The #iwill Fund Learning Hub –
Key Learnings from the last 12 months
September 2019

1) Introduction

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub was commissioned to support, and build on, the activities of the #iwill Fund. The #iwill Fund brings together DCMS, The National Lottery Community Fund and 25 Match Funders to support increased delivery of youth social action across England. In doing so a large amount of information has been, and will be, generated about what youth social action is, how it can be funded and sustained, and what outcomes it can lead to for young people and communities. The #iwill Fund Learning Hub's role is to capture this information, and use it to increase the #iwill Fund's, and the wider sector's, knowledge and understanding.

This briefing summarises some of our key learning to date from the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. It is divided into two sections: one around what we are learning about the outcomes of youth social action for young people and for communities; and one around what we are learning about how funders can support more high-quality youth social action for young people from all backgrounds.

2) The Outcomes of Youth Social Action

It should be noted that individual evaluations of #iwill Funded activities are yet to report in significant numbers so initial papers have focussed on external research.

Outcomes for young people

- Youth social action is said to promote a range of outcomes for young people. Based on external evidence and Match Funder evaluation plans we have clustered them into social and emotional outcomes, civic/societal outcomes, employment outcomes, and education outcomes.
- Within these, our review of the evidence showed particular grounds for confidence that youth social action can have positive effects on self-confidence, teamwork, civic/political engagement, and job skills.

- o Beyond this, the evidence base for youth social action is still in the early stages of development, and a wide range of measures are used, which makes comparability challenging.

The forthcoming evaluations from Match Funders contain a significant focus on young people's outcomes and will add significantly to our understanding of *what* youth social does, and *how* it does it.

Outcomes for communities

- o In comparison to young people, outcomes for communities are relatively under-explored in organisational theories of change, funder motivations, and evaluations. This has been found via a review of the external evidence base, direct work within delivery organisations in the Quality Practice workstream, and Match Funder evaluation plans.
- o Our research developed a more nuanced picture of outcomes, or benefit for communities. There are communities of geography, culture, interest, and experience, any of which could be impacted by youth social action. Outcomes can accrue directly to a community as a whole, or to a subset of 'service users' within them. Communities can benefit via young people developing new skills or attributes through participation. Young people can, in turn, benefit from the changes they have brought about in their community.
- o This adds up to a more complex picture of how communities could benefit (or where there could be negative impact) from youth social action than has usually been discussed. Funders have recognised a need to address these issues more explicitly (including via the first LabStorm), and we recommend that both funders and delivery organisations use more sophisticated definitions of community benefit to design and evaluate youth social action programmes.

More information can be found in our full reports:
- o [Youth Social Action and Outcomes for Young People](#)
- o [Community Benefit and Youth Social Action](#).

3) How funders can support high-quality youth social action for all young people

Engaging with institutions and other organisations to embed youth social action

o *Funders should understand the drivers of those they are working with*

Youth social action has a double benefit – for young people and communities. However, institutions such as schools perceive an additional benefit - for example to drive school improvement, or enhance its relationship with its local community. A local area may see youth social action as a route to becoming a more attractive place for young people to remain. These additional benefits are often significant reasons why an institution may offer youth social action, and these may be different to funders' motivations, though not in opposition. Understanding the distinct drivers of systems or settings, and the practitioners within them, can help funders create opportunities that are tailored to meet these, and are more likely to be taken up and sustained.

o *Funders should use funding to lower barriers to establishing youth social action*

Across our systems mapping work we learnt about barriers to new settings or places offering youth social action: poor understanding of what youth social action is, underfunded local infrastructure, or uncertainty about the costs of integrating young people into existing social action. Funders have the opportunity to lower these barriers; for example, through supporting resources which can guide practitioners on how to introduce youth social action into their setting, funding the core costs of community organisations that can enable youth social action, or allowing delivery organisations to trial a youth focussed offer and understand whether it can be sustained.

o *Funders can work within existing infrastructures*

Particularly at local level, it is important for funders to build deep relationships with existing youth- and/or community-focussed organisations (some of whom may not have a track record within youth social action) and help them explore if and how youth social action can help them meet their aims. These organisations know their

local area and will be key to sustaining youth social action opportunities, and youth leadership, after initial funding has ended.

o *Funders can go beyond 'youth' expertise*

Our work in this area revealed that it is easy to emphasise the 'youth' in 'youth social action' and see those with expertise in youth development as the obvious partners for expanding provision. This may have crowded out those organisations with expertise in supporting social action for people of all ages (but without a specific youth focus) and achieving community benefit. To support youth social action to have a true double benefit, further work with these social action organisations and settings could be supported.

The #iwill Fund includes programmes taking these approaches, including work to support hospitals to integrate young people into volunteering, and the creation of resources for professionals within schools to integrate youth social action into the curriculum.

More information can be found in our full reports:
o [Increasing Youth Social Action in Education](#)
o [Increasing Youth Social Action in Place](#)
o [Exploring Integration of Youth Social Action and 'All-Ages' Social Action](#).

Supporting participation in youth social action for young people from lower-socio-economic backgrounds

o There is a persistent participation gap in youth social action between young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and their financially better-off peers. This can be detrimental in two ways: firstly, that some young people are missing out on the benefits that social action can bring, and secondly that communities are missing out on these young people's talents and contributions.
o Well-evidenced explanations of the gap include the idea that children 'inherit' the expectation and habit of social action from their parents, and better-off adults are more likely to participate; that social action participation has hidden costs that children from low-income households cannot meet; that children from low-income households are less likely to be offered social action opportunities; and that these children and young people are likely to be taking part in types of social action not currently recognised as such, including caring for family members.
o Approaches to closing the gap include focussing on recruitment via schools as the most equitable route least likely to exclude certain

groups, targeted recruitment of under-represented children and young people, and 'family social action' to encourage parental participation.

The #iwill Fund is supporting many programmes attempting to close the gap in a variety of ways, and the progress of these initiatives will be reported in subsequent papers.

More information can be found in our full report:
- o [The Socio-Economic Participation Gap in Youth Social Action](#).

4) What's Next

Work across all three workstreams (see overview below) is ongoing. In particular we will focus increasingly on evidence that is being generated by the #iwill Fund, by reviewing and aggregating evidence from Match Funder evaluations and the #iwill Fund's Information Management System. We anticipate that this will build richer answers to key questions around outcomes, participation, and sustainability.

For more information about any of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub's work, please contact jenny.north@dartington.org.uk.

5) Further information about the #iwill Fund Learning Hub

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub has two strategic objectives:

1. To inform the strategic and investment direction of the #iwill Fund.
2. To strengthen and connect the youth social action sector by sharing key insights and learning generated by the #iwill Fund and the Learning Hub.

The Learning Hub is led by the Dartington Service Design Lab, and supported by the Centre for Youth Impact, Renaisi, and Generation Change. Since January 2019 seven reports have been published, and all can be found [here](#).

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub has three workstreams:

Systems – in this workstream we are exploring **barriers and enablers in building and strengthening sustained youth social action**. This includes looking at how youth social action can work within and alongside institutions and delivery organisations, as well as how Funders can collaborate to tackle shared issue in funding youth social action.

- o We held three enquiries into
    - (i) [How youth social action could be supported within education](#)
    - (ii) [How youth social action can be supported within 'place'](#)
    - (iii) [How youth social action does, or can, work with 'all-ages' social action](#).
- o We held our first 'LabStorm' with Match Funders to foster collaboration on shared challenges.

Evidence – in this workstream we aggregate evidence about youth social action (including its outcomes) from a range of sources including external research, Match Funder evaluations, and the #iwill Fund's own Information Management System. We are iteratively developing answers to some key questions about youth social action.

- o Within our Evidence Plan workstream we have prioritised questions about youth social action, and researched and published initial papers on
    - (i) [The socio-economic participation gap in youth social action](#)
    - (ii) [Outcomes for communities from youth social action](#)
    - (iii) [Outcomes for young people from youth social action](#).

Quality Practice – in this workstream we are working to understand how youth social action is delivered, the quality of provision, and how this might be further strengthened. Insights from this work can inform delivery organisations and funders about how to identify, support and implement quality practice within youth social action.

- o Within our Quality Practice workstream we have supported, to date, nine #iwill Funded organisations through the Impact Accelerator process – helping them to identify strengths and weaknesses in their programme design, delivery, or monitoring, and put in place improvement plans. [Initial insights have been shared](#).