

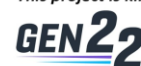
C A S E S T U D Y

Cooking Up Change

Gen22 food and social action project
for young people | JULY 2026



This project is kindly funded by United by 2022.





UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

As a catering social enterprise, ChangeKitchen CIC has always been passionate about engaging with young people and supporting the opportunities that can be created for them. Work opportunities, particularly for the next generation, provide the basis for a fair society and balanced economy.

With youth unemployment rising, we listened as young people told us it was increasingly harder to get onto the jobs ladder. Former minister, Alan Milburn (former Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and Chair at The Social Mobility Foundation), stated in his 2026 Young People and Work interim report that with nearly a million young people 'not in employment, education or training' (NEETs), a complete "system reset" was needed.

ChangeKitchen CIC has a core belief that change was needed. We accept we cannot create change for all at a national level but have a heartfelt belief we can 'cook up change' at a local level.

A project proposal was submitted to United by 2022 to shift the dial on Birmingham youth unemployment by providing a food and social action programme for unemployed young people aged 16 to 25 years old.

Our core purpose of the project was to establish a pilot programme of practical support and personal development for young people in south Birmingham who were unemployed, or NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Targeting those who wanted to work but felt their options were limited, ChangeKitchen CIC would empower them to gain confidence and skills that would enable them to apply and gain training placements or sustainable employment.

"For every £25 that we spend keeping young people on benefits, we spend only £1 helping them get into work through employment support."

SOURCE: Young People and Work: interim report, 2026, Alan Milburn



SETTING UP

On project award, and with £15,000 of funding from United by 2022, ChangeKitchen CIC conducted an open recruitment process to appoint a Community Engagement Officer and welcomed James Leach in January 2026.

With clear objectives for this 10 week 'proof of concept' project, James set about connecting with local referral partners, community groups, and local schools to share more about our Gen22 project, due to run from February to April 2026.

#CookingUpChange



Project objectives:

- ➔ **20 YOUNG PEOPLE** | Birmingham postcode, currently unemployed.
- ➔ **LEARN NEW SKILLS** | 30 hours of guided volunteering to gain employment-based abilities.
- ➔ **MEET NEW PEOPLE** | strengthen connections, build confidence.
- ➔ **FIND OPPORTUNITIES** | supportive work environment, work reference on completion.

Primarily, ChangeKitchen CIC had anecdotal evidence that young people who were struggling to find employment had little or no support, or motivation, to make the changes needed to move them closer to the jobs market. Many young people were still impacted by the long-term effects of the 2020 pandemic, both mental and emotional, social and physical, as well as educationally.

"Many recalled living through an 'empty time' of lockdown, when normal routines and young people's fundamentally important milestones simply disappeared."

SOURCE: UK Covid-19 Inquiry

ENGAGEMENT AT SCALE

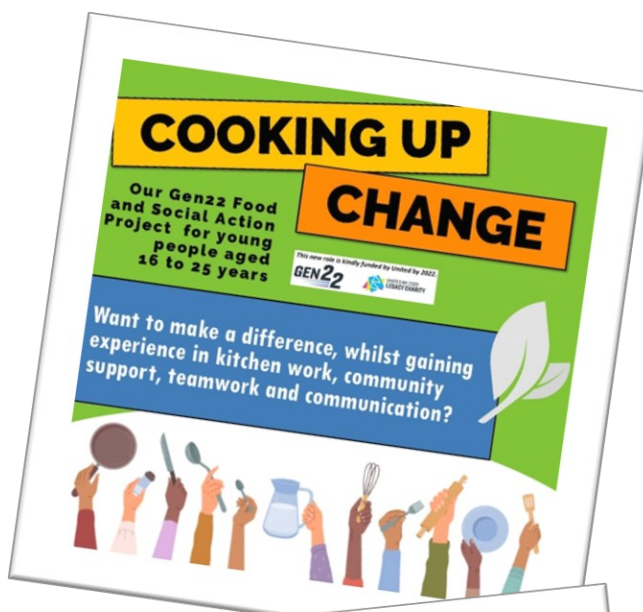
Essential to the project success was the community connection with partners, to whom ChangeKitchen CIC is extremely grateful for their collaboration and commitment to the project.

These included:

- ➔ **The Prosper Project by Jericho**
- ➔ **University College Birmingham**
- ➔ **St. Chad's Sanctuary**

Direct engagement for the Gen22 project was through personalised contact calls, visits and meetings led by James.

Engagement and promotion were supported by bespoke marketing materials, ongoing social media campaign and updates across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, a curated web page with registration link and update blogs.



#CookingUpChange



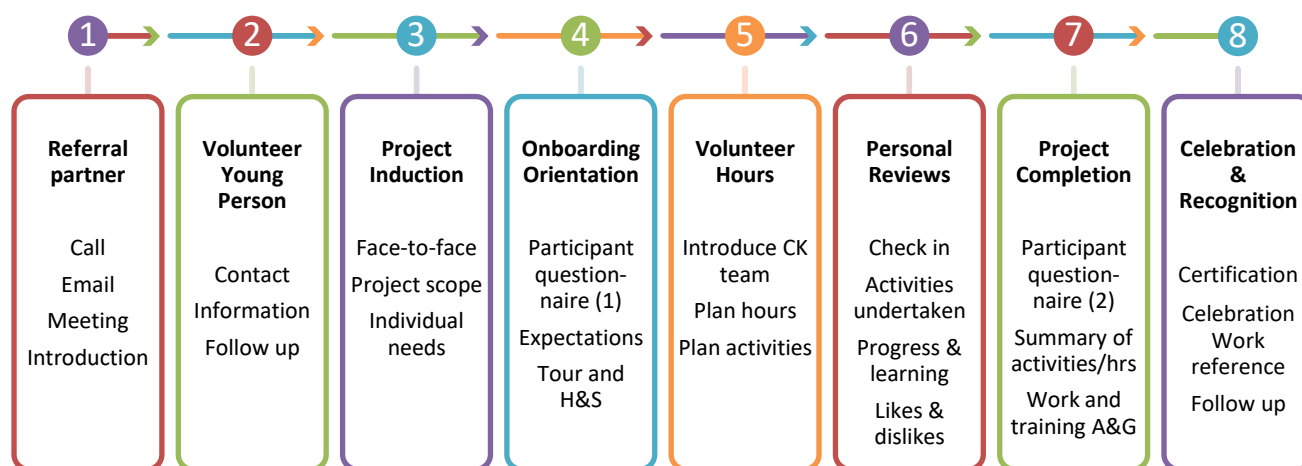
DELIVERY TAILORED TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

A key element here were ChangeKitchen CIC's established connections within the communities in south Birmingham.

The ChangeKitchen CIC network of partner organisations, local schools and colleges, community groups and support organisations meant trust and confidence existed meaning there was a warm approach and open interest in 'doing things differently' for young unemployed local people.

The foundation to effective and impactful delivery of the volunteering and skills-building was understanding individual needs and barriers to accessing traditional work placements and employment opportunities.

The Gen22 onboarding and volunteering process was defined and refined, both internally and with our referral partners in the south Birmingham area.



Steps 1 to 3 showed the diversity of needs from each young person that were their individual barriers to employment.

Steps 3 to 6 were key to ensuring individual needs were understood, listened to, and met.

Steps 7 and 8 were crucial to understanding and celebrating the personal legacy for each young person. Please watch our Gen22 playlist for volunteer videos.

Through the project evaluation, ChangeKitchen CIC has clarified the 'evidence of need' for the project - taking it from concept to commitment in terms of future opportunities and funding potential.

Before coming to ChangeKitchen CIC, a number of the Gen22 volunteers had found that access to training or work was challenging for them as their individual needs were not considered or met by potential employers.

As part of the ChangeKitchen CIC delivery, young people were also provided with CV writing guidance, work and college applications, training course advice and interview questions.



[WATCH THE PLAYLIST](#)

#CookingUpChange



Personal challenges included:

- ➔ Physical abilities and mobility.
- ➔ Mental health considerations.
- ➔ Health diagnosis and recognised conditions.
- ➔ Speech and communication challenges.
- ➔ Economic barriers.
- ➔ Access to suitable travel and transport options.
- ➔ Availability to attend regularly.

Eden's mum shared some of his personal challenges as part of his Gen22 participation...

"Eden has autism and a particular aversion to public transport that has made it difficult for Eden to find employment in Birmingham. Whilst Eden also volunteers at the Birmingham Orthopaedic Hospital, ChangeKitchen CIC represented a vastly different environment, testing new skills as well as a new (and lengthy) bus route!"

SOURCE: Eden's mum

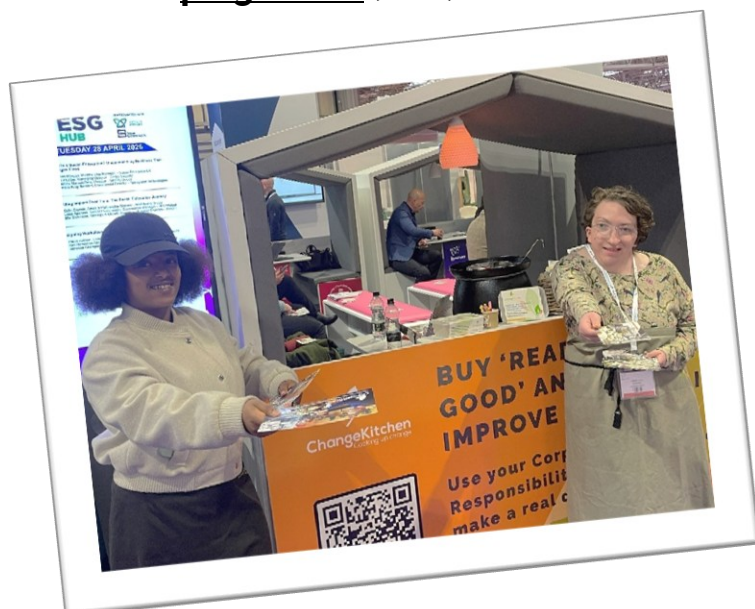
Having a single point of contact as the Community Engagement Officer meant James was able to build relationships with each volunteer based on active listening, care and kindness, supporting interventions, and adjustments to ad hoc personal changes.

The 30 hours of project volunteering were flexibly timetabled around each volunteer's home and lifestyle circumstances.

Activities and training options were tailored to individual preferences and interests for potential future employment.

Skills and training activities across the project included:

- ➔ Kitchen preparation.
- ➔ Cooking and baking.
- ➔ Food partner engagement including **Fareshare Midlands** and **Incredible Surplus**.
- ➔ Local business engagement (sharing ChangeKitchen CIC marketing materials).
- ➔ Community meal distribution including **Birmingham Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF)**.



- ➔ **ChangeKitchen Kindness Café** customer service.
- ➔ Events and markets including those at **Birmingham Botanical Gardens**, **Balsall Heath Second Saturday market** and **The Workplace Event (NEC Birmingham)**.
- ➔ Team working and communication.
- ➔ Organisation and planning.
- ➔ Understanding roles and responsibilities.

#CookingUpChange



OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- Funding award was based on 20 young people engaged in Gen22 project.
- Gen22 pilot project participants totalled 32 with delivery being completed for all 32 within the original funding budget for 20 participants.
- Young people completed 617 hours of volunteering and skills-based learning.
- Of the 32 participants, 14 completed the end of project evaluation form.
- Of these, 100% rated volunteering at ChangeKitchen CIC as 10/10 in terms of enjoyability of activities and sessions delivered.

The quantitative outcomes and achievements have been evaluated from step 4 and step 7 of the project process these being Onboarding Orientation and Project Completion questionnaires.

In support of the project success, ChangeKitchen CIC has also captured qualitative testimonials from both volunteers and family members:

"Yes, it benefited me in many ways besides cooking, including boosting my self-confidence and learning how to adapt to working as part of a team."

"Super helpful in setting up community kitchen society at university. Mental health - a safe, calm, supportive and caring environment to come to every week."

"I'm an introvert and working at ChangeKitchen CIC helped me open up more."

"Definitely! It has instilled the sort of work ethic I think will be useful in the world of employment and it has allowed me to connect with a helpful cause in a heartening way."



We concluded our project with a celebration lunch at ChangeKitchen CIC's Kindness Cafe. Volunteers caught up with the familiar faces and met new ones. We shared food and stories of the new paths people had pursued after volunteering at ChangeKitchen CIC.

Crucially, we celebrated the achievements of our Gen22 volunteers with certificates commemorating success and the work references to support their future employment applications.

#CookingUpChange



An example is shared here to evidence the soft outcomes that often create the long-term sustainable change for individuals.:

"My son Amaan is an exceedingly kind and hardworking individual.

He always thinks the best of people and gives his utmost effort regardless of his circumstances or situations. He will go out of his way for others weather he physically can or not. He was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder when he was 10 years old. He has learning difficulties and communicating difficulties.

Unfortunately, when Covid hit and the whole world went into lockdown, Amaan got ill. Due to the delay in being seen and getting treatment after 6 months he ended up with lifelong mobility difficulties. He got nerve damage below both ankles resulting in paralysis in both feet. He lost a lot of muscle in his legs and arms. Because he is tall, he finds it difficult to balance without physical support. He lost the ability to write, clothe himself, feed himself. He found it difficult to do the everyday tasks he did daily. His hands had clawed up, and he could not move his fingers due to muscle weakness.

Due to safety concerns at college, he did not have many options on which courses he could pursue. He also did not secure the Maths and English level 3 requirements to apply for apprenticeship opportunities.

Amaan does not go places he is not familiar with alone. He always has me or his dad with him. There are some places he likes to go alone to, to buy his favourite Boba drinks or buy his anime collectibles.

Recently we found out that there were volunteering opportunities available at ChangeKitchen CIC, helping in the kitchen environment. When I told Amaan about this he was very excited as it is something that he loves being able to do. We contacted James and were asked to come and introduce ourselves and to go over any concerns that could arise if Amaan were to volunteer at ChangeKitchen CIC.

Amaan was a bit nervous because he had faced obstacles in other settings which ended up in him having to not continue there. But once we went and Amaan had a look around and spoke to James his concern was no longer there. He really looked forward to his first shift. What was even more advantageous was that we live on the same road as where ChangeKitchen CIC are based. It is a 2-minute walk so commuting is not a problem. When Amaan had his first shift he was excited, and when he came home, he was happy, he enjoys being part of a work environment as well as being part of a team.

The opportunity has given him the chance of being part of something that he enjoys the most. He was particularly excited about being asked to help at The Workplace Event at the NEC. He really enjoyed working with the team and talking about what was made and serving customers. He now looks forward to his shift times at ChangeKitchen CIC. It gives him the opportunity to be a part of an organisation and being part of a team."

SOURCE: Sehreen, Amman's mum, April 2026



WHAT'S THE PROJECT LEGACY

The Gen22 pilot project outputs have been shown to be highly successful, impactful and effective, and clearly demonstrate the need for pre-employment support for young people. ChangeKitchen CIC exceeded delivery expectations, based on the demand shown and needed by the young people in the Gen22 project.

The outcomes have been transformational for the majority of participant volunteers with increases in confidence, improved social skills, better teamworking and communication demonstrated resulting in ongoing work experience and better employment opportunities.

The legacy piece that changes social mobility, and has the potential to build social capital, is the most impactful in the long-term. **For example:** One young person, who has acknowledged barriers to employment, and who volunteered with Gen22, has just been given an unconditional offer to do a BA in creative writing at Birmingham City University... and, after support and encouragement from the Gen22 project lead and the ChangeKitchen CIC CEO, has accepted the offer and starts in September 2026.

In addition, based on evidence from this pilot, new funding was awarded based on the pilot project proven concept and Phase 2 delivery commenced in July 2026.



#CookingUpChange



STATEMENT FROM UNITED BY 2022

Kallianne Titley, Youth Programmes Lead, United by 2022

Why we funded the project

We chose to fund the project because we recognised the valuable work being done to support young people through hospitality-focused skills development and employability opportunities.

ChangeKitchen CIC was making a meaningful difference within the community, and we wanted to build a partnership with an organisation that shared our values while helping to strengthen its platform and extend its impact.

Why the project was valued

The project team were a pleasure to work with - flexible, collaborative, and responsive throughout. They created a range of opportunities to engage participants while always listening to their needs and shaping delivery around participants' own goals and aspirations.

This participant-centred approach-built trust with both United by 2022 and the young people involved, contributing to positive outcomes for individuals and the wider community.

How it has influenced our thinking

Working together has reinforced the value of genuine partnership. Rather than taking a traditional funder-fundee approach, this project demonstrated the importance of listening to an organisation's expertise, understanding what it needs to thrive, and supporting it to build on its strengths.

This experience has helped shape how we approach future partnerships, placing greater emphasis on collaboration, trust, and shared impact.

"This partnership showed what's possible when organisations work together with a shared purpose and put young people at the centre of everything they do. By listening to participants and building opportunities around their ambitions, we saw the confidence, skills and aspirations of young people grow. It's exactly the kind of collaborative approach that continues to influence how we develop partnerships and create lasting impact in our communities."



STATEMENT FROM CHANGEKITCHEN CIC

Birgit Kehrer, CEO and Founder, ChangeKitchen CIC

"I was delighted for ChangeKitchen CIC to receive a grant to support young people with employability skills.

We as a team, have always supported some young people with work experience and similar on an ad hoc basis but loved having a dedicated programme for it.

We are all too well aware that so many young people, especially since Covid, never had any work experience, and therefore themselves feel anxious about entering the world of work AND that many employers would not consider anyone who cannot demonstrate at least a minimum of experience AND potentially a reference from an employer.

As ChangeKitchen CIC prides itself to run a very supportive work environment we are well placed to give young people who might feel worried about stepping into a work environment the opportunity to grow. We also have many links to referring organisations who value us for 16 years of positive employability support, the wonderful organisations very much helped us with this programme.

The result of this first phase of Gen22 has been beyond expectations.

We managed to place many more young people than was requested by the grant.

Also feedback from young people and parents alike was very positive:

- ➞ Increased confidence, social connections and an improved ability to work as part of a team.
- ➞ Highly improved mental health, life skills and much more.

The young people particularly loved being part of something bigger and positive - like supporting our work cooking meals for people impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

We are incredibly grateful to United by 2022 that due to this immense success, we have been awarded more funding to continue this work - and we have big plans to increase the capacity and scope of this type of programme even further."



ChangeKitchen
Cooking up change



[WATCH THE PLAYLIST](#)

WWW.CHANGEKITCHEN.CO.UK

196-198 Edward Road, Birmingham, B12 9LX | 07828 825 850 | hello@changekitchen.co.uk

ChangeKitchen CIC is a Community Interest Company registered in England and Wales. Company registration no. 0727904.