

# Engaging role models in your sessions

## Identify role models that young people might want to connect with

It's not just about celebrities and influencers. The most common role model young people identified in EmpowHER sessions was their mum!

Talk to your group about what it is they're hoping to learn or explore, and think about who might be able to provide that:

- ★ People with lived or professional experience in something the group are learning about
- ★ Someone with a skill that the group want to learn or develop – it might be something technical like social media marketing, something creative like DJ-ing, a certain sport, or something more abstract like confidence or public speaking
- ★ Someone from the community that the group would like to help with their social action, who might have personal insights to share
- ★ Peers and people from the local community



***“You can't be what you can't see”***

Noni Roberts

Start by exploring the idea of role models with young people in your session.

'Role model' might not be a term that all young people identify with, or it might even have negative connotations. Start a conversation about who they look up to – what are the qualities they look for in the people that inspire them?

## Use your networks to reach out

You don't have to start emailing agents (although if your group are interested in reaching out to someone famous – social media can be a great place to start) – there are potential role models all around you!

- ★ Once you know what you're looking for, speak to friends, colleagues, and local groups – you might be only a few connections away from someone with the skills or experiences you're looking for.
- ★ If you're trying to find a role model with specific knowledge or expertise, try contacting relevant local businesses or specialist charities who might already have experts who are keen to encourage or educate others.
- ★ Institutions like the police, fire departments or universities are likely to have specialist outreach programmes that you can contact.
- ★ Keep in contact with people. Even if someone can't help right now, they could still have lots to offer in the future.

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## Being called a 'role model' can be intimidating! Support people to get involved

People are usually keen to share their experiences and help support and encourage others – but role models can need encouragement too, especially if they're not experienced working with young people.

- ★ Highlight the benefits of getting involved – EmpowHER role models told us that volunteering with young people helped to build their own confidence, added to their CVs, inspired new creative ideas and even inspired them to start their own businesses!
- ★ Be flexible with the options available. As you'll see below there are lots of ways people can support your group as a role model – find out how much time and capacity they have and work with that.
- ★ Take the time to chat to people and find out what support they might need. Do they have accessibility requirements? Might they want time to practice a presentation with you beforehand? Can you give them technical support with playing videos or getting hold of resources?
- ★ Set boundaries that everyone's comfortable with. Some role models might be happy to answer questions for hours after a session or give follow-up support; others will only have a set time that they can contribute or won't feel comfortable answering questions on certain topics. Have honest and ongoing conversations about what people do or don't want to contribute.
- ★ Brief your role models about the group they'll be working with. Share as much information as is appropriate about their age, ability-level, the numbers you're expecting and how you might be expecting them to respond to the session. This can be particularly important if you'll be addressing a sensitive or difficult topic.
- ★ If a role model is leading a session with young people, remember to get engaged yourself and don't be afraid to chip in and facilitate the conversation.



## Use your networks to reach out

There are so many diverse ways that role models can get involved to support young people, and valuable contributions are about quality, not quantity. Role models could:

- ★ Give a talk or run a workshop, in person or online
- ★ Be the 'expert in the room' to give advice on a project the group are working on
- ★ Respond remotely to questions that the group have by recording their answers in a video, voice note, email or card
- ★ Provide encouraging messages via video or by sending a card or letter
- ★ Give a tour of their workplace (by filming themselves, or having the group visit in person)
- ★ Share the work they've produced - whether that's a relevant research report, a film they've made, tickets to a play they've directed
- ★ Take part in a 'speed-dating' session with other role models to introduce themselves to the group
- ★ Support the group by attending an event they're putting on, or sharing their campaign on social media
- ★ Review something the group have produced and offer advice or edits
- ★ Take part in an online 'Role Model Event' arranged for young people to explore a specific topic



## Celebrate your role models!

Find a way to show your appreciation with thanks, a card, or feedback from the young people involved. Lots of role models might be keen to continue to hear how the young people get on or what they achieve with their social action projects – try and keep them in the loop with a newsletter, or an invite to a final event!