

# Caithness Community Planning Partnership

## Thurso Locality Plan

### Young Men Focus Group

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Throughout April and May 2019, Thurso Development Officer under Aspiring Communities programme has consulted with 24 young men aged between 17 – 25 years living in Thurso. Consultation has taken place in groups and through one on one sessions. Respondents have requested that while their responses may be discussed throughout the Caithness Community Partnership and used to inform work in the Thurso Locality Plan their preference is for results to not be made publically available.

Of these young men, all are either working on zero hours contracts or are currently unemployed. Of 10 who are currently unemployed, only 6 are claiming any form of benefits. The breakdown of respondents is as follows:

Identifier	Age	Living Status	Employment Status
Respondent One	17	Parent	Unemployed, no benefits
Respondent Two	18	Parent	Unemployed, no benefits
Respondent Three	17	Friend	Unemployed, no benefits
Respondent Four	19	Own Home	Unemployed, Universal Credit
Respondent Five	19	Friend	Zero Hours Contract
Respondent Six	19	Partner	Zero Hours Contract
Respondent Seven	23	Partner	Zero Hours Contract
Respondent Eight	23	Friend	Zero Hours Contract
Respondent Nine	23	Partner	Zero Hours Contract
Respondent Ten	24	Partner	Share Fisherman
Respondent Eleven	25	Parent	Labourer, Full time on a 12mth contract
Respondent Twelve	25	Parent	Labourer, Agency work
Respondent Thirteen	25	Friend	Labourer, Agency work
Respondent Fourteen	18	Partner	Unemployed, no benefits
Respondent Fifteen	17	Friend	Unemployed, no benefits, odd jobs
Respondent Sixteen	24	Own Home	Unemployed, diagnosed mental health
Respondent Seventeen	19	Partner	Zero Hours Contract
Respondent Eighteen	20	Partner	Zero Hours Contract
Respondent Nineteen	20	Own Home	Unemployed, benefits
Respondent Twenty	21	Friend	Share Fisherman
Respondent Twenty-one	21	Friend	Share Fisherman
Respondent Twenty-two	22	Partner	Unemployed, no benefits, odd jobs
Respondent Twenty-three	24	Partner	Unemployed, no benefits, odd jobs
Respondent Twenty-four	25	Own Home	Agency work

As shown above by the levels of young men who are unemployed and not claiming any benefits as they have dropped out of the system, they are not appearing on current statistics. This was part of the reasoning of consulting with them as they genuinely are the hard to reach as are not engaged with any agencies or contributing to statistics.

## Living Status

**17%** live in their own home, of these ALL live in Highland Council one bedroom properties. All were provided with properties after at one stage having been declared homeless and in all situations due to family breakdown and leaving the parental home. Only one of those who have their own home is currently in work. The others pay rent via benefits. The one young man who works expressed fear for the future as he is currently employed in the construction industry on agency work:

*"I never know when the work might end and I'm back having to claim benefits again. It's scary, I could go to work on a Friday and literally be told my contract has ended and have no work on Monday. I've gone through benefits before and it takes ages to get anything, sometimes by the time benefits kick in I've got another contract but it means I've not paid my rent and it all ends up in a mess with all my money from the new job going to catching up what was missed."*

Respondent Twenty-Four (Age 25 years, Own Home, Labourer – Agency Work)

**17%** live with their parents, two of those still living with parents are 25 years old and both are employed in the construction industry on either a contract or agency work. Both expressed that they felt having their home would be nearly impossible as they don't feel their employment is secure.

**36%** are living with their Partner. Again the lack of secure employment is an issue and all respondents acknowledged that if it wasn't for their partner having either employment or benefits due to having children they would not be able to live in their own home. Five respondents stated that if it was not for having a partner, they would have nowhere else to go. Three stated that the reason they are with and living with a partner is for housing.

**30%** are living with a Friend. This takes various forms and is of the most concerning. Living with a friend takes various forms from living in a friend's parental home as a lodger. This applied to four respondents. To literally couch hopping between friends. There exists, particularly in the Ormlie area a culture where one respondent has secured a home due to homeless status, claims benefits to pay the rent, others will also live in the house and sleep on the couch or the floor.

*"My Mum and Dad broke up and my Mum moved away from Thurso. My Dad had a new family so didn't want me to stay with them. I had nowhere to go. I was 15 years old, didn't go to school and no one was really there. A friend's Mum took me in for a while and then I got a girlfriend who had her own house because she had a couple of kids, I lived with her then but she had mental health issues and committed suicide. By then we had our own baby but after my girlfriend died they all got took into care. I went back to my friend's Mum's house for a while but I was struggling in my head y'know and she kicked me out so I stayed at my sisters for a while till she kicked me out and now I'm on a mate's floor up in Ormlie. I work but it isn't much, zero hours some months I get around £300 other months it can be more like £600 but its difficult to do much. My mate just has a microwave, I don't remember my mum cooking, it was only when I was a kid and I went to \_\_\_\_\_ house I had proper dinners and sometimes by my Granny but she's dead now. I eat Pot Noodles and microwave burgers, sleep on a floor and I smoke Cannabis because it helps me escape a bit. I want life with a house, kids, a job but don't think it will happen so it is day to day."*

Respondent Eight, (Age 23 years, Zero Hours Contract)

## Employment Status

30% of respondents are unemployed but not claiming any benefits. Two of those are supported by parents in the parental home. One of those is not claiming benefits as until recently was attending North Highland College and was in receipt of bursary but dropped out at Easter.

Three are supported financially by their partners who are either in work or in receipt of benefit.

Five admitted to picking up odd pieces of work which received cash payments. Examples were;

- Fish landing at Scrabster
- Welking
- Line catching fish
- Fencing/general odd jobs
- Working cash in hand for a local contractor/tradesmen sporadically
- General lifting and shifting work such as helping with dump runs
- Fixing cars
- Grass cutting

*"I'd love to get a job like a proper job but there ain't nothing out there. I did construction at College and worked on one of the substations but then that work went away again and I was just labouring so didn't get any further. I love driving and my mate co-drives me in his van but I could never afford proper lessons or get through a test but I think if one day I can get regular work I'd be a driver doing deliveries or the taxis or something"*

Respondent Twenty-Two (Age 22, living with partner, unemployed, not claiming benefits)

*"I tried the benefit thing but I missed an appointment because I never got the letter telling me I had an appointment until the day after but they wouldn't listen to me and I got sanctioned. It ain't worth it the benefits thing cos you have to jump to their tune. I cut grass in the summer with a mower I got off an old boy and in the winter work on cars. I'm good with cars and fixing stuff but I don't have no qualifications just know how to do it and not good with reading or going to college to learn. I just know."*

Respondent Twenty-Three (Age 24, living with partner, unemployed, not claiming benefits)

13% in receipt of benefits. All acknowledged that this was so that they could pay for housing. All have engaged with various agencies from time to time –Department of Work and Pensions, Highland Council Housing, medical professionals. One is in receipt of benefits due to having been diagnosed with a mental health issue, they are currently medicated but are not receiving any further support for their condition other than being on a waiting list for treatment.

*"I struggled at school, was smoking cannabis most days and never sat my exams. My mum is a single parent and I've little brothers and a sister at home. I was getting into trouble and she kicked me out lived in \_\_\_\_\_ but came up here to sleep on a mates couch and got a house off the council just wanted out of Inverness cos of who was around me but I ended up partying and taking drugs and ended up in bother and had an episode but that got me help at first but I'm waiting on proper counselling got pills from doctor but use other stuff too to feel better. Just want to get sorted."*

Respondent Sixteen (Age 24, unemployed on benefits, diagnosed mental health condition)

31% are employed on zero hour contracts all of these are within the fishing industry at Scrabster and are a variety from fish landings to crab packing to fish filleting. Average earnings are around £300 per month but can occasionally rise to around £700 for the month. Work is sporadic and generally although they can work most days it can just be for an hour or maybe two hours in the early morning before sometimes having to go back in the evening for an hour or so.

*"I'd love to be able to do more hours but you need lots of boys to get the job done and that means its lots of work by lots of us and it gets done then go home. Some days I don't get a text. Hard to plan anything cos you get a text half an hour before and just need to go to work. I asked for more hours but to get more work means going off to sea to fish and I don't want to do that cos I hear of the accidents and stuff."*

Respondent Seven (Age 23, Living with Partner, Zero Hours Contract)

13% are employed as Share Fishermen, two of which are on day boats operating from Scrabster and the other on a crab fishing boat.

*"Its hard work going to the sea but don't know what I would do if I didn't. Money is hard sometimes you have and sometimes you don't. Sometimes you don't get because of the weather. I'd be lost if it wasn't for my girlfriend she works as a carer and has a steady income so she pays the bills. There needs to be more checking of health and safety up here though it wasn't until there was an accident that I got my sea survival no one was bothered about me going to the sea before that and I've been going for 4 years."*

Respondent Ten (Age 24, living with partner, share fisherman)

13% are employed as Labourers in the Construction Industry either via an agency or one is on a 12 month job contract. All who are working in the Construction Industry completed the Access to Construction Skills one year course at Thurso College. Two currently work away from Thurso on contracts and two are still working locally. All acknowledged that the work they are doing does not feel secure and identified various issues with the work.

- Working for an agency can mean being told at short notice, no longer required. Examples of going to work on a Friday to be told no longer required.
- No investment to develop. All felt that they could be doing more than just labouring but agencies do not put any investment into them gaining the tickets to develop skills.
- Tickets are expensive, even for driving a forklift and there is no assistance towards it.
- All had in the past completed work placements with local companies in the hope of getting taken on to complete a trade, all had a story to tell where they felt they had been taken advantage of and apprenticeships had gone instead to business owners friends sons etc. It wasn't about how well you worked, it was about who you knew.
- All expressed a wish for more courses to be available locally in order to specialise.
- Difficult to get further work after a job ends, need to be able to travel and drive but most jobs are 7am – 7pm and include weekends. When can you fit in driving lessons?

*"I tried and tried to get a trade. I did courses at college for access to construction skills. I did work placements through work clubs that PPP in Wick arranged and [Skills Development Scotland] and on placement from College. Every one promised if I worked hard they would have an apprenticeship but each time someone else got took on. On one for a Plumber I'd done lots of work placements been to college worked for the Plumbers for £50 a week off my own back as a Plumbers Mate, promised an apprenticeship but gave it to a 16 year old boy straight out of school cos he was his Dad's mate. The boy lasted six months. If I had that chance no way I would waste it. Now I go from job to job been lucky now the boy I'm working for is trying to build a business and he's good to me. Pays my travel and accommodation and is going to pay for tickets for me but no way I would get that from a Caithness business or an agency."*

Respondent Eleven (Age 25, Living with Parent, Labourer 12 month contract)

## Issues

The young men consulted with raised a number of issues and possible solutions they felt could be made in Thurso in terms of their living and working circumstances and issues that they witness around them. They were each asked to arrange these into priority needs and suggested solutions which have been compiled as a group as below.

Issue	Evidence	Suggested Solution
Drugs, Addiction issues	All respondents admitted to being drug takers, from daily usage and addiction issues to habitual drug use. The drug in use most often was cannabis. Recent issues in the community from deaths and major crime was expressed as stopping some from taking other drugs. While it is a small sample, younger respondents under the age of 22 were more flippant regarding drug use, older in the 23-25 expressed they had actively moved on and had cut back drug use.	Addiction services being too difficult to access Educating more about the side effects and impacts of certain drugs Need to reach people in a way they speak E.g. A few years ago a friend launched social media group against legal highs when there had been deaths and it worked, stopped taking legal highs.
Mental Health	All respondents expressed that they had at time to time struggled with mental health. Also more than half expressed that there was a history of mental illness in families from parental to siblings. <i>"There is no one to talk to, we talk to each other more these days about it, when we feel down but pretty much all of us do and if you go to the doctor but say you take drugs then they just want to treat that but most of us know it's the mental health you take drugs to escape feeling hopeless"</i>	Having access to services where you are treated as a human being, just being able to have an informal chat with someone. Texting rather than talking. Saturday morning appointments at GPs
Employment	As evidenced above	Encouraging businesses to offer contracts that are not zero hours Access to training for tickets and financial assistance – even as no credit check loan that could be paid back Courses at North Highland College that teach a trade rather than having to find a business to take you as an apprentice More adult apprenticeships Access to quality work programmes where you learn rather than being seen as cheap labour
Facilities and Activities	<i>"My options are work, Xbox or go to gym, playing football or something like that you need to have money for equipment and be in that clique of men or you don't get accepted."</i> <i>"The gym at the pool is great but could do with more organised things that aren't for women"</i>	Boxing gym Cross training Informal, rather than team sports
Transport	<i>"If you don't drive it is hard to get around even for jobs but you end up working like 60 hours so no time to fit in driving lessons. Most jobs are in the country but no access to transport. Job at ___ but had to turn it down because couldn't get there."</i>	Greater flexibility to transport Out of town employers should arrange minibuses
Food Poverty	<i>"I don't know how to cook a meal, takeaways or micro meals. Sometimes I go days without eating"</i>	Not having to have a ticket to go to food bank Mince & Tatties takeaway!