



Jo Gittins and NWCA: Empowering Young People in Armley

"I really enjoyed getting people to take part. After a while I got into it and felt proud." **Young volunteer**

The Beginning:

Jo Gittins first met Victoria, the community builder from New Wortley Community Association (NWCA), at a community group gathering in Dixons Academy. Jo was already known in Armley for her drive to support young people. She consistently showed up, asked questions and pushed for better opportunities for young people. Victoria noticed her dedication early on, and their conversations at the school's community room and local events helped build trust over time.

Jo was driven by a desire to give young people a sense of purpose. Her journey began with supporting her own daughter and advocating for students who found mainstream education challenging. In doing so, she forged strong connections with families, teachers, and faith leaders across the community.

Already active in her neighbourhood, Jo ran GCSE revision sessions, organised litter picks, and helped transform local signal boxes with vibrant street art. She saw firsthand the talent and energy young people possessed. What they lacked wasn't ability — it was opportunity. Jo believed they needed spaces where they could lead, express themselves, and be celebrated, not judged.



The Journey:

Jo shared the idea with Victoria. She wanted to run community games at the annual Armley Festival. She wanted young people to lead, welcoming families, neighbours, teachers and the local church. The idea fit the ABCD (Asset Based Community Development) approach because it was led by residents, built on local strengths and used Jo's existing relationships and skills. It brought together people who cared about young people in Armley and created space for them to act. With this in mind, Victoria encouraged Jo to apply for the Small Sparks Fund so she could purchase equipment and turn the plan into reality.

Jo used the £116 Small Sparks funding to buy space hoppers, pool noodles, litter pickers and simple game supplies. She then encouraged eight young volunteers from her network, who helped choose activities, plan the layout and organise the day. At first, the group assumed adults would take charge, but as the event unfolded the young people stepped forward.

They invited adults to join, explained the rules, refereed games and encouraged everyone to take part. Confidence grew hour by hour. Around 30 young people and several adults joined throughout the day, and many families chose to stay longer because the atmosphere felt welcoming and lively.

The community assets shaped every stage of the journey. Jo already brought passion and commitment, and the youth strengthened this by adding support, connections and confidence in their abilities. The project showed young people as community assets rather than problems to solve, and volunteers developed a real sense of ownership. Neighbours saw young people leading with energy and kindness. Teachers worked alongside students outside the school setting, and faith leaders took part too. As people mixed and played together, barriers fell, and the community began to see one another in a new and more positive light.

The Impact:

The festival lasted one day, yet the impact continued. The games equipment is now stored for future community use, and the young volunteers are keen to support other events. New relationships formed between families, school staff and community organisations, and confidence grew on both sides. Young people learned they could take charge, and adults recognised the value of stepping back and giving space for youth leadership to grow.

There were challenges along the way. Engaging young volunteers took time, and some felt unsure at first because leading in public can feel daunting. The group also had to balance school, home life and planning commitments. With steady support, encouragement and patience, their confidence grew, and those early nerves turned into active participation.

Future plans focus on taking the games to other community events, creating more chances for young people to volunteer and building a small group of peer leaders who can support and train others. Jo and Victoria will keep meeting to look at how the equipment can be shared across Armley and how this activity can link with other youth projects. The aim is not a one-off festival, but steady growth driven by young people in Armley, supported by trusted adults and rooted in the community.



"Jo brings people together and shows what local parents can achieve." **Victoria Kortekaas NWCA**

"This showed that young people have real leadership skills when given the chance." **Local teacher**

