



GEN22 DIGITAL FILMMAKING & COMMUNITY ARTS:

EMPOWERING YOUNG CREATIVES IN WOLVERHAMPTON

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.

Gen22 empowers disadvantaged young people aged 16-24 in the West Midlands through skill-building social action assignments with partner organisations, and by funding youth-led community initiatives.

Gen22 provided young people in Wolverhampton with a unique opportunity to develop their skills in digital filmmaking and community arts. Delivered by **Central Youth Theatre (CYT)**—Wolverhampton's longest-running youth theatre since 1983—the project immersed young people in weekly creative skill development workshops. The culmination of this work was the creation of three short documentary-drama films celebrating Wolverhampton residents who had contributed to the city's cultural, social, and community development.





For Anthony, Programme Producer, the aim was clear from the outset. *"We wanted to introduce young people to all aspects of filmmaking—acting, cinematography, and producing—so they could find their niche and gain confidence along the way"*. The programme was structured into three core areas: acting for screen, cinematography, and producing. This included:

- ▶ 24 workshops for 20 young people (16-24).
- ▶ 10 younger volunteers (13-15) assisting with admin and logistics.
- ▶ 2 drop-in events where young people interviewed the public.
- ▶ 3 outreach sessions at community venues to engage local audiences.

Max, a young person in the cinematography course, had always been interested in visual storytelling but had never worked with professional equipment. *"I knew how to use cameras to some degree, but it was more photography-based,"* he said. ***"This course allowed me to understand the technical side of filmmaking—how to use industry-standard cameras, how different lenses affect a shot, how to work with lighting"***.

The hands-on experience proved invaluable, pushing him to explore new career possibilities. Max will soon be starting a new job in digital marketing, a field he is eager to pursue. He hopes to apply the skills he gained at CYT in his new role and, in the future, return to do freelance digital marketing work for the organisation. Max continues to volunteer with CYT, helping produce their podcast.

Under the guidance of Matt, a professional actor and trainer, the acting for screen workshops helped young people build confidence in front of the camera. *"One of the biggest hurdles was overcoming nerves,"* Matt reflected. ***"Many of them had never performed for a camera before, but by the end, they were confidently delivering monologues and working seamlessly in film scenes"***.

Masterclasses were also facilitated by actors from Waterloo Road and DI Ray, who provided invaluable insights into the realities of working in film and television.

A key element of the project was interviewing prominent local figures, including Anita Lonsborough, Olympic swimming gold medalist and Hugh Porter, world champion cyclist. These interviews formed the foundation of the final documentary—dramas, allowing participants to develop skills in research, interviewing, and script writing.

I never had anywhere I could really access these professional cameras and all this equipment that's really expensive.

Emily, Young Person



Emily, another young person, had long aspired to work in cinematography but struggled to find opportunities to gain practical experience. Despite her passion for visual storytelling, she lacked access to professional equipment and industry-standard training. *"I never had anywhere I could really access these professional cameras and all this equipment that's really expensive,"* she explained. Before joining the project, she had only worked with a small, outdated camera at home and had no opportunities to gain hands-on experience with lighting or sound equipment.

Beyond the technical limitations, Emily also faced challenges in finding a supportive environment where she could develop her skills. *"I never really had any teachers or any friends that really had an interest in film,"* she said, which made it difficult to learn collaboratively or receive guidance. The lack of industry connections and structured learning pathways meant that pursuing cinematography often felt like an inaccessible dream.

Joining the programme gave her the opportunity to train with professionals, use industry-standard kit, and work in a team setting, significantly boosting her confidence. *"It was just amazing because I got all the hands-on experience that I really wanted and needed,"* she reflected. *"Being able to actually see that I can do this if I want to as a career and I can do it with my friends at college and show them, 'Don't worry guys, I actually know what to do here,' really helped boost my confidence and my passion for it."*

Her passion and dedication led her to not only contribute to the main project but also take the initiative to create a promotional video for a local tennis club. *"That was really cool to me to be able to do something more corporate and something that will really help you on your CV and in the industry,"* she said. *"I've told my teachers at college and they're like, 'Wow, you're doing a lot,' but it's really all thanks to this opportunity that we have presented to us."*

Through this experience, Emily gained the practical expertise, confidence, and industry insight she had previously lacked, setting her on a clearer path toward a future in film.

The project wasn't without its challenges. Coordinating filming days, ensuring actors and crew were on schedule, and managing the logistics of production were all learning curves. *"One thing we'd do differently next time is bringing all the groups –actors, cinematographers, and producers–together much earlier,"* Anthony admitted. *"On filming days, it was often the first time many of them were meeting and working together, which made collaboration more challenging".*

Despite these hurdles, the impact of the programme was undeniable. For many young people, Gen22 at CYT was a transformative experience, equipping them with technical skills, industry insights, and the confidence to pursue their ambitions. As Emily explained, ***“It’s really shown me that I want to go on to university to learn film, but really what I want to do is get a job placement as soon as possible”***. The experience has given her a crucial first step toward her career, helping her gain the skills and confidence to navigate the industry. *“I think with the experience I’ve had, that’s not going to be as hard as going to university for how many years and then suddenly jumping into the industry. It’s kind of like I’ve done a bit of work already, so I don’t have to start from that low to go up,”* she reflected. While editing the *Beyond the Boundary* and Gen22 introductory films in preparation for the upcoming showcase, she expressed her hopes: ***“I hope people get inspired by what we showcase and that others join future projects after seeing what we’ve done”***.

The films produced through the programme – ***Beyond the Boundary***, a tribute to pioneering cricketer Rachel Heyhoe Flint; ***In Pursuit***, focusing on cycling legend Hugh Porter; and a four-part short films collection ***A Club We Call Home***, celebrating the community spirit of Wolverhampton’s sporting clubs including Fordhouse Cricket Club, Wolverhampton Wheelers Cycling Club and Cleverly Tennis Club – were showcased at a public exhibition in January 2025. For the young creatives involved, this marks not just the culmination of months of hard work, but the beginning of their journeys in the film industry.

“ I hope people get inspired by what we showcase and that others join future projects after seeing what we’ve done. **Emily, Young Person** ”

