



2019

YOUTHLEADS

EVALUATION REPORT

Introduction

The YouthLeads programme was established by London Youth in 2016 and ran for three years. It was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The programme targeted youth organisations in Enfield, Haringey and Waltham Forest and aimed to support young people in developing life skills and improve confidence, leadership and communication skills by planning and delivering social action projects in their organisation or communities.

The programme involved;

Creation of core teams of 5 young people who attended an initial residential designed to build confidence and relationships and discuss project ideas.

Core teams developed a project idea that

would have a positive impact on their communities and would tackle or highlight an issue that they are passionate about.

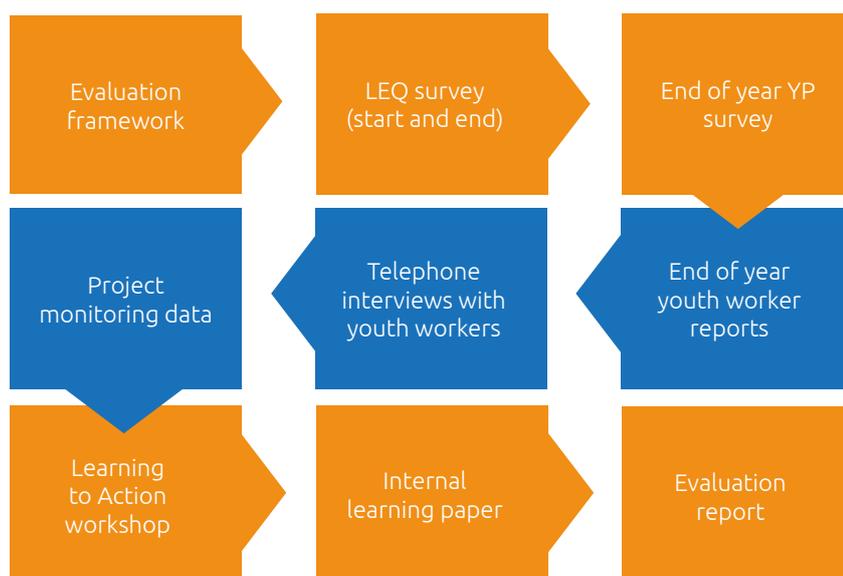
The teams then pitched their project ideas to a panel in an external venue for up to £700 of funding.

The core teams then delivered the project with support from their youth organisation and local organisations and aimed to engage a further 15 young people.

The programme concluded with a second residential which reviewed their learning, celebrated achievements and enabled young people to gain a Youth Leadership accreditation.

Evaluation Approach

Shephard & Moyes Ltd was appointed to support a light touch evaluation of the programme. All quantitative data was collected by London Youth, with Shephard & Moyes carrying out annual interviews with youth workers and facilitating the Learning to Action workshop at the end of the three year programme. This report aims to reflect on what the programme has achieved and learnt.



About YouthLeads

Engaging organisations and young people

Over the three years, 11 teams of young people from 10 different youth organisations were involved in the YouthLeads programme, with two organisations taking part in two years. All but one team successfully completed the programme.

The majority of youth organisations involved in the programme already had some methods for involving young people in leadership activities, for example through membership of youth panels, volunteering opportunities and training and support. However, many organisations did not have experience of delivering a funded and structured leadership programme.

“ We have a young people's panel that decides what they will do at the club, but we don't have any other leadership programmes. YouthLeads was the first one.” (youth worker)

“ We run a volunteer young leaders project and are used to empowering young people to be young leaders. But the difference with YouthLeads is the money – our programme is just about building skills but lack of funding means we can't offer a financial incentive.” (youth worker)

YouthLeads has added value to member organisations' existing offers by providing a structured framework for enabling young people to engage in leadership and take responsibility for designing and delivering projects.

“ YouthLeads provides young people with a structured project in which they have full responsibility for design and implementation and provides the young people with greater freedom and autonomy than they have in our existing provision.” (youth worker)

A total of 162 young people took part in the

programme; 54 were members of core teams and the remaining 108 other young people involved in delivering the projects. This is an average of just under 15 young people per organisation involved in the project.

Youth organisations generally found it easy to recruit young people to the core team. A range of methods were used, with some organisations opening up the programme to any young person who wanted to take part, and others targeting specific young people they thought would benefit.

“ We chose those who don't have strong leadership skills or don't normally put their hand up for things.” (youth worker)

“ We asked everyone who was interested to prepare a short presentation on why they should be involved and then selected the top 5 who we felt had the best reasons. They were really committed and passionate about making a difference to their community, so it was easy to recruit them.” (youth worker)

Youth organisations who didn't have much previous experience of delivering programmes of this nature tended to select young people who they thought would engage.

“ We wanted reliable young people, and people who would benefit.” (youth worker)

Although organisations generally found it easy to engage young people initially, some found it challenging to retain engagement over the life of the programme. With core teams relatively small to start with, one or two people dropping out can easily have a big impact on the group. The programme was appealing to young people as it encouraged them to take ownership of a project and funding was available to turn ideas into reality. Barriers to engagement included exams and other pressures, with some organisations finding it difficult to maintain enthusiasm over the life of the programme.

“ It was easy to recruit initially, but difficult to engage them over the life of the project, with only two finishing.” (youth worker)

Residential and pitch events

The two residential events were well received by youth organisations and young people, and for some were one of the main appeals of the programme. In particular the first residential was useful in helping young people understand the purpose of the programme and the second involved more experiential learning through outdoor and team building activities.

“ We had some meetings before the first residential, but they were still pretty unsure about the purpose of the project, so this really cemented it for them and helped them understand the focus on leadership.” (youth worker)

Residential events were also useful in helping young people develop core skills and motivate them to stay involved.

“ They learnt that if they can put their heart and mind to something they can achieve anything.” (youth worker)

“ Training delivered in an unfamiliar environment enhanced young people’s focus which led to more effective learning.” (youth worker)

“ They also presented a great opportunity for young people to experience something outside of their community and meeting other young people from different areas.” (youth worker)

Although organisations liked the mix of theoretical and practical exercises, suggested improvements for future residential events included more structured free time and more time spent developing relationships between youth workers.

The pitch events were a particular success of the programme; they help keep young people motivated as they have a specific deadline to work towards and they help young people develop presentation skills and confidence.

“ The pitch was great, it helped with their self-confidence and has helped prepare them for the future – with public speaking, job interviews etc. It’s a really important part of the project. It gave them a real sense of achievement and they were really chuffed afterwards.” (youth worker)

Project ideas

Youth workers were able to support young people in developing a variety of project ideas, including;

an e-zine to help young people understand issues a young carer may go through.

a series of plays that reject negative labels.

basketball workshops and mentoring for young people.

music workshops for young people to produce drill music with positive lyrics.

improved IT resources for young people to use in the club to help with homework.

teenage homelessness project.

Youth workers found that although young people were initially very good at coming up with lots of different project ideas, they needed support to identify ideas that could be realistically delivered with the budget and time available and help in deciding on the final idea.

Youth workers also found the support and resources from London Youth really valuable, with many commenting on how helpful London Youth staff were. Some organisations needed more support than others, and some felt that more monitoring or refresher training throughout the programme would have been useful to keep them on track.

Overall satisfaction with taking part in the project was high amongst young people:

81% found staff at their organisation were helpful/supportive.

69% recommend YouthLeads to others.

60% found London Youth staff helpful.

57% enjoyed taking part in YouthLeads.

What works?

Engaging organisations and young people

London Youth were able to benefit from existing connections and knowledge of youth organisations, which led to targeting of organisations that had limited experience of delivering similar programmes. However, this limited experience and capacity means that organisations will need more support in order to successfully deliver a structured programme.

The resources and session plans produced by London Youth, alongside visits to groups by London Youth staff to support youth workers and young people, worked well.

Although generally youth organisations found it easy to recruit for the core team, the desire to involve more young people in the delivery of the project was more of a challenge for some organisations. And although some organisations did involve other young people, this was not necessarily in a leadership role. London Youth being clearer over the role of the other young people, and giving examples of how this could be achieved may have helped support more organisations to achieve this element of the programme.

Delivery model

The key success factors of the YouthLeads delivery model were;

Pitch events which help keep focus and motivate young people.

First residential which provides young people with a better understanding of the aims of the programme.

Second residential with a focus on achieving a leadership accreditation.

Providing funding for support costs to enable staff to travel to residential etc.

Providing three opportunities for young people to come together provided an increase in

awareness of other project ideas and enabled young people to learn from and inspire each other. This was particularly effective given the programme had a locality focus as the young people were all from areas facing similar issues.

Bringing groups and youth workers together for the two-day residential provides an opportunity to accelerate learning and achieve a lot in a short space of time. And the achievement of the leadership qualification recognises young people's achievements, provides a clear 'end' to the project and enables young people to reflect on what they have learnt.

Flexibility vs Structure

There is a strong desire to ensure the programme is as flexible as possible and can respond to needs of individual organisations and young people. The advantage of a flexible model is that organisations can work at their own pace and young people can generate ideas that are important to them. The challenge with a flexible model is that some groups can lose motivation and may not have completed their project by the second residential.

To ensure momentum is not lost, it may be necessary to keep in touch more frequently with organisations and carry out refresher training or ongoing support to ensure they complete the project in a timely manner.

“ [I liked] That for once young people had a choice and a chance to speak.” (young person)

“ I enjoyed the responsibility and trust people put in to direct a personal project.” (young person)

“ [I liked] meeting other people from similar youth groups and finding things in common, developing new skills and improving my ability to work with people I don't know.” (young person)

The difference YouthLeads has made

Breaking down barriers to positive activities

Youth workers were able to identify a number of key barriers which prevent young people from taking part in positive activities. These included;

Lack of money/funding.

Lack of a positive mindset amongst young people.

Lack of opportunity and access.

Lack of relevant activities that meet young people's needs.

The majority of youth workers felt that involvement in YouthLeads was helping to break down these barriers, by providing young people with positive opportunities, funding for project ideas and the opportunity to develop activities that young people value.

“ The current climate of austerity gives young people the illusion that there's no money for anything. The youth club was closed by the local authority (I was made redundant) and taken over by the charity that currently runs it, and this has affected the young people who have just seen things contract and close down. But it's not true that money isn't available – money is out there, you just need people with the right skills etc to access it. Young people had it in their heads that nothing could happen – but giving them the idea that they can apply for money and do something positive with it – it's helped them understand that they can affect change. It's made a big difference to their understanding and attitudes around this.”

“ Barriers are lack of funding and focus. Everyone talks about the need to get them off the street, but where's the money to do this? The problem isn't the streets, it's a lack of a positive mindset. All young people see are negative things – they are a product of the streets. There

isn't enough positivity promoted or money to do anything – particularly in Haringey which is a very deprived area.”

“ The project provided positive opportunities – the opportunities to go to the residential for example was massive – particularly for kids who have nothing.”

Improving confidence and resilience

Data collected from young people shows that;

86% young people said they feel more able to achieve their goals in the future.

64% reported an increase in emotional control.

“ The pitch event was really good at building confidence – one young person was very unconfident but I really saw her coming out of herself and presenting ideas to the group for the pitch.” (youth worker)

Improving leadership and team working skills

Data collected from young people shows that;

96% feel they are better at working in a team to deliver a project.

100% feel they are better at motivating and influencing others.

96% feel they are better at resolving conflicts in a team.

“ It was an opportunity to develop relationships with different people and develop my leadership skills.” (young person)

“ [London Youth] helped us understand the meaning of being a youth leader.” (young person)

Youth workers were able to notice an improvement in leadership, team working and communication skills, as young people were required to work together to develop project ideas.

“ Team working - working with people they don't necessarily get along with that well – they had to put aside their differences and work together, which taught them you have to work with people you don't like and act professionally.” (youth worker)

“ How to work in a group, how to agree and disagree and compromise.” (youth worker)

Improving understanding of local issues

As young people were able to develop project ideas that were important to them, many chose projects that aimed to address local issues. As a result, young people researched these issues in more depth and were able to expand their knowledge and understanding.

As a result 52% of young people said they had learned more about their local community or area.

“ They did lots of research on a few different subjects and it's opened their eyes about what's happening in Haringey. They researched homeless, crime stats etc and learnt a lot.” (youth worker)

“ The project has helped improve understanding among young people of the importance of and how to incorporate local needs in project design, development and in funding application, an essential skill for them to learn.” (youth worker)

“ [Would you take part in a similar project in the future?] Definitely, it has opened up everyone's eyes including my own.” (young person)

Impact on organisations and youth workers

As well as the impact on young people, YouthLeads has also helped build the capacity of organisations and youth workers. In particular, youth workers found that involvement in the programme has helped them to;

Trust young people more with developing ideas and taking the lead on projects.

Inspire more young people to get involved in developing project ideas.

Develop a better understanding of what London Youth can offer.

Develop a better understanding of the needs of the young people involved.

Improve their capacity to deliver similar programmes in future.

“ I've learnt that once something is explained to young people, you can leave it with them. Youth leaders often like to predict any outcome and leave no room for error, but this has taught me that young people can come up with ideas you never thought of, and are often better – if you give them that chance.” (youth worker)

“ Although we have known most of the young people for a long time, working more closely with them has helped us get to know them better and enhanced our relationship with them.” (youth worker)

“ The more you give young people responsibility, the more they love it. Projects like this give them the chance to lead on projects and make a difference to their community. Young people need a focus and this gives them that.” (youth worker)

“ We now have 6 extra leaders who have insight into project design, needs analysis and evaluation which will be invaluable to us moving forward. As a result of funding from local council the programme will be able to continue.” (youth worker)

Key Findings

Over the last three years the YouthLeads programme has engaged youth organisations and young people in designing and delivering a variety of projects in their clubs or communities.

YouthLeads has provided youth organisations with a new offer to young people, providing;

Funding/resources.

A social action focus.

A structured leadership programme.

The key successes of YouthLeads are;

Giving young people ownership over developing and implementing projects in their organisations or communities.

Bringing young people together from similar localities to share ideas.

The pitch event which helps motivate young people and build presentation skills and confidence.

The residentials which can accelerate learning, help young people understand the purpose of the programme and develop skills.

A leadership accreditation which helps to celebrate success and reflect on learning.

The support and resources from London Youth help organisations who are less experienced at delivering programmes of this nature.

Overall the data collected from young people and youth workers demonstrates the success of the programme in terms of increasing confidence, improving leadership and team working skills, improving understanding of local issues and helping to break down barriers to positive activities, particularly in areas of high deprivation.

The evaluation also shows how the programme has helped build capacity and learning of youth workers, which should lead to a greater emphasis on young people taking the lead in their organisations.

The main challenges of the YouthLeads programme have been;

Supporting organisations who may not have the experience or capacity to deliver a structured programme.

Maintaining young people's enthusiasm throughout the life of the programme.

Ensuring that other young people, beyond the core group, are involved in a meaningful way.

Ensuring there is an appropriate balance between a desire for flexibility and successful completion of a structured programme.

In order to build on the successes and address some of these challenges in future similar programmes, London Youth have identified a number of actions;

Continuing to provide bespoke support to members, looking at ways to improve and innovate this support, specific to each programme.

Encouraging youth workers to engage a slightly larger number of young people into the initial team, allowing greater room for drop out.

Ensuring it is clear how and why young people beyond the 'core team' are engaged.

Continuing to ensure that youth workers and young people have the support needed to develop a project idea that has a clear purpose and community benefit.

More reflective tools and time for reflection built into project delivery.