

Evaluation of NDH 'Bridging the Gap' Project 2015-2018

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Executive Summary

This report is an independent evaluation of the NDH 'Bridging the Gap' project completed by the Plymouth Marjon University, Plymouth. The project is a universal locality-based initiative that is set in the heart of two disadvantaged communities: Slade Valley in Ilfracombe and Forches in Barnstable. Both areas have multiple deprivation and child poverty. The project time-span was May 2015 to April 2018. The focus of 'Bridging the Gap' was on developing and delivering provision that would build resilience within young people and their families to enable them to overcome the barriers they face. The project's 'theory of change' is that this can be achieved through:

- developing trusting relationships with young people and their families
- providing opportunities for young people to develop social skills to support their educational and employment journeys
- developing young people's connection with peers and their wider community
- developing health and wellbeing.

The 'Bridging the Gap' project is a universal provision, open to all young people in the localities.

The evaluation has been informed by two elements; the Transformative Evaluation project (2015 -2017) involving fifty seven young people and five focus groups with young people and parents that took place in May 2017. The aim of the evaluation was to develop understanding in relation to the overall effectiveness of the project and to identify contributing enabling factors. Given the time limitations, the evaluation focused on generating qualitative data to be used alongside the existing quantitative data held by NDH.

The findings of the evaluation identify that NDH 'Bridging the Gap' project has much to celebrate. The value of providing universal locality-based provision is clearly evident in terms of identifying and addressing specific needs of young people and their families as they emerge. This approach to youth work is a distinguishing feature of the project and together with the consistency, longevity and quality of the service delivery significantly contributes to its success. The fact that 59.9% of the young people registered with the project also participate in activities outside of youth club settings is noteworthy. The intergenerational work, for example specific school holiday activities such helping out in the community by undertaking activities that need addressing and organising social events with older people, provides good examples of this wider engagement. Change is not confined to the 'youth club', the effects 'ripple' out as young people are more engaged with their communities, intergenerational gaps are reduced and family connectedness is increased.

The impact of the project is summarised below:

Intrinsic Impact

- Young people reported that the project had enabled them to develop wider social networks, within and across peer groups. This reduced feelings of isolation and had increased their life satisfaction.
- Young people's confidence had increased as a result of their engagement with the project. The wider impact of this was seen in terms of improving their school and family life.
- Young people expressed feelings of improved well-being arising from their social engagement in the project and from the individual support they received in regards to dealing with challenging situations. The impact of increased resilience and coping mechanisms was seen in the wider context, e.g. in school and in family life.
- Young people had a greater understanding of self and were more able to manage their behaviours and emotions in positive ways. In the older group, this had resulted in some young people being able to change their direction, leading to a more positive vision of the future.
- Young people developed the attitudes and behaviours that promote pro-social behaviour through acting as YMT members or Senior Members. The commitment to helping others is foundational to developing a culture of co-operative self reliance.

Extrinsic Impact

- Mediation between young people and their families at times of crisis have contributed to the avoidance of negative outcomes that arise from family breakdown. Parents identified the project as being a vital element in regards to safeguarding their children.
- Community relations have benefitted through the provision of community events where young people have played a significant part. The development of the young communities has the potential to impact in the longer term as the young people move into adulthood.
- The Young Health Champions initiative has enabled young people to act as peer educators, and their involvement in the health radio project with Voice Radio has enabled this impact to reach far beyond the boundaries of the project.
- The employment prospects of young people have been enhanced, supporting the longer term social-economic prospects of the community.

Additionally, the project has two further significant achievements;

- The innovation and excellence of the project has been recognised nationally as NDH were named as one of eight finalists in the Youth Work category in the Children & Young People Now Awards 2017. This award is the gold standard for everyone working with children, young people and families.

- The development of a robust context-appropriate evaluation mechanism and their contribution to evaluation thinking at a European level.

The report offers six recommendations;

1. The significant impact of the project on young people, their families and communities should be applauded. It is recommended that project considers extending the age range further to include work with the 6 – 8 year olds now that the ‘young communities’ are well-established. This may present opportunities for those aged between 11 and 14 to engage in volunteering experiences.
2. The advancements made in the innovative youth work practice model ‘Developing Young Communities’ should be disseminated far and wide as an example of excellent practice in both practice and academic forums.
3. The effective leadership of the project at both management and practice levels should be commended. The development of a robust and context-appropriate evaluation mechanism has supported the project’s capacity to deliver high quality needs-responsive work.
4. Collaboration is at the heart of the project and the strength of the relationships between NDH and its partners (professional, parents and customers) is remarkable. Further collaboration will support the NDH to develop future opportunities as appropriate.
5. The intergenerational work is an excellent example of innovative work, and one which benefits all involved. NDH could usefully consider how this work can be further developed to support young people to gain knowledge and skills in regards to self-employment opportunities in the future.
6. As the project approaches the end of the BIG Lottery-funded period, alternative sources of funding need to be established to ensure the long-term impact of the project is not lost.

Project Overview

North Devon Homes (NDH) is a registered social landlord based in north Devon. As a social landlord NDH recognises it has a crucial role to play in rebuilding and strengthening communities for the future. Their vision to “build communities where people want to live” informs their youth service provision which is part of NDH’s wider community development program working alongside regeneration and neighbourhood service delivery.

Following the successful delivery of the ‘Starfish NDH’ project in 2012-2015, NDH secured further funding from the Big Lottery in 2015 to support the development and delivery of the ‘Bridging the Gap’ project. The ‘Bridging the Gap’ project started on the 1st May 2015 and is funded up to 30th April 2018. Youth work has been delivered in Slade Valley in Ilfracombe and Forches in Barnstable. Both areas have multiple deprivation and child poverty.

The project aims were informed by local needs and the external evaluation of the ‘Starfish NDH’ project. The focus of the ‘Bridging the Gap’ project was on developing and delivering provision that would build resilience within young people and their families to enable them to overcome the barriers they face. The project’s ‘theory of change’ is that this can be achieved through

- developing trusting relationships with young people and their families
- providing opportunities for young people to develop social skills to support their educational and employment journeys
- developing young people’s connection with peers and their wider community
- developing health and wellbeing.

‘Bridging the Gap’ planned to work with young people aged 9-19 years who reside on the Forches Estate in Barnstable and Slade Valley in Ilfracombe using a combination of open access youth club sessions, targeted age-appropriate learning opportunities and engagement in community activity and events. The projects outcomes were specified as follows:

1. Young people will benefit from training courses and learning activities to increase employability skills.
2. Young people aged 9 - 12 years will gain life skills that will lead to improved behaviours within school and family settings and that will increase their emotional coping mechanisms.
3. Young people aged 13-19 years will benefit from projects to improve their health awareness and emotional / physical resilience that will lead to strengthened coping mechanisms.
4. Young people will benefit from opportunities to build community networks and wider community awareness leading to increased self confidence and self-esteem.

Evaluation Scope and Methodology

North Devon Homes commissioned the Plymouth Marjon University to conduct an external evaluation of the activities of the BIG Lottery funded project 'Bridging the Gap' over the time period May 2015 and May 2017. The evaluation has two elements; the Transformative Evaluation project that ran between 2015 -2017 and a round of focus groups with young people and parents that took place in May 2017. The aim of the evaluation was to develop understanding in relation to the overall effectiveness of the project and to identify contributing enabling factors. Given the time limitations, the evaluation focused on generating qualitative data to be used alongside the existing quantitative data held by NDH.

Data Generation through Transformative Evaluation

Transformative Evaluation (TE) was developed in 2011 and has been used in youth projects worldwide to provide evidence of impact. Essentially TE involves the generation of a number of young people's significant change stories during a given time period and the systematic collective analysis of the stories. Young people are facilitated to talk about how their involvement in the project's activities has supported them to address issues in their everyday lives. The process involved fifty seven individual young people, the youth work team and Customer Forum members (see the NDH Transformative Evaluation (2015-2106) Report for examples of the stories generated).

Stories were generated via four cycles conducted between June 2015 and November 2016 (see Table 1).

Cycle	Time Period	Stories generated
1	June 2015 – August 2015	17
2	September 2015 – January 2016	15
3	January 2016 – April 2016	11
4	May 2016 – November 2016	14

Table 1: Story Generation

Twenty six young men and thirty one young women participated. Figure 1 shows the age and gender of the young people involved.

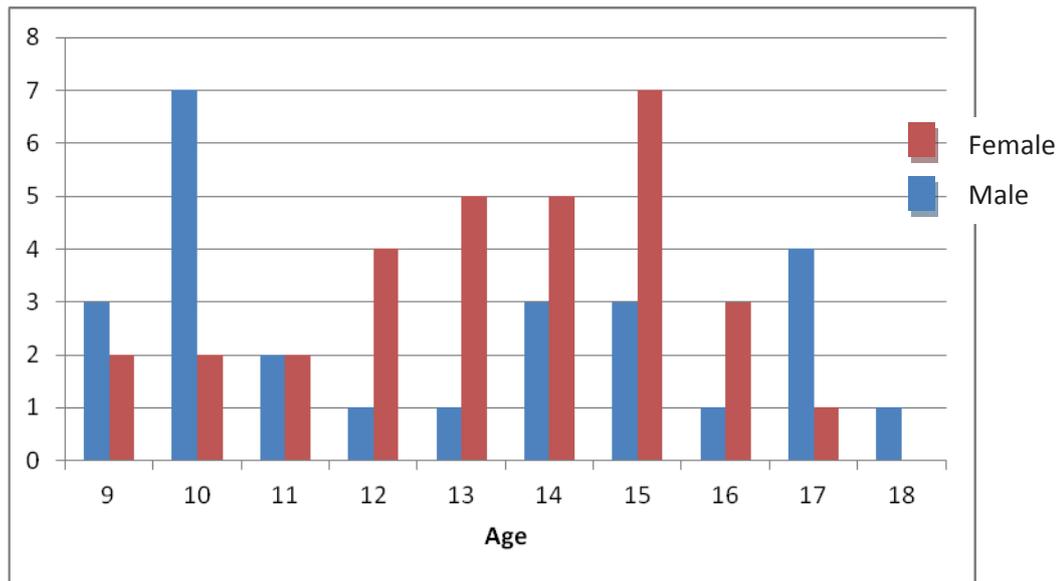


Figure 1: Age and Gender

Three young people were involved in creating ‘continuation’ stories that evidence the longitudinal impact of the project’s activities (see appendix 1).

Data Generation through Focus Groups

Qualitative data were also generated via a series of focus group discussions and activities that took place in May 2017. All activities were audio-recorded with the permissions of participants. Five focus groups, involving twenty eight participants, were held: these involved:

1. Four young people who have had long-term contact

Gender	Age	Length of engagement (years)
F	18	6
F	16	5
F	17	6
M	16	8

2. Six young people from Slade and Barnstaple who were either members of a Youth Management Team or a Senior Member

Gender	Age	Length of time		
		at club	As YMT	As SM
M	19	2	-	0.5
M	15	6	5	0.5
F	16	4	4	2
F	17	5	4	2
F	17	7	5	2
F	13	2	1	-

7. Nine parents and care-givers (7 females and 2 males) from Slade and Barnstaple
8. Five young people aged 9-13 from Forches

Ages of Young People	F	M
9,10,10,12,13	4	1

9. Four young people aged 9-13 from Slade

Ages of Young People	F	M
10, 11, 11, 12	3	1

The participants in the evaluation were identified by NDH who acted as gatekeeper in the arrangement of focus groups. All participants were fully informed by NDH about the purpose of the evaluation and procedures for generation and use of data in line UKES Guidelines for Good Practice in Evaluation (2013). This was checked and confirmed at the beginning of each group by the evaluator.

Methods

The focus group with parents followed the familiar process of a facilitated semi-structured discussion based on an interview schedule (see appendix 2). The group lasted for one hour and discussions were audio recorded and data were analysed thematically. Anonymised direct quotations are used in the report to illustrate the discussion.

The young people's focus groups used different methods to generate data. The two groups with young people aged 9-13 included five structured activities that sought to provide alternative means to gather views. The activities are described below.

1. An 'agree /disagree' activity where young people were asked to identify an aspect of the project that they thought was good. The purpose of this activity was to generate a sense of fun in order to build rapport and to bring the process with an open inquiry in order to generate data on a more generalised level in regards to young people's perspectives.
2. The Matrix was used to generate individual responses to a number of questions relating to how they felt they had benefited from their involvement in the project's activities (see appendix 3 for the matrix). Each young person was asked to complete a sentence on a post-it note and stick on the appropriate space on the matrix.
3. The 'Helping Hand' activity focussed on the issue of resilience, using a hand model to address six questions (see appendix 4 for model). The aim was to generate data related to the development of coping mechanisms.

4. This activity involved young people individually addressing the question: What would you miss most if the youth club stopped running? Why? The other members of the group then indicated their views using agree, neutral, disagree cards.
5. The 'envelope' activity was used to allow each participant to say something anonymously about their youth project (see appendix 5 for blank example). It is based on completing the sentence 'Something I'd like you to know about my youth project is..... This is important because.....' on a sheet of paper. This was completed as an individual activity and once completed the paper was folded to form an envelope which was then passed to the evaluator. This activity was the closing activity for each focus group.

Data generated through these activities were analysed thematically both in project sets and as a whole. Direct extracts from data generated from activities two, three and five are used in the report for illustrative purposes.

The focus group with YMT and Senior Members used a more discursive process (group discussion / response to an open question) in recognition of the maturity of the group (see appendix 6). The matrix exercise and the envelop exercise were also used with this group. The focus group with the young people who have had long-term contact (the Leavers group) used the matrix and envelop exercises alongside an activity focussed on employability skills (see appendix 7).

Evaluation Integrity

Every effort has been made to ensure the integrity of the evaluation. This included preliminary discussions with NDH (the commissioner) to shape the evaluation. The quantitative information supplied by NDH is assumed to be accurate and complete. There has been a comprehensive and appropriate use of all the data generated. Credibility of the evaluation is enhanced by the use of multiple methods of data generation. Dependability is supported by the provision of detailed information regarding the evaluation process and the commitment to communicate the evaluation findings in accessible language to allow as wide an audience as possible to engage with its findings. The evaluator and the commissioner share a commitment to the integrity of the process of evaluation and its purpose to increase learning in the public domain.

The report is structured as follows:

- *What works and why?*
This section presents an analysis of the conditions that have enabled success
- *Impact*

This section presents the evaluation findings under two headings: Intrinsic impact and extrinsic impact. Intrinsic impact refers to the benefits directly experienced by young people, and includes increased social networks, confidence, well-being, self-management, extended horizons and pro-social behaviour. Extrinsic impact refers to the benefits that are more widely. These include supporting families, connected communities, health and well-being and employability.

- *Summary and Points for Consideration*

This section presents a summary of the findings and some recommendations for the further development of the work.

What works and why?

This section presents an exploration of the contributing factors that have enabled NDH to achieve success in the delivery of the 'Bridging the Gap' project. It explores three factors; staff, practice approach and leadership.

Staff

Central to the achievements of the 'Bridging the Gap' project are its staff. 55% of young people participating in the Transformative Evaluation explicitly stated that their relationship with staff members was fundamental in enabling them to improve their lives. In many other cases, the importance of relationships can be inferred. Focus group data provided further evidence of the centrality of relationship. Whilst this is influenced to some extent by individual personalities, it is much more than this. There is a well-developed culture of openness, care, non-judgment and patience within the team and a strong commitment to seeing young people as community assets rather than problems to be dealt with. There is a 'can-do' approach and a shared pursuit of continually pushing the boundaries and seeking new opportunities.

Approach to Practice

Two aspects of practice development are highlighted as exemplary; the use of involvement and the brokering of peer support. Both are embedded in the 'Developing Young Communities' approach identified in the previous evaluation (Evaluation of the Starfish NDH Project; 2001 -2014). All youth projects involve young people in some way; the difference with the 'Bridging the Gap' project is that its involvement is not simply just taking part in something. There exists a formularised development pathway that supports young people to participate in transformative ways. Young people move beyond the personal to the collective as they begin to understand and value equality in diversity, cooperation rather than competition and a sense of connectedness. Importantly, young people are aware of this pathway, they aspire to travel along it and are able to articulate the feelings of well-being they gain from their journey. It is recognised that well-being is enhanced when one's actions and interactions satisfy basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Increasing involvement can also foster young people's competence as they are acting on the world in ways that directly result in positive changes. In terms of long term outcomes, this approach to youth work practice is likely to have wide-reaching benefits for the community as young people reach adulthood.

The term 'brokering' in relation to peer support is used to illustrate the intentionality of the youth workers' actions in supporting young people to become the future change-makers. NDH's innovative approach to delivering youth work is shaped by community development practices. Central to this approach is viewing young people not as problems to be contained, but as community assets, as a source of social capital that can strengthen the community.

The 'Bridging the Gap' project actively supports and encourages young people to develop the willingness, skills and attributes necessary to support others through a variety of opportunities. This aspect of the youth work approach is important in relation to sustainability, now and for the future. Direct contact with youth workers is limited and support from trusted peers can help young people who are facing challenging issues when youth workers are not available. In the longer term, the commitment to support others and the willingness to engage in these actions will enhance community relations and community resilience. Building individual young people's knowledge and skills alone is unlikely to lead to cultural change over the long-term; this requires the development of values that support acceptance of difference, empathy and a sense of collective efficacy.

Leadership

The management and leadership of the 'Bridging the Gap' project have made a significant contribution to its success. The consistency and stability in relation to delivery is of key importance to young people and parents. The development of effective collaborations with other local providers has also contributed to the success of the project. It should be noted that in times of increasing competition, collaboration is not easily achieved. Of particular note is NDH's commitment to continuous monitoring and evaluation. Processes such as the NEF 'How do you know' impact mapping tool, young people surveying the community using survey monkey, the Transformative Evaluation and external evaluation have been used to assess performance and to identify areas for development. Data generated through evaluation has been used for regular promotion of the project. Opportunities have been successfully gained to engage in national campaigns and events, for example the Young Health Champions and participation as 'experts' in the European Evaluation Project where staff shared their experiences with youth workers from five European countries. These activities have raised the profile of the NDH as a social landlord.

The innovation and excellence of the project has also been recognised nationally as NDH were named as finalists in the Children & Young People Now Awards 2017. These awards have become the gold standard for everyone working with children, young people and families. The project was named as one of eight finalists in the following category:

Youth Work: For the initiative that has done the most to promote young people's personal development and help them achieve their potential through youth work, informal education and participation in positive activities, especially among disadvantaged or excluded groups.

Impact

The 'Bridging the Gap' provided 869 individual opportunities through which young people were supported to develop their personal and social skills and confidence. Generally, these were delivered through the provision of universal locality-based youth clubs. 234 young people participated in these opportunities between June 2015 and September 2017. The trusting relationships that young people form with staff and with each other are central to enabling young people to access the support and learning opportunities available to them.

This section is informed by analysis of the qualitative data generated through the Transformative Evaluation (TE) and the focus groups. The stories generated through Transformative Evaluation were subjected to a content analysis using an emergent coding process. The analysis was conducted on the young people's narratives and the youth workers' narratives separately to identify the key impacts from these two perspectives.

Young People's Perspective

The following themes emerged from the young people's accounts of how they had benefitted from their engagement with project (see figure 2).

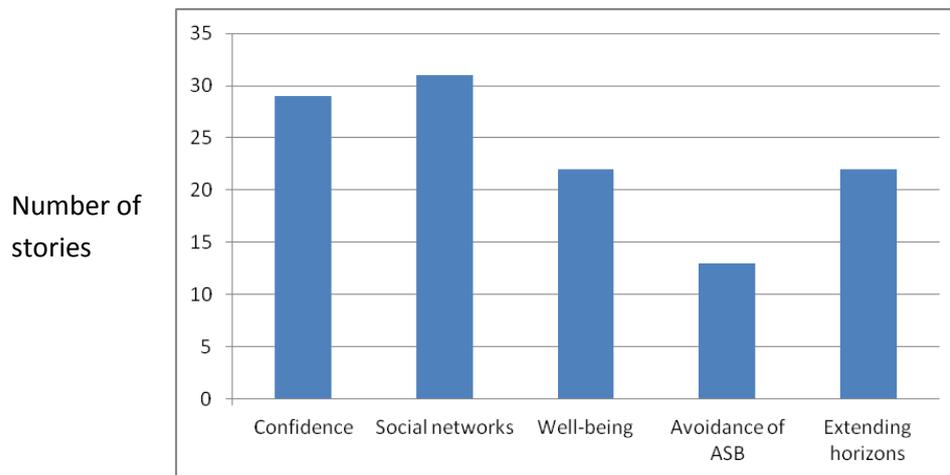


Figure 2: Themes emerging from Young People's Narratives

Youth Workers' Perspective

The following themes emerged from the youth workers' accounts of how young people had benefitted from their engagement with project (see figure 3).

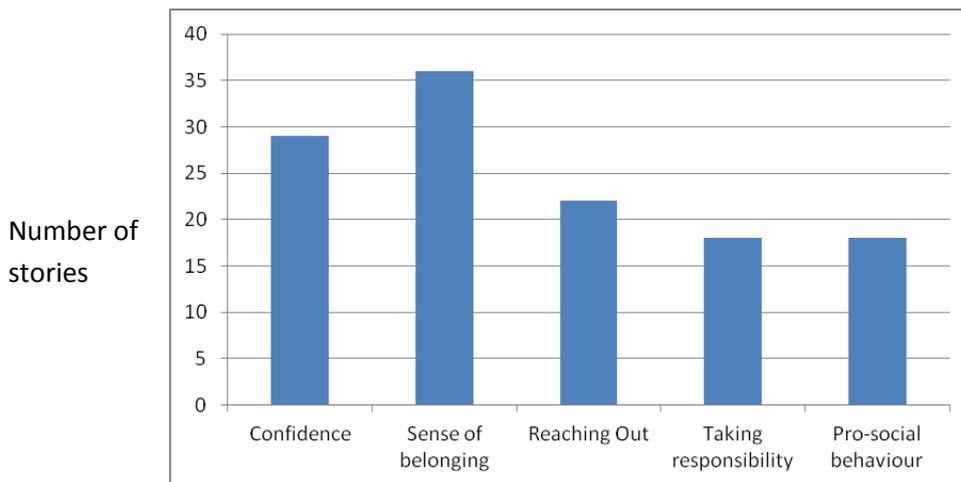


Figure 3: Themes emerging from Youth Workers' Narratives

Intrinsic Impact

The themes emerging from both perspectives are similar, with confidence and social networks the most prevalent in both sets. The themes 'Avoidance of anti-social behaviour' and 'Taking responsibility' both relate to increases in understanding of the consequences of behaviour and are thus combined to form the impact 'Self-management'.

Well-being emerged as a theme in both cases, however the young peoples' examples of increased well-being covers a wider spectrum that those identified by youth workers. The increased ability of young people to seek help was more evident in the youth workers' narratives whereas young people included this but also talked of feeling happier and having fun.

Extended horizons emerged as a theme from the young people's narratives. Young people described how the various activities and staff interventions had enabled them to do things they either thought were beyond their capabilities or beyond their reach.

Pro-social behaviour as an impact emerged from the youth workers' narratives and relates to examples of young people choosing to help others. This theme includes examples of young people helping staff and peers with day-to-day activities, encouraging and enabling their peers, participating as a member of a Youth Management Team and acting as a Senior Member. Young people did refer to their roles as YMT members or Senior Members but tended to see this as recognition of their developing maturity rather than as an impact.

In summary, the intrinsic impacts of the 'Bridging the Gap' project can be seen in relation to increases in young people's

- Social Networks
- Confidence
- Well-being
- Self-management

- Extended horizons
- Pro-social behaviour.

Social Networks

Overall, 54% of the young people who participated in the Transformative Evaluation described how their engagement had increased their social networks. This represents 55% of the young women and 54% of the young men in the study. In several cases the young people made an explicit link between increased self confidence and increased social networks, for example:

Since I've been coming to youth club, I have become more confident, and I have been making lots more friends (Alice, 15)

When I first started youth club, I was quiet and shy, then I started to make friends, my confidence grew, and the friends I have at club are now my friends at school, I didn't know them before (Ellie, 13)

The youth workers identified an enhanced ability to 'make friends' as a specific impact in twenty of the fifty seven stories (35%). There is a difference across gender, with this impact showing in 30% of the male cases and 42% of the female cases. This difference is not reflected in the young people's narrative and may be a consequence of the way in which social networks are generally perceived by adults as being more important to females than males.

The focus group data from the Matrix exercise indicate that the main reason that young people aged between nine and twelve attend the project is related to forming friendships, for example

I was struggling to make friends

I want to meet new friends

You can make friends

64% of all responses to the matrix question 'Something that has made my life better is...' related to increased friendships.

Increased Confidence

51% of the young people who participated in the Transformative Evaluation specifically talked about their increase in confidence as a result of being involved with the project.

Youth club has changed me into a better, more confident person (Maggie 15)

Coming to youth club has made me a better person, more confident when I meet new people, before I was not very confident (Steve, 17)

My confidence has changed a lot and now I feel like I can do anything (Sarah, 12)

A greater percentage of young women (53%) than young men (39%) reported increased confidence. Youth workers explicitly cited increased confidence as an impact in thirty five stories (61%) however they saw this impact occurring more evenly across gender (59% of female and 50% of males). Within the male population, increased confidence is evenly spread across the age range (9 – 17 year olds), however in the female population the impact is more prevalent in those aged 14 and 15.

The focus group data also shows an age-related correlation; for example the majority of explicit references to increased confidence in the Matrix exercise came from the focus group containing 13 -19 year olds.

Improved well-being

37% of young people who participated in the Transformative Evaluation explicitly talked about having fun, being happier, and enjoying their involvement with other young people and with staff. 59% of these stories came from young people aged 9 – 12, and overall, 50% of the stories containing evidence of this impact were from female young people and 50% from male young people.

I came to club because my friends went, so I thought I would try it out, it is really fun, I made a lot of friends and it has boosted some of my social skills and courage (Mark, 10)

I like coming to club because it means I can socialise with people from other schools, Club is a relaxed place where I can have a laugh. I love all the trips we can do (Bobbie, 15)

I like club because you can play fun games and make new friends. It's a time to let our excitement flow and we can interact with other people our age and above to learn new things. I love youth club (Rebecca, 9)

The youth workers identified improved well-being in relation to the way in which, over time, young people had developed their ability to communicate issues of concern and to seek support to address the difficulties they faced. This was evident in eighteen of the fifty seven stories (32%). In terms of gender, the increased ability to 'reach out' is evenly spread across gender, with 56% of the stories with evidence of this impact coming from young women and 44% from young men.

The spread across age range is significant. All but one of the cases relate to young people aged between 13 and 17. In the male population, 50% of the stories relate to young people aged 14 and in the female population, 40% relate to young people aged 15 and 30% to those aged 16. Six cases related to the issue of self-harm; these all concerned young women aged between 12 and 16. This represents 19% of the females involved in the TE evaluation. 182 young people received specific informal mental health-related interventions between June 2015 and September 2017 and 29 young people were supported to access formal services, for example counselling and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services. The quantitative data shows an increase in demand for support with mental well-being.

Data from the Matrix exercise demonstrate a number of ways in which the project has enhanced young people’s well-being, for example by providing a break from family pressures, alleviating boredom and enabling them to be more active. The ‘Helping Hand’ exercise used in the focus groups with the nine to twelve year olds provided further data about well-being and coping strategies within this age range. 44% were able to identify an increased understanding and ability to seek help with the difficulties they face (see Table 2 for examples).

Things that stress you	One thing you’ve learnt in club is ...	How and why does this help?
Dogs, school, rain	Stand up to people	Stops people being mean
Dogs barking all the time, School	Being able to talk to the staff	Because I can talk to them about anything
Siblings, school, being under pressure	To tell people to stop	So people will stop putting me under pressure
Friends sometimes, family sometimes, loosing at video games	That it’s ok to speak about how you feel to family and friends	Because if there is a major family issue then I can talk to someone, not hold it back

Table 2: Extracts from the ‘Helping Hand’ exercise

The Envelope exercise also included examples of this impact:

‘Something I'd like you to know about my youth project is..... That I can cope and I don't feel stressed all the time

This is important because..... My family has a major issue and youth club is there to offer support and it makes me feel happy.’

‘Something I'd like you to know about my youth project is..... It is my safe space

This is important because..... I struggle with a lot of stuff including home life. Club is a way of escaping from it all and I can speak to the staff about everything.’

'Something I'd like you to know about my youth project is..... The youth staff are so supportive and they have helped me through both the smallest and biggest situations that I have trouble coping with

This is important because..... Sometimes I don't have many people to turn to who would understand how I feel. I know the youth staff will understand and help me through any problems I have.'

Self-management

23% of young people who participated in Transformative Evaluation specifically talked about how their involvement in the youth club had helped them to stay out of trouble, to manage themselves more effectively and change their direction of travel. 83% of these stories came from young people aged 13 – 19 and the majority came from male young people (83%).

Youth club has changed my life because I'm not out doing drugs and causing trouble (Alfie, 14)

I think I have changed since coming to club as now I don't get as angry as I used to and respond much better than I used to (Gerald Ginger, 12)

Before I came to youth club, my behaviour and attitude was a lot worse and youth club has changed my behaviour and attitude in general towards everyone. Also I have become more confident with new people, it helped change me by getting a good relationship with staff (Nam Nori, 16)

The youth workers identified examples of how young people had developed their understanding of their own actions and the consequences that arise from these. The majority of these related to issues of managing emotions, managing anger and desisting anti-social behaviour. Twelve cases identified this impact and all related to young men. Five cases (42%) relate to young people aged 10 or 11; the remaining seven (58%) relate to young people aged 14 to 18. The difference between self-reporting and youth worker reporting in relation to age is interesting and may reflect the case that the consequences of poor self-management are not perceived by those in the younger age range as being as significant as it is for those in the older age range. As such it may be that this impact is more highly valued by those in the higher age-range.

The 'Helping hand' exercise used in the 9-12 year old focus groups produced evidence of the beginnings of this impact. Young people's responses to a question about what they had learnt through youth club show an awareness of unhelpful behaviours and the benefits of self-management, for example:

'One thing you've learnt in youth club is... to not blame others'

'One thing you've learnt in youth club is... to not get mad'

'One thing you've learnt in youth club is... to calm down when I lose'

Extended horizons

The 'Bridging the Gap' project provided opportunities for 235 young people to participate in activities such as residential or day trips. 37% of young people explicitly reported that the various activities together with staff interventions had enabled them to do things they either thought were beyond their capabilities or beyond their reach. 60% of these stories came from young women.

I've been involved in active projects like YCEP and charity events, I've been to PGL twice where I did things like the zipline and the trapeze that I never thought I would do. This has made me proud of myself – I'm proud of everything I've done with club (Bob, 15)

We help out with fundraising and work really hard to raise funds for our trips. I've done loads of trips like PGL which I could not have the chance to do without the project (Emma, 15)

The focus group data provides further evidence of the impact of the project in terms of extending the range of activities that young people engage with during their leisure time. Young people aged 9 to 12 highlighted a number of activities that they had participated in for the first time through the project. Young people in the older age range talked about how external and more expensive activities were 'earned' rather than 'provided', through good behaviour and a commitment to fundraising. They saw their involvement in fund raising as significant, the act of giving to other as well as funding their own activities was seen as an enriching and empowering experience.

Pro-social behaviour

This relates to examples of young people 'giving back' and includes examples of helping staff and peers with day-to-day activities, encouraging and enabling peers, participating as a member of a Youth Management Team and acting as a Senior Member. 57 young people were actively involved in supporting NDH's community activities, for example the Summer Fayre and Fun Day. The youth workers reported this impact in seventeen stories (32%) generated through the Transformative Evaluation. The majority of these came from stories generated by young people aged 13 to 17 (78%). Pro-social behaviour can result in both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. The intrinsic benefits include a sense of self-worth, of being respected and valued, and of being part of something beyond one's self. Data generated

through the focus group with YMT members and Senior Members provided evidence of these benefits:

What does it mean to you to be a YMT member?

'It means being a role model, you've got a say, people look up to you and it makes you feel important'

'you help people out even if you're not asked to because it's the right thing to do'

'we help to run the clubs, helping the younger ones, it means they are less scared to join in, sometimes they feel it's easier to talk to us rather than the staff –we can be like a link between them and the staff'

Discussion

Whilst the themes presented in this report have been examined independently, it is clear that in reality they are inter-connected and any discussion of impact must acknowledge this. A good example of this is seen in the regards to social networks and confidence. Developing confidence can only take place in a social context, and developing a wider social network requires confidence. The degree to which young people experience a social context as a welcoming and 'safe' non-judgemental space determines the likelihood of them developing confidence. Improved well-being is supported by both an increase in confidence and a sense of belonging, the ability to seek support when necessary is underpinned by a trust in others. Self-management requires a belief that one can change, a sense of agency and a degree of self-efficacy. Pro-social behaviour is more likely to occur when all these things are in place.

The findings of this evaluation individually are unsurprising, however when these are examined from an age perspective, they present an interesting picture (table 4).

Theme	Story teller's age (9 -12)	Story teller's age (13-18)
Overall population (n=57)	40%	60%
Social networks	47%	53%
Confidence	38%	62%
Well-being	14%	86%
Self-management	28%	72%
Pro-social behaviour	22%	78%

Table 4: Themes across Age Range

There is significant difference between the two age groups in relation to three impacts: Well-being, Self-management and Pro-social behaviour. This evidences a developmental outcomes pathway that exists for young people within the 'Bridging the Gap' project. The developmental pathway can be represented as shown in figure 3

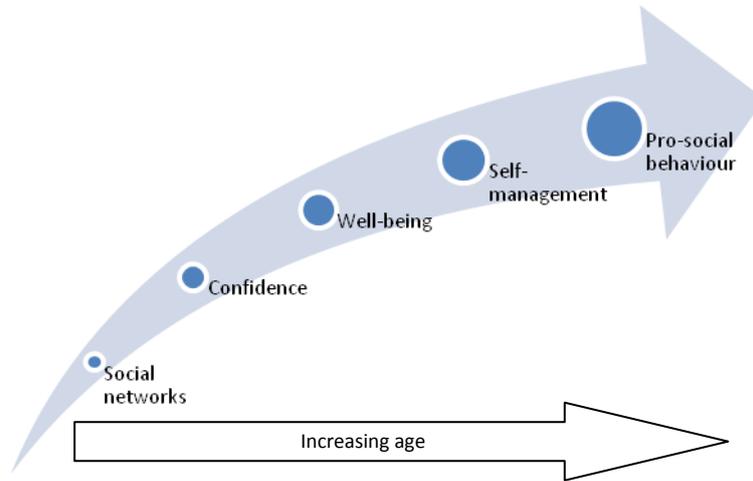


Figure 3: Developmental Outcomes Pathway

Extrinsic Impact

Extrinsic impact is evident when the outcomes of a project's activities are seen as beneficial beyond the individual young person. The extrinsic impact of the 'Bridging the Gap' project can be seen in relation to:

- Supporting families
- Connecting communities
- Promoting health and well-being
- Promoting employability.

Supporting Families

Data generated through the focus group with parents and care-givers evidence the high value placed on the youth work offered by the 'Bridging the Gap' project. Youth workers were highly regarded by this group for the contributions they made to improving their lives and the lives of their children, for example one parent stated:

they learn new skills, build their confidence and generally learn how to be kind and considerate people

A range of factors were identified, for example the accessibility, the stable environment and the skill level of staff, as key to the success of the project. Importantly parents and care-givers identified that their children had an improved understanding of self, had developed important social skills that they did not acquire through schooling and were more able to ask for help when necessary. These changes impacted positively on their relationships with their children and within the home environment.

There was unanimous agreement that the staff 'go the extra mile' to support families, and examples included one parent who said the staff had 'took her under their wing' when she first arrived at club and this support had enabled her to feel ok about leaving her child at the project. Other comments included:

'staff help us to sort out our issues and our children's issues'

'there's nothing quite like this, we need it, our children need it'

The youth team have supported fifty seven families between June 2015 and September 2017. They have acted as mediators between young people and their families and as advocates for parents in addressing a range of issues including education, health and criminal behaviour. This has reduced family stress and supported positive outcomes.

Two key aspects were raised by the focus group; positivity and safeguarding. Positivity was raised as a key impact for the project. Examples of how this positivity was experienced included young people feeling listened to, feeling valued, improving their behaviour and being more actively engaged. These behaviours can be linked to positive subjective well-being and, as research shows, this is essential if young people are to be encouraged and supported to be active participants in society, their community and family (Childrens Society 2012). Safeguarding was identified by the parents and care-givers group as being an important aspect. There was consensus within the group that the youth project provided a vital service in enabling issues to be identified. They expressed the view that young people were much more likely to speak with youth workers than with teachers or parents. Examples were cited where early intervention had prevented issues escalating and had enabled young people and parents to access wider services.

Connected Communities

Young people have engaged in community action through a range of activities , for example the Young Community Enterprise Project, Talent Shows, New to You and the Golden Globe Awards,. This has enhanced community relations and positioned young people as change agents, able to influence their peers, the younger generation, their parents and the older generation.

The 'Bridging the Gap' project has enabled the youth work team to develop their 'Developing Young Communities' approach in a more systematic fashion. An analysis of the youth workers' narratives from the transformative Evaluation was conducted to identify what they considered to be the key contributory factors in terms of achieving change through this approach.

Two themes emerged that warranted further investigation; involvement and brokering peer support.

- Involvement relates to the active, intentional and progressive involvement of young people in activities appropriate to their development stage. Examples include the encouragement and support to participate in group activities, in 'helping' activities, in volunteering and in taking on more formal roles such as a member of a Youth Management Team or becoming a Senior Member.
- Brokering peer support relates to examples where the 'young community' has had a significant impact on enabling a young person to achieve their significant change. The stories in which this theme is evident include a range of examples of both informal and formal peer support.

Looking in more detail at these stories shows that it is the way in which 'involvement' is used by the youth workers as a mechanism for learning and development. Again, it is a development approach as shown in figure 4.

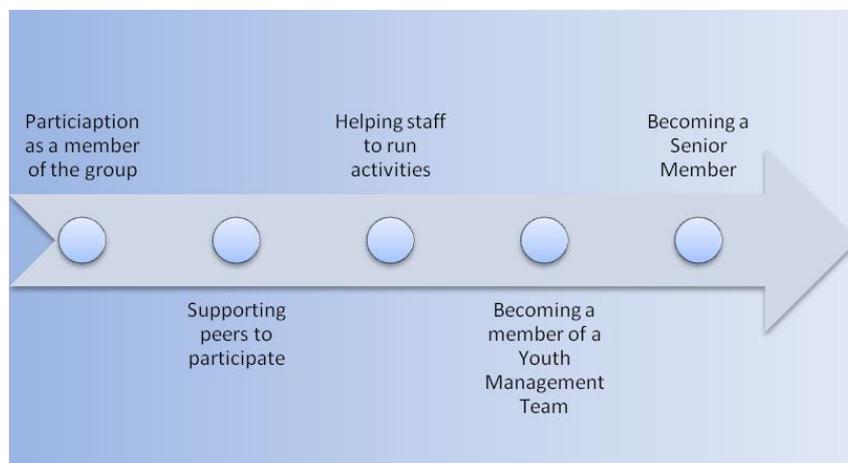


Figure 4: Involvement Continuum

Pro-social actions such as those demonstrated in stories from YMT members and Senior Members are freely done and are expressions of internalised values. This greater involvement also provides opportunities to experience autonomy and the positive states that follow from it. Young people in the YMT and SM focus group talked about the positive sense of self they achieved through their role, their commitment to supporting and enabling their peers, and the wider community and their ability to 'make things happen'. Parents

reported that those who held the role were very proud to so, that it had encouraged positive behaviour, demonstrated the positive contribution young people can make to communities and additionally, it was a useful addition to their CVs.

Health and Well-being

The intrinsic well-being benefits of the ‘Bridging the Gap’ project have been identified earlier in this report. Here the Young Health Champions project is highlighted for its extrinsic benefit. A Health Champion is an individual who is engaged, trained and supported to volunteer and use their life experience, understanding and position to help others in their communities to lead healthier lives. Health Champions are trained on a national Level 2 course accreditation by the Royal Society for Public Health. This provides young people with knowledge and vital practical skills to facilitate peer to peer education and mentoring about lifestyle related risks to health to effect real and lasting change in the wider community.

In most cases around the country this scheme has been delivered through schools, however NDH, building on their previous partnership with Health Promotion Devon: Northern Devon Healthcare Trust, were able to secure the opportunity to deliver this national health promotion initiative. Eight young people have successfully completed the qualification. Following on from this young people have engaged in community-wide peer to peer education through a health radio show on Voice Radio. This represents a significant achievement.

Employability

Supporting young people to gain and sustain employment has economic, social, and health benefits. Given that the project is located in an area with significantly higher unemployment than surrounding areas, enhancing young people’s employability has been a priority for the ‘Bridging the Gap’ project. 402 individual opportunities were provided to support young people’s education and employment. These included the iCan project, support for exam revision, course work and homework, volunteering, work experience, help with CVs, interview practice and sourcing employment opportunities. 62 young people participated in these activities.

The youth work team have focused on supporting young people to develop and enhance their employability attitudes and skills (see table 5).

Employability Attitudes and Skills	
(Self) Confidence	Teamwork skills
Self-esteem	Social / interpersonal skills

Motivation	Communication skills
Self-efficacy	Prioritising
Assertiveness	Planning
Positive attitude	Reliability
Self-control	

Table 5: Employability Attitudes and Skills

The acquisition of employability skills is seen as a necessary first step in path towards long-term employment; however they are frequently referenced in the media as lacking in school-leavers and graduates. Data from the Leavers focus group self-assessment exercise show that the young people felt the 'Bridging the Gap' project had helped them to develop all these attributes and skills. In seven of the fifteen categories, 75% of the young people reported that the project had helped them either 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal'; these categories were (Self) Confidence, self-efficacy, social /interpersonal skills, team work, assertiveness, self-control and problem-solving.

Summary and Recommendations

The NDH 'Bridging the Gap' project has clearly been influential in enabling young people and their families to address the challenges they face. The impact of the project's activities is explored in detail in the previous section of this report. Here the factors that contributed to the success of the project are summarised.

The value of providing universal locality-based provision is clearly evident in terms of identifying and addressing specific needs of young people and their families as they emerge. This approach to youth work is a distinguishing feature of the project and significantly contributes to its success.

The fact that 59.9% of the young people registered with the project also participate in activities outside of youth club settings is noteworthy. The intergenerational work, for example specific school holiday activities such helping out in the community by undertaking activities that need addressing and organising social events with older people, provides good examples of this wider engagement. Change is not confined to the 'youth club', the effects 'ripple' out as young people are more engaged with their communities, intergenerational gaps are reduced and family connectedness is increased.

The responsive and flexible nature of the project is contributing factor. Opportunities, through fund raising and collaboration, have been sought to enhance project delivery and meet emerging needs, for example in order to address the growing issue of young people's poor mental health, the youth team trained to become Mental Health First Aiders. Importantly, at a time when the criteria for access to statutory support services are being raised, the project was been able to offer support to those in need at a time when it is needed.

A key contributory factor to the success of the project is the consistency of delivery. The impacts as described in this report cannot be achieved through short-term activity. It is through a commitment to engaging with young people and their families over the longer term that the trusting relationships necessary to support change are achieved. These relationships enable the necessary combination of challenge and support to be received and utilised. The quality of the staff and the teamwork is noteworthy; there is a 'can-do' culture a shared commitment to finding innovative ways of supporting young people and their families – of 'going the extra mile'. Their enthusiasm and energy is appreciated by young people and families and often means they work beyond their contracted hours.

The 'Bridging the Gap' project is much more than a 'support' service – it's focus on building resilience is a defining aspect. This avoids the potential of developing a 'culture of dependency'; instead it seeks to develop within individuals and communities a 'culture of co-operative self-reliance'. The 'Developing Young Communities' approach to youth work was developed in the NDH 'Starfish' has been strengthened over this review period, particularly in regards to the creation of developmental pathways that enable and

encourage young people to develop pro-social behaviours and dispositions. A culture of co-operative self-reliance is now fully evident within the youth clubs and there are examples of it emerging within the wider community.

The NDH 'Bridging the Gap' project has much to celebrate. The impact of the project is summarised below;

Intrinsic Impact

- Young people reported that the project had enabled them to develop wider social networks, within and across peer groups. This reduced feelings of isolation and had increased their life satisfaction.
- Young people's confidence had increased as a result of their engagement with the project. The wider impact of this was seen in terms of improving their school and family life.
- Young people expressed feelings of improved well-being arising from their social engagement in the project and from the individual support they received in regards to dealing with challenging situations. The impact of increased resilience and coping mechanisms was seen in the wider context, e.g. in school and in family life.
- Young people had a greater understanding of self and were more able to manage their behaviours and emotions in positive ways. In the older group, this had resulted in some young people being able to change their direction, leading to a more positive vision of the future.
- Young people developed the attitudes and behaviours that promote pro-social behaviour through acting as YMT members or Senior Members. The commitment to helping others is foundational to developing a culture of co-operative self reliance.

Extrinsic Impact

- Mediation between young people and their families at times of crisis have contributed to the avoidance of negative outcomes that arise from family breakdown. Parents identified the project as being a vital element in regards to safeguarding their children.
- Community relations have benefitted through the provision of community events where young people have played a significant part. The development of the young communities has the potential to impact in the longer term as the young people move into adulthood.
- The Young Health Champions initiative has enabled young people to act as peer educators, and their involvement in the health radio project with Voice Radio has enabled this impact to reach far beyond the boundaries of the project.
- The employment prospects of young people have been enhanced, supporting the longer term social-economic prospects of the community.

Additionally, the project has two further significant achievements;

- The innovation and excellence of the project has been recognised nationally as NDH were named as one of eight finalists in the Youth Work category in the Children & Young People Now Awards 2017. This award is the gold standard for everyone working with children, young people and families.
- The development of a robust context-appropriate evaluation mechanism and their contribution to evaluation thinking at a European level.

The following recommendations are offered:

1. The significant impact of the project on young people, their families and communities should be applauded. It is recommended that project considers extending the age range further to include work with the 6 – 8 year olds now that the ‘young communities’ are well-established. This may present opportunities for those aged between 11 and 14 to engage in volunteering experiences.
2. The advancements made in the innovative youth work practice model ‘Developing Young Communities’ should be disseminated far and wide as an example of excellent practice in both practice and academic forums.
3. The effective leadership of the project at both management and practice levels should be commended. The development of a robust and context-appropriate evaluation mechanism has supported the project’s capacity to deliver high quality needs-responsive work.
4. Collaboration is at the heart of the project and the strength of the relationships between NDH and its partners (professional, parents and customers) is remarkable. Further collaboration will support the NDH to develop future opportunities as appropriate.
5. The intergenerational work is an excellent example of innovative work, and one which benefits all involved. NDH could usefully consider how this work can be further developed to support young people to gain knowledge and skills in regards to self-employment opportunities in the future.
6. As the project approaches the end of the BIG Lottery-funded period, alternative sources of funding need to be established to ensure the long-term impact of the project is not lost.

Appendix 1: Continuation Stories

SNAPSHOT OF MY BRIDGING THE GAP EXPERIENCES



In 2016 we went to Barton Hall PGL. This gave me the opportunity to meet lots of new friends; I was able to meet people that I may not have met if it wasn't for going away on this residential trip!

Earlier in 2017 we held a Slade Valley Fun Day to celebrate and mark the 25th anniversary of the Slade Valley Community Centre being built. This brought the community together; we had well over 400 people attend this event.



In November 2016 we held the annual Slade Valley Golden Globe Awards. My little brother won the 'Special Recognition award' due to the fact he underwent open heart surgery. This had a massive boost on his confidence after the surgery.

In May 2017, we held a talent show at the West Down Village Hall to show off some of our talents! During the talent show I performed as a solo, a couple years ago I would never have thought that I would be up on stage performing. I also hosted the Talent Show along -side Leigh and Andie, I would have never of had the confidence to host a show in front of an audience of parents and children either.



SNAPSHOT OF MY BRIDGING THE GAP EXPERIENCES



This summer we went to Osmington Bay PGL. This weekend away enabled me to both interact with people I may not really have talked to before and to do things I would never of had the opportunity to do.

When I started the project in 2011 I was very shy and didn't really interact with anyone I didn't know, if it wasn't for everyone at club encouraging me to go outside of my comfort zone I wouldn't be in the position I am in today. Over the years I've dealt with different issues and the staff have really been there to help me through them not just while they happened but after as well, some of these involved issues with friendships, family, college and school. The staff always make sure I leave with a smile on my face.



Earlier this year in May a group of us were asked to help the scrutiny panel to survey Forches about the regeneration of the estate. This meant we were out within the community showing what we do as part of the project.



In both 2016 and 2017 we were donated 2 camping pitches by Ruda. These camping trips were an opportunity for me to be with a smaller group of people and be able to spend time with staff. It was also an opportunity to have fun and enjoy the weekend with friends that I wouldn't always see due to other commitments such as college or work



In April 2017 we held the Slade Silver Big Bash in celebration the 25th anniversary of the Slade Valley Community Centre being built. Several members of my family attended including my dad and sister showing their support of me and the project.

Appendix 2: Parents Focus Group Question Schedule

Intro

Me, the purpose, consent, recording

You – name/ the nature of your involvement

1. How have young people benefited from their involvement with the youth club?
2. How do you know this?
3. What things have you seen about young people that are different now from when they first started the project that you believe are directly related to what they learnt from their involvement?
4. How have others benefited from this?
5. How do you know this?
6. In what ways, if any, has the project improved community life?
7. What is it about the project that makes it work?
8. How could the youth club be made even better?
9. How would things change if the project ended?

Wrap-up questions

1. Do you have anything to add?
2. Is there anything I should have asked you about?
3. How did the interview feel for you?

Appendix 3: The Matrix

<p>I come to youth club because ...</p>	<p>Something I don't do now that I used to do before...</p>	<p>Something that I know now that I didn't before is...</p>
<p>Something that's different about the way I feel ...</p>		<p>Something that would make club even better is...</p>
<p>Something that has made my life better is...</p>	<p>Something I do now that I didn't do before...</p>	<p>Something I have achieved is...</p>

Appendix 4: The 'Helping Hand'

1. Three things that stress you

2. One thing you've learnt in club that helps you in difficult situations

3. How and why does this help?

4. What do you still need help with?

5. Generally, how do you feel
☺☹☹

6. A Hope for the future

Appendix 5: The Envelope

Something I'd like you to know about my youth project is...

This is important to me because...



Thank you for your participation

Appendix 6: Young Peoples Focus Group (YMT / SM)

Welcome, introduction, what's this all about?

Introductions – your name, how long you've been using the youth club, whether you're a YMT or SM and for how long....

Tell me about being a YMT member...

Question: What's involved in being a YMT?

Why did you want to be one?

How do you become one?

What does it mean to you to be a YMT...?

Tell me something about what you've got out of being involved

Post-it notes exercise

Tell me about being a SM...

Question: What's involved in being a SM?

Why did you want to be one?

Who wants to be one? Why?

How do you become one?

What does it mean to you to be a SM...?

Final question: What would you miss most if the youth club stopped running? Why? (Group vote: agree, neutral, disagree cards)

One thing you want me to know about your youth project

Envelope exercise

Appendix 7: Young Peoples Focus Group (Leavers)

Welcome, introduction, what's this all about?

Introductions – your name, how long you've been coming to the youth club and one thing you tell a new young person who just moved into the area them about the youth club (round robin)

Tell me something about what you've got out of being involved

Post-it notes exercise

Triangle exercise + questionnaire

Arrange the triangles in order of importance (group activity – 15 triangles)

Complete questionnaire

Tell me about how things are different now?

Question: What's changed for young people in the area as a consequence of the youth project?

One thing you want me to know about your youth project

Envelope exercise

Appendix 8: An overview of quantitative data

Quantitative data supplied by NDH is presented below. Where existing data from the period 2012-2015 was available, a comparison was made to indicate an increase (shown in green) or a decrease (shown in light blue and more significant decrease in dark blue) in the number of young people participating in the period 2015 – present.

Focus of activity / intervention	Number of young people participating
Personal development and life skills	869
Mental health (self-harm, depression / anxiety)	182
Other health related (First aid, Health awareness, fitness, nutrition)	147
Schooling / education	315
Employment	117
Issues associated with criminal justice	53
Issues associated with drugs and alcohol	87
Family Liaison	55
Activities (residential / day trips)	235
Supporting NDH Activities (Summer Fayre etc.)	57
Community projects (fundraising / YCEP etc.)	234
Collaborative projects (Young Carers, Community Action, Voice Radio, etc.)	318



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