

Involving children and young people from the start – Wakefield’s approach to understanding youth vaping

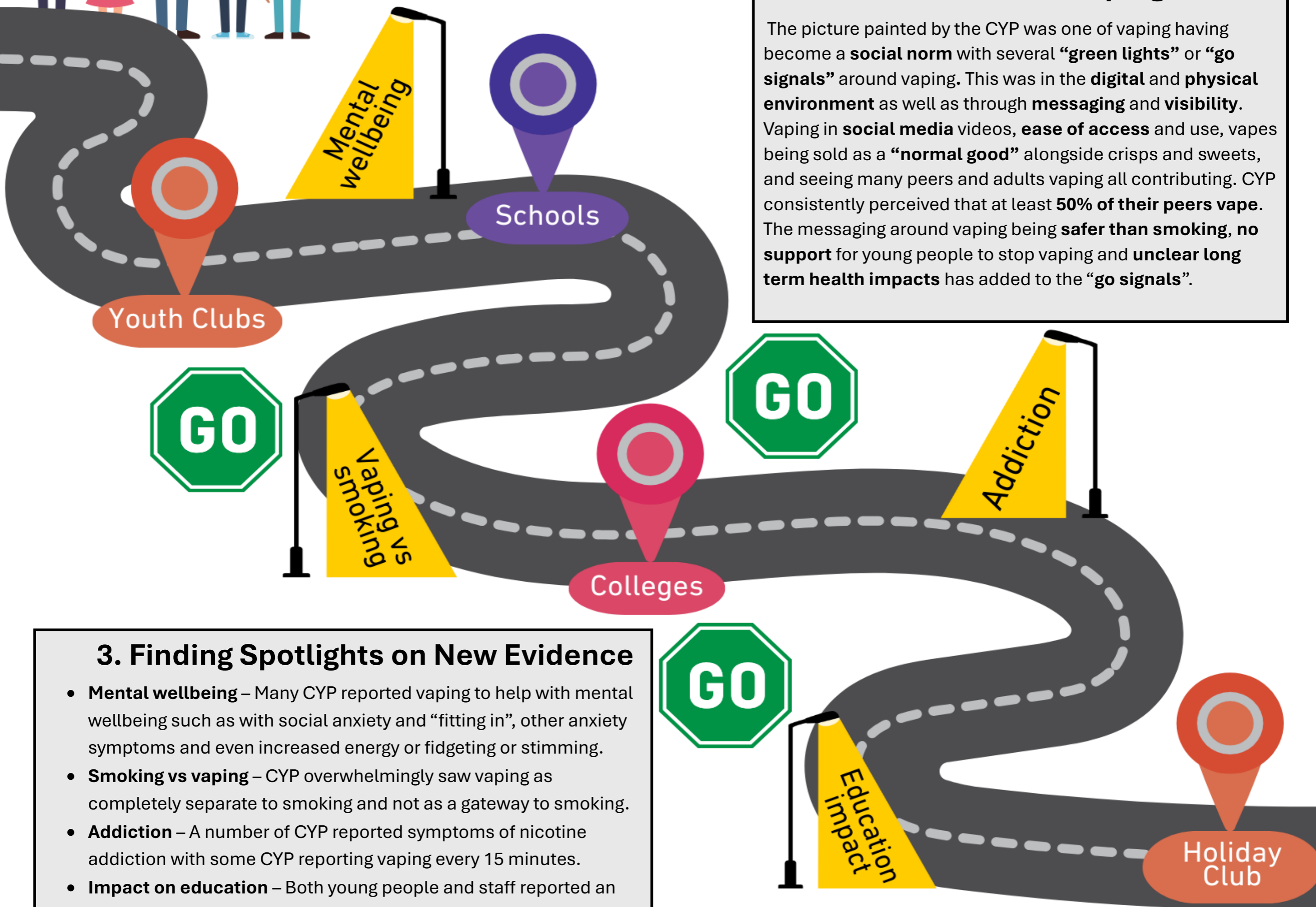
1. What we did and why we did it

This was a **qualitative exploration** of **children and young people (CYP)** in Wakefield’s experiences and views on vaping. It initially came about through **engaging CYP** in the **Big Conversation** and then with the **Healthy and Sustainable Communities** work. As part of this they **expressed their concerns** and questions around **vaping**. This was echoed by parents, youth workers, public health colleagues and elected members.

We spoke to **65 CYP aged 11-17 across the district** (vapers and non-vapers) in schools, youth clubs and a Branching Out session. **This also included the young people who originally raised their concerns** as well as **20 staff members**. We used a flexible approach adapted to the setting and needs of the young people. The groundwork done and **trusted relationships created** within the community prior to starting the research was **key to the success** of this approach. The data was analysed using thematic analysis and is being peer reviewed by CYP in the district using conversations and creative approaches like podcasts and films.

2. The road to vaping

The picture painted by the CYP was one of vaping having become a **social norm** with several **“green lights”** or **“go signals”** around vaping. This was in the **digital** and **physical environment** as well as through **messaging** and **visibility**. Vaping in **social media** videos, **ease of access** and use, vapes being sold as a **“normal good”** alongside crisps and sweets, and seeing many peers and adults vaping all contributing. CYP consistently perceived that at least **50% of their peers vape**. The messaging around vaping being **safer than smoking**, **no support** for young people to stop vaping and **unclear long term health impacts** has added to the **“go signals”**.



3. Finding Spotlights on New Evidence

- **Mental wellbeing** – Many CYP reported vaping to help with mental wellbeing such as with social anxiety and “fitting in”, other anxiety symptoms and even increased energy or fidgeting or stimming.
- **Smoking vs vaping** – CYP overwhelmingly saw vaping as completely separate to smoking and not as a gateway to smoking.
- **Addiction** – A number of CYP reported symptoms of nicotine addiction with some CYP reporting vaping every 15 minutes.
- **Impact on education** – Both young people and staff reported an impact of vaping on concentration and behaviour in school.

4. Next Steps

We have **CYP peer reviewing** the findings with one school also aiming to produce a **podcast around vaping**. This will help shape the **knowledge translation and dissemination** with CYP being a key part of this process. Recommendations will be shaped by the children and young people through a **CYP advisory panel**. Wakefield Council and wider partners will continue the work to make sure CYP voices influences what happens in Wakefield and in their communities.