



YOUNG PEOPLE'S NCS EXPERIENCES

The National Citizen Service (NCS), launched in 2010 to help build a more cohesive society and subsequently closed in 2025. NCS delivered over 1 million experiences to young people and this document contains some of those stories.



Kirushan, 19, London

Kirushan took part in an NCS experience in London, in the summer of 2021. The experience developed his leadership skills and gave him an appreciation for the benefits of volunteering.

The programme, which was shortened due to COVID-19, involved one week of team building and skills based training, followed by one week of social action.

For their social action project, Kirushan and his teammates chose to make a video to raise awareness about homelessness. The group shared the video, which explored the issues and causes of homelessness, on social media to raise money for the [Homeless Link](#) charity.

The following autumn, Kirushan took part in another NCS experience at his school and was able to apply his new leadership skills and video production knowledge to a new project. Recognising the negative impact the pandemic had on the mental health of young people and others, Kirushan produced a video to raise awareness about mental health issues, which he shared with his schoolmates and on social media.

Kirushan enjoyed these experiences so much that he joined an NCS Changemakers group in London to continue working on projects in his local community. Less than two weeks later, Russia invaded Ukraine. The distressing news coverage of refugees flowing out of Ukraine prompted Kirushan and his fellow Changemakers to help. The team decided to collect clothes for Ukrainian refugees coming to the UK. To raise awareness about their initiative, the team shared posts on social media and produced flyers which they handed out at a local shopping

centre. They then went door to door in their community collecting clothes which they delivered to a centre in London.

The team amassed 26 volunteers to help with the project, and Kirushan soon became team leader, coordinating everyone. Plenty of challenges presented themselves throughout the day, including running out of empty boxes due to the generosity of local donors. However, Kirushan and the enterprising teens soon secured more boxes from the local supermarket and continued carrying the donations to their destination.

As a result of their initiative, they secured over 200 kilos of clothing!

It was only one month after when he saw an article about himself in the local newspaper that Kirushan realised the magnitude of what he and the team had achieved, saying, *“When you’re being productive and doing something for the right reason, you feel really good. It was a great thing to do and it gave me the happiest feeling.”*

Kirushan said that he would love to volunteer in the future for a cause he feels passionate about.

“My NCS experiences taught me that I can do something useful with my time and made me realise that you can get people together and make the impossible possible.”

In recognition of his sterling work on the Ukrainian refugee clothes collection project, Kirushan was nominated for a Young Citizen Award and received a runner-up award at a ceremony, hosted by his local Mayor.



Sharandeep, 20, West Midlands

Sharandeep took part in an NCS experience in the West Midlands during the summer of 2020. The experience further deepened her commitment to volunteering, involving her in local social action projects that she felt passionate about.

Despite Sharandeep's experience being cut short because of COVID-19, she participated in teambuilding activities, including leading an online presentation for a business design challenge, which strengthened her leadership and communication skills.

Sharandeep's group focused on spreading awareness about knife crime through podcasts, posters, and a campaign around the Knife Angel sculpture in Coventry. They also received First Aid training, which Sharandeep later applied in her work with the Carer's Trust.

After NCS, Sharandeep joined a local Changemakers group and contributed to several projects, including food donations for the homeless, creating Christmas gift packages for a children's ward, and renovating a 'Peace Garden' to support mental health. These initiatives were especially important to her after the challenges of the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Sharandeep has been passionate about volunteering since a young age, having cared for her family members with disabilities. She founded the Young Carers Council and inspired her younger brother to volunteer as well. She also works with multiple charities, including Sahil, Midlands Langar Seva Society, and Amnesty International.

Her volunteer work has earned recognition, including a nomination for a Young Heroes Award and a Coronation Champions Award. In 2024, she received the Change Maker of the Year Award and a Good Citizens Award in 2025.

"Volunteering opportunities allow me to take care of the people I love as well as give back to the community and service that supported me. As per my culture and religion, we believe in Seva which is selfless service. For Sikhs, it is important to help the community and aid others when you can through acts of Seva."

Brighton Period Project, South East



This group of young women created an awareness campaign around period poverty and collected and distributed period products to those in need. Their achievements raised significant awareness for the cause and helped inspire other young people to support similar initiatives.

The Brighton Period Project is a youth-led awareness campaign addressing period poverty in Brighton and Hove. The project, founded during an NCS experience by Isobel, Sylvie, and Isabella, was inspired by research that revealed 46% of women and girls in the area struggle to afford basic sanitary products. The group created donation boxes in local shops, distributed posters, and promoted their cause through social media.

Their use of platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook proved highly successful, with one TikTok video receiving over 900,000 views. Since 2021, their social media campaign has attracted over two million views and 6,000 followers, helping to raise awareness, destigmatise menstruation, and encourage donations.

The team collected over 30,000 period products and other donations from businesses like Morrisons and Superdrug, which were distributed to local women's charities. Their efforts gained national recognition, including media coverage in a magazine and interviews with BBC Southeast and BBC Radio Sussex. They were also shortlisted for the 2023 Children & Young People Now Award, and Isabella was nominated for a Coronation Champions Award.

The project has inspired other young people, with several NCS graduates seeking advice on starting similar initiatives. The group also participated in NCS Lions Lair panels to mentor others on social action projects. Isobel expressed hopes of expanding the project to other areas, recognising the widespread need for such initiatives. The Brighton Period Project continues to inspire and empower others to tackle period poverty and engage in volunteering.

"We thank NCS for giving us the tools and the confidence to continue to push the narrative way beyond our experience. We really hope we can roll it out to other parts of the country because we know there is a need for it. Hopefully, us reaching out to the big players in this field will come to something and help spread that change."

Jemimah, 18, London



Jemimah joined an NCS local community experience in 2023 where she visited a law firm and met people who inspired her to aim high and pursue her goals.

Jemimah was born in Spain to Nigerian parents. In 2019 Jemimah's family moved from Barcelona to London where Jemimah and her younger sister enrolled at a local school. At first, Jemimah found that adapting to a new culture and language was challenging, and making new friends wasn't easy. Fortunately, thanks to her natural linguistic ability, her experience of learning Yoruba and Catalan and studying hard, Jemimah soon became fluent in English. She embraced her studies at school and was fascinated to learn new topics like Black History Month in October. However, in March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic led to a national lockdown which meant that Jemimah and her fellow students weren't able to attend school in person for the rest of year 8.

When Jemimah returned to school in year 9, she joined football and basketball clubs to indulge her love for sport and make new friends. She also enjoyed meeting a lot of new students from different countries like Romania and Bangladesh. Jemimah further expanded her social circle by attending a local supplementary school which ran Saturday programmes covering a range of subjects to help young people develop skills and leadership potential. Highlights for Jemimah included learning about Black history and activism, as well as sessions on debating, presenting, teamwork, and wellbeing.

Through this, Jemimah was introduced to The Catalyst Collective, an NCS grantee which matches and supports Black teenagers with professional Black women

for mentoring relationships. Jemimah signed up to attend a trip organised by The Catalyst Collective to visit law firm Irwin Mitchell with a group of young women of a similar age. The action-packed day included networking with Irwin Mitchell employees and taking part in activities designed to develop skills for the workplace, like communication, collaboration, teamwork, problem-solving, paying attention to detail, critical thinking, and debating.

For Jemimah, there were many highlights throughout the day including meeting Angela Jackman, a senior lawyer and descendant of the Windrush generation, who had been one of the first Black women at her Oxford college. Angela's story describing how she progressed from economically challenging circumstances in the late 1990s to become a partner at the firm, strengthened Jemimah's belief that she can achieve anything she aspires to. She was also interested to hear how a young apprentice at Irwin Mitchell who had just completed their A Levels was already thriving at the law firm. **"This event shattered myths and answered questions I've always had about doing an apprenticeship"** said Jemimah.

In the afternoon, the group engaged in an organised debate for and against e-scooters. The teams had just half an hour to prepare their case so Jemimah stepped into a leadership role, taking the lead in developing the opening debate for her team. Jemimah had to **"employ critical thinking and problem-solving skills"** to put her points across effectively.

In 2024 Jemimah became an NCS Youth Ambassador and is also involved in a youth advisory board and STEM research.



Network Rail Project, South East

This group of young people created a network rail safety campaign during an NCS experience in 2024. Their winning campaign saw them invited to an awards event at Waterloo station hosted by Network Rail, where their safety posters were displayed on digital screens throughout the station.

The awards were presented to a group of young people who won a competition for the best railway safety campaign at an NCS away from home experience at YMCA Fairthorne Manor during the summer. There, the group had designed and pitched their winning campaign to a panel of judges, including their local MP, Paul Holmes.

In September, the successful group was invited to visit Network Rail's offices in Waterloo station where they received framed certificates from Andrew Haines, the chief executive of Network Rail, and had the thrill of seeing their winning poster displayed on digital screens around Waterloo station. The station has around 100,000 visitors a day so this meant plenty of exposure for their eye-catching artwork!

The team enjoyed taking photos of themselves posing proudly next to the digital displays, and were encouraged by Andrew to consider a range of careers on offer with Network Rail.

The partnership with Network Rail was a win-win, with young people learning skills from a meaningful project with tangible outcomes and Network Rail benefiting from raising awareness about rail safety. As Andrew said to the group, *"If we can save one life as a result of this work, this might be the most important thing you do in your life."*

One team member, Luke, said, *"Having the poster rolled out more widely could help people realise that what they had previously been doing around railways may have been dangerous and that seeing the poster will help them change their ways."*

Ella said that she had picked up useful new skills, in particular *"presentation skills and learning how to work with new people"*.

And Finley said he hoped their poster *"would save lives"* adding that he would definitely recommend NCS to others and *"honestly, really liked it!"*



Sainsbury's food bank project, South West

In 2018, a group of young people in the South West inspired Sainsbury's to adopt their innovative scheme to increase food bank donations.

The awards were presented to a group. The group of 13 young people from the South West saw their simple idea to drive food bank donations rolled out in Sainsbury's stores nationwide. The idea, which was designed to inspire one million donations over Christmas, was developed after the group spoke to their local food bank during their NCS experience.

Holly said: *"After talking to the manager of our local food bank it was clear that shoppers were being reminded too late about donating, with food bank collection points usually being placed at the exit of the store. We also learnt that people were regularly donating similar items, making it difficult for them to get the quantity and variety that they needed to serve the needs of their beneficiaries."*

To combat this, the team came up with a simple, ingenious idea: pop a branded sticker, with 'Help Brighten a Million Christmases' on them, alongside the items most needed by the local food bank to encourage people to purchase the item and drop it in the existing food bank collection box on their way out.

Holly continued: *"Once we had developed an idea we were confident would help we set about pitching it to various local retailers. After being turned away by a few we popped into Sainsbury's and spoke to the store manager who, to our delight, agreed to trial the initiative."*

After two weeks of the labels being in store, the food bank reported the number of donations had increased by 300%.

Mark Richardson, manager of Exeter foodbank, said: *"Teenagers these days often have an unfair reputation for being unengaged with the world around them, so it's great to see young people being empowered by experiences like NCS to go out into their communities and make a difference."*

The results of this initiative goes to show that sometimes you just need a new mind on an old problem. Sometimes the most simple ideas have the greatest impact. This campaign has already had fantastic results locally, and I'm excited to see how it can benefit food banks and their clients across the UK."

Claudine Blamey, Sainsbury's Group Head of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability, said:

"We're excited to be working together as a group to expand Sainsbury's food donation programme and to launch Argos' toy donation programme."

We are committed to making a positive difference in local communities and we hope our customers get on board to help brighten the lives of those less fortunate in the community."

It's been brilliant to work with the NCS team to permanently roll out their fantastic label initiative to all our stores and help reach our target of one million donations."



Rakaya, 18, North West

Rakaya took part in an NCS experience in 2017 in the North West region, which led to her developing her confidence and leadership skills, eventually becoming an NCS team leader.

Initially, Rakaya's biggest fear was that she wouldn't fit in with her group. This fear was quickly alleviated as she was voted to be the leader of her group in a range of activities.

During her experience, Rakaya took part in a social action project where she and her team wanted to show that young people who have committed a crime can truly turn their life around. They were inspired by actor, Mark Wahlberg, who was involved in crime at a young age and designed canvases telling his story. The public read the first part of the story and then attempted to guess how his life turned out by writing their thoughts on another canvas. Rakaya and the team then revealed the true outcome of the "young offender" and delivered their message:

"Despite committing a crime or making a mistake in your youth, your story is never over. With the right guidance and determination, you can still be successful in your own way."

Following her NCS experience, Raykaya joined the NCS Youth Board with the aim of getting more young people involved with NCS and creating more opportunities for social action projects.

She also became a team leader to develop her leadership skills and said,

"I'm so excited to become an NCS Leader. It's amazing how much of an impact the three week experience can have – not only do your confidence levels grow, but through amazing opportunities, you become a better leader and a team player who is ready to take on any challenge that is presented to you. The experience has already given me so much - the opportunity to meet new people, to spend time away from home, and to explore my own interests. NCS Leaders took this to a new level. My favourite part of NCS was the gorge walking activity during week one in Wales. This activity was amazing and it truly made our team work together to get everyone to the top of the gorge. I'd recommend NCS to anyone."



Andy, 17, South West

Andy took part in NCS in 2018 in the South West region. This experience helped him to build his confidence and gave him the support to win South West Junior Chef of the Year.

Before starting his experience, Andy said that he did not have much confidence. However, afterwards he felt completely different and said that NCS gave him the confidence to overcome his fear of speaking to new people!

During his experience, Andy spent time doing activities like cooking and was encouraged by the cooking teacher to enter the South West Junior Chef of the Year competition. He ended up winning the competition and has since completed work experience in Michelin starred restaurants!

Andy and his group were also involved in a social action project where they raised mental health awareness in Bournemouth. This involved distributing leaflets, speaking to local businesses, running a quiz night to raise money, and starting a social media campaign which was continued after the programme had finished.

During his experience, Andy also had the time to connect with homeless people and it helped him understand the issues surrounding homelessness and broke the stigma he felt.

“Being in the community talking with the homeless, trying to make a small difference for them, made me realise we can make a change and a long-lasting difference if we have that drive to do it. That was the part of NCS that made our team feel truly unstoppable. And going on to work with NCS Youth Board made me realise that if people are working together with a common goal, then change can be made on a national level. Anything is possible. Anything can happen – and we’re going to make it happen!”

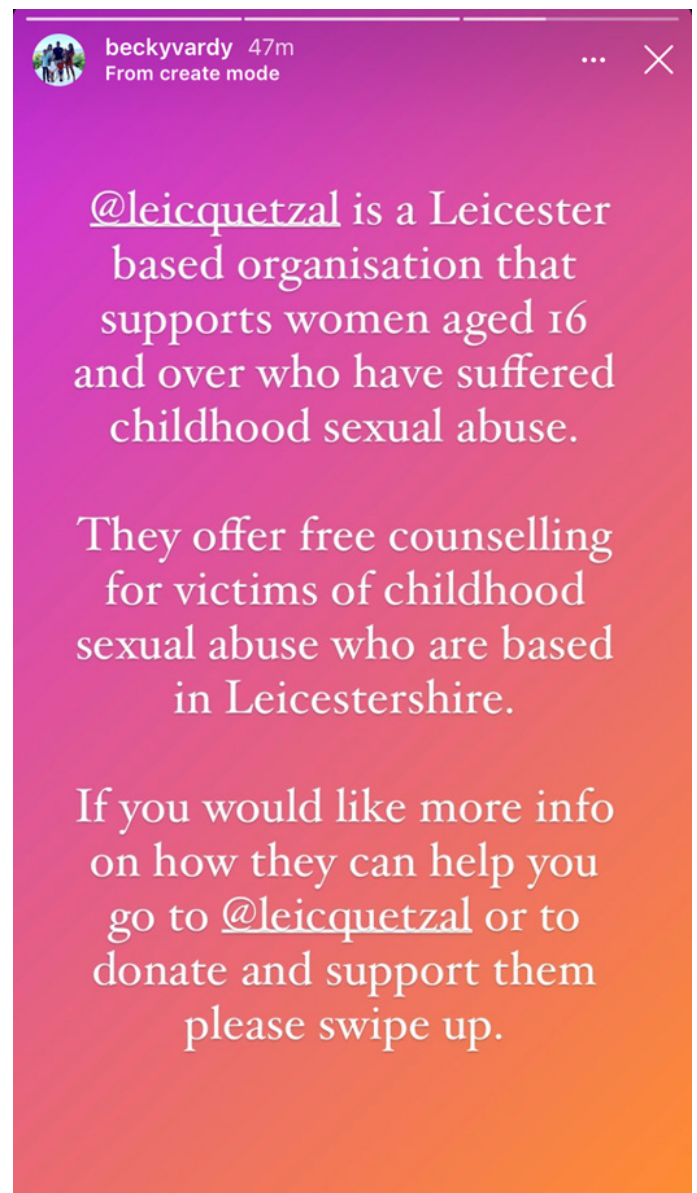
Quetzal project, East Midlands



This group of young people chose to support women's charity Quetzal by spreading awareness and securing a celebrity endorsement.

Quetzal is an organisation in Leicester which supports women recovering from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse. A group of NCS young people supported them through their social action project in 2025. They created the Crush the Hush campaign, advocating to break the silence, stigma and misconceptions about sexual and domestic abuse. The team distributed posters and leaflets to local businesses and did a social media 'takeover' of Quetzal's Instagram, where they made their own content to raise awareness.

The group's effort was successful, raising £428 for Quetzal, and increasing downloads of Quetzal's self help guide from their website. The group also managed to get in contact with celebrity, Becky Vardy, who shared the team's poster on her Instagram and put up a story about Quetzal.





Simon, 16, North West

Simon's introduction to boxing through an NCS local community experience in the North West, boosted his physical and mental health, and introduced him to a fulfilling volunteering role.

Simon's NCS local community experience packed a punch, in more than one way! Taking part in HYPE Merseyside's Boxing and Fitness programme at Hard Hitters boxing gym, he not only learnt how to throw a mean right hook, but how to turn that energy into positive action.

For Simon, who *"always had an interest in boxing but never had the opportunity to try it"* this experience was perfect. Training sessions in the gym focused on boxing basics, technique, fitness, and conditioning. And then, pro boxer (and coach) Luke Nevin, opened up the floor for team discussions.

"Luke would check in, see how we were doing, and give us the chance to ask questions". These ranged from stories about Luke's childhood and boxing career, to life skills, motivation, and struggles.

Simon put in work in the boxing ring, and outside of it. Part of his local community experience included going to a local youth club and helping to clear the outside area for kids to be able to play in. *"Volunteering at the youth club introduced me to a new place I'd never been before"*

said Simon, *"and after that I wanted to get more involved with them, so I started volunteering two or three times a week for a few hours. I've been helping the staff, doing some sports stuff with the kids and my aim is to get paid part-time hours over there when I've built up experience."*

The whole experience made Simon think about what he enjoys doing: *"I want to make better use of my time outside of college and do more clubs and similar NCS type of activities now, whereas before I didn't know what to get involved in."*

"NCS was insane, amazing, and it opened doors for me. I wasn't up to the best fitness levels, and was struggling mentally. Now I feel refreshed and I'm inspired to do more, get out there and find more opportunities."



Lucy, 16, South West

A group of inspiring Cornish teens, all aged 16 and 17, spent their summer holidays tackling food waste and making a difference to Truro's homeless community.

As well as raising awareness into how food waste was contributing to climate change, they pinpointed that some chain outlets in their local towns were throwing away unused food, which they collected and donated to a local homeless charity. But when the local shelter didn't have enough storage space, they set about to fundraise for a new fridge and freezer to ensure no food for those most in need was wasted.

One of the team, Lucy, said: *"We decided to tackle food waste because so much edible food is wasted every single day. This is not only harmful to the planet but also to your pocket, so we thought it was in everyone's best interests to reduce the amount of food that we threw away. We really wanted to raise awareness of the issue and try to reduce food waste as much as we possibly could."*

Empowered to make a change in her pocket of Cornwall, Lucy continued: *"We found that a lot of the smaller businesses in Truro were really good at managing their waste, so instead we went to the likes of Starbucks, Costa and Baker Tom's and found that at the end of the day they had lots of items like*

sandwiches and bread that just go into the bin. We collected their unused food items and donated them to St Petrocs, which runs a shelter and food bank for homeless people.

St Petrocs didn't have enough space to store fresh or freezable items, so we set up a fundraiser. In total, we gathered over £600 for a new fridge and freezer and made sure it was fully stocked for them."

The charity was obviously thrilled.

Angie Utting, Service Manager at St Petrocs, said: *"As the numbers of rough sleepers are increasing, we have more people to feed. We now have double the fridge space and it will make such a difference because it means we can accept extra food which is served to our rough sleepers on a daily basis. The new freezer will allow us to store donated bread which we use to make sandwiches for our rough sleepers. We are very grateful to the teenagers on NCS for all their hard work and kindness."*

Lucy added: *"It's opened up my eyes to the shocking amount of food that is wasted each year, and I'm planning on continuing to raise awareness of the issue. NCS was an absolutely amazing experience and it was rounded off really nicely with the social action project."*



Yousra, 20, North East

Yousra and her family fled from Syria two years after the war there began. After living in Jordan for around four years the family then moved to Newcastle upon Tyne with the support of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. Joining an NCS experience in 2019 helped Yousra meet new people and build skills ready for university.

Moving to the UK not knowing any English at all was a big challenge for Yousra, and it was hard, at first, not knowing anyone apart from her family. After a little trepidation and getting used to things like catching the bus, getting a bank account, and entering the school system, she started to make new friends, while teachers and support workers helped her settle and adapt to the new lifestyle.

Yousra took part in NCS in the summer of 2019. *"I always say that NCS has been my favourite adventure that I ever went for,"* she remarks, *"I met so many great friends, I volunteered for charities which made me feel very proud, and that helped me with the personal statement that I submitted with my application to university."*

"I also raised money for the first time. Me and my friends from NCS did Henna tattoos and raised over £50. Doing NCS helped me learn to be more independent, as I challenged myself and faced my fears - including jumping in a lake! - and I became more confident in meeting new people."

Yousra credits the experiences she gained on NCS as the reason she secured a part-time job around her studies: *"I had no work experience but they treated NCS as an equivalent, and so I got the job. They were looking for someone that had worked within a team before, so doing NCS definitely helped."*

Fast forward to now, and Yousra is thriving. She has completed a law degree at university and has secured her first legal job while she completes a masters degree.

A close-up photograph of a person sitting in a wheelchair. The person is wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and a colorful, patterned bag is slung over their shoulder. The background is a warm, orange-yellow gradient.

Rebecca, 20, London

Rebecca took part in NCS during the summer of 2021 as a new wheelchair user. She credits the programme with 'changing her life'. The volunteering work she did has since seen her collect a British Empire Medal.

Following her NCS experience as a new wheelchair user, Rebecca realised that she *"wasn't a burden and that life could be okay"*. The experience inspired her to join youth advisory boards, where she is now the Vice Chair of Whizz Kidz's Kidz Board, sits on the Council for Disabled Children's Youth Board and also had a year-long role on the NCS Youth Advisory Board. These are all roles where she pushed for greater representation for disabled young people, focusing on making organisations accessible.

Outside of her advocacy work, Rebecca is a keen cricketer and plays for Team GB's wheelchair team, as well as her county team, Surrey.

"NCS changed my life" she says, "I was a new wheelchair user who felt out of place, confused and scared of what this new life would bring. On NCS being disabled wasn't a problem. I was able to do all of the activities like everyone else, just with a few adaptations. I started to see that I wasn't a burden and that life could be okay as a wheelchair user."

For their social action project, Rebecca's group focused on improving the accessibility of shops in their local area. She said, *"the fact that all these people around me cared about my experience as a disabled person and wanted to improve it completely changed my mindset."*

Rebecca is now a biomedical engineering student at King's College London. She added: *"I'm sad that, after the Government's announcement of their new youth voice strategy and the winding down of NCS that comes with that, no one else will get to experience the power of NCS like I did."*



Rob, 28, North East

Rob says he was a shy teenager when he joined an NCS experience back in 2012, and he credits the experience for giving him the desire, skills and opportunities to help improve his local community.

Rob's experience provided him with the motivation to go for a career in youth work, and he has now been elected as a local councillor.

"NCS was truly a life-changing experience for me when I completed the programme in 2012. I was able to talk to new people, gain confidence to talk in front of people, and understand what community meant to me."

Rob was part of the first NCS Leaders programme that took place in late 2012 and carried on volunteering for NCS, being part of the steering group of young people to create the NCS Youth Board.

"NCS gave me opportunities I never knew were possible. NCS made me the person I am today. I gained a greater understanding of what community meant to me and how to make change. Thank you NCS for giving me the skills that I gained and helping me explore the career path I am doing today."

"I was a shy teenager, unsure what to do with my future. Now I'm an elected local councillor, and youth worker, passionate about empowering young people and communities."



Tom, 18, East England

Tom took part in a NCS experience in 2023 and is from the East of England. He thought it would be a fun thing to do in the summer holidays and a way to meet new people.

From the first day, Tom was involved in activities like high ropes and team challenges which helped break the ice with his new teammates and encourage constructive collaboration to achieve their goals. According to Tom, some tasks were harder than others, particularly Jacob's Ladder, which involved effective communication and positive motivation to help everyone build their confidence and overcome their fears.

Tom enjoyed sailing, which he'd never done before and taught him new skills. By the end of his session he felt comfortable with sailing and the other water based activities. Fortunately the hot weather meant that falling into the lake at the end wasn't too much of a shock either!

On the final day, Tom was involved in creating a budget for university life. Together with his teammates they researched rent, food costs, and university grants and discussed how they would split expenses in shared accommodation. For the more immediate future though Tom is looking forward to starting A levels in maths, physics, law, and geography at his first choice school thanks to his successful GCSE results which he received on the penultimate day of his NCS experience!

"It was a fantastic week, the leaders were amazing and it was lovely to meet new people, and enjoy some great activities alongside them."



Shamza, 20, Yorkshire & Humber

Shamza arrived in the UK as a shy teenager unable to speak any English and struggling with confidence, moving from a low-populated town in Northern Italy to Bradford in West Yorkshire. After joining NCS to make new friends she's since become a prolific volunteer and has, at the age of 20, achieved her goal of becoming a police officer.

Shamza is one of the youngest recipients of a British Empire Medal (BEM) for her volunteering efforts including projects to tackle youth crime and bullying.

She said: *"I have done so much work with NCS, from social action and charitable work to volunteering at the Queen's funeral and the King's Coronation. My work with the Peer Action Collective has enabled me to campaign against knife crime.*

I arrived in the UK as a young 16 year old who wanted to learn the language and make some friends. I joined NCS for a summer and it is the best thing I ever did. My confidence boosted and I have met so many friends for life and have done so many remarkable things."

Shamza has now embarked on her dream career in the police force. She added:

"I could have gone to university, however, because of my work in the community and my time on NCS, I am driven to helping people and that's what motivated me to get involved in public services. NCS has been a big motivator for me wanting to help people. After two years of applications and exams I finally achieved my dream job as a police officer. I want to say a massive thank you to NCS, who encouraged me not to give up. I can't wait to see how my journey goes."



Kai, 23, North East

Kai ended up leaving secondary education with no GCSEs to his name. He found himself 'knocking about with the wrong crowd' and in trouble with the police.

The Felling area of Gateshead where Kai grew up is in the top 10% of deprived neighbourhoods, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Only 52% of the total working population are in employment and the average wage is £18,000 per annum.

"On the scrapheap, perhaps" he says, but he does credit his mum with pushing him to take part in a NCS experience that summer: *"I'm so glad she persisted as this was the activity that changed me for the better. I didn't really know what I was letting myself in for, but the whole experience was a crash course learning life skills, meeting new people and doing good."*

It was exactly the transformation that I needed."

He continued, *"It was the leaders that guided me - for the first time I felt that someone had faith in me - and the new mates I met led me away from the dangerous route I'd been heading. The whole NCS experience gave me confidence, the ability to speak in front of others and open up. There are so many skills that I still use today."*

The experience also inspired Kai to enrol at college. *"Even just having the confidence to walk through the doors on enrolment day and consider all*

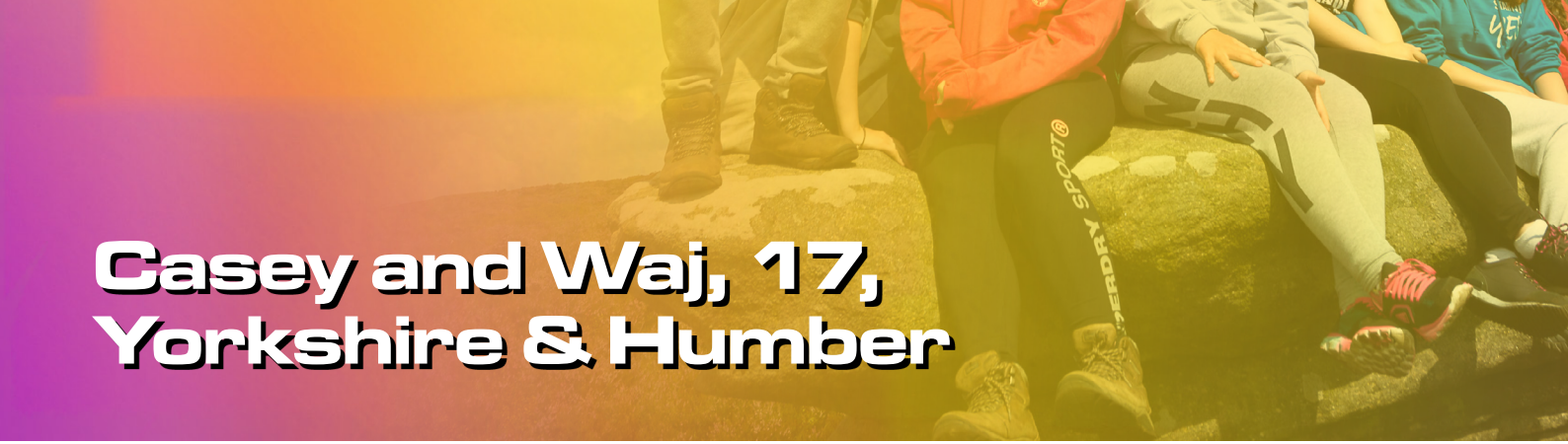
options was something I wouldn't have been able to do just weeks before. I signed up for a mechanics course, and the following summer I was invited back to NCS as a member of staff. Helping other teenagers, some of them in similar circumstances to myself, motivated me to go for a youth work qualification."

Kai then got a job at McDonalds where he worked his way up to be a shift manager. He was in charge of looking after the store and managing shifts.

"Taking on a managerial role was an amazing stepping stone in my journey. And that's where my big break came."

Kai landed a role with a housing association in Gateshead as a mental health support worker. There, he assisted 16 to 21 year olds living in supported housing, and this year he's taken another career step, transferring to a role where he helps women fleeing from domestic violence.

"I've used my lived experiences to help the young people I work with. I'll tell them 'I was kicked out of school, I got no GCSEs - but look at me now. I've got a great, stable job helping others'. It can inspire them to see a light at the end of the tunnel for themselves. If I can do that, there's no reason, with a little support from role models, that they can't too. I aspire to be one of those role models that helped me when I was 16."



Casey and Waj, 17, Yorkshire & Humber

Casey and Waj, both from South Yorkshire, met on an NCS experience in 2017 and bridged their cultural differences through friendship.

“I’d never have met Waj were it not for NCS,” says 17-year-old Casey, who comes from a predominantly white British area of her local town. The pair bonded during a hike up a mountain, and hit it off immediately.

“Where I’m from, it’s not ethnically diverse,” she explains. “I’d not really interacted with people from different backgrounds, so meeting Waj was a new experience. On NCS, there are so many different groups of people, but it gives you those commonalities and talking points. For example, I didn’t know the ins and outs of what Halal meat was until I met Waj, and I remember asking her about her hijab, and whether she wears it at home.”

It made Casey realise that there’s *“often a lack of understanding about different cultures. You don’t really learn about it in school, but being aware of and accepting other people’s cultures makes you a more rounded person.”*

Waj agrees, saying *“People think differences will tear people apart, but it actually brings people closer together, and that’s powerful.”*

Waj quickly realised that Casey was up for learning a lot, and learnt from her too saying *“She’ll give anything a go! Before I visited where she lives, I wouldn’t have been completely comfortable about going to a predominantly white area, in case there was some kind of hate there. Integration is really important,”*

She continues, *“We’re such an ethnically diverse country, so it’s great when people get to meet people from different backgrounds, like at NCS. For me, having friends from different races and religions means you get to learn different things every day. It makes you more knowledgeable and well informed. And you get to try lots of different foods!”*

Tilly, 17, North East



17-year-old Tilly started volunteering regularly in 2022 after joining up with her local NCS Changemakers team. Although charity work had been a key interest growing up, joining up with other young people on NCS was a driver to expand her volunteering, and Tilly further developed a passion for helping others.

During the year, Tilly played a major role in setting up different events and fundraisers to help various charities and causes across Stockton-on-Tees.

This included work with Sanctuary Supported Living. Her team raised money to help the refuge for residents escaping domestic violence and other conflicts through a book and bake sale. The money went towards a revamped family lounge and kitchen.

Also lending support to Tees Community Hub, who help residents in social crisis, Tilly collected hygiene products for redistribution to families and individuals in need.

Tilly's most hard-hitting project, however, was one that held a close personal connection. Last summer she led a team of young volunteers on a donation drive for the North Tees Chemotherapy Ward where they raised over £1,000 to provide care packages for the patients, as well as for the nurses on the ward.

"The project held deep meaning for myself and other members of the team, who had seen family members in the same ward receiving treatment," she said. "For me, this was my father who lost his battle in December of 2018. Now I think about him every time I achieve anything and think of how proud he would be to see me today."

Furthermore, during the summer Tilly was also able to play an active role at Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF), taking on the role of social media correspondent for the council's Bright Minds Big Futures team.

Tilly's volunteering exploits in 2022 helped her win North East's Youth's Young Volunteer of the Year award, and she's since become a young community panel member for The Key, who helped fund her team's project for Sanctuary Supported Living.

Summing up, Tilly added: *"Charity work had been something I had been interested in for years through the influence of my parents and experiencing the support my family was able to receive from charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support and the Butterwick Hospice during my dad's illness."*



Tom, 19, North East

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a Gateshead teenager helped create a uniform donation project that ended up assisting hundreds of local families, having a substantial impact on the community - and him.

Tom originally took part in NCS during the summer of 2020, and was able to help construct a highly impactful and award winning project that benefitted hundreds of families.

Knowing that many families struggled with the cost of financing expensive school uniform supplies, Tom and his team set out to create a donation hub so they could redistribute items to families in need. They were blown away by the support they received from their community, with hundreds of parents dropping off donations after their creative social media campaign.

Local media soon caught wind of the team's project and Tom spoke live on radio about why they were helping their community. Thousands of donated items flooded in and soon the team were inundated with shirts, blazers, trousers, and shoes and quickly had to find solutions of where to store and wash all of the items and plan how they could redistribute to families.

What started as an idea for a week-long donation drive turned into a full summer of volunteering in which Tom and his teammates were able to directly help 500 local families with the costs of school uniforms - and they didn't stop there. With many items left over in stock the teams set up collection hubs in local schools and donated surplus items to charity shops.

After catching the volunteering bug, Tom relaunched the project the following summer, leading a fresh team of young volunteers and also started a similar scheme during the winter collecting coats and warm clothing for homeless people.

The team's project ended up winning Children & Young People Now's (CYPN) Youth Volunteering and Social Action Award and Tom was invited to attend the Prime Minister's 'Thank You Day' event at 10 Downing Street with other local community heroes, meeting Boris Johnson and talking to him about the success of the project.

Tom went on to receive a Coronation Champion Award as part of the King's Coronation celebrations, and also worked as a team leader on NCS experiences, inspiring other young people to get involved in community action.

Talking about how the project originally launched, Tom commented: ***"At that time school uniforms were increasing in price and I was conscious that during COVID-19 many families would struggle financially to provide uniforms for their children returning to school."***

He continued, ***"I have absolutely loved working with NCS both as a participant and as a leader. It has certainly helped me grow in confidence and made me into the young adult I am today. NCS has played such a huge part in my journey in life and I am so proud of the work we have accomplished."***



Lucy, 16, North West

Back in 2020 Lucy got involved in a project called Digital Buddies, set up by NCS delivery partner Salford Foundation.

Lucy signed up to help the older generation across Salford and Trafford who were struggling to use their phone, tablet, or computer, to stay connected with friends and family. By linking these people with a 'tech-savvy' teen, they were provided with one-to-one support to help them solve their digital challenges, and help to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Lucy was paired with Sue, who needed help with her laptop. They started having weekly calls, and after four months their friendship led them into an exciting opportunity. They both took part in an interview on BBC Radio 5 Live for a special programme, guest-edited by HM Majesty Queen Camilla, where they had the chance to discuss their journey as Digital Buddies.

During the interview, the pair spoke with passion and enthusiasm about their experiences. They both think the contact and communication has been helpful; getting to share different experiences and learning something new has been valuable for them both.

Lucy said: ***"We would call each other maybe once a week for an hour or so and I would help Sue with anything she was having trouble with, with her technology, so she could stay in contact with other people and use social media and the internet."***

Lucy loved having contact with a member of her local community who I would never have spoken to before. She said, "I have loved the weekly conversations and I was very excited to be on national radio with my buddy. It was an amazing opportunity to spread the word about digital buddies and inspire more people to stay connected."



Confidence in Conversations refugee project, North East

This group of award-winning 16 and 17 year old refugees living in the North East took part in an experience with NCS grantee The Key.

A team of young people with lived experience of being refugees arriving in a new city set up their project, Confidence in Conversations. Together they supported other young refugees who had recently arrived in Newcastle upon Tyne, tutoring them on different topics such as transport, getting around, schools, jobs, and even the local Geordie slang!

Group member Nuha said: *“We showcased Newcastle to the tutees and the beauty of our city as well as how to navigate it. We aided their understanding of the education system in the UK and we cooked delicious meals together and had conversations.”*

Nuha wanted to give back to their community, saying *“I have first hand experience and I know how helpful my community was and I wanted them to have the same support.”*

At the Key’s annual awards event, the team was picked out as the most impactful NCS-funded project.



RWE Sofia Offshore Wind Farm enterprise challenge partnership, North East

In 2022, NCS teamed up with leading energy company RWE to create a real-world enterprise challenge that saw 1600 NCS participants in the North East create campaigns to improve the gender balance in the wind sector, which at the time was only 18% women.

RWE's Sofia Offshore Wind Farm, off the North East coast, is one of the world's largest, with the generated electricity transported into Teesside. For the energy firm, it provided the perfect opportunity to seek valuable insights and advice from many of the young people who may join their workforce in years to come. For those taking part in NCS, it gave them a chance to work creatively, develop their presentation skills, and start to mould their future career ambitions.

The creative campaigns ranged from an offshore wind Barbie and a Love Island pastiche, to a touring bus and use of historical role models. The communications team at RWE reviewed the young people's ideas and planned to incorporate them into potential future awareness campaigns.

Once the ideas were evaluated, many of the participants involved were invited to a ceremony, with one team crowned the winning entry. They were a team from South Tyneside who picked up the main accolade for their campaign that aimed to tackle gender stereotypes using social media trends on TikTok and education outreach. Judges praised the team for their clever 'finger down' TikTok campaign that demonstrated barriers young women might encounter when it comes to entering sectors such as the offshore wind. The team had also developed lesson plans for an education programme to encourage more girls to consider a career within the industry.

Tyger, who took part, said: ***"The whole challenge has led me to take a closer look at the offshore wind sector as a potential career path. There are so many different types of roles available and women shouldn't be put off by the stereotypical idea that jobs in engineering or construction are for men."***