

# EMPOWHER

LEGACY

Final Evaluation Summary Report



SPIRIT OF 2012  
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS

UK YOUTH

# The EmpowHER Legacy Programme

EmpowHER is an approach to delivering youth-led social action that encourages young women and girls to use their voices for positive change.

Originally running from 2018 to 2021, the EmpowHER programme sought to address the worryingly low levels of wellbeing amongst young women and girls through inclusive, meaningful social action opportunities. The programme achieved statistically significant results, supporting young women and girls to feel happier, more confident and inspired to make a difference.

The EmpowHER delivery model takes young women and girls on a journey through social learning, social action and finally social leadership (see diagram).



## EmpowHER Legacy

Building on the success of the EmpowHER programme, EmpowHER Legacy (2021 to 2023) explored if and how the EmpowHER model could be scaled to reach more young people and be embedded within more youth organisations. This programme worked with 52 youth organisations, offering varying levels of support and funding to understand what is needed to sustainably deliver EmpowHER, at scale.

Through EmpowHER Legacy, 746 young women and girls took part in youth social action, many for the first time. They set up 79 new youth social action projects with the most common themes being violence against women, body image and environmental themed projects. These social action projects reached an estimated 30,465 people. On EmpowHER Legacy, youth workers provided over 2800 hours of social learning and social action support to young women and girls and the youth organisations involved in the programme connected with 171 other organisations to support delivery – partnership working was a key ambition of the programme as we sought to scale and embed youth social action.

## The EmpowHER Legacy Evaluation

Our findings and implications for the youth sector are summarised in this summary report. Further detail can be found in the EmpowHER Legacy Final Report, including key definitions, more background on the programme, our approach to evaluation, detailed findings, acknowledgements and a bibliography.



## CASE STUDY

# The Boathouse Youth



The Boathouse Youth, a Strand Three partner, delivered EmpowHER Legacy to two groups of young women and girls aged 12–16. They delivered sessions on body image, sexual harassment, social media and puberty.

One group worked on an impressive social action project, lobbying one of their partner schools for gender-targeted sex education lessons and free and accessible sanitary products in toilets. The young women and girls have drafted and written a letter to their school asking for these changes: "Following lengthy discussions with our youth workers we have found a common ground and interest surrounding puberty and periods. [...] Our aim is that we can prevent humiliation by normalising puberty by having more open honest discussions with girls of our age to make them feel more comfortable about their changing bodies."

The second group was concerned about safety in their area and decided to work on a campaign to bring awareness to safer streets, aiming to reduce the number of incidents relating to sexual harassment. One of the key partnerships was with Empowerment Charity, a Blackpool based organisation who make a long-term commitment to supporting local communities and improving the lives of others. The group protested safely around the Blackpool town centre. They held up their signs and chanted with pride. The chants included "What do we want? Safer Streets! When do we want them? Now!" and "My body, My choice!". The energy after the march was incredible, the young women and girls were immensely proud of themselves and having their voices heard!

To end the project, the young women and girls were invited to talk at a local conference 'It Stops Here'. One participant created a short video which was played at the conference. They spoke about the journey they have been on with the EmpowHER programme and the impact this has had on them individually and as a group. The posters they created were also displayed at the conference and were then shared locally, at schools and colleges.

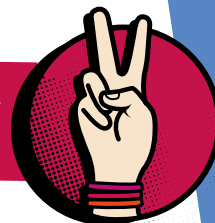
Following the success of EmpowHER, the Safer Streets Campaign co-ordinator from Empowerment Charity was asked to speak with members of parliament about this project!

“

*The experience of the march is one they will never forget. [...] They are proud of what they have achieved and are delighted about their voices being displayed throughout the whole of Blackpool via the posters they have created.”*  
- youth worker, Boathouse Youth

# EmpowHER

## an effective model with a lasting legacy



**EmpowHER is an effective model**, improving outcomes for young women and girls and reducing barriers to participation in social action. In its first three years, EmpowHER had a statistically significant impact on young women and girls, improving their levels of happiness and confidence and building habits of social action. Similar outcomes appear to have been achieved at scale through EmpowHER Legacy and the programme almost doubled the number of young women and girls reached, per £1 invested.

**Youth workers think highly of EmpowHER** – they enjoyed delivering it, saw it make a difference for their young women and girls and experienced professional development that will be felt beyond delivery. For example, youth workers developed:

### Implication for the youth sector:

EmpowHER is a scalable model, which has legacy impact and can continue to be disseminated and scaled in future.



Skills and desire to work in a more youth-led way



Knowledge and confidence in delivering youth social action



Confidence and skills to deliver more gender-targeted provision

We have seen that young women and girls **are keen to continue participating in social action beyond participation in EmpowHER**. Where next steps were made available to them, young women and girls went on to set up EmpowHER sessions at their schools, stepped up as Young Leaders, started volunteering or started planning the next step for their social action project. We also saw examples of young people joining youth organisations as staff after taking part in EmpowHER.

**EmpowHER will have a legacy with the youth workers and youth organisations that delivered it.** This includes: staff using EmpowHER resources in detached work; increased youth worker skills and commitment to youth social action in general; and organisations using the EmpowHER evidence base and UK Youth's profile to secure future funding for the EmpowHER model in its entirety, or elements of it.

### CASE STUDY

#### Original EmpowHER delivery organisation

EmpowHER was very helpful for the organisation's development. Before delivering EmpowHER, they were a sports organisation wanting to reach more young women and girls. The restricted, gender-targeted funding for EmpowHER was helpful for cementing this in their organisation. They now employ more female staff and have a maternity policy. Young women who took part in EmpowHER have become staff members, partly because of leadership opportunities during the sessions. EmpowHER has really driven forward their understanding of social action as a tool for personal development. We now use it in all our programmes. Using the language of social action has helped to attract funding, including from Comic Relief. This started with EmpowHER.

# Supporting Organisations to embed the EmpowHER Model

A number of youth organisations delivered high quality youth social action, even on a low level of support and funding. However, youth work professionals identified issues with this level of support and had to depend on their reserves, funding from other sources, volunteer capacity and support from partners to bolster delivery. While this evaluation cannot conclusively recommend a minimum level of funding to deliver EmpowHER, funding of £10,000-15,000 was seen by youth work professionals as adequate to cover 'basic' provision and delivery of the model.

## **The EmpowHER toolkit was identified as the key enabler of successful delivery of EmpowHER.**

The toolkit of delivery resources provided the inspiration, guidance, benchmarking and practical materials to facilitate youth workers at different levels of experience to deliver high quality youth social action.

## **Beyond adequate funding and the toolkit, we identified a number of enablers to scaling and embedding the EmpowHER model.**

**Flexibility in the model**, allowing youth workers the freedom to choose sessions topics and when and how to deliver them rather than according to a set curriculum. Flexibility gave youth workers the space to bring in their youth work expertise, facilitates youth-led delivery and easier embedding of the model into existing practice.

**Youth worker training** – Quality, accessible training on all aspects of high quality delivery (e.g. social learning, youth-led social action and partnership working) develops youth worker skills and confidence to deliver a model that youth workers often find very different from previous social action experiences. Organisations that were not offered deep dive training appear to have delivered slightly lower quality youth social action, on average.

**Peer learning spaces** – Building youth worker networks, facilitating collaboration and providing spaces to share best practice and hear from those who have delivered EmpowHER before provides essential peer support and professional development that contributes to high quality delivery.

**1:1 infrastructure support** - Optional 1:1 support for youth workers from external project support staff with expertise in youth work enables youth workers to work through delivery challenges and build confidence when youth social action is a new experience.



### **Implication for the youth sector:**

Funding alone does not equal quality and impact – a range of resources (e.g. toolkits), and wraparound support (e.g. training and youth worker peer learning) must be combined with funding.

# Creating the conditions for youth social action to become embedded

**The conditions for delivering the EmpowHER model become more embedded over time.** For example, youth workers improved their understanding and delivery of high quality youth social action the longer they delivered the programme. The highest increases in youth workers' confidence in delivering youth social action were seen on Strand Three, the only Strand required to deliver two subsequent cohorts of EmpowHER. Conversely, high staff turnover was a recurring challenge for youth organisations and sees knowledge being lost in the youth sector. **There is a need to invest in youth organisations' bottom line and the workforce to underpin and embed models like EmpowHER.** The government and youth sector infrastructure organisations are pivotal in these areas, respectively.

Equally, **it is recommended that funders and infrastructure organisations prioritise length of investment over the number of delivery organisations.** This approach enables best practice to take hold as youth workers build knowledge, skills and confidence over time.

## Implication for the youth sector:

The youth sector must focus on workforce development – EmpowHER highlights the need for us to provide higher quality CPD opportunities to support and retain great youth workers. Focussing on workforce development creates the platform for models like EmpowHER to become embedded.

## Supporting youth organisations to build new partnerships and develop existing ones enabled youth organisations to enhance delivery of the EmpowHER model:



**Enriching delivery** – partnerships with organisations delivering social action themselves or who held expertise (and lived experience) in relevant topics enhanced delivery by offering more diverse sessions, trips and events and providing opportunities for young people to get involved in the partner's activities.



**Developing young women and girls' confidence and skills where partnerships were youth led.** When young women and girls were given the opportunity to contribute to choosing and involving partners, youth workers observed increased confidence and improved skills in communication and public speaking.



**Meeting operational needs** – some youth organisations held partnerships that filled operational or funding gaps, for example by providing premises for EmpowHER sessions to take place.



**Referring and signposting young people** – the most common type of partner for youth organisations was those that directed young people to the programme or worked with the youth organisation to choose participants. This was the most common type of partnership for organisations receiving the lowest level of support (Strand One).

# Creating the conditions for youth social action to become embedded

## What is required for effective partnership working during programme delivery?

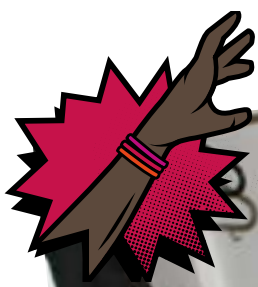
Partnership development activity must be properly resourced as part of programme funding to allow youth workers to give time to this endeavour and to avoid it taking time or resource from delivery with young people.

UK Youth can support youth organisations to develop effective, sustainable partnerships by offering: 1:1 time with regional project officers, introductions to organisations in UK Youth's network; and resources that enable youth organisations to link themselves with UK Youth's brand, including the [EmpowHER Toolkit](#).

Support with partnership development should also carefully consider which types of partnerships are most beneficial at which point of programme delivery. For example, developing partnerships that support referral and delivery are most beneficial early on in the programme, whereas partnerships focussed on sustainability and leveraging additional funding are more beneficial and easier to develop once youth organisations have embedded the EmpowHER model.

### Implication for the youth sector:

Partnerships can bolster and sustain youth organisations' delivery of models like EmpowHER, but they should be provided with tailored support to build them.



# Evaluation approach & the design of the EmpowHER Legacy Programme

Youth organisations received differing levels of support on different programme strands and comparison across these strands was inconclusive in defining the minimum level of support required to scale. **Project setup and evaluation design needs careful consideration when seeking to understand the optimal level of support that youth organisations require to deliver, embed and sustain models like EmpowHER. In particular:**

- **Controls need to be in place** to adjust for variables such as high staff turnover (and the associated loss of youth worker skills and knowledge) and youth organisations bolstering delivery by securing additional funding or using reserves.
- **Adequate resourcing and communication of the evaluation requirements**, to allow youth workers to participate fully in programme-related research and allow for staff turnover at youth organisations.
- **By using standardised outcomes measures and/or measures of fidelity to the model** – it is difficult to ascertain the quality of delivery (and compare between strands) without gathering primary data on either young people's outcomes or fidelity to the model. Equally, using a small suite of standardised measures on programmes like EmpowHER Legacy can reduce the burden of data collection for youth workers and young people.

## Recommendations for evaluators

- Communicate and/or negotiate the level of commitment required before youth organisations sign up to the programme.
- Provide support and resource (e.g. funding) for youth worker time to take part in evaluation activities, particularly those that take time such as focus groups or deploying surveys to young people.
- Prepare to be flexible in their evaluation approach, for example by changing a schedule of evaluation activities, rescheduling or rethinking activities such as focus groups to suit youth workers' schedules.
- Pivot to using a small suite of consistent, recognised data collection tools; aligning with key youth sector initiatives that are seeking to standardise impact measurement, such as the Healthy Data Ecosystem project and the Youth Work Evidence Alliance.

However, funders and infrastructure organisations should be aware that youth organisations, due to the cost of living crisis and funding challenges, will likely face capacity issues regardless of evaluators' efforts to adjust the evaluation approach.





## The start of EmpowHER

EmpowHER started back in 2018 to help young women and girls lead change in their communities and increase wellbeing by providing inclusive and meaningful social action opportunities. The programme was funded by Spirit of 2012 and the #iwill Fund and was led by UK Youth in partnership the British Red Cross and Young Women's Trust. Launched to mark the centenary of women's suffrage in the UK, the programme encouraged young women and girls to use their voices for positive change – just as their predecessors did 100 years ago.

## EmpowHER Legacy and this evaluation

Following the success of EmpowHER, Spirit of 2012 provided further funding to UK Youth to deliver and evaluate EmpowHER Legacy. We sought to understand how the EmpowHER model could be scaled and embedded in the youth sector.

Further detail can be found in the EmpowHER Legacy Final Report, including key definitions, more background on the programme, our approach to evaluation, detailed findings, acknowledgements and a bibliography.

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