



FOCUS

INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE, CREATING CHANGE

Impact Report 2022-23

Welcome!

"I must begin by saying a huge thank you to our staff team, trustees and volunteers for their extraordinary hard work and dedication to the personal development and wellbeing of young people over the past year.

Like many in the voluntary youth sector, we've faced some significant challenges in keeping our projects open, retaining staff, and maintaining our high standards of service. We've managed, through no little effort on the part of our team, to overcome these challenges and still deliver great projects and personal development to many young people across Leicester.

We are, as so often, indebted to our funders and donors for their unwavering support. We recently received news of new grants awarded to us by the National Lottery Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund. These will sustain our Inspire and Leicestival projects for several years. This is amazing news and will enable us to continue to engage with and inspire young people through these cornerstones of our work.

This Impact Report provides a snapshot of what we achieved in the year from April 2022 - March 2023. It also sets out some of our challenges, and the aspirations we have for the coming year.

We aim to expand our range of projects to meet the increasing and changing needs of young people in the city. We will also launch new Fundraising and 'Charity of the Year' packs to attract new supporters and help raise the funds we need to sustain and develop the charity as we widen our reach to Leicester's growing young population. Looking further forward, we will finalise our new Strategic Plan that will guide us over the next 4 – 5 years and beyond.

Thank you for your support and interest in Focus. I hope you enjoy what you read."

Matt Lilley
Chief Executive

Our Vision

We aim to become the 'go to' organisation to support young people 13-25 in Leicester. We will achieve this by living our values, learning from the best, supporting one another, shouting about our impact, leading the way, and becoming the best youth organisation we can be.

Our Mission

We inspire young people to believe in themselves, because we believe in them and their capacity to create positive change in themselves and their communities. We achieve this by creating an environment in which young people feel **safe, loved and appreciated** for who they are.

We have an **open-door policy** and, and strive to never turn a young person away, ensuring everyone has:

- **somewhere to go,**
- **someone to talk to, and**
- **something positive to do.**

Through taking part in our projects, they gain important employability and life skills. They are able to build their self-esteem and confidence to step into their greatness, and are empowered to find their voice and become the positive change they want to see in the world.

We bring together people with different experiences and backgrounds to address issues like mental health, racism, bullying or inequality. Through their actions, young people make a positive difference in the world.

Our Values

- We believe in young people and the potential they possess
- We create powerful and life-changing opportunities for young people
- We create an environment where young people feel loved and appreciated
- We work with integrity and honesty

232

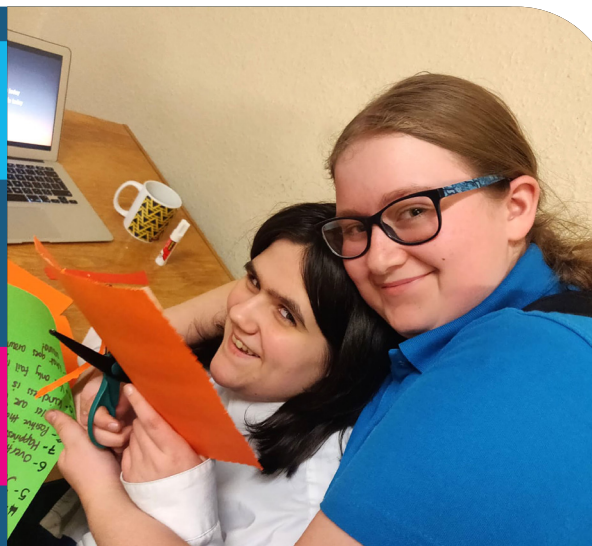
young people were regularly engaged in our projects throughout 2022-23

195

individual and family support sessions

177

group sessions delivered across the year



Inspire

A year-long personal development programme for young people aged 13-16 years. Inspire comprises youth-led social action projects, workshops, and mentoring support. It is funded primarily by the National Lottery Fund through their Reaching Communities grant scheme.



Highlights

- A community lunch to celebrate the late Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee, which included a gallery of youth-created artwork. Our celebration was awarded the prestigious Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire's Community and Business Award.
- 'Green Influencer' campaign - an environmental project delivered in partnership with the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. Young people learned about how we can best protect our environment, even getting involved in a clean-up on the River Soar.
- In August, we collaborated with Spice Queen Productions for the Journeys Festival, performing for over 200 community members in the city centre.
- 2022 October Half-Term activity week returned. Young people had the opportunity to make a short movie, plan an entire Halloween-themed family day, and enjoy an outdoor pursuit afternoon. This year 40 young people took part, and we established very positive relationships with families and young people.

92%

of young people reported an increase in their **team-working skills**.

91%

said that they had improved their **communication skills**.

We have seen an increasing need for us to work with young people's families to provide support alongside this project. This is due to a worrying increase in young people experiencing detrimental issues such as, but not limited to: isolation, self-harm, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem, bullying and risk-taking behaviours.

Parents and carers are understandably more worried about the mental health and wellbeing of their children. Our project team has developed a high level of trust and regular contact with many families.

Young people tell us that they view the Inspire Project as a safe place to be, where they develop positive role models. Their self-assessment evaluation shows them feeling much more confident in expressing their emotions, thoughts, feelings, and ideas, both one-to-one and in a group.

"Taking part in Inspire helps me with supporting my mental health and well-being, helping me to build my confidence and self-esteem."

- Emily

"Coming to FOCUS helps me to meet new young people and make awesome friends, build my confidence and step out of my comfort zone. Since joining Inspire, I have felt a big difference in myself."

- Laura

"FOCUS and Inspire have helped me to make friends and build up my confidence, allowing me to do things I would not have done before, like catch the bus on my own" – Mark

"Taking part in Inspire helps me with supporting my mental health and well-being, helping me to build my confidence and self-esteem."

- Emily



'Bryan's' Story

'Bryan', aged 15, sat down with our Inspire Project Manager, Darren, to reflect on the impact the project has had on him.

"I found out about Inspire from my Social Worker. They said that it would keep me busy and my brain active, so I wouldn't get into trouble in and out of school. It was something I'd never done before, really. When you [Darren, Inspire Project Manager] came to my home to tell me what the project looked like, and what we'd do, that gave me an extra push to get involved.



"The first day we made smoothies with Nathan [a volunteer] and I met the other young people. But it was scary! They were people that I have never met in my life before. New people, a new place - it was all completely new, and I was giving it a go. Things in my life weren't going so great, so I wanted to see if it would help. And it actually did. Talking to new people gave me a massive boost to my confidence, and it's been giving me pushes and boosts ever since. I'm glad I stuck to it.

"My main target was to try and stay in this new thing and not to get kicked out. I just know how my anger gets the better of me. If I'm not in the right mood, if I can't get my words out, or if someone just presses that one little button, I'll just switch. It's in the back of my mind that I don't want to screw up. I just don't want to miss out on something that's good. My other goal was to socialise, to go out more as I always stay in a play on my console.

“I’m still in the early stages of meeting people and like doing new things, but I’m trusting people as well. I have trust issues from past experiences. You have to earn respect, to gain respect.

“I’ve taken part in loads of FOCUS activities, like the environmental litter pick with the Wildlife Trust. At Abbey Park we did an Easter Egg Hunt. We went to Bradgate Park - that was the one where we had to find our own way there [referring to an activity designed to get young people to independently plan and carry out a journey on public transport]. The main challenge was getting the transport there.

“I have loved it - more now than when I first started! It’s because I’ve gotten to know people; I’ve gotten to know their personalities. I’ve learnt that I can overcome personal challenges at home and know that I can go through it again. I can come into FOCUS and can control myself. I want to work in demolition in future, something like that.”



Leicestival

A project providing opportunities for young people aged 13-25 to volunteer at the diverse range of festivals and cultural events Leicester City is renowned for. Leicestival equips young people to engage with members of the public, and introduces them and others to Leicester's diverse communities and cultures.



60

young people took part this year, participating in events including Holi, Leicester Pride, St Patrick's Day, Open Streets, Diwali and the Caribbean Carnival.

Highlights

A highlight of 2022 was our work with the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ). Young people showcased their artistic talents by creating exhibitions promoting Church Gate, High Street and Granby Street. These are neglected areas of Leicester that HAZ had promoted as in need of revitalisation.



The young people narrated a 'virtual tour' of Church Gate, encompassing stories about Church Gate and Granby Street. They also created an interactive map of the city centre through the 'Mapping the City' project, which was showcased at the Beta X building. This piece, which featured a 'soundwall' of stories of some of the city's landmarks, proved so popular that it was subsequently displayed at further events organised by the City Council.

73%

reported feeling an increased **sense of belonging** to their local area.

89%

had increased the level of **volunteering** they had been involved in.

Other highlights include:

- Our team's productive relationship with Leicester City Council's Festival & Event Team saw young people provide community activities at the 'Storm the Giant' summer event at Jubilee Square, and the Christmas lights switch-on event in November. We also collaborated with the Western Park Festival and the Rowlatts Hill Allotment Society on its Bonfire Night celebrations.
- Developing key presentations skills and 'youth voice' work is a key part of the project. Our group undertook a six-week project on the meaning and impact of oppression to them and their peers and presented their final work at an event for our local business supporters in October at Metro Bank's new Haymarket branch. This was an element of our Anti Oppression Practice strategy this year.
- During the winter, young people created and performed a show for the 2023 Leicester Comedy Festival, called 'Some like it Lit - Part 2'. A great audience joined us at the Big Difference Café for the show, including a number of our business partners who bravely joined the cast. The show was nominated for the Leicester Comedy Festival community awards.

We were delighted that a successful application to Heritage Lottery Fund will provide a new two-year remit for the project to develop young people's heritage skills.

The project will continue to provide unique experiences for young people to develop key skills that they can utilise within our social action and community festive activity. The project will see some young people use the skills they develop to lead and newer younger members through a series of cultural events. Young people can expect an eventful year in the city, influencing the wider community in regard to heritage and its importance today.



Going the extra 26 miles for Cain



Cain was first introduced to FOCUS in 2018, to support him in developing his self-confidence and social skills. When we first met him, 19-year-old Cain rarely spoke. He found it difficult to engage with people outside of his immediate family, at an age where he was seeking the next progressive step in his life.

However, over the next few years he threw himself into our projects. With encouragement, training and support, he became a volunteer for us in 2022. He is a regular at our allotment and is thriving in his role supporting other young people.

Buoyed by his new-found confidence, we supported Cain to tackle a long-held ambition: applying for university. Now he has just completed his first year!

We caught up with him to reflect on his experiences:

He first told us,

"I never saw myself going to university, so it's already a huge accomplishment. It has been a happy time in my life, taking the next step in pursuing an IT career."

But, it's not been easy, as Cain explained,

"The challenges were having to do everything. You are living by yourself and meeting new people. There's also the workload. I have managed to overcome them by going with the flow, learning new skills from these challenges. Settling into the new environment and being open to the positives this experience brings helped me."

He described the support he got from FOCUS as being instrumental in this.

"I do get a lot of encouragement from the staff and they do push me to try new things - like becoming a volunteer. That has been rewarding. The support has given me more motivation, a boost in confidence and a feeling that I can do it."



We also worked with Cain on some of the practical aspects of getting to University.

"Luke [a FOCUS Project Manager] helped me with the UCAS application. This involved writing a personal statement, having references, and proving I met the necessary entry requirements for the course. He helped me to apply for accommodation and student finance too."

Having been accepted for his course, we stayed in contact with Cain as he prepared to leave home for the first time. One of our team, Gavan, even drove Cain and his belongings 26 miles to his University accommodation.

Cain has now completed his foundation year and will begin his degree in the Autumn. We asked how he now feels about his career ambitions.

"I do hope in the next few years I eventually take up an IT management role because I will have gained the knowledge and experience which university has provided and is invaluable."

So, what advice would Cain give to a young person who may not be certain about going to university?

"I would say go for it. Once you overcome the obstacles, like applying for a place, it becomes much easier. You gain new experiences: personal independence, socialising and meeting new people - and you will get a qualification. Living away from home has its challenges but this has been rewarding."

We are hugely proud of Cain and his fantastic achievements. We look forward to hearing more about his journey beyond FOCUS and his pursuit of his ambitions.

START

The START Project, which ran up until December 2022, supported young people 16-25. These young people were all highly socially isolated, with little or no social network, and not engaged in education or employment. They were also vulnerable to the consuming influence of online platforms or extremism, such as far-right propaganda.

Young people were offered a 12-week programme of personal and team challenges, youth-led community action, workshops based on issues that the young people identify, and one-to-one mentoring. Through this they increased their social and employment skills, developed their self-confidence and increased their aspirations. Key segments in the three-month period were delivered at Leicester Outdoor Pursuits Centre, where teambuilding and individual challenges took place in a fun, outdoor learning space.

In 2022, we received referrals from various city youth support agencies such as VAL's YES project, Turning Point and the YMCA.



24

young people supported in 2022



86%

told us that they felt more **confident** in their own abilities.

78%

felt more positive about their **future prospects** as a result of their involvement with us

Highlights

As part of the Green Influencers Scheme, we assisted the Council's Parks Team in a number of environmental projects and litter picks in green areas in the city centre.

In the summer of 2022, young people designed and delivered a public consultation on behalf of the Heritage Action Zone, the results of which were showcased at an event for local business leaders.

At the end of 2022, young people ran Give To Live, an effort to gather food for those in need. The community action project also aimed to raise awareness for the valuable work done by food banks and homeless shelters across Leicester.

Young people's project management skills were put to the test when they perfectly planned and served a three-course lunch for over 70 people who are homeless or at risk at the Bridge Project.

These social action projects are not only an impactful learning tool for young people, but also enhance the feeling of being more connected to their community.

Zara's Story

'Zara' was referred to our START project last year. She was previously on a paid apprenticeship role as an outdoor activity instructor. However, her lack of confidence prevented her from talking to people, making it difficult to run her own sessions.

'Zara' told us that after taking part and assisting in START's community projects it has allowed her to "feel more confident going to places on my own, as I get very anxious." She has since been able to take on new opportunities back at work.

"I want to do my paddle instructor course, as before I didn't feel confident in myself, but I feel confident now to do so."

START was a great way for 'Zara' to gain new skills and develop her own confidence. "I actually run a lot of my own sessions now; I feel more comfortable talking to groups". She wants to continue to support other young people at FOCUS, and is excited to use her increased confidence to complete more training at work.

The cessation of funding has seen the project conclude for the present, but will it return in the future.

Breathing Space

Since 2018, we have proudly rented a triple-sized allotment plot at Rowlatts Hill Allotments. With the hard work and enthusiasm of young people, volunteers and business partners, the once-neglected plot has been revived. Now it is thriving as The Wooden Spoon Allotment.

Breathing Space was created to support the growing number of young people experiencing mental health issues, such as social anxiety, depression, panic attacks and eating disorders. The project focuses on the enormous benefits of working in green spaces. It is well-established that natural environments are inherently beneficial to mental health. We wanted to provide the best possible place for young people to get time away from the pressures of their usual urban environments to breathe.

A small group of young people and volunteers attend the project every Friday, to maintain the site. The team also plans the year's activities, and develops relationships with the surrounding community. There is so much to understand, learn and do on an allotment. The work ranges from planting, weeding a vegetable patch, and strimming the grass, to painting the shed, and repairing the tools. The jobs list is never short!

Throughout the year the allotment's regular work team is supported by small groups of young people from other FOCUS projects. Even on a cold and grey day, the air and sounds of birds have a positive effect on our well-being.



30

young people took part in activities at the allotment this year!

Highlights

The best highlight of the past twelve months had been our Allotment Day in April 2023. Held as part of our Focus on Business community events, the day saw several of our supporters return to see just how well the allotment is doing, and lend a little helping hand. This included BNI Foxes and the returning KP Snacks.

Two other great highlights of this year were the Summer Open Day and Bonfire Night, both delivered in partnership with the allotment committee. Our team delivered activities connected to these celebrations, which were clearly enjoyed by the attendees on both occasions.

We are enormously grateful to some of our key supporters such as the Wooden Spoon Trust, Engie, St James Place Foundation, and KP Snacks. Without their assistance, we would not have this incredible space today. Our allotment remains a 'work in progress'. Every day this year we've built new resources, introduced new plants, and improved our knowledge and skills as 'Allotmenters'.



Volunteering

Our volunteers have always been the lifeblood of FOCUS, and have been an essential part of our project delivery since our inception.

FOCUS' volunteers assist our staff in delivering all aspects of our work. They represent a huge range of ages and backgrounds, and bring diverse experiences, ideas, skills, and personal attributes. Volunteers enable us to support young people in ways that we could never otherwise achieve.

By gaining the trust and respect of young people, volunteers develop a range of transferable skills, such as communication, leadership, and project management. Volunteers advocate on young people's behalf; they guide and mentor teams and individuals. They become part of a supportive team, who are passionate about improving the prospects of young people.

To have this impact, our volunteers simply require the qualities of a commitment to our vision, empathy, a non-judgemental approach, a willingness to understand cultural differences, an acceptance of our safeguarding role, approachability, and sense of humour.

Volunteering at FOCUS provides a real opportunity for those who want to make a difference to the lives of young people and the local community of Leicester. The role can really suit students, those looking for practical experience of working in community, or who are considering a career within the youth and community sector, and those who simply want a rewarding challenge.



We run several volunteer training events each year.

For more information about our upcoming recruitment, email admin@focus-charity.co.uk, or call 0116 251 0369.

Our Challenges

As with many charities, sustainability has been a central theme this year, as there is much less funding and support available to our sector. The reasons are numerous, but the long-term impact of the covid pandemic can be cited as a major reason. Trusts and foundations who we rely on for much of our income have found their resources much reduced, and the knock on effect has impacted the sector.

Faced with a significantly reduced income, and in order to protect our projects and the support we provide to young people, we were forced to make some staff posts redundant. All staff who expressed a wish to remain with the organisation were offered a post, albeit on reduced hours or pay. We were pleased to find that even those staff have left us have remained in contact, often returning as volunteers.

We have seen some green shoots of recovery in early 2023, having successfully obtained new funding streams. It has enabled FOCUS to be more creative, and reach and engage with as many families' and referring agencies as we can. We survived a difficult period in our long and distinguished history, but we have further to go.

Our strategy to sustain our services involves the sharing of our new Fundraising Pack, which is available to print direct from our website. The pack explains what external fundraising can do to directly benefit young people, while supplying a well of ideas that you and colleagues and/or friends can do to offer financial support.

We are also asking business owners to consider our Charity of the Year approach. Through this partnership approach, we can work with you and your staff team to generate funds with which we can support more vulnerable young people, whilst also motivating your team and raising your profile.

We have been delighted through the past year to be chosen as Charity of the Year by BNI Foxes, the East Midlands Chamber, Fosse Business Network, Futures Housing Group, Leicestershire Law Society, and the Rotary Club of Leicester. All of these partnerships last around 12 months. Please contact us if you'd like to support us as they have and help us to continue to improve young people's futures.



Focus on Business

Our work to inspire and empower young people to make a difference would not be possible without the support of our local business community. As such, we have built the Focus on Business (FoB) community. FoB provides the opportunity for businesses to network and support each other, while getting involved with the wonderful work we do.



This year we staged a number of events where FoB members and associates could view the work of our projects, and engage with the young people involved. In 2022, members were given an exclusive showcase of our young people's Heritage Action Zone Churchgate consultation virtual tour and Mapping the City interactive wall.

Our October event, done in partnership with Metro Bank, showcased our Anti Oppressive Practice project. There, a group of young people produced a presentation about how discrimination affects them and what they wished to see as action to challenge it.

At the beginning of 2023, we brought a comedic theme to February, when a couple of our BNI associates and FoB members who had attended our 'Liven up Business' workshop with professional comedian Rob Gee partook in our Leicester Comedy Festival show 'Some Like it Lit part 2'. Rajesh Modha of The Finance Lab commented that it was "not only a lot of fun, but I learned a lot about improving my presentations."



We will have a package of events in the year ahead and if you want to know more about Focus on Business and how it can help your business and assist in personal development of young people of Leicester get in touch.

There are numerous avenues businesses can get involved with the charity from applying to become a charity trustee, becoming a member of FOB, providing a team of volunteers to join our young people on a project or residential right the way through to becoming an adult volunteer who maybe mentors a young person. You may consider being involved in planning or leading a fundraising campaign to help support our business objective as only 'a rising tide lifts many boats'.

FOCUS

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Want to support us or get involved? Get in contact!

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Thanks to our supporters and funders for 2022-23!

