



BUILDING A GENERATION READY FOR LIFE

A pilot evaluation report
on essential life skills,
peer-to-peer mentoring
and the future of education



HIGHER HEALTH

September 2025

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AT A GLANCE

In early 2025, Higher Health UK launched the first Skills4Living pilot in Greater Manchester, working with 11 further education colleges, universities and apprenticeship providers to deliver a new model of essential life skills education. This builds on over two decades of impact in South Africa, where Higher Health has supported millions of young people to strengthen their health, wellbeing and life skills.

Over three months, more than 1,000 UK learners enrolled, with 487 actively engaging in topics ranging from mental health and gender equality to community building, climate change and global citizenship.

Skills4Living addresses the core determinants of health – emotional regulation, substance use,

social connection, financial stress and personal safety – while building complimentary skills such as empathy, leadership and conflict resolution to embed wellbeing into everyday life.

The pilot programme combined interactive online modules with self-audits, polls, discussion forums and peer-to-peer mentoring. Learners explored their strengths and challenges, applied skills in real situations, and built connections across the city-region.

The main aim was to learn, not meet fixed targets. Participation was strong: almost half of all enrolled learners accessed the platform, with 64 certificates awarded for the first module. Engagement deepened over time, with 78 starting a second module and 51 completing it.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive: 90% could apply what they learned, 88% gained new knowledge, and 75% felt part of a community. Peer mentoring sparked early ripple effects, with 34 learners delivering 54 activities that reached 267 peers and generated more than 32 hours of engagement.

A pre- and post-survey with 44 learners showed encouraging short-term gains: those feeling very confident in essential life skills rose from 25% to 39%, while constructive coping strategies for stress increased from 48% to 75%.

The pilot demonstrated that when learning is co-designed with young people and rooted in lived experience, the impact can be immediate and far-reaching.

From September 2025, Skills4Living will expand with a hybrid model, introducing trained Peer Champions to lead in-person discussion groups. Work is also underway towards recognised Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications.

Scaling this approach could ensure that, one day, every post-16 learner leaves education with the skills and confidence to thrive in society.

FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR



I am immensely proud to present this pilot evaluation report, which captures the energy and insight of our first year in the UK and the bold ambition that continues to guide us.

Young adults today face the impacts of the 5Cs: Covid, cost of living, climate change, conflict and cyberspace. Social media, connecting almost 95% of the world in ways unseen before has transformed society and created pressures unique to this generation. Meeting these challenges requires a new set of life skills.

At the heart of this work is a simple idea: education should equip young people with the wellbeing foundations and essential life skills they need to protect their health, stay steady, and shape futures they believe in.

Our origins in South Africa have shaped our understanding of what makes change possible. We have seen the strength of young

people when given space to lead, and the value of practical, inclusive approaches that focus on prevention and participation. I thank our South African partners for their ongoing inspiration and generosity in helping us adapt this model to the UK.

Together with learners, educators, civic leaders and community organisations, we are beginning to build a new kind of public infrastructure. One that starts with people, not systems. The pages that follow mark early progress and extend a wider invitation. If we move forward together, step by step, what kind of future can we bring to life?

Professor Sandeep Ranote
Chair, Higher Health UK

Voices from the pilot

“Now I can look at myself and say: actually, there’s so much more to me than I once thought and I can be proud of that.” Chris

“It’s helped me see a life beyond qualifications, and that there’s more to success than just academic achievements.” Dhruwi

WELCOME FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

It is with great pride that I welcome you to this account of the first phase of the Higher Health UK journey.

From our beginnings twenty-five years ago in South Africa to this pilot in Greater Manchester, our mission has remained clear. We strive to support young people to grow into healthy, happy and capable contributors to their communities and the world around them.

Skills4Living represents a growing movement of learners, educators and institutions who believe that health, wellbeing and a sense of connection belong at the core of education.

As you read through these pages, I hope you will see what I see – a generation stepping forward with imagination and determination. And I hope you will feel inspired to walk with us into the next chapter.

Professor Ramneek Ahluwalia

*Chief Executive, Higher Health
South Africa & UK*



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report shares the findings from the first UK pilot of the Skills4Living programme, delivered across Greater Manchester in 2025. It captures what was learned and what is needed to grow this work nationally.

This evaluation explores:

- What learners gained, contributed and discovered about themselves
- The methods used, from self-audits and peer logs to focus groups and city-wide polls
- The early impact of the pilot and its potential for scale
- The insights of young people, woven through every section

This work responds to urgent need. As pressures on young people and public services grow, we see essential life skills education as a practical, preventative and powerful part of the solution.

With thanks

This pilot evaluation was made possible through the generous support of the Oglesby Charitable Trust. We are grateful for their belief in the potential of young people and their role in shaping a healthier future.





A VISION FOR CHANGE



HELPING LEARNERS ACROSS THE UK BUILD HEALTHIER, MORE CONNECTED LIVES

Imagine a future where every young person leaves education equipped not only with qualifications, but with the skills, confidence and mindset to thrive in society.

We need to act now

Young people in the UK are navigating an unprecedented mix of pressures. These challenges are no longer isolated. They are systemic, connected and urgent:

- A growing mental health crisis and record levels of loneliness¹
- Deepening inequality²
- Eroding trust in systems and institutions
- Exposure to polarisation, misinformation and online harm³
- Financial instability, housing precarity and rising living costs
- Climate anxiety and environmental uncertainty

At the same time, the services designed to support young people are stretched to breaking point. Schools, universities and further education providers are asked to do more with less, often reacting to crisis rather than working to prevent it.

Equipping young people with the tools to succeed

Higher Health UK has a clear theory of change: equip young people with essential life skills, and you unlock a ripple effect that strengthens individual wellbeing, educational outcomes, civic participation and population health.

When young people have the confidence and capability to navigate life's challenges, they are better able to contribute to the economy, foster social cohesion, and lead positive change. At scale, this means a healthier, more connected society where every young person has the agency and support to reach their potential and help others do the same.

Essential life skills education, when delivered early and with care, offers one of the most scalable and proactive public health responses available.

¹ NHS Digital. Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

² Nuffield Foundation. Who are today's 14–24-year-olds? Available at: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/research/our-programmes/grown-up/rethinking-journeys-to-adulthood/who-are-todays-14-24-year-olds>

³ Orben, A. et al. The Longitudinal Impact of Social Media Use on UK Adolescents. Available at: <https://www.jmir.org/2023/1/e43213/>

Defining essential life skills

These are the foundational capabilities that help people navigate complexity, manage emotions, and thrive in a changing world:

- Critical thinking and decision-making
- Emotional regulation and resilience
- Empathy, communication and active listening
- Conflict resolution and self-management
- Problem-solving and adaptability
- Teamwork, leadership and civic agency

These skills are best developed through real-world themes that matter to learners, including mental health, gender equality, online safety, environmental action and global citizenship. When skills acquisition is rooted in relevance, it becomes more powerful, more lasting and more inclusive.

Yet there is still no consistent framework for delivering essential life skills beyond the age of 16. Provision is often fragmented, reactive, and disconnected from young people's lived experience. This leaves too many learners without the tools to meet life's demands with confidence.

By closing this gap, the impact can be tangible:

- » Learners become more confident, motivated and connected
- » Mental health improves through a preventative, strengths-based model
- » Institutions become more inclusive, responsive and shaped by student voice
- » Educational engagement and attainment increase
- » Public services experience reduced pressure through earlier, community-based support
- » Society benefits from populations that are emotionally literate, socially aware and ready to lead

From a health economics perspective, this kind of upstream, skills-based intervention has the potential to drive significant long-term value for the NHS, for communities, and for the wider economy.

Global commitments, local impact

Higher Health is a proud official partner of UNESCO. The Skills4Living programme supports UNESCO's vision for education that fosters wellbeing, advances equality and nurtures active citizenship.

The programme directly advances **SDG 3: Good health and wellbeing**, while also contributing to:

- 🎯 **SDG 4:** Quality education
- 🎯 **SDG 5:** Gender equality
- 🎯 **SDG 10:** Reduced inequality
- 🎯 **SDG 13:** Climate action
- 🎯 **SDG 16:** Peace, justice and strong institutions

By aligning global goals with local delivery, Skills4Living connects world-class frameworks to the real needs of young people in the UK.



Proud Global partner of UNESCO
unesco

LAUNCHING THE SKILLS4LIVING MODEL



FROM CONCEPT TO DELIVERY AND EVALUATION

The pilot demonstrates how a co-designed approach can move from theory into practice and begin shaping impact at scale.

APR 2024

Greater Manchester was selected as the pilot site for Skills4Living. With a population of 2.8 million, including one third under the age of 18, the city-region offered a strong foundation. Its social and economic diversity, along with its integrated approach to health, education and skills, made it a natural choice.



MAY-AUG 2024

Stakeholder engagement tested and validated the concept across political, civic and education sectors, with strong backing from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.



SEPT 2024

Widespread agreement was reached to launch the Skills4Living pilot.



OCT-DEC 2024

The programme curriculum, drawing from UNESCO frameworks and the established Higher Health model in South Africa, was adapted through co-production with ten young people, ten educators, five employers and three civic partners.



FEB-APR 2025

The pilot was delivered across 11 education sites.

APR 2025

A student celebration event was held at the Manchester Museum, marking the achievements of learners and providers.

“Higher Health’s work is truly inspirational and just what we need right now. There are a million young people in this country not in education, employment or training. That’s a clear statement that things must change and we need something fundamentally different. Skills4Living gives us a big part of the answer and I’m proud that Greater Manchester’s young people are the first in the UK to access this opportunity.”

**Andy Burnham,
Mayor of Greater Manchester**



Programme overview and delivery mode

In its first phase, Skills4Living was delivered primarily online. The programme was co-designed with young people and built on participatory, experiential learning principles.

Key features included:

- » Interactive online modules with real-time feedback loops
- » Learning by doing through activities that sparked reflection, discussion and real-world connection
- » Insight through engagement using polls, journaling and logbooks to make learning visible
- » Self-audits and reflective practice integrated throughout
- » Peer-to-peer mentoring, which began to take shape and will be expanded in future phases
- » Digital certification, with future steps toward formal accreditation

Even at this early stage, tens of thousands of learner interactions and reflections were captured, creating a rich picture of how confidence, awareness and mindsets began to shift over a short space of time.

Curriculum overview

The pilot focused on a single foundation module, but the full Skills4Living curriculum spans ten thematic areas that together address a comprehensive set of health determinants recognised in public health frameworks⁴. These themes also reflect the real-world challenges and opportunities facing young people today:

1. **Mental health and wellbeing**
2. **Gender equality and identity**
3. **Digital and cyber safety**
4. **Climate and green futures**
5. **Rights, respect and community**
6. **Physical and sexual health**
7. **Disability awareness and inclusion**
8. **Substance use and harm reduction**
9. **Financial planning and future readiness**
10. **Global citizenship and leadership**



“The feedback from our learners has been amazing. While they’re gaining the technical knowledge, skills and behaviours for their chosen sector, the Skills4Living programme has helped them develop wider soft skills such as leadership and teamwork. Learners are already applying these experiences to support their wellbeing, with some adding them to their CVs.”

Yvonne Cope, Head of Apprenticeships, Wigan & Leigh College

“Universities are places of learning, but that learning is about far more than just academic disciplines. Students are navigating transitions into adulthood, independence and a complex world. Skills4Living aligns with the work we already do around mental health and wellbeing, but it also fills a wider gap in helping students manage change and prepare for the world beyond. It resonates so strongly with the challenges we see every day.”

Dr. Simon Merrywest, Executive Director for the Student Experience, The University of Manchester

“Skills4Living has been such a positive experience for our learners. They’ve gained confidence and improved their communication. We can already see the difference it’s making to their wellbeing and the way they approach challenges in life.”

Jill Nagy, CEO, Rochdale Training

Participating providers

The pilot brought together a diverse mix of colleges, universities and apprenticeship providers across Greater Manchester. The commitment and energy of leadership teams, tutors and support staff made the programme possible.



From pilot to scale

From September 2025, the programme will expand into a new delivery phase. This includes:

- **A rollout of the full programme across all modules**
- **In-person, peer-led discussion groups guided by trained Peer Champions**
- **A national Speaker Series, connecting learners with real-world voices and lived experience**

- **Wider implementation across more education providers**
- **Regional pilots across the UK to refine and adapt the model in different contexts**

This next phase will deepen the programme’s reach, expand its methods, and help build a national learning system that puts essential life skills at its core.

⁴ World Health Organization. The Solid Facts: Social Determinants of Health. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/42818/924159103X.pdf>

Public Health England. Health Profile for England: 2018 – Chapter 6: Wider determinants of health. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england-2018/chapter-6-wider-determinants-of-health>

Evaluation approach

The Skills4Living pilot was designed as both a delivery programme and a learning opportunity.

Overview of the methodology

From the outset, reflective tools, data capture points and feedback loops were embedded to understand:

- » How learners engaged with the content
- » What shifted in their confidence, behaviour and self-perception
- » What helped or hindered impact across different education settings

With over 1,000 learners enrolled, more than 30,000 individual responses were captured and over 150 unique peer-led interactions were recorded. This provided insight into both personal growth and wider systemic patterns.

What data was collected and how

A mixed-methods approach was used, blending qualitative and quantitative data across digital and in-person formats. This provided a layered picture of what learners said and what they did, helping to explore behaviours and outlooks across the programme.

Data type	Description
Self-audits	Learners assessed their confidence in skills like communication and conflict resolution
Surveys	Baseline and outcome responses across 34 core life skills
Polls	Live digital polls embedded in modules and workshops
Peer activity logs	Learner-recorded reflections on peer mentoring interactions
Forum posts and reflections	Unstructured learner voice on key themes and topics
Attendance and completion	Data on participation and module progress
Workshops, focus groups and group feedback	Feedback from educators, delivery teams, peer facilitators and learner discussion groups

This framework captured both micro-level shifts in individual learners and macro-level trends across education providers, shaping immediate improvements and informing longer-term programme design.

Early limitations and future learning

As a pilot, this phase was designed to surface insight as well as nascent outcomes. While the findings are promising, it is important to recognise the limitations that shaped the results:

Self-selecting learners

Those who engaged were often already interested in personal development, meaning some perspectives may be under-represented in the data.

Uneven sample sizes

While participation was high overall, some elements such as peer mentoring activity logs reflected smaller and less consistent subsets of the cohort.

Varying provider capacity

Education providers differed in their readiness and resource levels. In some cases, limited staff availability or scheduling constraints affected delivery quality.

Short-term feedback focus

Most evaluation data was collected immediately after the programme. Systems to track longer-term impact are still being developed.

Timing of delivery

The February–April delivery window coincided with key academic deadlines, which may have limited engagement in some settings.

These reflections are shared openly to support collective learning. Every challenge in this pilot helps shape a stronger next phase: guided by evidence, responsive to context, and remaining rooted in the lived experience of learners.



SIGNALS FROM THE FIRST ROLLOUT



STRONG EARLY REACH, WITH DEPTH IN KEY AREAS

Launching across a complex and varied education landscape came with clear challenges, but the outcomes offer strong encouragement for what is possible.

This section sets out the headline findings from the first rollout. It provides a snapshot of the main outcomes, which will be explored in detail in the pages that follow. Together, they show what worked, what was learned and how this will guide the next phase.

Participation and reach

1,005 STUDENTS WERE ENROLLED IN THE PILOT

- 360** from higher education, opting in through light-touch promotion
- 645** from further education and apprenticeships, enrolled by their providers

Over 90% of participants were aged 16 to 25, with some learners in their late twenties and a smaller number over 30. This diversity of age and stage added valuable perspective.



11 EDUCATION PROVIDERS WERE BROUGHT TOGETHER TO DELIVER SIMULTANEOUSLY

This marked an unprecedented achievement. It reflected regional commitment and growing appetite for learner wellbeing as a core part of education.

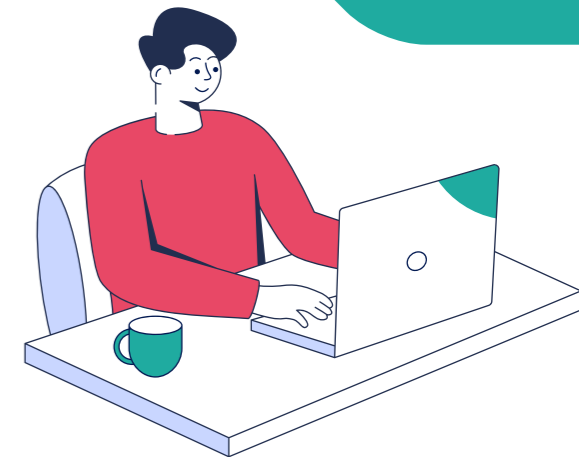
However, many learners were enrolled at short notice, with limited information on what to expect. This, combined with minimal early communication, likely contributed to “drop-off” patterns: some never logged in, while others logged in but did not begin the module.

Tackling these early disengagement points will be a priority for future phases, with improvements including:

- Earlier and more targeted communications
- Stronger provider-led onboarding
- Clearer learner expectations

487 LEARNERS ACTIVELY LOGGED IN

This was despite the challenges, including provider capacity, onboarding logistics and limited face-to-face contact. Nearly half of all those enrolled took this step independently, demonstrating strong appetite for Skills4Living even in a digital-only environment.



Testing the curriculum and tracking the journey

115 MODULE CERTIFICATES WERE AWARDED

- 60** in further education and apprenticeship settings
- 55** in higher education

The pilot concentrated on one core module, *Community Building and Global Citizenship*. This focused approach enabled the content, structure and learner response to be tested in greater depth.

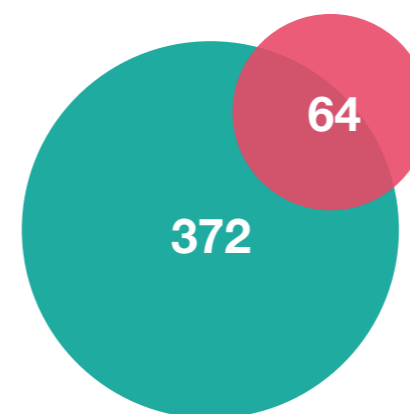
COMPLETION OF THE FIRST MODULE

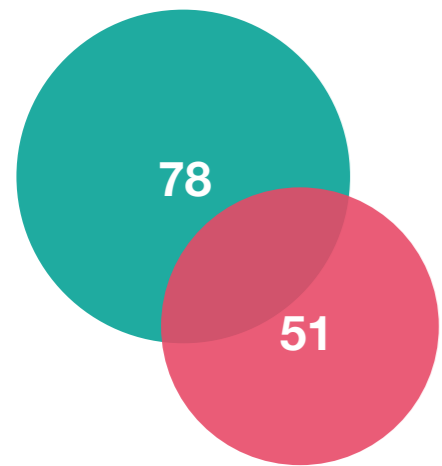
372 learners began the module

64 completed it in full

While the completion rate may seem modest, it aligns with typical UK online learning patterns and reflects the pilot’s deliberately low-touch, digital-first delivery. Importantly, the primary aim was not to hit fixed targets but to test proof of concept, gather insight and identify the factors that drive or hinder progression.

This cohort gave valuable feedback on what resonated, what needed adjusting, and what brought the learning to life.





BEYOND THE FIRST MODULE

78 learners started a second module

51 completed it

This progression suggests that once learners connected with the material, retention improved.

Many also expressed interest in exploring more topics, indicating strong demand if the full 10-module curriculum were available. To meet that demand, onboarding must be clear, pathways well-structured, and education providers equipped with the tools to sustain motivation.

How learners see their skills

Learners who completed the first module offered valuable insight into how they see their own strengths, challenges and capacity to grow. Their self-assessments and reflections are helping shape the next phase of development.



Baseline pre-and-post shifts

A survey of 44 learners showed clear short-term gains.

Those who felt “very confident” in key life skills rose from **25%** to **39%**

The use of constructive coping strategies for stress increased from **48%** to **75%**,

reinforcing the wider evidence that targeted opportunities can quickly build capacity and resilience.

Life skills self-assessments

11,000 INDIVIDUAL SELF-ASSESSMENTS WERE SUBMITTED

These were drawn from 330 learners, across 34 essential life skills. In 50% of responses, learners selected “I have this skill, but I need to strengthen it” showing **high levels of self-awareness** and motivation to improve.

Top strengths

The common personal “superpowers” were:

- **Empathy (58%)**
- **Open-mindedness (38%)**
- **Active listening (34%)**

These are qualities essential for peer-to-peer mentoring, group work and civic leadership. They also provide a foundation for the development of future peer-to-peer training.

Top gaps

The areas with the lowest confidence were:

- **Entrepreneurial skills (54%)**
- **Financial literacy (46%)**
- **Networking (44%)**

These results highlight the need to strengthen practical competencies that support mental health, reduce stress, and build confidence for participation in adulthood and community life.

What learners said about the impact

Across the curriculum, learners were invited to reflect after each topic. More than 1,000 responses were collected across nine modules and 22 themes.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive:

Feedback statement	% positive response
“I can apply the skills, knowledge and values I have learned”	90%
“I learned something new”	88%

This highlights both relevance and real-world value. Learners were connecting the content to their lives, relationships and goals.

Peer influence is already taking root

Even in its earliest form, the programme began to generate ripple effects. Learners were gaining insights and actively sharing them.

54 PEER-TO-PEER INTERACTIONS WERE FORMALLY LOGGED AND EVIDENCED

These reached **267** peers through one-to-one conversations, small groups, digital messages and classroom presentations.

Many learners described the experience as confidence-building and emotionally meaningful, with one calling it *“practical, personal and powerful”*



How this shapes what happens next


This pilot confirmed several core findings:

- Young people are ready for this kind of learning
- The content works when grounded in real experience and relationships
- Engagement grows when learners feel supported and education providers are equipped to deliver confidently

Perhaps most importantly, the pilot demonstrated that culture shifts can begin with just a small group. When learners are trusted to lead, the effects spread quickly.

These insights provide a clear direction, strong foundation and a growing community to build from.





LISTENING TO THE HEARTBEAT OF A GENERATION

UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUNG PEOPLE SEE THEMSELVES, THEIR CHALLENGES AND THEIR STRENGTHS

To reimagine education as a foundation for health, belonging and social progress, the starting point must be the people it serves. That means looking beyond grades and qualifications to understand how young people live, feel and grow, both as individuals and as members of their communities.

This section draws directly from the voices of learners who took part in the Skills4Living pilot. Their words offer a striking glimpse into the mindset of a generation growing up amid today's challenges.

Who are the learners? In their own words

As part of the programme, learners were invited to explore who they are and what matters most to them. Their voices show why this work is so important.

Identity and self-understanding

Many learners saw themselves as works in progress. They spoke openly about what they are still learning, showing warmth, honesty and a willingness to be vulnerable. These are qualities that create strong foundations for meaningful personal growth.

“I’m just like everyone else, with my own flaws and struggles”

Superpowers and strengths

Learners spoke with pride about the qualities they had developed through lived experience. Many viewed these as skills built through reflection and persistence rather than as traits they were simply born with. These included:

- » Empathy and emotional awareness
- » Listening and supportiveness
- » Resilience through adversity
- » Creativity and initiative
- » Dedication to helping others

“I believe I am stronger than I think I am”

Challenges and vulnerabilities

Learners were equally open about the areas they find difficult. Many described the emotional weight of managing expectations, caring for others, or feeling uncertain in new settings.

Common challenges included:

- Building confidence
- Speaking up in unfamiliar settings
- Managing time and energy across commitments
- Balancing care for others with self-care
- Dealing with self-doubt and overthinking

“I care deeply for others but often forget about myself”

Aspirations and values

Learners shared a wide range of ambitions, from working in education or healthcare to launching a business, travelling, or making a difference in their communities. These were underpinned by values of compassion, fairness and purpose.

“I want to be a person who uplifts others and makes a difference”

What matters most

Kindness, fairness and compassion were recurring themes. Learners said these values shape how they live, learn and connect with others. Relationships were central, with many defining their identity through friends, family, mentors and communities, recognising those who shaped them and those they want to support in return.

“I try to treat people how I would want to be treated”



Who we're becoming

These reflections show a community of learners who bring personality and honesty to their work and study.

Many are still figuring things out. Some are returning to learning after years away. Others are just starting out and full of ideas. Across the board, the tone is hopeful and grounded. This is a pilot group that believes in change for themselves, for others, and for the world around them.

Rather than asking, “Who are you?” in isolation, this activity helped people say:

This is where I've come from. This is what matters to me. And this is the direction I'm heading.

Community building: bringing people together

Community is one of the most powerful forces available for shaping a healthier, more connected world. Strong communities are what allow people to care for one another and solve shared problems.

Whether tackling loneliness, inequality, polarisation or poor mental health, the answers so often begin with connection. When people feel part of something bigger, and when they feel safe to contribute, change becomes possible.

Within the Skills4Living programme, community is a mindset, a skillset and a method. It is used to frame learning, strengthen peer relationships and nurture a sense of shared responsibility. Most importantly, learners were asked what community means to them.

When 160 pilot participants reflected on the idea of community, they spoke with passion about the kinds of spaces, relationships and goals they want to create together.

Community means connection

Learners described community as something human and relational. For them it begins with conversation, contact and a sense of togetherness.

“Bringing people together”
“Connecting with others”

Belonging and safety are essential

For learners, being part of a community is about more than inclusion. It means being respected and protected.

“Knowing my neighbours”
“Creating a safe environment”

Support and care are central

Young people want to care for others as much as be cared for. Community is seen as a shared responsibility that is practical and emotional.

“Helping each other”
“Support, growth, trust”

Community is something we do

Action words dominated. Learners do not see community as static but as something they actively shape.

“Working together”
“Building together”

Shared purpose matters more than sameness

Young people value difference but seek common purpose. For them, community is about shared goals and values, not uniformity.

“Collaborating across differences”
“Common goals, different backgrounds”

Where this takes us next

This mindset is the heartbeat of the Skills4Living programme where learning is not just for yourself, but with and for each other.

As the programme evolves, community will remain central to teaching, learning and leadership:

- » Community learning modules will be co-created with young people, using their lived experiences as the starting point
- » Peer mentoring structures will reflect what learners say they value most: connection, empathy and belonging
- » Insights like these will be shared with local authorities, civic networks and educators to strengthen youth inclusion in policy, planning and wellbeing strategies



T-shirts for togetherness

As part of a creative exercise within the programme, learners were invited to design a T-shirt that captured their personal vision of community and peer mentoring. The brief encouraged freedom and joy. Whether using pens, collage, digital tools or AI, participants were given space to express what togetherness looks and feels like to them.

Over 30 unique designs were submitted. Some featured bold slogans like *“Better with you, never without.”* Others used hand-drawn imagery to show support, unity and shared strength.

The message was clear: this generation places high value on connection and collective action.



Global citizenship

Learners also explored the idea of global citizenship, the belief that individuals share responsibility for the wellbeing of people and the planet across national and continental boundaries.

At the heart of this is the idea of global togetherness. To face today’s challenges, we need people who see themselves as part of a wider human story, who feel connected to others, and who recognise that progress depends on shared action.

Learners were asked a simple question:

What is something we all share? Me, you, the person next door, the person in the next town, the next country and in the rest of the world?

From 109 responses, four key themes emerged:

Emotional connection

Learners spoke about compassion, feelings and the capacity to care. Words like love, empathy and understanding featured often, showing that human connection is viewed as a universal bond.

Basic needs

Many pointed to the essentials we all rely on to survive and thrive: air, water, shelter and food. These responses reflected a grounded awareness of life’s shared foundations.

Human dignity

Concepts like freedom, respect, peace and rights pointed to a shared sense of justice and fairness. Learners recognised that dignity should belong to everyone, regardless of place or circumstance.

Hope and struggle

There was also an acknowledgement of challenge. Words like failure, growth, dreams and opportunity suggested that our shared experiences include both difficulty and the determination to move forward.

“For me, global citizenship is about the social, environmental and economic actions of globally minded people. It’s about our responsibilities to ourselves, our communities, our nation and the world.”

This activity implies that young people are already thinking globally. Their reflections show an understanding of global citizenship as something active and lived, built on shared responsibility and the desire to make a difference.



Reflections on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

To explore global citizenship more deeply, learners reflected on the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. They considered whether these goals are achievable through global cooperation, and which ones felt most urgent or relevant in their own lives.

Responses showed a strong sense of pragmatism. Learners valued the idea of working together, but many also highlighted the barriers. Inequality, political division and self-interest were seen as major obstacles. Despite this, there was broad agreement that progress is possible when people act with shared purpose, and that even small contributions make a difference.

Clear themes emerged:

Community, peace and cooperation

Learners stressed the importance of collaboration both locally and globally. Teamwork was seen as the foundation for meaningful progress.

No poverty, zero hunger and good health

Meeting basic needs was viewed as the starting point for all other goals.

Climate action and environmental care

Learners highlighted the urgency of protecting the planet, linking environmental wellbeing with health, safety and future opportunity.

Education and equality

Access to quality education reducing inequality were seen as central to unlocking wider change.



Category	Description	No. of learners	Example phrase
Global cooperation is essential	Belief that progress depends on collaboration within and across countries	22	“Community is key”
Ending poverty and hunger	Saw poverty, hunger and safety as the most urgent priorities	18	“Poverty and hunger must be tackled”
Valuable but hard to achieve	Recognition that the goals matter but are difficult to deliver	14	“People are driven by greed”
Climate action and environment	Prioritised climate and sustainability as urgent global issues	10	“Planet is our home”
Health and wellbeing	Stressed the importance of access to healthcare and wellness	12	“Healthcare is crucial globally”
Education and opportunity	Highlighted education as the key to long-term change	9	“Quality education is key”
Individual responsibility	Emphasised the power of small actions and personal responsibility	8	“We can all do our bit”
Peace, justice and equality	Called for fairness, equality and stronger institutions	7	“Gender equality matters”
All goals matter equally	Viewed the SDGs as interconnected and inseparable	6	“They all matter”
Scepticism about progress	Expressed doubt due to politics of self-interest	5	“Too many driven by money”

Local voices, real impact: how young people see Greater Manchester

After exploring global ideas of citizenship and social responsibility, learners reflected on what these concepts mean closer to home. Greater Manchester, with its diversity, history of activism and deep-rooted inequalities, offered a powerful lens to understand how young people view place, power and progress.

These insights come from discussion forums and open prompts across the Skills4Living pilot.

What does it mean to live and learn in Greater Manchester?

Learners expressed a strong sense of belonging. Many spoke with pride about the region's cultural mix, history of change-making, and opportunities for growth. Yet concerns were also raised about safety, inequality and navigating the challenges of city life. This is a generation that recognises both the strengths and the barriers of the places they call home, whether they were born here or have come to study in Greater Manchester.

How do young people create change?

The message was clear: small actions matter. Learners described checking in on others, volunteering, speaking up and showing kindness as meaningful ways to contribute. Their focus wasn't on status or grand gestures, but on everyday actions that build momentum.

“You don't need to be famous or rich to make a difference. Small actions can create real impact.”

What makes this generation powerful?

Learners described themselves and their peers as connected, courageous and questioning. They know how to use digital platforms, they are attuned to justice, and they are unafraid to challenge outdated norms.

“We ask questions, demand better, and bring fresh energy to issues that have been ignored for too long.”

If they had the power, what would they change?

Learners' priorities were clear and grounded:

- » Better access to youth mental health support
- » Safer streets, especially for women and marginalised groups
- » Affordable school uniforms and housing
- » Action on homelessness and regional inequality
- » Improved transport systems

The takeaway

The Skills4Living pilot confirmed what many already sense: young people in Greater Manchester are not waiting to be included in conversations about change. They are already shaping them, with clarity, urgency and purpose.



FROM SELF- AWARENESS TO SOCIAL CHANGE

TRACKING SHIFTS IN SKILLS, CONFIDENCE AND RESILIENCE

This section explores how young people assessed themselves during the programme. They reflected on their confidence across 34 core life skills, identified strengths and gaps, and shared insights on real-world challenges. It also includes a focused before-and-after survey completed by a smaller group of learners, which shows clear short-term gains in confidence.

Together, these voices and data offer a picture of how young people see themselves today, and the direction in which they want to grow tomorrow.

Shifts in skills and confidence

Although only 44 learners completed both the before-and-after survey, the results reveal clear and meaningful short-term improvements in confidence, resilience and communication.

The biggest improvements were seen in learners' ability to apply key life skills, cope with stress, and practise active listening, alongside notable reductions in less confident or unhelpful responses.

For example, the proportion rating themselves "very confident" in decision-making, communication and time management rose from 25% to 39%, while those "not very confident" fell from 16% to 5%. Active listening increased from 48% to 66%. In coping with stress or setbacks, the share using strategies like mindfulness, problem-solving or seeking support jumped from 48% to 75%, while those relying on handling stress alone dropped from 30% to 14%.

Even within a small cohort, these shifts suggest the programme helped move learners from tentative to more assured in their skills and outlook within just a few weeks.



Question	Response	Before	After
How confident do you feel about your ability to use key life skills like decision-making, communication, and time management?	Very confident – I use these skills effectively in my daily life	25%	39%
	Not very confident – I struggle with some of these skills	16%	5%
If you were in a disagreement with someone, how would you most likely respond?	Avoid the situation and hope it resolves itself	16%	5%
	Always – I make a conscious effort to listen attentively	48%	66%
How well do you typically handle your time when balancing studies, work, and personal life?	I try to manage my time but often get overwhelmed	45%	27%
	I use mindfulness, problem-solving, or reach out for support	48%	75%
How do you typically cope with stress or setbacks?	I try to handle it alone, but I often feel overwhelmed	30%	14%

How learners see their own strengths and gaps

At the beginning of the programme, learners completed a self-audit to reflect on their confidence across 34 essential life skills such as empathy, communication, resilience and listening. Each participant rated themselves against five levels of confidence.

With over 330 learners and nearly 11,000 individual responses, the results offer a clear picture of how young people see their own strengths, where they feel less confident, and what they want to develop further.

Key trends from the self-assessment data

Combined responses across all 34 soft skills	% of total
I have this skill, but I need to strengthen it	49.1%
This is one of my very strong skills – a "superpower"	25.6%
I need to develop this skill; I am not skilled in this	11.4%
I don't know if I have this skill	11.1%
I don't understand what this skill means	2.8%

What this shows

Nearly half of all responses reflect a strong desire to build on existing abilities, implying both self-awareness and motivation.

One in four learners identified key life skills as personal strengths, highlighting a strong foundation for peer mentoring and leadership in their communities.

At the same time, around one in five responses point to uncertainty or low confidence, with a smaller group unclear about what certain skills meant. This underlines the importance of clear, accessible teaching and support tailored to different learner starting points.

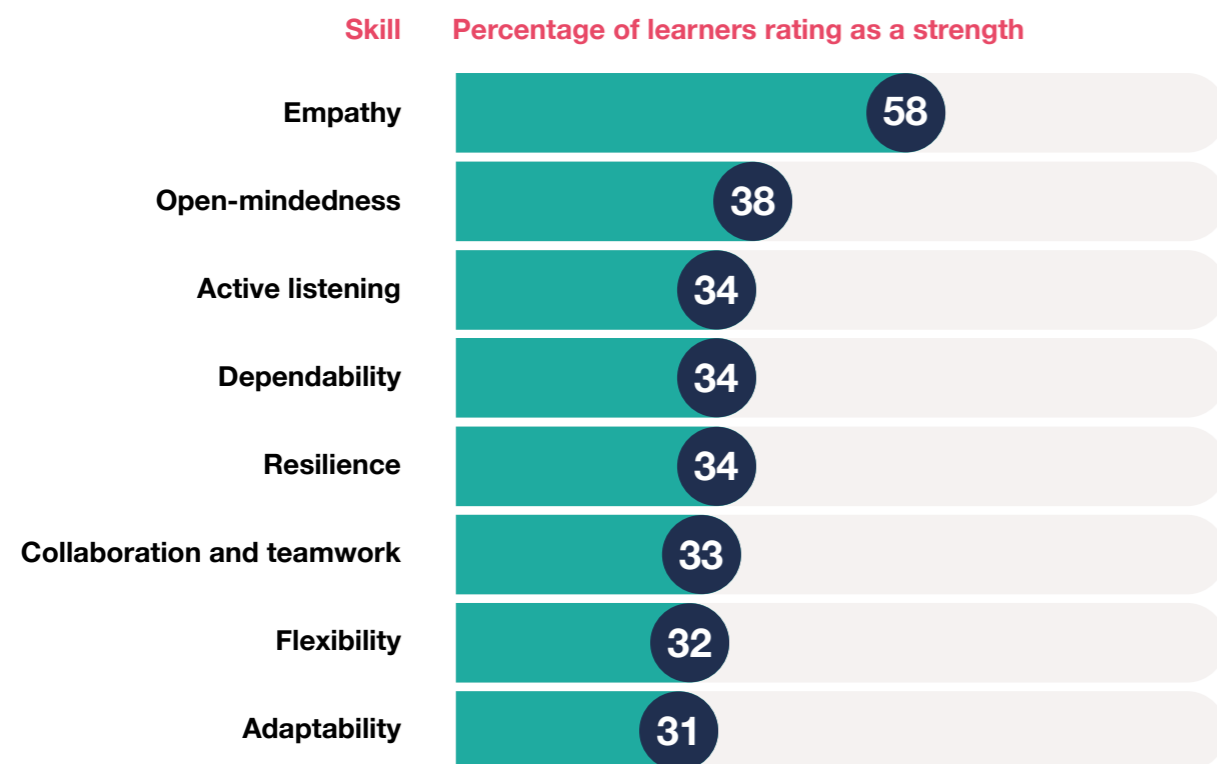
What skills learners feel strongest and least confident in

While emotional literacy can sometimes be overstated in self-assessments, the consistency of these findings suggests learners were both aspirational and honest. Ongoing evaluation will continue to test and deepen these insights.

Clear strengths: where learners feel confident

Many of the 330 learners rated themselves highly on qualities that support teamwork, relationship building and leadership. These skills provide a strong base for peer learning and civic participation.

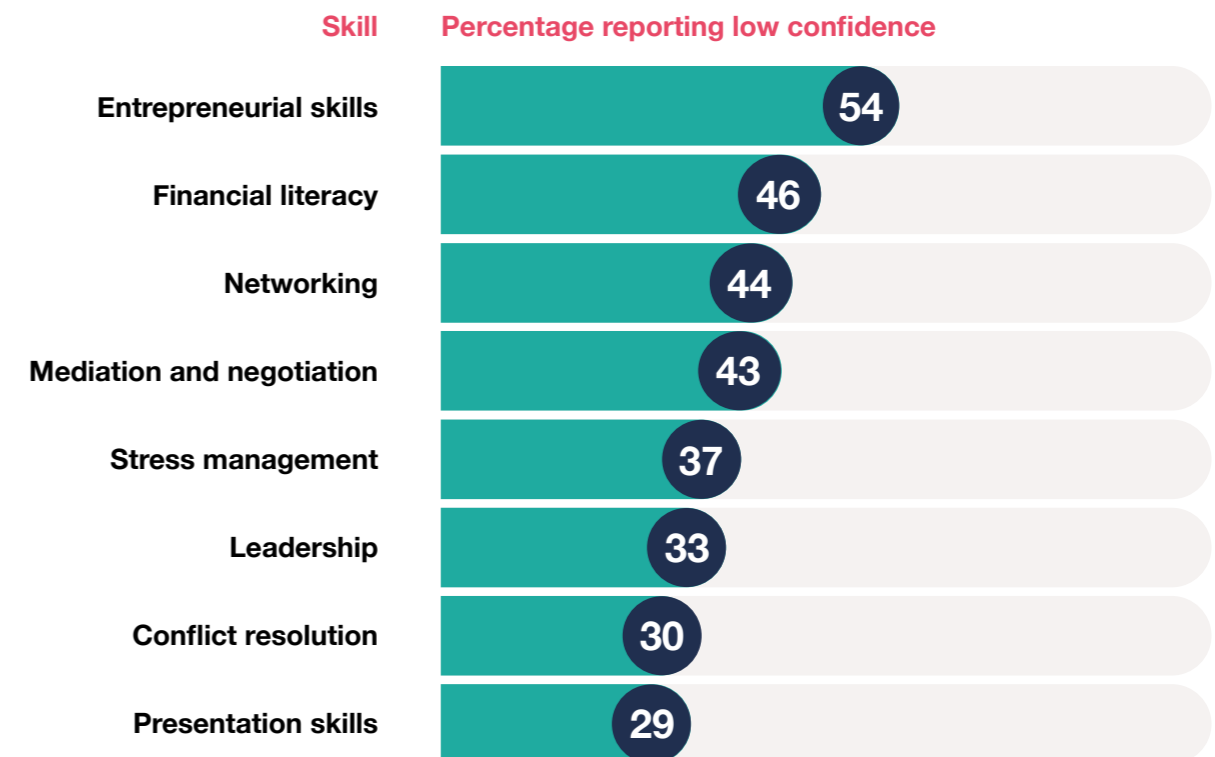
Top strengths reported



Where more support is needed

Some areas showed lower confidence and higher uncertainty. Learners were more likely to seek help or feel unsure about skills linked to systems, structures and professional settings. These areas often benefit from clearer explanation, real-life examples and practical application.

Top gaps reported



What this suggests

Learners are self-aware and motivated to improve, while many are already showing strong interpersonal and emotional skills. The next phase will focus building confidence in practical and professional capabilities that relate to life beyond education.

Strengthening the peer-led model alongside inclusive teaching, will be key. With the right tools, this data can also shape personalised learning and wider systems change:

- » Learners receive tailored content based on their needs
- » Educators identify trends and target support
- » Systems benchmark skills across regions and sectors
- » Employers gain clearer insight into the capabilities of young people

Thematic self-audits

As they moved through the programme, learners completed short yes/no audits to reflect on their habits, choices and ways of interacting. Acting like a mirror, these audits helped learners spot patterns and think about how they handle everyday situations.

Each audit included around 10 questions linked to a specific life skill. On average, 150 learners completed each one, offering a snapshot of mindset and behaviour across the group.

Examples from the pilot

Conflict resolution

Learners reflected on how they usually respond to disagreement and confrontation.

Question	Yes %	No %
Do you often avoid conflict, but feel frustrated because it's unresolved?	53	47
Do you mostly respond to conflict with aggression?	26	74
Do you avoid being assertive because you fear it may be seen as rudeness and lead to more conflict?	48	52
Do you often feel unsure about how to resolve conflicts?	44	56
Do you find it very difficult to compromise or to change your ideas?	23	77

These responses show many young people approach conflict cautiously or with uncertainty. This provides a clear starting point for building confidence, teaching practical tools, and encouraging more constructive engagement by showing that conflict, when understood and approached respectfully, can also be positive and useful.

Listening and speaking

This audit asked learners to reflect on how they communicate as both speakers and listeners.

Question	Yes %	No %
Do you find it difficult to listen when another person is speaking?	25	75
Do you avoid speaking in public?	56	44
Do you often interrupt people while they speak?	25	75
Are you so focused on what you are going to say next that you forget to listen to the speaker?	49	51
Do you sometimes get the feeling that people do not understand what you are trying to say?	61	39

These habits are common and understandable. By recognising them, learners can start to build stronger skills in active listening and clear communication. These skills underpin both personal growth and effective peer relationships.

More self-audit snapshots

Below is a further sample of self-audit questions and responses drawn from different modules. As with earlier examples, each question was answered by an average of 150 learners and framed to prompt honest, intuitive responses.

Digital citizenship

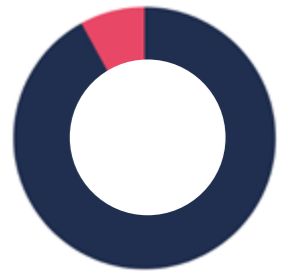
Do you ignore it when you see a person being cyber-bullied and just scroll past?

Yes: 31%
No: 69%



Do you think that because you are anonymous online you can say anything you want?

Yes: 8%
No: 92%



Digital safety

Have you used the same password for years?

Yes: 55%
No: 45%



Do you have fake profiles on social media?

Yes: 6%
No: 94%



Cognitive bias

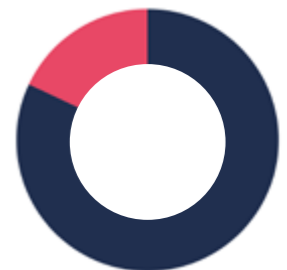
Do you use the first piece of information you find when making decisions?

Yes: 22%
No: 78%



Do you only pay attention to media and news that support your opinions?

Yes: 18%
No: 82%



Leadership, organisation and time management

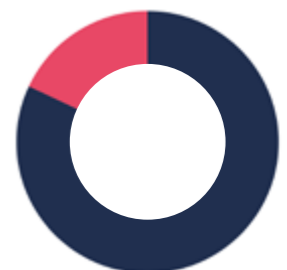
Do you often feel you don't use your time as effectively as you could?

Yes: 46%
No: 54%



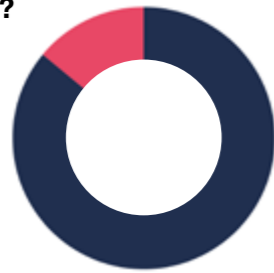
Are you often late for classes or events?

Yes: 18%
No: 82%



Do you procrastinate?

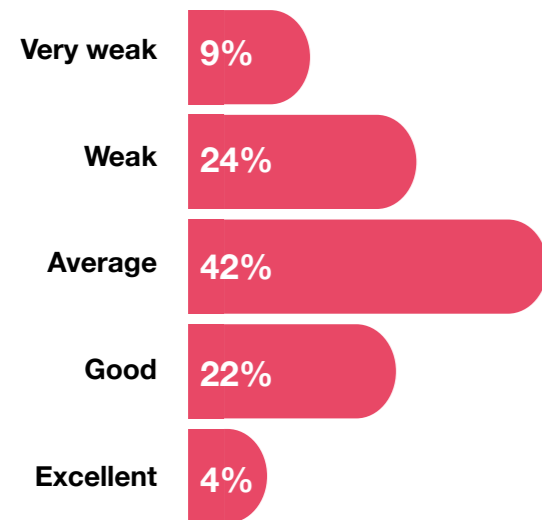
Yes: 87%
No: 13%



Knowing that others share the same habits can often help reduce feelings of isolation or shame. This created a useful entry point for modules focused on time management, stress and prioritisation.

How do you rate your public speaking skills?

Learners assessed their confidence using five categories. Responses showed a broad spread, with most rating themselves in the lower or middle range:



Citizen science

Citizen science activities gave learners the chance to review the curriculum, share lived experiences and suggest improvements. This learner-led feedback offers crucial insight into impact and future development.

What we learned from students

» **Mental health is a priority**
Young people are balancing academic pressure, financial insecurity, and identity-related challenges. Many called for more open discussion, more diverse representation and better access to both human and digital support.

» **Intersectionality and inclusion matter**
Learners stressed the importance of recognising how race, class, neurodivergence and disability intersect with gender and sexuality. This reinforces the need to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach.

» **Learners want practical tools**
Across different modules, learners asked for more real-world strategies: how to be a better ally, where to seek help, and how to create change in their communities.

» **Space for personal stories is essential**
Learners valued opportunities to share their experiences and asked for more creative outlets, such as drawing and object-sharing, alongside written or verbal reflection.

» **Cultural perspectives enrich learning**
Learners highlighted the need to understand how different cultures view gender, sexuality and wellbeing. This aligns with our aim of making the curriculum locally grounded while globally aware.

The impact

By creating space for critique and co-creation, citizen science fostered ownership, relevance and inclusion. Learner feedback directly shaped changes such as updated language, new examples, and the removal of binary or abstract content that no longer reflected lived experience.





**PEER POWER:
YOUNG PEOPLE
MENTORING
YOUNG PEOPLE**

THE VALUE OF PEER MENTORING IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Peer-to-peer connection is one of the most human ways to learn and grow. Rooted in trust and shared experience, it helps people navigate challenges, exchange knowledge, and build stronger communities.



This approach is key to creating societies that are compassionate and future-focused. It helps to break down stigma, challenge bias, and confront discrimination in ways that feel authentic and personal. It also offers a practical response to rising pressures on public services by reinforcing the networks people already depend on.

As the #BeeWell findings highlight, young people want to learn horizontally and support each other⁵. Skills4Living aims to pioneer the evaluation of peer mentoring to explore its potential impact on population health, wellbeing and future success, recognising that when young people are empowered to lead, connect and share their stories, the ripple effects can be powerful and far-reaching.



How do young people define the role of a peer mentor?

As part of the programme, each learner was asked:

What are the three most important roles of a peer mentor?

More than 140 responses were submitted. Each was unique, yet strong patterns quickly emerged. Together, they reveal a shared understanding of what peer mentoring means and what makes it effective.

» Empathy and emotional support

Young people described peer mentors as people who lead with care. They listen first, speak thoughtfully and help others feel safe and understood.

Their words included:

“Empathy, patience, communication”
“Listening, supportive, reliable”

⁵ The #BeeWell programme uses co-created surveys to listen to young people’s wellbeing in Greater Manchester, highlighting the importance of peer-to-peer support as an educational tool: <https://beewellprogramme.org/>

» Trust and relatability

Trust was seen as central. A peer mentor is someone steady, honest and real. They don’t need all the answers, but they do need to be open, kind and easy to talk to.

They described the role as:

“Empathy, patience, communication”
“Listening, supportive, reliable”

» Shared learning and encouragement

Learners didn’t view peer mentors as instructors. Instead, they saw them as people who share experiences and encourage others grow.

They used phrases like:

“Empathy, patience, communication”
“Listening, supportive, reliable”

» Growth for the mentor as well as the mentee

Many learners recognised that peer mentoring benefits the giver as much as the receiver. It builds confidence, purpose and identity.

Their descriptions included:

“Empathy, patience, communication”
“Listening, supportive, reliable”



Most common words used by learners to describe a peer mentor

Words	Mentions
Support	85
Empathy	40
Listening	35
Understanding	25
Educate/Education	20
Trust/Trustworthy	15
Role Model	12
Encourage	10



What learners said peer mentoring looks like

In a survey of 211 learners, each person selected up to three actions they would feel comfortable taking to support others. The results highlight the types of peer mentoring that feel most natural and achievable.



What did they do

As part of the programme, learners were invited to put their skills into practice by mentoring peers and then reflecting on the experience.

A total of 34 learners submitted evidence of 54 peer mentoring interactions, reaching 267 people and contributing more than 32 hours of meaningful engagement.

Even at this early stage, the activity showed how peer learning can ripple through friendship groups, classrooms and communities.

How they did it

Method of peer mentoring	Count
In-person discussions	19
Presentations	13
Online discussions	10
Interactive activities	10
Videos	2
Total	54

Who they reached

Peer type	Total reached
Classmates	105
Friends	66
Social media connections	55
Family	12
Other	29
Total	267

What learners say they gained

Learners reflected on their experiences of leading peer interactions. Their responses revealed consistent themes of confidence, growth and the emotional value of connecting with others.

» Confidence and pride

Speaking in front of others, facilitating activities and handling questions helped many learners feel more self-assured.

“I felt I spoke confidently and presented well, even with questions at the end”

» Personal growth

Mentoring others encouraged learners to recognise their own strengths and areas for development, particularly in communication, planning and awareness.

“Mentoring peers and fostering collaboration strengthens the learning environment and personal development”

» Meaningful engagement

Connecting with peers on real issues such as conflict, wellbeing and online safety made the experience feel relevant and impactful.

“It provided me the confidence in handling disputes and appreciating different perspectives”

» Motivation to improve

Many showed maturity in identifying ways to refine their approach in the future.

“Next time I would incorporate more real-life examples”

What this shows

Learners are taking the peer mentoring role seriously

They understand its purpose and treat it as both a challenge and a chance to grow.

Reflection is already embedded

Their responses showed emotional intelligence, insight and a readiness to learn from experience.

Skills are taking root

Confidence, growth, understanding and support came through repeatedly, showing that learners are not only participating but beginning to adopt the mindset behind peer mentoring.

How learners feel about becoming peer mentors

At the end of the Skills4Living module, learners were asked how they felt about stepping into a peer mentor role. Their answers provided a clear picture of emotional readiness, confidence levels and the type of support they may need.

Out of 158 learners who responded:

32.3% said "I feel a bit nervous but want to give it a try"

31.0% said "I am excited and eager to begin"

20.9% said "I feel overwhelmed and unsure if I will manage"

15.8% said "I feel confused or uncertain"



**HOW IT LANDED:
LEARNER
VOICES ON
SKILLS4LIVING**

FEEDBACK THAT SHAPED THE PROGRAMME

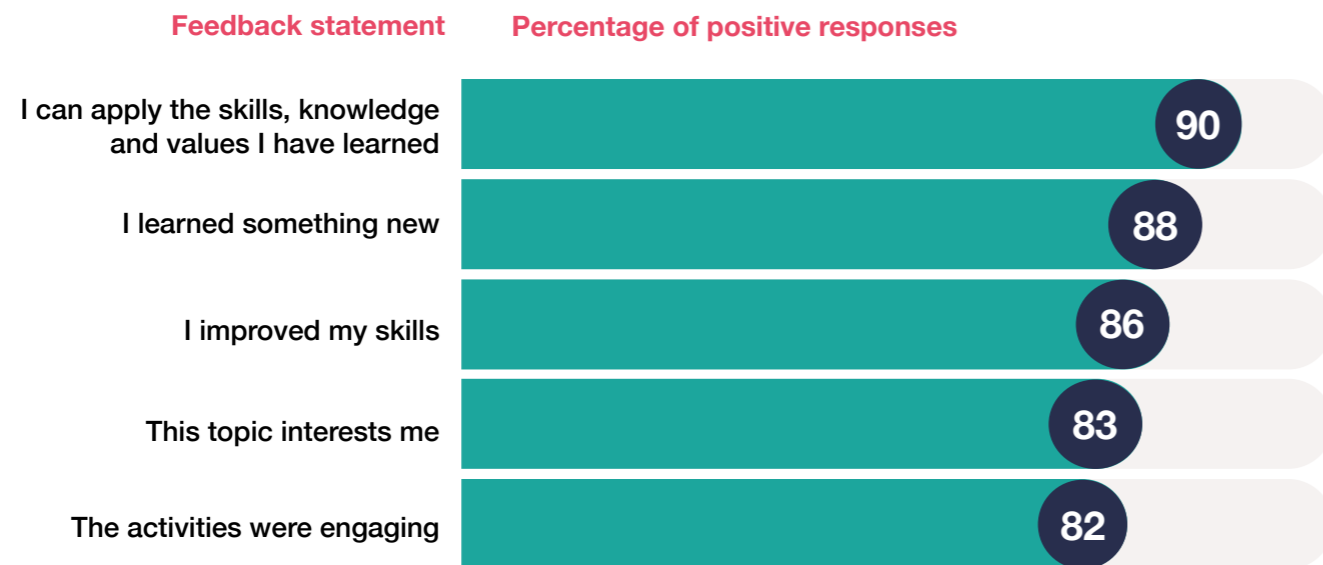
From the beginning, Skills4Living was designed and delivered in partnership with young people. Their reflections have shaped the content, guided improvements and highlighted what matters most.

The feedback so far has been consistently positive and thoughtful. It shows that the programme connects with the realities of young people's lives and provides a strong foundation to build on. It also points to opportunities to deepen the model, expand delivery methods, and strengthen evaluation.

As the programme scales, learner voice will remain central to how impact is improved and measured.

Topic feedback

At the end of each topic, learners rated a short set of feedback statements. More than 1,000 responses were collected across nine modules and 22 topics.



These are promising early results. Even on a short timeline and with limited scope for adaptation, learners strongly connected with the material and its relevance. The feedback reinforces the value of youth-led, peer-informed education, where participation comes from genuine interest and lived experience.

Module survey

At the end of the Skills4Living pilot, a separate survey invited deeper reflections. Responses from 64 participants, who completed at least one module, provide a richer picture of what they valued and where improvements could be made.

Question	Responses
Were you able to express your feelings during this module?	Yes: 91% No: 9%
Were you able to respond to others' emotional expressions?	Yes: 88% No: 12%
Did the reflection activities help you to express and explore feelings?	Yes: 84% No: 16%
After this module, I feel more confident to be a peer mentor	Agree: 71% Neutral: 26% Disagree: 3%
How will you use what you've learned?	Personal benefit: 40% Inform future work: 38% Share with peers: 16% Seek work opportunities: 6%
This course could have been enhanced with a mentor or tutor	Yes: 72% No: 28%
Did you feel part of a group or community during this module?	Yes: 77% No: 23%

What learners said through these results

- The programme gave most learners the confidence to express themselves and engage with others' emotions
- Many saw both personal and professional value in what they learned, from everyday life to future work
- A sense of community emerged strongly, though more could be done to ensure every learner feels included
- Learners highlighted the value of additional mentor or tutor support to guide their journey

These insights are helping to shape the next phase of delivery and reinforce the potential of Skills4Living to support emotional openness, confidence and connection when the right structures are in place.



WHAT COMES NEXT



EXPANDING REACH AND DEEPENING IMPACT

The next phase of Skills4Living will broaden delivery, strengthen peer leadership and build a robust evidence base to measure long-term change.

Early signs of change

The Skills4Living pilot is already gaining momentum. Learners are engaging deeply with the content, applying it to real life, and asking for more.

Across the programme, students reported strong impact and relevance. Ninety percent said they could use what they had learned. Many took on peer mentoring roles, built confidence, and sparked ripple-effect conversations with classmates, friends and family. Some even completed extra modules, driven by curiosity rather than obligation.

Learners described the experience as personal and emotionally safe. They spoke of new self-belief and a desire to help others feel the same.

These early outcomes show that when learning feels real, and young people are trusted to lead, they respond with energy and insight.

“I want to be the person I needed when I was younger”
Skills4Living participant

What will be measured next

As Skills4Living expands, a more robust evaluation framework is being developed. Reflection, feedback and behavioural insight will remain central, while new tools and partnerships will support exploration of:

- » Changes in confidence, skill use and self-awareness
- » Indicators of wellbeing such as belonging and optimism
- » Uptake of peer mentoring roles and ripple-effect activity
- » Progression into volunteering, civic engagement and employment
- » Institutional change around inclusion, wellbeing and student voice

Partnerships with academic researchers will strengthen the long-term evidence base and deepen understanding of impact at scale.

Planned next steps

Expanding across education

The next phase of Skills4Living will continue in higher education while reaching further into colleges, apprenticeships, training providers and community learning. The goal is a cross-sector model that meets young people wherever they are.

The programme will also adapt to support those not in education, employment, or training (NEET), keeping the same core values while flexing to different contexts and pressures.

Accreditation

Recognised pathways are being developed, including Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications with a regulated awarding body. In higher education, credit-bearing options are being explored so that Skills4Living modules can sit within degree structures.

These routes will open multiple entry points and ways to progress, embedding life skills into long-term learning and development.

Peer Champions

From September 2025, the first Peer Champion programme will be launched. Twenty young people will take on leadership roles within their places of learning, guiding group sessions, supporting civic engagement and co-designing future content.

What success could look like at scale

The pilot shows that change is both possible and necessary. Young people are ready.

Scaling Skills4Living would mean:

- » Every post-16 learner having access to life skills education that is practical and relevant
- » Youth-led wellbeing embedded into everyday learning culture
- » Stronger data guiding decisions across education, health and employment
- » A growing Peer Champion network driving change in communities



WALK WITH US

Skills4Living is the beginning of a wider movement to rethink how we prepare young people for life.

We now need partners who share this vision. If you are a funder, policymaker, educator or employer who believes in a more human and inclusive learning system with holistic health at its heart, we invite you to walk with us.

Investing in essential life skills is investing in health, community and resilience. It is backing a generation already stepping up to lead and support one another.

Let's build the system they deserve. **Let's shape the future together.**

Let's keep in touch



Scan to get in touch or join our newsletter and stay connected.

