

Ross Podyma

Best Practice

Participation in Action: Youth-led conference empowers young people to think big for a better future

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Youth organisation empowers young people to run a conference about rethinking social policy to create a society that better meets their needs.



The Youth Innovation Conference saw young people take part in workshops to share ideas and challenge concepts. Picture: Sporting Communities

Name: Youth Innovation Conference

Organisation: Sporting Communities

The Youth Innovation Conference, held at Manchester’s University Academy 92 in January, embarked on a bold mission to initiate meaningful conversations between adults who hold power and the younger generation. Influencers and innovators were invited to an intergenerational gathering to share insights into their experiences and the impactful work within their specialist fields. Speakers included Mike Kent, the founder of Kitlocker, Mark Lawrie, chief executive of StreetGames, Yvonne Harrison, from Foundation 92 and Naomi Beckles, from Sport England.

The event, organised and led by young people, served as a vibrant platform where ideas were shared, and where established concepts could be challenged.

The conference featured a series of workshops curated by various youth-led groups. These workshops reflected the diverse interests and passions propelling this forward-thinking cohort into the forefront of innovation and societal change. Diverse workshops addressed issues such as the impact of poverty on lifestyle choices, fostering safer spaces within communities, and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis through the eyes of young people.

As the conversations unfolded throughout the day, there was a palpable acknowledgment and recognition among the attending adults regarding the influence they have over the lives of young people, prompting a reflective query into whether we authentically seek transformative change or not. The young people of Derby, Manchester, and Staffordshire, despite encountering challenging responses and grappling with nuance and context, showcased remarkable resilience in their quest to reclaim their voices, emerging informed but also determined.

The conference stands out as a beacon of hope, purposefully crafted by and for young citizens, serving as a potent platform for their voices.

As stewards of the services that shape the lives of young individuals, it is incumbent upon us as adults in positions of influence to actively include them. We bear the responsibility to champion this movement, fostering the development of young minds on a national scale as the architects of positive change. In contemplating an uncertain future, we must consider previous shortcomings in our social and political engagement with young people – it is undeniable that we have fallen short on this, prompting the imperative for change.

- Ross Podyma, director of strategy, Sporting Communities

My view: Maleekah Nabi, youth ambassador, Derby



Attending the Youth Innovation Conference has been an enlightening experience in which I met some amazing and incredible personalities.

It gave me and many others the chance to associate and expand our knowledge with other individuals and companies and has given me the opportunity to grow in my skills of networking, public speaking, and confidence.

It has enabled my peers and I to have a voice and to be heard. Breaking down stereotypes and barriers, this conference encouraged and inspired all its attendees to focus on the positives and individuals compared to what society dictates.

Sporting Communities had established a protected and illuminating environment with this conference, one which I am proud and privileged to have been a part.



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