

# PATHWAY MANUAL



# OPTIONS 4 CHANGE

**Options 4 Change is a children and young people's organisation based in the London Borough of Lambeth. Our aim is to change minds and lives for the better. Since it was established in 2005 Options 4 Change has worked to engage, empower and inspire children and young people to maximise their potential academically and socially.**

We support our service users to access our services and engage in:

- Innovative projects and services to enable personal development.
- Work with schools, universities and grass roots agencies to support engagement with education and the community.
- Crisis intervention for those in need of intensive support to address adolescent challenges, behaviour management and peer relationships.
- Advocacy work around school exclusions.
- Workshops to support parenting abilities.

We have delivered successful outcomes across a range of areas including:

- The re-integration of excluded pupils back into mainstream education.
- Enabling pathways out of dysfunctional lifestyles.
- Rejecting labels and negative stereotypes around young people.
- Securing community development partnerships within the voluntary and statutory sectors.
- Making quality assured contributions towards children and young people's initiatives focused on their inclusion and empowerment to have a voice where it matters.

**We are committed to inspiring children and young people to aim high and achieve more.**

**For more information on Options 4 Change and our work visit us at [www.options4change.org.uk](http://www.options4change.org.uk).**



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# FOREWORD

Options 4 Change Pathway Manual is a structured programme to tackle and overcome issues that children and young people face around peer pressure, self-esteem and negative stereotypes.

It is a resource to be accessed by children and young people in need of guidance to help build pathways into meaningful engagement in terms of social and academic development.

This manual outlines five key pathways for the individual child and young person to follow: positive relationships; a strong personal identity; engagement with the community; and good physical and mental health. Each pathway is a building block for developing positive and resilient life attitudes that enhance well-being. Taken together the pathways are designed to enable children and young people to stand up to the negative risks and challenges that face them in society.

**Donna Sinclair, CEO, Options 4 Change**  
**JONATHAN WATES MESSAGE GOES HERE**

This manual is for parents and practitioners as well as children and young people. Parents should take responsibility to work with their children in building up the five positive pathways outlined. Doing so will build up resilience in our young people and help break cycles of dysfunction, raise academic achievement and social aspiration, and prevent pathways that lead to negative and destructive life choices.

The journey that young people and children face today in growing up is full of obstacles and challenges that are often difficult to navigate and overcome; I hope this manual will help in realising the full potential of those setting out on life's journey.



# BUILDING POSITIVE PATHWAYS

## INTRODUCTION

Positive Pathways can help us find a way through some of the challenges we face in our lives.

Each of the Pathways we explore in this manual is about developing a positive attitude to life. This can help us make good decisions and choices that will benefit ourselves, our families and our communities. The aim is to make us live happier, more fulfilling lives where we can reach our full potential.

Building positive relationships; developing a strong personal identity; engaging with the community; and making sure we are in good physical and mental health are the five Pathways we look at.

Together these Pathways can make us stronger as individuals – both physically and mentally. They can prepare us for the risks we face every day in our communities. These risks are the negative things we experience around us - things like gangs, low achievement at school, and drug and alcohol abuse. Later on in the manual we look at these and other risks, and in particular how people have used positive pathways to stand up to the negatives.

Positive Pathways are about giving us resilience in the face of negative risks. Resilience is a kind of mental and physical strength that can help us withstand setbacks, disappointments, pressures and stress – the stuff we face every day that is often hard to deal with.

Recent research on resilience has identified many potential 'protective' factors that appear to be responsible for positive outcomes with children exposed to risk. According to a study produced by the American Psychological Association, a positive family environment and social support are central to developing resilience irrespective of gender, age, or ethnic group, and exist to some extent for all groups of children and young people.

Resilience in a practical sense is about using our brains to respond to difficult and hard to deal with situations in a calm way. It's about not overreacting

or getting overheated, or letting negative emotions run so wild that we get out of control. The truth is that we are at our weakest when we are out of control – and it's during these times that the negatives can draw us in and cause damage.

"Resilience for me is being able to pick myself up and carry on when the road gets rough." Michael, 15

"I bounced back to shape with my education even after having problems at home." Esther, 17

Positive Pathways take us in a different direction to the negatives. They help build self-esteem and confidence and give us a sense of well-being in ourselves and in our relationships with other people.

Positive Pathways are about practicing resilient thinking and the ability to control our emotions, to make them appropriate to the different situations we face be they good or bad.

Practicing resilient thinking and self-control will help us achieve more in our lives. It will help at school, at home, with our friends – in fact it will help all the way through our lives.

Resilient thinking is not about expecting everyone to always agree with our point of view. Over the course of our lives we will encounter many different situations and many people with different opinions and beliefs to our own. Resilient thinking and emotional control is about being flexible and adapting to the different circumstances and people we experience in our lives. This doesn't mean we have to agree with everyone – it's just that we shouldn't expect everyone to always agree with us. If we do, we are likely to get very frustrated!

Building Positive Pathways like a strong sense of personal identity, positive relationships, engagement with the community and good mental and physical health are the first line of defence against the negative risks in society. These Pathways can enable and empower us to take charge of our lives in a positive way – not the negative way that society often expects of us.

# POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are at the core of our lives – we cannot avoid them however hard we try.

The relationships we have with our families and friends – in fact anyone we are close to – can make us feel many different emotions. One minute we feel happy, the next upset or angry, all of which leave us feeling confused, so much so sometimes that life seems very frustrating. This is normal and something that we all experience in our lives.

Building positive relationships is about putting the ups and downs of our relationships into perspective. That means having the ability to stand back and think about our relationships in a calm, reflective way. It's not about, for example, immediately over-reacting if we feel someone we have a relationship with has hurt us. It's about standing back and taking a moment to think about our feelings, and the other person's feelings too.

Throughout our life relationships come and go. Some relationships last a lifetime, others no more than a few days. Some of these relationships are easy, some are hard, and many we may not have any precise feelings about. In fact, relationships come in all shapes and sizes – and one thing we can be sure of is that we never know in advance quite how a relationship will develop and work out.

This means that to build positive relationships we have to be flexible in our attitudes. If all we want is our own way all the time, we will find it hard to build positive and close relationships. Wanting to have everything your own way is being inflexible – it kind of ignores the other person in a relationship or assumes that they also want everything their own way. Relationships like this are often full of conflict as each person fights it out to get what they want. Relationships like this can be very negative.

Of course, sometimes it is hard not to behave negatively if we are angry and upset – after all, it is how we behaved when we were babies when we couldn't get what we wanted straight away. But

“Sometimes I get frustrated when my teacher tells me off because I talk too much, but knowing that she wants me to do well makes me try harder with my work.”

Jelani, 12

“Building a positive relationship with people is knowing that everyone has their flaws; it's a matter of accepting their flaws.”

Joshua, 14

if as we grow older we are unable to be flexible in our relationships, to put them into perspective and see the other person's point of view, we run the risk of always feeling angry and upset at the world and other people. Feeling like this can make us vulnerable to relationships that lower our self-esteem and make us feel bad about ourselves. And when we feel like this we may be less able to stand up to the negative risks in society, such as alcohol and drug abuse, gang involvement, bad eating habits, or low achievement at school.

Positive flexible relationships can protect us from feeling negative about ourselves. They raise our self-esteem and make us feel more confident and resilient. We are better able to take criticism from other people, and less likely to be overly critical of ourselves.

The practice of building positive relationships helps us to feel valued and to value other people. This enables us to empathise with and relate to others in a mutually respectful way.

# STRONG PERSONAL IDENTITY

Personal identity is about our sense of self; it's about who we think we are, how we perceive ourselves, and how we believe other people perceive us.

People with a strong sense of their identity tend to be more confident and happier; they know who they are and – to use a common expression – feel comfortable in their own skin.

## Our families

Are important in our early development of identity and how we see and value ourselves. Parents play a key role in us becoming who we are.

## Our parents

Transmit values, beliefs and ideas to us that are based on their own experiences of life. They will likely have become the people they are based on their own parents' life experiences. Values and beliefs pass on from one generation to another. We, in turn, will pass on our values to our children.

## Our personal

Identity begins to develop in our teenage years. This is when our own particular experiences combine with the values and beliefs that our parents have given us. These can be challenging times, especially in our teenage years; there is often a conflict between who we think we are and what our parents think we should be. This conflict is part of growing up and is the process by which our own identity is formed.

Who we think we are is also very closely connected to who we want to be in the future.

Someone with a strong sense of identity will have a clear idea of what they want to become in life and, importantly, how they see themselves getting there. It's seeing an image of one's self in the future as, a lawyer or an architect, for example, and trying to make that image become a reality.

"Knowing who I am is so important for relationships. My roots are African but I was born in England. Being able to stand out from the crowd is better than blending in."

Keisha, 16

"My sense of identity is knowing who I am and what exactly I want in life "

Vanessa, 17

For this reason, wanting to do well in school and college is a big part of developing a strong sense of identity. It is the aspiration to be successful that will help us achieve what we want in life.

Besides our own aspirations, we encounter many other things that make up our identity. Our friends, the groups we associate with, the expectations around us and our responsibilities all play a key part in making us who we are.

We saw in the previous chapter how the quality of our relationships – whether they are positive or negative – has a big impact on our well-being and happiness. The quality of our relationships also influences our sense of self and identity; positive relationships help reinforce identity by making it stronger and more resilient, and this empowers us to become the person we want to be.

With a strong sense of purpose about who we are and what we want to achieve, we will be better equipped to withstand the pressures other people – like our peers at school, for example – put on us to behave in certain ways.

Building a strong identity means having the confidence to act in our own best interests, not the interests of others who may lead us away from our goals.

# ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

We have seen how positive relationships and a strong sense of personal identity are Pathways to a more fulfilled way of life.

But day to day living throws up so many challenges – for example, racism, discrimination and the challenges created by negative urban conditions – that we need the support of others to help us through. Another word for this type of support is Community; the wider network around us that we are part of and is, in many ways, part of us.

A strong identity on its own is not enough to help us through life. The point is that we are not alone in the world (though it may feel that way sometimes!); we are part of a wider community consisting of people like us in terms of their family and social background, culture, and experiences.

It is important that we connect with and explore our wider community because on our own it is unlikely we will have all the strength we need to deal with the everyday pressures that can prevent us achieving our aims and ambitions.

In fact, it is by engaging with the community that we fully develop our identities. We see that we are part of a bigger whole, that we have experiences in common with other people, and that our own aspirations and hopes are shared by others too.

This helps us realise that our own personal achievements are also the achievements of the wider community, and that what we do individually can make a difference to those around us by improving their sense of well-being and happiness. And if the community feels better about itself that will have a positive impact on its individual members, promoting further well-being. This is called a virtuous circle.

Responsibility is at the heart of our relationship with the community. The community has a responsibility for our well-being and we in turn should have a responsibility for the well-being of the community.

“Attending the Options 4 Change workshop really helped me with time management, having to learn to get up on time, and getting to the workshop promptly. It gave me a sense of responsibility.”

Roland, 17

“The purpose of engaging with the community is being able to know your environment and the people around you, and a sense of responsibility for how the community works.”

Adelaide, 19

Our relationship with the community is one of mutual responsibility.

It is this sense of attachment, of individual effort and achievement contributing to the community’s own well-being that gives people the power to change their lives for the better.

Where does community start? For most of us it begins in the family, in particular the extended family. This is the immediate community around us that we grow up with. The wider community is like a whole network of extended families; some of its members know each other directly; some know each other indirectly or not at all; but generally everybody feels in some way part of the same group.

The wider community has a shared heritage, culture and history. By acknowledging and understanding these shared characteristics, we will come to understand ourselves – and our own identities – better. We will have a clearer idea of where we have come from – both as individuals and as a community – and so will be in position to take our community forward, making it stronger.

We will come to realise that we have a responsibility for our community’s well-being and that the well-being we help create will in turn make our own lives more fulfilled. In short, we will understand that there is more to life than just looking after number 1 – that is, there are other interests besides our own that are important.



The church can be a building block in our communities. The church is about trying to make a difference individually and collectively. Being involved in a church can improve self-esteem. It can provide an outlet for self-expression and for support in the way a family does, and can help address and discuss issues such as discrimination and low school achievement.

Beside the church there are many groups and organisations that we can get involved with in the community. There are organisations centred around education, sport, and music and of course groups like Options 4 Change. All of these organisations give us positive values and beliefs, and experiences that enrich our identity and give meaning to life.

Engagement with the community – with its particular heritage, history and culture – is a major part of our education for life. Our communities have so much to give us – but we have to give to them as well. If we don't play our part, the community and its members will become weaker, and will find it harder to function in society. For a community to thrive and progress it needs its people to pull together for the benefit of all.

Illustration/cartoon showing something to illustrate sense of community and its reciprocal nature: E.g. Beatrice animal kingdom picture.

**Points for Discussion:**

- **What is your community? How would you describe it?**
- **Think of something you could do that would help to bring your community together.**
- **What would the benefits be to the community, and to you?**



# GOOD PHYSICAL HEALTH

We have seen how positive relationships, a strong identity, and engagement with the community help us to build resilient Pathways for a better life.

The final two Pathways we look at in this manual complete the basic toolkit: Good physical and mental health. First we look at physical health. Positive physical development through eating well, being physically active – and getting enough sleep – are all essential factors in building our resilience and preparedness for life.

Childhood obesity, low levels of physical exercise and poor eating habits are all on the increase amongst children and young people. The latest figures for child obesity show that 18.9% of children in Year 6 (aged 10-11) were obese and a further 14.4% were overweight. Of children in Reception (aged 4-5), 9.3% were obese and another 13% were overweight. This means almost a third of 10-11 year olds and over a fifth of 4-5 year olds were overweight or obese.

People in poor physical health do not function as well as healthy people; they find it much harder to deal with life's challenges and can experience depression, social difficulties and a decline in thinking ability. This leads to a lack of resilience. Building up a positive pathway of good physical health requires us to make difficult choices about what we eat and how much physical exercise we do. Making the right choices for physical health requires mental effort to control our emotions, especially at times when our feelings are running high or we are under stress. It is at these moments when we are most susceptible to letting our emotions get out of control, and in terms of say healthy eating, when we are most likely to eat unhealthy foods.

Good physical health therefore requires the practice of strong, purposeful thinking; having the will power to resist, reject or refuse patterns of eating

and physical activity that increase negative health outcomes.

The really positive thing about good physical development is that once it is consistently maintained it helps increase our mental abilities more generally, making constructive life style choices easier for us. We will, for example, find it easier to refuse negative choices such as drug use and unhealthy sexual behaviour.

Looking after and improving our own physical health is one of the most important responsibilities we have in life. If we don't take this responsibility seriously the consequences and negative impact of poor physical health can cause us enormous difficulties later in life. For one thing, we will not be able to attain the levels of physical and mental resilience that we need to function successfully in life.



## Obesity

Childhood obesity has become a serious problem in our society. While a number of health problems result from obesity in youth – such as diabetes and high blood pressure – one of the more pronounced impacts of childhood obesity is on our psychological health and well-being, specifically in the form of depression. Children who are obese are more likely to experience psychological distress, including isolation, behaviour difficulties, low self-esteem and discrimination.

Physical activity not only decreases the risk of obesity but also reduces asthma attacks, increases the practice of strong, resilient thinking, reduces blood pressure and promotes positive mental health.

## Nutrition

Eating a diet that just fills us up – but which is not nutritional or healthy - has become increasingly normal for many of us. We crave food high in sugar and fat content because it gives us a 'hit', satisfying our craving for it instantly. But the effect wears off very quickly, and it is not long before we crave another hit, and so on. This kind of heating is bad for our health.

The practice in the community of cooking and eating good nutritional food has decreased due to the pressures on our time and the easy availability and convenience of fast foods. It is as if we have run out of patience with the time required to cook good food, and with that impatience the skills and understanding for cooking and preparing healthy food disappear.

Poor nutrition contributes to childhood obesity, and it also has a negative impact on academic achievement. Research has shown, for example, that not having a healthy breakfast negatively affects performance in school. Getting the recommended levels of protein and iron has a positive effect on learning and academic ability. As we get older we become increasingly responsible for our lifestyle choices – in particular for the food we eat and the exercise we take. Young people who have a sense of themselves as responsible individuals in a network of positive relationships grounded in the community, appreciate physical health and the benefits it brings to them in achieving their goals and aspirations.

“Learning better skills to stay in shape makes you live longer.”

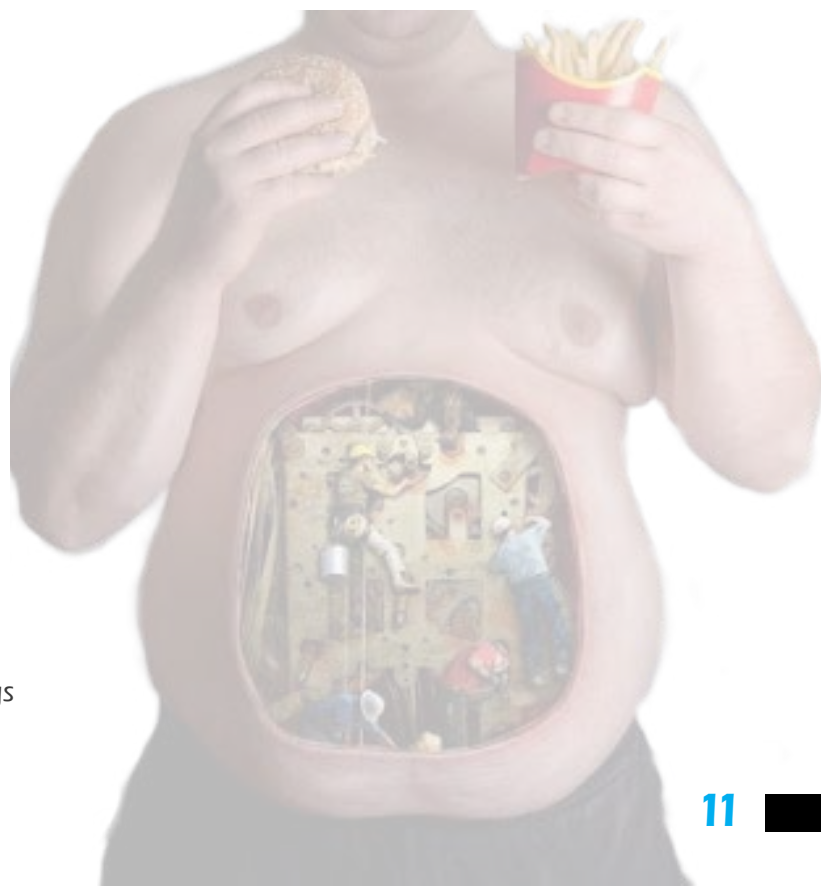
Siobhan, 12

“Having good physical health means that you live longer and have more control over your future.”

Sarah, 13

### Points for Discussion

- **Draw a mind map of the things you eat and drink.**
- **Rank the food and drink you eat in order of how healthy and nutritional you think they are.**
- **Discuss why you eat certain things at certain times and what you could change in your diet in order to eat more healthily.**
- **Think about what kinds of physical activity you've done in the last week – how active do you see yourself?**



# GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

The pursuit and practice of good mental health lies at the heart of the Pathways covered in this manual.

In essence, attaining and keeping good mental health is about managing our emotions – this means understanding our emotions, seeing their causes and effects, and in particularly heightened and challenging situations, trying to control them.

Let us recap what we have discovered so far:

- We saw that Resilience is the key to managing our emotions; it gives us the mental and physical strength to help us withstand uncomfortable and painful emotions arising from personal setbacks, disappointments, and the pressures and stresses we face every day.
- We saw that Positive Relationships can protect us from feeling negative about ourselves, and can raise self-esteem and confidence.
- We saw that a Strong Personal Identity helps give us a positive sense of who we are and what we want to achieve, making us more empowered to act in our own best interests.
- We saw that Engaging with the Community can help us to realise our own ambitions while at the same time making a difference to those around us.
- And we saw that maintaining Good Physical Health by eating well and keeping fit can make it easier to cope with life's challenges.
- Each Pathway we looked at gave us ideas for building up resilience and with that the means to better manage and control our emotions.

"I try to stay as positive as possible – there's no point dwelling on the bad things all the time."

Mark, 14

"There's a lot of things going on in my neighbourhood that aren't so good. I can't say they don't affect me sometimes – but you've just got to be positive and be focused on your future."

Letitia, 16

## Bouncing Back

Sometimes it's not always possible to remain resilient in the face of personal setbacks or problems. We cannot always control and manage our emotions, especially when they are strong and overwhelming, or painful and uncomfortable. During times like these we can experience severe mood swings, emotional outbursts and sadness, and can behave in ways that distract us from uncomfortable feelings, such as sleeping a lot, wanting to be alone, or listening to loud music.

Overwhelming feelings that make us feel unhappy – and our reactions to these feelings – are a normal part of growing up; they are not uncommon and generally we are able to bounce back after a while and feel better again.

## Not Bouncing Back

For some of us, though, feelings of anxiety, sadness, anger or stress may not go away, and may begin to interfere with our normal ability to function. In the UK one in 10 children and young people aged 5 – 16 suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder that disrupts their ability to function at home, school, or in the community. That is around three children in every school class.

The most common mental health disorders in young people are depression, characterised by prolonged period of feeling hopeless and sad; problems with anxiety, which includes extreme feelings of anxiety and fear; and alcohol and drug abuse.

### Signs of Depression

- Frequent sadness, crying
- Decreased interest in activities or inability to enjoy formerly favourite activities
- Hopelessness
- Persistent boredom, low energy
- Social isolation, poor communication
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- Increased irritability, anger or hostility
- Difficulty with relationships
- Frequent complaints of physical illness such as headaches or stomach aches
- Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school
- Poor concentration
- Feeling overwhelmed easily or often
- A major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Talk of or efforts to run away from home
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behaviour

The underlying causes of mental health disorders are varied and cannot always be identified. Many factors may be present, including genetic predisposition – that is, mental health problems that run in our families, environmental conditions such as living in a dysfunctional household, and trauma such as abuse, exposure to violence, or witnessing a shooting or knife related fatality.

Prolonged stress makes us more vulnerable to emotional disturbance; and the way we react to painful and uncomfortable experiences can affect our mental health if the negative experiences go on for too long.

Our reactions to negative experience can lead us to engage in behaviours that enforce and deepen the anxieties we are trying to cope with. For example, alcohol and drug abuse, gang involvement, carrying guns and knives, and sexual violence are all negative behaviours that might be taken up to deal with difficult situations and circumstances in our lives.

Underneath the 'hard' exterior displayed by those involved in these behaviours will often be a fragile,

frightened and hurt individual who has adopted certain behaviours as a form of protection against what they see as a painful and unforgiving world. However, these forms of protection actually make the underlying issues worse for the individual, making it harder for them to break out of their cycle of negativity.

In the next section we look at some of these negative behaviours and how young people have stood up to them.

Positive Pathways = Good Mental Health

The Pathways explored in this manual are designed to help us find our way through life's challenges in a positive way, one where our mental health and resilience can be enhanced. We do not as individuals have the power to change the environment we live in overnight – but we can develop life skills and positive attitudes that will enable us to make good decisions and choices that will benefit ourselves, our families and communities.

### Points for Discussion

- **Think about a problem or situation that has been difficult for you but which you managed to overcome. How did you manage it?**
- **What advice would you give to a friend who faced a similar problem?**
- **Think about the Pathways in this manual. Rank them in order of importance for you and discuss your reasons why.**

# STANDING UP TO THE NEGATIVES

## INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this manual we explored Pathways that we can use to support and guide us in our lives. We looked at how positive relationships, a strong personal identity, engagement with the community, and good physical and mental health all contributed to our well-being and promoted a positive outlook on life.

One of the main themes of the Pathways was the development of resilience – the inner strength that keeps us focused on our goals and ambitions and helps us deal with life’s setbacks and disappointments.

With resilience comes self-esteem – a positive sense of self where we value ourselves and feel valued by other people. When we feel good and positive about ourselves we are much more likely to behave in ways that enhance our emotional and physical well-being.

When we feel bad about ourselves our self-esteem can take a knock. If we are resilient we can deal with setbacks that make us unhappy; our positive personal relationships can, in particular, help us to pull through difficult times and show us that our lives aren’t really that bad.

Conversely, low self-esteem and a lack of resilience can make us vulnerable to negativity. Low esteem can shape a view of the world in which we see ourselves as weak and unable to cope with or control life. It can make us feel unhappy, unvalued and above all negative – about ourselves and other people, particularly those close to us.

A negative sense of self can lead to significant risks. Here are some of them:

- Low school achievement
- Harmful peer pressure
- Gang involvement
- Unhealthy eating
- Involvement in crime
- Drug and alcohol abuse

In the pages that follow we hear stories from people who have managed to stand up to these negative risks. Some of the people we hear from engaged in negative behaviour because they themselves did not have a strong enough sense of mind, and thus were vulnerable to the risks out there. Other people were exposed to the same negative risks but managed, by making certain decisions, not to become involved.

We shall see that it was resilience and a strong sense of self that empowered and enabled the individuals whose stories we hear to successfully stand up to the negatives and pursue their own pathway in life.

# HARMFUL PEER PRESSURE

Peer Pressure and other types of peer influence can be particularly strong for teenagers. In some cases it can be destructive, encouraging teenagers to engage in harmful behaviours such as drug use or crime.

Peer Pressure can cause young people to engage in certain behaviour in order to be accepted by a group. In some cases, individuals do things they do not really approve of because they believe peers will reward them for joining in or punish them – reject or mock them – if they do not.

Giving in to peer pressure can be harmful, especially for teenagers. Research has shown that adolescents are much more likely to engage in risky behaviours such as drug use and sexual activity, if their friends do.

Young people are more likely to adopt the views of others who are socially similar. Groups can have a particularly strong influence over an individual who really wants to belong to the group. Gangs use this principle to make new members follow their codes of behaviour.

(Source: 'Peer Pressure', Gale Opposing Viewpoints in Context (<http://ic.galegroup.com>), 2014.)

Standing Up To... Harmful Peer Pressure

"From a young age I always knew what was wrong. But I was with bad company and we went down the wrong way – like not going to school and getting into fights with different youths. Once you start like that it becomes a habit and you can't help yourself. It's only now that I look back and see more clearly how I got into doing bad things with my friends when I was younger."

Marlon, 18

"It was round the time of the riots in 2011 when the shops were getting looted. My friends kept phoning me up to say, 'come out with us, we're going to get some free computer stuff and trainers'. I didn't want to go but my friends kept phoning me all night. In the end I told them to leave me alone. I said, 'I just want to get some sleep.'"

Isiah, 21

# LOW SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

African-Caribbean boys and young men suffer disproportionately from low academic achievement and exclusion from school. They are also disproportionately involved in crime.

In the aftermath of the UK riots in 2011, a high percentage of those arrested for taking part were black and mixed race young people who had experienced school exclusion and who had special educational needs.

Research has shown that for young African-Caribbean young men getting into trouble at school is closely linked to getting into trouble on the 'street'. For example, difficulties at school are usually academic or behavioural but these problems are often interconnected and a cycle of frustration and de-motivation can start. Disenchanted students may decide to play truant or drop out of the education system altogether.

Alternatively, the school itself may exclude African-Caribbean young men for disruptive or violent behaviour. Although schools are responsible for arranging alternative provision, in practice, once out of mainstream education students are unlikely to gain academic qualifications and the problem of low achievement is exacerbated. They are then at a disadvantage in the labour market and their perceived lack of legitimate opportunities for making money may lead them to engage in crime.

"I started behaving badly when I went to secondary school. I got into fights and didn't go to school. Then I got excluded. I got into more trouble after that but about a year later I realised that if I didn't get an education I wouldn't get any work. I sat down and thought about it and decided to pull myself together and grow up."

Stephen, 19



(Source: 'School Meets Street: Exploring links between low achievement, school exclusion and youth crime among African-Caribbean boys in London', ISER, November 2013.)

Practical Take Away Points/Professional Advice:  
How to protect against the negative/mitigate the risks (from BBC, CEN...)



# DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

Addiction and alcohol and drugs abuse are widespread in Britain. One in 20 adults in England (1.6 million) is dependent on alcohol and one in 100 (380,000) is addicted to heroin or crack cocaine. Alcohol related harm is estimated to cost society £21 billion a year.

The costs to society of substance abuse are rising. Use of opiates and crack remains high and roughly one new drug enters the market each week. Alcohol-related admissions to hospital have more than doubled in a decade.

The consequences of addiction and abuse are serious with the effects felt most by those who are already highly vulnerable or disadvantaged. Alcohol and drug-related violence, domestic abuse, unemployment, child neglect, debt and educational failure all disproportionately affect poor communities and are regularly intertwined.

(Source: 'No Quick Fix: Exposing the depth of Britain's drug and alcohol problem', Centre for Social Justice, September 2013.

Practical Take Away Points/Professional Advice: How to protect against the negative/mitigate the risks.

"When I was 17 I started selling weed for someone who had to go away for a few weeks. I kind of agreed because I thought the guy was my friend. When he came back he asked me for the money I owed him. I gave him all the money but he said it was short and he started to get mad. I thought, 'what have I done getting involved in drugs?' It's against my religion and it's bad for my health. After that I stopped anything to do with drugs. It wasn't worth it."  
Marcus, 20

"When you start smoking weed you just want to do it again and again. It's like a disease – you can't get anything done. You start doing things you wouldn't think of normally. Smoking weed is like being chained, you're stuck. Now I can see it's a waste of life."  
Blake, 17



# GANGS, GUNS AND KNIVES

Gang culture is symptomatic of deep problems in our society: dysfunctional families; absent fathers; and young people cut adrift and lacking purpose. Gangs were said to have played a role in the UK riots of 2011, with 1 in five of those arrested in London at the time reported to be affiliated with a gang. While gangs themselves did not cause the riots, the existence of gang activity in riot-affected areas made those neighbourhoods more vulnerable to unrest.

Individuals who have links to gangs are believed to be responsible for 16% of London's total drug supply, nearly a fifth of stabbings, half of all shootings and 14% of all rapes.

The vast majority of young people are not involved in gangs and want nothing to do with them. However, as noted above, the behaviour of those involved has a significant impact on communities, their families and associates, as well as themselves.

A growing problem is the involvement of girls in gangs. They may be asked to hide weapons or drugs, or be targeted by male gang members in acts of revenge or gang initiations. All of this tends to go on 'behind closed doors'.

(Sources: 'Time to Wake Up: Tackling gangs one year after the riots', Centre for Social Justice, October 2012; 'Advice to parents and carers on gangs', HMSO, 2013.)

Practical Take Away Points/Professional Advice: How to protect against the negative/mitigate the risks.

"When I was at primary school I got bullied by two older boys. One day one of the bullies took my place in a music performance I'd been looking forward to. I went mad and had a fight with the bully. I won the fight but that wasn't the end of it. Soon I had a group around me and we started picking fights with younger and older boys in the school. The same thing happened in secondary school. One day my group of friends picked a fight with some much older boys in college. That was when it got really serious. One of my friends was kidnapped by the older boys and I had to move out of the area. Only then did I realise that things were so serious that I had to change my ways.

"Thinking about it now I can see that my group of friends at school was really like a gang, and that the whole thing started from when I was young and had to protect myself from bullies. But as my story shows, that just led to more and more trouble."

Jeremiah, 27

# UNHEALTHY EATING

Poor eating habits include under- or over- eating, not having enough of the healthy foods we need each day, or consuming too many types of food and drink – such as junk food or sugary drinks – which are low in fibre or high in fat, salt and/or sugar.

These unhealthy eating habits can affect our nutrient intake, including energy, protein, carbohydrates, essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals as well as fibre and fluid.

In the short term poor nutrition and unhealthy eating can contribute to stress, tiredness and our capacity to work, and over time it can contribute to the risk of developing some illnesses and other health problems such as:

- Being overweight or obese
- Tooth decay
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Heart disease and stroke
- Diabetes (Type 2)
- Bone decay
- Some cancers
- Depression
- Eating disorders

“I was 18 and at college and just drinking fizzy drinks all the time. I wasn’t eating properly and began losing weight - but I still kept drinking anyway. Soon I lost about a stone and it was getting serious. I went to the doctor and got admitted to hospital to recover. I don’t touch fizzy drinks anymore – I eat and drink properly now.”

Charlene, 23

(Source: ‘The risks of poor nutrition’, [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au), 2014.)

Practical Take Away Points/Professional Advice:  
How to protect against the negative/mitigate the risks.



# UNHEALTHY SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Sexual health is defined by the World Health Organisation as:

- Enjoyment of sexual relations without exploitation, oppression or abuse.
- Safe pregnancy and childbirth, and avoidance of unintended pregnancies.
- Absence and avoidance of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

Unhealthy sexual behaviours can lead to deviance from any of these points.

There is a clear relationship between sexual ill health, poverty and exclusion. There is also an unequal impact of STI infection on certain minority ethnic groups.

There have been large increases in many STIs in the last 10 years including Chlamydia (up 300%), gonorrhoeas (up 200%) and HIV (up 300%). People are having sex for the first time at a younger age, and a greater proportion of people have multiple partners.

These infection statistics are just the tip of the iceberg. Co-infections are often common and an infection with an STI makes transmission of HIV easier. Newly diagnosed HIV infections are increasing in the migrant population.

(Source: 'Sexual Behaviour', [www.healthknowledge.org.uk](http://www.healthknowledge.org.uk), 2011.)

"When I first had sexual intercourse I went ahead without any condoms. I thought there were some in the house but I couldn't find them. I knew I shouldn't have gone ahead like that. Now I use protection all the time. And I even get checked out at the clinic if I'm worried about a sexually transmitted infection."

Tyler, 22





