



DARLINGTON YOUTH PARTNERSHIP

CREATING THE BEST LIFE FOR EVERY YOUNG PERSON IN DARLINGTON

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This strategy has been created by organisations that have come together to build a local youth partnership for Darlington.

Through consultation with young people and organisations that support them, we know that there are many challenges facing children and young people living in Darlington.

Our starting point was a shared intention to work collaboratively to address challenges and create opportunities for young people to thrive. We firmly believe that if we come together in active partnership, we can make a positive difference by increasing our reach, demonstrating our value and impact and securing investment in local services.

Our aim is 'creating the best life for every young person in Darlington' and our approach to achieving this aim is set out in this document, in our Theories of Change and Strategic Objectives:

- Youth focused
- Sustainability
- Growth
- Influencing

The people and organisations involved in the initial work to establish the partnership and get to this point have done so because they care about creating opportunities for young people in Darlington. The next phase of this work is to set and achieve actions in line with the strategy and to continue to develop the partnership through an open and collaborative approach.

TEES VALLEY YMCA

Tees Valley YMCA is a dedicated youth charity that has supported young people in Darlington for over 30 years. Everything we do is driven by one clear mission: to help young people belong, contribute, and thrive.

We create safe, welcoming and free spaces where young people can be themselves, build confidence, and find their voice. Through inclusive, tailored sessions delivered by trained and skilled Youth Workers, we encourage teamwork, boost wellbeing, and empower young people to get involved in their community.

Alongside our youth programs, we also offer specialist youth housing, giving young people a secure and supportive place to live when they need it most. Our housing team helps young people develop independence, learn vital life skills and build a positive future.

Everything we do is centered around making sure every young person in Darlington feels valued, included and ready to reach their full potential.



DARLINGTON ASSOCIATION ON DISABILITY

Darlington Association on Disability (D.A.D) supports disabled children and young people aged 3–25 across Darlington to have choice, independence, and equal access to opportunities. We work alongside young people and their families to remove barriers, build confidence, and ensure young people are heard, valued, and included in their communities.

We offer a range of inclusive support for young people, including holiday play schemes (DASH), term time youth groups, mentoring for independence, leadership and volunteering opportunities, and safe spaces where young people can connect with others who share similar experiences. Our work supports young people to develop life skills, emotional wellbeing, self-advocacy, and aspirations for the future.

D.A.D is rooted in co-production and disability justice, ensuring that young people shape the activities, services, and opportunities available to them. We are committed to creating accessible, welcoming spaces where all young people can thrive and have the support they need to live the lives they choose.

Darlington Association on Disability



TANDEM

Tandem (formerly called Morrison Trust) is a Darlington based charity, established in 1995. We help people in Darlington to reach their full potential. We particularly support people who are struggling to find employment, helping them to gain skills and qualifications and to increase wellbeing and confidence through positive experiences, leading to a wider choice of employment opportunities and earning potential.



We work with young people from 16 years old and provide support that meets individual needs, not a 'one size fits all'. To achieve this we provide:

- One-to-one support (goal setting, reviewing progress, recognising progress).
- Job search support (up-to-date CVs, support to complete application forms, interview preparation, support to attend interviews).
- Access to vocational training, based on skills needs and labour market needs.
- Starting work support (support with travel / clothes / equipment).
- Personal development and wellbeing small group sessions.
- Employability and life skills small group sessions.
- In-work support (particularly in first few weeks).
- Access / support with IT and digital skills.

We work collaboratively and recognise the strength and benefits gained in working with partners, communities and statutory services.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

- Adhere to being confidential and non-judgmental.
- Attend meetings - organisational representation is required at meetings - this may be individuals at operational or management level. Decision makers of organisations may be required at times but it will be made clear to them at what point their involvement is needed.
- Participate in all meetings that are held, don't just attend.
- Be committed to the Darlington Youth Partnership.
- Championing the voice of young people.
- Improve outcomes, safeguard and increase aspirations.
- Be open, honest and participate.
- Be a critical friend.
- Commit to the active involvement of young people.
- Improve our offer by encouraging other partners to join the partnership.
- Be actively involved in local youth partnership networks.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Darlington has long experienced high levels of need in relation to support for young people. This includes young people from a wide range of backgrounds and lived experiences, particularly those who face additional barriers due to disability, poverty, care experience, mental health, neurodivergence, discrimination, or social exclusion. Organisations that make up Darlington's youth offer have continued to sustain provision, in some cases for many years, despite no public investment following austerity and few funding opportunities.

There remains a significant gap in the offer young people in Darlington need and deserve and what the sector can sustain. It is hoped that through working in closer collaboration, an enhanced offer for young people in Darlington can be developed and sustained.

The group is intended to be a space for providers of support to young people to explore how we can work together to better communicate our impact, share resources and knowledge, increase the support on offer and work together more effectively. It is not intended to be a top down process or owned or led by a single organisation, but a collective of organisations who are committed to working together to improve services for young people in Darlington.

We will build momentum by securing tangible positive outcomes for young people aged 10 - 25, which will naturally attract more local people and organisations. We believe a ground-up approach, growing from a locality level, will have greater relevance for communities and be more effective in improving the offer to young people.

We understand that any model for wider relationship development and delivery of local service provision needs to be underpinned by commitment and understanding of local organisations.

We won't be descriptive of the structure, identity or configuration of the group. That is up to the people and organisations around the table, and can comprise of young people, volunteers, youth and community sector organisations, local businesses and statutory services - (local authority, public health, police). The important factor is they are there for the right reason - what they can bring to the table to support young people.



MISSION

"We believe in the potential of every young person in Darlington; we deliver on this commitment by working together in trusted collaboration, guided by young people building meaningful opportunities for all."

OUR AIM

Creating the best life for every young person in Darlington



VALUES

- **Young people focused**
 - everything we do or develop should connect back to improving the experiences and outcomes of all young people in Darlington.
- **Youth led**
 - driven by inclusive, equitable and meaningful youth voice with a commitment to amplifying those whose voices are least heard.
- **Inclusive**
 - respecting the different and diverse provision that makes up the local offer in Darlington including the different size, stage in development and resource pressures on organisations and the promotion of working together positively.
- **A collaboration of the willing**
 - not a resourced group or a group led by dominant partners but a jointly owned collaboration of organisations getting together to improve services for young people as it is the right thing to do.
- **Ambitious**
 - commitment to high quality provision and continuous improvement.
- **Purposeful**
 - commitment to collective and collaborative working and generous leadership.
- **Evidence**
 - needs driven and informed response.
- **Taking an 'asset-based' approach to collaboration**
 - values the contribution of all partners and recognises that young people and youth work will be best served by approaches that respect the different contributions each partner brings and build solutions and models that take into account the diversity of young people, youth work and the environments in which they are based.
- **Honesty amongst partners**
 - includes being open about the reasons for the collaboration, about any associated financial benefits and about organisational priorities and motivation.
- **Generosity**
 - in terms of sharing resources, information and public profile associated with improving youth services and conditions for young people. This should include partners publicly acknowledging the roles played by members in shaping the outcomes of collaborations.

PURPOSE OF THE GROUP

- Strategically pursue the aims of the Darlington youth partnership.
- Improve the understanding of the youth offer to support young people in Darlington, through mapping and more effective ways to promote the whole offer to young people and services that support them.
- To better coordinate provision to identify gaps and opportunities that exist within current provision and resource.
- Come together to share knowledge, resources and experience, as well as supporting each other to learn and improve to deliver better services for young people.
- To develop better communication across organisations to prevent duplication and develop more effective working relationships.
- To connect to local, regional and national agendas around supporting young people to improve practice, increase the resource in Darlington and keep up to date with developments in the field.
- Explore potential partnerships and joint endeavours.
- Identify key barriers to effective services locally and work together to explore solutions that may include issues around workforce, development, shared learning and best practices or resources.
- To develop a joint voice in relation to youth support services in Darlington.
- Advocate for change in the prioritisation of work with young people out of school hours.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Darlington Youth Partnership have chosen 4 strategic priorities to steer us going forward which are:

YOUTH FOCUSED



GROWTH



INFLUENCING



SUSTAINABILITY



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

YOUTH FOCUSED

- Creating accessible, inclusive opportunities for all young people.
- Creating the mechanisms and providing the platforms for young people's voices to be heard and to influence change.
- Equip young people with knowledge, skills and tools for the future.

INFLUENCING

- Develop and deepen our existing local, regional and national partnerships so that we can achieve even more together, including:
 - Respective government bodies (Central, Combined and Local Authority)
 - National Youth Organisations & Regional Youth Work Units
 - Funders
 - Health, housing and others.
- Create a louder voice for the sector to share and advocate for investment into the youth sector.
- A co-ordinated/cohesive approach across the partnership to gather data/insight.

GROWTH

- Ensure long term positive impacts for young people by growing a youth focussed offer.
- Act as a bridge between organisations to share best practice and opportunities.
- Create opportunities to link and collaborate to increase the offer for young people.
- Convene networks to support sustainable peer to peer learning both locally and across the Tees Valley.
- Grow and nurture a confident, skilled and motivated workforce.

SUSTAINABILITY

- Build cross - sector partnerships and collaboration to develop and maintain services for young people.
- To work with commissioners, grant givers and funders to effectively bring investment that responds to local need and provides long term sustainable funding streams.
- Raise the profile of the local youth offer so that it's recognised by stakeholders as high quality and reputable.

Theory of Change Model for Organisations in the Partnership

AIM - Creating the best life for every young person in Darlington.

ACTIVITIES	CHANGE MECHANISM	OUTCOMES
- Media platforms to provide information to signpost young people - Recruitment of young people - Provide support to young people to improve physical, mental and digital wellbeing - Support opportunities to access volunteering/social action for young people - Services collaborating with active young peoples voices - Championing the youth offer in Darlington - Awareness of LYP social media marketing - Evening / Weekend / Holiday activities for all - Providing positive role models - Fundraising Strategy - Employability support - tailored	- Unify the Youth Voice groups - No wrong door initiative - Develop a sustainable youth offer - Develop skills and experience of practitioners - All involved organisations regularly meet to contribute to the Local Youth Partnership - Push the impact of youth support and attract investment - Develop the relationship between LA, private and voluntary sectors - More organisations involved in Tees Valley opportunities - Support organisations to identify quality training based on the partnership needs	- Improved physical, mental and digital wellbeing for young people - Reduced crime, antisocial behaviour, and risk taking behaviour among young people - Make young people life ready - resilience, life skills etc - To increase aspirations and opportunities for young people in Darlington - Increased funding 

AIM - Creating the best life for every young person in Darlington.

ACTIVITIES	CHANGE MECHANISM	OUTCOMES
1 Support young people to be aware of what's available for them and to engage in the local youth offer 2 Provide support to enable all young people to engage and thrive in communities 3 Volunteering/Social Action and work skills and opportunities 4 Peer Mentoring (support other young people your age) 5 Coaching/Buddying (helping others to build skills) 6 Evening / Weekend / Holiday activities for all 7 Provide fun and meaningful opportunities 8 Provide safe youth spaces 9 Festival of Youth 10 Activities and support guided by young people 11 Range of activities for young people	1 Positive peer groups 2 Positive adult role models 3 Providing volunteering opportunities 4 Youth voice and community 5 Responsible local services meeting local need 6 Providing inclusive and accessible services for all 7 Supporting physical, mental and digital wellbeing 	1 Young people have a voice and feel they belong in Darlington 2 Increase opportunities to reach your full potential (careers / personal) 3 Improved positive relationship with others 4 Improved physical, mental and digital wellbeing for young people 5 Reduced crime, Antisocial Behaviour and Risk taking behaviour amongst young people 6 Improve young people skills for life - resilience, communication, money management, cooking etc

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Darlington Youth Partnership believes strongly in accountability across the sector. Everyone working with young people should be able to clearly show the impact of their work, demonstrate value for money, and explain how their support has genuinely improved outcomes for children and young people.

These agreed values enable the group to work within a shared framework built on a foundation of respect, openness and transparency. This will allow a culture of positive dialogue and forward-thinking amongst members which will lead to greater outcomes for children and young people.

Through the Terms of Reference, progress on the strategy, Theory of Change model, and wider partnership work will be monitored through regular operational and strategic meetings, alongside an annual general meeting. Evaluation of the strategy and Theory of Change, and their impact on the sector, will be ongoing.

MONITORING THE STRATEGY

Through the Terms of Reference, Theory of Change model, and the broader work of the Darlington Youth Partnership, we will be closely reviewing at a strategic and operational level regularly.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets are a required element in many funding arrangements, ensuring focus and accountability against activity. Alongside shorter-term outcomes aligned to particular projects, Darlington Youth Partnership will take a broader view and create mechanisms to monitor and measure meaningful and long-lasting benefits for children and young people, aligned to our strategy.

We will adopt a consistent framework to measure impact and will be in collaboration with all key stakeholders as part of this strategy.

Youth voice will be threaded throughout the monitoring of our project, supported by a yearly impact report and annual reviews to ensure we remain aligned with our vision, values, and goals, and that we continue to meet any funding requirements.

CASE STUDY 1

Before coming to the Haven this young person was a prolific offender of anti-social behaviour in the town centre and inside its shops. He was banned from going in the cornmill and multiple shops in the town centre. Many incidents involved arson. This young person started attending the Haven Youth Project at the beginning of October 25 and has been attending sessions almost every night of the week since. The young person said he started coming to the Haven because "I needed to sort my behaviour as I was always just causing trouble in the town centre because I was bored, then my friends told me about this place so I thought I would give it a try". The young person has family with an offending background and is determined to not take the same path as them.

This young person said their favourite thing about the Haven is playing pool and all the games they can do. The young person said the Youth workers at the Haven are good because 'they do not just shout and scream at you. They will talk calmy and not give up on you'. The young person went on to say that if the youth club was not available then he would be in the town causing trouble and getting himself into bother. He said that he would recommend the youth club to other young people who may be in similar situations to him to support them to divert their behaviour into something positive.

This young person goes out of his way to support the staff and help out where he can by bringing in shopping, decorating the centre and trying to help when there are issues with other young people in the sessions. They have built a positive professional relationship with Youth workers and feel able to go to them to share any issues he may be having.

CASE STUDY 2

Jamie was 16 when he came to Tandem looking for support to find a job. He thought he would like to work in construction but wasn't sure where to start. Jamie was struggling with low confidence and found it hard to stick with long training courses; he also struggled with some social skills which made it difficult for him to settle at college.

We spent time with Jamie, talking through his goals and concerns and explored options including shorter training routes that could support him to get a job in construction. Jamie opted to do a health and safety course in order to gain a CSCS card to allow him to access construction sites and he also attended some Tandem skills sessions (e.g. team working, building confidence and communication skills).

Over time, Jamie felt more independent, started to build his confidence, and began interacting more with others. With the right support and encouragement, he was able to complete his training successfully and we supported him to apply for his CSCS card.

We're now supporting Jamie with the next steps; we've helped him put together a CV and to look for job opportunities.

CASE STUDY 3

In February our Younger Leaders were supported to attend the national Youth Voice Matters Conference in Birmingham, an opportunity for young people to develop their participation skills and to recognise the impact they can have when taking part in strategic participation.

The theme of the 2026 event was Youth Citizenship. During the conference, young people explored:

- What they have in common with each other and how we can use our shared goals to shout louder.*
- How they can work together with other young people across the country to talk to decision-makers.*
- How to be strong leaders and work with the decision-makers who can help them create change.*
- How to share their skills and power with other young people, so they can be youth citizens, too.*
- The ways we can keep on working together after Youth Voice Matters, to use our voices and experiences positively for change.*

Four Young Leaders made the journey to Birmingham for the conference and took part in workshops and sessions to further develop confidence and skills to actively speak up, share their views and influence decision making on the issues that are important to them. Two of the Group took the mic and shared their experiences and views at the conference, a great achievement for them to public speak to such a large audience.

The Group made connections with other young people and friendships started to form, linking people together across the county with a shared view and ambition to drive change and have their voices heard.

SELECTION OF THE DARLINGTON LOGO

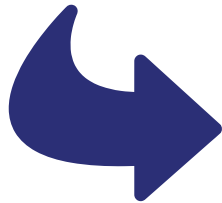
Darlington Youth Partnership ran a logo design competition to ensure the partnership's visual identity was shaped by young people and reflected Darlington, its youth, and the core purpose and values of the partnership. Young people were invited to create designs that represented their connection to Darlington and what the partnership means to them.

The logos were reviewed by a panel of young people from two lead organisations, DAD and YMCA Darlington. The process was deliberately youth-led, allowing young people to discuss the designs, share their perspectives, and explain the reasoning behind their choices. Designs were assessed based on how well they reflected local identity, resonated with young people, and communicated the partnership's values, including inclusion, collaboration, and youth focused.

The winning design was chosen as it best captured a strong sense of Darlington while remaining inclusive and relevant to a wide range of young people. It clearly reflects the partnership's focus on working together to support and empower young people across the town and was felt by the panel to genuinely represent their voices and experiences.

This approach ensured the partnership's logo is not only visually meaningful, but also rooted in youth voice, shared ownership, and the values that underpin Darlington Youth Partnership.







Darlington Association on Disability

Tees Valley
YMCA



Breaking Through Barriers

***tandem**
space to connect + progress