



## **OUR 2025-2028 STRATEGY**





# Contents

|                                           |                |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>1. Executive Summary.....</b>          | <b>1-2</b>     |
| <b>2. Welcome from our Chair.....</b>     | <b>3</b>       |
| <b>3. Our Vision.....</b>                 | <b>4 - 5</b>   |
| <b>4. The Context.....</b>                | <b>6 - 9</b>   |
| • The challenges young people face.....   | 6 - 7          |
| • The difference we make.....             | 8              |
| • Our history.....                        | 9              |
| <b>5. Our Approach.....</b>               | <b>10 - 12</b> |
| • The KEY+ Challenge.....                 | 11             |
| <b>6. Our 2025-28 Strategy.....</b>       | <b>13 - 26</b> |
| • Overview.....                           | 15             |
| • Reach.....                              | 16 - 18        |
| • Quality.....                            | 19 - 21        |
| • Impact.....                             | 22 - 24        |
| • Our Enablers.....                       | 25-26          |
| • What this means for young people.....   | 27             |
| <b>7. Closing words from our CEO.....</b> | <b>28</b>      |
| <b>8. Appendices.....</b>                 | <b>30</b>      |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At The Key, we believe that every young person has the potential to succeed - but too many face barriers that limit their opportunities. Over the next three years, our strategy will focus on expanding access, improving quality, and increasing impact, ensuring that young people, particularly those growing up in poverty and those facing challenging circumstances, have the tools to build bright futures.



## THE CHALLENGES WE ARE TACKLING

Young people in the North East face some of the most significant challenges in the UK, including:

### POVERTY & SOCIAL MOBILITY

35% of children in the region live in poverty, limiting their education, career prospects, and life chances.

### LIMITED ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES

Underfunding of youth services has increased barriers and reduced access to impactful youth opportunities.

### REDUCED ACCESS TO YOUTH SERVICES

Youth service funding has fallen dramatically everywhere, but the North East saw the steepest cuts.

### MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

1 in 5 children have a probable mental health disorder, affecting their confidence and engagement.

### YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The North East has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the UK at 15%.

### YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEND

The North East's overall SEND rate is higher than the national average, including those with EHC plans.

## OUR RESPONSE: THE KEY+ CHALLENGE

The KEY+ Challenge is our flagship programme which nurtures young people's psychological needs, enhancing their wellbeing and developing growth mindsets.

Guided by a trained facilitator, groups of young people follow our five-step process to think, plan, pitch, do and review their own projects, exploring their purpose and building the skills, confidence, and resilience to take control of their futures.

Working with others, we create youth-led opportunities that empower young people to harness their own agency and forge positive pathways for themselves, regardless of their starting point.



**"It has helped me improve my skills, build my confidence, become more independent and talk to different people."**  
– Ethan, young person who completed KEY+

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## OUR 2025-28 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### 1. REACH



Supporting young people who need us most

- Build, maintain and enhance relevant partnerships
- Respond to national, regional and local priorities and align our efforts towards supporting young people who need us most
- Raise our profile amongst relevant new, existing and emerging networks

**3,700**  
individual young people will participate in the KEY+ Challenge



Young people will participate in the KEY+ Challenge in  
**237**  
locations throughout the North East of England



### 2. QUALITY



Creating the best experience for young people

- Clearly and consistently communicate the value of our role and our offer
- Establish and embed our quality framework and create opportunities for sharing best practice and elevating ambition
- Tailor our programme to meet young people's specific needs

**92%**  
of young people will report improved essential skills with an average skills growth of 25%



Design and deliver  
**5**  
tailored adaptations of KEY+ to meet young people's specific needs



### 3. IMPACT



Delivering the best outcomes for young people

- Empower young people to understand and articulate how the skills they develop through KEY+ supports their futures
- Establish and embed an evidence-based impact framework, using data to inform priorities
- Link the direct impact of our programme to the long-term outcomes for young people

**98%**  
young people will feel KEY+ will have a positive impact on their future



Establish a Key Alumni offer and Youth Advisory Board, nurturing follow-on opportunities with  
**150**  
young people



JOIN US

We are committed to expanding opportunities for young people - but we can't do it alone. We invite funders, commissioners, and partners to invest in this work, helping us create lasting change for young people across the North East of England. By working together, we can ensure that young people have the support, skills and opportunities they need to succeed. To find out more visit [www.thekeyuk.org](http://www.thekeyuk.org)

# WELCOME



As Chair of Trustees, I'm proud to introduce The Key's new three-year strategy, a bold plan that puts young people at the centre. As we close one chapter and begin the next, this strategy comes at a crucial time - for our charity, our sector, and the young people we serve.

Now, more than ever, young people need the right support, opportunities, and belief to unlock their potential. At The Key, we are committed to ensuring that those who need us most are empowered to shape their own futures. This strategy reinforces our dedication to equipping young people with the skills, confidence, and resilience to thrive.

As we embark on this journey, we remain steadfast in our mission, working alongside our partners, supporters, and, most importantly, the young people themselves to create meaningful, lasting change. Together, we can make a lasting impact.

Thank you for being part of this vital work.

**Liz Watchorn, Chair of Trustees**





# WHO WE ARE

The Key empowers young people across the North East of England, particularly those growing up in poverty and those facing challenging personal circumstances. Through our proven approach, young people shape their own futures.

## Vision

A future where all young people believe in themselves, unlock their potential, and lead connected and fulfilling lives.

## Mission

We work in collaboration to provide young people with meaningful and impactful opportunities to develop skills, build confidence, and grow resilience.

## Values



**FOCUS**  
We keep sight  
of the goal



**COLLABORATION**  
We work together  
to achieve common  
objectives



**GROWTH**  
We constantly  
strive to be the  
best we can be

**Everything we do is for the benefit of young people**



# OUR BELIEFS

We believe young people should be:

- Empowered to **use their voice and be heard**
- Trusted to **lead and deliver projects and activities that interest and matter to them**
- Supported to **build the skills, confidence and resilience** to thrive
- Inspired and enabled to **be active in their communities** by exploring enterprise or tackling social issues



# THE CHALLENGES

Young people growing up in the North East of England face many barriers to believing in themselves, unlocking their potential and leading connected and fulfilling lives. These challenges create barriers for young people. That's why The Key exists to break down these barriers and create real opportunities for those who need them most.



## GROWING UP IN POVERTY

**Growing up in poverty severely limits young people's life chances, impacting their education, health, and future employment prospects.** It restricts access to extracurricular activities, increases stress, and affects mental health. With fewer social networks and opportunities than their more affluent peers, these young people face exclusion that significantly impacts their future.

**Tackling child poverty is essential to enhancing the overall well-being and future success of young people in the North East of England.**

**35% of children in the North East live in relative poverty after housing costs. This is the highest rate in the UK, increasing to 46% in some North East of England areas.\***

[\\*End Child Poverty Report](#)

## SOCIAL MOBILITY

**Social mobility is another key issue. The North East of England has some of the lowest social mobility in the UK, making it harder for young people to improve their circumstances.** For young people this can mean continued cycles of lower educational attainment, limited access to quality jobs, and fewer opportunities for career advancement.

**Addressing social mobility for young people unlocks potential, reduces inequality, strengthens communities, and improves economic and well-being outcomes, creating a fairer society for all.**

**There's a negative 'North East effect' comprising less favourable prospects for people who grew up in Newcastle, Sunderland, Gateshead, Hartlepool, South Tyneside, Northumberland and Durham.**

[\\*Social Mobility Commission](#)

## REDUCED YOUTH SECTOR FUNDING

**Declining investment in the youth sector has made long-term stable support harder to sustain.** The loss of funding has resulted in fewer youth workers and services, reducing access to quality youth work - just when young people need it most. The youth sector faces broader systemic challenges, including economic instability, job scarcity, and rising costs. As a result, youth work is often not seen as a viable career, leading to a shortage of qualified professionals. This reduces opportunities for young people to access high-quality, affordable youth work, which is essential for their development and future success.

**Ensuring stable investment in the youth sector is crucial for creating a consistent and supportive environment where young people can thrive.**

**Nearly half of voluntary sector youth work providers have insufficient reserves to operate beyond six months if their funding stopped.**

[\\*National Youth Agency: Youth Sector Census](#)

# THE CHALLENGES

Young people growing up in the North East of England face many barriers to believing in themselves, unlocking their potential and leading connected and fulfilling lives. These challenges create barriers for young people. That's why The Key exists to break down these barriers and create real opportunities for those who need them most.



## SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the North East of England often experience lower academic achievement, higher absenteeism, and increased exclusion rates compared to their peers. They face difficulties in accessing further education and employment opportunities, which hinder their personal and professional development.

Addressing the challenges faced by young people with SEND can improve outcomes and enhance access to fulfilling education and employment opportunities, empowering them to reach their full potential and lead connected and fulfilling lives.

17.5% of pupils in the North East of England receive SEN support, with 4.8% having an Education, Health, and Care plan.\*

[\\*Government Education statistics](#)

## POOR MENTAL HEALTH

Poor mental health is a growing concern. It significantly impacts young people's life chances, affecting their education, social relationships, and future employment prospects. Mental health challenges can lead to lower academic achievement, increased absenteeism from school, social isolation and difficulties in forming healthy relationships, which can make it harder to secure stable jobs.

Tackling poor mental health supports young people by improving their well-being, building resilience, boosting confidence, and enabling them to fully engage in education, work, and social opportunities, ultimately helping them to thrive and reach their potential.

In the North East, mental health inequalities are also widening at a higher rate compared to other regions in the country.\*

[\\*Unravelling the dynamics of mental health inequalities in England](#)

## YOUTH OFFENDING

Youth offending in the North East of England is influenced by various factors, including poverty, unmet special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), school exclusion, and exposure to adverse childhood experiences such as abuse, neglect, and domestic violence. Reoffending leads to disrupted education, limited job opportunities, and increased likelihood of continued involvement in the criminal justice system.

Addressing youth reoffending is crucial to breaking this cycle and providing young people with the support they need to build a positive and productive future.

In County Durham, the youth reoffending rate is 43.8% compared to the national average of 32.6%. The North East region consistently reports higher than national average youth reoffending rates.\*

[\\*County Durham Youth Justice Service](#)

## YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Youth unemployment remains a significant challenge, with limited access to training, skills development, and meaningful employment opportunities. The decline of traditional industries and the lack of investment in new sectors have exacerbated the issue. Generational unemployment makes things worse, as young people from families with a history of unemployment face more challenges in finding stable jobs. This cycle can lead to lower education levels, reduced social mobility, and fewer career opportunities, affecting their prospects.

Tackling youth unemployment provides young people with stable employment opportunities, boosting their independence, skills, and confidence, which in turn leads to improved wellbeing, greater opportunities, and long-term stability, ultimately paving the way for better futures.

The North East of England has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the UK at 15.2% compared to UK average of 14.8%.\*

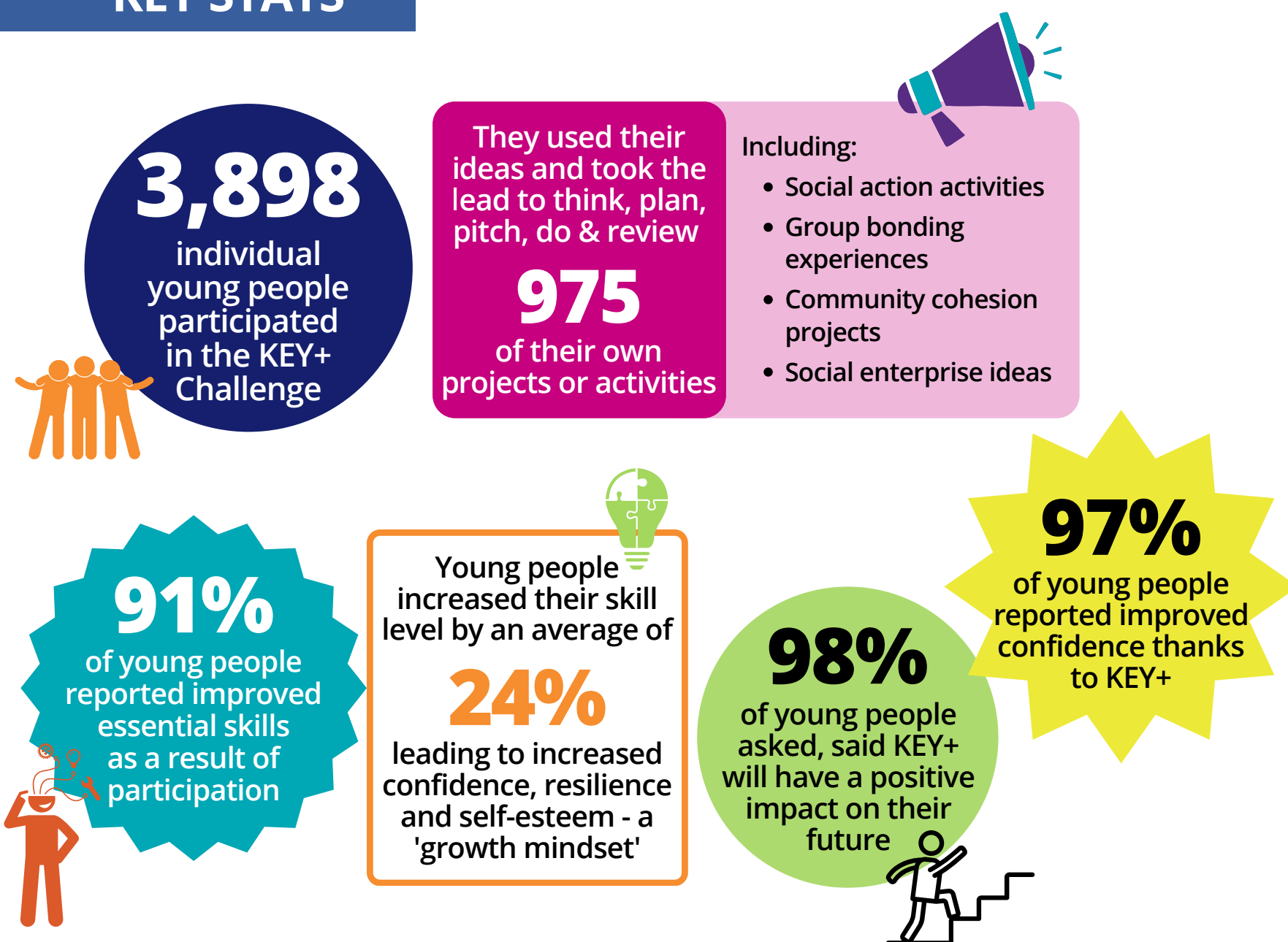
[\\*ONS Youth Unemployment by region](#)

# THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

Since our last strategy began in April 2021, The Key has been empowering young people with opportunities to lead, develop, and thrive. Through our programmes, partnerships, and the dedication of our community, we've made a real difference. The numbers speak for themselves.



## KEY STATS



## KEY IMPACT

**KEY+ has sparked countless positive stories, empowering young people to take control of their futures.** It has helped NEET young women overcome mental health, confidence and behavioural barriers, enabling them to re-engage, find employment and volunteer. It has supported young refugees in creating an empowering song to share their experiences as new arrivals. It has also helped pupils struggling with confidence and behaviour to engage positively with school. **KEY+ is a unique programme that meets young people where they are and supports their individual journeys.**

"It has allowed us to do something we would have never been able to. [KEY+] has given us a lot of learning that we can take forward in our careers."

"I've learnt I am more capable than I give myself credit for."

"KEY+ helped me have the confidence to believe in myself and not dim my personality to suit other people."

"It has helped me improve my skills, build my confidence, become more independent and talk to different people."

"I got the opportunity to make friends and have fun. It made me more confident."

"It has helped me to overcome my anxiety, make friends and become more confident and less shy."

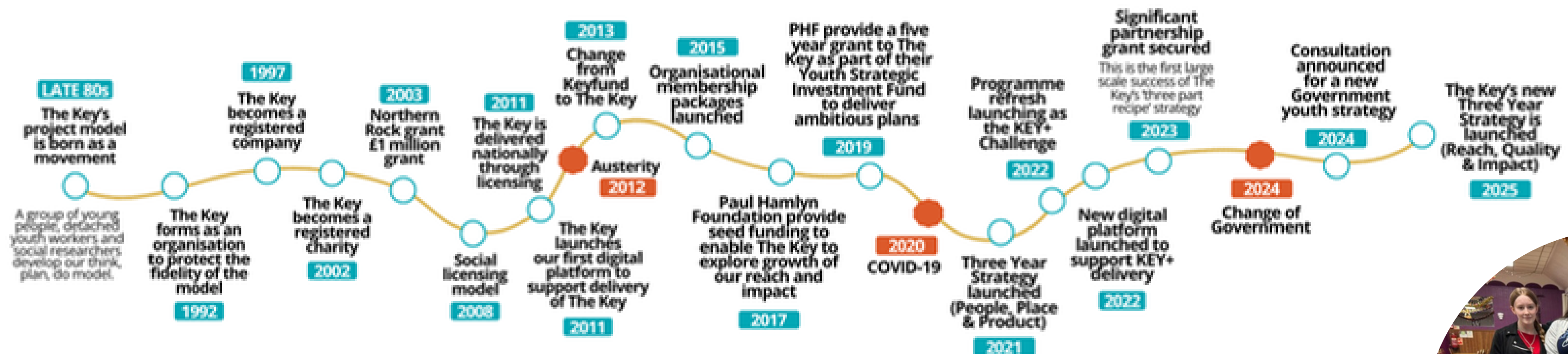
# OUR HISTORY



**For over thirty years, The Key has provided young people with the opportunity to build their skills, confidence and resilience.**

Born in the late 1980s from the ideas of young people, youth workers, and social researchers, our unique five-step model was created to empower those who need it most. Today, we continue that mission with a dedicated team, board, and network of partners, working to make KEY+ accessible to over 1,000 young people each year.

**Our journey has been shaped by pivotal moments, milestones, and the unwavering belief in young people's potential. Explore our history below.**



**"It has helped me gain confidence around people and work in a social environment. It helped me realise that I can achieve what I believe and encouraged me to get into the world and explore."**

- Ellie, a young person who completed KEY+





## OUR RESPONSE

Our response is grounded in self-determination theory, which highlights the importance of nurturing the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By fulfilling these needs, young people form a growth mindset, enhance their wellbeing and gain the confidence to pursue opportunities. It empowers them to unlock their potential and build meaningful, connected, and fulfilling futures.

Through our approach, young people use their voices and ideas to shape and deliver projects and activities that are meaningful to them, promoting a sense of **autonomy**. They build confidence, grow resilience, and measurably develop essential skills, gaining **competence**. By exploring their interests, they form positive relationships with their facilitators, peers, and their community, strengthening **relatedness** and gaining a sense of purpose.

Social action is key to our work, our scaffolded programme encourages young people to explore this when they are ready. By connecting with their communities, young people can expand their horizons, broaden their networks, and develop essential skills and confidence, ultimately enhancing their future prospects.

“[KEY+] has helped me so much. I would normally be out in the streets and not even thinking of any employment and working on the barriers I face. Being part of The Key has helped me become more motivated and think about my future and where I would like to go in life. Using the skills has made me a better person and I have enjoyed being part of the group”

- Ocean-Tia, a young person who completed KEY+

# OUR RESPONSE

Our approach is centred around young people's needs and aspirations. Through partnerships and a network of trained facilitators, we empower young people to build on their existing strengths whilst helping them to develop new ones. This boosts skills, purpose, friendship, and confidence. We prioritise the development of essential skills and champion youth-led social action, to support successful transitions into further education, training, volunteering, employment and adult life.



## THE KEY+ CHALLENGE



**The KEY+ Challenge** empowers young people to take ownership of their development. It provides a flexible, tailored group work approach that meets young people where they are.

Trained facilitators support them to follow a five-step process of KEY+ to:

1. **Think** of a project or activity that interests them
2. **Plan** what is needed, including a budget
3. **Pitch** their project to a panel of business and community volunteers
4. **Do** their project if approved by the volunteer panel
5. **Review** and reflect on their project, learning, and development

Young people complete this process up to three times, each time budgeting an increased amount of funds to invest in their ideas and plan more progressively challenging projects leading to greater personal development. Delivering their first KEY+ project is a great achievement for young people, delivering their second stretches them further and enhances their skills and at Stage 3, they explore enterprise or social action on their terms, providing a way to take action and contribute to their communities.



# OUR RESPONSE

## Tailored Approach

The flexible nature of the KEY+ Challenge allows it to be tailored effectively to meet the needs of young people facing challenging personal circumstances. Throughout 2025-2028 we will harness the knowledge and skills of professionals as well as experts by experience to co-create tailored resources and training. This will support our network of facilitators in effectively addressing the emerging needs of young people, leading to increased positive outcomes.

## Beyond the Challenge: The '+' in KEY+

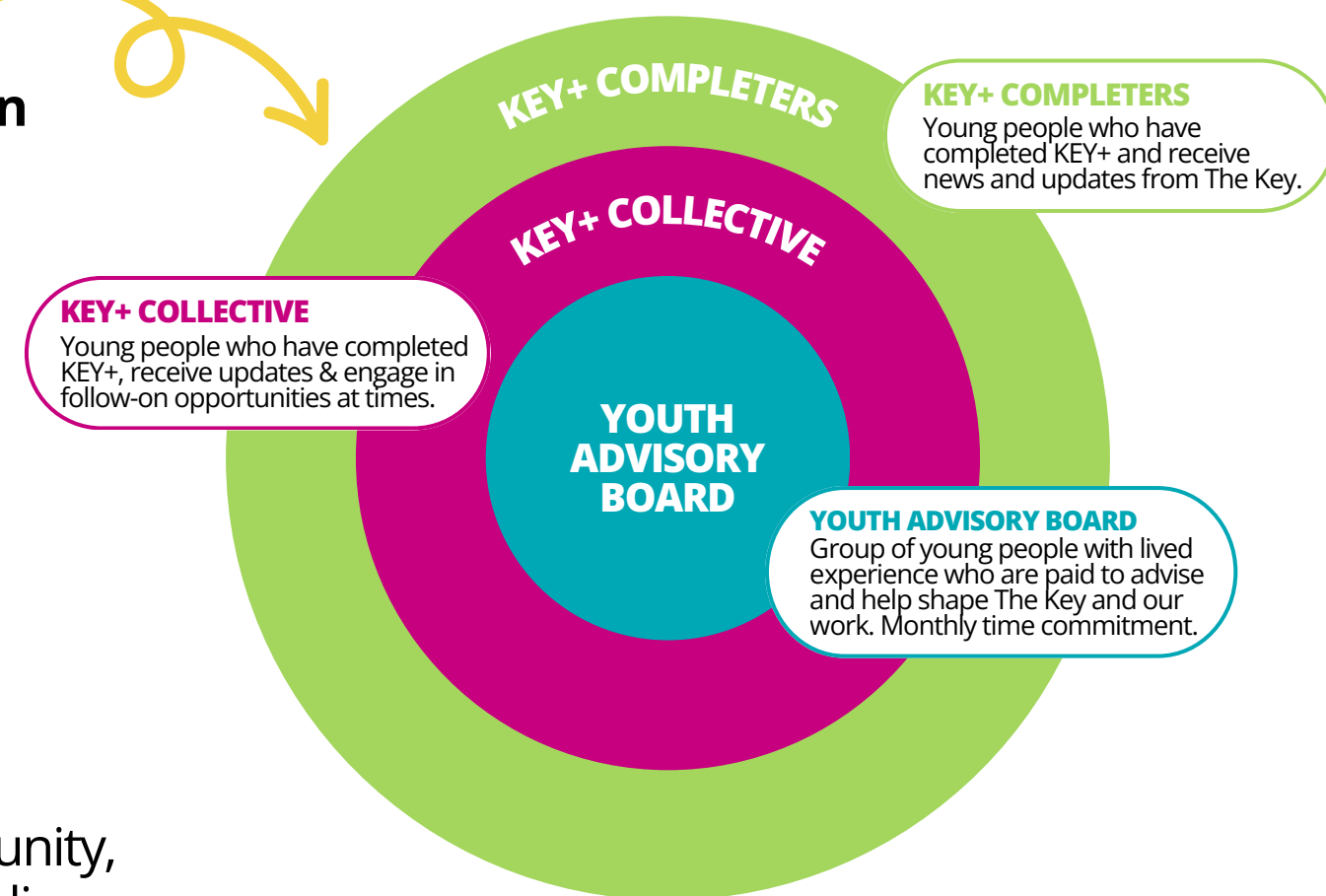
Through our research and feedback, we know that young people value the outcomes they gain from the KEY+ Challenge and are eager to access opportunities that help further develop their skills, confidence, and resilience. To support this, we will establish a Youth Advisory Board, create opportunities for young people to enhance their skills and knowledge through short-term, project-based tasks. We will also train young people to become volunteer panel members and provide training for young facilitators.

## Strength in Collaboration

To address the years of declining investment in youth work, we will advocate for stable sector funding and amplify the long-term benefits of consistent youth work. Through strategic partnerships, we will strengthen investment in youth work, provide high-quality professional development, and amplify young people's voices in decision-making.

By harnessing the strength of our partnerships and networks, we will strengthen the youth, community, and education ecosystem, adding value where we can. We will achieve this by collaborating on funding applications to increase sector resources, creating opportunities for young people to be heard, and empowering them to take action on the issues that matter most in their communities.

Through collaboration, we will continue to bring together funders, policy makers, and community leaders to ensure young people receive the support they need.



# 2025-2028

## OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS

**"[KEY+] made me realise what I can do and achieve and have confidence in myself!"**  
- Thomas



**"I've learnt I am more capable than I give myself credit for."**  
- Gray



**"KEY+ makes me happy and more confident going new places"**  
- Zak



# HOW OUR STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED



To ensure our strategy reflects the real needs of young people in the North East of England, we actively sought input from those who know them best - young people, facilitators, partners, and sector experts.

We engaged in focus groups, surveys, and consultations with current and potential partners, including schools, youth organisations, and local authorities. We also analysed data, reviewed national and regional policies, and attended sector events to understand emerging trends.

This collaborative process has shaped a strategy that is informed, ambitious, and responsive. We are grateful to everyone who contributed their insights, helping us build a plan that truly supports young people to unlock their potential.

With thanks to young people and partners at:

Cheesy Waffles Project  
Durham Agency Against Crime  
Groundwork South & North Tyneside  
Gosforth East Middle School  
Gateshead Libraries  
Northbourne Youth  
Gateshead Youth Council  
North Benwell Youth Project  
Patchwork Project  
Investing in Children  
8th Billingham Scouts  
Sunderland All Together Consortium  
Bright Futures Young Women's Project

Hexham Youth Initiative  
Hebburn Comprehensive School  
NE Youth  
Hilltop School  
Together for Children  
Foundation of Light  
YMCA Northumberland  
Whitley Bay High School  
Ferryhill School  
KAYAKS  
Linx Youth Project  
Together for Children  
Durham City Youth Project

# OUR STRATEGIC GOALS AND ENABLERS

→ 2025 - 2028



## OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

### 1. REACH



Supporting young  
people who need  
us most

### 2. QUALITY



Creating the best  
experience for  
young people

### 3. IMPACT



Delivering the best  
outcomes for  
young people

## OUR ENABLERS

WILL DRIVE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THESE STRATEGIC GOALS



SUSTAINABILITY  
AND GROWTH



YOUNG PEOPLE  
AT THE HEART



RELATIONSHIPS,  
PARTNERSHIPS &  
PEOPLE



MARKETING &  
COMMUNICATIONS



LEARNING  
ORGANISATION



SYSTEMS AND  
PROCESSES



EQUALITY, EQUITY,  
DIVERSITY &  
INCLUSION



DIGITAL  
SOLUTIONS

# REACH

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY ONE

Supporting young people who need us most





## 1. REACH

Supporting young people who need us most

By focusing on our reach, we address the emerging needs of young people in the North East of England, with particular attention to those growing up in poverty and those facing challenging personal circumstances. Collaborating with strategic partners, we create an equitable and supportive environment for all young people in the region, through targeted, aligned efforts and shared resources. Guided by the voices of young people, we collaborate with local, regional, and national networks to strengthen our partnerships and expand opportunities for young people.

BY 2028



**3,700**

individual young people will participate in the KEY+ Challenge

Young people will use their ideas and take the lead to think, plan, pitch, do and review

**925**

of their own KEY+ projects or activities



Young people will participate in the KEY+ Challenge in

**237**

locations throughout the North East of England

Attract and sustain a community of

**110**

diverse Key Partners, including 20 recruited through our targeted partnership strategy



Develop and implement an annual marketing and communications strategy



# 1. REACH

Supporting young people who need us most



Supporting young people who need us most

By 2028

We are purposefully engaging with diverse young people

Through collaboration, we are intelligently responding to the emerging needs of young people who need us most

We are actively adding value to regional and national networks

How we'll achieve this

Respond to national, regional and local priorities and align our efforts towards supporting young people who need us most

Build, maintain and enhance relevant partnerships

Raise our profile amongst relevant new, existing and emerging networks

Our work in 2025/26

- Develop and implement our **partnership strategy** to nurture collaborative relationships with organisations that share our goals of supporting young people in need
- Introduce an updated **membership offer** to support more young people to engage
- Implement the first-year priorities of our **marketing and communications strategy**

Our work in 2026/27

- Deepen and expand our existing **strategic partnerships** to better support young people with the **greatest need**, aligned to regional and national priorities.
- Grow our thematic & place-based opportunities that **enable young people to be seen and heard** as they respond to their priorities such as Youth Action Unlocked, Unity in the Community, and other KEY+ initiatives.
- Evolve our **membership offer** so more young people can access and benefit from what we provide.

# QUALITY

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY TWO

Creating the best experience for young people





## 2. QUALITY

Creating the best experience for young people

By focusing on quality, we provide meaningful and impactful experiences that address young people's unique needs and aspirations leading to best possible outcomes. Our commitment to quality builds trust and engagement, creating a supportive environment where young people feel valued and empowered. It also drives continuous improvement in our practices, ensuring that we remain responsive to the evolving challenges and opportunities faced by young people.

BY 2028



Develop and implement a **co-produced quality framework** to support great facilitation and continuous practice improvement in year one



Develop and implement enhanced training and development opportunities for KEY+ facilitators, delivering training to

**300** facilitators

Design and deliver **5** tailored adaptations of the KEY+ Challenge to meet young people's specific needs



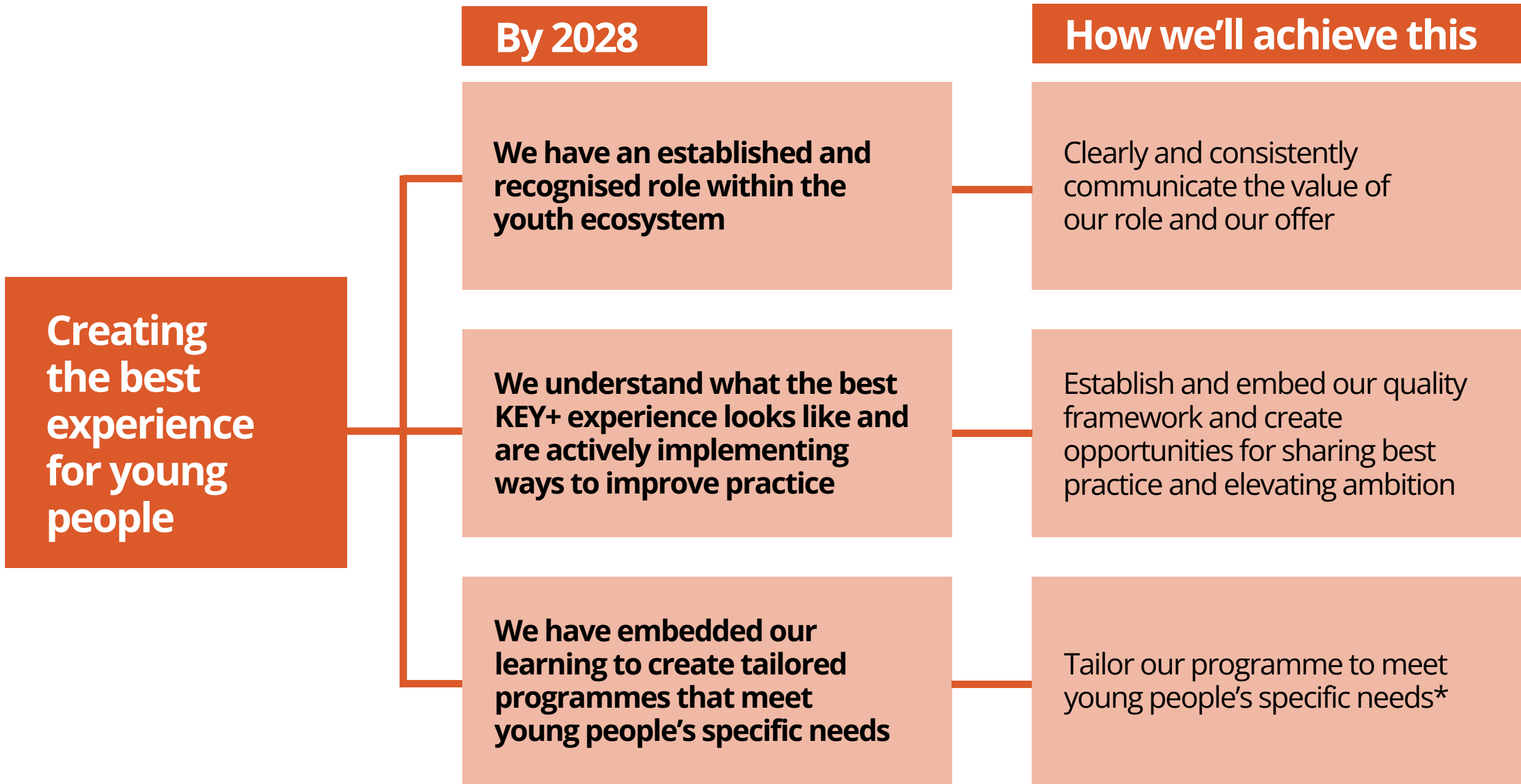
**92%**

of young people will report improved essential skills with an average skills growth of 25%



2. QUALITY

Creating the best experience for young people



Our work in 2025/26

- Enhance facilitator experience from onboarding to ongoing support by adopting a relational approach
- Develop and implement our **quality framework** and clearly define the criteria for a KEY+ project
- Review and **update our essential skills tool** to ensure it meets the emerging needs of young people

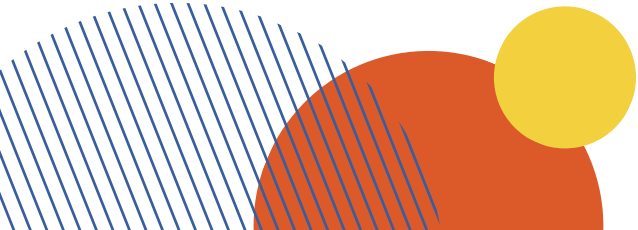


2. QUALITY

Creating the best experience for young people



Creating the best experience for young people



# IMPACT

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY THREE

Delivering the best outcomes for young people





### 3. IMPACT

Delivering the best outcomes for young people

By focusing on impact, we deliver the best outcomes for young people, developing their skills, confidence, and resilience, empowering them to build connected and fulfilling futures. By prioritising engagement with those who are best served by our programmes, we ensure our efforts are targeted and effective. Sharing the long-term impact and positive outcomes achieved by young people will inspire further support and collaboration, amplifying our influence.

BY 2028

Develop and implement a co-produced **evidence-based impact framework** in year one

**97%**

will report improved confidence

**98%**

young people will feel KEY+ will have a positive impact on their future

Establish a Key Alumni offer and Youth Advisory Board, nurturing follow-on opportunities with

**150**

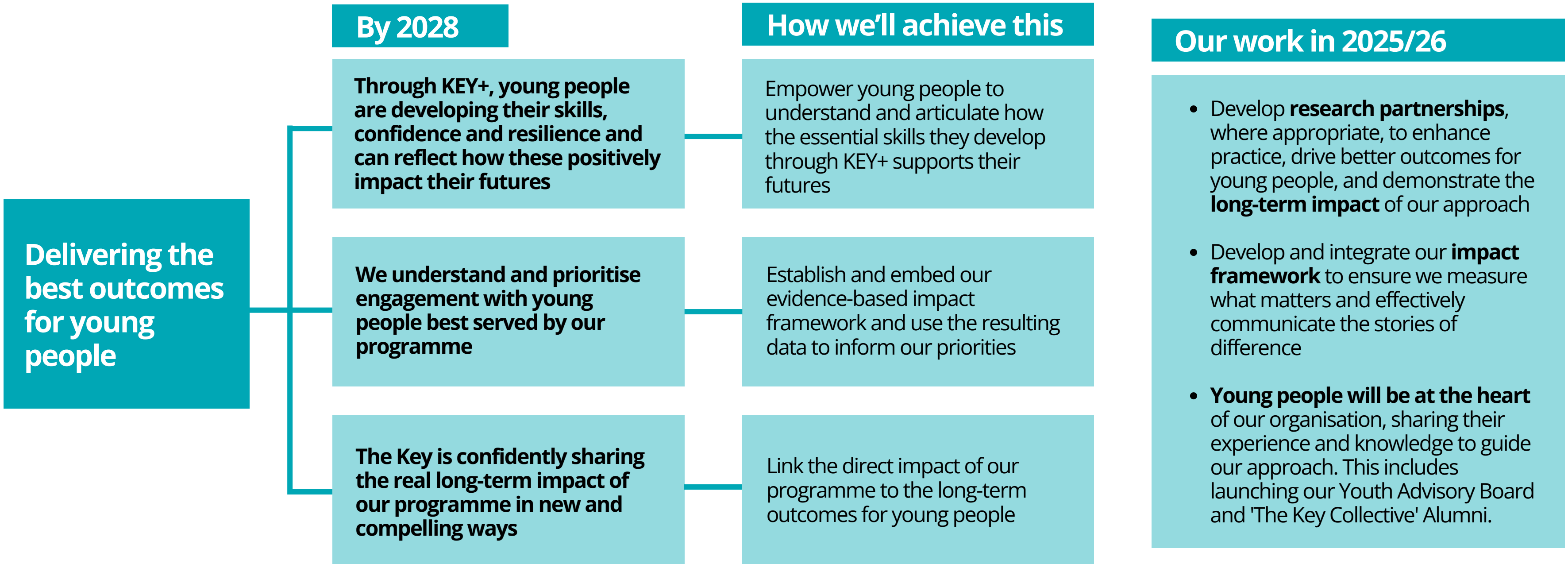
young people

Share **60**

stories showcasing the true impact of KEY+, including six in-depth stories of difference

3. IMPACT

Delivering the best outcomes for young people



# 3. IMPACT

Delivering the best outcomes for young people



Delivering the best outcomes for young people

## By 2028

Through KEY+, young people are developing **their skills, confidence and resilience** and can reflect **how these positively impact their futures**

We understand and **prioritise engagement with young people best served by our programme**

The Key is confidently **sharing the real long-term impact of our programme in new and compelling ways**

## How we'll achieve this

Empower young people to understand and articulate how the essential skills they develop through KEY+ supports their futures

Establish and embed our evidence-based impact framework and use the resulting data to inform our priorities

Link the direct impact of our programme to the long-term outcomes for young people

## Our work in 2025/26

- Develop **research partnerships**, where appropriate, to enhance practice, drive better outcomes for young people, and demonstrate the **long-term impact** of our approach
- Develop and integrate our **impact framework** to ensure we measure what matters and effectively communicate the stories of difference
- **Young people will be at the heart** of our organisation, sharing their experience and knowledge to guide our approach. This includes launching our Youth Advisory Board and 'The Key Collective' Alumni.

## Our work in 2026/27

- **Fully integrate our impact framework and benchmark our data** against sector standards, enabling a clearer, evidence-driven understanding of the impact KEY+ creates.
- **Partner with SEND experts to review and intentionally adapt KEY+**, ensuring the programme is inclusive, effective and able to deliver measurable outcomes for young people with SEND.
- Begin **building and communicating a compelling picture of KEY+'s longer-term impact**, guided by the insight and structure of our new impact framework.

# OUR ENABLERS

To achieve our strategic priorities and create meaningful, lasting change for young people, we have identified eight key enablers that will underpin our approach. These enablers provide the essential structures, resources, and ways of working that will empower us to deliver our mission effectively. By strengthening our organisation, harnessing collaboration, and leveraging expertise, we will deliver the best outcomes and experiences for young people.



YOUNG PEOPLE  
AT THE HEART

**Placing young people at the heart of our organisation is fundamental to ensuring that our work is relevant, impactful, and effective.** By actively involving young people in the design, implementation, and evaluation of our work, we will better understand and address their needs and aspirations.

**We will prioritise creating meaningful opportunities for young people** this will include apprenticeship opportunities, work experience and placement offers, as well as training Young Facilitators and Young Panel Members as part of our KEY+ Alumni offer, equipping them with valuable skills for their future.

**Our Youth Advisory Board will play a central role in this effort.** By providing valuable insight and representing the voice of young people in shaping the direction of The Key.



RELATIONSHIPS,  
PARTNERSHIPS &  
PEOPLE

**Building strong, collaborative relationships** with young people, youth and community sector organisations, educational institutions, academic partners, stakeholders, and other partners is essential. These partnerships enable us to share knowledge, co-create innovative solutions, and provide high-quality support tailored to the needs of young people.

**KEY+ Facilitators are vital to our success**, and we will continue to strengthen our relationships with them, improve our training, and offer support when needed. We will create a structured approach to facilitator engagement, ensuring they feel supported, inspired, and connected.

**Championing and supporting youth work in schools and other learning environments remains a priority**, ensuring young people who struggle in traditional educational settings receive the help they need and deserve.

**We will grow and guide our diverse network of Volunteer Panel Members**, including increasing the number of young volunteers to further support their development.

**Creating an organisation that is a great place to work** involves providing our team with opportunities to develop skills and knowledge, stay healthy at work, and balance work and life.



SUSTAINABILITY  
AND GROWTH

**Our financial strength and competence comes from robust strategies.** Both pre and post COVID, we have successfully adapted to challenges, particularly with the support of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, enabling us to sustain and expand our work. Our leadership in managing a significant regional National Citizenship Service (NCS) contract, securing partnership funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, and obtaining commissions through the North East Combined Authority further showcases our ability to manage substantial funds to meet the needs of young people and partners.

**We will continue to diversify our income streams to drive long-term sustainability.** By aligning with strategic priorities and emerging policies, we will proactively address the evolving needs of young people through targeted initiatives, concentrating our efforts where we can achieve the greatest impact.

**Building on our successful partnership funding approach**, we will further strengthen our expertise and capacity to manage large-scale partnership contracts. This will bring vital funding and investment into the sector, enabling our partners to better support young people facing challenging personal circumstances. As funding pressures in the youth sector grow, this collaborative approach will be more crucial than ever.

**The funding landscape for charities, especially those in the youth sector, remains uncertain.** To navigate this, aligning and positioning ourselves effectively with the National Youth Strategy and North East Combined Authority priorities is crucial. Our experience has shown that remaining a small charity allows us to be agile and resilient. Therefore, our aim is to achieve sustainability rather than pursuing growth.

# OUR ENABLERS



## LEARNING ORGANISATION

With a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and knowledge, we remain **adaptable and responsive to emerging needs and challenges.**

We value feedback, use data to inform decision-making, and embed reflective practice throughout our work.

By **embracing test-and-learn approaches**, we will pilot new initiatives with young people to ensure our programmes deliver the best possible outcomes for them.

We will **share our learning and insights openly**, building a collaborative culture that empowers others and enables us to influence positive change.



## EQUALITY, EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Using different viewpoints and giving everyone a fair chance helps us reach more people and make a bigger difference. We will work with groups, partners, and individuals who have **valuable experiences and knowledge.** This way, we can focus our efforts where they are needed most. By actively listening and reducing our assumptions, we can make our work more effective and impactful.

**Creating an inclusive environment at all levels, including our staff team and board of trustees, is essential to showing our commitment** to equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Embedding EDI training and promoting an equitable culture are key parts of this effort.



## DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

By continuing to develop and refine our digital solutions including our online platform, KIT, we will improve the user experience for both young people and facilitators.

Our digital solutions create space for young people to take active responsibility for and engage with their development journey. They also facilitate better data collection and analysis, allowing us to make data-driven decisions to continuously improve our offerings and measure our impact.

**Our digital solutions strengthen our work**, complemented by resources designed to best support young people, facilitators, and partners including KEY+ workbooks and training materials.

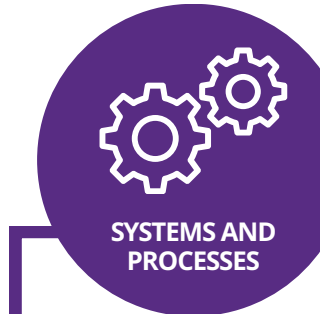


## MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Through strategic messaging and targeted campaigns, we will attract more diverse partners and reach more young people who need us most.

Using **insightful content, sector partnerships, and tailored messaging**, we will generate stronger relationships with partners and stakeholders.

We will **showcase stories of difference to inspire trust and engagement to demonstrate the impact of KEY+.**



## SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

We will enhance our internal and external systems and processes to increase efficiency and ensure good governance.

We will continue to **employ robust financial management and practices that provide transparency and accountability.** We will seek support and guidance from external experts where additional support is required.



**"The Key changes the way I think about things. I think about things in a more social action and community based way now."**

- Ellie, a young person who completed KEY+



## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Our three strategic priorities will directly help tackle the challenges young people face in the North East of England.

By ensuring we **reach** those who need us most, we are breaking down barriers to social mobility, providing opportunities to young people growing up in poverty, and ensuring that no one is left behind. Through our commitment to **quality**, we are creating meaningful, engaging experiences that support young people's personal growth, enhance their mental wellbeing, and equip them with the skills needed for the future. And by driving **impact**, we are delivering real, measurable outcomes, ensuring young people are empowered to build their skills, confidence and resilience.

**The Key and our KEY+ Challenge will be a catalyst for change, by nurturing young people's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, we can empower more young people to take charge of their futures, unlock their potential and lead connected and fulfilling lives.**

# JOIN US →



“As we embark on this exciting chapter for The Key, our focus on Reach, Quality, and Impact will guide us in making a real difference in the lives of young people. There is a growing energy and momentum in the North East, driven by the need to empower young people to develop their skills, confidence, and resilience, enabling them to unlock their potential to lead connected and fulfilling lives.

By building strong partnerships, placing young people at the heart of everything we do, and responding to the challenging funding landscape affecting our partners, we are committed to creating meaningful opportunities for collaboration and action.

This strategy is our roadmap for the future - and we want you to be part of it. Together, we can create lasting change for young people in the North East.

We invite funders and partners to join us in this mission - whether through investment, collaboration, or advocacy. Get in touch to explore how we can work together.”



**Rebecca Maw, CEO**





**THANK YOU**  
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