

**Youth.comUnity and
the Young Ambassadors Programme:
An Independent Evaluation**

**Programme delivered by
Central YMCA for the Well London Alliance**



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INTRODUCTION

In Autumn 2009 Central YMCA commissioned Sandy Craig of Leisure Futures to undertake an independent evaluation of Youth.comUnity¹ and its Young Ambassadors Programme. This is only one of the Well London Alliance's 14 programme strands that are being delivered across 20 boroughs in London. The Well London Alliance is a partnership headed by the London Health Commission and funded through the BIG Lottery's Well-being fund.

During the course of the evaluation, the Author met and interviewed Well London Partners, staff at Central YMCA, local partners and a number of the Young Ambassadors. My thanks to everyone, but particularly to the Young Ambassadors, for their time, thoughtfulness and frankness of response. All views, opinions and judgements are, of course, the Author's – as are any errors and omissions.

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¹ The report uses 'Youth.com', the shortened form of 'Youth.comUnity', throughout.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is an independent evaluation of Youth.com and its Young Ambassadors Programme. It analyses the experience of the Young Ambassadors. It assesses the extent to which the Young Ambassadors Programme was youth led. It reviews the model underpinning the Programme and its impact on youth participation. It assesses the impact of the Programme on Well London Partners. And it looks at issues of sustainability for the Programme.

Well London is a pan London programme that aims to bring new ways to deliver improvements in the physical and mental well-being of Londoners. It delivers 14 different project-strands in 20 of London's most deprived communities. It is delivered by the Well London Alliance, a partnership of seven independent organisations, and funded by The Big Lottery receiving approx. £10 million compared to a bid of approx. £20 million.

Initial consultation showed that, across all communities, 'young people' were considered to be both an issue and a priority. An issue because of perceptions of 'young people hanging around'. A priority because there were few facilities or activities for young people in the local neighbourhoods.

In response to this consultation, Well London Partners agreed the need for a youth-orientated programme and that Central YMCA was best suited to lead this programme. This became Youth.com.

Youth.com has three elements –

- Young Ambassadors – Recruiting, managing and supporting a Young Ambassador from each of the 20 communities. Young Ambassadors help Well London Partners by publicising their events and activities, by integrating the concerns of young people into Well London programmes generally and by developing projects in partnership with Well London Partners. Uniquely the Young Ambassadors plan and deliver their own projects in their own communities and, as a team, are planning the Wellnet Conference at City Hall in February 2010. (Wellnet is a learning network connecting all those working in health and well-being promotion across London and sharing fresh ideas for boosting well-being through community-led activities.)
- Youth Participation Seminars and Conferences – Part of the Wellnet project, these are designed to change attitudes and identify organisational challenges
- Youth Update Briefings – Policy briefings aimed at partners, including local partners, and informing them of youth related issues

The Young Ambassadors Programme is managed by two Youth.com Workers, each worker recruiting, supporting and managing 10 Young Ambassadors. The Young Ambassadors are paid an hourly wage based on an average of 20 hours work per month. They also hold their own budget of approx. £500 per quarter. They receive extensive training of three week-long

accredited courses in community work, participation work with young people and street and community-based outreach work. They are recruited through local organisations (e.g. youth clubs), outreach work and Well London consultation.

The Programme is a two year time-limited project finishing in March 2010.

The target for Youth.com was to engage 2,400 young people. As of Autumn 2009, 1,873 young people had been engaged. This indicates that Youth.com is well on track to achieving its target.

The experience of the Young Ambassadors has been very positive. They have relished the challenge of realising their own projects. They found the training helpful and considered the support and help given by their Youth.com Worker as central to their enjoyment and achievements. Young Ambassadors interviewed reported improvements in their skills and capacities across a wide range of organisational, social and life skills. Their motivations included a mix of self-development, altruism, belonging (to an area or group) and enjoyment. Their aspirations and ambitions have been raised.

Their interactions with other Well London Partners have been more limited but there has been good feedback from the Young Ambassadors of working with the main Well London delivery agents. All the Young Ambassadors interviewed considered that their ideas were implemented. They were optimistic that their project was making a difference to the community.

There have been a variety of factors which have constrained the success of the Young Ambassadors Programme –

- The complexity of the Well London Alliance and the scale of its delivery has led to communication, timing and delivery difficulties. At times the Well London programme on the ground has appeared under-resourced and fragmentary and the attention of Well London Partners diverted from addressing the needs of the communities towards managing their own processes.
- With only two Youth.com Workers managing 20 Young Ambassadors, there has been a mismatch between the aspirations for the Programme and the resources to support and implement it.
- The Well London model specifies that its interventions are tightly focussed on communities living in specific 'Lower Super Output Areas' – very small areas whose geographical boundaries often bear little relationship to the reality on the ground and do not fit with the peer and friendship networks of the Young Ambassadors.
- Borough Co-ordination responsibilities are undertaken by a Well London Partner or delegated to individuals in local organisations. But most Borough Co-ordinators have other responsibilities while little decision-making is delegated to them. This has led to a lack of ownership of Well London projects by the communities themselves.

- Numerical outputs and short timescales have militated against the building and development of long-term relationships with the community.

The Young Ambassadors Programme was evaluated against the six aims of the Programme –

- *To allow young people to have ideas which can be implemented* The Author's view is that this has been achieved. Well London Partners were positive about the achievement of the Programme in this regard.
- *To create a bottom up approach to planning projects which impact and/or engage young people* The Author considers that this has been achieved in terms of the Young Ambassadors' own projects. Some Well London projects have also involved the Young Ambassadors though generally to a more limited extent. Well London Partners felt that this aim had been achieved to some extent.
- *To encourage the participation of young people* Attendance at the Young Ambassadors' projects has been reasonable and there is evidence that, through the Young Ambassadors' 'social marketing', other Well London programmes have been helped. Well London Partners were positive about the achievement of the Programme in this regard. The Young Ambassadors were unanimous that their projects had encouraged the participation of young people.
- *To train and develop skills in both the young people and Well London Partners* The Author considers that the Programme has been very successful in developing the skills of the Young Ambassadors. For a variety of reasons it has not been successful in developing the skills of Well London Partners. Well London Partners concur in this assessment.
- *To provide opportunities for the young people to become active citizens* The Author considers that opportunities have been provided and that there is evidence that some Young Ambassadors are likely to remain active citizens. Well London Partners also considered that the Programme had been effective in getting young people involved.
- *To engage with disengaged and demotivated young people directly from the LSOA [their community]* Monitoring shows that significant numbers of young people have been engaged. It is likely that some of these will be 'disengaged and demotivated'.

In terms of its impact on Well London Partners, the Young Ambassadors Programme appears to have had little impact in either influencing the aims and agendas of the Partners or of changing their ways of working. This is not surprising given that it is a 'big ask' for any small-scale and time-limited programme to change existing, large-scale organisations.

But while the Young Ambassadors Programme has had little influence on the Well London Partners, it – and the Young Ambassadors themselves – has been received enthusiastically by local partners. Here the Programme has made a difference in influencing the ways of working of those local organisations.

There have been a number of success factors underpinning the Young Ambassadors Programme –

- Elements of the programme – the payment of the Young Ambassadors, the focus on training, having dedicated Youth.com Workers and the title, ‘Young Ambassador’, have all helped
- The Youth.com Workers have been central and crucial to the achievements of the Young Ambassadors
- Support from local organisations have helped the Young Ambassadors and helped to ground Well London locally

These elements can easily be replicated by other organisations though local support is dependent on the existing capacity of the community.

In terms of sustainability, there are two potential possibilities. The first is that Well London Partners agree to find the additional funding necessary to continue the programme through to Spring 2011. The Author recognises that this may be only a fleeting possibility. The second involves recognising that the Young Ambassadors Programme fits with the sports and arts legacy plans of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. It involves Central YMCA and Well London Partners advocating the unique strengths of the Young Ambassadors Programme to The Mayor, GLA, 2012 and other public and private sector organisations.

Whether or not the Programme is sustainable, the Author considers that there are good reasons for assuming that some Young Ambassadors will continue their work into summer 2010. Some local and Well London Partners may be able to find funding for individual Young Ambassadors while there may be possibilities in transferring one or two Young Ambassadors on to The Mayor’s Peer Outreach Workers team.

However, given the present recession and the number of other ‘competing’ programmes, including national volunteering programmes such as v, it is unlikely that the Young Ambassadors Programme will be used as a basis by other agencies.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

There were four main aims for the evaluation –

- To analyse the experience of the Young Ambassadors and assess the extent to which the Young Ambassadors Programme (YA Programme), and other Well London programmes, were youth led
- To review the model underpinning the YA Programme and its impact on youth participation
- To assess the impacts of the YA Programme on Well London Partners
- To look at issues of sustainability for the YA Programme, review the extent to which it is replicable and, where possible, suggest how the YA Programme may be sustained.

The evaluation was carried out as follows –

- Initial background research into the YA Programme, Youth.com and its context within Well London
- Research and discussions with comparator programmes, in particular the Greater London Authority's Peer Outreach Workers (POW) team and the national Young Advisors initiative
- Development of research tools including semi-structured interviews for Well London Partners (WL Partners), Central YMCA (CYMCA) staff and the Young Ambassadors. The semi-structured interviews with WL Partners included some questions which asked the Partner to rate aspects of the YA Programme on a five point scale. For instance, Partners were asked to rate the YA Programme in terms of its achievement of each of its aims with 1 = Very poor, 2 = Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Very Good and 0 = Don't Know/Can't Say. This helps to establish the extent to which there is a consensus amongst partners about the impacts of the YA Programme
- Selection of Young Ambassadors and their projects to track as case studies
- Observation of a group meeting of Young Ambassadors planning the forthcoming Wellnet conference, 'Youth, health and happiness: Engaging and working with young people to boost health and well-being', at City Hall² Interviews with partners and CYMCA staff
- Interviews with Young Ambassadors including visits to their communities and observation of their projects and, where possible, other Well London projects in their communities
- Analysis and assessment of information, including the views and perceptions of all involved
- Report drafting and writing

² Wellnet is a Well London programme. It is a learning network aimed at connecting and motivating all those working in health and well-being promotion across London. It shares fresh ideas for boosting well-being through community-led activities.

This evaluation is primarily a qualitative evaluation. As such, it focuses on the experience and views of the Young Ambassadors (recounted mainly in the Case Studies of individual Young Ambassadors), the structure of the YA Programme and the Well London context in which it is placed, the impacts and achievements of the programme, the constraints which limited these outcomes or made them more difficult to attain, the success factors underlying the programme, and whether the programme could be sustained post-BIG Lottery (BIG) funding. In addition, a note on the quantitative achievements of Youth.com is given.

To ensure that the programme was assessed on what it set out to do, the impacts and achievements of the YA Programme were assessed against the aims set out for the programme. These are –

- To allow young people to have ideas which can be implemented
- To create a bottom up approach to planning projects which impact and/or engage young people
- To encourage the participation of young people
- To train and develop skills in both the young people and Well London Partners
- To provide opportunities for the young people to become active citizens; and
- To engage with disengaged and demotivated young people directly from the LSOA.

WELL LONDON

Introduction

Well London is a pan London programme that aims to bring new ways to deliver improvements in the physical and mental well-being of Londoners. The aim is to deliver co-ordinated, sustainable grass-roots projects in 20 of London's most deprived communities.

Well London is funded by BIG and delivered by the Well London Alliance, a partnership of seven independent organisations –

- London Health Commission
- Groundwork London
- London Sustainability Exchange (LSx)
- Central YMCA (CYMCA)
- University of East London (UEL)
- South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM)
- Arts Council England, London (ACE, London)

Gestation and Development of Well London

The gestation and development of Well London is complex. In 2006, different agencies in London mounted separate expressions of interest for funding from BIG's Well-being Fund. In response, BIG brought the agencies together to discuss their bids and, from this initial meeting, the agencies agreed to form a partnership (which became the Well London Alliance) so that together they could take a holistic approach to health and well-being.

At this stage, UEL came in to help develop the concept and approach. A model of intervention was designed to track explicitly the health impacts of Well London. To do this, two similar 'Lower Super Output Areas' in each of 20 London boroughs were selected. All were amongst the 11% most deprived LSOAs in London. One LSOA in each borough was then selected randomly to be the target for all Well London programmes in that borough; the other LSOA would act as a baseline or comparator: research at the end of Well London would determine the differences in health and other indicators in the two LSOAs as a guide to the impacts of the Well London programmes.

(A LSOA typically has around 2,000 population and is the smallest 'building block' for census and demographic research purposes. Three or more LSOAs are then grouped into SOAs which in turn are grouped into wards and borough-wide units. However, while suitable for census and research purposes, the geographical borders of LSOAs rarely fit with local perceptions. Inevitably, LSOAs also vary in terms of local resources in their area – both facilities (e.g. community centres and halls) and community organisations – with some Well London LSOAs being strikingly deficient in these resources.)

The Well London bid to BIG was for approx. £20 million. In response to this, BIG offered funding of approx. £10 million. In the light of this offer, WL Partners decided to scale back their programmes, but to continue delivery across all 20 boroughs.

In total, the seven WL Partners are committed to delivering 14 different projects of two kinds, 'Heart of the community projects' and 'Theme projects' –

Heart of the community projects

- **CADBE** (UEL)
- **Youth.com** (CYMCA)
- **Well London Delivery teams** (LSx and CYMCA)
- **Training communities** (SlaM)
- **Wellnet** (LSx)
- **Active Living Map** (Groundwork London)

Theme projects

- **Be Creative, Be Well** project based on the Culture and Tradition theme (ACE, London)
- **Buywell** and **Eatwell** projects based on the Healthy Eating theme (LSx)
- **DIY Happiness, Mental well-being Impact Assessment, and Changing minds** projects based on the Mental health and well-being theme (SlaM)
- **Healthy Spaces** project based on the Healthy Spaces theme (Groundwork London)
- **Activate London** project based on the Physical activity theme (CYMCA)

In addition each LSOA is managed by one of the Well London Partners, through a 'Borough Co-ordinator' for that LSOA. Project priorities are based on the community engagement process.

Well London is a three year programme and will run until April 2011.

YOUTH.COM AND THE YOUNG AMBASSADORS PROGRAMME

Initial research by Well London, backed up by further consultation, showed that, across all the selected LSOAs, 'young people' were considered to be both an issue and a priority. An issue because of perceptions of 'young people hanging around', leading to anti-social behaviour, vandalism and crime. A priority because there were few, if any, facilities for young people locally and little, if anything, for the young people to do. Providing more activities for young people would help to reduce the problems associated with youth.

WL Partners agreed both the need for a specifically youth-orientated programme and that CYMCA was best suited to lead this programme. This became Youth.com.

Youth.com, is the focal point for Well London in engaging young people from the LSOAs and involving them in the development and delivery of services which impact on them. The principles underpinning Youth.com are –

- Attitude change towards young people – understanding where young people come from and why they behave as they do
- Raise awareness of the needs of young people
- Understanding of young people
- Strengthen the citizenship of young people
- Build on the confidence and self esteem of young people
- Give young people a sense of respect
- Empower young people
- Set examples for young people that there are people who want to talk to them and listen
- Ensure that young people's voices link with Well London projects
- Give young people a sense of ownership

There are three elements of Youth.com –

- Young Ambassadors – the focus of this evaluation and the major element in Youth.com. Young Ambassadors are recruited from the LSOA. They work with WL Partners in planning their projects and in encouraging young people to attend these projects, e.g. Community Feasts delivered by LSx. They advise partners on policy or practice in their LSOA, e.g. involvement in ACE, London's commissioning of artists. They are involved as a team in planning and delivering pan London conferences including the Wellnet conference in February 2010. However, the primary role of the Young Ambassadors is to work with their borough co-ordinator to identify, plan and deliver a project for young people in their area which will provide opportunities for the Young Ambassador to gain a range of skills and experiences.

- Youth Participation Seminars and Conferences aimed primarily at WL Partners' self development and training and involving young people. These are part of the Wellnet project. They are designed to change attitudes and identify organisational challenges
- Youth Update Briefings – policy briefings aimed at partners, including local partners, informing them of borough specific youth related issues, provision, policy, funding, etc as it relates to the specific LSOA.

Youth.com is managed by a CYMCA Programme Manager, though this is only one of a number of her responsibilities. The YA Programme is managed by two Youth.com Workers. Each Youth.com Worker helps recruit, support, manage and guide 10 Young Ambassadors – one Youth.com Worker managing those boroughs which underwent the community engagement process in Autumn 2007, the other those boroughs which underwent the community engagement process in July 2008. This is very much scaled back from the model initially envisaged in which there would be a Youth.com Worker for each borough.

Initially the Young Ambassadors were to be recruited on a volunteer basis. But, because of legal and employment considerations, it was decided that they would be paid an hourly wage, based on an average of 20 hours work per month (though this is flexible), plus expenses. They also hold their own budget which was originally approx. £500 per quarter.

Young Ambassadors receive extensive training: three, week-long training courses delivered by Youthforce, a national training provider dedicated to developing the children and young people's workforce throughout the UK. The first of these is in community work (and gains the Young Ambassadors three credits on the Open College Network accreditation); the second in participation work with young people (another three credits); and the third in street and community-based outreach work (a further six credits). Training also includes two 'outward-bound' team-building residentials in Essex and Devon.

The YA Programme is a two year project which finishes in March 2010. It took around nine months to set up which limits the delivery of the YA Programme to around 15 months.

The BIG target for Youth.com was to engage 2,400 young people – including the Young Ambassadors themselves, the children and young people who participate in their projects and activities, and the children and young people who attend other Well London projects as a result of the encouragement of the Young Ambassadors. As of Autumn 2009, 1,873 young people had been engaged, indicating that Youth.com is well on track to achieving its target.

CASE STUDY

Klein, Croydon

Klein is the Young Ambassador for the Broad Green Super Output Area in Croydon and is studying Sport Studies at college. He was recruited through Winston Phillips, a local resident and Youth Leader at the Resource Centre. Previously he had helped out Winston on football sessions and had been invited to community meetings to represent the views of young people on local issues. He was attracted to becoming a Young Ambassador because, 'It would bring the community together and give the kids something to do. It would give me experience and help with my career. Plus, it would give me support to set up some of my ideas.'

Klein's project is ambitious. Through organising a series of regular football sessions for the children and young people of the estate, he aims to set up local football teams and, over time, develop this into a local football academy for 11 – 15 year olds on the estate. (His model is the Dutch football model which takes a holistic view of football development and includes healthy eating and the different career opportunities within football.)

Alongside this he is involved in organising a pan London football tournament with other Young Ambassadors. He is also involved in the Young Ambassadors' pan London Wellnet Conference in February 2010.

It helps that Klein is a qualified FA coach (level 1 and training for level 2) , is studying sport science at college and has contacts in football. But the list of the tasks he is under-taking is enormous: as well as buying equipment and kit and marketing (including setting up a website and making Powerpoint presentations) and outreach work to the young people on the estate, he is linking with organisations such as Kick Racism Out of Football, the FA (his aim is to get his football teams and academy 'Chartered Standard' status, plus participation in the FA's Respect campaign), Croydon Council, Crystal Palace's Football in the Community scheme and CYMCA's Activate team. That way he can get the political (with a small 'p'), financial and footballing backing for his project.

Klein is appreciative of the support he has received, particularly from Shelley Pletsch, his Youth.com Worker: 'She's given me a lot of support, but best of all, she's given me freedom. She knows that I know what I'm doing. She's very supportive – and that lifts my confidence.'

He firmly believes that the YA Programme will help to get local young people involved: 'It hasn't started yet [December 2009 – Klein is waiting for the delivery of kit and equipment which is being funded through his Youth.com budget] and I'm already excited. But for the kids, to be a team brings them together. They're safe, they're not judged, they're there to have fun. I'm also

hoping that the Mums and Dads will get involved. It helps that I'm from the estate and people know me.'

Klein is disciplined, focused, hard-working, personable and a great motivator. But what is so special about him is his long-term vision. When asked whether he thinks the YA Programme will make a difference to his community, he answers: 'I'm hoping [my project] will make a huge difference. It's not just about football sessions. It's about building these into teams [playing in local leagues] and the Academy. It's the long-term result that I want to get out of it.'

Being a Young Ambassador has helped Klein a lot. 'I like the way I've been treated. Everyone has treated me respectfully, as an equal. They've got involved, they've been 'critical friends' and helped challenged my thinking.' The experience has also helped him with his meeting skills ('I'm more comfortable at meetings, whether speaking or listening or relating. '), his project management skills, negotiating skills (he negotiated with Nike to get a discount on the kit) and his organisational skills. It has also, he believes, helped increase his capacity for hard work.

For him (as for most Young Ambassadors) there have been no downsides to being a Young Ambassador. 'I enjoy being a Young Ambassador. I'm extremely proud of being the Young Ambassador for Croydon. It's given me opportunities which I wouldn't otherwise have got – and which most people my age don't get. I've met the Mayor [of London, Boris Johnson]. I'm involved in the pan London tournament ... In a way, it was luck [that he became a Young Ambassador]. But it's given me a chance, given me experience, and I have dreams and now it's up to me.'

EXPERIENCE OF THE YOUNG AMBASSADORS

Recruitment of the Young Ambassadors

The Young Ambassadors are recruited through a number of channels, including local organisations (e.g. youth clubs), outreach work undertaken by the Youth.com Workers, friends of existing Young Ambassadors and Well London consultation. This ensures, as far as possible, that Young Ambassadors are recruited from the LSOA and that they are 'representative' of the young people in the LSOA.

Some Well London Partners questioned whether the Young Ambassadors were truly 'hard to reach'. Certainly, Young Ambassadors are intelligent, committed and personable: perhaps they had to be to rise to the challenge of being a Young Ambassador in the first place. But, while they may not be the 'hardest to reach' amongst their cohort, this does not mean that they are not representative of young people in their LSOA. Nor that they aren't affected by the pressures, stresses and deprivations which come with the territory.

Retention

In the past year around half of Young Ambassadors have left and been replaced by new recruits. This is to be expected and reflects the experience of similar projects (see Appendix One: Comparators).

In part this reflects the lifestyle of Young Ambassadors and their peers and the added pressures of 'holding down' the job of Young Ambassador in addition to school / college, family and other commitments. In part it reflects natural transitions to university, work and parenthood. In part it may also reflect the turnover in Youth.com Workers and the consequent lack of stable management.

Functions

The functions of the Young Ambassador varies from individual to individual and from borough to borough, but broadly falls into five categories:

(1) 'Social marketing' – helping to publicise Well London consultations, events and activities amongst peers in the LSOA, increasing attendance and participation at Well London activities, e.g. LSx's Community Feasts, CYMCA's Activate programming strand.

(2) 'Youth proofing' – helping to integrate the voices and concerns of young people into Well London programmes generally, e.g. with ACE, London and commissioning artists for Well London arts projects. This example is perhaps best illustrated with the Young Ambassador's intervention in Haringey. The

Young Ambassador considered that the arts project favoured by some of the committee would not meet the needs of the young people in the LSOA and had the self-confidence and authority to press, and win, his case. At the time of writing a new commission was under way.

(3) Developing and delivering their own projects. These range from table tennis and football tournaments and football academies to talent shows, drama, health and beauty sessions, and facilitating local girls in making their own music video. This is youth led programming in its purest sense though it should be judged as much on the process of developing the project and the learning that the Young Ambassador derives from his/her project as on the attendance at the final event.

(4) Pan London Conference – the Young Ambassadors are working together through monthly meetings and steering groups, to plan and deliver the Wellnet Conference at City Hall in February 2010. This aims to attract London's decision-makers. It will set out how to involve young people in their policies and programmes and show-case some of the projects of the YA Programme.

(5) Developing and delivering projects in partnership with the other Well London Partners.

Of these five functions, the greatest focus is on (3) and (4) with the greatest attention paid to the Young Ambassadors' own projects. Conversely, there appears to be comparatively little work undertaken in terms of 'youth proofing' or on developing and delivering projects with other WL Partners (though this pattern varies from borough to borough and between WL Partners). This partly reflects the complexities of the Well London partnership structure and the natural focus of each WL Partner on their projects. Perhaps most crucially it reflects clashing timescales: individual projects tend to have short time-scales but the involvement of Young Ambassadors is predicated on developing a good relationship between WL Partner and Young Ambassador. This takes time.

Views of the Young Ambassadors

The experience of the Young Ambassadors has been very positive. In particular, they have relished the challenge of realising their own projects. (See Case Studies.) The training was viewed as very helpful and all the Young Ambassadors interviewed considered that the support, mentoring and help they were given by their Youth.com Worker was central to their enjoyment of being a Young Ambassador and to their achievements.

The Young Ambassadors interviewed reported improvements in their own skills and capacities across a wide range of organisational, social and life skills including –

- communication skills

- teamwork skills
- problem solving
- decision making
- organisational and project management skills
- understanding how organisations work
- meeting councillors and other authority figures and being able to work with them
- motivation
- confidence
- sense of responsibility
- broadening horizons and increasing their aspirations, e.g. aiming to go to university

In general, they all felt that being a Young Ambassador had helped them significantly.

Their motivations included a mix of self-development, altruism, belonging (to an area or group) and enjoyment, e.g.:

“It gives me skills.”

“It looks good on my CV and will help me get to university.”

“I’m doing it for my area.”

“I want to give something back to my area.”

“There’s a lot of talent on the estate.”

“It’s with young people and I like working with young people.”

“And, of course, the title [Young Ambassador] sounds so flash!”

Their interactions with other WL Partners have, as a generalisation, been more limited and dependent on the circumstances of the Young Ambassador, the borough (and its resources and infrastructure) and the WL Partner. But there has been good feedback from the Young Ambassadors of working with ACE, Groundwork and LSx (the main Well London delivery agents) and, particularly, the other CYMCA Well London programme, Activate.

The Young Ambassadors were almost unanimous in their praise of the YA Programme. Only one ambassador interviewed noted that there was a downside – in his case, he was looked on with envy by some of his peers. All the Young Ambassadors interviewed considered that their views were listened to and that their ideas were implemented. They were also optimistic that the programme, and their project, was making a difference to the community.

CASE STUDY

Janel, Hackney

Janel is the Young Ambassador for the Brownswood SOA in Hackney and studying for her A levels. Her previous Young Ambassador project, a dance project, was delivered in partnership with ACE, London. Her current project is a step on from this – a piece of musical theatre developed from scratch. With the help of her Youth.com Worker she has approached, negotiated and commissioned a local theatre company, Immediate Theatre, to develop the idea through a series of weekly workshops and rehearsals leading first to a dramatised reading and, in Spring 2010, to a showcase performance.

Almost immediately – and, according to Immediate’s Associate Director Tony Gouveia, largely through Janel’s networking and encouragement – around 30 children and young people (aged 8 to 17), mainly Black Caribbean and Black African, began attending the workshops. At first these were held at the youth club but because of safety issues the workshops were switched to the Robin Redmond Community Centre.

Fairly early on the participants (including Janel) decided that the subject for their piece of musical theatre would be the life of Mary Seacole. Then, having worked on the main scenes and characters, Tony was delegated to write the script. At the session observed, in the lead up to the dramatised reading, the pace was hectic. Tony, his Trainee Drama Workers and his Peer Facilitators were rehearsing two, sometimes three, different scenes and songs at the same time.

Why had Janel decided on a musical theatre piece? ‘Because through musical theatre youth can be empowered, be creative and also stay fit. It doesn’t happen much. And it’s fun, too.’ Janel had never been a volunteer before but she was attracted to being a Young Ambassador ‘because of the responsibilities and because I knew I had a say in what the young people do – which doesn’t happen often.’

Basically, Janel is the Producer of the show. With her mentor at CYMCA she put the project plan together, she commissioned Immediate Theatre, she negotiated the rehearsal space, she phoned and got the young people together ‘trying to get the whole thing out there whatever, via word of mouth and Facebook’ and motivates them to keep on turning up and rising to the challenge.

In her view the project is definitely helping young people involved. ‘It’s giving them something they enjoy doing. It’s taking them off the streets.’ And it’s made a difference in the local community – if only because there aren’t so many boys hanging around. For her, the YA Programme is delivering what it said it would: it’s her project, her views have been listened to and acted on and it has given her many new skills. ‘It’s helped me with responsibility. I’ve

learned how to produce and plan. And it helps with my work at school. One of my A-levels is in music and part of that is about the music business.' The biggest single impact for Janel is that it has helped to develop her performance skills.

Tony adds, 'Yes, Janel's made a difference. Right from the start she was straight in persuading young lads to come. She's a young motivator. She has learnt that you have to lead from the front. In projects like this you've got to get people to follow you. You can't push them from behind. She's a self-starter but she's learnt that not everyone is like her, that people need to be motivated. She's got that message. She organises. She gets up on stage and does the silly stuff first. She's good.'

Indirectly, Janel has influenced Manor House Development Trust which is helping with the large scale regeneration of the area. Lesley Ann Forman, the Community Development Officer, is setting up a community choir. Through Janel's project, she has got to know Tony and Immediate Theatre and has learned from this experience. 'I've seen how Tony rehearses a song and at first sight it looks like some aren't paying too much attention. But his technique is right, it's well managed and he's got a good relationship with the participants. So it works.' As for Janel, Lesley Ann sees her 'as a role model, a someone to share ideas with, to be a link between the tutors and the young people, to help ideas and inspiration come from the ground ... And, of course, have a bit of fun.'

While Immediate Theatre's workshop fees are funded through Youth.com, additional funding is needed to take the project through to its final dramatised performance. At the time of the visit, Janel, with other young people, was putting together an application to Hackney's PAYP fund to cover these costs. Hopefully she will be successful. Certainly the participants, both girls and boys, are motivated and enthusiastic, working hard as a team, singing beautifully, sharing jokes and enjoying themselves.

CONSTRAINTS

Introduction

There have been a variety of factors which have constrained or curtailed the success of the YA Programme. Some of these are to do with the wider context of the programme – in the genesis, structure and funding of Well London itself. Some reflect the set-up and model of the YA Programme itself.

The Well London Alliance

The Well London Alliance is a partnership involving seven partners, who individually and collectively deliver in 20 LSOAs through 14 separate programme-strands. Given the limited resources (time, funding, organisational capacity) and despite Strategic Partnership Meetings, WL Partners have not been able to set up a single, integrated delivery-process. Instead, WL Partners operate semi-autonomously with operational decision-making retained by individual WL Partners – rather than jointly or with authority and budgets delegated to borough level. This has led to communication, timing, and delivery difficulties. The original intention of WL Partners had been to create projects which addressed well-being holistically. However delivery on the ground appears under-resourced, fragmented and lacking synergy, while the attention of WL Partners appears to have been partly diverted from addressing the needs of the communities in the LSOAs towards managing their own processes.

It has also impacted on what appears to have been the initial aim for the YA Programme: that the Young Ambassadors would influence the design and delivery of WL Partners' programmes so that they genuinely addressed the needs and concerns of young people. With Well London programming not integrated, decision-making retained at individual WL Partner-level and pressing timescales (because of the need to deliver programmes on the ground), this became an unachievable aim. Accordingly, and with some exceptions, the focus for the YA Programme shifted from 'youth proofing' WL Partners' programmes to the Young Ambassadors delivering their own programmes.

This has been a major constraint on the YA Programme.

Scale of Youth.com and the Young Ambassadors Programme

The Author's understanding is that the initial thinking for the programme was that there would be a Youth.com Worker based in each borough. When the BIG Lottery agreed approx. £10 million funding, rather than the £20 million in the Well London bid, it was decided to cut the resources under-pinning the programme but without cutting the programme itself. Youth.com would

operate in the 20 boroughs but these would be supported by only two Youth.com Workers and they would be based centrally at CYMCA rather than in the LSOAs themselves. (The exact nature of the intervention and the development of the YA Programme came later.) This has led to a fundamental mismatch between the aspirations for the Programme on the one hand, and the resources to support and implement it on the other.

Organisationally, it has led to over-stretch and a rapid turnover in Youth.com Workers. This has not been helped by the short duration of the programme and the challenging nature of their 'intermediary' role between the Young Ambassadors and WL Partners. And it has been made more difficult with the shift in aim and the lack of progress at youth proofing many WL Partners' programmes. It has also meant that the programme could not be embedded locally.

With hindsight, it would have made more sense to have cut the programme back to, at most, ten LSOAs – or to cut it to, say, six LSOAs but extending the duration of the programme from two to three years – while, in either case, maintaining the same staffing.

This has been a major constraint on the YA Programme.

Well London Model

The Well London model specifies that interventions need to be tightly focussed on the communities living in specific LSOAs (and sometimes, apparently, delivered in these LSOAs). However, in most cases, the geographical boundaries of the LSOAs bear little relationship to the reality on the ground. They do not fit with the peer and friendship networks of the Young Ambassadors which are based on family and schools. Neither do LSOAs necessarily contain the minimum of 'community capital' – existing community organisations and facilities. This increases the difficulty of delivering projects, particularly within the short time-frame of the YA Programme. Finally, the Young Ambassadors themselves have difficulty in grasping exactly where and to whom they should be targeting their project:

This has been a constraint on the YA Programme.

Borough Co-ordinators

WL Partners are London-wide organisations (though Groundwork has local borough-based teams). Borough Co-ordination responsibilities are undertaken by a WL Partner (with partners sharing out boroughs) or are delegated to individuals in local organisations. However, most Borough Co-ordinators have other, often competing, responsibilities. (Indeed, in some cases, Borough Co-ordinator responsibilities appear to be 'tacked on' to an already overflowing job description.)

In addition, the extent to which decision-making and authority is delegated to Borough Co-ordinators is limited. This lack of delegation at Borough / LSOA level is compounded by communication difficulties between the Co-ordinators and individual partners (which appear to vary from borough to borough and between partners). This exacerbates the problems with co-ordination, fragmented programming and a lack of synergy noted above. It also leads to a lack of ownership of Well London projects by the communities themselves.

This has been a constraint on the YA Programme.

Targets for and Duration of the Young Ambassadors Programme

The need for the funder, BIG, to see that Well London has achieved targets has led to a focus on easy, numerical outputs (e.g. number of beneficiaries). For Youth.com these are likely to be achieved. On this basis the YA Programme must be counted as a success. But with programmes like this, real success lies in capacity building the local community (e.g. growing new local organisations, strengthening existing organisations, developing local networks, increasing trust). This involves long-term relationship building.

The overall timescales – three years for Well London, two years for Youth.com and, because it took some time to establish, around 15 months for the YA Programme – leads to concerns that this is yet another ‘parachute’ intervention, which tend only to raise, and then dash, the hopes of the local community. Despite the large amounts of funding and the good intentions of all concerned, this pattern of intervention leads to reduced community capacity. It erodes the trust and the resilience of the community and it militates against building a strong local culture of participation and citizenship.

This under-cuts the effectiveness of the YA Programme. As one Young Ambassador commented, ‘It’s such a shame that it’s not going to last. It’s started, it’s having an impact and then it stops. I’ve had a lot of the younger girls interested [in being a YA]. It would be nice if the tradition could be continued.’

This has been a constraint on the YA Programme. The short duration of the YA Programme (together with other constraints noted above) makes it more difficult for it to be sustained or for funding to be found from other sources.

CASE STUDY

Martha, Greenwich

Martha is the Young Ambassador for the LSOA area which includes the Barnfield Estate. She was attending a local community event, organised by the Barnfield Project, with her little brother where she was recruited by CYMCA's Youth.com Worker, Shelley Pletsch. Martha was attracted to being a Young Ambassador for a number of reasons: 'I really liked the sound of it. It was something that would help me gain more confidence. It looks good on my CV. And I wanted to make a change in my community.'

Martha has been involved in a number of Well London projects, including the Community Feast in Autumn 2009 and a Talent Show she is organising for children and young people from the Barnfield Estate. 'It's about getting people together, about getting them to be confident and brave by performing in front of people. There's lots of talent in Barnfield but everyone just stays in their house and they don't come together.'

Martha works with Kelly-Ann Ibrahim, Greenwich Council's Project Co-ordinator for the Barnfield Estate, and her young volunteer Nancy. Kelly-Ann's remit is to increase the community capacity on the Barnfield Estate. This includes setting up a residents' committee, publishing a newsletter and establishing a youth group. She has also been proactive in linking Well London programmes into the estate – including working with CYMCA's Activate programme, Groundwork, Community Feasts and volunteering programmes.

'It's an ambitious project,' Kelly-Ann says of Martha's Talent Show. 'We've got Greenwich to agree to pay for a marquee ...' The lack of a proper indoor community facility is one of the most pressing issues for the estate and makes it more difficult to sustain initiatives like the YA Programme. 'Now we're marketing the event. Through the newsletter, through door-knocking. We've got volunteers from different blocks, so they are each doing their own block.'

Having a close and supportive local mentor is undoubtedly helpful to Martha, as is having Nancy who is helping her closely with the Talent Show. The Show itself has consolidated links with the Simba Youth Centre who are helping out with the music system. 'So it's not just a talent show,' Kelly-Ann says. 'It's about cementing relationships, about helping to bring a youth group from the estate together.'

Kelly-Ann comments on her role: 'I'm her local support and mentor. I encourage her. It's not always about adults making the decisions. You have to allow things to go with the flow. It's not about condescending or pushing my ideas and opinions. It's about valuing their input and point of view.'

Martha is very positive about the support she has received from both CYMCA and Kelly-Ann. 'It's been good. The training has definitely been useful. And working with Shelley, she's been telling me what kind of things I need to do and been really supportive. As has Kelly-Ann.' But the most valuable help has been, 'knowing that I've got a good amount of money to spend. Getting money to organise your own events – that's amazing!'

Being a Young Ambassador has helped Martha in many ways: 'I can talk freely about my own opinions and not be scared. I've discovered myself – it's given me power so that I can do what I want to do ... And when I say "I'm the Young Ambassador for Greenwich", people say "Wow!"' It's helped her develop communication and organisation skills, helped her develop a sense of responsibility and increased her aspirations. Currently studying at college she says, 'I want to do a degree in pharmacology and physiology and later become a teacher. I love being around children and young people.' But perhaps the single biggest impact for Martha has been: '[It's been a voyage] of self-discovery. I was going through hard times and [the chance to be a Young Ambassador] came at the right time.'

Things are moving on the Barnfield Estate. The local councillor sits on the Residents Committee, the relationship with Simba is almost cemented and the Community Feast was successful. Kelly-Ann believes that, 'there is an energy around, a 'can-do' attitude at present ... Part of the challenge is making residents and young people feel empowered and that they do have a voice and that that voice will be heard. Once people know that they can make a difference they tend to participate.' She is hopeful that these local and Well London initiatives can be sustained.

For Kelly-Ann the major achievement of the YA Programme has been that it has helped to empower Martha. 'Her eyes have been opened – to Well London, to Greenwich Council, to how decisions are made, to having a say.' And, though it is early days, she believes that the YA Programme may have influenced the ways of working of Greenwich Council: 'It's a new way of engaging with young people. So, we are looking at how to do this, looking at funding streams, looking at how, with partners, it may be sustained.'

IMPACTS

Introduction

This section assesses the YA Programme against its six aims. The discussion under each aim centres on the impacts of the programme (a) on the Young Ambassadors themselves, (b) on the target community, particularly the young people in that community, including impacts on other Well London events and activities in that community, (c) on WL Partners and CYMCA in terms of any influence on policies, programmes or ways of working.

The Author's assessment is given for each aim with the evidence backing up his assessment. WL Partners were also asked to rate the YA Programme's achievement of each aim (on a scale of one to five, where one = very poor, three = average, and five = very good). Their average assessment is given with comments where appropriate.

1: To allow young people to have ideas which can be implemented

The Author's view is that this has been achieved. All the Young Ambassadors interviewed had developed or were developing projects either on their own (though with the support of their Youth.com Worker and, often, local support) or with Well London partners. This is shown in all six case studies. A number of these projects – the music theatre piece in Hackney, the talent show in Greenwich – were also shaped to some extent by their participants.

The rating of WL Partners for this aim was 3.75 – a positive and above average rating. 'Some Young Ambassadors have put on projects and that's positive. It's allowed ideas to come through,' commented one Partner. Another noted, 'Yes, definitely, [the Young Ambassadors had] a key role and communicated that to partners.' And a third stated, 'A lot of them [the Young Ambassadors] have led on the ideas. And to make [their project] happen – that's brilliant.'

2: To create a bottom up approach to planning projects which impact and/or engage young people

The Author's view is that this has been achieved in terms of the Young Ambassadors' projects. (See all six case studies) In addition, some CYMCA Activate projects have included detailed discussions with young people (usually the Young Ambassadors) about their physical activity needs and this has influenced their programming. Similarly, ACE, London has given Young Ambassadors the opportunity to feed in their views into their commissioning process. This has had mixed success but, on occasion, has definitely made a difference.

Overall, though, the Author's view is that there is little evidence of a bottom up approach being adopted for most other Well London projects.

The average rating of WL Partners for this aim was 3.25 – about average. One partner noted, 'They've done a bit of it. But I'm not sure what they can do with only two people and one Young Ambassador in each borough and over 20 boroughs.' Another stated, 'We have tried our best to involve them. Whether or not it has worked is by the by.' Another noted, 'There's been a lot done by CYMCA to encourage young people and involve them in the programme. But it hasn't been bottom up or influenced projects. Nobody has [influenced the projects]. The projects were already decided.'

3: To encourage the participation of young people

The Author's view is that this has been achieved for the Young Ambassadors' own projects. Observation of sessions and events showed reasonable levels of attendance (particularly bearing in mind the bad weather in the lead-up to Christmas 2009). There is also evidence that, through 'social marketing' and the occasional 'bending' of Well London programmes (see previous aim), this has been achieved, at least to a limited extent, across the wider programme.

WL Partners rated this at almost 4 – higher than the other aims. 'Where the Young Ambassador was involved, it has definitely encouraged participation [by young people],' one WL Partner said. Another agreed: 'There has been the voice of someone who lives in the area and talks to the area. It's getting someone as a link [between Well London and the LSOA].'

The Young Ambassadors themselves were unanimous in their belief that their projects had encouraged the participation of young people (and made a positive impact generally on their communities).

4: To train and develop skills in both the young people and Well London Partners

This is in fact two aims –

- (1) to develop skills in the young people, i.e. the Young Ambassadors, and
- (2) to develop skills in WL Partners. (WL Partners were offered the opportunity to take part in the training organised for the Young Ambassadors, and the other two strands of Youth.com – the Seminars and Conferences, and the Youth Update Briefings – are also aimed, in the main, at them.)

The Author's view is that this has been achieved for the Young Ambassadors. The programme has been very successful when assessed against this aim.

However, the Author considers that this has not been achieved for WL Partners. Only one WL Partner officer interviewed took the opportunity to attend some of the training. No WL Partner interviewed noted participating in the other two strands of Youth.com. However a Youth.com Worker noted that 'several strategic partners' participated in the training on the culture of participation. This suggests that, overall, there has been little cultural change in WL Partners as a consequence of the YA Programme.

WL Partners rated this at 3.3, around average. However, from their comments, it is clear that they considered that the programme had been considerably more successful at developing the skills of the Young Ambassadors than at developing the skills of WL Partners. 'It's been a wonderful learning opportunity for the Young Ambassadors both through training and their exposure to a range of organisations. It's the best thing that's come out of the YA Programme,' one said. 'I'd rate it 4 for the young people and 2 for WL Partners. The WL Partners are too stressed.'

5: To provide opportunities for the young people to become active citizens

The Author's view is that the YA Programme has provided opportunities for the Young Ambassadors to become active citizens. It has involved them in public policy. The acid test, though, is whether or not the Young Ambassadors will remain active citizens. Here the evidence is that at least three of the Young Ambassadors interviewed are likely to continue to be active citizens. If this was extrapolated to all Young Ambassadors there could be as many as 15 to 20 young people engaged as citizens. However, this is likely to be an over-estimate if only because there is always a gap between intention and action.

WL Partners rated the YA programme highly in this regard with an average rating of 4 out of a maximum of 5. "It's definitely encouraged young people to get involved ... It's pushed them to be vocal and outspoken," noted one partner.

6: To engage with disengaged and demotivated young people directly from the LSOA

Young people from the LSOA have been engaged: the numbers speak for themselves (1,873 at the latest count). Some, at least, of these will have been 'disengaged and demotivated' – though it is not possible to say exactly how many. Therefore, the Author's view is that the YA Programme has engaged with some disengaged and demotivated young people.

WL Partners rated the YA Programme at 2 out of 5 (poor) on the achievement of this aim. However, they appeared to be rating this mainly on their

experience and perception of the Young Ambassadors themselves. 'The people [Young Ambassadors] we have,' noted one, 'are the most active young people.' 'They're not the most vulnerable,' seconded another.

However, although as Young Ambassadors the individuals concerned are generally not 'disengaged and demotivated', some may have been so before – or, at least, at a low point in their lives. And it could well under-estimate the part that the recruitment process, the training and the staff support for the Young Ambassadors plays in moving individuals from the 'disengaged' end of the spectrum to the 'engaged' end.

Impact on Well London Partners

Well London Partners were asked whether or not the YA Programme had influenced their organisation either in terms of the organisation's aims and agenda or in terms of its ways of working. The consensus amongst WL Partners was that the YA Programme had made little or no difference to their organisation either in terms of its aims and agenda or in terms of its ways of working.

'On a personal level [the YA Programme] has influenced the way I work,' commented one WL Partner. 'But not on an organisational level.' Another, after having said that the Programme had not influenced his organisation noted, 'But we try to recognise that all areas, including youth, should have their voice.' Another commented that working with the Young Ambassadors had been productive but that it was based on their pre-existing model of empowering key individuals in the community. A fourth felt that further evaluation would be necessary.

It is not surprising that the YA Programme has hardly impacted on WL Partners at an organisational level. Youth.com and the YA Programme is small-scale and time-limited. All the WL Partners are, relatively speaking, large-scale organisations involved in a range of projects beyond their involvement in Well London. It is a 'big ask' for any small-scale programme to change existing, large-scale organisations – the scale, language, traditions and culture of organisations protect them from externally-directed change. As such, the lack of impact on WL Partners reflects as much, if not more, on them as it does on the YA Programme.

Nevertheless it can be argued that because the initial Well London consultation (in all 20 LSOAs) affirmed the importance of young people, both as a priority need and as an issue, the need to involve and engage local young people was put firmly on the agenda of WL Partners. But while one can say that this has influenced the overall shape of the Well London Programme, it is problematic to assert that this will have a long term influence on any WL Partner.

But while the YA Programme may have had little influence on WL Partners, it – and the Young Ambassadors themselves – has been received enthusiastically by local partners. At this level there is better evidence that the Programme is influencing organisations in their ways of working:

‘[For us] it’s a new way of engaging with young people,’ one local organisation noted. ‘We’re looking at how [we continue] to do this. We’re looking at funding streams.’ Another local agency commented, ‘We wouldn’t have got anywhere without the YA Programme ... [The Young Ambassador] is coming on the Board [of the local organisation] in January. She’ll help make sure that young people have a voice.’

This disparity in organisational impacts of the Programme between WL Partners and grass-roots organisations may reflect a series of differences between the two sets of organisations: differences in scale, purpose and programmes, between working at the strategic and operational levels, and between those organisations making time-limited interventions and those which are more deeply imbedded in their communities.

Summary of Impacts

The Author considers that the YA Programme has been successful in terms of its impacts on the Young Ambassadors themselves – their ideas have been listened to and realised, their skills have been developed and enhanced and they have been provided with opportunities to become active citizens. The process has been a bottom up approach.

Similarly, the quantitative evidence indicates that it has been successful in encouraging participation from other young people in the Young Ambassadors’ communities.

While there is little evidence that the YA Programme has influenced WL Partners, it does appear to be the case that, in some areas, it has made a significant impact at an organisational level on local organisations and agencies.

CASE STUDY

Che, Camden

Che is the Young Ambassador for the Haverstock area in Camden and is studying for his A levels. He was brought in to complement the existing Young Ambassador, Jordan.

Che's first experience of the YA Programme was attending the three-day team-building residential course for the Young Ambassadors in Devon. Since then he has been involved in the Halloween 'Pumpkin Party', organised by WL Partner LSx, in the Burmash Estate, helping the local children carve their pumpkins into lanterns. Together with Jordan, he is a member of the Pan London group working towards the Wellnet conference in February 2010 where they will be running the sports section.

Che and Jordan's main project involves organising a football tournament at Talacre Sports Centre for teams from different schools. They have been busy ordering the equipment (including uniforms, footballs, bibs, trophies), getting out their publicity, liaising with Camden's Sports Development team (who have been helpful both with the booking and with negotiating with suppliers), contracting the referees and organising the structure of the tournament.

Previous to the YA Programme Che had had no experience of anything similar although he had been on his schools' School Council, 'but that was a lot more formal than this.' Like other Young Ambassadors, he is enthusiastic about the help he's received from his Youth.com Worker, Shelley Pletsch: 'She calls me three times a week, makes sure that I'm up-to-date, keeps me involved. Things pop up all the time, so it's good she keeps us informed, so that we can keep on top of it.'

Che firmly believes that the YA Programme is helping to get young people locally doing things. 'It's about a lot of things, not just the football. It's about making sure people in the area know about it [YA Programme]. He is also pleased that his, and Jordan's, views are listened to and their ideas implemented. 'It was up to Jordan to choose what he wanted to do. It was his idea to do a football tournament. It's basically what Jordan thought, it's completely his call.' And it's beginning, he thinks, to make a difference in the community: 'So far [what we've been involved in] has been for younger children. But the football tournament is for 14 to 15 year olds, so that will make a difference.'

For Che, one of the best things about being a Young Ambassador is getting paid: 'Getting paid is nice. Getting paid to do what I enjoy is even better. I'm having a nice time and getting paid – that's like a double bonus!' It's also broadened his horizons: 'Working with [Camden's] Sports Development – doing things independently – has given me an insight into organising and into

how hard it is to do. It's strengthened my want to work with kids later in life. I wanted to be a teacher and this has helped to cement that [aspiration].'

There are few, if any, downsides to being a Young Ambassador – 'It's still new to me.' – though he wonders whether there could be better publicity. This would, he believes, lead to more kids being involved.

That, however, is a minor concern. For Che, the single biggest impact the YA Programme has had for him is that, 'It allows me to make a change for the community.'

He is now also studying for his A levels. He is hoping to go to university and later train as a teacher. His ambition is to be a primary school teacher.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Elements of Young Ambassadors Programme model

Certain elements of the YA Programme model work well, in particular –

- Payment for the work done by the Young Ambassadors rather than having them as volunteers. This motivates the Young Ambassadors and gives them a status both in their own and their peers' eyes. It makes the job real and is helpful for their CVs. The flexibility of the job – part-time with hours varying from week to week – also works well.
- The focus on training has increased the skills of the Young Ambassadors in the tasks expected of them. It helps, too, that the training is accredited and leads to qualifications.
- Dedicated Youth.com Workers are also crucial to the success of the programme – though the resource is not nearly as great as it should have been. A ratio of 5:1 (Young Ambassadors to worker) would have increased the effectiveness of the programme. Professional support based locally to the Young Ambassadors would also have increased the effectiveness of the programme, helping the Young Ambassador forge local links and minimising the time that workers spent travelling between projects.
- The title itself, 'Young Ambassador', also helps. It is instantly noticeable, adds status for the Young Ambassador and helps to increase his / her aspirations by giving him / her something to live up to.

Taken together, these have been a major success factor.

While none of the Young Ambassadors directly expressed any concerns about being the sole Young Ambassador for their area, the experience of comparator organisations (The Mayor's POW team, national Young Advisors network) suggests that having a team of young people working together has significant benefits – mutual support, mentoring, ideas exchange, the sense of belonging that comes from being part of a team and organisation, and the wider range of interests and skills of the team helping it to interface better with its hosting organisation and meet its needs.

Youth.com Workers

Central and crucial to the achievements of the Young Ambassadors have been the Youth.com Workers. They have acted as mentors, project managers and champions. They have been committed and dedicated to the work of the Young Ambassadors and have stepped back and let the Young Ambassadors themselves take charge while continuing to provide a safety net for them. Despite tensions and difficulties, they have helped to keep the YA Programme on the agenda of WL Partners and – within the structural constraints noted above – have not ducked taking on the challenging intermediary role between Young Ambassadors and WL Partners.

It is no accident that the Youth.com Workers were seen as a real strength by all the Young Ambassadors, by other CYMCA staff and by a number of WL Partners. Their blend of community development and youth-based skills and their personal qualities has been an essential and major success factor underpinning the programme.

This has been a major, and crucial, success factor.

Having more Youth.com Workers, having them spread less thinly, would have helped. Extending the programme to a minimum of three years would also have helped: it would have improved continuity and, in all likelihood, reduced staff turnover. Giving added authority to the workers (e.g. re-titling the job to Youth.com Project Manager) would also have helped.

Local support

The difficulties faced by most Borough Co-ordinators has been noted above. However, in some cases (as, for instance, in Greenwich and Newham) there have been local organisations which have helped to fill, or supplement, this role, providing local, hands-on, day-to-day support. This, in part at least, has made up for the difficulties of 'scale' of Well London and helped ground Well London projects locally. They also provide an on-going link and interface with public organisations, e.g. local authorities, with potential access to other funding streams, increasing the sustainability of the work of at least the Young Ambassadors currently in post in their locality.

This has been a contributing success factor.

Replicability

The successful elements of the YA Programme model can easily be replicated by other organisations while there are many individuals with the community development / youth work skills who could act as managers and mentors to the young people involved. Local support, however, is dependent on the existing capacity of the community in particular the presence and willingness of local organisations to act as hosts.

CASE STUDY

Sidrah, Newham

Sidrah is the Young Ambassador for the Canning Town area in Newham. She was appointed in Autumn 2009. She heard about the project through Robert Churchill, the Manager at the local CTR Triangle Tenant Managed Organisation (which is responsible for the grounds works, day-to-day repairs and communal repairs in the immediate area). Robert had previously met with ACE in connection with their 'Newham Final Frontier Festival' and through this met Youth.com Worker, Sara Kraus, who asked him if he would be interested in finding a Young Ambassador for the area. He had no hesitation in recommending Sidrah, 'She was ideal. She knows all the young people locally. Her family were one of the first Asian families to come to our Xmas party. She was active in the area. And there was a spark there ...'

Sidrah is involved in two Well London projects – boxercise sessions with CYMCA's Activate programme and her Youth.com project. With the help of Sara, she has short-listed three community theatre projects (including the Theatre Royal at Stratford). 'We've got a group of about 15 to 20 children and young people, aged eight to 15. They're all close to each other,' Sidrah explains. 'Originally Robert suggested *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, but we haven't got an actual idea just yet because we want the group to come up with the idea.' The aim is for the group to participate in weekly classes leading to a performance for the community in Spring 2010.

The main sticking point with the project had been the lack of a suitable venue. The Hub (the NDC's centre) was outside the LSOA; the only other possibility was the Ascot Hall, which was used and managed by a local community organisation. Fortunately, agreement was quickly reached so that Sidrah's programmes could use the hall without clashing with the existing programmes.

Sidrah is fulsome in her praise for the help that Sara and Robert have given her. 'Sara has been wonderful. The best thing is talking to her – she understands me. And we make decisions together. Robert got the hall and has helped me a lot.' As a result the YA Programme is starting to make a difference to the local community and has high hopes that it will be successful. Whatever happens, the YA Programme has already helped her: 'It's broadened my horizon. [Since I became a Young Ambassador] I want to go to a really good university. At first, I wasn't quite sure ... I feel really good about the [YA] Programme. It's motivated me a lot. It's helped me with communication, with talking over the phone, with meeting people like councillors. At first, I felt nervous, but now I'm just being myself. ... Looking back later, I hope I'll think I did well.'

Whatever happens with the project, Sidrah is likely to keep meeting people like councillors. Robert explains: 'She's invaluable. She's got a job and is going to college. And Youth.com came along and put it all into a structure and

gave something to her. We wouldn't have got anywhere without the YA Programme. Having Sara there was great for Sidrah, and it made it easier for us Sidrah is coming on the Board [of the CTR] in January. She'll help make sure that young people have a voice. And we will be able to get training packages for her. I'd thought that she would be right for the Board before, but I knew it was going to be difficult. But finding this [the YA Programme] immediately was a gift. And it's not only having Sidrah on the Board. The programme has helped us in other ways. It's opened doors: the local authority, everyone, wants to join us. We're isolated here because Canning Town is isolated. But we can see a light at the end of the tunnel. The young people locally have gone from sitting on the balcony to designing programmes and posters. Contractors are volunteering. There are much better relationships on the estate now.'

SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction

There are three separate but inter-related aspects to the sustainability of the project –

- The sustainability of the YA Programme itself
- The sustainability of the work of some of the individual Young Ambassadors, and
- Using the Young Ambassador model for future similar programmes

Young Ambassadors Programme

The comparator initiatives (GLA's POW team, the national Young Advisors network – See Appendix One) are based on teams of young people acting, on a paid basis, as consultants or advisors to the organisation in which they are based. The hosting organisations have chosen to develop their Young Advisor / POW teams. They benefit directly from the work of their young consultants because, through their work, the organisation's policies and practice can better meet the needs of its community. While few of these projects are properly funded through mainstream budgets, there is a greater longevity about them.

All these factors make these projects more sustainable than the YA Programme.

A number of other Well London programmes aim to increase community capacity (for instance, through training and supporting local volunteers). However, despite these programmes, it is doubtful whether there will be sufficient community capacity within the LSOAs to continue to support the YA Programme after its current end-date in 2010.

There are two potential possibilities for sustaining the YA Programme. First, WL Partners could agree to find the additional funding necessary to continue the programme from Spring 2010 through to the end of Well London in Spring 2011. Given that there is currently only one Youth.com Worker, it would make sense to scale back the initiative – perhaps focussing on those with a greater chance of sustainability. However, given the overall funding to Well London and the fact that it is approaching the final phase of its delivery, this may be only a fleeting, even theoretical, possibility.

The second possibility involves using the Wellnet conference in February, which is being developed, delivered and mainly fronted by the Young Ambassadors themselves as a pitch for continuing the programme. Given that most of the Young Ambassadors' projects are sport or art-based – and that they are all related to health – it would be worth testing out whether the YA

Programme fits with the sports and arts legacy plans of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. The fact that the programme is tested, that it is up and running and that it could be used (without undue 'bending' of its aims) to increase participation and involvement in the Games by young people, may be attractive to funders and corporate social responsibility budgets.

Crucially what the YA Programme offers is, firstly, the engagement of young people from areas of deprivation across London, and, secondly, a structure within which young people are able to develop their skills and aspirations so that they can deliver their own events and projects in their areas. This is a considerable resource. It is, perhaps, a unique resource. It makes possible the prospect of hosting a series of Olympic-related events and celebrations across London's poorest neighbourhoods. Such a prospect dovetails perfectly with 2012's and The Mayor's vision of a legacy for the Olympics. It is attractive not only to public sector funding but also to corporate social responsibility budgets. And, as many of the Young Ambassadors realise, the title – 'Young Ambassador' – is great.

Whether or not this is a route to sustaining the YA Programme will depend on discussions with The Mayor and 2012 – and the timescales are short. Nevertheless, it represents the best chance of continuing the YA Programme. Of course, a package geared to the Olympics and its legacy vision would be even more attractive if Well London were able to guarantee continued funding for at least a scaled back programme through to autumn 2010 or, preferably, spring 2011. This could be viewed as partnership funding and, thus, help leverage in other funding. It would help to sell the idea because there would be Young Ambassadors already on the ground. It would also ensure a smooth transition to an 'Olympics-flavoured' YA Programme, increasing the chances of success of the successor initiative.

Individual Young Ambassadors

While the YA Programme as a whole may not be sustainable, there are good reasons for assuming that some Young Ambassadors will continue their work into summer 2010 and beyond. Some local and WL Partners have found the resources, or will be able to continue the funding, for their Young Ambassadors. At least one Young Ambassador is determined to continue working as an ambassador even if on a voluntary basis.

There may possibly be opportunities to discuss with the POW team's manager the possibility of transferring one or two Young Ambassadors on to the POW team (though their responsibilities would need to align with those of the POW). Some funding from other Well London programmes and other sources means that the work of some Young Ambassadors may continue beyond the YA programme end date. Similarly there are a number of Young Advisors groups in London, both in NDCs (though these are now nearing the end of their lives some are continuing as regeneration and housing agencies) and in local authorities (e.g. Southwark, Haringey, Waltham Forest).

It may, therefore, be worthwhile for CYMCA (and perhaps other WL Partners) to discuss the YA Programme with officers at the GLA and the relevant local authorities with the aim of securing continuing funding and support for individual Young Ambassadors.

Young Ambassadors Programme as an Example

The YA Programme, The Mayor's POW team and Young Advisors teams share common elements – young people are paid for their work but on a part-time and flexible way to fit in with their life-styles, and are managed and mentored by a dedicated officer at their hosting organisation. However, these initiatives are focussed on involving young people in policy-making rather than on delivery. This makes them more attractive to local authorities and public agencies. Therefore it is more likely that the POW team / Young Advisors model will be taken up than the Young Ambassador model.

It is also a 'crowded market' with national volunteering programmes, such as v, and with renewed attention to Young Apprentice programmes. Both of these are focussed on skilling young people and helping them find employment, rather than on the active citizenship / community link model underlying the YA Programme.

Given the present recession it is likely that schemes orientated explicitly towards skills and employment will find more favour with government. Therefore, it is unlikely that the YA Programme will be used by other agencies (with the exception of 2012) as a basis for the development of similar projects.

CASE STUDY

Miriam, Lambeth

Miriam is the Young Ambassador for the Larkhall area in Lambeth and was attracted to the post because it was about helping young people. 'Thinking of my area, there's not many activities going on or, if they are, the young people aren't aware of them. And to have young people leading projects is a great idea. I aspire to be a role model of someone who's positive about the area and wants to see a change.'

Miriam was involved in the area's Community Feast. She is one of the main co-ordinators of the Young Ambassadors' pan London Wellnet Conference in February 2010. (She has had some previous experience with conferences). She is also in contact with Lambeth Council's Sports Development Team about getting more youth football teams at Larkhall Park. She has also worked with ACE, London and helped them assess some applications for funding, though she is disappointed that there has been no follow-up to this.

Miriam's main project involves helping young girls at the local youth club. She feels that most activities and events for young people in the area tend to be for the boys. She is determined to redress the balance and give the girls a chance.

The first stage of her project involved the girls, split into two groups, writing lyrics and then recording them to an existing backing track. This happened over the October half-term week at a studio on an industrial estate in New Cross and, by the Friday afternoon, both groups had successfully recorded their songs. The next stage will be to make a music video / DVD of the songs.

Essentially, Miriam is acting as the Executive Producer for the project – she has found and coached the girls, helping them to develop their ideas and then prioritise which they were going to realise ('at first the girls wanted to do so many things'); researched recording studios and film companies; negotiated the contract with the recording studio; organised (with the girls' Youth Worker) the transport arrangements from Larkhall to New Cross; done presentations and networked to get help with the project and, throughout, has supported and mentored the girls.

She has been supported by her Youth.com Worker, Sara Kraus, throughout. 'Sara has helped a lot. She's been there since the first day of the project and been at almost everything I've done. It's good to have a familiar face, to know you've got someone behind you. Otherwise you can feel shy and overwhelmed.' As with all project management, there's also a host of details that have to be remembered and actioned in the right order. Sara has also helped find contacts. Most importantly, 'As well as being my boss, she's been my friend. We can talk about almost everything. That's been invaluable.'

Miriam thinks that the same applies to the work behind the pan London conference. 'Sara and Shelley hold us all together through monthly meetings. And they've set up a steering group to organise the conference between meetings.'

Being a Young Ambassador is a great experience for Miriam. 'It's given us training. It's opened opportunities for us – I had to give a presentation at an international mental health conference. It was quite scary. But this was the first time they had young people [presenting at the conference]. It was good. It was good having our opinion valued. You don't usually get that as a young person. That's perhaps the biggest way it's helped us: giving us opportunities speaking to people we've never met, finding out what's going on ... And, of course, the title [Young Ambassador] sounds so flash!'

She currently works in retail, and she likes her work, but her experience on the YA Programme has caused her to reflect on what she wants to do in the future. 'I'd really like to continue as a Young Ambassador. I don't want to stop. Helping those young girls and hearing some of the things they say, has made a real impact on me.'

She hopes the YA Programme will continue, 'It's started, it's having an impact and then it stops. I've had a lot of the younger girls interested [in being a Young Ambassador]. It would be nice if the tradition could be continued.'

CONCLUSION

The YA Programme is a youth led initiative which recruits, supports and manages a Young Ambassador from each of the 20 LSOAs that are the focus of Well London. Young Ambassadors help the seven WL Partners in the Well London Alliance by publicising Well London consultations, events and activities, by integrating the voices and concerns of young people into Well London projects and by developing projects in partnership with WL Partners. Uniquely the Young Ambassadors plan and deliver their own projects in their LSOA and, together, are planning the Wellnet Conference at City Hall in February 2010.

The YA Programme has not been without its difficulties and constraints. Because of the complexities of the partnership and delivery, the YA Programme has had relatively little impact on WL Partners. It has relied too heavily on the two Youth.com Workers based at CYMCA to manage and support the 20 Young Ambassadors across London. While the YA Programme has helped to build community capacity in at least some LSOAs the timescales are short and probably insufficient for that capacity to be embedded. It is unlikely that the YA Programme will be sustained.

This would be a wasted opportunity. The YA Programme is genuinely youth led. (Few programmes involving young people are led by the young people themselves.) It is, in the Author's experience, unique in enabling young people to put on their own projects – a complex and challenging set of project management tasks carried out in 'real time' and in front of their peers and their community. It has made a positive impact on the lives of the Young Ambassadors, developing their skills and raising their aspirations and ambitions. It has helped to attract significant participation from other young people in the LSOAs. It has been taken up enthusiastically by local community organisations. On all these counts it has made a positive difference. On all these counts it should, if possible, be sustained.

The Author believes that, with the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, there may be an opportunity to extend and sustain the YA Programme as part of the Olympics Legacy. It would help to show other communities in the UK and across the world that the Olympics can be a force for social change. For this reason the Author encourages CYMCA and Well London to advocate the benefits of the YA Programme to The Mayor, the GLA and 2012 with the aim of extending it through to 2012 and beyond.

Sandy Craig
February 2010

APPENDIX ONE: COMPARATOR PROJECTS

Greater London Authority: The Mayor's Peer Outreach Workers (POW)

The Mayor's Peer Outreach Workers (POW) team is a group of approx 40 young people aged 15 to 25 (a somewhat older group than the Young Ambassadors) who work with the Greater London Authority (GLA) and local authorities to influence policies that directly affect young Londoners. To do this, they attend professional boards as the voice of young people; present to conferences and steering groups; lead and support projects on e.g. community safety; carry out research into issues such as gangs, guns and knives and work with the Mayor on youth-related projects.

POWs are drawn from across London and reflect London's diversity – they come from a variety of cultural, religious and racial backgrounds, and include young people with disabilities, young offenders, young people in care and NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training), but they are not necessarily the most deprived.

Like the Young Ambassadors, they are employed on a sessional basis. They are paid approx £8.50 per hour for a maximum of 16 hours per week: this fits in well with the POW's life-styles. They attend training in youth work, child protection, participation, conflict resolution, research and other topics. They are supported by a full-time Manager. More experienced members of the POW team also act as mentors for new members.

The group's size means that the GLA can make the most of the flexible nature of the team's employment. It also allows as many young people as possible the chance to be involved and to develop skills. Different groups within the POW team work together on different policies including:

- SN4P (Safer Neighbourhoods for Young People) Project – mapping places between home and school where children don't feel safe, then working with schools, local authorities and other agencies to get these problems fixed;
- You're Welcome Pilot Project – funded by the Department of Health, this project involved improving health services for, and their accessibility to, young Londoners
- The Young Inspectors' Project – funded by the Government Office for London, this looked at how six London boroughs consulted with young people resulting in a report and presentation to officers of the boroughs concerned. Subsequently they are working with the boroughs on a series of recommendations to improve their consultation processes.

As a consequence of the success of the POW team, Transport for London and the British Transport Police have since decided to set up their own youth boards.

The Mayor's POW and Youth.com's Young Ambassadors have formed a close working alliance. Some POWs met with the Youth.com staff in the early days of the YA Programme and have helped to recruit Young Ambassadors. Currently, other POWs are working closely with the Young Ambassadors on the Wellnet Conference in February 2010.

The major differences between The Mayor's POW and the YA Programme is that the former has been set up as a 'mainstream' rather than time-limited project (though there continue to be funding difficulties); that they have a less complex brief, work to a simpler process and to one organisation; that members of The Mayor's POW team work together either as a team or in sub-groups; and that the aim for the The Mayor's POW is clear (influencing policies which impact on young people).

Young Advisors

Young Advisors (YAdv) is a national charity but with its roots in the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal policies and in a number of the New Deal for Communities (NDCs) set up around the country. NDCs were set up in deprived neighbourhoods to tackle holistically the problems of deprivation and disadvantage. Initially, and still in many cases, a group of around six young people are recruited as Young Advisors to the NDC.

The aim of the YAdv programme is to help NDCs (and, latterly, other public agencies) engage more effectively with children and young people, using the Young Advisors as 'young consultants'. They are involved in three areas of work –

- promotion and marketing (helping to link young people to service providers, acting as a conduit for decision makers to engage with young people)
- 'youth proofing' (ensuring that the voices of young people are heard and that the needs and concerns of young people are embedded in the policies of the agency)
- and project work

More recently, the programme has flourished with local authorities, PCTs and other agencies setting up YAdv teams. There are now over 40 projects nationwide and, while most have a team of between six and ten Young Advisors, there are one or two 'super teams' of up to 30 young people. The team approach means that, between them, the Young Advisors have a range of skills and interests enabling them to take on a wider range of tasks. The team approach also provides peer support (with more experienced Young Advisors helping new members of the team).

Like the YA Programme and The Mayor's POW team, Young Advisors are paid on an hourly rate (sometimes with a part of their hourly rate going to fund

local projects). According to YAdv, the fact that they are paid professionals – experts in their local area – gives them credibility in the eyes of the agencies they deal with and motivates the Young Advisors to develop and maintain professional standards. Young advisors also undergo extensive accredited training (usually a 30 hour residential course or over two weekends in intensive sessions).

Each team is managed by an officer in the agency they work for, though usually this is part of an existing job, e.g. Youth Engagement Officer. The typical pattern of work involves the officer in a lot of work initially in setting up the Young Advisors team and during the training; thereafter the work takes much less time. There is also the back-up of the National Charity and its development and other staff.

In addition to their local projects, YAdv is involved in a number of national projects which draw Young Advisors from different areas and regions. The national charity also helps to ensure that different Young Advisor teams share good practice.

The major differences between YAdv and the YA Programme are that the Young Advisors work to, and are based in, one organisation which is located within their neighbourhood; and that they are organised as teams.