



# THE LEVEL UP YOUTH WORK PROGRAMME

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

The 'Level Up Youth Work' programme addresses a critical gap in youth workforce development across Northwest London, where small, community-led grassroots organisations deliver a significant portion of youth services. Despite considerable national and regional investment in qualifications and training, these funds often fail to reach smaller community-led organisations. The [NYA Census 2023](#) highlights that larger organisations tend to have a higher proportion of qualified staff, as smaller providers are often deterred by complex procedures or fail to meet criteria for youth work bursaries and apprenticeships.

Responding to this need, the Young Westminster Foundation (YWF) initiated a pilot programme involving a quarterly Local Youth Work Forum with 49 practitioners from 30 predominantly small to medium community-led organisations. This pilot revealed a strong demand among youth and community workers for improved networking, information sharing, and specialist training to address increasingly complex challenges facing young people.

Building on the success of this pilot, which also supported 22 practitioners in obtaining level 2/3 youth work qualifications, the 'Level Up Youth Work' programme secured £848K from City Bridge Foundation via London Funder's Propel initiative. The programme now operates in partnership with six Young People's Foundations (YPFs) across Camden, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow, Kensington & Chelsea, with Westminster serving as the lead delivery partner.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

The YPF model is crucial to the programme's success, as it is built on the understanding that partnerships between individuals and organisations are rooted in trusted relationships. YPFs are uniquely positioned to co-develop and deliver forums that effectively reach and support grassroots organisations. In each borough, YPFs have deep knowledge of the local landscape, allowing them to convene key local stakeholders and community services.

The expanded programme aims to enhance the skills, training, and qualifications of youth and community practitioners working within small, community-led grassroots organisations. It offers valuable opportunities for networking, best practice sharing, and specialist training for frontline youth workers. Moreover, it seeks to cultivate trusted relationships between small providers, and aspires for more coordinated, partnership-based approaches within the NW London youth sector.

This approach is particularly important for addressing challenges that extend beyond individual neighbourhoods or geographic areas. By bridging the investment gap in workforce development, the 'Level Up Youth Work' programme ensures the sustainability and impact of small voluntary and community sector organisations. It addresses the unique needs of these organisations, providing targeted support that larger funding initiatives often miss.

**“It’s a situation and topic I’ve dealt with before, but now I feel much better equipped to have a constructive conversation with a young person about their relationships.”**

**(Attendee Westminster, Healthy Relationships training)**



## KEY LEARNING & HIGHLIGHTS ONE YEAR ON

### Youth Worker forums

We delivered 24 youth worker forums attended by 339 practitioners, primarily from small grassroots organisations and global majority backgrounds. The forums have successfully engaged these practitioners as intended. We found that allowing time for peer interaction and using interactive games enhances networking. It's also important to use inclusive language in promoting forums, as not everyone identifies as a youth or community worker (e.g., supplementary education or playworkers).

### Specialist training

Four hundred and forty-five practitioners participated in 44 specialist training sessions covering topics like safeguarding, mental health first aid, autism awareness, and youth voice. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with practitioners reporting increased confidence in applying new skills and handling complex situations.

We've learned that training is most successful when delivered by those with lived experience. The programme's knowledge exchange has helped identify quality, cost-effective providers and foster cross-sector collaboration. For example, local authorities often offer free training that can be shared with the VCS sector, which the programme facilitates.



## KEY LEARNING & HIGHLIGHTS ONE YEAR ON

### Learning through partnership

In July 2024, we held our first annual Level Up Youth Work Celebration and Learning Event, attended by youth and community workers, strategic partners and YPFs. This event allowed us to reflect on the year's achievements and key priorities, such as addressing barriers to qualification, providing meaningful training, and raising the profile of youth and community work. We're also seeing more cross-sector knowledge sharing and collaboration, for example, between supplementary schools and early help practitioners.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

To strengthen the youth sector in Northwest London, we will create specialist networks of practitioners with expertise or lived experience in working with marginalised groups. These networks will build a community of practice, helping local organisations access knowledge, best practices, and resources.

We will improve understanding of youth work qualifications and their implications. Implementation has been complex due to varying qualification levels. Face-to-face training is more effective, and host organisations need to understand the implications to youth workers taking on qualifications. We are exploring ways to remunerate practitioners for time spent on qualifications when organisations cannot accommodate this.

We will continue sharing learning across the partnership to enhance programme delivery through quarterly meetings, annual conferences, and collaboration with a learning partner for formal evaluation. Our goal is to increase knowledge sharing between small grassroots organisations, early help, and children's commissioning teams. By providing tailored support and capacity building, we will ensure staff voices are heard in strategic forums where decisions about youth services are made, addressing their previous underrepresentation.

Finally, we will seek additional investment from external partners for areas not covered by current funding.



For more information on the Level Up Youth Work,  
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