

Impact Report 2023-24



Contents

- 2 Hello from our CEO**
- 4 Introduction**
- 8 Student Journeys**
- 15 Community Journeys**
- 20 Partner Journeys**
- 25 Goodbye for Now**

Hello from our CEO

Simran Dhanjal-Field



Welcome to our 2023-24 Impact Report - as always it's an honour to share this with you, however it's particularly meaningful as this will be the last annual report Student Hubs shares, with our organisation closure taking place in January 2025.

Whilst collating this year's report and reviewing feedback forms and case studies one particular theme stood out to us, which was about the journey each student volunteer recognised they were on, and how they had noticed journeys of transformation in the community participants they had worked with as well.

The theme of journeys made me reflect on my own journey, one shared with many of the staff at Student Hubs over the years. Starting as a volunteer on a Student Hubs project whilst at university, the skills I grew and the experiences I had shaped the next steps I took, pointing me towards roles in the charity sector.





3

Of all the outcomes and benefits we see, **it was the increase to our confidence and resilience, as well as feeling grounded in our local communities that gave us the strength to take on new challenges and move forward in our journeys**. Over the past eight years I have worked at Student Hubs, I've witnessed so many individuals start the same journey: from students participating in social action for the first time; or stepping into leadership roles; to primary school aged children feeling listened to by their near-to-peer mentors; to the staff team taking on challenges and delivering impact in partnership. Everyone is on their own personal journey, be that the beginning or middle, or even restarting. Their journeys are full of stories of developing, growing, and connecting with the people and world around us.

As our work at Student Hubs now shifts to legacy activities, we've been speaking with alumni to find out where their journey has taken them once they graduated. Every story starts with fond memories of Student Hubs, and it has been a great reminder of all the people across our 16 year history who we have reached and supported, and who have gone on to shape their own journey with social action at the heart.

The stories we share in this year's Impact Report are just the beginning for so many people, and we know that each and every one will go on to inspire others and continue to make change in the future. We are so proud of every student, community partner, community participant, university staff, and our own wonderful team - thank you so much for making the 2023-24 year so impactful.

Introduction

At Student Hubs we know that when students are supported to **learn** about social issues and themselves, **connect** with each other and their local communities and **do** something to make change, amazing things happen.

Students critically engage with the world around them, feel a stronger sense of belonging in the place they live and develop skills for life, whilst communities benefit from added capacity, expertise and energy; ultimately supporting better outcomes for community members and facilitating **active citizenship**.



Student Hubs announced that after 16 years of delivering student social action we will be **closing our doors in January 2025**, with our local Hubs stopping activity in summer 2024. This difficult decision was made safe in the knowledge that the journeys of those in our network have only just begun. The skills and experiences built by those involved with our activities is broad and impressive, and will go on to support them for many years to come.

This Impact Report showcases some of the journeys which were a part of in the 2023-24 academic year.

At first, I just wanted to have a chance to make my university life more meaningful and to do something different. But I found [volunteering was] a chance for me to say something to the past me, the right now me and the future me.

Xiaoqi Xu, Empower mentor



Snapshot of 2023-24

We supported **301** long-term volunteers, **67** one-off volunteers and **125** student consultants.

We worked with **54** community organisations to reach **1023** community members.

We reached **591** students through events and **1808** students through training.

Ultimately resulting in more than **8000** hours of student social action.

88% of student participants agreed that our activities enhanced their university experience

Supporting students to...



LEARN

92% of student participants agreed they have gained an increased understanding of social issues



CONNECT

84% of student participants agreed that participating in our activities enhanced their wellbeing



DO

82% of student participants agreed they are more likely to tackle further social challenges

Carol's Story

"Getting to know people that are completely different from me was such a refreshing change from university. I built relationships with some of the residents and developed interpersonal skills communicating with people from different sets of age groups. These sessions **greatly developed my confidence and ability to help people**. It was a really good experience, I'm really glad I got to take part in helping the residents and to make their lives easier.

"I remember coming back from my first volunteering thinking '**Wow!, now I have something to look forward to!**' The quietness of the residents' village was such a soothing change from the busy environment of the University. I really appreciated the difference: it was much more relaxed, where I could enjoy tea and biscuits with the residents."

Carol Thomas
Biomedical Sciences
Tech and Talk Volunteer
LinkAges
Bristol Hub

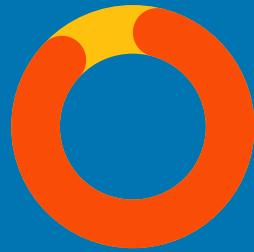


Student Journeys

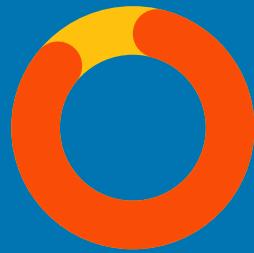
The framework of our activities aims to provide an environment for students which is **supportive** of wellbeing, reflection and learning; **inclusive** to truly mainstream student social action; and **trusting**, offering a safe space to lead and grow.

This environment supports students to thrive, developing their critical awareness, wellbeing and skills which will support them in the short-term as they develop as volunteers; in the medium-term as they move through their academic career into graduate careers; and in the long-term as lifelong active citizens.





91% of student participants agreed our activities improved their confidence in approaching challenges



90% of student participants agreed our activities improved their ability to work with others to make change



89% of student participants agreed our activities improved their ability to adapt and overcome challenges

In 2023-24 we sought to understand how our activities and social action support students to develop [**essential skills for 2035**](#), a framework of in demand skills for graduates of the future. We heard students share that our activities also developed their skills in communication (92%), thinking outside the box (74%), organisation (82%) and decision making (80%). We asked our student participants to share what supported them to develop their skills and heard four main themes.



Theme 1: Meeting new people

Whether it was those volunteering with young people stepping up as near-to-peer role models; international students experiencing social action in the UK; or students meeting like-minded volunteers and becoming part of a bigger network; our participants felt that having the opportunity to meet new people supported them to step outside of their comfort zone, learn from others and build new skills.

92% of student participants agreed our activities introduce them to people they otherwise wouldn't have met

As an international student, it was my first time working with people from different countries with a different culture. It has made me become more confident to express myself and helped me to better understand the UK's culture.



Theme 2: Receiving tailored support

Students have repeatedly shared how training in tangible skills like safeguarding, public speaking and report writing supported them through their activities. They also appreciated how staff and students supported one another throughout our programmes, particularly when this led to opportunities to collaborate and develop skills together.

89% of student participants agreed they had access to the necessary support for their role

The weekly meetings prior to the session in the school was a nice opportunity to engage in teamwork... and discuss what we thought would work best. Taking turns to lead the sessions boosted confidence as well as my ability to communicate in a clear and effective way... I brought a sense of enthusiasm... this was also amplified by my fellow volunteers.



Theme 3: Feeling safe to practise skills

Trying something new in a safe environment supported our student participants to build confidence in skills. It was particularly clear how being trusted to take responsibility built leadership, especially through an extracurricular opportunity.

83% of student participants agreed our activities offered them access to opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have had

“Putting these skills into action each week has developed my confidence, and overall, learning how to best communicate with my mentee... has been the most rewarding part of my experience.”

Theme 4: Making an impact

You can't underestimate the power of seeing the people you are supporting thrive firsthand. Student participants told us hearing about the impact they were having and feeling useful made them feel connected to their community, and confident in their abilities as changemakers.

73% of student participants agreed they feel a sense of belonging in their local community

“One of the students... wasn't interested or engaged. I went over to her and asked some questions about school and... her hobbies... She felt more relaxed into doing the activity as I don't think she felt as pressured to create something good, rather just take part.”

Elise's Story

When asked about skill development during the programme Elise shared that the programme provided her first experience of leadership within a team:

“One of the skills that I gained... is leadership. Even though I wasn't the leader of my group, I do think that I was able to build up some leadership skills, and I have made it my mission in other work that I'm doing to build up those skills.”



Elise also developed organisational and project management skills through the programme:

“One of the issues that my group had was the way that we managed our time and... our mentor gave us project management tools that she'd used in her work... We tried to incorporate those to organise the way that we were completing the work... it was really helpful for me to see that this is a tool that's actually being used by people in professional projects in their work and so then I've been able to apply it to other projects I've done.”

Elise developed skills through the programme which have already proven useful within other projects she is a part of. We can't wait to see what's next in her journey!

Elise Johnstone
Social Policy
Student Consultant
Social Innovation Programme
Bristol Hub

William's Story

William coordinated the 2024 Cambridge Climate and Sustainability Forum. He shared that he benefited from connecting with like-minded peers on the committee and in the community:

“One of the brilliant things... is that everyone in the committee applied the passion they feel about their subject into making the Forum the best it could be. Everyone had a unique and creative contribution. But Cambridge isn't just about the university and I was really pleased that CCSF engaged with the community. I particularly enjoyed the event we ran for local school children - it was wonderful to hear their thoughts on a variety of environmental issues, which contributed to our main event.”



William was also motivated by seeing firsthand the change the Forum was making through raising awareness of the climate challenge and connecting peers:

“It made me extremely happy to read the feedback from the Forum and see it had inspired attendees to do more in their own lives to address the environmental crisis... One of my favourite parts of the day was chatting with attendees about why they were passionate about the environment and hearing which aspects of the Forum particularly spoke to them. I was so pleased to see people exchanging views and building networks because it is only by working together that we can address these monumental issues. I am delighted to have played even a small role in fostering those connections and engaging people in these important discussions.”

William Beattie
Geography
Student Coordinator
Cambridge Climate and Sustainability Forum
Cambridge Hub

Community Journeys

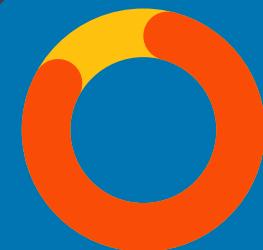
Through our structured volunteering activities, student volunteers get out into the community to work with young people and older community members directly. Each activity has a double benefit, supporting students on their journeys whilst making a difference in the community.



Branch Up activity days aim to develop young people's emotional management, relationships with others and self-belief through creating an environment in which they feel **safe, supported, respected, interested** and **challenged**. The days see near-to-peer student mentors work with 7-11 year olds who have faced a range of adverse childhood experiences, including growing up in poverty, at free Saturday activity days. Across the 2023-24 academic year our trips included science workshops, sports days, outdoor theatre and a trip to the fire station.



For the young people we work with, Branch Up is often their first opportunity to establish themselves outside of the family and school environment. They get to meet new people, try new things and have fun. Through working with our school and city partners we ensure that this is the first step in a continual journey as they build their independence and confidence into secondary school and beyond.



87% of young people agreed that they enjoy Branch Up



79% of young people agreed that they feel supported at Branch Up



Young People's Stories

One of our young people concisely picked three words to describe Branch Up: **“Nice, proud, fun”**. Across the year through ongoing self-reports, Jack* self-reported positively across our outcomes including feeling more proud of himself, especially when he helps his little brother; feeling more willing to try new things; and getting on better with his classmates.

Another young person Niamh* felt more able to ask for help by the end of the programme, recognising their parents and rugby coaches as adults they can trust.

*Names changed

80% of young people agreed that at activity days they are confident to try new things



Schools Plus tutors provide academic support for young people to improve their confidence, subject understanding and motivation for learning. Ultimately this aims to improve their academic attainment, closing the attainment gap for young people experiencing the impact of educational disadvantage.

For the young people, having a near-to-peer friend for motivation and to support them to build the skills they need for independent study is a positive stepping stone as they navigate school.

76% of young people agreed that they are more motivated to learn because of Schools Plus

89% of young people agreed that at Schools Plus they feel confident trying new things

Claire Cleghorn, a Southampton Hub school partner, shared about one pupil:
I know that her home life has been really quite tricky recently and she hasn't always wanted to come to school for various reasons. But I know that she... looks forward to seeing one of your volunteers in particular that she's struck up a relationship with... I do believe it's made a real difference to her engagement in school life.



Young People's Stories

When asked what they enjoyed about Schools Plus, young people shared:

"I enjoyed it because I knew how to understand the words I was learning. I enjoyed [it] because **[my tutor] helped me when I was stuck** on a word."

"I like... Schools Plus because **they motivate me a lot and make me feel more confident**. They also always help to correct mistakes."

"I really enjoyed [my tutor] correcting my mistakes. She was really nice to me, **I felt I could be myself around her.**"

"I liked **feeling encouraged**"

"I enjoyed our jokes but we were still learning at the same time and **it was fun!**"



Partner Journeys

Our local teams were embedded in their communities, well connected to the unique needs and context of the cities they lived and worked in. As such, our activities have a broader benefit on communities and the partners we work with. In 2023-24 we worked with schools, libraries, retirement communities, community centres, local councils and more - ensuring that the impact of our programmes was meaningful and complemented other provision in the city.



Our skilled placement activities support student consultants to work on a social impact project. For Engage for Change in Cambridge this looks like students making sustainable change at the University through independent projects which in 2023-24 included redistributing food waste from university cafes; organising clothes swaps; upcycling workshops within Colleges; and improving lawn biodiversity with meadows across the campus. Climate Action Bristol also supports a more sustainable future through pairing teams of student consultants with local organisations to create and implement a Climate Action Plan to reduce their footprint.

“It’s really nice because... we have the opportunity to work with students and get their perspective. It’s also just nice to work with people you know are passionate about sustainability.

Medical School, Climate Action Bristol partner



88% of partners agreed that students added expertise to their organisation



80% of partners agreed that students added capacity to their organisation



76% of partners agreed that students allowed them to innovate and explore new areas

The Social Innovation Programme at Bristol Hub is an eight week programme which sees teams of students support a socially impactful organisation with research on a real life challenge brief, culminating in a recommendations report. One of our 2023-24 briefs was with mental health social movement [**Off the Record**](#). Their student team researched how to recruit more young people from underrepresented areas of the city onto their volunteer team, using surveys, questionnaires and focus groups to reach their recommendations.

Another brief for [**Mothers for Mothers**](#) saw students provide recommendations for the charity to diversify income through corporate relationships. These recommendations will support our partner organisations for years to come as they work with service users, develop their strategies and continue to make a meaningful impact in the community.

100% of Social Innovation Programme partners agreed the recommendations added value to their organisation



Creative Tuition Collective's Story

Lara Lalemi
CEO
Creative Tuition Collective
Social Innovation Programme
Bristol Hub



The Creative Tuition Collective has partnered with Bristol Hub three times, getting recommendations from student consultants on building technological skills and generating income. Lara shared the organisation's positive experience working with student volunteers, including how that has added capacity to the organisation beyond the programme: **“University students are really great people to work with... I genuinely do feel like university students are some of the most dedicated, motivated people, and they can be so inspiring if you give them a chance. I don't think a lot of people give them a chance, or think they're not qualified enough. But I think... [they] did such a great job of interviewing people and investigating what I haven't had capacity to. I'm using it this year to change my business plan and strategise... I really appreciate what they did in their work... It's been so incredibly useful for me as well. I wouldn't be where I am if I didn't have the encouragement from the work that came out of the Social Innovation Programme.”**

Karen's Story

Long-term Hub partner Karen shared that student volunteers have added capacity to the school, enabling them to offer additional opportunities for young people:

“Student volunteers in the classroom are an absolute bonus because we do not have enough teaching assistants to support all the children we have... The after school club would not run. We do not have anybody to run it, so that would not happen. And the children that go on the Branch Up days are children that because of their home circumstances, would never get to do those sort of activities.”

Karen Allen
Family Support Worker
Shirley Infants and Junior School
Youth Programmes
Southampton Hub

Karen shared that the benefit of having student volunteers goes beyond added capacity, as the near-to-peer element supports young people to build expectations for future life:

“They relate to them more because... they're nearer their age group and so they're much more relatable. They don't see them as authority figures like they would see a teacher and I think that enables them to... feel more comfortable as they are meeting strangers which can be really hard for the sort of children that get that extra support... It's also a positive role model that they see young people that are still in education that still enjoy learning, coming in and helping them with their learning.“



Goodbye for Now

The 2023-24 year was impactful, meaningful and joyful. We are delighted to be able to share this Impact Report with you, celebrating all of the journeys we have had the privilege to be a part of over the last 12 months.

Before Student Hubs closes our doors in January 2025, we are working to celebrate and share [our legacy](#) as an organisation.

Stay in touch



Acknowledgements

Our delivery partners

Bristol Students' Union
Burges Salmon LLP
Cambridge Zero
Garfield Weston Foundation
Institute of Engineering and Technology
Kingston Technology
Kingston University Careers and Employability Service
St Mary's Fire Station
The MacRobert Trust
The National Lottery Community Fund
Pears Foundation
Teach First
Tribe Theatre
University College Birmingham
University of Bristol Careers Service
University of Bristol Sustainability Department
University of Cambridge
University of Cambridge Colleges
University of Southampton
UPP Foundation
Youth Options

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William Westgarth
Sorcha Young

Thank you to all of our student committees, community partners and university champions.

Thank you!

