



SMART Courses

January - August Report 2026

GIRLS
INSPIRED



BOYS
INSPIRED



WHAT ARE SMART COURSES?

SMART courses are a targeted early intervention programme developed by Active Essex Foundation (AEF) designed to support young people aged 11 to 24 years who may be facing additional challenges.

This includes those who are at risk of, vulnerable to, or already involved in exploitation, anti-social behaviour, or youth crime, as well as young people experiencing poor mental health, low emotional wellbeing, or difficulties with emotional regulation. While these are key target groups, eligibility is not limited to these circumstances.

Delivered in partnership with locally trusted organisations, SMART blends sport, mentoring, life skills development and wellbeing support to help young people build confidence, resilience and safer pathways for their futures.

SMART courses are flexible and tailored to the needs of each group, providing a safe, inclusive and engaging environment where young people can learn, connect and grow.

The SMART framework focuses on five key areas:

Sport: encouraging engagement in physical activity

Motivation: helping individuals identify future goals and aspirations

Awareness: developing knowledge and understanding of risks

Resilience: building confidence and decision-making skills

Trust: encouraging positive relationships and peer support

SMART courses support young people at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) by building confidence, developing life skills, improving wellbeing, and exploring education, employment and volunteering opportunities. Delivered in schools and community settings, the programmes help participants achieve personal growth and gain ASDAN accreditation in recognition of their achievements.



KEY OUTCOMES AND DATA

36

total SMART
courses delivered
by LTOs

599

unique young
people engaged
through SMART
courses

4,621

total attendances
across SMART
courses

378

ASDAN awards
achieved, supporting
learning and personal
development

327

youth volunteers
engaged, highlighting
opportunities for
leaderships

Course type delivered:

21



2



11



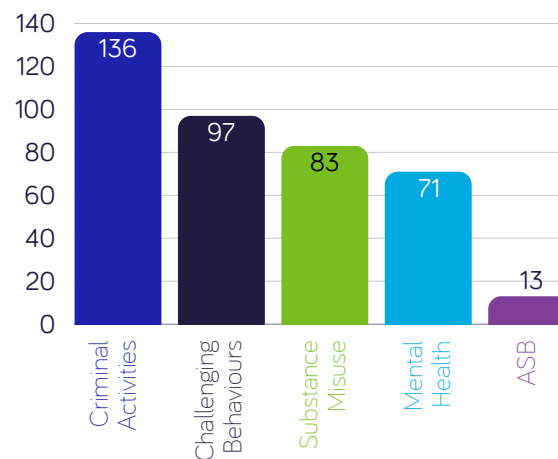
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A broad range of learning and development activities were delivered, providing opportunities for young people to **build skills, confidence and resilience**

Young People's Identified Needs and Vulnerabilities

SMART courses are **successfully engaging vulnerable young people**, providing support to those most at risk of adverse outcomes.



Almost half (49%) of all young people engaged were aged 11-13, with a further 40% aged 14-16



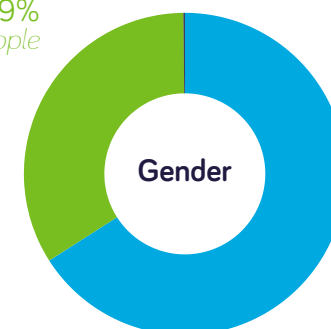
155 young people engaged in **Maldon**, with strong participation across **Colchester, Harlow and Tendring**



227 participants were SEND and/or neurodiverse
99 diagnosed | 128 undiagnosed

Female: 33.9%
(254) young people

Non-disclosed: 00.1%
(1) young person



Male: 66%
(494) young people



I just love these sessions, I find life quite lonely at times living in independent supported living so this gives me somewhere safe and fun to attend.

Young participant, Braintree

SUCCESSES AND LEARNINGS



Key Successes

Strong Engagement

SMART courses successfully reached young people across Greater Essex, including those at risk of becoming disengaged, demonstrating the programme's ability to connect with and support those who need it most.

Positive Development

Learning and development activities helped participants build confidence, develop new skills and make positive progress towards education, employment and training opportunities.

Inclusive Delivery

Tailored approaches enabled strong engagement from SEND and neurodiverse young people, ensuring support was accessible, inclusive and responsive to individual needs.

Strong Partnership Working

Effective collaboration with local partners helped extend the programme's reach, strengthen referral pathways and provide holistic support for young people.



Key Learnings

Early Intervention Works

Strong engagement among younger age groups highlights the value of providing support early to build confidence, resilience and future aspirations.

Flexibility is Essential

Personalised delivery remains key to overcoming barriers and ensuring young people with diverse needs can fully participate and benefit.

Opportunities for Growth

Further strengthening engagement in lower-participating localities and improving progression tracking could help maximise future impact.

Sustained Engagement Drives Better Outcomes

Young people benefit most when support is provided consistently over time, highlighting the importance of ongoing engagement, trusted relationships and clear progression pathways.



CASE STUDIES AND STORIES

“

My daughter has become much more confident and is happy to speak up and get involved in new activities. She looks forward to every session and has made new friends. We've noticed a big improvement in her self-esteem and overall mood. She has really stepped outside of her comfort zone!

Parent of participant, Brentwood

“

This project helped me because it gave me something positive to focus on. Boxing made me feel more confident and calmer, and the talks helped me understand myself better. I liked knowing I could come here, feel safe and be listened to.

Young participant, Braintree

“

I didn't really talk to people before I came here, but now I feel more confident speaking up and working with others.

Young participant, Harlow

“

I like being here as we get to talk about things without being judged.

Young participant, Tendring



“

Girls Inspired has helped me think differently about some of the challenges I face and made me realise that changing my attitude is just as important as any consequences I get in school. It's helped me focus more on what I want for my future, whether that's working in beauty or childcare, travelling, or getting the qualifications I need to achieve my goals.

I really enjoyed activities like First Aid, boxing and the trip to Mersea, as they gave me the chance to learn in a different way and try new experiences. My friends, family and dance are really important to me, but the programme has helped me see the value of staying engaged in school and working towards something positive.

I'd love to see more small group sessions, team-building activities and opportunities to learn outside the classroom, as these helped me build confidence and think more positively about my future."

Young participant, Harlow

“

Before I joined, I didn't really have anything positive to do after school. Coming here has given me something to look forward to, helped me stay active, and built my confidence. I enjoy helping out so much that I'm now volunteering with the programme.

Young participant, Southend

