

BRING THE POWER FESTIVAL DAYS: A STORY OF YOUTH-LED TRANSFORMATION

United By 2022 Charity, a legacy of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, champions the West Midlands by connecting businesses with community groups. Funded by a £5 million investment, it has continued five impactful programmes supporting volunteers, young people, and local grassroots organisations. The charity upskills community groups, enhances their resilience, and focuses on marginalised communities. Through civic engagement and community development, United By 2022 preserves the Games' spirit of pride and inclusivity across the region.

Bring The Power offers inclusive sports and cultural activities across the West Midlands to children and young people, focusing on underrepresented groups and youth empowerment through diverse programmes and events in schools throughout the region.

Across the West Midlands, seven communities from Birmingham, Dudley, Oldbury, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, and Wolverhampton, came alive with the energy of young people determined to make a difference. Led by local organisations and young people themselves, with the support of United By 2022, the Bring the Power Festival Days aimed to bring sport, creativity, and activism to those who might not otherwise have access. What emerged was more than a series of events—it was a movement shaped by the voices, ideas, and ambitions of young people themselves.



“

These young people weren't hard to engage—we just needed to meet them where they felt safe.
Helen, ConnectEd Partnership

”



In Wolverhampton, Helen Bourton and her team from *ConnectEd Partnership*, focused on an often-overlooked group—children with disabilities. Through careful planning and consultation with schools, SEND parents groups, young people, young leaders and sports coaches, they built a programme that allowed children to engage in physical activity in ways that felt safe and comfortable to them.

“We learned that we'd been trying to fit a round peg in a square hole,” Helen admitted. “These young people weren't hard to engage—we just needed to meet them where they felt safe”. Activities were designed so that families could replicate them at home, ensuring that the impact would last long after the festival ended. The event even led to a new initiative where siblings of disabled children were trained as young leaders, helping not only their own families but their wider communities.

In Walsall, Benjamin Williams from *Kids in Communication*, had a different vision. He saw the festival as an opportunity to bring young voices into the civic arena, pairing sports with a youth-led debate. **“Young people wanted to know—how do we have our say?”** Benjamin explained. As part of the event young people held a panel with a number of guests, including the Police and Crime Commissioner and local councillors, where young attendees challenged decision-makers on issues that mattered to them. But the event wasn't just about discussion—it was about action. **“One of our young people went straight up to the council leader and said, ‘How do we make this happen?’”** Benjamin recounted. The leader's response was

immediate: “My door is always open”. That moment, captured on a podcast made as part of the festival day, became a testament to the power of youth voice when given a platform.

In Birmingham, Basharad Dad and his youth-led organisation *Our Community* took on the challenge of designing a festival that would reach beyond their familiar territory. When they learned they weren't just one of several Birmingham-based projects, but the sole festival lead for the city, the pressure mounted. **“We realised we had to up our game,”** Basharad recalled. His team, made up of young people from across Birmingham, spent months designing workshops, sports sessions, and interactive experiences. On the big day, the venue was buzzing—with wheelchair basketball, smoothie bikes, and even a boxing ring featuring a European champion. **“How many young people get to step into the ring with a pro?”** he considered. The day wasn't just about fun—it was about changing perspectives, inspiring confidence, and proving that young people could take the lead in their own communities.

“

The encouragement shown to all to get involved with the different activities. Everyone so friendly and helpful.
Dudley Festival Day Attendee

”

Meanwhile, in Sandwell, Ruth Hopkins and her team fused sport with music, creating an inclusive festival experience unlike any other. University interns studying music worked with young participants to design innovative activities, including a sensory musical boxing session. The rhythmic footwork and percussive beats allowed disabled and non-disabled children to train together. It was described as ***“an incredible way to engage children who may never have had the opportunity to participate in a sport like boxing before”***. The involvement of university students as interns ensured that the festival was not only a youth-led initiative but also a learning experience for emerging professionals in community engagement. “The boxing coach said he might use this approach in all his sessions—it was that effective,” Ruth recalled.

The event also provided a rare space where disabled children and their siblings could play together as equals, creating unforgettable moments of shared joy.

As shown through these four examples, though unique in design, they shared a common purpose—to give young people a voice and a platform to shape their own experiences. Whether through sport, debate, music, or leadership, these events did more than just entertain—they empowered. The lessons learned from these festival days will shape future initiatives, proving that when young people are trusted to lead, they bring the power to transform their communities.

