EYES WIDE OPEN

AN EVALUATION OF THE RURAL REFUGEE NETWORK'S SOUTH DOWNS YOUTH DISCOVERY PROJECT

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" The Downs...too much for one pair of eyes, enough to float a whole population in happiness. "

Tennyson

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SECTION 1.   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document reports an evaluation of the South Downs Youth Discovery Project, a pilot project that supports young people aged 16-19 who came to the UK alone and are therefore in the care of the local authority. Organised by the Rural Refugee Network, a charity with expertise in supporting refugee families to settle in East Hampshire and Havant, the project aims to help participants experience and understand the local environment and to feel more confident, empowered and settled. To this end it has organised monthly activity days and a three-day residential in the natural beauty of the South Downs National Park, with funding from the South Downs National Park Youth Action Fund, and from Nordson Corporation, and practical support in kind from Bedales School, the University of Winchester and the charity's supporters and volunteers.

This evaluation research took place 7 months into the 12 month pilot and involved a focus group with the young people who attend the project, interviews with key stakeholders and a survey to gather input from volunteers and from the young people's key workers or foster carers. Responses indicate that the project is meeting its aims. The supportive community of young people from diverse cultures and shared experience provides a safe space to learn, to understand their local environment and the environmental sector, to be creative, to enjoy the outdoors and to have hope for the future.

1.1 RESULTS

1.1.1 What the young people value

The young people's focus group highlighted the benefit they feel in positive relationships with people running and volunteering on the project and with each other, from sharing experiences and learning together in a safe, inclusive atmosphere and from being out in nature. Some of the young people said:

- *"Connect with friends" "Belong: being in this group"*
- *"Making pizza with friends"*
- *"It's very amazing place very green and beautiful and I love nature that's why I am relaxed in the green place"*

1.1.2 What the young people would like

- For the project to continue
- *"More residentials"*
- More opportunities to explore the countryside and find out about new places and experiences they are not aware of: "*I don't mind what, but I want to do new things*"
- Sport and physical skills
- Visits to historical and cultural sites

1.1.3 Project workers and volunteers' perspectives

"*It's about the journey not the result*." (workshop lead)

- The project is improving participants' communication skills and helping them to feel heard

- Participants benefit from positive experiences of the countryside and of the public in a safe environment
- The unanticipated benefit on the wider community of time spent *"seeing gentle boys, kind, gentle boys"*, which challenges preconceived ideas.
- The project's logistics are meticulously planned and very effective despite time constraints
- The approach is supportive and inclusive, a project ethos built up through sensitive attention to detail and a sense of caring, learning and discovery
  "*Having spoken to most of the participants throughout the day, it became evident that this project has been a place of solace for them.*" (volunteer)

Both the young participants and stakeholders would like this pilot to continue and to reach more young people in the future. Key themes in the conversations were expanding the geographical reach, addressing time constraints and retaining the ethos participants so valued in the current pilot.

1.1.4 The young people's keyworkers' perspectives

The key workers and foster carers focused on the connection to others and opportunity for discovery their young people had experienced through the programme: "*Friendship groups, a sense of community and the chance to be able to try new things, improved communication and confidence.*"

1.1.5 Unexpected benefits

Respondents in this research implicitly or explicitly described observing that the project has had a positive impact on volunteers and stakeholders, on workshop leads and on the wider discourse around these young people, as well as on individual intended beneficiaries.

1.1.6 The literature review

Prior research provides evidence that outdoor programmes, social support and opportunities for communication can be effective support for similar cohorts and suggests potential opportunities to enhance the approach in the future. Residential elements are found to be particularly effective. This brief review did not find any evidence as to the focus on the environment that was the emphasis of this particular project.

1.1.7 Barriers to success

This short pilot has reached a limited number of young people in a limited geographical area. The length of activity days and the choice of locations was constrained by the young people's locations (spread across two cities 30 minutes apart) and the need to keep activities within the South Downs National Park. There is an opportunity to improve future projects through the recruitment of more volunteers from a similar demographic as the participants and a review of the project's logistical and administrative burden. Using the lessons learned in the pilot to develop a communication plan and visual materials offers potential to enhance recruitment for future projects.

1.2 THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF SUPPORT

The evaluation identified factors underpinning the success of the project's approach:

1) Knowledge, skills and learning
2) Positive relationships
3) Feeling connected to the local environment
4) Feeling settled

1.2.1 Principle 1: Knowledge, skills and learning: Communication, practical and creative skills are enhanced through incidental and planned learning opportunities.

Knowledge, skills and learning encapsulates the formal and informal learning valued by the young people and by stakeholders.

"It feels like they're really observing and absorbing information and I get the impression they're enjoying the countryside here and learning from it." (workshop lead)
"Learning about the landscape, learning about the geology and the plant life" (project worker)

1.2.2 Principle 2: Feeling connected to the local environment: New experiences in natural surroundings offer a sense of discovery and hope.

Feeling connected to the local environment describes the project's targeted opportunities to connect with and understand the South Downs National Park and the people who live and work there.

"Because it's very amazing place, very green and beautiful and I love nature. That's why I am relaxed in the green place." (young participant)
"In nature you could see they were more themselves, I don't know how to explain, they were ... more comfortable and more themselves." (volunteer)

1.2.3 Principle 3: Feeling settled: Young people feel safe and are allowed to be children first and foremost.

Feeling settled encompasses the impact of belonging, of feeling cared for and of enhanced wellbeing that respondents felt the young people had gained through the project.

"They were kind with us always. Cares for us and very friendly. I really appreciate and specially thank all of them for being with us." (young participant)
"Giving them their own space to have some power over what is happening." (project worker)
"They have a deep sense of kinship and community with each other, but also with the PEOPLE that run the project" (volunteer)

1.2.4 Principle 4: Positive relationships: Meaningful relationships are developed with adults in the community and with peers with shared lived experience despite diverse countries of origin.

The *positive relationships* principle recognises the strength of meaningful relationships developed with adults in the community and with peers with shared lived experience.

"I liked it because I was working together with my friends." (participant)
"Almost every participant asked about [absent project worker]. This, to me, showed the community and appreciation they have developed with the organisers of the project." (volunteer)

1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- The current project should continue beyond its pilot year
- The charity should consider expanding this provision to reach more young people
- Future projects should aim for unrestricted geographical scope to alleviate the transport issues
- Plan for a longer timeframe; continuity is crucial for this cohort
- Evaluation, using a logic model approach, should be built in from the planning stage
- Develop visual marketing materials such as a short video clip to engage more young people
- Develop written volunteer/workshop lead briefings
- Budget for a scaling up of logistical support beyond the Rural Refugee Network's current capacity, for example through a paid coordinator.
- Future projects should not assume it would be easy to scale the significant contribution in kind from Rural Refugee Network supporters
- Develop mechanisms to bring in more workshop leads and volunteers from a similar demographic or with lived experience
- Explore opportunities to help participants understand areas beyond the environmental sector
- Share the four principles within the charity and beyond to inform future provision
- Consider commissioning evaluation reports about the Rural Refugee Network's other interventions in support of refugees and asylum-seekers

SECTION 2.   INTRODUCTION

This document provides a report on the evaluation of the South Downs Youth Discovery Project (SDYDP). The SDYDP is a pilot project initiated by the Rural Refugee Network (RRN), a local charity with expertise in supporting refugee families to settle in East Hampshire and Havant. The pilot is the first time the charity has used its experience supporting families to work directly with young people aged 16-19 who came to the UK alone and are therefore in the care of the local authority and it aims to help participants feel more confident, empowered and settled. Research points to a heightened risk of mental health problems[1] with these separated adolescents, who are likely to have experienced trauma in the past. Housed in the major cities in the area, they face the challenge of navigating a new culture and language and 'reconstructing their social networks while moving through important developmental stages'[2]. The UK received 3,762 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in 2021, 69% of whom were aged 16-17[3]. They have diverse countries of origin and reasons for being in the UK and each child's experience of trauma, flight and arrival in the UK will have its own unique aspects, but migration generally entails the severing of community ties and the loss of social networks and familiar bonds[4].

The South Downs Youth Discovery Project organises monthly activity days and a three-day residential, in the natural beauty of the South Downs National Park. It is run by the Rural Refugee Network with funding from the South Downs National Park Youth Action Fund and Nordson Corporation and practical support in kind from Bedales School, the University of Winchester and the charity's supporters and volunteers. Eight young men have attended regularly and another eight have joined part way through or moved to another part of the country and so dropped out. The project launched at the Winchester Science Centre in December 2021 and is due to conclude at the end of 2022. The project's logic model sets out the logistics that need to be in place (*project processes*) and maps the intermediate *outcomes* that project staff believed would lead to the desired *impact*: that the young people feel more confident, empowered and settled.

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[1] Derluyn, I., Mels, C. and Broekaert, E. (2009) Mental Health Problems in Separated Refugee Adolescents. *Journal Of Adolescent Health* 44, (3), 291–297. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2008.07.016

[2] Smith, A., Crooks, C. and Baker, L. (2022) "You Have to be Resilient": A Qualitative Study Exploring Advice Newcomer Youth Have for Other Newcomer Youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-021-00807-3.

[3] UK government Asylum and resettlement summary tables to December 2021: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1055845/asylum-summary-dec-2021-tables.ods

[4] Rania, N., Migliorini, L., Sclavo E., Cardinali, P. and Lotti, A. (2015) Unaccompanied Migrant Adolescents in the Italian Context: Tailored Educational Interventions and Acculturation Stress. *Child & Youth Services* 35, (4), 292-315. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2014.955173
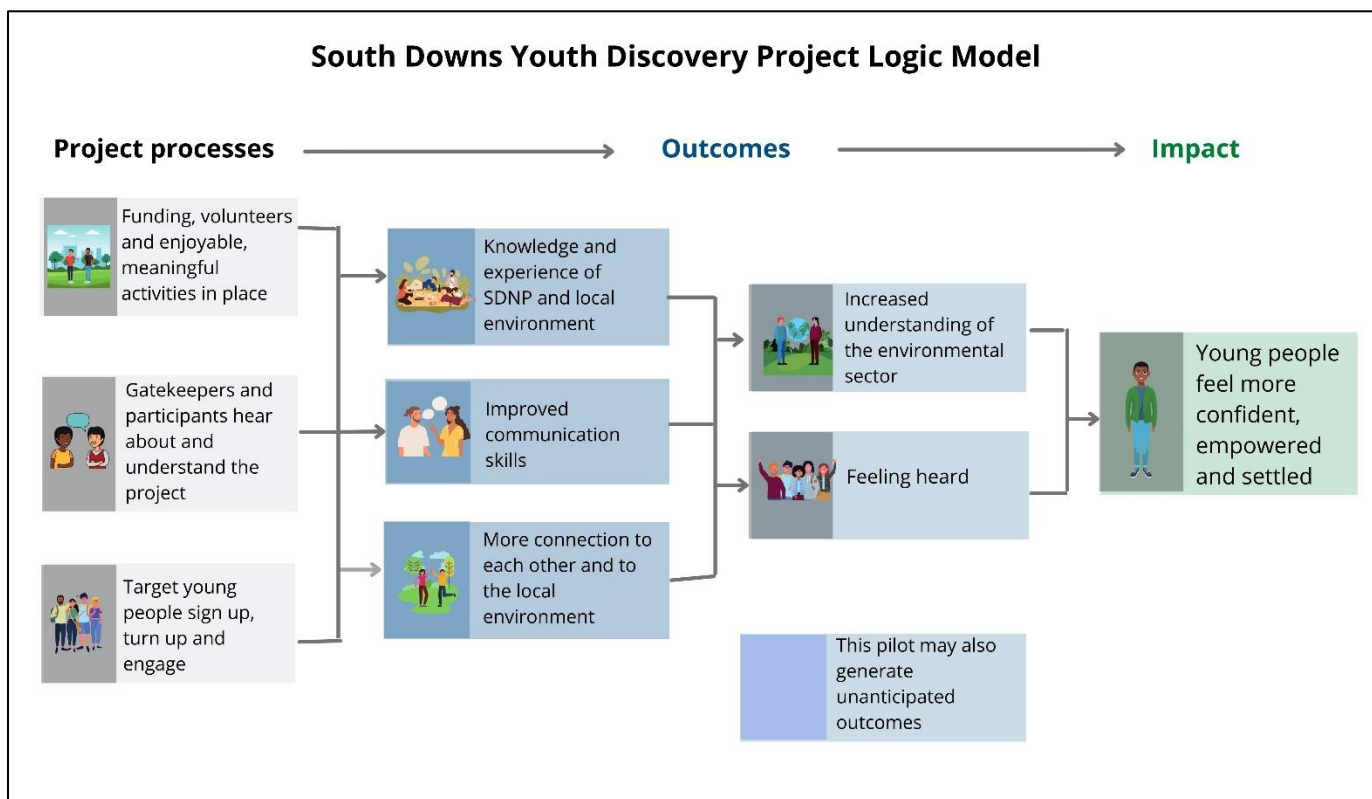
Figure 1 The South Downs Youth Discovery Project logic model

The project arranged monthly days out, with educational, practical and creative workshops in the South Downs National Park. Additionally, a three-day residential was held at the Sustainability Centre in May half term. The project to July 2022 has involved the following activities:

- December 2021: Launch at the Winchester Science Centre and Planetarium
- February 2022: The Weald and Downland Living Museum
- March 2022: Arundel Wetland Centre
- April 2022: No activity due to Ramadan
- May 2022: A three-day residential at the Sustainability Centre
- June 2022: Scent-making workshop and Cyanotype workshop
- July 2022: Alice Holt Forest nature walk, evaluation focus group and treetop challenge

SECTION 3. THE EVALUATION

This research has been undertaken by Katherine Lawrence, a postgraduate student and staff member at the University of Winchester and trustee of the Rural Refugee Network. The research heard from the young people themselves and gathered the perspectives of their key workers or foster carers and of volunteers, workshop leads and others who have experienced the South Downs Youth Discovery Project. It captures the first seven months of the year-long pilot, so that the learning can be applied to the remaining pilot activities as well as informing future plans and providing a summative assessment of whether the project is on track

to meeting its aims. The research reflects the intended outcomes of the project's logic model and explores the relationships between the project's logistics, its outcomes and impact.

3.1 Methods

A detailed methodology and example documentation is available in the appendices of this report. In brief, the research:

1. Held a focus group with the project's young participants
2. Interviewed project workers and volunteers
3. Undertook a qualitative survey asking stakeholders such as key workers and volunteers to:
   - Rate how much they agree or disagree with statements about the project's outcomes in the logic model
   - Comment on what they felt participants had gained and what could be done differently in future.
4. Reviewed the literature around the assumptions in the project's logic model

The dataset for the first three of these methods comprised:
- The young people's focus group transcript and written feedback (8 participants)
- Six interview transcripts
- Six questionnaire responses

The spoken and written responses to open questions were analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis[5] which involves the following six steps:

1) Familiarisation: responses were read, re-read and annotated
2) Coding: succinct labels, codes, capturing units of meaning were linked to excerpts
3) Generating initial themes: the codes were collated into broader ideas
4) Developing and reviewing themes: these ideas, or themes, were reviewed against the coded dataset, checking the fit to the research question, the literature and the aims of the study
5) Refining, defining and naming themes: each theme was developed to clarify the scope and focus and given an appropriate name
6) Writing up

The qualitative data analysis software package, Dedoose, was used to analyse the dataset from step 2 onwards. The underlying data were also filtered and analysed by respondent and by theme. Grouping the codes into layers and identifying key themes clarified the key principles underpinning the project's success and identified some unanticipated positive outcomes.

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[5] Braun, V. and Clarke, V. *Doing Reflexive Thematic Analysis* https://www.thematicanalysis.net/doing-reflexive-ta/

3.2 Results

The first point to note is that every interviewee opened with heartfelt general statements about their overall positive experience and the young focus group participants were keen to express their overall experience. This section therefore begins with a selection of these quotes, before presenting more detailed results:

"*Just very very positive, they really are happy, it's very humbling how engaged they are and the atmosphere*." (volunteer)

"*I want thank you everyone help me*" (young participant)

"*And it was really really nice, I mean like I really really liked it*" (volunteer)

"*The whole thing has been wonderful*" (project staff)

"*I felt confident and happy. The people here very respectful and their face smile and it's very welcome people. I am very happy from them.*" (young participant)

"*All the little details it was so nice" (*volunteer)
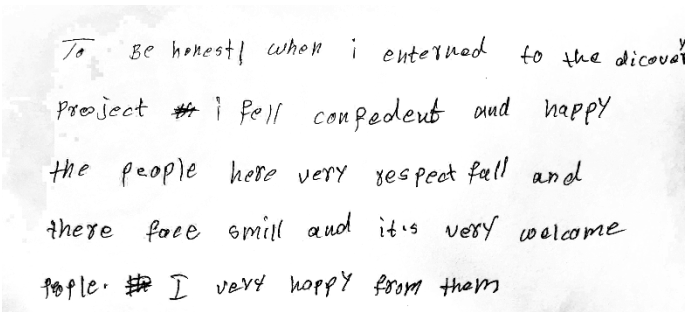
"*I like all project. I really enjoyed with all the project*" (young participant)

This section will now present stakeholders' judgements on the project's achievement of its stated outcomes, the voices of the young people and an exploration of the key principles of practice identified in the data. The results address the two questions a project evaluation needs to answer.

1. Outcomes: does the project achieve its intended **outcomes**?

2. Processes: what factors contribute to this? Were the project **processes** implemented as intended and are they effective?

3.2.1 What the young people say

> The young people's focus group discussion highlighted positive relationships with the people running and volunteering on the project and with each other, sharing experiences and learning together in a safe, inclusive atmosphere and the benefits of being out in nature

Figure 2 Young participant's reflection on the project
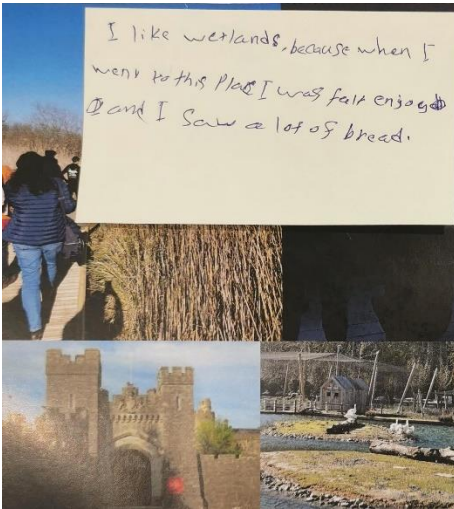
Figure 3 Young participant's favourite activity

The young people also expressed their ideas about future project priorities, which are reported in section 5.

The following word cloud was generated from coding of the focus group transcript and participants' written comments.

Figure 4 What the participants value about the South Downs Youth Discovery Project

In addition to the planned transcribed conversation, the young people wanted to express their thoughts about the project in writing and to be sure that their voices would be heard.

Figure 5 Young participant's written description of how the project makes them feel

Their writing was therefore scanned in for verbatim reporting (here and appendix G) in addition to incorporating the messages in the analysis.

Figure 6 Young participant's reflection on how the project has helped their English

While some of the young people had a good command of English, others had arrived in the country recently, knowing very little English and coming from countries which use a different script. Their confidence to write their thoughts down in English and ask for help where needed indicates a safe, supportive atmosphere. Many of them referred in their feedback to the opportunities to use and develop their English informally in this way.

3.2.2 What stakeholders say

> Stakeholders strongly agreed that the project is addressing the outcomes identified in its logic model.

Beginning with the results of the survey, there was particularly strong agreement that the project is improving participants' communication skills (two-thirds of respondents strongly agreed, one third agreed with the statement) and helping them to feel heard (over 80% strongly agreed, the other respondent agreed with the statement). Confidence in participants' understanding of the environmental sector was lower but still positive overall. The results of six stakeholder judgements against the logic model are:
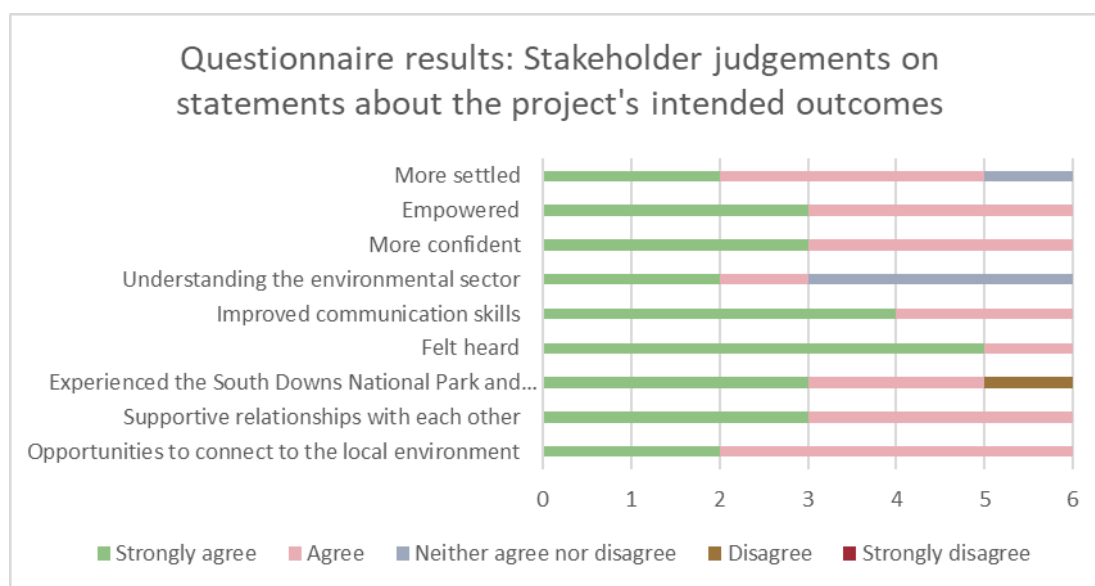
Figure 7 Stakeholder judgements

When filtered to only the three key worker/foster carer responses, the chart looks as follows:
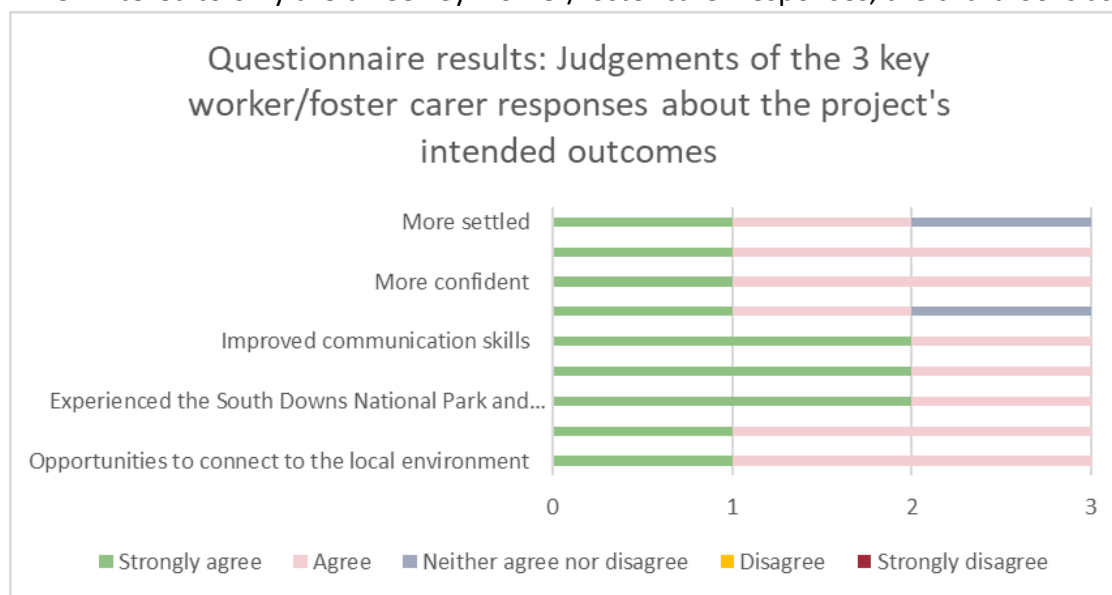
Figure 8 The three key worker/foster carer respondents' judgements

> The key workers and foster carers focused on the connection to others and the opportunity for discovery their young people had experienced through the programme

"Friendship groups, a sense of community and the chance to try new things, improved communication and confidence."
"The opportunity to experience new things and take part in different activities they otherwise would not experience."
"Confidence and a caring environment."

In addition, one interviewee who works on the project mentioned positive informal feedback: "*Some of the foster carers texting how much [their young people] love coming to the project and thanking us for doing the project."*

Survey responses to the open questions were analysed with interviewees' data. This analysis produced the following themes in relation to project outcomes.
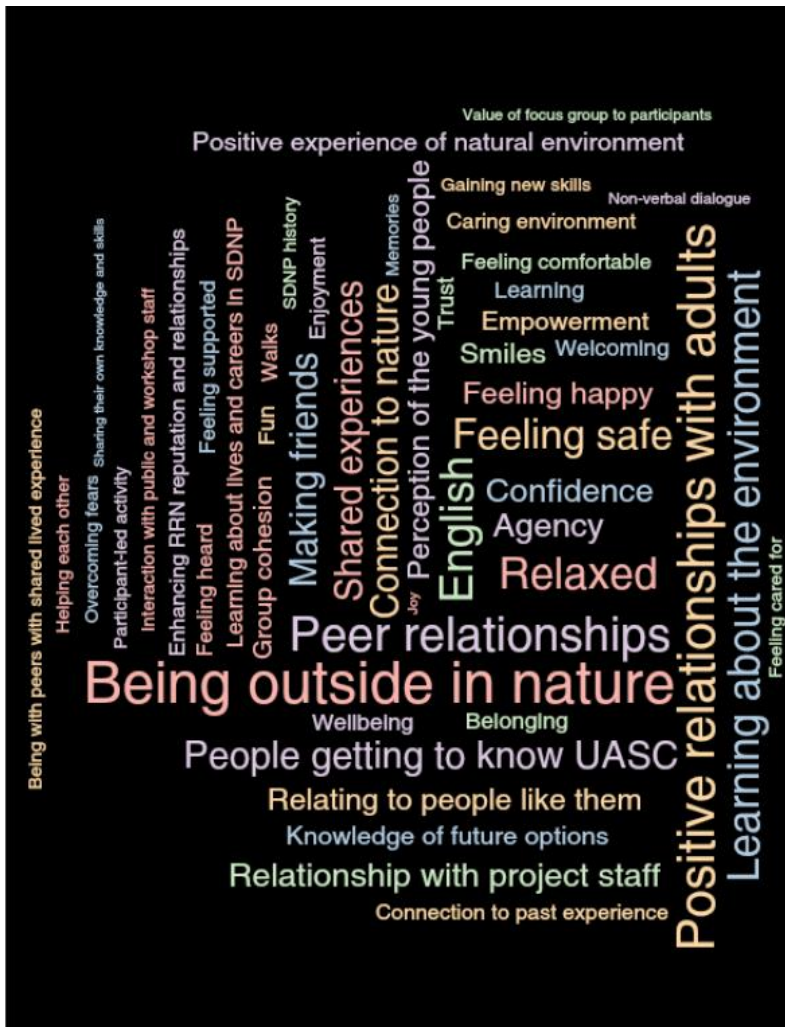
Figure 9 What stakeholders feel the South Downs Youth Discovery Project is providing

3.2.3 **What prior research says**

> Prior research provides evidence that outdoor programmes, social support and opportunities for communication can be effective in supporting similar cohorts. Residential elements are found to be particularly effective.

The evaluation examined prior research of relevance to what the project aimed for in terms of outcomes and impact. The literature search found several reviews of studies about outdoor education. These concur with the South Downs Youth Discovery Project's assumption of the benefits of spending time connecting to the local environment. They also indicate that outdoor programmes foster positive relationships between and among students through the 'relational nature of experience and learning'[6], which links to the South

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[6] Burke et al. (2012) Nel Noddings' care theory and outdoor education. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education and Leadership*, 4, (1), 3-15. https://js.sagamorepub.com/jorel/article/view/6651

Downs Youth Discovery Project's level one outcomes. One article reviewing 61 research papers concluded, for example, that 'spending time in nature leads to improvements in mental health' and to increased self-confidence and that 'experience of green environments is associated with greater environmental knowledge'[7]. This brief review did not find evidence relating to the project's focus on that environmental knowledge specifically as leading to the desired impact. The literature was stronger around the importance of communication skills. An analysis of immigrant youth perspectives cited building language proficiency as critical to successful settlement[8], supporting the assumption made by this project that the opportunities for interaction and learning in English will contribute to the project's aim. An Italian study concluded that 'possessing strong skills in the language of the host community and one's native language are predictors of low acculturative stress'.[9] It identified the buffering effect of social support for child migrants, chiming with the themes in this evaluation report and suggesting that future projects might extend the scope of the logic model's intermediate stages. That study also indicated that the youth they interviewed valued opportunities to explore career options and to connect with others, as offered by the South Downs Youth Discovery Project. The importance of opportunities to explore career options comes through in the literature, indicating an opportunity for the South Downs Youth Discovery Project in the future to widen the scope of the careers it focuses on to sectors other than the environmental sector. The residential element emerged as a strength of the South Downs Youth Discovery Project and something participants wanted more of in future, echoing findings in evaluations reported in the literature, which find, for example that 'overnight and multi-day activities had a stronger effect than shorter ones'[10].

The word empowerment features in the project's logic model and was mentioned by respondents in this research. It is a widely used but rarely defined concept. Research defines empowerment as a process of caring, mutual respect and group participation in the community, 'a process by which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the life of their community, and a critical understanding of their environment'.[11] Respondents in this evaluation judged that this project contributes to these elements, but future projects would benefit from more precise definition.

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[7] Gill, T. (2011) *Children and nature. A Quasi-systematic review of the empirical evidence.* P8.

[8] Smith, A., Crooks, C. and Baker, L. (2022) "You Have to be Resilient": A Qualitative Study Exploring Advice Newcomer Youth Have for Other Newcomer Youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal.* Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-021-00807-3

[9] Rania, N., Migliorini, L., Sclavo E., Cardinali, P. and Lotti, A. (2015) Unaccompanied Migrant Adolescents in the Italian Context: Tailored Educational Interventions and Acculturation Stress. *Child & Youth Services* 35, (4), 292-315. https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2014.955173

[10] Fiennes, C., Oliver, E., Dickson, K., Escobar, D., Romans, A., and Oliver, S. (2015) *The Existing Evidence-Base about the Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning.* Available at: https://www.outdoor-learning.org/Portals/0/IOL%20Documents/Research/outdoor-learning-giving-evidence-revised-final-report-nov-2015-etc-v21.pdf?ver=2017-03-16-110244-937. P7.

[11] Perkins, D. (2010). Empowerment. In Couto, R. Political and civic leadership: A reference handbook (p207-218). https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412979337.n25.

3.2.4 **Unexpected Outcomes**

> Changing perceptions: respondents in this research implicitly or explicitly described observing that the project has had a positive impact on volunteers and stakeholders, on workshop leads and on the wider discourse around these young people, as well as on individual intended beneficiaries.

The respondents in this research indicated that the South Downs Youth Discovery Project generates additional outcomes beyond those envisaged at the start.

While the project's logic model focuses on the benefits for its young participants, there was a strong sense from volunteers and workshop leads that the group of young people made quite an impression on them. Several chose to articulate this, such as a young volunteer who commented that *"it taught me how to be around people that haven't had the same lives as me"*, going on to say that "*I'm not used to that kind of stuff, I've never worked with refugees, I was surprised how they were all the time, they would talk about anything, they would be joking around"*.

Interviewees commented on how the young people were unexpectedly nice, how they were gentle, relaxed but keenly interested and engaged in every activity. The unanticipated benefit on the wider community of time spent *"seeing gentle boys, kind, gentle boys"* was felt by many to be challenging preconceived ideas in the media with a breadth of volunteers and workshop leads about young male asylum-seekers. This is backed up by prior research around contact theory[12]. As one interviewee put it, *"They tend to be pleasantly surprised"* and become very invested in this cohort.

The positivity of the interactions between participants and members of the public in the venues was both explicitly mentioned and clear from the many anecdotes recalled by respondents, such as the moment when photographers in a bird hide at the Wetlands Centre shared their photographs and their passion for the birds with the young people. Interviewees described those who interacted with the young people as interested in them as people and keen to engage, and the young people were very open to speaking to different people. 'Young Sanctuary Seekers contend with adverse experiences in their countries of origin, which often force them to flee. Journeys are arduous and involve further traumatic experiences'[13]. Positive experiences of the public in a safe space came through as important to the young people and a strength of the project.

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[12] Pettigrew et al. (2011) Recent Advances in Intergroup Contact Theory. *International journal of intercultural relations* 35, (3), 271–280: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.03.001.

[13] Public Health Wales (2020) Adverse Childhood Experiences in child refugee and asylum seeking populations https://www.wmsmp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ACEs-in-Child-Refugee-and-Asylum-Seekers-Report-English-final.pdf

3.2.5 Project process effectiveness

The research also looked at the effectiveness of how the project was organised. The analysis produced the following code tree where the relative number of times respondents referred to a concept is shown by the size of the circles within each colour cluster.
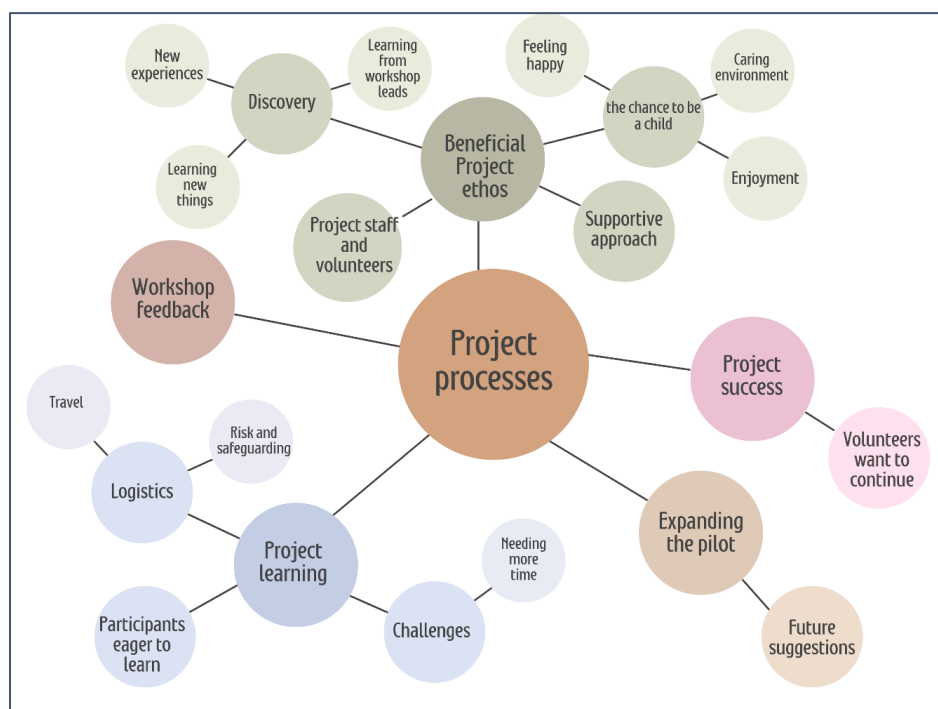
Figure 10 The effectiveness of how the South Downs Youth Discovery Project was organized

3.2.6 What worked well

The project's ethos was held to be critical to its success. Respondents felt that the project's logistics were handled very well indeed and that the Rural Refugee Network's expertise and the dedication of its volunteers and staff were enabling the days out to be meaningful and enjoyable.

Every respondent group praised the supportive, inclusive approach, a project ethos built up through constant attention to detail and a sense of caring, learning and discovery. A volunteer explained that the focus of the South Downs Youth Discovery Project is on providing an opportunity for relaxed learning, enjoyment and bonding in beautiful surroundings, rather than providing trauma support or casework:

> *"I learned a lot about how the charity focuses entirely on the fact that these are children at the crux of it all, and that this project tells them that this is deeply understood, through such outings".*

One interviewee, who had led several days of workshops for the project, summed up the project's relaxed and caring approach as 'about the journey not the result', contrasting his experience that week positively against other groups he works with. Several interviewees expressed how delighted they are to have been part of this project, typified by this workshop lead's feeling:

> *"What a lovely lovely group and the staff on the project, all getting on very well, so welcoming. I feel privileged to have been asked to come here"*.

There was strong agreement that the project's logistics are meticulously planned and very effective in ensuring every activity proceeds safely and smoothly and participants are engaged and relaxed. Much of this was credited to the personal qualities of the team running each activity. A volunteer, for example, commented that "*I think the 'Nature Bathing' walk was well handled despite very energetic and sometimes distracted participants*". No one identified issues with the organisation of the project, and one professional commented that *"everything has been really well organised and planned"*.

3.2.7 Barriers to success

This short pilot has reached a limited number of young people in a limited geographical area. The length of activity days and the choice of locations was constrained by the young people's locations, spread across two cities 30 minutes apart, and the need to keep activities within the South Downs National Park. There is an opportunity to improve future projects through recruitment of more volunteers from a similar demographic as the participants and a review of the project's logistical and administrative burden. Using the lessons learned in the pilot to develop a communication plan and visual materials offers potential to enhance recruitment for future projects.

The length of activity days and the choice of locations was constrained by the young people's locations (spread across two cities 30 minutes apart) and the need to keep activities within the South Downs National Park area. While interviewees identified time in the minibus as informal downtime together for everyone, some days involved several hours of driving. The variety of countries of origin and levels of English ability could have been challenging in a project which lent itself less to adaptation and peer learning.

One interviewee mentioned the challenge in recruiting young male volunteers. While the project has been very well supported, and has involved several volunteers and workshop leads from similar backgrounds to the young participants and a male youth worker during the 3-day residential, the majority of volunteers are older than the young men and female. This is not unique to this project. Research commissioned by the Big Lottery Fund in 2012 found that 'there is a perception among some men that volunteering constitutes a carer role and that this domain is considered predominately female. The lack of visibility of men in the social sector can be detrimental in engaging male beneficiaries if they feel that they are in a female environment.'[14]

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[14] Johal, A., Shelupanov, A. and Norman, W. (2012) Invisible Men: Engaging More Men in Social Projects. Big Lottery Fund. https://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/INVISIBLE_MEN_-_FINAL.pdf

A potential barrier that might have been created by the need to go through gatekeepers to engage with the young people has not in fact held the project back. This is possibly due to the good relationships all round, which were referenced so frequently in responses, and the charity's CEO's experience and relationships in the local authorities. One of the organisers commented that this element has worked well, despite the high time burden on the charity's limited capacity: *"organising the details with the foster carers and the local authority. That worked really well actually, once we had the contact, they were really good"*. One young volunteer mentioned that project staff's warnings of what not to talk about with this vulnerable cohort, while necessary, left them feeling at a loss and nervous approaching the young people to start with. Another young volunteer on the other hand, appreciated the clarity about how the project's ethos does not involve addressing trauma.

The project has involved a steep learning curve for the charity, for volunteers and for workshop leads, most of whom had not worked with this cohort before. *"I think for some people it's a learning curve, who are not sure whether they're out of their depth but they're thinking on their feet and trying to adapt their teaching style or communication style to the participants."*

SECTION 4. PRINCIPLES OF SUPPORT

The data indicated four principles which describe factors underpinning the success of the project's approach:

1. Knowledge, skills and learning
2. Feeling connected to the local environment
3. Feeling settled
4. Positive relationships

4.1 Principle 1: Knowledge, skills and learning

> Communication, practical and creative skills are enhanced through incidental and planned learning opportunities.

The project's formal and informal learning is valued by the young people and by stakeholders. Project days are built around learning from professional guides or workshop leads at each venue and workshop outcomes have included both practical skill acquisition and formal learning. Respondents cited specific creative, physical and practical skills taught in the workshops, such as map reading, woodwork, hands-on science, "*basic skills in perfumery and fragrance blending*", plant identification, fire-building, music, wood-splitting, cooking. The young people have taken opportunities for experiential learning, as described by a workshop lead who commented that *"it feels like they're really observing and absorbing information and I get the impression they're enjoying the countryside here and learning from it*". In addition, there have been opportunities to build personal skills and resilience through shared challenges and supportive coaching from the project staff and volunteers. A workshop lead observed that "*[project leader] said to one boy, 'you know this is the learning process, you have to make mistakes to know how to do it better'.*"

While the project does not offer formal English language lessons, which the young people are attending at college, many respondents, including the young people themselves, mentioned the value in the project's natural, unpressured conversations, task-orientated communication and non-verbal communication, through shared tasks, music, gestures and interaction with animals. The wide variation in levels of English within the group mean that the young people learn from helping each other. In addition to this incidental learning, project staff explicitly encourage the participants' efforts to learn English, by explaining new words and concepts and by showing interest in their progress.

> *"One of the young people, he didn't speak a word of English when he started and I mentioned that next time I see him he will speak a little bit more English because obviously they go to college, and he did."*

Each project day provides opportunities to talk to volunteers and staff at the venue and Rural Refugee Network volunteers about their own career journeys. The volunteer on the scent workshop summed up the potential impact of opening participants' eyes to career options:

"I honestly like to think out of that weekend, that one of them goes into making scent, cos [workshop lead] said it's a £45million industry in this country and there are jobs based around making scent. I'd like to think that one of them goes 'oh that's quite interesting I wouldn't mind doing something like that'."

4.2 Principle 2: Feeling connected to the local environment

> New experiences in natural surroundings offer a sense of discovery and hope.

The stakeholder comment that *"Nature gives them freedom"* was reflected throughout the data. Being outside in nature came through as a strong priority for the young people, both in the discussion about the current project and in what they would value in the future.

Respondents described the joy in activities such as walks over the Downs, identifying plants and wildlife and whittling wood or building campfires in the forest. One young person chose the word *relaxed* to describe how it makes them feel *"because it's very amazing place, very green and beautiful and I love nature. That's why I am relaxed in the green place".*

One volunteer felt that *"to go and collect flowers and leaves and things and just walk through the grass and be outside and looking at the Downs, embracing that was, I think, really special for them"*. Several interviewees expressed their surprise that *"they focus so much and really get into the activities, even very simple ones, out in nature, just enjoying being together"*, how *"in nature you could see they were more themselves, I don't know how to explain, they were ... more comfortable and more themselves".*

Every activity day was located in and strongly linked to the South Downs National Park. Some workshops explicitly focused participants on climate change, or on aspects of nature, such as gathering leaves and flowers for cyanotype printing or for making medicinal syrup, observing birds in a hide, forest bathing, counting rings in tree trunks, or "*taking all the natural elements that they see around them like lavender and camomile and using them to make up their own scent".*

Several of the venues, such as the Weald and Downland Living Museum or the Sustainability Centre, showcase present and past lifestyles in the South Downs National Park and the project has featured "*a lot of history, whether it is the history of Alice Holt Forest, whether it is how houses used to be built, whether it is how people used to live"*. "*We had education officers leading the walk round Weald and Downland for example. The Wetlands we had environment officers who were teaching them about the birds, migration, about the wetlands habitat. And on the residential we had outdoors education professionals, and forestry management, leading activities in the outdoors."*

"*Each activity they had the opportunity to talk to volunteers and workers on sight and engage with a wide range of people and professions"*, getting to know different people who live and work in the South Downs National Park who let them into their lives, choices and motivations:

> *"Quite a few of the leaders explained their background, I remember one of the young people was talking about plants in his country and the leader mentioned he's never left the UK and hardly left this area. The young people were very surprised and so he talked about his career, why he loves his job."*

Workshop leaders and guides explained the career options in, for example, forestry,"*pointing the young people to the different jobs in the sector if they're interested in working outside".*

The project gave participants a sense of their local environment.
> *"On the walk at the residential they took it in turns to read the map and navigate. And also whenever we went somewhere we have always had someone showing them on a map, where we are, and where it is in relationship to the cities they live in, where we've been before, so they get a kind of sense of the local environment and the UK."*

4.3 Principle 3: Feeling settled

> Young people feel safe and are allowed to be children first and foremost.

All respondent groups mentioned how the project is *"building confidence and helping them settle"* through simple activities, exemplified in the young person who commented that "*I enjoyed making pizza myself"*. Respondents articulated the value in the neutral, safe, supportive space, in which participants develop *"a mutual sense of security, friendship and trust"*, according to one volunteer. A project worker observed that "*in the first couple of sessions, we really had to work hard to communicate with them, they were very shy, but now they are certainly not shy any more, they feel it's their space"*.
The project prioritises making group decisions where possible, *"giving them their own space to have some power over what is happening"*. The data show reference to the young people leading activities, such as navigating on a walk, and more importantly expressing their needs and wishes and having them met, even at the expense of a meticulously planned schedule. For example, when they need to pray, or, as teenagers, to get up later than planned, they ask, confident that the project leaders will happily accommodate their needs if they possibly can. This supported decision-making and sense of being heard is a particular strength of the project for these young people for whom so much in their lives is out of their control. One interviewee recalled a special moment at the residential when the evening bat walk had finished and the plan was to go to bed. The young people wanted to restart the camp fire they had so enjoyed earlier, successfully rekindled the fire and the project workers and volunteers all stayed out with them happily chatting over the flames.

A full schedule of activities is provided but participants have felt empowered to simply support their new friends rather than take part. One volunteer reflected that:
> "*I think [project leaders'] very participant-centered approach made the participants feel a lot less obligated to do anything. I noticed this especially when two of the participants felt free and empowered to say they did not want to take part in Go Ape.*"

The relaxed atmosphere and the way the project leaders model interaction with the young people seems to have lent itself to workshop leads really listening to the young people and respecting that they can learn from them as well as imparting their knowledge. For example, "*when we had the residential, and we were looking at the medicinal value of some of the plants, one of the young people was sharing his knowledge about one of the plants*".

A strong sense of belonging came through from participants, one young person summing up how he has felt on the project by writing simply "*being in this group".* A volunteer reflected that *"the participants have gained a sense of community and kinship: they have a deep sense of kinship and community with each other, but also with the PEOPLE that run the project"* and described the change during a participant's first day on the programme, in July:

> "*There was a new participant the same day I volunteered. I noticed a stark difference in his openness from when we initially met…, to the end of the day when we got off the coach. So much more open, and relaxed. In terms of what I feel this participant gained from it, I can only speculate that they felt safe. I noticed this in the participant's posture and lack of engaging in conversation at the beginning of the trip, to their open posture and engaging with everyone else at the end*."

Some activities have explicitly promoted wellbeing, such as finding flow in a creative task, forest bathing, simple meditation under a tree or nature walks. The scent workshop was mentioned as *"a positive interaction with scent and memory*", with several of the young people naming the perfume they made after their mothers. Several respondents mentioned this sense of connection, how spending time in the countryside had evoked memories of home, giving participants an opportunity to share memories of plants or animals from their homeland.

The young people had clearly felt that project leaders and volunteers cared about them and were interested in them. One articulated it in the focus group: "*They were kind with us always. Cares for us and very friendly. I really appreciate and specially thank all of them for being with us".* A workshop lead commented that *"it's very nurturing for them, it's a nice pace of life and it's a safe space".* Implicit in many interviewees' reflections was a caring approach and attention to detail in making the young people feel at home and looking out for them, simple gestures like sharing food and snacks on top of that provided as part of the planned activity, or phoning to remind them and waiting for them to turn up late. Volunteers and workshop leads commented on the relaxed atmosphere, with comments such as *"I like the calmness of the group".* One volunteer reflected that:

> "*having spoken to most of the participants throughout the day, it became evident that this project has been a place of solace for them."*

4.4 Principle 4: Positive relationships

> Meaningful relationships are developed with adults in the community and with peers with shared lived experience despite diverse countries of origin.

A professional responded *"friendship groups"* when asked what their young person had gained from the project. The value in the close-knit group came through strongly in the young people's focus group and stakeholders described the value of the meaningful relationships developed with peers with shared lived experience and with adults in the community. When asked to describe their favourite activities, the young people generally described the shared experience as much as the specific activity. For example, "*I liked it because I was working together with my friends, we had to do it all of us"* or "together with friends making

small bridge". A workshop lead observed how *"you might think we'll do it like this and someone says, hang on have you thought about this. And just they've been so warm with each other, there's no one excluded, no one who doesn't get their point of view across, it's nice."* One participant simply summed up his experience as *"I like to come and meet all of you guys ... and when I meet the boys I will be happy and smile, that why I like to come and meet you all thanks".*

An interviewee who had moderated the focus group commented that *"some of the young people just wrote the one word but it was quite powerful like 'connected'."*
Interviewees observed that although the young people came from a wide variety of countries and cultures, the project gave them the opportunity to *"get to know people with similar past experiences and they could understand each other".* A volunteer spoke about "*a mutual sense of security, friendship and trust",* another described how participants developed relationships having been strangers at the start:
> *"The first time I don't think they knew each other but you could see how the second time, they were talking to each other, joking, and you could see that they made friendships there."*

This volunteer explains it from the point of view of an international student identifying with the value in shared lived experience:
> *"I think it was really good that they get the chance to talk to people that have gone through the same stuff, you're talking to someone that knows exactly how it is to be away from home and I think that's something very beneficial about the project".*

A workshop lead elaborated with an anecdote about how *"today we did some carving, and a couple were used to whittling, they'd done it before and a couple of them weren't so one of the lads was helping one of the others make his mallet cos he was struggling",* then thought of another incident to illustrate his point about the mutual support in the group of young people: *"And also with the fires as well, some of them seem very confident and others didn't but they certainly supported each other, they just seemed to be there for each other. That was surprising, they seemed very supportive of each other."*

Several respondents reflected on how the project's approach of understated support and joint activities fosters a close, trusting relationship with the Rural Refugee Network staff and volunteers.
> *"Some young people share their journey with one of us, but shared in a manner that is more a discussion and we're listening because we are interested in them ... The project provides that trusting relationship with RRN staff and volunteers".*

The volunteer on the project day that one of the organisers could not attend observed that:
> *"almost every participant asked about [absent project worker]. This, to me, showed the community and appreciation they have developed with the organisers of the project".*

One interviewee commented on "*how the young people engage with us, engage with the activity leaders in a meaningful manner and you know we're happy we saw a lot of smiles and because they are young people who are looked after by the local authority we can't take photos of their faces, of their smiles and that's one of the saddest things is not being able to take photos of their joy, see all those smiles with all the different activities we've done."*

SECTION 5. FUTURE PRIORITIES

> Both the young participants and stakeholders would like this pilot to continue and to reach more young people in the future. Key themes in the conversations were expanding the geographical reach, addressing time constraints and retaining the ethos participants so valued in the current pilot.

5.1 The young people's future priorities
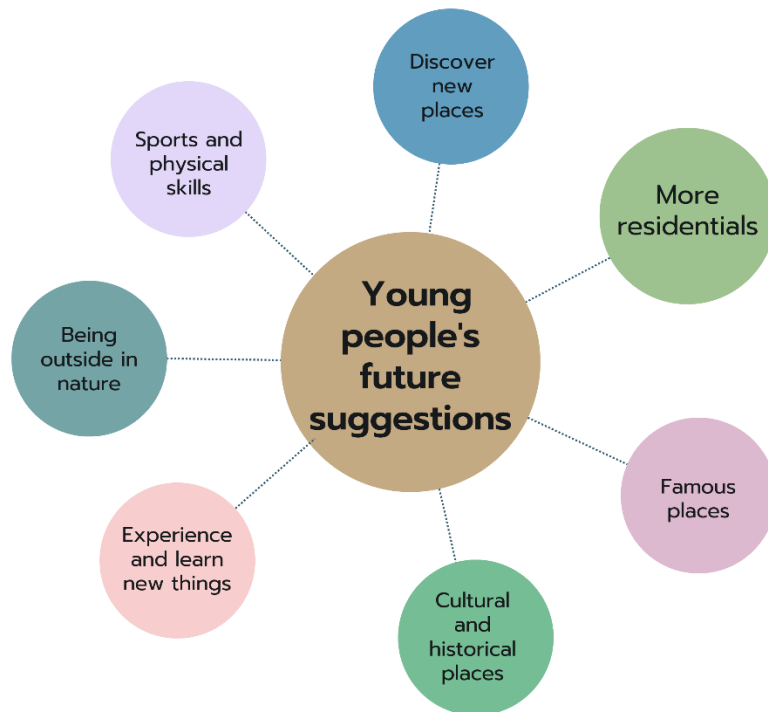
Figure 11 What the project's participants would like in future provision

The young people's reactions when asked what else they would like was to say they would like more of the same. They then went on develop the ideas in the diagram above. More residentials and learning about the countryside around them featured particularly strongly. A project worker observed that:

> *"When we asked the young people 'what would you like to do?', they said the same, we want to do things with nature. They couldn't say what but they wanted to see more, they don't know what is out there and that's what the project has offered them, it has shown them what there is around them".*

Some participants favoured more physical activities and skills, others would like to gain more appreciation of the UK's famous sites and its cultural and historical areas beyond the South Downs National Park.

5.2 Suggestions from stakeholders

Respondents felt that the project should continue beyond its pilot year. The main theme from stakeholders was that project days would benefit from being longer and enabling longer, more in-depth activities. This

has proven difficult given the travel and funding constraints but could perhaps be addressed by scheduling fewer workshops and activities as well as by strategies to minimise the time spent travelling. Stakeholders suggested that the natural beauty nearer to the participants' home cities could also be explored.

"I wouldn't restrict it to the South Downs National Park. I would like to explore, for example, rivers, the coastal areas, Chichester harbour, the beaches, fun sports events."

Stakeholders concurred with the young people that the strength in the project that should be developed is the exposure to new ideas, places and options: *"if you could find workshops where they actually think, oh I hadn't thought about this, I could have a career in this."* This was linked by one volunteer to the idea of role models: *"I think they need to try and get some people from more diverse backgrounds so that they can see that these people have made it in this country and made careers, you know, and pushed forward, and it gives them more hope".*

One interviewee, who had been part of two of the activity days, commented on the benefits of the workshop run by younger people from a similar background to the participants and suggested the project should seek out more such opportunities in addition to retaining the stable caring relationships with older project staff and volunteers.

The charity's CEO reflected that the project would be significantly enhanced by securing *"funding for a paid coordinator who could attend all the activities for continuity, and so that we could reach more young people, someone who has experience of working with young people".*

The interview process sparked ideas and offers from volunteers, for example: "*Actually my nephew, he's a sound engineer and he's got all the mixing desks and all that, he would love to come down and do something".* This quote highlights something which didn't come out explicitly in the data but is an implicit and unique strength of the project. The charity delivering the project has a strong network of committed and highly connected supporters who have provided venues, workshops and expertise to this project. Future provision will need to develop this further or accept constrained potential and budget for significantly higher costs without these contributions.

SECTION 6.   CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation demonstrates that the project is being effectively implemented and is meeting its aims. Its educational and enjoyable days out in the natural beauty of the South Downs National Park provide connection, support and a sense of community. The themes identified in stakeholder and participant data point to the project meeting the aims in the original logic model, despite some logistical challenges, and indicate unanticipated benefits for participants, for stakeholders, for the charity's networks and reputation and for the local community's perceptions of young asylum-seekers. Not only do the young people report enjoying and valuing their time on the project, but the activities help them to develop a new confidence and new conceptions of a possible future. They report the value of building relationships with peers and with trusted adults. The project's supportive community of young people from diverse cultures but with shared

experiences provides a safe space to learn, to be creative, to enjoy the outdoors and to have hope for the future.

SECTION 7.   RECOMMENDATIONS

The data in this evaluation point to the following recommendations:

- The current project should continue beyond its pilot year
- The charity should consider expanding this provision to reach more young people
- Future projects should aim for unrestricted geographical scope to alleviate the transport issues
- Plan for a longer timeframe; continuity is crucial for this cohort
- Evaluation, using a logic model approach, should be built in from the planning stage
- Develop visual marketing materials such as a short video clip to engage more young people
- Develop written volunteer/workshop lead briefings
- Budget for a scaling up of logistical support beyond the Rural Refugee Network's current capacity, for example through a paid coordinator.
- Future projects should not assume it would be easy to scale the significant contribution in kind from Rural Refugee Network supporters
- Develop mechanisms to bring in more workshop leads and volunteers from a similar demographic or with lived experience
- Explore opportunities to help participants understand areas beyond the environmental sector
- Share the four principles of support identified here within the charity and beyond to inform future provision:
  1. **Knowledge, skills and learning:** Communication, practical and creative skills are enhanced through incidental and planned learning opportunities
  2. **Feeling connected to the local environment:** New experiences in natural surroundings offer a sense of discovery and hope
  3. **Feeling settled:** Young people feel safe and are allowed to be children first and foremost
  4. **Positive relationships:** Meaningful relationships are developed with adults in the community and with peers with shared lived experience
- Consider commissioning evaluation reports about the Rural Refugee Network's other interventions in support of refugees and asylum-seekers

WITH THANKS TO

Everyone who took time out of busy lives to share their reflections and ideas for this research, and in particular the young participants for their generosity in taking part in this research and their openness to the focus group process.

In addition, the two funders:

> The South Downs National Park Youth Action Fund
> Nordson Corporation

The project would also like to highlight the contribution of:

> Rural Refugee Network volunteers, trustees and CEO
> Workshop and activity leaders
> Arundel Wetland Centre
> Bedales School
> Forestry England
> The Sustainability Centre
> The Ukes of Hazard, Horndean
> The University of Winchester
> The Vetch family
> The Weald and Downland Museum
> Winchester Science Centre and Planetarium

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Methodology

Definitions

Refugee

Someone who 'is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion' (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022: online).

Asylum-seeker

Someone who has crossed an international border and applied for refugee status but is waiting for a decision (City of Sanctuary, 2022).

Young people

For the purposes of this report, the term 'young people' refers to those aged 16-19.

Methodology

This evaluation undertook a literature review and then took a qualitative multi-methods approach to examine whether the South Downs Youth Discovery Project works and why. The empirical methods employed were:

1. Focus groups with a visual-methods element (Appendix B)

2. Semi-structured interviews (Appendix C)

3. A qualitative questionnaire (Appendix D)

Purposive sampling was chosen in order to prioritise inclusivity, through researcher judgement about a relevant sample for balanced perspectives. Young participants aged 16-19 were invited, through their key workers or foster carers, to participate in a focus group during a planned project day, because speaking to participants outside the project would be neither practical nor ethical. Five project workers and volunteers who spent significant time with participants and one workshop lead who had also volunteered on the project were invited to interview, and a brief questionnaire ensured that all those with a stake in the programme had an opportunity to contribute.

The themes and questions to be explored with participants were derived from the project's outcomes in the logic model, the accepted starting point for intervention evaluation (Rogers and Weiss, 2007; Jones et al., 2020). Photos of activities and places supported the young focus group participants to share what is important to them.

Analysis

The dataset was prepared through transcription, cleaning up of transcripts to remove repetition and hesitation and downloading the questionnaire results into Excel. Questionnaire respondents' judgements against the project's outcomes were analysed in Excel. The text responses were analysed with the interview transcripts. This analysis used a six-phase reflexive thematic analysis process, as proposed by Braun and Clarke:

1. **Familiarisation:** transcriptions were read, re-read and annotated to get a sense of the data and hone analytic sensibility

2. **Coding:** succinct labels, codes, capturing units of meaning were collated with relevant data extracts

3. **Generating initial themes:** candidate themes were generated by examining the codes and collated data into broader patterns of meaning

4. **Developing and reviewing themes:** candidate themes were reviewed against the coded dataset, checking the fit to the research question, the literature and the aims of the study

5. **Refining, defining and naming themes:** each theme was developed to clarify the scope, focus and story and given an appropriate name

6. **Writing up:** the analytic narrative and data extracts were woven together, contextualising the analysis in relation to literature

The Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software package Dedoose was used from phase 2 to manage the layers of data. Dedoose was chosen as it is a web-based application with secure log-in process with an additional, optional layer of security and its coding and memo features across transcripts is efficient. Multiple codes can be applied to selected words or phrases and linked across transcripts, supporting data-driven analysis.

Ethics

This research is grounded in the principles embodied in the British Educational Research Association's codes[15] (2018) and the University of Winchester's ethics policy (2019)[16]. Ethical approval was sought and obtained through the University's Education Faculty Research and Knowledge Exchange Review and opportunities to discuss ethical issues with stakeholders were planned from conception through to analysis. Detailed consenting processes were planned with the faculty's ethics advisor and project information letters were prepared and approved. These explained the purpose and nature of the study and made explicit participants' right to stop or withdraw and the timeframe beyond which data could not be withdrawn due to

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[15] BERA (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*: https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018-online
[16] University of Winchester (2019) *University Research Ethics Policy*: https://www.winchester.ac.uk/media/critical-documents/RKE-Ethics-Policy-and-Procedures.pdf

it having been anonymously analysed. Documentation was shared with participants and with gatekeepers and was made available at the start of interviews and focus groups. Before transcription and analysis, respondents were coded to break the link between data and identifiable individuals. Reporting omits any reference such as names, or where participants are living, which could give clues to identity. Questioning and discussion focused solely on the project to be evaluated and steered clear of past or present lives, countries or experiences outside the project, which could be upsetting for this group of young people or risk inadvertently identifying them.

The NSPCC's guidance about research with young people[17] states that there 'must be a balance between the needs of the research and the need to protect children from harm'. In addition to the careful consideration around mitigating potential risks, this research will make a positive contribution to society in two ways:

- By providing the Rural Refugee Network with feedback directly from participants to inform development of future projects.
- By empowering these young people to voice their opinions in an open, supportive atmosphere.

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[17] *NSPCC* (2022) Research with children: ethics, safety and avoiding harm: https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/briefings/research-with-children-ethics-safety-avoiding-harm#article-top

Appendix B: Young participants' focus group moderator guide
South Downs Youth Discovery Project 16th July 2022: Moderator guide

The aim is: not only to learn the participants' perspectives on the project but also that the young people find out about research and feel confident that their input is valued and that they can influence the rest of this pilot and help develop further projects. Facilitation will take into account this aspiration not to prioritise collecting data over making sure participants fully understand and feel empowered.

****

Introduction

Welcome, we would like to understand what the days out in the countryside have meant to you, hear about what you have enjoyed and work out together how we could make them better. So we are going to do some research together. Run through PowerPoint slides:

- About research
- About focus groups
- What I will do with what we talk about today
- Any questions?
- Consent

Participants complete consent forms if happy to proceed.

- Remember, you don't have to respond and you can keep quiet or stop at any time. There are no wrong answers – we want to hear from all of you, so please say what you think, even if other people have said something different.

Ground rules [displayed on screen]:
Everyone's opinion is important. One person talk at a time. Phones on silent.

Discussion questions

1. Here are some photos of the things we have done together [lay out labelled picture cards of the places they've been and activities they've done].

What do you think about the activities you have been to? Ask participants to rank them. [Moderators to photograph ranked cards]

2. Pick one of the photos or share a photo you have taken on your phone on one of our days out [Moderators check NO faces or identifiers then write a description of the photo]
   - What did the activity mean to you?
   - Did you learn anything? If so, what?
3. Word cards: [Layout cards with words on - relaxed, tired, rushed, safe, worried, supported, fun, friends, comfortable, belong, English, communication].

Ask participants to select cards they associate with the project and talk about why they chose that card. How have you felt on the project?

4. Are there things the leaders have done which made you feel comfortable or uncomfortable? What else could they have done? What else would help you, what would you like in future?

Finish
Summarise main messages. Is there anything that's been missed? – [leave flip chart paper out and encourage to write or draw any other thoughts]. Thank participants.

Moderator role:
- Regularly check all are happy to continue.
- Prompt deeper responses
  - Can you explain further?
  - Can you give an example?
- Keep everyone focused on the main discussion
- Write down key points that come up, and participants' exact quotes for use in the research, in quotation marks (no name attribution)

Research question:
Does the South Downs Youth Discovery Project achieve its intended outcome of making young people feel more confident, empowered and settled?
- •Do participants feel heard and connected to each other and the environment?
- •Do participants have better communication skills and understanding of the local environment?

Focus group purpose:
We are examining how their experience of the project matches the stated aims, focusing on the level ringed in purple below. Also, be alert to noting the outcomes we hadn't thought about, **both good and bad**. The wider research of which this is one element will complement this open feedback and ideas from the young people with interviews with volunteers and project workers and a survey to capture wider stakeholder views.

Logic model outcomes chain

South Downs Youth Discovery Project
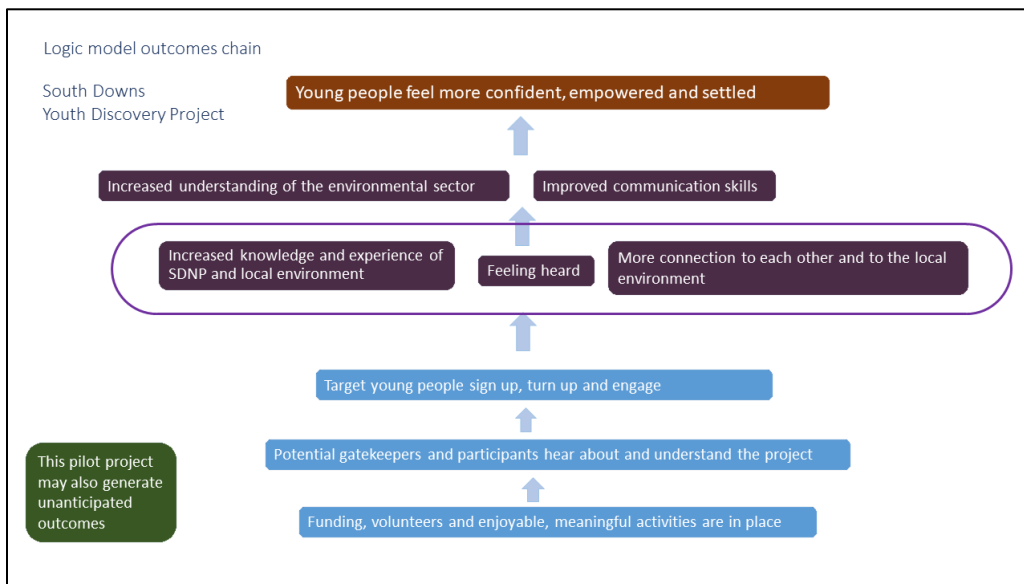
Appendix C: Interview discussion questions

Introduction

Thank you for being willing to take part in an interview. Can I first of all reassure you, as we discussed, that you will remain completely anonymous; no records of the interview will be kept with your name on them and I will make sure nothing will identify you personally in reporting. I will be recording, purely for transcription purposes, is that OK?

1. Would you like to start by reflecting on your overall experience of the project? What has particularly struck you about how the young people have engaged or what they have experienced? Has anything surprised you?
2. I wonder whether you've seen evidence of the participants bonding with or supporting each other? If so what do you think has helped this? How important is it?
3. What do you think are the main benefits for the participants of the activities they've done in the South Downs National Park?
4. What opportunities have particularly helped the participants to experience the South Downs National Park and to understand the character of the SDNP and English heritage?
5. What kind of opportunities have there been for the young people to interact with people who work in the South Downs National Park and to see the different jobs people do in the sector?
6. How do you think the project has helped participants with their English and with communication skills in general? Has their English improved?
7. How has the project or individual activities/days been adapted in response to the participants' opinions?
8. Have there been any unanticipated outcomes for the participants, yourself or for RRN?
9. How do you feel about your own experience of this project?
10. Do you have any ideas about different approaches or activities in the future? What would this project look like in an ideal world with no time or funding constraints?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the project?

Extra questions for stakeholders:

1. Did the project reach the priority participants? What challenges have there been with engaging young people to take part?

2. What other logistical challenges have you had to overcome?
3. How did you feel the focus group impacted on the young people, what about the use of photos?
4. What have you learnt?

Finish

Interviewer to recap what has been covered. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Thank you very much for helping us and giving up your time.

Appendix D: Questionnaire

South Downs Youth Discovery Project feedback survey

Thank you for helping us capture the perspectives of stakeholders, volunteers and leaders on the Rural Refugee Network's South Downs Youth Discovery Project. This survey is part of an evaluation being undertaken by Katherine Lawrence, a student and staff member at the University of Winchester and trustee of the Rural Refugee Network.

Your responses will be combined with all others and reporting will not contain information that identifies any individual. You may complete the survey anonymously. If you choose to provide your contact details and subsequently decide that you want to withdraw your responses, you can do so by contacting k.lawrence.21@unimail.winchester.ac.uk.

This research is being conducted in accordance with University of Winchester ethical guidelines. If you have concerns or questions, you can also contact Katherine's tutor, Dr K. Ball (Kerry.ball@winchester.ac.uk). In addition you can contact the University Data Protection Officer: Stephen Dowell at: Stephen.Dowell@winchester.ac.uk. Complaints regarding the mishandling of data can be lodged with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

* Required

1. I have read and understood the above information and agree to participate. *

   ◯ Yes

2. Which of these best describes you? *

   ☐ I have been engaged by the project to run a workshop or activity

   ☐ I have worked or volunteered on the project

   ☐ I am a key worker or other professional connected to those involved in the project

   ☐ Other

3. To what extent do you agree that participants ... *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
...have had opportunities to connect to the local environment	○	○	○	○	○
... have developed supportive relationships with each other	○	○	○	○	○
... have experienced the South Downs National Park and local environment	○	○	○	○	○
... have felt heard	○	○	○	○	○
... have improved their communication skills	○	○	○	○	○
... have gained understanding of the environmental sector	○	○	○	○	○
... feel more confident	○	○	○	○	○
... feel more empowered	○	○	○	○	○
... feel more settled	○	○	○	○	○

4. What do you feel the participants have gained from the project?

5. Is there anything that could be done differently in future?

6. If you would like to provide your contact details please add your email address here. Withdrawal of anonymous responses will not be possible. Your details will not be retained once the project report is complete and will not be shared with anyone else.

Appendix E: Respondents

The dataset represents 100% of those invited to interview, 6 out of 10 stakeholders invited to complete the questionnaire (including 3 out of 7 key workers/foster carers) and the eight young people present at the project day when the focus group took place in July 2022.

Full data set: respondents' roles

Workshop lead 15%

Young people 40%

Project staff or volunteer 30%

Key worker or other professional 15%

Questionnaire: respondents' roles

Workshop lead, 1

Key worker or other professional , 3

Project staff or volunteer, 2
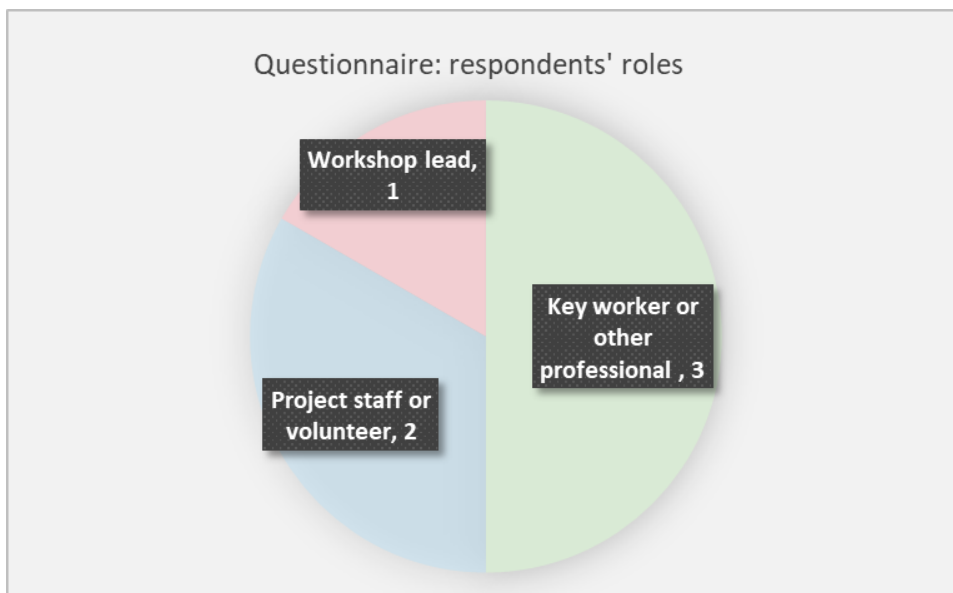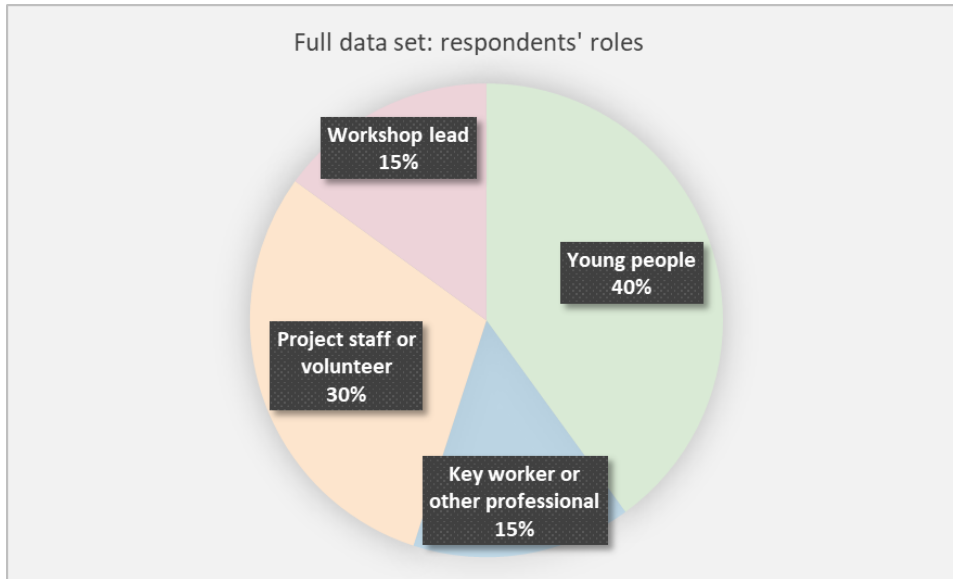
Appendix F: Analysis – dataset and code frequency chart

	Knowledge, skills and learning	Communication skills	English	Non-verbal dialogue	Gaining new skills	Learning	Knowledge of future options	Feeling connected to the local environment	Connection to nature	Learning about the environment	Being outside in nature	Positive experience of natural environment	Walking	Learning about lives and careers in SDNP	Learning about the SDNP	Feeling settled	Belonging	Wellbeing	Memories	Connection to past experience	Feeling cared for and supported	Empowerment	Agency	Participant-led activity	Sharing their own knowledge and skills	Feeling heard
Focus Group data	0	1	3	0	2	4	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	4	1	1	1	0	1
Respondent 1 key worker	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 2 key worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 3 key worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 4 volunteer	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 5 workshop lead	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 6 volunteer	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	2
Interviewee 1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	1	4	4	5	3	2	3	2	1	0	0	2	2	0	2	6	1	0	1
Interviewee 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 3	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	5	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Interviewee 4	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 5	0	2	3	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Interviewee 6	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	0	9	14	2	5	6	6	1	9	10	20	6	5	5	3	2	5	5	4	4	6	5	9	3	1	4

	Value of focus group to participants	Confidence	Feeling safe	Overcoming fears	Feeling comfortable	Positive relationships	Peer relationships	Being with peers with shared lived experience	Group cohesion	Helping each other	Making friends	Shared experiences	Positive relationships with adults	Interaction with public and workshop staff	Relating to people like them	Relationship with project staff	Trust	Changing perceptions	Enhancing RRN reputation and relationships	Impact on volunteers and local community	Perception of the young people	People getting to know UASC	Focus group impact and ethics	Focus group design	Focus group co-research	Focus group safe space
Focus Group data	0	2	0	0	1	0	4	0	1	0	7	6	0	0	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 1 key worker	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 2 key worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 3 key worker	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 4 volunteer	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 5 workshop lead	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 6 volunteer	1	2	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0
Interviewee 1	1	0	4	3	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	9	1	1	1	3	0	3	2	0	3	1	0	0	1
Interviewee 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 4	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	1	6	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 6	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	0	0	0	0
Totals	2	9	11	3	4	0	15	3	6	3	10	10	16	3	8	9	5	0	4	11	8	11	2	1	1	1

	Project process	Project success	Volunteers want to continue	Expanding the pilot	Future suggestions	Music	More residentials	Discover new places	Sports and physical skills	Be outside in nature	Experience and learn new things	Experience cultural or historical places	Go to famous places	Workshop feedback	Activities	Film making	Weald and Downland	Alice Holt	Creative activities	Cyanotype workshop	Pizza oven and pizza making	Planetarium	Sand bag bridge activity	Scent workshop	Sustainability centre residential	WWT
Focus Group data	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	7	2	1	3	2	3	5	0	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	3	2	6	2
Respondent 1 key worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 2 key worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 3 key worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 4 volunteer	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 5 workshop lead	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 6 volunteer	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 1	0	3	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1
Interviewee 2	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	0	0
Interviewee 3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Interviewee 4	0	1	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	0
Interviewee 5	0	3	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Interviewee 6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	0	12	2	2	19	4	1	7	3	1	3	3	3	10	5	1	2	4	1	2	3	3	4	6	12	3

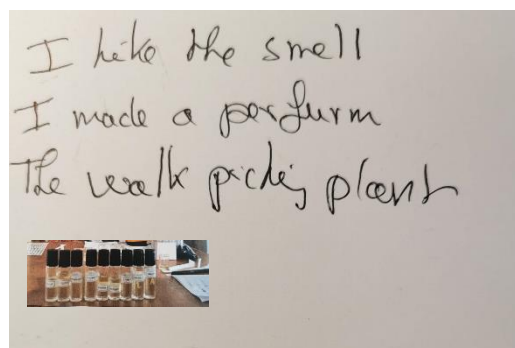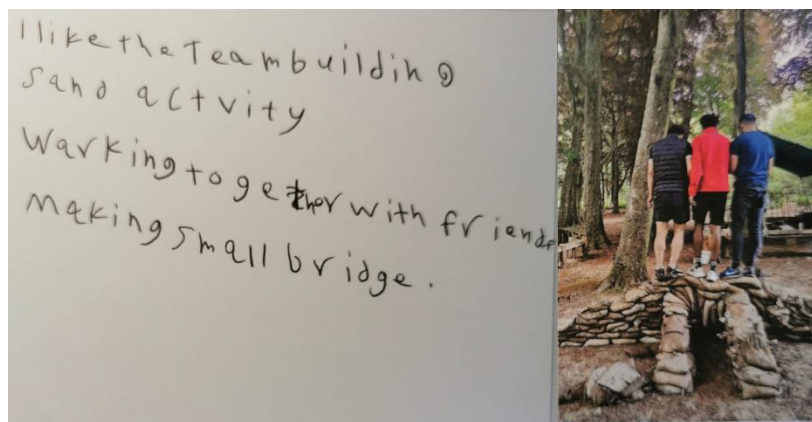|	Project learning	Eager to learn	RN challenges	Needing more time	Logistics	Risk and safeguarding	Travel	Beneficial project ethos	Supportive approach	Approach to trauma	Project staff/volunteers	Relaxed	Welcoming	Discovery	Learning from workshop leads	Learning new things	New experiences	Trying new things	Project adapted to participant needs	UASC are children	Caring environment	Enjoyment	Smiles	Fun	Feeling happy
Focus Group data	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	8	1	2	0	0	2	2	4	1	0	0	4	3	3	6
Respondent 1 key worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 2 key worker	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 3 key worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Respondent 4 volunteer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 5 workshop lead	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondent 6 volunteer	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	2	0
Interviewee 1	0	2	3	1	2	1	3	4	1	0	0	2	1	2	3	3	2	3	1	4	3	0	4	0	3
Interviewee 2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 3	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 4	0	1	3	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interviewee 6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	1	4	6	4	6	2	4	10	5	2	18	12	5	2	7	5	7	10	10	6	4	4	7	5	9

Appendix G: Young participants' focus group writing

To Be honest! when i enterned to the dicovery Project ## i fell confedent and happy the people here very respect fall and there face smill and it's very welcome fople. ## I very happy from them

I like wetlands, because when I went to this Place I was fair enjoyd @ and I Saw a lot of bread.
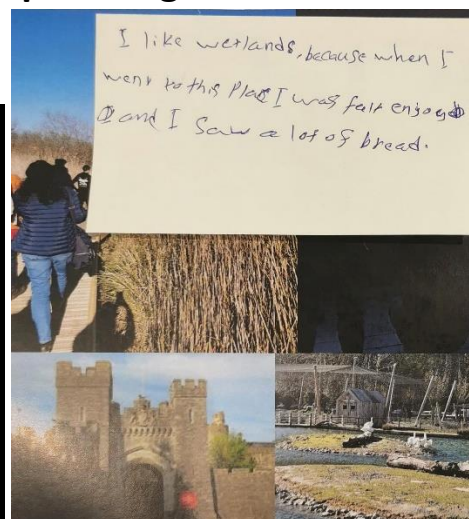
English

Theas all Prisects help me to improve move my English language. because I am from a different coundry and I dont speak English well so these Prisects really help me and I am so happy ☺.

English

English language
Hello!   Hi!
How are you?   Goodbye!

I like the Team building sand activity Warking together with friends making small bridge.

I like the smell
I made a perfurm
The walk picking plant

i like to come meet all of you gays and I felly enged at that time and When I meet the boys I will be Happy and shil that why I like to come and meed you all thanks.

I want
Thank you everyone help me.

(happy)
When I came to those Place I feel so happy and
they talk so good 帮我 😊

Relaxed?

Because It's very amazing place very
green and beatiful and I love nature

thats but why I am relaxed in the
green place