

CONNECT



# IMPACT REPORT

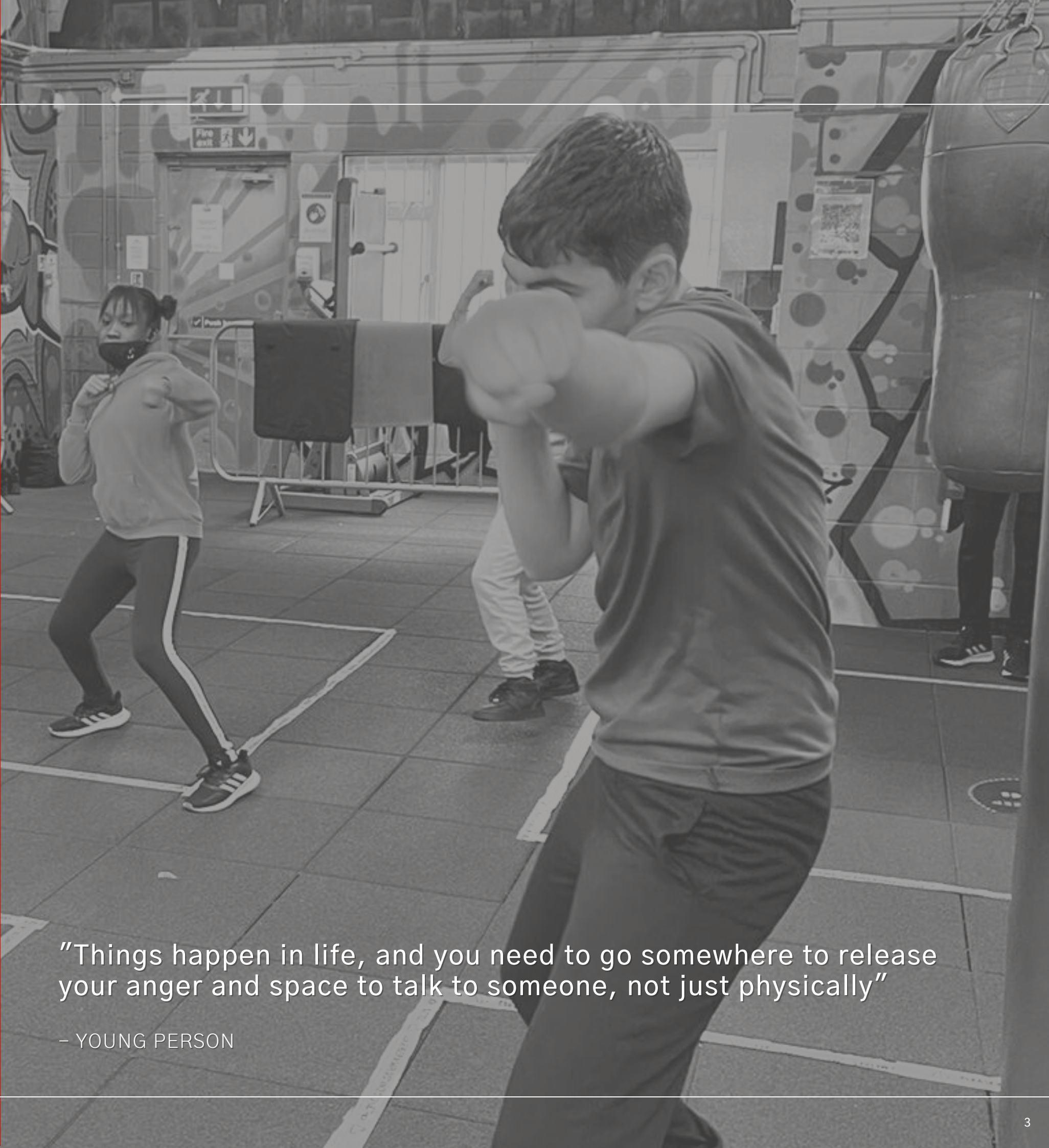
SEPTEMBER 2018 – NOVEMBER 2021





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“Things happen in life, and you need to go somewhere to release your anger and space to talk to someone, not just physically”

– YOUNG PERSON





# INTRODUCTION

CONNECT is a partnership between In Your Corner, London Community Boxing and Southwark Local Authority Children's Services. This was a 38 month project funded by Comic Relief.

## WHO WE REACH

CONNECT aims to reach young people aged 11–18, particularly young men, who might experience barriers to accessing support for their emotional wellbeing or who might struggle to sustain engagement with clinic based services.

We work with some of Southwark's most complex young people, many of whom have experienced multiple challenges and adversities. CONNECT is free for young people to access.

## WHAT WE DO

We aim to improve young people's emotional wellbeing, through offering a range of interventions in the boxing gym, including mentoring, therapeutic groups, creative projects, and staff development activities. We use In Your Corner's innovative practice model to combine non-contact boxing with evidence-based ideas from psychological intervention, in order to help young people improve their emotional wellbeing, and feel better connected to others and their community.

We work in partnership with targeted services in Southwark (e.g. CAMHS, Youth Justice Service, Children's Services, Family Early Help) who refer young people to the project.

## THIS REPORT

Summarises our work from September 2018 – November 2021, including the adaptations made to continue to reach young people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are passionate about our impact and learning what works, and we use feedback from CONNECT young people, parents/carers and professionals in this report to give ideas about effective work as CONNECT continues.



# WHAT WE DELIVERED

We delivered the following therapeutic opportunities for young people:

## 7 X STARTER GROUPS

for young people aged 12–15 (12 weeks, 2 hour session).

## 2 X 1:1 MENTORING PROGRAMMES

for young people aged 12–15 and 16–18.

## GRADUATES GROUP

for young people who had completed a starter group (weekly, 1 hour session).

## FILMMAKING PROJECT

where graduates wrote and performed a rap video: Get Back Up.

## SUPPORTED EXITS

for young people into other local opportunities such as competitive boxing, specialist therapies, work experience and paid work.

## AQA UNITS

The opportunity to gain AQA educational units in boxing skills.





# COVID-19 RESPONSE

Due to COVID-19 restrictions the gym was closed and group work was not permitted for significant periods of time between March 20 – April 21.

With a mix of innovation and flexibility, CONNECT successfully pivoted during this time to continue to reach young people using outdoor working, individual mentoring, virtual boxing groups, and video challenge projects.



# OUR REACH

CONNECT worked with **74** young people from 2018–21.

Several young people attended multiple project elements but are counted here once for clarity.

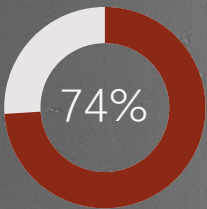
We reached a truly complex cohort, many of who had significant needs across their individual emotional wellbeing, home lives, friendships, education, and community.

Young people were referred in by targeted services or education, with a focus on working with young people whom services were struggling to build or sustain engagement with, or where they felt extra emotional support was required in addition to what they were offering.

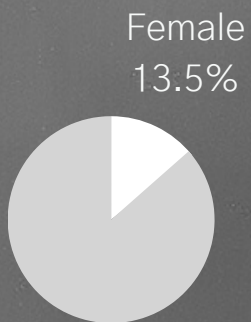
We are proud of CONNECT’s ability to reach and engage this group. In particular we have noticed young people staying engaged with CONNECT, even when they have had significant adverse events happen such as becoming looked after, experiencing bereavements, or youth violence incidents.

We think this speaks to strong relationships that have been built between young people and with the CONNECT team.

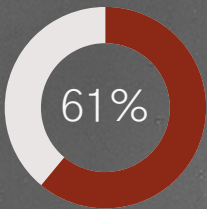
Aged 11–18, with 80% being in the 12–15 age range



were known to have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences or significant trauma



Male  
86.5%



were from Black and Minoritized groups



Many young people were working with several agencies in Southwark and had a range of emotional wellbeing needs:

**60%**

had a social worker or family early help worker

**12%**

were Looked After (in care)

**14%**

had Youth Justice Service involvement

**32%**

had CAMHS or other mental health services involvement

**38%**

had a diagnosis or were being assessed by specialist services for ADHD, ASC or ODD/Conduct disorder\*

**12%**

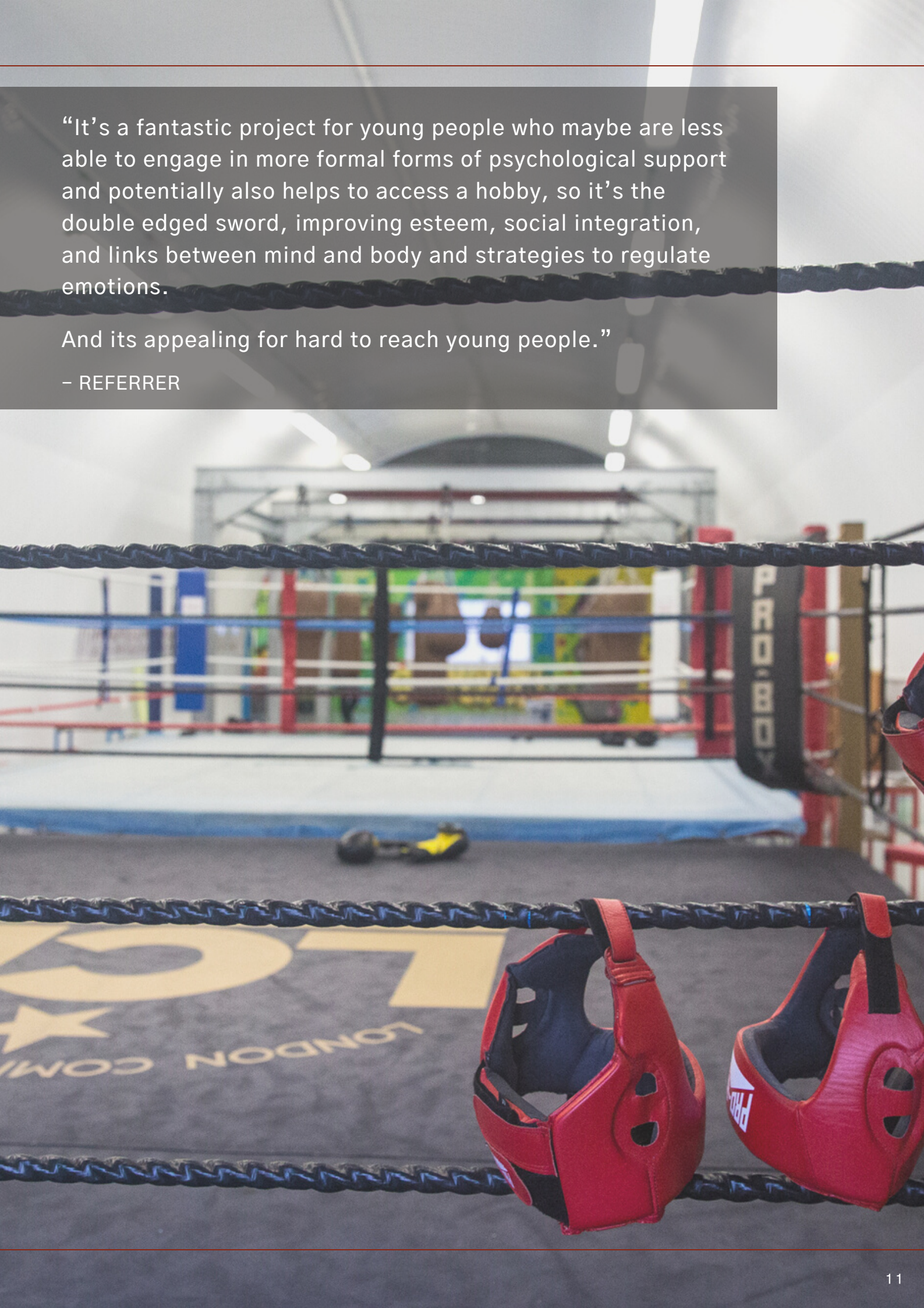
had a learning disability

\*This is significantly larger than the prevalence of these diagnoses in the general population of young people (ASC 1.5%, ADHD 3-4%; ODD/Conduct 5-8%)

“It’s a fantastic project for young people who maybe are less able to engage in more formal forms of psychological support and potentially also helps to access a hobby, so it’s the double edged sword, improving esteem, social integration, and links between mind and body and strategies to regulate emotions.

And its appealing for hard to reach young people.”

– REFERRER





# OUR IMPACT

## IMPROVING EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

We used questionnaires, goal based outcomes, and interviews before and after CONNECT to measure how young people were feeling and if the project had helped them. We have paired (pre and post intervention) data for **41% of young people**.

Young people set personalised goals and rated these on a ten point scale (where 10 = goal completely achieved). Young people set 2-3 goals each.

CONNECT young people set a total of

# 75

goals

and achieved positive change on



of these.

There were two types of goals set:

### Boxing Goals

(for boxing or fitness gains)

e.g. "I want to improve my boxing technique"

"I want to improve my co-ordination"

### Feel Better Goals

(for emotional wellbeing gains)

e.g. "I want to feel more comfortable in a group"

"I want to feel less stressed"



Positive change was achieved on 25/25 Boxing goals, with average positive change of

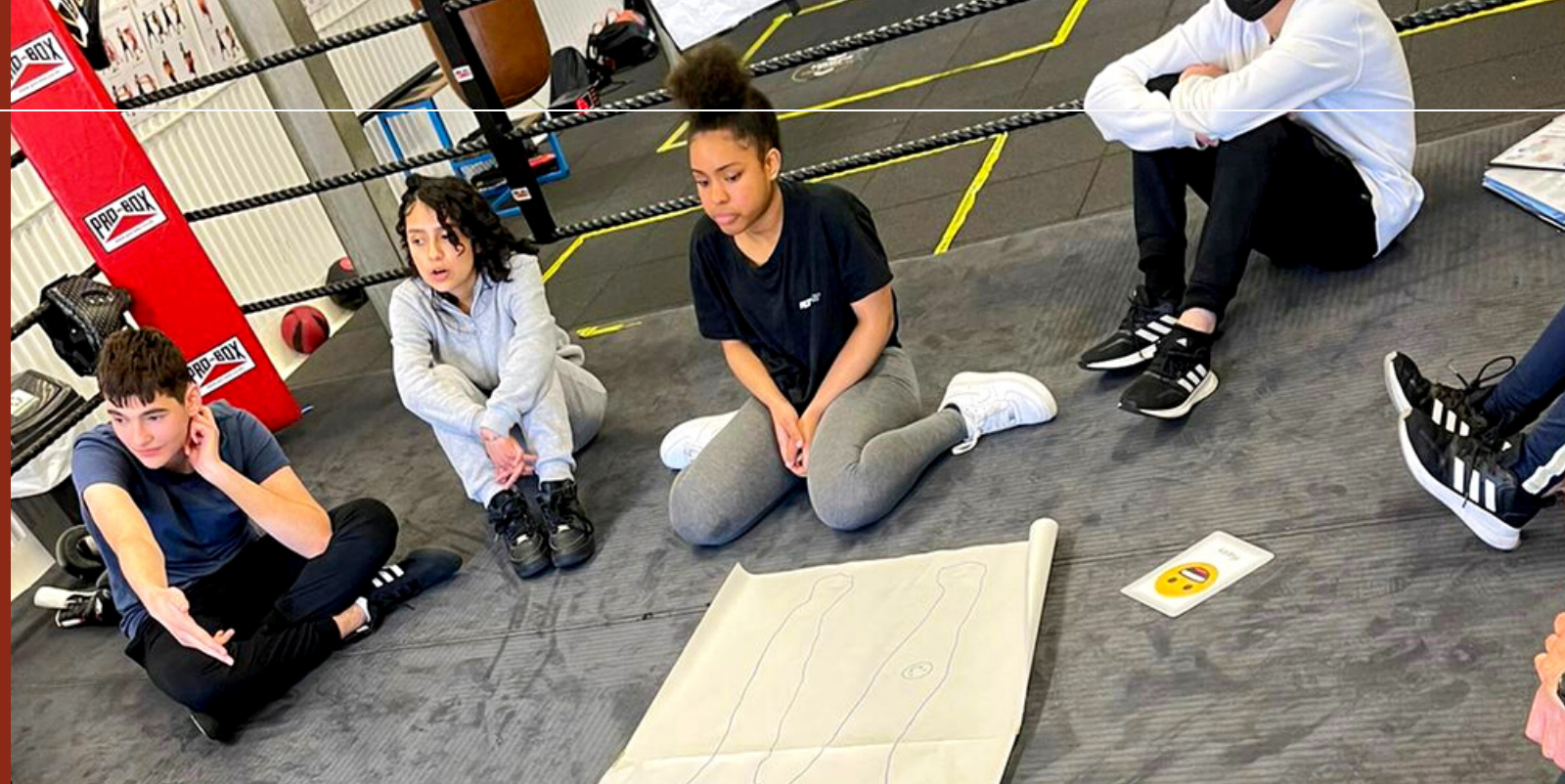
+3.84



Positive change was achieved on 45/50 Feeling Better goals, with average positive change of

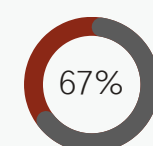
+2.91

which is clinically meaningful change\*



## INCREASING RELATIONAL TRUST

One of our aims in CONNECT was to give young people a positive experience of accessing mental health support. We wanted to know if young people felt more trust in other people to be helpful as a result of attending the project. The General Help-seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) was used as a standardised measure to capture this.



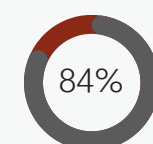
young people (n=30) showed increased intention to seek help for their wellbeing after attending CONNECT.

The average amount of positive change on the GHSQ was +3.74 points which was an increase of 14.6%.



## INCREASING WELLBEING

The Warwick Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale (S-WEMWBS) was used as a standardised measure of emotional wellbeing.



of young people (n=31) showed positive change on WEMWBS after attending CONNECT.

The metric (converted) average wellbeing increase was +2.9 points (+14%). This is just 0.1 below the threshold for meaningful improvement on this measure.





# SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT: CONNECT GRADS

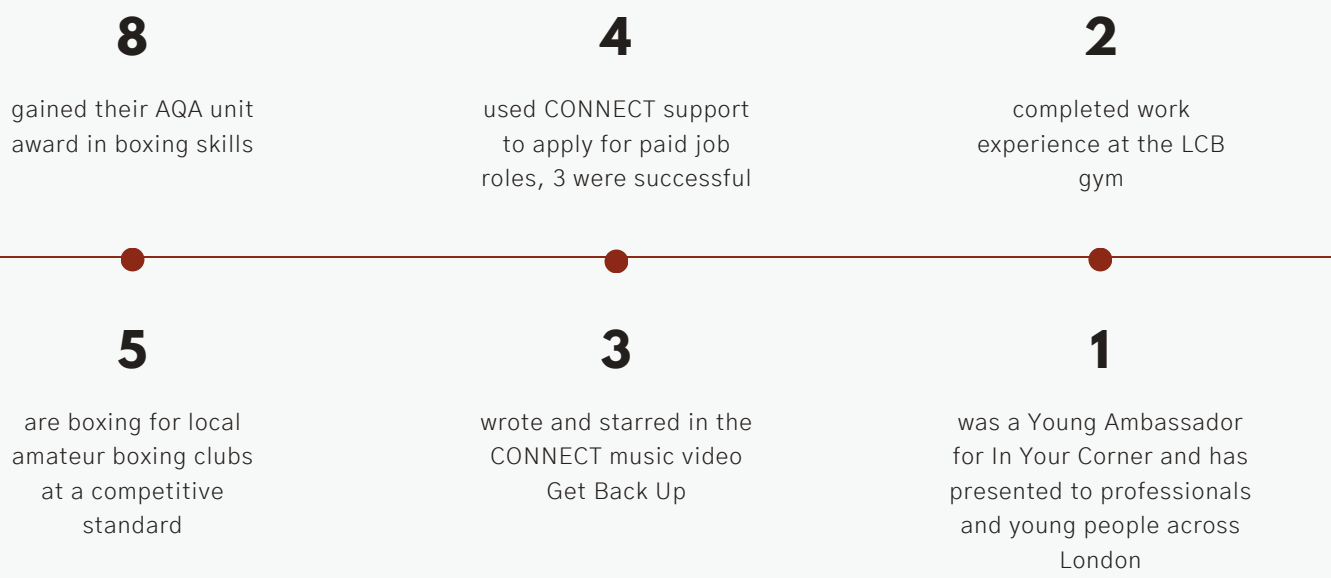
Overall **76% of young people** who graduated from a CONNECT starter group or mentoring programme transitioned into another CONNECT activity such as the Grads Group or film-making opportunities.

The aim of CONNECT Grads Group was to consolidate boxing skills, emotional wellbeing and relationships, whilst being offered a range of self-development opportunities within an accessible and safe local venue, the LCB gym.

We recognise that emotional wellbeing is not just about reducing distress and managing emotional difficulties, it is about feeling confident and able to make best use of life’s opportunities.

We have seen several Grads move from being quite socially excluded (e.g. outside of mainstream education; in the youth justice system) to building friendships, and being able to achieve and access positive opportunities, both in and outside of the gym.

We are extremely proud of what the CONNECT graduates have achieved:



## GET BACK UP

was written and performed by young people attending CONNECT. They had complete creative freedom to produce this music video, coming up with the concept, beats and lyrics. GET BACK UP delivers an inspiring message to all young people and shares some of the CONNECT boxer’s stories.



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

We interviewed all young people who graduated from a CONNECT group about their experience, and asked parents and referrers for their views. We analysed what they told us, so that we can understand what they found helpful about attending. Six main themes emerged and these are presented here:

## 1. TRYING THINGS AND OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

“The group helped me with confidence because it pushed me to do things I’d never thought I could do.” – Young person

“(There’s a) sense (name) has that he is someone that can manage this stuff...deciding to do something and smashing that target. I think he is quite a lot more confident... (has) realised it’s important to be occupied, challenge himself, get out.” – Referrer

## 2. GROWING IN CONFIDENCE

“He has got more confidence in taking other people’s ideas and activities that he might get involved with. He is more open to trying something. His perception of new things are a bit more positive and trying them rather than knocking back.” – Referrer

“When life knocks you down, you should always get up and not be scared. Make the most of what you have.” – Young person

## 3. DEVELOPING EMOTION REGULATION SKILLS

### Feeling Calmer:

“I feel like I am calmer. Feelings have got better, like I’m not that sensitive anymore and before I was sensitive to anything.” – Young person







“Doing something physical grounded him, he slept better.” – Carer

“The chill skills gave you a moment to relax and think. It was really helpful, like meditating.” – Young person

#### **Thinking things through:**

“(I) learnt to think before I do something, because I used to just like do stuff without thinking about the consequences. Doing this has made me think. (Like the) mindfulness...stop myself and be a bit more mature.” – Young person

“(There’s been) more than one incident where (name) has shown he can control and regulate his temper, he’s able to think before reacting, gets angry but can calm himself down.” – Referrer

#### **Having strategies to draw on:**

“I know how to control my anger better now, most of the time I would get angry but now I keep myself away and listen to music.” – Young person

“You guys help a lot. I’ve learned to ignore other people and distractions. I’m focusing more on myself.” – Young person

#### **Communicating emotions:**

“I was able to say what was on my mind and after that I was able to say to other people.” – Young person

“The main takeaway was expressing emotions...(he’s) much more able to tell you what he’s feeling. (His) key worker noticed that he’s talking more in their sessions.” – Carer

#### **Improved focus:**

“I don’t overthink, (I have) more focus.” – Young person

“Coming to the group has helped my focus improve and I listen to orders more now.” – Young person



#### 4. MAKING FRIENDS

“The people within the group are like really nice and really easy to like get along with and like forge friendships with.” – Young person

“It was very difficult for him to get along with people, he didn’t really have friends in the beginning, none, zero. He has more friends now, the other people in the group.” – Carer

#### 5. A SAFE SPACE

“Home can be quite difficult for him and to have a safe place for him to go to has had a positive impact on him, because he feels valued”. – Referrer

“I had seen just how much of a difference it had made to (him). He felt valued, it gave him a sense of purpose.” – Carer

“That structure and the supervision and the psychological understanding – he wouldn’t have been able to cope (in a boxing club) without those elements.” – Referrer

#### 6. GETTING ON BETTER IN SCHOOL

“School have said he’s calmer and more focused. He is getting positive behaviour points and not negative. Teachers have said to me he’s making better choices.” – Carer

## BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO ATTENDING CONNECT

We also asked young people what supported them to attend sessions and what got in the way of coming.

#### WHAT HELPED SUPPORT ATTENDANCE?

- Gym location is easy to access
- The team help with transport if needed
- Wanting to come and feeling motivated to attend
- Being reminded about the session by text message, a parent/carers, or someone at school

#### WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF COMING?

- Not feeling safe or being safe on the journey to and from the gym or in Peckham
- School or home being too far from the gym
- Friends asking you where you are going and what you are doing there
- Some CONNECT group members being “annoying” or less motivated to work hard in sessions
- School exams or detentions happening at the same time as sessions

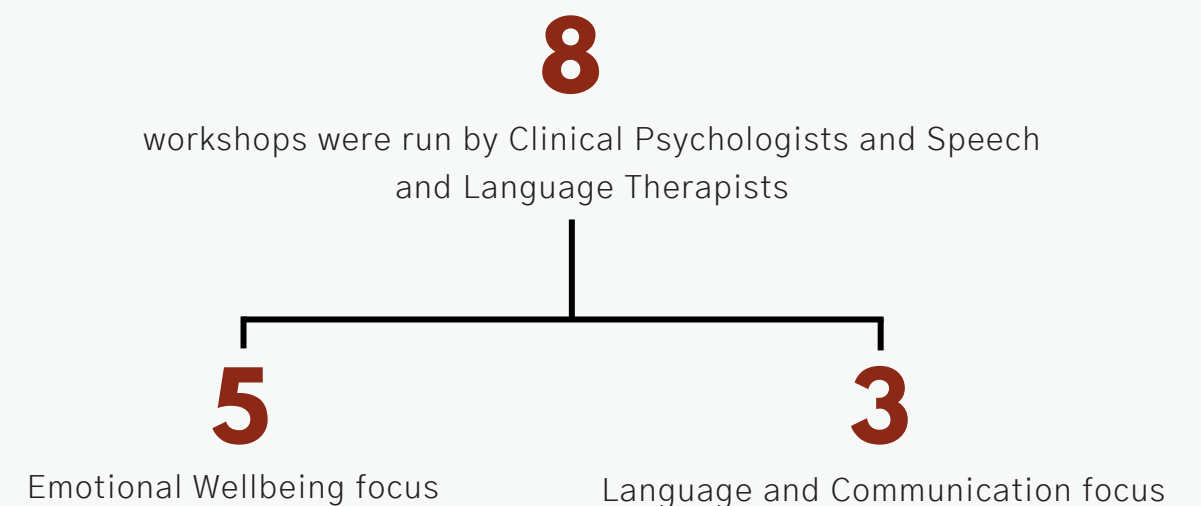




# WORKSHOPS FOR COACHES AND STAFF

Alongside our offer to young people, CONNECT ran a series of workshops to support boxing coaches and LCB staff to develop their awareness of mental health and language and communication needs in young people.

This aimed to help LCB become a psychologically and trauma informed community space, across its whole offer to local young people.

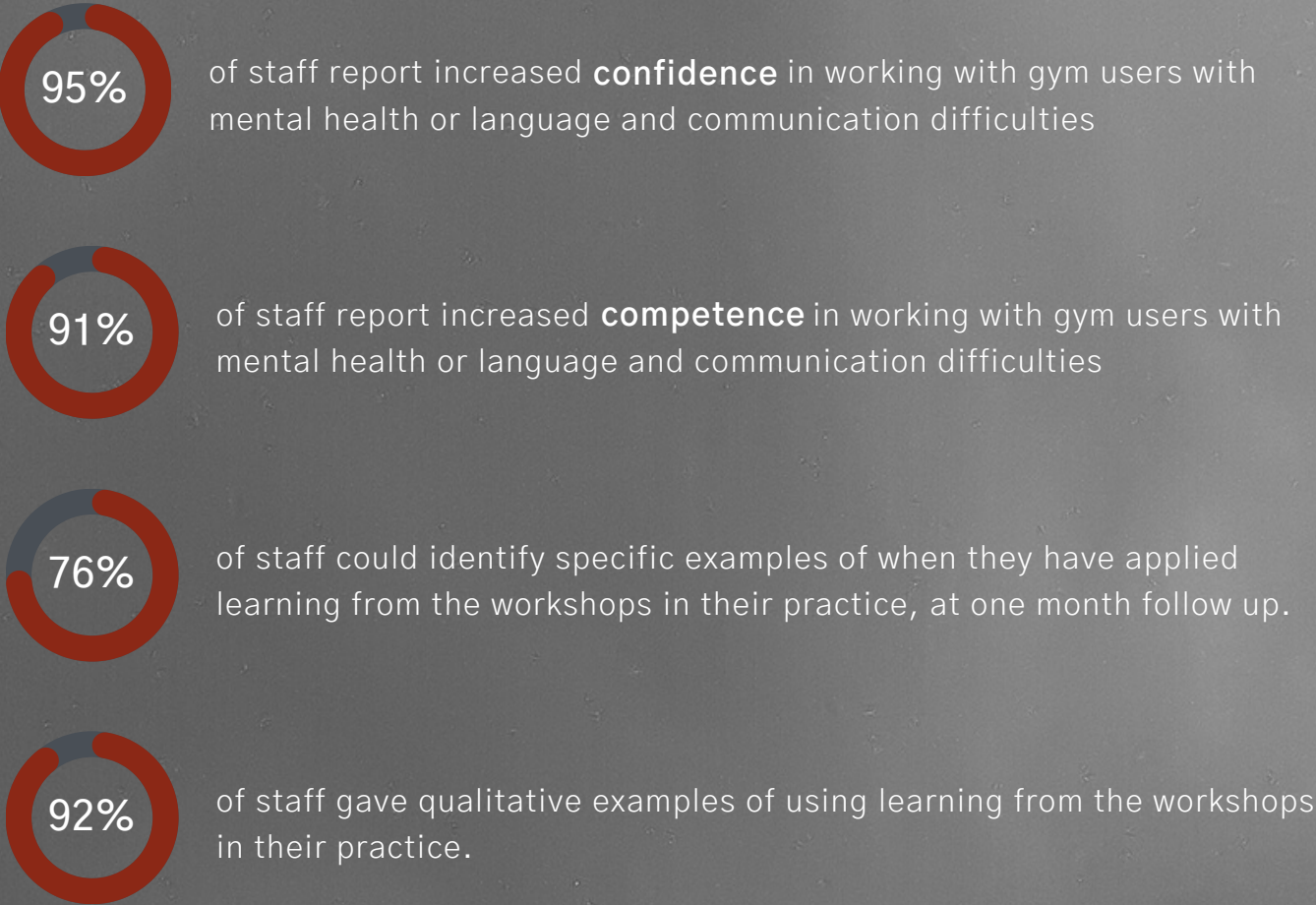


**26** staff attended at least one workshop

**42%** of staff attended multiple workshops



# LEARNING FROM WORKSHOPS



“

Talking with kids on an individual level. Letting them know they are valued and treated as individuals and we’re looking after their individual welfare, not just as a group

“

Make sure that if I notice someone who needs support, provide a safe space for them to be able to express themselves. Be aware of (my) tone of voice, it needs to be different from my coaching voice

“

Placing an importance on how proper breathing techniques can help both with boxing but also with wellbeing and its use in calming the body and mind

“

Not assuming what’s going on with someone, and approaching them with curiosity



# FINAL THOUGHTS

We are proud of CONNECT's reach and ability to engage complex young people from a range of diverse backgrounds in accessible mental health support. We know that our work improves emotional wellbeing with clinically meaningful change on Goal Based Outcomes and positive change on all outcome measures. This is an achievement that is all the more significant, given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021, and our need to adapt and show resilience in an extremely challenging climate.

We are particularly impressed with our Grads, both in terms of their sustained engagement with the project, and what they have gone on to achieve in their wellbeing, boxing, work, and life outside the gym.

CONNECT's programme of coach and staff workshops reached 26 staff members and were highly impactful. This has built the capacity of staff at LCB to respond in a psychologically and trauma informed way to all boxing gym users.

We invested considerable resource into data collection and analysis throughout the three year period and as a result have some very clear and compelling evidence of local impact. This helps us to understand not only who CONNECT works for, but why it is helpful.

Relationships are at the heart of our work and we are proud of the community and relationships we have built across Southwark with young people, parents/carers and referring agencies.

# THE FUTURE

In 2022–3 we will consolidate our group work with young people aged 12–15, and will develop new access routes into the project.

We completed a series of co-design workshops with the CONNECT Grads in Summer 22, which has led to the relaunch of the Grads Group, with a new format. We will further develop opportunities for Grads who would like to become young coaches and will consolidate support to accessing work experience.

Having developed “what works” in Southwark, and proven our impact with local young people, it is a priority for CONNECT to achieve sustainable funding. This will ensure that we can continue to deliver positive mental health outcomes for Southwark's young people, many of whom experience significant barriers to making use of clinic based mental health support.

We look forward to further developing our impact: Improving, adapting and innovating to ensure we continue to deliver the best possible outcomes for the young people we work with.





# CONNECT

## Report by:

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