

Leicester Young Ecology Adventurers Evaluation Report 2: Final



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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of year two of external evaluation of Leicester Young Ecology Adventurers. Data was collected using a mix of methods centred on gathering young people's perspectives on project impacts and stakeholder feedback on delivery.

Headlines:

- Young participants in both 2017 and 2018 enjoyed the project, learnt new skills and about waterway heritage, and achieved the John Muir Award.
- Parents highly valued the project, and reported an increased interest in waterways, outdoor recreation and greenspaces for their families.
- Project partners regarded the project as a success.
- Good progress was made in achievements related to each headline outcome.
- Enhancements were made to the 2018 programme as a result of the pilot, including programme changes, new activities, and the addition of youth workers and 'young leaders', all of which heightened the success of the project.
- The successful project model developed between 2017 and 2018 provides a means through which other potential future projects might be organised - in Leicester or elsewhere.
- There is considerable enthusiasm within the community for further projects relating to outdoor recreation and heritage, but consultation with parents should be prioritised to identify future programmes.

The second year of the programme was successful with **positive feedback** from participants, and all partners satisfied with delivery. Good progress has been made across all key outcomes which were tracked by evaluation activity. Many of the challenges and problems encountered during the pilot phase were addressed, making delivery more efficient.

Programme achievements for all three groups of young participants (**2017 and 2018**):

- **50 young people**, completed **124 hours** of activities over **23 weeks**
- **6 volunteers** attended the sessions equalling around **210 hours** of volunteering
- **50 young people** and **3 volunteers** achieved **John Muir Award**
- **6 volunteers** received **certificates** from Canal and River Trust
- **15 young people** met with Canal & River Trust staff to talk about their experiences
- **60 parents** and around **20 community representatives** attended **Graduation Events**
- **2 young people** discussed their experience on **local radio**
- The project was **shortlisted** for the **Living Waterways Award** in the Education and Skills category, coming Runners Up at the event in Birmingham.

The data from the evaluation illustrates good progress made across the outcome areas for 2017 and 2018 (assessing the project as a whole):

BENEFICIARY	OUTCOME ASSESSMENT Green = Achieved Amber = Partially Achieved Red = Not achieved White = No data collected	Justification
Leicester's natural heritage	1) Headline outcome: Greater understanding of waterway natural heritage	
	a) waterway wildlife will be observed, interpreted and explained through the eyes of young participants	Young people participated in various wildlife observation activities and demonstrate learning about wildlife, and delivered interpretation of this.
	b) interpretation will be communicated to friends, families, teachers and others	Interpretation was communicated at events, with presentations and materials demonstrating more detailed understanding from young people.
	c) natural heritage communicated to a wider audience through media activity	Press and social media activity had some limited reach about the project more generally. The heritage aspect was picked up by some parents who re-visited the canals.
Young participants	2) Headline outcome: Local waterways are more significant to young people's lives	
	a) increased understanding of waterways' historic context	The majority of young people in 2017 and 2018 demonstrated a significant increase from a low baseline to some understanding.
	b) increased understanding and appreciation of the unique natural heritage of Leicester's waterways	All young people demonstrated significant increase from a low awareness to some understanding, with some highlighting this as their favourite aspect of the project.
	c) increased interest in History, Science and Geography at school	A small number of young people expressed greater interest in these subjects.

	d) enhanced personal and social skills (e.g. perseverance, overcoming challenge, team work)	The majority of young people and parents reported gains in these skills, with many highlighting them as a key project benefit.
	e) enhanced practical skills (e.g. canoeing, digital communication skills)	All young people and parents reported these practical skills being gained, highlighting them as a key outcome.
	f) sense of pride, enjoyment and achievement	Young people report personal achievement, a sense of pride in their own accomplishment, and that they often had fun. Some found the project and the environment challenging at times and uncomfortable, but many overcame this.
Wider community	3) Headline outcome: Local residents are more aware of the significance of waterways	
	a) increased awareness of the city's natural heritage and its value	A small number of parents highlighted an increased interest in natural heritage in the city, and suggested ideas for future projects
	b) increased awareness of young people's achievements and activities	Local people were informed about the project through the celebration events, and parents commented on their recognition of young people's activities, as well as interest from their friends in future projects.
	c) increased awareness of canals and waterways as places of recreation and heritage	All parents consulted showed a heightened interest in canals, waterways and other greenspaces in the city for recreation for their families. They were unanimously keen to find future activities for their young people to participate in.
	d) local people are offered enriching volunteering experiences	Six local volunteers and two youth-work volunteers (one of whom was from the local community) took part in the programme, receiving certificates for their participation.

Outcomes for Young People

- Overall the majority of young people **enjoyed the project** in both 2017 and 2018, highlighting the **novelty** of the activities to them and the opportunities to **learn new skills**.
- The **changes** made between 2017 and 2018 were **largely positively** reflected in young peoples' knowledge and feedback, but there remained some **ambivalence** about **recommending the project to others**.
- **Canoeing** remained the most enjoyable part of the project in 2018, and similar to 2017, young people also highlighted some degree of '**discomfort**' with the waterway environment.
- The 2018 group started with a **higher baseline** of waterway knowledge (including heritage features, environment and wildlife) than the 2017 group, but there were still **notable improvements in their knowledge** by the end of the project.
- The young people identified a range of **social and personal skills**, as well as **making new friends**, as their primary outcomes in 2017, with similar results from interviews in 2018.
- There was a **positive change** in young people's self-assessment of their **knowledge** in both 2017 and 2018; the 2018 cohort were noticeably more confident in their knowledge at the start of the project.
- Across both years, young people placed considerable emphasis on **practical skills** learnt during the project.
- There was **less evidence of tensions** within the group in 2018 than in 2017, which may be a **positive outcome of the changes made to the programme**, including the presence of youth workers, young leaders, and smaller groups.
- The **changes made to the 2018 programme** from the pilot in 2017 were overall regarded as **positive**, with several of the young people enjoying the new activities, and with more focus on canoe skills early on being positive for later in the programme.

Outcomes for Partners and Parents

- **Project partners** were not interviewed in detail during this phase of the project; detail of their impressions of the project were included in the report Evaluation 1 (Pilot project).
- In-depth **interviews with parents** found that they were **highly positive about the project**, within initial fears during the pilot phase having been overcome.
- The project **increased parents' awareness of canals** as potential spaces for outdoor recreation; several responded positively to the project by seeking further activities or outdoor opportunities for their families.
- Interviews highlighted a **range of reflections on their community and their local area** and the impacts of these factors on young people's ability to use outdoor spaces. These should inform the direction of future projects.
- Parents were positive about **contributing to future projects** and would be interested in **more activities aimed at families**.
- The **graduation events** in 2017 and 2018 were successful in attracting support from parents and families.
- **Local volunteers**, mostly parents, took part in the project alongside youth-work volunteers.
- The project gained some national **publicity** through being nominated for a **Living Waterways Award**.

Success Factors

- The **changes made to the programme in 2018**, based on the experience of the pilot phase, were clearly of benefit to the running, organisation and success of the project. Introducing more core canoe skills early on, and splitting into smaller groups, both worked well.
- As with the 2017 evaluation, the **partners worked well together**, had clear roles, and provided complimentary elements. New team members (youth workers and volunteers) were integrated well.
- A **key coordinating person** who linked the core partners together was crucial, particularly in making changes to the programme, as was the role of organisers in SOCOPA for coordinating parents and young people themselves.
- In both years the **John Muir Award** provided a purpose for the interlinked activities, kudos to the programme, and a reward for young people participating.
- The project remained **flexible**, and **youth workers** in particular made valuable contributions to new project activities that worked well within the scope of the existing project.
- **Behaviour management** was much clearer in 2018, with the youth workers and volunteers playing an important role in minimising issues which occurred during the pilot stage.
- In both years, the **variety of activities** clearly stimulated the young people and provided a good range to suit all interests. The evaluation shows that whilst canoeing was always the most popular activity overall, some young people really valued the wildlife and heritage elements.
- Continuing to have **parents** on the **volunteer** team, and making use of **'young leaders'** from the previous project, played an important role in reassuring parents concerned about safety.
- The project clearly **stimulated many parents' and young peoples' interest in outdoor recreation**, parks and green spaces, and more generally seeking out activities, driving demand for potential future projects.

Challenges

- **Timing** of the programme still remained a challenge for some. There was varying feedback from young people and parents: some felt sessions were too long, others that sessions could have been longer and more adventurous.
- Some sessions remained **ambitious with timing**. Although practical activities were much better scheduled, there was not always time available for reflection, such as writing JMA diaries.
- Impacts could have been furthered by more work to **engage parents, families and the wider community** with the project. Where parents were involved effects were highly positive.
- **Longer-term impacts** for young people were **difficult to measure and foresee**. In both 2017 and 2018 it was unclear if young people would necessarily 'recommend' the project to their friends, which might reflect how such projects are regarded amongst peer groups.
- Young people **perceiving canals as 'dirty' or 'littered'** remained an issue, although this did not seem to impact on their enjoyment of the project.
- Interviews with parents highlighted some of the possible **barriers for their families to visit outdoor sites for recreation**. The project has made a positive impact in this regard – but more could be done in future.
- The **JMA diaries** were arguably not utilised to their full potential to allow young people to document their activities, and perhaps more could have been done to encourage them to use them independently (e.g. with parents at home).

Recommendations for future projects

- Young people enjoyed both the **physical activity** and **learning a new skill** (canoeing) as well as **learning about nature and heritage** – but this was different for different young people. Future projects might consider how to allow young people to pursue individual interests further.
- The young people **highly valued the social skills and social learning** that came out of the project, such as making new friends, respect, and teamwork. Building these skills into future projects would be beneficial.
- If future project pursue canoeing as an activity, there was certainly demand from some young people and parents to **improve their skills and take part in more adventurous trips**.
- Pursuing canoeing and visiting the canals and waterways **independently** would still be a **challenge** for many young people and their families, and future projects should consider how more **'independent visiting'** could be enhanced.
- Throughout, younger people tended to emphasise wildlife and environment components more than **built heritage** aspects of waterways – future projects might consider this.
- **Parents** were clearly impacted by the project, with good opportunities to volunteer, but **could have been more involved throughout**. It was unclear how well the **wider community** was impacted beyond immediate families.
- Including **youth workers** and **more adult volunteers** was very successful, and future projects should consider these as possible staffing models.
- Parents expressed a **range of challenges for themselves and within their community for getting young people and families outdoors**. Further research and work with parents might enhance future projects by addressing these.
- **Parents made a number of suggestions for possible 'next-steps'**, including diversifying into other activities, opening a community garden, or providing more assistance for families to get to various green spaces, amongst others.

1. Introduction

Leicester Young Ecology Adventurers is a project conceived and managed by the Somali Community Parents Association (SOCOPA), a charity based in Leicester. The project has received funding from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for 21 months from April 2017. Researchers from Cardiff University were invited to act as external evaluators for the project, building on research delivered by the Sustainable Places Research Institute during 2016. This is the second evaluation report, presenting findings of evaluation of the second round of delivery during summer 2018, and summarising outcomes of the project across its life.

2. Background

SOCOPA is based in the St Matthews area of Leicester, and provides services to improve the lives of Somali families in the city. This is one of England's most deprived neighbourhoods, with particular issues of overcrowded housing. The organisation supports families with low incomes and facing multiple difficulties, and aims to increase the opportunities available to them. SOCOPA began working with the Canal and River Trust (CRT) in 2016 in order to facilitate the community's use of the city's waterway environment. Linked to this partnership and wider work commissioned by CRT, research led by Cardiff University found that Leicester's ethnically diverse population is not reflected amongst those currently visiting waterways¹. Further investigation focused on the Somali community found low levels of awareness and understanding of how they can access and enjoy local waterways². Consultation led by SOCOPA found that those they work with have an appetite to engage more with their city's environment and community activities.

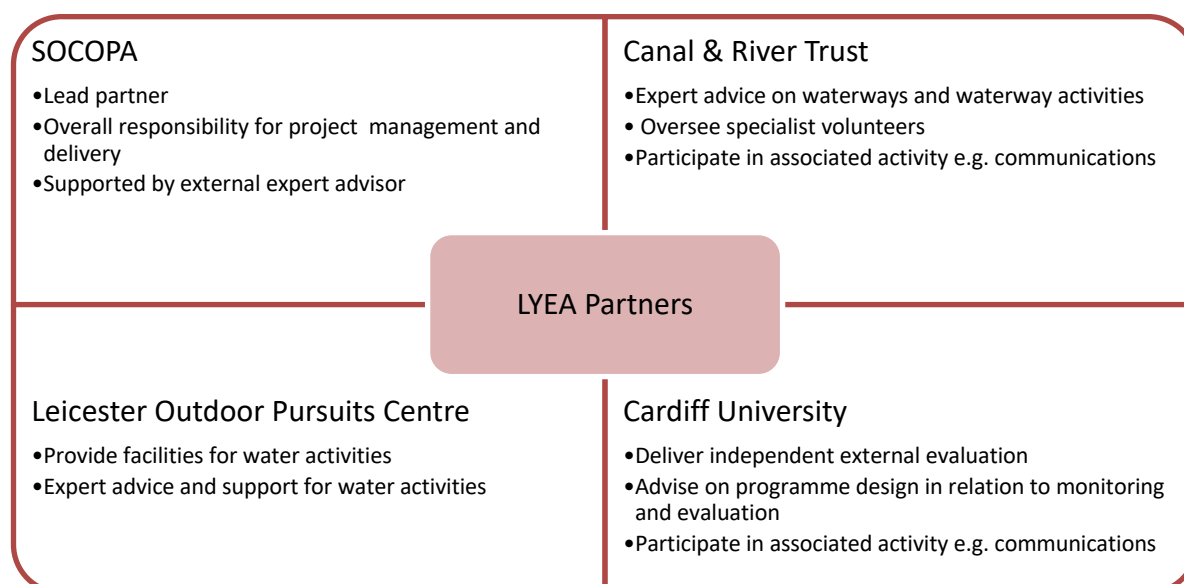
The project *Leicester Young Ecology Adventurers* (LYEA) was conceived to give young people (11-14 years) opportunities to explore the natural heritage of their local canals, whilst gaining skills and experience in outdoor pursuits and conservation. Three groups of young people participated in a 12 week programme, culminating in application for the Discovery level John Muir Award³. The project focuses on the natural and cultural heritage of canals and the River Soar in Leicester, and aims to foster young people's understanding of and care for it. The project is managed by SOCOPA staff with support from an external consultant (Jon Boagey) and overseen by a Steering Group, comprising representatives of the four project partners (see figure 1). It is envisaged that this model might be replicated or rolled out elsewhere, such that one outcome of the project will be learning to inform these future developments.

¹ *Survey of Waterway Users – Leicester*, Sustainable Places Research Institute 2016

² Canal and River Trust Research Case Study - Leicester: Engaging with a minority ethnic community, Sustainable Places Research Institute 2017

³ <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award>

Figure 1: Roles of Project Partners



3. Project design

LYEA was designed in response to needs identified by the project partners:

- the low engagement of ethnic minorities in Leicester's waterways;
- the social and economic circumstances of one of England's most deprived communities which mean children and young people have limited opportunities to experience nature; and,
- the enthusiasm and interest from those involved in SOCOPA's work for an outdoor activity programme.

Links to the John Muir Award programme responded to needs expressed by young people to support their school studies, their soft skills and give them a recognised certificate.

The project centres on providing inspiring opportunities for young Somali people living in the St Matthews estate in Leicester to experience the city's waterways. The Grand Union Canal and the River Soar lie less than half a kilometre away from St Matthew's but are not well known by this age group or the city's Somali community. The programme offers 11-14 year olds the chance to learn canoeing and explore the natural heritage of the canals, whilst undertaking the Discovery level John Muir Award through a structured programme of challenge and exploration. Weekly sessions over 12 weeks culminate in them presenting their experience to family members, project partners and invited local representatives.

Activities focus on two navigable waterways flowing through Leicester: the Leicester Line of the Grand Union Canal and the River Soar. This enables greater understanding and appreciation of a range of natural heritage local to young people. By observing and identifying common aquatic life and plant species the young people are able to understand the factors which support and hinder the area's ecology. The aspiration is to foster young people's interest in and empathy for their environment and its natural heritage. Involvement of experts from CRT and other local organisations allows young people to engage with those who are passionate about natural heritage who might inspire them to value and conserve it.

LYEA’s main intended beneficiaries are:

- 1) The natural heritage of Leicester’s waterways – including associated habitats and protected species.
- 2) Young people –11-14 year old participants, predominantly Somalis resident in St Matthews.
- 3) The wider community of St Matthews – families of young participants, other residents and stakeholders.

They are reached through three key activities:

- 1) Programme of waterway activities for young people, centred on exploring and understanding natural heritage.
- 2) Communication activity to promote the programme and its impacts to local people and stakeholders.
- 3) Opportunities for local people to volunteer as programme assistants.

The steering group discussed the project aims and aspirations to identify desired outcomes to work towards and which would represent key impacts for all intended beneficiaries. To test whether outcomes relating to young people were appropriate, during the pilot phase young people discussed what they hope to gain from the project. Learning from these discussions can be used to develop the Outcomes to ensure they are appropriate to young participants’ aspirations. Evaluation of the pilot was designed to ensure that young participants were not constrained to reporting only impacts directly related to the outcomes defined by the Steering Group.

Figure 2: Programme Outcomes

Beneficiary	Outcomes
Leicester’s natural heritage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Greater understanding of waterway natural heritage <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) waterway wildlife will be observed, interpreted and explained through the eyes of young participants b) interpretation will be communicated to friends, families, teachers and others c) natural heritage communicated to a wider audience through media activity
Young participants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Local waterways are more significant to young people’s lives <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) increased understanding of waterways’ history and use b) increased understanding and appreciation of the unique natural heritage of Leicester's waterways c) increased interest in History, Science and Geography at school d) enhanced personal and social skills (e.g. perseverance, overcoming challenge, team work) e) enhanced practical skills (e.g. canoeing, digital communication skills) f) sense of pride, enjoyment and achievement

Wider community	<p>3) Local residents are more aware of the significance of waterways.</p> <p>i) increased awareness of the city’s natural heritage and its value</p> <p>ii) increased awareness of young people’s achievements and activities</p> <p>iii) increased awareness of canals and waterways as places of recreation and heritage</p>
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These outcomes provide a framework for monitoring the projects’ impact; where appropriate evaluation findings reported here are aligned with relevant outcomes.

4. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation aims are:

- To present a robust and transparent account of the project’s impacts and how they are achieved.
- To support the project’s routine monitoring and data collection, including reporting to the funder.
- To help develop project partners’ capacity, skills and tools for future evaluation and data collection.

To achieve this suitable methods were selected to collect data relevant to the project outcomes. In discussion with the steering group and reference to relevant literature, for each outcome a measure and indicator was identified which would provide a picture of how much progress is made.

As noted above, the project partners were keen to ensure that the programme allowed young people freedom to achieve benefits important to them. To reflect this ethos, and capture insight to young people’s priorities the evaluation team used participatory approaches. These enable flexibility to respond to participants, and share decision making about what should be investigating with them. This meant that findings are not limited to data related to the key outcomes.

Figure 3: Summary of Outcome Measures and Data

BENEFICIARY	OUTCOME	Main measure/ indicator	Main Data collection
Leicester's natural heritage	1) <i>Greater understanding of waterway natural heritage</i>		
	a) waterway wildlife will be observed, interpreted and explained through the eyes of young participants	% young people reporting increased knowledge of wildlife	Pre- and Post-programme participant questionnaire
	b) interpretation will be communicated to friends, families, teachers and others	No. outputs presenting wildlife to others	Project records & Parent Interviews
	c) natural heritage communicated to a wider audience through media activity	No. media items	Project records
Young participants	2) <i>Headline outcome: Local waterways are more significant to young people's lives</i>		
	a) increased understanding of waterways' historic context	Change in young people's score on waterway quiz % young people reporting increased knowledge of history	Pre- and post-questionnaire comparison Post-programme participant questionnaire
	b) increased understanding and appreciation of the unique natural heritage of Leicester's waterways	Change in young people's perception of the significance of waterway heritage	Pre- and post-questionnaire comparison
	c) increased interest in History, Science and Geography at school	Change in young people's likely subject options	Pre- and post-questionnaire comparison
	d) enhanced personal and social skills (e.g. perseverance, overcoming challenge, team work)	Young people's reports of personal benefit	JM Award Diary Post-programme participant interviews Parent Interviews
	e) enhanced practical skills (e.g. canoeing, digital communication skills)	Young people's reports of skills gained	JM Award Diary Post-programme participant interview
	f) sense of pride, enjoyment and achievement	No. JM Awards completed % young people reporting satisfaction with the programme	Project records Post-programme participant questionnaire Films, posters and presentations made by the young people

Wider community	3) <i>Headline outcome: Local residents are more aware of the significance of waterways</i>		
	a) increased awareness of the city's natural heritage and its value	No. people reporting increased awareness No. hours volunteered by family & local residents	Parent and volunteer interviews Project records
	b) increased awareness of young people's achievements and activities	No. attending graduation event % reporting changed perceptions of young people	Project records Graduation event Feedback form
	c) increased awareness of canals and waterways as places of recreation and heritage	No. people reporting increased likelihood to visit	Parent and volunteer interviews
	d) local people are offered enriching volunteering experiences	Volunteers' reports of personal benefits	Parent and volunteer interviews

In year 2 the evaluation team led various activities and participated in programme sessions alongside young participants. Findings presented here are based on the following research activities:

1) Introductory sessions with young people

Informal discussions during the programme enrolment and induction sessions explained the role of evaluation. These provided opportunities to explain the ethical implications of research and to introduce the survey questionnaire. Parents were also involved in discussion to elicit their initial views on the programme.

2) Participant questionnaires

Young people completed a questionnaire during their induction session to gather baseline data on their awareness of waterways and natural heritage. They completed a comparable questionnaire at the end of the programme to track change in understanding and gather feedback on their participation.

3) Participant observation during activity session

Members of the evaluation team attended 2 programme sessions in 2017 and 2 in 2018 to observe young people's participation in canoeing and learning activities. This offered an opportunity for informal discussion with them and volunteers, and direct experience of the programme activities.

4) Participant observation during Presentation and Graduation Evenings

Members of the evaluation team attended these events to witness participation by young people, volunteers, programme staff and members of the community.

5) Interviews with participants

Following the end of the programme key stakeholders were interviewed to gather their reflections on its successes, challenges and outcomes. This included 2 project youth workers who were involved across the activity sessions, 10 young people, and 8 of their parents.

Figure 4: Summary of data for 2017 & 2018 evaluation

Source	2017: Participants/no.	2018: Participants/no.	Combined 2017 & 2018
Young people's pre-programme questionnaire	17	17	34
Young people's post-programme questionnaire	14	13	27
Interviews with young people	12	10	22
Graduation event comments cards	7	0	7
Interviews with parents	0	8	8
Interviews with staff and volunteers	5	2	7

5. Overview of year 2 programme

The second phase of LYEA commenced in July 2018 with an introductory session held at St Matthews Neighbourhood centre. Young people attended with their parents/guardians as an opportunity for families to find out more about the programme, ask questions, and provide information required from those wishing to participate. Participants were recruited through information sent to local schools, through SOCOPA's networks and from adverts placed in community facilities. A group of 32 young participants aged 11-14 enrolled, with their parents' support. These were divided into two groups for the whole programme, with each group completing the same activities and sessions on separate days.

Each group participated 10 LYEA sessions between July and October, most taking place in evenings. Five sessions were based at Leicester Outdoor Pursuits Centre and involved the group being on the water in canoes or other watercraft powered by themselves, with one further water-based session involving a boat trip. Across the programme young people participated in a range of activities designed to inform them about different aspects of waterways heritage, and to engage in wildlife conservation skills – see Figure 5.

There were a number of key changes from the pilot in 2017. The two groups of young people were smaller, making it easier for the adult instructors and volunteers to work with them. Two young workers assisted with the project, again enabling more supervision and assistance for the young people, particularly when undertaking challenging, water-based activities. A small group of 'young leaders' also took part in the 2018 cohort. These were young people who had taken part in the 2017 pilot, whose experience would assist those new to the programme. Overall these changes in staffing and the recruiting of young leaders were regarded as positive by the project team in terms of the young people's behaviour and the management of the waterway activities. A number of adjustments were also made the project programme in terms of the order and length of activities in response to issues highlighted in the 2017 evaluation. The key changes were the involvement of youth workers who focused on engaging young people with the activities, and helping manage behaviour. Smaller group sizes were also maintained. The sessions were also designed to be less rushed, and phased to allow the young people to develop a grounding in familiarity with being on the water and canoeing before additional tasks were added. Sessions included additional elements to engage the young people with wildlife and the environment, for example collecting materials to make a collage, and discussing littering. The programme team found these changes helped make the sessions run more

smoothly, were easier to manage and helped maintain the young people’s focus on the waterway activities.

Figure 5: Summary of Waterway Activities completed during the year 2 programme

Activity	Learning
Canoeing/boating practice	Safe operation of a variety of sizes of craft, including launching boats and storing equipment, working as a team, listening to instructions, navigating stretches of river and canal, familiarisation with the routes.
Lock keeping	Briefing about locks and their history by volunteer lock keepers, working the locks.
Wildlife observations along a stretch of river	Observing waterway wildlife and plants, recording observations, briefing about natural heritage by volunteers and staff.
Setting and retrieving camera traps	Setting up and operating camera traps to observe waterway wildlife, reviewing results.
Canal/river dipping	Collecting water samples, observing wildlife in the samples, understanding water quality, briefing about natural heritage by conservation volunteer.
Visit to rural stretch of canal and to interpret the natural environment through artwork.	Wider appreciation of the canal network; access to the towpath and opportunity to create pieces of art based on found items in the hedgerows.
Litter picking	Learning about conservation; teams took part in litter picking activity on the water by Leicester Outdoor Pursuits Centre
Photographing and filming the group	Using digital equipment to record activities, interviewing peers about the activities and their learning.
Preparing and delivering activities to share learning	Presenting experiences of waterways visually; making posters, films and exhibitions; talking to adults about personal experiences, website where photos were published (www.youngecologyadventurers.org.uk).

6. Progress with outcomes

In summary, year two built on the foundations of the pilot phase with continued strong delivery of outcomes achieved. Detail on each of the outcomes shows that good progress was made in relation to the priorities for this phase – see Figure 6. The nature of the impacts and achievement of headline is outlined after the Figure.

Figure 6: Outcome Measures for 2018 (see 2017 figures in evaluation report 1)

BENEFICIARY	OUTCOME	Main measure/ indicator	Results
Leicester's natural heritage	<i>1) Greater understanding of waterway natural heritage</i>		
	a) waterway wildlife will be observed, interpreted and explained through the eyes of young participants	% young people reporting increased knowledge of wildlife Positive change in young people's score on waterway quiz	91% of young people reported an increase in their knowledge of wildlife. All young people were able to name more specific species relevant to waterways after the project.
	b) interpretation will be communicated to friends, families, teachers and others	No. outputs presenting wildlife to others	30 YP shared their experiences at Graduation event with 13 parents and 10 community representatives, and 15 YP presented to CRT staff, including the regional director.
	c) natural heritage communicated to a wider audience through media activity	No. media items	Project shortlisted for Living Waterways Awards and the project was active on Twitter (note more media items were achieved in 2017).
Young participants	<i>2) Headline outcome: Local waterways are more significant to young people's lives</i>		
	a) increased understanding of waterways' historic context	Change in young people's score on waterway quiz % young people reporting increased knowledge of history	91% of young people reported an increase in their knowledge of waterways history.
	b) increased understanding and appreciation of the unique natural heritage of Leicester's waterways	Change in young people's perception of the significance of waterway heritage	72% of young people reported that their understanding of the importance of waterway heritage had positively changed.
	c) increased interest in History, Science and Geography at school	Change in young people's likely subject options	11 young people reported an increased interest in Science, History and Geography at School.
	d) enhanced personal and social skills (e.g. perseverance,	Young people's reports of personal benefit	Young people reported a number of different types of personal and social benefits,

	overcoming challenge, team work)		including making new friends, respect, meeting new people, increased confidence, teamwork skills, and organisation and communication skills.
	e) enhanced practical skills (e.g. canoeing, digital communication skills)	Young people's reports of skills gained	Canoeing skills were reported by the young people as the primary benefit, learning outcome and enjoyable activity. Several young people highlighted other skills such as communication and teamwork.
	f) sense of pride, enjoyment and achievement	No. JM Awards completed % young people reporting satisfaction with the programme	32 young people and 3 volunteers received John Muir Awards in 2018 92% of young people reported satisfaction with the project.
Wider community	3) <i>Headline outcome: Local residents are more aware of the significance of waterways</i>		
	a) increased awareness of the city's natural heritage and its value	No. people reporting increased awareness No. hours volunteered by family & local residents	All eight parents interviewed expressed a heightened awareness of natural heritage 140 hours volunteered by three local volunteers & volunteers from CRT attended to support project activities.
	b) increased awareness of young people's achievements and activities	No. attending graduation event % reporting changed perceptions of young people	13 parents attended the graduate events and 10 community representatives. All eight parents interviewed reported increased awareness of young people's achievements
	c) increased awareness of canals and waterways as places of recreation and heritage	No. people reporting increased likelihood to visit	All parents expressed an interest in returning to waterways and some returned on independent visits

	d) local people are offered enriching volunteering experiences	Volunteers' reports of personal benefits	Volunteers and Youth Work Volunteers reported positive experiences from the project and six received certificates
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Headline Outcome 1: Greater understanding of waterway natural heritage

The data shows that in both 2017 and 2018 young people's awareness of waterway natural heritage was quite low, although this was higher in 2018. Few could describe natural features in the baseline questionnaires. By the end of each programme, this had changed notably, with more participants able to describe waterway heritage, and more correct responses identification of their features, including the environment and wildlife. It was notable that in 2018 participants were more confident from the beginning about their waterway knowledge, which was perhaps due to the presence of 'young leaders' who had been part of the project the previous year. There was good evidence from interviews with parents that the young people talked about their experiences at home and shared their knowledge of waterway heritage. Several parents were also enthusiastic about encouraging their young people to continue to learn more and to engage in more outdoor activities as a family. Young people also communicated their knowledge through the graduation event, although in future more media outlets for communicating to the wider community could be considered.

Headline Outcome 2: Local waterways are more significant to young people's lives

Questionnaire results from 2017 and 2018 suggest that young people were relatively unfamiliar with waterways prior to the programme, although in 2018 there was more familiarity overall due to the presence of the 'young leaders'. In both years, follow-up questionnaires suggested young people's awareness of waterways had increased, with more knowledge of built heritage features and current usage. For both 2017 and 2018 the results for whether they would recommend the programme to a friend or not were unremarkable, and their interest in related school subjects did not significantly improve. Whether either of these measures provide good indication of the increased significance of waterways in young people's lives is perhaps questionable. However, there was clear evidence from in-depth interviews with parents that the young people had clearly engaged with waterway heritage during the project, and that young people had expressed enthusiasm to their parents. Some had already re-visited the waterway after the project, and in one example, the children had demonstrated their knowledge of lock gates to other families.

Headline outcome 3: Local residents are more aware of the significance of waterways

In 2017 parents were briefly surveyed during the graduation ceremony and there were informal discussions with family members, revealing a relatively low awareness of waterways amongst parents and family members. In both 2017 and 2018 parents and family members volunteered on the project, and in 2018 a sample of eight parents took part in in-depth interviews at the programme end. These interviews suggested that the young people had been communicating with their parents about the project and their experiences, and that many families were enthusiastic about returning to waterways for recreation as a result of their contact with the project. Therefore, there is some evidence of heightened family and community interest in waterways. Similarly, it appeared that the project stimulated a more general interest amongst parents for finding further outdoor activities for their young people to participate in, and to visit other greenspaces throughout the area.

7. Outcomes for young people

This section details outcomes young people achieved beyond those related directly to natural heritage. It includes feedback from young people on benefits which are important to them which were not all specified by the project team prior to the pilot.

7.1 Young people's overall assessment of the project (Outcome 2f)

In the follow-up questionnaire, young people were asked to reflect on how much they enjoyed the programme. Overall, they were positive about the programme, with more than half finding it good or very good in both 2017 and 2018 cohorts (Figure 7).

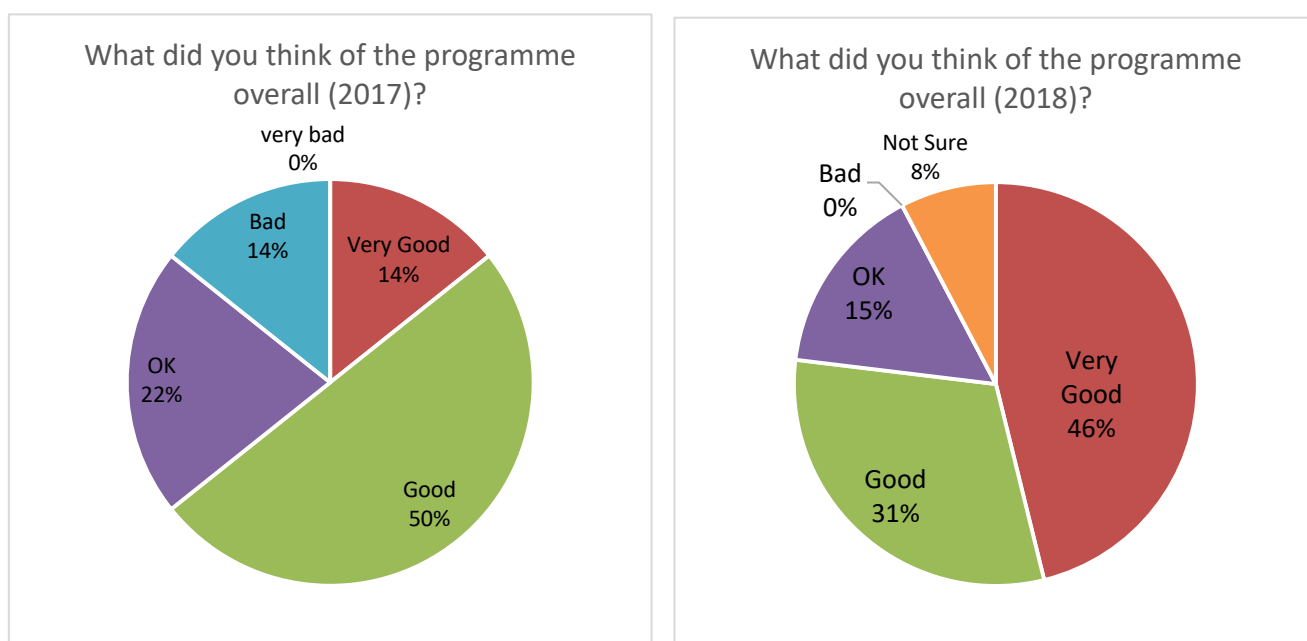


Figure 7: Young People's overall assessment of the programme.

Reasons given for finding the programme very good or good in **2017** were that it was 'adventurous', 'fun', 'great' and that they had 'a good time'. The positive responses also focused repeatedly on the learning elements:

*'It's a great opportunity for young people to improve their **teamwork skills** and **academic work**'*

*'because it's interesting **learning how to canoe**'*

*'I've **learned a lot** doing this programme'*

*'I get to **learn things** I never knew I was interested in',*

*'**learning** how to **canoe** was mad'.*

*'when teachers ask me what did you do and I say **canoeing** and they sounded very surprised'*

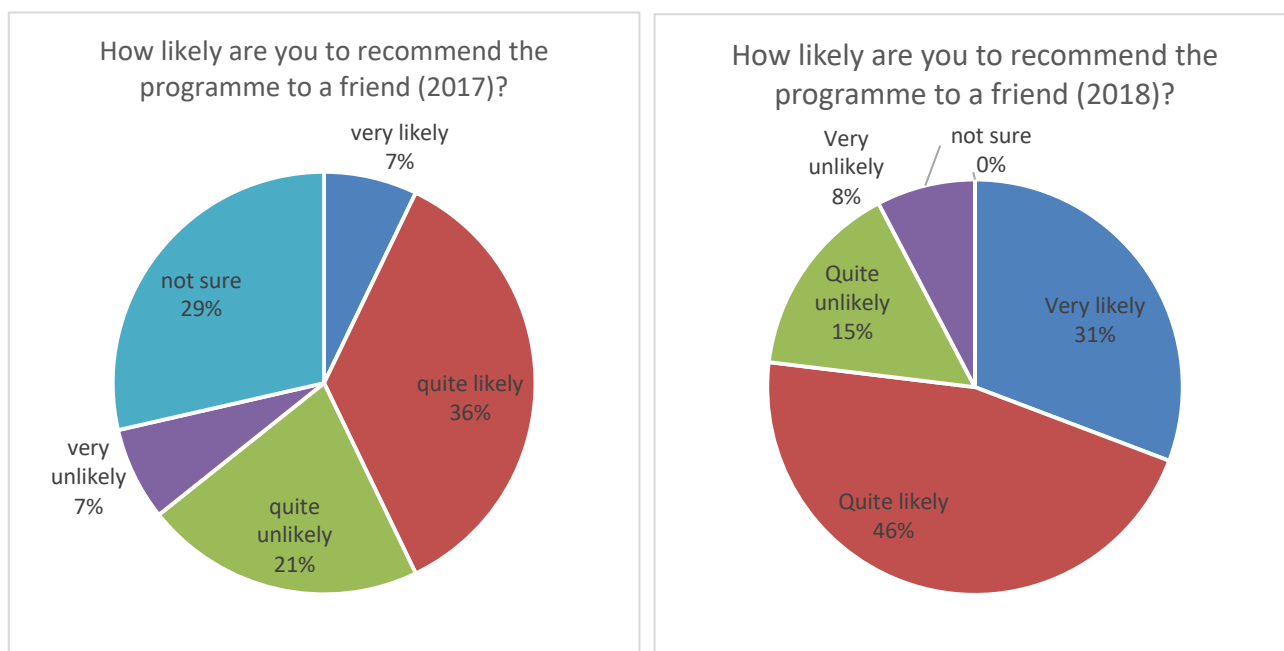
*'I also feel like I am **closer to nature** and **wildlife**'.*

In **2018** the reasons for the project being good or very good were similar, but slightly more focused on the learning and knowledge, although several still mentioned the importance of fun and the overall experience of canoeing and being on the water:

*'It is a very good programme because it helps people **understand** a lot **about wildlife**'*
*'Because it was **enjoyable, interactive, educational and fun**. We did lots of **canoeing** and I learnt a lot about **locks, wildlife** and how to **canoe**.'*
*'It was **fun** and they've provided me with a lot of **knowledge** on **canals and rivers**'*
*'I think it's good because it has **taught us** about **wildlife and nature**. It has also taught us how to **canoe** and how to pick dead plants rather than well and live plants.'*
*'There was some **experience** we didn't do last year and also we saw **insects up close** that I found interesting.'*
*'Because it something I have **never experienced before**'.*

Young people also reported if they would recommend a friend to take part in the programme, although responses overall were quite mixed there were notable improvements between 2017 and 2018 (Figure 8). In 2018 77% of the young people were either very likely or quite likely to recommend the project to a friend, whereas in 2017 this figure was 43%. This is largely accounted for by a much higher proportion in 2017 being 'not sure' (29%) than in 2018, although overall there was also a drop in those either quite unlikely or very unlikely to recommend the project. This overall positive change in how young participants viewed the project may relate to some of the changes introduced between the pilot and the second programme.

Figure 8: Young people's likelihood of recommending the programme to a friend



Some of those who were likely to recommend it to a friend gave quite straightforward reasons as to why, stating that the project was 'fun' or 'good'. Some highlighted the novelty of the project as something that was 'out of the ordinary' to them:

'Because it is something you aren't very used to, and it's very different' (2017)
'They're young and haven't experience of nature and would probably be interested.' (2017)

Two highlighted that it was a *great opportunity for young people to do in their spare time* and that *'It would benefit you in the future'*. The young people who provided positive responses therefore expressed not only that they found the project fun, but that it was novel compared to their daily lives (that it was a *'new experience'* - 2018), and that it might be of benefit to them in the future. One young person said in their interview that they would recommend it to a friend, but suggested it would be challenging:

'Yeah, cause I didn't like it at the start but then once I'd gone to it a couple of weeks I liked it, so probably a friend would like it.' (2017)

In 2018 several young people highlighted the experience of nature and the outdoors in their positive comments about why they would recommend the project to a friend:

'So they experience nature and its raw beauty' (2018)

'It has a lot of info about nature and it takes you on wonderful canoeing trips.' (2018)

One also suggested the recommending the project to friends would be beneficial, because they would enjoy doing the project more if more of their friends were participating also:

'I would recommend this programme to a friend as if there are more people that you know it's more enjoyable.' (2018)

Reasons for not recommending it to friends included thinking others would not be interested in the project. One of the young people, in their interview, said that they would recommend it to a friend but that he had *'few friends that would listen to me properly'* (2017). A small number gave comical or dramatic responses, such as saying they will be still be *'in trauma'* recovering from the project, suggesting they did not enjoy their time on the project. Others suggested that their friends *'might not like going in water'* (2018).

During the interviews, some of the young people commented on whether they would be interested in continuing with the project activities themselves in their own time. One young person said they would not be interested in continuing canoeing as a hobby, stating that *'I'd do it if it was on a school trip. Not by myself'* (2017). Three said they would do the project again or would be interested in taking part in future. Some were unsure if they would be interested in doing the project again:

'Maybe. If school gets very hard maybe not. If school is still the same probably, maybe' (2017).

'The project? Not quite sure' (2017).

None specifically said they were keen to take up canoeing independently, suggesting that although many of them valued it as a structured activity, they did not necessarily have the confidence, knowledge or skills to do the activity in their own time.

In **2018** the young people were asked to reflect on whether there was anything they would change about the programme to make it better for the next group. 11 out of 13 of the young people responded to this question. The majority of responses suggested that the young people wanted to spend more time on the waterways and canoeing, as well as mentioning the importance of the camera traps:

'There should be more time spent on the water and in exploration.'

'More water activities.'

'More time on the waterway.'

'More water activities. Less writing. More funnn....'

'There should be more cameras and more canoeing.'

'I think the people who put the camera traps should take out their own.'

Two of the young people mentioned 'diversity' – one specifically mentioned the need for more diversity in the group, whilst the other simply mentioned the need for 'more diversity', and it is unclear whether this is a comment on the group, or on the nature of the activities:

'There should be diversity in the group.'

'Next time there should be a lot more diversity.'

One young person mentioned that they thought they should '*do more foraging*' – this was a new activity for 2018 and it obviously had a good impression on this participant. The only negative comment was left by one young person who stated '*Make sure they will go on CLEAN water - not with dead animals.*' The cleanliness of the water and the experience overall was a comment consistent with those made in 2017. Some young people clearly remained concerned about the water and environment being 'dirty'.

The young people were also asked in **2017** (group 1) during group sessions to propose the best and worst things about the project. The responses have been categorised as follows (Figure 9):

Figure 9: Young people's 'best things' about the project.

Best things about the project		
Category	Count	Detailed Response
Canoeing	6	The best thing in canoeing is when we went on the 6 seated boat.
		Life jackets are cool.
		Canoeing without stopping because of other canoers.
		Canoeing.
		Canoeing.
		Canoeing.
Wildlife & Environment	6	The animals. The wildlife.
		The water and wildlife.
		Nature.
		Animals.
		The sights. The herons. The plants.
		The greenery.
Splashing	4	People splashing.
		Splashing.
		Splashing.
		The most enjoyable thing was when we all had water fights with one another.

Waterways	3	Going on the water.
		Opening the locks.
		The water.
Falling in	2	Falling off.
		People falling in.
Teamwork	2	Teamwork.
		The other thing I enjoy was all of us working as a team to get the canoes out and help one another.
Other	7	I found the best thing was doing the drawing and annotation on our John Muir Books.
		Relaxing.
		Competition.
		Something to look forward to during the week.
		Putting camera traps.
		The activities.
		Meeting new friends.

Similarly to other responses canoeing and related activities featured strongly. Although later responses failed to mention learning about wildlife, the environment and waterways, these emerge as important to many of the young people, with wildlife and the environment highlighted as equally important as canoeing. Teamwork was mentioned, but again not as highly as might have been speculated given how important ‘respect’ was in terms of the main benefits of the project to young people.

Figure 10: Young people’s ‘worst things’ about the project

Worst things about the project		
Category	Count	Detailed Response
Instructors	6	When [<i>instructor</i>] pushed your boat and didn’t care if you were about to fall.
		Instructor splashing us.
		Annoying the instructor.
		[Instructor name]
		[Instructor name]
		[Instructor name]
Wet	5	When I get wet.
		It’s cold when you have water at you.
		Wet in the change room.
		Worst thing is being splashed by someone else.
		Worst thing is when you fall in the water and it is too cold.
Cold	4	Doing canoeing on cold days.
		It’s cold when you have water at you.
		Worst thing is when you fall in the water and it is too cold.

		When it's cold.
Difficult boats	3	Canoeing in large boats.
		The worst things were when we had to join into different groups and go on the six people canoe which was horrible since it harder to paddle.
		I don't like 2 person boat because you rock.
Splashing	3	When the people who are not part of your project splash water.
		Instructor splashing us.
		Worst thing is being splashed by someone else.
Touching things	3	Seeing bugs on my body.
		Stinging nettles.
		Camera traps was hard because I touch the concrete which had mould on it. It made my hand all funny.
Falling in	2	When [<i>instructor</i>] pushed your boat and didn't care if you were about to fall.
		Falling off the boat.
Facilities	2	Dirty changing room.
		Stinky room.
Other	3	Bad jokes.
		Doing writing.
		Not being allowed to splash.

Although the young people ranked canoeing highly as a 'best thing' about the project, and many felt that the skills learnt associated with canoeing were important, many of their 'worst things' (figure 11) relate to either having to learn about canoeing (the instructors), some of the physical difficulties of canoeing (difficult boats), and some of the unpleasant feelings of being out on the water (being cold and wet, and falling in). Although several young people ranked 'splashing' as one of the best things, several of the young people found the splashing disruptive and ranked it as a 'worst thing'. Others were concerned about feeling uncomfortable in the various environments that they had to be in as part of the project, including touching things outdoors (insects, stinging nettles and mould) and the changing rooms that they described as 'dirty'.

2017: Summary of Outcomes for Young People

In the 2017 cohort a range of indoor ranking and scoring activities were conducted with the young people to explore their perceptions of the key outcomes. These activities were not repeated in 2018 due to time pressure; we report the outcomes again here to compare with the comments (above) from the 2018 and 2017 cohorts.

Figure 11: Summary of young people's outcomes

Summary of Young People's Perceptions, Mapped to Project Outcomes					
Rank	Outcomes	Main Benefits	Learning Outcomes	Best Things	Worst Things
1	Respect (2d, 2f)	Canoeing (2e)	Canoeing (2e)	Canoeing (2e) Wildlife & Env. (2b)	Instructors (2d)
2	Meet new people (2d)	CV/jobs (2f)	Camera Traps (2e)		Getting Wet
3	Canoeing skills (2e)	Meet people (2d)	Personal (2d)	Splashing	Being Cold
4	Confidence (2d, 2f)	Learning (2a, 2b)	Waterways (2a)	Waterways (2a)	Difficult Boats (2e)
5	Teamwork skills (2d)	Award (2f)	Wildlife (2b)	Falling in	Splashing
6	Communication skills (2d)	Occupy time		Teamwork (2d)	Touching things
7	See new places (2a, 2b)	Wildlife (2b)		Other	Falling in
8	Planning & organising (2d)	Personal skills (2d)			Facilities

Significant themes that ran across these group exercises are highlighted in colour. **Canoeing** (in red) features highly across all of the exercises, as the young people ranked it as a key outcome, benefit and learning outcome, and it was one of the 'best things' about the project. **Personal and interpersonal skills** (in green) were regarded as important for the young people, particularly when they were asked to think about the overall outcomes of the project. It is interesting to note, however, that in these exercises the importance of personal and interpersonal skills and activities appeared very little in the 'best and worst things' exercise. **Wildlife, waterways** and 'new places' (in blue) did not feature prominently when young people assessed the outcomes, main benefits and learning outcomes (although most were recognised as relevant), but, interestingly, did feature prominently in the 'best things' exercise. The **experiences** of being in and around the water and associated **playful activities** (in orange) were only highlighted in the 'best and worst things' exercises, and clearly divided opinion amongst the young people.

These data suggest that the young people were aware that some aspects of the project were beneficial to them (such as learning about waterways, wildlife, gaining skills for their CV), but that these were not always the most enjoyable or fun, or necessarily the most important aspects for them, which seemed dominated instead by personal skills (in outcomes) and their 'best things' (such as canoeing and 'splashing'). Some clearly found canoeing as one of the key outcomes and learnt skills, but that some aspects of canoeing were not enjoyable or challenging (getting wet and being cold). This may suggest that, even though the young people's outcomes generally mapped well onto the project outcomes, there is a gap in terms of what has been initially assessed as part of the project outcomes and what the young people regarded as more significant. Note that some of these issues are highlighted by the 2018 cohort in the end-of-project interviews with some of the young people, discussed below.

Summary

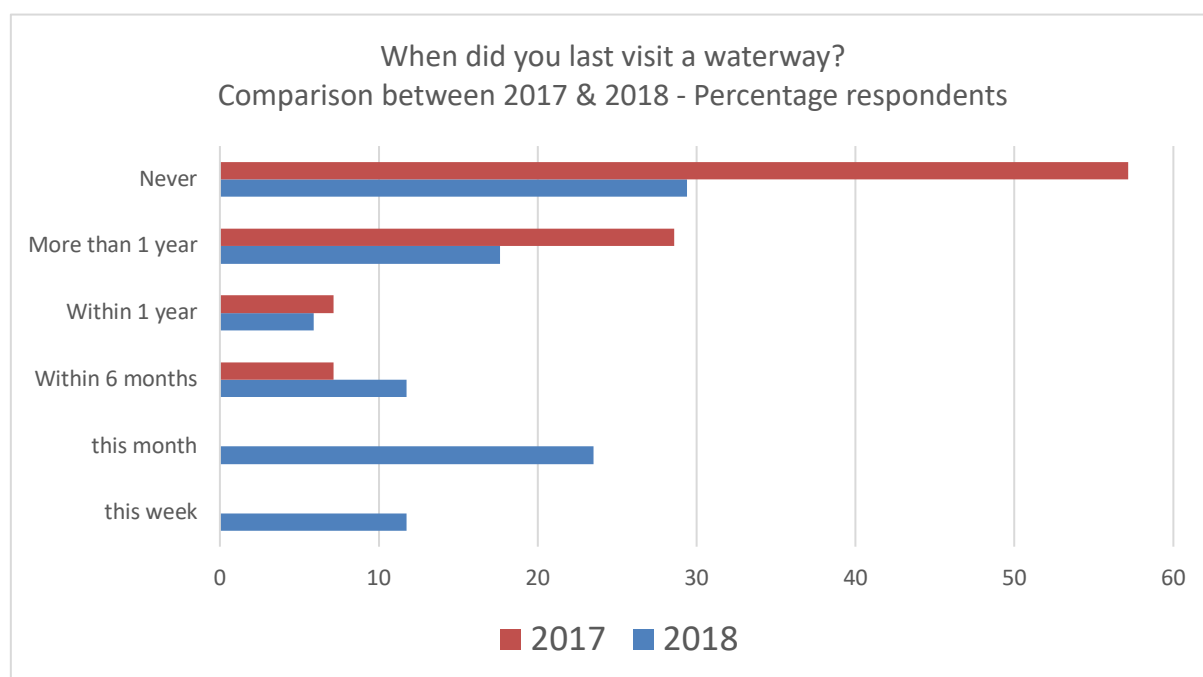
- In both 2017 and 2018 the young people’s assessment of the project was **positive**, with some notable **improvements** in 2018, with more focus on learning and knowledge.
- Similarly, in 2018 the young participants were more likely to recommend the project to a friend than those participating in 2017.
- In 2018 several young people felt that, to improve the project, **more time** could be spent on **the water** and doing over activities. These aligned with some of the ‘best things’ that young people liked about the project in 2017.
- Young people’s **perceptions** of the **benefits** of the project generally mapped well onto project outcomes, but they also suggested other skills that they felt were important.

7.2 Understanding of waterways and their significance (Outcomes: 1a, 2a, 2b.)

The baseline information demonstrates that, particularly in 2017 young people began with very little familiarity with local waterways, although in 2018 more of the participants had visited a waterway within the last year. This could be due to the fact that some participants were ‘young leaders’ who had taken part in the project the previous year, or it could reflect the successes of the project by overall increasing young people’s and community member’s likelihood of visiting the waterways.

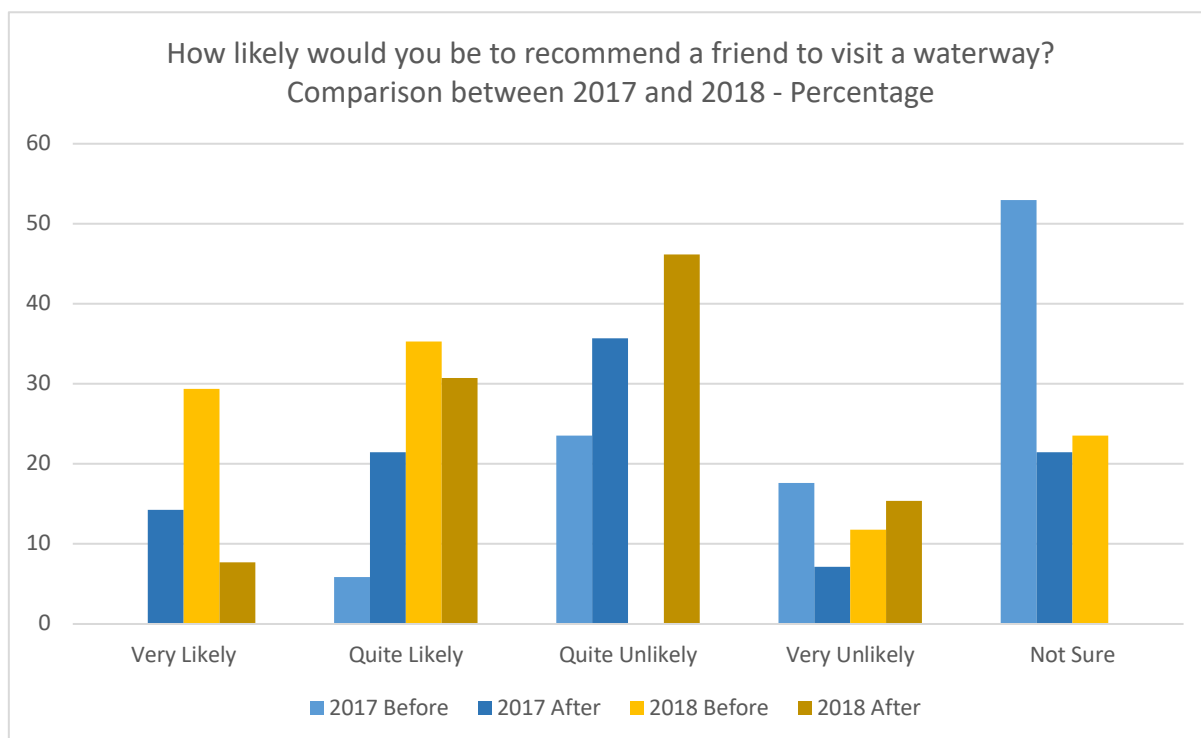
Some of those who responded in 2018 had been to the waterway as part of a family visit not connected to the project. For example, one respondent’s stated ‘*we went to observe the canal, going through Abbey Park, and it was fun*’. Two mentioned that they went ‘*paddleboarding*’ and canoeing as part of a separate free activity course at the outdoor pursuits centre. This suggests that some families had accessed other courses or waterway opportunities outside of the LYEA project. In both 2017 and 2018, those who did report previous visits suggested that they had positive experiences, that they had had ‘*fun*’ and that it was ‘*very nice and relaxing*’ (2017), whilst for others ‘*it was peaceful and but also a little polluted but a good experience*’ (2018).

Figure 12: The participants’ last visit to a waterway



To also help assess young people’s overall feelings about waterways, the questionnaire asked them before and after the project whether they would recommend for a friend to visit a local waterway (figure 13).

Figure 13: Likelihood of recommending a friend to visit a waterway



Before the project in 2017 there was notable uncertainty – with the majority ‘not sure’ and the remainder ‘unlikely’ to recommend to a friend to visit a waterway, with only one respondent ‘quite likely’ to recommend it to others. In 2018 there was a slightly different pattern – there were still a proportion unsure or unlikely, but a higher proportion who were very likely or quite likely. This could be related to a number of factors. Firstly, more participants had visited a waterway more recently in 2018. Those in this group may also have been ‘excited’ about the project having heard about it from the first group, whereas the first group had no such precursors to base their anticipation about the project or waterways on.

After the project in 2017 it was notable that more young people were likely to recommend a visit to a waterway to a friend. In 2018 there were still a good number likely to recommend it to a friend, but note that those who are ‘unlikely’ increases significantly after the project. This could simply be related to those young people who responded to the survey. Although 17 responded in both 2017 and 2018 to the initial survey, only 13 responded in the end of project survey. A second possibility is that for some young participants, their impression of waterways as places to visit actually did decline as a result of the project. In 2017, 4 young people who were likely to recommend the project to a friend said that they were unlikely to recommend a visit to the waterway, and similarly 5 respondents in 2018 stated that they were likely to recommend the project but unlikely to recommend a visit to the waterway.

Those who were positive about the waterways stated that it was ‘fun’ ‘adventurous’, ‘interesting’ and that ‘it was beautiful’ (2017), or that ‘it looks really nice’, ‘there’s loads to learn’, or that ‘waterways are very fun once you get used to them’ (2018). For those that responded negatively in 2018, their

reasons included 'I don't talk about waterways to my friends', 'I'm not sure how many of my friend are wildflower loveys', or that 'it is fun but it could be cleaner'. Some thought their friends 'wouldn't care about a waterway' or that they 'wouldn't go by myself so I think I would recommend her to go as a group', whilst another thought that their friends 'might be worried about going near water'. These reasons might account for the changes seen in 2018 where young people were less likely to recommend waterways to a friend after the project. This potentially points to an overall concern about how young people come to view waterways through their experience with the project. Most are highly positive about the project itself and the project activities, but do not necessarily come away with a positive view of waterways as 'good places' for young people to go. This may also be a comment on how young people perceive their relationships with their friends, and their perceptions of what their friends might be interested in.

The young people were also asked before and after the project what they specifically liked and disliked about waterways (Figure 14); in each case there were multiple responses per individual:

Figure 14: Likes and dislikes about waterways

I like waterways because...	No. responses			
	2017 Before	2017 After	2018 Before	2018 After
Never been &/or don't know	4	1		
Love of Nature	1		2	1
Important or Interesting (generally)	1	1		3
Getting to know somewhere new	1			
Fun	1	2	1	2
Presence of Water	1	3		
Swimming	1			
Canoeing		3	2	
Learning History & Use		2		1
Water fights		2		
Presence of Animals, birds & Wildlife		2	3	6
Beautiful views/Peaceful		2		2
Exploring or Adventure		2		1
Good for Health/Exercise			1	1
Seeing Plants			2	2
Total	10	20	11	19

I don't like waterways because	No. Responses			
	2017 Before	2017 After	2018 Before	2018 After
Never been & don't know	4			
Does not like water/getting wet	2	4		1
Difficulty Swimming/worry of drowning	1		1	
There might be foxes	1			
Dirty/Polluted/unhygienic		3	4	5
I don't like waterways/boring		1		1
Difficulty canoeing/hard work		1		1

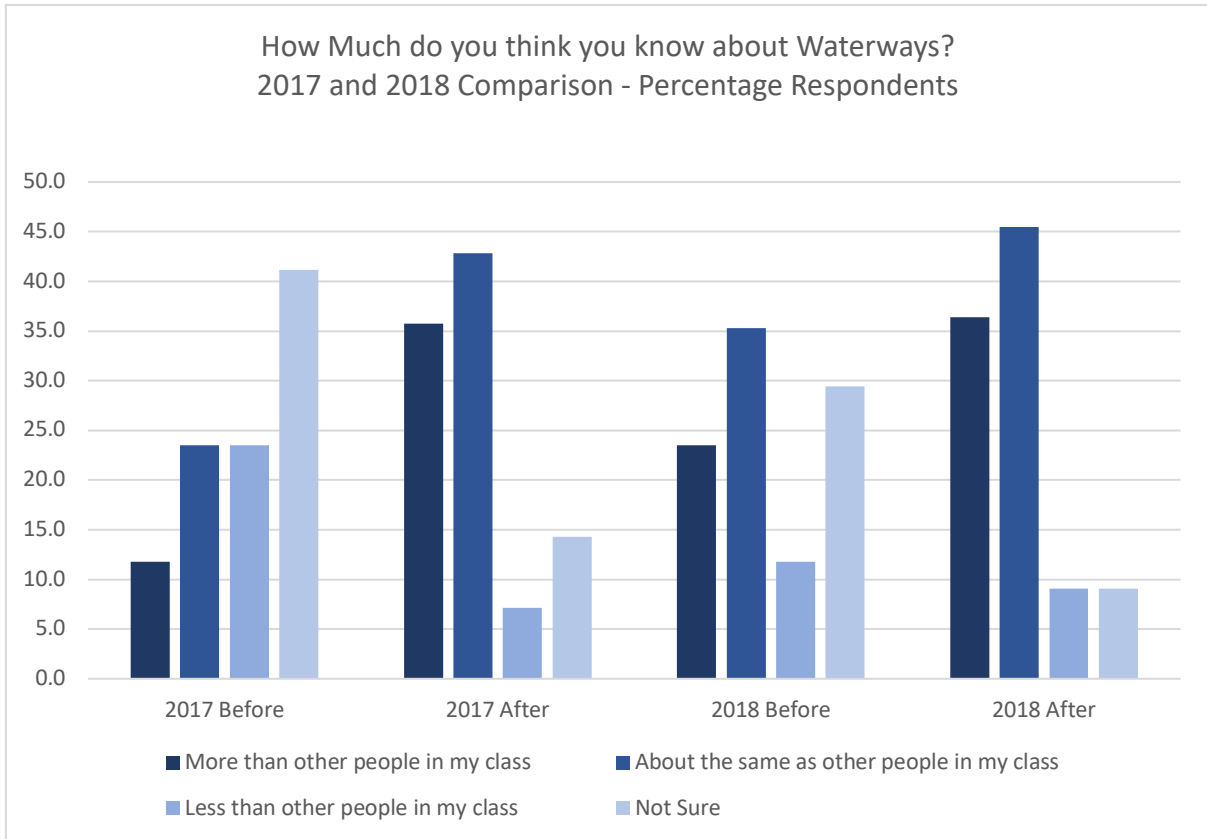
Dislike of Instructors		1		
Insects		1		
Animals & stinging nettles		1	1	2
Risks (general)			1	
Litter and Rubbish				4
Flooding				1
Far away/long time to get there				1
Total	8	12	7	16

There were some similar suggestions across both 2017 and 2018 cohorts. In the ‘before’ survey, responses could be quite general, whereas ‘after’ they tended to be more specifically focused on features of the waterways which were observed during the programme. In 2018, the presence of animals, birds or wildlife clearly stands out as being a key reason for young people to have enjoyed the project, as does ‘seeing plants’. Although the responses were too few in each category to really see a pattern here, the survey results do demonstrate that the young people picked out the nature, wildlife, and aesthetic benefits of being on the canals as much as they highlighted the activity-focused elements, such as canoeing.

The dislikes are again similar across cohorts. Notable is the impression of waterways as ‘dirty’, with the 2018 cohort being more specific about ‘litter’ as a problem. Interestingly, whilst ‘getting wet’ seemed to be a problem highlighted by several in 2017, this was much less of a problem in 2018 – where young people (in their interviews and other evidence) clearly enjoyed the activity of ‘jumping in’ the water at the end of some of the sessions.

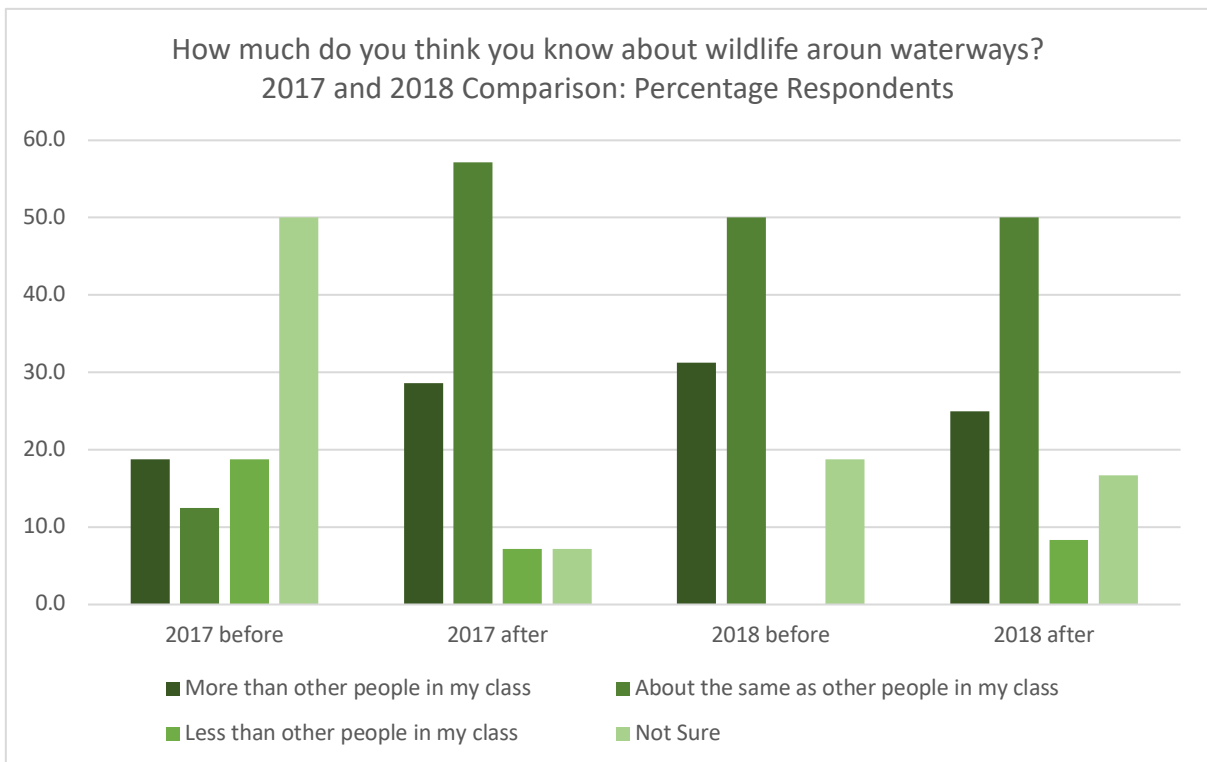
The young people were asked before and after the project how much they felt they knew about waterways (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Young people's self-assessment about their knowledge of waterways



They were also asked about their knowledge of wildlife around waterways both before and after the project (figure 16).

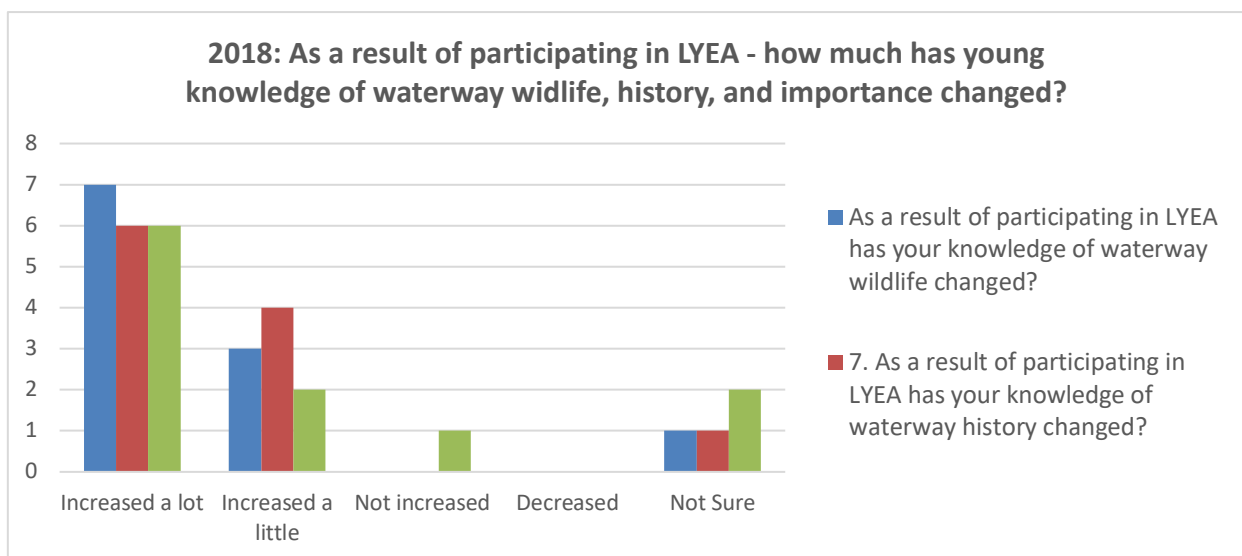
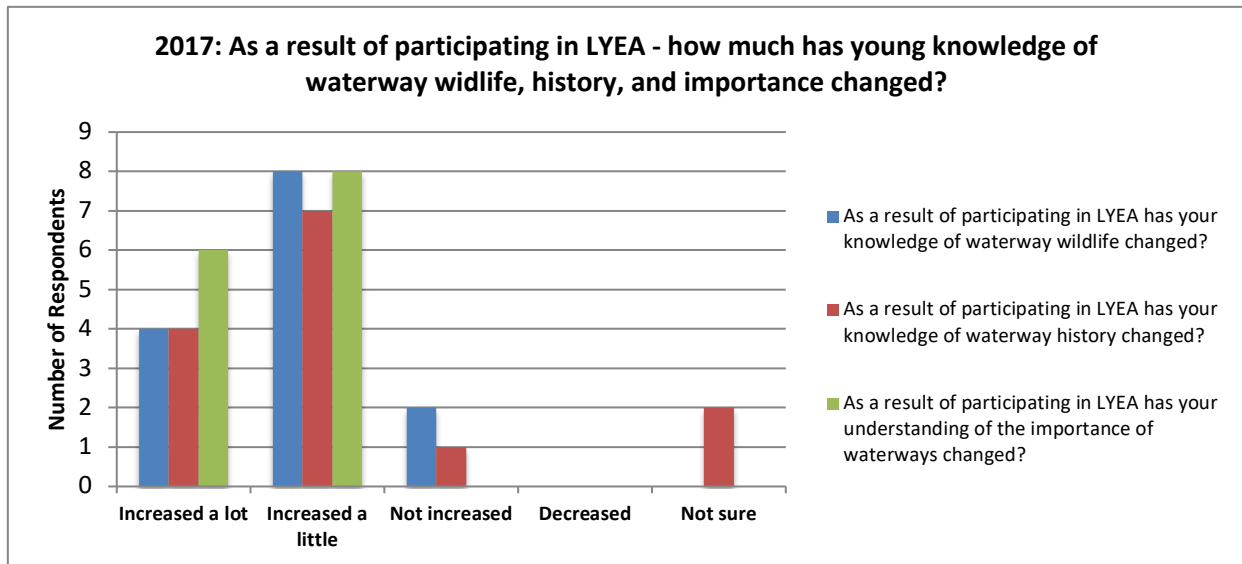
Figure 16: Young people's self-assessment of their knowledge of wildlife



In relation to both waterways and wildlife the 2018 cohort were more confident from the start of the programme in their knowledge, possibly because of the presence of young leaders who had also attended in 2017. In the 2017 cohort, there was a much more significant jump from a low level of self-assessed knowledge before to a higher level after the project.

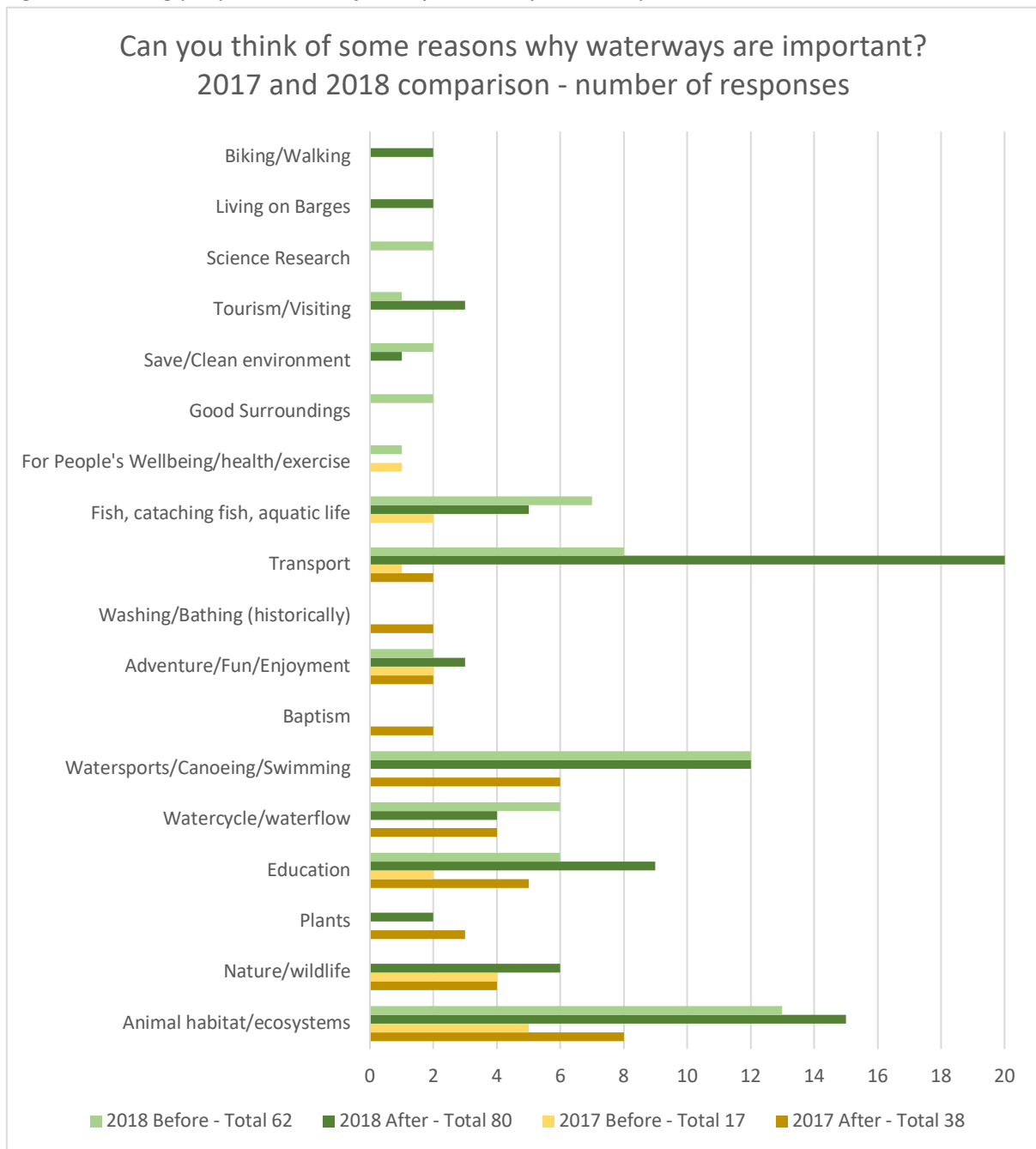
When asked to self-assess changes in their knowledge of wildlife and history associated with waterways, the young people were overwhelmingly positive, suggesting the programme had been influential in their learning (figure 17).

Figure 17: Self-assessment of change in knowledge



When asked about why they thought waterways were important in both before and after questionnaire (figure 18), the young people gave a number of responses:

Figure 18: Young people’s reasons for why waterways were important



In both 2017 and 2018 cohorts there was clearly an increase in responses after the programme. Indeed, in 2018 there was a high total of 80 different reasons given – much higher than in the previous year. It is also notable that the 2018 group appeared to have a higher baseline of knowledge – with a total of 62 different responses compared to 17 in 2017. Although many of the suggestions were similar across the two years, it appears that there was more consistent learning about these things in the 2018 survey participants. Also note that the 2018 cohort did pick out a few additional uses of waterways not described by the 2017 group, such as biking, tourism, living on barges and the importance of maintaining a clean environment.

Comparing the questionnaires also suggests that young people gained knowledge of wildlife around waterways (figure 19).

Figure 19: Young people's identification of wildlife around waterways

Can you think of some wildlife that lives around waterways?					
	2017 Before	2017 After	2018 Before	2018 After	Total
Ducks/Mallard	1	5	9	7	22
Swans		8	5	1	14
Heron		5	3	6	14
Coot		2	6	6	14
Moorhen			4	5	9
Birds	3	1	1		5
Magpie			2	3	5
Kingfisher			2	3	5
Swallow		1		2	3
Geese			2		2
Pigeon		1			1
Himalayan Balsam		2	4	9	15
Stinging Nettles		4	3	2	9
Berries/Blackberries			4	4	8
Trees	3		1		4
Willow			2	2	4
Seaweed			3		3
Moss	1		1		2
Weed Ponds			2		2
Poison Ivy			1		1
Otters	5	6	4	4	19
Water Vole			1	3	4
Foxes	2			1	3
Bat		3			3
Rats		1		1	2
Pig	2				2
Snakes	1				1
Beavers	1				1
Fish	15	5	2		22
Frogs	4	2	4		10
Crocodiles/Alligators	4	1			5
Toads	2				2
Tadpole			2		2
Tortoise	1				1
Insects	5	1			6
Bees			1		1
Dragonflies	1				1
Mosquitoes	1				1
Waterflies		1			1
Crayfish				1	1
Mantis Shrimp		1			1
Amphibians	1				1
Eel	1				1
Octopus	1				1
Turtle	1				1

There are some striking differences between the young people's knowledge of wildlife pre and post project. In 2017 the young people mentioned a whole range of animals that might possibly be found near canals, several mentioned also at the end of the project, but there was a considerable amount of 'guesswork' about other animals. After the project, suggestions appear to be more accurate and based on their experiences, with mention of specific species. In 2018 it appeared that the young people did have more of a base knowledge of canal wildlife, particularly birds – possibly due to a small number attending the project for a second time as young leaders. Similar to the 2017 group however, some of the 'guesses' and more generic answers in the pre-questionnaire are left out of the final questionnaire, most likely because they were not observed by the young people during the activities (e.g. fish, tadpoles, seaweed, moss etc.). The young people in 2017 discussed wildlife in more detail in their peer interviews (see Report 1 for more details of these responses).

Overall **the young people had clearly learnt more specific species of animals and plants that relate to waterways**, although slightly different patterns of responses were observed between 2017 and 2018.

Summary

- Young people **gained awareness** of waterways, their functions, and heritage features.
- Most were starting from a very **low baseline of waterway knowledge** and awareness and demonstrated **considerable gains in understanding**, although in 2018 more participants had visited a waterway recently compared to 2017.
- There was a **positive change** in young people's self-assessment of their knowledge. In 2017 many felt unsure about their knowledge compared to their peers, whereas in 2018 there was a lot more confidence in their knowledge versus peers.
- Overall the **2018** group appeared to start with a **higher baseline of knowledge** about waterways. This could have been due to the presence of 'young leaders' from 2017, or because the group was simply more confident and enthusiastic for learning about waterways.
- **Wildlife features were prominent** in young people's understanding of and interest in waterway heritage. Learning about wildlife came from both structured activities and circumstantial encounters.
- The groups in both 2017 and 2018 show **ambivalence** regarding their and their **peers' future interest** in visiting waterways. It remains unclear whether this is a reflection of their own experience, or an assessment of what their friends might be interested in.

7.3 Feelings about waterways and the activities (Outcomes: 2d, 2e, 2f)

In the first evaluation report we commented in detail on how young people described the following in relation to their feelings about waterways and the project activities:

- Young people **overcame their fears** and gained confidence in unfamiliar environments and activities, but ideas about activities being 'dangerous' remained for some.
- How young people felt about waterways and associated activities was important – there was a **spectrum of feelings**: calming, exciting, whilst for some it was dirty and boring.
- Different feelings about **how waterways could be enjoyed** (as calm and active, exciting places) could be incorporated into future iterations of the project.
- **Non-core project activities** were important for young people. Some enjoyed the 'documenting' activities as part of the evaluation, others enjoyed opportunities to 'play' rather than doing pre-determined tasks.

In **2018**, the young people involved in post-programme interviews presented good understanding of waterways, and that they had learnt various things about them. All 10 were interested in returning to the waterway in future, and were also likely to state that they would encourage others to visit, and would highlight their points of interest:

“I would... tell... tell them to... er, well, that water ways are very important, because they give us a means of travel. They give us wildlife, so a lot of the... the... the coots, moorhens and mallards we see are in the water ways.”

“I’d say it’s really interesting, and that I would recommend it to them. And that it’s really fun and you should go, and I would say that you can also learn a lot from it as well.”

Although one was less positive about their characteristics:

“And the water there is not... is not really that clean, because lots of animals in there, and there’s a lot of, like, plants in there. So, it’s not... so, then you shouldn’t... in the... the wat... if you do, you don’t really want to go... fall in the water.”

All 10 of those interviewed said they would return to the waterway, with most wanting to do more canoeing or other water activities. They suggested visiting with friends or family in future.

7.4 After the project: Impacts on educational futures (Outcome: 2c)

The project aimed to promote an interest in ecology and heritage for young people, with the hope that this interest is sustained beyond the project. Therefore, outcome 2c focuses on whether participation in the project will influence the subject choices at school for the young people. Before and after surveys asked the young people which three school subjects they would most like to study in the next two years, and which three school subjects they thought would be most useful in future.

Figure 20: Which three school subjects would you most like to study in the next two years?

Subject	2017 Before	2017 After	2018 Before	2018 After
Maths	5	7	8	5
English	4	4	6	4
Science	3	5	6	2
History	3	4	3	4
Media	2	2		
PE	2	2	3	2
Drama	2	1		
Food	2			
Art	1	1	1	1
Biology	1	1		2
Business	1	1		
Citizenship	1	1	1	2
Sociology	1	1		
Chemistry	1			1
Electronics	1			

Product Design	1			
DT		2	1	
Film		1	2	2
Geography		1	3	5
ICT		1	5	
RE			1	
Environmental Studies				1
Food Tech				1
Physics				1
Spanish				1

Figure 21: Which three school subjects do you think will be most useful for you in the future?

Subject	2017 Before	2017 After	2018 Before	2018 After
English	10	8	10	8
Maths	9	9	11	7
Science	7	6	10	7
History	3	2	1	1
Geography	1		1	4
Sociology	1	1		
Media	1	1	1	1
Citizenship	1		2	1
French	1			
PE	1		2	1
Biology			1	2
ICT		1	2	
Religious studies		1		
Humanities			1	
DT			1	
Chemistry			1	2
Languages			1	
Food Tech				1
Physics				1

The results for both years show little difference before and after, and any minor differences may be due to different numbers of young people (and indeed different young people themselves) taking part in the survey at the beginning and the end of the project. There was therefore little evidence that participation in the project had any significant influence on subjects chosen at School – and it was

perhaps too ambitious of the project to assume that this specific outcome was achievable given multiple other influences in such decisions.

However in both 2017 and 2018 young people mentioned that the project might have a positive impact on their school work. In **2017**, for example:

- *'[The project will benefit me] in geography and know that the knowledge that you've have taught me and now have been moved to a higher group. It help me in my art lesson because we set camera traps up before the summer holidays.'*
- Another said: *'it has helped me a lot in school... my knowledge in geography has increased a lot. It has also benefited me in my learning about the waterways and wildlife',*
- and finally another mentioned: *'it increased my amount of knowledge about history, geography and other relevant subjects'.*

Two of the young people also mentioned that the project might be helpful with their schoolwork, particularly history. Clearly some of the young people connected their learning on the project with their studies at school, and felt that it had improved their understanding of relevant subjects.

In **2018**, one of the young people interviewed at the programme end said a reason for choosing to participate in the programme was that he studies geography, but it was not that he expected it to help with this subject, rather that it demonstrated he was already interested in the outdoors.

Summary:

- The project had **no immediate impact** on the young people's subject choices at School.
- However, some young people believed that the project **would help them with their work at School**, particularly Geography. It may have been that young people interested in related subjects (Sciences, Geography, History) were therefore attracted to the project.
- **It was perhaps too ambitious of the project to assume a direct impact on school choices, and in future other ways to measure and record** the immediate and possibly lasting impacts on young people's educational careers **might be considered**.

7.5 Young people's assessment of benefits (Outcomes: 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e)

In **2018**, more detailed comments on the programme and their reactions to it were given during **interviews with 10 of the young participants**. Asked to describe what they had been doing they highlighted various elements of the programme:

"Um, we've done canoeing, we've done camera traps, we've done foraging and... yeah, just a good time."

"Oh, basically, I went to the... some water place, yeah! We had water fights! We were rubbish! With brown water. [...] We were canoeing, yeah, we saw animals, ducks, um, and plants, yeah, and we fell out of the water a couple of times as well."

"Oh, we... we've been doing canoeing, we've been doing PowerPoint presentations. So, we learnt the safety and basics, and we learnt how to turn and everything, including... and... we even had some people, er, capsize. [...] Some people capsized on purpose – hmm-mm. Or just... some people just... just accidentally lean over too far."

All described their experiences in positive, terms and identified things they had enjoyed. **Canoeing** was a particularly popular element, identified as fun. One young person explained what they enjoyed about it:

“Um, just like it’s really relaxing, like, especially when if you just lay down on your boat while it’s sunny, it’s just like... it was... but it’s a good thing to do.”

Others enjoyed **seeing animals** or **jumping into the river**, whilst three young people conveyed their enjoyment of being around waterways:

“I’ve enjoyed the canoeing. I like the opportunity to, like... to... to explore the wildlife and the, um, water ways.”

“I think getting to meet the... the canal and just people, because they told us a lot about the Locks and the... how they work, and I think they taught us a lot.”

“Um, I liked... hmm, going under canals and going around... going around near the Space Centre in the canoe, because... because it was near the Space Centre. Yeah.”

Asked if there was anything they **had not enjoyed**, three of the interviews said there was not as they had enjoyed it all. Those who specified things they did not like highlighted different aspects, some to do with particular activities like foraging:

“Hmm, I didn’t like, er, picking up blackberries, because you might get... you know there’s thorns, so...”

Or the **design** of the programme overall:

“The thing I didn’t like about it is... that... well, just we didn’t get to do as much canoeing as I think we could, er... we could have done. So, we only did a few sessions and that was it.”

Whilst others had **not liked aspects** of the **waterway**:

“if there was clean water... Cleaner water, then it would be a bit better. But overall, it was a good experience.”

“Yeah, basically, I was on the boat, yeah, one more time, and basically, a herd of rats attacked me.”

Although two young people described initially **feeling nervous** about going to the canal, they **overcame** this quickly:

“I... I was worried before I got there, because I thought, er... I thought you... I thought... because I didn’t... I don’t... like, so I can’t swim. I thought that if I fall in, I will drown, I did not know that you do.”

Another young person who cannot swim said that they still jumped into the water.

Asked whether they had **learnt anything** through the programme, **canoeing** was again a common response but most interviewees noted additional dimensions:

“We kept diary entries for the John Muir award, and it was mostly about the canoes, and we learnt about... canoeing, about... and we know learnt about the water way, and we’re going to study about... [clears throat]... I think, tomorrow... We’re doing the water, and just learning about the water and the cleanliness of the stuff that live in it. I think that it’s like... it’s been quite good so far, er, I think I would definitely do it again next year. [...] We learned about the

wildlife that lives on it. Hmm, the type of boats that go on it, and we met a few people on the barges, and they told us about how... well, how they live.”

Two young people noted **learning** related to the **environment**:

“Er, to protect my surroundings, and we learned to not litter and, um... um, and I learnt how to canoe, also.”

“I’ve learnt how to canoe. I’ve learnt how to, like, take care of the environment without damaging it, and that the water ways were really important back in the day. Yeah?”

Others detailed things they **now knew** about **waterways**, such as how **important** they had been in the past:

“Um, because we... we... the thing that was we... well, they... the... the word... the phrase horse power comes from how many horses would pull a canal boat to go through thingy. And like, when you hear a car has 500 horse power, it would take 500 horses to pull it that fast. [...]... I was so shocked when I found that out.”

“A lot, about... mainly about the water ways, why they impor... they... why they’re important to us, and learnt about how locks work as well, and that they’re very... they’re very, um, old technology and they’re still... they’re so ingenious that they... they haven’t been able to replace it with anything... with any better technology. I found that really interesting. [...]And they’re just generally important for the eco system and for the... all the creatures that live there. Because I’m very interested in wildlife.”

Several interviewees highlighted things they had learnt about wildlife, such as the names of different animals, and:

“I’ve learnt how to identify different, er... like, different ducks, like mallards, and different types of flowers/plants.”

One interviewee described learning to **identify different types of plants**:

I: Can you remember what any of them were?

YP: Er, brambles. Er, the yellow lily flower and...Er, reeds?

Another explained why they had only collected dead things to make a collage with:

“Er, because you’re a part of their... er, because it’s part of the Young Ecology Adventures. And, er, you’re meant to be saving plants and helping, er, the nature and stuff, so you can’t pick up, um, alive stuff.”

During the presentation evening the young people also talked about how they had noticed a **problem** with **littering** around the waterways, and suggested things to address this. Although confident they had learnt from the programme, young people were **not necessarily clear how this would help them**:

I: And is there anything you’ve learnt from doing this, that you think might be useful in... at school?

YP: Um, that... maybe not useful at school, but like sometimes it’s [funner] to go outside to the environment than stay home and just play games.

Beyond things they had learnt, some of the interviewees noted how they had **developed personally** or **gained** in other ways:

I: So, you weren’t nervous about it or anything, when... before you... you were going to...?

YP: Maybe the first week, but everyone was really... what’s the word? Comfortable to talk to, and it’s like... it’s... it’s a calm environment.

Another young person explained that having not known others in the group before hand, he had **made new friends** through participating:

“It was... it was good, because I made new friends and... and... and I got on well.”

Two young people highlighted the value of the **John Muir Award**:

“Because it would look good in my CV if I became something to do with... outdoors and stuff, like, can... someone would put it, looks after the environment or something like that.”

“Because, er, I’ve never actually done this before (gone for an award), and I think it’d be a very nice experience. And because I love nature, and me and my family, we really enjoy thing... doing things outdoors. It’d be nice to have an award for something to do with nature.”

Others were **grateful** for the **opportunity to participate**:

“it was really good, it was really beneficial. And I think a lot of people... I would recommend it to a lot of my friends to do it, because I enjoyed it and I want them to enjoy it too.”

“Um, thank you SOCOPA for giving me this chance to do this.”

7.6 Comparison with 2017 results

The discussions with young people suggest some differences between 2018 participants and the pilot cohort. Those interviewed in 2018 readily talked about various dimensions of the waterways, and **highlighted things they had learnt beyond the obvious canoeing skills**. This may be due to the **environmental learning being emphasised more** in the redesigned programme, or because the **smaller groups** and **additional staffing** made it easier for the young people to focus on this. The counter-balance to this is that **some would have liked more time canoeing and being on the water**, something the 2017 group did not feel.

Another obvious contrast is that overall the 2018 cohort seemed **more confident** and **less afraid** about being around the water. The briefing session with parents included an opportunity to voice concerns about this, but issues with water safety were barely raised, in contrast with the obvious nervousness around the previous year’s group. This may simply be a result of variations between young people and their families, but may also be a consequence of the pilot programme establishing confidence in its safety and word having spread about its achievements.

Summary:

- The young people overwhelmingly described their experiences in **positive** terms, with **canoeing** being the most consistently positive outcome. Seeing **animals** and **jumping in the river** were also highlighted as particularly enjoyable.
- The **dirtyness** of the waterways, and being **worried** about the **water** and **swimming**, were highlighted as more **negative** parts of their experience.
- Although most commented on canoeing, some young people highlighted their **learning** about the **environment** and **canal heritage** and the importance of the **JMA**.
- The young people also highlighted **social benefits**, such as **making new friends**.
- There were **notable improvements** from 2017 to 2018, including the young people feeling more confident on the water and a greater focus on the environmental and wildlife learning.

8. Outcomes for the local community, parents and youth workers (Outcomes 1b, 1c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d)

A total of eight parents were interviewed at the end of the project to gain an understanding of their opinions of it, how they felt that their children had benefited, to comment on what could have been improved and what their desires were for the future.

Parent Perceptions of Outcomes for the Young People

All interviewees were very **positive** about the **benefits** of the project to their children. Whilst they recognised that initially some of the young people were either worried or 'scared', mainly related to worries about being on the water, eventually all of the young people were '**happy**' and '**excited**' to be part of the project. For example:

"I think they experienced nice and very informative and they... especially they like or loved the canoe... even yesterday night I talked to them and I asked them... they told me, "We like the water, and this is the chance for canoeing and going outside the city" They see something that they don't get every time."

"They don't actually know how to swim really confidently, they are learning to swim. So initially I remember they were reluctant to fall in. By the end of it they were jumping in, so you can see that gradual process of... you know that shows that their confidence was built gradually over the different sessions, so that was a really wonderful thing to see."

Although all parents commented that the main benefit was for the young people to **learn to canoe**, some also commented on the importance of the **wildlife** and the **environment** to young people's enjoyment of the project:

"Because after the canoeing introduction... after the canoeing introduction, now he learned how canoeing... and how it works. Now he starts to love canoeing. And in the environment... he loves the environment, and wildlife, they experience very nice. And still they talk about it."

"My children... I think their experience was really amazing, because they quite like animals a lot, and they like nature. But they got to experience it first hand, the canal way which we haven't done before, in all honesty."

"Also they learnt a lot more about the plants and the animals around the canal ways. I mean like I said, they have a passion for those things already, but it was new knowledge, they didn't know about the Himalayan Balsam plant and things like that."

Several parents indeed commented that their child was 'still talking' about the project, even though by the time of the interviews the project had finished. Almost all of the parents further suggested that the project was '**unusual**' for their child or children – it was an experience that they had not had before, nor that they could necessarily access through school. Both the canoeing and going to the waterways were seen as '**out-of-the-ordinary**' for the young people, which was regarded by the parents as a positive attribute of the project.

In terms of the children's learning, some of the parents felt that the **John Muir Award** was valuable in terms of encouraging the young people to learn about the plants and animals of the waterways, whilst the majority felt that the main learning activity was canoeing itself.

Many of the parents mentioned other '**soft skills**' that their children had learnt. They commented on how they had learnt to **work as a team** with other people they did not necessarily know well before,

and that they had **made new friends**, but also that the project had more broadly helped their child's **behaviour**, for example boosting their **confidence**, making them more **organised**, and taking them away from sedentary activities such as playing computer games. For example, one parent said:

"It made him braver, it made him confident and also he got to know that if you give something a bit of a time... for a child, now he understands what it means to be patient"

There were a few comments from parents which suggested that some of the children had also enjoyed the other components of the project, such as using the camera traps, doing presentations and videos, and attending the end-of-project event.

The parents only reported a small number of issues they had with the project. Some mentioned that when their children attended in the **evenings**, that this interfered with the time that they might normally do homework in. As with the first group in 2017, several parents commented on their **safety concerns** about the young people being unable to swim, or more general concerns about canoeing on the water. One parent, however, commented that the experience of the project had encouraged them to take their child to swimming lessons. Two parents mentioned that it was important for them to know that their children were being supervised by community members known to them, which reassured them that they were safe. Another parent felt that, although their children had learnt about wildlife and the environment, that this element was relatively 'light'. They suggested that perhaps the young people should have written down more.

Outcomes for the Community and Parents

The parents commented in a number of ways on the impact of the project for them and their families, and for the community as a whole. Whilst most did not necessarily suggest there were very **direct** or **significant impacts** on the **community** from a relatively small project aimed at young people, many of their comments related to their own perceptions of their community and how a project such as this might benefit them now and in the future.

The majority of parents suggested that the project had **increased their awareness of the local canals as spaces where they and their children could go for recreation**. Most had never been to the canals before. One of the most positive responses came from a parent who had been back with another family after the project had finished:

"I told all my friends about it, they told all their friends about it, we told family about it. We took them back to the canal ways. I took my friends and their children. My two were over the moon to explain how locks work. They went and took them back to the locks, climbed over, showed them... explained everything that they had learned. So definitely we would go back, definitely we would look to do more activities. We even go for... I even went for a walk the other day just on the canal, the same locks that we had visited. So it has really encouraged us to go there, and we will continue to visit it with our friends and family."

Some parents suggested that they were worried about their children being involved in **gangs** or other **dangerous activities** (such a drug taking) in their area, particularly if they were allowed out on the streets alone. Although none commented on specific experiences, the possibility of their young people being involved with gangs was a concern for many. They praised the LYEA project because it provided activities for their young people which would take them away from such problems. Four of the parents

were concerned about **'screen time'** and the amount of time their children spent playing computer games and using the internet. For example, one parent commented:

"Because gaming is sometimes good, but if you do a lot of gaming, gaming, gaming, physically I think... maybe even your brain will be damaged, maybe I am not sure... The whole day, even nowadays, even online gaming with their friends, at the weekends, Saturday morning, when they get up they close the door and they begin."

This was a real concern for many parents, and they felt that this project made a small contribution to encouraging their children to go outdoors rather than stay inside.

Several commented on their perception of the **availability** of **outdoor activities** and **greenspaces** for young people and families in the area. Many of the parents felt that the opportunities that young people had were very limited, and that families too were quite limited in terms of where they could go to access greenspace or waterways. They felt that the project provided these opportunities.

For example, when asked to comment on the other activities their children took part in outside of school, the majority commented that their children either played football, basketball, went swimming, or played computer games. Some mentioned that they would go to some parks as a family, depending on the age of the children. But many felt that there were **not enough activities** on offer like the LYEA project, for example:

I: "Do you think there are enough facilities for young people?"

P: "I don't think so. If it is possible, I think it would be better if there were more activity things, more programs, and in this area I don't think so, I don't think it's enough."

Many felt limited by the need to **pay** for some activities, such as taking their children swimming which incurred a **cost**, which in turn limited them taking their children to other activities which might also be costly. Although several mentioned that this project had stimulated them to search out other outdoor activities for their children (horse-riding and archery were both mentioned), many felt that they might be limited by the likely costs. Some assumed that to do canoeing independently outside of the project would be too expensive for them.

The parents unanimously felt that one major limitation for them and their children engaging with such projects or activities was a **lack of information**, or knowing where to search for information.

"...they could exist but no one knows, you know? It could be. Even if you try to contact them, we can't find them, you know? This is, as you say now, came only by chance, Abdikaif was... Abdikaif was very active, but some people, if you go to the community, talk to them, same place he can forget, you know?"

"Yeah, honestly, you know, most of the community have limited contact with these speciality sports activities, recreational activities there. Unless you... I am not a sportsman, honestly... for some people it is very difficult to find, unless through SOCOPA they hear about it or through [inaudible], you know? Word of mouth through the community. It is very difficult for them to find it."

"It is hard to find out about what opportunities there are I think."

Most parents came across the LYEA project through previous contact with SOCOPA, or word-of-mouth from other parents. There was clearly a strong desire to find other opportunities for their children, but all felt that there was not enough information available in the community for them to locate these opportunities.

There were mixed reflections on the role of **schools** in providing such activities and opportunities for young people. The parents reported that some of the young people had either been canoeing before or had been to Leicester outdoor pursuits centre with their school, normally around once per year. A few commented that their children's primary schools had provided some outdoor activities, but the secondary schools did not, instead focusing on team sport such as football and basketball.

Reflections on the Community and Outdoor Spaces

There were mixed reflections on the community and the local areas as providing safe places for children and young people to play outside, and for families to visit outdoor spaces. Several parents were **positive** about their local area (either St Matthews or other nearby locations) as being **safe** for their children to play outside:

"Yeah from here, Leicester, my children are playing outside. I am not worried about them."

I: "Is there somewhere for you nearby? Do they just play in the street? Is there a park they can go to?"

P: "Yeah, small parks in our area. And they play on the road if they want to because they are in a quiet area."

I: "And do you feel like there are good, safe places that young people can go to be outside? Whether to play outside when they are younger or meet friends or something?"

P "Yeah it's... for example, near me, I think five minutes from my house there are two... one is five minutes, another is maybe ten minutes, [inaudible] park, and Johan Cruyff football play... But it's overcrowded."

But other parents felt the area nearby, and nearby parks, were **not safe** for children to play alone or go to outside alone. For example:

P: "Normally they don't go outside without me, unless they go and play out in the garden, you know? In the back garden. We don't do that."

I: "Okay, yeah."

P: "And although in the area I live they don't [inaudible], you know? They don't go outside and play, the kids [inaudible]."

I: "Is that just because... do you feel that it's not quite safe enough?"

P: "Not safety, but a lot of cars, you know?"

Whilst some were unhappy to let their children outside independently, they did feel that certain contained outdoor spaces were safe, for example a nearby football park, certain closed playgrounds, and other nearby parks that they might go as a family. One commented that whilst it was relatively easy for her to find safe spaces for her children to play when they were younger, once they were in their early teens this became increasingly difficult. Others felt that there were limited local greenspaces, or that where there were greenspaces these were under-utilised. One parent commented that a small park near the SOCOPA office was largely neglected but had a lot of potential, for example, as a community garden.

A few parents commented that they had sometimes **felt unwelcome in certain outdoor spaces**, or that they might be concerned about going to certain places as a Somali Muslim family. One parent commented that:

"We are very conscious about going places where we can be... I don't want to sound paranoid, but I'll tell you how people think. If you go places where you might not feel welcomed, because of the way we look and the way we dress, and we just want to have fun with the children. Children don't notice those things, but you just want to be [inaudible]. That's why I am very self-conscious about what time of the day we go and with whom and is it like a normal place where a lot of people are, for example, bonfire night, it was full of [inaudible] people so it was okay, that's fine, but there are places where sort of [inaudible] are not, don't go there, so we don't want to face any problems, that's how it is, yeah, you know?"

P: "Yeah, but would it be okay if we go on those Butlins holidays, or what is it called? [Central Park]."

I: "Yes, Center Parcs."

P: "I would love that, but would we be the odd family? And those sorts of things, but again as much as it might sound cliché, lessons experienced made me think how that... "Okay, maybe we can go, just be ourselves and just... for the first [inaudible]." I think it's not dangerous, just getting those funny looks from people, and because we speak our language, sometimes with our children, mostly English, we don't want to be looked weird at or feel uncomfortable, yeah, there we are."

Whilst there were not direct comments linking the outcomes of the LYEA project with tackling this issue, it is important to note for possible future projects, as it has important implications for where parents feel comfortable taking their families. One parent commented that it might be helpful to focus future projects on activities that were more familiar to the Somali community, suggesting both horse riding and archery as possibilities, with which some parents may feel comfortable being involved.

A few parents drew on their experiences of other cities, both in the UK and in Europe, to compare Leicester and the area they now live in. The majority felt that, compared to other UK cities, Leicester was very safe. Some had moved from Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham or London, and all commented that they felt that Leicester overall was safer than the areas they lived in in these other cities. For example:

"In fact I was having problems, but somebody discussing with me said, "Leicester is a very nice city and you will see." So when I came here I discovered first of all it's very secure, you know? In Manchester, some areas you can't walk."

Other parents who had come to Leicester from European countries, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, felt that Leicester was less safe for their children by comparison. Several commented that outdoor and sports facilities in these cities were better and often free or much cheaper than in the UK, and that children and young people were safer when outdoors independently. They commented that Schools tended to run more sports clubs, and that there were more activities available after-school and during the holidays. Some suggested that the communities they had lived in in these other European countries were less segregated, which contributed to them being safer.

Implications for the Future:

All of the parents were enthusiastic about either **extending the project**, or for SOCOPA to provide or support other outdoor activity programmes. There was quite a variety of suggestions from parents about what kinds of activities they were interested in, and how these should be achieved. Several parents commented that they would like to see their children to **continue to canoe**, but that opportunities were limited once the project had finished. Some felt that, during the project, the young

people would have benefited from more canoeing, or for canoeing longer distances or going on more substantial trips.

There were a range of **other suggestions** for outdoor activities that young people might benefit from which at present they have little access to. These included horse riding, archery, and learning about farming. Some suggested extending the project by 'helping out' along the canal, such as litter-picking. One parent felt that future projects might do more to introduce young people to green spaces, such as through growing plants, which parents might be able to contribute to as well:

"It was amazing and I think it would be such a shame if these kinds of projects didn't continue... maybe have some sort of an idea of how to... to continue these kind of projects, but on a smaller scale, a more accessible scale for everybody. So yeah I think maybe the green spaces, look to doing some sort of thing, whether it's growing... doing some planting, you know, having some sort of forest school. A lot of the community here in St. Matthews, you know the elders here, they grew up growing their own vegetation and things like that. I don't think they would hesitate to come and be a part of some sort of vegetation, you know like an allotment thing."

Several parents echoed the sentiment that **they themselves would like the opportunity to join in and contribute to these programmes**, either through the projects themselves being more aimed at families, or through allowing more parents to join in or instruct on future outdoor activities.

There were also some alternative suggestions. Some felt that their children would benefit from more 'academic' or indoor-based projects, for example learning more about wildlife and the environment, or contributing to work such as website building or writing articles. One parent felt that future projects could do more heritage activities, such as visiting historic sites.

Many parents struggled with simply finding out about the availability of activities in their area. Providing information about the range of activities on offer could assist many parents. Cost was an important factor for most. Future activities would most likely need to be heavily subsidised or free to enable most parents to continue to support their children participating. Parents felt that the costs of other activities were prohibitive, so one possible facilitation that SOCOPA could provide would be to identify for parents other activities which are low-cost or free. Some parents did not have their own private transport, and again this may be one possible facility that SOCOPA might consider, which would be to lay on transportation for families to visit more distant outdoor recreation spaces which families might otherwise struggle to get to on public transportation.

Youth Worker Assessment:

Both youth workers in the 2018 cohort enjoyed working on the project. Both were volunteers, one conducting training for youth work, the second conducting teacher training. One felt that they were relatively inexperienced to be working on the project and found it challenging, but overall still very much enjoyed the opportunity to work on it and embraced the challenge.

Overall both were very positive about the project, particularly the changes they saw in some of the young people, for example:

"I enjoyed seeing certain young people come in, not so confident, and grow and be really outspoken, so I really enjoyed that side of things."

There was a general sense from both youth workers that they observed good personal development with the young people. They noted that at the beginning of the project some of the young people

seemed intimidated by the large group, but by the end the groups were much more comfortable with each other and many of them had grown in confidence.

One of the youth workers was from the Somali community in Leicester and felt that it was a good opportunity for her to 'give back' to the community. She also noted that, given her knowledge of the community, this was the first project of its kind that she could remember, and made connections between this and the lack of diverse ethnic groups present at the CRT award ceremony. This suggests the positive impact of the project to the CRT community, and perhaps the need for greater representation of more diverse communities. She noted, again from her knowledge of the community, that her perception of the barriers faced by community members were also around lack of information for parents, and the potential cost of certain outdoor activities. Whilst one of the youth workers felt that the focus on the Somali community was very valuable, they also questioned whether the young people would benefit from working with a more diverse cohort.

The youth workers noted that there perhaps could have been greater congruence between the learning in the programme (e.g. ecology and heritage) and what either had or might be learnt in the School curriculum. One of the youth workers felt that there could have been a little more structure to the programme, with more time for the participants to reflect on their learning. They suggested 'debriefing' the group at the end of the session, and trying to make better use of the 'down time' or 'waiting time' – for example when waiting for buses to arrive. However, one did note that they saw considerable value in the JMA and the other learning activities:

“Going back to the John Muir award, a lot of them did take away a lot about the award, so what they had learnt on the waterways, what they had seen on the waterways, the pictures, the use of the camera traps and the cameras, that’s what they really enjoyed and that was good.”

One noted differences between the attitudes of the two groups in 2018, which she put down to the difference in average age between the two groups:

“The older children were more interested in doing the activities and having... it’s summertime, so they were interested and having fun and trying to do the things themselves, whereas the younger kids were more interested in how this is happening, they asked more questions about the wildlife and everything that they saw.”

One of the youth workers commented that she felt that one participant she knew behaved much better when on the project than her experience of meeting her on a School placement:

“It was surprising to see how she behaved much more maturely and calmly outside in this activity compared to in school, and that may be because she prefers the freedom and the structure of going outdoors and learning rather than staying in a classroom and limiting her.”

And later reflected that:

“When you do the outdoor stuff, they feel much more involved and independent, and in this classroom you kind of have to give them a lot more guidance and push them more to do it. But outside, they are more wanting to do it themselves.”

This youth worker concluded that Schools themselves should give more consideration to these kinds of outdoor programmes. These comments are also interesting to note in relation to some of the behaviour difficulties that were experienced with the 2017 cohort of participants – and both youth workers felt that overall behaviour was good, and that sometimes potentially disruptive behaviour might be seen more positively as the young people 'just being themselves'.

Summary:

- Parents were overwhelmingly **positive** about the project, highlighting the young people's **enjoyment**, and how they had learnt both **physical** and **social skills**.
- Some had **fears** about **safety**, but these were largely **overcome** – but they also highlighted that for them safety was also about trusting those running the programme.
- The project increased parents' **awareness** of the **canals** as potential spaces for outdoor recreation.
- Many parents were **worried** about their children's involvement in **gangs** and **sedentary behaviours**, and felt that the project made a small contribution to these issues.
- Parents identified problems with **lack of access to activities** (including costs) and **outdoor spaces** as barriers to their children engaging in such projects, as well as a **lack of information** on potential activities.
- There were **mixed reflections** on the **local area** as either **safe** or not safe for children and young people to be outside independently. Parents drew on past experiences of other cities and countries to compare Leicester.
- More could be done to enable parents, families and young people to feel **safe** and **comfortable** in outdoor spaces across Leicester.
- There was considerable **enthusiasm** for **extending the project** and for **parents to play a more active role**.
- **Youth workers** were also **positive** about their experience of the project, praising how behaviour was managed and the growth in the young people's confidence.
- The youth workers made some **minor suggestions** for **future improvements** or changes, including more **structure** and better use of 'down time', perhaps more **diverse cohorts**, and more time for **reflection on learning**.

9. Conclusions

The Leicester Young Ecology Adventurers project has successfully delivered against the project objectives. All target beneficiaries envisaged in the project design demonstrate signs of positive outcomes. Minor changes were made between the pilot phase in 2017 and the larger 2018 cohort which brought positive changes to the project. This demonstrates the value of a pilot phase of delivery, including embedded evaluation as this allowed findings to feed into future delivery. The project's success suggests there is merit in considering this and similar formats to engage young people from communities less likely to access waterways. Learning from this programme could usefully inform similar activity in other areas or with other communities in order to shape initiatives to suit their needs.

Many of the young people engaged in LYEA and their families have gained appreciation of natural heritage and outdoor activities. This could provide a valuable foundation for other outdoor activity and environmental education. There is considerable merit in considering how this can be harnessed in order that participation in a short project provides a springboard for the future. A project like LYEA is unlikely to address all the ongoing barriers which make it difficult for some groups to access places like waterways. Enabling long-term changes therefore requires succession type activity programmes, or sign-posting to additional opportunities or support.

There is little available research into the long-term impacts of young people's participation in programmes like LYEA, meaning that we have little evidence of how their attitudes or behaviour are

changed beyond the immediate project period. It would therefore be valuable to return to the cohorts who participated in LYEA in future years to track them and seek signs of ongoing impacts.

Strengths and Limitations of the Evaluation

There were a number of strengths and weaknesses to the evaluation which should be recognised. In terms of **limitations**, in contrast with the pilot phase, the evaluation team did not administer all the survey questionnaires with the young people. This means it cannot be guaranteed that the staff and volunteers doing so did not offer prompts or suggestions which influenced the answers given. Secondly, as researchers were present less often throughout the 2018 programme, they did not get to know the young people so well which may mean that they were less comfortable contributing their views during the interviews. It continued to prove difficult to measure longer-term impacts for the young people, as there was no clear impact on suggested measures such as future school subject choice. Finally, as in 2017, using the JMA diaries as potential evidence in the evaluation proved difficult, as it was difficult for the young people to fill these out independently.

Across both phases the major **strengths** of the evaluation were the strong voice young people were given in the evaluation through multiple forms of expression, allowing us to identify outcomes that were important for them. In the 2018 cohort parents were also given a strong voice in the evaluation, allowing us to reflect on the wider impacts on young people's families. A broad range of qualitative data gathering techniques provided valuable data and useful material for the project itself, such as some of the videos made by the young people. Some of these activities were also enjoyable for the young people and allowed them to reflect on their learning.

Recommendations for future projects

- Young people enjoyed both the **physical activity** and **learning a new skill** (canoeing) as well as the **learning about nature and heritage** – but this was different for different young people. Future projects might consider how to allow young people to pursue their interests further.
- The young people **highly valued the social skills and social learning** that came out of the project, such as making new friends, respect, and teamwork. Building these skills into future projects would be beneficial.
- If future project pursue canoeing as an activity, there was certainly demand from some young people and parents to **improve their skills and take part in more adventurous trips**.
- Pursuing canoeing and visiting the canals and waterways **independently** would still be a **challenge** for many young people and their families, and future projects should consider how more '**independent visiting**' could be enhanced.
- Throughout younger people tended to emphasise the wildlife and environment components more than the **built heritage aspects** – future projects might consider this.
- **Parents** were clearly impacted by the project, with good opportunities to volunteer, but **could have been more involved throughout**. It was unclear how well the **wider community** was impacted beyond immediate families.
- Including **youth workers** and **more adult volunteers** was very successful, and future projects should consider these as possibilities for staffing.
- Parents expressed a **range of challenges for themselves and within their community for getting young people and families outdoors**. Further research and work with parents might enhance future projects.

- **Parents made a number of suggestions for possible 'next-steps'**, including diversifying into other activities, opening a community garden, or providing more assistance for families to get to various green spaces, amongst others.