

Youth Ngage

Group interview arranged by Yetunde Adeola, attended by Fay, Bobby, Brooklyn, Victoria - all young people involved in the project



The project

Youth Ngage is a user-led organisation, set up to provide positive activities and empowerment programs for the BME (Mostly African Caribbean) youth and young people in the North Kent Area. Youth Ngage has members and reaches out to youth and young people in Dartford, Swanscombe, Northfleet, Gravesend and Medway areas; organising youth empowerment programs that encourage bonding, create opportunities and community engagement. One of their goals is to disengage young people from anti-social behaviour and develop their skills and leadership potential.

Before Covid, they would have different sessions each week held in a local hall; some would be led by different members of the group and some by outside people coming in to talk about different subjects. Two or three times a year, they would organise events where they would have a fun day out at the beach or meet in a pub and invite new people to join; the workshops and events focus on mental wellbeing, career development or crime prevention workshops .

They do online tutoring sometimes for those who need online support in some of their subjects, and most importantly, support for entering the workplace, such as traineeship and CV building. (They get referrals from local schools, regular parents and local groups).

The impact of the pandemic

Lockdown meant that they were unable to meet at their centre and unable to meet for face-to-face sessions of any kind for a while. This resulted in the need for more access to online platforms. They had a desktop computer in the office but this meant waiting to take turns using it and very slow; so they needed the access and mobility that laptops could offer.

Side By Side Fund

They applied for funding for a laptop for their online activities. The aim was to continue training and work placement in the office, so the laptop would enable people to learn skills and volunteers to keep supporting group members. They organise 1-2-1 online sessions with members experiencing isolation, anxiety, job loss, or family hardship.

The application process was simple and straightforward, perhaps particularly because they were applying for just the one item. Other applications they have been working on have been more complex: trying to get funding for volunteer expenses and so on to keep the work going and people attending.

Impact of the Fund

Several of the young people spoke about the benefits of having the extra laptop. Brooklyn, in particular, as President of the youth club, said he had been learning online accounting, hosting meetings and sharing PowerPoint slides to share skills and so on. 'So, you guys have been helpful in every aspect of the project'. Others agreed that the access to Zoom for meetings and activities had been really helpful in enabling them all to remain connected. Yetunde said it had helped them to connect with people far afield, some of whom do not have siblings at home. Fay described her experience like this:

'It's been really good as, like, a safety net of people that are my age, apart from my mum and my sister at home, because it gets boring. And it's also given me the chance to learn new skills that I wanted to learn but never really had the chance to try.'

Examples of activities they have shared include braiding hair, cooking, workout, indoor games and exercises. Some are new in the area and needed to bond with a positive group and make new friends; for example, Bobby said:

"Through the online activities I was able to have fun during the lockdown because we just moved to Gravesend and I didn't have any friend before; I learnt lots of online activities and guys are very supportive."

Ways NSUN could support groups

Their main concern at present is funding. Now that they are returning to their centre, they need funds for their activities, for cooking and workshops, events, youth workers and speakers.