

For Immediate Release - 16/3/23

Young people and their families are forced to use food banks, as revealed by Bytes Project's landmark research on young people and the Cost of Living Crisis

As the Cost of Living Crisis continues to affect communities in Northern Ireland, **The Bytes Project** is using its unique position to engage the voice of children and young people across Northern Ireland. We have carried out in-depth research with young people, to build a compelling picture of the impact the crisis is having on them.

In December 2022, 1,739 young people between the ages of 11 and 25 took part in the research via Bytes' Positive Sparks platform¹. They answered a series of questions on their financial situation, their worries about household and family income, their direct experiences of rising costs and what they or their families had cut back on.

One of the most startling findings was that **68% of respondents said that they or their family had used a Food Bank** in the last year. This suggests a widespread and significant problem with finances for young people and their families, as Food Banks can only be accessed through referral schemes from a GP, school, specialist charity or Citizen's Advice.

Some additional key findings in *Cost of Living: Views from Young People* include:

- **61%** of young people feel they are '*financially worse off*' than at the start of summer 2022
- Of young people who were billpayers, **74%** are either worried or very worried about their ability to meet the rising cost of living.
- For non-billpaying young people, **68%** are worried or very worried about their parents/guardians' ability to meet rising costs.

These findings reveal widespread worry and anxiety among young people in Northern Ireland, regardless of whether they are personally responsible for household bills, as well as a general perception of being personally less well off. This was matched up with the cost of fuel, public transport and energy being cited as the top three rising costs experienced by young people. Meanwhile, when asked what they had cut back on in order to meet rising costs, nearly a third of respondents listed leisure activities as their main area of reduced spending.

As part of the research, other regional youth work organisation asked young people their views on the research. This narrative shows young people worried about their expenses and the ability of their families to pay bills, while also lacking optimism for the future and being despondent about social & educational activities due to their lack of money. Some of the testimony recorded included:

¹ A digital listening platform created by with funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to allow Bytes to better amplify the voices of the young people we work with and help them organise with like-minded peers to advocate for change.

"We had no heating for over a week, the oil run out and we had to wait until the end of the month to get it – I hated it I didn't feel clean or warm or anything..."

"...I am very worried for my Mummy. [My parents] are paying for my phone and still giving me some money, but I know it's tough for her and it makes me feel guilty. But I am doing A Levels and the pay is so low for people my age, it's not even worth it".

"Anxious for my parent when I leave my phone charging all night by accident."

"...I was never so happy to get a local placement so I can walk because I was really worried that if I had to travel I would need more money..."

"I have [taken on extra work to earn more money] but see at the end of the day, what is the point? People my age are working for less than £5. If I get a coffee and a chocolate bar, I am basically working an hour for free. Like, what is the point?"

Commenting on the research, Bytes Project CEO Stephen Dallas said:

'This work has highlighted what our youth workers have known anecdotally for some time, that young people are facing bleak day-to-day situations all over Northern Ireland. Both the mental and physical health of children and young people can only suffer when they are forced to go without heating or hot water, feel unable to socialise with peers and are in a state of constant worry about bills. The words of young people in this research can make for difficult reading, but it is important that we listen'

The Bytes Project will be officially launching the report, *Cost of Living: Views from Young People* at Kells and Connor Community Centre, Ballymena on Friday 24th March. For more information, contact our communications consultant patrick.thompson@btinternet.com.

ENDS

Note to Editors

The Bytes Project is a youth work charity that has been working with the most vulnerable young people in Northern Ireland for nearly three decades. We blend youth work with digital inclusion and our mission is to annually ensure that over 3000 young people access digital technology in communities of promise.

Over the last two years, we have widened our reach beyond Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. We have established youth hubs with a range of partners across the Sperrin's, Maghera, Coleraine, Ballymoney, Rasharkin, Kells, Ballymena, Antrim, Ballyclare and Glengormley. Through these hubs, we deliver youth work programmes that focus on building employment skills, creating greater empathy for others and empowering young people. During 2022 we engaged over 1000 young people in these programmes.