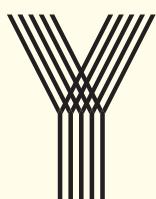


THE U

Connecting communities through learning



THE
YOUNG
FOUNDATION
THINKING
ACTION
CHANGE

“The benefits? Engaging with other people, having more confidence, knowing what to do. You’re always smiling! ”



VISION

We believe that each of us can be part of safer, healthier and happier communities.

We believe that communities thrive when people have the connections and confidence that they need to feel safe, and where individuals are equipped with the skills that they need to cope with everyday challenges.

We believe that everyone, irrespective of age, background or experience, can have a positive experience of learning, and should be encouraged to feel confident about their own knowledge & capabilities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Busy schedules, long commutes and changing populations are common features in today's world. This pace of life can be positive in many ways; however research shows that a lack of time also prevents us from making connections with those we meet¹. It takes time to get to know the people around us, let alone be helpful or thoughtful to them. This disconnect can reduce our sense of safety, and affect our attitude towards our neighbourhoods and wider communities.

At The U, we believe that it is possible to foster social connections in communities without demanding a large shift in lifestyle, culture or personal values. We believe in the power of the nod and the smile, and we champion the sense of familiarity and belonging that these gestures bring. Sociologists call these connections 'weak ties'; they represent a form of social capital that is undemanding in times of plenty, yet which can reveal an unexpected power in times of uncertainty or in challenging situations such as medical emergencies.

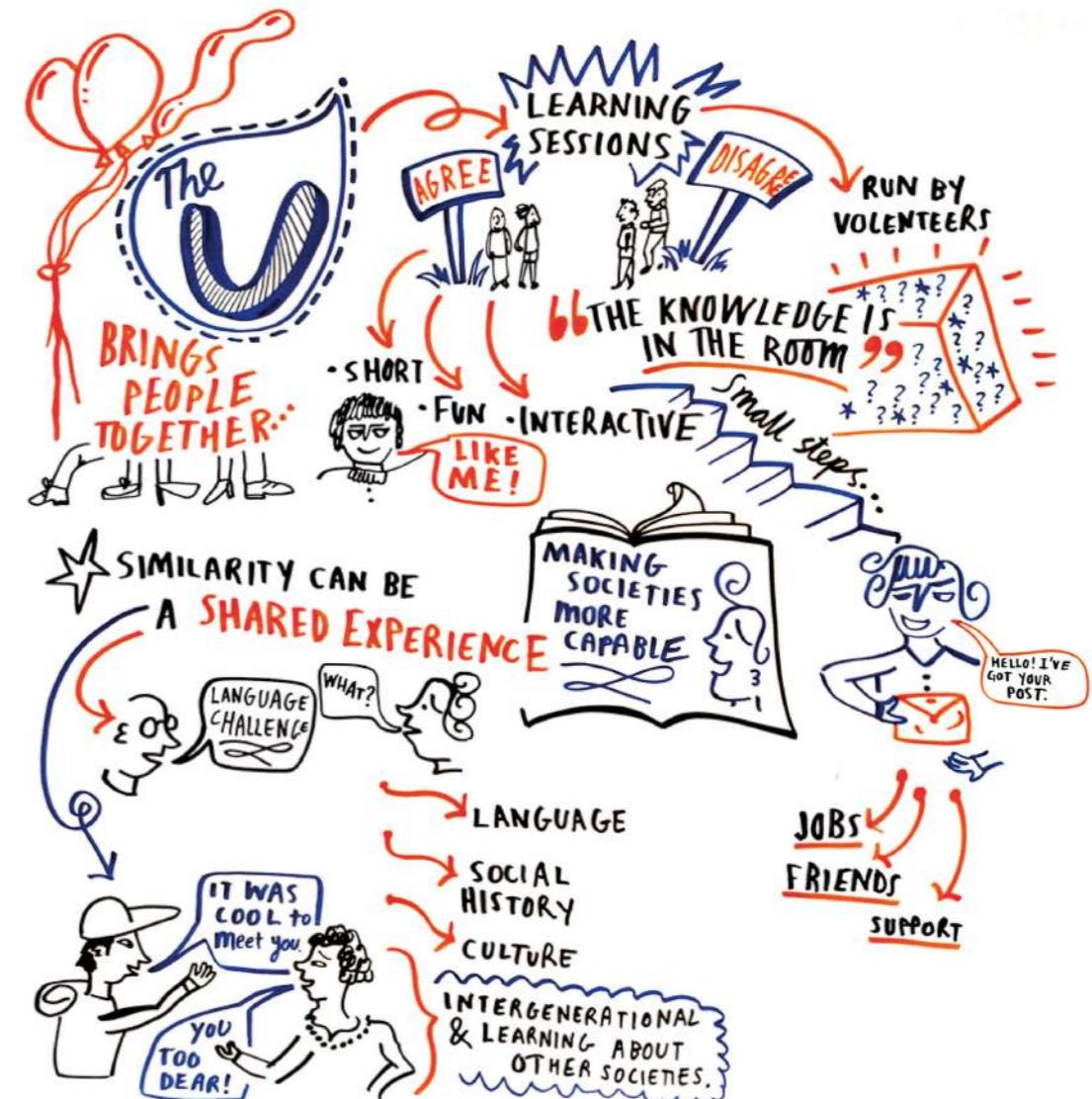
Research into the impact of the cuts on some of London's most vulnerable residents² highlighted the influence that social capital can have upon community resilience. Giving people ready access to information, encouraging residents to get to know their neighbours and supporting groups of community leaders were all recommended as activities that are known to boost collective resilience and reduce social isolation. This is particularly important in the context of growing evidence about the negative impact that social isolation can have upon physical health; lacking social connections and living alone is as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day³.

By providing more opportunities for neighbours to get to know each other in a way that is inclusive, interesting and fun, we believe that it is possible to reduce social isolation and to contribute towards safer, happier and healthier communities.

WHAT WE DO

The U brings together diverse groups of people for a shared experience, giving them the opportunity to engage with one another and learn something new. Guests attend free 90 minute sessions where they are able to learn socially useful skills in a positive and friendly environment.

Sessions are delivered by local volunteers who we call Hosts. Topics include: everyday first aid, diffusing conflict, practising positivity & youth enterprise.



1. *Charm Offensive*, The Young Foundation 2011

2. *An insight into the impact of the cuts on some of the most vulnerable in Camden*, The Young Foundation 2012

3. *Social Relationships and Mortality Risk*, Holt-Lunstad 2010

2. OUTCOMES: THE STORY SO FAR

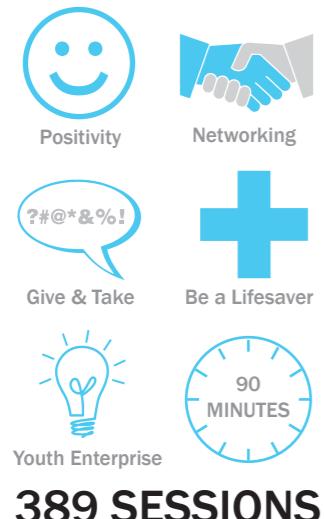
WE HAVE WORKED IN
10 COMMUNITIES,
COLLABORATING WITH OVER
230 LOCAL ORGANISATIONS,
CLUBS & BUSINESSES



AND HAVE TRAINED...
132 VOLUNTEERS



TO DELIVER



389 SESSIONS



94%
of people who attended 'Be a Lifesaver' felt more confident to act in a medical emergency

87%
of people attending 'Practising Positivity' felt more confident to manage their own happiness

92%
of people who attended 'Give and Take' felt more confident to handle everyday disagreements

WHO MAKE SMALL COMMITMENTS
TO DO GREAT THINGS LIKE...

CHAT
201 people pledged to chat to a neighbour

SHARE
375 people pledged to share a skill they learnt

HELP
192 people pledged to lend a hand to someone

DO 246 people pledged to do something new locally

AND THIS IS WHAT THEY SAID.

"I got to learn that there are amazing people in my community who care just as much as I do about making a difference" - Guest, Maidstone 2013

"Everyone I spoke to who attended the sessions said that they found them enjoyable, fun, interactive and that they learnt new skills... It has really helped them to reduce their isolation and learn some life skills" - Local partner, Barking & Dagenham 2014

"I was intrigued when I heard about The U, and being the oldest person there around all these young people who were so enthusiastic - well, it fired me with enthusiasm too!" - Host, Sutton 2011

NEW CONNECTIONS

U sessions help to build familiarity in neighbourhoods by providing opportunities for individuals of different ages and backgrounds to share a memorable experience. Learning topics are chosen on the basis that they have broad relevance to many different people, and sessions are co-ordinated by two local employees who build relationships with other local organisations and networks as part of their outreach work.

Throughout each session, Guests take part in a series of activities and discussions which provide opportunities to work in groups as well as one-to-one. We recognize that just bringing people together is not enough; we focus on encouraging laughter, shared learning and active listening in order to foster understanding and connectedness.

The U has worked in collaboration with a wide range of organisations and networks including youth clubs and foyers, carers' groups, young parents, faith groups, support groups for individuals recovering from drug or alcohol addiction, women's empowerment groups and mental health support networks. So far this year, 81% of participants met new people when they attended a U session.

Through our impact tracking we are able to learn about the ways in which participants have connected with new people and what this has meant to them. Some examples of outcomes related to this include: young people who are looking for work connecting with adults working in their field of interest; individuals who suffered from the same chronic condition joining a support group together, and someone who was experiencing social isolation after bereavement meeting up with other participants for further social activities.

For many people, The U is appealing because it is a light-touch offer that doesn't require a big commitment. Some participants will return to attend multiple sessions or to volunteer; others take part as a one-off experience. However, our post-project survey has shown that the new connections formed during the project continue to be present in their day-to-day lives months after attending; bumping into a familiar face on the street, meeting up for a chat, keeping in touch online or saying hello to new neighbours. These are small actions that can make a big difference to how we feel about the communities we live in.

"YOU GUYS ARE LIKE THE OLYMPICS ALL OVER AGAIN, GETTING PEOPLE TOGETHER TO DO SOMETHING POSITIVE AND FUN!"

- GUEST, BARKING & DAGENHAM 2013



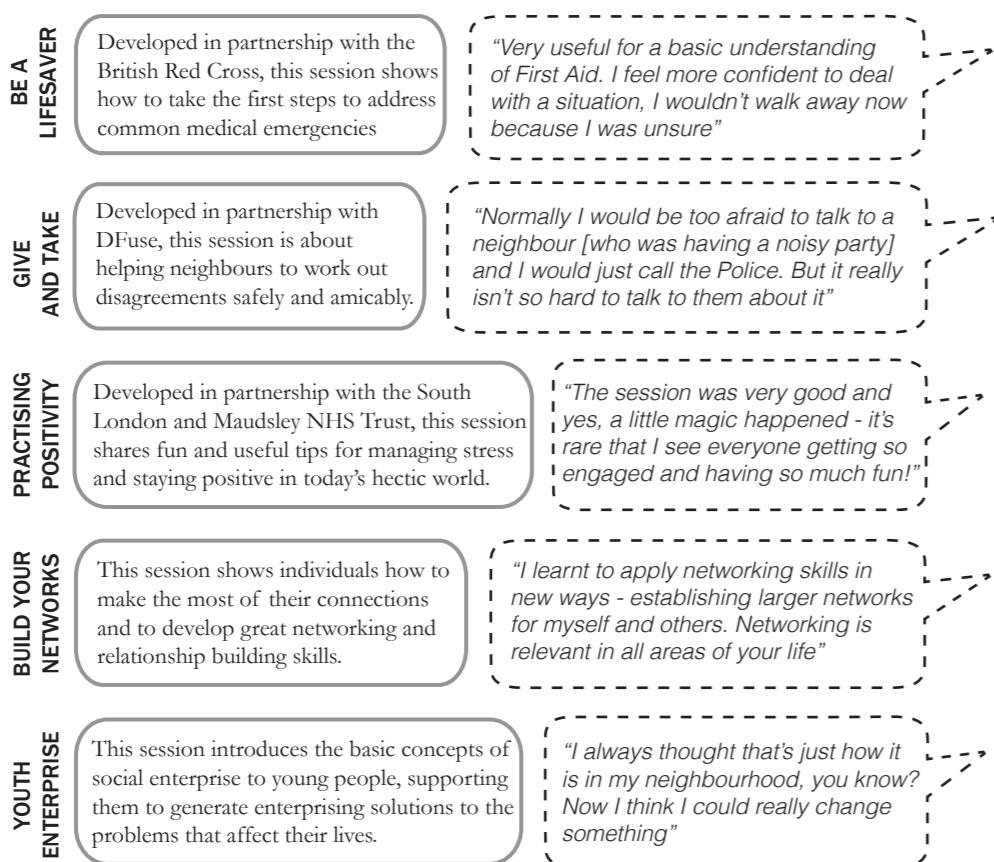
LEARNING

Our approach to learning and engagement is based on the principles of hospitality and grounded in the belief that each person in the room has something useful to contribute.

Local outreach workers and volunteers work hard to ensure that as many people as possible are able to attend, with sessions taking place at different times of the day and evening in a broad range of venues including cafes, community centres, pubs, churches and cinemas.

Every session at The U is designed to be:

- **Learner led.** Hosts facilitate group activities and discussions in a way which encourages Guests to make contributions and draw from their own experiences.
- **Playful and positive.** Research shows that people learn best when they are enjoying themselves, & learning by doing makes it easier to remember new skills.
- **Context specific.** Skills are rooted within realistic everyday scenarios, taught through role-play and storytelling.



FURTHER ACTION

To mark the end of each project, The U invites all Guests, Hosts and local partner organisations to attend a celebration party. This is an opportunity to say thank you to everyone who's been involved, to recognise individual achievements and crucially to connect our participants with all the fantastic things that are going on in the local area.

In keeping with the spirit of the project, we use food, games and laughter to bring people together and help them to discover interesting new things; from promoting small local businesses and voluntary organisations to sharing unusual facts and stories about their neighbourhoods.

For Hosts, the training and experience gained as a volunteer can act as a spring-board for further personal development and social action. Motivations for joining the project are varied, including those who have recently moved to the area and would like to get to know more people, individuals who are hoping to improve their employment prospects and young people who would like to develop strong communication and leadership skills. After being involved with The U, we have heard how the experience led to a range of positive outcomes such as new volunteering roles with community organisations, developing new social enterprises and taking up further training opportunities such as TEFL and certified First Aid courses.

By working closely with local organisations and groups we have also seen how the skills that are practised during sessions or developed during volunteer training continue to be shared more widely in the community. After session delivery has finished, we have heard from a range of individuals including teaching assistants, support workers for young homeless people and volunteer co-ordinators about how they have drawn upon their experience with The U to support the work that they do everyday.

"In my role I have been able to use all of these skills... communication, leadership and confidence to try new things. I have also been able to support volunteers with their learning and help them put their newly acquired skills into practice"

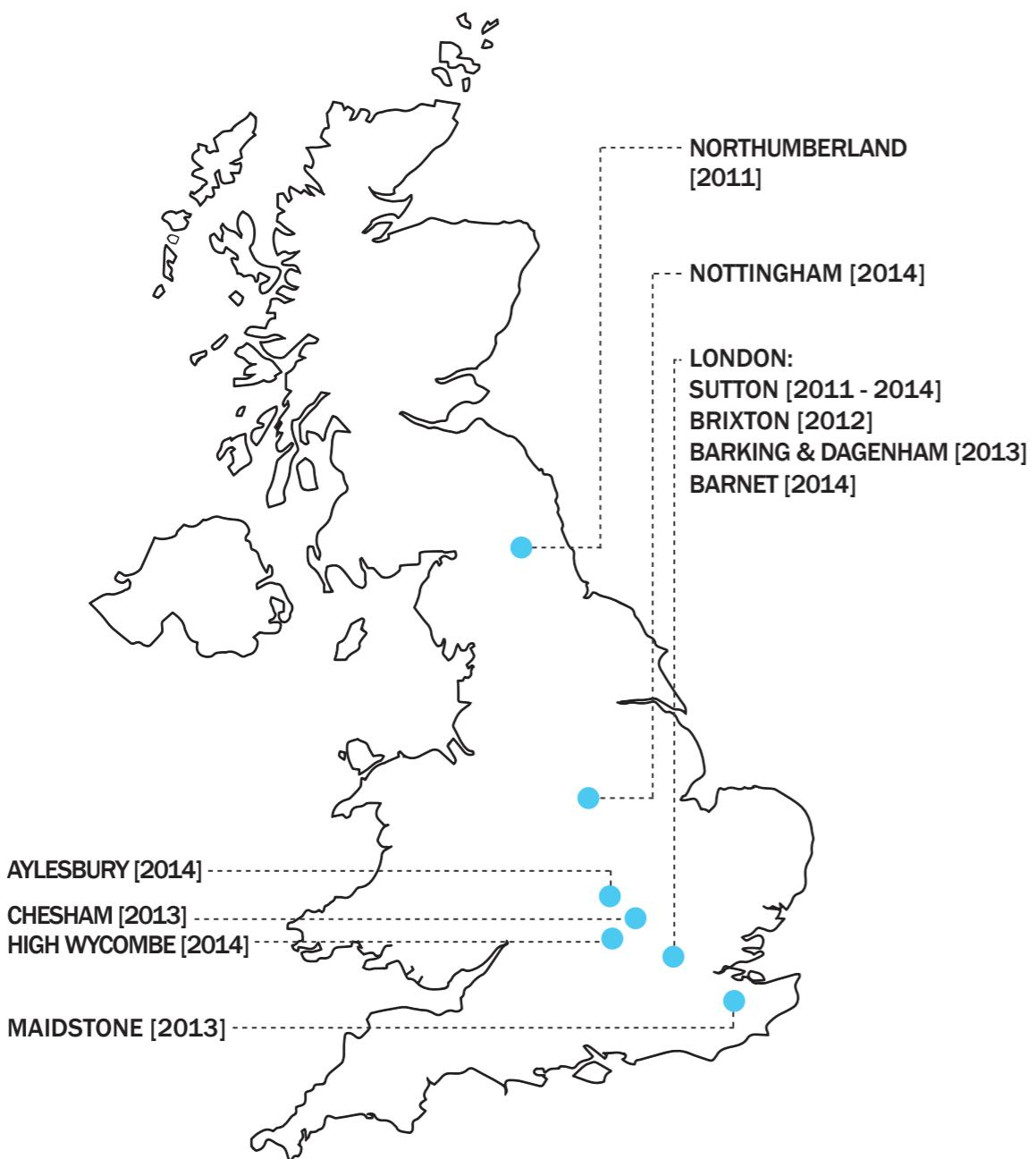
- Volunteer Co-ordinator, 'meet & greet' project for volunteers with support needs.



"THIS HAS COMPLETELY CHANGED MY MINDSET ABOUT VOLUNTEERING. I NEVER WOULD'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT BEFORE, BUT NOW I'D LIKE TO DO SOMETHING AGAIN."

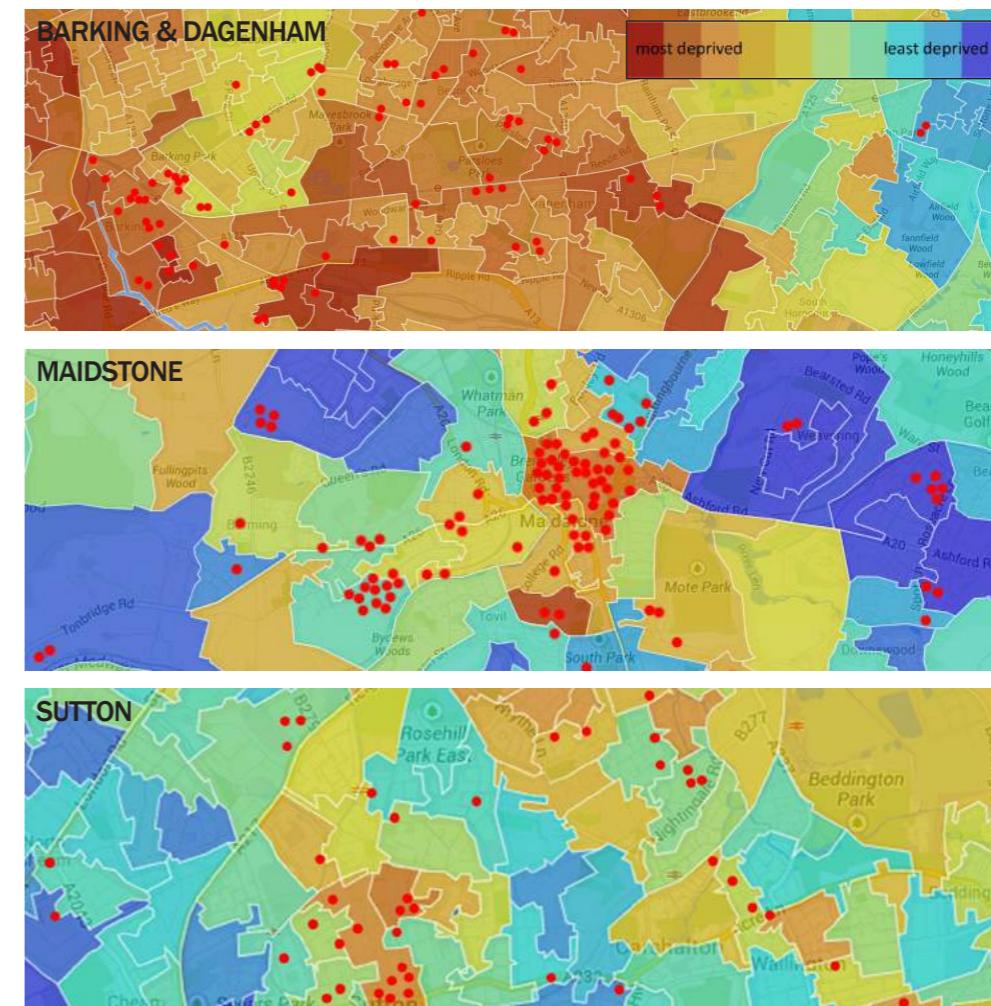
- HOST, BARKING & DAGENHAM 2013

3. LOCAL SITES



GUEST DEMOGRAPHICS

The U has engaged with individuals across the social spectrum. In each area that we work, we collect postcodes from participants and plot this against data from the indices of multiple deprivations. This information helps us to ensure that the project is reaching different parts of the community and that it is successful in enabling people from different backgrounds to learn together. Below are examples of postcode maps created for 3 local sites:



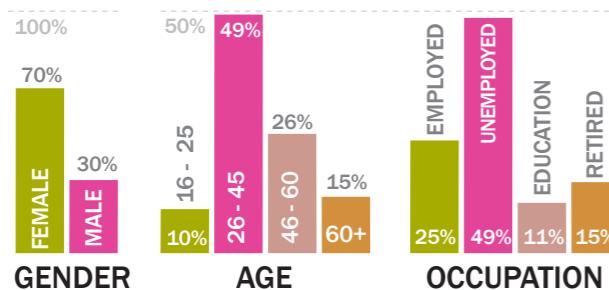
CASE STUDY [A]: SUTTON



**42 HOSTS TRAINED
212 SESSIONS
1283 ATTENDANCES**



WHO COMES TO THE U IN SUTTON?



"I GUESS BEFORE I TOOK PART IN THE U I WOULD'VE SAID THAT WASN'T PARTICULARLY INTEGRATED AS A LOCAL... I DO FEEL NOW THAT I KNOW 1. WHAT'S GOING ON, 2. WHERE TO GET THINGS FROM AND 3. WHO TO SPEAK TO IF I NEED ANYTHING."

- HOST, SUTTON

FRIENDS:

- [Carers Centre]
- [Prospects Education & Training services]
- [Circle Library]
- [Tweeddale Children's Centre]
- [Sutton Vision for visual impairment]
- [Greyhound Pub]
- [The Challenge Network]
- [Wallington Library]
- [Cheam Library]
- [Community Drug Service]
- [The Sports Village]

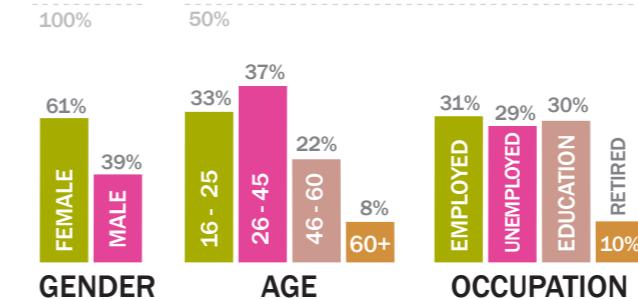
CASE STUDY [B]: BARKING & DAGENHAM



**20 HOSTS TRAINED
25 SESSIONS
451 ATTENDANCES**



WHO CAME TO THE U IN BARKING & DAGENHAM?



"I LEARNT FROM THE U, AND NOW KEEP ON LEARNING THROUGH EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES, THAT YOU ARE NEVER TOO OLD TO LEARN "

- GUEST, POST-PROJECT SURVEY

FRIENDS:

- [Foyer]
- [Carer's befriending]
- [Women of Substance]
- [Dagenham Butterflies over 55's Social Club]
- [Dagenham Redbridge Football Club]
- [Starlight mental health support group]
- [Faith Forum]
- [Brighter Steppings]
- [Abbey Children's Centre]
- [Arc Theatre]
- [Homestyle Health]

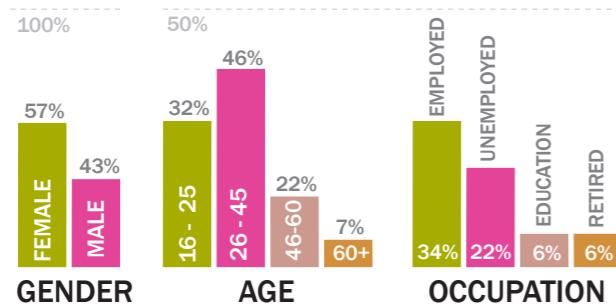
CASE STUDY [C]: MAIDSTONE



**12 HOSTS TRAINED
51 SESSIONS
259 ATTENDANCES**



WHO CAME TO THE U IN MAIDSTONE?



"PHILIP AND RAJ MET EACH OTHER AT A SESSION AND DISCOVERED THAT THEY BOTH CAME FROM THE SAME COUNTRY - THEY STAYED IN TOUCH AFTER THE SESSION AND KEEP EACH OTHER UP TO DATE WITH THINGS THAT ARE GOING ON IN THE AREA "

- CHRIS, LOCAL OUTREACH WORKER

FRIENDS:

- [Maidstone Gateway Volunteers]
- [The Rafters club]
- [Stepping Stones Studio]
- [Maidstone Community Support Centre]
- [The Children's Hut]
- [Parkwood Community Centre]
- [Willowbrook Place Teenage Parent Unit]
- [Kings Hill GP Surgery]
- [Urban Blue Bus]
- [Pippin Court supported housing]
- [Trinity Foyer]

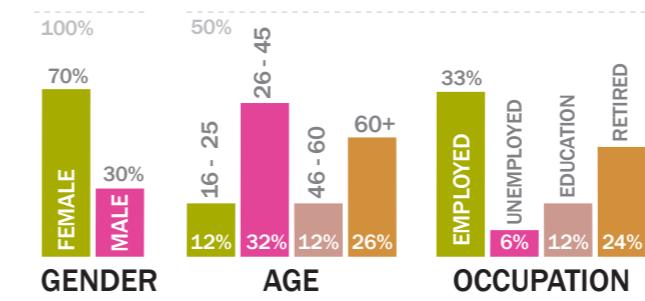
CASE STUDY [D]: CHESHAM



**9 HOSTS TRAINED
34 SESSIONS
176 ATTENDANCES**



WHO CAME TO THE U IN CHESHAM?

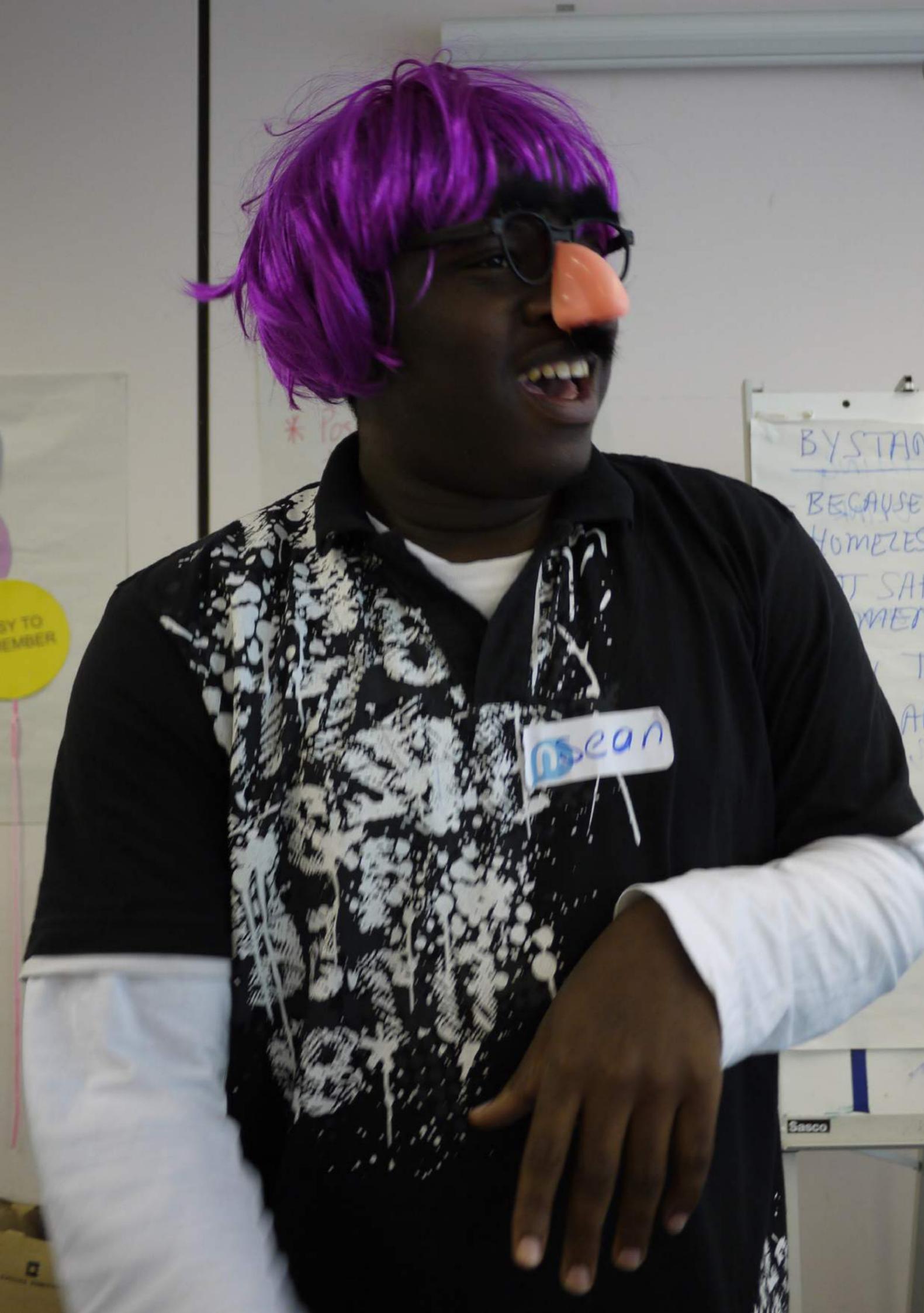


"N HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO TEACH ENGLISH TO PEOPLE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE. AFTER HOSTING, SHE WAS ALREADY STARTING TO USE THESE SKILLS AND HAS NOW ENROLLED ON AN INTERNET COURSE FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE "

- MARY, LOCAL OUTREACH WORKER

FRIENDS:

- [The Bagnall Centre]
- [Chesham Library]
- [The Moor Swim&Gym]
- [Hivings Free Church]
- [Chiltern Hills Academy]
- [The Youth Centre]
- [Flix Hairdressers]
- [Waterside Children's Centre]
- [Newtown Sure Start Centre]
- [Wallington House]
- [Lowndes Park]
- [Atlas House supported housing]

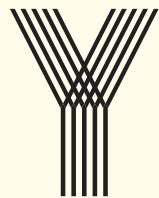


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