



Youth Power Fund

Impact Report



Fund background and objectives

In 2021, the Blagrave Trust partnered with the Foyer Federation to offer local Foyers the opportunity to access pots of funding to support innovation and creativity around youth leadership and empowerment.

We wanted to champion new thinking, long-term change and youth-led approaches that challenge existing power structures and provide a catalyst for young people to lead in their local community and beyond.

In the supported housing sector, youth leadership and involvement, despite best intentions, is often underfunded and overlooked resulting in approaches becoming tokenistic, inconsistent and short term.

By providing this funding, we aimed to create some space and time for services to innovate, try new approaches, and implement sustainable youth leadership systems.



Programme impact report

This report captures the impact shared by young people and staff members reflecting back on the first two years of the fund and sharing their hopes and ambitions for the final year and beyond.

Impact to date paints a compelling picture of what happens when Foyers receive long-term, flexible investment that allows them to experiment, take risks and be genuinely driven by the ideas and aspirations of young people.

Inspired by this impact, we are determined to learn from the effectiveness of this programme and embed new principles into our future work, influencing **more Foyers** to normalise youth leadership and put genuine power sharing at the heart of how their Foyers operate as places of power and purpose.

Impact Snapshot

Overall, young people's involvement and leadership increased over two years across all areas.



increase in the number of young people directly involved in leadership and taking on power across all engaged Foyers.

Increases in youth involvement and leadership in different areas



38%
Individual

Eg, setting goals, making positive progress, being able to identify their own strengths.



204%
Foyer

Eg, leading a session, being a resident rep, gathering and representing the views of others.



57%
Community

Eg, speaking to the local authority, volunteering at a local organisation.



200%
National

Eg, speaking at a conference, being part of a Foyer Federation panel, taking part in a campaign.



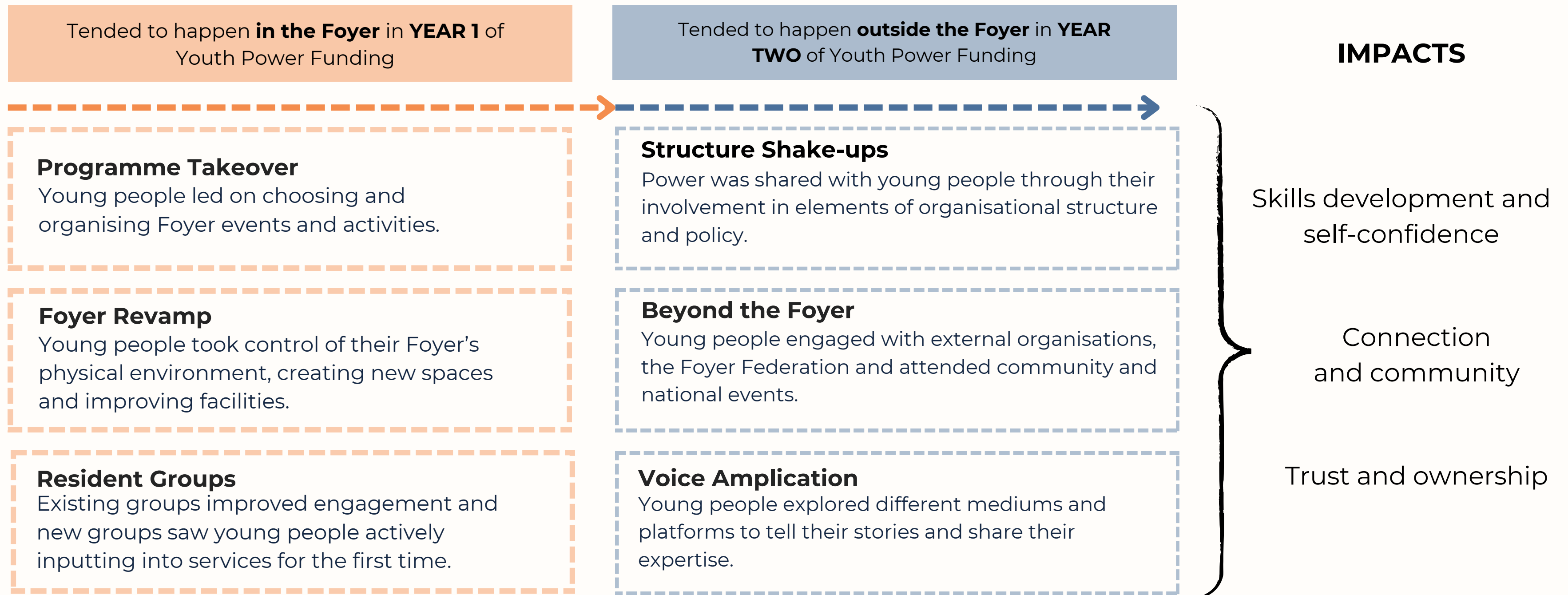
Before the Youth Power project, I would spend all day in my flat. I didn't communicate with the people I lived with, and I wouldn't get involved with the activities hosted by the Foyer. Now, two years later, I have the confidence to speak up about issues that affect me. I speak to my peers and encourage them to be a part of the groups that I'm involved in. I've truly found myself and I'm now comfortable with others.

Young Leader

Activities and Impact



The flexibility of the Youth Power Fund meant that every Foyer undertook their own unique approach. However, across Foyers we can identify some of the common types of activities, when and where they tended to happen, and their impacts.





Impacts

Skills development and self-confidence

- By organising and running outings and events, young people **gained practical skills** like budgeting, communication and group decision making, **boosting their self-confidence**.
- As Youth Power Fund activities encouraged young people to take on roles where they were handed control, they became **more confident in voicing their wants and needs** relating to service improvement within the Foyer.
- In many cases youth-led organising within the Foyer built a foundation from which **young people gained the skills and confidence** to grow projects beyond the Foyer into the local community.

“You can really see the difference in how the funding has empowered them – their voice is heard, they're listened to, it's given them so much more independence and life skills.”

Foyer Staff Member

“I've definitely seen people ask for things more and be more vocal with their voice, which is obviously always a plus.”

Young Leader

“The Youth Power Fund has helped me grow in confidence and empower myself.”

Young Leader

Impacts

Connection and community

- Through working together on projects, support and leading each other, Youth Power Fund activities **increased the opportunities for connections** to be made between resident.
- Young people reported meeting people in their building they didn't really interact with before and often these **new connections led to the formation of further projects.**
- Activities within the Foyer such as community meals, painting and gardening **increased an overall sense of community** both between young people and staff members.



“Our Foyer has improved aesthetically but it is much more of a community. Our residents are proud to live at the Foyer and staff are proud to work there.”

Foyer Staff Member

“People are coming together more, and like, I've met more people from other parts of the buildings as time's gone on.”

Young Leader

“Thanks to the guidance and funding, we've been able to bring together a community of young people who all want to act and make a change in the area that they live and work in.”

Young Leader

Impacts

Trust and ownership

- Getting involved in the practical upkeep of the Foyer building – through painting, gardening and creating new spaces – **increased a sense of ownership** and a feeling that the building and the service belonged to young people.
- Physically changing parts of the Foyer and dictating activities proved to be a **trust-building** exercise between many staff and young people, encouraging staff to stretch their own boundaries and **hand over more control** to young people.
- Dynamics shifted in resident meetings from young people being told agenda items by staff to **young people setting the agenda**, topics and leading the meetings with staff support.



“We asked the young people, what do you want to do? They said they want a gym. And now that's being converted into a gym.”

Foyer Staff Member

“Trusting them to do something massively helps a young person with making sure their voice is heard and being independent.”

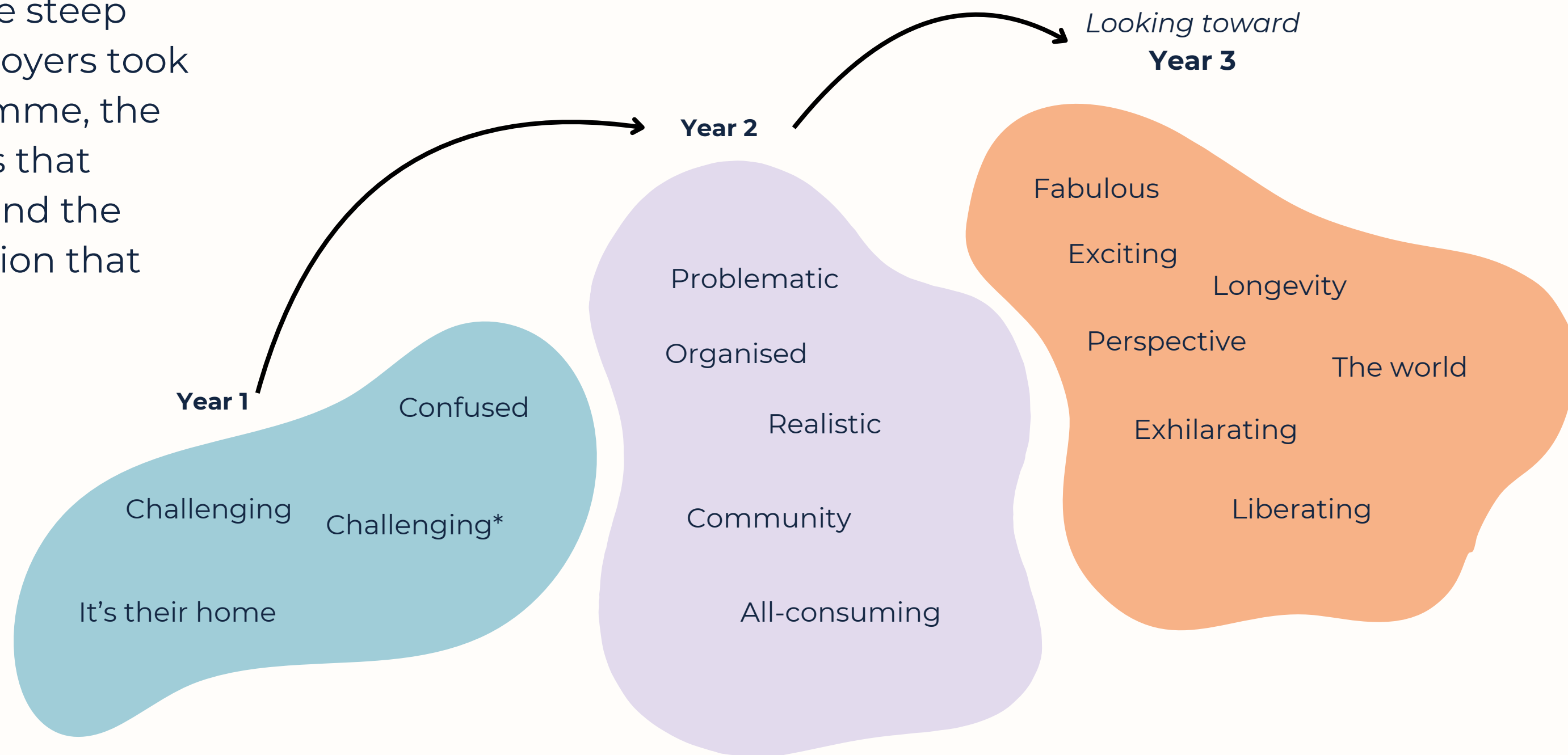
Foyer Staff Member

“[The Youth Power Fund] fosters trust and empowers the youth to take the lead in their own lives.”

Young Leader

The Youth Power Fund Journey in words

These words reflect the steep learning curve many Foyers took early on in the programme, the mobilisation and focus that emerged in year two and the excitement and ambition that framed year three.



*the word 'challenging' was shared by two different staff members.

Common Challenges

Challenges are an inevitable part of trying and testing approaches. As part of their journey, Foyers and young people shared many challenges and learnings.

Some issues were tackled creatively, especially when problems were shared with the group – giving young people equal roles and providing experience for them to learn about the complexities of decision making in the real world. *Read more about creative problem solving on page 37.*

While there wasn't a clear 'fix' for every issue Foyers and young people found it helpful to see that they shared similar experiences.

Here are three of the most common challenge areas that arose during the first two years of the Youth Power Fund.

Engagement and turnover with young people

Turnover of young people moving on from the Foyer into independent living often slowed momentum and required projects to shift direction and pace as new young people were recruited and grew into leadership roles. **Conflict** between young people or groups sometimes halted progress on activities and projects.

Shifting entrenched cultures and behaviours

Wider supported housing services can find it particularly challenging to move beyond a top-down approach. Staff members had to work hard to challenge **entrenched attitudes toward risk taking and gatekeeping** over activities and projects.

Organisational barriers and changes

Finding and sustaining staff members to champion Youth Power Fund activities was crucial and an ongoing challenge. Many projects were disrupted by **significant changes and cuts to staffing**. **Slow bureaucratic processes** from wider housing associations created barriers for some Foyers in accessing essential project finances and items like phones. **Significant organisational changes** like mergers and building works presented challenges that were beyond Foyers' control.



Do not underestimate
the importance of
smaller actions to
build trust in the
community and each
other.

Young Leader

Shift Moments



Shift moments

“Young people did not want to choose the cheapest options and we have respected that.”

At one Foyer staff allowed young people to take control and make decisions over the budget for their residential without taking over. In one instance, this looked like allowing young people to choose more expensive accommodation options over camping. While staff were initially hesitant about this issue, they ultimately chose to uphold their commitment to handing over more control and decision-making power to young people in activity planning.

“We have seen a big change in the way our Foyer Residents Facebook Group is used.”

As young people built relationships and increased connection through new activities at the Foyer, their resident Facebook group shifted from just advertising activities to posts from young people asking for or offering each other help.

“Now there are other residents coming in and seeing what resident leads do and saying, ‘well I don't want quite *that* responsibility but I want a voice in this.’”

Staff reported noticing that residents who were very disengaged before had started taking interest in activities, even if not in a high level of commitment but by voicing their ideas and organising small Foyer events like BBQs.

“Maybe for staff members it feels scary. Giving away some of your own power comes with risks when you are responsible for the Foyer. But this is actually where the power dynamic comes from.”

This Foyer identified that trust between staff and residents was an area that needed work. Handing over control to young people to change the use of certain Foyer spaces was a crucial first step in shifting control and trust into young people's hands.

“I think from the board, it's made them twig that actually some of the decisions they're making, they shouldn't be making without direct service input [from young people].”

A staff member reflects on the impact that attending their young people's board advisory panel meeting had on a Trustee and the wider board. As more Trustees attended these meetings they saw a shift in senior leadership – taking young people's voices more seriously and involving their input in decision-making processes.

“It had dawned on me that I have the largest team in the organisation as it is made up of eight staff members and 35 residents.”

A staff member reflects a shift to seeing young people as active and equal participants in the management of their Foyer and its community.

Ingredients for success

Listening to the experiences of staff and young people reflecting on the first two years of their Youth Power Fund journey, we heard many rich reflections and learnings.

From these, four key factors were identified that according to Foyers and young people, contributed significantly to the success of their Youth Power Fund work.

We have called these the 'ingredients for success'.



Building gradually

Taking time to build the foundations needed to do youth power work, for example building relationships, trust and addressing mental health needs.



Following the young people

This may seem obvious, but learning to listen and follow young people's direction required an ability to release fixed agendas and become comfortable with experimentation and changing direction. Doing this had big pay-offs.



Getting organisational buy-in

Ensuring that the programme objective and direction is understood across the organisation, from top to bottom. Influencing investment from senior decision makers from the beginning where possible.



Turning challenge to triumph

Approaching challenges creatively, working with young people to find a solution and reframing issues as a learning opportunities.

Building gradually

Ingredients for success

Summary

Questioning and challenging existing structures of power and accepted ways of doing things can be intimidating and hard – for both young people *and* Foyer staff. In line with the initial programme structure, multiple Foyers took time to build the specific foundations they needed to do this work. Broadly this involved spending time building trusting relationships, supporting young people to grow their confidence and mental wellbeing, and creating safe spaces where they could start to express themselves more and advocate for change.



Start small if you're at the very beginning of this journey. A lot of what we have learned has been through trial and error and not knowing 100% what we were doing at the start!

Young Leader

Bath Foyer

Early on, young People at Bath Foyer identified a pressing need to address relations between staff and young people which was underpinned by a long-standing culture of staff being 'in charge' and having the ultimate say on issues. 'Building gradually' in their first year meant re-establishing a new residents group – the Robin Hood Project – and starting to push the boundaries of staff trust through decisions such as opening up communal spaces on a new schedule and handing over full control of ideas for activities, resident's newsletter, group meetings and involving young people in staff recruitment.

YMCA Cheshire

One of YMCA Cheshire's long-term goals was for a young person with lived experience to join their Board of Trustees. They built toward this gradually by focusing their first year on growing a Board Advisory Group and using this as an exercise to support young people to build confidence and learn experientially to voice their views and aspirations to advocate for change on issues they cared about.

Swan Housing

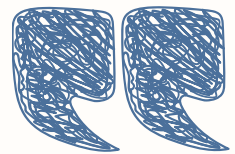
Early on Swan's Foyers identified the need for young people to feel power in themselves before being able to step into power in wider spaces. To build this foundation they partnered with a charity to run workshops focused on supporting young people to release barriers relating to previous trauma and abuse and discover confidence to challenge their personal status quo.

Following the young people

Ingredients for success

Summary

Many Foyers reflected on the importance and impact of being truly led by young people's voices throughout their Youth Power Fund journey. As usual this looked different across different Foyers, from practicalities like scheduling meetings in a time and place most suited to young people to allowing projects to evolve through the interests and ideas of young people – letting go of what something was 'meant' to be and allowing outcomes emerge in a less controlled way.



Keeping young people engaged requires creativity and innovation. Offer a variety of projects and opportunities that match their interests and aspirations.

Staff member

YMCA Cheshire

“Always remember to prioritise the interests and passions of the young people you are working with. Look for what excites them and harness that energy to drive your initiatives forward.” This was a key learning shared by YMCA Cheshire at the end of year two. They note that by doing this they cultivated a genuine sense of ownership that young people felt over the projects pursued which ultimately contributed to their success.

Braintree Foyer

Braintree's approach crucially recognised that different young people might want to engage in Youth Power Fund work at different levels and it upheld a strong acceptance of this. Staff learned the need to “start where your residents are at [instead of coming] in with a preconceived idea of what you want to do or where you want to go.”

Swan Housing

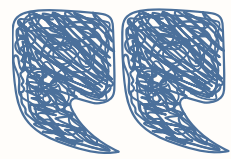
Swan's Foyers found that the simple practice of creating convenience for young people was a significant driver in engagement. For example when hosting workshops around sensitive topics like mental health and wellbeing – ensuring they were held in the Foyer where young people felt safe and comfortable was important. Ensuring their resident meetings were at a time and in a space requested by young people also supported engagement.

Getting organisational buy-in

Ingredients for success

Summary

Across the participating Foyers there were a range of organisational structures. Overall the engagement of senior leadership in the Youth Power Fund work proved to be a strengthener to the overall project. In some cases having senior leadership understand the aims of the work supported Foyers helped to involve young people in higher levels of decision making. Senior leadership buy-in also supported Foyer staff members to prioritise Youth Power Fund work, giving it the time and attention it needed.



It was getting that kind of buy-in... from the CEO and the board and kind of having a Trustee that was willing to give up some additional time on that and really champion it.
Staff member

YMCA Cheshire

From the beginning YMCA Cheshire communicated a clear vision of what the objectives of the Youth Power Fund was across their organisation from support staff members to the CEO and board Trustees. This helped when it came to asking for Trustee and CEO engagement as part of their youth advisory board work.

CHADD

The involvement of CHADD's CEO and board members contributed to their Youth Power Fund activities and helped to grow initiatives, for example leading on from the attendance of young people at the board room, their CEO proposed the formation of a residents subcommittee which would enable a permanent feedback channel back to their board.

Swan Housing

At Swan's Foyers, senior management was highly engaged, asking regularly about how the project was going and championing the different initiatives that emerged. This supported Foyer staff and young people to maintain momentum, access funds easily and uphold the importance of the project overall.

Turning challenge to triumph

Ingredients for success

Summary

With all experimental and risk-taking approaches, bumps along the road are part of the journey. During the Youth Power Fund many Foyers and young people turned challenges into opportunities to improve practice and in some cases increase opportunities for young people to step into leadership. Ultimately this ability to problem-solve creatively contributed to the overall successes and development of Youth Power Fund activities.



What we found [after staff reduction] was that there was more youth leadership in young people being in charge of workshops and events... taking their ideas and then actually putting it into practice.

Staff member

CHADD Group conflicts

As CHADD's resident groups grew in the first year of the fund, one group in particular hit a challenging period due to conflict amongst group members. While difficult at the time, as result of the conflict, CHADD held a meeting led by young people and supported by staff where everyone could openly discuss their expectations around their role and involvement in the groups. This session was extremely positive and enabled young people to explain why they were involved in the projects and understand what they all needed together to make the groups a positive experience for everyone. As a result a new set of standards was agreed by everyone and was implemented across all future group meetings.

ENFIELD Staff reduction and turnover

A recurring challenge for Foyers during the Youth Power Fund was managing the impact of staff turnover. Losing key engaged staff members could sometimes impact the momentum of activities and engagement of young people. Sometimes however such circumstances created the space and opportunity for young people to step more fully into positions of responsibility and leadership. At Enfield Foyer for example, when their engagement team left in year one, this prompted young people to step into roles of leadership in order to continue the programmes that the previous team had coordinated.

Models of Success

The diverse approaches taken across Foyers show us that there is no **'one recipe'** for how to catalyse youth leadership and empowerment.

We did however identify some patterns across the participating Foyers which offer us **3 potential 'models'** for how the Youth Power Fund was approached in different but equally powerful ways.

Some Foyers used a combination of these models while some leaned more heavily into one.

1

The Incubator

2

The Amplifier

3

The Structure Shifter

The Incubator

Experimental, Entrepreneurial, Champions self-growth

What does an Incubator do?

- Cultivates youth-led projects to develop within the Foyer space, supporting young people to test ideas and develop relevant skills and confidence. When ready, 'Foyer-grown' projects are championed to expand into the local community and beyond.
- Will often take a 'try and test' approach – doing lots of different activities and giving young people the freedom and decision-making power to see what sticks and dictate direction.
- Takes on an entrepreneurial mindset where young people offer the Foyer's assets up as a resource to the outside world, inviting the wider community in.

Foyers that pioneered this model

Braintree Foyer, Enfield Foyer, Bath Foyer

What does power look like?

Youth power grows from the individual outwards. Young people are supported to grow confidence, leadership and other relevant skills at their own pace within the safe space the Foyer provides and then championed to expand these into initiatives and experiences beyond the Foyer.



The Amplifier

Trailblazing, Influential, Connected

What does an Amplifier do?

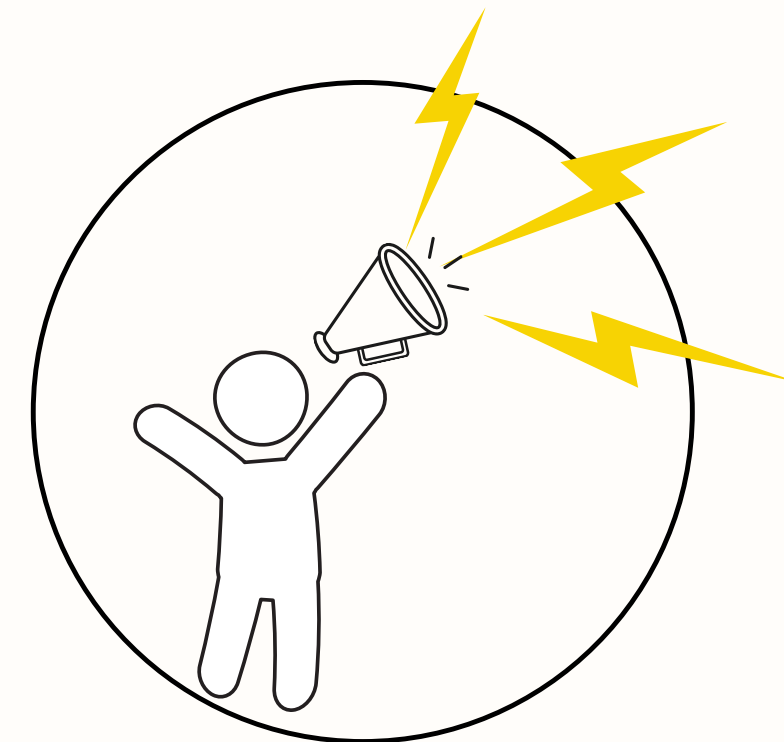
- Seeks out many opportunities outside the Foyer – both locally and nationally – for young people to get actively involved in spaces where they can amplify their voices and share their expertise and their leadership, such as conferences, youth awards, local political groups and involvement with the Foyer Federation.
- Creates activities that focus on amplifying young people's voices outside the Foyer and raising awareness/educating the public on issues important to young people.
- Starts to share their approaches and best practices toward youth leadership and empowerment with others beyond their Foyer, positioning themselves as thought leaders/sector influencers.

Foyers that pioneered this model

YMCA Cheshire, CHADD

What does power look like?

Youth power is grown through influence and amplification of young people's voices in spaces outside the Foyer.



The Structure Shifter

Challenging, Strategic, Creative.

What does a structure shifter do?

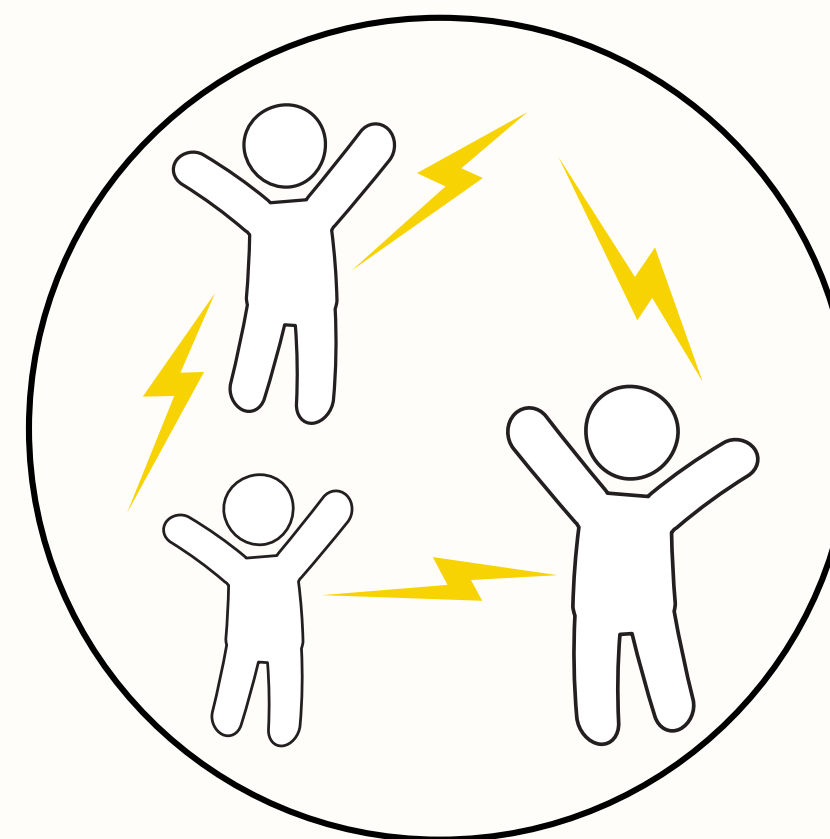
- Focuses many activities on shifting and sharing power within the existing structures of their Foyer and wider organisation.
- Finds ways to support and champion young people into spaces of influence and decision making within their wider organisation, connecting with Trustees and CEOs.
- Seeks out paid roles for young people and involves young people in recruitment processes and policy development.

Foyers that pioneered this model

CHADD, Swan Housing Foyers, YMCA Cheshire, Bath Foyer

What does power look like?

Youth power is grown from demanding the sharing of power from others and actions to shift structures that withhold power from young people.



We'd like to thank



for their generous support
which made this work possible.

We're excited to see what's to
come as Foyers and young
people execute their plans for
year three and beyond!



"I believe that other Foyers and young people should get involved with projects just like this one to make a difference in their communities and their homes. It's beautiful to see something this pure blossom and flourish. It's an amazing experience. From gaining self-confidence to having an impact on what matters to us – there's something for everyone and everyone would benefit from the

experience."
Young Leader

