

IMPACT REPORT 2020-2023

How more than 17,000 young Londoners took action on the issues they care about, and took their ideas to City Hall

BIG IDEAS

Delivered by Big Ideas in partnership with the Greater London Authority and the #iwill Fund, as part of Team London Young Ambassadors

WHAT WAS GAMECHANGERS?

Over three school years, more than 17,000 young Londoners took part in GameChangers. They wrote to the Mayor of London, ran their own social action projects and saw their ideas reach City Hall.

GameChangers was a youth social action programme designed and delivered by social impact organisation Big Ideas. It was funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA) with the #iwill Fund, as part of the Mayor of London's Team London Young Ambassadors programme. It launched to schools in January 2021 and ran until July 2023.

GameChangers challenged young people to take action in their schools and communities on the issues they care about. The programme focused on schools serving areas of social deprivation. Most participants were primary school children aged 6 to 11, a key age for building a habit of volunteering.

The programme launched in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, with schools closed and class bubbles isolating. Big Ideas rebuilt it as a digital programme so that young people could still meet, share ideas and act together across London.

Phase One · 2020–2022

GameChangers for Team London Young Ambassadors: digital workshops, Youth Summits, Youth Advisory Boards and accredited teacher CPD.

Phase Two · 2022–2023

GameChanger Grants: Letters to London workshops and 90 grants for youth-led social action projects across 22 London boroughs.

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PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Wide reaching

17,680
young people took part

7,180
young people defined as 'at risk'

225
social action projects started or funded

33
digital Youth Summits and Letters to London workshops

1,016
letters from young Londoners to City Hall

9
personal replies from the Mayor of London

TWO PHASES IN NUMBERS

	Phase One: GameChangers 2020–2022	Phase Two: GameChanger Grants 2022–2023
Young people taking part (minimum)	12,322	5,358
Young people defined as 'at risk' (minimum)	4,384	2,796
Schools engaged	190	95
Social action projects	135 started	90 funded by grants
Digital youth events	12 Youth Summits	21 Letters to London workshops
Young people's surveys completed	6,461	1,982

In Year 2, 10,612 young people took part against a target of 6,150. Totals combine both phases and are minimum figures; some schools took part in both phases. 'At risk' follows the GLA definition, including pupils with poor attendance, additional needs or pupil premium funding.

IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE



87%

of young people felt **proud of what they had done** after a Letters to London workshop (2023)

85%

said they had **new ideas for the future**, and 85% wanted to take part in activities like this again (2023)

58 → 70%

agreed **"I have the power to change things around me for the better"** before and after taking part (Year 2)

100%

of teachers surveyed said their students were **more likely to keep playing active roles in their communities** (2023)

Reaching those who need it most

70/90

grants went to schools where 30% or more of pupils receive Free School Meals (national average 23.8%)

52%

of Phase Two participants were identified by teachers as 'at risk'

59%

of Phase Two participants were from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds

Youth voice that reached decision makers

1,016

letters from young Londoners shared with the GLA in 2022–23

9

letters received a personal reply from the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan

11

GameChanger schools registered for the Mayor's first Young People & Communities Conference at City Hall, June 2023

HOW IT WORKED

GameChangers gave young people a simple route from an idea to action: choose an issue, make a plan, act on it, and tell people in power what needs to change.

Workshops and Inspire Sessions

Classes took part in a GameChangers workshop, then the Big Ideas team joined them live on Zoom to hear their ideas and help shape a social action plan. Students chose the issue themselves, from food poverty and knife crime to climate change and racial justice.

Digital Youth Summits

Twelve online summits on the environment, racial justice, food justice and advocacy reached an estimated 9,295 young people from 176 schools, with speakers from City Hall, campaigners and young people themselves. See page 6.

Letters to London

One-hour digital workshops where young people explored issues in class, added to a citywide word cloud and wrote to the Mayor of London. Every student who attended took part in social action during the session.

Grants to schools

In Phase Two, 90 schools received a £400 GameChanger Grant to put the ideas in their letters into action. In Year 2, highly engaged schools were offered grants of up to £1,000 to run larger projects.

Youth Advisory Boards

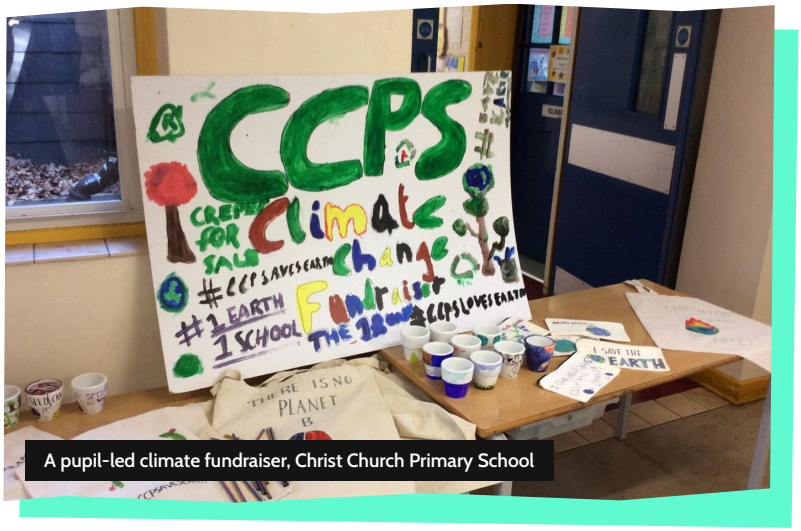
49 young people shaped how the programme was designed and delivered. Sixth form students from St Mary Magdalene Academy also co-designed and co-hosted workshops.

Teacher CPD

Four accredited CPD modules helped teachers embed social action in their schools, from *Social Action Now: How Young People Can Play a Part in London's Recovery* to the final Cup of Tea CPD, where grant-funded teachers shared what worked.



Planning a campaign, Christ Church Primary School



A pupil-led climate fundraiser, Christ Church Primary School

YOUTH SUMMITS

Twelve digital Youth Summits brought classrooms across London together with speakers, campaigners and each other. An estimated 9,295 young people from 176 schools took part, and every student committed to or completed a social action challenge.

CLIMATE ACTION

2 July 2021 · London Climate Action Week

900 students from 17 schools in 10 boroughs heard from Zack Polanski, Chair of the London Assembly Environment Committee, Zamzam Ibrahim, co-founder of Students Organising for Sustainability UK, and musician and climate activist Louis VI.

Schools posted 182 ideas for tackling climate change in two minutes. The ideas were sent to the Mayor of London.

RACIAL JUSTICE

October 2021 · opening Black History Month

More than 2,700 young people, in 90 classes from 31 schools, heard from Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, opera singer Peter Brathwaite and activist Olamide Taiwo.

Each speaker set a challenge for students across the city to take action on racial justice.

FOOD JUSTICE

January 2022

52 schools took part. Pupils from Van Gogh Primary School presented their food donation project for Brixton Soup Kitchen, giving other schools a clear, achievable example to follow.

From 2022 the summit format grew into Letters to London (see page 9).

Young people sharing what they had done

Summits gave schools a stage. At the first summit in March 2021, Edward Wilson Primary School students helped the Big Ideas team to digitally produce the event. At the Climate Action summit, Eleanor Palmer Primary School's eco-club described writing to Camden Council to ask for Ecosia, a search engine that plants trees, to become the default browser in Camden schools. Pupils from Christ Church Primary School performed their own rap about protecting the planet.

> Our students don't usually get the chance to do this kind of thing, to work with other schools and to appear on something like this so thank you... The producers told me they had never been so nervous but they really enjoyed the challenge.
>
> **Teacher, Edward Wilson Primary School**

> It was great for our children to have an open conversation about race and equality.
>
> **Teacher**

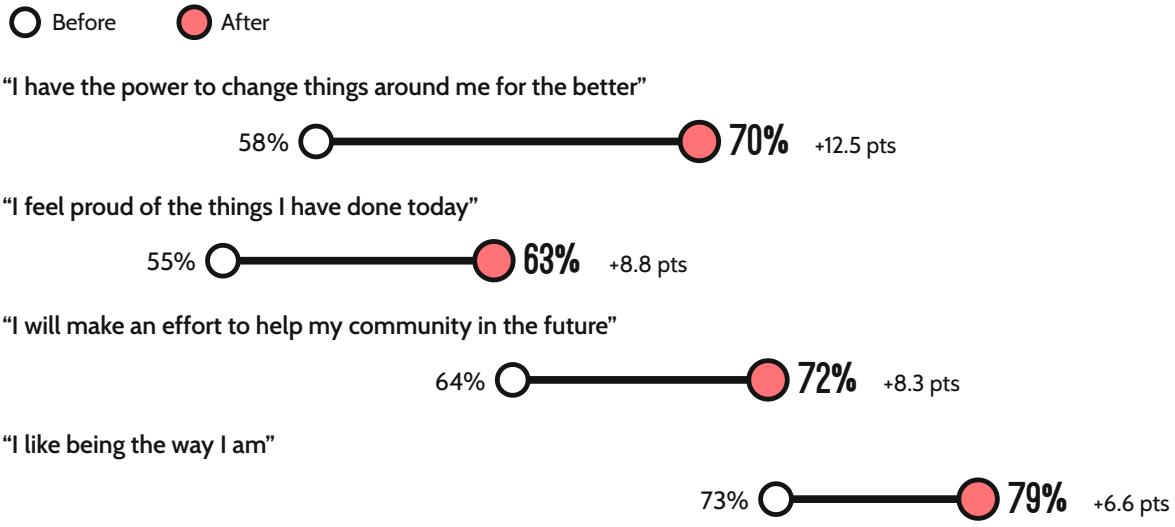
> Look around in your classroom and understand that everybody in that room has a very different experience. When we work collectively is when we will tackle all the big issues that exist in our world.
>
> **Zamzam Ibrahim, speaker at the Climate Action Youth Summit**

PROGRAMME IMPACT

Young people left GameChangers more confident that they could change things, prouder of what they had done and more likely to help their community again.

MORE YOUNG PEOPLE AGREED WITH EVERY STATEMENT AFTER TAKING PART

% of young people agreeing, before and after a GameChangers event, Year 2 (2021–22). Source: Big Ideas pre- and post-event class surveys.



The biggest shift was in young people's belief that they can make a difference. Agreement with "I have the power to change things around me for the better" rose after taking part in both years of Phase One: by 9% in Year 1 and by 12.5 percentage points in Year 2.

Skills and confidence

Teachers and students described gains in public speaking, teamwork, leadership, planning and organisation, all skills linked to social mobility. In Phase Two, 85% of young people said they had new ideas for the future.

> Speaking to a wider audience, at first I remember I would have been trembling but now I feel really confident, like I got up in front of lots of people and it was fine.
>
> **Student**

> They grew in confidence and learnt many skills such as public speaking, team work, planning and organising.
>
> **Teacher**

> I learnt how to organise a large group of people. That will be useful if I get a future job with lots of people and I become a manager.
>
> **Student, Van Gogh Primary School**



WELLBEING

After Letters to London workshops in 2023, 87% of young people said they felt proud of what they had done that day. Every teacher surveyed said the programme had encouraged previously disengaged young people to get involved.

> What I really liked about this project was having people get together. I moved to the school this year and it helped me prove to myself that I am good at something.
>
> Student, Youth Advisory Board

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND A HABIT OF VOLUNTEERING

Projects reached well beyond the classroom. Students sorted donated baby clothes for the Salvation Army, collected food for Brixton Soup Kitchen, fundraised for single-parent charity Gingerbread, worked with Centrepoint on homelessness, cleaned their local streets and built community gardens. GameChanger schools raised more than £2,595 in Year 1 alone.

In Year 2, 61% of young people said they would take part in social action again, compared with 38% who had done so before. In 2023, 85% wanted to take part in activities like this in the future.

"One student has now set up two charity events to raise money for the RSPCA... it has really changed the way she thinks."

Teacher, Eltham Hill School

TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

The programme gave teachers the confidence to hand projects over to their students. All teachers surveyed in 2023 said they were more likely to build youth social action into regular lessons, and in Year 2 nine of ten grant schools said GameChangers had created a habit of volunteering at their school.

> It was an act of courage for staff to give the students complete ownership but it was such a lovely atmosphere as the students did take over and they were really self-sufficient. The staff are more likely to do youth led projects in the future too, we're motivated.
>
> Teacher

> It has given us the confidence to know that, with the children as the driving force, our school community and parents can make large behaviour changes.
>
> Teacher



Christ Church Primary School

YOUTH VOICE REACHING CITY HALL

Letters to London gave young people a direct line to the Mayor of London, and the Mayor wrote back.

The first series in 2021–22 featured former BBC London journalist Dekan Apajee. These fast-paced, one-hour digital workshops fitted into a single lesson, linked to the curriculum and asked little of busy teachers. That meant they reached classrooms across the capital even while schools were still recovering from the pandemic. Big Ideas and the GLA read every letter and sorted them by theme, and the letters were shared with relevant teams at City Hall.

> **"Tell London what matters to you, tell London what your life is like today and what you want to change."**
>
> The Letters to London challenge

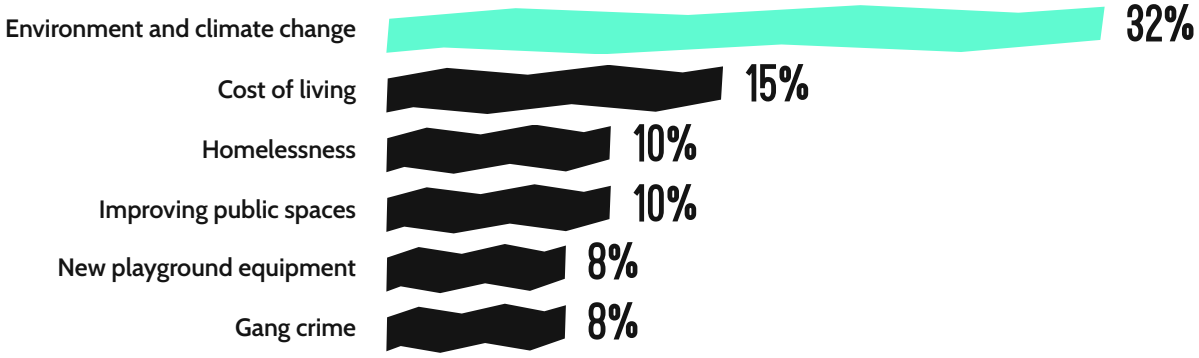
4,140
young people from 74 schools in 8 workshops, 2021–22

21
workshops for 95 schools in 2022–23

1,016
letters sent in by schools in 2022–23

THE ENVIRONMENT FEATURED IN NEARLY A THIRD OF LETTERS TO THE MAYOR

% of 1,016 GameChanger Grants letters mentioning each issue, 2022–23. A letter can mention several issues. Source: Big Ideas and GLA analysis.



Young people's letters also tracked the news. When Letters to London began in the 2021–22 school year, the war in Ukraine appeared in 11% of letters. Students also wrote about racism, exam stress, air pollution, knife crime and mental health.


Pupils with their letters to London

> **"JUST BECAUSE I AM 13, IT DOESN'T MEAN MY VOICE SHOULDN'T BE HEARD..."**
>
> Letter to City Hall, age 13

> **"YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD BE LISTENED TO BECAUSE THEY ARE THE HOPE AND FUTURE OF LONDON."**
>
> GameChanger Grants student

FROM THE CLASSROOM TO CITY HALL

The Mayor replied

Sadiq Khan replied personally to nine letters. GLA staff handed the replies to students, often in whole-school assemblies.

Letters on show

At the Mayor of London's first Young People & Communities Conference in June 2023, letters were exhibited at A0 size and read aloud on stage by their authors. Young people from 11 GameChanger schools registered to attend.

Meeting decision makers

Young Ambassadors from Tollgate Primary School spoke to the Mayor of London and Assembly members about the issues in their letters at a City Hall celebration of the King's Coronation.

"WOW I DIDN'T THINK I WOULD GET A RESPONSE."

Student, John Wood School

"WHEN THIS STARTED ON ZOOM I COULDN'T IMAGINE WE WOULD END UP HERE!"

Student at the Young People & Communities Conference

> It was an honour to deliver the letters on behalf of the Mayor of London alongside Big Ideas and see the smiles following receipt of their letter response. The visit provided the opportunity to thank all the Young Ambassadors for their letter writing and raised the importance of youth voice to shape our future policy work.
>
> Rhian Horlock, Greater London Authority



CASE STUDY

VAN GOGH PRIMARY SCHOOL: COLOURS OF THE WORLD

Van Gogh Primary's Pupil Parliament in Lambeth took part in GameChangers over two years. Their first project tackled food poverty. They set up a donations point in school and handed the food to Brixton Soup Kitchen, whose founder visited the school to collect it. The donations box stayed in place and the partnership continued. The students then presented their project to other schools at the Food Justice Youth Summit.

Wanting to do more, the Pupil Parliament pitched a racial justice project to Big Ideas and received a grant of up to £1,000. In July 2022 they ran Colours of the World, an after-school event for families celebrating the cultures in their school.

More than 100 people came. Each student led a station, from Mexican paper flowers to Bagudun, a Nigerian card game. The grant bought "colours of the world" pencils so every child could draw a self-portrait in their own skin tone.

100+

pupils, parents and teachers at Colours of the World

> It's been all student-led... It was hard for me to let go but I can really say that they have taken ownership.
>
> **Teacher**

> We've never been given £1000 before... this is worth the money because look at all of this.
>
> **Pupil Parliament member**

"It's equipping children to lead and plan Game Changing activities and events, to create change, inspire people and generate hope. The work on anti-racism is so relevant and prevalent and absolutely necessary for our community... this allows them to channel their anxiety and frustration into something positive, into something they can change."

Headteacher, Van Gogh Primary School



MORE CASE STUDIES

Year 5 · Literacy · 2021

Tudor Academy: a whole-school read-a-thon

The Pupil Parliament chose literacy, because "some people don't have any books at home". They launched a sponsored read-a-thon the Monday after their workshop, with a comms team writing to parents, an awareness team speaking in assembly and a fundraising team running sponsorship. The school expected to raise a few hundred pounds and raised nearly **£1,400** for new library books.

> There has been a huge increase in reading and a nice buzz about the project.
>
> Teacher, Tudor Academy

Year 10 · Single-parent families · 2021

Eltham Hill School: support for single-parent families

Fifteen Year 10 students split into research, presentation and fundraising roles. They ran assemblies and form-time activities, invited Gingerbread ambassador Daniel David to speak, and held a food carousel of dishes from around the world with donations from local businesses including the Co-op. They raised just over **£350** for Gingerbread.

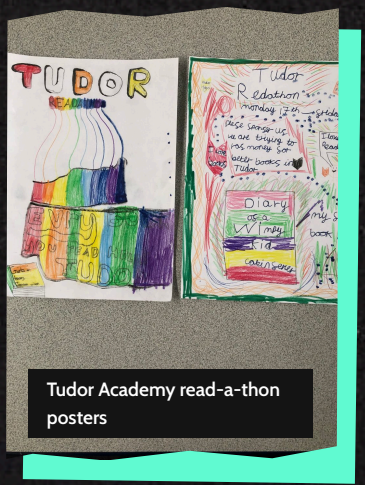
> Teachers have loved the idea, they have said they're really proud of us... I'd love to do another one.
>
> Year 10 student, Eltham Hill School

Year 8 · Stronger communities · 2021

School 21: four projects at once

Students sorted four large bags of donated baby clothes into bundles with the Salvation Army, made baking packs for local food banks, and sold personalised key rings for Lola's Homeless, taking over 50 orders. After a day wearing traditional Islamic clothing, they ran peer coaching sessions about Islam in eight classes.

> It makes me feel good that other people won't question and judge anymore.
>
> Student, School 21



Tudor Academy read-a-thon posters

GRANTS IN ACTION

In Phase Two, a £400 grant let each class turn the ideas in their letter to the Mayor into a real project. Many have kept going long after the programme ended.

GameChanger Grant · 2023

Cayley Primary School: a wild garden for the community

Cayley Primary used its grant to create a wild garden. A parent PTA group now maintains it, students are raising money through drawings of the creatures they hope to attract, and the school's philosophy café holds its after-school sessions there.

> It is ongoing and the effects will amplify as the garden gets established... We also are running a forest school and are in discussion with other community groups and schools about using the space.
>
> **Teacher, Cayley Primary School**

GameChanger Grant · 2023

Brookland Junior School: cleaning up the local area

After writing to the Mayor about the environment, pupils used their grant to buy litter pickers, high-vis vests, bags and gloves. They now go out in teams to clean local streets.

> The children have been very energised by this project and feel that they are doing good work in the community... [it] inspired pupils to think about what really matters to them and then to action it.
>
> **Teacher, Brookland Junior School**

GameChangers grant · 2022

St Luke's Primary School, Newham: a Cultural Day

St Luke's used a GameChangers grant to organise a Cultural Day for the school community, one of several grant-funded events in 2022 run by pupils with peers and families attending.



St Luke's Primary School's Justice Committee at their Cultural Day

CONCLUSION

GameChangers showed that primary and secondary school children can lead social action that changes their schools and neighbourhoods, and that decision makers will listen when young people have a clear route to reach them.

Over three years, more than 17,000 young Londoners took part, 225 social action projects were started or funded, and over 1,000 letters reached City Hall.

The programme also proved a delivery model: short digital sessions that any class can join, small grants that turn ideas into action, and a direct line from the classroom to people in power. Big Ideas would be delighted to bring it back, for London or for new places and partners.

Big Ideas and the Greater London Authority thank all the young people, teachers, schools, families and speakers who made GameChangers possible.

"Can we be GameChangers next year as well?" Student

About Big Ideas

Big Ideas is a social impact organisation founded in 2015 by Dr Virginia Crompton. Our Everyone Everywhere mission is to create spaces where people from all backgrounds, identities, abilities and experiences are actively welcomed, supported and take part on equal terms. We work across all four nations of the UK and internationally, with schools, Alternative Provision and SEND settings, FE colleges, prisons and community groups. Over 165,000 people took part in Big Ideas programmes in 2025.

Work with us

We would welcome conversations with funders, public bodies and corporate partners interested in youth voice, social action or citizenship programmes.

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