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# #iwill Fund Learning Hub Evidence Workstream

Theory of Change – Guidance for funders and grantees  
Dartington Service Design Lab  
2021

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## Introduction

This report provides guidance on 'theory of change' for organisations working within youth social action, particularly those enabling activities for young people. This guidance is for organisations who already have theories of change, to refresh and scrutinise, and for those that do not, to help them create one for the first time.

The report will briefly introduce what a theory of change is, before sharing what we currently know about theories of change within the #iwill Fund, and why they can be such an important resource for the #iwill Fund Learning Hub in understanding what has been enabled by the #iwill Fund, and what we are learning from this.

Finally the report will provide a guide for delivery organisations – what does a theory of change need to include, what decisions need to be made, and how should it be used? This, and much else in the report, will draw on work done by the Centre for Youth Impact in delivering the Impact Accelerator as part of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. The Impact Accelerator has worked with 33 organisations delivering youth social action – this work has included assessing and strengthening theories of change.

Delivery organisations are not alone in benefitting from theories of change – they are also highly relevant for funders, and much of the content in this report can be applied to creating theories of change for funding programmes. However, this guidance is addressed to, and focussed on the needs of, organisations working *directly* with young people and communities in enabling youth social action. For some organisations youth social action may only be one element of what they deliver among many. It is important to have a separate theory of change for this provision, which should also feed into the organisation's overall theory of change.

We will use the word 'provision' in this report: this is a deliberately broad term to acknowledge the fact that organisation describes the work they do in different ways - words like 'programme', 'service', 'opportunity', or even 'organisation' could be substituted. We also refer to 'team' – this reflects the fact that the creation of theories of change and enabling youth social action is a team task, and not one that can be undertaken by an individual alone, however senior or specialised.

Not only is theory of change a participatory task, but it should be an enjoyable one. The decisions a team makes in a theory of change relate to the very reasons they do what they do, and are centred around how to do it as well and impactfully as possible. This should be engaging and motivating for teams, building a shared sense of purpose and excitement for the task of putting the theory into practice.

## 1. What is a theory of change?

A 'theory of change' is a plan for, or an explanation of, how an organisation is going to make impact. It is often visualised as a map, allowing a team to set out a destination, a route, and what will be needed along the way.

Theory of change is a *practical* tool which helps teams design, deliver and evaluate their provision well. It requires a team to decide and describe the change they wish to make, articulate why they expect the change to happen, and set out what's needed to achieve it.

Going through this process of decision-making and description is helpful for an organisation in several ways:

- It supports team alignment and participation: the theory of change process and the final plan should involve all relevant voices in decision-making (including the young people and communities served), and result in everyone being clear about the goals of a programme, service, or organisation, and their individual role in achieving them.
- It improves implementation: A theory of change will specify what needs to be delivered or enabled, particularly the most important or 'core' elements of a programme. This helps teams focus resources on delivering these, identifying any barriers, and improving implementation over time. Longer-time, understanding these core elements can support replication and scale of provision.
- It guides monitoring and evaluation: A theory of change pinpoints the most important elements of provision – who you plan to work with, what you plan to deliver, what you think this should achieve in terms of outcomes. This frames the questions you need to ask and track through routine monitoring, and eventually more formal evaluation
- It supports clear communication with external stakeholders: the final theory of change should make your provision comprehensible to anyone. This is a powerful tool in building understanding and support from partners, peers, and funders, and also helps other to learn from your provision. Making your theory explicit also allows for informed critique and allows you and others to see how it aligns with the external evidence base.

It's crucial to remember that a theory of change is just that: a theory. It is a team's 'best guess', or hypothesis, about how they will make change. It will be an informed hypothesis, based on external evidence, past delivery, practitioner experience, and the views and ideas of those they work with. But it will need to flex to adapt to the reality of delivery: it is not set in stone and should change over time as the team learn more about what they can deliver well, the experiences of those they work with, and the results of their work. We have seen in 2020 how quickly the delivery context can change, and having clear decisions about what your provision does, can help you adapt without losing what's most important for impact.

## 2. Theories of change and youth social action

Organisations enabling youth social action can benefit from theory of change for all the reasons given above – for any service or provision it is an essential tool for high-quality design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

However, the term ‘youth social action’ covers a diverse range of activities and is also a relatively new term without a significant associated evidence base. Because of these factors, it’s particularly important to be as precise as possible in describing what activities and experiences a particular youth social action provision will enable, and how they think this will lead to change (these are known as the ‘mechanisms of change’). As a sector, we are still understanding what different types of youth social action ‘look like’, what are the features of high-quality social action and what changes they might support.

Despite this, theory of change creation and use is not universal across youth social action. The #iwill Fund Learning Hub has found they are not routinely included in Match Funder descriptions of their #iwill-Funded activity, although we have tentatively developed some high-level, and incomplete, theories of change from evaluations and Match Funder reports (see Appendix 3).

The Centre for Youth Impact have found that amongst the over 30 organisations with which they have worked on the Impact Accelerator programme, almost half had no theory of change. For those that did, assessment revealed some common weaknesses. Theories of change suffered from:

- a lack of specificity in general;
- in particular a lack of clarity about which young people the provision was intended for and the intended outcomes for young people and for communities;
- frequently not listing their ‘mechanisms of change’ – that is the things about the provision that should be effective in creating outcomes for young people and communities;
- weak logical connections – this can mean that activities were assumed to lead to particular outcome without a good explanation as to why this should happen.

Nearly all organisation wanted more guidance and hands-on help with creating a theory of change, and most taking part in the Impact Accelerator prioritised working on this.

### Youth Leadership

There are two elements associated with youth social action that we need to bear in mind when thinking about theory of change. The first is that youth social action must be, at least to some extent, youth-led. In practice this can mean young people making decisions about the community benefit they are trying to achieve, the activities they pursue, and the length of their engagement.

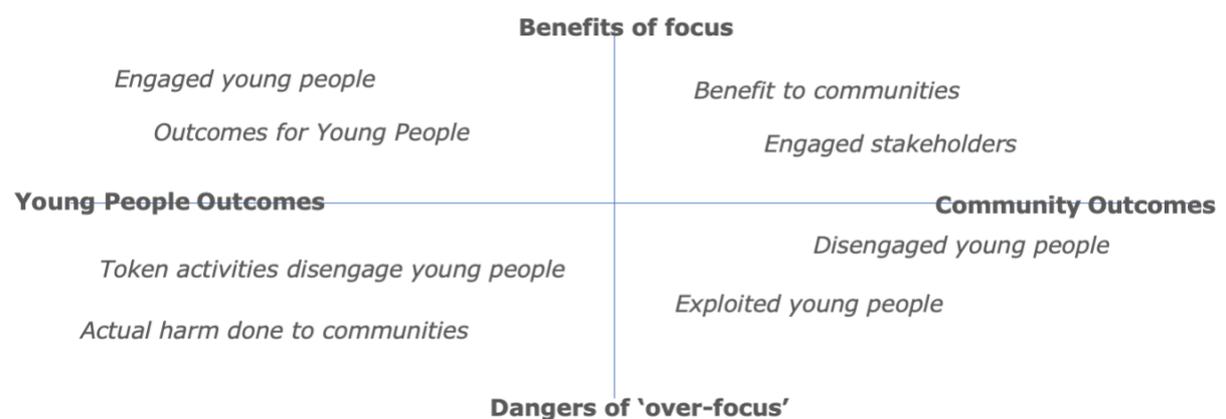
Because of this youth social action opportunities more challenging to define in terms of how long they last, or the activities they involve than other provision for young people.

Each youth social action provision needs to define the ways in which youth-leadership is in itself a *mechanism of change* in their programme - what role does the experience of leadership play in creating outcomes for young people, and what difference does it make to community outcomes? - and the ways in which they will enable it. These will look different in provision for very young children, or for young people with lots of existing experience of youth social action. We will return to this in the Guidance.

## Double Benefit

The second element to consider is that youth social action requires the definition and pursuit of two sets of outcomes or 'benefit' – for young people as a result of taking part in the social action, and for 'communities', as a result of the action. This is unusual and can be challenging, both because of the youth-led element, but also because most organisations are naturally more expert in creating outcomes for one than the other. Because of this it can be tempting to focus on where there is more expertise and define only (or particularly) one set of outcomes – leaving the theory of change and subsequent delivery one-sided.

However, the Learning Hub's work to date assessing evidence from, and talking to, Match Funders suggests this is a mistake. Within youth social action, the creation of outcomes for young people or communities is at least partly dependent on creating outcomes for the other.



We use a concept known 'as 'managing polarities' to describe this, illustrated in the figure above. At each end of the horizontal axis are outcomes, either of which may receive more focus from an organisation enabling provision. Above the line and on either side of the vertical axis are the benefits of that focus. Below it are the risks, or dangers.

We can see that provision which is focused on outcomes for young people can engage young people well and may indeed achieve some outcomes. However, over-focus on these outcomes and

a marginalisation of community outcomes may have perverse consequences. Young people report that part of why they engage with social action is to feel they are making a difference to others. If they detect that the community benefit is token or absent, they will disengage and no longer be able to benefit from social action at all, undermining the initial focus on their outcomes. There is also the danger that an organisation which does not take its engagement with the community seriously may end up doing real harm to those they work with.

On the other side of the spectrum, an organisation focused on creating benefit for other people via young people's social action may indeed achieve some benefit through young people's initial engagement and action, and likely other stakeholders and institutions will be pleased and engaged by this. However, if organisations do not consider the needs and development of those young people, they are likely to eventually disengage, making further community benefit impossible. At the extreme end there is the danger that young people are actually poorly or unfairly treated.

A fuller diagram of this dynamic, created collaboratively by Match Funders led by Pears Foundation, is available in Appendix 2.

### 3. Learning about youth social action

The #iwill Fund Learning has created a 'Sector Evidence Plan' to capture and make sense of the learning generated by the #iwill Fund's grantmaking. One of the key questions we are seeking to answer is 'What is youth social action?': what are the forms it come in, and what do young people and communities experience? The evidence base and delivery prior to the #iwill Fund provides us with some information – but the #iwill Fund is an unprecedented investment in youth social action and has significantly expanded the number of youth social action opportunities and organisations enabling these. We need to know the nature and design of the youth social action being delivered to know what the Fund has supported, and what could be sustained and replicated longer-term.

Understanding theories of change is also essential for making sense of evaluation results. Results of evaluations are shared by Match Funders – but without clarity over what is being tested it is not possible to draw conclusions about *why* particular provision may have been successful (or not), or which elements should be replicated. We cannot speak more confidently about particular mechanisms of change, which undermines future delivery.

Other than via the Impact Accelerator, the Learning Hub works directly with Match Funders, not grantees. Reports from the Impact Accelerator recommend specifically that Match Funders invest in supporting grantees to develop theories of change. We hope that this guidance will be shared with grantees but we also recommend that match funders use it to scrutinise the theories of change they receive, and that these theories of change are used to guide reporting and discussions with grantees.

Over a grant period an organisation will learn whether they were able to enable their youth social action provision as set out in the theory of change, which outcomes they were able to monitor,

and what data told them about these. Conversations and reporting about these are grounded in the reality of delivery and give organisations that chance to share 'failures' as well as successes. Both represent learning and point the way towards what an organisation should do in the future.

Finally, we hope that Match Funders will be able to share more grantee theories of change with the Learning Hub, and in doing so we will be able to say more about what youth social action is, how it attempts to make change, and what seems to work and not work in creating this change.

## 4. Creating theories of change

This guidance is based in part on The Confidence Framework, a tool designed to support improvements in the quality, scale and impact of programmes and services for children and young people. The Framework was originally developed by Dartington Service Design Lab, and the current version has been created by the Centre for Youth Impact.

The guidance will take you through a series of questions that any theory of change has to answer, and which should prompt discussion, reflection, and decision in an organisation. We will also provide some ideas on how to use your theory of change to guide delivery and monitoring. Before that, we share some principles for any organisation to bear in mind if it considering undertaking a theory of change creation or review process. We believe that following these principles can create a well-informed, robust, and useful theory of change:

### The Principles

- 1) **Participatory** – involving the right stakeholders is essential. Most obviously this means involving colleagues from, for example, programme delivery staff, data and impact teams, and management, and young people themselves. It can also mean including trustees, funders, referral partners or other users themselves. The decisions must be taken by the organisation who enables the provision – but they should be informed by many voices. This produces stronger decisions, but also builds alignment and buy-in.
- 2) **Evidence-informed** – the youth social action evidence base is limited but useful in building understanding of the theories of change in previous programmes, including some with proof of impact. This evidence can build confidence in the outcomes and activities you decide upon. The #iwill Fund Learning Hub's papers on [types of youth social action](#), [young people's outcomes](#), and [community benefit](#) are useful places to start.
- 3) **Aligned** – it is important that your theory of change makes sense, and that there are logical connections between its elements. The activities you contribute must plausibly contribute to the outcomes you seek. This increases the chances that you will have your desired impact.

- 4) **Precise** – a theory of change should be specific and detailed. Ambiguous and vague statements introduce the possibility of misunderstandings which undermine implementation and evaluation.

A participatory theory of change process is not a day’s work. It requires up front research into the current theory or plan used to guide delivery, and into promising or proven practice in your field. The team creating the theory of change need to receive this research in advance and be ‘in the room’ over one or more sessions to make the decisions – these sessions are often externally facilitated to support participation, although this is not essential. A draft theory of change can then be created and refined.

## The Decisions

In this section we list the major decisions an organisation needs to make to create their theory of change. They do not have to be made in the order we have set them out – we find organisations go back and forth between them during the process, in particular to ensure they are aligned.

<b>Who?</b>	Who is your provision for? In youth social action this requires an answer for both young people and communities.
<b>What?</b>	What outcomes will it achieve with and for those who take part? Again, this needs to be defined for both young people and communities.
<b>How?</b>	How will your provision support those outcomes, and what needs to be delivered or enabled to make this happen?

These are often visualised in the order shown below to make explicit the hypothesised causal chain:



Below we look at these decisions in more detail and offer some considerations to help decision-making.

Who	Young People	Communities
	<p>Which children or young people is your provision right for? Criteria may include age, gender, location or other demographic factors. You may also consider specific needs – is this provision specially for young people facing particular challenges, or experiencing difficulties?</p>	<p>Which community/communities should benefit from the youth social action? This could be individuals, groups, an organisation, or institution, or a cause regionally, nationally or internationally.</p>
(i)	<p>Being intentional about your target population helps you meet the needs of those you serve – no provision can meet the needs of all young people equally well. Often your decision may be as simple as setting an age-range, which means you can develop and enable developmentally-appropriate opportunities. It may be more precisely for young people with certain disabilities, or for young people identified, or self-identifying, as experiencing challenges with wellbeing, or school, or from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The young people you wish to serve will affect which outcomes you seek, and how you design your provision to meet their needs.</p>	
(ii)	<p>Your staff and referral partners need to know who you can serve – this can guide their decisions and ensure they promote, refer, and enroll the young people who can get the most out of your provision.</p>	
(iii)	<p>The community target population decision is different – a too-detailed decision isn't always appropriate in highly youth-led provision, where young people will decide the precise aims of their action, including who it will benefit. However, a high-level decision can be formed by deciding whether the provision will enable activity with individuals (e.g., one-to one volunteering), local areas, communities, or groups (e.g., local environmental activity of fundraising) or at a larger scale (e.g., campaigning on a national or international level). This will determine how the youth social action opportunities are designed.</p>	

What?	Young People	Communities
(i)	<p>What are the outcomes you (and young people) want young people to get from this youth social action? You may think of this in terms of new skills or knowledge, or improvements in mental health, relationships, or other circumstances (See <b>Appendix 3</b> for more details).</p>	<p>What are the likely intended outcomes for the 'community' or 'communities' that the social action is for? You may think of this in terms of individual benefits, or progress at a group or national level. As well as direct benefits, there may also be indirect benefits that you wish to consider (See <b>Appendix 3</b> for more details).</p>
	<p>Your outcomes need to be relevant and meaningful to, and wanted by, your target population – what do the specific young people you are serving want and need from youth social action, and what can you enable in partnership with them? The outcomes framework in Appendix 2 shows the range of outcomes commonly hypothesised for youth social action – some are clearly targeted to young people with specific needs,</p>	

	and others address the developmental needs of all young people. Your decisions must be co-produced with the young people you will serve.
<b>(ii)</b>	Changes in skills, knowledge or circumstance don't usually happen immediately. As well as defining your 'ultimate' outcomes, you also need to think about the more immediate changes that not only lead to your ultimate change but can act as markers of progress.
<b>(iii)</b>	'Measurability' is not the most important criteria to consider when deciding outcomes – what you think is relevant for, and needed by, for your target population is the most important, balanced by what you think it is reasonable for your provision to achieve. However, you <i>should</i> consider how you will monitor, and eventually evaluate, what difference your youth social action provision is making. Community benefit may be particularly challenging to measure, particularly indirect benefits. As the polarity mapping exercise shows, it is still important to define and direct resources to achieving these benefits, even if they are not easily measurable.

<b>How?</b>	What needs to happen for the changes above to occur? This should be answered <i>firstly</i> in terms of 'mechanisms of change' – the experiences young people and 'communities' need to have that you believe can affect their outcomes. <i>Secondly</i> you need to agree the detail the activities which will enable these experiences.
<b>(i)</b>	Mechanisms of change are the 'active ingredients' in your provision. To identify them you need to get to the heart of what's important about your provision and what will make it high-quality. For example, one mechanism might be that 'young people are challenged to learn and practice new skills in a safe environment'. In <b>Appendix 4</b> you will find some more mechanisms of change for young people that the #iwill Fund Learning Hub has identified from reports of #iwill-Funded provision.
<b>(ii)</b>	It may be more challenging to identify mechanisms of change for the community in detail. However, the general type of youth social action you enable will determine some active ingredients which will promote a quality experience for community beneficiaries and increase the likelihood of outcomes.
<b>(iii)</b>	Once the mechanisms of change are agreed, the shape of the provision can be designed and agreed. What will the activities look like, how often should young people attend or engage and how long for? Which adults will enable the activities and where will they take place? The answers to these questions are individual for each provision, but they should be designed to enable young people to experience the mechanisms of change, which should be logically linked to your outcomes.

## Reviewing your decisions

Theory of change decisions need to align, otherwise one decision won't make logical sense next to the others. Reaching alignment may mean returning to previous decisions as you make new ones

and making adjustments. Below are some questions you can ask yourself to check alignment. You can see an example theory of change in **Appendix 1**.

- 1) Are the outcomes chosen *meaningful* to the target population? For example, if you have said you serve any young people aged between 16-18 does it make sense to say you're committing to improve their wellbeing? You are not targeting young people who have low wellbeing. In response you could think about what other outcomes your provision could aim for or think about intentionally focusing on and reaching young people who could benefit from increased wellbeing.
- 2) Is the number of outcomes realistic? It can be tempting to include a long list of outcomes that could potentially flow from your efforts. We recommend focusing on just a few – not only because you need to monitor progress towards each of them (and perhaps eventually evaluate your impact on them) but also because it is unrealistic to expect one particular provision to 'do everything' – focus on being really good at a few important things.
- 3) How many mechanisms of change are we committing to? A long list is not necessarily better – making sure that each young person has 'enough' of the most important experiences is more important than trying to do everything possible.
- 4) Are our outcomes achievable? Conversely, your mechanisms of change and the logistics of your provision must plausibly lead to the outcomes you have chosen. A very short engagement with only a couple of mechanisms of change may be very worthwhile but it cannot achieve very meaningful outcomes, particularly for more vulnerable young people or communities. Aiming for outcomes you can't deliver lets young people down, as well as obviously undermining evaluation.
- 5) What are the assumptions you're making – are they reasonable? It can be helpful to record these – what needs to be in place to make your theory of change work as you plan? These are likely to be contextual, like relationships with referral partners who introduce young people to your provision, or community partners who help enable the social action. These are really important and including them in your theory of change decreases the chance that they are overlooked or under-resourced as you plan delivery.

## What happens next?

Most organisations choose to visualise their theory of change for ease of communication, and to highlight the logical connections between each decision. It should be easy for your team, your delivery partners and your funders to look at this and understand not only what you are trying to do but how you are going to do it.

A visualisation needs to be high-level and communicating only the key decisions – perhaps accompanied by a brief narrative to highlight the most important features and causal connections. But the detail of your decisions is needed to make the theory of change useful. The kind of detail

that can be created after the theory of change is agreed include participation criteria (i.e., how staff can decide whether a particular young person is eligible or not for your provision) and guidance for staff about how to deliver each activity. This needs to be in a format that staff can easily use.

Finally, your theory of change is a tool for learning. It identifies the key elements of a provision, and by tracking these, you can learn

- whether you reach the young people you want to, and how long they engage for
- whether and how you enable the planned activities
- whether this appears to affect the outcomes for young people and communities

Over time you can respond to this data by (for example) changing how you attract young people and work with referral partners or adjust your activities so that they are more effective in enabling your mechanisms of change. Sometimes these changes will be significant enough that you adjust your theory of change. Over time, you will build your confidence in your provision's quality and effectiveness, be able to communicate this to others, and use further learning for further improvement.

A theory of change is a living document but you need to have amassed learning through delivery to make the review worthwhile. This review should be carried out at least every three years and perhaps more frequently if you have found it very difficult to successfully deliver any part of your theory of change.

## Further Reading

**Below is a list of free resources that provide further information, insight and tools to explain and support theory of change creation and use:**

- Detailed [theory of change guidance](#) from the Centre for Youth Impact, including a downloadable toolkit
- A recent [outcomes framework](#) for young people, developed by the Centre for Youth Impact for the LGA
- [‘Working Hard and Working Well: A Practical Guide’](#) by David E K Hunter
- [Driving Impact: Helping charities transform the lives of disadvantaged young people’](#) by Impetus
- [Theory of Change in 10 Steps](#) by NPC

## Appendix 1

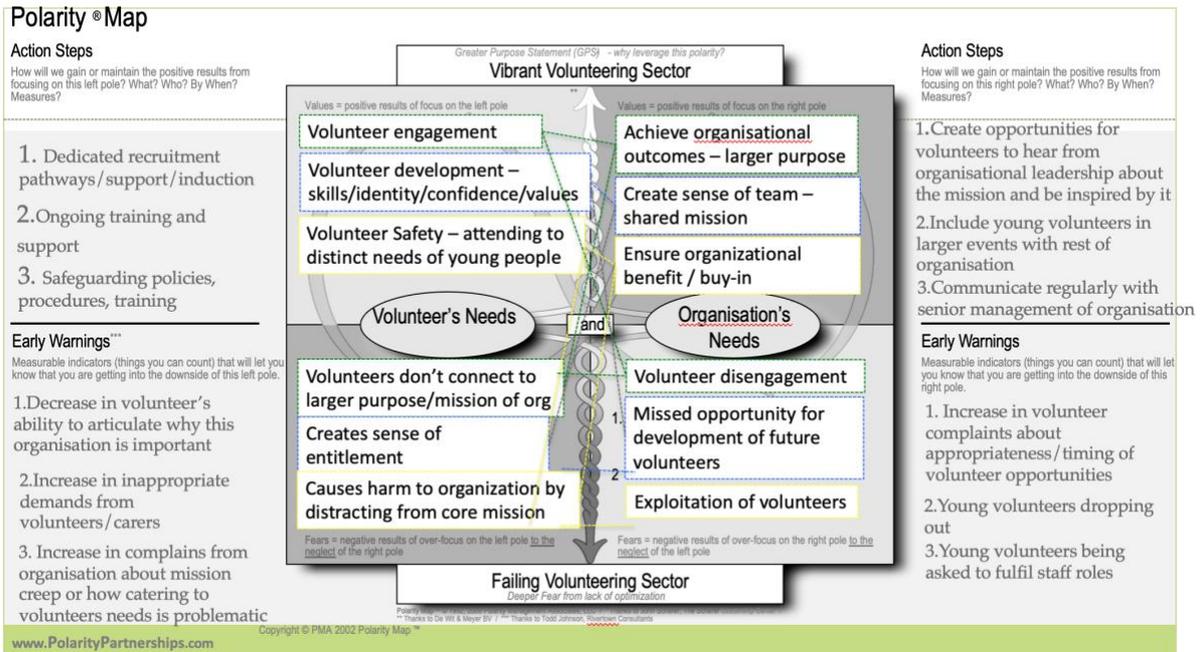
Below shows an illustrative theory of change following the guidance in this report.

<p><b>Overview and Aim:</b> Young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds design and lead their own social action projects rooted locally to increase their sense of self-efficacy and long-term connection to their community. This takes place in Years 7-9 to support the habit of youth social action.</p>		
Target Population (Who)	Mechanisms of Change (How)	Outcomes (What)
<p><u>Young People</u> Girls and boys aged between 11-14, attending schools with &gt;50% of pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium funding.</p> <p><u>Community</u> Local community School</p>	<p>Young people learn about social action and change</p> <p>Young people feel a sense of purpose, achievement, and contribution</p> <p>Young people feel positively challenged</p> <p>Community links are formed and young people experience meaningful working relationships with others in their community.</p>	<p><u>Young People</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Greater understanding of local issues and knowledge of/connection to community actors</li> <li>- Improved self-efficacy, problem-solving and team-working skills</li> <li>- Increased ability to and likelihood of taking part in further social action</li> </ul>
<p><i>Activities – the detail</i></p> <p>10-week youth social action project. Young people meet weekly for 2 hour sessions and they are supported to deliver their social action projects outside of these sessions. These could include holding an event, running a campaign, etc.</p> <p>2-hour weekly sessions involve the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young people take part in social learning about social action enabled by programme staff over 2 weeks</li> <li>- Young people are supported to identify local issues (environmental/social/cultural) and design their own projects to address these, enabled by programme staff and community groups/members</li> </ul>	<p>Young people are supported to set specific goals for their social action projects, and expectations around the degree of change that can be achieved are managed</p> <p>Young people have opportunities for reflection on value of social action for themselves and others</p> <p>Young people are aware of other social action opportunities and feel able to connect with them</p> <p>Community groups are engaged with the provision and work with young people</p>	<p><u>Community and school</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct benefit of social action projects – these will be defined individually but are likely to include improvements to local environment, action on local priorities, or benefit to individuals via volunteering</li> <li>- Increased participation and voice of young people in community issues/organisations</li> <li>- Enhanced reputation for school</li> </ul>

<p>over 3 weeks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Young people lead these projects in teams and work with community members and programme staff to complete them over 3-4 weeks</li><li>- Young people evaluate and reflect on the project and experience, including identifying and connecting to organisations where they can continue to act on specific issues over 1 week</li></ul>	<p>Community members are receptive of young people's projects and demonstrate a willingness to change</p>	
<p><i>Assumptions:</i> The provision can work with schools to ensure all students enrol over a year or in other ways to ensure better-off students are not cherry-picked for participation</p>		

## Appendix 2

The slide below shares the result of a workshop for #iwill Fund Match Funders, facilitated by Pears Foundation, which used the 'polarity mapping' techniques to identify the positive and negative results of 'over-focus' on benefit for young people or communities. 'Volunteering' was focused on as a particular type of youth social action, but there is great transferability to other types.



## Appendix 3

The tables below show the results of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub's work mapping outcomes for young people and communities that have been hypothesised, and in some cases proven, to result from youth social action. More detail can be found for young people [here](#), and communities [here](#).

### Young People's Outcomes

Type	Examples
Socio-Emotional Outcomes	Resilience, self-concept, interpersonal skills, trust and respect for others, practical skills, pro-social attitudes, wellbeing
Civic-societal Outcomes	Change agency, civil understanding/skills, social cohesion, habit of service
Employment Outcomes	Skills development, work-readiness, career choices and aspirations, employment status and income
Education Outcomes	Attitude to education, attendance, progress and attainment

### Community Outcomes

Type	Examples
Direct community benefit	Improved outcomes for individual recipients of e.g., volunteering, mentoring; improvement of local physical assets or environment, achievement of campaigning ends.
Societal benefit	The benefit to society of the change created for the young person e.g., more engaged citizens, young people with increased wellbeing, more pro-social behaviour.
Reflexive benefit	The benefit to young people from the change they create, beyond individual outcomes. This may include improved perception of young people in the community, or improved treatment.
Organisational benefit	The benefit to an impact-focused organization of youth social action e.g., young people playing a distinctive role in creating impact on a particular issue.

## Appendix 4

The tables below show some example 'mechanisms of change' that the #iwill Fund Learning Hub has identified from Match Funder reports and evaluations. They are composites and do not describe any particular provision but can be helpful in thinking about what young people need to experience to reach certain outcomes. These three examples are centred around achieving socio-emotional outcomes for young people. You can find more detail [here](#).

'Safe challenge'	
Overview	Youth social action provides young people with a chance to learn by doing. Young people act in a space where it is safe to fail, but are nevertheless faced with real challenge against which they can practice and develop their skills.
Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and teaching of practical, vocational or socio-emotional skills.</li> <li>• A structured process in which social action is devised, completed and reflected upon.</li> <li>• A clear role, and responsibility, for the young person to undertake.</li> <li>• The young person takes a perceived risk. This should be emotionally challenging.</li> <li>• The young person has some control over the direction of the activity.</li> <li>• Social action takes place in a space where it's safe to fail. This may include structured time for reflection, ongoing adult support, a limited scope of action.</li> </ul>

'Self-directed action'	
Overview	Youth social action opportunities enable young people to determine and carry out action to address an issue that matters to them. This can create the feeling of making a difference and give a sense of purpose and meaning to young people's lives, which may have a positive effect on their wellbeing, self-concept and self-efficacy.
Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The young person chooses the cause for which they take social action.</li> <li>• The young person has some control over the direction of the activity.</li> <li>• A clear role, and responsibility, for the young person to undertake.</li> <li>• Positive affirmation from others that social action is making a difference. This could come from programme leaders, peers or beneficiaries.</li> </ul>



'Engaging with others'	
Overview	Youth social action opportunities enable young people to engage with and support different people and communities. These could be their local community, or communities of culture, interest or experience. This can create a sense of belonging for the young person. It may also expose the young person to communities they would not otherwise meet which can increase their openness to and comfort with difference.
Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The young person meets people who are different to them or who have had different experiences.</li> <li>• The young person has increased contact with people in their own communities.</li> <li>• Through social action the young person makes a perceived positive contribution to their community.</li> </ul>