#iwill Fund Learning Hub
Evidence Workstream

Data Review 3
Dartington Service Design Lab
June 2020

Introduction

This is the third data review produced by the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. The purpose of these reviews is to synthesise the learning that is being generated and documented by the #iwill Fund and Match Funders with existing and emerging evidence outside the Fund. The scale and variety of youth social action supported by the #iwill Fund represents an unprecedented wave of activity. These data reviews seek to harness this activity to capture and disseminate valuable learning for the field.

This paper updates the #iwill Fund Learning Hub's answers to a selection of the Sector Evidence Plan questions, in light of the new evidence and data that has been generated by the #iwill Fund. We also take particular area to examine in more depth. This is: **How do youth social action programmes supported through the #iwill Fund (plan to) achieve outcomes for young people?** For this we reviewed Theories of Change across #iwill Funded delivery. We also present new analysis of Information Management System data on the geographical reach of #iwill Funded delivery.

1. In focus: Theories of Change

1.1 Summary of learning

Our analysis of Match Funder reports to the #iwill Fund identifies three mechanisms through which youth social action programmes aim to achieve outcomes for young people. A 'mechanism' is a theory about how the activities that make up a youth social action opportunities cause changes in the outcomes the opportunity is trying to influence.

- Young people have a safe yet challenging space in which to develop practical, vocational and socio-emotional skills.

- Young people take self-directed action which gives them a sense of purpose that contributes to their wellbeing, self-concept and self-efficacy.

- Young people have the opportunity to engage with different communities, increasing their knowledge of others and their sense of belonging.

There is promising evidence that the first of these mechanisms is effective. Evidence for the remaining two is more mixed at this point, with some studies finding youth social action makes a positive difference in this way and others finding no effect or a negative impact. However, emerging insights from opportunities supported through the #iwill Fund suggest that youth social action may be able to promote young people's wellbeing by helping young people to find meaning in their life and actions.

1.2 Why do we want to understand theories of change for youth social action?

Many funders and delivery organisations involved with the #iwill Fund support and deliver youth social action opportunities in order to achieve a double benefit, improving a range of outcomes for young people, from wellbeing, confidence, and self-efficacy to skills, employment and social connectedness, as well as realising community benefit. The #iwill Fund Learning Hub has recommended that the youth social action sector, like many others, would be strengthened if organisations who fund and deliver opportunities develop more precise Theories of Change. These would identify the specific things about youth social action - the *mechanisms* – that are believed to contribute to improvements in young people's outcomes.[i] Many youth social action organisations who have participated in the #iwill Learning Hub's Impact Accelerator have changed the way they view theories of change. Where before theories of change were viewed as an abstract documents for funders and evaluators, organisations in the Impact Accelerator are developing theories of change that help staff to deliver and improve the opportunity.[ii]

More precise Theories of Change can help organisations, and funders, learn what does and doesn't work well in terms of implementation (what does it take to deliver this programme, and mechanisms, well?) and outcomes (did the programme, and mechanisms, contribute to a chance in outcomes as predicted?). More clearly defined programme theories can enable more accurate evaluations as well as identifying the underlying conditions and assumptions that need to be in place to replicate programmes that are found to be effective. Over time, the wider sector can use this understanding to adapt existing Theories of Change, and build stronger programmes.

Developing this knowledge has always been a priority for the #iwill Fund Learning Hub – the COVID-19 outbreak and policy response highlights this, as the forms that youth social action opportunities can take have changed. In order to continue providing youth social action opportunities that are effective in promoting outcomes for young people we need to understand the mechanisms that lead to positive change and translate those into delivery under new circumstances.

1.3 How do youth social action programmes supported through the #iwill Fund achieve outcomes for young people?

We have analysed documents returned to the #iwill Fund Learning Hub by Match Funders to identify Theories of Change, or partial theories, by which youth social action is hypothesised to promote outcomes for the young people who take part. We have found three common elements which are distinctive to the social action element of programmes.

We have focused on the social action element of multi-component programmes in order to isolate the distinctive ways in which youth social action can promote outcomes for young people.

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1.3.1 Young people have a safe yet challenging space in which to develop practical, vocational and socio-emotional skills.

Overview	Youth social action provides young people with a chance to learn by doing. Young people act in a space where it is safe to fail, but are nevertheless faced with real challenge against which they can practice and develop their skills.

Mechanisms	• Training and teaching of practical, vocational or socio-emotional skills.
	
	• A structured process in which social action is devised, completed and reflected upon.
	
	• A clear role, and responsibility, for the young person to undertake.
	
	• The young person takes a perceived risk. This should be emotionally challenging.
	
	• The young person has some control over the direction of the activity.
	
	• Social action takes place in a space where it's safe to fail. This may include:
	     o structured time for reflection;
	     o ongoing adult support;
	     o limited scope of action.

Examples	***Ormiston Academy Trust***. The Multi-Academy Trust is aiming to build pupils' self-efficacy, resilience and social and emotional skills through youth social action as part of the core and wider curriculum. Social action is intended to enable pupils to "develop, practice and refine … and evidence social and emotional capabilities." The ***HAYN Volunteering Academy Young Leaders Project*** delivered by ***Peabody*** is designed to support young people to become leaders within their communities by allowing them to build their skills, confidence and knowledge through meaningful youth led social action and masterclasses. The accredited programme provides young people with funding, resources and knowledge to design and deliver social action projects to develop themselves, their peers and their wider communities. Partners are chosen based on their track record of working with hard to reach young people and delivering high quality services. All Young Leader projects are designed and delivered by the young people themselves. • *Peabody* provides: structured processes for participation; funding; accreditation; signposting; masterclasses to develop young people's skills; and further development opportunities. The accreditation provides structure for young people to plan, deliver and reflect upon their project and their role in its success. • Partners offer the opportunity to young people who are already using their service, including young people who might not otherwise access

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	social action and support young people to develop and deliver their ideas. • Specialist organisations provide expertise through delivering masterclasses or being commissioned by young people for their events e.g. networking and communication skills training, digital skills or event management.[iii]
Evidence	**There is promising evidence that these mechanisms are effective.** Randomised control trials of opportunities that seek to use this mechanism of change have found small, statistically significant improvements in 'life skills' such as empathy, problem solving and cooperation.[iv] There is some evidence that youth social action contributes to the development of non-cognitive skills that are relevant for success in the classroom.[v] **From the #iwill Fund** Of the young people on ***Virgin Money Foundation***'s Youth Advisory Panel, 100% self-reported improved decision making skills and 57% improved teamworking skills.[vi] A pre-post evaluation of the ***HAYN Young Leaders Project*** shows a positive change in attitude to education, motivation and specific skills but no change in empathy, self-confidence, teamwork and resilience.[vii]

1.3.2 Young people take self-directed action which gives them a sense of purpose that contributes to their wellbeing, self-concept and self-efficacy.

Overview	Youth social action opportunities enable young people to determine and carry out action to address an issue that matters to them. This can create the feeling of making a difference and give a sense of purpose and meaning to young people's lives, which may have a positive effect on their wellbeing, self-concept and self-efficacy.
Mechanisms	• The young person chooses the cause for which they take social action. • The young person has some control over the direction of the activity. • A clear role, and responsibility, for the young person to undertake. • Positive affirmation from others that social action is making a difference. This could come from programme leaders, peers or beneficiaries.
Examples	The *EmpowHER* programme supported by **Spirit of 2012** and delivered through **UK Youth** includes a component in which young women and girls (YW&G) undertake social action. Through social learning YW&G explore issues they care about tackling in their communities. Local youth workers and British Red Cross youth engagement workers support YW&G to explore project ideas. YW&G then lead their own social action project(s) in the community. Qualitative evaluation of the programme suggests that YW&G experience improved wellbeing and self-efficacy because youth social action leads to • a sense of achievement; • pride; • ownership and control; • positive affirmation from others; • positive feelings of supporting a cause.[viii]
Evidence	**The evidence that these mechanisms are effective is mixed.** The principal challenge for the evidence base around youth social action and socio-emotional outcomes is the lack of clearly or consistently defined outcomes. The best quality evidence finds small effects on the measures used. The ways in which youth social action causes these changes are not well understood.[ix] Clearer theories of change will help to improve this evidence base in the future as we will be able to conduct more accurate evaluations of the effects of youth social action opportunities. **From the #iwill Fund** Early insights from opportunities supported by **Spirit of 2012** and **Team London** suggest that youth social action may be able to **promote young people's wellbeing by helping young people to find meaning in their life and actions**.[x]

	Early insights from a peer-research evaluation of **Young Manchester**'s programmes show young people reporting benefits in terms of wellbeing and how good it feels to help people and make a difference.[xi]

1.3.3 Young people have the opportunity to engage with different communities, increasing their knowledge of others and their sense of belonging.

Overview	Youth social action opportunities enable young people to engage with and support different communities. These could be their local community, or communities of culture, interest or experience. This can create a sense of belonging for the young person. It may also expose the young person to communities they would not otherwise meet which can increase their openness to and comfort with difference.
Mechanisms	• The young person meets people who are different to them/have different experiences. • The young person has increased contact with people in their own communities. • Through social action the young person makes a perceived positive contribution to their community. • A community that can be reached by the young person (with adult support).
Examples	The **EmpowHER** programme supported by **Spirit of 2012** and delivered through **UK Youth** includes a component in which young women and girls (YW&G) undertake social action. A mixed methods programme evaluation reported that although YSA participants felt improved social cohesion (acceptance by others, trust, interacting with different people), this was challenged by the relatively small role they played against the size of the social action activity or event. The impact on social connectedness was supported by increased knowledge of their community and more opportunities to mix with their community.[xii] **Co-op Foundation** are funding youth social action opportunities through the #iwill Fund with the goal of reducing loneliness and isolation in young people and society more widely. By enabling young people to take action in their communities, the programmes supported by *Co-op* aim to increase the number of young people who have enough good quality relationships based on mutual trust and empathy and who feel part of a wider community that values their contribution.[xiii]
Evidence	**The evidence that these mechanisms are effective is mixed.[xiv]** While some studies have suggested positive effects,[xv] one randomised control trial

found social connectedness to decline with social action participation. Qualitative interviews with young people suggest this is because the opportunity feels disconnected with other parts of their lives.[xvi]

From the #iwill Fund

Spirit of 2012's evaluation (carried out by *UK Youth*) of the *EmpowHER* programme show improved feelings of social cohesion for participants. An increase in young women and girls meeting different people is correlated with them perceiving that people in their community have benefitted from their social action project.[xvii]

Early insights from a peer-research evaluation of **Young Manchester**'s programmes show young people reporting benefits in terms of social connections.[xviii]

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2. What is youth social action?

A summary of our learning on this question prior to this review can be found in Appendix 1.

2.1 What has the #iwill Fund funded?

The Information Management System allows us to paint an emerging picture of what has been funded. Volunteering (50% of funded opportunities) is the most common form of youth social action supported through the #iwill Fund, followed by tutoring, coaching or mentoring (16%) and helping to improve the local area (16%). Campaigning currently represents a small proportion of funded activity (6%). Over half (58%) of youth social action opportunities in the #iwill Fund portfolio are delivered in community settings while a fifth (22%) are delivered through schools.

The vast majority of #iwill-funded youth social action opportunities are directed towards a specific cause (88%) and the most popular causes are Education & Learning (45%) and People & Communities (39%).

2.2 Our emerging typology

The Learning Hub's paper 'Towards a Typology of Youth Social Action' reviews definitions and typologies of youth social action, and begins to build an evidence-based picture of the different types of youth social action being supported by the #iwill Fund.

3. What does youth social action do?

A summary of our learning on this question prior to this review can be found in Appendix 1.

3.1 A framework for the benefits of youth social action

In our paper [on the community impact of youth social action,](#) the #iwill Fund Learning Hub set out a framework for thinking about different kinds of benefit for young people and communities. We identified five kinds of potential benefit from youth social action opportunities.

1. **Young person**. Young people benefit directly from participating in the youth social action. Our paper on outcomes for young people identified four major categories: (i) socio-emotional or character outcomes, (ii) civic or societal outcomes, (iii) employment outcomes (iv) education outcomes.

2. **Organisational**. Organisations that provide youth social action opportunities can benefit directly from the activity, e.g. young volunteers free up capacity for paid staff.

3. **Community**. Benefits may accrue to a community directly from the social action young people are engaged in, e.g. the local community may benefit from young people regenerating a park area, or people may benefit from volunteering undertaken by a young person.

4. **Reflexive**. Young people belong to communities. Any benefits that accrue to their communities may also benefit the young person individually, e.g. young people can also enjoy the regenerated park.

5. **Societal**. Young people continue to belong to communities as they grow up. Some of the benefits that accrue to young people directly from youth social action participation may be beneficial for the societies in which they live, e.g. young people may become more active citizens.

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

A summary of our learning on this question prior to this review can be found in Appendix 1.

4.1 Background

Our paper on the [socio-economic participation gap in youth social action](#) sets out the data on the fact that young people from lower-income backgrounds are less likely to participate in social action. It also lays out the external evidence about what drives, and can help close, this gap.
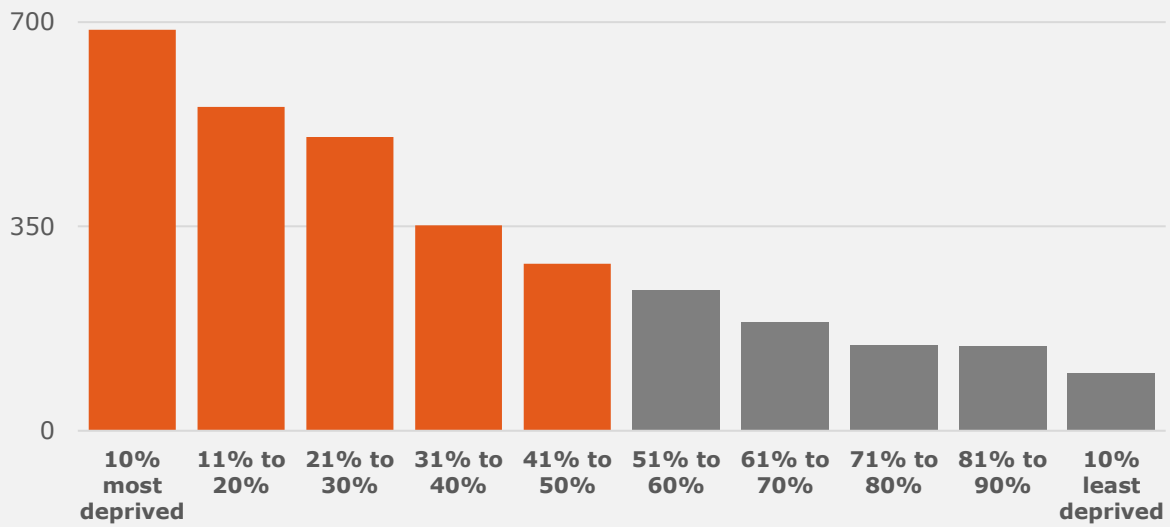
Alongside closing the socio-economic participation gap, the #iwill Fund aims to support younger children (less than 14 years of age) into social action and also seeks to create youth social action opportunities in geographical 'cold spots' where young people's access to opportunities is lower.

4.2 Reach of the #iwill Fund
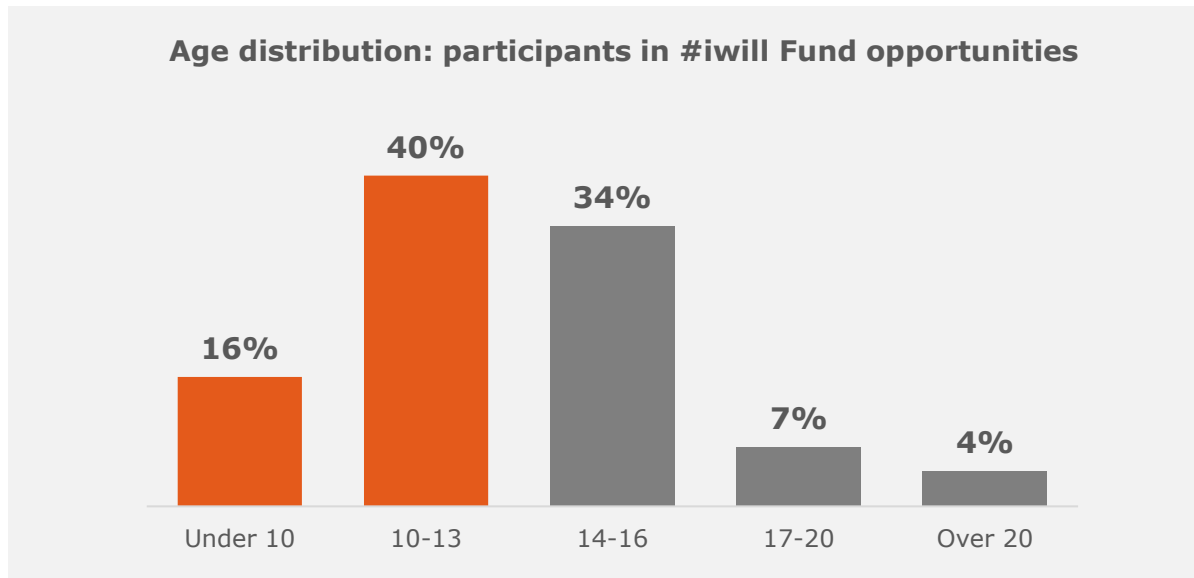
4.2.1 Deprivation

The #iwill Fund investment driver of engaging (which covers recruitment, retention, completion, and transition) more young people from lower socio-economic groups to participate in youth social action has translated into more #iwill funded social action opportunities taking place in the most deprived postcodes in the UK.

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

4.2.3 Age

Just over half of the youth social action opportunities supported through the #iwill Fund have been for children younger than 14. However, the vast majority of opportunities supported through the Fund have been for children and young people of secondary school age (between 10 and 16 years old).

Age distribution: participants in #iwill Fund opportunities

Under 10	10-13	14-16	17-20	Over 20
16%	40%	34%	7%	4%

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5. How can we support quality youth social action?

A summary of our learning on this question prior to this review can be found in Appendix 1.

In this Data Review we have focused on the #iwill Campaign principle that quality youth social action is youth-led. At this time, we do not have anything more to add on this question but note that further insights on supporting quality youth social action from the #iwill Fund Learning Hub's Impact Accelerator will be published before the next Data Review.

Appendix 1. Summary of Evidence Plan Questions

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub exists to harness the evidence and learning generated by the wave of youth social action opportunities supported through the #iwill Fund. Our Data Review papers synthesise the learning and evidence from within, and external to, the #iwill Fund through the lens of our Strategic Evidence Plan questions. The Learning Hub developed the questions in consultation with stakeholders in the #iwill Fund – Match Funders, their evaluation partners, and the Leadership Board.

The boxes below summarise our emerging answers to the Strategic Evidence Plan questions. These answers are based on previous Data Reviews and are updated here in light of new evidence and data that has been generated by the #iwill Fund since the most recent Review. New content appears in **bold**.

What is youth social action?

- **Is there a useful typology of youth social action that can cover both the nature and aims of an activity?**

- **What kinds of youth social action have been supported through the #iwill Fund?**

- Youth social action is a deliberately broad term, and new. One result is that some grantees do not understand what is meant by the terms 'social action' and 'youth-led'. This implies a need to promote a shared understanding of these terms for that delivery organisations can develop viable youth social action proposition for funding.

- The most common way in which young people are able to lead youth social action opportunities is by making decisions and choices within the programme. Some opportunities enable young people to apply directly for funding, take a lead in assessing funding applications or get involved in evaluation and research.

- Youth social action is best understood by considering a range of typologies that highlight different features of the practice.

- An emerging 'evidence-based' typology is being developed from the #iwill Fund Information Management System, which helps us to be more precise with recommendations around outcomes and quality.

- The Information Management System also allows us to build a (developing) picture of the opportunities being supported by the #iwill Fund.

What does youth social action do?

- **Which positive outcomes have been shown to be promoted by youth social action for young people, children and communities?**

- **Can we say there are types or features of youth social action which increase chances of outcomes?**

- In general, the evidence base for the impact of youth social action on young people's outcomes is in the early stages of development.

- Particular areas of confidence, however, are around employment skills and civic and political engagement, where evidence suggests that youth social action can be effective in promoting positive outcomes.

- We cannot conclude from the evidence to date that participation in youth social action improves attainment in educational assessments, although there is some evidence it can affect non-attainment outcomes such as teamwork and self-confidence.

- Early insights from opportunities supported by the #iwill Fund suggest that youth social action may be able to promote young people's wellbeing by helping young people to find meaning in their life and actions.

- The evidence base for the community benefit of youth social action is underdeveloped relative to other potential benefits.

- **Our analysis of Match Funder reports to the #iwill Fund identifies three mechanisms through which youth social action programmes supported through the #iwill Fund aim to achieve outcomes for young people.**

    o **Young people have a safe yet challenging space in which to develop practical, vocational and socio-emotional skills.**

    o **Young people take self-directed action which gives them a sense of purpose that contributes to their wellbeing, self-concept and self-efficacy.**

    o **Young people have the opportunity to engage with different communities, increasing their knowledge of others and their sense of belonging.**

How do we support youth social action for all?

- **How do we reach children and young people from backgrounds known to be less likely to participate?**

- **How do we engage children and young people younger than 14?**

- **How do we initiate youth social action in 'cold spots' (geographies/sectors/ institutions), and how can youth social action activity be sustained?**

- **How do we support children and young people to transition between youth social action opportunities?**

- In 2018, 40% of young people (10-20 years old) from the most affluent backgrounds took part in some form of social action compared with 30% of the least affluent.

- The #iwill Fund has supported more youth social action opportunities in deprived postcodes than affluent ones.

- The most common engagement strategy the Match Funders report supporting is *targeted universalism*, which appears to be an effective way of reaching young people from lower socio-economic groups.

- Charitable funders and delivery organisations that seek to close the socio-economic gap must be conscious of the fact that it is due to self-reinforcing patterns of behaviour and therefore requires an intentional response that is implemented consistently and with sufficient resource.

How can we support quality youth social action?

- **What can we say about the strengths and weaknesses of youth social action providers in aggregate?**

- **What do we know about how to support youth social action providers to improve?**

- Shared quality improvement challenges for the field include managing and monitoring implementation fidelity, measuring impact and learning from this and sharing learning across the field.

- Organisations within the Impact Accelerator benefitted from support to integrate youth social action into their theory of change, and to define what is 'core' and 'flex' within their programmes.

- The #iwill Campaign quality principle of youth-led opportunities can be implemented at different levels. Funders with a commitment to supporting youth-led social action should consider how to adapt all of their processes to enable young people to be part of leadership and decision-making.

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[i] Dartington Service Design Lab (2019). *Youth Social Action and Outcomes for Young People*. #iwill Fund Learning Hub: https://www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/iwill_fund_learning_hub_-_evidence_workstream_-_youth_socal_action_and_outcomes_for_young_people.pdf.

ii #iwill Fund Learning Hub (forthcoming). *Impact Accelerator Report: Cohort 2*.

iii HAYN (2020) *Volunteering Academy – Mid Year Report (Year 2)*. Internal Document.

iv Kirkman et al. (2016), *Evaluating Youth Social Action: Does Participating in Social Action Boost the Skills Young People Need to Succeed in Adult Life?* Cabinet Office; Behavioural Insights Team.

v Gorard et al. (2016) *Youth Social Action Trials: Youth United*. Education Endowment Foundation.

vi Rachel Kyle-Barclay (2019) *Youth Advisory Panel Thoughts and Reflections*. Accessed: 11/02/20. https://virginmoneyfoundation.org.uk/blog/youth-advisory-panel-thoughts-and-reflections.html

vii HAYN (2020)

viii UKYouth (2019) *EMPOWHER Cohort One Impact Report*. Internal Document.

ix Dartington Service Design Lab (2019)

x Dartington Service Design Lab (2019)

xi Manchester Metropolitan University (2019) *Evaluation of Young Manchester Youth and Play Fund: YSARs Programme Update Summary*. Internal Document.

xii UKYouth (2019)

xiii Co-operative Foundation (2019) *#iwill / National Lottery Community Fund Reporting: Full Year Report*. Internal Document.

xiv Dartington Service Design Lab (2019)

xv Panayiotou et al. (2017) *National Citizen Service 2016 Evaluation Report*. Kantar Public.

xvi Gill et al. (2019) *Learning from HeadStart: Does social action help young people with emerging mental health issues?*

xvii UKYouth (2019)

xviii Manchester Metropolitan University (2019)