

REWRITING STORIES OF SUCCESS AND ADULTHOOD: A JOURNEY TO HOPEFUL FUTURES

INSIGHTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CARE EXPERIENCE IN DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY



WHY THIS MATTERS

- “Success” is commonly related to education, employment and “positive destinations”
- Transitions to adulthood are increasingly measured against narrow, normative indicators
- Young people’s futures are often defined by what they are statistically less likely to achieve
- This can overlook lived realities and shape how young people understand their futures
- This research challenges these narrow definitions and centres young people’s strengths, ideas and lived realities of the journey to successful adulthood

WHAT THE RESEARCH DONE

- Co-designed the study with young people, ensuring their priorities guided the entire process
- Developed creative, youth led methods (story work, visual mapping, workshops) to explore transitions in ways that felt meaningful and accessible.
- Co-facilitated multiple phases of data collection with young people designing and leading their own research workshop
- Analysed stories together, identifying how policy language, expectations and relationships shape identity, hope and future orientation.
- Co-created knowledge and producing insights that challenge deficit-based narratives.
- Shared findings collaboratively, with young people contributing to presentations and reflective workshops with the local champions board.



The project was co-created with Tyler, James, Abi, Kelly, Jamie and Olivia, who shaped the study as equal partners throughout design, data collection, analysis and dissemination. Their leadership and commitment was recognised when they received a Youth Work Award for the Equality Category in 2025. Their achievement reflects the strength of co-production, young people not only contributing to research but being celebrated for the expertise, insight and change they can bring.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND: NARRATIVE INSIGHTS

• DEFICIT NARRATIVES SHAPE IDENTITY - DON'T LET STATISTICS BECOME YOUNG PEOPLE'S STORIES.

“People try and stop us from becoming a statistic but that in itself means they think we are likely to be one”

• SUCCESS IS MORE THAN OUTCOMES - EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT MATTER BUT THEY ARE ONLY PART OF THE STORY.

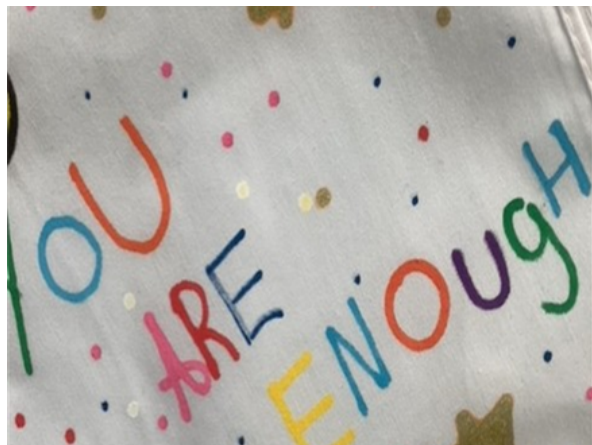
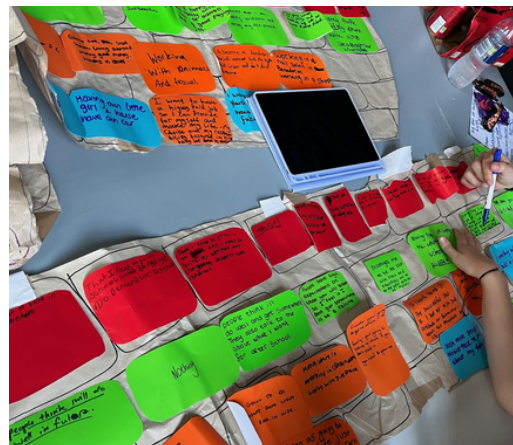
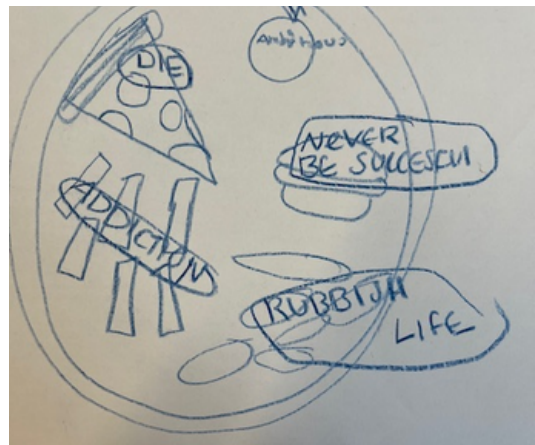
“Success has always been painted to me as you get A's and you go get a good job, good money whereas I don't think that's the case. I think success for me is more being happy and more like being healthy within yourself and then choosing the career you want to go down and like at your own time as well”

• RELATIONSHIPS SHAPE FUTURE POSSIBILITIES - THE WAY ADULTS SHOW UP MATTERS.

“A lot of them [adults] recognise positive things that have changed in my life and how far I've come and then I took a photo of another thing that said you are enough because I feel like a lot of them remind me about that [...] look how far you've come and I can do it”

• THERE IS NO SINGLE PATH TO SUCCESSFUL ADULTHOOD - SUPPORT PATHWAYS NOT JUST DESTINATIONS

“I feel like It's all go to school, go to university and I feel there's so much more stuff out there [...] more to the world than just focusing on education but that's what's pushed and what we are all made to believe when I've grown so much being involved with youth work and just having different life experiences”



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTICE

- Start with young people's own definitions of success. Ask what matters to them before focusing on outcomes or destinations.
- Recognise the power of relationships. Everyday interactions can shape how young people understand themselves and what they believe is possible.
- Celebrate progress that often goes unseen. Value confidence, resilience, wellbeing and personal growth alongside educational and employment achievements.
- Use hopeful, strengths-based conversations. Help young people imagine multiple pathways into adulthood and avoid reinforcing limiting assumptions about their futures.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR POLICY

- Broaden definitions of success by moving beyond attainment and destinations to include relational and wellbeing based indicators.
- Challenge deficit-based assumptions by avoiding statistical labels that young people can internalise and limit how their futures are imagined.
- Recognise relational foundations and build policy frameworks that value consistency, belonging and trust as essential conditions for transition.
- Embed lived experience in decision-making and treat co-produced insights as legitimate evidence when designing, reviewing and evaluating policy.
- Allow for non-linear progress by creating flexible reporting systems that acknowledge pauses, setbacks and relational turning points as part of the journey.