Inspiring Futures

Insights from Scotland, February 2023

# Introduction

Inspiring Futures enabled the continuation of support for young people with their employment pathways during the pandemic. In Scotland during 2020/21, this flexible emergency fund invested £631,449 in 10 projects. This summary of insights from their work offers learning for the future that can help support young people though the current economic turbulence.

# Recommendations

* There are no quick fixes and the Inspiring Futures funding recognised that. Projects need at least 18months with a young person in order to support them to make progress. Scottish Government initiatives such as Kickstart and the Young Persons Guarantee were not unwelcome, but their duration fell short of what’s needed for young people facing multiple barriers.
* There needs to be much more awareness of how mental health and racism intersect; as well as improved cultural competency and understanding of trauma across education and other professions. There are discrepancies between the work on trauma and the way Westminster manages asylum in ways that perpetuate trauma and violence.
* The Inspiring Futures grants are sowing the seeds of social capital, and, as such, align well with the Scottish Government’s policy focus on building social capital and can help contribute to The Promise. These projects are embedded in communities, understand entrenched disadvantage such as intergenerational worklessness and the experiences of racialised communities.

# Three projects

The experience of three projects funded by Inspiring Futures helps explain why these recommendations are important for young people, their families, parents and carers, and communities.

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| **Young Salehiya**  **Unpicking the barriers to young women’s aspirations and change**  This project provided support to Black and minority ethnic young women surviving honour-based abuse, forced or early marriage, or domestic abuse, further isolated by Covid-19.  Through a combination of one to one support, therapeutic services, and group work including drop ins, the project supports the young women to see that they have choices and to unpick some of the barriers preventing them from pursuing them. The project can intervene in different ways from gently challenging a young woman that maybe she can take a different path, to mediating with parents who object to their young person’s choices or by simply demystifying processes like applying for a job.  The project reported that 30 young women decided to stay at school, change school, or go to college who wouldn't otherwise have been able to continue their learning; and 14 young women made progress to moving into paid employment. The project also identified positive changes in some of the building blocks and prerequisites to learning or to career progression including improved mental and physical health and wellbeing as well as better relationships with parents or peers.  There is family pressure on some young women to take responsibility for domestic and caring responsibilities from a young age; seeing Saheliya staff who 'look like them' employed and having 'status' makes a difference in itself. Young women often feel guilty for not feeling satisfied with the conservative, tradition role they are expected to be confined within. Gaining a greater understanding of power structures and of the role of many world religions specifically supporting the education of women (especially Islam) enables them to feel less guilty and to understand the influences which have determined their parents' and carers' views.  A project worker described working with a young woman to build her self-advocacy and confidence to be able to discuss with her parents that she wanted to take a different path: *“You have a young woman on tramlines that make her unhappy. The project says maybe you could stay on at school and maybe we can help you talk to your parents”.* |

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| **Growing2gether In the Community**  **Building positive connections in the community**  This youth-led project provides young people with the opportunity to work together as a creative team, to assess the needs of their community, identify an issue that they care deeply about and to design and deliver a project that will address this issue. It has its roots in positive psychology which supports young people to recognise their own potential: *“It’s the job of the facilitator to see the young person’s potential before they see it themselves”*. The project is committed to [continuous learning and evaluation](https://www.growing2gether.org.uk/our-approach/) and works with the young people to develop the project together.  Through taking part in the project, and with a blend of individual and group support from the team, each young person is able to discover what skills they can bring to the project; explore the things that interest them; acquire skills for their future work and personal lives; as well as help improve their community.  Young people reported feeling empowered and feeling more confident in communicating with others; and said they had more confidence in their abilities. They also talked about feeling more connected to their community, and having a greater sense of pride and purpose. The impact on mental health, aspiration and confidence was very strong across all of the projects with young people saying that they felt more positive about themselves, had learned about themselves and how to cope better with their problems.  One young person said that his goal was to *'communicate more and give more ideas'.* He achieved this by helping design the mental health graffiti board and becoming the photographer on the graffiti day. Another young person stated that her goal was *"Creating a project where people can feel safe to tell their story and use my abilities to encourage people."* At the end she said: *"I am proud that I was the link between the group project and the youth parliament with their conference that focuses on mental health."* |

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| **The Zone**  **What it means to be work-ready**  This project worked with a cohort of young people who have left school without qualifications and live in an area where poverty and unemployment are high; there is no work and public transport out of the area is poor; and serious health problems including addiction are common.  The project worked with 10 young people through Inspiring Futures and leveraged funding from elsewhere to work with five more. The aim was to support the young people to develop their confidence and skills to be ready to seek work. Supporting all the young people to stay engaged and motivated through the pandemic was extremely challenging, especially for those living in homes where one or both parents have addiction issues.  The project has partnerships with many organisations in their community where young people carry out work with the project’s guidance and the support of a peer mentor. This might be outdoor work, childcare or work with elderly people.  The changes in the first 10 young people far exceeded the project’s expectations. All were from homes affected by addiction, mental health issues and worklessness: *“Seeing young people who started their journey during the pandemic as under achievers, young, naive, very isolated and worried young people to the confident young people they have become starting new employment opportunities and full time education has been one of the best successes we could have ever imagined”.* The project keeps in touch with all these young people to ensure that they are happy and confident within their chosen path. |

# Lessons learned

## Features

Projects funded through Inspiring Futures have a number of features in common.

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| Delivered by very experienced, qualified personnel using tried and tested approaches including being equipped to recognise and respond to trauma. | A whole family support approach through directly assisting parents/carers or due to the positive outcomes for their young people. | Person-centred, individualised work that looks for the strengths and potential of each young person and draws out what’s good in them. |
| Sets an expectation that the young people will form positive connections in the community and become accredited in the skills that they acquire through the project. | Makes space for mental health from relaxing the project process to allow even more time for young people to just talk about their feelings to bringing in extra counselling. | Work with young people over a long period of time and be available to them even after they have moved on for the moments when circumstances knock them back. |

## Outcomes

Projects funded through Inspiring Futures delivered positive outcomes for young people, their families and communities.

For **young people**, the outcomes show the way the projects opened up the possibility of making new and different choices and built their confidence to make them. Young people:

* Discovered their own strengths and interests through being invited to make choices about the roles they played within a project about how they to engage with its support and activities
* Felt able to be themselves. This was evidenced most starkly by one project which said that hidden disabilities had come out
* Developed the confidence to have aspirations, to even feel that it is worth looking at job opportunities and to ask for help with pursuing them.
* Gained in confidence and awareness that they have options beyond the ones prescribed within their community.
* Developed their understanding of how, practically, the job application process works and where and how to ask for help.
* Gained self-advocacy skills and confidence to ask for help and self-belief that they are worth supporting
* Managed to stay motivated and engaged in the context of a range of barriers and issues in their lives in addition to the pandemic.

The projects created **a ripple effect in the young people’s families and communities and the connection between them** with the following positive effects:

* Shifts in how young people from a very deprived area are perceived by other particularly older people living locally. One project reported young people carrying out work in the community and that being made visible – *“we show off young people’s successes in the community”* – and leading to the young people also feeling a greater sense of place and belonging.
* Local businesses taking on young people for work experience who are well supported by the project, do well and get trained and kept on with the business longer term.
* The projects also make space for young people to open up about their feelings and connections in the community. One project opened up a conversation about ‘what it’s like for you’ living here and that led to a much bigger conversation about how they are affected by widespread drug use.
* Linked to this, the projects create alternative role models and options that can appear to be closed off to the community. These ranged very widely from showing that staying on at school or having a job is possible to showing that it is possible to have a different conversation about issues like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

## Flexible funding

The funding was flexible and so projects were able to decide what they needed to do and this helped respond to young people’s circumstances. For example,

* Being able to continue to develop their vision and approach to their work with young people carried out by experienced people.
* Enabled them to use a range of strategies for keeping in touch with the young people and keep them motivated even during lockdown.
* Having the trust and support of the funder enabled the projects to hold back restricted funds for work that could only be carried out in person and when business reopened.
* Some projects were able to leverage additional funding off the back of the CiN funds including one project that was able to support 15 young people instead of the original 10 planned.

# Acknowledgements

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