



ingeus

NCS: National Citizen Service

From commitment to
impact: supporting
young people on the
National Citizen Service
from 2014-2025



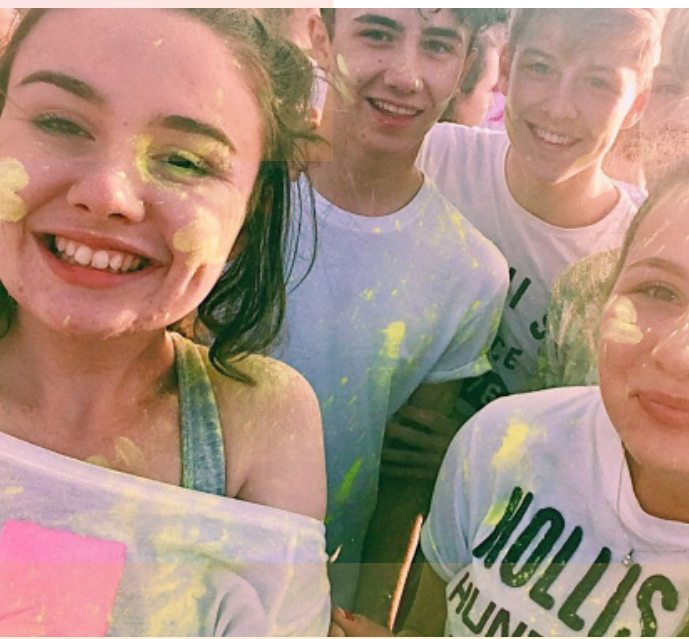


Our role in the National Citizen Service (NCS)



What is NCS?

NCS was a youth engagement programme predominantly for 15-17 year-olds. Backed by Government and a key component of the National Youth Guarantee, it allowed any young person living in England or Northern Ireland access to fun, socially inclusive and community-positive activities for a nominal fee or via a fully funded bursary. Largely delivered for Year 11 students during school holidays, it traditionally comprised time at outdoor activity centres, a spell living away from home to develop life skills, and community action projects to benefit the lives of others.



NCS changed with the times – including through a pandemic – and reflected the needs of young people from vastly different backgrounds. It aimed to ‘invest in the country’s future talent, helping them to become the next greatest generation, serving the community and society at large as active citizens’.

Its positive impact on young people is undisputed. Participants consistently reported improved wellbeing, greater optimism about the future, increased understanding of people’s differences, and a greater commitment to get involved in social action and volunteering.

It was curated and managed by the NCS Trust, which worked with youth sector partners including Ingeus and our now Group company, APM. It will enter the record books as Ingeus’ longest running programme to date. We eventually became the sole provider of NCS residential experiences and accommodated, quite literally, 28,000 young people in 2024 – the final full year of NCS.

NCS: A pioneering programme with a proud legacy

NCS was created with a bold vision to help young people think big and achieve their dreams, no matter what their background. It is a vision we have been immensely proud to help shape over the past 14 years.

Sitting squarely within our mission to Enable Better Lives, NCS built confidence and resilience in young people on the transition to adulthood, offering them life-enhancing experiences and the opportunity to make a difference in their communities. Taking expertise from Ingeus’s wider people services, we intervened at a crucial age, and during crucial times, to help thousands of young people become more world ready.

That world is diverse and changeable, and while there are many shared challenges young people face, others are born of background and early-life experiences. Our aim from the start was to widen NCS’ reach and give our participants unique opportunities to meet people, do things, and consider topics they had perhaps never encountered before.

Working closely with a social mobility army of schools, colleges, parents, and partners, we built the networks to safely springboard young people into adult life – while having the time of their lives.

With young people firmly at its core, and a talented team that consistently gave Ingeus the NCS point of difference, our final year, in 2024, was our biggest and best yet. It was the culmination of over a decade of delivery which I have loved being a part of and am delighted to share in this report.



In 15 years, NCS nationally delivered more than a million experiences to young people, who undertook over 18 million hours of volunteering.

**Simon Smithson,
Director of Youth
Services, Ingeus**

Ingeus delivery: key dates and locations

2009/10

NCS is piloted. So too are affiliated sports and personal development workshops led by Rob Houlston, who would go on to become Ingeus' NCS Programme Director.

The NCS Trust sources a formalised partner network to deliver the programme. APM secures the West Midlands and, following successful delivery, expands to the South East. Ingeus delivers in the North West, East Midlands, and East Anglia.

2018/19

APM acquires Ingeus, to jointly deliver across the five regions. : The newly formed Ingeus also secures NCS in the South West. 21,500 young people attend Ingeus-led NCS programmes in 2019.

Ingeus adds the North East to its portfolio, making us the largest NCS provider. In the wake of Covid, 23,500 young people attend our programmes in 2022.

2023/24

The format of NCS changes significantly. Ingeus, in partnership with the Youth Hostel Association (YHA), becomes the sole provider of residential experiences across England. 2024 became our biggest year, with more than 28,000 young people attending.

In November 2024, the Government announced the closure of the NCS Trust and the end of NCS contracts by March 2025.

2014/15

2020/22

2023/24



NCS in numbers

Ingeus engaged
with
220,000
young people

We worked
with more than
6,700
educational
establishments
across England

A
76
strong
Ingeus
team

176,203
young people
attended
Ingeus
residential
experiences

In 2024, the Ingeus
contact centre handled
almost
240,000
NCS Calls

8,000
community action projects
were delivered by
young people volunteering
over 3 million hours

We engaged with
more than
450
community
groups and local
authorities





NCS Activities

NCS centred on building skills for work and life, with participants taking on new challenges, making new friends, learning new skills, and contributing to their communities.

Way before ‘levelling up’ was first articulated, it brought young people together from all across the country who would never normally interact with each other; a key driver of its major success of Ingeus’ operations.

For many young people, NCS was their first time away from home. It gave them the chance to see themselves in a way like never before and learn lessons not taught at school. It provided an opportunity to give something back to their communities and was a valued addition to UCAS university applications and Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

The programme flexed and innovated, shaped by the needs of its participants, fluctuating budgets, and the rigours of a pandemic.

It brought young people together from all across the country who would never normally interact with each other; a key driver of its major success of Ingeus’ operations



2-4 week programme

For much of its history, NCS operated as a two or four-week school holiday experience, running in the spring, summer and autumn breaks.

For the preferred full, four week programme, the first week was spent at an outward bound facility participating in adrenaline-fuelled activities such as abseiling, water rafting and canoeing.

The second week saw the teens live away from home, typically at a university hall of residence, learning how to be self-sufficient, with input from employers, community leaders, and inspirational NCS Ambassadors. They also masterminded a social action project to deliver closer to home, which then formed a 30-hour project in the final fortnight.



As NCS changed with the times, so too did its look, feel and messaging. Ingeus and its partners made age-appropriate adjustments to their residential experiences, creating festival-feel pop up sites with surfing, real rock climbing, and coasteering built in. Driven by participant feedback, hard hitting content highlighting mental health, trauma and county lines became fixtures on the agenda, while social action topics too imperceptibly shifted from fundraising and community clear ups to raising awareness of topical societal issues.

The fee for NCS was £50 or less with accommodation, meals and activities heavily subsidised. The focus was on building tangible and in-demand skills for the future including leadership, teamwork and communication skills.



2-4 week programme



Fundraising colour run

NCS teens from St Albans, Hemel Hempstead and Hatfield added a splash of colour to their fundraising efforts with a three-kilometre run, while being pelted with powdered paints.

They were inspired to raise money for national charity Willow, which provides special days for seriously ill young adults after visiting patients at Watford General Hospital as part of the NCS programme.

A fundraising afternoon of stalls, games, and the colour run at St Albans' Girls' School raised £1,500.



Bramblebrook Community Centre

Love Your City

A team of 14 public-spirited NCS volunteers painted, tidied, gardened and repaired community centres throughout Derby, including the Bramblebrook Community Centre, Pakistani Community Centre, the clubhouse at Sherwin Football Club and Sunnyhill Community Centre. The Love Your City initiative was devised by the group, who cleared overgrown gardens, painted walls, and repaired broken furniture.

"What a fun way to top off the whole amazing NCS experience. I've gained so much from it, meeting new people, learning new skills and putting our fundraising ideas into practice for Willow"

Lifesaver Ben

Quick thinking Ben from the West Midlands was able to save his father's life by performing CPR after learning the emergency medical technique just weeks before on NCS.

When dad Daniel collapsed and stopped breathing, Ben reassured his mum that he knew what to do and took over while she dialled for an ambulance.

Following Daniel's recovery, the family appeared on ITV Central News calling for secondary schools to include CPR in the curriculum.

"NCS has been amazing. We've been caving, rock climbing and abseiling and I've met a whole group of new friends. It's developed my leadership skills and confidence, so much so that I really enjoyed climbing down the clock tower. I'd happily do it again, especially for such a good cause."



Teen take the plunge

49 NCS participants from Watford took a leap of faith by abseiling down St. Mary's Church tower on behalf of local charity, Home-Start. The abseil off the 160-foot-high church tower, plus stalls and crafts in the church, raised more than £2,000 for the charity.



5-day residential programme



In 2023, the format of NCS changed significantly, driven by financial restructuring, an evolving digital landscape, and the desire to give young people more flexibility. A range of experiences: away from home, in the local community, and online were launched, with young people able to access them successively.

The new formats were still designed to boost confidence and build resilience, while providing a quality choice for young people and value for money to taxpayers.

Ingeus, in partnership with the Youth Hostel Association, delivered the action-packed, five-day residential experience. Working with outdoor education providers, charities, youth organisations, and thousands of schools, three themed programmes: Boss It, Change It and Live It, offered employability, social action and life skills development.

The five-day events cost £95 or less to attend and proved to be the summer smash hits of 2023/4.



“I wasn’t really sure what to expect but as soon as I got there, I knew it would be great. The activities were brilliant fun but what I really enjoyed was the relaxation time. Everyone could find someone new to talk to and I was able to mix with people from different backgrounds. I learned all about Hinduism and veganism. I loved every second.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed the Boss It trip and wish it hadn’t ended so soon. Everyone was so supportive; they became a second family. I felt so happy there, I cried a lot leaving, but we have a group chat to stay in touch with the friends I made. I will never forget how amazing the five days away were – it changed my life.”



I’m interested in politics, I’d like a career where I can influence and help people, so the Change It camp sounded perfect when NCS came to my school to present it. NCS taught me to listen and understand other people’s points of view. I’ve just moved schools, without any of my existing friends. NCS has helped enormously, giving me experience of being in a new setting, talking to new people and not being embarrassed.”

Tailored delivery



Great lengths were taken to ensure all young people, regardless of their background, had access to NCS:

- Fees were heavily subsidised and bursaries to cover payment were available.
- 52 priority locations aligned to levelling up areas, with specific support targeted at local authorities, schools and community groups in those areas.
- Support was provided for cohorts of young people with additional learning or cultural requirements.
- Specific programmes ran for refugees and asylum seekers; speakers of English as a second language; victims of child trafficking; care-experienced and young carers; children in alternative education, such as pupil referral units and home schooling; and young people not in education, employment or training.
- Ingeus employed two national Community Engagement Managers, who liaised with more than 450 community groups and local authorities to design and deliver cohort-specific NCS experiences.

“We wanted every young person to have the chance to do NCS. For people who easily fell through the gaps of mainstream services, the life affirming NCS experience often had its biggest impact.”

Brooke Williams,
Community Engagement
Manager



“Many of our supported learning pupils dislike change – new surroundings and people can be worrying. Building confidence to take steps out of their comfort zone is vital and I’ve seen time and again how NCS achieves that. Getting curious, taking ownership, following new rules, and beyond anything, the confidence it built up, were things you simply can’t teach in a classroom.”

Paula Gardiner, Alternative
Learning Course Director at
West Suffolk College





NCS Extreme

In 2017 and 2018, Ingeus devised and piloted NCS Extreme, a more intense and rugged version of the NCS 4-week programme. During the first week, living outdoors with only basic facilities, participants gained essential survival skills such as water purification, building a camp, emergency first aid and navigation training.



College programmes

In addition to delivering school holiday programmes, Ingeus worked with further education providers to integrate NCS into Public Services term-time course content.

“NCS is perfect preparation for a working life of any kind, but especially for those pursuing a public services career... it definitely adds value. The social action activity is very popular; students studying for a public services career are likely to be motivated by helping other people and that’s exactly what this module delivers.”

Jamie Jones, Public Services course tutor, Chelmsford College

Covid: Skills Booster

As the country faced the Covid-19 pandemic, our delivery of NCS switched online, with digital interventions focussed on supporting physical and mental wellbeing.

Recognising the profound impact of lockdown on young people, NCS instigated Skills Booster – support for schools in the wake of lockdown.

The programme was designed to help young people reconnect and recover, limiting the impact of Covid on young people’s education. It supported the most vulnerable young people and communities by tackling isolation and loneliness and offering support to those experiencing grief, trauma and other mental health impacts due to the pandemic. Topics included Citizenship and British Values, Health and Wellbeing, Careers and Progression Guidance, Employability Skills for Independent Living, and Activism.

Delivery in schools provided support in preparation for exams, with schools able to tailor the duration from one day per week to five days of delivery.



Supporting the national post-pandemic recovery of young people, Ingeus delivered Skills Booster programmes to 9,018 young people in 2020/21, against a target of 5,092 (177%).

Graduate activity

A movement not a moment

NCS was no one-hit-wonder for those who participated. With new-found friendships and boundless enthusiasm, our grads consistently returned to mentor successive year's programmes and volunteer thousands of hours to social action projects.

NCS graduates had the opportunity to:

- Celebrate at graduation events attended by local celebrities and VIPs.
- Apply for volunteer positions on one of 19 NCS regional youth boards, which planned and delivered local community initiatives and shaped the programme for those that followed.
- Become NCS Changemakers, taking part in an annual day of social action as grads across the country mobilised to support thousands of good causes.
- Compete for Graduate of the Year accolades, with a chance to put their volunteering into action internationally.
- Attend Kickstart and Leaders Week residential courses to hone their socially-minded, teamworking skills.
- Progress to the NCS National Youth Board and shape the national programme at the highest level.

“NCS didn’t end when the programme finished. It gave me the confidence, friendships and opportunities to keep making a difference long after graduation.”

Aisha, 17. NCS Participant.



Making it happen



The people who made NCS

NCS was formed to build a more connected, cohesive society and it was exactly that, in a microcosm, that made it happen. A like-minded network of dedicated, highly experienced staff and stakeholders shared expertise and enthusiasm in equal measure, innovating and overcoming challenges to deliver the very best experiences for young people in their extended care.

It was a genuine labour of love for everyone involved, living and breathing NCS, many of us since its inception. Its golden kitemark was the many NCS graduates returning year on year to help lead our seasonal programmes, many treading a career into youth work as a result.

Together we widened the scope of NCS, professionalising the recruitment and engagement of young people to meet that cohesive society vision. We can only imagine the future human cost of having not intervened so positively in some of those lives.

The young people themselves are of course what made NCS great – their new-found confidence and ‘I did that’ pride in achievement is indelibly etched in my mind. It’s humbling to see the impact the programme had on so many people.



“We can only imagine the future human cost of having not intervened so positively in some of those lives.”

Rob Houlston, NCS Programme Director



Young people

The recruitment journey



Youth Voice

Young people know best what young people want. As participants on NCS they also experienced the highs of our programmes, and the areas for improvement. Young people's feedback and suggestions always sat at the forefront of any operational changes to NCS and Ingeus young ambassadors progressed to sit on NCS Trust youth boards, attending senior stakeholder events and workshops.

This approach fledged Ingeus's own Youth Voice initiative, a dynamic team of young people aged 16-25, joining forces from across the country to influence change. They play an active role in our business to this day ensuring our services are accessible and meaningful to young people.

"Ingeus mastered gathering feedback from young people to benefit services – they were constantly seeking input. It's a model we've replicated across our other programmes as a result."

Bradley Pogson, Head of Youth Services, Pilot UK – NCS supply chain partner.



NCS ambassadors

The NCS Trust enlisted the talents of inspirational ambassadors to promote NCS and amplify discussion of issues affecting young people. It also encouraged MPs, business leaders and employers to visit programmes and see young people in action.

From YouTube sensation LukelsNotSexy tackling teen body fears; singer Jermain Jackman talking of overcoming challenges; and premiership footballer Mark Noble explaining steps to build confidence, Ingeus was delighted to host numerous visits for NCS ambassadors to motivate and inspire our participants.

Delivered outside of term time with little or no disruption to the school timetable, NCS was free to schools and offered experiences largely outside of their reach to deliver. Yet gaining the buy-in from schools to present NCS and encourage its students to sign up held its challenges.

Working regionally – and eventually nationally – with thousands of schools to populate Ingeus' and its supply chain partners' programmes helped Ingeus unlock the answers, as Gareth Downie, Former Head of Sales explains:

"Understanding the school environment was key, as was building trusted relationships with school staff – everyone from the receptionist and safeguarding lead to the head teacher. We brought forward the recruitment journey with the autumn term spent on teacher meetings. By Christmas we had assemblies booked in to promote the next summer's programme. We used the full academic year to give us time logistically to visit everyone and build anticipation of what was coming. We'd host NCS take-over days for Year 10s, deliver extra sessions, and volunteer at sports days to build those relationships and maintain interest.

"As other providers struggled to hit their engagement targets, the NCS Trust adopted our successful model nationwide. The schools were our clients; the young people and their carers our consumers. Professionalising and extending that recruitment journey had a massive impact on uptake."





Our team

NCS Ingeus team

'Do something you love, and you'll never work a day in your life' could have been written for the NCS Ingeus team. Against a backdrop of economic and social change, with a carefully balanced blend of fun and professionalism, we consistently topped the performance tables while maxing the benefits for young people.

The Ingeus operational team, including senior leaders, all had multiple years of direct delivery experience and a hands-on approach to finding solutions: "We wanted to create a festival feel at some of our delivery sites," recalls Gareth Downie, Former Head of Sales. "I organised hay bales, bunting, photo booths, street food vans, live music, anything we could think of that young people would enjoy. I still get teased about the hay bales!"

The Ingeus in-house contact centre managed the participant journey from an initial expression of interest on the website to a place being confirmed, handling all enquiries from young people and their parents.



Quality seasonal staff were the making of NCS on the ground. Ingeus and its partners recruited and trained an estimated 24,000 team leader placements during NCS. Many were NCS graduates themselves, returning to lead successive seasons during their further and higher education holidays. All were enhanced DBS-checked and trained in essentials such as health and safety, risk assessments, and safeguarding.



Our team

Team leaders

Team leader, George from Poole, has a natural affinity with the teens in his care. Attending NCS himself in 2017, he went on to be a representative of the NCS regional youth board and volunteered during subsequent summers, before starting to work for NCS summer seasons in 2019. As a full-time carer for his autistic younger brother, his busman's holiday every summer for NCS is something he valued greatly:

"I love youth work and everything that NCS stands for. I've met thousands of young people and learn so much from them. There's a lot of talking goes on and I share my own story. I like to think I've made a difference in their lives, helped them to be themselves. I'm the same generation as the people I support. If I can help them to enjoy being young, have a laugh and learn new things about themselves then that's job done."

"Fantastic, passionate people made NCS successful, not process or paperwork. Their energy, enthusiasm and drive to always do the right thing by young people consistently gave Ingeus the point of difference."

Simon Smithson, Director of Youth Services



Direct delivery

Ingeus managed an extensive supply chain to deliver the thousands of experiences young people signed up for, but consciously retained at least 5% of commissioned places to implement directly.

Heidi Rutter, Supply Chain Manager explains: "Our direct delivery experience brought many benefits to the programme, and to our supply chain. We had more insight into the programme deliverables and could test new approaches and pilot programmes without asking our partners to take financial or other risks. We could also share best practice and learning from our own programmes."

"Ingeus were hands-on. They cared and led by example, only asking of us what they could deliver themselves. There was no criticism if we asked for support or help, we spoke the same language."

Dan Morrin, Head of NCS, Charlton Athletic Community Trust – NCS supply chain partner

Safeguarding

Operating any youth programme demands stringent safeguarding protocols. Delivering one on the scale of NCS came with an associated level of responsibility. From teenage pranks and near misses, to more serious accidents and criminal activity, Ingeus managed 30,000, mainly minor, incidents during its NCS tenure.

"Taking a group of 15-17 year-olds away from home, some for the first time, will inevitably hold some risk," says Charlie Sunderland, Head of Partnerships and Designated Safeguarding Lead. "We treated all incidents seriously and preventative measures or resolutions were rolled out immediately across our network. Ingeus' direct delivery experience meant we became adept at quickly recognising potential problems."

- All activities were comprehensively risk-assessed and overseen by carefully selected instructors.
- All staff were enhanced DBS checked.
- A 24/7 on-call process manned by Ingeus senior leaders fed into an established crisis plan, escalating through four carefully defined levels of seriousness.
- Safeguarding best practice was shared freely and frequently with all supply chain partners.



The NCS way



Partners



NCS Trust

The NCS Trust, a not-for-profit enterprise formed in 2013 to commission and manage NCS, worked closely and collaboratively with Ingeus.

“We never missed a meeting or opportunity to understand what the Trust or young people wanted,” says Former Head of Programmes, Steve Binns. “We became a tried and trusted pair of hands with a will to find a way around any changes or challenges. We had the same mindset and developed a healthy and honest partnership.”



Youth Hostel Association (England and Wales)

In 2023, Ingeus partnered with Youth Hostel Association (England and Wales) to deliver the new five-day NCS residential experiences. YHA provided accommodation and authentic activities at several sites, delivering around a fifth of all residential experiences. Ingeus led the consortium, managing overall contract requirements, the recruitment of participants, and supply chain partners.

Supply chain

Huge credit for the success of NCS goes to our supply chain partners: a network of exceptional youth organisations carefully curated over many years of NCS delivery.

With Ingeus' backing, providers grew, took on additional staff, and used their NCS experience to successfully bid for other contracts. Ingeus meanwhile provided the scale to absorb cashflow complexities, managed risk, and the logistics of geographically widespread delivery.

"Our partners delivered exceptional programmes that always put the young people first; that's why we worked with many of them year after year," says Head of Partnerships, Charlie Sunderland. "Yet they still maintained a business focus, able to mobilise quickly and think on their feet when required. We were in it together and had genuine transparency and trust."

Poppy Horsman, Supply Chain Manager adds: "The numbers were important but the young people more so. Supply chain partners went above and beyond to make residential experiences as fun as they could be and to ensure social action projects resonated in the local areas where they were based."

Final programme supply chain organisations

Action 4 Youth
Activate
Charlton Athletic Community
Trust
Entrust
Flying Futures CIC
Ingeus
Personal Best Education
Pilot IMS Ltd

South West Lakes
Sport 4 Life UK
Twin UK
Inspiring Learning
Groundwork
Hear 2 Listen
EFL
Street games

Supply chain

Charlton Athletic Community Trust Worked with Ingeus from 2013



Ingeus was fantastic from day one. They visited every programme, and we couldn't have asked for more support. The sharing of knowledge with other partners was invaluable; regular forums allowed us to work together and share updates and best practice. There was no competitiveness, just a one team approach and willingness to do the job right.

NCS gave young people an experience they wouldn't get elsewhere, that will stay with them forever, and the constant little wins we saw in the young people will stay with us too.

Dan Morrin, Head of NCS

Pilot UK Worked with Ingeus from 2022



We grew rapidly with NCS, from 500 participants in our first year, to 1,400 in our second. We were impressed with how well informed the contact centre kept the participants and the access we had not only to supply chain managers but the wider Ingeus back office.

There was a clear quality focus in the reporting and training. Ingeus had a vision of NCS delivery, and all partners were given that same skills and support to deliver that vision.

Bradley Pogson, Head of Youth Services

Entrust (Capita Public Service) Worked with Ingeus from 2013

Capita

entrust
Inspiring Futures

The NCS programme significantly transformed our business. Initially operating from our residential sites offering outdoor activities, we expanded to create bespoke NCS tented villages that provided safe, well-managed experiences in picturesque locations in England and Wales. By 2024, we had established seven sites and successfully delivered the programme to over 5,000 young people.

As the NCS programme evolved we assumed responsibility for the pastoral care of our NCS participants and through this enhanced the skills of hundreds of our staff members. We also extended training to our broader teams. Leveraging the contacts and supply chains developed through NCS, we have been able to diversify our offerings and secure additional contracts.

NCS stands out as one of the most impactful transitional projects in the youth sector. Its transformative effect on the lives of young people is beyond measure.

Lisa Welborn, Contract Manager

Personal Best Education Worked with Ingeus from 2013



Ingeus had an open door policy, but didn't micro manage. They listened and adapted processes to make improvements. We've grown from a small coaching company in Hampshire to a major provider of youth services, including partnering with Ingeus again on the Positive Pathways pilot programme. We wouldn't have bid for some of our current contracts without our NCS track record.

Danny Smith, Head of Operations



A group of people, including adults and teenagers, are running through a shallow body of water in a park-like setting. They are splashing water, and the scene is captured in a bright, sunny environment with lush green trees in the background. A stone wall and a wire fence are visible behind the group. The overall mood is energetic and playful.

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