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Libraries Rising Youth Engagement Network

Independent Evaluation Report

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(covering 2024 pilot phase one and 2025 phase two)

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Libraries RISING
Creating libraries of tomorrow with children and young people today

AI usage declaration: AI has not been used in the data analysis nor write up of this summative evaluation.

Please note that the independent evaluation report from Marge Ainsley has been edited and designed by Libraries Rising.

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Table of Contents

1 Executive summary 4

1.1 **Key findings** 5
1.1.1 Facts and stats: target outputs results 5
1.1.2 Outcomes for young people 5
1.1.3 Outcomes for library staff 8
1.1.4 Process evaluation highlights 10
1.1.5 Overall aims results summary 16

2 Introduction to the Youth Engagement Network 17

3 About this report 18

3.1 **What is the evaluation setting out to measure?** 18
3.1.1 'At a glance' evaluation framework 19
3.1.2 Sources of evidence 20
3.1.3 Limitations 24

4 Impact evaluation: key findings 25

4.1 **Young people** 25
4.1.1 Outputs 25
4.1.2 Intended output targets summary 28
4.1.3 Outcomes 28

4.2 **Library staff** 45
4.2.1 Outputs update 45
4.2.2 Intended output targets summary 47
4.2.3 Outcomes update 47

5 Process evaluation: learning from the pilot and recommendations for future phases or replications 71

5.1 **What worked well and resulting recommendations** 71
5.2 **What worked less well and resulting recommendations** 79
5.3 **Library staff experience of working with Libraries Rising** 91

6 Top tips checklist of advice for future co-created work with young people 92

7 Closing remarks 93

8 Appendices 94

8.1 **Pilot projects summary overview** 94
8.2 **Data tables** 102
8.2.1 Number of young people engaged 102
8.2.2 Staffing summary overview 105
8.2.3 Products and library users 107
8.2.4 Library staff attendance at networking meetings 109
8.2.5 Young people's feedback forms completions by library service 111
8.2.6 Demographic profile: pilot 111
8.2.7 Demographic profile: phase two 112

1 Executive summary

Funded by Arts Council England, the Libraries Rising[1] Youth Engagement Network programme aims to platform the voices of children and young people, including those who are marginalised or experiencing deprivation.

A total of 20 unique library services[2] were involved in the programme in 2024 and 2025. During this time they took part in meetings, training and networking opportunities, and/or tested co-created approaches with young people aged 11-16 years old.[3]

There were four overarching aims to the overall Youth Engagement Network programme:

- Ensure young people have power in libraries (by giving them a genuine opportunity to influence their local library services)
- Provide opportunities to co-create activities and shape the services on offer in their local library (and also the national network with the intention of influencing sector policy and decision-making more broadly)
- Encourage young people to learn something new, gaining skills and finding out about working in a library (with library staff learning new skills in co-creation and youth engagement)
- Support libraries across the country, building positive relationships between libraries and young people through the national network. Libraries taking part were also part of a pilot network which offered support, ideas exchange and an opportunity to reflect.

An evaluation framework and overarching strategy was put in place to monitor and evaluate the Youth Network Programme's intended impact[4]. This was created with the Libraries Rising Youth Engagement Network Programme Manager based on the original Arts Council England activity plan and was updated in December 2024 to respond to programme changes made following the pilot. A full version of the evaluation strategy and methodology is available from the project team on request. This executive summary briefly shares some of the topline findings[5].

1 Libraries Rising is the operating name of the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (formerly ASCEL).

2 Phase one pilot libraries (2024) included Luton Libraries, Norfolk Library & Information Service, Kirklees Library & Information Service, Newham Libraries, Slough Libraries, Libraries Unlimited (Barnstaple), Cornwall Libraries. Phase two libraries (2025) included Manchester Libraries, Stockton-on-Tees Libraries & Archives, Barnet Libraries, North Somerset Libraries, West Northamptonshire Libraries, Cornwall Libraries (see note below), North Northamptonshire Libraries, Newcastle Libraries, East Sussex Libraries, Lancashire Library Service, North Tyneside Libraries, Leeds Libraries, Knowsley Libraries, and Idea Store (London Borough of Tower Hamlets). Note that pilot phase one library services Burnside College (North Tyneside) and Libraries Unlimited (Churston & Torquay) withdrew from the process in 2024; and phase two library service Suffolk Libraries withdrew in 2025. In addition, note that Cornwall Libraries from the 2024 pilot continued into 2025 and are therefore only counted once in the overall participating libraries figure above.

3 Note that the age bracket of young people was changed following the interim evaluation to 11-16 years from 11-13 years to remove the narrow restriction and better reflect the opportunities for engagement that libraries reported.

4 Available on request.

5 Please see the main report for methodology, limitations, and sources of evidence for sample sizes and the exact number behind the percentages (equivalent N is shared in the main report as standard).

1.1 Key findings

- Overall, the independent evaluator finds that the programme achieved (and at times exceeded) its original aims as outlined in the grant activity plan to Arts Council England. This has been an innovative programme which deserves acknowledgement and celebration.
- It has not always been easy. The Programme Manager and wider Libraries Rising team have learned a substantial amount through administrating and delivering a programme like this, which will no doubt be positively applied in their future projects. Being open to learning from things that have not gone well is testament to the values of transparency and authenticity embodied by Libraries Rising.
- Furthermore, the findings from the programme have significant relevance on a national level. They should continue to be shared by Libraries Rising to inspire others and could certainly be used within national influencing for advocating and at policy development levels.

1.1.1. Facts and stats: target outputs results

Output target	Result	Status
120 young people in total over the two years	236	Achieved
Number of national meetings including Children's Promise Alliance [young people have the opportunity to share their opinions and feedback at a national level]	0	This output was removed as a target for the programme in consultation with Arts Council England based on feedback from young people and Libraries Rising's proactive response.
Diverse range of young people attend	-	Achieved (with some caveats around limitations particularly during the pilot with formal demographic data capture)
New product designed by young people	-	Achieved
20 sites in total	20	Achieved, with the caveat that some library services from phase two have rolled their total or partial delivery into phase three
At least five pilot services in Levelling Up areas	10 (including five in the pilot)	Achieved

1.1.2 Outcomes for young people

Young people enjoy the experience [Find more on this in the main report on pages 28- 32]

- The majority of young people enjoyed participating, with 94% agreeing that they had a good time. This was commonly attributed to a mix of both social experiences (e.g. meeting friends, visiting the library, chatting to staff) and creative experiences (e.g. painting, spoken word, playing games, drawing).
- They predominantly used positive words to describe their experience, including fun, amazing, and delightful. Given that we can use enjoyment as an indicator for satisfaction, the findings indicate that the majority of participating libraries have created satisfactory experiences for those involved.
- Young people made several suggestions for improving their experience. Commonly occurring examples included:

- More time for activities (per session)
- Having more of their ideas heard
- More sessions overall
- More activities or equipment, for example, getting a PS5.

- Some other suggestions were individually made by young people on their feedback forms for the libraries to take into consideration. These included: treating young people like adults, having a separate room for young people, including food/snacks, improving computers in libraries by having tablets, adding bean bags for comfort, thinking more about the opening time of libraries/time of sessions (i.e. having them later), organising more visits from libraries into schools and to have book-related competitions for younger children.

Young people learn something new [Find more on this in the main report on pages 32- 33]

- 77% of young people reported gaining new knowledge and skills, including self-awareness, creative skills, and library-related learning. Bringing in external expertise indicatively added more opportunities to gain enhanced skills, for example, working with artist practitioners led to a variety of additional outcomes for the young people.
- It should be noted that the young people from marginalised groups have potentially been exposed to opportunities that they would not ordinarily have had e.g. Newcastle Libraries giving access to tutors for their young people's revision study group.

Young people develop soft skills [Find more on this in the main report on pages 33- 35]

- Young people suggested they had gained a range of new soft skills as a result of being involved, for example: teamwork, budgeting, organisation, time management and communication (with 83% reporting improved communication and 82% stating that they had improved their ability to work as part of a team). This indicates that the activities being co-created have not only provided enjoyment but have provided life skills which are likely to be useful in school, volunteering or work settings in the future.
- There is also some evidence to suggest that the young people felt empowered, especially those projects where engagement was happening with libraries outside of school assignments or settings. Many of the young people involved did not know each other before taking part and have gained new friends as a result. The report also describes instances where young people taught each other e.g. how to play particular games.

Young people increase personal resilience [Find more on this in the main report on pages 35-37]

- 75% of young people reported that their confidence improved, and 88% felt proud of their achievements. There are isolated examples within the qualitative data where libraries reported specific instances of individuals developing confidence. For example, one teacher working with the Kirklees Library and Information Service team described how a student was initially reluctant to participate due to anxiety, but successfully took part in the end and was keen to return to the library in the future. Library staff from West Northamptonshire also shared the experience of a young person who had returned from university for wellbeing reasons but had developed enough confidence through the group to go back and try again.[6]

6 Outside the target age group but was included within the provision due to demand.

- There are several examples where young people have been inspired to do something as a direct result of their experience. Commonly occurring suggestions included doing more creative activities at home, school or elsewhere); repeat engagement with the library (e.g. Summer Reading Challenge); and finding ways to make more friends or share skills. One participant reported that they had been inspired to do Art for GSCE.

Young people feel their voice has been heard [Find more on this in the main report on pages 37-38]

- 94% of young people felt that their opinions, feelings, and ideas were listened to, and 95% felt involved and included in co-designing activities. It was particularly striking to see how library services found inclusive ways to ensure neurodivergent young people or those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) were able to voice their opinions.
- Overall, findings suggest that library staff were listening – with services that used consultation and feedback from young people to inform projects working particularly well.

Young people feel they have greater ownership of the library [Find more on this in the main report on pages 39- 41]

- There is some evidence to suggest that young people felt more 'at home' in their library space as a direct result of being involved. 92% of young people said they felt more welcome in the library, and 61% expressed a propensity to visit the library more often than they did before.
- Where ownership seems to have been particularly strong, it is where the library services have:

  - Given permission to the young people to make decisions from the start, e.g. having authority
  - Encouraged them to be more empowered from the beginning and put mechanisms in place to do this, e.g. creating group rules
  - Given young people a thorough knowledge of what was in the library and where, e.g. how to find teen books
  - Provided an identifiable space; e.g. noticeboard or teen area.

Unintended outcomes [Find more on this in the main report on pages 41- 42]

- There are several unintended isolated outcomes noted in the report. These include two parents becoming friends; the inclusion of young people from the programme in wider local authority consultation schemes; the ripple effect of activity on the participation of parents/carers and siblings; and a creative practitioner team member taking their SEND learning into other future project commissions.

1.1.3 Outcomes for library staff

Development of skills and knowledge [Find more on this in the main report on pages 47- 54]

- Library staff improved their skills in co-creating activities with young people, with some notable increases in confidence and capability in designing and delivering such projects.
- Staff experienced significant professional development through practical engagement, particularly in working with marginalised young people including those who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/ Questioning and more (LGBTQIA+), looked after children (LAC)[7], or neurodivergent and young people with SEND.
- Evidence suggests that there was a substantial amount of 'learning by doing' across both the pilot and phase two, with staff reflecting on specific challenges and successes of delivery. Being able to practically try out activity gave the library teams permission to test, fail and learn. The programme evaluation finds common areas of learning including keeping things simple, developing trust with young people, taking time to develop partnerships, consulting with young people, best methods for recruiting young people, plus evaluation and monitoring techniques. Overall, they realised that this work is challenging and needs time. Specific examples of learning by individual library services was also captured, including learning how to deal with negativity on social media.
- Library staff reported that they can better communicate the value of this type of work. For example, 75% said that they feel better equipped to articulate the value of co-created work in libraries as a direct result of the programme and 88% reported that they can describe what successful co-created work 'looks like' more confidently.
- Although there are isolated examples of feedback which describes how some staff struggled with the brief from Libraries Rising being so open, others relished that it was not prescriptive.

Increased confidence in working with young people and/or co-created projects [Find more on this in the main report on pages 54- 57]

- 56% of library staff reported increased confidence in delivering co-created projects and 81% had greater empathy towards young people as a direct result of the project. Being involved was also an opportunity for some staff to develop confidence in working specifically with neurodivergent young people and those with SEND.
- There were some bespoke challenges reported by phase two library teams who, whilst still increasing their learning, suggested that they needed further support, guidance, and time to really build up their confidence in working with young people to implement a truly co-created approach.
- There were instances where decision-making had to fall with the library service rather than collaboratively with the young people. For example, the report finds that it can be a challenge to implement the ideas of young people in local authority library spaces due to particular restrictions. This has potentially reduced staff confidence in the co-creation process.

Library staff develop new contacts with other library services [Find more on this in the main report on pages 57- 58]

- 56% of library staff gained new contacts at other library services, potentially strengthening external relationships albeit with reported restrictions on time to maintain these new connections. There is also isolated evidence to indicate that the project helped to develop relationships within existing teams internally too.
- Having networking opportunities with others on the programme (and being able to bounce ideas around with the Programme Manager) was attributed to the supportive and friendly backdrop created for delivery of this work.

7 Looked after Children.

Library staff have greater propensity to work on co-created projects with young people in the future [Find more on this in the main report on pages 58- 61]

- One of the most striking findings with library staff was in their propensity and tenacity to continue this work. Alongside ongoing support from the Programme Manager, having the freedom to experiment without a fear of getting it wrong has been key to ensuring that libraries have a determination for doing this work.
- 81% of library staff could see the potential of using library spaces for co-created projects, and 56% were very likely to work on such projects in the future. Staff also suggested they had been inspired in some way, for example, to re-run a similar project, or to work in creative ways with SEND children.
- There were isolated examples where staff had been motivated to continue co-created projects by having a 'proof of concept' which could be rolled out to other branch libraries. This suggests that learning is potentially being cascaded outside of the immediate project teams.
- Library staff commonly felt that they have been left with legacies that they would not have had without the programme.

Unintended outcomes [Find more on this in the main report on pages 62- 68]

- Library staff commonly described how they had enjoyed being part of the programme and how fun it was (despite any challenges they faced). The report finds that their satisfaction can be attributed to two common aspects of the process: being given permission to experiment (learn, fail, try again) and the ongoing support provided by Libraries Rising.
- Despite reassurance, some services felt self-imposed pressure on achieving success within the time frame (e.g. having a final 'product' or working with large numbers of children). Library staff in phase two also reported that there was a conflict between when the young people wanted to come in for activities versus when the library was open.
- Lack of internal support or senior management buy-in was commonly reported during the pilot and phase two as a barrier to successful delivery of this work. Several individual suggestions for improvement were also made, and these mostly related to additional training ideas for onboarding. Having more than one library staff member delivering the project from a single service was highlighted as a particularly important learning point.
- Taking part in a programme like this was reported by one library service as a way to raise morale within a currently difficult delivery landscape for libraries.
- Partnerships were unexpectedly strengthened with other internal local authority departments for some library services. One library service had interest from other nearby local authorities who wanted to understand what had made their project such a success.
- There are some isolated but important examples of legacy to note in the findings. For example, one library service suggested that because they have started putting on a regular activity for young people, this has encouraged other youth-led partners to enquire whether they can work with the library to support provision for this target audience.

1.1.4 Process evaluation highlights

The process evaluation section of the report highlights the successes and challenges of the programme, outlining a journey of progress and learning from the pilot year into phase two and providing recommendations for phase three. It finds that the main aspects that worked well are as follows:

Training and support

- The quarterly peer meetings provided a positive space for sharing challenges, ideas, and developing independence. They helped to generate a supportive and friendly environment, with the frequency of quarterly meetings being seen as appropriate to manage within their existing workload. Implementing additional training in phase two worked well, along with sharing pilot library service experiences and case studies.
- A review of whether the specifics of 'getting from A to B'[8] with co-creation could be covered more readily through additional training is recommended, given the feedback from some library staff in still being unconfident in how to truly co-create with their young people.
- Feedback from library services is that they want this work to continue and are keen to work together as a network to support each other. They are keen to help co-create the activities of a permanent national Youth Engagement group which the Programme Manager has already set up.

Authenticity

- Authenticity has been a successful value of the programme across both years, but especially in phase two.
- Although more encouragement is necessary (more on this below), libraries on the whole appreciated having the freedom and permission to experiment and fail. This brought integrity to the projects and led to authentic relationship-building with children in many cases. Authenticity as a key message should continue to be pushed in phase three onboarding, with practical points from pilot and phase two learning used to demonstrate that it is absolutely possible to experiment, learn from what does not work, and successfully achieve by the end of the process.
- Library staff felt confident and comfortable with sharing how they were feeling about the general libraries landscape at the moment. An authentic, shared learning experience was delivered through the meetings by creating a trusted, safe space.
- A broader mindset shift is required for this type of work, with library staff nervous to buy into a 'permission to experiment and learn' concept when they have concerns about perceptions of failure and pressures of potential redundancies. Libraries Rising should continue trying to make change outside of the programme in other advocacy/influencing/strategic ways at senior management level.
- The report finds that the programme is primarily about process not product - and it should potentially be positioned as a movement, rather than a project.

Step change

- The report finds that the project was a big leap for many library services. It should not be under-estimated how much has been achieved especially by those who are working under challenging local authority conditions. The evidence suggests that finding ways to celebrate achievements from the programme to raise morale and encourage continuation of co-created work may be useful.
- Libraries Rising were able to share programme outputs and outcomes at the Libraries Connected and CILIP conferences in 2025, and to an international audience at Next Library in DOKK1, Aarhus, Denmark. This was a real shift for the programme in terms of visibility and was an opportunity to highlight the key learning which other library services could benefit from. There is an opportunity to continue sharing the programme's findings and advocate for young people's inclusion through 2026/7 conferences, seminars and newsletters.

8 This is shorthand for the gap between getting young people in a room to them deciding what they want to do (opposed to the library service directing them too much).

- Whilst young people have been at the heart, the emphasis of the programme has been more on learning rather than outcomes for the young people. Library staff knowledge and skills development have been invaluable. Word of mouth about the programme is indicatively growing – for example, phase three applications have increased exponentially since the pilot.

Challenging perceptions

- The pilot was successful in challenging perceptions about young people; for example, pilot libraries were surprised by how engaged the young people were and their capability and willingness to continue working with the library service. Activities within phase two training delivery worked well in continuing to challenge library staff perception of young people before they even started.
- Library staff felt prepared through the training, notwithstanding some of the bespoke feedback above around additional co-created training support. Some library services were motivated to bring in additional external training for their staff.

Expertise

- Training by Participation People was a 'cementing point' that brought external expertise into the mix and filled gaps in Libraries Rising's existing knowledge level. This training was repeated for phase two (and broadened to include equity, diversity and inclusion/SEND/audience development), taking place earlier in the onboarding process than in the pilot. Bringing in additional expertise e.g. from Curious Minds also helped develop the skillset of library staff.
- Library staff rated the training highly and benefited from additional support in understanding how to co-create with different types of young people they could work with. Phase two library services were inspired to work with new rather than existing groups e.g. Lancashire Library Service and young people with SEND. It also resulted in improved confidence prior to any delivery. This should be maintained if not bolstered for phase three, which will require additional resource (see more on this below).

Partnerships

- The programme provided an opportunity for library staff to engage with partners they had not worked with before.
- The majority of library staff reportedly benefited from having the extended time period that was given to phase two services for developing partnerships, although there was concern from some that it 'pushed the can down the road' i.e. it allowed some drift with other projects able to easily 'creep in'.

Young people with special educational needs

- Library staff experienced continuing professional development (CPD) through practically trying out this type of work out. They developed skills in consulting with young people, leading to useful feedback and changes in the library space. Those working with neurodivergent young people and young people with SEND gained a greater understanding of communication methods e.g. if children are non-verbal. This learning could be brought together in a toolkit for the sector at the end of phase three.

Consulting with young people

- Library staff developed consultation skills with young people (and an understanding of how useful a feedback loop/continuous dialogue can be). Some services were even inspired to involve young people in other wider local authority consultation that was taking place e.g. at Manchester Libraries and North Somerset Libraries.
- Despite training being rated highly, some library staff still felt that they had 'led' the young people too much in their decision-making. Further training in getting library staff from the recruitment of young people to them deciding what they want to do is recommended as described above.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Despite some minor issues, monitoring and evaluation requirements were reported as being at the right level. Staff valued the flexibility of data collection tools and the permission to adapt approaches based on the needs of their young people.
- Having additional monitoring data in phase two allowed for greater exploration of results in the final impact evaluation of the main report. However, issues were still faced with collecting monitoring data especially demographic profile.
- The Programme Manager should work with the independent evaluator to enable a 'good exit' with evaluation once their contract ends in February 2026.

Accessibility

- Two staff members identifying as neurodivergent suggested that Libraries Rising's overall approach of the programme meant that it was accessible. No particular access needs were identified in phase two, but there are specific learnings around inclusion (e.g. the challenges of using virtual spaces for quarterly meetings).
- Given the distinct differences between library services, it was a challenge for the Programme Manager to ensure an experience equitable e.g. by offering more (and the right types of) support for all library staff involved.

[Find more on this in the main report on pages 71- 78]

Overall, library staff valued Libraries Rising's supportive, understanding, and collaborative approach, which significantly contributed to their positive experience of the programme.

Overall the report finds that:

- 100% of library staff described their relationship with Libraries Rising as positive.
- Staff praised the support and communication from the Programme Manager, describing it as 'collaborative' rather than judgemental.
- 100% rated the overall project design and delivery support as either excellent or good.
- 100% rated the training received as either excellent or good.
- 94% rated the evaluation support tools as either excellent or good.
- The Programme Manager was frequently described as 'positive', 'engaging', 'helpful', and 'enthusiastic'. It should not be underestimated how crucial, valuable and pivotal this role was in encouraging library staff to continue when they were experiencing challenges.
- 100% of library staff stated that they would be either very likely or likely to recommend working with Libraries Rising to other library services.

[Further detail on the relationship between library staff and Libraries Rising can be found on pages 91 - 92 in the main report].

The evaluation finds that the main challenges and learning points were as follows:

Recruitment and onboarding

- Due to varying factors discussed in the report, including the need to get onboarding off the ground very quickly, some pilot library services did not fully appreciate the time commitment required, and there was variation in understanding what true co-creation entails. This ultimately led to a mismatch between what Libraries Rising would consider authentic co-creation vs the library services who believe they have delivered it. The time-sensitive schedule for recruiting young people, building trust, and relationship building with partners prior to delivery was too tight for pilot organisations - especially those with limited partnership development experience and an already strained capacity. Two library services withdrew as a direct result of these challenges.[9] By the time young people had been recruited, activity in some instances clashed with the school exam period which led to reduced participation. This was successfully addressed in phase two, with Libraries Rising thoroughly revising the recruitment and onboarding process which gave it greater authority. The messaging was adapted, and - as stated above - additional training was put in place.
- A larger library staff group demanded more management in the online learning environment e.g. encouraging library staff to come off their mics and share. The size of the phase two cohort also meant more administration time for the Programme Manager.
- The budget felt more squeezed for phase two support due to the increased costs of training. It was also challenging for the Programme Manager to deliver the support programme single-handedly, given the increase in their other workload during phase two. The report recommends that further budget and staffing resource from Libraries Rising will be necessary to match the demands and ambitions of the programme in phase three.

Diverse young people

- Although SEND and neurodivergent young people were engaged in the pilot, Libraries Rising would have wanted to see greater representation of marginalised groups among the young people during the first year (for example, across LGBTQIA+ and disability).
- Positively, phase two organisations were inspired to work with a more diverse range of young people experiencing marginalisation e.g. LGBTQIA+ young people and LACs[10]. The recruitment and onboarding process plus encouragement from the Programme Manager (along with clearer expectations at the onboarding stage) can indicatively be attributed to this.
- The report recommends that examples from both the pilot and phase two are shared with phase three organisations for inspiration and motivation to work with specific young people that they have not engaged before.

Partnerships

- The programme has demonstrated that small scale can be mighty (and innovative for the library sector). The report highlights how simple changes can lead to larger outcomes such as developing new partnerships and independent visits by teenagers. However, the pilot phase's time-sensitive, limited duration and lead-in times were too tight for recruitment, delivery and relationship building for many services, especially those who were engaging new groups (or had little experience with developing partnerships). As referenced above, this was acknowledged by Libraries Rising following the interim evaluation and extended for phase two, to allow an extended time period for partnership development and delivery; longer opportunities to build trust with young people; the ability to avoid school exam periods for those working with education partners; and to give libraries encouragement to see that the process is as important as the final product.

9 It should be noted that both organisations described how they left the project with resources and a greater understanding of co-creation to take into future projects. This feedback is included in the main report.

10 Looked after Children.

- Pilot and Phase 2 libraries needed to build more holistic support around young people including through parents and carers. This should be modelled for phase three organisations.

Reluctancy with sharing learning

- There was limited enthusiasm from pilot library services for sharing experiences and learning beyond the project network due to (primarily) concerns about being seen as a failure. It was sometimes difficult to balance creating a safe space for the group meetings (where conversations could be kept confidential) with Libraries Rising's intention to share learning with the sector. Changes to messaging within the recruitment and onboarding process eased this in phase two; however, there were still concerns from some services who felt pressure to 'achieve something'. This reflects the challenges that library staff are currently facing on the ground at the moment with job redundancies and concerns around being seen to fail.
- As stated above, ultimately a change in mindset is needed outside of the Youth Engagement Network programme– there is only so much that can be achieved within it. Change management is required at a higher, and wider level.

Delivering co-creation within local authorities and gaining buy-in

- Despite the positivity of the majority of staff to continue doing this work in some way, in reality there is a concern that capacity, budget and time will hamper co-creation and ultimately embedding learning from the programme. Both pilot and phase two organisations sometimes found it difficult to implement what their young people wanted within local authority restrictions (e.g. receiving the project funding; paying for specific games with companies that are not listed as suppliers).
- It is not feasible for library service staff to be able to make change happen without the backing of their senior managers, and the impact evaluation at both pilot and phase two shows the difference in success between services who did, and did not have that buy-in.
- The report recommends that Libraries Rising continue to build in requirements for senior management buy-in evidence at recruitment stage. They should develop their wider Libraries Rising work in influencing and seeking buy-in from Heads of Service for co-creation and youth engagement work.

Engaging young people on a national level

- The intended national network meetings did not happen during the pilot or phase two, mainly due to feedback from the target audiences (e.g. SEND, neurodivergent young people) who reported that they were uncomfortable with national-level communication either in person or online. The Programme Manager will continue collecting evidence on the outcomes of this work to feed into national conversations. Although this is listed in the 'what did not work well' section, the reason behind not achieving it points to a proactive, sensible and positive picture.

Developing trust

- Those working with young people over a longer, more sustained period (e.g. those who got up to speed quickly within the existing timeframes) were able to develop a more positive and trusted relationship. Having implemented a longer lead-in time for partners during phase two, this led to a greater amount of trust-building time with young people which worked well.
- However, concerns were raised in phase two in relation to specific barriers that were experienced by library staff (and therefore young people). These included the opening times of library services which do not always match the needs of young people. Conversely, those who opened after hours to try and attract engagements from young people found it a struggle to staff these events.

Evaluation and monitoring

- There were some challenges with capturing monitoring and evaluation data. These included collecting young people's demographic data to evidence diversity and being confident to adapt tools provided for SEND and neurodivergent participants. Recommendations made at the interim evaluation reporting

stage were put into action to address these issues for phase two, including changes to the evaluation briefing for staff, the end of project proforma, and the messaging around collecting demographic data (including sharing best practice case studies). This resulted in a much better experience for library staff and also improved data for analysis in phase two.

- Although library services were not asked to formally measure the number of young people who had returned to the library independently as a result of the Youth Engagement Network, it would be useful to find ways to do this in future years. The report also recommends:

  - Keeping the evaluation 'light touch' for phase three (i.e. proportionate) whilst maintaining its robustness
  - Developing a co-created approach to evaluation planning in the future, e.g. working with young people to help develop the evaluation framework (in the same way that they would co-create other elements of the project)
  - Revisiting the methodology e.g. if the creative toolkit is not used, what could work better for library staff? Is time the only barrier in using this?
  - Bringing in youth engagement evaluation training specialists who could bring fresh ideas into the mix e.g. peer-to-peer video interviews.

- A light touch online survey to assess the longitudinal impacts on pilot library services was deployed. Unfortunately the response rate was poor, and reliance is currently on the Programme Manager to seek updates from pilot organisations – some of which have changed staff. Further work in terms of long-term legacy for the programme is recommended, but this would require additional internal resource or external budget.

Young people with SEND

- Co-creating with non-verbal young people was challenging for pilot library services and highlighted the need for more specialised support and training for those working with SEND participants. This was introduced into the phase two training and onboarding phase, including using learning from the pilot organisations.

Setting targets

- Initial targets in the activity plan were set too high. This could not have been pre-empted until the pilot had been delivered, and both impact and process evaluation completed. The evidence in the interim report suggested that this type of work is more about group need and depth rather than breadth. Limiting age groups to 11-13 years was also found to be unnecessary, with some library services working with children up to the age of 14. This was adjusted and work continued to focus on delivering meaningful activity rather than achieving high numbers. Library services were able to access a greater pool of young people and partners having had the age band increased.

Genuine strategic need

- Changes to the recruitment and selection process for phase two were made by Libraries Rising to ensure that all applicants genuinely wanted to make a difference to young people.
- Although the impact evaluation highlights that there were some buy-in issues, evidence suggests that the majority of library services involved in phase two genuinely wanted to develop a strategic approach to co-creation.
- The report suggests continuing to instil at recruitment stage that this work is hard, and time intensive. It is critical to want to do this work, and to do it properly. It should always align with a library services' strategic intent. **[Further detail can be found on pages 79- 90]**

1.1.5 Overall aims results summary

Programme aim	Status
Ensure young people have power in libraries (by giving them a genuine opportunity to influence their local library services)	Achieved
Provide opportunities to co-create activities and shape the services on offer in their local library (and also the national network with the intention of influencing sector policy and decision-making more broadly)	Achieved
Encourage young people to learn something new, gaining skills and finding out about working in a library (with library staff learning new skills in co-creation and youth engagement)	Achieved
Support libraries across the country, building positive relationships between libraries and young people through the national network. Libraries taking part were also part of a pilot network which offered support, ideas exchange and an opportunity to reflect	Achieved

2 Introduction to the Youth Engagement Network

Funded by Arts Council England, the Libraries Rising[11] Youth Engagement Network programme aims to platform the voices of children and young people, including those who are marginalised or experiencing deprivation.

A total of 20 unique library services[12] were involved in the programme in 2024 and 2025. During this time they took part in meetings, training and networking opportunities, and/or tested co-created approaches with young people aged 11-16 years old.[13] There were four overarching aims to the overall Youth Engagement Network programme:

- Ensure young people have power in libraries (by giving them a genuine opportunity to influence their local library services)
- Provide opportunities to co-create activities and shape the services on offer in their local library (and also the national network with the intention of influencing sector policy and decision-making more broadly)
- Encourage young people to learn something new, gaining skills and finding out about working in a library (with library staff learning new skills in co-creation and youth engagement)
- Support libraries across the country, building positive relationships between libraries and young people through the national network. Libraries taking part were also part of a pilot network which offered support, ideas exchange and an opportunity to reflect.

A summary of the activity delivered across 2024 and 2025 by each library service is provided in section 8.1.

11 Libraries Rising is the operating name of the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (formerly ASCEL).

12 Phase one pilot libraries (2024) included Luton Libraries, Norfolk Library & Information Service, Kirklees Library & Information Service, Newham Libraries, Slough Libraries, Libraries Unlimited (Barnstaple), Cornwall Libraries. Phase two libraries (2025) included Manchester Libraries, Stockton-on-Tees Libraries & Archives, Barnet Libraries, North Somerset Libraries, West Northamptonshire Libraries, Cornwall Libraries (see note below), North Northamptonshire Libraries, Newcastle Libraries, East Sussex Libraries, Lancashire Library Service, North Tyneside Libraries, Leeds Libraries, Knowsley Libraries, and Idea Store (London Borough of Tower Hamlets). Note that pilot phase one library services Burnside College (North Tyneside) and Libraries Unlimited (Churston & Torbay) withdrew from the process in 2024; and phase two library service Suffolk Libraries withdrew in 2025. In addition, note that Cornwall Libraries from the 2024 pilot continued into 2025 and are therefore only counted once in the overall participating libraries figure above.

13 Note that the age bracket of young people was changed following the interim evaluation to 11-16 years from 11-13 years to remove the narrow restriction and better reflect the opportunities for engagement that libraries reported.

3 About this report

This independent evaluation assesses whether the intended outputs and outcomes for the programme have been achieved. It builds on the interim report (delivered in September 2024) to present overall combined findings from the first two years of the programme.[14]

The report draws on data collected by 20 participating projects (and three library services who withdrew) between January 2024 and December 2025. It is separated into impact and process evaluation findings. With impact, progress against outputs and outcomes is presented for each of the two programme beneficiaries: young people and library staff. A summary of unintended outcomes is also provided. The process evaluation section presents successes, challenges, learning and recommendations drawn directly from evidence, and reviewed through the lens of the Quality Principles[15]. This gives Libraries Rising an opportunity to share learning with the wider sector and provides a potential blueprint for services who may wish to develop a co-created approach to their work with young people. The insight discussed in this report reflects commonly occurring themes or outcomes, however where findings are representative of one individual, this is clearly stated.

Where quotations are not attributed, these are taken from anonymous sources such as library staff surveys and depth interviews, both of which were purposefully unattributable to allow for open and honest responses. On the request of Libraries Rising, extended quotation samples have been included.

3.1 What is the evaluation setting out to measure?

An evaluation framework and overarching strategy was put in place to monitor and evaluate the Youth Network Programme's intended impact[16]. This was created with the Libraries Rising Programme Manager based on the original Arts Council England activity plan and was updated in December 2024 to respond to programme changes made following the pilot. A full version of the evaluation strategy (mapped against Generic Learning Outcomes or GLOs) is available from the project team on request. It should be noted that the methodology also allowed data collection of unintended outcomes, which are also discussed in this report.

The below diagram is an abridged version of the logic model which shows the range of intended outputs and outcomes that the programme intended to collectively deliver for young people and library staff[17]. The framework was ultimately a roadmap for achieving the overarching programme aim to 'provide a genuine opportunity for young people to influence their local library's services through activity co-creation'.

The overall monitoring and evaluation approach for the programme was underpinned by the CCV's Evaluation Principles[18] of people-centred, connected, beneficial and robust evaluation.

14 Analysis of combined data from pilot phase one and roll-out phase two has been freshly undertaken for this report.

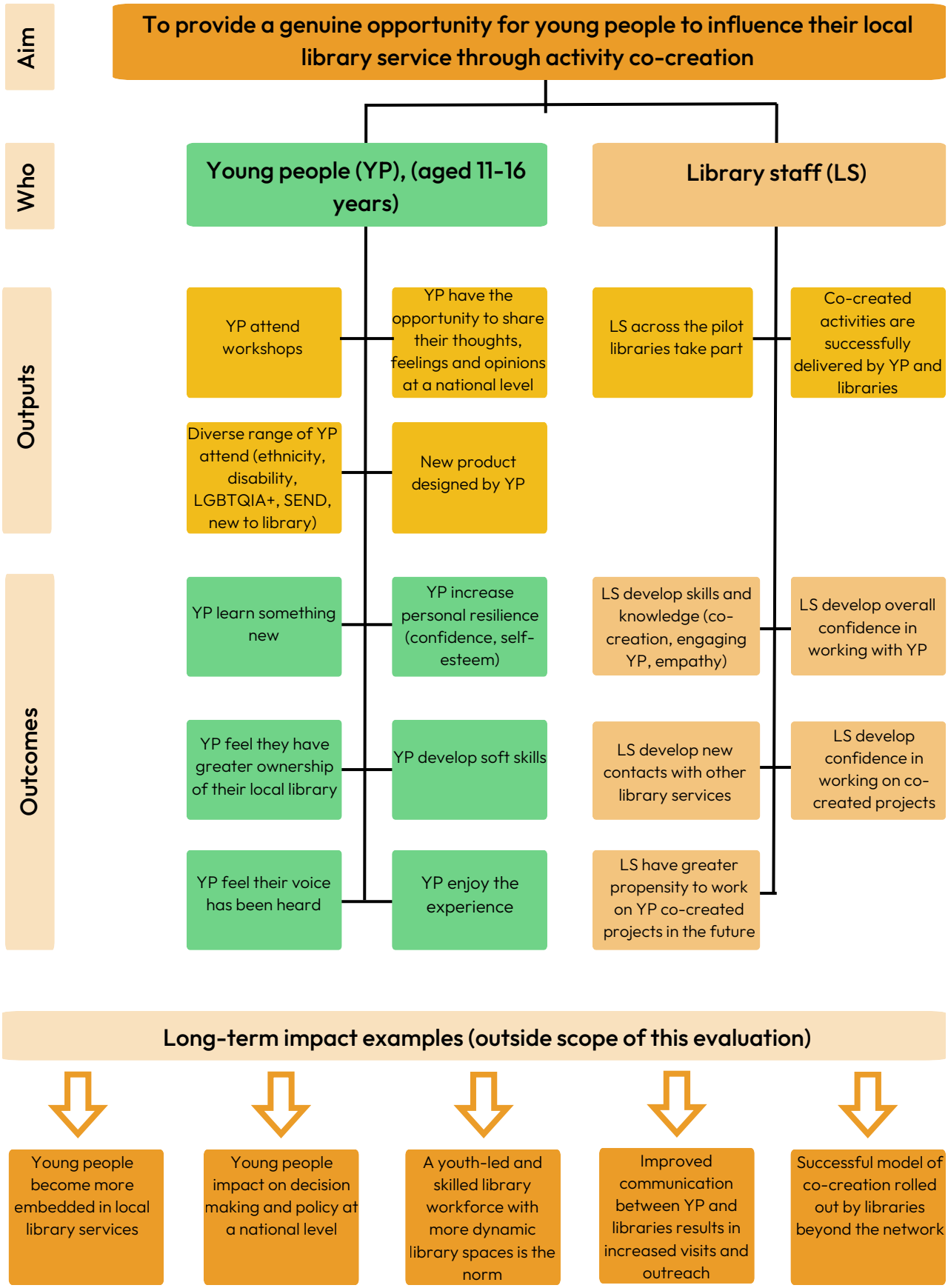
15 https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/quality-principles

16 Available on request.

17 Outcomes are defined as the benefit, difference or change that Libraries Rising want to make for beneficiaries (young people and library staff) as a result of taking part in this work.

18 https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/our-work/evaluation/evaluation-principles/

3.1.1 'At a glance' evaluation framework



3.1.2 Sources of evidence

The below table summarises the various data sources that were put in place to monitor and evaluate the Youth Engagement Network in response to the evaluation framework, along with sample details for transparency[19]. All of the below data types and evidence have been analysed, interpreted and drawn upon for this report.

Data source/ research instrument	Sample	Period covered by data/ time period collected	Notes
Independent observations of library service activity	3	2024 and November 2025	The independent evaluator visited Kirklees and Newham libraries during the pilot, and North Tyneside Libraries during phase two. The Programme Manager also visited four library services during the pilot and five library services during phase two. These experiences were discussed with the independent evaluator at the midpoint and endpoint reviews, plus notes were made where relevant in the Programme Manager's reflection diary (see below).
Young people's feedback forms	80	February 2024-December 2025	80 completions out of 236 unique young people taking part in the programme represents a 34% response rate. Pilot data represents 4 of the 7 libraries:[20] Norfolk (n=5), Newham (n=3), Libraries Unlimited - Barnstaple (n=3), Luton (n=10).

19 The pilot was an excellent way to test and learn from the original monitoring and evaluation methodology. Several recommendations and changes were made to strengthen the approach going into phase two. These changes are highlighted in section 5.1 and 5.2.

20 Libraries during the pilot struggled to collect feedback from young people despite having a creative toolkit to flex the standard young person's feedback form provided. Enhanced training was provided in advance of phase two to encourage library teams to be more confident in embedding evaluation into their programming, to encourage more completions. This is discussed further in 5.1 and 5.2.

			Phase two data included 9 of the 13 libraries: Cornwall (n=10), North Tyneside (n=19), Knowsley (n=4), Lancashire (n=1), Manchester (n=14), Newcastle (n=2), North Northamptonshire (n=3), Idea Store: Tower Hamlets (n=4), West Northamptonshire (n=4). See appendix for further detail.
Young people additional feedback gathered	2 sets	June 2024 and December 2025	Pilot organisation Kirklees Library and Information Service devised their own method of data collection from young people, inspired by the creative toolkit and conversations with the independent evaluator during their visit (mainly to meet the needs of their particular group of young people, as encouraged). They sought feedback from teachers to complete their proforma, which was shared with Libraries Rising and independent evaluator. Idea Store devised reflection windows which were completed by the young people.
Additional materials evidencing further consultation with young people	1 set	January 2026	Manchester Libraries shared files related to their Youth Consultation which their young people from theYouth Engagement Network were involved in.
Depth interviews with library staff project leaders	15 library services	July/August 2024 and November/December 2025	Pilot (n=6 interviews, note that one interview included three members of staff.); phase two (n=9 interviews, note that one interview included two members of staff).
Depth interviews with libraries who had withdrawn from project	1	April 2024	Interview with Burnside College (North Tyneside)

Other feedback from libraries who had withdrawn from the project	1	May 2024	Email feedback provided by Library Supervisor Libraries Unlimited (Churston & Torquay)
End of project proformas	20	August 2024 and December 2025	All libraries except East Sussex submitted proformas (pilot n=7 and phase two n=13: note that Cornwall supplied two proformas, one for each year). Additional information was provided by Slough Libraries (pilot) in a short report.
Library staff online survey	19	August 2024 and December 2025	As this is anonymous, we do not know if all participating libraries completed the survey (i.e. some library services had more than one member of staff working on the project who may also have completed it). Pilot n=7, phase two n=12.
Reflection session with Libraries Rising - Programme Manager and Chief Executive	1 session	September 2024	To review exploratory research questions related to impact evaluation with two members of Libraries Rising staff.
Reflection session with Libraries Rising - Programme Manager	1 session	November 2025	To review overall project progress against outcomes and exploratory research questions.
Parental/carer consent forms and demographic survey (pilot)	6 library services submitted data, based on 32 young people overall	February 2024 – August 2024	Limited and missing demographic data sets exist within those supplied, due to challenges libraries faced with data collection.

Parental/carer consent forms and demographic survey (phase two improved mechanism)	9 library services submitted data based on 68 young people	February 2025 – December 2025	Capturing demographic data continued to be a challenge in phase two due to the same issues raised in the pilot i.e. capturing data from teachers/parents/carers or the young people themselves due to reticence or logistical practicalities.[21]
Case studies	4 case studies from the pilot and 5 case studies from phase two	August 2024 and January 2026	Case studies written by Libraries Rising/participating libraries, Kirklees, Libraries Unlimited – Barnstaple, Luton, Norfolk, Knowsley, Manchester, North Northants, Idea Store – Tower Hamlets and West Northants) were supplied by Libraries Rising for review.
Libraries Rising Programme Manager reflection diary	5 pages (pilot) and 5 pages (phase two)	February 2024 – August 2024 (pilot) January 2025 – October 2025 (phase two)	Informal reflection notes from meetings, 1-1s etc.
'Legacy' online survey	1	November 2025	This survey was a test to see if pilot library services would share how/if they had continued their co-created work from 2024. The low response rate is discussed in 5.1 and 5.2.
Miscellaneous materials including posters, photographs, presentations (e.g. internal evaluation or advocacy), recruitment materials	-	February 2024-December 2026	

21 The independent evaluator notes that this is a consistent trend across their projects and not isolated to the Youth Engagement Network programme.

3.1.3 Limitations

Thorough analysis of combined evidence from the above sources has directly informed the insight in this report. However, there are several limitations to note:[22]

- As stated above, pilot library staff did not collect the full range of demographic data requested at the start of the project. Reasons for this are discussed below in section 5. This means that the demographic profile of young people is incomplete for the pilot year (for example, we cannot report on young people's ethnicity data). Although challenges in data collection remained, this improved in phase two, and indicative findings are provided below.
- Survey data and young people's feedback form data is unweighted. The young people's responses collected by each library service is included above for transparency. This does not necessarily reflect a failure of the library service to collect data; the projects were all different and some had less capacity than others; also young people had varying needs and abilities to take part in giving their feedback, so data collection was (quite rightly) adapted. It does however skew the quantitative young people's data results towards particular library projects (e.g. Slough, Norfolk, Devon and Luton during the pilot and Cornwall, North Tyneside and Manchester in phase two). Young people's feedback forms varied in reliability and validity due to the mixed attention given to completing these forms (and observed peer conformity in writing the same comments). There is one suspected duplication of a form reported by the Programme Manager at the data input stage. This was included in the data for the benefit of doubt, but this may have impacted the overall data reliability. There were also some isolated different approaches to collecting young people's data. For example, some young people at Lancashire Library Service submitted a joint collective response (multiple young people completing one form) rather than individually. The number of respondents per question varies, therefore all data tables in the appendix shows the number of completions and overall respondents per question for transparency. Where percentage totals in the narrative do not add up to 100, this is likely due to rounding.
- Year one was a pilot for the monitoring and evaluation tools, as much as the programme. Some minor issues existed with the end of project proforma and feedback form wording (in terms of understanding). User experience tweaks were made for phase two to ensure that data collected was robust, however some issues remained; for example, the way that some library services responded to the data question on 'number of library users engaging with young people's product'.
- The majority of pilot libraries did not submit correct young people's engagement data. Whilst we can report on the total number of unique young people involved (once or more in a session) in the pilot, we do not have a full picture of what that looked like in terms of number of engagements from those young people. This was rectified for phase two and full data is presented.
- Some data tables in the appendix (and indeed throughout) are only representative of 2025 phase two data due to the limitations described above.
- Despite engaging in the programme, no figures were supplied by East Sussex Libraries. This service has been included in the figures for overall participation but the individual results from this service are unable to be included.
- There was limited time in the budget for the independent evaluator to visit sessions and observe projects on the ground, resulting in a reliance on feedback from the Programme Manager. Finding mutually suitable scheduling in phase two was particularly challenging.
- Case studies were not written by the independent evaluator and used data collected by library services/Libraries Rising in-house. This may have introduced bias into the findings.

22 These are included as best practice and provide context for the rest of the report.

4 Impact evaluation: key findings

4.1 Young people

4.1.1 Outputs

4.1.1.1 Numbers of young people

A total of 236 unique young people were involved at least once in the YEN programme[23]. This includes 56 young people in the pilot year, and 180 in phase two. This is nearly double the overall programme target of 120 young people and would certainly have been even larger if North Tyneside (Burnside College), Torbay and Suffolk Libraries had not withdrawn. Although engagements[24] were not measured in the pilot year, this was put into place for phase two. A total of 541 engagements happened across the 13 participating phase two libraries. These multiple engagements, coupled with the positive outcomes reported in 4.2.3 positively indicates that there is a demand for this kind of co-created engagement in libraries.

4.1.1.2 Number of national meetings including Children and Young People Promise Alliance [Young people have the opportunity to share their opinions and feedback at a national level]

The intended approach and model for these meetings when targets were set at activity plan submission was not relevant once the project got underway. In the pilot, young people shared that they did not want to feed into anything nationally and instead preferred to focus on their local library. At that point the Programme Manager began to change thinking about what those national events could 'look like' to more genuinely meet the needs and types of young people the libraries had been engaging with e.g. SEND. In phase two, only two library services suggested that their young people would want to be involved with national activity. This adaptation is to be expected in a socially engaged, co-created project like the Youth Network Programme[25].

Positively, there were examples where young people had participated in additional consultation at a local level (with changes being made as a result)[26]. For example, the young people at Manchester Libraries took part in a broader Libraries Youth Consultation (which was used as a basis to update Youth Friendly Standards) and also at North Somerset, where they were involved in a children's consultation which ran parallel to a 12-week transformation consultation which was happening at the same time.

> "Through the training I had as part of the Youth Engagement network, I was able to strongly advocate for a children's consultation to be carried [in] parallel to the main over 16s consultation, which received nearly 500 responses and facilitated a partnership with the Children's Engagement and Participation officer for the council, who is very eager to work more closely with libraries to engage young people."
> **(Library staff end of project proforma phase two)**

> "Loved being part of the project and if there was any way a representative from our SEND group could be part of wider national discussions, that would be great. The school are keeping in touch with us and we'll be working with them in the library again next year."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

23 See 8.2.1 for full breakdown of young people numbers by library service across both years.
24 I.e. the total young people recorded as attending opposed to unique young people.
25 It should be noted that the Programme Manager has set up a 'National Youth Engagement Group' which will be a community of practice involving both pilot and phase two libraries.
26 This is discussed further in 4.1.3.

4.1.1.3 Young people profile

In order to report on whether Libraries Rising achieved their overarching aim of engaging with a diverse group of young people, libraries were provided with tools[27] to collect existing library membership status and the following demographic profile information[28]:

- Ethnicity
- LGBTQIA+ identity
- Disability
- Neurodiversity
- Age
- Postcode.

The profile data in section 8.2 is presented separately for the pilot and phase two years due to the differences in what was collected each year. Although targets were not set for demographic profile, the findings do suggest that a range of young people were engaged – especially from a deprivation, neurodivergent and disability perspective. For example, topline findings include:

- A range of ages took part across both years – with the age specification increased from 13 to 16 years going into phase two as described earlier, in response to the demand and need of libraries. 28% (n=18) of young people in phase two were aged 12 years old.[29]
- 60% (n=41) of young people in phase two identified as a girl.[30]
- 38% (n=21) of young people in phase two identified as neurodivergent.[31]
- 15% (n=8) of young people in phase two identified as LGBTQIA+.[32]
- 13% (n=7) of young people in phase two identified as D/deaf and/or disabled.[33]
- 57% (n=33) - the majority of young people in phase two - identified as White/White British with a range of other ethnicities making up the remainder.[34]

27 This data was requested in a short feedback form accompanying the parental consent form with some changes made between both years of the programme to encourage greater completions. Note that it is likely that the parents/carers will have completed the demographic profile information. This does not necessarily mean it will reflect the identities of the young people themselves (e.g. they may identify differently than what their responsible adult submitted). Pilot library services did not collect data across all demographic profile areas of interest and therefore data in the appendix is limited to age, ethnicity and postcode. Additional training and support was put in place for phase two library services to collect this data more confidently, but logistical challenges in collecting or accessing this data from responsible adults remained, as discussed in 5.1 and 5.2.

28 These questions used the standard Arts Council England Illuminate compliant demographic questions.

29 This reflects a total of 65 responses to this question, with the following results: 11 years (n=11), 12 years (n=18), 13 years (n=7), 14 years (n=16), 15 years (n=11), 16 years (n=1), over 16 (n=1).

30 This reflects a total of 68 responses to this question, with the following results: Boy (n=21), Girl (n=41), Non-binary (n=1), Another way (n=0), PNS (n=3).

31 This reflects a total of 56 responses to the question 'Does your child identify as neurodivergent? Being Neurodivergent could also include dyslexia, ADHD etc', with the following results: Yes (n=21), No (n=27), PNS (n=8).

32 This reflects a total of 55 responses to the question 'Does your child identify as LGBTQIA+?', with the following results: Yes (n=8), No (n=43), PNS (n=4).

33 This reflects a total of 56 responses to the question 'Does your child identify as a D/deaf and/or disabled person, or have a long-term health condition?', with the following results: Yes (n=7), No (n=48), PNS (n=1).

34 This reflects a total of 58 responses to this question, with the following results (please note that other response choices were provided with zero results and are not included here: see section 8 for full response choices list): Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi (n=1), Asian/Asian British – Pakistani (n=1), Black/Black British – Black African (n=3), Black/Black British – Black Caribbean (n=1), Mixed background – Black Caribbean and White (n=1), Any other Mixed background (n=3), White/White British – Gypsy, Roma or Irish Traveller (n=1), White/White British – White British (n=22), White/White British – White Irish (n=3), Any other White Background (n=3), Any other Background – Arab (n=1), Any other background (n=4), PNS (n-1), Not known (n=1), Prefer to self-describe (n=1).

- 89 postcodes were collected across both years. 86 of these postcodes were successfully profiled against the most recent IMD 2025[35]. Of these: 28% (n=24) were in the most deprived ten percent of England (decile 1, facing the highest levels of deprivation); 16% (n=14) were in the 10-20% most deprived (decile 2, areas still facing relatively high deprivation); 45% (n=39) were in decile 3 – 8 (middle groups, with areas around or slightly above or below the England average); and 10% (n= 9) were in deciles 9 or 10 (areas with relatively low or the lowest levels of deprivation).
- 82% (n=46)[36] of phase two young people had previously visited the library before. Whilst we do not know the context of this e.g. with school/independent/family, it indicates that the young people involved in this project did have some prior experience of these spaces and had therefore already an existing frame of reference to bring to their sessions (this was especially helpful potentially for those groups who suggested or developed particular changes to the library environment).
- 57% (n=31)[37] were not members of the library. There is limited evidence that young people became members following their experience, which is discussed further below.

> "I feel quite proud because I think I've reached kids that I wouldn't have if I'd just have advertised for a group of teenagers. I don't think they're the kind of people we'd have ever pulled through the door to come along to something."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

4.1.1.4 Product development

The young people took part in a range of activities or developed specific new products across both years of the programme, as shown in the individual descriptions of library projects in section 8.1. The type of activities and products has been one of the most fascinating aspects to observe – with the approaches of library services and the levels of engagement from the young people differing substantially (and resulting in no single co-created output being the same). From simply wanting to make changes to the library environment, through to designing and running their own club, activity has been wide-ranging. A total of 13 different 'products' were recorded in phase two[38].

35 https://imd2025.co.uk/imd2025/. See 4.2.1 for detail on Levelling Up for Culture and Priority Places.

36 This reflects a total of 56 responses to the question 'Has your child visited this library before?', with the following results: Yes (n=46), No (n=10).

37 This reflects a total of 54 responses to the question 'Is your child a member of this library?', with the following results: Yes (n=22), No (n=31), PNS (n=1).

38 This was not a required quantitative measure in the pilot year but was brought in for phase two. It was acknowledged that the young people may not produce a product at all during their time on the project (for example, they may have simply taken part in a review of the library space) however, outputs such as producing a games club, poster, designing an exhibition etc were all 'products' required to be recorded by the library service.

4.1.2 Intended output targets summary

Output targets	Cumulative result	Status
120 young people in total over the two years	236	Achieved
Number of national meetings including Children's Promise Alliance [young people have the opportunity to share their opinions and feedback at a national level]	0	This output was removed as a target for the programme in consultation with Arts Council England based on feedback from the young people and Libraries Rising's pro-active response to that (see more on this in 5.1 and 5.2).
Diverse range of young people attend	-	Achieved with caution on limitations
New product designed by the young people	-	Achieved

4.1.3 Outcomes

4.1.3.1 Intended outcome 1: Young people enjoy the experience

The overall results from the young people's feedback form data[39] shows that 41% (or n=33) rated their enjoyment at the top of the emoji scale[40] (defined for analysis purposes as excellent), 35% (or n=28) as good, 21% (or n=17) as neither good nor bad, and 3% (n=2) as poor or very poor. With just over three quarters (76% or n=61) rating it either excellent or good, this indicates that the young people enjoyed their experience on the project and suggests that participating libraries have (on the whole) created satisfactory experiences. Furthermore, 94% (n=77) of young people answered 'yes' to the statement 'I had a good time.'[41]

To understand what this satisfaction might be attributed to, the feedback form asked the young people to share something they enjoyed. Of 73 comments submitted, the most commonly occurring responses were creative experiences e.g. painting, playing games, spoken word, drawing etc; and social experiences e.g. meeting friends, visiting the library, or simply taking part and communicating with peers and staff. Isolated suggestions also related to independence and voice, including being away from school, sharing ideas with adults and having freedom.

39 A total of 80 responses were collected. See above sources of evidence for sample sizes and limitations. Note that where percentages and N do not total 100, this is due to rounding.

40 Young people rated their enjoyment based on five different mobile phone emoji pictures ranging from smiling to unhappy.

41 This represents a total of 82 respondents answering this question.

"Talking to library workers and telling them my ideas."
(Young person feedback)

"The freeness, I could do what I wanted to. I could draw etc whilst others played Uno for example."
(Young person feedback)

"It was a wonderful experience. I felt relaxed and calm."
(Young person feedback)

"Having time away from school."
(Young person feedback)

"I hate to say this, but I've really enjoyed it."
(Young person feedback)

"Exploring central library and having the ability to point out flaws."
(Young person feedback)

"All four young people picked the happiest emoji to convey their feelings about the project."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

Other qualitative data evidence collected by both the library services and independent evaluator also reflects high levels of enjoyment; often attributed to doing something different, socialising with others of a similar age, being able to relax, having a voice (more on this below) and doing something fun that was deemed better than school.

"This is way better than school."
(Young person feedback)

"One young man, commented on his first session that he 'didn't really enjoy school because however hard I try I can't get better than a level one. I really enjoy coming here though'. He didn't miss a session after that one."
(Young person feedback)

"It's fun coming somewhere different."
(Young person feedback)

"Only thing exciting about Thursdays."
(Young person feedback)

"It's really fun. I like that we can just relax and draw here."
(Young person feedback)

The young people were also asked to share something that would have improved their experience. A total 56 responses (following data cleaning) were analysed and themed from their feedback forms as follows:

- having longer time in sessions (n=10)
- if they had been more vocal/had more of their ideas heard/participated more (n=4)

- more visits to the library/more sessions (n=4)
- getting a PS5 (n=3)
- if they'd made more friends (n=3)
- if more young people were involved (n=3)
- having more food (n=2)
- more games (n=2)
- more consistent meetings with the same people to make sure everyone is aware of what's happening (n=1)
- being invited to places to showcase my artwork (n=1)
- art in sketch book (n=1)
- more girls (n=1)
- more freedom/choice (n=1)
- talking to more people in group (n=1)
- going to the park (n=1)
- smaller group (n=1)
- time of the session (n=1)
- playing more characters (n=1)
- getting transport to the session (n=1)
- doing more writing (n=1).

> "It was a good experience, but I live too far from the library."
> **(Young person feedback)**

> "We thought that a twice monthly session of 1.5 hours would be plenty when we were in the planning phase, but we were surprised and pleased to learn that the group felt the frequency and length of time is not enough. At the end of most of the sessions the group were disappointed it was time to finish."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

Twelve young people suggested there was nothing that could have improved their experience, and another said that they wanted to improve 'everything'. The top responses above indicate that there is a potential appetite for libraries to offer more sessions in the future (and for these to be longer in duration than they were during the programme).

Although caution needs to be drawn based on the sample size, it is curious given the below positive quantitative and qualitative feedback on voice (see 4.1.3.5) that four young people (from two different library services) felt that their experience could have been improved by having a greater say, or if they had participated more. This could simply reflect the fact they did not feel confident to speak or 'sat back', or conversely (and less positively) that they were not encouraged.

Three respondents had a negative experience and so they unfortunately suggested 'not going' in response to what libraries could have improved.

If we compare feedback from young people with the library services who ran the greatest number of sessions with young people, and who built relationships and trust over a long period of time (in school and at the library for those working with education providers), there is – perhaps unsurprisingly – a correlation between satisfaction and enjoyment. It is evident that this relationship-building and ultimate success was a result of library staff capacity and prioritisation; being able to find suitable partners; and recruiting successfully in time for the project delivery phase (rather than for example, poor planning or failure on the part of the library service). Extending the time given to libraries to build relationships with the young people was recommended following the pilot and the impact of this during phase two is discussed further in 5.1 and 5.2.

"Not sure, I didn't care much, sorry. It was not welcoming for me."
(Young person feedback)

"If I took part more so I knew what I was doing."
(Young person feedback

"The timeline of delivery by the end of June was not achievable due to challenges in organising meetings with the group and getting them released from lessons but also in library staff capacity to progress the ideas."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"I think the fact that we spent such a condensed time together made it a success."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview- pilot)

"We had several comments from parents that the timing of the project impacted their decision not to allow their young people to take part, particularly the Summer term with exams, revision etc. The project may have had better success over the Summer holidays and early Autumn term."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"I have to be honest and say there was no indication that they enjoyed their experience. I think they found their visits to the library disconcerting at times."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"All of the participants have told us that the project has provided them with a sense of belonging and that they have had 'fun' and enjoyed the 'buzz' of coming to each session and playing games with each other. Another person who is new to the RPG experience exclaimed that she thought it was the same as Warhammer but now she has experienced it she really enjoyed the escapism and the fact that it is really different and gives her the opportunity to 'pretend' to be someone/something else for an hour. We have purchased 'themed' notebooks that align with the variety of D&D characters and gifted them to each 'player' so that they are able to create a character journal whilst playing the D&D campaign: this has provided an additional creative avenue for participants which they have enjoyed."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

- Some other suggestions were individually made by the young people on their feedback forms for the libraries to take into consideration. These included: treating young people like adults, having a separate room for young people, including food/snacks, improving computers in libraries by having tablets, incorporating bean bags for comfort, thinking about the opening time of libraries/time of sessions (e.g. having them later), organising more visits from libraries into schools and having book-related competitions for younger children. As highlighted by library staff in section 4.2.3.1, they learned a huge amount of what young people are actually looking for from library spaces (albeit not all ideas are feasible due to practicalities and/or restrictions by the local authority).

"If there are more visits from libraries in school. To showcase what they have happening in libraries."
(Young person feedback)

"I had fun it was top peak. Snacks all the time, oh and bean bags, I love bean bags they're super comfy for reading."
(Young person feedback)

"Maybe have small book related competitions so young children can have an opportunity to win prizes."
(Young person feedback)

- The participants were asked to share one word to describe their experience, with 74 responses collected and analysed. The below word cloud highlights these, with the most frequently used words appearing the largest. As shown, the majority of the words have positive connotations which is a great result for the library services. Isolated negative experiences including those referenced above can clearly be seen in the word cloud on the next page, with 'average', 'boring' and 'awful' being included.

"A volunteer has now taken over in my place, and the group now meet once a month; the parents and children have continued to engage in the library and said they found the group 'fun', 'enjoyable and 'look forward to it every week"
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"Loved seeing the old library and getting free bookmarks."
(Young person feedback)

4.1.3.2 Intended outcome 2: Young people learn something new

There is evidence to suggest that the young people learned something new as a direct result of their engagement with the programme, for example, 77% (n=60) agreed with the statement 'I've gained new knowledge and skills.' When asked to share something new that they didn't know before, responses fell into three different categories:

- Library-related learning e.g. that the library is free, what you can do at the library including accessing online books, what library staff do etc.
- Something about themselves e.g. they have an ability to make friends, are good at teamwork, gained more confidence etc.
- Creative or technical knowledge e.g. how to play games, how to write poems, how to set up a PlayStation.

"(Something new that I didn't know before is…) There are other people like me."
(Young person feedback)

"Learning to use a public computer in the library to find images for badge making. This has been supervised and has promoted the services on offer. Discovered that public computers are free to use, which they were surprised about."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

(Something new that I didn't know before is…) You can use the library for free."
(Young person feedback)

"(Something new that I didn't know before is…) Longsight has a library."
(Young person feedback)

"(Something new that I didn't know before is…) How a badge maker works."
(Young person feedback)

It should be noted that the young people from marginalised groups have potentially been exposed to opportunities they would not ordinarily have had e.g. Newcastle Libraries providing access to expert tutors for their young people's revision study group.

4.1.3.3 Intended outcome 3: Young people develop soft skills e.g. teamwork, communication

There are some positive findings in both quantitative and qualitative data which suggests that the young people have gained a range of life (or 'soft' skills). For example:

- 83% (n=66) agreed that taking part had improved their communication skills.
- 82% (n=65) reported that being involved had improved their ability to work as part of a team.

The young people were also asked to share a new skill gained as a direct result of their involvement. The responses show the potential of the programme to develop a variety of different soft skills alongside all the creative ones they experienced. For example these included budgeting, teamwork, communication, confidence building, organisation and time management. Many of the young people involved did not know each other before taking part and have gained new friends as a result.

"(A new skill I gained is…) Talking with other people from different age groups."
(Young person feedback)

"(A new skill I gained is…) Organisation and time management."
(Young person feedback)

"During the group evaluation one young person commented that they had learnt social skills at the group."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"All the young people appeared to improve their communication skills, specifically active listening. At the beginning they all talked over each other, by the end they listened to each other and gave each other space to put forward ideas. They made a fair decision to vote for ideas to work out what they wanted. Teamwork improved with this skill."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

> "Young people's communication skills improved. Example: young person didn't speak in the first session. As sessions progressed he started to join in and would start to say hello. By the end session he was comfortable enough to ask why there was no juice with the biscuits!"
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

This indicates that the co-created activities have not only given enjoyment but have also provided life skills which are likely to be useful in school, volunteering or work settings in the future. Library teams also reported numerous other skills learned by the young people, some of which e.g. at North Tyneside Libraries, Luton Libraries and Kirklees Library and Information Service were a direct result of bringing in external expertise. These included:

- developing writing skills (e.g. through producing proposals for their ideas)
- learning digital marketing using Canva
- research skills (such as researching costings and suppliers)
- creating stories, poems, characters and props
- improving fine motor skills
- using their imagination
- making musical instruments
- new art and drawing techniques.

> "Students also benefited from learning new art and drawing techniques from the art producer. A variety of new brushing, colour and shading skills benefited the students' knowledge, and some have now been inspired to take art at GCSE."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "The last session was amazing they all used their imagination adding so much of their own ideas to the story. Seeing them work together was incredible. Even when another student was talking through what they wanted to happen in their part of the story the others joined in by making sounds our shaking their instruments. Making each other laugh or sparking ideas for the next students part of their story."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "Making costumes. Storytelling. Character development."
> (**Young person feedback**)

There is some evidence to suggest that the young people also felt empowered through skill sharing. For example, there were several reported cases where the young people taught each other e.g. how to play particular games (West Northamptonshire Libraries) or how to make paper flowers/crocheting (Idea Store, Tower Hamlets). At Newham Libraries the young people exchanged skill sets with the library team rather than each other, showing staff how to set up PS4 equipment for the games club. It seems that projects outside of school assignments were particularly successful in developing initiative, independence and communication skills, with young people feeling empowered by working on their own self-directed project.

> "The October session was a skills-based session where some of the young people taught each other. Guided by young person A we created colourful bunches of paper flowers, and young person B taught us all how to crochet."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

"Young people certainly developed communication skills, as their ideas were listened to (budget, equipment etc) they certainly seem to feel more able to express their ideas. They learned to work as part of a team, setting up the equipment and turn taking. They felt particularly empowered as they had to help library staff to set up equipment as the team did not know how to set up a PS4 with the monitor. Also code switching talking to friends and adults in the room."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"As this was a project that was separate from their school assignments, it allowed them the opportunity to work on something they are genuinely passionate about. They had to work with likeminded students to achieve the best result possible. Many, if not all mentioned that their communication skills have benefited from this and by simply asking questions, their confidence has picked up a lot of momentum going into the new school year."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

4.1.3.4 Intended outcome 4: Young people increase personal resilience e.g. confidence, self-esteem

The findings support that this has been achieved. For example, 75% (n=58) agreed with the statement 'taking part improved my confidence'. It is also evident through feedback on pride that the project has indicatively had an impact on self-esteem. For example 88% (n=70) of the young people agreed with the statement 'I feel proud of what I've achieved.'

"This was a lovely experience and a successful project. I am proud to be a part of it."
(Young person feedback)

There are also several anecdotal reports of individuals gaining greater confidence. For example, one teacher described how a student was initially reluctant to participate due to anxiety, but by the end successfully took part and was keen to return to the library. Library staff in another library service also shared the experience of a young person[42] who had returned from university for wellbeing reasons but had developed enough confidence through the group and decided to go back and try again. Another example showed the positive impact the group had on a young person experiencing bullying at school, with them now using the game they co-created as a way to engage with others in their class.

"The participant who had returned from university for wellbeing reasons is now planning on 'trying again': this is a direct result of his attendance at the sessions supporting the development of his self-esteem and confidence as well as his ability to interact with peers."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"One pupil has been having a tough time in school with friends. The teacher told us it was so nice to see her laughing and enjoying herself. She's also now used the game as a way to interact with some people in her class."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

42 Outside the target age group but was included within the provision due to demand.

"At the start of the project, one student was reluctant to join in due to anxiety. By the end he was asking to go to the library."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"Their social skills and confidence have greatly improved, with them being very mindful of one another e.g. offering each other a drink or biscuit, helping one another with the paper folding activities. A few even swapped numbers to talk outside of the group. I saw the children feeling more comfortable and confident to ask the library staff for books or if they needed extra paper, scissors etc."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"They've all swapped numbers. They've got, like, a little WhatsApp group as well."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"...what I have noticed is that confidence in the space when they are there, it feels like it's their space, and they've got as much right to be there as anybody else. And I think that's always been my belief about teenagers, is that they are invisible customers, because they never ask for anything."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"It's enabled a group that feel that there are barriers in their lives anyway, to find somewhere that they feel valued and that they feel slightly more understood, that there aren't specific expectations on them as such."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

There are numerous examples where the young people have self-reported that they have been inspired to do something as a direct result of their experience. Commonly occurring suggestions fell into three themes:

- doing more creative activities at home, school, or elsewhere (n=30)
- repeat engagement with the library e.g. Summer Reading Challenge, events, volunteering (n=19)
- finding ways to make more friends, share skills e.g. games or meet others (n=14).

Whilst we cannot robustly attribute this feedback to increased confidence, it is positive that the participants have been inspired in some way. A few of the examples are particularly striking and are not always consistent with having had a positive experience. For instance, one participant who expressed neutral enjoyment (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied emoji selection) reported that they had been inspired to do Art for GSCE. Whilst isolated, this unintended outcome indicates that despite not having the best experience, positive outcomes can still happen from simply opening up access to libraries and co-created activities.

"(Something I've been inspired to do is....) Complete Summer Reading Challenge."
(Young person feedback)

"(Something I've been inspired to do is....) Writing poems."
(Young person feedback)

"(Something I've been inspired to do is....) Do art for GSCE."
(Young person feedback)

"(Something I've been inspired to do is....) Seeing all the variety of things going on in the library has made me want to go to more events and try out different things rather than just borrowing books."
(Young person feedback)

"The young people gained self-assurance working with another set of new adults and developed confidence to express themselves."
(Library service, end of project proforma)

4.1.3.5 Intended outcome 5: Young people feel their voice has been heard

Positively, 94% (n=76) of the young people agreed with the statement 'My opinions, feelings and ideas were listened to.' In addition, 95% (n=74) stated that they felt involved and included when they co-designed activity. Although there are some reported concerns about whether services genuinely were able to deliver meaningful co-creation (for example, due to local authority restrictions or worries about 'over-leading' as highlighted in 5.1 and 5.2) the response from the young people has predominantly been a positive one and suggests their voice has been heard for the most part. Of the 82 young people's feedback forms, as outlined earlier, there were only four negative comments focused on being bored or needing to be listened to, which suggests that overall the young people felt their voices were heard.

"I like that we get to have a say about the library and want to see what happens next."
(Young person feedback)

"I asked if they could add the word clean to 'we provide accessible toilets' and I was listened to."
(Young person feedback)

"Treat us more like grown-ups in the space."
(Young person feedback)

"(Something that would have improved your experience is…) Have more of my ideas heard."
(**Young person feedback)**

"I got bored."
(Young person feedback)

Overall findings suggest that library staff were listening – with those that used consultation and feedback from the young people to inform projects working particularly well.[43] This was helped by Libraries Rising giving staff permission to make changes to their original project plans from the outset. This is discussed further in 5.1 and 5.2. There are several consistent anecdotal examples from library staff who observed that young people who were quiet in their first session became more vocal and confident in sharing their views and opinions by the end.

"We had aimed to target the LGBTQIA+ demographic so that we could support isolation and mental health by providing them with peer connections and also professional support. We felt that the young people engagement project would be ideal at providing them with a voice that would be heard as well as opportunities to shape an offer which they valued. Following the first feedback we removed the LGBTQIA+ wording and instead focused on the fact that the evidence directed us towards board games and RPG [role-playing games] for the age group."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

43 This was particularly the case for those library services who involved their groups in wider consultation that was happening within their local authorities (for example, Manchester Libraries and North Somerset Libraries).

"The young people have become more vocal in sharing their ideas and opinions as the project developed. Initially, thoughts had to be teased from them, but they are now actively approaching staff members to make suggestions."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

It has been particularly striking to see how library services found inclusive ways to ensure neurodivergent young people and those with SEND were able to have their say. For example, Kirklees Library and Information Service adapted evaluation tools to ensure their participants were able to give views on the programme in a way that was suited to them. This reiterated that making the programme evaluation flexible was the right decision – for example, by giving libraries permission to adapt the feedback form and/or use the creative toolkit we supplied. Giving the young people choice at each session and being accommodating to the needs and wishes of the young people were also praised by teachers in their feedback to Kirklees.

"The evaluation session was run in the library and adapted so it was more suited to the needs of the young people. The image attached to the email shows the results of the conversation with the young people for the 'complete the missing sentences' section. For the Yes/No section, we asked a selection of the questions to the group and provided them with green/red paddles to indicate yes/no."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

4.1.3.6 Intended outcome 6: Young people feel they have greater ownership of their local library

Although we are unable to robustly and quantifiably evidence the number of new memberships, or whether the young people have independently returned to the library[44], there is some evidence to suggest that the young people are re-engaging and/or now feel more 'at home' in the space than they did at the start of the project.[45] For example, 92% (n=72) of the young people agreed with the statement 'I feel more welcome in the library than I did before'. Conversely, this view was only shared by half of library staff, with 50% (n=8) of library staff survey respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing that 'our library is more welcoming to children and young people as a result of this project' (with 44% n=7 and the majority neither agreeing nor disagreeing). This could reflect the challenges library staff faced in terms of encouraging the young people to lead on decision making, and their concerns of realistically implementing some of the ideas that were suggested (this is discussed further in 5.1 and 5.2).

> "It is really challenging to truly make this project co-created and deliver what young people really want and not try to influence them so much that it becomes another library service idea being imposed on them. We may need to acknowledge that the library service young people would like to see is not within our power in terms of cost, staff capacity, confines of the library space or accommodating other library users."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

Furthermore, 61% (n=49) of the young people agreed with the statement 'I'm going to visit my local library more often than I did before.' Although no target was set for this (and it is still a positive result), it might be worth reflecting on why this was not as high as some of the other results outlined above. For example, if 92% of the young people feel more welcome, what is preventing them visiting more often? What are the barriers? As highlighted earlier, one young person suggested they wanted a room that they could explicitly use (not just the library space) and there were also isolated references about library opening times or living too far away. We could potentially infer – but further research would need to be undertaken to confirm – that it is practicalities (such as being able to get there during standard opening hours) that currently reduces their propensity for regular visits. Individual circumstances for library services, such as fear over closures could also have impacted on their perceptions of barriers and the overall welcome.

> "Branch libraries reported a few teens asking questions about the consultation – "Why do you need to close some of the libraries?" "Will we still be able to get library books from somewhere?" "What will happen to all the books?" Consultation feedback shows a theme of young people appreciating the social value of libraries to not just themselves but to older generations as well."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

44 Library services were not expected to track library memberships or independent return visits. Whilst this would have been preferable for the evaluation, it was decided that it was realistically not manageable for the staff. Other indicators are used instead (with acknowledged limitations), including anecdotal evidence.

45 See full list of participating libraries in 8.1. Barriers to tracking post-project engagement with the library is discussed in section 5.

It is worth highlighting that whilst the majority of participating young people felt more welcome, and had a propensity to return, this does not necessarily mean they had feelings of greater ownership which has been difficult to measure.[46] Where this seems to have been more prevalent, it is where the library services have:

- Given permission to the young people to make decisions from the start e.g. sense of authority.
- Encouraged them to be more empowered from the beginning and put mechanisms in place to do this e.g. creating group rules.
- Given the young people a thorough knowledge of what was in the library and where e.g. how to find teen books.
- Provided an identifiable space e.g. noticeboard.

> "I think it's kind of changed their perception a bit, as in, I can do more than simply read."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

Positively, there are isolated examples in the qualitative evidence where library staff have reported seeing young people return to the space, either to engage in their developed product e.g. games or to do other activities. The young people– as highlighted earlier – have become more familiar with the library offer and more comfortable moving around the space. Several services described how the young people had made the library 'feel like home' or 'their living room', therefore offering a 'third space' where they can come and feel safe away from home or school (this is discussed further below in 4.1.3.7.).

> "Two young people became library members and reported that they would come back to the library. Some asked if they could come again with school to which the teacher agreed."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "The whole project with this group of young people turned into them redesigning the library space to make them feel welcome. We don't have many of them visit on a regular basis but there are a few that get here when they can and that would not have happened before. A few have brought along older siblings as well."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "...a couple of the lads had said they'd been in, and then one of the young lads as well had come in with his family and with their little brother or sister as well. So yeah, I think they have been returning."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "As we got to know the boys, we realised that they had started to feel comfortable in the space. When we asked why they didn't go to each other's houses to play PlayStation they said their parents didn't want people there whilst they were at work so in some ways the library was like their living room."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "...they now visit the library at other times, to meet each other, study and read and also to see the staff. Two of the participants have recently also enquired about volunteering opportunities at the library."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

[46] This is primarily due to the limited time for qualitative engagement with the young people themselves and the independent evaluator (there has been a reliance on quantitative tools and qualitative data from library staff sharing anecdotal impressions second hand).

> "They feel comfortable in the space and can see this in the way that they enter the building, they know where they are going and very much 'make themselves at home'."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "When the young people first started attending the sessions they were comfortable in one area of the library but by the end of the project they were freely roaming around the space and came to life."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "Many told us that they plan to visit more with their families and show of their work. Some even mentioned that they want to help the library further in the future. This point came as a suggestion upon seeing the libraries new and refurbished layout. They saw a sense of commitment for the future of Luton Libraries and saw potential in playing and part and suggesting ideas for the future."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

4.1.3.7 Unintended outputs and outcomes

Isolated examples include:

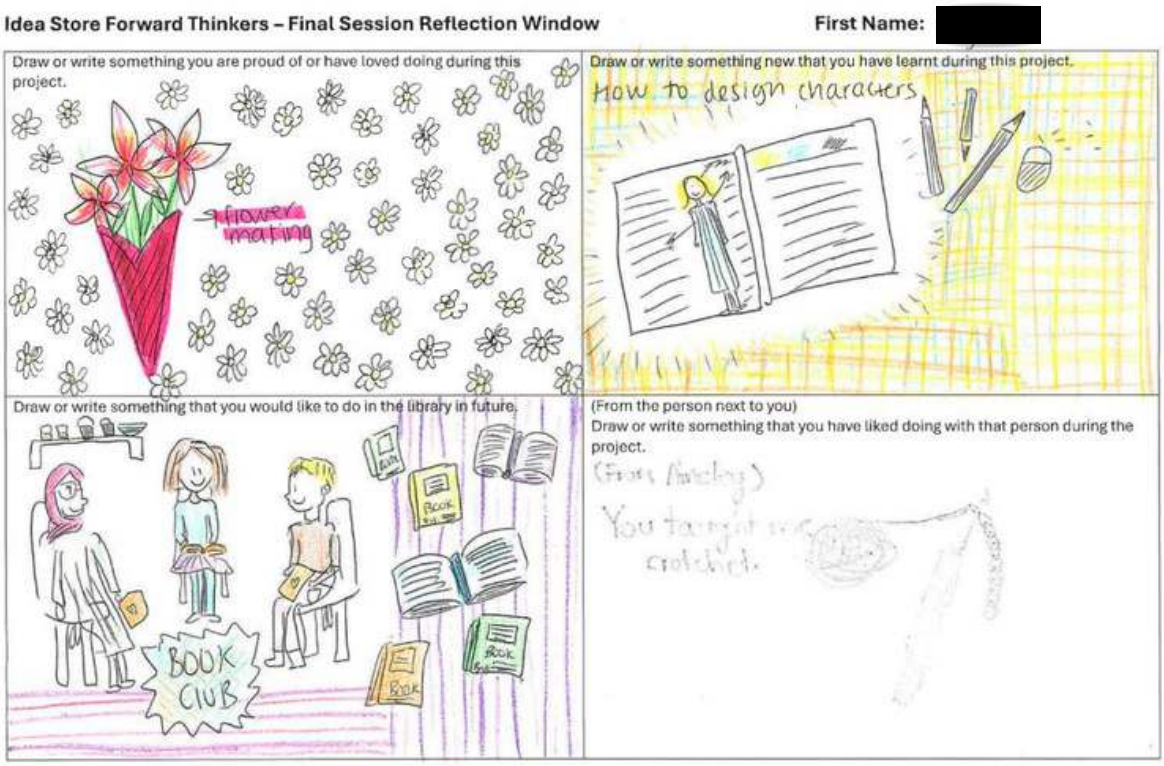
- Two of the parents at the Norfolk Library & Information Service project became friends and are now going to the gym together.
- An older sibling of a participant at Norfolk Library & Information Service joined the library as a volunteer to support with their Summer Reading Challenge and to complete their Gold Duke of Edinburgh award.
- Similarly, North Northamptonshire Libraries reported that they had seen a ripple effect on parents/carers spending time browsing in the library whilst their child was participating in the group.
- A teacher working with Knowsley Libraries often brought other young people to the library (separate to the Youth Engagement Network group) to have a look at the books. A couple of these young people were particularly interested in the creative activities of the Youth Engagement Network group and joined in for part of a session.
- A parent at Cornwall Libraries reported forming a new bond with their child through the project – they had been previously unaware of the library but have now become members (having been encouraged by their child) and attend regularly together.
- The Children's Art School who worked with Kirklees Library and Information Service intend to incorporate their SEND approach into future projects.
- Manchester Libraries and North Somerset Libraries included their young people in broader consultation as highlighted earlier.
- Manchester Libraries group of young people influenced an unplanned move of the teen books section within the library space.
- A parent at West Northamptonshire Libraries reported that they felt that their child was safe in the library environment due the safeguarding policies they knew were in place. This highlights the trust that parents potentially place on libraries generally.

> "Two of the participants have returned at other times to the library with peers who do not attend the sessions in order to access the board games: this form of advocacy is invaluable to the service particularly with the demographic that we struggle most to interact with."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

"One participant came rushing into the library after a school session with their parents, who were unaware of the library, and joined up. They now come in regularly and the young people and parents are enjoying a shared experience which the parents have said has provided a new bond."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

4.1.3.8 Intended outcomes summary

Outcomes	Evidence this has been achieved?
Young people enjoy the experience	Yes
Young people learn something new	Yes
Young people feel they have greater ownership of their local library	Yes, with caveats as outlined above
Young people feel their voice has been heard	Yes, with some positive examples especially around neurodivergent and SEND young people. Some services struggled with the balance of decision-making which is discussed in section 5
Young people increase personal resilience	Yes
Young people develop soft skills	Yes



Images: Idea Store, Tower Hamlets (with young people creative evaluation feedback tool above).

Images (above and below): Manchester Libraries

4.2 Library Staff

4.2.1 Outputs update

4.2.1 Numbers of library staff

Whilst there are no intended targets for the number of library staff involved in the programme, a total of 52 library staff led or supported projects. There are also several other key outputs to note:

- A total of 15 external creative practitioners were also brought in to support delivery.
- One volunteer was noted as supporting activity at Norfolk Library & Information Service during the pilot. We did not ask pilot libraries to submit volunteer data in their monitoring end of year proforma but implemented this during phase two to build a better picture of capacity. A total of 13 volunteers were recorded as being involved during the second year.
- Library staff attended a range of network meetings, drop-in sessions and 1-1's with the Programme Manager. This resulted in 167 engagements: a full breakdown is available in section 8.2.

These figures provide a snapshot of the potential capacity that is required to deliver a co-created programme on this scale. However, the qualitative data highlights both challenges and successes around staffing. For example, some library teams reported struggling to find staff who could work after-hours to meet the needs of the young people; compared with services who ran really successful projects because they had buy-in from the top down. Findings linked to staffing are discussed further below and also in section 5.

4.2.1.2 Number of project sites/number of sites within Levelling Up for Culture Places

The overall target of engaging 20 library services across the two years has been achieved, albeit with some libraries rolling partial or full delivery activity into phase three. The independent evaluator notes that this does not represent a concern, indeed it is reflective of what was observed in the pilot as a logical, care-focused and sensible way for Libraries Rising to respond to services who unexpectedly need to make changes or adaptations due to their circumstances whilst being determined to continue.[47] More specifically:

- A total of seven libraries took part in the pilot programme. Two projects withdrew during the early stages (North Tyneside – Burnside College, and Torbay). Although the overall target of nine libraries for the pilot year was not achieved, valuable learning from those who withdrew was gained through a semi-structured depth interview with North Tyneside - Burnside College, and email feedback with Torbay. The Programme Manager also held numerous informal conversations with both services.
- Their feedback (especially on barriers to engagement such as capacity[48]) fed into the learning for phase two (this is referenced in section 5).
- A total of 13 new libraries joined phase two, with Cornwall Libraries returning (making it a cohort of 14 library services). Suffolk Libraries chose to withdraw from the project due to the service being brought back under council control which had potential implications for accepting/withholding the grant and being able to deliver.

47 This was appreciated by library staff and was reflected in their feedback in terms of Libraries Rising being flexible and supportive. Determination as a quality in library teams is also discussed further below.

48 The reasons for the two library services' withdrawal reflected individual circumstances. These included time, capacity, recruitment challenges and extenuating circumstances. Further detail was anonymously supplied to the independent evaluator and Programme Manager. Positively, both library contacts commented that despite leaving the project, they had left with a greater understanding of co-creation and had resources which would help them in the future.

- Four services (North Somerset Libraries, Stockton-on-Tees Libraries & Archives, Barnet Libraries and Leeds Libraries) decided to roll their delivery schedule into phase three (and at the time of writing, Manchester Libraries were due – but had yet to deliver – their final young people event). There were a variety of reasons for this, including:

  - Delays due to partners changing/withdrawing or being recruited to support (common)
  - Lack of engagement due to the restrictions around library opening hours, which did not always align with when the young people wanted to engage (common). This is discussed further in section 5
  - Service-wide impacts such as transformation consultation which reduced the trust in young people realistically being able to have a say (isolated)
  - Staff capacity including sickness (common)
  - External factors cancelling events e.g. bus strikes (isolated)
  - The genuine time it can take for libraries (especially those with no existing warm connections) to do this type of audience development work.[49]

10 of the participating library services (including five in the pilot) were located in Levelling Up for Culture Places, and nine were within Arts Council England's Priority Places, which means the original target of five pilot library services in Levelling Up for Culture Places was achieved.[50]

49 The time taken to develop partnerships was extended in phase two as a response to those experiencing challenges in the pilot. This went some way to alleviate that pressure, but findings suggest that it can still take much longer to forge partnerships and develop trust with the young people. This is discussed further in section 5.

50 A target of 5 was set for the pilot only. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61fd3d1ee90e0768a0d0bd59/Delivering_for_all_parts_of_the_United_Kingdom_Hi-res.pdf. See also https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/which-areas-have-benefited-from-the-levelling-up-fund/?utm_source=chatgpt.com and https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/new-levelling-up-and-community-investments.

51 https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/your-area/priority-places

4.2.2 Intended output targets summary

Output target	Cumulative result	Status
20 sites in total	20 library services	Achieved, with the caveat that some library services from phase two have rolled total or partial delivery into phase three
At least 5 pilot services in Levelling Up for Culture areas	10 (including 5 in the pilot)	Achieved

4.2.2 Outcomes update

4.2.3.1 Intended outcome 1: Library staff develop skills and knowledge e.g. co-creation, engaging young people, empathy

Although there were isolated suggestions regarding improvements to future training (see more on these below), data analysed across both the library staff survey and depth interviews[52] suggests that library teams have learnt a variety of new skills and knowledge as a direct result of being involved in the programme. These will be useful to take into other projects or to replicate the delivery of a co-created approach with young people.

We can see marginal improvements to skills in the below quantitative data tables, including in co-creating activities for all target audience types not just young people.[53] For example, prior to the project no library staff described themselves as 'extremely skilled' in evaluating the experience of young people. By the end of the programme, this increased to seven library staff members.

Designing and delivering co-created activities (for any type of visitor)	Extremely skilled	Very skilled	Somewhat skilled	Not so skilled	Not at all skilled
Before project	5% (1)	11% (2)	48% (9)	32% (6)	5% (1)
After project	12% (2)	47% (8)	29% (5)	12% (2)	0% (0)
N change (+/-)	+1	+6	-4	-4	-1

52 See evidence sources in 3.1.2 for sample sizes.

53 Note that in terms of attribution, of 17 respondents answering this question: 18% (n=3) stated that 'all' of the change happened as a direct result of the project, 53% (n=9) 'most' of it, 18% (n=3) 'some' of it, 0% (n=0) 'none' of it, and 12% (n=2) unsure.

Designing and delivering co-created activities (for young people)	Extremely skilled	Very skilled	Somewhat skilled	Not so skilled	Not at all skilled
Before project	5% (1)	11% (2)	37% (7)	42% (8)	5% (1)
After project	6%[54] (1)	42% (7)	41% (7)	12% (2)	0% (0)
N change (+/-)	-	+5	-	-6	-1

Evaluating the experience of young people	Extremely skilled	Very skilled	Somewhat skilled	Not so skilled	Not at all skilled
Before project	0% (0)	11% (2)	63% (12)	26% (5)	0% (0)
After project	41% (7)	29% (5)	29% (5)	0% (0)	0% (0)
N change (+/-)	+7	+3	-7	-	-

More consistently however, evidence suggests that there has been a substantial amount of 'learning by doing' across both the pilot and phase two, with staff reflecting on specific challenges and successes of delivery. Being able to try out activity has not only given the library teams permission to test, fail and learn, but has also proactively informed Libraries Rising's approach, training, and guidance for library services (both inside and outside the programme e.g. via Spark Space[55]). Sharing practical examples from other co-created projects (and from the pilot projects to those in phase two) was also deemed to have positively contributed towards their learning journey.

> "You almost kind of have to go through this experience and fail, in a way, don't you, to understand what to do next time."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

> "I think there's been a lot more understanding that it is working with children and young people, that it's relationship building, whereas I think in the pilot, we saw maybe more sort of adult initiated activity."
> **(Programme Manager interview)**

> "I liked it at the beginning, when you had the people from the previous year, and they sort of gave ideas and things about how their sessions would run and how that had gone, that was really good to have examples and like case studies."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

54 Due to rounding.

55 https://librariesrising.org.uk/sparkspace-course/

"One of the good things about the project, particularly with Lucy, is setting it up in the sense of we're only here to learn. So it was a learning experience."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

Whilst the resulting actions from this outcome are highlighted in section 5, the below list shares the most commonly reported areas of learning from library staff across the programme.[56] These highlight potential areas for Libraries Rising to focus on in future training.

- It doesn't have to be complicated: keeping the activity and approach simple is the best way.

"...we haven't done anything revolutionary."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"I think it's more about giving them (young people) time and space more than what it is that you actually do."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"I actually feel that a lot of the libraries came into this with very creative, innovative visions of how this might pan out. And then actually, where they've landed is that the children and young people just want a place where they can just spend time."
(Programme Manager interview)

"Less is more, they enjoy simple activities and chatting, want somewhere to socialise and be themselves."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"I think there's a tendency, certainly with library staff, to think like, well, I can't do that because I don't know or don't understand that world. And actually, it's not a separate world. It's just humans sitting around a table talking to each other."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

- Developing trust with the young people is key and it's important to take time to do this e.g. by working over a longer period of time with more sessions; spending time getting to know the young people through icebreakers; and building in fun activities before the core activity begins (and not feeling rushed).[57]

"I wish it had gone better this year, because it is something that I do think is valuable, but I think also maybe we underestimated the time needed, and just how difficult it would it would be, and how it is around building trust and that takes time, unfortunately. And even if you know, and get young people on board, you've still got to somehow build that trust with them."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - phase two)

"I think the flexibility is what allowed us to build that relationship with them, because...it allowed us, on a weekly basis, to cater it to what their needs were, and it – so it helped build on that relationship."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

56 A list of specific tips and advice gathered from library staff across both years can be found in section 6.
57 See more on the impact of pressure in 4.2.3.5 and section 5.

- Partnership working takes time[58] and arrangements can be fragile – having a back-up plan or partner is important. Libraries also commonly found that partnerships were vital for bringing in specific skills (plugging gaps in their own knowledge e.g. youth worker experience) and helping them to increase their confidence in working with young people. This suggests that bringing in a delivery partner has multiple benefits and should be recommended for phase three participating libraries.

> "We had difficulties with our partners not stepping up to what they promised. We tried to reach the young people on our own, but this didn't work but we have found a new contact which we will continue to explore."
> **(Library staff, anonymous survey)**
>
> "It's a double-edged sword. You always complain that you've not got enough time, but when you do then other things that in your workload that have a shorter period to complete tend to then take priority."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**
>
> "I think if we didn't have the partner, we would feel very out of our depth."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - phase two)**
>
> "I don't think we would have achieved this if we tried to set up this group organically."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - phase two)**
>
> "It was just exceedingly lucky in that they had a youth worker that was really interested in getting involved. So it's worked really well. I don't think it would have been anywhere near as successful without [names worker], because [names worker] has brought all their expertise to the group and their interaction with the teenagers."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - phase two)**
>
> "One of the challenges is that that initial period where we had potential partners who then backed out or expressed an interest and then were difficult to engage with."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - phase two)**

- How to consult with young people - especially with neurodivergent young people - and how to make libraries a comfortable environment for their needs.

> "It gave us a deeper insight into the library from the perspective of a neurodiverse young person."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**
>
> "It gave us a proof of concept in working with SEND young people."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - phase two)**

- How to find, recruit and retain young people (co-creation works best when the young people decide to take part themselves i.e. they are self-elected rather than 'forced' into it by a partner).

> "The young people showed no enthusiasm for getting involved with the delivery of activities. The group were selected to participate by the school, rather than choosing to attend and this could account for their lack of enthusiasm. Lack of confidence may also

58 The impact of extending the time for building partnerships in phase two compared with the pilot is discussed further in section 5.

have been a factor. Although this meant engaging with the group was very challenging, it did present a golden opportunity to meet young people whose voices would not normally be heard. Rather than going straight into discussions, maybe a more gentle introduction involving icebreakers and fun activities to get the group more relaxed and build a rapport would work better in future. Working with the young people over a few more regular sessions to develop trust and get them feeling more comfortable engaging with library staff, could also have encouraged more active."
(Library service, internal report supplied)

- Time for evaluation needs building in and embedding; new skills were gained in evaluating children's experiences, albeit with challenges (these are covered further in section 5).

"I think I could have done more evaluation as we went along but we just there wasn't always time, and we didn't build the time in."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"Libraries Rising provided great training throughout the project, and I have a much better understanding of both the technique and value of co-creation. I also received valuable training on child evaluation techniques, which I intend to implement into evaluation for Summer Reading Challenge and Rhymetimes/Storytimes along with other young people activities we do."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

- That this work is hard and takes time (and that's OK).

"It was difficult to be the first cohort. I think the learning provided from this pilot group will be invaluable to the next group."
(Library staff, anonymous survey)

"I knew that this was going to be a big commitment, because we were starting very, quite relatively cold, you know, it's not a group that we've got any sort of engagement, like teens in general."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

- Whilst capacity generally is a challenge, libraries reported that it would be better to have more than one library staff member allocated to the project in order to cover any illness, but also to develop an interest in co-created work more generally, and to encourage front-line colleagues to develop an understanding of how to better work with young people.[59]

"One of the things I am changing is making sure that I've got a few more staff on board because I do think if we're putting the time and the effort into it, we want to make the project work, we need a backup to me as well."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"...one regret was not getting other members of staff involved in it from the beginning. So it's been very much my project."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

59 Capacity and senior buy-in is discussed further in section five.

> "I think I've been blown away by the enthusiasm from the staff members to be involved and to listen to the young people. Involving them was really important."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "...it has just been me. And I think that's something I sort of slightly regret, but it is, sort of my way of doing things sometimes."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

There were also several individual learning areas relevant to specific library service projects. For example:

- Tying in with popular culture and teen trends worked well.

> "Launching the sessions in November with the insights that the demographic were interested in RPG [role-play games] allowed us to follow trends in pop culture as this coincided with the promotion of the Netflix series Stranger Things which is considered accountable for the resurgence of Dungeons and Dragons: all of the participants informed us that they watched the series and consider themselves fans and that this is where they learnt about Dungeons and Dragons but have not been able to find a group to learn the game due to social anxiety and also lack of a local offer."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

- Learning how to deal with negative comments on social media (for example, one library service reported that they had received abusive and homophobic comments in response to their posts regarding LGBTQIA+ young people activity).

> "I think that was quite a learning curve, because as a library, you rarely get negative comments on Facebook. I mean, you get complaints and things, obviously, but it's not something we were used to. But then speaking with the comms team and with [name of partner], they were like, yes, sadly, we're used to this. So that was a learning curve."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

- Understanding how to encourage parents and carers with SEND children to join the library.

> "We sent forms to the school who spoke to parents and sent the forms home, but the parents were reluctant to join the young people. Reasons given were: sensory issues, e.g. we conducted the sessions when the library was closed, and parents were worried they wouldn't cope when it was open. Parents didn't feel they would have time to bring them to the library/they didn't feel they lived within a reasonable distance to the library. It would have been better if we had been able to communicate directly with the parents. In future, we could invite the parents to the final session to see what the group had created and then we could directly speak to them about the value of joining the library and we could address any concerns they may have face to face."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

- How to work with schools (needs flexibility and time, plus you are restricted to working within their timetable).

"It was really hard to get schools or youth groups to engage."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

"We have to work to their schedule, and we couldn't meet as often as I'd like. They just have so little time."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

- How to deal with challenging or disruptive behaviour.

"We had hoped to continue the sessions beyond July as a regular club attracting new young people. However there was a major dispute between the boys attending the club and another young person, a regular library user who we think saw 'his space' being taken over. The incidents over two weeks grew violent causing upset to other library users and there was escalating issues involving racism. We took the decision to stop the club but we are hoping to re-introduce something similar in the autumn as part of our Warm Haven."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

- Meeting the young people in the places they are used to meeting at e.g. a youth club before engaging them in the library space can help get to know them, but sessions ultimately need to be delivered in the library as this increases motivation and agency (note contrasting experiences highlighted below).

"Visiting the students and explaining the project initially gave them the opportunity to ask key questions and also get a vibe of the library team. What they truly appreciated was visiting the library as a class to check out the new layout and gather together ideas. This was the moment when the project felt real to them and got their creativity on an upward trend. The teachers, art producer and library team never discouraged their attempts and constantly offer beneficial advice on how they could enhance their work. This later gave them confidence to communicate further with us and achieve their final designs."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"Challenges with communication were the main issue. With hindsight, I think they may have been more comfortable if I had visited the school. However, this would have defeated the object as it was important for them to explore the library space."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

Positively, library staff reported that they can better communicate the value of this type of work, with 75% (n=12) strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement 'I feel better equipped to articulate the value of co-created work in libraries as a direct result of this programme' (with 56% n=9 strongly agreeing). Staff also have a better idea of the 'arc' of young people co-created work, with 88% (n=14) strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement 'I can describe what successful co-created work 'looks like' more confidently as a direct result of this project (with 69% or n=11 strongly agreeing).

"It was beneficial that it was so open as every library and area/community could tailor the project to the needs of those around. I've improved my skills of developing projects with young people - not an expert as this was my first time but my confidence has grown greatly, and I'd love to do something like this again. Our library has always been welcome to children and young people, but this project has helped to connect with and create engagement for a marginalised group."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"My understanding of what young people want and what works well is greatly developed."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"I think if you'd asked me a year ago, you know, is co creation important, I would have been like, yeah, but I'm not sure I would have been able to articulate very clearly why it's important and what makes it successful, yeah, whereas now I have a much better understanding to the point that I can explain that to other people."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"This is the best way to evolve our library services without doubt. We just need practice to get better at it!"
(Library staff anonymous survey)

4.2.3.2 Intended outcome 2: Library staff develop overall confidence in working with young people and/or on co-created projects

56% (n=9) of library staff surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'my confidence in delivering co-created projects (generally) has increased as a direct result of this project' (with 18% n=3 disagreeing and 25% n=4 neither agreeing nor disagreeing). Proportionally, strength of agreement with this statement was stronger in pilot library staff than phase two library staff (with 72% of pilot library staff respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing compared with 44% of phase two library staff respondents). This could be due to some of the bespoke challenges faced by phase two library teams who, whilst still increasing their learning, reported that they needed further support and guidance (and time) to really build up their confidence in truly implementing a co-created approach. Note that 56% (n=5) of phase two library staff surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I've gained confidence in working with young people generally as a direct result of this project.[60]

Statement 'My confidence in delivering co-created projects has increased as a direct result of this project'	Extremely skilled	Very skilled	Somewhat skilled	Not so skilled	Not at all skilled
Pilot services	29% (n=2)	43% (n=3)	0% (n=0)	29% (n=2)	0% (n=0)
Phase two services	11% (n=2)	33% (n=3)	44% (n=4)	11% (n=1)	0% (n=0)

Positively, 81% (n=13) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I have greater empathy with children and young people as a direct result of this project' (with 31% n=5 strongly agreeing). These are both positive results and – as above - indicate the powerful benefit for libraries in being able to practically try out activity within a supportive network environment, despite it being challenging. As highlighted above, it was also an opportunity for some staff to develop confidence in working with neurodivergent and children with SEND.

60 Note that only n=9 library staff answered this question, compared to n=16 for general confidence in co-creation. The results in answer to the statement 'I've gained confidence in working with young people generally as a direct result of the project' were: Strongly agree (n=3), agree (n=2), neither agree nor disagree (n=3), disagree (n=0), strongly disagree (n=0).

"It was my first time co-creating and I was a little nervous, but it worked out really well and it has given me the confidence to do it again. It was great to have the training and support sessions from Libraries Rising to fall back on and know that we could share ideas with others around the country if needed."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"We did a walk through, and they sort of opened our eyes to things that perhaps we hadn't noticed or things from their perspective."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

"Working with teenagers is very challenging."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"I would have been nervous sort of going in cold, just randomly saying I wanted to co-create something with SEND young people, but now we're – we know what we're doing, I think I'd feel confident putting a – like an Arts Council activity plan together or something saying we'd like to go in and do this. Especially if we had a topic it would fit in with."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

"I hope to improve on our service delivery to young people."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"I've worked with SEND young people before, but I've not worked with ones with such complex needs, so this was kind of a totally like new approach for me, and I feel like it's really helped me in how to engage them."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

"I'm actually so encouraged and impressed at what they came up with and that they did take it seriously and put some effort into it. I found that encouraging and heartening. I found the feedback really useful. And their ideas, I think there's things we're going to be implementing, that are already on our kind of programme going forward."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

However, it is evident that there have been instances where decision-making has fallen with the library service rather than in collaboration with the young people, for example, when one service had to close their games club due to violent and racial conflict within the membership[61]; and when others have had to seek permission from their local authority to implement certain ideas e.g. developing teen areas where anti-social behaviour exists, buying smoothie makers or games. This 'rub' that exists between meaningful co-creation, authorship and decision-making within local authority managed environments can potentially diminish confidence in the co-creation process (on both sides). This finding raises a more strategic point about the realistic restrictions that exist with local authorities, the need for internal advocacy with co-creation, and getting senior leaders on board. This is addressed further in section 5.

"It hasn't been quite as simple as, oh, let's go and get that, sort of thing - where we work with particular suppliers and things like that. In terms of purchasing it hasn't been as cost effective as it could be. So there are elements of the [example of what young people wanted to purchase] that you can buy from specific kinds of shops, but I'm not able to purchase from those shops. Yeah, so those kind of local authority restrictions are a challenge."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

61 The independent evaluator notes that at time of writing, the members have subsequently returned and want to restart the group (this in itself demonstrates the trust these young people have built with library service staff).

Furthermore, some library services (particularly in phase two) reported that they found it difficult to explain the concept to the young people and to practically 'get to' the co-created idea. This highlights one of the challenges for Libraries Rising of being able to offer relevant training when every library project focused on young people is different. This is discussed in more detail below.

> "Explaining the project and co-creation to the young people was and is difficult."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "The training received from Libraries Rising was a good grounding, but what we weren't prepared for was how to get to that point of a collective decision on what the group wanted to do. The group also changed month to month, new young people joined so we were constantly getting to know new members. A new person in the group could change the dynamic. We have taken time to reflect after each session, especially when things haven't gone well and look for the positives to build into the next sessions."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "It is really challenging to truly make this project co-created and deliver what young people really want and not try to influence them so much that it becomes another library service idea being imposed on them. We may need to acknowledge that the library service young people would like to see is not within our power in terms of cost, staff capacity, confines of the library space or accommodating other library users."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "Young people felt heard in designing the activities they wanted as we bought and did what they asked for, putting suggestions to a vote in the early stages. However they probably didn't feel they were being listened to once arguments started as we closed the club down. We wanted some conflict resolution, but the situation was layered and problematic."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "With the best will in the world I can't see the building manager letting me have basketball hoops."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

> "I need to get a [explains item suggested by the young people]. Okay, none of the Council's suppliers seem to do that. Either I've got to buy it from Amazon and claim it back, you know, buy it myself, claim it back or I have to set up a new supplier. And then you think, have I got time to set up a new supplier? So then you run into like the Council kind of difficulties. So we've got a lot of red tape that we have to clear. So I think that's where you go, "Oh no, I've got all this red tape to get through and permissions and risk assessments."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

> "We do get some antisocial behaviour here, mainly, not all, but with young people, so we did wonder, if we did create a teen area as they wanted, whether some might feel intimidated coming into a space where there was already a large group. So I think at the moment it works well that they can find their own spaces and there's not a designated area. I feel that perhaps we did sort of not deliver exactly what they wanted, but we have been able to implement more or less everything else."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

> "I expected them to suggest activities, however, they were adamant that they did not want to. They were focused on suggesting improvements to the library space and our resources."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

"It's like saying I've got a project, but you lead it, and that doesn't mean anything. So yeah, I think that was difficult. That was one of the really difficult things. I was like, how do we get this in front of them when we don't know what it is? And they don't know what it is, and they don't know us. So I think there were a lot of barriers to break down."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"I felt that the staff have been making more of the decisions for the young people."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"...while I totally understand that co creation is a good thing and I think we've achieved that, it's very difficult when you're working with small or large groups, because you get such a wide variety of 'this is what we want to do'. I have learned that it's hard, especially at the start of a project when they don't know you and they don't trust you. Giving them a blank sheet of paper and saying, 'what do you want to do?' is, in my experience quite difficult to get anything back."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"I would have really liked to have the full coproduction training thing that I think was sort of muted at the beginning. We had some people coming along and talking to us. But I didn't feel like necessarily any of it was like really training. Does that make sense? I think I went into it thinking that that would maybe be part of it, that we would have some real, proper, yeah, training."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"I think it's actually a lot harder than I expected it would be. Because, you know, when you say, 'we've got this money, what do you want to do with it?' they just want to have a McDonald's in the library, you know. I think that's been the hardest part, really, to like work out what they want to do, or, you know, how."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

4.2.3.3 Intended outcome 3: library staff develop new contacts with other library services

56% (n=9) of library staff either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I have gained new contacts at other library services as a result of this project' (with 38% n=6 of those strongly agreeing, 25% n=4 neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 19% n=3 disagreeing). As the below table shows, this result differed between the pilot and phase two cohorts. Although the phase two Youth Engagement Network online group meetings were mostly well-attended (see 8.2.4), this could reflect the lack of time that these particular library staff had for continuing to build their relationships with Youth Engagement Network library service contacts outside the programmed sessions. There is some evidence in the qualitative data to suggest this might be the case.

"...we had said we were going to, like, share...get in contact with each other and get in time where we could just talk, because we're at such a similar point. And that just didn't happen. I think it just comes down to time and juggling so many different things."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

Statement 'I have gained new contacts at other library services as a result of this project.'	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Pilot services	57% (n=4)	29% (n=2)	0% (n=0)	14% (n=1)	0% (n=0)
Phase two services	22% (n=2)	11% (n=1)	44% (n=4)	22% (n=2)	0% (n=0)

Notwithstanding this, having networking opportunities with others on the programme (and being able to bounce ideas around with the Programme Manager) was attributed to having a supportive and friendly backdrop (described by one staff member as a 'feeling of camaraderie') in which to deliver this work. There is some isolated evidence to indicate that the programme helped strengthen relationships within existing internal teams too, and this is highlighted in 4.2.3.5 below.

> "Being very new to the service as I started this project, I feel my relationship with the children's team developed greatly as I worked closely with [colleague's name provided] in the children's and heritage team, I feel I can just give her a call whenever needed. I already had empathy for children and young people - it does not seem that long ago that I was in their shoes."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "I mean the meetings were brilliant, to hear from colleagues and, you know, the challenges other people were having and the successes, was absolutely great, that was the real key, I think, because it gave us that confidence that we weren't alone, but it also showed us that it can be done."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "It's a real like job satisfaction, for me, because I manage three libraries, so a lot of my time is meetings and calls and sorting out cover, sickness, things like that, and just like general managing."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

4.2.3.4 Intended outcome 4: library staff have greater propensity to work on co-created projects with young people in the future

Perhaps one of the most striking findings with library staff is in their propensity and tenacity to carry this work on. This is particularly the case in teams where projects have not gone as planned. It is attributed to the support, guidance and training from Libraries Rising that these staff members are not dissuaded from trying again. Giving permission to fail and learn has been key to ensuring libraries do still have a propensity and determination for undertaking this work, even when things go wrong.

"Lucy has been amazing. It was really, really helpful, really reassuring, when I turned around and said, I've had real difficulties with this, that she went, okay, tell me about them, and she wasn't like, oh, well, you know, you should have tried harder - there was a real acceptance that this is a hard project."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"I think we've instilled that really well, that 'no fear of failure' attitude, so nothing is a failure. I think that message was heard loud and clear, and it has encouraged them to try out stuff and not to fret if it goes a little bit awry."
(Programme Manager interview)

"I am not giving up. I intend to continue with phase three. I am confident that I will eventually work with a partner and young people. Once the partnership does kick off, I intend to work with a team member to run some exciting and creative sessions."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

"This free-choice art activity turned chaotic, with too many options leading to disengagement and poor behaviour. We felt deflated, but after meeting with the youth worker, we agreed to try smaller, more structured sessions."
(Library staff, end of project proforma)

Across both years, it is indicative that library staff have been motivated to explore further co-created opportunities (with young people, and other target audiences). For instance, 81% (n=13) of library staff strongly agreed or agreed that 'I can more readily see the potential of using library spaces to deliver co-created projects as a direct result of this project.' (with 38% n=6 of those strongly agreeing). This indicates that participants have potentially been encouraged to think more creatively about their spaces and how to bring co-creation into their offer.

"I think co creation is the way forward and I would like to see it in at least 75% of any future projects."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"...hopefully, the legacy is being able to talk about teens and work for teens in a different way."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

More specifically with propensity, 56% (n=9) stated that they would be 'very likely' to work on co-created projects with young people in the future, 25% (n=4) 'likely' and 19% (n=3) somewhat likely. Whilst this is a positive result, qualitative data indicates what might push those selecting 'likely' into 'very likely' positions. For example, library staff reported challenges such as capacity, available budget to continue work in this field, and limited support from their senior management/local authority. These are discussed further in 4.2.3.5 and section 5.

"I think if someone said co-creation now, we could go straight in and we'd have some ideas, "Right, this could work, that could work.""
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

Library staff survey respondents were asked to suggest whether they had been inspired to do anything specifically as a direct result of the project (either with young people's engagement, activity, or something else). 15 different library staff members made suggestions including:

- Plan more activities for young people generally (n=1)
- Making specific changes to where teen book areas are in the library (n=2)
- Think more generally about making young people friendly spaces/an improved welcome for young people in the library (n=2)
- Extend the project into other branch libraries (n=2)
- Work with young people in different areas of the borough (n=1)
- Maintain relationships delivered with partners/internal colleagues (n=1)
- Continue activities into next year (n=1)
- Support a funding application for a partner who was involved in helping to deliver the Youth Engagement Network programme activity (n=1)
- Re-run more SEND co-created activities (n=2)
- Utilise the resources purchased for this project in other events (n=1)
- Look into creating a study kit for loan – an idea being taken forward from one of the young people (n=1).

In addition to the above, there is also evidence across both years to show that libraries have been inspired to roll-out Libraries Rising's training recommendations or their learning from the programme to colleagues in their other libraries. This suggests that knowledge and skills are potentially being cascaded from the programme and outside of the immediate project teams.[62]

> "[We'll] Use the ideas from the young people to help with other branch library provision."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**
>
> "...actually, some of the training suggestions that came out of this project was one of the reasons we went ahead, and we funded the 'I'm a teenager', training for some staff all over the county."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**
>
> "Extend project into our other library branches across our town."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**
>
> "I mean, what would be ideal is if this group could then be mirrored at other libraries. The ultimate aim is to look at all the libraries and maybe set up a group like this. This group has definitely opened our eyes to the other groups we can set up in the libraries and that sort of thing."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**
>
> "The school is keen to rerun this or a similar project (as we don't know what direction the project would take until we consult with the young people!) and I'd love to co-create other things with them and other SEND and mainstream schools in the future."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**
>
> "Host more events using the resources we've been provided with the funding - thank you!"
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

One library service also reported that they had been inspired to do neurodiversity training ahead of the Youth Engagement Network programme:

62 Further research would be needed to assess true success, but it is a positive legacy finding and shows that the Youth Engagement Network programme's funding may be reaching wider staff (and public) outside of the programme targets.

> "We completed neurodiversity awareness training (via our corporate learning modules). We also looked through Curious Minds training together and watched a video on the teenage brain ahead of the project. These things gave the frontline staff members running the project some background and confidence ahead of working with the YP."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

There are also several examples of positive project legacies where activities or groups are going to continue.[63] For example, Norfolk Library & Information Service intended to continue their group as a regular offer, shifting it from being simply a 'project' into a regular embedded activity. Similarly, West Northamptonshire's D&D games club participants intend to carry on too. This demonstrates the potential of experimental projects to successfully move into a core library offer.[64]

> "I think at the start it was very much positioned as, it's a project, it's going to be over this duration. But now, we're going to be advertising it as of next week on our library website and posters as the second Thursday of every month we've got a youth group games club, and it's not going to be like sort of positioned as a project but embedded."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

> "We want this to continue. It could keep going on and on, it's just purely the finance side of things that's actually causing the biggest headache, to be honest."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "We established that the group would continue to meet on a weekly basis after Christmas to finish the original D&D campaign but were then keen to continue meeting weekly. We spoke to the participants as to whether they would prefer to then take ownership of the group and run their own games and 2 participants volunteered to take the lead and learn from the storyteller we hired how to run their own games."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

Libraries commonly felt that they have been left with legacies that they would not have had without the programme. For example, being more confident in making the case for budgets and co-created work, or being able to discuss co-created projects more readily.

> "...it's just having those opportunities to talk about things. Without the project, I think we probably wouldn't have been talking about it so much, and then maybe things wouldn't have changed. I feel like if they could have been slower to change, maybe, or the conversations wouldn't have been out there."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "It puts us in a good position as well. Like going into the new financial year we can say, look, can we look for somewhere within the budget where we can allocate a little bit of money to ensure that we can sustain this?"
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

63 Budget is one of the main barriers for some. This is highlighted further in section 5.

64 Unfortunately, as highlighted in 3.1.2, only one service completed the legacy survey and there was no budget within the independent evaluator's time for depth interviews with pilot library services, so we have little data in terms of the longer-term impact of pilot organisations at time of writing. Evaluating the longitudinal impact of the programme is raised in 5.1 and 5.2

4.2.3.5 Unintended outcomes

There are several unintended outcomes that were not defined in the evaluation logic model.

- Fun. Library staff commonly described how they enjoyed being part of the programme (despite the challenges they faced). Evidence across both pilot and phase two library services suggests that this satisfaction can be attributed to two common aspects of the process: being given permission to experiment (learn, fail, try again) and the support provided by Libraries Rising[65] as described above. In the library staff survey we asked respondents to suggest three words that summarise their experience of being involved. A total of 47 words were submitted, all of which are displayed in the below word cloud, with those occurring most frequently appearing the largest. As shown, the majority of words have positive connotations, and are a mix of feelings but also experiences. Words like 'frustrating' and 'confusing' reflect the fact that this type of work is hard to do.

> "I've really enjoyed getting to know the young people we have worked with. We are going to continue this work where possible and would love to try working with other groups in other libraries."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "I really, really, really enjoyed it. I've always felt supported by Lucy."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

Notwithstanding the above, there were two commonly reported barriers which did impact on enjoyment of the process. Both were prevalent in the data for phase two rather than the pilot library teams.

65 The views on communication and support provided by Libraries Rising during the pilot is presented in 5.3.

- Although Libraries Rising reassured library staff, some services felt self-imposed pressure on achieving success within the time frame (e.g. having a final 'product'; or working with large numbers of children).

> "For the next recruitment of libraries who are taking participants, maybe it's being a little bit clearer right at the start. It wasn't something that we were told we had to do. It wasn't like Lucy said, 'oh, you must have this up and running.' But I think you do immediately put that pressure on yourself, that you've got this long to deliver something. I need to get going. But maybe, if that's clearer for the next round - saying give yourself enough time to bed in and get to know the young people rather than 'we need to bottom out what this activity is going to be as quick as possible', then it might feel less pressured."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "I think at the start I'd thought, well, like, we've got a year, it's going to be fine. And then actually you need that time at the start, you almost need, like, four sessions just to get to know them. I think we worried a little bit at the start of, like, oh, we're not progressing quick enough. I think that once I got into that mindset of 'it takes as long as it takes', I felt a little bit more relaxed about it."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "I felt like a lot of pressure, if I'm being completely honest, you know, particularly because it wasn't going well, there was a lot of pressure to make it work. And that pressure hasn't, hasn't come from, you know, Lucy, but because it's a project that I really wanted to make work. It's been quite supportive to hear when other people have also been having problems, you know, it's felt good in terms of the amount of training that we've had and the upskilling that I felt has happened over the last year. I now feel really prepared to do a good job of this."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

- Library opening hours. As highlighted earlier, library staff in phase two reported that there was a rub between when the young people wanted to come for activities versus when the library was open. This added additional stress for some library staff who were trying to deliver after hours based on reduced staff (including having to work around their own e.g. child commitments). One service also described how this removed the learning opportunity for frontline staff who were not paid to work evenings.

> "I guess the bit that we haven't really achieved is we wanted working with young people to maybe change the attitudes of some of the frontline team. And unfortunately, because of our opening hours, we haven't been able to get the young people in when the building's open. So the rest of the teams in there, like, haven't really met them."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "I think one of the things that I really struggled with most is where to find the children within the opening hours of the libraries. You're probably in a management position. You're probably not working the evenings or the weekends. And so it's then trying to find staff who are able to work those times to deliver it, but also training them up to do it, if that makes sense, yeah, it's like a really difficult balance."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "Library opening hours are a barrier."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

> "Unfortunately, due to the constraints of the library only being open until 5pm, and no staff being available to run sessions after this time, this was very difficult. I attempted to arrange childcare so I could be present at the library after opening hours, but no young people attended that sessions and I couldn't continue to be available at that time. This meant we moved to school holiday sessions, but again we had no turn out as the branch staff were offering their own holiday craft sessions, which although not co-created or child led, were still very popular, and made my sessions unnecessary (as they were not offering anything 'new')."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

As highlighted above, it should also be noted that senior management buy-in and communication was also commonly reported during the pilot and phase two as a barrier to successful delivery of this work. This is discussed further in section 5.

> "…trying to meet up with line managers is difficult because the calendars are full. So when you need that conversation, it can be tricky."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "I can't change the service, and that needs to come from, you know, from higher up."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

The remaining suggestions for improvement were isolated and made by small groups or individual library staff.[66] For example:

- Four phase two services asked for more specific training around co-production (as outlined earlier). The independent evaluator acknowledges that if Libraries Rising had more budgetary resources, additional in-built and/or bespoke training could have been offered.[67]
- One pilot service suggested that it would put less pressure on staff to 'be successful' if funding was not provided by Libraries Rising up-front.
- A buddy system was suggested by one phase two library service e.g. using staff from previous year cohorts to support current teams.
- Further support from Libraries Rising in setting up contacts with schools was suggested by one pilot service. This level of micro-administration would require substantial additional resource from Libraries Rising.
- One pilot library service suggested implementing training resources for other library staff outside of the project lead contact (e.g. in case they were off on leave).
- One pilot library service suggested that there was a need for differentiation of support/approach depending on the type of local authority and geographic location (e.g. rural vs city).

66 With the exception of increased recruitment time/general project time in the pilot year, which was a common theme and one which was addressed for phase two (see more on this in section 5). Three staff in the pilot year also suggested that they would have benefited from some more skills in recruiting the young people (through Libraries Rising making introductions, templates or general ideas for approaching groups).

67 Training and travel costs increased between the pilot and phase two years. Whilst budget felt comfortable for delivery during the pilot, it was increasingly stretched for the second year. This is covered more in section 5.

- One pilot library staff member suggested that bespoke training in evaluation specifically for young people with SEND/complex autism may be particularly useful for future cohorts. In addition, a phase two service would have liked to have had more training in application of the evaluation tools that were provided. Whilst developing evaluation skills is not a key target or focus for the programme, enabling greater support in embedding evaluation and developing specialist skills during phase three is discussed further in section 5.

> "Maybe if Libraries Rising could help connect [us up with a] school as that was something I was never able to get a response from - my local high school, multiple times I has no replies. I've found primary schools are easier to connect to but secondary not as much. So an intro email, call or teams meeting from Libraries Rising to the school - to then say we're doing this project...your Library will be in contact? Just an idea."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "Something I've definitely learned, is that it's new to most libraries. I hadn't appreciated how unfamiliar this feels as a way of working. I think the training was right, but I would be looking in the future to including even more, getting even more support from external partners."
> **(Programme Manager interview)**

> "I can't think of anything for this particular project in terms of training etc, as it was such a wide brief. The only thing...don't know if this exists but maybe training on evaluation sessions specifically for young people with SEND/complex autism...but that might be less useful for the other groups. We were able to adapt the tools provided, I'm just not sure we got enough evaluation evidence for Libraries Rising."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "More training around using the evaluation tools. There were plenty of creative examples but didn't feel skilled putting them into practice. Was difficult getting the demographic/ consent forms completed."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "The most difficult part of the experience was identifying a group to work with. Some templates to introduce the aims may have been useful and guidance on what to consider before approaching a group."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "I think buddy systems would work really well, so the new cohort get buddied with somebody that's already been through it, so they've got somebody there that they can talk to."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "It's been a great experience - I have no suggestions. I've particularly appreciated the guidance from people at Libraries Rising when I've had a specific question."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "I mean, in an ideal world maybe there could be a slightly different approach, depending on the make-up of the authority. If you're talking about one of the big cities, I think the challenges they're going to face are going to be very different, you know, no easier or anything like that, but very different to a rural, kind of touristy area. We're all working to the same objective, but yeah, maybe the practicalities of what to do at a given time might be different."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

"I think the fact that we have the funding has been a bit of an issue for us, and I'd have preferred that we didn't have that up front. If we'd got to the point – it got to this point and not had the funding, I think we'd feel more comfortable about where we are and just looking at those lessons."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

"I think it would have been useful to have been given some skills to do the initial engagement with the group. We were given great tools and training, and the Participation People training was fantastic, but it was all on the understanding that you had a group of engaged children that you could take forward. So that actual initial contact and how to frame that with – whether it was teachers or group leaders or something, I think was a bit of a missing link. Because it's not kind of in the day-to-day experience of what our library teams would be doing."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

"As mentioned maybe help with an intro/in with local schools or groups? Encourage managers at the start to block out time asap."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"Have training resources available to access for all. This is in case a certain team member is not available and someone else needs to take over."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

Although there are isolated examples of feedback which suggest that some staff struggled with the brief from Libraries Rising being so open, others relished the fact that it was not prescriptive.[67] This indicates that the differentiated and 1-1 tailored support delivered by the Programme Manager during the pilot and phase two should continue into phase three to meet the varying needs, confidence and experience levels of staff.

"Some more guidance [was needed], project was way too open."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"I loved the freedom we had with this project, especially as our group had complex autism, meaning that any strict parameters to the project would have made it very difficult/impossible to fully deliver. The loose brief gave us the opportunity to fully work with the choices the young people made in a way that was accessible and enjoyable to them."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

- There are various examples of unexpected legacies as a result of partnership working. For example, one library service reported that because they have started putting on a regular activity for young people, this has encouraged other youth-led partners to enquire whether they can work with the library to support provision for this target audience. In this instance it has therefore opened up new partnership opportunities that were otherwise non-existent. Similarly, a library service who built a relationship with another cultural partner organisation resulted in them exhibiting art in the library foyer. And another library service who worked with a school are going to be continuing that relationship post-project with a view to doing further sessions with students. Kirklees Library and Information Service have directly used some of the SEND consultation, thinking, activities and

68 44% (n=5) either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement 'we had too much freedom in designing our project i.e. we would have liked more direction from Libraries Rising.' 31% (n=2) agreed with the statement, and 25% (n=4) neither agreed nor disagreed.

learning from the start of their Youth Network Engagement project to inform part of their new children's reading for pleasure programme. Kirklees staff also used their case study from the programme (produced by Libraries Rising in-house) in their Best Start council objectives quarterly report.

> "The wider people I've been networking with, like the charities and organisations, the fact that they've gone, "Oh, you've put something on for that age group." And now they're saying, "Can we do some drop-in sessions and have a presence in your library for parents or teenagers, you know, to just come and talk to us?""
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

> "We hadn't really worked with this organisation before, and as a result of this they are going to exhibit their art in our foyer in the autumn, which will be lovely."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

> "The main thing was to engage with them, get a relationship with them, and teach them some new skills and some things that they could take back and enjoy, and that they'd want to work with us again. And the school have already said they'd like to come back and do further sessions."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)**

- One library service has had interest from other nearby local authorities who want to understand what has made their project such a success. This indicates the potential interest in sharing case studies within local authorities more broadly to showcase the work and learning that has been achieved through the Youth Engagement Network programme.

> "I've had two conversations separately with library authorities that have contacted me and said, hey, what are you doing? And 'yours seems to be working, can we just check in with you' and that for me is gives me real pleasure, because I'm a massive fan of not working in silos and it's about sharing, sharing sharing!"
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

- As briefly mentioned earlier, partnerships were unexpectedly strengthened internally within other local authority departments for some library services. For example, North Somerset Libraries developed their working relationship with the Children's Engagement and Participation Officer, and Manchester got to know their Youth and Play team. Both these particular examples came about due to involvement in wider consultation opportunities happening with children and young people.

> "We have made very good connections with our youth and play team, and we are working with them to help us develop a youth ambassador scheme, potentially using the Kloodle platform to help young people record their activities and skills earned when taking part in activities such as teen book club, volunteering in libraries and more."
> **(Library staff, end of project proforma)**

- Taking part in a programme like this was reported by one library service as a way to raise morale within a currently difficult delivery environment.

> "I've really appreciated the opportunity, and I know that the library staff really engaged with it. They found it exciting. They felt that, particularly when all we ever hear about is spending, freezes and cuts, a bunch of cuts and stuff, it raises morale, which is lovely, and it's lovely as well, just to see teenagers that come in and recognise that the library is a safe space and it's inclusive."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

- Being involved in the Youth Engagement Network clearly has aligned well with overall strategic priorities of library services, including working with young men. This was particularly highlighted during phase two, given the release of the DCMS's National Youth Strategy in December 2025[69] and the launch of the National Year of Reading in 2026[70]. Strategic impacts are discussed further in section 5.

> "I think something that has been good is it hasn't felt like it's been an add on. It's integrated as part, like part of a bigger piece of work that will kind of want to think about."
> (**Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "I mean, part of our service plan is very we're very much focusing on young adults and making them feel welcome in the libraries. At the moment, we've done quite a bit of training on it and that sort of thing. So I know that the library service as a whole is keen to get young adults into the libraries, which is why they've sort of encouraged us to take part in this as well."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

> "I think it has been quite timely, with the National Year of Reading coming up, that one of the target groups is teenage boys. And when that came out, it was something that immediately I was thinking that's going to be a tough one. But actually, I feel like this has kind of helped and paved the way for it. So you know, our senior managers are going to be looking at, well, what are you going to be doing around the national year of reading for these groups? So it means, like, because we've already started this, it gives permission to kind of keep it going as well."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

4.2.3.6 Intended outcomes summary

Outcomes	Evidence this has been achieved?
Library staff develop skills and knowledge	Yes
Library staff develop overall confidence in working with young people and/or on co-created projects	Yes, with caveats listed above

69 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-matters-your-national-youth-strategy/youth-matters-your-national-youth-strategy

70 https://goallin.org.uk/

Library staff develop new contacts with other library services	Yes although capacity of library staff to continue conversations outside the Youth Engagement Network programme environment has been a challenge
Library staff have greater propensity to work on young people's co-created projects in the future	Yes

Image: Kirklees Library and Information Service.

Image: Luton Libraries.

Image: Knowsley Libraries.

Image: Idea Store, Tower Hamlets.

5 Process evaluation: learning from the pilot and recommendations for future phases or replications

This section presents an overview of the logistical and operational context in which the programme was delivered. It shows the journey of progress and learning from the pilot year into phase two and provides recommendations for phase three. The aim is to share a sample of practical learning points (focused on what worked less well as much as what worked well) and recommended actions directly drawn from evidence across the programme, including reflection workshops with the Libraries Rising Programme Manager.[71]

5.1 What worked well and resulting recommendations

What worked well in the pilot and what was learnt?	Which changes were made as a result for phase two?	What was the impact of this change in phase two? What additional learning took place this year based on what worked well?	What needs to happen next for phase three or projects that may wish to replicate this type of work?
Training and support. The quarterly peer-network meetings were a positive place to bring challenges, share ideas, and develop independence. The ability to have discussions collectively and have an opportunity to meet independently with Lucy were highly valued.	Quarterly meetings continued to be held in phase two and were well attended. Libraries Rising brought 'case study' library services into the onboarding sessions to inspire the new cohort with their achievements.	The support structure felt appropriate in terms of content and time, with strong attendance. More training was delivered (and it was given earlier), resulting in additional opportunities to learn about different aspects of co-creation from experts.	A review of the practical specifics 'getting from A to B[72] with co-creation is recommended, given the feedback from some library staff in still being unconfident in how to truly co-create with their young people.

71 As outlined earlier, these sessions used Arts Council England's Quality Principles as a lens to reflect on project learning.

72 This is shorthand for the gap between getting young people in a room, to them deciding what they want to do (opposed to the library service influencing them too much).

The meetings also generated a supportive and friendly environment. Holding the meetings quarterly was viewed by both library staff and the Programme Manager as the correct frequency.	The meetings were used to bring in external trainers/opportunities for bespoke learning based on the ongoing needs of library services.	Relationship building was strong between the Programme Manager and library staff members. Feedback from library services is that they want continued support. A new network has been set up by the Programme Manager as reported earlier in the impact evaluation to continue the conversation, learning and provide ongoing support with co-created work. Both pilot and phase two organisations will be able to help co-create and access this opportunity.	Deliver new network meeting for pilot and phase two organisation, bringing phase three into this at the end of 2026/7.
Authenticity. Library staff appreciated the permission given by Libraries Rising to experiment and fail; it brought integrity to projects (and in turn led to authentic relationship building with children in some cases). This approach also aligned to the values of Libraries Rising (togetherness, sharing and being safe with each other, progression).	Authenticity was pushed in the messaging of the programme for phase two e.g. having permission to fail. Practical learning points from pilot organisations learning (when things had not gone well) were shared during meetings and onboarding to demonstrate it is possible to fail, learn, achieve.	Library staff felt confident and comfortable with sharing how they were feeling about the general libraries landscape at the moment. A culture around honesty and transparency (freedom to be authentic) was indicatively developed. Impact evaluation findings (as outlined above) suggested that having permission to fail took the pressure off for some organisations.	Continue with the same messaging for phase three. A mindset shift is required for this type of work, and it is reportedly challenging for library staff to buy into a 'permission to fail' concept when they have concerns over perceptions around failure and pressures due to potential job cuts. Libraries Rising may be able to continue influencing change outside of the programme in other advocacy/ influencing/ strategic ways at senior management level.

		The independent evaluator notes that authenticity has been a key successful strand across both years but especially so in phase two. An authentic, shared learning experience was delivered through the meetings by creating a trusted, safe space. The application process for phase two had more gravitas.	The programme is about process not product – it should be positioned as a movement, rather than a project.
Step change. It should not be under-estimated how much was achieved by pilot library services who were working under challenging current social and economic conditions. This programme was a big leap, and it should be recognised that with many libraries the starting point with co-creation was very low. A genuine attempt was made by some of the library services to work with new, under-represented non-user groups.	Achievements, however small, were celebrated in meetings in an attempt to increase morale and encourage phase two libraries to continue this type of work. Acknowledgement of the challenging landscape was made rather than shied away from.	Libraries Rising were able to share programme outputs and outcomes at the Next Library, CILIP and Libraries Connected conferences. This was a real shift for the programme in terms of visibility, and it was an opportunity to highlight the key learning which other services could follow. Balance felt like it shifted on the programme – whilst young people were absolutely at the heart, it became focused on library staff learning rather than necessarily achieving outcomes for the young people. The learning for library staff has been invaluable. Impact evaluation showed how much respect the library staff had for the Programme Manager, who was highly praised for their support.	Keep shouting loudly about the programme – research future opportunities to share the successes of the programme in the sector e.g. 2026/7 conferences, seminars, newsletters.

		Word of mouth about the programme is indicatively growing – for example, phase three applications were up on the pilot year.	
Challenging perceptions. Pilot libraries were surprised by how much the young people engaged in the process. The pilot was successful in challenging perceptions about young people and how keen they are to engage with libraries overall. Young people's intention to continue working with the library was under-estimated by some services.	Activities within phase two training delivery were designed to challenge library staff perception of young people before they even started. Case study examples were shared from the pilot libraries during the application process.	Library staff felt prepared through the training, notwithstanding some of the bespoke feedback above regarding additional co-created training support. Some library services were motivated to bring in additional external training for their staff.	Continue to use case studies to prepare phase three library staff. Attempt to put improved measures in place for library staff to measure post project return visits of the young people (perhaps through a tracker/card stamped option etc).
Expertise. Training provided by Participation People was a 'cementing point' – it brought external expertise into the training mix and filled gaps in Libraries Rising's existing knowledge.	Participation People training content was bolstered (e.g. SEND) and was also delivered earlier in the programme for phase two. Additional training was put in place to plug gaps – e.g. library staff also accessed training from Curious Minds and The Spark Arts for Children during these sessions.	Greater support, high satisfaction ratings for training. More training happened (and it was delivered earlier), resulting in additional opportunities to learn more about different aspects of co-creation and increased confidence (prior to any delivery). Libraries Rising positively responded to suggestions for improvement from the pilot and this made a difference to phase two organisations.	Sustain this level of training if budget allows. A review of the practical specifics 'getting from A to B' with co-creation is recommended, given the feedback from some library staff in still be unconfident in how to truly co-create with their young people.

Partnerships. The pilot was a useful opportunity for library staff to reach out to partners that they had not engaged with at all/for some time. However it highlighted challenges that existed with partnership working (covered in more detail below).	Greater time was given to phase two library staff to develop their partnerships as a result of feedback from pilot organisations. Libraries Rising did not assume that phase two library teams had good partnership working skills, or existing partners to approach. Phase two libraries were advised to build more holistic support around the young people including through parents and carers.	The majority of library staff reportedly benefitted from having the extended time period.	Keep the same amount of time in the programme for partnership development as there were more pros than cons in having the additional allocation in phase two. Model what holistic support 'looks like' for phase three organisations.
Young people with SEND. Pilot library staff had a steep learning curve but received excellent CPD through Participation People and the act of 'doing' projects rather than simply being trained in co-creation elsewhere. In particular, those working with neurodivergent and SEND young people gained a greater understanding of communication methods and how to engage young people in co-created activities e.g. if children are non-verbal.	Specific SEND case studies/suggestions were able to be shared from the pilot with phase two organisations.	This boosted confidence and improved learning for phase two teams through training and practical examples, with some organisations delivering with SEND children e.g. Lancashire Library Service.	Consider whether it may be worth capturing this specific learning into a SEND co-creation toolkit for the sector after phase three.
Consulting with young people. Library staff developed consultation skills with young people (and an understanding of how useful a feedback loop/continuous dialogue can be).	These examples were built into training for phase two libraries. Permission was given to be open to what the young people wanted to do e.g. it could be simple and small changes (to do with a space) rather than a club or event.	Training was rated highly but as per the above, some library staff still felt that they had 'led' the young people too much in their decision making.	Sustain this level of training if budget allows. A review of the practical specifics 'getting from A to B' with co-creation is recommended, given the feedback from some library staff

This was reportedly useful for library staff and raised ideas that they would never have thought about, leading to change in the library space.		Critically, library services have developed 'proof of concept' for gaining buy-in either internally or externally. Library services were inspired to involve young people in other wider local authority consultation e.g. Manchester and Somerset.	in still being unconfident in how to truly co-create with their young people. Longer-term, there may be an opportunity to develop a toolkit specifically about consultation with young people (this could be video based) in the way that Engaging Libraries have released a 'how to' guide using staff to share their direct experience.[73] This may be something already covered through the new Spark Space.[74]
Monitoring and evaluation skills. The pilot was an opportunity to test out the monitoring and evaluation tools designed by the independent evaluator. Evaluation and monitoring mechanisms were reported by pilot library staff as being at the right level. Flexibility through use of the creative toolkit and alternatives to the young people's feedback form were appreciated – these gave the library staff permission to adapt approaches based on the needs of the young people.	Data was collected in the same way during phase two, with some tweaks as per the above with monitoring to explore areas of interest for Libraries Rising that had not been considered in the original evaluation framework. Flexibility and permission to adapt evaluation using the creative toolkit was stressed in phase two evaluation training. An evaluation webinar formed part of the phase two training programme.	Impact evaluation showed that phase two library staff felt that evaluation tools were proportionate to the project. Some phase two organisations were inspired to create their own approaches e.g. Idea Store and their reflection windows. A comparison was able to be made during impact evaluation comparing pilot vs phase two library services.	Keep evaluation and monitoring as light touch as possible. Encourage library staff to embed monitoring and evaluation into their programme rather than having it as an add on. Work with independent evaluator to enable a 'good exit' with evaluation e.g. ensuring Programme Manager has a copy of the survey so that Libraries Rising can utilise it in year three, enabling three years' comparisons.

73 https://public-engagement.librariesconnected.org.uk
74 https://librariesrising.org.uk/sparkspace-course/

The year one programme meant that the monitoring and evaluation could be piloted. It also provided a series of useful data baselines.		Having additional monitoring data e.g. engagements allowed for greater exploration of results in the phase two impact evaluation. Taking a flexible approach to monitoring and evaluation i.e. making changes where needed worked well. It meant that the evaluation was responsive and met the needs of Libraries Rising.	
Accessibility. Two staff members identifying as neurodivergent suggested that Libraries Rising's overall approach of the programme meant that it was accessible.	Libraries Rising continued to consult with library staff on particular access needs – whether at recruitment stage or during training.	No particular access needs were identified in phase two but Libraries Rising reflected that they are on a learning journey around inclusion (e.g. virtual spaces are not always inclusive). The library services in phase two (and in the pilot) were very different, and it is a challenge for the Programme Manager to maintain an equitable experience e.g. by offering more (and the right types of) support, for all library staff involved.	Ensure any specific access needs for library staff are assessed prior to phase three training delivery.

“Loved this project - I received really positive feedback from the children and their parents - would love to be a part of another one.”
(Library staff anonymous survey)

“Thank you for having me a part of this. Myself and [states name] have completed a case study as we're eager for this to be a success elsewhere.”
(Library staff anonymous survey)

“Loved being part of the project and if there was any way a representative from our SEND group could be part of wider national discussions, that would be great. The school are keeping in touch with us, and we'll be working with them in the library again next year.”
(Library staff anonymous survey)

“We know that we need to start putting children, young people’s voices at the heart of national policy decision making. You know we need to start really creating that space so they can be heard. And we know that this isn’t doing that – this is doing great work in library services, and we’re not going to stop this, but we know we need to do something else. So we’re reaching out to some partners like Spark Arts with existing groups to start working with them about building that national picture.”
(Programme Manager interview)

5.2 What worked less well and resulting recommendations

What didn't work well in the pilot and what was learnt?	Which changes were made as a result for phase two?	What was the impact of this change in phase two? What additional learning took place this year based on what worked less well?	What needs to happen next for phase three or projects that may wish to replicate this type of work?
Recruitment and onboarding. Small changes to the recruitment and subsequent onboarding experience for library staff would have made their experience better overall. Libraries Rising needed to get onboarding off the ground very quickly due to the timeline and the Programme Manager was new in post. This meant there were some instances where library services did not fully understand what they were committing to. There was a great deal of variation around understanding what true 'co-creation' really is.	Libraries Rising thoroughly revised the recruitment and onboarding process overall for phase two which gave it greater authority. It also meant that information was given 'up front' and modelled what 'good' co-creation 'looks like'. It allowed the Programme Manager to emphasise that process is as important as the product. The messaging was adapted i.e. Libraries Rising are trying to build a movement through this work; to show that process is OK if it builds to something else. The Programme Manager was clear early on that this work should not positioned as a 'project' – that they	Library staff felt supported and developed a strong relationship with the Programme Manager. Training satisfaction levels were high as highlighted above. A larger library staff group demanded more careful management in online settings e.g. encouraging library staff to come off their mics and share. It also meant more administration time for the Programme Manager. Given the attendance figures in 8.2.4, the Programme Manager should be commended for their efforts. Budget felt more squeezed for phase two support due to the	To take the training offer to the next level, further budget and staffing resource from Libraries Rising will be necessary. The demands of the project require more than one person from Libraries Rising helping to coordinate it. Additional staffing is recommended if at all possible for phase three.

Similarly, there were isolated instances of library staff being concerned during the pilot that they had not delivered a 'product'. Two libraries withdrew due to factors listed in the impact evaluation.	are looking for library teams who see this opportunity to develop (or enhance) a holistic approach around youth engagement. That it is better to work with fewer young people, from under-represented and marginal groups. As stated above, additional training from other experts including Participation People was delivered earlier in the process.	increased costs for training. It was also challenging for the Programme Manager to deliver the support programme single handedly, given the increase they have had in their other workload during phase two.	
Diverse young people. Some libraries reached out to young people who had never been to the library before (therefore achieving the authentic learning Libraries Rising were aiming for during this programme). However those who felt rushed or lacked skills with partnership development worked with those they already knew. Although SEND and neurodivergent young people were engaged, Libraries Rising would have wanted to see greater representation of other marginalised groups within the young people.	Encouragement was given to focusing on under-represented young people, including those from marginalised groups.	Phase two organisations were inspired to work with a more diverse range of young people experiencing marginalisation e.g. LGBTQIA+ young people and LACs[75]. Encouragement from the Programme Manager (along with clearer expectations from Libraries Rising at onboarding stage) could be attributed to this. For example, working with home schooled young people, young people with SEND, young people from highly deprived areas, young people from the global majority.	Share case studies from those in phase two who worked with young people from marginalised groups to inspire those joining phase three.

75 Looked after Children.

This ultimately led to a mismatch between what Libraries Rising would consider authentic co-creation vs the library services who believe they have delivered it.			
Partnerships. The project's time-sensitive, limited duration and lead-in times were too tight for recruitment, delivery and relationship building for many pilot library services, especially those who were engaging new groups (or had little experience with developing partnerships). Clashes with summer holiday exam periods for some library services also impacted their projects and youth engagement. Existing connections with schools was patchier than expected and therefore greater time was needed to build relationships than anticipated. Library services needed more 'hand holding' when reaching out to local partners; confidence was low in doing this independently without support from Libraries Rising in some places.	Libraries Rising changed the timeline for phase two, to allow for an extended time period for partnership development and delivery; longer opportunities to build trust with the young people; the ability to avoid school exam periods for those working with education partners; and to give libraries encouragement to see that the process is as important as the final product.	There were some isolated comments that the longer timeline 'pushed the can down the road' i.e. it allowed some drift with other projects able to 'creep in'. This again reflects the differences between library services and their varying needs.	As above - sustain the amount of time in the programme for partnership development as there were more pros than cons in having that additional allocation in phase two.
Reluctancy with sharing learning. The pilot demonstrated that small scale can be mighty (and innovative for the library sector-	Libraries Rising changed the recruitment and onboarding messaging to address this in phase two.	There are still concerns with some services on feeling pressure to 'achieve something'.	Continue to be clear with phase three organisations in the messaging at recruitment and onboarding stages that their

not necessarily for elsewhere). The pilot interim evaluation report showed how small changes can lead to larger outcomes such as developing new partnerships. However, there was limited enthusiasm in sharing experience and learning wider than the project network. This was attributed to concerns of being seen to 'fail'. It was difficult to balance the safety of a group network (i.e. a safe space for sharing where conversations can be kept confidential) with Libraries Rising's intention to share the learning with the sector.	They were clear with organisations about the intention to share learning more widely, and to instil an ethos of being brave, bold and open to sharing learning.	This reflects the challenges that library staff are facing on the ground at the moment with job cuts and concerns around being seen to fail.	learning has the potential to shift the sector from piecemeal projects to something more meaningful. This could be a positive motivator. E.g. hyper-targeted focused approach is not well adopted; libraries often aim to place children at centre but are not always meaningfully doing this work – this is an opportunity to share how it can be done (through successful examples). As above - this change in mindset is needed outside of the Youth Engagement Network programme – there is only so much that can be achieved within it. Change management is required at a higher, and broader level.
Delivering co-creation within local authorities and gaining buy-in. As seen in the evaluation of other library projects,[76] the ability to make public engagement projects like co-creation a priority continues to be a challenge for library services.	Libraries Rising encouraged senior management buy-in at the recruitment stage, for example, the Programme Manager ran a webinar prior to application and invited Heads of Service along and also shared information via Libraries Connected's Basecamp group.	As the impact evaluation showed, it was still difficult for some phase two library services to implement what their young people wanted within the local authority environment (and the logistics of that e.g. paying for specific games with companies that are not listed as suppliers).	Continue to build in requirements or evidence for senior management level buy-in for the project at recruitment stage (to ensure delivery staff have a supportive manager who recognises this work needs to be prioritised and gives them permission to do so).

76 For example, Engaging Libraries https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/engaging-public-research

Despite the positivity of the majority of pilot staff to continue doing this work in some way, in reality there was a concern that staff capacity, budget and time will hamper future co-creation and embedding the learning from the programme. It was noted that pilot organisations did well to step up and deliver a project like the Youth Engagement Network within the current library sector landscape (e.g. cuts, restructures, cost of living crisis etc). Similarly, several libraries reported the challenges of operating in a local authority when working on co-created projects (e.g. time needed for listing new suppliers) and the need for buy-in from senior leaders to enable true co-creation where the young people's ideas can be implemented. There were isolated examples in the pilot where library staff did not have the ability or confidence to 'let go of control'. There were also concerns around the impact of co-created activities on existing problems with anti-social behaviour.	More emphasis was put on buy-in during the quarterly meetings with the libraries, encouraging them to think about sharing the learning, making the case to senior leadership etc. It was also embedded into the application process (asking libraries to think about how they would share the learning across their workforce and get others on board).	It is not feasible for library service staff to be able to make change happen without the backing of their senior managers, and the impact evaluation for both pilot and phase two shows the difference in success between services who did, and did not have that buy-in. Local authorities have different ways of doing things e.g. managing the grant.	Continue wider Libraries Rising work in influencing and seeking buy-in from Heads of Service for co-creation and youth engagement work e.g. through conferences (as was delivered this year with CILIP, Libraries Connected etc). Consider what additional training may be needed to deal with anti-social behaviour or prevent it happening within the context of co-created projects to reassure and equip staff with the necessary skills should it happen.

Engaging young people on a national level. The national meetings network did not begin during the pilot as had been anticipated and therefore intended targets for this particular stream of work were not met. This finding demonstrated the need for a pilot and how well Libraries Rising had responded to the ongoing insight. For example, the main reason these meetings did not happen is due to the type of target audience that many of the library services ended up working with during the programme (e.g. SEND, neurodivergent). In addition, based on feedback from the young people themselves, they would not have been comfortable communicating via online or in person at a national level. It was therefore the right decision to pause this activity and take time to work out the best way to deliver it.	Libraries Rising continued to monitor the views of young people with this idea. The message was clear insofar that they had little interest in national contributions but wanted to focus on their local libraries instead.	No further action was taken. Learning from the Youth Engagement Network programme is however being fed into national policy conversations via broader Libraries Rising activities.	No further action for phase three. Programme Manager to continue collecting evidence on the outcomes of this work on young people to feed into national conversations.
Developing trust. Perhaps unsurprisingly, frequency of engagement with the young people on the pilot was relative to the success of the project.	A longer lead in time to develop partnerships and trust with the young people was implemented.	As above, this made a difference to the majority of library services who reported positive relationships being built with their young people e.g. North Tyneside working with their young people over several months.	Maintain the lead in time for phase three organisations. Show opposing library service experiences from low to high engagement and trust.

Those working with young people over a longer more sustained period (e.g. those who got up to speed quickly within the existing timeframes) were able to develop a positive and trusted collective relationship. There were also instances where library services appeared to be more distant from the young people which did not help develop trust. For example, where a school partner took the lead on facilitation or where few meetings were held in the library, by library staff. This ultimately led to library staff nervousness about being with the children and did not build confidence in this type of work.	Examples were shared from the pilot to show the difference in outcomes by putting in work over a long period of time to build trust.	Issues were however raised this year in relation to specific barriers that were experienced by library staff (and therefore young people). As outlined above, these included the opening times of library services which do not always match the needs of the young people. Conversely, those who opened after hours to try and attract engagements from young people found it a struggle to staff these events.	It may not be feasible for phase three, but finding ways to break down barriers around opening hours in future projects (and budgeting to cover these costs or advocate for later opening) may be necessary to truly meet the needs of young people.
Evaluation and monitoring. Although the pilot was seen as an opportunity to test and try out data collection tools prior to phase two, there were some challenges to monitoring and evaluation data during the first year. Firstly, as highlighted in the interim evaluation report, library staff did not collect demographic monitoring information as requested using the tools provided.	The messaging was changed around collecting demographic data to show the purpose more clearly. The evaluation and monitoring training video was changed to include examples of how demographic data is used strategically for audience development e.g. using St Helens Libraries audience development plan as a case study. A real-world example was used to inspire and motivate.	The impact evaluation showed that library staff felt they had learned something new around evaluation techniques which they will be able to take forward into other projects. A much better picture was gained in phase two in terms of demographics. However some of the same barriers existed for phase two library staff as they did in the pilot e.g. accessing demographic data; lack of time built in for evaluation.	Continue emphasising the need to collect demographic data in phase three, but adapt the system as described above to make it easier for both the Programme Manager and library services e.g. via a sole electronic method if this is deemed better. Review monitoring at a granular level e.g. ease of collecting data on demographics for both the library services and Programme Manager via potentially

This was primarily attributed to resistance in collection (driven by a lack of experience and confidence in doing this). However, there were also challenges in collecting this information for services who were working with schools or youth engagement services where access to parents/carers is second hand.

Whilst it is not compulsory for Libraries Rising to report to Arts Council England on this data given that the young people are under 16, it meant that we were unable to report on the ethnicity, disability or LGBTQIA+ profile of young people engaged in the pilot (and data on date of birth/gender is also patchy). It was therefore difficult to robustly measure (and report on the programme's key aim of) whether the library services had engaged with those from particular target groups (including under-represented and marginalised audiences).

Permission was given to adapt and flex the tools for SEND and neurodivergent young people and phase two organisations were shown existing examples in the creative toolkit provided, and examples from the pilots.

Monitoring and evaluation was discussed at group network meetings and library staff raised any ongoing issues with capturing feedback.

The end of project proforma was adapted so it was clearer to report on engagements and existing library user status questions.

A light touch online survey to assess the longitudinal impacts of pilot projects was deployed by the independent evaluator.

Although library services were not asked to formally measure the number of young people who had returned to the library independently as a result of the Youth Engagement Network (instead anecdotal data was used which was felt less of a burden), it would be useful to find ways to do this in future years.

Some services drew inspiration from the creative evaluation toolkit, however this was still underused.

Whilst an adaptable creative toolkit was provided, feedback requested specific creative evaluation ideas for the young people.

The response rate to the pilot legacy survey was poor. It is difficult to reach the right people with an online survey especially given the churn of staff.

implementing a wholly electronic method. Speak to phase three library staff in advance to find the best way to capture the data (or decide not to capture demographic data in the same way at all – for example, using a narrative about the context in which a library service is operating instead).

Ensure evaluation and monitoring continues to receive as much emphasis in the onboarding as it did for phase two.

Consider developing a co-created approach to evaluation planning in the future, e.g. working with young people to help develop the evaluation framework (in the same way that they would co-create the rest of the project).

Revisit the methodology e.g. if the creative toolkit is not used, what could work better for library staff? Is time the only barrier? As above, bring in young people evaluation training specialist who could bring fresh ideas into the mix.

It was also difficult during the pilot to report on existing users/the number of memberships gained/legacy of membership or independent returns. This was attributed in part to confusion around the end of project proforma requirement to submit this data, and a lack of confidence about asking this question. However it was also challenging for libraries to collect this data when working with schools or youth-led groups i.e. tracking they have returned independently. Although one pilot organisation used the creative toolkit to adapt the tools for their SEND participants (as encouraged), this was not a typical result across the board, and it was underused. Despite the training video provided and evaluation onboarding activities, one library staff member admitted they had forgotten about monitoring and evaluation altogether.			Library staff could be encouraged to develop their own in-house public surveys (if they do not have them already) which could include a question to ascertain whether families/young people have come back as a direct result of their child taking part in a school/youth engagement led project at the library. Or, instead of a public survey, add a 'how did you find out about us' response choice that would evidence 'being part of a youth engagement project' on new membership forms.
Setting targets. Initial targets in the activity grant were set too high. This could not have been pre-empted until the pilot had been delivered, and both impact and process evaluation completed.	Targets were adjusted with Arts Council England to increase the age band to 11 – 16 for phase two library services.	Work continued to focus on being about delivering meaningful activity rather than achieving high numbers.	Use the data collected in the pilot and phase two phases to set realistic targets for phase three.

A focus on numbers was not comfortable for the Libraries Rising or library staff teams. The pilot indicated that this type of work is more about group need and responding to it, rather than focusing on numbers i.e. depth rather than breadth. Similarly, limiting age groups to 11-13 years as per the original activity plan was not necessary and added a level of complexity around the national network meeting idea (as some children participating in the overall programme were older).		Library services were able to access a greater pool of young people and partners having had the age band increased.	
Genuine strategic need. Although there is no evidence in the data from library staff, Libraries Rising staff reported concerns that libraries potentially submitted applications for this project not because it is something they strategically want to do, but because they respect and value Libraries Rising and wanted to receive funding for a 'project'.	The recruitment process for phase two was strengthened as outlined above.	Although the impact evaluation highlighted that there were some buy-in issues, evidence suggests that the majority of library services involved in phase two genuinely wanted to develop a strategic approach to co-creation.	Continue to instil that this work is hard, and time intensive. It is critical to want to do this work, and to do it properly. It should align with a library services strategic intent.

“I did get a lot out of it, you know, there was a lot of information and links that I've still got, that I will be able to use professionally in the future.”
(Library service withdrawal - depth interview)

“I needed more staff time factored into the budget. Mainly though there was not much ASCEL [Libraries Rising] could do. I guess if we did the project over Autumn there would be fewer exam pressures etc.”
(Library service withdrawal - emailed feedback)

“I think settings want to know what the project is before we say things like it’s up to the teenagers, but I appreciate you are trying to get them to say what they want. The budget was not enough for most of the artists I approached after the pupils wanted to learn art skills and create models.”
(Library service withdrawal - emailed feedback)

“I think the learning is around the fact that it's the process, not the outcome. I think we sort of started to get there in the pilot of realising what this was really about. And I think we're there now, and that's great. I mean, everyone keeps referring to it….we collectively, we call it a movement, not a project. And with the libraries, there is a lot of buy in to that.”
(Programme Manager interview)

“It would be lovely if it could be in some sort of toolkit for engaging with SEND schools.”
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

“I don't think I realised exactly the format of trying to engage a group and then bring them into the library setting. And I hadn't really thought about what the barriers to that might be in any given site. So the one I chose to take this project forward, the manager there is very, very engaged and was really keen, and on paper it looked like it would be quite successful because it's one of our bigger libraries, lovely space, quite modern, good parking. But what we didn't consider was it's a little bit out of town, which is a real barrier.”
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

“We had some struggles with engaging with the school and in the end, they decided that they didn't have the capacity, they didn't have the staffing. We asked for the opportunity to correspond directly with the parents and see if we could do it outside of school time. The school weren't willing to assist us with that, so really, we had to draw a line.”
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

“I think the fact that we have the funding has been a bit of an issue for us, and I'd have preferred that we didn't have that up front. If we'd got to the point – it got to this point and not had the funding, I think we'd feel more comfortable about where we are and just looking at those lessons.”
(Anonymised library staff depth interview - pilot)

“The library services are so different. It’s about that tailoring, that personalisation, what you're offering them. I'm really interested in targeted universalism, how you how you make it really equitable by perhaps offering more to certain Library Services who need more support.”
(Programme Manager interview)

“I think it would have been useful to have been given some of those skills to do the initial engagement with the group. We were given great tools and training, and the Participation People training was fantastic, but it was all on the understanding that you had a group of engaged children that you could take forward. So that actual initial contact and how to frame that with – whether it was teachers or group leaders or something, I think was a bit of a missing link.”
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

“I think that it is very much a shift in an entire workforce mindset.”
(Programme Manager interview)

5.3 Library staff experience of working with Libraries Rising

Both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that library staff highly valued the support from the Programme Manager. As outlined above, their satisfaction with the programme was partially attributed to the relationship and ethos of Libraries Rising, which was commonly described as being 'collaborative' rather than judgemental. Overall communication was rated highly, with 100% (n=16) of library staff rating it as either excellent or good (with 75% n=12 rating it as good). In addition:

- 100% (n=16) rated the overall project design and delivery support as either excellent or good (with 56% n=9 of those rating it as excellent).
- 100% (n=16) rated the training as excellent or good (with 50% or n=8 of those rating it excellent) and 25% or n=4 rating it as don't know/unsure – presumably because they did not attend.
- Although challenges did exist with some services being able to engage young people with evaluation (as per the above findings), 94% (n=15) rated the evaluation support tools as excellent or good (with 44% n=7 of those rating them as excellent) and 6% or n=1 rating them as don't know/unsure – presumably because they did not use the tools/were not in charge of disseminating them)[77].

> "The evaluation tools have been good, but we have found it hard to get the young people to actually engage with them."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

- The Programme Manager was commonly praised, and described as 'positive', 'engaging', 'helpful' and 'enthusiastic'. It should not be underestimated how crucial, valuable and pivotal this role was to encouraging library staff to continue when they were experiencing challenges. Based on the qualitative evidence about Libraries Rising's support and encouragement as highlighted earlier, it is highly likely that without such an approach, the withdrawal rate may have been higher.

- Positively and more specifically:

  - 100% (n=16) said they would describe their relationship with Libraries Rising as a positive one.
  - 100% (n=16) said they would be either 'very likely' or 'likely' to recommend working with Libraries Rising to other library services.

> "They have been informal but informative. Helpful, friendly, easily available, a pleasure to work with."
> **(Library staff anonymous survey)**

> "I think that working with Lucy on this has been like a real pleasure, because I have felt supported."
> **(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)**

77 All depth interview participants were asked if the evaluation tools were too onerous or about right for the size of project. All interviewees sampled across both years expressed that they were comfortable with the amount that Libraries Rising/the independent evaluator were both asking of them. However, it should be noted that this finding may be skewed given the evaluator was asking the question.

"We felt really supported by ASCEL [Libraries Rising]. I felt at any point that I could email like Lucy, or attend any of the extra sessions if I was had any particular questions. So we've really felt very supported."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"She's so nice. And, yeah, it didn't feel there was anything I couldn't ask her or talk to her about, or any barriers."
(Anonymised library staff depth interview – phase two)

"The communication and support offered is great. ASCEL [Libraries Rising] always come from a place of understanding and collaboration, rather than judgement."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"Lucy is really positive, enthusiastic and engaging - she was happy to help and talk to those taking a part and created a clear structure and time frame guide at the start which helped to be prepared."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"Always been helpful and been realistic of our expectations and more."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"They have the support available should you need it but give you the space to grow the project yourself. Also, they are good at gently reminding when deadlines are close, so those of us who are more hands-on delivery focused and less paperwork based are kept in check, in a non-patronising way!"
(Library staff anonymous survey)

"100% [would work with them again]. As mentioned above Lucy is wonderful. The project being so open gave space for creative freedom for myself and the young people involved. Extra support and check ins were there if needed with Lucy and I developed a now close relationship with my young people team."
(Library staff anonymous survey)

6 Top tips checklist of advice for future co-created work with young people

The following tips were provided anonymously by pilot library staff participants through their depth interviews and/or end of project proformas. These have been anonymously collated here in case they are a useful checklist to extract for phase three recruited library services.

"...it's got to be fun. If it's not fun for you, it's not going to be fun for the young people."

"Food. They always remember the food."

"Get a really good partner who knows what they're talking about."

"Don't put too much pressure on yourself with the time limits. I think at the beginning, I was like, oh my God, we've got to get this done. But actually, good relationships take time to build."

"Start early and engage as many partners as possible. Don't close yourself off. Don't get fixated on one part of the project."

"Reinforce to managers the importance of blocking out time straight away."

"Maintain communication and conversations between yourself and central teams that may work directly with children and young people, as they will be able to offer extra support and guidance if needed."

"Whoever says they're going to do it, just kind of really push whichever manager or colleague, to book the time out straightaway. So if you're saying, "I want to have a youth group" put it in your diary, because otherwise, things just happen and then you're struggling. So I just – that was kind of one of my only big things, is to – however they word it or gently nudge the manager or the staff that are doing it, "Okay, you're doing this project. How often are you looking at meeting up with them? Or - have you got a day of the week?" Decide that quite quickly, even if you've not got the set time, if you've got the day that you're looking at doing it, be it weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, block it out and then you've got room to play around."

"I would say, absolutely embrace the project, go for it, don't be afraid to not achieve the outcomes that you intend to at the beginning. Because it is all great learning and it's all great development, and ASCEL [Libraries Rising] are amazingly supportive. And I think the more of these kinds of programmes that we can do the stronger we'll all get in our skills. So yeah, I would say absolutely go for it, don't be afraid to not achieve, you know, the excellent result you have in your head."

"I think you've got to be quite thick skinned; I think you've got to be persistent and just keep plugging away until you find someone – it's not that they don't want to work with you, I think all these organisations are just stretched, so finding someone that, you know, has a little bit more capacity and can work with you."

"Be realistic about the people that are looking to engage, you know, maybe don't be too ambitious. I know that sounds awful, but sometimes it's – you know, people need to be coaxed quite gently. So start – yeah, just be realistic, I guess."

"So you either need a stable group and a very flexible project or, if you've got a group that might be more transient, you'd need a very stable project. One element in your thing needs to be definitely there, and that allows you for the other element to be a bit more out there."

7 Closing remarks

Overall, the programme achieved (and at times exceeded) its original aims as outlined in the grant activity plan to Arts Council England. This has been an innovative programme which deserves acknowledgement and celebration. It has not always been easy. The Programme Manager and wider Libraries Rising team have learned a substantial amount through administrating and delivering a programme like this, which will no doubt be positively used in their future projects. Being open to learning from things that have not gone well is testament to the values of transparency and authenticity embodied by Libraries Rising. Furthermore, the findings from the programme have significant relevance on a national level. They should continue to be shared by Libraries Rising to inspire others and could certainly be used within national influencing and at policy development levels.

8 Appendices

8.1 Pilot projects summary overview

Library service	Short project summary	Completed project?
Luton Libraries (pilot phase one)	Worked with a local high school librarian at Chiltern Academy to identify a suitable group of young people. The young people were keen to create artwork which could be displayed in central library. The library worked with local artist Mary Hearne to boost the student's ideas. The result was eight art wall pieces which complement the new refurbished layout in the children's library at Central.	Yes
Norfolk Library & Information Service (Watton Library) (pilot phase one)	Ran weekly meet ups from March – June with young people recruited from the community via social media and partner callouts. Activities initially focused on playing games and getting to know each other. The young people decided they wanted to create a scrapbook as a way of capturing thoughts and feelings. A volunteer helped to deliver creative activity. The group now meet once a month and continue to enjoy activities together.	Yes
Kirklees Library & Information Service (Almondbury Library) (pilot phase one)	The team met with a small group of young people with complex autism at Woodley School and College for an initial meeting to establish what kind of project they wanted to create and to understand needs. The young people chose to work on an art-based storytelling project. As a result, Kirklees commissioned The Children's Art School to help deliver sessions. In the library, activity was designed and delivered by the young people including a story cube, story scenarios, props, costumes and musical instruments, location floor panels, characters and profiles and sensory components.	Yes

Newham Libraries (pilot phase one)	Newham's young people wanted to design a games club using PS4 consoles, monitors and also table tennis. The group designed flyers for a launch event using new skills learnt via Canva.	Yes
Slough Libraries (pilot phase one)	Worked with the young people from Slough and Eton C of E Business and Enterprise College. Sessions included consultation with the young people on barriers to engagement with the library and idea generation for making the library more appealing for young people. Ideas such as producing a study pack, installing a smoothie station, poster promotion, activities to make the library more entertaining e.g. golden ticket promotion, and air hockey are being taken forward by the library service.	Yes
Libraries Unlimited (Barnstaple, Devon) (pilot phase one)	Worked with neurodivergent young people via On Track Education, an organisation for children who are not in mainstream education. The young people decided they wanted to use the budget within the project to make physical improvements to the space, rather than attend workshops. Their suggestions (which have been actioned) included improved Borrowbox promotion on social media, a Comic Con, D&D sessions, enhancing a BookTok area, adding charging points for devices, graphic novels, and sensory items e.g. soft blankets for those with sensory issues.	Yes
Cornwall Libraries (Bodmin Library) (pilot phase one and delivery in phase two)	During the pilot, the library worked with Bodmin College and held an initial meeting with the young people to discuss potential ideas for a project at Bodmin Library. Several meetings were subsequently arranged and postponed due to staff restrictions/illness. The school eventually decided to withdraw, and the library sought alternative options including home schooled children and advertised more broadly to attract young people for a project. The service joined the phase two cohort to complete	Rolled over to phase two, delivered in phase two successfully

	their programme. This involved working with year six pupils to co-design an ideal library environment. A key part of this was involvement in budget allocation where they collaboratively decided on enhancements like themed wall art, sensory items, a den area with bean bags and a games console to create a welcoming and engaging space. A celebratory silent disco was held at the library for all participants and siblings.	
North Tyneside (Burnside College) (pilot phase one)	-	Withdrew
Churston & Torquay library (Torbay) (pilot phase one)	-	Withdrew
Manchester Libraries (phase two)	Manchester worked with young people from a local secondary school who decided to develop an event (Manchester Activity Day or MAD[78]) which was delivered shortly after data submission for this report (January 2026) having been delayed from its original October 2025 date due to bus strikes. The group had sessions at Manchester Central Library, Longsight Library as well as the University Library John Rylands to think about what was 'hot or not.' They also had a tour of the archives. They worked with an artist and Lego company to design extra activities for the MAD. The group also took part in the Libraries Youth Consultation with over 280 other young people.	Yes
Stockton-on-Tees Libraries & Archives (phase two)	Stockton's initial plans involved working with Looked After Children through the No Limits Hub. Unfortunately plans did not progress as intended due to the partner organisation closing for a refurbishment for several months, coupled with a period of library staff illness which caused delays to the project timeline. When the team reconnected	Rolled over to phase three

78 A film of the MAD day was supplied at report sign off stage and can be seen at https://www.linkedin.com/posts/neil-macinnes-obe-frsa-5284aa6_this-group-of-young-people-asked-me-if-they-activity-7436081814848376832-A-jW/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAABGv77UBA_w1kDnAbkWngIRrtoscgZe2dqI

	with the No Limits Hub they were advised that the target group for the Youth Engagement Network programme were not their target audience age. Changing approach, library staff promoted the project at their 'Children in Our Care' Summer Party, where the young people expressed interest and signed up for the first session. Unfortunately only two young people attended and reported that they would be unable to continue participation once their college commitments resumed.	
Barnet Libraries (phase two)	Barnet struggled to form a suitable partnership during the project although they did identify some new contacts within their service. They benefitted from attending the meetings and CPD training for library services on the Youth Engagement Network programme but despite determination, did not manage to deliver their project this year as intended.	Rolled over to phase three
North Somerset Libraries (phase two)	A challenging year for this service due to a service-wide consultation on achieving savings. This understandably drew focus away from the project and caused challenges in presenting the project to the young people who were concerned that the library they were engaging with would close with no available input from them. An initial meeting with the young people led to suggestions of potential 'craft taster sessions' including a writing workshop, cooking demo and sewing workshop. However these proved difficult to deliver due to the availability of library staff and the library opening hours of when the young people wanted to attend (post 5pm). Sessions were moved to school holidays as a result, which then clashed with existing branch staff holiday craft sessions (popular, but then meant co-created session idea content was not offering anything new).	Rolled over to phase three
West Northamptonshire Libraries (phase two)	Following initial consultation and potential idea generation around targeting a LGBTQIA+ demographic,	Yes

	this library service decided to create an open offer to those aged 13+ (given that feedback suggested some of the young people consulted were still questioning their sexuality or were not openly defining themselves as LGBTQIA+). Instead (and drawing on the initial consultation) the library service worked with the young people to build a role play games (RPG) group. A professional miniature artist attended one of the sessions and the library purchased a range of figures, manuals, guides, games etc following input from the young people. Other taster sessions included young people trying a range of games, and feeding back to staff for what they wanted to see next time. The team held a reflective evaluation session at the end which led to the young people suggesting that they wanted to continue meeting weekly.	
North Northamptonshire Libraries (phase two)	Young people co-designed and delivered an LGBTQIA+ social group called The Rainbow Circle for ages 11-16. Attendees decided to make it a social group with activities including arts, crafts and events. They created a wish list of resources and materials. Session themes were co-created e.g. Halloween, and the group designed a logo for promotion. Funding was also used to purchase beanbags and a whiteboard/noticeboard display. Highlights included a library tour and a festive pizza party with games. For next year, plans include a collage workshop with a local artist and a theatre tour.	Yes
Newcastle Libraries (phase two)	This service organised a focus group event called 'Have your Say' which encouraged young people to attend City library. They gave a tour of the library and consulted young people about their suggestions and barriers for visiting. These included more clubs e.g. crochet, film, games and revision. The funding was then used to provide six sessions of revision techniques that would focus on a different topic each session. This was provided by an education specialist.	Yes

Lancashire Library Service (phase two)	Lancashire Library Service worked with young people with SEND through Unique Kidz and Co, an organisation dedicated to giving young people with disabilities opportunities to socialise, play and grow, while providing families with support and respite. Initially the young people toured the library and provided feedback on how staff could make the library more accessible to young people with SEND. This included: moving the teen section to be more in-step with the library flow, setting up a sensory area for young people, and adjusting the shelves to make them more accessible for wheelchair users. The young people provided details of sensory items which they felt would benefit users of the library which the library purchased and added to the sensory area. The young people delivered two sensory story times and a Makaton signed Christmas Carol concert - Sensory Storie-z: Bringing Stories to Life in the Community | Unique Kidz	
North Tyneside Libraries (phase two)	North Tyneside worked with an existing group of young people who meet at the local YMCA. This was a new partnership for the service. After first meeting the group at their allotment, they took part in a range of sessions at the library. The first one included a tour and initial discussion about what they might like to do at the library/things they would like to design. This did not provide any one route to follow (especially given the group was large with mixed interests). Staff decided to use a 'what's hot' list created and developed sessions to match these ideas. For example drawing and graffiti, quiz and pizza night. Later sessions included working with an artist (as part of a wider library project called Our Freedom). The group responded well and their contributions were worked into a piece by the artist which is on display in one of the branch libraries. A free-style art session with a variety of materials felt too chaotic, so the team returned to delivering a structure – working finally with a spoken word poet. He performed and then led a workshop in free writing	

	and poetry.	
Leeds Libraries (phase two)	Although this library participated in the quarterly meetings and training, there were delays with activity due to staff sickness. Young care-leavers will be invited to work on a podcast project.	Rolled over to phase three
Knowsley Libraries (phase two)	The team worked with young people from a local SEND secondary school on this project. The group decided to design their own version of the UNO card game. Tasks involved collaging to create backgrounds for the cards, drawing and designing the numbers, creating their own wild cards and thinking how they could influence the game, considering rules and how best to explain them and helping to make the instruction leaflet. The library printed decks of the new UNO game.	Yes
Idea Store (London Borough of Tower Hamlets) (phase two)	Idea Store worked with Step Forward, a charity that support young people who are facing disadvantage. Targeting LGBTQIA+ young people, the library held monthly sessions from July – December 2025, with some extra sessions in the school summer holidays. Having voted on potential ideas about what they might want to do, the group made zines which shared their imagined library environment. The second session was with an artist, Arc Armande. Following sessions over the summer focused on working with the young people to create a name for a teen area in the library and to help create a new sign. Over the summer they worked on designs and also comic strips that were intended to help other young people access the Idea Store. Different themed sessions followed in the autumn, including a games evening, a skills-based session, character design, and the creation of short promotional films made by the young people using iPads. The library team also delivered evaluation including vox pops and 'reflection windows'.	Yes

East Sussex Libraries (phase two)	Final project information was not submitted by this service.	Yes
Suffolk Libraries	-	Withdrew

8.2 Data tables

8.2.1 Number of young people engaged

Library	Total number of young people involved[79] (unique)	Total number of sessions with the young people	Number of engage-ments	Number attending national meetings including the young people Promise Alliance meetings[80]	Notes
Luton Libraries	10	7	-	0	
Norfolk Library & Information Service (Watton Library)	5	17[81]	-	0	
Kirklees Library and Information Service	4	6	-	0	
Newham Libraries	7	12	-	0	
Slough Libraries	8	3	-	0	Students were selected by the school and were identified as young people who could benefit from building their confidence. Most of them had never visited the library.

79 Attending one or more session.

80 As described earlier, the young people predominantly did not want to engage on a national level. There are figures in phase two which it is assumed relate to feeding into the direction of the programme as a whole (Libraries Rising have done no specific activity on this).

81 Note that two additional 'drop in' sessions were held prior to these 'standard' sessions.

Libraries Unlimited (Barnstaple, Devon)	5	3	-	0	
Cornwall Libraries (Bodmin Library)	17	3	-	0	Activity was severely impacted by delays due to school commitment/ alternative option recruitment period time required. Activity will continue in early September. Whilst output and outcome data has been included in this report where possible, Cornwall will be included more fully in the final report at the end of the next phase.
North Tyneside (Burnside College)	-	-	-	-	Withdrew
Torbay Libraries (Churston & Torquay)	-	-	-	-	Withdrew
Manchester Libraries (phase two)	15	7	68	0	All group members have now joined the library service
Stockton-on-Tees Libraries & Archives (phase two)	0	0	0	0	Rolled into phase three
Barnet Libraries (phase two)	0	0	0	0	Rolled into phase three

North Somerset Libraries (phase two)	5	3	11	0	Rolled into phase three
West Northamptonshire Libraries (phase two)	7	4	20	4	Rolled into phase three
North Northamptonshire Libraries (phase two)	4	10	25	3	
Newcastle Libraries (phase two)	80	10	20	0	
Lancashire Library Service (phase two)	9	5	40	9	
North Tyneside Libraries (phase two)	26	8	208	20	
Leeds Libraries (phase two)	0	0	0	0	Rolled into phase three
Knowsley Libraries (phase two)	7	9	30	0	
Idea Store (London Borough of Tower Hamlets) (phase two)	7	9	29	0	
East Sussex Libraries	0	0	0	0	No figures supplied

Suffolk Libraries	-	-	-		Withdrew
Totals (both years)	236	121	541	36	

8.2.2 Staffing summary overview

Library service	Number of library staff involved	Number of external creative practitioner or artists[82]	Number of volunteers
Luton Libraries	3	1	
Norfolk Library & Information Service (Watton Library)	1	0	
Kirklees Library and Information Service	3	3	
Newham Libraries	4	0	
Slough Libraries	1		
Libraries Unlimited (Barnstaple, Devon)	3	0	
Cornwall Libraries (Bodmin Library)	4	0	

82 There are no targets or expectations on bringing in external creative practitioners or artists. This is simply for monitoring and record keeping as a baseline for the next phase.

North Tyneside (Burnside College) Withdrew	-	-	-
Torbay Libraries (Churston & Torquay) Withdrew	-	-	-
Manchester Libraries (phase two)	4	2	4
Stockton-on-Tees Libraries & Archives (phase two)	1	0	0
Barnet Libraries (phase two)	1	0	0
North Somerset Libraries (phase two)	2	0	0
West Northamptonshire Libraries (phase two)	2	3	1
North Northamptonshire Libraries (phase two)	3	1	5
Newcastle Libraries (phase two)	2	1	0
Lancashire Library Service (phase two)	3	1	0
North Tyneside Libraries (phase two)	5	2	2
Leeds Libraries (phase two)	3	0	0
Knowsley Libraries (phase two)	3	0	0

Idea Store (London Borough of Tower Hamlets) (phase two)	2	1	0
East Sussex Libraries (no figures supplied)	0	0	0
Suffolk Libraries (withdrew)	-	-	-
Total	52	15	13

8.2.3 Products and library users

Library service	Number of products designed/produced by young people (data collected only 2025 phase two)	Total number of library users taking part in young people activities e.g. performances or public facing events (data only collected 2025 phase two)[83]
Luton Libraries	-	-
Norfolk Library & Information Service (Watton Library)	-	-
Kirklees Library and Information Service	-	-
Newham Libraries	-	-
Slough Libraries	-	-
Libraries Unlimited (Barnstaple, Devon)	-	-
Cornwall Libraries (Bodmin Library)	-	-
North Tyneside (Burnside College) Withdrew	-	-

83 See limitations outlined in 3.1.3 regarding inconsistency of data supplied.

Torbay Libraries (Churston & Torquay) Withdrew	-	-
Manchester Libraries (phase two)	1	0
Stockton-on-Tees Libraries & Archives (phase two)	0	0
Barnet Libraries (phase two)	0	0
North Somerset Libraries (phase two)	0	0
West Northamptonshire Libraries (phase two)	1	11
North Northamptonshire Libraries (phase two)	3	4
Newcastle Libraries (phase two)	0	0
Lancashire Library Service (phase two)	2	18
North Tyneside Libraries (phase two)	0	0
Leeds Libraries (phase two)	0	0
Knowsley Libraries (phase two)	1	0
Idea Store (London Borough of Tower Hamlets) (phase two)	4	0
East Sussex Libraries (no figures supplied)	0	0
Suffolk Libraries (withdrew)	0	0
Total	13	51

8.2.4 Library staff attendance at networking meetings

Event[84]	Date	Number of library staff attending	Format in-person/online etc
Youth Engagement Network meeting (libraries)	06/11/2023	11	Online
Youth Engagement Network meeting (libraries)	15/01/2024	11	Online
Drop-in session for libraries	13/02/2024	4	Online
Youth Engagement Network training session with Participation People (libraries)	26/03/2024	12	Online
Meeting with Cornwall libraries	02/04/2024	2	In person
Drop-in session for libraries	29/04/2024	3	Online
Meeting with Luton libraries	1/05/2024	1	In person
Meeting with Libraries Unlimited (Barnstaple - Devon) (Libraries Unlimited)	14/05/2024	2	In person
Youth Engagement Network meeting (libraries)	23/05/2024	10	Online
Meeting with Slough libraries	24/05/2024	1	In person

84 Note that this does not include visits made by the Programme Manager to observe visits (these are outlined in 3.1.2). In addition, a range of various other ad hoc and informal meetings occurred on top of these formal noted activities. It should not be viewed as an exhaustive list of engagement with the Programme Manager/Libraries Rising.

Drop-in session for libraries	25/06/2024	5	Online
Drop-in session for libraries	17/07/2024	1	Online
Youth Engagement Network meeting (libraries)	23/07/2024	11	Online
Youth Engagement Network first meeting	18/12/2024	20	Online
Youth Engagement Network training session with Participation People	21/01/2025	20	Online
Youth Engagement Network drop-in session	27/02/2025	4	Online
Youth Engagement Network drop-in session	25/3/2025	1	Online
Youth Engagement Network second meeting	01/04/2025	12	Online
Youth Engagement Network third meeting	02/06/2025	12	Online
Youth Engagement Network drop-in session	08/07/2025	1	Online
Youth Engagement Network drop-in session	03/08/2025	1	Online
Youth Engagement Network fourth meeting	08/09/2025	11	Online
Youth Engagement Network final meeting	08/12/2025	12	Online
Total engagements		167	

8.2.5 Young people's feedback form completions by library service

Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Norfolk	6.10%	5
Slough	0%	0
Newham	3.66%	3
Cornwall (pilot)	0%	0
Cornwall (phase 2)	12.20%	10
Torbay	0%	0
Devon	3.66%	3
Luton	12.20%	10
Kirklees	0%	0
North Tyneside (phase 2)	23.17%	19
Barnet	0%	0
East Sussex	0%	0
Knowsley	4.88%	4
Lancashire	1.22%	1
Total		82

8.2.6 Demographic profile: pilot

A total of 32 parental/carer registration forms were completed:

- 19 young people identified as male, 10 young people identified as female, 1 preferred to self-describe and 2 identified as non-binary.
- 27 parents/carers provided the age of their child. 17 of the participating young people were within Libraries Rising's target 11-13 years age range, and 10 were just above it - aged 14 years.

8.2.7 Demographic profile: phase two

8.2.7.1 Age

Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
11	16.92%	11
12	27.69%	18
13	10.77%	7
14	24.62%	16
15	16.92%	11
16	1.54%	1
Over 16 (adding just in case)	1.54%	1
Total		**65**

8.2.7.2 Gender

Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Boy	33.82%	23
Girl	60.29%	41
Non-binary	1.47%	1
Another way	0%	0
PNS	4.41%	3
Show comments		
Total		**68**

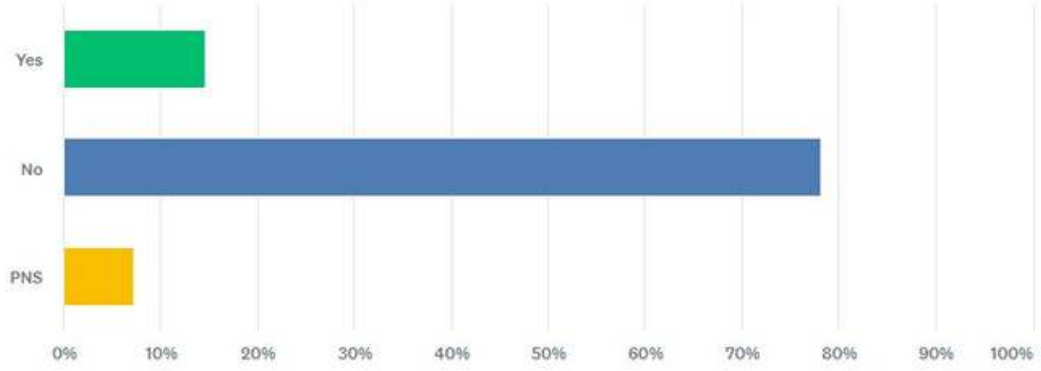
8.2.7.3 Ethinicity

Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi	1.72%	1
Asian/Asian British - Chinese	0%	0
Asian/Asian British - Indian	0%	0
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani	1.72%	1
Any other Asian background	0%	0
Black/Black British - Black African	5.17%	3
Black/Black British - Black Caribbean	1.72%	1
Any other Black background	0%	0
Mixed background - Asian & white	0%	0
Mixed background - Black African & white	0%	0
Mixed background - Black Caribbean & white	1.72%	1
Any other Mixed background	5.17%	3
White/White British - Gypsy, Roma, or Irish traveller	1.72%	1
White/White British - White British	56.90%	33
White/White British - White Irish	5.17%	3
Any other White background	5.17%	3
Any other Background - Arab	1.72%	1
Any other Background - Latin American	0%	0
Any other Background	6.90%	4
Total		**58**

8.2.7.4 Sexual orientations

Does your child identify as LGBTQ+?

Answered: 55 Skipped: 13

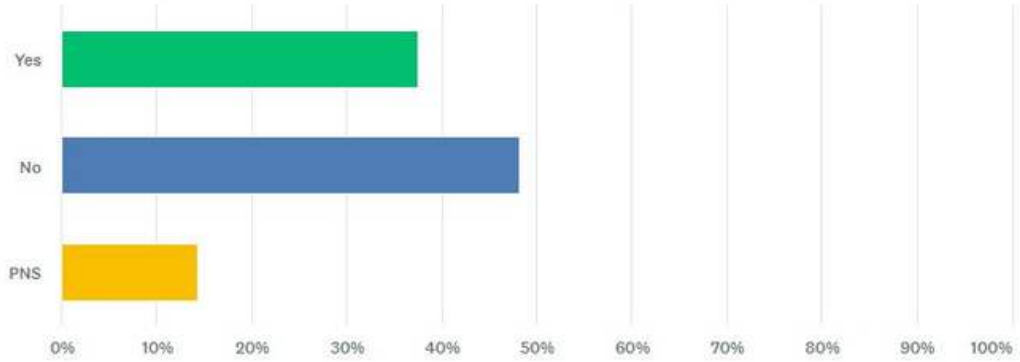


Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Yes	14.55%	8
No	78.18%	43
PNS	7.27%	4
Total		55

8.2.7.5 Neurodiversity

Does your child identify as neurodivergent? Being Neurodivergent could also include Dyslexia, ADHD etc.

Answered: 56 Skipped: 12

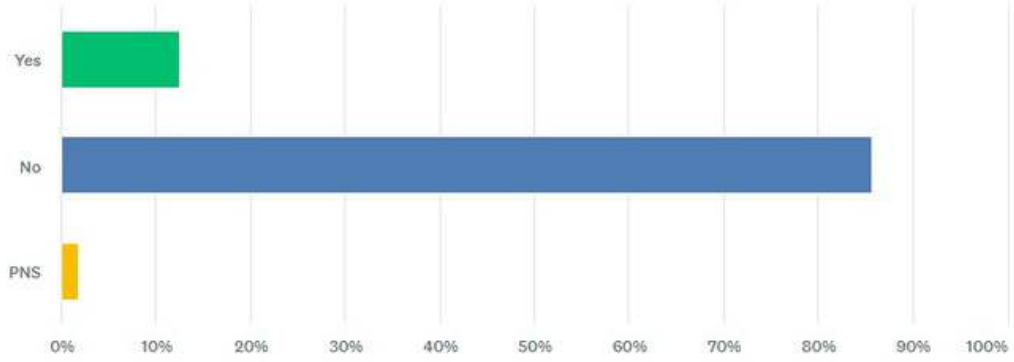


Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Yes	37.50%	21
No	48.21%	27
PNS	14.29%	8
Total		56

8.2.7.6 D/deaf or disability

Does your child identify as a D/deaf and/or disabled person, or have a long-term health condition?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 12

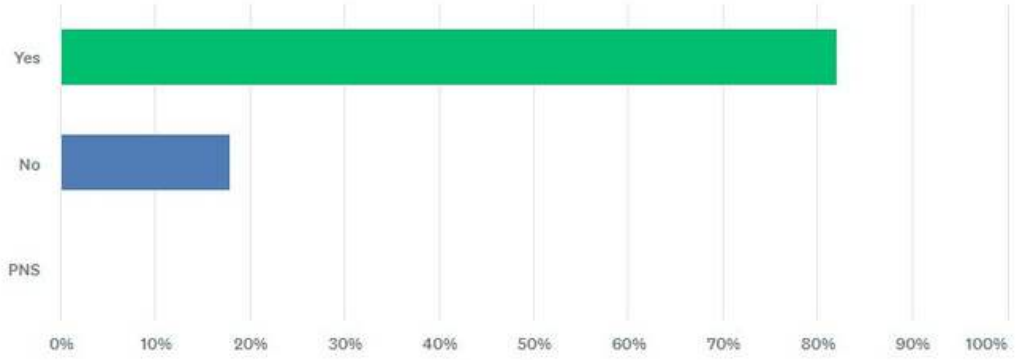


Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Yes	12.50%	7
No	85.71%	48
PNS	1.79%	1
Total		**56**

8.2.7.7 Previous library visitation

Has your child visited this library before?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 12

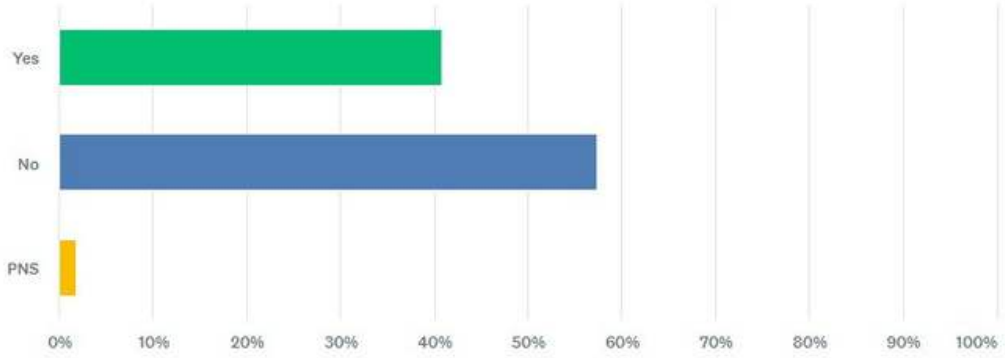


Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Yes	82.14%	46
No	17.86%	10
PNS	0%	0
Total		**56**

8.2.7.8 Library membership prior to programme

Is your child a member of this library?

Answered: 54 Skipped: 14



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Yes	40.74%	22
No	57.41%	31
PNS	1.85%	1
Total		54

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