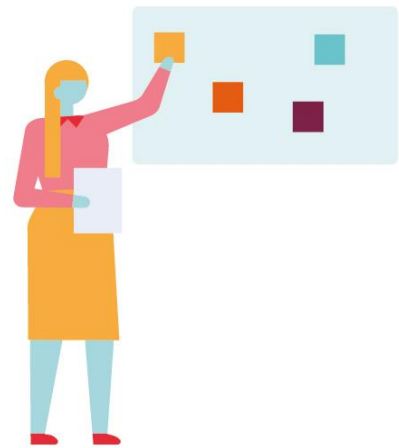


## Inspiring Futures evaluation

Summary for service providers and  
practitioners

Cordis Bright  
August 2023



# Introduction

## About Inspiring Futures

Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established with a £90m endowment from the Reclaim Fund to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Our aim is to narrow employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change.

The COVID-19 outbreak exacerbated multiple challenges for young people looking to access further education, training and work. As a rapid response to the pandemic YFF in partnership with BBC Children in Need (BBC CIN) developed Inspiring Futures, a £7 million grant funding programme to deliver positive activities that aimed to support children and young people who face the greatest disadvantage to achieve their potential in their journey towards employment.

85 Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations in England received grants, ranging between £10,000 and £80,000 in value and 12 to 18 months in length.

## About the evaluation

[Cordis Bright](#) is an independent research organisation commissioned to evaluate the Inspiring Futures programme on behalf of BBC Children in Need and Youth Futures Foundation.

This summary report presents the key findings of relevance to service providers and practitioners supporting children and young people's pathways to employment.

Further detail can be found in the main final evaluation report which can be accessed [here](#).

# Key findings

## The implementation of Inspiring Futures

Inspiring Futures was an ambitious programme with a wide reach, supporting over 15,000 children and young people which exceeded the target by 15%.

The flexibility of the funding enabled grantees to prioritise their key areas of need which included:

- Staying afloat during the pandemic.
- Continuing and expanding their delivery for children and young people.
- Adapting delivery to the COVID-19 context.
- Supporting families with basic needs.

This adaptable approach was enabled by flexible grant management and a broad remit for the programme which were viewed as key success factors.

The models of delivery were also varied, with the most common project types being categorised as life skills, training, 1-2-1 befriending or mentoring work, work placements, and issue-based youth services / work.

Grantees reported that the majority of children and young people they supported faced barriers and challenges in their pathways to employment.

## Responding to need during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted children and young people's daily lives and pathways to employment. Whilst this created greater need for support focused on education, employment and training (EET) outcomes, grantees identified that need was even greater for 'personal and social development' outcomes. In particular, grantees adapted their support to focus on:

- Confidence, self-esteem, and motivation.
- Mental health and wellbeing.
- Basic needs (accommodation, food, safety).
- Communication, social, and life skills.

Grantees, young people and stakeholders agreed that these personal and social development outcomes are both important pre-cursors to EET outcomes, and are also important outcomes in and of themselves. They also agreed that support that focuses on personal and social development outcomes is particularly important for children and young people furthest from the labour market or who face the most challenges and barriers.

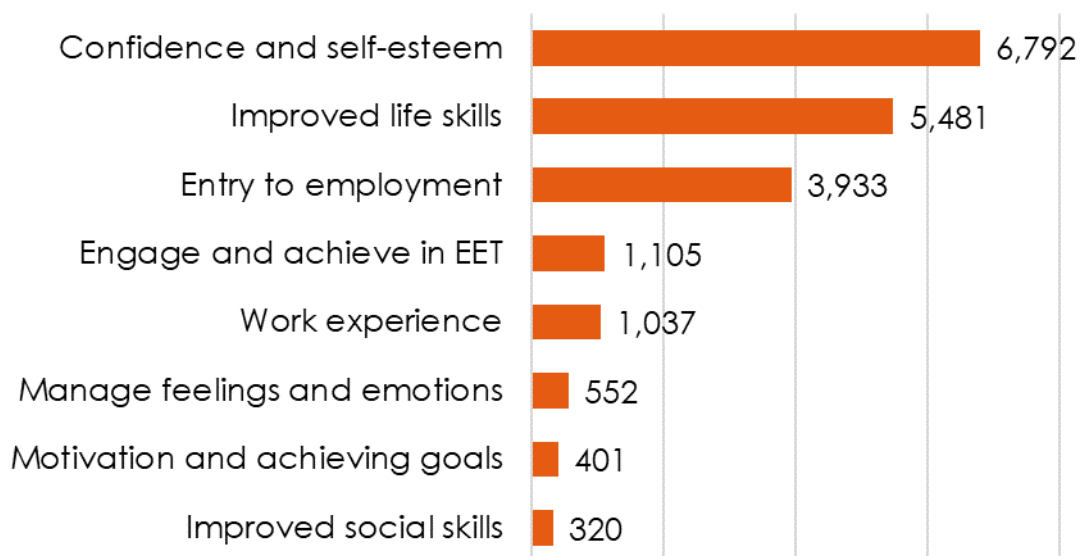
To respond to these needs and adapt their support to deliver in COVID-19 safe ways, grantees:

- Increased their focus on personal and social development outcomes.
- Delivered more of their support online and developed COVID-19 safe ways to deliver in person.
- Focused more on reaching children and young people and keeping them engaged, when young people were more isolated. This included new referral approaches.

### The difference made by Inspiring Futures

Inspiring Futures achieved its primary aim of supporting **grantees** to continue delivery and adapt as needed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this, grantees also developed skills and confidence in delivering new kinds of support, and identified new ways of working they plan to sustain beyond the pandemic.

**Children and young people** most commonly experienced personal and social development outcomes, but many also experienced EET outcomes. Young people saw significant progress in the following areas according to monitoring data<sup>1</sup>:



There were also some positive outcomes for **family members**, including improved relationships and mental health and wellbeing.

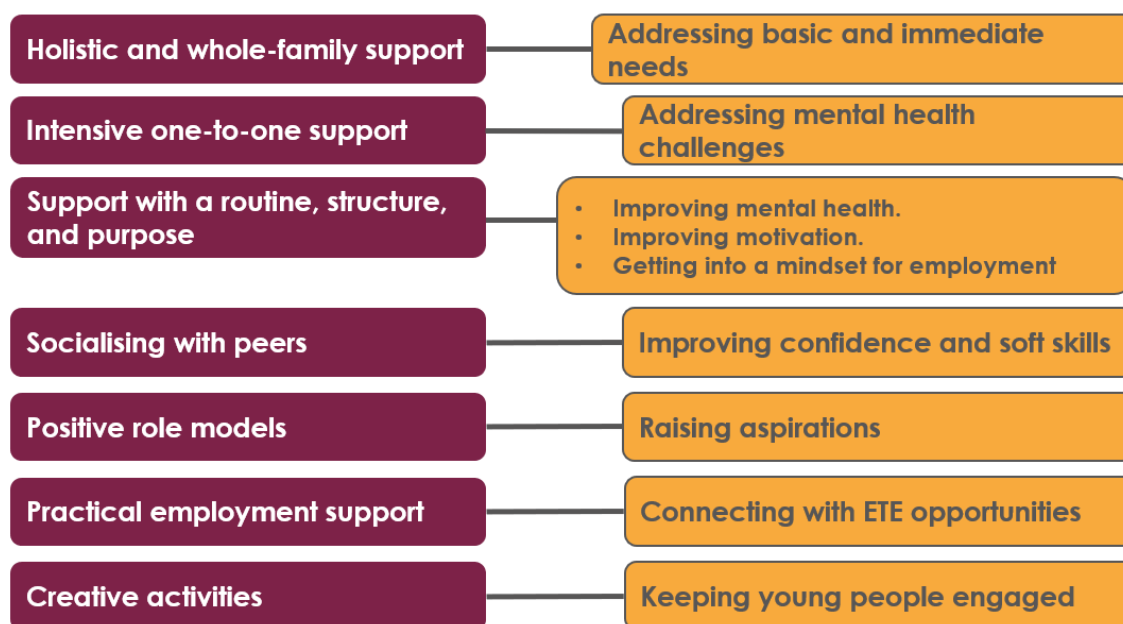
<sup>1</sup> Please note, young people may be counted towards more than one of these 'difference types' and grantees were not all aiming for the same 'difference types'. This data represents 62 of the 85 grantees in England.

## Lessons for practice

Five key elements of effective practice were identified as being relevant across project types:



The diagram below provides further detail about more granular elements of promising and effective practice, and the kinds of things grantees used them for:



For ongoing or future work, areas for development could include the development of clearly articulated models of support, theories of change, and robust monitoring and learning mechanisms about activity, reach, and outcomes. Grantees identified a challenge in capacity to embed robust monitoring and evaluation processes, and with understanding how best to capture the flexibility and person-centred nature of their approaches.

### Implications for future commissioning and policy

Moving into recovery from the pandemic, there was a shared sense that children and young people will continue to require support to reach their potential in their pathways to employment. This future provision should:

- Support personal and social development outcomes to build the base for achieving EET outcomes where needed.
- Continue to respond to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on needs, challenges, and opportunities.
- Be able to adapt and respond to the changing wider context and in particular the cost-of-living crisis.

For future commissioning of EET support for children and young people, funders could consider how they can provide service providers with:

- Long-term funding.
- Funding that can be used flexibly and for organisational development.
- Opportunities to share learning and network with other VCS organisations.
- Capacity-building support including: training opportunities (in particular with online safeguarding and providing mental health and wellbeing support); organisational development; support with accessing funding; and capacity-building support and funding to embed more robust monitoring and evaluation approaches.

## Recommendations

The recommendations in the table below were co-developed during a series of workshops with programme stakeholders, young peer researchers, strategic stakeholders with policy insight, and grantees. The numbers in the right-hand column correspond to the Section in the final report where you can read more context to the recommendation.

Recommendation	Audience				Section in final report
	Practitioners	Policymakers	Funders	Commissioners	
Employability support					
Continue things that worked well during the COVID-19 pandemic and do not automatically revert to the old ways of working.					5.3, 5.4, 6.3
Review this report and consider the best mechanisms to support good practice such as aspects of delivery, funding evaluations and projects to spread and scale effective practice.					6
Continue to acknowledge and support the development of personal and social development outcomes that may precede EET outcomes.					5.3.2, 6.3, and Impacts of COVID-19 report
Review and research what adaptations service providers made during the pandemic and have kept to assess whether they are effective, including understanding (1) whether they have responded to the increased prevalence and need relating to personal and social development needs and (2) how efficacy varies between face-to-face versus virtual or hybrid support delivery.					5.4.1, and Impacts of COVID-19 report

Recommendation	Audience				Section in final report
	Practitioners	Policymakers	Funders	Commissioners	
Explore the potential of providing longer-term support for children and young people, in particular, those who are considered furthest from the labour market.					6, and Impacts of COVID-19 report
Continue to encourage and use participatory approaches in policy making, funding, commissioning, service design, research and evaluation.					2.3, 4.6, 5.3, 6.3, 6.4
Funding and commissioning					
Work collaboratively to develop long-term investment strategies for young people's employability support.					6.4, 6.5
Build on the 'light-touch' application process and grant management approaches employed by Inspiring Futures.					6.5
Exploring funding organisational capacity building, to support aspects other than service delivery, such as improving data collection strategy.					6.5
Explore ways to move towards longer-term funding arrangements to support projects to be					6.4, 6.5



Recommendation	Audience				Section in final report
	Practitioners	Policymakers	Funders	Commissioners	
implemented, embedded and perform in local systems. <sup>2</sup>					
Include capacity building funding in agreements with service providers to cover the cost of monitoring data capture, analysis, evaluation and reporting.					6.5
Establish robust processes to support providers when funding comes to an end, and to support children and young people when this may interrupt or prevent delivery.					6.5
Review and use current and future levers to encourage greater networking and collaboration between VCS employability service providers.					5.4, 6.5
Evaluation and evidence base					
Explore models of outreach support, working closely with providers to pilot models and evaluate their impact on reaching target groups and generating EET outcomes.					5.3

<sup>2</sup> Research conducted by Kluve et al. (2017) provides further exploration of the potential of longer-term support for young people's labour market outcomes. Source: Kluve, J. et al (2017). *Interventions to improve the labour market outcomes of youth: A systematic review of training, entrepreneurship promotion, employment services and subsidized employment interventions*. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.4073/csr.2017.12> [Accessed 18.07.2023]

Recommendation	Audience				Section in final report
	Practitioners	Policymakers	Funders	Commissioners	
Create an environment in which employability service providers are able and committed to: (1) develop and share their theories of change, and (2) articulate and document their models of delivery including considerations of protocolisation/manualisation.					4.5
Ensure that the link between evidence and practice is central to service delivery by collecting appropriate and proportionate activity and outcomes monitoring, designing and developing robust impact evaluations, and mobilising evidence effectively to inform practice.					2.4

# Acknowledgements and contact details

## Contact details

To find out more about Inspiring Futures or the evaluation, please get in touch using the details below.

### Youth Futures

- Matthew Poole: [Matthew.poole@youthfuturesfoundation.org](mailto:Matthew.poole@youthfuturesfoundation.org)

### Cordis Bright

- Anna Manning: [annamanning@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:annamanning@cordisbright.co.uk)
- Dr. Stephen Boxford: [stephenBoxford@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:stephenBoxford@cordisbright.co.uk)
- The evaluation team [info@cordisbright.co.uk](mailto:info@cordisbright.co.uk)

### BBC Children in Need

- Rachel Carter: [rachel.carter03@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rachel.carter03@bbc.co.uk)

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Inspiring Futures grantees	
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Autism Bedfordshire	Oxfordshire Youth
AutismAble CIC	Pedestrian Ltd
Babbasa Youth Empowerment Projects CIC	Prior's Court Foundation

Inspiring Futures grantees	
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Beap Community Partnership	Redcar & Cleveland Mind
Bradford College	Rubygirl Limited
Breaking Barriers	Saints Foundation
Buckinghamshire Disability Services (BuDS)	Salmon Youth Centre In Bermondsey
Carefree - Fostering Independence Cornwall	Society for the Advancement of Black Arts
Carers Trust Heart of England	Soft Touch Arts Ltd
Centre of Wellbeing, Training & Culture	Sound Connections
Circle Community	Sport 4 Life UK
Company Three	Step by Step
Construction Industry Trust for Youth	Team Domenica
Creative Youth Network	The Diana Award
Cripplegate Foundation	The Juno Project
Damilola Taylor Trust	The Manchester Deaf Centre Ltd
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*BBC CiN staff*

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*YFF staff*

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- Matthew Poole – Director of Grants and Investment
- Jane Colechin – Deputy Director of Impact and Evidence
- Catherine Fitzgerald
- Shivonne Gates

*YRG team members*

- Caroline Appleton
- Josh Campbell
- Louise Chandler
- Katie Douglas
- Nyasha Duri
- Anisha Rahman
- Fahmida Yasmin