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#iwill Fund Learning Hub Quality Practice Workstream

Initial Report on the Second Impact Accelerator Cohort
The Centre for Youth Impact
March 2020

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Introduction

The Quality Practice workstream of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub seeks to identify strengths and areas for development in youth social action delivery, by supporting learning and improvement amongst delivery organisations, and sharing the resulting learning with funders and beyond. At the core of this workstream is a 12-month learning programme, developed by Generation Change and now delivered by the Centre for Youth Impact, called the Impact Accelerator. This scheme is undertaken by #iwill Fund grantees individually and as part of a peer cohort. The Impact Accelerator is structured around a self-assessment tool, developed by the Dartington Service Design Lab, called the Confidence Framework. The self-assessment process sits alongside a package of training, consultancy and coaching to help organisations to use the tool to inform and drive improvement and learning.

By supporting delivery organisations to understand and improve their offer in this way, and by building their capacity to clarify and learn about their programme outcomes, this work will deepen our understanding of what it takes to deliver quality youth social action. This will also generate insights that can inform Match Funders' understanding of practice across different settings. Alongside, the Impact Accelerator aims to establish a strong community of practice amongst organisations offering youth social action opportunities, all of whom are using the Confidence Framework as a common self-assessment process to better understand and improve their impact.

The Quality Practice workstream intends to support three cohorts of organisations in total to undertake the process. The learning from each cohort will feed into two Quality Practice Insights Reports - one during the early stages to capture initial insights, and one produced at the end, once improvement work has been implemented. These reports will build on each other, with learning from each cohort feeding into the delivery and reports for the next. You can read the initial paper relating to the first cohort [here](#), and our final report [here](#).

This is the initial insights paper for the second cohort, who commenced the Impact Accelerator in September 2019. In this paper, we covers insights that have been collected from the first two phases of the Impact Accelerator, and our reflections on how insights from this cohort are supporting learning from the previous cohort.

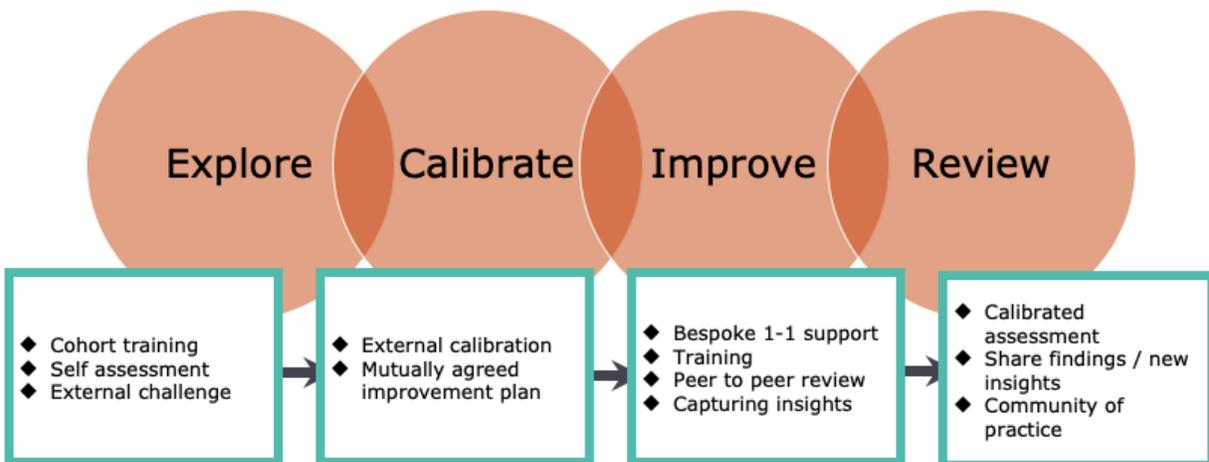
The Impact Accelerator Programme

The Impact Accelerator is an intensive, 12-month programme for organisations offering youth social action opportunities that are committed to getting (even) better at what they do. It is designed to work towards three core aims:

- i) to foster a culture of learning within programme delivery;
- ii) to build organisational capacity for evidence-led improvement; and
- iii) to establish a common assessment of programme efficacy.

It is a cohort-based programme, with opportunities for organisations to share collective lessons, insights and good practice as they progress through the process. Whilst many participants can recognise the potential value of this aspect, in their final reports most organisations from the first cohort reflected that they had not felt that they had the capacity to make full use of the community. As such, we will be connecting relevant organisations from the current and past cohorts as and when there is clear benefit, demand, and capacity to do so.

The programme takes place over four key phases:



1) Explore

The common structure running through each of these phases is the Confidence Framework, which supports organisations to identify their strengths and weaknesses and prioritise their improvement goals. The process takes organisations through an initial self-assessment, which generates a 'heat-map' of the team's confidence across five key 'pillars':

To improve quality, increase impact and scale of Youth Social Action:						
Design	The YSA opportunity is logical and clearly articulated	Target populations are defined	Core structure and activities are clearly defined	Supporting materials have been created	Outcomes are clearly defined and measurable	The YSAO is supported by a Theory of Change linking these elements
Deliver	The YSAO is effectively and properly delivered to support young people to make a difference	Implementation of the YSAO is monitored	Delivery targets are set, and monitored.	The YSAO recruits the right staff	The YSAO supports and develops staff	Key stakeholders for delivery are known and engaged.
Monitor	Evidence is used to learn and adapt, as required	Outcomes are monitored, and acted upon	Target population enrolment is monitored, and acted upon	Attendance and attrition is monitored and acted upon	Young people are involved in shaping the YSAO	Learning is shared across the organisation
Determine double benefit	There is confidence that outcomes have improved	The theory of change of the YSAO is underpinned by research evidence	Evidence generated in other sites (organisations or locations) suggests the YSAO improves outcomes for YP	The organisation is able to effectively analyse and communicate its data	Evidence generated in the present site (organisation or location) suggests the YSAO improves outcomes for YP and/or communities	There is evidence in the present site of wider positive double benefit
Sustain	The YSAO provides value for money and is sustainable	There is evidence that YP value and are satisfied with the YSAO	There is evidence the YSAO is value for money	There is a compelling business case for replicating the YSAO	The YSAO is fully integrated into core business of the organisation	Delivery of the YSAO is sustainable

2) Calibrate

The participating team then gathers evidence as grounds for these confidence levels, which is 'calibrated', via a moderated review from two external 'coaches' (a member of staff from both Dartington and the Centre). This calibration is not a 'pass/fail' process: rather, it provides the organisation with a broader perspective, informed by external insight and expertise, and how others in the cohort have rated and evidenced their confidence levels, and indicates any areas where they may have over- or under-estimated how established their practice is within each of the five pillars.

3) Improve

The calibrated Confidence Framework then informs the production of a targeted improvement plan, which sets out specific objectives that the organisation is committed to achieving. This is undertaken with a combination of dedicated one-to-one support (usually with a member of staff from the Centre), as well as peer review and support from other members of the cohort.

Some of the objectives may be achievable within the 12-month timeframe of the Accelerator; others will be set out for the medium and long term. Crucially, the process as a whole is intended to support a cycle of continuous quality improvement – assess, plan and improve – which manifests across every aspect of participating organisations’ work.

4) Review

The final phase sees the organisation return to the Confidence Framework, re-assessing themselves and reflecting on any changes they see. This also provides a backdrop for a final ‘improvement report’, which combines a retrospective review of the process, and identifies next steps for the organisation in its continuous quality improvement cycle. As a cohort, organisations are also actively encouraged to share insights, learning and examples of effective practice that others can apply to their own context.

To what extent have we met the aims of the Impact Accelerator so far?

i) Foster a culture of learning within youth programme delivery

- **Organisations commit to an in-depth and challenging process**

The Impact Accelerator requires participants to be prepared to challenge their current practice and commit to learning and improving. All nine organisations in Cohort One completed every stage of the process and achieved some or all the improvement goals they set for themselves.

12 of 13 Cohort Two organisations¹ have completed the first two stages of the process on schedule.

- **Improvement goals focus specifically on learning culture**

These goals include several examples of participants developing new tools for ongoing implementation fidelity across delivery teams, and clarifying the intention and importance of a Theory of Change in an accessible way for all staff.

- **The effects of the Impact Accelerator are sustained**

When asked ‘to what extent is the Impact Accelerator still having an impact on your organisation?’, those who responded to a Cohort One follow-up survey gave an average score of 7.6/10 and, via follow-up interviews², reported an ongoing commitment to and enthusiasm

¹ One organisation left the programme after a key member of staff moved on.

² Survey and interviews completed between Nov ‘19 – Jan ‘20.

for improvement work.

Organisations involved in the pilot of the Impact Accelerator (delivered in 2016, prior to the launch of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub) have also reported that they continue to see and feel the changes resulting from their participation.

ii) Build organisational capacity for evidence-led improvement

- **Participation raises the internal profile of improvement work**

The buy-in and support of senior staff is a requirement of the Impact Accelerator process: this leadership has been crucial for organisations getting proposed improvement plans signed off and delivered. It is common for senior staff members to join Project Leads at key interactions, such as Improvement Meetings.

- **Participants have directed more resources towards learning and improvement**

The majority of Cohort One organisations included an increased allocation of capacity for learning and improvement work within their improvement plans. In one case this involved creating a new role solely focused on evaluation and quality, while others upskilled existing staff with dedicated training on these areas³. Many organisations have also taken a collaborative approach to their self-assessment and improvement work, bringing in staff from other teams within the organisation to support project leads with the process.

- **The process facilitates a repeated cycle of learning and improvement**

Through training and improvement work, organisations are provided with common tools and templates that can be applied on an ongoing basis, and to other organisational activities; for example, the Confidence Framework, or a template format for an internal training workshop on Theory of Change. In follow-up interviews, Cohort One participants reported they have used these tools and templates to track their progress against longer term improvement goals.

iii) Establish a common approach to understanding and improving impact

- **A shared framework is highly valued and supports consistency**

The Confidence Framework provides a common tool for assessing and guiding improvement of organisational learning practice and sets standards and expectations for 'what good looks like'.

³ One organisation created a new staff role, three organisations carried out specific training sessions, six organisations brought other staff members into the improvement work process, for example through a Theory of Change workshop.

It has been consistently cited as one of the most valuable aspects of the programme by participants.

- **Social action specific resources are being used and refined**

The programme provides an opportunity for participant organisations to apply a growing library of #iwill Fund Learning Hub outputs to their practice (for example, [a framework for measuring community benefit](#)). Participants are signposted to these through key programme touchpoints, such as improvement and review meetings.

- **The Centre's approach provides a broader context**

Cohort Two are being supported to apply the Centre for Youth Impact's 'Asking Good Questions' process and Outcomes Framework, which complements the Confidence Framework, with a focus on quality of practice supporting young people's social and emotional learning.

The #iwill Fund Cohort Two - overview

Recruitment of the second cohort began in April and continued up until August 2019, with a slightly longer process than the first cohort due to the onboarding of a larger group and the addition of two NHS based organisations. The aim was to recruit organisations who met selection criteria set by the #iwill Fund Learning Hub (see **appendix I**), and who were motivated to participate in the scheme, given the resource and time commitments involved.

The #iwill Fund selected 13 organisations, which are detailed below. One organisation was unfortunately unable to continue dedicating capacity to the programme due to a key staff member leaving the team and competing demands for remaining staff, and withdrew in December.

Once organisations had been accepted onto the programme, we held timeline meetings with project leads and key staff from each one to learn more about the context of their provision within the wider organisation, where learning and evaluation 'sat' within the staff team, and what their key drivers and dates were over the year. This process enabled us to bring together bespoke timelines for each organisation, ensuring that all deliverables were as realistic as possible and avoiding, for example, programme deadlines that might clash with periods of peak delivery.

For more information on the recruitment and selection process, please see **appendix I**.

Match Funder	Organisation	Programme Description
Comic Relief	Stonewall	This project supports LGBT young people who are BAME, disabled and/or trans to engage in social action. Each young person participates in a campaigning residential where they design their campaign, and are then supported to deliver it within their community. The project ends with a youth summit where participants present the impact of their campaign to peers.
Pears Foundation	First Give	This provides a fully resourced scheme of work to secondary schools that gets an entire year group engaging in social action. The programme consists of eight fully resourced lessons, three facilitated sessions and £1,000 prize money for local charities chosen and supported by students.
Sport England	Volunteer It Yourself - VIY	VIY challenges young people (who are typically unemployed and/or disengaged/excluded from mainstream education or training, or at risk of disengagement) to learn trade and building skills through helping to fix local grassroots sports clubs and facilities in need of essential repairs and improvements.
Liverpool FC Foundation *	Liverpool FC Foundation	This school-based social action programme works in both primary and secondary schools within the Liverpool City Region. The programme empowers participants to identify key issues that they feel strongly about and empowers the participants to deliver youth led social action activities.
Esmee Fairbairn & Paul Hamlyn Foundation	Just for Kids Law	This project engages children and young people aged 10-19 from London, with lived experience of school exclusion, to organise around and undertake social action on this issue to achieve change in London. A core group of young people will work to

		create a wider network, build group identity, develop peer leaders to explore the educational, emotional and psychological impact of school exclusion, and enable participants to confidently speak out on this issue.
Comic Relief	Build Up Foundation	Build Up are working with young people in six communities across London making decisions about their local area and shaping the future of their city. Six teams of young people will work with Build Up to design and build a permanent public or community space for their neighbourhood.
Pears Foundation	Woodland Trust	Through this programme, young people will plan, design, and plant a 162 hectare woodland of more than 250,000 trees, ensuring the new woodland is a place that young people and the wider community can enjoy and feel a sense of ownership for.
Esmee Fairbairn & Paul Hamlyn Foundation	The Advocacy Academy	The Social Justice Leadership Fellowship is an immersive six-month crash-course in democratic engagement for 16-18 year olds in South London. The Advocacy Academy delivers over 350 hours of programming made up of three residential retreats and two evening events a month, delivered by an outstanding team of social-change experts from more than 40 partner organisations.
JLGB *	JLGB	eVOLve is JLGB's response to the ever-changing needs of young Jewish volunteers. For the first time, eVOLve brings together all key stakeholders from across the community to ensure that social action becomes more accessible and more rewarding for Jewish young people than ever before. The programme creates a volunteering journey that embraces Jewish young people aged 8-25, enabling them to fully engage in meaningful social action and become active citizens in their community.

Young Manchester	4CT	4CT leads the East Manchester Youth and Play Partnership, aiming to deliver a core programme of regular youth and play sessions equally distributed to ensure geographical coverage across the five identified wards of East Manchester. The partnership offers an integrated programme of social action within these sessions and access to a range of training, volunteering, campaigning and activities of benefit to the wider community.
Pears Foundation	NHS – Imperial Health Charity	Working alongside the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, NHS Imperial Health Charity have developed an opportunity for 16 – 25 year olds to get involved and volunteer at Hammersmith and Charing Cross Hospitals. They offer two programmes a year - the Summer Programme and the Patient Engagement Volunteer Programme
Pears Foundation	NHS Trust - South London/Maudsley	As part of their Youth Volunteering Programme, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust runs a CAMHS Mentoring Project. Young adults (aged 19-25) support current Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service users in a one-to-one befriending style relationship. Volunteers have the chance to develop their skills and understanding of the mental health sector, whilst giving crucial “peer support” to other young people from their community.

* Direct delivery Match Funder

Involvement by organisations

Each participating organisation identifies a staff member to act as a Project Lead for the process. The Project Lead must have *some* responsibility for either delivery on the programme, or its evaluation and monitoring, as they are responsible for completing the self-assessment and then implementing improvement work. In the current cohort, Project Leads make up a combination of senior leadership, Programme Managers, Grant/Development Managers, Impact & Evaluation leads, and Volunteering

Managers, demonstrating the wide variety of ways in which organisations are currently resourcing learning and quality work for social action (and other activity) within their teams. This spread of representation is useful, as it brings different perspectives and priorities to the table, however it highlights a challenge in generating transferable insights that are applicable and relevant at a peer level within the cohort.

To ensure that the Project Lead is supported to deliver a process of internal change, where possible the Centre for Youth Impact also meets with each organisation's Chief Executive in the early stages of the process, to clarify expectations and identify strategic priorities shaping staff roles in the organisation. In some cases, however, these conversations had already been held at recruitment stage or in early timeline meetings, or initial applications had been submitted by a member of senior management, and so subsequent meetings were not deemed necessary.

Types of organisations

Our #iwill Fund Learning Hub partners recently published a [paper on the types of organisation](#) being supported through the #iwill Fund. This report shared analysis and categorisation of the grantees of 12 Match Funders within the #iwill Fund⁴, and discussed the ways in which an organisation's type can dictate its 'impact focus':

- 1) Organisations that have always had youth social action as a key component of what they do, possibly alongside other elements, and as at least part of their 'impact focus'.
- 2) Organisations that have a 'impact focus' on young people's development and wellbeing, and which have now developed a youth social action offer as a way of supporting this focus.
- 3) Organisations that have an 'impact focus' on a social issue and have traditionally used social action (carried out by adults) to make impact on this issue. They have now developed a youth-focussed offer to involve young people and make more impact in their chosen area.
- 4) Organisations that don't have a historic 'impact focus' on young people's development or a track record of using social action to make an impact on their area of 'impact focus', but which have developed a youth social action offer.

⁴ This includes all those who have, as of August 2019, made publicly announced grant-funding decisions. For more information please see:

www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/iwill_fund_learning_hub_grantee_mapping_report_final.pdf.

Both the first and second cohort organisations represent a mix across these categories. In the following section, we share a reflection on what 'grantee type' and their associated 'impact focus' can mean for the improvement work that is then undertaken through the Impact Accelerator programme.

Key learning and insights

Outputs

The findings in this report are based on reviewing the following forms of assessment:

- Self-assessed Confidence Frameworks for 12 organisations participating in the Impact Accelerator
- Calibrated Confidence Frameworks for these same 12 organisations
- Submitted evidence in support of each organisation's Confidence Framework scores
- Case notes from each organisation's 1:1 meetings
- Case notes from 11 improvement meetings with Research Associates
- Case notes and analysis of Cohort One
- Feedback from participants of Cohort One and Cohort Two (on experience of completing the self-assessment, and attending cohort retreat)
- Feedback generated from staff and Associates working on the Impact Accelerator

Drawing from these outputs, the following key points of learning from the delivery of Cohort Two are consistent with, and build on, the experience and feedback of Cohort One.

Insights about practice

- Organisations are operating across a wide range of different contexts, which has implications for the way in which specific sections of the Confidence Framework can be applied. When assessing quality, it is important to take a considered approach, developing a **confident justification** of the programme's position and focusing energy and improvement work accordingly. For example, the first Design domain in the Framework states that 'target populations are defined'. In the self-assessment, some organisations – such as those taking an open access approach, or working in school settings across whole class groups – have interpreted their model as being non-targeted and thus 'undefined'. However, we would argue that this *is* a form of targeting, and that the 'definition' lies in a confident justification of being 'open'. Targeting might also be found in the geographical areas in which the programme or organisation is operating. Similarly, a co-design approach might be considered less suitable or feasible in some settings (such as healthcare), but confidence that 'young people are involved

in shaping the opportunity', in the Monitor domain, could be increased by establishing tighter feedback loops and finding ways to demonstrate that young people's feedback has been acted upon. There is no one-size-fits all approach, and often **light touch improvements** can be just as valuable as, and can build the groundwork for ongoing, more intensive work.

- As we know, there is a limited evidence base for youth social action⁵. Programmes are often adapted from similar models taking place elsewhere – and whilst this can still lead to quality opportunities for young people in the new setting, any approach that underpins a Theory of Change needs to be justified in every context. It is unlikely that a whole programme will be evidence-based, but specific practices might be and can be drawn upon, if appropriate to the specific setting. It may also be that external evidence for specific elements of your programme does not yet exist, and so ongoing improvement work needs to involve **testing any existing assumptions**, and a **systematic process** through which to change future activities in response to any monitoring and analysis that is taking place. This goes hand-in-hand with refining a Theory of Change, ensuring that activities, mechanisms of change, and outcomes are both distinct from one another and logically connected, and that organisations are clear on how far their realm of influence is likely to extend (the '**accountability line**').
- A common behaviour is for organisations to skip attendance and attrition data or feedback in favour of outcomes data (or to conflate them), but in order to effectively analyse outcomes data, it is essential to know who is showing up to activities and when (attendance), and how they are engaging (attrition), as well as knowing what young people think about their experience. The Centre for Youth Impact's [Asking Good Questions](#) framework, focussed on establishing a cycle of continuous improvement, can support with **laying foundations** for confidence in both delivery and evaluation.
- Levels of 'confidence' across the five pillars of the Confidence Framework still appear largely unrelated to factors such as organisational size or turnover. Similarly to Cohort One, organisations that are new to youth social action delivery are more likely to demonstrate lower overall confidence⁶ and are less likely to see the activity as core to the organisation's offer. Where this is not the case (for example, where an organisation with a lower score does have

⁵ For more information, see previous #iwill Fund Learning Hub reports:

www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/final_learning_hub_12_month_look_back_aug_19_.pdf, p3;

www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/iwill_fund_learning_hub_-_evidence_workstream_-_youth_social_action_and_outcomes_for_young_people.pdf, p3;

www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/iwill_fund_learning_hub_-_evidence_workstream_-_community_benefit_and_youth_social_action.pdf, p.16.

⁶ In this case, lower confidence is seen as more 'no' or 'little' confidence scores across the Confidence Framework.

experience of delivering youth social action), staff teams are typically very small. This could reflect the time and resources that have been made available for developing the specific activity.

Insights about process

- Organisations value **the space and structure** to reflect and act on improvement needs. The process of undertaking a self-assessment using the Confidence Framework continues to be a valuable aspect of the programme, with participants citing that the Framework supports with getting evidence more organised, and progressing tasks that “needed doing anyway”. Participants have reported feeling more confident due to the process, with one current cohort member commenting:

“This has been a really useful journey for [us] – this has involved lots of departmental involvement reviewing where we feel we are as an organisation and also what evidence we can use to supply or support why we have placed ourselves where we have within the matrix.”

- A **‘lower stakes accountability’**⁷ approach for the Impact Accelerator is essential, as many organisations find that they need to take a number of steps back from their original plans in order to make progress on their improvement plans. This can be demoralising, and the prospect of embarking on an improvement journey – particularly one that is even longer than anticipated - can feel overwhelming. For this reason, the coaching and support element of the Impact Accelerator is key. We need to continually iterate the programme and our support where possible in order to maximise what can be achieved, and ensure the process is both valuable and efficient for those who get involved.
- Whilst we have made good progress towards the three core aims of the Impact Accelerator, expectations of what can be achieved within the space of the programme need to be carefully managed. Close consideration of what is needed to ensure that progress continues once participation is complete is also crucial in order to sustain improvements and support an enabling, learning culture. **Organisational change** takes time, and improvement plans are “intricate” (as one participant commented), often extending beyond the scope of the

⁷ This is a term drawn from the Youth Programme Quality intervention, a continuous quality improvement process currently being piloted across the UK by the Centre, with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund. Low stakes accountability means that teams are collectively accountable to each for identifying where and how they can improve, improvements are attainable, and resources and support are available (internally and externally) to achieve them.

programme. However, there is appetite and commitment from organisations to continue implementing changes and through the programme, we are drawing together a clearer picture of the elements that could support that.

Sustaining improvement work: beyond the Impact Accelerator programme

In follow-up calls with the first cohort, organisations reported a maintained commitment to and energy for ongoing quality improvement work, and continued application of tools or approaches (for example, 'core and flex') adopted through the Impact Accelerator - both for activities that were part of the programme and for other activities. One participant commented:

"We are using the evaluation framework in our current project. We continue to check in on the framework to ensure we are using good practice in areas. We are also creating our strategy and evaluation and impact measurement is a focus."

However, a number of discussions emphasised that any type of evidence-led improvement work takes time, and a consistent investment of resources beyond the Impact Accelerator programme. For some organisations, work on the Impact Accelerator had prompted (or coincided with) a wider strategic review, which can in turn hold up the implementation of specific improvement priorities. Another organisation commented:

"We are steadily building a case to address high level research and evaluation questions...With that being said, a process such as this inevitably raises more questions than answers and we are having ongoing discussions around the Theory of Change and measurement plan."

Whilst this can delay progress, aligning specific improvement work with a wider strategy review can be a positive approach, supporting one of the Impact Accelerator's core aims to build organisational capacity for ongoing quality work.

There are also set points at which organisations can usefully adapt their delivery; for example, implementing a new monitoring framework might need to wait until a round of programme delivery has finished. As such, we could not reasonably expect all organisations to have made significant advancements in their improvement work, and these follow-up calls were conducted with a balance of accountability, and creating space for open, honest conversations about the challenge and realities of building and maintaining a strong culture of ongoing learning and improvement.

As mentioned in our [previous paper](#), we are committed to developing and refining the Impact Accelerator programme in an open, structured and responsive way, in close partnership with our colleagues at Dartington Service Design Lab. In preparing for the launch of the second cohort, we have made changes to the recruitment and onboarding process, initial cohort training, and the way in which we are supporting a community of peer learning. In response to learning and feedback from Cohort One, we have also been codifying the programme at each of the four key phases to ensure that the process is as helpful and as efficient as possible for all involved (for example, by providing templates and additional guidance for improvement work), recognising that improvement work at this level requires a significant investment of organisational resources and energy. More detail on these specific iterations can be found throughout the following sections of this report.

What we learnt from the cohort retreat

Once onboarding was complete, each organisation attended a cohort retreat where the Centre for Youth Impact and Dartington Service Design Lab delivered core training in the concepts behind the Confidence Framework. This year, we also introduced the Centre's ['Asking Good Questions'](#) framework as a common tool to support with and complement participants' use of the Confidence Framework.

In response to feedback from Cohort One, which suggested that more practical examples or case studies from previous participants would help to 'demystify' the rest of the Impact Accelerator journey, we also included some video testimonies from previous participants in the training and in follow-up resources, as well as spending more time walking through and setting expectations for each key phase and requirement of the programme.

Feedback from this year's retreat suggests that attendees valued the opportunity to make space, particularly with colleagues and/or peers, to reflect on quality and impact, and that in many cases this built confidence and motivation to embark on an improvement journey. Reported highlights include:

- "Being able to get away and solely think about impact. Great to have the space to prioritise it"
- "A great kick-off to an exciting new way of working"
- "Running through it with a colleague is a very valuable exercise and allows you to practice and build confidence for future use."

At times, it was felt that content was too theoretical and overly focused on specific elements of the Confidence Framework, such as Design. In improvement meetings, it becomes easier to see how different parts of the Framework are related; for example, how the 'targeting' element of Theory of Change in 'Design' is linked to monitoring attendance and attrition in 'Monitor', or how mechanisms of change and core/flex will guide both effective implementation fidelity, and staff recruitment and

support (Deliver). We have found that most improvement work conducted through the programme will involve some review of Theory of Change design, although this might not be expected by all participants when they begin the programme. However, more could be done to build trust in other elements of the framework, and it might be that training in the Design aspect is more useful at a later stage, once improvement priorities are being developed and actioned and any Theory of Change work becomes clearer.

There were also requests to hear even more about previous participants' experiences. This feedback reflects similar comments from Cohort One's experience of the initial training retreat and suggests that whilst there will always be a degree of ambiguity related to improvement work, more could still be done to promote the experience of organisations who have already embarked on this journey; further supporting the programme's core aim to 'foster a culture of learning within youth programme delivery.'

A number of attendees also reported feeling overwhelmed or anxious at new concepts and at the extent of the work set to be undertaken. Our priority over the second and third phases of the programme is to support organisations to set realistic, manageable improvement plans and goals. As already alluded to, in future it may also be beneficial to separate out some of the initial training content - perhaps making use of online sessions to reduce the need for travel and time spent out of the office, thus making content more accessible and supportive of sustained engagement with ongoing improvement work.

What we learnt from the calibration process

About the calibration process

Following the retreat, the self-assessment was undertaken internally by the Project Lead who collected evidence and internal documentation to support the score they believed most suitable for each criterion. A number of organisations involved multiple team members in this exercise beyond the Project Lead, with a few replicating an internal 'calibration' with review by multiple members of the team to ensure that confidence levels were representative across the wider organisation. This is a good example of the way in which the programme supports its three core aims; fostering a culture of learning through cross-organisational engagement, and building both organisational capacity and understanding by introducing new staff members to a common framework and tools that can guide improvement work.

All organisations were offered support calls throughout this process, as a space to share any concerns or questions about the exercise, as well as another opportunity to reinforce the 'low stakes accountability' approach with which the programme is delivered.

Evidence collected was submitted to the Centre for Youth Impact, who coordinated a calibration and review process with members of staff from Dartington Service Design Lab. This was conducted by separate researchers and moderated to create the most accurate scores. Calibrated Frameworks, with commentary, were then provided back to organisations ahead of their improvement meetings.

Insights from the calibration process

[Insights from Cohort One](#) indicated that organisations consistently rated their evidence-confidence more highly than the calibrated scores. We saw this pattern continue across Cohort Two, with an average mark-down of 11 scores per framework, and only one mark-up across the whole cohort. In practice, this ranged from three to 22 mark downs per organisation, though there was no pattern to the types of organisations that demonstrated significant over-confidence in their delivery (for example, being part of a larger organisation or newer to youth social action delivery).

In some cases, Project Leads had misinterpreted evidence guidance, and improvement meetings indicated that evidence did exist, but had not been presented, or that evidence was already in development and was a known priority. In other cases, a more nuanced understanding of 'standards of evidence' was reached in the improvement meeting, such as the difference between monitoring feedback and outcomes, or the degree to which 'young people are involved in shaping provision.' In these situations, the Confidence Framework itself serves as a learning tool for individuals coming together on 'a common approach to understanding and improving impact'.

Emerging insights about practice

Across all 300 Confidence Framework scores from the cohort, 21 were validated as having a 'high' confidence score (compared to three in Cohort One). 125 scores (42%) were calibrated as having 'moderate' to 'high' confidence (compared to 45% in Cohort One) and 175 scores (58%) were calibrated as having 'little' or 'no' confidence (compared to 56% in Cohort One). Whilst this suggests slightly higher confidence within the current cohort, overall this is in line with findings from Cohort One.

Common areas of high confidence⁸

Consistent again with Cohort One, **target populations of young people** were often well defined. This area could be strengthened with external evidence to support justifications, particularly where an approach is more universal. Community populations continue to be less well-defined, with one or two exceptions, and continue to be limited where activities are more youth-led. There are a number of instances where a '[reflexive benefit](#)' model could be explored, where young people are taking part in social action related to their lived experience or communities of which they are members themselves.

Tools and resources for delivery are often well thought-through and provided, although there was less evidence of how these are used in practice. Similarly, **consultation with stakeholders** is well documented and **key relationships are mapped**, but there is less to demonstrate that relationships are attended to, and that these relationships drive the development of activities, although this may be happening without any documentation. Again, this is likely to reflect the stage at which some programmes are at, and a focus on these areas over the next phase of the Impact Accelerator could prove to be a timely and valuable investment for multiple organisations.

There was confidence that **young people value and are satisfied** with the opportunities provided, and that they are **involved with shaping them**. There was also high confidence that the opportunities had been **integrated into the core business** of the organisation; in some case, this is because youth social action is the core activity, but there were also a number of examples where there was evidence of the approach being used across other organisational activities, or where the programme had been written into a central strategy.

Common areas of low confidence⁹

A number of organisations do not have a specific **Theory of Change** in place, reflecting their early stage of programme development and implementation. Where there is a Theory of Change, inputs, activities, and outcomes may not be logically connected, mechanisms of change have not been included, and/or many of the steps and connections are not evidence-based. This reflects findings from the first cohort and supports one of our key recommendations for Match Funders at the end of this report.

Across the youth sector more broadly, it is uncommon for a whole programme to be supported by research evidence. It is possible for specific research to endorse particular aspects of the Theory of

⁸ 'Moderate' or 'high' confidence scores.

⁹ 'Little' or 'no' confidence scores.

Change, however many organisations currently make no or only broad reference to published research evidence and it is not always clear **how the evidence has informed programme design** and development.

In a number of cases, there is no attempt - or only an inconsistent or unstructured attempt - to **monitor the outcomes of children and young people** who are participating. Where standardised measures or bespoke tools have been adopted, they may not be systematically administered. Sampling approaches may be unclear, or outcomes data may be conflated with feedback on experience and satisfaction. This is very common, particularly for new projects and programmes.

Similarly, whilst there were some examples of systems being in place for **capturing learning internally**, there was limited evidence that it is being **used systematically** in the ongoing development of provision and to inform a continuous cycle of improvement. Again, this could be reflective of the number of new providers, particularly where youth social action provision is not seen as core to the organisation's mission, but it is a key area of priority with regard to increasing the overall quality of youth social action. Again, this is consistent with Cohort One.

Finally, whilst there was often internal and external demand for **replicating an opportunity**, there was rarely evidence of a compelling business case for doing so, considering other factors such as evidence of outcomes and alternative approaches. Considering the points made above, it is unlikely that we will see greater confidence in this area without a stronger evidence base.

Improvement priorities

Earlier in this report, we suggest that organisational 'type' can be related to the type of improvement work that is undertaken during phase three of the Impact Accelerator programme. In this case, organisational type also relates to how long an organisation has been delivering through a youth social action model, with organisations within the second, third, and fourth categories tending to be newer to delivery of youth social action opportunities.

Cohort One organisations with a history of youth social action delivery tended to focus their improvement work on the following areas:

- Some refinement of their Theory of Change based on learning from previous delivery (for example, narrowing target groups or outcomes, or identifying mechanisms of change)
- Developing new tools to support with implementation fidelity and/or use of data for ongoing improvement work against an already embedded and codified programme design and Theory of Change (such as 'core' and 'flex' indicators on site visit forms and call logs)

- In a few cases, developing a stronger internal and/or external base of evidence for their work with young people, including testing particular mechanisms of change.

For Cohort One organisations that were newer to youth social action delivery, improvement work focused on:

- An in-depth Theory of Change review - which could include identifying the role of youth social action within their wider organisational mission, often at a more strategic level
- Early-stage design work, based on shaping an appropriate and attractive youth social action offer for young people who are not necessarily already involved or familiar with the delivery organisation
- Other ways of 'embedding' youth social action within the organisation, for example upskilling staff with relevant training or bringing them into Theory of Change work through consultation, altering staff roles, or securing new funding specifically for youth social action.

One participant from the first cohort described the impact of this type of improvement work:

"As this was a new area of work for [us] it was helpful to learn and be guided by an expert to develop our evaluation framework, this has allowed us to be able to measure the impact our project makes and replicate the approach for our other projects."

In most cases, these priorities took up the full scope of improvement work within the Impact Accelerator programme, and organisations were not in a position to do additional work, such as testing particular mechanisms of change. An exception here is where an organisation had been explicitly funded (and/or had existing internal capacity and capabilities) to focus additional time and effort on learning and improvement, and could therefore pursue work more similar to those in the first category, alongside the 'embedding' piece.

As improvement priorities emerge for the current cohort, we see this pattern continue. Organisations that are new to youth social action delivery intend to work on initial Theory of Change designs, as well as some programme codification and work building foundational processes for ongoing feedback and evaluation cycles. A number of organisations are also prioritising young people's input at this stage, for example by establishing youth boards.

For the organisations who do have more of a track record of delivering youth social action, improvement needs are more focused on specific Theory of Change refinement work (again focusing on refining outcomes, mechanisms of change, or targets for attendance and attrition), as well as exploring longitudinal impact and triangulating evaluation methods.

Other improvement needs that are more common across the cohort are:

- Distinguishing between programme activities, outcomes, and mechanisms of change, as well as identifying which outcomes are short, medium, or longer term
- Reviewing how ‘attendance and attrition’ data is collected and used, and exploring what is meaningful in particular settings – such as schools, where it can be difficult to obtain this data, or where in-curriculum delivery means that attendance is required and therefore not an accurate representation of engagement
- Measuring community benefit, which continues to be an area of challenge for the sector. Several organisations working in particular settings (such as health care, campaigning, or community woodlands) may be in a position to explore this in more detail, however it will depend on what improvement work participants choose to prioritise in the next phase of the programme.

It is logical that organisations who have been delivering youth social action opportunities for longer will be better placed to do more intensive work on their Theories of Change, as they will have had more opportunity to ‘test and learn’ based on data collected over time. Whilst this might suggest that in the short-term, these organisations are better placed to contribute to a shared evidence base for youth social action, it is worth noting that an organisation’s work on Theory of Change and evidence is often very specific to their individual setting, context, and target groups. Some peer-to-peer sharing is possible and useful from this work; for instance, we have seen an example of evidence comparisons between two organisations working towards similar outcomes for young people. However, it remains limited by a relatively small sample size of organisations participating in the Impact Accelerator programme, and the broad spread of individual priorities on which an organisation might decide to focus in Phase Three.

Nor should it be interpreted that organisations within either group can be seen as ‘stronger’ or delivering higher quality activities. As mentioned previously, Confidence Framework scores demonstrate instances of high confidence across the cohort. A traditionally youth-focused organisation, for example, might have already developed thorough mechanisms for involving young people in strategic decisions, or a very clear idea of the young people that they seek to engage. An organisation that has typically focused on a social issue might have a clear idea of the target communities that the youth social action opportunity is designed to benefit.

However, it is important to recognise that these organisations will be at different stages in their cycle of delivery and improvement and as such, will be able to focus their improvement efforts in different places. It also highlights that any improvement journey and organisational change takes time, and

whilst good practice exists across a wide range of different types of organisations delivering youth social action, more work needs to be done in order to test this and build a stronger evidence base for the sector. To do this, it is important that we work with organisations in both categories; supporting those already delivering youth social action opportunities to organise and consolidate the evidence that already exists, and enabling newcomers to design and evaluate new activities in a way which builds on, tests, and aligns with this.

Recommendations for Match Funders

As the Impact Accelerator moves through its next developmental stage, our aim is for the collective experience and learning of both participant organisations and the Centre to be a regular source of insight to inform and guide the practice of the diverse range of Match Funders engaged across the #iwill Fund, and youth social action funders outside of the #iwill Fund.

Recommendations to date have included a need to be clear about the goals of funding organisations to develop new youth social action activity streams, codifying best practice, investing more in supporting learning and evaluation at organisation level in a way that meets each organisation's learning needs, and building tools such as the Confidence Framework (or a light touch version) into the grant assessment and support process.

Building on these, and considering the reflections made throughout this report, we set out three supplementary recommendations below. These are offered for discussion and refinement, with an intention to create consensus and consistency as far as possible. This process will be supported by our work on the funder-focussed LabStorms strand of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub: we will share these recommendations with Match Funders taking part in the next LabStorm session. For reference, you can read the first LabStorm report [here](#).

1. Support organisations with more experience of delivering youth social action to pursue improvement work in tandem with other organisations that are working towards similar outcomes

In a previous report, it was suggested that 'more work could be done to make the external evidence base accessible to youth providers in a way that can inform design practices¹⁰'.

¹⁰ Please see the #iwill Fund Learning Hub Impact Accelerator Initial Insights Report: www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/iwill_fund_learning_hub_-_quality_practice_workstream_-_impact_accelerator_initial_insights_report.pdf, p.13.

Supporting more organisations to 'deep-dive' into their own Theories of Change, mechanisms of change, and the associated evidence, will help us to learn more and to build this base as a sector, however we are currently limited by the small numbers of organisations that are in a position to pursue this work, and by the broad spread of issue areas and activities covered by current youth social action providers. This challenge could be worked on by connecting groups of organisations across the #iwill Fund that are targeting similar, specific outcomes (for example, wellbeing or changed perceptions) to pursue this work together, allowing more opportunities for shared efforts and the building of a collaborative evidence base, for example, through internal research, rapid testing cycles, and external evidence reviews. Participants in the Impact Accelerator may be able to offer particular insight and leadership across a broader group of #iwill Fund grantees.

2. Support organisations that are newer to youth social action delivery to develop a clear understanding of the role that youth social action plays in their wider mission

This is key to ensuring that any youth social action (and ongoing improvement work) is sustainable, and meaningful. It will involve defining what a realistic vision of double benefit looks like in their delivery, and how to both implement with fidelity, and monitor. Again, there is potential to bring together additional communities of learning here; for example, campaigning and advocacy organisations who are bringing young people in as campaigners and advocates, and who want to explore what impact this has for both young people, and the communities that they exist to support.

3. Provide access to training in Theory of Change and other core concepts

Given that most improvement work we have seen over the programme to date has begun with or involved some sort of Theory of Change review, supporting Match Funders to engage in a more collaborative, consistent approach in this area of work could accelerate an organisation's improvement journey, and contribute further to the three core aims of the Impact Accelerator. This could be enriched by training and support in other relevant areas, such as 'core' and 'flex' and implementation fidelity.

The future of the Impact Accelerator

In our [recent paper](#), we set out three key reflections and refinements we have made and intend to develop, to support the achievement of our ambition to consolidate the Impact Accelerator's place within the youth social action field, and open up the programme to other areas of practice and specialism within the youth sector.

1) The Confidence Framework

Ahead of the second cohort, the core tool was updated to create a 'Confidence Framework 2.0' version. This took on board feedback from the first cohort around clarity of specific criteria explainers and guidance, as well as updated 'Guidance for Evidence' based on the type of documentation we had commonly seen in Cohort One. We are working on a Version 3.0 for the third cohort, ensuring backwards compatibility and the integrity of the tool, as well as alignment with the Centre's wider approach. We will also be working to make the tool more accessible, both in terms of language and format, following specific feedback on these points from the current cohort.

2) Confidence in community

As mentioned in our [previous paper](#), we are committed to working closely with both Cohort One and Cohort Two to establish the terms of engagement for a learning community that will draw together the collective continuous improvement experience, challenge and ambition for the sector, and work to prevent the loss of collective momentum and the opportunity to develop durable, youth social action-specific assets and insights.

We have now completed a round of follow-up calls with the first cohort to both revisit progress on improvement work priorities and explore various options to model this community. Calls were conducted off the back of a survey, which Cohort One participants completed over October 2019. Seven out of nine participants from the first cohort completed the survey, as well as one organisation who took part in the pilot programme that ran before the programme's expansion through the #iwill Fund.

From the survey, we learnt:

- The most valuable aspects of the Impact Accelerator process were most commonly cited as 'access to the evaluation expertise of the Research Associate' and 'external challenge and scrutiny through the validation process'. One organisation commented:

“Having the specific time, with the wrap around structure of touch points and action plans allowed us to go deeper into those things that we always want to do but are easy to de-prioritise as non-essential. External scrutiny was really valuable, to benchmark ourselves and get an objective look at what we do well and the limitations of our model. The coaching support from the RA [Research Associate] allowed us to choose improvement areas that could make maximum impact with relatively small tweaks - this stopped us from trying to do everything and meant we were more strategic in our thinking.”

- Aspects considered to be most attractive from a continued community were ‘access to specialist training in evaluation and improvement’, an ‘annual review of your organisational self-assessment and/or improvement plan’, and ‘a logo or status that can be used publicly (for example, with funders).’

This feedback has supported our reflections throughout this report that any ambition to draw together the collective continuous improvement experience, challenge and ambition for the sector needs to be reinforced by a combination of accountability, recognition, and access to resources.

3) Consistency of external support

Previously, we noted the crucial role of the ‘Research Associate’ in supporting Cohort One organisations through the different phases of the programme, as well as ‘friction’ in the form of staff time invested in briefing them about their context, culture and priorities. We are currently in the early stages of testing our adjusted delivery model for the Research Associate function, with the majority of this support provided by key staff within the Centre for Youth Impact’s Practice Development team.

So far, we have found this effective in supporting organisations to reach a plan of action more quickly, as they are able to build a relationship with the Research Associate early-on and begin discussing improvement work options in the improvement meeting. This change has also allowed us to be more specific in diagnosing and assigning appropriate support within the Centre’s team, for example process support versus content support. There is still, however, scope to further refine this process over the course of the programme, as more specific improvement support needs are identified and refined by participants.

APPENDIX

I) Recruitment and selection process:

About

The Impact Accelerator recruitment process was designed to build and validate demand for the scheme, by communicating the value of taking part to prospective organisations, and ensuring that the full obligations of taking part are known from the start. It was critical to identify organisations that were fully able to participate over a 12-month process, and could meet the time commitments.

Recruitment was undertaken prior to the Centre's acquisition of the programme, and Generation Change undertook the following approach:

- Match Funders were provided with the selection criteria agreed with the #iwill Fund Learning Hub Steering Committee, and asked to identify grantees who met the learning criteria
- Organisations were then invited directly (by Generation Change) to complete an expression of interest for taking part in the second cohort, confirming that they met our requirements for taking part in the scheme, and providing information to aid the selection process
- Communications with organisations to pitch the scheme and highlight the benefits to them should they choose to take part. This was supported by face-to-face meetings or calls to establish the value proposition, answer questions, and identify client needs/drivers for taking part
- We assessed organisations against selection criteria agreed with the #iwill Fund Learning Hub Steering Committee in order to determine which organisations would be chosen
- Successful and unsuccessful organisations were notified.

Organisations were informed that the Impact Accelerator would focus on just one programme that they offer (if they deliver more than one), or one discrete aspect of their services that involves social action (if their services are not defined into 'programmes').

The agreed selection criteria looked at three areas of consideration:

1. Primary eligibility

YES / NO criteria was applied to ensure that only #iwill Fund grantees delivering in England with capacity to take part over a 12 month period were considered for sponsorship by the #iwill Fund Learning Hub

2. Strategic areas of focus

Organisations were then categorised as to whether they fit into five strategic learning areas put forward by the Steering Committee:

- I. Community outcomes focus;
- II. Delivering at scale;
- III. Potential to be replicated against a setting;
- IV. Younger age range focus;
- V. Socio-economic focus.

These learning areas were chosen with the goal of identifying transferable learning about practices that can be replicated widely, beyond the cohort organisations that took part in the scheme.

3. Emerging good practice

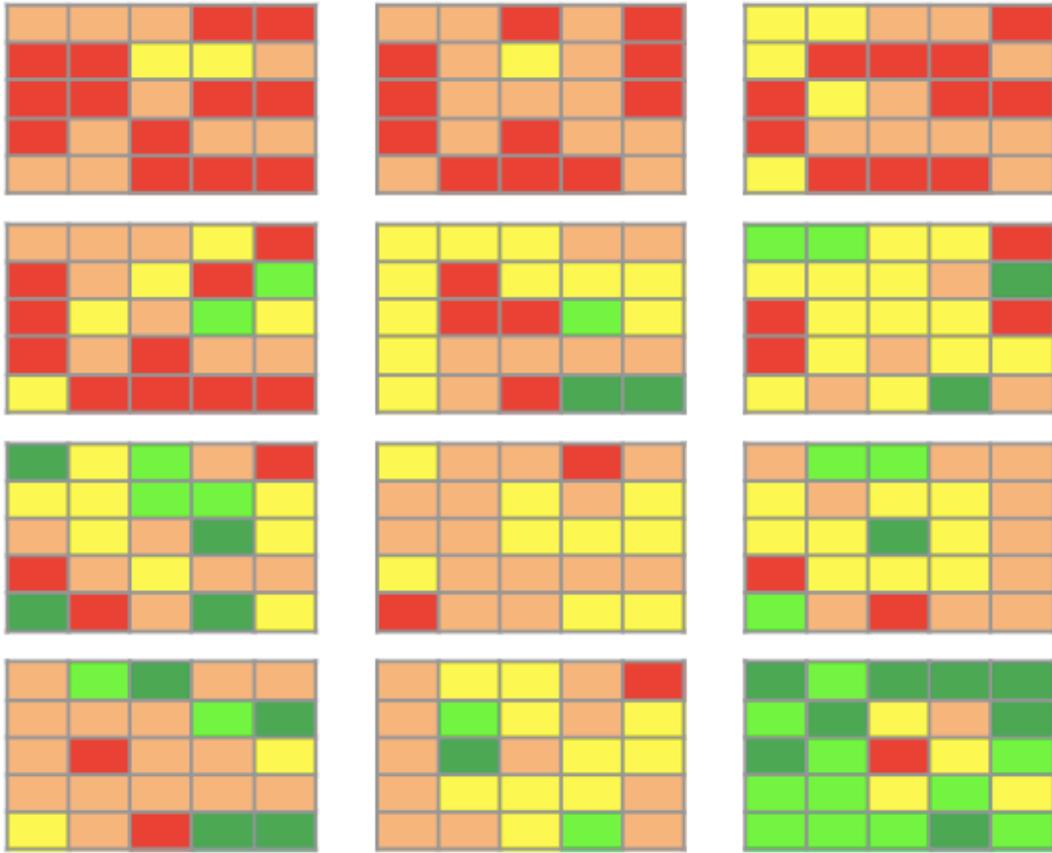
Organisations were scored according to how well they demonstrated an aptitude and appetite for evidence-based learning in their existing work.

Result

26 #iwill funded grantees submitted an Expression of Interest to join the second cohort of the Impact Accelerator. Of these, 15 were put forward by Generation Change and Dartington Service Design Lab to join the scheme as part of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. Of these 15 organisations, 13 were approved by the Steering Committee and started the scheme in September 2019.

II) Overall Confidence Framework scores

Calibrated framework scores for each of the 12 organisations on the cohort have been anonymised and ordered by the number of 'red' scores.



Scale of confidence

- High confidence
- Moderate confidence
- Moderate confidence
- Low/no confidence

Pre-assessment

Design	The YSA opportunity is logical and clearly articulated	Target populations are defined	Core structure and activities are clearly defined	Supporting materials have been created	Outcomes are clearly defined and measurable	The YSAO is supported by a Theory of Change linking these elements
Deliver	The YSAO is effectively and properly delivered to support young people to make a difference	Implementation of the YSAO is monitored	Delivery targets are set, and monitored.	The YSAO recruits the right staff	The YSAO supports and develops staff	Key stakeholders for delivery are known and engaged.
Monitor	Evidence is used to learn and adapt, as required	Outcomes are monitored, and acted upon	Target population enrolment is monitored, and acted upon	Attendance and attrition is monitored and acted upon	Young people are involved in shaping the YSAO	Learning is shared across the organisation
Determine double benefit	There is confidence that outcomes have improved	The theory of change of the YSAO is underpinned by research evidence	Evidence generated in other sites (organisations or locations) suggests the YSAO improves outcomes for YP	The organisation is able to effectively analyse and communicate its data	Evidence generated in the present site (organisation or location) suggests the YSAO improves outcomes for YP and/or communities	There is evidence in the present site of wider positive double benefit
Sustain	The YSAO provides value for money and is sustainable	There is evidence that YP value and are satisfied with the YSAO	There is evidence the YSAO is value for money	There is a compelling business case for replicating the YSAO	The YSAO is fully integrated into core business of the organisation	Delivery of the YSAO is sustainable

III) 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 #iwill Fund 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, and sharing key insights and learning more broadly within the wider youth social action sector.

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub has developed three workstreams that will support its objectives. This will allow us to support funders in making decisions about how to support youth social action now, and 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 help guide investment decisions.

(a) Systems Mapping

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

(b) Funder Collaboration

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

2) Sector Evidence Plan

This work will build on our understanding of what youth social action achieves; 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 the Centre for Youth Impact, is an intensive process of impact support, challenge and development – up to 30 organisations will take part in this. Learning from these organisations will be shared more widely to spread knowledge about improvement across the youth social action landscape.