

RESTART YOUTH – LEARNING

This is the third in a series of internal Blaggrave learning reports about Restart Youth. The first report covers the call out, applications received, and process of prioritisation. The second documents learning about intersectionality. This report summarises the learning from work that was funded, and tries to capture the impact of the funding.

It sits alongside an external report written by an independent evaluator, Mary Mulvey Oates, on the impact of work with young advisers.

Summary

Restart Youth was highly effective in creating impact for young people in the wake of Covid, despite the small scale of the grants. However, long term impact was limited because the short term nature of the funding (6 months) did not give long enough for partners to embed the work. Partners responded to the funding with initiatives to embed young people in their decision making, as had been intended by the Young Advisers. Many of the partners began to employ young people as part of their teams, or as associates, meaning that young people were at the heart of their covid recovery efforts. Some partners began to reach outside their existing client group to examine what new needs were emerging, finding that the systems of support for young people who are existing outside official channels are fragmented and young people experiencing the most challenge are being left unsupported through a process of referral. One of the clearest areas of impact was in partners approach to intersectionality with tangible outcomes from the training and support offered by Blaggrave meaning that they have become more inclusive and accessible spaces for all young people who need them.

About Restart Youth

In December 2021, Blaggrave was awarded £220,000 by the NLCF for recovery in the youth sector in the wake of Covid 19. We made three rounds of grants to youth organisations in the South of England, half of which were already partners but half were completely new to Blaggrave. Funding was awarded to 21 organisations working to support and embed youth leadership in the wake of Covid.

Restart Youth was founded on the belief that, in the wake of Covid, organisations needed to be flexible and adaptable to meet young people's needs and to thrive.

Putting young people at the heart of decisions allows organisations to become more adaptable because it closes the social distance between an organisation's work and the young people they seek to reach. This strategy was directed by 6 advisers, themselves young people with experience of services in the region.

Learning questions

The learning in this report surrounds 3 key learning questions:

1. How Covid changed the needs of young people in the region

The most significant learning here is that covid – working from home, and limiting external input – has caused fractures in the usual relationships with the system surrounding young people. Our partners reported that young people are less likely to be referred by statutory agencies to them and less likely to be supported through the process if they are. Young people themselves were calling out for more accessible, open points where they could find help, rather than having to navigate their way round a broken system to find support. (No 5)

2. Reaching young people experiencing social injustice

Many Restart Youth projects used their funding to reach out to groups of young people they wouldn't normally work with, or who were engaging only at the margins of their service. The key learning was that young people facing social injustice will only want to ask for help from a service they believe will understand their identity and the issues they are facing. Young people value lived experience within organisations. Young people want to build relationships before seeking support as they do not give away their trust easily. Therefore persistence and ensuring there are quick wins for those that do engage are essential.

3. The difference that involving young people in decision making makes

All of the Restart Youth projects reported that young people grew in confidence and motivation once they could see their action having an impact. For some this meant starting small and building up greater engagement over a period of time. The work clearly shows that young people are enthusiastic, excited and motivated by the chance to make a difference.

Many of the projects reported an increase in awareness and knowledge about intersectionality as a result of their work on this project which meant they were more able to listen and act on young people's needs and wants. Many reported wider organisational impacts as adult staff and volunteers found their skills increased by working with young people alongside, and found that young people

who feel they have a real role became incredibly invested in the organisation as a whole, working to improve service delivery, fundraising, governance and evaluation.

Other learning emerging from these reports is that for many regional charities, even those with more substantial turnovers, this work is new. They have not benefitted from some of the training and resources circulating in larger areas. At the outset this led many to believe that the work would be simpler and quicker than it turned out to be. Changing direction, and absorbing the learning, takes time, and 6 months is simply not long enough for these changes to be guaranteed a long term effect.

It was clear from the convening that spearheading this sort of work within regional charities is lonely work. For some, they are the lone voice within a larger organisation and others are leaders of small charities without much support nearby. There was a tremendous appetite to make connections with others within the Blaggrave network and in particular an enthusiasm to be connected within a small group where relationships can flourish.

Sustainability and the future

The Restart Youth young advisers felt strongly they did not want to pay adults for work that young people could do, and that young people involved in the project should be paid. It was quickly clear that this is not usual practice in youth organisations, many of whom involve young people in a volunteer capacity. They jumped at the chance to pay young people but only offered short term contracts, meaning that the momentum of the project will slow once funding ends as 6 months is not long enough to find replacement funding. As well as funding many say they need to make the right connections locally to make sure the work continues. Some felt that more training would be useful although there was greater interest in being part of relevant conversations which Blaggrave might facilitate or know about.

Recommendation

The Restart Youth funding allowed many youth projects in the region to work outside their normal boundaries and trust in the power of lived experience to guide their work. This had tangible results for the young people that were involved, and also for the organisation as a whole. Far from seeing the training and resources around intersectionality as an imposition, projects welcomed specialist support that is not available to them locally. However the amount of funding and

length of the funding period limited the impact and sustainability of the work. There is a clear need to build on this work in future and I have no doubt there are many other organisations who would benefit.

Therefore I recommend that

- a) Clear criteria are drawn up to whether any of the current partners should be recommended for future core funding by Blaggrave/ Lottery in order to support continued momentum of their work
- b) Restart youth is run in 2022 to provide resources to enable more youth organisations to reach young people facing social injustice

Appendix: Learning from the projects

This is a summary of the main points from projects end of grant forms

1. Impact of the funding

The impact of the funding surrounds 3 key questions:

How has covid changed the needs of young people?	What did you learn about reaching young people who are experiencing social injustice?	What impact did young people have on your decision making, post pandemic
Covid has impacted relationships with other agencies which means yp are less likely to be referred on, and certainly less supported through the process if they are (aBOB) (Aoi)	Young people can only make a meaningful contribution when they feel valued and worthy (aBOB)	A greater focus on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion in a way that improves practice on a daily basis. (Act on It)
Young people need an open access point to be able to find support	Young people were initially excited to be able to have their say but when they found out more were daunted by the responsibility (ASD Support)	Staff developed their skills in active listening facilitation and person-centred planning (amaze)
Young people need a physical place to go	Staff need training on how to present/ engage yp (ASD)	Adult staff and yp have learned from each other- each sharing expertise (amaze)

The delivery of work experience and T level industry placements has been seriously affected/ cancelled by covid (Techresort)	Young people are excited to have their voices heard (FFT)	Young person decided to stand for trustee board (Amaze)
Schools are limiting the number of external visitors they accept (StopGap)	Young people will only want to access support from organisations they believe understand their identity and view their issues in an intersectional way (No5)	Board recognised the value of listening to yp and built this into wider strategy (FFT)
	Yp see risk differently – not as a risk and therefore as something to be avoided, but as an opportunity to be explored. Young people want safe places and relationships in order to do this in their own lives. (No5)	Yp who believe they have a role in the project become incredibly invested in the future of the whole organisation (Mandala)
	Need to offer fun and engaging activities for young people in exchange for their time (Oxfordshire Youth)	Yp have taken the DEI policy and are making it real within the organisation, eg pronoun badges for staff, changes to the client record sheet (OTR)
	Recruitment of lived experience is as significant as aspects of identity (OTR)	Young people were able to secure a higher profile with others for the organisation's services (SPF)
	It was important to ensure that promotional materials to attract yp into the project were fully accessible (roberts)	Young people were able to suggest improvements to service delivery (Techresort)
	It was essential to include achievable short term as well as longer term targets (Roberts)	Existing staff members improved their skills (Techresort)

	Constant persistence alongside sensitivity at a time of increasing mental health issues is needed (Roberts)	One decision builds on another – giving decision making power is better if it starts small (StopGap)
	Understanding the difference between the group’s work and therapy was essential (Roberts) Young people need to see quick evidence of response before they will trust organisations (Xtrax)	Young people need to be at the right point in their personal development to step into this work (StopGap)
	Developing relationships of trust is essential before real engagement (Xtrax)	
	Young people feel they have always had a voice but either not being heard, or heard and dismissed (Xtrax)	
	If supported, yp are eager to make an impact for themselves and for other younger young people (Xtrax)	

2. Other impacts

- Improved/ new relationships with statutory agencies who act as referrers (aBOB)
- Improved fundraising as yp was able to guide re social media use (Amaze)
- YP influenced recruitment for senior staff for the LA Social care team (Amaze)
- There is a clear route for yp to influence the board in future (FFT)
- The organisation has a digital strategy genuinely guided by young people (Mandala)
- Enabled charity to get matched funding (Me2)

- Learning around using positive action to ensure wider diversity within the staff team
 - Wider 'exposure' has led to appointment of two further yp in other posts (OTR)
 - There was already a young trustee, but setting up a Youth Voice panel supports them in their role and ensures a direct link with other young people (SPF)
 - A lasting 'product' that can be used in future by the agency with other young people (a training programme – Act on It)
 - Improved capacity as an organisation as existing staff improved their skills (TechResort)
 - Working more systematically to ensure yp have decision making power has led to proof of concept which can be used with other funders (Techresort)
 - A group formed that is representative of users of the service (Roberts)
 - Yp develop a stronger sense of place within their community (Xtrax)
 - Yp improved social media use and promotion of the service (YD)
 - Young people have volunteered to act as ambassadors for the programme (StopGap)
3. Other learning
- Asking genuinely open questions is really hard to do well (Aoi)
 - To support yp to contribute to decision making needs proper organisational investment – not anticipated at the outset (ASD)
 - Online engagement doesn't work for this (ASD)
 - Yp with additional needs are rarely asked for their views, so it's harder for them to voice (ASD)
 - Paying young people is important to ensure fair access (Mandala)
 - Mastering an activity (photography) is the first step to enabling active participation (Motiv8)
 - Young people were happy to work in a collaborative way with adults where they were the best people to do the work (No5)

- Yp understand the boundaries of what is possible, and without being directed to, make decisions within those reasonable boundaries and understand the limitations (No5)
- Seeking leadership training for young people is really hard (OTR)
- Training is needed for organisation on how to manage lived experience in the staff team. Also training is needed for young people on preparation for work eg project planning, how to communicate effectively with external organisations and how best an organisation can support a young person in work.