Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle Young People Questionnaire.

Loneliness and Social Isolation in young people living in Newcastle and Gateshead.

About Healthwatch Gateshead

Healthwatch Gateshead (HWG) and Healthwatch Newcastle (HWN) are two of 152 local Healthwatch organisations established throughout England on 1 April 2013 under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We have a dual role to champion the rights of users of publicly funded health and social care services for both adults and children, and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

We collect feedback on services from people of all ages and communities. We do this through our network of voluntary and community sector organisations; during events, drop-in sessions and listening events at a range of venues across Gateshead; online through the feedback centre on our websites; via social media; and from callers to our information and signposting helpline. As part of the remit to gather views, we also have the power to 'enter and view' services and conduct announced and unannounced visits.

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1. Introduction

Access to Healthcare is a right afforded to all citizens in the United Kingdom via the NHS. The first principle of the NHS Constitution for England is that 'the NHS provides a comprehensive service available to all'. Providers of these services have a duty to support those who access these services.

HWG & HWN work to understand the experience of users, carers, and representatives through a range of engagement activities. We collect feedback on services from people of all ages and communities. We do this through our network of voluntary and community sector organisations; during events, drop-in sessions and listening events at a range of venues across Gateshead and Newcastle; online through the feedback centre on our websites; via social media; and from callers to our information and signposting helplines. As part of the remit to gather views, we also have the power to 'enter and view' services and conduct announced and unannounced visits.

In March 2022 HWG and HWN launched a survey to gather young people's views and general experiences of loneliness and social isolation. Our report focuses on feedback received from:
- young people from Gateshead aged between 18 and 25 who responded to the survey. Most respondents were white British and there was an equal mix of females to males.
and
- young people from Newcastle aged between 16 and 25 who responded to the survey. Most respondents were Asian / Asian British: Bangladeshi and there was an equal mix of females to males.

2. Rationale

In March 2020 the UK went into lockdown, with restrictions imposed by the government to contain the spread of COVID-19. These restrictions cause extended periods of isolation for young people away from their social circles, educational establishments, work colleagues and their extended families and community networks. Even before the pandemic, young people nationally are more likely to report that they were more lonely than older generations. Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle identified loneliness as a recurring issue in other engagement projects and recognised that these feelings occur in wide ranging settings and in all stages of life. They then explored questions around loneliness and isolation and co-created this project and survey with Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle.

The intended outcomes from this report were to
- Understand how often young people feel lonely or socially isolated
- Find out the local services young people are using to combat loneliness and social isolation
- Make insightful recommendations to local providers.

3. Methodology

An online structured questionnaire with open and closed questions was developed and data collection ran for 12 weeks from March 2022. The survey questions were co-designed by volunteers to gather young people's experiences of loneliness and social isolation.

Surveys were initially promoted via Healthwatch Gateshead Healthwatch Newcastle networks, contacts within NHS, social care and other local voluntary sector organisations, and volunteers promoting the survey within their own networks. A second phase promoted the survey via events at Newcastle College.

4. Findings

Key Findings:

- From 8 respondents in Gateshead aged between 18 and 25, 6 felt they were lonely sometimes and 7 felt socially isolated sometimes.
- The main cause of feeling lonely and socially isolated was low self-esteem / lack of confidence and having no friends to talk to. A lack of social interaction was the third main cause.
- It was found that from the responses, young people preferred to do an outdoor activity with another person to help with feelings of loneliness and social isolation.
- From 9 respondents in Newcastle aged between 16 and 25, 5 felt they were lonely sometimes and 5 felt socially isolated sometimes.
- The main cause of feeling lonely and socially isolated was low mood with 5 in 9 stating this: being too busy with work or studies and bereavement was the next main causes.
- It was found that from the respondents, young people digitally connecting with friends and family or someone they trust helped with feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

HOW OFTEN DO YOUNG PEOPLE FROM GATESHEAD FEEL LONELY?
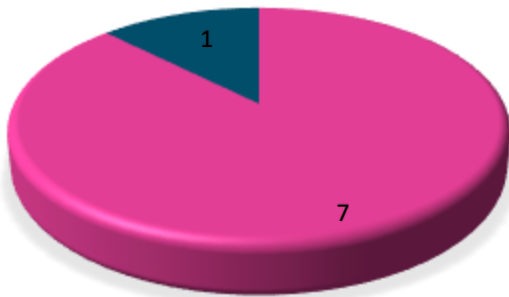

1   1   6
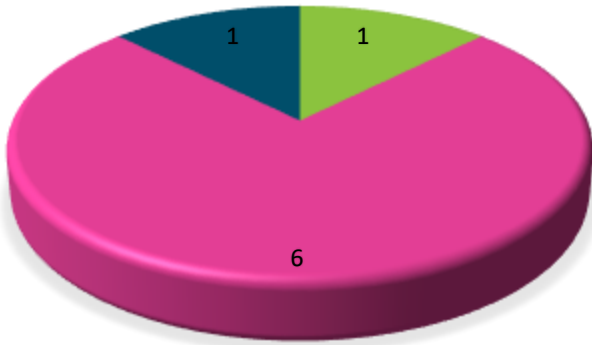
Rarely   Sometimes   Most of the time

HOW OFTEN DO YOUNG PEOPLE FROM NEWCASTLE FEEL LONELY?
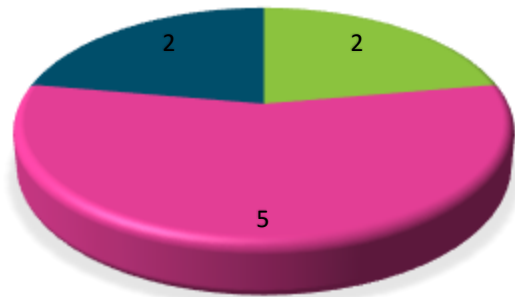

2   2   5
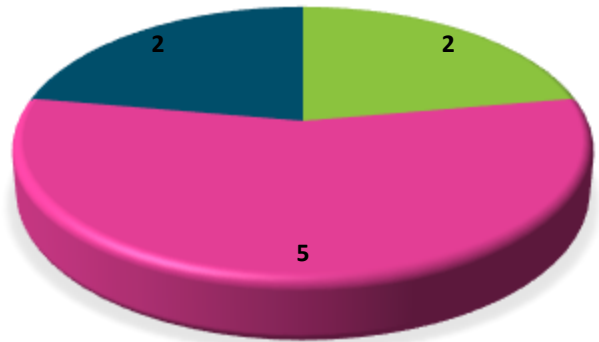
Never   Sometimes   Most of the time

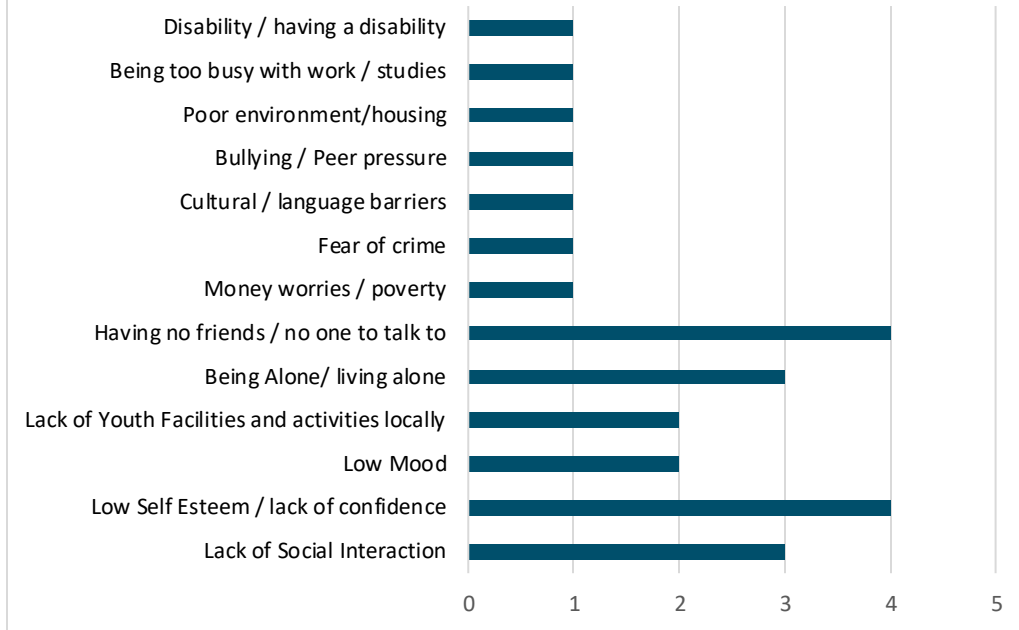## HOW OFTEN DO YOUNG PEOPLE IN GATESHEAD FEEL SOCIALLY ISOLATED?

1   7

Sometimes   Most of the time

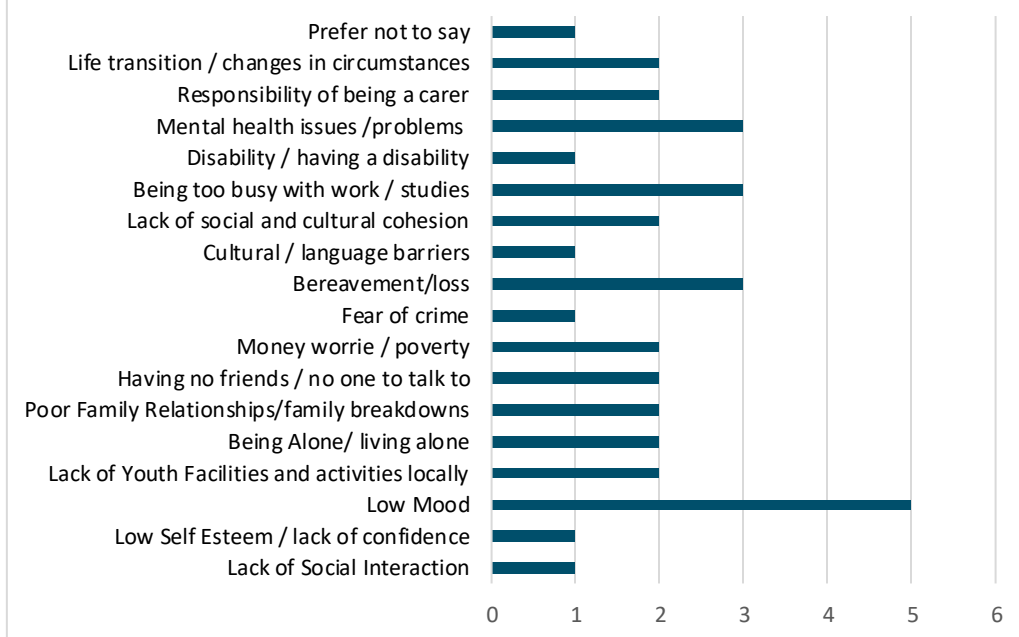## HOW OFTEN DO YOUNG PEOPLE FROM NEWCASTLE FEEL SOCIALLY ISOLATED?

2   2   5

Never   Sometimes   Most of the time

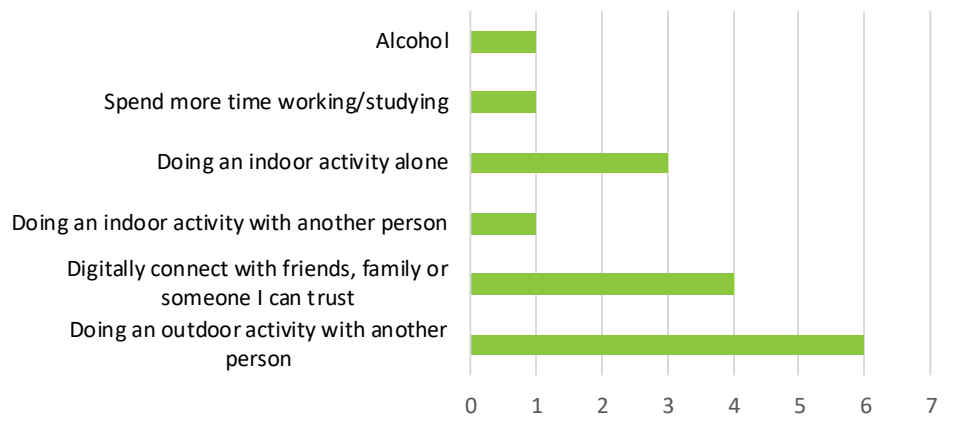## Respondents from Gateshead felt the following issues caused them to feel lonely and/or socially isolated.

Issue	Value
Disability / having a disability	1
Being too busy with work / studies	1
Poor environment/housing	1
Bullying / Peer pressure	1
Cultural / language barriers	1
Fear of crime	1
Money worries / poverty	1
Having no friends / no one to talk to	4
Being Alone/ living alone	3
Lack of Youth Facilities and activities locally	2
Low Mood	2
Low Self Esteem / lack of confidence	4
Lack of Social Interaction	3

Respondents from Newcastle felt the following issues caused them to feel lonely and/or socially isolated.

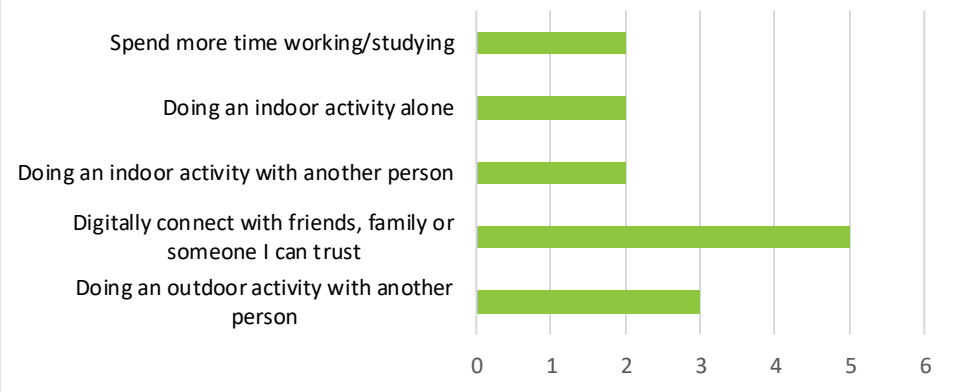| Issue	Value
Prefer not to say	1
Life transition / changes in circumstances	2
Responsibility of being a carer	2
Mental health issues /problems	3
Disability / having a disability	1
Being too busy with work / studies	3
Lack of social and cultural cohesion	2
Cultural / language barriers	1
Bereavement/loss	3
Fear of crime	1
Money worrie / poverty	2
Having no friends / no one to talk to	2
Poor Family Relationships/family breakdowns	2
Being Alone/ living alone	2
Lack of Youth Facilities and activities locally	2
Low Mood	5
Low Self Esteem / lack of confidence	1
Lack of Social Interaction	1

Most respondents from Newcastle felt that Low mood caused them to feel lonely and socially isolated, and respondents in Gateshead found that having no friends and no one to talk to and low self esteem was a major factor in causing loneliness and social isolation.
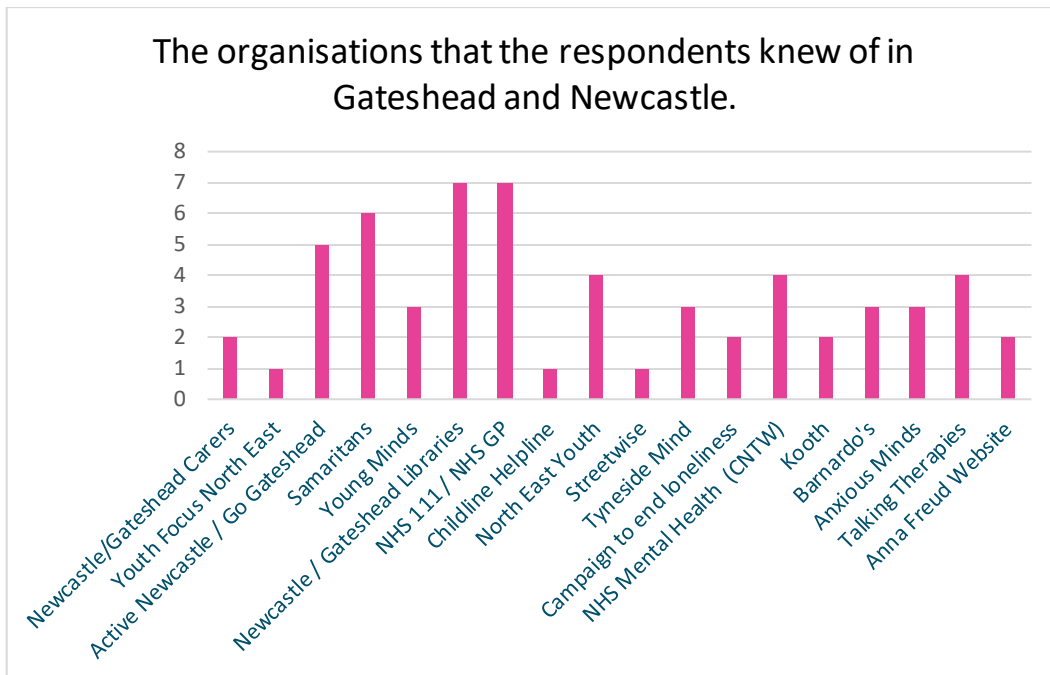
Respondents in Gateshead felt that these interventions helped them when they felt lonely and/or socially isolated

Intervention	Value
Alcohol	1
Spend more time working/studying	1
Doing an indoor activity alone	3
Doing an indoor activity with another person	1
Digitally connect with friends, family or someone I can trust	4
Doing an outdoor activity with another person	6

Respondents in Newcastle felt the following interventions helped them when they felt lonely and/orsocially isolated.

Intervention	Value
Spend more time working/studying	2
Doing an indoor activity alone	2
Doing an indoor activity with another person	2
Digitally connect with friends, family or someone I can trust	5
Doing an outdoor activity with another person	3

Respondents in Newcastle felt digitally connecting with friends online, which is a solitary activity, helped them when they felt lonely and/or socially isolated, where those in Gateshead found doing an outdoor activity with another person more beneficial. This is conspicuous as Gateshead is less urbanised than Newcastle so this could be a factor in shaping this response.

The organisations that the respondents knew of in Gateshead and Newcastle.

A bar chart showing the number of respondents (0 to 8 scale) who knew of each organisation:

- Newcastle/Gateshead Carers: 2
- Youth Focus North East: 1
- Active Newcastle / Go Gateshead: 5
- Samaritans: 6
- Young Minds: 3
- Newcastle / Gateshead Libraries: 7
- NHS 111 / NHS GP: 7
- Childline Helpline: 1
- North East Youth: 4
- Streetwise: 1
- Tyneside Mind: 3
- Campaign to end loneliness: 2
- NHS Mental Health (CNTW): 4
- Kooth: 2
- Barnardo's: 3
- Anxious Minds: 3
- Talking Therapies: 4
- Anna Freud Website: 2

5. Demographics

Our report focuses on feedback from a small group of young people from Gateshead and Newcastle. In Gateshead the age range of respondents was between 18 and 25 and in Newcastle they were aged between 16 and 25. In Gateshead most respondents were White British and in Newcastle they were Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi. There was an equal mix of males and females across both areas. Please see Appendix 1 for demographic breakdown.

6. Conclusion/Recommendations

This report solidifies the findings of other national reports and wider system knowledge. Before the pandemic in spring 2020, 35% of young people said they feel lonely often or most of the time despite spending 3 or more hours on social media. In November 2020, according to an Oxford ARC Study of UK adults, almost half of the 18- to 24-year-old respondents reported to being lonely in lockdown.
Even before the lockdown in 2019, nearly 9 in 10 Britons aged from 18 to 24 said they experience loneliness to some degree with a quarter of respondents suffering often and 7% of respondents saying they are lonely all the time.[1]

We reinforce the following points as important priorities to improving services for young people living in Gateshead and Newcastle. These recommendations are aimed at services in Gateshead and Newcastle that work with young people, voluntary and community

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[1] Mental Health Foundation (2022). Loneliness policy briefing - England | Mental Health Foundation (Accessed on 05/07/2022)

organisations, mental health services, counselling services, schools, colleges and universities, social workers, and any other professional working with young people.

Anyone working with young people need to be aware of loneliness and social isolation in young people so that services can provide interventions, help, and support to young people. Services need to acknowledge loneliness and social isolation as a factor in young people taking part in activities and recognise this, so that they can improve their service delivery.

Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle will continue to engage with young people about health and social care services suitable to them. We will promote open conversations about mental health, loneliness and social isolation using social media platforms to reduce stigma and misconceptions. Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle will continue to build positive relationships with young people, raise awareness of the Mental Health statutory and voluntary services in the local area and promote NHS validated online support, events, and activities for young people in Gateshead and Newcastle.

Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle will work with all health and social care services in Gateshead and Newcastle to build strong resilient communities as an important protection against loneliness and social isolation. We will also promote system wide staff training in Mental Health First Aid or Make Every Contact Count Mental Health.

We will share this report to key partners and stakeholders and publish it on the Healthwatch Gateshead website and the Healthwatch Newcastle website.

7. Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle volunteers who co-created this survey as well as distributed the survey.
Thank you to everyone that has helped us with our consultation for this report including members of the public who shared their views and experiences with us and our partners for sharing the survey within their groups.
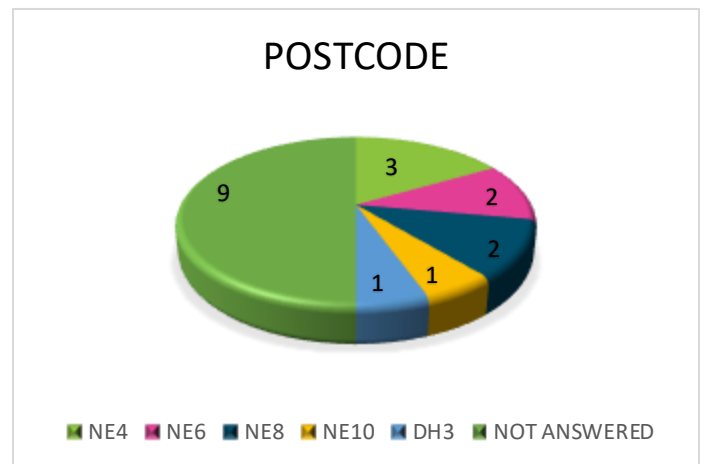
8. Appendix 1

Demographics
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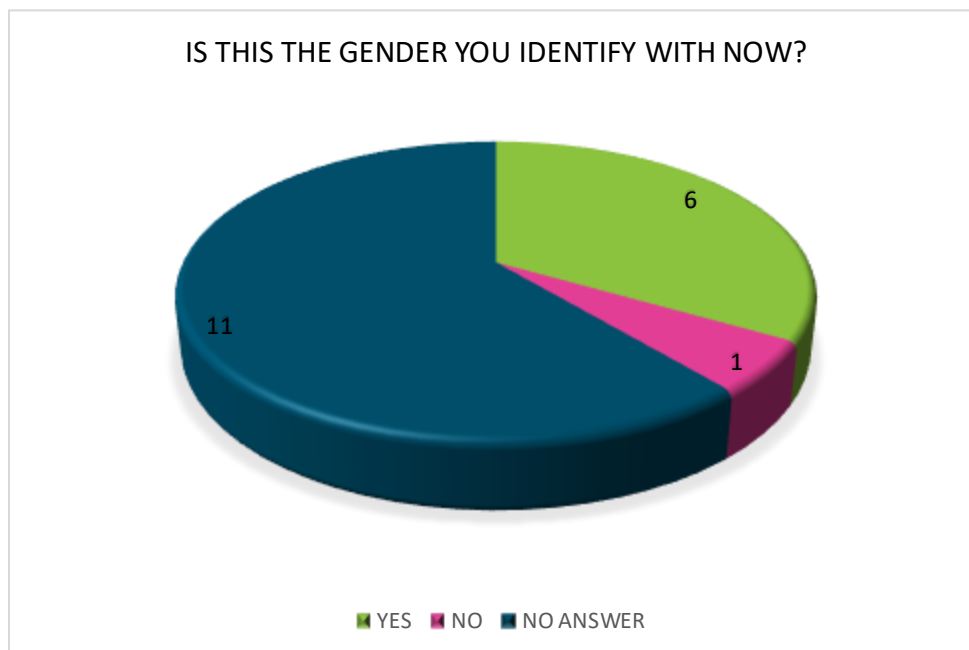
YOUR POSTCODE	PARTICIPANTS
NE4	3
NE6	2
NE8	2
NE10	1
DH3	1
NOT ANSWERED	9

POSTCODE

WHAT GENDER WERE YOU ASSIGNED AT BIRTH?	PARTICIPANTS
MAN	4
WOMAN	4
PREFER NOT TO SAY	1
NOT ANSWERED	9

IS THIS THE GENDER YOU IDENTIFY WITH NOW?

WHAT IS YOUR ETHNIC BACKGROUND	PARTICIPANTS
ASIAN/ASIAN BRITISH: BANGLADESHI	4
BLACK/BLACK BRITISH: AFRICAN	1
WHITE: BRITISH/ENGLISH/ N.IRISH/ SCOTTISH/WELSH	2
WHITE IRISH	1
OTHER WHITE BACKGROUND	1
NOT ANSWERED	9

WHAT IS YOUR AGE	PARTICIPANTS
14-16	0
16-18	1
18-20	2
20-22	2
22-25	4
NOT ANSWERED	9

WHAT IS YOUR SEXUALITY	PARTICIPANTS
HETEROSEXUAL	8
NOT ANSWERED	10

DO YOU HAVE A LONG-TERM HEALTH CONDITION?	PARTICIPANTS
YES	2
NO	6
PREFER NOT TO SAY	2
NOT ANSWERED	8

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO HAVE A DISABILITY?	PARTICIPANTS
YES	0
NO	8
PREFER NOT TO SAY	0

DO YOU HAVE CARING RESPONSIBILITIES?	PARTICIPANTS
YES – UNPAID SANDWICH CARER	1
YES – UNPAID PARENT CARER	1
NO	7
NOT ANSWERED	9

How would you describe your general health?

	Very Good	Average	Poor
Participants	3	5	2
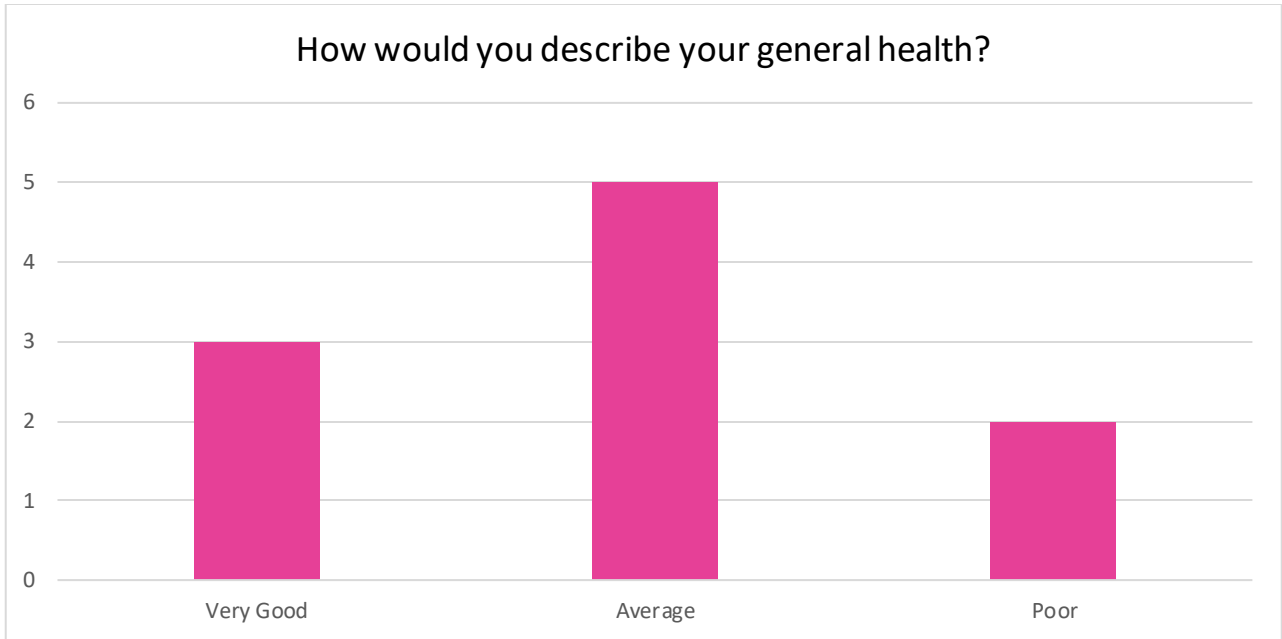
HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD?	PARTICIPANTS
1	2
2	3
3	0
4	4
5+	2
NOT ANSWERED	7

WHAT IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD INCOME?	PARTICIPANTS
LESS THAN 15,000	1
15,000 – 25,000	2
25,001 – 45,000	3
PREFER NOT TO SAY	3
NOT ANSWERED	9

Contact details

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🌐	www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk	https://healthwatchgateshead.co.uk
Twitter	@HWNewcastle	@HWGateshead
Facebook	HWNewcastle	gatesheadhealthwatch
Instagram	healthwatchnewcastle	healthwatch_gateshead
LinkedIn	healthwatch-newcastle	healthwatch-gateshead

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