



# **BETTER FUTURES**

Final Report  
December 2016

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## Thanks and acknowledgements

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It has been a privilege to work alongside the three projects over the course of this generous and insightful funding from the Clothworkers. The staff, parents, carers and young people themselves have shown extraordinary commitment to the communities they serve and their enthusiasm and their ability to celebrate when things go well has been both positive and heart-warming. YMCA England's role has been crucial in coordinating and encouraging the project.

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# Executive Summary

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This has been an excellent and inspiring project which has had a strong impact at all levels:

- ▶ The three year period of the funding has allowed a deeper more connected way of working which has brought more substantial change in the young people who are part of the project
- ▶ The role of young people as potential leaders which has been encouraged by the project has inspired many to take leadership roles whilst other young people have seen the possibility of change and development for themselves
- ▶ By working together the projects have allowed the space for managers and professionals to reflect and share good practice and support each other
- ▶ Youth and community work has been shown to be a powerful, cost effective intervention which has given value and impact to individuals and supported community cohesion and regeneration
- ▶ The project has managed to survive and thrive in spite of severe cuts to Local Authority services and has played a major role in the communities for the three year period
- ▶ Quality staff has played a major part in the success of the project
- ▶ The trust and a strong relationship between Clothworkers and the YMCAs has allowed the project to be creative and develop to fulfil the young people's needs
- ▶ The project has identified a creative and effective way to work with hard to reach young people. This will be very useful for the individual YMCAs and across the YMCA Federation

# 1. Introduction

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YMCA England responded to the Clothworkers Foundation invitation in 2013 to tender to work with young people following the riots in August 2011. The YMCA was keen to demonstrate their current work across the country and to develop new ways of working with young people on the streets and away from their premises. The project was set up in three YMCAs with experience of working in this way and where there was clear evidence of considerable need within the community. As well as the more general aims of the work there were specific targets set for the projects.

- ▶ 320 disadvantaged young people from 3 of the most deprived urban/inner city areas will be supported through street-based youth work to access relevant services; gain an improved sense of community and take a new route that will help them to reach their full potential
- ▶ 100 hard-to-reach young people in North Tyneside, identified as most vulnerable to potential gang influence and involvement in anti-social behaviour will benefit from street-based intervention at a critical stage, gaining increased access to positive role models and improved aspirations
- ▶ 100 disadvantaged young people from inner-city estates in South East London affected by gang postcode territories, will be reached by detached workers and supported to take part in positive activities, including engaging with police, improving their sense of community and reducing anti-social behaviour
- ▶ 120 young people from the most deprived urban neighbourhoods in North Birmingham further disadvantaged by a lack of youth provision, will benefit from street-based youth work, with increased awareness and take-up of provision available to them and their wider families

The project will develop longer-term solutions to address the underlying causes of the riots for young people and communities, including the development of regional YMCA Action Learning Centres; improved local and national partnership networks; access to new resources including evaluation and toolkits; and a growing body of peer Leaders/Ambassadors

One of the key features of this project is that it was funded for three years so as well as managing immediate issues with young people it included longer term approaches to build leadership and capacity.

## 1.1 The three YMCA Associations

The three YMCAs that were chosen for the project were North Tyneside, Thames Gateway and Sutton Coldfield. Each of the projects identified wards within their catchment area which had significant disadvantage. As well as using the data to measure poverty and need the YMCAs had a huge amount of local knowledge and experience of their areas which they brought to the project. All three projects had some experience of street based working with children and young people. The three projects met regularly with YMCA England staff and the researcher to share good practice, suggest new approaches and learn from each other. Dissemination of ideas and practice was a key theme that developed over the course of the project.

## 1.2 Initial proposal and outcomes

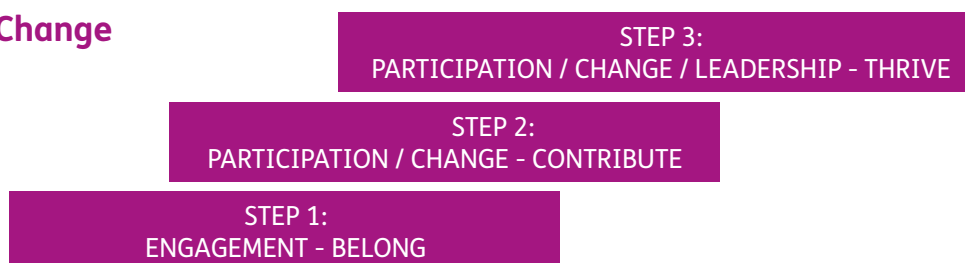
### 1.2.1 Monitoring and capturing change

In any social situation the dynamics are so interlinked and complex it is difficult to track the impact and effect of an intervention. This project has received funding for three years which is longer than a lot of funding, however the impact of an intervention can sometimes take many more years to manifest itself. It is not unusual for young people to return to a project when they have had children themselves and relate how important the project and the workers had been to them. Additionally the young people, their families and the communities are subject to a huge number of factors during the life of the project so it is difficult to be precise and show a causal connection between the project and a positive change.

However, all the YMCA staff involved in the project know that without some evidence to show that the investment has produced results it is difficult to demonstrate to the funder that their input has worked. Considerable energy was spent on working with models and methods to try to capture the results and the changes.

The quantitative data set was agreed with the funder to show the profile of young people who were in contact with the projects. Even this was potentially confusing as a 'contact' could be an extremely brief encounter or could be an in depth engagement between the youth worker and the young person. There was a wish amongst the workers to use a model which also showed the qualitative change that happened with young people. The model that was adopted was the 'Step up to Change' model developed by the YMCA to show the progression from the first encounter to young people taking leadership roles.

#### Step up to Change



This progression from feeling connected with the project, starting to participate and then to take on tasks or leadership positions was a good model to show the way that young people engaged and changed through their contract with the projects.

The initial proposal looked at the behaviour of the young people in terms of their anti-social behaviour, their propensity to join gangs and their relationships with authority figures such as the police. The way the projects worked was not just to target behaviour but to help young people build a sense of connection, worth and respect for themselves and others. By working in the community with others the aim was for them not to feel that they were outsiders but become part of the community. So instead of fighting against others they feel that they belong, can contribute and eventually can lead and shape their communities. By using this model the expectation within a project starts to shape the young people's aspirations and agreeing the likely progression across the three YMCAs enabled a collective understanding of change and the impact of the work.

## 1.3 Detached or street-based work

### 1.3.1 Definitions

There are misconceptions about detached or street-based work. To a casual observer it can be seen as a vague exercise which does not bring about change or impact. On the contrary, good detached youth work can be a powerful tool to reach young people who are harder to engage, and also in terms of the range of important outcomes that can develop from the relationship between young people and the detached youth worker.

Youth workers engage with young people in order to help them to develop, learn and grow. This is an educative process and one where the young people set the agenda and should be able to choose how they engage. Youth work started in centres where they were together with other young people. They learned skills and gained understanding through the process of being part of a larger group within a safe environment. Through these 'learning associations' young people were able to develop skills and knowledge. However, there have always been young people who choose not to 'belong' to a youth club or centre and who choose to come together in groups on the streets. In these cases the detached youth worker will go out to them and meet them in their own settings. In a recent report Brian Belton from YMCA George Williams College, identified the key aspects of detached youth work.

Detached youth work is:-

- ▶ Is an on-going process, although associations with young people can happen only once or recur over time
- ▶ Happens in a shared public space (sometimes known as a 'third space') where young people are better positioned to make choices on their own level of engagement with the youth worker on their own terms
- ▶ Offers support, care, non-formal (and where appropriate formal) learning opportunities to groups and individuals
- ▶ Addresses young people's issues, concerns, interests and aspirations.
- ▶ Relies on the voluntary involvement of young people
- ▶ Works (usually but not always) without the constraints of building based responsibilities but within the constraints of the laws on the use of private and/or public property
- ▶ Responds to the individual, group and social needs
- ▶ Demands creative approaches by youth work staff
- ▶ Requires skilled, well trained staff with effective managerial support and supervision

Belton 2016

Belton also goes on to say that wandering around the streets aimlessly, policing young people and working in isolation isn't detached youth work. He also makes a distinction between detached youth work and outreach work. Outreach work is a mechanism to bring young people into an existing centre and provision; whereas detached youth work does not have this as an aim. He argues that the encounter on the street or public space can be sufficient in itself.



## 1.4 Youth work as a tool of community regeneration

The input of youth workers in all three projects in different spaces around their localities has been a powerful intervention and has had significant impact on individual young people, their families and wider communities.

Another important dimension of the youth work approach is that it is not just aimed at changing behaviour; it is more than that. Many government initiatives look at errant behaviour such as the riots in August 2011 and want to change it. The youth work approach does have an impact on behaviour but it does this through working with young people on their values and sense of identity. In 1964 Bateson identified different levels of learning which he further developed (see Bateson 2000) and has been extended by Dilts (2014) and others into a model showing the different neurological levels involved in people's learning. This neurological level model demonstrates that more substantial, profound learning happens when people's values change and particularly when they come to see themselves with a different identity.

Short term learning happens at the 'base' of the model where the learning context is changed or behaviours are learnt. The next level of learning is about increasing skills and aptitudes to equip the learner to manage a situation. The 'higher' levels of identified learning are concerned with values, and then gaining an identity. The model proposes that where learning occurs at the higher neurological levels it then 'automatically' has an effect on the neurological levels below it. Someone who has the identity of a pacifist and the values of respect for others is more likely to exhibit peaceful non-violent behaviour.

The youth work approach is about engaging young people as people with the ability to change and transform themselves and achieve their best potential. It is about supporting young people so that they can understand, work through and adopt positive values and achieve an identity that works for them, their families and the community. This does take longer than a quick behavioural approach such as 'anger management' but once a young person has a sense of themselves as being wanted by their community and being able to contribute to their community they are much less likely to do something that impacts badly on others.

All three YMCAs ran celebratory events which enabled them to reach more young people and gave the young leaders a good opportunity to organise something to support and celebrate their communities.

A real advantage of this project running for three years is that these more substantial profound changes have been able to be supported and young people have been able to develop different values and make different, more positive choices about who they are and what they can do.

This profound identity change is not just at an individual level, it also plays a significant part in community regeneration. The youth and community work model has empowerment at the heart of the practice. Where a group of young people have experienced the potency of being able to organise events together and lead change, they become a strong presence in their local communities. Families will support these events and this in turn develops more of a 'can do' approach and opens possibilities for the communities.

Parents and carers reported that as well as seeing their own children grow and develop they were also more open to trying things themselves. Young people were leading not just each other but also setting aspirations and potential for their communities. This can be a real asset in developing community spirit and fostering community regeneration as local people move from dependency and are able to be more independent and mutually supportive.



## 1.5 What the projects did

The projects were based on street work and meeting young people in their own spaces. In all three projects 'going out' to meet and be with young people has been a major part of the project activity. However as positive relationships formed with the young people, more organised activities could be undertaken. Additionally as relationships grew with other agencies Better Futures had a way of working with partners to extend new opportunities to young people. As the project has evolved, all three YMCAs have worked with partner organisations to access indoor space for activities, events and joint working. The projects have also worked with sports, arts and faith organisations to bring specialist resources to the young people.

The weather impacted on the work and when it was really cold the young people were not on the streets so the use of local partners' facilities to provide a warm safe place was necessary during the coldest months of the year.

Youth work has a good tradition of offering residential opportunities and each association ran residential for their young people. This had a massive impact on the young people some of whom had never been on holiday; been in the countryside where there were no street lights and where they could see the stars; or had simply never been away from home. The changes that occur on residential are huge as young people learn to live alongside each other and interact.

## 1.6 Meeting the targets in the proposal

The targets set in the initial proposal were hugely exceeded both in terms of the number of young people reached and also in the changes to their behaviour and their attitudes through contact with the project:

Proposal	Number	Achieved
Number of young people to be supported across the three projects	320	1307
Number of young people in North Tyneside having access to role models and gaining improved aspirations	100	255
Number of hard to reach young people in South East London engaged with positive activities	100	419
Number of young people from deprived neighbourhoods in North Birmingham taking up opportunities and engaging with provision	120	633

All the young people supported and recorded in these figures have been actively involved in the projects and connected with the YMCA over an extended period of time. These figures relate to young people who have shown 'distance travelled' and experienced change and growth through their contact with the projects. There have also been a huge number of young people who have had more transitory contact with the work. The total contacts with young people are 461 from North Tyneside; 912 from Thames Gateway; and 5394 from Sutton Coldfield making a massive total of 6767 young people who have been influenced by this work. The differences in figures between the projects relate to the different locations, style of work and opportunities to run large events.

In addition to meeting the quantitative, the qualitative targets which are very important in YMCA work were also monitored. The following section illustrates the quality of the work and the impact.

# 2. Impact

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## 2.1 Measuring the impact

*‘This is a quality piece of work that the workers and the young people can be proud of’.*

YMCA Manager

The model of a ‘pebble in the pond’ is followed by looking at the impact of the project. This starts with young people, and moves on to their communities and finally looks at how the project has impacted on partners and agencies in the three locations.

### 2.1.1 On young people

All YMCAs had collated information about the measures of need and deprivation as a way of identifying the most at risk communities at the beginning of the project. They used national and local statistics as well as the knowledge obtained from working for decades in the community. There are some characteristics which were common to young people in all three areas:-

► **Lack of confidence and fear about taking risks**

Young people often appeared loud and in control but this often hid a real fear of the unknown. The residentials helped young people to confront fears and to gather experience of their own competence and ability to face the unknown

► **World view restricted to very local community**

Many of the young people had never been out of their local area so the opportunity to travel to the countryside and a visit an Oxford college really opened up other worlds to them. Another aspect of the project was that young people had the chance to meet others from neighbouring communities and realise that they had a lot in common with them e.g. the ‘Hands across the Tyne’ project linking the neighbourhoods together from both sides of the River Tyne through a Heritage project

► **Lack of aspiration**

Some of the young people come from second and third generations of families who have not worked but have lived on state benefit. There is a deep inertia in some of the families regarding work, which is often seen as ‘a mugs game’. In some situations young people were actively mocked for seeking apprenticeship opportunities or getting work. A lot of this comes from the adults in the community who want to protect their young people from failing and not having the expectation of the possibility of any sort of professional achievement or opportunity to make more money than one would receive in benefits

► **Lack of skills to manage situations**

Many of the young people have a limited range of skills to manage different situations. Consequently other behaviours can dominate; for example being aggressive rather than being

assertive. When young people (or their families) are out of their depth they can withdraw or become aggressive. The opportunity to engage with the project to run activities and try new things has enabled some of the young people to build new skills and aptitudes that give them more control to manage situations

► **Lack of resources**

There is not much money available in the local communities, restricting what young people can do. The subsidy for the residentials boosted the opportunity for young people to do something really different. Parents said that they would find it impossible to take their children on holiday or give them the outward bound opportunities

► **Isolation**

While the riots have been seen as a problem one common concern raised in all three projects was the isolation of young people. With concern about safety in the streets and general inertia many young people were seen to be spending a lot of time by themselves in their bedrooms. The youth workers reported a lot of apathy, and a lack of belief amongst young people that they could do anything

*‘My concern is for the young people stuck in their bedrooms on social media, not out doing things with other young people. They have low aspirations and low ambitions and don’t have the chance to take responsibility for themselves and others.’*

Drama worker

Through the activities of the project the young people were supported to expand their horizons, take appropriate risks, gain opportunities and achieve positive outcomes. The following case studies and quotes show some of the individual journeys young people have made.

**Case study:** - L is a young woman who first came to the project as a very shy 12 year old. She spoke very quietly and was a loner. Through the project she discovered a love of street dance and this has grown into a passion in the project. After the second year she was nominated and became one of three peer motivators and now helps run a new members’ forum helping them to identify what they want to do. She now feels confident speaking to strangers, performing in a drama group and supporting others involved in the project.

*‘Our peer motivators are our ambassadors, they are our ears and eyes in the community helping us to be tuned in and reinforcing our message.’*

Youth worker

**Case Study:** - A young man F, of 16 years old started at the project feeling hard done by and that the world was against him. He kicked out against this and had weekly contact with the local police. He says that that the project had listened to him and given him a second chance. It is not just the opportunity to do things and enjoy being with others and he said that the workers took him seriously and were more like friends making him and everyone feel welcome.

F says that the area here is thought of as rough by some people but he is proud to live here. He also says that he wouldn't want his kids to grow up here as they need to be able to express themselves and not be bullied. F now coaches football at the project, has built up his confidence and self-esteem and is hoping to join the Royal Marines.

*'The trip to Patterdale was a once in a lifetime chance. I had no experience of rock climbing and did things that I never thought I could do. I came away knowing that it is worth giving things a go.'*

Young person

As the youth workers built relationships and trust with young people, different concerns were raised. In North Tyneside one of these issues was the young women's sexuality and sexting in particular. At the residential they were able to talk about men, their body image, managing relationships on Facebook and other social media; drink; and as the youth worker said 'every conceivable topic'. They were also able to link up with the Sexual Health worker who operated from the Howdon Community Centre where they held regular sessions.

**Case Study:** - K was excluded from school immediately before she discovered the project. She was not able to fit in and found it very difficult to manage working alongside others. Through her contact with the project her confidence improved to the point that in the third year she attended a conference for professionals working with young people in the area. She addressed the whole conference and one of the ideas that she put forward is being picked up and progressed by the new funders.

The difference in family structure was highlighted by workers in Howdon who said that a 'one parent family' was regarded as relatively stable in this community. There were children and young people living with grandparents, friends or in some cases just being left alone. One young person was supporting all of his siblings while his father worked away from home after his mother had left. When it looked as if the children were going to be taken into care the family simply moved away with no forwarding contact details. Another carer who was looking after her two grandchildren in the absence of her daughter explained how she had slept on the sofa for years since her other daughter had returned home with a child.

The opportunity for input from significant and trusted youth workers is all the more important where there is poor stability in the home. As well as being a sounding board the youth workers have provided positive and motivational role models. A worker in Birmingham talked of everyone being entitled to a 'hat and gown moment' when they gained a degree. This idea of achievement in an area where University education is very limited can give some individuals motivation and encouragement to see themselves as potential professionals.

This project has traditionally focussed on young people aged between 13–19 years old. However, as many of the young people have responsibilities for their younger brothers and sisters the age group has spread. There seems to be a tolerance in all three projects for teenagers to share space and facilities with younger children and a real spirit of sharing the opportunity with the wider family. In Birmingham a group of young women organised a roller disco for mums and daughters and the fun day on Conker Island was promoted as ‘an event for all the family.’

## 2.1.2 Leadership

The three YMCAs were keen to build a leadership progression within the projects. Initially there was an idea of Young People’s Champions but discussions with the young people showed they did not warm to the term. However leadership featured in all three schemes. In North Tyneside groups of young people took part in the ‘Leaders for Life’ scheme where they were involved in building up leadership skills. In Thames Gateway there was a less structured approach and young people who committed to the project were given opportunities of leading and a small group were given the title ‘Peer Mentors’. A similar process happened in Birmingham especially relating to the residential as young people who had supported others and the project throughout the year were given leadership roles with younger members in the following residential.

This progression in all three projects fits with the Step up to Change model described in section 3.1. It is also an important part of leaving a legacy following the end of the project funding.” (see section 10)

## 2.2 On the Community

One of the aspirations of the project in all three areas was to increase the resources available to the young people and their families. In the first year projects undertook some surveys to try and ascertain the level of awareness of help and support in the community and whether these services were accessed. One of the aims of the surveys was to establish a base line at the start of the project and revisit this at the end of the project to see whether resources had increased. However, even as first results were being gathered it was apparent in all three locations that the drastic cuts to local authority budgets were a much more significant factor than the increase of opportunity as a result of this project. This has meant that in all three locations the project has been one of the only constants in the life of the young people, as other services have been withdrawn.

**Parent** - ‘The project has been really fantastic. It has given my 14 year old son somewhere to go where he feels safe, and I feel safe about him coming here. Young people round here don’t have a good life, they can get into drugs and bother. The YMCA do a good job, giving advice. When they take the kids out they don’t let them wander off. They teach them to cook – the other day they made bread buns – they came out of there buzzing. The YMCA is always there and they love all of the kids and they want to be here – it makes life better.’

Community cohesion is seen as an aspirational aim in building community work. Youth workers in all three projects talked about the postcode separation and how young people felt restricted to certain areas and were potentially threatened when they strayed outside these areas. The graffiti tagging of areas is one way of territory being defined but there is also an issue of young people feeling unsafe often with good reason, when they enter another territory or area. The projects

have worked positively to break down some of these issues by gathering young people from several areas to work together on fun days, with a residential experience or simply to go on days out together. This has helped to break down barriers and has enabled the young people to see that those from 'other territories' are similar to them. It has reduced fear and built confidence.

## 2.3 On Partners

*'Working with partners with this project has widened and deepened our relationships with other agencies'*

- Manager Thames Gateway

Partnerships were crucial in the success of all three YMCAs. At a time of austerity all projects recognised the sense in working with partners. These joint relationships allowed the larger fun days and sporting events and they also enabled enhanced activities for the young people involved in the project such as access to sports coaching, photography, drama and other specialisms.

### 2.3.1 Working with the Police

One of the critical factors which was a focus of all three projects was the young peoples' relationship with the police. All three projects engaged directly with their local community officers which meant that for all the larger community days that were organised the police were actively engaged. There was also a sharing of information where young people were seen at risk of being drawn into gangs or criminal activities. The youth workers were very aware of how the closeness to the police could be perceived by young people but because of the relaxed and supportive ambience achieved in all three projects this seemed to work. Feedback from the police in North Tyneside was that the days that crime decreased was when the project was running and they experienced fewer call outs.

The police were also aware of cutbacks in their own services and how the broader community liaison work that they used to do was being decreased in favour of more focussed work.

### 2.3.2 Working with other agencies

*"In areas like Howdon you have to realise that it is not a sprint it is a marathon. Having young people in the building has been hard for the staff and we talk about swearing being the norm for the young people at home so it's hard to change that quickly. We do want to be part of encouraging something good and see that it is important to make a difference. The real difference comes from within".*

- Local Authority Manager North Tyneside



Thames Gateway workers talked of how the project has raised the profile of the YMCA with partners and how the funding had provided a catalyst to gather partners together as they had the resource to employ youth workers.

*“We worked directly with the young people and built activities with them that they were really interested in”.*

Youth worker

As part of the evaluation a range of agencies were approached to assess their views on the success of the project. The following areas were identified by partners:

### **2.3.3 The benefit to the community**

Partner agencies commented on how the communities had benefited from the Better Futures project. This was seen at its starkest when a police officer identified fewer call outs when the Better Futures sessions were running and at its most positive when agencies were effusive about the impact of Fun Days and events in the community.

### **2.3.4 The YMCA as a partner**

Partner agencies were extremely keen to meet with the researcher to offer positive comments about the YMCA. Phrases like ‘The YMCA is dependable, a really good partner’ and ‘YMCA is a partner of choice for joint funding bids and initiatives’ illustrated the quality of the relationship and how highly the YMCA was valued.

### **2.3.5 Individual stories of young people’s progression and development**

Partner agency staff were aware of the progression of some individual young people. A teacher was able to outline the journey of individuals in the after school group run as part of the Better Futures project. She was surprised that previous non-attenders and disruptive pupils were not only back to school and attending but also taking the lead in some projects. Police in contact with the project were also able to give examples of young people who had fallen off their radar as they had taken up with the project.

### **2.3.6 Collaborative work and help in achieving their goals**

The increased accountability for all agencies has meant that targets have had to be met. The YMCAs have been particularly praised for helping agencies to access the ‘hard to reach’ young people. For example health initiatives such as healthy eating and sexual health awareness projects have used the good relationships young people have with the Better Futures workers to contact and work with young people.

# 3. Success factors/Critical areas and approaches

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## 3.1 The staff

Over the duration of the project there has been some turnover of staff. In the first year, two of the projects employed staff who were reasonable and managed the project. However, in the second and third year both North Tyneside and Thames Gateway were able to recruit really first rate staff who were excellent at both working with young people and other agencies.

The subsequent rise in impact and power of the project was really noticeable with comments from partners and young people about the extraordinary qualities of the staff. Over the course of the project the following points were identified by agencies, the workers and the young people as being important in selection of the staff

- ▶ Being local – acceptance and knowledge of the area and dynamics
- ▶ Consistency – building trust by always being available and keeping commitments
- ▶ Training – not just walking the streets – being focussed and informed – much more powerful interventions
- ▶ A commitment to and love of the young people and their families

One of the partners spoke very highly of one of the project workers. In response to the question of why they rated him he said:-

*‘The young people warm to him, engage with how he looks – he looks the part. He is very astute and recognises issues young people have and pulls these closer into his web. He produces superb reports and can feedback what is happening in the community. He is very good at Child Protection he is a safe pair of hands’*

One of the parents said:-

*‘I trust xxxx with my son, that he will not only look after him but help him to grow up well. When they were away and I was worried about my son they texted me every day to let me know that he was OK’.*

The workers currently engaged on all three projects are excellent and as this piece of work closes there are some really difficult decisions for the YMCAs to make. One of the problems with short

term projects is the lack of security for staff and there is a concern that good quality staff will go elsewhere to pay the mortgage. YMCAs are combatting this by clustering project funding to provide a reasonable income for the best individual workers, but it is frustrating for managers when they have appointed excellent workers to see them having to leave to ensure security for their own families.

### 3.2 Using warm spots or investing in cold spots

Much of the work that has been undertaken by the three YMCAs has its roots in community connections which have been established for decades. The YMCA as a trusted 'brand' with a very local emphasis is well set up to engage immediately with the local community.

For this project Sutton Coldfield and Howdon started work in new areas. The feedback from youth workers and managers is that it proved extremely hard to do the early work and the early relationship building. At some point energy has to be put in to establishing the connection with young people, their families and the community. It takes time to build good relationship and trust where there is suspicion of authority. The YMCAs were only able to do this for this project because there was the security of longer term funding.

It also points to using 'warm spots' where trust and relationships are already built up if there are specific aims and targets which are the focus for funders. For example if a project wants to support healthy eating starting this in 'warm spots' where there are good existing relationships will give quicker results.

### 3.3 Collaborative work

The areas where the work had greatest impact is where there is other activity going on, either other YMCA activity or where partners are working. To manage the impact of austerity, agencies have had to work together as described in section 5.4. As well as this cooperation between agencies, there needs to be cooperation within the different departments of the individual YMCAs. Different streams of the YMCA work have contributed to fun days and the residentials and have often worked side by side to produce large events.

For example at the Conker Island Funday the YMCA Young Carers Project had a stall and was actively involved. This also applied to how YMCAs managed different funding streams. The YMCAs were able to use other funders and agencies to increase the number of sessions and contacts with the young people who were involved principally with the Better Futures project. There was a lot of discussion and scrutiny to ensure that there was a separation and identity to the Better Futures project and a real understanding that the Clothworkers Foundation wanted to have a true picture of the impact of their grant. What projects found was by running several activities in parallel there was added value. For example, by offering basketball training alongside the Better Futures work in Thames Gateway the young people had additional contact time with staff and more opportunities.

Some funding from the Kingstanding Regeneration Trust, Birmingham Youth Service (Statutory), Big Lottery and Sport England in Birmingham also enabled additional sessions to be held in Conker Island. This flexibility not only increased the impact of the work it also enabled staff to be creative as they were encouraged to look at how to 'add value' rather than be stuck with a rigid pre-determined range of activities.

## 4. Challenges for the project

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The projects have achieved remarkable things as illustrated in the comments about impact but there have been some difficulties to overcome. The main challenge has been the rapidly changing context with local authority cuts and the reduction in charitable funds available. Local authority cuts have been draconian; in the first year these impacted on the youth service but by the end of year three the cuts were hitting all services. Workers reported that Social Services Departments were being deemed inadequate; rubbish piled up in the streets with decreased collections and all non-statutory work with children and young people was cut back. An original aim of the project was to build on the existing services and enhance opportunities. Unfortunately, in two of the areas people report that the project and the YMCA is the only agency working with young people and the third area is seeing the local authority work experiencing further cutbacks. The profile of the project has been enhanced in all three areas as other services have fallen away. At the last visit of the researcher a great ally of Better Futures, the Kingstanding Food Community Project reported that they would be closing as they were unable to find funds to continue.

Another challenge was getting a good understanding of the scope and direction of the project. One of the YMCAs experienced real difficulty getting the project off of the ground and sickness and poor initial recruitment meant that there was a delay in starting the project properly. This was remedied by the current manager who was really able to grasp the opportunity offered with Better Futures and appointed good workers and built leadership among the senior young people. The turning point for this project and the strength of the other projects does rely heavily on the quality and motivation of the staff.

# 5. Feedback to the Funders

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## 5.1 Positive features of the funding/delivery relationship

There was widespread appreciation of the Clothworkers' Foundation trust in the YMCA to identify the most effective work with young people. This enabled the project to be flexible and manage the work to the best effect for the young people and their families. The projects appreciated not being constrained by very specific targets and detailed operations which they said can quickly go out of date. They reported that other funding streams expected the projects to design and carry out very specific pieces of work which meant that they were not able to respond to the identified and changing needs of young people and their communities.

The trust between the funder and those working with young people has enabled the work to creatively evolve as the relationship between project workers, young people and their communities has grown. Subsequently some very ambitious pieces of work have taken place in all communities where young people have taken a lead and developed their own projects; for example the Roller Disco for Mums and Daughters in Birmingham, which could never have been anticipated when the original funding application was submitted.

*“We haven't had to try and second guess what the young people might need at the start of the project and then deliver it. We have been able to work with the young people and deliver what they need. We can change things and try something new”.* Youth worker Thames Gateway

*“The funding through the Clothworkers has helped us build a community rather than just run sessions with young people”.* Youth worker

There are also advantages to funding through a federated structure in terms of dissemination of good practice but also how the three groups became connected. This enabled a healthy relationship to be formed between the three YMCAs and while not 'competing' with the other projects there was an incentive to achieve for their own young people and a lot of mutual encouragement to develop similar initiatives.

The investment was generous and long term which really supported the work. However, the reach and the impact of the funding was extensive. Six thousand, seven hundred and sixty seven (**6767**) young people have been touched and influenced through the project and one thousand three hundred and seven (**1307**) have grown and developed and made significant change.

This is from a project which has operated on a part time basis with approximately 12 hours of paid sessional staff support per week in each of the three centres. This is an extraordinarily good return for the investment by the funders and shows a model and approach which really works and should be replicated.

# 6. Dissemination

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## 6.1 Working together – Collaborative learning

The YMCAs were rated as good partners for collaborative work. There was an especially helpful synergy where other partners needed to access young people in order to fulfil their own targets. Health agencies and sports associations who were running campaigns to improve health and mobility worked closely with the projects. One example of this was the Kingstanding Food Community Project in Birmingham who had accessed funding to promote healthy eating with young people, especially those who were disadvantaged. The YMCA was able to introduce young people to the Kingstanding Community Food Project and this provided them with further opportunities. Similarly, the Newcastle Eagles Basketball scheme was set up to introduce young people to basketball and to help young people to become more active. By working with the YMCA in Birmingham there was a group of young people who were ready to engage. This connection with the local community was echoed in the other projects; in North Tyneside workers said that their contribution was valued because ‘we are on the ground’.

## 6.2 Impact on the wider federation and others

One of the advantages of running the project in three areas is that the working methods can be demonstrated and interrogated. The YMCA as a federation working within the community uses commitment and passion as valuable tools in its work. It also uses charismatic local leaders who ‘go the extra mile’ for the people they work with. A large part of the YMCA’s work is through structured programmes such as health and fitness, apprenticeships, work qualifications and sports initiatives.

The detached youth work approach might be seen as less structured, but good detached youth work needs more structure than more formal programmes. It can be harder to measure the impact of this approach as the changes in values, identity and community are more complex than a programme with a designated outcome. The method of being ‘on the streets’ is also much harder to supervise and it is more difficult to reassure the managers that good work is taking place. If a person is supervising football training it is easy to see that a good session is taking place. It is much harder when the detached youth work session is happening and the effective contact is in conversation with small groups.

The strength of this project is that it has been able to demonstrate on three sites that YMCA staff have managed to contact ‘hard to reach’ young people. They have built relationships which have enabled them to engage and contribute and with some of the young people helped them to become active leaders in their communities. This has shown itself to be an initiative which contacts those young people that are outside the reach of other agencies such as schools. It has also helped those ‘known’ to agencies like the police to explore and adopt alternative more positive approaches.



# 7. Legacy

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There are many areas where this project leaves a legacy:-

- ▶ The young people
- ▶ Their local communities
- ▶ The partners
- ▶ YMCA and wider family
- ▶ Funders; in particular the Clothworkers' Foundation

These have been explored in the course of the report but what cannot be properly identified in a three year project is the impact of those young people who have become young leaders within their communities. The Rank Foundation has a term for this - 'the pebble in the pond'. The changed young person is like a pebble dropped in the pond which brings about ripples of change giving a much greater impact than just their own transformation. Local young people have gained a real sense of vocation to lead in their communities and have acquired the values, skills and motivation to continue to support positive change.

This project has also inspired other agencies to find ways of gathering funding to allow the work to continue in light of the severe local authority cuts and decreased charitable funds available. In the North East a consortium has been established as a collective way to continue funding projects. The consortium recognises the decline in funds available from local authority and charities and the resources wasted in being in competition with each other. It is not just an effort to reduce the time projects spent in competitive bidding but to build a more collaborative approach. The size of the consortium has enabled it to look at larger grants and they have just secured a major grant with 'Save the Children' as a partner to support work in the area. The active role that YMCA has both with the work through Better Futures and by contributing to the Consortium has been a key factor in this initiative.

There has been an unexpected legacy in the connection that now exists between the three associations. The YMCA is a federated organisation with each of the Associations being independent charities. Whilst there are some arenas and mechanisms for dissemination and sharing across the federation this project has offered all three associations a much more intense, scrutinized and collaborative opportunity to work together. The conversations about practice, assessing impact and staffing have really enhanced the work. The groups have been really good at supporting and encouraging each other, especially when there have been difficulties to face.

The impact has been multi-layered and very positive and has brought learning, growth and enthusiasm to the young people, the staff, the managers, the partners and all involved in Better Futures.

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YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

SUPPORT & ADVICE

ACCOMMODATION

FAMILY WORK

HEALTH & WELLBEING

TRAINING & EDUCATION