

Exploring the impacts of the Venturists Programme in 2024

Introduction

The Venturists youth action programme began in 2020 to add a further innovative strand to Participate Projects' work in finding, exploring and supporting ideas that contribute positively towards people, place and planet. Participate recognises that young people often think more creatively and without the constraints of practicalities and the Venturists programme harnesses this by encouraging them to explore issues in their local community and develop ideas about how to tackle them. The Venturists includes school-based sessions, inspirational talks and trips involving a wide range of local organisations, and the infamous 'Dragons' Den' where students pitch their ideas to try and secure funding for them. Importantly, students then go on to deliver their projects often with significant impacts for the school, community and / or local organisations.

While initially conceived as a youth action project, it was hoped that the Venturists would also have a positive impact on self-esteem, personal development and career aspirations for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and facing challenges to learning. This report outlines findings from research to capture emerging themes from the Venturists so far, as well as a snapshot of the programme in 2024.

Our key findings are:

- There is a lot that is working with the Venturists Programme! It is reaching and positively impacting young people from a range of schools in the Bradford area, who are facing a variety of challenges to learning in the traditional school environment.
- The Venturists is attracting interest from a range of different Bradford-based individuals and organisations who report many positive outcomes from being involved in the programme.
- Impacts are also being felt in the schools that are involved with reports of shifting perceptions of what young people can achieve, fostering community connections, practical projects and providing innovative ways to align with and build on the curriculum.
- These positive impacts were enabled and enhanced by the team behind the Venturists with Jill and Participate being recognised for their approach and values and bringing their networks to the fore to ensure the right people are involved in the programme.
- Capacity and funding remain critical challenges for maintaining and seeking to expand the Venturists.

The Venturists in 2024

Since it began, the Venturists has gone from strength to strength and evolved to best fit the contexts it is delivered in. The below figure highlights the headlines from the Venturists Programme in 2024, showing the numbers of young people, adults, schools and organisations engaged as well as volunteering numbers and finances:



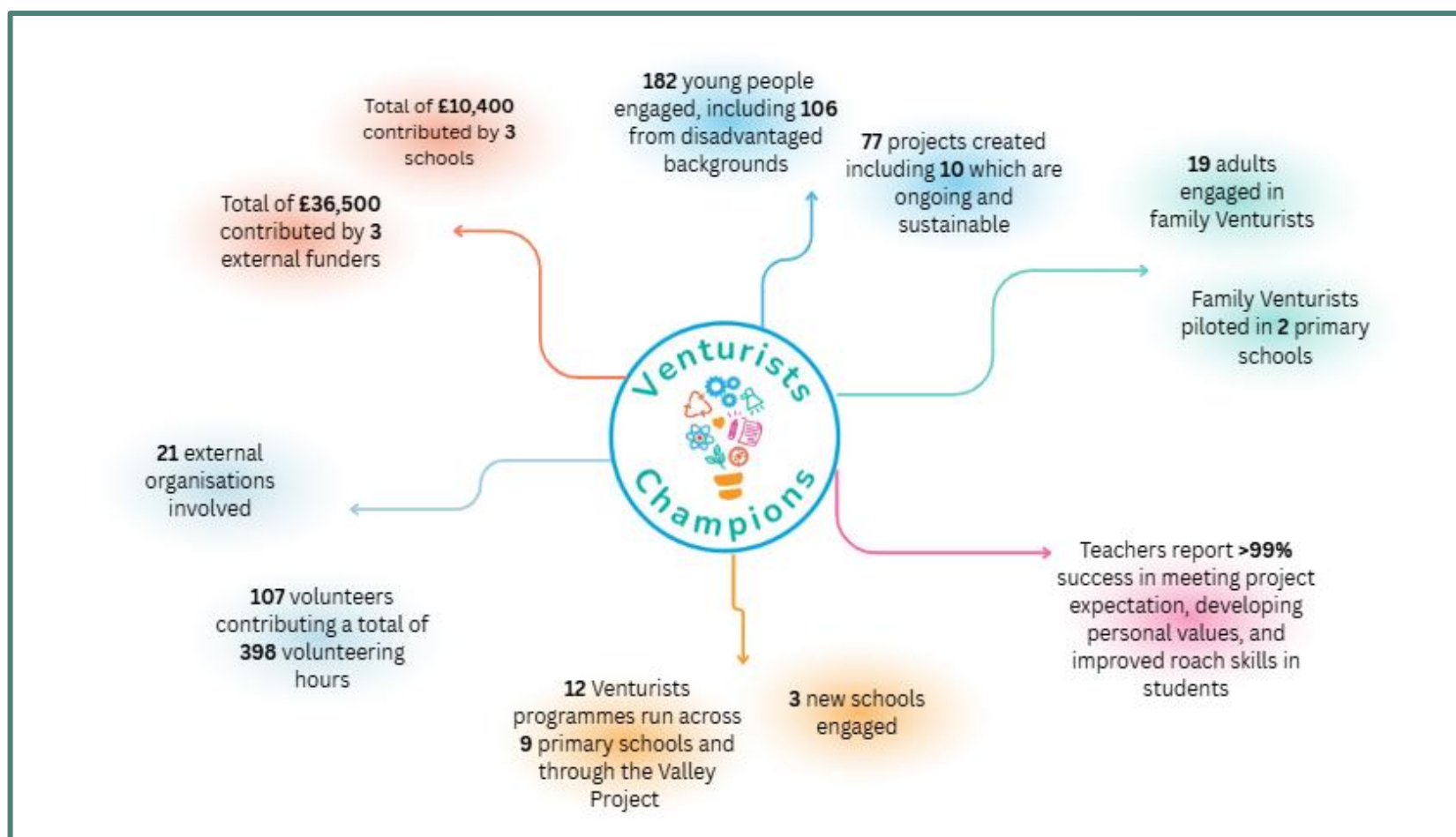


Figure 1 - Snapshot of the Venturists Programme in 2024 in numbers



Emerging themes

Qualitative interviews allowed us to explore these numbers in more detail to capture the learning and the nuance across contexts. Some key themes emerged around impacts for students, schools and external individuals and organisations.

Impacts on students

Students were asked self-assessment questions at the start and the end of the programme. Of 182 young people involved:

- 85% said they had increased in resilience
- 81% had improved communication skills
- 73% felt they had gained problem solving skills
- 72% were better able to work with others
- 82% said their confidence and self-esteem had improved.

In interviews, key themes around student impacts focused on increased confidence, raising awareness of community issues and exploring different job options, skills and careers.

Increased confidence

Many interviewees mentioned the impact of being involved in the Venturists on increased student confidence. Chris Tolson, Headteacher at the Academy at St James and Lady Royd Primary, spoke about students being able to speak in front of people for the first time, and to articulate ideas. Similarly, Gareth Baterip, Headteacher at Newby Primary School explained his experience of the first Dragons' Den he attended:

'I sat there as the Head thinking this has got to be a broader opportunity because it's had such a positive impact on the children that it was working with. Children who were new to English who were stood in front of a group of people speaking in beautiful English and really articulate and children who in that moment I thought 'I don't think I've ever heard you talk this much – ever.' And they were talking with real passion and real enthusiasm. And I thought 'there are other children in school who need access to this'.'

Gareth Baterip, Headteacher of Newby Primary School

In exploring why the Venturists is so effective in building confidence, Chris Tolson identified the fact that it is grounded in business and makes a contribution to the community. He explained that an important part of the process is students presenting their ideas to people at the Dragons' Den and getting money to see the project right through to fruition. A total of 76 projects were completed in 2024, focused on a variety of areas:

Focus of project	Number carried out
Environmental	25
Social Inclusion & Equity	12
Homelessness	17
Economic Empowerment	1



Wellbeing	10
Health	4
Animal welfare	7
TOTAL	76

Other interviewees picked up on the theme of students being able to see a project through to fruition and the young people having ownership over it, which doesn't happen in other areas of school life:

'I think it's so different from any other programme, and the kids have ownership, they own it ... And the kids come up with their own projects and they lead it, and [Jill] tells them that right from the beginning: 'this is your project, you're managing it, you tell us what you want us to do, what's important to you.' And I don't think they get that with other lessons. With the curriculum, they are learning to pass a test.'

Cathy Prior, Vanquis Bank representative

Cathy further recalled a standout project for her where a little girl at a local primary wanted to build a willow wigwam in the playground with a bench in it so if anyone was lonely, they could sit in there and others would know they needed a friend. She was delighted when the student was bossing them around with 'where it should go, how big it should be and what they should be doing' as it showed how much she felt in charge of the project:

*'To see her face at the end of it and to know that was **her** project and how it had gone from [an idea] to actually being erected – this wigwam with a little bench and everything ... And how that had built her confidence.'*

Cathy Prior, Vanquis Bank representative

Contributing to community

Raising awareness of community issues and empowering students to contribute to their local community and beyond was cited as an impact by many interviewees. For example, Sharon Orr, formerly of Vanquis Bank, said she felt it was a clever and insightful way to start to embed the values of kindness at an early age:

'Projects like the Venturists have taught me that behind everything bad that happens or that somebody does, there's always a reason for it. It's very rarely nature, it's more nurture and you see that playing out time and time again in disadvantaged communities. I don't know where or when that cycle gets broken because there's so much that needs to be addressed at the root. And that again is one of the reasons that the Venturists is such a great project because it does get kids thinking early doors about what part they can play in their communities and maybe a little bit more about what their responsibility is to future generations.'

Sharon Orr, Vanquis Bank representative



One student, who has benefited from the Venturists is Zahra. She reports gaining confidence and developing ways to contribute to her community and this has had ripple effects for her family:



Spotlight on Zahra

The first time Zahra took part in the Venturists was in Year 5 of primary school. She remembers her name being called and worrying that she was in trouble! Zahra said she used to get bullied at school and teachers often told her she was too sensitive, so she became shy and introverted. When she got involved in the Venturists, she got to know and like Jill very quickly and became more confident.

Zahra developed a project called 'We Are One' which emphasised kindness and tackled racism and discrimination, forming the basis of her plan to '*make the world a better place*'. As part of this she wrote and presented a speech to her school and has since worked alongside REN (Race Equality Network) to develop and deliver workshops to reduce stereotypes and racism in her community and produced a video on YouTube. She was the deserved winner at the Young Active Citizen Award at the Bradford Community Stars Awards and Born in Bradford Age of Wonder project where she developed a short film.



Zahra thinks she might like to work in psychotherapy or in a residential care home when she is older, where she can make a difference to people and see them smile.

Zahra's Mum, Salma explained how proud she is of her daughter and all her achievements. She said she's learnt a lot from her and now embeds compassion in her work as well as sharing 'subtle things' with her Line Manager around racism and tackling it in her organisation. Her husband was similarly inspired to go back to university to study Politics, where he is also exploring racism and gender equality:

'It's kind of like a family thing now, it's like we're all on this journey with her.'

Salma said the Venturists gave Zahra the confidence she needed after her experiences with bullying and had a 'magical impact' on her, leading to 'one opportunity after another'. She said it's like living with a mini celebrity now, with Zahra getting lots of requests for interviews. She can also see how Zahra is building resilience and learning to manage her empathic nature, so she isn't 'pouring from an empty cup', which is something that took Salma a long time to learn. Salma is certain Zahra will continue to keep doing good and sharing her compassion with others and is very pleased that Zahra's secondary school experience has been very positive so far!



Job skills and awareness

Interviewees spoke a lot about how the Venturists raises awareness and breaks perceptions of different job and career options and helps build relevant skills around those:

‘That’s what this programme is all about and that for me is what these kids need. They need to see why they are going to school – what’s the reason for all of this – and it’s to see they are developing skills, can get good job in the future, they can do anything they want.’

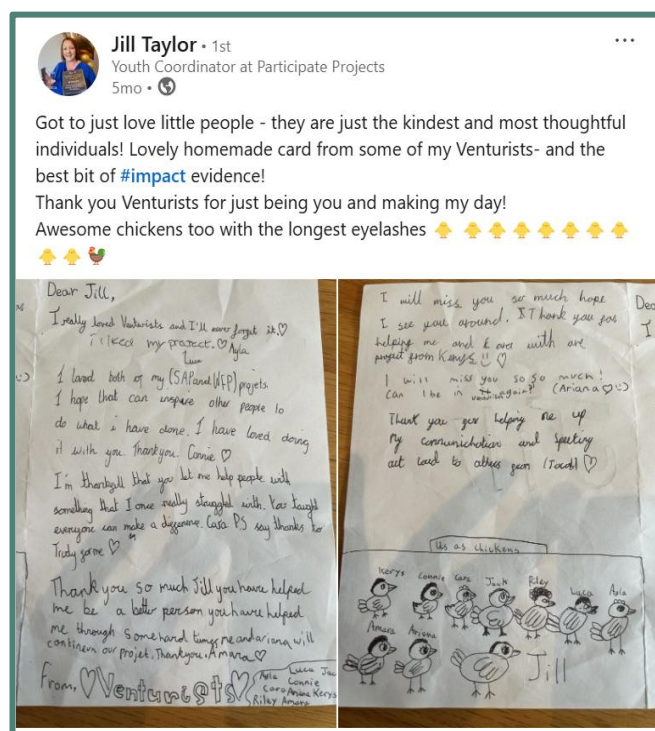
Cathy Prior, Vanquis Bank representative

One example was a mock interview they enacted for the position of a new chef at Vanquis Bank. There were two candidates, one who was very good and one who was terrible – she was late and checked her phone constantly during the interview. The students gave the interviewees excellent feedback about their performance and what made them good or not. Volunteers also work with students on what skills they already have. Cathy explained that many students don’t think they have any skills, but she works with them to show e.g., if they play football, they have teamwork skills.

The variety of volunteers and ‘Dragons’ also highlighted a lot of different jobs and careers. At Newby Primary alone, these have included a ward sister, a farmer, an accountant, a local Vicar, a local Imam, a bank manager, the manager of ‘Chai and Chat’, a local Councillor, a rap artist, a local MP, and the list continues to grow!

Vanquis Bank representatives also felt that students visiting their offices in Bradford went a long way to breaking down perceptions about working at an organisation like theirs. Students, and indeed parents as part of the Family Venturists (see below), could see they were people ‘just like them’, not ‘suited and booted’ or ‘sitting at desks number crunching’. They also highlighted to the students that an organisation like Vanquis Bank has a huge number of roles available in e.g., communications, human resources and marketing departments so if someone has the right attitude and is willing to learn, they would be welcome. A number of interviewees mentioned how this was particularly important in the Bradford context, where students from south Asian heritage are often steered towards healthcare or law careers and this shows them a variety of different options.

These themes are also reflected in the words of the children themselves as evidenced by this thank you card Jill received recently.



While the impacts on students are positive and many, there was evidence of different perceptions on which are or should be emphasised through the Venturists. Initially set out to explore the theme of social action with students, interviewees variously suggested it could be adapted to focus more on personal development or careers. Reflection on this could be valuable in evolving the programme.

Impacts on schools

The Venturists programme is currently being run in nine schools across Bradford. While there are similarities in the schools, each represents a different context for the Venturists programme. Here we highlight two schools and their Venturists journey so far.

Spotlight on Newby Primary School

The first Venturists Programme at Newby was organised in summer 2023. The aim was to target students who had low self-esteem or limited opportunities outside of school and very much focused on giving them a real purpose and a sense of what it would look like to give back in a more meaningful way. Headteacher, Gareth Baterip, remembers the first Dragons' Den where he was part of the panel alongside a female pilot from Jet2 and a representative from the local Rotary club:

'I will not forget how I felt when I sat in that first Dragons' Den watching those 12 children and thinking 'this has absolutely changed them as people' and that's what all our children need, not just the lucky few.'

Gareth Baterip, Headteacher Newby Primary School

Gareth quickly acted on this and in the school year 2023/2024, every child in Key Stage 2 engaged in a Venturists project. Jill supported the school to create a structure that worked, retaining the core elements of the programme such as the Dragons Den, and the job roles the students are responsible for, but fitting it into a half term so that each student can do it once in the year. It is now embedded as part of the personal development offering at the school and half a day a week is dedicated to it.

The Newby team didn't feel the name 'Venturists' gave enough information to the parents about what the programme was, so they refer to it instead as 'Community Outreach' projects. Through the programme they have worked with local organisations including the teenage cancer ward, a 'Chai and Chat' group, a foodbank and ASDA, as well as doing projects on the school grounds around e.g., supporting biodiversity. Some of these projects are ongoing which helps, as Gareth explained that one of the key challenges is children wanting to do more and more and more and having to find new opportunities and ways to facilitate that. He recognises this is a great problem to have and they still want the ideas to be led by the students so they develop new ideas aligned with student interests and passions when they can and use the ongoing projects with e.g., ASDA and Chai and Chat as backups when needed. The Dragons' Den aspect of the Venturists is useful for keeping these connections alive and getting new people into the school from the community.

Impacts for students

Students are developing key skills through the Venturists such as teamwork and leadership, and Gareth thinks their ideas about what they could do when they are older have broadened as well – he said that now, when he talks to students about what they want to do, their first



response isn't always 'footballer'! The girls were particularly impacted by the female pilot from Jet2 and couldn't believe that girls can 'drive planes too'!

Gareth explained that the children at Newby school are predominantly from Pakistani Muslim heritage, which he felt has particular relevance for the Venturists. For example, the concept of working in the community aligns well with the Muslim principle of 'Zakat' and 'giving back' as core to the belief system. He thinks the focus on community projects has opened the students' eyes to different ways of doing this, beyond financial support. In addition, he mentioned that the Muslim children often go to Madrassa rather than attending after school clubs, so this is a different way to provide development opportunities during school time. He also feels the range of jobs and careers the children are exposed to, really helps in a context where girls, in particular, tend to be steered towards a limited range of careers such as being a Doctor, Lawyer or stay at home as a Mum.

'And it's not just giving back to the community but it's about what giving back gives you back and really exploring with the children how that makes you feel and why doing things that matter is more important than doing things that make you loads of money.'

Gareth Baterip, Headteacher Newby Primary School

As such, they try to make the Dragons relevant for the projects the students are doing and to get a diverse range of people in for students to meet:

'One of our school values is confidence. This project, which started as just 12 children and is now 240 this year, is about giving them confidence and giving them ownership and exposing them to different kinds of people and different walks of life and that grounds you in who you are as well.'

Gareth Baterip, Headteacher Newby Primary School

Impacts for school

Gareth reports that one of the key impacts of the Venturists work has been establishing much deeper connections between the school and the local community. Ongoing relationships with groups like Chai and Chat mean there is an intergenerational aspect to learning and members of the group have even attended the school nativity, which he described as 'really, really powerful'. It has also raised awareness amongst staff of what is going on locally, opened their eyes to community issues and changed the way they do things. For example, on non-uniform days, they now ask for food donations rather than money, and give these to the local foodbank rather than donating to a big charity.

The school realises they are taking a bold approach with the Venturists and knows they need to articulate the benefits to the Governors and to Ofsted. In fact, Ofsted have been into Newby since the Venturists started, and the children 'chatted and chatted and chatted' about how much they love it. They also keep the Governors updated and recently recorded a video of two of their staff talking through a lovely, detailed presentation of the different activities the students are involved with in each year group such as with Asda, Chai and Chat, and the Foodbank, and the impacts on the students and groups involved.

'It might even be worth me videoing a Dragons Den so that I've got that as evidence because you can't sit through that, knowing what you know about our children and go 'this has had no impact' you just can't.'

Gareth Baterip, Headteacher Newby Primary School



Impacts beyond the school

The impacts of the Venturists programme have now moved beyond the school to the families. Gareth explained that the relationship they have built with the local foodbank means they can now refer families to it and some parents have been donating food to other charities as a result of raised awareness of the issues. One family has even set up their own charity off the back of the work done with the Venturists.

'It's exciting to think about the impact this could have if every one of our children left school and was prepared to give an hour a week to a charity or to giving back. That's 420 hours a week!'

Gareth Baterip, Headteacher Newby Primary School

Looking forwards

The Venturists approach continues to evolve at Newby. They are hoping Jill will return to the school next year to support them in consolidating what they have learnt from running it themselves this year and work out how to go forwards with, e.g., longer term partnerships and projects and the best way to ensure all students benefit through their time at the school. They are also keen to try the Family Venturists (see below) and see how that further impacts the students, their families and beyond.

Spotlight on the Academy at St James

The Academy at St James has a similarly exciting story when it comes to the Venturists. The Headteacher, Chris Tolson, was approached by Anthony and Gemma from Participate back in October 2020 to pilot the programme. This was largely due to the school having an existing relationship with the Participate Team who had previously arranged volunteering challenges at the school.

Chris explained that the Venturists really aligns with the school values especially around contributing to the community. They select students to take part if they are likely to benefit over any of four areas:

- Social emotional aspects of work e.g., social skills, team skills
- Speaking and listening skills – learning to speak and articulate ideas in front of an audience, especially those with more limited vocabulary and access to educational opportunities
- Academic aspects – opportunities to grow, read, write and calculate based on real life concepts
- Real life context – children that might particularly benefit from the ownership and purpose-focus of the programme and seeing something that can be delivered, which is often lacking in education as explored above.

He described how the programme had evolved since the pilot to better fit the context of the school, with the Venturists booklet now linked to the curriculum and them better understanding which students are likely to benefit most. Chris thinks that Participate could focus more on the personal development angle, which goes hand in hand with the social enterprise element.



The school has benefited from the Venturists in a number of ways, including onsite projects such as those supporting biodiversity in the school grounds. Students and the school have also been nominated for awards such as the Bradford Business Award, and one student won £1000 for a science and innovation award. This reportedly helps them validate their work - showing the impact they are having as a school - and also showcasing this as part of e.g., Ofsted inspections.

Chris also reported improved connections with the community as an important impact from the Venturists. He explained that this has provided an opportunity for growth and shed a light on local development, which changed their culture and mindset in 'looking for opportunities for our parents to work in the community in which they live.' As such, they have employed eight local residents at the school in a range of roles including in the kitchen, as cleaners and in the classrooms as teaching assistants. Chris described how this means there is likely ~£150,000 salaries going into the community that wasn't before:

'The wider picture in terms of growing our own staff and promoting their development while doing it to our children, cause that's what we're doing isn't it? We're trying to give them opportunities to know there are jobs out there they can do'.

Chris Tolson, Headteacher Academy at St James

Chris said he was initially quite sceptical about these sorts of projects, but he can see it is working well, and the school has changed positively for it. He has also personally come to understand and appreciate the value of careers education and social enterprise and showing children that no matter how young you are, you have a voice and uniqueness, and this can grow over time with right support. He has now introduced the Venturists at Lady Royd Primary where he is also Headteacher. He says this school has a very different demographic but he has seen a similar impact in student confidence across the first cohort there and they will be working closely with Jet2 to co-develop an exciting, tailored programme with a focus on Jet2's Apprentice scheme (see below).

The Family Venturists

The Academy at St James was also one of two schools that took part in the Family Venturists pilot in 2024, where each student has a parent with them through the process and they work on a project together. Cathy Prior from Vanquis Bank recalled how some of the parents were getting really 'stuck in' during the pilot and she mentioned one of her favourite projects was a dad from the Academy at St. James making flapjacks in the slow cooker for the homeless. She thinks the visit to Vanquis Bank broke down perceptions of the firm with the parents as much as the children. There are potential plans in progress to offer CV and skills workshops for the parents in recognition of the positive impacts of the pilot programme. Cathy also noted the significant demographic differences between the Academy at St James and the other pilot school at Whetley Academy – one of which has children who are predominantly from Pakistani Muslim heritage and the other which is in a white British estate. It would be interesting to





explore these differences in terms of future impacts. Jill received excellent feedback from the Academy at St James for the Family Venturists as shown below.

**Jill Taylor** • 1st
Youth Coordinator at Participate Projects
4mo • 

When a Head Teacher gives you feedback like this, you know The Family Venturists has had [#impact!](#) Family [#learning](#) and [#engagement](#) at its best! A huge THANK YOU to [Vanquis](#) for sponsoring the pilot project [Cathy Prior Sharon Orr](#)

“The Family Venturist project was a real joy to watch unfold as it not only reflected our school values of community and courage it also provided opportunities for families to bond, create and design their own projects and was a great example of family learning unfolding before our very eyes. The beauty of this project was that it combined the skills of collaboration, creativity and design alongside developing Literacy and Numeracy skills. Crucially, this happened alongside their parents and gave them a window into their success. Parents flourished alongside their children and took ownership of the projects. Adults learning together with their children was just a wonderful experience. The real life visits to places like Vanquis Bank gave both parents and children a window into the world of work and careers which some had never seen before. The photo of them all looking out of the huge window was something I will cherish for a very long term. Community and family learning has become even more important in our lives in recent years and the Venturist project this time captured this in so many ways. Moments of success were seen every session in both adults and children. For the adults, some had not had much success in school themselves but they wanted their children and project to work and this success and the unconditional positive regard Jilly and the team showed to our families will leave a legacy at Our School - thank you and a truly wonderful 10 week programme which I would highly recommend to any school.”

Impacts for external individuals and organisations

Across the interviewees and social media posts there were some clear direct impacts of being involved in the Venturists and evidence of some ripple effects for individuals and their organisations. For example, Dragons’ Den regular Geoff Roberts, who is also a Trustee of



Participate recently posted on LinkedIn about his involvement with the Venturists highlighting how proud he was to be involved.

In 2024, there were 21 external organisations involved in the Venturists Programme from across the public, private and voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and contributing through volunteering hours and running contracted sessions:



Geoff Roberts • 2nd

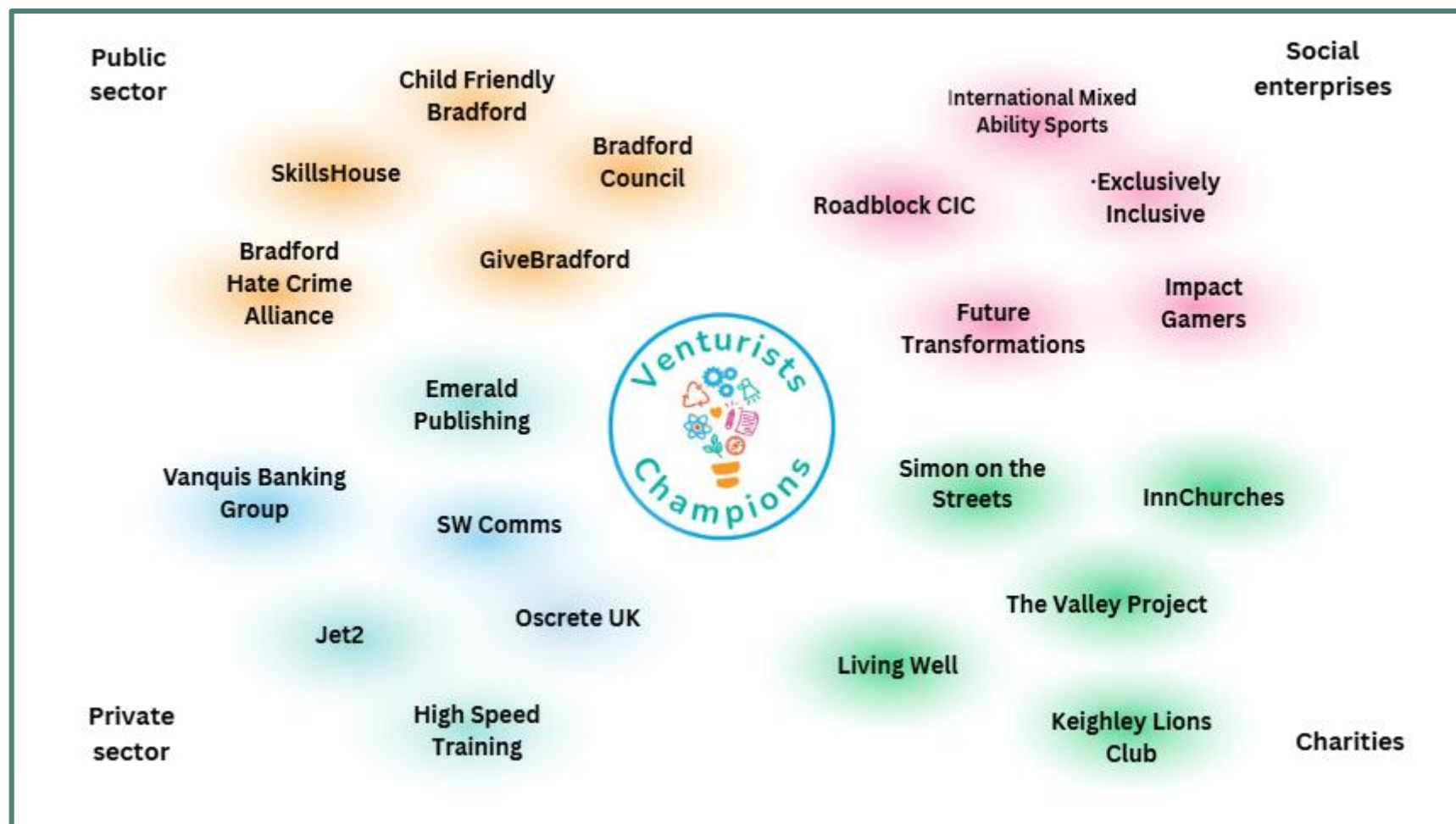
Trustee at THE AIRE RIVERS Trust and PARTICIPATE
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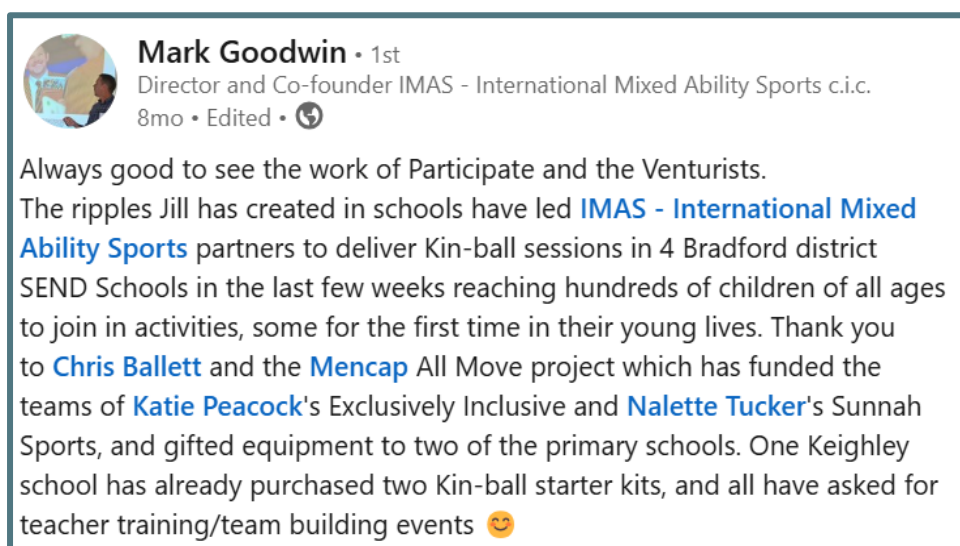
I am a dragon on this program and if it's ever needed a testimonial, this is the one. it makes noticeable differences in pupil self-confidence and attainment in a remarkably short time using unconventional methods. how can we open the doors for more schools to participate and for more organizations to sponsor a program?

in the year or so that I have been involved, I feel prouder of about this than many of the other things I've done in my life.



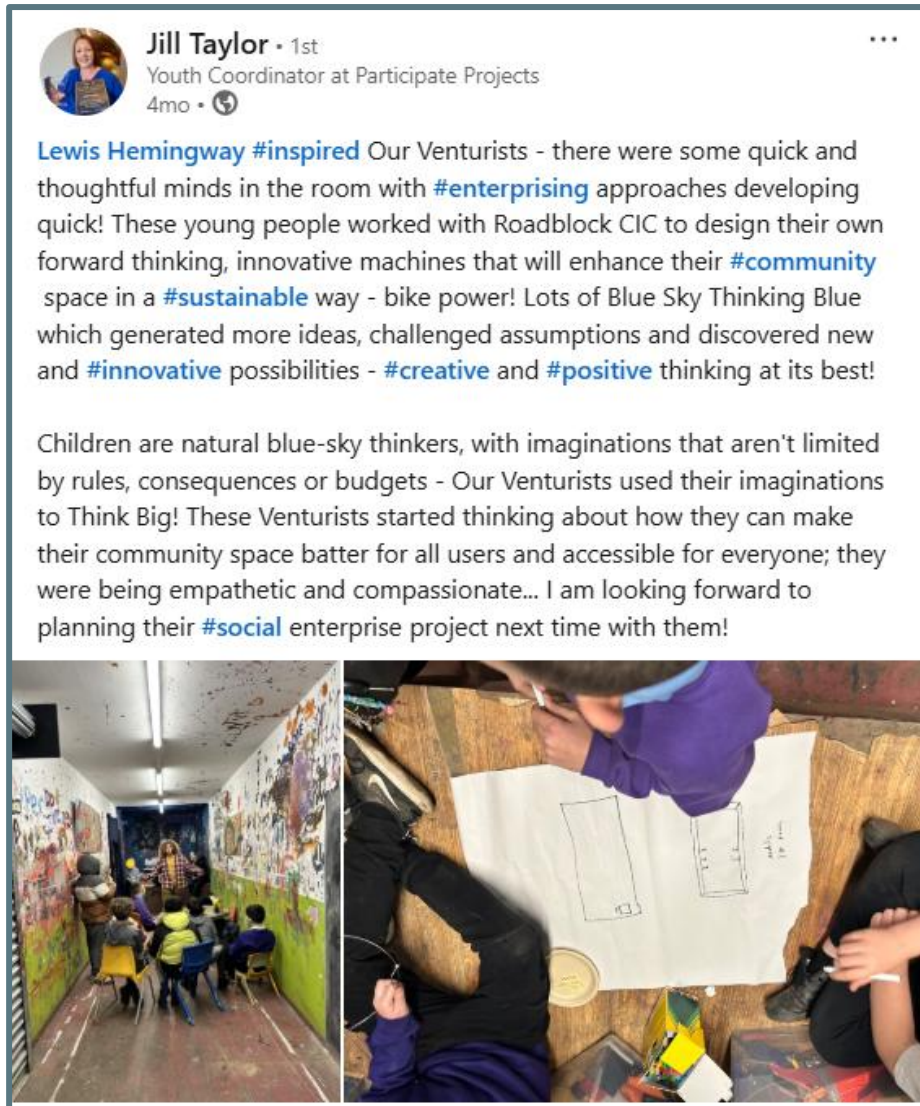


Some organisations involved in delivering sessions for the Venturists and in the Dragons' Den sessions reported business development opportunities had evolved. For example, International Mixed Ability Sports (IMAS) were commissioned to deliver KinBall sessions through a longstanding relationship with Participate Projects. It was the first time they had worked with Primary schools and felt they wouldn't have got an 'in' if they had cold called. IMAS Director, Mark Goodwin, said the work really took them out of their comfort zone but has resulted in exciting opportunities as they quickly realised that KinBall is very relevant for primary age and for SEND children. This led to a successful funding bid to Living Well Schools to deliver teacher training in KinBall in 8 SEND schools in Bradford resulting in the teachers being accredited with KinBall Leadership awards. IMAS plans to secure further funding to provide the schools with KinBall starter packs to use independently. IMAS worked with two other organisations on this – Exclusively Inclusive (EI) and Sunnah Sports - who both benefited from the additional delivery, and Mark reported that IMAS had benefited from EI's expertise in adapting KinBall to a primary school context. Watch this space for an interschool KinBall tournament!



In many cases, the impacts of being involved were felt at both an individual and organisational level. For example, Lewis Hemingway was invited to deliver a session to showcase his alternative business on the Holme Wood estate as part of the Valley Project. This was as a result of having been involved with Participate Projects' business coaching service and being recommended to the Venturists as a young person doing things differently. He explained this felt like an important transition for him as it was the first time he had been approached as an individual for his skills rather than as part of an organisation, moving from being '*someone who helps because they like to, to someone who helps because they have the skills.*' In his Venturists session, he explored how bike power works and how it can be harnessed to solve issues in the community with the young people involved in the project before they went away to think about ideas. When the young people presented their ideas back, their enthusiasm for a bike powered smoothie maker that could be easily transported between places was evident. This inspired Lewis and his organisation Roadblock CIC, who create bike powered inventions, to secure funding to develop a bike that can be easily transported and assembled using child-friendly hand tools. Lewis described how he had seen the young people developing their skills and leadership and being 'empowered to have more strength in their next steps.'





Bradford-based Vanquis Banking Group has a historical partnership with Participate Projects, working on a variety of initiatives over many years. Jill approached them at the early stages of developing the Venturists. The involvement has led to different impacts on individuals and the organisation:

Spotlight on Vanquis Banking Group

When Participate pitched the idea of the Venturists to Vanquis Banking Group, it went to a panel to discuss. Having worked with Participate in the past, Sharon Orr said she had no hesitation advocating for it:

'I talked about it passionately because I know Participate and their ability to deliver, and I knew that a lot of thought had gone into it. It seemed a very natural extension [to our existing work with them] firmly rooted in evidence of need and knowledge of the local community.'

Sharon Orr, Vanquis Bank representative

Vanquis Bank staff are encouraged to volunteer as much as they would like to and have unlimited hours they can use for local projects. As such, the organisation has been a reliable



source of volunteers since the start of the Venturists programme. Lorraine Handley, who coordinates the volunteering opportunities explained that they have volunteers in all the schools the Venturists are working in.

'It's not hard to get volunteers who want to go to local schools and work with the fantastic and lovely Jill.'

Lorraine Handley, Social Impact Programme Manager (Education Lead), Vanquis Bank

Lorraine encourages people to do the whole programme if they can, so they really see the impact on the children from start to finish, a sentiment shared by Cathy and Emma, who are both regular Venturists volunteers. Emma explained that you really build a rapport with the students when you see them every week and Cathy, who is now retired but still goes into Clayton Primary School every Monday, says you can see the confidence and belief improve each week you go. She said she would have loved a programme like this when she was at school.

Others reported how rewarding it is to be involved with the Venturists and how much you can learn from the children:

'The fact I used to get emotional every time I went to a session probably says it all – I think it did reiterate just how insightful children can be and how we, as adults, have a lot to learn from them. Adults can, wrongly, be very quick to dismiss children's thoughts and ideas, but these come as honest observations of the world around them, anchored in their own experience. We should listen more to our children and young people. I think children are very insightful and that's come through in spades for me throughout the whole process.'

Sharon Orr, Vanquis Bank representative

'Primary school children have such a thirst for knowledge, and I think the fact that their backgrounds are challenging it really breaks my heart and if you can make a difference and help them when they aren't getting that help anywhere else and have an impact on them in a positive way, I just think that's priceless.'

Emma Hamilton, Vanquis Bank representative

Interviewees felt that being involved in the Venturists has also impacted the organisation in several ways. Cathy mentioned the 'buzz' created in the Bradford office when the Venturists went to visit, and people were happy to chat to them about their jobs and what they do. She received messages from colleagues to say how nice it was the children were there and how important that is to show what they do to the future generation and their future employees.

Emma mentioned that the Family Venturists, in particular, has made her think more about the barriers people might face in using their services and how they can be more inclusive through, for example, providing translation support for those that don't speak English as a first language and making their products more accessible to different communities:

'The Venturists opened my eyes to challenges that maybe I didn't realise were there before I did it.'

Emma Hamilton, Vanquis Bank representative

In fact, the Venturists is proving so popular and well regarded in the Bradford branch of Vanquis Bank that those involved with volunteer coordination feel bad that the other sites



are missing out and are working with Jill to see whether they could look at developing a Venturists 'Light' for their London, Chatham and Petersfield sites.

2024 also saw Jet2 get involved with the Venturists programme and they are exploring skills development and training opportunities through the partnership:

Spotlight on Jet2

Steve Taylor, Engineering Training and Development Manager at Jet2 leads on the organisation's 4-year Apprenticeship programme, which teaches people who have been out of school for some time basic aircraft engineering skills. Steve has been involved with the Venturists as a volunteer in the past, supporting with building projects and talking to the students about engineering and working at Jet2.

When Ofsted suggested the apprenticeship programme needed more formalised personal development opportunities, Steve realised that involving the Apprentices in the Venturists programme would be a match made in heaven!

'It takes [the Apprentices] out of their comfort zone and it develops that side of it but also what it does, it just exposes them to a different experience they may not have been involved in. And the community engagement side it really just brings that whole piece together for us to support the local community while developing our own skills and that was the crux of it.'

Steve Taylor, Engineering Training and Development Manager at Jet2

So far, 11 Apprentices have been involved, volunteering at Lady Royd Primary and the Academy at St James. They have delivered presentations around the theory of flight and how engines work, which is a firm favourite with the students who always remember the 'suck, squeeze, bang, blow' process! They also recently helped out with student projects based on supporting biodiversity on campus. The Apprentices needed to work together with a manual to prepare pieces of wood for bird, bat and frog boxes and bug hotels in the morning and then support the students to build the structures in the afternoon. Steve explained that this was perfect given that covers interpretation, communication and teamwork which are the bedrock of engineering.

Despite one of the Apprentices saying they were dreading the session; they all came out feeling very positive as their feedback to Steve attests:

"Volunteering with The Venturists project was a truly rewarding experience. Not only did it boost my sense of wellbeing and confidence but also provided me with an opportunity to develop new skills I hadn't gained before. Working with the children to build wildlife structures, such as birdboxes and hedgehog houses was a fun and meaningful way to give back to the community."

"A very wholesome experience"

"I believe that volunteering has its benefits on people as it has allowed us to show others our skills that will help the confidence of others to possibly use these skills in the future"

Steve thinks the Venturists is an excellent way to raise awareness about engineering as a career option in schools and to encourage the next generation of aircraft engineers. He also



highlighted the variety of careers that are available at Jet2 as a large organisation with a legal department, HR and IT, as well as the more obvious cabin crew and pilot options. Indeed, one of the people to go in and speak to the Venturists about their job was a female pilot from Jet2 and one of the recent Apprentices is female so he is hoping that will inspire young girls to look beyond the more traditional ideas they may have of what work they could do.

In 2025, Jet2 are aiming to work closely with Lady Royd to develop a Jet2-focused Venturists. Steve is excited about the potential to adapt the programme to really fit their focus and the skills needs of their Apprentices. They are planning more STEM-focused learning around e.g., making aviation more sustainable. They will use a model of working where students develop ideas and the Apprentices take the ideas away and work with others at Jet2 on designing a prototype which they will then bring back and build with the students. This will mirror interactions Jet2 Apprentices will need when they are sharing complex information between e.g., night and day shifts. In addition, the Dragons' Den process mirrors how they will need to put together a business case for what they need for a given task.

Thinking about the Venturists has also prompted Steve to reflect on their recruitment strategy:

*'Before, all we ever used to do was the roadshows and the recruitment events and things like that. And now I'm thinking 'those aren't the places you need to be at!' You ... **we** need to be in schools - primary schools upwards - talking to kids about fixing aeroplanes and that's where we'll start growing the industry.'*

Steve Taylor, Engineering Training and Development Manager at Jet2

The Participate team

It is clear that there is a lot working with the Venturists Programme. In digging into why that is, a theme that stood out throughout the research was the role of the Participate team in facilitating the relationships that meant the Venturists could be effective and impactful. Using their existing networks of individuals and organisations means they get the right people and places to pilot ideas and to develop the programme. Their approach, ways of working, desire for positive impact and shared values were praised by many:

'Anthony and Gemma have been very loyal and supportive of me and what I'm trying to do and understand the community we're in because there are lots of challenges. The parents and children are all great but there are still lots of challenges. And they're very aware of those challenges and they help as much as they can. And I think that's partly because they know that we want to make things work for them and we're aligned values wise which really helps.'

Chris Tolson, Headteacher Academy at St James and Lady Royd Primary

As a key part of that team for delivering the Venturists, Jill's enthusiasm, expertise and approach was mentioned by many as being exceptional and key to the success of the programme. One interviewee discussed how, as an ex-teacher, Jill has a good understanding of the school context, and the challenges associated with working with limited time and resources, as well as in communities facing their own challenges. This goes towards earning the trust of teachers and Headteachers in the Venturists programme and schools knowing her



involvement will not be a further call on their limited resources. Interviewees also described the lovely way Jill interacts with the students, encouraging them to discuss and explore, finding ways for them to work well with each other and 'gently putting their hand down' when they need to listen rather than speak:

'There is nothing else like it! I mean Jill is one of the most fabulous humans in the world in our opinion because she's really passionate about it and she's really passionate about children seeing themselves as being able to work in the charity sector but at the same time really passionate about the children being in charge and in control and having that autonomy and developing as people.'

Gareth Baterip, Headteacher Newby Primary

'Jill is an absolute natural with the children ... how she just wants to love them all and how she goes out of her way to accommodate individuals and it's just so lovely to see that ... She's just one in a million.'

Lorraine Handley, Social Impact Programme Manager (Education Lead), Vanquis Bank

Jill's approach was also praised by Lewis Hemingway who had been approached to run a workshop at the Valley Project through the Venturists. It was the first time he had been invited to offer his expertise as an individual outside of his organisation and Jill supported him with knowing what to charge, encouraging him to value his time and 'held space' for him to explore the opportunity. In fact, he said Jill showed him what an interaction with a model employer should look like.

While Jill is clearly doing a fabulous job, these comments also highlight how reliant the Venturists is on Jill, who has a finite amount of capacity. It also leaves the project vulnerable should Jill become unavailable. This links to broader concerns raised within and beyond the Participate team about resourcing the project. They are continually looking for funding and currently rely on small pots from private sector and grants or for the schools to fund it themselves. If the Venturists is to expand so other students and schools can benefit from the positive impacts, this will need to be addressed.

Bringing the learning together

The evaluation has shown that there is a lot that is working with the Venturists Programme. It is reaching good numbers of students across a range of schools in the Bradford area, who are facing a variety of challenges to learning in the traditional school environment. These students are responding well to a different style and focus of learning in the Venturists sessions and there is evidence of increased confidence, awareness of community issues and ideas of how to tackle them and raised awareness of job and career opportunities.

The Venturists is also attracting interest from a range of different Bradford-based individuals and organisations who report many positive outcomes from being involved: from feeling a sense of warmth in being able to contribute, to more practical outcomes such as training opportunities for staff and thinking more about inclusion within their organisations.

Impacts are being felt at the school level with reports of shifting perceptions of what students can achieve, fostering community connections, practical projects and providing innovative



ways to align with and build on the curriculum. The flexibility of the Venturists programme in being able to adapt to different contexts stood out from the data, with ways to adjust the timings and duration, the focus and format, and the outcomes emphasised being explored across different contexts.

It was clear that these positive impacts were enabled and enhanced by the team behind the Venturists with Jill and Participate being recognised for their approach and values and bringing their networks to the fore to ensure the right people are involved in the programme. However, capacity and funding remain critical challenges for maintaining and seeking to expand the Venturists.

Reflecting on the evaluation

This report is based on data from 13 interviews with a cross section of those most closely involved with the Venturists, and representing a range of stakeholders including Headteachers, students, volunteers and organisations commissioned to deliver sessions. Data collection also included two school visits to participate in a Venturists introduction session and a Dragons' Den, a light touch social media review and analysis of quantitative data collected by Participate in 2024. This initial evaluation was valuable in identifying some emerging themes as well as some areas it would be interesting to explore further e.g.:

- Digging into the different contexts to better understand the cross-cutting issues and how the nuances involved differ across e.g., school demographics.
- Exploring ways to increase student voice in the evaluation using creative and accessible methods and better understand what they perceive to be the main impacts.
- Tracking the Family Venturists as it evolves and the ripple effects involving families in the programme might have.
- Tracking the school / Jet2 partnership to explore the impacts on both sides and beyond of co-producing this innovative programme.
- Reflecting on the core focus of the Venturists and whether that is still social action or whether it could be adapted to focus more on personal development or careers.

