

**THE
B!G
iDEA**

Creative Ireland Youthreach Report

2024



Clár Éire Ildánach
*Creative Ireland
Programme*
2017–2022



Project Summary

The B!G Idea Youthreach programme aims to provide creative thinking education to young individuals who have moved from mainstream secondary education. After a successful pilot in 2022, The B!G Idea Youthreach programme offers free creative education to Youthreach learners, tutors, and resource staff. The number of learners taking part in the programme has increased year on year, growing from 16 learners in a single centre in 2022 to 151 learners in 8 centres in 2024. By fostering creative thinking, the initiative empowers disadvantaged students to tackle immediate challenges, build resilience, and propose practical solutions.

The Creative Ireland Programme's Mission

The Creative Ireland Programme is an all-of-government, culture-based initiative that underscores the significance of human creativity for individual, community, and national wellbeing. Grounded in the belief that every person possesses creative capacities, the programme aims to nurture these abilities to enhance personal and communal growth. The Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027, a key component of the programme, seeks to embed creativity into the lives of children and young people from birth to 24 years. By promoting creative opportunities, equity of access, and the integration of creative thinking across educational settings, Creative Ireland aspires to develop a more inclusive and innovative society.

The B!G Idea Youthreach Programme

The core mission of The B!G Idea Youthreach programme is to empower learners in Youthreach centres and Community Training Centres (CTCs) to "Think BIG" and tackle society's most pressing challenges through creativity and innovation. By offering a series of 25 workshops free of charge, this programme equips these learners with the confidence and skills needed to navigate and address complex issues. The B!G Idea believes that creative thinking is a vital skill for everyone and strives to democratise access to creative education, fostering a generation of resilient, innovative, and socially-conscious individuals.

Through its collaborations with industry mentors, The B!G Idea Youthreach programme not only enhances the educational experience for learners but also strengthens the connection between education and industry, ensuring that learners are well-prepared for future opportunities. The programme's inclusive design ensures that all participants, regardless of their background, have access to high-quality creative education.



Strategic Partnership Between The B!G Idea & Creative Ireland

The strategic partnership between The B!G Idea and Creative Ireland synergises the core objectives of both organisations to foster creative thinking and problem-solving skills among Ireland's young people. This collaboration is designed to support learners in addressing societal issues through innovative solutions, particularly focusing on disadvantaged youth in the Youthreach sector. With the support of Creative Ireland, The B!G Idea has created a creative-thinking programme to meet the unique needs of Youthreach learners who could not thrive in a traditional school environment, ensuring it complements existing Youthreach modules and aligns with educational objectives.

The B!G Idea Youthreach programme's principles align with the broader cultural and educational initiatives championed by Creative Ireland. This alignment not only enhances the reach and impact of The B!G Idea's Youthreach programme but also furthers Creative Ireland's mission to embed creativity into the lives of young people across the nation. The B!G Idea Youthreach programme's reach has expanded significantly under the auspices of this partnership, increasing by almost 1000% since its pilot in 2022. This growth is a testament to the effectiveness of the collaboration and its ability to scale impactful educational interventions.



Benefits of Integrating Creative Thinking into the Youthreach Curriculum

Integrating creative thinking into the Youthreach curriculum is crucial for several reasons:

Empowerment and Engagement:

Creative thinking empowers Youthreach learners by providing them with the tools to tackle real-world challenges. It fosters a sense of agency and confidence, motivating students to engage actively in their learning process.

Skill Development:

The B!G Idea Youthreach programme focuses on developing essential soft skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, and communication. These skills are not only vital for academic success but also for personal and professional growth, as well as enhancing learners' future employability.

Wellbeing and Resilience:

Creative activities contribute significantly to the mental and emotional wellbeing of learners. By encouraging self-expression and reflection, the programme helps students build resilience and a positive self-image, which is particularly important for those who have faced adverse childhood experiences.

Inclusion and Equity:

The B!G Idea's approach ensures that creative education is accessible to all learners, regardless of their background. This inclusive model helps bridge the gap between mainstream education and alternative educational settings, providing equal opportunities for all students to explore and develop their creative potential.

Real-World Connections:

By connecting learners with industry mentors, The B!G Idea Youthreach programme provides valuable insights into various career pathways and further education opportunities. This exposure helps participants see the practical applications of their creative skills and broadens their horizons.

Overall, integrating creative thinking into the Youthreach curriculum not only enhances the educational experience for learners but also prepares them to navigate and contribute to an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

1 Programme Implementation

The B!G Idea Youthreach Programme Scope

The scope of The B!G Idea Youthreach programme encompasses a comprehensive and inclusive approach to creative thinking education, specifically targeting young people who have left mainstream secondary education. The programme is designed to engage Youthreach learners aged 16-20 years, who face economic, social, and educational disadvantages, across a diverse range of geographical locations in Ireland. With 12 Youthreach centres and CTCs registering for the programme in 2024, The B!G Idea has significantly broadened its reach, aiming to further expand this network in the coming years.

The B!G Idea Youthreach programme involves a series of 25 workshops that cover various aspects of creative thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application. These workshops are tailored to meet the unique needs of Youthreach learners, ensuring accessibility and relevance. The scope of the Youthreach programme also includes the development and provision of modified programme materials, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions for educators, and structured online Q&A sessions with industry mentors. These elements are designed to create a holistic learning environment that supports the personal and professional growth of both learners and facilitators in the Youthreach space.





Additionally, B!G Idea Youthreach programme aims to align closely with existing Youthreach modules and educational frameworks, such as the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 3 and Level 4 modules. This alignment ensures that the creative education provided through The B!G Idea complements and enhances the formal education pathways available to Youthreach learners.

Furthermore, the programme systematically collects and assesses feedback from learners, educators, and other stakeholders. This framework is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of the programme and making data-driven decisions for continuous improvement. Overall, the scope of The B!G Idea Youthreach programme is both ambitious and inclusive, aiming to democratise access to creative thinking education and provide young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with the tools they need to thrive in their personal and professional lives.

Onboarding Youthreach Centres & CTCs onto the Programme

The onboarding process for Youthreach Centres and CTCs into The B!G Idea Youthreach programme has been designed to be smooth and supportive, ensuring that coordinators, facilitators, tutors, and resource staff have all the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively implement the programme. This year, we introduced concise information sessions to provide an overview of the programme, its objectives, and the benefits for learners and educators. Centres that registered for the programme received comprehensive onboarding materials, including detailed guides and access to an online platform where they could manage their participation and access programme resources.

To increase awareness and broaden the programme's reach, The B!G Idea launched targeted campaigns through various channels, including social media and professional networks. These campaigns were strategically timed to align with key educational periods and were designed to engage not only Youthreach coordinators but also a wider audience of educational stakeholders. The campaigns highlighted the successes of the programme, showcased testimonials from past participants, and provided updates on new developments within The B!G Idea.



In addition, The B!G Idea attended key educational events where possible, including meetings and conferences relevant to the Youthreach sector. For instance, participation in National Youthreach Coordinator meetings and regional Youthreach forums provided the opportunity to communicate directly with coordinators and discuss the benefits of The B!G Idea Youthreach programme. These events also offered valuable insights into upcoming changes and trends within the Youthreach sector and facilitated engagement with governmental and educational officials. Promotional materials, including information leaflets, were distributed at these events to further raise awareness and encourage participation in the programme.



"The students that I'd have thought wouldn't have had as much input, **given the chance, started to be quite vocal on their opinions.**"

- Pauline Murphy, Co-ordinator, *Tullamore CTC*

Programme Content & Development

The development and continuous refinement of The BIG Idea Youthreach programme have been significantly informed by feedback from various stakeholders, including Youthreach learners, coordinators, tutors, as well as from participating industry mentors. This feedback has been instrumental in tailoring the programme to better meet the educational needs and learning styles of Youthreach learners. For example, ongoing modifications are being made to ensure the programme's objectives and outcomes continue to align with the Youthreach curriculum and softer outcomes, providing students with practical applications of their learning and fostering a deeper understanding of critical issues.

The programme focuses on collaborative projects and interactive activities that resonate with Youthreach's emphasis on hands-on learning and personal development. These elements ensure that the Youthreach programme not only supports the academic development of students but also enhances their personal growth and readiness for future challenges.



In response to previous feedback highlighting the need for more targeted support for educators, The B!G Idea increased its focus on professional development opportunities. This led to the creation of more comprehensive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions and tailored resources that enable Youthreach educators to effectively facilitate the programme and encourage creative thinking and problem-solving among learners. A dedicated Youthreach programme manager was appointed to ensure tutors receive tailored, one-to-one support whenever needed. This direct interaction with the programme manager also provides further insight into the challenges of delivering the programme and helps identify potential solutions.

Additionally, the programme aims to incorporate a robust impact measurement and management framework to systematically collect and assess feedback from learners, educators, and other stakeholders. This framework is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of the programme and making data-driven decisions for continuous improvement. By measuring the development of soft skills such as creative thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving, the framework ensures that the programme supports both personal and professional growth.

Youthreach Programme Delivery

Following the onboarding process, Youthreach centre staff deliver the programme workshops, guiding learners through the creative process from ideation to prototype development. Each workshop is aligned with Youthreach modules to ensure the learning is relevant and supports vocational training. At the start of the programme, young people across Ireland were surveyed to identify the global and societal issues most important to them. In 2024, the top five challenges identified were Climate Change, Mental Health, AI for Humanity, Diversity and Inclusion, and Cost of Living. Youthreach participants then worked in groups to formulate solutions to the challenge that resonated most with them.

The programme guides participants step-by-step through the creative process and provides a variety of activities to ensure learners of all abilities can engage and thrive. They are encouraged to think differently and approach issues from multiple angles. These approaches and problem-solving strategies are applicable to their studies and life beyond the classroom. The quality of ideas submitted by Youthreach teams was outstanding, with projects being recognised for their innovation and impact as well as one project, submitted by Team Motherboard from Kilkenny Youthreach. They won the AI for Humanity category with their transformative app designed to empower young people to manage their finances wisely. Leveraging advanced AI to analyse individual spending patterns, the app delivers tailored recommendations for savings by pinpointing the most economical local sources for frequently purchased items. Users can upload their shopping lists, and the app efficiently locates the cheapest options at nearby stores, seamlessly combining technology with practical financial education.



Industry Mentors

A highlight of the Youthreach programme is its emphasis on connecting learners with industry mentors who offer guidance, insights, and feedback throughout the creative process through the programme Dashboard. These mentors inspire students with their professional experiences and knowledge, enriching the learning experience and helping students gain a clearer understanding of career pathways in a number of areas, including creative industries. This mentorship component is crucial for bridging the gap between classroom learning and the world of work, providing learners with unique opportunities to learn from and network with established professionals.

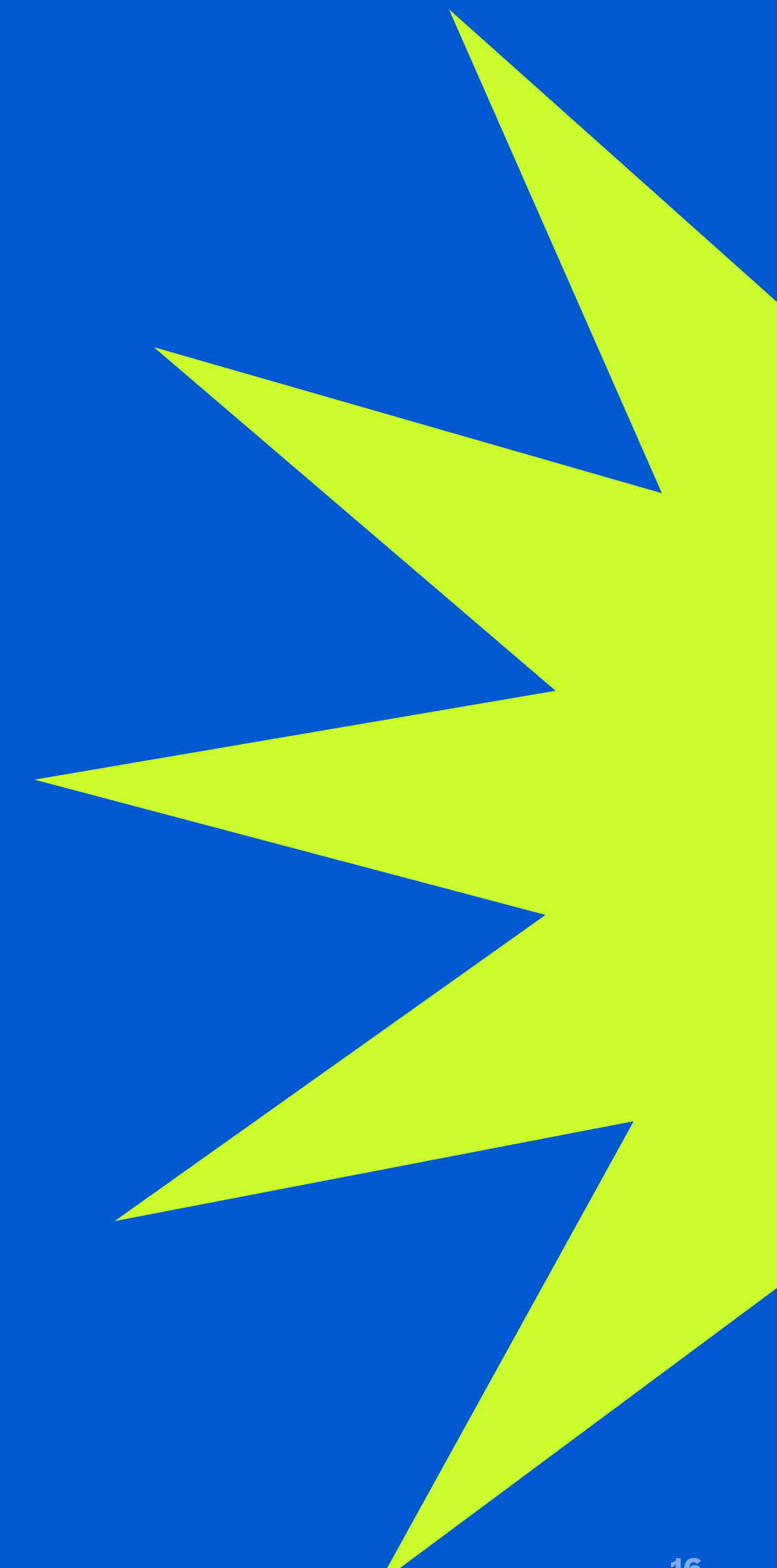
While mentoring in The B!G Idea Youthreach programme typically occurs through written feedback shared through the programme Dashboard, this year we facilitated a live mentoring session to provide additional support to a Youthreach centre. This live session was conducted via Zoom for Kilkenny Youthreach. The session aimed to help the teams to develop their ideas more effectively by providing direct, real-time feedback from industry professionals. Mentors from EPAM Systems engaged with the learners, offering practical advice on improving their project presentations and refining their creative concepts. The mentors emphasised the importance of understanding competitors, testing ideas with their target audience, and using tools like Figma for design. This session not only helped the learners to advance their projects but also alleviated some of the pressure they were feeling by giving them a clear plan for the next steps. The positive interaction and guidance from the mentors provided an invaluable boost to the learners' confidence and project development, demonstrating the significant impact of direct, live mentoring support.

2 Programme Impact

Impact Measurement and Data Collection for Youthreach Programme

The B!G Idea Youthreach programme initially planned to implement a comprehensive series of surveys for impact measurement. However, this approach was subsequently adapted to better align with the dynamic educational environment and enhance participant engagement. This adaptive strategy involved leveraging the programme Dashboard extensively to collect real-time, ongoing feedback throughout the programme. Educators were regularly prompted to reflect on various aspects of the programme, providing immediate insights into its effectiveness and alignment with classroom dynamics. This method not only maintained the continuity and relevance of feedback but also reduced the administrative burden on participants, thereby increasing the quality and utility of the data collected.

To deepen our understanding of the Youthreach programme's impact, we conducted in-person visits to two centres participating in the programme —Kilkenny Youthreach and Tullamore CTC. These visits allowed us to gather detailed qualitative data and observe the programme's effects firsthand, enriching our understanding of its tangible impact on the ground. During these visits, we engaged directly with learners and tutors, capturing nuanced feedback that went beyond standard surveys.



At Kilkenny Youthreach, learners expressed how the programme helped them develop essential skills. One noted, "**It really helped me to get out of my shell and to understand myself better!**" while another highlighted an increase in confidence, stating, "**This programme really helped to improve my confidence in myself and in my role as team leader.**" Another learner also reflected on the importance of teamwork, saying, "**The teamwork skills will definitely help me in the future. It applies to nearly every job.**" These reflections underscore The B!G Idea Youthreach programme's success in fostering personal growth and teamwork skills, vital for future employment and personal development.

Additionally, team 'Motherboard' from Kilkenny Youthreach submitted an innovative idea that won the category of AI for Humanity. The learners were celebrated at The B!G Showcase, highlighting the innovative capabilities fostered through the programme. This recognition not only boosted the morale of the learners but also showcased the high level of creative and critical thinking skills developed through their participation in The B!G Idea.





Similarly, at Tullamore CTC, participants shared their positive experiences. One learner was eager to talk about how much she enjoyed the teamwork involved in the programme: **"The first thing we do is talk to each other and share what we are thinking. It is much better to work as a team."** Another reflected on the broader impact of the programme, saying, **"I used to think creativity was just making something. But now I think it's also very mental and involves thinking outside the box."** These insights highlight the programme's role in enhancing both creative thinking and collaborative skills. A third learner added, **"I didn't think I'd be very keen on working with people but doing this definitely helped with the teamwork and creativity part of it."**

Tutors at these centres also provided valuable feedback on the programme's implementation. Michelle Murphy from Kilkenny Youthreach emphasised the importance of confidence building and problem-solving skills, noting that **"The key learning I think is confidence building. The problem-solving skills and critical thinking transfer across to their other studies too."** She further added, **"Problem-solving, critical thinking, seeing things through—these are all life skills and they're working on them every day with The B!G Idea."** Pauline Murphy from Tullamore CTC observed, **"They really started to thrive when they took the ownership over the project."** Pauline also highlighted the programme's flexibility, stating, **"It's so flexible, like it fits around you and your classroom—no matter what you're doing."**

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It applies to nearly every job."**

- Joshua, Learner, *Kilkenny Youthreach*

The programme dashboard played a crucial role in collecting quantitative data. This tool enabled educators to provide immediate feedback on various aspects of the programme. For instance, 100% of teachers and tutors expressed satisfaction with the quality of the teaching materials provided. Additionally, 82% observed a significant improvement in their students' problem-solving skills, with an additional 18% noting some level of progress in this regard. This feedback underscores the Youthreach programme's success in fostering essential critical thinking skills, a key objective and core outcome of the Youthreach curriculum.

Furthermore, the versatility of the programme's tools and methods was affirmed, with 76% of educators across the programme reporting that the strategies could be effectively integrated into other lessons. This adaptability enhances the programme's utility, extending its impact beyond the immediate context to enrich broader educational practices, thus supporting the holistic educational goals of Youthreach.





As part of The B!G Idea's objective to constantly evolve the Youthreach programme to suit the needs of learners and tutors, we also asked facilitators if they would be interested in an option to start the programme in September as well as January. A clear preference emerged for an earlier start in the academic year, with 100% of participants on the Youthreach programme favouring a commencement in September. In response, we have decided to offer start dates in both September and January for the upcoming academic year. This adjustment will allow educators greater flexibility in engaging learners with the creative process over a more extended period, potentially alleviating common issues such as absenteeism and providing ample time for the development and refinement of creative projects.

The B!G Idea Showcase, held at Mastercard HQ in Dublin on May 10th, provided a platform for participants to celebrate their achievements in the programme. Both Kilkenny Youthreach and Tullamore CTC attended the event, which also served as an opportunity to gather additional feedback from participants. According to the showcase survey, 100% of the learners reported learning new skills through the programme, and all of them believed these skills would be useful for life beyond school or Youthreach. Additionally, 96% of the students enjoyed using the Creativity Card Kit to develop their B!G Idea, and 100% felt more confident in their problem-solving abilities after participating in the programme.

The in-person visits and the Showcase also provided qualitative data that enriched our understanding of the Youthreach programme's impact. At Kilkenny Youthreach, learners shared how the programme influenced their personal growth and teamwork skills. One remarked, "**I feel more confident tackling challenges now that I've done The B!G Idea.**" She also noted, "**Doing The B!G Idea I've made more friends. You actually get to know the people in your team and it's been a great experience.**"

At Tullamore CTC, the feedback was similarly positive. One participant highlighted the programme's impact on his creativity and teamwork skills, saying, "**The B!G Idea has made my ideas a lot more exciting and boosted my imagination.**" Another also emphasised how working together can foster creativity, noting, "**I always thought I was creative, but when you bring a team together, a lot of individuals, you can get even more creative.**" These reflections underscore the programme's success in fostering a collaborative and innovative learning environment.





Tutors from both centres provided insights into the programme's benefits and its integration with the existing curriculum. Michelle Murphy from Kilkenny Youthreach stated, **"I've heard from the students the Mentor feedback is meaningful and definitely gives them a boost in their own abilities and confidence."** She also highlighted the broader impact of the programme, saying, **"For students to speak and meet with professionals, they feel quite honoured! They definitely come away with feelings of 'wow, we got it', or they can tease things out further with the feedback."** Pauline Murphy from Tullamore CTC echoed this sentiment, noting, **"The students that I'd have thought wouldn't have had as much input, given the chance, started to be quite vocal on their opinions."**

Overall, the combination of real-time feedback through the programme Dashboard, qualitative data from centre visits, and insights gathered at the B!G Showcase provided a comprehensive understanding of The B!G Idea Youthreach programme's impact. This adaptive and responsive approach ensured that the programme remained aligned with the needs of Youthreach learners and educators, supporting the development of essential skills and fostering a positive, engaging learning environment. The successful implementation and positive feedback highlight the programme's effectiveness in enhancing creative thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills among Youthreach learners, preparing them for future success in both their personal and professional lives.

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- Robbie, Learner, *Tullamore CTC*

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Recommendations

Drawing from the comprehensive data collected through impact measurement and the rich qualitative feedback obtained from interactions with Youthreach learners, educators, and other stakeholders, several key recommendations emerge. These recommendations are designed to further enhance the effectiveness and reach of The B!G Idea Youthreach programme, ensuring it continues to meet the evolving needs of disadvantaged young people and their educators.



1. Expansion of the Youthreach Programme

One of the primary recommendations is to expand the programme to include more Youthreach centres and learners. Building on the substantial growth from the pilot phase to the current programme, there is clear evidence of the Youthreach programme's positive impact on learners. Expanding the programme will provide a broader range of disadvantaged youth with access to creative thinking education. This expansion could be supported through targeted outreach campaigns that leverage multiple communication channels, including social media and in-person visits to Youthreach centres. Additionally, strategic partnerships with key stakeholders within the educational sector will be essential to secure endorsements and support for the Youthreach programme.

2. Enhanced Support for Educators

Another crucial recommendation is to provide additional resources and professional development opportunities for educators, which could positively impact the effective delivery of the Youthreach programme. By enhancing the support offered to programme facilitators, we can ensure they are well-equipped to deliver creative thinking activities and support their learners' development. This enhanced support could include expanding the scope and frequency of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) materials, offering more in-depth training on creative pedagogy, project-based learning, and the integration of creative thinking into the curriculum. Developing a suite of additional resources tailored to the specific needs of Youthreach learners and maintaining the role of a dedicated Youthreach Programme Manager will also be instrumental in addressing the unique challenges faced by individual centres.

3. Focus on Mental Health and Wellbeing

Focusing on mental health and wellbeing is another key area for further development. Many Youthreach learners face significant mental health challenges. Incorporating more comprehensive mental health and wellbeing content into the Youthreach programme can provide these young people with the tools and strategies they need to manage their mental health effectively. This involves conducting thorough research on best practices for integrating mental health and wellbeing into educational settings, potentially collaborating with mental health experts and educational psychologists, and developing comprehensive educational materials that support wellbeing to be used within the Youthreach programme.

4. Continue to Increase Student Engagement and Participation

While the Youthreach programme has seen high levels of engagement, there is always room for improvement. Increasing engagement can lead to better learning outcomes and a more enjoyable experience for learners. This can be achieved by continuing to develop and integrate interactive, hands-on activities that engage them in the creative process, ensuring these activities cater to different learning styles. Exploring opportunities to provide more direct and real-time mentorship to Youthreach participants can also inspire and provide them with valuable insights into potential career paths.

5. Strengthening Impact Measurement and Evaluation

Strengthening the impact measurement and evaluation framework is essential for understanding the Youthreach programme's effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. By refining this framework, we can ensure it captures all relevant data and provides meaningful insights. This includes collecting data at multiple points throughout the programme, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to capture a full picture of the Youthreach programme's impact, and developing detailed reports that present the data in a clear and accessible way. Implementing a continuous evaluation process that allows for regular review and adjustment of the programme based on the data collected will ensure the programme remains responsive to the needs of its participants.



4 Conclusion

The BIG Idea Youthreach programme has demonstrated considerable success in empowering disadvantaged youth through creative thinking education. This success is a testament to the programme's innovative approach, dedicated implementation, and the invaluable partnership with Creative Ireland. The Youthreach programme's expansion from a single centre to multiple centres across the country, and the positive feedback from learners, educators, and industry mentors, highlight the significant impact it has had on fostering creative thinking, problem-solving skills, and personal growth among Youthreach learners.

The strategic partnership between The BIG Idea and Creative Ireland has been instrumental in this journey. Creative Ireland's commitment to nurturing creativity and supporting innovative educational initiatives has provided the foundation for the programme's growth and success. Their vision of embedding creativity into the lives of young people aligns seamlessly with The BIG Idea's mission to democratise creative education and equip learners with the skills needed to tackle complex societal issues. This alignment has enabled The BIG Idea to develop a robust, inclusive, and impactful programme that resonates with the unique needs of Youthreach learners.

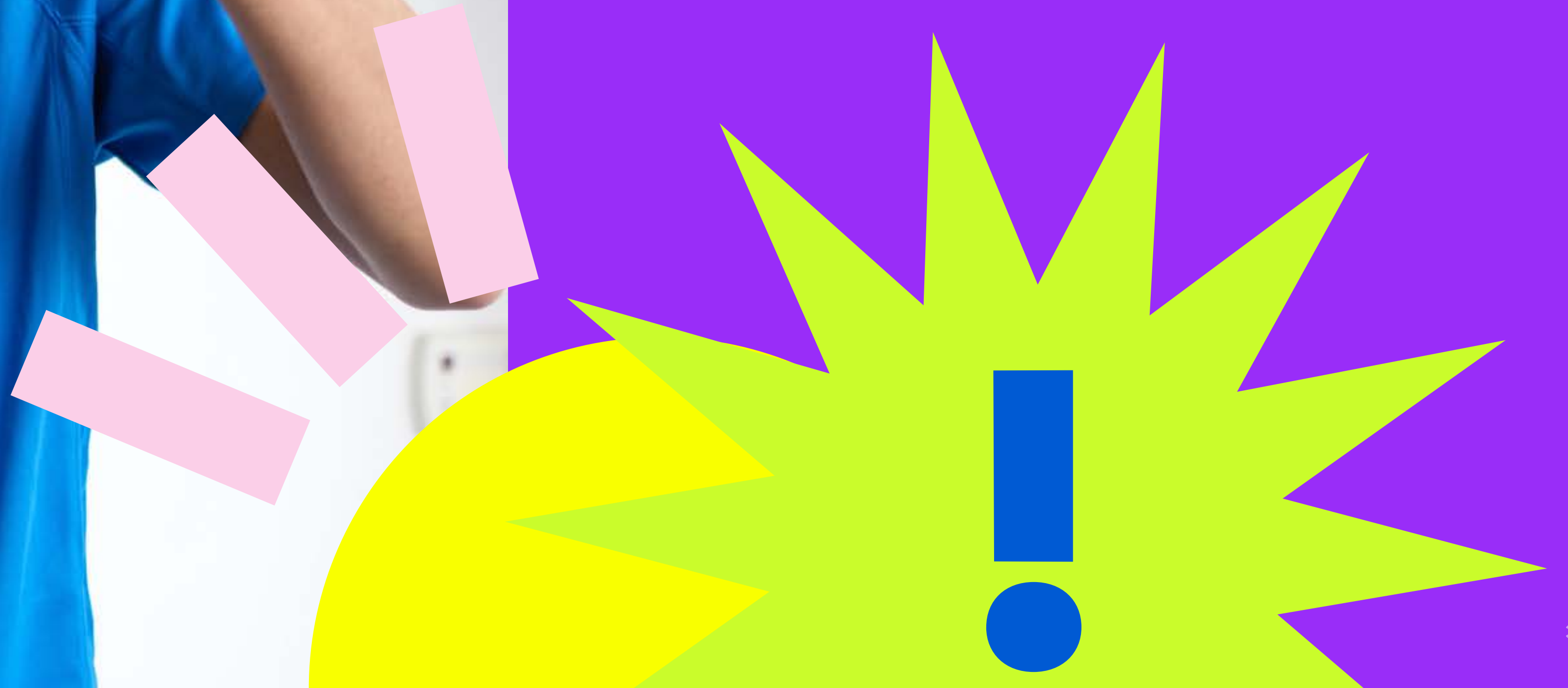


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- Michelle Murphy, Co-ordinator, *Kilkenny Youthreach*



As we look to the future, creative education initiatives like The B!G Idea Youthreach programme will be instrumental in ensuring that disadvantaged youth have the opportunity to develop their creative potential, build resilience, and contribute positively to society. The positive outcomes and success stories from the Youthreach programme underscore the transformative power of creativity and the importance of providing equitable access to creative education for all young people.





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