

Releasing the potential already within a community

The commitment was already there. The ideas were already there. The challenge was giving people the confidence, structure and practical skills to turn them into action.

THE SITUATION

YMCA Cheshire works to improve the lives of individuals and families across the county, including vulnerable communities.

On the Sherborne Estate in Crewe, the organisation was working in a community experiencing significant challenges including unemployment, social isolation and low community engagement.

Through a funding opportunity from the Institute of Leadership, YMCA Cheshire wanted to help local volunteers become more confident, develop leadership skills and take greater ownership of activities within their community.

THE FRICTION

The volunteers cared deeply about where they lived and wanted to make a difference. But commitment alone wasn't enough.

The friction was between wanting to step forward and having the confidence, structure and tools to do it.

Some volunteers were also dealing with significant challenges in their own lives, including recovery from addiction, the effects of domestic abuse and long-term unemployment.

A conventional leadership programme wasn't the answer.

The starting point needed to be the individuals themselves - building belief and self-awareness before expecting people to lead others.

The capability is often already there. The challenge is releasing it.

THE FOCUS

Working alongside YMCA Cheshire, we co-designed a six-week face-to-face programme around the realities of the volunteers and their community.

The focus developed progressively through three areas.

First, self-leadership - using the Mental Toughness framework to explore confidence, control, resilience and how mindset can affect behaviour.

Then, practical capability - developing skills in planning, communication, facilitation and community engagement, with opportunities to present ideas and build confidence through practice and feedback.

Finally, embedding change - using one-to-one coaching, reassessment and practical planning tools to help participants recognise their progress and turn it into future action.

The programme was shaped with the volunteers, not simply delivered to them.

THE DIFFERENCE

The difference went well beyond completing a six-week programme.

All five participants increased their overall Mental Toughness scores and reported improvements in confidence, self-belief and motivation.

And that change translated into action:

- two volunteers moved into paid employment
- a new fundraising committee was established
- volunteers took greater ownership of their local hub
- a community BBQ and programme of future events were planned
- a refreshed volunteer pack was created
- the group established a more structured approach to running activities independently

The wider social value generated by the programme was independently assessed at £146,952 - equivalent to £29,390 per participant.

This wasn't simply learning. It was capability being turned into action - and action creating measurable difference.

IN THEIR WORDS

"This programme has changed the way I see myself and given me a new outlook on life. I feel like I'm back to my confident, positive self."

Programme participant

"This course has been life-changing for our volunteers. We've seen huge growth in their confidence and capabilities."

Mark Hills, CEO, YMCA Cheshire

THE AQR WAY

Find the friction. Focus on what matters. Measure the difference.

Sometimes performance isn't about giving people more capability. It's about creating the conditions in which the capability that's already there can emerge.

The capability is often already there. The challenge is releasing it.

01 BELIEVE

Build self-awareness, confidence and personal agency.

02 PRACTISE

Develop practical leadership skills through action.

03 RELEASE

Turn capability into ownership and community impact.