

**HENRY SMITH  
FOUNDATION**

**iGNITE!**

engage empower transform

# IGNITE'S EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMME IMPACT REPORT 2025

Produced by the Centre for Health Equity and Sustainable Societies (CHESS), based at the University of East London

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# FOREWORD



Ignite Youth was established in 2001 to support and help disadvantaged young people in the London Borough of Harrow.

We deliver youth work activities, such as open access drop-in sessions, detached youth work and mentoring across the borough in the community and in local schools.

At Ignite, employability work has always been more than a programme, it is the golden strand that runs through everything we do. It connects our mission, our values and our belief in the potential of every young person who walks through our doors. This strand is woven into our youth work, our mentoring, our outreach and our partnerships. It reflects who we are at our core; a small, determined charity in Harrow that refuses to give up on young people, no matter the barriers stacked against them.

When our employability project began back in 2015, we had no idea just how far-reaching its impact would be. What started as a practical response to young people struggling to take their first steps into the world of work has become one of our most transformative areas of support.

This project has helped countless young people build confidence, develop skills, and secure roles they once thought were out of reach. Many are now in jobs that have changed not only their lives, but the lives of their families and our communities.

Thank you for taking the time to explore this impact with us.

**Donna John**  
**CEO, Ignite Youth**

# AT A GLANCE

## Average profile of our young people



Age:  
**17**



Ethnicity:  
**Black African**



Disability:  
**No**



Gender:  
**Male**



Area:  
**Harrow**

## Education and Employment Programme impact



**251**

young people supported



**400**

hours of specialist support delivered



**50**

young people into employment, training, apprenticeships or education



**230**

young people reported increased confidence



**178**

increased engagements in employment-related activity



**160**

reduced life-limiting behaviours

# INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the UK government set out its “Plan for change” outlining the five key priorities (GOV UK, 2025) including “Break Down Barriers to Opportunity”. The Break Down Barriers to Opportunity report shows that many young people want to work but face real challenges that make it harder to find and keep a job. These challenges can include financial pressure, lack of work experience, limited support networks, and barriers linked to health, confidence, or discrimination. The report highlights that young people do best when they receive early, tailored support that looks at the whole person, not just their CV. It also shows that lasting change happens when schools, employers, and community organisations work together to remove barriers and create fairer routes into education, training, and employment.



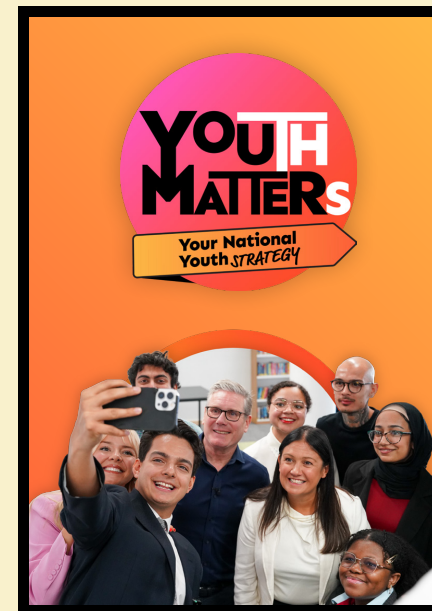
These priorities respond directly to the significant barriers facing young people in the UK. In 2025, 12.8% of 16–24-year-olds were not in education, employment or training (ONS, 2025), and youth unemployment stood at 14.5% (House of Commons Library, 2025). Over the same period, 39.2% of young people were economically inactive, with a growing proportion affected by mental health conditions. These challenges sit within a wider context of rising poverty and inequality, with one in three children and a quarter of adults living in poverty in 2024 (WPI Economics, 2024). Together, this evidence highlights the scale and urgency of the need for targeted, early, and sustained investment to support young people into education, training, and employment.

In London, the most deprived neighbourhoods usually have a higher proportion of young adults (Trust for London, 2023). Unemployment is much higher among young Londoners than other age groups and it is also significantly higher than among young people in the rest of England (Trust for London, 2023). In Harrow,

## Spotlight: Youth Employment and National Policy Context

The UK Government's Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy (2025) highlights employment as a critical priority for improving outcomes for young people, particularly those at risk of disengagement. Through its Good Work agenda, the strategy focuses on strengthening pathways into employment by improving skills development, careers guidance, and access to work experience, apprenticeships, and paid opportunities. A key commitment is the expansion of the Youth Guarantee, supported by £820 million of investment, alongside the development of over 360 employment youth hubs to provide locally delivered, tailored support. The strategy emphasises collaboration with employers and community organisations to equip young people with practical skills, confidence, and access to opportunities, with the overarching aim of reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and improving long-term life chances.

Source: UK Government (2025) Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy. London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-matters-your-national-youth-strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-matters-your-national-youth-strategy) (Accessed: December 2025).



**“It feels calmer than other places, but safety is still a concern.”**

**17 | Male | Black British**

there are approximately 42,392 children and young people, with 88% being from global majority ethnic backgrounds (Young Harrow foundation, 2021). Like in many parts of the UK, families in Harrow are struggling with 14% of children living in absolute low-income families which is less than the London average (Young Harrow foundation, 2021). According to HAY Harrow (2025), 65% of young people say they “often” or “sometimes” feel down or depressed. Other critical issues faced by disadvantaged young people in Harrow and adjacent boroughs include education and exclusion, lack of safe spaces, lack of trusted adults, criminal and sexual exploitation and lack of employment and economic opportunities (Ignite, 2023). In a recent survey by Ignite (2024), only 12% of young people felt “very safe” in Harrow Town Centre. At the same time, their survey reported 80% of young people knew nothing or very little about the jobs in Harrow, while 80% also reported an interest in paid work experience in the borough.

In this context, grassroots charity organisations that promote activities, wellbeing, employability skills and access to opportunities and community spaces are key for the long-term success of young people. Ignite is a progressive, community-based youth work charity, with a mission to help young people advance in life and strengthen their communities. Ignite provides personalised support to young people most at risk of engaging in gang violence or anti-social behaviour.



**“Harrow is diverse, but there aren’t always safe spaces for young people.”**

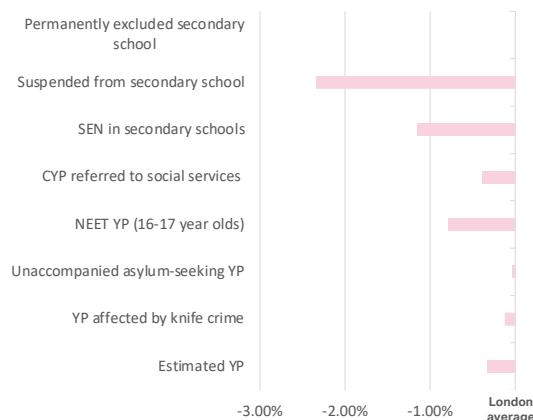
**15 | Female | British Asian**

## Spotlight: Disadvantaged and At-Risk Young People in Harrow

In Harrow, many young people are growing up in circumstances that place them at heightened risk of serious exploitation, youth violence, and gang involvement. These risks are often shaped by limited access to positive opportunities, trusted adult support, and pathways into education or employment. Our findings show a clear and urgent need for targeted, youth-led interventions that not only protect young people from harm but actively support them to build safer, more hopeful futures.

Ignite exists to meet this need. Through a combination of detached youth work, targeted referrals, and structured education and employment support, Ignite works directly with young people who are most vulnerable. By engaging young people in the spaces where they already spend their time,

Harrow YP comparison to London average



| Measure                                            | Number | Proportion |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Estimated young population                         | 80,988 | 32.10%     |
| Young people affected by knife crime               | 193    | 0.26%      |
| Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children looked after | 18     | 0.03%      |
| NEETs or not knowns (16-17 year olds)              | 90     | 1.75%      |
| CYP referred to social services                    | 3028   | 5.05%      |
| SEND in secondary schools                          | 1,688  | 9.09%      |
| Suspended from state funded secondary schools      | 477    | 2.57%      |
| Permanently excluded from state funded secondary   | 11     | 0.06%      |

Source: NDYP Mentoring Mapping Slides. (2023, March 8). Page 72. Data on Harrow Young People comparison to London average. Retrieved from NDYP internal presentation slides.

building trusted relationships, and offering practical opportunities for growth, Ignite is able to create both short-term stability and long-term positive change. Our approach

recognises young people as individuals with potential, and focuses on empowering them to develop confidence, skills, and aspirations that can transform the course of their lives.

**“I want a good job, but I don’t know where to start.”**

**16 | Female | Mixed Heritage**

# ABOUT IGNITE

Ignite Youth (formerly Ignite Trust) was founded by Revd Simon Jones and his team in 2001 to 'train the next generation' so that disadvantaged and marginalised young people left school with qualifications and experience in leadership. The vision of the charity is to create a community where young people can turn adversity into advantage.

Since opening in 2001, Ignite Youth has supported hundreds of young people in Harrow to re-engage with education, access training and employment, and move away from anti-social behaviour and exploitative situations. The organisation reaches more than 700 young people each year through mentoring, outreach, sports, creative activities, and tailored support services. Ignite's programmes have helped young people improve emotional wellbeing, build positive relationships, and develop life skills, often exceeding planned outcomes in areas like behaviour, confidence and health. Its work has also strengthened community

## Why young people engage with Ignite Youth



**80%**

because they enjoy it



**49%**

they like the youth workers



**62%**

to spend time with friends



**37%**

it keeps them fit



**58%**

to meet new people



**34%**

it's a safe space to be themselves

Source: Internal data from Ignite Youth Programme (n=65), as presented in NDYP or affiliated community insight report, 2023.

connections and provided safe, inclusive spaces for young people to grow and succeed (see appendix ToC).

Ignite is a progressive, community-based charity, whose roots are set in the Christian faith, which guides their work and values.

Ignite works collaboratively to achieve the best possible offer for young people. The charity offers sports programmes, mentoring, summer activities, specific activities focused on women and girls and supports young people into employment. In 2024, Ignite supported 875 young people, hosted 16 services or programmes and provided 303 hours of mentoring (Ignite, 2025).

To expand the reach of their activities and share best practice, the charity has collaborated with 24 local partners such as the NHS, The Jubilee Academy, the Youth Justice Service, Whitmore High School and Mathsmaker, among others.

The impact of the charity is reflected in the feedback from young people. In a recent survey (Ignite, 2025), 100% of young people said they would recommend Ignite to a friend. Of the young people who participated in activities, 82% reported an increase in confidence, 87% an increase in emotional resilience and 97% reported an increase in health and wellbeing.

Quotes from young people who participated in the activities reflect the supportive and caring environment of the charity:

**“I believe I made a very good decision to join Ignite Youth as it has opened so many opportunities for me to make new friends and socialise with more people.”**

**“The staff are always friendly and welcoming. They always listen to us and make us feel welcome in every way they can. The staff are very caring and always look out for the young people.”**

Ignite Youth in Harrow has received strong local and sector recognition for the quality and impact of its work with young people. The organisation holds the London Youth Gold Quality Mark, demonstrating excellence in youth work practice, safeguarding, and governance. Ignite was also a finalist in the 2023 Smiley Charity Film Awards, highlighting the strength of its impact storytelling and young people’s voices. In addition, Ignite has secured funding from trusted local partners, including Harrow Giving, reflecting confidence in its leadership and ability to deliver effective, community-led programmes for young people in Harrow.

**“A lot of young people struggle with mental health quietly.”**

**17 | Male | Black Caribbean**

# EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

The objective of the employability programme is to help young people find satisfying employment and/or re-engage with education to enhance financial security, build self-esteem and improve well-being. The programme equips young people with essential skills to access employment or training opportunities. At the same, the programme stems from young people's needs, in a survey from Ignite 22% young people were interested in employment skills (Ignite, 2025).



## Activities young people would like to see more of (Ignite, 2025).



**37%**

Physical health and sports



**18%**

Arts and creative activities



**8%**

Offer information, advice and guidance



**26%**

Fun activities (i.e. board games, computer coding)



**12%**

Supporting young people involved in crime



**8%**

Supporting exploring identity



**22%**

Employment, training and skills for work



**11%**

Volunteering and social action opportunities



**5%**

Supporting care experienced young people



**20%**

Supporting mental health and wellbeing

Ignites's employment programme provides a holistic approach to professional development, including workshops, one-on-one coaching, and assistance with preparing CVs, designed to empower young individuals for a successful transition into the job market.

Ignite has created key partnerships to better support young people with real life industry experiences. Ignite partnered with Google, Service Partner Group (SSP) and London & Quadrant Housing Trust (L&Q) to deliver three careers and insights days for young people. Through industry-specific workshops, the attendees learnt how to develop strong CVs and professional profiles, build confidence when interviewing, and heard from employees about their unique career journeys. The events also offered valuable networking opportunities and a chance for young people to gain advice from industry professionals. As a result, a young mum part of the group secured employment with SSP.

The team has established a new employability course at Harrow College, reaching vulnerable young people. The six-week course equips young people with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to navigate the job market and

## Case study: Gabrielle

Gabrielle, a parent navigating the challenges of childcare and job hunting in the competitive hospitality industry, faced repeated setbacks in her search for stable employment.

Determined to secure a stable position, she partnered with Ignite Youth and participated in SSP's Career and Insight Day. The transformative event equipped her with the tools and confidence to succeed. Through industry specific workshops, Gabrielle developed a strong CV and LinkedIn profile. During interview preparation sessions, she received direct feedback from industry professionals. She was able to address her previous unsuccessful interviews, craft effective answers to interview questions and learn how to present herself confidently. Utilising the networking opportunities, Gabrielle also gained a clearer understanding of what employers look for and how to tailor her applications accordingly.

Empowered by her newfound skills and clarity, Gabrielle applied for a role at SSP, confidently showcasing her abilities and knowledge of the industry through the interview process. As a result, she secured the position, marking the culmination of months of perseverance and personal growth.

Gabrielle's journey illustrates how career development events can empower young people facing barriers to employment. By building essential skills, improving confidence, and providing valuable industry insight, Gabrielle overcame previous challenges and secured meaningful employment.

Note: The young person's name in this case study has been changed to respect their anonymity.

succeed in their careers. The sessions include building your personal brand, mastering the job search, creating CV and cover letters, the art of interviewing, developing soft skills for career success, career pathways and goal setting.

The team also created an employability job fair at Harrow College. The event was designed to support young people (up to age 25) and the wider Harrow community by creating direct pathways into education, training and employment. The fair brought together local employers, apprenticeship providers, and training organisations, including Bright Horizons (early years), Xcite (employment services), Wates (construction), Caramel Rock, and HRUC Apprenticeships & Skills. In addition to exhibition stands and delegate materials, Bright Horizons and Wates delivered sector presentations which inspired attendees and showcased career pathways.

Ignite also hosts sessions specifically for women and girls as part of the HER Space programme. During one of these sessions delivered by a qualified solicitor, Zara, one of the young women expressed a strong interest in law. She took the opportunity to ask the solicitor several questions about her career path and any advice she could offer. The solicitor was

## Case study: Nathaniel

Nathaniel, a Year 11 student, came into Ignite's programme and said he was deeply disengaged from education and life in general. He had developed a long-standing history of substance use that began at the early age of 11 and continued into his teenage years. This habit contributed to his lack of motivation and resistance to attending school. When the youth worker first met Nathaniel, he hardly attended lessons and had expressed openly that "school wasn't for him". Feeling that he didn't understand much in school, he began to slowly disengage from it from a young age.

The youth worker approached Nathaniel with a space where he could be open with no judgement. He got to know him better, asking him what things he liked and listened to him more than telling him things. The worker collaborated with Nathaniel establishing a mentoring plan to identify his strengths and work together in his weaknesses.

The team collaborated with Nathaniel to actively apply to local apprenticeship programmes in the field of mechanics. Their primary target has been Kwik Fit, where they continue to pursue a placement for him beginning in September.

Nathaniel has now finished year 11, attending school regularly and sometimes even when not supposed to, due to his eagerness to improve and secure an apprenticeship in mechanics. His confidence, commitment to personal change, and ability to envision a more stable future not just as a career but as a person are all testament to his incredible progress.

Nathaniel's journey reflects the power of tailored mentorship, consistent encouragement, and belief in the potential of young people, even when they are at their lowest. His story reminds us that transformation is possible when the right support meets the right moment.

Note: The young person's name in this case study has been changed to respect their anonymity.

impressed with Zara's curiosity and even offered her a chance to do work experience at her firm which was an offer Zara was very grateful for. After the session, Zara shared that she felt more confident and clearer about her future options, thanks to the practical information and encouragement the solicitor provided.

The employability programme has been running for three years and so far, it has supported 251 young people with 400 hours of specialist support. The support has been invaluable for young people and has led to real-life opportunities with 50 young people securing employment, training, apprenticeships or further education applications. The programme also influenced 178 young people in increasing their engagement with employment and 160 young people in showing a decrease in life limiting behaviour.



**“Opportunities exist, but not everyone knows about them.”**

**18 | Male | British Asian**

## Case study: Joseph's story – Building Confidence into Employment

**Case study about a young person who has successfully gone through the employability programme.**

Joseph is a 19-year-old IT student at Harrow College with ambitions to work in cyber security. Already connected to Ignite Youth through college boxing sessions, he joined the six-week Ignite Youth Employability Programme in the lead-up to summer 2025, eager to find part-time work alongside his studies.

Before the programme, Joseph lacked confidence and had no CV, limited work experience, and little understanding of how to prepare for interviews or approach employers. Like many young people, he found balancing job searching with college challenging.

Through Ignite Youth's practical and supportive employability sessions, Joseph developed the skills and confidence needed to succeed. He created a professional CV and cover letters, practised interviews, learned how to research employers, and built strong communication skills. Mock interviews helped him feel confident presenting himself to employers.

After completing the programme, Joseph received tailored one-to-one support from an Ignite Youth employability youth worker to search and apply for roles. As a result, he secured a paid fundraising role over the summer, gaining valuable work experience and earning his own income.

Today, Joseph feels more confident, independent, and prepared for the world of work. The skills he gained through Ignite Youth will continue to support him as he works towards a future career in IT and cyber security. His journey shows how Ignite Youth empowers young people to turn potential into real opportunities.

## Case study: Supporting Young People Beyond the First Job

Case study of the employability programme from the perspective of the youth worker.

Ignite Youth's impact goes beyond helping young people secure employment. The Youth Employability Youth Worker provides ongoing one-to-one support beyond the structured Employability Programme, offering tailored guidance throughout each young person's employment journey and beyond.

This continued support helps young people prepare for the realities of the workplace, understand professional expectations and etiquette, and build the confidence needed to sustain employment long term. Youth workers also remain in contact after a young person secures a job, providing encouragement, check-ins, and support to transition into new roles as opportunities arise.

Joseph's journey highlights the value of this approach. After completing the Ignite Youth Employability Programme and securing summer employment, Joseph re-engaged with Ignite Youth once his role ended.

With continued one-to-one support from a Youth Employability Youth Worker, he was supported to secure an interview and a paid trial day at a new workplace. This ongoing guidance helped Joseph remain motivated, confident, and actively engaged with the labour market.

Ignite Youth's employability support is always tailored to the individual. Youth workers take into account each young person's personal circumstances, skills, interests, and capacity at that moment in time. This is particularly impactful for vulnerable young people, including care leavers, those facing challenges at home, and young people who require additional language or cultural integration support.

By meeting young people where they are and walking alongside them beyond their first job, Ignite Youth helps young people not only access employment, but build the skills, resilience, and confidence needed to thrive in the long term.

**“Through trusted, one-to-one engagement, youth workers build motivation and confidence, helping young people recognise their potential and navigate clear pathways into employment, education, or training. This hope-driven approach supports sustained engagement and positive long-term outcomes.”**

**Employability Youth Worker**

# CONCLUSION

Ignite provides vital support for young people living in Harrow and adjacent boroughs. The residents face increasing challenges related to rising costs of living, housing, transport, education completion and obtaining secure employment. The charity objectives align with government priorities and key needs for the borough.

Ignite's important work tackles challenges affecting young people directly by providing a space for young people to enjoy themselves, grow, be listened to, strengthen their communities, improve their confidence, health and wellbeing, and use their incredible resilience to turn adversity into advantage. The charity works collaboratively to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people.

For many of these young people, employment or higher education feels out of reach. Ignite's mentoring and employment programme supports young people to engage with education and employment, in turn creating more opportunities and a better future for young people. Their programme brings practical skills such as creating a CV, applying for jobs, meeting industry experts, improving job interview skills and planning for their future career. Ignite contributes in the long-term with skills and experiences that will forever stay with young people and in the short-term helping young people secure apprenticeships, training and employment.

**"I feel safe at home, but outside it depends where you are."**

**14 | Female | White British**

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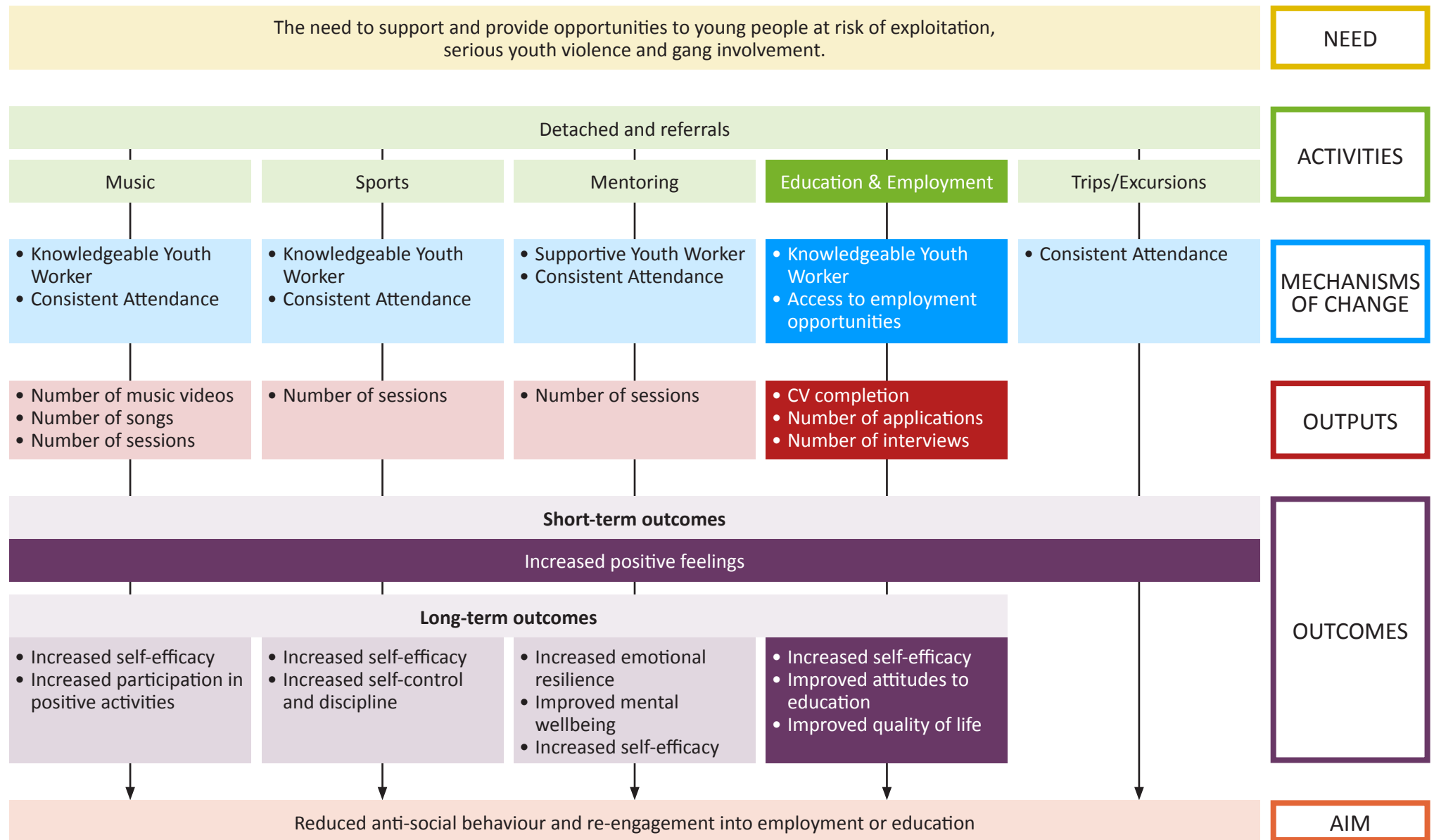
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# APPENDIX 1: THEORY OF CHANGE HANDBOOK



## APPENDIX 2:

| CATEGORY                                    | METRIC/STATISTIC            | VALUE     |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Annual Survey Results 2024</b>           | <b>Total respondents</b>    | <b>65</b> |
|                                             | Attend Ignite weekly        | 90%       |
|                                             | Age: 12–15                  | 75%       |
|                                             | Age: 16–19                  | 14%       |
|                                             | Age: 20–23                  | 2%        |
|                                             | Under 12                    | 9%        |
|                                             | Gender: Male                | 70%       |
|                                             | Gender: Female              | 28%       |
|                                             | Gender: Prefer not to say   | 2%        |
|                                             | Attend <1 month             | 2%        |
|                                             | Attend 1–2 times/month      | 9%        |
|                                             | Attend weekly               | 38%       |
|                                             | Attend multiple times/week  | 52%       |
| <b>Session Attendance Split</b>             | Football                    | 63%       |
|                                             | Basketball                  | 48%       |
|                                             | Social Spot (mixed)         | 45%       |
|                                             | Mixed gender                | 28%       |
|                                             | Day trips                   | 23%       |
|                                             | Girls' Social Spot          | 11%       |
|                                             | Boxing                      | 5%        |
|                                             | Maths                       | 3%        |
| <b>Why Young People Attend Ignite</b>       | Enjoy it                    | 80%       |
|                                             | Spend time with friends     | 62%       |
|                                             | Meet new people             | 58%       |
|                                             | Like youth workers          | 49%       |
|                                             | Keeps them fit              | 37%       |
|                                             | Safe space                  | 34%       |
| <b>Youth Work Availability (Perception)</b> | Very few options            | 46%       |
|                                             | Some options but not enough | 20%       |

| CATEGORY                             | METRIC/STATISTIC                     | VALUE      |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|
|                                      | Plenty of options                    | 18%        |
|                                      | Don't know                           | 12%        |
|                                      | No options                           | 2%         |
|                                      | Prefer not to say                    | 2%         |
| Activities Young People Want More Of | Physical health & sports             | 37%        |
|                                      | Fun activities                       | 26%        |
|                                      | Employment training & skills         | 22%        |
|                                      | Mental health & wellbeing            | 20%        |
|                                      | Arts & creative                      | 18%        |
|                                      | Supporting YP involved in crime      | 12%        |
|                                      | Volunteering & social action         | 11%        |
|                                      | Information/advice/guidance          | 8%         |
|                                      | Supporting exploring identity        | 8%         |
|                                      | Supporting care-experienced YP       | 5%         |
| Impact on Young People               | Feel more confident                  | 82%        |
|                                      | Improved relationships               | 71%        |
|                                      | Inspired                             | 66%        |
|                                      | More connected to community          | 60%        |
|                                      | Transformed an area of life          | 54%        |
|                                      | Feel more positive about future      | 52%        |
|                                      | Would recommend Ignite               | 100%       |
| Partner Feedback (2024)              | Staff maximum rating                 | 88%        |
|                                      | Programmes effective                 | 88%        |
|                                      | Would recommend Ignite               | 89%        |
| Youth Violence Research              | <b>Total respondents</b>             | <b>403</b> |
|                                      | Digital survey responses             | 403        |
|                                      | In-person interviews                 | 20         |
|                                      | Professional interviews              | 3          |
|                                      | Feel very safe in Harrow Town Centre | 12%        |
|                                      | Witnessed violence or ASB            | 60%        |
|                                      | Girls feeling unsafe at night        | 51%        |
|                                      | Would feel safer with more police    | 55%        |

| CATEGORY                     | METRIC/STATISTIC                              | VALUE        |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Reasons for violence         | Environment/influence                         | Major factor |
|                              | Financial difficulties                        | Major factor |
|                              | Peer pressure                                 | Major factor |
| Police Interaction Knowledge | Know rights                                   | 22%          |
|                              | Know how to complain                          | 22%          |
|                              | Support police working w/ youth workers       | 59%          |
|                              | Would feel less comfortable if police present | 14%          |
| Employment Opportunities     | Know little/nothing about jobs in Harrow      | 80%          |
|                              | Interested in paid work experience            | 80%+         |
|                              | Would benefit from culture pass               | 85%          |
| Interest in Skills/Resources | Sports                                        | 224          |
|                              | Gaming                                        | 219          |
|                              | Books                                         | 165          |
|                              | Computers                                     | 164          |
|                              | Space to socialise                            | 160          |
|                              | Music studio                                  | 147          |
|                              | Cooking                                       | 139          |
|                              | Financial literacy                            | 129          |
|                              | Employment support                            | 127          |
|                              | Tutoring                                      | 97           |

**“We learn for exams, not always for real life or work.”**

**15 | Non-binary | British Asian**



**"I want Harrow to invest more in young people's futures."**

**18 | Female | White European**