

NEAR NEIGHBOURS

CATALYST EVALUATION SUMMARY

COVENTRY UNIVERSITY CENTRE
FOR TRUST, PEACE, AND SOCIAL RELATIONS



What is Catalyst?

Catalyst is an interactive leadership programme for young people between 16 and 30 years of age. It is a part of the Near Neighbours Programme¹ and is a dynamic and interactive programme to inspire individuals to realise their potential both personally to enhance their life skills and employability and so they can positively impact their communities. The programme consists of a four-day residential, or stand-alone sessions across five days, as well as alumni activities.

Catalyst is run by two different partner organisations: the St Philip's Centre (responsible for the Programme in the south of England and the east Midlands, known as 'Catalyst South') and Faithful Neighbours (which runs Catalyst in the north of England and West Midlands, known as 'Catalyst North'). Since 2011, 25 catalyst programmes have taken place across 18 different towns and cities in the UK with approximately 310 people taking part.

Catalyst brings together young people from different faiths and backgrounds, providing training, dialogue and experiential learning on a range of topics related to leadership, social action and interfaith relations. The core content is accredited by Leicester College and, upon completion, alumni are awarded a qualification equivalent to an NVQ Level 2.

¹ Near Neighbours is a programme which brings together people of different faiths and ethnicities in order to change communities for the better through relationship building and joint social action. It is a programme of the Department for Communities and local government and the Church of England. <http://www.cuf.org.uk/near-neighbours>

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The impact of Catalyst

This evaluation found that:

- The programme met the aims and expectations of 91% of participants.
- Lasting relationships were built, with 70% of alumni staying in contact with people that they had met on the programme.
- Alumni gained confidence with regards to talking to, making friends with and working with people from other faith and ethnic backgrounds.
- 91% of alumni felt that coming into contact with people from different faith or non-faith backgrounds was a positive experience (none felt that it was a negative experience). Of these, 70% have seen a positive change in their attitudes to other faiths (with none of the respondents seeing an increase in their negative attitudes).
- 87% of alumni now feel more prepared and enabled to take on leadership roles within their community.

The methods used have built strong relationships between alumni and have been successful in preparing people to live and work effectively with people of different faiths and backgrounds. The investment in enhancing leadership skills has enabled a group of young people to not just feel more prepared to lead, but to take on roles that reflect their new skills and confidence.

The Programme's successes in creating meaningful relationships, breaking down barriers between faiths and cultures and preparing leaders has been shown to ultimately increase levels of involvement in social action; more young people take a more active role in enhancing their local areas and communities as a result of attending Catalyst.

Against a national backdrop of community tensions and calls for an enhanced role for faith-based actors in tackling social issues, this is an important and timely intervention in the present and future of our communities, faith-based or otherwise.



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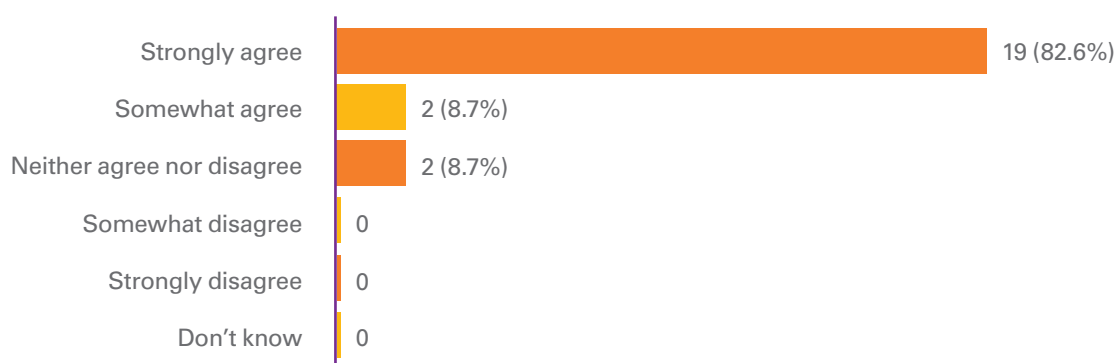
Faith and Ethnicity

The course introduces participants to people from different backgrounds and develops their confidence to talk to and work with difference.

'A leadership course that's very informative and enables me to understand a variety of different faiths and work with variety of people I wouldn't have normally worked with' (Catalyst Alumnus)

Participants said that Catalyst has shaped their attitudes to other faith groups and strongly agreed that meeting people from different faith and non-faith backgrounds was a positive experience: nearly 70% of participants agreed that taking part in Catalyst had changed their attitudes towards other faith groups in a positive way, and no one said that it had a negative effect.

Figure 1. The Catalyst programme brings participants into contact with people from different faith and non-faith backgrounds. Was this a positive and useful experience?



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Leadership

Development of leadership skills is a core aim for Catalyst. The Programme aims to build the capacity of young people to become leaders in their own communities and local areas, especially developing leadership skills to lead across faith and cultures. Some go on to apply for funding from the Near Neighbours Small Grants Scheme in order to start new projects in their area. Through this they can apply for a grant ranging from £250 to £5,000 for projects that build relationships in diverse communities and improve their local area.

Coventry University discovered that many participants felt the course had encouraged them to take action: 87% of respondents felt that the Programme has prepared and enabled them to take a more active leadership role within their community. Some alumni described a link between their increased confidence and the ability to meet and work with new people and grow their networks.

Others spoke about how the course has made them think differently about their future leadership progress: *'I am much more focused on how I can improve myself if I am to become a leader'* (Catalyst Alumnus).

Social Action

'I've been given the confidence better to engage in interfaith, better to engage with media and better engaging with helping people in communities. I wouldn't have been able to say this one year ago hadn't I been on the course' (Catalyst Alumnus)

Catalyst aims to enable young people to create positive social change after the Programme. Quantitative evidence suggests that people's existing appetite for social action appears to have been strengthened by attending Catalyst and the barriers to taking part have been reduced by the process. Further interview data shows that different ways to get involved in social action have been introduced to alumni.

'I'm running my own group of Duke of Edinburgh silver project as a result of attending Catalyst' (Catalyst Alumnus)

'After the Catalyst programme, I did the National Citizens Service, I did activities for charities, I did a lot of stuff' (Catalyst Alumnus)

'Yes. I teach English to women in women's centre. I didn't know about that before it's a group of refugee and asylum seeker women' (Catalyst Alumnus)

'Definitely more active. I am more involved with community groups and voluntary groups which are related to faith' (Catalyst Alumnus)

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Relationships and Friendships

The design of the course helps to create long-lasting relationships with people of different faiths, an opportunity many participants would not have without Catalyst. Many participants spoke about how the course enabled them to build relationships with people of different faith and cultural backgrounds:

'That was my favourite part. It really opened my eyes. It allowed me to build relationships that I wouldn't have had the opportunity to build otherwise.' (Catalyst Alumnus)



The approach to relationship building taken by Catalyst has been highly successful in allowing friendships and relationships to develop between Catalyst delegates. Many of the delegates from that area have made comments about the *'amazing people on the course'* (Catalyst Alumnus), often rating the relationships made as the most valuable thing about their time on the Programme. Testament to this success is the event arranged by the cohort from Spring 2015 who are due to meet up for a 'one-year-on celebration' event which will be attended by the majority of the cohort.

'The friendships I created, they were very special people. I met a police officer. Where I live, police officers aren't the most kind or liked members of the community getting to know the person behind the uniform. Getting to know the person behind the title that was really special'
(Catalyst Alumnus)

Future for Catalyst

The Coventry University team made a series of recommendations and as a result:

- A single delivery structure will be established to ensure a consistent and clear approach towards the delivery and evaluation of the Programme. This will be put into place in April 2017.
- We will develop a more effective web presence for Catalyst to assist recruitment.
- There will be greater efforts to link participants to opportunities to apply for funding from the Near Neighbours Small Grants Scheme.
- We will further develop our programme of alumni activities, both locally and nationally. This will include events to showcase work done by alumni and a greater degree of aftercare to assist with and record the progress of alumni.

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