

# Report on Young people and their Attitudes to Healthy Living Completed 2014

**This research was developed and implemented by the  
GP Champions for Youth Health project:**

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the project

#### What is the GP Champions for Youth Health Project?

Brighton and Hove has been taking part in a national pilot; 10 locations around England were involved. Each location had a voluntary sector youth advice agency partnered with a General Practice. The remit was to 'improve health outcomes for young people'.

The national pilot has been a partnership between Youth Access, The Association for Young People's Health and the Royal College of General Practitioners. It was funded by the Department for Health and The Paul Hamlyn Foundation (see Appendix 1 for an information flyer).

Nationally the work is due to end in March 2015, with key learning, and tips, from the ten sites pulled together to form a toolkit which can be rolled out to other areas.

Each local project has been working hard with young people to improve health outcomes. In **Brighton and Hove** this has meant that **YMCA Downslink Group** (YMCA DLG), through its advice services, has been partnering with **The Portslade Health Centre**. We looked at local health data, and talked to the local authority about what research and work was being done in areas of health that were specifically focused on young people.

As a result of local data Dr Fiona Levack (Portslade Health Centre), and El Clarke (YMCA DLG) decided to work with young people on 'healthy lifestyles' as they recognised that a lot of work was already being done in areas such as mental health/emotional wellbeing, sexual health, and substance misuse.

El Clarke recruited a team of young 'GP health champions' for the project and together they decided that the commissioners and other youth services needed to know what young people thought about healthy living; the young volunteers decided to undertake a survey to analyse local attitudes to weight, exercise and eating. We received 246 survey responses back from young people. This report pulls together those responses and learning from the project.

## 2.0 The GP Champions for Health

### 2.1 Why did young people wanted to be involved?

Our interest to join the GP Champions for Youth Health stemmed from the ambition to improve the health of Young People and the health services they use throughout Brighton and Hove. The chance to join this group was made available to us through a variety of forms; researching for opportunities to become involved in Brighton and Hove health projects, and through the Brighton and Hove Youth Council.



(left to right, Kyle Stuart, Amber Muir, Thomas Soud, Hanna Ward-Penny)



*"Improving any type of public service is not an easy task. But when it comes to health services, the difficulty increases by countless folds. As a founding member of the GP Champions, I hoped that as a young person I could help improve GP services in a way that would be beneficial to young people, and without a doubt the current members have taken that initiative further. They produced this report that highlights key points regarding the relationship between young people and their consciousness of healthy wellbeing, and GP services. Let us hope that policy makers take the voice of the young people of our city into consideration to improve services that fall under their control."*

**Hayyan Asif, GP Champion**

*"I am really interested in studying medicine at university and becoming a doctor, and so I joined the GP champions, having heard about it through the Youth Council, as I wanted to gain more knowledge about how some of the local health systems worked, side by side with working to improve them, especially for young people"*

**Hannah Ward-Penny, GP Champion**



*"I got involved in GP Champions For Youth Health because of the work I did for the Brighton and Hove Youth Council in being the representative on the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was this opportunity which led to the offer to help Young People in the city even further by becoming part of this group. I joined GP Champions for Youth Health in the Summer of 2012. It has been a great experience and has led me to meeting many interesting people. I am*

*hopeful that the work we do will positively affect the health of Young People across the City”*

**Thomas Soud, GP Champion**

*“I joined GP champions because I wanted to make GP surgeries in Brighton and Hove safe and welcoming places for young adults to get advice they can trust on a healthy lifestyle”*

**Kyle Stuart, GP Champion**

One of our aims was to significantly reduce the communication barrier between health professionals and Young People, as we have found that many people can feel uncomfortable talking about their lifestyles with GPs. We have done our research through distributing surveys and running focus groups, in order to develop a straightforward guide for GPs. This guide will explain the most appropriate and effective ways to approach Young People about their health, using information we have gathered from our findings.

## 3.0 Objectives

One of the benefits most relevant to this project, as listed by the AYPH and Youth Access for GP Champions for Youth Health is **Promoting local awareness of the evidence and health needs of young people.**

The young GP Champions for Youth Health wanted to find out from local young people their thoughts on accessing health services to talk about weight, fitness and diet. The aim of the project was to increase GP’s awareness of these issues and how to ensure young people feel comfortable in asking for advice on these areas.

As part of the project we met with our partner, Portslade Health Centre, to help them become a young person friendly surgery. The young people created some interview questions which were answered by the Practice Manager, Angie Cool, and Dr Fiona Levack. From this, an insert was created just for young patients (see appendix 4).

## 4.0 Methodology

### 4.1 The Survey

We created a survey to get an idea of how young people in Brighton and Hove felt towards Healthy Living and also their attitudes towards GPs on the issue. The idea of the survey was to get a wide range of opinions and statistics which we could analyse in more detail in the focus group. The questions in the survey were split into 2 different parts; the first section focused more on how Young People felt about their own healthy living and lifestyle, whilst the second part focused more on how

they would interact with GPs on this issue. This allowed us to see how Young People saw GPs about issues which at first glance may not be related to them.

**(Thomas Soud)**

**See appendix 2 for a blank paper copy of the survey.**

## **Distributing the Survey**

When distributing the survey we used both a paper and an online system, and received a larger response than anticipated. The link for the online version was posted on both Twitter and Facebook, whilst both were also sent to local schools, colleges and other organisations across the city. We received 246 survey responses. When analysing our results we were found there was a higher proportion of female responses (69%) compared to the male responses (28%), and we felt that this may not have given us a true representation of young people's attitudes across the city.

The majority of the paper responses came from the schools that we, the GP Champions, attended. Overall we found that paper copies were more likely to be completed than the online version - perhaps it was easier for young people to fill in. Similarly, some of the online surveys were started, but not completed; we decided that this could have been due to the survey being too long.

**(Hanna Ward-Penny)**

## **4.2 Focus Group**

A focus group took place and was attended by 4 young people between the ages of 13 and 21 years old. We had hoped the participant numbers would be higher, but on the day we had 4 young people turn up.

The aim of the group was to explore further the results of the survey looking at key areas –

- looking online,
- going to GPs for advice,
- how surgeries and GPs can help young people feel comfortable
- weight concerns that appeared to be specific to young women

During the group we also looked at:

- helping Portslade Health Centre develop their Facebook page
- feedback on a new weight management service for young people run by Brighton & Hove Food Partnership.

You can see Appendix 8 for full notes from the focus group.

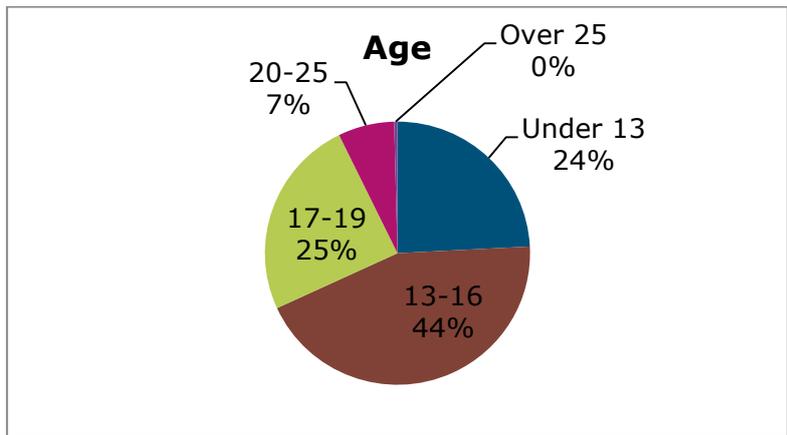


## 5.0 Demographics of Respondents

### 5.1 Gender

69% were female; 28% were male  
 1% were transgender; 2% preferred not to say

### 5.2 Age



### 5.3 Identity Groups

We asked respondents to identify with one or more of the following groups:

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| I am in education, employment or training                             | <b>89%</b> |
| English is my first language  | <b>78%</b> |
| I am from a Black or Asian or other minority ethnic group             | <b>13%</b> |
| I have a long term health condition or disability                     | <b>11%</b> |
| I have been homeless or lived in insecure housing                     | <b>9%</b>  |
| I am above school age and unemployed                                  | <b>9%</b>  |
| I have had contact with the Criminal Justice System                   | <b>8%</b>  |
| I am from the LGBTU community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Unsure) | <b>7%</b>  |
| I am a young parent   | <b>3%</b>  |
| I am a young carer  | <b>3%</b>  |
| I have been in care   | <b>2%</b>  |
| I am from the travelling community                                    | <b>1%</b>  |

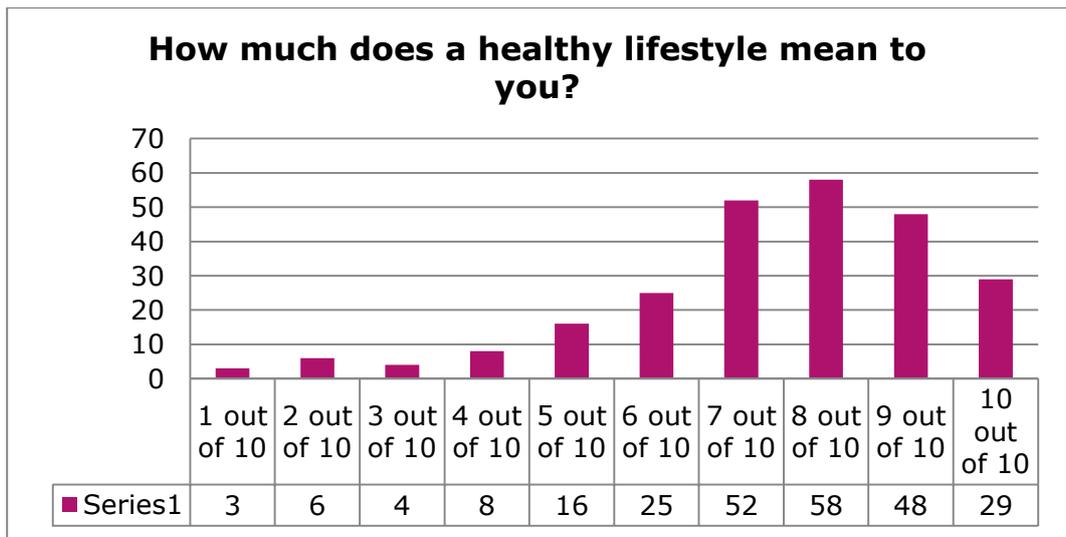


**6.0 Survey Findings**

**6.1 The questions and responses**

**On a scale of 1 – 10, how much does a healthy lifestyle mean to you?**

10 = really important and 1= I don't think about it



The average score was 8, important.

**Please tell us the reasons why.**

120 comments were made as to the reasons for the scores above. The comments were sorted into 7 categories; some comments covered more than one category.

- 38% thought it would help them to be health and/or fit
- 24% considered their future, including prevention of illnesses or premature death
- 23% considered their emotional and mental health
- 18% wanted to lose weight or maintain their weight
- 8% thought that it was important for their looks
- 2% said it was important because of what their friends thought or that it depended on who you were with as to how important it was, *"Depends who I'm hanging out with"*
- 2% said that it was imperative due to health condition (e.g. pregnant)

*"A healthy lifestyle is important because you feel and look confident and feel good in yourself"*

*"Because I want to stay healthy and avoid as many diseases as possible and live for as long as possible and I don't want to look fat"*

Those who scored low said that they had other priorities, like school or college or that it just didn't matter to them.

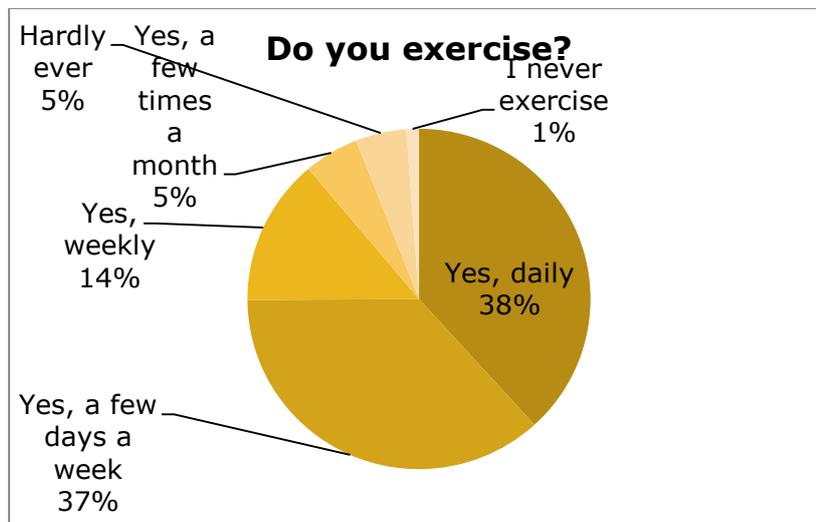


"More important stuff in my life"

"I have other things to worry about such as exams and work to worry about rather than my diet"

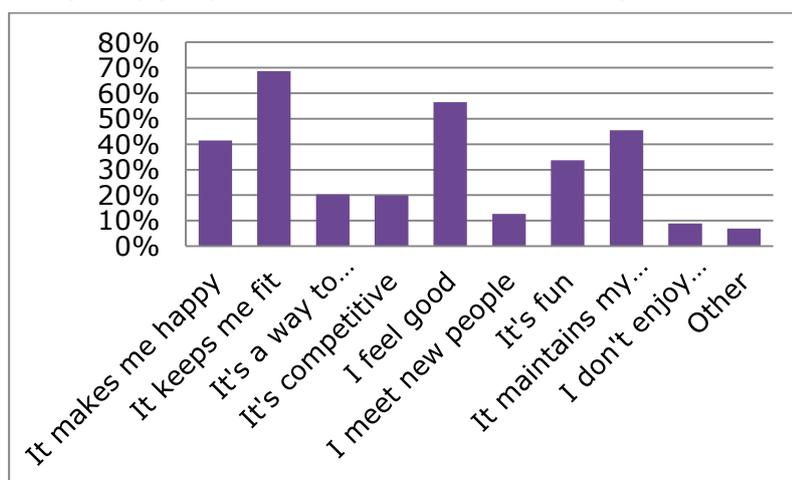
## Do you exercise?

Exercise in this instance was defined as: 30 minutes of brisk walking, cycling, aerobic exercise, sports, gym, etc)



## What do you enjoy about exercise?

NB, young people could tick more than one option on the survey.



NB: 'It's a way to...' is from the option 'it's a way to socialise and see my friends' and 'it maintains my...' was 'it maintains my weight'.

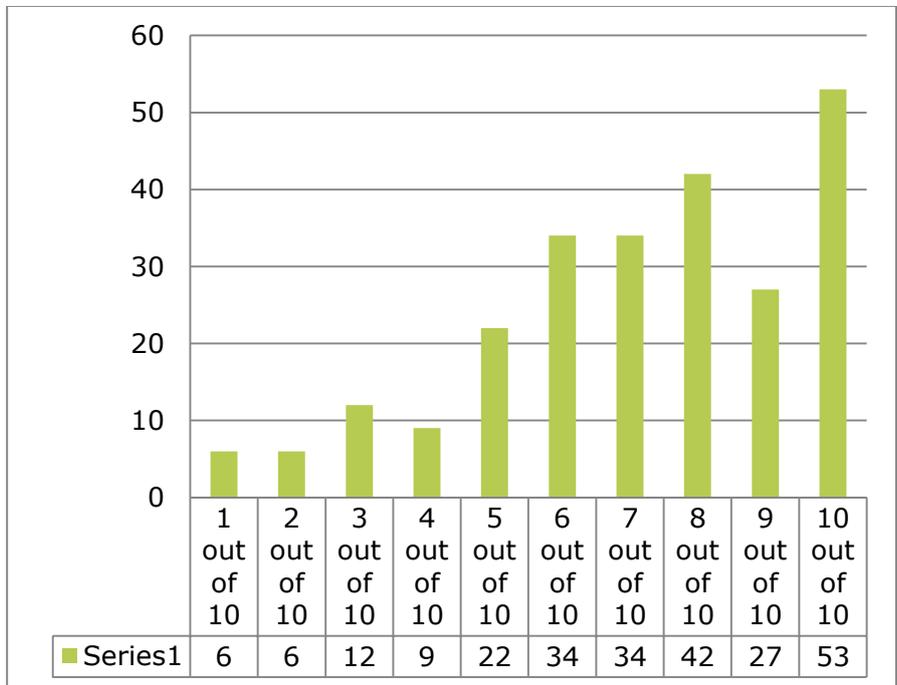
Others reasons given:

- "It relieves stress"
- "It gets me places (walking)"



- "Clears my mind"
- "It depends on what it is"
- "Refreshes you"
- "It allows me to play and release positive energy"
- "Rewarding"
- "Helps me when I am depressed"

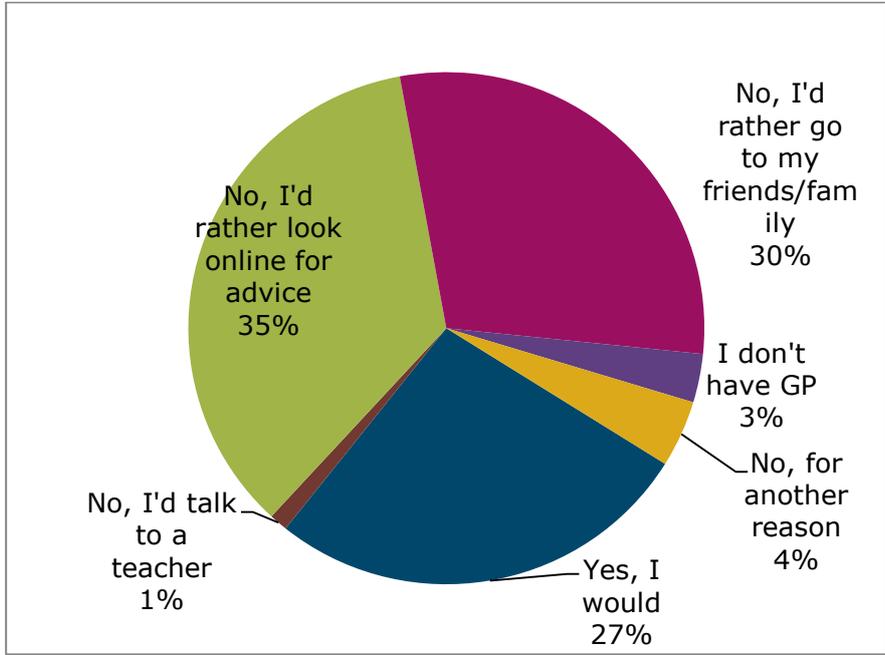
**On a scale of 1 – 10, how comfortable would you be talking to your GP about your lifestyle?** 10 = really comfortable and 1= very uncomfortable



The average score was 7.



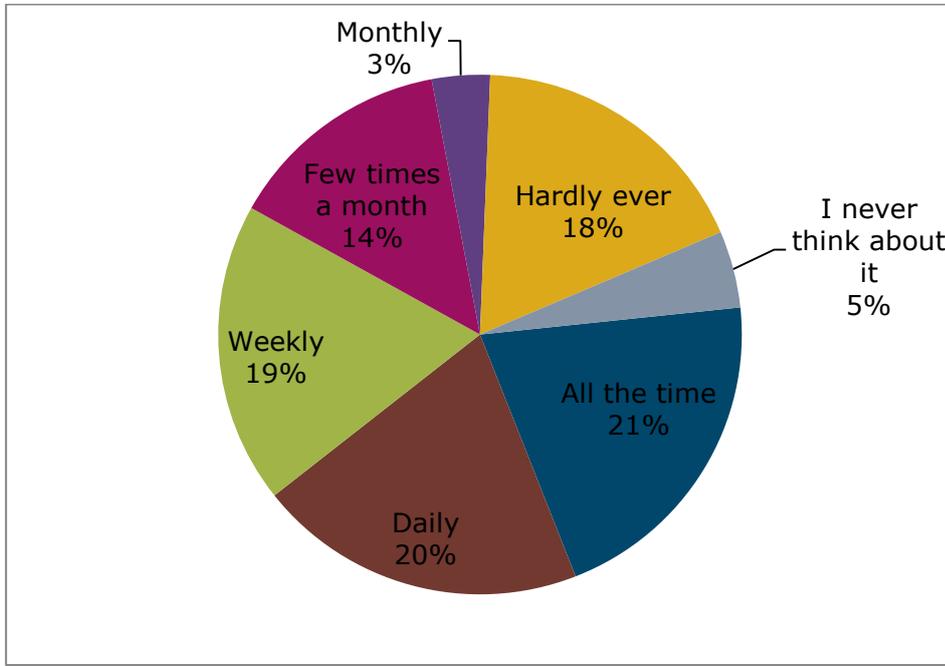
**If you had an issue about your lifestyle would you go to your GP?**



- *"I'd sort my own life out"*
- *"I wouldn't at all"*
- *"If my family advised talking to my GP after I talked to them I would"*



**How often do you think about your weight?**

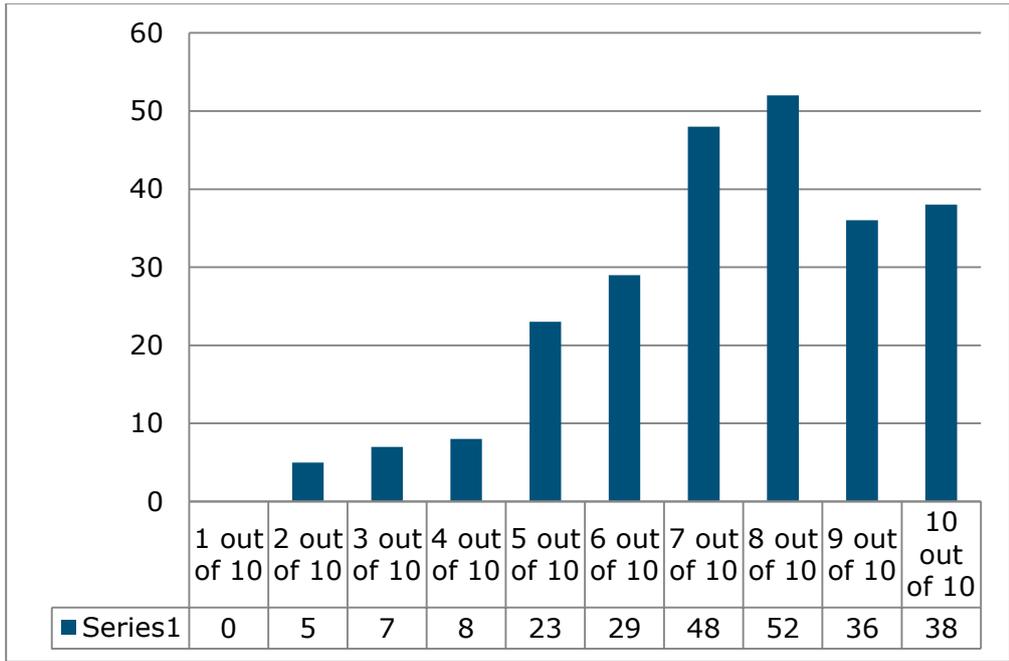


**Are you happy with your weight?**

- 55% said yes
- 40% said no
- 5% said sometimes (this was not an option available on the online survey, however some people wrote this on as extra on the paper forms)



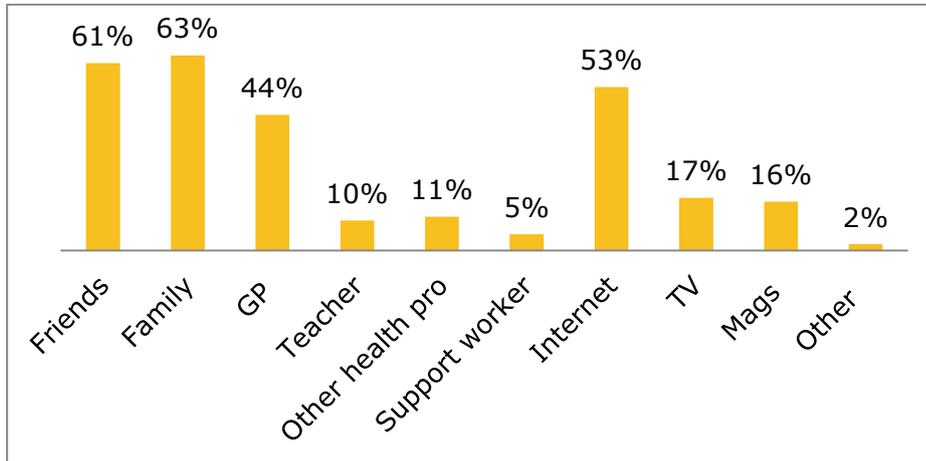
**On a scale of 1 – 10, if you wanted to maintain/achieve a healthy weight, how confident would you feel about doing this? 10 = very confident and 1= not confident**



The average score was 8



**Who or where else would you take advice from about your lifestyle (weight/eating/exercise?)** NB, young people could tick more than one option on the survey



Comments made by those who selected 'Other':

- "I don't feel comfortable doing it"
- "My therapist"
- "Internet, a reliable website e.g. NHS"

**If you wanted to change your weight, how would you go about this?**

NB, young people could select more than one option on the survey

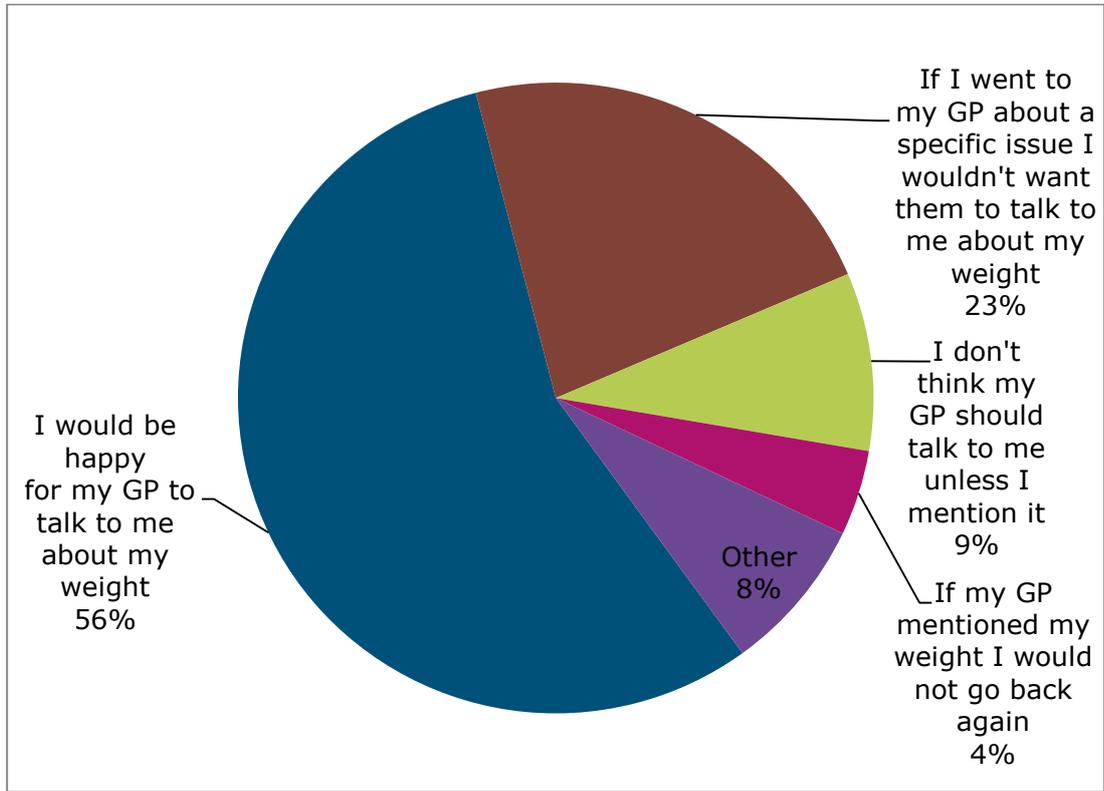
|  |            |
|--|------------|
| I would increase my levels of exercise                         | <b>57%</b> |
| I would eat healthier (less junk food, more fruit and veg)     | <b>49%</b> |
| I would look for advice on my own                              | <b>22%</b> |
| I would eat less of everything                                 | <b>20%</b> |
| I would ask a health professional (e.g. nurse, GP, pharmacist) | <b>7%</b>  |
| I would buy slimming pills                                     | <b>4%</b>  |
| Other  | <b>3%</b>  |
| I would join a slimming club like Weight Watchers              | <b>2%</b>  |
| I would go on Slimfast, or a similar product                   | <b>1%</b>  |

Comments made by those who chose 'other':

- "Ask friends for help"
- "I really don't care. I know I'm ok and if I'm not then it's my own fault"
- "I don't know"



**How would you feel if your GP asked you about your weight?**



Comments made by those who selected 'Other':

- "I would tell them but be embarrassed"
- "Uncomfortable"
- "I don't care"
- "I would ignore them"
- "I feel embarrassed and self-conscious"
- "Reply and be polite, but would be happy with the conversation"
- "I wouldn't mind, I don't really care"
- "I'd feel a bit awkward about it but if they brought it up I'd talk about it a bit"
- "I would feel uncomfortable but would go with it"
- "I don't like discussing it with people I have never met"

**How do you think young people would like to be talked to about their weight/exercise/eating by their GP ?**

We included a text box for young people to write their ideas down and collated all their responses into themes, which the GP Champions wrote up as a 'guide' for GPs.

Please see appendices 5 and 6.

## 7.0 Focus Group Summary

### 7.1 Going to GPs for advice

The group felt that young people might not be going to their GP because they may be ashamed or embarrassed of their body. One said that they didn't think a doctor could see you about this topic and that many people think the doctor will only see you if you are very ill. They therefore felt that if they went to see a GP about their health, they would feel it was as if it was their own fault for being unhealthy.

The group found that marketing was a big issue surrounding young people's knowledge of what GP surgeries offer and thought that perhaps more young people would visit their GPs if they knew they could.

Another issue that was brought up was surrounding the surgery itself. One said that waiting for their appointment can often be quite boring, especially if they had to wait for a long time.

Some suggestions into how the young people thought they could make GP surgeries more accessible includes the following:

- For surgeries to offer a 5 minute drop in slot, so that young people could quickly pop in and ask for some advice.
- Some young people do not find leaflets very helpful as many of them put them in their pocket and forget to read them.
- It would be helpful if some GP surgeries could be open later so that young people could easily pop in after college or work, as they might not be able to during the day.
- Organising a healthy living event could be a great way of promoting what local GPs have to offer in terms of advice and support around healthy living.
- The creation of a 'Group setting', for example a support group around healthy living, where it was possible for young people to talk openly about their lifestyle was also suggested.

The group were asked to write things they would and wouldn't like to experience when seeing a GP. These were written on post-it notes which can be seen in Appendix 8.

The following additional suggestions came from the group:

- They felt that reception staff could be more equipped to deal with young people, and that it would be helpful if relevant information about the surgery, could be shown on screens inside the surgery.
- A major point that arose was surrounding waiting times. They felt that information about waiting times were often inaccurate and that it would be very beneficial if this information could be improved.
- The efficiency of referral could be improved, as it often took a long time for them to be processed and so they often have to wait for weeks to hear.

- Although they would like to receive advice from their GPs, they wouldn't automatically expect medication for issues around their weight.
- The young people felt that it could be seen as 'irresponsible' for a doctor not to talk to them about their lifestyle, even if the patient came in with an issue irrelevant to weight issues, as it can give GPs a chance to deal with issues and offer advice about lifestyle to people who may not have visited their GP otherwise.
- One young person brought up a poster depicting a male measuring his stomach, showing what measurement defined obesity, that he had seen on the street and felt that this was a good way to communicate with someone who may have a problem with their weight.

## 8.0 Conclusion

### 8.1 Main findings

We found that:

- 85% of young people said that a healthy lifestyle was important or very important to them.
- 75% of young people said that they exercise at least a few times a week or more
- 70% of young people enjoyed exercise as it kept them fit and healthy
- 78% of young people would be comfortable speaking to a GP about healthy living
- However, only 27% said that they would go to their GP for advice
- 42% of young people think about their weight all the time or on a daily basis; 55% said that they were happy with their weight
- Overall, young people feel that they are equipped and confident to live a healthy lifestyle, giving 8 out of 10 for confidence levels
- The top 3 places where young people would look for advice on healthy living were: Family, Friends, Internet
- When asked how they would change their weight young people overwhelming stated they would eat more healthily and increase their exercise

Overall, these results suggest that the majority of young people hold a healthy lifestyle to be important and feel confident that they have the ability to live one.

However, in spite of this a large number are not happy with their weight. This appears to link to what extent healthy living occupies young people's thoughts, with half thinking about health living regularly. Our results suggest that young people are aware that the best way to live a healthy lifestyle is to exercise more and eat better; taking advice primarily from friends and family but also including their own research through the internet.

From our focus group reasons not to go to the GP about lifestyles are that they would be embarrassed, they might receive complex information around their BMI, they don't want to be judged or 'nagged', and also a lot of young people don't realise that they can go to their GP in the first place.

## 9.0 Recommendations

Here are some recommendations from young people about our results for GPs:

1. Don't use terms like BMI, it's confusing to us
2. Ask every young person 'do you mind if I ask you about your lifestyle / do you have any issues with your lifestyle?' Make them aware that you ask everyone the same thing. This will give young people an option to talk more about any concerns they might have.
3. Although young people at the focus group thought that the 'brutal truth' was in order, there has been a survey recently which has suggested that this has the opposite effect<sup>1</sup>
4. Offer detailed advice, including signposting to relevant services across the City<sup>2</sup>
5. Offer follow up appointments
6. If possible offer drop-in slots for young people to improve accessibility
7. Train reception staff to talk to young people
8. Create a young person friendly surgery (for example, have a radio to help with confidentiality, display board, patient booklet – point 9)
9. Confirm and advertise that GPs or nurses at your surgery are open to talk about healthy living advice
10. Include information specific to young people in your patient booklet (see the example developed by GP Champions for Portslade Health Centre in the Appendix 4)
11. Read our booklet and use our mouse mat for handy tips at your fingertips!

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2014/09/11/fat-shaming-doesnt-work-a-new-study-says/>

<sup>2</sup> For example, YMCA Youth Advice Centre, YMCA Right Here, B&H Food Partnership

## 10.0 Learning Points from Project

### **Be consistent with terms used**

From looking at the results we should have focused on 'weight' throughout the survey, as opposed to using the term 'healthy living'. Weight is a more sensitive issue so would we have had different results asking specifically about this as opposed to all encompassing 'healthy living' looking at weight, exercise, diet, etc?

### **Collection of information**

The project used Puzzledout.com for the online survey. This tool is administered by Cernis and was developed from funding received from the National CAHMS Support Service. The aim of Puzzledout.com is to give young people a platform in which to share their opinions about health services so it felt like the most appropriate tool to use.

As well as the above, it was seen by the GP Champions to be a very young person friendly online survey.

Cernis were great at delivering results as and when we needed it but it became difficult trying to make comparisons across questions when we ended up with online responses and hard copy responses.

### **Distribution of the survey**

When reviewing the distribution of our survey, we concluded that in order to get a larger and more even spread of responses, there were aspects of it that we could improve on next time.

The Survey : As the vast majority of responses came from paper surveys, we thought that, in order to increase the number of responses, we should distribute more paper surveys as well as making the survey shorter, to try to increase the number of young people finishing it.

Many of the respondents were at school, college or working. We did distribute the online survey to many voluntary agencies across the City and, although the results were reflective of the demographic of Brighton & Hove, it would have been good to get other groups of young people more engaged with the survey (for example, unemployed, more from BME communities, specific groups of disadvantaged young people, etc.). We would have liked to have had an equal proportion of females to males; 69% females took part.

Gender : if we had kept track of the number of each responses from each gender over the duration of the survey, we could have tried to push for more male responses, thus increasing our male feedback.

Organisations : many of the paper copies were from schools that we attended. To try and improve the responses from other schools, we could have asked Schools

Councils, or Youth Council representatives from other schools to circulate more copies of the survey around their schools, to get a more balanced response.

## **More focus groups**

Only one group took place and the GP Champions would have liked to have had more. We asked young people on the survey if they would like to be involved with focus groups and many did say yes, however, it was extremely difficult to contact or get in touch with those interested.

## **11.0 Next Steps**

The legacy of this project will be the resources created for GP surgeries across the City in the form of an information booklet and mouse mat. These will be sent to 47 surgeries across the City alongside Right Here resources (see Appendices 5, 6 and 7).

The GP Champions survey results will be disseminated to the city's Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Public Health (Brighton and Hove City Council) and other agencies that serve to meet the health needs of young people.

The resources and guides produced from the project will be included in a national toolkit, produced by AYHP and Youth Access.

## **12.0 Acknowledgements**

This report acknowledges the much needed support from the following areas:

- The GP Champions – thank you for all the enthusiasm, commitment and ideas.
- Youth Access – who project managed the national pilots and offered advice, support, and a contribution to participation resources.
- Public Health, Brighton and Hove City Council - who collaborated with us during the survey period, and have been very willing to engage in further discussions around understanding the health needs of young people. They also funded some of the meetings for the GP Champions.
- Portslade Health Centre – who were willing to listen and act on feedback from the GP Champions.

## 12.1 Final words

“The project has been a great example of how involving young people in peer-led research can produce some really useful, honest, feedback for services and commissioners to take on board.

It’s had a number of challenges – there was limited funding attached to the local pilots, funding was mainly to do participation and staff attendance at one event a year. This meant that YMCA DLG staff and Portslade Health Centre staff had to volunteer their own time, in order to help move young people’s ideas into something tangible.

This report shows what learning came out of the **survey**, but there has also been further work undertaken as part of this pilot which includes:

- Young People and Portslade Health Centre working together to enable the surgery to make some changes that will improve young people’s experiences
- Developing ‘top tips’ for GPs when talking to young people about health lifestyles
- Working with Brighton and Hove Food Partnership to help them consult young people around a new weight management service designed for young people”

(El Clarke, Quality and Participation Manager, YMCA DownsLink Group)

“The GP Champions project has given the doctors and staff at Portslade Health Centre the opportunity to take a closer look at the way we provide GP services for young people. This allowed us to work with the young people and ask them to suggest innovative ways we could make the Practice more accessible to young people. We really welcomed this and believe that by adopting the suggestions they made young people will feel able to get more out of each consultation.

The project would never have got off the ground without the hard work and persistence of Eleanor Clarke and Lianne Kenny who facilitated the Healthy Lifestyle Survey which was devised by the young people themselves. This has produced some valuable data about the attitudes of young people in the predominantly 13-18 year old age group, to diet, weight and exercise. This survey has produced a stimulus to The Brighton and Hove Commissioners in Public Health to set up a healthy weight service dedicated to this age group which will be accessible for young people throughout the city. This is a real achievement.

I would like to thank all the young people who worked with GP Champions and the over two hundred young people who completed the survey”

(Dr Fiona Levack, Portslade Health Centre)

Report Published February 2015

## **Appendices:**

- 1. AYPH GP Champs Flyer**
- 2. The young person's survey**
- 3. Interview with Portslade Health Centre (PHC)**
- 4. Information insert for young patients at PHC**
- 5. Image of GP Champs Mouse Mat**
- 6. Booklet for GPs to accompany the Mouse Mat**
- 7. Information sheet for GP packages**
- 8. Full notes from Focus Group (July 2014)**