



FOCUS

INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE, CREATING CHANGE

Impact Report 2024-25

Welcome!

As we reflect on the past year, one factor stands out as the most significant in our successes – the contribution of our volunteers. They have committed themselves to the additional training opportunities we've offered, they've taken on roles of greater responsibility, helped drive the development of our projects, and raised the quality of support that we provide to young people.

Volunteers have always been vital to FOCUS' work with young people, and not merely because they offer their time for free. The trusting relationships they are able to develop with young people can be all the more impactful due to their voluntary nature. Young people are quick to recognise that the volunteers are doing this not because they're paid or obliged to help, but because they want to.

There can be an external perception that volunteers lack professionalism and accountability. In our experience, however, nothing could be further from the truth. The lack of a financial incentive means that many are motivated purely out of a commitment to our beneficiaries.

We are absolutely indebted to our volunteers, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them for their dedication, commitment, passion, expertise, professionalism, empathy and boundless energy. Without them FOCUS could not do what we do.

I hope that, in reading this Impact Report, you'll enjoy hearing about how our volunteers have had a profound and positive effect on the lives of young people.

Thank you.

Matt Lilley
Chief Executive

Our Vision

We aim to become the 'go to' organisation to support young people 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 strive to never turn a young person away, ensuring everyone has:

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

Leicester is a vibrant, diverse city for young people to grow and thrive, but it faces many challenges. Around 40% of children and young people in the city are growing up in poverty. As a result, they are likely to leave school approximately five terms behind, and their life expectancy will be nine years fewer than more affluent peers.

Through taking part in our projects, young people 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 engage on issues such as mental health, culture, and future aspirations. Our projects connect young people with various communities and their shared Leicester heritage, promoting diversity and inclusivity. Through their actions, young people see the power they have to 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



282

young people were regularly engaged in our projects throughout 2024-25

170

individual and family support sessions given

330

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.

Inspire continued its dynamic and engaging personal development programme for ages 13-16. This year our trained volunteers had a prominent role leading weekly sessions. Volunteers delivered an array of themed workshops around the young people's interests and needs. This includes suicide prevention and managing negative mental health, stress awareness, social media kindness, anti-bullying and deaf awareness.

38 volunteers contributed over the course of the year. The volunteers have increased their own confidence and skills with the Inspire project in mind. This includes their knowledge in Safeguarding, Anti-Oppressive Practice, Pro-Social Modelling, and Practical Activities. They also each received accredited training in Mental Health First Aid provided by our Facing the Future project. The volunteers' regular attendance and enthusiasm has enabled them to provide emotional and social support at the point of need.

Inspire had many collaborations with other organisations this year, notably from the Violence Reduction Network. Young people learned first aid and how to respond to someone who is bleeding, courtesy of the NHS Street Doctors. The SHUSH Project taught our young people better sexual health. Meanwhile, workshops by Rose Alchemy CIC helped them identify and understand cycles of trauma-related experiences.



**"Being here makes me feel safe."
- Rayssa, 13**

95%

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

94%

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

"I have learned to work with new people - which is good, because sometimes I don't want to work with others."

- Hope, 15

"My mental health and self esteem have increased and I want to do more in life."

- Fadhila, 18

A testament to the legacy of Inspire project has been the continual number of alumni from the previous cohort, who remain connected to FOCUS. Many of these alumni seek mentoring advice from the Inspire Team when needed. Our staff provide support for issues related to housing and family, employment and welfare, the cost of living, and navigating life as a young adult.

This year Inspire engaged with a core group of **46 young people** in need of extra social support and guidance. Their overall reach impacted **226 young people** within the city, through its various community projects like Halloween and Christmas events.

The Inspire project continues to have a significant and long-lasting impact, remaining innovative and relevant to the changing needs of the young people, their families and the community. Some of the young people describe the Inspire project as 'life changing.'



'Eliza's' Story

We met with 'Eliza' to discuss her experiences with FOCUS, and reflecting on the impact it has had upon her life.

Elza was referred to us by her secondary school, who believed FOCUS would provide a good chance to meet new people and do new things.



"I was nervous; I had never been to a new place with new people before.

"I wanted to build my confidence by being around people I don't know, to get involved in new things and have new experiences. I also sought personal support with things that I struggled with, such as being a young carer. It is hard sometimes, and I didn't really have anyone to speak to about it or who really understood.

"The first thing I did was the Leicester Comedy Festival. I'd never done anything like that before. I'm so happy that I did it and stepped out of my comfort zone. I feel like it helped me so much with my self-confidence and esteem, knowing I'm capable of doing things I never thought I would be able to.

"I have been involved in loads of events during my time with Inspire. I think [my favourite was] probably Festive FOCUS. It's always a fun time of year and the event is always successful. But honestly I like being a part of all of the events. I've been able to talk to new people and gain confidence when dealing with the public.

"Mentoring and one-to-one support from staff and volunteers has really helped me. I feel like I can open up and talk about my home life and what's happening with mums' health. It makes me feel like I'm being heard, and



that my feelings are valid.

"Inspire has definitely been a valuable experience for me. I've made a lot more friends which has helped me loads with my communication and socialisation skills. I've learned how to better trust people and confide in others. I've also learned how to better understand how being a young carer has impacted other parts of my life. Having staff members listen to me, offer advice and be non-judgemental has really helped me.

"Inspire has really helped me to value myself and my future, helping to support me with college and my future aspirations. I'm now in a new role with Inspire as a peer mentor, helping to support young people who are just like I was. I also help the volunteers and staff to plan and deliver sessions. I couldn't be doing any of it without being part of Inspire."



Leicestival

This year, as the primary aim of the project, we set out to create and deliver a youth-led festival. This would bring together the skills and experiences the young people had gained last year, from taking part in festivals and cultural events throughout the city. It also served to meet a need for more youth-focused events in the city - a key finding from our community consultation.

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.

In the first part of the year, we continued to engage with existing festivals. For example, young people created a youth-led heritage tour as part of Leicester's Walking Festival, and provided free family activities at the 2024 Riverside Festival. Both acted as further preparation for our youth-led festival.

"I think Leicestival has taught me to branch out and share my heritage."

- Elsa (volunteer), aged 18



As summer 2024 drew to a close, 20 young people and ten volunteers headed to Beaumanor Hall for a training residential. The group task was to create their festival 'project plan'. Experienced volunteers and the City Council's Festival Team provided training on both heritage skills and key festival-planning skills. Festival co-ordination, safety management and running risk assessments, and creating a project timeline were just some of the skills added to the cohort's repertoire.

81%

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

82%

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

The youth-led festival focused on “Youth Heritage, Celebration and Recognition”. Young people wanted to celebrate youth organisations and their impact on young people in Leicester. They created a ‘Performance Zone’ to recognise and celebrate youth music. A ‘Zen Den’ where young people could relax and seek mental health advice. An ‘Activity Alley’ with an array of brilliant interactive stalls. Last but not least, they wanted an opportunity for young voices and views of Leicester and its future to be amplified.

Driven by the motto “By the youth; for the youth”, the ‘LEICESTIVAL Festival’ was born.

The festival was a huge success. LEICESTIVAL Festival took place at the Haymarket Shopping Centre - in the heart of the city - and across two days of the February half-term. It attracted over 1,500 visitors and provided activities delivered directly by young people. Partner organisations also joined us, including University of Leicester, Pedestrian Arts, Leicester City Council, Leicester City FC, Zam Zam, and many more.

“Young people of FOCUS delivering [youth-led festival] for other young people is a massive plus for the city and the community, a real positive because there is not enough for young people.”

- Dean Cross, Haymarket Shopping Centre Manager



“I have learned skills such as communication, socialising and teamwork. I learnt to celebrate heritage through creative ways such as filming, art and music. Talking to new people brought me out of my comfort zone and it slowly made me lose my social anxiety. I feel generally happier since attending Leicestival.”

- Tie, aged 18

"There were two teenagers who came to the Zen Den and I got talking to them. At first they were timid and shy, but after a few minutes they were sharing their experiences on mental health. This experience really made it memorable for me."

- Durga (volunteer), aged 20



The festival marked the culmination of two years' work for many of the young people. It allowed them to put into practice the skills and knowledge they had developed from and working alongside some of the leading festival organisers in Leicester.

It has never felt more important to bring people together to celebrate the incredible diversity of the city along with our shared heritage. The impact of this project on young people and the wider community has demonstrated the enormous need for events like the Leicestival Festival to continue and to grow.



'TC's' Story



We met with 'TC' to discuss their time at FOCUS. TC can become very shy and anxious, so they chose to meet in one of their favourite places in Leicester where they feel most at ease, Victoria Park.

"I found out about FOCUS by my peer support worker at college who said it might be worth looking into. It was something that I had never tried before. I remember the first few sessions involved film making. During them I met 'Ru', who has become a good friend of mine. Ru said 'come to Leicestival; it's really good'. It is always good to put yourself out there especially as a young person; that's how you learn to socialise.

"Leicestival is a lot about Heritage, but it was all good. Prior to this project, heritage was never something I really thought about, but now I know a lot more about it. It is not just about what is in the past - Heritage is about you as a person and what you like, and recognising that everybody has different cultures.

"Leicestival has definitely helped me, especially with socialising. It is just a positive thing that gets me out of the house. I've met some friends that I would not have met otherwise. It also opened a gateway for me to do new things.

"I was proud of being involved with the Youth-Led Festival in the Haymarket Centre. I never would have thought about this occurring a year ago and my confidence has increased significantly. It was good to see the work pay off.

"The social connections are what I value a lot, plus the opportunity to contribute to a big project like the Youth-Led Festival. It is not an experience that many young people would get nowadays, but it did provide young people such as me with an opportunity to actually make something significant that has a tangible impact."

Facing the Future



Facing the Future (FtF) is a project funded by BBC Children in Need. It aims to improve the mental health of Leicester's 13–18-year-olds, through the support, guidance and encouragement of a team of adult volunteers.

Facing the Future (FtF) has now completed its first full year. Twenty volunteers undertook 'Mental Health in Young People Awareness' Training as part of their induction to FtF.

Through monthly meetings, the volunteers further developed their confidence and abilities. Their goal was to provide impactful one-to-one Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) interventions for young people, helping to prevent severe emotional distress. Through their interventions, the volunteers have helped young people raise their confidence, by finding productive ways to manage their mental wellbeing. In Year One, we recorded 232 MHFA interventions for 112 young people.

As part of the LEICESTIVAL Festival, we designed and delivered a mental wellbeing corner on behalf of the city's Public Health department. This 'Zen Den' engaged over 170 members of the public.

88%

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

83%

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

FtF also held a survey during the event, to gather data on accessing Mental Health Services. The data stated:

39% of the public 'lacked confidence to approach services'.

35% of people lacked knowledge of available services.

35% of people also said they were afraid to use services due to their personal/cultural background, or due to prior negative experience of health services.

A number of the respondents highlighted issues of anxiety and low confidence as barriers to seeking support:

"There's a fear of rejection and judgement, which reduces confidence."

"I don't have so much confidence and sometimes I think people don't understand me".

"I've always been scared to talk or seek help for mental health."

Going into year two of the project, we aim to continue to provide learning environments that will address positive mental health. These will encompass community action to directly enhance well-being and social connection. With our newest cohort of twenty volunteers already recruited, trained and inducted, Facing the Future will continue to deliver life changing and enhancing interventions with young people.



Wooden Spoon Allotment

Our staff, volunteers, and young people continued to cultivate a range of fruit, vegetables and flowers on our allotment, using the advice given by other allotmenters, and the experiences they had gained in recent years. The allotment continues to provide its unique environment and learning experiences, supporting the mental wellbeing of young people experiencing social isolation and lacking opportunities for education, training or employment.

The space is ideal for young people who prefer active learning, be it individually or with the assistance of others. Staff, volunteers and young people all work together at each Friday session. Everyone is involved in big decisions, with roles and responsibilities shared.

This year, our allotment team learnt to construct new compost bins, replace roof tiles, prune an apple tree, and repair a poly-tunnel with recycled materials. We overhauled areas that were neglected ready for a new plan.

Alongside the hard graft, taking a break as a team for a cuppa and a chat is a vital element of the success of the project. We have lots of conversations on different topics, offering support and unconditional encouragement alongside laughter and fun.

Young people and volunteers attend the project every Friday morning. We also host half-term events, where partners join in with young people, building their social skills and emotional resilience as a group.



40

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

Volunteering



We cannot overstate just how much volunteers assist in the design, planning, preparation, and delivery of all aspects of our youth work. Without their skills, passion, expertise, and hard work, we could not provide the high level of meaningful support that we do for vulnerable young people.

In the next twelve months, we will provide new volunteers with Mental Health First Aid training via our 'Facing the Future' project. Additional free training opportunities will be available through our partnership with the Mental Health Friendly Places network. This will all help our volunteers to increase their knowledge and confidence, especially in relation to suicide prevention.

Establishing positive and trusting relationships between young people and our volunteers is fundamental to our success and the reason that our projects can be life-changing experiences. This process takes time, dedication and an unwavering belief in the limitless potential of young people.

We host several training events each year, including in Mental Health First Aid. If you are interested in becoming a FOCUS volunteer contact us: admin@focus-charity.co.uk, or call 0116 251 0369.

Please note that the application and selection process to become a volunteer with FOCUS involves attending an interview, providing two references, completing our volunteer induction training programme, and completing an Enhanced DBS Check (paid for by FOCUS). Out of pocket expenses are provided when attending all training and youth work sessions.

The Difference You Can Make

Fundraising is vital for the survival of all charities and voluntary sector projects, especially since the end of the COVID pandemic and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. Grants and statutory funding often come with strict conditions. Meanwhile, fundraising carried out by individuals has fewer strings attached and can be directed to support any chosen aspect of our work. It's not just about money either - local firms may also wish to donate goods and services.

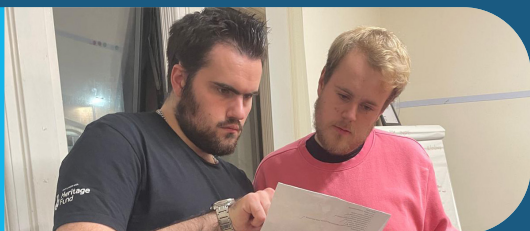
With your assistance, we can support more of Leicester's most vulnerable young people, and continue to make a profound difference in our community.

£15 enables us to recruit a new volunteer to mentor a young person as part of our Facing the Future and Inspire projects.



£30 covers the cost for a young person to attend one week of our FOCUS Does Summer scheme.

£200 covers the training and on-going support costs for 5 volunteers for a whole year, to help achieve positive outcomes for more vulnerable young people.



There are numerous ways you can get involved with FOCUS. You could apply to become a trustee, ask your employer to adopt Focus as their Charity of the Year, join our growing team of volunteers, or run your own fundraising campaign.

Do you have a fundraising idea you want to discuss, or require any further details, resources, or support? Do not hesitate to **get in touch**.

Stakeholders Review



Last year, we reached out to established stakeholders to ask for their opinions on our organisation's work. Stakeholders of FOCUS include business partners and associates, statutory and voluntary youth and community agencies, families, Focus alumni and more.

The feedback we received will help us to better develop our services and output in the year ahead.

An overwhelming majority of respondents felt that FOCUS' work has had a positive impact on young people. In particular, they mentioned observing an increase in employability skills, such as teamworking and communication.

"FOCUS is a great service, supporting the youth. Very keen to engage, upskill and work with others. Keep up the fantastic work you do."

- Amy Jones, Public Health Suicide Prevention Programme Officer for Leicester

"Thank you for all the support you provide to WQE and our students."

- Kate O Farrell, WQE Career Education Manager

"Leicestival has been a great project[...] a much needed 'focus' on the role of festivals in our city and the role young people have in them."

- John Coster, Doc Media Centre

We also asked which areas of the organisation that stakeholders wanted more knowledge of and participation in. The top three choices were in regard to volunteering, upcoming projects and events, and project partnership. Other requests included fundraising and sponsorship opportunities.

We are always looking for ways we can improve our work and are hugely grateful to those who offered suggestions. For example, we will be developing our communications strategy to ensure that you're able to stay in touch with us and in the ever-changing social media environment, we're exploring new opportunities for partnerships to complete the work of the other fantastic youth organisations in the city, and we're always adapting our projects to provide young people with the tools they need to navigate a changing world.."



Thank you to everyone who answered our Shareholders' Review. Our staff team will continue to build on our strengths and the recommendations highlighted, to increase our profile and positive impact on Leicester's young people.

A Trustee's Role

"I am Mark Bennett and I am the Chair of FOCUS' Board of Trustees. As a trustee of a charity dedicated to supporting young people in Leicester, I understand the immense responsibility and privilege that comes with my role. Our work is driven by a shared passion for empowering young people and providing them with opportunities to thrive. My role as trustee is not to manage day-to-day operations, but to ensure the charity's mission is upheld, and oversee its long-term sustainability.

"Trustees are stewards of a cause that requires both vision and integrity. Our job is to make critical decisions about funding and resources, ensure compliance with legal and ethical standards, and safeguard the trust of our supporters and the community. But perhaps most importantly, a trustee of FOCUS ensures that the voice of the young people we serve remains at the heart of everything we do.

"Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond, we are actively seeking new trustees who can bring skills and expertise in areas that will strengthen our charity's impact. We seek to meet individuals who are experienced in digital transformation and technology, as we look to enhance our digital platforms and engage more young people online. Finance and fundraising expertise are also essential to ensure we can continue to secure the resources necessary for our programmes. We also welcome trustees with a background in diversity, equity, and inclusion to help us build a more inclusive environment for the young people we serve, and legal and governance professionals to ensure our operations remain sound and accountable.

"Being a trustee is a voluntary role, one that asks for time, expertise, and dedication. But the rewards are immeasurable. Knowing that you are part of making a real difference in the lives of young people is truly inspiring. If you are passionate about giving back and have the skills to help guide us through the challenges of the future, we would love to hear from you."



Our web site (www.focus-charity.co.uk) provides more details. Please contact our Director (Matt Lilley) on 0116 251 0369 / matt.lilley@focus-charity.co.uk for an information pack.

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Thanks to our supporters and funders for 2024-25!

