



PATHWAYS TO SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE: PROJECT ZERO'S SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

Reflections and Learning from Summer
2025



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“THANKS TO PROJECT ZERO, STEVE, AND EVERYBODY THAT WORKS HERE, I'VE MANAGED TO SEE THE [CAREER] PATH THAT I WANT SEE WHERE IT LIKE LEADS ME BECAUSE BEING ON A SUMMER JOB PROGRAMME DOESN'T JUST MEAN YOU WORK. IT'S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO OPEN YOURSELF UP TO THE WORLD TO A WORLD LIKE YOU JUST HAVEN'T REALISED YET.
PARTICIPANT 4, MALE, 16

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ABOUT US



Project Zero is a Waltham Forest based Community Interest Company (CIC) committed to seeing a year when there are been zero deaths of a young person from knife or violent crime. Project Zero seeks to make this happen through our aims:

- engaging young people in positive activities to promote social inclusion, reduce anti-social / offending behaviour and strengthen community cohesion
- raising the aspirations of young people in reaching their full potential and grow into well-adjusted adults
- helping young people to feel safe and part of their community.



**Our mission is to see
a YEAR when there
has been ZERO
deaths of a young
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or violent crime.**

Introduction



Meaningful employment opportunities do far more than provide young people with income. They create structure, purpose, and pathways to develop essential life skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Research from the Youth Endowment Fund highlights that these skills play a crucial role in helping young people build resilience, self-esteem, and adaptability factors that significantly reduce the risk of becoming involved in violence.

Conversely, when young people face barriers to employment, the resulting frustration and lack of direction can increase vulnerability to negative influences.

In Waltham Forest, as in many London boroughs, young people face persistent challenges around inequality, access to opportunities, and future employment pathways. The borough's Local Needs Analysis and Mission Waltham Forest strategy both emphasise the importance of supporting young people to overcome these barriers, recognising that investing in skills and employment is a vital part of building a fairer and safer community.

Project Zero's Summer Job Programme responds directly to this need. It provides 16–20 year olds with structured, meaningful employment opportunities during the holiday period. Alongside practical work experience, the programme aims to build young people's confidence, communication skills, and awareness of their own strengths. By embedding these opportunities within a safe and supportive environment, Project Zero seeks to empower participants to take positive next steps in education, training, and employment.

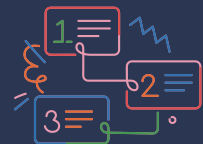


FUNDING



The program is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, Youth Futures Foundation, and DCMS. the Youth Endowment Fund, Youth Futures Foundation, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS).

THE PROGRAMME



The Summer Job Programme is structured to give young people both preparation and real-world experience. It begins with a preparation week, where participants receive training to get ready for their placements. This is followed by five weeks of paid work experience, giving them the chance to take on responsibilities across a range of roles. Throughout the programme, a dedicated youth worker provides ongoing support and guidance. The overall aim is to reduce youth violence by offering structured opportunities that help young people build skills, confidence, and brighter futures.



EVALUATION PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES



This evaluation examines how far the programme's structure achieved its aims. Specifically, it explores the experiences of participants in the 2025 cohort, assessing the impact on their skills, confidence, aspirations, and financial awareness. By connecting the programme's design to its outcomes, the evaluation highlights how access to meaningful work experiences can contribute to preventing youth violence and building stronger, fairer communities. It also identifies areas for improvement by capturing feedback from young people about what worked well and what could be developed further.

EVALUATION PROCESS



The monitoring, evaluation and learning team (MELT) recognised that qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method of data collection. The interview schedule design was informed by the questionnaires to determine the most appropriate questions. Young people were asked questions during weeks four to six to recount their experiences from the programme. A purposive sample was taken where then MELT handpicked participants based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question.

Evaluation findings

The evaluation was based on six in-depth interviews with young people who took part in the 2025 Summer Job Programme. The interviews were recorded, written up, and then carefully reviewed. Researchers used a thematic analysis approach this means looking across all the answers, grouping common themes (like confidence, financial planning, or relationships with staff), and highlighting both shared experiences and individual differences. Direct quotes from participants are included in the report to illustrate these themes in the young people's own words.

WHO TOOK PART?

N=6 interviews were conducted with young people from the programme aged between 16-18. There were 3 males and 3 females. School years ranged from Year 11 to Year 13, ensuring a mix of perspectives across age and experience. The six participants interviewed represented a range of ethnic backgrounds. Two identified as Black/Black British/Caribbean (Jamaican heritage), three as Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups (including English and Nigerian, and Jamaican and St Lucian), and one as Other ethnic group (Arab/Other) (Moroccan heritage).

"I STUDIED MATHS. PHYSICS, AND ECONOMICS AT A-LEVELS."
PARTICIPANT 1, MALE, 18

"I WENT TO COLLEGE TO DO A DIGITAL MEDIA AND ENGINEERING."
PARTICIPANT 2, MALE, 18

"I'LL BE GETTING MY GSCES RESULTS SOON. SO I'VE JUST SPENT THIS WHOLE YEAR LIKE PREPARING FOR MY GCSES."
PARTICIPANT 3, FEMALE, 16

"SO FOR THE PAST ACADEMIC YEAR, I'VE BEEN WORKING TOWARDS COMPLETING MY GCSES."
PARTICIPANT 4, MALE, 16

"I RECENTLY JUST COMPLETED YEAR 11."
PARTICIPANT 5, FEMALE, 16

"THIS LAST ACADEMIC YEAR, I'VE BEEN DOING A-LEVELS, SO I JUST FINISHED YEAR 13. I GOT MY A-LEVEL RESULTS AND I'M GOING TO UNI IN SEPTEMBER."
PARTICIPANT 6, FEMALE, 18

The Summer Job Programme ran for five weeks, with participants able to attend up to 17 days in total. Attendance records show that the young people interviewed engaged strongly with the programme, with most attending the vast majority of available days.
(See Table 1).

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT ATTENDANCE OF THE SUMMER JOB PROGRAMME

Participant	Days attended in July	Days attended in August	Total (% attendance)
Participant 1	7	9	16 (94%)
Participant 2	7	10	17 (100%)
Participant 3	5	11	16 (94%)
Participant 4	7	7	14 (82%)
Participant 5	5	12	17 (100%)
Participant 6	7	8	15 (88%)

Across the group, attendance rates ranged from 82% to full attendance, reflecting a high level of commitment and consistency. This level of engagement demonstrates that young people not only valued the opportunity but also sustained their participation throughout the summer, which is a positive indicator of the programme's appeal.

MOTIVATION FOR PARTICIPATION

The young people joined the Summer Job Programme with Project Zero for a number of reasons. While the prospect of gaining new experiences and part-time employment was important, the strongest driver was the pre-existing relationships with Project Zero staff particularly the Operational Manager, and the sense of belonging developed through earlier involvement with Project Zero. Several participants highlighted how the programme offered a welcoming and supportive environment that encouraged them to return year after year. Others were motivated by the opportunity to contribute to their community, connect with children, and gain experience that could support their longer-term career aspirations.

"IT WAS JUST SOMETHING TO DEAL WITH THE SUMMER, WHILST AT THE SAME TIME, LETTING ME JUST GET SOME [NEW] EXPERIENCES."

PARTICIPANT 1, MALE, 18

"THE PEOPLE AT PROJECT ZERO, THEY'RE REALLY NICE. I ENJOY COMING HERE, AND IT'S GIVEN ME A LOT OF OPPORTUNITIES THAT I MIGHT NOT HAVE HAD OTHERWISE."

PARTICIPANT 3, FEMALE, 16

"I JUST REALLY, REALLY ENJOYED IT. I FEEL LIKE I CONNECTED WITH A LOT OF THE KIDS. I CONNECTED WITH A LOT OF THE WORKERS THAT WERE THERE AND IT JUST IT WAS A VERY LIKE WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT."

PARTICIPANT 4, MALE, 16



HOPE AND EXPECTATIONS

When asked what they hoped to gain from the programme, young people highlighted both personal development and practical benefits. Confidence and improved social skills were mentioned as key outcomes. Several participants also emphasised the value of having paid employment. Together, these perspectives show that the programme met both immediate needs such as income and experience, and longer-term goals, including personal growth, employability, and community connection.

"I FEEL WE ALL JUST WANT TO GET PAID. IT DOES PUT YOU IN A GOOD POSITION THAT YOU HAVE A JOB LINED UP WHEN A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING TO GET JOBS RIGHT BEFORE UNI AS WELL."

PARTICIPANT 6, FEMALE, 18

ROLES ON THE SUMMER JOB PROGRAMME

The young people described contributing to a variety of roles within Project Zero during the summer, highlighting the breadth of responsibility and exposure they experienced. These roles include administration, security, early engagement with younger children, support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and catering. Administrative duties helped build organisational and digital skills, while security and safeguarding roles developed responsibility and awareness of health and safety. Early engagement and SEND support encouraged patience, empathy, and inclusive practice, while catering responsibilities fostered teamwork, communication, and customer service skills. Through these roles, they gained valuable experience of both frontline delivery and operational support.

"I'M MOSTLY JUST WORK AROUND, DO SURVEILLANCE, MAKE SURE THAT EVERYTHING IS [FOLLOWING GOOD] HEALTH AND SAFETY."

PARTICIPANT 2, MALE, 18

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

The young people consistently highlighted the positive aspects of their summer job experience, particularly the relationships they built with staff and children, opportunities to take responsibility, and the variety of activities they were able to support. Training and enrichment sessions, such as safeguarding workshops, trips, and creative sessions like Vibes and Essence, also stood out as memorable. These elements gave participants a sense of purpose and responsibility, as well as enjoyment in contributing to the programme's community atmosphere.

"I THINK I ENJOY HAVING LIKE THE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY. ALSO JUST LIKE GETTING TO KNOW ALL OF THE CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY BEING ON REGISTRATION, I LITERALLY KNOW EVERYONE'S NAMES. AND IT IS NICE, INTERACTING WITH THE KIDS AS WELL. IT'S LIKE, QUITE A REWARDING JOB."

PARTICIPANT 6, FEMALE, 18

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

When asked to describe moments that stood out during the programme, participants reflected on experiences that combined social connection, responsibility, and shared activities. Several highlighted the importance of building relationships, recalling how the group bonded through training, meetings, and time spent together. Others pointed to memorable activities, such as park outings, barbecues, games, and the fashion show, which created enjoyable and inclusive moments with children and peers. A few participants reflected on responsibility, with one describing a challenging safeguarding incident and the accountability that came with their role. Overall, standout moments were shaped by both positive group cohesion and the opportunities to contribute meaningfully to activities and responsibilities, leaving participants with a sense of pride, connection, and achievement.

"WHEN WE FIRST MET, LIKE THE WHOLE GROUP AS A WHOLE, BECAUSE I THINK EVERYONE KIND OF JUST GETS ALONG WITH EACH OTHER."

PARTICIPANT 1, MALE, 18

CHALLENGES AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

When reflecting on challenges within the programme, generally participants reported few difficulties and described their experience as smooth and manageable on. Several noted that they felt well-prepared to handle issues that arose. It was highlighted that working with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) could sometimes feel challenging, particularly when they were unsure how to respond, however support was received from core staff in these moments. Overall, the findings suggest that while participants encountered some situational challenges, they largely saw these as opportunities for growth, supported by staff guidance and teamwork.

"I FEEL LIKE THAT'S JUST BEEN DEALT WITH QUITE SMOOTHLY. THERE'S NOT BEEN ANY SORT OF ISSUES WITH ANY OF THAT SO FAR. SO IT'S BEEN QUITE AN EASY, EASY JOURNEY."

PARTICIPANT 4, MALE, 16

"... KNOWING HOW TO DEAL WITH CERTAIN SITUATIONS, LIKE, FOR EXAMPLE, IF THERE'S A CHILD, ESPECIALLY LIKE WITH CERTAIN NEEDS, LIKE, FOR EXAMPLE, A SEND CHILD, ..I THINK IT WAS A BIT CHALLENGING FOR ME TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO. LIKE, I HAD TO LIKE TURN TO A CORE MEMBER OF STAFF SO YEAH, THAT WAS ONE KIND OF CHALLENGE."

PARTICIPANT 5, FEMALE, 16

GROWTH THROUGH THE PROGRAMME

Young people reported becoming more confident, responsible, and mature through the Summer Job Programme. They highlighted improvements in communication, leadership, and teamwork, as well as the importance of building connections for future opportunities. The programme also helped them form new friendships and gain a clearer outlook on working life.

"I'VE NOW REALISED THAT THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTIONS WITH NOT JUST THE KIDS, BUT WITH OTHER PEOPLE THAT CAN GET YOU TO PLACES..."

PARTICIPANT 4, MALE, 16

"THE MORE YOU DO SOMETHING, THE BETTER YOU GET. SO THE MORE THAT I'VE WORKED, THE MORE VIGILANT I'VE BECOME, THE MORE ABLE I AM TO TALK TO THE LITTLE KIDS. ALL OF IT JUST COMPOUNDS TO YOU BEING A MOULDED WORKER IN A SENSE. I WOULDN'T SAY THAT I'VE CHANGED BUT I'VE GROWN"

PARTICIPANT 2, MALE, 18

PERSONAL GROWTH AND SELF- DISCOVERY

When asked whether they had learned anything new about themselves, participants reflected on a mix of personal growth, self-awareness, and work-related insights. Several highlighted gains in confidence. Another participant discovered they could be more assertive when required, which challenged their self-perception as non-confrontational. Some also mentioned smaller but meaningful personal discoveries, such as enjoying new activities like pool. Not all participants felt they had learned something new, but overall the responses suggest that the programme provided opportunities for reflection, growth, and recognition of personal strengths in a workplace setting.

**“GETTING UP LIKE EARLY IS NOT FOR THE WEAK...I
THINK ALSO I CAN BE LIKE QUITE ASSERTIVE, WHICH I
DIDN'T THINK I COULD REALLY BE BEFORE. LIKE, I
THOUGHT THAT I WAS QUITE A NON-
CONFRONTATIONAL PERSON, BUT I DISCOVERED THAT
IN CERTAIN MOMENTS, LIKE, THERE IS ACTUALLY A
NEED FOR THAT.”**

PARTICIPANT 6, FEMALE, 18

**“I'VE LEARNED TO BE MORE CONFIDENT
IN A WAY. YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO LIKE
INTERACT WITH CHILDREN YOU NEED TO
BE ABLE TO HAVE THAT CONFIDENCE
AND GO UP TO THEM AND SEE HOW
THEIR DAYS GOING.”**

PARTICIPANT 3, FEMALE, 16

**“I THINK THROUGH WORKING, I'VE
REALISED THAT I'M MORE OF A
COMMITTED PERSON THAN I
THOUGHT I WAS.”**

PARTICIPANT 4, MALE, 16



LEARNING IN PRACTICE

Participants were able to identify clear ways in which skills learned during the programme had been applied outside of Project Zero. Teamwork emerged as a strong theme, with participants noting that they had developed the ability to collaborate in larger groups, balance initiative with knowing when to seek support, and exercise leadership. Others reflected on becoming more mature and responsible, recognising how the programme had helped shape transferable skills they could leverage in future opportunities. Several participants linked their learning directly to education and career readiness, such as applying improved commitment and discipline to A-level studies or drawing confidence for job interviews and formal conversations. Communication was particularly valued, with young people explaining that they now felt less nervous in conversations and more able to assert themselves, even when engaging with adults and parents. Overall, the responses indicate that the programme not only provided immediate workplace experience but also instilled transferable skills such as teamwork, communication, confidence, responsibility, and independence that participants were already beginning to apply in other areas of their lives.

“TEAMWORK, IS KEY... YOU HAVE TO LEARN TO WHEN TO ACTUALLY ASK [FOR ADVICE] BECAUSE YOU CAN'T JUST DO THINGS BY YOURSELF.”

PARTICIPANT 1, MALE, 18

“IT JUST MAKES YOU MORE OF A MATURE PERSON 'CAUSE WHEN YOU START TO REALISE THAT, YOU KNOW, THE THINGS THAT YOU'RE DOING, IS MOULDING A SKILL SET, THEN YOU UNDERSTAND THAT THE SKILLS THAT YOU'RE MOULDING ALL TRANSFER TO SOMETHING ELSE... YOU CAN ALWAYS LEVERAGE THOSE SKILLS THAT YOU'VE USED TO ACHIEVE DIFFERENT THINGS.”

PARTICIPANT 2

“I THINK I'D COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE IN MY LIFE NOW MORE THAN I DID BEFORE I HAD THE JOB DEFINITELY. I'M NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK OUT ANYMORE.”

PARTICIPANT 6, FEMALE, 18



CAREER ASPIRATIONS

The Young people demonstrated a wide range of career aspirations, spanning finance, STEM, trades, social sciences, and creative pathways. While some participants expressed clear plans (e.g., accounting, plumbing, engineering, psychology), others were still uncertain, particularly around creative subjects and how to access chosen pathways. Despite this being a youth work-focused programme, none of the young people expressed interest in pursuing a career in the youth or community sector. This reflects both ambition and diversity of interest, alongside a continuing need for structured careers guidance, mentoring, and exposure to a wider range of career options.

“I'M TRYING TO DO ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE AT UNIVERSITY.”
PARTICIPANT 1, MALE, 18

“I PLAN TO DO A PLUMBING COURSE.”
PARTICIPANT 2, MALE, 18

“FOR COLLEGE, I'D LIKE TO DO SUBJECTS THAT ARE MORE IN THE CREATIVE SIDE, BUT I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHAT I'D LIKE TO DO AFTER COLLEGE PROBABLY MAYBE AN APPRENTICESHIP OR SOMETHING WHERE I CAN LIKE DO THINGS HAND ON.”
PARTICIPANT 3, FEMALE, 16

“POST A-LEVELS, CURRENTLY, I'VE JUST BEEN SORT OF PEERING OVER DIFFERENT DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS TO DO FINANCE.”
PARTICIPANT 4, MALE, 16

“I WANT TO GO INTO ENGINEERING FIELDS LIKE, NUCLEAR PHYSICS.”
PARTICIPANT 5, FEMALE, 16

“I'M GOING TO DO PSYCHOLOGY WITH CRIMINOLOGY [AT UNIVERSITY].”
PARTICIPANT 6, FEMALE, 18



KEY DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

When asked which parts of the programme made the biggest difference, participants highlighted three main areas: building connections, engaging directly with children and families, and training. Several described how engaging with peers from different backgrounds broadened their perspectives and helped them form meaningful friendships. Others emphasised the value of working with children greeting them daily, creating positive experiences, and building trust with both the young people and their parents. This not only gave participants a sense of responsibility but also helped them understand the wider role Project Zero plays in the community. Finally, training was described as highly impactful, particularly sessions with a clinical psychologist that deepened participants' awareness of how children's moods and wellbeing can shift throughout the day. Learning how to respond appropriately in these scenarios helped participants feel better equipped to support others in practice. Together, these reflections suggest that the combination of peer relationships, community engagement, and structured training created a powerful developmental experience for the young people involved.

"I FEEL LIKE IT WOULD BE SORT OF JUST CONNECTING WITH THE KIDS... TO SEE THAT SMILE ON THEIR FACE WHEN THEY COME IN AND WHEN THEY'RE PLAYING, I THINK THAT BRINGS THE MOST IMPACT ON ME."

PARTICIPANT 4, MALE, 16

"I THINK MAYBE THE TRAINING, BECAUSE IT MADE ME REALISE LIKE HOW MUCH TIME AND EFFORT, LIKE, ESPECIALLY PRODUCT ZERO TAKES TO LIKE HELP THE YOUNG PEOPLE DEAL WITH SITUATIONS THAT YOUNG PEOPLE MIGHT BE FACING, WHETHER IT'S INSIDE OR OUTSIDE PROJECT ZERO."

PARTICIPANT 5, FEMALE, 16

SUPPORTIVE STAFF AND TEAM CULTURE

Participants emphasised that the support they received from staff and peers was central to their positive experience on the programme. For many, this sense of teamwork and family-like atmosphere helped them feel more confident and capable in their roles.

"I think just like all of the staff here, like in general, everyone is kind of like a family. So it is good that like, no matter what problem you have, you can pretty much go to anyone."

Participant 6, Female, 18

BUILDING ON SKILLS BEYOND THE PROGRAMME

A key theme emerging from the interviews was that young people saw the programme not as a one-off experience, but as a foundation for lifelong growth. They emphasised the importance of self-reflection, practising skills regularly, and applying what they had learned to both education and personal life. For many, the programme gave them the confidence to step outside their comfort zones and recognise that their skills could continue to develop with ongoing effort.

“Self-evaluation is very key to growing because you need to know exactly what you are, who you are, what skills you have, and where you need to grow.”

Participant 2, Male, 18

“You can take those skills into your life to help build on them, no matter where you go... all the skills you need to make friends here and all the activities you can apply to your everyday life.”

Participant 4, Male, 16

“Taking myself out my comfort zone... hopefully this will be a good foundation to learn more.”

Participant 5, Female, 16



YOUNG PEOPLE'S SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAMME

Participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with the programme, with very few suggesting changes. The majority felt that the structure, activities, and delivery were already effective and well organised. The only recurring feedback related to improving the Tempo online platform for logging staff hours, which some found confusing. Overall, young people's responses reflect a strong endorsement of the programme's design and leadership.

“Tempo [the online platform for staff pay] was very confusing at sometimes. I know it's just a timesheet. But I feel like the whole concept of the 25 hours and adding up, got a bit confusing.”

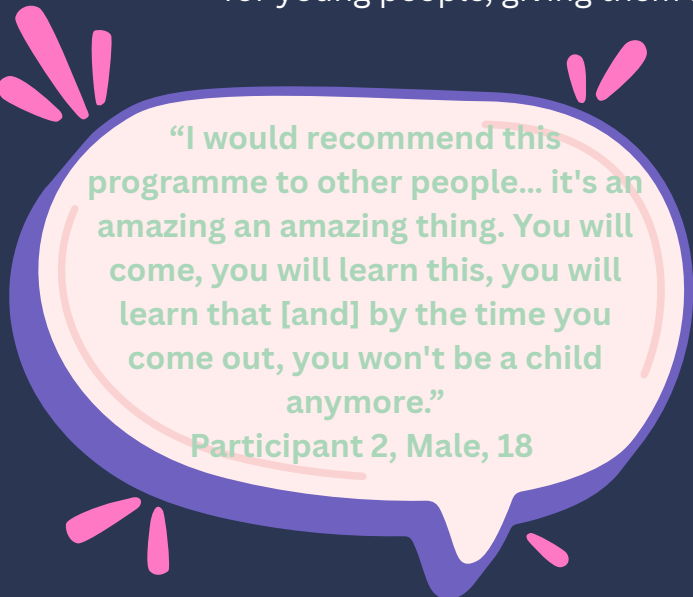
Participant 1, Male, 18

“Honestly, I don't think I would change anything. I think it's pretty perfect as it is. All of the children get good experiences.”

Participant 6, Female, 18

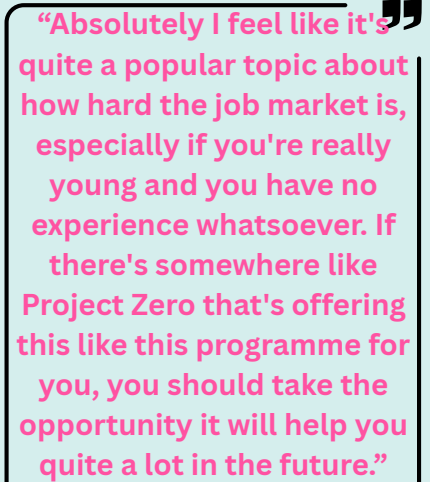
RECOMMENDATIONS TO PEERS

All participants said they would recommend the programme to other young people. The reasons reflected both personal development (gaining confidence, work skills, and responsibility) and social benefits (building friendships, connections, and exposure to new opportunities). Several highlighted that Project Zero provided a rare early job opportunity for young people, giving them a valuable first step in their career journey.



"I would recommend this programme to other people... it's an amazing an amazing thing. You will come, you will learn this, you will learn that [and] by the time you come out, you won't be a child anymore."

Participant 2, Male, 18

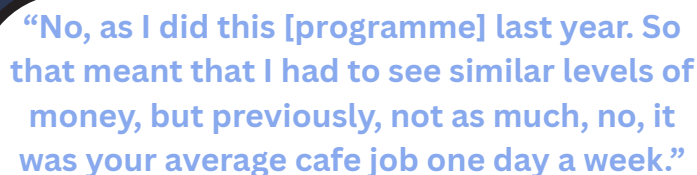


"Absolutely I feel like it's quite a popular topic about how hard the job market is, especially if you're really young and you have no experience whatsoever. If there's somewhere like Project Zero that's offering this like this programme for you, you should take the opportunity it will help you quite a lot in the future."

Participant 5, Female, 16

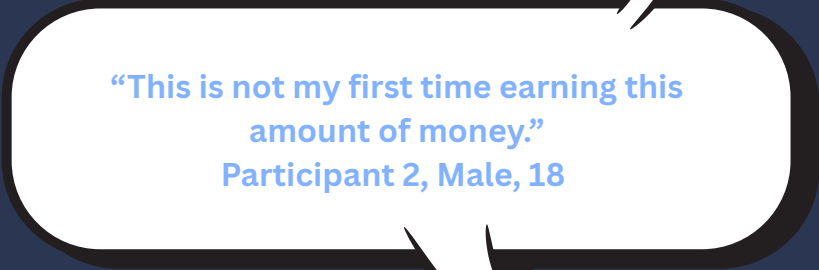
FROM FIRST JOBS TO PROJECT ZERO

For most participants, this was not their first time earning money, as they had either taken part in a previous Project Zero summer programme or had other part-time jobs. This means that while the financial experience was valuable, the programme was not their first introduction to paid work.



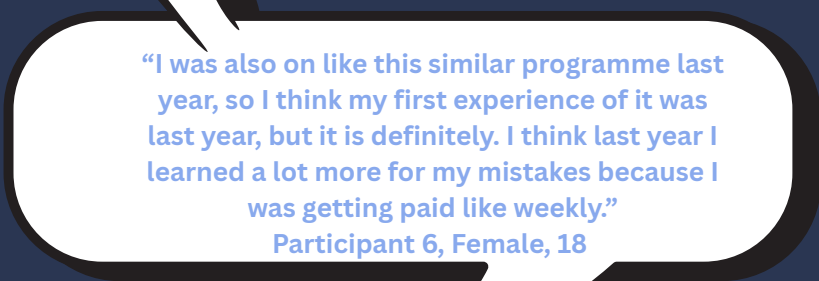
"No, as I did this [programme] last year. So that meant that I had to see similar levels of money, but previously, not as much, no, it was your average cafe job one day a week."

Participant 1, Male, 18



"This is not my first time earning this amount of money."

Participant 2, Male, 18



"I was also on like this similar programme last year, so I think my first experience of it was last year, but it is definitely. I think last year I learned a lot more for my mistakes because I was getting paid like weekly."

Participant 6, Female, 18

FINANCIAL PLANNING

Participants described a strong tendency to use their earnings in purposeful and future-focused ways. Several young people planned to save for higher education costs, with university fees and living expenses being key priorities. Others highlighted investing in personal development by funding qualifications such as driving lessons, SIA and construction badges, or vocational training like plumbing courses investments that they saw as directly linked to future employability. Saving for the long term was a recurring theme, with some participants mentioning ISAs, junior savings accounts, or even investments in stocks and gold as ways to secure their financial futures. While a small amount of spending on leisure or personal items was acknowledged, the overwhelming emphasis was on saving and using money responsibly, reflecting a developing sense of financial maturity and awareness of money as a scarce and valuable resource.

For some participants, this was their first experience of earning a significant amount of money, while for others it was a continuation of previous employment or similar programmes. A few had part-time jobs, such as café work, that provided smaller, more regular income, but described this programme as offering a larger sum at once. Those returning from last year's programme reflected on how their money management had changed, with one noting they had learned from past mistakes of spending their wages quickly and were now approaching saving more deliberately. This mix of first-time and repeat earners illustrates both the novelty of financial independence for younger participants and the opportunity for returning participants to build on past experiences, suggesting the programme supports progression in financial learning over time.

“

“I'm saving so I can start my driver's license, my SIA badge, and my construction Badge. [Once] I get all of those , I might save up a little bit more so that I could do a plumbing course after I finish my first two courses at college. Once I get all of them qualifications, there's no way I can't have a job. at any point in time. I could always find a job anywhere.”

Participant 2, Male, 18

“I'm opening up a junior ISA trying to find different savings accounts to sort of split up the money, because I'm looking into sort of investing in stocks of gold and sort of stuff like that just to sort of stack my money up for when I need it most.”

Participant 4, Male, 16

“I'm going to uni in September, so I just trying to save as much of it as I can. I want to put my money in an ISA, the moment the end of August comes, I'll probably put all of that money in my ISA.”

Participant 6, Female, 18

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FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Participants described being at very different stages in their financial wellbeing journeys. Some expressed a growing awareness of savings, ISAs, and interest rates, reflecting early efforts to build financial literacy. Across the group, saving was a recurring theme, with participants describing a cautious approach to spending and an understanding of the need to build financial security, even if their knowledge and engagement varied significantly.

**“I say I’m halfway there. I have an idea around savings, interest rates, and whatnot, but I need to know more, honestly. There’s always more to the finances
But I’ve started to get more through up on isas and stuff like that, especially with my own money.”**

Participant 1, Male, 18

“I’ve indulged in all of that stuff, man. Right now, I’m up on stocks... I’m up on bonds as well.”

Participant 2, Male, 18

“I know my parents are into like stocks and shares and all about I’m not really into that stuff.”

Participant 6, Female, 18



LASTING IMPACT

Participants strongly believed that the skills and knowledge gained through the Summer Job Programme would continue to benefit them long after it ended. They highlighted teamwork, resilience, and the ability to stay positive in challenging situations as transferable skills that apply to many areas of life.

“100%. I FEEL LIKE THIS WILL PROBABLY BE SOMETHING I CARRY THROUGH OUR LIFE, JUST TEAMWORK, DIFFERENT ASPECTS, AND KNOWING HOW TO NOT LET THINGS GET TO YOU SOMETIMES, AND ALSO JUST TAKE EVERYTHING IN A POSITIVE WAY OF JUST KEEPING FORWARD.”

PARTICIPANT 1, MALE, 18

“I THINK MAYBE PRESENTING MYSELF, ESPECIALLY AS A WOMEN IN STEM BECAUSE IT'S SOMETHING THAT KIND OF GETS DOWNPLAYED A LOT, BUT YOU HAVE TO LIKE KIND OF CONVINCE PEOPLE OF YOURSELF OR LIKE PRESENT YOURSELF TO OTHERS.”

PARTICIPANT 5, FEMALE, 16

Similarly, when asked how long they believed the benefits of the programme would last, participants overwhelmingly expressed that the skills and confidence gained were lifelong. Several noted that attributes such as communication, commitment, and maturity are essential across education, employment, and life more broadly. Overall, the young people saw the impact of the programme not as temporary, but as shaping traits they expect to draw on well into adulthood.

“to the day I die, I'll continue to grow and be better, more confident, my mature, more capable, in a sense... I'm not the same person as I was when I came in.”

Participant 2, Male, 18

“I want to carry those traits and those skills that I've learned throughout my life, like after education, throughout work and sort of sort of like go on to like make the best out of myself.”

Participant 4, Male, 16

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH WALTHAM FOREST PRIORITIES

The Project Zero Summer Job and Work Experience Programme directly supports the London Borough of Waltham Forest's vision for children, young people, and communities. By offering structured, paid placements, the programme equips young people with confidence, skills, and real-world experience that match borough-wide ambitions.

Discussion: What the findings mean

The evaluation demonstrates that the Summer Job Programme supports the borough's aim of preventing youth violence by providing structured, purposeful alternatives to risky or unstructured activity. Young people repeatedly described how the programme gave them responsibility, routine, and a sense of belonging. Instead of being idle during the summer (a time when youth violence risks can increase), participants were engaged in paid, supervised work placements that developed their employability and life skills.

Building skills and confidence was a consistent theme across interviews.

Participants reported gains in teamwork, communication, leadership, and resilience. Many highlighted that they had become more confident interacting with both children and adults, and more capable of handling challenges. These are protective factors that reduce the likelihood of young people being drawn into violent or antisocial behaviour, while increasing their ability to navigate future opportunities.

The programme also fostered positive relationships with staff, peers, children, and parents. These trusting relationships offered role models, guidance, and a supportive "family-like" environment, which participants described as central to their growth. For young people who may otherwise lack positive networks, this sense of belonging helps counter isolation, frustration, or peer pressure linked to violence.

A consistent theme across the interviews was young people's growing financial awareness and responsibility. Several participants described saving for university, professional qualifications, or opening ISAs, while others reflected on lessons learned from previous earning experiences, such as managing spending more carefully. Importantly, these developments were largely self-driven; participants did not attribute their financial habits to Project Zero, but rather to personal interest, family influence, or prior work experiences. This suggests that while the programme offered valuable paid employment, it did not directly shape young people's financial journeys. Instead, participants brought their own approaches to managing money, highlighting an opportunity for Project Zero to embed financial wellbeing education more deliberately in future programmes.

Evidence indicates that structured summer employment programmes can lead to reductions in violent behaviour by limiting unstructured time, increasing routine, and strengthening young people's sense of purpose. Research also highlights that paid work combined with supervision and mentoring, rather than employment alone, is more likely to support positive identity formation and behavioural change. The inclusion of a preparation phase reflects wider findings that young people, particularly those from Black and minoritised communities, benefit from employment support that is responsive to their lived experiences and financial realities, helping to build confidence and workplace readiness. In addition, evidence from community-based interventions demonstrates the importance of trusted relationships and culturally grounded support in fostering feelings of safety, belonging, and sustained engagement.

Discussion: What the findings mean

THE ROLE OF METACOGNITION IN SUSTAINING GROWTH

One of the most significant and also unintended outcomes of the programme was the way young people reflected on their own development. This self-awareness described in educational research as metacognition and goes beyond learning new skills. It involves recognising how those skills are gained, identifying areas for improvement, and applying lessons to future contexts. The fact that participants could articulate changes in their confidence, commitment, and outlook suggests that the programme not only built immediate employability skills but also nurtured reflective habits that will support lifelong learning.

CONSISTENT ENGAGEMENT STRENGTHENS PREVENTIVE IMPACT

Attendance records reinforce the qualitative findings on confidence, skill-building and positive peer relationships. Across the five-week programme, young people could attend up to 17 days; the six interviewees averaged 16 days of attendance, with individual rates ranging from 82 % to 100 %. This sustained daily participation meant that participants spent much of the summer in a structured, supervised environment at precisely the time when unstructured hours can increase exposure to anti-social behaviour or violence. By providing meaningful work, regular income and a supportive team culture, the programme offered an attractive alternative to risky settings and created space for personal growth.

High attendance therefore not only reflects the programme's appeal and accessibility but also strengthens its contribution to violence prevention, aligning directly with Project Zero's aim of helping young people build skills, confidence and brighter futures.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the Summer Job Programme reduces risk factors for youth violence (idle time, lack of purpose, limited confidence) and strengthens protective factors (skills, responsibility, relationships, financial planning, and aspiration). While the programme cannot eliminate all structural drivers of youth violence, it offers a meaningful, structured opportunity that helps young people redirect their energy towards positive personal and professional growth.



Key learning

Gaps and opportunities

- Careers aspirations were diverse (finance, STEM, trades, psychology, creative), and the young people would benefit from layering in light-touch careers guidance/mentoring, or employer talks which could convert confidence into clearer next steps.
- SEND confidence. A few participants felt unsure responding to complex SEND needs. Brief, scenario-based refreshers during the programme (e.g., 10-minute huddles) could raise confidence without adding heavy training load.
- Financial capability (nudges, not lectures). Participants' financial behaviours were largely self-driven (saving for ISAs, qualifications, uni). A short "money choices" micro-session (e.g., budgeting for first paycheck, weekly vs lump-sum pay) could reinforce good habits, especially for first-time earners.
- Sector awareness. None expressed interest in youth/community work careers. A one-off "behind the scenes" careers spotlight (youth work, community arts, sport development, safeguarding, charity ops) could broaden horizons without steering choices.



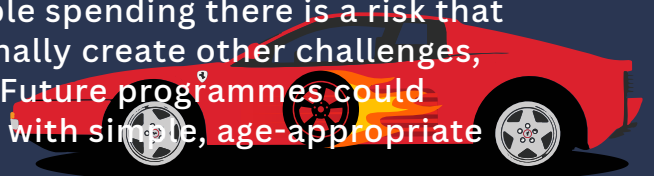
What worked particularly well

- Staff culture as a protective factor. Young people repeatedly described a family-like team where help was easy to access. This culture likely underpins the high satisfaction and the willingness to return.
- Authentic responsibility. Roles with visible consequences (e.g., registration accuracy, safeguarding awareness, running the café) appeared to drive maturity and pride.
- Variety and enrichment. Trips and creative sessions (e.g., Vibes & Essence, Formula E) added motivation and widened the definition of success beyond sport alone.



Implementation learnings

- Simple systems matter. The only recurring improvement area was the Tempo hours-logging platform. A short onboarding guide (one-pager with screenshots) or a 5-minute desk-side walk-through could resolve confusion quickly.
- If you give a Ferrari to a driver, show them how to brake. Providing young people with significant earnings for the first time is like handing someone a powerful car without fitting the brakes. Without basic financial tools such as guidance on budgeting, saving and responsible spending there is a risk that increased access to money could unintentionally create other challenges, from overspending to financial exploitation. Future programmes could strengthen their impact by pairing paid work with simple, age-appropriate financial education.





Conclusion: So what's the bottom line?

Project Zero's Summer Job Programme is doing what it set out to do: it gives young people real responsibility in a safe, trusted setting, builds confidence and communication, and helps them carry those skills into school, work and life. With small, targeted tweaks careers navigation, leadership opportunities, a SEND confidence top-up, and a clearer hours-logging guide, the programme can deepen impact and make the pathway from belonging to engagement to growth to progression even stronger.

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Appendix

SUMMER JOB PROGRAMME

Running from July to August 2025, The Summer Jobs Programme aims to combat the barriers that many young people face in gaining employment by fostering career development, personal growth, and positive engagement. It is specifically designed to reduce the risk of youth violence by providing structured opportunities that empower young people and build brighter futures. The programme will run in North East, Yorkshire, South Wales, Greater Manchester, West Midlands and London.

The programme includes a one-week pre-employment training for the young people, followed by a five-week paid work placement. By taking part, employers will not only help to transform lives but also:

- Diversify their workforce by connecting with young talent.
- Give their team a chance to develop their leadership and mentoring skills.
- Demonstrate their organisation's commitment to social impact.
- Access additional staff resource for the summer
- Here's the ask from employers:
- Provide a five-week work placement (25 hours/week).
- Assign a supervisor to support the young person.
- Attend a full-day, in-person training session in June to set everyone up for success.
- Make a reasonable financial contribution to support the programme's costs.
- Employers will have the full support of a dedicated youth worker (and UK Youth) throughout the programme, and I can promise it's a meaningful way to make a positive difference in your community.

The UK Youth Summer Jobs Programme, in partnership with the Youth Endowment Fund, Youth Futures Foundation, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), is a paid work experience initiative designed to reduce youth violence and improve future engagement in education, training, and work. The program, which is evaluated by IFF Research, provides vulnerable young people with six weeks of paid work experience, including a preparation week and ongoing support from a youth worker. Here's a more detailed breakdown:

- **Partners:** It's a collaboration between UK Youth, the Youth Endowment Fund, Youth Futures Foundation, DCMS, and IFF Research.
- **Target Group:** It primarily targets vulnerable young people aged 16-20, particularly those at risk of violence.