



Newsletter

April 2025

Empowering young people by exploring choices

The first two terms of this year have continued in the same busy, active and engaging way for Inspiring Choices working with young people in schools and colleges across our region. Here, in summary, are some of the amazing activities and events we have run already this year and a look forward to what's in store for this term, and to acknowledge the massive commitment of our fantastic Outreach Coordinators, who, with the support of student ambassadors, create opportunities for young people across North Yorkshire to explore their future options and possibilities for further study.

The Outreach Coordinators work closely with their contacts in schools and colleges to continuously update our activities, which this year also includes a session on how to use AI effectively and sessions on Future Selves.

We have welcomed a new Outreach Coordinator into the team, whilst bidding farewell to another and in the first two terms of 2024/2025 delivered activities on campus and in schools and colleges and have created, developed and delivered three longer projects, two of which are detailed in this newsletter. We have also hosted the first Destinations Festival and are already planning the second!

Alongside what could be described as our 'regular' work, we are also busy planning two residentials to Cambridge and Edinburgh, our fourth STEM conference in collaboration with the National Railway Museum, another visit to the extraordinary Creativity Lab at University of York and Project Dare with Nestle, giving students the opportunity to work with one of York's largest employers, all of which will take place in the summer term.

All of this is possible because although we are a small team working in a very big county, we all have a passion for what we do. We said it last year and it's true again this year.....it's our busiest year yet! Here's to the next three months.

Penny Garner, Outreach and Partnerships Manager

The Literacy Project



We were pleased to facilitate the return of the Catch-up literacy project this year. The literacy project is a one-to-one intervention scheme, focussed on supporting reading strategy, comprehension and developing writing skills. Alongside the development of practical skills, such as reading fluency, the literacy project also helps the students to build confidence with their reading. We hope that building this confidence will help the students to feel more comfortable with written texts and comprehension in their lessons.

This year we have been working with a group of Year 7 students, and we have been running sessions twice a week for ten weeks. We have also brought in some brand-new books for the students to read on the project, with animals proving to be a popular theme! Alongside our new books, some students have elected to bring in their own books from home and have engaged in interesting conversations about the characters and plot. It has been fantastic to see such enthusiasm from the students.

Abbie Salkeld, Outreach Coordinator



Destinations Festival

On Wednesday 9th April 2025, Inspiring Choices and partners hosted the first ever Destinations Festival, held on campus at York St John University!

The festival was aimed at young people in Year 9 and above from any background who have an interest in attending University and would like to know more. There were professionals from a variety of careers and universities sharing their advice at careers stands, drop-in sessions on how to apply for student finance and through UCAS, guidance and support for certain groups including students eligible for DSA (disabled students' allowance), and taster sessions with the Policing department at York St John University. There were also lots of other activities to get involved with like adding your own design to a collaborative art banner, creating hot water bottle covers and trying to set the fastest time on the rowing machine.

It really was a fantastic day for all involved and we would like to thank everyone who was involved in Destinations Festival for making the event a great success. We are also pleased to announce that Destinations Festival will be returning next year! More information is coming soon so for now, stay tuned for an update!

Jamie Thompson, Outreach Coordinator

Beyond the Barracks



Beyond the Barracks is a new mentoring scheme programme we have launched in collaboration with York St John University widening participation team. We are working with military service children from three schools across North Yorkshire on the project, their ages ranging from Year 7 up to Year 11. The purpose of Beyond the Barracks is to equip the students with skills for their future and help them to recognise the skills they already have, including those they have gained from their experiences of being a military service child.



Each week the students have been working in small groups with an assigned student ambassador mentor. They have tackled topics such as pathways into HE, CV writing, wellbeing week, revision skills and life as a military service child. The students will also be joining us for a campus visit later in the year to celebrate their achievements on the programme. This will also give the students the opportunity to tour the campus and meet other military service children from across the county.

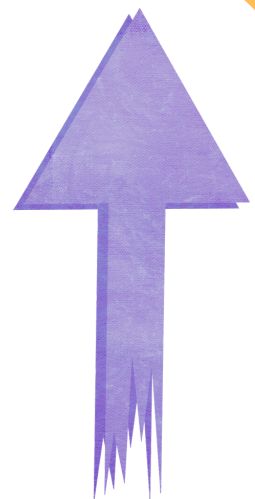
It has been wonderful to hear the students participating in thought provoking conversations throughout the project and participating in some entertaining teamwork activities. We hope that the information and skills they take away from Beyond the Barracks will prove to be useful to all the students who have participated in the project.

Abbie Salkeld, Outreach Coordinator

Purple Up! Day is on the way!

April is the month of the military service child. This is an opportunity to celebrate military service children and acknowledge the challenges they overcome. This may often include moving schools and experiencing parents deployment. Throughout April we celebrate the strength and resilience military service children show on a daily basis.

On the 25th April we will celebrate Purple Up! Day. This is a day where you can wear something purple, the colour of the military service child, to show support for military service children. Why not join in or get creative to include a splash of purple for the day.



The Spark Programme



Inspired by our attendance at the [Boys' Impact Conference](#) in September 2024 and its founder Alex Blower's work, Inspiring Choices has launched a new pilot programme, entitled the Spark Programme. Spark is directed at Year 11 boys that have become disengaged with their education, acknowledging that working class boys are one of the lowest attaining groups at GCSE and are more likely to make decisions about their future later than their peers.

Utilising the [Taking Boys Seriously Principles](#) (TBS) (Ulster University), the aim of Spark is to encourage boys to make considered and timely decisions about their future learning, and recognise that they can be successful.

From December to March, we worked with Graham School in Scarborough to deliver nine sessions targeted at six Year 11 boys. Sessions ranged from discussing motivations and goal setting, to exploring their further education, apprenticeships, and higher education options available. Specific focus was placed upon their interests and local institutions. We also had the opportunity to visit Scarborough Technical College, seeing their Construction Trades courses in action, and Askham Bryan College in York, receiving a fantastic tour of both their campus and wildlife park!

Adopting the TBS Principles *#1: Recognising the Primacy of Relationship* and *#8: Engage Meaningfully with Boys*, Spark was designed as a long-term programme that prioritised a small group, allowing for positive relationships to develop. The boys were encouraged to share what they were interested in and their expectations, allowing for a programme curated specifically to their needs. Whilst the content of the sessions was important, *how* they were delivered proved more significant. Every week was a learning opportunity on how best to engage the group and allow for positive interactions. For example, when teaching the boys about higher education, we played our HE version of Jenga, creating an informal learning environment where questions could be asked whilst having a laugh! Throughout the duration of Spark, it was fantastic to see the boys become more open and initiating one-to-one conversations, keeping me updated on both their plans after Year 11 and interests outside of school.

Inspiring Choices would like to thank Graham School for allowing us to pilot Spark with their students.

Molly Crowe, Outreach Coordinator



Data Snapshot Aug - April 2024/2025

Two terms have now been completed and a busy final term is left to come. So far this academic year, we have worked with 33 schools and colleges across York and North Yorkshire. We have delivered 526 activities to young people, parents/carers and staff. These activities include 280 one-to-one literacy sessions, 85 in-school workshops, 12 campus visits, and attendance at 12 careers fairs. These activities have accounted for over 400 hours of activity contact time.

We have worked with 1980 “unique learners.” Unique learners are only counted in activities where we receive named registers of participants. Unique learners are counted only once no matter how many times they participate in our activities.

We have had 3952 interactions with learners. Interactions includes unique learners and unnamed participants (e.g., those we speak to at careers fair) and are counted every time they participate in an activity. For example, 10 learners participating in three of our workshops would count as 30 interactions.

We look forward to many more activities in the summer term.

Laura Fenwick, Research and Impact Evaluation Officer

526
Activities

33
Schools/Colleges

401
Contact Hours

1980
Unique Learners

3952
Interactions

Stakeholder Consultation

We gained valuable and informative feedback on how our activities and workshops from the Winter term have been received by staff and students in our stakeholder consultation in December 2024. You can read the full report [here](#).

In the Summer term we will be sharing feedback from the stakeholder consultations between 2022 - 2024, as well as our responses and how we are implementing your feedback.

We will also be in touch with our second stakeholder consultation of the year which will focus on activity our stakeholders have received during the Spring and Summer term of 2025.

We use stakeholder feedback and insights to enhance and develop our programme, including creating new and amended activities which better meet the needs of our stakeholders.

Thank you in anticipation for your responses!

Jess Ely, Evaluation Assistant

“The Inspiring Choices programme and staff offer great understanding and personal insight into HE for our varied and mixed cohort that they would not otherwise experience.”

“The Inspiring Choices team is professional, knowledgeable and a pleasure to work with.”

“Inspiring Choices add capacity and allow for bespoke, directed workshops to audiences that we would not teach together normally.”

“We have been grateful for the opportunity to work with Inspiring Choices to reach a different group of people with the intervention training, which in turn has enabled more struggling learners to be supported.”

“We were proud to be involved with the Literacy Project and deliver Catch Up literacy training to staff and students.”

What's next?

I'm pleased to share that the Office for Students has confirmed funding for another academic year.

At the time of writing, we are still awaiting confirmation from the Department for Education regarding the final funding amount. However, we are already looking forward to meeting with you soon to discuss our plans for the 2025/26 programme, which will continue to include a wide range of higher education outreach opportunities and activities.

Next year will mark the final year of Uni Connect funding, which will conclude in July 2026. The government is currently developing a new programme to succeed it, and we very much hope to continue delivering impactful opportunities to your students through this new initiative.

To mark the end of this chapter, we will be hosting a celebration of the past seven years of Uni Connect. This will also be a chance for you to share your thoughts on what you'd like to see in a future programme. Look out for an invitation at the start of the next academic year.

As always, thank you for your continued support of the Inspiring Choices programme. We look forward to working with you in the year ahead.

Louisa Dobson, Head of Inspiring Choices Programme

