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REWILDING YOUTH

EDUCATION FOR FREEDOM

Data, Place and Lived Experience: Exploring the Value of Regional and National Datasets for Third Sector Organisations

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Introduction

Third sector organisations are increasingly expected to demonstrate the impact of their work through evidence-based approaches. Alongside traditional methods of evaluation, large-scale datasets provide new opportunities to better understand communities, identify need, support funding applications, and contextualise organisational impact. However, the value of data is not simply found in the statistics themselves. Rather, its usefulness emerges when data is combined with local knowledge, organisational experience, and the lived experiences of the communities being served.

This report explores how regional and national datasets can support third sector organisations through a case study of [Rewilding Youth](#), a Community Interest Company working across Hull, East Yorkshire, and North Lincolnshire. **Rewilding Youth seeks to connect young people from predominantly urban and disadvantaged communities with nature** through activities including bushcraft, green woodworking, gardening, environmental action, outdoor education, and nature-based wellbeing programmes. Through these activities the organisation aims to strengthen young people's connection to

nature while contributing to wellbeing, confidence, community participation, and a greater sense of place.

The report focuses specifically on the potential value of the [Yorkshire Engagement Portal \(YEP\)](#) and complementary national datasets. Four stages are used to explore this relationship. First, YEP data is used to provide a broader socio-economic picture of Hull and its young people. Second, national environmental datasets are used to examine access to green space and environmental inequalities. Third, internal organisational data from Upshot is analysed to understand Rewilding Youth's activities and engagement within specific communities. Finally, lived experience data from young people and practitioners is incorporated to explore how statistical indicators align with, or differ from, experiences on the ground.

To illustrate these relationships, the report focuses on Bransholme, one of Hull's largest housing estates. **Bransholme presents an interesting case study because it combines high levels of deprivation with comparatively strong access to green space.** This apparent contradiction provides an opportunity to examine both the strengths and limitations of quantitative datasets and to consider how organisations such as Rewilding Youth can operate within the gap between statistical provision and lived experience.

Part One: Understanding Hull Through the Yorkshire Engagement Portal

The Yorkshire Engagement Portal provides an opportunity for organisations to better understand the wider social, economic, and demographic context within which they operate. While community organisations often possess extensive local knowledge, datasets such as YEP enable this knowledge to be situated within broader regional patterns and trends. One of the most striking findings from the YEP is the growth in Hull's young population. **Between 2011 and 2023 the number of young people living in Hull increased by 5.13% (Figure 1).** This trend is particularly significant when compared with neighbouring authorities. During the same period, Doncaster, Bradford, Sheffield, North East Lincolnshire, and the East Riding all experienced declines in their youth populations, while Leeds recorded a more modest increase of 1.76%.

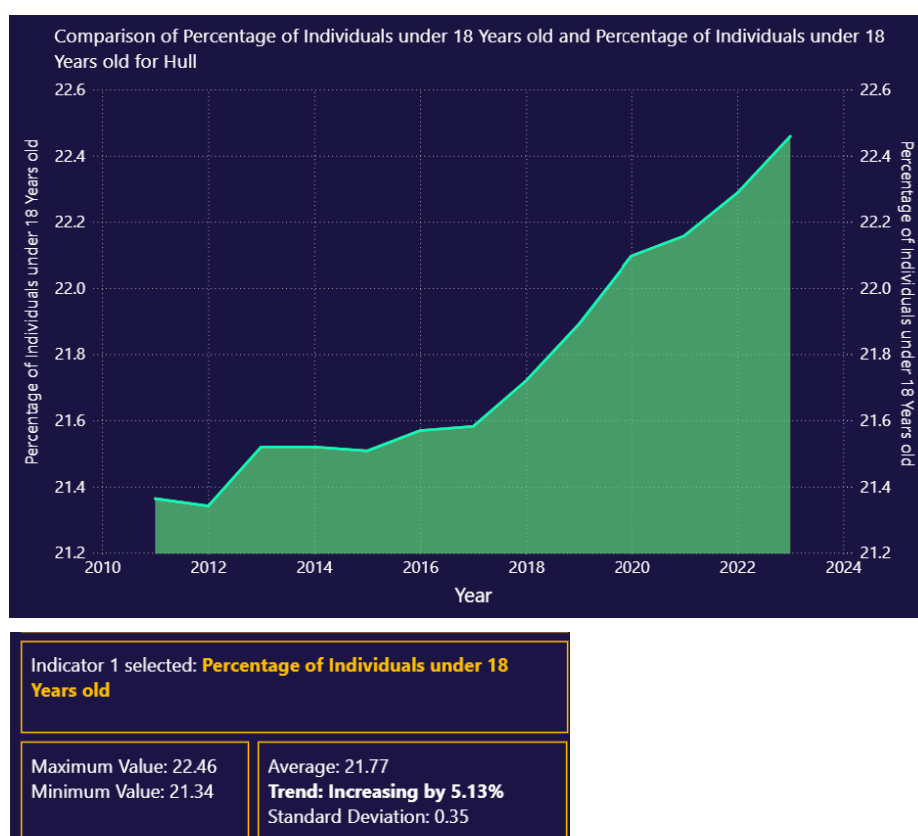


Fig. 1. Screenshot from the [Yorkshire Vitality Observatory](#).

For organisations working with young people, this growth is significant. An increasing youth population potentially creates greater demand for youth services, educational support, wellbeing provision, and opportunities for community participation. In this respect, Hull's growing youth population represents both a positive development and a challenge for organisations operating within the city. However, the YEP data also highlights some of the complexities associated with this growth. While the number of young people has increased, educational outcomes have not improved at the same rate. Between 2017 and 2023 the proportion of 19-year-olds achieving Level 3 qualifications increased by only 0.14%, placing Hull behind several comparable authorities including Doncaster, Leeds, and North East Lincolnshire. Similarly, **while employee numbers increased by 6.97%, the YEP suggests that this growth has not translated into a significant expansion of employment opportunities (Figure 2)**. This raises important questions regarding the opportunities available to young people as they transition into adulthood.

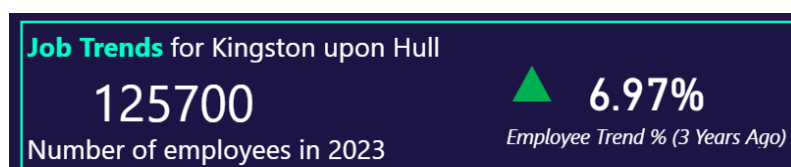
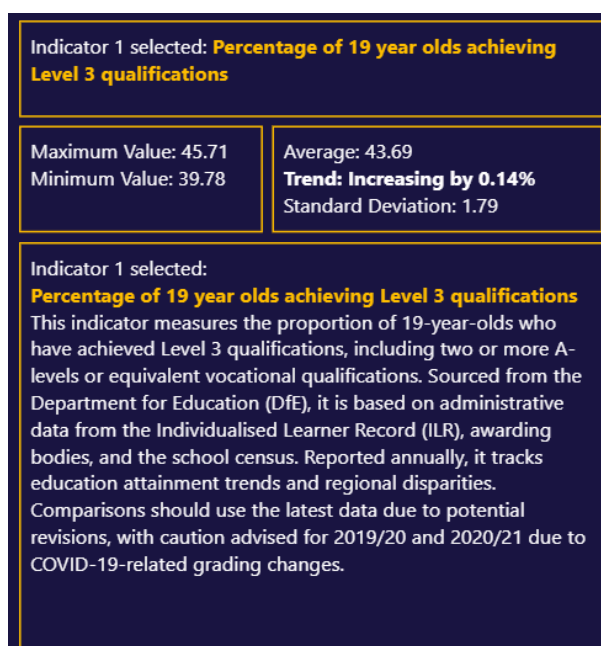


Fig. 2. Screenshot from the [Yorkshire Vitality Observatory](#) and [Yorkshire Vitality Jobs](#).

At the same time, there are positive indicators. GCSE attainment improved by 2.32% between 2019 and 2024, broadly reflecting improvements observed elsewhere in the region. Together, these indicators present a nuanced picture of Hull. The city is experiencing population growth among young people and modest improvements in educational attainment, yet challenges remain around qualifications, opportunity, and wider socio-economic outcomes.

For third sector organisations, this contextual information is valuable. It does not directly explain individual experiences, nor does it determine where interventions should occur. However, it provides an important backdrop against which community needs and organisational activities can be understood. The picture emerging from the YEP becomes even more significant when considered alongside wider measures of deprivation and environmental inequality.

Part Two: Deprivation, Green Space and the Case of Bransholme

While the YEP provides an overview of Hull's social and economic conditions, national datasets provide an opportunity to explore more specific characteristics of the place. For [Rewilding Youth](#), environmental datasets are particularly relevant given the organisation's focus on nature connection and outdoor engagement. Hull continues to experience significant levels of deprivation. According to the [2025 Index of Multiple Deprivation](#), Hull ranks as the sixth most deprived upper-tier local authority in England (Figure 3). Furthermore, over half (51.8%) of Hull's Lower Super Output Areas fall within the most deprived fifth of areas nationally. These statistics provide important context for understanding the challenges facing many young people in the city. Educational outcomes, employment opportunities, health inequalities, and community wellbeing cannot be separated from the broader socio-economic realities experienced by many residents.

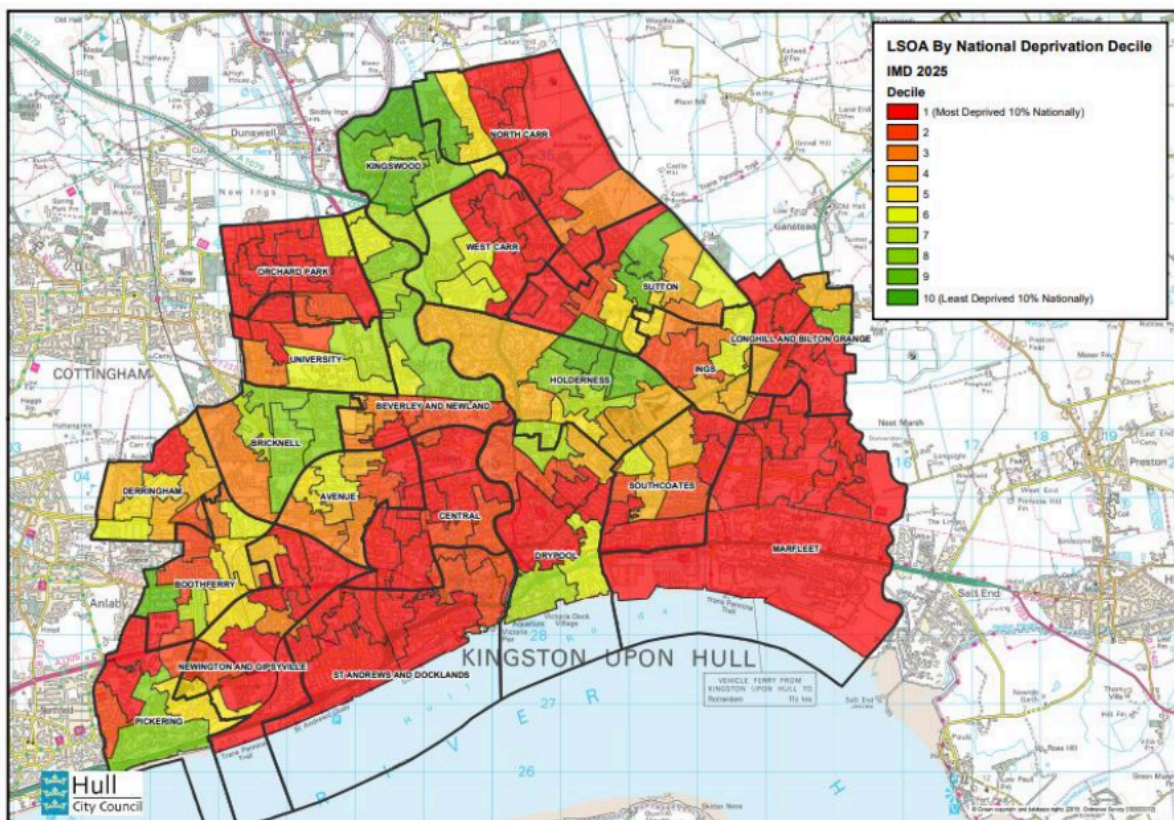


Fig. 3. [Index of Multiple Deprivation \(Hull\) 2025](#).

Within the northern part of Hull, **Bransholme represents a particularly interesting case study**. The area falls within the most deprived fifth of neighbourhoods nationally and

experiences many of the challenges commonly associated with socio-economic disadvantage. For Rewilding Youth, such indicators help identify areas where engagement and community-based support may be particularly valuable. However, Bransholme also presents an apparent contradiction. According to [Natural England's Accessible Greenspace Inequalities](#) data, the area is classified as H1, one of the highest categories for access to green space (Figure 4). In practical terms, this suggests that many residents live relatively close to accessible natural environments. This finding is somewhat unusual. Areas experiencing comparable levels of deprivation often have significantly lower access to green space. Even within Hull, areas such as Orchard Park experience similar levels of deprivation while recording considerably lower levels of accessible green space.

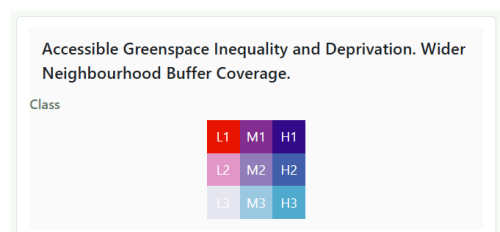
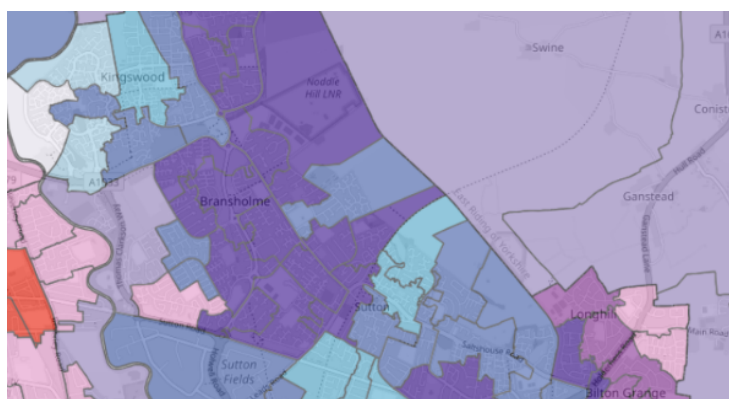


Fig. 4. [Accessible Greenspace Inequality and Deprivation](#). Natural England.

At first glance, this might suggest that young people in Bransholme enjoy relatively strong opportunities to engage with nature. However, **research conducted by Rewilding Youth in 2024 paints a more complicated picture.**

Young people participating in the research frequently described feelings of environmental disconnection:

"I live on Bransholme, my options are limited."

"I live in a flat in Bransholme, there's no green spaces."

"Not much beauty in nature in Hull."

"I love walking but all the places around me are shit."

These comments reveal a significant tension between statistical indicators and lived experience. **While datasets suggest that green space is available, many young people do not perceive it as accessible, valuable, attractive, or relevant to their daily lives.** This distinction is important. Access to green space does not automatically lead to engagement with nature. The existence of a park, woodland, or natural area may satisfy a statistical measure of accessibility, yet fail to create meaningful experiences or connections for local residents.

It is within this gap between provision and participation that organisations such as Rewilding Youth seek to operate. The data identifies opportunity; community engagement seeks to make that opportunity meaningful.

Part Three: Organisational Data and Understanding Community Engagement

While regional and national datasets provide valuable contextual information, they cannot explain how organisations respond to local needs. For this reason, internal organisational data forms an important third layer of understanding. For [Rewilding Youth](#), this is primarily collected through [Upshot](#), a monitoring and evaluation platform designed specifically for third sector organisations. Where datasets such as the YEP identify broad social trends and environmental datasets highlight areas of opportunity or need, organisational data allows us to examine how resources, programmes, and staff time are distributed in response to those conditions. In the case of Bransholme, this enables us to understand not only why the area has become a focus for engagement, but also the scale and nature of that engagement.

To provide a contemporary picture, this report focuses on activity undertaken between 30 March 2025 and 1 June 2026. During this fourteen-month period, **Rewilding Youth engaged with 1,719 young people through activities delivered on Bransholme. Of these, 1,220 were unique participants, comprising 641 males and 579 females.** The scale of this engagement demonstrates the significance of Bransholme within the organisation's wider programme delivery. Activity was concentrated in locations that provide regular access to young people, particularly Astra Youth Centre, which hosted 63 sessions, and Winifred Holtby Academy, which hosted 57 sessions. These locations provide

important opportunities to establish consistent relationships with young people and deliver sustained programmes over time.

However, organisational data also reveals that Rewilding Youth's presence extends beyond these core locations. Across the reporting period, sessions were delivered throughout Bransholme's varied urban, green, and blue spaces. Activities took place in community venues such as the Bespoke Centre, which hosted 12 sessions, alongside outdoor locations including Bude Park, Noddle Hill Nature Reserve, and Noddle Hill Community Woodland.



Image 1. [Noddle Hill Nature Reserve](#). Source: Hull City Council.

This geographic spread is significant. While schools and youth centres provide important points of contact, the organisation's broader aim is to facilitate direct engagement with local green spaces. In this sense, organisational data begins to reveal how the opportunities identified within environmental datasets are translated into practical experiences for young people. Upshot data also provides insight into programme objectives and strategic outcomes. Rather than simply recording attendance, the system enables the organisation to track participation against specific aims.

One example is **the [Postcode Gardener programme](#), which seeks to develop wellbeing and nature connectedness among participants while monitoring agreed outcomes.**

During the reporting period, 381 unique participants engaged with activities linked to this strategy, generating approximately 440 hours of direct engagement. Similarly, one of Rewilding Youth's National Lottery-funded objectives seeks to increase participation and

engagement among people from low-income and deprived communities in pro-environmental activities. Across Bransholme, this objective engaged 623 unique participants and generated over 1,291 hours of activity. A related strategic objective focuses on fostering environmental behaviour change through **increased awareness of climate change, greater engagement with nature, and the development of pro-environmental behaviours**. This objective engaged 608 unique participants and accounted for over 1,093 hours of delivery.

Taken together, these figures demonstrate the additional value of organisational datasets. While regional and national data can identify communities experiencing deprivation or environmental inequalities, internal data provides evidence of how organisations respond to these conditions and the extent to which communities engage with those responses. However, **even detailed participation data cannot fully explain what these experiences mean to the individuals involved. To understand this, it is necessary to move beyond numbers and consider lived experience.**

Part Four: Lived Experience and the Limits of Data

The final layer of evidence considered within this report is lived experience. While quantitative datasets provide important insights into populations, trends, and participation, they cannot fully capture how people experience their communities, opportunities, and environments. For Rewilding Youth, lived experience is not simply an addition to quantitative data; it is an essential component of understanding impact. The relationship between statistical indicators and individual experiences is often complex, and in some cases contradictory. Bransholme provides a particularly useful example of this dynamic.

As discussed previously, Natural England's Accessible Greenspace Inequalities data classifies Bransholme as an H1 area, indicating relatively strong access to green space. Yet research undertaken by Rewilding Youth in 2024 revealed that many young people perceived their environment very differently. Participants described limited opportunities, a lack of attractive natural spaces, and a weak connection to their local environment. These reflections challenge simplistic interpretations of environmental datasets and suggest that physical access alone may not be sufficient to generate meaningful engagement with nature.

This finding highlights an important lesson for third sector organisations. **Data can identify the presence of opportunities, but it cannot determine whether those opportunities are recognised, valued, or utilised by local communities.** Understanding this distinction is crucial for organisations seeking to design effective interventions. In many respects, this is where Rewilding Youth seeks to position its work. The organisation operates within the space between environmental provision and environmental participation. Through practical activities, outdoor learning, and relationship-building, the aim is not simply to bring young people into green spaces but to help them develop meaningful connections with those spaces.

Evidence from participants suggests that this process can be significant. Alongside earlier comments describing disconnection from nature, other young people described experiences of curiosity, enjoyment, and growing appreciation of the natural world.

One participant reflected:

"I think it's beautiful because of being out in the fresh air."

Another explained:

"To go out in the real world you need to know about wildlife."

A third stated:

"Obviously, I'm starting to like to know the real world more."

These comments suggest a developing relationship with nature that extends beyond physical access alone. Nature becomes something experienced, understood, and valued rather than simply something located nearby.

Participants also described the social dimensions of these experiences. One young person noted:

"Feels like we have our own little community."

This observation reflects an important aspect of nature-based youth work. While environmental engagement may be the primary focus, activities often create opportunities for social connection, belonging, and community formation. In this sense, nature can act as both the setting and facilitator for wider personal and social development. The impact of these approaches is also evident within educational settings. Rewilding Youth's work with Winifred Holtby Academy aims to support young people through outdoor learning, practical activities, and alternative forms of engagement.

One participant reflected on the changes they had experienced through involvement in the programme:

"Before I started doing this, I was always getting removed from lessons and truanting. When I started coming here, it made me realise I needed to start behaving and doing things differently."

While individual testimonies should not be interpreted as representative of all participants, they provide valuable insight into the ways young people understand and describe their own experiences. These accounts help illuminate dimensions of impact that would remain invisible within attendance figures, demographic statistics, or deprivation indices.

Together, these findings suggest that the greatest value emerges when quantitative and qualitative evidence are considered alongside one another. **Data can identify patterns, but lived experience helps explain their meaning.**

Conclusion

This report has explored how regional, national, organisational, and experiential forms of data can be combined to support the work of third sector organisations. Using Rewilding Youth as a case study, it has demonstrated that datasets such as the Yorkshire Engagement Portal provide valuable contextual information about the communities in which organisations operate. They help identify demographic trends, social challenges, and areas of potential need, while also supporting strategic planning, funding applications, and impact reporting.

The case of Hull highlights the importance of this contextual understanding. YEP data reveals a city experiencing growth in its young population alongside ongoing challenges relating to deprivation, qualifications, and opportunity. Environmental datasets add a further layer of understanding by revealing significant differences in access to green space across communities. However, the Bransholme case study demonstrates that datasets alone are insufficient. **While environmental indicators suggest strong access to green space, the experiences of many young people reveal a more complex reality characterised by feelings of disconnection and limited opportunity.** This tension highlights both the strengths and limitations of quantitative approaches.

Internal organisational data provides an important bridge between these perspectives. Through Upshot, Rewilding Youth is able to evidence where it works, who it engages, and

how its activities align with strategic objectives. This enables the organisation to demonstrate how identified needs are translated into practical action. Ultimately, the report suggests that the greatest value of data lies not in any single dataset but in the combination of multiple forms of evidence. Regional and national statistics provide context, organisational data demonstrates response, and lived experience provides meaning. Together, these forms of knowledge create a richer and more nuanced understanding of communities than any one source could provide alone.

For organisations such as Rewilding Youth, **the future potential of platforms such as the Yorkshire Engagement Portal lies not simply in measuring communities, but in helping to tell their stories.** When combined with local knowledge and lived experience, data becomes a powerful tool for understanding a place, demonstrating impact, and supporting meaningful social and environmental change.

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Sources:

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