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# #iwill Fund Learning Hub Systems Workstream

Increasing Youth Social Action in Education  
Dartington Service Design Lab  
February 2019

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## About the #iwill Fund Learning Hub

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

1. To inform the strategic and investment direction of the #iwill Fund. This will ensure that the Leadership Board and #iwill Fund delivery partners are able to target funds into the right areas, ages and approaches, where it is really needed.
2. To strengthen and connect the youth social action sector by enabling and facilitating the sharing of learning, data and insights across delivery partners, including what does and doesn't work. Sharing key insights and learning more broadly within the wider youth social action sector.

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

### 1) Systems

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

#### **(a) Systems Mapping**

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

#### **(b) Funder Collaboration**

A series of 'Lab Storms' will be offered to Match Funders to enable a collaborative approach toward identifying common challenges, and to find and share actionable responses to them. The Lab Storms will support Match Funders to fund as effectively as possible (April 2019 – April 2021).

## 2) Sector Evidence Plan

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

- Intra-fund evaluation aggregation
- Extra-fund research aggregation
- Match Funder returns to the #iwill Fund and data from Information Management System
- Results from other workstreams.

## 3) Quality Practice

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

# Introduction

The Systems Mapping workstream was developed in response to the fact that many Match Funders are interested in developing new and sustainable ways to increase the number of youth social action opportunities available to young people. This depends, at least in part, in youth social action being integrated into, or collaborating with, existing settings and institutions.

Within the #iwill Fund Learning Hub, we are looking at how youth social action can be integrated into, or collaborate with, three 'systems' – education, place and the wider social action system.

**In doing this we are relying on existing research, the views of experts and delivery partners, and particularly the views of Match Funders.**

There are two aims of this work:

1. We are seeking to understand Match Funders' experiences of collaborating with these 'systems', and the barriers and enablers they have observed.

2. We then seek to go beyond this to develop ‘responses’ to these things. **Responses may be ways of funding and collaborating which increase the chances of success – or they may be ‘big ideas’ that could form the heart of a funding approach.**

These responses, and the work with funders that underlies them, can inform the ongoing development of proposals and decisions by the #iwill Fund Leadership Board and Match Funders. Beyond the Fund, we hope to reach other funders and delivery organisations which are also interested in the same aims: of increasing the number of youth social action opportunities in these systems’ in sustainable ways.

This report was written by Dartington Service Design Lab. It presents the results of our work on education and youth social action. The audiences for this paper are the Leadership Board and Match Funders of the #iwill Fund, and other funders interested in youth social action and education. We want this work to support their decision-making and work with schools. In ‘Process’ we describe the process we followed to (a) achieve a collective understanding of the barriers and enablers for youth social action in education and (b) co-produce a set of ideas in response to this understanding.

‘Why focus on education and schools?’ provides some context from the existing evidence base, gives a brief rationale for our focus on the education system, and lays out the assumptions, or hypotheses, about education and youth social action that we used to ground the work with Match Funders.

‘Conclusions’ pulls together our conclusions: four key principles for ways in which those seeking to increase youth social action in education should go about this, and ‘in practice’ ideas that emerged from the workshop about how this might be done.

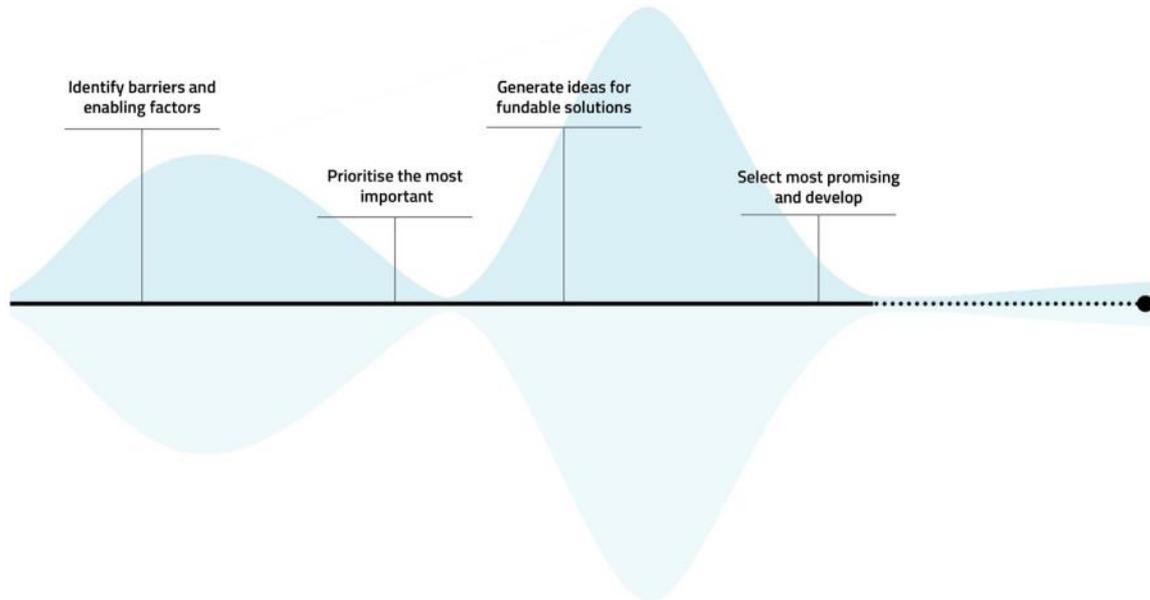
The first Appendix comprises the long list of barriers and enablers to establishing youth social action in education that came out of the first workshop. These represent the views and experiences of funders, teachers, and delivery organisations in attendance. The second Appendix comprises a similar list drawn from a research paper into the same subject – barriers and enablers for youth social action in school. Read together, they provide further useful information for those looking to support youth social action in a school context.

## Process

At the heart of this process were a pair of workshops facilitated by the Dartington Service Design Lab and Renaisi. These brought Match Funders together with experts and stakeholders in each system. The first workshop identified and prioritised a long list of barriers and enablers to youth social action in the system. The results of this can be found in the first Appendix. In the second

session, attendees chose to focus on a limited number of these barriers and co-designed responses to these. These can be found in the third section of this report.

The process was guided by the 'double-diamond approach' depicted below.



Alongside #iwill Fund Match Funders, attendees were drawn from youth social action delivery partners (some funded by the #iwill Fund) and school practitioners. These included Envision, First Give, the Co-op Foundation, Ormiston Trust, Ormiston MAT, Pears Foundation, Children in Need, Step Up to Serve, and the National Lottery Community Fund. A young #iwill Ambassador also attended the second workshop – he had participated in youth social action via school and so brought a participant’s perspective.

These workshops were supported by desk research into the drivers and barriers to establishing youth social action in education. This research also led us to narrow our focus to schools alone – the reasons for this are shared in the next section.

## Why focus on education and schools?

In 2017, the proportion of young people who participated in social action was estimated at 39%.<sup>i</sup> Despite the growth in investment and attention devoted to youth social action in connection with the #iwill campaign this number has not changed significantly since 2014.<sup>ii</sup> Neither has the participation gap: In 2014 the socio-economic gap in youth social action participation stood at 20 percentage points and at 19 percentage points in 2017.<sup>iii</sup>

There are a number of reasons to believe that schools – and the education system more widely – may be pivotal in increasing participation rates in youth social action and vital in continuing to close the socio-economic participation gap.

1. Analysis of data collected by the National Youth Social Action Survey found that “If I could do it at school/ college/ university/ work” was the second most popular answer to the question ‘what would encourage you to take part [in social action]’; the first most popular being ‘if I could do it with my friends’. This question was posed to respondents who had not taken part in any meaningful youth social action in the last 12months.<sup>iv</sup>
2. An estimated 59% of young people who participated in social action in 2017 got involved through their school or college.
3. School is a more important driver of participation for young people in lower socio-economic categories (C, D and E).<sup>v</sup> A recent paper by Eddy Hogg at the University of Kent makes the case that schools are the most egalitarian way to introduce young people of all backgrounds to youth social action, as the socio-economic gap is smallest where participation via school is at its highest.<sup>vi</sup>
4. There is a significant socio-economic gap in teacher’s perceptions of their school’s social action culture with just 27% of Primary teachers in schools with a high percentage of pupils who are eligible for free school meals saying social action is embedded compared with 57% of Primary teachers in schools with a low rate of free school meals.<sup>vii</sup>

Schools may be convinced to buy into youth social action for two reasons:

1. There is some evidence that participation in youth social action is associated with better academic performance.<sup>viii</sup> There is also some evidence that participation increases non-academic attitudes and skills that are valued by schools and parents, including empathy, ‘grit’, and a sense of community involvement.<sup>ix</sup>
2. Primary and Secondary teachers increasingly see social action as part of their school’s culture and practice (34% in 2015 vs. 59% in 2017).<sup>x</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that the policy context is currently favourable to youth social action: as well as DCMS’s financial commitment through the #iwill Fund, the Secretary of State for Education has repeatedly made clear his commitment to strengthening ‘character’ through education, and specifically mentioned volunteering as a route to this. This commitment includes work with the Social Mobility Commission to research the value of extra-curricular activities to social mobility<sup>xi</sup>.

Out of our background research, we developed three hypotheses to ‘boundary’ and guide our discussions:

**Hypothesis 1** Schools aren’t the only game in town when it comes to education and youth social action, but that’s where the majority of 7-to-20-year olds<sup>xii</sup> are, and

therefore the most effective route to engaging young people, **from all socio-economic backgrounds**, in **meaningful** social action.

**Hypothesis 2** Schools have highly devolved **and informal** decision-making powers; the system is very decentralised.

**Hypothesis 3** The desire to embed youth social action in a school is conditioned by two factors: (a) buy-in to the value of youth social action and (b) access to the resource needed to make it happen.

## Conclusions

From the workshops emerged two distinct types of outputs:

1. Over-arching principles for supporting youth social action in schools that all participants felt were important and should be integrated into the ways funders act in the school's space. Note that these are different to the six Quality Principles which underpin high-quality, meaningful youth social action.
2. These gave rise to 'in practice' ideas for funders that are in line with these principles and give some concrete suggestions for supporting the availability and sustainability of youth social action in schools.

These outputs are presented below.

## The Principle: Understand and emphasise benefits for schools

The term 'triple benefit' was used by workshop attendees to describe the potential for youth social action to have a positive effect for young people, the wider community *and schools*. The school leaders and ex-teachers who participated emphasised their experience that youth social action supported school improvement and was a way in which the pupils could 'do their bit' to improve a school, alongside teachers and leadership.

'Triple benefit' is a potentially attractive concept to all schools, but it has particular salience to head teachers thinking about their improvement needs. Schools in this situation can benefit from engaging students as well as staff in their improvement strategy, and youth social action is a way to do this.

Investing in youth social action signals to students that a school cares about their all-round development, and that they expect high standards from them. It also signals to the local stakeholders that the school wants to be a part of its community and develop a habit of service in its young people.

In addition, as described above there is evidence (albeit limited) that youth social action can improve some of the key outcomes that schools are OFSTED-inspected on, including attainment.

### In Practice:

- Funders could curate, and publicise, a collection of case studies from head teachers that describe how schools have used youth social action in their improvement plans. Education practitioners shared anecdotal examples of this during the workshop.
- Funders could support peer networks (see below) to allow heads to share these stories and support others to integrate youth social action into school improvement plans.
- Funders could specifically support schools with significant improvement needs to integrate youth social action – this could be facilitated by working with Local Authorities or Multi-Academy Trusts.

## The Principle: Use peer networks

Education practitioners described during both workshops how they have been convinced of the value of youth social action, in general or a specific programme, by peers in the field. The credibility of youth social action spreads through the teaching profession by peer effects: either word-of-mouth or when school leads observe others they respect adopting youth social action practices in their school(s).

The implication is that those looking to expand the reach of youth social action in the education sector should use teacher and head-teacher peer networks. Supporting youth social action champions within the education system, fostering collaboration and contact between schools and encouraging healthy one-upmanship through the recognition of good practice by awards and social media coverage.

### In Practice:

- Funders can develop and support ‘youth social action champions’ at all stages of the teaching profession (not just senior leadership) by providing funding to allow them to take time away from the classroom to connect with other teachers and share their experiences.

- This can be complemented by funding youth social action conferences, or sponsoring slots at general education conferences to give champions a platform to speak to, and engage, others.
- Funders can support the establishment and maintenance of partnerships between schools to share the delivery of, and learning from, youth social action opportunities.
- A necessary preliminary step to the above could be to fund research into the landscape of teacher and head teacher networks. This could help funders and partners work with the right ones for their purposes.

## The Principle: Support clear communication with schools

Clear and consistent communication with school emerged as a key principle during the workshops for some schools; the right choice will be to engage external providers to facilitate at least a part of the youth social action offer. Assessing which external provider is right, or testing the potential fit, and quality, or a prospective partner, can be challenging.

Participants said that schools want guidance about what good quality youth social action 'looks like', how to assess whether a provider can offer this, and about how to evaluate the success of what actually is delivered. They also want the full costs, including internal resourcing requirements, of working with external partners to be explicit.

It was also noted that communication with schools does not have to come just from funders or delivery organisations. Young people themselves can be powerful advocates for youth social action. Additionally, while teachers do want more information about the 'market', the views they value most are those of their peers.

### In Practice:

- Funders could support a 'Trip Advisor' style resource where teachers and leads share experiences and views of organisations they've worked with. This could be extremely light touch at the beginning, working with any of the online resources which we know a lot of teachers use, rather than creating anything new.
- Funders could support an evaluation guide for schools. Given the diversity of youth social action activities and intended outcomes, a 'one-size-fits-all' framework isn't possible, but schools can be guided to set realistic outputs and outcomes for youth social action (whether externally commissioned, or delivered in-house), put in place feasible and practical tracking measures, and use this to assess the success of the activity.

## The Principle: Build capacity for in-school delivery

It is easy to think that increasing social action in schools requires expanding the work of delivery organisations. This is an important part of the picture but not a complete one. Schools already deliver a lot of work that can be considered youth social action, and supporting them to do more is important. Youth social action funders can also seek to build capacity within schools to deliver their own youth social action.

It was noted that sometimes schools deliver what attendees were confident describing as 'youth social action' but that schools often don't call it that. Youth social action is a wide-ranging term which encompasses many projects and activities and there are many discrete or programmatic activities that contain a youth social action component.

If promising practice isn't identified as youth social action, it may not be spread through campaign networks and shared with other schools. Attendees wanted schools to be encouraged to see appropriate existing activity through a 'youth social action lens' and be supported to share this internally and externally.

Attendees also commented that quality in-school delivery requires resources, and that, in primary schools in particular, this would be teacher resource. Protecting this in a time of constrained budgets can be challenging for schools.

### In Practice:

- Funders can support the building of an online resource to host youth social action resources – including descriptions of activities schools have facilitated, how they've been delivered, and any materials used to support them. A good place to start might be in-school delivery funded via the #iwill campaign.
- Funders can strengthen a school's capacity to deliver youth social action in-house by (part-)funding more than one post with time protected for delivering youth social action. This may be a more *sustainable* strategy than funding a single position because knowledge and capacity for youth social action will be distributed across the school and therefore less vulnerable to staff turnover.

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## Appendix 1. Barriers and Enablers I

At the first workshop, we asked attendees to develop a long list of barriers that make it challenging to establish and sustain youth social action in schools, as well as enabling factors that make it easier. We have grouped these into eight themes identified during the first workshop. The bullet points below extend and nuance the headings. These are the summarised views of attendees.

### **1. School leaders are the crucial decision-makers but can be hard to reach and don't respond to a one-size fits all approach.**

- School leaders make decisions that determine whether youth social action is offered within their school, and how it is resourced.
- They establish, maintain and communicate a culture that values youth social action – which is crucial to it being taken up.
- A good school leader is able to work within the wider system – funding, Ofsted etc. – to protect space for youth social action.
- Headteachers influence each other – where there is respect. Actions and priorities within schools may be discussed between heads of different schools.
- School leads can be self-interested – ambitious school heads may be motivated to establish youth social action in their school to improve their own reputation.
- Some school leads might have negative past experience of social action, including poor provision.

### **2. Some schools will struggle to integrate youth social action more than others – often the ones we want to reach.**

- The delivery lead (usually a teacher) needs to be organised and committed to youth social action, but also have time protected for them to deliver and benefit from support across the school (finance, caretaker, SLT).
- The transition to a new delivery lead is a key moment for success or failure.
- A culture of youth social action within a school makes it easier to initiate and deliver activities from the school. Fostered by: recognition and celebration; integration of youth social action into teacher performance management, whole class/school approach.
- There are particular barriers to working with schools in special measures: inexperienced, unconfident school leadership not wanting to take risks; a flight of talented teachers from the school; a focus on near-term objectives. NB Could youth social action be a part of 'special measures' schools recovery plans?

- Schools with a higher proportion of student who are eligible for free school meals feel qualitatively different to work with – due to greater safeguarding concerns, lower community/parental support.
- Schools see youth social action as 'nice to have' for students so don't see it as a priority to make it available to free school meal pupils.
- There can often be multiple partners running programmes in one school – especially if the school carries a flag of high need (e.g. Opportunity Areas).
- Outsourcing can alleviate resource and logistical concerns for schools, but there are many opportunities for youth social action within schools, or very locally.
- The school needs to balance youth social action with curricular *and* other non-curricular activities like sport and performing arts.

### **3. Youth social action has some distinctive delivery challenges and risks.**

- The logistics and safeguarding procedures of taking children out of the school can be challenging and require resources to overcome/satisfy.
- Lack of personal interface with external partners is a barrier – delivery partners can't meet 1000s of heads.
- Fundraising when parents can't afford meals is expected to be challenging.
- Schools don't like factors beyond their control – is youth social action particularly susceptible to this?
- Schools need buy-in from external stakeholders such as local communities, parents and governors.
- Cost is always a constraint – especially if you don't know what good looks like.
- Any decision to allocate a school's finite resources is risky.
- Out-of-the-box, outsourced youth social action providers can be a good option for schools but:
  - Resources for internal provision remains a very important issue.
  - Schools may not know how to distinguish good providers from poor ones.
  - Is the youth social action activity going to be sustainably funded?
  - "Free is the magic word", or even 'minus-free' offers where delivery partners can source grants for pupils' youth social action.
  - Good quality programmes don't have the resource to market themselves.

### **4. Youth social action – and its value – still isn't widely known.**

- Schools may not have enough information or knowledge about youth social action.
- Is there an accepted and used definition of (meaningful) social action?
- Youth social action needs an evidence base to demonstrate/determine its value.
- How is the (potential) value of youth social action communicated?
- Parents may think money is going on non-essential things if they do not value youth social action. This creates pressures on schools not to offer youth social action.
- Is youth social action written into the school philosophy?

- Should we talk about volunteering with a young cohort?
- If a funder is supporting youth social action for distinctive reasons, does this impact on the school?
- Is the 'double-benefit' really a draw for schools?

#### **5. Meaningful social action for all young people can disrupt typical school culture.**

- Schools may not be giving students genuine leadership opportunities.
- Safeguarding procedures limit the scope – and increase the resources required – for external volunteering with younger pupils (under 16).
- A culture of youth-led social action within a school may be a key factor determining the sustainability of youth social action there – how do you get it if it's not there.
- Are schools overly risk averse? How do they feel about letting go of control?
- Can young people be reached directly to introduce youth social action within their schools?
- Higher deprivation may imply higher levels of risk which require higher levels of resource.

#### **6. Schools need to be well-linked to a local community - that wants youth social action.**

- What is the level of a school's local intelligence – how well do they know local needs and resources?
- Schools need to build strong links to the local community.
- The perception of young people nationally is quite poor – are communities reluctant to engage?
- Do schools *believe* that other stakeholder value youth social action and will buy in to their activities?

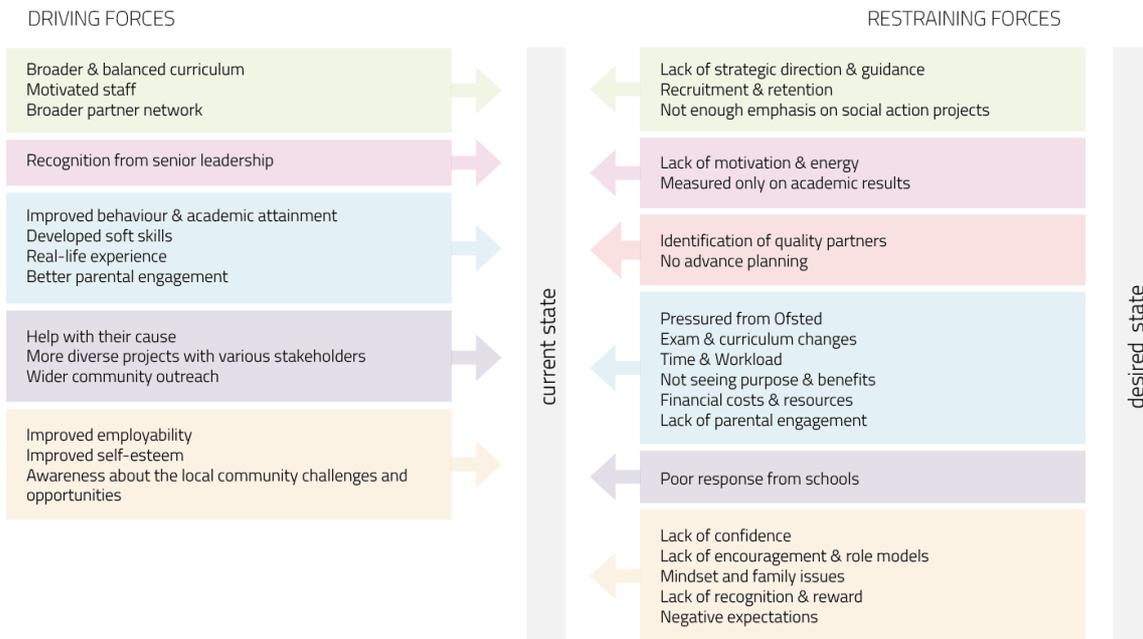
#### **7. There aren't (m)any external incentives that align with schools embedding youth social action.**

- Could healthy competition between schools on youth social action drive up participation and opportunities?
- DfE/Ofsted pressures influence priorities. These may be further influenced by public perceptions and international rankings such as PISA tables.
- How does the character agenda align with funder' approach to backing youth social action?
- Is youth social action recognised and valued in life beyond/outside school e.g. universities, employers?
- Schools are juggling competing objectives including statutory obligations and other extra-curricular activities.
- Schools in special measures face very different pressures and incentives that often seem poorly aligned with youth social action.

## Appendix 2. Barriers and Enablers II

Alexandra Bamburova from Henley Business School has looked at what helps, and hinders, the take-up of youth social action within education.<sup>xiii</sup> In the table below, enablers (or “driving forces”) and barriers (or “restraining forces”) are broken down by the stakeholders within the education system to which they relate. This list was shared with attendees prior to the first workshop as a starting point for discussion.

Leadership in schools	Young people & Parents	Schools, Young people & Parents
Staff	Partner organisations	All employees in schools



## REFERENCES

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- <sup>viii</sup> Celio, C.I., Durlak, J., & Dymnicki, A. (2011) A meta-analysis of the impact of service-learning on students; Journal of Experiential Education, 34(2), 164-181
- <sup>ix</sup> Behavioural Insights Team (2016), Evaluating Youth Social Action – Final Report
- <sup>x</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research (2017) Teacher Voice Omnibus
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://www.tes.com/news/major-research-pledge-after-school-activities>
- <sup>xii</sup> This is the age range of interest to the #iwill Fund
- <sup>xiii</sup> Bamburova, A. (2017) An exploration of the drivers and potential barriers for schools in England embedding youth social action in their culture and practice