



# HIGHLIGHTS LAUNCHING INTO LIFE

Highlights of *My LegaSea*:  
launching into life, the  
long-term impact of work  
with young people

A multigenerational impact study of Sea Cadets

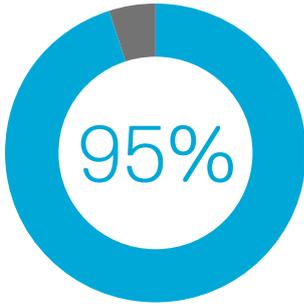


*My LegaSea - launching into life* is a groundbreaking multi-generational research study commissioned by the Marine Society and Sea Cadets (MSSC) and delivered by independent researchers<sup>1</sup>. It examined the impact on an individual's whole life of their engagement as a young person with the experiences offered by Sea Cadets.

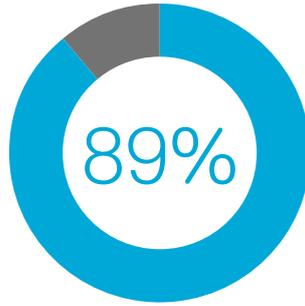
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1. For more details regarding the methodologies employed to gather the evidence which informed *My LegaSea* see [page 22].

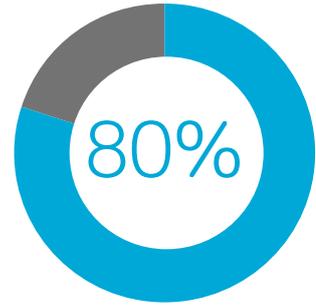
Of the nine generations of former cadets who participated in the My LegaSea survey:



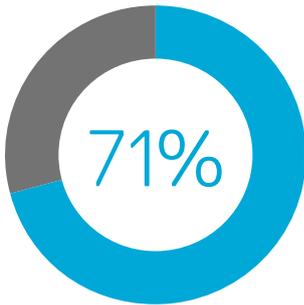
**believed Sea Cadets had a positive long-term impact on their life**



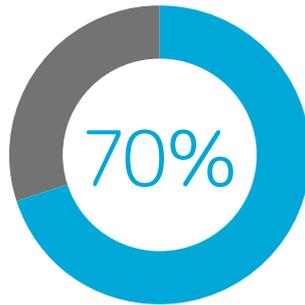
**said Sea Cadets developed their independence and skills during their time as members**



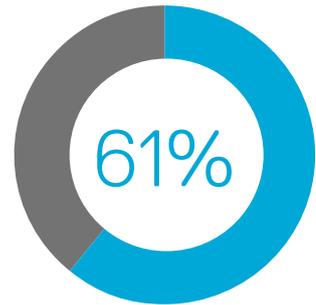
**reported that Sea Cadets had increased their independence and skills in the longer term**



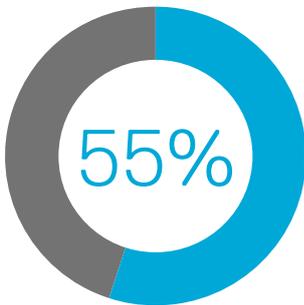
**reported Sea Cadets improved their happiness and wellbeing whilst they were members**



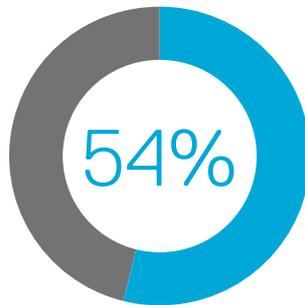
**thought Sea Cadets helped them cope with challenges in the longer term**



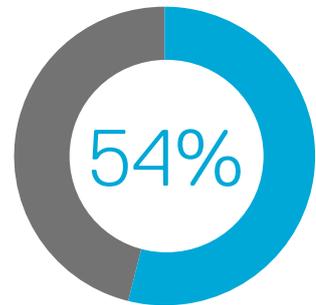
**credited Sea Cadets with inspiring them to seriously consider a Royal Navy or maritime career**



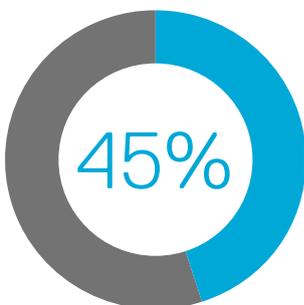
**deemed Sea Cadets to have helped them gain qualifications during their time as members**



**reported Sea Cadets helped them with their careers during their time as members**



**said Sea Cadets helped them with their careers in the longer term**



**confirmed Sea Cadets contributed to their long-term wellbeing**



**were unable to identify a specific long-term impact on their lives**

These statistics indicate that Sea Cadets had a consistent and enduring beneficial impact on the lives of survey participants across the different generations that engaged in the research.



A difficult challenge for youth sector organisations is knowing whether or not their intervention has achieved a meaningful impact beyond the visible and immediate reaction of the young person to a given experience or encounter. The youth sector always hopes a positive long-term impact has occurred but little research to date confirms whether or not this is the case. With its unique multi-generational approach, the *My LegaSea* study provides a rare substantive answer to the question ‘can youth work have an enduring impact’.

#### **THE STUDY IDENTIFIED EIGHT KEY IMPACT AREAS:**

- The transformative effect of the enabling environment created by Sea Cadets.
- The vital role of Sea Cadets’ empowering educational approaches, particularly with respect to the lives of those who did not always flourish within mainstream schooling.
- The importance of reframing risk and appreciating the value of the challenging and adventurous experiences safely supervised that occur within Sea Cadets.
- The significance of the friendships and sense of belonging nurtured by the Sea Cadets experience.
- The fostering of courage and confidence through involvement with the Sea Cadets programme that enables former members to navigate later life with greater resilience.



- The value of progressing through the ranks in Sea Cadets which for many plays a pivotal role in preparing them for their working life.
- The range of skills for life developed in Sea Cadets that proved advantageous in the longer-term.
- The value of impact and outcome studies that embrace long-term evaluation techniques.

The study engaged with former Sea Cadets in order to assess the long-term impact, if any, affiliation had on their lives.<sup>2</sup> Those involved ranged from recent members to ex-cadets who ended their affiliation in the 1940s.

*My LegaSea* employed a mix of quantitative (measurable) research data drawn from over 3,000 survey responses, and qualitative research data based on the stories and experiences of the 103 former cadets who took part in focus groups and interviews. These two research strands combined to provide a wealth of evidence as to the nature of the lifelong impact resulting from prior involvement with Sea Cadets programmes.

You can read the full report [here](#).

2. The research cohort included ex-members of the Girls Nautical Training Corps which merged with Sea Cadets in 1980. From that date onwards Sea Cadets became a fully integrated mixed gender organisation.



**This highlight report distils three over-arching themes drawn from the eight core areas already listed and encountered in *My LegaSea*. MSSC believes these convey some of the key ways whereby Sea Cadets delivers a positive and enduring impact. As such these are, we suggest, of relevance to the wider youth sector and its stakeholders. The three thematic elements are:-**

**i. A STRETCHING, CREATIVE AND ADVENTUROUS EDUCATIONAL MODEL**

A stretching, creative and adventurous educational model which fosters resilience and inculcates skills and attitudes which boost lifelong attainment and well-being (page 07);

**ii. A COMMUNITY (LOCAL AND NATIONAL) CEMENTED BY TRUSTED ADULT VOLUNTEERS**

An embodied sense of community (local and national), cemented by trusted adult volunteers, which creates an awareness of the importance of working for and with others across ones lifespan for the benefit of the wider community (page 10);

**iii. STRUCTURED YOUTH WORK THROUGH ASSOCIATION WITH THE CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF AN ESTABLISHED ORGANISATION**

Structured youth work through association with the customs and traditions of an established organisation which provides an enduring sense of purpose and an understanding of progression and continuity (page 17).



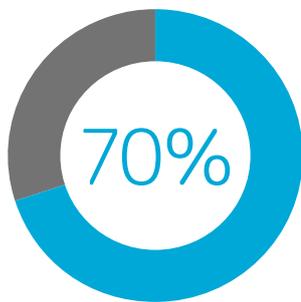
## A STRETCHING, CREATIVE AND ADVENTUROUS EDUCATIONAL MODEL



Respondents to the research found activities that stretched and extended them as a young person helped them to test their own boundaries, and allowed them to develop resilience and wider transferable skills, both of which proved invaluable in the longer term.

*'Sea Cadets gives you resilience and it teaches you to just muck in and get on really more than anything and to get on with folk because if you're living on a vessel with people for a couple of weeks at sea, you've got to get on with 'em whether you like 'em or not because you're stuck with 'em and they're stuck with you. So, all those things around conflict resolution and you're a teenager and you're all over the place but you're kind of thrust together and you know you've got to work together, so I think that's a really good lesson to take in to the workplace.'*

**Female, 50s – South West Area**



**70% thought Sea Cadets helped them cope with challenges in the longer term**

We know that one of the biggest challenges facing any youth intervention is how to help young people better adapt to an ever changing workplace and unpredictable social environment. Learning, through Sea Cadets, how to adapt to and recover from new challenges seems to have been an especially important experience which former cadets found helped them to maximise their life chances. 70 per cent of survey respondents specifically reported that their Sea Cadets experience had enabled them to cope with challenges throughout their adulthood.

In large part this is ascribable to the ‘learn by doing’ approach embedded within Sea Cadets. A model by which Sea Cadets introduces young people to a wide range of practical tasks linked, to varying degrees, to the maritime experience and the values of the Royal Navy. These tasks include activities as diverse as sailing, engineering, seamanship, catering or being part of a marching band. Irrespective of the topic or challenge all these teach young people in various ways that the more you invest in an activity the more you will get out of it, and that success requires hard work and dedication. The ‘learning by doing’ model allows young people to ‘take risks’ within a managed environment, to feel comfortable trying new things, and to learn from failure, without feeling a failure.

Women and those dealing with adverse personal circumstances in particular stressed how they valued the Sea Cadets mindset of holding fast to a can-do-attitude. They appreciated a culture that encouraged them and their peers to do more than they imagined they were capable of and which gave them permission to try something new and taxing. Especially when it was all too often the case that home or school had previously instilled in them the need to keep expectations low, play safe and circumvent risk.



The adventurous nature of many activities is also in and of itself important; not solely because it makes an experience exciting and engaging thereby helping to sustain interest, but also because it enables young people to manage risk, to learn to work in team settings and to acquire a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others.

By engaging in these varied opportunities young people acquire a mindset which enables them to face challenges and adversity; skills that are essential for the successful navigation of adult life. The can-do-attitude that runs through Sea Cadets culture was repeatedly linked, by former cadets, to their ability, in later life, to respond to testing situations, solve complex problems and keep going in adverse circumstances.

*'The can-do-attitude... I'm not put off by anything. In fact... if it's difficult I'm more attracted, "Right, let's get stuck in and find a way through this." I mean you can see that's got its roots back from when you're younger, when you're doing exercises and doing stuff in the cadets and you're trying to do something you haven't done before.'*

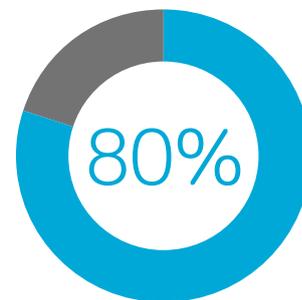
**Julian, 56 – Buxton Sea Cadets**

*'I think I appreciate the dedication of the staff, the time they gave me, the opportunities. They didn't say, "No, you can't do that" ... I was a little less fortunate in those days, so to be put in a, "Yes" atmosphere where it was, "Yes, yes you can, yes we will," to go into that atmosphere and build those relationships, that stayed with me.'*

**Female, 50s – North West Area**

The importance Sea Cadets places on introducing those with more adverse personal circumstances to this educational experience is reflected in the organisation's commitment to ensuring none are excluded as a consequence of a lack of parental income. The contributions a cadet makes towards meeting the costs of any activity are kept extremely low. In addition steps are taken to ensure all cadets have ready access to the Sea Cadets Bursary Programme.<sup>3</sup> This financial support is vital as many of the adventurous activities offered are expensive and would, in normal circumstances, be out of the reach of those from less privileged backgrounds.

3. Bursaries are available towards the already heavily subsidised contributions for all courses at District to International levels. Indeed, over 50% of cadets who go on offshore voyages and 80% of those who go on international exchanges do so with the benefit of a bursary.



### **80% reported that Sea Cadets had increased their independence and skills in the longer term**

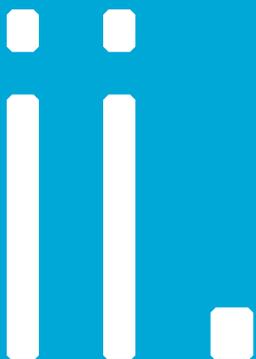
Overall 80 per cent of respondents noted their time as a cadet provided them with a heightened sense of independence and improved their personal and relational skills.<sup>4</sup>

All these transferable skill-sets in one way or another launch former cadets on a path leading to heightened employability and excellence. Of those contacted 54 per cent felt their time with Sea Cadets helped them with their career. Interestingly, this impact has grown amongst more recent generations; 60 per cent of those who left Sea Cadets since 2000 reported a positive impact on their career, compared with 46 per cent of those who were members during the 1940s.

4. All figures in this paper are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.

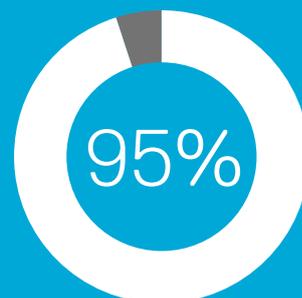


## A COMMUNITY (LOCAL AND NATIONAL) CEMENTED BY TRUSTED ADULT VOLUNTEERS



Research respondents reported that being part of a community as a young person wherein they felt safe and valued, and which built connections and provided role models had helped transform them into future adult leaders and shapers within their local communities and wider society.

One of the strongest findings to emerge from the interviews and focus groups as to the long-term benefits of Sea Cadets is how it created a sense of connection with others, both within the Sea Cadets community and beyond.



**95% believed Sea Cadets had a positive long term impact on their life**



Findings relating to this topic can effectively be seen as having three stages. First, where young people become socialised into the organisation and build a sense of trust, particularly with adult volunteers. Second, how that trust and those links cascade to integrate the young person into the wider Sea Cadets community. Third, how this experience and learning develops in the young person resulting in them in turn becoming role models to others in their later life.

At the centre of this impact and the crucial sense of community was the contribution of Sea Cadets 9,000 adult volunteers who support and educate almost 15,000 cadets. This exceptionally high ratio is only possible because Sea Cadets is a volunteer delivered organisation.

The research highlighted the importance of adults offering an approachable role model to which young people could relate. Often the development of this relationship was aided by the legitimacy afforded the volunteer as a consequence of their rank and uniform.

*'I think the biggest thing that Sea Cadets did for me growing up... is that it introduced me to the person that I most passionately want to be like now, the member of staff in Sea Cadets who really looked after me and showed me what it meant to try and make the world a better place – Lieutenant Commander Alex White, who ran the junior section at our unit. I now basically go out and about and try and act the way that he would have done when faced with difficult situations or when faced with any decision or choice, to try and do it the way that he would have done it, had he been faced with the same choice.'*

**Oliver, 29 – Stevenage Sea Cadets**

Respondents frequently spoke of how adult volunteers demonstrated characteristics, outlooks and behaviour that helped them as a young person build a model of what they hoped to become in adulthood.



*'So, what drove me to move on to where I am now in my lifespan is that it gave me the building blocks to build on. I'm getting emotional, but there's people out there that believe in [me], that's what it's all about... there's people that believe in you and give you the chances in life, and you take it and move on. And those chances all started with the cadet corps.'*

**Tony, 73 – Tooting and Balham Sea Cadets**

*'It was Kelvin and George who really started it off for me. I just really, really appreciate what they did for me because if they hadn't, I wouldn't be where I am now. I really don't think he knows, Kelvin especially, the impact that he's had on my life. He's been like a second dad to me. I know he's always looked out for me.'*

**Jenny, 43 – Aberystwyth Sea Cadets**

By building upon these relationships between cadets and adult volunteers Sea Cadets is able to create a community where young people feel safe and secure; this makes it easier to bond with other cadets and sustain ongoing engagement. The report notes that Sea Cadets is often a source of lifelong friendships and connections which persist long after direct involvement ceased. This finding is particularly important within the context of increasing national concern around the impact on individuals of isolation and loneliness.

But the impact of a young person building connections within a community will often extend beyond Sea Cadets itself. One of the interesting findings of the report was how engagement with Sea Cadets bred a strong sense of civic identity and a wish to support the wider community. Participants in the research spoke of their deep sense of social responsibility and willingness to contribute to the welfare of their neighbours and fellow citizens. Usually they attributed this commitment to lessons learnt in, and attitudes cultivated by, Sea Cadets.



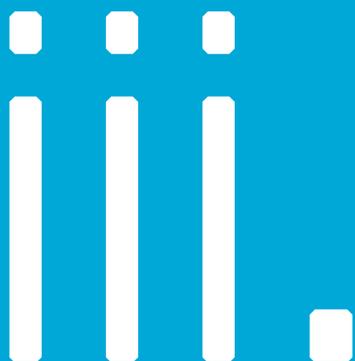
Certainly many continued to undertake voluntary activity (in Sea Cadets and elsewhere) because they felt a debt of gratitude for their time spent as members and had acquired from it an abiding sense of service. Sea Cadets gave many the drive to help others, which benefited their communities, society at large, and provided them with high levels of personal satisfaction. As one former cadet explained:

*'Service, that's important because once I felt part of it, I felt obligated to be part of it but not in a bad way, I felt part of a team which was quite important and when you're growing up and you feel part of something, I think kids need that sense of stability. Sea Cadets definitely offered me the stability, but in turn, I served them well.'*

**Camron, 52 – Reigate Sea Cadets**



## STRUCTURED YOUTH WORK THROUGH ASSOCIATION WITH THE CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF AN ESTABLISHED ORGANISATION



Respondents to the research found that participating in structured youth work embedded in a set of traditions and ways of working that felt real, helped to sustain engagement, provide a sense of structure and an understanding of progression.

### **STRUCTURE, COMBINED WITH PRACTICAL LEARNING AND EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES, SUSTAINS ENGAGEMENT.**

An aspirational model of youth work, such as that embodied in the Sea Cadet offer, provides young people with fixed targets to aim for, a pathway to the acquisition of skills, and a structure that encourages them to achieve desirable outcomes which are of long-term benefit to them and wider society.



The Sea Cadets model, which is similar in many respects to that encountered within other cadet organisations, embodies a rank structure whereby young people can, with support and encouragement, progress upwards through the ranks via a clear pathway and defined set of processes. In the case of Sea Cadets this structure and the processes reflect the rich and valued customs and traditions of the Royal Navy.

One key finding of the qualitative research is how the rank structure and the links to the Royal Navy creates a framework that encourages the engagement of young people with the organisation and fosters a desire to achieve ambitious long-term outcomes.

The goal of attaining a higher rank and status within Sea Cadets, it was found, gave young people a mindset of achievement which was then channelled into advancing their life skills and building a lifelong commitment to their communities.

**C:** *It [Sea Cadets] was respectful.*

**R:** *You appreciated the people who were above and below you, and there was a pecking order.*

**C:** *You had to work to get further up.*

**R:** *And if you wanted up that pecking order you had to put some effort in, but a lot of people are missing that... if you want it you've got to work for it.*

**Ruth, 30 and Caera, 25 – Glasgow Sea Cadets**

Rooting the structure within a high status organisation such as the Royal Navy lends Sea Cadets heightened legitimacy. Young people can directly identify with the customs and traditions of the Royal Navy and as a consequence are encouraged to achieve and to reach their full potential within Sea Cadets and beyond. The links to the Royal Navy also serve to build a sense that they are part of something greater than themselves.



An interesting element of this structure was its helpful function as a social leveller. By placing everyone within the same highly structured system with a uniform and shared set of rituals (e.g. 'colours' as formal opening of a unit parade evening), all linked to common expectations and duties, and a shared specialist language (use of naval terminology) for many meant differences in backgrounds and personal experiences became less apparent. The shared endeavours also encouraged cadets to both work as a team and learn from each other.

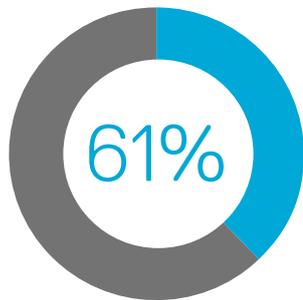
*'It's like a great equaliser as well really because you're all in the uniform and you can't tell the difference between people that live in a mansion and people that live in a tent because you're all equal and you've got a hierarchy of demand and you get on with it. So, I think particularly people from a less advantageous background, it definitely gives you access to things.'*

**Female, 50s – South West Area**

Alongside this aspirational model, a key element contributing to the effectiveness of Sea Cadets is the practical vocational approach of much of its training programme. Respondents often recalled finding this to be more engaging than traditional classroom learning. This was especially the case for those who had a difficult experience at school.

*'Joining Sea Cadets gave me the ability to vocationally learn, that was independent to school. If it had anything to do with actually engaging in school, then that probably would have been counter-productive to me, because I needed something different, not something that was associated with that mainstream education that was looking for an academic mind. I need a different way of learning, and Sea Cadets fulfilled that different way of learning.'*

**Carol, 54 – Weston-Super-Mare Sea Cadets**



**61% credited Sea Cadets with inspiring them to seriously consider a Royal Navy or maritime career**

61% credited Sea Cadets with inspiring them to seriously consider a Royal Navy or maritime career, of which 38% actually did go on to a maritime career, with 26% joining the Royal Navy. It was also evident from the findings of the focus groups that many found the transferable skills gained in Sea Cadets applicable to a wide range of jobs. In particular, respondents highlighted a key skill gained with Sea Cadets was the ability to adapt and learn in a flexible and changing environment. This seems to have been an especially important outcome for those, who for a variety of reasons found school difficult; and for young women seeking to enter traditionally male-led industries and workspaces.

*'I think in terms of my work life, the promotion there, has never daunted me, because in Sea Cadets, you want to get promoted, you want to get to that high level, and I've done that... civil servant with the Ministry of Defence, I have done what they call three operational tours. So I've spent six months in a tent in Kosovo, and I've done Bosnia and Iraq. I think the confidence that Sea Cadets has given me and empowered me has certainly helped..... Leading on from that, my current work, I'm a senior civil servant responsible for a huge team and I got an MBE, I'd never have got that, and also a deputy Lord Lieutenant for Bedfordshire. So, all starting from that 12 and three-quarter girl that wouldn't say boo to a goose, so there's a lot to be thankful to Sea Cadets for.'*

**Ruth, 52 – Biggleswade Girls' Nautical Training Corps**



Image provided by Ray Bullock

## LESSONS FOR THE YOUTH SECTOR

*My LegaSea* is a major and substantive contribution to the youth sector's understanding of the long term benefits uniformed youth work can make in relation to the adult lives of ex-members. Although the focus of the research is on Sea Cadets, many of the findings readily translate to other uniformed youth groups and to the wider youth sector.

- **Structured youth work creates changes that benefits not just the individual but the wider community.** The skills young people gain put them in a strong position to make a real difference during the course of their adult life. Engaging with uniformed youth work gives young people and adults a sense of civic responsibility, which motivates them to use the skills they acquire to benefit their wider community. This means the difference made to one individual can easily cascade down to whole communities over time. This aspect may be particularly important when looking at how one can effectively intervene to best support harder-to-reach communities.



- **The powerful potential of volunteering to create positive role models for young people.**

The ongoing support provided by volunteers that are embedded both within their organisation and the local community offers structure and security to young people's lives, along with powerful life-changing opportunities for their growth and development. Achieving this without volunteers would be prohibitively expensive. This illustrates the importance of providing sufficient support to volunteer-delivered youth organisations, and suggests greater work might usefully be undertaken on how to unlock the potential of the volunteer workforce for the benefit of all.

- **The effectiveness of the aspirational development structure, as a way to maintain effective engagement.**

While this has been evidenced explicitly in the case of Sea Cadets, it seems a reasonable assumption that this would be an effective model when applied elsewhere. The wider uniformed youth movement can provide a template which could be built on and applied to developing youth services in future to help maximise the range of positive influences young people are exposed to during their journey towards adulthood.

As young people face an increasingly challenging and changing world the findings from *My LegaSea* clearly show that uniformed youth work is not only relevant but highly effective in giving young people a positive start in life, and that it offers benefits which could be adopted by and incorporated within the wider world of youth services.



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