

Make Change Project Evaluation Report

Ideas Test 2020-1

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CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction: Warts and all**
- 2. Purpose of Make Change**
- 3. Make Change Objectives**
- 4. Evaluation Plan and Methodologies.**

PART ONE: THE PROGRAMME

- 5. Capturing young people's ideas and skill/experience levels before the workshops**
- 6. The Make Change programme**

PART TWO: LEARNING AND REFLECTIONS

- 7. Direct Impact 1: Engage young people in targeted areas**
 - 8. Direct Impact 2: Identify resources**
 - 9. Direct Impact 3: Support young people's leadership**
 - 10. Direct impact 4: Create more opportunities for young people**
 - 11. Direct Impact 5: Build support networks for young people**
 - 12. Direct Impact 6: Develop confident young people**
 - 13. Summary findings: Learning and actions**
- Acknowledgements**

Make Change Project Evaluation Report

Ideas Test 2020-1

What would you do to Make Change in your neighbourhood?

What would make life better for you, your family and friends?

**If you have an idea, no matter how small or how impossible it seems,
we want to know.**

1. Introduction: Warts and all

This is a story about a pilot project that did not work out as planned, that failed to generate all the hoped and planned for impacts but has made a useful space for reflection and learning for the Ideas Test team, their partners and networks. It will inform and shape future project plans with and by young people. The work reflects the role of Creative People and Places as action-learning projects.

Although four young people took part in the workshop programme November-December 2020, after New Year only one decided to continue with 1-1 mentoring sessions and the opportunity to pitch their idea for change in their community to a panel with the power to take it further. It isn't known why the other participants dropped out.

The reasons for 'failure' are not a surprise to the partners. They all know from tried and tested approaches and from long experience what it takes to deliver these kinds of projects. Sometimes, as in love, hope triumphs over experience. But 2020-21 has been a year like no other. This project took place during a pandemic.

The flexibility and adaptability of community artists and practitioners have been stretched to their limits. When an offer to engage with your project has been accepted by a small group of young people, it is encouraging. When continuing with the project means another group of young people, who have been trained as facilitators, will be paid if the project goes ahead, it feels important to continue, especially at a time when work for early freelancers has dropped off a cliff.

With funding partners Royal Opera House Bridge, Ideas Test agreed specific objectives for themselves and delivery partners Battersea Arts Centre, whose facilitators and Agency alumni delivered the workshop programme. The Agency seeks to prioritise young people's voices and ideas, taking them through a process of developing ideas about how they can make the area that they live in better. An evaluation plan (shared on a Jamboard) was agreed for how impacts could be evidenced. However, when only one participant continued with the second half of the programme, the whole evaluation plan was no longer deliverable in the way it was designed.

Nevertheless in this report, we are taking each hoped for impact in turn, matching it with any relevant evidence, summarising the learning and what was achieved for the Ideas Test and the Agency teams, and for the sole participant who completed. Sometimes more is learnt from what has not worked and Ideas Test is committed to use the learning from this project to shape future iterations as youth-led, co-designed initiatives.

2. Purpose of Make Change

The overarching purpose of the project supported the ultimate impact of the organisation:

Ideas Test works to create a vibrant arts ecology in Swale and Medway that involves the full diversity of local communities and brings new opportunities to celebrate the area.¹

The vision for the project was to generate the following direct impacts²:

1. **Engage young people in Medway** from Ideas Test's target areas and under-resourced neighbourhoods to foreground young people's ideas for social change, through working with Medway youth partners, BAC Agency and others.
2. **Identify the resource(s) needed** to support an Ideas Test programme tailored to the needs of young people in Gillingham.
3. **Support young people to lead and shape** Ideas Test programmes in the future as a legacy from this pilot.
4. **Create more opportunities** for young people in Medway, particularly those from under-resourced backgrounds
5. **Build support networks** for young people and enable their networks to thrive.
6. **Develop confident young people** in the longer term to support and shape Medway 2025

3. Make Change Objectives

For Ideas Test the specific benefits they hoped the project would generate were to:

1. **Inspire young people to make change**, through working with other young people who have led social change as Agency alumni, testing their training model.
2. **To highlight young people's ideas for social change** and help make them happen where possible. To help identify barriers we may not have considered
3. **Raise local aspiration** enabling young people to gain confidence and skills in generating ideas for social change
4. **To support youth leadership** and recruit potential youth community champions
5. **To reach new funders/sponsors/allies** to support the youth programme to scale operations and be properly resource
6. **Raise visibility and evidence of the work** promoted by both partner organisations, contributing to strategic partnerships and the aspiration for NPO status with a strong Goal 5 offer, and to our sustainability beyond 2023.

For BAC Agency, the specific benefits hoped for were

1. **BAC Agents learning** about social issues in other areas
2. **BAC Agents developing** their practice as facilitators and mentors
3. **Develop a dialogue with BAC the Agency and Medway** for continued partnership working

4. Evaluation Plan and Methodologies.

An evaluation plan was designed with input from four members of the Ideas Test team but as indicated in the introduction, the use of all the tools for data collection could not be implemented. The first Project Manager resigned in September 2020 and left no evidence for

¹ From Ideas Test Story of Change

² Application to ROH Bridge December 2019

partnerships with youth organisations that could encourage and refer young people in the target areas³. The intention was to conduct before and after interviews with them on their observations of change in the young people they know well. All but one of the four participants dropped out of the programme after New Year 2021, for reasons unknown

The Agency shared their evaluation tools and these informed the questions for participant survey and interviews. The evaluation methods that we were able to use were as follows:

A. Online surveys:

- Base-line data capture from participants (4/5 responses). This survey utilised some of the questions used by the Agency in their non-validated baseline assessments
- Post workshop survey of the Agency team (4/6 responses, 1 x lead facilitator and 3 x Agents)

B. Observation of sessions by the evaluator:

- Workshop sessions online x 4
- Viewing of recordings of mentoring sessions x 2
- Pitching session

C. Online Interviews:

- Post programme interview with participant x 1
- Post programme interview with Ideas Test team x 2 people
- Post programme interview with mentor

D. Communication: In addition to this data collection, the evaluator was in regular conversation and attended seven meetings with the BAC, the Project Manager and other Ideas Test team members. BAC and the Agency team provided workshop outlines in advance. A summary of the report was presented at sharing event 31 March 2020 with Ideas Test and partners, including Royal Opera House Bridge.

PART ONE: THE PROGRAMME

5. Capturing young people's ideas and skill/experience levels prior to the workshops

5.1 Change in my area

In the survey circulated prior to the workshop sessions, young people were asked about their neighbourhoods and they indicated the following things they would like to change:

- **Environment:** Empty spaces/Lack of creative opportunities/Neglected environment:

The empty potential places can be used for amazing things, [and could] involve young generations in a more creative environment outside social media. Youth survey

Cleanliness, everywhere is dirty...Lighting, there isn't many lights that actually brighten up the street and there are lights that doesn't even look like it's doing anything. Youth survey

Parking, there aren't many parking spaces but places where people would park illegally like a pavement, there isn't anything stopping them from parking there, like a bollard. Youth survey

- **People:** Lack of community support/Crime/homelessness/ Older people's needs

³ See Section 7.1: Staffing, etc.

There seems to be a lot of homelessness and I think that this should be tackled in the way of help for these people that need it. There also seems to be a lot of crime which again I think needs to be tackled in the same way, and finally I think more local businesses at reasonable prices need to be supported. I think that this would create a more 'community' feel. Youth survey

Being inclusive for older generations. Youth survey

5.2 They were also asked about what they loved about their area and why. They indicated that it felt cosy, they liked the historical and heritage aspects and that it was close to Rochester and within easy travelling distance of London. They liked the cafes and markets, which bring the high street alive and that the area is quite diverse, "People are generally friendly".

During the workshops however, the history/heritage aspect didn't emerge. The 'dead' high street was described more frequently, along with the low number of facilities/opportunities for young people.

5.3 Challenges currently experienced

In response to the question '**What are the 3 main challenges about living or working in your area for you and the people around you?**' they responded in a similar vein with four comments about the lack of things to do, no creative jobs available, poor options for shopping and the poor environment – rubbish, noise, poor parking facilities. One person said they did not feel safe and another described discrimination against teenagers:

Too much stereotyping against teens wearing black coats in public or like teens wearing hoodies etc. Youth survey

5.4 Reflections by the Agency team

I have included these reflections from the post project survey by The Agency team in this section as they relate to what is described above. The Agents (4/6 people) reflected on what they had learnt about the social issues in an area unfamiliar to all of them where these themes of poor urban environment and lack of opportunities for young people had resonated strongly.

I've never heard of those places. What I found out about those places from the young people who lived there was how challenging it was to live there. Agency team member

The Agency team learnt that there were not enough exciting or adventurous opportunities for young people, few youth networks and community facilities (6 comments), that young people are concerned about the uncared for public environment.

I realised that something as simple as recycling and keeping the area clean has an effect on the youth, [...] because they are around it all the time and it has impact on their lives and how they see themselves.

Agency team member

During the sessions, they identified the three main social issues affecting young people in Swale and Medway as: Missing a sense of community; Lack of opportunities/resources/social hubs; Poverty/deprivation.

In the exercise that they had to identify places in the community that could help, I was surprised to learn they felt they had limited options and places to go for furthering their ideas. Agency team member

However, spotting the opportunity and the hope offered by young people when consulted, one of the Agency team also commented:

I wasn't surprised but I was happy to see how passionate the young people were about changing the situation for the better. Agency team member

5.5 Self-validation questions about skills and experience

The survey asked young people questions about: confidence when facing difficult tasks; experience of planning activities or events; use of social media; working with a team; talking to the public about their idea; budgeting and planning. The sample was so small that useful conclusions can't be drawn from the data. I noted that the participants indicated confidence in being able to face difficult tasks across several questions and relatively little experience of using social media, planning and budgeting. In response to the following question, there were useful reflective comments:

“Do you have any strengths in project planning? If ‘not sure’, tell us one thing you'd like to develop. If ‘yes’, tell us about your strengths. If ‘yes’ also tell us what you think need to work on.”

- I'm really communicative, self-directed worker, I want to be involved in creative and young projects
- I am good at time management
- I'm not sure, I guess you could say I'm good at social media things. But otherwise I would say getting my voice heard and not ignored maybe, as a thing to develop.
- I would like to work on organisation and being able to put things together and make it work

6. The Make Change programme

The programme consisted of

- Four workshop sessions designed and delivered online by BAC Agency facilitators and Agents⁴ November-December 2020.
- Three 1-1 mentoring sessions with a local creative business mentor identified by Ideas Test
- A pitching event organised and hosted by Ideas Test

6.1 The workshops

The first two zoom workshop sessions used a mixture of icebreakers, creative tools and reflection instruments plus space for the sharing of the Agents' personal experiences. These approaches helped the participants to articulate their ideas and organise their thinking. The tools helped them think about resources in their community and to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

The second two sessions continued with the mix of games and worked with the concept of maps as tools to order and understand information and to create a collective map of their territory as a means of identifying possible networks.

Two BAC/Agency facilitators supported by four Agents facilitated the sessions. Homework was assigned to the participants in between sessions.

6.1a Summary of reflections by the Agency, Ideas Test and evaluator's observations

The main challenge identified in the Agency feedback survey was transferring their methodology to an online platform. So much of their approach is about movement and interacting through drama. On the whole the Agency team felt that their activities were well received by the participants and that they helped them think differently about themselves and the area.

One Agent also reflected:

⁴ BAC Agency alumni

In the future I would have more conversation throughout, making people feel comfortable and at ease. I would share with my own experiences, things I learnt or would have changed for the better. Agency team member

From the survey responses, my observations and all the interviews, this recommendation is supported. The tone of the sessions was relaxed and welcoming, with a mix of activities to encourage conversation and guide the development of ideas. However, more thinking and imagining time was needed to take the participants to the stage where they have a well thought through idea.

In future, as we are all learning, attention needs paying to pace and variety on screen to maintain energy levels, e.g. use of background music during solo working, screen-sharing visuals, use of polls, emojis and quiz functions on zoom. The homework wasn't a great success, unsurprising given the circumstances of online study during lockdown. Therefore most of the thinking had to be done during the sessions. As there were only two participants in the final session, there could have been some flexibility with the workshop plan. In the absence of the peer-to-peer support, the participants could have been given focused attention on their idea in groups. Making space in the sessions for brainstorming and scaffolding for each person's idea, maybe in breakout rooms, would have been useful, e.g. thinking about categories of people, organisations and businesses relevant to their idea, going in a bit deeper on the headings in the Project Initiation Document.

One Agent suggested that the written exercises could be done during the first half of the session 'while everyone is energetic'. They thought their use of breakout rooms worked well; it 'encouraged excitement and competition'.

In terms of their own learning, the Agency team gained some useful insights about their online communication skills – the importance of setting the tone with their energy and full attention on screen and how working online requires extra animation and amplification of your energy,

Eye contact is also very important because it's a sign of respect when speaking to someone to look at them. Agency team member

In the future I would be more vocal, asking each young person questions to see how they're feeling throughout. Agency team member

One member of the team said that taking part in Make Change had developed her facilitation skills, e.g. the importance of preparing by resting before a session because 'you control the energy levels in the room'. Other members said that the experience of leading sessions has helped with their own project, supported their networking skills and that they had gained an insights into living in a small, less populated area.

Across all the feedback it was unanimous that the presence of the Agents offered positive and inspiring role models to the participants and brought the right age balance to the group between staff and young people.

In terms of the content...the passion behind the delivery, the planning, the engagement of everybody involved, I think they managed it really well...in terms of the fact that there were only one or two participants sometimes, I think they did really well to make those people feel welcome. They still managed to make it feel really supportive, friendly, interactive, all of those kinds of things. Sarah Davies, Project Manager

I observed that the Agents were very open. They also made themselves vulnerable sometimes, talking about the challenges presented for of their own projects. This meant that they positioned themselves empathetically alongside the participants, as opposed to implying 'we know it all'.

6.1b Reflections and learning by a participant

The participant described the Agency team as very relatable, understanding of the perspectives of their (younger) age group and 'how life is right now.'

I feel like all the people who we spoke to are very inspirational. Yeah, their ideas really helped me to think about what I really wanted to do. Yeah, relatable....some of the activities were relaxing to do and enjoyable, it wasn't feeling tense for people that you don't know. Participant.

The participant who completed the project was asked to rate aspects of the workshop content on a scale of scale of 1(low) to 6 (High). Overall, the content engaged their attention at 6. 'How interesting' was rated at 4 and 'new to them' was rated at 6. The relevance of the content scored 3:

I feel like some of the tasks were more open and not really targeted. They gave us tasks to do that weren't really helping to develop our plans. I did that with my mentor afterwards. I felt that in the sessions they could have used breakout rooms, had like one [Agent] in each of kind of say, you can do this, or you can do this, give us inspiration and more ideas, rather than being more generic. Participant

In addition to more use of breakout rooms, they commented that more functions such as sharing images could have been used on the online platform – the whiteboard was used once. The participant wished that the Agency team had shown some images relating to their own projects. Seeing something would have helped hearing about the projects in a more engaging way.

The participant commented that the area difference between London and Gillingham was 'quite significant and that the Agency team didn't seem to know the location of the town. However, in the context of lockdown it was acknowledged that visiting Gillingham wasn't an option.

From hearing other people's stories during the sessions and using the tools such as the Avatar game and the Compass, the participant was able to think deeply, in a new way, about who they might work with to help them with their project. Hearing about how the Agency team were able to deliver their projects gave the participants greater confidence in their own ideas and talking about them to others.

6.2 Mentoring

Sparked Echo⁵ helped Ideas Test to identify a mentor/coach for two x 30 minute sessions during February 2021 and then to deliver a further two x one-hour sessions in March to rehearse the presentation and support (technically) the pitch to the panel on the day itself.

My idea is to create a social media platform that would be able to connect local businesses to more local customers as a way to support the local community with local stores. Also allowing more local people access to local shops near to them.

My ideal coach would be someone that has experience with using social media to promote businesses and engage with a wide base of people and someone who has contacts with local communities and businesses. Participant

Hannah Whittaker⁶ was chosen because her experience most closely aligned with the requirements expressed above. Hannah is an artist who has training in coaching and describes

⁵ <https://www.sparkedecho.org/our-vision.html> Sparked Echo had previously employed coaches for their Electric Medway Festival

⁶ <http://hannahwhittaker.com/work> Hannah Whittaker is a performance maker, creating interactive installations, one on one encounters and digital performances.

her approach on this project as mentoring 'in a coaching style', drawing out the participant's ideas and contributing professional knowledge and insights as required.

6.2a Learning and reflections

In terms of developing their idea and planning, the mentoring accelerated the participant's learning. The mentor helped them identify specifically who might help them with their project, and the resources needed and/or available. Goals were set between sessions that helped the plans move forward. The participant appreciated the mentor's professional experience, the insights she shared about running her own local business and the critical and constructive feedback and signposting that was offered. They also said that five mentoring sessions would have been great! Of course in the original face to face plan the mentors would have been working with small project groups to take ideas from conception to delivery and as the participant reflected, more people working on an project would have contributed different ideas and helped to think outside of the box. Therefore five mentoring sessions could be considered for future iterations of this programme.

My observation on the mentoring sessions⁷ is that they were of high quality, structured but informal in tone. The mentor asked careful questions, made suggestions but didn't impose her ideas and let the mentee take the lead and guide the mentor on what was useful at each stage.

The mentor reflected that she wanted to make sure that her mentee felt confident and excited about the possibility that they would be able to realise their project and be supported. Also, that there **are** people who are listening to her, and her generation, about ideas that would have a positive impact in their communities.

It's not necessarily a natural thing for a teenager to come up with an idea that fills a need that they see. And sometimes they need to be prompted to do that. Because they might not feel that it's their place, or they have the power to do something. Hannah Whittaker, mentor

The mentor worked with the participant using the Project Initiation Document provided by BAC's Agency. Hannah acted as a sounding board, challenging assumptions, helping think through solutions around logistics and resources. She also prompted the participant to think about where developing this project was leading to, how it might inform her future plans, what skills did she want to learn herself and where she could find allies and ambassadors for her concept.

Good communication between Hannah and Sarah in between sessions ensured that the focus of the sessions was on track, developing the participant's idea and working towards a pitch. Useful mentor feedback was that knowing who would be on the panel early on would help inform the preparation for the pitch, e.g. whether they would be people with access to funding, or people who were going to give their skills and their time and effort to make it happen.

The panel members were recruited over several weeks, and in retrospect Sarah thinks that it would have been better to have them on board from early January so that we all knew which skills would be available to the participant. However, like other aspects of this project, this task was prevented by the pandemic.

6.3 The Pitch

[What did you learn about yourself?] That I can confidently speak and pitch an idea to people that I may never have met before. Yeah. Really it was a confidence booster to be able to speak. I'm not really an outspoken person. I'd rather be kind of quiet about things. Being able to pitch to people was a really big thing yesterday. Participant

The panel of four – two local business people, a senior Medway youth worker and Ideas Test team member listened to the presentation of the project idea, accompanied by slides with text

⁷ These were recorded for safeguarding and evaluation purposes with consent

and images. The (15 year old) participant's idea was to encourage people to shop locally to boost the local economy and support the environment by reducing car journeys. The main tool to promote the idea was rich content on the Instagram social media platform which would engage small local retailers, attract shoppers and build a supportive community that wants to work, shop and create in Gillingham.

Mission statement

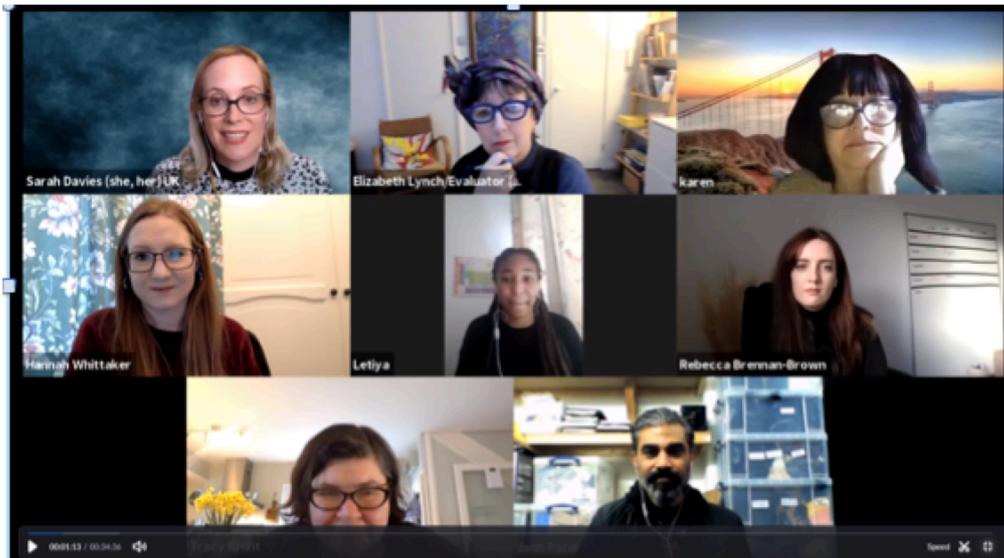
- To bring the local community together
- To help promote shopping locally
- To encourage being environmentally friendly
- To help boost the local community
- To help increase the reach for independent businesses



In breakout room sessions, with a couple of the panel members in each, there was an opportunity for questions and discussion. The panel asked the young person about their motivation, their story, their ambition and why their project values were local and environmental. The participant described in detail the useful feedback and ideas they had received. For example, about fundraising – from raffles to grants available and about the use of social media - on Instagram, how algorithms work and the use of polls to boost audiences; linking Instagram to Facebook to reach an older demographic.

I think that made me really think about what I need to say, to really tap that audience. So I feel like what [panel member] came up was very useful. They made me think deeply well, even after the pitch, I need to come up with something for my work, a motto or a catch phrase, or even hashtag that would encourage and entice people. Participant

My observations on the pitching session are that it was well chaired by Sarah Davies who guided us elegantly and clearly through the format and transitions from stage to stage. Technical support for the presentation slides was in place for the participant who joined the zoom call via mobile phone. The panel contributed a range of professional perspectives including local knowledge and business insights. They took time to ask probing questions, offer constructive suggestions and to applaud the young person's courage, ambition and passion for a project idea that could bring community benefit and that was attainable.



PART TWO: LEARNING AND REFLECTIONS

7. Direct Impact 1: Engaging young people

Engaging young people in Medway from Ideas Test’s target areas and under-resourced neighbourhoods to foreground young people's ideas for social change, through working with Medway youth partners, BAC Agency and others.

This aim was only partially met as the numbers recruited were low and engagement not retained after the workshop sessions. The known reasons for under-recruitment this are outlined in this section supported by monitoring data, details of recruitment activity and observations from the Ideas Test team.

7.1 Staffing, timeline, recruitment and outreach, challenges and responses:

Staffing: Some face to face outreach work was understood to have been conducted by the Ideas Test Project Manager during August/September. However, this staff member resigned in September. The details of the 15 young people that they said had already expressed interest in the project were unfortunately not shared with the team before they left their post. No data of any kind was shared, e.g. locations, professional contacts/networks, and this left a legacy of confusion for the team regarding partners contacted and any messaging about the project. This meant that recruitment had to begin again from scratch. Sensitivity was required by IT staff to determine the status of any previous conversations with partners. This difficult scenario had a negative impact on the wellbeing of this small team’s members.

A new project leader was appointed, Sarah Davies, an experienced arts producer and further education lecturer who is a part-time staff member of Ideas Test. Sarah sensitively picked up where she could with colleagues in the local youth and education networks. Kyra Cross, Ideas Test Audience Development Officer planned a marketing campaign that was ‘hopeful and optimistic given the nature of what was going on at the time in the UK.’ **Make Change** was chosen as the project title as it was short, memorable and described the project's aims. The campaign made use of flyers, posters, social media and word of mouth.

Timeline: The Ideas Test team had to work in a uniquely flexible way during this project, responding to the changes in lockdown regulations and eventually settling on delivering the whole programme online. This was a vastly different approach to the original plan, implemented the former project manager, which began in August 2020 and would have involved face to face meetings and day long workshops with participants and BAC Agents. Hence what is usually an

intensive six month long face to face project, was streamlined in to four weekly online sessions as a pilot project, which by its nature was much more experimental and concise.

BAC staff leading on the Agency partnership were furloughed and this affected the timescale and communications. The furlough timetable mean there was a rolling roster of people who were assigned to liaise with the Ideas Test team. This disruption had an impact on the flow and of communication and extended its timescale.

Recruitment, outreach and marketing: Make Change was advertised extensively across Ideas Test's social media and website, involved partners in spreading the word. Posters and flyers were emailed to youth organisations, faith groups, local authority connections and school/education contacts. Young people were offered incentives in the form of Amazon vouchers. An interesting observation is that all of the young people who did enquire/engage were new to Ideas Test, rather than from existing networks. Three of the four participants came to the project via word of mouth contacts.

During the outreach activity and delivery of the project, contact with new community contacts were established. For example, Nicole Allison at GlassBox Theatre based on MidKent Colleges Medway campus in Gillingham was very helpful and identified a student who took part on the basis of it being recognised as work experience hours, which were very difficult to arrange under lockdown conditions. It's good to note that this contact was a result of another Ideas Test project that Sarah had worked on, *Sea Folk Sing*.

I think even in spite of the difficulties of the pandemic and lockdown and not being able to meet, when we were able to go out on a bicycle or get flyers somewhere or do something, we were doing it. And partners were reciprocating and doing their best to help us, you know, there's no substitute for face to face. Lucy Medhurst, Director Ideas Test

Feedback about this process

The Ideas Test monthly youth session, *Snack & Chat* was notified. Attendees indicated that a weekend slot would be better for them, but this was not possible for The Agency partners. An interested parent suggested indicating more clearly that the sessions were free. This advice was implemented in future communications - especially those for whom English is a second language. Online fatigue during months of lockdown may have contributed to low take-up of the project.

One of the first young people enrolled for Make Change was engaged prior to the workshops to give feedback on how the outreach was going from the perspective of a participant and to spread the word amongst their friends and school peers. Their reflection at the end of the programme was that a short video or staff presentation at school assemblies would be a useful approach in the future as the reach via the few local youth organisations is limited and not inclusive. However this approach alone might not deliver the target individual that Ideas Test wants to engage with, those from the most under-resourced backgrounds. Working with youth organisation and grassroots community contacts will remain a primary route alongside targeting schools serving target postcodes. Central to all future campaign design will be the participation of young people.

There are so many kids that I know at school would like to have their voice heard, but they don't know where to go. Participant

7.2 Participants

Numbers and demographics: Due to the circumstances of the pandemic lockdown and delays cause by a change in the project's staff lead at Ideas Test, the target of 20 for participation was revised down to 10. 10 was considered to be the maximum suitable number for the online platform, based on the new Project Manager's teaching experience in FE.

- 4 x young people who expressed interest and also attended
- 2 x young people who expressed interest but did not attend
- One parent enquired on behalf of her two children but they did not attend
- 4 x young people completed the base line survey
- 3 went on to attend and complete the workshop sessions
- One took up the offer of mentoring and pitching their idea to a panel

The young people who expressed interest and/or attended were from Ideas Test target areas & neighbourhoods of Swale and Medway.

Engagement: As evidenced in the table below, attendance to the online sessions was difficult to predict - with different numbers and groupings of participants at nearly every session.

Participants seemed very engaged during sessions and participated actively, but sadly this did not translate to engagement with the final phase, as from what ended up being 3-4 active participants, only one has gone through to the pitching stage. This participant is very actively involved with, and enthusiastic about [their] project, and with the help of [their] business mentor is beginning to generate some solid ideas for development. Sarah Davies, Project Manager

Dates of sessions @ 1.5hrs	Participants: numbers and names*	Age/gender/ethnicity/disability	Postcodes
WEEK 1 25/11/20	2: (Colin, Ainhoa). (Apologies from Aayla, Elliot)	Colin - 18, male, white, British, dyslexia Ainhoa - 21, female, white, Spanish.	Colin - ME8 7PU Ainhoa – not declared, but said she was based in Chatham.
WEEK 2 2/12/20	3: (Ainhoa, Aayla, Elliot)	Ainhoa - 21, female, white, Spanish. Aayla – 15, female, black, British Elliot – 16, male, white, British, Autism, Anxiety, ADHD.	Chatham Aayla - ME7 2SY Elliot - ME7 1NQ
WEEK 3 9/12/20	3: (Ainhoa, Aayla, Elliot)	Ainhoa - 21, female, white, Spanish. Aayla – 15, female, black, British Elliot – 16, male, white British, Autism, Anxiety, and ADHD.	Chatham Aayla - ME7 2SY Elliot - ME7 1NQ
WEEK 4 16/12/20	2: (Aayla, Elliot)	Aayla – 15, female, black, British Elliot – 16, male, white British, Autism, Anxiety, ADHD.	Aayla - ME7 2SY Elliot - ME7 1NQ

*Names have been changed

8. Direct Impact 2: Identify resources

Identify the resource(s) needed to support an Ideas Test programme tailored to the needs of young people in Gillingham.

The Agency model was skillfully reworked for online delivery within a shorter timeframe and low participation. Across all the feedback it was unanimous that the presence of the Agents offered positive and inspiring role models to the participants and brought the right age balance to the group between staff and young people.

The lockdown restrictions meant that the knowledge gathering on the street planned to take place during the recruitment process could not take place. The Agency team couldn't visit the area even once and their lack of local knowledge had an impact on some of the sessions. The participants lived in different neighbourhoods from each other and their sense of local geography and services was limited.

In retrospect, given the BAC/Agency's aims of learning about social issues in other areas and developing dialogue with Medway for continued partnership working, the recommendation is that in future more research could be conducted by the partners to gain some relevant insights into the area, e.g. its geography, demographics and economy. For example, in one session the participants were asked to draw a map of their area with the places they use and an actual map on the whiteboard would have been a useful prompt/guide for everyone.

It is recommended by the team and our interviewed participant that someone with good local knowledge should be part of any future similar programme. The Ideas Test team also pointed out that in future they would engage a group of young people in this type of conversation at the start:

[What we have learned is that we would do it completely differently!](#) Lucy Medhurst, Director Ideas Test

9. Direct Impact 3: Support young people's leadership

Support young people to lead and shape Ideas Test programme in the future as a legacy from this pilot.

There is a real success in the achievement of the teenage participant who completed Make Change and as a result, they have stated their commitment to continue working with Ideas Test. The team will be involving them and other young people, using the *Snack and Chat* group, in the design of the next youth programme. Ideas Test will invite young people to directly work on the legacy of Make Change, the learning, which ingredients could be taken forward and what needs a fresh approach.

Any future plans for face to face activity will also have a Plan B in the event of another pandemic lockdown. Ideas Test will also work with young people to identify and review blended online and face to face delivery and consider how 'zoom fatigue' can be addressed.

Note

It's worth mentioning here that another Ideas Test project, delivered online during lockdown, has been very successful. [Morpheus](#) is an innovative approach to get young people to get involved in theatre, creating characters and developing stories in really unique ways. Ideas Test is working with theatre company Dante or Die and the pupils and teachers at the Will Adams Centre in Gillingham, commissioned as part of Theatre 31.

[Morpheus really prioritises young people's voices, and helps give them a sense of confidence to express ideas and to create amazing things!](#) Sarah Davies, Morpheus Producer for Ideas Test

The context is very different as the participants are attending their school, a pupil referral unit. However it's a good example of the way Ideas Test like to work, building relationship from the ground up, working really closely with teachers to understand what the young people need and with a very experienced, flexible artistic team. The pupils are very engaged, influencing each other and showing curiosity and willingness to try new activities. The work began before lockdown...

[And it's still working, even though we've had to do a mix of online and different staff and adapt, but it's so focused on: Where are these young people at the moment? What do they need? And what are we going to do with the resource as a result of it?](#) Lucy Medhurst

[Yes and it's resourceful, based on what the young people are engaging with and their feedback every single week.](#) Sarah Davies, Morpheus Producer for Ideas Test

10. Direct impact 4: Create more opportunities for young people

Create more opportunities for young people in Medway, particularly those from under-resourced backgrounds

Whilst it was not possible to realise this impact in the way it was envisaged, the learning has illuminated what is starting to happen at a strategic level in Medway that may help to join up the offers across the area. The learning from liaising with existing and new youth work contacts during the recruitment process, identifying mentors and panelists - is that Ideas Test can start to map activity. This will enable the organisation to engage in a wider strategic conversation about young people's perceptions, to make sure their voice is heard and that young people have agency in decision making, especially if they are to be involved in shaping Medway City Culture 2025.

The groundwork needed to release more opportunities for young people requires commitment to changing structural barriers within organisations that currently prevent young people from being heard. Lucy sees the Youth Service as well-resourced allies for this strategic approach. Capturing evidence from young people about programmes they want and need is essential and this work needs resourcing properly. Ideas Test will think differently about their youth role as a direct result of this pilot.

11. Direct Impact 5: Build support networks for young people

Build support networks for young people *and enable their networks to thrive.*

Alongside the strategic work outlined above IT will be recruiting for a new Youth Programme Development role. This person will be charged with following up conversations with existing and new networks and partners who work with young people. They will also be responsible for recruiting and working with young people to continue the conversation started by the Make Change project, outlined in Section 8.

Note:

During the Make Change project Ideas Test networked with GlassBox Theatre, Sparked Echo, the new Ideas Test Board of Trustees, Will Adams Centre, Diversity Network, 51 Zero festival, Fiona Watt (Chair of [Society of British Theatre Designers](#), who sometimes is able to offer work experience), North Kent MIND and Medway Youth Service. These organisations helped get the word out about the project to support the recruitment. Several potential partners who might have supported a face to face programme and/or recruitment were closed during lockdown.

It is hoped that as initiatives like Creative Medway and the City of Culture bid gain momentum. This will bring resources to undertake this much needed development of young people in Medway, particularly in underserved communities.

12. Direct Impact 6: Develop confident young people

Develop confident young people in the longer term to support and shape Medway 2025

Ideas Test believe that they are in a position where they can influence young people's engagement with Medway. For some of the teenage young people involved in Make Change, 2025 seems very far away. Working with partners to provide opportunities for young people to make decisions and influence policy and plans for Medway 2025 remains an aspiration. The seeds with young people need to be sown now, and resources allocated, hopefully as part of Medway 2025 consultation planning.

What is evident from the single participant who completed the Make Change programme is that their confidence and self-esteem has increased through participating. Asked what they had learned about themselves, they said:

That I can confidently speak and pitch an idea to people that I may never have met before. Yeah. Really it was a confidence booster to be able to speak. I'm not really an outspoken person. I'd rather be kind of quiet about things. Being able to pitch to people was a really big thing yesterday. Participant

Having observed the zoom workshop and the mentoring it is clear that the project's stated values were delivered by Ideas Test and the Agency teams. They made the activities accessible through active listening to young people, 'no ideas or bad ideas' and created a safe space that celebrated taking risks and failure as part of the creative process.

There definitely was a safe environment created and, you know, friendly, pleasant people able to share ideas. I think more time and more space would have enabled that a lot more. Sarah Davies, Programme Manager Ideas Test

13. Summary findings: learning and actions

1. **Low recruitment and participation was due to both internal and external factors**, i.e. the impact of project manager disruption and the Covid19 lockdowns 2020-21, which made face to face work impossible and affected the planning process. Like many other organisations, IT and BAC took the risk to pivot from face to face to online delivery for Make Change.
2. **The BAC Agency model will influence future Ideas Test youth programmes.** The revised and shorter online workshop programme was well planned and engaging, with the Agents offering friendly and positive role models to the participants. There are constructive recommendations for the pace, design and delivery of the sessions. Some of the Agency team developed their facilitation and online presentation and communication skills. Although only one participant took up the mentoring opportunity, the success of the process and the final pitch to a local expert panel will inform future thinking.
3. **Future working with partners from outside the region** should require and allow for research time to ensure that they come with relevant insights on demographics, geography and economy.
4. **Engaging young people in project planning and creation** will be part of all future Ideas Test youth programmes. The learning from the workshops and the positive experience of the participant who completed the whole programme are evidence for the valuing of youth people's contribution as citizens to their communities.
5. Ideas Test have identified that **mapping the facilities and services** offering support and opportunities for young people is needed. This strategic exercise will help to join up offers across Medway and illuminate where the gaps lie.
6. Ideas Test will work with the Youth Service and school networks **to explore the resources needed to make services more visible** to young people and their families and to **advocate for the structural changes** needed within organisations that present barriers to the voices of young people being heard.
7. **A level of flexibility and responsiveness** is now required due to the impact of the pandemic. Future youth programmes will need to include planning for face to face and a back up of online delivery. Ideas Test's planning will remain thorough but will build in the capacity to change at short notice in response to any national restrictions. Everyone is working in new ways. Time and space is needed to evaluate and reflect on that.

Elizabeth Lynch MBE

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Mentor: Hannah Whittaker, artist, coach and mentor.

The Make Change Panel:

Karen Yusuf: Youth Participation Worker, Medway Youth Service

Jatin Patel: Co-chair of Medway 2025 City of Culture, fashion designer and creative director at Chatham-based Kalikas Armour, Trustee, Ideas Test

Rebecca Brennan-Brown: Wedding Planner and writer, Trustee, Ideas Test

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