

YouthBanks in Manchester, UK

Local Roots, City Impact: How Manchester Scaled Youth-Led Grantmaking

Overview

Manchester City Council supported a network of four YouthBanks hosted by partner organisations across the city.

Four hosting organisations represented diverse areas of youth work, including sports, street-based engagement, and Black-led initiatives.

Together, they engaged young grant-makers aged 12 to 25 from across Manchester, creating a city-wide ecosystem of youth-led decision-making.

Each YouthBank was supported by a dedicated practitioner employed by the hosting organisation, ensuring local leadership and consistent guidance.

The Model in Action

Each YouthBank operated within its own local community, where young people meet weekly to:

- Identify community priorities
- Define funding criteria
- Review project proposals
- Allocate funding to youth-led initiatives

At the same time, the network convened monthly meetings bringing together practitioners from all four YouthBanks. These sessions provided space to:

- Share learning and challenges
- Align approaches
- Strengthen collaboration across the city
- Support continuous improvement

CASE STUDY - YOUTHBANK & CITY COUNCIL

What Makes This Initiative Significant

The Manchester YouthBank Network demonstrates that:

- Youth-led grantmaking can operate at both local and city-wide levels
- Diverse host organisations can collaborate under a shared framework
- Structured practitioner support strengthens sustainability
- Young people from different backgrounds can engage in shared civic leadership

By combining neighbourhood-based YouthBanks with city-wide coordination, Manchester has created a scalable and collaborative youth leadership model.

Broader Impact

Through this networked approach:

- Young people gain experience in budgeting, evaluation, and decision-making
- Community-based organisations collaborate rather than compete
- Youth voices are embedded in local funding conversations
- Leadership opportunities are distributed across different communities

The model reflects the diversity of Manchester itself, ensuring that youth participation is inclusive and locally rooted.

CASE STUDY - YOUTHBANK & CITY COUNCIL

Programme Status

The Manchester YouthBank Network is active, but in a different setup. Having completed one full YouthBank cycle, the network is exploring and expanding youth leadership opportunities across the city.

Key Takeaway

Manchester demonstrates that YouthBank can function not only as a single initiative, but as a coordinated network embedded within local government and community organisations.

When supported by strong partnerships and practitioner collaboration, youth-led grantmaking becomes a sustainable, city-wide model of participation and impact.

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YouthBank in Liverpool, UK

From Hospital Forum to Community Impact: A Youth-Led Funding Model in Action

Overview

Liverpool YouthBank operated as an extension of the Alder Hey Youth Forum, connected to Alder Hey Children's Hospital Trust. It demonstrated how youth-led grantmaking can be successfully embedded within a healthcare-linked institution while contributing to wider community impact.

The Youth Forum engaged young people in leadership development, consultations, and decision-making initiatives. While membership was not dependent on hospital service use, many participants had long-term health conditions, creating a strong connection between youth engagement and the hospital's broader mission of care and inclusion.

The Model in Action

Funded in partnership with the NSPCC, Liverpool YouthBank allocated £5,000 to youth-led initiatives across Liverpool.

Young people aged 12–18:

- Identified issues affecting their communities
- Defined funding priorities
- Reviewed grant applications
- Made funding decisions
- Supported the implementation of youth-led projects

Youth Workers from Alder Hey Children's Hospital Trust played a key role in supporting the YouthBank process, ensuring that the programme was integrated into broader youth engagement and leadership activities.

CASE STUDY – YOUTHBANK & HOSPITAL

The YouthBank operated alongside leadership courses, consultations, and city-wide youth engagement efforts, reinforcing a culture of responsibility and civic participation.

What Made This Initiative Significant

Liverpool YouthBank demonstrated that:

- Youth-led grantmaking can operate effectively within healthcare-linked environments
- Young people can manage real funding responsibly when given structure and support
- Cross-sector partnerships (healthcare, safeguarding organisations, youth services) can strengthen youth participation
- Youth with lived health experiences can contribute meaningfully to broader community development

The initiative expanded youth participation beyond consultation – into real financial decision-making.

Broader Impact

Through Liverpool YouthBank, young people developed:

- Leadership and facilitation skills
- Financial literacy and budgeting experience
- Confidence in public speaking and consultation
- Experience in collaborative decision-making

Importantly, the programme strengthened links between young people and institutional stakeholders, illustrating how youth voice can influence both service environments and wider community initiatives.

CASE STUDY – YOUTHBANK & HOSPITAL

Programme Status

Liverpool YouthBank is no longer active.

However, it remains an important case study of how YouthBank can be successfully integrated into institutional and healthcare settings. The experience continues to inform the development of YouthBank partnerships across diverse sectors.

Liverpool YouthBank demonstrated that youth-led grantmaking is not limited to traditional community spaces – it can thrive within healthcare-linked institutions and contribute to meaningful civic engagement.

Key Takeaway

When young people are trusted with real responsibility - even within structured institutional environments – they rise to the challenge.

Liverpool YouthBank showed that youth leadership, when properly supported, can extend into new sectors and create lasting institutional and community impact.

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YouthBank in Minnesota, USA

Equity in Action: Youth-Led Grantmaking in a School Community

Overview

Northfield YouthBank engaged young people aged 14 to 19 who resided in the Northfield School District or attended a Northfield school.

The initiative empowered youth to act as grant-makers - allocating funding to youth-led projects designed to address issues affecting their peers and wider community.

Through structured training and adult mentorship, young people were equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed funding decisions and create tangible change for Northfield's youth.

The Model in Action

YouthBank participants:

- Identified priority issues within their community
- Reviewed proposals submitted by youth-led groups
- Allocated grants to projects they believed would create meaningful impact
- Reflected on outcomes and learning

Experienced Adult Advisors provided practical, on-the-ground training and guidance. They collaborated with local organisations and donors to ensure young participants had access to the resources and support needed to transform their ideas into funded initiatives.

Over an eight-year period, Northfield YouthBank contributed \$164,000 to youth-envisioned and youth-executed projects.

CASE STUDY - YOUTHBANK & SCHOOL

What Made This Initiative Significant

Northfield YouthBank demonstrated that:

- Young people can responsibly manage and allocate substantial funding
- School district-based YouthBanks can serve as catalysts for civic engagement
- Structured adult mentorship strengthens youth leadership without limiting youth decision-making
- Long-term investment in youth-led grantmaking generates measurable financial impact

The initiative placed real financial responsibility in the hands of young people — reinforcing both accountability and confidence.

Broader Impact

Through Northfield YouthBank, young people developed:

- Financial literacy and budgeting skills
- Critical thinking and proposal evaluation skills
- Public speaking and facilitation experience
- Confidence in leadership and decision-making

The programme upheld core values of equity and youth empowerment. It amplified the voices of young people — particularly those underrepresented — and actively promoted inclusion and opposition to racism and systemic bias.

By embedding equity into its decision-making processes, YouthBank fostered a culture of fairness, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

CASE STUDY - YOUTHBANK & SCHOOL

Programme Status

Northfield YouthBank is still active.

Its eight-year track record and \$164,000 investment in youth-led projects remain a strong example of how YouthBank can operate within a school district context to create sustained, measurable impact.

The experience continues to inform YouthBank's approach to youth empowerment, equity, and community-based grantmaking.

Key Takeaway

Northfield YouthBank showed that when young people are trusted with real funding decisions — and supported with structured training — they rise to the responsibility.

Over eight years, youth did not simply participate. They allocated resources, shaped priorities, and created lasting impact in their community.

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YouthBanks in South Africa

Building a National Youth-Led Grantmaking Network

Overview

In South Africa, YouthBank has empowered young people aged 14–35 to become active leaders in community development through fundraising and youth-led grantmaking.

The Institute for Community Advancement (ICA) hosts and supports YouthBank projects along the West Coast while also providing training and support to organisations across the country interested in establishing YouthBanks.

By acting both as an implementing organisation and as an infrastructure support partner, ICA collaborates closely with YouthBank International to strengthen and expand youth-led grantmaking across South Africa.

The Model in Action

YouthBank South Africa enables young people to move beyond participation and take real responsibility for community change.

Young people involved in YouthBank:

- Identify issues affecting their communities
- Fundraise locally to support youth-led projects
- Allocate funding to initiatives led by their peers
- Develop leadership, financial management, and project evaluation skills

Host organisations play an important role in ensuring sustainability. Each host organisation provides matched funding to complement the funds raised by young people, creating shared responsibility for the success of YouthBank initiatives.

CASE STUDY – YOUTHBANK & ORGANISATION

Through training, mentoring, and network support provided by ICA, YouthBanks are able to operate with structure, accountability, and long-term vision.

What Makes This Initiative Significant

The South African YouthBank approach demonstrates that:

- Youth-led grantmaking can function effectively within a national network structure
- Infrastructure organisations can support multiple YouthBanks while maintaining local autonomy
- Matched funding strengthens commitment from host organisations and communities
- Youth fundraising combined with institutional support builds stronger ownership and sustainability

By combining local initiative with national coordination, YouthBank South Africa creates a model capable of scaling across regions.

Broader Impact

Through YouthBank participation, young people gain experience in:

- Leadership and facilitation
- Community fundraising and financial decision-making
- Project evaluation and accountability
- Collaboration across communities and organisations

The initiative also strengthens partnerships between youth organisations, community groups, and national support structures, expanding opportunities for youth-led development.

ICA's work as an infrastructure partner supports the growth of YouthBank initiatives beyond individual projects, enabling a broader ecosystem of youth leadership.

CASE STUDY – YOUTHBANK & ORGANISATION

Programme Development

Looking ahead, ICA envisions the creation of a national YouthBank fund that would allow YouthBanks across South Africa to apply for additional resources to support youth-led projects.

The organisation also explores opportunities for YouthBank exchange programmes, connecting young people from different regions and strengthening peer learning.

Through national gatherings of YouthBank coordinators and members, ICA aims to develop a regional YouthBank HUB, further strengthening collaboration and shared learning across the network.

Key Takeaway

The South African YouthBank model illustrates how youth-led grantmaking can grow beyond individual projects into a coordinated national network.

By combining youth initiative, local fundraising, and infrastructure support, YouthBank South Africa demonstrates that sustainable youth leadership can thrive when young people and institutions work together to invest in community change.

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CASE STUDY - WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE
DECIDE WHERE THE MONEY GOES

Case Study: YouthBank Khon Kaen, Thailand (2024–2025)

*Delivered by Voice of Youth, Khon Kaen with support from VSO
International, Bangkok*

In 2024–2025, a group of 15–25-year-olds in Khon Kaen, Thailand, didn't just join a community project — they ran it. They trained, created the grant process, reviewed proposals, made funding decisions, and reflected on the outcomes.

Their theme: Youth Action on Climate Change, aligned with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

Khon Kaen, a city hit hard by record heatwaves and air pollution, became a testing ground for youth-led climate action — and for what happens when young people are trusted with real power and money.

HOW IT WORKED

Phase 1 – Learning by Doing:

YouthBank members joined workshops (in Thai and English) on community mapping, budgeting, and evaluation. They ran a trial round and even organized a local Saturday school under a railway bridge — learning by leading.

Phase 2 – Youth-Led Grantmaking:

They launched an open call for climate-focused projects, screened applications, interviewed teams, and awarded grants up to 10,000 THB (£225). All processes — from decisions to communications — were run by the YouthBank team.

Phase 3 – Reflection and Learning:

Funded teams reported on outcomes and joined a peer reflection event, discussing lessons and sharing stories online to inspire others.

CASE STUDY - WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE DECIDE WHERE THE MONEY GOES

IMPACT: REAL MONEY. REAL POWER. REAL LEARNING

The shift from participant to decision-maker was transformative. YouthBank members learned to balance fairness with friendship, idealism with budgets, and autonomy with accountability. They didn't just learn about governance — they practiced it.

Five youth-led projects tackled local climate risks and advanced multiple SDGs:

- Kon Rim Rang: Mapped how floods and heat affect poor communities; shared findings with local leaders. (SDG 13, SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities)
- Green Kinship: Built raised gardens for food security and climate resilience. (SDG 2 – Zero Hunger, SDG 13)
- Gujajang: Taught families to recycle food waste using worms, reducing field burning. (SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production)
- Mai Wai Tae Pai Tor: Ran school campaigns on air pollution using recycled materials. (SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 13)
- We Bare Bears: Trained youth to use Instagram for digital climate advocacy. (SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, SDG 13)

WHY IT MATTERS

YouthBank Khon Kaen proved that agency > access.

When young people control the funds, they learn to govern, negotiate, and lead — not in theory, but in practice.

This was not youth “participation”; it was shared governance in action.

Money became more than a tool — it became a way to explore values, justice, and community priorities.

CASE STUDY - WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE DECIDE WHERE THE MONEY GOES

Key Lessons for Policymakers and Donors

- Trust youth with real budgets, not simulations.
- Invest in youth platforms, not just youth projects.
- Design for equity: translation, timing, and inclusion all shape who gets to lead.
- Local first: The best ideas start from lived experience, not imported templates.

CONCLUSION

YouthBank Khon Kaen turned funding into a form of civic education. By giving young people control over resources, it built democratic muscle — one decision, one budget, and one local project at a time.

Participation isn't the goal. Power is. And when young people are trusted with it, they don't just engage — they lead.

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CASE STUDY - WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE LEAD

Case Study: YouthBank Dhanusha, Nepal (2024–2025)

Delivered by Unnat Nepal, supported by VSO International

In Dhanusha, Nepal, young people took on two of the region's toughest social challenges: child marriage and youth drug use, and led the solutions themselves.

With YouthBank's model, they received microgrants, training, and full decision-making power, transforming them from participants into real civic actors.

WHAT YOUTHBANK MADE POSSIBLE

Youth defined the priorities!

Using the YouthBank participatory model, young people consulted peers, families, and local leaders. They set the agenda based on lived reality:

- Rising drug use among youth
- Persistent child marriage practices

Youth selected and funded the projects!

Through YouthBank's interview-based grantmaking process, nine youth teams were chosen without requiring formal proposals - removing barriers for first-time leaders.

Youth led the interventions!

With small grants and support, they delivered:

- 6 community dialogues on marriage laws and drug risks
- 4 street dramas reaching 3,000+ people
- 1 youth-produced documentary soon reaching an estimated 10,000 viewers
- School sessions, youth-police dialogues, and community storytelling

These activities used local language, local culture, and low-tech communication, making legal rights understandable and relevant.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

475 people directly engaged in structured events

3,000+ reached through public theatre

10,000 expected through digital documentary release

12+ government and civil society leaders involved, including police and ward officials.

Direct contributions to SDG 3, Good health and well-being; SDG 4, Quality education; SDG 5, Gender equality; SDG 10, Reduced inequalities; SDG 11, Sustainable cities and communities and SDG 16, Peace, justice and strong institutions.

WHY IT WORKED

Because YouthBank gave young people ownership, not just a seat at the table.

The model enabled:

- Youth-led priority setting
- Peer-led project selection
- Civic accountability (youth to youth, and youth to community)
- Bridging power gaps between young people, families, and institutions

Youth didn't just raise awareness; they changed norms, built trust, and brought laws to life through culturally rooted methods like Maithili street theatre and local radio.

Key Lessons for Funders & Policymakers

- Fund youth-led structures, not just youth-themed activities
- Trust young people to allocate resources — it improves equity
- Support local-language, low-tech communication for deeper reach
- Build youth–government collaboration through real shared platforms

CONCLUSION

With only £3,700, YouthBank Dhanusha turned microgrants into macro-impact — shifting social norms, strengthening legal literacy, and proving that when young people lead, communities listen.

YouthBank didn't just support projects.

It created young changemakers.

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