

The Blaze City Project

2023 The review...

PACE UK (ProActive Community Endeavours) & The Blaze City Project

Report presented by: Zach Weaver - Youth Engagement & Development Lead
Report No. 4

Dear All,

Let me start by saying Happy New Year! I hope you are enjoying 2024 already.

This report is a little bit different because I wanted to reflect on The Blaze City Project's work throughout 2023. What a year it was as well. This may be the first report of ours that you have received or it could be the fourth. Either way let me tell you what we have achieved in just a few months. This report will be ever so slightly longer than the other reports produced.

For several years we, PACE UK, have been deliver youth activities. However, in July 2023 my self, our CEO and our Charity Manager met together to see how we could expand our delivery to help and support the young people in Charnwood, our aim, was to have a wider impact across the Borough. But the biggest question was in fact 'how were we going to achieve this?' Off the back of this meeting came the birth of 'The Blaze City Project' The challenge there after, was to implement a growth strategy and indeed venture into new areas.

FLAME:

At the beginning of August 2023, the CEO of PACE, our Charity Manager and myself, had a meeting with Councillor Sandie Forrest to discuss us potentially working with young people in the more challenging areas of Charnwood. This meeting was organised to help us discover some of the local salient issues and to explore what provision is already being provided for the young people in Loughborough. We spoke about how PACE could help and what we would like to deliver. As a result of this meeting, we concluded it would be a positive thing to meet with all the councillors in the area to discuss things further concerning the town's youth situation. A breakfast meeting was arranged for Saturday 9th September, of which 15 ward councillors accepted the invitation.

I then went to meet with some representatives of Leicestershire Cares, and discussed how they could help support us here in Charnwood. We formed a partnership so that we could deliver *Flame* which is our youth outreach work currently taking place on the Lewis Road estate in Loughborough. On the 14th of December 2023 I was invited to a multi - agency working group by PS Rhys Barber, where a group of us discussed ways to help serve the community of Lewis Road and Warwick Way. This was a very positive and productive meeting.

FLAME The Stats:

Let me break down some of our stats from October to mid December 2023. Since starting our *FLAME* project we have worked with over 130 young people on the estate, we have given out over 300 coffees, hot chocolates & teas, over 400 snacks such as dairy milk

bars, fruit pastels and a definite favourite, caramel freddos! We have also invited every single young person to some of our events such as ENERGIZE etc, and they all have had some of our specifically designed literature about; Knife Crime, Mental Health, Substance Misuse & ASB (Anti-social Behaviour).



Flame session photos from parts of the year

Normal Youth Sessions (Thursday Evening):

This wasn't something that we set up because of The Blaze City Project, in fact, this was something that PACE already was running for several years. When I took on my new role in September, I also continued the work that I had been involved in that PACE had already been delivering. At that time we had an average of 10 - 20 young people attending each week. In these sessions, we give a hot meal to every young person that comes to the building. This is a space by which young people can come relax and make friends their own age and build connections. It really is a thriving, vibrant group. Since September through to December we have seen substantial growth and are now averaging between 30 and 40 young people attending each week. With ages varying from 11, fresh into high school at year 7, through to 17, those at the beginning of their collage/A-levels.

Thursday Evening The Stats:

Since September 2023 we have worked with over 550 young people just in our Thursday evening sessions. We have given out over 1000 hot chocolates / hot drinks, we've also given out over 900 hot meals over the last three months. On top of this, we have given well over 1000 deserts / sweet items out, over 100 specialised leaflets. At Christmas we gave every single young person a full Christmas turkey dinner with all the trimmings worth over £10 a head. We then gave them all gifts worth over £10 each at our big Christmas party.

Photos from our Christmas party



Schools Work:

On top of these two strands mentioned above, one of the things we love to do is to work with some local schools and help and assist the young people during their time in school. This is how it works; we go into a school and run one-on-one sessions and also a larger group sessions with all year groups. This is partially designed not to do PHSE / RE sessions but to run sessions where we tackle real life topics that young people are facing in modern day society. We explore how to overcome matters such as; Fear & Anxiety, Negative Social Media Influences, Tough Relationships amongst other matters. All the topics discussed are brought by the young people we work with and we wrote and designed our own content and structure for the sessions. We honestly feel that these are areas that we needed to tackle front on to try and support the young people where they were currently at.

Schools Work The Stats:

We have been running these sessions for one full 1/2 term so since November 2023, we have worked with over 75 young people in our school provision work. Each one going through our '*Becoming an Overcomer*' programme, they all received specialist booklets on each topic. We have also given out over 25 of our specialist resources.

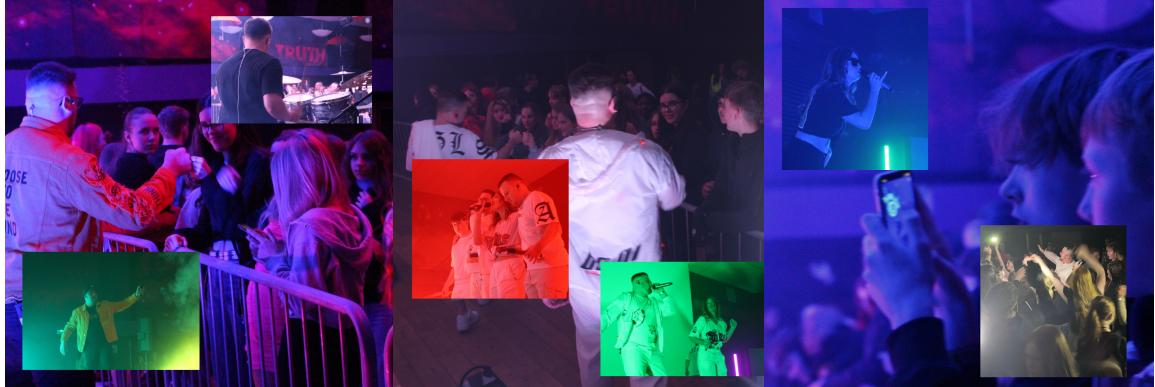


Photos from our Thursday youth session

ENERGIZE:

On the Saturday 25th November 2023, we held our first free live event which we called *ENERGIZE* where we saw over 100 young people gathered together at The NSC Arena, the home of PACE, to enjoy our indoor festival style gig. It was an amazing way to gather young people we work with from the estates, schools and youth groups, in a safe space where they can enjoy the night and the parents not have to worry about where they are or what they are doing. This was particularly successful and we have already had countless messages, emails and conversations about when will our similar next event will be. Furthermore a number of young people have indicated that the next time we hold such an event that they are going to invite loads of their friends as the first night was so good. This is really encouraging. I would personally say a massive thank you to all the PACE volunteer team that came out to steward, run the car park and make the event work! In total there were 50 + volunteers who were engaged during various things.

The whole evening cost over a thousand pounds, which PACE raised. It was a free event for the young people and PACE consider it money well spent. The young people have benefited greatly from this. We were able to bring in various international artistes from all around the country.



Photos from ENERGIZE in November 2023

Quotes - What people are saying:

Below, I thought it would be beneficial to add in some of the many quotes that we have received over the time of our work, this gives you a slight insight to what others think about what we are doing.

“There is a real buzz about the project around the school... The kids won’t stop talking about the work you are doing!” - Mr Smith (Assistant Head Limehurst Academy - Nov 2023)

“Your work is simply phenomenal” - Michael Charlesworth (Loughborough Rotary Nov 2023)

“My daughter has simply never felt more happy than when she’s with The Blaze City Project on a Thursday evening... The team are amazing” - A Parent of a young person (Dec 2023)

“The work you are doing is really welcomed on the estate.” - Phillip Martindale (Oct 2023)

“This is excellent - very well done!!!!” - The PACE CEO (Sept 2023)

“When is the next [ENERGIZE] event!!! I loved it so much, it was an amazing night with great vibes” - A Young Person (Nov 2023)

“The project and the team are simply outstanding! Keep it up.” - Ben Malpass (Artist at ENERGIZE - Dec 2023)

“It seems to be a place that young people come to belong and where they feel safe. I wish I had The Blaze City Project when I was growing up.” - James Brabender (Artist at ENERGIZE - Dec 2023)

To Conclude and Looking forward:

Well, 2023 was an outstanding year for us by all accounts, despite only setting up officially in the September 2023. So let me give you some more stats.

In total we have worked with over 900 young people in 3 months across all areas of the project, given out over 1000 hot drinks, 1000 hot meals, 200 specialist leaflets amongst so much more. However these are just all numbers, of course the most important thing is that already we are having considerable positive impact on young people/individuals across the Borough of Charnwood. As I've commented to many of you before, we are not the complete solution, however we are doing our best to have impact on a small percentage of the young people who are struggling within the Borough.

Wow! If this can be achieved 3 months... Imagine what we can do in the next 12 months. I am personally excited about what we are going to do in 2024. We are aiming to have impact on significantly more young people than we already have. I will of course keep you all up to date with everything that goes on within the project at the end of every month. If you know any other people who you feel should be kept in the loop, please feel free to pass this on or indeed send me their details and I will get them added on to our mailing list.

We said we would review The Blaze City Project after 3 months, which we are currently doing, We also said that after 6 months, which is in 3 months time, we would call another meeting so that we can assess the value of the project, and look at how to move forward.

Finally, I want to say a massive thank you to all those people who volunteer with us in various aspects of our work. To the people at the local authorities that have allowed us to work with them to make impact. To the people who have donated finances in support. To the people who believed in me and also in the project and stood by us. To the young people that engage with us in every aspect. And to the CEO of PACE and the Charity Manger who have allowed me to run with the vision and supported us every step of the way. This wouldn't work if it wasn't for every single one of you. From the bottom of my heart, THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Have a blessed 2024,

I cant wait to speak to you again.

Kind regards,

Zach Weaver

PACE Youth Engagement & Development Lead

