



# #iwill Youth Social Action Fund

## FINAL EVALUATION

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ContentsAcknowledgements .....	2
Contents .....	i
Executive Summary.....	i
Key Findings .....	i
1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Background to the evaluation.....	2
2 Engaging underrepresented groups in Youth Social Action .....	3
2.1 Who took part? .....	3
2.2 How were young people recruited?.....	2
2.3 What strategies were used to involve young people in youth social action? .....	2
2.4 Young people’s motivations for participating in youth social action projects .....	5
2.5 Which strategies were the most successful at engaging underrepresented young people in social action?.....	6
2.6 Challenges faced by funded partners .....	14
3 The impact of Youth Social Action on young people .....	22
3.1 The reach of the projects .....	22
3.2 Impact on participating young people .....	23
3.3 Impact on others .....	34
4 Impact of Youth Social Action on organisations .....	37
4.1 Has this model had a lasting impact on the funded partner’s plans to engage these young people in future? If so, how? .....	38
5 Works Cited.....	39
Annex 1: Funded Partners and their projects.....	40
Annex 2: Methodology .....	43
Methodological limitations.....	43

# Executive Summary

The #iwill Youth Social Action Fund provided over 5,800 opportunities for young people to take part in youth social action, through a range of projects delivered by 16 funded organisations (funded partners).

## What is youth social action?

Social action involves young people campaigning, fundraising and volunteering, all of which enable young people to make a positive difference in their communities as well as develop their own skills and knowledge.

The funded partners supported a range of young people from groups commonly underrepresented in youth social action to participate. This included projects that focused on male participants, and individuals from socio-economically deprived backgrounds, in addition to young carers, care experienced young people, disabled young people and young people who had experienced homelessness.

Reflecting on the experiences of project delivery staff and young people, this report explores the following issues:

1. Effective strategies for engaging underrepresented groups in youth social action and the challenges faced by funded partners
2. The impact of the projects on the young people involved
3. The impact of engaging in Youth Social Action for funded partners, organisations and practitioners and the lasting legacy of their #iwill Youth Social Action Fund Project.

## Key Findings

### Effective strategies for engaging underrepresented groups in youth social action and common challenges faced by funded partners

1. Effective strategies for engaging young participants from underrepresented groups included creating spaces to bring young people together with their peers, involving young people in recruitment and engagement, and involving a diverse and locally knowledgeable staff team.
2. The term youth social action was not always well understood by young people or practitioners, which may suggest that staff seeking to involve young people in social action need to think carefully about how to meaningfully articulate what this means in terms that will be relatable to the young people they are seeking to involve.
3. Commonly funded partners experienced challenges sustaining engagement owing to the multiple and complex issues faced by participants, due to the complex circumstances of their lives. As such staff need to take steps to minimise barriers and ensure they understand the specific experiences of the target groups they are working with.
4. Male participants were commonly underrepresented in projects, replicating wider trends in youth social action but activity-driven projects were generally more successful when it came to involving male participants.

## The impact of youth social action on young people's development

5. Involvement in youth social action has helped young people to develop social outcomes, including belonging and a sense of community, improved confidence, agency and self-worth.
6. There was strong evidence that youth social action had contributed to developing young people's skills, including foundational skills around communication, practical skills (such as building, creative skills etc), as well as skills more directly related to social action including campaigning and volunteering knowledge.
7. Participation in youth social action is helping young people from underrepresented groups to develop their aspirations and see their potential, and there was evidence that young people had entered employment, education or training that had been supported by their experience through the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund.
8. As a result of involvement in youth social action, 71% of surveyed young people reported that they were confident they can make a change in their community, and more than two in three said they had been influenced to get involved in other activities to make a change in their community.

## The impact of the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund on funded partners

9. Ninety per cent of organisations reported that the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund had helped them to deliver activities that they would not otherwise have been able to deliver.
10. The majority of organisations reported that their engagement with young people had improved as a result of the project they had delivered as part of the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund, and most organisations reported that the support or service they deliver have become more relevant to the needs of the young people they support.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to £54 million joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action. The #iwill Fund brings together a group of organisations who all contribute funding to embed meaningful social action into the lives of young people.

The #iwill Fund supports the aims of the #iwill campaign – to make involvement in social action a part of life for young people, by recognising the benefit for both young people and their communities. By bringing together funders from across different sectors and by making sure that young people have a say in where the funding goes – the #iwill Fund is taking a collaborative approach.

In 2017 Comic Relief partnered with the [#iwill Fund](#) to create the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund - a £2.4million fund that would provide opportunities for young people to participate in social action.

### **What is youth social action?**

Social action involves young people campaigning, fundraising and volunteering, all of which enable young people to make a positive difference in their communities as well as develop their own skills and knowledge.

The #iwill Youth Social Action Fund was co-produced with young people, championing peer to peer engagement and the importance of trust-building. This initiative aimed to fund projects to encourage those from lower socio-economic communities to participate in and lead youth social action, alongside other underrepresented groups. The young people who helped Comic Relief to co-design this initiative expected youth social action to be developed, led, and managed by young people, and were most interested in activities focused on mental health, homelessness, LGBTQ+ communities and young people who are or have been looked after.

The #iwill Youth Social Action Fund (referred to throughout this report as ‘the fund’) aimed to help provide opportunities for young people in areas of high need and deprivation, and where there were minimal services or activities available for young people. Programme outcomes were flexible, and funded partners were supported to work towards a set of individually defined project outcomes.

Since 2017 the fund has supported 16 organisations (otherwise known as funded partners) across the UK to deliver youth social action projects. Details of their projects can be found in [Annex 1](#). Based on the experiences of the funded partners and the young people involved in the projects, this report explores:

1. Effective strategies for engaging underrepresented groups in youth social action and the challenges faced by funded partners
2. The impact of the projects on the young people involved
3. The impact of engaging in Youth Social Action for funded partners, organisations and practitioners and the lasting legacy of their #iwill Youth Social Action Fund Project.

## 1.2 Background to the evaluation

In May 2021 Wavehill were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund on behalf of Comic Relief. The evaluation team undertook the following activities:



### **Desk based review**

This included project reports submitted to Comic Relief, and any additional document supplied by funded partners themselves.



### **Interviews with 14 funded partners**

Plus an additional follow-up in-depth interview with 4 funded partners



### **Online Surveys**

22 young people took part in an online survey exploring their experiences of the project.

23 staff from across the funded partners took part in a survey to share their experiences of effective practice and challenges delivering YSA.



### **In-depth interviews with 7 young people**

7 young people took part in an in-depth interview via phone or video call to share their experiences of Youth Social Action

The methodology of this evaluation is explored in greater detail, alongside the challenges and limitations faced, in [Annex 2](#).

## 2 Engaging underrepresented groups in Youth Social Action

### Key Findings

- The #iwill Youth Social Action Fund created more than 5,800 opportunities for young people to participate in youth social action, across projects led by 16 funded partners.
- Effective strategies for engaging young participants from underrepresented groups included creating spaces to bring young people together with their peers, involving young people in recruitment and engagement, and involving a diverse and locally knowledgeable staff team.
- The term youth social action was not always well understood by young people or practitioners, which may suggest that staff seeking to involve young people in social action need to think carefully about how to meaningfully articulate what this means in terms that will be relatable to the young people they are seeking to involve.
- Commonly funded partners experienced challenges sustaining engagement owing to the multiple and complex issues faced by participants, due to the complex circumstances of their lives. As such staff need to take steps to minimise barriers and ensure they understand the specific experiences of the target groups they are working with.
- Male participants were commonly underrepresented in projects, replicating wider trends in youth social action but activity-driven projects were generally more successful when it came to involving male participants.

This section of the report outlines the range of strategies used by funded partners to engage young people and explores which strategies were successful in which contexts and the challenges faced.

### 2.1 Who took part?

The #iwill Youth Social Action Fund created more than 5,000 opportunities for young people to participate in youth social action projects. The 16 funded projects engaged with a wide variety of groups who are underrepresented in youth social action. This included young people from the following groups:

- Men
- Socio-economically disadvantaged young people
- Young carers
- Care experienced young people
- Disabled young people
- Young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Asylum seekers and refugees.

## 2.2 How were young people recruited?

Many of the projects were set up within existing groups or organisations that young people were already engaging with. Several other projects reached out to existing community groups, youth clubs, schools, and colleges, to work with young people who were already meeting on a regular basis. Whilst this appears to have worked well (as can be seen in Section 2.5) it is important to consider that the aim of the fund was to engage young people new to social action, which may not have been the case for all young people who had pre-existing relationships with the funded partners. However, in most cases, funded partners introduced a youth social action approach to participants they had already engaged with in the past but that had not previously been social action related. This suggests that funded partners have successfully drawn on their existing relationships with young people to encourage them to participate in social action.

Partnerships were an important aspect of the recruitment approach for projects. For example, **Leonard Cheshire Disability** worked with schools to identify opportunities for young people to participate in *Can Do Southampton*. Can Do Southampton was a project set up to support disabled young people, aged 10-20, to participate in community-based volunteering projects. The project team found that this was particularly beneficial for engaging younger participants (younger than 16) in youth social action, which substantiates earlier findings from the 2019 Youth Social Action Survey, which found that schools and colleges are key enablers for engagement in youth social action (Bratsa, Mollidor, & Stevens, 2020). Evidence from the Youth Social Action: Rapid Evidence Assessment produced for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport suggests that schools are a particularly key avenue for engagement when seeking to involve young people from disadvantaged groups in social action (Alma Economics, 2021). When working with schools, **Leonard Cheshire Disability** highlighted the importance of planning sessions far in advance to ensure that collaborations are well established.

## 2.3 What strategies were used to involve young people in youth social action?

Across the 16 projects, a wide range of strategies were used to involve young people. The types of strategy commonly used are outlined below.

### **Campaigning and social action through youth group settings**

Many projects used youth group settings to enable young people to lead their own youth social action projects. For example, *WAVES* was situated within the **YMCA East Surrey** youth group for 13–19-year-olds, which aims to create a space for young people to talk about mental health and wellbeing and engage in activities and campaigns.

Other projects were anchored around pre-existing national campaigns. For instance, one project embedded activities around the Time to Change<sup>1</sup> campaign to act as a springboard for youth social action around mental health. Projects used news items or discussions about what had been happening in the young people's lives to help provide a hook for the young people to consider what they wanted to act on and what change they wanted to make.

'It's all about conversation. At sessions (like a youth club) we bring relevant news and current events to help spark conversation about what people are interested in. At the beginning of each session, we talk about how everyone has been and what has been affecting them, including globally. That's where all the ideas for campaigning come from.' (Project delivery staff, scoping interviews)

For other projects, campaigns were focused on national issues, for example, participants in *Reaching Further Into Communities: Supporting LGBT Young People to Engage in Social Action*, led by **Stonewall**, explored topics like LGBT+ inclusion in sixth form. Within this project, the focus was on young people designing and delivering campaigns that would create change across the country. This included a focus on social media campaigning.

In some cases, the project focus was more local, with young people invited to affect change within the host organisation, local services, or their local community. For example, **North Tyneside Carers Centre** supported young carers to present changes they wanted to see to the organisation's Board. This has also influenced wider change within the local authority. Project leads who were working with young people with multiple and complex barriers frequently reported that a more local focus was helpful, as it framed the projects around tangible changes the young people could achieve. This was particularly key as the groups being targeted were often from communities that had experienced disempowerment, which sometimes meant that young people did not feel that anyone would listen to their views on what needed to change.

### Activity-led youth social action

In several projects, activities or interests were used as an anchor for social action projects. For example, **the Build Up Foundation** invited young people to lead and take part in construction projects to make a change in their local community. Through this project, young people created six permanent new spaces that can be enjoyed by the community, including a new play space, seating area, bike repair workshop, a playground café, wildlife homes, and games and seating. Each of the spaces was designed to respond to a local need and was designed and built by the young people involved. More than 200 young people were involved in creating the space as part of *Build Up London*.

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<sup>1</sup> Time to Change was a social movement and campaign that sought to change the way people think and act about mental health problems. It ran between 2007 and 2021. More information is available [here](#).

**BIGKID Foundation's Boys' Football Programme** supported young people to participate in projects based around community cohesion using football as an engagement tool. This included delivering a football programme running two sessions a week. Online sessions were also delivered throughout the Covid-19 pandemic which included creative workshops and topical discussions around mental health and social justice, as well as virtual football-related content (such as football challenges, interviews and fitness sessions).



Photo: A group of people sitting together enjoying a performance as part of Citz Young Storytellers

**Citz Storytellers** (above) involved young people in creative activities including theatre productions and filmmaking, which gave young people the opportunity to tell their stories. For example, Citz Storytellers made an interactive film called *Light and Shade* with High-Rise Theatre company, which explores the limitations of the label 'BAME'.

Activities delivered by projects have been varied, directly reflecting the wide range of funded partners and the young people they have supported. For example, **Digartref Ynys Min** (in partnership with **Medrwn Mon**) supported young people in sheltered housing, who have previously been homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, to create a podcast. This podcast provided the young people with the opportunity to share their experiences and offer advice to others who might be in a similar position.

Activities to provide young people with a creative outlet and opportunity e.g., through performances and musical sessions, were also provided by a range of funded partners including **Community Recording Studios**, **Small Green Shoots**, **YMCA Sutton Coldfield** and the **Positive Youth Foundation**. In these cases, funded partners also described young people being provided with work experience opportunities and opportunities for participants to lead activities ensuring that participants could develop a range of skills.

## 2.4 Young people's motivations for participating in youth social action projects



Of the young people who participated in the survey, 43% heard about the project they took part in as they were already involved with activities delivered by an organisation who received funding through the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund. Others reported that they found out via word of mouth (29%) or through online adverts (29%).

Most young people reported that they chose to participate in the projects because they were interested in learning new skills, attracted by the topic area, or they wanted to give back to their community.

**'I have a huge passion for diversity, inclusion and belonging and thought this would help me implement ideas and make some great connections.'** (Young person, aged 16-25, participant survey)

Half of the participants surveyed also said they joined their respective projects because they wanted to meet new people, suggesting that the social aspects of the projects were valued. A core aspect of this seems to have been how projects brought young people together as members of a shared community. In this respect #iwill projects have played a key role in supporting wider community cohesion. For example, project staff described how some care experienced young people had never previously met another young person like them, but the #iwill project had enabled them to meet other young people with similar lived experience.

Almost half of all surveyed participants were motivated to participate in their project because they were explicitly interested in getting involved in social action or campaigning. This motivation was reported by a slightly smaller proportion of participants than other motivations. It is possible that this may reflect a more limited understanding of the term 'social action' among participants. Indeed, project delivery staff frequently reported that staff experienced challenges communicating what social action is (please see [Section 2.3](#) for more details).

In follow-up interviews, participants suggested that they wanted to support other young people in similar circumstances and/or young people with similar lived experiences. This suggests that young people who participated did so because they saw it as a way to support others and contribute to a range of communities. This indicates that projects seeking to engage young people in social action should articulate how the project will help young people to develop skills and meet people as part of their recruitment and marketing approach.

## 2.5 Which strategies were the most successful at engaging underrepresented young people in social action?

Within interviews and in their final project reports, funded partners highlighted their most successful strategies for engaging young people in social action. Effective strategies included:

- Making space for young people to share their experiences
- Creating spaces that bring young people together with their peer group
- Involving young people in recruitment
- Minimising barriers
- Embedding support within the offer
- Involving a diverse and appropriate staff team
- Making the offer special.

These strategies are explored in further detail below.

### Creating spaces for young people to connect and share their experiences

Many of the projects created spaces for young people with shared experiences or characteristics to come together. For example, **Stonewall's** project brought together LGBT+ young people, whilst **Medrwn Môn** and **Digartref Ynys Min's #iwill Anglesey** project brought together young people who had experienced homelessness. A staff member credited this approach with having 'the power of representation', by creating spaces where young people were 'not the only one'.

Feedback from participants further suggests that this is an effective way of involving young people in youth social action and that the ability to meet with their peer group was often one of the aspects of projects that was most valued by participants.

'Imagine being in a room where you're no longer a minority, where your voice is heard, where you have the chance to make a positive change in this ever-darkening world.' (Young person, aged 16-25, participant survey)

For some, this was particularly important, as they might not have had previous opportunities to meet other young people with similar lived experiences. This was beneficial in projects that brought together young carers, care experienced young people, young people who have experienced homelessness, and LGBT+ young people (particularly those living in more rural settings). Some interviewed participants highlighted that, as a result of their participation, they have been able to develop social groups and support networks. For one participant, this was perceived as a key legacy of their project as they now are part of a group of young carers who 'check-in' on each other's wellbeing.

Related to this theme, project staff reported that it was important to group young people with others who were close to their own age, as they were more likely to have similar experiences and interests. For example, *Can Do Southampton* involved young people aged between 10-25 and found it was beneficial to group the cohorts by age to respond to different interests between age ranges.

'The age group of our target audience is wide; we ensure cohorts are grouped together according to age. The needs and interests of these groups are incredibly varied. Delivery and engagement style differs for the older/younger cohorts.' (**Can Do Southampton - Leonard Cheshire Disability, final project report**)

Staff also suggested that by providing a space in which young people could discuss issues that were important to them, participants led social action projects that meant something to them and became collectively invested in the project. Interviewed staff also reported that bringing groups of young people together in this way made them feel 'like they were part of something bigger than them' which, in turn, led to participants taking part in social action activity without explicitly referring to the activity as social action.

### Empowering young people to lead projects

A key element of the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund and of the #iwill movement is the requirement that projects are youth-led. Staff and participants acknowledged the success of this strategy in their projects as it enabled the young people to take ownership and learn through project development and delivery. This was demonstrated in numerous ways. Some projects found that their recruitment of young people was supported by the young people themselves sharing information about the group with their peers. Staff said this was an effective approach as the participants were able to use their own local knowledge and enthusiasm to encourage other young people to engage. One staff member also suggested that young people were better able to find others who may need support.

'Having young people themselves advertising the group and talking to other people about the project was very effective as we found young people were in the best position to identify other young people who maybe struggling that no one else had seen. For being able to intervene early for young people this worked really well.' (**Project delivery staff, staff survey**)

One project supported this approach by developing ‘peer ambassadors’ who were able to support others because of their own experience of homelessness. In this case, staff suggested that other participants benefitted from seeing peer ambassadors as ‘role models’ which subsequently resulted in a high level of engagement and participant retention.

Several other projects use similar models, with some participants in follow-up interviews highlighting that they themselves were taking on greater responsibilities due to their previous experience and familiarity with the funded partner in question and/or because of their previous lived experiences. Roles for young people here included activity facilitators and mental health champions. For some funded partners, this model is embedded within a wider organisational structure and ethos. For example, the **Small Green Shoots Project Fundamentals** employs young people as ‘shoots’ within the organisation, to ensure that the organisation itself is youth-led. The ‘shoots’ are young people who have previously been involved in the service who are employed as apprentices. Within their role that carry out targeted peer-to-peer outreach to other young people. By allowing the young people to lead in this way, projects were able to ensure that there were young people positioned in specific communities who could engage and support others effectively as a result of their local knowledge and relatability.

Whilst there are a range of methods that can be used to empower young people, creating an environment that is supportive and non-pressured was commonly identified as an effective approach. Staff reported that it was key for the participants to feel their contributions were valid, valued, and important. To do so, staff ensured that participants were actively listened to and encouraged to work together towards shared goals.

Both staff and participants highlighted the importance of empowering young people to make decisions within the projects. Staff reported that whilst it could feel difficult to ‘let go’ and let the young people lead, it was beneficial for the young people to develop skills and feel more confident. Some staff also highlighted that as a result of undertaking project delivery in this way, they now have a higher appreciation of the value of youth-led projects and what they can achieve.

‘They [the participants] need to be the ones to take the direction. It is hard because you can see the direction, they will end up going in but you have to let them get there, you need that patience to let them learn and embed without leading them and guiding them in a certain way because that’s what makes these projects great. You have to take a step back.’ **(Project delivery staff, staff follow-up interview)**

Being empowered and provided with the opportunity to lead projects, participants described feeling more confident and able to make a difference to others and their communities. This evidences the wider benefits of engaging young people in youth social action, as it can promote wider civic engagement. In one instance, a participant described how their development of leadership skills on the project has meant that they are now seen as a responsible member of their community. They said:

'I am from the community and [the funded partner] has helped to give me the skills I need to make a difference. If you look at some of the people on my street, they've gone to prison, and some have been murdered [...] A lot of parents in the area come to me and ask for help with their kids and with their kids CVs. I am entrusted with that responsibility.' **(Participant, participant follow-up interview)**

### Utilising partnerships to recruit participants

Several projects reported that partnership working was an integral part of their recruitment approach, to ensure they could reach young people from groups who are often underrepresented in youth social action.

For example, one project that sought to involve young people at risk of homelessness worked closely with a local homelessness project, youth centres and a housing association to help them reach and sustain engagement with young people who had experienced homelessness.

'Having the right partners that support effective joined-up working was vital to the success of retaining new and currently engaged members in the ACT NOW programme.' **(Citiz Young Storytellers – Cardboard Citizens, final project report)**

Interviewed staff from another project reported that partnership working has helped them to involve other young people beyond those that engage with their own services. This partnership enabled them to reach a wider audience of young people interested in making a difference and offer social action opportunities.



Photo: A group of people sitting on one of the structures created by young people as part of Build Up London

Similarly, staff from *Build Up London* reported that using a combination of referrals from partners, alongside direct recruitment was important for reaching a broader group of participants.

'We've learnt how it is important to use multiple approaches to recruitment to support a variety of young people take part. Some young people will sign up in advance (or be supported to sign up in advance by a partner). For other young people (e.g. those less confident in their abilities or doing new things), they are able to get involved once they see activities happening in a space or their peers tell them about what is happening.' **(Build Up London – Build Up Foundation, final report)**

Like *Build Up London*, *Creative Changers* included an opportunity for young people to get involved after observing project activities. For instance, the team delivered work in a local park popular with young people, alongside a public exhibition. The team engaged 26 new young people in their sessions this way. This complemented other recruitment methods such as holding open youth club sessions and working with partners to identify young people who might be interested in participating.

### Providing pastoral support and minimizing barriers

The groups projects involved in youth social action included young carers, care-experienced young people, homeless young people, and other socio-economically disadvantaged groups. As a result, it was important that projects took steps to offer pastoral support and minimise the barriers to participation faced by these groups.

Flexible and needs-led pastoral support was perceived as key for participants in a small number of projects. Staff suggested that where participants were facing difficult circumstances, it was important that they knew they could receive support from team members alongside developing their own social action project. The positive impact of this is clearly outlined by one participant.

'Obviously I don't know if I would be as strong as I am if the [Funded Partner] didn't give me as much support as they do, I know they are there to support me if I need anything and the group of people, I have made friends there too. People check in on me and we all know how stressful it gets.' **(Young person, aged 13-15, follow-up interview)**

Funded partners offered a range of different pastoral support based on what was appropriate for the project in question. This included one-to-one mentorship via face-to-face meetings and/or over the phone, advocacy with support services where needed and other specialised support including mental health and wellbeing support and employability services e.g., goal setting, help developing CVs and other soft skill development activities.

Within this, staff also described ensuring that venues were accessible and that sessions were hosted at suitable times to fit around the other commitments or responsibilities young people may be juggling. Often projects also provided food for attendees. In some cases, particularly where staff were supporting more vulnerable groups of young people, they suggested that this was a vital element of support as it ensured that participants were not taking part in projects hungry.

**'We also make sure they are fed, we give them bacon butties to make sure they don't come hungry, I've been in this role for 10 years, you learn what works.'**  
**(Project delivery staff, staff follow-up interview)**

Minimising barriers also relates to the way that projects are planned so that they do not overburden young people who have a lot going on in their lives. For example, many of the young people who were involved in *Citz Young Storytellers* were in receipt of Universal Credit, which means they had to evidence that they are actively seeking work or employed on zero-hour contracts. This meant that participants work demands could change unexpectedly, reducing their capacity to engage in regular sessions. Additionally, Covid-19 adversely impacted upon young people's capacity to engage in project activity.

**'Covid-19 had a direct impact on young people's wellbeing and mental health. Some young people struggled to engage with the high intensity of the campaign due to personal reasons. Feedback shows that some young people valued the low-key, drop-in nature of working over focused campaigning work. Cardboard Citizens will ensure we have a variety of engagement options to insure young people no matter their external circumstance can continue to engage and benefit from the programme.'** **(Citz Young Storytellers – Cardboard Citizens, final project report)**

Whilst the provision of pastoral support is a typical aspect of their delivery model for some organisations, for others, this is less common. Staff in this latter group suggested that ensuring there is the capacity to offer consistent pastoral support has been a key lesson learnt through their participation in the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund. Within this, staff recognised that some participants face challenges in their home, school/college and/or personal life and, therefore, the funded partner needs to offer them a range of support to ensure that they feel comfortable and able to participate in social action and realise their motivations and ambitions.

### Involving a diverse and locally knowledgeable staff team

Staff reported that the diversity of their team was an important aspect of engagement, considering the lived experiences of participants including homelessness, ethnicity, disability, gender, and/or sexuality. Having a diverse team ensured that funded partner teams were able to reflect the wide range of young people they were working with. This, in turn, increased participants ability to relate to staff, encouraging better engagement with the project in question.

In follow-up interviews, participants reported that staff with limited local knowledge could be a risk to the success of a project. Two participants suggested that, where engaging with people or organisations not based locally or staffed by people who weren't local, projects could feel less relevant to their experiences. Reflecting on what other organisations looking to develop social action projects should consider, one participant said:

'The best thing you can do is make sure that staff have practical knowledge about the area and as much exposure to the young people they will be working with as possible. If staff come down from London for a day - that's not enough insight. You need staff who live there who understand and grasp the culture of how things work.' **(Participant, participant follow-up interview)**

### Evaluating and refining project delivery

All projects were required to share updates on project progress through annual reports. Through this work funded partners reported that they have become increasingly well versed in effectively monitoring their work. Projects reported that they had been involving young people in the production of their annual reports. Where this was the case, project leads reported this had been beneficial as it had kept the young people engaged and ensured that the content of the project feels relevant for the young people the project is seeking to support.

Regular monitoring had helped projects to plan their next steps and ensure that their project continued to improve learning from what had worked well.

Related to this, staff highlighted how when working with underrepresented groups it was important to recognise that what worked well for one group may not necessarily work well with other young people. This was also highlighted in the *Creative Changers* project, delivered by **Creative Youth Network**.

'Need to be realistic and informed about the aims of the work in relation to the demographics, needs, and abilities of the target participants. If the work is pitched too high, too low or is simply irrelevant, it can be very difficult for them and the staff lead to achieve a rapport around the work, and to actually do the work. We managed this by working with the young artists in advance to help them understand each group and align their sessions with the young people they would be working with.' **(Creative Changers – Creative Youth Network, final project report)**

### Making the value for young people clear

Project staff emphasised the importance of being clear about projects' value to young people and what they would gain through their involvement. Within this, staff suggested that if the direction of a project was too broad, young people were more reluctant to engage as the value of the project was less clear. The need for a clear and concise message was identified within the **Streetlife** final report.

'The best Social Action projects were those that tied into national campaigns or could be explained in one sentence. When projects had too wide a scope, young people weren't sure which direction to head off in as they had never walked that route before. Better planning gets better results. Whereas: 'Let's Clean up the back alley, link it into 'The Great Get Together' and have a barbeque afterwards' works on every level!' (#famsquad - Streetlife final report)

Staff and participants also suggested activities that felt 'special' or clearly demonstrated projects' appreciation for the young people also acted as a key incentive to keep young people involved. What was considered special may depend on individuals, but with some groups this meant including day trips or activities that allowed them to get away from the pressures of the other things going on in their lives. This theme also included activities that appealed because they enabled young people to do something they had never experienced before or offered the chance to meet people young people had heard of. In some cases, these activities may have provided a form of respite for young people who experienced very challenging personal circumstances.

Examples of actions projects took included:

- Involving well-respected artists in the delivery of sessions as part of *Fundamentals*
- The *Windmills project* performed to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, and met with musicians and journalists
- As part of *WAVES*, the group were given opportunities to meet with key individuals to influence mental health policy. Within this, participants met with the All-Parties Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Affairs and took part in the Lord Mayors Parade.



Photo: A group of children celebrating the opening of the structure they created as part of the Build Up London project

Events and activities that were special for the participants were described as a successful aspect of project delivery when appealing to more reluctant young people. Within this, projects should consider that a minority of participants, when asked if any improvements could be made to their respective projects, said that the marketing of the projects could be improved. Participants suggested that the benefit of the project were not made explicit to them at the beginning. If activities were made clear at the beginning of the project, participants suggested that more young people would have sustained engagement.

## 2.6 Challenges faced by funded partners

This sub-section explores the challenges faced by organisations who were involved in delivering projects through the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund. Please note that participants identified few challenges in evaluation fieldwork, however, where relevant this will also be explored below.

### Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic

The pandemic has had wide-reaching impacts on individuals and organisations, including reducing the capacity of staff to deliver projects. The pandemic has also had considerable impacts on organisations' ability to engage young people in social action. This was the result of both practical difficulties relating to remote delivery as well as young people's own reduced capacity to engage which was restricted by the range of other issues they were having to deal with, including adverse impacts on their mental health.

Many of the groups supported by the funded partner projects included young people who are likely to have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and subsequent government-mandated lockdowns, including disabled young people, young people with pre-existing mental health conditions, young people experiencing homelessness, and young carers.

In many cases, projects were successfully able to adapt their delivery so that it could be delivered remotely i.e., via video sessions. However, project staff did report that they experienced challenges around maintaining engagement whilst using remote methods. This was in part related to young people experiencing 'zoom fatigue'.

'The main challenge was maintaining engagement through the lockdowns, as young people were struggling with a variety of issues, such as lack of motivation, lack of access to wifi/devices, decrease in their mental health. Once face-to-face sessions were running again, we noticed a rise in engagements and retention as the social action aspect proved most impactful when young people were able to work together.' **(Project delivery staff, staff survey)**

In several projects, even where participants could access sessions remotely, there were concerns that participants didn't have access to a 'safe space' where they could speak freely due to the concerns of family or housemates overhearing.

This was perceived as an additional barrier in social action projects where participants were exploring issues like mental health, or caring experiences. In these cases, staff reported that they had to postpone some activities until they were able to facilitate them in person whilst others provided additional resources e.g., **YMCA East Surrey** provided mental health and wellbeing activity packs to schools.

For a small number of projects moving to a fully digital model was not possible, as the groups they were working with were affected by digital poverty or because delivery was reliant on face-to-face activity e.g., in *Build Up London* participants were physically constructing large structures. However, some organisations were still able to facilitate small group meetings in line with the Covid-19 regulations, and others were able to adopt a more blended approach by offering offline materials for participants who may have been affected by digital exclusion.

'While technology has proved to be a lifeline for so many of us during the pandemic, it has exacerbated inequalities. Many young disabled people we support were previously not used to using technology/digital equipment for prolonged periods, so the transition to virtual home schooling, combined with virtual Can Do sessions had the potential to lead to 'zoom fatigue' and 'screen burnout'. In addition, for many young people, technology was not freely available at home due to low income and/or poor WiFi. In recognition of the need to offer 'offline' activities to ensure we were delivering a programme which was fully inclusive, we worked with a small steering group of Can Doers to co-design a 'in a box' activity pack, sent out to Can Doers at home. This included learning opportunities, offline challenges and activities.' (**Can Do Southampton - Leonard Cheshire Disability, final project report**)

Responses to remote delivery were mixed. This is unsurprising given the diversity of the projects and the groups they supported. Whilst some participants expressed that they would have preferred face-to-face participation, they also acknowledged that project staff did the best they could in the circumstances.

It is important to note however that, for some funded partners, remote delivery brought about additional benefits. For example, several participants working on a project with a national organisation reported that the remote delivery enabled them to access an organisation and project that otherwise would have been inaccessible to them due to the need to travel. Other projects found that remote delivery enabled them to access a different cohort of young people, who may face additional barriers to participating in face-to-face activity. For example, the team leading *Can Do Southampton* found that this enabled them to reach disabled young people who may be more reliant on carers or family to help them access sessions.

A young person with anxiety, who participated in the virtual Youth Summit delivered by **Stonewall** also reported that being able to attend sessions remotely was beneficial as it meant they could more easily manage their anxiety through having the comfort of their own space. This sentiment was echoed by interviewed staff who suggested that, for some participants, being in their own environment was beneficial as they felt more comfortable sharing their personal experiences and engaging with their peers.

## The complexity of young people's lives

Whilst all projects funded by the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund were working with underrepresented groups, some projects were working with groups who experience multiple and complex barriers to engagement which may have limited the extent to which young people were able to continually engage with social action projects. For example, projects that worked with care experienced young people, young carers, asylum seekers and refugees and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

There was a recognition among the staff delivering these projects that the needs of the young people needed to take priority, and that sometimes participants capacity to engage was limited by the other things going on in their lives.

'We work with young people affected by homelessness so many of them had multiple challenges in their lives, which at times had to take priority and therefore retaining engagement was sometimes a struggle. In addition, work, education and training, particularly the demands of zero-hour contracts often posed a barrier to engagement.' **(Project delivery staff, follow-up interview)**

For some projects, this impacted the consistency of attendance among participants, and sometimes project staff experienced high rates of 'no shows'. As outlined in [Section 2.5](#), project staff provided pastoral care where necessary and acknowledged that they needed to be 'adaptive' and 'responsive' to the changing capacity and needs of the young people they were working with.

These barriers were not specific to delivering youth social action, but more general barriers that staff recognised affected participation from groups that experienced multiple barriers. For example, young carers were more likely to experience challenges relating to transport or finding alternative care, which could mean that they did not know if they would be able to participate in activities until the last minute.

Whilst delivery staff may not be able to address all barriers faced by participants, there are things they can do which will help facilitate engagement. For example, a project that was supporting young carers reported that they always provide food because they do not know if the carers will have had the chance to eat between their other commitments. Another project lead emphasised the importance of not cancelling activities, even if there is a high dropout rate, as this can disrupt relationship building and lead to a loss of trust from participants.

'Practitioners need to not take things too personally if people disengage. I can do anything I want but if the person has a horrible argument the night before and decides not to come it's not because of the project. It is what's going on in their life. Don't take it personally. We did a trip where it was a walk and there was me and two workers with two young people and we could have taken 12 but we didn't cancel, and you can't cancel it because then you get in the habit of cancelling it. And those two people had a great day and an experience. It's serve and return. You have to keep serving even if you're getting nothing back. You just need to come in and pull out all the stops. Do what you said you'd do. But keep reviewing what you're doing at the same time.' **(Project delivery staff, follow-up interview)**

Related to this was the importance of the structure of projects and how expectations are placed on project participants. Several projects set out with ambitions to have a core group of young people who met regularly over six months to a year but found that this was not realistic in the context of the young people's lives, especially where projects were working with young people experiencing homelessness, or asylum seekers and refugees. Instead, it was important to ensure that young people were able to engage to the extent that they felt able to, and for some young people, the ability to dip in and out of projects without pressure was important to facilitating continued engagement.

'I've had quite a few opportunities, just through being part of Citz. Not even necessarily coming here every week – there's been times when I've disappeared for a few months or whatever – and when I've come back, it's always accepting, like I haven't left kinda thing' **(Young person - Citz Young Storytellers, final report)**

### Communicating what 'social action' is

Some practitioners highlighted that communicating what 'social action' is to the participants was, at times, challenging.

'The idea of campaigning and social action was sometimes difficult to convey. Most of our young people come to us for arts workshops and we did a lot of work thinking about how to best communicate the idea of social action in an accessible way and embed it in our creative process.' **(Project delivery staff, staff survey)**

This might in part stem from the breadth of activities that can be considered 'social action'. For example, the [Youth Social Action Toolkit](#) explains that social action can include volunteering, campaigning, mentoring, fundraising and any other activity through which 'young people come together to solve an issue or improve something in their community' (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2019). Considering the challenges faced in explaining what social action is, some staff suggested that they were not confident in their own explanations, in part because social action is 'such a broad church.'

Related to this, some staff struggled to understand how youth social action should be differentiated from other ways of delivering youth work like participation or co-production. As a result, one project lead described how they were often questioning whether they were really 'doing social action'. Their project often focused on making changes within their organisation, but this sometimes led to questions of whether they were 'doing enough' or whether social action needed to be about affecting bigger social changes or needed to be very high profile externally.

Staff from several projects reported that the term 'social action' was not well understood by participants. Consequently, staff often tried to use more commonly understood terms like 'campaigning' or 'volunteering' to describe what they would be doing, or focused conversations around what changes young people would like to make. In one project, staff used these more well-understood terms to introduce topics, and then later worked with young people to help them understand how what they had delivered was social action.

'We've found that social action as a term is not very well understood - we change the language - introduce a topic, consultations on their passions, changes they want to make and then deliver. Then we have a reflection period explaining how what they did was social action. We turned it on its head because then we don't get blank faces and people engage in the project- engage then bring it in later. Use social action as a personal development tool - what skills do they need to deliver a campaign, do they need upskilling etc. We want a mindset change where they embed it into their life once they've done it. I think we just need to look at the terms when we're talking to young people and tailor more to them.' **(Project delivery staff, scoping interview)**

### Working with disempowered young people

Often the projects supported by the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund were working with groups where young people were not used to having their voice heard or feeling that their voice was valued. Several projects were supporting young people whose life experiences had made them distrustful of adults. This is unsurprising given that many of the young people supported by projects have come from groups who experience marginalisation. For example, 41% of participants in *Young Activists*, delivered by the **Hot Chocolate Trust**, had previously been excluded from school, 30% were not in education, employment, or training, and 19% had been homeless.

As a result, relationship and trust-building was important to ensure that participants felt listened to and valued.

'We strive to create a community which is safe, consistent, positive and fun. Our starting point with the young people is always that of building trusting, authentic, reciprocal relationships which offer choice and empowerment. Within this context, the young people begin to recognise themselves as valuable, and with a contribution to make to the world.' **(Young Activists - Hot Chocolate Trust, final project report)**

Related to this theme, a staff member from another project emphasised the importance of identifying ‘quick wins’, and issues where change could be more easily affected. This was perceived as an important aspect of ensuring that young people could see that they could make a change. As a result, delivery staff emphasised the importance of identifying partners who are willing to work together and services that are prepared to make changes. The need for realistic goals and clear communication about this with participants is key as otherwise there is a risk where change is not affected, this compounds young people’s pre-existing beliefs that their views are not valued.

### Exploring mental health topic areas

Several of the funded projects explored mental health and wellbeing. Often project delivery staff reported that they had to be careful with the terminology they used to discuss mental health as the language of mental health could cause young people to ‘shut down’.

As previously outlined, where there were concerns about mental health and wellbeing, staff generally reported offering a range of pastoral care that was adaptive and responded to the needs of individuals to support them. Where terminology acted as a barrier, some projects adapted wording to alleviate the negative associations linked with ‘mental health.’ This, staff suggested, helped participants to feel more comfortable discussing the topic and led, in some cases, to participants discussing a wider range of wellbeing related issues than they may have done otherwise. It is understood that by broaching the subject in this way, projects have been able to create a supportive environment in which discussion around wellbeing and mental health can be raised without judgement. This is illustrated in the quote below.

‘We also feel this [adapting the words used to emotional wellbeing] helps to encapsulate all elements of feelings and emotions and the way the impact on people’s lives. For example, anxiety and low mood may not be diagnosed clinically as depression, however the signs can often be similar which may be intimidating or daunting for young people. If we speak about these conditions informally and as a part of everyday life, we hope this creates a mindset that feelings and emotions can be positive and negative, and everyone can access support either way.’ **(Head Positive & Team Up - Positive Youth foundation, final report)**

### Engaging males in youth social action

Whilst over the whole programme male participants were really well represented, making up 59% of participants across funded partners, this was largely due to a few projects that targeted young males, who had very high numbers of participants. In other areas many projects experienced challenges engaging male participants in social action. This follows broader trends in social action participation. For example, the National Youth Social Action Survey found that girls are more likely to participate in meaningful social action than boys (Bratsa, Mollidor, & Stevens, 2020). The 2019 survey found that 37% of girls have participated in meaningful social action in the last 12 months, compared to 34% of boys.

Within six out of 12 projects, male participants were underrepresented, whilst female participants were overrepresented.<sup>2</sup>

However, some projects had greater success recruiting male participants than others. Indeed, 88% of young people participating in the *Boys' Football Programme* were male, and 59% of participants in *Build Up London* were male. These projects tended to be themed around an activity, rather than themed around social action, which may have contributed to their appeal towards male participants. Notably, these activities – respectively football and construction – may be considered to be activities that usually attract greater numbers of male participants than female participants.

**The Build Up Foundation** reported that they found it more challenging to recruit female participants. Project staff reported that this might have in part been influenced by gender stereotypes which meant that males were more likely to be referred to their construction-based project than females. To overcome this, the funded partner adapted their method and directly recruited female participants. This, they have reported, has benefitted the project.

The underrepresentation of male participants appeared to be a common theme in projects that were outwardly focused on mental health and wellbeing, with the exception of **YMCA Sutton Coldfield's** project 'Virtually Minded', which predominantly targeted male participants. All participants were male within the activity funded through the project's first grant. Within this project a converted riot van was used as a hub where young men could come to talk about how they are feeling and get creative. Project staff reflected that a settling in period was crucial to allow young males to open up, and so the converted van was sometimes used as a space for informal conversations, snacks and catch-ups to help the participants get comfortable in the space.

Watch Reese's story about participating in Virtually Minded



Projects that explored mental health, but that were themed around a core activity (for example the focus on art/poetry and creativity in *Positively Minded*, and the focus on rap and hip-hop in *Windmills/Weall*, delivered by **Community Recording Studios**), tended to have slightly more success recruiting male participants. This may suggest that where youth social action projects have an outward focus on mental health and wellbeing there is a risk that male participants may be deterred from participating.

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<sup>2</sup> This only includes projects who provided full demographic breakdowns for gender. Currently data is also missing for Community Recording Studios, Medrwn Mon and YMCA Sutton Coldfield.

This appears to align with wider trends in mental health and wellbeing, where men are less likely to access support and are often less likely to participate in mental health initiatives. For example, the Mental Health Foundation report that men are less likely to access psychological therapies than women (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Additionally, Student Minds has found that male students struggle to open up about their mental health due to 'lack of knowledge and feelings of isolation or due to the impact of gender stereotypes' (Maggs, 2021). In [their guidance](#) on supporting male mental health in Higher Education, Student Minds recommend that activities are used as a 'hook' to help engage men in mental health projects. Whilst this is a different cohort of young people than those who have been supported by the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund, the finding nevertheless may have applicability in this context.

Further substantiating this, staff from one project suggested that males were not engaging as much as females because of the stigma around young males sharing how they are feeling and because most staff on the project were female. To overcome this, once the project engaged a group of males, the male participants were trained as mental health champions to ensure that there was a supportive environment in which other males could join. The project also developed a partnership with mental health group for males so that they could continue to work on creating a diverse and supportive environment in which males can feel part of a wider group.

This does not dilute the importance of youth social action projects that explore mental health and wellbeing. Indeed, mental health was one of the key themes young people who helped to co-design the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund were interested in exploring. However, where projects are themed around mental health, delivery staff may want to consider how promotion around other activities can be used to help improve engagement from male participants.

## 3 The impact of Youth Social Action on young people

This section will explore the experiences of young people who were involved in the projects, exploring how involvement in Youth Social Action has impacted them and others.

### Key Findings

- Involvement in youth social action has helped young people to develop social outcomes, including belonging and a sense of community, improved confidence, agency and self-worth.
- There was strong evidence that youth social action had contributed to developing young people's skills, including foundational skills around communication, practical skills (such as building, creative skills etc.), as well as skills more directly related to social action including campaigning and volunteering knowledge.
- Participation in youth social action is helping young people from underrepresented groups to develop their aspirations and see their potential, and there was evidence that young people had entered employment, education or training that had been supported by their experience through the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund.
- As a result of involvement in youth social action, 71% of surveyed young people reported that they were confident they can make a change in their community, and more than two in three said they had been influenced to get involved in other activities to make a change in their community.

### 3.1 The reach of the projects

Across all 16 projects, the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund provided over 5,800 opportunities for young people to engage in social action. As illustrated in Table 3.1 over page, where the gender breakdown of participants was given, almost three in five opportunities provided were taken up by males. However, it should be noted that this was influenced by the large number of male participants involved in the *Boys' Football Programme* and *Build Up London and Positively Minded*, which were among some of the larger projects funded by the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund.

These projects were also among the few projects in which male participants were overrepresented. Across the 12 projects where sex was recorded, male participants were underrepresented within six. Overall, this suggests that whilst the fund as a whole has been successful in engaging male participants, this group still remain more difficult to engage in social action.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As outlined by (Bratsa, Mollidor, & Stevens, 2020) in the previous section.

Table 3.1: Gender breakdown of participant opportunities

Sex	Number	Percentage
<b>Males</b>	2070	59%
<b>Females</b>	1359	39%
<b>Gender not disclosed</b>	97	3%

Base: Monitoring information where gender is disclosed (n=3526)

The projects also successfully engaged young people from a diverse range of communities including young people who have experienced homelessness, young carers, care experienced young people, and disabled young people. However, as projects used different monitoring data it has not been possible to quantify this across the programme.

## 3.2 Impact on participating young people

As illustrated below, the vast majority of young people were positive about their involvement in #iwill Youth Social Action Fund projects and the impact it has had on them. Participants reported that involvement in youth social action had helped them to feel part of a community and develop new friendships.

### How has the project helped young people?



73% of young people feel part of a community



64% made new friends



59% are more confident



59% of young people have new skills



50% of young people are more confident about their future



27% say their mental health or wellbeing has improved

Both staff and participants reported that projects have had a positive impact on young people's soft skills, highlighting how involvement had brought about improved confidence, agency and self-belief. Over a quarter of surveyed participants and almost three quarters of interviewed staff reported that projects have had an impact on participant health and wellbeing, as will be explored further in [Section 3.2.5](#), this is a key and valuable project impact.

Staff reported that young people were more confident, displayed increased agency or self-belief and had widened their aspirations.

Considering the impact their respective projects have had on them, participants commonly also highlighted ways in which their participation has led to further community involvement.

**Participant feedback from the participant survey:**

‘It was fantastic, I learnt so much about campaigning and I met some great people who are doing incredible things with the skills they gained from this experience. I have gained a lot of confidence and I feel like I’m doing something positive for my community at last.’

‘This was such an amazing project, and I am a better person and member of the community for it.’

As outlined above, young people reported that their involvement in projects funded through the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund has supported their personal development in the following ways:

- Belonging and a sense of community
- Increased confidence
- Increased agency and self-worth
- Widened aspirations and improved employability skills
- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Skills development
- The confidence they can make a change
- Further involvement in youth social action.

These impacts are explored in greater detail below.

### 3.2.1 Belonging and sense of community

Young people reported that their involvement in youth social action projects has helped them to feel ‘included’, ‘connected to their community’, and to feel ‘less alone’.

For example, 92% of participants who took part in the *Boys’ Football Programme*, led by **BIGKID Foundation**, reported that they feel part of the BIGKID family, and 92% said they felt less lonely or isolated as a result of the project. Similarly, 83% of young disabled people who took part in *Can Do Southampton* reported that they felt more connected to others and that the project has helped them to make friends.

Young people also emphasised the benefits of being able to participate in spaces made up of peers from their own community or background. This was a common feature of the design of the #iwill projects which often brought together a specific group of young people (for example care experienced young people, LGBT+ young people, or young people who had been at risk of homelessness). Within interviews, participants frequently reported that one of the best things about their project was the opportunity to engage with those who had similar lived experiences to them which allowed them to feel a sense of community.

This was also important to LGBT+ young people who were involved in *Reaching Further Into Communities: Supporting LGBT Young People to Engage in Social Action*, led by **Stonewall**. Some of these young people reported that, before the project, they did not often have opportunities to connect with other LGBT+ young people or access to spaces where they feel safe disclosing their identity. This is demonstrated in the quote below.

'The best thing about being involved in the project was creating new friendships with other people who were on the LGBT+ spectrum. Stonewall were able to understand the type of issues I was facing, and I wished that the youth summit had gone on forever.' **(Participant survey)**

### 3.2.2 Increased confidence

Across all surveyed participants, 59% reported that they are more confident because of participating in their project. This was one of the most commonly reported impacts by participants.

'It gave me more confidence. I can now speak about issues and not be second guessing myself. It helped me to see issues from another angle, beyond my own lived experience.' **(Young person, participant follow-up interview)**

Staff also frequently reported that young people's confidence has improved through their involvement in youth social action. Improved confidence was understood as helping young people to believe that their views and opinions matter. In turn, staff suggested, this has encouraged participants to be more assertive and challenge issues they feel strongly about.

Sometimes this impact was perceived as more 'subtle' and demonstrated through participants continued engagement with their project where they would not have done previously. As a result, project delivery staff emphasised the importance of looking at outcomes on an individual basis, recognising that for some participants subtle shifts in their engagement may be the most meaningful.

### 3.2.3 Increased agency and self-worth

Project delivery staff frequently described how young people demonstrated increased agency because of their involvement in youth social action. This was felt to be particularly key given the adversity faced by some of the participants being supported by the projects, who may not have access to many spaces where they feel their voices are valued and listened to.

Increased agency and self-worth can also be seen through participants' heightened awareness of how their experience can fit into a wider narrative. For example, in follow-up interviews, one participant stated that through the project, and sharing their experiences with other young carers, they formed a greater understanding what it meant to be a young carer, moreover that they were proud of their role.

'Personally, I feel like it helped me find my true self and my own caring role. I didn't really understand that I was a carer [before the project] and had to google it a bit. This is normal life for me, I don't know what life would be like without me being a young carer.' **(Participant, follow-up interview)**

This suggests that whilst projects were developed with social action in mind, in some cases, they have also enabled young carers, care-experienced young people, homeless young people and those at risk, and other socio-economically disadvantaged groups to feel more pride, self-worth and valuable based on their roles, experiences and what they can give back to communities.

### 3.2.4 Widened aspirations and improved employability skills

Frequently participants and project staff reported that involvement in youth social action has had a positive impact on young people's aspirations and plans for the future. Project staff reported that involvement in the projects has helped young people to identify what they want to do and has helped expose them to jobs that they may not have been aware of otherwise. A small number of participants also reported that, through their engagement in the projects, they have been able to network and secure contacts in sectors they are interested to work in in the future.

In one project that supported young people with mental health problems to run youth social action projects, project staff reported that it has helped participants to develop the confidence to enter work, education or volunteering, and has helped them to see what they are capable of. This emphasises the benefits of using a youth social action approach to support young people who may feel disempowered as it can help them to empower them.

'When we first met them, they were completely quiet. Had strong ideas but didn't know what to do with them or didn't think they were useful. [...] Now we have three young people who have gone off to university, who never thought they'd be able to do that. [...] Some had a feeling like they had mental health issues and so wouldn't be able to do 'normal things' that other young people could do, but through the project a lot of young people have realised that their mental health doesn't define them, and it doesn't mean they can't do what they want to do.' **(Project delivery staff, scoping interview)**

Young people frequently reported that their involvement in the projects has helped them to consider their aspirations and plans for the future. Often this included young people considering future involvement in advocacy or community-based work, which has been influenced by their experience of youth social action.

'Before this experience I didn't really know what I wanted to do, but now I'm very keen to become an advocate and a mentor for young LGBTQ+ people. As well as this, I'm eager to make sure my local areas have pride events!' (Young person, participant survey)

In one case a young person has gone on to create their own business following their involvement in youth social action. This saw them partnering with companies to speak about inclusion.

Other young people have developed their skillset through their involvement in youth social action which has helped them to access other volunteering opportunities or employment in a related area. For example, several participants from WAVES have gone on to develop their experience in youth work, including one who has completed a Level 2 Youth Work Practice qualification.

*Fundamentals* provided young people with apprentice opportunities and a paid intensive training programme, which has helped participants to develop their skillsets. For example, one of the young apprentices who participated in *Fundamentals* has used their portfolio creating content as part of the project to secure a full-time job as a Content Producer at an Arts organisation.

It is important to highlight that some projects also worked with young people who were not in education, employment, or training at the start of the project. Project staff reported that and, as a result of their engagement with the project, some participants developed employability skills and confidence that has enabled them to move into employment and education. For example, *Citz Young Storytellers* supported young people who were homeless, and over three years reported that 13 young people entered external employment, and 12 young people progressed into education.

Participation in youth social action is helping young people to develop their aspirations and see their potential.

*Case study from Head Positive, led by Positive Youth Foundation*

'M began engaging with Head Positive through our online sessions in October 2020, which was also her introduction to Positive Youth Foundation (PYF) as an organisation. When we first met M, it became apparent that she was working through her own anxieties and lack of self-esteem. Her insecurities stemmed from her conflicting home life, a desire to find her own identity and a feeling of being stuck in limbo as she had finished school and had put University off for a year but was now unsure whether she wished to go anymore.

M has a keen interest in research and sociology, the more she attended sessions, the more she honed her skills in these areas. She started to express her interest in the education system and how young people have been affected by the current pandemic. When engaging in the podcast sessions, she came up with poignant questions for the interviewees which received positive reactions and in turn boosted her confidence.

Through her committed interaction with the sessions, M was asked to join an additional project where she received four weeks of training and worked consistently with a group of likeminded young people to design and implement a social action project from scratch. The group project originated from M's thought that 'education should not be isolated to schools' and then grew into a larger movement around empowering other young people to seek out the knowledge they desire and upskill themselves.

Her involvement in the project has continued outside of PYF and past the completion of funding. This dedication to the project has boosted her confidence and her drive to go back into education.

Since participating in Head Positive M has mentioned that 'PYF has been really supportive and has provided a lot of opportunities to allow me to explore my options and interests for the future'. She has also taken the initiative to reach out for mental wellbeing support and resources. M is now preparing to go to university at the end of September to study Sociology. Her aim is to still engage with the social action group and continue the project remotely as it has had a clear positive impact for additional young people outside of the original cohort.'

### 3.2.5 Improved mental health or wellbeing

Five projects were specifically designed to provide opportunities to young people to deliver social action related to mental health:

- *Virtually Minded* explored men's mental health through engagement with youth work and comic book art
- *Head Positive/Team Up* supported social action groups to improve mental health and wellbeing of young people living in deprived wards of Coventry
- *Fundamentals* supported young people who are out of employment, education and training to use creative arts to explore social action focused on mental health
- *WAVES* supported young people to manage their mental health and used youth social action to equip them with the skills to become mental health champions
- *Windmills/Weall* supported young people to develop a hip-hopera to promote discussion around mental health.

Monitoring data was limited in the extent it could measure the impact of this work on the mental health and wellbeing of participants as the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns have had a negative impact on young people's mental health (OECD, 2021). However, feedback from both staff and participants showed that the projects have positively impacted participants mental health and wellbeing.

For example, project staff from WAVES described how young people have become more able to manage their mental health.

'We have seen, during sessions, that young people have become better at talking about their mental health. They have shown how they have a better understanding about what helps them and how they can support themselves to promote good mental health. We have been able to sit with young people and help them to create their own coping strategies and safety plans to support them at home and in school.' **(WAVES – YMCA east Surrey, final project report)**

Similarly, monitoring data collected as part of *Fundamentals* shows that young people are better able to manage their own mental health and support others:

- Sixty-four per cent of young people reported that they felt more able to support others suffering from poor mental health
- Sixty-six per cent of young people said they were more likely to seek help/advice from professionals about mental health issues
- Seventy-one per cent of young people reported that they know more about how people can maintain good mental health.

Positive impacts on participants mental health and wellbeing were not only reported in projects that had an explicit focus on social action related to mental health. For example, 87% of participants in the *Boys' Football Programme* reported that the project has helped them to improve their wellbeing.

Additionally, project staff from other projects have seen improvements in young people's resilience from engaging in social action.

'We have seen young people who found it difficult to find the words to explain how they were feeling and openly talk to others or ask for help being able to now explain what is going on for them and use language to ask for support and help themselves. Young people have become more resistant during this project and have seen that their voices can make a difference in their lives and the lives of others.' **(Project delivery staff, staff survey)**

### 3.2.6 Skills development

Involvement in youth social action has helped young people to develop a range of skills, including communication skills, practical skills (for example building, creative skills etc.), leaderships skills and campaigning skills.

## Campaigning skills

Several young people reported that involvement in youth social action has helped them to develop campaigning skills, including an understanding of effective strategies for making a change. Campaigning skills were a key focus within *Reaching Further Into Communities: Supporting LGBT Young People to Engage in Social Action*, led by Stonewall. As part of this project young people were taught transferable skills that could support them in campaigning as well as other contexts, including how to do stakeholder analysis, SWOT analysis and how to develop a theory of change. Staff described these as ‘skills for life’ which participants will be able to deploy in their work, as well as campaigning. Of the young people who participated in this project, 91% reported that they understand the different types of campaign tools, and 100% said their campaigning knowledge improved through the project.

‘It helps me so much to be motivated to fighting for my own rights and the rights of others and to always be reminded that I need to take action, it taught me many things about campaigning from strategies to self-care to the role of art and beauty and human relationships.’ **(Young person, participant survey)**

Involvement in youth social action has also enabled some participants to widen their understandings of what successful campaigning might look like. It has, therefore, helped them to understand other tangible ways that they could make a change in their community beyond highly visible activities like attending protests. For example, one participant reported that they intend to start their own business in the future which will act as an opportunity for local people and give back to their local community.

Other examples are documented below.

‘It might not be wearing a t-shirt and holding a placard. There are other ways of campaigning that are not super physical or over stimulating. There are other ways you can change things beyond that front facing activism like social media campaigning. Personally, I find protests overwhelming so I like it when you can get involved behind the scenes.’ **(Young person, participant interview)**

‘I feel like a Campaigner now and I finally understand what it means through our work.’ **(Young person, Citz Young Storytellers – Carboard Citizens, final project report)**

## Communication skills

Involvement in youth social action has helped young people to improve their communication skills. For example, young people reported that they feel more confident interacting with new people. Involvement in youth social action also helped young people to improve their communication skills, by allowing them to learn from other people’s perspectives, which has helped them to feel more confident putting their views forward.

'It educated me on issues within my community, and communities I would never have interacted with in my life if not for the project. It gave me more confidence speaking about these things because I was able to learn from the other people there.' **(Young person, participant follow-up Interview)**

Participants and staff also identified activities within projects that helped participants improve their communication skills e.g. the development of a podcast in *#iwill Anglesey* which shared participant experiences of homelessness and *Experts by Experience* in which the project group developed a book to share with others about their experiences of being a young carer. Activities such as these, required participants to consider how they communicated their experiences to people and how they could help others by providing this information. This was described as a beneficial experience for those involved.

### Practical skills

The funded projects included a wide range of opportunities to learn new skills, including creative arts, podcast making, content creation, and building.

For example, young people who took part in *Build Up London* were able to learn how to use tools and how to build structures.

'I learned things that I had never before known about: they taught me how to measure, saw, drill, level and build [...] After being part of this project I seriously considered taking a construction course in college and taking a job in construction, and I might still be able to do that after university. This year in the summer holiday I'm going to also be pushing the next generation to take part in events like these.' **(Young person, Build Up London – Build Up Foundation, final project report)**

Project staff suggested that physically creating something provided the participants with tangible outcomes that they could see and be proud of.

Participants also reported how their involvement in volunteering has helped give them transferable skills that will help them in future employment. This included the development of soft skills such as communication and confidence alongside hands-on experience working with large, sometimes national, organisations and learning about their systems and ways of working.



Photo: Two participants building a wooden structure with tools in Build Up London project

### Leadership skills

As outlined in [Section 2.5](#), where participants felt empowered to lead projects, they generally felt more comfortable to be assertive and confident in leading. Across projects, staff commonly suggested that ‘providing a safe space’ for young people to share ideas and concerns allowed them to develop leadership skills as they were engaged in the topics and were provided the time to try and test different things.

Similarly, participants highlighted that being afforded the space to share their experiences and opinions led to them feeling more comfortable in leadership roles. For one participant, their project was an opportunity to build on previous projects they had worked on with the same organisation. Based on their previous experience, this individual was provided with greater responsibility and acted as a supervisory mentor for younger participants. This, they said helped them to develop management skills and feel more confident in a position of authority. For others, developing leadership skills meant developing their own voice, and feeling more comfortable to use their platform to amplify the voices of others.

**‘It was an eye opening, progressive experience that allowed me to express my voice and share the voice of many others that are too often left unheard.’  
(Participant, participant survey)**

### 3.2.7 The confidence that they can make a change

After participating in the youth social action projects, 71% of participants agreed that they can bring about change in their community.

'It felt like I was having my voice heard in a really influential charity which does make a difference. Even though I may be a small cog in a big wheel it was being involved in helping other young people... it made me feel included in an organisation that can feel unreachable.' **(Young person, participant interview)**

Frequently project participants reported that involvement in youth social action has helped them to feel listened to and able to make tangible changes within their local communities. Within this, some participants highlighted that they also felt on equal footing with adults making decisions.

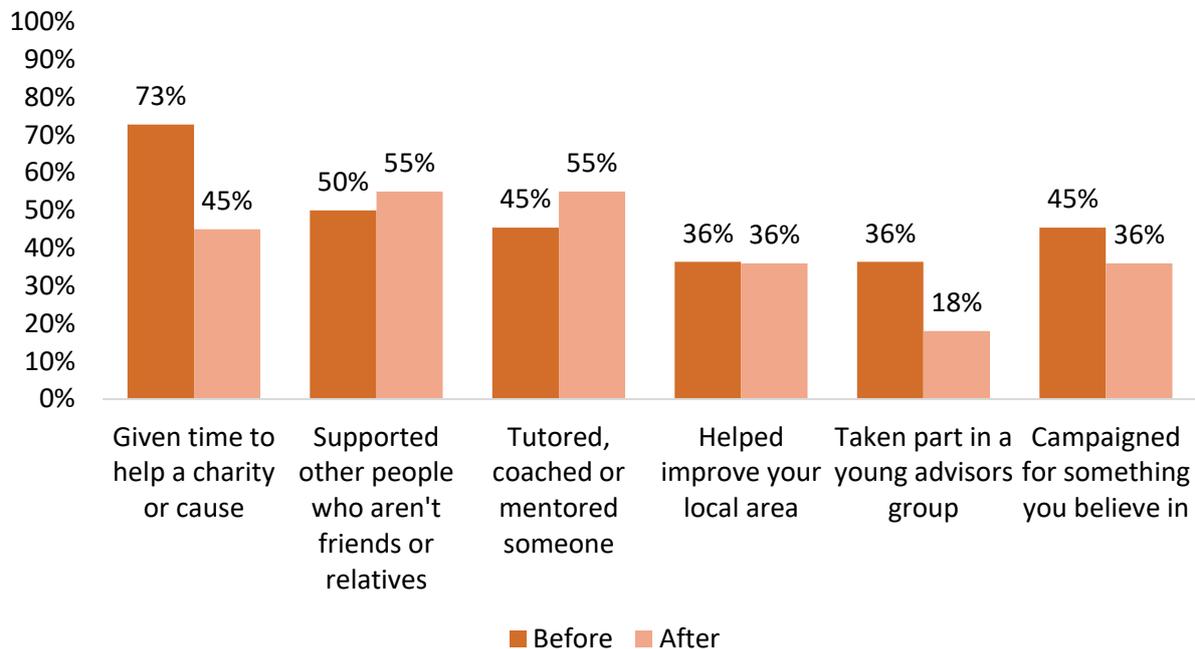
'The team are always reflecting on what we're wanting, and what could change. And it's not tokenistic where you ask us, and you don't do anything. Everything gets actioned on. It makes you feel like you have a lot more power. And that helps outside of Hot Chocolate, coz you know that people listen to you'. **(Young person, Young Activists – Hot Chocolate Trust, final project report)**

### 3.2.8 Further involvement in Youth Social Action

The vast majority of surveyed participants said they would encourage other young people to get involved in the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund project they took part in (95%). Considering the importance of consistent and sustainable social action (Pye, 2016), it is also positive that 67% of survey respondents said that involvement in their youth social action project has influenced them to get involved in other activities to make a change or help their community.

The picture was more mixed when it came to the action participants have taken since their project has come to an end. However, it should be noted that many of the projects had only concluded a few months before fieldwork took place, and at the time of data collection, the Covid-19 pandemic was still a concern and may have limited some of the available opportunities for young people to engage in social action. This is supported by data from project reports, for example, one project reported that: 'due to COVID there have been fewer opportunities to engage in social action this year, in a physical sense, particularly within the community. Although virtually, young people have engaged actively with discussions, debates and projects.'

Figure 3.1: Have you participated in any of the following activities? Before and after participating in the Youth Social Action Project?



Base: Participant survey (n=22)

### 3.3 Impact on others

Almost 32,000 people indirectly benefited from the #iwill Youth Social Action. This included other young people supported by services that were transformed through youth social action, practitioners, and attendees at activities put on as part of the projects led by the 16 funded partners.

Some projects involved participants working to have an impact on others with similar lived experiences, which may result in improved services or support. For example, as part of *Young Carers Social Action*, young carers created a book about being a young carer and developed an installation on caring which will help others to understand the experiences of care experienced young people. The group also advocated for other young carers, including advocating for young carers to be considered as key workers for shops during the pandemic, and held an online session with professionals including local Head Teachers and school leads which has helped to generate wider impact.

In other projects youth social action enabled participants to support other young people who needed support. For example, young people who took part in *WAVES* were involved in volunteering with foodbanks to provide essentials for families through the pandemic. Similarly, young people who took part in *#famsquad*, delivered by **Streetlife** were involved in campaigning against food poverty and helped households in need to access food. These activities helped to support local communities, but also had a positive impact on the participants themselves. One staff member described how using social action to support others can help participants themselves to feel more empowered.

'It helps them to feel empowered that they can help others. One was so into being a Time to Change Champion and at the same time was so disadvantaged that we had to manage the safeguarding carefully, but she wanted to offer support to everybody, and it really gave her something to hold on to and get involved in and believe in and focus [...] It makes them feel less helpless themselves because they are doing something to help someone else. Maybe they feel a sense of purpose.'  
**(Project delivery staff, follow-up interview)**

As previously highlighted, some projects also supported participants to share their experiences with others who may be experiencing something similar e.g., through a podcast or book. This, staff suggested, helped participants to 'own their narrative' and provide support that would be relevant and applicable to others going through a similar experience.



Photo: A group of young people writing their suggestions for how to improve their community space (Build Up London)

Youth social action helps young people to bring about changes to support other young people from their community  
*Case study from Join Our Voice/Lived Experience Leading to Change, led by Voices from Care*

In Feb 2020 C connected with Voices for the first time at Proud To Be Me. Proud To Be Me is an annual celebration delivered by Voices from Care that was coproduced with care-experienced young people, to explore what it means to be care experienced in Wales today. C was really passionate about making changes for young people and using her negative experiences for good and hadn't found opportunities to do so. C joined Voices From Care Cymru Policy group, alongside Voices Staff, professionals and young people, who advise the organisations influencing agenda. C was instrumental in the development of the Voices From Care Cymru Manifesto and was passionate about calling for profit free placement.

C created a video explaining why she thought should be a priority for Welsh Government as part of our digital manifesto.

Voices From Care Cymru had monthly meetings with the deputy minister for Social Services during the pandemic. At one of these meetings, we played them C's video clip. This had a significant impact on the deputy minister, who asked for a Welsh Government official to look into the issue of profit making in placements. This call made the Labour Party Manifesto and subsequently has become a key policy priority for Welsh Government. This removal of profits in children's placement will have a significant impact on the care experienced landscape in the future. We have been told that it was down to C's passionate video that Welsh Labour added this to their political agenda, this would not have happened if it wasn't for C connecting with Voices From Care at Proud to Be Me.

## 4 Impact of Youth Social Action on organisations

Ninety per cent of organisations reported that the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund had helped them to deliver activities that they would not otherwise have been able to deliver. Following their work on youth social action projects, most organisations reported that their engagement with young people has improved, that their services and/or support have become more relevant to the needs of young people, and that their organisation has a better understanding of the issues affecting the young people they support.

**'It has allowed us to really look at the perspective of young people and learn and understand better ways to work with young people and what matters to them. Therefore, we have been able to adapt our organisation to better meet young people's needs.'** (Project delivery staff, staff survey)



95% of organisations agree that as a result of the #iwill project their organisation has a better understanding of the issues affecting the young people they support



90% of organisations agree that young people are more involved in shaping decisions in their organisation as a result of the #iwill project



85% of organisations said that their engagement with young people has improved as a result of the #iwill project



85% of organisations said that as a result of the #iwill project their services and support have become more relevant to the needs of young people

Base: Staff survey (n=23)

Staff commonly reported that their involvement in projects has helped them to better show young people that their voices will be heard, which, in turn, has helped to encourage young people to continue sharing their ideas.

## 4.1 Has this model had a lasting impact on the funded partner's plans to engage these young people in future? If so, how?

Following their involvement in delivering youth social action through the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund, 89% of delivery staff agreed that young people are now more involved in shaping decisions in their organisation. Whilst this model was not new for all organisations, some organisations have now developed new youth boards or new forums for young people to get involved in shaping change within their organisation because of their experience working with young people to deliver social action.

'We have a youth forum now that works alongside staff and our committee members to create and make positive change in our organisation. Their voices now are heard in all levels of our organisation and form an important part of all our decision making which is vital for us to keep creating and developing projects for young people, by young people.' **(Project delivery staff, staff survey)**

Many organisations said that social action has been 'embedded' within their work as a consequence of their involvement in the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund. For example, one organisation reported that they have now included youth social action in other parts of their work and included youth consultation across each area of their organisation to ensure their work is led by young people. This was echoed by other organisations. For example, one staff member reported that this work has resulted in the organisation 'flipping their work on its head' to ensure that young people are in charge.

All funded partners found youth social action beneficial in shaping their work and ensuring that what they deliver is more suited to the needs of the young people their work supports. For example, responding to a campaign (#BAMEover) launched by the young people they had worked with one organisation has internally reflected on the language their team used regarding diversity.

'Involving young people from the beginning of the process of developing a project and having them shape the project themselves has been so brilliant. It has taken more time and energy than other projects to put together but has meant that young people and the community have got more out of this project than if we dictated what the project should look like.' **(Project delivery staff, staff survey)**

Funded partners also reported that, as a result of involvement in youth social action and specifically the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund, they have built relationships with new audiences, partners and, in some cases, been able to expand their service offer. Within this, project leads highlighted that this was only possible because of the track record and evidence base they have created through their #iwill Youth Social Action Project.

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## Annex 1: Funded Partners and their projects

Organisation	Title	Focus
Streetlife	#famsquad	Supports young homeless people in Blackpool to undertake social action, such as raising awareness of homelessness, establishing a young people's homelessness forum, local community and work towards their Duke of Edinburgh Award.
Sutton Coldfield Young Men's Christian Association	Virtually Minded	Supports young men in North Birmingham to engage in social action and explore male mental health through detached youth work and engagement with comic book art.
Positive Youth Foundation	Head Positive/ Team Up	Supports young people, with an emphasis on those less likely to engage such as looked after or newly arrived young people. Young person-led social action groups support the improvement of mental health and well-being of young people living in the deprived wards of inner-city Coventry through developing local activities.
North Tyneside Carers Centre	Young Carers Social Action/Experts by Experience	Supports young carers in North Tyneside to identify areas of their lives that need change and develop and lead creative social action projects to make that change happen. The project will give them more of a voice, improve awareness, improve access to services and change the way professionals engage with them.
Stonewall Equality Ltd	Reaching Further Into Communities: Supporting LGBT Young People to Engage in Social Action	This project will support British LGBT young people who are BAME, disabled, and/or trans to lead youth social action within their communities. These young people may previously not have felt able to participate in youth social action or understood how they can lead and own social action. Supported by Stonewall, young LGBT participants will design and deliver campaigns that will help create lasting change across the country.

Organisation	Title	Focus
Small Green Shoots	Fundamentals	This project works in areas of high deprivation with young people who are not in employment, education or further training. Using creative arts to encourage engagement, the project creates opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to take part in youth social action focused primarily on mental health.
Leonard Cheshire Disability	Can Do Southampton	The Can-Do Project in Southampton will support disabled young people aged between 10 and 20 to participate in community-based volunteering activities, which will build their confidence, increase their skillset & improve networks between young people and their communities/peers.
Cardboard Citizens	Citz Young Storytellers	Citz Young Story-Tellers is led by young people for young people. A unique, arts-based approach is designed to ensure disengaged and disadvantaged young people's stories are heard and valued, enhancing their long-term independence, confidence & progression as social activists.
YMCA East Surrey	WAVES/Meet and Eat	YMCA East Surrey support young people to manage their mental health as well as empowering and equipping them to become mental health champions.
Build Up Foundation	Build Up London	Working with young people aged 10-14 years old across in London the project will build large structures on Adventure Playground and play sites. Working from design through to construction, young people will gain confidence and develop resilience as well as gain valuable leadership and construction skills and experiences.
BIGKID Foundation	Boys' Football Programme	The Boys Football Programme works with young people aged 11-18 years old in Lambeth, supporting young people to take on volunteer roles and lead social action projects based around community cohesion.
Creative Youth Network	Creative Changers	Young people in Bristol are supported to use the creative arts to develop youth social action projects that reflect youth issues and opinions.

Organisation	Title	Focus
Community Recording Studios	Windmills/Weall	The project works with young people aged 10-20 years old living in St Anne's to create a Hip-Hopera using hip-hop, rap and the spoken word to help raise awareness of mental health through discussion and information sharing it will help young people to better manage their mental health experiences.
Voices From Care	Join Our Voice/ Lived Experience Leading to Change	The project supports young person-organised events across Wales to engage care-experienced young people who have no previous involvement in social action. Once engaged, young people join social action campaigns and participation groups aiming to improve services for care-experienced young people.
Hot Chocolate Trust	Young Activists	Supports young people to convert their ideas for positive change into action, locally and nationally. Young people jointly design, implement and manage the Young Activists project, growing in self-worth, hope and skills and agency in the world and increasing their belief that they can bring about positive change
Medrwn Môn	#iwill Anglesey	Supports young people through a partnership between Medrwn Môn & Digartref Ynys Môn that aims to create opportunities for young people who have experienced homelessness to take part in training and community events. They will be supported to use their experiences to help influence and improve services.

## Annex 2: Methodology

In line with the report sections outlined above, the evaluation has sought to address the following research questions:

1. Which strategies were most successful in engaging underrepresented young people in social action?
  - a. What strategies have funded partners used to engage young people in youth social action?
  - b. Which of these were more effective for engaging underrepresented young people?
  - c. What, if any, challenges did organisations face in engaging young people in youth social action?
2. What was the experience of young people involved in the programme? How has the programme impacted upon them and others?
3. Had this model had a lasting impact on the funded partner's plans to engage young people in the future?

All fieldwork undertaken is outlined in [Section 1.1](#).

### Methodological limitations

As previously outlined, the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund aimed to help provide opportunities for young people in areas of high need and deprivation, but aside from that programme outcomes were left open, and funded partners were supported to work towards a set of individually defined project outcomes. This enabled projects to create their own set of measures which they were able to adapt based on project context. This flexible nature was particularly beneficial in the context of Covid-19 which unavoidably changed the delivery models for some projects. Within interviews, the vast majority of projects praised the flexibility of Comic Relief during this time as it meant that projects were able to prioritise adapting their models to suit the needs of their young people. However, it is important to acknowledge that the lack of a shared outcomes framework hinders the programme evaluation's ability to assess the collective impact of the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund. This is because, besides capturing key demographic information e.g., age, there are no other shared measures from which to assess the reach of projects into particularly hard to reach or socially excluded groups nor outcomes to measure as a cohesive whole. It is understood that each project is different, with various delivery models and methods of engagement, therefore an extensive shared framework could be difficult to prescribe to funded partners. It should, however, be considered that a condensed shared framework in which funded partners systematically collect data on participant engagement demographics and outcomes e.g., previous experience of social engagement and development of soft skills e.g., confidence could provide a more consistent and rigorous evidence base to demonstrate programme impact.

As a result of a lack of participant engagement at the beginning of the evaluation, the evaluators adapted fieldwork so that participants primarily took part in surveys and telephone interviews instead of virtual workshops and focus groups. Whilst it was the initial intention that participant survey and telephone interviews were co-produced with project participants, this was not possible due to the lack of engagement. It is therefore acknowledged that the fieldwork tools may not have been as directly relevant to the participants as they would have been if co-produced by young people engaged in the projects. To mitigate this risk, fieldwork tools were developed following the initial interviews with project leads and the creation of an evaluation framework. This ensured that the fieldwork tools were developed with an understanding of each project and the context in which they sat. This evaluation also triangulated the data available from participant interviews, staff interviews and project reporting to ensure that a rich and in-depth evidence base was used.

It is anticipated that limited participant engagement occurred for a number of reasons. This includes, 'Zoom fatigue' as fieldwork was undertaken between July- November 2021, when lockdown measures were eased in the UK and young people may have felt less inclined to take part in additional, voluntary screen-based activities. It is also possible that, as some projects were finished prior to the evaluation, participants were less inclined to engage with the evaluation once they were no longer engaging with their respective projects. It should be considered that future evaluations could be carried out alongside project delivery to ensure that projects and the evaluator are well connected, and an in-depth understanding can be developed.