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#iwill Fund Learning Hub
Systems Workstream

Report on the fourth and fifth #iwill Fund Learning Hub
Labstorms
The Centre for Youth Impact
March 2021

Introduction

LabStorms were adopted within the #iwill Fund Learning Hub to foster ongoing, deeper collaboration between Match Funders, to enable a system of effective youth social action funding to be continued beyond 2023. Success for this workstream includes stronger, more enduring collaboration across funders, and a shared sense of common challenges and potential solutions.

The Centre for Youth Impact facilitates a series of LabStorms as part of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. By sharing insights across the sector, the LabStorms will also contribute to sharing learning, data, and insights. Each LabStorm will create a dedicated space for the #iwill Fund Match Funders to collaboratively frame and respond to a problem or challenge that they have identified as pressing in their work.

This report draws out the key themes from the fourth and fifth round of LabStorms for the #iwill Fund Learning Hub, which took place on 9 December 2020 and 10 February 2021. To accommodate COVID-19 restrictions, both LabStorms were held online for two hours and intentionally involved a smaller group of Match Funders. We would like to thank Jenny North of the Dartington Service Design Lab and Olly Offord of Team London at the Greater London Authority for leading the discussions and all the Match Funders who participated.

As LabStorms take place under Chatham House rules, the themes and reflections in this report cannot be attributed to any one person or organisation; nor should they be seen as representative of an 'average' or consensus view in the room. Instead, they should be understood as providing kernels of insight and conversation within the Match Funder community. In the sections below, we first summarise the discussions held in December and February before highlighting the key insights generated from the discussion and identifying potential opportunities for funders moving forwards.

The first three rounds of LabStorms took place in June 2019, February 2020, and October 2020, and similar reports[1] [2] [3] were produced to draw out the key themes. The first round of LabStorms included a session led by the Pears Foundation that focused on understanding and communicating community benefit. A session led by the Act for Change Fund (a joint initiative between the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation), focused on developing a habit of social action. The second round included a session led by Premier League Charitable Fund on how to embed high-quality opportunities for youth voice into youth-led social action, and another session by Young Manchester about the concept of 'place' in youth social action. The third LabStorm was a session led by the Ernest Cook Trust and focused on working with schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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[1] https://www.youthimpact.uk/iwill-learninghubpublications/report-first-iwill-fund-learning-labstorms

[2] https://www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/iwill_labstorms_report_round_2.pdf

[3] https://www.youthimpact.uk/iwill-fund-learning-hub/iwill-fund-learning-hub-blogs-and-reports

The fourth and fifth LabStorms were a slight departure from the standard format, as the discussion generated from the fourth session was so rich, that it was felt that returning to the topic for a follow-up session would be helpful. Thus, this report summarises the outcomes of both discussions.

Discussion: Funding campaigning as part of youth social action

Dartington Service Design Lab began life over 50 years ago as the Dartington Social Research Unit. Based in Devon but reaching across the UK, it works at two key intersections: between evidence-informed practice and user-centred design; and between public system reform and service design and improvement.

Dartington is the lead Learning Partner for the #iwill Learning Hub. Dartington works with Match Funders, delivery organisations and evaluators to maximise learning and develop knowledge about how to fund, develop and deliver high-quality youth social action that can benefit young people and their communities. In something of a departure from the usual LabStorms, which usually begin with a presentation from a Match Funder, Dartington presented on the theme of campaigning, and its role within youth social action provision.

Team London is Mayor Sadiq Khan's volunteering programme. Team London encourages all Londoners to become active citizens and give their time to make the capital a better place.

Team London believes volunteering is a great way to help Londoners reach their full potential. It can help them build the new skills that employers are looking for. It is also a great way to bring people from different backgrounds and communities together. As such, it's a great social leveller and is helping London to become a happier and more unified city.

Team London also works hard to be part of every community in the city. Alongside small local charities, they create even more opportunities for Londoners to volunteer and encourage businesses to support their staff to give back.

Focus of discussion 1: Campaigning is still a minority of #iwill-funded activity, but it is growing in numbers and particularly profile. It raises several challenges compared to other forms of youth social action, including issues of definition and how we think about outcomes, quality and safety.

Focus of discussion 2: Does working within a political institution raise different questions about campaigning? Decisions on whether to fund campaigns seem to be based on values, but whose values are they? How far do they extend, and where do you draw the line?

1. Relationship between campaigning and other forms of youth social action

The initial response to the opening presentation was for the group to wonder how far campaigning should be considered as a discrete form of social action in itself, or rather as part of a 'continuum' of youth social action that includes volunteering and 'youth voice' activities (and indeed may emerge directly from these activities). Whilst there was some consensus around the idea of a 'continuum', the group acknowledged the need for a more explicit narrative to recognise the distinct nature and role of campaigning. There was a concern that some nuances may be missed where campaigning is assimilated into broader youth social action. The group went further to consider how activism features on this continuum, and whether this is the same as or an extension of campaigning. The group also wondered whether all youth campaigning activities should be considered in the same framing, or whether the scale of the campaign might make a difference (e.g. 'eradicate plastic from our school' vs 'stop climate change'). The 'scale' of a campaign was also discussed – for example, small and local versus 'grand and global' – particularly regarding how this influences funders' comfort level.

The group also wondered whether all forms of youth campaigning were being captured within the #iwill Fund, as sometimes they might be defined as something else.

2. Campaigning and politics

The group discussed the relationship between campaigning and 'youth voice' activities. Asking young people to talk about what matters to them is not necessarily campaigning, but more an exercise in democracy (although this does not make it any less 'political'). However, some youth voice activity can feel like campaigning because particular groups of young people have been 'so unheard'. There was an honesty in recognising that it can be more comfortable to hear from some young people than others. This led the group to ask whether there are unacceptable campaigns, and whether the acceptability of a campaign is related to the young people who are doing the campaigning. Some of the group acknowledged that decisions about the 'acceptability' of campaigning activity were often, in practice, effectively devolved to delivery organisations or schools (as the 'intermediary' between funders and young people). The tensions in this were acknowledged: accepting a de facto adult influence on young people's campaigning activities in exchange for funders not exerting this influence directly themselves.

By its very nature, a campaign has (potential) winners and losers and is, therefore, less of an 'uncontested social good' than other forms of youth social action. Nor should it be assumed that young people will necessarily hold progressive views or act as a kind of 'unstoppable progressive monolith' with the issues on which they campaign. This also plays out in how community benefit through campaigning is defined and understood – the potential role of a campaign as a disruptor may not 'feel beneficial' to some parts of a community.

The group agreed that the organisations best at supporting young people to campaign have a clearly articulated value base around equity and justice.

The group wondered whether all campaigning is inherently political, and what this means for funders. By funding a campaign, a funder is making a political decision. This is problematic because of the nature of the funding source for the programme or provision – campaigning involves a political conversation that cannot always be acknowledged.

3. The role of adults in supporting youth campaigning

Adults have a critical role in safeguarding and promoting a high quality and developmental campaigning experience for young people. This can mean enabling young people to recognise the implications of taking an 'indelible stance' online, and the exposure to critique and possible abuse that this brings. Adults also have a role in preventing illegal behaviour in campaigns. There is an extent to which the 'backroom' activity in supporting young people to campaign, such as supporting critical thinking, and exposing young people to different communities and opinions, looks like high-quality youth work (prompting a question about the relationship between youth social action, youth work and campaigning). In the second discussion, the group recognised the role of adults in enabling and supporting campaigning, such as managing risk and bringing experience and advice. Beyond this, however, the group wondered how 'involved' adults should be in shaping and steering campaigning activity. There is a risk that young people can be used in adult-formulated campaigns because their voice is perceived as being more powerful, but that this can also be used cynically.

Finally, the group considered whether there are particular campaign issues where the involvement of young people might be questioned. How far, for example, do we 'give' young people certain issues to campaign upon because adults have been unable to find a solution?

In the second discussion, the group raised the issue of accountability for campaigns, and asked how far young people are protected from the accountability that might sit with campaigning by other groups, for example, in terms of assessing the impact on others. This was felt to be a critical element of campaigning, but one which equally poses challenges in effective youth development, rooted in emotional and physical safety. Effective campaigning may well create 'unsafe' spaces for young people, and both funders and youth organisations need to approach this knowingly.

4. Defining the outcomes of youth campaigning

The group recognised the need for a 'practice guide' on enabling youth campaigning: participants observed that delving into the Theories of Change for various youth campaigns being supported by the #iwill Fund might help to uncover campaigning's relationship to other social action activities and unpack some of the 'mechanisms of change' that underpin it. The group acknowledged that the relationship between community benefit and campaigning is more problematic than with other forms of youth social action, given the potential for conflict.

Similarly, the relationship between young people's outcomes and community outcomes is different, and community benefit can take a long time to emerge. How far, for example, are outcomes

around self-confidence and democratic participation dependent on the success or otherwise of a particular campaign? Is the 'outcome' for young people involved in campaigning more about the process or the success (or otherwise) of the campaign itself? In the second discussion, the group raised the importance of being mindful that involvement in campaigning can change the life course of a young person and that it bears risks that young people could disconnect from civic engagement completely if a campaign is 'unsuccessful'. This is more complex than in other forms of youth social action, and again, calls on a higher degree of intentionality from both funders and youth organisations.

5. The role of values in shaping funding decisions in campaigns

The second discussion was focused on the role of values in shaping funding decisions. There was a broad recognition that the extent to which campaigning is political is a debate that is actually situated within a values framework. This then led to conversations about power – whether there is a hierarchy in who is most able to express values in both the funding and youth social action spaces, and whether campaigning requires both a strong values position and equally the scope and space for this to change in response to a campaign. The potential tension was acknowledged between centring youth voice as a value, and the potential for young people's values to conflict with the funder's own. Should this happen, what is the more 'values aligned' course of action for a funder? Similarly, the group discussed the value position underpinning funding campaigning: is it youth development or social change? Do the two always sit in harmony, and if they don't, which takes precedence? How much responsibility do funders need to take for this?

The group considered the difference between individual and institutional values, and reflected on the example of family foundations where the relationship between the two is very close. The group discussed how one way of managing any tensions around funding campaigns that might conflict with values was to 'delegate' decisions to a local level. However, some funders offered examples of how they have funded campaigns that might be in tension with their values as both individuals and organisations. The group questioned how much genuine freedom young people had to exercise their values in any case since they are continually operating within an adult-mediated framework. The group discussed how far funding campaigns might inherently 'neuter' them, and reflected on the profile of individual funders in relation to the framing of campaigns. There was an acknowledgement that some funders could never fund a campaign, as doing so would immediately cancel its impact.

Feedback and Reflections

To understand how the Match Funders experienced the second set of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub LabStorms, we collected informal feedback after the session on what they were taking away from the session discussion and how effective Zoom was as a platform for hosting them.

Feedback was wholly positive, and the Match Funders who participated appreciated the time spent working through challenges that resonated with everyone in the group. Participants felt a sense of camaraderie and comfort in learning together. It was also felt that returning a second time to a discussion topic with a second presenter led to a much more in-depth and richer discussion.

Zoom worked well, and we are looking forward to facilitating more virtual LabStorms.

What are LabStorms?

LabStorms are collaborative problem-solving sessions designed to help generate and explore actionable responses to challenges with which organisations are wrestling. They are an approach developed by Feedback Labs; a US-based consortium focused on identifying the best ways of using feedback to make programmes and institutions responsive to the needs of their constituents.

How do LabStorms work?

Conducted under Chatham House rules, LabStorms are designed to create space for deep discussions between stakeholders who value collective approaches to problem-solving. Each LabStorm begins with an individual giving a 15-minute presentation covering both their work in general and details of a specific challenge that they're facing, with which they would like support and guidance. The presenter sets out what they have tried so far, and two or three specific questions they would like help with from the attendees. Then, attendees work together to support the presenter in finding responses to their challenge via a group discussion. This can range from offering specific advice or suggestions to asking open questions to help the presenter reframe their questions and find new insight. While the discussion remains confidential, the learning from each session is written up and distributed to benefit the wider community.

How can I take part in future LabStorms?

The Centre for Youth Impact will facilitate a round of LabStorms as part of the #iwill Learning Hub approximately every six months from 2019 until 2021. If you would like to be involved in a future LabStorm, or if you wish to discuss any aspects of this report, please contact Bethia McNeil (bethia.mcneil@youthimpact.org.uk).

Appendix A: About the #iwill Fund Learning Hub

This is a report by the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. The #iwill Fund Learning Hub was commissioned to support and build on the #iwill Fund activities. It has two strategic objectives:

1. To inform the strategic and investment direction of the #iwill Fund. This will ensure that the Leadership Board and #iwill Fund delivery partners can target funds into the right areas, ages and approaches, where it is needed.

2. To strengthen and connect the youth social action sector by enabling and facilitating the sharing of learning, data and insights across delivery partners, including what does and doesn't work, and sharing key insights and learning more broadly within the wider youth social action sector.

The Learning Hub has developed three workstreams that will support its objectives. This will allow us to support funders in making decisions about how to support youth social action now and capitalise on the evidence generated through the #iwill Fund to create a legacy of evidence to support funding and delivery in the future.

1. Systems

This work will develop our understanding of barriers and enablers in building and strengthening sustained youth social action. It will support the identification of emerging practice and the testing of potential new solutions and help guide investment decisions.

(a) Systems Mapping

Co-production workshops, supported by research briefings, will build the understanding of barriers to, and opportunities for, embedding and sustaining youth social action in three priority themes: education, place, and the relationship between youth social action and 'all ages' social action. Workshops are attended by Match Funders, invited grantees, and other invited stakeholders (Sept 2018 – Mar 2019).

(b) Funder Collaboration

A series of 'LabStorms' will be offered to Match Funders to enable a collaborative approach to identify common challenges and finding and sharing actionable responses to them. The LabStorms will support Match Funders to fund as effectively as possible (April 2019 – April 2021).

2. Sector Evidence Plan

This work will build on our understanding of what youth social action achieves, reach under-served groups, and sustain youth social action (Aug 2018 – ongoing). It will draw on these four information sources to develop and evolve answers to key questions:

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- Intra-fund evaluation aggregation

- Extra-fund research aggregation

- Match Funder returns to the #iwill Fund and data from Information Management System

- Results from other workstreams.

3) Quality Practice

This work will deepen our understanding of what it takes to deliver quality youth social action. It will illustrate how delivery organisations define 'double benefit' and how they attempt to achieve and measure it. This work will support delivery organisations to improve their offer (September 2018 – ongoing). 'The Impact Accelerator', delivered by the Centre for Youth Impact, is an intensive process of impact support, challenge and development – up to 30 organisations will take part in this. Learning from these organisations will be shared more widely to spread knowledge about improvement across the youth social action landscape.