

**EVALUATING THE
SCALING OF
EARLY YEARS
PROVISION IN
SCOUTING
2021-23
SEPTEMBER 2023**



FULL REPORT

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Executive Summary of Evaluation Findings

Background

The qualitative and quantitative evaluation evidence presented in this report was gathered by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) between September 2021 and May 2023 using the following six research methods:

1. Scout Child and Young Leader Outcomes Assessment Tool
2. Scout Monitoring Data
3. Focus Groups
4. Online Surveys
5. Interviews
6. Collaborative Action Research

The evidence presented provides a positive and strong endorsement of the value and impact of the national roll out of the Squirrels programme although some aspects, particularly regarding reach, require further consideration. Specifically, the evidence gathered has provided a greater understanding in four specific areas.

1. **The efficacy of the Early Years Scouting programme** in developing young people (Squirrels) according to the Scout Theory of Change
 - vi. 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.
 - vii. Drey Leaders, parents and children reported that the programme was equally appropriate and working well for both boys and girls.
 - viii. Parents and children felt the programme offered them different experiences to school and appreciated its more relaxed nature. Both parents and children highlighted the risky adventurous activities which they did outdoors such as camping, making fires, den building. They also enjoyed the social and community opportunities the programme offered.
 - ix. The badge work was seen as an important element of the programme but needs further development and promotion as part of home learning as well as in Squirrels sessions.
 - x. Outdoors and ‘adventurous/riskier’ activities were less commonly experienced by Squirrels even though this was perceived as a highlight of the Squirrels programme and a strong motivator for participation.

- xi. There is strong evidence that the programme encourages the Squirrels and Young Leaders to develop skills in **Citizenship and Connectedness** and **Sociability**.
- xii. Although less consistently giving Squirrels and Young leaders the opportunity to display **Wellbeing** outcomes, parents did feel their children were happier and more connected due to the programme.
- xiii. Parents are incredibly positive about the programme and believe that it positively impacts their children particularly in relation to **enhanced confidence, independence and sociability**. They also acknowledge that their children had become more **socially connected and more community aware**. Parents could point to evidence of **enhanced wellbeing**, with their children being happy, enthusiastic and engaged with the Scouting programme, enjoying the sessions enormously.
- xiv. Children spoke of **fun, happiness, playing and meeting new friends** when they spoke to us.

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

- i. Recruitment and participation in Squirrels are healthy and growing rapidly.
- ii. Whilst the dreys are spread fairly evenly across the 10 IMD deciles, 60% of squirrels continue to come from the 50% most affluent postcode areas (this has reduced from 66% in 2022),
- iii. Gender imbalance has remained consistent between 2022-2023: 70% of Squirrels are now boys (up from 66% boys in Autumn 2021),
- iv. More than 9 out of 10 Squirrels are still White British, with all other ethnicity groups under represented.
- v. Roll out has been supported at regional level but new Dreys have been opened to serve existing areas rather than targeting new communities.
- vi. Where dreys have set up, the support has been very valuable, and the offer sells itself.
- vii. There is some evidence of continuing ‘myths’ and costs which might be preventing some target communities to fully engage.
- viii. Experience of effective recruitment strategies could be used more strategically in areas where participation is harder to achieve.

- ix. There are some very successful community Dreys in targeted communities which deserve follow up and some further deep dive case study work to capture learning about how to establish and recruit children from target populations.

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)

- i. A key aim of Early Years Scouting programme (as identified in the Scout Theory of Change) is that Scouting should make a positive difference in society and this is being demonstrated through the Young leaders' Social Action Projects.
- ii. The Social Action Projects have been successful for all those who responded to the survey, and positive lessons could be identified for Scouting, including the positive organisational profile gained in communities from these projects.
- iii. The Young Leaders learned the importance of making the social action participatory and active, involving Squirrels in team work and making it fun, but some need support in engaging these younger children.
- iv. It was felt that the focus of the Social Action projects had been successful in showing Squirrels the value of supporting social and community cohesion and caring for the environment and embedding a social and community care ethos within young children.
- v. Young Leaders felt the focus and nature of the Social Action Projects had been pitched well for this younger age phase of Scouting. They were also actively contributing to real world social and community needs including food poverty, environmental degradation, and social isolation.
- vi. Squirrels and The Scouts have learned that through social action they can make a real and positive difference to people's lives and the sustainability agenda.

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

- i. 97% of Drey Leaders feel participating in Early Years Scouting has had a positive impact across a wide spectrum of their lives including improved: Socialization and friendship; confidence; wellbeing; new skills; sense of personal achievement and pride; satisfaction of contributing to community; sense of purpose; (but also tiredness!)
- ii. Parents who are more actively involved indicated that their **parenting skills** had been enhanced and as a result were: listening more to their children; had gained confidence; learned new parenting skills; developed more environmental awareness; developed more social and community awareness.

- iii. Early Years Scouting can have a significant impact on Home Learning Environment, reaching into homes and transforming the early family experiences of young children (and their siblings), maximizing the opportunity for Scouting to influence the longer-term outcomes of these young children.
- iv. Changes in Home Learning Environment reported are wide-ranging and demonstrate families engaging in a wider range of **family** activities, including more outdoor/physical activities, adventurous and risky play, and natural world activity.

These evaluation findings offer a great deal of insight into the experiences of young children, Young Leaders, Volunteer Drey leaders, Parent volunteers, and Scout Strategic Leads which provide an agenda for further reflections and actions. These are set out in the report under three categories:

- Firstly, the authors have identified what should be celebrated and further promoted as the Squirrels Programme continues to develop.
- Secondly, the authors have identified aspects of the Squirrels Programme which would benefit from further reflection and development.
- Thirdly, the authors have identified new and future initiatives arising from the experience of Squirrels to date which might be considered to further enhance the efficacy and impact of the roll out of Early Years Scouting.

Background to Early Years Scouting

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 piloted the concept, and in Summer 2021 committing to implement Early Years Scouting, the Scouts decided 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 was also understood that there were also opportunities 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 had been conceived and how it was due to be delivered.

The project aims were to obtain a greater understanding of:

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;**

Evaluation Approach

CREC¹ was commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the programme rollout. It undertook an evaluation which responded to the 4 key research focus areas (covering outcomes & process) to provide iterative real time development of the programme as well as to inform future roll out. Each research focus area was broken down into smaller research questions which data was collated and analysed against.

CREC's approach was underpinned by three key pillars:

1. A mixed-methods approach to evaluating the programme (over two years) combining different data collection methods and analytical techniques.
2. A strong element of stakeholder engagement and self-evaluation in order to generate rich information and help to maximise the learning possibilities for Scout stakeholders.
3. 'Real-time' evaluation with feedback loops and early results that informed the implementation of the programme as it unfolded.

The research design had two phases (Year 1 & Year 2) with interim reporting at mid-point to help inform revisions to roll-out strategy. Four work strands were set up in response to the four research focus areas. The four work strands, the research questions that guide them, and the research methods that inform them are set out below.

Work Strand 1: Efficacy of the Early Years Scouting Programme

The main aim of this work strand was to evaluate how far and in what ways the Early Years Scouting Programme develops young people (Squirrels) according to the Scout Theory of Change. This theoretical framework suggests that involvement in Scouting encourages children and young people to contribute more to their communities; enables them to become happier, more resilient citizens; and to learn and develop a range of skills for life. The outcomes for children are specified as:

- *Adventure*: physically active; healthier lifestyles, with courage to try new things
- *Skills for Life*: skills to succeed regardless of academic ability
- *Wellbeing*: happy, resilient and confident
- *Leadership*: responsible leaders and team players
- *Citizenship*: active citizens in society, locally, nationally and internationally
- *Connectedness*: strong friendships, with care, trust and respect for others from all backgrounds.

It is suggested that these outcomes are achieved by young Scouts actively participating in a range of activities in that encourage: **valuing** and living by the Scout promise; **participating** in

¹ www.crec.co.uk

a varied, balanced programme of fun, challenging activities, often outdoors; **learning by doing**, taking responsibility, making decisions and reflecting; and **achieving badges and awards**.

Gathering robust evidence to evaluate the efficacy of Early Years Scouting in achieving these outcomes for young children required this work strand to focus on **2 key research questions**:

1. How far, and in what ways, do children (Squirrels) participate in the range of activities offered by Young Scouting programme?
2. What is the impact and what are the outcomes for young children of this participation?

Gathering evidence to answer these research questions was achieved by **three, triangulated research strategies**:

- 1. Child Outcomes Assessment Tool:** A basic instrument for recording a range of child outcomes (relating to skills for life identified in Scouting Theory of Change) will be sent to a 20% sample of the Squirrel Dreys to be completed by the 4/5 year old's parent or Drey leader. (2 occurrences Y1/Y2)
- 2. Focus Groups:** A series of 12 focus groups- 6 with adults delivering the programme; and 6 with children representing a range of different Squirrel sections/Dreys. (Spread across Y1/Y2)
- 3. Survey:** Online survey with different sections for completion by all Squirrel Drey leaders/ volunteers, parents. (Repeated each year)

Work Strand 2: Efficacy of the Early Years Scouting Delivery Model

It is accepted by the Scouting Association that their existing provision does not always reach young people and communities that could benefit the most and that current demographics are skewed towards white, male, more affluent backgrounds. It is a key aim of Early Years Scouting to establish early years opportunities in communities they don't currently reach and also systemically change the demographics throughout all of the age groups. To further this aim three Key Performance Indicators were established:

1. **Volume:** 300 sections to be created in financial year 2021/22 (FY22) and 500 in FY23
2. **Socioeconomic Reach:** 30% of those sections to be located in post codes corresponding with the bottom three deciles of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 1-3). Additionally, identifying where possible, the IMD of the young people themselves, rather than just the location in which they take part.
3. **Ethnicity Reach:** 10% of participants to be from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background.

Gathering robust evidence to evaluate 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 requires this work strand to focus on **4 key research questions**:

1. What are the current delivery models of Early Years Scouting?
2. What is the reach of these delivery models according to their local demographics?
3. What is the demographics of the children participating in Squirrels sections?
4. What are the enablers and inhibitors to establishing a Squirrels section and increasing participation in these sections?

Gathering evidence to answer these research questions was achieved by **four, triangulated research strategies**:

- 1. Monitoring Data:** All active Squirrels were required to record and return basic data monitoring data via Online Scout Manager and the annual census (already set up to record attendance of children, ethnicity, religious beliefs, postcode, SEND, and previous links to Scouting). Additional questions were added to assess the economic status of Squirrels families to understand if more socio-economically disadvantaged groups were accessing the programme.
- 2. Focus Groups:** A series of 18 focus groups; 6 with volunteers delivering the programme; 6 with Young Leaders; and 6 with parents experiencing the programme, representing a range of Squirrels Sections. (Spread across Y1/Y2)
- 3. Survey:** Online survey with different sections for completion by all Squirrels Drey leaders, volunteers, young leaders, parents. (Repeated each year)
- 4. Interviews:** 12 In depth Interviews with Scouts Strategic leads/project leads. These interviews (online/ telephone) covered a set of semi-structured questions aimed to gather perceptions and evidence on the delivery and impact of the Young Scouting Programme. (Repeated Y1/Y2)

Work Strand 3: Efficacy of the Scouts in Supporting Young People to Take 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. It is suggested that Scouting can have a positive impact on society, enabling greater social cohesion, happy resilient citizens, more civic participation and improved social mobility. Following this, an important element of Early Years Scouting is that social action should form part of the Young Scouting experience and to this end the programme has two metrics related to this:

- 1. Social Action (4/5 year olds):** Every section undertakes a social action project annually

2. Social Action (14-17 year olds): Every section embeds a Young Leader (young person aged 14-17 who volunteers alongside adults to lead the section) in their section leadership team

Gathering robust evidence to evaluate the efficacy of the Early Years Scouting in supporting young children (Squirrels) and Young Leaders to take social action through participating in an annual social project (4/5 year olds); or supporting a Squirrels Section (14-17 year olds); or both, required this work strand to focus on **4 key research questions:**

1. What is the nature, focus and community reach of the social action projects undertaken in each Squirrels Section?
2. How far and in what ways are Young Leaders being used to lead the activities in the Squirrels programme, and in particular, the social action projects?
3. Who is involved in the social action projects, including 4/5 year olds and Scout volunteers?
4. What is the impact of the social action project on those involved and those it reaches?

Gathering evidence to answer these research questions was achieved by **three, triangulated research strategies** which also had the added value of providing Young Leaders with additional skills for leading and critically evaluating social action projects:

1. Collaborative Action Research: All Young Leaders and volunteers were invited to complete online community action research to enable them to gather evidence to complete a Social Action Evaluation Proforma. This contained open sections where the Young Leader was encouraged to take responsibility for gathering information about the focus of the social action, the activities undertaken, the participants involved, the reach into the community and the impact of the social action project. These online proformas were analysed to evaluate the efficacy of this strand of the Scouting Programme. (Y1 and Y2)

2. Focus Groups: A series of 12 focus groups: 6 with Young Leaders; and 6 with Volunteers representing range of Squirrel sections/Dreys leaders, volunteers. (Spread across Y1/Y2)

3. Young Leader Outcomes Assessment Tool: A basic instrument for recording a range of young leader outcomes (relating to skills for life identified in Scouting Theory of Change) was sent to all Dreys for completion by group leaders about the outcomes which the programme gave the Young Leaders opportunities to demonstrate (2 occurrences Y1 & Y2)

Work Strand 4: The Impact on Volunteers and Parents/Carers of Young People

The Scouting movement is a wonderful example of a volunteer led and supported social programme with a very large adult volunteer community who effectively lead the different sections. The Early Years Scouting Pilot Programme was innovative in its piloting of family led groups, and in all of the pilot models, the programme worked to involve parents more and provide activities that supported home learning as part of their weekly sessions. The pilot evaluation (Pascal et al, 2020) also revealed that Early Years Scouting was effective in recruiting new volunteers from communities that had never worked with Scouts or this age group before,

providing opportunities for Young Scout leaders to develop their skills and building social cohesion and community capacity through its volunteers. Building on this pioneering work, the Early Years Scouting Programme wanted to further evaluate the impact of participation in its Programme on volunteers and young leaders. It furthermore wanted to explore the impact of the Programme on the parents/carers of the young people who take part, and how it shapes the Home Learning Environment that they create for the child. Gathering robust evidence to evaluate the impact of participation in Early Years Scouting on volunteers, including Young Leaders, and the parents/carers of young people required this work strand to focus on **3 key research questions**:

1. What is the demographic profile of those who volunteer to support Early Years Scouting or become a Young Leader and what is their motivation for participation?
2. What is the nature of parent participation in Young Scouting?
3. What is the impact of participation on volunteers, Young Leaders, parents/carers and the home learning environment they create?

Gathering evidence to answer these research questions was achieved by **three, triangulated research strategies**:

1. Monitoring Data: All active Squirrels were required to record and return basic data monitoring data via Online Scout Manager and the annual census (already set up to record attendance of children, ethnicity, religious beliefs, postcode, SEND, and previous links to Scouting). Additional questions were added to assess the economic status of Squirrels families to understand if more socio-economically disadvantaged groups were accessing the programme.

2. Focus Groups: A series of 12 focus groups: 6 with parents and 6 with volunteers representing a range of different Squirrels Sections/Dreys. (Spread across Y1/Y2)

3. Survey: Online survey with different sections for completion by all Squirrels Drey leaders, volunteers and parents. (Repeated Y1/Y2)

A research methods matrix is provided in *Table 1* to demonstrate how the various research methods supported data collection across the four work strands:

	Research Requirements:	Monitoring Data	Online Focus Groups	Parent & Drey Leaders Questionnaire/survey	Collaborative Action Research (Online Training with Young leaders to complete a Social Action Evaluation	Online/telephone interviews	Squirrels Outcomes Assessment Tool
i	The efficacy of the Early Years Scouting programme in developing young people (Squirrels) according to the Scout Theory of Change		x	x			x
ii	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	x	x	x		x	
iii	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)		x		x		x
iv	The impact on volunteers and parents/carers of young people who take part, and the Home Learning Environment	x	x	x			

Table 1: Research Methods Matrix

CREC's approach to research and evaluation is values based and assumes that the participant, whether adult or child, has valid knowledge and capacity and a right to having their story heard. Our research is designed to ensure trustworthiness, authenticity, and practice relevance through an ethical and rights-based approach. Participant voice, inclusion, awareness of power and voice dynamics are as important to creating a robust, rigorous research framework as the choice of methodology and triangulation of methods. This approach is explained further in our [code of ethics](#).

All participants were asked to provide their informed consent which guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Data has been kept securely for the duration of the project in line with CREC's data protection and security policy. We have worked with The Scouts to raise awareness of the evaluation work being conducted with relevant partners and provided information sheets which were distributed to participants to ensure that there was awareness and understanding of the evaluation, its purpose and timescales throughout.

Data sources will be anonymised in the report and the following codes are used:

DLI= Drey Leader Interview

DLFG=Drey Leader Focus Group

SLI = Senior Lead Interview

PFG= Parent Focus Group

YLFG = Young Leader Focus Group CFG = Child (Squirrel) Focus Group

DLS = Drey Leader Survey PS = Parent Survey

Any number that follows the code is used to identify within a multiple data source.

Evaluation Findings

Workstrand 1: The efficacy of the Early Years Scouting programme in developing young people (Squirrels) according to the Scout Theory of Change

This work strand evaluated the efficacy of the Early Years Scouting Programme in developing young people (Squirrels) according to the Scout Theory of Change. The hypothesis is that these outcomes are achieved by young Scouts actively participating in a range of activities in that encourage **valuing** and living by the Scout promise; **participating** in a varied, balanced programme of fun, challenging activities, often outdoors; **learning by doing**, taking responsibility, making decisions and reflecting; and **achieving badges and awards**. The evidence gathered is set out below against 2 key research questions:

1. How far, and in what ways, do children (Squirrels) participate in the range of activities offered by Young Scouting programme?
2. What is the impact and what are the outcomes for young children of this participation?

1. How far, and in what ways, do children (Squirrels) participate in the range of activities offered by Young Scouting programme?

To answer this question, we firstly considered what the range and frequency of activities offered through Early Years Scouting were before then exploring the ways in which these activities developed the young people. Evidence from Drey Leader surveys provided insight into what Scouting activities were typically offered within Squirrels sessions (*Figure 1*).

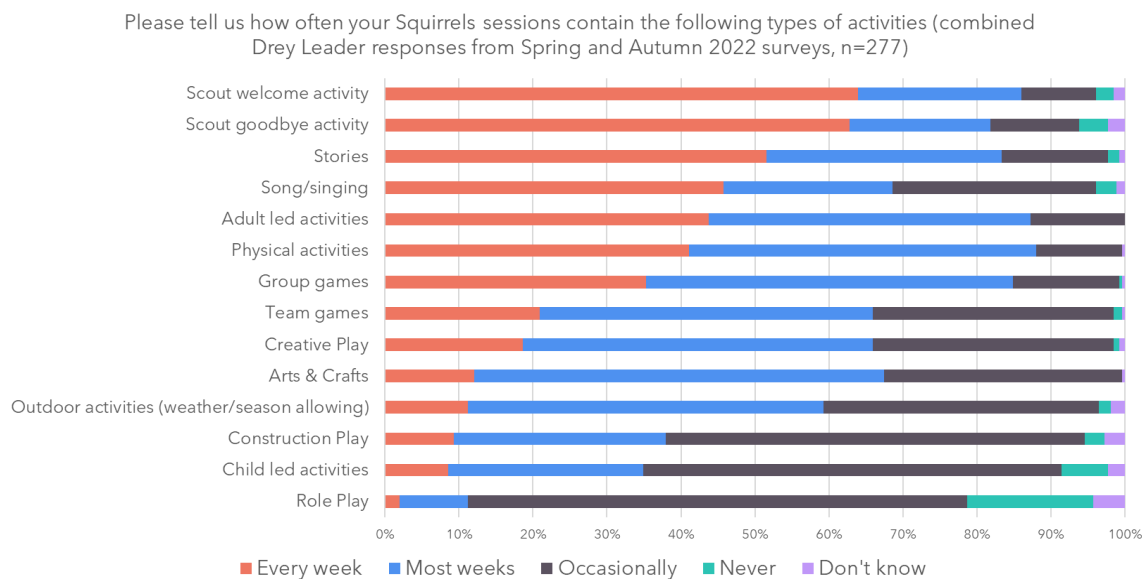


Fig 1: Frequency of defined activities offered in Squirrels sessions (Group Leader Survey responses)

The survey evidence indicated that a wide variety of activities and approaches offered most or all weeks across majority of Dreys; In addition to the Scout welcome/goodbye activities, stories, songs, physical activities and Team/group games were the most frequently experienced activities. Construction and role play were the two activities experienced least frequently with more than 50% of Squirrels only occasionally or even never experiencing these. Adult led activities were far more frequently experienced than child led activities – almost 90% of Squirrels experienced adult led activities most or all weeks whereas only 35% experienced child led activities to the same degree of frequency.

It should also be noted that the Squirrels programme has fidelity to a strong Scouting identity and most Squirrels sessions include **Scouting traditions and routines** as key parts of the programme.

It should be noted that this dataset includes 18 Family led and 1 Partner led response. When these are removed there is no discernible difference to the data – e.g. of the 7 Dreys that reported never doing the Scout Welcome activity, 6 of those were Scout led Dreys.

When we explored this further with Drey Leaders, and also Strategic Leads, they emphasised the value of the programme in offering more freedom, independence and outdoors adventures; it appears that in some cases a mismatch exists between the values that it is felt the programme offers, and the reality of programme delivery in some Dreys.

There's a debate about adult-led versus child-led and there's that 'everything looks the same' issue – differentiate, make it different, open, allow individual expression, child-led opportunities should be in there. But at first the less confident [Group leaders] need most control and we must help them work towards children's independence. (SLI)

Many [children] are too used to sitting in front of a screen or holding a device. We meet for just an hour and it passes so quickly. We'll go for a walk and it takes time. They want to look at everything. We have nearby Heathland and we went up there in the dark with torches – that kind of traditional Scouting stuff. They learnt to use scissors. These broader skills for life. (DSL)

Drey and Strategic Leaders also valued the programme community and social interaction experiences for the children, particularly post-Covid, and they believed particular aspects, e.g. storytelling approach within the programme, worked well.

Social interaction is the key, sparking that initial interest in Scouting at a very young age and then sustaining it. Having fun and socialising for this post-COVID generation. I see it in my own grandchildren that hesitancy to interact. They are so inquisitive at this age – you know it's never too early to be responsive – And I also see when we involve these Squirrels we also involve parents and they become interested in Scouting. (SLI)

The story framework is effective, I think. It gives a grounding, provides a hook for some, there's good access to the books, so developmentally I think it is spot on. (SLI)

Parents and children were also invited to share their perceptions of what activities the Squirrels programme typically included. It is interesting to note the differences between these participants' perspectives - Both parents and children had an informed perspective about what activities the Squirrels sessions offered and these differed from the Drey Leader Survey evidence.

Parents saw the key elements of the programme as providing the children with opportunities for being in the **natural world outdoors** and having more **freedom to have adventures** and try out **risky experiences** such as fire building, making dens and overnight camping. They were aware it was a different offer to school.

Where else do they get to enjoy making a fire? It's the adventures they love. (PFG1)

They like surprises and the magic of it all. So different to school where it is all structured curriculum and testing. (PFG1)

And let's get them away from screens, TV or phones or computers. There's so much they miss out from, nature and the outdoors. (PFG3)

Learn - if you never try you never know, explore and adventure, a mix of things they would never do, and certainly not at school. (PFG2)

Parents also appreciated that the programme gave the children more opportunities to **socialise** and to **engage with the local community**. They felt this was important post-Covid.

And they made sandwiches and they had talks about helping others and the Food Bank (the Beavers in the next room were helping with the foodbank that evening). (PFG1)

It's been different post-COVID. He needs to socialise in a different way than at school. (PFG2)

Children had a greater knowledge of the programme than their parents and enjoyed the wider variety of experiences it offered them; they understood how different it was to school and its more relaxed nature. The children particularly enjoyed the games that were part of the sessions and also the freedom to try more risky adventurous activities which they did outdoors such as camping, making fires, den building.

I like playing games – hiding people under the blanket and remembering who is missing and calling their name – I like that and playing 'duck, duck, goose'. (CFG1)

Lots of different things, mainly I like to go camping, make a fire, climb a mountain. (CFG2)

[I like] Making dens and making fires. (CFG4)

They also enjoyed the social and community opportunities the programme offered.

I learnt about Chinese people because I have a friend at school who is Chinese and we had Chinese week with a dragon. That was really interesting. (CFG1)

I make friends. (CFG4)

2. What is the impact and what are the outcomes for young children and Young Leaders of this participation?

Evidence on the impact and outcomes for young children and Young Leaders of participation in Squirrels session was evaluated using an innovative and bespoke designed assessment tool: The Squirrels Outcomes Assessment Tool. This assessed the children and young leaders' frequency of opportunity to develop selected areas of 'life skill' competence as they experienced participation in the Squirrels Programme over time. Its design was based on CREC's previous extensive experience of jointly assessing the development of life skills, dispositions and attitudes in early year's practitioners and their children in the 'Accounting Early for Lifelong Learning Project' (AcE Project 2013). AcE demonstrated that certain dispositions could be sustained and habituated through appropriate experiences. These life 'super skills', such as persistence, resilience, exploratory drive, curiosity, creativity, mastery orientation, 'can do/have a go', incremental precision, sociability, self-esteem, collaboration, etc.) have been shown to be important for fulfilment, success and achievement of both young children and adults alike.

To support the development of this tool, CREC also reviewed the Scouting evidence base to identify those development outcomes that The Scout Association particularly highlights as being important to its mission for children and young people. In consultation with the Squirrels Evaluation Steering Group, and with reference to the Scout Theory of Change (Table 3 below sets out how outcomes were mapped), we identified a further selection of outcomes which it was agreed would be appropriate and significant to assess in this evaluation. The tool addressed the potential for development of these same skills in both Young Leaders and the children within the Squirrels Programme.

Scouts Theory of Change: Outcomes of Children and Young People	Squirrels Assessment Instrument Outcome Domains
Adventure: physically active; healthier life styles, with courage to try new things	2b. Self Confidence
Skills for Life: skills to succeed regardless of academic ability	1a. Problem solving /Self organisation 1c. Communication/Language
Wellbeing: happy, resilient and confident	2a. Resilience
Leadership: responsible leaders and team players	1b. Leadership /Agency

Citizenship: active citizens in society, locally, nationally and internationally	3c. Responsibility
Connectedness: strong friendships, with care, trust and respect for others from all backgrounds.	2c. Sociability 3a. Belonging 3b. Trustworthiness

Table 2: Scout Theory of Change outcomes mapped against assessment tool outcomes

The three selected overarching Outcome Domains each have three Indicators, providing a cluster of 9 capabilities. These, as listed in Table 3 below, provide a robust and useable framework for a national comparison of agreed development outcomes for the Squirrels Scout Programme. An ‘Outcome Domain’ can be thought of as a category of competences that are associated with successful Scouting experiences. These Indicators, then, are a further sub-division of the Domains and identify more precisely the skills, knowledge, and/or attitudes which are required for competence in that area of development.

In summary, the Outcome Domains and Indicators set out below distinguish certain specific competencies which, if developed well by the Squirrels programme, will enhance social competence, successful participation in Scouting and facilitate later lifetime success.

1. Skills for life and Adventure	Being able to:
1a. Problem solving /Self organisation	Take advantage of new opportunities and make things happen
1b. Leadership /Agency	Plan and execute projects with others
1c. Communication/Language	Communicate ideas and intentions
2. Wellbeing	Being able to:
2a. Resilience	Deal with setbacks and manage own and others’ feelings
2b. Self confidence	Make decisions and articulate their ideas

2c. Sociability	Make friendships and work with others
3. Citizenship and Connectedness	Being able to:
3a. Belonging	Connect to, and operate as part of, the group
3b. Trustworthiness	Show reliability and dependability
3c. Responsibility	Show concern and care for others

Table 3: Outcomes Tool Domains

It is important to note that the evaluation evidence demonstrates not the LEVEL of development of these skills, but rather how regularly the programme allows a young person to experience opportunities that allow them to demonstrate these skills for life. This is an important distinction from other assessment scales which are developmentally sequenced according to a maturational perspective. Using these scales allows us to establish how participation in the Squirrels Programme encourages and establishes securely the identified life skills as in the repertoire of responses of both children and young leaders. In this way, they capture how far the professed outcomes of the Squirrels Programme are being successfully promoted in the children and young leaders who engage in the Programme.

Outcomes of participation in Squirrels for young children

Data collection was completed on two occasions with similar findings across both cohorts; combined cohort data is presented here numerically (Fig 2) and proportionally (Fig 3). The three areas of **Citizenship & Connectedness** are the skills where group leaders perceive opportunities for their demonstration are most frequently observed. Conversely, **1b. Leadership/Agency; 2a. Resilience; 2b. Self confidence; 1a. Problem solving/Self organisation** – are the skills where opportunities for their demonstration are least frequently observed. Interestingly, Drey Leaders perceive that more than 10% of Squirrels (126 of 1084) are never afforded opportunities to demonstrate **leadership** through the programme as delivered.

The frequency at which young children (n=1084) are given the opportunity to demonstrate certain skills at Squirrels - as perceived by Group Leaders (Combined cohorts data)

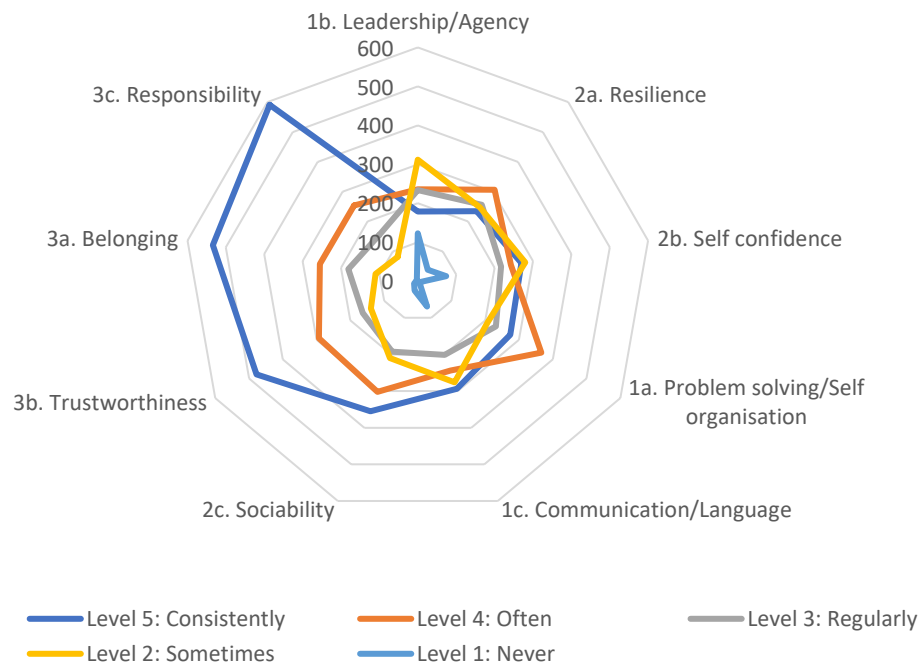


Figure 2: Outcomes Tool data – Squirrels – Combined Cohorts – Radar Diagram

In terms of ongoing refinement and development of the programme, it is perhaps worth considering those skills where a number of Squirrels are only *sometimes* or perhaps *never* given an opportunity to demonstrate (see Fig.3, the triangle to the right) – **Leadership, Self confidence** and (perhaps most surprisingly) **Communication and Language**. This may be related to some Drey Leaders’ lack of understanding of what opportunities for these skills might look like at this age and stage of development, and/or it may be that the programme being delivered at these Dreys does not give sufficient opportunity for child autonomy, choice and voice. Either, or indeed both, of these issues could be addressed by further Professional Development of the Drey Leaders.

The frequency at which young children are given the opportunity to demonstrate certain skills at Squirrels - as perceived by Group Leaders
(Combined cohorts data)

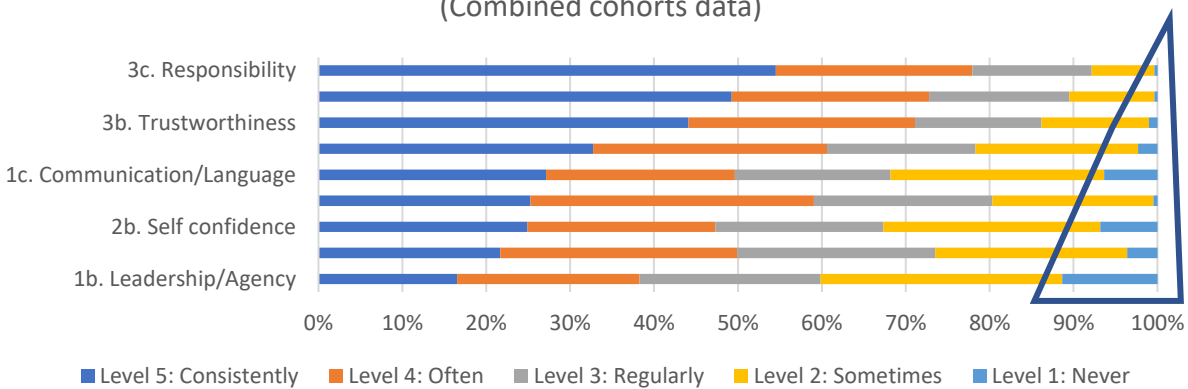


Figure 3: Outcomes Tool Data – Squirrels – Combined cohorts – Bar Chart

Outcomes of participation in Squirrels for Young Leaders

When the same tool was used to consider the impact of the programme on Young Leaders, again, similar findings were found across both cohorts considered. The data suggests that across **all 9 skills** the vast majority of Young Leaders are given opportunities ‘always’ or ‘Often’ to develop them. **Responsibility** is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most consistently supported skill according to Drey Leaders, with Belonging, Sociability and Trustworthiness also scoring highly - **Citizenship and Connectedness skills** is the therefore the identified *Skill for Life* demonstrated most consistently (see Fig 4)

The frequency at which Young Leaders are given the opportunity to demonstrate certain skills at Squirrels - as perceived by Group Leaders
(Combined cohorts data)



Figure 4: Outcomes Tool Data – Young Leaders – Combined cohorts – Radar Diagram

In terms of programme development, it is worth noting that for 1 in 10 YLs, they are not given an opportunity to demonstrate **self confidence** more frequently than ‘sometimes’ (Figure 5). Given the widespread concerns around mental health and wellbeing in children and adults, attention would be welcome here to explore how all YLs are afforded opportunities to demonstrate self confidence at least ‘regularly’ if not more frequently.

The frequency at which Young Leaders are given the opportunity to demonstrate certain skills at Squirrels - as perceived by Group Leaders (Combined cohorts data)

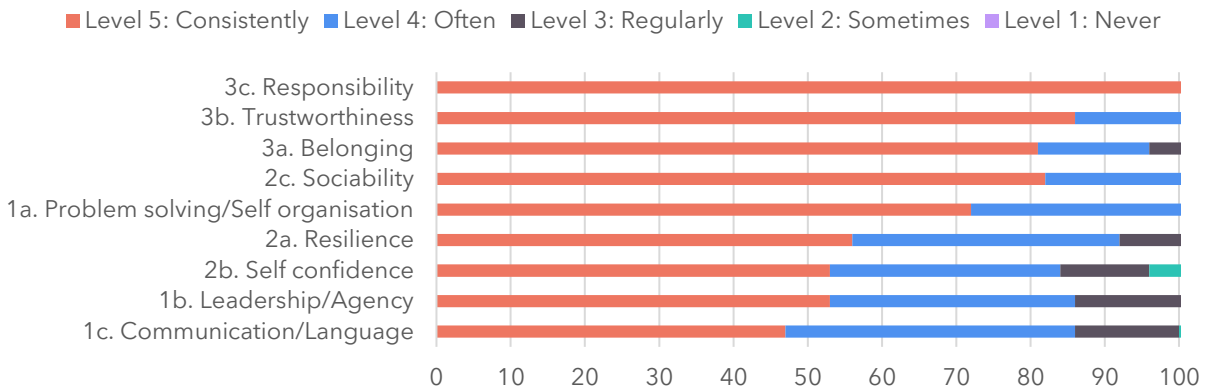


Figure 5: Outcomes Tool Data – Young Leaders – Combined cohorts – Bar Chart

Alongside the outcomes assessment tool, the evaluation also captured the perceptions of parents of Squirrels which provided supportive qualitative evidence about the perceived impact of participating in Squirrels on children. Parent surveys indicated a very positive perceived impact on their child of participating in the Squirrels Programme, as shown in Figure 6. Parents most strongly agreed that the programme made their child happy, allowed them to be part of a team, and try new things. In fact, across all areas the vast majority of parents either agreed or strongly agreed that the programme positively impacted their child.

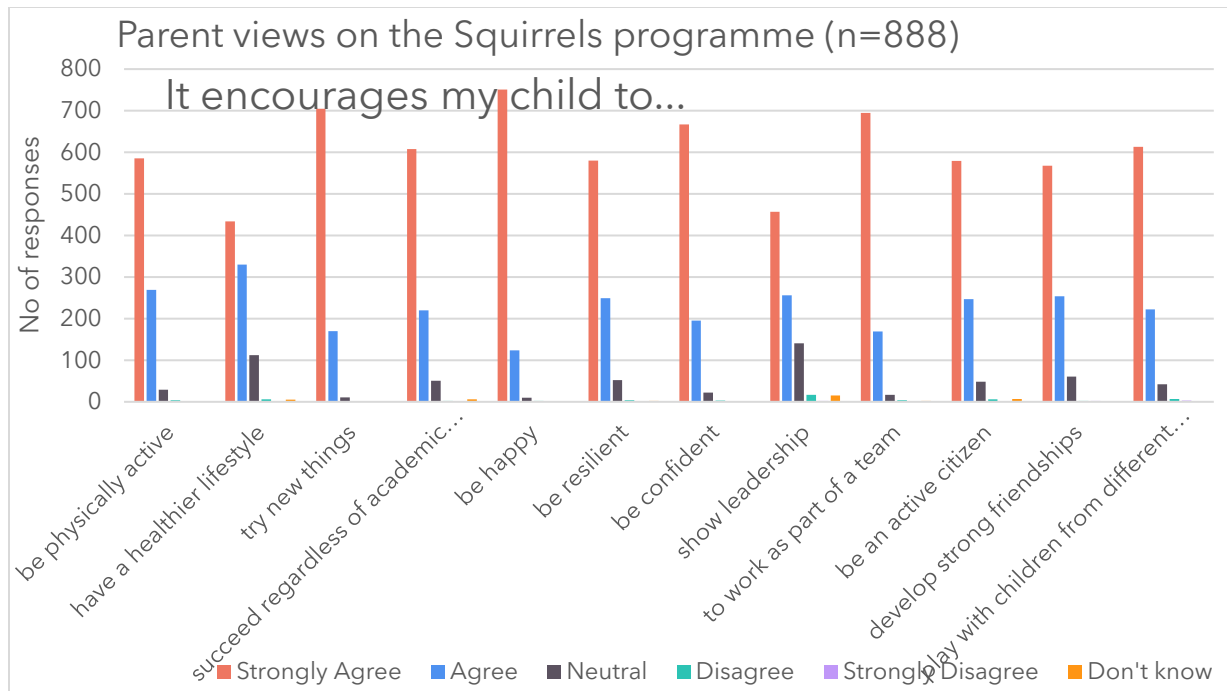


Figure 6: Parents views on impact of Squirrels programme on their child

The focus group data reinforced this survey data and also the positive impact evidence. The analysis shows that the strongest perceived outcome of the programme on their children was **enhanced confidence, independence and sociability**.

Mine's definitely more confident now – in fact he's a little leader coming out with ideas and enjoying these widening experiences and greater empathy and understanding for others. (PFG1)

I can see the skill transference, building up confidence about my child's ability to act on his own, have agency, make decisions. (PFG1)

Parents also acknowledged that their children had become more **socially connected and more community aware**.

We are raising post-COVID children – I see some [children] who are scared of other kids – Squirrels widens the interaction in a fun but secure way. (PFG1)

He's enjoying these widening experiences and greater empathy and understanding for others. (PFG1)

Well they're embedding social responsibility. Environmentally when they're out and even in Tesco helping packing for those who need it. We need more parents staying and taking a turn, giving it attention and learning with us, being involved. And when we go to the library too, being respectful there, learning and behaving in a different environments

and contexts. Self-management, discipline, turn taking, waiting and iteration...they are all part of interacting with others. (PFG4)

Parents could also point to evidence of **enhanced wellbeing**, with their children being happy, enthusiastic and engaged with the Scouting programme, enjoying the sessions enormously.

I believe as a parent that the Squirrels programme has encouraged the children to be happy. (PFG1)

We had a 'bravery chart' for our E. He had anxiety issues. We don't use it now. Now he just gets involved. (PFG2)

The views of parents were corroborated in our conversations with children who spoke frequently of happiness and friendship, and with Group and Strategic Leaders who also indicated that the strongest outcomes of the programme on the children was **enhanced confidence, independence and sociability**. It should be noted that the high value of this was acknowledged in a post-COVID world.

Well some are very silent when they come in, even lurking behind their Granddad's legs. The kid I'm thinking of is the life and soul now, outgoing, in the thick of it, has the confidence to be who he is. That's a very common pattern. The parents see it and talk about it. (SLI)

Their confidence grows. We had one girl who cried every time her Mum dropped her off. Now she mixes, shares, understands that you can lose and its ok, has resilience. It's made transfer to Beavers much more easily. (SLI)

The greatest impact is on their confidence especially when you think they are the post-COVID generation. They kept away from everyone except their family, so social interaction. So many children seem to be behind with their development. Squirrels makes a difference and brings them new skills like listening to each other, team work. Some children are not used to being read to. The sleep over gave them independence and agency, getting themselves dressed, cooking simply and so many other life skills. (SLI)

They can mix with children they don't know and they can be themselves and they are not rule bound or driven, and can have fun. Because of COVID as toddlers they didn't go to playgroups, didn't sing – all those early development skills they lost. (SLI)

Workstrand 1: Key Learning (Programme)

- i. 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.
- ii. Drey Leaders, parents and children reported that the programme was equally appropriate and working well for both boys and girls.
- iii. Parents and children felt the programme offered them different experiences to school and appreciated its more relaxed nature. Both parents and children highlighted the risky adventurous activities which they did outdoors such as camping, making fires, den building. They also enjoyed the social and community opportunities the programme offered.
- iv. The badge work was seen as an important element of the programme but needs further development and promotion as part of home learning as well as in Squirrels sessions.
- v. Outdoors and 'adventurous/riskier' activities were less commonly experienced by Squirrels even though this was perceived as a highlight of the Squirrels programme and a strong motivator for participation.

- vi. There is strong evidence that the programme encourages the Squirrels and Young Leaders to develop skills in **Citizenship and Connectedness** and **Sociability**.
- vii. Although less consistently giving Squirrels and Young leaders the opportunity to display **Wellbeing** outcomes, parents did feel their children were happier and more connected due to the programme.
- viii. Parents are incredibly positive about the programme and believe that it positively impacts their children particularly in relation to **enhanced confidence, independence and sociability**. They also acknowledge that their children had become more **socially connected and more community aware**. Parents could point to evidence of **enhanced wellbeing**, with their children being happy, enthusiastic and engaged with the Scouting programme, enjoying the sessions enormously.
- ix. Children spoke of **fun, happiness, playing and meeting new friends** when they spoke to us.

Workstrand 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

1. What are the current delivery models of Early Years Scouting?

During the 24 month period of this evaluation the Scouts have focussed on rolling out Early Years Scouting through the Scout-led model. Some of the Family-led and Partner-led Dreys, which were piloted alongside the Scout-led model in 2019/20, have continued to be trialled on a small scale through this period but a strategic decision was taken not to expand these models. According to the January 2023 census there were 860 Dreys of which the overwhelming majority were following the Scout-led model. Only a small number were family-led or Partner-led (<25).

Evidence from the focus groups and visits reveal that there is an appetite from those involved in both front line and strategic delivery of Early Years Scouting to have an openness to explore new and innovative delivery models for Squirrels in addition to the Scout led model, but believe any extension of delivery models should be carefully managed and evaluated.

Additional delivery models suggested to the evaluation team are:

School led models

We have possibilities of some based in Nurseries and Schools and have had interesting conversations with home schooling groups and I'd certainly like more time to pursue these leads. (SL1)

SEND focused models:

Some suggest a group catering especially for children with SEND. That's not yet in Squirrels but we are thinking about it. (SL1)

Peer supported models:

Should we look for new models? How about 'buddy' Dreys, linking start-ups with those established, or different models or religious affiliation. Some of that has already begun learning from each other, peer mentoring, should we formalise that? We are not always sure about HQ messages, the what and the when. Bottom up might work in some places rather better than top – down growth. The tool kit is extremely useful and the Cohort Coaches can be too. (SL1)

Multiple delivery models:

The future is all three of them. Look into the communities, grandparents, all the family all help in understanding the needs of young children in their community. I think the family led model is hugely beneficial to the whole community if it engages in that way. The Squirrels are seen as more exciting in many ways than other groups. We recently

celebrated Chinese New Year linking the Church Hall and the Scout Hut buildings – bringing communities together. (SLI3)

2. What is the reach of these delivery models according to their local demographics?

The evidence from the Scout census reveals that in the final term of the evaluation period:

- **10,586 squirrels were enrolled in 860 Dreys across 382 Scout Districts in Jan 2023**

This exceeds the overall target of 800 Dreys to be set up in this period – the interim data suggesting a relatively steady yet rapid rate of growth:

- 6002 squirrels enrolled across 247 Scout Districts by Spring 2022
- 3342 Squirrels enrolled across 150 Scout Districts (382 Dreys) by Autumn 2021

This growth trajectory reveals the huge demand and support for this section of Scouting. It indicates the huge success of the roll out programme and how it has been managed. It also bodes well for the long-term sustainability and further growth of Squirrels within The Scout Association.

Whilst not completely evenly spread across IMD deciles, the data on location of Dreys (Figure 7) does indicate some impact of targeting opening of new Dreys into low IMD postcode areas; 25% of Dreys operate from locations in IMD deciles 1-3 i.e. the 30% most deprived areas. This does not however entirely correlate with the IMD distribution of the squirrels themselves which will be covered below.

3. What are the demographics of the children participating in Squirrels sections?

The roll out of the Squirrels programme had targets to not only locate Dreys in less socio-economically advantaged communities (IMD deciles 1-3) but to reach a similar proportion (30%) of children from these communities – the reasonable hypothesis being that the location of the Drey would allow reach into that particular community. As of January 2023 (census data) 24% of Dreys are located in an IMD decile 1-3 which is a greater proportion than for Beavers, Cubs or Scouts (all 18%).

The data (figure 7) however reveals only 21% of Squirrels live in the lowest 30% (socio-economically) of post codes, and that, in fact, 60% of squirrels are from the 50% most economically advantaged postcode areas (albeit down from 66% in 2022 and 2021), indicating that success in reaching those living in economically disadvantaged communities continues to be limited. However, it should be noted that as the numbers of Squirrels and Dreys have increased in the last two years, the reach into poorer communities has slightly improved. It should also be noted that it is not possible to compare this scout-level data with older age groups as this scout-level post code data is not currently captured at census.

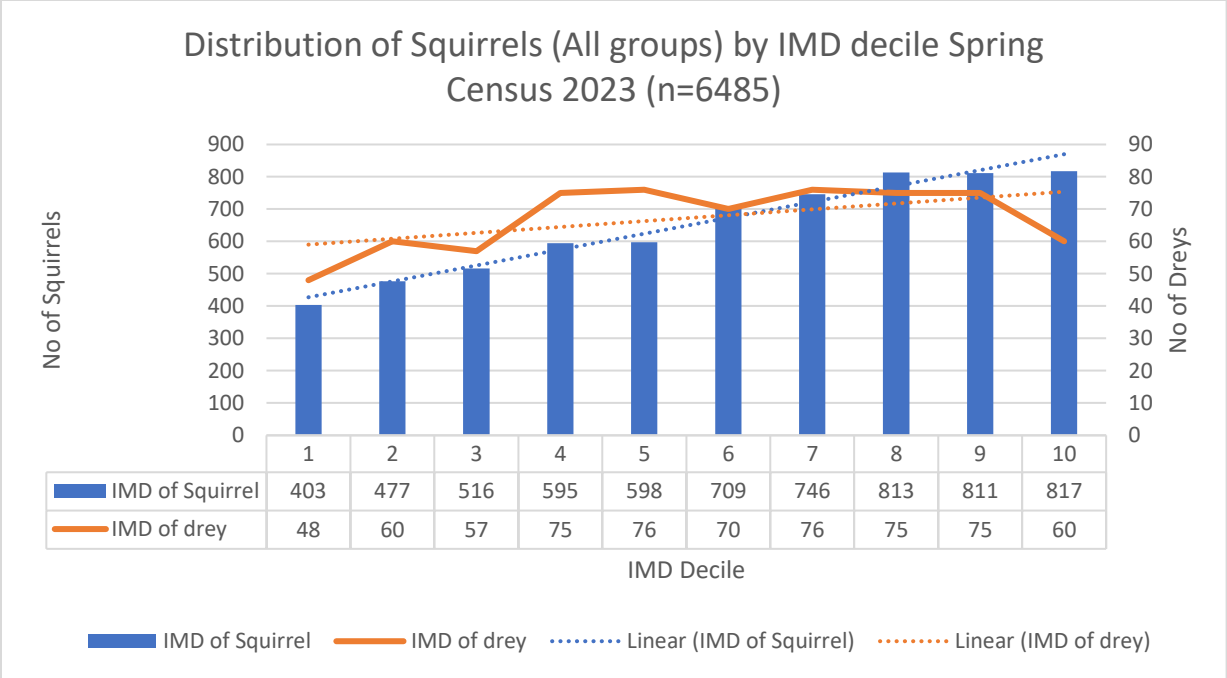


Figure 7: Distribution of Squirrels and Dreys by IMD decile (January 2023)

Whilst at the end of the initial roll-out period the socio-economic targets have not been fully met the sign for optimism is that the data seems to be starting to improve as the programme scales. If data from year 1 and year 2 is compared, the differential between Decile 1 and Decile 10 has reduced (+114% versus +363% 12 months previously). So, this may indicate that the distribution of Squirrels is levelling out a little, and this should be monitored. It should not however be ignored that there still remain twice as many children from the most affluent decile becoming Squirrels as compared to the least affluent decile.

Whilst the cohort sizes for other delivery models is not large enough to provide statistical significance, the far more even distribution of Squirrels and Dreys across IMD deciles in the family-led model (Fig. 8) is of interest and suggests it may be an effective delivery model to target the setting of Dreys in order to reach the least socio-economically advantaged communities, and therefore worthy of further exploration.

Distribution of Squirrels & Dreys (Family led groups) by IMD decile Spring Census 2023

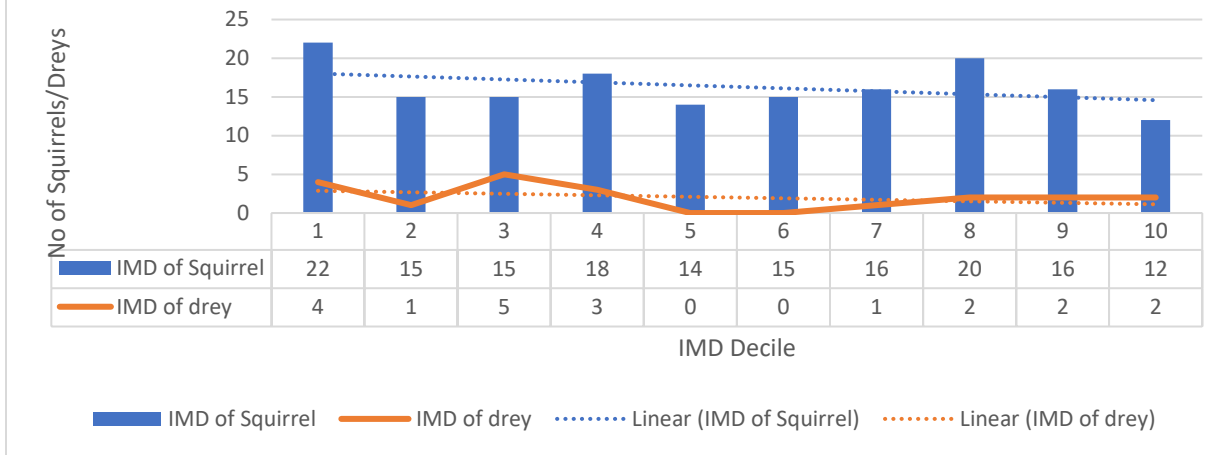


Figure 8: Family led model IMD data – Squirrels and Dreys (January 2023)

The roll-out also set itself the aim of being more ethnically diverse and more reflective of the wider community, with a target set for at least 10% of Squirrels to be from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background.

Figure 9 reveals that in 2023 participation by children with black and minority ethnicity (BAME) was 7.2%, meaning that the ethnic make-up of Squirrels is congruent with other Scout age groups which range between 7-8% BAME. It also demonstrates that ethnicity figures have remained relatively consistent since the initial Early Years pilot; more than 9 out of 10 (92.7%) of Squirrels continue to identify as White British despite the increasing numbers of Squirrels overall. For reference, when compared with national data sets, only 79% children in UK aged 5-17 identify as White British (ONS data 2020). This suggests that not only is it important that Squirrels continue to set and monitor ethnicity targets but that the targets are continually reviewed to ensure a suitable level of ambition.

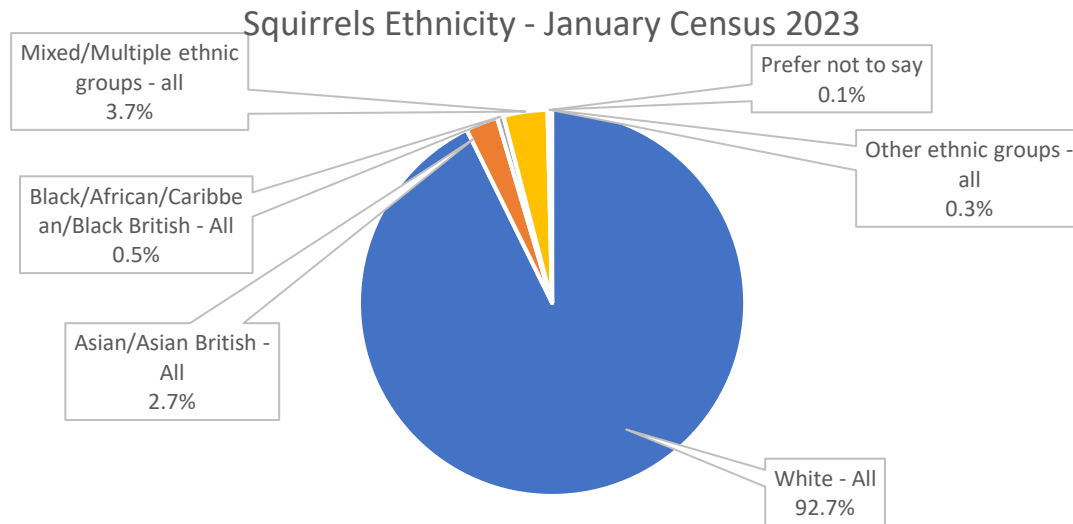


Figure 9: Ethnicity of Squirrels – January 2023

Squirrels' participation by gender

Whilst not explicitly targeted in the initial brief, the evaluation captured useful information regarding gender which it is felt pertinent to share within this section.

Early Years Scouting aims to be non-gender specific, attracting children of all gendered identities with an inclusive ambition. During the initial pilot 66% of Squirrels were boys however this proportion increased during the roll out period (Fig 10).

Gender of Squirrels 2023 (January Census)

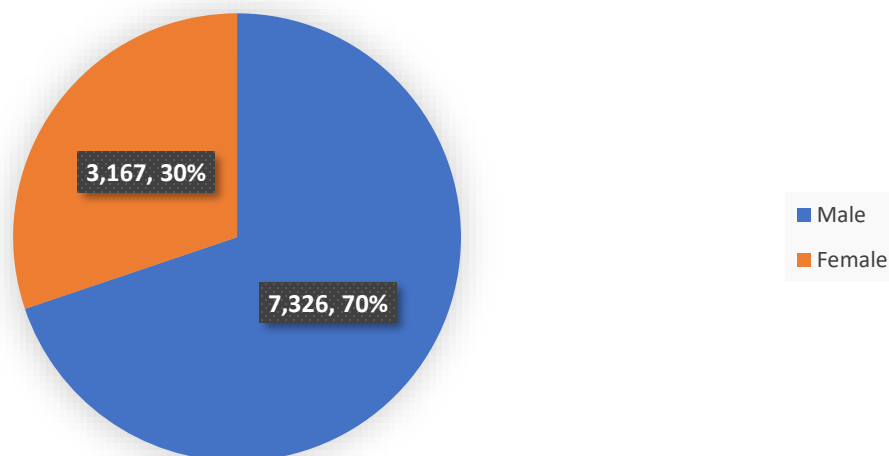


Figure 10: Squirrels participation by gender identity

The January 2023 data reveals the gender identity of Squirrels to be 70% boys/30% girls. This is identical to Spring 2022 data showing that, as the programme has scaled, it has done so without redressing the gender imbalance. This raises various questions about the appeal of the respective appeal of the programme to both girls and boys (or perhaps its appeal to parents of girls and boys). Following analysis of the interim data in 2022 the research tools were modified in 2023 in an attempt to gain greater insight to the question of gender appropriateness.

Parents (Fig 11ii) and Drey Leaders (11i) agreed in their views that the programme was as appropriate for girls as it was for boys, with the vast majority of both groups agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Appropriateness of programme for boys and girls – Drey leaders told us...

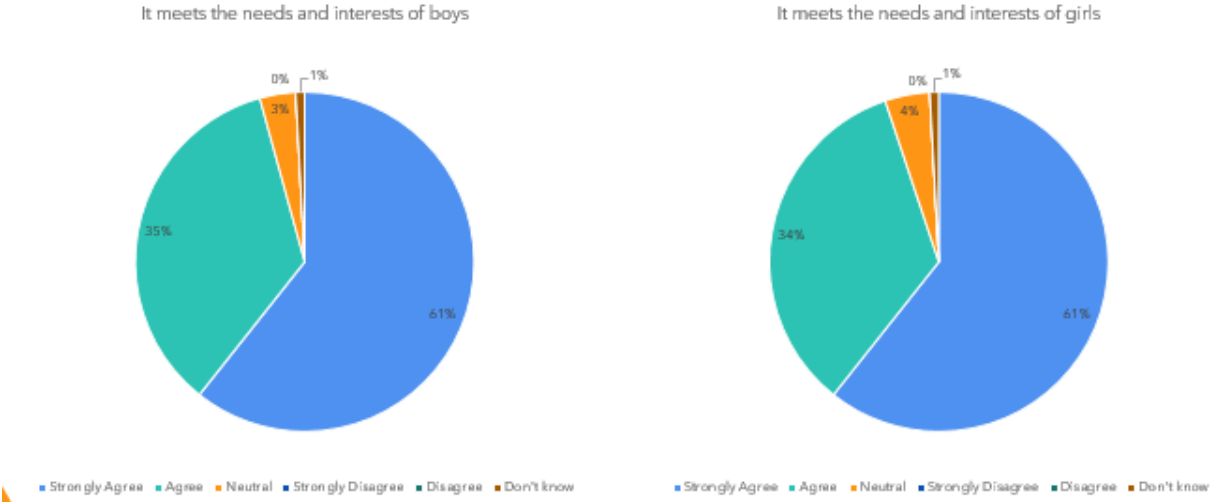


Figure 11i: Drey Leaders' views on appropriateness of Squirrels Programme by gender

Appropriateness of programme for boys and girls – Parents told us...

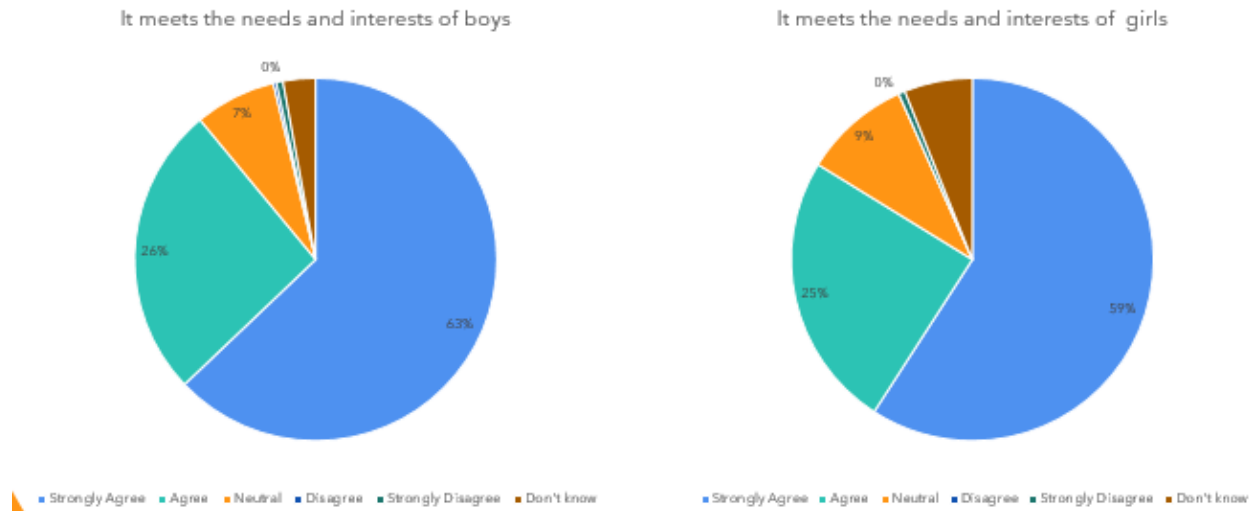


Figure 11ii: Parents' views on appropriateness of Squirrels Programme by gender

Strategic Leaders also acknowledged that boys currently predominate but feel Squirrels is more gender balanced than other Scout sections and improving, and that the Squirrels programme is gender neutral.

I'm rarely asked about it and it doesn't seem a big concern. Maybe there's a preconception that historically it's a boy thing – there's Rainbows for girls – but no it's not a big thing on my agenda. They are nearly all female Leaders and the children are mixed gender, monitoring data shows a higher proportion of girls in this Squirrel Section than the other sections. (SLI2)

There are definitely more girls in Squirrels than in any other section, but still boys predominate. But it's new and more attractive to both boys and girls at that age – and not so rooted in a 'Scouting for Boys' mentality. There are deep rooted traditional connotations in some communities about Boy Scouts. In reality there are not much activity clubs for children of that age group. There is still disparity in the numbers of boys and girls in Squirrels but it is more balanced than other sections. (SLI1)

4. What are the enablers and inhibitors to establishing a Squirrels section and increasing participation in these sections?

As the national roll-out of Squirrels progressed evidence was gathered from a range of participants about what enabled and what inhibited the establishment of a new Squirrels section and what strategies best encouraged participation by young children in these sections. Enablers and inhibitors to establishing new Dreys and increasing participation are set out below

and include those factors which relate to The Scouts directly (the organisation, the structure, its systems, the volunteers) and those that relate to the target communities that the roll out aimed to reach.

With regard to establishing new Dreys, the key role of support systems (cohort coaches and mentors, buddying) in enabling the roll out, especially to new start communities, was recognised by Drey leaders. Interestingly however there was little mention of the recently developed Scout guidance on extending reach (Further Reach) to BAME and low socio-economic groups.

The roll out seemed to be happening based on enthusiasm and capacity to proceed more than through a clearly, or solely, targeted approach; it was variously reported that the national roll out of Squirrels was generally taking place through existing Groups putting themselves forward rather than being targeted at new communities.

When these Dreys were then established, again lesser priority seemed to be given by Scout strategic leaders and local Scout leaders to targeting specific groups, especially where that Drey was not located in area of high deprivation or BAME at this time. The Dreys that had set up largely had no issue in recruiting and therefore the concept of targeting certain parts of the community was not evident. There was however an emerging realisation from some Drey leaders of the importance of foregrounding the value of supporting ALL communities to access Squirrels, not just where already established and the need to challenge questioning of this as legitimate.

It should be emphasised that all participants, from children and parents, to Drey and strategic leaders were incredibly supportive of Squirrels, what it was achieving and the potential it had. Participants identified a range of key enablers and inhibitors for increasing participation in Squirrels sections.

The top enablers/attractors for enhancing participation were:

1. Parents identified a clear distinction and contrast between what children experienced in Squirrels and at school. This attracted parents, but promotion and/or signposting by school was also acknowledged as a way they got to know about the programme.

They like the surprises and the magic of it all. So different to school where it is all structured curriculum and testing. (PFG1)

It's a less pressured environment than schools. There's space and time to explore, be adventurous. You don't have to be 'right' just do it and see. That ethos and that outlook creates a different space, not performance metrics. Ratios are smaller too in Squirrels than in school classrooms, you can pick up on the individual, better conversations. 'Think of something you really like, draw it and let's talk about it'. (SLI1)

... learning about different things to school and in a different way. (PFG1)

2. Parents were attracted by the concepts of social cohesion and connectivity and this was aided by the visibility of Squirrels in community

There are about 6 different schools represented here, making connections with others they haven't met, absorbing that, caring for others, the wider community, it's leading to citizenship- that's the direction travel anyway even at this young age. (PFG1)

Connections and connectivity – get out there into the community, link to local groups informally – a chat over coffee. They need to be comfortable as a volunteer, happy to give some of their time. So out and active in your local community, or find the person who is a community connector and engage them. That's the way forward. (SLI3)

3. The content of the programme and the range of activities offered was felt to be highly attractive: adventure, range of activities, badges, uniform

Where else do they get to enjoy making a fire. It's the adventures they love. (PFG1)

They are 4 years old but they can already see the journey through when they'll be able to light fires or camp over night, they aspire to that. She sees the route through – the life journey really. (PFG2)

Mine's obsessed with the badges and there is a good flow of badges. There's always something different to do. There's a framework and structure and always something else within reach. (PFG3)

The badges are hugely important, marks of real achievement. (PFG1)

Some groups have found they can get jumpers for £2 and they'll provide everyone with a red jumper and they claim they fit better. They are a real stand out, the scarlet colour has really been welcomed and it is easy to spot. And children like the Necker too, they are very proud of them and their Acorn award. That's a real key too and creates this shared identity. (SLINT1)

4. Word of mouth and social media were the key ways parents and group leaders identified as how and why children became Squirrels.

Most found out from Facebook local community site. (PFG3)

I heard about it by way of word of mouth through my children and through other parents. (PFG5)

Top inhibitors which limited participation by some families were that:

1. Even amongst parents who had brought their children to Squirrels, a range of myths and old-fashioned perceptions about Scouting persisted: religion and gender

We have to overcome the perception that [this Drey, based in a church hall] is all about religion. [This] doesn't play well in our Muslim communities but we are secular, we use the church rooms but as it is linked to the name of our group it can be a barrier for some.

I'm working on the name. But when we are out in the local park, highly visible in the local community in our scarlet, we get into starting conversations. (SLI4)

2. Some parents reported that the cost of subs and uniform could be challenging and some reported that it deterred other people in the community from attending. This was however an issue that leaders appeared acutely aware of.

We charge £32 a term. We had one parent with triplets who said it was too much money! We do make some adjustments, we have donations of old jumpers recycled and we buy their jumpers as group. We worry sometimes if we do things, will it set a precedent for others? We only insist on the 'necker' and jumper not anything else. There's no real expense compared to other extra curricula groups like football or ballet. The kit you have to have for them can be really costly, even swimming. (SLI5)

Our geographical area where our group are based is an area of deprivation, we attract high visibility in the area. We subsidise some parents and keep it affordable and accessible. The uniform can be very expensive for some particularly if you only use it for a year – £3.25 is also not realistic for some – we ask for a donation for second hand clothes, shoes etc and in the Mosque we ask for help. We have a visibility there. Costs for a term are £25 but we currently aren't paying the registration to Scouts, so it's £15 and includes insurance etc. We bring these exceptionally poor in – at that community level. (SLINT6)

3. Demand is currently outstripping supply and in many areas there are either waiting lists or simply no local groups to signpost to.

We are the only Squirrel section in our area and we were inundated with requests from day one. So, we have 14 plus a waiting list and they came mostly from Beavers waiting list and our website. Throughout the District we are turning them away – lack of volunteers or suitable space. (DLFG1)

We could fill another Drey, easily. There's a lot of unmet demand. (DLFG1)

- i. Recruitment and participation in Squirrels are healthy and growing rapidly.
- ii. Whilst the dreys are spread fairly evenly across the 10 IMD deciles, 60% of squirrels continue to come from the 50% most affluent postcode areas (this has reduced from 66% in 2022),
- iii. Gender imbalance has remained consistent between 2022-2023: 70% of Squirrels are now boys (up from 66% boys in Autumn 2021),
- iv. More than 9 out of 10 Squirrels are still White British, with all other ethnicity groups under represented.
- v. Roll out has been supported at regional level but new Dreys have been opened to serve existing areas rather than targeting new communities.
- vi. Where dreys have set up, the support has been very valuable, and the offer sells itself.
- vii. There is some evidence of continuing 'myths' and costs which might be preventing some target communities to fully engage.
- viii. Experience of effective recruitment strategies could be used more strategically in areas where participation is harder to achieve.
- ix. There are some very successful community Dreys in targeted communities which deserve follow up and some further deep dive case study work to capture learning about how to establish and recruit children from target populations.

Workstrand 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)

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. It is suggested that Scouting can have a positive impact on society, enabling greater social cohesion, happy resilient citizens, more civic participation and improved social mobility. Following this, an important element of Early Years Scouting is that social action should form part of the Young Scouting experience and to this end the programme has two metrics related to this:

1. **Social Action (4/5 year olds):** Every section undertakes a social action project annually
2. **Social Action (14-17 year olds):** Every section embeds a Young Leader (young person aged 14-17 who volunteers alongside adults to lead the section) in their section leadership team

This makes social action a key element of the Squirrels programme and a central aspect of its activity and impact. Given this focus, the evaluation gathered evidence on the efficacy of the Squirrels programme 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).

It was noted in this evaluation that #iwill and Dartington Service Design Lab suggest that Social Action has a double benefit:

1. Benefits for Young Leaders and Squirrels
2. Community benefits

They also suggest that benefits for Young Leaders and Squirrels can be viewed in three dimensions:

- Social-emotional
- Education and employment
- Skills for life

Additionally, benefits for community can be viewed in these dimensions:

- Direct benefit e.g. improvement in local lives, infrastructure and environment
- Reflexive benefit e.g. feeling lives improved, develop social action habit
- Organisational benefit e.g. Scouts gain better profile, more community involvement

These suggestions have been incorporated into this element of the Squirrels Programme evaluation.

1. What is the nature, focus and community reach of the social action projects undertaken in each Squirrels section?

From the first round of data collection we learned that a wide range of social action projects were led by Young Leaders, mostly focused on the local community, and environmental improvement projects were also popular.

The second round of data collection reinforced the growing civic value of the Squirrels social action projects with greater focus over recent months on projects that addressed inequality and social need in local communities. Examples included: Donations to local charities supporting issues of poverty; and Supporting Local Community Action e.g. visiting care homes, supporting food banks and homeless and more community activity with emphasis on Squirrels playing a part and being visible in local community events and activities. In short, the data suggests that Dreys have become more outward looking and aware of their social contribution as they've become more established. Developing lifelong habits of, and leadership skills in, participation in community action and promoting the value of this work for Young Leaders and Squirrels are priority aims which are being successfully realised.

The **broad nature, focus and community reach** of the social action projects undertaken in Squirrel Dreys are illustrated below:

Donations to local charities supporting issues of poverty

The Food Bank we now call the 'Youth Bath'. They make up trollies in the Community kitchen, the Young Leaders sometimes sorting donations, sometimes, shelving and stacking, serving – the YLs do all that. We get large bags or sacks, and they sometimes are unpacking repacking into portion size. Donations come in from Tesco, for example, on Saturdays. The YL's do the stock take, date them. They have objectives and targets, forms, and tick boxes. That group are really organised – it's really growing them. (SLI)

The Squirrels made and decorated Christmas cards and bags, which were then filled with essentials, and given to Shelter at Christmas. (YLFG)

Donating to the local Sainsbury's food bank collection point. (YLFG)

Supporting local community action

We all went to the local sheltered accommodation – I helped arrange that with my Leader. (YLFG)

This year and last year we were involved with Shelter and making Christmas cards and gifts. I got my Young Leaders badge through my Squirrel involvement. We looked at homelessness – helped them understand the wider world away from their own circumstances. We don't get controversial, just helpful. We get them to help, show it is important to make the effort. (YLFG)

Well there are badges designed to encourage Community action, empowering social action, we do litter pick and help Foodbanks. A mother said to me 'he's still talking about it', weeks later. We visit Care Homes and they love us, all those kinds of things, the joy of supporting others. (SLI)

Enhancing community cohesion and inclusion

Learning sign language to help communicate with people within our community. (YLFG)

We got a visit from a Therapy Dog company to help teach the squirrels about going out of their way to help others. (YLFG)

Environmental Improvement

We did planting daffodils [sic] - they are biennials, so you need to plant twice [sic]. We are operating temporarily out of a school. We didn't have a flag so we made our own water -proof one and we've done litter picks too. The Beavers turn up sometimes too and we join up. I'm involved in different groups. (YLFG)

We did a litter pick 2 weeks ago. Every month we do something in the community. The last one was a Fire Station visit. It really got them involved. We talked about the effects of litter in the environment, the dangers to animals and that. We try to help the community as much as we can, it is important that they learn what impact we humans can have on the environment – so to take care of it, and respect other's property. We decided on our rules, they were really involved. (YLFG)

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

Supporting Squirrels activities during sessions

We support activities with the young Squirrels during Squirrels sessions. (YLFG)

I lead activities and games during sessions and outside on trips during holidays. (YLFG)

The aims of the Social Action Projects identified by Young Leaders included a range of ambitions, most frequently:

Supporting the local community

It's a simple way for the Squirrels to make an impact and understand how they can help others, hopefully the items we donated have helped some families get the food they need! (YLFG)

To show to people who can't hear that they can speak to younger people and not have nobody to talk to. (YLFG)

Enhancing environmental awareness in Squirrels and Young Leaders

I have chosen this project to hopefully introduce the children to the beauties of nature and how our world works. This is also as an eco-project to reflect my jamboree unit and our efforts to protect nature. (YLFG)

We chose this as it was a good way to get the squirrels outside while also helping the environment by clearing the forest behind our scout hut. (YLFG)

Developing YLs leadership learning from taking responsibility for the projects

I chose this as it will benefit me when I become a leader as I will know what to do and have a wider games knowledge. (YLFG)

I chose this project because I like running activities and I like helping the Squirrels to learn new skills. I hope to achieve a stronger sense of leadership which will help me later on in life. (YLFG)

2. How far and in what ways are Young Leaders being used to lead the activities in the Squirrels programme, and in particular, the social action projects?

The evaluation explored the motivations of Young Leaders (YL) to become involved in the Squirrels Programme and also what role they were fulfilling within the Squirrels programme and sessions. The Young Leaders Focus Group evidence reveals a range of motivations for working with the Squirrels. In particular they expressed **personal satisfaction and reward** from their volunteering, and also that they are strongly motivated by a desire to make a social contribution and to 'give something back' to the organisation or community they have benefited from.

I've been involved in Scouts that long I just wanted to give something back. (YLFG)

Why Squirrels? Well, I went all the way through Scouting and if I could give one child that start – the way it changed my values – then that makes it worth it to me. (YLFG)

Some Young Leaders really enjoy observing and playing a part in the development of these younger children – they can see they make a difference and enjoy being part of that, one Young leader light-heartedly referred to herself as 'an *Influencer!*'

It gives you a chance to be an influencer! Even YLs are influencers in the Squirrel world. They see you as grown-ups. (YLFG)

I get real satisfaction in supporting those children's development – sometimes you help a Squirrel or correct something they're doing wrong and you never see them make that mistake again – you know that you helped their development when you notice that. (YLFG)

You can see the difference you are making. My nickname was passed on by my driving instructor. They just loved calling me that and you realise how influential you are, how influenced they are – they're adorable. (YLFG)

There is also some evidence that Scout Awards and Duke of Edinburgh Award schemes for volunteering can motivate and prepare YLs for undertaking their volunteering role.

I did my Beaver's experience originally for my Gold award. I just enjoyed the experience of working with these young ones. (YLFG)

I'm doing it for my Bronze for volunteering. Quite fun to be part of a start-up, a new venture. (YLFG)

I'm doing my Duke of Edinburgh, and this is what I chose, and it fits into that and I also feel I'm giving something back. But I won't start until January. (YLFG)

A few Young Leaders were part of the Hedgehog pilots (name of Squirrels during pilot phase) or have worked in other age groups and have extended their involvement.

I was part of original Hedgehogs' pilot early on and thought it would be cool to be part of a new thing. They see you as role model, look up to you with respect. (YLFG)

I was part of the pilot of Hedgehogs. They asked me, could I help out and I really enjoyed it. It's a really good experience working with these young children. I've been with Beavers already and I did work experience in school. (YLFG)

Some Young Leaders indicate that they believe it is easier to work with this younger age phase.

I thought it would be easier to work with younger children. I was more confident I'd be able to work with them. I enjoy it. They're calmer [than older age groups]...They are just at a stage of becoming themselves, finding out who they are. (YLFG)

With regards to the role that Young Leaders play in the course of a regular Squirrels session, the evidence suggests that for most, it is to:

- support the leaders in organising the small group activities

We have a pretend camp fire and sit round that together and do our Promise. We have a range of small group activities and they go off and then we gather them again at the end. (YLFG)

- support the young Squirrels in participating

I support the Leaders particularly with the art and craft stuff – just get involved where needed, support, talk and help. We have a boy with Downs’ Syndrome so I spend time helping him. Generally, I’m a bit of a shepherd, I suppose and packing things away at the end. (YLFG)

- helping in greeting and leaving rituals.

I meet them at the door and say ‘Hello’. We have a board with their name on and they pick it out and stick it on an attendance board so we know who’s turned up.. (YLFG)

These are all either supportive or pre-defined roles suggestive of being an ‘extra pair of hands’ rather than leading. It must however be noted that most Dreys are recently established and all volunteers will be learning the programme and what works well. It is therefore encouraging to see in the most recent data more examples of Young Leaders being more involved in planning activities suggesting that in some Dreys the role is developing as they become more established and their leadership role within the Squirrels sessions is now being realised.

I’ve done a few planning meetings with Leaders – we’ll be in charge of games and I’ve got to come up with some. Start with a game and then see how we can link it to the activity. (YLFG)

As Young Leaders we run the session every few weeks entirely – the adults are there watching but we have the responsibility, so 2 months ago, I did cycling. We have a unifying theme, we start with games and activities, I did Animals and we made bird feeders and included songs and poems, I got them to draw their favourite animal and we talked about extinction and that. We split it up between us. So, when there’s a YL session (there’s 2 of us) we plan and run it with the adult in the background. I really enjoy them and I’ve done two. You need to think, ‘What did I enjoy when I was their age?’ It’s been really good to develop my leadership skills. (YLFG)

The evaluation also evidences Young Leaders’ key role in Social Action Projects. The majority of Young Leaders could identify that they had played a key **leadership role** in the social action projects, **instigating** the project, planning and preparing for it, and then **leading** the Squirrels in their social action activity. There is however a range of competencies and levels of experience within the group as others suggested that they played a more **supportive role** in helping the young Squirrels engage with the social action activity.

I liaised with local business, organised resources and organised squirrels. (YLFG)

I was involved in idea creation and the attempt to make relationships with businesses and community groups so I can create an interesting and enjoyable experience for the young people. (YLFG)

I know a high level of sign language so I taught and organised the session with the help of another Young Leader and gathered resources to help us. (YLFG)

I took a group out litter picking with the assistance of another leader and some parent helpers and explained why recycling is important and that littering is harmful to the environment and wildlife that lives in it. (YLFG)

3. Who is involved in the social action projects, including 4/5 year olds and Scout volunteers?

Both rounds of data collection (year 1 and 2) indicate that the Social Action Project has been a **key focus of Squirrels activity** in all the Dreys who submitted evidence. Furthermore, in all cases the Social Action Projects have **involved ALL members** of the Squirrels Drey, including Squirrels, Drey Leaders and other Young Leaders in the action, and, as reported above, young Leaders have played a key role in **encouraging the involvement** of all members of the Squirrels Drey in the Social Action Project.

Everyone in the Squirrels Drey was involved- the Squirrels, the Young Leaders and the Group. Leaders all took part in or helped with running the activity. (YLFG)

The Squirrels walked to Sainsbury's carrying their tins and put them in the collection bin. The Leaders organised the meeting, informing parents what their Squirrels needed and co-ordinating with Sainsbury's so someone could explain to the Squirrels what the food bank is all about. Another Young leader and I helped with the safety of the group, leading the squirrels across roads safely etc., but more importantly we were able to answer their questions and help them to understand why some people might need help from food banks. (YLFG)

Everyone is involved - other Young Leaders support me and I support them and then our Leaders support all of us so that our Squirrels get the best out of their meetings. (YLFG)

Many Young Leaders had also successfully achieved wider community participation in their Social Action Projects, including local community groups, local businesses, local charities and local artists and now this was very evident in the aims and actions of the Social Action Projects. Some Young Leaders had successfully engaged parents and the wider families of Squirrels in the Social Action Projects. In these ways it is clear that, as considered above, there a clear double benefit of the Social Action projects for not only the Squirrels and Young Leaders, but for the wider community as well.

The local community group was involved and they helped to show us the area a bit better, where we can and cannot go. (YLFG)

Community Groups have played a big part in our Social Action Project by shelling out and leading some activities and letting us use their ground to run bigger activities that need a lot of space. (YLFG)

It involved a local charity; Shelter, as they were receiving the bags and cards. (YLFG)

The supermarket helped accommodate all the Squirrels' donations and had someone help us. (YLFG)

Parents/carers of the Squirrels bought items to be donated. (YLFG)

4. What is the impact of the social action project on those involved and those it reaches?

There is strong evidence then that a double benefit is being felt and that the social action projects have had a significant impact on those involved, especially the Young Leaders, the Squirrels and the local community, indicating the social value of this element of the Squirrels Programme.

Impact on Young Leaders

Young Leaders felt that leading the Social Action Project has had a **positive impact on** themselves and felt their **Leadership Skills** and their **Skills for Life and Adventure** had been enhanced by their Social Action Project. They could identify for themselves enhanced Resilience, Self Confidence and Sociability with a wider age range within their communities, from the old to the young.

I have learnt to be resilient as a Young Leader, working through challenges that comes with working with squirrels. I have also learnt organisational skills – I arranged a visit for the group to a care home. I had to ring them up and organise it. The [residents] really enjoyed having the visit as many don't see their family. The Squirrels had fun and I was really proud of what we did and how happy everyone was. I'd never organised anything like that before. (YLFG)

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

It helps with my public speaking skills. I've a tendency to gabble, speak to fast. I stop and give instructions clearly and simply, or read a story with proper emphasis, slowly with clarity in the telling and make it interactive to involve them. (YLFG)

Some Young Leaders identified that their sense of **Citizenship and Connectedness** had been enhanced through their Social Action Project while for others, their wellbeing had been enhanced.

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. (YLFG)

I have a feeling of belonging in the community. (YLFG)

And I learn to control my own emotions and present 'happy and enthusiastic'. (YLFG)

I started a long time ago and I remember I was very nervous to begin and my other YL wasn't particularly welcoming. I had to learn to be more confident and there was a lot of learning online during COVID. In some ways it was easier then to put myself out there. I was worried about what they'd think of me – self-conscious, but I'm so really happy now and at ease. (YLFG)

Impact on Squirrels

For the Squirrels themselves, the evidence from Young Leaders and parents suggested that their participation in the Social Action Projects has had a positive impact on all three aspects of development (considered in this evaluation)

In particular, it was strongly believed that Squirrels' sense of Citizenship and Connectedness has been enhanced through the extended Social Action Projects. It was felt that the focus of the Social Action projects had been successful in showing Squirrels the value of supporting social and community cohesion and caring for the environment in a practical, hands-on, and engaging way.

The young Squirrels learnt about homelessness and were able to do something really kind for other people in their community to help them at Christmas, having a lot of fun at the same time! (YLFG)

Understanding that correctly throwing away your rubbish is better for the environment. (YLFG)

It helped them to understand their own privilege to a degree, and it developed their empathy skills and they now know of an easy way to make an impact and really help someone. (YLFG)

Well they're embedding social responsibility. Environmentally when they're out and even in Tesco helping packing for those who need it. And when we go to the library too, being respectful there, learning and behaving in a different environments and contexts. Self-management, discipline, turn taking, waiting and iteration...they are all part of interacting with others. (PFG)

Young Leaders and parents could also identify that Squirrel's **Skills for Life and Adventure** and **Wellbeing** had been enhanced by their participation.

They learned valuable life skills and that they should listen to everyone not just the leader. (YLFG)

They were so happy doing activities. (YLFG)

Impact on Local Community

Scout Strategic, Drey and Young Leaders felt that Social Action Projects have had a **positive impact** on their local community and could identify several ways in which the local community had benefited. The primary benefits identified were an enhanced sense of **citizenship and social cohesion** and greater **community well being** created through the Social Action Projects, providing evidence of 'Reflexive benefits' of the social action.

And I hope that the public seeing the Squirrels donate their items inspired them to do something to make a difference, if the Squirrels can do it so can the rest of the community. (DLFG)

They have been able to feel like they are together in one big community including the scouting services. (YLFG)

People in the deaf community no longer have to feel left out on conversations because they might not be understood. (YLFG)

All the food we donated has gone to families around our town so I feel we've made a real difference. (DLFG)

This is important work for our community, collectively as a community offering something back. (YLFG)

The Young Leaders could identify **environmental improvements** as direct outcomes of their Social Action which demonstrates '**Direct benefits**' of the social action.

Brightens up the town and brings joy to passers-by. (YLFG)

Clearing the local area of litter therefore making a cleaner place for everyone. (YLFG)

The Drey and Young Leaders also acknowledged '**Organisational benefits**' for the Scout Association in the Squirrel's **enhanced visibility and status** within the local community.

We have a carnival in our town. Everyone takes part. This year was the first time we took the Squirrels and it was great to have them at the very front leading the parade. We walked through the streets with everyone watching and clapping. I was really proud of

them and they were proud too, the fact they are part of Scouting. They'll do it again as they get older- a tradition and a visibility and presence in our community. (YLFG)

Going into the community especially as a group they get to be part of the wider village community but also belonging and having identity in our group of Squirrels at the same time. They are located and have an identity in the community. (YLFG)

NB: Five Exemplar Case Studies of Young Leader's Social Action Projects are provided in Appendix 1.

Workstrand 3: Key Learning

- i. A key aim of Early Years Scouting programme (as identified in the Scout Theory of Change) is that Scouting should make a positive difference in society and this is being demonstrated through the Young leaders' Social Action Projects.
- ii. The Social Action Projects have been successful for all those who responded to the survey, and positive lessons could be identified for Scouting, including the positive organisational profile gained in communities from these projects.
- iii. The Young Leaders learned the importance of making the social action participatory and active, involving Squirrels in team work and making it fun, but some need support in engaging these younger children.
- iv. It was felt that the focus of the Social Action projects had been successful in showing Squirrels the value of supporting social and community cohesion and caring for the environment and embedding a social and community care ethos within young children.
- v. Young Leaders felt the focus and nature of the Social Action Projects had been pitched well for this younger age phase of Scouting. They were also actively contributing to real world social and community needs including food poverty, environmental degradation, and social isolation.
- vi. Squirrels and The Scouts have learned that through social action they can make a real and positive difference to people's lives and the sustainability agenda.

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

1. What is the demographic profile of those who volunteer to support Early Years Scouting or become a Young Leader and what is their motivation for participation?

The Squirrel section is largely run by a wide group of volunteers with different roles within the Squirrels Programme and its ongoing success is dependent on the unpaid contributions of these individuals. According to the January 2023 census there are 3192 volunteers working across 860 Dreys, comprising:

1724 Leaders & Assistant Leaders
736 Section Assistants
732 Young Leaders

It should be noted that for this section (4.1) we have considered two key types of volunteer in depth:

1. Drey Leaders
2. Young Leaders

Further consideration of parent volunteers (generally classified as section assistants) is considered in section 4.2 as one part of parent participation. As can be seen in Fig 12 the vast majority of Drey leaders are supported by other adult volunteers with the majority being support by 5 or more.

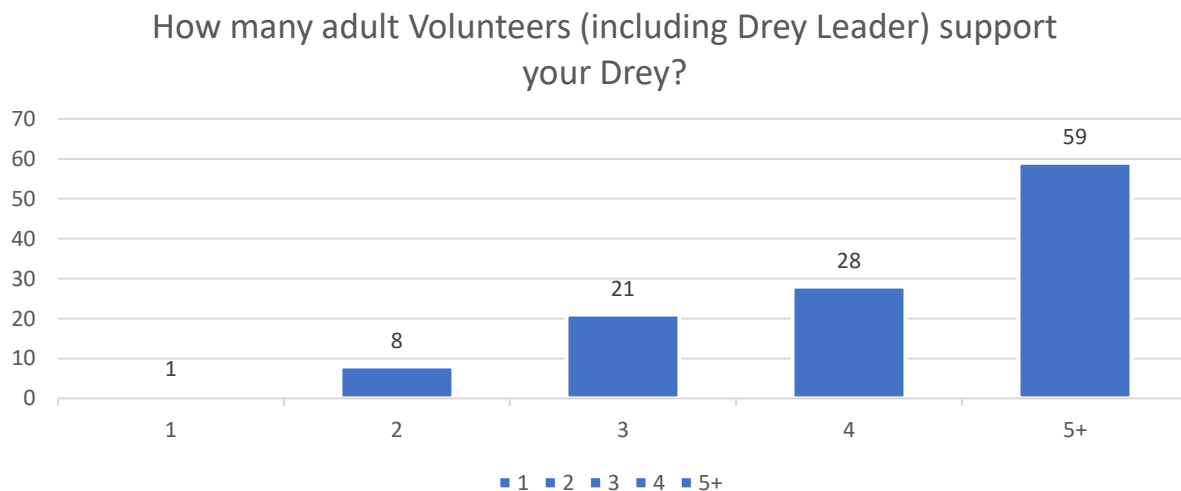


Figure 12: Combined Spring/Autumn 22 Drey Leaders Survey: Number of Adult Volunteers

It has not been possible from available data sets to ascertain the current demographic breakdown of these volunteers.

Motivations for Drey Leaders’ participation in Early Years Scouting

Table 3 reveals the range of motivations identified by Drey Leaders for their involvement in the Squirrels programme. It starts with the children being the most common reason, followed by personal motivations, before widening out to include contributions to the Scouting movement and the wider community.

Motivating Force	Motivation	N=119
1. Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributing to children’s development and achievements • Children’s enjoyment and enthusiasm • Fulfilling a social need for the youngest children post-Covid • Giving children new experiences 	57
2. Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using expertise and experience • Own children attend Scout groups • Personal enjoyment • Personal challenge 	28
3. Scouting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling younger children to access Scouting • Building a strong Drey leadership team and capacity • Clearing Beaver waiting list 	28
4. Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining parent satisfaction and appreciation 	4
5. Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a community contribution 	7

Table 3: Motivations of Drey Leaders

The primary motivator for the Drey Leaders was the children, and they expressed their deep satisfaction in playing a part in young children’s development and achievements. They were also enthused by the children’s enjoyment, feeling that they were fulfilling a social need post-Covid and giving children experiences that were not available elsewhere.

The children, seeing them progress and gain confidence week by week, being able to leave their parents and be independent. When they achieve something, it makes me very proud. (DLFG)

A passion to lead and encourage children to become confident and have self-esteem. To see children take on tasks and challenges and be confident. It is all about the children. (DLFG)

To make a difference in young people's lives and to invest in their futures. To help them grow into better citizens. To watch them grow and progress on a weekly basis. (DLFG)

A second major motivator was how their volunteering had personally enabled them to use their early years expertise and experience to benefit the children, to create a place for their own children or grandchildren, and how Squirrels gave the volunteers a deep sense of personal enjoyment and challenge.

I was a primary school teacher with early years specialism and after redundancy I had to seek alternative employment. It meant I no longer worked with children. Volunteering with Squirrels means I'm back doing something I'm good at and something I love but without the stresses and pressures of teaching. (DLFG)

I enjoy spending time with this age ranges after spending 8 years previously working in Early Years settings. It provides me with transferable skills for my current job working in school settings. (DLFG)

As GSL, I was aware there was a demand and as an early years teacher and forest school practitioner, I know how much this type of environment can benefit children of this age group. (DLFG)

As a teacher I love providing opportunities to children and seeing them grow from it. (DLFG)

A number of volunteers were also motivated by the Scouting movement, expressing a deep pleasure in enabling younger children to access Scouting, in developing Scouting capacity and leadership for this younger age group and alleviating pressure on Beaver waiting lists.

I have always been part of Scouting as have my children so volunteering at the newest group was the next step. (DLFG)

Finally, some volunteers were motivated by their sense of making a community contribution in these current times of need.

I am the GSL who was responsible for setting up the Drey along with my Beaver leaders. The reasons behind us wanting to open were that we live in a rural area where there is very little for children to participate in locally. Most villages share a Scout Group and have a cricket club other than these activities parents have to travel to the local towns. We thought it would be good for the children mentally, physically and socially to have a club somewhere local for them to attend and the chance to mix outside school. (DLFG)

Our children have spent half their young lives in a pandemic, unable to mix with their peers or go on trips freely. They are now growing up in a time of austerity. Providing activities and cheap/free events makes such a difference to their life experience. (DLFG)

To help young children and their families to socialise after the repercussions of COVID. (DLFG)

Young Leader Volunteers

Numbers of volunteer Young Leaders supporting the Dreys

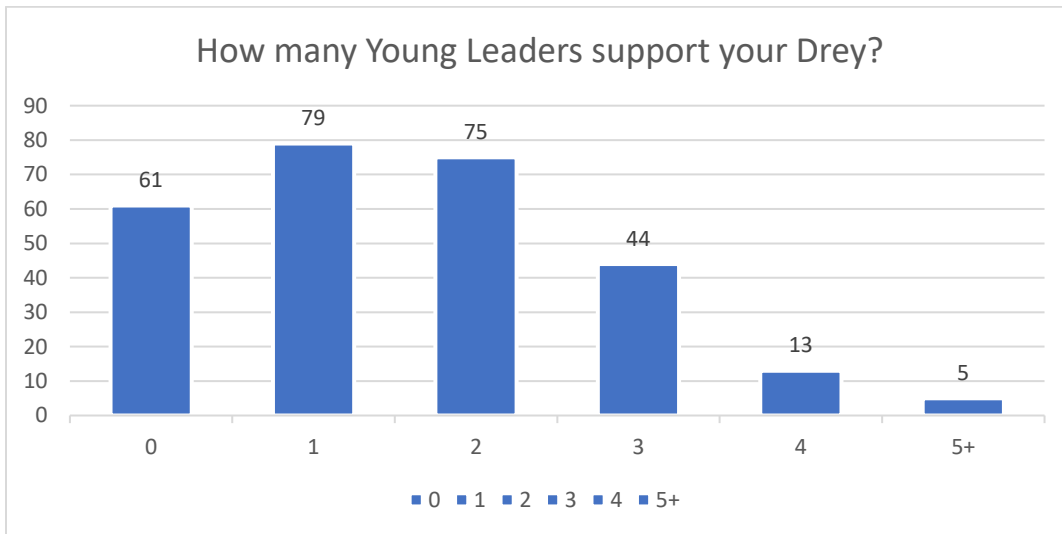


Figure 13: Combined Spring/Autumn Drey Leaders Survey 22: Number of Young Leader Volunteers

Drey Leaders report that the vast majority of Dreys have at least one Young Leader supporting the Drey, and most have more than this (2 or 3), with some Dreys attracting more than 5 Young Leaders. However, a significant minority have still not yet attracted Young Leaders to participate. The Autumn 2022 data suggests that Young Leaders involvement has grown significantly from 160 in Spring to 277 in Autumn 2022, and according to the January 2023 census (which is a compulsory data return) there are 860 Young Leaders supporting Dreys. However, according to returned survey data some Dreys (c22%) have not yet attracted Young Leader involvement.

Young Leaders' motivations for participation in Early Years Scouting

The Young Leaders Focus Groups undertaken in 2022 reveal that Young Leaders are a highly motivated and socially committed group. Some Young Leaders came from a 'Scouting family' so it was a natural progression for them to become more involved in Scouting.

My Mum's a District Commissioner and I've been involved about 2 years. (YLFG)

I've grown up with Scouts and now I think I'm giving back what I got out of it, the opportunities I've had and help this new section start up. (YLFG)

In addition, for most there was a particular attraction to Early Years Scouting, including:

An attraction to work with younger children

I thought it would be easier to work with younger children. I was more confident I'd be able to work with them. I enjoy it. They're calmer [than older groups]... They are just at a stage of becoming themselves, finding out who they are. (YLFG)

I decided about 3 months ago and really enjoyed working with these young children. I want to be a teacher and I really enjoy watching these children grow, their interest and excitement. I feel I'm investing in them and they in me. (YLFG)

Perceived higher status with younger children

They see you as role model, look up to you with respect. (YLFG)

You can see the difference you are making. My nickname was passed on by my driving instructor. They just loved calling me that and you realise how influential you are, how influenced they are – they're adorable. (YLFG)

Social altruism

For some of the kids, that Squirrel night is the best part of their week – I really enjoy that they think that- and it's something for them to do outside of school and it's better than staying in at home. I'm proud of doing my job if they are having fun. Scouts was part of my childhood and I want that for them too. (YLFG)

The excitement of playing a part in the development of a new section

YLFG: I was part of original Hedgehogs' pilot early on and thought it would be cool to be part of a new thing.

We only started Squirrels in May 2023. I hadn't heard much about Squirrels but I knew it was coming. Our YL trainer said we would do a pilot with these younger children. I thought it would be tough but fun. We've only one Squirrel group but we are growing into three. It is challenging but enjoyable. (YLFG)

Gaining additional leadership experience and skills development

I really wanted experience of engaging with young children, you learn so many skills and I just hadn't appreciated that until I began. You need to just get into it and you pick up things as you go along. And it's a really great opportunity to develop my leadership skills. I also feel I'm giving something back. (YLFG)

Experience for an award (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh award).

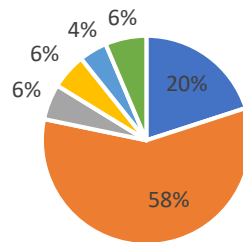
I'm doing my Duke of Edinburgh, and this is what I chose, and it fits into that. (YLFG)

I'm doing it for my Bronze for volunteering. (YLF)

2. What is the nature of parent participation in Young Scouting?

The nature of parent involvement is complex and varied across the country. As an overview however, the Autumn 2022 Parents/Carers Survey data reveals that most parents do not stay for the Squirrels sessions, but just drop them off at the door and pick them up (Fig 14). Of those who stay, some just operate as an observer, but others do support their own child when required. However, around 20% of Drey Leaders and parents report that most or all parents who stay do take a more active role within the Drey, indicating that encouraging parents to take a more active role in the sessions could be positively received:

Which of the following descriptions best matches your involvement in Squirrels as a parent?



- I stay for the session and support any child, not just my own
- I drop/collect my child at the door, I don't stay for the session
- I stay for the session and support my own child, but only when I am asked
- I stay for the session but I just watch and/or talk to other parents
- I stay for the session and support my own child all the time

Figure 14: Parental involvement in Squirrels Sessions – Autumn 2022 survey data

Looking at those parents who participate, Drey Leaders report that most Dreys have attracted one or two parent volunteers, and some have been very successful in attracting many more than this with the recruitment holding up, from 160 parent volunteers in Spring 22 to 277 by Autumn 2022 according to those Dreys who responded. (Fig. 15).

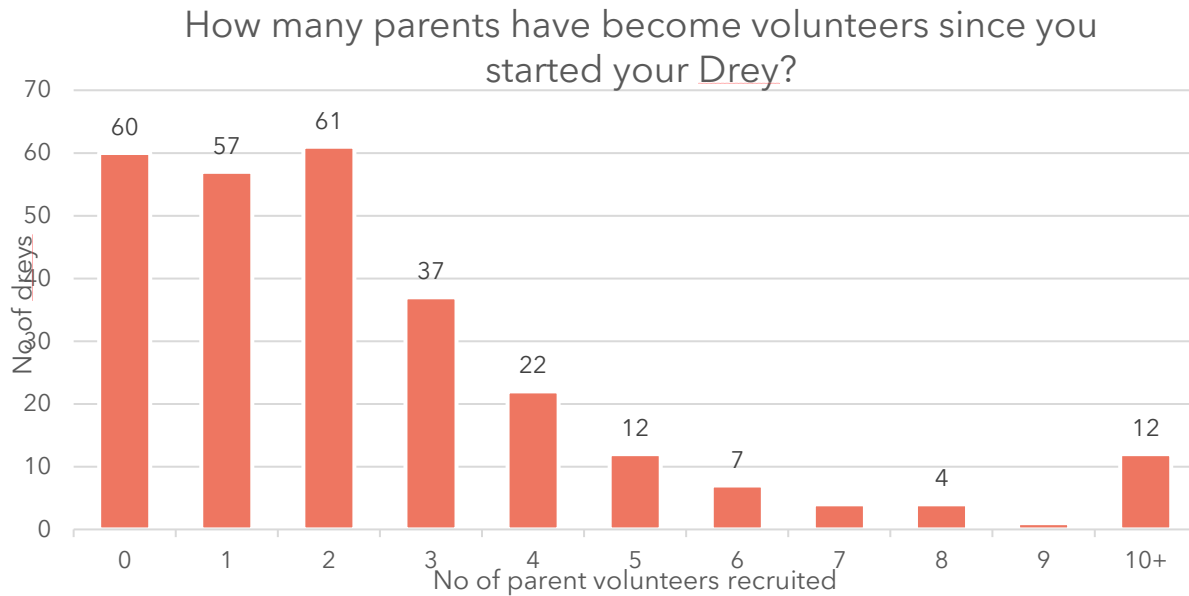


Figure 15: Range of success in recruiting parent volunteers into Squirrels

However, a significant number of Drey Leaders report that they have no parent volunteers supporting the Drey, suggesting this is an area for further action. Yet, interviews with Strategic Leaders in Feb/Mar 2023 indicate the buoyancy of parent volunteer recruitment.

Sometimes I think they think they need every single thing from the get go. I don't think they need to tick every box to begin. Squirrels bring in older siblings too not just the other way around. Parents and grandparents too although we are still catching up from COVID and lockdown, but recruitment has been really buoyant. Last month we had grandparents bringing 2 YLs in – really full family connectivity. (SL14)

This discrepancy could be explained by evidence indicating some reluctance to actively recruit parent volunteers by some Drey Leaders. Significant numbers of parents who are not currently volunteering (59%) report never being asked to volunteer in Squirrels sessions, as shown in Figure 16, and of note is that 15% of parents not currently volunteering stated that they would be interested in doing so.

Have you ever been asked to be a parent volunteer?

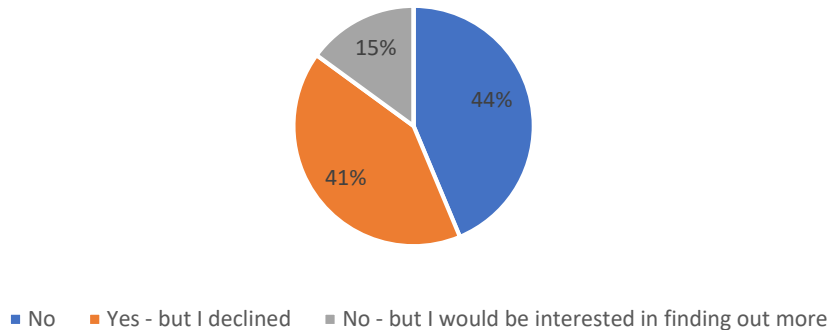


Figure 16: Parent responses to survey question regarding being asked to volunteer -Autumn 2022

Suggested strategies to increase parental involvement were offered by Drey Leaders, illustrating their awareness that they could do more to attract parent volunteers, including:

- Developing a parent volunteer rota (24%)
- Defining parent role (24%)
- Introducing more varied, family friendly and outdoor activities (14%)
- Just asking parents to help (13%)
- Better communication and information exchange (10%)
- Offering 'Taster' sessions for parents (6%)

It should be noted that a significant number (15%) of Drey Leaders who responded to the survey expressed open opposition to more parent involvement, citing the children's need for independence from their parents.

I find this a difficult one. I think that children should be there without their parents because we all know children act different with their parents and without their parents. But I also understand that parents being involved is beneficial. Some of the parents I have are brilliant they help all the children; other parents focus on their own. I feel that sometimes having parents involved means the children act less confident and they also lack some independence. (DLFG)

The Autumn 2022 data from the Parents/Carers Survey suggests similar strategies to those suggested by Drey Leaders for increasing parent/carer involvement in Early Years Scouting, although many respondent parents expressed that they were unable to make any suggestions for improving involvement (16%). Top suggestions for improving parent participation from parents were:

- Introducing more varied, family friendly and outdoor activities (13%)
- Better communication and information exchange (12%)
- Just asking parents to help (10%)

- Developing a parent volunteer rota and defining parent role (10%)
- Different volunteering options (5%)

These data suggest that parents would like the Dreys to offer them more varied ways of being involved rather than just supporting Squirrels sessions, often preferring activities with a community, home based or outdoor element.

As suggested by the Drey Leaders data, a significant number of parents (19%) felt they were happy with the current level of parental involvement and that the Squirrels Leaders were already doing enough to encourage their involvement. Some parents also suggested that their circumstances meant that they could not participate more fully.

Again, resonating with the Drey leaders' evidence a significant number (15%) of parents/carers expressed their own view of open opposition to more parent involvement, citing the children's need for independence from their parents. Others suggested that they had felt the Drey Leaders actively discouraged parents to become involved in Squirrels sessions. It further supports the evidence that many parents have never been asked to volunteer. This suggests that a clearer rationale for involving parents more actively in the Squirrels sessions is needed to convince Drey Leaders of the value of this.

3. What is the impact of participation on volunteers, Young Leaders, parents/carers and the home learning environment they create?

Impact on Volunteers (Drey Leaders)

97% of Drey Leaders who responded in the Autumn 22 survey stated that participating in Early Years Scouting had had a positive impact on their lives. The impact and wide range of benefits felt by Drey leaders are laid out below in descending order of citation; the greatest impacts (28%) were felt in Drey Leaders' sense of pride and self-worth and mental health and wellbeing.

A significant number of Drey Leaders also mentioned that participation had led to feeling more pressured and tired (15%), although most also added that they felt the reward was worth it. This finding should be monitored and addressed as Early Years Scouting rolls out.

Pleasure, pride and self-worth (28%)

Feel valued. I am incredibly proud of the work I have done to set up and introduce Squirrels to the area. (DLS)

All of the leaders get enjoyment and a sense of achievement from volunteering with Squirrels. (DLS)

Teaching young minds, watching them progress because of something you have done is a great feeling. (DLS)

Improved wellbeing and mental health: Joy, fun and energy (28%)

Definitely helps my mental health. I unfortunately broke my ankle when we were due to start our Drey and we delayed it until I was "on my feet". I found that for my mental health going around to Squirrels once a week helped me, gave me something to do and focus on when I wasn't able to do much else. I am still healing and unfortunately cannot work so this for me has gave me the purpose and the drive to keep going. (DLS)

Wellbeing, better mental health, chance to play. (DLS)

It brings us together and we have fun, this has lifted my mental health over the years and love it! (DLS)

Personal Development and Learning new leadership skills (15%)

One of our volunteers was able to start a new career as a teaching assistant, and another was able to find work in a school after a long gap away directly because of the skills developed with volunteering at Squirrels. (DLS)

I think my confidence in leading a team of adults and setting things up has increased as I've had a lot more responsibility for it and feel I have grown as a volunteer. (DLS)

Socialisation and new friendships (10%)

COVID turned me into a recluse and volunteering has enabled me to get out and meet new people and develop lifelong friends on the way. (DLS)

Volunteering brings me friendship, fun and my Scouting family. (DLS)

We have come together to work as a team and have developed new friendships and learnt from other people's ideas. (DLS)

Being part of a Group and making new friends. Meeting new people and giving support for each other broadening our perspective and increasing individual performance and the Groups' performance. (DLS)

Visibility and role in community (7%)

It makes me feel that I am a participating member of the community and that hopefully will extend to encouraging parents & volunteer leaders to roll-out what they see and learn at our weekly sessions. (DLS)

I am more visible in the community. We have also been on 2 camps (day camps only) and everyone from other groups has loved coming up to see and talk to Squirrels. (DLS)

Pressured time and tiredness (15%)

Less time to myself! It tires me out but I feel good for it. (DLS)

It is rewarding however it is hard work and time consuming. Lots of planning, trial and error. I would hope as time goes on it will get easier as we gain experience. (DLS)

All of the leaders that volunteer with Squirrels have other roles within the group, and particularly for me, I have struggled with time for the planning and programming for the two sections that I currently run and balancing it with my family responsibilities. (DLS)

Although exhausting at times, straight after work I would not miss it for the world. (DLS)

Impact on Young Leaders (See also sections 1.2 and 3.4)

The Young Leaders Focus Groups undertaken in autumn 2022 reveals that Young Leaders could also identify how their participation in Early Years Scouting had positively impacted on them. Their self-assessments echo the perceptions of Drey Leaders but in a powerful and personal way and show how the Scout Theory of Change outcomes are being realised for the Young Leaders.

The perceptions of the Drey leaders captured via the Outcomes Assessment Tool, supported by the testimonies of Strategic Leaders (see below), provides positive evidence of the perceived impact of involvement in Early Years Scouting on the volunteer Young Leaders. This evidence reveals that all areas of outcome for Scouts, as identified in the Scout Theory of Change, can be seen in the Young Leaders development, Citizenship and Connectedness, Skills for Life & Adventure, and Wellbeing.

At a time of crisis (post-Covid) in the mental health and wellbeing of young people in England, the positive impact on mental health and wellbeing for Young Leaders is a significant and positive finding, indicating that participation in Early Years Scouting can provide valuable protection and therapy for young people. Interestingly, a number of Drey Leaders also felt that the Young Leaders' career prospects had been positively improved by their participation in Early Years Scouting.

Evidence from interviews with Scouting strategic leaders in Spring 2023 also indicates the positive impact of Early Years Scouting on Young Leaders as shown in the testimonies below:

I think YLs that fit in get more out of Squirrels than any other Section. They grow and change so quickly at this age you see the difference you make and that's hugely satisfying. Some very much prefer this age range as do some of the Leadership team. The Explorers now are not linked to one Section, they can explore age ranges, there's more choice for them, more value and for the children. Especially the shy ones, they like the

key worker idea, establishing close relationships with child and parents. It's so valuable having time to do all that. (SLI1)

Younger ones relate to these young ones very positively, both ways and it also brings the more reluctant YLs in, less threatening for some, for others terrifying. It's a great experience for YLs. They learn they have to work in a different way, use a different skill set, not just instructions but manner of interaction and fun and some just love doing it. My 13 year old daughter – it's been really effective in bringing her out, it's what she wants to do. Small children seeing them as grown-ups but it is not for all. Really positive to have that next generation of leaders coming through. Learning how to hold the attention of 4 & 5 year olds – having that confidence with younger ones. Feeling themselves a role model. Seeing the progression in these rapid developing young ones and know they made that difference – seeing their progression to the next steps – that's not abstract but concrete for both the Squirrel and the YLs. (SLI2)

This Squirrel Programme builds confidence too, in children and YLs who gain a lot from it, if they are suited to working with our youngest section. They get them – they don't talk down but with them – and some are brilliant at story telling just natural and acting it out – sometimes in a daft way to make them laugh – at best they are simply not self-conscious. The link to Duke of Edinburgh has worked well. Gives them experience of working in a team and they gain confidence. These Squirrels seem to love YL's – older sibling kind of thing – and the YLs grow in self-esteem, have a sense of purpose and want to give something back to Scouting. Early evening works for them too, they are often finishing school or college at 3.30pm and that gives them time to do early evening Squirrel without it taking up too much of their evening with their own social group. (SLI7)

Impact on parents/carers and the Home Learning Environment (HLE)

It is interesting that although parents often indicated that they believed participation in Early Years Scouting had not impacted on themselves personally, many mentioned that they were listening more, had gained confidence, had learned new parenting skills, had developed more environmental awareness and had more social and community awareness. These are important **enhancements in their parenting skills and actions** and should be celebrated.

As a parent, I have learned a lot since attending Squirrels and can use the activities at home which are fun for all my children. (PS)

Yes, ideas from other parents and linked to badges. (PS)

Listening. (PS)

Gaining confidence as a parent. (PS)

We are more conscious about food waste since helping with the food bank. (PS)

We are being a better citizen, learning about the area, charity and being empathic towards others. (PS)

The evidence of the impact on **creating a positive home learning environment (HLE)** however, was much stronger. A substantial majority of parents/carers indicated that participation had impacted very positively on their home learning environment. The most significant changes to HLE identified by parents were:

- Family engagement in a much wider range of activities (19%), including more crafting, reading, singing, cooking and this was increasingly linked to badge work and reflected the activities experienced at the Squirrels sessions.
- Children recreating Scout games and activities at home (13%).
- More outdoor/physical activities and engaging with nature (11%)
- More talk, sharing of experiences and questions (9%)
- Increased child autonomy/Child led activities (9%)
- More adventure/risky play (6%)

Family engagement in a much wider range of activities (19%), including more crafting, reading, singing, cooking

Some of the activities are great and really excite the kids with learning elements so I do them on the weekends with all the kids. (PS)

Books sent home every week are a huge hit and we read them multiple times during the week. (PS)

Children recreating Scout games and activities at home (13%).

He loves recreating the games he plays. (PS)

They often act out Squirrel sessions again in play. (PS)

As a parent, I can use the activities at home. After attending a campfire activity my son was keen to put up the tent and try out camping in our garden. (PS)

More outdoor/physical activities and engaging with nature (11%)

We do a lot more outdoor activity. (PS)

We certainly get outside more enjoying nature. (PS)

Yes, we've found a new wood in our local area to walk in, we've done our "homework" together such as Adventure Journals. (PS)

More talk, sharing of experiences and questions (9%)

My daughter has followed in the footsteps of her older brothers (Beavers and Cubs) this has made her proud and she talks to us about what she had done and enjoys showing her brothers her new badges. (PS)

Every week my child discusses what he has done and is excited about it. (PS)

Encourages conversations about topics or activities covered at Squirrels. (PS)

It encouraged our son to talk about Diwali, the remembrance parade. He likes to talk about what he has done at the session that week. (PS)

He's only been going a few weeks but one of the first things he did was attend Remembrance Day parade, and it really got him actively talking about it. (PS)

Increased child autonomy/Child led activities (9%)

Absolutely, it has continued to build my child's confidence and she has learnt to tie her shoe laces after their first challenge, she is very mindful of other people and often talks about Squirrels rules and ethos. (PS)

My son is an active and inquisitive boy and Squirrels helps support what he is like as a person. (PS)

Encouraged my child to become more independent, make new friends. (PS)

For me, it was a big way to increase her independence and confidence with her peers, whilst also having opportunities for new experiences. (PS)

More adventure/risky play (6%)

My son was very shy when he started and would not try new things if his big sister was with him. He is becoming much more resilient and willing to try adventurous things on his own. E.g. climbing. (PS)

We are becoming more adventurous, playing more active games. (PS)

We are more confident to try new things due to Squirrels. (PS)

He has now learned how to use a knife to cut his sandwich. (PS)

He is much more willing to try new things and more adventurous activities. (PS)

More community and environmental awareness (5%)

Learning about the parade for Remembrance Day. (PS)

We are now helping to recycle and more confident with other children that are outside of home. (PS)

We think about the community and environment more. (PS)

We have a sense of belonging to wider community. (PS)

More moral and values awareness (2%)

Yes, good values, broadening horizon. (PS)

Being kind and helpful. (PS)

My son loved it when Nutty [Squirrel mascot] came home with him. He was taught at Squirrels how important he was and took looking after him very seriously. (PS)

This evidence indicates that the impact of Early Years Scouting is reaching into homes and transforming the early family experiences of young children (and their siblings), maximizing the opportunity for Scouting to influence the longer-term outcomes of these young children.

Workstrand 4: Key Learning

- i. 97% of Drey Leaders feel participating in Early Years Scouting has had a positive impact across a wide spectrum of their lives including improved: Socialization and friendship; confidence; wellbeing; new skills; sense of personal achievement and pride; satisfaction of contributing to community; sense of purpose; (but also tiredness!)
- ii. Parents who are more actively involved indicated that their parenting skills had been enhanced and as a result were: listening more to their children; had gained confidence; learned new parenting skills; developed more environmental awareness; developed more social and community awareness.
- iii. Early Years Scouting can have a significant impact on Home Learning Environment, reaching into homes and transforming the early family experiences of young children (and their siblings), maximizing the opportunity for Scouting to influence the longer-term outcomes of these young children.
- iv. Changes in Home Learning Environment reported are wide-ranging and demonstrate families engaging in a wider range of family activities, including more outdoor/physical activities, adventurous and risky play, and natural world activity.

Reflections and Recommendations

The evaluation evidence presented in this report provides a positive and strong endorsement of the value and impact of the national roll out of the Squirrels programme. Specifically, it has provided a greater understanding of:

The efficacy of the Early Years Scouting programme in developing young people (Squirrels) according to the Scout Theory of Change

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

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)

The impact on volunteers and parents/carers of young people who take part, and the Home Learning Environment

The evaluation findings have generated a wealth of data about the process and experiences of young children, Young Leaders, Volunteer Drey leaders, Parent volunteers, and Scout Strategic Leads which provide an agenda for further reflections and actions. These are summarised below in three sections in relation to each research question (RQ):

- Firstly, we have identified what should be celebrated and further promoted as the Squirrels Programme continues to develop.
- Secondly, we have identified aspects of the Squirrels Programme which would benefit from further reflection and development.
- Thirdly, we have identified new and future initiatives arising from the experience of Squirrels to date which might be considered to further enhance the efficacy and impact of the roll out of Early Years Scouting.

Future Actions: Celebration & Promotion

1. Celebrate the positive perception of parents, children and leaders about the current format and content of the programme and to celebrate and positively promote the non-gendered view of the programme. (RQ#1)
2. Celebrate the contribution it is making to the development of children and young leaders' confidence, sociability and citizenship. (RQ#1).
3. Celebrate positivity of what has been achieved - boast about success and benefits to children and families. (RQ#2).
4. Promote visibility of more diverse leaders at strategic and front line – role models. (RQ#2).
5. Review and revise strategy for targeting location of new dreys & guidance for group leaders. (RQ#2).
6. Disseminate more and diverse social action case studies to provide exemplars for YLs and Dreys to learn from. Locating and enabling access to more resources and age appropriate knowledge will support Young Leaders in implementing their Social Action Projects. (RQ#3).
7. Provide a greater profile for the value and nature of Well Being/Mental health given the crisis post COVID-19 and its characteristics of Resilience, Self Confidence and Sociability as key outcomes for both Squirrels and Young Leaders, and also for the local communities they work in. (RQ#3).
8. Profile to the wider public the benefits and impact of the Squirrel's Social Action Projects for the less advantaged and for enhancing community cohesion. Also promote how it encourages volunteering in young children and young people which is a good news story to be shared. (RQ#3).
9. More widely disseminate the significant personal motivations and benefits of volunteering in Early Years Scouting. (RQ#4).

Future Actions: Programme Development

1. Develop further the emphasis on outdoor, natural world experiences throughout the year, and consider how Squirrels might be more involved with Scout camping and adventurous activity. (RQ#1).
2. Consider the balance between adult led and child led activity in the Squirrels sessions to encourage the development of more leadership, self-organisation and agency outcomes in the children and Young Leaders. (RQ#1).
3. Consider how Leadership and Life Skills for both Squirrels and Young Leaders might be better supported through the Programme through providing more opportunities for self-organisation, agency and problem-solving. (RQ#1).
4. Explore how wellbeing and emotional health for Squirrels and Young Leaders might be more supported and made more visible through the programme. (RQ#1).
5. Develop Squirrels badge work and extend it into home activities. (RQ#1)
6. Consider using local schools/churches both for recruitment of Squirrels for new dreys and establishing new groups. (RQ#2).
7. Commission some deep dive case studies of successful dreys where recruitment and participation of target communities is strong. (RQ#2).
8. Develop greater use of 'Further Reach' pack and possible training for district and group leaders on working in diverse areas (RQ#2).
9. Review current marketing & messaging in regard to gender and ethnicity – consider broader focus on strengths such as sustainability goals – outdoors, nature, social cohesion (RQ#2).
10. Develop a clearer rationale and development strategy to encourage Drey Leaders to increase parental engagement and recruit more parent volunteers (RQ#4).
11. Offer more varied ways of encouraging parent/carer involvement in Early Years Scouting. (RQ#4).
12. Introduce more extension activities to encourage transference of Scouting experiences within the home environment. (RQ#4).

13. Provide more modelling for parents/carers re strategies and interactions that support young children's development (RQ#4).
14. Offer more varied ways of encouraging parent/carer involvement in Early Years Scouting. (RQ#4).
15. Introduce more extension activities to encourage transference of Scouting experiences within the home environment. (RQ#4).
16. Provide more modelling for parents/carers re strategies and interactions that support young children's development (RQ#4).

Future Actions: New Initiative

1. Explore other delivery models, maybe linked to other local or community organisations eg schools, special needs, community groups (RQ#2).
2. Ensure future data management systems have mechanisms that encourage return of monitoring data. (RQ#2).
3. Invest more in the leadership training of Young Leaders, geared at working with the younger age phase of Squirrels and developing their skills in leading collaborative Social Action Projects which can reach and make a difference to less advantaged and visible communities. (RQ#3).
4. Capitalise on the Scouts Awards (and Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme) for volunteering to further motivate and prepare Young Leaders for their role, especially if these awards specifically included preparation for working with younger children and with those from less advantaged and diverse communities. (RQ#3).
5. Consider access to counselling and mental health support to ensure wellbeing and retention of volunteers. (RQ#4).

Appendix 1: Five Exemplar Social Action Project Case Studies

Case Study 1: Donating to local people experiencing poverty and hardship

What we did

The Squirrels made and decorated Christmas cards and bags, which were then filled with essentials, and given to Shelter at Christmas. We were hoping to support people in the local community and help the Squirrels learn about homelessness and being kind to others. We hoped the people at Shelter would be supported with the goods in the bags as well as with the cards decorated by the Squirrels too. It involved a local charity; Shelter, as they were receiving the bags and cards.

What I did

I helped set out the equipment for the activity, as well as sticking the labels on the bags, helped the Squirrels find the stationery they wanted and made sure everyone was enjoying themselves and sharing everything. Throughout, I was supporting the Squirrels when they asked for help and after the activity helped tidy up with the Leaders.

What went well?

The Squirrels loved the decorating, learnt about homelessness, and were able to help other people in the community, learning about being kind and generous to others, and the people at Shelter really appreciated the bags and cards.

What was difficult?

I found it a little difficult to support the Squirrels with the activity (e.g., by making sure all the Squirrels had what they needed for the activity and encouraging them to share the equipment with each other) at the same time as making sure everyone was enjoying themselves and helping them if they did not, as well as making sure the Squirrels were all safe, as there were a lot of Squirrels taking part, but I think it went really well.

What was the impact?

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.

The young Squirrels learnt about homelessness and were able to do something really kind for other people in their community to help them at Christmas, having a lot of fun at the same time! I think the people at Shelter were very grateful for the bags and cards, and hope it showed them that we care about and want to help them. Especially in the festive season, I think receiving a hand-decorated Christmas card with a bag of essentials would have been really valuable, emotionally too.

Case Study 2: Improving the Environment

What we did

Litter picking during one of our Squirrel sessions. We chose this as it was a good way to get the squirrels outside while also helping the environment by clearing the forest behind our scout hut. The squirrels went around the forest picking up the litter in groups while our leaders and young leaders supervised and made sure they weren't picking up anything dangerous or harmful. As

we are a new Drey, not much of the community was involved but we had parents of the squirrels walking with us and helping in all aspects of the session.

What I did

I took a group out litter picking with the assistance of another leader and some parent helpers and explained why recycling is important and that littering is harmful to the environment and wildlife that lives in it.

What went well?

We cleared the forest of litter and I taught them the importance of not littering and why it's good to recycle.

What was difficult?

Making sure that I understand the importance of recycling different items in different ways.

What was the impact?

It benefited me as it was one of the first times holding a session away from our scout hut so I learnt how to adapt with children of that age to a different environment while also educating them. Understanding that correctly throwing away your rubbish is better for the environment. Clearing the local area of litter therefore making a cleaner place for everyone.

Case Study 3: Donating to local people experiencing poverty and hardship

What we did

Donating to the local Sainsbury's food bank collection point. It's a simple way for the Squirrels to make an impact and understand how they can help others, hopefully the items we donated have helped some families get the food they need! The Squirrels walked to Sainsbury's carrying their tins and put them in the collection bin. The Leaders organised the meeting, informing parents what their Squirrels needed and co-ordinating with Sainsbury's so someone could explain to the Squirrels what the food bank is all about. The supermarket helped accommodate all the Squirrels' donations and had someone help us. Parents/carers of the squirrels bought items to be donated.

What I did

I helped get the Squirrels get to Sainsbury's safely and made sure they all felt comfortable and understood what we were doing and why. Another Young Leader and I helped with the safety of the group, leading the Squirrels across roads safely etc., but more importantly we were able to answer their questions and help them to understand why some people might need help from food banks.

What went well?

As a group we filled the collection bin, and the Squirrels were really pleased to see their contributions overflowing, there were lots of smiles!

What was difficult?

The Squirrels had lots of questions, which was to be expected, but it forced me to think a lot about balancing telling them the truth but also making it accessible and easy to understand for all the Squirrels because there's a lot of difference in what the youngest and oldest squirrels can process.

What was the impact?

It gave me a reminder of how easy it is to donate something, I always forget but the Squirrels reminded me how much of a difference it makes even donating a little! The trip also helped me develop my skills as a young leader, answering difficult questions and dealing with safety. It helped the Squirrels to understand their own privilege to a degree, and it developed their empathy skills and they now know of an easy way to make an impact and really help someone. All the food we donated has gone to families around our town so I feel we've made a real difference. And I hope that the public seeing the Squirrels donate their items inspired them to do something to make a difference, if the Squirrels can do it so can the rest of the community.

Case Study 4: Learning Sign Language

What we did

Learning sign language to help communicate with people within our community so that people who aren't able to hear can speak to younger people and not have nobody to talk to. Young Leaders and I taught Squirrels basic sign language. Section Leaders in our Scout group helped the Squirrels by re-enacting scenarios that could happen in later life.

What I did

I know a high level of sign language so I taught and organised the session with the help of another young leader and gathered resources to help us.

What went well?

The Squirrels picked up learning basic sign language easily.

What was difficult?

Some squirrels got bored easily so we had to think of a game to do with sign language to make them more interested.

What was the impact?

I have become more confident with teaching other people basic sign language and talking to people in the deaf community.

The Squirrels know they can have conversations to people in the deaf community about Scouting and not have to worry that they might not be understood. People in the deaf community no longer have to feel left out on conversations because they might not be understood.

Case Study 5: Helping in the Squirrels Sessions

What we did

We developed and ran activities with the young Squirrels during Squirrels sessions. I chose this project because I like running activities and I like helping the squirrels to learn new skills. I hope to achieve a stronger sense of leadership which will help me later on in life. Young Leaders assisted the activities and Squirrels took part in the activities. Community Groups have played a big part in our social action project by shelling out and leading some activities and letting us use their ground to run bigger activities that need a lot of space.

What I did

I have run games for the Squirrels and also lead activities/sessions.

What went well?

The Squirrels all learnt new skills and enjoyed all the games that I ran. I became confident in being able to run an activity and I can now do it better.

What was difficult?

Some of the time I found it difficult to get the Squirrels to listen and focus but with a bit of help I managed to do it.

What was the impact?

I learnt new skills and grew in confidence meaning I now have the ability to run activities in public and more often too. The Leader learns valuable life skills and that they should listen to everyone not just the Leader. They have been able to feel like they are together in one big community including the Scouting services.