



## INSPIRING BELIEF IN YOUNG PEOPLE

A year in review - 2023/24  
[thekeyuk.org](https://thekeyuk.org)



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# THE KEY - A YEAR IN REVIEW

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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR OF TRUSTEES, LIZ WATCHORN

Welcome to The Key's annual impact report for the financial year 2023/24.

2023-2024 has been a year of highs and some significant change at The Key - from amazing stories of young people sharing how completing the KEY+ challenge has impacted their lives, to seeing some of our key team move on to new roles including The Key's CEO, Richard Haigh, to securing significant grant and commissioned funding to expand our work and finish the year on a secure financial footing.

Our mission continues to be to create opportunities where young people are inspired to believe in themselves and achieve their potential. We're here to support young people to believe in their ideas and discover what they're capable of. The demand and need for provision such as ours continues to be clear, with over a third of young people in the North East living in poverty and the gap between those with challenges and those without challenges continuing to grow. Taking part in the KEY+ Challenge empowers young people to use their voices, participate in activities, develop their skills and become more involved in their communities.

All of these achievements took place against the backdrop of common challenges facing the charitable sector. It has been a rewarding year for The Key's team and Board of Trustees. We are proud to have worked with so many partners, volunteers and funders who have joined us in inspiring belief in young people through the KEY+ Challenge. Thank you for your continued support.



LIZ WATCHORN,  
THE KEY'S CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

## A YEAR IN PHOTOS





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### WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Key is committed to inspiring young people to believe in themselves, especially those living in deprivation and facing challenging personal circumstances.

We want to create a world where all young people are inspired to believe in themselves and are empowered to achieve their full potential.

Our work is built upon four core beliefs that young people should be empowered to:



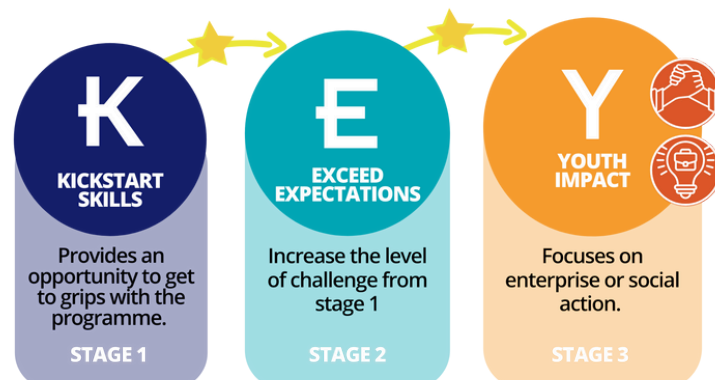
### WHAT WE DO

We support young people to complete our proven, youth-led skills development programme, The KEY+ Challenge.

Together in small groups (and supported by a KEY+ Facilitator), young people are set the challenge to:

1. **Think** of a project or activity
2. **Plan** what is needed for that project, including a budget
3. **Pitch** their project to a panel of volunteers
4. **Do** their project if given the go ahead by the panel
5. **Review** and reflect on their project, learning, and development.

Young people complete this process up to three times, each time planning more progressively challenging projects with greater personal development. At Stage 3, young people must explore enterprise or tackle a social issue with their KEY+ project.



The KEY+ Challenge gives young people the opportunity to use their voices and ideas and take the lead in delivering projects and activities that matter to them. It empowers and equips them with the skills, mindset and self-belief to achieve their potential.

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### A 2023-24 SNAPSHOT

This year saw us build on the solid foundation laid out in the previous year. We empowered more young people take on the KEY+ Challenge and we are closer to achieving pre-pandemic levels of activity than in recent years.

We achieved some major milestones, undertook some great learning and we're proud to have inspired belief in so many young people facing challenging circumstances.

### KEY STATS

**995**  
individual  
young people  
were supported  
to participate  
in KEY+

They used their  
ideas and took the  
lead to think, plan,  
pitch, do & review

**248**  
of their own  
projects & activities

Including:

- Food hamper support for struggling families
- Group bonding experiences
- Community fun days
- Environmental campaigning projects

Young people  
developed their skills  
by an average of

**26%**  
leading to increased  
confidence, resilience  
and self-esteem - a  
'growth mindset'

**98%**

of young people  
reported improved  
confidence thanks  
to KEY+

**99%**

of young people  
asked, said KEY+  
will have a positive  
impact on their  
future

### KEY YOUNG PEOPLE QUOTES

"It has helped me be a better person and become more motivated to attend school. If it didn't happen, I would still be a non-attender."

- Joseph, KEY+ Completer

"KEY+ has given me confidence in myself. I feel stronger inside as a person and I'm able to speak out in front of people, something I struggled with before."

- Charlie, KEY+ completer

"It has helped my confidence in myself and I now feel like I can do a lot more things which I couldn't before doing The Key."

- Grace, KEY+ completer

"I'm more likely to speak to people and not be so stressed around strangers now. I feel like I can make friendships with people now without being worried of their intentions."

- Tori, KEY+ completer

### KEY STORIES

1. **Rock n Roll Sausage Rolls** gained a sense of their influence and impact through the KEY+ Challenge. Together they set about making a difference to their community and used their personal experiences to drive change. They completed all three stages of the KEY+ Challenge and even moved onto participating in KEY+ Changemakers too. [Read more about their journey here.](#)

2. **2 School 4 Kool** took a unique view of the cost of living crisis and how it was impacting families in a variety of ways. The five young women decided to do their bit to help by running a free uniform event for young people in secondary school to come along and receive free or low cost uniform goods. [See what they did here.](#)

3. **Nature Gang** ran a school wide art competition to promote friendship and kindness. They chose two winning designs and transformed them from ideas to reality onto two wooden benches. The group then donated their painted benches to a local shelter supporting refugee families. [Check it out here.](#)

4. **Funky Phoenixes** tackled climate change with their KEY+ Project but made sure they galvanised others in the process. They launched a recycling competition in school after being shocked at the amount of single use plastic being binned. The group got the school on board and made it a house wide challenge which helped them make a big impact. [Read about it here.](#)

5. **Everyone and a guy named Kevin** took on the KEY+ Challenge as a group of friends in the West End of Newcastle. They thrived through the first two stages and wanted to push themselves at Stage 3. They chose to run a community focussed comedy night from their youth club which turned out to be a real crowd pleased and a fully maxed out event. [See how they found the experience here.](#)

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## KEY MILESTONES

### 1. The KEY+ Challenge

We built on the solid foundations created in 22-23 with KEY+ and got back to pre-pandemic levels of activity with young people. This year, we supported over 995 young people to engage. That's a 12.5% increase from the prior year.

### 2. Greater collaboration

We got closer to our Key Partners to better understand their needs and how we could work together for young people. We launched collaborative projects which funded both the delivery time of Key Partners and our costs. Partners valued this approach and we built upon it in year by securing a large NCS contract.

### 3. Recruited additional team capacity

Despite the ongoing challenge of recruitment in the sector, The Key welcomed three new team members in year adding to our overall capacity. We employed two experienced youth workers and a finance co-ordinator to help us operate best.

### 4. KEY+ Changemakers

We continued to evolve our programme and meet the needs of young people. We piloted a new programme which supports KEY+ Completers to take the extra step and continue their engagement after Stage 3. We have learning to draw from this but are excited about launching our first + offer.

### 5. Made sustainability progress

The Key has always strived to diversify our income and this year we made great strides. Our main source of income was from individual grants (43%) however this is usually 85-95% of our income profile. Instead, we grew our income from collaborative contracts and grants, commissioned services, earned income, and fundraising.

## KEY LEARNING

**1. We identified an opportunity to improve skills assessment for young people.** For years, we've used a skill wheels to help young people recognise the skills they develop. This year, we spoke to young people and KEY+ Facilitators to better understand their use of the skills wheel measurement and what their real needs are. We found that the younger age band of those we supported needed a simplified tool whilst our older cohorts needed something that is more complex and thought out.

**2. Not all young people accessed our digital platform to engage with their KEY+ journey.** We want to increase this further and reduce the need for young people to rely on their KEY+ Facilitator to input their project information. We continue to collaborate with young people and partners to re-evaluate what they want from the platform and how we can improve it so that more young people use it.

**3. There is a continued appetite for collaborative funded KEY+ delivery** which has enabled The Key to work on behalf of our partners to secure funding for the "three part recipe" - projects funds for young people, staff costs for partners to deliver KEY+ and the core funding needed for The Key to support delivery. This has transformed some delivery by enabling partners to open their doors to focus on supporting young people to complete KEY+.

**4. Demand for KEY+ Facilitators to meet and share ideas and best practise is apparent.** We launched KEY+ Hubs to bring volunteers and Facilitators together in each locality. This proved successful and Facilitators want us to continue to deliver KEY+ Hubs in each local authority area to build a sense of community and help others make relevant connections locally.

## WHAT NEXT?

2024/25 provides The Key with some real opportunities. Our new CEO, Rebecca Maw, joins in year and will as a team to define our next three year strategy. Some key areas of opportunity arising include:

- **Growing our reach:** We will continue to grow the reach of the KEY+ Challenge in communities of high deprivation. With additional capacity now in place, we can focus on establishing KEY+ delivery in some of our cold spot areas.
- **North East Mayoral Combined Authority:** The imminent move to the wider combined authority provides real opportunity for commissioned services. We know that KEY+ can enhance provision across a number of different priority areas.
- **Skills Builder:** We have an opportunity to pilot Skills Builder (funded by NCS) within some of our provision. If successful, The Key could explore embedding the validated external skills measure across wider KEY+ delivery.
- **+ Opportunities:** This year, we piloted our first real follow-on opportunity, KEY+ Changemakers. We took some significant learning from this pilot and know we can build on this and deliver it again successfully in the future taking in feedback from young people, volunteers and partners.

Stay up to date with our progress by visiting us at [thekeyuk.org](https://thekeyuk.org).