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youth social action



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport



#iwill Fund Learning Hub Evidence Workstream

Summary Report

Dartington Service Design Lab

August 2021

Summary

This report is itself a summary of three years of work by the #iwill Fund Learning Hub - but on this page we have pulled out some key findings and reflections. They are about youth social action, its delivery and outcomes, and the work of the #iwill Fund to date.

- 'Youth social action' covers a broad range of both activities undertaken by young people, and causes these activities are aimed at. However, we believe, and are building some evidence to support, that these activities can be united by similar *mechanisms of change*, particularly when it comes to the specific experiences that can promote outcomes for young people (p.7).
- Socio-emotional outcomes are the most commonly (but not the only) evaluated outcomes for young people within the #iwill Fund, reflecting the fact that a large number of Match Funders wish to support these outcomes via youth social action (p.9).
- The potential community outcomes of youth social action are as diverse as the outcomes for young people. They have tended to receive less focus in delivery and evaluation, but we are learning how both types of 'benefit' must receive attention to avoid undermining either (p.17).
- The #iwill Fund has enabled more opportunities in economically disadvantaged areas than advantaged ones. Many Match Funders are reporting strategies to ensure the young people attending opportunities are not 'the usual suspects' – including where and how they work with partners, and how they make opportunities appealing to young people (p.23).
- The #iwill Fund has greatly increased the number and types of organisations enabling youth social action, including some without a track record of work with young people, or even of social action. This diversity means there will be different ways in which these projects are sustained, and different support needed to do so (p.26).
- Organisations enabling youth social action are typically strong at seeking, and acting on feedback from young people, but many lack a clear theory of change for their provision, and many do not yet collect data that can support improvement (p. 28).
- COVID-19 has created a large amount of digital or blended youth social action provision which previously did not exist – this offers opportunities for expanded reach and different activities, but there are also risks in terms of inadvertent exclusion of, and possible less secure engagement by, some young people (pp. 7, 25).

Introduction

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub was commissioned to help the #iwill Fund – which consists of The National Lottery Community Fund, DCMS, and more than 25 independent Match Funders – to capture and reflect on learning emerging from the #iwill Fund’s unprecedented investment in youth social action. The Learning Hub does this in two ways: first, 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 opportunities.

This report provides a high-level overview of, or introduction to, our learning over the last three years. It is for stakeholders within and beyond the #iwill Fund, including funders, delivery organisations, and researchers. It is particularly relevant for people looking to understand how to design, deliver, and fund quality youth social action opportunities.

The Learning Hub has three workstreams:

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

The table below shows the information sources we are able to draw on in our work as the #iwill Fund Learning Hub.

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

We have also drawn on external evidence about youth social action, particularly evaluations of previous youth social action provision, so that learning from the #iwill Fund can be placed in context. The Learning Hub has produced many reports since 2018, all of which can be found [here](#). Each report has its own objectives, but over time they also contribute to answering our Sector Evidence Plan questions. This report is structured around these questions, with more detail linked throughout.

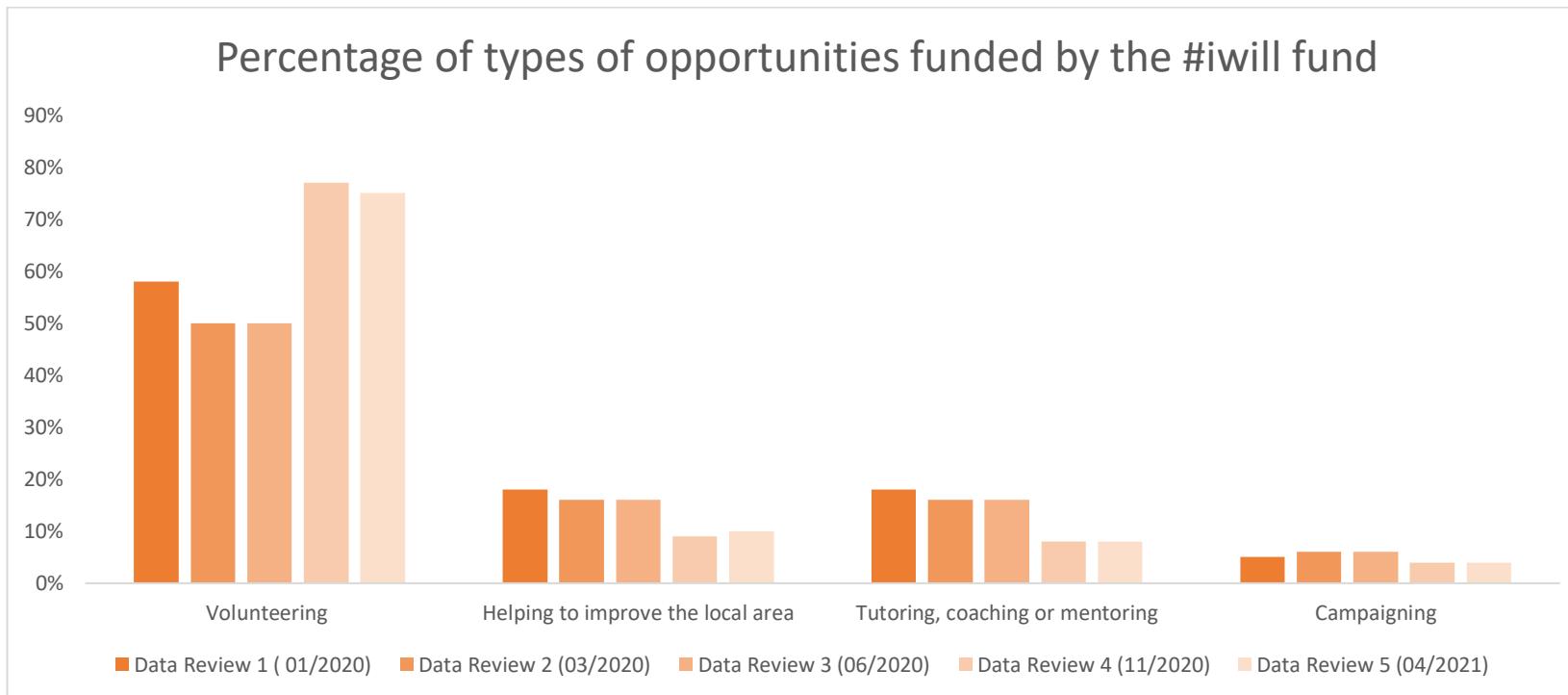
| Question | Sub-Questions |
|---|--|
| What is Youth Social Action? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What types of youth social action have been funded, including via digital delivery? - What are common Theories of Change? |
| What does Youth Social Action do? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 <i>all</i> 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? |

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub is a consortium of Dartington Service Design Lab, Renaisi, and the Centre for Youth Impact. Work by all three organisations has fed into this report. We have also used direct quotes from Match Funders or grantees in places.

1. What is youth social action?

'Youth Social Action' covers [a broad range of activities](#), and is not yet a very well-known term. In answering this question we share learning about the different types of activity the #iwill Fund has supported, about the mechanisms of change which are hypothesised to make youth social action distinctive and effective, and about some of the more recent innovations that took place due to COVID-19.

(i) What has the #iwill Fund funded?



- This table draws together IMS data at five different time points between December 2019 and May 2021.

- It shows that more volunteering opportunities have consistently been enabled than other types via the #iwill Fund.
- The IMS also tells us that the most commonly recorded 'causes' of funded opportunities have been people and communities, and education and learning.
- Several Match Funders have funded 'campaigning' activities – however it represents the smallest category of opportunities. This may suggest that campaigning youth social action is currently more resource-intensive and needs to be enabled at a smaller scale than other types of youth social action. It may also reflect that, in some youth social action opportunities, campaigning is a secondary activity, perhaps following, and inspired by, volunteering.
- We found anecdotal evidence that campaigning youth social action increased during the COVID-19 restrictions, due to it being easier to support online, while volunteering and other 'service-based' activities were more likely to halt altogether for a time.

(ii) What happens within youth social action?

- Understanding the types of opportunities that have been enabled by the #iwill Fund is important but to understand what youth social action 'is' we need to understand the distinctive experiences and elements which give it the best chance of making a difference for young people, and communities. Organisations' 'theories of change' are critical tools in defining and sharing these *mechanisms of change*.
- We have learned that a large number of organisations delivering youth social action have no theory of change - in response the Learning Hub has created guidance to support wider creation of these. However, we have been able to identify some common theories within #iwill-funded youth social action programmes, all relating to impact for young people, summarised below. Any of these 'theories of change' could be put into practice by any type of youth social action.
 1. Youth social action provides young people with a chance to learn by doing. Young people act in a space where it is safe to fail, but are nevertheless faced with real challenge against which they can practice and develop their skills.
 2. Youth social action opportunities enable young people to determine and carry out action to address an issue that matters to them. This can create the feeling of making a difference and give a sense of purpose and meaning to young people's lives, which may have a positive effect on their wellbeing, self-concept and self-efficacy.

3. Youth social action opportunities enable young people to engage with and support different people and communities. These could be their local community, or communities of culture, interest or experience. This can create a sense of belonging for the young person. It may also expose the young person to communities they would not otherwise meet which can increase their openness to and comfort with difference.

(iii) How has COVID-19 changed youth social action?

- Before the pandemic, youth social action was an overwhelmingly off-line activity. During 2020, almost all Match Funders reported that at least some of their funded activity had moved at least partially online.
- Both Match Funders and delivery organisations expect a model of youth social action which blends face-to-face and online delivery to remain even as restrictions are fully lifted.
- While there are pitfalls to digital delivery which we share elsewhere in this report, online youth social action allows young people to take part in activities that may be happening far from where they are, and also appears to reduce the barriers to greater ‘youth voice’ within organisations and institutions, by removing some of the logistical barriers to involving young people in decision-making, and other forms of participation.

2. What does youth social action do? Young people's outcomes

In this section we share learning on the outcomes of youth social action in terms of benefits for young people.

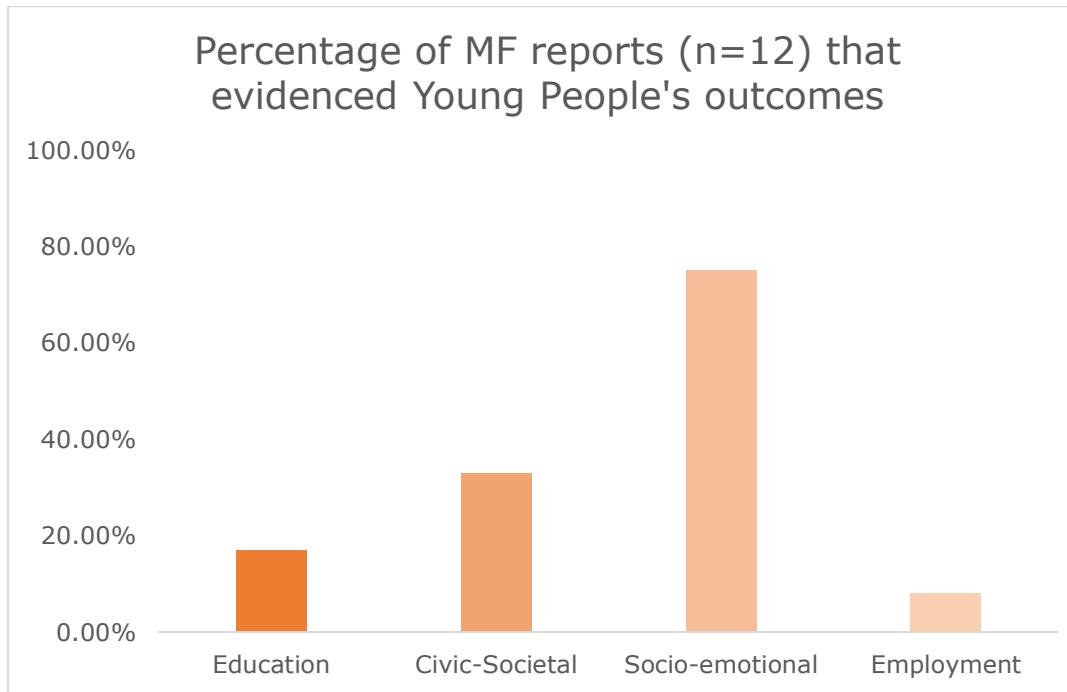
(i) What are the benefits for young people of youth social action?

- An [early review of external evidence](#) revealed four categories of outcomes for young people that have been shown, or theorised, to be linked to youth social action:

| Outcome Category | Specific Outcomes include |
|--------------------------|---|
| Socio-Emotional Outcomes | Wellbeing, self-concept, interpersonal skills, pro-social attitudes |
| Civic-Societal Outcomes | Change agency, civic skills, social cohesion, habit of service |
| Educational Outcomes | Attitude to education, attendance, progress |
| Employment Outcomes | Skills development, career choices, work readiness |

- There is reasonably strong evidence to link youth social action to civic-societal and employment outcomes, as well as socio-emotional outcomes such as confidence, and pro-social behaviour. There is less strong evidence to link it to educational outcomes.
- Other reviews of youth social action point out that young people likely to take part in social action are also more likely to already be engaged in civic activity, and to have positive socio-emotional outcomes. Further, the diversity of youth social action and the lack of clear theories of change makes it difficult to generalise from positive evaluations of one youth social action opportunity to youth social action in general.

(ii) Outcomes for young people within the #iwill Fund



- As the table above shows, socio-emotional outcomes are the most commonly measured and reported on by Match Funders within the #iwill Fund (note that not all Match Funders are supporting outcome evaluations), reflecting the fact that many Match Funders are primarily drawn to youth social action to support young people's outcomes, and particularly their wellbeing and socio-emotional development.
- The relative lack of focus on employment outcomes in evaluation may reflect the fact that many Match Funders are supporting opportunities for under-14s, for whom employment outcomes are a long way off.
- The majority of Match Funder reports with outcomes data have reported on young people's outcomes rather than community benefit, again reflecting a primary attraction to youth social action as a means to support outcomes for young people

- The table below captures some of the reporting on young people's outcomes to date. It shows some positive results across the three measured outcome categories, as well as cross-over between the three, particularly socio-emotional and civic-societal outcomes.

| Outcomes for Young People | Evidence | Further questions to consider/points to note |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Education | <p>Team London Young Ambassadors shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 75% (n=15) of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their students performed better academically after taking part in TLYA. ○ 91% (n=20) of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their students had improved behaviour and/or improved attendance at school after participating in TLYA. | <p>Team London Young Ambassadors (TLYA) received 25 survey responses from teachers who had actively engaged with TLYA.</p> <p>Most respondents taught in secondary school (n=17).</p> <p>To note, survey data only provides a snapshot and not pre-post measures so attributing differences to participation may be biased.</p> |
| | <p>The evaluation of HAYN Volunteering Academy shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Positive change in attitude to education, motivation and specific skills ○ 250 young people received accredited awards | <p>This evaluation uses a self-reported pre-post survey method, without validated measures</p> |
| Civic-societal | <p>Spirit of 2012's evaluation (carried out by UK Youth) of the EmpowHER programme show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 63% of young women and girls' motivation for doing social action was to help and educate others. ○ 46% of participants reported they would take part in social action in the next 12 months. | <p>This evaluation used 200 exit surveys.</p> <p>It was agreed not to measure wellbeing outcomes due to them likely being skewed by the experience of COVID-19.</p> <p>Qualitative data that was collected included focus groups with young women and girls who had completed or were near to completing the programme. While six were planned, three were conducted due to an unwillingness of participants to do focus groups online, and challenges keeping</p> |

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| | | <p>young women and girls engaged after the completion of the programme.</p> <p>In depth interviews were conducted with youth workers.</p> |
| HAYN Volunteering Academy Evaluation shows: 67% of young people said their willingness to do more volunteering increased a lot after participation and 17% of young people said their willingness increased a little. | | Participants took part in a final evaluation workshop as part of the HAYN Volunteering Academy Community Ambassadors Programme. Evaluation statements were developed through consultation with young people |
| Early insights from a peer-research evaluation of Young Manchester 's programmes show young people reporting benefits in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ skills and knowledge; ○ confidence; ○ capacity building, including confidence, leadership, communication, and teamwork; ○ how good it feels to help people and make a difference, and ○ awareness and empowerment. | | Case study method carried out with young peer-researchers. It should be noted that this is a small- scale study. |
| Of the young people on Virgin Money Foundation 's Youth Advisory Panel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 100% self-reported improved decision-making skills ○ 85% improved knowledge of social action ○ 71% improved confidence ○ 57% improved communication skills ○ 57% improved planning skills ○ 57% improved team working skills | | Questions only asked following programme so no pre-post comparison. |

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| Socio-emotional | <p>Team London Young Ambassadors programme undertook pre-and post-survey measures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 71% of young volunteers showed improvements in their wellbeing on the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Survey (SWEMWBS). ○ Statements in the SWEMBS that showed the biggest overall improvement among young people were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "I've been feeling relaxed" ■ "I've been feeling close to other people" ■ "I've been thinking clearly" ○ 26% of young people reported improved levels of trust, while 43% of young people's results stayed the same. <p>52% of young people reported improvements in their thoughts and feelings, whilst 21% of young people's results stayed the same.</p> <p>Sport England's pre-and post ONS Wellbeing measures showed young people having positive changes in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 49% Anxiousness yesterday ○ 46% Satisfaction with life ○ 44% Happiness yesterday ○ 43% Things are worthwhile ○ 46% Achieve most goals ○ 40% Confident to have a go ○ 44% Satisfied with me | <p>This evaluation undertook pre-and post-survey measures.</p> <p>Team London saw lower rates of improvement in the Levels of Trust and Thoughts and Feelings' questions. They believe this is because there isn't enough nuance in the measuring scales of these questions. This is emphasised by the fact that the responses to the SWEMWBS, which uses a sliding scale, were more easily quantifiable.</p> <p>This evaluation used a self-report pre-post survey method using ONS Wellbeing measures.</p> <p>There is more information on Sport England's evaluation methodology in their <u>Volunteering Evaluation Toolkit</u>.</p> |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 44% Ability to bounce back ○ 45% Motivate/influence others ○ 48% Possess valuable skills | |
| | <p>Spirit of 2012's evaluation (carried out by UK Youth) of the EmpowHER programme show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 91% of young women and girls agreed that EmpowHER had made them feel less lonely during the pandemic. ○ Young women and girls self-reported benefits from the Social learning sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 85% of young women and girls said that it helped them to understand that they can ask for advice. ● 83% understood more about mental health issues. ● 78% said it helped them feel like they can talk to others when they're sad or upset. ● 76% reported that it made them feel comfortable sharing how they felt with other people. ○ Young women and girls' limiting perceptions of self and others were challenged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 93% thought the programme had helped them feel that young women and girls can do anything that they set their minds to ● 83% said it had helped them see that they could do things as well as other people | <p>This evaluation used 200 exit surveys. It was agreed not to measure wellbeing outcomes due to them likely being skewed by the experience of COVID-19.</p> <p>Qualitative data that was collected included focus groups with young women and girls who had completed or were near to completing the programme. While six were planned, three were conducted due to an unwillingness of participants to do focus groups online., and challenges keeping young women and girls engaged after the completion of the programme.</p> <p>In depth interviews were conducted with youth workers.</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 83% of the young women and girls reported that the programme helped them learn new things ◦ 82% young women and girls reported improved confidence. ◦ 75% young women and girls reported improved leadership skills. | |
| | <p>Sport England shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Over 50% of young people reported their programme had positive impacts on aspects of mental wellbeing, individual development and social and community development outcomes. ◦ Pre-post measures find small positive changes in these outcomes on average | <p>This evaluation uses a self-report pre-post survey method. There is more information on Sport England's evaluation methodology in their Volunteering Evaluation Toolkit.</p> |
| | <p>Team London shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 63% young people reported improved wellbeing ◦ 34% increased levels of trust ◦ 55% improved thoughts and feelings | <p>This evaluation uses a self- report pre-post survey method with some validated measures. Of seven statements young people reported the greatest increase in against the statement 'I've been feeling useful'.</p> |
| | <p>HAYN Volunteering Academy Evaluation shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Young people feel they learnt what their strengths are: 63% felt they know what they are good at a little and 38% felt they know what they are good at a lot ◦ Young people felt they learnt teamwork skills 38% said they felt their knowledge increased a little and 54% said their knowledge increased a lot ◦ Young people's felt their confidence increased 25% said a little and 44% said a lot | <p>Participants took part in a final evaluation workshop as part of the HAYN Volunteering Academy Community Ambassador Programme. Evaluation statements were developed through consultation with young people, reflecting on research completed by UK Youth and Centre for Youth Impact as well as the HACT wellbeing tool</p> |

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| | <p>Spirit of 2012's evaluation (carried out by UK Youth) of the EmpowHER programme shows:</p> <p>Young women & girls report improved mental wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ satisfied indicator: 0.35 effect size ○ worthwhile: 0.38 ○ happiness: 0.29 ○ anxiety: not significant <p>Young women and girls' limiting perceptions of self and others were challenged</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ have a limiting perception of gender: 20% before, 11% after ○ have a limiting perception of own ability: 59% before, 33% after <p>50% of young women and girls report increased confidence and leadership skills</p> | <p>This evaluation uses a self-report pre-post survey method (n=143), with some validated measures and qualitative feedback.</p> <p>The indicator of mental wellbeing that was correlated specifically with youth social action was feeling that life is worthwhile. The programme specifically targets young people identified as having low self-esteem and wellbeing.</p> <p>Of seven statements young people reported the greatest increase in against the statement 'I've been feeling useful'.</p> |
| | <p>Early insights from a peer-research evaluation of Young Manchester's programmes show young people reporting benefits in terms of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ social connections; ○ confidence; ○ health and wellbeing; ○ how good it feels to help people and make a difference. | <p>These outcomes are based on qualitative interviews with young participants. It should be noted that this is a small-scale study.</p> |
| | <p>A survey of participants in the Team London Young Ambassadors programme compared their scores on the Warwick Edinburgh short scale for wellbeing with the national average and found</p> | <p>Survey data collects a snapshot and not pre-post measures so attributing differences to</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Overall scores in line with national average. | <p>participation in the programme requires strong assumptions.</p> <p>Data is collected only for young people who chose to take part in the survey.</p> |
| Employment | <p>HAYN Volunteering Academy Evaluation shows: 89% of young people who participated in the Young Leaders strand felt they developed 7 out of 8 skills on the Peabody Employability and Life Success Evaluation Framework</p> <p>Likewise, 50% reported having a better idea of their future plans as a result of participating in the Community Ambassadors Programme. 29% seemed confused about their future. They felt this programme has opened the door to new opportunities and were quite young to figure out their future.</p> | <p>Participants took part in a final evaluation workshop as part of the HAYN Volunteering Academy Community Ambassadors Programme. Evaluation statements were developed through consultation with young people.</p> |

3. What does youth social action do – community outcomes?

In this section we share our learning on the outcome of youth social action in terms of benefit for communities.

(i) What are the benefits for communities of youth social action?

This is a less-explored area of social action compared to outcomes for young people. Through [our review of the external evidence](#) and in conversation with #iwill Fund stakeholders we have identified four distinct types of community benefit relevant to the creation of theories of change, delivery, and evaluation – one is direct, and the other three are indirect.

| Outcome Category | Specific Outcomes include |
|--------------------------|---|
| Direct Community Benefit | These include outcomes to the ‘beneficiaries’ of volunteering, mentoring, local environmental work or campaigning |
| Societal Benefit | Benefit to society as a result of young people taking part in social action – e.g. more civic engagement in the population |
| Reflexive Benefit | Benefit to young people as a result of changes brought about by youth social action - e.g., changes brought about by campaigning, or by improved public spaces |
| Organisational Benefit | Benefit to social purpose organisations which enable youth social action - e.g., youth social action helps them create more impact on their goals and strengthens the organisation. |

(i) Outcomes for communities within the #iwill Fund

- [Community benefit is not being widely evaluated by Match Funders](#) within the #iwill Fund, reflecting both a greater interest in young people's outcomes, and greater technical challenges in evaluating these outcomes. The Learning Hub has put greater focus on this area and we are seeing new Match Funders build community outcomes more into both their delivery and evaluation plans.
- Three Match Funders have shared evaluation reports evidencing community benefit to date, and the outcomes reported on are in the categories of direct community benefit, societal benefit and organisational benefit. There have been no reports on the reflexive benefit of youth social action. The table below shares some of their findings.
- We also have evidence about the [organisational benefit](#) to organisations enabling youth social action for the first time.

'There's no doubt that setting up the Young People's Forest has been time-consuming and involved a lot of decisions. But as well as all the other benefits it has helped make us more open and responsive to opportunities.' – The Woodland Trust

| Outcomes for Community | Evidence | Further questions to consider/points to note |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Community Benefit | <p>Spirit of 2012's evaluation (carried out by UK Youth) of the EmpowHER programme shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 78% said that the projects they did helped their community. ○ 82% reported that they believed they could make a difference to where they lived. | <p>This evaluation used 200 exit surveys.</p> <p>It was agreed not to measure wellbeing outcomes due to them likely being skewed by the experience of COVID-19.</p> <p>Qualitative data that was collected included focus groups with young women and girls who had completed or were near to completing the programme. While six were planned, three were conducted due to an unwillingness of participants to do focus</p> |

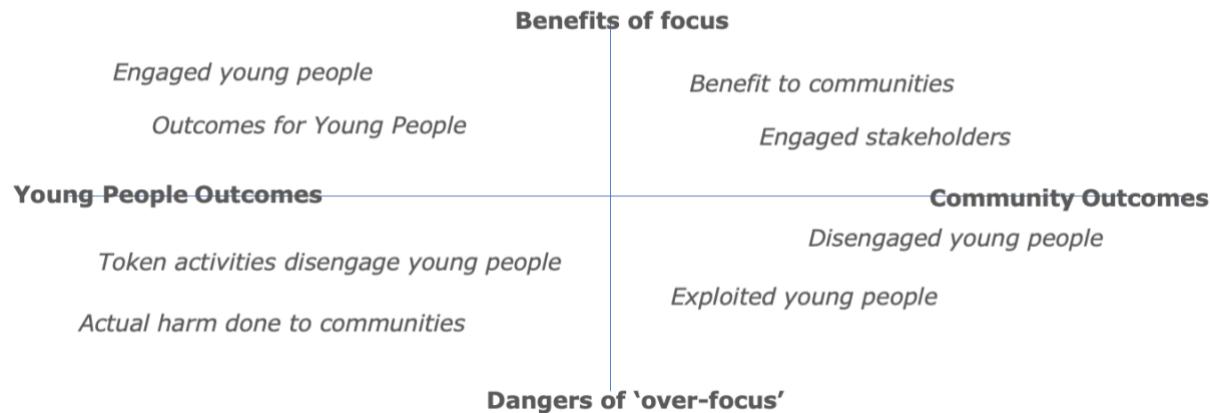
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| | | <p>groups online., and challenges keeping young women and girls engaged after the completion of the programme.</p> <p>In depth interviews were conducted with youth workers.</p> |
| | <p>The evaluation of the HAYN Young Leaders Project shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 74% of young people felt their social action had a lot (42%) or a fair amount (32%) of impact. | <p>Participants took part in a final evaluation workshop as part of the HAYN Volunteering Academy Community Ambassador Programme. Evaluation statements were developed through consultation with young people, reflecting on research completed by UK Youth and Centre for Youth Impact as well as the HACT wellbeing tool .</p> |
| Societal Benefit | <p>Spirit of 2012's evaluation (carried out by UK Youth) of the EmpowHER programme shows reported improvements in social cohesion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 70% of young women and girls reported that they felt that they could trust the people who live near them. ○ 35% of young women and girls would take part in social action with the British Red Cross. | <p>This evaluation used 200 exit surveys.</p> <p>It was agreed not to measure wellbeing outcomes due to them likely being skewed by the experience of COVID-19.</p> <p>Qualitative data that was collected included focus groups with young women and girls who had completed or were near to completing the programme. While six were planned, three were conducted due to an unwillingness of participants to do focus groups online., and challenges keeping young women and girls engaged after the completion of the programme.</p> <p>In depth interviews were conducted with youth workers.</p> |
| | <p>Spirit of 2012's evaluation (carried out by UK Youth) of the EmpowHER programme show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ improved feelings of social cohesion for participants (41% believe more strongly that they often meet people who are different to them; 38% believe more strongly that they want to help people who live near them). ○ qualitative data show some young women and girls meet different people in the community than usual during the programme, but not all. | <p>This evaluation uses a self- report pre-post survey method (n=143), with some validated measures and qualitative feedback.</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ an increase in young women and girls meeting different people is correlated with them perceiving that people in their community have benefitted from their social action project | |
| | <p>Sport England's pre-and post ONS Wellbeing measures showed young people having positive changes in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 47% Neighbourhood belonging ○ 47% People can be trusted | <p>This evaluation used a self-report pre-post survey method using ONS Wellbeing measures.</p> <p>There is more information on Sport England's evaluation methodology in their Volunteering Evaluation Toolkit.</p> |
| Organisational Benefit | <p>HAYN has funded over 24 grass roots organisations and 9 housing associations in new communities.</p> <p>Most funded organisations have achieved the First Steps UK Youth Quality Mark. This has been an opportunity to review their services, and be supported to improve their provision.</p> | |

(ii) Balancing young people and community outcomes

- Our early work understanding funder motivations shows that many Match Funders were drawn to fund youth social action out of a deep interest in young people's outcomes (especially wellbeing) and their participation in society. They were less drawn to, or invested in, the precise community benefit of the youth social action funded and less attention was given to community outcomes in theories of change and in monitoring and evaluation.
- Over time, we have learned that whichever benefit of youth social action a match funder or delivery organisation is more drawn to, they must try to focus as equally as possible on both – or they risk undermining both. This diagram below shows that focussing on either outcome brings

benefits (the words in italics above the horizontal line), but that 'over focus' on one at the expense of the other brings risk (the words in italics below the horizontal line). More can be read in our guidance on Theory of Change [here](#).



Engaging young people through youth social action has helped us understand and tackle these barriers a bit more and to engage young people in shaping the type of sport and physical activity that they want to take part in – Sport England

Drawing on a review of Match Funder evaluation and learning plans, over the next 18 months we anticipate analysis of, and reporting on, more quantitative and qualitative data on. This will be chiefly socio-emotional and civic-societal outcomes for young people. Employment and education outcomes will also feature but less commonly.

Match Funders are increasingly including consideration of community benefit in their evaluations so we also anticipate being able to share more on, this, almost always in qualitative or 'case study' terms. Most commonly Match Funders expect to explore community benefit through interviewing and surveying young people or other stakeholders. Some Match Funders also hope to report on the quality (as perceived by young people) of funded provision, or the factors behind successful provision of youth social action.

4. How can we support youth social action for all?

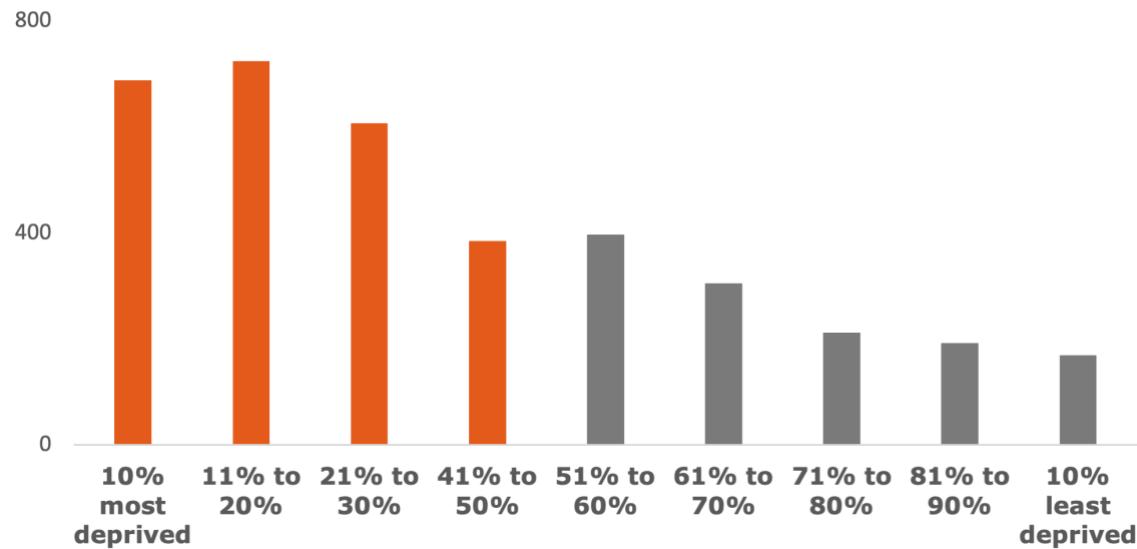
In this section we share learning on how youth social action can engage all young people, particularly specific groups targeted by the #iwill Fund. We also look at how youth social action can expand and be sustained.

Reach and engagement

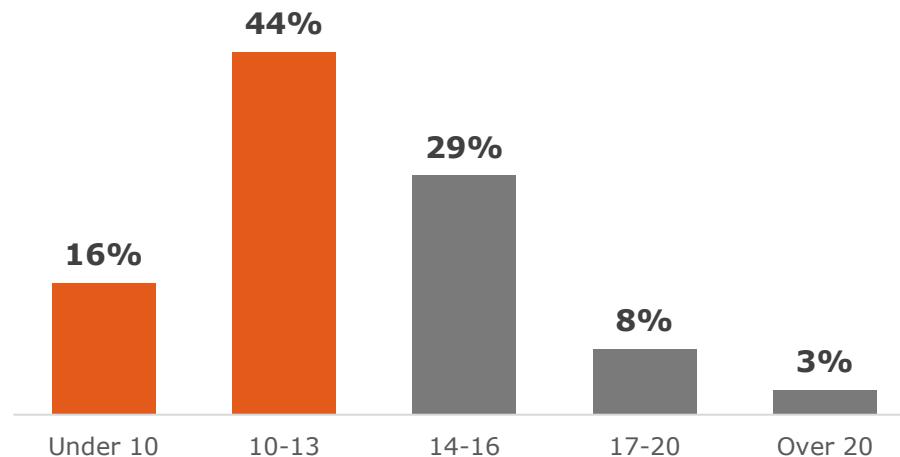
(i) The reach of the #iwill Fund to young people

Two of the #iwill Fund's investment aims are to reach young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and to reach younger children, including the under-14s. The two tables below draw on the most recent IMS data from April 2021 to show the #iwill Fund's track record on meeting these aims:

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



The #iwill Fund has supported **more opportunities for under-14s** than over-14s



The #iwill Fund has consistently funded more opportunities for youth social action in deprived postcodes than affluent ones (using the Index of Multiple Deprivation to define these), and the largest numbers of young people reached by the #iwill Fund have been under-14.

(ii) Strategies for reaching young people

- [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 afford to take part. They are also more likely to spend time on responsibilities, such as caring for family members, that are not usually counted as social action.
- Match Funders have supported various strategies to address these factors, with some evidence supplied that they are having success. These include targeting delivery partners more likely to work with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including FE Colleges and schools

with high Pupil Premium numbers, and being very clear to communicate to teachers and other referral partners that they want to enrol young people facing challenges.

- Other successful strategies include engaging older peers, rather than teachers or other adults, to introduce youth social action to new cohorts, and ideally involving those peers in delivery as well. Most recently, some funded programmes have begun to investigate and recognise 'invisible' youth social action, such as caring responsibilities.

All stakeholders emphasised that youth social action in schools needs to be delivered to young people who are least likely to be exposed otherwise and agreed that it is really important to 'go in with really strong demographic criteria', guiding teachers to select the young people that the programme aims to reach.- Team London

(iii) The effect of digital on reach and engagement

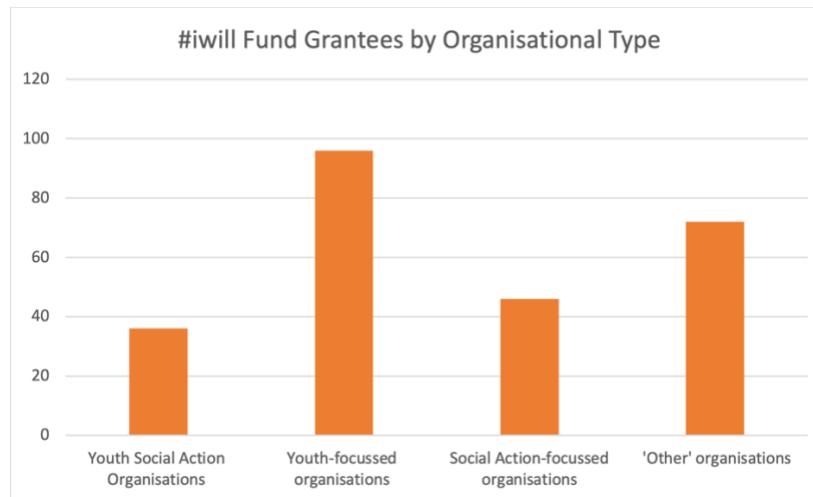
- There has been a notable increase in digital delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, with Match Funders sharing initial learning about its impact on engagement and reach. Digital events can be a way to reach very large numbers of young people with information about social action but this is not the same as building engagement in a specific opportunity, and some face-to-face delivery was felt to be needed for long-term engagement in social action.
- Match Funders felt that digital delivery reaches young people in rural or remote locations, and can connect young people with others like them. It also offers a new route to participation for some young people with disabilities, as well as those who may feel at least initially uncomfortable face-to-face.
- Digital delivery relies on young people having access to devices, data or Wi-Fi and a suitable environment to participate from. As a result, Match Funders felt that participation was 'less diverse' when entirely digital.

Moving online allowed some delivery partners to reach and engage young people they had not initially worked with, particularly in rural areas, and contributed to the YW&G feeling connected to the wider EmpowHER network and "part of something bigger"- Spirit of 2012

Organisational sustainability

(i) Organisations delivering under the #iwill Fund

- We are interested to learn about the types of organisations which have been funded to enable youth social action. Data collection in 2019 from 12 Match Funders found [four types of organisations funded by the #iwill Fund,](#) and that the majority of organisations funded were new, or relatively new, to enabling youth social action specifically.
- The largest group of funded organisations were those traditionally focussed on young people's development and wellbeing, and who saw an alignment between this and youth social action's intended impact on young people. A small group of organisations had previously enabled social action by adults to make impact on a particular social issue, and a larger group of organisations had no track record in working with young people or in social action generally, but who have developed a social impact offer aligned with their charitable mission.



- It is clear that the #iwill Fund has taken youth social action well beyond the existing base of organisations already focussed on it, building new organisational capacity to deliver and increased understanding of youth social action itself amongst organisations and their networks.
- We have also 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 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 in engaging and working with young people, and supporting them to make an impact.
- Similarly when organisations consider whether and how to sustain their youth social action after the #iwill Fund, they will need to think through whether youth social action is helping them achieve their (diverse) missions. We are carrying out further work to understand whether this is the case, and which organisations think their work will be sustainable.

5. How can we enable quality youth social action?

In this section we share learning on the strengths and weaknesses of organisations enabling youth social action, as well as on some of the ways in which organisations are realising the six quality principles of youth social action.

(i) Quality of design, delivery and monitoring within youth social action provision

- [The Impact Accelerator programme](#) supports organisations to assess the quality of their provision's design, delivery and monitoring, and then to address weaknesses and build capacity for ongoing improvement. They have supported 30 organisations funded by the #iwill Fund.
- A common strength among organisations in designing participatory approaches that elicit young people's views on the design and delivery of activities and in acting on feedback to improve activities in the future.
- Shared weaknesses include defining mechanisms of change: the ways in which young people and communities are expected to benefit, and the things the organisation has to do to enable this. Relatedly, there is a lack of 'codification': many organisations cannot communicate internally the details of their provision and particularly what *must* happen to ensure quality and, hopefully impact.
- Organisations taking part in the Impact Accelerator have benefitted from time and expert support to focus on developing their theories of change, particularly defining their target population, and building their capacity to collect, analyse, and act on data. It is recommended that funders support grantees to do this improvement work, particularly for organisations enabling youth social action for the first time.

(ii) Enabling the six quality principles

The #iwill campaign defined six principles of 'high-quality' youth social action. While they are hard to evaluate and indeed do not feature in Match Funder evaluations, we seek to capture and share ways in which they can be operationalised by delivery organisations:

| Principle | Examples |
|---------------------|--|
| Be youth-led | How youth-led a particular opportunity is depends on the age and experience of participants as well as the nature of the activity but most commonly 'youth leadership' looks like deciding |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| | the cause or shape of the activities, less frequently about assessing where funding should go, or being involved in evaluation |
| Be challenging | This can be around enabling stretching activities (which is itself sometimes a <i>mechanism of change</i>) but may also involve providing safe challenge to young people on their ideas and plans, particularly for how they will bring about community benefit. |
| Have social impact | Youth social action is still developing proportionate but meaningful ways of evidencing community impact, but we know this is a prime motivator for young people's participation. |
| Allow progression | 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 | Over half of funded activity is delivered through schools, and there is evidence that this is a particularly effective route to engaging young people, particularly those less likely to participate. |
| Enable reflection | Digital or part-digital models have enabled more reflection by making it easier to schedule small group or 1:1 conversations. |

6. Next Steps

All the #iwill Fund Learning Hub reports to date can be found at the Centre for Youth Impact's website [here](#). The Learning Hub will continue to report until Spring 2023 with an increasing focus on providing concluding answers to our Sector Evidence Plan questions. As the #iwill Fund moves towards its close, we will increase our focus on sustainability, as well as on sharing outcomes for Match Funders' evaluations – with the caveat that the outcomes evaluated are diverse, as are the evaluations methods used, and we will not be able to generate generalisable conclusions about the impact of 'youth social action'.

One legacy of the #iwill Fund will be an increase in the number of organisations experienced in enabling youth social action, although many will still be in the early stages of doing so. To support this, we will share learning as it emerges about whether, how, and why funders and organisations make the decision to sustain youth social action – including their perceptions of its outcomes and its 'fundability'.

We will also share increasing insight into successful strategies for engagement of young people and for quality delivery including using digital tools, and learning about how funders can support this quality.

Finally we will share conclusions about new directions and priorities for funding, delivery and research in youth social action to provide continued opportunities beyond the #iwill Fund.