

FEBRUARY 2024

Mid-year newsletter

Inspiring Choices February Newsletter

Welcome to our mid-year newsletter. This year has been our busiest year yet, and we still have so much to come!

Please, read through to see what we have been up to so far and what is coming up for us.

What is new?

As you may know, our delivery team doubled in size this year. With this added capacity, we have been able to develop and deliver more sessions and events than ever before.

We are happy to announce we are now starting to work with young carers in the area, adding them to our existing strategic outreach groups. You can read more about our resources and our strategic work [here](#).

Newsletter Highlights

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Recent acknowledgements

Inspiring Futures Award

In October, we were presented the 'Inspiring Future' award at the North Yorkshire Annual Care Leavers Celebration event at the University of York. This award came in recognition for our collaborative work on the July 2023 London Residential trip for 13 care leavers.

Read about the trip on our website, [here](#).

Read the York St John news article on the award [here](#).



John Lewis Partnership, 'Building Happier Futures' Impact Report

Part of the care leavers London residential trip was to visit John Lewis Partnership (JLP). JLP celebrates the first year of their 'Building Happier Futures' programme, which focusing on improving opportunities for individuals who are care experienced.

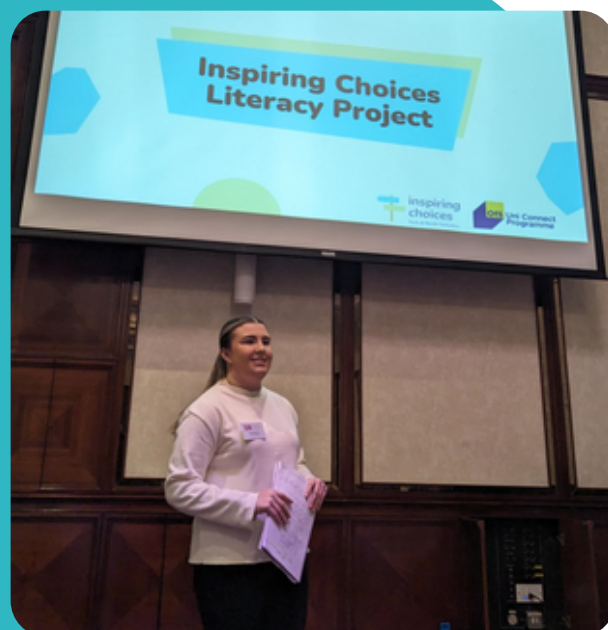
Inspiring Choices, and our London visit prompted us to be included in their 2023 Impact Report, which you can take a look at [here](#).



SUN conference presentation

At the end of January, one of our Outreach Coordinators, Lydia Macpherson presented about the success of our Literacy Project pilot at the Southern Universities Network (SUN) Practitioner Conference.

To read more about our literacy project, please [click here](#).



The year so far

On Track Launch

We are delighted to report that the On Track partnership is going strong and this year's programme of events has gotten off to a flying start. In October, Askham Bryan College kindly hosted our launch event which included lava lamp making, volcano building, and pizza! We were delighted with the great turn out and had a full laboratory of eager people (both young and a little older) to pour oil, food colouring, and effervescent tablets into a cup and watch the luminous bubbles dance around to our delight.

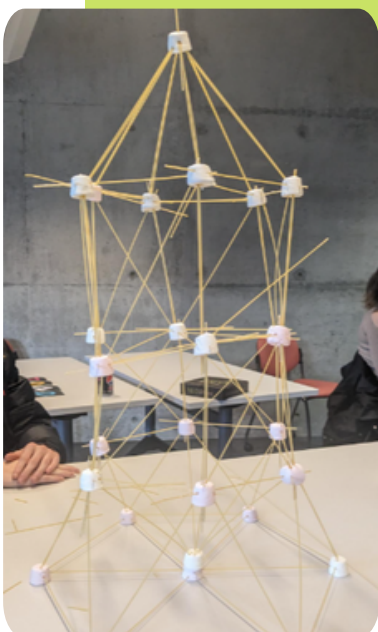
A big thank you to all of our partners at York St John University, the University of York, and CU Scarborough for coming along and introducing yourselves, and our enormous gratitude to Steven McLean at Askham Bryan who helped us with booking and scheduling for the day, as well as being an absolute star by doing several coffee runs for the attendees. We can't wait to be back on 15th February for the Askham Bryan On Track day, then at York St John on 3rd April, University of York on 30th May, then CU Scarborough on 28th August! (Shameless dates plug intended)

Alex Hargreaves

Outreach Coordinator



Project Dare



In December we successfully ran our first Project Dare sessions of this academic year. There were 2 sessions at York St John University led by ARUP. The students participating got to talk to professionals in the rail industry, learn more about STEM careers and have a go at planning a new rail line. Despite our staff's best attempts, all groups of students were able to plan a rail line that costed less, held more people, was more environmentally friendly and quicker than ours!

Our next Project Dare takes place later this month with Aviva.

Annie Smith

Project Assistant

Creativity Lab

On 31st January, Inspiring Choices – in partnership with York Cares and the University of York – arranged and funded a visit to the University's Campus West for Harrogate High students. Sixteen year 10s attended the visit that included a tour of the university campus, a chance to chat with student ambassadors, and a two-hour workshop at the university's Creativity Lab, based within the main library complex. The Lab provides students with the opportunity to try out emerging technologies with a focus on creativity – such technologies include Virtual and Augmented reality, as well as a range of high-end software including Adobe Creative, and the game engines Unity and Unreal.

One particular highlight was the Lego engineering activity, in which students were tasked with building a custom vehicle and programme motors to navigate an obstacle course. Another highlight was the campus tour led by STEM ambassadors at the University of York, which included a look round the state-of-the-art science facilities at the university, as well as a sneak peak of university learning by exploring a chemistry lecture theatre.

Inspiring Choices would like to thank the Creativity Lab, York Cares, and the University of York for making this visit such a fantastic event. We hope to be back soon!

Jack Evason

Outreach Officer



Co-Create

In early February, myself and Jack got to stretch our creative muscles by taking part in York St John's wonderful 2024 Co-Create Festival. A vibrant celebration of creativity, imagination and performance, the festival invites students 11-18 across the county to take part by creating a drama, dance, or music piece (or a combination of all three) around a given theme. Serendipity was the focus of this year's festival, and what a wonderful variety of interpretations there were!

As part of the festival, current students and industry professionals are invited to lead workshops and watch the students' performances, which is where we come in. Alongside my work with Inspiring Choices, I write and make silly theatre with my company Notice this Notice. Following my workshop last year, I was asked if I could run a drama workshop with a focus on music for this year's festival. The focus was on creating theatrical soundscapes to add atmosphere and musical accompaniment to live theatre. So plans were drawn up, a workshop was written, and a boat load of musical instruments were hired. Enter Jack, music aficionado and percussionist extraordinaire. In 1 short hour, our goal was to explain the function of a soundscape, demonstrate its artistic capabilities, and have the participants create their own. And goodness gracious did they deliver. The workshop ran twice, once with East Durham College, and then with Caedmon College, and the standard of work produced in each was fantastic. We listened to six vastly different soundscapes that were all given the same brief that were emotional, atmospheric, and performative. It was a pleasure to work with these wonderfully creative and talented people.

I stayed to watch the school performances into the evening and they were fantastic, encapsulating the sublime to the ridiculous. Co-Create is an inspiring project that celebrates the arts and their ability to empower young people through creativity. We sincerely hope that this festival continues to grow every year and this opportunity can be enjoyed by all those who have a passion to perform, create, or immerse themselves in the arts.

Alex Hargreaves

Outreach Coordinator

Mature Learners Sessions

We have partnered with York St John University to provide information sessions at local venues for people considering returning to education. So far, we have set up a stand at Selby Library in January and Eastfield Library last week.

Look out on our website and Instagram to see where we will be next! Get more information for mature learners on our website [here](#).

Annie Smith

Project Assistant



Literacy Project

Northallerton School Autumn 2023

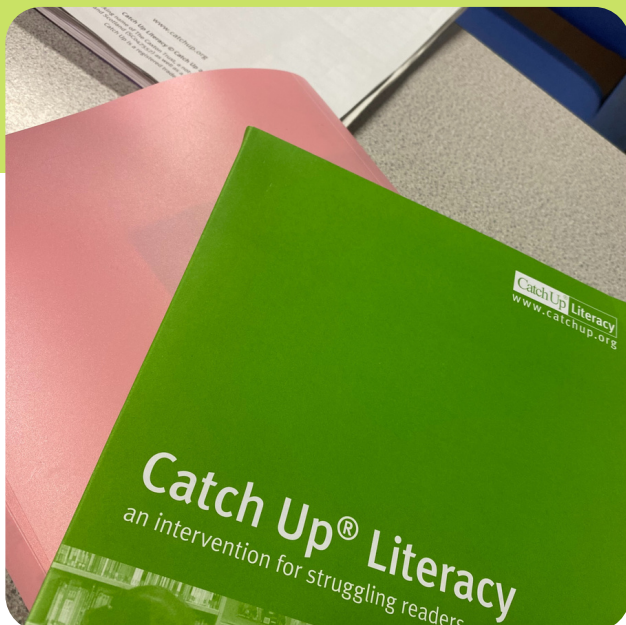
From October to December 2023 Inspiring Choices were delivering an Attainment Raising literacy project at Northallerton School. The project worked with 8 x year 7 male pupils who were identified as having a below reading and writing age. One Outreach Coordinator and York St John graduate delivered Catch Up literacy sessions three times a week to the pupils to maximise their progress. The Catch Up literacy sessions involved the pupils reading a selected book and a subsequent writing task.

At the end of the term, confidence to read out loud and progression could be seen in all pupils. For example, one pupil progressed from a Catch Up level 6 to level 11.

Graham School Spring 2024

Following a successful first run at Northallerton School, the literacy project is now starting its second run in Graham School. Whilst following the same format as the first literacy project, this time around we will be working with eight year eight students. We are hopeful that the literacy project will support these students with their reading and help them to grow their confidence. Whilst these sessions may be in their early stages, it is great to see the growth of the literacy project and the continuation of an exciting project.

Lydia Macpherson and Abbie Salkeld
Outreach Coordinators



New Activities

Autumn term saw the rollout of two new activity strands, and seven new workshops, developed following our annual report and feedback gathered from our stakeholder consultation. These workshops are available now and ready to be delivered in your institutions by our delivery team.

Future Selves

Future Selves is all about choices. We begin with an exploration of **passions** and strengths: understanding what we are good at and what we enjoy. We then learn about **decision making**: what our priorities are and how to make a good decision. Finally, we bring these together and set **goals** for future education, careers, and life. This series of workshops is available for all years from Y10 onwards.

HE Study Skills

HE Study Skills equips learners with the skills they need to succeed academically in Higher Education and provide insight into learning in a university environment. We cover **research techniques** – including the use of AI technology – **academic writing**, and **revision techniques**. This series of workshops is primarily aimed at Y12, Y13, and FE learners considering university.

Digital Skills

Digital Skills is a new workshop developed for the employability strand, covering skills for the workplace including professional communication etiquette, online safety, and transacting online. This workshop has been developed to align with the UK Government's Essential Digital Skills framework and is available for all learners from Y10 onwards.

Each series of workshops has been mapped against our NERUPI framework and the Gatsby Benchmarks. For further information, or to book in these workshops for your institution, please contact your Outreach Coordinator.

Jack Evason

Outreach Officer

Stakeholder consultation

Thank you so much to our stakeholders who responded to our survey in June. We gained fantastic feedback on how our activities and workshops had been received by staff and students.

The survey covered packages, bespoke, third party, and strategic outreach that we had delivered and been involved in throughout the year. Responses were high and positive, with stakeholders praising our involvement in local institutions and communities.

Employability and preparing for student life were considered the most successful packages on offer to students. Groundwork and Brilliant Club were praised for being well received in our third party category, and the chance for young people to share their opinions and visit new places were shared as highlights within our strategic outreach work.

Stakeholders suggested working with Year 9s around option time, an increase in support to prepare students academically for HE, more icebreakers to include more vulnerable students, supporting students to find work experience placements, the use of a different venue to a youth club, and for feedback to be shared with the students so they can see how workshops and activities were received.

We are already incorporating suggested alterations and new activity ideas into our provision for this academic year and are excited to put out further stakeholder surveys at the end of the Spring and Summer terms. Thank you, in anticipation for your participation in those. A presentation of the full findings can be found [here](#).

Jess Ely

Evaluation Assistant



'I'd like to thank the team for the work they do, and the opportunities they give to young people. Without this support, schools wouldn't be able to do a lot of these things as cost is so inhibiting.'

'The Inspiring Choices team are absolutely brilliant.'

'We really value your help.'

'I really appreciate the work that Uni Connect have done at Askham Bryan College. The feedback from the Ivy House award and student finance workshops was positive and have made a positive difference to our students. We hope to continue to make the most of the partnership going forward.'

Looking ahead at the rest of the year

As you can tell, we have had a busy first half of this academic year! We have even more exciting events and workshops ahead. Just a couple of these include, residentials for care experienced young people, history attainment raising project and our annual Year 9 STEM Conference.

We are going to continue developing our work with our strategic groups, specifically military service students, mature learners and young carers, so please be on the lookout for more information on those.

As always, please reach out to us with any requests for engagement or information!

Annie Smith

Project Assistant

Get in touch with us



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