

Young People Forward Programme

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GREATERSPORT



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Introduction to the programme

Throughout 2021 we worked with partners on a project funded by The London Marathon Charitable Trust, to improve the health and wellbeing of young homeless people across Greater Manchester through access to physical activity and mentoring.

We took a different approach to this programme and went where young people already were, as opposed to supporting an organisation to recruit participants. We contacted a number of organisations across GM who we knew were working with young homeless people, who would benefit from this project. Once the organisation was on board with the programme, we consulted with the young people to find out what sport or activity they would like to do. The project was designed in Greater Manchester to find young people who live in alternative housing – such as care experienced young people – and listen to their voices, opinions and thoughts on physical activity, sport and movement. Using data and insight, we identified the top boroughs in the GM region who have the highest levels of youth homelessness. After contacting youth workers/staff that work directly with young people, it was requested to consult and engage the young people to find out which sport or activity they would like to do, the barriers they feel there are and how we remove them to help they enjoy the project. Each consultation, in different boroughs, reflected a different idea and thirst for a variety of activity. We additionally asked the young people, which type of mentoring they would like and how help them co-design the project to suit their needs – to increase retention and participation.

To date we have engaged 94 young people across Bury, Manchester, Salford and Wigan in a variety of projects and activities including yoga, football and walking. Our aim was engage young people in further mentoring support, also designed by the young people to benefit their growth, development and skills. Mentoring included traineeships and qualifications, mental health and well-being, employability skills, money management, healthy eating and housing options – “next steps”.

This short brochure provides insight into the partners involved, what we did and the difference the programme is making.



Albert Kennedy Trust

The Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT) in Manchester City is still in the early stages of its Young People Forward (YPF) programme, yet is already evidencing significant improvement in the wellbeing of the young people attending the sessions.

Finding a way to create sustainable partnerships

AKT has partnered with The Running Charity and Hatton Boxing Limited. AKT Programme Lead Matthew Waites explains how these partnerships came about: 'Together with GreaterSport, we consulted with the young people about which physical activities would suit them best. They agreed running felt the most inclusive sport. However, while they were keen to try it, they hadn't felt confident running alone. Therefore, it seemed a natural activity for us to try together.'

The boxing element of the YPF project was a little harder for AKT to put in place. 'One young person expressed interest in trying boxing,' Matthew explains. 'However, we knew we faced a challenge to make this sustainable over a longer period of time.' To overcome this, AKT paid for a boxing coaching course for one of its staff members, meaning any young person accessing the service can work on a one-to-one basis from the AKT site. 'These sessions help the young people learn new skills safely and engage in meaningful activities that will have a positive impact on their lives,' says Matthew. 'Sessions also support emotional wellbeing and stress management.'

Boxing for self-defence and mental health

The partnership with Hatton Boxing Limited will help the AKT team to deliver the mentoring aspect of the YPF project. The focus will be around self-defence, with qualifications available for young people in boxing or another martial art of their choice.

'We're lucky that Emma, one of our team members, has experience training boxing and in gyms,' says Matthew. 'We've used some of the YPF funds so Emma can gain a coaching qualification to train young people. The money allowed us to give her the professional development she needed to support the project to continue. Emma can then lead the provisions so our attendees can take part in contact sports safely and learn a new discipline around fitness. We also hope having an active member of our staff will inspire young people to get involved in sport.'

Looking to long-term success

Though the project is still in its early stages, AKT are developing other sports sessions, with the next planned activity a weekly swimming session. 'Consultations with young people have revealed they're keen to try everything, from basketball and table tennis to canoeing, rock climbing and archery. This is in addition to the boxing, running and gym sessions, which are already taking place,' Matthew says. 'The funding through YPF has given us the room to talk to young people and design the project organically. With the youth voice in mind, we're allowing young people to decide, in groups or individually, which sport they would like to take further following taster sessions.'



Further plans for the programme include certifying the boxing club. This will provide the young people who complete the project with certificates and skills in physical activity, which will help their further education or provide employment opportunities. 'We're excited to progress this, and the young people are keen to get involved,' concludes Matthew. 'We may be at the beginning of the programme, but it's already clear it's having a hugely positive impact on the communities we support.'

Case study

Despite the project's early days, positive stories are already emerging. One particular young person has been attending the AKT session in partnership with The Running Charity. He lives in supported lodgings, and has had past struggles with homelessness, managing a tenancy and budgeting. These troubles increased when he recently lost his job.

The young person came along to the first session with The Running Charity and has since become a regular attendee, also running with a weekend group the charity offers. The mental wellbeing benefits of this physical activity for this individual have been profound. He'd felt particularly stressed and low about the impact of being unemployed. Yet he told the programme he decided to go for a run instead of staying at home, which significantly improved his feelings about a challenging situation.

Since beginning sessions with AKT, the young person has told us how participating in the YPF project supports him in other areas of life and helps with stress management. This young person is now keen to attend as many running events as possible.



Barnardos BeU

Barnardo's BeU worked with The Running Charity, Bury Leisure and Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) to deliver weekly physical activity sessions to support six young LGBTQIA+ people facing housing challenges in Bury.

Assessing inclusive movement providers

The Barnardo's residential BeU provides trauma supported accommodation for young people who identify as LGBTQIA+. Those they help are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or at risk in their accommodation due to their identity.

'Jess Eastoe at GreaterSport approached us to ask if she could speak to our young people and find out which sport or movement activities they'd like to try,' explains Bury BeU Project Lead Jade Williams. 'We had an existing, successful, relationship with The Running Charity. Yet Jess also needed to match us to another movement provider, and suggested Bury Leisure. Though enthusiastic, we first needed to make sure Bury Leisure promoted LGBTQIA+ inclusion and safety before our young people accessed the facilities available.'

Following assessment, Barnardo's BeU were happy with Bury Leisure's inclusivity, and they ran one active session per week from the start of the Young People Forward (YPF) project in March 2021. There were four main activities: running, walking, cycling, and gym sessions, each chosen following consultations with the young people. 'Some young people had previously attended running and walking activities with The Running Charity, and wanted to make it a permanent thing,' Jade says. 'The activities were then co-designed by those living at the Barnardo's BeU residential, alongside our team and Jess at GreaterSport.'

Finding solutions to attendance barriers

'Our main barrier to participation occurred when the young people in the residential fell out, or argued,' Jade explains. 'When this happened, their attendance was negatively affected.'

To overcome this, both TfGM [donating bicycles] and The Running Charity allowed people to be involved in the activities individually, until the conflict was solved. 'We knew it was important that these young people kept coming along and taking part in our physical activities, so we had to find ways to meet their needs' says Jade. 'Our partners worked with us to give young people three-month gym memberships, which they could use to swim or attend the gym either alone or with a member of staff. This way, they could remain active while tackling their own personal group challenges.'

Mentoring young people to increase engagement

This non-participation was one of the prompts for developing the mentoring and coaching part of the YPF project. 'We wanted to promote good mental health, build resilience and support the young people to make positive lifestyle changes,' explains Jade. 'The mentoring was designed to help those who weren't engaging with groups or with professional staff who could support their next steps, as well as benefitting those with mental ill health.'

The mentoring focussed on confidence building; resilience building; money management; building networks to help young people move on in life with success; job opportunities, and physical and mental health. 'Every element of the project was linked,' Jade says. 'For example, as the young people



began to enjoy the running and cycling, this in turn encouraged their participation with services linked to social care. One young person now uses their bike to travel to and from their new job, which they gained during this period of time with the YPF project.'

'Incorporating physical activity and movement into the daily lives of young people has helped their mental health,' Jade concludes. 'It has opened new doors for them, and we will continue to prioritise physical activity at the residential.'

Case studies

Running for mental health

Every young person in the residential attended the weekly running club at least once. Yet there were two young people in particular who attended regularly.

At first, they came to support positive mental health, and began to feel a true difference in their wellbeing once they'd participated in physical activity. One of these young people also engaged in mental health and 'next steps' mentoring to help them with the transitional period of leaving care, and found it hugely beneficial.

Cycling to improve prospects

Together with the BeU residents, the project identified cycling as an enjoyable activity for the young people. However, cycling would also prove beneficial as a means of transport, helping young people to travel to the wraparound service that supports them with their mental health and job prospects.

Thanks to the partnership with TfGM, the young people were given bikes so they could attend further groups as part of their mentoring. One young person who was able to do this gathered the support and found the networks they needed to move into independent living accommodation - remaining active, healthy and happy.



Foundation 92

A charity in Salford delivered 100 football-focused activity sessions to support 20 young people with unstable living situations to improve their confidence and life skills.

Delivering activities by understanding interests

Foundation 92 is an independent registered charity working with young people across the Salford borough to support them to improve their lives through sport and education. The charity became connected to the Young People Forward (YPF) project via Salford council, as it was clear Foundation 92 had both the ability and resources to meet the requests of young people expressing interests in beginning new sporting activities.

‘Most of the young people come to us because of their living situation,’ explains Head of Foundation Tom Hutton. ‘These include those connected to, or living at, Places for People at Salford Foyer, Emmaus Salford, and Salford City Council Housing Options. These young people are often disengaged with physical activity, and we wanted to understand what mattered to them to provide projects and activities through the YPF programme.’

‘Initial feedback from young people told us football was their main interest, and it was therefore the primary sport Foundation 92 delivered,’ continues Tom. ‘We embedded football in all parts of our delivery of the YPF provision to make sure participants remained enthusiastic and engaged.’

Recognising how to overcome engagement challenges

Continued engagement with young people was the biggest challenge the project faced. ‘People came to us thanks to our marketing initiatives and, at first, most participants were keen to get involved,’ explains Tom. ‘Yet as the programme progressed beyond its initial sessions, engagement in the activities became a little patchier.’

To overcome this, Foundation 92 provided further resources to support marketing and engagement. ‘Most of the young people in this programme faced a turbulent, transient lifestyle,’ Tom says. ‘We needed to step in and meet their needs by providing more pastoral care and mentoring, which in turned helped to increase engagement with the physical activities.’

Providing mentoring focussed on young people’s needs

Foundation 92 used two approaches to mentoring: one-to-one sessions for those with the greatest need, and small group-based classes for others. The aim was to deliver support in a way that made sure every single young person’s needs could be continually met, with guidance to help them achieve their potential.

‘To understand every individual, each programme participant completed a benchmarking exercise,’ Tom explains. ‘Following this, we could focus our mentoring on certain key skills: communication; leadership; decision making; problem solving; financial inclusion, and career planning, and also offer industry specific advice. These all complemented the physical activity skills young people were learning with us.’



Successful outcomes to support young people's opportunities

Tom and his team are proud to report positive outcomes from their mentoring scheme. 'The young people felt their confidence, sense of happiness, ability to form positive relationships and aspirations had all improved as a direct result of engaging with the programme,' says Tom. 'They also felt they could now better understand how to navigate the job market, and effectively and efficiently manage their finances.'

One young person told us: 'Foundation 92 coaches really understood my needs and circumstances. No one had previously understood this or wanted to. Through Foundation 92's non-judgemental approach to supporting me, I was able to really understand my potential.'

'Feedback like this reinforces how the YPF programme helped Foundation 92 improve its capability, understanding and opportunities to support highly vulnerable young people to develop the confidence, knowledge and skills to achieve their potential in the community', Tom concludes.

Case study

Damian Owens was referred into the Foundation 92 YPF programme by Emmaus in Salford. 19-year-old Damian, who'd previously been homeless, had recently settled into short-term accommodation with Emmaus. However, he was at high risk of becoming homeless again if he didn't receive the right support.

Damian expressed a clear interest in football, and wanted to use his life experiences to help others. Despite not having many academic qualifications, Damian wanted to learn, and attended the Foundation 92 mentoring programme. There, he began a range of personal and social development activities, alongside developing the skills required to coach football - allowing Damian to achieve his coaching dreams.

Strong engagement in the provision meant Damian took every available opportunity to grow and thrive, even carrying out an enhanced work placement and wider community engagement projects.

Thanks to this commitment, Damian has successfully transitioned into full-time education, where he's gained a nationally-recognised level three qualification: a traineeship for sports coaching and youth work. As a result, Damian is now in a full-time role as an assistant sports coach at Foundation 92.



GMBOP

Greater Manchester Bridges Outcomes Partnership, GMBOP, in the Bolton and Salford boroughs benefitted from the funding and support of GreaterSport's Young People Forward (YPF) project to tackle the challenge of taking part in physical activity during the pandemic.

Walking for improved physical and mental wellness

The GMBOP project, led by Programme Manager Rachel O'Connor, supports young homeless people in Greater Manchester to stabilise their accommodation situation, and build their confidence and resilience to avoid long term homelessness. From early conversations, it was clear walking was an activity the young people felt should be accessible and promoted their wellbeing. 'Our young people identified they'd like to improve their overall fitness through walking, but had started to feel trapped in the city,' explains Rachel. 'However, as they didn't know the countryside, they didn't feel confident going out for walks.'

To find a solution to make them feel secure in their active choices, GMBOP purchased some fitness trackers (with the support of GreaterSport). The aim was to encourage young people to start to increase their daily steps, then build their walking confidence. From this, GMBOP used their connection to a local walking organisation to arrange for a walk to take place in Bolton. 'We planned a walk for ten young people to attend,' says Rachel. 'People with local knowledge would facilitate the walk, so they could identify interesting surroundings and encourage mindfulness of nature and the local environment.'

Unfortunately, at the time of the planned walk, the government recommended avoiding travel into the Bolton area due to an increased risk of coronavirus. 'This was very disappointing, but the walk will be rescheduled,' Rachel says. 'In the meantime, despite restrictions on group activity, young people and their key workers have completed one-to-one walks around their local areas to remain active.'

Changing focus to individual active sessions

Delaying group sessions has been necessary for GMBOP in order to adhere to their covid safeguarding processes. However, shifting focus to individual activities has helped them overcome this challenge and still find ways to encourage young people to remain active.

'Our young people were hoping to engage in movement that supported mental health, so Jess Eastoe at GreaterSport connected us with StreetGames and their yoga instructor,' Rachel explains. 'The goal was to engage young people in a yoga session to aid their wellbeing and help them learn a new skill. We're developing this partnership, yet in the meantime individual young people and their key workers have been participating in other local yoga classes so they can start to progress the activity. The YPF fund has helped with both the costs of classes and equipment.'

To support independent lifestyle changes, GMBOP invested in gym memberships, a personal training session, and a skateboard for one young person. 'Graystone Action Sports Park in Salford helped us to engage the individual to attend their venue, using the skateboard as a means of travel,' says Rachel. 'It's part of our focus on sustainable activities. That way, after the YPF project is complete, the young people can continue to support a healthy lifestyle and stay active in a way that suits them as individuals.'



Programme participant feedback has been hugely promising to date, and Rachel praises the partnership with Jess and the wider GreaterSport team: ‘We’ve really enjoyed working alongside GreaterSport on this project. They’ve been really supportive in helping us to build our links with organisations in the community who are delivering activities that can help improve the wellbeing of our young people. This will continue to help us improve their long term stability in accommodation.’

Case study

The GMBOP and GreaterSport partnership through the YPF project has allowed GMBOP to organise an upcoming healthy eating course. The course will be split into healthy eating workshops for small groups, with 16 attendees in total. Sessions will include information about balanced diets and nutrition, practical cookery sessions, and ideas for cooking with limited facilities and budgets. The young people will also receive a healthy eating pack, with recipes, meal planners, and shopping list ideas, and have the option to complete a level 2 accredited food hygiene certification course.

On introduction, young people have responded positively to the course. They have explained how they feel it will improve their skills and build their confidence when cooking healthy food, which will support them on their journey to long term stability.



Pathfinder, DePaul UK

As part of the wider GMBOP programme, Pathfinder supported eight young people in the Manchester, Salford and Bolton boroughs with yoga sessions delivered through the Young People Forward (YPF) programme.

Consulting with young people to meet active needs

Programme Lead Ander Morgan explains the choice of project activity: ‘Consultation was a really valuable part of the YPF project, so we asked our young people what activities they would be interested in. Yoga was a popular response, and we saw great benefit to physical activity that includes mindful techniques, giving young people space to connect to the present moment. We include this connection as a pillar of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in our Pathfinder work.’

The yoga sessions were initially planned to take place in a community café, but Pathfinder faced attendance issues. ‘The location wasn’t great, and numbers were low,’ says Ander. ‘Consultation and inclusion played such a key role, so we spoke to our current attendees first to learn how they felt about changing venues, which they were happy to do. We managed to move the sessions to a more central location, allowing more young people to benefit from taking part.’

Engaging with others through supportive partnerships

Through Pathfinder, GMBOP work with young people to understand how they engage with meaningful activities. ‘Our data revealed that those who achieved their meaningful activity outcome had a much higher chance of meeting the other outcomes on the Pathfinder project,’ explains Rachel O’Connor, GMBOP Programme Lead. ‘Here, the partnership with GreaterSport has been a really valuable asset. GreaterSport has been able to support us to increase the number of young people who have achieved this outcome thanks to flexible funding.’

‘This funding means we’ve been able to use a person-centred approach to identify and unlock barriers our young people face to access and take part in activities,’ Rachel continues. ‘For example, with the YPF project funding, a progression coach from our service was able to purchase a pair of roller skates to enable a young person to take up a childhood hobby. This affect on both their physical and mental health was hugely positive.’

Furthering new opportunities through youth programmes

Pathfinder’s yoga participants will also be involved in an upcoming programme of healthy eating workshops, organised by Pathfinder as part of GMBOP. Through the programme, they’ll learn how to improve nutrition, shop and cook with limited budgets and facilities, and have the chance to gain food hygiene certificates.

‘The new opportunities available to our young people have a hugely positive effect on their physical and mental wellbeing,’ concludes Ander. ‘The regular yoga sessions gave a taster of something they might otherwise not have had a chance to try. The sessions also provided a calm and comfortable space to come to once a week with familiar faces. The combination of this supportive atmosphere, physical exercise and exploration of basic mindfulness concepts gave the young people a noticeable boost to their wellbeing.’



Case study

One of Pathfinder's young people had faced gender identity challenges, which had caused her to leave home. She'd often struggled with group activities due to experiencing micro-aggressions, such as being accidentally mis-gendered. However, her coach encouraged her to come along to Pathfinder's yoga session.

The young person really enjoyed the yoga classes. She said she slept incredibly well that night after just one session, and continued to engage. The yoga teacher also sent her some resources about mindfulness and better sleep. Thanks to the comfortable sessions and the benefit gained, she is now keen to get involved in similar group sport opportunities, as well as boxing.



Wigan Athletic Community Trust

Wigan Athletic Community Trust (WACT) partnered with Wigan Council Targeted Youth Support Services, Wigan Council Care Leavers Team, and Wigan and Leigh Young Carers to deliver sports activities for 22 vulnerable young people living in the local area.

Working in partnerships to deliver activities

WACT ran 36 sessions across three cohorts for young people connected by their disadvantages, including those living in social care settings or residential accommodation. The participants and providers chose the programme activities together to give everyone involved a say, and delivered a range of activities. These included go karting, water sports, multi-sports, trampolining, and recreational activities such as pool and table tennis.

Jess Eastoe, the Young People Forward (YPF) project lead at GreaterSport, contacted WACT to learn which cohorts of young people she thought may be interested in the programme. 'After understanding what worked for us, Jess matched WACT with Wigan Social Care as they had the abilities and resources to change their sports offering to suit what our young people requested,' says WACT Project Lead, Steven Eastwood.

'Wigan Social Care are also cemented in the borough, so they could give us access to, and partnerships with, alternative provisions (e.g. Scotsman's Flash Activity Centre's water sports facilities),' Steven explains. 'This was crucial to allow us to deliver the physical activities our young people were keen to partake in. We also wanted to provide activities aiming to push the young people out of their comfort zones and try something new, and the wider partnerships through the YPF programme gave us this ability.'

Increasing confidence and opportunities through mentoring

The mentoring aspect, provided alongside the physical activity sessions, was crucial, and delivered some hugely positive outcomes for participants. The young people received weekly support, with someone to talk to who could also provide a listening ear. 'Maximising this was really important,' says Steven. 'For example, our transport time to different physical activities was spent having wellbeing conversations with the young people and mentoring them on any issues they had. Trust staff were always available to talk to carers, and had a weekly check-in with parents/carers to make sure everything was OK with the young people on the programme.'

'As a result of the mentoring, young people felt more confident to talk to staff, and were more aware of the support available to them,' Steven continues. 'They also recognised the importance of being organised and planning ahead for both short and long-term futures. To aid that, we provided each group with specific workshops about life in care and where they could go for help. These included money management, opportunities for the future, learning what is available for recreation and activity, sexual health, and health and wellbeing.'



Overcoming the challenges of reduced support

One of the main learnings WACT gained from the YPF project was how to overcome barriers to involvement. ‘Limited participation from the care and care leavers teams within Wigan Council created a challenge for us at times,’ Steven explains. ‘The initial conversations we had with them about the project were very positive, and they agreed their teams would send referrals our way and help us deliver some of the workshops. However, the referrals came in more slowly than we’d anticipated, and the buy-in from care teams was not as forthcoming as promised.’

Instead, Steven and his team took on this challenge: ‘It would have been ideal if the care team had delivered the workshops themselves to support the questions the young people asked,’ he says. ‘Yet we were able to use this information to deliver the workshops ourselves. What’s more, by working as a team, we found other young people who could benefit from the programme. Some of these people were not in care, but did meet the criteria for being at risk of homelessness: for example, they were the oldest sibling in a family of many children in an area of high deprivation. Identifying them meant we could reach out to provide them with the opportunity for support if they needed it.’

Providing accredited skills for young people

Following the YPF project, Steven and his team have been able to set up WACT as an AQA provider for young people. ‘Our partnership with Wigan Council Targeted Youth Support Services was really important here,’ Steven says. ‘This project has allowed us to certify and qualify young people in their new skills. They receive an official certificate celebrating their skills and knowledge in a specific physical activity, and have extra certificates to take to their education provider or add to their CV.’

The AQA provider status also means WACT can support the pathway of young people in other projects, giving them chance to try something new, make friends and have fun. It also means they’ve been able to invest in a wraparound service for young people either living in care or with significant levels of instability, sustaining the project further.

Praising the far-reaching effects of the programme

The impact of the project has been positively felt by both attendees and organising partners. ‘The project has helped me a lot and I’ve learned a lot whilst having fun and doing good things I haven’t done before,’ said one participant. ‘[It was] quite fun and [I’ve done] tonnes of stuff taking my mind off caring for your parents. High ropes was [sic] well fun, and I’ve never done paddle boarding before. It makes me feel happy and keeps my mind off stuff.’

‘The project has given the young people the chance to try something new, improve their social skills, and build relationships with others having a similar life experience,’ Steven adds. ‘Without the project, the young people would not have had the opportunity to be connected to the services and mentoring on offer or to try new sports and activities, which they’ve enjoyed.’

‘Giving young people opportunities has been a highlight for me,’ concludes Steven. ‘They don’t know each other, but are tied together by their circumstances. Through the YPF project, we’ve been able to give them the same chance as others to access support and experiences.’



Case study

14-year-old Thomas is living in a residential care home, where his behaviour and lack of engagement was causing multiple issues.

Thomas was already receiving some help, yet after becoming part of the 12-week YPF cohort, he's made a huge improvement in his attitude, behaviour, happiness, health, and levels of engagement. Taking part in WACT sessions gave Thomas a great deal of stability and he's achieved a higher level of independence. He was supported to go to activities alone, improving his confidence and building relationships.

Dolton at Crystal Care Solutions, an independent children and young people's social care provider, said: 'Thomas loved attending the sessions every week and was sad when the weekly activities came to an end. Thank you for supporting and encouraging him.'

Thomas himself acknowledged that the project 'helped me a lot,' and that he saw an improvement in his behaviour. He also increased his awareness of activities he can be involved in in his community.
