

Level Up Youth Work Evaluation Report

CEO Foreword

Helen Mann, CEO, Young Westminster Foundation

For the past three years, Level Up Youth Work has been rooted in a simple but important belief: that the people working every day with children and young people deserve opportunities to connect, learn, develop and thrive.



Across northwest London, youth workers, community practitioners, volunteers and grassroots leaders are supporting young people through increasingly complex challenges. They do this with enormous commitment, creativity and care, often within organisations operating on very limited resources. Yet too often, workforce development is treated as an optional extra rather than an essential part of delivering high-quality support for young people.

This programme offered an opportunity to support skills development across the sector, while also enabling a focus where needs are greatest, enabling support for organisations that are equity-led and with fewer resources.

This evaluation shows what can happen when we invest in the people behind youth provision.

I would like to begin by thanking our partners across the Young People's Foundation network: Young Camden Foundation, Young Ealing Foundation, Young Hammersmith & Fulham Foundation, Young Harrow Foundation and Young K&C. Together, we have tested and grown a model built on collaboration, local knowledge and shared ambition. I would also like to thank City Bridge Foundation for making this work possible through Propel, and the evaluation team for capturing the programme's impact and learning so thoughtfully.

Most importantly, I want to thank the hundreds of practitioners who engaged with the programme. Whether attending a forum, undertaking training, completing a qualification or sharing their expertise with peers, they embraced opportunities to learn and connect despite significant pressures on their time. Their commitment to young people and to strengthening their own practice has been the driving force behind the programme's success.

The evaluation highlights several important lessons.

Firstly, connection matters. The youth workforce is diverse, operating across a wide range of organisations, communities and specialisms. Many practitioners do not identify with traditional definitions of youth work, yet they share a common purpose: supporting children and young people to thrive. Level Up Youth Work was designed with a particular focus on smaller, grassroots and equity-led organisations, whose opportunities for professional development are often most limited. However, the programme also demonstrated the value of bringing together organisations of different sizes, backgrounds and specialisms. Through local forums and learning opportunities, practitioners were able to strengthen their skills and knowledge, learn from one another, build relationships and develop a stronger sense of belonging to a wider sector.

Secondly, place-based approaches work. The strength of our delivery model lies in the ability to convene local organisations, understand community needs and create trusted spaces for learning and collaboration. By creating opportunities for grassroots, equity-led, voluntary and larger organisations to come together, Level Up Youth Work helped strengthen local ecosystems rather than individual organisations alone. The forums, training and qualifications supported practitioners not only to strengthen their own skills but also to build partnerships, share resources and learn from one another, generating benefits that extended far beyond those directly participating.

Thirdly, the evaluation reinforces a reality many in the sector already know. Workforce development remains significantly under-resourced. For many small, grassroots and equity-led organisations, professional development can feel like a luxury when funding is short-term and resources are stretched. These were the organisations at the heart of the programme because the need was greatest. Yet the findings also show that workforce development is a challenge experienced across the sector. Investing in the people who work with children and young people, wherever they are based, improves practice, builds confidence, strengthens organisations and ultimately delivers better outcomes for children and young people.

As the Government's Youth Matters strategy recognises, a skilled, supported and sustainable workforce is central to ensuring every young person can access high-quality opportunities in their community. The recommendations in this report offer a practical roadmap for how place-based partnerships can continue building that workforce through connection, shared learning, professional development and stronger infrastructure.

Level Up Youth Work has shown the value of investing in people, relationships and local ecosystems. The challenge now is not whether this work is needed and valued but how we ensure sure that it continues and how we build on what we have learned so that more young people, communities and practitioners can continue to benefit from it in the years ahead.