

LIFE ROUTES

Equipping young people — in and out of school — with essential life skills

THE CHALLENGE

Children's and young people's health, well-being, and life chances are higher on the UK public policy agenda than ever before. The Children Act 2004 requires all professionals working with children and youth to work toward achieving five national outcomes for children and young people: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being. In order for children and young people to achieve these outcomes, they need opportunities to develop essential life skills, such as how to make decisions, work with others, express themselves, and manage conflicts. Following the Children Act 2004, all child development programs, including schools, are being inspected against the five national outcomes; yet schools and other local services often lack the training capacity and know how to implement action toward the five outcomes. This presents a range of opportunities for the National Children's Bureau (NCB) to advocate for life skills development and help others to develop programs based on their experiences.

THE PROGRAM

Life Routes¹ provides young people, some of them growing up in high-risk environments, with the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for emotional health and wellbeing, while helping them realize their role – and potential impact – in the wider community. The current three-year program cycle has four main goals: 1) To enable 18,500 youth to access high quality life skills education through community-based programs and curricula delivered in schools; 2) To support professionals in developing creative methods of teaching life skills; 3) To influence the design and delivery of life skills education by government departments, local authorities, schools, and other local services; and 4) To involve young people in the development and running of Life Routes and ensure effectiveness through monitoring and evaluation.



OUTCOMES

The program has been successful in achieving its key outcomes set out for the current phase. Almost 20,000 youth have had access to life skills education in schools and community settings. According to a recent study conducted by NCB, over 80% of youth in the community programs showed significant improvements in five life skills (e.g., teamwork, respect for others, listening, critical thinking, and decision making), with 35% continuing on to achieve the “Life Routes U Choose” formal accreditation. On the schools program, 118 schools (almost double the target) confirm having used the life skills resource. Moreover, an NCB evaluation verified that nearly 60% of the schools surveyed said that the resource was used during the 2004-2005 school year. NCB is currently undertaking an in-depth study of several schools to assess the impact of the resource on teachers and, ultimately, on the students. Results are due in early 2007.

THE PARTNER

The National Children's Bureau became a partner of the International Youth Foundation (IYF) in July 2005. Its mission is to promote the voices, interests, and wellbeing of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives. As an umbrella body for the children's sector in England and Northern Ireland, NCB provides essential information on policy, research, and best practice for members and partners.



¹ First established as Make a Connection in 2001.

PROGRAM: Life Routes
PARTNER: National Children's Bureau (NCB)
PERIOD: 1 July 2004 – 30 June 2007
LOCATION: National
REACH: 18,500 young people, ages 11-16
MODEL: Formal and non-formal education