

Rising Together: How Collaboration Will Shape the Future of the Music Industries

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For the past 25 years, Youth Music has been working to expand access and opportunities for young people in the music industry, regardless of background. As part of our latest research into the views of the young people we work with, we talked in depth with seven of our NextGen community members about their career, skills, and hopes for the future. We found a vibrant community of young creatives and musicians; an incredibly driven and passionate group of people striving to create a career for themselves. All of them have varying ambitions and dreams of success, but there was something that united them – a deep rooted desire to help others in the music industry.

Charlie is a 24-year-old from London, who worked as a content creator for both the Youth Music Awards 2022 and Give a Gig Week 2023. Charlie's long-term goal is to eventually set up her own social media agency working within the music industry. Having personally experienced the low or non-existent pay for entry level roles in the industry, she wanted to start an agency where she could better support and offer opportunities to people.

"I think that it would be really nice to bring together my community and the people in my inner circle, create an agency and provide training opportunities," Charlie told us. "I'd quite like to teach people about social media, but not only that about digital marketing, branding, just the things that I've overall learned because I feel like a lot of that is very gate kept."

It was clear from the interviews that a sense of community is important for young people in the music industry. "I feel like it's a very like a lovely kind of close knit, creative community," said 23-year-old NextGen Fund Creative, Jen, on the support she receives from fellow creatives in Liverpool. It was the support from one of these people that helped Jen apply for the NextGen Fund: "[It's] given me the confidence to search for those people and make sure that I can connect with people and saying, 'We should grab a coffee, have a little chat and maybe work together in the future.'"

Similarly, after some initial hesitation, Abdullah, a 23-year-old from Leicester, reached out to another artist about collaborating and reaped the reward for it. "It's not really been easy for me to reach out to other young people," he told us. "But last month [a friend] recommended to me that I should work with this guy I've known for a long time. And now we have one of my favorite songs I've ever made. I made a beat and then he came to my house because I've got a new studio, it was like fireworks! Literally, the song was made in like 5-10 minutes."

Jen and Abdullah certainly aren't alone in wanting to collaborate with others. Ruairi, a 26-year-old from Belfast, better known as Lemonade Shoelace, spoke of how he likes helping others creating music, saying he liked spending time in studio spaces with other artists and collaborating: "I think I am just better suited to studio environments; I can help other people's songs come and work with people in my own music. I'll be doing lots of different writing sessions with people, which has been quite successful so far." Lok Pui, on the other hand, spoke about how she wants to help artists within live music. While they improve their own skills as a musician, Lok hopes to one day host her own events for others: "I would like to organise a concert for myself [...] But not only for me, but also for 30 other musicians!"

Lok Pui went on to say, "I think it's quite important for people who are from different backgrounds to have the opportunity to get into your music or the music industry." This is echoed by Sophia, a 24-year-old from Coventry who works for Positive Youth Foundation, a Youth Music funded partner. Following on from her participation in Youth Music funded project, she thought, "Wow, why would I not want to give this opportunity to other people with the insight that I have?" This led to her working for the organisation, herself; while she never envisioned herself as a youth worker, she is happy that she became one. She's now able to gain valuable skills to help her achieve her long-term goal: "My dream is to work for an art gallery and to do something similar to what I do in terms of community engagement."

Why is this important? In this crisis that the youth and community music sectors are currently facing, an aspiration from those in the industry to help others could be crucial to continuing to provide support to those who need it the most. As reported in our [2024 Sound of the Next Generation](#) report, more than two thirds of local authorities have cut, or plan to cut, their arts and cultural budgets; in the last decade youth services have had over £1 billion in budget cuts.

While it won't be able to solve all of these issues, the willingness to work with others within the industry that we have found is a healthy sign for the future. It could help to alleviate some of the impacts of the funding and access crisis that we find ourselves in. A new government hints at potential for increase funding and support, but even still the desire to help others will always be invaluable.