



GROWING GREAT IDEAS REPORT: EXPANDING THE AGENCY NETWORK



A NATIONAL COMMUNITY LOTTERY FUND PROJECT



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INTRODUCTION

The last two and a half years have been an exciting time of growth for The Agency. The programme expanded from running in two locations to running in six- Cardiff, Belfast, Manchester and three areas of London.

Working on a partnerships model, the core Agency team- Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), Contact, and People's Palace Projects (PPP) expanded their collaborative way of working to include new locations, further refining the methodology first developed in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro by Marcus Faustini, now the Minister of Culture for the city, in 2011.

Throughout these past few years, the team has learned and grown in new ways, supporting 184 young people from underserved communities to realise their ideas for change and facilitating their development of key life and professional skills that will help them to be successful in continuing to deliver their projects or in other employment or projects they deliver in the future. We worked on building a stronger network of likeminded organisations who work towards creative social change in different yet joined up ways.

This time was not without its challenges, the biggest of which was brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 which greatly affected how young people across the UK were able to deliver their projects. Even that challenge brought incredible opportunities for learning and new insights into the ways that the programme can continue to grow and develop for years to come.

The following outlines some of these triumphs and struggles in more detail emphasising the voices of young people, facilitators and those leading its development. The first section introduces the programme and gives a bit more information about the programme's history and ambitions. The second section outlines The Agency's response to Covid-19, a key challenge of the past year of delivery. The third section looks deeper into our impact taking into account taking the projects online and how that has affected the way that we work. The last section is a glimpse to the future of the Agency, with recommendations and future plans of our direction of travel.

Even though we had to change our projects because of Covid and The Agency was really impacted, I think The Agency still did accomplish what it needed to which was to have a social impact on the following generations. Our project is going to go on but even if our project stops, it impacted me to make that change, and The Agency accomplished that goal of making others desire to make a change too.

-Manchester Agent



KEY OUTPUTS

Total number of Agents- Cycle 1	159
Total number of Agents- Cycle 2	49
Extension grant	25
Total funded projects	26
Total number of people engaged	1,785

KEY FINDINGS

1. Creative projects can fill a space where other provisions fail
2. Young people are the best people to lead change in their communities
3. Creative projects foster relationships with young people that become critical for pastoral care during a time of crisis

RESEARCH REPORT METHODOLOGY

This report was based on online focus groups and interviews with Agency facilitators, project managers and young people from all four locations- Manchester, London, Cardiff and Belfast. The data for this past year was collected via focus groups on Zoom or phone, using semi-structured interview questions which means that there is a set of questions, but the interview is opened to be partially guided by the interviewees. The previous year, prior to the pandemic, face-to-face interviews were held, along with some creative methodologies for young people to map their Agency journeys. The epistemological approach was from a social constructivist, feminist perspective, attempting to break down barriers to marginalised groups to take ownership of their own value and experience (Narayan, 1989).

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed, forming the basis of the analysis. Based on the sensitivity of the interview data, especially as young people describe impacts on their mental health, the identity of those interviewed remains anonymous throughout, with their location is the sole identifier.



The methodology of co-creation is the truest I've ever seen with The Agency. Most times when people say they are going to co-create with young people, they really just mean being collaborative. The young people genuinely are given Agency to do what they want to do with a supportive network around them. There's not a lot of opportunities like that around here when it comes to young people. It really values the voice and ideas of young people, forging the skills to lead on their own things.

-Cardiff facilitator



WHAT IS THE AGENCY?

The Agency is a creative entrepreneurship programme enabling young people aged 15 to 25 from some of the most deprived areas in the UK to create social change projects based on the needs they identify in their own communities. The programme began in 2013 in the UK through a partnership between Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), Contact and People's Palace Projects (PPP).

Since the pilot year in 2013, it has had a significant impact not only on the young people who have taken part but also the organisations and communities that enable them to realise their ideas. We aim to be truly representative of the local area, working with young people who are driven and ambitious with lots of ideas, as well as those who may not think they have anything to contribute to their local area, in order to drive social innovation from the ground up.

The Agency is not only a tool for individual empowerment and social mobility but has the potential to provide an emancipatory education to drive social innovation and solve systemic social problems. The programme does this through constructing a safe space for young people to think critically about the world and their place in it while devising ways they can turn their ideas and dreams for change into a reality.

WHAT SETS THE AGENCY APART?

1. The Agency methodology **puts young people from some of the most deprived areas of the UK at the centre of social change**, using an asset-based approach to achieve **sustainable, local change** through young peoples' life experience, community resources, culture and passion.
2. The Agency supports young people on an individual level to **improve their opportunities** but also creates a collective force for systematic change, **mobilising young people around social issues** they care about.
3. The Agency **changes the way cultural and community organisations work with young people** by adopting more inclusive, co-created, collaborative working practices across their organisations.
4. The Agency uses **creativity as its key currency** to unlock innovation, helping young people to **achieve their potential** and future success in education, employment and enterprise.
5. The Agency is a **tool to create robust networks** within a locality where young people, cultural organisations and communities work together around shared goals and values.





AGENCY TIMELINE

CYCLE 1: CYCLE OF STIMULUS

The first, 12-week cycle uses a theatre-based, creative methodology to help young people develop their ideas starting from their desire for change in their local areas. The aim of this cycle is for Agents to take an idea based on a need they identify in their community; articulate it; defend it; and find support for it through different networks, including:

- **INNOVATIVE IDEA GENERATION** - Developing ideas and expanding their notions of what's possible through creative workshops
- **SOCIAL IMPACT**- Each project needs to highlight and address a specified need identified by young people in their communities
- **RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION** with communities - every project needs to consult with communities and obtain 50 signatures before it is pitched for funding from The Panel.
- **NETWORKING** - Identifying and opening up local networks, using creativity to build networking skills
- **DEVELOPING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET**- key to success in resourcefulness running their own projects but also in future careers and education.

Agents receive a stipend for taking part which helps to counterbalance hidden privileges of being able to take part in unpaid work, helps with travel and food, and provides disposable income for them to spend on themselves and their projects.

At the end of this cycle, young people pitch their ideas to a panel of industry experts who decide upon three projects that will move onto Cycle 2, receiving £2,000 of seed funding and an additional 16 weeks of support. Agents who are not awarded funding for their projects are encouraged to join other successful projects to stay engaged.

CYCLE 2: THE INCUBATOR

The aim of the 16-week Cycle 2 is to teach practical project management, planning and business skills alongside bespoke support with an individual producer who guides the Agents in building their projects and piloting them in the local area. It focuses on:

COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY SUPPORT through community partnerships, 1-on-1 mentorship and professional networking meetings

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT- practical skills in resource building, developing networks and being creative in approaching them

SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT- self-confidence, self-efficacy, perseverance, motivation, creativity and resilience: just a few of the skills necessary to deliver projects. Some of the specific skills sessions include:

- o Business planning and scaling
- o Branding and marketing
- o Budget spend and best practice
- o Evaluation and impact
- o Facilitation

BECOMING LEADERS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES - working with other young people, partners and local groups to implement their ideas

MAKING PROJECTS COME TO LIFE - becoming skilled producers and project managers to make their projects happen

This is the cycle where the agents turn their ideas into projects, laying the foundation for a potential long-term intervention implemented within the community. Agents develop their ideas into social enterprises with the support of lead organisations, industry experts, local people and businesses. Through piloting their projects, by the end of this phase agents also learn to evaluate their projects through gathering integral feedback that then impacts the future development of their projects.

Young people who complete Cycle 2 have the continued support of organisations if they choose to continue running their projects beyond the specified length of the programme.

The Agency supported my growth and allowed me insight into avenues of other support systems too. It's given me a can-do attitude generally with artistic projects knowing that I can make my ideas happen.

-London Agent

In college age, people like to go out and be with their friends, but a lot of school has been restricted because of Covid. When we did go to school, if anyone around where you were sitting had the virus, you had to self-isolate and I think that really affects how you learn. If you don't learn then tough. In college you can't just go back and learn again. I think education levels will go even lower.

-Manchester Agent

SECTION 2: THE NEED

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK has been significant on people of all ages, greatly impacting society's physical, mental and emotional health. While young people have not been affected as much physically by the impact of the pandemic, the lockdowns imposed by the government have had a severe impact on young people's mental health. Preliminary data shows that out of any age group, young people are more likely to report the negative impact of the pandemic on their mental health (ONS, 2020). While mental health has worsened by 8.1% for the general population in the UK, it has been significantly worse for young adults 16-24 (Banks and Xu, 2020). As a result, mental health services have been stretched and oversubscribed, with an estimate of 1 in 4 young people not able to get the support they need (Mind, 2020).

Employment opportunities have also been severely affected for the general population but affecting younger populations more significantly. One in three young people aged 18-24 lost their job or were furloughed as a result of the lockdowns, as compared to one in six for the general population. Young people from minority ethnic groups already have significant labour market disadvantage and are less likely to be in employment compared to others in their age group (Resolution Foundation, 2020). Employment not only positively impacts socio-economic status but also has a positive effect on self-esteem, sense of purpose and sense of stability, with unemployed young people twice as likely to suffer from mental health issues (UCL, 2017).

In addition, 60% of young people are concerned that the lockdowns have negatively affected their relationships with their peers and others in their community (ONS, 2020). With the age of 12-24 a crucial time frame for the development of socio-emotional skills that will help them in all areas of their lives, the result of the pandemic could also have long-term effects on how these skills are developed and maintained.

The impact of the lockdowns on the young people taking part in the Agency align with this national research, further outlined in the following section. The Agency teams were acutely aware of these issues and proactively worked to counteract some of these negatives effects through the way they engaged with and supported young people during this time, further outlined in Section 3.

2.2 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE TERRITORY

The pandemic had a substantial and disproportionate impact on young people in the territories where the Agency took place. Without school and friends, they felt isolated and worried for the safety of family. Many are key workers from BAME backgrounds, hardest hit by Coronavirus. Some are grieving lost loved ones. The young people fed back that sometimes their Agency sessions were the only reason they had to get out of bed that day. Many felt disconnected from each other, from the organisations who were running the sessions and from their communities. Motivation was a challenge generally as many young people reported that digital engagement did not work well for them. It was much easier for them to check out and not engage in sessions or to not follow up for missing sessions.

Though many were in school, because of the strain that schools were under, young people did not feel particularly supported by them. Where a teacher could have gauged how a young person was doing in a face-to-face classroom environment, in an online environment it was difficult for them to connect with their teachers and their peers, adding to their feelings of isolation. It was evident from focus groups with the young people that many felt let down by their schools if they were of school age, with many reporting that the communication from schools was minimal and some were even unaware when they were meant to be attending classes. This did not seem to be negligence on the part of the schools but demonstrates the difficulty many faced in adapting to transitioning online. Many of the young people The Agency supports do not find formal education structures work well for them though they excel in the supportive, creative environment of The Agency. This accounts for why many struggled to stay engaged with their online schooling though were able to keep up with Agency facilitators who also helped them with staying involved with their schooling. Those who were outside of school age generally need less hands-on support with school, but many had difficulties in their home and employment situations.

The impact of not being able to deliver their projects in the ways they planned was also difficult for many of the young people. They were in the middle of Cycle 2 where they turn their ideas which had been successful in the panel into real projects with the support of a producer when the pandemic hit, completely altering the ways most of the young people were going to have to deliver their projects.

It's tough to be in a position where you can't be in the same room to bounce ideas off of each other. Our best ideas come from us having a conversation and building from there. You can do it on Zoom but it's not the same. It's weird to be at home when normally I can be in a space and look to my left and my right and ask them questions like, what do you think of this character? What do you think should happen here? It's a lot harder to text. It's not as easy to write freely and do my best work.

-Manchester Agent

YEMEN



VANJA GARAJ: RETHINKING ETHNOGRAPHY



SWEDEN



"Even though I'm not from here, Cardiff has always felt like home. I've never felt out of place in this city."
Said Nazjeb

Excerpts from World On Waters book, Cardiff

2.3 THE AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

My whole project changed because of the pandemic. It was handled really well, and I was able to talk to the alumni support and the team, not even just about Agency stuff. They helped me to move things forward regardless. It wasn't really a low because I had so much support. I even feel like things worked out for the best actually. I was able to ease into my project more.

-London Agent

As presented in our previous report, The Agency works using an asset-based, responsive approach to working with young people from some of the most marginalised and underserved areas of the UK. Young people in these communities already face hardships with mental health, employment, education and housing that The Agency works to equalise by putting young people at the heart of change in their lives and in their territories. Though the way The Agency normally operates was significantly disrupted as a result of the lockdowns from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Agency teams adapted quickly to continue to support young people using the core values, principles and tools of the Agency methodology to deliver support online. These sessions were also open to Agency alumni, knowing that other Agency graduates would need support during this time. For some it was a source of support and refuge, others a sense of purpose and fun, and others a place where they could continue to implement their projects in adapted versions in their local areas. Digital poverty is experienced by many of the young people we work with on The Agency, so we quickly worked to source funding and support to enable us to provide IT equipment and data to support young people to be able to get online.

During the first lockdown sessions became focussed on mental health, how we could support young people to continue to create routines for themselves and an open space to discuss how they were coping with the pandemic. Alongside small tasks that they could complete in their own time and feedback on at the next session.

Depending on the organisation, each of the four partner organisations had slightly different responses to supporting young people throughout the pandemic. Some of the Agency team was furloughed which affected how the team was able to support facilitators and young people, though the teams still maintained regular contact with one another so that young people felt they were supported. Online workshops were the key mechanism that facilitators and Agents were able to stay connected as well as group chats and some email communication.

Despite the many difficulties caused by the lockdown, there were some positives that came from the pandemic. The Agency network in the UK and Brazil had never connected online together before though because of the pandemic, there were group calls where the team was able to connect and share what the situation was like for them in both places. This is something that the team aims to continue to build on moving forward, particularly making stronger connections with the team in Brazil. The Agency consortium also met regularly which project managers stated was a key motivator for them and a place where they could share best practice and how they were working to support young people during this time.

It was a huge shift for them. Most of them were staying up all night and sleeping during the day. They were given a lot of tasks to do online but they weren't getting the right kind of support from their schools. You're not really able to say they weren't understanding things. The teachers weren't able to check in with them to see how things were going at home. It was a tough time for them.

-Belfast facilitator



SECTION 3: OUR IMPACT

In this iteration of The Agency programme which included a six-month extension grant, there were 26 funded projects implemented in the territories in London, Manchester, Cardiff and Belfast. Details of these projects are introduced before doing through further information about the impact on the young people and the territories.

3.1 AGENTS' PROJECTS

London-18-19

Working out the Kinks

Empowers BAME girls ages 7 - 11 to embrace their natural hair and learn how to care for it through scientific workshops, hair braiding, and a campaign promoting natural beauty.

Streets Got Talent

Streets Got Talent is a music event made by and for young people from the Alton Estate in Roehampton - an area of south London affected by gang, drug, knife and firearm violence. Zafir, the founder, leads on delivering positive, motivational, music-based events to start a movement against anti-social behaviour where young people feel they have few options outside of a criminal life.

The Glow Up

The Glow up promotes positive body image for secondary school students with skin conditions, with workshops and events to increase confidence and mental wellbeing, as well as natural skincare education.

London-19-21

Unrestricted LDN

Unrestricted LDN celebrates black girl joy, while challenging the stereotype of the 'angry black girl'. Danielle runs workshops and creates powerful exhibitions showcasing the power of young black women in the area. Danielle shifted her project because of the pandemic to create a zine for girls celebrated black girl joy.

Horizon Retreats

Horizon Retreats empowers young women at risk of offending by taking them on activity-filled residential trips to broaden their perspectives. Horizon Retreats was adapted because of the pandemic though socially-distanced, in-person sessions held in a local youth club.

ViZION

ViZion is a community album co-created with Wandsworth residents showcasing stories and talents from across the borough. Prince's project was minimally affected by the pandemic, and he is still working to complete his album.

Silhouette

Silhouette was commissioned to document all the projects and other youth events. The majority of this project took place prior to the pandemic.

I definitely think my workshops helped with leadership skills-facilitating them. Leading and speaking to a group, planning the timings throughout the day.

-London Agent

Additional opportunities- London

- Kyle Frank hosted Agency Parliament event and youth event at the GLA.
- Qansa Omar Cycle 1 Agent, who worked with Zafir in cycle 2, was then employed to create logos/flyers for all projects.
- Kyle, Angelina and Philippa employed as part of the street team for the next cohort.
- Dulcie Usher spoke on two panels as part of the We Will Still Breathe festival
- Danielle Honger was commissioned to create a piece shared on BAC socials
- Danielle's zine and Prince's Album featured as part of the We Will Still Breathe festival
- Both Danielle and Dulcie spoke on riverside radio station and were featured in the Exeunt Magazine
- Danielle created Inside Out Collective with 4 other Agency alumni, commissioned £10,000 by BAC to run a community festival as part of the Spring Season 2021

Manchester- 18-19

Clay Help

A series of clay workshops which aim to support young peoples' well-being. Clay help offers young people the opportunity to open up and talk about their mental health and get support from professionals while taking part in arts activities. At the end of the programme the young people exhibit the work they have created in a showcase for invited guests.

EmPOWherr

A campaign which highlights female inequality in grassroots, and elite sports, such as boxing, athletics and football. Founded by Faidat Ode, the project runs Empower days in schools which aim to "liberate females in to sport", Faidat often speaks publicly advocating for gender equality in sport.

Something to Say

Founded by Alex Etosa and Ade Adedeji, Something to Say is an exciting new platform for young black people in Manchester aged 13-21 years to express themselves and give the wider community a window into their life journey. We do this through a high quality publication which includes compelling life stories, insightful interviews and poetry.

It is an opportunity to truly listen about who we are and hear about our lives. Things are changing. Power is shifting. If they want to be part of that change, then they need to hear our voices and what we have to say. It's time to rise up."

-Something to Say Founder

My desire is to help other young people like me realise that just because everyone else looks different, or acts a certain way, they should not feel pressured to change themselves but instead embrace who they are and carry themselves with confidence.

-Dawn to the Light Founder

Manchester- 19-20

Dawn to the Light

Dawn to the light is a video game that aims to spread awareness and help those with developing mental health issues. The game does this by providing interactive coping methods to help the player deal with their daily stresses. This game is made for those young people aged between 12-17, through our research we found this was the age where mental issues develop. Dawn to the light is greatly inspired by the teams constant want to improve the health of the community as a whole.

Embracing Me

Embracing Me is a body positivity project tailored to young people struggling with the challenges on fitting in. During the pandemic Embracing Me have adapted the way they work, providing young people across Greater Manchester with digital body positivity workshops and accompanying packs of creative materials.

We: Integrate

We Integrate works with young people in Manchester who are at risk of offending, the project introduces participants to professionals in music, poetry and drama and encourages self-exploration and self-expression through creativity.

Additional opportunities- Manchester

- Faidat spoke on Parliament Day – presented her project to stakeholders and other Agents from Manchester, Cardiff, Belfast and London. Ade and Alex presented their project too. Faidat, Ade and Alex had their market stalls.
- Cardiff Panel Day – Ade travelled to Cardiff to sit on the Agency experts Panel.
- Cardiff Parliament prep – I (Olivia) took Ade, Alex and Faidat to Cardiff for a day to prep their Parliament speeches.
- In Place of War Conference – Olivia, Samuel and Josh involved in this. Held a panel discussion on change-makers. Being in your 20's, challenges, setting up your own business, event or project alone vs in a team.
- Young Manchester Big People Music – Faidat sat on Panel representing her project Empowherr. Olivia hosted with Samuel (In a Young Manchester capacity, both employed at the time by YM)
- Kids of Colour on Education – Ade and Alex attended and spoke about their project and experiences
- Ade from the Something to Say project sat on the panel for the Cardiff Agents alongside high-profile professionals to help select the winning Agency projects.
- Yomi, Olivia and Henrietta presented to the Bank of England about The Agency and possible partnerships opportunities
- Faidat has been paid to be part of recruitment panels for Production Manager, Young People's Producer and Technicians in the last year
- Faidat has been employed by Contact as part of it's anti-racism task force over the last six months looking at language. Ex-Agents
- Yomi and Samuel were also paid as consultants as part of this work. Faidat was invited to speak about women in Sport on BBC Radio Manchester because of her project Empowerherr
- Faidat applied and was interviewed to be Contact's Chair of the Board
- Josh Wilkinson spoke at the Glitter and Guilds event about his journey from The Agency to Contact trustee.



Cardiff- 18-19

Film Firm

Film firm is a project that aims to plug the gap between the South Wales film industry and young filmmakers. A part of the project is a film competition where budding filmmakers will be invited to submit films. The will need to have been shot on mobile phones. Film firm will also run training sessions and host talks from industry professionals.

#Glisten Up

#GlistenUp is a project for women. Through make up sessions Afifa will work with women, predominantly from the Muslim community, creating a safe space to for discussions. Periodically #GlistenUp will invite guest speakers to lead a talk on various relevant issues.

Green Plug

This project was a pilot for how hydroponics might be able to be used more readily for indoor urban gardening. The Agents had a test set of plants that were grown inside National Theatre Wales.

We spent so long working on the projects that we were so prepared whenever anyone had questions and had guidance to think about each aspect.

-Cardiff Agent

Cardiff- 19-20

World on Waters

This is a unique cultural experience where an audience take a boat ride down the river Taff. Each boat ride is themed with influences from a specific cultural community that has made Cardiff their home, from Bangladeshi, to Indian, to Somali. Due to the pandemic, this project became a physical and online book that looks at different cultures that have made Cardiff their home.

Soldering Sisters

A project that was to encourage young ladies to pursue a career in engineering. This will be done through as series of workshops in school, mentorship, connecting relevant organisations with young ladies and will culminate with an event at the Senedd. Due to the pandemic, this became an online seminar lead by a leading female engineer and college students and an online conversation between Nabilah and the engineer.

Baked Words

Combining storytelling and food, Baked Words will make Somali inspired cakes that are wrapped in short stories. Due to the pandemic, the Agents baked cakes and donated them to a voluntary group who provide food packages to families effected at this time.

Mycelium

Due to an underspend in the first year, the NTW Agency team ran a forth project. Mycelium is an arts project based in Agency territories in Butetown, Riverside and Grangetown, matching artists with unused and unloved spaces. This project reminded more or less the same as when conceived.



I hated school. I got out as soon as I could. With The Agency, I looked forward to working with the young people and helping them. Some of the packs are going to the Catholic area and some of the packs are going to the Protestant area which helps to bridge divides.

-Belfast Agent

Belfast- 18-19

Inside Out Beauty

Inside Out Beauty is a beauty therapy / body image project consisting of a series of workshops for young people focusing on self-love and acceptance. Working with young people aged 13 to 18, workshops demonstrate makeup techniques while facilitating real conversations about image, mental health and self-love.

Walk and Talk

Walk and Talk creates a safe space for young men aged 14 to 18 from North Belfast to come together and share issues that they are facing in their own personal lives. The project has four walks, each increasing in length and difficulty, culminating in the final walk to the top of the highest peak in Northern Ireland. The project promotes positive physical and mental health, providing young men with the opportunity to forge new friendships, listen to each other and share personal experiences to reduce suicide and anti-social behaviour.

Your Way

Your Way is a youth-based project run by two young girls from North Belfast to improve mental health and good wellbeing, stemming from a need in the community for more mental health support. They support young people and to help them get the help they need, opening up discussions about mental health. They provide new coping skills and can make new friends through art, sports and talk therapy.

Belfast- 19-20

Art From The Heart

Art from the Heart delivered to care homes across Belfast. Packages were created and delivered to 5 care homes, where 12 people from each home were provided with materials to engage in an arts programme including making memory boxes and a postcard that they will send to their family. The project offers older people the opportunity to learn new skills, be creative, socialise with their peers and make something that can then be given as a gift to their loved ones. Due to restrictions, this project was delayed with the packs being delivered to Care Homes a week before Christmas. As a new lockdown was just being imposed, this gave residents an arts-based activity to engage in during these new restrictions, and the ability to make things to give to their families as Christmas gifts.

In Control

In Control is an anger management programme for young people, targeting those who have been in trouble at school and with the Police Service due to anger issues. The project uses a variety of art-based workshops and physical fitness to provide ways for the participants to deal with their anger. Due to the pandemic, this project was not able to be implemented in the same way and the young people are still working on ways they can adapt it to the current situation.

Listen

The Listen project initially aimed to bring families together in a neutral space providing them with workshops that develop a greater connection and understanding between the family members. The target audience for this project is families that face mental health issues and where there is conflict within the family unit. Due to Covid, the project had to be altered and packs were created for 60 families containing activities, advice and support guidance.

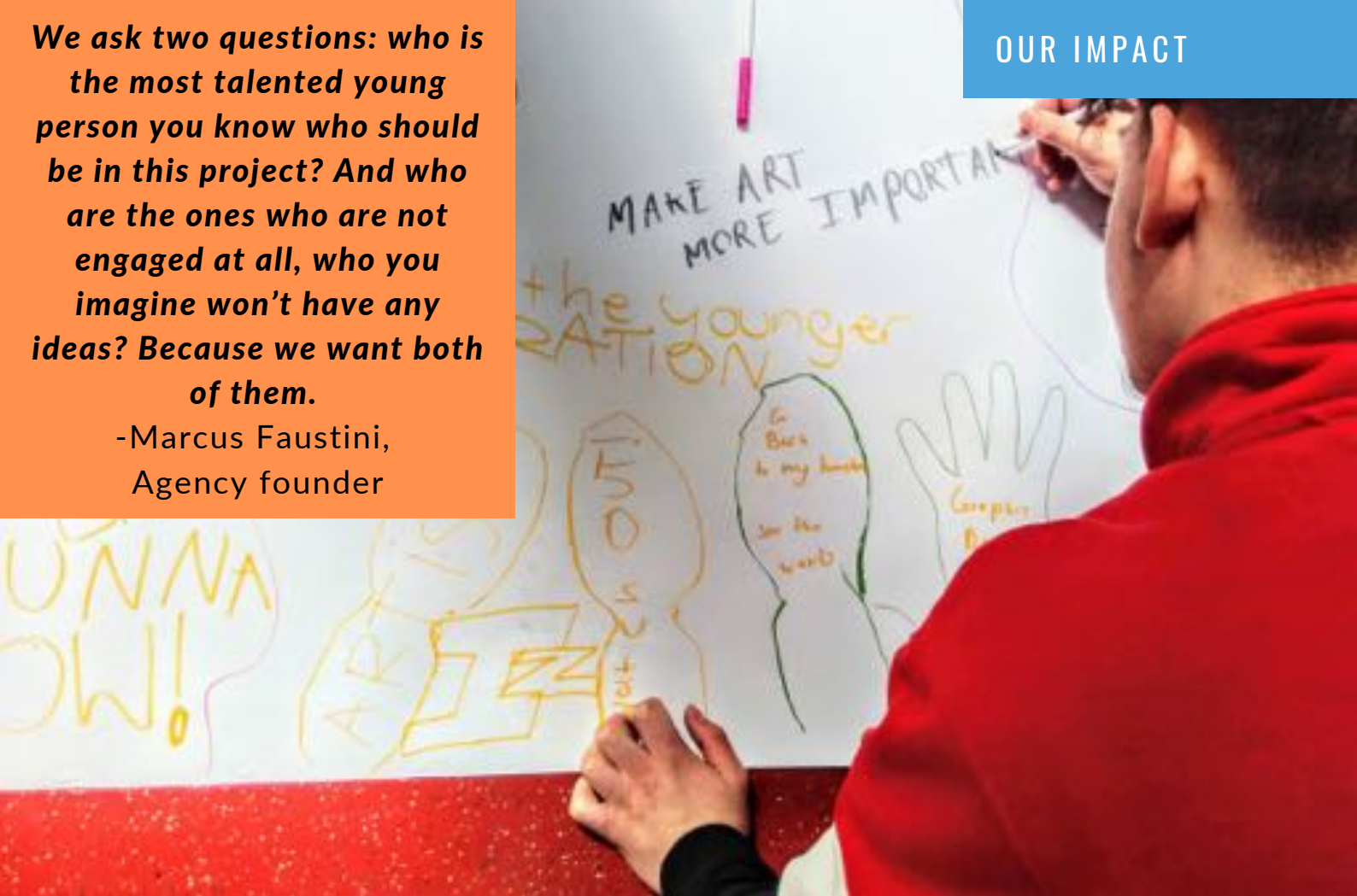
Additional opportunities- Belfast

- Seana and Claire have gotten involved in other local community organisations including New Lodge Arts, New Lodge Youth Centre, TAMHI - Tackling Mental Health and Participation and Practice of Rights.
- Seana and Claire have been involved in campaigns for social housing and better services for mental health and have volunteered at local food banks.
- Several of the Agents also took part in the Ashton Breakthrough Youth Development programme and participated in Good Relations, Citizenship, Sport, Art and Youth Work.
- During lockdowns, many Agents were active in volunteering at local foodbanks



We ask two questions: who is the most talented young person you know who should be in this project? And who are the ones who are not engaged at all, who you imagine won't have any ideas? Because we want both of them.

-Marcus Faustini,
Agency founder



3.2 IMPACT

The Agency's aims to facilitate young people from underserved communities to have the self-confidence, skills and creative mindset needed to be protagonists in their lives and the world around them. Young people are active agents in the transformation of their communities based on needs they identify themselves in their local areas. As a result of the various lockdowns in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, this aim was compromised in a number of ways. As mentioned in section 2, the pandemic had an impact on physical health, but also very much affected their mental health and sense of mobility, crucial to fostering this sense of agency that is one of the fundamental elements of the programme. The lockdowns happened when young people were in the midst of implementing their projects in Cycle 2 of the programme when they had to take their projects online. It was clear that a significant amount of benefit came from completing the first cycle, though that sense of achievement that comes from delivering their ideas was compromised by the multiple lockdowns and subsequent amendments needing to be made to their projects.

The way they supported the projects was really great- not only helping with our projects but also life skills too. They taught us budgeting and event planning. They helped us to understand how we could present our ideas. It really helped with our confidence, talking about our projects to lots of people. We learned how to negotiate as well, how to communicate the benefits to someone else to get them to support our projects.

-Cardiff Agent

There was also a considerable shift for some in their relationship to their communities, both their situational communities- where they live- but also the many communities of interest they are a part of. That disconnection exacerbated mental health conditions for some while also affecting how they thought about their projects and the impact they felt they were able to have with implementing their ideas in the territory. For some they took it upon themselves to volunteer delivering food and helping elderly neighbours, for example, making their projects more responsive to the immediate need. Others shifted their projects in such a way that they felt the outcome was actually better than it had been if the pandemic didn't happen.

It was evident, however, from the data collected from young people and feedback from facilitators and project managers that the Agency still had a significant impact on the young people who took part in the project this year. The projects the young people develop and implement in The Agency have always been a mechanism for greater creative, personal, professional and community development. This was still very much true, though it took a different place and situation based on the position of the country. There was much more personal and pastoral support required for many young people while others were not as affected mentally but needed a great deal of guidance to help them to adapt their projects to new circumstances. The flexibility, responsiveness and expertise in being able to understand the varying needs of the young people from the team was evident here.

Some the same as previous years and some very much different, the following highlights some of the key skills the young people reported to have gained in the last cycle. As it is as essential as possible for young people to have a voice surrounding their own experiences and the way they describe them, as many direct quotes were used as possible.



Presentation skills

Presenting their ideas in front of their peers, their communities and high-profile individuals is a key aspect of the programme. This was one of the skills that was still very much maintained throughout the programme, despite the pandemic. Though many of their meetings with networks were online, they still had to learn how to present their ideas clearly and confidently.

I learned how to present in front of a lot of people, more people than I usually would. I can speak more confidently than I used to.

-Manchester Agent

I had a great experience working with other people. I don't like talking in front of a lot of people but through this programme, I've overcome that.

-Manchester Agent

Organisational and project management skills

Building project management skills is also another area that has always been integral to The Agency and even though the pandemic shifted how many projects were delivered, these skills were still very much developed by the young people.

I've been able to change my CV after running workshops like around project management. Before this, I had never held my own thing. It was my first time facilitating anything.

-London Agent

My role on my project helped me improve my organisational skills.

-Manchester Agent

We learned how to run events which for people our age is quite rare.

-Cardiff Agent

Confidence

Confidence has not been an aspect we have measured directly as part of The Agency evaluation, though it is an aspect of self-efficacy which is. It was clear from many of the Agents that confidence, perhaps especially in a time of great uncertainty, was really valued.

The mapping we did for The Agency made me realise I didn't know as much about my territory than I think I did.

-Manchester Agent

It's made me more confident as a writer that I can take into the future. Without this, I wouldn't have had that.

-Manchester Agent

Resilience and perseverance

Many of the Agents had to significantly change their projects because of the lockdowns that were put into place. Initially it was not so bad for many of them though with constantly shifting rules, eventually most of them became incredibly discouraged by having to make so many changes, with many delivering a project quite different from their original plan. With the help of Agency teams, however, they felt supported to implement their projects in their new iterations, requiring perseverance to keep going and making them more resilient.

We were backed against a corner and we just had to push through it. We just had to go with the flow.

-Manchester Agent

I rely on my others in my team for ideas for my drawings, so I really lost motivation. We usually all reflect off each other to get ideas, but we got through it.

-Manchester Agent

Networks and creative careers

For some Agents, the programme is the perfect recipe for creativity in action that allows them to be in the driving seat of developing their own creative careers. For some young people we work with, the arts is not seen as a viable career path for them though they have a desire to follow that path. The Agency is a crucial opportunity for those young people to build connections and test out how they might be able to make a more creative career work for them.

When it comes to me reaching out to brands and influencers, having the confidence and the vocabulary to make it sound professional. It's helped a lot to be fair.

-London Agent

The Agency team treated us like equals. That was one of my favourite parts of The Agency. We didn't have to ask for permission for things. The formalities we were so used to in the school environment, we really felt independent. We didn't have to be treated as inferiors. From the very start we felt supported and respected. In school environments, most teachers don't have that same sort of respect- you do what I say, and you don't question it. You have to do what we are telling you to do. In the Agency, they actually encourage you to speak up.

-Cardiff Agent

Most of the young people hadn't really considered working in the arts and didn't think of themselves as creative. They have considered changing their career paths. One Agent has always been quite creative but never had it nurtured so she's considering a career now.

-Cardiff facilitator

Leadership

One aspect that has become of increasing importance over the course of the Agency in the UK and Brazil is the importance of youth voice and developing young leaders. At a time when young people are often misrepresented, youth leadership has become a key pillar of The Agency in 2021. This was reflected in comments by young people, requesting even more development in this area.

I started volunteering with a youth group in between the two conflict areas. I'm a young leader with them and started in the last couple of months. I found out about it through the Agency. One of the facilitators connected me with the opportunity. The Agency has helped with leadership a lot- having to be the older person and a good example for younger people.

-Belfast Agent

At the start of the project when you're coming up with an idea, they encourage you to believe in yourself. That helps with leadership because you are more certain in your ideas so you can carry it out.

-Cardiff Agent

Fun, supportive environment

Even more crucial than in previous years, the Agency was a source of enjoyment and fun for the young people who took part. This is something we have never measured or felt was of as much significance previously, but in a time of great difficulty for young people, The Agency was a respite for many and at certain points throughout the process, facilitators became less focussed on project delivery and more about giving them a space to have fun, feel supported and connect with one another.

Sometimes we would talk about the project, sometimes we would have a crack, sometimes we would play bingo. It was just a little place they could come to. That was really important for them.

-Belfast facilitator

It helps you keep in touch with people who have become your friends and it's an escape really. They made us laugh when things were really grim.

-Manchester Agent

I got a lot of opportunities even outside of my Agency project in the last six months.

-London Agent

3.3 INTERIM GRANT IMPACT

The impact of the interim grant that extended Cycle 2 from August to January was crucial in allowing the opportunity for many young people to implement their projects and for others to start shorter, smaller iterations of the Agency in their territories. It gave young people a sense of achievement and allowed many of the locations to come together and even deliver their projects in a socially distanced manner to find a sense of community and accomplishment again. There were variations from territory to territory, but the following outlines the key benefits of the additional, interim funding. Overall, the funding allowed:

- Agents to have more time on their projects as Cycle 2 was interrupted by lockdowns
- Facilitators to hold more frequent sessions online with young people to make sure they were supported
- Facilitators to follow up with schools, social services and youth services on behalf of the Agents to make sure they had adequate housing, education and mental health services
- Adaptations to be made to the delivery so that sessions could be held online and in a socially-distanced manner when restrictions eased
- Agency teams to create a safe space for young people
- Some locations to run a shortened version of The Agency to develop new projects, testing how the methodology can be adapted to various funding and environments
- Agents to connect with other projects in organisations outside of the Agency, further building networks beyond the programme

Having a producer there was like having a parent there. Without our producer, I don't think we would have done the book especially. She was a big help. We had never interviewed people, but she coached us through it. We learned a lot from her.

-Cardiff Agent

My school wasn't really communicating with me, and I didn't have any motivation to engage with my school. The Agency was something that I was passionate about. Something I wanted to do, not something I had to do. That was a big part of it.

-Belfast Agent

The Agency they did help a lot and I feel like because a lot of people are at home 24-7 can't do anything and we are special in a way, but we have something to do. Some don't have anything to do at all. We have something to do. I lost my job during lockdown and the Agency paid me enough money to sustain me during that time. I was technically broke, but The Agency helped us financially.

-Manchester Agent

I felt so lucky to have that time together from October to December and it made those sessions different. It certainly kept me going because you were the only people I was seeing. That also made those sessions something different to what it usually was and made them more special because it was an especially difficult time for everyone.

-Manchester facilitator

3.4 THE CONSORTIUM

Expanding the Agency to two new locations, BAC, Contact and PPP utilised a partnership model of working, building a Consortium of sharing and learning amongst the four partner organisations and Agencia in Brazil. The process of expansion involved developing a training programme and a toolkit for new facilitators and projects managers in new locations to learn the methodology. This training programme has now been refined and delivered two additional times to train teams in Brent and Waltham Forest in London as part of the London Borough of Culture. The learning from scaling up the programme will be used to further develop how the next round of funding to increase impact on the territories where we work.

The first lockdown gave the team an opportunity to pilot plans for the National Network of Agency partners and young people. This included communication methods, sharing best practice and amplifying youth voice. As we were all working in new and unexpected ways to support the young people on The Agency, we instigated weekly video calls for Agency Project Managers and facilitators to come together and share their sessions plan ideas and activities that could be delivered online and to support each other. This became an important space for practice development as we learned to create interactive and creative online sessions. These meetings were well attended and allowed us to form a network of support for each other and to quickly share learning from across The Agency Network.

I had a lot of contact with the other teams which was great. You could hear what everyone else was doing and I felt like I could bring their learning into the sessions. Everyone was delivering in their own way. Everyone was different. That to me is the only way you can be successful. You can't say, right, this is the model in London, everyone do it. Cardiff has different issues; Belfast has different issues; we all have different things to work through. It was empowering to have that freedom.

-Belfast facilitator

In addition to this, we decided to implement some Agency sessions that would bring young people from all five of The Agency programmes together in an online space. To share their experiences of the pandemic, to talk about their projects and to have fun. In a time where travel was no longer permitted, we wanted to support young people to feel connected to each other. These sessions were a highlight of the lockdown; led by Agents from each of the five areas, supported by Agency staff, they involved Instagram live debates across the UK, zoom creative workshops and discussions, digital performances and international perspectives on Covid. We were able to bring in Marcus Faustini, creator of The Agency to connect with them and also update them on The Agency in Brazil and how they were experiencing the pandemic.

Meetings in real life were useful to talk about what people were doing and learning about innovation. We didn't have to ask BAC for permission to trial things. It was led by BAC and Contact, but we felt that we were equal partners and were trusted to make good decisions. I felt supported and trusted by BAC and Contact, and I could adapt the methodology if need be.

-Cardiff Project Manager

SECTION 4: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The Agency is entering an exciting phase of expansion for the programme. The programme will be entering a phase of research to further understand the needs in the territories where they work. Starting in September 2021, The Agency will embark on its eighth year of delivery in London and Manchester, building up a more robust way to support other organisations who will be implementing the programme in Hampshire, England and Scotland.

As part of that, the team will continue to refine the methodology and the evaluation to be better and more responsive to the needs of the programme as it grows. The programme aims to be increasingly youth-led and centred around how young people can be at the forefront of change across the country.




The communities where we deliver The Agency have been hugely and disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. There has never been a more important time for The Agency to expand. We have a tried and tested methodology that supports young people to develop brave, new and creative ideas for transformation of themselves and their communities. Developing a range of new skills and often creating employment opportunities for themselves and others through their projects.

To give hope during a time that has felt hopeless and provide a focus for young people on what is within their power to change. The opportunity to join a national network of young change makers helps them to see themselves as part of something bigger and feel the collective power of young people making change across England.

4.1 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

Online focus groups with Agency facilitators and young people were held over Zoom though the online environment served as a limitation and barrier for young people to be as open as they normally would have in the closing focus group evaluation session. These are normally held in a facilitation room in their territory using a combination of written, oral and arts-based feedback to better understand the impact of the programme. As it was in an online setting, all of these techniques were not able to be realised and favoured the young people who are more comfortable with oral feedback. Online sessions proved a challenge throughout as was evident in the data that these digital platforms made it more difficult to engage the Agents. In addition, because of the limitations of data collection of surveys that are normally conducted in person, we were not able to collect as many of the forms in a reliable way from many of the young people. From the ones we have, the numbers did not show as significant of a positive change as they normally do because of the impact of the pandemic and lockdowns across the UK so we chose not to include these as part of the impact.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

 **Strengthen the Agency network and build the movement-** build upon the increase in digital literacy to use online tools to build stronger connections between the young people in the various locations and in Brazil. Young people and facilitators frequently report that the times when they feel the most inspired is when we all come together to share ideas. This happened twice in 2019 for the training and for the Parliament event. During lockdown there was a Zoom call organised by the Agency teams in the four locations and with the Agencia team in Brazil which was stated as one of the highlights. There is potential to do this more regularly so that young people can share ideas with Agents from other locations and feel a part of a bigger movement. Through a stronger network, there is also a stronger culture of learning and exchange that can be fostered. The programme is firmly rooted in the global north and the global south, so there is immense potential to find more ways to connect to policy and other global movements.

Actions in motion:

The lead partners have set up a regular monthly meeting with the Agencia team in Rio, coordinated by People’s Palace Projects. This is a space to learn from each other, to develop the methodology collaboratively and to explore ways to tell the global story of young people on the periphery to advocate for change.





Putting young people more in the lead- Young people are already in the lead when it comes to designing and implementing their projects; hiring past Agents and giving them public speaking and leadership opportunities, but the future of the programme needs to have young people in the lead, not just when it comes to their projects and employment but in deciding the future direction of the programme.

Actions in motion:

The lead partners have set up a regular monthly meeting with the Agencia team in Rio, coordinated by People's Palace Projects. This is a space to learn from each other, to develop the methodology collaboratively and to explore ways to tell the global story of young people on the periphery to advocate for change.



Refining the evaluation framework- While it is clear through the evidence the team has gathered over the past five years that The Agency has a profound, long-lasting impact on young people in the territories they work in. The role of the evaluator thus far has been to build a case for this impact as their primary focus. However, now that this has been clearly demonstrated, there is a need to have a stronger evidence base for the delivery of the methodology to maximise impact. This does not mean standardising it to the point that the facilitators do not have agency to adapt it to their own practice, as this is a key element, but it is clear that delivery varies a great deal from location to location. The quality is unmistakably high but there is no way of knowing which elements worked and why and ensuring that the facilitators are also challenged to continue to grow and develop as part of their engagement with the programme. This could be done through having someone who goes from location to location to visit and work closely with teams as well as more defined learning outcomes that each session plan has to clearly address. There is no desire to make it like a school for the young people but adding more structure to the expectations of each concept being delivered could greatly improve what we know about the programme's impact and build a stronger evidence base for best practice. Additionally, the theory of Change was developed five years ago and needs to be revisited and revised as the programme has evolved.



Further develop training- It was clear from conversations from some facilitators that though the training we have works well, it would be worth spending more time, particularly on training for Cycle 2. Especially as some facilitators have struggled more with Cycle 2 than Cycle 1, it would be worth revisiting what training there is and how it can be improved. One aspect that arose during the evaluation was around making it clearer that facilitators have creativity and flexibility within the methodology to adapt to their own creative practice. This is something that is mentioned, but some facilitators found it difficult to maintain in practice.



Invest in more professional training and support for staff and young people- Evident from the mental health difficulties facing many young people as a result of the pandemic and the required lockdowns, the need for pastoral support is high. Most likely related to cuts in youth and social services across the UK the increasing reliance of young people on the support provided through arts programme has been the case for a number of years though these challenges were amplified in 2020 (Guardian, 2020). Arts organisations could be better equipped to deal with these augmented challenges by hiring a more permanent member of staff such as a social or youth worker who is trained to deal with these more intense situations. Additionally, further training for facilitators in dealing with some of these pastoral issues would be beneficial to better equip young people with the support they need.



Find ways to work more closely with councils, schools and youth services- It was clear from interviews with facilitators that many government bodies such as youth services, schools and mental health provision were not able to adapt quickly to the pandemic, leaving many young people unable to receive the services they desperately needed during this time. Herein lies a potential to work more closely with these entities to share ideas and best practice, particularly around training them.



Investigate the methodology- As the Agency has a refined methodology that has been fine-tuned over the last ten years gives it strength and depth, however, it also can act to limit thinking about how it can be adapted to better fit the environment where the projects take place. Shorter versions of The Agency were run in a youth prison and in Cardiff with their additional funding which demonstrates that a significant impact can still happen in shorter formats. More research needs to be done into the extent of this impact, but the methodology could benefit from more thinking about what the non-negotiables of methodology and potentially taking aspects out that no longer serve its success. Especially with the impact of the pandemic, what needs to change to best support young leaders in this time? One of the aspects that has come up already is around infusing more business skills into the methodology, especially in Cycle 1 to support young people who don't get through the Panel. Deeper support for alumni is another area that could be further developed for more longitudinal impact.



Explore ways the projects can be less dependent on subsidy- While there are benefits to young people having their projects eligible for public subsidy, to truly be social enterprises, it would be useful for the programme to explore ways the projects could receive earned income or even mixed revenue streams from their projects. Many of the young people reported wanting to continue their projects but were very much dependent on funding that will become increasingly precarious. As this might not be the skill set of the organisations that run The Agency, a partnership with an organisation that could mentor young people into this process could help the projects to become more sustainable.



Ensure facilitators who lead each project have a balance between artistic and producerial skill sets- Connected to the previous point, as part of both the creative as well as entrepreneurial development of the young people, it is essential that recruitment for facilitators is based on merits as an artist or creative as well as a producer or project manager. Many facilitators in the past have reported not enjoying Cycle 2 as much as Cycle 1 as it is not seen as creative as the first one, so finding facilitators with both skill sets is essential.



Allowing more time to explore deeper issues in the territory- It was noted that some of the young people's projects from year to year can be similar and some do not go as deep as they could in terms of exploring the root causes of issues in their own territories. It would be helpful to re-think how the young people get to more of these root issues. For example, many of the projects address mental health but what is the cause of some of these mental health issues? The project could benefit perhaps from a more in-depth targeted approach at looking critically into some of these issues. This could be in the form of guest speakers of other young people or community leaders to inspire the young people or more time spent on exploring the issues through research, for example.

Actions in motion:

With the support of the National Lottery Community Fund the next iteration of The Agency in London and Manchester will undergo an intense research project to further understand the issues within the territories. This research programme will be led by agency alumni and offer paid employment and training for those taking part. Through interviews with community members, focus groups and data, each territory will produce a report and recruit future agents who want to address the most pertinent issues in their communities.





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Report by: The Agency Teams and Dr Meg Peterson.
Report designed by Meg Peterson.



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