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I'm Speaking

End of Project Report October 2025

PRIORITY 1-54

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Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all the young women who took part in the I'm Speaking project for their courage, creativity, and commitment.

Special thanks to Nicola Bryson and Miranda Whelehan for facilitating the workshops, and to Lindsey Smith for bringing such creativity and inspiration to the sessions.

We are also grateful to Charleston in Lewes for providing such a creative space that enriched the project. Finally, we thank our funders, Comic Relief and Lewes Borough Council, whose support made this project possible.



Youth-Led Recommendations

Create Safe Youth Spaces for Girls and Young Women

Youth hubs should have women-only spaces where young women feel safe to speak openly.

Address Gender Inequality in Community and Recreational Spaces

Community and recreational facilities (e.g. MUGAs) should be designed with input from girls and young women as well as boys, ensuring equitable access, safety, and representation in community activities.

Embed Young Women's Voices in Service Design

Services for young people should adopt the Lundy Model of Participation, whilst ensuring young women have genuine influence over decisions that affect them.

Improve Education on Sexual Harassment and Coercive Control

Youth and educational settings should deliver practical, rights-based education that addresses harassment, coercive relationships, spiking, and stalking, ensuring space for lived experiences.

Tackle Period Poverty and Stigma

All youth and educational settings should provide free period products in accessible ways and foster environment where requesting menstrual support is not stigmatised.

Challenge Beauty Standards and Promote Body Positivity

Campaigns and youth work programmes should explicitly address unrealistic beauty standards and their links to self-esteem and mental health.

Strengthen Support in Healthcare Settings

Healthcare providers should take young women's concerns seriously, around reproductive and mental health. Prescriptions (e.g. the pill) must involve listening to wider concerns, not dismissing them.

Invest in Creative Campaigning Approaches

Funders and youth services should support more creative methods of engagement, that provide safe, non-verbal routes for young women to explore sensitive issues and express their voices.

Recognise and Enable Male Allyship

Male allies can play constructive roles in campaigning and creative work when their involvement is agreed by young women in advance and handled with sensitivity.

Sustain Youth-Led Action Beyond Short-Term Funding

Funders should support groups like I'm Speaking, more long-term with hybrid models enabling young women to stay engaged.



1. Introduction

The I'm Speaking project set out to give young women in East Sussex a safe, youth-led platform to share their experiences and campaign on issues linked to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Over nine months, the project created space for 16 young women to explore themes such as sexual harassment, coercive control, women's health, and representation in education and work.

Through workshops, creative activities, and campaigning, the group translated their lived experiences into practical recommendations for youth hubs and wider community safety work. The project was underpinned by children's rights approach and the Lundy Model of Participation, ensuring that young women's voices were not only heard but also had influence.

2. Project Overview

I'm Speaking is a nine-month project (January–September 2025) led by Priority 1-54 and funded by the Eastbourne & Lewes District Community Safety Partnership and Comic Relief.

Core aims:

- Establish a youth-led advocacy group of young women (aged 14–21).
- Deliver 8 monthly meetings (January – September 2025).
- Develop practical guidance for safe spaces in youth services across East Sussex.
- Create and lead campaigns on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and community safety priorities.
- Embed young women's recommendations into local policy and practice, ensuring a legacy of youth-led change.

3. Context and Need

National picture

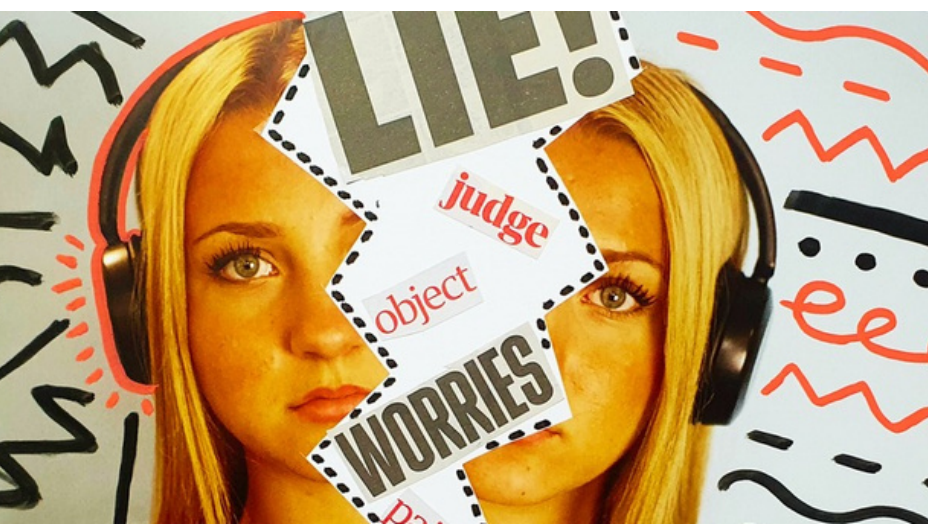
Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) remains a major issue: one in two women report experiencing harassment in public spaces, and young women aged 16–24 are among the most at risk. Plan UK (2024) found that nearly one-third of young women want to be more involved in activism around VAWG issues such as street harassment, coercive control, spiking and sextortion.

Local insight

Priority 1-54's work on sexual harassment and bullying in schools shows that many young women feel their concerns are minimised or "shut down" in education settings. From the Safe Space initiative in Newhaven (2024), young women reported not feeling safe at certain times and highlighted a lack of dedicated, proactive safe spaces. Provision tended to be reactive, established only after incidents.

Gap identified

Few youth voice mechanisms exist locally for girls and young women to directly influence community safety priorities. This project responds by creating a structured, youth-led platform where young women can both share their lived experiences and translate them into policy recommendations and campaigns.



“I’ve faced so much discrimination and sexual harassment. So being part of this group is about me taking back control.”

Young woman, age, 17

4. Safeguarding and Risk Management

The safe and trusting space created by the project led directly to several safeguarding disclosures from young women, including previous experiences of sexual harassment, coercive control, and mental health concerns. These disclosures were managed sensitively and appropriately, reinforcing the importance of clear pathways to support services and having strong safeguarding protocols in place that were discussed at the beginning of every workshop.

In addition to Priority 1-54's overarching organisational safeguarding policy, a standalone safeguarding protocol and dynamic risk assessment were designed specifically for the delivery of the project and workshops. This ensured the risks around discussing VAWG, coercive control, and lived experiences were anticipated and addressed proactively.

- **Safeguarding protocols:** Clear pathways for disclosures, confidentiality boundaries, and regular well-being check-ins. Workshop facilitators and Priority 1-54's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) oversaw all concerns and referrals to external services where required.
- **Safe environment:** Each session was underpinned by a group agreement and co-facilitated by qualified female youth workers, creating a calm and supportive atmosphere where young women could step back if discussions became difficult.
- **Support services:** Young women were signposted to local and national specialist organisations (e.g. Survivors Network, CAMHS) to provide follow-up support.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Activities took account of young women's diverse backgrounds and needs, ensuring inclusivity for neurodiverse and seldom-heard young women.

Safeguarding learning from this project will inform Priority 1-54's wider youth engagement programmes, strengthening approaches to managing sensitive disclosures in future projects. For example, when one young woman disclosed a recent relationship where there had been police involvement due to coercive control, the workshop facilitator, who was an highly experienced youth worker, was able to offer ongoing one-to-one support both during and outside of the workshop. This anonymised case demonstrates the importance of trust, clarity, and follow-up support.

5. Delivery and Activities

The workshops were delivered across the nine months. All the sessions were grounded in children's rights approach and the Lundy Model of Participation. The Lundy Model provided the framework (Space, Voice, Audience, Influence) to ensure their views were not only expressed but carried influence in shaping campaigns and key recommendations.

Central to delivery was the creation of a safe space where young women could talk openly about Violence Against Women and Girls, their own lived experiences of sexual harassment, unhealthy relationships and coercive control, and a wide range of women's issues.

Recruitment

Recruitment began in January 2025 through outreach to Priority 1-54's Youth Consultants and those taking part in other projects, local youth voice groups, schools and word of mouth. Sixteen young women aged 14-21 took part regularly with a core group of 9, with more expected to join as campaign activities develop. The group represented a mix of lived experiences, including neurodiverse young women, LGBTQ+ identities, and racially diverse voices.



“For me being part of this group is about actions speaking louder than words and taking an active role in speaking up for our rights”

Young woman, age 16.

Workshops

Each workshop began with a group check-in to support well-being and set the tone for open dialogue. This was followed by a deep exploration of the issue under discussion, ensuring that sensitive topics were approached with care and respect. Just as important was the powerful and positive peer support that developed within the group; young women consistently reinforced one another's confidence, creating a strong sense of solidarity.

Workshop 1 (Hybrid/March):

- Built trust and co-created a group agreement, giving young women ownership of the space.
- Mapped skills and identified campaign themes that mattered most to them.
- Discussed issues linked to VAWG, including sexual harassment in schools/public places, coercive and unhealthy relationships, and discrimination in education/work. These discussions showed how lived experience shaped campaign priorities.
- Raised concerns around mental health stigma and barriers to support, highlighting the need for accessible and non-judgemental services.
- Early campaign ideas included street safety, period dignity, and challenging normalised sexism, laying the foundation for future sessions.

“The session has worked really well and we made a lot of progress in getting the fundamentals out of the way. The hybrid approach makes it more accessible as I only live in East Sussex over the summer!”

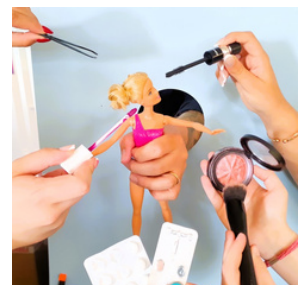
Young woman, age 20.

Workshop 2 (Hybrid/April):

- Explored campaign themes in greater depth, moving from ideas to more detailed planning.
- Open discussion about sexual harassment and lack of accessible self-defence opportunities showed the group's concern for everyday safety.
- Drew connections between VAWG, discrimination, and structural pressures on young women, reinforcing the systemic nature of these issues.
- Highlighted stigma/embarrassment of periods, especially in mixed-gender settings. Young women spoke about the embarrassment of having to explain the need to go to the toilet in front of peers, the fact that toilets were often locked during lessons, and the lack of period products in female toilets in schools. These experiences reinforced the importance of tackling period poverty and promoting dignity.
- Examined harmful beauty standards, abortion rights, and barriers to girls in education, all connected back to broader patterns of discrimination.
- Campaign actions proposed included social media awareness, school workshops, health service collaborations, and improved access to sexual health/coercive control information.

“There so many ideas to explore. It will be interesting to see what direction the project goes in and what the main focus will be.”

Young woman, age 15.





Workshops 3 & 4 (May):

- Explored intersectionality and campaign branding, ensuring diverse experiences shaped campaign messages.
- Acknowledged VAWG experiences shaped by race, sexuality, disability, and class, emphasising that not all young women face these issues in the same way.
- Discussed in detail how recreational and sports spaces, such as Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs), were often designed with boys and young men in mind, leaving young women feeling excluded or unsafe. This raised important points about discrimination in the design of community spaces and how safety is gendered.
- Created the Safe Informal Space (SIS) identity, with variations like SIS-STAR (sister), giving the group a unifying brand.
- Worked with a graffiti artist to visually express campaign themes, offering a powerful creative outlet to address issues like sexual harassment and coercive control.
- Drafted youth hub recommendations addressing harassment, body image, safety, and stigma around period poverty, linking workshop discussions directly to practical changes in services.

“I liked the range of ways to express our viewpoints like speaking in a group, writing down ideas and the graffiti.”

Young woman, age 14.

Workshop 5

Before outlining Workshops 5–6 it is important to note that Charleston Art Centre in Lewes generously provided free art space for these sessions, for which we are incredibly grateful. Two highly experienced artists (one female and one male) were brought in to work alongside the young women. The artists reiterated the principles of the Lundy Model and spoke about how graffiti has historically been used as a vehicle for protest and direct action, connecting the group’s creative work to more creative ways to bring about social change.

The technique the artists introduced was called *‘photo-graf’*, a mix of traditional photography and urban street art. Prior to the sessions the group were invited to bring in various objects related to campaign themes that could be photographed and then transformed into layered artworks, using both digital and spray-paint methods to create striking visual artwork.

More importantly, prior to Workshop 5 it was agreed with the group that permission should be sought regarding the participation of two male adults (the artist and a film-maker). The group discussed this in advance and confirmed they were comfortable, ensuring that their safety and consent were placed at the centre of the process.

Issues discussed

- Explored how themes such as VAWG, sexual harassment, and coercive control could be communicated through posters, zines, and digital reels.
- Many in the group also spoke at length about how the contraceptive pill had frequently been prescribed by doctors for multiple issues, from intense period pain to acne, often without properly listening to or addressing their wider concerns. This reflected a wider frustration with how young women’s health needs and the pain they were experiencing were often minimised or dismissed.
- Discussions highlighted ongoing concerns about mental health pressures, emphasising the importance of supportive peer networks alongside campaigning.
- Focused on refining campaign messages and translating earlier discussions into practical outputs.
- Reflected on progress to date, with young women evaluating the value of creative methods and the inclusive environment.
- Discussions highlighted ongoing concerns about mental health pressures, emphasising the importance of supportive peer networks alongside campaigning.
- The session was captured on film and placed on social media with over 3,000 impressions.

“It was amazing to see our campaigns come together, but in ways I just didn’t expect.”

Young woman, age 16.

Workshop 6 (August)

- The creative process gave young women another vehicle to explore how issues like VAWG are rooted in everyday experiences, and how art can amplify these stories.
 - Young women used creative visual arts to express their feelings on VAWG and discrimination, providing powerful testimonies in visual form.
 - Each member of the group was invited to share the meaning and messages behind their artwork, explaining how it connected to their lived experiences and campaign themes.
 - Discussions also revisited stigma within healthcare, with participants sharing experiences of being dismissed by medical professionals when raising concerns about pain or reproductive health.
 - Reflections revealed increased confidence, new skills in public speaking and creative campaigning, and a strong sense of solidarity across the group.
 - Captured on film with over 2,000 social media impressions, this session consolidated the group's key messages on sexual harassment, women's health and body image.
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Workshop 7 (Online/September)

- Focused discussion on the youth hubs guidance, particularly the importance of providing female-only spaces and safe environments for young women.
 - Worked on creating supporting text for the 13 campaign artworks produced over the summer, linking each piece to themes such as women's health, sexual harassment, silencing of women's voices, body image, and intergenerational solidarity.
 - Planned a social media campaign using these images, suggesting monthly posting with captions and links to further resources.
 - Identified opportunities for the physical exhibition of artworks in community venues, youth hubs, and cultural institutions, with Brighton Museum expressing interest in showcasing their work.
 - Reflections reinforced how the artworks captured lived experiences, from healthcare stigma (e.g. being dismissed by doctors or "just given the pill") to the pressures of beauty standards and the resilience of women across generations.
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Workshop 8 (Planned – October Half-Term 2025):

- This final workshop has not yet taken place and is scheduled for the October school half-term.
 - The session will provide an opportunity to feedback evaluation data collected from young women and wider stakeholders.
 - Young women will use this space to refine and finalise the youth-led recommendations, ensuring they are ready for dissemination to services and decision-makers.
 - The group will also map out next steps for the project's legacy, including peer-led consultations, exhibitions, and campaigning activities scheduled through to December 2025.
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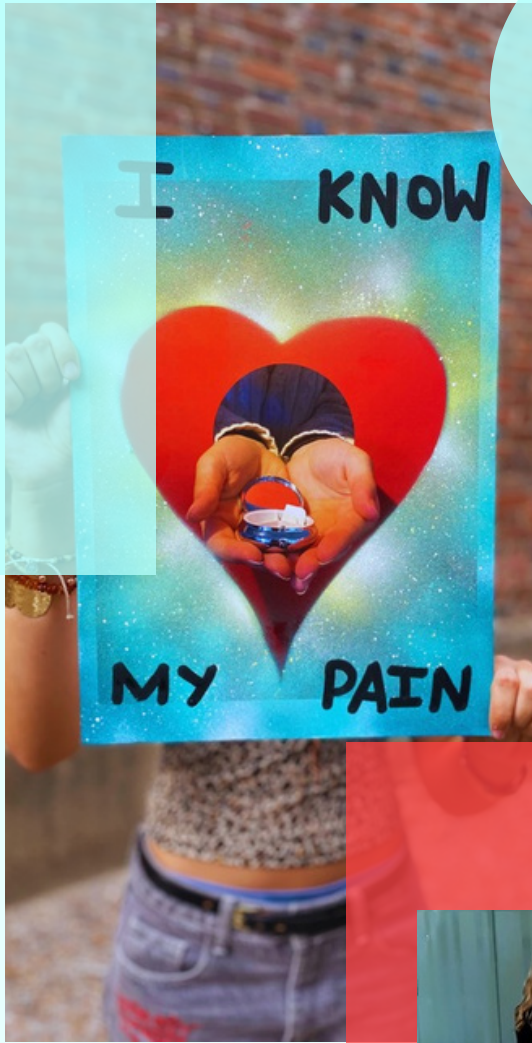
Workshop 9 (Planned November):

- Brighton Museum will be hosting a bespoke workshop for the group as part of their ongoing exhibition *Passion, Power and Protest*.
- The exhibition explores themes of love, identity, connection, prejudice, resistance, challenge, and change, with a central question: who gets to tell the story?
- The workshop will invite young women to engage with these themes directly, participate in gallery activities, and link their own campaign work to broader cultural and historical narratives of protest and social change.
- It will also be an opportunity for the group and Brighton Museum to explore ways to collaborate in the future, ensuring young women's voices continue to shape conversation about cultural spaces and conversations about VAWG.

"I thought the Lundy Model exercise was really useful, because it got us thinking about who the audience should be."

Young woman, age 18.





6. Outcomes and Impact

A more detailed evaluation process is currently being planned that will shed further light on the overall impact of the project on young women. This will include follow-up feedback from young women and wider stakeholders, and an assessment of how far the recommendations influence practice across East Sussex

For young women

- Increased confidence, public speaking, and advocacy skills through regular participation and campaigning.
- Development of practical outputs such as posters, zines, graffiti art and short films, providing them with tangible evidence of their influence.
- Strengthened peer support networks, with young women reporting a sense of solidarity and inclusion.
- Empowerment to discuss sensitive topics like sexual harassment, coercive control, and body image in a safe and supported environment.

For community and youth services

- Production of Youth Hub Recommendations with clear guidance on how to design safe, inclusive spaces for girls and young women.
- Youth-led quality assurance of campaign ideas and youth work practice, ensuring that services respond directly to lived experience.
- Increased visibility of issues such as period dignity, online safety, and coercive relationships in local youth provision.

For wider stakeholders

- Raised awareness of Violence Against Women and Girls in East Sussex through campaigns, creative outputs, and upcoming exhibitions.
- Mechanisms for embedding youth voice into existing structures like the Safe Spaces Network, Community Safety Partnership, and PSHE delivery.
- Outreach to local art venues also created opportunities for partnership, including Charleston in Lewes offering free art space for the group to use in support of their campaigning and creative work.

Equity and Inclusion

- The project created space for seldom-heard voices, with the group including neurodiverse young women, LGBTQ+ young people, and those with lived experience mental health.
- A hybrid model (online and in-person) increased accessibility and inclusivity.
- Multiple routes for expression, verbal, written, anonymous, and creative, ensured all participants could contribute meaningfully.

“Today was about creating meaningful art that I am proud of”

Young woman, age 15.



“Too often conversations about sexual harassment get shut down in class, but here, you could say things and know your views are listened to and respected.”

Young woman, age 15.

7. Sustainability and Legacy

The project has laid strong foundations for lasting impact. Several activities begun during delivery will extend into the next phase:

- **Seeking additional funding:** Young women expressed a strong desire to continue being part of the group beyond the funded period. For those starting university, a hybrid model of online and in-person sessions will be crucial in enabling them to stay connected. Priority 1-54 will pursue further funding to sustain the group and embed its work into wider local authority and youth service strategies.
- **Peer-led consultations:** With additional funding from East Sussex Youth Services, young women will run 2–3 peer consultations in youth hubs across the county (Oct–Nov 2025). These will broaden participation and co-develop further guidance on safe spaces in youth hubs.
- **Exhibiting artwork:** Creative outputs will be exhibited in youth centres, schools, and community venues. A partnership with Brighton Museum is being explored to showcase the work in a cultural setting.
- **Social media campaign:** The SIS-STAR branding will be developed into a wider campaign, using short films and digital reels to reach more young people online. We have also been approached by a local college whose T-Level Media students, seeking work placement opportunities throughout the academic year, are keen to support the group's campaigns over the next 12 months. This partnership will help sustain and expand the project's online reach.
- **Upskilling and capacity building:** Core group members will continue developing advanced campaigning, media, and peer consultation skills to strengthen their leadership.
- **Youth worker training:** The group's co-produced recommendations will inform training for youth workers on how to create safe and inclusive spaces for girls and young women.
- **Learning on inclusion of male allies:** The project demonstrated that male allies can be invited to participate in specific roles (e.g. artists, film-makers) when the young women are consulted and give their consent. This approach ensured the integrity of safe spaces while modelling positive allyship.
- **Exploring partnerships with museums:** The group has been invited by Brighton Museum to take part in workshops connected to their Passion, Power and Protest exhibition in November 2025, opening up new opportunities to link creative campaigning with cultural institutions.

Together, these steps ensure the young women's voices remain central, leaving a lasting legacy of youth-led change across East Sussex.

“In the group, everyone was heard, and it was good to be able to ask tricky questions that some adults find hard to talk about.”

Young woman, age 16.



“The thing I liked most about the group was the sense of solidarity and trust that was created. It made it feel safe.”

Young woman, age 15.

8. Challenges and Flexibility

- **Multiple campaigns themes:** Young women were passionate about campaigning on several themes, including some outside of the original project brief. We felt it important to capture and respect this passion, recognising that their energy and commitment extended beyond the project's formal scope.
- **Timing and exams:** Several young people were preparing for GCSEs and A-Levels during the spring, which affected attendance. The project adapted by offering hybrid (online and in-person) delivery and rescheduling sessions during August 2025.
- **Sensitive content:** Conversations on VAWG, coercive control, and lived experiences were at times emotionally challenging. Facilitators allowed participants to step out, used creative methods to ease discussion, and ensured support was available outside workshops.
- **Sustaining engagement:** With a core group of 9 attending consistently, maintaining wider involvement did require flexibility. Reward and recognition approaches, alongside creative delivery, helped sustain motivation.
- **Engaging young women of colour:** While several young women of colour were initially recruited, none were able to attend the workshops. This resulted in gaps in our understanding of how this specific groups of young people experience VAWG, and signals the need for deeper outreach and support strategies in future phases of the project.
- **Resourcing creativity:** Incorporating the creative strand with funding from Arts Council England UK added significant value, by amplifying young women's voices. This strand provided another vehicle by which key themes could be explored, offering creative and non-verbal ways for young women to express themselves and deepen their engagement with sensitive issues.

9. Conclusions

I'm Speaking has shown the importance and power of creating safe, inclusive, and youth-led spaces for young women to address VAWG and community safety. Over the course of the project, young women developed confidence, campaigning skills, and creative outputs that reached thousands of people locally and online. They produced practical recommendations for youth hubs, worked with female artists to explore sensitive issues, and began to shape future training for youth workers.

Challenges remain, particularly around consistent engagement of young women of colour, but the project has laid a strong foundation for sustainable change. With planned peer consultations, exhibitions, and ongoing partnerships, the voices of young women will continue to influence policy, practice, and culture across East Sussex, leaving a legacy of youth-led advocacy and action.

“These workshops made me feel safe and heard.”

Young woman, age 15.

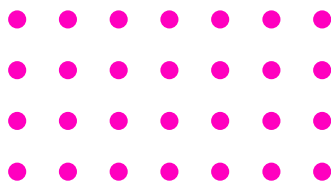




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PREPARED BY:
JOHN KHAN



FOR MORE INFORMATION



07846 137 597



www.priority154.com



john.khan@priority154.com