



Central YMCA – A World of Good

The Challenge of Being Young in Modern Britain

2016

The Challenge of Being Young in Modern Britain:

Central YMCA has been helping young people improve their lives for over 170 years, a task that has evolved with each new generation.

As the nature of these challenges change, so must the support society offers to ensure no one is left behind.

Those of us working with young people know the importance of remaining flexible and fluid, especially in a society where the pace of change seems more rapid than ever. Always-on digital communication, widening gaps between rich and poor, increasingly sedentary lifestyles, and the impact of austerity on public services are changing the experience of being young in modern Britain. Support for this group, therefore, also needs to move with the times.

This work is vital. Young people are amongst the most vulnerable in society, often with fewer financial and emotional resources to withstand life's battles. Any harm caused can leave a permanent scar over the rest of their lives. This not only reduces the quality of their own lives, but may also be detrimental to their families and society as a whole for many years to come.

To better understand how our organisation (and others) can best support this generation, we have conducted a survey asking young people, and those working with them on a daily basis, to assess the nature of the challenges they face.

Our findings are set out in this report and provide interesting food for thought about where to direct resources and which issues to prioritise.

They are accompanied by some real-life examples, detailing the impact of major issues and the work being done to support young people.



Rosi Prescott, Chief Executive, Central YMCA



Our research

To inform our report, we issued a survey asking people the following:

1. To identify the challenges causing most harm to young people (aged 16-25) in our society.
2. What aspects of young peoples' lives create the biggest barriers to overcoming these challenges.
3. Whether they expect these challenges to become easier or harder for the next generation of young people (those currently aged between 11 and 15).

Our survey was completed by young people living in the UK (over 1,600 16 to 25 year olds) and professionals currently working to support young people through Central YMCA (93 professionals working with young people).

We also reached out to a number of individuals with unique perspectives on these issues (including MPs, heads of NGOs, other respected experts and thought leaders). Some of these responses have been included in the pages that follow.

Which five challenges cause most harm to young people in Britain today?

Most people surveyed believe that the biggest challenge young people face is when they are unable to find their place within society – either within the mainstream education system or satisfactory employment.

One of the most surprising results from our survey was the emphasis placed on issues to do with body image. It reveals the vulnerability of young people to such concerns and suggests the very real, lasting damage caused by low self-esteem.

We also see the importance of family to young people, and how the breakdown of the family unit removes a vital safety net for people beginning to make their way in the world.

Finally, the responses reveal the potential harm of substance abuse and how, despite decades of efforts to reduce its impact on young people, it still ranks as one of the five major challenges they face today.

Rank	Issue	Score on Index
1	Lack of employment opportunities	100
2	Failing to succeed within the education system (e.g. not being given support with studies when needed)	92
3	Issues of body image (e.g. am I too fat? Am I not attractive?)	86
4	Family breakdown (e.g. parents splitting up, siblings leaving home)	81
5	Substance abuse (e.g. regularly taking drugs)	78

Which issues are having most impact on young people today? (based on an index with the most commonly expressed challenge scoring 100)

Where did other challenges rank?

The relative importance placed on other challenges reveals an interesting insight into the perspectives of young people and those working to support them on a daily basis.

We see a high degree of harm attributed to ‘invisible’ problems that are unlikely to appear in many government statistics. As well as issues connected to body image, we also see relatively high scores for the pressures of materialism and negative stereotyping.

This indicates the importance that must be placed on the emotional wellbeing of young people, as well as their financial status.

We can also see the potential harm attributed to our increasingly digital society, with issues to do with 24hr social networking ranked 9th by our sample group.

Of the issues related to economic matters, lack of affordable housing ranks highest (other than lack of employment opportunities), indicating a fear amongst young people that they are missing out on the long-term financial benefits of home ownership.

It is also interesting to see which issues rank lowest in our list. The relatively low harm perceived to be caused by sexual health issues and lack of access to training, may indicate the impact of recent efforts to tackle such problems through education and funding.

Our lowest scoring issues (worsening environment and lack of political voice) are also interesting, given the growing evidence of harm caused by environmental changes and the relative lack of engagement by young people in the political process.

It indicates that the potential harm caused by these challenges is not of immediate concern for young people. Is this in itself a potential problem?

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4	Family breakdown (e.g. parents splitting up, siblings leaving home)	81
5	Substance abuse (e.g. regularly taking drugs)	78
6	Pressures of materialism (e.g. being able to afford the latest fashions, or a new iPhone)	76
7	Lack of affordable housing (e.g. rising house prices might mean never owning your own home)	73
8	Negative stereotyping (e.g. all people that are overweight are lazy)	70

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Rank	Issue	Score on Index
9	Issues related to 24hr social networking (e.g. being addicted to checking Facebook)	68
10	Crime (being involved in, or a victim of)	49
11	Financial exclusion (e.g. not being able to do an internship because you can't afford it, not being able to do activities with friends due to lack of funds)	49
12	Lack of things to do / leisure opportunities	46
13	Increasingly sedentary lifestyle (e.g. not exercising enough)	38
14	Online access to sites harmful to mental health and wellbeing (e.g. pro-anorexia sites)	32
15	The policy of austerity	30
16	Sexual health (e.g. the rise of sexually transmitted infections)	27
17	Lack of access to training (e.g. apprenticeships, internships, courses, learning and development)	14
18	Worsening environment (e.g. pollution, increased emissions from cars, greenhouse gasses)	14
19	Lack of political voice (e.g. if 18 or over, that their vote is not effective)	5

What are the biggest barriers to overcoming these challenges?

As well as identifying the major challenges facing young people, we also need to understand which sectors of society are most vulnerable – i.e. least able to overcome these challenges without external support.

The clear consensus is that a lack of financial resource is by far the biggest barrier faced by young people, either from being in a low-income bracket or lacking employment opportunities.

Those who have not succeeded within the mainstream education system are also deemed to be at risk, lacking the qualifications or capability needed to address these challenges unaided.

Finally, those young people with health problems (including mental health issues) are also perceived to be highly vulnerable.

We can also see the relatively low ranking of barriers such as racism or sexism. This may be because of the legal protection designed to prevent discrimination, changes in social attitudes, or that the barriers these issues present have become subtler and less visible.

Rank	Factor	Score on Index
1	Being in a low income bracket	100
2	Lack of / poor education	82
3	Health issues (including mental health)	76
4	Lack of employment opportunities	76
5	Current Government policy	65
6	Racism	35
7	Lack of a family network	35
8	Friendship issues	24
9	Sexism	18
10	Community problems	18

What are the biggest barriers young people face when attempting to overcome these challenges?
(based on an index with the most commonly expressed barrier scoring 100)

Which challenges are getting worse?

For our next generation of young adults (those currently aged between 11 and 15), our sample highlighted lack of affordable housing as the issue most expected to become considerably worse.

This indicates that its ranking in our list of challenges (7th) may be masking the growing harm being caused.

We can also see the momentum for issues related to emerging challenges, such as the rise of 24hr social networking. Also, how some of the less visible challenges are growing in significance, e.g. pressures of materialism and issues of body image.

There are long-term challenges included in our top ten – such as substance abuse and crime - indicating that there is little faith that society has an effective strategy to tackle the harm they cause.

Also, there is an indication that, despite signs of economic recovery, issues such as a lack of employment opportunities and financial exclusion will increasingly affect young people.

Rank	Issues
1	Lack of affordable housing
2	Issues related to 24hr social networking
3	Pressures of a materialism
4	Substance abuse
5	Issues associated with crime
6	Employment opportunities
7	Issues of body image
8	Financial exclusion
9	Family breakdown
10	Failing to succeed within the education system

Which of challenges are expected to become considerably worse for the next generation of young people? Top 10 according to our respondents



Focus on.....Education

Our research indicates the high degree of harm caused to those young people who fail to succeed within the current education system.

Worryingly, evidence suggests that this is much more likely to be an issue for those from lower income families, further aggravating the impact of financial inequality.

A study conducted in 2015 by Sutton Trust (Missing Talent Report 2015), highlighted the extent of this issue. For example, over a third of boys on free school meals who are in the top 10% of performers at the age of 11, have fallen outside the top 25% of pupils by the age of 16.

On average, highly able children from poorer families achieve half a grade less than other pupils of equivalent ability. They are also less likely to take GCSEs in core subjects such as history, geography, triple sciences or a language.

Studies also suggest that grades are not the only way to look at whether schools are failing pupils.

A report by Demos (Mind over Matter October 2015) also suggests that schools are failing to support the mental wellbeing of children in their care. Its study concluded that final year students are half as likely to be happy in their lives than 14-year-olds, and considerably less likely to think their parents and teacher believe in them.

They are also three times as likely to feel their school is only focused on preparing them for exams, rather than to succeed in life more generally. Such issues are particularly acute for girls who are much less likely than boys to feel happy and are more likely to experience feelings of frustration or give up on tasks when they fail.

There is also evidence that schools are failing to do enough to tackle the impact of bullying. For example, a study by Stonewall found that 'more than 55% of LGB pupils have experienced direct bullying and almost all had heard the 'use of the word gay as a negative'.

Far from a lost cause: helping those who have dropped out of mainstream education

“Government cuts mean funding for those students who have fallen out of the traditional education system is now more difficult to acquire. For this reason, it’s an issue that is only set to worsen, as situations and issues facing young people and how they respond to education delivery become increasingly complex.”

Lady Andree Baron-Deane, Managing Director at YMCA Training.

Central YMCA works with thousands of young people that have fallen out of the mainstream education system each year through its Study Programme – funded by the Department for Education. The programme helps youngsters who aren’t yet ready to go into work, by easing them back into education and working through apprenticeship schemes.

Recognising that not everyone responds in the same way to education delivery, the Study Programme attempts to tackle the issues caused by teaching ‘subjects for subjects’ sake’ – so instead of teaching Maths and English in a traditional way, for example, students are taught the required skills to pass these core subjects through other, more relatable subjects and real-life situations that they can easily engage with, such as engineering and horticulture.

Central YMCA allows students to join its Study Programme at any point in the academic year so that they’re able to get back on track right away should they become disengaged, rather than having to wait until the new academic year to join, which often leads to students falling into bad habits. The programme is largely project and community based, with lots of work experience meaning students learn through practical activities, rather than solely classroom based learning, and tailored depending on what each individual student wants to achieve, and the line of work they’re hoping to go into.

18-year-old Luke* is just one example of a youth let-down by the mainstream education system. Originally homeless and placed into shared housing, he suffered identity issues and his parents were heavy substance abusers.

Despite always feeling ‘different’ and struggling to learn in large groups, Luke wasn’t diagnosed with aspergers until he enrolled on the Central YMCA Study Programme. The diagnosis and the aid of Central YMCA’s tutors enabled him to get back on track and be educated in a way that best suited him.

Following enrolment, Luke was placed in a small group of learners, and over 18 months, gained employment and a level two apprenticeship in business administration. He is now studying for his level three qualification, and living in independent housing. His tutor was able to offer him not only professional, but also general life support, meaning Luke was able to get on his feet and become happier in a relatively short period of time.

Central YMCA reaches out to students in need of support via a range of methods, including social media, the website, and partnering with local schools and colleges, as well as having a number of referrers working directly with the charity.

**we are using a made up name to protect the identity of the person in this case study*



Focus on.....Body Image

The high ranking of body image issues within our table of most harmful challenges faced by young people may surprise many, but not those who have been looking at this topic for some time.

There is a growing body of academic research suggesting that anxiety caused by poor body image, may cause greater harm than actually being overweight. Weight dissatisfaction has been linked to higher blood pressure and glucose levels, a greater metabolic risk of disease, higher BMI levels, more disordered eating and a lower quality of life.

One study, from the University of South Carolina, even predicts that a period of weight dissatisfaction can be linked to higher levels of type 2 diabetes later in life.

At Central YMCA we helped the All Party Parliamentary Group on body image produce a report that examined the extent of this issue in 2012.

It found that 34% of adolescent boys and 49% of girls have been on a diet to change their body shape or lose weight. It also revealed that children and young people with body image dissatisfaction are less likely to engage in learning and participation in school, and that over half of bullying experienced by young people was because of appearance.

Overcoming negative body image

“Body image issues show themselves in a multitude of ways; through (sometimes extreme) dissatisfaction with body size, weight, hair and skin type – to name but a few examples – all negatively affecting self-esteem and confidence in some way or other. Body image challenges affect both men and women and struggling to overcome them can be a long and painful journey.”

Rosi Prescott, CEO of Central YMCA

19-year-old Sarah* was suffering from low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts. She had been in an abusive relationship and was embarrassed of the scars on her wrists.

Sarah was referred to Central YMCA by her support worker and the youth team met with her to talk through where she felt she was in her life, and what she wanted to do with her future. Despite being a bright individual, Sarah had no qualifications and felt she had little prospect of achieving anything. Disinterested in school and unhappy in herself, she was becoming more and more disengaged with life.

Central YMCA enrolled Sarah onto its ‘Get on Track’ programme – a free, six-week employability mentoring programme designed to help young people improve their communication, teamwork, confidence, health and wellbeing.

In the interim months before the programme started, the youth team supported Sarah, creating her membership at the gym and regularly calling and meeting up with her at the club. Regular contact with other young people and effective relationships with the youth team meant that Sarah’s motivation had returned by the time the programme started.

Despite this, Sarah ran into many barriers throughout her participation in the programme. She was embarrassed of the scars on her wrists, which would become visible whilst exercising, and she would run out of sessions due to feelings of inadequacy. With a sensitive approach, the team offered support and encouraged her to motivate herself and gradually, she began to bring herself back into the group. Within the first week of the programme it was clear to see Sarah was feeling much more independent.

Sarah is just one of many individuals suffering with body image issues and low self-esteem. Before joining Central YMCA, she had no qualifications, was starting to feel suicidal and had no concrete positive relationships. Since completing the course, Sarah has a stewarding, First Aid and sports leader qualification. With improved confidence, she is regularly exercising and wants to get in to youth work.

Young people suffering from negative body image want to be acknowledged, valued and have their opinions and thoughts heard. The youth team acted as Sarah’s advocates until she could independently hold her own space. At a time when government youth services are being squeezed or closing, young people are being left without this kind of vital support.

“Being part of Get On Track helped me with my social skills, and I met lots of new friends. I also gained qualifications in First Aid, stewarding and sports leadership. Unlike before, I feel like my life is going somewhere now. I am much more active and feel healthier and happier. I used to be very nervous but the staff on Get On Track helped me to come out of my shell and be myself.” – Sarah, 19.

“Targeted work with young people often benefits from a sensitive individual to listen and support change, as well as being given the opportunity to share experiences with their peers. Since completing ‘Get on Track’, the smile and brightness from Sarah is amazing and gives me a great sense of achievement and warmth.” – Laura Walsh, Children and Young People Manager at YMCA Club.

*we are using a made up name to protect the identity of the person in this case study

Results

In the past year, 70% of the people involved in Central YMCA's Get on Track programme, in partnership with the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust, were in employment, education or training within three weeks of completing the programme.



Focus on.....Substance Abuse

The strong showing for substance abuse as a major cause of harm for young people in our study is underlined by the findings of the annual Global Drugs Survey 2015.

This indicates that use of illegal drugs in the UK continues to rise, with just under a third (31%) of UK adults having taken an illegal drug at least once in their lives.

This behaviour is heavily weighted towards younger people, with half of all active users in the survey aged between 16 and 34. Younger people are also more likely to identify themselves as having a problem with their drug use – 15% of users between 16 and 24, and 25% of those aged between 25 and 34.

81% of people who have ever taken drugs did so before the age of 21, with 23% doing so before they were 16.

There are also indications that, as a nation, we have been quick to adapt to the growth of the internet as a way to obtain drugs. In the UK, one fifth of users have procured drugs using the internet, compared to 14.3% in the US and 11% globally.

The study also points to high rates of alcohol and 'recreational' use of prescription drugs.

Drink is also likely to make us more promiscuous with our illegal drug use. 11% of UK drug users admitted to taking a 'white powder' without knowing what it was. A third of this group was aged between 18 and 24 and 80% admitted to being intoxicated when they did so.

There is also evidence that intoxication increases risks of unwelcome sexual approaches. One in five drug users said that they had been taken advantage of sexually after alcohol or drug use. 14% said they had been offered drugs or alcohol by someone they believed had intention of taking advantage of them sexually.

The availability of synthetic rather than natural cannabis is also cited as increasing risks to users. Users themselves reported that the drug was more likely to produce negative effects such as paranoia and was more harmful to the lungs. Users of synthetic cannabis were also much more likely to seek medical help as result of harm caused by such drugs.

Despite these figures, few people are likely to identify themselves as having a substance misuse problem. For example, 7% of respondents were found to be either dependent drinkers of alcohol or at risk of being dependent. And yet, 34.5% of this group believed they drank below the average amount.

Blurred lines: tackling substance abuse

“Substance abuse is a complex issue which makes it difficult to deal with. It’s easier to recognise those with a crack cocaine habit, for example, but for those struggling with a cannabis or legal high issue it’s much less clear cut.”

Laura Walsh, Children and Young People Manager at YMCA Club.

22-year-old Jonny* is a fully fledged member of the YMCA Club team – a world away from where he was six months ago. When the YMCA team met Jonny in a Central London job centre he was struggling not only to find employment, but also with a cannabis problem.

Although he desperately wanted to make a change in his life, Jonny didn’t have the right social network in place to make a change, with the majority of his friends also struggling with substance abuse issues.

In addition, Jonny had a criminal record - something that can be a huge issue when trying to get young ex-offenders into employment, training or education. The adversity young people face when they have a criminal record is something YMCA looks to tackle in a number of its initiatives, as well as the stigmatisms attached to drug abuse.

Despite Jonny’s personal challenges, YMCA enrolled him onto its six-week employability mentoring programme, Get on Track - a free service designed to help young people improve their communication, teamwork, confidence, health and wellbeing.

Although many doubted he’d even make it to the first day of the programme, he showed up and thrived over the course of the six-week initiative. The course provided Jonny with a much-needed routine and environment that allowed him to develop his skills, and make the change he strived for.

The team at YMCA successfully recognised skills in Jonny that others couldn’t see – empathy, drive, and a huge want for change. And sure enough, following the six-week-programme, Jonny is now successfully in employment.

“Get on Track helped me realise life is what you make of it. You get out what you put in. Since Get on Track I have got myself a job. It has given me the confidence to achieve what I want out of life.” – Jonny, 22

Jonny is one of the many youngsters suffering from substance abuse problems each year that YMCA helps get back on track, and into work or education. The organisation works with a number of select partners to ensure people suffering from these issues are provided with the correct help.

Results

In the past year, 70% of the people involved in YMCA’s Get on Track programme, in partnership with the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust, were in employment, education or training within three weeks of completing the programme.



Focus on.....Financial Inequality

There is a growing body of evidence that points conclusively to a widening inequality gap that disproportionately affects young people in the UK.

A recent study by the London School of Economics (May 2015 – using ONS data) found that young people in their 20s were 18% worse off than 20 year olds just five years ago, indicating the speed of change.

A further report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission said that young people are suffering the ‘worst economic prospects’ for several generations and point to an ‘age inequality gap’ between young people and their older counterparts.

A major reason for this shift in prospects is the change in house prices, with fewer young people able to capitalise on a growing investment in a home due to prohibitively high house prices.

As a result the LSE estimates a wealth gap of £365,000 between 25 to 34 year olds and those 30 years older. To close this gap the LSE estimates an average 30 year old would need to save £33 per day for three decades.

Young people under 25 have also been excluded from the increase in the minimum wage, further widening the inequality gap.

Some groups of young people are affected even more than average. Those suffering periods of unemployment in their youth and also those with few qualifications, suffer from greater financial inequality according to a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Austerity in the UK). Young people with disabilities are also hit by a larger than average inequality gap.

For minority ethnic groups JRF’s report also points to twice the rate of poverty despite improved levels of school qualifications.

Giving them a future: Helping children living on the poverty line

“The learning of social skills through play and healthy activity are a huge part of a child’s development, influencing their ability to form positive relationships, their physical and mental health, and their employment prospects, as they progress through their teenage years into adulthood. With child care fees costing more than some families’ incomes, parents have to make a choice; whether to rely on the welfare system and give their child these opportunities, or go out to work and risk their children missing out.”

Daniel Lynn, General Manager of YMCA Club.

YMCA Club’s Y Active programme delivers a children’s bursary scheme set up in partnership with the St Giles Hotel, London’s ‘Hotels with a Heart’ scheme. The free-to-access programme was designed to target local hostels, half-way houses and schools to help disadvantaged families with active childcare.

Through free activities, such as trampoline classes, football, and after-school clubs, children have the opportunity to meet people their own age and create social skills they otherwise might not have had the opportunity to develop.

The scheme was launched in early 2015 and five-year-old Betty is an example of just one child that has already benefitted.

Betty has cystic fibrosis and relies on at least an hour of exercise per day to keep her lungs healthy. Betty’s mother is a single parent of three on income support and with exercise being vital to keeping Betty well, her mother was struggling to juggle work commitments, the upkeep of Betty’s health and the care of her other two children.

Betty was welcomed onto YMCA Club’s children’s programme in spring 2015 and through the funding from ‘Hotels with a Heart’, is able to take part in trampolining sessions and swimming, as well as the Saturday club each week.

Without help from the YMCA Club bursary scheme, Betty’s health was at risk of deteriorating and her mother was under a constant strain. Now her mother has the time to work and support her three children, plus Betty’s cystic fibrosis is much more manageable.

“Seeing families like Betty’s benefitting from the bursary scheme is really encouraging and we’re continuing to see positive developments amongst the children taking part, such as increased self-confidence, higher self-esteem, development of friendships and communications skills, and improved physical health.

“Schemes like this don’t only benefit the physical health of children but help them to create vital social skills. In some cases, we’ve known children living on the poverty line to have spent their whole summer indoors. Such isolation and lack of social interaction can lead to anti-social behaviour, increased crime levels and challenges to gain employment later in life.

“Some families have little to no choice and end up putting further strain on the welfare system. Although the bursary scheme fills part of the increasing gap in provision left by cuts to local authority budgets, it is reliant on the goodwill and huge efforts of private fundraisers and charitable contributions for its existence. To ensure such schemes are sustainable and made available to the increasing number of children in need, additional funding from government and local authorities is essential.” – Daniel Lynn, general manager of YMCA Club.

*we are using a made up name to protect the identity of the person in this case study

Results

In the past year Central YMCA, in partnership with the St Giles Hotel, has provided a total of 563 days of school holiday play scheme places. It has also filled 26 places on 12 and 14 week-long term time courses.

Summary

What's clear from the findings of this report is the interrelationship between the major challenges facing our young people.

As one troubled young person from Shakespeare said, "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions."

As a consequence, our priority should be to help people in the round not in isolation.

To address these complex challenges, the agencies supporting young people need to work in partnership and be open to all parts of society. The challenges we face as a society are not restricted to rich or poor and cannot be met without helping people develop in all areas.

You cannot achieve good physical health without strong mental health and you cannot be a productive member of society if you cannot first help yourself.

At Central YMCA, our commitment is to work with all people and all partners including governments, the public and private sectors to bring lasting benefits, helping individuals and organisations to grow through our training, education and inclusion.

Responses



Peter Fitzboydon, CEO, London Sport:

"The findings from Central YMCA's survey, particularly around young people's concerns regarding body image, are hugely enlightening. It is vitally important that businesses, social enterprises and adults that come into contact with young people are aware of the issues that occupy them on a daily basis.

"Physical Activity and Sport are hugely powerful interventions in helping people to become fitter, healthier and happier individuals, and their potential impact for young people in addressing concerns around body confidence is vast. At its best, physical activity can have a profound impact on the well-being of a young person, but it is incredibly important that those delivering physical activity and sport in youth settings are aware of what is at the forefront of young people's minds in order to ensure concerns are considered and confidence built.

"It may be a cliché to say so, but young people truly are the future of the Nation. Understanding their motivations, and their worries, is an important part of giving them the best opportunities throughout their lives; as this survey demonstrates, physical activity and sport have a vital role to play in making this happen."



Tara Dillon, CEO, Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity:

"CIMSPA welcomes this latest Central YMCA research, which offers us a perceptive insight into the biggest issues on the minds of Britain's young people, and it's clear that getting into employment is a real concern for many.

"The world of sport, fitness and physical activity is well-known for offering achievable, entry-level employment opportunities for young people, whether coming from school, college or outside education, particularly through apprenticeships. And, we're hard at work on ensuring those who do come to work in our sector can quickly build a rewarding career.

"CIMSPA is looking forward to working closely with Central YMCA to address the issues that the "A World of Good" research raises."



More people
More active
More often

ukactive Executive Director Steven Ward said:

"Research shows that a record number of us don't like what we see in the mirror. For some people, constant connectivity just amplifies this feeling. It's no surprise that with today's multimedia environment young men and women feel the pressure to have bigger muscles or thinner waists when apparently aspirational images are all around us. Whilst for some people this can be motivating and inspiring, others are intimidated and disengaged. It's a fine line to tread.

"Being physically active is not just about slimmer waistlines or shredded abs. It's about feeling great and having fun whilst improving your health. Being active gives people confidence that they can achieve whichever goals they set out to accomplish.

"Campaigns such as Sport England's 'This Girl Campaign' have been instrumental in showing us that everyone can feel confident having a go. We need to shout about the fact that the benefits of physical activity – the mental, social and physical – are there for everyone, not just fitness models."

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