality; 'they telling us to eat healthy... and we go up and its pizza, pasta and rice - it's not very creative'. They compared this to a similar message shared at school about improving the environment by reducing waste, but the food provided is wrapped in plastic which contributes to environmental issues.

The young women expressed that they were limited in what they could bring into school and even if they did make a lunch for school, it would not be as good as if they were eating it at home as they could not prepare it the same.

In addition to the food made available, they expressed that the cost of food at school was expensive for what they were eating. For example, they raised the issue that a cookie at school is 70p but they can go to the shop before or after school and buy a pack of fives cookies for £1, so they would be more likely to do that to save money. For them, it was a matter of convenience to buy the unhealthy food from school rather than buying expensive, healthy food and preparing a meal as they did not feel they had enough time to do this and in either situation, the young people were spending more on food than they would like.

Conclusion

A group of young people in Bridgnorth voiced that they had never been asked their opinions on topics like this and were more instructed on how to be healthy, with the exception of their food technology lessons in school where they studied balanced diets. This consultation has been an opportunity for young people to raise issues that professionals working with them may not have considered before like the difficulty this demographic has in speaking about other people's weights as well as their own. The young people questioned did not want to say something that could offend others as they were more aware of the impact body confidence can have on a person than the impact of an unhealthy weight.

To conclude, young people generally felt positive that they understood what 'healthy weight' meant to them and that they were able to maintain a healthy weight but were aware of some of the obstacles that they may face. A lot of the reasoning linked back to personal influence on maintaining or changing their weight like choosing the right types of foods or deciding whether to take part in exercise, but young people were also aware of exterior influences that may affect others like dependence on others and having access to safe spaces and environments.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the staff and members at:

Wem Junior Youth Club

Wem Junior Plus Youth Club

Oswestry Juniors Youth Club

Oswestry Seniors Youth Club

Market Drayton Youth Club Juniors

Market Drayton Youth Club Seniors

Bridgnorth Youth Club Juniors

Bridgnorth Youth Club Seniors