

#iwill Fund Learning Hub

How do we support youth social action for all?

FEBRUARY 2023



Proudly supporting
youth social action



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport



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Summary

This report is the second in a four-part series of summative reports by the #iwill Fund Learning Hub and outlines learning on how we can support youth social action for all to maximise the benefit for young people and society.

This includes:

1. removing barriers to participation for young people,
2. removing barriers to sustaining youth social action on an organisational level, and
3. fostering a system that enhances engagement for all young people.

The evidence presented in this report draws from the insights and reports that Match Funders and delivery organisations have shared with the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. This report is for those who want to learn and understand more about youth social action's reach, organisations working with young people, funders supporting young people to drive change and champions of youth social action.



Summary

- A key investment driver of the #iwill Fund has been to create youth social action for all. Learning is particularly focused on **approaches to closing the socio-economic participation gap**, which has been observed consistently across time for children and adults. Although a large focus has been on financial inequity, youth social action participation should not be considered in isolation from other domains of social inequality at the level of policy and programme design.
- Organisational and community capacity, context and buy-in has a significant influence in the delivery of youth social action opportunities for young people.
- Whether a young person forms a habit of social action is influenced by factors such as age and frequency of participation, the quality of a service, encouragement and support, young people's sense of possibility and barriers limiting young people's ability to engage on a regular basis. Barriers that impede young people's ability to engage on a regular basis and develop a habit for life include: being unable to afford travel costs, time constraints, language barriers and caring responsibilities.
- Funders and delivery organisations must also consider the resources and structures required for successful implementation to counteract dynamics that produce participation gaps.
- Match Funders have used a mix of approaches for engaging young people that don't usually participate in youth social action. These have included resourcing recruitment and using partnership working (trusted places and trusted people), incorporating diverse roles and youth voice opportunities in the programme design, and reducing resource barriers.
- Whether an organisation's impact area focuses on young people, or the community may determine what specific challenges it will face when it's new to youth social action:
 - Organisations with a focus on young people's outcomes may have more expertise in engaging young people and their outcomes, not necessarily in achieving impact for communities.
 - Organisations without a history of working with young people may be experts in creating impact in their area of focus, but not necessarily in engaging and working with young people.
- To ensure youth social action is sustainable, organisations should consider how it contributes to meeting their existing organisational mission or strategy, rather than being an outlier.

Introduction

The #iwill Fund is a joint fund established by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF), Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS), and more than 25 independent Match Funders ([See Appendix 1](#)). The #iwill Fund Learning Hub was established to capture and reflect on learning from the #iwill Fund's investment in youth social action. It does this in two ways: first, by helping the funders involved to learn as they go. Secondly, it supports the legacy of the #iwill Fund by building a body of knowledge that can support future funders and enablers of youth social action. The #iwill Fund Learning Hub is a three-member consortium of Dartington Service Design Lab, Renaisi, and the Centre for Youth Impact. Work by all three organisations has fed into this report.

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub has produced 39 reports since 2018, [all of which can be found here](#).

Over the course of the #iwill Fund, the #iwill Fund Learning Hub's has focused on answering four sector evidence plan questions ([See Appendix 2](#)). The #iwill Fund Learning Hub developed the questions in consultation with stakeholders in the #iwill Fund – Match Funders, their evaluation partners, and the #iwill Fund Leadership Board to help guide learning. This report is the second in a series of high-level reports summarising learning from the past five years and answers the question: ***How do we support youth social action for all?***

This report is for stakeholders within and beyond the #iwill Fund including: funders, delivery organisations, decision-makers and young people. It is particularly relevant for anyone looking to understand how to design, deliver, and fund quality youth social action opportunities.

Within the #iwill Fund Learning Hub, three workstreams have fed into answering the sector evidence plan questions:

- **Systems** - Learning how to support youth social action within systems and supporting funder collaboration on shared challenges
- **Sector Evidence Plan** - Aggregating learning across sources to build answers to key questions about youth social action
- **Quality Practice** - Supporting organisations enabling youth social action to reflect on and improve practice, and share lessons from this

This summative report draws specifically on the Sector Evidence Plan workstream.

Why is it important to support youth social action?

The table below shows information sources used for analysis in answering the question "How do we support youth social action for all?".

| Information Management System (IMS) | Match Funder Reports | Match Funder Evaluations | #iwill Fund Learning Hub Activities |
|--|--|---|--|
| Quantitative data provided by Match Funders on funded activity | Qualitative information provided by Match Funders on their funded activities | Commissioned work by Match Funders to evaluate the process of their funded activities | Insights into funded activities from our LabStorms, Impact Accelerator ^a cohorts and events |

Table 1. Information sources for data collection

a. The Impact Accelerator is a 12-month process designed to help organisations delivering youth social action to examine, build confidence in, and improve their programmes' outcomes on the basis of evidence. Labstorms were a space created for Match Funders to share learning and collaborate on solving problems.

Youth social action has been associated with a range of positive outcomes including: employment outcomes, attitudes to education, personal wellbeing, and a sense of community. Initiatives to engage all young people are therefore justified, as unequal access to youth social action contributes to an unequal distribution of these benefits across society. Additionally, young people participating in youth social action can be viewed as a form of civic engagement which has been linked with a more cohesive and democratic society. Diversity of participation in youth social action is therefore important in bringing more of society together. Both perspectives demonstrate the need to focus on engagement (which covers recruitment, retention, completion and transition) as central parts of youth social action so that that opportunities are equitable, and youth social action has a wide reach¹.



Recommendations

Young people being likely to participate in youth social action is often a product of deeply entrenched social dynamics, in particular expectations, resources and networks that motivate and enable participation. Funders and delivery organisations that seek to enable the participation of all young people need to have in place intentional responses that are implemented consistently.

Here are key recommendations for engaging young people in youth social action based on examples from practice (see page 14 onwards).

These are largely focused on the design of programmes because of what learning has been reported, but this does not mean implementation is any less important.

Recruitment:

1. Use partnership working.

Partnership working can be invaluable in growing project capacity and widening reach. For example, The Housing Association Youth Network (HAYN) has used partnership working to partner with national parks and engage young people from both rural and urban areas. Working with partners that are embedded and trusted within communities is one way to undertake place-informed recruitment.

2. Go to where the young people are.

This is very often schools because nearly all young people can be reached here. A more targeted approach might consider identifying 'cold-spots' of youth social action and partnering with organisations that already have reach, exposure and trust with the

young people who are targeted for recruitment.

3. Be explicit about whom you are trying to recruit.

Where programmes are not specific about wanting to recruit young people from a range of backgrounds or specifically those from certain groups e.g., lower socio-economic backgrounds, they are likely to find that they have more of the 'usual suspects' referred in or applying^{2,3}.

4. Resource recruitment well.

Where resources are scarce, it is understandable to weigh funding towards the cost of delivery. But spending on marketing, branding and outreach may be important in reaching beyond the already motivated rather than solely relying on 'word-of-mouth'. Resourcing partnership development and building trust with communities are important to create meaningful opportunities so that delivery organisations are not perceived to be 'parachuting in'.



Recommendations

Programme Design:

- 5. Include a diversity of voices.** Make space for a diverse range of young people to take leadership roles and shape youth social action opportunities. Including young people in decision-making will ensure that opportunities reflect what they want to do and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to have a voice in society⁴.
- 6. Use different engagement structures.** Match Funders and delivery organisations have noticed that different engagement structures are more or less effective for different young people as well as partner organisations. Being flexible around different needs whilst maintaining structure for support is important in engaging young people who aren't already participating.
- 7. Create role models.** Parental role modelling and socialisation is a key determinant of children's volunteering⁵. Match Funders have reported that it's important for young people to have examples that encourage them to take part in youth social action themselves. These may act as substitutes for parental involvement and can take shape as peer role models, trusted adults (e.g., teachers or youth workers), or key inspiring speakers with similar backgrounds or lived experiences.

Resources:

- 8. Minimise resource barriers to participation.** Status transmission, when young people benefit from the social and economic resources of their parents, means that financial barriers to participation will affect young people from lower socio-economic background disproportionately. This may include funding or providing travel or suitable clothing.

Implementation:

- 9. Consider structures and resources for implementation.** Funders and delivery organisations must also seriously consider the resources and structures required for successful implementation. Services can be designed well-intentioned but still end up reinforcing unequal participation. For example, if youth workers do not have the time or resources to counteract dynamics that produce participation gaps, they may revert to the standard social pattern of recruiting young people from higher socio-economic groups.

Creating a habit for life

Participating in youth social action is beneficial not only for individual young people but also for society, as detailed in our “what is youth social action?” summative report. The more young people participate in youth social action, the more society may benefit as a whole⁶. Given this double benefit, two of the main investment drivers of the #iwill Fund have been reaching young people who have not previously undertaken sustained youth social action and creating a habit for life.

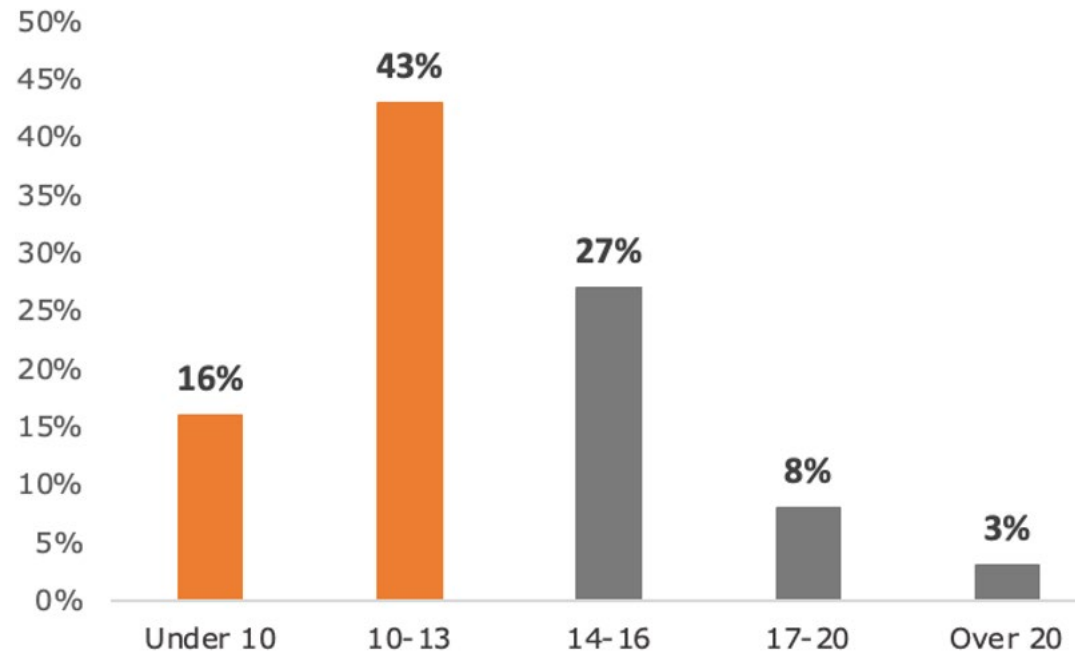
Factors that have been shown to influence whether youth social action becomes a sustained habit are:

1. Age started and frequency of participation

Young people who become involved in youth social action at a younger age are more likely to continue it⁷. Similarly, those who undertake youth social action more frequently in the past are more likely to continue frequently undertaking youth social action.

The #iwill Fund particularly aims to engage younger children (less than 14 years old) in youth social action to encourage a habit for life.

Graph 1 shows that although most opportunities supported through the #iwill Fund have been for children and young people of secondary school age (between 10 and 16 years old), over half of the youth social action opportunities supported through the #iwill Fund have been for children younger than 14. Data was accessed in May 2022 from the Information Management System (IMS) and has consistently shown the same pattern over the course of the #iwill Fund.



Graph 1. Percentage of age groups engaged in youth social action throughout the #iwill Fund

Creating a habit for life

2. Quality of service

The Jubilee Centre argued that anyone can **make a habit of youth social action** under the right conditions. To unpack how we can enable quality youth social action, read paper three in this report series. Particularly, whether programmes adhered to the following quality principles influenced whether youth social action would become a habit:

> Be youth-led

It is important that the opportunity is age appropriate and dependant on the young person's experience. Youth led activities enable young people to develop leadership skills that they can carry with them into adulthood.

> Be challenging

Young people act in a space where it is safe to fail but are nevertheless faced with a real and enjoyable challenge against which they can practice and develop their skills.

> Have social impact

Community benefit not only brings meaningful impact to the community but also acts as a prime motivator for young people's participation.

> Allow progression to other opportunities

For young people to continue with social action, there need to be further opportunities. Many funded evaluations assess young people's willingness to participate again, which is usually high – however, progression routes need to be built to support this.

> Be embedded in a young person's life

Youth social action should be embedded in young people's contexts and lives. For example, the majority of funded activity is delivered through schools, and there is evidence that this is an effective route for engaging young people.

Whether youth social action is embedded within organisations

or communities is influenced by organisational or community buy-in, capacity and culture.

> Enable reflection about the value of the activity

Reflection allows young people to think about what learning has taken place and creates space to celebrate success. Within the #iwill Fund, digital or part-digital models have enabled more reflection by making scheduling small group or 1:1 conversations easier.

Additionally, reflective learning has also allowed organisations to come together to share ideas. The **impact accelerator reports** captured this learning and have been used to embed continuous quality improvement.

Creating a habit for life

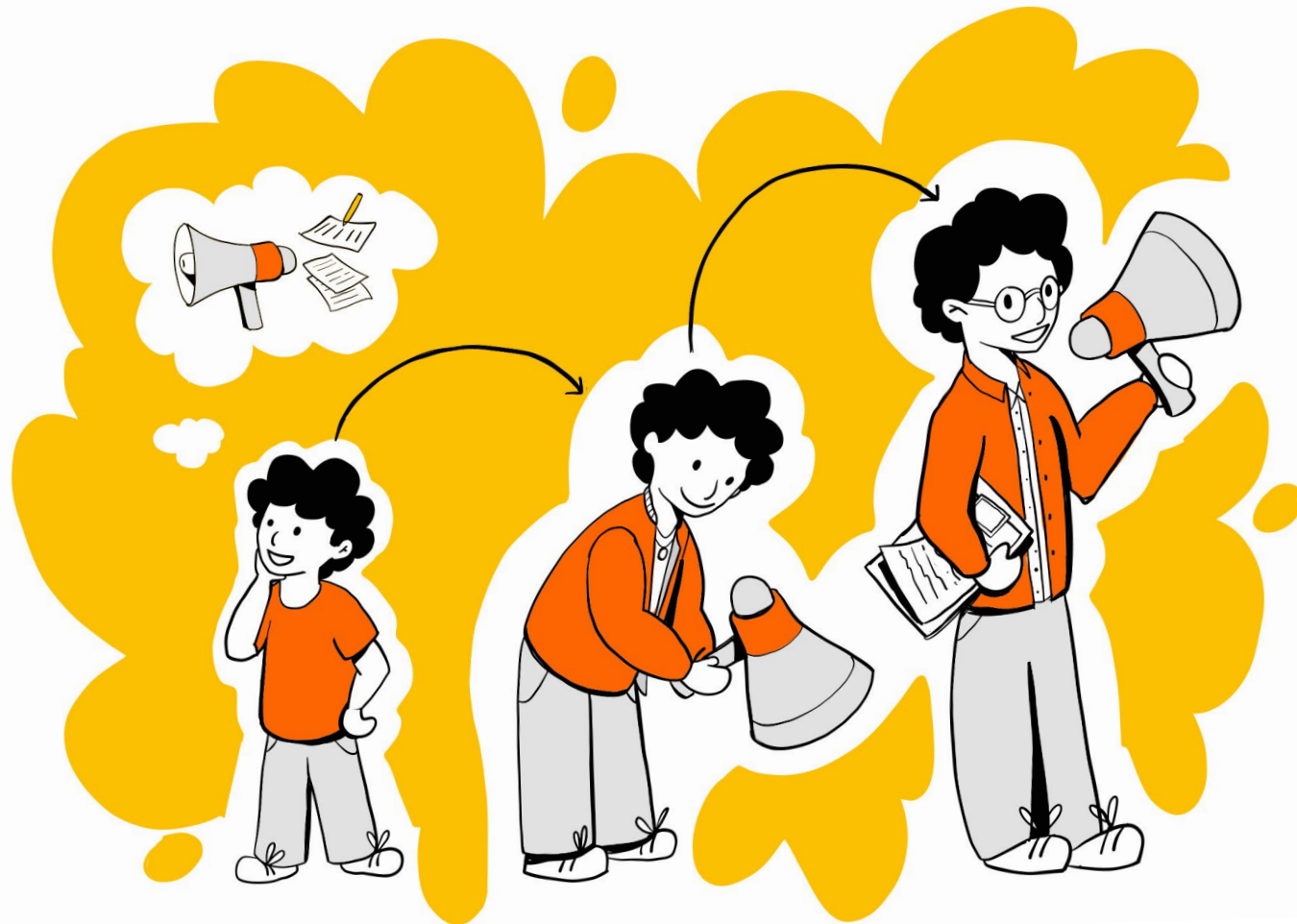
3. Encouragement and support

Support and encouragement from the wider community, such as friends and family, and organisations are important in whether a young person participates in youth social action⁸. Regardless of the quality of a youth social action opportunity, the level to which a young person may want to participate as well as their confidence to do so may affect whether they take up an opportunity.

Importantly, youth social action opportunities that actively encourage young people to take part, rather than opportunities being passively available, allow for greater take-up and sustained involvement⁹.

4. Young people's sense of possibility

Whether a young person thinks it's possible for them to take part in youth social action is crucial in creating a habit for life. This means that young people believe that they have the resources they need, the confidence and the skills to participate. Match Funders and delivery organisations should offer opportunities for skill development, demonstrate an asset-based approach and carefully mitigate any barriers when setting up opportunities.



Closing the socio-economic participation gap



Although the #iwill Fund aims to create youth social action for all, it has a particular focus on reaching and engaging young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This is because socio-economic status has been found to be a barrier to being involved in youth social action, with young people from more affluent backgrounds being more likely to participate¹⁰. It should be noted that although increased participation of young people from lower socio-economic groups is an investment driver for the #iwill Fund, this is not about 'closing the gap' by decreasing recruitment from higher socio-economic groups.

The gap in participation has been attributed to various factors. Our [review of external evidence](#) identified reasons why some young people – particularly from less affluent backgrounds – are less likely to participate in social action. These include being less likely to be offered opportunities to participate, being less likely to have family members who take part and 'role model' social action and being less able to access resources or funds to take part, for example transport costs to youth social action activities.

Another factor to consider when reviewing the socio-economic gap is the definition of social

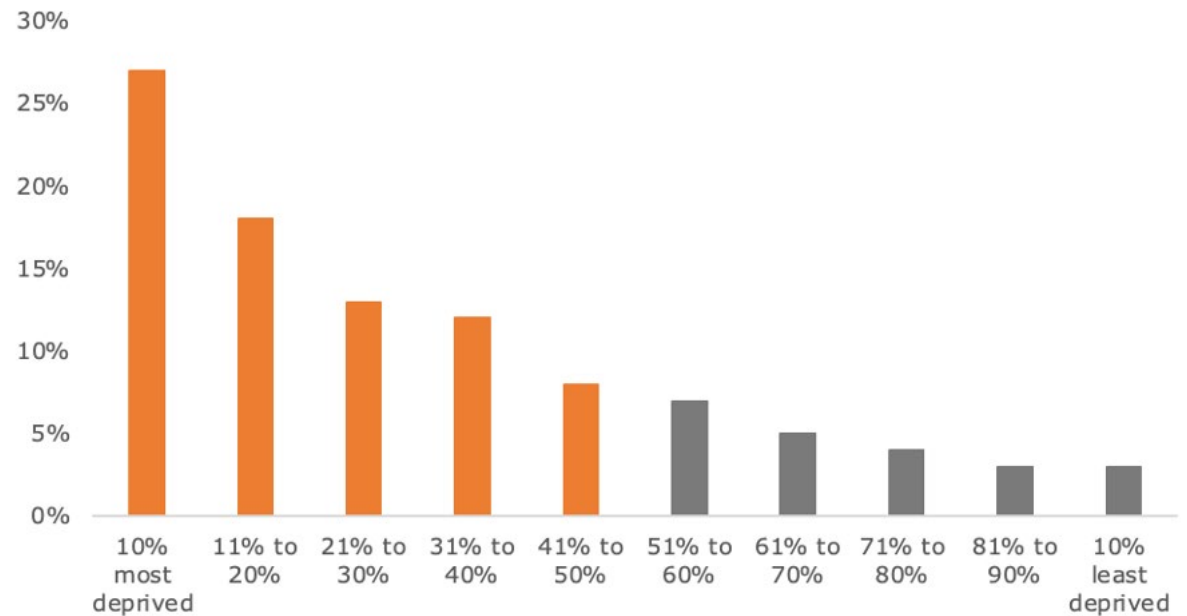
Closing the socio-economic participation gap

action used by the National Youth Social Action survey. It excludes activities such as helping family members or friends. Some Match Funders from the #iwill Fund have underlined the detriment of excluding this from the definition as it may overlook activities that young people from less affluent backgrounds are taking part in¹¹. Although helping others, including family members and friends, is now part of the #iwill Fund youth social action typologies, there may still be a scarcity in recording these activities.

Deprivation

One of the #iwill Fund's investment drivers is to engage (which covers recruitment, retention, completion, and transition) more young people from lower socio-economic groups in youth social action participation. Due to this investment driver, there has been an increase in the number of social action opportunities taking place in the most deprived postcodes in the UK. This has been consistent throughout the duration of the #iwill Fund. Data was accessed in May 2022 from the Information Management System (IMS).

The #iwill Fund has supported **more opportunities for YSA in deprived postcodes** than affluent ones



Graph 2. Percentage of youth social action opportunities delivered in the most to least deprived postcodes throughout the #iwill Fund

Approaches to increasing engagement of young people

Throughout the #iwill Fund, Match Funders and delivery organisations reported approaches to engaging young people that may otherwise not have participated in youth social action (See the following examples over the next two pages).

Approaches to engaging young people that might not otherwise have participated in youth social action

Match Funders and delivery organisations especially reported on strategies for closing the socio-economic participation gap. This focus chimes with the investment driver of the #iwill Fund to develop opportunities that enable young people, particularly those from less affluent backgrounds, to take part in high-quality youth social action opportunities.

1. Support and provide resources for local organisations that already have reach to socio-economically disadvantaged young people.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award provided funding and support to local organisations with reach into communities experiencing higher levels of deprivation. The relationships local organisations are able to build with communities are leveraged to increase the reach of youth social action programmes. While The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is not a grant-making

trust, it can provide additional resource to local groups for the purchase of equipment and transport for participants which are experiencing significant financial barriers to participation in the whole Award¹².

2. Fund resources to remove barriers to participation.

For example, the Ormiston Academies Trust's (OAT) #WeWill Cook programme budgets for food within the scheme of learning, as well as enrichment. This means the pupils were able to cook without being worried about having to buy the ingredients to take into school, which they may have not been able to afford.

3. Fund work that aims to embed youth social action in further education (FE) colleges.

The Pears Foundation took this approach. Data shows that young people from low-income backgrounds are disproportionately likely to attend FE colleges – supporting youth social action in colleges is designed to improve uptake by this group.

The [National Youth Social Action Survey](#) showcased that young people were more likely to engage in youth social action if they could access it through school and



Approaches to increasing engagement of young people

engage in it with friends. See the #iwill Fund Learning Hub's paper on ['Increasing Youth social action in Education'](#).

4. Use another activity (sport, the arts etc.,) as a 'hook' for youth social action programmes.

It is important that youth social action opportunities are engaging regardless of the socio-economic status of participants. This is what Sport England is doing.

However, an attractive hook may be more important for young people from lower socio-economic groups as they are less likely to have a socialised or parental-driven motivation to do social action for its own sake¹³. This is due to intergenerational transmission of expectations, resources and networks that motivate and enable participation. Football Beyond Borders used football to engage young people, many of whom were from lower socio-economic groups, who were excluded and at risk of exclusion from schools.

5. An adult mentor provides encouragement, resources and networks that more affluent young people may get from their parents.

Uprising took this approach. Young people may volunteer partly because they learn to do so from their parents and because their parents' resources and networks allow them access to opportunities^{14, 15}. Parents of lower socio-economic status are less likely to be able to provide this, so a mentor may act as a substitute, and role model, for the young person in this respect.

6. Develop a framework to assess access to opportunities.

Sport England developed a rubric of five factors to consider when establishing any project locally: the 'Five Rights'. These are right price, right time, right place, right people and the right style. In order to answer the rubric, a good understanding is needed of the assets and interests of young people and the community.

'StreetGames' were successful in reaching young people from lower socio-economic groups by applying the Five Rights through their 'Doorstep' sport access programme. The Doorstep programme has detailed

documentation that sets out what can be done to reach this group¹⁶.

7. Conduct research to inform decision-making around compensating young people.

Act for Change Fund commissioned the solicitors Bates Wells (employment law field leaders) to provide them with research around paying young people for their contributions.

Act for Change Fund recognised that young people in acute crisis (homelessness; during the process of school exclusions) require support to address their immediate needs in order to engage in youth social action. Over the course of Act for Change Fund, funded organisations and the funder themselves encountered difficulties around paying young people for intermittent contributions to work due to a series of structural and legal barriers. This is an extremely important issue, given the funding sector's ambition to better involve young people from all backgrounds in decision-making and insight.

Approaches to increasing engagement of young people

Approaches to increasing engagement with young people overall

Match Funders and delivery organisations also reported on approaches that were focused on increasing the overall engagement of young people (See these examples 1-7). This included partnership working (engaging young people through trusted people), going to where young people are such as schools and community centres (engaging young people through trusted places), targeting youth social action 'cold-spots' and using different engagement structures.



1. Fund programmes that help young people to tackle the issues which were important to them.

For an insight into how organisations can include youth voice, [read here](#).

Virgin Money Foundation increased overall engagement by awarding a grant to West End Women and Girls, which is the only open access community based women and girls centre in the city of Newcastle. The #iwill Take Action award employed two young domestic violence peer educators to recruit and train Domestic Violence Youth Champions to be the first point of call for any young person in their locality concerned about their relationship. The champions empowered young women to say no to abusive relationships and refer young people for one-to-one support where required. This approach widens overall engagement by integrating issues that young people have personally experienced or relate to with peer mentoring.

2. Engage in place-based work.

Young Manchester widened their general reach by expanding their focus on specific areas where further work was required including South Manchester and Central Manchester. This infrastructure was critical

in supporting a vibrant voluntary sector¹⁷. For insights into place-based work and youth social action, [read here](#).

3. Use digital delivery to continue supporting individuals even when they didn't share a physical space.

Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade (JLGB) used digital delivery to target those in geographical 'cold spots'. JLGB's programmes were online for small communities, and those not large enough to sustain their own JLGB group.

4. Create a universal infrastructure for youth social action in schools.

Ormiston Academies Trust leveraged schools' near-universal reach to young people. To foster participation in all pupils, the schools' resources and techniques were formalised and standardised. Offering youth social action in primary schools has been highlighted by Match Funders as a way to engage younger people.

5. Use partnership working to increase engagement.

The Housing Association of Youth Network (HAYN) Volunteering Academy (led by Clarion Futures)¹⁸ reported growing project capacity by partnering with four national

Approaches to increasing engagement of young people

parks. This enabled 'urban-rural twinning', allowing for young people from different backgrounds to work together.

6. Use different engagement structures.

Greater London Authority (GLA) reported that their Small Grants Programme, as opposed to other programmes, engaged more Alternative Provision and SEND schools because of its structured nature, commitment, clarity on what skills the young people would be attaining, and accessibility.

Similarly, other Match Funder tailored different engagement levels to young people's needs and desires e.g., an option for weekly drop-in sessions or formal 'classroom' sessions to maximise engagement.

7. Ensure there's representation of young people.

GLA emphasised the importance for young people to be represented and to see that others can be effective in youth leadership. GLA achieved this by increasing young people's visibility when they attended City Hall. This helped to reflect the diversity of young people in London and encouraged others to get involved¹⁹.

Approaches to engaging younger people (under the age of 14)

Approaches to engaging younger people (under the age of 14) considered safeguarding needs and using older peers other than teachers, youth workers or parents to pass on skills and learning (See these two examples).

1. Use youth workers and teachers when working with younger children.

HAYN shared that their mini ambassadors' programme successfully engaged those aged 5-11. For safeguarding purposes, when delivery occurred online, WhatsApp groups were used to liaise with parents rather than communicating with children directly.

The application of a "youth-led" principle with children aged 5-11 looks different than with older participants. For younger children, the ultimate goal and project idea can still be youth-led, but the implementation and project plan is usually led by youth workers and teachers to ensure that children and the community benefit from the project.

2. Use trusted older peers to pass on skills, insights, and learning to other young people.

Liverpool Football Club (LFC) Foundation offered sessions within a year 6 group to introduce the programme and concept of youth social action to the year 5 group who would be the next group to undertake youth social action. Youth succession ensures increased engagement as well as sustainability of youth social action²⁰.



Approaches to increasing engagement of young people

Approaches to engaging BAME* young people

**We recognise the diversity of individual identities and lived experiences, and accept that BAME is an imperfect term that does not fully capture the racial, cultural, and ethnic identities that experience structural and systematic inequality.*

It is difficult to estimate with confidence the association between ethnicity and social action because sample sizes for minority groups in national surveys are often too small to draw firm conclusions. The most statistically robust research relates to adult social action and finds that White British people are over-represented among volunteers compared with Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups. Here are some strategies reported by Match Funders to engage BAME young people in youth social action. Match Funders have typically tried to increase engagement of BAME young people by using targeted recruitment and increasing BAME representation within their staff and events.

1. Provide resources and skill development opportunities to help BAME young people access services.

Sport England's BAMEYouth projects aimed to support their volunteers to integrate by improving their English, providing them with emotional support and increasing connections outside of their own community group²¹. BAMEYouth provided solutions to overcome specific barriers, for example running a crèche for mothers or running female only sessions for female volunteers with low self-confidence or those for BAME only communities where cultural sensitivities might exist. During their projects, Sport England took the time to understand specific barriers of diverse young people and were able to tailor support to address barriers and interests which were relevant to the young person.

2. Ensure that BAME young people have youth-leadership opportunities.

BBC Children in Need explored key innovations including structured engagement of young Black people with grant assessments and decision making. To further reach BAME young people, BBC Children in Need also delivered their programme in partnership with a Black-led infrastructure organisation.

3. Use representative role models to inspire.

Spirit of 2012's EmpowHER brought in inspirational women to aim to inspire young people about women and Careers, Communication, Women in Sport, Activism, Race and Climate Change. This approach aimed to increase representation of BAME women in social action to create a more relatable space for young BAME girls and ultimately encourage them to participate in youth social action.

4. Enable youth voice in digital spaces.

Young Manchester increased reach by incorporating BAME youth voice by making their online space more accessible for BAME young people. Young Manchester consulted with young people within Greater Manchester. Focusing on marginalised groups, such as LGBTQ young people, BAME young people, LAC/Care leavers and young carers. The feedback and information from the consultations was used to design and expand 42nd Street's online services; with the help from web designers/developers and on-going consultation from the peer ambassadors and young people.

5. Work with schools with a larger BAME population.

To increase engagement of BAME young people, Ormiston Academies Trust actively worked with schools with a wider BAME population.



Learning from organisations new to youth social action

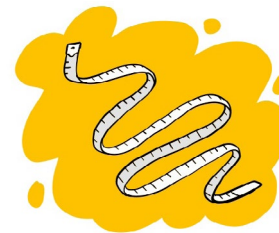
To support youth social action for all, we also need to consider how organisations new to youth social action can not only create but sustain youth social action opportunities. Many opportunities within the #iwill Fund were created by organisations new to youth social action, representing a huge expansion in organisational capacity to deliver it²⁷. Match Funders understanding the position of delivery organisations and whether they want to continue delivering youth social action long-term can drive our understanding on how to mitigate potential barriers in delivery. For guidance on how to enable quality youth social action [read the Impact Accelerator report here](#).

Throughout the #iwill Fund we have learned that organisations enabling youth social action for the first time are likely to have different challenges to address, depending on their area of impact focus:

- Organisations with a focus on young people's outcomes have expertise in engaging and supporting young people and their outcomes, not necessarily on achieving impact for the community.
- Organisations without a history of working with young people may be expert in creating impact in their area of focus, but not necessarily in engaging and working with young people and supporting them to make an impact.

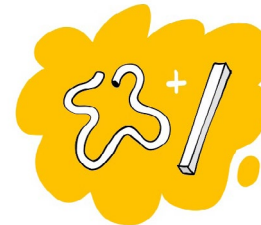
To create sustainable youth social action, we need to look at what it takes to get youth social action off the ground, and how to do it well. For youth social action to thrive long-term

it needs to be enabled beyond the relatively small group of organisations focused entirely on it. From reviewing previous insights gained from organisations new to youth social action a list of considerations has been developed^{22, 23, 24, 25, 26}:



1. One size doesn't fit all

Organisations new to youth social action noted that they couldn't just slot young people into the same roles that were previously taken up by adults. Making space for activities being youth-led means that roles that are created may not be able to be specified in advance.



2. Flexibility is required but structure is important

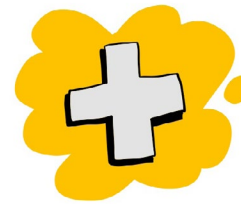
Approaching youth social action with both structure and flexibility will be beneficial to the young person but also gives the organisation confidence as they introduce youth social action. Flexibility and structure are both needed together to safeguard young people but also to adapt the existing systems for the young person within youth social action. It creates a more inclusive and safe space for young people to participate in.

Learning from organisations new to youth social action



3. Test and learn

Establishing a regular, 'low stakes' cycle of reflection is a key enabler for organisations to develop and sustain an effective learning culture. For organisations newer to youth social action, embedding this as an approach is supported by involving as broad a range of colleagues as possible, beyond those involved directly in the work.



5. Benefit for organisations

As well as a benefit to young people and the community, there is a benefit to organisations new to youth social action or funders getting involved with youth social action. By strategically aligning youth social action with the organisations overarching goals, youth social action can offer sustainability and organisational buy-in. For organisations newer to youth social action, embedding youth social action as an approach is supported by involving all staff in the development of either a Theory of Change or the early-stage design and iteration of the service itself.



4. Enabling Double benefit

There is a key focus on the benefits and outcomes to young people engaging in youth social action, but it was underlined that organisations new to youth social action may need support in how to help young people deliver benefit to the community. Organisations can be supported by helping them specify clear aims for target groups of young people and communities and explore how these aims inter-relate. As well as specifying aims, they can be supported in specifying critical components of how they will deliver their service and then map these components across to a wider organisational theory of change or aims.



6. Shared learning and collective understanding

Partnership working and shared learning is helpful to organisations as it can produce an environment of sharing resources and expertise, allowing organisations to work together to build confidence in designing and evaluating programmes, using common language and keeping frameworks for concepts such as theory of change consistent. Organisations working together also prevents duplication across funding streams, meaning that resources and time can be better used.

Learning from organisations new to youth social action



7. Organisational training

Providing tailored and appropriate support for improvement as part of the funding process, in a way that aligns with (and ideally supports) an organisation's broader aims and deliverables across different funded workstreams. Previous reports from an #iwill Fund Learning Hub quality practice workstream²⁷ identified that Theory of Change support from an associate researcher was beneficial. However, passing that learning on to organisations' practice development staff was more helpful for sustainable practice.



8. Youth Social Action 'champions'

Organisations that were especially successful in developing youth social action opportunities, despite challenging contexts like the Covid-19 pandemic, were characterised by having individuals in their teams who consistently championed and advocated for this work. For example, some organisations had dedicated staff that drove youth social action opportunities. Other organisations who struggled to do this, faced challenges with staff continuity. This learning shows that leadership should support individuals at all levels of delivery to develop skills and access opportunities to contribute to continuous quality improvement and sustained youth social action.

Discussion

Participating in youth social action is beneficial not only for individual young people but for society. The more young people participate in youth social action, the more society may benefit as a whole²⁸. As young people continue to belong to communities as they grow up, some of the benefits that accrue to young people directly from youth social action participation, such as pro-social behaviour or social trust may be beneficial for the societies in which they live. The formation of a habit of social action creates an ongoing benefit for the community that the young person lives in²⁹. For youth social action to be widespread, we need to consider three aspects:

- 1) the structures and resources that are needed to remove barriers to participation for young people,
- 2) what needs to be in place for organisations to successfully implement and sustain youth social action opportunities, and
- 3) fostering a system that enhances reach to all young people.

Removing barriers for young people to engage in youth social action

This paper has outlined how the quality of youth social action opportunities, support and encouragement, a sense of possibility for young people, and the age at which youth social action is started all influence whether it becomes a 'habit for life'.

However young people, especially from lower socio-

economic groups, have been found to experience financial and social barriers to participating. Different manifestations of inequality intersect to produce different experiences³⁰. BAME girls' experiences of youth social action, for example, differ from the experiences of both white girls and BAME boys. Despite challenges in measuring the aggregate effect of factors such as gender, race and sexual orientation on youth social action participation, they should not be overlooked at the level of policy or programme design.

Throughout this report we have outlined various strategies that Match Funders and delivery organisations employed to increase reach and engagement in youth social action. Inequity in participation is a product of deeply entrenched social dynamics, in particular the intergenerational transmission of expectations, resources and networks that motivate and enable participation. Responding to gaps in participation therefore requires intentional responses that are implemented consistently.

Importantly, in this report, approaches of engaging all young people in social action have been largely focused on the design of programmes. However, services can be designed well-intentioned but still end up reinforcing unequal participation. For example, if youth workers do not have the time or resource to counteract dynamics that produce participation gaps, they may revert to the standard social pattern of recruiting young people from higher socio-economic groups. Charitable funders and delivery organisations must therefore also consider the resources and structures required for successful implementation.

Discussion

Organisations delivering youth social action

The #iwill Fund has taken youth social action well beyond the existing base of organisations focused on youth social action. Depending on their area of impact focus, organisations new to youth social action may have different challenges. Organisations with a focus on young people's outcomes have expertise in engaging and supporting young people, but not necessarily achieving impact for the community. Whereas organisations without a history of working with young people may be experts in creating impact in their area of focus but not necessarily in engaging young people.

Importantly, organisations have diverse motivations for enabling youth social action, which do not stand alone from their other work. It is important to think about how young people and youth social action can contribute to meeting an existing mission and strategy. These insights have come about through the creativity of Match Funders and delivery partners rather than being specifically included in the investment drivers of the #iwill Fund. They point to ways in which youth social action may be sustained or extended after this phase of the #iwill Fund.

Next steps...

This has been the second of a four-part series in answering the sector evidence plan questions ([see Appendix 2](#)). All outputs from the #iwill Fund Learning Hub can be found on the Centre for Youth Impact [website here](#). The next steps in addressing the sector evidence plan questions will be to review "How can we support quality youth social action?" in the third of the four-part series.

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Appendix 1: List of Match Funders

BBC Children in Need
Bite Back 2030
Careers & Enterprise Company
Clarion Futures
Comic Relief
Co-op Foundation
Dulverton Trust
Dunhill Medical Trust
Global Action Plan
Global Fund for Children
Greater London Authority
Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade
Liverpool Football Club Foundation
Mumsnet
National Deaf Children's Society
One Million Mentors
Ormiston Trust
Paul Hamlyn Foundation & Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

Pears Foundation
Premier League Charitable Fund
Scouts Association
Sovereign Housing Association
Spirit of 2012
Sport England
The Diana Award
The Duke of Edinburgh's Award
The Ernest Cook Trust
UK Community Foundations
UK Youth
UpRising
V inspired
Virgin Money Foundation
Volunteering Matters
WE Foundation
Young Manchester
Youth Endowment Fund

Appendix 2: Sector Evidence Plan

Question: What is youth social action?

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub exists to harness the evidence and learning generated by the wave of youth social action opportunities supported through the #iwill Fund. The Learning Hub developed the sector evidence plan questions in consultation with stakeholders in the #iwill Fund – Match Funders, their evaluation partners, and the #iwill Fund Leadership Board. The sector evidence plan questions have largely guided the learning of the learning hub.

| Question | Sub-questions |
|---|---|
| What is Youth Social Action? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of youth social action have been funded, including via digital delivery? • What are common Theories of Change? |
| What does Youth Social Action do? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What positive outcomes have been shown to be promoted for CYP and communities? • How can double benefit be managed? • What features of youth social action make it effective? |
| How do we support Youth Social Action for all? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we reach CYP from backgrounds less likely to participate? • How do we reach younger children? • How do we initiate youth social action in 'cold spots' (places/institutions/sectors)? • What are the pros and cons of digital delivery for reaching all young people? |
| How can we support quality Youth Social Action? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we know about strengths and weaknesses of providers? - What do we know about supporting providers to improve? • How can digital delivery support the quality principles? |



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