

THE SCOUTS

SQUIRRELS PROGRAMME ROLL OUT 2021-23

INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT

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This interim report has been produced by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) as part of its evaluation of The Scouts Squirrels Programme which is running from October 2021 - March 2023.

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We would like to thank all those who have helped to facilitate this evaluation, particularly the staff members from The Scouts who have been leading the roll out of the Squirrels Programme.

Above all, we are indebted to the staff, parents, volunteers and children who gave of their time so generously and engaged so wholeheartedly and candidly in the focus group discussions and interviews, and who completed surveys and assessment tools to give us such informative and rich data to work with. We much appreciate their intelligent and perceptive reflections on the crucial importance of developing a high quality, inclusive and sustainable programme for, and with, young children and their families.

For more information about CREC please visit: www.crec.co.uk

INTERIM REPORT

Background

In summer 2021 The Squirrels programme was officially launched by The Scouts as its programme for 4-5 year old child following a pilot run the previous year.

It is known that the experiences offered to young children through engaging with the Scouts have demonstrable impact on their skills for life (attitudes and dispositions for lifelong learning) which evidence shows can lead to improved life outcomes.

Engaging with the Scouts also has the potential for impact in other domains (including language development, social development physical development and other key domains of early learning) if the quality of experience is right and the programme of activities is appropriate (Pascal et al, 2021).

Research evidence suggests that where those building blocks for lifelong learning (executive functioning, social skills, language development, relationships and attachments) are laid down during a child's first five formative years then the adverse effects of socio-economic factors can be negated, and that high quality early years educational experiences can have a disproportionately beneficial impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Pascal et al, 2019).

Through attending Squirrels, young people can now engage with Scouting from the age of 4 years old so there is the potential to have a significant positive impact on children by engaging with them and their families at this early stage in their lives.



Having committed to implementing Early Years Scouting, the Scouts wished to continue to evaluate the efficacy of their programme, as well as begin to measure the impact that it can have, particularly on children and families from currently underrepresented backgrounds (notably BAME community and most economically deprived communities). It also wished to explore the impact that this programme might have on young leaders, on parents and on the home learning environment due to the way that it has been conceived and how it is delivered.

In Autumn 2021 CREC was commissioned to evaluate the roll out of the Squirrels programme. This interim report shares the emerging findings (up to Summer 2022) and areas for future consideration as part of an iterative process to support programme and system development. At this point one whole round of data collection has been completed; a further round of data collection will be completed in autumn/winter 2022. A final evaluation report will be completed in March 2023.

The evaluation brief

The 4 research work strands are

- 1.The efficacy of the Early Years Scouting programme in developing young people according to the Scout Theory of Change;
- 2.The efficacy of the Early Years Scouting delivery model (including 'alternative' model pilots) in reaching young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds;
- 3.The efficacy of The Scouts in supporting young people to take Social Action, either via the programme (4/5 year olds) or via a leadership role (14-17 year olds);
- 4.The impact on volunteers and parents/carers of young people who take part, and the Home Learning Environment;



The following data collection methods are being used to gather evidence against the 4 research workstrands:

- 1.Child/Young Leader Outcomes Assessment Tool: A basic instrument for recording a range of child outcomes seen during Squirrels sessions (relating to skills for life identified in Scouting Theory of Change)
- 2.Focus Groups with Squirrels, Young leaders, Drey leaders and parents
- 3.Surveys: Online survey with different sections completed by Drey Leaders and parents
- 4.Anonymised monitoring data gathered from dreys
- 5.Interviews with Scouts Strategic leads/project leads.
- 6.Collaborative Action Research: Online proformas for Young leaders to document their social action projects and their perceived impact;



Work strand 1: The efficacy of the Early Years Scouting programme in developing young people according to the Scout Theory of Change;

At this mid-point, the data collected from Drey Leaders, Young Leaders, parents and Squirrels suggest that the programme is, as hoped, developing children and giving them opportunities to learn and enhance certain life skills.

The activities and approach offered through the programme appear to be supporting the acquisition of skills for life, although some more than others.

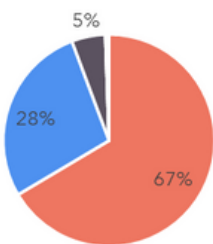
Parents and the children themselves are very positive about the programme and the benefits that they are gaining from it.



The frequency of life skills demonstrated by Squirrels during sessions

Emerging findings

It helps my child to be resilient



1.Squirrels sessions are reported as normally including Scout beginning/end activities, stories, songs, adult-led, physical activities and group games. Team games, outdoor, creative and child-led activities were less frequently reported, and construction and role play were the least frequently reported activities.

2.The programme at this stage seems to allow Squirrels and Young leaders to demonstrate identified life skills on a regular to consistent basis - in particular **Responsibility, Belonging & Trustworthiness**

3.The programme at this stage seems to allow Squirrels and Young leaders to demonstrate certain specific life skills on a consistent basis - these are largely within the domain of **Citizenship & Connectedness**.

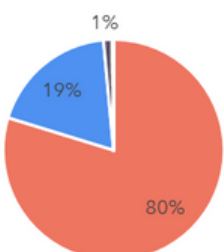
4.Skills for Life and Adventure and Wellbeing were demonstrated, but less consistently by both groups.

5.Wellbeing indicators were 'never' or only 'sometimes' seen for between 24-35% Squirrels.

6.Parents are incredibly positive about the programme and believe that it positively impacts their children across a whole range of areas linked to these life skills.

7.Children spoke of fun, happiness, playing and meeting new friends when they spoke to us. They also loved getting badges.

It encourages my child be courageous to try new things



Work strand 2: The efficacy of the Early Years Scouting delivery model in reaching young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds;

Using data largely drawn from Online Scout Manager (OSM) in Spring 2022, the emerging findings for this work strand suggest further work is required by The Scouts to meet their objectives.

In terms of scaling up the programme, the picture is positive with 6002 squirrels enrolled across 247 Scout Districts (up from 3342 Squirrels enrolled across 150 Scout Districts at end 2021).

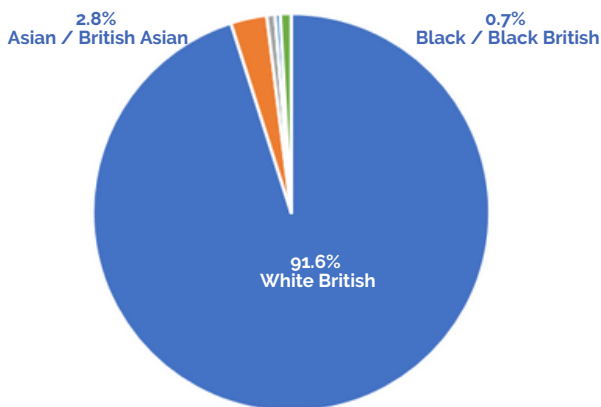
Whilst the dreys are spread fairly evenly across the 10 IMD deciles, two-thirds of squirrels continue to come from the 50% most affluent postcode areas

However the underlying data on ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status, where it is available (and that is an issue in itself) indicate that certain target groups for this programme are not being met in this scale up phase.



Emerging findings

Squirrels Ethnicity - Spring 22



" 9 out of 10 Squirrels are White British, with all other ethnicity groups under represented "

1. The socio-economic & ethnicity data suggests that the current roll-out is not reaching the communities that The Scouts are aiming for. Qualitative data so far gathered suggests that demand is outstripping supply in this first year of roll out meaning waiting lists for places in many areas – affluent parents are seemingly willing, and able, to travel to attend.

2. The gender data suggests that Squirrels is currently appealing to boys (or perhaps parents of boys) more than girls (65:35). This is however more equal than Beavers & Cubs (77:23) and Scouts (72:28) (source: Scouts census '22)

3. Whilst religious data is broadly in line with population level data the low uptake of places by Muslim children is notable, particularly when compared with pilot phase.

4. The sizeable non-submission of data of key monitoring fields through OSM (c45%) is a missed opportunity and affects validity and reliability.

Work strand 3: The efficacy of The Scouts in supporting young people to take Social Action, either via the programme (4/5 year olds) or via a leadership role (14-17 year olds);

What is Social Action?

An important aspiration for the Early Years Scouting programme, as identified in the Scout Theory of Change, is that Scouting should make a positive difference in society. It is a key aim that Scouts of all ages should become active citizens of a connected community who can work together towards greater social cohesion and a kinder and better world.

The evidence gathered to date strongly suggests that social action is embedded within the programme and that both Young Leaders and Squirrels are taking part.

The act of volunteering as a Young Leader is an act of social action in itself which also provides the young person with the opportunity to develop life skills (as per workstrand 1). Social Action Projects, which involve Young Leaders and Squirrels were frequently reported and were often concerned with engaging in the wider community, helping others, and enhancing the environment.



We cleaned and tidied our local village, scrubbed the metal gates and then decorated for the local carnival.

Emerging findings

I learnt new skills and grew in confidence meaning I now have the ability to run activities in public and more often too.

It encouraged me to think about more ways we could help the community; no one is too young to do something good for their community, you just need to think of how you can adapt something to make it enjoyable and safe for everyone taking part.

1. Both Young Leaders and Squirrels are becoming active citizens of a connected local community through the programme;
2. The process of being a Young Leader is a beneficial form of social action in itself, impacting positively on themselves and others
3. The Social Action projects, led or supported by Young Leaders, are involving Squirrels and introducing them to a wide variety of ways in which social action can happen.

Work strand 4: The impact on volunteers and parents/carers of young people who take part, and the Home Learning Environment;

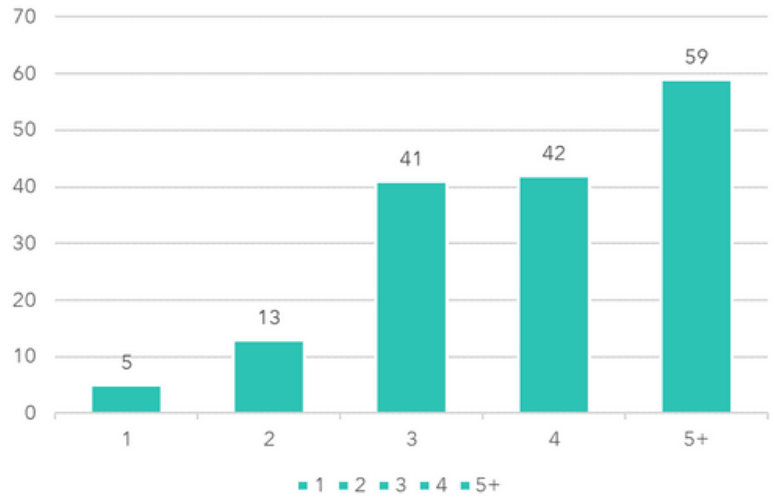
In this first data collection phase the focus has been on understanding the ways in which volunteering takes place in Squirrels and how parents interact and engage with the programme.

1607 volunteers are currently (July '22) registered with Squirrels – of these 769 (48%) are new to Scouting. Group leaders described a range of reasons that motivated them to volunteer - many personal, but also because of a commitment to Scouting.



The second part of the data collection in this work strand will focus in more detail on the impact the programme is having on those who volunteer and in what ways the programme might be impacting on the home learning environment of Squirrels

How many adult Volunteer Leaders (including you) support your Drey?



Emerging findings

1. 1.45% parents stayed for the Squirrels session – two-thirds of those in capacity of a parent volunteer – but one-third (13%) stay for other reasons.

2. Parents are very positive about the programme and there are a number suggesting that they are prepared to be more involved if they are engaged and included.

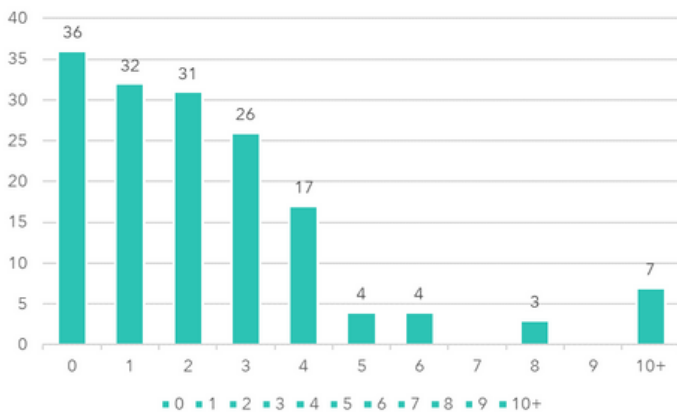
3. The vast majority of Dreys have 3 or more adult volunteers with more than 1/3 having 5 or more volunteers.

4. Most Dreys have been successful in gaining parent volunteers; a few have been very successful and recruited in high numbers. 1/5 have not yet recruited a parent volunteer

5. Group leaders volunteer for a wide variety of reasons and mostly feel that there is a positive benefit to them personally, to the children, and the organisation/community by doing so.

6. More than half of Dreys are supported by 1-2 Young Leaders with up to 1/5 having even more. 1/5 do not currently have a Young Leader supporting them.

How many parents have become volunteers since you started your Drey?



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WAY AHEAD

A route map to inform future delivery



Analysis of the evaluation evidence and reflection on the Programme achievements to date suggest some areas where The Scouts should celebrate success, and some other areas where they may wish to refine or review certain things in order to improve the efficacy and impact in line with their stated objectives

ONE

Celebrate the positive perceptions of parents, children and group leaders to support roll out of the programme;

TWO

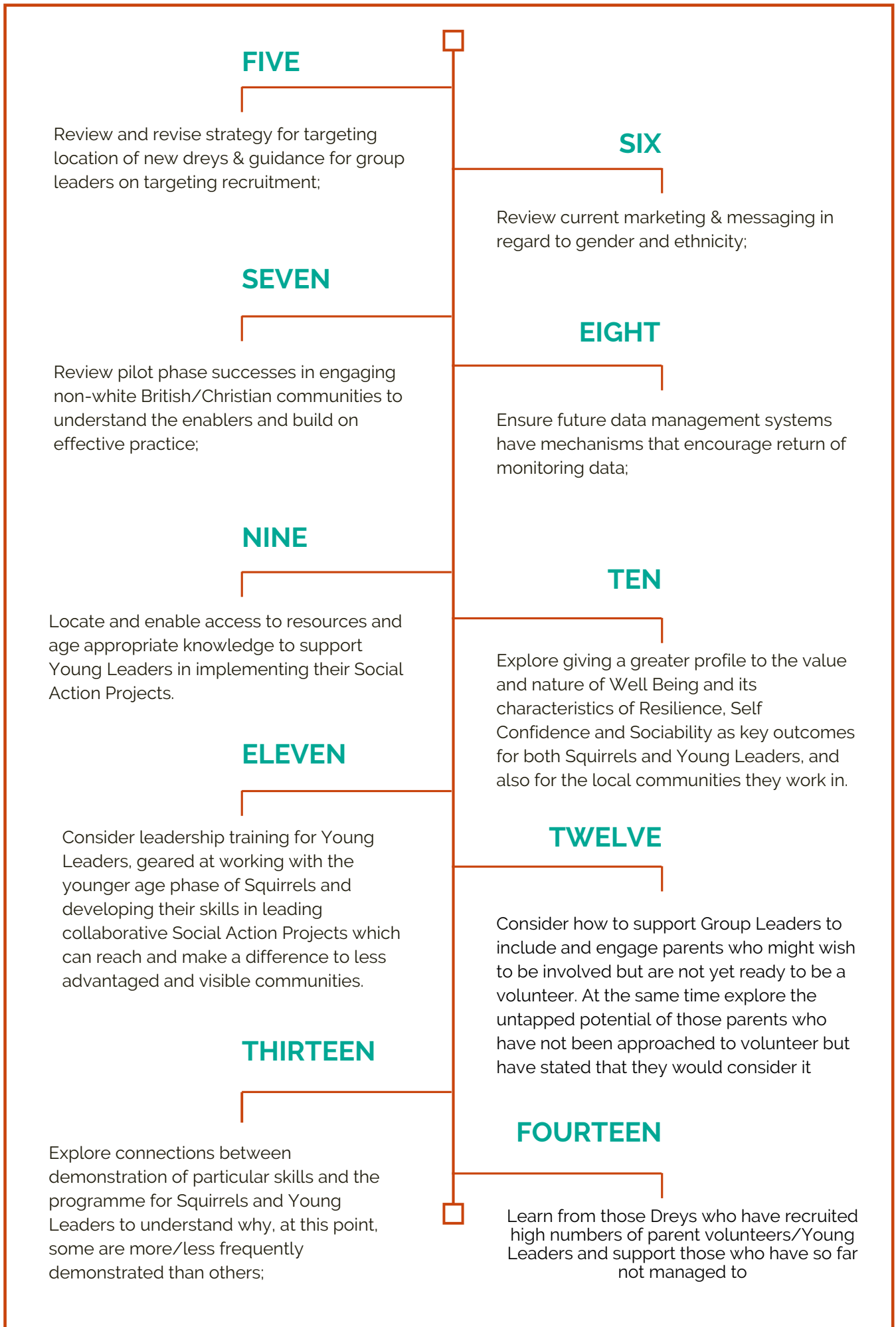
Celebrate the high levels of volunteering taking place in Squirrels to support the ongoing roll out of the programme.

THREE

Review emphasis on Wellbeing within programme structure/training to understand why Group leaders perceived that some Squirrels are never or rarely able to demonstrate resilience, self-confidence and leadership within sessions

FOUR

Review structure/support/training to understand why Group leaders perceived that some Young Leaders are never or rarely able to demonstrate self-confidence and belonging within sessions



The Theory of Change for The Scout Association has been referenced within this report and is reproduced here for reference:

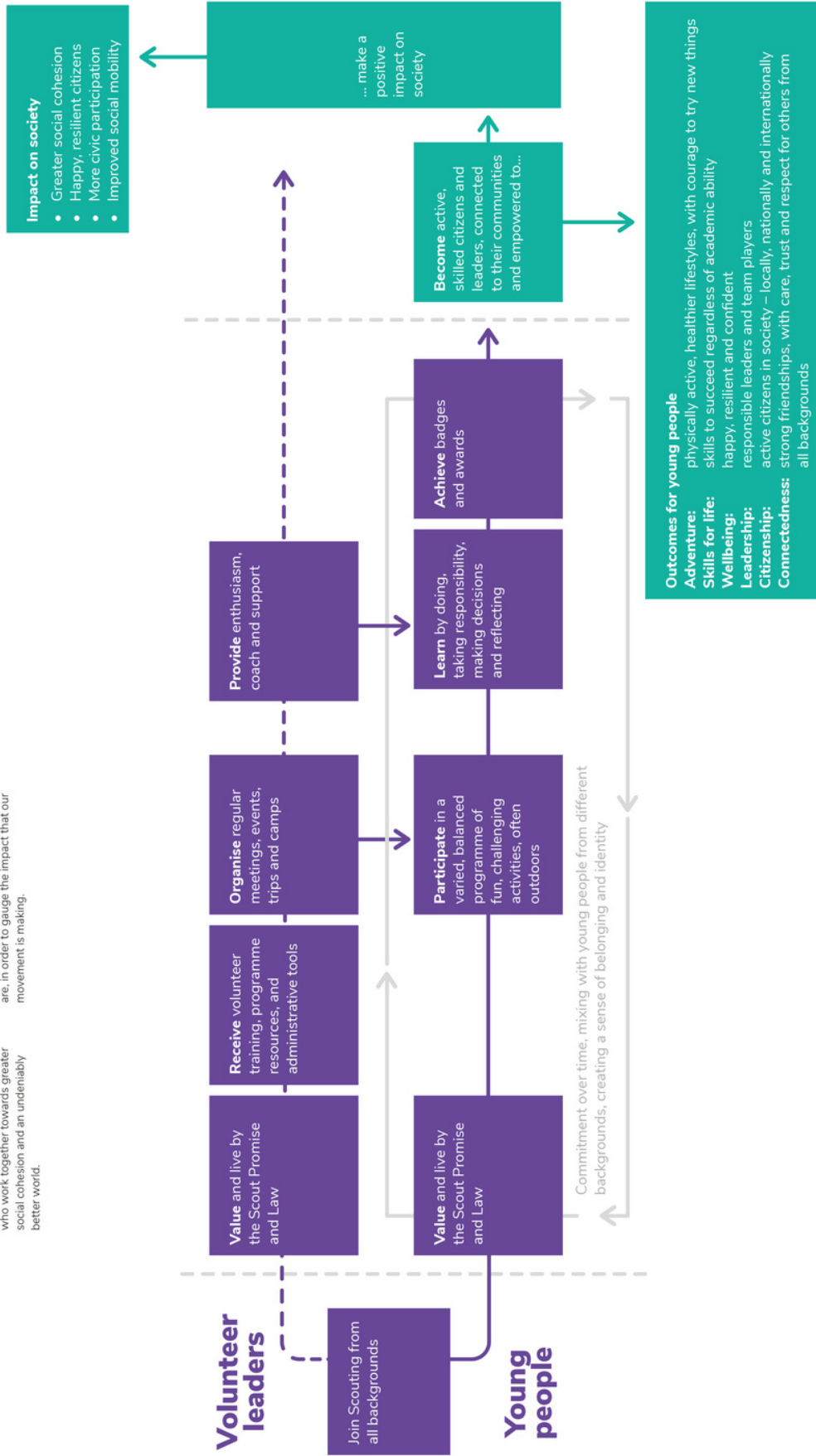
Theory of Change

Our theory of change shows the positive difference Scouts makes in society. We welcome young people and volunteers from all backgrounds. At Scouts they learn and share skills, enjoy an engaged and varied programme of activities, hon- our the Scout values and become active citizens of a connected community. We produce happier, more resilient citizens who work together towards greater social cohesion and an undeniably better world.

Over the last two years, we've conducted research with 13-17 year olds through the Scout Experience Survey. Based on responses to a variety of questions about their daily lives, activities, interests, citizenship and wellbeing, the research compares the experience of young people aged 13-17 who are not Scouts with those of the same age group who are, in order to gauge the impact that our movement is making.

The results of this research show that Scouts is bringing out the best in people, and that those people are contributing more to their communities. It shows that compared with young people who are not part of our movement, Scouts are learning more skills, volunteering more often, and contributing to a kinder, more cohesive society.

The role of volunteers delivering an amazing programme is vital to the impact that Scouts is making.



The stated activities that young people engaging with The Scouts take part in are:

- **Practical skills** - Learning practical skills which will be useful in my school, work or social life
- **Outdoor skills** - Learning skills and knowledge to spend time in the outdoors, such as navigation, camping, survival, backwoods cooking, knots/lashings and pioneering etc
- **Physical activity** - Taking part in physical, adventurous or sporting activities
- **Community engagement** - Learning about your community (such as people, places, services and democracy)
- **Social action** - volunteering to help other people, animals or the environment
- **International activities** - learning about other countries and cultures, either by visiting those countries or learning about them at home
- **Creative activities** - Taking part in drawing, painting, drama, sculpting, digital design, music or other creative activities
- **Spiritual activities** - Learning about the faith, beliefs or attitudes of others, or reflecting on my own

And the stated outcomes are:

Adventure: physically active, healthier lifestyles, with the courage to try new things

- More physically active
- Value the outdoors more
- Have increased knowledge of how to live a healthy lifestyle
- Are more likely to try new things
- Have increased courage to take risks and tackle challenging activities

Skills for Life: skills to succeed regardless of academic ability

- Have enhanced problem solving skills
- Are more independent
- Can communicate effectively
- Develop a range of practical and contemporary skills which are useful in their school, work and social life.

Wellbeing: Happy, resilient and confident

- Are happier
- Have enhanced personal wellbeing (measured by satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety)
- Have increased perseverance and grit
- Have increased confidence and self-esteem
- Have a deeper understanding and confidence in their own beliefs and attitudes

Leadership: Responsible leaders and team players

- Are more responsible and trustworthy
- Are better at working in a team
- Show leadership by taking initiative and acting as a role model to help others make a positive difference

Citizenship: participate in society as active citizens – locally, nationally and internationally

- Are more likely to play an active role in their community
- Are more likely to consider themselves local, national and international citizens

Connectedness: respecting difference, with more and deeper friendships

- Have more meaningful friendships and relationships
- Care more about other people
- Have more respect and trust for others, including those from backgrounds different to their own