youth futures FOUNDATION

Inspiring Futures evaluation

Final report

Cordis Bright
August 2023

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- Youth Futures Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established with a £90m endowment from the Reclaim Fund to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Our aim is to narrow employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change.
- BBC Children in Need is the BBC's UK charity. Our financial support is committed to funding grassroots organisations and project workers in every corner of the UK, who provide the vital relationships and support to help the children who need us most.
- The COVID-19 outbreak exacerbated multiple challenges for young people looking to access further education, training and work.

  As a rapid response to the pandemic, to support young people during that challenging time, Youth Futures delivered a series of grants through the Inspiring Futures programme in partnership with BBC Children in Need.

  Through the programme, we provided £7m to 107 frontline charities and social enterprises (85 of which were based in England, which is the focus of this evaluation) to deliver positive activities that support children and young people on their journey towards employment.
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About the research team/evaluator

Youth Futures Foundation commissioned Cordis Bright to evaluate the Inspiring Futures programme. The commissioning and evaluation management was conducted by members of the Impact and Evidence department: Emily Preston-Jones, Catherine Fitzgerald and Shivonne Gates.

Cordis Bright provides research, evaluation and consultancy aimed at improving public services. You can find out more here: https://www.cordisbright.co.uk

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High-level summary

Inspiring Futures was an ambitious programme that successfully provided emergency funding at pace and scale to 85 grantees across England in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It achieved its original aims of: (a) keeping the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations it funded financially stable during the pandemic, and (b) supporting the organisations to continue to provide valued support to children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve their potential on their journey to employment. It exceeded expectations in terms of the number of children and young people grantees reported reaching as a result of the funding.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated challenges for children and young people on their pathways towards employment, at all stages of the journey. Inspiring Futures provided grantees with capacity to adapt their support to respond to these needs and to continue delivery in the changing context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme design emphasised: the flexible use of grants, devolving trust and decision-making to grantees where possible; enabling access to funding for smaller VCS organisations where possible; and a broad conception of the pathways to employment, in the aim of 'meeting children and young people where they are' and enabling a wide reach.

The target cohort for Inspiring Futures was children and young people aged 10 to 24. This age range was chosen to span the target age range for Youth Futures Foundation (16-24 years old) and part of the target age range for BBC Children in Need (0-18 years old). A large variety of project types were funded. Many of these fell outside of the typical Education, Employment and Training (EET) space and focused on achieving 'personal and social development' outcomes, e.g., building blocks on the pathway to employment, such as mental health and wellbeing etc., rather than solely 'EET outcomes', e.g., getting a job, sustaining employment etc.

Personal and social development areas of need became more common and pronounced for children and young people during the pandemic according to grantees, young people and stakeholders. These needs were a result of the disruption that the COVID-19 pandemic caused to children and young people's daily lives, and the disruption of support routes and opportunities that were more accessible pre-pandemic. The support that grantees delivered often pivoted more towards achieving personal and social development outcomes and less towards entry into EET.

During the period of the evaluation, children and young people supported by Inspiring Futures achieved positive outcomes, as did some families and grantees. Evidence in this evaluation suggests that children and young people commonly achieved personal and social development outcomes,

and many achieved EET outcomes. The young people we consulted had a positive experience of the support they received.

The programme has pointed to useful learning for the future, such as: highlighting adaptions that grantees made during the pandemic that they plan to retain in the future; lessons from grantees about the type of funding and support they find most useful from funders; and some types of practice that grantees find promising or effective and why.

Moving into recovery from the pandemic, there was a shared sense that children and young people will continue to require support to reach their potential on their pathways to employment including: (1) supporting personal and social development outcomes to build the base for EET outcomes where needed, (2) continuing to respond to the impacts of the pandemic on needs, challenges and opportunities, (3) adapting and responding to the changing wider national economic context and in particular the current cost-of-living crisis, and (4) further commissioning of work to strengthen evidence of 'what works' in this space.

Executive summary

About Inspiring Futures

Towards the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) and BBC Children in Need (BBC CIN) partnered to deliver a £7 million grant funding programme, Inspiring Futures, to deliver positive activities that aimed to support children and young people who face the greatest disadvantage to achieve their potential on their journey towards employment.

The programme aimed to provide capacity in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to adapt and respond to the rising or evolving needs of children and young people in the context of, and the challenges presented by, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inspiring Futures took a broad remit and definition of pathways towards employment with a wide inclusion criteria for project types and target age range (10-24 years old) for young people to be supported. This age range results from the partnership between YFF and BBC CIN, which enabled the programme to focus on future and present employment opportunities by targeting children and young people at different life stages. As such, Inspiring Futures reach across the VCS sector was wide and many types of activities were funded.

Grant funding was provided to 85 VCS organisations in England, with grants ranging between £10,000 and £80,000 in value and 12 to 18 months in length. The programme commenced in October 2020 with most grants coming to an end by January 2023. The programme design focused on responding to the needs and challenges of the sector in the early pandemic by providing longer-term grant funding relative to other funding opportunities available at the time. As the funding was not unrestricted, it could be applied for based on what grantees' needs were in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim was to empower grantees to use funding in the most effective way for their organisation and the young people they support.

About the evaluation of Inspiring Futures

YFF and BBC CIN funded Cordis Bright to independently evaluate the Inspiring Futures programme. The evaluation focused on the implementation of Inspiring Futures and how it responded to the needs, challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic; the differences made by Inspiring Futures; and learning for the future. The evaluation was launched in December 2020 and final evaluation outputs were produced by March 2023.

The evaluation took a co-produced, mixed-methods approach, working collaboratively with young peer researchers and with programme

stakeholders throughout. The peer researchers were formed from YFF's Youth Reference Group, who played an active role in all phases of the evaluation, along with the fund as a whole. Activities they supported ranged from facilitating focus groups through to analysis and co-developing outputs. The evaluation involved consultation with grantees and children and young people they supported using Inspiring Futures grant funding; consultation with programme stakeholders; analysis of application, mid- and end-point data submitted by grantees; and sense-checking and improving findings and recommendations with young people, grantees, programme stakeholders and policy makers.

Implementation of Inspiring Futures

A wide variety of organisations and project types were funded across England, supporting a varied cohort of children and young people in terms of age, geography and need. Grantees were selected via a process that included input from young people from the Youth Reference Group.

Based on data available from 63 of the 85 grantees,[1] the programme supported 15,083 children and young people, exceeding the collective target of grantees by 15%. Data from grantees' application forms suggested that they expected the majority of children and young people to be from groups that face barriers and challenges in terms of their employment journeys.

Inspiring Futures funding was used by grantees in a range of ways, including: (1) helping them to stay afloat during the pandemic, (2) continuing and expanding delivery, and (3) adapting delivery to the COVID-19 context. The latter included adapting delivery to: (1) include the use of technology, (2) meet the changing needs of children and young people, and (3) help families with basic needs so that their children felt supported.

The type and focus of support provided to young people by grantees varied widely. The most common project types focused on life skills, training and one-to-one mentoring/befriending. However, many grantees delivered more than one activity in their support offer. Grantees frequently adapted their models of support on an ongoing basis, including prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and at times did not adhere to a routine model of support delivery. This flexible way of working was highlighted as a strength by those supporting children and young people, enabling them to respond to varying needs and provide highly personalised support. A consequence is that it is challenging to articulate the support models of many grantees or a typical support pathway through their service.

Grantees aimed to make a range of differences for the children and young people they supported, including personal and social development

[1] At the time of the evaluation reporting, BBC CIN had only received 63 completed monitoring forms from the 85 grantees funded by the programme.

outcomes (conceptualised as building blocks on the pathway to employment, such as mental health and wellbeing, confidence and motivation, and communication and social skills) and EET-related outcomes.

The difference made by Inspiring Futures

Inspiring Futures supported grantees to adapt and continue delivering support in response to young people's needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and grantees were able to reach and support a wide range of children and young people, geographically and in terms of needs and demographic profile.

The grantees, young people and stakeholders we consulted agreed that there were a range of positive outcomes for children and young people, and the young people had a positive experience of support. The outcomes that were reported in both monitoring and qualitative data were mainly personal and social development outcomes, including: mental health and wellbeing, confidence and aspirations, skills, and basic needs being addressed. This reflects the needs and types of support that grantees mostly focused on. However, grantee monitoring data collected by the programme also suggested 3,933 young people were supported to have made significant progress towards entry to employment.

The differences that the highest numbers of children and young people made significant progress towards, according to monitoring data, were:

- Confidence and self-esteem (6,792 young people).
- Improved life skills (5,481 young people).
- Entry to employment (3,933 young people).

Grantees suggested that some family members also experienced positive outcomes, either because of support provided by grantees or indirectly due to the improvements seen by the young person(s) in the family who were supported. Some of the main outcomes that grantees reported for families were improvements in relationships, mental health and wellbeing, and confidence and hope for the future.

Grantees reported positive outcomes for their own staff and organisations as a result of Inspiring Futures, including: increased capacity to deliver and adapt support; improved skills and confidence; and for some grantees, a sense of improved resilience for their organisation.

Lessons and implications

Grantees agreed that one of the main areas of learning for their organisations and practitioners was about adapting their support offer in

response to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, and children and young people's needs. They agreed in particular that:

- Grantees feel more confident and capable at adapting support.
- Funding that can be used to adapt support is useful.
- Adaptations made during the pandemic will be retained.

While a range of projects were funded, five common cross-cutting principles of effective practice were identified by grantees. These did not relate to specific outcomes but were identified as general principles of effective practice to support children and young people, and were often used in combination:

- Building trusting relationships with children and young people - 'being' before 'doing'.
- Taking a person-centred approach.
- Taking a flexible approach to support.
- Working with children and young people to plan activities.
- Tailoring support using specialist knowledge for specific cohorts.

At the programme level, stakeholders agreed that the wide remit and inclusion criteria, and flexible grant management, were key strengths in the programme design that should be considered for future similar programmes that aim to respond to crises.

Moving into recovery from the pandemic, there was a shared sense that children and young people will continue to require help to reach their potential on their pathways to employment, that: (1) supports personal and social development outcomes to build the base for EET outcomes where needed, (2) continues to respond to the impacts of the pandemic on needs, challenges and opportunities, and (3) can adapt and respond to the changing wider context and in particular the cost-of-living crisis.

When asked what would best support their organisations in the current context, grantees emphasised long-term funding that can be used flexibly and for their organisational development.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow have been sense-checked and co-developed through a series of workshops with the following groups: programme stakeholders; young peer researchers; strategic stakeholders with policy insight; and grantees.

We recognise that not everyone will agree with all the recommendations but hope that these are useful considerations to support children and young people to achieve their potential on their journeys to employment. Our co-developed recommendations are presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Co-developed evaluation recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

This is the final evaluation report of the Inspiring Futures programme ('Inspiring Futures') which was funded by Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) and BBC Children in Need (BBC CIN).

This chapter introduces the Inspiring Futures programme and its independent evaluation by Cordis Bright.

1.2. About Inspiring Futures

Towards the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, YFF and BBC CIN partnered to deliver a £7 million grant funding programme, Inspiring Futures, to deliver positive activities that aimed to support children and young people who face the greatest disadvantage to achieve their potential on their journey towards employment.

Inspiring Futures aimed to offer grant funding to provide capacity in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to adapt and respond to the rising or evolving needs of children and young people and the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Grant funding was provided to 85 VCS organisations in England, with grants ranging between £10,000 and £80,000 in value.

The programme commenced in October 2020 with most grants coming to an end by January 2023. Grants ranged from 12 to 18 months in length.[3] Grant start and end dates varied depending on each grantee's circumstances. However, the majority of grants (56 of 85) began in 2020 and the majority (70 of 85) ended in 2022. The majority of grants (57 of 85) lasted 18 months, and of the remainder the most common grant length was 12 months (23 of 85).

Geographical domain of the evaluation

The Inspiring Futures programme spans the United Kingdom. However, this evaluation and all its findings and outputs relate only to the programme in England.

1.3. About the evaluation

YFF and BBC CIN funded Cordis Bright to independently evaluate the Inspiring Futures programme. The evaluation focused on the implementation of Inspiring Futures and how it responded to the needs, challenges and

[3] This was true of all but one grant, which was eight months in length.

opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic; the differences made by Inspiring Futures; and learning for the future.

The evaluation was launched in December 2020 and final evaluation outputs were produced by March 2023. The full evaluation questions can be accessed at Appendix 10.1.

1.4. Evaluation outputs

This report can be read in conjunction with the following outputs, which provide more detail on the findings included in this report:

- **Technical appendix to the final evaluation report.** This technical appendix presents the analysis of secondary monitoring report data collected by BBC CIN and YFF as part of Inspiring Futures.
- **Deep-dive case studies.** Case studies included: (a) review of documentation and data where available; (b) consultation with grantees; and (c) consultation with young people receiving support alongside young peer researchers (YFF's Youth Reference Group).
- **Impacts of COVID-19 report.** This report contains the evaluation findings relating to the impacts of COVID-19 for children and young people's pathways to employment and the grantees who support them.

Alongside these final evaluation outputs, readers may be interested to also read:

- Final evaluation summary reports for: (1) practitioners and frontline organisations; (2) strategic stakeholders, funders, commissioners and policy makers; and (3) children and young people. These short summary outputs are geared to different audiences and include relevant evaluation findings and recommendations for each group.

- Outputs co-produced with young peer researchers about the participation and co-production process (more information on this in Section 2.3):
    - Blog written by two peer researchers partway through the evaluation, which can be accessed here: https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/news/evaluating-inspiring-futures/
    - Lessons learned and tips for future participation and co-production approaches, which can be accessed here: https://sway.office.com/N7rAdi9iofNectzY

1.5. Report structure

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 – Evaluation methods: provides an overview of the evaluation methods, an outline of the co-production approach taken by the evaluation, and the limitations and challenges of the research.
- Section 3 – About Inspiring Futures: provides an overview of the Inspiring Futures programme, including the rationale, aims and objectives, and programme model.
- Section 4 – Implementation of Inspiring Futures: details the implementation of Inspiring Futures including the programme set-up and mobilisation; the young people reached and how the funding was used; and a breakdown of the profile of grantees and projects funded, as well as a summary of how they used the Inspiring Futures funding.
- Section 5 – The difference Inspiring Futures made: explores the difference made by Inspiring Futures for children and young people and their families, and for grantees.
- Section 6 – Lessons and implications: presents a range of lessons and implications from the Inspiring Futures programme and evaluation at different levels including practice, programme design and delivery, and commissioning, funding and policy.
- Section 7 - Recommendations: presents recommendations based on the evaluation, and their rationale and supporting evidence.

2. Evaluation methods

2.1. Overview

The evaluation was designed and delivered in close collaboration with key programme stakeholders at BBC CIN and YFF, and young peer researchers from YFF's Youth Reference Group.

The evaluation approach included interim reporting and regular progress and project management updates to feed learning into the programme during delivery, and sense-checking findings with stakeholders, including grantees and the YFF Youth Reference Group at multiple stages.

The evaluation was delivered over three phases, taking a mixed-methods approach.

2.2. Evaluation methods

The evaluation took a mixed-methods approach. Approaches and methods were designed by Cordis Bright in collaboration with YFF, BBC CIN and the YRG, and agreed before use in the field. Evaluation methods are summarised in Figure 2 below. More detail about each method is provided in the technical appendix to this report.[4]

Key groups included in the research and whose views are referenced throughout this report are:

- **Children and young people**: The children and young people supported by grantees who we consulted as part of the evaluation. Please note, in places where the report references 'young people' but not children, this refers to those who are teenaged or older, i.e. up to 25.
- **Grantees**: VCS organisations in England who received an Inspiring Futures grant.[5]
- **Stakeholders**: Other professionals consulted as part of the evaluation, including programme staff at YFF and BBC CIN and wider strategic stakeholders from across the sector consulted as part of the recommendations co-development process. Programme stakeholders are sometimes distinguished as ether operational (i.e. grant officers and day-to-day programme managers) or strategic (i.e. those in a more strategic role at YFF or BBC CIN but with some oversight of/insight into Inspiring Futures).

[4] Please note, figures have been rounded to 0 decimal places and therefore percentages do not always total to 100%.
[5] Where grantees have been named these are deep-dive grantees who have consented to being identified as part of deep-dive research.

2.3. Co-production with young peer researchers

At each phase the evaluation involved co-production with young peer researchers from the Youth Reference Group,[6] including the evaluation design, fieldwork, analysis, production of findings and recommendations, and design of outputs to disseminate findings and recommendations for different key audiences.

They have been supported throughout by the evaluation team and received training, experience and practice sessions in research and evaluation theory and practice. They have:

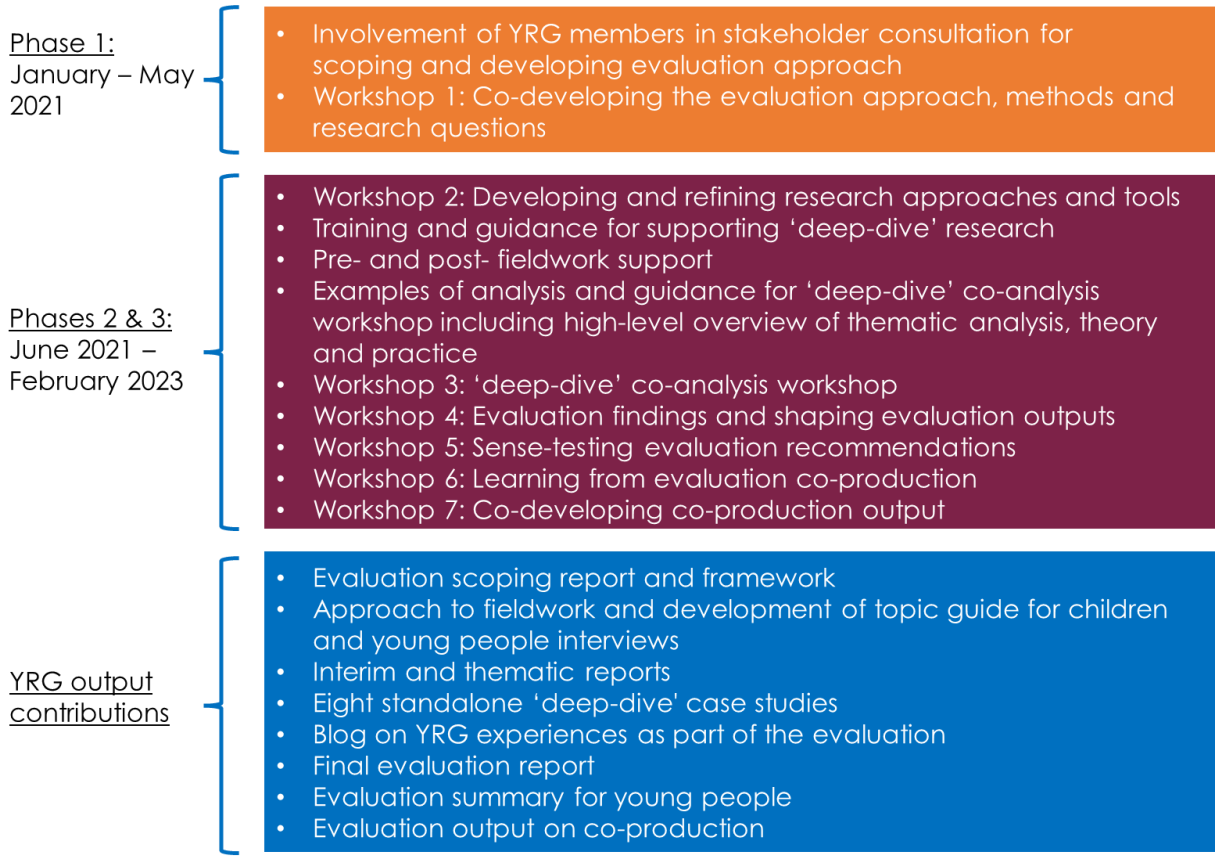
- Provided input and feedback on the design of evaluation methods and research tools.
- Facilitated focus groups with young people supported by 'deep-dive' grantees during phase 3 of the evaluation.
- Supported analysis on the deep-dive consultation with young people.
- Provided feedback, challenge and sense-testing on evaluation findings at each stage, and co-developed recommendations.
- Co-designed the summary output for children and young people.
- Co-developed an output highlighting lessons learned and tips for future participation and co-production.

Figure 3 provides a summary of evaluation activity involving the YRG.

[6] The Youth Reference Group is a steering group of young people formed by Youth Futures Foundation to provide challenge and input into Inspiring Futures.

Figure 2: A summary of the methods used in each phase of the Inspiring Futures evaluation

Figure 3: Summary of evaluation activity involving the YRG



2.4. Limitations and challenges

The following limitations and challenges should be considered when reading this report:

- **Intended outcomes of Inspiring Futures**. This evaluation explores a range of impacts of Inspiring Futures and the lessons than can be drawn from them, which relate to 'what works' to support children and young people into employment. This learning is based on evidence drawn from grantees, young people, and programme and system stakeholders through in-depth research. However, it should be noted that the overall aim of Inspiring Futures was to provide emergency funding to 'prop up' the VCS sector in the early pandemic, rather than expand the evidence base about 'what works'. Therefore, the extent to which it is possible to build evidence of 'what works' based on this programme is limited. However, the evaluation and this report suggest approaches and activities that may show promise and which could be evaluated further to support building the evidence of 'what works'.
- **Broad remit of Inspiring Futures**. Inspiring Futures funded a range of projects with differing levels of focus on EET outcomes. As such, some

findings in this report do not relate explicitly to EET, but more generally to the needs and outcomes of children and young people and VCS organisations.

- **Limited sample of grantees**. To manage the research burden on grantees, aspects of grantee consultation were open-invitation but optional for grantees to attend. This may present a self-selection bias, which means that the sample of grantees consulted is not representative of grantees as a whole. Other grantee consultation used purposive sampling to explore particular themes and, therefore, may also not be representative of grantees as a whole.

3. About Inspiring Futures

3.1. Key messages

- Inspiring Futures was an ambitious national programme, providing emergency funding to VCS organisations supporting young people on their pathways to employment, to continue and adapt delivery during the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Inspiring Futures draws on the resources and expertise of both BBC CIN and YFF.
- The funding was provided at pace, due to the legitimate concerns of the detrimental impact the pandemic may have had on the sector and on young people's outcomes concerning their pathways to employment.
- The programme design focused on responding to sector needs by providing longer-term grant funding relative to other funding opportunities available at the time.
- The programme took a broad remit and definition of pathways towards employment, with wide inclusion criteria for project types and the target age range (10-24 years old). As such, its reach across the VCS sector was wide and many types of activities were funded. This age range resulted from the partnership between YFF and BBC CIN, which enabled the programme to focus on future and present employment opportunities by targeting children and young people at different life stages.

3.2. Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the rationale and aims of Inspiring Futures and the model of the programme.

3.3. Rationale, aims and objectives

3.3.1. Rationale

The rationale for Inspiring Futures was to provide a 'lifeline' to VCS sector organisations supporting young people's pathways to employment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stakeholders agreed it was necessary to provide VCS sector organisations with the financial security and capacity to adapt and continue providing support during a period of unprecedented crisis. The challenge posed was two-fold, as the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Exacerbated and added to the existing challenges faced by children and young people in terms of pathways towards employment**. Stakeholders suggested that as well as opportunities, children and young people's hopes and aspirations were adversely affected by the pandemic.
- **Made VCS organisations vulnerable**. Stakeholders described how the disruptive impacts of COVID-19, lockdowns and restrictions, and economic uncertainty threatened the survival of services. They flagged that this was particularly true for community-led or smaller organisations, which they suggested may disproportionately cater to groups who face the poorest employment prospects, for example, ethnic minority led and/or supporting organisations.

About the pathway to employment used in Inspiring Futures

The pathway to employment was broadly conceptualised by Inspiring Futures, with funding available for programmes outside of the typical EET space and to support children and young people aged 10 to 24. Grantees were able to define their own intended project outcomes including personal and social development outcomes – in the programme design and this report these are conceived as earlier steps in the employment pathway, such as confidence and communication skills.

This means that Inspiring Futures enabled activities and learning about different possible stages or pathways to employment, including some activities that are not employment specific. One consequence is that the learning from the programme is not always specific to EET outcomes and 'what works' to achieve these, but speaks more generally to supporting children and young people's outcomes in other areas that may then support EET outcomes in the future. For example, outcomes in relation to mental health and wellbeing.

3.3.2. Aims and objectives

The purpose of Inspiring Futures was to support VCS organisations deliver positive activities that would help children and young people who face the greatest disadvantage to achieve their potential on their journeys towards employment.[7]

Key aims of Inspiring Futures were to ensure consistency and continuity of support for young people at a challenging time, and to adapt support where needed to meet the needs and challenges of young people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated social distancing measures, including national lockdowns.

The grant funding was designed to be '*flexible emergency funding in response to COVID-19*'[8], rather than necessarily to set up new initiatives or trial specific approaches. As such, grant funding could be used not only for direct delivery but also for organisational costs.

Another key aim was to alleviate the pressure experienced by grantees in the early pandemic. Key stakeholders reported that this pressure was a result of limited reserves amongst small and mid-sized VCS organisations, threatening their future, coupled with an influx of short-term funding opportunities in the early pandemic, which became time-consuming for VCS organisations to apply for. Inspiring Futures grants lasted 12 to18 months and were of a value of £10,000 to £80,000, in an aim to allow grantees the time and resource to adapt as needed and refocus on delivery.[9]

3.4. The Inspiring Futures model

3.4.1. Inputs

Inspiring Futures was a £7 million grant funding programme. Grant costs were split evenly between YFF and BBC CIN. YFF provided funding to BBC CIN to deliver the management of grants through BBC CIN's existing network of regional grant officers.

Programme oversight was via strategic and operational boards that met as and when required.

[7] Source: Invitation to Tender: Inspiring Futures Research and Evaluation project; Inspiring Futures Application Form 35380
[8] CIN Inspiring Futures – ITT FAQs
[9] Programme design was informed by consultation carried out by BBC CIN with organisations in the sector via optional surveys and workshops, and with children and young people. Stakeholders suggested that organisations within the sector reported a need for longer-term funding periods to offer stability to support them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4.2. Activities

Providing grant funding was the primary activity of the programme. Eligible organisations have been awarded between £10,000 and £80,000 for work commencing in October 2020 and running for 12 to 18 months. Funding could cover project and organisational costs, including planning and development for the future.

Grantees also received support from grant officers at BBC CIN as needed to complete mid- and end-point monitoring data, to amend grant terms[10] and problem solve.

In some cases, grantees received light-touch training and guidance from BBC CIN staff on using the Amended Difference Framework to measure outcomes, where a need was identified. The Amended Difference Framework training covered:

- The concepts and principles of self-evaluation, outcomes and impact.
- Exploration of different ways to collect information on outcomes and how best to use that information for learning and discussing achievements.
- Reflection, to further develop the outcomes and indicators submitted in the grant application.
- Information about requirements in relation to reporting.

3.4.3. Outcomes and impacts

Overall aim of Inspiring Futures

Intended outcomes and impacts were identified for both children and young people and grantees, but stakeholders emphasised that for both, expectations should be measured. This is because of the challenging and evolving context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fact that the primary aim of the programme was to provide emergency funding to enable services to continue to support children and young people within this context.

Children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people were monitored using BBC CIN's Amended Difference Framework, which is intended to be flexible to a range of interventions and intended outcomes and minimise the monitoring burden

[10] This support was required from a large proportion of grantees, typically earlier on in the programme and when COVID-19 restrictions created challenges with delivery as planned, so delivery was delayed (and grant terms amended accordingly) or activities, target groups/numbers, or intended outcomes were adapted (and grant terms amended accordingly).

on grantees. Within this framework, grantees identified three intended outcomes for their beneficiaries, which were subsequently coded by BBC CIN, against which grantees self-reported outcomes for the children and young people that they supported via mid- and end-point monitoring data.

Differences are considered either 'personal and social development outcomes' or 'EET outcomes' (see Figure 4 for more details). Stakeholders anticipated that activities and outcomes would vary in terms of how directly they were associated with EET, with those for older age ranges expected to be more directly focused on EET outcomes.[11] The intended outcomes for different groups were also expected to vary depending on need and the primary challenges and barriers faced by the group.

[11] During the grantee selection process, the selection panel only recommended grants to those working with young people over the age of 18 if they had at least one EET intended outcome.

Figure 4: A summary of the anticipated outcomes for children and young people, based on BBC CIN's Amended Difference Framework and Journey to Employment framework.

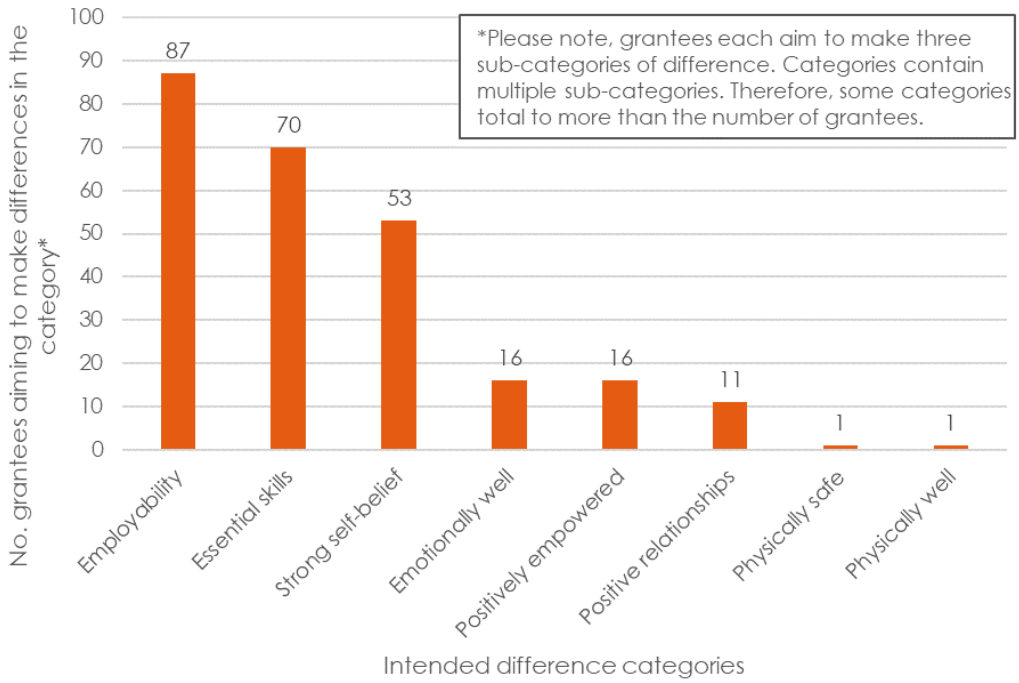
Description	Target age group	Source of description
Personal and social development outcomes		
These include personal, social and developmental differences, such as improvements in self-belief, life skills or aspirations for the future. Stakeholders have described these outcomes as building blocks on the journey towards employment. The Difference Framework acknowledges that it may be important to focus initially on personal outcomes and personal and social development skills as a step towards the wider goal of setting people on employment pathways, as many disadvantaged children and young people may have experienced a regression in personal outlooks and	10–24	BBC CIN's Amended Difference Framework. BBC CIN's Amended Difference Framework aims to provide an 'asset-based lens on the personal challenges experienced by disadvantaged Children and Young People (CYP)'. This framework is based around the following eight 'building blocks': • Being physically safe. • Being physically well. • Being emotionally well. • Having strong self-belief. • Having positive relationships. • Having essential skills. • Being positively empowered. • Being employment ready.

Description	Target age group	Source of description
opportunities for employment during the pandemic.[12]		
EET outcomes		
Direct employability-related outcomes, obtaining qualifications, getting a job and sustaining employment. Grantee programmes aimed for young people aged 19 to 24 are required to aim for at least one 'EET outcome' and have at least one outcome of this nature.	19–24	Journey to Employment (JET) framework.[13] YFF identified seven outcomes from the JET framework to act as EET outcomes for the Amended Difference Framework: • Achieving qualifications. • Work experience. • Community involvement. • Entry into employment. • Sustaining employment. • Quality of employment. • Young person's satisfaction with employment.

[12] Amended Difference Framework
[13] The JET framework was designed to help VCS organisations think through how their work contributes to young people's employability, and plan approaches to evaluation. More information is available here: https://www.inspiringimpact.org/resource-library/the-journey-to-employment-jet-framework/

The 'differences' grantees were aiming to make for the children and young people they supported were grouped into the categories shown in Figure 5:

Figure 5: Breakdown of the categories of the differences that grantees aimed to make (n=63 grantees)



Appendix 10.2 shows the full breakdown of the categories and sub-categories that grantees aimed to make a difference with for the children and young people using their Inspiring Futures grant, based on application form data coded by BBC CIN. Just under half of grantees (40 of 85) had 'entry to employment' as one of their intended differences for children and young people.

The most common intended difference sub-categories across grantees were:

- Entry to employment.
- Confidence and self-esteem.
- Improved life skills.
- Engage and achieve in EET.

Grantees

The primary intended outcome for grantee organisations was to be able to continue to support children and young people towards employment

pathways during the COVID-19 pandemic and into the beginning of recovery from the pandemic.

4. Implementation of Inspiring Futures

4.1. Key messages

- 85 grantees in England received funding from Inspiring Futures. Based on data available from 63 of the 85 grantees, the programme supported 15,083[14] children and young people, exceeding the collective target of grantees by 15%. Just under half of grantees (40%) reported they were able to reach more young people than expected. Adapting their support using digital technology helped them to do this.
- A wide variety of organisations and project types were funded across England, supporting a varied cohort of children and young people in terms of age, geography and need.
- The most common project types focused on life skills, training and one-to-one mentoring/befriending.
- Inspiring Futures funding was used by grantees in a range of ways including: staying afloat during the pandemic, continuing and expanding delivery, adapting delivery to the COVID-19 context including the use of technology and to meet the changing needs of children and young people, and supporting families with basic needs.

4.2. Overview

This chapter summarises the implementation of Inspiring Futures including the profile of grantees funded and children and young people supported.

4.3. Establishing Inspiring Futures

The grantee application process began in July 2020. Applications were submitted by 630 organisations and selected via a multi-stage process, with input from YFF and BBC CIN programme stakeholders and Youth Reference Group members. Following this process 85 grantees were selected.

Grants commenced from October 2020, lasting 12 to 18 months.[15]

[14] n=63 grantees.

[15] Please note, some grants commenced and therefore finished several months later due to the need to adapt their approach and grant terms in response to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (for example, in cases where in-person delivery was temporarily not possible within restrictions and virtual delivery was not suitable for the activity type/target group).

4.4. The children and young people reached and supported

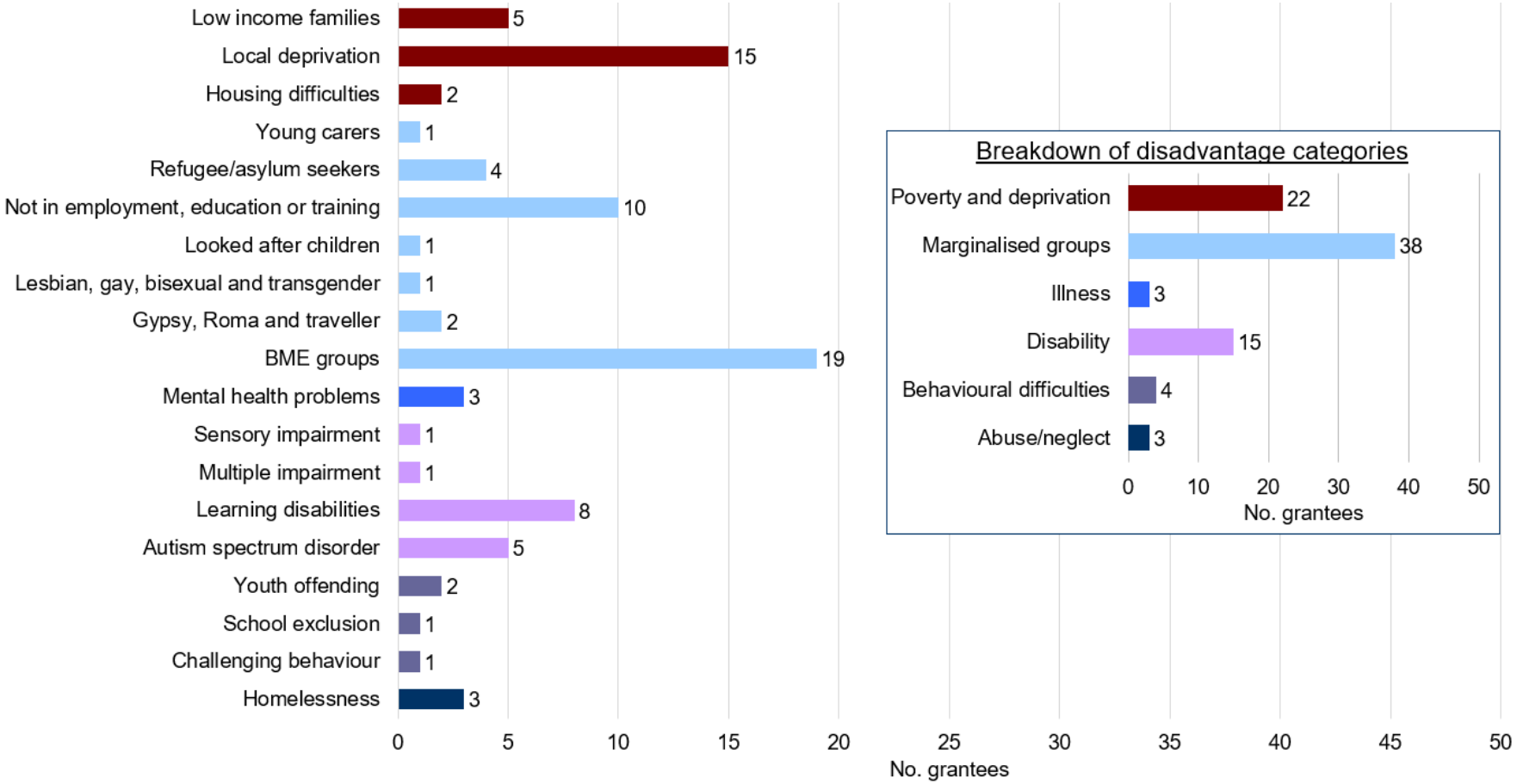
In total, Inspiring Futures grantees supported 15,083 children and young people based on final monitoring data that was available for 63 grantees, on average 239 children and young people per grantee (n=63 grantees). Collectively, the 85 grantees who received funding expected at application stage that 97% of the children and young people they aimed to support would be experiencing disadvantage.[16] Figure 6 presents a breakdown of types of disadvantage based on application form data coded by BBC CIN. It shows that the most common types of barriers and challenges that grantees predicted would be experienced by the cohort they planned to support were:

- Being from a marginalised group, most commonly from a Black or Minority Ethnic background (this was the case for 19 of 85 grantees).
- Experiencing local deprivation (15 grantees).
- Being not in education, employment or training (NEET) (10 grantees).
- Having a learning disability (8 grantees).

Inspiring Futures aimed to support children and young people who faced the greatest challenges and barriers in terms of employment prospects and who were furthest away from the labour market. Discussing these types of disadvantage, stakeholders highlighted ethnicity, disability and regional economic disparity as key areas of focus, which aligns with grantees' expectations as shown in their application form data.

[16] These are coded by BBC CIN. Grantees reported what they expected the main challenge/barrier to be amongst the children and young people they planned to support, using Inspiring Futures funding, at application stage.

Figure 6: A breakdown of the main disadvantage type amongst the children that each grantee expected to support using Inspiring Futures funding, based on application form data (n=85 grantees).



4.5. The profile of grantees and projects funded by Inspiring Futures

4.5.1. Projects funded by Inspiring Futures

The type and focus of support provided to young people varied widely, and many grantees delivered more than one activity in their support offer.

The most common project types focused on life skills, training and one-to-one mentoring/befriending.[17]

When discussing the children and young people supported, stakeholders tended to distinguish broadly between:

- **Support more narrowly focused on EET (typically concentrated at older groups).** This tended to include activities such as CV-writing support, work experience, job coaching or support with qualifications. Some grantees also provided insight into different types of careers, which helped improve young people's awareness of the kind of employment that might be available to them. In some instances, this took the form of practical support towards EET outcomes, such as providing resource for travel costs, interview clothes, workplace uniforms and technology for young people without access to laptops.
- **General support or support focused on more fundamental needs and building blocks on the pathway to employment.** This tended to include support with personal and social development outcomes less explicitly EET-focused (such as after-school clubs, mentoring or diversionary activities) and more directly-focused wellbeing or crisis support (such as temporary accommodation or providing access to technology).

Note on terms and definitions

Names for support methods described by grantees, for example, 'mentoring' and 'workshops', are widely used but working definitions can vary. This is also true for approaches, such as 'person-centred support'. We have described the key features of these methods as they have been identified by the grantees, stakeholders and the young people we consulted. However, they may differ to definitions used elsewhere and working definitions may differ between grantees themselves.

4.5.2. Grantees' support models

Grantees' support models varied across the programme and also over time. Grantees reported that:

[17] A more detailed breakdown is available in the technical appendix, showing the project types delivered by grantees (coded by BBC CIN) and the numbers of children and young people supported by each, based on final monitoring report data that was available for 63 grantees.

- **They frequently adapted their models of support on an ongoing basis**, including prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and at times did not adhere to a routine model of support delivery. They agreed that the flexibility of this way of working was a key strength, allowing them to respond to the different needs of children, young people and families, and provide highly personalised support. A consequence is that it is challenging to articulate the support models of many grantees or a typical support pathway through their service. It is also challenging to confidently identify effective practice or effective support models unless models of support are clearly articulated.
- **Delivery formats used by grantees varied**, including one-to-one and group sessions, in-person and virtual support, and varied timeframes of support. Grantees often varied their delivery approach between young people and in response to their individual needs, for example, providing one-to-one virtual support to young people for whom attending an in-person group was challenging or a barrier to engagement.
- **Grantees often delivered 'bundled' packages of support, with a range of activities/interventions delivered and the exact combination varying according to the child or young person at the practitioner's discretion.** As a result, it is at times challenging to identify the features of interventions that are most effective.[18]
- **Participative approaches were a lower priority for some grantees during the pandemic.** One aim of Inspiring Futures was, where possible, for grantees to implement **participative approaches with young people.** On the whole, this was a lower priority for grantees than meeting the needs of children and young people and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there were instances of early stages of participative work. For example, some grantees collaboratively designed portions of their activities with young people.

4.5.3. Profile of grantees

The majority of grantees delivered Inspiring Futures-funded projects in the North of England, London or Central England – see Figure 7.

[18] This feature was identified as common across support with employment pathways more widely, in an evidence review carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies on behalf of YFF. Source: IES (2020). *Supporting disadvantaged young people into meaningful work. An initial evidence review to identify what works and inform good practice among practitioners and employers*.

Figure 7: A breakdown of Inspiring Futures grantees' primary delivery by region, based on application form data (n=85).[19]

Region	No. grantees	%
Central	19	22%
Greater London	22	26%
North	23	27%
South East	14	16%
South West	7	8%
Total	**85**	**100%**

Of the 61 grantees who responded at application stage, just over half (31 [51%]) reported that they expected the majority of the children and young people they supported to be from an ethnic minority background.[20]

A minority of grantees (17 [28%] of the 61 grantees for whom this data was available) reported that more than half of their board were from an ethnic minority background. Available wider data provides a comparison.[21] According to analysis carried out by Inclusive Boards in 2018[22] on the top-earning 500 charities:[23]

- 8.2% of trustees are from an ethnic minority background.

[19] The following regional categorisation is used by BBC CIN:
South East: Kent, Essex, Hertfordshire, Surrey, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, West and East Sussex.
Central: Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, West Midlands (Birmingham, Black Country, Solihull and Coventry).
North: Cheshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cumbria, Isle of Man, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, East Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire, Durham, Tees Valley, Tyne & Wear, Northumberland.
South West: Gloucestershire, Bristol, Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall and The Channel Islands.
London: Greater London.
[20] Data on the ethnicity of the children and young people supported was not collected via the mid- or end-point monitoring forms.
[21] Please note, these figures have not been independently verified by the evaluation.
[22] More recent figures for a comparable sample size were not available.
[23] This is of the charities who submitted an annual return of over £1 million income in the calendar year of 2017. Data used in this analysis was obtained from the Charity Commission via Freedom of Information requests.
Source: https://www.inclusiveboards.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Charities-Inclusive-Governance.pdf Last accessed 25/01/2022.

- 62% of the UK's largest charities have all-white boards.
- 79% of senior leadership teams lack any professionals from an ethnic minority background.

4.6. How grantees used Inspiring Futures funding

Grantees we spoke to reported the following were the main ways they used Inspiring Futures funding:[24]

- Meeting organisational costs to avoid closure and where possible continue delivery. This included contributing to staff salaries for existing and additional staff.
- Adapting their provision in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Developing and implementing new activities or programmes in response to young people's needs.
- Enabling grantees to provide basic necessities and digital technology to families.

[24] Data collected as part of monitoring does not show how many grantees did which of these things with their funding.

5. The difference Inspiring Futures made

'Our key lesson is that you can't just focus on providing employment support. You have got to focus on the young person as a whole and meet all of their needs. This is important for sustaining employment.'

– Inspiring Futures grantee

5.1. Key messages

- Inspiring Futures supported grantees to adapt and continue delivering support to respond to young people's needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Grantees and programme stakeholders agreed collectively, and programme monitoring data showed, that grantees were able to reach and support a wide range of children and young people, geographically and in terms of needs and demographic profile.
- The grantees, young people and stakeholders agreed that there were a range of positive outcomes for children and young people. These were mainly personal and social development outcomes. However, there were also EET outcomes for some young people.
- Grantees suggested that some family members also experienced positive outcomes, either because of support provided by grantees or indirectly due to the improvements seen by the young person(s) in the family who were supported.
- Grantees reported that families may have experienced improved outcomes in the following areas due to Inspiring Futures: relationships, mental health and wellbeing, and confidence and hope for the future.
- Grantees reported positive outcomes for their own staff and organisations as a result of Inspiring Futures, including increased capacity to deliver and adapt support; improved skills and confidence; and for some grantees, a sense of improved resilience for their organisation.

5.2. Overview

This chapter presents evidence and analysis of the differences that the Inspiring Futures programme made, considering children and young people, families and communities, and grantees.

5.3. The difference made for children and young people

The evaluation identified evidence of a range of outcomes for children and young people supported by grantees in receipt of Inspiring Futures funding. The main outcomes were:

- A positive experience of support.
- Improved personal and social development outcomes including: mental health and wellbeing, confidence and aspirations, skills, and basic needs being addressed.
- Improved EET outcomes for some children and young people.

A full breakdown of the differences seen for children and young people supported via Inspiring Futures, based on the grantees' monitoring report data, can be found at Appendix 10.3. It shows the number of young people who grantees reported made significant progress towards each difference, and the number who started to progress towards each difference. The differences that the highest numbers of children and young people made significant progress towards, were:

- Confidence and self-esteem (6,792 young people).
- Improved life skills (5,481).
- Entry to employment (3,933).

These were also the three most common differences that grantees were aiming to achieve, according to monitoring data. These broadly align with some of the most commonly-identified outcomes in consultation with stakeholders, grantees and young people, although improved mental health and wellbeing was more prominent in consultation than in monitoring data.

The remainder of this section explores these differences in more detail.

Note about the interpretation of monitoring report data

Please note when interpreting these figures that:

- They are based on self-reported data by grantees, reported at the aggregate level, i.e. individual-level data for children and young people was not collected as part of programme monitoring and as such is not available for the evaluation.
- This data has not been independently verified by the evaluation team and is not based on a standardised outcome measure used across grantees to measure difference. As such, grantees may have used varying definitions of 'significant progress' and 'started progress' when collecting data.

- As intended differences vary by grantee, the data does not show the spread of all differences across all young people supported, and the figures may be skewed by the number of grantees who aimed for, and therefore reported against, that difference.
- Children and young people can be counted towards more than one difference type. There may also be double counting of young people in the 'progress started' and 'significant progress' categories depending on how monitoring reports were interpreted by grantees.

5.3.1. Children and young people's experience of support

Young people were positive about the support they received from grantees funded by Inspiring Futures. However, their views about the referral processes used by the grantees who supported them were more mixed. Generally, the young people we consulted reported that they had received the support they had wanted, with the exception of some work experience opportunities.

Young people's experience of the referral process

The young people we consulted had found out about grantees in different ways, including word of mouth (from friends and family), social media, outreach, schools, online research and from Jobcentres.

Young people generally thought the process for getting involved with grantees worked well, highlighting that it was straightforward and they were quick to receive support.

However, some suggested they had been lucky to find support and wondered if more could be done to reach other children and young people in need. They struggled to identify specific improvements but raised digital poverty or exclusion as an important consideration, highlighting that some children and young people do not have access to grantees' digital communications. They suggested more community outreach as one option, and were keen that grantees proactively reach out to children and young people who may not otherwise find their support.

Grantees' reflections on reaching 'hidden' children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic

Grantees shared similar reflections to the young people we consulted.

The challenges of reaching and engaging children and young people sometimes described as 'hard to reach' may be reflective of the wider sector, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and were identified in a literature review of what works to support employment pathways for

children and young people, carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies.[25]

Grantees' experiences varied in terms of whether they were able to support as many 'hidden' children and young people as they had hoped. Whilst some found that digital poverty and 'collapsed' referral pathways made it more difficult to engage children and young people in support, others highlighted that key adaptations funded through the Inspiring Futures programme had enabled them to reach these children and young people. In particular, this was via using social media to advertise support more broadly and developing new referral pathways, including from community groups.

Young people's experience of support to meet their needs

The young people we consulted agreed that, in the main, they had received the type of support they wanted, whether that was more EET-focused support or not. They shared that they had come to grantees for the following reasons: help with getting a job, and/or the opportunity to do work experience, to build up their CV, to have someone to speak to, to get involved in activities during lockdown, and to make friends.

One exception was the opportunity to do work experience, which was limited, according to the young people we consulted. Whilst this was offered by some grantees, other grantees struggled to deliver this strand of support as intended due to a lack of opportunities or opportunities having been poorly adapted to virtual delivery, particularly in the early pandemic (see Impacts of COVID-19 report). This was disappointing for those young people who did not receive work experience as intended or hoped for, although they recognised that this was often due to the pandemic, associated lockdowns and outside of the control of the grantee.

5.3.2. Personal and social development outcomes

Children and young people most commonly achieved personal and social development outcomes as part of the projects being funded by Inspiring Futures. This is based on consultation with grantees, young people, programme stakeholders and analysis of final monitoring data.

Similar to children and young people's needs, grantees reported that progress in these different personal and social development outcomes areas was often interconnected – for example, improved mental health and wellbeing often worked hand-in-hand with improved aspirations and confidence.

[25] Source: IES (2020). Supporting disadvantaged young people into meaningful work. An initial evidence review to identify what works and inform good practice among practitioners and employers.

Improved mental health and wellbeing

Improved mental health and wellbeing was a common outcome for children and young people according to the grantees and the young people we consulted. They reported that this was important progress, given the wellbeing and mental health needs that grantees saw increase during the pandemic.

Some key differences identified by children and young people and grantees, when discussing wellbeing and mental health, were:

- Improved mood and happiness.
- Reduced anxiety.
- Improved relationships with families.
- Improved sleep.
- Improved ability to cope with stress.
- Improved attendance at school or college.

At the same time, grantees recognised that progress looked different in each case and depended on the individual. For example, for some this was helping a young person leave their bedroom or stabilise their sleeping pattern.

Whilst they agreed that the progress in wellbeing and mental health was important, stakeholders and grantees reported that it remains an ongoing need for some children and young people and that this is reflected by the fact that mental health and wellbeing support is becoming incorporated in many grantees' programmes of support after Inspiring Futures.

Addressing basic needs

Grantees, stakeholders and young people agreed that Inspiring Futures grantees had been able to improve the situations of some children, young people and families by providing or linking them into support for basic needs such as food, accommodation and safety.

Discussing the higher-level needs, grantees reported that they could not address these adequately in a long-term way on their own, but in some cases had been able to 'hold' the situation by making short-term improvements and avoiding further deterioration. Some grantees suggested that in this sense, they temporarily stepped in to fill a gap they perceived in support for families in the early pandemic.

Improved confidence, motivation, self-esteem and aspirations

> **'Without the project I know I'd feel a lot more unhappy, lethargic and a lot more depressed because I would not leave the house. The project gives me a lot more structure and drive than I otherwise would have had.'**
>
> **– Young person supported by a grantee**

Some of the most commonly reported outcomes for children and young people were improved confidence, motivation, self-esteem and aspirations. This was evident in consultation with grantees and young people, and data reported by grantees. Young people commented:

> **'Before, my confidence was really lacking. It felt hard to talk to people but now I've really built up my confidence, it's easier to talk to people.'**
>
> **'The project really helped one person in the group who was very shy. That was his motivation to come […] It was nice to see people blossom a little bit and see them on the up and up every week. It was nice to see regular faces.'**

Grantees also reported that Inspiring Futures-funded support had helped inspire young people to increase their aspirations and consider other employment or education pathways.

> **'It was inspiring to hear from other people about their professions and learning about different careers you probably didn't know existed.'**
>
> **'The Placement programme has given me a clear career path to take whereas before I was unsure where in the industry I wanted to be. Now I know what I am aiming for and how to get there. I feel**

more hopeful when I think about my future and am less unclear about what I am doing.'

– Young people supported by grantees

Grantees suggested that, prior to the Inspiring Futures-funded support, these young people would have only considered lower paid jobs in their local area, but now were considering other career routes, some of which were further afield. For example, one grantee reported that a number of young people they supported wanted to pursue a career in healthcare after taking part in an employment workshop with a nurse and being encouraged by staff that they were capable. One young person commented:

'We had corporate insight days. It was quite inspiring to hear from other people on their professions, and to learn about different careers you probably didn't know existed and how they got there.'

Improved skills

Another commonly-reported outcome for children and young people was improved personal and social development skills, especially improved communication and social skills.

Grantees reported that skills-focused activities, work experience, and group work and socialising with peers, all helped to improve children and young people's skills. One young person commented:

'Before I came to the club, I wasn't sociable outside of school. When I came to the club, I made friends and was able to socialise. My anxiety lowered because of this.'

– Young person supported by a grantee

5.3.3. EET Outcomes

Monitoring data shows that the main 'employability'-related outcomes achieved by children and young people supported via Inspiring Futures were:[26]

- Entry to employment, which 4,287 children and young people reportedly started progressing towards and 3,933 reportedly made significant progress towards.
- Work experience, which 1,623 children and young people reportedly started progressing towards and 1,037 reportedly made significant progress towards.
- Achieving qualifications, which 46 children and young people reportedly started progressing towards and 208 reportedly made significant progress towards.

Grantees and stakeholders agreed that this indicates positive progress, particularly because EET outcomes were not expected 'across the board' given the needs of children and young people and the varied projects and intended outcomes funded through Inspiring Futures.

Grantees shared that EET outcomes were achieved through a range of approaches, but highlighted work experience, CV and interviewing support, and job coaching. Some grantees associated other activities with EET outcomes, including supporting young people in employment to sustain their employment; and providing EET opportunities 'in-house', such as training, qualifications and work experience.

The role of work experience

Stakeholders, grantees and young people agreed that there was a reduction in work experience opportunities and apprenticeships for young people during the pandemic. They shared that these were particularly lacking during lockdowns and the early pandemic, and placements that did take place were often delayed or adapted and therefore less intensive than was hoped.

For example, one young person reported doing work experience at a museum. The young person we spoke to really enjoyed the process, but gained less experience than hoped as the museum was shut and there were no visitors, meaning there was little opportunity to help with work.

Linking into effective work experience was therefore a challenge. However, some grantees reported that they were able to mitigate this through:

[26] The third most commonly reported employability-related outcome was 'other' employability-related outcomes, which 36 children and young people reportedly started progressing towards and 251 reportedly made significant progress towards. Data was not collected and therefore not available to the evaluation about what these outcomes were.

- **Providing in-house work experience**. Some grantees had increased work experience opportunities for their young people within their own organisation. The young people we consulted who had participated in this type of work experience strongly valued the experience, saying it helped them to build transferable employability skills, such as communication skills, and enhanced their CV. For grantees, this approach worked well as it limited their reliance on other organisations.
- **Building a strong network of partner organisations to signpost or refer young people to.** Some young people highlighted how the support of grantees had helped them to connect with work experience providers and secure opportunities and placements. For example:
  - Young people supported by Babbasa reported accessing meaningful opportunities through Babbasa TV, such as being involved in a Channel 4 panel, an apprenticeship, and work through their Trailblazer programme for Babbasa alumni.
  - Another grantee facilitated work experience in the young person's preferred industry, via work experience at Glastonbury Festival.

Where these approaches were possible, grantees and young people agreed they made a positive difference, and some young people shared examples of work experience allowing them to network in their fields of interest. One young person explained: '*We had a CEO talk to us. I had a one-to-one talk with him, and he gave me work experience at [organisation] for two weeks because he heard I wanted to be an accountant. This allowed me to develop skills.*'

Some grantees suggested that a combination of different types of support was often effective to achieve EET outcomes for children and young people, as evidenced by Clare's experience outlined in the call-out box below.

Young person spotlight: Clare's story[27]

Clare had just dropped out of university and was struggling to find a job when she was referred to a Circle Collective employment workshop via her Jobcentre.

Circle Collective is a London-based organisation that supports young people experiencing a range of barriers to finding employment. Circle Collective runs an employability support programme, #BackYourFuture, and two streetwear stores in London that serve as a work experience 'training ground' for young people.

[27] The names of children and young people have been changed throughout this report.

Over the course of a year, Clare received wide-ranging support from Circle Collective including one-to-one support from a job coach, employability workshops (including on CV writing and interview techniques), and practical work experience in one of their streetwear stores.

Through this support, Clare reported improving her communication and retail skills and growing her confidence: '*You do workshops upstairs and job searching with a job coach. Then downstairs there is a store, and that's where you do work experience and build up customer service and retail skills. That helped me massively, talking to customers. I used to never want to be the first one talking to a customer.*'

Following open-ended and intensive support from Circle Collective, Clare was able to secure a job and felt proud of her achievements, '*I have learned a lot. It's not just about finding a job, but also about your own self-achievement, feeling like "yay, I've got a job!"*'.

5.4. The difference made for grantees

'The grant supported [the staff's] extra working time to deliver a higher quality programme with staff who are not burnt out. It gave us more space to create different things and meet needs in different ways.'

– Grantee staff member

5.4.1. Increased capacity to deliver and adapt support

Grantees reported that Inspiring Futures increased their capacity to provide support to children and young people and make key adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and children and young people's changing needs.

For the grantees we consulted, the additional capacity was often used for more intensive or longer-lasting support to meet escalated or new needs, rather than support to a greater number of children and young people. One grantee stated:

'In terms of our impact, we won't achieve the numbers we had hoped for. We have helped less young people in total but the impact on those smaller groups of young people is deeper and more intense.'

Additional capacity was also used to adapt support, which grantees reported was key in the changing context of the pandemic. One grantee staff member commented:

> **'The Inspiring Futures grant was extremely valuable to allow us to invest in new ways of working.'**

Whilst this made grantees appreciative of the funding, they also emphasised that, looking to the future, they see the need for further funding for: (1) ongoing adaptation, and (2) continuing to offer more support in terms of intensity and reach, in response to children and young people's needs and future pressures particularly in the context of the cost-of-living crisis.

5.4.2. Improved skills and confidence

Some grantees reported that their skills and confidence improved through Inspiring Futures, and that their organisations now had bigger 'toolboxes' for responding to and meeting children and young people's needs.

For some grantees, these new skills were in supporting delivery, including supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing; supporting children and young people to achieve personal and social development skills and meet their basic needs; keeping children and young people engaged in support; and online safeguarding. For example, one grantee's final monitoring data included a quote from a staff member:

> **'Organising and chairing the morning meeting with students was quite a challenge for me at the start of the week, so it was great to stretch myself and build a new skill.'**

Operational stakeholders also suggested that Inspiring Futures helped some grantees to improve their online safeguarding processes through a compulsory digital safeguarding checklist, and that grantees could retain this learning and these improved processes after the programme.

Outcomes for volunteers

Some grantees who work with volunteers highlighted positive outcomes for these groups in their final monitoring returns.

Some grantees reported that volunteers had **enhanced their understanding of the challenges facing children and young people**. They reflected that this would have benefits for them in both their professional and personal lives, with one grantee saying, '*The volunteers who became mentors have also said that the experience benefitted them by improving their coaching skills to use in the workplace, and broadening their understanding of the challenges and reasons behind some behaviours for young people, increasing their empathy at work in management roles and with colleagues, as well as at home with their own children*.'

One grantee highlighted that volunteers, particularly those who were single parents, experienced **reduced social isolation and increased feelings of belonging** through participation in their 'open kitchen' programme.

Grantees reported that the main skill they developed was creatively adapting their support offer in response to the changing context and children and young people's needs. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic was a highly challenging time for them, grantees and other stakeholders recognised that the pandemic presented an opportunity to 'think outside the box' about how children and young people could be supported on their pathways to employment, and to consider creative solutions to new and older problems. Grantees reflected that the flexibility of the Inspiring Futures programme was a key enabler in allowing them to take this opportunity.

Some grantees reported in their final monitoring data that they had improved their skills and confidence in working with partner organisations as a result of Inspiring Futures, through:

- **Helping to increase partner organisations' understanding of the needs of children and young people**, and the challenges they face in different ways, including providing work experience placements, co-delivering support, or receiving training from grantees. For example:
  - A few grantees highlighted that they were able to provide insight and information about children and young people's needs to other partner organisations involved in their care and development, including schools, youth offending services and care leavers teams.
  - One grantee supporting young refugees and asylum seekers stated that 90% of corporate partners supporting skills workshops for children and young people reported that the experience improved their understanding of young refugee's needs.
  - One grantee supporting children and young people with autism reported that work experience and employment providers had an improved awareness of autism following 'Autism in the Workplace' training that was

delivered using the grant. These grantees viewed this as beneficial for making workplaces more diverse and inclusive.

- **Connecting children and young people with partner organisations**. For example, one grantee providing training and employment opportunities for children and young people with learning disabilities wrote:

> **'[Partner organisation] have told us that this project has been helpful in engaging local children in their facilities, especially SEND children who might not have otherwise been attracted to enter a library space. The children are now aware that this facility exists on their own doorsteps.'**

5.4.3. Increased resilience

Grantees had mixed views as to whether their resilience had improved as a result of Inspiring Futures.

Some grantees reported that Inspiring Futures had increased their resilience for the following reasons:

- **Greater profile and credibility**. Several grantees, particularly smaller VCS organisations, reported that receiving funding from national and high-profile funders such as BBC CIN and YFF raised their own profile and added to their credibility, which they suggested opens wider future funding opportunities.
- **Increased online presence.** Where grantees had grown their online presence using Inspiring Futures funding (particularly developing online referral routes and advertising their support offer online and on social media), they suggested this helped their organisation build its reach and reputation and therefore increase resilience. For example, one grantee established a digital team and social media presence using Inspiring Futures funding, which has enabled them to connect with more young people and recruitment partners than before.
- **Improved skills and confidence.** Some grantees suggested that the skills that they gained through Inspiring Futures, in support delivery and adapting their support offer, made their organisation more resilient by strengthening and diversifying their offer.

While grantees were generally positive about their increased resilience as a result of Inspiring Futures funding, some were concerned that their resilience faced further challenges in the future due to:

- Continuing uncertainty around funding and its often short-term nature. However, grantees also recognised that this is in some ways the nature of their type of organisation.

- Funding issues being potentially exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, causing further uncertainty.

5.5. The difference made for families and wider communities

Although not a key aim of the programme, some grantees reported that Inspiring Futures also helped improve outcomes for children and young people's families during the pandemic.[28] In open-text final monitoring report data submitted by grantees, the majority[29] of grantees agreed that they had benefitted family members of children and young people supported by Inspiring Futures funding. This was mainly parents but sometimes also siblings, partners and children of the young people supported.

Some grantees emphasised the importance of whole-family and holistic approaches. They suggested that this came into even stronger focus when COVID-19 restrictions made families more isolated and reliant on one another.

The main changes for families were:

- **Improved relationships** within families, as (1) children and young people gained important personal and social development skills, such as improved communication skills, which also improved their behaviour and resilience, and (2) support offered parents, carers, and children and young people a form of respite, which was positive for relationships. Improved family relationships were also identified as particularly significant by all three grantees supporting homeless young people. For example, one grantee reported that there had been 17 'positive move-ons' from their second stage of accommodation, which grantees explained usually means that young people have repaired their relationship with their family members and, as a result, have moved back home.
- **Improved mental health and wellbeing.** Some highlighted that positive outcomes for children and young people had a 'knock-on' effect of improving parents and carers' own mental health and wellbeing.
- **Improved confidence and hope for the future,** linked to improvements in parents and carers' mental health and wellbeing.
- **Reduced financial strains on families experiencing poverty and deprivation**. 'Knock-on' effects of support to reduce financial strains were emphasised by grantees supporting children and young people and families experiencing poverty and deprivation, for example, by providing a meal at each session. Supporting young people into employment also provided them with more financial stability and independence, which meant they were less reliant on

[28] A full summary of the outcomes that grantees work towards with families and the type of support associated with them, based on reports from grantees, can be found at Appendix 10.4.
[29] n=62. 'Small minority' means 0-25% of grantees; 'minority' means 26-50% of grantees; 'majority' means 51-75% of grantees; and 'large majority' means 76-100% of grantees.

others for money. For example, one grantee supported a young person to undertake a bricklaying course, which opened him up to more job opportunities and meant he is now able to provide for his young child.

- **Increased aspirations of siblings.** Some grantees also highlighted that some siblings experienced increased aspirations, particularly where their sibling receiving support became a positive role model for them.

Outcomes for families were typically achieved via one of three ways: **(1) Via support by grantees who took a whole-family approach that extended to support for family members.** One grantee wrote:

> **'Through conversations with young people, we become more aware of issues affecting other family members and provided interventions to meet need and often prevent crisis. For example, through working with a school refuser with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) we also established a positive relationship with her older brother who, due to mental and physical health issues, rarely left the house. Over time, [grantee] was able to engage the brother in our 6-month work skills development programme.'**

(2) As an indirect knock-on effect of improved outcomes for children and young people, and **(3) on other occasions, as a result of family members engaging themselves proactively in the support**, for example, joining in learning sessions such as English lessons, delivered via Zoom. One grantee wrote:

> **'[This] has contributed to whole families' learning of English and building of confidence, as well as enjoyment of learning.'**

Support that grantees provided to wider family members often focused on mental health and wellbeing, addressing basic needs, language support, or parenting support. For example:

- A monthly support group to help parents/carers understand how best to support their autistic child(ren) to prepare for adulthood (provided by Autism Bedfordshire).
- One grantee supporting young refugees and asylum seekers supported parents to enrol in their digital skills programme to improve employability.

- Some grantees also provided volunteering opportunities, signposting to EET opportunities and other services, and peer support.

6. Lessons and implications

6.1. Key messages

- YFF stakeholders reported that employability support for young people can be hard to navigate, and services are often fragmented within and across localities and places, which can make them hard to find. Grantees can increase visibility by using proactive outreach methods such as using social media and immersing themselves in local communities.
- Young people, grantees and stakeholders highlighted five key principles and approaches that worked well to support children and young people on their pathways to employment: (1) trusting relationships, (2) person-centred support, (3) collaboratively designed support, (4) flexibility in delivery, and (5) specialised support.
- Grantees also suggested some more granular elements of promising practice, such as holistic and whole-family support; support with a routine, structure and purpose; and positive role models. To support grantees to further build the evidence base of 'what works' in the future it will be important for them to define and articulate their models of support clearly and ensure that they are monitoring and evaluating outcomes robustly.
- Stakeholders and grantees agreed that flexible grant management was a key strength of the programme, enabling grantees to respond to children and young people's needs and trial different approaches, which was essential for success during the pandemic.
- Strategic and operational stakeholders also identified partnership working between YFF and BBC CIN as a strength of the Inspiring Futures programme.
- Key areas for improvement to support grantees in the future related to longer-term funding, improved access to funding for organisation's development and increased opportunities for networking and shared learning between grantees.
- Looking ahead, grantees shared concerns about securing funding and commented that the cost-of-living crisis compounded this. They commented that support to help them identify, explore and access alternative funding streams may help, for example, by developing application-writing skills or being linked into available funding.

6.2. Overview

This chapter presents the lessons learned through Inspiring Futures, considering learning for practice, similar future programmes, and commissioning and policy.

6.3. Learning for practice

Grantees shared reflections on what they had learned in terms of practice regarding promising and effective approaches.

'What works' to achieve different outcomes for children and young people

The evaluation identified a range of elements of promising or effective practice. These tended to relate mostly to getting and keeping children and young people engaged and achieving personal and social development outcomes and work readiness, rather than achieving EET outcomes. This is likely to reflect the makeup of grantees, particularly those who took part in evaluation activities, and the types of outcomes that grantees tended to focus on during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It may also reflect gaps in the wider evidence base – indeed, a literature review on what works to support young people's employment pathways suggests that high-quality evidence on what works to achieve employment outcomes, and which approaches are most effective, is not yet well-established.[30]

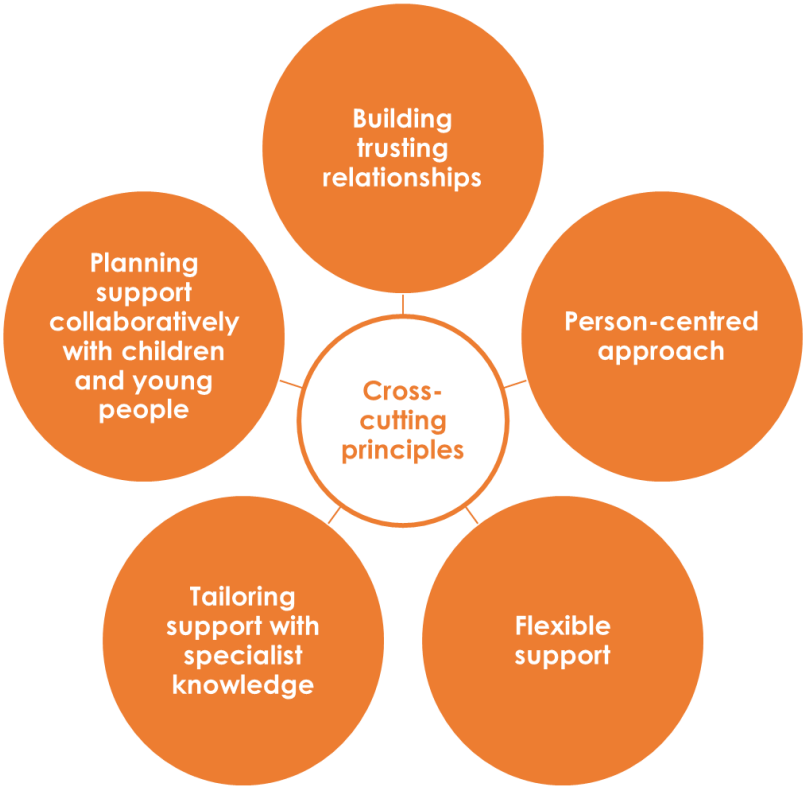
Stakeholders and grantees agreed that the Inspiring Futures programme was a helpful learning opportunity with regards to 'what works'.[31]

Five common cross-cutting principles of effective practice were identified. These did not relate to specific outcomes but were identified as general principles of effective practice to support children and young people. Grantees and stakeholders reported that using these in combination and flexibly, rather than solely one approach, was common and effective. They were:

[30] Source: IES (2020). Supporting disadvantaged young people into meaningful work. An initial evidence review to identify what works and inform good practice among practitioners and employers.

[31] Please note, grantees have different approaches to measuring impact, and data that grantees collect individually, which may back-up 'what works', has not been analysed by the evaluation.

Figure 8: Cross-cutting principles of promising practice



Building trusting relationships – 'being' before 'doing'

This involves grantees spending time building trust with children and young people before going straight into planning and providing support. Key enablers for this approach highlighted by grantees included: taking a non-judgmental attitude; ensuring practitioners have manageable case-loads; providing open-ended or long-term support as needed; and offering one-to-one support. Face-to-face work was cited by some grantees as particularly key for building trusting relationships, with grantees noting that the pandemic made it challenging to build relationships when delivering support remotely. For example, grantees found it harder to read and react to children and young people's body language, especially as many children and young people had their cameras switched off. Young people also highlighted the value of building trust. For example, saying:

> **'I was looking for work for quite a while and I couldn't find anything. When I spoke to [staff member] she sounded really helpful and really listened to my concerns. It felt like she wouldn't just say "apply here" and "apply there" … I felt like I could speak to them about anything and like I could put my trust in them.'**

Discussing this principle, some grantees shared that there was often a break in relationships with children and young people at the start of the pandemic when in-person delivery was most difficult. In this context, spending time building-up trust again or for the first time was especially important. Some grantees adapted face-to-face delivery to be COVID-19 safe where possible to ensure key relationships were not lost, for example, meeting children and young people outdoors for a walk.

Taking a person-centred approach

For grantees, this meant providing support in a way that is tailored to each young person's circumstances and needs, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Grantees highlighted that this requires consideration of each young person's specific situation, including their needs, views, motivations, history, identity and social context. Grantees and young people agreed that person-centred support is good for building trusting relationships as it helps children and young people feel heard and understood. Grantees also suggested that often, person-centred and flexible support worked hand-in-hand. One young person recalled:

> **'When I first got in touch with [the organisation], I did a "Mini DNA" call which is a one-to-one session. It was a good start as I wasn't sure how to navigate what I wanted to do with the organisation. After the one-to-one chat I was able to decide my direction. It was simple and straightforward.'**

Grantee spotlight: Autism Bedfordshire

Staff explained that their approach to support is flexible and tailored to each young adult's circumstances, needs and goals. They find this helps them meet individuals' needs and make the support accessible and easy to engage with for different people. For example, where a young adult did not want to receive one-to-one support over the phone during lockdown, staff members provided support via text or WhatsApp messages.

Taking a flexible approach to support

Grantees agreed that flexibility in the type, duration and format of support was important, particularly given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of flexibility were:

- Shifting from more intensive support to signposting and one-off advice, depending on the young person's appetite to engage.

- Flexibility in timings, for example, delivering support in evenings, weekends and holidays to meet children and young people's needs.
- Flexibility in group sizes. One grantee supported children and young people via one-to-one sessions to improve their confidence and social skills before taking part in a group-based programme.
- Providing support in a hybrid way (a mix of in-person and online support). Those we consulted valued the flexibility of this mode of delivery and suggested that it enabled some children and young people to access support that they might not have been able to access face-to-face due to factors including cost, location, accessibility issues or mental health.

Young people we consulted valued flexible approaches – one explained:

> ***'They're quite flexible in working. The aim isn't to process you and package you, but to give you the support you need and keep building you up, rather than trying to rush you out and then be done.'***

Working with children and young people to plan activities

Some grantees reported working with children and young people to plan and deliver support. Approaches included: (1) consultation with children and young people about the kind of support they wanted (one grantee delivered an employability session focusing on freelancing due to demand amongst the cohort); and (2) supporting children and young people to take the lead on planning and delivering some support activities. Where young people we consulted had been involved in planning activities, they reported that this made them feel trusted and empowered. Grantees suggested that as well as ensuring support was relevant, this approach helped keep children and young people engaged. One young person stated:

> **'It is a community of people. My views are respected and listened to, and my ideas are used. I hadn't experienced that before in teamwork and school.'**

Grantee spotlight: Babbasa

Young people took an active role in creating Babbasa TV (an online platform that provides a non-judgmental forum for young people to discuss

important topics). The young people and grantees reflected that Babbasa TV has developed into a platform where young people feel represented and able to speak about a range of issues that are important to them, including race, religion and culture.

Digital discussions included '*What Does an Anti-Racist Society Look Like?*', '*Does Drill Cause Crime?*' and '*Acting White*'. One young person described Babbasa TV as a '*safe space*'.

The young people we spoke to agreed that their involvement with Babbasa TV has improved their confidence, communication skills and knowledge, i.e. personal and social development outcomes. For example, one young person reported that Babbasa TV has taught them about the film industry, as well as about the different topics debated.

Tailoring support using specialist knowledge for specific cohorts

Stakeholders and grantees agreed that understanding the needs of specific cohorts of children and young people was important, for example, homeless young people, LGBTQ+ young people, and young people with learning disabilities and their families. Examples shared by grantees included:

- For children and young people with learning disabilities, some grantees emphasised consistent support and a stable structure in day-to-day life, and others emphasised ensuring support is as accessible as possible. These were both associated with getting and keeping young people engaged in support, rather than specific outcomes.
- For homeless young people, some grantees highlighted that 'meeting young people where they are', rooted in an understanding of trauma, was important. While this may mean a slower pace of progress, they explained that this was important for the success of the support. One grantee commented:

> **'We have the skills and experience… During lockdown when they were putting [street homeless young people] up in hotels, those street homeless young people had childhood trauma and can't live in four walls. It is hard for other organisations to understand. We provided tents and other supplies. It was massive to ask [those young people] to manage a budget. People don't understand why people who have been homeless wouldn't want to go into somewhere safe and secure, but it was overwhelming for them.'**

- For children and young people at risk of offending, some grantees focused on building self-esteem to address perceptions of stigmatisation.[32]

Grantee spotlight: The Proud Trust

The Proud Trust is a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) organisation that supports LGBT+ young people via youth groups, peer support, mentoring programmes and the Proud Connections chat service.

Staff members ran workshops about the barriers and issues LGBT+ people face in the workplace, disability rights, LGBT+ rights and how to join a union. They reported that the children and young people supported saw improved personal and social development skills supporting employability, particularly teamwork and communication, and improved confidence and self-esteem for LGBT+ young people.

More granular examples of promising/effective practice

Beyond the above key principles, grantees also identified some more granular examples of effective practice or practice that shows promise:

- **Holistic and whole-family support.** Grantees suggested that this was particularly relevant for addressing basic and immediate needs. For example, in one grantee organisation, an employment team worked closely with a housing team and complex needs workers, so children and young people were supported beyond employment support, for example, with their living situation and mental health.
- **Intensive one-to-one support**, which grantees commented was often useful in addressing mental health challenges and motivation and aspirations in relation to EET, or in relation to personal and social development outcomes such as developing life skills. One grantee explained:

> **'One-to-one support was important for helping with mental health. It helped get them more support and helped us to understand any wider issues, such as family issues. One-to-ones were very impactful for a number of the young people and often how staff have inspired them to go on and choose a different path.'**

- **Support with a routine, structure and purpose**, which grantees suggested was useful for improving mental health and motivation and getting young people

[32] This learning was included in their monitoring return, and they did not provide further details of which outcomes this approach was associated with.

into a mindset for employment. Young people we consulted also valued support from grantees to help them restore a regular routine in their daily lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, going to the gym once a week to meet with a mentor. One young person explained:

> **'[Without the project] I would've had way less structure. The project meant I had something every Thursday. If I didn't have it [the project], I would have slept through the day. I'd have less skills, resources and probably wouldn't try and get a job. I wouldn't be in the right mindset; I'd put it off and off.'**

- **Positive role models** in the form of staff or peer mentors were identified as effective at improving children and young people's aspirations concerning EET opportunities. Some young people emphasised role models with lived experience of challenges they were facing. One young person commented:

> **'Lots of staff members have come through the project themselves and act as role models. The staff look like the young people, sound like them and are from similar areas to them. It helps them think "if they can do it, so can I".'**

- **Creative activities.** Grantees and young people agreed that packaging support in a creative and fun way was helpful for keeping children and young people engaged in support, especially for younger age groups. For example, one grantee used an interactive game-based activity for younger age groups. They worked in groups to guess someone's career, similar in format to '20 questions'. The grantee suggested this helped improve young people's awareness of career options as well as their teamwork and communication skills.
- **Socialising with peers.** Some young people reported that socialising more with their peers had a positive effect on their mental health, wellbeing, and communication and social skills, and grantees agreed that this was sometimes a useful dynamic of group support. Some young people reflected that even more opportunities to socialise with peers, via a range of activities for different interests, would be useful for networking and building relationships with like-minded people.

- **Practical employment support** focusing on particular skills, such as CV and application-writing, and advice were highlighted by some young people as particularly useful. Young people said:

> **'They hold workshops every month to develop our CV and interview skills. In them, you can practice interview scenarios and questions they [recruiters] may ask […] They really helped because I hadn't really had an interview before.'**

> **'The programme has given me a clear career path to take whereas before I was unsure where in the industry I wanted to be, now I know what I am aiming for and how to get there. I feel more hopeful when I think about my future and less unclear about what I am doing.'**

- **Support to achieve qualifications**. Both grantees and young people recognised that qualifications were a key way to help young people progress into EET, teaching them transferable skills and helping enhance their CVs. This is demonstrated in the Westminster House Youth Club example below.

Grantee spotlight: Westminster House Youth Club

Westminster House Youth Club (WHYC) is a Peckham-based charity providing purposeful recreational and educational activities for marginalised children and young people aged 8 to 19 experiencing poverty and deprivation. They used the Inspiring Futures grant to fund tuition sessions, training and extra-curricular awards and qualifications for children and young people, and to run a food bank.

WHYC supported children and young people to work towards extra-curricular achievements, including the Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) award and work-ready qualifications such as Dementia Friends training, a mindfulness certification by the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP), and food safety training.

The young people we spoke to also shared that the support to achieve qualifications had helped them with their future careers. For example, one young person supported by WHYC reported that support to achieve her DofE qualification helped her to build her CV and get work experience: '*I'm doing my work experience in a few weeks. They told me that my having done DofE helped me stand out and made them pick me*.'

6.4. Learning for future programmes: Strengths and supporting factors

Grantees and stakeholders agreed that there were strengths to the programme design of Inspiring Futures that could be transferable to similar future programmes. The main strengths were:

- **Partnership between BBC CIN and YFF**. Programme stakeholders reported that the partnership between BBC CIN and YFF was well-formed and brought together different resources and skills from each organisation. This resulted in a wide range of projects and children and young people being targeted.
- **Flexible grant management**. Grantees agreed that flexible grant management was a key strength of Inspiring Futures, with some suggesting that this set the programme apart from other funding they had accessed in the past. Flexible grant management allowed grantees to adapt their support offer, timeframe, and outcomes depending on the changing context and children and young people's needs, and they were not wedded to the original grant agreements formed at application stage.

  Grantees reported that it meant that they could try new things, they appreciated the trust that it showed from funders and they would like more funding opportunities like this in future. Some stakeholders also praised this approach, suggesting that it recognised the insight that grantees have from working closely with children and young people and empowered them to use this in their decision-making, and it was also appropriate, given the aims of the programme and the shorter-term needs some children and young people were presented with, that grantees had the agility to respond quickly. One operational stakeholder commented:

> **'[Grantees] need a clear idea of what they want to deliver but we should allow groups to change and develop as the situation changes and we have more trusting relationships. They are the experts, they know what they are doing and they know what is best for their young people.'**

Grantees commented:

> **'The wonderful thing about YFF and BBC CIN was that they allowed us to be flexible and develop an early intervention for young people.'**

> **'We need funders that trust what we are doing and [that we] are going to achieve outcomes. We don't want to shoehorn ourselves into a funder's requirements.'**

A key enabler of flexible grant management was the support from BBC CIN grant officers, who grantees said were easy to reach and supportive. One grantee reported:

> **'There has been support [from BBC CIN]. Whenever I have sent an email to Children in Need, I have received a reply and they have been supportive. Our delivering finished in July and our request to move the deadline for the final report was accepted. The process was straightforward.'**

- **Wide remit and inclusion criteria**. Stakeholders were positive about the range of organisations that received Inspiring Futures funding, particularly smaller VCS organisations and those working with children and young people experiencing challenges and barriers on their pathways to employment. Some programme stakeholders suggested that funding these organisations had been important in attempting to reach children and young people most in need of support and furthest from the employment market. They suggested that this was enabled by the programme design, which meant that a wide range of organisations were able to apply and receive support as needed during the application process to demonstrate their ability to meet the funders' requirements.
- **Participation of the Youth Reference Group**. Programme stakeholders suggested that the participation of young people from the Youth Reference Group in decision-making at the grantee application stage strengthened the decision-making by including youth voice. For example, one stakeholder reported that the YRG urged the panel to include projects targeting girls and young women specifically, which then influenced the programme to fund a greater proportion of those project types.

6.5. Learning for commissioning and policy

When asked what would best support their organisations in the current context, grantees mainly suggested:

- Support for their capacity, via both funding and other support.
- Improved networking opportunities between VCS organisations.

6.5.1. Reflections on what best supports grantees in the current context

Support for grantees' capacity

Although grantees recognised increased capacity as a positive difference made by Inspiring Futures, there was a sense amongst grantees that this was a short-term outcome, lasting around the period of the grant funding (12-18 months). Many highlighted organisational capacity as an area of ongoing concern for VCS organisations and identified a need for: (1) further funding – ideally long-term, and (2) capacity-building support.

Discussing the type of funding that they would find most useful, grantees highlighted:

- **Long-term funding**. Grantees proposed that this would help them to deliver support and spend less time applying for funding, which can be a result of short-term funding opportunities. They also suggested that longer-term funding would support the quality of support that they could deliver, by enabling: (1) more long-term support for children and young people where needed, both for building trusting relationships and for meeting their needs, and (2) more consistency in support delivery, so there is less risk of support 'dropping off' and children and young people regressing in their progress, for example, losing confidence or becoming isolated again. One grantee staff member commented:

> **'The grant we received was 12 months. For autistic people, we ideally want two to three years to get outcomes.'**

  This view varied by grantees, and they did not collectively identify an ideal funding length. They also recognised that securing long-term funding is often a challenge that VCS organisations face, and it is not limited to the implementation of the Inspiring Futures programme.

- **Funding opportunities which can be used flexibly for organisational development.** Some grantees stated that similar programmes to Inspiring Futures, which could support the development of organisational capacity as well as delivering services for young people, would be useful. One stakeholder shared their thoughts on how funding opportunities could be improved:

> **'I think a key thing is better access to core funding and pots of money where organisations and grantees can be supported to develop their own internal systems infrastructure. So many funders**

are focused on project-by-project funding. What is missing is ongoing support for beneficiaries to develop a solid foundation and not have to live hand-to-mouth.'

- **Simple and quick funding application processes.** Some grantees also emphasised that light-touch application processes like Inspiring Futures would be useful to minimise the demand on grantees' capacity, which is useful for rapid funding. One stakeholder commented:

'In terms of system change, I would say grant application for third sector organisations should be faster, quicker and simpler because a lot of work needs doing before the grant stage, and all charities are struggling in capacity. This would help charities on the ground.'

Discussing non-financial support for capacity building, grantees suggested that they would benefit from more training opportunities for staff in two main areas:

- **Supporting children and young people's mental health.** Grantees agreed that these needs worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and through responding some practitioners identified a need for training and wellbeing support for staff delivering in this area, particularly where this wasn't previously a focus of the grantee's support offer.
- **Applying for funding and exploring new funding routes.** Some grantees reported that, moving into recovery from the pandemic, the funding landscape had changed with fewer opportunities available than in the early pandemic, and some pre-pandemic funding streams paused or no-longer available. The cost-of-living crisis exacerbated grantees' concerns about accessing adequate funding, and some grantees suggested that support to help grantees identify, explore and access alternative funding streams would be useful, for example, by developing application-writing skills or being linked into available funding.

Other training needs were identified by a minority of grantees, including management and use of IT.

'As a small-medium sized charity, we don't have built in HR… Support at senior management level and training would help.'

– Grantee

Reflecting on the balance between financial and non-financial support needs, one grantee suggested a 'grant plus' programme wherein grantees receive capacity building support alongside funding.

Networking opportunities between grantees

Some grantees also reflected that more networking opportunities across the sector would be useful. In particular, opportunities for smaller VCS organisations to learn from similar-sized and larger organisations. Some grantees suggested that this is currently an area for development in the sector of VCS organisations supporting children and young people's personal and social development and EET outcomes. One grantee reported:

> **'I love finding out what other charities are doing… We want to work with others who want to share and build a community. Bringing us together would be great.'**

Access to physical spaces in the community for children and young people to spend time and access support

Some grantees reported that access to physical spaces in the community for children and young people to spend time and access support has reduced in recent years, leading up to and including the COVID-19 pandemic, and that this can make it more challenging to support children and young people's outcomes. They suggested that an increase in these spaces would be helpful.

6.5.2. Reflections on policies and initiatives

The evaluation consulted stakeholders about the differences made by recent policies. Stakeholders and grantees had mixed views on the efficacy of two programmes that were discussed:

- **Kickstart, a scheme started by the UK Government to provide funding to employers to create jobs for 16- to 24-year-olds on Universal Credit who are at risk of long-term unemployment.**[33] Whilst some grantees we consulted had seen the positive impact of the scheme for the young people they support, others thought that it was difficult for organisations to implement and did not constitute a long-term solution to improving the employment prospects of young people. In particular, grantees highlighted that young people are often

[33] The Kickstart Scheme began on 2 September 2020. Applications closed at midday on 17 December 2021.

left unemployed after their Kickstart placement and thought that six months is not long enough for young people to develop new skills or to deliver effective work.

- **Youth Hubs: physical spaces run by partners including colleges, charities, training providers and local councils in which young people are provided with employment support and advice**. Grantees tended not to have strong views and many did not have experience with Youth Hubs to draw on. Those with experience had mixed views with some reporting that Youth Hubs in their areas had been useful but others reporting that the difference had so far been minimal.

7. Recommendations

7.6. Overview

This section presents recommendations that are based on the findings of this evaluation. They have been sense-checked and co-developed with the following groups through a series of workshops:

- Programme stakeholders.
- Young peer researchers – YFF's Youth Reference Group.
- Strategic stakeholders with policy insight.
- Grantees.

We recognise that not all stakeholders will agree with all the recommendations but we hope these are useful considerations to support children and young people to achieve their potential on their journeys to employment

7.7. Recommendations

Figure 9 sets out each recommendation based on the research conducted during this evaluation.

Each recommendation can be seen as relevant to one of four audiences: practitioners, policymakers, funders and commissioners. They can be defined as follows:

- Practitioners: Those working in frontline or operational management roles supporting children, young people and families, including volunteers.
- Policymakers: Those with a role to play in shaping the policies and structures that influence the direction of travel and strategic agenda, which directly or indirectly affects children and young people's journeys to employment.
- Funders: Those who administer funds for support and activities to support children and young people's journeys to employment, including grant funding.

- Commissioners: Those who commission support and activities that directly or indirectly affect children and young people's journeys to employment, including providing funding.

Figure 9: Co-developed evaluation recommendations

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

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

Recommendation	Audience				Jump to section
	Practitioners	Policymakers	Funders	Commissioners	
implemented, embedded and perform in local systems.[34]					
Include capacity building funding in agreements with service providers to cover the cost of monitoring data capture, analysis, evaluation and reporting.					6.5
Establish robust processes to support providers when funding comes to an end, and to support children and young people when this may interrupt or prevent delivery.					6.5
Review and use current and future levers to encourage greater networking and collaboration between VCS employability service providers.					5.4, 6.5
Evaluation and evidence base					
Explore models of outreach support, working closely with providers to pilot models and evaluate their impact on reaching target groups and generating EET outcomes.					5.3

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

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

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Inspiring Futures grantees

Inspiring Futures grantees	
Amaze Brighton & Hove	New Era Foundation
Ansbury	Nightsafe
Artcore Limited	Nightstop Communities Northwest CIC
Aston Mansfield Charity	Not Pants CIC
Aston Villa Foundation	Nova New Opportunities
Autism Bedfordshire	Oxfordshire Youth
AutismAble CIC	Pedestrian Ltd
Babbasa Youth Empowerment Projects CIC	Prior's Court Foundation
Basingstoke Voluntary Services	Recre8now
Beap Community Partnership	Redcar & Cleveland Mind
Bradford College	Rubygirl Limited
Breaking Barriers	Saints Foundation
Buckinghamshire Disability Services (BuDS)	Salmon Youth Centre in Bermondsey
Carefree - Fostering Independence Cornwall	Society for the Advancement of Black Arts
Carers Trust Heart of England	Soft Touch Arts Ltd
Centre of Wellbeing, Training & Culture	Sound Connections
Circle Community	Sport 4 Life UK
Company Three	Step by Step
Construction Industry Trust for Youth	Team Domenica
Creative Youth Network	The Diana Award
Cripplegate Foundation	The Juno Project
Damilola Taylor Trust	The Manchester Deaf Centre ltd

Inspiring Futures grantees	
Derbyshire Autism Services Group (D.A.S.G.)	The Melton Learning Hub
Ellesmere Youth Project	The Mustard Tree Foundation (Reading)
FACE - Family and Community Enterprise	The Platform Project
Flying Futures CIC	The Proud Trust
Football Unites, Racism Divides Educational Trust	The Royal School for the Blind
Friends, Families & Travellers	Toranj Tuition
Gateway Support Group	Transform Training
Getaway Girls	Trelya
Globalmama Enterprises Limited	UpRising Leadership
Golden Opportunity Skills and Development (GOSAD)	Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action
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Hearts and Minds	Windsor Fellowship
Highfields Community Association	YES OUTDOORS
Hillingdon Autistic Care & Support	YMCA Derbyshire
InUnity Ltd	YMCA East Surrey
Jacari	YMCA Milton Keynes
Lancashire Women	YMCA Norfolk
Lighthouse Futures Trust	Your Own Place CIC
MATRIX Neurological	YWCA England and Wales t/a Young Women's Trust
Mencap Ealing	

BBC CIN staff

- The Inspiring Futures project was an effort across multiple teams at BBC Children in Need.

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10. Appendix

10.1. Evaluation questions

Figure 10 presents the key evaluation questions as agreed with YFF, BBC CIN and key evaluation stakeholders as part of the co-developed evaluation framework.

Figure 10: Evaluation questions and where they are addressed in this report.

Evaluation question	Where addressed in report
1. What is the profile of grantees?	Section 4.5
2. What have grantees delivered?	Sections 4.5 and 4.6
3. How have children and young people been affected by COVID-19 with regard to their pathways to employment?	Impacts of COVID-19 report
4. How have grantees been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?	Impacts of COVID-19 report
5. What difference has Inspiring Futures made for children and young people?	Section 5
6. What difference has Inspiring Futures made for grantees?	Section 5
7. Has Inspiring Futures made a difference to families or wider communities?	Section 5
8. What about Inspiring Futures has worked well/less well to support children and young people towards positive employment pathways?	Section 6
9. During the pandemic what has worked well/less well to support children and young people towards positive employment pathways?	Section 6.3
10. What best supports grantees in the current context to deliver effectively and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and the economic context on children and young people's prospects?	Sections 6.4 and 6.5

Evaluation question	Where addressed in report
11. How does learning and good practice vary by: age, ethnicity, disability or physical or mental health condition and region?	Section 6.3
12. What other lessons, if any, should similar future programmes consider?	Sections 6 and 7

10.2. The difference that grantees aimed to make.

Figure 11: The type of differences that grantees aimed to make for the children and young people supported using their Inspiring Futures grant, based on application form data coded by BBC CIN (n=255).[35]

Difference for children and young people		No. grantees	Total	%
Emotionally well	Effects of distress or trauma	2	**16**	**6%**
	Having fun and enjoyment	1		
	Manage feelings and emotions	10		
	Manage mental ill health	3		
Employability	Access apprenticeship and traineeships	8	**87**	**34%**
	Achieving qualifications	13		
	Community involvement	2		
	Entry to employment	40		
	Other	3		
	Quality of employment	1		
	Satisfaction with employment	2		

[35] Figure 4 includes a base number greater than the total number of grantees (85), as each grantee is intended to aim for three differences.

Difference for children and young people		No. grantees	Total	%
	Sustaining employment	2		
	Work experience	16		
Essential skills	Better communication skills	10	**70**	**27%**
	Engage and achieve in EET	25		
	Improved life skills	32		
	Improved social skills	3		
Physically safe	Access to safe spaces	1	**1**	**0%**
Physically well	Physical activity or healthy diet	1	**1**	**0%**
Positive relationships	Friend and peer relationships	1	**11**	**4%**
	General relationships with others	5		
	Inclusion and belong to communities	1		
	Relating to trusted adults	4		
Positively empowered	Degrees of independence	2	**16**	**6%**
	Making informed life choices	2		
	Motivation and achieving goals	9		
	Participation and expressing self	1		
	Positive behaviour – anti-social behaviour/crime	2		

Difference for children and young people		No. grantees	Total	%
Strong self-belief	Confidence and self-esteem	36	**53**	**21%**
	Horizons and expectations for self	15		
	Sense of self and identity	2		
Total			**225**	**100%**

10.3. The difference made for children and young people

Figure 12: A breakdown of the differences seen for children and young people supported via Inspiring Futures, based on the grantees' monitoring report data.

Difference for children and young people		No. grantees aiming for difference		No. young people who reportedly:			
				Made significant progress		Started progress	
Emotionally well	Effects of distress or trauma	2	16 (6%)	108	736	70	**512**
	Having fun and enjoyment	1		15		3	
	Manage feelings and emotions	10		552		376	
	Manage mental ill health	3		61		63	
Employability	Access apprenticeship and traineeships	8	87 (34%)	116	5,835	56	**6,113**
	Achieving qualifications	13		208		46	
	Community involvement	2		69		46	
	Entry to employment	40		3,933		4,287	
	Other	3		251		36	

Difference for children and young people		No. grantees aiming for difference		No. young people who reportedly:			
				Made significant progress		Started progress	
	Quality of employment	1		13		5	
	Satisfaction with employment	2		154		1	
	Sustaining employment	2		72		13	
	Work experience	16		1,037		1,623	
Essential skills	Better communication skills	10	70 (27%)	206	7,112	180	**4,888**
	Engage and achieve in EET	25		1,105		877	
	Improved life skills	32		5,481		3,790	
	Improved social skills	3		320		41	
Physically safe	Access to safe spaces	1	1 (>1%)	5		50	
Physically well	Physical activity or healthy diet	1	1 (>1%)	190		0	
Positive relationships	Friend and peer relationships	1	11 (4%)	0	504	0	**250**
	General relationships with others	5		172		204	

Difference for children and young people		No. grantees aiming for difference		No. young people who reportedly:			
				Made significant progress		Started progress	
	Inclusion and belong to communities	1		200		0	
	Relating to trusted adults	4		132		46	
Positively empowered	Degrees of independence	2	**16 (6%)**	69	**559**	14	**523**
	Making informed choices	2		28		13	
	Motivation and achieving goals	9		401		475	
	Participation and expressing self	1		54		4	
	Positive behaviour – anti-social behaviour/crime	2		7		17	
Strong self-belief	Confidence and self-esteem	36	**53 (21%)**	6,792	**7,567**	1,442	**1,922**
	Horizons and expectations for self	15		491		385	
	Sense of self and identity	2		284		95	

10.4. The difference made for families and wider communities

Figure 13: A summary of the outcomes grantees' work towards with families and the type of support associated with them, based on reports from grantees.

Focus of support	Beneficiaries	Mechanism for change
Improved mental health and wellbeing	Parents/carers	As a result of direct support provided to family members, including: • Specialised mental health support • Creative activities • Staff providing a 'listening ear' And as a knock-on effect of support provided to the child/young person who is the primary beneficiary.
Skills development to support EET outcomes	Parents/carers	As a result of direct support provided to family members, including: • Internal skills development programmes • Volunteering opportunities
Improved language skills	Families	As a result of direct support provided to family members, including: • Language support
Improved integration into society	Families	As a result of direct support provided to family members, including: • Language support
Improved confidence and hope for the future	Parents/carers	As a knock-on effect of support provided to the child/young person who is the primary beneficiary.
Increased access to necessities	Families experiencing poverty, deprivation or homelessness	As a result of direct support provided to family members, including: • Provision of food • Provision of accommodation

Focus of support	Beneficiaries	Mechanism for change
Increased understanding of children's needs	Parents/carers of children and young people with disabilities	As a result of direct support provided to family members, including: • Monthly support group
Reduced social isolation	Parents/carers	As a result of direct support provided to family members, including: • Peer support
Improved family relationships	Families	As a knock-on effect of support provided to the child/young person who is the primary beneficiary.
Reduced financial strains	Families experiencing poverty and deprivation	As a knock-on effect of support provided to the child/young person who is the primary beneficiary.
Increased aspirations	Siblings	As a knock-on effect of support provided to the child/young person who is the primary beneficiary.