

Power of Youth Charter:

Organisations' stories

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Case studies have been written by Annie Caffyn, Houda Davis, Sonakshi Anand, Matt Jackson and Alex Parker, alongside the lead organisations for each story.

‘Nothing about us without us!’: Participation and collaboration in healthcare

Solent NHS Trust case study

Who we are: Solent NHS Trust provides community and mental health services in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Our work: Solent NHS Trust has been on a journey to involve more young people in the design and delivery of services. Staff are committed to creating a range of opportunities which involve children and young people *‘not just as beneficiaries, but as key stakeholders of their health service’*.

Our Power of Youth journey so far – key milestones

Solent NHS signed up to the Charter in 2022 to make a public pledge and demonstrate commitment to children and young people’s participation.

The Charter provides another way of signing up to something we believe in. It holds us to account for what we said we would do and helps us be specific about what we are going to do to grow the power of youth within our organisation. Key to this work is embedding a culture where young people have more voice and influence, and coproduce healthcare.

A key milestone has been the recent recruitment of three new ‘Participation Facilitators’ – a completely new role – aimed at supporting staff in clinical teams to involve communities and grow opportunities for young people to get involved.

Where we've had success

Community engagement

Working closely with young people requires skill, continuity and time to build relationships and trust. We need to be flexible about the ways young people can make their voices heard, making sure we go to where they are without an agenda and ask what's most important to them. It's unrealistic to expect that people will come to you – you need to go out to communities. Solent NHS Trust takes a strengths-based approach and believes communities have knowledge about their own healthcare and the skills and ideas to improve services.

Key to this 'going out to communities' approach is building relationships with young people and then developing new projects together based on their interests and capacity.

Staff recently supported [The Agency](#), a youth social action programme to empower young people to create the change they want to see. Young people are funded to develop their ideas and present them to a panel of community experts – including staff from Solent NHS.

Plans to use creative methods like Slam Poetry will help young people to talk about difficult issues and get their voices across. Some services like Gender Clinics have 10-year waiting lists, so understanding how to make the waiting experience a little bit better is really important.

Opening up decision-making

Children and Young People Advisory Groups help improve Children and Mental Health Services (CAMHS), making them *'a bit more warm and friendly, and less like a therapy waiting room, but a safe space young people come in to'* (Youth Ambassador). Members have co-produced promotional materials, co-designed spaces like waiting rooms and given presentations showcasing their work to other teams and NHS organisations. Young people are uniquely placed to spot changes needed that clinicians and managers may not.

Youth Ambassadors also play a key role delivering training, like LGBTQ+ awareness, and have already seen changes like staff having their pronoun on their lanyard.

Young people also sit on interview panels for positions within CAMHS: *'we'll say things like what we think they would be like giving therapy'* (Youth Ambassador).

They also carry out inspections of services, reviewing what they think the service does well and where it might need to make improvements: *‘our role is to look through the eyes of young people’* (Solent NHS Young Inspector). Young people can see the difference their input is making:

‘It honestly gives me a lot of joy. I’ve made friends. And it feels good that I’ve made a difference. It picks me up if I know I’ve got interviews later and makes me feel cheerful.’ (Youth Ambassador)

‘It’s given me confidence and I can say that so proudly being part of something good. Now I’m off to do arts awards, I work for the council, I take up volunteering opportunities. I’ve realised that there is so much in the world to unlock.’ (Youth Ambassador)

Celebrating young people’s participation

In 2022 Solent NHS held their first Summer Celebration, showcasing some of the different ways Youth Ambassadors have provided support and the impact of their involvement. The staff team also asked young people how they would like to be recognised for their involvement and they are using their ideas to shape the next celebration event.

Challenges we’ve encountered

Opening up decision-making, especially engaging people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, has been a particular challenge.

Staff and members are ambitious about diversifying the membership of Advisory Groups, as well as finding different, creative and flexible ways to involve more people. Outreach and partnership working is key, meeting people where they are and not going in with an agenda, as often groups are keen and clear about what we could do to support them. The ambition is to get out into more schools and colleges and promote our opportunities for involvement with young people, particularly to underrepresented or silent voices.

Evidencing the benefits of working with young people is hard. We talk about benefits regularly and have developed promotional materials and a quarterly newsletter to demonstrate outcomes. In future, we may consider more structured ways of evidencing benefits, developing the approach with young people and clinicians.

What is required to put the commitments into practice?

- **Embedding youth voice at every level of the organisation:** Support from senior leadership really does help and we have ideas about bringing in teams who perhaps have not yet had the capacity to start their journey of involvement. Having young people talking at events about the benefits and outcomes is also really important. It's often about sowing seeds and helping to embed cultures. We'd like to get to a place where young people can directly hold trust board members to account.
- More training and support for staff in clinical teams will help embed the culture of engagement.
- Demonstrating the benefits and outcomes is really important because young people's main motivation is wanting to make a difference.
- Reaching more young people by doing things at times, and in venues that are accessible.
- Putting a progression plan in place with training and support for young people, as well as payment for certain roles.

Tips or advice for others getting started with youth leadership and engagement

1. Work on creating a culture that believes services are better when you work in partnership with people by talking about – and getting young people to talk about – how youth voice and involvement is making a difference.
2. Try to arrange to meet young people in places where they already meet or are connected with. Don't just set up a room somewhere and expect young people to come to you. Their need to feel psychologically safe in familiar environments cannot be underestimated.
3. Offer a range of opportunities which allow young people to take part in as little or as much as they are able. People can sometimes forget that young people are busy people.
4. Always remember to use deep listening skills when engaging with young people. They will appreciate that you genuinely care about the issues affecting them.
5. Always feedback to young people even if you have no further news – go back and say, *'I have no further updates, but I haven't forgotten about what you said'*.



Putting youth work at the heart of the community:

Projects4Change case study

Who we are: Projects4Change started in 2018 to respond to the needs of young people in the Northeast. 'We love youth work' and believe in its power to change young people's lives.

Our work: Projects4Change provides youth-led projects for young people, including detached youth work, group work activities, opportunities, residentials, advice and information for 11–19-year-olds. Our projects help to maximise young people's potential by supporting them to direct our service to meet their needs, leading to positive outcomes and a brighter future. Our projects are for all young people but particularly address the needs and voices of under-represented and disadvantaged young people.



Our Power of Youth journey so far – key milestones

We were inspired to sign up to the Power of Youth Charter in 2020 as the commitments closely aligned with our projects and the processes we follow for youth work delivery:

‘The commitments almost perfectly matched what we were doing with our projects – the commitment to young people, listening to their voice, putting them at the forefront of the work and helping to make them co-creators.’

The Charter has helped to give Projects4Change a national presence and is a quality marker for funding applications to highlight how embedded the commitments are in our work. It has also connected us to a community of like-minded people and organisations:

‘The Power of Youth Charter commitments are a description of methods or processes of doing youth work and working with young people, which has been very affirming.’

Where we’ve had success

Supporting young people to take social action

The Change Makers Volunteer programme focuses on empowering young volunteers to identify the barriers and needs of young people, and supporting them to lead action. To do this well, we recognise the importance of educating young people on how government works and how they can influence power within existing structures.

Young people attended café sessions in Newcastle, where MPs were talking about youth issues. The young people talked about their needs and what services are missing. Some of the young people went to Parliament to share their ‘Changemaker’ consultation report with the Newcastle MP Chi Onwurah.

She asked a question in Parliament on youth mental health on behalf of the group about the minimum standard for mental health services within schools:

‘We are all about raising the voices of young people, taking action with and for them, and opening up decision-making structures.’

Opening up decision-making structures

We always seek opportunities to link young people into decision-making structures. For example, one of our young people sat on the board of the Newcastle Youth Fund. We have a young representative on our board of trustees who was one of our Change Maker Volunteers. The Change Makers Volunteer programme consults with young people and gives feedback to the board of trustees via the young representation. In addition, we have young people sitting on interview panels; sometimes they are the Panel! For example, young people led on recruiting an artist for a gender-based violence youth-led project:

‘Projects4Change creates the space where young people can talk about frustrating things, where they feel safe and what they say matters ...’ (A Change Maker, 2018 batch and youth worker at Projects4Change)

Challenges we’ve encountered

We have found it challenging to **properly recognise and celebrate young people’s impact** through our projects. We are a small project with limited resources and capacity to host award ceremonies to celebrate our young people:

‘We are very good at being present for young people, good at linking them in with opportunities that will benefit them but celebrating them is slightly different, and we haven’t absolutely hit the mark due to capacity.’

However, we do celebrate young people through our nurturing presence – by ensuring they are supported to get to where they want to be, can do what they want to do and that their needs are recognised and catered for. We also consult with them regularly to ensure their voices are heard and we often pay young volunteers on the Change Makers programme to show that we value their work:

‘We try to invest in our young people; that is how we show we recognise them.’

Championing youth voice can also come with challenges – we have gotten into trouble due to championing ‘unpopular’ opinions of young people, where their views differ to those in power, i.e. local council, MPs and politicians. But it is essential to remember that people in power are in service of young people. Our role is to educate people in power and the community – including politicians and councillors – to be open-minded and listen to young people.

What is required to put the commitments into practice?

Listening and facilitating change

The key is prioritising meeting the needs of young people and supporting them. The rationale for calling ourselves Projects4Change was to ensure we embed change in how we work and are open to listening and facilitating change for young people:

‘Young people know that their ideas and thoughts are valued. We are here to listen to what young people want to do – no idea is a bad idea.’

‘Projects4Change is very much youth-led and is particularly good at listening to what young people want and need. For example, if any project needs to happen at Projects4Change, it will mostly come from a young person or a group of young people who would have said they wanted to do that!’

(A Change Maker, 2018 batch and youth worker at Projects4Change)

Our ‘Counselling in Nature’ project

We set up this project to respond to the social prescribing and counselling needs raised by our Change Maker volunteers. They identified challenges in accessing mental health services, such as long waitlists, counselling breaking down or not connecting with counsellors. The group made a list of what would help them in counselling, for example, counselling in a natural environment with someone who you had an established relationship with, doing animal care, hiking, etc. This formed the basis for our project.

Investing in relationships

Like many other projects, we have had difficulty recruiting staff but good youth engagement starts with a quality workforce. It comes down to investing in youth work and equipping young people to lead, getting young workers qualified, training them and giving them the skills they need to engage appropriately with others. From the Change Makers Volunteer programme, two are employed and now working with us, and one is getting a degree in youth work and is our youth worker:

'I was actually the last person in our friendship group to join Projects4Change ... and now I'm the last person to leave!' (A Change Maker, 2018 batch and youth worker at Projects4Change)

Empowering by equipping young people

We met Les through our detached youth work. He was passionate about the area and supported us to raise funds at community events. Although he was homeless, in and out of care, we brought him through the project. We looked out for opportunities for him and sent him on a year-long residential course at *The School of Adventure Leadership* in Scotland. He then returned to Projects4Change as a youth worker, working with us for 16 months inspiring local young people to access the outdoors. He now works at an outdoor facility managed by UK Youth:

'Poverty is hurting young people and robbing them of their potential and we have to ask ourselves, what are we doing about it?'

Tips or advice for others getting started with youth leadership and engagement

Put young people first!: *'Make sure that your young people always come first because there is no us without them!'*

Build long-term relationships: Working with young people requires skills, patience and trust. Organisations need to be flexible and start by putting young people and their needs at the heart of their projects.

Find support: Find allies and like-minded people who can support you. This is crucial because you cannot do this alone. The Power of Youth Charter has connected us to a community of organisations that face similar struggles and understand our challenges.

‘Let children decide what youth social action looks like’

ASSET Education case study, St Helen's and Cliff Lane Primary Schools

Who we are: [ASSET Education](#) is a Trust of 14 primary schools in Suffolk, working together to provide high-quality education for all.

Our work: We seek to equip and empower the next generation of children to create a more compassionate, equitable and sustainable world where they personally and collectively thrive. Youth social action sits neatly within this:

‘We want children to leave our Trust feeling that they have the knowledge they need to understand the world, but also a view of the world they want it to be. We want to empower them as young activists to create that world.’



Our Power of Youth journey so far – key milestones

ASSET Education was set up in 2015 to improve primary education in Suffolk. Three Ipswich schools came together with a desire to focus on social justice and tackling inequalities. The Trust has been expanding ever since, and now includes 14 schools across Suffolk. We don't have a single ASSET template for youth social action – we have a vision across all 14 schools. Each school has a distinct personality and meets the needs of their own communities so youth social action looks different in every single school.

Most of our youth social action work was triggered by working with a Young Ambassador from Volunteering Matters. We signed the Power of Youth Charter in June 2022 – around this time the trust also committed leadership time to the creation of the Ipswich Social Mobility Alliance. We knew young people's voices were going to underpin any place-making work.

Where we've had success

Supporting young people to take social action

We equip children to leave us feeling like they can go into secondary education with a sense of how they can make positive change. Everyone has something to offer in our schools – we nurture and grow an ethos of activism. Children are empowered to be curious, headstrong, and to question *'how do I count and what can I do?'*.

The children are instigating change in areas that are important to them. For example, children at St Helen's set up an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion group, and Cliff Lane children set up a Young Planetarian group to focus on environmental issues. Our students stand up for what they believe in.

One pupil decided that the M&S clothes range for boys and girls was unfair – the girls' t-shirts had 'dream big' logos and the boys' t-shirts had 'be the hero'. She moved the clothes around in store so that they reflected the kind of world she wants to see.

Working collaboratively to foster inclusion

St Helen's children worked with Gecko Theatre Group which uses movement and music to help people tell their stories. Gecko worked with a group of children from the Roma population across six local schools to create a physical theatre production based on the children's experience in Ipswich. The group performed at Dance East (another partner organisation), helping to show that the children are valued here and are a celebrated part of our community.

We also collaborated with Volunteering Matters to set-up the Wolf Leaders programme to tackle racism and discrimination. Gecko worked with our children to develop a 'Tell Your Story' project: *'we are one group and we all come from different backgrounds and with different stories, but we've all come to this one place – this Ipswich'*.

Developing a collective place-based vision

Young Ambassadors from ASSET schools are leading the Social Mobility Alliance in Ipswich working with other local schools, health infrastructure organisations and universities, leading and designing what the priorities should be. This project showcases our commitment to a place-based approach to youth leadership.

Underpinning this is the importance of truly listening to young people and contextualising practice across the 14 schools. **Youth social action is in our DNA, but each school knows how best to empower their own children.** This approach allows each school to meet their communities' needs while supporting shared vision.

Challenges we've encountered

It's resource intensive to work in this way

Bringing together children from 14 different schools across Suffolk for a pupil parliament advisory board brings with it financial constraints that are often less visible in discussions about what it takes to do this work. Face-to-face is our preference, but this requires staff time, a venue and transport.

We are proactively trying to have younger people on our governing bodies but it can be challenging as a member of staff needs to accompany them to the meeting and support them to feel empowered to contribute. Within the current context of tight school budgets, this can squeeze already stretched staff and needs to be balanced with our existing commitments as a mainstream education provider.

Although there isn't a magic bullet to overcome these constraints, goodwill (used carefully!) can ease this challenge – passionate people that are dedicated and determined often go above and beyond.

Culture shifts in secondary schools

ASSET primary schools are modelling a new culture within mainstream education – one that celebrates social action and activism. However, creating young activists can be challenging for



the transition to secondary schools – if their culture isn't underpinned by this approach it risks halting the progress young people are making. We know some of our children have had to adapt their expectations of adults sharing power when they make this transition.

What is required to put the commitments into practice?

Recognise support needs and respect limitations: If you truly want to empower children, asking what they want to do isn't enough. If you want to take primary school children outside of their comfort zone and into youth leadership and activist roles, you have to build trust and tailor support for them. They need structure in place to understand the decisions they're contributing to and develop the skills and confidence they need to participate. Sometimes we can throw people in the deep end without any structure in place and it can put young people off.

Contextualise the commitments: We've avoided being prescriptive. Know your community and your school and contextualise the commitments.

Be ready to act on decisions: If you ask children what they think and then don't act on it, you do more damage than if you never asked in the first place. Opening up decision-making structures needs to be followed up with action.

Our primary schools have systems in place to listen to young people and then act. Showing evidence of this is powerful for young people to see.

Staff time and goodwill: You need a team of people who are passionate about putting young people at the heart of decisions. But this does also need to be adequately resourced.

Tips or advice for others getting started with youth leadership/engagement

- Start by making YSA a priority – you can't make space for this work unless it takes priority, especially within mainstream education.
- Work with a Young Ambassador – we'd recommend that all schools join the Volunteering Matters Young Ambassador programme. A group of our pupils worked with a mentor (from Volunteering Matters) and have gained confidence and bravery. It's widened their outlook about what's possible and has cemented this ethos throughout our schools.

Living the values of the Charter through all our work across the community



County in the Community case study

Who we are: County in the Community

Our work: County in the Community was set up when Newport County AFC got promoted into the football league in 2013 and became a registered charity in 2015. Using the power of sport, education and training, we aim to change lives, inspire physical activity, improve health/wellbeing and build greater community cohesion. We engage with all members of the community in southeast Wales – regardless of age, ethnicity, physical ability or economic status.



What the Power of Youth Charter means to us

As a community-focused organisation, we at County in the Community (CITC) have always been passionate about empowering young people. Our journey with the Power of Youth Charter began through our work with the Premier League Kicks programme when we learnt about the #iwill campaign and then signed up to the Charter.

Young people in Newport face all sorts of big issues in their lives and we've always strived to provide a safe, consistent space for them – somewhere away from the streets where they are welcome, can play sport and be listened to. The Power of Youth Charter resonates with everything we do.

Our work with young people is proper community work. It is about supporting young people to make positive decisions and take more positive paths in their lives. We provide positive role models in a world where young people get tarnished with the same brush, so we try to help them escape that. We want to be a safe space for them and provide continuity in their lives. We will always turn up, we will always be on time to support them every week.

For us, the Charter outlines ways of working that we were doing anyway, part of our bread and butter. So we don't look at it every week but it gives us focus every year with #iwill week – that's a chance to reflect on our work and try to celebrate, promote and give feedback to the young people on their achievements. It is a nice prompt to stand back and reflect.

The Charter commitments are universal for us, it's not just about young people as we are open to the whole community – if you take the word 'young' out of the Charter – it is what we are trying to do with everything we do from cradle to grave.

Where we've had success

We've seen great success in several areas, particularly in being as inclusive as possible. The first three commitments in the Charter are all underpinned by making your work as inclusive and open as possible. We welcome anyone who wants to get involved, regardless of age or other potential barriers. We will always say yes and let people from the community join in activities if they turn up.

We are living proof of how important it is to listen to young people and let them into the decisions you make as an organisation. It would be easy for us to just stick to offering work based around football, we were born out of a football club after all. We listen to what young people want in the sessions, including why some of their friends don't want to come along, and that has led to the variety of activities we now offer – be that basketball, dodgeball or adding music to sport sessions to get friends who are not sporty to come along and be safe.

The Charter is also a really good framework for us for putting funding bids together or to help us frame reports back to funders – the commitments are a good starting place to think through what we want to achieve with a project and help us reflect on what we have achieved.

Challenges we've encountered

One key challenge is trying to get young people to take the step from sport and being in a safe place off the street to social action.

We are a place where any young person can come and get involved; a place for them to get off the street and a place to feel welcomed. It can be a big leap to ask them to do some social action or push it on them. Youth work always has to be voluntary and for many young people, they can see 'social action' as eating into their sports time.

So, we've had to innovate to make it more appealing. For example, after a football session we added on 40 minutes of deeper time to sit down, have conversations, eat pizzas and homemade mutton curry. Through this they start to understand their wider connections to the community, explore some of the problems and maybe think how they could volunteer to improve it.

If you want to do this work well, you need to be honest and realise that not all young people will want to get involved in social action stuff and that's OK. For some it will always just be about sport; while others will want to do more in their community.

Recognising and celebrating young people's impact can be hard to find time for when we are so busy in providing the day-to-day services young people need so desperately. The impact is there, but we need to create the time to step back, record the impact and celebrate the young people.

Tips or advice for others getting started with youth leadership/engagement

We believe that the Power of Youth Charter and its commitments underpin all of our work across the community here in Newport. But if you are thinking of getting involved in #iwill and signing up to the Power of Youth Charter, here are a few tips on how to get started:

- All the commitments and principles are transferable – they are not just about young people, so reflect on and learn from work you might be doing with other groups.
- Let yourself be surprised by who might want to do social action (or who might not). It is not for everybody, don't force it – let them come to it in their own time.
- Use #iwill week as an opportunity to celebrate – a chance to stand back and realise what young people have done; let them get on your social media and share this – we can all celebrate our young people more often.
- Join the video call that #iwill offer. We loved the one on youth forums. You can learn lots from the work other youth organisations are doing – it gives you confidence to try new ideas if you know others have tried it before.
- Don't be intimidated by some of the language around youth social action – it is probably what you are doing anyway as part of your bread and butter work.

Creating opportunities for learners to set the agenda and build agency

Suffolk New College case study

Who we are: Suffolk New College (SNC) is based in Ipswich, the county town of Suffolk, near the thriving waterfront and town centre. The college also has the Suffolk Rural Campus at Otley, and the 'On the Coast' provision with centres in Halesworth and Leiston. We have about 5,000 learners across a range of vocational courses, T-Levels, apprenticeships, and adult learning programmes.

Our work: The College focuses on providing an 'exceptional learner experience' with a commitment to ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to broaden their horizons, aim high and achieve their ambitions. We offer across fourteen different subject sector areas, providing an extensive range of learning, and supporting regional and national workforce needs across each of these sectors.



Photo credit: Thomas Wolsey 550

Our Power of Youth journey so far

Suffolk New College (SNC) is focused on both our current and future students. We aim to provide local young people with the opportunity to see what we have to offer, both within and outside our campuses. We do this by our learners and staff interacting with young people in primary and secondary schools across the county to talk to them about their interests and aspirations. We also get involved in county discussions about engaging more young people in further education opportunities.

We are partnered with the [Ipswich Social Mobility Alliance \(ISMA\)](#) to help raise the aspirations of young people across Ipswich and make sure they feel part of their community. Together we hosted a workshop for young people – SNC students along with secondary school and primary school students – to decide what they wanted to achieve through ISMA.

After a few years, we got involved in the Power of Youth Charter through ISMA to empower our young people to make things better for everyone through community activities and social action. We formally signed up to the Power of Youth Charter in 2022. The value of the Charter is that it fits in with our existing programme of work and holds us to account:

‘What has worked well is that the agenda of the power of youth charter fits nicely with our internal goal to see social action be a part of our delivery. It has great complementary resources, and we use the language of the charter to get the buy in of our staff ... I love the fact that we’re now committed to the charter. I think it lends some accountability to our work.’

(Head of Student Personal Development and Enrichment, SNC)

A few learners gave a marvellous presentation workshop at the One Ipswich event in June 2023 with the aim of establishing an Ipswich village. Young people talked about their childhood and the people who have supported them to move forward socially and helped them to find a sense of belonging.

A key focus for SNC has been learners’ personal development, embedding this as part of our curriculum. One of the ways we’ve done this is through supporting level three learners to take part in social action and community projects. These can be anything of their choosing, including campaigns. For us, that was the icing on the cake, because it gave learners the opportunity to drive things forward in the way that they wanted to.

The personal development curriculum and its impact on learners was felt to be a key contributor to SNC being graded by Ofsted as ‘outstanding’ in 2022.

‘The Power of Youth Charter and #iwill movement has been prevalent in our development and underpinning of our understanding and in our support for our young people ... Helping us to think about things such as, how are we giving them agency and how are we empowering them to make change?’
(Head of Student Personal Development and Enrichment, SNC)

Where we’ve had success

Youth social action

The activities that learners took part in through the initial phase of social action and personal development tutorials included engaging with local charities, doing workshops with other learners and raising awareness of mental health. We then rolled this out across all of the extended courses and diplomas and single year level three qualifications.

As part of the course, learners chose to fundraise for local causes, raising a total of just under £800. This included raising money for specialist health equipment for a learner’s relative. Fundraising and other activities included: a sustainability and recycling awareness campaign and workshops, a beach clean, a protest gig (to protest the cuts in arts funding), a bake sale, an art installation, and a thrift shop. Some learners also campaigned for a local animal shelter that led to three animals being adopted.

‘The learners set the agenda, and it has given them more agency.’
(Head of Student Personal Development and Enrichment, SNC)

Working collaboratively

We work with Suffolk County Council and community partners (Volunteering Matters, Inspire, and Lofty Heights) to provide specific support to young people aged 16 to 24 who have inclusion needs or have an educational health care plan. This includes looking at ways to reengage them with society as well as education.

‘The Charter has shown us that there’s synergy in working together and it’s more powerful. Together we can do more.’

(Director of Transition, Foundation and Inclusive Learning, SNC)

Challenges we’ve encountered

Supporting young people to speak up and take social action

Our biggest challenge with the Charter has been about prioritising supporting young people to take social action when there are so many other things going on in their lives. Some of the young people that we work with tend to be disengaged with life generally, not just with education, but with society, families, and everything. With that often comes a lack of confidence, and some of that is due to trauma or specific needs and experiences. We are helping our young people to speak up by telling them, *‘your opinion is important. You are part of this journey. We’re not doing it to you. We’re doing it with you’*.

Sometimes it is hard to get learners to see the benefits of engaging in social action. We’ve struggled with appointing some Student Parliament Ambassadors this year. We have a student rep system, but we’ve not always been able to engage people to take the next step and become more of a voice for their team rather than just lead their class. We now have two learners who are Student Governors that started in this role at the end of the summer term and will serve for a full academic year. We’d like to weave the Power of Youth Charter into their terms of reference to give structure for the sorts of things that they will be working on with their peers.

Going the extra mile for feedback

Sometimes it’s been a challenge to get feedback from the learners. We tried to host focus groups for the transition room to hear from learners about what they wanted, but nobody came to these sessions. Then we went to their classes and got feedback directly from learners.

We have worked hard to make sure we’ve got that learner voice at every level of our organisation. We’ve just been through a consultation process for our new five-year strategic plan. We invited businesses, staff, and learners to help inform the direction of travel for us over the next five years. We’ve now pulled that together into our strategic plan which we’re going to be taking back to our learners on a bigger scale. We’ll be sharing with them what our key priorities are over the next five years,



Photo credit: Thomas Wolsey 550

and we'll be asking them for feedback on what they think about them, but also how we can make them feel real and visible for them. That's an interesting piece of work that we've not done before. It's something we've strived hard to achieve to get that learner engagement and feedback so we can continuously improve their experience.

What is required to put the commitments into practice?

The Charter helped us in terms of thinking about what's important and the areas we'd like to focus on. We need to make sure that we continue to improve the support for our young people. Their voice is important to us – we seek their feedback, and we act on their feedback. It's something we continue to strive to get right. Indirectly, the Charter has had an impact on the way that we've driven our improvement.

Every year we identify key priorities that the college would like to work on across the year to improve the learner experience. We have improved the number and range of opportunities that learners get to engage in, including creating more opportunities for learners to set the agenda and build agency. This has primarily been through the social action component of the personal development curriculum, but also through actively seeking feedback from learners on decisions that involve them.

SNC continues to look for opportunities for all learners to have their skills recognised and celebrated. This includes entering them in both team and individual competitions that have led to further opportunities in a range of fields such as: high-end catering, health and social care, construction, and carpentry. We had an entry in the Association of Colleges Learner of the Year Award, and one of our ESOL learners was one of the five finalists in that national award based upon his journey and his achievements.

Tips or advice for others getting started with youth engagement and leadership

What we need to do is keep working on letting young people know that they are valued, they are listened to, they are part of the community, and they have the power to make change.

'All the elements of the Charter are embedded within our culture but what the Charter has enabled us to do is to have that clarity around what we want to do. It's not just about the learners feeding back about what's good and not about the college but also thinking how they can engage in an activity themselves to improve their opportunity.' Deputy Principal, SNC



Making time for young people

Ipswich Central and Thomas Wolsey 550 case study

Who we are: We are Ipswich Central, the Business Improvement District (BID) for Ipswich town centre, Ipswich waterfront, and the 'Connected Town' area. These areas of our town bring together business, culture, sports, faith, arts, education, health and community.

Our work: We are working with partners across the town to make life in Ipswich more vibrant, welcoming, and fulfilling. Our ambition is to create a more populated town centre which attracts visitors eager to participate in a varied public offer here in Ipswich.

Ipswich Central hosts the 'Thomas Wolsey 550' project, which launched in March 2023 to recognise and celebrate the 550th anniversary of the birth of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1473-1530) in Ipswich. The project consists of a 550-day (18-month) programme of education and public activities. One of its aims is to increase social mobility and create opportunities for young people.



The Wolsey 550 PlaceChangers at the completion of their work on the street bollards.

Photo credit: Thomas Wolsey 550

Our Power of Youth journey so far

The Thomas Wolsey 550 project was initiated by Ipswich Central in 2021 and is administered as a community interest company (CIC). The project includes an education project working with all schools, and a youth-led placemaking scheme.

Our youth-led working group is called the 'Wolsey 550 PlaceChangers', and their work currently focuses on developing new street art projects in the public realm.

'From day one, young people have been involved in making change in Ipswich and actually doing stuff in the public realm.'

(Project Director, Thomas Wolsey 550)

At Ipswich Central we realised there's much more we can do to engage young people in our work. One of the ways we're doing that is by working closely with two educational establishments – Suffolk New College and the University of Suffolk – using the All about Ipswich Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn social media channels and a website: www.allaboutipswich.com.

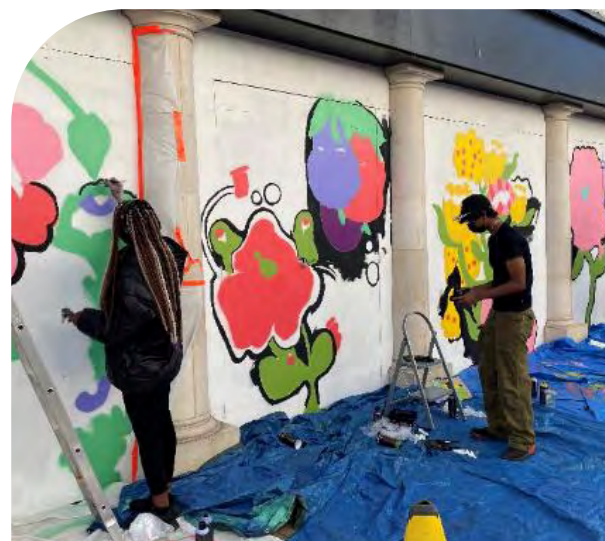
Thomas Wolsey 550 and Ipswich Central signed up to the Power of Youth Charter in 2023 following a deep consultation process with communities in Ipswich. Social mobility and developing pride of place in Ipswich are two major themes of the Thomas Wolsey 550 project. Young people are a primary audience for the work to support their social mobility and increase their sense of aspiration. As soon as we learnt about the Power of Youth Charter and the #iwill movement through Volunteering Matters we signed up and encouraged Ipswich Central to do the same.

Where we've had success

The first project we did with the Wolsey 550 PlaceChangers was to create a 45-metre-long mural in Ipswich on the theme of safety in the town centre.

The mural was in a part of town which had difficulties with drugs and crime. It was met positively by local residents and our partners and stakeholders, giving students from Suffolk One college the confidence to work with us again.

We have already noticed the effects of our work, not just on the group of young people we work with directly, but also in the wider



The Wolsey 550 PlaceChangers paint the mural.

Photo credit: Thomas Wolsey 550

social impact our work has had in public spaces – it's tangible and is having a positive effect on the community and businesses. Everyone can see the benefits of that very quickly, including the young people.

'We're really enjoying working with young people and the Power of Youth Charter. The way that we are with young people and the way that they are with us – it feels like an adult conversation. Because we give them that space, and we talk to them as if they are adults. We're not creating a special structure for them to fit into. And because we're brand new we didn't really have to adapt. We adopted this way of working rather than having to change something that had already gone before.' (Project Director, Thomas Wolsey 550)

At Ipswich Central, we've been encouraging students at the University of Suffolk and Suffolk New College to use the social media platforms linked to our 'All About Ipswich' campaign to express their perspectives and experiences of the town. One student used our platforms to conduct a survey and to take photographs that provided a different perspective on the town. With Suffolk New College we ran a small competition for the media students to create social media content, including comments, photographs, and videos about Ipswich. There was a prize of £100 won by Sonny for the great quality images taken.

Challenges we've encountered

One of the biggest challenges is the availability of young people to participate in projects around their other commitments. We try to be as flexible as possible and we communicate and schedule meetings via WhatsApp, which works quite well. If people can't attend an activity, then we make sure they can learn from, or get feedback from, their peers.

Some of the young people struggle with confidence and need to feel at ease with you before fully engaging in a project. When we spoke to the students, we gave a bit of background about ourselves and the site so that they could understand where it's coming from, rather than just seeing a brief on the page.

'It's almost like we're planting seeds, where we're inspiring young people to develop their sense of creativity.' (Communications Manager, Ipswich Central)

A lot of young people need encouragement to get involved in things. Sometimes their reliance on their mobile phones means they feel isolated, and they tend to stick to their own habits. Many young people just come into Ipswich town centre to go to college and don't spend any other kind of time there. We try to encourage them to look at the place in a different way. We didn't set parameters for the type of feedback we wanted from these young people – we just wanted them to be as creative as possible. Some of them have produced video footage, some showcased a selection of photographs.

As a local employer, what we offer young people is almost like a bit of work experience. The students can use it on their CV to show what they've done as an example of work that's been achieved.

What is required to put the commitments into practice?

Funding supports action and impact

The different types of funding we have received for the Thomas Wolsey 550 project enabled us to move quickly and co-create social action projects to be delivered by young people. As a youth-led organisation, we've opened up our decision-making structures to young people from the start and we're very collaborative. We have to evidence the benefits of the project for our funders. This means that we're constantly recognising and celebrating the impact and successes of working with young people through our social media, and also through day-to-day contact with them.

Taking time to listen

The projects we've undertaken with young people have engaged them in activities that they like doing, and we've taken the time and effort to listen to them and hear their perspective on things. We've gone into their colleges, given talks and answered the questions that they might have about what our intentions are for the town and what content we share on our social media. Some of the students come into Ipswich from elsewhere. We talk to them about what's going on here and get them to walk around the town and find things that they might be interested in. For example, events and local projects that they perhaps weren't aware of.

'It takes time to engage with young people and develop those relationships. You can't just jump into something. You need to have people on your team who preferably have experience working directly with young people. For young people to have the best experience they can out of this scenario, the conditions need to be right.'

(Project Director, Thomas Wolsey 550)

Tips or advice for others getting started with youth engagement and youth leadership

‘The Power of Youth Charter has given us confidence to increase the level of work we do with young people. The points of the Charter are quite succinct, they make total sense, and they’re very easy to understand. It was a no brainer to sign up. And it’s a no-brainer to recommend other organisations to sign up as well.’ (Project Director, Thomas Wolsey 550)

When we develop an idea for working with young people, for example the photography project with the media students, knowing that we’re signed up to the Charter encourages us to do this work and go further. We take our commitment very seriously. Working with young people is definitely something that we want to be doing more of:

‘It’s not always about having a physical presence of youth – this is about making space for youth voice to be heard. The young people we work with want to see change and be part of a place that is generating impact and initiating change. Young people today are very aware of themselves and are clear about what they want to see in the place they live in – they enjoy being involved with projects which will actually make a difference.’ (Project Director, Thomas Wolsey 550)