



# Angus Think Before You Type

*A youth led anti-bullying campaign, by partners Angus Council, respectme and  
NSPCC Scotland*

Phase One Campaign Report

April 2019



## **Contents**

- 1. Summary of recommendations**
- 2. Background**
- 3. National policy context**
- 4. Angus in context**
- 5. Campaign development**
- 6. Phase one findings**
- 7. Next steps**

## Summary of recommendations

The recommendations below follow a six month partnership between Angus Council, *respectme*, and NSPCC Scotland. They were formulated alongside an advisory group, made up of 16 young people from across Angus, and a steering group made up of partners from across the three lead organisations and local groups.

1. We should remember that **everyone** has a role in addressing bullying – all school staff (not just guidance staff) as well as all parents/carers and young people too
2. Everyone should recognise that bullying affects young people's mental health and an appropriate range of supports should be available
3. Relationships are vitally important to the anti-bullying agenda and we need to foster trusting relationships built on mutual respect between adults and young people.
4. Everyone should be able to have a supportive and non-judgemental conversation about bullying - young people should feel respected and listened to during these conversations
5. More training opportunities are required for parents/carers as well as teachers and other professionals to make sure they understand bullying and are able to give appropriate advice to young people
6. Anti-bullying work could better target primary aged children and young people in the Broad General Education phase, in order to help establish a positive culture early on and address issues quickly
7. We need to all help resolve bullying incidents, even when they have happened outside of school
8. Once bullying incidents are reported, communication should be seen as a priority, everyone should be kept up to date with the agreed plan and actions being taken to resolve it – with everyone clear on the role they play
9. We need to collect the views of young people about restorative approaches and conversations, and how they view these approaches are currently working
10. We should support young people to understand how their online behaviours like videoing, liking and sharing posts can contribute to bullying and a disrespectful culture for all
11. We should work with young people who bully others to understand why they are behaving that way and support them to change their behaviour
12. Young people in schools across Angus should be supported to lead on rolling out the Think Before You Type campaign e.g. through youth-led campaigns and activities in each school

## Background

*“Bullying is a really awkward thing to talk about...”*

The *Angus, Think before you type* campaign is a joint campaign between Angus Council, *respectme* and NSPCC Scotland. The partnership was formally announced in November 2018 and a commitment was given to a yearlong campaign across the region.

Online safety for children and young people has gained significant attention in the media in recent months, including a focus on online bullying and how children and young people interact with each other on the internet. There has also been increased scrutiny of social media companies and what role they can play in protecting children and young people from harm.

In Scotland, senior MSPs have recently raised their own concerns about the increase in abusive messages being sent to them and others via social media, showing that this is not just an issue that affects young people but is a wider societal issue. However, as adults we are able to respond in ways that children and young people are not so while this campaign will recognise wider issues and their impact, it will focus very much on online bullying between young people.

Alongside information in the news, we have knowledge from our own organisations showing the prevalence of online bullying amongst children and young people. In 2017/18, Childline carried out 3,088 counselling sessions with children and young people about online bullying, and *respectme*'s 'Bullying in Scotland' Report 2014<sup>1</sup>, found that 30% of children and young people had experienced bullying in the previous school year. Furthermore, today's digital world means that the bullying can be relentless, reaching young people 24 hours a day, and can take place in online spaces with little adult supervision.

*“People can bully you and post mean pictures of you. People can gang up on you.” (Girl, 13, Instagram)<sup>2</sup>*

We know that the impact of bullying can be devastating for a young person. It can affect academic performance, school attendance and attainment, and is linked to mental and physical health problems. In a quarter of ChildLine counselling sessions about bullying, children also talked about mental health and wellbeing issues.<sup>3</sup>

*“I am being bullied by a girl at school. She has taken photos of me and posted them on Snapchat calling me fat and ugly and how I will never have a boyfriend. I have been having suicidal thoughts as this girl is really popular and she has turned my whole year against me”. (Girl aged 14)<sup>4\*</sup>*

The prevalence and impact of online bullying have meant that there is a need to learn more about this issue and how we can work better together to prevent and respond to this issue, and this is what we have set out to do in Angus. The campaign aims to better understand an issue being experienced by young people globally, from a local perspective and find local solutions to address it.

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<sup>1</sup> *respectme* 2014 Bullying in Scotland Report

<sup>2</sup> NSPCC (2017) *Net Aware Freedom to express myself safely online*

<sup>3</sup> NSPCC (2016) *What Children are telling us about bullying – childline bullying report 2015/16*

<sup>4</sup> \*All names and potentially identifying details have been changed to protect the identity of the person contacting the Helpline. Quotes are created from real Helpline contacts but are not necessarily direct quotes.

## National policy context

Addressing bullying is key to achieving the Scottish Government's ambition to make Scotland the best place to grow up for all our children and young people and is integral to many aspects of the refreshed National Performance Framework. When left unaddressed, bullying has the ability to undermine the national outcomes set out for children and young people, education, health and human rights.

'Respect for All', the national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people provides an overarching framework and context for all anti-bullying work in Scotland and was launched in November 2017. The guidance makes it clear that everyone has a role to play in addressing bullying, it sets out the importance of a preventative anti-bullying agenda and makes an explicit commitment to addressing prejudice based bullying. Last year, the Scottish Government supplemented Respect For All with further guidance on the recording and monitoring of bullying incidents in Scottish schools.

Together, these key policy drivers have helped place a fresh impetus across Scotland on the anti-bullying agenda, and organisations have responded in a number of ways, including by working to review anti-bullying policies and bring them in line with national messages, and by taking steps to implement a coherent system around recording and monitoring incidents.

Anti-bullying and promoting positive relationships cuts across a range of further Scottish Government policy areas and sector initiatives. For example, it connects into the National Youth Work Strategy, the National action plan on parental involvement, engagement, family learning and learning at home 2018 – 2021, the Independent Care Review, the implementation of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), and the range of work around the promotion of equality, diversity and human rights.

The Scottish Government continues with the implementation of the new Mental Health Strategy for Scotland. This includes the Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce with a series of work streams that are considering significant change for young people who are help-seeking. During early consultations with young people, they have identified the role that bullying plays in a young person's mental health and wellbeing.

Finally, another key driver in our understanding of young people's experiences of the digital world was the 5Rights Youth Commission's report in 2017, 'Our Digital Rights: How Scotland can realise the rights of children and young people in the digital world.' The report was key in highlighting the importance of regarding offline and online worlds as two equal and intertwined aspects of young people's lives and reminding us that young people felt that while the world around them was changing at incredible pace, the protection of their rights remain as crucial as ever.

## **Angus in Context**

Angus Council is pleased to be working in partnership with respectme and NSPCC Scotland on the *Angus, Think before you type* campaign.

Our schools place the values of respect and inclusion at the heart of their ethos which helps to prevent bullying by creating an environment which fosters positive relationships, better behaviour and high expectations for all children and young people.

Bullying behaviour impacts on children's and young people's health and wellbeing and can affect their levels of participation, attainment and inclusion in school life. Children should be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included at school and in the wider community.

As we move forward in the revision of our current anti-bullying policy, we will take account of the findings of this campaign as well as the national and legislative landscape.

As a starting point, we carried out a survey with children and young people, school staff and parents. They said:

### **Young people**

- 75% of pupils in Angus said they had seen someone be bullied
- 51% said they had been bullied
- 7% said they have been involved in the bullying of others
- 17% said it took place online
- 79% people said you should tell someone
- 41% thought it was sorted, 34% said not, 25% not sure

### **Parents**

- 58% said their child had been bullied
- 48% of parents responded by contacting the school
- 11% said it had happened online
- Only 1% said their child had bullied someone else
- 63% parents said online bullying was the type that concerned them most

### **School staff**

- 84% reported seeing bullying behaviour in schools
- 30% said it took place online
- 74% said they dealt with it at the time

Moving forward we will look to develop guidance in partnership with parents, carers, staff, children and young people, other agencies and stakeholders from the wider community to fulfil our responsibility in supporting and promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Angus.

## Campaign development

The official launch of Angus, *think before you type* will be marked at a local stakeholder event on 25 April 2019, however, campaign development started significantly before this. In 2018, the NSPCC appointed the first Local Campaigns Manager for Scotland which enabled the organisation to run local campaigns in Scotland for the first time. NSPCC Scotland and *respectme* came together in May 2018 to start looking at shared priorities and by September had reached an agreement with Angus Council to work together on anti-bullying – with a focus on the online aspect. A steering group was then formed comprising of representatives from education, youth organisations and the third sector.

It is imperative to note that we did not select Angus for this campaign based on need or prevalence of online bullying. NSPCC Scotland and *respectme* wanted to look at the issue of online bullying in a rural local authority and as Angus Council was also refreshing its anti-bullying policy, it was timely to work together and add value to that process.

Given that young people are the experts in their own experiences, it was important to all three organisations that young people lead this campaign. The Youth Advisory Group was therefore formed, comprising of two representatives from each of the eight secondary schools in Angus. At the first session, they worked together to identify different types of bullying, including online bullying, and what the impact of it is. They also worked together to come up with the campaign name and a strapline for the campaign.

The young people who are a part of this group have each been a real tribute to their school. Each of them has been engaged and played a meaningful part in the campaign development process. Their commitment and dedication has made this a stronger campaign and allowed us to develop messages and recommendations that will really make a difference to the lives of young people in Angus.

The Youth Advisory Group led fifteen focus groups across the region; eight with pupils, four with school staff and three with parents. The questions asked at these were set by the young people themselves and the young people facilitated these groups, with the support of NSPCC Scotland and *respectme*. The findings from these focus groups then led to the recommendations which were written and agreed by the young people and agreed by the steering group. It was important for the young people that the recommendations made everyone think about their actions and feel empowered to respond to bullying online.

This report will mark the end of the first phase of the campaign, from which we will move onto a delivery phase before concluding by December 2019. This will be followed by a three month evaluation process at the beginning of 2020. While the campaign will come to a formal end at this stage, we hope that the learning in Angus will continue to develop and be taken forward by parents, professionals and young people and contribute to a lasting legacy of anti-bullying across Angus' communities.

Alongside this, we hope that by being involved in the campaign, the young people from the Youth Advisory Group will recognise the important role that they can play in achieving attitude and behavioural change. We hope that being involved in the campaign will provide them with valuable skills and increase their self-confidence.

## Phase One Campaign Findings

The following findings have emerged from focus groups delivered across the region, as well as discussions at the Youth Advisory Group and Steering Group. The findings will continue to be built upon as we move into the delivery phase of the campaign.

### **1. We should remember that everyone has a role in addressing bullying – all support staff (not just guidance staff) as well as all parents/carers and young people too**

*“In high school you either get it or you don’t. You’re either one of these people that everyone likes or you aren’t”.*

Overall, many of the discussions throughout this campaign have served as a reminder of the importance of a culture where everyone – young people, parents/carers, teachers as well as other professionals - understand and fulfil their particular role in preventing and responding to bullying.

During focus groups there were a number of discussions about the capacity of schools alone to manage bullying incidents and, within schools, how opportunities for early intervention can be lost when situations are too quickly passed onto others to resolve.

We believe that everyone has a role to play in addressing online bullying and hope this campaign will build confidence in individuals to do so. This includes young people who play a fundamental role.

### **2. Everyone should recognise that bullying affects young people’s mental health and an appropriate range of supports should be available**

*“It doesn’t matter how strong you are, whatever people say will still hurt you to an extent.”*

Our focus groups with school staff, parents and young people all recognised that experiencing bullying can have a very negative impact on the mental health of young people, including impacting on their confidence, self-esteem, ability to participate in school and links to anxiety and depression. For some of the young people involved the impact on their mental health was extreme and we spoke to parents whose children had missed long periods of school as a result of bullying, or indeed had moved school.

In order to ensure an appropriate range of supports are in place for young people in Angus, it could be helpful to establish what is already in place and gather young people’s views on what they think is missing.

### **3. Relationships are vitally important to the anti-bullying agenda and we need to foster trusting relationships built on mutual respect between adults and young people.**

The need for good relationships between all adults and young people was a clear theme throughout all of the focus groups. The pupils who took part in these groups were very clear that bullying was a difficult thing to talk about, and in order for them to disclose incidents they needed an adult who they felt was approachable, would



listen to them and would respond in a way that was helpful. Many young people were able to identify a member of staff in their school who they could go to, but this was not always the Pupil Care and Support Teacher.

*“Everyone believes what other people say and don’t listen to your side of the story”.*

Many of the young people who attended our focus groups said that they would be very reluctant to speak out about a bullying incident for fear of making things worse. They were not always confident that the advice that was given to them by adults was useful and highlighted that for them it was key that adults listened to what action they wanted to take. For many of the young people we spoke to this might mean no action but that they simply wanted someone to know what was going on.

#### **4. Everyone should be able to have a supportive and non-judgemental conversation about bullying - young people should feel respected and listened to during these conversations**

*“[Bullying can be] invisible so no one else necessarily knows unless they are willing to share that information”*

School staff recognised that online bullying can be hidden from adults unless young people are willing to speak out about it, but recognised why some young people may be reluctant to do so.

All pupil focus groups also showed a tendency of young people to keep bullying to themselves unless it got to the stage where this was no longer feasible. This unwillingness to speak out is exacerbated by the perception that reporting bullying makes you a grass and could bring further implications. This is a serious barrier to addressing bullying and its impact and the fear or reluctance to be seen as a grass was something that was raised across all the focus groups, including those with parents and school staff.

Young people were however able to give good examples of reporting where a teacher had dealt with an incident discretely and many expressed how they valued their ability to report incidents in a way that respected their confidentiality. To be clear, children have a right not to be bullied and it is unacceptable that they may feel frightened to speak out when they do experience bullying behaviour. However, we understand this is often a reality for some young people and in these cases confidential and discrete ways of reporting can play an important role.

While professionals and parents/carers will always have a duty of care to young people, the focus groups demonstrated that where adults fulfil this duty with the views of young people at the centre – this was of most value to them. Young people highlighted that they did not want adults to respond without speaking to them first and highlighted their fear of adults making the situation worse. They were clear that they wanted adults to listen to what they want to happen, rather than just taking action. They said that sometimes they just want to be able to tell someone and seek advice but not necessarily for the person they tell to do something.

We hope this campaign will highlight the importance of conversations between adults and young people about bullying that are non-judgemental, non-stigmatising and that put young people at centre by supporting them to explore options while reinforcing that bullying is always unacceptable.

**5. More training opportunities are required for parents/carers as well as teachers and other professionals to make sure they understand bullying and are able to give appropriate advice to young people**

*“Parents don’t understand what it is like nowadays. Bullying hasn’t stopped but it has changed”.*

Parents and school staff both highlighted in focus groups that they did not always feel they had a complete understanding of children and young people’s online lives or the apps they using to communicate. Young people also highlighted that adults’ knowledge was limited and quickly outdated. While adults don’t necessarily need to be technology experts, it was highlighted during the focus groups that an improved awareness of digital platforms and how young people use them could better position adults to provide young people with appropriate advice and support.

More widely, there was also discussion in parent and staff focus groups about varying levels of knowledge about bullying itself in terms of how its defined and strategies for helping to prevent and respond to it. Angus’ Anti-Bullying Policy should help to address this.

NSPCC Scotland and *respectme* both provide a range of training options which could be provided over the next year to improve local knowledge. In addition to this, we will seek to explore what local support there is for adults in this area and how we can build this into an effective package of resources.

**6. Anti-bullying work could better target primary aged children and young people in the Broad General Education phase, in order to help establish a positive culture early on and address issues quickly**

*“Online bullying can happen to anyone no matter how popular you are...”*

Young people in focus groups highlighted that bullying could often be worst in the early years of secondary school. This was also reflected in many discussions in staff groups. It would therefore make sense that resources are targeted towards reaching children while they are primary aged and young people during the Broad General Education phase to both seek to establish positive behaviours and cultures early on that prevent online bullying from happening and address incidents quickly as they arise.

**7. We need to all help resolve bullying incidents, even when they have happened outside of school**

*“All linked to school – everyone is just fake nowadays”.*

While many incidents of online bullying happen outwith school, the effects are often carried into school and young people in the focus groups said that the two were often linked because school is how they know each other. It is therefore important that schools continue to play a vital role in responding to online bullying incidents. It is also essential that parents/carers as well as other agencies in the youth sector recognise their role and take action within their sphere of influence to address bullying incidents and communicate with others as appropriate.

- 8. Once bullying incidents are reported, communication should be seen as a priority, everyone should be kept up to date with the agreed plan and actions being taken to resolve it – with everyone clear on the role they play.**

*“Teachers give up and stop helping after you have been to them a lot ...”*

We recognise that it can be difficult for school staff to communicate information about bullying incidents. It was apparent from the focus groups that parents and young people can often perceive a gap in communication as the issue not being dealt with, even when action has been taken by the school. This has been due to the fact that policies around confidentiality may not allow schools to share what action has been taken with individuals.

These policies are important and we respect the role they play in keeping children and young people safe. During focus group discussions, parents and young people also respected the importance of this but urged better sharing of information with parents and young people that continues to respect this but also keeps parents and young people secure in the knowledge that something is being done.

- 9. We need to collect the views of young people about restorative approaches and conversations, and how they view these approaches are currently working**

Young people who attended our focus groups overwhelmingly thought that restorative practice or face to face meetings did not work. They expressed that this process could feel awkward, uncomfortable and they regarded apologies offered as disingenuous. Many of the pupils said they would just want the bullying to stop rather than sit down face to face with the person bullying them however others said they would welcome the apology if it was genuine. The restorative meetings can be challenging for young people and we acknowledge that will contribute to their views on it.

By contrast, parents and school staff both identified restorative approaches as being a useful tool in resolving bullying incidents and promoting positive relationships. This highlights that further work is needed to establish if there is common understanding about what restorative approaches are, and further, to gather young people’s views on how they think the approach could work better for them.

- 10. We should support young people to understand how their online behaviours like videoing, liking and sharing posts can contribute to bullying and a disrespectful culture for all**

There are unique behaviours associated with online bullying such as videoing, liking and sharing posts. These behaviours can in themselves be disrespectful, have a detrimental impact on others and be perceived as bullying. Even if seemingly low level, the impact of these behaviours can be to undermine a culture of positive relationships and respect.

Schools across Angus are currently engaging in the Mentors for Violence Prevention (MVP) programme. This peer mentoring programme gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms that underpin gender-based violence, bullying and other forms of violence. Building on the work

already being done around this area creates an opportunity to improve young people's understanding of the impact of their behaviour and have young people take the lead in promoting respect online.

**11. We should work with young people who bully others to understand why they are behaving that way and support them to change their behaviour**

Focus group participants, across all three groups, recognised that children and young people don't generally bully for no reason. They thought that there was a need to understand better why young people may be displaying bullying behaviour and support them to change their behaviour. This should involve professionals, parents/carers and young people.

There is an opportunity to build on existing practice in this area by sharing what works well across the region, and consulting with children and young people as well as their parents to effect greater change where possible.

**12. Young people in schools across Angus should be supported to lead on rolling out the Think Before You Type campaign e.g. through youth-led campaigns and activities in each school**

To help cascade the learning from this campaign to other young people and continue to build on the momentum around anti-bullying, young people should be supported to run their own youth led campaigns and activities at a school or community level. This could be as simple as delivering awareness raising weeks or organising assemblies and spaces for young people to share experiences.

## **Next steps**

The campaign phase one findings and report will be disseminated as widely as possible to all relevant local stakeholders and communities.

The Steering Group will arrange further work and conversations to take place to understand the experiences of under-represented groups of young people such as those who are care experienced or who come from traveller backgrounds and incorporate this learning into the delivery phase of the campaign. We will also consult with more representatives from the youth sector.

The Steering Group will continue to work together to develop a local action plan to take forward the recommendations. This will incorporate offers of support from *respectme*, NSPCC Scotland and other partners where appropriate.

The Youth Advisory Group will evolve in its role and function to focus on cascading the campaign messages in their own communities – with culmination of local campaigning during Anti-Bullying Week in November 2019.

Recommendations and learning from the campaign will inform the forthcoming process to review Angus Council's Anti-Bullying Policy.

Where possible we will share learning from this campaign nationally, so that other local authorities and organisations can apply the campaign findings to their own anti-bullying work.

The delivery phase of the campaign will conclude in December 2019, following which NSPCC Scotland, Angus Council and *respectme* will then conduct an evaluation of the campaign which will be completed by April 2020.

Despite the initial campaign coming to a close, it is hoped that the campaign will continue to live on locally using the messages and materials developed over the year.