

# A Summary of the learning and impact of BounceBack

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WALCOT FOUNDATION



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# Introduction

This is the summary report for BounceBack, a three-year funded programme led by the Walcot Foundation since 2021 to help local organisations work together to **improve the employment outcomes for young people in Lambeth**.

BounceBack evolved from its initial scope as a jobs programme in response to the pandemic. Over the last three years the programme has **reached 1,065 Lambeth young people**, helping them access 524 positive outcomes. In year three, there was a refocusing on those young people who face systemic barriers for employment.

This report reflects on the journey of BounceBack. It **highlights the learning generated from three years of working collaboratively with the 17 delivery partners** and from the young people who face challenges in moving through a complex, fragmented and sometimes incoherent system of employment support.

It also sets out some **ideas for the future** and how this learning can be used to **shape a new relationship with young people in Lambeth**.

We would like to extend our thanks to all the partners and people that have contributed to the evaluation and this report.

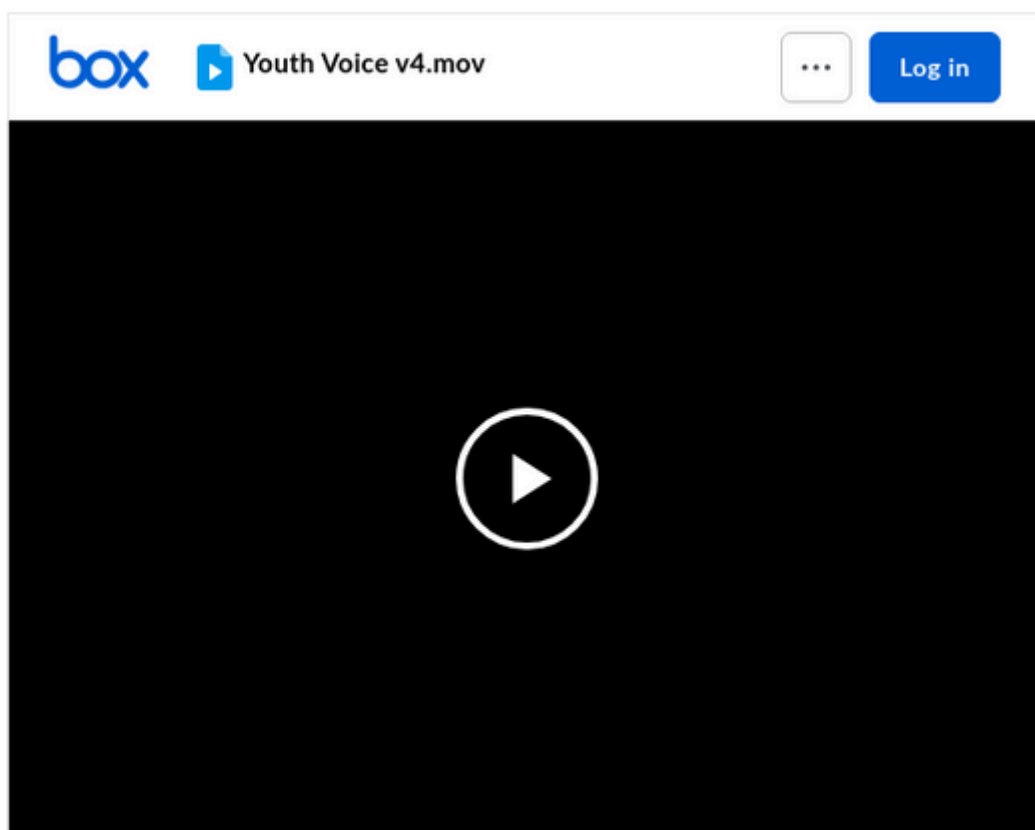
# Introduction

The voice of young people in Lambeth has been at the centre of the final year of the evaluation of BounceBack. We would like to thank the participants and delivery partners 198 Gallery and Creative Sparkworks, who worked with 10 BounceBack participants to bring their experiences to life in this video.

A report could not say this any better.

You can access the video on line here

<https://www.walcotfoundation.org.uk/bb.html>



<https://walcotfoundation.app.box.com/s/zlzp3usxsexu2qfpyfjnqsliz4a6offr>

# BounceBack in numbers

In total, 1,065 young people registered with BounceBack between October 2021 and September 2024.

The profile of BounceBack participants consisted of 59% male and 38% female; with 43% aged between 19-25 years old and 59% were Black, African, Caribbean or Black British.

49% of the initial participants completed their programmes of support; 27% of those started a new job and 9% went into full-time education.

34% of those who were classified as 'long-term unemployed' at the start of their programme were significantly less likely than the overall cohort (49%) to achieve an outcome. This illustrates the huge challenges this group faces in securing sustainable employment once they have been out of the system for an extended period. It also suggests that new approaches are needed to support these young people on their employment pathway.

Nearly two thirds (63%) of young people who achieved an outcome had this attributed 'mainly' or 'entirely' to their participation in a BounceBack project.

Where a job was the main outcome: 56% went into full-time employment; 30% temporary employment; and 14% onto zero-hour contracts.

# BounceBack in numbers

## BOUNCEBACK IN NUMBERS

 **10 partners**  
**1,065 Registrations in total**

Groups reached:  
46% receiving benefits  
36% long-term unemployed  
30% reporting a disability  
14% involved with the criminal justice system

Only 34% of those who were long term unemployed or had no qualifications achieved an outcome compared to 49% of overall cohort

Young people profile:



59% Male and 38% Female

43% between 19-25

59% Black, African, Caribbean or Black British



1 in 2 completed the BounceBack programme



For 63% of those who achieved an outcome, this can be attributed mainly or entirely to BounceBack participation

Out of all young people who completed the programme:

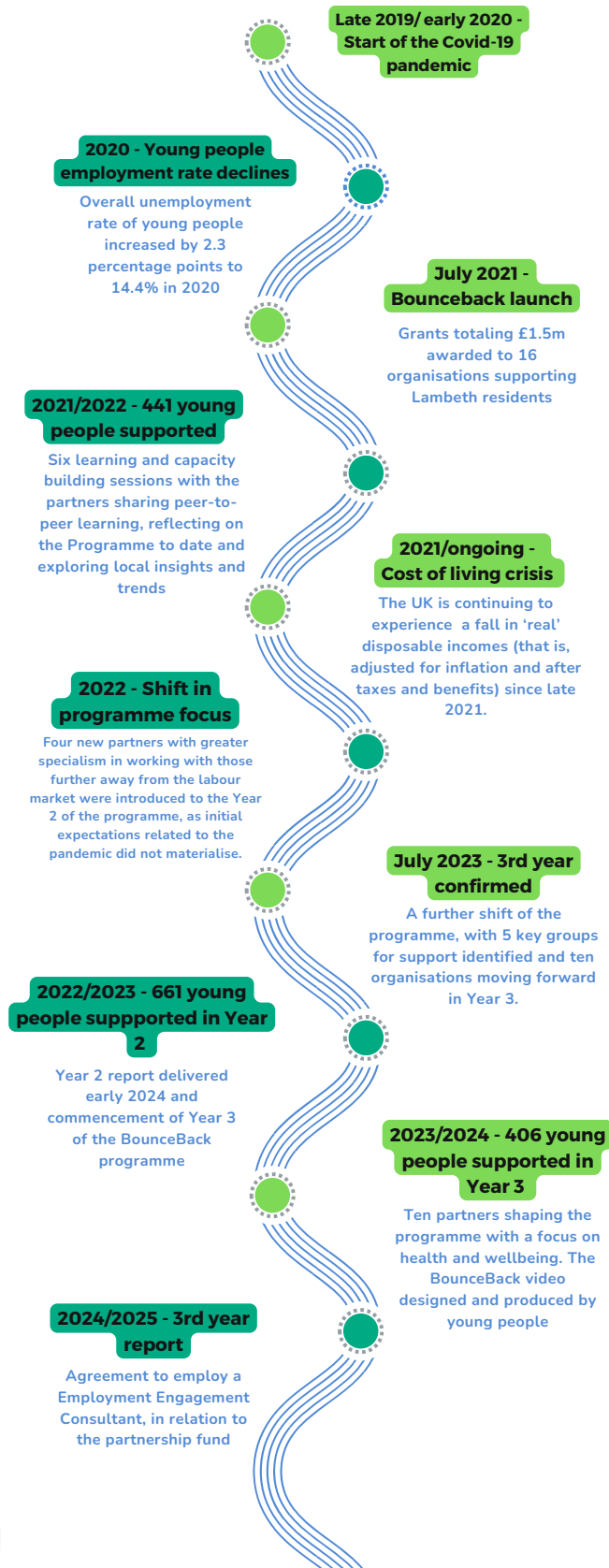
- 32% achieved no hard outcome
- 27% started a job
- 9% started full-time education
- 8% started an apprenticeship or placement
- 3% achieved a new qualification



**113 Job Transition Grants awarded**

# From collaboration to shifting power

## BOUNCEBACK TIMELINE



# From collaboration to shifting power

## Year One

The Walcot Foundation initially developed and commissioned a two-year employment programme as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time there were fears at both a national and local level that youth unemployment was going to rise sharply and the need for support for this group would increase.

The aim of the programme was to foster and nurture a collaborative offer between local partners so that they could provide better pathways in and out of services and reduce gaps in provision and the potential for young people to drop out of services; therefore, achieving better outcomes for them.

Partners were offered funding to bolster their existing projects and to support greater connection and collaboration with each other. Possible aims were to improve referrals, smooth pathways between opportunities and mitigate the chances of young people falling through the gaps between services.

In addition to programme support, Walcot offered Job Transition Grants (a £500 payment directly to a programme participant who secured work) to help young people with the costs of moving into employment once a job had been secured.



# From collaboration to shifting power

Following the pandemic the Government announced a series of employment interventions including the implementation of local Youth Hubs and Kickstart through Job Centre. BounceBack partners were operating in a changing and evolving landscape.

Rocket Science and its partner Institute of Employment Studies who provided data and facilitation support on learning events, were awarded the contract to evaluate the programme.

Coming in at this early stage enabled greater involvement with partners in the design of the evaluation and the learning elements of the programme.

Rocket Science worked with Walcot and partners to design a monitoring framework and tools to track progress, help shape learning about what was working and to adapt the programme over time.

Rocket Science created an interactive [dashboard](#) to share the data with partners and to reflect on learning sessions for the first two years of the programme.

Although capturing the data was challenging for some, in most cases partners felt that the insights generated from the dashboard and learning sessions were **useful and helped them understand** how BounceBack was helping them achieve outcomes for young people.

# From collaboration to shifting power

## What did we learn?

In our reporting from Year 1, we found that:

Employment was a significant outcome for many young people, with 174 young people starting a job. The programme also had positive outcomes around furthering educational opportunities with 34 young people gaining some kind of qualification. Young people spoke about their positive experiences on the programme, noting that they felt supported by the delivery partners, developing practical long-term skills. They valued the combination of 1-1 and group support; the individual support provided a chance to focus on goals, whilst group sessions allowed them to explore social skills and feel a sense of community.

However, it took several months before referrals to the programme came through in the expected numbers as projects mobilised, requiring partners to operate within this changing context and develop new ways of working together. A high number of young people with additional needs was observed during onboarding and this prompted partners to reassess the strategies needed to progress them into employment. Young people joining BounceBack displayed high levels of complex barriers, including mental health needs and delivering comprehensive and holistic support became imperative, often requiring a more intensive approach than had previously been planned.

Young people reported several positive 'softer' outcomes from the programme that are more difficult to quantify, specifically increased confidence, improved mental health and independence.

# From collaboration to shifting power

## Year Two

In year two, the profile of partners changed. The need for more holistic support to meet high needs identified in year one led to four new delivery partners being brought on to the programme, all focused on providing more specialist support.

Again, new partners initially faced challenges in recruiting young people. While the delivery model focusing on employment components worked well, many encountered challenges when participants had conflicting commitments like part-time jobs or schedule clashes.

The digital literacy gap experienced by some young people also limited their ability to take part in some of the elements of the programme. Delivery partners had to spend more time than they expected in preparing young people to engage with online opportunities.

Developing learning and sharing events from the collaborative partnership model enhanced the morale of the partner organisations involved but there were some ongoing challenges in facilitating referrals between partners.

Partners were operating different programmes at different times and often had limited time and resources to promote opportunities across the cohort. Whilst sharing of opportunities took place via email this did not always translate into 'warm handovers' and some opportunities went unfilled as a result.

# From collaboration to shifting power

Finally, engaging with employers continued to be a challenge, there were often high expectations with regard to the work readiness of young people and a lack of willingness to recruit young people who required more in-work support during their probation period.

## What did we learn?

In our reporting of Year two we found that:

The overall level of registration to the BounceBack programme increased (661 participants) compared to Year 1 (441 participants).

Young people described many positive long-term benefits of the programme. It improved young people's sense of self-belief, soft skills (communication and social interaction), as well as hard outcomes including job attainment, training opportunities and financial support.

Delivery partners explained the benefits of providing one-to-one support and gearing the individual projects they run towards specific employment skills that can be transferable beyond the end of a young person's time on the programme. The partners also detailed the benefits of collaboration.

# From collaboration to shifting power

Partners recognised an enhanced awareness of each other's work, leading to more cross-referrals and improved collaboration and joint initiatives. Communication between partners was also seen as valuable and occurred beyond the organised learning events through social media and discussions on collaboration.

Benefits that partners appreciated from the collaborative model included mutual support, attending networking events, having opportunities to share challenges and best practices, and being up to date with valuable labour market data and trends.

## Year Three

For this final year of BounceBack, the cohort of partners who made up the programme was focused on those best placed to meet the needs of young people worst affected by the pandemic. In particular young people who had been out of education or employment for over 6 months, those struggling with their mental health, those with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and those at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system.

The collaborative work between partners was also deepened in year 3 with elements of co-design and co-production utilised via the introduction of the BounceBack Partnership Fund, This allowed the partners themselves to collaborate on the design of a shared project. IG Advisors were commissioned to provide facilitation and learning support for this work and a new BounceBack employer engagement strand was developed as a result.

# From collaboration to shifting power

Partners chose to commission an employer engagement specialist to work across all 10 organisations for the last 6 months of the programme, helping them to generate new job and training opportunities as well as build relationships with local employers.

In Year 3, BounceBack reached a total of 406 people across the 10 partners. Nearly half (46%) of young people who completed the programme were aged between 19-25 years old and 61% were Black, African, Caribbean or Black British.

The split between male (53%) and female (42%) was consistent with previous years. Close to a third (28%) had a disability and nearly half (44%) were receiving benefits, with one-tenth (10%) involved in the criminal justice system. Looking at the outcomes from BounceBack, close to half (40%) achieved a primary outcome - a job or education placement.

## Learning from three years of delivery

### Enablers

The value of collaboration has been highlighted throughout the feedback received from the partners, and how beneficial and impactful it has been for the young people engaged in the programme.

There have been demonstrable improvements to the individual organisation's information sharing and referral support for the young people.

# From collaboration to shifting power

The benefits of improved referral amongst the partnership eased the burden on individuals to find the appropriate assistance for the complex needs of the young people; some examples include bereavement support and mental health and disability assistance.

Significant improvements to signposting were also highlighted as a benefit of partnership working through the BounceBack programme.; staff detailed how they were better equipped to aid young people with increased options for appropriate support. By increasing the connectivity between partners' pathways and referral processes, they have been able to work together to provide the appropriate support needed and identify gaps in provision. This allowed the partners to identify specialist organisations for the young people with more complex needs and refer them to the proper assistance sooner and with less hurdles in between.

*'Working in partnership on a project such as Bounce back afforded us the opportunity to widen our reach to cover the whole borough. This also meant the types of support being offered to young people was more comprehensive' High Trees*

The focal point of the programme was to provide access to employment through preparation on training and courses, CV writing, interview preparation.

For example, Creative Sparkworks provided film and TV skills training which exposed young people to connections with Sony Pictures Entertainment and ITV through studio tours and a networking brunch. This was invaluable, as young people had no previous engagement with these highly recognised companies.

# From collaboration to shifting power

Another example is the organisation Rising Stars Support, which utilised a mutual referral partner to offer useful courses and employment opportunities into industries, and additional personalised support needed for young people through their partnership with Job Centre Plus.

Partners forged valuable partnerships with local business owners providing tangible work experience and employment opportunities to participants of the programme and will continue to aid the partners in the future. Partners' staff reported the personal benefits of getting to know the cohort and witnessing their development of skills and confidence, and knowledge.

*'The workshops proved to be very useful for participants in that many of them had never attended any previously or received this kind of support. The knowledge gained through the workshops was very useful for our users and gave them insight into what is required of them in the working world and professionalism. It was great to be able to get young people to really start thinking about their longer-term career prospects whilst supporting them into employment.'* Rising Stars

Partners reported how the connections they made encouraged collaboration amongst them, as they decided to apply for funding together, which could increase their capacity for long term funding.

*'The increased connectivity which occurred through our involvement in BounceBack has been valuable to 198 as an organisation. We developed partnerships with Spiral Skills and Toucan Employment to refer participants to programmes which could help further their progress and/or provide more specific services for their needs.'* 198



# From collaboration to shifting power

## Barriers

Partners did their best to mitigate and resolve challenges faced by young people; such as providing adequate support for neurodivergent or disabled participants who had not fully disclosed their needs prior to attending the programme activities. Many had unsupported Additional Educational Learning Needs (AELN).

This made goal setting and support provided more difficult, and to remain on target to attain the goals in the time allotted. As young people had been undiagnosed or unsupported this left wider gaps in the skills required to gain the appropriate qualifications or training. Delivery partners' workers needed to refer these young people onto other programmes for the additional support required.

*'We were surprised by the very large number of participants who presented with complex additional needs and/or disabilities but would not disclose these to us. We found this particularly challenging when trying to set realistic employment goals and, when our employability programme ended in September 2024, trying to refer these participants onwards to organisations that might be able to offer more specific or specialised support for neurodivergent or disabled individuals.'* 198

Delivery partners explained that there were many entrenched and external barriers to achieving desired outcomes for young people and little had changed over the three years of the programme such as their housing situations or issues with their families.

# From collaboration to shifting power

Staff worked to bridge the gaps in the provision provided, and to link or signpost the young person to the necessary support.

*'Many young people face numerous barriers or welfare needs that hinder their access to employment or training opportunities, particularly due to health, housing, and family challenges. As they are no longer minors, we find we often need to work alongside statutory agencies, which have long waiting times and this discourages young people who then stop engaging.'* Spiral Skills

The organisational benefits included the sharing of ideas and practices with other local partners and providing opportunities for employment to young people, this empowered partners to improve collaboration and reduce gaps in the areas of support.

Sharing experiences of the youth employment landscape provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities and allowed them to standardise procedures and processes.

Challenges that arose were predominantly around the individual circumstances of the young person, and finding employment opportunities for the young person with convictions or dealing with mental health issues or disabilities.

Organisations met the challenges presented and ensured that they were able to holistically support the young person, when possible, into employment or training. Improved partnership working proved to be the most valuable outcome for both young people and employers.

# The Future

BounceBack has shown that investing in collaborative approaches with delivery organisations that have the reach, capacity and employer connections to support young people pays off but it needs time to develop and time within organisations to see the benefit. Giving larger grants, and grants for core/non-delivery costs helps, as does an appreciation that it takes time to see the benefits.

BounceBack has reached young people that other initiatives have not, with just over half of young people in the programme not receiving any benefits, this illustrates that although there is government support out there, a large proportion of young people are not accessing it.

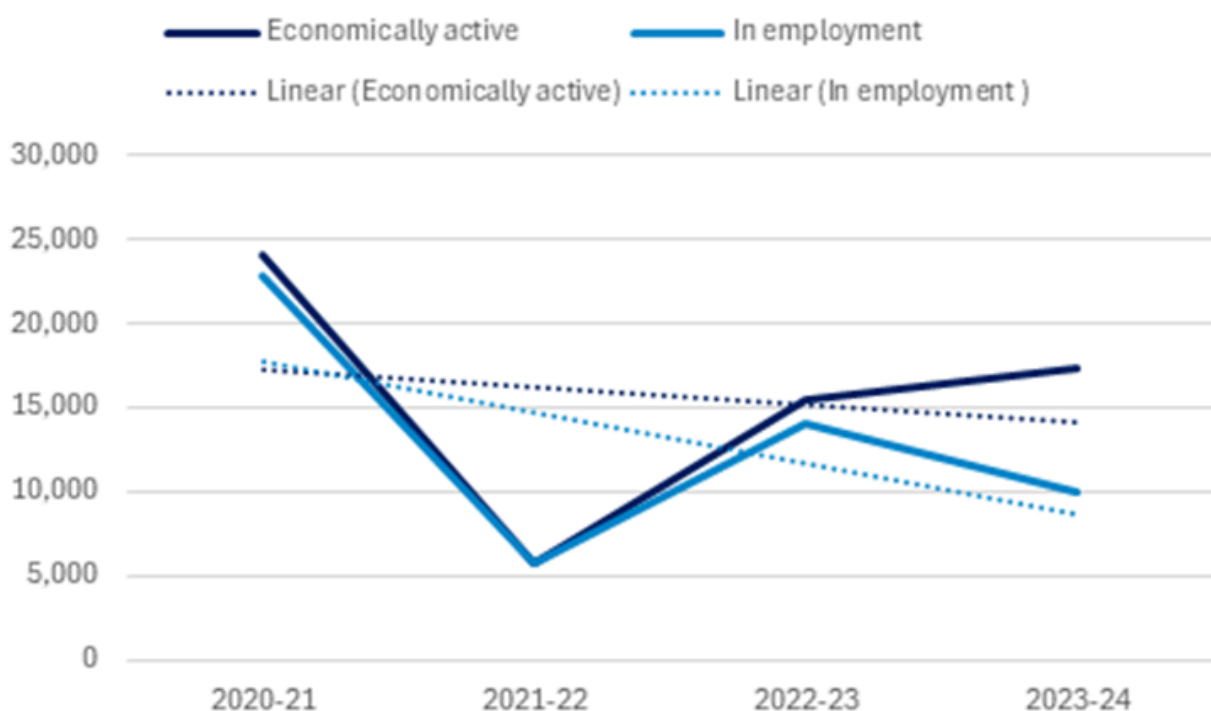
BounceBack has also worked with young people who face the greatest barriers to the world of work, they face complex challenges because they have not received the support they needed earlier in their education and therefore have the greatest journey to make into employment. This is made more difficult by those living in chaotic circumstances and where a trusted and sustained relationship with a professional/mentor is critical to help them succeed.

A key learning point from the programme is that entrenched issues around generational disadvantage and systemic barriers still persist, and whilst initiatives such as BounceBack are helpful, this can only be part of the solution. There has to be a wider shift to create lasting opportunities for young people.

# The Future

The following chart illustrates the volatility of young people's employment and unemployment, in Lambeth since before the pandemic and although things have improved, the road to recovery is uncertain. With employment still on a downward trajectory and economic inactivity growing.

This correlates with the national picture of the rising percentage of NEET young people in the UK at 13.4% [1], the highest in 11 years. A quarter of NEETs are black Caribbean young people, the major cohort of young people supported through BounceBack.



Source: Labour Force Survey data Age 20-25 in Lambeth  
[1] Data accessed from Youth Futures Foundation  
<https://data.youthfuturesfoundation.org/dashboard/neet/>

# The Future

BounceBack has shown that collaboration between organisations that support young people can improve pathways, support and outcomes to ensure that they get the help they need to secure employment and this correlates with emerging approaches around system change in employment for young people.

System change approaches are increasingly being leveraged to forge sustainable improvements in youth employment but are challenging due to the complicated nature of England's youth employment support system. [2]

The three 'levels' of systems change (explicit: changes to structures; semi-explicit: changes to relationships; implicit: changes to ways of thinking) can be achieved by utilising several 'levers' of change, for example:

- Aligning interests and creating a shared vision
- Adapting funding sources, for example pooling budgets or flexing funding arrangements
- Embedding service user voice in design and decision making
- Shifting leadership and accountability by acknowledging power dynamics and making them visible

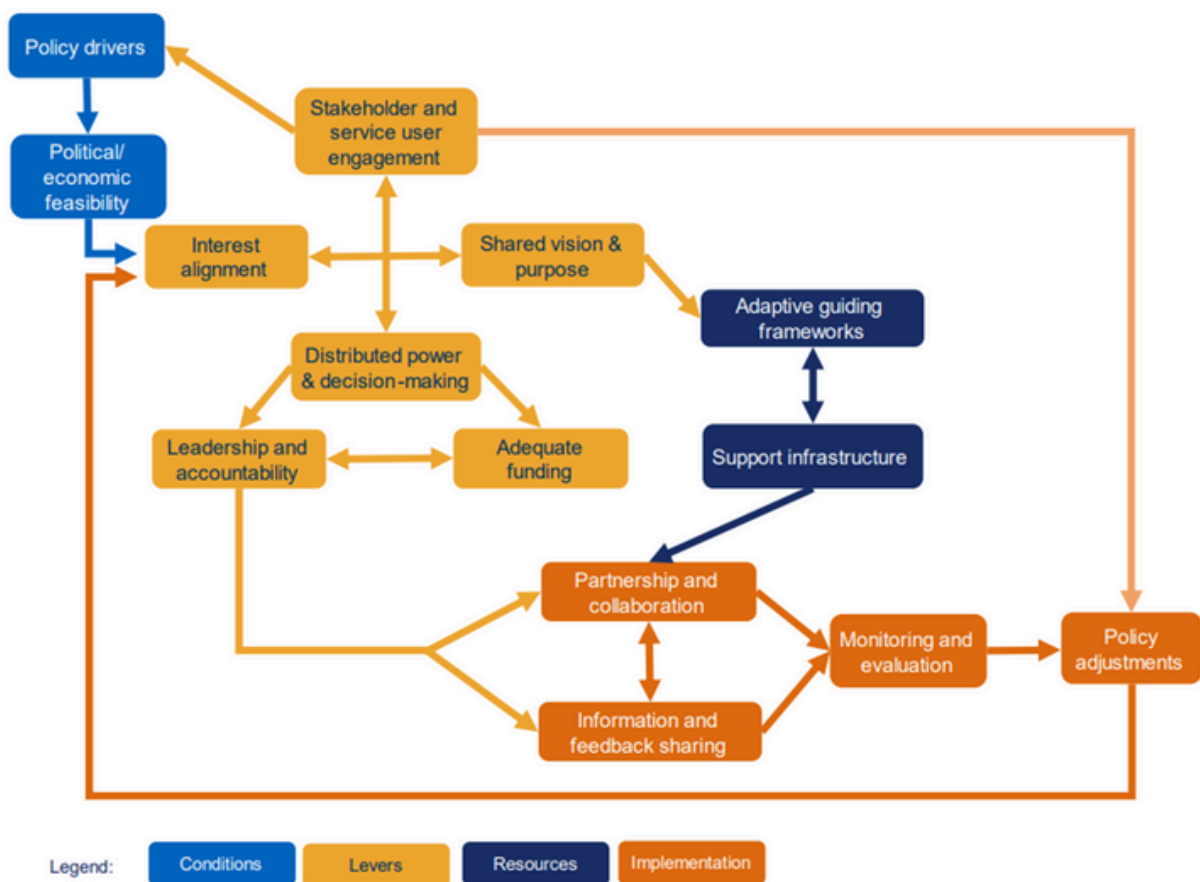
With these levers are activated and paired with suitable resources, implementing a system change approach can begin. Partners and organisations can then observe and measure for agreed definitions of effectiveness, whether that be changes in policy, changes in practice, changes in attitudes, or something else.

[2] Youth Futures Foundation (2024) What works in systems change interventions: A review of national and international evidence. [Link](#)

# The Future

It feels that BounceBack has much alignment around this model of systemic change but operating within part of a wider system.

This could be the moment where the learning from BounceBack and its engaged and motivated community of local organisations would enable it to move beyond a programme with a set lifespan to one of business as usual in Lambeth working with others and fundamentally by shifting power to young people.



# Summary

## Conclusions

BounceBack has had a demonstrable impact on young people in Lambeth on helping them access work and opportunities and moving them further along the employment pathway.

It has shown that when organisations collaborate, there are improved outcomes for young people and for greater coherence in the employment and skills pathway.

By giving organisations funding to build on what they already do well, rather than developing new projects, improves collaboration and outcomes. This is alongside investing in support to help organisations give them greater control and influence over what programmes need as they are best placed to know what works.

This approach to funding provides a blueprint for new ways of working to support young people who are left behind or have disconnected from mainstream education and training.

Taking a long term view is key and being able to adapt and flex to respond to changing need has been a founding principle of BounceBack and should be replicated. But it has also shown that

- we all need to act earlier to avoid young people being left behind and this requires greater collaboration at the system level
- we have to take a person-centred approach and offer help to young people when they need it
- we need to continue to invest in organisations that have the reach into and trust from the communities they know best.

# Summary

## Recommendations

Funders need to invest in what is already working to help sustain and/or amplify the impact of the organisations providing support to young people - fund core costs over a longer period of time. BounceBack was funded over three years to support existing programmes this gave organisations greater certainty and confidence to promote, engage with and support young people and work in collaboration with others.

Embed the voice and experiences of young people in the design and delivery of services. Although these criteria were important for delivery partners to secure funding, on reflection this was not considered sufficiently at the beginning of BounceBack in its design, this may have led to improving referrals in the programme earlier as partners took longer to mobilise than expected.

We need to ensure as system actors that we are making every opportunity count when young people engage with the employment and skills systems as and when they transition through school, services and access support. Although employment is an outcome, we need to ensure that we are giving them the right support at the right time and that each experience leads them onward in their employment journey.