

# **Volunteering Matters**

## **Futures Midlands Project Evaluation**

**Volunteering Matters  
August 2019**

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## 1. Introduction

The Futures Midlands project was a project run by national charity Volunteering Matters. The project began in November 2018 and was originally planned to run until 2020. However, the project ended in March 2019. The project was a partnership with the Acorns Hospices in the West Midlands, based in Birmingham, Walsall and Worcester. The project also worked with schools and colleges in the West Midlands.

The target group was young people with life limiting conditions aged 17 to 19 in the key transition period. The project organised training workshops, volunteering opportunities, work experience placements and mentoring opportunities. The project model was based around recruiting Volunteer Mentors to support the young people to access all their activities.

Futures Midlands was supported by the Volunteering Matters team based in Birmingham. A Volunteer Manager was recruited to set up and manage the project, with back up support from other Volunteering Matters staff in Birmingham.

The project began with a focus group of some young people from Acorns Hospices and members of their families to help them visualise the Futures programme. This helped the Volunteer Manager to understand some of the needs and challenges the young people currently faced, and could possibly face when taking part in the programme. It also enabled the young people to give their views about what kinds of activities they wanted to take part in and what attributes they wanted in a Volunteer Mentor. It was this co-production and feedback from the young people that informed the project what the young people were interested in. Some of the young people from the focus group took part in the project activities.

A number of young people with life limiting conditions were considered for the Future Midlands project and 21 young people were identified in the first year. The project hoped to involve higher numbers of young people, but recruitment of young people was challenging and not every young person ended up taking part due to a variety of reasons, including ill-health.

Twelve young people ended up taking part in the Futures Midlands project.

## **2. Evaluation Framework**

### **2.1 Purpose**

Impact and evaluation is important to all projects Volunteering Matters undertakes. Volunteering Matters matches local insight and flexibility with sector leading expertise in impact measurement and evaluation, using validated measurement tools to track progress, drive improvement and share learning with localities, peers and policy makers.

For Futures Midlands, as the project was a new project and the evaluation was centred on the involvement of young people and their families, it was envisaged that the terms of the evaluation would evolve as the project evolved. It was expected that the young people would guide the project and for the young people to learn alongside staff. Therefore the approach to impact and evaluation at Futures Midlands was to combine nationally validated tools with continuous dialogue with the young people and other stakeholders.

As it was planned to evaluate at every key stage of the project and to involve all the partners, and to aim to measure some of the information against other Volunteering Matters projects working with young people, including other projects with young disabled people, Volunteering Matters conducted the evaluation internally. Volunteering Matters expertise in evaluation was used in producing the tools and questions.

A mix of quantitative and qualitative data was gathered to:

1. Ascertain what effect the Futures Midlands project has had on the transition for young people
2. Determine whether young people have developed more through undertaking training, volunteering and work experience placements
3. Determine the factors required for successful volunteer and work experience placements, family support and successful support roles.
4. Look at the savings which such programmes can produce for services, such as hospices, health and social care services and schools, in order to open up diverse funding streams for future programmes.

## 2.2 Methodology

To collect the information, Volunteering Matters used a number of methods. Some of the tools were based on the successful tools used on current Volunteering Matters programmes supporting disabled young people. As a national organisation, Volunteering Matters asked some of the same questions that were asked of all other young people taking part in our programmes, including those who have disability and those who do not, with a view to comparing answers across the groups.

Flexibility and responding to change was a key part of the project and so although there was a commitment to disciplined evaluation methods, there were some developments to the methods as the project evolved.

### 1. Interviews

At the start of their involvement, young people completed baseline information at an interview to measure their current social activities, work activities, volunteering and skills. Information was gathered about levels of self-esteem, confidence, aspiration and skills perception. A personalised approach was taken and young people were worked with to develop personalised measures to explore things that were significant to their lives and aspirations. The young people were then interviewed at the end of their experiences to record changes in attitudes from both stages.

### 2. Quality of Life Measures

The project used nationally evaluated tools to ask the young people how they felt about certain factors at their entry point to the project. These included the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale and Journey to Employment and Training: The Personal Development Scale. These were again measured at their exit point from their experience, which was usually around the 6 months point.

### 3. Ongoing Sessional Monitoring

Volunteering Matters agreed Aims and Objectives with the young person at the start of their experiences. Progress was monitored at each session of volunteering or work experience by Volunteer Mentors and new aims set up as appropriate. Volunteer Mentors submitted activity logs to Volunteering Matters and aims changed through the placements.

### 4. Logs

Young people were encouraged to keep their own logs, in whichever format was most appropriate for them i.e. paper, electronic, to track their progress across each session. However most young people were reluctant to do this as some had difficulties using their hands. So it was not clear how much of this happened.

### 5. Quarterly Reviews

The original plan was to arrange quarterly review meetings with the young people and the Volunteer Mentors, however this was done slightly differently. The Volunteer Manager had regular contact with the young people, sometimes after every session, and had contact with Volunteer Mentors every week.

#### 6. Partner Monitoring

At the time of signing up, partners, e.g. work experience providers and volunteering providers, were asked about their attitudes to hosting young people with life limiting conditions and responses logged. Information from partners who did not wish to take part in the project was also logged, to see if there were reasons which could be of particular value to the project. For those partners who took part, their views were monitored through key stages to see if there were any changes in attitudes through the project. Schools were contacted every 2 weeks, some host partners were contacted every week, others every month.

#### 7. Focus Groups

Focus groups of young people were set up to develop overarching measures to explore issues that were significant to their lives and aspirations. Questions were asked such as what they wanted to get out of the programme, what activities they might want to do or not do, what did they want to talk about and what their ideal mentor would be like. Volunteer Mentors met each other and had chances to share experiences at volunteer training sessions. Additional volunteer events were planned, but as volunteers had such different commitments, it was felt that these were not needed.

#### 8. Case Studies

Young people, Volunteer Mentors and partners taking part in the project were encouraged to complete case studies and provide quotes. Some of these were published on social media. A young person and a Volunteer Mentor took over the Volunteering Matters social media pages for a day. Photographs were not published on the Volunteering Matters website due to difficulty in getting permission.

#### 9. Reflection

Time for reflection was built in to the project, through structured staff meetings and challenge and support sessions. These were useful as they often helped to change project strategy.

### **3. Recruitment of Young People Participants**

#### **3.1 Acorns Hospices**

In the first stage of the project, it was anticipated that participants would be referred from the 3 Acorns Hospices in the West Midlands situated in Birmingham, Walsall and Worcester. Relationships were built with key staff at the hospices, including the Head of Care Services and the Transitions Workers at each hospice. Building up the relationships took time and the Volunteering Matters Volunteer Manager spent time at the hospices at Birmingham and Walsall to help with this. Due to staff changes, it was more challenging to engage with the Worcester hospice. Initially all staff were behind the project and there was significant interest in the project. However, once referrals were tasked to Transitions Workers, it became more difficult to get referrals. The hospices referred young people to the project but unfortunately numbers were not as hoped for or projected in Year 1. It emerged that there were fewer young people who would be able to take part in the project than had been projected when the project bid was written. The hospices said they didn't have anyone suitable for the project, or had no one who met the project criteria.

The majority of the young people the hospices were working with at the time could not take part in the project as their health conditions, disabilities or needs were too severe. Some were not physically or mentally capable of taking part, while others required significant help with personal care which made it prohibitive for them to take part. Other young people just accessed the facilities or had palliative care on a daily basis. Additionally, the project did not see the interest from Acorns Hospice alumni that had been hoped for. There was some confusion from staff about who could take part in the project, as not every young person who accessed the Hospices had a life limiting condition.

The Worcester Hospice was a particular challenge. Things were promising very early on as the Transitions Worker identified 7 young people to take part in the project. However the Transitions Worker left and there was a delay in recruiting a replacement. When the replacement Transitions Worker was recruited, she decided that none of the young people was suitable for the programme and so they did not progress further. It was not clear whether there was a proper handover of information or if either staff member fully understood the project. No other young person was referred from the Worcester Hospice as they felt they had no one suitable. This was unfortunate as the project had developed partnerships with a number of organisations in Worcester willing to provide volunteering placements and work experience activities. The project then primarily concentrated on the other 2 hospices.

There were some young people who were referred to the project who were not able to take part.

A number of young people could not take part due to ill-health. The project worked extensively with one young person and his family, and he was matched to a Volunteer Mentor, but due to ill-health and being hospitalised, the activities could not be started. The young person was offered a volunteer to start activities while he was in hospital and his family were appreciative, but his health deteriorated and his family did not take up the offer. Another young person also experienced ill-health, delaying his participation. When he was able to take part, he declared that he only wanted to undertake work experience at Aston Villa Football Club (AVFC). The project had already entered into discussions with AVFC, but, after some initial interest, they declined to offer an opportunity as they were setting up their own project directly with Acorns Hospices. The young person may have been able to take part in this project directly.

The young people's families were also a factor. When the Transitions Workers asked permission for some young people to take part in the project, some families decided not to get involved or did not get back to the Transitions Workers. It was not always clear as to the reasons why, although families were sometimes quite protective of the young people. Although it was often not said explicitly, it was sometimes deduced that due to the young people's health conditions, some families were, perhaps understandably, more protective of their young people than if they would have been if they did not have such conditions. There may have been suspicions too. If families had not been approached and offered such activities by organisations before, and the Futures Midlands project showed they hadn't, this may have been a factor.

Many of the young people had not left their houses independently without support from family, carers or others. Only 3 young people, Jack, Abdul and Madhi, were able to travel independently by themselves. One young person, Aoslin, although not a wheelchair user, was not allowed to go out by herself. Both she and another young person did not have the travel sense to go out by herself. Another young person, Nazia, was not going to be able to take part in the project as she needed carers with her at all times. However, this changed as provision was made for her to take part in the project at her home where her parents were around. One young person, Heil, wanted his project experience to be home based as, if he left the house, his parents would always accompany him.

After the young people hit the age of 18, they no longer receive care and support from Acorns. Their care and support is then left to their families or any care package provided. This means they receive no help or support in terms of finding a job, work experience or volunteering opportunities.

During the duration of the project, 8 young people joined from the Acorns Hospices. Due to the lower than anticipated numbers, the project also concentrated on diversifying the recruitment of young people through local schools and colleges.



### 3.2 Education Providers

To increase the reach of the Futures Midlands project and the number of young people referred, it was envisaged to work with schools and colleges in the second part of the project. However, due to the lower than expected referrals of young people from the hospices, developing relationships with schools and colleges was a key step to bring in new referrals. The project started working with them slightly earlier than anticipated. The project researched educational institutions across the West Midlands, including Special Educational Needs Schools and mainstream schools. The project was promoted to them and introductory meetings were arranged. The Transitions Workers at the Acorns Hospices helped make introductions to some of the Special Educational Needs Schools in the area. A number of schools in the area were contacted, but not all were suitable to take part in the project as they did not currently have any young people with life limiting conditions. It was still a useful exercise however, as it helped gauge the interest from schools and colleges.

When the schools and colleges were asked if they were interested in taking part in the project, 100% of them said yes. The feedback from the schools was particularly useful. Schools felt that the Futures Midlands project would work for them as they reported they did not have the time or resources to put into finding appropriate volunteering and work experience opportunities for their students themselves and did not have the time to spend supporting the young people to find their own. Staff reported that they only had time for teaching, and that teaching assistants didn't have capacity to arrange placements, look for specialist places to provide support or to support the placements themselves. Staff were therefore quite excited about the project and were keen to take part in the project as soon as possible.

Three schools and colleges were keen to engage in the programme at the first time of asking, Wilson Stuart School in Birmingham, Penn Hall School in Wolverhampton and Victoria Specialist Arts College in Birmingham. The project also had contact and meetings with other educational institutions in the West Midlands, including James Brindley School in Birmingham, Baskerville School in Birmingham, Jane Lane School in Walsall and Chadsgrove School in Worcester, but they did not have any suitable young people to refer during the duration of the project.

The schools and colleges who took part identified some young people to take part who were interested in starting immediately, so the project piloted hosting them earlier than anticipated. It was hoped that the schools would refer higher numbers of young people, but they said they had very few young people with life limiting conditions. They asked if the project could accept young people with life threatening conditions or other disabilities as they had multiple students with additional support needs. It was therefore difficult for them to screen the students with life limiting

conditions if their other students could then not have the same opportunities. Some of their students would not have had the capacity to take part.

The schools had issues with the targeted age group, 17 to 19 year olds. They fed back that they would like to refer students who were slightly younger and older than the target age group. This was addressed by piloting accepting young people who were aged 16 years to give them a taste of the project in readiness to fully join at 17. The project was also willing to accept young people who had just turned 20.

During the time the project was operating, the schools and colleges referred 4 young people to the project, 2 students from Victoria Specialist Arts College and 1 each from Wilson Stuart School and Penn Hall School. However, if Futures Midlands had continued, the project was confident that after the success and positive results from the first cohort group, more teachers would have got involved and more students would have been referred from the new academic year. Victoria Specialist Arts College reported that they had students interested from September 2019.

The project found that where some young people in mainstream schools might get access to increasing opportunities, young people with life limiting conditions and other conditions or disabilities do not appear to have the same opportunities. Although the Futures Midlands project could not take all the young people who were referred as they did not meet the criteria, it illustrated that there was an interest and a market for this type of project with a wider group.

Working with the schools was not without its own challenges. The schools stipulated that the young people had to be based at the school from Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, and so originally it was anticipated that the activities would need to take place in the evenings. However, as the students had some free time in the curriculum, the teachers felt it would be more beneficial to host workshops in the schools. Due to the flexibility of the Futures Midlands project model, Volunteer Mentors were recruited who were able to go into the schools during the periods when the young people had free time. Sessions took place every week, mostly one to one, but in one case 2 young people were able to work together with a Volunteer Mentor, which further helped with their interpersonal and teamwork skills.

### **3.3 Observations at Entry Interview**

The Volunteering Matters team who worked on Futures Midlands had extensive experience of working with young people. The Volunteer Manager noticed a difference between the Futures Midlands young people and other young people she had worked with. Her experience included working on a full time, away from home volunteering programme, which young people could take part in from the age of 18. Comparing the Futures Midlands young people with others she had interviewed, she observed that the Futures Midlands young people lacked confidence, had lower

social skills and were more anxious during the interviews. This was more acute when they left their house and their comfort zones. She observed that they wouldn't openly start speaking as others would, they didn't speak if they weren't spoken to. When interviewing them and asking about their networks, none of the young people had significant friendship groups or social networks. Some of the young people had one friend at school but didn't have any friends outside school. One young person said he had no friends at all. One of the young people was very active, undertaking a lot of social activities, but that was not the norm. Many young people were not able to go out after school, not just because of having mobility issues, but because they attended Special Educational Needs schools and they did not live near to their school friends. If they wanted to go out, they were always reliant on their parents to take them anywhere, they weren't used to accessing public transport as other 18 year olds might have done.

## **4. Recruitment of Volunteer Mentors**

### **4.1 Volunteer Recruitment**

Volunteering Matters specialises in recruiting volunteers and developing volunteering opportunities. The Futures Midlands project model involved recruiting Volunteer Mentors from across the West Midlands to accompany the young people with life limiting conditions to their chosen activities, whether workshops, volunteering or work experience, and to support them in the opportunities. A team of Volunteer Mentors of varying ages was recruited. They volunteered with the young people over a number of months to help with their designated activities and also to identify new opportunities and learning.

The project engaged the Volunteering Matters Volunteering Recruitment Manager based in Birmingham to support the volunteer recruitment. The project initially targeted the 3 distinct geographical areas around the Acorns Hospices, Birmingham, Walsall and Worcester to enable local volunteers to be matched with young people from the same area. To find sources of volunteers, information was posted on popular volunteer recruitment sites such as Do-It and Indeed. For finding sources of both volunteers and community volunteering opportunities for the young people, links were made with local Volunteer Councils and Volunteer Centres in the target areas, as well as with local media organisations including radio and TV companies. The Worcestershire area was initially targeted as it was under-represented in the number of volunteer enquiries, and Volunteer Centres were contacted including Pershore Volunteer Centre and Community Action Malvern and District. This was reduced when it became evident that the project was not receiving referrals of young people from the Worcestershire area. A programme of attending local Volunteer Councils

AGMs and Conferences was started to find new voluntary organisations and sources of volunteers. This also included attending the Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council AGM and Conference and Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action AGM, to pick up opportunities from the border areas.

The initial recruitment activities generated 356 enquiries to the project. These enquiries resulted in 29 applications from potential volunteers. The most number of volunteer enquiries came from the Do-It and Indeed websites, and the Volunteering Matters website.

The most number of applicants came from the Birmingham area, although this was not too much of a problem as activities in the Walsall area could still be supported due to the close proximity.

Of the volunteers recruited:

76% were female, 24% were male.

The volunteers were of varying ages, the youngest was 18 and the oldest was 55. The majority of volunteers were aged 18 to 25, so similar in ages to the target young people which helped with empathy.

The volunteers were very representative of the diverse population of the West Midlands, with the majority recruited from black and minority ethnic backgrounds:

- 59% volunteers identified as Asian/Asian British (42% Pakistani, 10% Indian, 7% Bangladeshi)
- 21% volunteers identified as White British
- 17% volunteers identified as Black/Black British (10% Caribbean, 7% African)
- 3% volunteers identified as Chinese

The volunteer profile reflected well the diverse group of young people recruited.

Volunteers were aware of the benefits of the project to the young people and also themselves. When asked why they were interested in volunteering, there were a variety of responses, but typical reasons included:

- To give back to the community
- To make a difference to someone's life
- To improve their self confidence
- To gain experience and knowledge
- To make a career change
- Have experience of working with young people

- Have transferable mentoring skills

## **4.2 Training**

Futures Midlands ran a comprehensive induction and training programme for the Volunteer Mentors around volunteering with young people with life limiting conditions. The training included modules on Disability Awareness, Introduction to Life Limiting Conditions, Safeguarding, Communication Skills, Boundaries, Confidentiality, How To Deal With Challenging Behaviour and How To Be A Mentor. The training involved sessions from Acorns Hospice staff and real life scenarios to work through. Volunteers started in 3 cohorts, in June 2018, September 2018 and November 2018. Some volunteers attended training at Acorns Hospices but then didn't come back again. Although it cannot be confirmed, the project speculated that they may have found the extent of the disabilities that some of the young people had too challenging. Other volunteer applicants withdrew due to ill-health, changes in family circumstances, university commitments, or because they found jobs or moved to other areas. The DBS Check process took a long time which was off-putting for some.

Thirteen people (45% of applicants) completed the training programme and progressed to become Volunteer Mentors. Twelve matches were made between Volunteer Mentors and young people.

## **4.3 Volunteer Mentor Model Success**

Recruiting a team of dedicated Volunteer Mentors was a key success factor in the project. The Volunteer Mentors recruited were of varying ages and from across the diverse communities of the West Midlands. This was helpful in matching them to the young person who would most benefit from their skills, experience, knowledge, interests, background and personality. By engaging volunteers, it gave flexibility to change the project model and to deliver the project activities at times, in locations and at paces appropriate to each young person's needs. The Volunteer Mentors delivered workshops to them, supported them in volunteering activities and helped them with the work preparation activities. The Volunteer Mentors developed excellent relationships with the young people they supported over the months they took part in the project. Even though the Futures Midlands project ended, it is hoped that some of the relationships between young people and Volunteer Mentors will continue.

## 5. Recruitment of Partner Organisations

The Futures Midlands project researched across the West Midlands to find opportunities for volunteering, work experience and work-preparation activities. Although the net was cast wide for opportunities, the recruitment focused on two strands. Firstly, as the project wanted to be personalised to the interests, aspirations and goals of the young people, the project took learning from the initial focus group and ongoing interactions with young people. Common themes of interest included IT, media, animation and fashion design. Secondly, organisations were targeted that were felt would be able to accommodate young people who were wheelchair users and which had accessible workspaces, accessible toilet facilities and access to care workers who may be able to help with personal care. It was also envisaged that Volunteering Matters would endeavour to engage organisations that it already worked with, including through its Employee Volunteering division, as well as finding new organisations.

The partner recruitment was therefore focused on:

- IT companies
- Media organisations, including TV and radio companies
- Animation and photography companies
- Financial organisations
- Care facilities
- Academic institutions
- Animal welfare charities
- Food banks and homeless charities
- Museums and cultural centres
- Sports opportunities

The plan was to build up a diverse portfolio of organisations that would be willing to host young people, and a menu of opportunities that the young people could take part in. However, many organisations still had restrictions and brought challenges. There were some areas of interest to the young people which proved very difficult to find opportunities in, including fashion design and media.

Volunteering Matters joined the Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce to make introductions to new organisations in Birmingham and the wider West Midlands. They attended events including their AGM and networking event. A number of links were developed from this.

The project targeted 41 organisations and projects for the first stage of the project, split across the 3 geographic areas, Birmingham, Walsall and Worcester. Organisations were asked **“Could you host a volunteering placement or work experience placement for a young person with a life limiting condition?”** All

organisations were initially telephoned, and the project spoke to organisations where possible. All organisations were then sent further information by an e-mail. If the organisations did not respond on first contact, they were followed up again, sometimes several times.

From the organisations approached:

- 39% of organisations said yes
- 26% of organisations said no
- 24% of organisations did not respond
- 5% of organisations said they could possibly help in the future
- 5% of organisations after initial possible interest, did not get back to us

The organisations who said no to being involved cited:

- Access issues
- Staff being out and about so not able to provide support to young people at their offices
- Funding cuts

Other challenges included organisations saying that they could host a young person but would not invest time in training them. Although it was not specifically said, the Volunteer Manager felt that some of the organisations were also concerned about the young people's health conditions and disabilities.

Organisations were targeted that could offer volunteering, work experience and work preparation opportunities.

- Volunteering placements were offered by 7 organisations.
- Work experience placements were offered by 5 organisations.
- Workplace mentoring was offered by one organisation.

The organisations who signed up to the project included:

1. Zurich Insurance Birmingham – Zurich was already known to Volunteering Matters and the original project plan cited that Volunteering Matters would endeavour to engage existing partners in the project. Zurich offered its staff to act as Mentors to the young people and engage them in workshops to help them become work-ready. They also offered a one week work experience at Zurich at the end of the placement.

2. Free Radio across Birmingham and Worcester – the local radio station offered various work experience activities including researching, going out on interviews and helping prepare equipment. They also offered volunteering opportunities with their Cash For Kids Christmas campaign. Free Radio also helped to publicise the project with a feature on their Drivetime show.

3. Volunteering Matters Birmingham – Volunteering Matters offered a number of volunteering opportunities. The Get Out Get Active project, managed from Birmingham but working in 18 locations across the UK offered various activities including working with staff on a project to look at ways for disabled people to engage with sports, and to appeal to the IT and media interest, helping with leaflet design and website content. The Full Time Volunteering programme managed from Birmingham offered various activities including organising events for volunteers and helping with volunteer recruitment.

4. Perry Manor Care Home Worcester – The care home was engaged to offer accessible opportunities in the Worcester area. They offered various volunteering activities including help with activity groups for older residents such as craft, knitting and games groups. They were also interested in the individual interests that each young person would bring and so were looking for skills and interests to share with the residents. Unfortunately this partner was not used as no young people from the Worcester area were referred while the project was operating.

5. Extra Care Home Birmingham – The care home was close to the Birmingham Acorns Hospice and so was an option for young people who needed personal care facilities. They offered work experience including reception skills and help with database administration for people using the gym. They also offered a recycling project and help with designing leaflets to send to residents. We were fortunate to sign them up as a partner as they did not previously take on work experience students. However there were some challenges as they were not able to host young people under 18 and they also wanted young people to have DBS Checks.

6. Birmingham Local TV – Targeted for young people's interest in the media and IT, Birmingham Local TV offered work experience helping with researching local news stories, updating their website and social media, and accompanying reporters on filming shoots. However there was a delay to their participation as their office was not accessible and, due to organisational cuts, they had a reduction in staff, all back office and technical roles were transferred to their head office in Leeds and all output was filmed out on location, and so they had limited opportunities for placements. We matched one young person with Birmingham Local TV, but he could not take part in the duration of the project due to ill-health. Birmingham Local TV hoped to offer more opportunities in 2019, but couldn't take part again due to the project ending.

7. Cats Protection – Animal welfare charities were targeted as many young people had an interest in this area. Cats Protection didn't have any opportunities at rescue centres, however they had volunteering opportunities in charity shops. However no young people wanted to volunteer in charity shops.



8. Aston Villa Football Club Birmingham – Sports organisations in the region were targeted. Aston Villa were initially interested and would look into possible opportunities, however they later said they were developing a staff volunteering programme directly with Acorns Hospice and so couldn't take part. This was unfortunate as one of the young people we engaged only wanted to volunteer at Aston Villa and so did not want to take part in the programme further.

Some organisations offered placements but with restrictions:

1. Switch Radio Birmingham – offered opportunities to help with broadcasting. However they could only accommodate non-wheelchair users due to access issues as they were based on the first floor. They would have been a partner if the project had continued as they were relocating to the ground floor. Switch Radio did however publicise the project.

2. Black Country Food Bank – offered volunteering opportunities, but due to access issues they could only accommodate non-wheelchair users and young people with no restrictions on lifting, due to pallets stored at the centre and volunteers needing to be able to reach supplies.

Relationships were developed with a number of organisations who offered opportunities, but no young people were interested. Others said they may be able to offer placements in the future and would likely have taken part if the project had continued. These included:

Beacon Court Care Home, Black Country  
Advocacy charity Worcester  
Simply Hosting Worcester  
Worcester Art Gallery  
Friends Of The Earth Birmingham  
Salvation Army  
Deutsche Bank Birmingham

A number of organisations said they could not take part, for a variety of issues:

- Access issues were a factor for some organisations. Forward Photography, a digital photography company told us their office was small.
- Transport, support and personal care were factors for others. Aurameir Photography said no due to the travelling as their photographer was out on the road every day taking photos and they were unable to give support to a young person.
- Economic circumstances were an issue for some organisations. Both Walsall Art Gallery and Walsall Leather Museum told us they could not provide a placement due to funding cuts, but Walsall Leather Museum may have had opportunities in Year 2 if the project had continued.

- Some said they had no opportunities. These included Emmaus homeless charity.
- Some organisations did not seem interested. Mind Birmingham said they were not interested, and they did not see how they could take part in the scheme. They made much of the fact that all their volunteers needed to be over the age of 18, but many of the Futures Midlands young people were aged 18 and 19. Birmingham Metropolitan University said they couldn't support the project and that their focus was on teaching, learning and assessment.
- Some organisations said no for practical reasons. Rosedene Animal Rescue Centre couldn't offer a placement as all their animals were at people's own homes.

It was disappointing that a number of organisations did not respond. We contacted the organisations by telephone and by e-mail on several occasions. These included: BBC Birmingham, Maverick TV Birmingham, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Harmony Care Walsall, YMCA Walsall Food Bank, Birmingham Dogs Home, RSPCA Birmingham Animal Centre, Envision Photography, Action on Hearing Loss

It was not clear whether the nature of the project was a factor in organisations not responding to enquiries, but it did illustrate how difficult it can be for organisations such as schools and colleges to set up experiences for young people. Futures Midlands had time dedicated to the task, schools did not.

## **6. Project Participants**

### **6.1 Participants**

The Futures Midlands project was promoted to Hospices, schools and colleges across the West Midlands, but the number of referrals was not as high as originally projected. Twelve young people with life limiting conditions took part in the project. However this was based on the first year of the project. Based on the learning from the first year, if the project had continued into the second phase, Volunteering Matters was confident that the number of young people taking part would have been higher.

All 12 young people provided basic personal data at their entry to the project. Eleven young people completed all of the project evaluation questions. To measure results at the end of their involvement, some project exit data is based on 10 young people as 2 participants were not able to complete the data due to ill-health.

## 6.2 Gender

- 75% of the young people taking part in the project were male (9 people).
- 25% of the young people were female (3 people).

There was no correlation between the project being more attractive to any particular gender and there was no bias towards any gender from the Acorns Hospices, schools or college partners. However Futures Midlands observed more young males accessing the facilities at Acorns Hospices than young females.

## 6.3 Age

The project was aimed at engaging young people in the key transition period of ages 17 to 19. At entry point to the project, the project recruited a spread of all ages, although a higher proportion of young people entered aged 19 suggesting the project proved more attractive to the older group. The project concluded no real reason for this other than those were the young people referred who met the project criteria. However, the project unexpectedly proved attractive to young people below the target age range. The schools were keen to involve younger students so the project started working with young people in some activities from the age of 16, in readiness to fully participate from 17, and one young person started aged 16. Having the majority of young people starting aged over 18 was advantageous as all the partner organisations said they couldn't host young people until they were 18.

- 42% of the young people started the project at the age of 19
- 25% of young people started at 18
- 25% of young people started at 17.
- 8% of young people started at 16.

## 6.4 Ethnicity

The Futures Midlands project reflected the diversity of the population of the West Midlands and recruited a high percentage of young people from black and minority ethnic groups. The population of black and minority ethnic groups in the West Midlands is 17.3% (Census 2011), but the Futures Midlands project attracted 58% of young people identifying from that group.

- 50% of young people identified as Asian/Asian British (25% Pakistani, 8% Indian, 8% Bangladeshi)
- 42% of young people identified as White British
- 8% of young people identified as Korean

## **6.5 Medical Conditions**

The young people were asked which life limiting conditions they had. The project engaged people with a number of conditions.

A majority of the males who took part, 58% of the young people, had Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

One person had Ullrich Congenital Muscular Dystrophy and one had Myotonic Dystrophy.

Additionally one young person had Morquios Syndrome Type 4 and another had Epidermolysis Bullosa.

Additionally, young people told us of other conditions they had. Two young people also had mild learning disabilities, one had autism and another had osteoporosis.

A majority of the young people, 92%, required use of a wheelchair at all times, with only one young person, 8%, not requiring a wheelchair.

## **6.6 Geographical area**

The project was based around 3 areas of the West Midlands, corresponding with the catchment areas of the Acorns Hospices in Birmingham, Walsall and Worcester. Despite promoting the project to the Acorns Hospice in Worcester and to schools in the area, no referrals were received from that area.

A majority of the young people who took part were from Birmingham (Handsworth Wood, Edgbaston, Great Barr, Erdington, Hodge Hill, Kings Norton and Quinton). Other young people originated from Walsall, Wolverhampton and Coventry.

## **6.7 Living Circumstances**

The project asked the young people who they lived with. Ninety-two percent of the young people lived at home with their families. Some also had carers who came into their home on a daily basis. One young person, 8%, lived in supported accommodation. This was not due to family circumstances, but because the young person's family home was not accessible for his wheelchair and to accommodate his carers who lived in. None of the young people lived independently or had ever lived independently.

However, by the end of the project, one young person, Madhi, was planning to live independently when he starts at university in September 2019.

## **6.8 Education and Employment Status**

As to be expected from a project targeting young people aged 17 to 19, 67% of the young people were studying in school or at sixth form college. Despite the higher number of 18 and 19 year olds taking part, none of the young people were in further education.

None of the young people were in employment and 33% of the young people said they were unemployed or not doing anything.

During the duration of the project, this data did not change a great deal due to the project running for a shorter time than anticipated. However from participating in the project:

- One of the young people has started an apprenticeship and has also been offered paid work
- Two of the young people have enrolled onto university courses due to start in September 2019
- Another young person has been offered a place at college

The young people cited the project as helping them to achieve these goals.

None of the young people had undertaken any volunteering previously.

Only two of the young people had undertaken work experience.

When asked about the experiences of undertaking work experience previously, young people said that organisations were quick to make judgements and assumptions about their abilities. A number of organisations had said no to them undertaking work experience.

## **7. Challenges and Barriers to Participation, with Solutions**

During contact with partner organisations, schools and the Hospices, the project identified a number of challenges and barriers to finding volunteering and work experience opportunities.

### **7.1 Access**

Access issues were an issue, with many organisations not being wheelchair accessible, and even if they were, other barriers were encountered. A majority of organisations contacted did not have an accessible toilet or changing room at the location, and there were rarely any in the nearby area. The project sought opportunities in care facilities, modern shopping centres and at universities, where it was felt that access would be better.

Some of the IT and digital organisations were small scale, sometimes start-up organisations and so did not have appropriate access. Other organisations were based on upper floors of buildings without lifts. The project could have done more with a number of organisations (Volunteering Matters, Black Country Food Bank, Switch Radio, Birmingham Local TV, Forward Photography and Aurameir Photography) if access had not been an issue. Some organisations said that they couldn't host young people at the time due to access issues, but they could help in the future (Birmingham Local TV, Switch Radio). However, as the project ended earlier than planned, these offers were not able to be followed up.

Volunteering Matters is an organisation that endeavours to make its projects accessible to as many people as possible and looks for office bases which are accessible. However, even Volunteering Matters had access issues. Although the Volunteering Matters office in Birmingham was accessible, it had a recently refurbished accessible toilet and had previously hosted many wheelchair users, when a young person tried to enter the building to attend a workshop, it was discovered that the size of his electric wheelchair was too big to access the first lift that bypasses a small flight of stairs in the reception area. This meant that Volunteering Matters was not accessible to all volunteers. If an organisation like Volunteering Matters had issues, it is perhaps little wonder that other organisations were reluctant or nervous about taking part. On this occasion, the workshop still happened as it was relocated to a neighbouring hotel instead. It became evident that it was always imperative to have a plan B when organising opportunities for young people.

The Futures Midlands Volunteer Manager felt that although organisations had said yes to hosting a young person initially, when they realised how disabled the young people were, they withdrew their offer as they felt they would need to provide more support than expected, and possibly additional training. She also felt that some organisations made an excuse as she felt they didn't want people with additional support needs.

However, no activities that were scheduled or which had started were stopped because of access issues.

## **7.2 Personal care**

All young people referred to the project needed elements of personal care such as toileting, and many needed access to medical care. The young people were never able to do an activity for a full day because of needing access to help with personal care. When the project was originally planned, it was considered that volunteers may be able to help with some minor personal care activities. However, a change in Volunteering Matters policy and practice meant that volunteers were not able to help

with any personal care tasks and this added another challenge. Volunteers therefore were not trained in personal care tasks and couldn't help with them at all.

This became evident in the first Focus Group that was held at Acorns Hospice. The young people who attended with their families all needed to access the toilet, but as it was based at Acorns Hospice a member of Acorns Hospice staff was able to help them.

The project identified that one young person referred would need to have 4 people involved in their placement. As well as themselves and their Volunteer Mentor, they would require 2 carers because their tracheotomy would need changing. Volunteering Matters discussed this area with Acorns Hospice and the partners initially worked closely together to identify placement areas. As Acorns Hospice wanted the project to be a success, they were keen to offer as much help as possible. If placements were located near to Hospices and were planned, Hospice staff may be able to help with personal care. The young person or volunteer would need to call ahead to say they were coming to use the toilets and changing facilities. Regarding supporting young people when volunteering in other locations, Acorns Hospices did not have this facility available, however they said that if the project could pre-plan a placement and the Hospice could know when personal care would be needed, there may be something they could do with their outreach service. It was pointed out the outreach service was ad-hoc and would be restricted by the demands of the young people in the Hospice and the availability to go out at any one time. It was clear that advance planning would be essential.

It was decided that when a placement was planned, a conversation would be had about the care needs of the young people to discuss what could be possible from Acorns Hospices, what the young people's families may be able to do and, where young people had one, what their care packages could provide. Through this team approach, the team could tailor something around the young person. There was certainly an aspiration for Acorns Hospices to support placements and to prevent them from being cancelled due to personal care issues.

Therefore organisations were sought close to the Acorns Hospices so that young people could go to the Hospice if needed. One was Extra Care Home in Bourneville, Birmingham close to the Acorns Hospice in Birmingham. It was also looked at as to whether young people could bring their carers with them to the activities or for carers to travel to the activities as and when needed.

However it became evident that many of these solutions were not practical. Acorns staff did not have the time, it was impossible for young people to pre-plan toilet breaks and young people did not want to be restricted to volunteering at care homes. The project endeavoured to be as flexible as possible with the timings and locations of meetings. Opportunities were set up that were short, enabling young people to

have their personal care needs attended to from their usual sources before the placement started and then again when they returned home at the end. Some of the activities were only set up for an hour, 2 hours at the most. In all locations, the location of the nearest accessible toilets were investigated and volunteers and young people were made aware. This isn't something Volunteering Matters tends to do on other projects, although proximity to toilets does come up in Risk Assessments on all projects.

The project also sought organisations that were based at or close to large facilities like shopping centres which would have accessible toilets and sometimes Changing Places facilities.

One young person, Abdul, volunteered with local radio station Free Radio. Free Radio had offered a menu of activities but the one of interest to Abdul was to help with their Cash For Kids Campaign. The Cash For Kids Campaign had a pop up unit at Merry Hill Shopping Centre, in Brierley Hill. The unit was full of toys donated by various organisations and individuals. Abdul arranged the unit, then sorted toys in order of age groups to be packed away to be given to small charities and organisations, and then distributed. He needed the support of his volunteer Mentor to help him with this. This placement was fortunate as Merry Hill was accessible and had an accessible toilet. Abdul and his volunteer were shown where the toilet was and where to collect the key. Abdul would not have been able to be placed there without the toilet. Abdul was able to access and use the toilet himself, as long as someone could open his bag and take out his urine bottle. Volunteers were willing to do this to help him undertake the activities, but if volunteers weren't prepared to do this, it would have been another barrier.

### **7.3 Abilities**

It was always the goal of the Futures Midlands project to open up opportunities for what young people with life limiting conditions could do rather than identify what they could not do. The project always aimed to treat the young people as normally as possible. However the physical abilities of some young people was a challenge to finding some placements.

At Free Radio, during the original meeting between their staff member and young person Abdul, when various activities were proposed, it became evident that Abdul's disabilities meant that he would not be able to go out on to interviews as he would have needed extra support and he could not help with preparing equipment due to the mobility in his hands. This is one of the reasons why Abdul helped with their Cash For Kids Campaign, which he could do with the support of his Volunteer Mentor.



## **7.4 Ill-health**

A number of young people were considered for the project, but couldn't take part due to ill-health. One young person referred was met by the Volunteer Manager who matched him to a suitable Volunteer Mentor. Once a date was identified for the first meeting, the young person became ill and was taken to hospital. The project endeavoured to offer as much flexible and tailored support as possible, so offered the young person's family a Volunteer Mentor to meet him at hospital to provide, at the very least, some social needs. This was originally welcomed by the family, however the young person's health deteriorated, he was accommodated in ICU and he lost his vocal chords, so the family felt it would be best for him to recover first. Due to young people's medical conditions and admissions to hospital, some meetings had to be cancelled and rearranged at short notice.

## **7.5 Independence**

One young person, Heil, only wanted to undertake work experience which he could do from his home. It was clear this was a family decision as he didn't leave the house without one of his parents being with him. Arranging work experience at home was impossible, and it was initially thought this would make it impossible for him to take part in the project, but the project invested time in meeting families, often in their own homes, to build trust. Due to the flexibility built into the project, the project was able to offer him some one-to-work workshops based at home.

Another young person, Abdul, undertook a volunteering placement at Free Radio. Although he completed the volunteering successfully, it was very difficult for him to arrive on time and sometimes to remember he had a volunteering opportunity that day. Before starting the project, he was only travelling independently within his own comfort zone, but as his placement was in the Merry Hill Shopping Centre, he had to ensure he knew how to get there and what forms of transport to take. He had a slight Learning Difficulty which may have hindered this a little, but it became obvious he didn't allow himself enough time to get there. The project provided a little extra support to ensure he knew what day to volunteer on and to ensure he arrived on time.

## **8. Activity Delivery**

The project asked young people at various stages of the project what they were interested in. At the first Focus Group at the start of the project, it became clear that some of the areas the project had thought of would be of interest were not. The project set up and offered a portfolio of opportunities for young people:

## **8.1 Ready Steady Volunteering Workshops**

The Ready Steady Volunteer Workshops were originally planned to prepare groups of young people to undertake volunteering placements over several weeks. However from the interviews it was evident that young people were not at all interested in this strand. This was a programme that had worked at other Volunteering Matters projects for many years, but there was no interest here. All the young people had different levels of needs and requested different things. It cannot be presumed that Futures Midlands young people were any different to other young people, but it is likely that transposing the model from rural East Anglia where opportunities were limited to urban West Midlands where there were more opportunities could have been a factor. Additionally the model had been used mostly with young people with learning disabilities and other additional support needs. Although some of the young people on Futures Midlands had additional support needs, this was still not of interest to them.

However we did see an element of Ready Steady Volunteer taken up as one young person needed some help with travelling. Abdul needed help with getting to places, as he was not good at planning to go to places beyond his comfort zone. The project reminded him when he was due to be volunteering and advised him on the bus routes to take and times of buses, to make sure he got there.

## **8.2 Volunteering**

At the Focus Group, there was initially quite a lot of interest in volunteering. However this interest diminished as the project continued. A number of volunteering opportunities were organised across the West Midlands. One young person took this up. One of the organisations we worked with was Free Radio. Free Radio offered a number of opportunities including supporting on-air radio programmes and outside broadcast interviews. They also offered practical volunteering through their Cash For Kids charity campaign. Cash For Kids supports children subject to abuse and neglect, living in poverty or coping with illness or disability in the West Midlands. Abdul volunteered at their unit at Merry Hill Shopping Centre in Brierley Hill, where the public could donate toys for the Cash For Kids campaign. With the support of Volunteer Mentors, Abdul helped arrange the unit and sorted toys in order of age groups. His Volunteer Mentors supported him in the new environment, including with tasks such as picking up toys which he couldn't do himself. Abdul also had the opportunity to visit the Free Radio studios and had a tour of the facility.

One of the reasons for the low take up in Year 1 was the length of time it took to set up a volunteering placement when considering all the factors and challenges. Young people were offered workshops to keep them active. It was anticipated that

volunteering would have taken off in year 2 after the workshops were completed, if the project had continued. In some areas the project had volunteering opportunities set up, but there were no young people referred from those areas, for example in Worcester.

### **8.3 Work Experience**

No young people took up work experience, although again it was anticipated that this element would likely have been taken up in Year 2 after completion of the workshops. However, two young people took up the offer of Work-Preparation Mentoring offered by employees of Zurich Insurance. The young people would have been offered one week's work experience at Zurich after completing the 6 months mentoring. However, Jack withdrew because he obtained an internship, while Mahdi was not able to take up the work experience as it would have needed him to be there Monday to Friday from 9 to 5. Mahdi would have only been able to participate for an hour a day which would not have been a great experience for him, and if he had been there over lunchtime, he would have needed help with cutting up food and eating.

### **8.4 Work-Preparation Mentoring**

The project had envisaged engaging existing Volunteering Matters contacts and Zurich Insurance in Birmingham worked with the project to provide Work-Preparation Mentoring. Young people were matched with Zurich employees who mentored them and worked with them on areas such as CV writing, how to look for jobs, interview skills, presentation skills, how to dress appropriately in the working environment, understanding key strengths, how to sell themselves to employers, social skills and being part of a team. The Zurich Mentor and young person decided together how often to meet and how to communicate. Some meetings were in person, with other contact by e-mail. Volunteer Mentors were also provided to support these activities, including to help the young person to attend the meetings. On some occasions, the Zurich Mentor contacted the Volunteer Mentor and they planned workshops that the Volunteer Mentors then delivered. It was envisaged there would also be one week work placements at Zurich at the end of the programme, but these did not take place during the duration of the project.

One young person, Jack, took part in the Zurich mentoring. He took part for 7 months, although he ended his placement as he successfully secured an internship with an engineering company. Jack reported that Futures Midlands had helped him prepare for the internship, including getting his CV ready. He has since been offered paid work from the company.

## 8.5 Bespoke One-To-One Workshops

One of the elements of the project that was an unexpected success was the bespoke tailored one-to-one workshops. As there was no interest in the group Ready Steady Volunteer workshops, the model was changed to offer young people personalised workshops based on their interests, aspirations and goals.

Young people had already advised of their areas of interest for work experience or volunteering placements. These areas included IT, animation, digital and interactive media, and fashion. It proved very difficult to find placements in these specialised areas. Some young people were not very flexible and had other commitments. To address these issues, the project worked with the young people, encouraging them to be as open and flexible as possible, and the project looked at opportunities where young people could obtain transferable skills. The project looked at creative opportunities to engage young people. These included developing personalised workshops which could be delivered by Volunteer Mentors at the Volunteering Matters office, at a café, in the community, in schools or even at the young people's own homes. Many young people were interested in these tailored activities, so the project concentrated resources in these areas.

The workshops became the project's most popular offer. The workshops were delivered to young people by Volunteer Mentors at times, in locations and at pace most suitable to them. Young people liked having something bespoke to their interests and flexible to their times and needs. Eleven young people signed up to have workshops and 9 completed the programme. Two others withdrew due to ill-health.

For the young people recruited from schools, the one-to-one workshops worked better as they could be timetabled around their time commitments at school. These took place during school hours, which for many programmes could be a challenge, but by engaging Volunteer Mentors, the project was able to support them at times that worked best for the young people and the schools. There as a practical consideration too as Volunteering Matters did not have the contact details of the young people to contact them, so most communications were done through the school.

The workshops included:

Communication Skills

Presentation Skills

Interview Techniques

CV Writing

Preparing for the Workplace

Work Based Behaviours

Social Skills

Developing Relationships  
Assertiveness Skills  
Life Skills  
Team Building Activities

Travel training was also arranged to help one person learn how to travel independently to activities.

## 9. Evaluation: The Impact of the Futures Midlands Project

From obtaining qualitative and quantitative data from the participants, the Futures Midlands project can be shown to have had a successful impact on the participants, particularly the young people but also on some of the other stakeholders.

### 9.1 Qualitative Data

The project interviewed all participants at their entry point to the project, at key stages and at the exit point.

One young person, **Mahdi**, told the project he was interested in animation. He joined the project as it was his aspiration to go to university and he asked for help with university applications because he didn't have the confidence to do them himself. He wouldn't leave his house by himself and he didn't want to ask his parents for help. Futures Midlands arranged a Volunteer Mentor to help him. He welcomed this as he wanted somebody nearer his own age who he could relate to. He was supported with writing his CV, with communication skills and in interview techniques to help him get to university.

Mahdi reported:

*"My name is Mahdi. My Volunteer Mentor Simran gave me good advice with my university application. She helped build my CV which is now ready for any potential employers. Simran really helped me work on interview techniques and gave tips which I found useful which has resulted in me getting an unconditional offer at Gloucester University to study animation. I believe this project helps people really understand the struggles in applying for jobs and getting people ready for work".*

Mahdi's Volunteer Mentor **Simran** had Multiple Sclerosis herself. She had her own comfort zone and a friend came to her first interview to support her.

Simran reported:

*"My name is Simran and I supported a young man from Acorns, named Mahdi. Due to my disability, over time I have become increasingly anxious and personally find it very difficult to travel by myself. I especially struggle when I have to travel new*

*location by myself. During my training, I found out that I would be expected to travel to my mentee's house or hospital for the face to face meetings. This made me extremely anxious and stressed. However, I was determined to complete this as I wanted to guide young individuals. This experience taught me how to manage my balance, my emotions and wellbeing to ensure it does not interfere with my life and work. Another skill I gained is how to plan effectively and stay determined no matter how difficult the situation appears to me. Since my mentee was a young teenager who had just joined college, I was able to share my experience with him. The same age gap also helped to bridge clear communication. I offered him advice where needed and helped him with preparing for university after the summer".*

One young person, **Nazia**, loved art and textiles and had an interest in fashion design and IT. Her goal was to have her own clothing range online. She wanted to improve her health as she had been in hospital for over 2 years. Her disabilities were so severe that she needed carers around her full time, she couldn't leave the house without her family and her carers. Due to her tracheotomy she needed 4 people around her wherever she went. Nazia said that she didn't like "*being treated as a baby at school*", she hated being "*given kid activities, not my age related activities because of my special needs*". She wanted to be given "*age related activities not disability-related activities*", she wanted to be treated the same as other young people. Nazia's carer mentioned that her school wanted her to undertake work experience one day a per week on a Tuesday but they had left it to the family to find the placement and to let them know so they could give her authorisation to be out of the school for the day. The school had tried to find her a placement but were unsuccessful. The family welcomed Volunteering Matters looking for opportunities. A placement was sought but it was difficult as she would need to have 4 people at the placement due to her needs and she was only interested in something related to fashion or fashion design. Her family were also not keen for her to have a placement outside school or home.

Futures Midlands arranged for a Volunteer Mentor to visit her at home. The Volunteer Mentor, Tasnim, helped her to look online for clothes designing opportunities, and, as she was quite reserved, worked with her on communication skills, social skills and team building. Despite her interest in IT, she didn't have an e-mail address. Tasnim helped her create one and taught her the basics of e-mail.

One young person, **Jamie**, had an interest in computing and designing computer games. He had been home for some time and wanted to become more independent and "*do things a normal person can do*". His goal was to find a job in IT, perhaps as a game designer. Futures Midlands arranged a Volunteer Mentor to help him with workshops at home research gaming organisations and support with a volunteering opportunity. Jamie suffered from ill-health through the project and at one stage he was hospitalised with a chest infection.

After completing the Futures Midlands project, Jamie was planning to go to college in September 2019.

Two of the young people, **Lewis** and **Aoslin**, attended the same college. Futures Midlands arranged for a Volunteer Mentor, Diana, to meet them at their school and help them prepare for the workplace through team building activities and workshops including communication skills, workplace behaviours and how to deal with criticism. **Aoslin** didn't know what she wanted to do in the future, she had no aspirations. She was also helped with workshops relationship building, assertiveness and life skills.

Aoslin reported:

*"Diana helped me to improve my relationship building with other people. She also helped calm my anxiety down when I had exams. I enjoyed our workshops"*

**Lewis** reported:

*"I met with my Mentor every week in school. She helped with improving my communication skills. I liked the sessions and I shared my lessons with Aoslin which was fun. I was looking forward to every session"*

Volunteer Mentor **Diana** reported:

*"I decided to volunteer as I'm also disabled myself with chronic illness and I know we are all still equal and want to learn too. It's my passion to work with young adults and help them reach their potentials. I am passionate and experienced and I enjoy what I do. I am a mentor and deliver workshops to students to increase their life skills, such as communication skills, listening skills, teambuilding, assertiveness etc. I like searching for information, delivering the information and it makes me happy to see students listening and learning and enjoying themselves. I found that my students trust me, feel confident around me and they actively participate. I found it challenging to deal with some young adults' behaviour but I think I manage it alright. I stay calm and reassure the student. My students are welcoming, they look forward to the mentoring session each week. I feel that we have created trust, we communicate well with each other, and listen to each other. I feel that my students put what we have learnt into practice and they are sharing their journey with me. It's a lovely feeling to know that my support is needed and students use this effectively".*

Although the Futures Midlands project has ended, Diana is keen to stay on volunteering at the school. The school has said they may also have more students in the autumn for her to mentor.

**Andrew Middleton**, Assistant Head Teacher at Victoria Specialist Arts College in Birmingham reported the project's benefits for his students:

*"The pupils have enjoyed working with (Volunteer Mentor) Diana and have built up a close relationship in a short period of time. They look forward to the sessions and have developed important life skills as well as being more confident"*

Due to the successful placement between Diana, Lewis and Aoslin, Volunteering Matters continued to support the placement until July 2019 to allow the placement to finish naturally and positively at the end of the school year.

**Abdul's** goal was to get into photography, acting or modelling. He wanted workshops to improve his confidence skills as he lacked a lot. His volunteer helped him travel to his volunteering placement to make sure he turned up on time and on the right day, and helped him with his volunteering tasks.

At the end of the project, Abdul was offered a place at Walsall College to study Drama and Acting.

**Heil** joined the project to do something in his gap year. He was home based and had never been out of the house alone so he wanted workshops at home. He wanted to undertake workshops to help with his CV and help him improve his social relationships.

After the project, Heil's goal was to go to university in September 2019. The interventions were so successful that Heil asked Futures Midlands for help when he goes to university to help settle in especially during fresher's week.

**Jack** began involvement in the project at the start and took part in the first focus group. As well as loving concerts and beer gardens, his goal was to go into computer aided design. Futures Midlands provided Jack with Work-Preparation Mentoring from Zurich Insurance. He undertook workshops in building up his CV, communication skills, interview techniques, presentation skills, how to dress for interviews and work related skills.

Jack and his Volunteer Mentor Tasnim took over Volunteering Matters' Twitter account during '#iwill week' in November 2018 and tweeted about their project journeys. The #iwill campaign seeks to empower young people and celebrate their stories, enabling them to describe the impact they have on communities and causes they care about.

Jack reported:

*"Futures Midlands has helped me find out about what I like to do. I found it useful as I got a bit of understanding about how to make a CV. I learnt new skills like how to make my CV stand out to employers. I'm not that confident with speaking to people on the phone, and (Volunteer Mentor) Tasnim really helped me build my strengths around this. The best way to deal with it was making role plays face to face. It was good to discuss situations with Tasnim and talk about ways to overcome them. I'm now on an internship with an Engineering firm, working in the transport team doing road designs. The programme helped me for this as it got my CV ready for it".*



Since started with the engineering company, Jack has been told that the company will give him. He will however have to balance this with having a back operation.

**Ellie** joined the programme to have a bit more challenge in life. She had an interest in creative writing and poems and her goals were to get into writing, newspapers or book publishing. She wanted workshops to learn about IT, how to use social media, creative writing and anything book, poetry or library related.

Ellie reported:

*"I met with my mentor Thandeka at school. She helped me with improving my skills and we spoke about books that I have an interest in, especially my love for writing poetry".*

While she volunteered, Volunteer Mentor Thandeka was studying for a degree in Birmingham. She left Birmingham to return home in Summer 2019. However she got on so well with Ellie that they plan to keep in touch via Skype and carry on with individual workshops independently from the project.

**Hamid** joined the project as his goal was to be an interactive media designer, but he lacked confidence, particularly in large groups. As he was prone to chest infections, Hamid had to carry around an oxygen tank for an emergency and needed a carer with him at all time. He undertook workshops in building his CV, communications, building confidence and improving the skills he already has. He left the project to concentrate on his exams and he is continuing at school.

One young person, **Rav**, had no thoughts about a future job, but he loved music and particularly rap. He wanted workshops to help improve his life skills, communication skill and social skills. He had not been out of his house for sometime, so a goal was to get used to being outside the house. Rav was unable to comment at the end of his involvement as due to ill-health he was taken to hospital and so he did not complete his placement. At the time of the evaluation, Rav was still in hospital.

At their entry point of the project, young people were monitored as to who could access project activities independently. Only one young person would have been able to access their activities independently. At their exit from the project, 3 young people were able to access their activities independently. One of the things young people reported at the end of their involvement was how taking part in the project had increased their independence.

Young people were asked how many of them required the support of someone, such as a Volunteer Mentor, to take part in the project. Eleven young people said they wouldn't have been able to undertake the project without the support of a Volunteer Mentor.

## 9.2 Quantitative Data

During the interviews with the young people at their entry point to the project, to evaluate the impact on the young people taking part, they were asked a number of questions. They were then asked the same questions again at the end of their involvement in the project.

### Wellbeing

Q1: Young people were asked ***“How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?”*** (The scale was 0 not at all satisfied, 10 completely satisfied).

Despite their health conditions, most young people talked positively about their lives, with most scoring 6 or above and 2 scoring 8 and 9. However 3 rated their lives as 3, 4 and 5.

After taking part in the project, **80% of young people felt more satisfied with their lives**, with 2 young people giving the highest score, one increasing by 4 places.

Q2: Young people were asked ***“Overall to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?”*** (0 not all worthwhile, 10 completely)

The scores were again positive, with 4 of the young people scoring 8 or 9. After taking part in the project, **60% felt that the things they do in their life were more worthwhile**, with all of the lowest scoring young people increasing their scores. One gave a lower score but is likely to be because his health deteriorated during the placement.

Q3: Young people were asked ***“Overall how happy did you feel yesterday?”*** (0 not at all happy, 10 completely happy).

Again this was answered positively with all young people rating 5 or above and 2 of the young people rating “completely happy”.

After taking part in the project, **50% felt happier than they did yesterday, with 40% of young people saying they were “completely happy”**. One person dropped considerably but this again may be because of his health deterioration.

### Health

Q4: Young people were asked ***“Would you say your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, poor or not sure?”***

Despite having life limiting conditions, it was interesting how positively the young people talked about their health, with a majority stating very good or good. After taking part in the project, **30% felt their health had improved**. Three people who had said their health was good or very good at the start, said their health was poor, not including the person who had said their health was poor at the start. However, these figures are likely to be skewed as one young person was hospitalised due to a chest infection, another was due to have an operation on his back, while a third's mood would change daily.

## Personal Development

Young people were asked ***“How do you feel about the following things even if never done them before?”***

Q5: Interestingly 9 young people already felt confident in meeting new people. After the project, **70% of young people felt more confident in meeting new people**.

Q6: At the start of the project, 55% young people said they were confident at having a go at things that are new to me. At the end of the project, **90% were confident at having a go at new things, with 60% feeling more confident**.

Q7: After taking part in the project, **80% were confident about working with other people in a team**

Q8: At the start of the project, 73% of the young people felt confident or very confident at putting forward their ideas, at the end of the project, **100% of young people felt confident at putting forward their ideas**.

Q9: Young people were split on a question about leadership, with **half of young people feeling confident at being a leader of a team**. Only one young person felt very unconfident.

Q10: After taking part in the project, **70% of young people were confident or very confident in explaining their ideas clearly**.

Q11: At the end of the project, **50% of young people felt confident or very confident about getting things done on time** and there was little change here.

## Self Esteem

Q12: After taking part in the project, **91% of young people felt satisfied with themselves** with 30% of the young people strongly agreeing.

Q13: When asked “at times I think I am no good at all” at the start, statements were positive with 55% disagreeing and 27% strongly disagreeing. At the end, 40% of had improved their scores with 70% strongly disagreeing and 20% disagreeing.

Q14: **100% of volunteers agreed that they had a number of good qualities** at the start. There was a shift by the end with 40% of young people strongly agreeing with this statement.

Q15: Despite their conditions and disabilities, **92% of young people felt they could do things as well as any other person**. At the end, 20% of the young people had upgraded to strongly agreeing with this statement.

Q16: When asked, **92% of young people said they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they did not have much to be proud of**. There was an increase from 55% to 70% strongly disagreeing by the end of the project.

Q17: **92% of young people disagreed that they felt useless at times**. This was one of the few questions where there was a drop in score at the end of the project, but this is likely to be skewed by one young people’s personal situation.

Q18: When given a statement, **100% of young people agreed they were a person of worth at least on an equal plane as others**. At the end, 40% strongly agreed.

Q19: At the end of the project, **100% of young people disagreed or strongly disagreed that they wished they could have more respect for themselves**. Only 18% agreed with this at the start of the project.

Q20: Through taking part in the project, **100% of young people strongly disagreed that they were inclined to feel that they are a failure**. One young person had agreed with this comment at the start.

Q21: At the start of their involvement, **100% of young people agreed or strongly agreed that they took a positive attitude to themselves**, with 36% strongly agreeing. This increased to 60% strongly agreeing at the end of the project.

## Emotions and Relationships

Young people were asked some statements about their feelings and thoughts over the last 2 weeks.

Q22: At the end of the project, **30% said they were optimistic about the future all of the time, with 50% saying often**. This was a rise from only 18% saying all of the time and 45% saying some of the time at the start.

Q23: At the end of the project **80% said that they had been feeling useful feeling**, with 10% saying all of the time.

Q24: Although 100% had said they felt relaxed some of the time or often, **45% felt more relaxed at the end of the project**, with 30% feeling relaxed all of the time.

Q25: Through involvement in the project **80% of young people felt they had been dealing with problems well** all of the time or often. One person said they rarely dealt with problems well, but this was likely due to their health situation.

Q26: At the end of the project **100% of young people felt they had been thinking clearly**, with 27% of young people increasing their scores.

Q27: After taking part in the project, **90% of young people felt close to other people** all of the time or often.

Q28: At the end of the project, **80% of young people felt able to make up their own minds about things**, with 70% saying all of the time at the end. One changed their answer to rarely, but this was likely due to their health situation.

After taking part in the project:

**100% of young people agreed that they have others who will listen when they need to talk about problems.**

**90% of young people agreed there were several people they could talk to when they were lonely.**

**90% of young people felt they have others to turn to if there is a crisis.**

**100% of young people disagreed that they wouldn't know where to go for help if they needed help to find a job.**

## **10. Conclusions**

From evaluating the Futures Midlands project, it can be concluded that:

1. Despite the participants having life limited conditions, they were mostly positive about their current circumstances. However many lacked ambition of what to do in the future and the project helped them to focus their ideas and aspirations.
2. Having life limiting conditions should not be a barrier to young people accessing higher or further education, or employment.
3. Undertaking regular positive activity such as work preparation workshops or volunteering is beneficial to young people, can be seen to increase their feelings of

wellbeing and self-esteem and inspire them to access education and increase their chances of obtaining their own work experience.

4. For young people with severe physical disabilities and/or special educational needs, due to the complexities of their conditions, it is likely to be more difficult for them to access volunteering and work experience opportunities than young people without. There was no conclusive evidence that having life limiting conditions contributed further to that.
5. Schools and colleges, including special educational needs schools, do not have the time and resources to find work experience or volunteering opportunities for young people with life limiting conditions, and there is a demand for this service.
6. Finding volunteering and work experience opportunities that are fully accessible for young people who are wheelchair users is a particular barrier.
7. If young people with life limiting conditions are able to access volunteering and work experience opportunities, it is highly likely they will only be able to do so for a limited time, one or two hours, due to their personal care needs and a lack of accessible toilets and changing facilities.
8. Providing one to one support to a young person to access volunteering and work experience is essential to access transport, buildings and office environments, but hospices and schools do not have the resources to provide this.
9. Despite some physical barriers, young people with life limiting conditions can and should be encouraged to take part in the community around them, and there are organisations and individuals willing to host and support them.
10. Families of young people with life limiting conditions are not always willing for their young people to access volunteering, work experience and mentor support. The families should be introduced to the benefits for their young person and be supported to access the opportunities.
11. When working with families of young people with life limiting conditions, it is important that the families get involved so that trust and rapport is built from the outset. If they are invested in the activities, it enables more opportunities for the young people.
12. Many young people with life limiting conditions may be less independent than their peers, and may lack social skills, confidence in talking to new people and the ability to make friends.
13. Young people with life limiting conditions want to be given opportunities that everyone of their age can do. They are not happy for people to assume they cannot do something due to their life limiting conditions.

14. Young people value participating in work preparation workshops with the support of a Mentor as this is not something they receive help with at school or college.

15. Trying to find work experience or volunteering opportunities for young people under the age of 18 is particularly difficult due to restrictions from organisations around organisational policies and insurance. However there is no evidence that this is any more of an issue for young people with life limiting conditions than their peers.

## **11. The Factors Required for Successful Volunteering and Work Experience Placements**

As part of the Futures Midlands project, the project set out to identify the factors required for successful volunteer and work experience placement, family support and successful support roles. Although the work experience element was more limited than originally planned, due to less organisations being willing to host young people and less young people being interested in work experience than it was hoped for, based on interactions with organisations, young people, hospices, schools and colleges, the Futures Midlands team recommend the following:

1. It is getting more difficult to find volunteering and work experience placements for young people under the age of 18 due to organisation policies and insurance. To find opportunities for young people under the age of 18, it may be better to pursue other options such as work preparation activities. Volunteering opportunities may be an easier option, although some organisations instil similar restrictions.

2. Due to the complexities of living with a life limiting condition and a severe physical disability, it is important to be flexible about the model and the volunteering and work experience placements.

3. If recruiting Mentors to support young people, it is suggested to invite the Mentors to meet the young people in a 'get to know you' session or focus group first. This way Mentors will see first-hand what a life limiting condition looks like.

4. When engaging with potential volunteering and work experience placement providers, it is important to meet them to sell the project and get them on board. Don't just rely on e-mails and not even on phone calls.

5. To ensure that placements are of high quality, it is important that the placements will benefit the organisations and young people. Organisations will have expectations and it is important that they are met. Identify organisations who may want to give back to the community, not just because they feel they should do it. Consider larger organisations that may have corporate social responsibility pledges

and research them. They may have larger or modern buildings. Identify what the young people could help the organisation with and what they could bring to the organisation. Could the young people help co-produce something while they are there?

6. Additionally, it is important to establish what the role of the young person will be while they are on work experience. A meaningful role and meaningful tasks, or the opportunity for the young person to work on a specific project, will be more beneficial to a young person.

7. However meaningful the role and tasks are, keep them simple and not overly complicated. This means they are more likely to be achieved by both the young person and organisation, especially if any challenges or barriers are encountered.

8. Ensure that the opportunity is risk assessed, including the working environment, role and tasks.

9. Consider the location of the opportunity and the proximity to public transport hubs. Most young people will not drive, some may access lifts to the location, while others may need to travel by train and bus.

10. Whether dealing directly with organisations or involving Mentors, ensure that everyone involved understands that the young people with life limiting conditions want to be seen on an equal plane with everyone else. Any support provided should not involve pitying them but should help to empower them.

11. Consider setting up opportunities that are shorter, i.e. not an all-day placement. Due to the young people's health conditions and personal care needs, not all young people will be able to take part in an all-day activity, they may only be able to take part for a couple of hours before needing a break or help to access personal care.

12. To provide potential organisations with an insight, consider providing them with training on life limiting conditions and disability awareness, so that they can understand the conditions better. It may be beneficial to arrange an open day/evening for organisations to attend.

13. Any work experience opportunity should be monitored on the first day and then at regular intervals as appropriate.

14. Both young person and organisation should be given the details of a contact person so that any issues that arise can be dealt with swiftly.

15. Consider appointing the young person with a buddy in the organisation that they could go to for more informal support. Organisations may wish to appoint a person



who could benefit from the experience as this could give them management or organisational experience, and increased communication skills.

16. It is advisable to ask for the young person's family's views and opinions as many families may have their own choices for the young people. Consider inviting them to presentations. Keep in touch with families through the process to keep them involved and reassured.

17. It is important to be realistic with young people about what opportunities could be provided, so you meet their expectations and don't make promises that you cannot keep.

18. Build in flexibility in case something does not go to plan. However much research is done, there can be things which are not as predicted. Consider having a back-up organisation or activity should the first environment not be appropriate or accessible.

19. Although it is good to replicate models, don't assume that something that worked for one person, at one organisation, in one location will work somewhere else. See every organisation and every young person as an individual.

20. A Checklist for a successful volunteering or work experience placement:

- An accessible building
- An appropriate and accessible working environment, which should be risk assessed
- Access to accessible toilets
- Access to personal care (where needed and through care packages)
- Induction and training for the young person
- A contact person that the young person can go to at any time
- Provision of a buddy
- A clear but simple role for the young person
- Structured and achievable activities
- Opportunities for the young person to suggest their own ideas, within reason
- Opportunities for the young person to co-produce their own project, where possible
- Flexibility in case a first option does not go to plan

## 12. Summary

The Futures Midlands project ambitiously endeavoured to engage young people with life limiting conditions in meaningful activities including training workshops, volunteering, work experience and mentoring. The project met the goals of working in partnership with Acorns Hospices and recruiting schools and colleges from across the West Midlands.

Twelve young people took part in quality experiences at the project. Rather than just setting up activities and placing young people there as can happen with some work experience opportunities, the activities were tailor-made to each young person, considering their goals, interests and future plans, as well as carefully considering their health conditions, disabilities and support needs.

When considering the objectives listed in the Evaluation Framework in Section 2:

1. The results show that the Futures Midlands project has made an impact on the transition for young people, with young people having clearer ideas of what to do next, 3 young people enrolling university and college courses, and another obtaining paid work.

2. Through the qualitative and quantitative data gathered in the Evaluation section (Section 9), it has been shown that young people developed through undertaking training, volunteering and work experience placements.

3. The project has listed the factors required for successful volunteer and work experience placements, family support and successful support roles in Section 11 and has created a model of excellence.

4. The objective to look at savings which such programmes can produce for services, such as hospices, health and social care services and schools, was much more difficult to consider. The number of referrals of young people from all sources were disappointingly too low and the project ended a year earlier than expected, so the project did not get to gather enough data to fully evaluate this point. However, as the project activities were at no cost to the hospices and schools, there is evidence that the project saved them both resources and time. Additionally the activities were at no cost to the young people either, and due to the positive results from the young people, particularly around their wellbeing, self-esteem and aspirations, and how the project helped to get young people out of their houses, it is hoped that the project will have benefitted the young people's physical and mental health and so may have contributing to savings in health care costs in the future.

A further statement was made to endeavour to compare Futures Midlands answers with those from other young people accessing Volunteering Matters projects. It is

not possible to do that here as these measuring tools are new to Volunteering Matters and although the Futures Midlands project has used them, other projects around the country have only recently started using them. There is therefore not currently enough data to compare the answers to. However this should be possible in the near future.

The project contributed to much learning through its lifetime. Although Volunteering Matters undertook research when planning the project, they probably needed to have conducted a lot more. It was evident that there were not enough young people with life limiting conditions within the transition age range who were able to take part in the programme, when considering their severity of disabilities, health conditions and family and cultural circumstances. The project learnt that young people's health needs could change rapidly, which resulted in them not being able to participate in the project. Putting restrictions on the criteria for young people to be referred to the programme made it more difficult to meet the targets for the project as all the young people had different needs and access issues, and wanted different types of work experiences. It wasn't a 'one size fits all' situation.

The project found the importance of flexibility when setting up activities with young people with life limiting conditions. The project was set up presuming that models used successfully elsewhere would work with this group of young people. Much was made of the Ready Steady Volunteer model and activities that had been successfully delivered to young people with learning disabilities and additional support needs in the East of England for many years. However, working in a different geographical area, with a different client group, it was clear that the model needed adapting more than was originally expected. The project deduced that project models need to be kept flexible and should not to be prescriptive in imposing the same programme in another place, it is important to have a menu of options and also to be prepared to think creatively. This was especially important when young people were asked about the goals they wanted help with, the activities that interested them and what type of support they needed, and models had to be reflected upon and adapted much more than anticipated.

Through meeting with the young people in hospices and in their own homes, talking to their families and carers and talking to and meeting placement providers and schools, a significant amount of learning was gathered about why young people may not have previously accessed work experience and volunteering. Although building accessibility access issues had been foreseen, these were much more challenging than originally thought, as were the challenges around meeting personal care needs and families' cultural issues. Having a lift at an "accessible" building does not on its own guarantee access, as many high powered electric wheelchairs cannot fit into many lifts. The issue around accessible toilets and access to personal care was also a factor. The project couldn't engage with many organisations as they did not have or were not close to an accessible toilet. Project research found that during the

project, there were only 5 Changing Places facilities in central Birmingham, and all within a small area, and there was only one Changing Places facility in Walsall. In many cases, appointments were set up in specific geographical locations and to very tight time frames to allow young people to access their personal care needs.

Although the Futures Midlands project ended in its current form in March 2019, the project leaves a legacy. Through Futures Midlands, Volunteering Matters has made a number of new contacts in the West Midlands and conversations are ongoing about working with them on other new mentoring and activity projects in Birmingham and the Black Country. Futures Midlands volunteers were made aware of other new volunteering programmes and were given the opportunity to join these programmes. Although there is not a market to continue the Futures Midlands project for young people with life limiting conditions in its current form, the project did identify that there is a market for a more general youth mentoring programme for young people with a variety of disabilities and additional support needs in the West Midlands, and Volunteering Matters has been considering the possibility of working with schools, colleges and hospices in the future.

However, the project's greatest legacy will hopefully be on the young people who took part. Relationships between young people and their Volunteer Mentors were going so well that Volunteering Matters continued supporting some of the matches for a short time to allow them to end naturally at the end of summer academic term in July 2019. Some of the relationships between young people and Volunteer Mentors have been so successful, that they will continue to contact each other despite the project ending. One Volunteer Mentor was a university student in the Midlands and even though she left the area in Summer 2019, she plans to continue to Skype her young person and arrange workshops with her in a personal capacity. It is hoped that through taking part in the mentoring, work-preparation workshops, volunteering and work experience opportunities, the Futures Midlands project has made a difference to the young people's confidence and their goals and aspirations for the years to come.

**Volunteering Matters  
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