

IMPACT REPORT

2026

Changing the lives of young people



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF CHANGING LIVES. BUILDING THE NEXT 20.

WELCOME

We're incredibly proud to share Sport 4 Life UK's 2026 Impact Report, highlighting our outcomes, impact, partnerships and stories from across the 2025/26 year.

This year is especially significant, as we mark 20 years of changing lives and reflect on one of the most important years in our organisation's history.

Two decades on from where our journey began, the need for our work has never been clearer. More than one million young people aged 16 to 24 are now not in education, employment or training - the highest level for over a decade. Youth unemployment remains significantly higher than the national average, while economic inactivity continues to rise. Behind these figures are young people whose confidence, wellbeing and future prospects are being affected every day.

The challenges they face are becoming increasingly complex. Poor mental health and wellbeing, rising economic pressures, school absence, limited access to networks, and fewer entry-level opportunities are making the transition into adulthood harder than it should be. The 'Young People and Work: Interim Report' warns that the UK is at risk of creating a "lost generation", with too many young people becoming disconnected from education, employment, training, and the support systems that should help them move forward. For many young people, this is not about a lack of ambition or potential. It is about a lack of opportunity, access, confidence, and the right support at the right time. That is why our work remains so important.

Through sport, mentoring, employability support, accredited qualifications, and positive relationships with trusted adults, we help young people build the skills, confidence and resilience they need to create brighter futures and change this narrative.

Like many charities across the UK, we have faced significant challenges. Thanks to the resilience of our

team, trustees, partners and supporters, we have emerged stronger, supporting 4,144 young people this year and building momentum for the future. Every young person deserves someone who believes in them. Through trusted relationships, mentoring, sport and practical employability support, we help young people build the confidence to take their next step.

Collaboration continues to sit at the heart of our approach. Our work alongside schools, businesses, funders and community partners is vital to delivering the right support in the right places. We are also increasingly proud of the growing role of our Impact Partner model, which enables more outcomes for young people through our national network of like-minded organisations. By strengthening the capacity, quality and impact of partners who share our mission, we are helping to extend our reach far beyond what we could achieve alone.

As we celebrate 20 years of Sport 4 Life UK, we do so with enormous pride, but also with a clear sense of responsibility. The challenges facing young people are urgent, but our belief remains the same as it was at the very beginning: with the right support, every young person should have the opportunity to create a better future for themselves.

Your support is changing lives, and together we remain committed to ensuring that every young person has the opportunity to reach their potential.



Tom Clarke-Forrest
Founder & CEO



Mike Gahir
Chair of Trustees and Directors

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OUR VISION

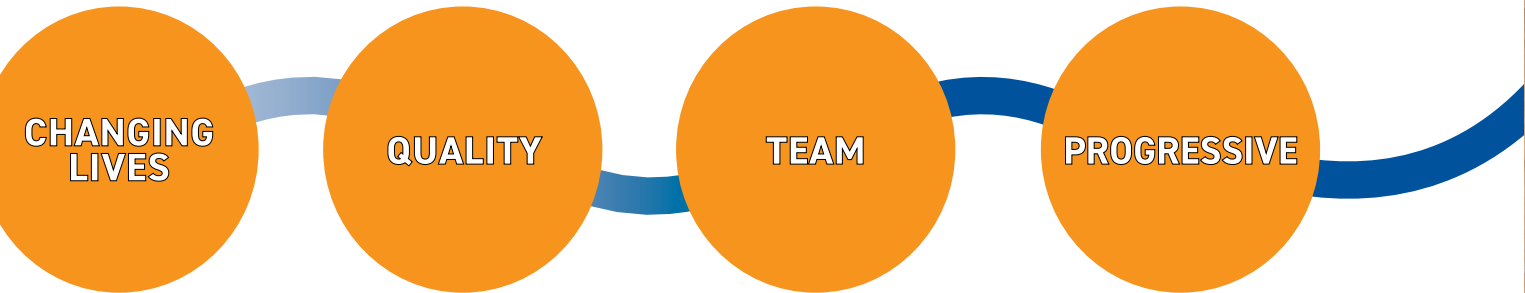
Our vision is to create a level playing field where every young person has the opportunity to create a better future for themselves.

OUR MISSION

We empower young people to reach their potential by providing the skills, qualifications and support needed to find work and shape successful futures.

Our transformative programmes are designed to empower young people by providing them with high-quality mentoring, employability support and sports sessions.

OUR VALUES



Changing the lives of young people | 4



Sport 4 Life helped me get back on track and helped me believe in myself again.



Dylan

WHY WE EXIST

More Than One Million Young People Are Waiting for a Way Forward

The number of young people aged 16–24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has now surpassed one million for the first time in over a decade. Between January and March 2026, an estimated 1.012 million young people were NEET, representing 13.5% of all young people in this age group.

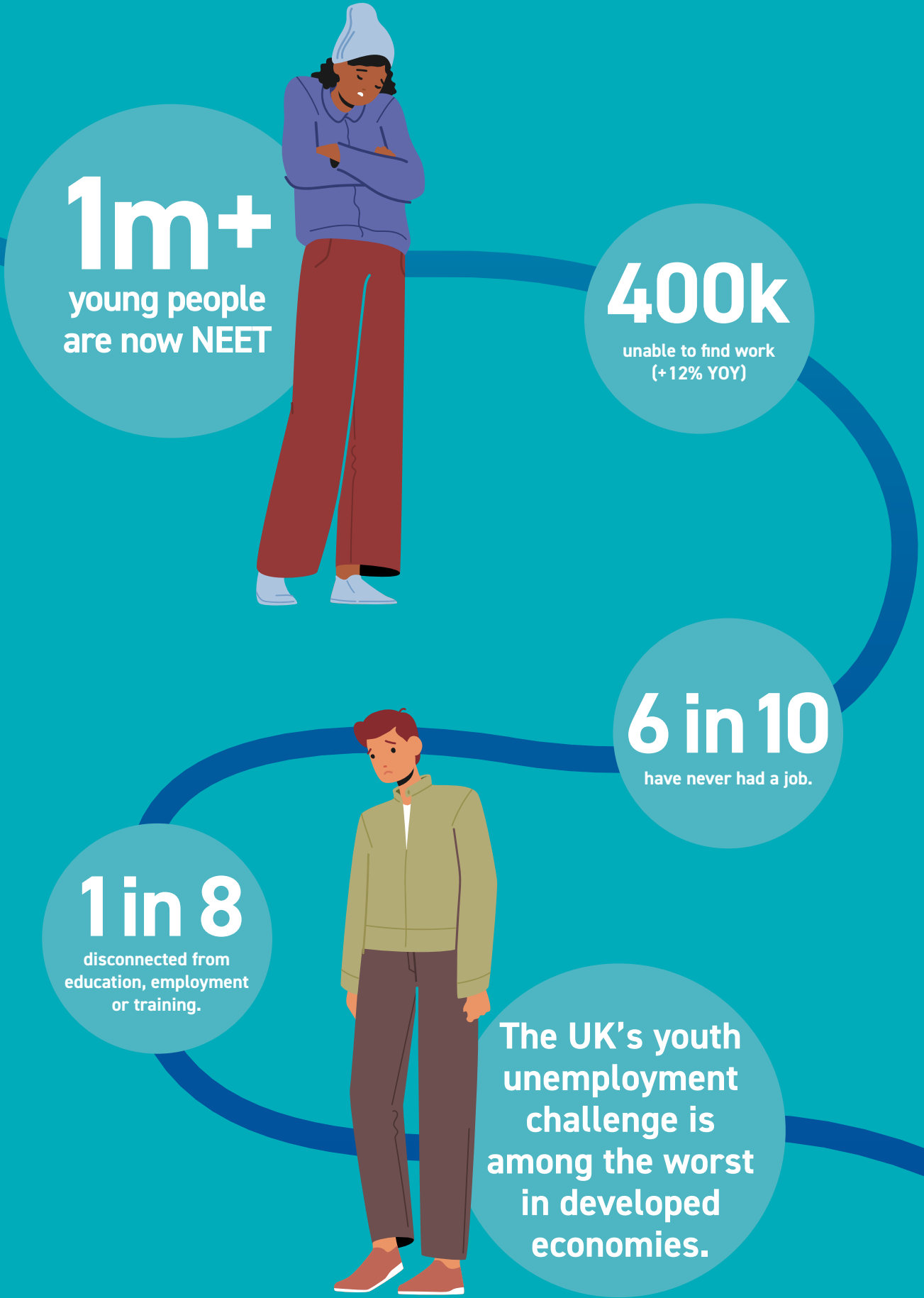
Youth unemployment continues to remain significantly higher than the national average. Of those who were NEET, around 400,000 young people were actively looking for work but unable to find it, an increase of 45,000 compared to the previous year. At the same time, 613,000 young people were economically inactive – not in education, employment, training, or actively seeking work.

These figures are more than statistics – they represent young people whose futures are being shaped by circumstances beyond their control.

Long periods out of education or work can have lasting effects, increasing the risk of poor mental health and wellbeing, financial insecurity, and reduced lifetime earnings. That’s why our work has never been more important.

The challenges facing young people are becoming increasingly complex. Poor mental health and wellbeing, rising economic pressures, a shortage of entry-level opportunities and growing barriers to employment are leaving many young people feeling uncertain about their future. National reviews warn that the UK risks creating a “lost generation” unless urgent action is taken to improve access to education, training, employment, and support services.

At Sport 4 Life, we continue to provide young people with the skills, confidence, qualifications and personalised support they need to overcome barriers and move towards sustainable education, employment, and training opportunities. By intervening early and supporting young people holistically, we help ensure they can build better futures and reach their full potential.



WHAT WE DO

Every young person's journey is different, which is why our support is tailored to their individual needs, aspirations and circumstances.

From the moment they join Sport 4 Life UK, we take the time to listen, understand the barriers they face and build a personalised journey that helps them move forward with confidence.

Through trusted one-to-one mentoring, practical employability support, accredited qualifications and real-world experiences, we help young people develop the skills, resilience and confidence they need to achieve their goals. Whether progressing into education, employment or an apprenticeship, our support doesn't stop there. We continue to provide mentoring and ongoing guidance to help young people overcome challenges, sustain positive outcomes and build better futures.

2,100+
hours
of sport, training
and mentoring



A YOUNG PERSON'S JOURNEY

A personalised journey of support from first contact through to sustained employment.

Every journey starts with a single step: the chance to be heard, without judgement.

Young people come to Sport 4 Life through schools, community groups, job centres or word of mouth.

We take time to listen, understand their story, and explore what they want for their future.

Together, we build confidence, improve wellbeing, and develop the skills needed to move towards employment.



BUILDING TRUST

Through 1:1 mentoring and consistent support, we help young people:



Identifying barriers



Develop routine



Goal setting



Feel seen and supported

DEVELOPING POTENTIAL

YOUNG PEOPLE GAIN

Recognised qualifications

Real-world experience

Practical employability skills

Mock interview feedback from real employers

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Moving into meaningful opportunities and building a foundation for long-term success.

EMPLOYMENT

APPRENTICESHIPS

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Ongoing support to sustain success

Our support doesn't stop at placement. Helping young people settle into work or education, overcome challenges and stay on track.

We continue to provide:

- ✓ In-work mentoring
- ✓ Regular check-ins
- ✓ Problem-solving support

We empower young people to reach their potential and create better futures.

OUR IMPACT

Life Skills &
Personal Development

53%

surveyed improved their
life skills

Mental Health
& Wellbeing

60%

reported an improvement
in their wellbeing*

Education
& Qualifications

360

achieved an accredited
qualification

Crime & Anti-Social
Behaviour

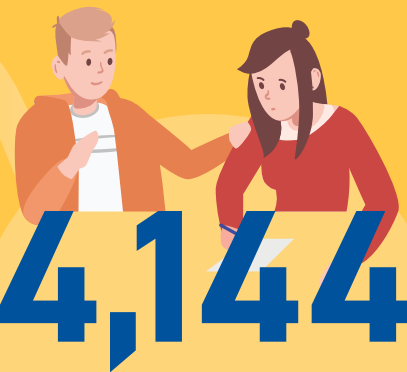
710

demonstrated positive
behavioural changes
associated with crime and
anti-social behaviour



*Based on young people who completed a Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)

OUR IMPACT



young people supported



hours of sport, training and mentoring support delivered



progressed into employment, education or training
(of NEET cohorts)



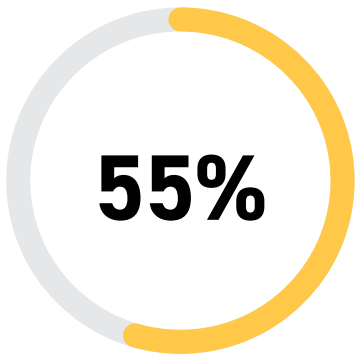
surveyed improved their life skills

Demographics

68% Male

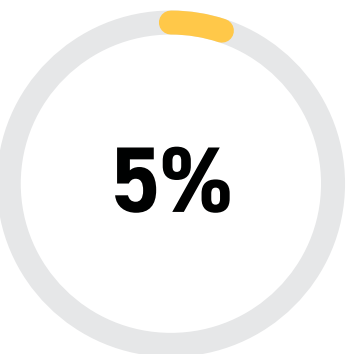
28% Female

<5% Undisclosed, trans



of young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds

Disability/SEN



of engaged young people identified as having a disability

Of those identifying with a disability:

40% of young people with learning disabilities

22% of young people affected by mental health disabilities

11% Physical

Engagement

2,325 young people have been meaningfully supported

638 aged 11-16

1,687 aged 17-29

1,265 received 1-to-1 mentoring support

147 aged 11-16

1,118 aged 17-29

264 attended employability activities

0 aged 11-16

264 aged 17-29

2,078 attended a sport session

1,123 aged 11-16

955 aged 17-29

25 took on a work placement or volunteering with us

24% of all placements are now in structured volunteering posts.



2,325
young people have been meaningfully supported

Progression

360 gained an accredited qualification / completed accredited training

173 Sector Based Qualifications

138 L1 Sports Leaders

16 L2 Sports Leaders

21 L1 Functional Skills

12 L2 Functional Skills

266 are still enrolled in mentoring services

85 aged 11-16

181 aged 17-29



282
progressed into EET

(100 into employment, 182 into education and training)



53%
surveyed improved their life skills



**THANKS TO OUR
20TH ANNIVERSARY
SPONSORS**

JD FOUNDATION

OakNorth 

WONDROUS.

**AS WE CELEBRATE 20 YEARS
OF SPORT 4 LIFE, WE'D LIKE TO
SAY A HEARTFELT THANK YOU
TO EVERYONE WHO HAS HELPED
US REACH THIS MILESTONE.**

To our event sponsors, partners, funders, supporters, volunteers, trustees and staff – thank you for believing in our mission and investing in the potential of young people.

For two decades, your support has helped us provide opportunities, build confidence and create better futures for thousands of young people across the West Midlands and beyond.

This anniversary isn't just about celebrating where we've been. It's about recognising the collective impact we've made together and looking ahead to the next generation of young people whose lives we can continue to change.

**20 YEARS
COUNTLESS
STORIES**

Behind every statistic is a young person with their own journey.

From first jobs and qualifications to renewed confidence and better futures, our story has always been about people.

Scan the QR code to watch our 20th Anniversary film and hear from the people who have helped shape Sport 4 Life over the past two decades, including those who were there at the very beginning, those who have witnessed our growth and the young people whose lives continue to inspire everything we do.

Thank you for being part of our story.



**SCAN TO WATCH OUR
20TH ANNIVERSARY FILM.**

20 YEARS OF IMPACT



Every number tells a story. Behind every statistic is a young person whose future looks different because someone believed in them.

SOCIAL VALUE CREATED FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED

Over the past 20 years, £14 million invested in Sport 4 Life has generated more than £87 million in social value while supporting 34,000+ young people to build better futures.

34K+

young people supported

3,300+

qualifications achieved

22K+

meaningfully supported
into positive destinations

2,200+

progressed into education,
employment or training¹

32k+

young people reached
through our Impact
Partner Network²

¹Since 2014, ²Since 2023

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

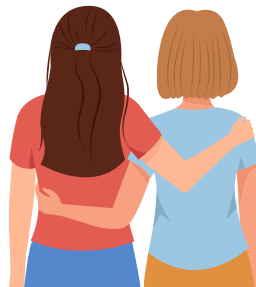
Supporting young people’s mental health and wellbeing remains at the heart of our work.

This year, 60% of young people who completed the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) demonstrated a significant improvement in their wellbeing, highlighting the positive impact of sustained mentoring, sport and personalised support.

The greatest improvements were seen among younger participants, with 76% of young people aged 11–16 reporting significant improvements in their mental health and wellbeing, compared with 54% of those aged 17–29. This reinforces the importance of early intervention in helping young people build positive habits, confidence and resilience before challenges become more deeply embedded.

We also saw encouraging progress in how young people view their future. 71% reported feeling optimistic about what lies ahead, while 54% said they had improved their ability to cope with challenges and bounce back from setbacks.

These outcomes are particularly significant at a time when many young people continue to face increasing pressures around education, employment, the cost of living and their future prospects. By providing trusted relationships, positive role models and tailored opportunities, Sport 4 Life UK is helping young people build the confidence, resilience and optimism they need to thrive.



76%
of young people aged 11–16 reporting significant improvements in their mental health and wellbeing

Dan has supported pupils in building self-confidence, resilience, and positive relationships with peers. He has adapted mentoring approaches to meet individual needs, including pupils with additional emotional or behavioural challenges. Dan has encouraged restorative conversations to repair relationships and promote accountability.

CRIME & ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR



710
(59%) demonstrated positive behavioural changes

- Including:
- Healthier emotional regulation
 - Stronger relationships
 - More positive responses to challenging situations

Outcomes were assessed through self-reporting by the young people using our Crime Reduction Survey. These changes play a key role in strengthening protective factors that reduce the risk of youth offending and exclusion.

Action & Crime Prevention at Sport 4 Life UK

At Sport 4 Life UK, we use sport and mentoring as preventative tools to help young people develop the confidence, self-control and decision-making skills needed to make positive life choices. By creating safe, supportive environments and building trusted relationships, we help reduce risk factors associated with anti-social behaviour while strengthening resilience and personal responsibility.

The impact of this approach is reflected in the feedback we receive from schools:

“Sport 4 Life mentors have helped pupils identify and understand their emotions through regular check-ins and calm, non-judgemental conversations. They

have supported pupils in developing positive coping strategies for frustration, anxiety, and anger. They have built strong, trusting relationships that encouraged pupils to feel safe, listened to, and respected. Sport 4 Life mentors have also used de-escalation techniques effectively to manage challenging situations and reduce conflict.”

By equipping young people with the skills to manage emotions, resolve conflict and make positive decisions, we are helping to reduce the likelihood of involvement in anti-social behaviour while supporting safer, stronger communities.



Join Businesses That Are Driving Positive Change

Businesses have a vital role to play in tackling youth unemployment and creating opportunities for the next generation. Through Sport 4 Life's Game Changers Business Club, organisations can make a meaningful difference while strengthening their own social impact goals, networks and community connections.

As a Game Changer, your business becomes part of a growing community of like-minded organisations committed to changing young lives through sport and employability support. Members gain access to exclusive networking opportunities, private events and regular updates on youth employment trends and challenges affecting our region, helping businesses better understand the challenges facing young people in the communities in which they operate.

The club also provides opportunities for your team to engage directly with our mission through volunteering, mentoring, workplace experiences and fundraising initiatives, creating meaningful employee engagement opportunities while supporting young people to develop the skills, confidence and resilience needed for future success.

Alongside helping transform lives, Game Changers membership can strengthen your organisation's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) commitments by demonstrating a tangible investment in local communities and social mobility.

Join the Game Changers Business Club and be part of the solution.



LED BY YOUTH VOICE

At Sport 4 Life, young people are at the centre of everything we do. That's why we created our Youth Voice Panel, a group of passionate young people who help shape our programmes, services and future direction.

The Youth Voice Panel ensures that the voices, experiences and perspectives of young people are heard and acted upon across the organisation. By sharing their ideas, feedback and lived experiences, panel members help us better understand the challenges young people face and how we can continue to improve the support we provide.

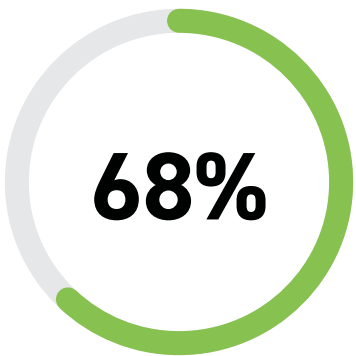
Being part of the Youth Voice Panel also provides members with opportunities to develop their confidence, leadership, communication and teamwork skills, while gaining experience of influencing real organisational change.

The Youth Voice Panel doesn't just inform our work - it shapes it. Their voices help shape our strategy, strengthen our impact and ensure that young people remain at the heart of every decision we make.



HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE THRIVE IN EDUCATION

Through targeted mentoring, sport-based activities and personalised support, we help pupils overcome barriers that can affect their confidence, behaviour and engagement in school.



of pupils demonstrated a significant improvement in their life skills

- 19% improved attainment
- 57% improved attendance
- 78% improved behaviour and engagement in lessons
- 3 in 4 improved engagement through school-based mentoring

These outcomes demonstrate the value of early intervention. By building trusted relationships, developing essential life skills and providing consistent support, we help young people feel more connected to school, better equipped to manage challenges, and more prepared to achieve positive outcomes both in education and beyond.



Thanks to Eugene, we've been able to build a life here with hope and stability.

Dani



IMPACT PARTNERS

Together, we're extending our collective impact and making a real difference in the lives of young people

Through our strategic support, we help our Impact Partners enhance their planning, assess their impact and strengthen governance, ensuring that our shared mission is achieved with lasting results.

Through our 'Impact Partner Model' we are collaborating with more and more organisations that share our vision.



Impact Partner Outcomes (enabled by Sport 4 Life UK)

Through our delivery model and strong partnerships, we continue to exceed the outcomes expected of our programmes. This year, we surpassed targets across the majority of our key performance measures, including young people engaged, life skills development, mental health and wellbeing, employability outcomes, progression into education and job outcomes. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of our personalised approach and the lasting impact that collaborative partnerships can have on improving opportunities and outcomes for young people across the West Midlands.

No. of young people engaged

Total: 20,469

No. of sport sessions delivered

Total: 6,932

No. of development sessions (non-sport) delivered

Total: 1,036

No. of qualifications gained

Total: 144

No. of young people that transformed key life skills

Total: 8,763

No. of young people that improved mental health & wellbeing

Total: 9,205

No. of young people that improved employability skills

Total: 1,015

No. of young people progressing NEET to EET (employment, education, training)

Total: 917

No. of young people reducing likelihood of involvement in crime

Total: 7,415

Figures exclude data from Birmingham United, Warrington Wolves Foundation and the Jason Robinson Foundation due to unavailable reporting at the time of publication.

THANK YOU

These are just some of the organisations we have been supported by and delivered projects in collaboration with.

Through strategic partnerships, we work collaboratively with purpose-driven organisations to empower disadvantaged young people. By combining time, resources and expertise, we create meaningful opportunities that build confidence, develop key skills, and prepare young people for lasting employment and better futures.



We are incredibly grateful to all our partners, funders and supporters for your continued commitment to changing the lives of young people.



Partnering with Sport 4 Life reflects our commitment to supporting UK communities and helping to create positive social impact. Their work to reduce youth unemployment in Birmingham by equipping young people with the confidence and skills they need is making a real difference to the younger generation.

Unity Trust Bank



Sport 4 Life helped me get back on track and helped me believe in myself again.

Dylan

CHANGING LIVES

Dylan's story – Age 21

Dylan had a clear plan after college: build a career in the trades. But the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted his education and left him struggling with his mental health, confidence, and motivation. By the time restrictions lifted, he felt uncertain about his future and doubtful of his chances of finding work.

After visiting his local Job Centre, Dylan was introduced to Sport 4 Life UK and began working with his mentor, Karl. Through regular mentoring, Functional Skills training and paid work experience on the HATCH programme (a joint youth employability initiative), Dylan started rebuilding his confidence and developing the skills he needed to move forward.

With support around CV writing, job applications and interview preparation, Dylan secured his first paid role as a warehouse operative - a major milestone that gave him valuable workplace experience, financial independence, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Today, Dylan has transformed his outlook and prospects. From feeling stuck with no clear pathway to qualifications, no job opportunities, and little confidence in his future, he now has recognised qualifications, paid work experience and clear career ambitions. He is working towards his long-term goal of joining the police force and has the confidence and skills to pursue opportunities that once felt out of reach.



WATCH OUR MAKE A CHANGE VIDEO

OUR PRIORITIES

All that we do is focused on **CHANGING** the **LIVES** of young people.

This is our North Star and guides everything that we do. As the West Midlands' leading sport for employment charity, we remain ambitious about the difference we can make and the role we can play in creating better futures for young people.

Our strategic priorities remain:

- ✓ **To grow and expand our services**
- ✓ **To drive transformational improvements in our services**
- ✓ **To be the 'go to' youth employment charity for the region**
- ✓ **To be one of the best places to work in the West Midlands**
- ✓ **To make key contributions to our society and community**

This means that over the next year (2026-2027), we will;

- Grow our reach and impact, supporting more young people through the expansion of our programmes and partnerships
- Launch and develop new services for schools, helping more young people overcome barriers and achieve positive outcomes
- Strengthen our strategic partnerships, working with businesses, funders and communities to create lasting change
- Amplify the voices and stories of young people, ensuring lived experience shapes our services and influences wider systems
- Continue to innovate and improve, enhancing the quality, consistency and impact of all our programmes
- Invest in our people and culture, supporting our ambition to be one of the best places to work in the West Midlands
- Raise our profile and influence, building our reputation as the leading youth employability charity in the region
- Strengthen our financial sustainability, creating the foundations to support even more young people in the years ahead

AS WE ENTER OUR THIRD DECADE, OUR AMBITION REMAINS UNCHANGED: TO ENSURE EVERY YOUNG PERSON HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL AND SHAPE A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE.





Sport 4 Life was my saving grace.
Conventional education routes don't
always work for everyone – and
unconventional doesn't mean wrong.

Ajax



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