

Case Study: YMCA Cheshire — Empowering Community Leaders Through Confidence, Clarity, and Connection

About YMCA Cheshire

YMCA Cheshire is a not-for-profit organisation working to improve the lives of individuals and families across the county, with a particular focus on vulnerable communities. At the heart of this case study is the Sherborne Estate in Crewe—an area facing significant challenges including unemployment, social isolation, and low community engagement.



As part of a funding opportunity from the Institute of Leadership, AQR Consulting partnered with YMCA Cheshire to co-design and deliver a transformational programme to support local volunteers. The aim? To empower community members to grow in confidence, develop leadership skills, and take ownership of initiatives that would make a lasting impact where they live.

The Challenge

The Sherborne Estate had seen rising crime, growing intergenerational unemployment, and a lack of community-led initiatives. Many volunteers were deeply committed but lacked the confidence, structure, and tools to turn their ideas into action.

Volunteers were often facing personal barriers of their own—including recovery from addiction, the impact of domestic abuse, and long-term unemployment. YMCA Cheshire recognised that a new approach was needed—one that would nurture confidence and leadership from the inside out.

Our Approach

AQR Consulting designed a six-week face-to-face programme, co-delivered with YMCA Cheshire and focused on building core leadership qualities using the Mental Toughness model.

The programme was structured around three key phases:

- **Building self-leadership:** Volunteers completed the MTQPlus assessment to explore how their mindset affected confidence,

control, and resilience. This was followed by group workshops to explore the 4C model and develop self-awareness.

- **Developing practical skills:** Sessions focused on planning, communication, facilitation, and community engagement. Volunteers presented project ideas, learned how to structure events, and built confidence through interactive activities and peer feedback.
- **Embedding change:** One-to-one coaching and final MTQ reassessments helped volunteers reflect on their journey, identify progress, and plan their next steps. Alongside this, a structured framework for planning future events was introduced, ensuring the programme's legacy would be sustained.

Importantly, each step of the programme was shaped by volunteer input, delivered in a safe, engaging environment, and designed to reflect real-world community needs.

The Outcome

The results were profound. All five participants showed increased Mental Toughness scores, with every individual reporting improved confidence, self-belief, and motivation.

Key outcomes included:

- Two volunteers successfully moved into paid employment.
- A new fundraising committee was established, with roles including Chair, Vice-Chair, and Treasurer.
- Volunteers took ownership of their local hub, planned a community BBQ, and set out a programme of future events.
- The group created a refreshed volunteer pack and agreed a structured approach to running sessions independently.
- Social value generated by the programme was independently assessed at **£146,952**—an equivalent of **£29,390 per person**.

In Their Words

One participant shared:

"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."

Another added:

"It's changed my life. I've gone from sitting at home and feeling isolated to taking on new opportunities, meeting people, and thinking about future studies."

The programme's impact was also recognised by Mark Hills, CEO of YMCA Cheshire:

"This course has been life-changing for our volunteers. We've seen huge growth in their confidence and capabilities. Without this opportunity, we simply wouldn't be able to run these services on the Sherborne Estate."

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates that leadership development is not just for the boardroom—it can unlock potential in every community. By embedding evidence-based tools like Mental Toughness into local engagement programmes, we can empower people to lead with purpose, confidence, and connection.

Helping people believe in themselves, step forward with clarity, and make a difference where it matters most.