Hackney Dreaming

Understanding the aspirations of young people in Hackney

OFF CENTRE

Contents

April 2012

Introduction

The relationship between an individual's life chances and the environment in which they grew up has been the focus of social researchers, the government, and social commentators for some time. Research carried out by the Government Department for Children, School and Families in 2008 concluded that children who are brought up in more deprived neighbourhoods are 'less likely to develop ambitious, achievable aspirations', and also tend to lack the confidence needed to formulate and pursue any aspirations.[1] There is no established consensus, however, as to how far the local environment is responsible for shaping the aspirations and worldview of individuals as they grow up, and how much weight should be attributed to the individual in developing and achieving aspirations.

This research was carried out behalf of Off Centre, which provides counselling, therapy, advocacy, advice and information services to young people aged between 11-25 years old in Hackney. It offers these services to young people free of charge, assures complete confidentiality, and seeks to enable young people to have greater control over their lives. Off Centre was hoping to find answers to a number of questions, so that it might refine its services to meet local need: firstly, what

the aspirations of young people in Hackney are; how their surroundings and the local area might impact on their aspirations and their lifestyle; what barriers they feel they face in pursuing their aspirations, and what things cause them to worry. As such the research looks both at the individual and the local environment concurrently, and whilst it does not presume to offer a conclusion to the debate outlined above, it does hope to provide some insight into young people's experiences within the Hackney area.

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[1] *Aspiration and Attainment amongst Young People in Deprived Communities Analysis and Discussion Paper,* Department for Children, Schools and Families, The Cabinet Office, Dec 2008, p. 2.

Chapter One:

Aspirations and success

Summary

Young people in Hackney often see success as being the result of individual effort and expressed relative optimism that they can change their future. However, young people often do not have long term plans.

Despite this optimism, many young people expressed concern and confusion about specific aspects of achieving their goals, with employment being seen as a key issue.

Aspirations and success

One of the research aims was to acquire an understanding of the aspirations of young people from the Hackney area, and how they perceived success.

Perhaps the overarching finding was that success was very much seen to be the result of individual effort. The findings of the research suggest that young people do maintain ambitions for their future and, indeed, there is a great deal of self-belief in what young people feel they are able to achieve. One discussion group participant said, *"it is what you do with what you have… you can go along with the stereotype, oh I live in Hackney and so I'm not going to achieve anything or you can push above it and say I came from Hackney but I'm going to make something of myself…"* Another cited the example of Alan Sugar: *"It depends on the individual person, when you think about it, look at*

Lord Alan Sugar and what he's done, he started out on a stall and now he has a multi-million pound business and everything else and he also works for the government. And he comes from round here, he comes from Clapton, and so it just shows you that anyone can do it, it just depends whether you want to get up and do it or not." Another highlighted the need for young people to be proactive and take responsibility for achieving their own success: *"If you read you will find the information you're looking for if you want something so bad, you have to look it up, you can't just sit there and wait for it to happen."* In this regard, many young people felt optimistic about their futures. Similarly only ten per cent of respondents answering the self-completion questionnaire did not feel that they exercised much control over achieving their hopes and aspirations in the future, affirming this idea that being successful is down to the individual.[2]

Nevertheless, whilst young people talked about taking responsibility for achieving their own success, it emerged that few of them had a strategy or a plan for doing so, and were primarily focused on the short-term. According to a number of professionals that were interviewed, this short-term focus appeared to concentrate heavily on

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[2] Q8 How much control do you feel you have to achieve your hopes and aspirations? Base: 78. N.B a high rating is defined as a rating of 8-10 on a 10 point scale, a medium rating being between 5-7 and a low rating considered a rating of 0-4.

making money. One individual who runs a local youth project said, *"I never really feel like they have aspirations in a way, apart from getting money…"* One interviewee who works with young people in a medical capacity talked about how we currently live in a society of *"instant gratification"*; of *"I want it and I want it now."* It was felt by many of the professionals that were interviewed that this desire for money combined with a focus solely on the immediate future undermined young people's ability to think ahead and plan a route to achieving greater things. Rather, young people prefer to take *'the quick option'*: as one of the professionals remarked, *"they need to teach them that you can succeed in life if you work hard. There are people that are working hard that they might not be rich, but they're just normal hard working people in this country that are working hard. And there's nothing wrong with that and they need to see there's nothing wrong with that."* Another interviewee explained that many of the young people he worked with had no concept of putting 'the time and effort' into something to learn how to do it, and instead perceived challenges as things that they either could do or could not do outright. If they struggled with a task they would simply abandon it. A further example that was provided was the reluctance of young people to complete apprenticeships and work for nothing, even if it created opportunities for the future. For the professionals interviewed, the answer is to help young people understand that success is often achieved in stages, and in order to overcome this 'I want it now' mentality, there should be a concerted
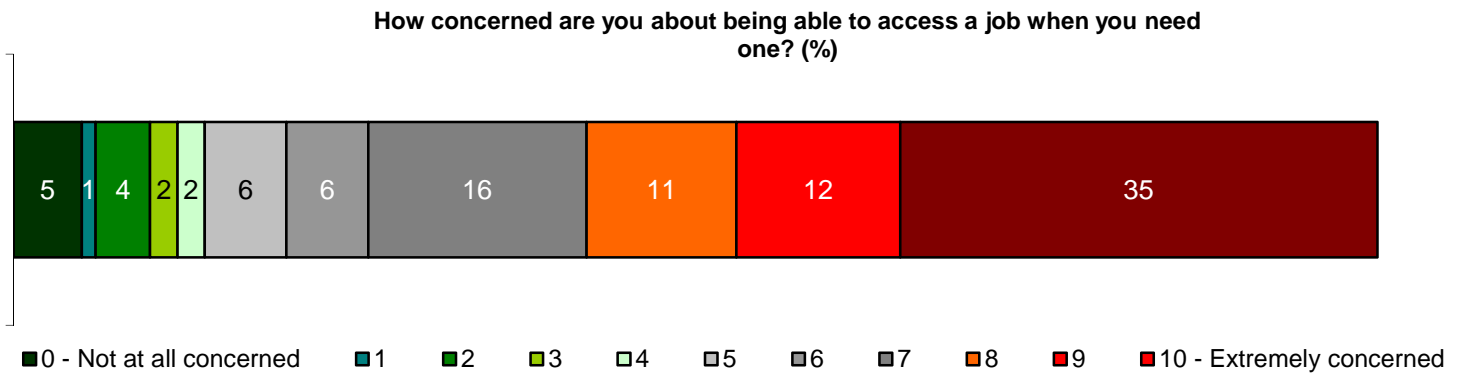
effort to show young people what the longer-term gains of working towards a longer-term goal might be.

When asked directly about the future, many of the young people who took part in the discussion groups said that they felt confused and apprehensive. Young people who participated in the research hoped to create their own business to provide employment opportunities. One individual in particular hoped to set up her own business, but acknowledged, as several other young people did, that she had a skills gap in this area.

This lack of certainty about the future was reinforced by the results of the questionnaire, particularly in relation to being able to get a job. Almost three in five of respondents gave the lowest confidence ratings when asked how they felt that they would be able to access a job when they need one.[3]

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[3] Q1e How concerned are you about the following in Hackney? – Being able to access a job. Base: 83.

How concerned are you about being able to access a job when you need one? (%)

5	1	4	2	2	6	6	16	11	12	35

■0 - Not at all concerned ■1 ■2 ■3 □4 □5 ■6 ■7 ■8 ■9 ■10 - Extremely concerned

Again, however, young people profess that they are responsible for overcoming any uncertainty about their plans. One discussion group participant who felt tentative about her plans for the next year and tried to explain what might make her feel more confident said, "*Just knowing what my options are for the future because I don't really know at the moment and there is just such a variety of things that I can't seem to focus on exactly what I want to do in terms of a career path, it's just the options I don't know which obviously **I need to find out**.*" (Writers' emphasis).

While the young people who participated in this research are ambitious and accept that they are responsible for their own success, often they were unclear about the immediate steps they needed to take, or had not taken the steps that they admitted they ought to have taken by now. Very often they were focused on the short-term rather than forming strategic long-term plans and working towards a goal that would pay off further along down the line.

Chapter Two: Influences on aspirations

Summary

Young people's aspirations are affected by a number of factors. A stable home environment was seen to be crucial to support a young person in forming and working to achieve the aspirations they have.

The home environment can also affect the ease a young person feels with regards to accessing support from an external organisation.

Young people identified that support from external organisations should be targeted to their individual needs to be the most effective.

The peer group was also seen to have an effect on whether an individual achieves their aspirations but the results of the research suggests that this influence does not necessarily need to be bad or harmful and that the influence of the peer group is a perhaps more subtle.

Young people in the research were generally positive about Hackney as a community and the support it can lend to young people, although the ethnic diversity of the borough can have significant implications on the experiences of individuals across the community.

In order to place young people's aspirations and their attitudes to success in a broader context, the research sought to gain an understanding of the influences that act on the formation of a young person's aspirations, and their attitude towards attaining them.

2.1 The home environment

Parental support and stability in the home were seen as key to opening up opportunities for young people at school and beyond. This was a factor mentioned by almost all the professionals interviewed: "*The ones that seem to be in some sort of secure family unit tend to be more, I see that they do well… they've worked hard to get to understand the system and what's going on in the system, made themselves involved in the community, and they have really tried and they have fought it and they themselves have learned to be the best advocates for their children. And so their children have made it,*" was the view of one interviewee. The importance of encouragement and a young person having somebody in their immediate environment who they could consult for advice was verified by one discussion group participant, who said, "*sometimes if there's a goal I want to pursue I need someone to push me to give me courage… I just need someone to always tell me come on, you can do it, go to this person for help, do this course…*"

Unfortunately it was also observed that there is some variation in the extent to which each young person in the Hackney area can rely on a stable family unit as a source of this advice and encouragement. One individual who works with young people described how he saw the situation: "*It's meant to be a comprehensive system but then some children have so much more advantages than others…, it's just that constantly having a parent that is making sure they*

get to the front of the queue… And it relies, the system kind of relies on there being the children having someone pushing them and getting them into that situation which then does make it really unfair." Another professional spoke of one young person she had worked with whose mother had abandoned any hope that her son might go to college and provided him with no encouragement to improve his situation. Relations between parents and children can also, it seems, affect how well-equipped young people feel about pursuing their goals: one discussion group participant explained that because she and her mother did not get on that well, she felt unable to talk about her ambitions, or ask for help in attaining them. Generally the professionals that were interviewed held the view that if parents are not proactive in providing or seeking support for their children, then their children are very rarely proactive in seeking help for themselves and pursuing their goals.

The results of the questionnaire, however, were positive about the prevalence of the family in helping young people make decisions. Almost three-quarters of young people surveyed felt they had been able to obtain guidance and support from their parents when they needed it – the vast majority of whom were aged between sixteen and twenty.[4]

The research demonstrates that whilst young people acknowledge their role in attaining 'success', they are still very much dependent on receiving appropriate support and guidance, to instil them with the confidence they need to achieve their ambitions.

[4] Q3 Have you been able to access support or guidance when you have needed it from a) Your parents, Base 88.

2.2 External support

As asserted by many professionals who were interviewed, parents who are proactive in seeking help for their children are more likely to raise children who feel confident and able to seek help for themselves from authorities outside of the family unit.

One professional interviewed stated that if a young person grows up in a household where the family does not look to external organisations for support, that young person may treat third party supporting organisations with suspicion, or may not be aware that they can occasionally find the guidance they need from a third party. One coordinator of a youth project in Hackney described how he had seen this behaviour exhibited amongst children aged eleven who, upon discovering they had difficulties with something like maths, for example, would not admit their difficulty or seek assistance from anybody else. Instead they would discard the task as *"rubbish"* or inherently worthless, and would cover up their inability to do it with a bravado, when, in reality, they lacked self-confidence.

There was a consensus amongst almost everybody involved in the research that the resources are there for young people to use but it is often a case of a young person being motivated to find the resources right for them. The self-completion questionnaire indicated that 55% of respondents had been able to access help from a third party

organisation.[5] Perhaps what is of greater importance, however, is that this support is relevant to the young person and is able to meet their individual needs. For example, one participant in a discussion group commented that "*the thing wrong at the moment is at job-centres and Connexions is that they are so over-run and so over-packed that they don't have the time to actually work with individual people*". Another example that was given by a discussion group participant drew attention to the fact that support is often not available for those in their 20s, which can be a barrier for someone to achieve their aspirations and broaden their horizons, and also limits the opportunity for engaging with people their age in the community. While resourcing is very much a significant concern within organisations that support young people, it is clear that young people see effective support as something which is targeted at them as individuals and takes account of their individual needs.

> "*the thing wrong at the moment is at job-centres and Connexions is that they are so over-run and so over-packed that they don't have the time to actually work with individual people*"

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[5] Q3 Have you been able to access support or guidance when you have needed it from c) Other community or voluntary organisations, Base 88.

Have you been able to access support or guidance when you have needed it from… (%)
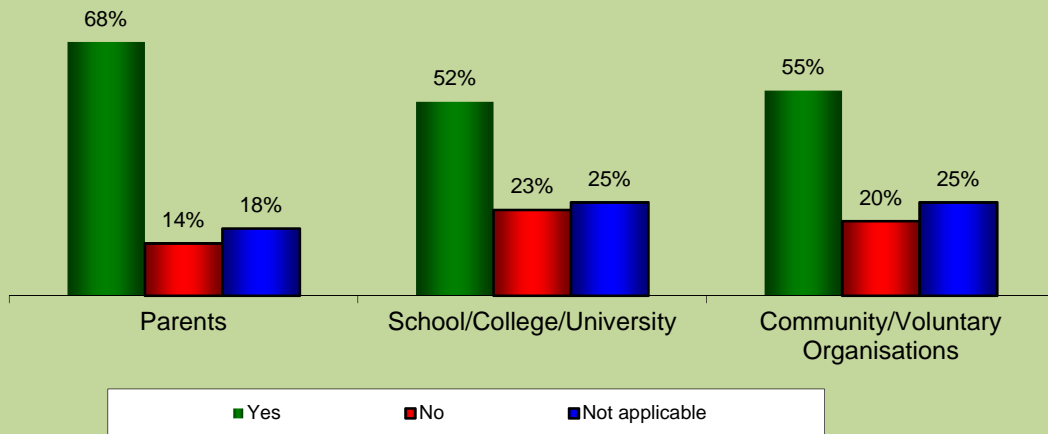
2.3 Peer group

Another influence that was identified as acting upon young people is their friendship group, which can not only be a source of support but also can shape young people's aspirations and future intentions directly.

One interviewee spoke of the importance of "acceptance" to young people, particularly within a peer group. This acceptance might take the form of owning the latest or most fashionable items, not prioritising or going to school, taking a dim view of going to university, and can be a powerful influence on the decisions that young people make. In one of the discussion groups, one participant explained that she thought the effects of the peer group may be more keenly felt by people in the lower age range (16-20), when the views of one's peers might made a young person rethink *"Oh why do I need to go to uni?"* In this regard the peer group may affect whether an individual decides to pursue a goal or not based on what is considered to be 'acceptable'. Nevertheless, the confidence of young people in Hackney is again suggested by the results of the questionnaire, with

almost one quarter of young people suggesting that they feel extremely confident in dealing with any issues that may come about within their friendship group, with less than one in five stating that they had little confidence in their ability to resolve issues with their friendship group.[6] While the peer group is very important to aspirations, the results of the questionnaire suggest that young people feel competent in their ability to resolve any conflict which may arise within their friendship group. This could suggest that young people may be able to challenge their peer group if they are critical or unsupportive of an individual's aspirations. Rather than blindly following the group, the influences of friendship groups are perhaps a little more subtle than may have previously been seen.

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[6] Q2c How confident do you feel that you can handle issues that come your way with regards to: Issues with friends, Base: 82.

2.4 Hackney and the community

The research also sought to understand further what young people thought of the Hackney area as well as further understanding the impact it has on their aspirations.

One major factor that many of those participating in the research identified spontaneously is the ethnic diversity of the borough. This research understood community as being both a general entity, i.e. Hackney, as well as operating on a smaller level in terms of a particular ethnic or cultural group with which an individual might identify. Several interviewees commented that there is perhaps a tendency for some ethnic minority communities to be quite insular and it was remarked that this could influence young people's aspirations, and sometimes prevent their pursuit. Some communities were thought of as having more reservations about approaching outside agencies for help or advice, which, as already described, can have an effect on whether or not a young person from those communities feels comfortable using external resources to help them in education, finding work or some other form of social support.

The other consideration with regard to the variety of cultural backgrounds that people come from is that different communities hold different expectations of what their children ought to aspire to. For some, it is expected that a young person will endeavour to go to university and enter a profession. One person in a discussion group whose parents had emigrated to the country from Africa said that he very much wanted to pursue

a career in music, but *"my parents are like it's either law, engineering, the new one is piloting… , there's times when I had to do those stuff rather than my stuff and I missed out on a lot of opportunities."* One of the professionals interviewed developed this point and explained that some young people experience a *"jarring of cultures"* and often face a tension of *"incompatible lifestyles"* – that of their family's culture and British values.

For others, any option that might threaten to take a young person out of their home and their community, like college or university, is treated with suspicion, and for some education is given less importance than maintaining family ties. In one of the discussion groups, one young person whose parents come from Southeast Europe said, *"my parents basically when I finished college they told me to look for unis in London… . Jobs as well, they would prefer me to be closer to them… [some parents from particular cultural backgrounds] are a bit more strict in terms of wanting their kids next to them and so not actually letting them go out and maybe there are better options for them but they can't do it."*

Nevertheless, when asked to list the positive characteristics of Hackney, discussion group participants were quick to point out that living in an ethnically diverse area has its benefits in being able to expand horizons and develop greater understanding of other cultures, far more than in other areas. It was also stated that Hackney often provided a tight-knit community which can offer support for young people besides that of the home and immediate family.

Young people's aspirations and understanding of 'success', therefore, must be situated in the environment within which they grew up, as they are subject to various pressures and influences over the course of time, and influence the way individuals respond to their aspirations.
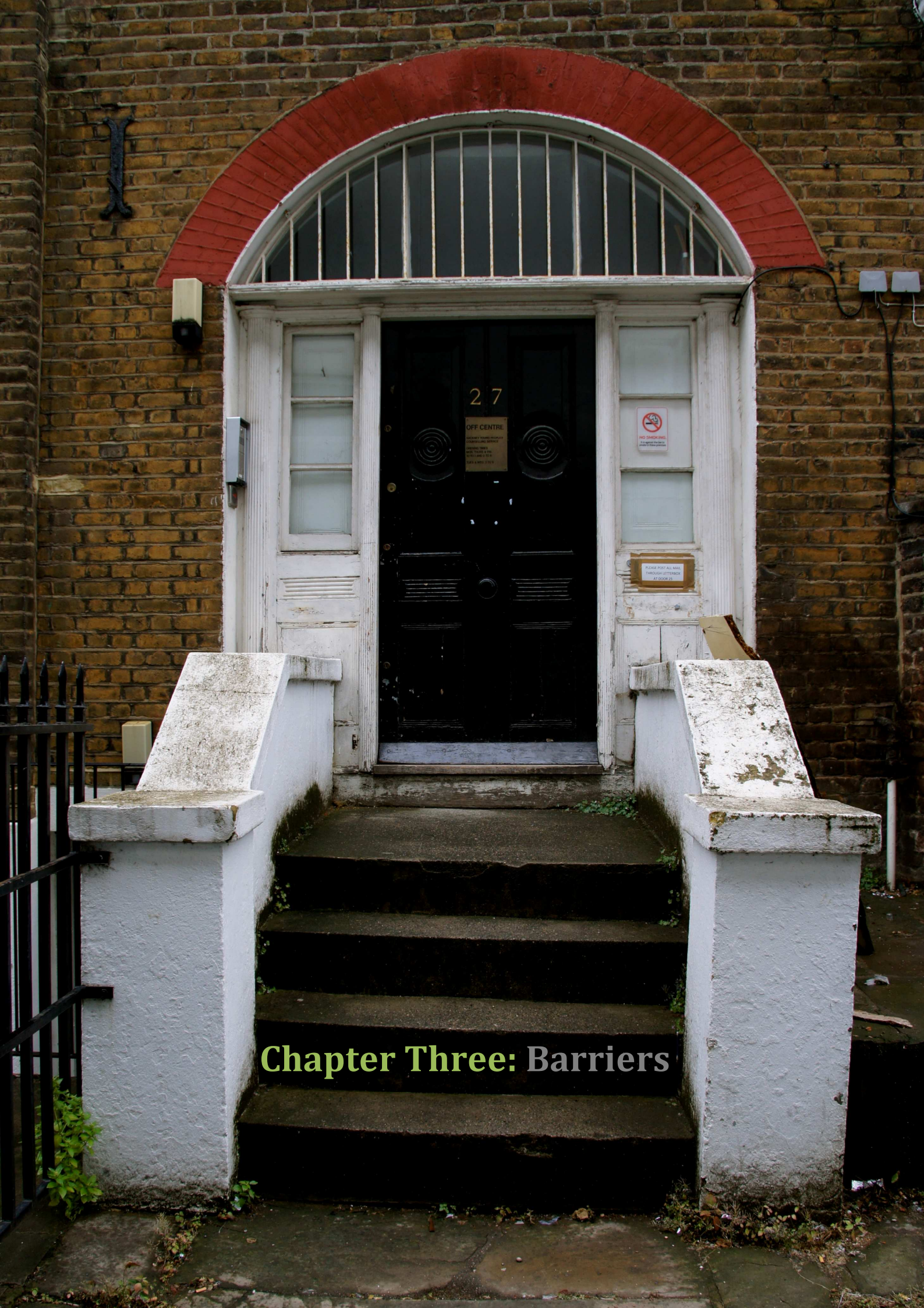
Chapter Three: Barriers

Summary

One of the main barriers young people identified which can prevent them from achieving their aspirations is a lack of motivation. This is consistent to young people's belief that individuals are able to control whether they achieve their aspirations.

Nevertheless, despite success and aspirations being understood as being dependent on the actions of the individual, young people recognise that they sometimes require support. It was felt that this support should be very much focused on the individual, and the education system came in for particular criticism as being unable to respond to these individual needs. As a result, it was often believed that young people can be labelled as not being successful, or academic, while at school and so can become disaffected with the education process.

Barriers

The final major research aim was to find out what barriers young people in Hackney face in trying to achieve their goals, and what causes individuals the most concern.

As discussed above, the responsibility for achieving aspirations and 'success' is placed firmly on the individual. Rather aptly, therefore, the main barrier stated both by young people in the discussion groups and amongst the professionals interviewed, was a lack of motivation or proactive behaviour on the part of young people themselves. This related not only to young people making plans and working towards their goals, but also in seeking help. One female discussion group participant admitted: *"with one of my friends, what I find is that because he actually researches he gets more opportunities whereas I can't be bothered because I just lay down in bed.*

That is what I'd rather do. I'm just not motivated, I don't know why; I used to be so motivated I used to be up, doing everything, now I'm just lazy. That's just me stopping myself from doing what it is that I want to do. That's the worst thing." Another young person expressed similar feelings of lethargy that accompanied a general feeling of contentment with his situation, and therefore not feeling *"the need to grow."* He expected these feelings to subside when he got *"that passion back, that fire back."* Some of the professionals who were interviewed felt that this lack of motivation on the part of young people was simply an unwillingness to look for help, or to listen to the advice that is given to them. One professional, however, suggested that apathy on the part of young people might be a symptom of the economic climate: young people feel unconfident about being able to find a job (as the results of the self-completion questionnaire confirm), and with cuts

being made to many of the services offered to young people, some may feel *"rejected and undervalued"*, and dubious that any effort they put into working towards their futures will be beneficial.

It is also important here to note that some young people, as a result of other pressures to which they are subjected, may be perceived as not being proactive in going after their goals, when in fact they have other concerns that have to take priority. A few of the professionals who were interviewed were keen to point out that when young people have caring responsibilities, for example, often for somebody within their family, they may well have similar aspirations to those who do not have caring responsibilities, but attempt to achieve these aspirations in very different circumstances. It is important that support available to young people within Hackney can respond to these very different and individual needs and ensure that young people are listened to.

The second major barrier in achieving aspirations that young people identified was the impersonal nature of the education system, and, in relation to this, receiving insufficient individual attention from their teachers. One professional who was interviewed comes into regular contact with young people who have learning or mental health problems, and affirmed that some young people whose needs are not addressed in school are often cast off as *"troubled"*, and as they struggle with the demands placed on them by the education system, these young people can become disaffected and

disillusioned with education. Many of the professionals said that they work with an alarming number of young people over the age of fifteen who cannot read or write. When asked about whether educational institutions had understood and responded to individuals' needs, over half of respondents (56%) gave a low rating for the statement 'I received individual attention', and 47% gave a similar rating for the statement 'the staff at my school understood my individual needs'.[7]

Young people's ratings of the overall standard of education they had received at school were similarly negative, with just one-third of questionnaire respondents giving the highest ratings.[8] Perhaps of greater concern is the fact that only just under one-quarter of young people felt that their education and experience at school prepared them for life afterwards.[9] It should be noted that considerably more respondents aged between 21 and 25 provided a lower rating to these questions, and some professionals conceded that many educational institutions have shown

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[7] Q5 Thinking generally about your experience in education how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? c) I received individual attention, Base: 79; b) The staff at my school/college/university understood my individual needs, Base: 81.
[8] Q4 How satisfied are/were you with the overall education provided at school? Base: 76.
[9] Q5 Thinking generally about your experience in education how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? a) My school/college/university prepared me for life after education, Base: 82.

great improvement in recent years, but some comments made by young people in the discussion groups suggest that the issue is still current. One young person said: *"…I was thinking that I wanted to go down the science route, but I had a few subjects that I was quite good at and there was no-one to advise… So when I went to uni I was a bit lost, I didn't really know what I wanted to do as such… Yes I was academically able, but in terms of the support system, in terms of the extra knowledge, extracurricular activities, I felt unsupported in that area."* Another agreed that she did not think *"they gave a lot of attention to actually help me choose or talk through… what am I actually good at".*

Only half of those answering the questionnaire had been able to get the advice and guidance they needed from their school.[10] The potential implications of this vacuum young people described in their experiences of education should not be overlooked: 48% of respondents who suggested that they felt life would get worse over the next year also gave a low rating when asked whether their school had prepared them for life after school. Similarly, 69% of those who gave a low rating with regards to their satisfaction with life in Hackney also gave a low rating when asked whether their education prepared them for life after school.[11]

Thinking generally about your experience in education how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (%)
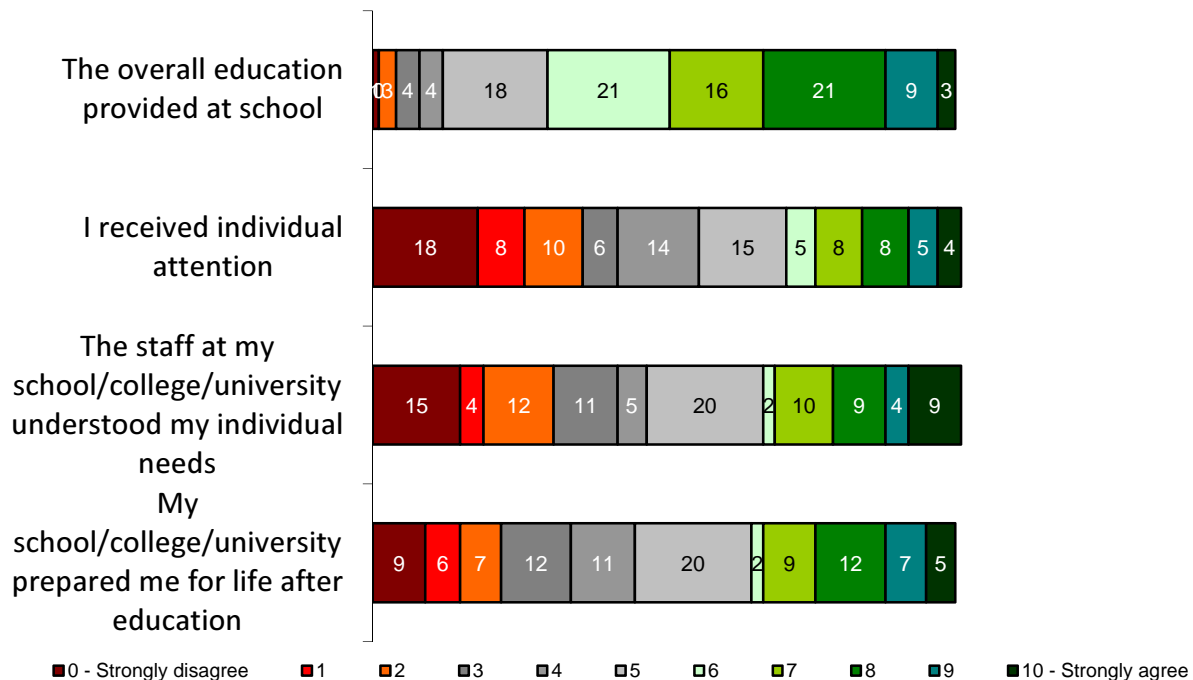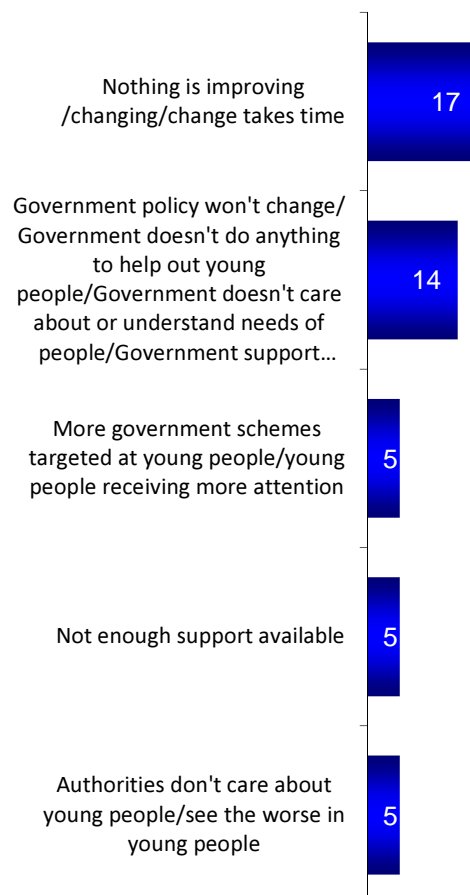
Where aspirations are concerned, ultimately the individual is regarded as instrumental in the pursuit of his or her goals. It has also been shown that encouragement and support from the family and community could have some bearing on how far an individual chooses to follow his or her goals. Similarly, schools and the individualised support they have the potential to provide play an important role in empowering an individual to achieve their aspirations. Equally, it was thought that teachers can hold low expectations of certain young people, particularly those who do not wish to go to college or university. One discussion group participant said "I didn't have the grades they wanted; you might as well be a dustman or something." The same individual went on to say that his ambition was to become a gardener, but his school was unable to provide any guidance as to how he could pursue his goal, leaving him to look for a route into work by himself. He felt that this was caused by his school's focus solely on those students going into Further and Higher Education, and neglect of individuals who wish to pursue other goals.

Top reasons: What challenges, if any, have you encountered in trying to achieve your goals? (%)

Challenge	%
Financial Concerns	11
Personal relationships/matters/health problems/not having any contacts	10
Lack of information/support provided/support not suitable	9
Insufficient training/qualifications/experience	6
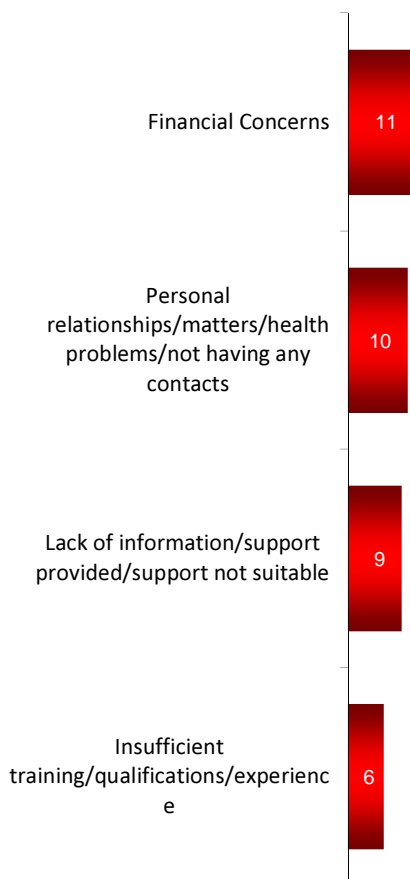
Top reasons: This time next year do you think the outlook for people aged 16-25 years will be better, the same or worse? (%)

Reason	%
Nothing is improving/changing/change takes time	17
Government policy won't change/ Government doesn't do anything to help out young people/Government doesn't care about or understand needs of people/Government support…	14
More government schemes targeted at young people/young people receiving more attention	5
Not enough support available	5
Authorities don't care about young people/see the worse in young people	5

As such, some young people who are not interested in Further or Higher Education confess to feeling "bored" with school, and resented being told that they had to "sit in an office and be a lawyer or something". Rather, they would have preferred a more practical education, or if not more practical, then an education which relates more to everyday life.

One professional who works with young people in the Hackney area reflected on his own experience that making education relevant to everyday life somehow engages young people more. In a number of ways, therefore, education seems to have a considerable bearing on young people's confidence and ability to pursue their aspirations.

This point is supported by the results of the questionnaire. While, in the main, young people have been able to access support; there was less of a belief in the ability of educational institutions to provide individuals with support relevant to their individual needs. It may be the case that parents and community organisations are more able to cater for the individual needs of young people in contrast to schools, universities or colleges which could contribute to young people feeling less able to access support from educational institutions.

Fear of crime was something else that was noted as a barrier – and a very practical barrier, for instance, some young people admitted to feeling scared about walking in the area after dark and this limited the activities they could comfortably participate in. Fifty-four

percent of those responding to the questionnaire provided a 'high' rating (a score of 8, 9 or 10 out of 10) when asked about their level of concern about crime in the local area.[12]

[13]Some of the professionals interviewed also pointed out the ease with which some young people can fall into criminal activity, especially those who feel alienated by the education system. For those young people who receive little positive feedback or encouragement from their school – and consequently have lower self-esteem as far as their education achievements and prospects are concerned – *"the gangs offer something different"*: acceptance and a way for a young person to rebuild or maintain their self-esteem.

The barriers that young people identified, and the concerns they have, seem to relate either to a lack of certainty or confidence about the future, their ability to achieve their goals, and the availability of support from external sources. Although aspirations are very personal things, individuals require individualised attention and assurance in order to achieve them.

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[12] Q1 How concerned are you about the following in Hackney – c) Crime, Base: 79.

[13] Q9. What challenges, if any, have you encountered in trying to achieve your goals? Base: 88

This research has indicated that for young people in Hackney at least, aspiration is something determined and achieved by the efforts of the individual. Young people involved in this research rejected the idea that some people have the opportunity to achieve more than others in life based on where they come from and their background. As such, young people strongly appreciate advice and guidance that is tailored to their individual needs and circumstances, and also require encouragement so that they have to confidence to pursue their goals going forward. It is when these factors are lacking that individual motivation to do well wanes.

Young people in Hackney at the moment hold a vague optimism about the future and understand their role in achieving their own success. However, those who feel that they are unsupported, or that they have not received appropriate individualised direction or support, or that the economic climate and lack of jobs may override their will to succeed, admit that they lack the motivation to achieve their aspirations. Despite claiming to be in control of their futures, the young people in Hackney lacked any long term plans, with only one-quarter feeling optimistic about the next year. Interestingly the group that felt most concerned about their situation this time next year was that of the unemployed.[14] The theme that seems to have emerged from the research is that young people's confidence and certainty in their ability to achieve their goals may increase with the level of individual, practical advice that they receive from a variety of authorities over the course of their childhood and teenage years. Increasing young people's confidence, be this through maintaining a stable home environment, ensuring that support from external organisations appears attractive or ensuring that the educational system can respond to the needs of the individual seems to be the way to overcome the barriers and concerns highlighted by the young people themselves, and those who work with them.

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[14] Q6 This time next year do you think the outlook for people aged 16-25 years will be better, the same or worse? Base: 80.

Appendix A: Methodology

The first stage of the research comprised of seven in-depth face-to-face interviews with professionals who work with young people in the Hackney area. These interviews were conducted between 23rd November and the 20th December 2011. It was hoped that these professionals would be able to provide some initial insight into the barriers that young people face in the Hackney area.

The second stage involved using these findings to inform the structure for two discussion groups with young people aged between 16-25 years old. These groups were held on the 20th December 2011. One discussion group was comprised of individuals who had utilised Off Centre's services previously, whilst the other consisted of respondents who had not had previous contact with Off Centre. This distinction was made in order that our findings incorporated the views and experiences of a wider range of individuals in the local area. It was hoped that the groups would provide some description of young people's experiences from their perspective, as well as exploring how they make decisions and how they feel about the future.

Finally the findings from these two methods were used to create a self-completion questionnaire, consisting of thirteen questions, which was administered at Off Centre between 10th January and the 30th January 2012. Including questionnaires that were not fully completed, 88 responses were received. For the purposes of this report, any statistics cited from the results of the questionnaire exclude those who did not answer a question.

Appendix B: Fieldwork documents

Discussion group: moderator guide

Introduction (5 mins)

- Introduce ourselves
- Thank participants for taking part
- Explain we are working on behalf of The Off Centre
- Interested in finding out about you – specifically. Aspirations and experiences; the environment in which you interact and live; experiences with people outside of the Hackney area
- Interested in speaking to you, as we feel you have unique viewpoints
- Should take about an hour and a half
- Stress confidentiality and seek permission to record
- Explain that there are no right or wrong answers

WARM UP: Skills and Qualities (15 mins)

- Ice breaker: one word young people associate with Hackney; what people are proud of; what skills or qualities impress them… Ice breaker? Maybe getting everyone to line up according to their birthday without speaking? One word they associate with Hackney?
- What skills do you have that you are proud of and consider valuable/useful in day-to-day life? Do you receive recognition for them? Do you often tell other people about these skills/get the chance to show them off?
- Split into 2 groups - what is success?

School and Education (25 mins)

- Did your school prepare you for life after education? Did you have plans upon leaving school? Did you know what your options were? Were you looking forward to leaving school?
- Further Education: why/why not?
- ACTIVITY: Draw the journey you have taken from leaving school to the present day. Is it the course you expected/hoped to take? What are the barriers people face in Hackney?

Hackney and the Local Area (15 mins)

- What kinds of issues do you feel young people in Hackney specifically have to deal with? Similar to experiences of young people in other parts of London/the country? Do you feel well-equipped to deal with certain situations?
- What do you think of the media coverage given to young people in the area after the riots in London earlier this year? Was the public reaction fair? Has it affected your confidence/situation at all?
- What sort of reaction do you expect – – when you announce that you are from Hackney?

Your Priorities and Decision Making (15 mins)

- What is pressure? How does it affect people? What kinds of everyday pressures do you feel you have to deal with?
- Is there anything or anybody that inspires you or motivates you to behave a certain way/have a certain opinion?
- Who do you talk to if you need advice or guidance or support? Do you feel well supported?
- Do you feel that you possess all the necessary resources to achieve the things you want to achieve?

The Future (15 mins)

- What would you like the future to hold for you?
- Have you any specific plans?

In-depth interview: interviewer guide

Personal experience with young people in Hackney.(5 mins)

- Elaborate on types of young people you have been working with.
- How have your experiences been overall? Are young people receptive to you? Have there been any difficulties with communication?

Issues facing young people (15 mins)

- What do you think the main priorities of the young people you have encountered are?
- What would you say are the things that cause concern or worry for the young people you have worked with?
- What/who are the most formative influences for young people in their decision making? Where do they obtain guidance? Where do they obtain their worldview?
- Local media coverage of young people in the Hackney area has been less than praiseworthy. Do you feel that this coverage has been fair? Has it been damaging to the confidence/situations of young people in the area?
- What would be a fair description, in your own words, of youth in Hackney?

The Hackney area (5 mins)

- Are there any issues within the local area that you feel young people in Hackney in particular face?
- Living in Hackney a barrier to their future plans?

Support structures available to young people (10 mins)

- In your opinion, is there enough official/external support for young people in the local area?
- Is there anything more than can be done/provided to benefit young people in the local area?
- Do you think that young people in Hackney are proactive in wanting to help themselves? Is there anything that prevents people seeking/obtaining support?

The future (10 mins)

- What would you like the future to hold in store for the youth of Hackney?
- What does the immediate future hold for youth in Hackney? Does that differ with your first answer?

As you are probably aware, Off Centre is a counselling, therapy, advocacy and advice service for people aged 11-25 who live, work or study in Hackney. We area service user-led organisation and need your help to ensure that the services we provide meet your needs. Please can you spare us 10 minutes to complete this short survey? There are no right or wrong answers, and you will not be required to provide your name or any information that could identify you.

1.How concerned are you about the following in Hackney? (please tick)

	Not at all concerned										Extremely concerned
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
a. Employment											
b. Leisure facilities											
c. Crime											
d. Community support for people aged 16-25 years											
e. Being able to access a job when you need one											

2. How confident do you feel that you can handle issues that come your way with regards to:

	Not at all confident										Extremely confident
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
a. Issues in the home											
b. Issues at work / school											
c. Issues with friends											
d. Issues with authority figures											

3. Have you been able to access support or guidance when you have needed it from: (please tick)

	Yes	No	Not applicable
a. Your parents			
b. Your school/ college/ university			
c. Other community or voluntary organisations			

4. How satisfied are/ were you with the overall education provided at school?

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Extremely dissatisfied   Extremely satisfied

5. Thinking generally about your experience in education how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree									Strongly agree	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
a. My school/ college/ university prepared me for life after education											
b. The staff at my school/ college/ university understood my individual needs											
c. I received individual attention											

6. This time next year do you think the outlook for people aged 16-25 years will be better, the same or worse? (please tick)

Better ☐   **The same** ☐   **Worse** ☐

7. Why is this?(Please write your answer below)

8. How much control do you feel you have to achieve your hopes and aspirations?

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
No control   Full control

9. What challenges, if any, have you encountered in trying to achieve your goals? (Please write your answer below)

10. Overall, how satisfied are you with life in Hackney?

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
Extremely   Extremely
dissatisfied   satisfied

11. Are you...(please tick) ☐Male (1) ☐Female (2)

12. Are you... (if you are in education but work part-time please only select education)

Working: ☐ Part-time (1) ☐Full-time(2) ☐In full-time education(3) ☐Unemployed(4)
☐Currently signed off work sick (5)

13. Are you... ☐16-20 (1) ☐ 21-25 (2)
Thank you very much for your time.

**Hackney Dreaming:
The hopes and aspirations
of young people in Hackney.**