

CREDIT SUISSE 

 THE
YOUNG
FOUNDATION



Amplify Youth

Putting Young People at
the Heart of Social Change

Programme Report
2017 - 2019



The Young Foundation's mission is to develop better connected and stronger communities across the UK.

As an UKRI accredited research organisation, social investor and community practitioner, we offer advice, training and delivery support to:

Understand Communities

Researching in and with communities to increase your understanding of community life today

Involve Communities

Offering different methods and approaches to involving communities and growing their capacity to own and lead change

Innovate with Communities

Providing tools and resources to support innovation to tackle the issues people and communities care about

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Our Impact	
Looking Ahead	
Introduction	6
Our Focus	7
Investing in Young People	
Making Social Innovation Accessible	
Amplifying Experiences	
Our Goals	16
Our Approach	17
Method	
Programme	
Ethnographic & Participatory Research	
Co-creation: Storytelling	
Co-creation: Social Innovation	
Youth-led Innovation	
Shared Learning	28
Participant Learning	
Our Learning	
Next Steps	30
Appendix	32

Executive Summary

Amplify Youth is a programme funded by Credit Suisse and delivered by The Young Foundation. We work with young people aged 16-25 in challenging areas of East London, Dublin and Belfast. Our aim is to tackle the structural inequality experienced by young people across the UK and Ireland by exploring the most pressing issues and equipping them with the tools of social innovation to create ideas with the potential to make a tangible difference to their communities. To do this, we invest in young people themselves by building capacity and recognising their latent potential; we make social innovation accessible by sharing the tools for change used in the social enterprise sector; and we equip young people with the qualitative research skills they need to hear from their peers and local communities to lead narratives of transformation.

Why it's needed

Amplify Youth is delivered in areas characterised by deep structural inequalities which impact the lived experiences of young people in each community. These include limited access to education and employment, poor mental health outcomes and high levels of deprivation. However, what we know from our extensive research is that these young people have the energy, expertise and potential to explore and address these issues from a position informed by their own experiences and those of their communities. Amplify Youth offers young people an opportunity they would otherwise be denied to face some of society's greatest challenges head-on, and to recognise themselves as agents for change.

Our impact

259

young people participated

167

sessions delivered in London, Belfast and Dublin

25

young people-led social innovations developed

100+

pieces of community research conducted by young people

100%

of young people who took part now have a good understanding of delivering community research

81%

are confident they can make a change in their community compared with less than 50% at the start

84%

have a good understanding of business, finance and turning an idea into reality, compared to 35% at the start

Looking ahead

Our work is needed now more than ever. The young people in our communities are facing increasing challenges related to inequality, including greater strains on their mental health and fewer opportunities in an era characterised by austerity.

Amplify Youth offers a platform for young people to develop the skills, confidence and capability to change the narrative often told about them. The impact of the programme to date is evident, and the young people who have taken part have gone on to further contribute to society.

For example, one participant (Yasir - Mulberry Academy) has gone on to use the research skills he developed through Amplify Youth in Tower Hamlets to become a Peer Evaluator for a local youth-led football project funded by Sport England, and 9 young women (HAPANI) have gone on to receive £5,000 in funding from Coca Cola and have been invited to join the Belfast City Council Youth Forum.

Using all that we have learnt over the course of this two-year pilot, we are more confident than ever in the importance of the programme, and our ability to work alongside the next generation of changemakers.

We advocate for a place-based approach which recognises the nuanced ways in which young people experience inequality, and focuses on capacity-building to embed the knowledge and drive needed for real change to be achieved.

Introduction

Over the last two years, with the support of Credit Suisse, The Young Foundation has delivered Amplify Youth; a programme which places young people at the heart of social change, using the tools of social innovation, research and action. We have worked with young people aged 16-25 to support them to develop the skills, networks and confidence to make a change in their local communities.

We've delivered 167 sessions with 259 young people across London, Dublin, and Belfast to develop 25 initiatives addressing the social issues most important to them. These have touched on a wide range of issues, from homelessness, to mental health, migrant integration, racism, and more. Through the programme, the young people have explored their own lived experiences, and those of the wider community, leading them to develop tangible actions. Already, 87% of those who participated in Amplify Youth have stated that they have the strong connections needed to make change.

Whilst our two year pilot has come to an end, our learning from the programme will inform our work and approach to supporting community-led change with communities of young people moving forward. This report covers our approach, what we have accomplished so far, and what we hope to achieve in the future.



Before I would have thought we're just young people but now I think we're more important than people think we are – adults should be aware we're coming and can change the system.

Our Focus

Investing in Young People

Given The Young Foundation's immersive, in-depth approach to social research, through Amplify Youth we sought to dig deep and explore the distinctive challenges being felt by young people in the UK and Ireland. We moved beyond the well-researched and publicised inequalities that are widely reported in the press and through academia to figure out what really matters to the young people living the realities of them. What has become clear from our research, and that of many others, is that current approaches to tackling inequality are having limited impact - rates of poverty, poor mental health, long-term unemployment, poor educational achievement and persistent anti-social behaviour amongst the young people we work with are all high. We have also heard how inequality in young people is intertwined with a pervasive lack of self-confidence across communities. In its mildest form this is portrayed as self-deprecation, sometimes expressed through humour or off-hand dispirited remarks, but at its most severe there is a deep lack of self-esteem that eats away at confidence and hope for the future.

From talking to the young people who participated in Amplify Youth, one of the single most important takeaways has been a growth in confidence, which translates into taking back power, and feeling they can interact with the problems they experience in everyday life.



“

Amplify Youth challenges young people to better themselves and think outside the box, and to be creative with their thinking of every day matters. Young people are often at their best when you let them think creatively and which opens their talent.

Cllr Tarik Khan, St. Peters Ward, Tower Hamlets

Jonathanne's Journey

Jonathanne joined Amplify Youth because she felt there wasn't a space where young people could share the problems they were confronting in their day-to-day lives: "I wanted to do the programme because when I heard about it I thought it would give me space to say what I think about society without people judging me or thinking I'm just a kid". This space became very important to Jonathanne because it allowed her to share her experiences in her community. From this, she worked with the other young people to begin identifying problems, and finding ways they could start combatting them.





We got to hear all of the people's opinions, and I thought I would hear that people didn't like the area but I heard the opposite

A key aspect of Amplify Youth was that the young people not only identified issues, but also spent many sessions developing the skills they needed to take action. In the first few sessions, the activities they engaged in centred on confidence-building and teamwork. This aspect of the programme was particularly important for Jonathanne; "I learned so much more confidence, I didn't used to want to speak but the confidence workshop really helped and made me more able to make my own choices and think about why I wanted to do them".

Building on these skills, the Amplify Youth participants spent an afternoon interviewing people on the street to hear their views; so that they could apply these insights as they develop their solutions to social issues.

Jonathanne explained that from this experience of community research;

"We got to hear all of the people's opinions, and I thought I would hear that people didn't like the area but I heard the opposite"

This led her to think about ways to incorporate people who wanted to help, like she did, in thinking about a project to make positive change in their community.

Jonathanne, along with Zaynab, Aida, Somaiya and Nadiya, started developing a project-plan for a community-led food programme for people in the area experiencing food poverty. They connected with local shops to discuss food donations, community centres for support, and planned to host a series of pop-up food-sharing events in which they would give bags packed with healthy meals to anyone in need. They hoped this would not only address hunger, but help break down stigma and barriers between people by creating a space for interaction - just as the community research had broken down barriers for them.

Overall, Jonathanne felt that her experience of Amplify Youth shifted how she interacts with issues in the area, and equipped her with the skills to take action: "I always thought about problems but never thought about how I could help because I felt too young".

Making Social Innovation Accessible

Through our research with people across communities, councils, government and business we have heard how traditional interventions have tended to address the symptoms rather than the roots, or structural causes of inequality. They all too often have been designed without the participation of the people they are intended to serve. For example, while we have found significant examples of social innovation developing, overall most areas lack the infrastructure to grow and develop social innovation in a sustainable way.

We set out to do Amplify Youth differently - investing in the young people themselves, and making sure they could walk away confident in the tools social innovation can offer.



Jean Pierre's Journey

For JP, Amplify Youth taught him new ways of thinking about the issues he has been familiar with for a long time; “there’s a lot that needs to be fixed – I used to just walk past homeless people but now I think about what can be done about it”. It also helped him to take more of an initiative and push himself outside of his comfort zone. He explained that; “the chance to gain confidence made me want to participate – and it has definitely happened”.





I know people who've been involved in knife crime, now I'm trying to think about why people would start, and solutions to how knife crime can stop and how more young people can help make it stop and spread awareness".

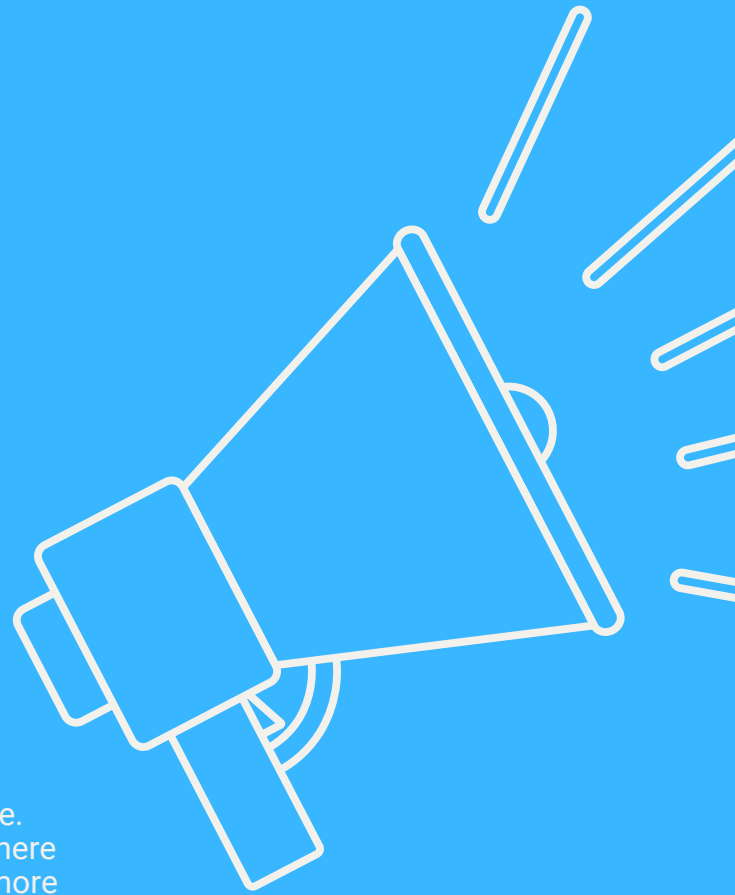
Over the course of the sessions, JP found himself re-examining many of the issues in his community because "a lot of the activities really made me think about what I would do in certain situations and why people react a certain way".

He felt that knife crime in his local area was particularly important - especially because it's such a big topic nationally; "I know people who've been involved in knife crime, now I'm trying to think about why people would start, and solutions to how knife crime can stop and how more young people can help make it stop and spread awareness".

After the programme, JP explained that a key lesson he took away was the importance of being aware so that you can see things happen. With his peer Afis, he designed a residential programme for young people from different backgrounds to come together to tackle racism and discrimination.

He believed that Amplify Youth made "a lot of people think a lot" and that this experience will stay with them into the future.

Amplifying Experiences



In Belfast, London and Dublin there are deep rooted traditions of creativity, industriousness and resilience. For many young people across these communities there is a shared commitment to building a stronger and more prosperous society. However, there are also deep set inequalities that need to be addressed.

In Belfast, one in five 16-24 year olds are not in education, employment or training, one in ten young people feel that they can't cope with day to day life, and two thirds of young people want to build their future outside of Belfast and Northern Ireland.

In Dublin, 51% of 15-24 year olds are unemployed, and 41% of young people have ceased full-time education. Tower Hamlets, London is in the 10% most deprived areas of the UK, with 43% of children and young people living in poverty, and 55% of young people diagnosed with a mental health problem not receiving any form of mental health support. However, we know that these statistics tell only one part of the story. The young people in these communities are bursting with creativity, ingenuity, resilience and passion to improve their communities for everyone.

Through Amplify Youth, we set out to support young people to tell their own narratives of transformation, and to support them to lead change inspired by the stories they told.

Tahmina's Journey

Tahmina joined Amplify Youth because she wanted to learn about helping people, and the different ways she can do that in the future. Through the programme, she “learned that if you can feel good about yourself, you can make other people feel even better”, and that by building up her confidence, she now feels more prepared to take action; “If I see anything happen I won’t hold back, I’ll go and help someone – I’m more confident now”.





I think at first I never thought I'd volunteer... but it helps people to understand different things, you can help make change as well, you shouldn't always just leave it to others.

Tahmina was particularly concerned about the ways that young people in her area are affected by issues like knife crime, and feels that Amplify Youth gave her the skills to begin thinking about solutions.

The storytelling workshop especially helped her because she learnt to discuss any challenges she is experiencing, and that now she also likes "hearing about things other people are going through and trying to help or just listening... because it feels like the group has become a support and comfort".

Realising the importance of having dialogue around different topics, Tahmina and her peers planned a mental health conference at their school so that fellow students could have a chance to speak about their experiences, and hear from experts on action being taken to prioritise young people's mental health.

Since completing the programme, Tahmina is transferring her newly learnt skills to the wider community to promote positive change; "because of Amplify Youth, I've joined a junior youth programme – we help whoever comes in with reading or feeling confident or whatever they need".

She feels this is a big step for her, explaining that; "I think at first I never thought I'd volunteer... but it helps people to understand different things – you can help make change as well, you shouldn't always just leave it to others".

Our Goals



1

Grow a diverse movement of young people, owned and led by people with direct experience of inequality

We aim to uncover the everyday experiences and challenges of people living in some of the most diverse and unequal parts of the UK.

Most importantly, it is about encouraging young people to see themselves as leaders for change.

To do this we engaged:

- 3 cities - London, Belfast, Dublin
- 21 leaders in the field of social innovation
- 25 teams of young people



2

Amplify the evolving and living narratives of a place

The ways people experience their local community - as individuals and as a collective - is always more nuanced than the dominant narratives we hear. Sharing these stories is key to understanding some of society's greatest challenges; from the housing crisis to knife crime and homelessness.

We aimed to deliver 5-10 pieces of youth based research with 150 young people and we achieved:

- 100+ community interviews exploring 24 research questions
- 167 sessions with the young people
- 259 young people completing the Amplify Youth programme



3

Support young people in their communities to accelerate ideas for social innovation

To realise impact, social innovation must be relevant and accessible to young people. We focus on key innovation tools; from charting how a communities might experience a project, to prototyping and seeing failure as a positive and necessary aspect of growth, to sharing some of the most impactful and creative community-led social innovation we know.

We aimed to deliver 6 accelerator programmes alongside 6 co-creation workshops and achieved:

- 12 accelerator programmes
- 18 co-creation workshops
- 28 developed ideas
- 251 supported through the young people's accelerator

Our Approach

Method

The Young Foundation's Amplify Methodology was central to creating a programme of community-led, bottom-up innovation based on a genuine partnership between young people and their communities. Our methodology focuses on amplifying the lived experiences of these young people, and building their capacity so that they can take a lead on the issues that most matter to them.

In practice, we begin by starting a dialogue, and building connections with each other. We then create space so that the young people can reflect on and share their own stories and experiences of their communities.

To understand the context of these stories, we embark on participatory research, introducing the young people to ethnographic approaches to gain insight into the experiences and perspectives of others in their community.

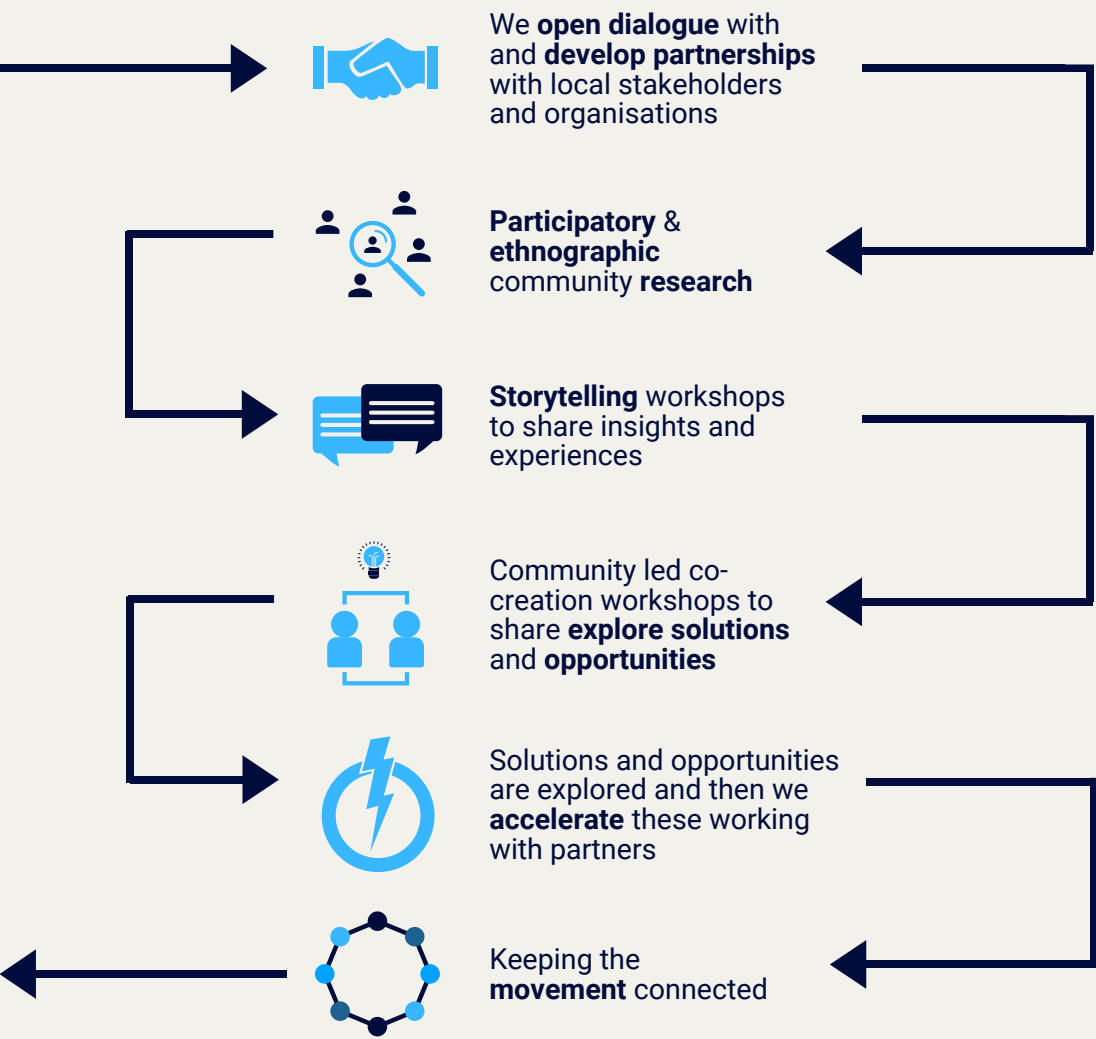
The young people are then supported to draw together all the insights gathered to create a narrative of place.

From these shared narratives, the young people identify where they want to act, and develop social innovation projects.

Our team helps to connect them with leaders, other young people, and community stakeholders along the way, while supporting them to develop the necessary skills to take action. Throughout the process, our aim is to build capacity in the community, encourage young people to work together, and to craft stories of change that have broad community ownership. We believe that deep social transformation that impacts young people is meaningfully achieved by the young people themselves in their own communities.

Our role is to bring young people together, to unpack what is happening in their community, to uncover the shared values, hopes and aspirations around which they can take action, and to enable them to build the skills and access the support needed to maximise their impact.

How we build a new narrative of transformation





Programme

From 2017 to 2019, we delivered 167 sessions to 21 groups across Belfast, Dublin and London. The programme followed an overarching format consisting of community research, idea development and team building and was tweaked to best suit the nature of each group.

The programme activities centred on connecting people; uncovering unvoiced inequalities; reaching out into inequalities; ethnographic and participatory research; co-creation activities focused on storytelling; co-creation activities focused on social innovation and social action; confidence building; mentoring; access to Accelerator tools; peer learning; skills development; partnership building; and more.

“

They feel more comfortable and as the sessions have gone on they're less sat back and instead observing - they're more involved and they're more free just to give their opinions and I'm seeing them not nervous, just saying what they want to say – so I have seen a difference in their conduct. Especially a few of them I feel there's been a big change.

Duygu Gumus, Deputy Director
of Sixth Form, Mulberry Academy



Ethnography & participatory research

Ethnography and participatory research is at the heart of weaving together narratives of place. To do this, we went out to talk to people in the streets, asking them questions about their community. While the young people were initially nervous at the idea of interviewing members of the public, they found the experience of hearing from people they wouldn't usually have the opportunity to speak to truly insightful. One young man recounted how he had spoken at length with a 'hipster' in a local cafe, who told him about how they felt misunderstood by society, challenging the young man's own preconceptions.

This led him to reflect on the shared experiences between different groups, as during the story circles, many of his peers had also spoken at length about feeling misunderstood and misrepresented in their community. Another young man explained how interviewing a local homeless person had drastically changed the way he thought about homelessness as an issue he could take action on; "There's a lot that needs to be fixed – I used to just walk past homeless people but now I think about what can be done about it".

We reviewed the original project design, to deliver the ethnographic and participatory research in a more intense 3 weeks, rather than the 4 months anticipated in the proposal. We learned that working in a more focused, concentrated manner suited the young people better and sustained their engagement throughout.

“

I joined Amplify because I knew we would discuss issues – as young people we don't really get the opportunity to talk about our issues. It's not that we're not interested, so this was an opportunity to see what was going on and learn how we can contribute.

Tasnim



We also made sure to tailor the research activities to the needs of the young people. For example, in year 1 with the LGBTQI group at Step Forward, the group requested to conduct the majority of their community research online. This was because during the local mapping exercise, several of the participants had stated that they felt unsafe in their community because of their identify as Trans women and/or queer. We were able to support them to tweak the participatory research tools, and understand that community research can take place in any community, whether a place-based community or an online community of representation.

St. Mary's school group in Dublin had been exposed to some research techniques in school, but ethnographic research was new to them. We tailored our sessions to include the research that they had been familiar with, and built in the new techniques. They discovered through their research that a high number of families were finding it difficult to afford complete school uniforms which brought extra stress to parents, care givers and their peers. They also contacted other young people who had set up similar school uniform drives to learn from their experience. This resulted in St. Mary's running their first ever school uniform drive; enabling good quality uniforms to be donated to the school and then having an open day for young people and parents to come and get fitted out in a uniform. The success of the project has led the school to agree to run it for the foreseeable future.



Co-creation: Storytelling

This element of the programme was perhaps the most popular and successful. The first stage was to understand what story-telling for social change means and can achieve, and the responsibilities we hold as change-makers when telling someone else's story - no matter how representative it is of our own or the wider community. The groups began therefore, by telling their own stories - focusing on the changes they had experienced, the challenges experienced by young people, and understanding this within the context of place and community. For many of the young people, they said afterwards how they had not had an opportunity to tell their story before. They reflected that whilst each story was unique, it was surprising how much they all had in common. For example, until the story-telling session, the Morpeth group had been a disparate group of 'trouble-makers'.

Having a chance to come together and tell their stories, allowed them to understand the mental health and wider life struggles they were collectively facing. This led them to go on to research mental health with their wider community, and ultimately design and deliver a mental health summit holding power holders to account on the issue. In year 1, the group at Step Forward explored the importance of the safe space for the LGBTQI community and how this sat apart from the wider community in Bethnal Green - showing the nuances of lesser heard stories and how they are often hidden by dominant narratives of place.



Co-creation: Social Innovation

The social innovation tools we shared with the young people as part of Amplify Youth included:

- Prototyping - a way of working which allows people to experiment, test and optimise an idea.
- Developing personas - portraits of fictional but realistic individuals that are used as a common reference point to describe particular groups in an intended audience.
- Pitching - to communicate an original, innovative idea, with direct plans for measuring impact, demonstrating how the idea was conceived, and why it will be effective.
- Project planning skills - focusing in particular on budgeting, networking with potential stakeholders, action planning, market research, and identifying barriers and ways to overcome them.

“

I learnt a lot here – about how to do social action – funding, prototypes, all the levels necessary – it really helped me think about how to do a project

Afis

We worked extensively with the Social Innovation and Investment team at The Young Foundation to develop the tools we usually use with ventures and social enterprises; adapting them to be youth-friendly, jargon free and easy to use.

We introduced the young people to local charities and social enterprises based on the objectives of their own initiatives - these included:



Glow NI

A registered charity in Belfast empowering women and girls with life skills to increase confidence and self-esteem.



Inspired Minds

A Muslim voluntary mental health charity raising awareness, combatting stigmas and providing professional, non-judgemental, confidential support to those with mental health illnesses in East London.



GATES

A European social innovation project aimed at enhancing the employability of young people sharing skills from across Poland, Greece and Spain.



Day Old

A food surplus social enterprise, tackling food waste and food poverty by selling surplus baked goods through treat boxes, office pop-ups, and event catering.



Happy Is

A Belfast-based self-care company offering 1:1s, coaching, courses and tools to promote mental wellbeing.



Queer Tours of London

Shining light on London's rich LGBTQ+ history through creative and life-affirming interactive tours; focusing on the lives, spaces, identities, repression and resistance that form queer history, present and vision for the future.



Second Shot

A coffee shop in Bethnal Green which employs people affected by homelessness. The company provides training and supports transitions onto long term employment elsewhere. They also operate a pay it forward system whereby customers pre-pay, so that later someone from the street can receive something to eat or drink free of charge.



Steel Warriors

Dedicated to reducing the number of young people carrying knives in the U.K. They melt down knives taken off the streets and recycle the steel into outdoor calisthenics gyms.



2-3 Degrees

A start-up promoting aspiration, resilience, engagement and direction for young people in London.

Youth-led Innovation

Over the past two years, Amplify Youth has supported young people to develop 25 exciting ideas and innovations in their local communities.

These have included:



An alternative sex education prospectus developed by LGBTQI youth in Tower Hamlets.



A support club for refugee, asylum seeker and migrant young women in Belfast.



An eco-friendly food-bank pop-up in Shoreditch to tackle food poverty in an inclusive and celebratory way.



A local heroes initiative to combat the negative stereotypes of young people impacted by stop-and-search police practices in Tower Hamlets.



A 'festival of Ballymun' aimed at creating more positive attitudes about the local community.



A befriending service for homeless people in Belfast.



A uniform drive for students experiencing financial hardship in Belfast.



A peer-support website



A space for young women to relax away from everyday stresses and pressures, and develop confidence and skills through educational courses, visits and guest speakers.



A youth mental health summit.

Horn of Africa Peoples Aid Northern Ireland

We supported 9 young women aged 16-18 who were asylum seekers, refugee and second generation migrants, mostly from Somalia and Sudan.

These young women were characterised by a powerful sense of empathy, with a deep desire to make life in Belfast better for new arrivals. Their own experiences of arriving in the city had been challenging, and they were determined that other newcomers would not face the same struggles. Through the community research phase of Amplify Youth, they learned the importance of women-only spaces and activities in Muslim culture, providing women of all ages somewhere to meet, share experiences, learn new skills, and feel accepted and safe. They identified the lack of such spaces in Belfast as a clear need. Using social innovation tools like Empathy Mapping and Storyboards, it became apparent that some young women had experienced high levels of trauma themselves, and others had heard first-hand stories from their parents.

They worked together to design and deliver a social club for young women aged 16-30 – in particular asylum seekers and refugees in Belfast – ensuring it felt highly inclusive. Their focus was on educational support (English lessons and educational trips), employment (writing CV's and preparing for interviews), reducing isolation and increasing confidence through socialising (particularly to improve well-being) and leisure activities (for physical and mental health). In the first year alone, the group were supported through Amplify Youth to expand the club to run 4 nights a week, and to showcase their project at the Amplify NI storytelling evening at the Duncairn Arts Centre. This led to a fundraiser in collaboration with local businesses and in the past year, the group successfully pitched to the Coca Cola Thank You Fund for which they were awarded £5,000 to launch their project. They have also been invited to Belfast City Council's Youth Forum, which gives them a voice in shaping youth services across the city.

YOU

Young Minds Matters

MINDS

A group of 20 young women aged 16-17 from Morpeth School in Tower Hamlets were supported to develop an initiative aimed at prioritising young people's mental health in the community.

In the early stages of Amplify Youth, they conducted pop-up interviews on a busy high street, taking a strengths based approach to understanding mental health in the local community. These interviews gave the young women access to experiences and perspectives of people from a mixture of backgrounds and ages, including groups they had never had the chance to speak to before.

As the young women know well, Tower Hamlets is a culturally rich and diverse borough; 63% of young people are of Bangladeshi origin, and 28% are of BAME origin. They also see the distinct challenges faced by people living in Tower Hamlets, and we know that the data creates a stark image. For instance, 55% of young people diagnosed with a mental health problem not receiving any form of mental health support, and 31% of under 20s in the borough live in poverty.

Through this research and by sharing their own experiences, the young women learnt more about the importance of mental health

they recognised the value of peer-support, but also that people with decision-making power over services need to prioritise young people's mental health, and that they could play a role in engaging key stakeholders on this issue.

The group decided to design and deliver a youth-led mental health conference at their school, inviting policy-makers and experts – including elected councillor Amina Ali, the Young Mayor for Tower Hamlets Jaami Barry, the deputy head teacher of Morpeth Sixth Form Ms. Worsely, Zaynab Hamdi from local Muslim mental health charity Inspired Minds, and Amy Williams from Tower Hamlets Young Person's Wellbeing Service. It was an inspiring event, attended by 150 young people who had the opportunity to learn about the impacts of mental health, how to access support, and how local authorities are responding to the issue. The event was entirely plan and run by young people, who did everything from booking the venue and inviting speakers, to creating and delivering a keynote presentation and chairing the panel discussion.

Shared Learning

Participant Learning

The Amplify Youth programme has enabled young people from London, Dublin and Belfast to acquire new skills, experiences, and confidence. They have had the experience of leading social action, providing them with a strong sense of agency.

The community research skills have built their confidence and capacity to speak to new people and ask questions about their community; “I am taking the research skills I’ve learnt forward with me”, explained one of the participants.

They also described the ways that these conversations expanded and shaped their understanding of the housing crisis and the ways the area is changing, which fed directly into the innovations they developed to tackle these issues.

Building on this, they also reflected on the process of telling their own stories, strengthening their own sense of community and shared experiences:

“I loved our storytelling session, we opened up and heard our own stories through others perspectives”

“What made me think the most was the storytelling session, it made me realise I am not alone.”

They learned about social action with one participant explaining that “the sessions made me think about how anyone can make a change in society”, and another “I learnt we have the ability to make a change, even if it’s small”.

They also described the impact that youth-led action can have, highlighting the change that is possible when young people use their voice to spread awareness about important social issues affecting them.

Throughout the programme, participants spent time hearing about what others think of young people, and thinking about the role they occupy in their communities.

On the whole, the participants said they loved that they had the opportunity to work together and, as one participant put it; “the fact that we are trying to come up with solutions to problems in society”. Their aspirations are to continue to work together, develop their project plans, and make sure youth voices continue to be heard going forward.



Our Learning

It is important to note that the participant learning explored above, was not a one-way, top-down process. As we worked to challenge power relations through the programme, we experienced mutual opportunities to learn and expand our identities as a group and as part of a wider community in each location. We recognised that young people have a latent potential for making change in their communities - informed by their expertise of place and lived experience. However, what became increasingly apparent over these two years, was the sense of disconnect felt by these young people in terms of these experiences and expertise and them feeling able to act on a given issue.

They certainly possess high levels of energy, enthusiasm and creativity, however much more work was needed to support them to see themselves as change makers. This challenge first became clear during our recruitment process, from which we learnt the importance of investing time in building up trust and relationships with the young people and other stakeholders.

Our main learning therefore, was the importance of building young people's confidence, particularly since they told us they often feel unheard with limited opportunities to express their views.

We learned the value of storytelling and community research as a means of unpacking complex issues. These tools allowed the young people to see themselves as valued actors in their community and to develop the critical mind-sets to engage with the world.

We have learnt that while the majority of these young people did not create formalised social innovations, they did develop the skills, tools and experiences to take action to improve their communities and wider society in the future.

Next Steps

We have had a rich two years so far working with young people on Amplify Youth. We have been inspired by the ways young people have grasped the opportunity to drive change in their communities. We have seen and learned so much about supporting young people living in challenging communities to deepen their understanding of priority concerns and how they can be best equipped to take action to improve their own lives as well as those of their peers and the wider community.

We have seen the power of working to build young people's confidence and sense of agency by providing them with an engaging range of tools, diverse opportunities to test them, and use the insights to design and deliver activities and initiatives.

During these first two years, we have worked directly with 259 young people, and have gathered enough evidence to show the need for the programme, the impact it can have and seen huge potential to grow and develop Amplify Youth further. Building on what has been achieved to date, and what we have learned, we want to see another 250 young people join the Amplify Youth movement.

In the next phase we want to:

- Co-design the next phase of Amplify Youth in partnership with young people, putting more agency and power in their hands.
- Support the Amplify Youth alumni who have already completed the programme to take the lead on this. The Amplify Youth alumni would have the opportunity to act as co-facilitators for future groups, to continue developing their skills further and to build the confidence of their younger peers. Doing this would also build up a base of young people who have come through Amplify Youth, strengthening the trust and relationships we have spent the last two years cultivating; spurring those young civic leaders into more action; that we can watch grow and develop.
- We have been overwhelmed by the impact that hearing directly from young people has on decision-makers and influential stakeholders, and the impact that has had on the young people themselves. For the next phase of the programme, we will make this a more central component. We would use our existing networks and relationships, and pursue new ones to create opportunities for young people to meet with key actors who have the power to affect greater change, and to incorporate youth voices where they are needed the most.
- We also see huge value in finding ways of stretching young people to move outside their immediate neighbourhoods, learn from one another, and would design such opportunities into the next iteration.

Appendix

Amplify Youth Session Series Outline

Week 1: Let's Chat

What: Conversations and deep listening about the issues and inequalities young people see in their communities, as well as their values, hopes and goals for the future.

Why: This is the chance for young people to draw upon the lived expertise they already have of their communities. The discussions will also help to shape their later research and idea generation.

How: Group and individual appreciative inquiry activities (e.g. local area mapping). This is the first stage of Amplify Youth, but activities can also be dispersed throughout the programme as reflection exercises.

Week 2: Build a team of innovators

What: The young people will work individually and separately to consider the different qualities and skills they have within their team.

Why: By the end of this stage, each young person will have identified their own strengths, and reflected on how individual strengths can best come together to form a strong team.

How: Team-building activities (e.g. spaghetti towers competition). This stage can be adapted according to the group circumstances. For example, if the group know each other well and members are used to working with each other, it can be modified. If discussions are strained throughout the programme, a team-building exercise in every workshop may be useful.

Weeks 3-6: Community Research

What: Young people will receive training on research methods and ethics. They will then work together to carry out research in their community.

Why: The only way to solve a complex problem is to have a deep understanding of it. The ideas and innovations that young people develop will be linked to the knowledge and expertise they gain through research.

How: Participants will be given an introduction to research and its utility for change-making. Participants will be given an overview of qualitative and participatory research methods. After the overview, ask the group to identify one or two methods that they would be most interested in using for their project. We will advise on considerations for these particular methods (e.g. if they are interested in filmmaking, are they happy to spend time editing their film?). They will then receive in-depth support for their chosen method. Research ethics will be covered through a scenario-activity, and participants will receive advice and support tailored to their project (e.g. developing consent forms together, safeguarding).

Week 6: Story-telling

What: Using insights from their research, young people will tell the stories about their communities that often get overlooked.

Why: Change making often starts with a story. Stories can help shape how we think about our communities and our place within them. Telling stories brings people together to listen, learn and reflect on how we can best tackle complex issues in our communities.

How: The young people reflect on their research and the stories they have heard. They identify common themes in the stories, recurring patterns and interesting exceptions.

This discussion may take the form of a grouping exercise, where young people take a photograph or make a sketch of a research participant, and summarise their story in a caption. They then talk about how different stories relate to each other, and group the captioned pictures together under different headings. Once they have identified the key themes in their stories, the young people decide which stories they will amplify and how they will best do this. Some storytelling methods include: a social media campaign, a short film, a play, a community storytelling event, a photography exhibition, a storybook, a poster, a comic strip etc. Our role is to support the young people to tell their stories in their chosen medium.

Week 7-9: Ideas and acceleration

What: Using insights from their research and storytelling, young people will start to refine and develop their project ideas.

Why: Ideas will be grounded in real life experience and developed (or co-created) with the people who will benefit from the project.

How: Participants will be encouraged to co-create their innovation with the people who will benefit from what they are doing. In workshops, they will map out their 'Theory of Change' – starting with their vision, considering the reality now, and mapping out their plan to bridge this gap. This will involve consideration of participants, activities, outcomes and assumptions. Outside of workshops, groups will be encouraged to continue to discuss and receive feedback from research participants and people with lived experience of their chosen issue.

Week 10: Showcase

What: Groups of young people will be invited to showcase their ideas in a format decided by them (e.g. to one another, their peers, experts on the topic they are working on, local activists, or potential funders).

Why: This is an opportunity for young people to receive advice and feedback on their idea and see themselves as part of a wider body of change-makers.

How: The session will be determined by the young people through discussions with them at an earlier stage in the session series. It may be that the session is held in house, or that a local venue is booked and parents/peers are invited to attend (as well as local experts, activists, funders etc.).


In any event, they will have a celebratory feel, and all young people will receive their Amplify Youth certificate. Going forward the young people can receive references (dependant on attendance level and commitment to the programme) and ad hoc support should they wish to take their project idea forward.


Contact us


Our doors are always open - if you want advice, evidence or delivery support for understanding, involving and innovating with your communities you can contact any of the team by calling **+44 (0)20 8980 6263** or at **hello@youngfoundation.org**

The Young Foundation
18 Victoria Park Square
London, E2 9PF

hello@youngfoundation.org
youngfoundation.org

 [the_young_fdn](https://twitter.com/the_young_fdn)

 [the_young_fdn](https://www.instagram.com/the_young_fdn)

 [theyoungfdn](https://www.facebook.com/theyoungfdn)