

London Youth Microgrants

May 2019 to February 2021

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Programme overview

The Microgrants programme offered up to £400 project funding to encourage young people aged between 14-20 to create a project that promotes or raises awareness of positive mental health and wellbeing in their community. The Microgrants programme was funded The Greater London Authority in partnership with Thrive LDN and the #iwill Fund and was delivered by London Youth between summer 2019 to February 2021. This included some extension of delivery due to the impact of COVID-19.

47 young people in total progressed to receive funding:

- **37** of these to young people applied through London Youth members
- **10** of these to young people that London Youth work with directly (i.e. our youth board)

Based on the above figures the Microgrants was set to fund:

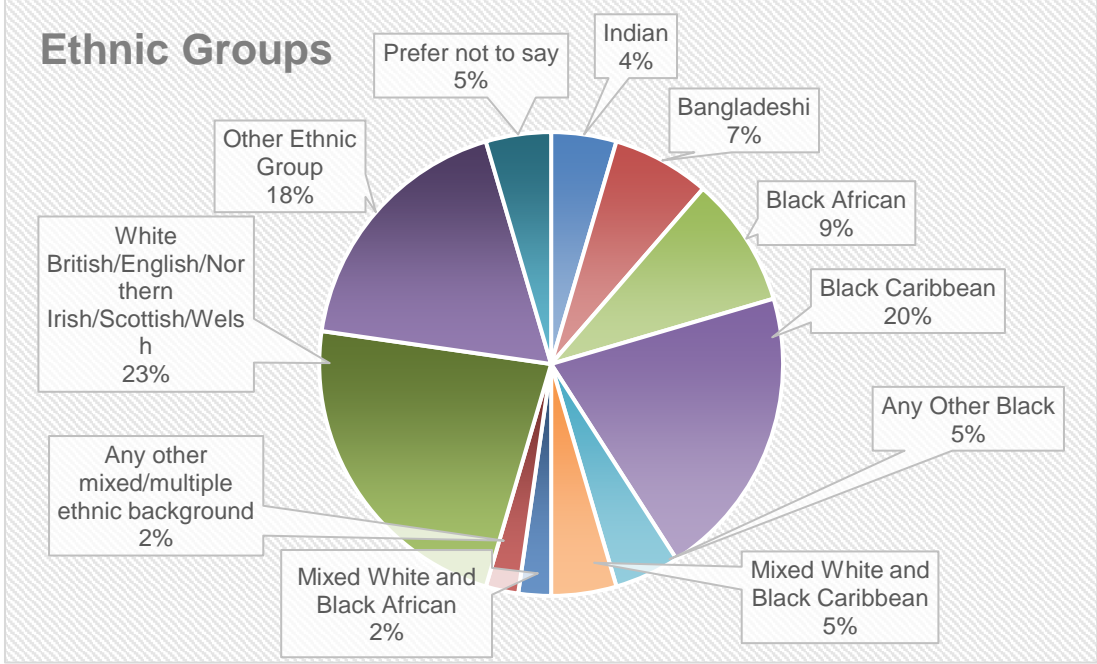
- **12** one-off events
- **23** programmes of activities
- **12** campaigns

307 additional young people were impacted by the projects that the young leaders ran with the Microgrants.

The number of additional young people is certainly higher than we have evaluation data for, as this question was added to the post-project evaluation form in the summer 2020 as requested by Team London.

Demographic breakdown

The below table outlines the demographic data off all the young people who were awarded a Microgrant.

Gender	Female: 35 Male: 11
Gender Identity Assigned at Birth	Yes: 45 Prefer not to say: 1
Disability	Yes: 1 No: 38 I don't know: 3 Prefer not to say: 3
Ethnic Group	 <p>Ethnic Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> White British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh: 23% Other Ethnic Group: 18% Prefer not to say: 5% Indian: 4% Bangladeshi: 7% Black African: 9% Black Caribbean: 20% Any Other Black: 5% Mixed White and Black Caribbean: 5% Mixed White and Black African: 2% Any other mixed/multiple ethnic background: 2%
Volunteering Experience	At least once a week: 18 At least once a month: 15 Less often: 5 Never: 5 40.4% of all the young people who were awarded the grant stated that they have never led a social action project before.

Highlights

Training

The training for the Microgrants was a clear highlight on the programme. Having young people from different organisations running creative projects around the topic of positive mental health all in the same room was a source of inspiration. The young people were able to learn from each other as well as share their ideas and experiences regarding the Microgrants. Running the training in this way helped to promote the benefits of volunteering and social action amongst the young people and between the different organisations. One of the young people at the training stated *"I enjoyed the group discussions and the detail we received from the session. This has definitely helped me to further progress my project"*.

Positive personal impact

Another highlight of the programme has been receiving feedback directly from young people on the positive impact the Microgrants has had on them. As we started to collect end of project evaluation data, it became clear that the Microgrants provided an opportunity that really helped young people to learn new skills and boosted their confidence in leadership. One young person said, *"I learnt how to turn my ideas into actual plans and then develop them into actual events, as well as how to manage events, successfully"*. Some young people also chose to give us some feedback during their project, and this too was overwhelmingly positive. Another young person sent us an email which included *"I have had lots of positive feedback from the staff and children and they all think I'm a star but I have to think to myself if you didn't give me the grant I wouldn't be a star right now"*.

Completing long standing projects

There were many young people who worked hard for months to adapt to the COVID-19 context. Changes in staff, government guidelines and access to resources caused several delays. However, it was wonderful to see some of these projects finally get off the ground and achieve positive impacts in their community. Here are pictures of three projects that were completed since the last Microgrants report:



Figure 1: Young people from Southwark Gymnastics created 36 mood boxes with mindful colouring resources, scented candles and a handmade calendar to log their mental health activities.

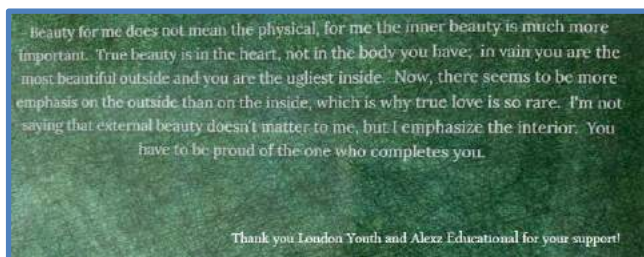


Figure 2: A young person from AlexZ Educational created a booklet on the importance on true beauty when an increased time indoors has resulted to many more people spending time looking at unrealistic beauty standards online.



Figure 3: a young person from our youth board created 35 care packages with crystals, plants, and herbal teas. She gave them away based on an Instagram competition encouraging people to 'spread the love' by tagging people they love and saying why they love them.

Challenges

Extended timelines of projects

Some young people were not able to start their projects within their proposed timelines due to a variety of challenges including family issues, staff changes at their youth club, and COVID-19. This meant that when a young person applied for a grant wasn't always synonymous to when the project was run. This created some issues planning for induction and evaluation trainings and general project management. We overcame this by creating online training resources alongside our physical training so that young people who were not yet ready to attend group sessions could still access resources. This also proved to be a helpful method once government guidelines changed around social distancing. We worked closely with the

young people and their youth workers to ensure they had the appropriate support based on their individual timelines.

Adapting to fit within government guidelines

It was challenging figuring out new ways to support our members through the COVID-19 crisis. Delivering a programme in the current circumstances has provided us with many new learning opportunities as it is something not many people have had to work through before. We've had to problem solve scenarios around staff availability, remote working and health and safety both within London Youth and throughout our membership. There's been a great variety in how our members have responded to COVID-19 which made it harder to gauge the best methods of support for each applicant to the Microgrants. Having said this, it's been good to be able to agree programme adaptations with Team London and that helped members to adapt and continue their projects.

Collecting evaluation

In order to make the programme more accessible and less admin heavy for members struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the fourth round of recruitment, we gave members the option to receive their project funding and supporting costs through one invoice at the beginning of their project rather than through a B4B money card at the beginning and a supporting costs invoice at the end. This supported young people through our membership to access funding for projects during a time where many were struggling to fund their work. However, this meant the supporting costs at the end of the programme no longer acted as an incentive to ensure all the evaluation paperwork was sent in within a good time frame after the project had finished. This resulted in a larger amount of administrative work for London Youth to encourage organisations to complete their evaluation. Nonetheless, with the support of other staff members at London Youth, we were able to provide bespoke support for organisations to get through the last steps of their projects.

Learnings

Flexible support

We learned more about the importance of being flexible in the types of support we give young people. For example, one young person from round one was able to independently work on his project, kept us regularly updated, and only asked for our support when necessary. Whereas another young person from the same round needed more rigorous support throughout as he hadn't led a project of this size before. The original plan for supporting projects was to arrange check-ins at regular intervals based on the length of the project but since delivering the Microgrants, it has become clear that more bespoke support works best.

Quote from young person: "I learnt that I can achieve anything I put my mind to with some support and confidence".

'Register interest' - online link

Following the first round of the Microgrants, we created a 'register your interest' link on our website for organisations that planned to apply for the programme but hadn't yet sent in an application. This helped to remove some of the ambiguity of how many applications to expect in each round. Including this feature also allowed us to give better support to organisations who were interested in applying to ensure they were ready to send in an application by the deadline.

Links to social action and career development

We found that young people chose to lead on projects that not only linked to positive mental health and wellbeing, but also found innovative ways to link this to their career interests. Young people have led projects linked to dance, fashion, and theatre which they later told us is the career path they want to pursue. One young person said, *"I am really hoping that this is the beginning of my dreams becoming real - being able to teach dance when I'm older"*. This is a clear demonstration that social action is a great gateway into building transferable skills that can help young people in later life.

More females

It is interesting to see that round three of funding was comprised entirely of female applicants. Although this was an unplanned outcome, we often work to ensure that programmes include and promote young women in leadership, so we were pleased to see that the programme has had such a big impact on this demographic.

Social action links to optimism

The data we have collected showcases a potential link between leading social action and feelings of optimism about the future. This may indicate that young people benefit from feeling like they have some power to create change and feel happier and more enthused as a result. It may be this same optimism that spurs young people to continue making changes in their community, and so it is important that there are follow up opportunities like the Microgrants to help continue the momentum.

Increasing time constraints

Although the Microgrants was planned to be a highly flexible and adaptive programme, towards the final rounds of the funding, some young people mentioned that the project was too short in their end of project evaluation. This was a theme that started to come out towards round three of funding as was highlighted in a previous report. However, this was exacerbated during round four of the funding where we had to finish the programme whilst COVID-19 restrictions were still very much in place across London. As the programme came to a close, perhaps there might have been a benefit to rebranding the programme to request short term projects or light touch campaigns so to better manage expectations. Alternatively, perhaps only three rounds would have worked better to allow the last applicants more time to complete their projects. That said, we received 17 applications in the fourth round.

The benefits of guided evaluation

We offered phone, in-person, and online evaluation sessions with young people on the programme to help them to reflect and fill in the evaluation forms with the help of London Youth staff and other young

Quote from young person: "I also enjoyed the evaluation because it's good to reflect on myself and learn new things. You helped me not to be so hard on myself".

people. Providing a space to evaluate together proved invaluable as it promoted meaningful reflection and validation of their learning. At the beginning of conversations or training sessions, many of the young people were able to

talk in volumes about their project, but not as much about what they had learned or how the project had impacted them personally. This was sometimes the case even when the youth worker was able to identify changes within the young person as a result of the programme. Having sessions based solely on reflection allowed us to explore the link between the project, their mental health and their skill set. By the end of the session, many of the young people were able to identify positive changes within themselves which seemed to make them feel more satisfied with their experience on the programme.

Insights from our monitoring and evaluation

The process and support around the Microgrants programme was rated highly amongst the young people.

- **9/10** average score for support from London Youth.
- **10/10** average score for support from their youth worker.
- **9/10** average score for level of enjoyment taking part in the Microgrants.
- **9/10** average score for learning new skills whilst on the programme.
- **9/10** average score for feeling more confident in taking part in similar projects in the future.
- **100%** would recommend to a friend.
- **76%** said they feel like they hit their goals when leading this project.

Young people highlighted that they learned key skills in "*leadership*", "*organisation*" and "*taking responsibility*", but also the focus of the Microgrants allowed them to learn more about mental health as a whole and about their own capacity and what they can achieve. A quote from a young person includes:

"I learned what I am truly capable of in terms of leadership and communication with others. The main thing I got from this project is that your anxiety and fear are the only things that can hold you back. Once you overcome those, what you can achieve is only limited by your ambition".

We also received positive qualitative feedback from the youth professionals that supported the projects. One youth worker said:

"The project I helped to support went really well, it started off slowly but the young person grew into it and really blossomed in the end and it was great to see their confidence and self-esteem grow, your help and support was excellent".

Key highlights mentioned from the programme were the flexibility and support available, as well as the training and varied methods of application. The biggest challenge mentioned were some issues with the B4B cards that were "solved quickly" and a more challenging timeline towards the end of the programme (See: increasing time constraints in the learning section of this report).

Case Studies

Resilience to create youth-led theatre

A young person from our youth board applied for round one of the London Youth Microgrants. He applied for funding to write and direct his own play, showcasing his work at his local youth club in December. He expressed to us that in future, he'd like to open his own theatre company to make the arts more accessible to children and young people from low income families and he wanted to use the London Youth Microgrant as the first step towards this. Since receiving his Microgrant, he had difficulty advertising and printing flyers as he had never done this before. We supported him with finding a reputable printing company and gave him some feedback on his flyers before he printed them. He used the flyers to invite young people to audition for leading roles in his play, however, unfortunately, on the day of his auditions, no one turned up. This young person was upset by this and wanted to give up on his project. With our support, within a few weeks, he built back up his resilience, revised his project dates and was ready and willing to continue his Microgrants project. He then went on to run a full youth-led theatre production in South London with a team of 6 young people including acting, directing, lighting, and photography. In this case, we were able to provide support to this young person to continue delivering his project when he otherwise may have given up. This shows the value of providing bespoke support alongside the project funding, as the money alone may not have been enough to ensure he delivered his project. The Microgrants programme has provided his young person with an opportunity to learn skills in resilience and reflective practice that will help him on his chosen career path.

Connections and confidence with mental health

One young person with special education needs applied for the Microgrants to lead a wellbeing day for young people in her youth club. She wanted to provide a safe space for people to discuss mental health and autism and help others to find a community in which they feel as if they can belong. When she first applied for the Microgrants, she gave herself low scores for most of the wellbeing questions, but by the end of the programme, she expressed a large increase in how she feels about herself and others. It seems that although she originally planned her project around helping others, she experienced the positive effects of social action for herself as well. As a result of her project she said she was able build connections with other young people and that "a friendship group has formed. It's amazing". She was the first young person in the programme to apply for the Microgrants via phone call. In her evaluation she said "the application process was easy, and I got a lot of help. I normally wouldn't apply for things that have more than one page because I struggle with my reading and writing but being able to apply through phone call was really helpful and modern". This shows us the value of having a variety of options at the application stage to help overcome barriers. If the phone call option was not available, she may have never experienced the benefits that the Microgrants programme has had on her life. She's since been promoting the programme to her peers and said she'd be willing to lead on other projects in future.

Wellbeing and movement through dance

A young person who applied for a Microgrant was disengaged with school and was experiencing issues with her anxiety. She was seeking something to invest her time in, so with the support of her youth worker, she applied to run dance workshops with local young people from her area. She identified dance as her passion and found that it uplifted her spirit and helped her to focus on her goals. The youth worker stated that *"The grant has helped [the young person] enormously to pursue her passion for dancing and gain practical skills of teaching, lesson planning, budgeting and delivery. [She] has gained confidence in public speaking and project management which is invaluable. She was also able to keep her anxiety under control which was lovely to see"*. Following the onset of the lockdown, she decided to end her project early but has shared her plans on how she will continue the legacy of this project in her community and in her personal life. She stated: *"Dance is something that makes me feel good about myself and I want to share with others... fingers crossed I can get some kind of apprenticeship in a dance school or something"*. She also decided to extend the dance lessons to an online offer to support young people during lockdown. Her youth worker also plans to invite her to meet with an experienced dance teacher to give her advice to support with her college applications. This young person's experience with the London Youth Microgrants has had a positive impact on her mental health as she was able to invest her time into an activity that she enjoyed and was good at when she was struggling in other areas of her life. This allowed her a chance to identify her strengths and grow as a leader. This shows when given the opportunity to take on additional responsibility and receiving practical support to pursue an idea, it can ignite a passion and change within a young person that could change their life all together.

Creating community change

Two young people from a football club created lockdown time capsules and art activities focusing on mental health. Through carrying out these projects, the organisation noticed that mental health needs in their community was higher than they originally thought. They started an Instagram page that focused solely on mental health and have now pursued the option to create a standalone branch of their organisation that focuses on providing mental health support. This was all done through youth involvement and co-design from the young people on the Microgrants programme. This is a great example of how the Microgrants not only provided the opportunity for young people to lead a short project around mental health, it also acted as a catalyst for long-term change in their organisation and community. The Microgrants gave a framework to explore a new area of work and discover ways to better meet the needs of their young people.

Conclusion

The Microgrants programme was a great offer for young people. Applicants responded well to the having responsibility of their own budget and running a social action project from start to finish. It helped young people to explore project management, pathways into their dream careers, and methods of improving mental health. It also provided youth organisations with a structure to promote meaningful engagement during a pandemic and build positive relationships and long-term youth leaders. Despite COVID-19 providing substantial obstacles, the Microgrants programme has proved to be a valuable offer for many young people. Even as the programme ends, there continues to be interest in this type of opportunity in the future.

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