



Aspire &
Achieve
Walsall



ANNUAL REPORT 2025 / 2026 YEAR 1

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Aspire & Achieve
Walsall

Our Partners



Table Of Contents

1. A message from the CEO
2. Aspire & Achieve Walsall
3. About Us
4. Visions & Purpose
5. Breaking Down Barriers to Youth Employment
6. Impact at a Glance
7. Our Delivery Partners
8. Community Engagement
9. Our Youth Panel
10. Listening to Young People- IPSOS Research
11. Youth Consultation Findings
12. Employer Engagement
13. Programme Impact
14. Looking Ahead
15. Special Acknowledgements

A Message From The CEO

It has been a busy and insightful year for the Aspire and Achieve programme. The team has established strong foundations for delivering employment-related opportunities for young people, alongside laying the groundwork for meaningful systems change. This progress would not have been possible without the trust that Youth Futures Foundation has placed in Aaina. Their approach demonstrates that systems change must begin at the point of grant allocation—by providing smaller organisations with the necessary funding and the necessary duration to initiate lasting change for young people.

At Aspire & Achieve Walsall, we believe that every young person deserves the chance to thrive, regardless of their background or circumstances. Connected Futures is our commitment to empowering young people aged 16–24, particularly those from Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities have access to education, training, employment, and leadership opportunities.

Our approach includes securing and nurturing impactful partnership working with local communities, Key Stakeholders and Partner organisations, Employers, and of course the young people we serve. This year, we have witnessed remarkable stories of growth, resilience, and achievement, which we are delighted to showcase and weave into this annual report.

Our vision is closely aligned to making a positive and lasting impact; to create a future where young people are supported, connected, and confident in their ability to succeed.

Thank you to our partners, networks and cheer leaders and, most importantly, the young people who have put their trust in us.

A'isha Khan
Chief Executive Officer
Aspire & Achieve Walsall

Aspire & Achieve Walsall

Aspire & Achieve Walsall was created with a clear purpose, to ensure that young people across Walsall are supported, empowered, and equipped with the tools they need to build meaningful futures.

Across Walsall, many young people face barriers when trying to access employment, education or training. These challenges can include limited access to opportunities, lack of career guidance, financial pressures, and a need for stronger community support.

Through Aspire & Achieve, we are working collaboratively with partner organisations, employers, and communities to address these challenges and create real pathways into progression for young people.

Over the past year, the programme has focused on:

- Supporting young people through mentoring and guidance
- Delivering employability workshops
- Listening to young peoples voices through consultations
- Building strong partnerships across Walsall
- Creating a youth panel to shape future conversations
- Establishing our Youth Employment Taskforce to see how we can work collaboratively with organisations

This report highlights the impact made so far, and the continued commitment to supporting young people from the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in Walsall.



About Us

Aspire & Achieve Walsall is proud to be funded by the Youth Futures Foundation through its Connected Futures programme, a strategic investment aimed at tackling systemic barriers to employment and strengthening local pathways for young people from under-represented backgrounds. This funding enables us to deliver tailored support that makes a real difference in young lives, helping to increase access to training, work skills, and long-term career prospects.

We are a youth-focused initiative dedicated to empowering young people aged 16-24 years from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds in Walsall to unlock their full potential and build meaningful pathways into education, training, and employment. We work directly with participants to boost confidence, develop skills, and open doors to real opportunities.

We exist because every young person deserves a chance to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances. By providing practical guidance, encouragement, and opportunity, we help young people aspire with confidence and achieve with purpose.

Supporting employers to strengthen their ability to recruit and retain young people from local communities, while improving inclusive and culturally aware employment practices.

Supporting young people in Walsall to build skills and confidence, improve employability, and gain access to a wide range of job and training opportunities.

Working with four community delivery partners across Walsall to strengthen the local offer, ensuring future groups of young people have the best possible chance to secure employment.



Vision & Purpose

At Aspire & Achieve Walsall, our vision is to create a future where every young person in Walsall (especially those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities) have equal access to opportunities that enable them to thrive.

Through the Connected Futures programme, we are breaking down barriers, amplifying youth voice, and building bridges between young people, communities, and systems that will inevitably shape their lifelong journey.

Our purpose is to co-design solutions with young people by fostering collaboration across sectors to reshape pathways into education, employment, and community participation. This is more than just another programme, and we see this as a piece of the puzzle that is driven by shared learning, lived experience, and an unflinching and collective belief in the potential of every young person.

Together with our partners we are:

- Reaching out and engaging with young people
- Impacting through; Coaching and Mentoring
- Raising the profile of our young people
- Developing our networks and linking young people to opportunities
- Creating belief systems / being role models and changing mindsets



Together, we are creating brighter futures by improving access to opportunities for young people across Walsall.



Breaking Down Barriers to Youth Employment

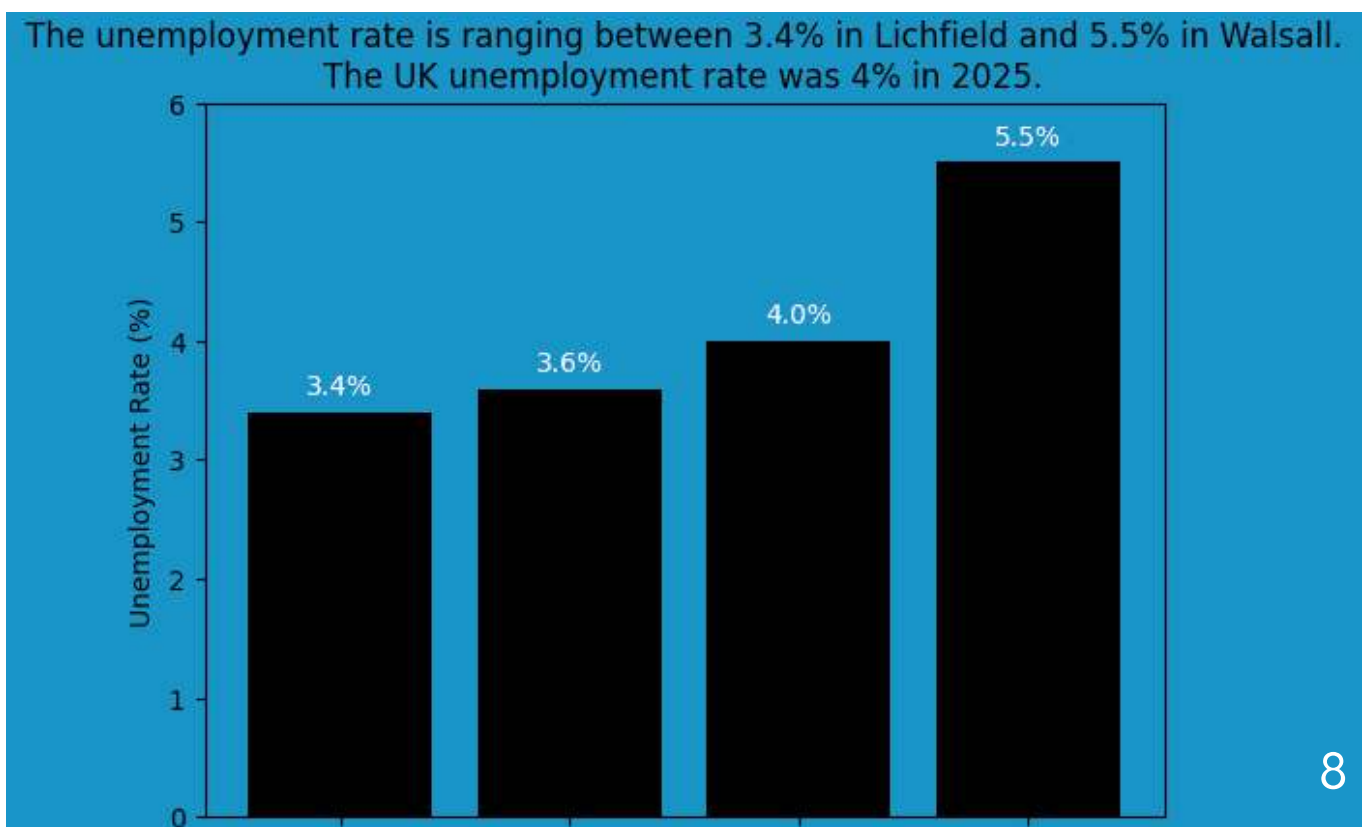
Across the UK, many young people face significant barriers when trying to access employment, education and training opportunities. In Walsall, these challenges are often shaped by a combination of social, economic and structural factors that make the transition into the workforce more difficult.

Consultations carried out through the Aspire & Achieve programme revealed that many young people feel unprepared for the realities of the job market. While education provides important academic foundations, young people highlighted a lack of practical skills, guidance and confidence when applying for jobs or exploring career pathways.

Young people also reported that opportunities such as apprenticeships, work experience and entry-level roles can be difficult to access without the right networks or support. For many, limited visibility of career pathways creates uncertainty about what steps to take next.

Some young people also face wider challenges including financial pressures, family responsibilities and limited access to resources. For those from under-represented communities, additional barriers such as lack of representation and experiences of bias can also impact their confidence and opportunities.

These challenges highlight the importance of programmes like Aspire & Achieve Walsall, which aim to provide young people with the guidance, skills and support they need to successfully move into employment, education and training.



Impact at a Glance

Our Impact

Over the past year Aspire & Achieve Walsall has supported young people across Walsall by providing guidance, access to opportunities and a platform for their voices to be heard.

100+ Young People Supported

More than one hundred young people have engaged with the Aspire & Achieve programme receiving mentoring, guidance and access to opportunities designed to help them develop confidence and explore their future career pathways.

26 Workshops Delivered

A series of workshops have been delivered focused on employability skills, confidence building, career exploration and wellbeing, equipping young people with practical knowledge and skills needed to navigate the world of work.

One-to-One Support Sessions

Personalised mentoring sessions have allowed young people to receive tailored guidance, helping them overcome barriers, set goals and build the confidence needed to progress into employment, education or training.

4 Community Delivery Partners

The programme is delivered in collaboration with four key community partners: Walsall For All, Walsall FC Foundation, Minhaj Ul Quran and IQRA Supplementary School, each bringing unique expertise and support to young people across Walsall.

Youth Panel Established

A dedicated Youth Panel has been created to ensure that young people's voices are at the centre of the programme, helping to shape consultations, discussions and the future direction of Aspire & Achieve.

Youth Employment Taskforce

By sharing knowledge and working collaboratively, our taskforce of employers develop solutions that create pathways into education, training and work, ensuring young people's voices help shape opportunities and support within their community.

Our Delivery Partners

Aspire & Achieve is delivered through collaboration with community organisations who share the same commitment to supporting young people. Our partners include, Walsall For All, Walsall FC Foundation, IQRA Supplementary School, and Minhaj Next Step.

WALSALL FOR ALL

Over the past year, Walsall For All has supported young people across Walsall, particularly those aged 16-24 from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds—to build confidence, develop skills, and access pathways into education, employment, and training

Walsall For All have delivered:

- 1:1 mentoring and coaching tailored to individual needs
- Workshops on CV writing, interview skills, and career preparation
- Basic workplace skills training, including communication, professionalism, and work etiquette
- Safeguarding workshops to support responsible and confident participation in professional settings

W4A have also supported young people into wider opportunities through Aspire & Achieve, including referrals to the Youth Panel. They have also delivered community-based engagement, including a networking Iftar at Masjid-Al-Aqsa, creating accessible and culturally relevant opportunities for young people and families to connect with support services. WFA played a fundamental role in supporting Aspire & Achieve Walsall with the design and overall recognition of Aspire & Achieve, playing a crucial role in developing our brochures, logos and merchandise.





A key success has been gathering insight from young people in education, employment, and those who are NEET, helping to shape the programme and identify the support they need. The programme has also created practical opportunities, including a young person volunteering at Walsall FC Foundation's Community Saturday Club, gaining valuable experience towards a potential future career.



Partnership working has also supported engagement with local employers, including encouraging organisations such as IKEA to sign the Employer Pledge. Overall the programme has shown the positive impact that investment, belief and support can have on young people, while providing important learning that will help strengthen the programme moving forward.

IQRA'S delivery for young people has centred on providing work placements for Bangladeshi and Pakistani youth aged 16 to 19 years. IQRA have supported over 15 young people on short and long term placements along with providing mentoring and coaching which has enabled three young people to move into employment. IQRA's work placements provide skills in children positive past times, youth groups, and administration skills.



IQRA staff provide volunteers with the opportunity to shadow staff to observe the planning and delivery of activities, young people gain a valuable insight into safeguarding responsibilities, risk assessments and professionalism in a busy working environment. We have also provided paid opportunities to young people through sessional work during our busy periods to further motivate and inspire young people.



Working collaboratively with the Aspire & Achieve programme the IQRA team have strengthened their employment skills offer and organisational infrastructure.

Minhaj Next Step Walsall is a key Aspire & Achieve partner supporting young people aged 16-24 years from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities across Walsall. Their work focuses on engaging young people through trusted community spaces and providing culturally responsive support to help them progress into education, training and employment.



Through personal development workshops, mentoring and family engagement sessions, Minhaj Next Step supports young people to build confidence, improve wellbeing and develop clearer pathways for their future. The organisation has also played a key role in community outreach, delivering events such as community dinners, Ramadan Iftar gatherings and school engagement sessions. These activities help raise awareness of Aspire & Achieve and connect young people and families with opportunities and support.



Community Engagement

Reaching Communities

Through community engagement activities, Aspire & Achieve has been able to connect with young people and families across different areas of Walsall. Events such as community gatherings, and outreach sessions have helped to:

- Raise awareness of opportunities
- Connect young people with local initiatives & support
- Build trust within communities.

One of the key engagement opportunities over the year included “A Day in the Life” experience with Taylor Woodrow, where young people were given a unique insight into what it is like to work in a professional environment. The experience allowed participants to learn about different roles within the organisation, understand career pathways within the industry and gain first-hand exposure to the expectations and opportunities within the workplace.

Aspire & Achieve Walsall also took part in the Walsall Jobs Fair Expo, one of the largest employment events in the Black Country. The event brought together employers, training providers and organisations from across the borough, creating valuable opportunities for young people to explore job openings, apprenticeships and training pathways while receiving guidance and support from the Aspire & Achieve team.



Our Youth Panel

A key achievement of the Aspire & Achieve Walsall programme has been the creation of our dedicated Youth Panel, designed to place young people at the heart of conversations around employment, progression and systems change. The Youth Panel provides a platform for young people to share their experiences, ideas and perspectives, ensuring their voices play a meaningful role in shaping the programme and the wider youth employment landscape.

Panel members have contributed to:

- Youth & Industry Consultations
- Aspire and Achieve Programme development
- Discussions on real systems change
- Youth-led initiatives

Their insights help ensure that Aspire & Achieve remains relevant, responsive and youth-led.



Here's what our young people said:

"Aminah has been helpful finding resources for my job search, and the workshops we do such as how to prepare for a job interview are very useful."

"Aminah helped me with my physical and mental health, and thanks to her, i got my first job!"

"Ever since i joined Aspire and Achieve, it has helped me very much. Aminah is patient with us all and helped me with preparing for interviews."

"It's been inspiring to work alongside others committed to driving positive change and improving outcomes for young people"

"Since i joined Aspire & Achieve my confidence in searching for jobs has grown, especially as someone who graduated last year."

"The Youth Panel is a highly rewarding experience, allowing me to represent young people and contribute to meaningful discussions."

Listening to Young People- IPSOS Research

Understanding the Local Labour Market

Research conducted by IPSOS provided valuable insight into the employment landscape in Walsall and the opportunities and challenges facing young people entering the workforce. The findings highlight the key industries employing people locally and the changing nature of work across the borough. These insights help inform how programmes like Aspire & Achieve can better prepare young people for future employment opportunities.

Key Findings from the Research

18% of all jobs in Walsall are in the retail sector, making it the single largest employer in the borough. This is higher than the national average of 14%, highlighting the importance of retail as a key source of employment locally.

16% of jobs are within health and social care, demonstrating the continued demand for roles within the care sector and the opportunities this industry offers for young people entering the workforce.

9% Both administrative and education roles make up a significant proportion of employment across Walsall, showing the importance of professional and public sector roles within the local labour market.

59% Research projections suggest that around 59% of jobs will continue to be full-time roles, highlighting the importance of preparing young people with the skills and experience needed to secure stable employment

Why this matters?

Understanding the structure of the local labour market helps programmes like Aspire and Achieve Walsall better prepare young people for the opportunities available to them. By aligning workshops, mentoring and employer engagement with the industries that are most prominent locally, the programme can support young people to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge needed to access meaningful employment.



Youth Consultation Findings

Listening to young people is central to the programme development, consultations carried out through our Youth Panel and wider engagement activities have highlighted several key challenges that young people face. These consultations have helped shape conversations with partners and employers about improving youth employment opportunities.

92% believe there is a lack of job opportunities available to young people

68% feel apprenticeships are not promoted positively in marginalised communities

54% said schools did not adequately prepare them for employment

50% over 50% reported struggling with job applications or interviews

These insights have helped guide the development of workshops and support delivered through the programme

Following the youth consultation in 2025, Aspire & Achieve focused on delivering practical support which included:

- CV writing workshops
- Interview preparation and techniques
- Career exploration sessions
- Confidence-building workshops
- Mentoring and guidance sessions
- Financial skills workshops

These sessions help young people develop the skills and confidence needed to take their next steps in the world of work and progression.

Employer Engagement

By building relationships with employers, organisations, and local industry, the programme has been able to create opportunities for young people to better understand career pathways and gain in-sight into the world of work.

10+ Employers Engaged

Local employers have engaged with the programme, contributing to conversations around youth employment, skills development, and opportunities for young people

Youth Employment Taskforce Established

Quarterly taskforce meetings bring together employers, partners and organisations to discuss challenges young people face and identify practical solutions.

Collaborative Referral Pathways

Partners are working together to connect programmes and refer young people to the most suitable support based on their individual needs and goals.

Industry Insight & Opportunities

Through employer engagement, young people have been able to gain valuable insight into different career pathways, industries and workplace expectations.

Programme Impact

Through Aspire & Achieve, young people are gaining:

Confidence

**Career
direction**

**Employability
skills**

**Mentoring &
support**

Looking Ahead

As Aspire & Achieve Walsall continues to grow, the programme will focus on four key areas designed to strengthen support for young people and improve pathways into employment, education and training.

Support & Skills Development

Providing young people with the skills, confidence and wellbeing support they need to build motivation, develop aspirations and succeed in their future careers.

Strengthening and Connecting the System

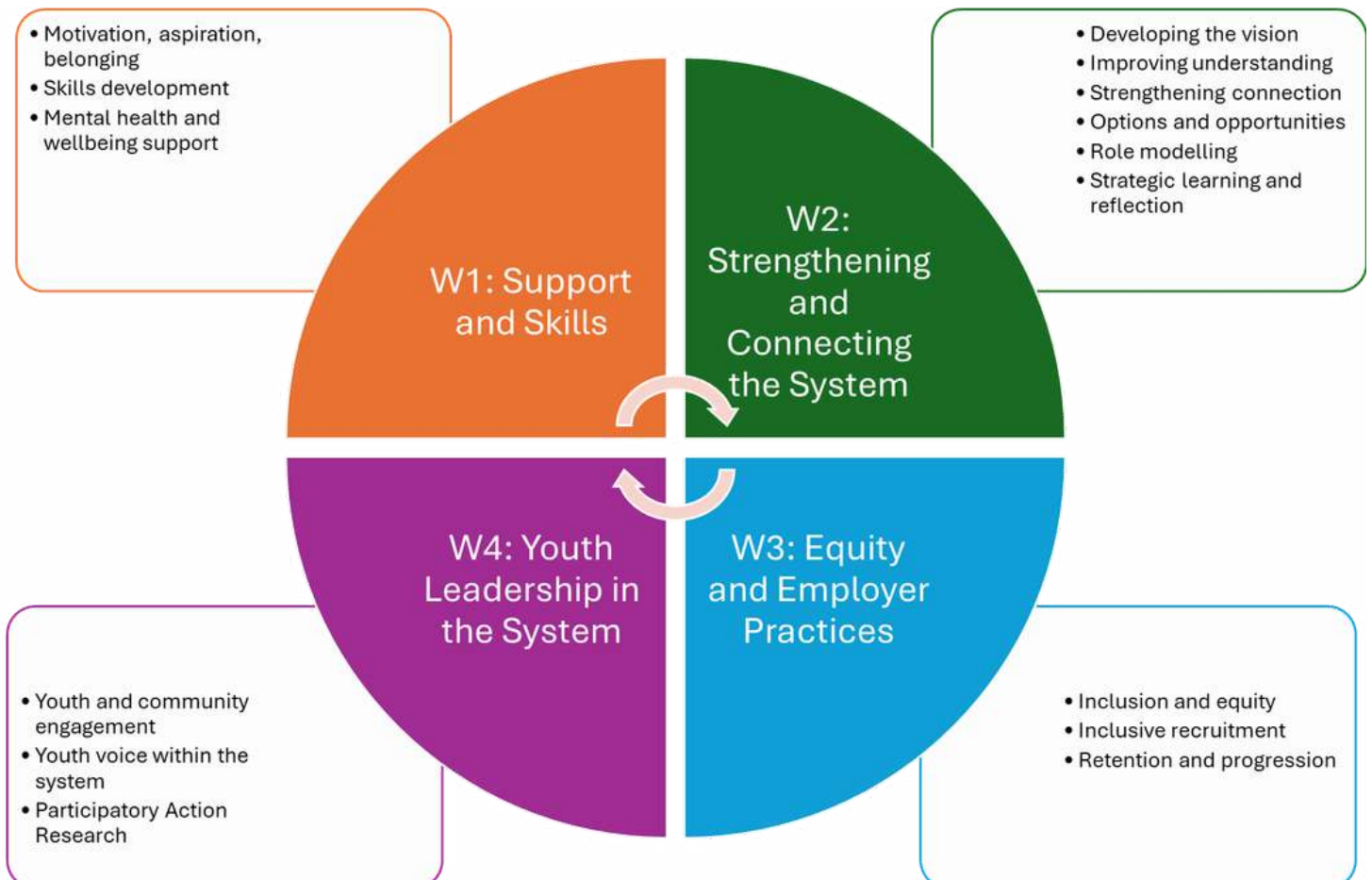
Bringing together partners, employers and organisations to strengthen collaboration, improve understanding and create clearer pathways to opportunities.

Equity & Employer Practices

Working with employers to promote inclusive recruitment, improve workplace opportunities and support progression for young people entering the workforce.

Youth Leadership and Voice

Empowering young people to shape conversations around employment through youth voice, community engagement and participatory research.



A Special Acknowledgement to Our Partners, Employers & Organisations

Ali Akbar - [Minhaj Next Steps](#)
Andreea Tudor - [HSBC](#)
Balvinder Kaur - [Youth Futures Foundation](#)
Beenish Zubair - [Walsall For All](#)
Carys Evans - [Connect Futures](#)
Chantal Doyle - [AF Blakemore](#)
Chris Springthorpe - [Walsall FC Foundation](#)
Derek Walsh - [Connect Futures](#)
Diane Stanley - [Miss Macaroon](#)
Emma Piet - [Action for Race Equality](#)
Heather Morris - [NHS Trust](#)
James Norris - [WMBC](#)
Jazz Dhaliwal - [Opus People Solutions](#)
Jodie Ward - [IKEA](#)
Julie Harris - [Dartington](#)
Kirsty Vigrass - [NHS Trust](#)
Laura-Mae Browne - [Business in the Community](#)
Laura Zahra McDonald - [Connect Futures](#)
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Sajid Hussain - [Minhaj Next Steps](#)
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Tutu Adebisi - [Action for Race Equality](#)
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