



EMPOWER

October 2020

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Executive Summary

The project

For young people low wellbeing and self-esteem are significant issues that particularly impact young women and girls, and those from families with lower income. The Covid-19 pandemic has only exacerbated low wellbeing for young people and increased anxiety about their future.

Launched to mark the centenary of women’s suffrage, EmpowHER encourages young women and girls to use their voices for positive change – just as their predecessors did 100 years ago. Led by UK Youth in partnership with the British Red Cross and Young Women’s Trust, EmpowHER is a three-and-a-half year programme that addresses the worryingly low levels of wellbeing amongst young women and girls in the UK and supports them to give back to their local communities through inclusive and meaningful social action opportunities.

EmpowHER is funded by Spirit of 2012 and the #iwill Fund. The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department of Culture, Media & Sport have each invested £25 million seed funding to create the #iwill Fund to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.

Funded in partnership by



Project reach

Over 1,000 young women and girls across England have completed the programme across three cohorts. In Cohort Three, from February to August 2020, and delivered in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, 12 youth organisations ran EmpowHER, engaging 312 young women and girls, 239 of whom completed the programme across the North West, South West, West Midlands and East of England.



Key findings and conclusion

Despite being the first online EmpowHER cohort, Cohort Three was a successful EmpowHER Cohort with EmpowHER groups delivering 58 social action projects and raising £3,746 for causes of their choice. In addition, the programme evaluation demonstrated that despite the difficult context, young women and girls were continuing to achieve the intended outcomes of EmpowHER, building social cohesion, challenging limiting perception and empowering young women and girls to lead change.

In addition, young women and girls reported the following;

- 82% said that EmpowHER improved their self-confidence;
- 75% that it had improved their leadership skills; and
- 46% young women and girls reported they would take part in social action in the next 12 months, which is an increase from 37% in Cohort Two and 34% in Cohort One.

Cohort Three clearly demonstrated that EmpowHER meets the need of young women and girls, whether online or face to face. Participating in EmpowHER improves the well-being, confidence and self-esteem of young women and girls through the mechanism of social action and encourages them to lead change in their communities.



Programme context and need

Low wellbeing of young women and girls

The poor wellbeing and general low self-esteem of young people is alarming. More than one in five young people report that they have experienced a high level of emotional problems and other emotional difficulties during the last six months (Brooks et al., 2020).

Young women and girls (YW&G), especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are even more likely to experience poor wellbeing and a 2018 report by the Children's Society found that girls had lower wellbeing and higher depressive symptoms than boys, and are more than twice as likely to self-harm as boys. Furthermore, young people from lower income households had a higher than average risk of self-harming, making YW&G from poorer families a high-risk group.



These findings corroborate those of the Millennium Cohort Study in 2015 (when participants were 14 years old), which showed that girls were significantly less happy than boys with their lives overall, and especially less happy with their appearance. Girls from homes with lower family income were more likely to report poorer mental health and lower wellbeing than their better-off peers (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2020).

Public Health England funded research into the wellbeing of adolescent girls in 2017 shows similar results, with girls scoring lower than boys in life satisfaction, and draws a direct link

between life satisfaction and family affluence. The report also identified key mitigating measures, such as having a trusted support network (Brooks et al.).

As well as a greater likelihood of dissatisfaction with their lives, the research shows differences between how dissatisfaction manifests among girls and boys, with girls being more prone to concerns about how they look, a much higher likelihood of self-harming, and a higher likelihood of having (or developing) an eating disorder. A survey carried out by Girlguiding in 2017 points to some potential causes of these discrepancies. Almost all the girls surveyed (95%) said that the advertising industry should show more positive, diverse representations of women. Many felt angry about gender stereotypes in the media and the products sold to them, but despite this awareness many girls internalise these negative messages. More than half the girls surveyed (55%) said that prevalent gender stereotypes affect their ability to say what they think, and they feel that stepping outside the norm will result in bullying and teasing from their peers. In addition, girls who identify as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic, LGBTQ+ or disabled, face additional barriers when it comes to feeling safe and confident to be themselves (Girlguiding 2020).

This issue is not receding and indeed has been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Prior to the UK wide lockdown of March 2020, research released by Headstart in February 2020 showed the emotional difficulties of girls escalate as they move from early to mid-adolescence, on average increasing by 17% between the ages of 11 and 14. During April and May 2020 during the height of government restrictions on socialising, young people reported lower scores on average across personal wellbeing measures and higher scores on feeling lonely (ONS, 2020). Young people are also increasingly concerned about the effect Covid-19 is having on their life, education and work as well their wellbeing (22%). Young Minds' Covid-19 survey further corroborates the government findings, reporting that for those who already had poor mental health, 80% of respondents said the pandemic had made their mental health worse and 87% had felt lonely or isolated (Young Minds, 2020).

Key Facts

Of 10,000 young people surveyed by NCVO in 2019;

- 77% agreed volunteering had improved their mental health.
- 53% said it had improved their physical health
- 74% said it gave them more confidence
- 84% of 18-24 year olds said it increased their confidence

The ample research into the wellbeing of YW&G paints a clear picture.

- Low wellbeing is prevalent among YW&G – especially from a low socio-economic background
- YW&G are especially impacted by negative gender stereotypes
- A trusted support network is important
- The transitional ages are a key moment for intervention
- Covid-19 is having a detrimental impact on young people's wellbeing

Having this foundation of evidence to stand upon, the next question is: what can we do to overcome these challenges and provide opportunities for YW&G to feel happy, supported and valued members of their community?

Impact of youth social action, youth groups and role models

Evidence suggests that inclusive and meaningful social action opportunities, including volunteering, and the influence of role models can improve the wellbeing of YW&G and inspire them to lead change in their communities. In addition, girls and young women point to youth groups as places where they can be themselves, learn new things and build positive and supportive relationships (Girlguiding, 2020).

Volunteering opportunities, social action and informal education expose girls to an environment in which they can be inspired by their own peers and challenge perceived norms. YW&G want to speak up, and they want to inform decisions that affect their lives (Girlguiding, 2020). They are also inspired by role models who challenge and overcome stereotypes, particularly women in sport, and are increasingly prepared, as they get older, to challenge sexism themselves (Girlguiding, 2017).

In a 2015 study into regular weekly volunteering sessions with 13 and 14-year-old girls, Youth United found that self-reported self-confidence and the ability to work in a team both improved (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020). Similarly, a 2016 Cabinet office report shows positive improvements in resilience, problem solving, empathy and community investment among YW&G who participated in social actions (Kirkman et al., 2016). Finally, the 2018 National Youth Social Action survey (funded by DCMS) found that volunteering and social action was particularly helpful for YW&G, since – once involved – girls are more likely to believe their actions can have an impact on their community (Knibbs et al., 2019).

EmpowHER was created in this context and launched on the centenary of suffrage to address these worrying low levels of wellbeing in young women, through the mechanism of social action and delivered in the safe space of a youth group. Its importance has only been reinforced by the impact of Covid-19 on young people and their local communities. Through meaningful and inclusive social action opportunities, YW&G challenge limiting perceptions and are inspired to lead change in their local areas, building community cohesion and supporting their own wellbeing and confidence.

Programme design and structure

EmpowHER was co-designed with young people to provide activities and learning around individuals' rights, wellbeing, empowerment and resilience and create opportunities to lead and design social action projects. The programme is targeted at "unusual suspects", between the ages of 10 and 20, i.e. YW&G with low wellbeing who may have been excluded from social action opportunities due to lack of access or the necessary skills or confidence to engage.

UK Youth leads the programme which is delivered in partnership with the British Red Cross (BRC), and Young Women's Trust (YWT). The three partners bring together their expertise in youth work, social action, campaigning, national programmes, and gender specific advocacy, and work closely on the planning and delivery of EmpowHER across the country.

UK Youth leads a national Movement of 7,000 youth organisations who support young people in their local communities. From across this Movement, 14 youth organisations have been recruited as delivery partners and trained on the aims, structure and delivery requirements of EmpowHER. They work closely with UK Youth to flexibly adapt elements of the programme to their local context. The youth organisations and youth workers bring incredible value to the programme through their knowledge and expertise in their local context. They reach and engage "unusual suspects" and understand how to adapt the programme to meet the different needs of different young people.

The relationships and partnerships between funders, programme partners, delivery partners and young people enable wider sector development and sharing of best practice, particularly around social action, partnership working and a 'test and learn' approach.

Over the six months of each cohort, the YW&G meet together with a youth worker in small groups across the South West, West Midlands, North West and East of England for at least 12 weeks and complete a minimum of 30 hours. The programme has three key elements; social learning, facilitated by a youth worker, social action, led by the YW&G, and social leadership, the opportunity for the girls to further develop their confidence and lead change. Underpinning these elements are regional working and sharing of best practice and celebrating and recognising YW&G' achievements.

Figure 1. The EmpowHER model



Celebration and recognition of the young women and girls
Regional working, partnership and sharing best practice and learning

Social Learning

Social learning encompasses the emotional and social capabilities we all need throughout life, including becoming self-aware and receptive, motivated and resilient, confident and an effective communicator, and learning how to take personal responsibility. In EmpowHER, social learning enables the development of these emotional and social capabilities through the framework of learning about empowerment, resilience and individual rights.



Social Learning Curriculum: The YW&G and youth workers can decide which of a wide range of topics they want to cover, including but not limited to: Inspirational Women and Role Models, Body Image and Positivity, Social Media and Technology, Dating, Sexual health and Relationships, Gender-based violence and Exploitation, Women in Sports, Politics and Feminism, Destigmatising periods.



Role Models: Role models from the BRC network support bringing to life and embedding the social learning by attending sessions and running online events. This gives the YW&G the opportunity to ask questions on specific topics and inspires the transition for the girls from learning to action.

Social Action

Social action allows young people to practice life skills gained by learning through doing, volunteering, and engaging in democratic structures. EmpowHER provides the opportunity for young people to fail in a safe environment with the support and guidance that comes

with having trusted caring adults and positive peer groups in their life. In EmpowHER, social action is first introduced by the BRC Youth Engagement Workers and then developed through Calls to Action, planning their own social action project, applying for funding and presenting their idea at a Social Action Pitch Day.



Calls to Action Bitesize activities to help familiarise young people with social action act as a stepping stone towards larger projects.



Social Action Project The EmpowHER groups are supported by their youth worker and the BRC to complete one or multiple projects following the #iwill principles of high quality youth social action; **youth-led, socially impactful, progressive, embedded, reflective and challenging.**



Social Action Funding UK youth provides up to £250 in funding for the projects for groups who submit an application stating their aims of the project, targeted beneficiaries and a detailed budget.



Social Action Pitch Day The groups have the opportunity to pitch their project ideas in a 'Dragons Den' to increase their funding from £250 to £400, gain life skills, practice their public speaking, and experience pitching to a panel for a cause they believe in.



Social Action Quality Mark A quality framework moderated by UK Youth to support youth organisations embed youth led social action in their work.

Social Leadership

EmpowHER aims to create lasting change for the YW&G by providing opportunities to progress into social leadership roles; applying their life skills and experiences to access training, employment and other opportunities, find roles in their community and become an empowered and contributing member of society



Peer Mentoring This strand of EmpowHER has developed organically over the first two cohorts as YW&G are keen to help their peers and so volunteer to support future groups. The YW&G work with the new groups to build their confidence, explore social learning topics and support with social action projects.



Be Your Best Self Workshop This workshop is run by YWT and provides an opportunity for young women to think about themselves and reflect on their achievements, both within the EmpowHER project and more widely. By the end of the session, YW&G feel more confident and inspired to continue to make change in their community.



EmpowHER Ambassadors YW&G from Cohorts One, Two and Three of EmpowHER interested in continuing in youth advocacy, social action or wellbeing can become an EmpowHER Ambassador, elevating the voices of young people in EmpowHER and encouraging regional sharing and collaboration.

Celebration and recognition of the YW&G

Recognising and celebrating achievement in young people is a key part of cementing learning and can both increase self-esteem and motivation, as well as encourage continued engagement in learning. In EmpowHER, we acknowledge the importance and have built into the programme numerous mechanisms for celebrating success and encouraging reflective practice in the young people.



Red Award This award is given to YW&G who complete ten hours of volunteering with the BRC.



UK Youth Achievement Award (UKYAA) The UKYAAs formally recognise the learning and work young people are doing. They provide structure, and an accreditation, to the social learning or social action of EmpowHER through three simple steps; Plan, Do, Review. Through this process, young people gain vital life skills, as well as develop their reflective practice.



EmpowHER Awards These commend girls for exceptional effort or growth in EmpowHER across the categories of Leadership, Courage, Peer Support and a Team Award.



Celebration Events At the end of each cohort, the YW&G have a chance to meet other EmpowHER participants, celebrate their social action projects, participate in activities, receive their awards and hoodies, and have fun!

EMPOWHER

Cohort three delivery and reach



Bolton Lads and Girls Club

239
Young women and girls completed



Creative Optimistic Visions, Positive Youth Foundation
Beauty gurus



UCO
Care packages



North West

47
UK Youth Achievement Awards moderated

60
Young people at Celebration event



West Midlands



Inspire Youth Zone



Wigan Youth Zone
International Women's Day



InUnity

17
Be Your Best Self workshop attendees



empower_insidout
21 Posts 165 Followers 353 Following
EmpowerHER girls
We are the EmpowerHER girls and we believe that everyone should be able to learn about sex education in a more inclusive way.
Created by @teenagegirls, @teenagegirls and @teenagegirls
Creative Academies Network
Inclusive sex education



South West



East of England

£3,746
Raised from social action projects



Young Gloucestershire



Autism and ADHD

58
Social action projects

£4,463
Social Action Project Funds given to 19 projects



Programme Delivery and Reach

EmpowHER during Covid-19

Cohort Three delivery began on 10th February 2020, however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown enforced across the UK in March of 2020, EmpowHER delivery partners, UK Youth, BRC and YWT had to work closely together to adapt delivery to an online setting. Between March and April, 12 out of 14 delivery partners were able to move delivery online. However, despite the hard work and dedication of delivery partners, not all of the groups were able to transition online, and the target for Cohort Three had to be reduced from 750 YW&G to 268.

Digital adaptation had a clear impact on the delivery model which was suddenly required to turn a programme based on face to face sessions into an online experience. One youth worker commented it was the first time that they'd used Zoom or Teams and that they had "to learn very quickly". The evaluation of the efficacy of this model can be found in the [Programme Evaluation](#) below, but from a delivery perspective, moving online was extremely challenging as the lockdown increased levels of anxiety for young people, added a digital access barrier, and essentially required a whole new programme design and technological skill set from youth workers. In addition, it proved difficult to motivate some young people to attend online sessions—as they struggled to overcome their anxiety and low confidence about speaking or turning on cameras—and so relationship building online took much more time than in a face to face setting.

However, having to deliver in a whole new way was seen by many youth workers as an opportunity to be embraced. Indeed, a youth worker from Preston Impact argued that while the digital delivery was a “learning curve”, the “staff gained new skills as well as the young people” indicating that digital delivery had a silver lining for youth workers too.

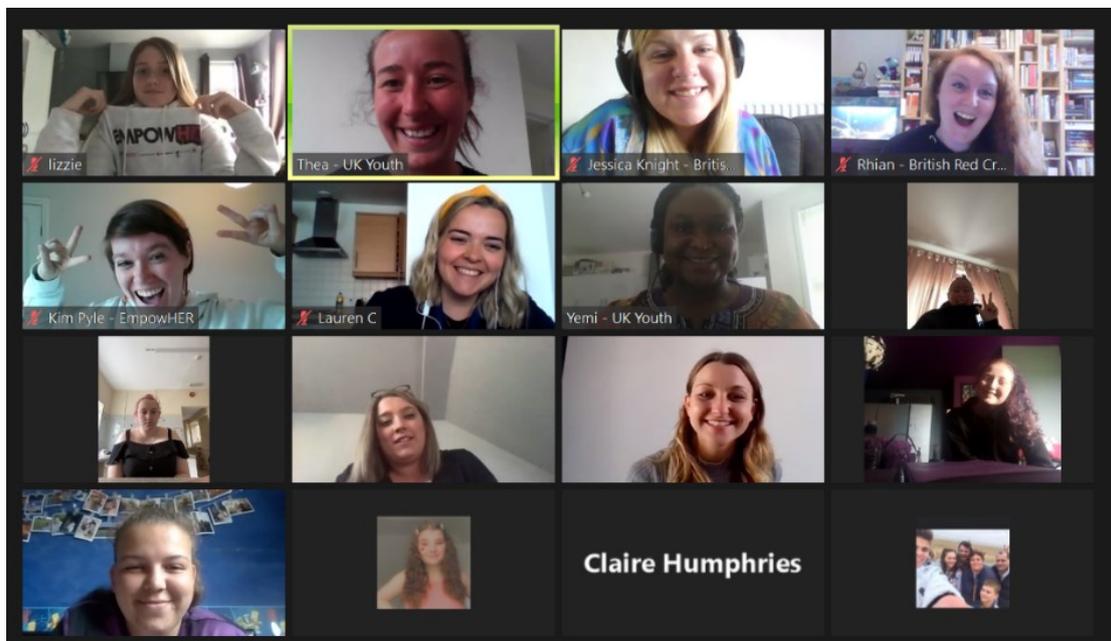
To support the move online, UK Youth, BRC and YWT created new elements and adapted existing activities, including; a Digital Inclusion Fund, online delivery guidance, social action ideas for social distancing, and online social action pitch days, role model events and Be Your Best Self Workshops.

“ We would have lost the engagement of a young person if they didn’t have the support of the Digital Inclusion Fund. It enabled her to be in [EmpowHER] and stay in it too ”

– Youth worker, Young Gloucestershire

Digital Inclusion Fund

The Digital Inclusion Fund was created as a response to the pandemic and expanded both the size and the intention of the existing EmpowHER Access Fund to cover digital inclusion needs. The aim of this expansion was to reduce barriers to participation caused by lack of access to digital technology or wifi.



Digital Inclusion Funding

Uniting Communities Organisation applied to the digital inclusion fund as all ten of the YW&G in their group did not have access to a laptop. Through the fund, they purchased tablets and wifi bundles and loaned them to the girls for the length of the programme. The YW&G were then able to engage in their weekly sessions, as well as attend British Red Cross role model events and Be Your Best Self Workshops, optional elements which would have been beyond their reach if they had not had their own devices.

The tablets are now being used by YW&G on another UK Youth programme, Sound Creators, further highlighting the impact that digital inclusion funds can have on reaching young people with socioeconomic barriers.

Delivery partners were able to apply to the Digital Inclusion Fund on a case by case basis and application requests included; webcams, tablets, Wi-Fi dongles, Norton Security to safeguard the devices of young people, and Smartie Internet applications. The latter was a particularly innovative application by Creative Academies Network (CAN) who were working with vulnerable YW&G who were not allowed to access devices that could connect to social

“
I liked being part of a group and getting to see friends onscreen.”

– Young person, Bolton Lads and Girls

media. By applying for funding for Smartie Internet Applications, CAN was able to provide tablets that restricted internet usage to EmpowHER, safeguarding the young people while providing them access to the programme.

Online delivery

67% of the EmpowHER groups started before lockdown began. The benefit to this was that the girls had time before lockdown to build relationships with the youth workers and the other EmpowHER participants. For some groups, this meant they were keen to transition online as they wanted to spend time together, however, for others, the appeal of online sessions was simply not the same as face to face. Our delivery partners did not take this challenge of re-engagement lightly and came up with innovative ways to address each of the challenges, but despite creativity and hard work, some young people found the transition from face to face to online delivery too different and difficult and did not continue with the programme.

An example of a delivery partner that faced numerous challenges and went above and beyond in their efforts to maintain engagement is InUnity in Birmingham. They were half-way through delivery by the time lockdown restrictions were imposed and a large number of the girls in their group said they were too anxious for online delivery.¹

¹ This was a common theme across the groups and is further discussed in the Programme Evaluation

InUnity adapted their delivery based on the young people's wishes and supported them to engage through an online Whatsapp group where they could discuss social learning topics without having to show their faces. In addition, they asked the BRC Youth Engagement Worker to send over videos of social action activities and the YW&G completed these as individual tasks. Once lock-down was loosened, the youth workers then met the YW&G socially distanced in the park, however, due to the length of time that delivery had stopped for (March to July) only two of the eight girls were still motivated to attend. Finally, they planned a two-day EmpowHER camp with workshops and social action activities, however, unfortunately they were not able to re-engage the YW&G.

The resourcefulness and creativity of the youth worker and organisation was inspiring, however this demonstrates how challenging transitioning to online delivery was and how, for some young people, it was simply not a format they wanted or were able to engage with. When InUnity returned to face to face delivery they learnt that two of the girls who had dropped out had been dealing with challenging home environments and have since raised safeguarding concerns.

In addition, many of the delivery partners struggled with engagement in July and August, both online and face to face, as after months of lockdown and social distancing, young people wanted to be out with their friends enjoying the weather, not in front of a computer screen.

Despite these challenges, there were numerous positive aspects to online delivery, from enabling delivery partners to engage with young people who would not traditionally have attended, or providing a way for young people to share personal stories with their cameras off, and facilitating rural access. In particular as one young woman reflected, being online 'brought people together from different places who might not be able to talk otherwise' and this was a key benefit of the programme partner events like the Be Your Self Best Workshops, Role Model events and Social Action Pitch Days.

Key learnings

Providing additional funding to support digital inclusion is very important. As the UK Consumer Digital Index 2018 revealed, over 700,000 young people do not have a computer or tablet at home, and 60,000 young people do not have any access to the internet. Providing individual grants is an effective way of overcoming this barrier and in Cohort Four we will continue to assess the individual needs of EmpowHER participants to ensure equality of access.



Moving online allowed some delivery partners to reach and engage young people they had not initially worked with, particularly in rural areas, and contributed to the YW&G feeling connected to the wider EmpowHER network and "part of something bigger". In Cohort Four, the EmpowHER network will work together to continue to highlight the national level

of EmpowHER and provide opportunities for girls from Truro to Coventry to Bolton to come together virtually.

The pandemic has shown how both youth workers and young people need support in developing digital skills to have successful, engaging and interactive online sessions. Furthermore, some of the EmpowHER materials, including the UKYAAAs and EmpowHER journals were not fully adaptable to an online setting. UK Youth has updated the EmpowHER social learning materials, developed additional resources and created a dedicated EmpowHER Sharepoint site for youth workers to easily access all the resources they need and be kept up to date with deadlines and opportunities. To support with digital communications materials, UK Youth has created an EmpowHER Canva with branded social media posters and other collateral to make it easy for organisations to publish EmpowHER news online. In addition, we will continue to use a test and learn approach to involving different digital tools in our trainings and meetings (such as mentimeter, miro, whiteboards, rotating breakout rooms) and demonstrate different techniques.

Social engagement

For online delivery, the first step for youth workers was to create a safe space that would allow young people to support one another and explore new ideas as comfortably in a virtual setting as they would in a youth club.

Inspire Youth Zone in Chorley was one of many delivery partners that successfully created this space for their group. First, they spoke to their group not just about the safe space they contributed to online, but the environment they created around themselves before logging in.

They encouraged young people to try and find a quiet, private place at home, where other family members would not disturb them before logging on and told the girls not to join when they were out and about. This was to ensure that the young people could speak about sensitive issues freely.

In addition to ensuring the outside environment was conducive to conversation, as the YW&G joined the session each week they spent 10 to 15 minutes chatting casually about how they were doing – essentially recreating the chit chat that would normally happen in a youth club –

“

Having a safe space for Amey* to discuss her mental health in has enabled her to feel confident with how she looks, not feel afraid of her anxiety and empower others within the group with positive copings strategies. Amey is now looking forward to going back to college because her confidence will enable her to do well with her education.”

- Youth worker, Young People Cornwall

*Name has been changed

before going into the social learning. This was an important part of relationship building and settling into a session.

Finally, as a safeguarding measure, Inspire Youth Zone always had three youth workers on the call, disabled their chat function and had all text interactions sent to one youth worker's work mobile. This designated youth worker could then add comments and contributions, but also screen any inappropriate or offensive messages.

“Once you learn something, you can't unlearn it”

- Stacey-Jade Mason, CEO of Creative Optimistic Visions



Mental Health and Wellbeing

An EmpowHER group from Bolton Lads and Girls were on the verge of finishing primary school before the lockdown and used the safe space of their group to discuss the impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown on their mental health, wellbeing, nerves and self-esteem. Talking to other young people going through a similar experience helped them open up about their feelings facing the unknown. This group were keen to help other YW&G who might be experiencing similar emotions and anxiety as a result of the pandemic. They researched and wrote inspirational messages and created a video of them reading each message aloud. They shared the video on their social media platforms alongside a motivational and positive playlist. The group hoped their positive and inspirational video would be a source of encouragement and support to other young people in the community.

Social learning

During Cohort Three, social learning continued to be used to support the YW&G' wellbeing and ignite their passion for social action. There was consistency across the social learning themes explored by all groups, with body image by far the most popular individual topic. YW&G feeling concerned or pressured about their appearance is consistent with the most

Inclusive Sex Education

The YMCA group at Creative Academies Network focused their social learning on dating, sexual health and healthy relationships after reflecting that inclusive sex education is not always taught in schools. Without a safe space to ask questions, young women tended to seek guidance from the internet, despite knowing the potential dangers and unreliability of the information. With their youth worker, a trusted adult, and the safety of the small, single-gender group, they were able to openly talk about these issues. The girls became passionate about supporting other young women to have a safe space to explore the sensitive topics covered in Sex Education. They created an Instagram page (@empowher_insideout) to support young people going through puberty and 'still figuring themselves out'. The page has 164 followers, and the young women confidently cover topics from their social learning such as LGBTQ+, sex, female genital mutilation, and menstruation.

recent Girls Attitudes Survey which showed that 39% of young women aged 11 to 21 feel unhappy they can't look like the images they see online (Girl Guiding, 2020). Grouped by broader themes, wellbeing and mental health were covered most widely, closely followed by issues around gender equality and feminism.

Although the social learning element of the programme was moved to online sessions, the topics chosen, and the enablers (a safe-space, single-gender group, trusted adult) remained the same and allowed the YW&G to explore sensitive issues in a supportive environment.

Role Models

Role model events also successfully moved online. Some delivery partners invited role models to attend individual sessions and in addition the BRC planned and delivered ten online role model events to 129 YW&G and youth workers from all regions. Each session was delivered by a different female role model with a specific area of expertise and passion alongside ice breakers, games and opportunities to connect with other YW&G. The YW&G' interests fed into the selection of the role models and topics ranged from; creative skills, women in sport, careers, activism, race, climate change, and body image.

Unlike role model events of previous cohorts, these events provided YW&G the opportunity to attend without a youth worker, meet other girls from the programme, and connect their actions to a larger movement. It was notable how often girls took advantage of this, especially for girls with groups that struggled to meet regularly online.

Key learning

Social learning is a key step in igniting the YW&G' passion for their social action project and can be effectively delivered online *but* it requires extra consideration and planning to create the same safe environment.

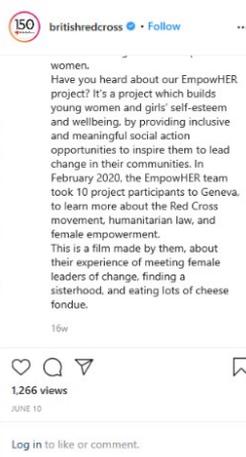
Providing centralized EmpowHER social learning sessions gives YW&G the opportunity to deepen their understanding and passion for a cause and connect and be inspired by other EmpowHER participants. The online role model events will remain a key part of EmpowHER, even beyond social distancing restrictions.

Body image role model



At this role model event, Noni Roberts, an activist focusing on body image and positivity played a bingo game with the YW&G who used interactive features on zoom to highlight negative statements they had heard or used about weight loss or their bodies. They then learnt about body neutrality and the history of different types of body shaming topics like cellulite (invented to sell firming creams).

One young person came to every role model event to speak to participants from across the regions as well as hear from inspiring role models. Attending these events allowed her to really understand and appreciate the scale of EmpowHER and she has since applied to be an EmpowHER Ambassador so she can continue to engage with the programme.



“We will give the community a peaceful and relaxing area to remember loved ones lost to COVID-19 and people will know that we haven't forgotten what happened, and we care.”

– Pinks and White group, Autism and ADHD

“I wanted to do the social action project to show our community that young people really care about people living in poverty in our local communities.”

–Young person, Preston

Social Action

Mirroring the concerns of young people and the focus of the nation during Covid-19, the main aims of social action projects in Cohort Three were around spreading kindness and combatting loneliness through care packages, community projects and messages of support. The main beneficiaries of these projects were; young people (59%), community (24%) the elderly (17%), and key workers (7%) and many of the groups received positive feedback from beneficiaries, family members, local councils and community organisations. 19 of the projects applied for funding for their project, outlining their goals and aims for their project, including community partners they could work with and a detailed budget and timeline.

Although it was not possible for the BRC Youth Engagement Workers (important sources of creativity and support) to visit the groups and talk about social action in person, they were able to visit online. For groups with low confidence that were hesitant about inviting additional adults into their virtual sessions, the Youth Engagement Workers filmed themselves talking about potential ideas and sent these to the girls to watch in a space that was comfortable for them. In addition, they developed a Social Action Resource with ideas ranging from creating an EmpowHER quilt to be displayed in the BRC archives, to becoming community pen pals.

British sign language version of You Will be Found, Preston Impact Group

“It's always important to stay connected, especially now, during these difficult times, more than ever before. So, here is the song 'You Will Be Found' from Dear Evan Hansen, to remind you, that you are not along. Enjoy!“. This EmpowHER group created a British Sign Language/Sign supported English version of the song and posted it on YouTube where it has had over 700 views and has received a lot of positive feedback. “You have empowered so many young people...You've helped so many of them to grow in themselves, their confidence and to find their voices” – St Bede's Catholic High School

EmpowHERed through vulnerability to find strength, Young

This EmpowHER group designed a campaign on mental health, promoting the message 'through vulnerability we find strength'. The group came to the Social Action Pitch Day to raise funds for the publication of a book that explored mental health and wellbeing. The girls held a socially distanced photoshoot, collected quotes from 30 community members about their personal relationships with mental health, and created a video and song to promote their work on social media platforms. The book has already sold 50 copies and has encouraged the EmpowHER YW&G to reflect on their own wellbeing. One participant said 'Doing the video made me realise how much of an impact that people's words have on my mental health. What people say and the way they treat you really makes a difference', and a community member highlighted that, 'the lyrics really resonated with me, it's like they know what I'm going through and it makes me feel like I'm not the only one'.

Covid-19 Memorial Garden, Autism and ADHD

The Pinks and Whites EmpowHER Group discussed the personal challenges they had overcome and how unhappy they felt not being able to meet in person during lockdown. Thinking that many others in their community could also be feeling unhappy they decided to create a Covid-19 memorial garden space to serve as a beacon of hope and bring the community together to plant a tree for someone they had lost.

The group reached out to the local newspaper and collaborated with their local council to spread the word of their project and get an allocated garden space. They raised over £800 to buy supplies for the garden and recruited lots of volunteers from the community to help them plant and decorate the memorial space.

International Women's Day, Wigan Youth Zone

This group delivered their social action project before lockdown. Inspired by role models and interested in self-care, wellbeing and equality, the YW&G planned an event for International Women's Day. The aim of the day was to both spread awareness of gender inequalities as well as celebrate the achievements of women and activities included a colour run, equality pledge wall, games highlighting inequality between genders, balloon drop and performances by the young people. It was a great success with over 200 people attending.

In addition, the girls achieved personal goals as " some of the group who were quite shy" were able to speak to "members who they hadn't spoken to before, not only to speak to them but to engage them in their cause and encourage them to take part" – a great personal achievement! (Youth worker, Wigan Youth Zone).

Key learnings

Early concerns that social action would be less meaningful or have less community interaction due to the restrictions of lockdown turned out to be unfounded. In fact, the restrictions meant the groups had to be even more creative in their approaches. This learning, that socially distanced social action can be as impactful and creative as in previous cohorts, as well as examples of successfully socially distanced projects, were shared in the Cohort Four training to assuage anxieties and exchange ideas.

Facing the Dragons Den

Beauty Gurus, a group from Creative Optimistic Visions, part of Positive Youth Foundation, wanted to encourage women to feel confident with or without make up. They pitched for funding to amplify their message of 'beauty begins the moment you decide to be yourself.' With the funding they hosted a photoshoot and then created a beauty bank, sending a total of 50 bags containing beauty items to five local voluntary sector organisations within Coventry working with vulnerable women that have been subjected to violence, have low self-esteem and confidence, and low income. "Thanks so much to the amazing girls from the EmpowHER social action project for your donations of 'feel good' goody bags for women at FWT who are experiencing low self esteem, confidence and isolation." Foleshill Women's Training (FWT)

The social action project fund application creates a positive framework for young people and encourages a useful thought process for their project planning. However, there were requests for a different format of the application which would empower the young people to complete it without reliance on the youth worker. An online form has been created for Cohort Four.

"I remember feeling really nervous on the pitch day, I thought I didn't know anyone and it was a bit scary, but once I started talking all that went away because I knew that it was a serious thing and we wanted to get the best out of it for our social action project."

– Young person, Young People Cornwall



Social Action Pitch Days

The Social Action Pitch Days piloted in Cohort Two continued in Cohort Three in an online format. The session began with a workshop on confidence and public speaking led by Julia Nolan, an EmpowHER youth worker from Coventry. Then the groups were put into breakout rooms with their youth workers and BRC Youth Engagement Worker to prep their pitches. Finally, the judges arrived to take part in the Dragons Den and the pitching began.

“At the start they were texting (their youth worker) saying they felt anxious and wanted to leave, but by the end they were messaging saying the anxiety had gone and they were loving it!”

– Young worker, Young People Cornwall

The judging panels for the pitch days brought together multiple stakeholders in the project including; EmpowHER alumni (Iqra from UCO and Kim from Positive Youth Foundation), the Grant and Learning Manager and Chief Executive from Spirit of 2012, the National Lottery Community Fund Funding Officer, and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Policy

Advisors as well as the UK Youth CEO. The diverse voices on the panel asked thoughtful questions to the YW&G about the impact and aims of their project and provided constructive feedback on their pitches and ideas.

Key learning

The Social Action Pitch Days trialed in Cohort Two have moved from strength to strength. Feedback from the youth workers indicates that these days are good for building confidence and developing presentation skills and all groups should be encouraged to take part. Furthermore, the presence of EmpowHER alumni to encourage the girls and help calm the nerves were a great addition. Although almost all the groups expressed nerves and anxiety before the pitches, the sense of accomplishment afterwards was very rewarding. Four Social Action Pitch Days have already been scheduled for Cohort Four and dates have been given to all youth workers so they can be working with the groups from the beginning to prepare.

Social leadership and embedding youth voice in EmpowHER

To ensure that EmpowHER is driven by the voices of diverse groups of young people, the opportunities for YW&G to be leaders in EmpowHER expanded in Cohort Three.

In addition to the YWT Be Your Best Self Workshops, Project Steering Group and peer mentoring opportunities available through Cohorts One and Two, there was a deepened focus on providing opportunities for EmpowHER alumni through: Social Action Pitch Day judging panels, hosting Celebration events, running Role Model Sessions, showcasing the GenevHER film at the BRC premier and Live Link Festival, sharing their experiences through UK Youth's Movement event and BRC Learning Event, and the piloting of a new group of EmpowHER Ambassadors.

“ I was in my shell before EmpowHER and accepted all the bad things that happened to me. I was bitter about it. EmpowHER opened up a kinder and more passionate side to me.”

– EmpowHER alumni

Be Your Best Self Workshop

17 YW&G from five delivery partners attended the Be Your Best Self Leadership workshops to develop their confidence through learning about and discussing overcoming nerves, self-care, and female role models or 'SHEroes'. These workshops highlighted the important role that youth workers play as role models to YW&G as, when asked to talk about their SHEroes, multiple young people spoke about their youth workers and their support and dedication. 75% of the YW&G agreed that, thanks to the session, they **'feel more confident to take the lead in small groups in the future'**, with one young woman commenting that she feels more confident to **'build up on teamwork and challenge herself to be a better person and leader.'**

Key Learning

The Be Your Best Self workshop was a great place for girls to connect, however, the content of the workshop had to change to be more focused and light touch in order to maintain engagement throughout the sessions. YWT has agreed to deliver these workshops in Cohort Four as they received extremely positive feedback from the YW&G and staff who attended.

Peer Mentoring

Several youth workers mentioned that peer mentoring was slightly more difficult to facilitate in Cohort Three with everything else going on. However, for the groups that were able to engage peer mentors, their support proved invaluable. Although roles differed across groups, Cohort Three peer mentors were instrumental in supporting girls to go online, sending emails and providing encouragement to young people to continue with the programme. They also helped with the planning and coordination of social action projects, acted as buddies for particularly shy EmpowHER participants and even returned as role models to support sessions. The peer mentors also benefit from this role, gaining skills and experience and further embedding social action into their lives.

EmpowHER Ambassadors

The pilot EmpowHER Ambassador programme was developed, planned and launched in October 2020 and will run until April 2021 with the aim of supporting Ambassadors to use their experience to meaningfully contribute to the direction, delivery and promotion of EmpowHER. In addition, this pilot will test a model of youth advocacy for UK Youth's National Programmes Team and diversify the ways young people can lead UK Youth programmes. By providing YW&G interested in youth advocacy, social action or wellbeing programmes with meaningful exit pathways, the programme will create a space for EmpowHER alumni to grow their own confidence and skills. The Ambassadors will also encourage regional working by offering their support to the Cohort Four groups and the youth workers and organisations that support them.

From the beginning, the EmpowHER Ambassadors have been youth led, with a young intern from the British Red Cross collaborating on the [application materials](#) to ensure they

“Now in my second year of the programme, I can reflect on my journey. At the start, at age 14, I was nervous, barely able to speak up and fast forward to now I’m... a LOT more confident.”

– Young person, Preston Impact

Preston Impact Peer Mentors

Two EmpowHER alumni from the Preston Impact Group played key roles in the delivery of Cohort Three. They attended online sessions, running social learning activities and talking to the YW&G about sensitive subjects such as healthy relationships and sexting. When the group transitioned online, the Peer Mentors were essential in continuing to organise and encourage the girls. Hallie, one of the Peer Mentors, went on to be interviewed by the National Lottery Community Fund for World Mental Health Day and talked about the benefit of her role “I began mentoring younger girls who really value having someone to support them who is nearer their age, and to whom they can relate.”

were accessible and youth friendly, and young people from YWT, BRC and the National Lottery Community Fund sitting on the recruitment panel. Fourteen YW&G have been recruited onto the panel and will meet in early November for their first group session.

Embedding youth voice in EmpowHER

As well as this, young women outside of the EmpowHER programme were also given opportunities to bring their expertise and experience to influence the programme. Two young women from UK Youth Voice moderated the EmpowHER awards, with one of them feeding back, **“Thank you for having me be part of this process, I have really enjoyed reading through the nominations and some of the girls reminded me of my past and how I was before, so that was heart-warming.”** – Kerrie Starkie, UK Youth Voice.

Championing youth voice is a key element of youth work and a core value of UK Youth. EmpowHER provides myriad opportunities to test and learn from different approaches and in Cohort Three, the leadership and input of YW&G has positively impacted every area of the programme.

Key learning

Essential to youth participation is providing the skills and knowledge to young people to be able to meaningfully contribute. The involvement of young people in the learning events and the pitch days was particularly successful as they were given support and time to prepare for those roles. Due to the volume of work required for the virtual celebration event, not enough time was provided to the young hosts, potentially making their role more challenging than it needed to be. Going into Cohort Four we will ensure that young people are given the time and support they need to be able to truly lead.



Celebration and Recognition of the YW&G

Celebration and recognition of the YW&G remains a core element of EmpowHER, underpinning and reinforcing their achievements in social learning and social action. The delivery partners worked hard over Cohort Three to ensure the young people felt this was an authentic celebration despite the virtual environment. Over 60 YW&G and youth workers attended the online EmpowHER Celebration event, ‘EmpowHER FEST’ and eight young people and groups received EmpowHER awards for extraordinary contributions to the programme.

In addition, 10 programme participants from Cohorts One and Two travelled to Geneva, Switzerland in February 2020 to learn more about the Red Cross movement, humanitarian law and female empowerment. Finally, 47 young people received UKYAAs and 68 received Red Awards for their achievements throughout the programme. Unfortunately, due to

Covid-19, the planned Easter trip to Disneyland (provided by British Airways based on their relationship with the BRC) was unable to go ahead, but the girls who had been selected for the group have stayed in touch through other ways, for example hosting the Celebration Event.

GenevHER

After four days of learning, fun and inspirational role models, the YW&G came away from Geneva motivated and excited to keep on engaging with social action and EmpowHER. They made a film capturing their experience of meeting female leaders for change and

“I’ve already spoken with my head of house and headteacher and they are willing to carry on our social action throughout the year while I’m still there. EmpowHER hasn’t died out in our school, it’s going to stay alive while I am there.”

- EmpowHER alumni, YMCA Coventry & Warwickshire

“I am going to continue looking for opportunities to keep volunteering with the BRC, it’s such a fantastic organisation. Hopefully I’ll do something like the EmpowHER team, empowering YW&G. I’d really enjoy it!”

- EmpowHER alumni, Positive Youth Foundation

finding an EmpowHER sisterhood. The film premiered at an online event on 28th April 2020 and was also chosen to be included in a London based youth film festival in August 2020 as the featured film under the category of identity. At the film festival, GenevHER YW&G had the opportunity to share their experiences and ambitious future plans with other young people across London and the UK.



EmpowHER Fest

With COVID-19 restrictions still in place, UK Youth and the BRC planned the first ever EmpowHER online celebration event. The YW&G were asked what they wanted from an event through a survey, and the response was a festival themed online event, including role models who were writers or musicians, which became known as **EmpowHER Fest**.

Complimentary EmpowHER hoodies used in previous cohorts were still a large draw of the programme. These are normally distributed at the celebration event, so to ensure the YW&G still received them, the EmpowHER team sent delivery partners celebration packs

with the hoodies as well as EmpowHER and BRC certificates and awards, balloons, glitter pots, mug cakes, affirmation cards, and cosmetic goodies donated by UK Youth's corporate partner, Oliver Bonas. The youth workers then distributed the packs, providing a great opportunity to see the girls socially distanced on the doorstep!

To enjoy the event, some of the EmpowHER groups came together socially distanced at their youth club to join the Zoom call together, and some logged in from their homes. It was a jam-packed evening with a scavenger hunt, photoshoot, graffiti wall, DJ booth, and workshops. The event was hosted by EmpowHER alumni who spoke about their own experience on EmpowHER and how it has helped build their confidence to do more actions that positively impact themselves and their communities.

EmpowHER Awards

24 applications were submitted for the EmpowHER awards of Courage, Leadership, Peer Support and a Team Award. An overall theme across the nominations was how supportive the YW&G had been of each other and how much their confidence had grown, despite having to adapt to online delivery sessions.

“Before this project I knew a very different girl, now I see a passionate and confident young lady, who when she puts her mind to something, she does it”

- EmpowHER Award Application

Key learning

The online celebration event exceeded expectations and received generally positive feedback. However, delivery partners highlighted it was more fun and appropriate for the older groups, and fewer of the 10-12 age groups engaged. Going into Cohort Four, the partners will work closely together to plan a celebration event that engages this younger age group as well or explore hosting two different events.

There was a significant reduction in the number of young people receiving the UK YAAs in Cohort Three. Despite 104 young people initially planning on completing an award, feedback from the delivery partners said that it was just too difficult for the young people to gather their portfolios with everything else going on, so although some completed the process of plan, do, and review, they were not able to evidence this. Re-training on the UK YAAs was a key part of the Cohort Four training, and examples of how to collect evidence and build portfolios online was shared with the delivery partners.

Collaboration, partnership, and regional working

One highlight of the shift to online working was the increase in collaboration and sharing during Cohort Three, as delivery partners fed back that they actively enjoyed coming together in regional network meetings. Although learning about EmpowHER and

understanding how it could be adapted to different delivery contexts was an important part of these meetings, delivery partners highlighted that it was feeling connected and part of something bigger that was key to the success of these meetings.

Collaboration also continued outside of the meetings, especially during March and April 2020 as delivery partners were faced with the decision to pause delivery or move online. InfoBuzz and Young Gloucestershire worked closely together to support each other through this challenging time. Young Gloucestershire made the shift to online delivery slightly before InfoBuzz, so were able to share with them how they had overcome the logistical challenges of moving online. InfoBuzz were able to adopt some of their solutions, drop equipment and resources to the YW&G and set up online sessions to complete the programme. As they go into Cohort Four, Infobuzz have been planning ahead for blended delivery to enable them to ensure barriers can be overcome before delivery starts.

In terms of the role of UK Youth and BRC, delivery partners felt that they had received a lot of support from both partners, and UK Youth had been particularly understanding and helpful through the transition to online delivery. One delivery partner said in terms of communication and support this has been the best cohort yet. However, youth workers suggested that the role should be more explicitly explained to the YW&G and they would like more visits and interactions from UK Youth earlier in the programme so the YW&G understood their role. [The 2.6 Challenge](#) that the UK Youth team participated in, asking the YW&G to set challenges for them to complete to raise money, was mentioned as a fun and engaging way for the girls to get to know the different team members.

The BRC Youth Engagement workers also received lots of positive feedback, especially for their role model events, creativity, and support helping delivery partners and young people think 'outside the box'.

Finally, the collaboration between UK Youth and the BRC continues to deepen and the partnership was recognised by the Charity Times Awards as it was shortlisted in the category of [Charity Collaboration of the Year](#) for our work on EmpowHER.

Key learning

Bringing together delivery partners to foster connection, encourage the feeling of being part of something bigger, and have cross-regional conversations with partners at the same stage of delivery or working with the same age range is more valuable than only connecting regionally. Therefore, the regional network meetings will be replaced with EmpowHER network meetings in Cohort Four and regional working will be achieved through break out rooms rather than separate meetings.

Sector upskilling and sharing learnings

During Cohort Three, UK Youth and the BRC had multiple opportunities to share insight and best practice, both internally and externally. Due to the transition to online working, our events were able to reach wider audiences and the EmpowHER team were able to engage with a range of youth organisations across the country, a significant positive to come out of the lockdown.

Embedding social action in youth work: Lessons from EmpowHER

UK Youth hosted a webinar to discuss lessons from EmpowHER on embedding social action in youth work. This event brought together Stacey-Jade Mason, the Director of Creative Optimistic Visions CIC who, in partnership with Positive Youth Foundation in Coventry, has been delivering EmpowHER to YW&G, and two EmpowHER alumni from Wigan Youth Zone and Uniting Communities Organisation. The panel spoke about the connection between social learning and social action and their experiences beyond EmpowHER and then answered questions from the audience about sustainability and mechanisms for engaging young people in social action. The event was well attended with 122 sign-ups and 79 attendees, including representatives from numerous youth organisations who were not delivering EmpowHER as well as National Lottery Community Fund, Dartington Service Design Lab, Spirit of 2012, and the BRC. Following the event, several organisations reached out to touch the EmpowHER team to ask for more information and tips on running their own single-gender or social action projects.

UK Youth Movement Collectives

The UK Youth Engagement and Advocacy team has worked very hard during lockdown to transition the UK Youth Movement Youth Work Collectives and regional meetings online, as well as provide additional training and support to the youth sector. The EmpowHER team deepened their collaboration with this team during Cohort Three, sharing case studies and stories from EmpowHER at the UK Youth Movement Collectives in the West Midlands, the South West and the North West – highlighting the adaptations EmpowHER made in Cohort Three to move online. These collectives reached over 50 youth sector workers.

#iwill Fund Learning Hub Event

UK Youth and BRC were invited to speak at the #iwill Fund Learning Hub event 'New Directions for Youth Social Action'. Unfortunately due to Covid-19, the event was cancelled, but UK Youth's Director of National Programmes and BRC's Head of Youth Engagement were later interviewed by Dartington Service Design Lab on how to grow good practice in youth social action across the UK Youth Movement, engaging young people as volunteers in the BRC, and the role that partnership has played within the EmpowHER model.

BRC Learning Event

The second BRC Learning event took place in October 2020. An all-day online event, attendees heard from YW&G about their achievements in EmpowHER, with a focus on activism and social action supporting Black Lives Matter, and had the opportunity to attend role model taster sessions. In the afternoon, UK Youth presented the Cohort Two and initial Cohort Three research and impact findings, and the UK Youth Director of National Programmes and BRC Head of Youth Engagement talked about the relationship between the two organisations, and shared challenges, successes and surprises. The day ended with an incredible guest speaker Tina Tinde, Gender and Diversity Coordinator from the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, speaking about her work on feminism and inspiring all of us to continue to push for equality within our own organisations.

“We are hoping that we will maintain a relationship with the care homes following this project and continue to keep in contact with them for the foreseeable future.”

- Social Action Project Fund
Application

Key learning

The youth sector has rapidly adapted to online working, presenting significant opportunities to bring people together who previously were disconnected. There is also an appetite and interest in the learnings of EmpowHER and multiple organisations have reached out to UK Youth asking for guidance and advice on how to run a single-gender, social action, wellbeing programme. In Cohort Four, UK Youth will continue to work closely with our Engagement and Advocacy team to deliver deep dive learning sessions on different components of EmpowHER and will begin planning of two learning events for the end of the programme engaging funders, youth organisations and the wider charity sector.

Embedding sustainability

In Cohort Two, the following areas of focus for sustainability were identified;

- Supporting YW&G to continue social action and leadership beyond EmpowHER
- Providing professional development opportunities for youth workers
- Embedding high quality youth led social action in EmpowHER youth organisations
- Creating an EmpowHER toolkit and sharing learnings with the youth sector
- Influencing funders and other subsections of the charity sector to adopt lessons from EmpowHER on partnership working, programme design and funding relationships.

In Cohort Three, the first three of these areas were addressed. First, exit pathways and opportunities have been provided to young people and the Ambassador panel pilot launched. Second, a youth worker skills audit has been completed to inform a professional development training plan which will be delivered over Cohort Four, and finally organisations have been trained on the UK Youth Social Action Quality Mark. In Cohort Four, we will continue to assess the efficacy of our actions to embed sustainability and focus

on the last two areas; creating an EmpowHER toolkit and sharing learnings with the sector and influencing funders.

Social Action Quality Mark

All delivery partners have been provided the UK Youth Social Action Quality Mark framework and guidance to begin their evidence collection. Due to Covid-19, the training of youth workers was delayed until September, but as of October 2020, youth workers from seven organisations have been trained on the quality mark and evidence requirements. In addition, UK Youth’s Head of Quality and Training has set up additional support sessions as the delivery partners begin to gather their evidence. There will be at least four opportunities throughout Cohort Four for delivery partners to submit their portfolios for moderation and either receive the Quality Mark, which will then last for three years, or receive guidance on improving their submission.

Skills audit and training

UK Youth conducted a skills audit in August 2020 to uncover specific expertise and specialist knowledge from the delivery partners and ensure it can be shared at events or individual training sessions. This audit has fed into a complete training plan which will be delivered over Cohort Four.

Furthermore, the YWT developed a Community Organising Training for EmpowHER youth workers, covering the theory and principles of community organising, its application to social action projects, the importance of stories, building relationships and how to identify the power a community already holds. This will be delivered over four session in November 2020.



Social leadership and sustainable social action

In addition to EmpowHER alumni engaging in peer mentoring or events, other Cohort One and Two YW&G have continued to engage in social action or leadership opportunities. For the groups that have continued, anecdotally, strong community connections, cohesion and focus of the group, and passion for a specific cause, seem to have played an important role.

We Change Adversity

At the end of Cohort Two, the We Change Adversity group from Creative Optimistic Visions were keen to continue with their online women's rights campaign. Over the last year, their entirely youth led campaign has continued and they have been using their platform to challenge racism. In their first post on the subject they wrote **"This isn't what we normally post, we normally post about women's rights and feminism. But racism should be protested as well, after all if you believe in one kind of equality, you believe in all kinds of equality!!"**. The group have hosted socially distant roadside protests to raise awareness and support the Black community and Black Lives Matter. They have also expanded, as other young people inspired by their activism have joined their campaigns.

A return to Menacuddle Wells

In Cohort Two a Young People Cornwall EmpowHER group revamped a beauty spot named Menacuddle Wells, planting bulbs and other flowers. During Cohort Three the town councillors who look after the site contacted the youth organisation to ask them if they have any further ideas for how they could improve the site and to offer them the opportunity to expand their project. The town council would not have considered asking young people to be involved or take responsibility for the site before their social action project. The young people from the Menacuddle EmpowHER group have been contacted and hope to pick up their social action project again to support the town and encourage sustainability.

EmpowHER Role Model

Following the murder of George Floyd and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter, Macie, an EmpowHER participant from Cohort One became more politically active. Along with her family she attended Black Lives Matter protests and was asked to speak to the crowd. Macie said **"I was terrified, but it is important. I spoke about colourism. I've been learning a lot about colourism because people think I'm black and think my sister is Asian. We get different types of racist comments even though we are sisters"**.

Macie spoke at the 'Race' British Red Cross role model event in Cohort Three, educating attendees about colourism and presenting her experiences and advice to young people. The event received excellent feedback from young people and staff with one saying, **"That was the best explanation of colourism I have heard. I really understand now"**.

EMPOWHER

Inspiring young women and girls to lead change

91%

Of young women and girls agreed that EmpowHER had made them feel less alone during the Covid-19 pandemic.



"My most significant change since coming to the group is that I am now able to talk about my mental health. The group has also helped me to find friends and given me the confidence to believe in myself."

- Young person

"Before this project I knew a very different girl, now I see a confident and passionate young lady who when she puts her mind to something, she does it."

- Youth worker



Social learning



83% Agreed that they understood more about mental health issues.

85% Of respondents said that social learning helped them to understand that they can ask for advice.

Empowered to identify and lead change

82% Of young women and girls reported that the programme improved their confidence.

75% Of young women and girls said the programme had improved their leadership skills.



"I love the feeling of EmpowHER-ing others."

- Young person

EMPOWHER

Created by

UK YOUTH

In partnership with

BritishRedCross



Funded in partnership by

#iwill

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

COMMUNITY FUND

2019-2024



Programme Evaluation

The quantitative and qualitative evidence from Cohort Three indicates that the outcomes of previous cohorts have been reinforced, despite the impact of last-minute changes to delivery due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While Cohort Three was smaller than the previous cohorts, we still saw in the data assurances that the programme is producing the desired outcomes; improving YW&G wellbeing, challenging limiting perceptions, YW&G empowered to identify and lead change, social cohesion, and long term social action habits formed.

The evaluation of this cohort focuses on three research questions:

- What do YW&G learn from social learning topics, and to what extent can programme delivery be optimised?
- To what extent do YW&G learn to carry out meaningful social action that can be sustained, and what are examples of community response?
- To what extent do YW&G report feeling confident in themselves and their ability to lead change?

The evaluation also investigates the demographic background of the YW&G reached by the programme, to assess whether we're reaching the YW&G that are less likely to be involved in social action, but likely to benefit from it. Young people in the transitional age ranges (Headstart, 2020) and those from homes with lower family income are more likely to report poorer mental health and lower wellbeing (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2020). In addition, young people from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to take part in social action (Ipsos Mori, 2018).

Methodology and Covid-19 adaptations

UK Youth collected a mixture of quantitative and qualitative information to conduct the evaluation. To assess the extent of change in participants' outcomes, we conducted:

- in-depth focus groups with YW&G across three delivery partners;
- 18 in-depth case studies with YW&G;
- in-depth interviews with youth workers across 12 delivery partners;
- 200 exit surveys from YW&G;
- Delivery partner reports of 12 delivery partners, from 33 groups, giving details of 58 social action projects.

To assess the extent of change across participants, we designed exit surveys to capture indicators of EmpowHER participants' views on social learning, action and confidence. We provided youth workers with blank participant records at the beginning of the programme to collect information about YW&G' age, ethnicity, postcode, and any personal barriers as reported by youth workers. The evaluation is based upon analysis of those that completed these tools. For each question we report based on the data from those who responded, a full break down of the base size per question is in Appendix I.

We conducted focus groups with YW&G who had completed or were near completion of the programme in Cohort Three. We also conducted in-depth interviews with youth workers. Finally, youth workers from each delivery partner were responsible for submitting a delivery report for every group of EmpowHER participants, including details of the social action completed, and feedback from local community.

The Impact of Covid-19

The evaluation, like the programme itself, was impacted by the global Covid-19 pandemic. To ensure consistency with previous evaluations, we looked to employ the same research methods, but adapted them to be appropriate to lockdown measures. The immediate impact was that face to face research became impossible. The second was that one of the key measures, YW&G' wellbeing, as measured through the ONS indicators was removed from the evaluation. It was agreed between UK Youth and Spirit of 2012, and the learning partnership, that it would be heavily and unfairly skewed by the fact these young women were living through a pandemic.

To ensure the robustness of data capture and the rigour of the evaluation, UK Youth made changes to the evaluation methodology. These were:

- A decision to not conduct entry surveys for young people who joined the programme after 18th March as the data would be unduly impacted by the pandemic and lockdown. This meant that we collected no wellbeing data or data that could be used to demonstrate change across the length of the programme. The

exit surveys were changed to reflect the lack of entry data and matching them to participants was no longer possible. In addition, due to the lack of entry data, we did not collect information on the number of YW&G who had previously participated in social action or on motivations for originally joining EmpowHER.

- Most of the data capture was conducted online. Most significantly, this led to a reduction in the number of focus groups completed against the number planned. This was due to YW&G being unwilling to do focus groups online, the completion of the programme coinciding with them going back to school, and the challenges in keeping the girls engaged once the sessions themselves had finished. While we intended to do six at the beginning of the programme, we were only able to complete three.
- It is worth noting that 53 YW&G who were originally registered for EmpowHER did not continue their engagement with the programme due to their delivery partner not being able to continue running their group due to Covid-19 logistical restrictions. They were not included in the 312 identified as having engaged with the programme.
- Overall, two delivery partners were not able to deliver EmpowHER to any groups, and eight delivery partners reduced their targets in terms of the number of groups and participants.

A final impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was that nothing was “normal” with programme delivery. While the focus of this evaluation remains firmly with the research questions, it would be remiss to not include evidence and insight from YW&G, as well as the youth workers, on digital delivery as part of this evaluation.

Participant engagement and retention

In Cohort Three, 312 YW&G, between the aged of 10 and 20, and three young women over the aged of 20 with special education needs or disabilities engaged in the programme. Of the 312, 239 completed the programme (defined as engaging for 30 hours or more) a retention rate of 77%.²

Initially, the data points to a higher dropout rate than previous cohorts, suggesting that online delivery impacted participation and retention. In Cohort Two the retention rate was 92% and in Cohort One it was 87%. However, the retention rate was also impacted by the timing of when a participant started the programme. Of the 312 YW&G overall, 67% started the programme before lockdown (18th March 2020) and of those, 75% completed the programme. While of those who started after lockdown (33%), 81% completed the programme. This suggests that maintaining engagement through the transition from face to

² This number includes young people who turned 10 during the programme.

face delivery to online delivery was challenging for delivery partners, which is further supported by the qualitative data from the youth worker interviews with UK Youth staff at the close of the programme.

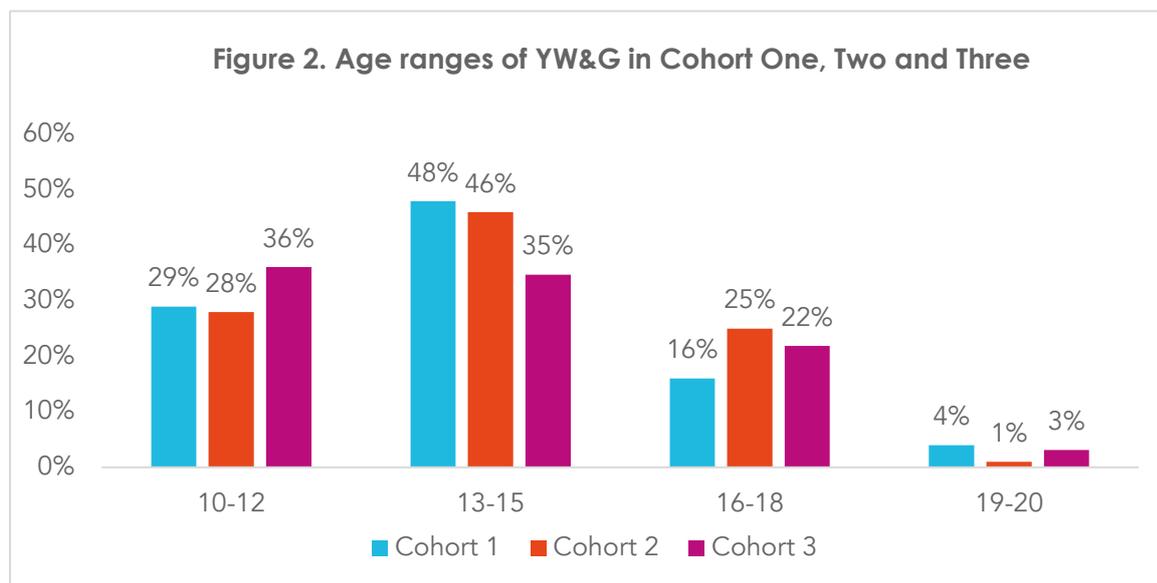
When looking at the engagement of the YW&G, of those that completed the programme, 76% completed 30-39 hours, 18% 40-49 hours and 6% completed 50-55 hours. Despite the changes to delivery, this is a similar split to Cohort Two where 73% completed 30-39 hours.

The majority of YW&G engaged in the programme in small groups of either six or less (48%) or seven to 12 young people (45%), and only 6% of them engaged in larger groups of 13 to 16 young people. This is a change from the 20% that reported being in groups of six or less in Cohort Two, and 59% in groups of seven to 12 to much smaller groups. Arguably, this is due to the challenge of engaging large groups online.

EmpowHER participant demographics in Cohort Three³

Across Cohort Three, 83% of participants reported as being from a white ethnic background. This is a 12% increase from Cohort Two, and a 20% increase from Cohort One. 64% of YW&G came from the 30% most deprived areas in the UK, compared to 56% in Cohort Two and 65% in Cohort One. Furthermore, 27% of YW&G came from the 30% least socially mobile areas in the UK, which is higher than in Cohort Two (20%).

The programme had notable engagement from younger YW&G as 71% were aged between 10 and 15 years old, a similar participation rate to previous cohorts.



³ Demographic results are based on the data from the participant records, which include both those who were engaged and those who completed. Overall, they number 312. However, calculations are done based on the number for whom we have data for each demographic question. See breakdown of base size in the Appendix.

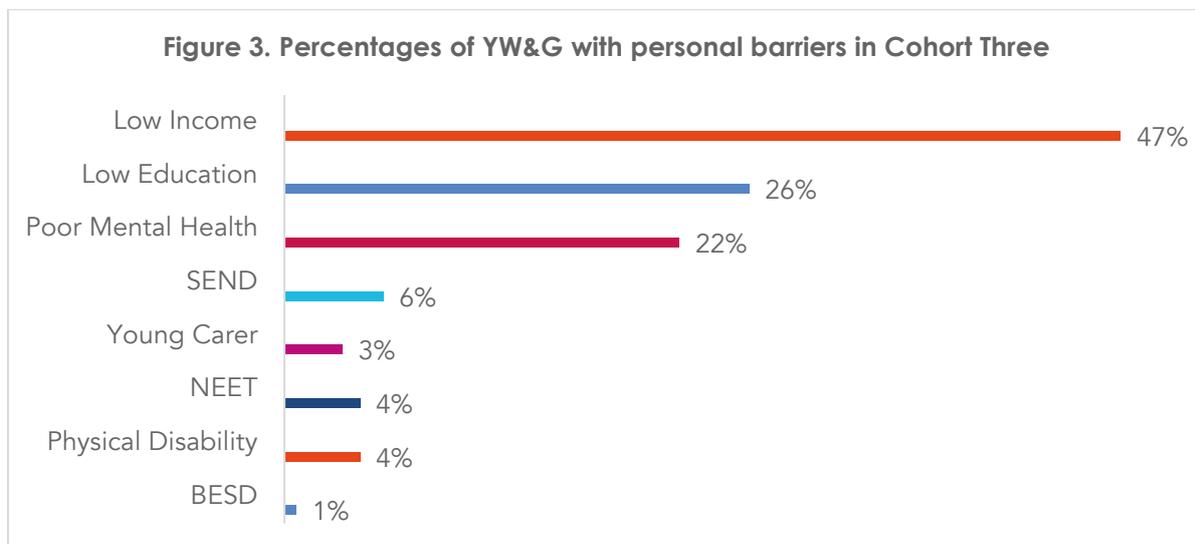
Note: Cohort One data based on 306 YW&G engaged in EmpowHER, across nine delivery partners. Cohort Two data based on 625 YW&G who completed EmpowHER across 11 delivery partners. Cohort Three data based on 288 YW&G who engaged on EmpowHER and we had age information. Source: UK Youth.

64% of Cohort Three participants engaged in EmpowHER were reported by youth workers as having at least one personal barrier. Of those YW&G, 45% had one personal barrier, 37% had two and finally 18% had three or more.

47% of all girls who engaged in EmpowHER came from a low-income background, 26% had low educational achievement and 22% had mental health concerns.

The types of personal barriers faced by the YW&G is similar to Cohort Two, with a slight increase in the percentage of YW&G coming from low income backgrounds, and a decrease in the number of YW&G from a refugee background, or English as a second language background. Due to Covid-19, New Routes, a delivery partner who specifically works with young refugees in Norwich, and Positive Youth Foundation, who run a new arrivals group in Coventry, were not able to transition to online delivery which may have contributed to this change.

Having a personal barrier did not impact on the likelihood of completing EmpowHER. 85% of YW&G reported as having at least one barrier completed the programme,



Note: Cohort Three data based on 307 YW&G who engaged in EmpowHER and we had information about personal barriers, across 12 delivery partners. Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD); Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND); Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). Source: UK Youth.

EmpowHER is a programme for “unusual suspects”, defined as YW&G with low wellbeing, who have not previously engaged in social action. Due to the change in our evaluation methodology, we did not collect wellbeing data for Cohort Three, nor collect completed entry surveys, so our ability to assess quantitatively whether we are still reaching this target group is difficult. Although we are still reaching young people from areas of low social

mobility and high deprivation, the ethnic diversity, as well as the number of personal barriers recorded, is lower in this cohort than in previous cohorts.

Although we cannot say for certain, learnings from previous cohorts indicate that some of the reduction in proportion of participants with personal barriers and ethnic diversity may be due to which delivery partners were able to continue online and which had to stop delivery or reduce targets. In addition, although we did not collect data on this, from Public Health England reports on the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people from Black and Asian communities, it is possible that the pandemic was a further contributing factor in the smaller proportion of YW&G from those backgrounds engaging.

The impact of online delivery on EmpowHER outcomes

Despite the many adaptations due to Covid-19, the data shows that EmpowHER online delivery, in the middle of a pandemic, still achieved the desired outcomes of; challenging limiting perceptions, empowering YW&G to identify and lead change, fostering social cohesion, and supporting long term social action habits. The qualitative data indicates through anecdotal accounts that the YW&G are also improving their confidence and wellbeing, however, as we did not collect quantitative ONS wellbeing data or comparative entry and exit surveys, we cannot substantiate this.

However, in terms of evaluating delivery, it would be neglectful to not point to the impact that digital delivery has had due to Covid-19 restrictions on the programme and YW&G's perceptions. All youth workers interviewed stated that online delivery presented new challenges. More specifically, they mentioned that the participants turned off their cameras, were too shy to speak on screen, and some failed to attend the online sessions, so some youth workers found it difficult to build rapport and crucial relationships with the YW&G. As one youth worker said **"Behind a screen it is harder to read face language or body language. Harder to have a deep bond."** This was further substantiated by the YW&G. One young woman commented that **"I found starting the programme difficult with my confidence and this was challenging at the start of the programme"** (EmpowHer participant, 18) while another said **"I found the zoom sessions really hard. I would attend but with no video. Or hardly speak, except by messages"** (EmpowHer participant, 17). A further challenge was highlighted by the BRC who said that digital delivery made it difficult to grasp whether the growth in confidence seen across the YW&G is consistent across the whole group, instead of one or two "who could take the lead".

Acknowledging a problem possibly more common than the data suggests, one youth worker flagged a quiet space to access the sessions was more of a problem than accessing the technology itself, with one youth worker reporting having to change session times to fit around parents needing access to the computer for work commitments. Youth workers from UCO reported speaking with parents about engaging with the YW&G online and working with them to ensure that the online sessions were successful. Furthermore, the BRC suggested that for **"some people home is not a pleasant space...and that could be potentially be a barrier."** So, while all the youth workers viewed the Digital Inclusion Fund

positively, barriers to accessing digital delivery can be more than having the right piece of equipment.

Despite challenges and teething problems, digital delivery of EmpowHER was viewed positively. Indeed, one young woman said, **“even with the virus, the online stuff, like the meetings or the role model lectures gave me a chance to be part of them”** (EmpowHER participant, 14). Indeed, the anonymity of speaking to just a screen helped some YW&G engage with the programme in ways they had not been able to previously; one youth worker reported that **“If they could turn their camera off they would feel free to talk with more anonymity and say what they think, that was helpful for some of them.”** Interestingly, **91% of survey respondents agreed that EmpowHER had made them feel less alone during the pandemic.** This indicates that while digital delivery comes with challenges, it is a positive alternative delivery structure when face to face engagement is not possible, and for some young people, can be a preferred method for discussing sensitive topics. However, the impact of the lack of a quiet space, the slight contradiction in being able to turn off a screen being not necessarily negative, and the effect on relationship building need further investigation.

Digital delivery inevitably impacted upon the participants’ experience of the programme. However, it has possible positives as a method of delivery, with some youth workers reporting that the potential for anonymity benefitted some YW&G. For delivery to be optimised the YW&G need to be supported to find a quiet space, the delivery partners supported with programme flexibility, and additional training provided on using online platforms.

Cohort Three research and evaluation⁴

What do YW&G learn from social learning topics, and to what extent can programme delivery be optimised?

The social learning provided a solid link to the social action by contextualising it and encouraging the YW&G to see themselves within the issues being discussed. These sessions led to positive outcomes for the YW&G giving them the opportunity to discuss and express their feelings and receive advice.

⁴ Programme outcomes information based on the data from the exit surveys, which include only those who completed. Overall, they number 200, however, calculations are done based on the number for whom we have data for each question. See breakdown of base size in Appendix I.

85% of respondents said that the social learning helped them to understand that they can ask for advice

83% agreed that they understood more about mental health issues

78% said that the sessions helped them feel like they can talk to others when they're sad or upset

76% reported that social learning had made them feel comfortable sharing how they felt with other people. 76%

The BRC Role Model Sessions continued to be a powerful contributor to social learning, with one of the YW&G saying: **"I definitely valued talking with other women and girls. I feel that's so important at the moment for both parties. Women can really hate or love each other; the hate is something that's really toxic. The sessions were purposeful; some of the girls reminded me of me, I felt so comfortable and that I could be a role model."** (EmpowHER participant, 20).

In Cohort Three, we did not collect entry data on YW&G's limiting perceptions of themselves and their gender, therefore it is not possible to compare Cohort Three and Cohort Two data on the impact of EmpowHER on challenging or overcoming limiting perceptions.⁵ However, in our exit survey we did ask the YW&G to self-report whether they thought joining EmpowHER had influenced their perceptions of themselves or their gender. To this question, **93% thought that the programme had helped them feel that YW&G can do anything they set their minds to** and **83% said it had helped them see that they could do things as well as other people.**

83% of the YW&G reported that the programme helped them learn new things. The social learning had a positive effect in helping YW&G realise that they should have more faith in themselves, be confident in their abilities and raise their voices.

⁵ By the end of Cohort Two, 19% of respondents had limiting perceptions of their gender and 37% of themselves, however this data is not directly comparable to Cohort Three as both the wording and the method of collection are distinct.

Social learning works best for YW&G when it covers topics that are related to them. They benefited from the safe space that allowed discussion of issues that directly affected them. In particular, the YW&G enjoyed the Role Model Sessions run by the BRC. Combined with the focus on body confidence, mental health and gender-based issues, the social learning gave the YW&G confidence to lead on social action.

“ I learnt about body image and that there is so much more to me than I knew about and all us girls can achieve anything and have an amazing future.”

- EmpowHer participant,

“ We have learned about what women can do, I feel that the whole programme has been about empowering women to make decisions for themselves and stuff. That is women have the power to do what they put their mind too.”

- EmpowHER participant,

“ The most important thing I learnt from the project is to have the confidence to express my opinion as a young person.”

- EmpowHER participant,
12

To what extent do YW&G learn to carry out meaningful social action that can be sustained, and what are examples of community response?

Whether it's clapping for carers, supporting those shielding or supporting food banks, the Covid-19 crisis has certainly shone a light on the importance of small-scale social actions that result in a huge impact to our communities. Arguably, the social action element of EmpowHER Cohort Three received a lift from the influence of communities coming together in the fight against Covid-19. Indeed, **46% of participants reported they would take part in social action in the next 12 months, which is an increase from 37% in Cohort Two and 34% in Cohort One.**

An interesting insight from Cohort Three is that **35% of YW&G reported that they would take part in social action with the British Red Cross.** This is higher than both Cohort Two (23%) and Cohort One (18%). This increase could be related to the fact that UK Youth retrained all delivery partners, bringing with them the Youth Engagement Workers and running "Inspiration to Action" activities highlighting the role of BRC in the training. In addition, the BRC set up intro sessions in the first few weeks with the YW&G (very similar to what was done in Cohort Two). However, it is notable in the case studies focus groups how often BRC staff are mentioned by name and the Role Model Sessions that they ran cited as a highlight.

The increase in the number of YW&G who reported wanting to take part in social action in the next 12 months and volunteer with the BRC is reflected in the enthusiasm for social action from the Delivery partner reports. The majority of groups completed one or two

social action projects (35% completed one; 45% completed two), with a smaller number completing three (16%) or four (3% - one very dedicated group!) different projects.

Delivery partner reports indicated that projects centred on the theme of supporting people were overwhelmingly reported to have arisen from YW&G wanting to offer specific support in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, for example:

Care packages (in the form of gifts, 'happy boxes', activity packs, food parcels etc.) were created broadly for NHS staff/key workers, elderly people and care residents, and young people and families.

Wellbeing/positive messages took a huge number of creative forms, from traditional letters, cards, and posters, to songs and videos released on social media, and kindness trails created in parks.

Supporting these findings—that the social learning sessions ought to be structured around issues relevant to the YW&G was an important step in inspiring them to take action—the evaluation found YW&G in Cohort Three were very keen to support other young people. Indeed, from the survey responses, **63% of YW&G indicated that their motivation for doing social action was to help and educate others.**⁶ The YW&G stated they wanted to help other young women, older people, the community and others more generally. This was often in reference to the potential huge negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the national lockdown on young people's mental health, feelings of loneliness, and general wellbeing. Youth workers report that these projects stemmed from conversations around the YW&G's own experiences and feelings, implying that these social actions were youth-led. This echoes comments in youth worker interviews about the importance of working with young people to lead their own youth work. One youth worker said, **"I think young women giving young people responsibility and allowing them to take responsibility, has supported them to apply their learning...The biggest thing is they have been able to have a voice and gain confidence."**

Supporting the community was a strong theme throughout Cohort Three and this was reflected in the perception of the YW&G on their projects. **78% said the projects they did helped their community, an increase of 13% from Cohort Two.** These findings are supported by the **82% who at the end of the programme reported that they believed they could make a difference to where they lived.**

As for the community impact of the social action projects, the reach can only be estimated due to the differing types of response given in the reports, but projects have directly reached approximately 1,200 people, with social media campaigns and marketing reaching over 5,000 more. However, in terms of inspiring longer-term action the response from the

⁶ Other motivations included to help the environment, for fun, to become more confident, develop new skills or learning, among many others.

recipients was more impactful than the reach. Indeed, a youth worker observation from a programme in Cornwall said that young women found giving to the community to be motivating and that the opportunity to help others increased their morale and sense of accomplishment. Feedback that they received included Cornwall Council reporting **“wow! This is just incredible that at a time like this young people are leading by example”**, while a young woman in hospital said **“It really makes you feel good knowing that we were not forgotten about”** and an elderly gentleman called up the youth organisation to say that he was ‘over the moon’ with his care bag. In fact, **70% of YW&G reported at the end of the programme that they felt that they could trust the people who live near them, indicating that EmpowHer through social action helps build social cohesion.**⁷

Overall, the effect of social action on the YW&G is transformative. They report a growth in confidence, an awareness that they can effect change and an understanding that helping others is a positive way of helping themselves. Indeed, one young woman in particular was so motivated by her social action project that she is taking an active role in applying for further funding – something she would never dreamed of doing before Covid-19. While another said, **“Social action gives me something to do at the same time as helping others.”** A young woman in a focus group said **“I don’t feel confident in myself, but I feel more confident in the fact that I know I can make a difference if I set my mind to it, for example I didn’t know how easy it was to sign petitions, and how much of a big impact it had on a cause.”**

YW&G enjoy and want to engage further with social action, particularly when it is linked to their interests. The social action element of the programme lifted YW&G’ confidence that they could lead change. They were also inspired by the Covid-19 pandemic and responded well to the feedback they received from the communities they were active in.

To what extent do YW&G report feeling confident in themselves and their ability to lead change?

The EmpowHER programme had a formidable impact on the confidence of YW&G and their ability to lead change. **Indeed, 82% of YW&G reported that the programme improved their confidence and 75% that it had improved their leadership skills.** This is an improvement from Cohort One where the two indicators were 61% and 50% respectively. The YW&G talked about being more ambitious for their futures, feeling more able to express their opinions and a stronger awareness of their own power. While the youth workers spoke about how confidence grew as the programme progressed.

The growth in confidence has helped the YW&G realise that they can work together to make change. One youth worker said that through the programme the YW&G **“learned to take responsibility and how to work together as a team and help each other”** while

⁷ In Cohort Three, we did not collect entry data on YW&G trust of people in their community, therefore it is not possible to compare Cohort Three and Cohort Two data on the impact of EmpowHER in increasing this trust as Cohort Two measured the increase and effect size. For reference, 53% of YW&G at the end of Cohort Two indicated that they could trust the people who lived near them, an increase with effect size of .39 (small) from the beginning of the cohort.

another said that the YW&G had been **“sharing ideas with other girls who they did not know... and working together.”** The participants suggested that this was a key outcome for them too. One said, **“working in Cohort Three, we were able to support each other and develop as young people working together, with support from our youth workers.”** This suggests that the YW&G recognise that having the confidence to work with others is important to achieving change.

By raising the confidence to work together, the programme also encouraged friendship. One young woman said **“My most significant change since coming to the group is that I am now able to talk about my mental health. The group has also helped me to find friends and given me the confidence to believe in myself,”** while another said, **“I achieved my goal at making new friends.”** Indeed, one youth worker suggested that the programme helped establish friendship between the YW&G, which in turn helped to create a safe space for them to be honest about their feelings and build a foundation upon which they could work together on social action.

A further confidence that the YW&G developed from the EmpowHER programme was the understanding that their actions, however small, are contributing to a larger change. Social learning that leads to social action can be directly linked to the confidence of YW&G. It is a strength of the programme that it provides YW&G with a platform to not only build their own confidence, but recognise their role in building the confidence of others as a social action in itself. One youth worker described this as a “win-win”. The Covid-19 restrictions almost benefitted the YW&G by pushing them to think creatively about how social action was carried out. Delivery partners reported that YW&G took on research tasks, focused on teamwork and delegation, and contacted authority figures, companies, and community organisations asking for assistance with their projects – all of which lifted their confidence to lead and make change.

Being able to speak up in groups and raise their voice was a key outcome from Cohort Three. For some of the participants it gave them a platform upon which to realise that their views and thoughts are valuable. The confidence to speak up underpinned a new-found ability to strive for themselves, and they saw how being more confident in speaking could enable them to achieve bigger things.

“I’ve found my voice in the sessions, like I’ve got something important to say.”
- EmpowHer participant,

“ [EmpowHER pushed me] higher than expected, I want to push myself now to get the best job I can aim for.”
- EmpowHer Participant,

“ I’m still a bit shy but I’ve learnt how to communicate better through EmpowHER. In fact, I decided to join the school council, learning how to communicate in EmpowHER has helped me communicate in school meetings”
- EmpowHer participant,



Conclusions and next steps

Cohort Three taught us clearly that EmpowHER is still EmpowHER when delivered online. With the hard work of our partners, youth workers and young people, it still has the impact we aim for, and the fun and creativity we have seen in previous cohorts. The youth workers and young people are optimistic and eager to continue online, and certain elements of EmpowHER actually work better online than face to face, as they allow for national collaboration and really highlight the scale of this programme and interconnectedness of the social actions.

As we look towards our final cohort of EmpowHER, it is important to consider what changes and improvements we have already made to the programme, and what final tweaks can be made and evaluated before the end of Cohort Four.

In Cohort Two, we planned to build on our understanding of the peer leadership role, explore specialist support from the Young Women's Trust, develop the Social Action Quality Mark, review and improve our wider communications. The Social Action Quality Mark framework was completed and, although ongoing processes, we have continued to build our understanding of the peer leadership role and improve our communications.

In Cohort Three, we wanted to reintroduce and advocate for the use of the Access Fund, train delivery partners on the Social Action Quality Mark, deliver Social Action Pitch Days across all regions, support the YW&G to come together cross-regionally, provide additional training to youth workers, create a new offer with the Young Women's Trust, further

develop our understanding of sustainability for EmpowHER, and ensure best practice is shared with other UK Youth programmes.

Despite the numerous adaptations made to our delivery, timescales and targets as a result of Covid-19, we have achieved the majority of our goals in Cohort Three, from supporting delivery partners to deliver online, to training youth organisations on the Social Action Quality Mark, to piloting a new EmpowHER Ambassador programme, and running the first of its kind UK Youth Movement event highlighting the importance of social action in youth work.

Although our evaluation plan and focus had to adapt, we have collected enough data to answer our research questions and remain confident in the quality of the delivery and the impact that EmpowHER is having on young people's confidence, their ability to overcome limiting perceptions, build long-term social action habits and deepen social cohesion (even in an online delivery format), and we know that both young people and youth workers are positive about doing further delivery online.

Going into Cohort Four, we will continue the current EmpowHER model, maintaining the same core and flex element and changes will be updates to technological elements, from shifting the EmpowHER social learning resources from Dropbox to Sharepoint, and moving from documents and powerpoints to online forms and videos. In addition, we will keep the lessons learnt through delivery and the results of the Programme Evaluation in mind and focus on the following areas of improvement.

Recruitment and retention

Cohort Three had less ethnic diversity than previous cohorts, and fewer personal barriers were reported. Although the percentages of young people coming from areas of high deprivation or low social mobility are still high, EmpowHER is committed to being a programme for all YW&G and the recruitment focus for Cohort Four will be on engaging young people with personal barriers and/or from Black, Asian or Minority ethnic backgrounds. This has been communicated to all delivery partners for consideration in their recruitment plans.

Retention rates were higher for YW&G who started the programme after lockdown had already begun. This suggests that transitioning from face to face to online delivery is more challenging than continuing to engage young people in online delivery, and that expectations of delivery method may be important, i.e., young people who were expecting to be face to face were more reluctant to continue online than young people who were starting the programme knowing it would be delivered virtually. Going into Cohort Four, delivery partners are communicating with young people and their parents prior to the start of the programme about their delivery method, whether blended, face to face or online, as well as the potential for it to shift online. We expect that clearer expectations and understanding of the programme will improve retention in Cohort Four.

Online delivery

In a world of digital delivery, flexibility for delivery partners is a must as it allows them to adapt to the needs of the YW&G. However, this must be balanced with quality assurance to ensure that YW&G' experience of EmpowHER continues to be impactful. Going into Cohort Four, UK Youth has produced an Online Delivery Pack with guidance on safeguarding and high-quality delivery and will be working closely with delivery partners to ensure the essence of EmpowHER remains the same.

Digital inclusion

The Digital Inclusion Fund was successful and well received. However, we learnt that digital based barriers extend beyond access, to include a lack of privacy or safe space to do the sessions. This needs to be factored into Cohort Four development, through more engagement with parents or guardians to get the support needed for the YW&G to have the space they need at home to do the sessions.

Social learning

Social learning topics continue to be focused on issues that directly impact upon YW&G. Their relatability is important to engaging YW&G in social action. To support youth workers with the social learning topics and ensure they remain topical we have created additional session plans covering; Race and Identify, Gender and Identity and Disability Rights in the UK.

Training and support for youth workers

Youth workers have had a steep learning curve over the last six months to not only deliver youth work digitally, but also support young people going through an incredibly turbulent period impacted by a global pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, a recession and continued uncertainty. To ensure that youth workers are equipped for Cohort Four and supported with the difficult conversations they will continue to have with young people, UK Youth will deliver our training plan, as well as support with arising needs. The first additional training covered working with young people experiencing bereavement and grief, and topics planned for the future include online skills, talking about race and identity, and gender and identity.

Embedding youth voice

The increase in youth voice in all aspects of the programme was well received in Cohort Three and allowed for wonderful moments of collaboration between EmpowHER alumni and current participants. The EmpowHER Ambassadors launch in October 2020, and we will

be working closely with the group to develop their work and ensure that YW&G are leading change, not only within their community, but also within EmpowHER. We will also continue to engage young people through the British Red Cross, UK Youth, Young Women's Trust, Spirit of 2012 and National Lottery Community Fund youth panels and provide opportunities to other EmpowHER alumni and opportunities.

Reintroducing UK Youth

A clear message from youth workers and young people was that they wanted more interaction from UK Youth so that the young people could really engage with UK Youth and our role in the programme. Several youth workers mentioned how it was a key part of feeling connected to something bigger and understanding where the social action pitch funds came from. Based on this feedback, UK Youth is creating an introduction video and will be attending early sessions to demystify our role and faces!

Sharing best practice

The UK Youth Movement event was successful in reaching new audiences and received positive feedback from a variety of stakeholders. As we look towards the end of the programme we are planning two final learning events to disseminate the macro themes of EmpowHER, as well as two additional Movement events focused on key enablers to consider when developing single-gender, wellbeing and social action programmes.

Research focus for Cohort Four

The impact and evaluation framework of EmpowHER aims to gather learnings and insight that can be shared beyond the programme, with the wider youth sector, to encourage best practice and innovation. The evaluation of Cohort Three touched lightly on the practicalities, outcomes and impacts of digital delivery and as the Project Evaluation demonstrated, the picture is complicated, with contradictory lessons such as "there is a benefit to the camera being off" and "it is difficult to build relationships when the camera is off". The evaluation for Cohort Four will explicitly include questions about online delivery to gather more in-depth insight and understanding of the key enablers of quality online youth work. The research questions for Cohort Four will be;

- To what extent is the programme meeting its outcomes for YW&G?
- How has the pandemic impacted delivery optimization?
- To what extent has the social action improved social cohesion and how is sustainability embedded?
- How can learning from EmpowHER inform future programming and the sector?

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Appendix I

Base size

Calculations related to demographic data are based on number of YW&G who engaged in the programme and had information about the below.

- Ethnicity base size 286.
- Age base size 288.
- Programme completion hours base size 312.
- Personal barriers base size 307.
- Deprivation analysis base size 275.
- Social mobility analysis 234.

Calculations related to the programme outcomes are based on the number of YW&G who completed the programme, filled the exit survey and answered specific questions.

Social learning

All percentages reported on the social learning questions were reporting the proportion of responses that scored at least 7 out of 10.

Responses to the following had a base size of 200: “How much do you think taking part in the social learning sessions DID or DID NOT help you with the things below, on a scale where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely?”

- The social learning helped me feel comfortable sharing how I feel with the other people in the group.
- The social learning helped me feel like I can talk to other people when I’m not feeling good, like when I’m feeling worried, sad or upset.
- The social learning helped me learn more about what mental health means.

Responses to the following had a base size of 198: “How much do you think taking part in the social learning sessions DID or DID NOT help you with the things below, on a scale where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely?”

Limiting perceptions

Responses to the following had a base size of 197: “First, we’d like to know what you think about yourself. After taking part in EmpowHER, how much do you agree with the below on a scale where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely? Please tick the box under the number you think fits best.”

- Joining EmpowHER helped me see I can do things as well as most other people

“Finally, we’d like to know what you think about YW&G and where you live. After taking part in EmpowHER, how much do you agree with the statements below on a scale where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely?”

- Joining EmpowHER helped me feel that YW&G can do anything they set their minds to

Those that scored statements from 0-6 on a 10-point scale are considered to have a limiting perception.

Social action

All percentages reported on the social action questions were reporting the proportion of responses that scored at least 8 out of 10. Responses to the following had a base size of 197:

- I will take part in social action in the next 12 months (social action is helping others, like volunteering, fundraising or campaigning).
- Social action helped the community (our social action helped people in my community)

Responses to the following had a base size of 196

- I will take part in social action with the British Red Cross in the next 12 months (social action is helping others, like volunteering, fundraising or campaigning).

Responses to the following had a base size of 195

- Motivation for taking part in social action (in your own words, please can you tell us why you wanted to do your social action project or projects? Or, if you did not want to do your social action projects, can you tell us why?)

Confidence, leadership and community cohesion

All percentages reported on the confidence questions were reporting the proportion of responses that scored at least 7 out of 10. Responses to the following had a base size of 196.

- Confidence (joining EmpowHER helped me feel more confident in myself)

Responses to the following had a base size of 196.

- I can make a difference to where I live
- I can trust people who live near me
- Joining EmpowHER helped me feel comfortable taking the lead in small groups

UK YOUTH

UK Youth London Office, Kings Building,
16 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HQ
Avon Tyrrell Outdoor Activity Centre, Bransgore,
Christchurch BH23 8EE

Website: www.ukyouth.org

Telephone: 0203 1373 810

Company Number: 05402004

UK Youth Registered Charity Number: 1110590