
EAST CLEVELAND GOOD NEIGHBOUR SOUP EVALUATION REPORT



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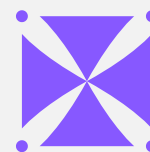


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

East Cleveland Good Neighbours (ECGN), with support from their Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO) Tees Valley Rural Action (TVRA), successfully initiated the SOUP funding events, inspired by the Detroit SOUP model, to facilitate accessible grant-making and strengthen community engagement. Held regularly since October 2022, these events have significantly impacted local communities by supporting grassroots initiatives across ECGN's strategic themes: Young People, Health & Well Being, Being Neighbourly, and Campaigning & Strong Local Voices. An additional 'Go Green' theme was included as theme development.

SOUP events provided essential funding to diverse community projects, including youth activities, health and wellness programs, community gardening initiatives, and neighborhood collaborations. Notably, funded groups such as Loftus Martial Arts CIC, Loftus Accord Walking Group, Boosbeck Village Hall, and Merge exemplified community-driven efforts enhanced by ECGN's targeted funding.

Participant engagement was robust, with democratic voting procedures utilising "monopoly money" ballots, promoting transparency and community empowerment. Structured feedback indicated that SOUP events significantly increased local collaboration and networking, leading to new partnerships and strengthened community cohesion. Testimonials from participants highlighted transformative impacts, affirming the importance of continued support for this type for local initiative.



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND



Purpose

This report provides a clear overview and evaluation of the East Cleveland Good Neighbours (ECGN) Big Local SOUP events. It covers the small grant awards given since October 2022, three events that took place in 2023, two events in 2024, and the first 2025 event held in February. Two additional SOUP events are planned for later in 2025. By reviewing these activities, we aim to understand how well the ECGN Big Local SOUP events are meeting community needs and contributing to positive local outcomes..

Background

East Cleveland Good Neighbours (ECGN) Big Local is a community-led initiative, part of the wider Big Local program, bringing together eleven rural communities in East Cleveland to enhance local opportunities and facilities. With a focus on sustainability, the group leverages East Cleveland's rich heritage—fossils, archaeological remains, and historic mines—to spark visitor interest and support long-term development. Endorsed by Local Trust, a UK-based charity, ECGN Big Local can access funds to implement its community-driven plan, as long as it aligns with Big Local's aims, values, and rules. By investing in shared heritage, the initiative seeks to attract new jobs, support local businesses, and foster diverse activities that will benefit the broader community.

Model and Local Adaptation

Based on the Detroit American SOUP Event concept, the format involves serving SOUP (or light lunch), collecting a small entry fee (waived in this model), and allowing community projects to present their ideas, with attendees voting on a funding recipient. Insights from similar events in Stockton and Middlesbrough helped tailor the approach to align with ECGN – Big Local priorities.



METHODOLOGY

Information for this report was collected via:

- A questionnaire consisting of 12 structured questions covering different themes, including awareness, participation, and perceived impact. The questions included both closed-ended (e.g., Yes/No) and open-ended responses to gather qualitative feedback
- Community presentations followed by democratic voting using ECGN-specific "monopoly money" ballots.
- Post-event structured feedback forms capturing qualitative responses and practical outcomes.
- Testimonials
- Individual conversations via telephone
- Social media
- Locally Trusted Organisation perspective
- Regular operational reporting to maintain accountability and effectiveness of funding activities.

Data Collection

Data was collected via conversations at June 2024 SOUP event and through an online / paper-based questionnaire distributed to attendees at February 2025 SOUP event. Participants provided responses on their experiences, and the data was compiled for analysis. Previous grant recipients also received the questionnaire and responses are included. TVRA as the LTO also provided feedback.

Analysis

Responses were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Closed-ended responses were summarized in percentages, while qualitative responses were categorized into key themes



Who's Been Helped

Since October 2022 SOUP events have funded 67 projects that:

- Support young people, such as Scout groups and youth sports.
- Promote health and well-being, including fitness classes and counselling.
- Foster neighbourliness, such as community gardening and local pride initiatives.

Attendance Trends

Attendance has varied between 30 and 70 people per event, with February 2025 recording the highest turnout. This indicates that effective promotion and engaging themes drive participation.

New Ideas and Themes

Recent events introduced themes such as:

- **“Go Green”** (March 2024) – Encouraging eco-friendly initiatives.
- **“Volunteers Week”** (June 2024) – Celebrating community contributions.

These themes help keep the events engaging and relevant to the community.

By the Numbers

Date	Groups Funded	Applications	Attendance
October 2022	9	10	50
February 2023	12	12	62
June 2023	9	13	30
November 2023	14	15	30
March 2024	3	4	50
June 2024	8	8	30
February 2025	12	13	70



OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGY



The strategic framework of the SOUP Events was reinforced by a series of documents and structured tools developed by ECGN and its partners:

- **SOUP Application Forms** clearly defined criteria and encouraged accessibility by accepting submissions from informal and new groups.
- **Grant Release Forms** ensured that all funding was linked to evaluation obligations and required proof of expenditure and impact.
- **Sign-in and Voting Record Sheets** provided a transparent process for participant engagement and democratic decision-making across multiple themed categories.
- **Event Presentations and Agendas** such as those from February 2025, June 2024, and internal drafts, illustrated ECGN's evolving strategy around participation, feedback loops, and themed approaches.
- **Evaluation and Feedback Forms** including direct reflections, post-grant evaluations, and attendance snapshots, guided iterative improvements.
- **Operational Planning Documents** detailed monthly progress, event strategy, and alignment with wider priorities like food security, volunteer engagement, and school liaison—demonstrating an embedded culture of transparency and partnership.
- **Project Impact Evidence** such as the Skelton United letter highlighted not only event outcomes but long-term capacity-building through cross-sector partnerships

Financial Accountability

Expenditure tracked across events October 2022 – February 2025 using:

- Individual grant release forms
- Centralised monitoring spreadsheets

Oversight ensured all informal groups submitted receipts or evaluations prior to fund releases.



KEY FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

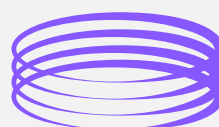
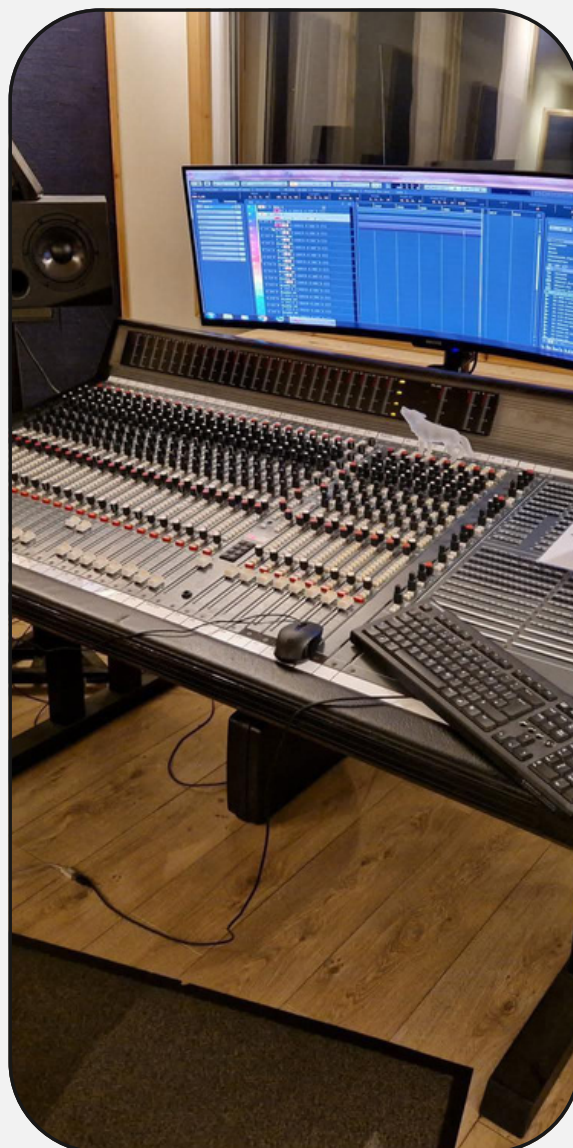
The operational framework and strategy materials form a robust evidence base for a participatory funding and engagement model that is responsive, accountable, and embedded in broader community development goals.

The participant questionnaire was designed to capture responses around the following areas:

- Community awareness
- Community impact of funding
- Communication and connectivity
- Confidence and motivation
- New connections and relationships
- Partnership intentions
- Additional funding and volunteer support
- Reach and beneficiaries
- Influence on practice and organisational development
- Learning and improvement
- Positive outcomes
- Anything else?

Key question answers are highlighted on pages 7-13. The final question enabled respondents to expand further or comment on any area not covered. Some statistics are below.

- **95% satisfaction** with event structure and inclusivity
- **88% positive impact** reported by funded groups
- Calls for **better reporting templates** and support pre-event



Questionnaire Overview and Response Summary

Surveys and interviews highlighted:



Q1: Did you know about ECGN BL before you knew about this event?

From the evaluation questionnaires, a strong level of awareness of ECGN Big Local was demonstrated among participants:

- Several groups had **previously received funding**, volunteered during COVID, or applied in earlier years.
- Multiple groups cited ECGN's **reputation for helping**, their **involvement since inception**, or awareness through **TVRA** and **social media**.
- Newer participants discovered the event via networking opportunities or community referrals.
- Notable groups identifying early involvement or knowledge include Poppys Ukuleles, Carlin How Keep Fit, Loftus Parish, and Lets Sing.

This confirms both repeat engagement and effective outreach to new stakeholders, validating ECGN's dual strategy of community continuity and growth



Q2: Without the funding, would your group have closed?

Participants provided strong feedback indicating that ECGN BL funding was crucial to the viability and operation of many groups:

- A number of groups stated they **might have closed** or been unable to deliver community services without the grant (e.g. Poppys Ukuleles, Carlin How Keep Fit, Loftus Accord).
- Groups used the funding to **book coaches**, **run trips**, **offer refreshments**, and **launch trial sessions** in new venues.
- Several respondents emphasised how the support protected hall reserves, enabled first-time applicants, or allowed groups to reach care homes and new audiences.
- For some, it was described as a vital funding stream to sustain or expand programming.

A majority said yes—the funding was critical. Groups used it to confidently book events, reduce pressure on limited reserves, and run free or inclusive activities.



Questionnaire Overview and Response Summary



Q3: Has the event improved local communication (giving/receiving info)?

The events were widely credited with improving local communication and information exchange:

- Groups noted that more people became aware of the **community hub** and the breadth of local initiatives.
- Respondents reported new opportunities to **network with other community champions**, connect with other groups, and use social media to share efforts and outcomes.
- Attendees felt the events gave them visibility into what other groups do and created a forum for **cross-group inspiration**.
- Comments included praise such as “**absolutely these need to continue**” and recognition of their role in surfacing the needs of vulnerable groups like older residents.

Only one respondent answered “No,” reinforcing a broad consensus on the value of these events in strengthening local information networks.



Q4: Has the funding improved confidence, motivation, or involvement in community issues?

Many groups reported that the SOUP events and associated funding significantly boosted their confidence and sense of involvement:

- Participants stated the events made them feel **part of a team**, and increased their **confidence** and **motivation**.
- Several highlighted how Big Local affirmed their efforts, especially in contrast to past experiences with short-term or top-down funding models.
- Others noted tangible benefits such as **new ideas**, **networking**, and **enthusiasm**.

For some, the funding helped shape or reveal hidden needs within their activities (for example, around incontinence).



Questionnaire Overview and Response Summary



Q5: Have you made any new connections from the event? If so, how many?

All respondents reported making new connections as a direct result of attending the SOUP events:

- Groups indicated forming links with **4 to over 20** other groups, with one reporting connections with **15 new groups**.
- Many shared experiences of **networking, collaboration, and new project inspiration**—including joint events like the Christmas Tree Festival and new speaker invitations.
- These connections extended beyond introductions, with practical partnerships forming and communities sharing spaces and audiences.

This outcome confirms the SOUP model's strength in fostering **collaborative networks** and peer support structures that are vital for sustainability and grassroots innovation



Q6: Do you have plans to partner with any of these organisations?

The evaluation revealed promising signs of ongoing collaboration and future partnerships:

- Several groups have already **initiated or committed** to future partnerships, including community trips, reciprocal visits, and shared event promotion.
- Others mentioned plans to **join shared resources**, such as volunteering with TVRA's minibus or becoming referral partners.
- A few noted they are **already well-established** or not planning partnerships immediately, but left the door open for future collaborations.

This shows that the events are not only **strengthening immediate relationships** but also laying the groundwork for deeper, **strategic alliances** across East Cleveland.



Questionnaire Overview and Response Summary



Q7: Has the funding helped you bring in additional funding, volunteers, or support?

Participants shared a mix of direct and indirect benefits from the funding:

- Some groups confirmed that the support led to **new partnerships** or **volunteer help**, such as working with the Land of Iron or through local festivals.
- Others described the funding as a key driver of **organisational confidence**, helping to **raise their public profile** or solidify their sustainability.
- While a few had not yet recruited new volunteers or generated further funds, the sentiment remained positive about future opportunities sparked by the grant.

This feedback underscores that even when immediate follow-on funding isn't secured, the foundational confidence and exposure gained through the SOUP events often opens new doors and sets the stage for growth.



Q8: How many people / organisations benefited from your award?

Groups reported a wide range of beneficiaries from their grant-funded activities:

- The smallest estimated reach was **15 people**, while the largest group served **over 100 individuals across 15 organisations**.
- Several projects **impacted 30 to 80+ community members**, and others noted "**all community**" indicating broad, inclusive benefit.
- Groups like Loftus Parish, Boosbeck Village Hall, and TEES demonstrated extensive reach, often through partnerships or public events.

These responses show that microgrants were leveraged to create meaningful, scalable benefits, serving diverse audiences from small group initiatives to large-scale community outreach.



Questionnaire Overview and Response Summary



Question 9: Has anything come from the SOUP event / award which has influenced the way you practice?

Responses show that the SOUP events not only provided funding but also **positively influenced how groups operate**:

- Several groups stated that the events **enabled better signposting, outreach, and referral practices**, particularly through increased awareness of other services.
- Participants mentioned a shift toward **personal contact**, broader **connection with community initiatives**, and a **renewed focus on communication beyond digital methods**.
- One group noted the events helped them improve longstanding practices, while another clarified it had enabled rather than directly influenced their operations.

These insights reflect the events' role in not just resourcing but shaping **community-led development** and **reflective practice**.



Question 10: What learning has there been that will enable you to do things better next time?

Participants shared meaningful reflections on lessons learned:

- Many identified the need for **better recording of outcomes** and clearer communication of their impact.
- Some were inspired to focus on **confidence-building**, especially for volunteers and community-facing activities.
- Others noted the importance of **mutual encouragement, better pitching**, and simply recognising that support is available when needed.
- While a few found the question less applicable to their context, most groups acknowledged insights that would help them **improve delivery or outreach** next time.

These reflections demonstrate that the events are not just about short-term funding—they're contributing to **skills growth, reflection, and learning**, essential for community development.



Questionnaire Overview and Response Summary



Question 11: What are the three most positive things to happen because of this activity?

Participants were asked to list the top three positive outcomes from their involvement in the SOUP events. Responses included:

- **Social Benefits:** Forming friendships, meeting new people, and improved team bonding and confidence across community groups.
- **Health and Inclusion:** Promoting social inclusion, mental wellbeing, and providing joy to isolated individuals.
- **Capacity and Learning:** Opportunities to take risks, improve communication, and enhance community outreach through better networking.
- **Resource Gains:** New equipment, funding opportunities, and the ability to try new activities otherwise unaffordable.
- **Community Impact:** Boosts in cohesion, shared experiences, and visible community spirit—described as creating "good vibes" and "new memories."

These outcomes reflect the holistic success of the events—strengthening individuals, organisations, and the wider community through **shared learning, visibility, and empowerment.**



Questionnaire Overview and Response Summary



Question 12: Anything else you'd like to add

Participants offered open comments that provide additional insight into the value and future potential of the SOUP events:

- “ECGN are doing a wonderful job promoting these events, the funds distribute help to so many people.” – **Carlin How Keep Fit**
- “It’s a very simple process to receive much needed funding.” – **Loftus Accord**
- “Thank you ECGN for the opportunities you’ve given to us.” – **MERGE**
- “Wonderful opportunity to highlight the amazing things that East Cleveland is doing.” – **Lingdale Tavern Community Hub CIC**
- “We always knew Big Local would take a while to embed... could do with an extension for the benefit of the whole community.” – **Loftus Parish**
- “These SOUP events are SO important to all the local villages.” – **Lets Sing**
- “A great project that supports groups that otherwise not have access to funds. This is why it is so important as it means smaller groups can develop and grow at their own pace.” – **Boosbeck Village Hall**
- “We are a CIC but would like help becoming a charity... this is our first time applying. The funding will help students attend their first competition in Scotland.” – **Loftus Martial Arts**
- “This type of funding is vital to the continuation of our group.” – **Carlin How and Skinningrove Girlguides**
- “It would be good to use other venues across East Cleveland”.
- “A printed newsletter would be a good idea to inform each other of successes”
- “Older people stopped going on trips after COVID. We adapted our project to help people feel more independent—including making sure we used buses with toilets.” – **TEES**

These comments reinforce how the programme **supports access, inclusion, dignity**, and the **organic growth of community ideas**.

Detailed within “**New Connections**,” “**Partnership Intentions**,” and “**Influence on Practice**,” highlighting **shared learning, co-organised events, and networking outcomes** across East Cleveland.



PARTICIPANT AND GROUP ENGAGEMENT



Key Features of ECGN's Approach

- **Accessible funding:** All participating groups receive funding at the event.
- **Flexible budgeting:** The budget is allocated per event, with adjustments made based on attendance and project themes.
- **Networking opportunities:** Events serve as a hub for community connections and collaboration.
- **Progress updates:** Big Local uses the platform to communicate achievements.
- **Mutual support:** Groups gain visibility, support, and potential future funding opportunities.

This initiative not only provides direct financial support but also **fosters a stronger, more connected community through shared goals and collaboration.**

FUNDED PROJECTS

OVERVIEW

What's Going Well?

Supporting Local Groups – Funding has gone to many diverse projects that improve lives in the community.

Exciting Themes – New themes keep people engaged and highlight important causes.

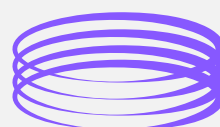
Broad Impact – Projects have benefited people of all ages, from children to seniors.

Project outcomes and examples:

- **Young People:** Skelton United Football coaching, Girl Guides, Zumba, 1st Loftus Scouts
- **Health & Wellbeing:** Dee Parker Counselling, Senses CIC, Take Heart
- **Being Neighbourly:** MeRGe (Mars Residents Group), Boosbeck Village Hall, Little Moorsholm Green Fingers
- **Campaigning:** Tug of War, Elderly Zumba, Land of Iron

67 projects were supported from Oct 2022 to February 2025, with thousands of indirect beneficiaries.

Recognising that not all groups are proficient or confident in using technology, ECGN displayed handwritten feedback and testimonials on boards around the room, showcasing outcomes and impacts for everyone to read.



COMMUNITY NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION



The East Cleveland SOUP events significantly strengthened community networking and collaboration across East Cleveland:

- **New partnerships and connections:** Participants consistently reported making new connections—with some noting links to over 20 groups—which facilitated reciprocal visits, collaborative event planning, and shared knowledge.
- **Transformation through participation:** Notable examples like the Saltburn and East Cleveland Befrienders project demonstrate how groups evolved in confidence and community impact, transforming audience perceptions and engagement levels through improved storytelling.
- **Inclusive platform for diverse voices:** The events provided a democratic, welcoming space for grassroots and underrepresented groups to present ideas, be heard, and receive recognition and support.
- **Informal networking and learning:** Events served as hubs for idea exchange, relationship-building, and informal mentoring—often cited as being as valuable as the funding itself.
- **Feedback highlights:** Testimonials highlighted the SOUP model's role in bringing communities together, celebrating local pride, and addressing gaps such as loneliness, inaccessibility, and financial barriers.

In summary, the SOUP events operated not only as a funding mechanism but also as a powerful enabler of civic dialogue, social capital building, and local collaboration.

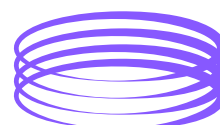
CASE STUDIES AND PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS



The Saltburn and East Cleveland Befrienders group is a local charity that welcomes refugees and asylum seekers to the Redcar area. They provide support and friendship to individuals seeking safety and resettlement. The group's mission is to connect refugees and asylum seekers with local volunteers who can offer companionship and support over time, helping them integrate into their new community and build social connections.

Highlighted Transformation Story:

During a recent Local Trust meeting, strong praise was shared for the **Saltburn and East Cleveland Befrienders project** (Asylum Support Group). Linda, ECGN Chair expressed her pride in the group's development, noting how their work has **helped challenge and change local perceptions**. She recalled how, during their first SOUP event pitch, the room's atmosphere was somewhat cold, and the group received few votes. However, by the latest event, their storytelling had improved significantly and they received an overwhelmingly positive reception. This progression was seen as a powerful testament to the impact and growth supported through the SOUP model.



CASE STUDIES AND PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS



TEES – Adapting Period Poverty Support to Empower Older Adults

TEES charity originally designed a project to tackle period poverty by distributing hygiene products to women and girls across East Cleveland. As the initiative progressed, they extended outreach to ageing adults and uncovered an **unexpected barrier**: post-COVID, many older people had stopped attending trips and social events. Curious about the cause, TEES discovered that many older people lacked the confidence to travel due to a lack of onboard toilet facilities and the cost of incontinence products.

Adapting their approach, TEES reallocated some hygiene supplies as incontinence support. This **simple yet impactful change** dramatically increased older adults' participation in community trips.

Encouraged by this success, TEES committed to booking only transport with onboard toilets and continued to engage older adults with tailored support.

This case highlights how **flexibility in project delivery** and **listening to hidden community needs** can lead to **inclusive innovation and expanded reach**.



LOCALLY TRUSTED ORGANISATION PERSPECTIVE



Key reflections from Tees Valley Rural Action (TVRA), Locally Trusted Organisation: TVRA, as the LTO for ECGN, shared an informed perspective on supporting SOUP events:

Pre-Event Considerations:

- **Community Readiness:** Ensure sufficient interest and ownership to support pitching and attendance.
- **Pitcher Support:** Provide pre-event coaching and mentoring to level the field for grassroots participants.
- **Funding Transparency:** Clearly communicate grant origins, processes, and award decisions.
- **Accessible Venues:** Prioritise welcoming, inclusive, and physically accessible locations.
- **Follow-up Support:** Assist both winners and non-winners post-event. TVRA acted as an accountable body for unconstituted groups.

Risks and Challenges:

- **Confidence Gaps:** Some participants lacked experience or comfort with public pitching.
- **Perceived Fairness:** Audience voting can be subjective; managing perceptions and expectations is key.
- **Limited Scope of Microgrants:** Short-term funding may not support long-term delivery.
- **Organisational Capacity:** High planning load may burden small delivery teams, especially without established models.



LOCALLY TRUSTED ORGANISATION PERSPECTIVE



Recommendations for Improvement:

- **Pitcher Preparation:** Offer workshops or one-to-one support to increase participation equity.
- **Alternative Voting Models:** Consider hybrid systems to balance public voice with expert input.
- **Structured Follow-Up:** Include tailored support for all participants (for example, project planning, banking support).
- **Outcome Visibility:** Track and share project outcomes to sustain community motivation and support.

Strategic Value:

TVRA noted that SOUP events expanded engagement, supported Big Local's visibility, and enabled broader community consultation. They fostered innovation and participation, providing a springboard for sustained funding and wider involvement. These events are now seen as both a funding mechanism and a civic participation tool.





CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The East Cleveland SOUP Events stand out as an innovative participatory funding mechanism that bridges local creativity with strategic development. The events foster trust, build relationships, and strengthen the community fabric. With continuous refinement, this model can inspire enduring local funding structures long beyond the Big Local initiative.

Key Takeaways

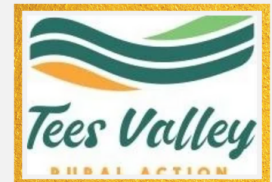
SOUP events have successfully raised funds for impactful community projects. The ability to adapt and be flexible has paid dividends; unearthing hidden community need, enabling inclusive innovation. Attendance fluctuates, with the highest turnout occurring when themes and promotions are strong. Continued engagement and fresh themes can sustain interest and growth.

Recommendations

1. **Maintain** and possibly **expand the SOUP event model** due to its effectiveness in community engagement and grassroots funding.
2. **Standardise Impact Reporting:** Uniformity to the forms and templates for all groups
3. **Capacity Building:** Provide training to support pitching and evaluation
4. **Youth Voice Strategy:** Further integrate with Skelton United and school partnerships
5. **Expand Funding Ceiling:** Allow select projects higher caps for scalability
6. **Annual Legacy Publication:** Share outcomes across platforms including paper based, to inspire replication and sustain partnerships

APPENDIX

EXAMPLES OF FORMS USED FOR SOUP



Template examples of the following are available upon request:

-  **SOUP Application Forms**
-  **Grant Release Forms**
-  **Sign-in and Voting Record Sheet**
-  **Event Presentations and Agendas**
-  **Evaluation and Feedback Forms**
-  **Operational Planning Documents**
-  **Project Impact Evidence**

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