

# Introduction

**Project Aims:** Analyse the wellbeing of young people in Sheffield and their support network.

**What is SenseMaker®?** SenseMaker® is a distributed ethnographic research tool that enables us to collect lived experiences, from real people, about what matters most to them. By uniquely combining storytelling with statistics, the software allows for the visualization of patterns across the narrative eco-system of a wide and diverse population; whilst also gaining local insight which can be put to use in locally actionable ways.

**Reading this report:** This Emergent Pattern report displays the high level patterns generated by respondent's self-signification of their own narratives into the software. It includes an overview of the context of those who took part, followed by the overall patterns and then some emerging narrative themes as analysed by members of the Cynefin Centre team. Interpretations from a preliminary sense-making workshop with members of the HPG are included throughout where applicable. The output of this report is designed to complement further workshopping and analysis of the data from a greater number of contextualised perspectives.

# Methodology

## SenseMaker



The study uses the SenseMaker® approach to collect, describe, visualize, and make sense of data. The data is collected via a dedicated project site (Collector), accessible via a secure smartphone/ tablet application. Story collectors were trained to go into the field and collect stories from participants by using the app.

Participants were asked to identify the character they most related to on an image, and then based on that share a story about what it is like to grow up/raise a family/ be a professional supporting young people in Sheffield. Following sharing this, participants were then asked to indicate a deeper level of meaning to their story around a pre-designed “signification framework”, containing “modulators” of experience (elements that shape and affect it). The resulting patterns from participants’ “self-signification” will be shared in the pages that follow.

The language used in the design of the tool is intended to contain a level of ambiguity to allow for multiplicity of interpretation, with the individual narratives providing explanation. This is in order to avoid researcher interpretation bias and entrained patterns of thinking which come from expertise in the field, but also to acknowledge the experience-based nature of quantitative data. Once the initial framework has been designed, testing took place to ensure the right balance of ambiguity/ clarity in the wording of the tool, and that the language is appropriate for its intended audience.

Any SenseMaker collection is always ideally situated in a wider context of collective sense-making. Rather than a one-way collection producing a standalone report, it is always encouraged to take some of these findings and present them in various ways through workshopping techniques, to enable mass interpretation based on contextual knowledge and diverse perspectives.

# Overall Findings

- Young people appear more optimistic than adults, while professionals report greater pessimism than parents/carers, suggesting higher stress levels among professionals.
- While young people generally feel more listened to than parents/carers and professionals, on average all groups skew toward feeling respected—though significant portions, especially among parents/carers, report feeling ignored.
- Perspective gap on support networks: Young people cite family and friends as primary support, while professionals underestimate peer support – highlighting a clear disconnect. Parents/carers also rely more on close networks than professional services/support.
- People and relationships are the the strongest factor influencing/shaping people's experiences . However, Young people identify the role of Place significantly more that parents or Professionals do.
- Divergent life focus in stories: Parents/carers emphasized home life, professionals focused on school/college, while young people highlighted both community/neighborhood and school/college, showing more varied experiences.
- Professionals feels although they have a lot less choice as compared with the other respondent groups.

# Overall Findings

- Children's mixed views on Sheffield: Most enjoy living there, citing fun, kind locals, and supportive friends/family making it "home." However, some express anxiety/sadness due to bullying or domestic arguments, while others feel ambivalent about lacking agency.
- Parents and carers mentioned feeling at home in community where support networks were strong. For many however there are feelings of isolation and hardship, especially when caring for young people with additional support needs.
- Professionals are committed to supporting young people but face challenges due to lack of external support, impacting outcomes and wellbeing, while schools struggle with overwhelming demand, especially for SEND.
- Mixed responses on changes to be made: The most frequent answer was 'no' or blank—suggesting either difficulty articulating needs or contentment. Among those who responded, the top request was to feel more heard and respected, followed by desires for help with social skills and addressing racism/aggression.
- Parents/carers requests for change, especially those of children with additional needs, emphasized social connection and better signposting of resources due to time and energy constraints.
- Professionals requests for change: Earlier assessments, more resources, and staff training (SEND/racism). Greater focus on wellbeing for staff/students.

# Who took part?

## Demographic data

A

Total number of responses: 414

199 from young people on the main collector

13 from young people on the simplified collector

47 from parents & carers

155 from professionals

# Stones Canvas

Place the marker where best represents you...

Young People



Young people most strongly related to the positive characters such as “together/friendship”, whilst parents more commonly related to negative characters indicating “isolation, exclusion and frustration”. Professionals identified most strongly with characters representing “help, support and concern for others” as well as “struggle/fear”

Parent

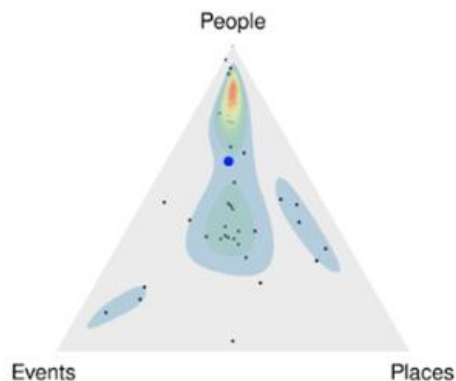


Professional



# Emerging Patterns

## How to read a Triad



The following pages display high level patterns, some of which are on triangular shapes. These “triads” contain patterns of dots that correspond to the responses received from each individual study respondent. When answering the question, the respondent had to consider the balance/ tension of the three elements described on each corner of the triangle in relation to the narrative they shared. They then marked their responses accordingly by dragging a marker to the position on the shape that best reflects their story.

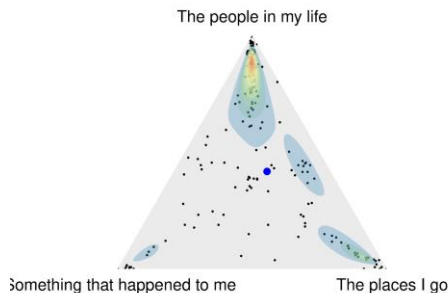
The heatmaps: a type of graphical visualisation that looks at the density of responses. It's largely used to understand where there are common beliefs or blind spots, the patterns can indicate a cultural pattern or belief system.

- The darker the shading the denser the pattern.
- The red simply shows where the stories most tightly cluster together.
- The Average (mean) response is indicated by a larger blue dot.

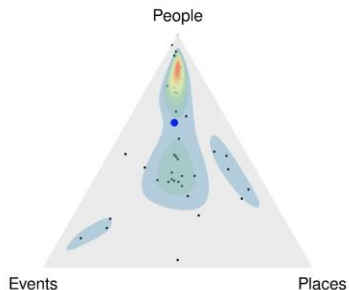
# TRIAD 1:

What I have just told you is mainly about...

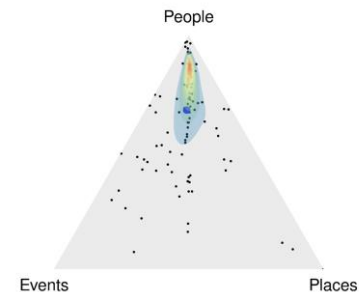
Young people



Parent/carer



Professional

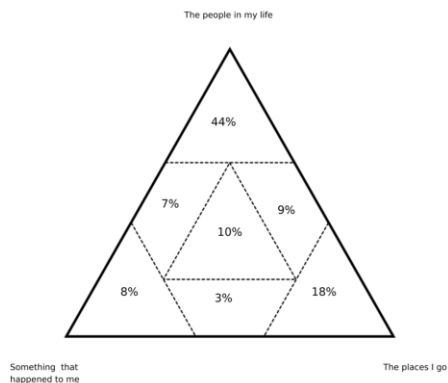


This question seeks to understand the factors that play a key role in shaping people's responses. Patterns show across all three respondent groups that People is the strongest factor. However, Young people identify the role of Place significantly more than parents or Professionals.

# TRIAD 1 Young People (YP)

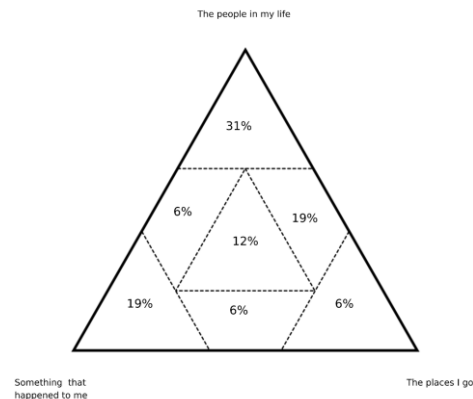
What I have just told you is mainly about...

## Primary school age (4-11)



I/A = 16 Skipped = 3 filter n = 153 %age = 100% filter N/A = 16  $\mu$  = L:23 T: 40 R: 37

## Secondary school age (11-16)

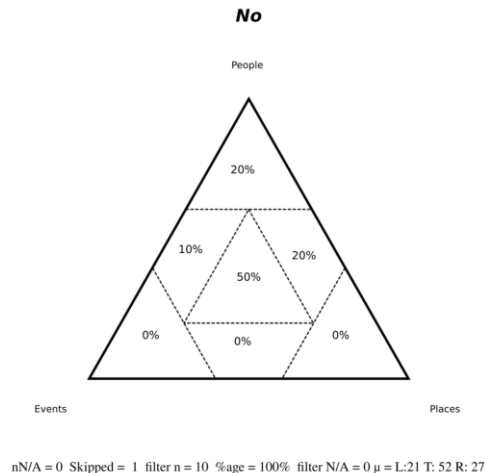
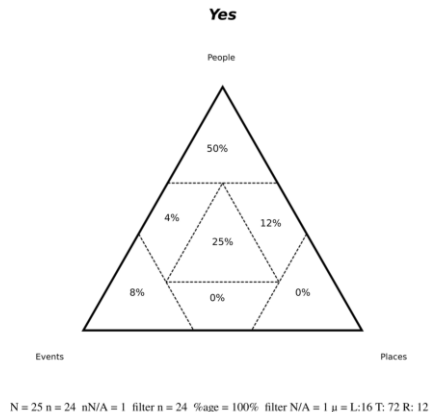


N = 19 n = 16 nN/A = 3 filter n = 16 %age = 100% filter N/A = 3  $\mu$  = L:33 T: 44 R: 22

Among young people there was some variation among age groups about what they chose to share. Primary school age children were more likely to say their story was about 'the people in my life' than secondary school students (44% v 31%). Secondary school pupils were more likely to say it was a mix of the people in the lives and the places they go (19% v 9% for primary). Secondary school students were more likely to say it concerned something that happened to them (19% v 8% for primary school pupils).

# TRIAD 1 Parents - does your child have SEN?

What I have just told you is mainly about...

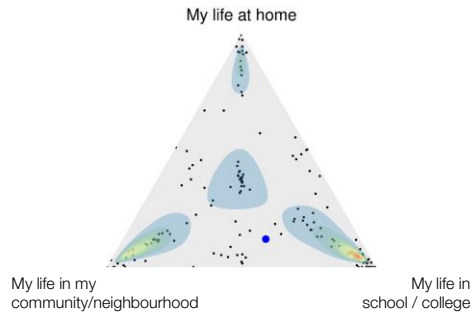


Parents of children with SEN were more likely to say their story was about people (50% v 20%). Parents of children without SEN were much more likely to place their story between people and places (20% v 12%) and were also twice as likely likely to place their story in the middle of the triad indicating a mixture of all three factors (50% v 25%). Half of all parents of children with SEN indicated that people were the sole focus of their story. By contrast, half of all parents of those children without SEN find events, place and people of similar significance. This is perhaps indicative of the greater importance of support systems to parents of children with SEN.

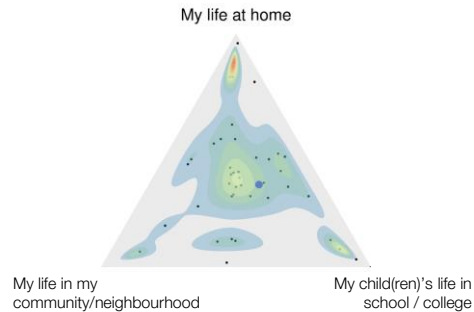
# TRIAD 2:

What I have just told you is mainly about...

Young people



Parent/carer



Professional

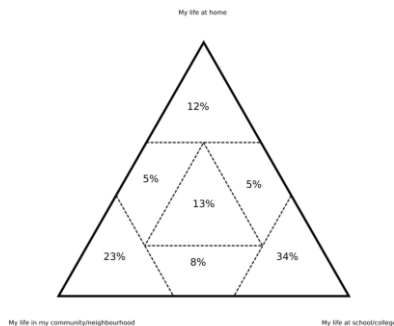


In this question, participants were asked to contextualise their stories across various aspects of their lives to explore how home, community and school relate in their experiences of growing up here. The patterns above show differences between the three groups. For parents and carers the dominant cluster of stories fall into home life with some in the middle between all three, for professionals into school/ college, and for young people we see more extreme placings in the three corners, with more of an emphasis on community/ neighbourhood alongside school/ college.

# TRIAD 2 YP

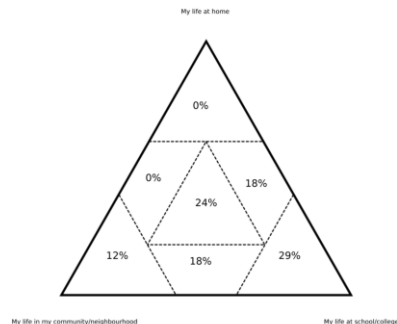
What I have just told you is mainly about...

**Primary school age (4-11)**



I/A = 15 Skipped = 5 filter n = 152 %age = 100% filter N/A = 15  $\mu$  = L:36 T: 11 R: 53

**Secondary school age (11-16)**

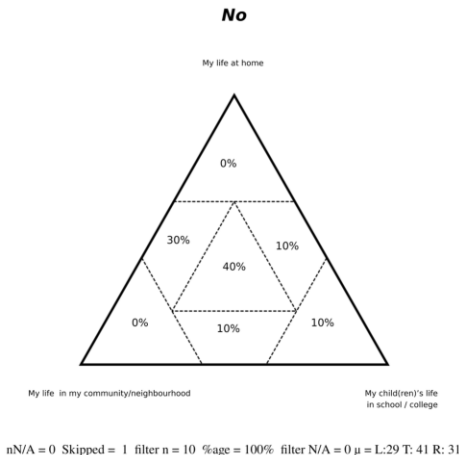
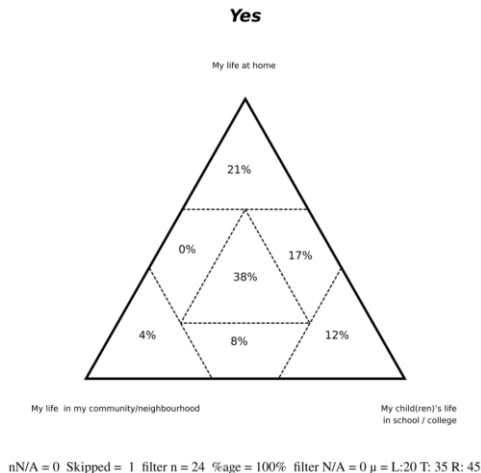


nN/A = 1 Skipped = 1 filter n = 17 %age = 100% filter N/A = 1  $\mu$  = L:27 T: 15 R: 58

Secondary school children were much more likely to indicate their story had a mixture of all three elements, while primary school children typically selected one corner of the triad in higher numbers. This may be in part due to the more sophisticated cognition of older children who can identify the links between the three areas more easily.

# TRIAD 2 Parents - does your child have SEN?

What I have just told you is mainly about...



Parents of children with SEN were more likely to say their story was about life at home (21% v 0%). A similar percentage of parents across both groups said that their story was about all three factors (38% of parents of children with SEN and 40% of parents of children without SEN)

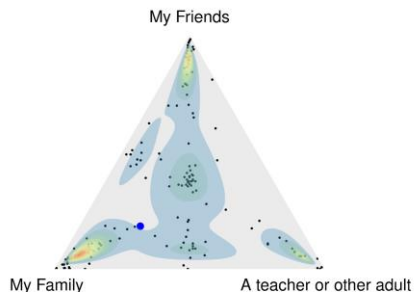
# TRIAD 3:

**In what I have told you any help I received came from....**

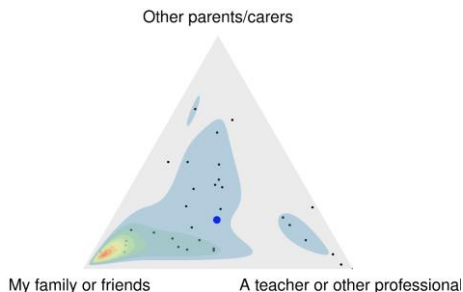
**In what I have just told you have just told you any help I received came from....**

**In what I have just told you young people received help mainly from...**

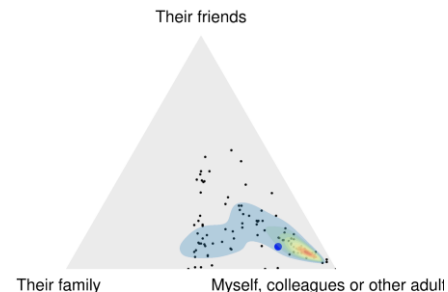
Young people



Parent/carer



Professional

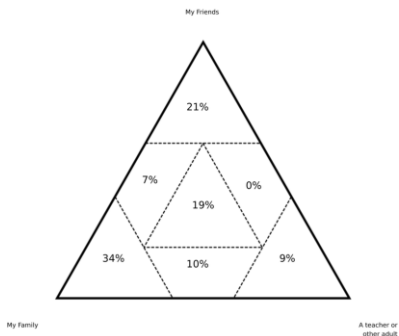


It is important to note that while young people and parents/carers were asked about where they receive support, professionals were asked their opinion on where young people received support. There is a sharp distinction between the pattern for professionals and the patterns for young people. Young people reported that family and friends as were their key support network with notably fewer turning to teachers/professionals for support. Professionals by contrast thought that almost no young people received support from their friends. This is a clear difference of perspective on young people's support network. Parents notably turned to their family and friends rather than their wider networks, whether that be other parents/carers or other teachers and professionals, for support.

# TRIAD 3 YP

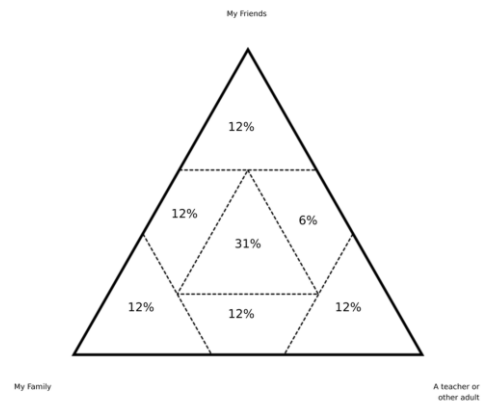
In what I have just told you any help I received came from

**Primary school age (4-11)**



I/A = 26 Skipped = 7 filter n = 139 %age = 100% filter N/A = 26  $\mu$  = L:61 T: 17 R: 22

**Secondary school age (11-16)**

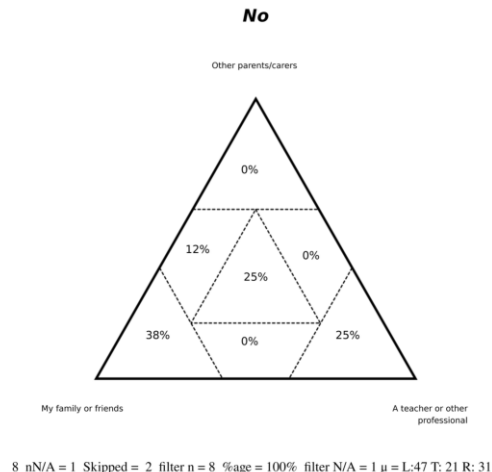
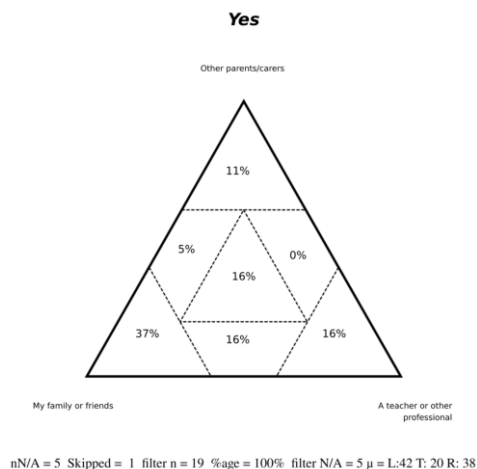


nN/A = 2 Skipped = 1 filter n = 16 %age = 100% filter N/A = 2  $\mu$  = L:46 T: 24 R: 30

Primary school children were much more likely to say that they received help from their family (34%) than secondary school children (12%) Secondary school children were again much more likely to place their story in the middle of a triad than primary school children (31% v 19%)

# TRIAD 3 Parents - does your child have SEN?

In what I have just told you any help I received came from



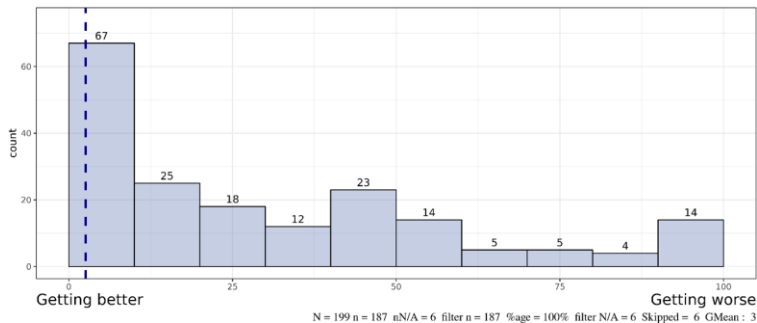
Similar percentages said that help came from family and friends (37% for parents of children with SEN v 38% of parents of children without SEN.) Parents of children with SEN were less likely to report that help came from teachers or other professionals (16% v 25%). 11% of parents with SEN said that help came from other parents/carers whereas no parents of children without SEN said this (0%).

# DYAD 1

I feel...

Young People

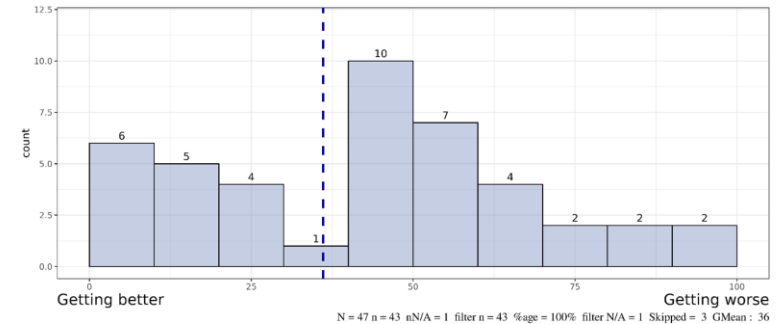
*Over time, I feel like things in my life are...*



Young people are strikingly more optimistic than adult respondents. Professionals lean more towards the view that things are getting worse than parents/carers with the latter group reporting mixed feelings and being fairly divided. This may indicate that significant stress or burden is being placed on professionals.

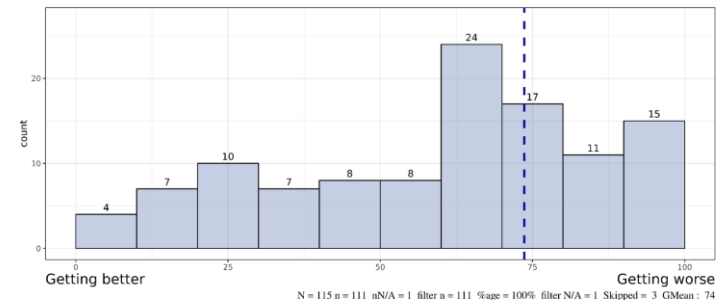
Parents

*Over time I feel like being a parent/carer is....*



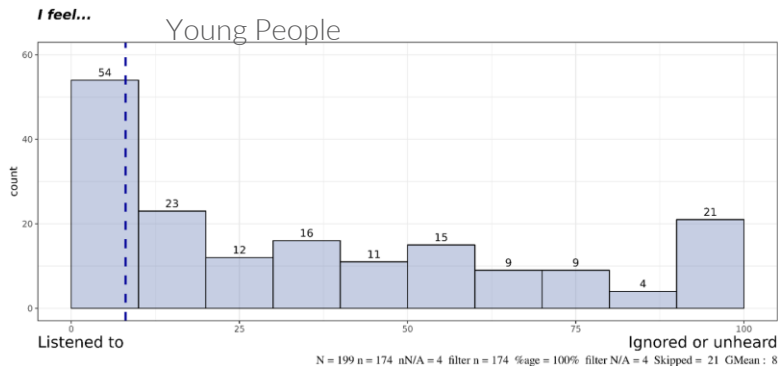
Professionals

*Over time I feel like being professional working with children is...*



# DYAD 2

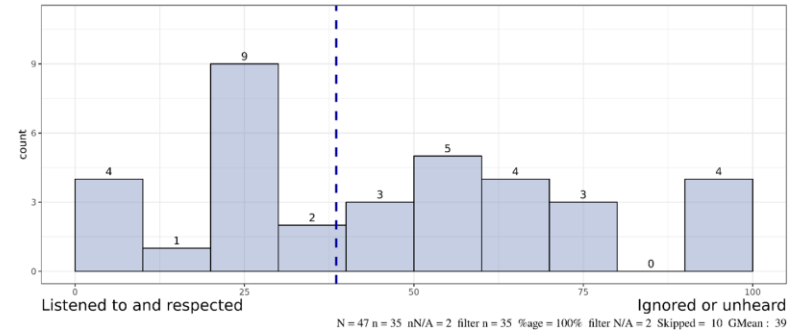
## I felt...



Generally the patterns here indicate that young people feel relatively more listened to than those in caring or professional roles. Although the skew is towards feeling listened to / respected to all three groups. Despite the stronger mean average towards the left for young people, there is still a considerable cluster in the extreme right of feeling ignored. This is borne out in some of the narratives from parents/ carers especially in the following pages of this report.

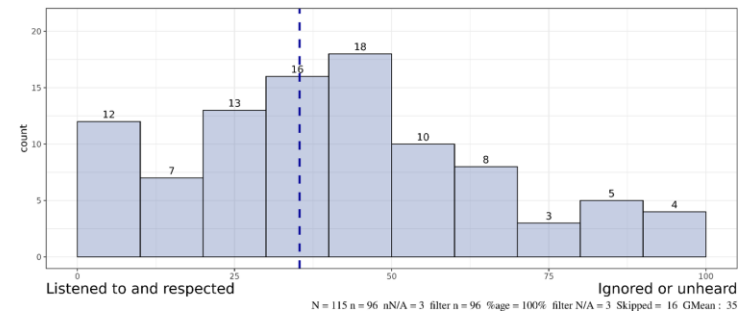
## Parents / carers

### As a parent/carer I feel...



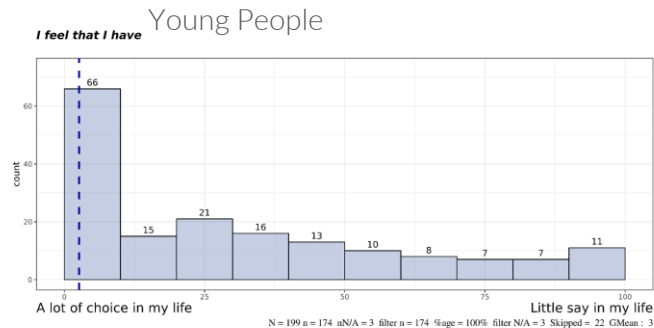
## Professionals

### In my professional life I feel...



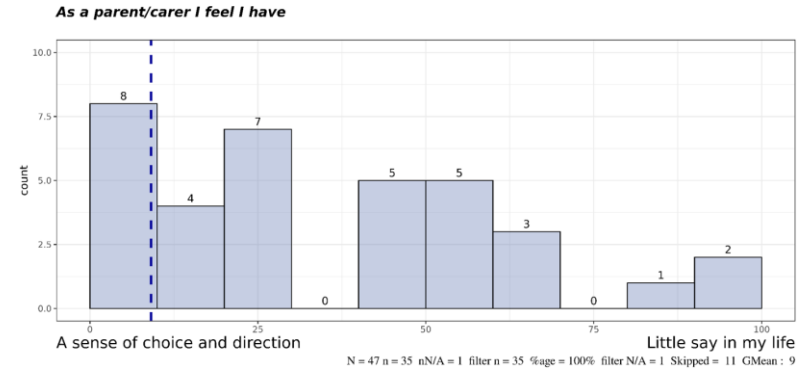
# DYAD 3

## Choice...

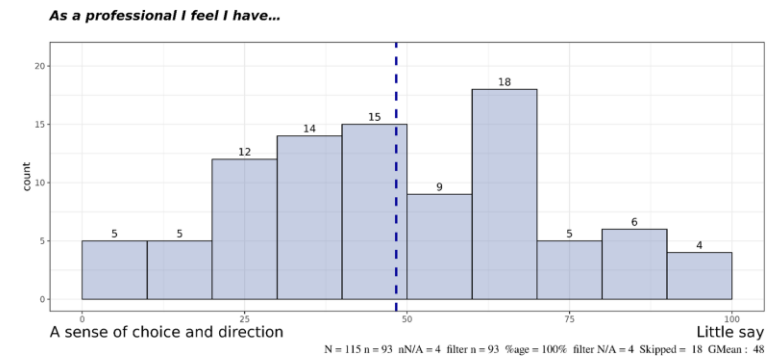


All respondent groups identify that on the whole they have a degree of choice, however, professionals identify having significantly less sense of choice compared with parents/carers or young people.

## Parents



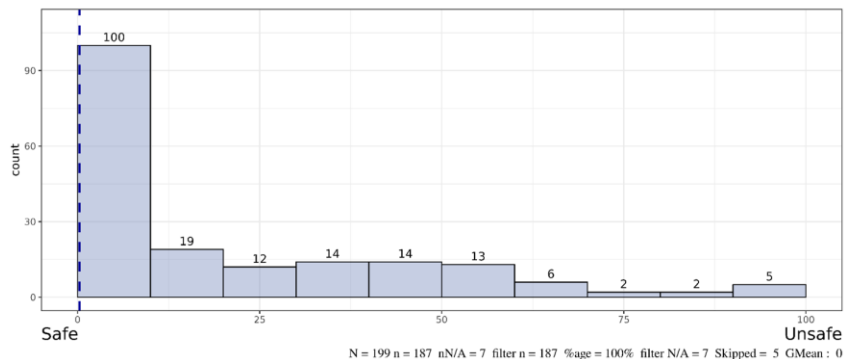
## Professionals



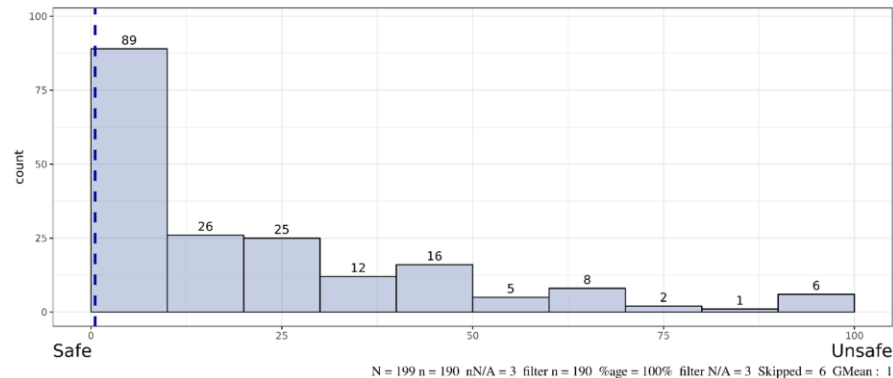
# DYAD Young People Well-being

## Safety...

*I felt... 1*



*In my life generally, most of the time I feel...*

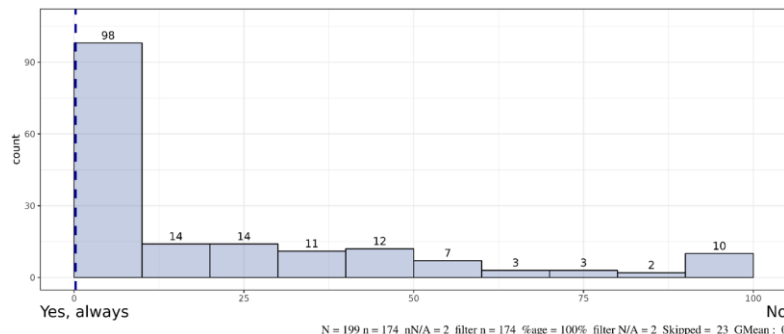


A reassuringly large proportion of young people report feeling safe . There is however a minority who report feeling unsafe. Digging into the stories indicates the main cause of mixed feelings around safety appears to be witnessing arguments at home, feeling lonely at school and more rarely discriminatory comments.

# DYAD Young People Well-being

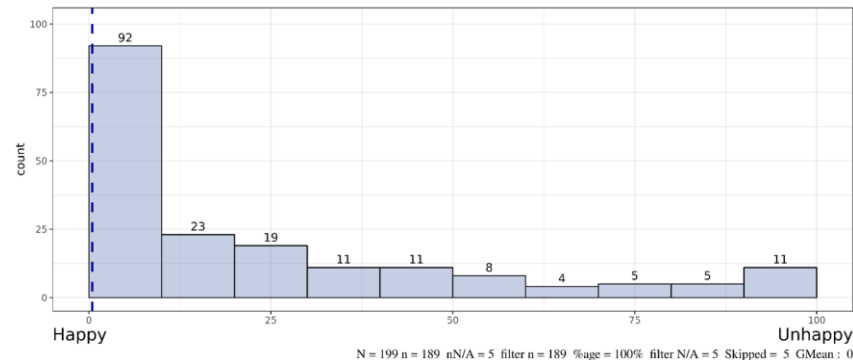
## I felt...

*If you needed any help would you know who to talk to or where to go?*

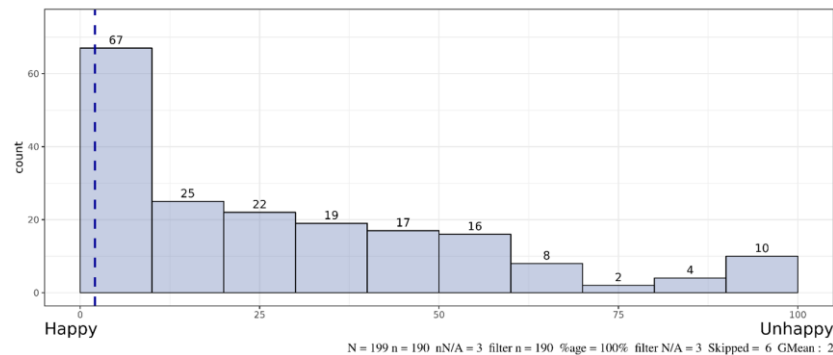


Again the patterns are reassuringly positive reflecting a generally supportive and safe environment for young people in Sheffield. Where there are outliers who lean towards feeling unhappy, the reasons stated are difficulties with loneliness, boredom and issues at home. Children who report not knowing where to go appear to have usually have a lower writing level (based on the story provided).

*I felt...*



*In my life generally, most of the time I feel... 1*



## Young Person Narrative Themes

The most common themes expressed by children are enjoying living in Sheffield due to a sense of fun and the kindness of local people, enjoying the supportive friends & family who make Sheffield 'home'. There were smaller cohort who expressed anxiety and sadness, the most common reasons given was bullying; a less common reason was witnessing arguments at home. Ambivalence was expressed about Sheffield by some children usually tied to a feeling that they lacked a sense of agency.

**Confidence, happiness and excitement:** *I feel confident and happy living in Sheffield. Excited because there's lots of things you can do in Sheffield that are fun."*

**Kindness, generosity and loving.** *"I have chosen this one because there is always people to support you through tough times. There are kind and nice people in Sheffield that are here to help you."*

**Happy lots of friends:** *I've grew up with a lot of friends. Who really care about me and it makes me feel happy in life."*

**My family:** *"bicus (sic) I love being with family"*

**I wish there were kinder people here I can't trust anyone** *"I think it is a safe place to grow up in .There are horrible things like racism , self harm , crashes and bullying there is so much more going on then people think there is no one to talk to without it being spreaded no one to be friends with without them talking behind your back it is horrible . I hate how this world is ."*

**sad and scared:** *"mum and dad argue a lot"*

**Free falling:** *"Because you can feel a bit like you are not in control of your life. Other people make decisions for you when you are growing up. Some teachers don't listen and school can be frustrating when you get blamed for things you haven't done or you can't help."*

## Parent / Carer Narratives themes

**Parents and carers mentioned feeling at home in community where support networks were strong. For many however there are feelings of isolation and hardship, especially when caring for young people with additional support needs.**

**“Fun, adventurous:** *I’ve got a good community, involved with my kids. There’s quite a few things to do. Eg Norfolk, football club.”*

**“Chaos, love:** *Being a parent is hard, 2 children, work full time. Difficult with older kids. Difficult to know what support is available. School has always been my support, very supportive.”*

**“Overwhelmed and tired:** *I am struggling and it is facing away. I don’t always access support and services as much as I could. I am a single parent and don’t have family in Sheffield.”*

**“Collaborative working:** *We are a split family and we have worked together to solve a problem for one of our children who felt their voices was not being heard. It doesn’t always happen that way. worked hard as separate families to make sure she felt involved and had a voice. she is in mainstream and is transitioning”*

**“Everyday life:** *Constant struggle, constant battle every day. For example help is practically not available, you are on your own and isolated. Both parents can only go places together with help at home. No adult conversation with non verbal 16 year old. Less support now than in the past. No PAs since February.”*

**“Outdoors, family, lucky:** *I am lucky to have a great family and a great job - we enjoy living in Sheffield and all the opportunities it brings to spend time outside and visiting interesting places.”*

## Professional Narrative Themes

Professionals express genuine care about the young people they support, and their work can be very rewarding. However, many struggle to feel understood or supported by professionals outside their field, which hinders their ability to act in the child's best interest and negatively impacts their own well-being. Additionally, many reference schools facing growing demands, with needs often exceeding their capacity, especially with regard to SEND.

**“poor systems and poor communication:** I feel like I am holding onto our pupils as tightly as I can but that any second I will let (or more) down. Joint working across agencies is very difficult and it can feel as though you have to go through hoop after hoop and at the end the case doesn't meet a threshold, or the child is at the end of an episode of care so we have to start again. The systems are too complex for our families to navigate and I feel as though they give up.”

**“too much need, too little space, not enough staff:** There are lots of children with lots of need which I do not think we are getting to because we are trying to reach so many, our school go over and above, we do a lot but the need is so high!”

**“Fulfilled, stressed, responsibility, love:** I am in a role where I get the chance to make a tangible difference to students lives. I also get the chance on a daily basis to feel like I'm genuinely helping staff. it is on that branch because relationships are really important to me in a professional sense as well as personally) but also on occasions, despite working as part of a team, sometimes I can feel overwhelmed by a huge workload and actually not always that well supported by colleagues. However, this also stems from me not having a full understanding of their work loads too.”

**“Stressed, tired and sad:** Clinging on for dear life during the past few years due to a high level of SEND pupils and managing behaviour.

**“Where do we go from here?** The child has a lot of professional support, however not thorough enough to help the child to be where they should be. There are obstacles and systems that have stopped this young person from potentially being accurately assessed. The child's needs do not 'fit neatly into an identifiable box' which has hindered the right professional's/ services being in place at the right time.

## Young People: Thinking about what you have told us would anything have helped make things better for you?

It is important to note first that 'no' or leaving the question blank was the most frequent response. In some cases, this may indicate that young people struggle to articulate their needs or to understand what type of support, even in theory, could be available. In other cases, it is an expression of contentment. The most common response after this was children wanting to be listened to more and to feel they are respected. Two other less common concerns were support with social and relational skills and wanting to see racism and aggression tackled.

*"Tips on where to go or what to do if you need help"*

*"No, I feel everything is fine..."*

*"Finding people that are actually me friends and making me feel liked"*

*"If there would be protests and more rules on protesting against others. Last Summer, there was EDL riots."*

*"i would want to be listenend (sic) to more in my life."*

*"Telling schools to stop bullying and racism"*

*"more respect from the world."*

## Parent/Carer: Thinking about what you have told us would anything have helped make things better for you?

**Community support and social connection came out strongly as a theme here, especially for those caring for children with additional support needs, who might not have the time or energy to reach out. Many parents/ carers asked for more signposting of available resources and services.**

*“complaint procedures, settings and professional development in every professions to handle anyone professionally not on their own emotions., social services to support what you need for not what they want think and they want”*

*“More community support. Having more communication from school. Financial support.”*

*“I think advice and knowledge for stages of childhood to teenhood are largely ignored or not spoken about or resourced. Especially for the neurodivergent community”*

*“Playgroups, community spaces, parks”*

*“Knowledge about available services and benefits, we found out right At the last minute about what we could access. Possibly due to covid”*

*“More time, better planning and more support at school”*

*“More advice at the early stages, information on groups where you can meet other parents in the same situation, more understanding of my child's needs in school”*

## Professionals: Thinking about what you have told us would anything have helped you to better support children and young people?

Resources and support were commonly cited themes here, alongside earlier and better assessments for specialist children needs. Some professionals requested better training and time for research for professionals around social issues such as racism, as well as SEND. The need to consider performance and success in relation to social and emotional wellbeing for happier staff and more supported students was also cited.

*"Earlier and better assessments were mentioned to ensure better support for young people."*

*"More training on SEND"*

*"More funding for SEND schools and more schools purpose built opened."*

*"Racial literacy from teachers..removing systemic racism."*

*"People who have control over spending and budgeting need to come and spend time in school. Ask teachers what they think when deciding on finance and spending."*

*"Services involved were brave enough to point out parent's responsibilities and their own responsibilities to safeguard a child".*

*"Being able to support children and young people well requires a positive and supportive team with strong and good relationships within the team. Within this in place, we can support children better. When this is missing, children's support can be really poor."*

## Open-text Responses - Any other comments - Young People

**Children expressed enjoying school, but there were also responses indicating concerns about bullying. A few children wanted to mention that they moved to Sheffield from other places or took the opportunity to tell us a bit more about themselves. Some children appeared to expressed what was bothering them in an indirect, incomplete way.**

*“ I like the way the teachers teach”*

*“Schools fun”*

*“We would like more parks in Sheffield. A lot of them are either old or nearly broken.”*

*“I’m scared to be bullied”*

*“I like that we’re all a community and like a big family”*

*“i love my school”*

*“could be tricky if you don’t have the right help”*

*“I have lots of allergies. I am a vegetarian.”*

*“everything is expensive”*

*“I didn’t grow up here I moved here”*

## Open-text Responses - Any other comments - Parents

**Parents expressed that they found parenting demanding and fears and concerns around managing a child with SEN were shared. Some parents wanted more communication from the school while others were concerned about gaps in support services for their children.**

*“ I would advise people if they do have children to think twice it takes over your life”*

*“ It is terrifying because there are no easily Accessible services available for people over 19 with severe and complex needs”*

*“Things are Ok, having a child with autism can be demanding and relentless”*

*“I wanted the same opportunities for my sons. One has SEND EHCP.... I wanted him to go to secondary mainstream but no school wanted him.....Special school has been brilliant but it has isolated him and us from his community” (abridged)*

*“Support from charities is often the most beneficial”*

*“It’s difficult being a parent to a child who excels in academia but struggles with what is deemed the simple side of life....How can we help her understand or help prepare her if we don’t know she’s had a tough day” (abridged)*

*“There is no support if your child is in crisis”*

## Open-text Responses - Any other comments - Professionals

**Professionals were concerned about cuts to services leading to high thresholds for support. Some professionals reported concerns about racism's effects on students. Finding the current context challenging was a common theme as was enjoying parts of the job. .**

*"It can be very rewarding when everyone works together and we implement the agreed plan for the child, monitoring progress over time and readjusting."*

*"It is becoming increasingly difficult to do what feels like the right thing for the children in my class."*

*"Well being and emotional health of students facing racism needs capturing"*

*"Support services for young people have very high thresholds for accessing services and extremely long waiting lists which means students are not supported."*

*"I absolutely love my job and would so like to progress"*

*"It can be incredibly satisfying, but is frustrating to see the provision we are delivering becoming narrower and more concerned with academic achievement rather than the needs of the students themselves."*