

Evaluation of Birmingham Connect (November 2022)

1. Introduction

‘Birmingham Connect’ used the power of sport, and excitement of the Commonwealth Games (CWG) Birmingham 2022, to promote social integration of young people aged 12-14 years in Birmingham. Pairing schools across Birmingham aimed to encourage meaningful social mixing to improve attitudes and perceptions held of people from different backgrounds; driven by young people who catalysed change.

The programme was delivered by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) and funded by the Commonwealth Sport Foundation (CSF) via Birmingham 2022 and Sport England.

The evaluation was conducted by the Youth Sport Trust’s Research and Insight Team.

2. Activities

The following activities were delivered as part of Birmingham Connect:

- Connect IN Launch Event (virtual): Young people trained as ‘Connectors’.
- Connect IN Taster Event (Birmingham University): Connectors and staff explored different types of activities to use in their own events.
- Two Connect WITH Events at Birmingham University and events at the schools: Two YST led events using sport and physical activity, followed by two more events for other young people that were led by the Connectors at each paired school partnership.
- Connect All Event (Virtual): a celebration event at the end of the Birmingham Connect project.

3. Engagement

12 schools across Birmingham took part in Birmingham Connect. A total of 26 teachers were engaged and 83 Connectors were recruited. It is estimated that a total of 1,581 young people participated in the programme¹.

¹ Based on data from 5 schools that has been aggregated up.

4. Outcomes

Survey and case study evidence demonstrates progress towards the programme outcomes. The evidence is based on end of programme surveys completed by 5 lead practitioners, end of programme surveys completed by 32 Connectors, and 3 school case studies.

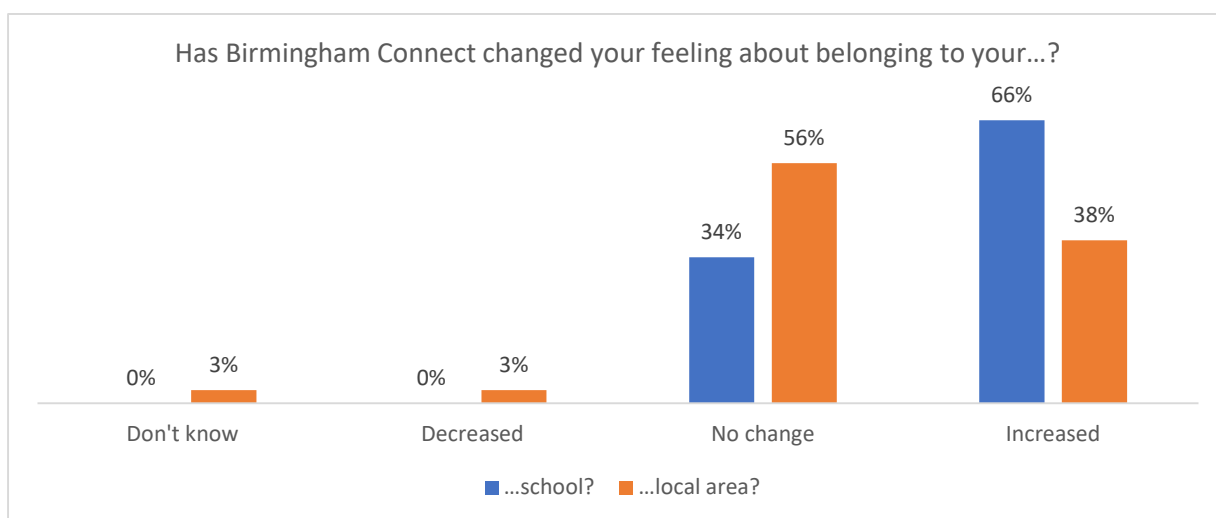
Improved relationships between schools

Prior to Birmingham Connect, some schools had not worked together before. The programme created new relationships between schools and there was evidence to suggest that schools were planning to maintain the relationships beyond the programme, for example by running sports clubs and events together in the future.

“Great opportunity for students to mix with other schools and engage in a project that has social mixing and awareness of others at the forefront.” (LEAD PRACTITIONER)

Increased sense of belonging

66% of young people said that their feeling about belonging to their school had increased as a result of taking part in Birmingham Connect (34% reported no change). 38% also reported that their feeling about belonging to their local area had also increased (56% reported no change).



Source: End of programme survey for Connectors (n=32)

Greater understanding of different cultures

At the end of the programme, 94% of Connectors ‘agreed’ that they have a good understanding of different cultures and 85% agreed that they can easily trust people from different cultures. 100% of the Connectors also reported that they accept other people’s opinions. A lead practitioner highlighted that her Connectors noticed differences between themselves and some of the other young people, but it was not a barrier to them mixing.

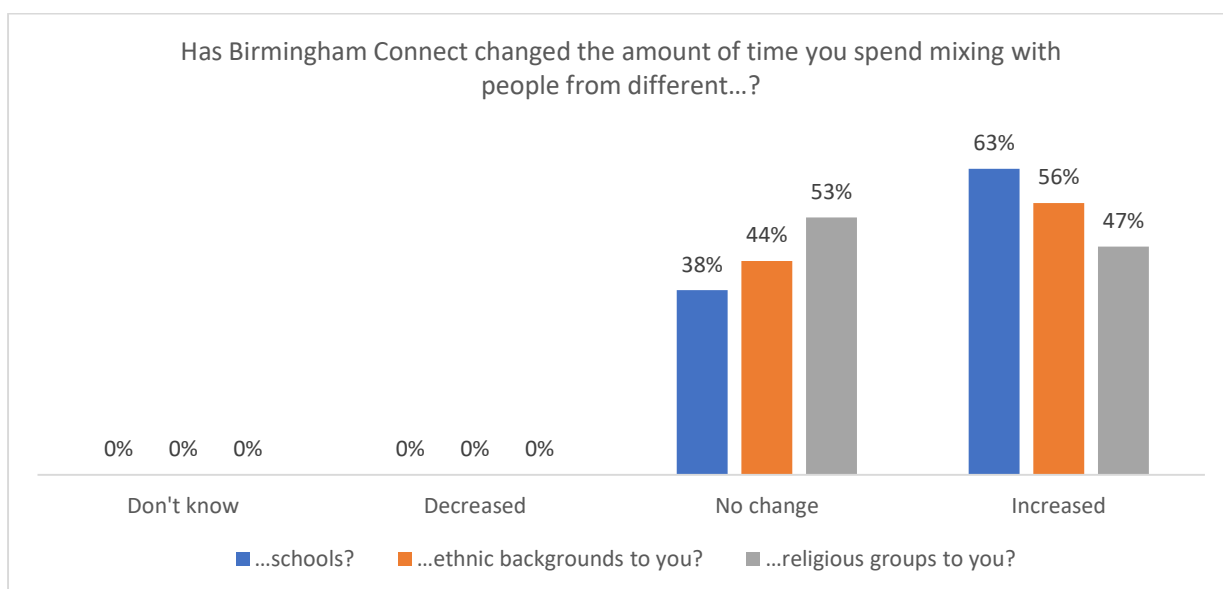
“Makes you realise that everyone is unique and different but shows that you can be friends with anyone.” (CONNECTOR AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

The best thing about taking part in Birmingham Connect was...“...seeing things from different point of views.” (CONNECTOR)

Improved attitudes and increased social mixing

Connectors agreed that Birmingham Connect had given them the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds.

The following graph highlights that Birmingham Connect has helped to increase the amount of time the Connectors spent missing with people from different backgrounds to them.



Source: End of programme survey for Connectors (n=32)

One lead practitioner emphasised that the Connectors at her school chose to spend time with other young people at the event that they liked, regardless of their gender or ethnicity, or the school they came from.

“We see the same faces at school so was nice to get out there and make new friends and broaden our social circles.” (CONNECTOR AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

“I got to meet lots of new people that I wouldn't ever have met on a day-to-day basis.” (CONNECTOR)

The best thing about taking part in Birmingham Connect was....*“the opportunity to connect with others through sport.” (CONNECTOR)*

“We got to meet new people; some I've kept in contact with through social media.” (CONNECTOR)

“Having fun with new people I’ve just met.” (CONNECTOR)

Increased empowerment

One lead practitioner highlighted that the programme and the new responsibilities that came with being a Connector had given the young people a sense of responsibility.

“They’re starting to really take ownership and think: well, if we’re leading, we need to be a part of it as well.” (SARAH CROSS-FELLOWS, HEAD OF PE AT QUEENSBRIDGE SCHOOL)

Improved character

Birmingham Connect has helped the Connectors to build their confidence and self-belief.

“They have really been pushed outside of their comfort zones and appear far more confident speaking in front of others.” (LEAD PRACTITIONER)

“It’s been really fascinating to see just how their confidence has grown around school.” (SARAH CROSS-FELLOWS, HEAD OF PE AT QUEENSBRIDGE SCHOOL)

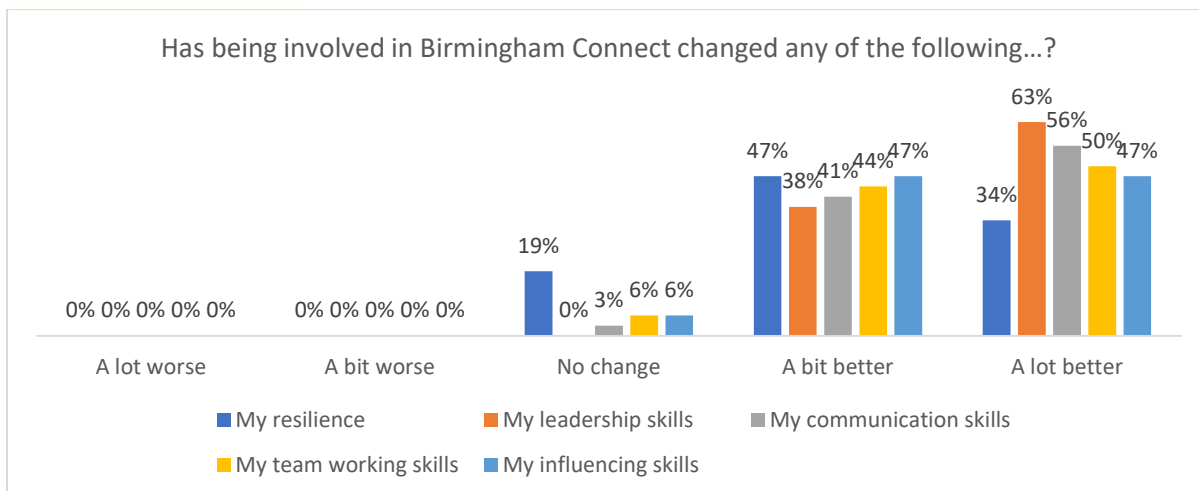
Improved skills

There is evidence to suggest that Connectors have improved their life skills, including leadership, communication, teamwork, and resilience (as shown in the following graph). Connectors also reported that they developed their social skills through the opportunities for social mixing.

“Amazing to see that journey from shy and reserved to them actually leading. That’s a life skill, whatever job you go into, you need to speak and communicate.” (HELEN TONKS, LEAD PRACTITIONER)

The best thing about taking part in Birmingham Connect was....*“learning how to lead and making me speak up a bit more.” (CONNECTOR)*

The best thing about taking part in Birmingham Connect was....*“learning how to organise activities with other people. I learnt that working together as a team gets things done quicker and better.” (CONNECTOR)*



Source: End of programme survey for Connectors (n=32)

Improved wellbeing

91% of young people said their overall happiness was better (47% ‘a lot’ and 44% ‘a bit’) as a result of being involved in Birmingham Connect. Young people were asked, on a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied they are with their life nowadays? The average score was 7.9.

The best thing about taking part in Birmingham Connect was...“doing something fun with my friends. They made me open up a bit more and I've realised it's not as scary even though it seems like that sometimes still. I have had less panic attacks and anxiety attacks because of it too.” (CONNECTOR)

Increased participation in physical activity

The young people came away from Birmingham Connect events with a greater understanding of the Commonwealth Games and what it is like to be part of a global event. 91% of young people said that their confidence to participate in sport and physical activity was better (53% said ‘a lot’ and 38% said ‘a bit’) as a result of being involved in Birmingham Connect and 75% of Connectors said that their enjoyment of taking part in physical activity was better (34% said ‘a lot’ and 41% said ‘a bit’). The young people enjoyed the variety of activities so much that some plan on engaging more with physical activity both inside and outside of school now. The programme inspired them as they now participate in sports they had never played before.

“They got the opportunity to trial different sports. Trying those sports they haven’t done before opened their mind a bit about what the Commonwealth Games are about.” (HELEN TONKS, LEAD PRACTITIONER)

“Beautiful to see sport being the centre of it all.” (LEAD PRACTITIONER)

“It [Birmingham Connect] influenced me to start doing judo.” (CONNECTOR)

5. Views of Birmingham Connect

Views of Birmingham Connect were also captured and were very positive. Schools were asked, on a scale of 0 (very unlikely) to 10 (very likely), how likely would you be to recommend Birmingham Connect to others? The average score was 9.2.

“Fantastic organisation and communication.” (LEAD PRACTITIONER)

63% of young people also rated the programme ‘very good’ and 38% rated the programme ‘good’. The young people were asked what the best thing about taking part in Birmingham Connect was, a sample of their responses is provided below:

“The kick-off event at the University of Birmingham.”

“Learning new sports and meeting new people.”

“I would say the best part of Birmingham Connect was many things such as meeting new people, taking part in fun sports I've never took part in before, and how welcomed you feel around others.”

“I enjoyed all of the connect events. It was fun and I learnt a lot about myself.”

“It was non-stop fun. We got to experience a variety of different activities.”