

# Stepping Stones

An evaluation of O2 Think Big in 2010



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# 1 Introduction

Think Big is a new youth programme, supported by O<sub>2</sub> to provide young people with opportunities to set up projects to make a difference to their own lives and to the wellbeing of their communities. The aim of the programme is ambitious in scope. The programme hopes to engage and inspire young people to make positive choices for themselves and their communities. Moreover, the programme sets out to engage with adults, through campaigns, to think differently about the positive role young people can and do play in their communities.

***“We believe in young people. We believe they have the power to make a better society. We need to back them, celebrate their talent and release their true potential to fix the things that matter. We’ll campaign for them. We’ll support their projects and promote their achievements. We’ll change attitudes. We’ll challenge the stereotypes that stifle them and ensure they are connected to the heart of our communities”.***

The programme aims both to support young people so that they benefit personally and also to make a tangible difference to their communities. The purpose of this report is to evaluate how the programme has progressed in its first year and to make observations on how its full potential can be unlocked in future years.

## 1.1 Aims of the project

Think Big aims to benefit young people who lead projects or actively take part in them by:

- increasing aspirations, hope and confidence;
- providing new experiences, and acquiring new skills;
- improving employability; and,
- developing the leadership skills of young people.

The project is socially inclusive in its design – but is particularly keen to provide opportunities to young people from less advantaged backgrounds or who lack social or emotional resilience. It is expected that at least 50% of young people on the programme will come from less advantaged backgrounds (the target is higher, standing at 80% for young people who are recruited by national and regional partner organisations).

It is expected that all young people can benefit, the project expects to reach young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds (BAME); young people with disabilities or limiting illnesses; and, from all regions and nations of the UK. So, progress is being monitored to ensure that all levels of participation are representative.

Providing new opportunities for young people is always important, but if there ever was a moment to invest in their future, it is now. Following the credit crunch, economic turbulence has impacted heavily upon young people’s prospects. Unemployment amongst the 17-24 year olds has risen to 20.6%, or 974,000, the highest level since these data were first collected in 1992. Problems in the banking sector in 2008 led to high levels of government

spending to keep the economy from falling further into recession. The longer term consequence is a deficit in the public purse amounting to £875bn.<sup>1</sup> Government response has been to cut public spending. Spending cuts are starting to feed through into public sector and charity provision for young people.

Think Big cannot tackle issues on this scale, but the programme comes at a vital time – when young people need support, encouragement and opportunities to help them make their way in life. In this multi-million pound programme, objectives are ambitious and are defined as follows:

- 10,000 young people will have been involved as ‘project leaders’;
- 100,000 young people will have been ‘actively participants’ in projects; and,
- 500,000 young people will have been ‘benefitting participants’.

## 1.2 How does the programme work?

Think big is still in its early stages. As this dynamic programme is still evolving, the best way of explaining its structure is through a generalised description of its core principles. The programme currently has two levels. **Think Big** projects are awarded to young people with good ideas about how to make a contribution to their ‘community of interest’ or ‘community of place’. They receive £300 in funding together with some other incentives to do their project and, as shown below, are given a lot of information, training and support along the way.

**Think Bigger** projects get more funding: £2,500, and it is expected that they are larger in terms of scope, reach and ambition. Think Bigger is also accompanied by support and more in-depth training together with some further incentives to get involved and stay committed. Young people who apply to Think Bigger must have done a Think Big project first.

There is potential in the programme to have even larger projects once young people have finished the Think Bigger stage. While developments are not complete yet, it is anticipated that these more generously funded projects could pave the way for the development of social enterprises.

This report is only concerned with the first phase of Think Big projects because we currently have no data on Think Bigger as these projects did not begin until 2011. However, it will be possible to do a full appraisal of their progress in the next annual report.

Figure 1.1 presents a diagram on the stages through which individual Think Big projects are initiated, supported and completed as they go through the first level.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Office National Statistics [\[1\]](#) (page updated March 27th, 2011)

Figure 1.1 **Stages of the Think Big project**

	<b>Sources of information and support</b>	<b>Impact on project objectives and outcomes</b>
<b>Involving:</b> how young people find out about the programme	Think Big core partnership Think Big partner organisations Community stakeholders O <sub>2</sub> Helpers Think Big alumni/Young Advisors	Using Think Big website, local networks, media and campaigns to increase knowledge and interest in the programme and to attract and maximise interest of potential applicants
<b>Engaging:</b> how young people apply to enter the programme	Think Big core partnership Think Big partner organisations Community stakeholders O <sub>2</sub> Helpers Think Big alumni/Young Advisors	Secure successful applications and entry into programme via Think Big website  Assess level of support needed by applicants and arrangements
<b>Preparing:</b> how young people are supported in planning and developing the right skills to do their projects	Think Big core partnership Think Big partner organisations O <sub>2</sub> Helpers Community stakeholders	Use web information tools, training, mentoring, networking to provide practical guidance on achieving outcomes and to build confidence and realism for project leaders to achieve objectives
<b>Resourcing:</b> how Think Big allocates resources to young people	Think Big core partnership	Provide funding and incentives and invest 'social trust' in young people
<b>Supporting:</b> how young people get support while they are doing their projects	Think Big core partnership O <sub>2</sub> Helpers Community stakeholders Think Big partner organisations Think Big alumni/Young Advisors	Provide mentoring, training and encouragement to improve participants' imagination, confidence, skills, capability, resilience, positive risk taking & achievement
<b>Celebrating:</b> how young people communicate and share knowledge on the success of their projects	Think Big core partnership O <sub>2</sub> Helpers Think Big alumni/Young Advisors	Use media, local and larger events, social media / Think Big website to celebrate successes in order to: challenge stereotypes of young people; build commitment and confidence of new entrants; embed alumni in supporting Think Big; and, strengthen commitment to Think Bigger
<b>Re-investing:</b> how young people who have completed projects can invest more energy into the programme	Think Big core partnership Think Big alumni/Young Advisors Think Big partner organisations O <sub>2</sub> Helpers, wider stakeholders	Think Big alumni move on to Think Bigger, encourage others to enter the programme in order to embed identity and build momentum into the programme and invigorate campaigns to challenge stereotypes

Formal and informal support is provided in the programme by a range of individuals and organisations:

- **Think Big core partnership:** this includes contributions from:
  - **O<sub>2</sub>** (overseeing website development and operation, campaigning, media and comms, providing and incentivising employee volunteers);
  - **National Youth Agency** (overall project management, partnership arrangements, recruiting and engaging Think Big national and regional partner organisations, providing opportunities for employee volunteers);
  - **Conservation Foundation** (managing the application process, coordinating the allocation of resources to young people, monitoring young people's progress through the Think Big journey); and,
  - **UK Youth** (coordinating training and mentoring for Think Big project leaders and employee volunteers).
- **Think Big partner organisations:** there are ten national youth partners and 25 regional partners which help to recruit and support young people doing projects.
- **O<sub>2</sub> Helpers:** are employee volunteers who provide support for Think Big.
- **Community stakeholders:** individuals (family, friends, community champions) and organisations (such as non-partner youth organisations, faith groups, schools and colleges) who encourage young people to apply and give support to the projects.
- **Think Big alumni:** to date, this role has been played by Young Advisors who were appointed at the start of the programme – but as more projects are completed, it is expected that Think Big alumni will assume an important role in building the momentum and ethos of the programme.

### 1.3 Structure of the report

This report is divided into several sections. Section 2 provides a contextual social, policy and economic background for the evaluation followed by a brief description of the evaluation methodology. Section 3 provides an evaluation of the project journey as experienced by young people. Section 4 considers the impact of Think Big on young people, on their communities and for society in general. Section 5 examines ways to unlock the potential of the project as it evolves by considering the role of national and regional partner organisations, employee volunteers and the use of electronic media. The concluding section presents a review of principal findings and observations on possible steps to be taken to maximise the potential of the programme.



## 2 Context and methodology

The O<sub>2</sub> Think Big programme has a clear ambition to support young people in making positive life transitions – especially so if young people are from less affluent backgrounds. In this section a brief outline of the impact of deprivation on young people's choices is provided to contextualise the findings presented in later sections of this evaluation report.

### 2.1 How does affluence and deprivation affect young people's choices?

Think Big seeks to challenge negative stereotypes about young people. Such stereotypes derive from prejudicial and mostly ill-informed attitudes about how young people do behave and how adults believe young people *should* behave. Stereotypes about the attitudes and behaviour of young people are largely misplaced. The vast majority of young people, just like most adults, are sensible, law-abiding citizens who care about their families and communities and who prepare and plan for their future.

Recent evidence on young people's wellbeing is also generally very positive. Research shows that 72% of 10-11 year olds are happy compared with 62% of 14-15 year olds. The evidence is from a recent study by the National Foundation for Education Research reported that most children aged 10-15 are happy, and that levels of happiness are not strongly affected by family wealth. Children who are not on free school meals (the most common measure of child poverty) were only 7% more likely to say that "I feel happy about life at the moment". The factor that makes young people most unhappy is that they are worried about their parents.<sup>2</sup>

Basic aspirations amongst young people, irrespective of their backgrounds are quite uniform: most want a good education so that they can get a good job. Most want to have a good long-term relationship with someone they love, they want to live in a secure environment and with sufficient resource to be able to plan ahead; and if they have them now or intend to have them one day, they want the best opportunities for their children. While broad aspirations may be similar – horizons can be shorter or longer depending upon young people's position in relation to opportunities.

Better off families are able to circumvent many difficulties young people may face by providing young people a relatively affluent lifestyle, safer neighbourhoods where schools are better and where there is peer support and role models available for successful transitions. They are also in a position to support young people well into adult life by assisting them financially at university, providing help with entry into the housing market and employment, and also ensuring that the safe haven of the parental home is available to them – come what may.

For the least well qualified young people who live in multiply deprived areas problems are compounded and this group are at risk of becoming what Williamson (1997) termed 'Status Zer0' because they have profound and complex problems which raise the likelihood that

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<sup>2</sup> Shepherd, J. (2010) 'Poor children as happy as more affluent classmates', *Guardian*, 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2010.

they will become ‘lost in the transition from school to work’. Research shows that these young people can find themselves in situations which are largely ‘beyond individual control’ (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005: 199).

Figure 2.1 and Box 2.1 shows that structural, situational, relational and personal factors affect individual aspirations and opportunities. This does not mean that it is possible to predict how such factors will interact – or suggest that the outcomes of such interactions are inevitable.

Figure 2.1 Factors affecting young people’s life transitions

FACTORS AFFECTING AMBITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES			
STRUCTURAL FACTORS	SITUATIONAL FACTORS	RELATIONAL FACTORS	PERSONAL FACTORS
<p><b>Social &amp; Economic Change</b></p> <p><b>Social Priorities &amp; Political Climate</b></p> <p><b>Key institutions</b> (Education system Benefits system Employment Law Criminal Justice etc)</p> <p><b>Labour Market Opportunities</b></p>	<p><b>Local culture</b></p> <p><b>Housing &amp; neighbourhood</b></p> <p><b>Community safety &amp; cohesion</b></p> <p><b>Local politics &amp; economy</b></p> <p><b>Health &amp; wellbeing</b></p> <p><b>Sport, leisure &amp; recreation facilities</b></p>	<p><b>Family life</b> (Quality of relationships with Parents &amp; guardians)</p> <p><b>Peer groups Influences</b> (positive &amp; negative)</p> <p><b>Friendship networks</b></p> <p><b>Intimate Relationships</b></p>	<p><b>Individual Differences</b> (intelligence, health/ mental health, Physical/learning disabilities, etc)</p> <p><b>Aptitudes</b> Skills &amp; talents, attractiveness, etc.</p> <p><b>Personality</b> (Optimism/pessimism, extraversion/ Introversion, ambition, etc.).</p>

Source: van der Graaf and Chapman (2009)

It is important to recognise that events in young people’s lives (such as bereavement, homelessness, being a victim of crime or becoming involved in criminal activity, becoming drug dependant and so on) can undermine attempts to frame young people’s lives more positively. Thomson *et al.*, (2002) have described such incidents as ‘critical moments’ which can lead to unpredictable outcomes. But of course, there are positive critical moments too. And so, while it is important to recognise the potential impact of structural and situational factors which are largely out of young people’s control, it is important not to become unduly pessimistic. It is equally important to recognise that the choices and actions that young people take can make a positive difference to their lives.

## Box 2.1 Factors affecting young people's positive life choices

**Structural factors** are largely out of the control of individuals, such as the legal and bureaucratic frameworks which shape the way the education system works, or the structure of the labour market. Structural factors are not, of course, static. Consequently, we include in this category, the vagaries of social and economic change which can rapidly transform the landscape for young people. As noted above, at present most European countries are subject to dramatic economic changes which are operating on a global scale which will impact heavily at a local level in labour market terms.

**Situational factors** are the more immediate local circumstances within which young people live. While such factors may be subject to the influence of wider structural factors, they do nevertheless have enduring qualities of their own such as a sense of place, and local cultural factors which shape attitudes, expectation and behaviour (van der Graaf, 2009). Similarly, the demographic makeup of the local population can affect experiences, particularly the depth of community cohesion, issues of health and wellbeing, and so on. Similarly, perceptions about community safety and neighbourliness can affect attitudes and behaviour in positive or negative ways. Finally, the 'fabric' of the locality is also important in shaping young people's experiences. The availability of sport, leisure and youth recreation facilities, for example, can impact on quality of life.

**Relational factors** refer to the relative strength and weakness of inter-personal ties. Young people can experience relationships in positive and negative ways at the same time, of course. Some young people may have very supportive parental and sibling relationships and yet suffer poor peer group relationships (through, for example, pressure to engage in risky behaviour or to become the object of ridicule, ostracism or physical bullying). Others may experience destructive parental relationships and gain support from strong friendships and supportive peer group influences. Intimate relationships are also likely to impact on young people's life choices in positive or negative ways. In sum, relational factors are complex and unpredictable, but can have enormous impacts (in isolation or when taken together with other factors) on young people's life choices.

**Personality factors** are difficult to define and their impact on behaviour hard to predict and so, sociologists, often tend to steer clear of this issue when generalising about social attitudes and behaviour. It is not appropriate, however, to ignore the importance of temperament, otherwise there is a risk of imposing expectations on the impact of externalities on the individual. Even now, it may not be uncommon for professionals and practitioners effectively to define individual capabilities and thereby close down young people's avenues of opportunity. In reality, it is not possible to predict the impact of ill-health, disability, or bereavement on an individual's life trajectory. On the contrary, every individual has to work such events into their life story.

Making decisions about their own futures is hard for young people. Pressure is often brought to bear upon them to make these decisions before they are ready. Why do parents and other older adults have a tendency to expect young people to make firm choices about their futures? Adults are preoccupied with, for example, the long-term benefits of the vocational or academic courses young people choose to do and want to know what job (i.e. life-long career) will be gained as a consequence. Their sense of urgency for young people to make the 'right' choices may be misplaced. Exaggerated worries about risk taking and unreasonable expectations about young people making firm decisions too soon are understandable. Older adults generally face fewer choices and take fewer risks – their lives are more continuous. Furthermore, they construct the story of their own lives with the benefit of hindsight. In a sense, adults construct stories about their lives in such a way as to make them feel comfortable about who they are and what they have achieved. It is not surprising, then, that adults tend to expect young people to commit themselves to particular career routes far too early.

Attitudes about 'what is good for young people' may run deep – but this is not necessarily to say that the principles underlying them are sound. This is because the world that adults hope to prepare young people for, through socialisation, may have changed by the time young people arrive in it. Even some organisations which seek to support young people, sometimes operate anachronistic policies and practices which fail to serve the interests of those who are supposed to benefit simply because they have not yet 'caught up' with social change.

The essential point is that young people have to make many choices and in so doing must take risks. It is up to them how they do so, but it is helpful if they have the experience and confidence to choose wisely. Think Big provides a platform for young people to make choices, take risks and reap the benefits of doing something for themselves by themselves. So the justification for allowing and encouraging young people to define and lead their own projects in Think Big is, therefore, an important element of the programme. Not just because it helps young people achieve what they want – but also actively challenges the stereotypes of adults who may hold different views on what is useful and what should be valued.

## 2.3 Approach to the evaluation

There are many approaches which can be adopted to evaluate the social impact of projects. While there are variations on the theme there are, essentially, three basic approaches:

- Qualitative methodologies which assess impact through in-depth interview and observation of the young people, practitioners and community stakeholders who are associated with interventions.
- Quantitative methodologies which collect evidence on the biographical characteristics and social circumstances of young people and the employment of research instruments to test how attitudes and behaviour have changed across the life-time (and, preferably, beyond) of the project.
- Impact assessment measures (drawing upon either or both qualitative and quantitative evidence) which attempt to calculate the social benefit of a programme to society as a whole by calculating, usually in monetary terms, the added value gained above the initial financial investment.

This is a well resourced social evaluation project which will run over three years. Consequently, we are able to adopt all three approaches in order to provide a substantive and rigorous assessment of social impact.

The objective of this evaluation is to monitor and analyse programme progress on the indicators and targets set out by O<sub>2</sub> outlined above. The research also aims to demonstrate the impact of the programme in bringing new opportunities to young people and challenging negative stereotypes. The action research element of the evaluation involves our close integration into the programme in order to help enhance and deepen the impact of the intervention.

The evaluation has three levels:

- At the grass roots level with O<sub>2</sub> Think Big projects;
- At the local level to assess how Think Big impacts on the community;
- At the national level to evaluate the overall social impact of Think Big.

There are several sources of evidence which will be used in the evaluation:

- Collection of quantitative data on young people's biographical data drawn from the Think Big website to assess inclusivity of the programme and map these data with national indicators of multiple deprivation to assess project reach.
- Collection of quantitative data on young people's pro-social attitudes and expectations about the impact of their projects collected from the Think Big website at different stages of their project journey.
- Gathering photo-elicitation and project journey data collected from the Think Big Website to garner evidence for case studies and to inform in-depth interviews with young people.
- Gathering information on web usage through analysis of samples of projects.
- Observation and evaluation of training and mentoring of young people for Think Big and Think Bigger to assess how well they are prepared to undertake projects.
- In depth interviews with young people on a sample of project journeys throughout the life of the programme, focusing progressively on young people with different biographies.
- Research on national and regional partner organisations' contribution to Think Big to assess the impact of the programme as a whole and to identify and embed good practice across the programme.
- Selective community based studies on clusters of projects including interviews with community stakeholders surrounding main O<sub>2</sub> offices and in Tees Valley.
- Evaluate employee volunteering participation and experience through questionnaires, focus groups, observation and interview throughout the programme.
- Periodically undertake pilot work in localities to test new approaches and to progress the programme.

This report draws on a wide range of evidence which has been collected in 2010 including:

- 60 qualitative interviews with young people undertaking Think Big projects.

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- Collection of quantitative biographical and pro-social data from all participants in the Think Big programme.
- Participant observation at all programme boards, alliance groups, team development days.
- Analysis of a random sample of 100 Think Big projects on the website to assess patterns of usage.
- 11 qualitative interviews, 2 focus groups and a survey of 118 O<sub>2</sub> employee volunteers.
- 7 interviews with national partner organisations
- Participant observation of 3 Think Big (level 1) training days and 1 employee volunteer training day<sup>3</sup>
- Participant observation at Conservation Foundation at 5 project award meetings

In this report we are not able to provide clear indications of social benefit due to the small number of project completions. However, a methodology has been devised to achieve this in 2011 and will be reported upon in March 2012.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Level 2 'Think Bigger' residential have also been observed at Avon Tyrrell and Thirsk in early 2011, but we will report on this separately once the follow up interviews are complete.

<sup>4</sup> A number of detailed technical papers have been produced on all aspects of methodology which can be made available to readers on request.



## 3 The impact of Think Big

This long-term evaluation of the impact of Think Big has three levels: the benefits the programme brings to young people; the impact on communities in which young people's projects take place, and the influence of Think Big on the perceptions of young people in wider society. At this stage in the study, we have limited information on community and societal impact due to the small number of project completions. Analysis at these levels will come through in our reports in 2011 and 2012. At this stage of the evaluation, we focus mainly on the experiences of young people as they have moved through the programme and assess its impact on their personal and social development.

### 3.1 Impact on individuals

To measure the impact of Think Big on young people, a short questionnaire on pro-social attitudes was devised to gain insights about the value of the programme for developing personal and social skills. The questionnaire is based on a set of well established approaches to pro-social testing, and has been generated specifically for this programme to achieve the maximum return of data in a relatively limited space.<sup>5</sup>

The questionnaire is used at three points in the programme on the O2 Think Big website to allow for assessment of longer term impacts on individuals' participation:

- When their Level 1 project is awarded;
- At the end of their Level 1 project;
- At the end of their Level 2 project (if applicable).

Preliminary work on changes in social attitudes has been possible by comparing responses provided by young people at the start and at completion of their projects. Evidence at completion stage is currently limited as only 34 projects had finished by December 2010.<sup>6</sup>

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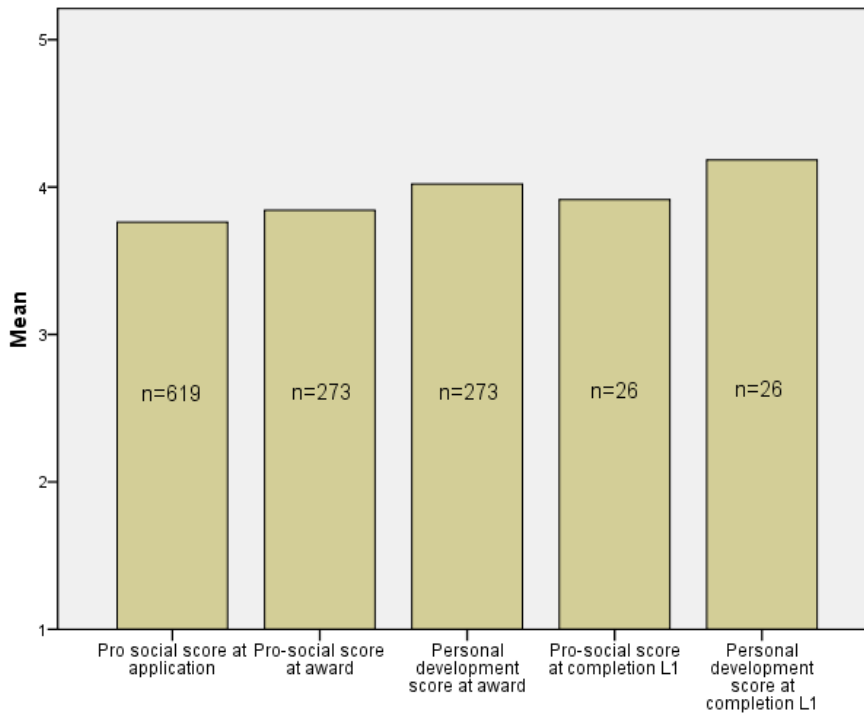
<sup>5</sup> A questionnaire was developed for young people to measure their progress in motivational terms. Indicators were collected that had a proven track record in previous research on youth participation so that we can compare our data with other programmes. These indicators were used to develop a short, two page questionnaire for young people with a number of statements on life satisfaction, self esteem, personal development and pro-social behaviour based on existing psychological tests of children's well-being. The scale on life satisfaction drew upon questions from a survey on child satisfaction (Huebner, Valois, Paxton and Drane, 2005). To measure personal development questions were adapted from the Curiosity Scale (CEI-T; Kashdan *et al.*, 2004). The scale captures two dimensions of personal development: "exploration" (the capacity for) and "flow", respectively the capacity for and the tendency to become absorbed in activities). Self-esteem is evaluated adapting questions from an established youth well-being scale (Huebner, 2001). Finally, pro-social behaviour is assessed based on a set of questions (Peterson, 2004) that identify how much children were using their 'character strengths' in their day-to-day lives. Two character strengths are identified through this scale that directly affect other people's well-being: interpersonal and civic strength.

<sup>6</sup> Of which, only 26 had completed pro-social questionnaires at the start at the end of the project. Website functionality problems did not make completion compulsory for the first few weeks of operation.

Conclusions drawn from findings are therefore indicative. As time goes on and more data are collected, it will be possible to make sound judgements about the personal and community benefits of doing a Think Big project.

Figure 3.1 shows that both in terms of pro-social behaviour and personal development, scores improve over time: young people generally report more confidence in social skills after they have completed their project. They are also in stronger agreement on the impact of their project on their personal development.

Figure 3.1 Average scores for pro-social and personal development scales



To find out in which areas young people felt they benefitted most, scores are compared on pro-social behaviour and personal development for each indicator (Table 3.1). Some interesting findings are emerging. The evidence shows that young people who have completed a Think Big project are developing their skills in many ways. For example, young people report that they were less likely to get bored (+16%), that the project has encouraged them to try new things (+8%) and from this, they hope to have new interests and hobbies (+12%).

A positive attitude to social engagement is also reflected in the responses to statements about their community. Young people already cared about their community before they started Think Big, and this has not changed, but they have become more passionate about their community (+4%). With this increased passion and commitment to their community, young people are more likely to take part or instigate positive activities in their community. These early findings suggest that Think Big may be able to make a valuable contribution to building of social capital and strengthening civil society.<sup>7</sup> A good example of this is Fife Youth Radio, Case Study 2 on page 32.

One of the most positive changes was having a different outlook. Reported responses to 'looking at the world in a different way' increased by 16%. This indicates that the project overall has encouraged young people to appreciate and take account of other perspectives.

<sup>7</sup> Currently there is too little data to explore this issue in depth, but in future reports we will employ a methodology developed for examining this in detail.



On the surface, some responses reported in Table 3.1 appear to be negative outcomes. For example, young people report lower levels of confidence in teamwork. But our qualitative analysis leads us to doubt that a literal reading of these data provides the right interpretation of the findings. What is happening is that young people have become more self aware by doing a Think Big project. Its practice has challenged individuals' untested views on their personal strengths as they have had to work hard to overcome hurdles. This growth of self-doubt will actually be more likely to strengthen their resolve to succeed in future.

Respondents said that their team work skills, their ability to take responsibility for a task and time management have all declined slightly (all by -4%). Doing a Think Big project may have required more skills than they anticipated, or they may have overestimated their skills at the start. However, more tangible changes in their understanding of ability resulted in more positive results – for example their ability to motivate others has improved significantly (+12%), suggesting that taking part in training and doing their project has helped young people to develop their leadership skills. And, as illustrated in Case Study 1, practically apply their skills and knowledge in order to support others (page 26).

Meeting people from other backgrounds also scored negatively (-4%). High expectations about meeting different people are not always met and this is not too much of a surprise, given that projects at Level 1 are usually relatively small with a short timescale. Some of these challenges are described in Case Study 3, pages 36-37. It will be interesting to see the results of this statement from those who complete Level 2 of the programme where projects are more ambitious and stretch over a longer time period. Level 2 also offers further opportunities to engage with people from different backgrounds, through the residential training and mentoring by O2 employees.

Qualitative data helps to make further sense of these findings.

***“I think I’ve gained confidence, a massive amount of self-confidence and also motivation; because by people investing in you, it’s not only the money, it’s the trust as well and also the support in terms of your ideas...”***

Taking responsibility for something, from planning to completion, is an important aspect of doing a Think Big project. For many young people, their Think Big project is the first time they have done anything like this – they take a leadership role and plan their project from start to finish. For others, it is the continuation of an idea, or an idea that has stemmed from something else they have been involved with. A Think Big project is a good place for a young person to learn about leadership and responsibility, as one young person discovered:

***“I have gained a lot of skills, because everything boils down to you...so if you do not do things, they just do not get done. So I have gained a lot of skills to do with that, sort of managing people [and] managing myself.”***

Other aspects of personal development that young people discussed related to communication skills. They include: public speaking skills; and, working with different people – particularly people with authority such as professionals or key stakeholders in the local community, such as members of the local council. They said that they were expected to communicate in ways that were new to them and this was sometimes out of their comfort zone. It was, however, a valuable experience.

Table 3.1 Changes in pro-social attitudes at the end of Level 1

	At award	At completion	Change
<b>Pro social attitudes and personal development</b>			
I tend to get bored pretty easily ( <i>[Strongly] disagree</i> )	52.0	68.0	<b>+16.0</b>
Quite often, I worry about my future ( <i>[Strongly] disagree</i> )	20.0	36.0	<b>+16.0</b>
I am not very good at motivating people ( <i>[Strongly] disagree</i> )	80.0	92.0	<b>+12.0</b>
I am pretty good at sticking at a task until it is finished ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	80.0	88.0	<b>+8.0</b>
I feel pretty strongly about issues in my local community ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	92.0	96.0	<b>+4.0</b>
I am pretty good at making decisions ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	84.0	84.0	<b>0</b>
I am pretty good at making decisions ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	84.0	84.0	<b>0</b>
I am not so good at team-work ( <i>[Strongly] disagree</i> )	84.0	80.0	<b>-4.0</b>
I am pretty good at taking responsibility for a task ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	96.0	92.0	<b>-4.0</b>
I am pretty good at organising my time ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	80.0	76.0	<b>-4.0</b>
<b>Perceived benefits of the project</b>			
The project will help/ has helped me to look at the world in a different way ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	64.0	80.0	<b>+16.0</b>
After I've done this project I (hope to) have some new interests and hobbies ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	68.0	80.0	<b>+12.0</b>
The project will help/ has helped me to try things I would not have tried before ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	72.0	80.0	<b>+8.0</b>
Doing the project will make/ has made me care more about my community ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	92.0	92.0	<b>0</b>
I will learn/ have learned new skills on the project I don't have now ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	88.0	84.0	<b>-4.0</b>
Doing the project will help/ has helped me meet people from different backgrounds than mine ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	88.0	84.0	<b>-4.0</b>
I think the project will make/ has made me feel more confident about my future ( <i>[Strongly] agree</i> )	88.0	80.0	<b>-8.0</b>

Respondents said that although they worry less about their future (+16%), they now feel less confident about their future (-8%). It is not possible to predict how external factors (such as widely known problems of youth unemployment, a weak economy, rising tuition fees, restructuring of Education Maintenance Allowance and so on) may have affected their response to the latter statement.

However, during the interviews, some young people explain that the project has helped them to prepare for their future, for instance, by helped them build their CV and make a good impression in job interviews.

***“During a job interview I had, I mentioned that I had received funding for a community project and...[this] has really helped me become an attractive candidate for employment...”***

Similarly, others reported how their achievement has been recognised and they have, on the back of their Think Big experience, been rewarded with further opportunities, such as temporary work or work experience.

*“I’ve gained temporary work as a marketing assistant and now I’ve become more employable via, like for fundraising jobs as well...”*

*“It’s kick started, I guess to things that...I wouldn’t be doing had I not done [my project] - I’m doing some assistant directing for [a well known company] this coming May...and I’m also doing some design work for a show at [a city theatre] which is on the back of meeting the people there...”*

## 3.2 Community impact

As noted in the previous section, young people feel more strongly about their community after doing a Think Big project. Young people were asked in more detail about how their project had involved their community and what impact their project may have had on others in their community.

Most young people said that by doing their project they had, in some way, increased their own involvement with their local community. Their Think Big projects provided young people in their community somewhere to go or with something positive to do, and more usually, both. And this has not gone unnoticed by their communities.

*“...it makes me feel good knowing that there’s people in my class and they’re not down the street smoking and everything else that they would normally be doing. It’s opened a few people’s eyes as to how important fitness actually is [...] There’s more people saying “alright Katie” as I walk past and taking an interest into how it’s doing because the local parish council have been quite good at writing articles about my group and putting it in the local [newsletter].”*

*“People in the local community have seen me around doing what I’m doing, they’re being engaged and I’m actually having conversations with them...”*

Young people said that one of the main ways that their project had impacted the community was the growth of understanding and appreciation by others. By doing their project they have raised awareness of issues that interest young people. Young people reported that this was done through campaigning, by being active in their community, by being visible while doing positive activities, and, by working with other age groups. Raising awareness of an issue was the aim of Case Study 4, the Homelessness and the Arts project (page 39).

Young people also stated how their activities have encouraged other young people to go out and do something similar: suggesting a positive ripple effect. This has sometimes resulted in new Think Big projects. Furthermore, some of the older participants in Think Big have become positive role models for younger people in their community. This suggests significant potential for the role of Think Big alumni to encourage others to get involved and do something positive in their community. They can play a role of inspiring and motivating other young people to get active and try something new. This could have a profound effect on communities.

*“It’s given people that didn’t think of doing anything the actual drive to do something... because if they see someone that’s roughly the same age as them*

*going out there and doing it as well, it gives them the kind of motivation to do it as well...”*

*“...it has certainly changed some people’s lives, given them a better direction... they have now joined [other groups] because of that and [it] has really stimulated their minds and given them a better understanding of what’s out there in the world and it’s not all about computer games and TV, so that’s probably one of the best results of running the project.”*

*“it’s all about role modelling and saying you don’t have to be naughty to get attention, you can do really positive things and learn skills and develop people, you know and be rewarded for that rather than making a fool of yourself and do whatever it is that other people do.”*

Others felt that their project has had more limited horizons and that its impact was aimed at individuals rather than the community as a whole – but it is clear to us that the indirect benefits are considerable:

*“...it hasn’t benefitted the whole community, it was those who wanted to come to the classes, it’s brought them together and opened them up to [other people].”*

Many young people said that they faced challenges when trying to get involved in their communities. Some people in the community were not open to what they were trying to achieve and initial interest in their projects was sometimes limited – but they worked hard to overcome this.

*“Initially it was hard to drum up interest at the beginning of the holidays... but we were quite lucky that one of the papers came down and took some photos and that really helped... and then we dropped some of the publicity off at the local schools and that helped us and it went quite well.”*

Young people showed resilience in trying to get their communities to engage with their projects and sometimes changed the emphasis of their project to meet the needs of specific people in their communities. This often involved being pro-active by getting friends involved and encouraging them to spread the word. Others contacted influential people in their communities or contacted people that were involved in their issue or were working on a similar project. As young people progress onto Think Bigger it is likely that the depth of community involvement and impact will increase as projects scale up. We will report on progress in next year’s report.

### **3.3 Wider society impact**

By involving their local communities and getting their projects noticed, young people say that they have changed perceptions of young people in their communities. Through demonstrating their activities – being seen to do something positive - perceptions of young people have been challenged. These small scale changes provide important first steps of meaningful engagement across generations and changed opinions about each other in different localities. Working with other generations has helped different age groups to form new opinions of each other, both as individuals and as groups.

*“...one of the old women in the group said ‘I used to see you all the time, hanging around with so and so all the time, you used to look terrible and causing trouble but actually you’re quite a nice young chap’ so you know they’ve got to know them a little bit better, give them the time of day, it’s not all about violence and graffiti.”*

***“Everyone knows me round here now - I went into town for a sun bed the other day and this woman said ‘oh you wouldn’t happen to be the dance teacher would you?’ - it’s not to the point where I can’t go to the toilet without the paparazzi on my back! – but people know who I am.”***

As the programme progresses, we hope to see the effect of this more clearly. However, young people were also realistic about the wider society impact of their project. Some said that they realised that changing perceptions can only happen over time and will not change immediately just because they have done a Think Big project. Others said that, though this was the aim of their project, it had not been as successful as they would like.

***“I don’t think it’s changed it for the longer term because it was a shorter project, but it gave kids an insight into what is around in the community and it raised the profile of other things going on in the community which was useful... I’m not going to say it has changed yet because it’s a continuous thing you can’t just change things instantly forever, you can set objectives and try and get a bit better at stuff.”***

Reading this quotation carefully reveals that the recognition of missed potential has the desired effect of nurturing hope and building the motivation to get it right at the next stage.

### 3.4 The potential of photo-elicitation

One of the ways that we are investigating how O<sub>2</sub> Think Big changes how young people think about their own lives and their community is through photo elicitation. In its simplest form, photo-elicitation uses photographs within an interview situation to prompt discussion. This usually involves using photographs that have been generated by the researcher. Here we are using photographs that have been taken by the young people of things that are related to their project and that they have uploaded onto their Think Big web page.

So far, the results of photo-elicitation with young people have been patchy. Initially, only a small number of young people have been uploading photographs onto their web page. Dunkerley (2010) found that 70 per cent of those who had a Think Big web page had not posted any images and only 2 per cent of those sampled had posted seven or more photos on their web page. Following encouragement from the partnership, young people’s engagement with the website is now increasing.

As more young people become engaged with the programme, their web page, and move on to Think Bigger, this data collection method will become more valuable. It will be extremely useful for evaluating the young person’s perception of their community and how this may have changed throughout the length of the project, and beyond. This element of the research has the potential to provide rich descriptions and perceptions by young people of their experiences through their own visual representation of the project. Over time, the images can be used as a prompt for young people to reflect on how doing their project may have changed their perception of themselves, of others, of their community, and others perceptions of them. It will help them to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of their project and what it has meant to them and their community.

This method complements the longitudinal nature of the evaluation. We will be able to revisit young peoples’ photos over time so that they can reflect further on their experiences and also give the young person the option of generating new photographs to supplement, or replace, their original ones which can then be discussed.



### 3.5 Summary

Preliminary findings suggest that the main impact of O<sub>2</sub> Think Big has been on the development of personal and social skills of young people. Young people learn new skills and become more self aware. This has not gone unnoticed by local communities who acknowledge the positive activities of young people. This also appears to be having a ripple effect on other young people in their communities who become inspired to get involved in their communities.

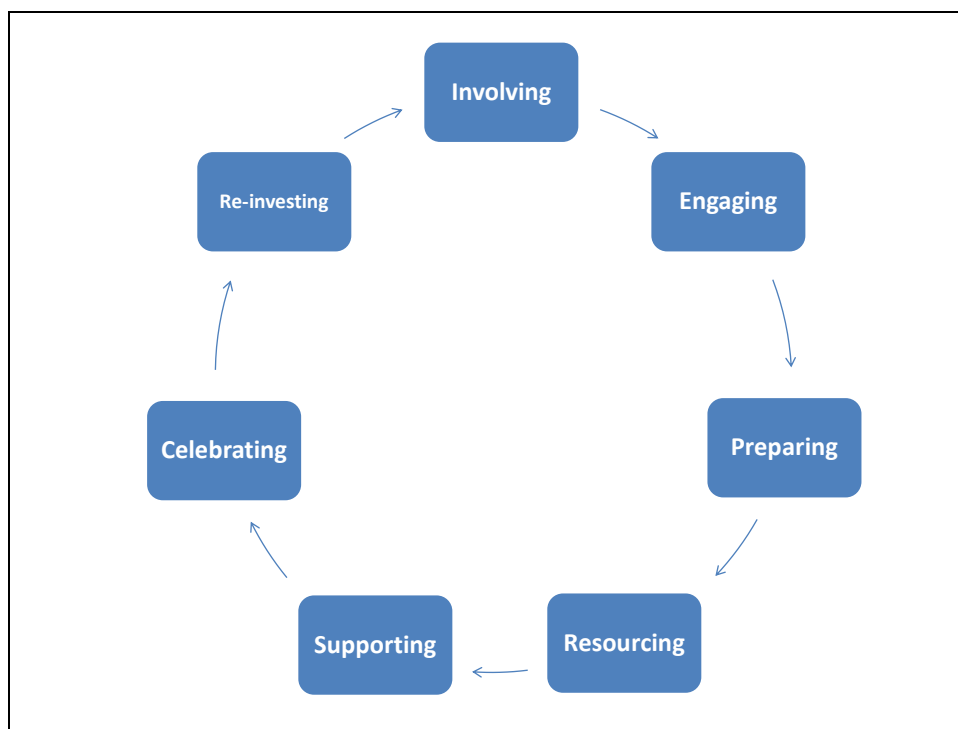
Data collected on the pro-social attitudes of young people suggest that young people who have completed their Think Big project show that they are more likely to try new things and engage further with other activities. They have also increased their passion and commitment to their community, and are therefore more likely to take part or instigate positive activities in their community. One of the most positive changes was that their Think Big project encouraged young people to appreciate and take account of others' perspectives.

Other responses indicate that young people have become more self aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses by doing a Think big project. Their project may have required more skills than they anticipated, or they may have overestimated their skills at the start. However, their ability to motivate others has improved significantly, suggesting that taking part in training and doing their project has helped young people to develop their leadership skills. High expectations about meeting different people were not always met, because of the scale of Think Big projects and the short time scale within which they operate. It is important to observe young people's experiences of Think Bigger projects carefully to see if the breadth and depth of impact is increased.

## 4 The project journey

The aim of this section is to evaluate the progress of young people as they make their journey through Think Big. Figure 4.1 illustrates the life cycle of a Think Big project. As discussed in the introduction to this report, at each stage, young people are supported in a range of ways, so that they can make a successful project journey. In the evaluation of the progress Think Big has made in its first year, we discuss each of these stages drawing upon a range of evidence which has been collected.

Figure 4.1 The Think Big project journey



At each stage we comment on how well the programme has worked in 2010 and then make observations on how the programme is evolving to ensure that its objectives are fully met.

## 4.1 Involving young people in Think Big

Think Big was launched in 2010. This began with an internal corporate launch in January, followed by a national external media campaign in March. The internal launch was devised mainly to inform employees of the company's new corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme, to capture their interest and encourage involvement in the programme. They did this in several ways including news on the O<sub>2</sub> intranet and more obviously with giant posters to attract attention to the campaign (see image).



Think Big banner, Bath Road O<sub>2</sub> offices, Slough.

The external launch of the programme came in March 2010, when a large scale media campaign was carried out and articles appeared in youth magazines such as *Children and Young People Now*, in O<sub>2</sub> promotional material and on their website.

Raising awareness of the programme through media campaigns was an important method of drawing attention to Think Big. The programme received a good deal of press and radio attention. This media coverage alerted youth organisations, faith groups, schools and other stakeholders who, in turn, let young people know about the programme and encouraged them to apply.

The evidence from the evaluation shows that the most common way that young people got to know about Think Big was usually by a youth or community worker or from a youth or voluntary based funding bulletin. In other cases, young people found out about Think Big by doing a search for funding on the internet.

Involving young people in the programme is achieved through the Think Big website. The website has been constructed to inform young people how to apply online for entry to the programme. The application process was developed with simplicity in mind, to avoid dissuading young people from entering the process and to ensure that young people with poorer levels of literacy would not be excluded.

The application process required young people to provide information about their proposed project, about themselves and also to supply details of two referees who would support their application. In addition to the request for basic biographical data, so that the



programme could be monitored successfully, young people were also asked to complete a short questionnaire to provide information about pro-social attitudes, to assess their confidence and resilience, and the anticipated benefits of doing a Think Big project.

Following application, a telephone interview was arranged by Conservation Foundation with young people. At this stage of the process, young people were encouraged to explain what they wanted to do and to think about the appropriateness of its ambition in relation to the amount of money invested. Young people's ability to achieve their objectives was also assessed informally at this stage – drawing upon information in the application process, the interview and follow up phone calls with referees. Conservation Foundation assessed projects using a set of common criteria which made observations on the candidates' potential, the potential social impact of the project and whether or not there were any unreasonable risks associated with the project which may need to be referred to the programmes safeguarding and risk assessment officer at National Youth Agency.

Observation of the process demonstrates that Conservation Foundation undertake interviews with a good measure of informality and friendliness. At the same time, they are alert to cues about the intentions and motivations of young people and make sound judgements on whether applicants are fully ready to enter the programme. Using their skills, developed in a previous O<sub>2</sub> corporate social responsibility programme 'It's Your Community' which operated for several years before Think Big was established, Conservation Foundation have brought many projects on from poorly articulated plans to potentially successful projects which can enter the programme.

In 2010, Conservation Foundation held monthly decision making meetings to appraise the latest cohort of applications and made awards on the basis of their readiness and potential for success. Participant observation of these meetings, preceded by pre-reading of project applications, provide clear evidence of strong capability to make good judgements against the set criteria established by National Youth Agency for project inclusion.

On the basis of experience in the first year of operation, it is now evident that the 'bar' to entry has been too high when the level of financial investment is considered. And while existing measures to allow entry to the programme will undoubtedly lead ultimately to a high level of project completion – this may work against the overall aims of achieving project volumes. A higher level of risk taking, in sum, is the conclusion drawn from the evaluation if the requisite number of projects is to be achieved via open applications. While the approach adopted in 2010 was reasonably stringent, this is not to say that young people who successfully entered the programme felt in any way limited or discouraged.

The support offered and given by Conservation Foundation is valued by young people. Being available at the end of the phone for personal contact with young people across the UK enriches the experience of Think Big for young people. They value the personal contact and assistance that is given, and it is recognised that this can help get their ideas off the ground. For example, one young person explained how they helped him develop his idea:

***“I wouldn't have had this idea properly and developed it if it wasn't for Think Big, if Think Big hadn't kind of helped me open up what my original seed of an idea was to what it became.”***

Box 4.1 Case study 1

## Daddy Cool Project, London

### Using skills and knowledge – positive support and activities for others

Emma is 22 and a graduate in Events Management. When applying for jobs, Emma was constantly told that she needed to get more experience. Her response was to set up her project: She is the founder and project co-ordinator of a young dad's project in London. Emma explained why she decided to do this project:

*"The aim of my project is to promote the positive side of dads - not all dads on weekends are bad dads, it's just the situation that they are in at the moment...and not just from the dad's perspective but to encourage mums as well to support the project because it takes that kind of relationship from both parents to make the partnership work successfully."*

*"Basically I found a need within my local community...fathers, young fathers in particular, weren't getting a lot of positive promotion, and they were unaware of the other organisations that were out there to support them - so that need and my skills..."*

On being female and leading a project that focuses on dads, Emma said: *"You don't have to be part of the problem to be part of the solution...fatherhood affects us all even if it's a female individual not having a father there, or having him there affects your life and your upbringing."*

Emma runs workshops and other sessions aimed at Dads and used her Think Big funding to set up the project's website and towards printing promotional literature. Feedback and experiences from the sessions are recorded as 'vox-pops' and these are then put on to the website to share with others.



Emma described one of the images of a workshop from her webpage: *"Basically that picture just depicts that, it's fun, its creative and it kind of looks cool in a weird way - a jam session where everyone is relaxed but we still cover very important, quite touching issues, but it's in a relaxed [way], it's a kind of gathering of family in some respects."*

### Using and making contacts

Emma has taken advantage of her existing contacts to publicise her project. This has included a contact from a previous internship which helped her get an article published in the local press. Emma has also begun working with other organisations in the local area. For example, for one event she was able to borrow equipment and as a result of making contacts in the community, the event was held on a 'community day' in a local centre, keeping the cost to a minimum and within the funding given by another organisation.

However, this has not prevented Emma's project from being affected by external forces – in this case, the recession. The library where she was holding the sessions is no longer able to accommodate the group: *"we were using the local library, but now because of the credit crunch and the cuts they can't afford to give it to us for free anymore, so we have to try and find another location where we can host the workshop sessions."*

## 4.2 Engaging young people in Think Big

This section shows how successful Think Big has been in 2010 in achieving its objectives statistically. Table 4.1 lists the number of applicants and the percentage of projects which were awarded in 2010.<sup>8</sup> The majority of applications in 2010 were 'open'<sup>9</sup> (80.9%). This is because it has taken time to engage national and regional partner organisations fully with the programme (see a discussion of this process in Section 5).

The prospects for increasing the number of projects from partner organisations in 2011 are good and it is anticipated that they may provide over half of all applications in future. Similarly, the number of projects referred by O<sub>2</sub> Helpers (employee volunteers) are currently low, but once employee volunteers engage with the programme more fully in 2011 it is anticipated that numbers will rise significantly. A discussion of the involvement and role of O<sub>2</sub> Helpers can be found in Section 5.

Table 4.1 **Applications received**

Source of application	All applications n=	Completed applications n=	Awards n=	% projects awarded
Open applications	1,724	694	230	33.1
National partner organisations	8	8	5	62.5
Regional partner organisations	13	13	11	84.6
Named youth organisations	209	196	68	34.6
Other youth organisations	111	102	35	34.3
O <sub>2</sub> Helpers referrals	66	60	10	16.6
<b>Total applications</b>	<b>2131</b>	<b>1073</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>33.4</b>

Success rates of all applications look low in Table 4.1. The reason for this is that almost half of applications (49.6%) are not completed by young people. By the end of 2010, 1,057 applications were still in the 'drafting stage'. When incomplete applications are discounted, the award rate is therefore more accurate.

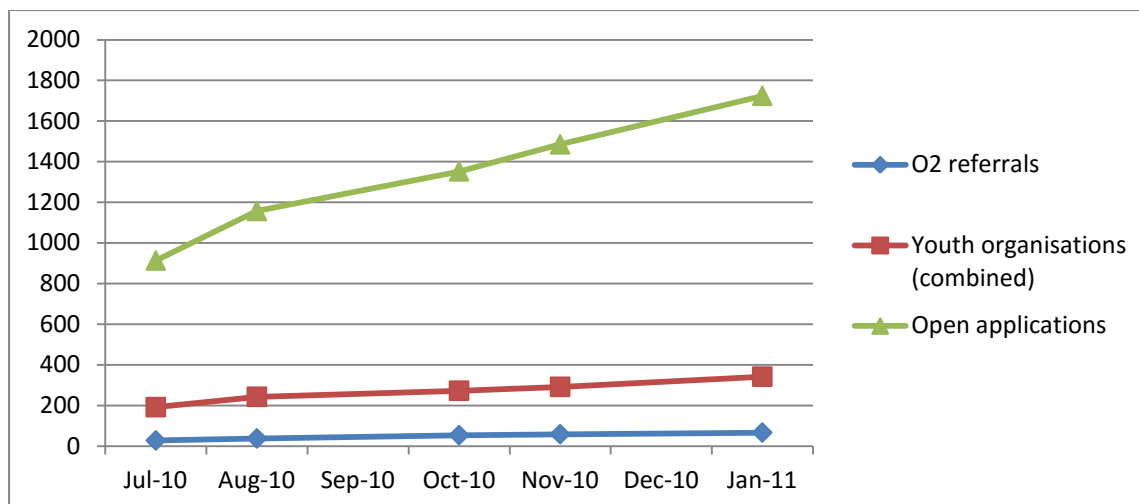
Success rates from regional and national partner organisations, though low in number at present, are high at 84% and 62% respectively. Other open applications (even if supported by youth organisations) have a success rate of about one third. These findings emphasise the importance of increasing the throughput of applications from partner organisations if overall project targets are to be met (see Section 5 for a further discussion).

<sup>8</sup> The applications were all submitted in 2010. The December applications were processed on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2010 by Conservation Foundation.

<sup>9</sup> Applications by unaffiliated young people.

Figure 4.1 shows that there has been steady progress in growing the number of applications in 2010. It is anticipated that numbers should ‘take off’ in mid 2011 when national and regional partner organisations work more intensively on the programme.

Figure 4.1 Cumulative Think Big application numbers in 2010



O2 Think Big aims to fund 850 projects by the end of 2011, of which at least 50% of open applications and 80% of youth partner organisation applications are to be located in deprived communities. The data collected in 2010 suggests that the programme will continue to be successful in reaching less advantaged young people.

Table 4.2 Applications and awards in England by IMD

	All applications N=	% of applications	All awards N=	% of all awards
Decile 1 (least affluent)	344	20.6	62	21.1
Decile 2	311	18.6	51	17.3
Decile 3	205	12.3	41	13.9
Decile 4	178	10.6	33	11.2
Decile 5	134	8.0	15	5.1
Decile 6	98	5.9	22	7.5
Decile 7	104	6.2	21	7.1
Decile 8	122	7.3	21	7.1
Decile 9	92	5.5	13	4.4
Decile 10 (most affluent)	84	5.0	15	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>*1672</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>*294</b>	<b>100.0</b>

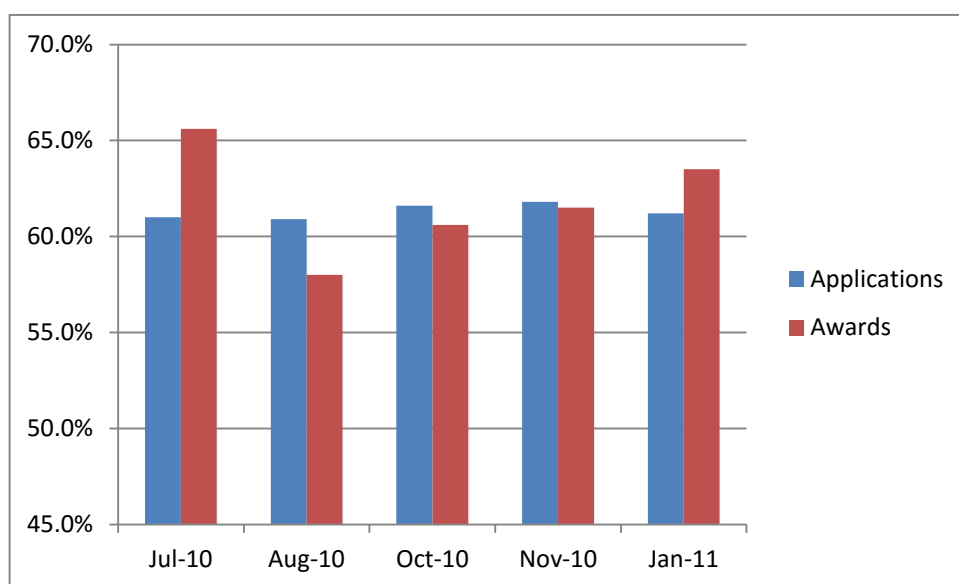
\* Only data for England is used as deciles are not comparable across countries because different indicators are used in each country. For 77 applications and 7 awards in England, IMD level is not available.

Currently the programme is achieving above target on the number of applications and awards from deprived communities. Table 4.2 shows the success rate of applications and awards using the Index of Multiple Deprivation in England. These data are reassuring,

because it is clear that the targets set for attracting young people from less affluent backgrounds are easily being reached: 62.1% of applicants and 63.5% of awards are from the four most deprived deciles. This is 13.5% over the programme target of 50%. Particularly encouraging is the high percentage of awards in the most disadvantaged areas (decile 1; 21.1%).

Figure 4.2 shows that Think Big is continuously achieving its targets of less affluent young people and indicates that award rates have increased for the most deprived areas (decile 1-4) between August 2010 and January 2011.

**Figure 4.2 Applications and awards in England in IMD Deciles 1-4, July 2010-January 2011**



The Index of Multiple Deprivation is a good indicator of the level of affluence of applicants. However, it is important to ensure that the programme is inclusive on other biographical dimensions. Table 4.3 demonstrates that the programme is inclusive.

- Males and females are almost equally likely to apply and success in achieving an award is broadly similar.
- By age, it is apparent that 13-16 year olds are the least likely to apply (23%). The number of applications rises with age, with over 40% of applications coming from the over 21s.
- Successes in achieving awards by age are broadly similar, although 17-20 year olds appear to be a little more successful (39%) than their older counterparts (36.5%).
- The programme is successful in attracting applications from ethnic minorities. Application and award rates are particularly good for black young people with 11.9% of applicants and 14.2% of awards.
- Young people with disabilities are also applying in relatively large numbers.

Data on young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) are hard to disentangle from the data set. Of those young people who are above the age of leaving compulsory education, 61% of young people applying for Think Big and 66.4% of those awarded are in education or training. 36.8% of young people applying and 30.7% of those awarded are in full time or part time employment. We estimate that 204 (9.6%) young people are NEET. Of these 204 applications, 46 were awarded, which shows that NEET young people have a higher than average success rate (22.5%). However, many young people (55.5%) did not answer the question on employment which skews the NEET number significantly. Furthermore, the NEET category would include those young people who are taking a 'gap year' before, during or after leaving university or college.

Table 4.3 **Biographical characteristics of applicants and awards**

	Applications		Awards	
	Count	%	Count	%
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	1081	50.8	178	49.6
Female	1049	49.2	181	50.4
<b>Age</b>				
13 – 16	488	23.0	88	24.5
17 – 20	719	33.8	140	39.0
21 – 25	918	43.2	131	36.5
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	1495	70.2	244	68.0
Black	254	11.9	51	14.2
Asian	186	8.7	32	8.9
Chinese	22	1.0	4	1.1
Mixed	122	5.7	21	5.8
Other	51	2.4	7	1.9
<b>Disabled</b>				
Yes	73	3.5	12	3.4
No	2006	96.5	344	96.6
<b>Education/ Training</b>				
In PT or FT	1280	61.0	235	66.4
Not in PT or FT	817	39.0	119	33.6
<b>Employment*</b>				
In PT or FT	438	36.8	79	30.7
Not in PT or FT	753	63.2	178	69.3

\*A large number of data are missing from this category, likely due to applicants not considering this to relevant or applicable.

The analysis shows that the programme is progressing well on all inclusion indicators. In particular, applications from deprived neighbourhoods and black young people are above average. The volume of applications remains lower than expected at present and this is being addressed by the core programme team. There is considerable potential for increasing applications through stronger engagement with youth partner organisations and by employing the energy of O2 Helpers. These points are discussed in Section 5.



## Box 4.2 Case study 2

### Fife Youth Radio, Scotland

#### Community engagement

Ricky is 16 years old and runs an online radio station in Scotland. Ricky's interests in radio started when he began volunteering for his local hospital radio as part of his Duke of Edinburgh's Award. This interest led to further professional training and he is keen to pass on these skills to others. He is also involved in various other youth organisations and dedicates his time to sharing the skills he has gained with other people.

The aim of his Level 1 Think Big project was to make young people aware of what's on offer in their local area by providing an interactive 'what's on' guide. When asked why he wanted to set up his project, he said *"young people are always complaining about having nothing to do, well our aim is to change that"*.

The radio station is run by and is dedicated to young people. They can tune in to hear information on local youth projects, sports clubs, gigs, youth clubs and workshops. As well as listening to the station, young people volunteer and present an hour slot on the radio once a week. Ricky runs workshops to provide young people with the training they need to run their show.



#### Community impact and engagement

Ricky started the project with a friend and now has up to 12 young people volunteering at the radio station each week. The fact the radio station is broadcast online makes it more assessable to young people. By the end of their first month of broadcasting, they had received 3,847 hits on the website.

As well as bringing young people together, Ricky has managed to involve other members of the community in the project: the local Police Community Support Officers, youth workers, local councillors, local schools and also Members of Scottish Parliament have shown support for his project.

Ricky's project has been so successful that many more young people are trying to get involved, but with a limited number of resources he cannot take them on and is having to turn them away. This has led to one of Ricky's volunteers applying for (and being awarded) her own Think Big project to try and expand what the group can offer to young people.

#### Level 2 – Think Bigger

Ricky has high ambitions and has taken his project a step further by continuing doing Level 2 Think Bigger. This time he aims to include more activities for young people to get involved in. Using his networking skills, Ricky has already recruited a drama teacher, a dance teacher, sports coaches and people trained in the media industry, who have all volunteered to do workshops with young people. Ricky hopes his Level 2 project will give young people something to do in their community and the workshops will help young people learn vital skills that could help towards employment opportunities.



### 4.3 Preparing young people to do their Think Big projects

The Think Big programme in 2010 provided training for all young people in the programme. This involved young people booking a place on a one day training course in a location as close as possible to where they live. Training support was provided by UK Youth across the whole of the UK.

Training involved helping young people in a number of ways:

- Networking with other young people on Think Big.
- Practical information and advice on project planning and budgeting.
- Advice and guidance on safety and assessing risk.
- An opportunity to present their ideas to focus their minds and build confidence.

Participant observation of the training element of the programme show that the programme was beneficial for young people because it supported them in their Think Big project journey in practical terms. Evaluation of training indicate two main areas of benefit for young people: meeting fellow Think Big awardees and building the right skills, confidence and motivation to complete their project.

Making links and connections with other young people on Think Big was a well liked aspect of training. Training days helped to achieve this by staging interactive sessions to encourage young people from different places, backgrounds and ages to mix and learn about other projects. Often, young people exchanged contact details to keep in touch about each others' projects, to take part in other projects, to give each other support and simply to make friends. Spending time with others helped young people focus project aims and learn other ways of doing things. Probably the most important aspect of training was that it endorsed the worthiness of their ideas and demonstrated O<sub>2</sub>'s investment in them.

*"The workshop was really good and interesting. We learned a lot from each other. The other kids' ideas were all so different and that really helped...and was really interesting. The best thing was learning what other people were doing and getting advice from other young people. It helped definitely to think more clearly about my own project..."*

*"...hearing other people's opinions and getting their view on it, it's really insightful, it's like an outside perspective..."*

The training bolstered young people's confidence to meet and engage with young people who have different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives and was highly valued as one of the main ways that they gained benefit from doing a Thing Big project.

The main skills that young people learned on the training day were budgeting and project management skills, so focusing their ideas and project planning. These skills helped them anticipate and resolve problems that they may face when they were carrying out their project.

As part of the Think Big programme, young people had to identify five milestones to track their progress and record on their web page. Defining milestones was difficult for many young people and the training helped them think clearly about how they could plan different phases of their work and have clear indicators of achievement so that they could move onto the next part of the project.

One aspect of training which was particularly helpful in this process was the 'snakes and ladders' activity. This involved identifying possible obstacles and challenges and to think about how they could deal with them.

***"[Snakes and Ladders training] was really good, we were rushing ahead a bit quick [but] the workshop made us think about things in steps, breaking things down into do-able bite-sized pieces."***

***"...training literally focused me and gave me a definite direction..."***

***"It helped me plan the event more to sort of put it into stages because the milestones that you use it gives you five steps that you need to complete to have your project successful, and I think that's a good way to do it to see what you need to do..."***

The training did not just provide support in developing a step-by-step approach to the project, but also helped them get a realistic idea of what they could achieve, how to get their project up and running, sustain it and complete it. This may have been one of the most important ways of increasing their ability to reflect on what they were doing and raise self-awareness – albeit with the unintended consequence of lowering, to some extent, their self-perception of confidence (see Section 4).

Training was strongly valued once young people attended, but there were some difficulties in arranging training days resulting in quite long waiting times. This could frustrate young people who were very eager to get on with their project.

***"...there was so much trouble getting up to the training... There was no training near us...I mean I live near London but I had to go to Birmingham for my training."***

***" Well it took a while to actually get hold of Think Big, communication wasn't very good at certain times, like for the training dates, it took a good couple of months before we actually knew when we were going on our training days and where it was and stuff like that..."***

The programme was not completely inflexible, however, and where there was strong levels of confidence about capability some projects were able to proceed.

***"...they didn't have any courses running around the time we were doing the project so they agreed to fund the project so we did the project before the course...."***

Timing of training also had to be re-scheduled as the programme developed to meet young people's preference to have training at weekends. Weekends were preferred to avoid taking time out of school, college or work.

***"...the only thing that was a problem for us was when they were doing our training event. Most of the dates that they were selecting were school dates. I'm not at school any more, I'm at college, but the dates that they were running training were days I was at college, so it's difficult for people to take time out of school..."***

The distance required to travel to training could be inconvenient for some young people and raised the cost of delivering the programme. In some cases, young people had no experience of longer-distance travel and found the prospect overwhelming. As one support worker said after the young person she was assisting had dropped out of the programme:

***"...the prospect of undertaking this kind of activity for a young person who has low self-esteem, limited horizons or special needs is too challenging. This is exacerbated where isolated geography is involved as training events tend to***

***take place in central locations, meaning that the young person will be worried about travelling to the event.”***

Similarly, parents' of younger applicants were wary of them travelling longer distances. In some cases, wariness was due to cultural or religious reasons which disallowed girls from mixing with young men. The programme was able to fund adults to accompany younger people to training where necessary and this assisted many. But costs were high relative to the value brought to the programme as a whole. This was recognised by young people in the programme:

***“We had to go to one which was in London and the money they actually spent on the travel for us, that could be put into funding more projects, because they paid for three of us to go and I think that was £230 and that is like nearly the amount one project is given. So they have spent a lot of money on travel. What would be better is if they could do them closer, where a lot of people are.”***

In summary, evaluation evidence shows that training was a more important source of support for some young people than others. Many of the better educated, older and more confident young people (particularly those who were on university courses or who had already completed degrees) clearly had a higher level of capability. While they were not frustrated by the requirement to attend training and gained some benefit from it in networking terms and for framing project scope and ambition – it was clear that many could have progressed their projects without such an intensive day. Drawing upon web-based information and support may, for example, have been sufficient to help them learn and show that they had a good project plan and the ability to see it through.

Ultimately, it was recognised that training provision as initially planned for all participants in the programme was too ambitious, costly and for some young people a barrier to involvement. As a consequence, it is now recognised that support has to be tailored more closely to individual needs and this is being built into plans for 2011.

#### **4.4 Resourcing Think Big projects**

The direct investment of £300 by O<sub>2</sub> in Think Big projects is not a large sum of money. However, it is clear from the evaluation that this investment was appreciated, by young people, above and beyond its cash value. Young people felt that O<sub>2</sub> had invested commitment in them. As Zelitzer (1989) notes money is valued in different ways. Earned money, money from government benefits, family gift money and so on clearly have 'strings attached'. These obligations can mean that money is valued in a negative way, rather than a positive one. Benefits, for example, can be valued in a negative way because of the lack of social worth attached to 'subsistence' support. O<sub>2</sub> Think Big project grants, by contrast, would fall into what Zelitzer calls a 'special money' category. It is not like a 'windfall' from the lottery or gambling which does not carry social legitimacy, but instead represents investment by an organisation which is valued.

Young people said that they were very grateful of the opportunity that O<sub>2</sub> has given them, enabling them to do something that they are passionate about, raise awareness of an issue, or want to do in their community. Many of them talked about how they valued the money and trust invested by O<sub>2</sub> and how this had been a significant factor in their personal development.

*“I think young people are underestimated about what they can do and what they can’t do, I think it’s right that [Think Big] aims are to broaden horizons and break down stereotypes, I think it’s a good thing that they are giving young people a chance to actually do something good for themselves rather than stay at home and play computer games or having to scrape together pennies just to do things, actually give them a chance...”*

### Box 4.3 Case study 3

## SOAP: Salford Opera Action Performance

### Personal and community impact

Katherine is aware that most people’s perception of opera is *“high art, upper class and inaccessible”*. The aim of her project was to get people who had no previous experience of opera involved in a performance. The project involved organising and delivering workshops, working towards an end performance. Opera is Katherine’s passion but doing this project was a new experience for her: *“Before I started this project I hadn’t done anything other than work experience and studying it and watching it.”*

One of the main challenges that Katherine faced was getting people engaged with the project. She had hoped to involve disadvantaged young people, but came across difficulties accessing them: *“I think I had it in my head that I was going to get really challenging 18 year olds and it just didn’t happen because I just couldn’t access them”*. This challenge was overcome by a contact who introduced her to the leader of an outreach centre who agreed to help her recruit participants from the local area. This support was invaluable for getting people engaged, as Katherine said:

*“[The outreach centre leader] agreed to support it...which was brilliant because then you’ve got someone that people trust and already know...because it was a massive ask for people to come along and get involved in something that was so alien, from their experiences.”* Through this support, Katherine was able to recruit ten people to take part. However, in order to make the production as professional as possible, Katherine also needed to recruit an orchestra, a choir, dancers and other actors to be involved in the performance. For this she used known contacts and other companies from within the city.



## The performance

The aim of the performance was for the participants to “*experience what a professional performance could be like*”. The most significant part of the performance for Katherine was a scene where the different groups of performers are on stage together (see image). Of the image, Katherine said:

*“it’s two of the groups together and that bit was all about, they were speaking about the different communities within their area... they spoke about this division and the idea of them winding the ropes, the idea was of the community working together and the forming some cohesive whole... so I think for me this is one where I think yay, everything comes together, quite nicely!”*

## Personal impact

Katherine gained personally from her project through positive peer feedback. The musicians and artists affirmed her skills, giving her confidence in her own abilities: *“I think that for me to do something like this, something creative and to direct is completely terrifying and...actually it turns out that people thought it was good so that has been the penny dropping that actually I could do this!”*

Being awarded Think Big funding has also given Katherine confidence in her ideas:

*“The trust that [o2] are giving young people, I don’t think I could have done any of this without being trusted , I don’t need help organising things and I don’t need help learning to speak...but I do need the trust.”*

## Community impact

Katherine’s project did not impact upon her community as much as she would have liked. However, it has benefited the community in two ways. Firstly, the impact for the local residents who took part, and secondly, for the performers and artists who got involved: *“[The participants] really enjoyed the opportunity to work with so many different groups of people”*. Similarly, the artists and performers learnt a lot from their experience – most of them had never done community outreach work before:

*“Two things that a few of them spoke about, one was the experience of meeting people from that area...to listen to their experiences...you know, people from very different backgrounds...[and second] because it was a community piece...they said that they liked this because actually there was not an element of it being tokenistic, although I don’t think you can really escape from that.”*

For many young people, their Think Big project is the first time they have organised something on their own, where they have a leadership role and where they have planned something from start to finish. This was especially likely to be the case for those young people from less advantaged communities. For others, who had wider horizons and opportunities, the project was beneficial because it often allowed them to achieve a continuation of an idea that stemmed from something else they had been involved with.

The way that young people planned to use their funding varied considerably – with many showing real creativity in the ways that they employed this resource. This has resulted, as shown in the case studies, in a diversity of approaches to Think Big projects which have different levels and types of impact. Some young people were very ambitious, some intended to use their funding as part of something else, whilst others focused on smaller-scale objectives involving only a handful of people.



The result is that the potential for community impact varies considerably in terms of scope and reach. But it needs also to be understood that a small scale project which, on the surface, appears to have narrow ambitions may represent a real challenge to some young people and therefore can be equally or more valuable than those which have wider scope.

When the Think Big fund was intended to contribute to a much larger project that a young person was involved in, Conservation Foundation asked the young person to ring fence their Think Big money and state how it would contribute to the wider project. For example, some project leaders wanted to buy equipment that could enhance the impact or reach of the work they were already doing on a related project.

***“I think it’s pretty good that they’re involved with helping setting up these projects, because otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to get the funding for the equipment that I needed...”***

The intention of the programme was to issue young people with dedicated Think Big money cards which had been loaded with project funds that could be accessed at ATMs. These funds could then be used by young people in line with the agreed project plans. The intention behind the use of money cards was to demonstrate the high level of trust O<sub>2</sub> were investing in young people by allowing them autonomy instead of close, over managed, supervision.

In 2010 there were some teething troubles in delivering funding to young people via the money cards which have now been resolved. Irrespective of procedural problems, some young people struggled more than others because of a lack of confidence and consequent understanding about the processes.

***“...when it came to getting the money it wasn’t the case that we were given a cheque, we were given instructions on how to get an O<sub>2</sub> card and we had to register online and we had to wait for the card to come through; we had to email to get the money to come through and then the money got all mixed up and the money didn’t come out - then they had to email us again and there was a lot of emails and it was about six weeks afterwards that the money came through and the money had to be withdrawn in £100 stages – it took a lot of work and a lot of time to actually get it.”***

Conservation Foundation provided telephone support to young people and worked hard to rectify hold ups in the process – in some cases by sending cheques to young people.

These teething troubles with processes should not be blown up out of proportion however, young people felt that they had been invested in by Think Big and the benefits far outweighed the procedural difficulties some encountered.

## Box 4.4 Case study 4

### Homelessness and the Arts, Newcastle upon Tyne

#### Campaigning - raising awareness changing perceptions

The aim of James' Think Big project is to challenge negative perceptions and raise awareness of homelessness, particularly for young people. James volunteers for a national charity. This was one of the driving forces behind his project: *"I used to be homeless myself when I was 16 and it was [a charity] who put me back on the right track to employment, education, that sort of thing...I thought by planning the event I would try and give something back to them."*

James worked with young people who have experienced being homeless to put together an art installation and exhibition about the issues that young people have to overcome when they find themselves in this situation. They constructed a street of cardboard houses, into which young people wrote about their experiences, their fears and aspirations. Up to 50 young people helped to create the installation and on the day, approximately 80 people visited the exhibition and it received local press coverage. James described his project as a pilot: *"Hopefully the overall aim of the whole series of projects is to give young homeless people a voice and what they want to see changed in the homelessness system and [highlight] the flaws in the homelessness system they have experienced themselves."* James believes that, being a young person who has experienced homelessness, he is in a good position to help others as he understands the issues.



#### Personal impact

By doing his Think Big project James has learnt a lot about how to plan, organise and execute an event: *"I didn't think that at 18 I'd be able to run a project like this...setting it up and seeing it through to the end, finding talents you didn't know you had before, areas that you need help on and things like that, so personally I've found out a lot about myself, what I can and can't do...I've never managed to stick with a project all the way through [before] which has been excellent, it's been a great experience."* This has given him confidence in his abilities and one of the results of this is that he has since gained employment. It has also given him the confidence to apply for Level 2, Thinking Bigger.

#### Community impact

James' Think Big project has made a step towards raising awareness of what it means to be young and homeless in his area. The exhibition would have had more success in doing this if it had been on for more than one day, but due to funding, one day venue hire was all that they could afford. People may have read about it in the local paper and wanted to go along, but unfortunately this was not possible. It was a good location near the centre of the city so may have attracted many more visitors over a few days. The project has also been positive for the charity that James volunteers with as it has encouraged some young people to volunteer for them.

## 4.5 Supporting young people in their project journey

Support was provided to young people in their project journey in a number of ways. The principal sources of support were through the helpline operated by Conservation Foundation and additional support from UK Youth by phone and whilst training. In 2010 there was limited support provided by O<sub>2</sub> helpers, but in 2011 it is anticipated that there will be much more capacity to provide additional face to face and helpline support to young people and on the web. Young people were complimentary about the support they gained.

*“There is a lot of support...it was fast reacting so if we had any problems, we knew who to contact, so that was pretty good...”*

*“I think Think Big are really organised, they are very easy to get in touch with and there’s always someone to give you support.”*

Many young people in the programme were given support by youth organisations which had helped them to apply for Think Big grants. In some cases young people were encouraged to do a Think Big project by a youth organisation. Generally the young people were leading the projects fully but in some cases, where young people had significant support needs, help was provided by youth workers or other stakeholders. Usually these higher levels of support were necessary due to limited capability through, for example, disability. In a very few cases, it was due to the young person not having access to email and/or a mobile contact number.

Support workers who were heavily involved in the delivery of projects sometimes accompanied young people to training. This is entirely legitimate when young people have special needs and we find little evidence to suggest that many projects were being led by youth workers or other stakeholders.

Levels of support provided to young people in Think Big are extensive – where needed. Most young people were able to get on with their projects without too much help. However, some young people were particularly needy and found project work a struggle. It is planned, in 2011, that these young people are identified early by Conservation Foundation so that support can be put in place by individual mentors.

Most young people on Think Big were more interested in background support. A preference for many was to have opportunities to meet collectively with other project leaders. One young person suggested that regular mentoring meetings might be the answer:

*“I understand it’s probably hard for them to do but maybe group mentors, like let’s say there’s a collection of people in Birmingham, maybe organise a place where everyone goes that’s doing you know projects in Birmingham and can actually network and talk to a mentor if they’re having any problems...”*

Observation of training sessions does show that young people responded well to opportunities to share issues with each other – and so the idea of holding regional meeting intermittently may be of real benefit to the programme (see Section 5 for further discussion).



## 4.6 Celebrating and re-investing in Think Big

Young people invested much time and effort in their Think Big projects. They were eager to stress the personal benefits they had gained from their involvement in terms of building confidence, meeting new people, widening their horizons, learning new skills and so on.

For example, one participant said that they had gained confidence by having to “*go outside my comfort zone*” and approach people in her community that she had had no contact with previously, such as members of the District Council. Another said that they had gained self belief:

*“Self belief, a belief that if you want something it’s best to go out there and get it don’t wait around...”*

As shown in more detail in Section 4, young people said that O<sub>2</sub>’s endorsement of their idea had given them the motivation to make the most of the opportunity. Taking responsibility for something and being able to see something through from planning to completion is an important aspect of doing a Think Big project. Self recognition of achievement is important. But many young people said that they would also like to have some more formal or public recognition of that achievement.

The programme provides some opportunity for celebration of achievement through the Think Big website where clouds can be built up to show how successful they have been. The website allows young people to post news and reports on progress and visual material can be uploaded (see Section 5 for more detail).

*“I keep meaning to look at the cloud and do more...I tend to do a lot through Facebook because we’ve got a page on Facebook and I send emails through that, erm, I’ve just not really had to time to keep things up on the cloud...”*

Some young people said that the reach of the Think Big website was too limited for their purposes. When theirs was a Think Big campaigning project, *Facebook* was preferred due to its reach to a wider audience. Young people are familiar with *Facebook* and are likely to log on regularly to catch up with their friends – it is a ‘one stop shop’ where they can go and do all their social networking. It is likely that the Think Big site will be used primarily by young people for operational reasons – application, seeking on line help, logging milestones and so on.

Take up of the opportunity to celebrate success using the Think Big website (or via other digital media) is relatively limited at present and many young people seem to be more interested in having a public celebration of their achievements. This desire sits closely with well understood cultural ideas about the ‘rite of passage’ where participants are able to identify a clear end point of a process from which they can launch themselves onto the next thing.

In 2011 we think there is scope to develop opportunities for celebration at periodic regional events. These could be offered by national or regional partner youth organisations and serve a number of purposes for young people at different stages of the life cycle of their projects. For example:

- Provide an opportunity for potential entrants to the programme to find out about how it works and see examples of successful projects;
- An opportunity for recently completed project teams to show-case their achievements;

- To be an efficient way to get young people together who are currently running projects to have some additional training, networking, self-help support, and so on.
- To bring in alumni from Think Big to capitalise on their experience and engage those who want to, to apply for Think Bigger projects.
- To use celebrations as an opportunity to involve families, friends and community stakeholders to demonstrate how much young people have achieved.
- To provide a focus for wider celebration of success by inviting local media to attend and report on the success of the programme – so challenging negative stereotypes of young people.

This section has focused on the practicalities of making a successful project journey. In the next section, attention is turned to the benefits of Think Big for young people, their communities and wider society.

## 5 Unlocking the potential of Think Big

In Section 4 it has been demonstrated that young people gain real benefits from involvement in Think Big. There is much scope to increase community and social impact as the programme becomes embedded and larger numbers of people are involved.

This section considers how the potential of the programme can be unlocked by capitalising on the contribution offered by national and regional youth partner organisations and by drawing upon the energy of O<sub>2</sub> employee volunteers.

Increasing the profile of the programme is important. The final part of this section examines the potential of using digital media to achieve this objective.

### 5.1 The role of national and regional partner organisations

To increase the impact and range of projects undertaken in Think Big, a large number of partner organisations were recruited in 2010 to help deliver projects – especially from young people in less advantaged communities. Ten national youth partner organisations joined Think Big together with 25 smaller regional partner organisations. The initial plan was to limit the number of projects allocated to each partner. National organisations were expected to deliver up to 25 Think Big projects a year and up to 5 Think Bigger projects. The regional partner organisations had an allocation of 2 Think Big projects.

In order to become a partner, each organisation was invited to complete an application form which asked questions on a range of issues to indicate capability and capacity to participate in Think Big. This also involved organisations uploading policies on a wide range of issues to ensure that they were compliant with expectations of the National Youth Agency, which holds management responsibility for the programme.

Upon acceptance, partners gained a Quality Mark to indicate that all criteria had been met. An additional stage in the process was for a Think Big Young Advisor to visit the organisation to help them gear up to deliver projects. This visit was not an accreditation visit, but it was anticipated that partner organisations would not start to develop projects until the visit had taken place.

These processes were time consuming for national partner organisations but most reported that they had been eager to become partners and did not mind making the effort. Some found the initial application form to be 'over cumbersome' and most felt that the process of being visited by a Young Advisor had taken a long time to organise – in some cases, this had not happened until very late in 2010.

When meetings with Young Advisors had taken place, there were some doubts about the benefits. In some cases, it was felt that Young Advisors had not prepared fully for the meetings; fully participated in them or, conversely, that their engagement with the

organisation ran beyond the boundaries of the Think Big brief. Because Young Advisors had not delivered Think Big projects themselves, there may have also been an issue of lack of authenticity in debate about the programme. Consequently, it would be recommended that in future years, Think Big alumni are recruited and positioned as Young Advisors.

Initial communication between partner organisations and the National Youth Agency was considered to be good when they were recruited. There was a consensus that communication needed to be maintained in order to drive the programme forward. Most organisations stated that, after an enthusiastic start, Think Big had fallen down their list of priorities. This was partly due to the pressures they felt due to the current round of public spending cuts which focused their minds elsewhere. But in other cases, it was due to lack of clarity about how they could engage with the programme, or, that queries they had raised about how best to get involved had not been fully answered.

Interviews with national partner organisations revealed that they were convinced that the investment in the programme would be beneficial to young people. Most felt that their involvement would be a long term one, providing that the approach fitted reasonably closely with their own practices and was not over-complicated in procedural terms.

In all cases, the emphasis on producing a 'youth led' programme sat well with their own values and practices. That said, most argued that the definition of youth led had to be realistic – given the level of capability of many of the young people with whom they worked. In those organisations which worked with young people in deprived communities, it was felt that the ambition of projects had to be aligned with the needs of the young people.

***“You can do youth led, but that doesn't mean young people have to do everything themselves. They have a facilitator for planning, design and delivery. It's the role and relationships with the facilitator that is core of the programme – because they know what the young people with benefit from, whether its leadership support, problem solving or just pushing the project along.”***

***“For the most disadvantaged young people, in some ways the project itself is incidental, it's all about them. The project is a bi-product of what we're trying to do – and it is after all, only £300. ”***

In these circumstances, youth led had to be interpreted relatively narrowly so that practicable outcomes were achieved.

Those organisations which worked with young people who have particular difficulties through physical disability or communication problems, felt that the application process was too challenging in practical terms and was possibly intimidating as a task. It was therefore necessary for them to give support to these young people if they were to have their projects accepted. It was not felt that such support was an impediment to the principle of the project being youth led, as such, but rather a way of overcoming communication barriers.

Many national partner organisations felt that involvement in the programme was limited by expectations of travel to training venues. It was commonly stated that young people from more deprived areas had very limited experience of independent travel, even over relatively short distances, and that the task would be too challenging for them unaccompanied. While few project applications had been made by the national partner organisations by the end of 2010 it was clear that early experiences of getting young people signed up for training had been slow and this had led to some loss of interest in the programme by young people.

It was also felt by most organisations that the requirements for training were probably unnecessary for many of their more capable candidates – who may be able to access localised mentoring support from the youth organisation if necessary – or rely on web material from the Think Big website should that become available. Whilst, conversely, it

was too demanding for others. Many called for a happy medium where they could be in a position to support the young people through the programme. Most felt that, having gained a Quality Mark to engage as partners, they should be trusted to get on with the job.

Taken together, these factors led to partner organisations putting Think Big on the back burner. It was generally felt that until the programme had bedded in fully and procedures had become simplified and transparent there was insufficient incentive to invest heavily. As one partner argued:

***“Momentum should pick up once we know what we’re doing and know what we’re dealing with. Ideally we want to get the young people thinking about and applying for projects around Easter and then doing them in the summer holidays when the schools are out.”***

Most partner organisations dealt with a network of organisations or licensed other organisations to take part in schemes they were already running. Consequently, they had the potential to get many Think Big projects started all around the country. Given the scale of activity of these organisations, being offered only 25 projects was not a strong enough incentive to invest a great deal of time: ***“To be honest,”*** one organisation stated, ***“we have bigger fish to fry.”***

Some of the partner organisations felt that Think Big was ***“missing a trick”*** by not encouraging them to engage many more young people. In one case, an organisation was ***“surprised that the programme was not taking advantage of the leverage opportunities we can bring to the table”***.

Higher levels of involvement, necessarily came with expectations that national partner organisations should have more control over the processes, or at least, that they should not be over burdened by administrative demands. In some cases, organisations felt that they should have responsibility for choosing projects once applications had been made – especially so when they had a long track record in successfully delivering similar programmes at high volumes. A case was also made for being funded for block delivery of projects which could be passed onto licensed or franchised organisations within their networks.

Many of the organisations in the partnership are accustomed to organising relatively low-cost local and regional events to celebrate the success of young people’s project activities. There is scope for Think Big to harness this experience and capacity in order to produce shared events where potential and new entrants to the programme can join with recently completed project teams and alumni of the programme to build momentum. National organisations recognise the importance of celebration events for young people as a way of inspiring others but also for those who have completed their project and need encouragement to move on to new challenges.

The issue of co-branding Think Big projects with their own organisation’s brand identity was discussed in most interviews. From the perspective of young people, especially those whose need was the greatest, it was not felt that branding of the projects was all that important – it was the support and investment that counted.<sup>10</sup> From an organisational perspective, however, being seen to have ownership or co-ownership over the programme

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<sup>10</sup> Our interviews with young people suggest, however, that the highly recognisable O<sub>2</sub> company brand is important to them – to be invested in by big business means a lot to them.

was an important element – sometimes meaning that Think Big would have to take second place to their own brand identity.

Some organisations recognised the strong possibility that alumni from Think Big may move on to different programmes once they had a taste for project organisation. It was generally agreed that neither the host organisation nor Think Big needed to become ‘precious’ about the ownership of people or projects – as this could be counterproductive in terms of overall impact. It was argued by a number of partner organisations that young people may move onto different programmes after Think Big rather than Think Bigger – especially so if Think Bigger was thought to be too ambitious a step forward for them.

Few of the national partners were aware of who the other partners in the Think Big programme were. While this was not considered to be detrimental, some benefits were identified in sharing views about experiences of the programme and how to get things moving forward. One organisation stated that communication about progress was vital in order to incentivise them to get fully involved: *“If I look down the list and see that we’ve got the fewest projects, I’ll want to do something about it.”*

Holding occasional partnership meetings was proposed by one organisation, and others when subsequently asked about participation, were keen to be involved – providing that meetings were not too frequent and that agendas were not dominated by procedural issues. Most wanted such meetings to provide a stimulus to build the programme and to learn from each other. Similarly, many organisations stressed the importance of having direct contact with senior management at O<sub>2</sub> to encourage buy in and cement commitment to the programme in the longer term.

In summary the key points that needed to be addressed if national partners were to throw their weight behind the programme were as follows:

- Better two-way communication about the involvement of all partners to ensure that the programme builds momentum in a more consistent way.
- That a closer relationship between O<sub>2</sub> and national partner organisations is built to encourage buy-in and longer term commitment.
- Lift the limit on the number of projects a partner organisation is able to offer – and potentially arrange for national organisations to deliver blocks of projects. Standardised caps on project numbers should be avoided in favour of informed debate and negotiation on the appropriate level of involvement.
- Ensure that protocols and procedures surrounding the engagement of new partners are not unduly cumbersome and that acceptance into the programme is quickly achieved.
- That Young Advisors roles in visiting organisations needs to be re-thought – with a view to engaging Think Big alumni to champion the programme and to incentivise others to join it.
- Once a partner has gained a Quality Mark status, to allow flexibility into the programme which suits partner and programme needs. Allowing the possibility of, for example, partners choosing projects using their own panels.
- To allow partner organisations to deliver support, training and mentoring as required but to avoid over burdensome expectations of procedural compliance (in relation to vetting project risk, scrutinising aims, monitoring progress and so on).
- To encourage partner organisations with sufficient volumes of projects to stage celebration events for young people completing Think Big projects (including young people in the area who joined the programme by open application) and to involve alumni, new and potential entrants to the programme at such events



- All applications and milestones should all still be recorded on the TB website to ensure that all data are collected. Conservation Foundation should continue to monitor the application process by sampling applications from different organisations to ensure that broadly comparable criteria are used.

## 5.2 Support from O<sub>2</sub> Helpers

Employee supported volunteering (or ESV) is becoming one of the fastest-growing areas of voluntary activity in the UK (Volunteering England, 2005), and throughout Western Europe (de Gilder *et al.*, 2005) and North America (Miller, 1997; Lantos, 2001; Hess *et al.*, 2002). Although it is often difficult to quantify its impact, there is evidence to suggest that ESV benefits the business organisation, employees, the voluntary organisation and society in general. As a result ESV has been described by several commentators as a 'win-win' situation (Steckel *et al.*, 1999; Phillips, 2000; Brewis, 2004; Lovell, 2005).

Involvement in community schemes has a positive impact on employees' perception of the work organisation (MORI, 2003; Brewis, 2004). Those involved in ESV are more committed to the organisation (de Gilder *et al.*, 2005). ESV facilitates employee development in that it helps employees develop job-related skills such as team working (Wild, 1993; Miller, 1997), leadership, greater social awareness (Lovell, 2005) and interpersonal skills (Finney, 1997).

Not only does the employer benefit from ESV but also the employees involved. Employees themselves see the benefits of volunteering in enhancing skills related to work through taking on new roles as a volunteer and bringing newly acquired skills back into the workplace.<sup>11</sup> Taking time out from work to volunteer reduces the pressures of the workplace, energising them so that they can better take on the challenges of the job when they return (Geroy *et al.*, 2000; Rose, 2002). For the career minded volunteering may enhance the CV and open up new career possibilities. For those coming to the end of their careers it can help the transition from work to retirement.

Those employees volunteering through ESV also tend to participate in volunteering outside work time (Brewis, 2004) and people who work with colleagues who volunteer are more likely to volunteer themselves (de Gilder *et al.*, 2005). Finally, there are benefits to the wider community. Those who participate in ESV have an opportunity to mix with people they might not normally have contact with. This external focus make them more aware of the problems facing people in the community and get to know their local district better (Hilpern, 2004) as well as an increased understanding of social issues (Brewis, 2004). ESV adds sustainable value to the local community. The co-learning which arises between the local region and businesses involved in ESV can increase prosperity in a community (Lovell, 2005).

### Employee supported volunteers in Think Big

Young people taking part in Think Big have the opportunity to receive support from O<sub>2</sub> employees while they are doing their project. O<sub>2</sub> employees can support young people's projects in two ways: as online helpers by answering questions that young people post on the Think Big forum; or as face-to-face mentors, supporting young people through their

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<sup>11</sup> The most frequently cited are transferable skills such as communication (Geroy *et al.*, 2000; Rose, 2002; Brewis, 2004), time management (Rose, 2002) and leadership (Brewis, 2004). Developing new skills and building on existing ones increases self esteem and confidence (Brewis, 2004; Murray, 2005; Geroy *et al.*, 2000).

project. Online help is available for Level 1 and 2 and mentoring is for those who progress on to Level 2.

To become an O<sub>2</sub> Helper, employees are required to fill in an online application form, obtain permission from their line-manager and obtain CRB clearance. All O<sub>2</sub> employees in the UK are eligible to take part. Online helpers are required to commit to a minimum of 6 weeks to the programme, while mentors commit for a period of 6 months. Volunteers are expected to dedicate at least 15 hours a year to the Think Big programme. For Level 1 (Think Big projects) employees attend a one day training session before progressing on to Level 2 (Think Bigger projects) mentor training, which currently involves getting together with project participants at a residential.

O<sub>2</sub> is keen to get their employees involved in local communities and has, in the past, developed a number of programmes to provide opportunities for employees to volunteer their time and donate money. Some of these will be discussed below, before we discuss volunteering experiences of O<sub>2</sub> employees in Think Big.

### ***Background on employee volunteering in O<sub>2</sub>***

O<sub>2</sub> employees have many different opportunities for getting involved in giving or donating through their work. These include volunteering, payroll giving and text donations. O<sub>2</sub> allows employees to use some of their working hours to help others or to carry out civic duties, such as community policing or Territorial Army work. According to O<sub>2</sub>'s sustainability report for 2009, a total of 1,488 employees gave their time to volunteering activities in O<sub>2</sub> that year. In all, they volunteered over 6,700 hours. Measured at the value of £20 per employee, per hour, this added up to £135,368 in 2009.

O<sub>2</sub>'s previous volunteering programme 'It's Your Community', supported projects that rebuilt and restored local places. A total of £1.9 million was donated, which supported nearly 2,500 local initiatives between 2007 and 2009. O<sub>2</sub> Think Big has built on this programme, putting the focus on young people to develop projects in their community and at the same time develop their personal and social skills. The aim is that these activities will challenge negative stereotypes of young people.

O<sub>2</sub> encourages employees to give in many different ways. One way of doing this is to donate to charities through payroll giving. In 2009, £97,230 was donated by O<sub>2</sub> employees in the UK through payroll giving. One example is the initiative Pennies from Heaven, which rounds down an individual's monthly salary to the nearest pound and the difference is donated to a charity of choice. O<sub>2</sub> employees raised £1,963 through the scheme in 2009.

Another initiative is Charity Top-up, where O<sub>2</sub> match fund up to £350 for an individual or £1,500 for a team when they raise funds for good causes. In 2009 £110,075 was raised in this way (O<sub>2</sub>'s sustainability report, 2009, <http://www.o2.com/sr2009/>).

### ***Employee volunteering in Think Big***

To explore the volunteering activities and potential of O<sub>2</sub> employees in Think Big, an online survey was developed and administered via Bristol Online Survey. Employees were invited to fill in the survey in September 2010. The survey included questions about: volunteering with O<sub>2</sub> and externally; motivations for getting involved; impacts of their volunteering; and, the benefits to themselves and others. The focus of the survey was on respondents' involvement with the Think Big programme and how they thought that their volunteering could contribute to the aims of Think Big.

A sample of 637 employees was drawn from O<sub>2</sub>'s database of employees who are active or have been active as volunteers in the company. We received 117 responses (18.4%) up

until December 2010. The survey will be sent out again autumn 2011, which will enable us to report in more detail on the experiences of O<sub>2</sub> employees in Think Big.

The sample is broadly representative of O<sub>2</sub> employees. It includes employees from all departments and across the five main offices in Bury, Glasgow, Leeds, Preston Brook and Slough. Almost an equal number of males and females responded with the majority of respondents being between 30 and 49 years old (69.3%) and of white origin (88.9%). Respondents have on average worked for O<sub>2</sub> for 6.9 years and are well educated: 40.2% held a degree or equivalent qualification.

**Table 5.1 Volunteering opportunities for O<sub>2</sub> employees (n=117)\***

	Previously involved	Currently involved
Think Big	22.4%	55.3%
Young Enterprise**	9.0%	-
Leeds Cares Scheme**	6.0%	-
It's Your Community Programme**	61.2%	-
Big Site Community Project (e.g. It's your Leeds)	13.4%	3.2%
Number Partners**	3.0%	-
Payroll giving	10.4%	27.7%
Charity top up	9.0%	10.6%
Match Funding scheme	31.3%	16.0%
Pennies from Heaven / Small Change Think Big	9.0%	60.6%

\* Percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents were allowed to provide multiple answers and only valid responses were counted. \*\* These programmes are no longer running.

To explore who is involved in Think Big, a number of questions were included on past and present volunteering experiences with O<sub>2</sub> and outside the company. The survey indicates that payroll giving, in particular Pennies from Heaven, is currently the most popular volunteering scheme among O<sub>2</sub> employees (53.8%),<sup>12</sup> closely followed by active volunteering through Think Big (55.3%). 61.2% of respondents had previously taken part in 'It's Your Community', suggesting that their past experience may have had an influence in them getting involved with Think Big. Of those who volunteer for Think Big, 37.6% signed up as 'Big Thinkers' and 23.1% said they were involved in Think Big Youth projects (as online helpers).

O<sub>2</sub> employees are not only volunteering their time and money at work but also in their spare time: 48.7% of O<sub>2</sub> employees who responded to the survey are currently volunteering in addition to their responsibilities at O<sub>2</sub>. Another 30.8% are not doing so at the moment but

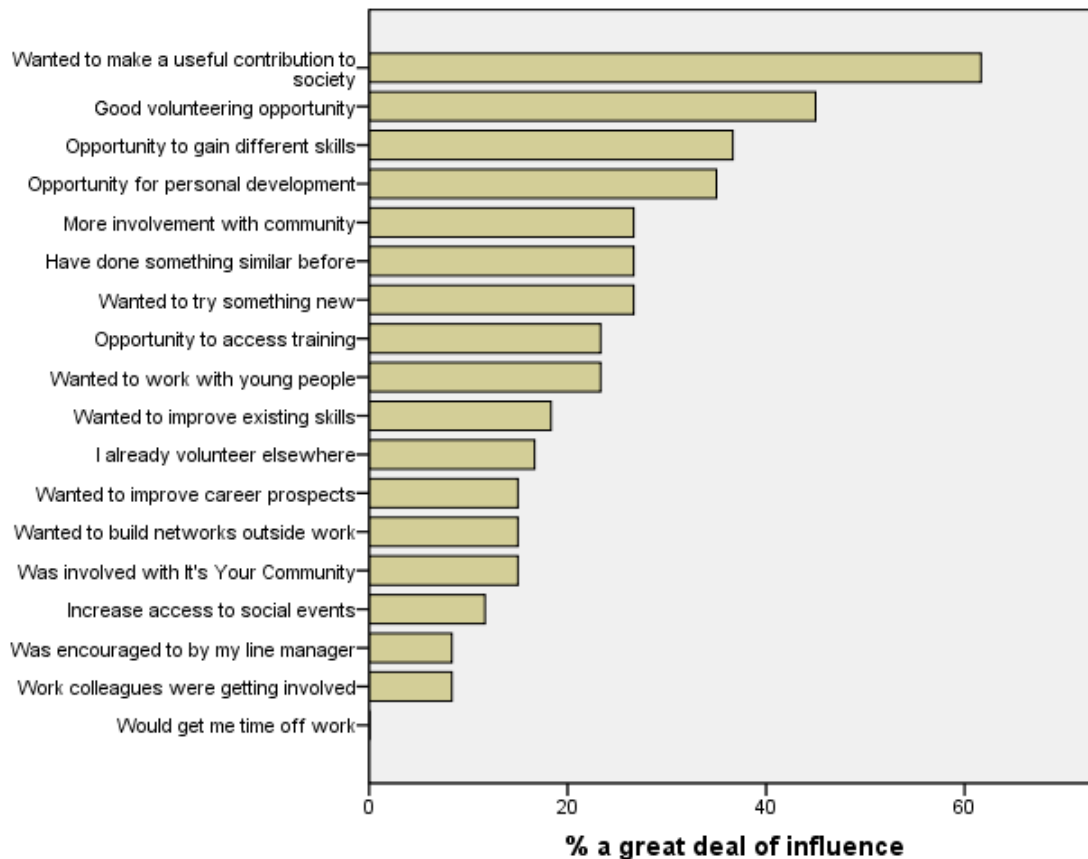
<sup>12</sup> 2011 O<sub>2</sub> Reflect survey recorded a company-wide participation in Think Big as 51% suggesting that the survey is reasonably accurate

have done so in the past. This suggests that employee volunteering in O<sub>2</sub> goes hand in hand with volunteering outside the company<sup>13</sup>.

Active employees prefer to volunteer their time working with young people (27.8%), followed by older people (14.9%). Where they volunteer the least is with welfare groups or arts, heritage and recreational groups. These data bode well for getting O<sub>2</sub> employees involved in volunteering with young people. They are motivated and used to working with young people, or by supporting schools and similar groups in their activities.

When asked why they were involved, the majority of employees answered that they wanted to make a useful contribution to society (63.6%) and saw Think Big as a good volunteering opportunity (47.4%). Many employees consider that Think Big will provide opportunities to gain new skills (38.2%) and for personal development (35.0%) (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Motivation for volunteering in Think Big



Participants were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed about their experience –8 respondents were subsequently interviewed in November 2010, five men and three women aged between 26-49, all of whom were white British and had worked for the company for less than 10 years. Half had a degree or higher level qualification. All but one (Customer Service) held management positions and worked in a range of Directorates including Customer Services, Marketing and Human Resources.

The interviews indicated that employees were attracted to Think Big because of the opportunities it provided for themselves and others. One of the interviewees said that she decided to take part because at the time of filling in the questionnaire she felt that she was

<sup>13</sup> Over a third of the employee volunteers (38.4%) revealed that volunteering in O<sub>2</sub> has made them more interested in volunteering outside work hours. In contrast, only 18.1% of employee volunteers revealed that volunteering elsewhere was a strong influence on their decision to get involved with Think Big.

not sufficiently challenged in her job and wanted to improve her personal skills. For another employee, being recognised at work was one of her main motives for taking part and continuing to be involved. Another employee said that personal development, learning different skills and making a useful contribution to society greatly influenced her in getting involved. She summed this up by saying Think Big was about *'building skills for myself and others'* – learning and sharing knowledge whilst giving something back.

Some employees see a direct link between volunteering in Think Big and their own career development in the company. An employee indicated that he was particularly attracted by the volunteering aspect as this would allow him to build his CV and prepare for new job positions, either within O<sub>2</sub> or externally. He had previous experience of working with young people and due to his experiences, he was keen to work with young people again. Another employee explained that, as part of their annual appraisal, employees can gain extra points for doing things above and beyond their usual job. This includes volunteering and this interviewee hoped that the extra points she gained from volunteering would eventually lead to a promotion within the company.

When asked in the survey what they gained personally from their involvement, employees most often referred to their personal development: increased self esteem (64.3%), confidence in their abilities (55.3%); willingness to try new things (57.1%); and, an increased sense of motivation (55.4%) (Figure 5.2). The majority of employees also reported an increased understanding of social issues (62.4%). One interviewee said that taking part had increased her confidence and self esteem and this had led to activities at work that she would usually have shied away from.

Employees reported specific benefits at work (Figure 5.3). In particular, Think Big has provided them with a talking point with other colleagues (80.2%), so increasing their communication with others. It has enabled them to strengthen and improve their social and other networks within the organisation. One interviewee said that because of his participation as a Big Thinker, he is now engaging with colleagues from across the company that he would not otherwise have had a chance to meet. He valued this chance to build useful networks across O<sub>2</sub>. The majority of employees also indicated that the programme makes them feel part of a special group (58.4%) and has helped them to make new friends at work (55.1%).

Figure 5.2 Personal gains of volunteering

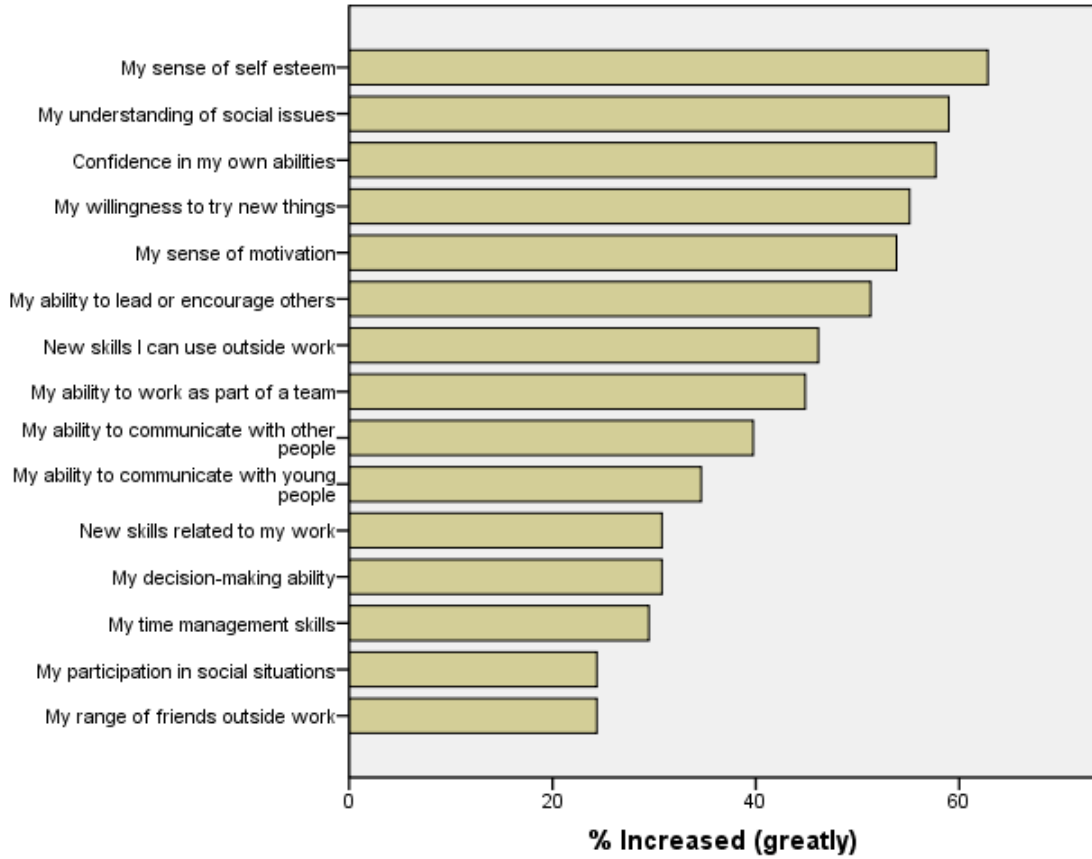
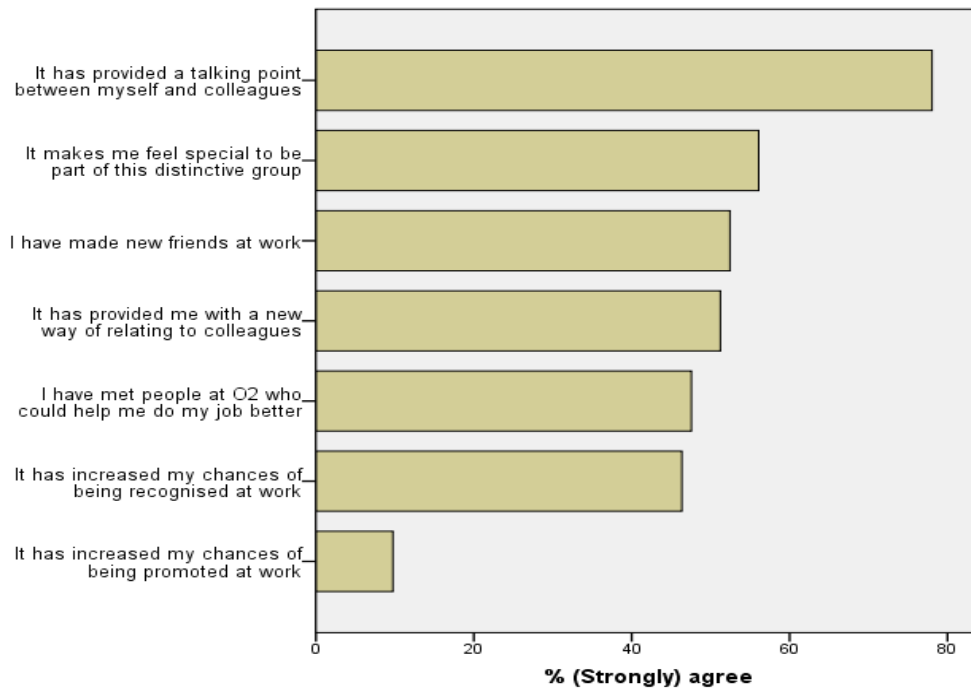


Figure 5.3 How has Think Big affected you at work?



The strengthening of bonds with colleagues further contributed to employees' personal development. An interviewee explained that his self esteem had increased due to working with colleagues on a project, getting to know them better and using knowledge and skills not linked to his job. By sharing this knowledge he felt more valued and respected by his



work colleagues and realised that he had a lot more to offer than he could achieve in his day job.

### ***Unlocking potential***

Think Big provides employees with new opportunities to develop themselves personally and professionally, connects them to colleagues by providing a talking point within the organisation and enables them to make a valuable contribution to society. However, some practical issues were reported in the interviews and focus groups about the process of getting involved in Think Big. These include communication, training and access to volunteering opportunities.

The interviews revealed that corporate messages on the objective of Think Big is too fluid. Most of those interviewed quoted the 'Big 6' as the main aim and one explained why: ***“The big 6 is the clearest explanation if you want to talk to someone [who doesn't know] about it as they are quantitative.”*** The big six encompasses all elements of the Think Big initiative, including people and planet:

1. Sustainable products and services
2. Energy efficiency
3. Working with environmental groups
4. Celebrating Learning
5. Supporting young people
6. Working with youth & community groups

One employee summed up the whole Think Big programme well by saying: ***“[It's about] awareness of environmental issues, young people and local community”***. Only a few employees referred only to Think Big youth projects.

***“O2 giving something back to the community, helping and supporting young people and reducing their [o2's] carbon footprint and helping customers to do that also.”***

***“The main thing is to inspire children so they can make a difference in their community and change the community themselves.”***

At the time of interviews, people were not fully clear on what roles they were expected to take on and what taking part actually involved: so they felt the need for stronger internal communication. There was a sense that the launch of Think Big had come too soon – before concrete volunteering opportunities were in place.

Getting started was slow due to procedures for CRB clearance and time taken to develop a bespoke training package for O<sub>2</sub> Helpers. In some instances, this has led to employees dropping out of the programme. The majority of employees who were keen to get involved were, however, keen to become active as soon as concrete opportunities became available.

The impetus to get involved in volunteering is stronger in some areas. At Preston Brook, for example, employees have contacted schools and charities directly in their local communities to engage in volunteering opportunities. Big Thinkers in each office have met up regularly to discuss volunteering opportunities and issues and look for ways to recruit

volunteers among colleagues. This shows the great potential that employees in O<sub>2</sub> have; they are highly motivated, eager to get involved and they are strong supporters of the aims of Think Big. This potential needs to be fostered and unlocked to prevent the programme losing momentum.

***“It is disorganised now and we are still achieving good things, if we were organised it would be incredible.”***

***“O2 needs to channel that willingness and passion for getting involved and use it to their advantage.”***

### **Findings from focus groups**

Focus groups with active volunteers and non-volunteers took place in early 2011 to explore the potential of embedding employee volunteers into the Think Big programme. Discussions began with a debate on the value of corporate social responsibility schemes (CSR).

CSR schemes are generally developed to win a competitive advantage over rivals whilst at the same time, making a manifest contribution to a social or environmental issue. Competitive advantage is gained, when CSR works well, by winning or retaining valued customers; and, by increasing company loyalty by improving employees' sense of wellbeing, their motivation and their opportunities for personal development. Research shows, as shown above, that successful CSR programmes can improve employee productivity as a result of investment in staff and in social issues.

As would be expected, most of the focus group participants associated the social aims with the corporate objectives of O<sub>2</sub>. In some cases these dual purposes of CSR were not considered to be an impediment to the aims of Think Big. ***“It’s corporate responsibility, we do want to be in a good organisation”*** (registered volunteer).

***“From a marketing point of view, CSR helps protect the reputation of your company... I get the feeling in O<sub>2</sub> it’s an opportunity to market in an indirect way... it also saves a company money by getting people to recycle and all that kind of stuff”*** (non volunteer).

Others were more sceptical about the motivations of the company – although, these participants were not necessarily non-volunteers.

***“The reason I’m here is because of what Think Big is trying to do, but I think from a corporate view, I think there are other areas that it should look at first... I’m a bit cynical about it to be honest”*** (registered volunteer).

For some it was mainly about positioning the company with customers: ***“Let’s not be naive... Help them now to get that loyalty for the future”*** (registered volunteer). In some cases, CSR was positioned simply as part of company life – something that O<sub>2</sub> does: ***“It’s in our objectives, to be aware of the Think big campaign”*** (registered volunteer).

CSR was welcomed by many, however, because it was recognised that there were social and personal benefits to be gained from involvement in Think Big.

***“It’s not [just] about what you are giving to them, but it’s about what you are gaining as well and I’m gaining a lot...I do something small that can help people with their life and O<sub>2</sub> help me do that”*** (registered volunteer).

***“It’s good to get out with other people from the team and to feel like you are making a difference”*** (registered volunteer).

***“I’ve got to that stage in my life where I want to give something back, I’ve not really done any volunteering before and thought this was an ideal opportunity to start” (registered volunteer).***

Think Big is a new programme with, as noted above, several strands. Employees who had signed up as volunteers, and those who had not, tended to emphasise procedural barriers to getting involved in Think Big. These ranged from very localised issues, such as the attitude of their boss: ***“My line manager is not particularly impressed that I do it” (registered volunteer)***, to more complex procedural barriers. As one participant noted:

***“Other sites have the drive and flexibility... We want to be out there on ground, so it needs to be far more structured, it needs to happen a lot more, it needs to become part of the culture, it needs to be an objective for personal development, it’s just got to be more involved” (registered volunteer).***

Interestingly, this participant emphasised the importance of the autonomous *drive and flexibility* in those area offices which were most successful, but insisted that in their own office the programme needed to be *structured* in order to increase involvement and build the culture of the programme. Much of the debate following this point focused upon ***‘not being allowed’*** to formally schedule regular meetings to discuss Think Big. But when pressed, it was apparent that this was a false barrier – as there is open space for such meeting to take place if there is a will to do so.

In some cases, employees emphasised that the aims of Think Big were not fully clear. There was a sense that there were several elements which had been fixed together where there was - not, necessarily, a natural fit.

***“O<sub>2</sub> is doing, and has always done, lots of stuff - so we are good at connecting with communities; and Think Big is trying to bring a whole bunch of stuff together and brand it so it doesn’t talk about corporate social responsibility... [but] multi strands are confusing... I think it’s a mantra rather than a programme” (non volunteer).***

For others, the programme did not capture their imagination or they did not feel that they had been informed well enough about its objectives.

***“The programme just hasn’t captured my imagination in any way but I do some stuff outside of work... about [helping people] who are struggling” (non volunteer).***

***“Nobody has ever really, in the [.....] department, told me the advantages of Think Big, We have two champions and they’ve never stood up and talked about it and said this is why we are doing Think Big, this is why we believe in it and this is why you should believe in it too.” (non volunteer)***

***“Information [is needed] about how to get involved and people know what they are putting in and if you want to volunteer and do something that makes you feel useful [you can]” (non volunteer).***

For some participants, the multi-stranded approach to Think Big was not regarded as a problem, however. For example, the youth project element of Think Big was particularly appealing to some volunteers – but not exclusively so – some were happy to support different elements.

***“I’m keen on environmental awareness and that was my original hook. But actually, I am really keen on the youth projects... focus on youth which echoes***

*the Proninio stuff over in [South America] which is a really needy society obviously... I think the difficulty is to marry them together [environment and people]" (registered volunteer).*

The focus groups indicate, bolstered by the survey and interview data discussed above, that the objectives of Think Big have not yet been fully embedded in the culture of the organisation. Of course, it would be surprising if it had, as the programme had only been running for six months when our survey was undertaken and for less than a year when focus groups took place. What is clear, is that there is considerable interest in participation in Think Big. Evidence from the O<sub>2</sub> Reflect survey shows that over 50% of employees are now actively involved at some level – a finding which is supported by our own survey data.

Getting people fully engaged with the programme will take time. But the prospects are positive because, even amongst those who are not keen to volunteer, there is little discernable hostility to the principle of Think Big. Choosing not to get involved is more to do with other issues such as their life-style or the fact that they are already fully engaged as volunteers with other external voluntary organisations or community groups. The key element to success, it seems to us, is: increasing the visibility of current activity; producing simpler and quicker routes to volunteering; and, providing some encouragement for groups of potential volunteers to get together and devise ways of getting involved.

Ultimately, for the programme to achieve its potential, Think Big has to become a part of employee culture – so that those who are not involved need to account for this in their own minds because they know that they are missing out on something. Deciding not to volunteer can be an entirely legitimate choice, and a positive one – and such choices are not a threat to the programme. The threat only rises in proportion when non-volunteers are dominant as negative influencers – thereby erecting cultural barriers which affect the choices of ‘fence sitters’. At present, we detect a limited amount of grumbling and confusion – which is not a threat to the programme – just a normal part of organisational life.

### ***Recommendations for the promotion of ESV involvement***

- **Information on the key elements of the programme:** we recommend that communication on the aims of the programme and processes surrounding involvement are made as clear and simple as possible to maximise involvement of ESVs in the programme. As Think Big encompasses a number of streams, we recommend a strong communications focus on Think Big for Young People and on Team Challenges – emphasising the symbiosis between these two areas. These are areas where ESVs are likely to be able to make ‘the biggest difference’ in social terms, which our research evidence suggests is the most important priority to them.
- **Clarification of ESVs entitlements:** we recommend that all communication with potential ESVs is as consistent as possible so that everyone is clear about entitlements and incentives. This is particularly important in ESV training delivered by partner organisations – where some discrepancies on entitlements became apparent. Communication to line-managers about the corporate value of ESV needs to be strong to encourage maximum engagement with the programme and to foster the culture of a ‘social movement’ within Think Big (and more widely within Telefonica UK).
- **Connect with O<sub>2</sub> Think Big partner organisations:** national and regional partner organisations provide the key to the success of the programme by giving opportunities for Think Big mentors/helpers and Team Challenges. There is much potential for the development of ESV opportunities via partner organisations and it is

necessary to invest significant time and resource in establishing and nurturing strong relationships to increase the throughput of Think Big for Young People projects.

- **Connect with young people:** opportunities for mentoring at Level 1 Think Big is relatively limited given the small scale and scope of projects. However, at Level 2, Think Bigger projects offer more intensive work opportunities for ESVs drawing upon a wide range of occupational skills developed at Telefonica UK. Engagement with Think Big alumni by ESVs will build the potential and culture of the programme and help to embed commitment to support new entrants at Level 1 and 2.
- **Be allowing of innovation:** clearly issues surrounding safeguarding of young people must be addressed, however, we recommend that procedural compliance to programme principles should be kept to a minimum to ensure that ESVs can operate with reasonable autonomy at the local level. Evidence suggests that innovation at the local level (i.e. regional O<sub>2</sub> offices and in the O<sub>2</sub> retail units) can help the Think Big programme to ‘take off’ and harness the enthusiasm and energy of ESVs.
- **Be a learning organisation:** it is important that innovation at the local level is recognised nationally so that best practice can be learned. Communications need to run to and from the centre so that best practice can be embedded and innovative ideas trialled in different situations. ESVs need to know how to recognise good practice and be able to communicate this to others. Opportunities to showcase best practice is likely to be an incentive for many ESVs to remain committed to the programme
- **Manage expectations and break down barriers to involvement of ESVs** – in the first year of Think Big, many ESVs felt disappointed that they could not get fully involved quickly enough. If this were to continue, it could dissuade ‘fence sitters’ or non participant ESVs from considering involvement. There needs to be a concomitant increase in opportunities (working with national and regional partners in particular) and back up support to speed up entry into active involvement with projects. Connecting people who may not normally do volunteering through team challenges may help to break down cultural barriers and encourage potential ESVs to recognise that voluntary work can be fun, make participants feel good about themselves and make a contribution to society without having to make what they regard (initially at least) as unreasonable out of work commitments.

### 5.3 Raising the profile of Think Big using electronic media

O2 is in a position to benefit from its customer reach through its mobile phone network and by capitalising upon its investment in the Think Big website. In this section, current website usage is evaluated by young people in the project, and the scope for enhancing its use is considered. The advantages of drawing upon other forms of electronic media are also discussed.

#### *Enhancing the Think Big website*

Young people who are leading O<sub>2</sub> Think Big projects in the UK have now been using the Think Big website since July 2010. This sub section presents analysis of the level of activity on the website up to the end of 2010. Our main purpose is to explore the extent to which some groups of young people are more or less likely to use the website and the reasons for



this. By identifying likely levels of usage and barriers to usage, this will help the programme consider the efficacy and purpose of investing in web-development to raise the public profile of the programme.<sup>14</sup>

The O<sub>2</sub> Think Big website has several features:

- **Application and participation:** the website is the medium through which young people apply to enter the programme, upload information and record completion of milestones, via its application form and website (see Section 3).
- **Training:** young people use the website to book onto Level 1 training. It is now a requirement that young people construct a cloud to enable them to do this. It is planned that interactive training materials will be put on the website by mid 2011 (see Section 4).
- **Message Board:** young people can make use of the online forums in the message board area of the website. Information and advice is provided by O<sub>2</sub> Helpers, Conservation Foundation and other young people involved with Think Big.
- **Clouds:** are used as a project page to record milestones, share project updates, comment on other people's project pages, upload photographs and videos, and provide links to other social media they engage with such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

The following example shows the potential uses of the Think Big website:

#### Box 5.1 Example of more intensive website usage

The project made full use of their Think Big webpage, making regular updates and documenting their progress. This included updates on how they were generating support and publicity for their project and also where they faced challenges. They provided links to other social networking sites such as *Facebook* and their own website.

Milestones are clearly stated and marked off to show what they have achieved. They also uploaded a short video which provides a clear example of what they have been doing. They used the message board to ask for advice from an O<sub>2</sub> Think Big Helper.

What makes this project's cloud significant is that it tells a story – not only of the positive progress, but also the setbacks along the way and how they dealt with these challenges. This is a good example of a young person successfully engaging with the Think Big website.

#### **Different types of engagement**

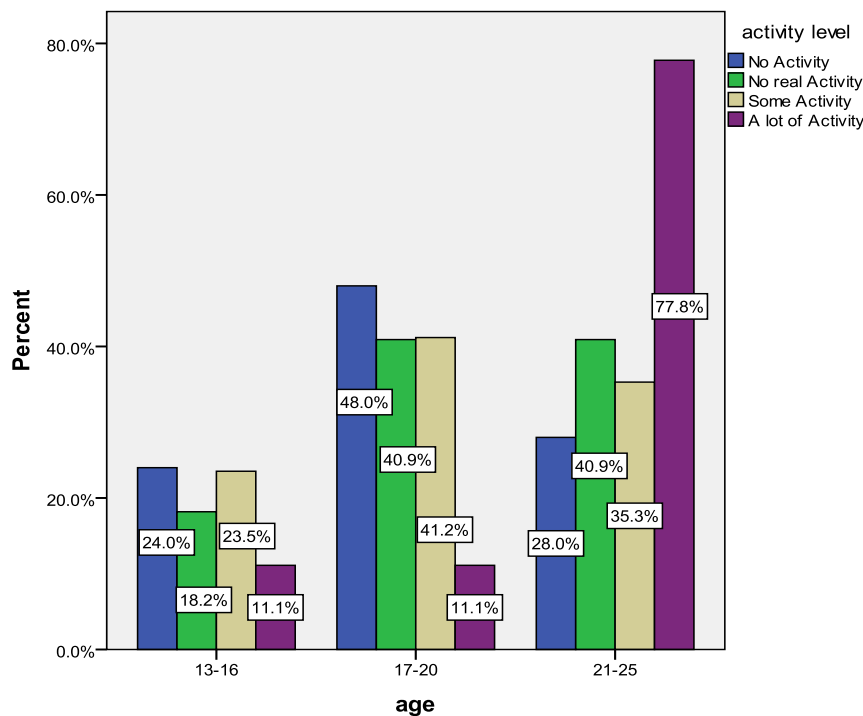
The majority (82%) of young people in the sample had a cloud on the Think Big website and 65.8% had at least one post (i.e. update, photograph, video etc) on their project page. Of those with a cloud, 72.6% had their milestones clearly stated on their project page. The content on their cloud varied between individuals. For example, 35.6% had no project updates, 28.8% had made 1 or 2 updates and 24.7% had 3-6 updates. 11% had 7 or more updates on their cloud, with 1 project having 17 updates. Similarly, there was much variation in image content on the web pages, with 64.4% having no images, whilst one project had uploaded 53 images.

<sup>14</sup> This section draws upon evidence from a separate report on website usage based on the analysis of a random sample of 100 projects between October and December 2010.



As the Think Big project pages are formed by user generated content, the level of engagement between young people varied considerably. For example of the 73 projects with a cloud on the Think Big website, 64.4% had low engagement (i.e. either no activity or no real activity) and 35.6% had high engagement (i.e. either some or a lot of activity). The most active were in the older age group: 77.8% were aged 21-25 (Figure 5.4) who are more likely to have access to their own computer and may have higher levels of competence.

Figure 5.4 Levels of web engagement by age



More active users of the Think Big website were likely to use other social networking media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. However Figure 5.5 shows that 32% of those with no activity and 40.9% of those with no real activity on the Think Big site did have a presence on other social networking sites. This suggests young people are using other social media to promote their project, rather than their Think Big page.

Evidence suggests that many young people use *Facebook* and *Twitter* as part of everyday communication - with the average young person spending approximately 30 minutes a day on social networking sites (Pempek *et al.*, 2009). Other social networking sites offer many options (i.e. communicate with friends, update their status, post photos and videos, advertise events, etc) so it is likely that they will not replicate tasks on the Think Big site too. The growing use of smart phones amongst young people also allows easy access to *Facebook* and *Twitter* making them more appealing to use and providing instant communication.

In the UK, 43.5% of *Facebook* users are aged 13-25<sup>15</sup> and with over half of the UK population now reported to be active users of this social networking site, there is significant potential for Think Big, through strategic PR, to raise awareness. Once young people are engaged with Think Big, *Facebook* can help to encourage the building of networks both

<sup>15</sup> Data from [www.insidefacebook.com](http://www.insidefacebook.com)

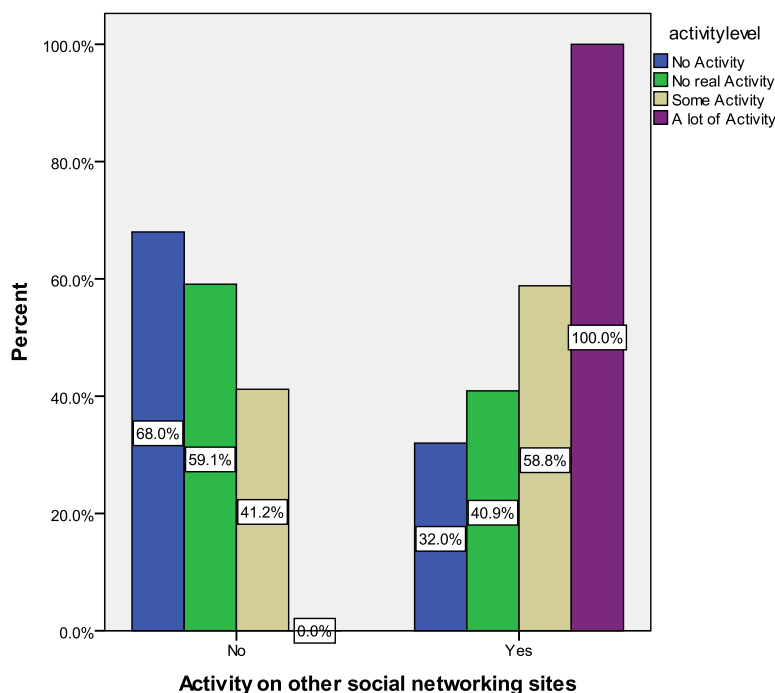
within interest groups and regionally. These networks could then also help feed into events: Access to networks of young people will make it easier to encourage attendance at events where young people can learn about, share information and celebrate the completion of their projects. As noted in Section 3 young people stressed the importance of peer support after attending training and often find each other via *Facebook*. *Facebook*'s interactivity encourages young people to promote their project and receive comments from others on their actions.

Social networking sites such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* have the potential to communicate up-to-date information. *Twitter* may also be a useful medium for communicating the successes of Think big to a wider, perhaps more influential, audience. You Tube, similarly, could be used to showcase projects, particularly performances such as dance, which young people will find visually appealing. The Think Big programme partners are also exploring the possibility of using text alerts and geo tagging to target active participants in Think Big for training and celebration events in localities.

Functionality of the Think Big website is currently limited. For example, it is not possible for a visitor to the website to leave a comment on a project page. This produces a one way flow of information so the young person cannot interact (via their project page) with anyone outside of Think Big. When users post updates/photographs/videos on social networking sites, they do so to gauge opinions about themselves which in turn increases self esteem and produces further activity (Pempek *et al.*, 2009). Creating a presence on a social networking site is the most important factor to influence young people's engagement (Cheung *et al.*, 2010). It is about feeling part of something, a sense of belonging, and feeling that other people are interested in what they have to say, which is often indicated by a comment or a simple 'Like'.

The current design of the site could also be a barrier for engagement. Young people report difficulty logging on to the website and delays when uploading content (for example, only one photograph can be added at a time). A website that is easy to use and navigate around can influence confidence levels (Gangadharbatla,2008). If the young person perceives the website as being difficult or cumbersome to use, then they are more likely to use other media.

Figure 5.5 Engagement on Think Big and other sites



### ***Recommendations for improving web engagement***

Young people use the social networking sites that their friends use. Consequently, heavy investment in creating interactivity on the Think Big site may not produce significant benefits. However, functionality of the Think Big is essential in terms of meeting the direct needs of users (applying to join the programme, accessing on-line training, etc.) and this is worth investment. The following recommendations may be worth consideration:

- A useful investment may be to produce easy to build links with *Facebook* and *Twitter* to direct more traffic to the Think Big website and promote O<sub>2</sub> Think Big to young people who are not currently involved with the programme.
- Make the message board more visible. This could be achieved by simply changing the colour of the tab from blue to make it stand out from the background (i.e. red or yellow). Young people may then be more likely to notice and use this function.
- Provide profiles of O<sub>2</sub> Helpers explaining what they specialise in and how they can help. This would add a more personal feel to the website and allow young people to become familiar with them.
- Provide a general home page on the Think Big website that does not link straight to their project page (i.e. the same way that social networking sites such as *Facebook* operate). The homepage could be populated with current, interesting and useful information included in the 'Big news' sheets which are circulated internally to the Think Big team members.
- The general homepage could highlight other young people's projects and direct them to their clouds (much like the 'newsfeed' element of *Facebook*). Viewing clouds with activity on them may encourage young people to have more interaction with the website. Showcasing projects might encourage young people to log on more frequently.
- The homepage could consist of a number of tabs to allow the young person to: navigate to their own cloud; other people's project cloud; the message board; training dates; online polls; and, results of previous polls.

## 6 Conclusions and next steps

This report has demonstrated that O<sub>2</sub> Think Big has real potential for achieving its objective of positively influencing the lives of young people. It also indicates that the programme can help to make a substantive contribution to challenging negative stereotypes of young people. In this concluding section, we briefly review findings on the impact of Think Big. Following this, we set these findings in the context of the future impact of the programme. Finally, a position statement is presented on our views about how Think Big's potential can be unlocked.

### 6.1 The impact of Think Big

The evidence we have presented shows that the experience of doing a Think Big project bolsters young people's confidence, gives them more hope for the future, and also has positive impact on their broader world view – so increasing social capital. Emerging evidence shows that young people develop skills and confidence in many ways from start to end of their project.

- 16% more young people said that they were less likely to get bored.
- 8% more young people said they would now try new things.
- 12% more young people said they had new interests and hobbies.
- 16% young people were more likely to look at the world in a different way.
- 12% more young people said they were more able to motivate others.
- 16% more young people felt that they now worried less about their future.

Young people already cared about their community before they started Think Big. After taking part, 4% more young people felt more passionate about helping their community. Young people also become more self aware by doing a Think Big project. It challenged individuals' untested views on their personal strengths as they have had to work hard to overcome hurdles. This may have reduced self perception of self confidence but actually strengthened their resolve to succeed in future:

*“I think I've gained confidence, a massive amount of self-confidence and also motivation, because by people investing in you. It's not only the money, it's the trust as well and also the support in terms of your ideas...”*

*“I have gained a lot of skills, because everything boils down to you... so if you do not do things, they just do not get done. So I have gained a lot of skills to do with that, sort of managing people [and] managing myself.”*

*“It's kick started, I guess to things that... I wouldn't be doing had I not done Think Big.”*

Most young people said Think Big had increased their community involvement. This has not gone unnoticed by their communities:

*“...it makes me feel good knowing that there's people in my class and they're not down the street smoking and everything else that they would normally be doing. It's opened a few people's eyes as to how important fitness actually is...”*

*there's more people saying, "alright Katie", as I walk past and taking an interest into how it's doing because the local parish council have been quite good at writing articles about my group and putting it in the local [newsletter]."*

*"People in the local community have seen me around doing what I'm doing, they're being engaged and I'm actually having conversations with them..."*

One of the biggest impacts was the growth of understanding and appreciation by others. By doing their project they have raised awareness of issues that interest young people. Young people reported that this was done through campaigning, by being active in their community, by being visible while doing positive activities, and, by working with other age groups.

Some say that their activities have encouraged other young people to go out and do something similar: suggesting a positive ripple effect – and this is beginning to produce more Think Big applications:

*"It's given people, that didn't think of doing anything, the actual drive to do something... because if they see someone that's roughly the same age as them going out there and doing it as well, it gives them the kind of motivation to do it as well..."*

*"it's all about role modelling and saying you don't have to be naughty to get attention. You can do really positive things and learn skills and develop people, you know, and be rewarded for that rather than making a fool of yourself and do whatever it is that other people do."*

And often it required young people to persevere:

*"Initially, it was hard to drum up interest at the beginning of the holidays... but we were quite lucky that one of the papers came down and took some photos and that really helped...and then we dropped some of the publicity off at the local schools and that helped us and it went quite well."*

As young people progress onto Think Bigger it is likely that the depth of community involvement and impact will increase as projects scale up. We will report on progress in next year's report.

There is insufficient data to undertake a wider social impact audit for 2010, but qualitative findings are positive. For example, working with other generations has helped challenge stereotypes:

*"...one of the old women in the group said 'I used to see you all the time, hanging around with so and so all the time, you used to look terrible and causing trouble but actually you're quite a nice young chap.' So, you know, they've got to know them a little bit better, give them the time of day, it's not all about violence and graffiti."*

*"Everyone knows me round here now - I went into town for a sun bed the other day and this woman said 'oh you wouldn't happen to be that dance teacher would you?' – it's not to the point where I can't go to the toilet without the paparazzi on my back! – but people know who I am."*

## 6.2 Stepping stones for disadvantaged young people

We have said a lot on how young people in general benefit. But a key finding of the evaluation is that young people from less advantaged backgrounds may, in relative terms, benefit more than more affluent participants. The reason for this is simply explained. Young people with fewer opportunities are less able to experiment and explore. Their horizons are lower as a consequence which can have the detrimental effect of limiting their scope to encounter different kinds of people.

This does not necessarily mean that young people with few opportunities are less happy than more affluent young people. Indeed, indicators of wellbeing suggest that young people from less affluent communities can, counter intuitively, be much the same.

Recent research shows that children do not strongly associate their material situation with life satisfaction. Consequently, child poverty measures are not strongly associated with children's life satisfaction (Rees *et al.*, 2011). Differences are marginal, as Pople *et al.*, (2011) have recently shown. For example, one in six children living in households where nobody is in full-time employment report low well-being, compared to one in ten households where at least one adult works full-time.

A factor which seems to have a bigger impact is change – where family income has suddenly fallen due to, for example, redundancy. As would be expected children in households where income has fallen are twice as likely to report lower levels of wellbeing than in households which have experienced significant increases in income. Both situations produce change, however, and that can increase children's loss of a sense of security. Increases in income usually mean that parents have to work harder and are less available to their children – thereby reducing their sense of wellbeing.

What is much more important in wellbeing terms is the quality and security of relationships with parents and siblings (McFall *et al.*, 2011). While a stable and caring family situation has the strongest association with positive feelings about wellbeing, having choices in life comes a close second, together with hopeful expectations about the future, and the security of the home environment.

Interestingly, some researchers dispute the importance of the relationship between feelings of wellbeing and experiences in school, the local area and friendships. While this may seem surprising, it may be related to the fact that strong social networks can be experienced negatively – particularly if they reproduce feelings of constraint (see, for example, Rees *et al.* 2010). This can apply equally to areas of affluence or deprivation – although the constraints in more affluent families usually lead to more successful life outcomes.

This analysis provides no reason to sit on our laurels if it means that these less affluent young people are persuaded to settle for less. Society needs to benefit from their potential and young people need to realise their potential.

### ***Projects are important to young people***

Think Big offers young people the chance to develop projects which tackle issues which concern them and have real benefits to their communities. The emphasis upon projects being 'youth led' is a fundamental philosophical paradigm of the project. The value of this approach was aptly summed up by a youth worker who accompanied a young person at a training day:

***“I've always believed that, you know, kids need to be kids. But at the same time if they are given the responsibility then they are going to act like adults; but unless an adult gives them that point, that chance to have that responsibility, they are only going to be kids at the end of the day.”***



The emphasis on youth-led projects is an important element of the programme because it targets the interests of young people, rather than to impose themes upon them which are considered to be beneficial for them.

As this report shows, it is equally important not to impose *too much* pressure to achieve too much – especially the younger cohorts in the programme or those young people who are less confident or capable – as this may dissuade them from getting involved. A cash investment of £300 has to be set in context – only so much can be achieved.

The dangers of introducing ‘gold standards’ have been successfully avoided in Think Big. A gold standard for a Think Big project might be one which has enormous social reach and impact - where its objective was truly original and its vision crystal clear; its leaders passionate, articulate and persuasive; its beneficiaries’ lives manifestly changed; and members of the community and key stakeholders were grateful and amazed. Undoubtedly, some projects can and do achieve such heights – but the majority will not. Indeed, for those young people with such capability, vision, passion and ambition - we have no way of knowing whether or not they would have achieved their objectives anyway drawing on some other funding pot that came their way. In essence, the gold standard sits at the heart of many arguments surrounding social mobility – where the focus is on extraordinary people who travel so very far in their lives – apparently against all odds. The brute fact of it is that these extraordinary people will always achieve – lesser mortals ambitions may be lower – but helping them to achieve them is no less valid. There is room at the top for very few. Think Big is about helping out the many who want to occupy a good place – somewhere in the middle ground.

In educational terms gold standards focus on benchmarks of performance. Where anyone who has reached a particular goal has demonstrated that they can do something as well as anyone else who has reached that level. In the UK, the achievement of 5 GCSEs at grade C or better is a useful measure of equivalence in terms of performance.

Measures of ‘achievement’ and ‘performance’ can easily become confused. For the achievement of a qualification to be regarded as truly equivalent, it would be necessary to show that all young people have the same start in life, which they self evidently do not. On the contrary, a very small achievement for one person may represent a more or less automatic movement forward on a well trodden path, but this may for another person represent a very significant personal triumph. Similarly, one person’s aspirations might to others seem pathetically low, while for that person it may represent a pinnacle of success.

### ***Stepping stones to a better future***

Think Big provides opportunities for everyone – it is an inclusive programme – but it has targets to meet the needs of at least 50% of less advantaged young people. On this measure, the programme is currently doing very well, hitting a target of 63%. The reason for the target is to ensure that those who need these opportunities the most - are more likely to get them.

Disadvantaged young people can have a tough time in their lives – because of factors which are often beyond their own control - which affects their life chances. Lack of confidence and self belief in personal progress along conventional routes to success can undermine young people’s ability to make good choices about their own lives. Where there is little hope, risky behaviour increases – sometimes with very negative personal consequences. That said, we do not believe that many young people fall into situations

which leave them with no prospect for a return to more conventional and secure routes to successful life transitions.

But we do think that they need support to build their confidence, to recognise their successes, and to give them the sense of optimism and resilience to take the next positive step forward. That support can come from many different kinds of sources, but the real question is whether that support must be delivered systematically, continuously and in an integrated way. In this report we have alluded to the question, why would young people want this to be so if they need to try many things in the process of establishing their sense of self identity? Similarly, help is not necessarily needed or wanted all of the time. Young people need room to try new things and see what works for them.

This report has shown that Think Big offers young people a unique opportunity take part in short-term projects where they can try new things, meet new people, get some support and show themselves and others that they can be successful in what they have chosen to do. It does not really matter that much, we conclude, whether the outcome of their project is of earth shattering importance from the perspective of others – providing that it moves these young people forward in a positive and lasting way: that it has, in some small way, changed their world.

This process of personal development and growth can be explained by drawing upon an analogy with a journey across 'stepping stones'. In such a model, it can be expected that young people recognise that they can go to safe places to ground themselves when things go wrong or, conversely, to get some support to launch themselves in new directions when opportunities arise. This argument may run counter to more populist political views on what kinds of support young people need (or, conversely, the kind of discipline society should impose upon them), but it does not represent a radical shift from the philosophies underpinning much of professional youth work and community development practice. Similarly, such an approach does not conflict with the existing practices of those organisations, especially in the third sector and faith sector, which seek to encourage young people to participate in volunteering.

Think Big programme lets young people use 'stepping stones' to help them secure their confidence and make positive life choices. This use of an 'ephemeral event' has positive outcomes - projects do not need to be sustainable. On the contrary, the fact that they have achieved what they wanted, possibly for the first time in their lives, provides them with the evidence of success they need.

As adults, after all, we do not recollect our week-in, week-out efforts to hone our sporting, artistic or musical skills when we were young. On the contrary, we remember the event, the applause and the expressions on the faces of the people who wanted us to succeed. The feelings such events produce are long-lasting and can carry us through difficult times.

Think Big provides young people with a chance to do something new which can produce a positive 'critical moment' that will stick in their minds and will have a lasting impact on their confidence and resilience; and, ultimately, increase their chances of making positive life choices in future. There is more scope in the programme for celebration and we hope that more opportunities for this will be introduced in 2011.

### 6.3 Unlocking the potential of Think Big

Think Big is a long term multi-million pound investment in young people and their communities spanning five years. It is intended that further value will be added to the programme by involving national and regional partner youth organisations across the UK.

And in addition, it is the ambition of O<sub>2</sub> to involve its employees in very large numbers as O<sub>2</sub> Helpers to invest their creativity and energy. More than this, the programme is also being rolled out across four other countries in Europe (Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland and Slovakia), drawing upon the experience and understanding gained in the UK.<sup>16</sup>

In the first year of operation, as would be expected, volumes of projects are not yet very high because it has taken time to build the infrastructure to support the programme. It also takes time to build momentum into a programme with this level of ambition. As we have shown, there is huge untapped potential from O<sub>2</sub> Helpers and from national and regional partner youth organisations which need to be fully unlocked.

Unlocking potential can be achieved in two ways. Firstly by ensuring that the programme's infrastructure is fit for purpose. Fitness for purpose is not about bureaucratic elegance, but about efficiency. In the first year of the programme, it has taken time to develop a methodology of delivering the programme which capitalises fully on the energy, experience and ambition of its partner organisations without wrapping them up in procedures which slow things down.

A lot of lessons have been learned, upon which we have reported, which are vital for the programme's future success:

That *trust* is the element that young people most value. There may be the odd exception as the programme goes forward, but we are confident that the vast majority of young people will take things seriously and can be relied upon, with some support, to get things right. Consequently the programme does not need to be too 'risk averse'. Administrative procedure needs to be streamlined accordingly to give the programme room to thrive.

Successful partnerships are also built on trust and mutual understanding. The *culture* of Think Big has to develop with this in mind so that all partner organisations can bring their best to the programme and so that everyone can learn from each other. Confidence in the programme, once fully embedded in practice and process, will result in higher volumes of achievement. We have made a number of recommendations on how to get partner organisations fully engaged, and quickly, to increase the volume of projects in 2011. The cornerstone of success, undoubtedly, is to increase procedural *flexibility* so that partners can get on with the job.

Knowing what help young people need to do successful projects, in terms of resources, incentives, information and support, has been a major learning experience in the first year of the programme. We now know that young people have different levels of need – depending upon their age, confidence, social position, and so on. This has allowed the programme to revise its approach to training and support which targets people's needs in the right way. This will make the programme cheaper to deliver, faster for projects to get started and, ultimately, to increase the volume of throughput significantly.

Telling the story of a successful programme such as Think Big, which reaches as many people as possible, is vital to its achievement of future potential. Young people need to know about it, and hear good things about it in order to encourage them to get involved.

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<sup>16</sup> A separate report on the development and progress of Think Big in Europe will be complete by May 2011.

Our evidence suggests that this cannot be achieved just by periodic bursts of expensive PR campaigning (although that undoubtedly will help) and electronic media.<sup>17</sup>

Instead, the programme has to build its culture, organically, through word of mouth association by young people and by opinion formers who interact regularly with young people. Think Big has to draw upon the growing volume of its own champions to make this happen. This includes all of the alumni of the programme - plus, perhaps, some investment in a smaller group of energetic alumni who can become its advisors and advocates. Advocates, or champions, of the programme have to tell its story in an authentic way – the only way to do that is through active involvement.

The same applies to the growing number of O<sub>2</sub> Helpers and potential supporters who can work with schools, local businesses, youth and community organisations, faith groups and charities to get more people interested and involved. The more people who are involved and tell the story of the programme, the more successful it will become. But also, within the company, the higher the level of involvement, the more likely that new O<sub>2</sub> Helpers will emerge – people who have never, perhaps, imagined themselves volunteering. Getting helpers involved requires a mix of incentive, procedural ease, training and support. Good work is being done to achieve all of these things.

There is another ingredient which needs to be introduced into the mix – *initiative*. In some areas, led by local champions, O<sub>2</sub> Helpers are taking the initiative to make things happen for Think Big. Where this happens, new ideas have emerged on ways to get projects started – particularly by harnessing the energy of local schools. In other areas, people seem to be waiting for guidance, support and clear pathways to projects (rather than beating a path on their own). The core programme team can build the vision and communicate this. They can also, to some extent, facilitate participation by providing concrete opportunities to get involved – which is happening now. Ultimately, success is about building the culture and passion of the programme so that those who do not know that they can benefit themselves as well as the young people they support will get involved as O<sub>2</sub> Helpers.

## 6.4 Next steps

In 2011, Think Big seeks to achieve a target of 850 projects. This is ambitious, but achievable providing that all the key elements of development and investment are put in place soon. Once these projects are completed, we will be in a position to do much more complex social impact analysis – controlling for many different factors associated with aspects of participants' personal biographies including their level of affluence, spatial location, ethnicity, gender, age and so on. Furthermore, it is hoped that much of this analysis may be done comparatively with those other countries which are now rolling out Think Big. This will also tell us much about the contribution young people can make to societies across Europe which may form the basis of campaigns to counter negative stereotypical attitudes amongst adults.

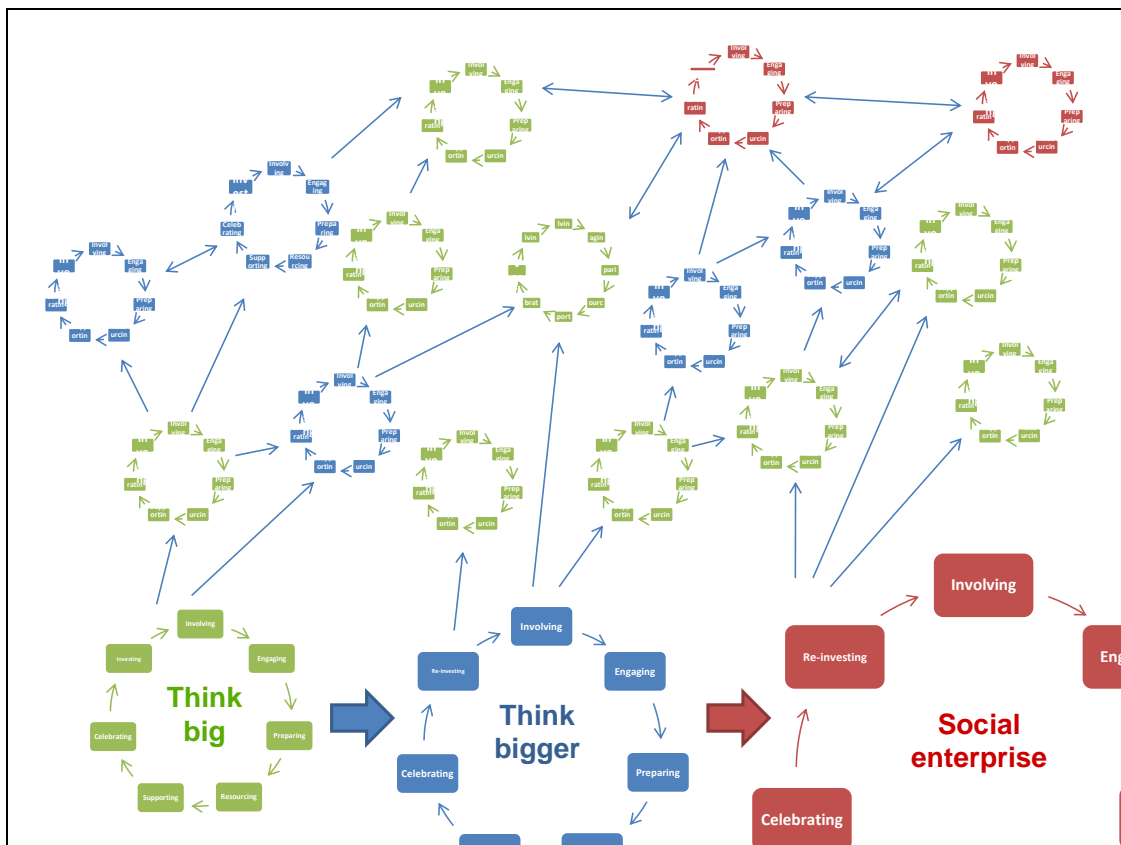
In the UK, small scale Think Big projects will grow into Think Bigger projects – which will receive higher levels of funding and more specialised training. We will follow the experiences of those young people who move on from Think Big to Think Bigger to see what difference the programme makes to them personally and to their communities. There will also be an opportunity to examine networks and interactions between projects to see how committed participants and alumni contribute to the programme as a whole – building

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<sup>17</sup> Other means may also be adopted to raise the profile of Think Big, using electronic media – including the Think Big website, through other social networking sites, by using tweets and texts and other targeted prompts – such as geo-tagging as discussed in Section 5.

its culture and momentum (see Figure 6.1). Ultimately, some projects may become bigger still – and form social enterprises which, with initial investment, make take on a life of their own.

Figure 6.1 Integration and growth of Think Big project networks



We will also continue to research the contribution of key stakeholders who support the programme – particularly O<sub>2</sub> Helpers, who will grow in number and experience over the next year. Similarly it will be important to follow the experiences of the national and regional youth partner organisations and see how they influence the programme’s development. We hope that we can contribute by helping the programme become a learning partnership so that where things go right or sometimes do not work – we can communicate this quickly and, importantly, in the context of the programme’s overall ambitions.

Finally in 2011, as the programme starts to mature – we will be in a position to undertake closer community-based analysis to find out what helps to make the programme grow organically. This will be achieved by analysing clusters of projects in spatially proximate areas. In May, we begin this process with a pilot study in Tees Valley where we will work as influencers in youth organisations, faith groups, schools and with key stakeholders in business, the community and in the public sector. We hope that in this and, potentially, other localised studies we will see how Think Big can grow and blossom as a programme.



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