
Interim Evaluation of the Youth Discovery Project

An external formative evaluation (Year 1)

*A report by Tiller Research Ltd on behalf of
Rural Refugee Network*

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Section 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background

The Rural Refugee Network (RRN) helps refugees and asylum seekers in East Hampshire, Havant and Portsmouth to integrate and flourish in the local community, and build a new life in the UK.

RRN ran a 12-month pilot project supporting young people aged 16-19 who came to the UK alone and are therefore in the care of the local authority. The pilot project focussed on helping participants experience and understand the local environment, with the aim of enabling them to feel more confident, empowered and settled.

Learning from the pilot was used to develop a model for the Youth Discovery Project. A weekly support drop-in service in Portsmouth is complemented by regular day trips into the South Downs countryside and local places of interest. Both the weekly sessions and the day trips give the young people a chance to socialise, improve their English language skills, learn about British culture, learn vital life skills, and explore their new environment. It also provides them with an opportunity to have some fun together in a relaxed atmosphere.

Funding was secured from the National Lottery Community Fund to run the project for three years starting in September 2024.

1.2 Evaluation Overview

RRN commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to support evaluation of the Youth Discovery Project for the three years of the current funding. The aims of the evaluation are to:

- **Identify outcomes for participants.** A Theory of Change has been developed that identified three key outcome areas that will be examined:
 - *Empowerment*- young people’s wellbeing improves, linked to having a strong personal support network and feeling safe and settled;
 - *Skills and Knowledge*- young people have improved English language skills and understanding of British culture;
 - *Connections*- young people feel connected with the local community, participating in local activities and opportunities such as a volunteering.
- **Develop a strong qualitative understanding of the project’s impact.** This includes understanding what participants value about their experience, what this means for them, and how the project has benefited project stakeholders.
- **Identify key learning points** to inform plans for future work.

An evaluation framework has been developed that sets out data collection measures, responsibilities and timelines. This ensures that the evaluation is embedded within project delivery, with the whole team aware of and involved in the evaluation. The evaluation provides evidence to support the project’s ongoing cycle of learning and development.

1.3 This Report

This interim evaluation report focusses on learning from the first year of the Youth Discovery Project. The views of participants, volunteers and stakeholders have been sought to identify the strengths of the project, learning points, and future priorities.

Section 2 – Evaluation Methodology

2.1 Evaluation Overview

The Youth Discovery Project's Evaluation Framework identifies four key data sources:

- **Project Monitoring Records**- referrals, attendance and participation records that show the numbers of participants in the core project and its associated activities;
- **Young People's Self-Reflection Measure**- a bespoke measure of young people's self-reflection on their current situation to track progress and identify impact. This provides a quantitative measure of impact related to the intended outcomes;
- **Case Notes and Training Records**- detailed records of the young person's involvement with the project. Primarily used for project delivery and support planning, the information recorded provides additional outcome data;
- **Interviews and Focus Groups**- periodic exercises to collect in-depth qualitative feedback from participants, volunteer and stakeholders. This provides a deeper understanding of the impact of the project, and the processes and enabling factors that the project has used to successfully deliver that impact.

These data sources are used to identify:

- **Short-term Outcomes**- the change experienced by young people that is directly created by participation in the Youth Discovery Project;
- **Longer-term Impact**- sustained change that results from the outcomes of participating in the Youth Discovery Project;
- **Learning**- understanding what has (and hasn't) worked, and identifying enabling factors and barriers to success to inform the ongoing development of the project and other future work.

The evaluation of the Youth Discovery Project is designed as a yearly cycle of learning and development. The ongoing evaluation will enable the project team to review progress and make changes in response to emerging evidence.

2.2 Self-Reflection Measure

The Youth Discovery Project uses a bespoke measure of young people's self-reflection on their current situation to track progress and identify outcomes. This measure considers eleven areas of importance identified within the project's Theory of Change.

The measure is completed with participants when they first attend the Youth Discovery Project in order to understand their baseline position. Follow-ups are undertaken every 6-8 weeks to understand how the young person's situation is developing. The eleven items have been grouped into three areas of impact:

- **Connections**- the extent to which they feel settled and connected to the community;
- **Participation**- attendance at college and participation in community activities;
- **Knowledge**- confidence with English language and understanding British culture.

For each area, a participant's self-reflection responses are interpreted as a percentage of the total possible score for that group of items.

2.3 Focus Groups

The external evaluator undertook three focus groups with young people participating in the Youth Discovery Project and one focus group with volunteers in July 2025. A total of ten young people and two volunteers participated.

Focus groups were undertaken face-to-face as part of the regular Tuesday night project drop-in session. The external evaluator conducted the focus group in English. The groups were supported by professional translators so that young people could participate in their first language if they preferred.

Group discussions were recorded with permission and professionally transcribed. Where a young person spoke through a translator, only the English translation was transcribed. Transcripts were analysed and coded to identify key themes.

2.4 Stakeholder Feedback

Feedback was sought from care providers and foster parents who attended the project's seasonal supper in June 2025. In addition, the external evaluator interviewed eight stakeholders, a mix of foster carers, other care providers and other support professionals.

Interviews were undertaken one-to-one via telephone, followed a semi-structured topic guide and were recorded with permission. Recordings were professionally transcribed, and coded to identify key themes

Section 3 – Self-Reflection Measure Baseline

3.1 Self-Reflection Measure Overview

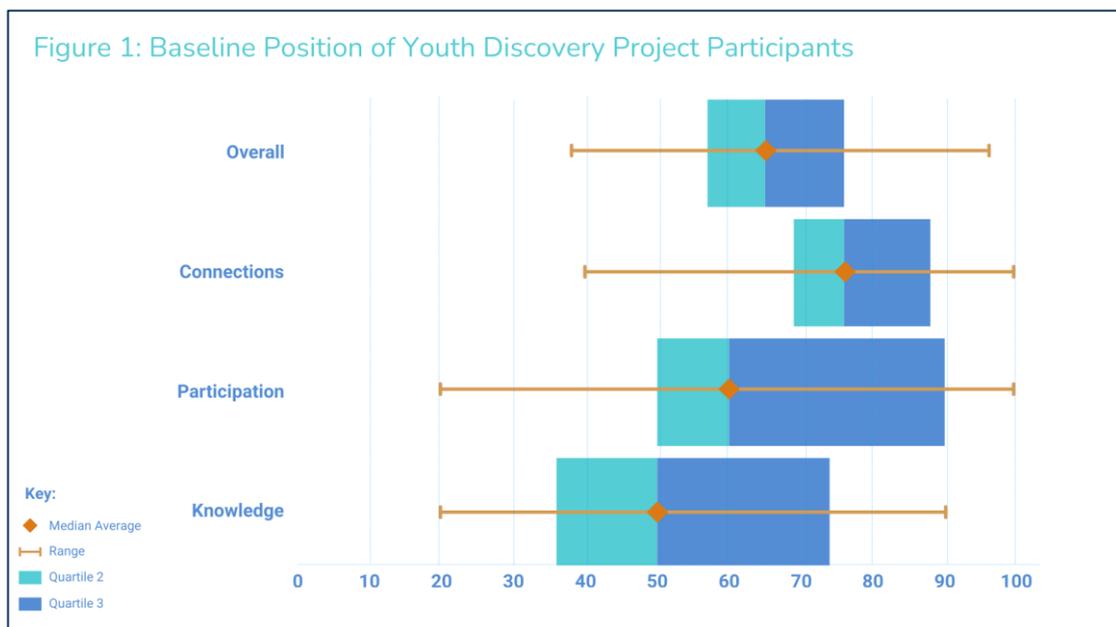
The self-reflection measure has been designed to evaluate impact of the Youth Discovery Project across eleven areas of importance identified within the Theory of Change. Currently, the volume of data is insufficient for undertaking statistical analysis, but is on track to provide the intended quantitative data set by the end of the project.

Baseline data has been collected for 26 participants. This has been analysed to understand the starting position of the cohort.

3.2 Baseline Position

An overview of the self-reflection measure baseline data is shown in figure 1. This shows that there is a wide range of starting positions for young people. However, the overall pattern indicates that Knowledge scores are typically the lowest at baseline. Participation scores are typically slightly higher than Knowledge, but lower than Connections at baseline.

This indicates that the project’s focus on education and providing opportunities to participate in positive activities is an appropriate response to the needs of the cohort.



Section 4 – Qualitative Findings

4.1 Qualitative Findings Overview

This section presents the themes identified from the qualitative feedback, focus groups and interviews with project participants, volunteers and stakeholders. Due to the small number of volunteers who took part in a focus group, their responses were combined with the wider project stakeholders to protect their confidentiality.

4.2 Benefits for Participants

Themes from Young People

Focus group participants were keen to emphasise how much they valued the drop-in sessions. For most, the Youth Discovery Project is the only group they attend outside college. Where a young person is involved in other activities or volunteering opportunities, this has typically been facilitated by the project. The majority of young people talked about feeling safe and supported. Many spoke about being more confident as a result of attending the sessions, and how this had helped them to feel more settled in the UK.

“I joined this place two months after coming to the UK, and when I came here I didn’t know how to interact with people, I didn’t know the laws, the rules and everything of the land. So coming here helped me better communicate with people especially when I go to the shops, how to buy, how to ask for price and things like that.”

“[I now feel] a lot more confident and less embarrassed, okay and being able to engage with people and interact with people without being embarrassed or shy... like when you say something wrong.”

- **English Language Support**

The benefit most commonly mentioned by participants is the opportunity to improve English language skills. Many young people noted how the project had helped them not just improve their language skills, but more importantly their confidence in using English in everyday settings.

“For me, in particular, it’s language courses because when I came here my skills, language skills including listening and understanding what people say wasn’t that good so since I started coming here my listening skill has gone up and also my speaking skill and reading skill has gone up, so I really appreciate that.”

“[W]hen I came the first time I didn’t have the confidence to speak English, but now I’m not shy because I have a lot of confidence to speak with other people.”

“We learn English and in the English is different topics. Once I was speaking about, for example, shopping, one time we will speak about coffee.”

“And also, they are focusing on the interaction of the main things that we need, for example, in the communication skills. For example... how to go to the shop and how to ask for something in the shop, so the communication skills.”

“Honestly, the most important thing for us is education.”

- **Cultural Learning**

Young people also highly valued additional opportunities such as trips and the residential experience. Understanding British history and culture was viewed as important, as was experiencing other places.

"[G]oing to London and seeing the tourist spots and things like that, helped me understand better the history of the country."

"[S]ometimes we go outside the city, this is the most thing I love about the group and the project."

- **Connections**

Young people spoke about friends they had made at the Youth Discovery Project, and how this had a positive impact on their wellbeing. Others talked about additional connections with the local community that they are gained through the project. A small number noted how the project had helped them engage with college.

"I feel relaxed when I see all my friends here and enjoy talking with each other and feeling confident when I talk in English."

"I learned the language, then cultures, then made friends [in the local community]."

"I started... volunteering. I meet a lot of people and speak to them to improve my English and get skills for work."

"So I didn't go to college before I came to the UK, so coming here participating in this project helped me. When I went to the college now for further education, the transition was seamless."

Themes from Stakeholders

Stakeholders identified strong benefits for the young people who participate in the Youth Discovery Project, with most detail given by care providers, including foster carers. Identified benefits were clearly linked to the three outcome areas identified in the project's Theory of Change: Skills and Knowledge, Connections and Empowerment.

- **Education**

The benefit for participants most commonly mentioned by stakeholders was education. Interviewees noted that support with English language skills is a key feature of the project, with stakeholders noting that this is provided with a focus on supporting young people to develop those language skills that are most useful for everyday life. In addition to language skills, stakeholders noted how participants benefitted from learning about British culture, and learning through engagement in positive activities. Experiential learning opportunities such as trips and volunteering opportunities were highlighted.

"I think that they obviously are trying to develop their language skills, which I think is one of their primary aims, but what I like is that it's more than just learning English. It feels very practical, it feels like the use of English in real life type settings. So I like that."

"I think the skills that they are giving the young people are just invaluable. The integration side of things is so important that they can understand how to operate in our society."

"He is volunteering [through a link made by the Youth Discovery Project] and he does it twice every week on a Friday and Saturday. And it's something he loves, and the people love him as well because he's really engaging."

- **Broadening Experience**

Interviewees talked about the breadth of experiences that the Youth Discovery Project offers to participants. Building on the education theme, interviewees noted how the project provides a range of experiences and opportunities that provide a rich and varied learning environment.

“A lot of the kids I work with will come to the UK and they want to be in a city, they want to be around that community and stuff like that. This is from my own experience, but if you take a group out of that environment, place them in something that’s unusual to them, like the New Forest is unique. They’re going to gain a lot... one, they’re going to understand the New Forest and the countryside, but two, it’s about being relaxing, it’s about having that time away from the hustle and bustle of the city and everything else.”

“[T]here’s already been some quick wins or some successes in my eyes, because a couple of the early ones that I helped doing CV’s with, they actually secured some volunteering at a café in a cinema.”

- **Meeting People**

Several stakeholders talked about the positive impact of participants meeting other young people through the Youth Discovery Project, and building connections with other opportunities in the community, such as through volunteering opportunities noted above. Stakeholders identified that many of the young people are very isolated, their circumstances meaning that they often have no friends or other local connections before joining the project. The value of being able to meet others of a similar age and in similar circumstances was highlighted, with positive impacts on wellbeing, confidence and engagement with other positive opportunities reported to result from the building of a friendship and support network.

“It is such an important means for young people newly joining this community to feel integrated and welcomed. It is important for mental wellbeing to be able to connect with friends.”

“So yeah, it’s good for them in ways of making friends, getting to know the community, things that are available out there for them.”

“So involving him with [the Youth Discovery Project] was fantastic because he got to link up with the others on Tuesday nights for three hours and do projects there which he enjoyed and also meeting the other boys, he started to make friends that he could go and call on a friend as opposed to just sitting around waiting for something to happen.”

“[I]t’s good for them in ways of making friends, getting to know the community, things that are available out there for them, so it’s just very informative for them and for our guys, and they enjoy it.”

“Definitely there is a social connection, so even the young people living in different areas, they come here, they know each other and they learn English because they don’t know how to speak English firstly. They plan to go out, maybe one day because they’ve friends from here who were strangers before.”

- **Knowing They Matter**

Several carers noted that their young people had benefitted from opportunities to contribute to activities through the project where they could share about themselves and their culture in a safe and supported environment. Young people were reported to feel valued as individuals, which both contributed to positive wellbeing outcomes and encouraged ongoing participation in the project activities.

"[W]ith my boys not having anybody, I'm their somebody and so to be called in to be part of that, you're giving them the message that they matter, the boys matter... to somebody. So it's quite an important little thing that they do. I've appreciated it."

"That's more than learning English, you know, that's more than anything else, giving them a bit of belonging and a bit of feeling of being wanted and being cared for."

"[I]t gave them some creative activity and the sense that we value their thoughts and their heritage as well."

"It is really motivating and lets people have the chance not only to communicate but to reveal their talent and abilities."

4.3 Benefits for Stakeholders

In addition to benefits for young people participating, stakeholders identified a range of benefits for them as a carer or service provider that have resulted from working with the Youth Discovery Project. Overall, the project is seen to complement and enhance the work of stakeholders.

- **Enhanced Understanding**

Several carers noted how they had developed a better understanding of the young people they were supporting as a result of the opportunities provided by the Youth Discovery Project. In addition to English language support helping to improve communication, the activities provided talking points that some carers reported facilitated the identification of a young person's preferences, ambitions and challenges. This learning helped carers to shape the support they provided to young people, strengthening their relationship and providing a foundation for enhanced future outcomes. The importance of a peer support forum was also noted, with examples given of how this had helped young people understand and adjust to some of the expectations placed on them that they may find challenging.

"[T]hey're learning things from there... they have to speak English sometimes, you know, so it helps them with their English and then it also helps us because it gives us better communication."

"It's nice when he comes home and he talks about what he's been doing, and I've been to a couple of their events and that to see... how he's going on and his interaction with everybody else. And by watching him, the way he is with other people helps me define what I can do with him to enable him to carry on and do things from home. Do you know what I mean? Because if I didn't know the sort of things that he liked and I didn't know the way he participated in different things I wouldn't know that I could do those things with him at home. But because I know from [the Youth Discovery Project team], it does benefit us at home as well."

"[T]wice now I've been invited in to share their evening with them... it's actually really nice to see the boys slightly differently because they're quite proud of the work they're doing with the Rural Refugee Network and it's quite nice to see that coming out."

"[W]hen they meet with their friends in a friendly, social activity, they're going out, it makes them see life differently even when they come home."

- **Appropriate Opportunities**

Carers noted how the Youth Discovery Project offered valuable opportunities to the young people they support that they were not necessarily able to provide directly. Several carers noted that the cohort age is such that engaging in activities as a family group is not always appropriate. By being able to engage in a range of constructive activities with appropriate support and a group of peers, carers felt that they benefitted by being able to offer their young people more than they could in isolation.

“And I can do the age-appropriate things but they wouldn’t want to particularly do it with me... it’s not cool to come and do it with me, even if I could find the right activity.”

“So when they get the opportunity to go out and they will visit other areas of the community, other areas of the region it’s a really important... because the challenges as well for most foster carers is... with only the two of you there, it’s difficult for them to enjoy it because it’s only two of you. So sometimes I take my foster child bowling, it’s only the two of us, then maybe [he] doesn’t like to go bowling; but when they go with their friends, you know it’s really something they’re happy with.”

- **Opportunity to work with client group**

Non-carer stakeholders noted how their involvement with the Youth Discovery Project had extended and enhanced their own practice. Often this was an opportunity to work with a different group of young people with different experiences, needs and opportunities. This resulted in practitioners needing to work differently in ways that could then be applied to enhance their wider practice.

“So this was one where people are new to the city or even just sometimes what we class as the NEET as well, so not in employment, education or training. So, it was just a new opportunity to work with a different group.”

“[We just wanted to involve the young people in the exhibition as a way of engaging them and making them feel welcome and enhancing our exhibition as well.”

4.4 Enablers of Success

Young people spoke about how they felt comfortable, safe and welcome at the Youth Discovery Project. This gave them the confidence to engage with activities, which in turn built their confidence.

“[I]t’s a reception, it’s the welcoming faces of the place that stands out.”

Stakeholders identified some key features of the Youth Discovery Project that they viewed as important enablers of the success of the project.

- **Consistency**

Several stakeholders noted how this cohort had typically experienced a lot of change and upheaval, and that they benefitted from the consistency and stability provided by the Youth Discovery Project.

“They’re more important than they realise, do you know what I mean? They might only see them on a Tuesday for a couple of hours but actually, I think it’s quite important and it’s important that they are consistent.”

“I think the consistency, the fact that it’s on every week, they know where it is, it’s always in the same place, but that it’s staffed by the same people so that if they’re not familiar with anybody else they get very familiar with those staff.”

- **Compassion**

Stakeholders noted that in their view the Youth Discovery Project was founded on a commitment to understand the needs and aspirations of the young people involved, and to shape the project alongside the participants to deliver positive sustainable outcomes.

“There is a real compassion... from the staff that work there. So you really feel that they’re invested in making a difference for the boys.”

“It’s important that they seem to care.”

“I can only think of one other project that is as good as what they do because everything else is other people delivering something and it feels like they’re delivering because they have to, whereas this feels like they’re delivering the sessions, they’re running the trips because they want to do it and they want to improve these kids’ lives.”

- **Feeling Comfortable**

Stakeholders discussed how the project provided a safe space where young people felt comfortable. This was identified as an important element for enabling positive outcomes, allowing young people to relax, be open to and engage with new opportunities.

“Yeah, my current boy hasn’t particularly made a friendship group but seems very willing to go to this group... They feel comfortable going there.”

“A warm welcoming atmosphere. I can feel the welcome and how it relaxes each young person when they walk in.”

- **Allowed to be Young People**

It was noted that the Youth Discovery Project provides age-appropriate opportunities. Many of the young people have missed out on key personal development opportunities, in particular the opportunity to be a young person, and it was felt the Youth Discovery Project helped to address this in the choice of activities and structure of opportunities provided.

“[T]hey were letting the young people still be young people, which I think is important too. Everyone has had to grow up quite quickly anyway.”

- **Equality of Participation**

Some carers noted how the project’s delivery structure ensured equality of access to opportunities for participants. This was viewed as important for creating a safe and comfortable experience for all participants.

“The other thing to say, and again, wonderful is that whenever they do any of these activities, we don’t have to think about anything. We don’t have to think about drinks, we don’t have to think about lunch, we don’t have to think about anything which, I think when all the boys are coming from such different backgrounds... they’re all equal. I could send a boy with an egg sandwich and somebody else has got a whole feast coming, but by them doing it, it just puts everybody on an equal footing. So it’s nice from my perspective, I don’t have to think, I can just take them to the trip, but it’s also nice that the boys are now experiencing something together and it’s the same and there’s no competitive or jealousy or anything.”

4.5 Areas for Development

Themes from Young People

When asked about what they would like the project to focus on over the next year, young people focussed overwhelmingly on English language support. Participants indicated that they viewed strong English language skills as the foundation for being able to engage with the wider community and make the most of the opportunities available. Many spoke about their future ambitions, and how strong language skills were important to achieve these.

- **Strengthening English Language Support**

Some comments were made about recent disruption to the English language element of the project, due to staff availability. Participants were keen to ensure that this disruption was only temporary. In addition to emphasising the central importance of the English support, several participants suggested ways in which the value of the English support could be further enhanced.

“I believe everyone who comes here wants- myself in particular- I would like to improve my English skills and try to speak and understand English better. At the beginning there was a good amount of English course, now that has gone down.... I would like that to be like at the beginning.”

“I would suggest if there would be two teachers for the two classes. For example a teacher to teach the beginner, and the other teacher or tutor would teach the people who have already started or the people at a bit higher level because when you have one teacher for all people, for example, to help with the reading and things so the person who is the beginner, he will find it difficult to follow and the other person has already done these things. So it could be more beneficial if there are two teachers to teach the beginner and the people on higher levels.”

“Also I would suggest if we were given the sentences or the conversations or a general conversation you would have, for example, if you go to the shop what are you going to say and then when we come here so we can practice it. So this will help improve the speaking skills and being able to use it when to practice with people in here, it will also be beneficial.”

- **Increased Frequency of Sessions**

The most common suggestion for improvements to the Youth Discovery Project was to increase the number of sessions and the amount of English language support. Although capacity for doing this will be limited by available resources, it indicates the value placed on the project by participants.

“I would just like to ask the frequency of the days to increase. It’s only one day that we are coming here so if an extra day or two could be added that would be fantastic.”

- **Skills Based Opportunities**

Some young people expressed an interest in having more opportunities to develop practical skills. Sometimes this was about pursuing interests or making use of skills they already have, and sometimes about broadening their education or creating a foundation for a future career.

“I have past experience from back home, I like DIY things, like fixing stuff. For example, I like working on bicycles so I would like to get opportunity so I could volunteer and learn these skills, you know, improve so that when I start my life in the UK I have a foundation and then I can take it from there.”

“I want to learn cooking like making pizza or burger- I’m just giving an example but I would like to learn those skills.”

“And also maths lessons.”

- **Careers Guidance**

Some young people expressed an interest in receiving specific support for careers guidance. This is something that has been offered through the project, but not all participants were aware that it is available.

“Also, if there is someone who can just, for example, give us details and advice and guidance about the future. For example, like a career, approaching this and how to do these things.”

“[A]lso to advise us, for example, this job you’re going to get this and this, and this job will be this and this.”

Themes from Stakeholders

Stakeholders expressed high levels of satisfaction with the Youth Discovery Project. When asked about suggested developments or future priorities for the project, interviewees were of the view of that the top priority is maintaining the current track of the project. The most frequently suggested development was ‘more of the same’, with a desire for an increase in the number of weekly sessions and/or trips and volunteering opportunities.

- **Education**

The current focus on education that combines language development, cultural understanding and personal development opportunities was viewed as the foundation of the Youth Discovery Project. For the project to continue to deliver positive outcomes for participants, stakeholders were of the opinion that this should remain the primary focus of the project.

“I think they do quite well because they are focussing on education with cultural integration. It’s really a good way of helping people who come from a different culture.”

“I think the language skills are key. Obviously a lot of work on that I think is really important, because language is so important to integration.”

- **Focussed activities**

Some stakeholders suggested that there may be more opportunities to ensure activities provided a specific focus to support engagement. Others suggested the value of increasing opportunities for more confident members of the group to provide peer support, either directly or through sharing the value of their additional experiences such as volunteering opportunities.

“There is one thing that he has started saying that he likes the activities where he is doing something, but he doesn’t like so much when he is just walking. You know if they go somewhere like the woods or something and they just walk through the woods, he doesn’t like that as much as if he is going somewhere to do an activity, whether its model making or bowling.”

“[Perhaps] doing a voluntary project as a group... mind map or brainstorm their own community-based project that they want to do... you know, they can volunteer and come up with an idea themselves. I think volunteering is a good way in, it’s a good way to develop the skills.”

“[I]t would be good if they could step up and become, not a mentor as such, but someone who maybe... if they feel involved in the project they can share how useful it is to attend the sessions.”

- **More Notice**

A small number of carers indicated that they would welcome more notice for additional activities such as trips. This wasn't necessarily about scheduling, but often more about being able to prepare their young person for the opportunity, support them to engage, and/or have something positive to look forward to.

"You don't know particularly so well ahead, maybe three weeks or something, but it's quite nice to know these things are coming up and they will come up."

"So it's not like we can never do it, so it's never a problem. It's almost the opposite. It would be something to look forward to and know to look forward."

- **Increased Visibility/Advocacy**

Some stakeholders noted that there may be opportunities to increase awareness of the project, for example to ensure that it was accessible to those who may benefit. Building links with schools in addition to the existing links with colleges was suggested as a possible area for development.

"Probably more outreach. So more actually getting out there and telling their story to other people, like schools... a lot of my students who arrive are year 11. If they could work with the schools at that age group, that would be really good, for that outreach stuff and then that would raise the profile of what they're doing, as well."

"I think the advocacy side is really important, but again I know they're trying really hard with that so maybe a bit more YouTube videos or things about what they're doing."

"More interaction with community groups – welcome people in from other groups to see your excellent work."

4.6 General Project Feedback

The overall message from young people was that they were very grateful for the opportunities that they had been able to access through the Youth Discovery Project, and were also grateful for the opportunity to share their views as part of the focus group. However, a small number of participants expressed some scepticism that their input would lead to positive changes. This was not a specific comment about their experience of the Youth Discovery Project, but a more general comment about their experience of consultation in the UK. Nevertheless, this does emphasise the importance of feeding back to participants that their input has helped to shape the project and, where changes are not possible, explaining the reasons for this.

"[W]e have done these interviews multiple times and I haven't seen any change so I am sceptical or a bit apprehensive of saying things and see no change happening."

Stakeholders were keen to record praise for the project, with several noting that the Youth Discovery Project offered a model of support that there would be benefits in replicating elsewhere.

"Let the guys know that they're doing a brilliant job and our young people absolutely love it."

"I'm really humbled by the work that they're doing and it was so easy to work with them. They were so open to working with us, so positive... It certainly inspired us, that whole project inspired us to do more, and be bolder with our community engagement."

"[F]or me, there's everything they do they do well and they do right and the only thing that I'd love to see is them expand and grow but that's probably not possible at the moment."

"I think it's almost like a best practice way of integration."

Section 5 – Concluding Remarks

5.1 Key Findings

The overall finding of this interim evaluation is that the Youth Discovery Project has successfully established a model of delivery that is viewed favourably by participants and stakeholders. There is strong evidence that participants have developed their English language skills, confidence, and feelings of being settled. Most have made positive connections with peers. Some participants have gone on to make meaningful connections within their local community, for example through volunteering with community groups.

Participants and stakeholders noted that the approach taken by the project team was key to the success of the project to date. The safe, welcoming atmosphere and inclusive ethos was widely noted. Stakeholders – including carers – praised the team’s approach of mutual respect, which built a partnership focussed on achieving the best outcomes for the young people participating in the project.

The baseline self-reflection data indicates that, as expected, young people join the project with a need to develop their language skills and knowledge of British culture, and with limited social connections.

Overall, this indicates that the Youth Discovery Project is delivering activities that address an identified need. The project team have established strong relationships with both participants and stakeholders. The evidence shows that the project has developed a strong foundation during its first year. Future evaluations will examine the outcomes for participants and the sustained impact of the project in more detail.

5.2 Recommendations

The Youth Discovery Project has had a successful first year. Participants and stakeholders are keen to see the project build on the foundations that have been established. It is suggested that consideration is given to the range of comments and suggestions outlined throughout this report. The following recommendations highlight areas for consideration:

- **Consolidate the project structure**

It is recommended that primary focus is placed on consolidating the processes and approach that have been developed over the first year of the project. Overall feedback indicates that participants and stakeholders view the approach taken to be appropriate and effective. Ensuring that established approaches can be sustained and enhanced should be given greater priority than allocating resources to new developments.

- **Consider options for further enhancing English language support**

English language support is the highest priority of participants, and is seen by both participants and stakeholders to be central to integration. The concern expressed about recent disruption to the English language support highlights its central importance to the project. It is recommended that options for extending English language support should be explored, for example by providing more tailored support based on an individual’s current level, increasing the amount of time allocated to English support, and/or identifying ways for using other project activities such as trips or volunteering to explicitly contribute to English language development.

- **Review the information given to (new) participants**

Some of the suggestions made by young people for enhancing the project were things that have already been delivered, for example careers advice. This suggests that not all participants are aware of the full range of activities and opportunities provided by the project, likely exacerbated by the drop-in nature of sessions and rolling induction. It is recommended that a review is undertaken of how the project is explained to new arrivals and their carers to ensure a full understanding. Consideration might be given to producing a rolling timetable- e.g. for the next six weeks- to enhance awareness of non-regular activities such as trips or visitor-led sessions. This would be useful for both new and existing participants and their carers to have an awareness of the full range of opportunities provided by the Youth Discovery Project, and to forward plan.

- **Consider options for wider personal development opportunities**

Several participants and stakeholders noted how additional skills development and/or volunteering opportunities would be a valuable extension to the project's core activities. These would provide an opportunity for young people to apply and further develop their language skills, utilise and explore their own skills and interests, and gain experience that can support future ambitions. It is recognised that there may not be the resources available to explore all suggested opportunities in the short term. Nevertheless, it is recommended that consideration is given to options for extension activities that will further enhance the project's impact.

- **Establish a mechanism for providing feedback to participants**

Participants and stakeholders were grateful for the opportunity to speak about their experience of the Youth Discovery Project, and to share their views on possible developments or future priorities. It was noted that the project team responded positively to ideas put forward by participants. Nevertheless, a small number of participants said that they felt their feedback was not always acknowledged. It will not always be possible to action every suggestion made and, in some cases, suggestions may not be within the scope or control of the Youth Discovery Project. In these cases, there would be benefit in explicitly acknowledging comments and suggestions and explaining the reasons behind decisions. Therefore, it is recommended that a clear mechanism is developed for acknowledging and responding to feedback and suggestions, and that this mechanism is clearly communicated to participants and stakeholders. This will build on and further enhance the project's reputation for partnership and collaboration.