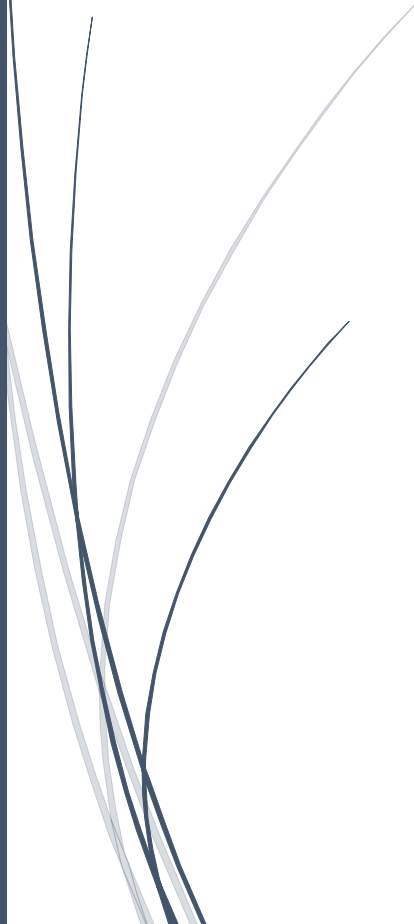




Routes2Success (R2S)

Evaluation report on 2020/2021
programme



INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This report provides an evaluation of the Youth Learning Network's (YLN) programme delivered in 2020/21 against the backdrop of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The programme delivered has to be seen against a backdrop of national 'lockdowns' and 'restrictions' that were nationally in place and legally binding in some cases for infractions.

During the first wave of the pandemic, March 2020 – September 2020, YLN was successful in securing 'emergency covid' funding from a range of funders, including London Community Foundation (LCF), BTEG/NET/Comic Relief, BBC Children in Need and The Phoenix Fund, to extend and sustain its work over Wave 1 and Wave 2 (October to April 2021). This report covers work up to April 2021.

A number of concerns and considerations applied to Youth Learning Network (YLN) in how it was able to develop and deliver the programme; and in some instances, engaged YLN in new and creative ways of working, that may not have been possible were it not for the 'new normal' within which they found themselves. For example:

- The organisation was at risk of closing within the first three months of the new financial year at the outset of the pandemic (March 2020);
- The first national lockdown proved challenging as YLN sought to identify 'emergency funding support' by re-shaping service delivery around COVID-19 impacted circumstances;

- Parents and children were at a loose end as to what to do as schools were largely closed and parents now found themselves not sure about exams and general schooling;
- Health and safety considerations following easing down from lockdown, especially ensuring PPEs, sanitisation stations, face coverings and social distancing measures were in place, especially as these now also formed part of their 'conditions' of hire.

The aim of YLN is to meet the educational needs of children, young people and parents from the African diaspora communities in South London by providing activities which help to facilitate their personal, cultural and social development through the provision of complementary education as part of its youth and community development programme. In broad terms, YLN provides:

1. Tutorials in English, Maths, ICT and Science
2. Homework, drama and music and activities programmes
3. Weekend and holiday school activities for children (i.e. residential Workshops, motivational and heritage programmes).
4. Information and advice sessions to parents and families (i.e. educate parents to enhance their understanding of the education and technological issues).

Needs identified and approach: underpinning theory for change

No programme can be developed unless it is clear about the need it is trying to

address and why the approach is the most appropriate means to address those needs. YLN's theory of change is based on an early intervention approach; that is, by working with those children most vulnerable, alongside their parents, will motivate those disengaged in the education system to be re-engaged. The approach is to work with children and young people-at-risk through a targeted tutored approach with social and career development programme and engagement with parents as part of a triangulation of activities. This they aim to do by developing the life skills and enhancing the qualities of young people to enable them to avoid negative pathways such as getting involved in anti-social behaviour and/or criminality. It is the prevention of these that lie at the heart of the Routes to Success Programme (R2SP).

THE ROUTES TO SUCCESS PROGRAMME (R2SP): OVERVIEW

YLN was successful in securing funding from the Big Lottery's Awards for All programme in 2020 to deliver the '*Routes to Success Programme*' (R2SP), to deliver a programme that was responsive to the pandemic in the first instance, especially as at that time, it was unclear how long the pandemic would last.

The funding sought enabled the further roll out and development of YLN's 'online' tutoring programme for children aged 5yrs to 16yrs, who were then at 'home' while schools were closed. They were able to transfer their programme online when the lockdown started which enabled them to engage with those students they had been working with through their complementary Saturday school programme.

What also became even clearer, was that not only did they have to engage with children more directly, but their parents needed additional support at two important levels. First they needed support in managing 'stay-at-home' children who would otherwise have been at school; and secondly, how to access and embrace online technology for themselves in supporting their child through this process (i.e. resolving demands for a limited resource in an household of multiple users).

The programme covered:

1. Tutorials in teaching/tutoring (Maths, English & Science)
2. Personal development programme (i.e. Mentoring/group work social development programme, including non-residential/off-site programme). - provide for a 2wks summer school programme of 4 hrs per day x 3 days per week
3. Parent and school engagement programme

How did YLN adapt and/or respond to the needs of the children and young people they were working with?

YLN provided a new 'Online Tuition programme' involving:

1. Children and young people;
2. Work with parents; and
3. Deliver confidence and enrichment complementary programmes through mentoring programme that supports health and wellbeing (e.g. coping with isolation strategies, especially stress,

frustration and anxieties)

Parent workshops were provided, especially around coping with children and young people during 'lockdown' as well as interventions in areas which involved some difficult situations that parents were encountering, largely of behavioural and boundary setting nature (i.e. conflict resolution and advocacy support).

YLN was able to pilot a new 'Online Youth Mentoring' programme, especially for those in transition Years 6 to 7 since they were already having difficulties in the areas of disruptions and not able to cope with the changes from primary to secondary schooling.

What were the characteristics of the beneficiaries?

60 children and young people were engaged on the programme, of which 39% were boys and 61% girls and 53% under 11yrs (32) and 47% (28) 11 – 16yrs.

The overwhelming majority (80%) were from Southwark while the others reflected a wide range from across London (Lambeth, Lewisham, Wandsworth, Croydon and Hackney being where the others came from).

The online programme had more than doubled their regular Saturday programme (from average attendance of 22 per week to 50), which suggests that the online approach might be a feature they may want to consider as part of their delivery approach in the future.

The majority of referrals came through word of mouth, largely through WhatsApp and telephone, where parents heard

about the programme via these channels. This was probably made more possible due to the closure of schools with parents seeking ways to ensure their child did not fall too far behind. This demonstrates that the desire for good quality education had not diminished and, despite the challenges brought about by the restrictions, parents were keen to ensure the provision of an effective education support was in place.

Over 40% (two-out-of-five) of parents identified as single parent household, while 30% were part-time employed and 46% in full-time employment.

WHAT WAS THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT BY THOSE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WERE ENGAGED IN THE PROGRAMME?

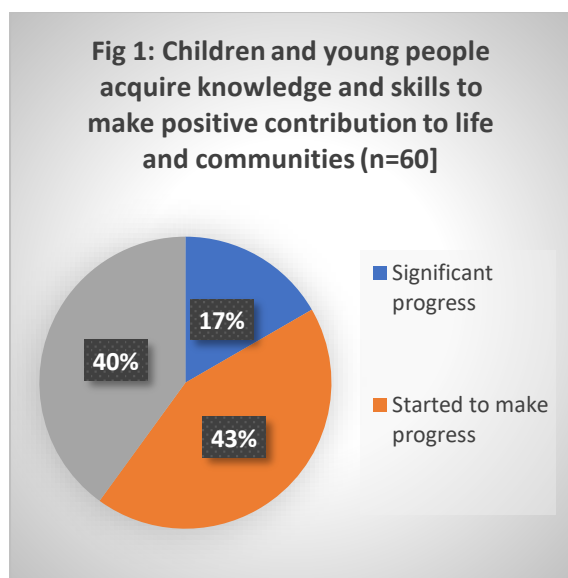
Outcome 1: *the main outcome envisaged was to build or allow children and young people the opportunity to acquire the knowledge of essential skills which is needed in life to be able to make positive contributions to life and communities.*

Participants on the programme showed improvements and acquired new areas of learning through the range of activities offered (see Fig 1). From interviews with tutors and feedback from parents, children and young people:

- fully participated in the classes, answering questions confidently and seeking clarification when not sure; and
- showed evidence that they had been learning over the course of the sessions, showing good understanding of the concepts they were learning.

Due to the pandemic and its impact on restrictions being put in place over the last 12 months, YLN had to move their programme online, with the exception of a few weeks over the summer, which meant that their traditional activities had to be moved from face-to-face delivery to remote delivery.

The students adapted quickly to the structure of the sessions, especially beneficial was the ability to utilise the 'chat and breakout room features' of Zoom. This enabled the students to engage in written communications collectively and so enhanced their writing skills and engaged in debates and discussions (a one-year Zoom Registration was purchased for the purpose of delivering the Online Tuition Programmes).



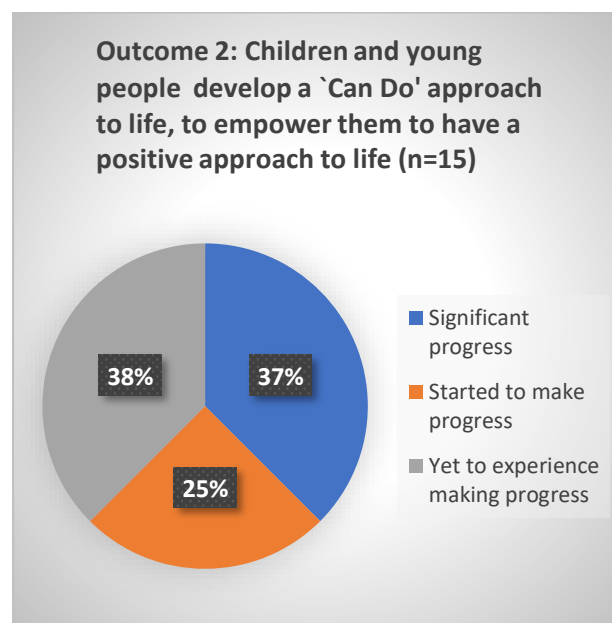
Outcome 2: to build in children and young people a 'Can Do' approach to life, to empower them the need to have a positive approach to life.

The older children and young people (13 – 16 yrs) participated in the Mentoring programme, which focused on their social

and personal development needs as well as the cultural and environmental context within which they reside. The programme provided guidance and support to the young people by focusing on home and school life: addressing issues of negative attitudes, self-esteem and friendship patterns that could be 'push' and 'pull' factors in the lives of individuals growing up (see Fig 2). They were able to explore issues and concerns in relation to:

- a) self-control
- b) family stability
- c) interpersonal relationships
- d) attitudes towards others

An example drawn from the mentoring programme revealed the difference made when a student who did not 'appreciate' her name and after discussions about identity, qualities of a person and aspirations, started to express a more positive self-image about self. She was also able to open-up about always talking in class and messing about and so work was undertaken with her to explore those areas that she could work on to better manage her attitude in class better especially when she becomes bored and distracted.



Outcome 3: *to enable and ensure children and young people were able to do their homework by creating a strong self-belief.*

Homework assignments were routinely completed, and this against a backdrop of working online. One of the unintended outcomes from the lockdown (both phases) was the transformation and attentiveness that the children reflected. By focusing on lived experiences and engagement through a remote channel, especially where individuals weren't able to 'physically shout, touch or annoy' others, was liberating which, as tutors and parents remarked, had an effect on their productivity level. One parent remarked:

"The mentoring has been superb; it has really made C think and be more analytical. The mentor used tools that were very engaging for young people. C really benefitted from the one to one work. I understand that he has done work on learning about how he presents himself, the meaning of his name, gratitude, respect and the importance of education. C has missed one session (last week as we were away). I see C trying and I understand being in lockdown is difficult for him as his life has changed drastically in terms of his routine."

Recognising the effect of the mentoring programme the tutor offered the following insights. Students were given 'challenges' to undertake as part of the programme; they were to find an influential role model and to explain why they chose that person. One student wanted to look at where their parents originated and so explored Jamaica as part of her challenge. They produced

impressive reports (verbal and written) and were praised for their input, especially as some of them were soft spoken and quiet but through the project shone, giving very good account as to why they chose the topic they did. The presentations showed improved confidence when speaking about their projects, demonstrating their capacity to rise to challenges and to achieve (see Fig 3).

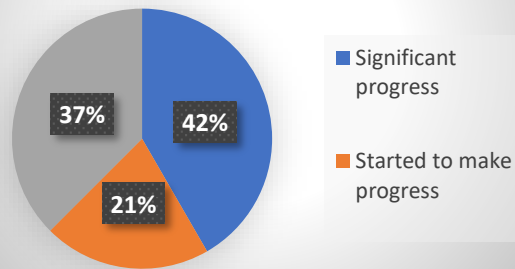
Other comments from parents further highlight the progress and achievements made

"My daughter was fortunate enough to have online lessons during the lockdown. These lessons consisted of mathematics and English. My daughter enjoyed the lessons so much as the teacher was very patient and she was able to ask questions and get answers. She was also given a lot of homework to keep her busy at the same time having to practice what she learnt during the online class independently."

"I hope the lessons can continue as they've been a life saver during these pandemic months."

"I would also as a parent want to use this opportunity to say a Big thank you to Youth Learning Network for being able to make this learning happen. "

Fig 3: Enable and ensure children and young people were able to do their homework by creating a strong self-belief (n=48)



WHAT HAVE BEEN THE LESSONS FOR YLN AS A RESULT OF THE EXPERIENCE AND HOW CAN THEY BUILD ON THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND INSIGHTS GAINED?

The programme enabled YLN to engage 36 additional students which made a tremendous difference in their overall approach. This additionality enabled them to reach 60 young people, an increase of 163% on their regular weekly participation level.

As part of the project, parent support workshops were provided on how to cope with children and young people during ‘lockdown’ as well as interventions in areas which involved some difficult situations that parents were encountering, largely of behavioural and boundary setting nature (i.e. conflict resolution and advocacy support).

The role of the parents in supporting their children on the programme was crucial as they spent time together (mostly working from home) which not only boosted the popularity of the programme but appreciated the complementary education programme YLN was offering. Parents saw first-hand how their children were responding to the teaching and also took on board the new system of teaching and

learning using specialised conference calling apps such Zoom. How to sustain this momentum after parents return to work and restrictions are fully lifted will be a challenge. It is clear that the online learning approach will need to be built on as it had made some noticeable difference in both teaching and learning.

There were interpersonal concerns that some parents were grappling with within the home that affected how the children were learning. YLN was not equipped to deal with some of the presenting issues, which meant signposting to relevant agencies. As they go forward, they will need to see how they can work more collaboratively with other partners/agencies who can provide some of those more psychological support and are better equipped to do so, particularly, in the provisions of equipment like Laptops, stationery etc.

The mentoring programme demonstrated that some students performed better having 1-2-1 support than whole group situations as when this was offered accounts indicated that they thrived and came out of their shell (see above).

YLN will need to consider expanding the programme over the summer holiday period. Providing a ‘summer school’ programme against this backdrop would be an important step as it seems the students will need ongoing support as we move out of lockdown heading into the summer. This could have the added advantage of enrolling children and young people over the summer to effectively prepare them to return in the new academic year in September.

Challenges to overcome

There are some challenges that YLN will need to address.

1. They were not equipped to advocate on some of the presenting issues by parents and so will need to work closely with agencies better equipped to handle psychological and behavioural concerns, especially where these relate to parent-child interrelationship breakdown;
2. As part of the project, they provided workshops on parenting skills, especially on how to cope with children and young people during lockdown. The mental health implication is one that YLN may not be well equipped to tackle at this moment in time, but they could consider mental health first aid approach for parents by working with specialist providers;
3. Parents were grappling with concerns that clearly affected their child's learning. We were not equipped to provide support on some of the presenting issues and so we will need to see how we can work more collaboratively with others who can provide some of those more psychological support.

Going forward

The Online programme showed that YLN can provide quality access to education and learning alongside one to one mentoring which may help to address gaps. They should seriously consider expanding the programme and enrol more learners and pupils through any proposed new summer programme that they would be encouraged to seek to develop. They

should therefore seek additional funding to resource such a programme.

Specifically, they would be advised to strongly consider:

1. Changing delivery days from Saturdays to include weekdays/evenings and to deliver programmes online and face to face following easing down of restrictions. This could increase their reach as demonstrated by the number of new participants who participated who were from outside the borough (i.e. 20% coming from outside Southwark).
2. The mentoring programme demonstrated that some students performed better having 1-2-1 support and thrived and came out of their shell.
3. The programme engaged additional students from the wider general population via the online approach, and this is encouraging and therefore something they should consider strongly on how they build on this momentum.
4. YLN should seek resources to establish a 'summer school' programme as students will need ongoing support as they prepare for the new academic year.
5. YLN should seek resources to purchase laptops which can be provided to those without such resources as we have experienced during the pandemic as well as for those with a limited number at home where parents were also sharing a single laptop.

THANK YOU

Youth Learning Network (YLN) would like to thank the following funders for supporting us over the period of the pandemic to April 2021; without their support and help, YLN would have ceased to operate from June 2020.

Supported by

**The
Phoenix
Fund**



**The London
Community
Foundation**



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