



**SPIRIT OF 2012**  
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS

# INSPIRING A GENERATION

**LESSONS FROM FUNDING YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION  
AND VOLUNTEERING IN UK EVENTS**



**AUGUST 2024**

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# INTRODUCTION

**Spirit of 2012 was established in 2013 with a £47 million National Lottery Community Fund endowment to continue the pride and positivity that people felt across the UK following the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.**

Building on the 'Inspiring a Generation' theme of London 2012, and the widely celebrated success of the Games Makers, our charitable objects include commitments to:

- the advancement of the education of children and young people including but not limited to sporting and cultural activities to encourage good citizenship
- increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Voluntary Sector by encouraging members of the public to engage in activities to help others on a voluntary basis

This report is about the combination of those two objectives: ways that young people can get involved in events as volunteers and social action participants. It is aimed at:

- Event organisers, commissioners and funders who want to increase youth representation in their volunteer workforce, or design a youth specific strand;
- Funders and bid writers looking for evidence about the impact of youth event volunteering;
- Youth organisations thinking about how events could best provide a platform for benefiting young people, and for working in partnership with others

There are strong, interconnected reasons for encouraging young people to volunteer at events:

- 1. Young people can be valuable members of the volunteer workforce:** events need volunteers, and young people can be an important part of this volunteer workforce.
- 2. Events benefit from diverse perspectives:** young people don't speak all of one voice, but having a diverse volunteer base, including diversity of age, as well as disability, class and culture, brings a wider variety of ideas – and can help the event appeal to different audiences, too.
- 3. Young people themselves will benefit in a range of ways** from improved wellbeing, skills and employment and increased confidence.
- 4. It's a highly visible form of volunteering,** so can improve positive perceptions about young people.
- 5. It could start a habit for life:** evidence from the #iwill Fund suggests starting volunteering in early life makes it more likely that you will be an engaged and active citizen throughout life.

In **Part One** (pages 4-25) of this report, we bring together evidence from across ten years of grant making to share the impact and achievements of events-based youth volunteering programmes. In this section you will find outcomes data, case studies and stories that demonstrate what's possible.

In **Part Two** (pages 26-37) we share learning from these grants about what has worked well, and what has not worked so well. We identify some of the common challenges and how they can be overcome.

### What do we mean by event volunteering?

This report includes examples of:

- 1. Volunteering at events:** Getting involved in the "official" event volunteer programme that goes alongside a major national event, or a formal role such as stewarding or first aid at regular events.
- 2. Volunteering inspired by an event:** Taking part in community activity, fundraising or campaigning following the 'spark' of a local or national event.
- 3. Designing and delivering youth-led events:** Many events themselves are volunteer-run, and young people can take the lead in putting events on for other young people and/or the community as a whole.

Events can involve young people in a whole range of ways. They're important as spectators, audience members, and participants. The education programme from the London 2012 Games, Get Set, is still going strong, and several other events, including Liverpool's activities for Eurovision 2023, have developed education programmes for their city and beyond. Sixteen to twenty-four-year-olds are an important part of the workforce, and we've seen events increasingly think about how to offer apprenticeships and training that opens up new career opportunities. All of these are important ways that events can continue the promise of London 2012 to 'Inspire A Generation'. We've focused this report specifically on youth volunteering and social action but please check out the Spirit of 2012 website for more evidence about the ways young people can be involved in events.





# PART ONE: IMPACT



Since 2013, Spirit of 2012 has directly supported over 60,000 volunteering opportunities connected to events across the UK. 57% of these have been for people under the age of 25.

This first section covers some of the achievements and benefits of supporting young people into volunteering.

It begins by looking at the benefits to young people (wellbeing, skills and employment, other).

It then looks at different types of wider community benefit: both the direct benefit of the actual volunteering and the broader societal benefits of increasing youth engagement in pro-social activities.

## What kinds of youth volunteering have we funded?

With funding from Spirit of 2012, young people have been an important part of the volunteering workforce of national events such as Hull 2017's "blue army", the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, the Women of the World Festivals or the first national Thank You Day.

They've taken inspiration for sporting and cultural moments to develop their own activities for their communities, through projects such as the LGA's Team London Young Ambassadors (London 2012), RFU's Spirit of Rugby (Men's Rugby World Cup 2015), Youth Sport Trust and Sporting Equals' Breaking Boundaries (Cricket World Cups 2017 & 2019) and UK Youth's EmpowHER (2018 Centenary of Women's Suffrage).

They've also created and delivered their own events, from a community event to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement (Our Lives Our Legacy, Springboard), to twelve spoken word festivals commemorating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death across the Midlands (Emerge, Mighty Creatives).

Some of the organisations we've worked with have been youth organisations designing projects solely for young people, others have been interested in how to open up their volunteering opportunities to a younger audience.

We have supported organisations from Team GB the British Red Cross, and StreetGames to the London Legacy Development Corporation to continue to build on their London 2012 legacy through youth social action, and integrated youth volunteering directly into our own decision making through our youth panel. In many projects, included through our youth panel, young people have been delegated budget to spend on activities or commission their own grants.

These projects are varied, and the majority have their own evaluations which describe their outcomes and learning (see [Spirit of 2012 website](#)). This summary brings together their achievements, and explores how different types of volunteering opportunity have led to different outcomes.



## BENEFITS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

### Wellbeing

Spirit of 2012 has had a particular focus on the wellbeing benefits of volunteering, funding the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's Rapid Evidence Review of adult volunteering and wellbeing in 2020. Young people's subjective wellbeing, along with associated measures such as loneliness, has been in decline in the UK over the past 15 years. There are competing theories about what has caused this and how to reverse the trend. Our contribution to this is broadly summed up as 'investing in happiness' - looking at how to engage more young people in fun, social activities which wider research indicates can help support wellbeing. Evidence from our youth social action funding suggests that volunteering can have a significant impact on personal wellbeing.

**Before I was on this project, I was always in the house...I was an outsider, introverted... but since being on this project, I've been getting out, talking to others, socialising... this project has helped me achieve things"**  
Swansea Volunteer,  
Inclusive Future

Whilst grantholders each produce their own individual evaluation plans, we have asked all grants to measure their wellbeing impact using ONS4. These measure, which allows projects to compare their cohorts with national average data. It asks four questions:

### Life Satisfaction

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

### Worthwhile

Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

### Happiness

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

### Anxiety

On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Note that these measures were developed for over 16s, although many of our funded projects have found them suitable for younger teenagers (though not younger children). The What Works Centre for Wellbeing has published further advice on measuring children's wellbeing for those interested in more comprehensive advice.

The ONS has acknowledged these measures are not always suitable for neurodivergent people or people with learning disabilities.

Projects that are delivered to a whole school, or where recruitment is less targeted, are likely to see lower overall increases in wellbeing, because the starting point will be higher. They may - as we observed in some of our physical activity volunteer programmes - start with high levels of wellbeing, perhaps because of their existing participation in other positive activities such as sport, or for wider socio-economic factors. If the main purpose of a project is to increase wellbeing, then this needs to be factored into recruitment.

However, in less targeted projects it may still be that those with low starting points gained the most from these programmes, and that these effects are less detectable at an aggregate level. Most of our projects did not collect quantitative data with matched sample that would have allowed this level of analysis.

Youth volunteering projects are not always designed to improve subjective wellbeing, nor should they be - there are a range of other benefits for both young people and the wider community which make them worthwhile

whether or not they have a wellbeing focus. Furthermore, providing young people with good access to a range of positive social activities - physical activity, creative arts etc alongside volunteering - can support young people to maintain good wellbeing. Rather than being positioned as a targeted intervention, programmes that argue for this approach tend to aim for widespread reach, with low barriers to entry and a sustainable financial model that can run regular activities over the long term.

Schemes like Team London Young Ambassadors, which we funded between 2014 and 2016 and is still going strong, supports social action in London schools by offering individual school assemblies, workshops and follow-up activity, together with large-scale youth summits and the opportunity for young people to attend the annual flagship We Day event. Schools had access to interactive handbooks introducing students to social action, and took part in an awards scheme recognising the volunteering efforts of young people. Schools were also supported by Borough Ambassadors - adult volunteers recruited and trained by Team London - who helped students and teachers identify volunteering projects in the local area.

The focus of the project was engaging young people in social action to address local needs, but through this model participants saw growth in wellbeing and social cohesion, as well as increased participation in arts, culture and physical activity.





### Inclusive Futures, Youth Sport Trust

**Inclusive Futures** was a leadership and volunteering programme which aimed to give disabled and non-disabled young people aged 14-19-years-old the opportunity to work alongside each other to support and deliver inclusive sport and physical activities in schools and communities. It supported 1441 young people to volunteer, 43% of whom were disabled. In addition to the wellbeing increases shown in the survey (see table), testimony from volunteers demonstrate how the project supported increased social connections and self-belief. The project supported young people to take up regular sports club volunteering, and also ran a National Camp in 2015 and regional training camps for volunteers. Volunteers and staff at partner organisations describe how the project successfully created an inclusive atmosphere. "Before I was on this project, I was always in the house...I was an outsider, introverted...but since being on this project, I've been getting out, talking to others, socialising... this project has helped me achieve things" Swansea Volunteer.

The evaluation also describes increases in understanding and empathy from non-disabled participants towards their disabled peers. A member of staff from Disability Sport Wales noted, "Non-disabled kids have had their perceptions changed about disabled young people, and had their eyes opened about what their challenges might be."

**“Non-disabled kids have had their perceptions changed about disabled young people, and had their eyes opened about what their challenges might be.”**

53% of volunteers said they had a much more positive view of disabled people because of taking part in Inclusive Futures. Volunteers were also more likely to think disabled people have a lot to offer society. The proportion strongly agreeing with this statement almost doubled from 32% to 63%. Perhaps wellbeing increases amongst disabled people are in part a response to greater recognition and respect.

### Wellbeing data from Inclusive Futures, 2013-2015 (n=88)

Wellbeing measure	Volunteers (matched) baseline survey average	Volunteers (matched) endpoint survey average	National average
Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?	2.6	1.7	2.9
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?	6.9	7.9	7.4
Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	7.1	8.2	7.7
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	7.1	8.1	7.5

### EmpowHER, UK Youth

In funding UK Youth's EmpowHER project we examined whether encouraging girls to take part in youth social action could be a way of addressing the wellbeing gap between girls and boys. We were particularly interested in reaching girls with below-average wellbeing (though not necessarily 'poor mental health') to see if positive, socially focused activity could make a difference.

EmpowHER deliberately set out to recruit girls with lower wellbeing to the programme, with youth workers encouraging girls who they thought would benefit to get involved. The project saw girls complete at least 30 hours of social learning and social action over a period of around 3 months. In Cohorts 1, 2 and 4 over 90% of girls completed the programme; during Cohort 3 at the height of COVID, 77% of girls completed it.

64% of girls saw improvements in their wellbeing, and there was a bigger difference for those who had a lower starting point. The evaluation also showed larger positive changes for girls from deprived areas, girls from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, and those with more barriers to participation.

The evaluation highlighted several key mechanics responsible for this change including: regular participation, with at least 30 hours of engagement across a minimum of 12 weeks; small group sizes of between 7-12; same gender group and age range; closed, safe spaces; a consistent group of young women and girls, and youth workers; a non-judgemental and relaxed environment; a flexible environment tailored to the needs of participants; direct or indirect engagement with EmpowHER young women and girls and community members.





## OUR LIVES OUR LEGACY, SPRINGBOARD

Springboard, a youth organisation in Belfast, worked with fifteen young people on a project to reflect on and mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in 2023. The group found out more about the history of the agreement, and its impact on both sides of the sectarian divide. The midpoint of the project was a fantastic event for 165 people of all ages, held in the Crumlin Road Gaol on the UN International Day of Peace. The young people had creative control and organisational responsibility for the event, which included poetry, music and voting booths re-running the 1998 referendum.

The wellbeing changes between the start and end of the project were dramatic, as show in the table below. It is interesting that two very different anniversaries – women’s suffrage and the Good Friday Agreement – both appear to have led to projects with large wellbeing impacts. Both provided opportunity for reflection on how far things had come, and what young people still felt needed to change.

### Northern Ireland and UK figures are taken from average ratings for year end March 2023 Personal well-being in the UK – Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

	Life Satisfaction			Life is Worthwhile			Happiness			Anxiety			Confidence		
	Start	End	%	Start	End	%	Start	End	%	Start	End	%	Start	End	%
NexGen Group	4.1	8.2	↑ 101	3.7	8.6	↑ 130	4.0	8.5	↑ 111	4.1	2.6	↓ 37	4.8	8.1	↑ 82
Northern Ireland	7.6			7.9			7.6			2.9			N/A		
UK	7.4			7.7			7.4			3.3			N/A		

## SKILLS & EMPLOYMENT

Employability and skills development are frequently mentioned as a benefit of volunteering. Survey evidence from our report into event volunteering showed that there are more important benefits for young volunteers than older volunteers: 59% of 18-24-year-olds and 49% of 25-34-year-olds said they would be more likely to volunteer if they knew it would improve their skills or job prospects, compared with 34% of all **survey respondents**.

Major events often benefit from a structured volunteer training programme, with funding which might be out of reach for smaller organisations to provide for their regular volunteers. This gives them a particular opportunity to develop skills of their young recruits in ways that would benefit both the volunteers, and the wider volunteering infrastructure if they continue to use those skills in future opportunities.

Some projects have supported young people to gain formal qualifications or recognition through their volunteering for example Team Spirit (England Athletics) supported 95 under 25s to gain coaching or officiating qualifications, whilst the most popular volunteering opportunity offered the British Red Cross Inspired Action was event first aid (293 young people were trained to deliver this).

There are several examples of projects where the volunteering experience has inspired young people to think about a future career. As a volunteer on the Women of the World project in Cardiff explained, “I’ve loved doing WOW and when I was telling my family about wow they were saying how I should go into this line of work because I just lit up when talking about it [...] I never really knew what I wanted to do for work. Just knew I like talking to people and helping people. And this festival kinda opened my eyes into this is something that I’d love to do.”

Of the 33 volunteers interviewed at the end of the Spirit of Rugby project, 16 said they had changed their career plans as a result of being part of the project, and 24 (73%) said they had made contacts who would be useful in their future career.

The Inclusive Futures evaluation provides the case study of Sultan, 21, who attributed his volunteering experience to helping him find employment after a series of knock-backs. The volunteer coordinator supported his application to Coach Core (through Glasgow Sport) where he was offered a one-year, 50% work, and 50% training apprenticeship. The evaluation report states, “Sultan is certain that without the Inclusive Futures Programme, he wouldn’t have made this important step on his career path: “[If I hadn’t had the opportunity to volunteer] right now, I would be lost, to be honest with you”.”

The largest number of young volunteers recruited through our funding was for UK Active’s Sports Leaders programme, one of the direct legacy grants from London 2012 made by Big Lottery (as was), and novated to Spirit after we were founded. Jointly funded with Asda, it trained over 7,000 young people to volunteer in sports clubs and schools, supporting them to acquire a formal sports leadership qualification.

Not all young people will be able to identify the ways in which volunteering improves their skills or how they could use their experiences as a volunteer when job hunting. Project staff can use the evaluation process to explicitly support young people in how to talk about their skills and achievements in ways that are advantageous in the employment market.



## YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Several of our projects have supported young people to take an active role in shaping the events they are volunteering at.

- **Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games:** StreetGames supported seventeen young people (aged 17-25) to act as 'young advisors' on Camp Glasgow, a project which brought 521 young people to Glasgow to experience the Commonwealth Games.
- **Coventry 2021 City of Culture:** Eight young producers led the CVX festival, a two-day festival in the heart of the city. As one young producer explained in the run up, *"This is a real-life experience, I like workshops but this is something that I can be a part of that's more professional. As a young producer it's been stressful but fun. From thinking about my own ideas and then seeing it all come together it's a really nice experience and gives me a lot of hope."*
- **Women of the World Festivals:** Two thirds of the 140 volunteers who supported WOW festivals in Norwich, Perth, Cardiff, Exeter and Bradford were aged 25 and under. The 'WOWsers' were involved in deciding the programme to ensure it reflected a diverse range of young people's perspectives. Many WOWsers took advantage of mentoring opportunities with older volunteers and speakers. In Bradford, the girls went on to found their own initiative, Speakers Corner, to continue organising events.

This type of leadership was often undertaken by young people who had been in regular, volunteering roles within an organisation for a long time. Most of the seventeen young advisors working on Camp Glasgow for instance had been volunteering with their local StreetGames for two plus years. In other instances, projects were taking place over

a prolonged period of time, allowing young people to gradually build up their level of contribution or leadership – Coventry City of Culture Trust began trialling ways of getting young people getting involved in the Coventry City of Culture programme back in 2019 (more than two years before the CVX festival), partnering with Positive Youth Foundation, a Coventry-based youth work charity. The young people's relationship with Positive Youth Foundation had an even longer history – they were trusted local partners who bridged young people's involvement with the City of Culture Trust.

The case study of Camp Glasgow produced by InFocus, as part of Spirit's first three-year evaluation, describes the relationship between the outcomes of volunteering at an event, and the outcomes of volunteering longer term:

**“Our interpretation is that the Camp was an arena in which the young people brought into their practice (of design and delivery) the capabilities with which their much longer StreetGames engagement equipped them. The Camp was a moment in their personal history of engagement. Without the Camp, they would not have demonstrated this to other young people who attended, to the local partners or to the organisation. In our view, one may only understand the Camp and its significance in relation to this longer-term process of enablement and maturation that the organisation fostered. For the young volunteers themselves, the two are ‘part and parcel’ of the same process”**

### EVENTS: AN ENTRY POINT FOR LONG TERM VOLUNTEERING, OR A PROGRESSION OPPORTUNITY?

Some of our project evaluations suggest that event volunteering could be a good starting point for attracting young people who haven't thought about volunteering before (e.g. UK Youth's Inspire 2022). This is also an idea we've explored for adult volunteers in our 2021 [report about event volunteering](#), which posits that people might be initially attracted by the glamour or significance of a major event, and then get hooked on volunteering and want to continue post-event.

In addition, young people who have not volunteered before perhaps stand most to gain from event volunteer programmes, above those who have perhaps acquired the skills and wellbeing benefits outlined above from volunteering in other opportunities.

However, some of the evidence covered in this section, including from Camp Glasgow, suggests that where young people are taking on leadership roles, for example designing events or running activities, then a longer history of volunteering could be beneficial. Event leadership could be the next step on a "volunteer journey" after more prescribed opportunities.

Overall, youth leadership opportunities provide a high degree of ownership from young people, are good for concrete skills development, and are a good progression opportunity for young people who are already regular volunteers. They provide young people with a sense of ownership over the ideas, which links to empowerment and community engagement outcomes we discuss later in the report.

However, getting youth leadership right is time intensive for staff and so not necessarily a solution for organisations looking to fill gaps in their volunteering workforce. It could be stressful for participants, so thought needs to be given to how this relates to planned wellbeing outcomes. There are also question marks about the boundaries between paid and unpaid opportunities, and when young people should be remunerated for their time. Since we were founded, we have seen an increase in the number of youth panels and advisory boards that are remunerating for their time (not just recompensed for out-of-pocket expenses) rather than advertising these as volunteering positions.



## BENEFITS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Projects have described community benefits in a wide variety of ways, including:

- Numbers of events they helped to make happen
- Audience and attendee numbers at those events
- Hours of volunteering time
- Money and awareness raised for good causes
- Examples of changes brought about by having a more diverse volunteer workforce
- Activities that would not have happened without young volunteers' ideas

This page provides a sample of case studies of community impact to demonstrate this variety.

One question is what we mean by “the community”. This could be people who attend events and activities run by young people, beneficiaries of a particular cause, or a wider place-based community who benefit indirectly over the short and long term from young people being involved in positive activities. We have observed that young people (and/or those working with them) often conceive of the main beneficiaries of their activities as being other young people. However, we have seen significant benefits where young people have been encouraged to work with and for the benefit of the wider community.

In general, traditional event volunteering is easier to quantify and aggregate than event based social action, where the wide variety of individual youth-led projects is often evaluated by asking young participants to describe whether they think they have had an impact and define what it is.



### INSPIRE 22, UK YOUTH

In total, 321 youth-led events were delivered across the UK through Inspire 2022, with reported community impacts ranging from the MK Dons youth group leading dementia walk & talks, to a ‘Cooking Across Continents’ collaboration between Brighton & Hove Youth Council and the Network of International Women for Brighton & Hove, to an LGBTQ+ event coinciding with the FIFA World Cup in order to highlight Qatar’s poor record on gay rights. Over half of the events sought to raise awareness about a particular issue close to the young people’s hearts (e.g. mental health, climate action, healthy lifestyles) whilst 9% of the events raised money for good causes.

**321**  
YOUTH-LED EVENTS WERE  
DELIVERED ACROSS THE UK  
THROUGH INSPIRE 2022

### BREAKING BOUNDARIES, YOUTH SPORT TRUST

The 379 young people who became “Community Champions” through Breaking Boundaries took part in 3864 hours of volunteering across the course of the project. The projects young people took part in were hugely varied: from JJ, young hijab-wearing Black woman, giving advice to other young women about how to navigate conversations with sceptical parents in order to pursue a career in sport, to a partnership between a youth club, women’s club and homeless charity to provide Christmas meals. The programme overall intended to improve social cohesion between people from different ethnic and religious groups, and was successful at recruiting young volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds.

**379**  
YOUNG PEOPLE WHO BECAME  
“COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS”  
THROUGH BREAKING BOUNDARIES  
TOOK PART IN 3864 HOURS  
OF VOLUNTEERING



### CRITICAL MASS

The young people from Critical Mass were part of the opening ceremony for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, part of a now-established tradition to include a mass cast of volunteer ‘amateurs’ alongside professional performers. The main benefit that this project set out to create for the community was in challenging and changing perceptions of disability, for both audiences watching the performances, and for event organisers increasing their understanding of how to work with a fully inclusive cast. The project set a new standard for what is possible, and its [evaluation report](#) and [playbook](#) set out detailed learning about the project’s achievements, and areas where practice can still improve. “My inclusive practice awareness completely revolutionised through working not just on Critical Mass, but with [the inclusion champion] ... so that is now part of me, and my life, which was not necessarily there before ... I learned new models and ways to build structures to support the individual and the group come together as a company.”



**EMERGE, THE MIGHTY CREATIVES**

The youth led arts festivals had the potential to be significant events in the 12 Midlands towns which hosted them. The **evaluation report** describes how in one town, Cannock Chase, the Library and Town Centre Partnership collaborated to expand the scale of the festival, and bring its activities right into the heart of the high street. It concludes, "The festival has built momentum and confidence within the Town Centre Partnership and community more widely to incorporate arts events as a key part of a new programme animation in the centre of Cannock. The Emerge programme has provided a model which has highlighted the positive contribution that local children and young people can provide in developing and ideas and content for local arts events." Artists working on the festival in other towns noted that local businesses had supported the project, recognising how the Emerge festivals could be part of efforts to revitalise the high street.



**WOW, SOUTHBANK CENTRE**

68 young "WOWsers" supported the development and delivery of WOW festivals in 5 UK Cities, alongside 72 adult volunteers. As a core part of the event volunteer workforce, the young women helped to make the event enjoyable and educational for over 9000 participants. The WOWsers were actively involved in shaping the programme, platforming content to inspire audiences – and perhaps inspire some to take their own action on gender equality. The events brought new audiences into culturally significant venues in the host cities (1/3 of attendees).

**68**  
 YOUNG "WOWSERS" SUPPORTED THE DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF WOW FESTIVALS IN 5 UK CITIES, ALONGSIDE 72 ADULT VOLENTEERS



**TEAM SPIRIT, ENGLAND ATHLETICS**

397 young people took part in Gamechangers, the youth strand of England Athletics' wider work to diversify their volunteering workforce. The Chair of Bedford and County Cricket Club, which recruited 11 new young volunteers as part of Gamechangers, explained, "The project has been fundamental in changing the success and dynamics of Beagles (their sessions for 8-11-year-olds). We now have 60 young athletes attending Beagles and a waiting list. This would not have been possible without the 11 Game Changer young coaching assistant volunteers whose enthusiasm inspires the Beagles athletes."

**397**  
 YOUNG PEOPLE TOOK PART IN GAMECHANGERS



## BRIDGING DIVIDES

Event volunteering also has an important role in bridging divides: between young people from different backgrounds, between young people and adults, and between young people and institutions or 'the community' as a whole.

Belong – The Cohesion and Integration Network – has published a **toolkit** and evidence summary exploring the relationship between volunteering and social cohesion. The report finds, “consistent support for a positive relationship between volunteering engagement and social cohesion, based on survey data, case studies and cross-sectional research”, though the evidence cannot explain the “direction of causality” of these relationships.

Our youth volunteering projects fit in well with many of themes Belong describe as important for social connection such as sense of belonging, positive feelings towards others and civic pride. Both pre-/post- survey data and qualitative evidence suggests that there is a causal relationship between young people volunteering, and increases in these social cohesion indicators.

### Between young people of different backgrounds

Collaborating around a shared positive goal supports young people to realise they have more in common.

Several projects supported disabled and non-disabled volunteers to participate together on an equal basis. The evaluation of the Youth Sport Trust's Inclusive Futures project says that this has supported non-disabled young people to broaden their understanding about the barriers faced by disabled people, as well as increased volunteers' understanding of inclusive practice. The British Red Cross, who led Inspired Action, went on to produce an excellent **toolkit** sharing the learning of how to make large scale volunteering more inclusive.

On EmpowHER, there was an increase in the number of girls who agreed they met people “*who are different to me*” (average score of 6.9/10 pre-programme to 7.8/10 post-programme, n=911). A youth worker explained, “The biggest thing I've noticed is that it's brought the white and the Asian girls together. They don't usually mix; they live in different areas, go to different schools and a lot of the Muslim girls don't do anything outside of school. They thought they wouldn't get on but once they tried, they were fine.”

Whilst in some projects, this social mixing seemed to be an organic by-product of the volunteering activity, in other cases – perhaps where divides were more entrenched, or time together was short – a more structured approach to mixing was needed. This was especially the case with Our Lives Our Legacy, a project delivered by Springboard which supported fifteen young people in Belfast to reflect on the Good Friday Agreement, twenty-five years on. The staff at Springboard are highly skilled at cross community working.

Bridging divides was an explicit feature of Breaking Boundaries, which sought to bring young people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds together over a shared love of cricket. Over the course of the programme, the Youth Sport Trust adapted delivery to encourage greater interaction between different groups, finding that young people were more reticent to step outside the comfort zone of existing friendships without strong encouragement. For example, groups of young people were initially able to apply for funding to run their social action activities via the main youth organisation or school that they attended, but in the final year they were paired with another youth group to collaborate on a joint project.

### Across generations

Several projects also interviewed adult community members and found that that seeing young people volunteering also positively affected their attitude towards young people in general. Event volunteering is a highly visible form of volunteering, so we suggest it is likely to be particularly effective at producing this spillover effect of increasing adults' positive perceptions of young people than other forms of youth volunteering which many not be noticed by the public at large.

- Many event volunteering opportunities involve wearing a uniform, which helps the public to identify those people who are making a difference in their community. Its role is arguably analogous how uniformed youth groups tend to be seen more positively because they are part of something with a clear, civic-orientated identity. The Hull 2017 volunteer evaluation makes clear how important the uniform was to both volunteers, and to the public.

- 66% youth workers said EmpowHER enhanced and improved relationships between young people and the local community.

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**“I felt really taken care of right at the start. Basically, like any young person at that point... All the other [volunteers] were quite older ... and they kind of just looked after me.”**

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- Artists on Emerge noted that the project design allowed both teenage participants and early career artists to develop alongside each other: “Emerge seems pretty unique as a project on this scale, particularly with the double prong of engagement and opportunity ... there's both opportunity for young people and for the artist. So that's two generations of people who can do things better. It's really nurturing and development focused”.





In Hull 2017, friendships between different generations are a clear feature of the final evaluation. 14% of Hull's volunteer cohort were between aged 16 and 24. Corey, who was 16 when he started volunteering for Hull 2017 and completed 193 shifts throughout the year, explained that there were "about 35 or so" people who "I'll keep in touch with and speak to throughout my life ... They've the same outlook in life ... have the same sense of humour and that. They're all older people." He went on to explain how the environment had helped nurture connections between volunteers from different ages. "I felt really taken care of right at the start. Basically, like any young person at that point... All the other [volunteers] were quite older ... and they kind of just looked after me." A quote from another volunteer demonstrates this caring attitude that helped foster a sense of belonging. "When you sort of volunteered with somebody early on in the year and then you don't see them for ages and ages, and then the next time you see them you think, "Wow, you've blossomed." Particularly some of the younger volunteers, but not just the younger volunteers."

For some grants, intergenerational work was at the heart of the project. In Le Grand Depart, a £12,000 grant to the Sporting Memories Foundation, young people were supported to gather memories from older people at an event to mark the first anniversary of the Tour De Yorkshire. Guest of honour was 84-year-old Brian Robson, the first Britain to compete in (and win a stage!) of the Tour De France. The evaluation report noted, "There is a strong sense with SMF is that it has struck gold in matching an existing (and indeed, increasing) need for holistic care and meaningful activities for older people with dementia, and the ongoing need to develop young people's potential and build communities by connecting generations, with a targeted and precise intervention." The conversations opened the

doorway for meaningful connections across the generations. One teacher observed that the older people had enjoyed finding out how much the girls enjoyed football, and had begun following their progress in the league. Teachers observed that the sessions were beneficial to the young people. "There was so many "this is why I went into teaching moments" for me and my colleague just seeing... the way some of our young people really had to get out of their comfort zones and really challenge themselves." The project evaluation noted that some teachers intended to carry on the connection to the residential homes into the new academic year

**"There is a strong sense with SMF is that it has struck gold in matching an existing (and indeed, increasing) need for holistic care and meaningful activities for older people with dementia, and the ongoing need to develop young people's potential and build communities by connecting generations, with a targeted and precise intervention."**

## PRIDE OF PLACE

Across our volunteering and youth social action projects, some of the strongest survey increases have been in measures that relate to social trust, belonging and community engagement. This evidence supports wider research that suggests working together to improve the community will make you feel more connected to it.

Projects were provided with a list of option questions to understand this outcome, including:

# 1

To what extent do you agree or disagree that this local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?

# 2

Do you feel that your views are heard by members of your community?

# 3

Please rate how much you agree/disagree with the following statement: can make a difference in my community

# 4

Please rate how much you agree/disagree with the following statement: I feel positive about participating in my community

# 5

Please rate how proud you feel of your contribution to your community (Very proud, Mostly proud, Occasionally proud, Not at all proud)



**Examples include:**

**Inspire 2022:** The project saw substantial increases in the sorts of measures that appear in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities then follow with the acronym (now MHCLG) civic pride theory of change. After working together to put on a community event, 70% of young people said they feel that their voices are likely to be heard in local decision-making, up by 37% from the 33% who stated this at the beginning. We saw a 17% increase in young people telling us that 'people from different backgrounds now get on well together' from 52% to 69%, and an 18% increase in young people feeling 'proud of their local area' from 65% to 83%.

Young people also indicated that their civic engagement would continue - 83% of young people on Inspire 2022 said they would now participate in community events, up by 33% from the 50% who said they would at the beginning, and 88% said they would be more likely to participate in further social action. The project team found less change around measures about whether young people cared about their local area and felt positive about making a difference - these were at 94% and 86% at the start of the project, and remained at 94% and increased to 88% respectively at the end of the project. This is likely to be because the project attracted people who wanted to make a change - but does also suggest there are high levels of willingness of young people to get involved to improve their area, if provided with the opportunity, resources and trust to do so.

**70%**  
OF YOUNG PEOPLE SAID THEY FEEL THAT THEIR VOICES ARE LIKELY TO BE HEARD IN LOCAL DECISION- MAKING

**Inclusive Futures:** 1441 young volunteers were recruited to support physical activity projects in eight cities across the UK. Pre and post event survey data found an increase in the proportion of young people who agreed that they can make a difference in the community, from 64% agreeing or strongly agreeing at baseline to 91% agreeing at endline. Those selecting strongly agree increased from 14% to 56%. 77% said they felt more strongly connected to their community as a result of participating in the programme. The evaluation used a matched sample of base and endline responses with a sample of 88 respondents.

**1441**  
YOUNG VOLUNTEERS WERE RECRUITED TO SUPPORT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROJECTS IN EIGHT CITIES ACROSS THE UK

**77%**  
SAID THEY FELT MORE STRONGLY CONNECTED TO THEIR COMMUNITY AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAMME

**Fourteen (UKCF and Springboard):** Fourteen initially ran as a three-year programme across the UK set up to mark the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. Fourteen communities set up 'Local Reference Groups' to distribute grant funding to support local priorities. Overall the project involved over 5000 volunteers of all ages. Young people were involved in decision-making about community priorities alongside older adults. In Islay and Jura, a dedicated Youth Inquiry was set up for young people to share their priorities. Feedback to the evaluators from the local organisers explained, "This single event led to a systemic change around support infrastructure in the community for young people." The evaluation report states, "The inquiry [led to the] young people having to think emotionally and empathetically about a wide range of issues, in particular disability, and encouraged them to actively participate with other services in the community. One example is six young people who took an idea they had voiced in the enquiry to learn sign language and have now started volunteering with a local support service, utilising this skill."

There is some evidence in our evaluations that the young people who got involved in volunteering and social action were already fairly positive about their community and felt pride in it. It would have been beneficial to have a deeper look at those with higher levels of disengagement to pinpoint some of the reasons why their views changed - or indeed, the reasons why they did not.

There is also a wider literature that events themselves contribute to social cohesion for the people who attend them - the topic of our **learning partnership with Belong** - so the young volunteers who help make the events happen are a vital part of this outcome, too.

## CONCLUSIONS: WHY SUPPORT EVENTS-BASED VOLUNTEERING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

- Volunteering has a wide range of positive impacts on young people, including skills development and increased wellbeing. Different project designs will likely lead to different outcomes, and no one project needs to do it all.
- Formal events-based volunteering provides structured, time-bound opportunities with well-funded training and support.
- Event volunteers are often highly visible to members of the public, making it an ideal way of challenging negative perceptions some older people have about young people
- Event-based volunteering supports young people to feel more connected to their communities, as well as benefiting the community more broadly. It is correlated with high social cohesion.





# PART TWO: LEARNING



Where Part One set out the achievements of event volunteering programmes working with young people, Part Two sets out key learning – including from those things that didn’t go as planned.

The projects covered in this section differ in their approach to engaging young people and their design of volunteering opportunities. Some sought to integrate young people into

a wider volunteer workforce, whilst others supported the creation of volunteering or youth social action opportunities specifically for young people.

These two different types of events-based volunteering tends to provide different opportunities and challenges, summarised in the table below.

Specific events-based volunteering programmes for young people	Young people included as part of a wider cohort of volunteers of all ages
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
Allows programme to be delivered by youth workers / those with experience working with young people.	Helps reach the numbers needed to run the event effectively.
Can support young people’s ideas and promote youth leadership.	Promotes intergenerational connection.
Can focus on targeted outreach to specific groups.	Helps volunteer workforce more accurately reflect the participant base/audience.
Can plan activities around school and/or university calendars	Young volunteers may have skills and experiences that the older volunteers lack (and vice versa).
Can be more specific with training and support.	Gives an opportunity for young people to be involved in and feel part a significant moment where they live.
Often includes opportunity for young people to pitch ideas and manage budgets/grants.	If volunteering initiatives aim to increase skills or employment: young people are more likely to be motivated by this potential benefit than older adults (and less likely to have acquired the skills already through their work).
<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Perpetuates idea that young people need bespoke support – may make it less likely that opportunities are made more available to them within all-ages volunteering schemes.	May not allow for sufficient, tailored support.
Separates out young people from “the community”.	Different age groups have different demands on their time, and demands of event may make these difficult to reconcile.
Can lead to introspective projects focused solely on young people’s issues.	Roles often require quite a lot of structure, and perhaps more autonomy.
Time-intensive - question marks around whether this is suitable for organisations with stretched capacity who need volunteers.	Safeguarding considerations more complex (though not insurmountable!).
Difficulty in navigating the balance between youth-led, with a focus on learning with the demands of a high-quality event.	Potentially less focus on the individual outcomes and more on the needs of the particular event.
	Potentially fewer opportunities for youth leadership.
	Volunteer Manager may not be youth engagement expert.
	Potential scepticism about whether younger volunteers will be effective.
	Potential increased expectations on small number of volunteers and/or volunteer managers to accommodate requirements of young volunteers.

## YOUNG ENGAGEMENT IN WIDER VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE

Several of the event volunteering opportunities we have funded were not specifically aimed at young people, but the project team or organising committee wanted to include young people as part of a diverse workforce of all ages.

The British Red Cross, Hull 2017, Birmingham 2022, England Athletics and the Jo Cox Foundation are all examples of organisations that wanted to increase the proportion of their volunteer workforce who were under 25.

While Hull 2017 did this as part of their main volunteering programme through advertising in places such as the University of Hull, Birmingham 2022 also ran a separate volunteer programme, Generation 2022, to reach 1000 young people who may not have been able to participate in the main Commonwealth Collective. The British Red Cross and England Athletics developed specific projects to increase the number of young people in their volunteer workforce, tailoring the volunteer recruitment process and available roles. The Jo Cox Foundation ran consultation with younger people to understand more about why they may or may not be attracted to volunteering as part of the Great Get Together movement.

One recurring question was whether young people had different needs to adult volunteers. Whilst not all volunteering opportunities will be suitable for all age groups, The British Red Cross found that there were more roles than they had expected which could be opened up to young(er) people, first with Inspired Action, which focused on over 16s, and then extending their learning to how 10–15-year-olds could get involved as part of their work on EmpowHER.

Some of projects that most successfully recruited volunteers under the age of 25 did not have “increasing youth volunteering” as a set aim. Get Out Get Active (Activity Alliance) for example had 30% of volunteers under the age of 25, while 14-NOW (Springboard) had 32%. These projects had a broader commitment to inclusive volunteering, with a low barrier to entry, flexible roles and an emphasis on helping out in ways that worked for the individual rather than requiring set times – factors that worked for young people, as well as others with barriers to participation. Neighbourly Lab has **produced research and a toolkit** for event organisers and other voluntary sector organisations to support them to think how moving from formal volunteering to “helping out” could broaden the volunteer pool.

However, there will be other groups of young people who prefer the structured, formal training and prestige of the formal event volunteer positions. One challenge for volunteer managers is deciding if and how the volunteering opportunity can be made flexible to allow for different levels of involvement. The UK City of Culture of Culture programmes in Hull and Coventry have been able to do this very well because they had a large pool of volunteers to draw on. This meant volunteers could select the number and exact times of shifts that worked for them, without fear of letting the team down if they couldn't commit to a regular pattern. This is not always possible – many events rely on a small number of volunteers, and indeed may have to cancel if their volunteers cannot commit to regular hours.

In one project some existing volunteers were sceptical about their volunteering opportunity

being opened up to younger volunteers who did not have as much time to dedicate to the events as they did. It is important to take this seriously rather than simply dismiss it: if young volunteers are likely to volunteer fewer hours than older volunteers, but there is still the same amount of work to be done, could this lead to a greater burden being placed on older volunteers, and a question as to whether they could absorb it, or would require greater numbers of volunteers. One consistent theme from the evaluations we've reviewed is that supporting young people into volunteering can take a considerable amount of time. There is clearly a tension between the time and investment it takes to manage volunteers, and the time and overall value they bring to an event, which organisers must take into consideration when they decide to open up their volunteering opportunity.

Project evaluations that emphasise the time and effort it takes to recruit and retain young people to take part in volunteering (and hence the need for a certain level of staffing) may put off other organisations attempting to include young people in the wider volunteer workforce if such resources aren't available or it is seen as over-burdensome and resource intensive.

This area would benefit from more research, for example wellbeing cost-effectiveness analysis to understand, for example, if the benefits to young people of a more time-intensive, youth-led volunteering opportunity were substantially greater than the benefits of a well-run, but less bespoke event volunteer programme.

**“We targeted groups of young people who might not otherwise think about volunteering, or those with additional barriers to taking part, and told them about the opportunities in their local area. Those who were interested in volunteering worked with our engagement managers to decide what they wanted to do. The engagement workers also helped them apply if they needed support. This support might involve the engagement worker speaking with a line manager to get them thinking about what an individual might need in terms of adaptations or support. They might even join the young person for the interview.”**





### Barriers to youth participation in event volunteering

There are several common challenges projects faced in recruiting and retaining young people on event volunteering opportunities. Not all our projects reached as many young people as they initially hoped, for a wide variety of reasons – not least the background context of COVID-19, cost of living pressures and the general decline in the appeal of volunteering that has been noted by NCVO and others.

**1. Timing:** All projects seeking to work with school-aged children have to offer opportunities that fit with the realities of their school timetable, the pattern of school holidays and (for some year groups) exams. Those advertising opportunities to university students may find they are free at odd times of the day, working around lectures and part-time jobs, and that these patterns change each time.

Difficulties with scheduling comes up frequently in learning reports: the reality is that finding the right time for young volunteers to work on a project or give back to their community is a challenge which varies from project to project, and from person to person. Some youth social action we have funded took part during the school day, some straight after school; for some volunteering during the school holidays is impossible, for others it is the ideal opportunity to take part in a time-bound project.

Large scale event volunteering, like Cities of Culture and major sports events, where there are many shifts available, and participation can vary week by week, could work well for young people to help them fit it round other commitments, giving as little or as much time as they feel able.

**2. Retaining volunteers:** Our evaluations express a wide range of different views about the ideal duration of a volunteering opportunity for young people.

Project evaluations dispute the importance of longer-term engagement, versus shorter, more flexible volunteering. Some noted the positive correlation between outcomes reported by young people and the length of time which they were engaged in a project, as well as the importance of relationship building. Inspire 2022's evaluation judged that "the time frames for delivery showed it can take anything from between 3 -12 months to build the relationships with young people to take them from developing their social action idea, to final delivery of the event."

Inspired Action, on the other hand, emphasised the importance of offering shorter-term 'pick-and drop' opportunities, given the reality that some young people would be unable to commit themselves long-term. The project asked young people for a minimum commitment of six months, and found that many stayed on longer. However, they also recognised that for some young people, six months was too great a commitment: "we were keen to express to hesitant volunteers that they could come for a week, and see how they got on. Our service coordinators were supportive of this approach, and we didn't put young people through to the training stage until they had finished their informal taster, and were keen to commit. For young people who were looking for a shorter-term commitment, we were also able to offer them a Social Action Project opportunity."

Many projects noted the challenges of retaining young volunteers long term. Spirit of Rugby's evaluation flagged a fall in the number of 16-24-year-old volunteers who were involved in the project from 89% at the time of baseline to 62% at the end-line. The project noted "A key finding from the most recent survey is the shift of from full-time education and part-time work to full time work among the volunteers. Making the transition from education and part-time work to full-time work is a key milestone, irrespective of their involvement or otherwise in volunteering. Nevertheless, many of the Spirit of Rugby volunteers have made that transition over the course of the project."

Absolutely Cultured's evaluation of the Hull Volunteering Programme noted that "maintaining a pool of younger volunteers can be particularly challenging and retention is often much lower than with other age groups", and more resource-heavy to achieve the same number of volunteers - though they do not provide details here of the variation in attrition rates.



**3. Communications and Marketing:** Several evaluation reports note the importance of good communication and clarity around what is involved in a volunteering opportunity. Finding the right balance and level of communication which suits young volunteers is important.

In Team Spirit's evaluation, just over half (61%) of young volunteers were satisfied with the communications which they received from the clubs which they were involved with as volunteers. In the same project, over one third of the volunteers who stopped volunteering felt that either 'too much was expected of me' or 'their skills were not utilised', illustrating the importance of clear communication.

Inspired Action's Toolkit noted the importance of managing volunteer expectations: "Be clear about you can expect from one another. Give clear role descriptions and use the interview to paint a picture of what volunteering might be like on a typical day. If it is a role that relies heavily on punctuality and commitment, say so. You can also use this time to explain what and how expenses will be paid, whether there are opportunities for training or development, or to move into employment."

**4. Confidence:** Section 1 of this report highlights how often taking part in volunteering led to increases in participants' confidence and self-esteem. However, as Inspired Action's Toolkit points out, taking part in a volunteering opportunity requires a certain level of confidence to begin with. The British Red Cross staff approached recruitment by reaching out young people in their communities and targeting them directly. They did this through a series of 'Inspiration workshops', through which they were able to introduce over 4,000 young people to the programme and to the British Red Cross, presenting volunteering opportunities in a comfortable environment:

"We encouraged attendees to think about the 'double benefit' of volunteering, exploring what they had to offer in terms of personal qualities and time, and what they had to gain in terms of skills and experience. The tone was informal and fun. For some young people who lack confidence, responding to an advert is daunting whereas meeting someone from the Red Cross with a friendly face is welcoming, and encourages them to apply to be a volunteer. The feedback from young people who attended inspiration workshops backs this up. Many said they simply wouldn't have known about volunteering opportunities if we'd not gone and met them. This shows the importance of reaching out and directly targeting groups who are under-represented."

**"As far as is possible, we recommend trying to take the stress out of the interview process. We offered young people the chance to have informal chats in a setting that they felt comfortable in, such as their college. If this led to a more formal interview, we let them know what to expect, and coached them through some standard questions. If a young person has a learning disability or communication barriers to overcome, it might be a good idea to let them know what questions they will be asked in advance. We also gave young people the opportunity to be accompanied if that gave them more confidence."**

The project also encouraged new volunteers to make friends, linking young people up in buddying schemes to ensure that they were supported throughout the process: "Making new friends is something that our volunteers really appreciated. We found that it is a good idea to encourage young people to attend volunteering activities in pairs to increase their confidence. They also appreciated being told there would be other young people at events and training sessions. We tried to find every young person a 'buddy' where possible – who doesn't need a buddy when they move to a new place? It was an informal link with someone they could ask questions to, or go to lunch with. For less confident young people, this made a big difference.

The Inspired Action evaluation emphasised the importance of simplifying the recruitment process as far as possible. It offered one-month trial periods and taster sessions, which allowed young people to take part in a casual, non-committal way, and arranged for them to speak with current volunteers about their experience.





## STARTING A HABIT FOR LIFE

Events-based social action and event volunteering positions tend to be time-bound, without always having a clear next step once the event has finished.

Spirit of 2012's report, *How Can Events Boost Volunteering* (2021), looked at relationship between events and the volunteers which made them possible. One of the key questions posed in the report was around whether volunteering as part of an event led to further volunteering. The report found that whilst went on to participate in regular volunteering, for others the main draw was the connection of the opportunity to a specific event, and they were unlikely to carry on in grass-roots volunteering. The report concluded that in order to capitalise on the draw of an event, volunteer legacy programmes should be integral to the planning of that event.

Looking at this question through the lens of youth is difficult – many of the project evaluations which feature in this report highlight an attitude amongst young volunteers to continue volunteering. *Inspire 2022*, for example, noted that young people involved in the project indicated that they would be keen to continue to participate in some form of civic engagement - 83% said they would now participate in community events, up by 33% from the 50% who said they would at the beginning, and 88% said they would be more likely to participate in further social action. However, many of the evaluations for our projects are time-limited themselves, and cannot track the extent to which this actually occurred. We would encourage funders to consider extending the time-frame of evaluations to examine this further.

Some projects, however, did have the scope to look at this. EmpowHER's *Leaders of the Future* report looked at how the habit of social action was formed amongst their participants. Key to this is an early start – the evaluation concluded that those who first get involved in social action under the age of 10 were found to be more than two times more likely to have formed a social action habit than if they started their social action aged 16-18. The project also highlighted the importance of role models in this habit-forming process, as well as the ongoing support of parents and friends.

InFocus's evaluation of *Women of the World*, Bradford, also provides an interesting insight here. Young volunteers, or WOWsers, involved in the festival in Bradford took advantage of mentoring opportunities with older volunteers and speakers and went on to found their own initiative, *Speakers Corner*, to continue organising events. Through interviewing volunteers, the evaluation found that: "No WOWsers or volunteers interviewed felt that *Speakers Corner* would have occurred without the *WOW Spirit* festival, making particular reference to the fact that many WOWsers and volunteers did not meet until joining the *WOWser/volunteer* programme". For the young people, this created a snowball effect in their participation in volunteering: "WOWsers identified that while they volunteered previously through their schools, and being part of *Speakers Corner* had significantly increased the amount of volunteering they took part in".

This habit can have a knock-on impact on young people's broader participation in civic life. This is explored in the *#iwill Fund Learning*

Hub's Evidence Workstream, which digs into the way in which youth social action can serve as an initial platform for young people to express their civic identities and take active roles in their communities and can help them to develop a better understanding of social issues and the functioning of civic institutions, increasing their likelihood of future civic and political participation.

### Key takeaways:

- Communication and clarity around what a volunteering opportunity involves is very important to young volunteers.
- Incorporating opportunities for volunteers to develop new skills, gain experience, and enhance their personal growth is crucial. This can include training sessions, workshops, and mentoring programs.
- Offering flexible volunteering opportunities that accommodate the schedules and commitments of young people can increase participation. This includes providing options for short-term, long-term, and episodic involvement.
- Establishing mechanisms for volunteers to provide feedback on their experiences and incorporating this feedback into programme improvements can help ensure that the programme remains relevant and appealing.
- Collaborating with schools, local organisations, and community groups can enhance the reach and impact of the volunteering programme. Partnerships can provide additional resources, expertise, and opportunities for volunteers.
- Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of young volunteers through clear policies, training, and safeguarding measures is essential, particularly when volunteer opportunities are connected to larger events or existing volunteer programmes.



## CONCLUSION

**Over the past eleven years Spirit of 2012 has funded over 30,000 opportunities for young people to volunteers and take part in social action.**

In doing so we have sought to deliver on our charitable objects to:

- Advance the education of children and young people through sporting and cultural activities to promote good citizenship.
- Enhance the effectiveness of the Voluntary Sector by encouraging public participation in volunteer activities

Our Theory of Change sets out the pathways (see page 36) through which events, large and small, contribute to those aims. Two main themes of empowering young people and connecting generations were present in part through all of the projects we talked about in this report.

The young people involved in our funded projects made valuable contributions to the events they were part of, bringing diverse perspectives and ideas. They reported improved wellbeing, skills, employment prospects, and increased confidence. In some cases, their participation carried on beyond the life of a single project and created longer-term habits.

We saw broader benefits too: the visibility of young people as volunteers challenged negative perceptions and fostered longer-term engagement in their communities, contributing to social cohesion.

Each of the projects discussed in this report took a distinct approach to engaging young people, but what connected them was an understanding of the groups they wanted to engage, and an approach driven by this understanding. Many actively involved young people in the design of the projects and volunteering they were a part of, whilst provided the structure and training opportunities for young people to get the most out of their involvement.

Ultimately, organisers should strive to balance the mutual benefits of involving young people in event volunteering: emphasising the skills, confidence, and friendships that volunteering can bring, whilst clearly articulating what the event aims to achieve through their participation.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Event volunteering gives young people the chance to be part of “something bigger”, increasing feelings of belonging and community engagement.**

Project teams can maximise their impact here by:

- Explicitly build in opportunities to build connections to the bigger event, anniversary or movement: facilitating online networking with groups across the country doing similar things, funding tickets and attendance at performances, bringing in speakers or experts from the parent event, explicitly teaching about the history of the wider event.
- Support opportunities for young volunteer to build “linking” capital with institutional representatives such as council officials and elected representatives: to learn, to be heard, to influence.
- Considering the starting points of their volunteers – many may already have high levels of community pride and agency (it may be what drew them to sign up to take part).

Event volunteering and events-based youth-social action are highly visible forms of volunteering, so supporting young people to take part in them can challenge stereotypes and showcase the positive contribution young people make to society.

Project teams can maximise their impact here by:

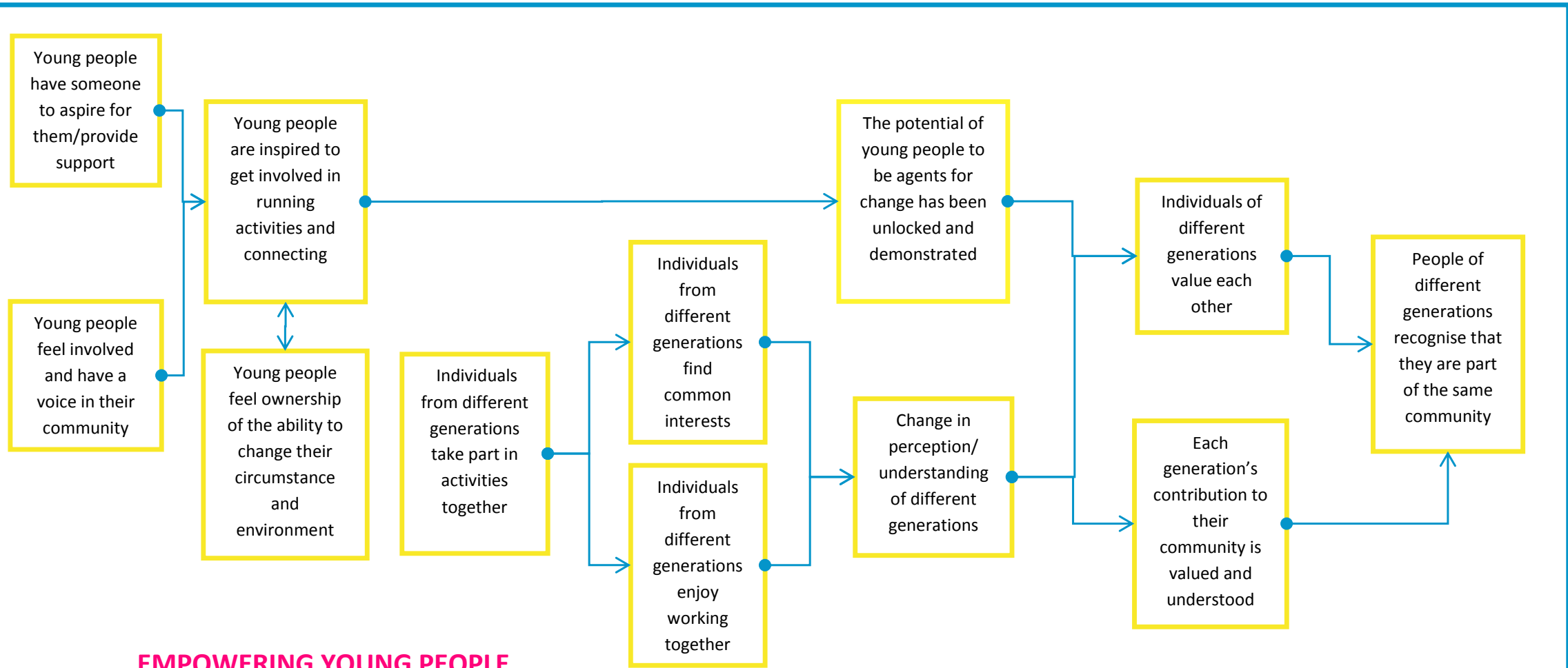
- Publicity and marketing – including local media -that celebrates young people’s contribution to the events.
- Ensuring volunteer shifts give young people the chance to interact with volunteers of different age groups, and the wider public, not just people that already know and appreciate their talents.
- Partnership working between schools/ youth-settings and organisations that don’t normally involved young people.
- Explicitly including perception change as an area to measure through the evaluation.

Event volunteering and events-based social action gives young people the chance to build new skills which can be used throughout life.

Project teams can maximise their impact here by:

- Understanding the profile of the young volunteers and what they want out of the volunteering opportunity, including whether qualifications and accreditation would be valuable.
- Ensuring there is support in place so that young people can gain a sense of achievement from their volunteering experience, including identifying where there is a safe space to ‘fail’ and where it is appropriate to intervene
- Supporting transition to the next appropriate opportunity, including guided conversations about how to use what they’ve learnt in their next step – which may be more volunteering, employment, further education, or more independent social action.





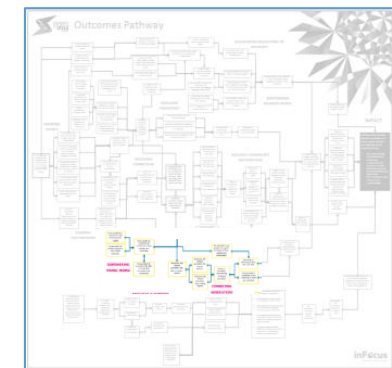
## EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE

*Young people are inspired, enabled and empowered to participate in sport, arts and culture, and volunteering as a volunteer or active participant and have the opportunity to design and deliver change in and for their communities. Young people aspire to do more and do better and have others aspiring for them – encouraging and celebrating participation and attainment. Young people have the opportunity to develop important skills and achieve meaningful qualifications that are recognised and valued by employers and educators. Active participation in life, and in the service of others, becomes a habit and lasts a lifetime. Well-being is improved through being an active participant and connected in community and wider society.*

## CONNECTING GENERATIONS

*Inter-generational activity benefits all participants, improving understanding and respect between generations and leading to greater social cohesion. The lives of, and opportunities for, young people are improved by working across the generations in families, communities and wider networks. Older volunteers are recognised for the work they do with young people; young people are recognised for the work they do with older people.*

### Where it fits?



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

We would like to thank all of the brilliant project teams and organisations whose learning contributed to this report, and in particular the National Lottery Community Fund #iwill Team. Below is a list of the projects, organisations and evaluators whose work we drew on in the report in the order in which they appear.

---

Hull 2017 City of Culture & Volunteer Programme (Absolutely Cultured, HEY! Volunteering) **evaluation**.

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Coventry 2021 City of Culture

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Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, Critical Mass **evaluation** & **playbook**.

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Women of the World Festivals, Southbank Centre, InFocus Bradford **case study**

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Thank You Day, Community Connector Pilot Evaluation, Neighbourly Lab **evaluation**.

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Team London Young Ambassadors, Greater London Authority **evaluation**.

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Spirit of Rugby, Rugby Football Union, **evaluation**.

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Breaking Boundaries, Youth Sport Trust, Wavehill **evaluation**.

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EmpowHER, UK Youth, **evaluation**, Legacy **evaluation**, and Leaders of the Future **evaluation**.

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Our Lives Our Legacy, Springboard **Opportunities**, project.

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Emerge, Mighty Creatives, Consilium **evaluation**.

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Inspired Action, British Red Cross **toolkit**.

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Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, StreetGames **projects**.

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London Legacy Development Corporation, London 2012 Legacy Partnership **project**.

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Inclusive Futures, Youth Sport Trust, LKMco, now the Centre for Education and Youth, **evaluation**.

---

Team Spirit, England Athletics **evaluation**.

---

Asda Active Sport Leaders Programme, UK Active **project**.

---

Inspire 2022, UK Youth **evaluation**.

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Belong - the Cohesion and Integration Network **toolkit**.

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Sporting Memories Foundation, Le Grand Depart **project**.

---

Fourteen / 14-NOW, UK Community Foundations & Springboard, **evaluations**.

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