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## People's Health Trust: Active Communities Case Study Canvey Get Set Youth

People's Health Trust believes in a world without health inequalities. The Trust funds small and local projects in neighbourhoods that are most affected by health inequalities with funding generated through The Health Lottery. Active Communities is one of its funding programmes and grants aim to support people to create or shape local projects that will help their community or neighbourhood to become even better, and require local people to design and run these projects. Typically lasting up to two years, the grants are between £5,000 and £50,000 for each project, or £40,000 since 2019. The programme's main intended outcomes are:

- **Collective control:** Ideas designed and led by local people. Regular participation of residents, who are empowered to lead and take ownership of the project design, delivery and development.
- **Social links and ties:** Stronger connections between people. Decreased social isolation and loneliness, and improved connection, friendships and collective support networks among participants.

Drawing on interviews with projects leads, volunteers and the young beneficiaries across two visits in spring and summer 2019, this case study explains how individuals have come together to shape and lead the Canvey Get Set Youth project. It shares what they learned and achieved as part of the 2018-19 Active Communities evaluation.

### Key facts

#### Canvey Get Set Youth

Ealing and West  
Hounslow

**£31,740**

of People's Health Trust funding, through Health Lottery East.

### Main activities

Youth Bus  
Sports sessions  
Summer holiday club

### Key outcomes

- Improved social links and ties
- Collective action and control
- Increased confidence, knowledge, skills and assets
- Improved individual wellbeing

## About the project

Yellow Door is an independent charity based on Canvey Island, Essex, offering young people aged 11-25 information, advice, support and advocacy services. This organisation operated the 'Canvey Get Set Youth' project, with funding from People's Health Trust. This project established the 'Youth Bus' at Waterside Skate Park to provide a safe space for young people to socialise, have fun, learn and increase their wellbeing.

Weekly after-school dodgeball and table tennis sessions at Waterside Leisure Centre proved to be a success, leading to the introduction of an equally popular Summer Holiday Club. Activities were framed around physical activities and sports, volunteers helping to address issues around drugs, sexual and mental health, and emotional support. The club also provided an entry point for young people to other Yellow Door services, including counselling and a food bank. The services were free, which project leads and young people saw as significant in an area with limited access to services and affordable activities.

Delivery partners included Essex Youth Service (providing access to the Youth Bus), Waterside Leisure Centre (offering space free of charge), Active Essex (providing support, including in the grants application process) and Castle Point Council (offering support and exposure as a selected local charity). There was no fixed membership; turnout at the Skate Park was fluid and transient, and young people could attend activities for as long or as often as they wished. Yellow Door estimated that as many as 200 young people accessed the services at Waterside during 2018. The initial grant was for two years, with funding ending in September 2019.

## How did local people shape and lead the project?

The lead organisation first identified a need to support young people's social networks and wellbeing, reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour and improve community cohesion. Interviewees said the project offers engaging support and guidance, but young people drive the activities, have "freedom", "control" and "ownership", and are made to feel as if it is "their space".

Whilst Yellow Door retained overall control of delivery, the project leads said they were in a constant dialogue with young people and their Young Volunteers (previous participants who became volunteers) to ensure the service met the needs and expectations of local young people. Informal communication proved to be the most effective way for project leads to engage with young people among the skate park's transient population.

**"We started off having quite a formal process with forms and feedback sessions for understanding what the kids wanted to do – but it didn't really work as the population was too transient, particularly with the Youth Bus at the skate park, so we found that an informal process was a much more effective way to speak to and understand the views of young people." (Project lead)**

Based on feedback, over time Yellow Door replaced its previous parkour activities with dodgeball and table tennis sessions, which were introduced following consultation with the group on their preferred activities. This participant-informed approach had been central to Yellow Door's work for a long time:

**"We have always let kids inform us with what they want and need, and then we act on their needs, so it is not a new approach for us. Giving the kids control of the project and what they do is a good fit with what we do." (Project lead)**



"We found that an informal process was a much more effective way to speak to and understand the views of young people."

(Project lead)



## What has the project achieved?

The Canvey Get Set Youth project had many layers and aspects, and therefore its achievements were wide-ranging. It empowered young people through their involvement in community activities, provided a service that ultimately reflected the local needs and aspirations of young people, and also helped young people in Canvey to be more fit and active.

### Improved social links and ties

By running the project in a location where young people already socialise, Canvey Get Set Youth has supported residents to increase their friendships and social connectedness, thereby reducing social isolation, building support networks and bringing the community together.

*"I like coming here – I would just be sat at home or with my mum at work if I was not here. Here I get to meet lots of new people and now I have more friends that I didn't have before."* (Participant)

The project has also helped to improve ties and working relationships within the local community for Yellow Door themselves, with improved levels of partnership working as the activities have progressed and gained traction. This increased dialogue and supported shared learning and an enhanced level of trust between Yellow Door and the wider community.

*"We now have a much closer relationship with the local community and the different organisations that we have worked with on this project compared to before, and this helps when you want to start new projects or have new ideas on how to do things moving forward."* (Project lead)

### Individual and collective action and control

Get Set Youth's primary approach to involving participants in the delivery of the project was through direct engagement and conversations to ensure the service met young people's needs and expectations. The benefits of this were summarised by the following:

*"We constantly ask, engage and involve our young people and our volunteers. Without these two groups, the service would fail and so it is crucial that we have them on board at all times."* (Project lead)

The project had a transient population, with the cohort's needs changing from year to year, therefore making it important to build a participatory culture. Young people also co-delivered events on Pancake Day and Halloween, and several went on to volunteer on a regular basis. Not taking young volunteers for granted and investing time in them was important in establishing a core network of young people to help implement the project.

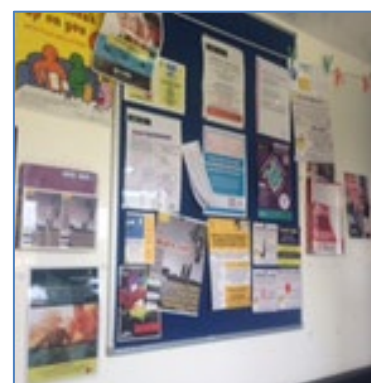
*"You have to understand that volunteers are not free, they cost time and need support, but it is worth it if you do it properly, and involve volunteers in the overall running of the project. ... We feel we give volunteers the opportunity and freedom to expand and develop with the work that they do, and not just empty the bins and make tea. In this way, everybody benefits."* (Project lead)

At the time of the second visit, there were plans to increase the level of control and accountability of the Young Volunteers for developing the programme. The project leads planned to introduce Young Volunteers onto their management board. However, as previously mentioned, project leads and volunteers learned and accepted that informal communication was perhaps the most effective way to engage with young people in shaping the project to fit their needs and desires.



*"It is not necessarily that some kids benefit more than others - all kids need something different, and they all get the support that they need, whether it is something quite small, or something quite large."*

(Volunteer)





## Increased confidence, knowledge, skills and assets

The increase in confidence and knowledge of the young people that attended was a key success of the programme, which led to many young people going on to become Young Volunteers. There were also wider benefits such as encouraging young people to experience new things, get new hobbies and sports skills, and learn about issues such as mental health, sexual health and social issues.

“The kids really enjoy learning new skills, not just in sport, but other life skills like learning to cook and learning to make friends. They are free to do what they want – the important thing is that the sport and the bus give the children the opportunity to develop these skills in safe and productive spaces.” (Volunteer)

It has been important to bring up local issues in sessions, the project team said, to help young people to be aware of any risks or issues that they could face in the local area, and so that young people could speak up and express their concerns among both volunteers and their peers.

“We have had discussion on important local topics such as knife crime and drugs. A lot of it is about things relevant to the age group being engaged, such as sexual health, drugs and child exploitation. Sometimes you can go there with an agenda to warn the children about local issues or particular concerns, and then other times you can overhear conversations and chip in and provide support that way.” (Volunteer)

One issue faced by young people in Canvey is the lack of affordable after-school and holiday activities. It was noted that without the sessions provided at Waterside, many young people would have remained isolated and perhaps inactive at home.

“I like coming to play sports every week. There is nothing to do in Canvey. I used to come here to do dancing, but I had to stop because it cost money.” (Resident)

Due to the service being free and provided in a space where young people congregate and socialise, staff and volunteers were sometimes able to direct young people to other services (such as counselling, food parcels, and medical support) provided by Yellow Door and others. These young people may perhaps have required help beyond what the Youth Bus or sports session alone could tackle but may not otherwise have accessed targeted support.

“If we can create an environment where young people feel safe and able to discuss their issues, we can then let them know if there are other services that we, or anyone else, provide that might be able to help.” (Project lead).

The use of the Waterside project as a gateway helped Yellow Door to join up its services such as the youth café and food parcels, so that they were no longer discrete, self-contained projects, but instead part of a wider network of youth services and support.

“Young people might enter at one project such as the Youth Bus, but end up engaged in another project, such as the Youth Café.” (Project lead)

## Longer-term outcomes

The engagement of young people through the project also had longer-term impacts on young people and the local community in Canvey, particularly by providing safe and enriching spaces, reducing anti-social behaviour, and promoting greater levels of physical activity. One of the project leads highlighted this.

“A key success factor for the project is making sure that young people are spending their time in a space that is supportive and engaging, and not somewhere where they can get in trouble and end up doing illicit or anti-social behaviour.” (Project lead)

“We want the young volunteers to elect one member onto our management board so that we have that line from young people up to the decisions that are being made.”

(Project lead)



“I like coming to play sports every week. There is nothing to do in Canvey.”

(Resident)

The project leads believe that there was a noticeable decrease in anti-social behaviour following the introduction of Yellow Door's activities at Waterside, with a reduction in the risk of young people being exposed to anti-social behaviour as a result. They admit that this view is supported only by anecdotal evidence.

"In the first year that we were there, there was a clear reduction in anti-social behaviour in the surrounding area as a result of our presence and support. If this project was not here, there would be nothing else to fill the gap... It is an issue with the skate park because it is just full of young people, and there is just no positive adult presence there without us. It is a worry because we cannot be there all of the time." (Project lead)

Volunteers also believed that running the sports sessions was important as they gave young people in Canvey the opportunity to try new sports and be active. If young people are active at a young age, volunteers said they hoped that this might help to instil good habits and make it more likely that the young people continued to have active lifestyles throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

"The kids have so much fun, and whilst having fun they also keep active and learn about being fit and active, which then will hopefully continue to be in their lives as they get older." (Volunteer)

"Speaking to young people informally, away from formal representation structures is sometimes the best way to understand what young people are really thinking, and what they need us to do."

(Volunteer)

### Participant case study

A key success factor for the project was the engagement of Young Volunteers.

The sports sessions were spearheaded by one Young Volunteer whilst he undertook a sports coaching apprenticeship. He identified the potential that sports coaching sessions could bring to young people, particularly as a young person that grew up in the area:

"I wanted to take it on as there was no previous history of sports coaching at Yellow Door and I like a challenge. The kids here don't have anything to do outside school and I felt that I could provide something new."

By the second case study visit, the success of the sport sessions had led to a summer holiday club being established by the Young Volunteer. Yellow Door gave him the agency and authority to set up the sessions and provided a space for his ideas to grow and develop over time:

"I have learned a lot – I have never organised anything like this before. It has given me so much confidence and Yellow Door have been so supportive in helping me organise everything for the kids."



"Many of the older kids have migrated to the youth centre and visit there now, so it can act as a gateway to the wider services".

(Youth volunteer)

## What has worked well?

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Project leads, volunteers, partners and young people engaged with Yellow Door's activities at Waterside agreed that the project had been a success. Several things helped to enable this success:

- **Understanding the local community and keeping the young people engaged.** Engaging the community and matching the needs of young people was important, particularly because the project existed in a fluid environment without a set membership.
- **Keeping the service simple and not trying to be over-elaborate.** The Project leads said that, from their experience they knew what worked, and so there was no need to start trying new things without a specific reason to do so.
- **Working cooperatively as a team.** Volunteers believed that staff and volunteers all worked cooperatively as a team towards a common goal. Yellow Door built effective local partnerships with the council and Active Essex.

## What are the lessons?

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Project leads and Volunteers were clear that whilst they believed the project was successful, there were also a number of key project learnings:

- **Increased visibility and awareness-raising is needed to engage a wider network of supporters and investors.** While Yellow Door was successful at engaging young people in the local community, its visibility outside the local community remained limited. This led to some instances where large charities sought to implement new initiatives that would duplicate Yellow Door services.
- **It is important to take some risks, as they can help increase learning and experience.** Yellow Door had never considered running sports sessions or large events such as 'Skate Jam' before they received the Active Communities funding. The project leads realised that it is okay to try new things and to make some mistakes and that the learning experience helps to improve projects even further.

## The future

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The main consideration at the time of the second visit was how the service would be sustained financially once the Active Communities funding ended. Some new external funding had been successfully acquired and this, alongside agreements that Yellow Door achieved with Essex Youth Services, meant that there was optimism that the Youth Bus outreach work would be able to continue.

There remained some uncertainty over future funding, with concerns about what might happen if some activities were to end or become less extensive than they had been during the funded project. The project leads agreed that ideally, a permanent youth centre was needed but at the time, did not believe this was realistic. There are other services, such as BMX sessions, that Yellow Door would like to obtain funding to provide in the future.

Regardless of future funding, the project team remain committed to meeting the needs of young people and giving them a say in the services that they provide.

"We will continue to work with young people to try and do what they want to do, and we will just have to be realistic depending on the resources that we have." (Project lead)

"I think success would be encouraging kids to get off the street and make sure that they do not get into trouble."

(Volunteer)



"I think that the youngest kids are the ones that can benefit the most, as they can develop skills and get support and advice at an age that can help to stop them from making mistakes in the future."

(Project lead)