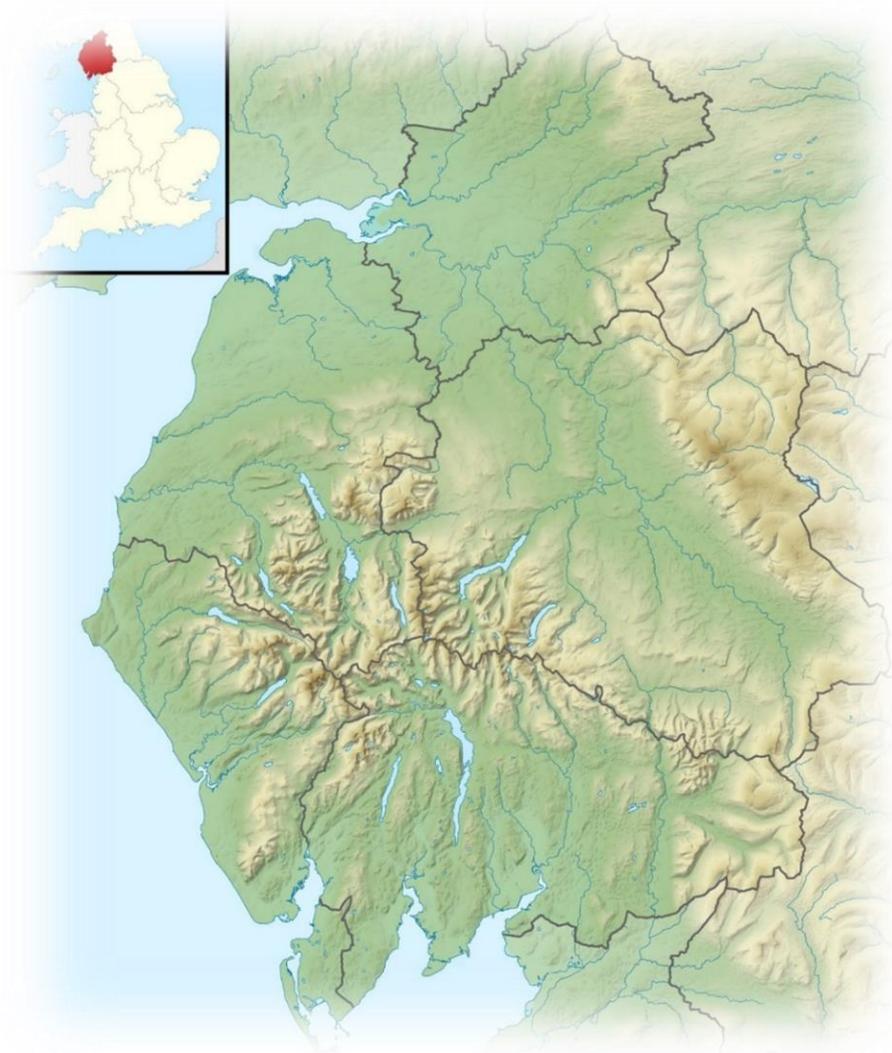




Francis Scott Trust



Better Tomorrows Programme

More young people in Cumbria getting access to quality youth work

Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Context: The Better Tomorrows Programme is a three-year initiative in Cumbria aimed at increasing the number of trained youth workers and improving access to youth support services. Led by David Beeby, the programme offers accredited training to over 100 individuals, and grants of up to £75,000 over three years to community organisations to establish new youth work opportunities. It is supported by Cumbria Community Foundation, Cumbria Youth Alliance and Francis C. Scott Charitable Trust and over 40 funders who have invested in the programme. The programme aims to empower young people through high-quality youth work, fostering their confidence, skills, and aspirations. The programme launched in 2021, with the first cohort of youth workers completing their training in 2022.

Method: The Better Tomorrows Programme aims to provide quality youth work opportunities for young people in Cumbria. To evaluate this, the term "quality youth work" (page 7) was defined through a comprehensive process involving a literature review, stakeholder consultation, and interviews with youth workers. The evaluation focuses on three main areas: training, youth work jobs, and improving young people's lives. Data collection is managed by Cumbria Community Foundation, then analysed and presented in an annual report (Table 1, page 4). The evaluation adopts a pragmatic and naturalistic approach, utilising naturally generated data, informal interviews, and a literature review. The analysis includes quantitative and qualitative methods, with thematic analysis and case studies to capture participants' perspectives. The evaluation aims to provide a holistic understanding of the programme and capture both intended and unintended outcomes.

Findings from Year 1: For reporting purposes, Year 1 is from the Better Tomorrows Programme inception to 28 February 2023.

Training:¹ Challenges in securing a training provider and a shift from online to face-to-face delivery resulted in a delayed start to training. Two cohorts participated in Year 1: Cohort 1 had 14 candidates who all completed the course, while Cohort 2 faced more challenges, with 5 non-completions, mainly due to organisational support issues, which highlights the need for amendments to the learning agreement and improved commitment from organisations to allocate sufficient time for participants to complete the training. Regarding the effectiveness of the training, the completion rate for Year 1 was 82%, with Cohort 1 having 100% completion and Cohort 2 experiencing a lower completion rate of 64%. The report identifies several helpful aspects of the training and development, including clear expectations, proper level assessment, employer support, motivated candidates, and the importance of ongoing skill development and reflective practice. Key learning points include supporting managers and supervisors, clarifying expectations for time off for training and clear deadlines.

Youth work jobs: In Year 1, 18 organisations were funded, with one receiving a continuation grant and another securing a second grant, resulting in the creation of 25 new youth worker positions (Table 2, page 13). The impact on the lives of youth workers in Cumbria was significant (Table 3, page 14), with

¹ This element of the report was revised on 25/07/2023 (after the celebration event) to reflect updated information on training cohort 2.

149 people reporting an increased sense of belonging in their community and 55 people reporting improved skills and knowledge. Case studies in section four of the report highlight the experiences of three new youth workers. Feedback from these workers and others demonstrates the positive impact they have had within their organisations, such as improved youth work practice and confidence, and positive feedback from young people and the wider community.

In terms of youth work sessions delivered, 1,046 young people aged 11-25 engaged in the programme, with 171 new sessions, providing 3,670 hours of youth work provision. The report emphasises the diverse nature of the opportunities provided and highlights the creative and flexible approaches employed in youth work. Examples include relationship building in detached youth work, trips, nature walks, craft activities, and collaborative efforts to broaden the horizons and aspirations of young people. Overall, in Year 1, the Better Tomorrows Programme has made a significant impact on the personal and professional development of youth workers and has provided diverse and valuable experiences for young people in Cumbria.

Improving young people's lives: 1,046 young people engaged in the programme, participating in 3,670 hours of youth work provision provided across Cumbria, accessing youth work sessions in diverse settings such as youth clubs, schools, and community centres. Young people face various challenges, including poor mental and physical health, difficult family relationships, poverty, low self-esteem, and a sense of hopelessness. The short-term impact of youth work for young people was positive. Table 4 (pages 17-18) in the report indicates that engagement in activities led to increased interpersonal skills for 69% of the participants and increased practical skills for 39%. Furthermore, 68.5% reported increased confidence, and 56% felt an increased sense of belonging in their community. These findings are particularly significant considering the increasing trend of young people feeling disconnected from their communities in recent years.

Although less than 6% reported feeling better prepared for work, this could be attributed to the young age of many participants who are still in school or college. Notably, 43% reported increased confidence in keeping themselves safe, which is valuable in addressing contemporary concerns such as potential exposure to sexual exploitation and online abuse. The Year 1 monitoring reports highlighted the importance of youth work in promoting learning, enhancing aspirations, nurturing self-worth, and improving health and well-being. The activities provided opportunities for young people's voices to be heard, social interaction, shared experiences, and the development of positive relationships. Parents also noticed positive changes in their children, with fewer reports of antisocial behaviour.

Challenges were encountered due to the diverse needs of the young people, including those with additional needs or diagnosed SEND (special educational needs and disabilities). Understanding behaviour perceived as challenging and providing appropriate support were identified as critical issues. Insights from the monitoring reports highlight the ongoing need to address the diverse needs of young people and adapt youth work interventions accordingly. The skills acquired, increased confidence, improved relationships, and a sense of belonging can have long-term benefits. These include improved self-perception, self-efficacy, resilience, and the ability to navigate challenges, pursue further education or employment, and succeed in their future endeavours. The connections made during the

programme can also serve as a supportive network beyond the programme's duration. However, it is important to acknowledge that longer-term outcomes are influenced by external factors such as family support, socioeconomic circumstances, and broader societal conditions. While the Better Tomorrows Programme provides a foundation for positive development, sustained support and favourable external conditions are needed for longer-term outcomes in young people's lives.

Summary of Year 1: The first year of the Better Tomorrows Programme has been ambitious and complex, requiring efforts from the steering group and participating organisations. The funding has allowed for the creation of new youth worker positions and staff training through accredited programmes. However, the shortage of qualified assessors and moderators in youth and community work in Cumbria has been highlighted as a challenge, along with the need for relevant and accessible training. While it is too early to make definitive conclusions about the programme's impact on young people's lives, the Year 1 monitoring reports testify to its positive effects. With two more years remaining in the programme, it is yet to be seen what difference the Better Tomorrows Programme will make in the longer term.

Suggested areas for review by the steering group

- Review the support provided to organisations applying for funding and ensure they have the appropriate skilled staff to support youth workers.
- Reflect on the learning from Year 1 of the programme and review the output targets in the Theory of Change in use for Year 2.
- Review the reporting criteria to ensure that data can be accurately collected regarding the number of experienced youth workers and new youth worker jobs and how these categories are defined.
- It would be beneficial for the evaluation to include the voice of young people (in the form of stories and direct quotes) to understand what they have made of the opportunities available to them as a result of the Better Tomorrows Programme. This is particularly important for the evaluation to report against the programme's overall aim: Young People in Cumbria experience increased wellbeing “feeling good and functioning well”.

The Year 1 report completes with a quote from David Beeby,

One of the exciting things about the Better Tomorrows Programme is that it has demonstrated the power of over 40 funders working together for the benefit of the young people of Cumbria, achieving a level of positive change that none of us could have imagined on our own.

Dr Tracy Hayes, 28 June 2023, email: thayes@marjon.ac.uk

Introduction and Context

Better Tomorrows was planned as a three-year programme to encourage people in Cumbria to become accredited in youth work and substantially increase the number of young people having access to support from youth workers to help them reach their potential. The Better Tomorrows Programme is a unique initiative that aims to provide accredited training for more than 100 people and offer grants of up to £75,000 over three years to community organisations setting up or providing new youth work opportunities for local people. The programme is spearheaded by David Beeby and is supported by Cumbria Youth Alliance, local funders Cumbria Community Foundation and Francis C Scott Charitable Trust and over 40 funders who have invested in the programme. The full Better Tomorrows Programme proposal provides a detailed introduction to the programme, outlining the needs of young people, the importance of quality youth work training and the background for the programme.² It is underpinned by the belief that:

High-quality youth work has a crucial role to play supporting many young people to achieve their full potential. Through informal and non-formal educational approaches, effective youth work practice builds the capacity and resilience of young people and can change young people's lives for the better. Through participation in youth work, young people gain confidence and competence, develop self-assurance, and have the opportunity to establish high expectations and aspirations for themselves.

Highly qualified youth workers are a valuable asset, not only to the communities they work in but to the county as a whole. They support positive outcomes for young people but are an essential feature of the wider educational offer they need in order to succeed. (Cumbria Youth Alliance, 2023)³

The Better Tomorrows Programme launched in the summer of 2021. Following delays due to the impact of COVID-19 and challenges encountered in commissioning a local training provider, the first cohort of youth workers completed their training programme in the summer of 2022, with assessment and moderation processes completed over the following months.

In September 2022, Dr Tracy Hayes was appointed to undertake an independent evaluation of the programme, using a mix of secondary and primary data to consider the impact of training and the provision of new youth work opportunities. This continued an approach previously agreed upon with the University of Cumbria.

² The full Better Tomorrows' Proposal: <https://www.cumbriafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Better-Tomorrows-Proposal-2021.pdf>

³ <https://www.cya.org.uk/partnership-projects/better-tomorrows>

Methods

Core Principle of the Evaluation

The overall purpose of the Better Tomorrows Programme is **‘more young people in Cumbria getting access to quality youth work’**. To show this, it was important first to define what the term ‘quality youth work’ means. The definition adopted by the Better Tomorrows Programme was informed by a review of policy, practice and academic literature, consultation with key stakeholders, and interviews with youth workers from the programme's first cohort. The steering group requested that this be presented as a one-sided A4 document (page 7). A draft version was created in late 2022 and then revised to include input from the first cohort of interviewees. It was shared in April 2023 and subsequently adopted as the definition in use for the programme. This gives the definition a local practice-based context.

The evaluation took a pragmatic and naturalistic approach by using data that was naturally generated throughout the development, delivery and monitoring of the Programme. In addition, there were informal interviews (see below for details) and a review of relevant literature.

Better Tomorrows Programme Theory of Change

In 2021, a theory of change diagram was drafted from the Better Tomorrows proposal document to inform the development of an evaluation framework. The initial Theory of Change developed for the project was revised during Year 1 to reflect initial learning from the project and the increased funding input (from £453,210 to £1,002,836). This second version (Figure 1 below) is the reference point for the Year 1 evaluation report. The Theory of Change will be reviewed each year to provide a ‘living’ reference point for the ongoing evaluation.⁴

⁴ The cumulative report will include all versions to show the distance travelled by the Better Tomorrows Programme.

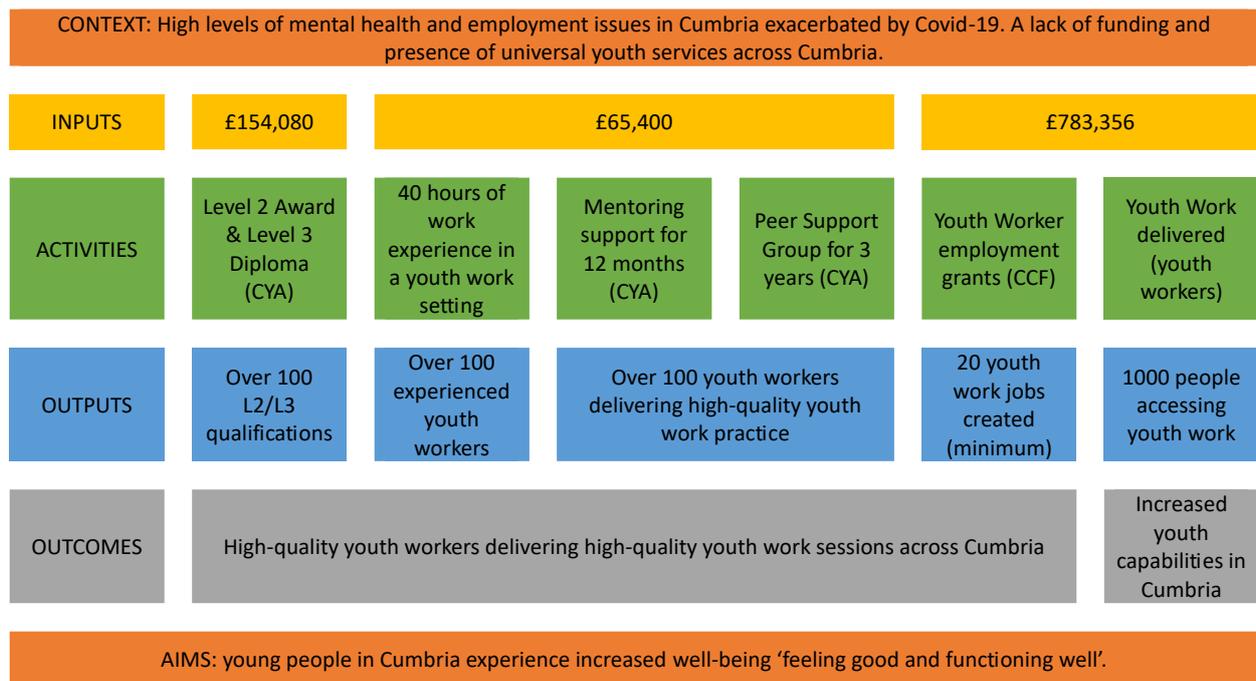


Figure 1: Theory of Change Year 1

Using this framework, the evaluation seeks to explore assumptions embedded in the Theory of Change with regard to the training and employment of youth workers and the impact they have on young people's lives.

Evaluation Questions

1 – Training

1.1 How effective was the youth work training in readying youth workers to support young people in Cumbria?

1.2 Which aspects of the youth work training and development were the most helpful and why?

2 - Youth Work Jobs

2.1 How many youth worker posts were created, and in which organisations?

2.2 Who became youth workers in Cumbria, and how did the Better Tomorrows opportunity impact their lives?

2.4 How many youth work sessions were delivered, and of what nature?

3 – Improving Young People's Lives

3.1 Who accessed youth work funded via Better Tomorrows?

3.2 What impact did the youth work have on young people in the short term?

3.3. How might this contribute to longer-term outcomes in their lives?

Evaluation Process

Cumbria Community Foundation manages data collection and collation throughout the Better Tomorrows Programme and shares this with the evaluator at the end of each year. The evaluator provided guidance on templates and forms to complement those that existed at the start of the project. Plymouth Marjon University Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for research; this included conducting interviews with three youth workers each year. Data will be analysed and presented in an end-of-year report. The reporting will be cumulative, with each consecutive year comparing results to the previous year to avoid the need for a final project report in addition to the annual reporting.

Table 1: The reporting scheduling profile, as agreed in late 2022

Project Set Up	Sept 2021 – Aug 2022	Agreed action
Year 1 data collection	Oct-Nov 2022	CCF to collect and collate data and send to evaluator in October 2022 (once ethical approval is secured).
Year 1 evaluation	Oct-Dec 2022	Evaluator to analyse data and deliver report in early 2023. ⁵
Year 2 data collection	Oct 2022-Sep 2023	CCF to collect and collate data and send to evaluator in Oct 2023.
Year 2 evaluation	Oct 2023-Dec 2023	Evaluator to analyse data and deliver report in early 2024.
Year 3 data collection	Oct 2023-Sep 2024	CCF to collect and collate data and send to evaluator in October 2024.
Year 3 evaluation	Oct 2024-Dec 2024	Evaluator to analyse data and deliver report in early 2025.

The dates have been revised through agreement with the steering group, taking account of delays in starting the programme.

⁵ Delays in individual projects' start/end dates and reporting to CCF postponed this until June 2023. In project steering group meetings, it was agreed to take a flexible approach going forward and adjust timescales as required during the lifetime of the Programme.

Evaluation Methods

The Better Tomorrow Programme Evaluation adopts a pragmatic and naturalistic approach by using data that is naturally generated throughout the development, delivery and monitoring of the programme (see above Table 1 summarising timeline and location of data collection). This approach to data collection (and analysis methods) is informed by a praxis-based or 'phronetic' approach. This means that qualitative data is systematically gathered, analysed and communicated in a practical way, which focuses on self-reflexivity, contextual knowledge, situated meanings and practical wisdom.

In addition to naturally occurring data, there will be informal interviews each year and a review of relevant literature. Interviews will be face-to-face or online (using Microsoft Teams), recorded in note form, and audio recorded (subject to consent procedures) before being transcribed into text for analysis. Three youth workers per year, nine in total, who are involved in the Better Tomorrows Programme, will be invited to an informal interview with the evaluator, Tracy Hayes. The evaluation is independent of the training and monitoring of the Better Tomorrows Programme. It will not impact participants' engagement in the programme, and participation in the interviews is voluntary. All interviewees will be 18+ adults involved in the Better Tomorrows programme, and it is anticipated that there will be a mix of ages, genders and backgrounds. The researcher will follow Plymouth Marjon University⁶ and British Education Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research⁷ by ensuring that participants are clear that their participation is voluntary and that they understand what is involved and how their information will be used and shared (Appendix i and ii). Confidentiality will be maintained where necessary by not directly attributing comments/quotes to individuals, organisations or specific areas of the county. However, this is a high-profile programme, regularly publicised through social and written media (e.g. newspapers) by the Better Tomorrows Programme team and some details may be identifiable.

For research purposes, the researcher will use participant-checking procedures to ensure that each individual is comfortable with their level of confidentiality/exposure. This will be individually negotiated and agreed upon by sharing transcripts of interviews prior to analysis. At the end of Year 1, the Programme Steering Group requested permission to use case studies within a performance, which would form part of a celebratory event. The evaluator returned to the participants to check that they were comfortable with this, and all three consented via email.

⁶ <https://www.marjon.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/>

⁷ <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018>

Analysis

Quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data will be analysed thematically in an interpretive way that draws on hermeneutics, aiming at a holistic understanding. This involves moving between the data text (artefacts) and the situated scene to enable an understanding of the experience, motivations and context of the participants. In this way, the interview transcripts will be analysed and used to create a case study, which centralises the participant's voice (youth worker).

These varied methods enable the evaluator to gain a holistic understanding of the project, which takes account of the various stakeholders' perspectives. By doing this, the evaluation hopes to capture perceived benefits, intended and unintended consequences and surprises, and to capture learning from the Better Tomorrows Programme through this evaluative research approach. This emphasises gaining participants' authentic views, going beyond 'it was all lovely' through taking a more critical 'warts and all' approach to undertake an authentic evaluation.

Quality youth work

Quality youth work is a process of supporting and empowering young people to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to reach their full potential. It places young people at the centre of practice and empowers them to overcome disadvantages or challenges (UK Youth).⁸ It involves creating a safe and inclusive space where young people can explore their identities, their interests, express their views, and engage with others in meaningful ways. It is a practice of informal education, which involves the development of democratic and associational approaches that promote learning and development in the communities or individuals who choose to take part. It is focused on work with adolescents, with groups as well as individuals, and with personal development in the context of the development of wide social networks and collective engagement with issues of social justice (Marjon, 2023).⁹

Quality youth work starts where young people are in terms of developmental or physical location (e.g. open access or detached/street work). The relationship between young people and youth workers is entirely voluntary: it is the young person's choice whether/how to engage with the professional (NYA n.d.).¹⁰ This does not negate school-based or targeted interventions where young people have been referred; it is about the process of developing a relationship with the youth worker. Quality youth work is characterised by a number of key features, including:

- Focus on the needs and interests of young people: responsive to their needs and interests, guided by their perspectives.
- Commitment to youth participation: actively engage young people in the planning, design, and delivery of programmes and activities.
- Recognition of the importance of relationships: prioritise building positive relationships between youth workers and young people, as well as among young people themselves, and their wider communities.
- Commitment to youth development: support the holistic development of young people, including social, emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being, so that they have voice, influence and place in their communities and society as a whole.
- Focus on learning and skill-building: provide opportunities for young people to learn new skills, explore new interests, and develop their talents. This builds resilience and gives young people the confidence and life skills they need to live, learn, work and achieve.
- Commitment to diversity, inclusion and social justice: inclusive and accessible to all young people, regardless of their background or circumstances.

In the words of some of Better Tomorrows youth workers, a quality youth worker is

... somebody who is caring, is kind, is compassionate. It's somebody who has the young person's interest, like their *best* interest at heart, and it's somebody who is *passionate* about it... It's about making a difference and impacting their lives in a positive way.

... always be approachable and *let them talk*... being there for them... have a *crac* with them...

Quality youth work requires training that can *inspire, encourage and nurture*... [enabling youth workers] *to become a catalyst for change and make a real difference to the lives of young people* (Marjon, 2023). The National Occupational Standards (NOS) and the National Curriculum¹¹ for youth work inform and underpin training.¹²

⁸ <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/UKYouthStrategyPaperFINAL.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.marjon.ac.uk/courses/youth-work-degree-apprenticeship/>

¹⁰ <https://www.nya.org.uk/youth-work/>

¹¹ <https://www.nya.org.uk/quality/curriculum/>

¹² <https://www.nya.org.uk/national-occupational-standards-and-english-youth-work-policy-new-document-published/>

Year 1

For reporting purposes, Year 1 is from Better Tomorrows Programme inception to 28 February 2023.

1. Training

This section of the report starts with an overview of the training based on information from Cumbria Youth Alliance's (CYA) annual report, dated 17 October 2022 and CYA's interim report submitted in February 2023. It then reviews the two cohorts of learners from Year 1 before addressing the two agreed evaluation questions, drawing on the youth worker case studies and notes and minutes from steering group meetings.

The funding from Better Tomorrows helped to develop the funded training programme to encourage people within Cumbria to become trained in youth work, leading to accredited qualifications with the option to progress into paid positions and look at options about further training and/or education to degree level. This has supported more young people to engage in youth work provision across the County. It has supported mapping exercises across Cumbria to identify need so that CYA target support with a plan to increase youth provision in more isolated areas and also support non youth groups with accessible training so they can develop their service.

There were initial delays in securing a training provider until CADAS (Cumbria Addictions Advice and Solutions) were appointed to deliver the programme, with support and management from CYA. The course enables a level 2 or 3 qualification and provides the opportunity for professional development and to share good practice. The course is interactive and the trainers are experienced workers who have pulled together a programme covering the core principles of youth work, the youth work curriculum¹³ and also reflective practice.

Staff from CYA facilitated a meeting with students, observed delivery and reported overall positive feedback from candidates about how much they enjoyed the face-to-face delivery and the opportunity to network with other workers from different projects. Candidates' feedback included:

- The course is already informing their own delivery and they are looking at strategies for the future to engage more young people in youth work.
- Training staff are good and even when it changes it is good as everyone learns differently and they get a mix of delivery.

The number of participants accessing training was lower than initially agreed. This is attributed to the decision to change from using online Youth Work training from the NYA (National Youth Agency) to face-to-face delivery in local settings. This significant difference created additional

¹³ <https://www.nya.org.uk/quality/curriculum/>

work in the planning, preparation, coordination and management, as well as with the training and support given to participants. However, the Better Tomorrows steering group agreed this was the best option for the programme following consultations and discussions with local organisations and potential participants. The NYA online training is still available for participants who cannot attend face-to-face training. As a result of the delays and change of provider, the output identified in the Theory of Change was revised from 90 x Level 3 and 90 x Level 2 qualifications to more than 100 Level 2/3 qualifications (page 3).

CYA report the impact of improving life skills, education, employability and enterprise, with the following outcomes:

- Strengthen organisations through capacity building.
- Improve health (physical/mental/emotional).
- Improve the community working together.

CYA report that the grant from Better Tomorrows has made a difference in several ways outlined below. Youth Work trainees have been upskilled and achieved qualifications, thus improving their CV and employability. Then, through working with young people, it is hoped there will be a multiplier or ripple effect, enhancing quality of life and developing resilience in the community around Cumbria, especially for young people. This may help reduce antisocial behaviour, raise aspirations, and support participants' and young people's mental health and wellbeing. To date, CYA has not asked participants or their settings to provide impact data. This is something they would like to include as it will demonstrate the power of high-quality youth work in local communities. They are looking at ways to incorporate this project into other current and future work and need to source additional funding to enable this to happen.

Some of the challenges CYA encountered in Year 1, with examples of how they addressed them:

- Some trainees were unable to travel and have been supported with lifts from other trainees and CYA staff. This highlighted the importance of delivering training in a variety of community settings around the county.
- Finding a suitable venue in a location which best suits the cohort, with access and parking for free, is becoming very difficult. To ensure a quality venue with all the equipment, resources and access requirements, CYA made the decision to pay.
- The new cohort of participants is increasingly from non-traditional Youth Work settings. This significantly increased the workload of trainers and support staff in order to help and support them properly. They are looking at Buddy systems and linking to nearby 'Youth Clubs' for participants to gain knowledge and expertise from these settings. This additional support is an increased cost which needs addressing as they do not want to deter non-traditional settings from applying and identifying participants. They see this as a very positive position.

- A further challenge has arisen due to the mapping exercise, which highlighted many areas with no Youth Clubs. This is creating several problems:
 - A bigger gap between those very well-established Youth Clubs, with paid staff and established Youth Club provision, and many areas of Cumbria with little or no Youth Clubs. They do not have anybody identified to attend the training, no infrastructure to consider applying for funding, no venue, nothing. It could be argued that these are the communities the Better Tomorrows Programme ought to prioritise, but the current model does not address this issue.
- The Better Tomorrows Programme was originally written as an online offer through the NYA and subsequently changed to face-to-face delivery. The costs to CYA have increased from a strategic and operational perspective, and they have committed many additional staff hours to the project.

Cumbria Youth Alliance provided a personal "story of change" to demonstrate a significant difference made to the life of an individual or group.

Steve¹⁴ had been a volunteer with his local youth group [...] as a teenager and had been employed as a sessional youth worker. As a qualified professional, he has now been employed on a contract with great benefits to his self-esteem. He is unable to drive, so living in rural Cumbria, his opportunities have been limited but is now able to fulfil his ambition and potential while working locally in his first-choice profession. The group employing him has gained a first-class employee and has been able to make full use of his capabilities for the first time, thus benefiting the young people attending their sessions.

Individual Cohorts

There were two cohorts within Year 1:

Cohort 1 began on 3rd March 2022 at Cleator Moor Youth & Community Centre and brought together a range of workers from different organisations, predominantly in the north, west and east of the County. Delivery was face-to-face and once per week for 12 weeks.

There were 14 candidates (4 x L2 and 10 x L3) who all completed the course, the workbooks, observations and professional discussions. This gives a 100% completion rate for cohort 1.

Moderation processes took longer than anticipated, with certificates arriving just before Christmas in 2022.

Cohort 2 began in Barrow on 13th September 2022 at Hindpool Community Centre. Again, delivery was over 12 weeks, completing on 6th December. 20 candidates initially enrolled, 14 of whom started the programme, all at L3. Of this 14:

¹⁴ Pseudonym

- 9 completed the course and submitted their portfolios for assessment and moderation.¹⁵
- 2 completed most of the course but did not submit their portfolios. They plan to join cohort 4 to complete the work. They will be counted within the 4th cohort reports.
- 3 did not complete the course.

This gives a 64% completion rate for cohort 2, and an overall completion rate of 82% for Year 1 (n = 23/28).

CYA reported this was a more problematic delivery than the first cohort, with various reasons for non-completion, including having other commitments or external factors that meant they did not have time. The main reason they picked up on was organisational support. When Learning Agreement meetings took place before the course began, workloads, support and backing from organisations were highlighted several times, and trainers re-iterated this throughout the course. In particular, there were problems with non-youth work organisations funded by Better Tomorrows, not having the infrastructure to understand the course and/or the qualification.

Of the five who completed the course but not the portfolio: two said they wanted to complete the qualification with their line manager's support and asked to defer the moderation process to one of the future cohorts; the other three may request to defer completion. This presents a range of issues for learners and staff, as between cohorts learners will not have an allocated assessor or assessor support; in effect, it may be like starting again.

The training team identified that there need to be some amendments to the learning agreement, more clearly setting out the requirements – and demands - of the course. One of the main issues was that some organisations appear to be not committing to giving their employees/volunteers sufficient time to undertake the work needed. This time needs to be allocated on top of attendance at the course. It is estimated that candidates from cohort 2 took an average of 4-5 hours. There were also some questions about whether some organisations were meeting the 60 hours of youth work needed to support the course.

Going forward into year 2, with cohort 3 having started in April 2023, there are some key learning points:

- The day will be 10 am-4 pm, and the Training team will stress how important it is to follow the correct process for time off, extensions on work and deadline dates at the Learning Agreement meetings.
- It is important to clarify that managers and supervisors are adequately equipped to support staff and volunteers through the process.

¹⁵ 8 completed on time, the ninth had an extended deadline.

1.1 How effective was the youth work training in readying youth workers to support young people in Cumbria?

Despite the initial delays, 22 youth workers were trained in Year 1 of the programme, with another five completing the face-to-face learning and seven accessing some (but not all) of the training. This represents 34 youth workers being more skilled than they were before the start of the Better Tomorrows Programme and, therefore, more prepared to support young people. The delivery model takes a localised approach, which means that learning is focused on young people in Cumbria. The overall aim (Theory of Change, page 3) is for more than 100 experienced youth workers to deliver high-quality youth work practice in Cumbria. Year 1 has contributed 34 to this, leaving an additional 66+ to be supported to develop their skills during the remaining two years of the programme.

Taking the year as a whole, the completion rate is 82%. Cohort two had a completion rate of 64%, compared to the 100% completion rate of cohort one. There was a range of contributing factors for this, and it is apparent that the Better Tomorrows Programme team quickly responded to this and explored alternative delivery models for future cohorts. The delay in assessing and moderating portfolios is of concern, which reflects the current shortage of JNC-qualified youth workers who are also trained in assessment and moderation. The Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications are recognised within the role of Youth Support Worker.¹⁶ Full recognition as a Professional Youth Worker requires completion of level 6 or 7 training to gain the status of qualified youth worker. There are indications from the reports and case studies that some of the newly qualified workers are interested in continuing their professional development, for example, moving on from Level 2 to 3 or exploring Level 4+ options; however, for others, particularly those on sessional/part-time or voluntary contracts, the training provided by Better Tomorrows is sufficient to meet their needs.

1.2 Which aspects of the youth work training and development were the most helpful and why?

From the information provided to the evaluator,¹⁷ the aspects of the training and development that appear to be more helpful are summarised as follows:

- **EXPECTATIONS:** Clear expectations of the programme regarding time commitment for all elements (attendance at face-to-face sessions, portfolio completion, observations and assessments).
- **LEVEL:** Check carefully that candidates are ready for the level they are applying for and understand the differences between levels.

¹⁶ <https://www.nya.org.uk/career-in-youth-work/getting-qualified/>

¹⁷ Ideally, this question would have been asked individually of each candidate, and each member of the training delivery team.

- **PLACEMENT SUPPORT:** Employers understand the need to provide sufficient time for learning, practice hours and supervision/guidance for reflective practice.
- **INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS:** Candidates need to be motivated to undertake the training, want to learn and value the opportunity. It is a significant time commitment and must be balanced with other home/work/personal commitments.
- **ONGOING DEVELOPMENT:** Level 2/3 provides a strong foundation for practice; however, to deliver quality youth work, there needs to be an understanding of and a commitment to reflective practice and ongoing skill development to be able to keep up with the ever-changing world of young people.

2 Youth Work Jobs

2.1 How many youth worker posts were created, and in which organisations?

As with training, for reporting purposes, Year 1 is from the Better Tomorrows Programme inception to 28 February 2023. During this time, 18 organisations were funded, with one securing a continuation grant (CandoFM Community Radio) and another securing a second grant (Pride in North Cumbria). As a result of the funding, 25 new youth worker posts were created in Year 1. This is summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Organisations funded in Year 1 of the programme

Awarded Date	Organisation	Posts Funded
22/02/2022	Aspatia Dreamscheme (3 years)	1
22/02/2022	Keswick Youth Centre Services (3 years)	1
22/02/2022	Multicultural Cumbria (3 years)	1
22/02/2022	Shackles Off Youth Project (3 years)	1
22/02/2022	Women's Community Matters (3 years)	1
22/02/2022	Longtown Memorial Hall and Community Centre (3 years)	3
22/02/2022	CandoFM Community Radio (1 year)	2
10/05/2022	Brathay Trust (3 years)	1
10/05/2022	Pride in North Cumbria (PiNC) (1 year)	1
10/05/2022	South Whitehaven Youth Partnership (3 years)	2
10/05/2022	CancerCare North Lancashire & South Cumbria (1 year)	1
19/07/2022	Cowran Care Limited (3 years) – appointee resigned after 7 weeks	1
20/09/2022	Carnegie Theatre Trust (3 years)	1
20/09/2022	Drop Zone Youth Projects (3 years)	1
20/09/2022	Youthability Youth Services & Walney Community Centre (3 years)	2
20/09/2022	SoundWave (1 year)	1
13/12/2022	North Allerdale Development Trust Limited (NADT) (3 years)	2
21/02/2023	CandoFM Community Radio (continuation grant) (2 years)	-
21/02/2023	Pride in North Cumbria (PiNC) (new project) (2 years)	1
21/02/2023	Euphoric Circus (3 years)	1
		25

Of the 18 organisations funded in Year 1, 14 submitted end of year monitoring reports; one (Cancer Care) submitted a full report, as it was a one-year project; three organisations have an extended reporting deadline and will be included in the Year 2 report.

Five organisations reported delays in getting started due to time taken for staff recruitment and induction.

2.2 Who became youth workers in Cumbria, and how did the Better Tomorrows opportunity impact their lives?

There were 25 new youth work appointments in Year 1 as a result of the funding, with one, unfortunately, leaving soon afterwards, whose hours will be split across existing members of staff who will be undertaking additional/new work.

Table 3 (below) summarises the impact of the Better Tomorrows Programme for the youth workers and volunteers involved. Evidently, there has been a significant impact, with 149 people reporting an increased sense of belonging in their community and 55 people reporting increased skills & knowledge.

Table 3: Quantitative data for youth workers and volunteers

Youth Workers / Volunteers:		
Programme	No. of additional qualified youth workers as a result of the funding ¹⁸	23
	No. of new volunteers as a direct result of the funding	30
	No. of people reporting that they feel an increased sense of belonging in their community	149
Employment	No. of people employed as a direct result of the funding ¹⁹	24
	No. of people who have gained employment after funding	31
	No. of people who have gone on to further employment in youth work	3
	No. of people reporting that they feel better prepared for work	16
Education ²⁰	Total no. of hours of training/education undertaken	1086
	No. of people progressing onto further education/training	6
	No. of people who undertook Level 2 accreditation	12
	No. of people who undertook Level 3 accreditation	10
	No. of people who gained an accredited qualification	14
Skills	No. of people reporting increased practical skills	72
	No. of people reporting increased interpersonal (social, communication & relationship) skills	77
	No. of people reporting increased skills & knowledge	55

¹⁸ This refers to a minimum of L2 training.

¹⁹ One appointee resigned after 7 weeks due to personal circumstances.

²⁰ See previous section for a more detailed discussion about education.

Section four of the report provides detailed case studies of three new youth workers. Here, exemplar quotes from the Year 1 monitoring reports give insight into some of the other youth workers supported by the Better Tomorrows Programme and the impact they have had within their organisations.

“Having the new staff on board has made a huge difference for the lead youth worker, it has enabled him to focus on managing the project as a whole whilst also being able to deliver with the support of the new staff. It has increased the morale in the team and enabled us to plan our sessions in advance and develop our project.”

“It has made a huge difference to our youth worker's youth work practice and confidence in dealing with different situations. We have had numerous conversations with the young people with lots of positive feedback; the relationships that are being built are priceless. Some of the feedback from the wider community include: Parents, thanking us for providing the extra sessions, which provide the young people with positivity and purpose. There has been less reports of antisocial behaviour too.”

“Like most services in the area it was hard to recruit new staff, we feel this is mainly due to the influx in job opportunities at [large non-youth work organisation] which are offering very good packages. We did send out over 100 job packs but only had a handful of applicants apply. We are happy that we chose the correct people for the roles and look forward to seeing them develop in their new roles.”

Having spoken directly with some of the individual youth workers in informal interviews (see section 4, case studies) it is clear that the Better Tomorrows Programme significantly impacts their personal and professional development. It would be good to hear from more youth workers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this.

2.3 How many youth work sessions were delivered, and of what nature?

Table 3 below shows that 1,046 young people (11-25) engaged in the programme, with 3,670 hours of youth work provision provided through 171 new youth sessions and 23 other services offered to participants. The opportunities offered are diverse and wide-ranging and include:

- Outreach work.
- Detached work.
- Group activities in schools and colleges and enrichment activities.
- Centre-based and youth clubs.
- Direct 1-1 work to young men and women, tailored to meet their specific needs.
- Song, rap and lyric writing.
- Food and cooking sessions.

- Healthy relationships, peer mentoring and peer support programmes.
- Specialist groups for specific disabilities.
- Issue-based informal educational workshops, e.g., risk-taking behaviour, knife crime, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), and online safety.
- School holiday provision and trips.
- Circus skills, performing arts, theatre, gaming and crafts.
- Volunteering and community projects, e.g. litter picking and helping at community events.

This list provides a flavour of what has been offered across Year 1 of the Better Tomorrows programme. Exemplar quotes provide more insight into the nature of these activities and the creativity and flexibility of youth work approaches being used:

“... the Detached Youth Work programme is focussed around relationship building - staff have engaged with 168 young people aged 11+ years, across the [...] area. During this time, staff have offered advice and guidance; this has mainly been around safety during the winter months, as detached is different from centre-based youth provision, staff are meeting young people in dark parks or getting the bus home late at night. One young person was scared one evening and staff walked her to the bus and waited with her. These 'little' things are what are making a difference locally while establishing strong relationships. Staff are also working with McDonalds, staff have been given the 'ok' by management to use their premises as a meeting point or a place to engage - this is one of the biggest hot spots within [the area] and over the past month this seem to be working positively and we are seeing repeat engagement.”

“... activities such as coach trips, local nature walks, laser quest, craft activities, sharing food, and beginning to decorate the youth room together to help give the young people ownership of the space.”

“... enabled organisations supporting young people across Cumbria to have more knowledge about processes that need to be followed, ensuring our young people access high quality provision and are safeguarded. Organisations have been able to employ more staff to increase their reach and capacity, engaging more young people in youth work activities.”

What is evident from the individual monitoring reports is the importance of establishing and maintaining networks of professional relationships and working collaboratively to support young people. As one report noted, “... some young people have never travelled outside of [town] let alone the county of Cumbria...”. The activities offered have helped broaden their horizons and raise the aspirations of youth workers and young people.

3 Improving Young People’s Lives

3.1 Who accessed youth work funded via Better Tomorrows?

In Year 1 of the programme, 1,046 engaged in the programme through a total of 3,670 hours of youth work provision. Young people who have accessed youth work funded via Better Tomorrows have come from across Cumbria, north, south, east and west. They have attended sessions in health care settings, youth clubs, theatres, schools, community centres and engaged with detached work on the streets. Some sessions have been open access, and others have taken a more targeted, focused approach. Some young people have been identified as NEET (not in education, employment or training), school refusers or at risk of exclusion; others are dealing with issues such as poor mental and/or physical health, difficult family relationships, poverty, low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness.

As one report highlighted, some of the young people they worked with,

... had little or no aspirations and in a lot of cases achieving poor or no grades. They felt there was no point in looking for, or applying for, further education/employment opportunities; they have basically ‘written themselves off’ and had the mindset that they were not good enough.

3.2 What impact did the youth work have on young people in the short term?

Table 4 shows that engagement in the activities provided has supported young people’s perceptions of functioning well: 69% of participants report increased interpersonal skills, and 39% report increased practical skills. Regarding their perceptions of feeling good, 68.5% report increased confidence and 56% report feeling an increased sense of belonging in their community. Recent research (ONS 2020) indicates that young people aged 16 to 24 in the UK may feel more disconnected from their communities - a decreasing trend since 2014 –a notable achievement.

Table 4: Summary of impact on young people

Young People:		
Programme	No. of young people (11-25) engaged in the programme	1046
	Total no. of hours of youth work provision provided	3670
	No. of other services offered to participants	23
Functioning Well	No. of people whose engagement in education/learning has improved	391
	No. of people who went into further and/or higher education as a direct result of participation.	31
	No. of people reporting increased interpersonal (social, communication & relationship) skills	724
	No. of people reporting they feel better prepared for work	59
	No. of people reporting increased practical skills	406

Feeling Good	No. of people reporting that they feel an increased sense of belonging in their community	590	
	No. of people reporting increased confidence in keeping themselves safe	453	
	No. of people reporting an increase in personal aspirations and goals	331	
	No. of people reporting an increase in:	Resilience	444
		Competence	412
		Optimism	481
		self-assurance	579
self-care		544	
	Confidence	717	
Community:			
Community	No. of <i>new</i> youth sessions created	171	
	No. of people reporting that they feel safer in their communities	558	
	No. of people reporting better access to services or support	597	

Less than 6% report feeling better prepared for work; however this may be more a reflection of the age of the young people engaged, many of whom are still at school/college. It is important to note that 43% report increased confidence in keeping themselves safe, which may help them cope with contemporary concerns, such as potential exposure to sexual exploitation and online abuse (Barnardo's 2023). Other key contemporary concerns for practitioners outlined in Barnardo's report include:

- Increasing mental health issues and insufficient support.
- Poverty, financial instability, and inequality.
- Lack of safety and cohesion in the home.
- Poor transition between services for young people.

The need to address these concerns is apparent in the Year 1 monitoring reports, as shown in these exemplar quotes:

... played a critical role in promoting learning, enhancing aspirations, and nurturing self-worth in these young individuals. The project provided a platform for youth voices and promoted social interaction and shared experiences. As a result, participants could exchange ideas, enjoy time with friends, and become part of an inclusive community that encouraged active societal involvement.

... improved the health and wellbeing of young people locally, improved their abilities to manage their mental health issues, raised self-confidence and knowledge of healthy relationships ... develop their communications skills, enabling them to grow new friendships, rebuild difficult family relationships and become better connected to their wider community.

... enabled young people to have their own safe space 'to be themselves' outside of school, [...] opportunities to learn and build a wide array of life skills and positive behaviours. This has helped young people to identify and engage in building positive relationships within their local communities, and work towards becoming the 'best versions of themselves'.

We get feedback from parents that their children are growing in confidence, we see them developing peer support and friendships within the group, and we have regular feedback/evaluation sessions where we find out where things are going for us and adapt our services in order to give them ownership and involvement in their groups.

... messages highlight the tangible positive changes parents have observed in their children.

... had numerous conversations with young people with lots of positive feedback; the relationships that are being built are priceless [...] Parents, thanking us for providing the extra sessions, which provide the young people with positivity and purpose.... less reports of antisocial behaviour too.

One notable difference within the group was that two of the young people with neurodivergent needs have become very close friends ... they would not have met each other if it wasn't for the project.

The monitoring reports show that a number of challenges have been encountered over the year, which relate to the diverse needs of the young people they are engaging. As one report highlighted, 'staff have noticed an increase in numbers of young people attending that have additional needs and /or diagnosed SEND', which requires additional support and/or resources. This is an unintended outcome, as it was not included in the monitoring reports, and the organisation has now added this to enable them to measure the need.

Another report shared:

We have faced many challenges this year, particularly due to the vulnerability of the young people we are currently working with. The main issue has been of managing the large amount of challenging behaviour we have in one group. Youth workers are used to dealing with challenging behaviour, however having so many in one group has been immensely difficult and has needed a full range of interventions.

3.3. How might this contribute to longer-term outcomes in their lives?

Youth work interventions such as those provided through the Better Tomorrows Programme can have short-term positive impacts on young people's lives, as discussed in the previous section, and these short-term effects can contribute to longer-term outcomes. The opportunities provided for young people to develop a wide range of skills, including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, can enhance their abilities to navigate challenges, pursue further education or employment, and succeed in their future endeavours.

As the monitoring reports demonstrate, positive experiences and achievements can boost young people's self-confidence and self-esteem in the short term. This increased confidence can lead to a more positive self-perception, improved self-efficacy, and a greater belief in their capabilities. Such beliefs can have long-term benefits, enabling young people to take on new challenges, set ambitious goals, and persevere in the face of obstacles. The youth work sessions have provided opportunities for young people to connect with peers, mentors, and supportive adults. The relationships they have developed can foster a sense of belonging and support in the short term (as evidenced in the reports), creating a network of positive influences.

These connections can influence longer-term outcomes, as young people may continue to receive guidance, mentorship, and support from their network even after the Better Tomorrow Programme ends. However, it is important to note that the longer-term impact of youth work is also influenced by external factors such as family support, socioeconomic circumstances, and broader societal conditions. Nonetheless, the short-term positive impacts mentioned above can create a foundation for positive development and contribute to longer-term outcomes in young people's lives.

4 Youth Worker Case Studies

Individual Interview with Sam²¹

Sam is a youth worker in Cumbria. Since 2019, she has been volunteering at an organisation that aims to make a positive difference in the lives of women, young girls aged 13 and above and young boys aged 13-17 in their local area. Volunteering within a group for young people showed her this was what she wanted for a career, and the Better Tomorrows' funding provided her with a paid role in the organisation.

I'm a project assistant, but basically, I do one-to-one support - emotional support - and I do group sessions that are like structured and targeted and work on mental health, well-being, identity, things like that. And I do groups in schools, so I go into school and do more like specific. So if the school says they need work on this, then I'll develop sessions to kind of suit that.

People come to the group for a variety of support needs, including mental health, family issues, relationship support, "... people who are at risk of different things". Sam shared that the centre recently had a new kitchen, and she is looking forward to cooking with young people. The group also works with external organisations, like the local Wildlife Trust, on specific short programmes, workshops and activities.

Sam has completed a range of short training courses to support her practice through Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership, Cumbria Domestic Abuse Champions' Network, and the local Further Education College. She joined the first training cohort provided through the Better Tomorrows Programme, successfully completing the 12-week NVQ Level 2 in Youth Work. At the time of the interview, she planned to start Level 3 in 2023 and would like to continue to gain a JNC qualification, as she recognises that this,

... would obviously open a lot more doors. Yeah. And you know, it would be good to have the qualifications... Because that's what I want to do. I just want to be a youth worker...

Sam enjoyed the training course; however, she recognised that others in her cohort found it challenging:

a lot of people struggled and a lot of people, even now we have like a group, a group chat and from different people here on the course... and a lot of people now are still making amendments and still trying to get it ready.

I think... If your employers aren't very... umm... what's the word, you know, like forthcoming and trying to, like help you have the time to do the stuff and... and I think it's like your own initiative as well, isn't it? Because I think a lot of people kind of complained that we weren't

²¹ Pseudonym

really getting enough time to do the workbooks and they were finding that we didn't really have a lot of time out of the sessions to do it.

In contrast, Sam felt supported by her workplace, where she was given a couple of hours each week, which she added to by studying in her own time:

... it's just taking your own initiative really. So I found it, OK and I completed it on the deadline ... I didn't have any extensions or anything... but pretty much everybody else needed an extension because, yeah, I think a lot of people kind of thought it would just do itself, but obviously not...

Her comments highlight the importance of being clear about expectations when undertaking a 12-week (or longer) programme of study, in contrast to the less demanding requirements of a short course, where most (if not all) the learning takes place within the session. A longer course takes more commitment and the confidence to study independently. One of the challenges she encountered, was around the structure of the programme,

it was a little bit jumbled up ... if it was more structured, I think people would have found it easier... because, say one week, we would learn something that would relate to question 27, the next week, we'll learn something that will relate to Question 6 and stuff like that. And so I think people weren't kind of registering that actually, you know, you need to put that in there and because it's right at the back. But you know, so I feel like if it was more like... in a good order... I think that people might have got on with it a bit better... just because it didn't really make sense in the order that we learned stuff.

Sam made time at home to understand what needed to be done by when and where it went in the workbook; however, a clearer, more explicitly logical structure would have been beneficial. For some, it was also not always apparent why they were learning something, if it did not directly relate to the workbook:

...there was quite a lot of things that we learned that wasn't in the workbook, but it was interesting stuff. And I think you should know that if you're going to do your work and... but because we're in such a short time scale, a lot of people kind of found like... They wanted that time to work. Do some work on the workbook or wanted that time to learn something that's going to be relevant to the workbook.

... because we did spend a lot of time like on other things that were still really interesting, like case studies and you know, different laws and things like that, and it comes into work book sometimes... but some of it, you know didn't... But like I say it's stuff that you should know anyways if you're doing this, so it wouldn't be a thing, so it had some good conversations come up from that and... But like I say, I think a lot of people just wanted it done ... didn't want to waste any time, but I never stopped working, so I was fine with it...

Sam's contract lasts until 2024 (at the time of the interview, she was not sure of the exact dates). She is hopeful that it will be extended and that she will be able to take on a more senior role. However, she has a young child and, even with family support, feels it will be easier to do more hours once her child is older and she can access more nursery care. In the UK, there is currently a lack of affordable nursery provision, a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted solution involving increased Government funding, support for nursery staff, and increased awareness of the benefits of early childhood education. The UK government provides funding for nursery education for children aged three and four (Sam's child is younger than this), but this funding does not cover the full cost of provision. Providers rely on additional funding sources, such as private fees or donations, to keep their nurseries running. A recent survey indicated that around 540,000 mothers like Sam have been prevented from entering paid work due to a lack of appropriate childcare, 880,000 have reduced their working hours, while 470,000 have quit their jobs.²² Sam is ambitious. She wants to progress in her career and aspires to be a youth worker/project worker rather than an assistant.

When asked what it is about youth work that appeals to her, Sam explained,

I just like making a difference to people. I like talking to people. I like making someone smile, making someone laugh. And I like knowing that someone is comfortable with me and feeling that they can trust me ...

I've had a lot of issues when I was a teenager, when I was younger... and I always accessed different services, different mental health services like CAMHS and things like that. I accessed the centre that I'm working for now, for one-to-one support and stuff like that. So I know what it's like to kind of have a lot of stuff going on and to just need somebody that's not... somebody that's not directly involved in your kind of... all your rubbish... to speak to.

Now, she feels that she is making a difference for the young people she works with. One young woman she has been supporting shared her journal with Sam, and entries revealed that she had moved on from writing things like "I don't wanna be here... I hate my life. I wanted to kill myself..." to a more positive position, "things are gonna get better... and all work out in the end ... it'll be ok... and stuff like that..." This shows the impact of quality support from a skilled youth worker. Sam attributes this to, "... it's just that friendly face, isn't it? And that person.... reassuring...", showing empathy with a young person who is dealing with similar issues to those she had when growing up, drawing on the wisdom she has gained from her lived experiences. However, there is the potential to minimise her impact by taking this stance: what she offers is more than 'just a friendly face' (although this is important); it is the skills and knowledge that she brings to sessions that enable the young person to be more positive about their life. The quality of the relationship she has developed means the young person feels able to share her journal with Sam.

²² <https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/growing-pains>

There has been a positive impact on Sam too. She feels well-supported in her role, has enjoyed the training programme and is able to use her learning to inform her practice:

... to be fair with you... I was a little bit... I thought ohh I'm already a youth worker, so I'm probably not going to learn much more. You know, I'm already doing it. But I learned loads more and it's helped definitely... learned a lot... just a lot more about how the system works and things like that and which I already knew a bit, but learnt a bit more about that. And also... the different types of youth work and how you know, having the structure and stuff like that and... yeah, I feel like I've applied a lot of the things I've learned... having more knowledge on different things that I didn't really know...

This is an example of Praxis. Sam is putting into practice the theories, principles, and concepts learned through the Better Tomorrows training - taking what she has learned and using it to make a positive impact for the young people she works with.²³ The training and employment opportunities provided by Better Tomorrows have been life-changing for her. As a young person, she was unable to attend mainstream school due to extreme anxiety, with limited capability for learning or work. The support she has received, and her own determination, courage and initiative, have given her the motivation and confidence to overcome her own challenges with mental and physical health,

...it's changed my whole kind of perspective on life, really, because, you know, I just thought I'm never going to be able to work. I'm never going to be able to overcome this. But now I'm in a place where I'm so comfortable and I know what I'm doing. I think it's because I'm confident in what I'm doing. And I know that. I know what I'm doing and so really enjoy it.

Sam feels confident in supporting young people and inspire them to make the changes they want to make in their lives.

This case study closes with her words in response to the question, 'What does quality youth work look like to you?'

I think it's somebody who is caring, is kind, is compassionate. It's somebody who has the young person's interest, like their best interest at heart, and it's somebody who is passionate about it and they want to protect young people. I think that's like quality youth work, isn't it? It's about making a difference and impacting their lives in a positive way.

²³ Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (revised). New York: Continuum.

Paired Interview with Michelle and Sara²⁴

Michelle and Sara are youth workers in Cumbria. They were predominantly based in youth centres, and the funding from Better Tomorrows enabled services to be expanded to include new posts doing detached youth work. They told me,

... there's a lot of young people on the streets that we don't engage with in youth club... we wanted to reach out to new ones, the wider community.... when the opportunity came up, we grabbed it with two hands and we couldn't wait to get out... couldn't wait, we just wanted to get out and... you've seen them all on the streets... they don't all want to come to youth club... (Michelle)

... there's some that just don't feel comfortable in there, in the youth club settings, so to be able to engage with them outside and still give them the opportunities as what the ones that do in centre. Yeah. It's, you know, it's quite rewarding... (Sara)

They are passionate about detached youth work, clearly relishing the opportunities this provides for them to reach and engage with new young people. They wear a uniform of matching jackets and matching walking boots and carry ID so that young people know they are youth workers. They have a few main meeting points where they anticipate encountering young people, where they “hang around for 15-20 minutes, and if there’s nobody there, we’ll move on...” The young people look forward to seeing them, although they admitted finding it “... quite surprising the amount of people that we have met interacted with...”

... we just let them know them know we're there to support them... (Sara)

... because they think they've got nobody. They can't tell the teachers, they can't tell their parents. So when we turn up and they've got something to say or to talk about, we're there... (Michelle)

...and they know we're there... and they actually love talking to us about everything, everything, if there's any issues or anything that we can signpost them too... It's great that they think, ohh, it's Michelle and Sara... (Sara)

... they'll shout at us from like from miles away, it's Michelle and Sara... we'll go over and we'll take out hot chocolates with biscuits... or one of the groups... we found he had a punctured tyre... so now we've got a puncture repair kit in our bag just in case it happens again... (Michelle)

... if we find somebody stuck with a flat tyre we can repair it... (Sara)

... or well, we can give them the kit... they can repair it...(Michelle)

²⁴ Pseudonyms

Their work is varied: a wide age range of young people (including 18-19-year-olds), with diverse interests and support needs, for example: asking for support when they have been “...kicked out of college” and exploring options with young people who are not regularly attending school. In addition to their street-based approach, Michelle and Sara use social media (Facebook) so that young people can contact them and find out about the support that is available. They remind young people that,

... they're always welcome in the centre if they wanted to... if that's not what they wanted to do, that we would be there every week, to support them and meet them for any sort of support that they needed... even if they didn't have any issues or anything, we're just there anyways... (Sara)

... for the craic, for conversation... (Michelle)

... and just to check in on them that they're OK... (Sara)

However, the young people they talk with are reluctant to go to the youth centres, particularly those who are not attending school/college regularly. They prefer to spend their time in the parks, sports areas, railway arches and under bridges. In nice weather, Michelle and Sara take footballs (and other sporting equipment and games) out with them, along with snacks and drinks. Detached work is not about ‘getting young people off the streets’; it is about recognising that young people have as much right to be there as other aged people, encouraging them to engage in positive activities and providing much-needed support.

Michelle and Sara are locals, “born and bred [in the area]” they know, and are known by, many of the young people in the area, something they recognise is important,

... they find it a little bit easier to engage with us... it helps that we're from around here and we've grown up around here - we know what it's like - we know what there is a lot of and what there isn't a lot of... (Michelle)

... because there's not a lot for them around here, is there? No... (Sara)

Through their detached work, Sara and Michelle have brought together a group of young people who have planned a trip to a neighbouring large city. Young people have,

... done everything... (Michelle)

... they're amazing, done all the PowerPoints... (Sara)

... the trains, booked the meal, they've done everything... (Michelle)

... they have to budget for everything and they've done it all themselves... (Sara)

This is a real achievement for the young people, who have developed additional skills and have something they can include on a CV. It is also an achievement for Sara and Michelle, who hope,

... the word will get out that they've done this... and then maybe more will come and say I wanna do that... can I have a go? (Michelle)

Detached work is difficult, especially in inclement weather, when they have to search for shelter; they would like somewhere in town – “like just a room or something” – where they can get out of the rain. However, this needs to be somewhere other than a purpose-built youth centre or school. It needs to be somewhere young people feel safe to engage on their terms, where they feel comfortable. Sara and Michelle see the town centre as a neutral place, avoiding postcode issues/divides that prevent young people from mixing with others from the ‘wrong postcode area’.

They have identified a church building where young people tend to gather,

...we found out like one of the... churches in town... it has outdoor like plugs... like a socket on the back of the building. So we found out that that's where they go to charge their phones... But do you know what? We wouldn't have known without detached... but we found out... (Michelle)

... we have found out quite a lot, haven't we? (Sara)

And we wouldn't know that. This is why they're going in there. So it's like there is a reason, they're not going in there to cause trouble or mess about, they're going simply to charge their phones... (Michelle)

Detached youth work provides opportunities to listen to young people – to *really* listen, which is about more than simply hearing their voices. It involves noticing what they do not say, as well as the words they speak, their behaviour and actions, drawing on broader contextual knowledge and practical wisdom to develop understanding. Youth workers are in a privileged position to bear witness and give testimony to these experiences – to be able to advocate on their behalf.²⁵ Young people have practical reasons for choosing where to ‘hang out’: they seek out places where they can feel safe, escape the worst of the weather and access resources. It is important that they can do this,

... say they're walking home alone at night and there's no charge on their phone. That is a massive safety issue... for there to be a charging point somewhere for children to be able to charge their phone in the case of emergency I think is mega. (Sara)

²⁵ Hayes, T. A., & Prince, H. (2019). Shared-story approaches in outdoor studies: the HEAR ‘listening’ methodological model. *Research Methods in Outdoor Studies*, pp. 153-163. Routledge. Available: https://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/4486/1/Hayes_SharedStoryApproaches.pdf

Michelle and Sara shared that they had enjoyed the training they had undertaken to date and were keen to do more to continue developing their skills. They consider themselves 'newbies' in the world of detached youth work,

... it's gonna become more and more and more familiar and around here because obviously, like with being new, people aren't aware of, weren't aware of us doing the detached... the more we're out, the more people seeing us... (Sara)

... the community are actually noticing us as well... (Michelle)

... it's just our first year and I think I think we've done well so far. So I think it's only just going to get better really... (Sara)

They are exploring how to work more closely with other organisations, including the Police, to identify how they may support engagement in 'problem areas'. However, they are clear about their role in this, drawing on their values as youth workers,

... let us know where these problem areas are now, with the young people, we will go and have word with them... but at the end of the day, if they're just sitting and they're just congregating and they're just playing ... and they're not making a mess, we're not gonna move them. We're not gonna ask them to move... [they're] not doing anything wrong... (Michelle)

... we're going to them [young people], to let them know that we're here... And that they have us for that support and that, you know, they aren't just a lost cause... (Sara)

Michelle and Sara are hopeful that there will soon be somewhere new for young people in the centre of town, a cyber café where they can meet friends and access the internet. But they would settle for a room that they could use, where they could take the young people they meet,

... say come on, we'll go and get a hot chocolate... they're stepping in and they're looking at what's happening, going on around. But they feel safe because of us, they know who we are, we've made this relationship with them. We're with you... it's somewhere safe, somewhere warm, somewhere where they can get a drink or even some food you know... (Michelle)

From the conversation, it was clear they are passionate about the work they do, they see it as vital for the safety and wellbeing of young people in the area, as well as providing informal education and guidance. They are on the streets, engaging with some of the most vulnerable young people, developing supportive, trusting relationships, helping them in practical, caring ways:

...it's eye opening... some of them haven't even got a home to go to after school - they're still in uniform – whether it's that the home environment isn't safe or they don't feel safe or

they don't get on with their parents or whatever... we're meeting up with them, and we sometimes like to try and like take food with us... (Michelle)

... or carry a little bit of money with us in case we need to take them for a burger... (Sara)

... because some of these kids have had nothing to eat... it's so hard, and just sometimes, you know, a pasty... is what they need ... or a 99 pence burger... at least we know they've had something... because, at the end of the day, they're expected to go to school, but you can't learn, you can't focus if you've got nothing in your stomach, if you've had nothing to eat... (Michelle)

... have they had anything to eat all day? We don't know, that's what we're trying to find out... (Sara)

...and that's basically us, that's what we do. (Michelle)

Recent research estimates that 'More than 1 in 4 of all children in the UK now live in poverty, with millions facing the risk of going hungry'²⁶, '26% of young people do not have access to a laptop or similar device' and '53% of people offline cannot afford an average monthly broadband bill'.²⁷ The ongoing cost of living crisis exacerbates this, with families struggling to provide children with food, clothing and warm homes. Digital poverty leads to exclusion, making it difficult to access education, job opportunities and social activities – to look on Facebook and find out about detached youth work. It is heartening to hear that young people in the area have found some solutions to this by identifying places where they can charge their phones (a local Church building) and access free Wi-Fi. But this is not enough.

Sara and Michelle appreciate the support provided by Better Tomorrows, which has enabled them to undertake detached youth work and provided training to develop their skills and knowledge. They are ambitious. They can see they are making a difference and want to do more,

... a detached van would be absolutely fantastic... that we could just park up and get all the kids on there... ..we probably need a couple of years under our belts before that... before we put in for a van. (Michelle)

However, they are also pragmatic and agreed they may have to start with a wheelbarrow or shopping trolley,

We can fill it up with drinks, biscuits and snacks... we'll get one of those little trollies, that you pull behind... a Nana trolley... (Sara)

²⁶ Barnardo's (2022). *At what cost? The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on children and young people*. Available: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-10/At%20What%20Cost%20-%20the%20impact%20of%20the%20cost%20of%20living%20crisis%20on%20children%20and%20young%20people.pdf>

²⁷ Digital Poverty Alliance (2023). *Digital poverty: The Facts*. Available: <https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/>

This case study closes with their words in response to the question, 'What does quality youth work look like to you?'

... you've got to be approachable, always be approachable and let them talk... Don't talk, let them talk... (Michelle)

... being there for them, letting them know that they can approach you for any reason... they've become that comfortable with you, that they feel they can tell you anything... and when it gets to that point, then you know that you've given them quality youth work. (Sara)

5 Summary and conclusions from Year 1

This has been an ambitious and complex programme to develop and begin to deliver across Cumbria, taking concerted efforts from the steering group and all organisations involved in its delivery. The funding has enabled the creation of new youth worker posts, with accompanying upskilling of staff through accredited training. This is a much-needed investment in youth work and follows on from the decimation of youth services through austerity measures for more than a decade:

Funding to youth services by local authorities in England and Wales saw a real terms decline of 70 per cent between 2010/11 and 2018/19. Since 2010/11, youth services such as youth clubs and youth workers have been cut by 69 per cent. More than 4,500 youth work jobs have been cut and 750 youth centres closed.²⁸

With regards to the training, this year of the programme has highlighted the countywide shortage of suitably qualified assessors and moderators in youth and community work and the challenges inherent in post-compulsory training. People have competing demands on their time; therefore training needs to be relevant, accessible and of meaning to each individual. This takes understanding, patience and skilful support from the training team. Concerns have been raised that some of the organisations who have applied for funding may need further guidance at the application stage, with questions around organisations' infrastructure, knowledge and expertise in youth work practice. If line managers/supervisors of trainee youth workers are unaware of basic youth work practices, then their support is unlikely to be effective.

The Theory of Change (page 3) identifies a target output from the programme of over 100 level 2 and level 3 qualified youth workers. From the Year 1 monitoring reports:

- 4 completed level 2
- 18 completed level 3

This shows that 78 qualifications remain to reach the target. As Year 1 has demonstrated, it is important to remember that quality youth work training takes time, which is something for the steering group to continue reviewing as the programme proceeds.

²⁸ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/re-thinking-local/re-thinking-local-children-and-young-people/re-thinking-local>

With regards to the provision of additional youth worker roles, the Theory of Change identifies a target output from the programme of over 100 experienced youth workers delivering high-quality youth work practice and 20 youth worker jobs created. From the Year 1 monitoring reports:

- 24 people have been employed as a direct result of the funding
- 31 have gained employment after funding
- 16 people report they feel better prepared for work
- 3 have gone on to further employment in youth work

Therefore, the programme is on track to meet these targets.²⁹

The Theory of Change identifies a target output of 1000 young people accessing youth work. The Year 1 monitoring reports indicate that 1,046 young people have engaged in the programme, clearly already exceeding the target. This is something for the steering group to consider moving forward and to review the target.

With regard to the aim of improving young people's lives, it is too soon to be able to say much with conviction. In the short term, each organisation's monitoring report provides a snapshot of their experiences and provides some testimony as to the impact this has had. However, this is second-hand information, which has been filtered through the monitoring and reporting processes, and therefore may have an inherent bias towards overly optimistic reporting. What can be confidently claimed, based on the evidence provided in the Year 1 monitoring reports, is that *high-quality youth workers are delivering high-quality youth work sessions across Cumbria* (Theory of Change outcome), and there is some evidence of *increased youth capabilities* (Theory of Change outcome).

With two more years of the Better Tomorrows Programme to come, it remains to be seen what difference the Better Tomorrows Programme will make in the longer term. However, the programme is now well established across the County and has started making a genuine difference in the lives of youth workers and the young people they work with.

²⁹ This assumes that there is no overlap in reporting and that the people directly employed, those gaining employment after funding, and those reporting feeling better prepared for work are distinct categories. This is something for the steering group to review going forward.

Suggested areas for review by the steering group

- Review the support provided to organisations applying for funding and ensure they have the appropriate skilled staff to support youth workers.
- Reflect on the learning from Year 1 of the programme and review the output targets in the Theory of Change in use for Year 2. In particular, the number of young people accessing youth work: a target of 1000 over three years, seems low given the achievements of Year 1.
- Review the reporting criteria to ensure that data can be accurately collected regarding the number of experienced youth workers and new youth worker jobs and how these categories are defined.
- Unintended outcome from Year 1: consider adding criteria to the monitoring forms to include reporting the number of young people with additional needs and /or diagnosed SEND and the diversity of these.
- It would be beneficial for the evaluation to include the voice of young people (in the form of stories and direct quotes) to understand what they have made of the opportunities available to them as a result of the Better Tomorrows Programme. This is particularly important for the evaluation to report against the programme's overall aim: Young People in Cumbria experience increased wellbeing “feeling good and functioning well”.

The Year 1 report completes with a quote from David Beeby,

One of the exciting things about the Better Tomorrows Programme is that it has demonstrated the power of over 40 funders working together for the benefit of the young people of Cumbria, achieving a level of positive change that none of us could have imagined on our own.

Appendices

Appendix i: Participant Information Sheet

Title of Research Project: Better Tomorrow Programme Evaluation

Name of Researcher: Dr Tracy Ann Hayes JNC

I am a professionally qualified, experienced youth worker with extensive practical and academic experiences in youth and community work. I have been asked to evaluate the Better Tomorrows (BT) Programme. This is a three-year programme, launched in 2021, to encourage people within Cumbria to become accredited in youth work and substantially increase the number of young people having access to support from youth workers to help them reach their potential. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the training and employment of youth workers through the Better Tomorrows Programme and the impact they have on young people's lives.

The evaluation study uses the following questions:

1 – Training

1.1 How effective was the youth work training in readying youth workers to support young people in Cumbria?

1.2 Which aspects of the youth work training and development were the most helpful and why?

2 - Youth Work Jobs

2.1 How many youth worker posts were created and in which organisations?

2.2 Who became youth workers in Cumbria, and how did the BT opportunity impact their lives?

2.4 How many youth work sessions were delivered, and of what nature?

3 – Improving Young People's Lives

3.1 Who accessed youth work funded via BT?

3.2 What impact did the youth work have on young people in the short term?

3.3. How might this contribute to longer-term outcomes in their lives?

Why have I been invited? You have been identified as a potential participant due to your involvement in the BT Programme.

Do I have to take part? Participation in this study is voluntary, and if you agree to participate, you will be talked through the consent process to ensure that you understand what is involved.

What will happen to me if I take part? I will invite you to participate in an informal interview with me (Tracy) to explore your experiences of being involved in the BT Programme. This will involve in-person or online (using Microsoft Teams) to explore the above research questions.

What will I have to do? The interview will take no longer than 60 minutes and will be recorded and transcribed into written text. The transcript will be shared with you to check before analysis, and you will have the opportunity to discuss, amend or add to what you have said. We will use the research questions above to guide the informal interview. This gives you a chance to think about what you want to say and avoids you feeling pressured to come up with answers.

What are the advantages of taking part? Taking part in this study will provide you with the opportunity to reflect on your experiences, a process which is integral to youth work practice. It will also help to inform the development and delivery of future programmes like Better Tomorrows.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part? I do not anticipate there being any disadvantages or risks in taking part.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential? Confidentiality will be maintained where necessary by not directly attributing comments/quotes to individuals. However, as you will be aware, this is a high-profile programme, which is regularly publicised through social and written media (e.g. newspapers) by the BT Programme team. For research purposes, I will use participant-checking procedures to ensure that you are comfortable with your level of confidentiality/exposure. This will be negotiated and agreed upon as part of the consent process.

You will also be offered the opportunity to review any draft publications or presentations from this study so that amendments can be made as necessary to negate any fear of reprisal.

To note:

- It is possible that some of the data collected will be looked at by authorised persons from the University of St Mark & St John to check that the study is being carried out correctly. All will have a duty of confidentiality to the research participant and will do their best to meet this duty.
- All data will be stored on the secure network drive at the University of St Mark & St John. Audio files of the interviews will be uploaded to the secure network and the original files will be deleted.
- Data will be kept until the completion of the evaluation in January 2025 and then disposed of securely.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study? You can withdraw from the study up to 2 weeks after reviewing the transcript of your interview. After this, it may not be possible to withdraw your data as it will have been incorporated into the annual report for the BT Programme.

What if there is a problem? If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to me (Tracy), and I will do my best to answer your questions. My contact details are at the end of the information sheet.

If you wish to raise concerns about the integrity of the research being conducted, you can contact Lucy Pengelly at lpengelly@marjon.ac.uk

What will happen to the results of the research study? The evaluation will report on an annual basis through a report to the BT Programme steering group. There may also be an associated article in a peer-reviewed journal. Should this occur, participants will be provided with a draft copy to review before publication and subsequently provided with the publication details. Results may also be presented at a conference.

Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet. If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of the information sheet to keep, and your consent will be sought.

My contact details: Dr Tracy Hayes, Plymouth Marjon University, Derriford, Plymouth.

Email: thayes@marjon.ac.uk

Appendix ii: Consent Form

Title of Research Project: **Better Tomorrow Programme Evaluation**

Name of Researcher: **Dr Tracy Ann Hayes**

- I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet dated 3rd October 2022 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time **up to 2 weeks after reviewing the transcript of my interview** without providing a reason.
- I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from the University of St Mark & St John for regulatory purposes. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.
- I agree to my interview being audio recorded. The recording will be transcribed and analysed for the purpose of the research. The transcript of the recording will be shared with you to check before analysis.
- I understand that oral recordings, notes and transcripts will be securely stored on a password-protected laptop and will be destroyed following completion of the Better Tomorrow Programme evaluation in 2025.
- I consent to verbatim quotes being used in publications and conference presentations. I will not be named, although I understand that there is a risk I could be identified.
- I understand that the results of the study may be published and/or presented at meetings or conferences and may be provided to research funders. I give my permission for my anonymised data to be disseminated in this way.
- I consent to the data being stored until the Better Tomorrows Programme evaluation is completed in January 2025.
- I agree to take part in the above study.

Research Participant Information

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

Person Taking Consent

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Please note: If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to make a complaint, you can contact the University Research Ethics Panel at ethicspanel@marjon.ac.uk

When completed: 1 for participant; 1 for researcher's file.

Appendix iii: Summary of Training Cohorts

Cumulative record.

				Started		Completed			
	Date	Venue	Applications	Level 2	Level 3	Level 2	Level 3	Deferred	Dropped out
Year 1									
Cohort 1	03/03/2022	Cleator Moor Youth & Community Centre	14	4	10	4	10		
Cohort 2	13/09/2022	Barrow	20		20		8	5	7
Year 2									
Cohort 3	19/04/2023	Carlisle Youth Zone	19	10	4			1	
Cohort 4		Kendal tbc							
Year 3									
Cohort 5									
Cohort 6									
TOTAL			53	14	34	4	18	6	7