

Abingdon Integrated Youth Support Project (AIYSP)
Funded by Abingdon Town Council (ATC)
Report of work by
Abingdon DAMASCUS Youth Project (ADYP)

April 2023 to March 2024



‘To work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity.’

Abingdon Town Council Key Objective 4.

Our target group for 2023/24

- In Line with ATC's key objective 4 and the age group (10 to 19 years) with whom we work, we have focused our work with vulnerable young people aged 10 to 19 in the Caldecott ward.
- 23% of young people aged 10 to 19 years in Abingdon live in the Caldecott ward (2021 census). All compilations of statistics indicate that the vulnerabilities of young people and their families challenged by adverse socioeconomic circumstances in the Caldecott ward is greater than in other wards in Abingdon.

Our aspirational outcomes

ADYP walks the journey with young people in their own community, so they develop a positive sense of belonging and purpose. It is not a quick fix – sometimes it is a ‘two step forward and one backward’ scenario. While groups change over time, the older young people will always come and find us ***if & when*** they stumble. Follow up is important. Our work aims to:

- Improve young people’s emotional wellbeing and mental health.
- Reduce risky behaviour – substance misuse, smoking, anti-social behaviour and improving relationships and sexual health, use of social media.
- Meet the needs of young people that require additional support in their transition from adolescence to adulthood or because of other socioeconomic circumstances.
- Re-connect to education, employment or training.
- Increase community cohesion and build bridges between young people and their community as well as other service providers.

Tools of our trade

- 1.Grassroots Street Work.
- 2.One to one support.
- 3.Weekly Gazebo sessions
- 4.Issue-based focused group work.
- 5.Young-people led sports, arts, music projects.
- 6.Train Young Community Leaders
- 7.Job/study/training/money management support
- 8.Inter-generational community events
- 9.Liaising with schools and other agencies

‘And when young people have a sense of belonging, communities are stronger, benefiting all ages.’ All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs (2019), Youth Work Enquiry: Final Report

Gazebo sessions

Connecting with young people in their spaces in all weathers.

Builds trusting relationships on young people's terms and space; early needs analyses to design bespoke preventative interventions.

Fosters community engagement - adults stop by to say hello so builds intergenerational community bridges. Increases self-efficacy of young people and sense of belonging in the community .



‘Good youthwork recognises the teachable and reachable moment and is adaptive in its delivery’ – James Quartermain, ADYP

Staff are prepared and ready to deliver activities based on the topics informed by the conversations young people are having at a session or needs picked up in street work.

Workshop on toxic masculinity

Through street conversations, we saw the vulnerability of masculinity within young men when they feel undermined and disrespected. Their sense of pride is more concerned with being recognised as “hard” which leads to poor mental health and disengagement.



Young people discuss and rate their agreement/disagreement on a set of statements defining masculinity and toxic traits in a relationship



Issue-based focused group work: empowering to make informed decisions; positive street conversations.

Struggling to understand the complexities of their own politically charged identities, racism, homophobia, sexism, islamophobia, transphobia & antisemitism casually surface in derogatory language within conversations and go unchallenged by peers, even though majority of the group express they do not support such ideologies.

Other interactive workshops were delivered on consent, relationship & friendship, sexual health, drug use, serious youth violence, online safety.



South Abingdon Safe-fest Mini-day festival



Young people take part in a variety of entertaining activities that also explores ways of staying safe and reducing risks when attending the TRUCK festival or any other festival/summer event:

- General well being & safety,
- Protective Behaviours,
- Alcohol & other Drugs,
- Sexual Health, Emergency first aid recovery position



Individual support to young people

Requested by young people themselves

Young people are now very confident of approaching staff and requesting some one-on-one time. Staff also pick up needs early and offer to support a young person who is clearly struggling emotionally or maybe feeling a financial hardship.

Issues that commonly give rise to a young person's inability to cope are often related to their domestic situation; relationship breakdown; bullying both in a group situation and on social media, disengagement with school, in and out of employment.

The one-on-one time is used to provides a trusting and non-judgemental space for the young person to explore personal drivers; owning actions; taking responsibility; support with adverse life experiences.

There is no time limit to the support offered but we do work to outcomes as identified by the young person and track progress through the sessions.

Wider community engagement: breaking down barriers with the police

Over the years, we have worked hard to build positive relationships between young people and the local Neighbourhood Police Team. It is very good to see that young people are accepting of PCSOs dropping by to say hello and equally the police approach the young people positively and do not assume that they are causing trouble – it has happened in the past!



Wider community engagement: therapeutic benefits of art and increasing the sense of belonging

Young people worked with Dionne Freeman of Makespace Oxford and the Vale of Whitehorse District Council's Ride Revolution project in South Abingdon to support design and painting of Shipping Container to house bicycles for the community.



The Numbers

- Our gazebo sessions are held weekly, outside the Gainsborough Green shops; South Abingdon Recreation Ground and Southern Town Park (Lambrick Way). We increase the number of sessions in summer depending on staff availability. In total in 2023/24 we delivered 56 1.5-hour sessions. Time taken by each staff to collect gazebo and chairs from the ADYP office and set up and then take down and return to the office is an additional 2 hours.
- Street work is across the whole of the Caldecott area – done on an as-needs basis – but there is an established pattern whereby young people come to the gazebo – staff put out a message on where the gazebo will be located for the session.
- A minimum of two and maximum of four staff are present at each session depending on the numbers of young people and the needs and planned activities.
- Minimum number of young people in a session is usually about 20 but very often we are up to 40 young people.
- We have also supported 6 young people from South Abingdon with 1-2-1 sessions

“Data are just summaries of thousands of stories—tell a few of those stories to help make the data meaningful.” Dan Heath, Centre for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship, Duke University, North Carolina

Case Study 1: Young Person (YP) showing risky behaviour in our street work:

- Volatile home situation because of parents’ relationship.
- YP in constant conflict with father as blames him.
- Father leaves family home & mother becomes more and more unstable, e.g. going out every weekend and drinking lots of alcohol.
- YP opens up to youth worker under gazebo and plans to meet for 121 support.
- YP works with youth worker to evaluate healthy & unhealthy relationships and recognises that his own sexual relationships have unhealthy tendencies, e.g. misogynistic views, understanding of consent, boundaries.
- YP identifies with parents’ situation and is able to view it from a new perspective/understanding which helps to reconfigure relationship with parents.

“Data are just summaries of thousands of stories—tell a few of those stories to help make the data meaningful.” Dan Heath, Centre for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship, Duke University, North Carolina

Case study 2: Young couple in potentially coercive relationship.

Young couple engage regularly under the gazebo; their relationship has toxic tendencies.

Young woman was previously a victim of rape which adds to the complexities of the dynamics between the two.

Young male engages in various risky behaviours, e.g. drug dealing, which adds a further instability to the relationship.

Relationship breaks down.

Both begin increasing unhealthy risk taking, e.g. casual sexual partners, finding themselves in more conflict with peers.

Staff build relationship under gazebo and offer 1-2-1 support.

Over several weeks Staff support the couple through conversations and activities that consider healthy & unhealthy aspects of relationships and protective behaviours.

Kept in regular contact to ensure young woman is safe and subsequently expressed a wish to talk about earlier abuse – dealt with under our safeguarding policy.

Feedback from young people

We conducted a questionnaire survey of 20 young people with whom we work to understand how they felt about sessions and the 1-2-1 support.

The overwhelming majority responded very positively to statements that indicated that they felt much more part of their community and that having the support of the youth workers on their doorstep made a huge difference to them.

Another 15 young people had taken part in a focus group session in an earlier study by OCC (through Community First) on health inequalities in the Caldecott ward. When asked about perceptions of their local area – some thought that

Caldecott is ‘branded’ negatively and that people are pessimistic and cynical and think that Caldecott cannot be different

There were varying opinions from the positive to the negative about the friendliness of the area

Young people identified Intergenerational history of issues – they felt that some young people are related to the ‘Caldecott Road Mafia’ and they were expectations to live up to a reputation.

Work in 2024/25

We have actively sought the support of SOFEA which provides education, employability and wellbeing programmes for vulnerable young people. It is also known for its Community Larder scheme – which young people help run and develop practical skills. It has also been developing other facilities such as a state-of-the-art kitchen and a science lab – again for young people to develop practical skills and get used to the world of work.

While the two current partners in AIYSP work on soft outcomes for young people; linking with SOFEA will provide the vital link to hard outcomes in terms of education, employment and training and ensure an integrated provision for young people.

SOFEA staff have been working alongside ADYP staff in South Abingdon getting to know the young people and this will be further strengthened in 2024/25.

We will be discussing this further at a meeting with Cllr. Murali Gunarajah and Cllr. Penelope Clover who are the nominated councillors for this Abingdon Town Council initiative and our other AIYSP partner - The Abingdon Bridge.

Thank you

The staff and trustees of ADYP thank Abingdon Town Council for its consistent support in ADYP's work with some of Abingdon's most vulnerable young people.

Rita Atkinson MBE

Trustee

Abingdon DAMASCUS Youth Project

April 2024