Understanding the Lives of Disadvantaged Young People

*Literature Review*

January 2014
Understanding the lives of disadvantaged young people

This document is a synthesis of 2CV experience & literature review

ADDRESSING GAPS WITH EXPERIENCE & EXPERTISE:
The following document includes a synthesis of relevant case studies, previous research findings and experience from three of 2CV's core areas of expertise:

- Digital Team
- Social Practice
- Lifestyle Practice

Where applicable, these findings have been footnoted with an *2cv

We drew on 2CV's previous research & experience in a range of industries to address literature gaps. This included previous research for:

- Top mobile phone companies
- One of the largest music corporations in the world
- Youth-based non-profit organisations
- Leading gaming and tech organisations
- Financial organisations
- UK government bodies/departments

KEY CONSIDERATION:
Significant gaps in the literature on brands, trends & financial habits of disadvantaged young people specifically
Understanding the lives of disadvantaged young people

**Desk-based literature on disadvantaged youth largely negative - focuses on the nature of being disadvantaged**

**Literature tends to be negative**
Existing literature on disadvantaged young people is quite negative - particularly for those in the UK. Social mobility is the lowest in the UK than nearly anywhere else in the developed world. A child born into a disadvantaged community in the UK is likely to stay disadvantaged more than any other child born in the developed world, except Portugal. And it’s getting worse. 1

**The UK has some of the lowest social mobility in the developed world**

Source: 1

**The UK has less social mobility...**
How sons’ earnings reflect their fathers
Higher score means less social mobility

Source: 1
Low social mobility rates can perpetuate stereotypes of ‘disadvantaged young people’ which is not true for all

They are **often linked** to low levels of education, homelessness, crime and a range of anti-social behaviours - but this does not reflect the lives of all disadvantaged young people. There are significant literature gaps regarding the differences between these young people specifically.

**Further research** is required to explore the lives, dreams, attitudes, motivations and aspirations of disadvantaged young people and how they differ on a personal level, between ages, and between sexes.
Young adulthood is a vulnerable time regardless of where you live, this is compounded for young people who come from disadvantaged communities. 

Understanding the lives of disadvantaged young people

- Education
- Finding Work
- Housing
- Social Media
- Money & Debt
- Friends
- Family

IDENTITY
Over time, external factors inhibit aspirations which can lead to demotivation as reality sets in*2cv, 2 & 3

**Early Teens 14-17**
- Focused on identity forming - discovering who they are
- Highly influenced by external factors
- Interested in what impacts and benefits them “now”; less concerned with future
- Experimentation with rule breaking and limit testing

**Late Teens 18-20**
- Focused on who they want to be in context of society
- Unrealistically high expectations of future & concerns about personal failure
- Strong influence of role models
- Increased emphasis with “Self-Branding” via online media

**Young Adults 21-24**
- Reality of what’s possible sets in
- When high expectations of future not met this fuels self-doubt/low-confidence
- Identity linked to contribution or role within society
- Continued emphasis on “Self-Branding” via online media

Goals are short term and idealistic- an assumption that everything will be okay but no clear idea of how they will get there*2cv
Phone & constant connectivity is their lifeline; but there are upsides and downsides

Blackberry tends to be most popular phone brand amongst young people but losing appeal as status is greater for those with more expensive phones

How young people currently use their smartphones

The positives & negatives to constant connectivity

Emphasis on peer approval and social image is particularly high amongst disadvantaged young people, making online bullying particularly relevant

Fear of Missing Out

- Insecurity, never being fully satisfied

A Desire to Be More

- A desire to see more, do more, experience more

Exposure to lifestyles outside local environment can increase ambitions & hopes to “be discovered”
Part of the “Brand Me” generation; young people are under pressure to form identities at very young ages:

- Peer pressured to formulate an identity that expresses who they are and want to be at a very young age & to present this identity online.
- This means the early experimentation with self expression can leave a potentially damaging digital footprint.
- Balance act of “fitting in” and “standing out” at the same time.
- Social labels influence identity and have lasting effects, particularly for disadvantaged young people.
- They may be more likely to take up behaviour, brands and activities that help them relate to given peer groups or solidify their identity.
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Brands are the ultimate expression of identity *2CV

*There is an opportunity to explore the role of brands specifically for disadvantaged young people

Media, clothing and trends are consumed and propagated through friends – Peer to Peer communication & consensus is all important at this age
Increasing pressure on disadvantaged young people to spend more money:  
*Instant gratification + poor money management = worse financial situation*

Learnt **bad spending habits** from parents  

**Instant gratification**

Credit cards have become **status symbols**

**More important to be seen as ‘cool’** - must buy the latest things as soon as they come out.

**Unable to manage:** many don’t have a bank account – might have parents managing their money instead

"I got offered my first card when I was 18," The credit limit was £4,000. . . . Within two years, Gemma had incurred £14,000 of debt”*  
(Female, Essex)

Money is a real source of worry for young people and more so if you don’t have any. This can be quite contradictory to habits of instant gratification.*2CV

*18 is a turning point where young people have access to a range of credit services
Lack of support networks in family, community, school can lead to feelings of distrust and resentment

‘NEET’ is widely used in policy circles but it dehumanises the personal stories of young people who cannot obtain and retain jobs after struggling at school & cannot find an employer to give them a chance.

‘Everyone lets me down’

They believe there are significant gaps in the basic services they need in their local community.

Young people realise anti-social behaviour holds them back, but they need tailored support to help them

- Lack of support: Insufficient services in their local community to deal with drugs, alcohol and substance misuse
- Nothing to do: Not enough activities for young people in their community
- How do I get started? No clear path to work - lack of support in school: teachers don’t have much advise other than higher education

“My music teacher is the only person who allows me to do what I’m natural at. No-one cares about my skills, my interests. They’re not valued. They’re not going to get me anywhere... apparently”
They can feel cheated by the system; school can feel like a ‘waste of time’

**Principal Barriers**

- Family influence over education is biggest in UK compared to other countries and is just as important as quality of school

- Family Difficulties

- Living in Poverty

- School or Online Bullying

- Substance Abuse

- Child Sexual Exploitation

- Disruptive Behaviour

**Behaviours as Barriers**

**Outcome**

- 50% of disadvantaged youth feel they are held back by substance abuse

**False Promises**

They have reported feeling subject to ‘false promises’ made by educators and service staff, which had serious negative effects in terms of their ability to trust and develop meaningful rapport.
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**Identity often shaped by feelings of failure**

Desperately want to be employed; not just to be in a job but to have a Future

Being out of work can lead to feelings of having nothing to live for - being a failure

There are some schemes that try to help, for example...

- Cambridgeshire County Council has launched a pre-paid card scheme with £40 a month to spend on positive activities such as sports etc
- HSBC Future First programme continues to support disadvantaged young people
- Princes Trust: Enterprise programme - supports unemployed young people aged 18-30 in developing potential business ventures

"They feel isolated. They fall behind from their friends and peers. Then we have this whole section just sat on the sidelines, really just waiting. Because you try, get knocked back, try again, get knocked back again, and eventually you just stop trying."

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Don’t want to feel trapped in a vicious circle: Marginalization from society can have further negative consequences for the community.

Ignored by Community

Low Self Esteem

I CAN’T ESCAPE

High Risk = Daily

TRAPPED

Disengaged from Society

Hopeless

Angry

Lonely

Nearly half of disadvantaged young people claimed to not feel safe in their community, compared to 28% who felt ‘very safe’.

Potential to Lose Hope for Future as Reality Sets In:

- Learning to accept environment
- Learning street survival skills
- Feel ‘life isn’t really going to get any better for them’
Don’t want to feel trapped in a Vicious Circle: *Local Environment can be the biggest barrier to escaping the poverty trap*

**TEENAGE PREGNANCY**
Teenage pregnancy is 8x more common amongst young people from manual social backgrounds than those from managerial or professional households. 22

**FAMILY MEMBER ROLE MODELS**
Adult behaviour within the family has high impact on behaviour of younger family members. Research suggests that family life is the biggest predictor of a young person’s education and employment preferences and opportunities; as well as likelihood of getting into trouble with the law 18

**Young adult carers** have been identified as particularly high risk subset of disadvantaged young people. Nearly 15,000 children up to the age of 17 are providing more than 50 hours of care per week 19
Perpetuation of low social mobility:

**Cycle of poverty, distrust & unemployment**

DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES
Poverty; Unemployment; Crime; Poor Health

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR
Crime; Drugs; Acting Out (more normalised)

FEW OPPORTUNITIES
Lose confidence and hope as reality sets in

MANY BARRIERS
Feels there are too many obstacles to achieve goals

IDENTITY
"Young people who stay unemployed for a long period of time - it scars them....over the long run, [it] seriously reduces growth as well as hurt[s] their own prospects and those of their families."

Half of all girls under age 18 feel unsafe in UK cities

Effective programmes challenge current negative perceptions of Identity

40% of 14-17 years old think anti-social behaviour is major barrier to their goals

Treated as the problem rather than the solution

"Young people who stay unemployed for a long period of time - it scars them....over the long run, [it] seriously reduces growth as well as hurt[s] their own prospects and those of their families."
Gaps in the literature helped us to identify 5 key themes we aim to explore in the fieldwork

Most literature focuses on nature of deprivation, we aim to explore the human element of young people in a way that accounts for their individual experiences and attitudes

1. **Favourite activities** that they enjoy doing
2. **Spending habits** of disadvantaged young people in particular
3. **Who is influential?** Pop-culture, role-models, celebrities
4. **Technology & Entertainment** (eg. Mobile phone use and connectivity) and the impact it has on their daily lives
5. **Gender** and **Age Differences** for all of the above

**Giving young people a voice**

**Focus on the individual, not on the disadvantage**
Contact Us

Rob.Hartley@2cv.com

Jessica.Long@2cv.com

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