

Proudly supporting
youth social action



Department for
Digital, Culture
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DARTINGTON
SERVICE
DESIGN LAB

#iwill Fund Learning Hub Evidence Workstream

Data Review 6
Dartington Service Design Lab
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Introduction

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

Although the Learning Hub carried out surveys and interviews with Match Funders in Summer 2020 to understand the effects of COVID-19, we are now getting further information on this as Match Funders submit their own reports covering this period. As we emerge from restrictions, we assess this information using the Sector Evidence Plan questions as a framework to understand how learning can feed into youth social action going forward rather than simply reflecting on what has happened.

1. What is youth social action?

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

1.1 What has the #iwill Fund funded?

The Information Management System allows us to paint an emerging picture of what has been funded. Data was retrieved in August 2021.

Volunteering (60% of funded opportunities) is the most common form of youth social action supported through the #iwill Fund, followed by helping to improve the local area (21%) and tutoring, coaching or mentoring (10%). Compared to the last data review, helping to improve the local area had an observed 10% increase. Campaigning still represents a small proportion of funded activity (5%). Over half (56%) of youth social action opportunities in the #iwill Fund portfolio are delivered through schools while over a third (35%) are delivered in community settings.

The vast majority of #iwill-funded youth social action opportunities are directed towards a specific cause (90%) and the most popular causes are Education & Learning (39%), People & Communities (21%), health and care (11%) and environmental (10%).

1.2 Our emerging typology

The Learning Hub's paper ['Towards a Typology of Youth Social Action'](#) reviews definitions and typologies of youth social action, and begins to build an evidence-based picture of the different types of youth social action being supported by the #iwill Fund. To clarify this further, we have recently adjusted our evidence questions to focus on what common Theories of Change and 'user journeys' exist within youth social action.

1.3 Youth Social Action as a response to social contexts

Some Match Funders observed that young people chose their activities based on current events. For example, *Sport England* mentioned young people re-directing their efforts to support the wider community during the pandemic.

By running separate programmes in mainstream schools and alternative providers, *Team London* was able to compare students' preferences on issues that affect them. Whereas 35% of students' social action in mainstream schools was directed at environmental issues, there weren't any projects directed towards the environment in PRU and SEND settings. Instead, 52% of young people wanted to address serious knife crime and youth violence. Subsequent preferences were mental health, inequality, sexual harassment, bullying and homelessness. This highlights that youth social action is shaped by young people's contexts, whether that's larger scale such as a global pandemic or smaller scale such as the school they are attending. Incorporating youth voice and enabling youth leadership to make activities relevant and meaningful for young people is therefore especially important.

1.4 Understanding the language of 'youth social action'

Ormiston Academy Trust (OAT) noted that although a lot of social action was already happening in the OAT Academies, this was often not understood by students and staff as social action, and thus participation was not tracked. Unless staff were explicitly involved in a 'social action programme', the phrase 'social action' was not commonly used across OAT prior to the start of the #iwill project.

Mitigating this 'language barrier' by continuing to develop a common language for youth social action through the #iwill fund may ensure the sustainability of youth social action, smoother implementation of projects, and a more accurate picture of who is participating in youth social action and what outcomes are being achieved. It also raises the tentative question whether we can look for the words 'youth social action' to reliably judge whether youth social action is taking place.

2. What does youth social action do?

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

2.1 A framework for the benefits of youth social action

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

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

2. **Organisational.** Organisations that provide youth social action opportunities can benefit directly from the activity, e.g., young volunteers free up capacity for paid staff.
3. **Community.** Benefits may accrue to a community directly from the social action young people are engaged in, e.g., the local community may benefit from young people regenerating a park area, or people may benefit from volunteering undertaken by a young person.
4. **Reflexive.** Young people belong to communities. Any benefits that accrue to their communities may also benefit the young person individually, e.g., young people can also enjoy the regenerated park.
5. **Societal.** Young people continue to belong to communities as they grow up. Some of the benefits that accrue to young people directly from youth social action participation may be beneficial for the societies in which they live, e.g., young people may become more active citizens.

2.2 Early insights from the #iwill Fund

In this section we present some emerging findings from the #iwill Fund against the five outcomes listed above. We include here only findings that have been reported since the most recent Data Review was published in April 2021.

Outcomes for Young People	New evidence in the last quarter (April – September 2021)	Further questions to consider/points to note
Socio-emotional	<p>Team London Young Ambassadors undertook pre-and post survey measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56% of young volunteers showed improvements in their wellbeing on the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Survey (SWEMWBS). • Statements in the SWEMBS that showed the strongest overall improvement among young people were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feeling useful – 10.5% increase ○ Dealing with problems well – 8.08% increase ○ Optimistic about the future – 2.8% increase • Statements on the SWEMBS that showed the strongest overall decline among young people were: 	<p>It was noted that this round of data collection has shown a significantly lower improvement in young people’s subjective wellbeing than previous rounds, as well as some deterioration. Team London posited that this could be due to the impact of the pandemic and were still encouraged by over half of young people reporting improvements in their wellbeing. It could also be reflective of the increased time pressure the last two rounds faced as they came to an end.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feeling relaxed – 9.2% decrease ○ Feeling close to other people – 6.5% decrease • 55% of young people reported improvements in their thoughts and feelings, whilst 19% of young people’s results stayed the same. • 23% of young people reported improved levels of trust, whilst 51% of young people’s results stayed the same. <p>The London Youth Leaders Reflective Tool asked the young people at the end of their project to reflect on their skills before the project and how they think they have changed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas development - 36.8% increase • Motivating and influencing others - 27.5% increase • Resolve conflicts in my team - 21.9% increase • Completing projects - 24.7% increase 	
	<p>Sport England collected pre- and post ONS wellbeing measures. Young people showed an overall increase in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life satisfaction – pre: 7.2 post: 7.8 • Happiness yesterday – pre: 7.0 post: 7.5 • Things are worthwhile – pre: 7.3 post: 7.7 • Achieve most goals – pre: 7.2 post: 7.7 • Confident to have a go – pre: 7.4 post: 7.7 • Satisfaction with myself – pre: 7.2 post: 7.7 • Ability to bounce back – pre: 7.2 post: 7.6 • Motivate/influence others – pre: 7.1 post: 7.6 	<p>As there wasn’t a comparison group, we can’t be certain that improvements can be attributed to the programme – however Sport England do ask participants to consider which outcomes can be attributed to the programme.</p> <p>Sport England’s evaluators noted that all differences have been tested for statistical significance and only those that are statistically significant at the 5% level are reported in the commentary of the report.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possess valuable skills/experience – pre: 7.2 post: 7.7 • Neighbourhood belonging – pre: 6.1 post: 6.5 • People can be trusted – pre: 5.8 post: 6.4 	
Civic-societal	No studies identified in this period	
Employment	No studies identified in this period	
Education	No studies identified in this period	

Outcomes for Community	New evidence in the last quarter	Further questions to consider/points to note
Community Benefit	No studies identified in this period	
Societal Benefit	No studies identified in this period	
	No studies identified in this period	
Reflexive Benefit	No studies identified in this period	
Organisational Benefit	No studies identified in this period	

2.3 Double benefit

Although Match Funders didn't explicitly measure outcomes for double benefit, a few reports mentioned the double benefit they felt occurred throughout intergenerational activities whereby older people also benefited. For example, *UK Community Foundations* reported on young people creating artwork for Care Homes to combat feelings of social isolation during the pandemic.

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

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

3.1 Background

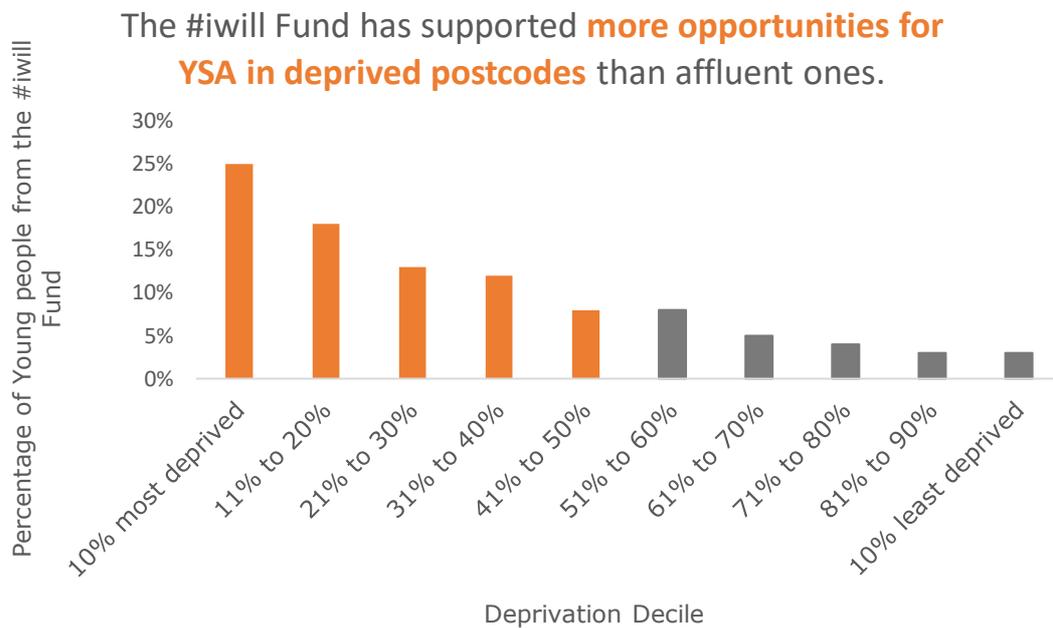
Our paper on the [socio-economic participation gap in youth social action](#) sets out the data on the fact that young people from lower-income backgrounds are less likely to participate in social action. It also lays out the external evidence about what drives, and can help close, this gap.

Alongside closing the socio-economic participation gap, the #iwill Fund aims to support younger children (less than 14 years of age) into social action.

3.2 Reach of the #iwill Fund

3.2.1 Deprivation

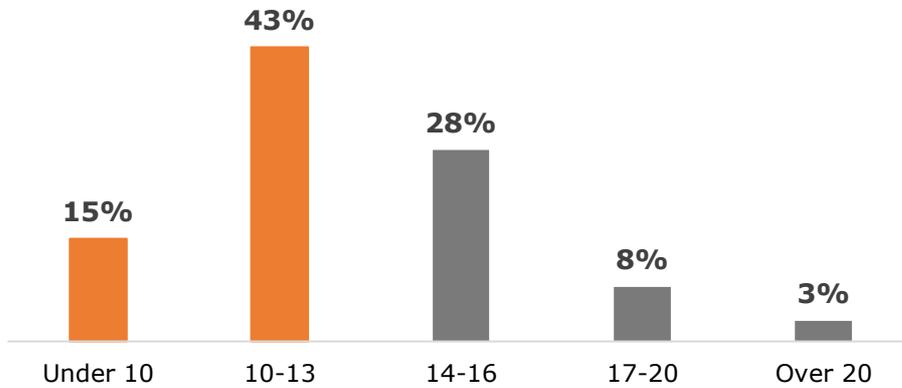
The #iwill Fund investment driver of engaging (which covers recruitment, retention, completion, and transition) more young people from lower socio-economic groups to participate in youth social action has translated into an increase in the number of social action opportunities taking place in the most deprived postcodes in England. Data was retrieved from the #iwill Fund Information Management System in August 2021.



3.2.2 Age

Over half of the youth social action opportunities supported through the #iwill Fund have been for children younger than 14. However, most opportunities supported through the Fund have been for children and young people of secondary school age (between 10 and 16 years old). Data was retrieved from the #iwill Fund Information Management System in August 2021.

Age distribution: participants in #iwill Fund opportunities



3.3 Digital Delivery

Building on the 'in focus' section of Data Review 4, match funders continued to report on digital delivery playing a role in reaching young people. Although digital skill, poverty and accessibility remains an issue, *Sport England* suggested that many young people found online delivery engaging and less intimidating than face-to-face delivery. With several Match Funders reporting that they are aiming to continue with a blended flexible approach, digital delivery will remain relevant in reaching young people.

3.3.1 Geographic 'cold spots'

Match Funders have noted digital delivery as an opportunity to reach young people who may not have previously been able to take part in youth social action due to living in remote areas.

Additionally, *JLGB* reported that their programmes will be online for small communities, and those not large enough to sustain their own *JLGB* group. Although it is yet to be seen how effective this will be, *JLGB* are intending to offer weekly or monthly virtual programmes supplemented by subsidised opportunities to attend physical events. As such, digital delivery can continue to support individuals to unite even if they don't share a physical space.

3.3.2 Adult volunteers

JLGB highlighted that the 'virtual world' offers an opportunity to enlist more adult volunteers with training being provided online. They envision that being able to offer more transferable skills and

youth development training for young, adult, and parent volunteers will enable more social action and help them to supervise and ensure that young people's projects are safe and well designed.

3.3.3 A wider reach

Digital delivery was mentioned by several Match Funders as a tool to reach more young people. *Dunhill Medical Trust* reported that owing to the digital aspect of their project, some schools have been able to have an increased number of forms taking part.

Premier League Charitable Fund noted that they were able to engage more girls and young people with disabilities using a 'digital format of youth voice'. To ensure that those who prefer digital delivery continue to be engaged, young people have been consulted to understand their preference regarding delivery methods. Indeed, other Match Funders echoed this and seem to be aiming to continue with a blended, flexible approach rather than choosing one method over the other.

To note, *Premier League Charitable Fund* were able to engage more girls and young people with disabilities through digital delivery, but the reduction of in person delivery opportunities combined with the fact that some digital delivery required smaller groups (for example for safeguarding or other reasons) meant they were overall able to reach fewer young people. Although digital delivery may reach young people otherwise not engaged, it doesn't necessarily mean that *more* young people will take part.

3.4 Delivery spaces

Dunhill Medical Trust described a project run by the Sensory Trust charity using outdoor spaces to engage beneficiaries that have least opportunity to participate in their local places and communities, and experience some of the most extreme social isolation and mental health and physical health issues. Through outdoor spaces providing a 'neutral space' that is less aligned to particular ages or backgrounds than indoor spaces, they can connect a diversity of people. Thus, thinking about the delivery spaces and their contexts may be an important factor in supporting youth social action for all.

3.5 Application processes

Unsurprisingly, Match Funders mentioned their communication and recruitment strategies as a way of engaging more young people. For example, *Dunhill Medical Trust* used a webinar format to generate interest for the project as well as the wider #iwill campaign.

Sport England noted that consultation and co-design with young people and other volunteers was critical to ensure inclusivity was at the heart of project design, recruitment, and delivery. This indicates that youth voice should be considered at every stage of a project process to engage young people and make opportunities meaningful to them.

Team London reported providing young people with the option to have bespoke application processes while distributing small grants directly to young people. As well as providing the option to send in draft submissions, *Team London* offered young people through online forms, via email or phone interview. As young people chose different options for their application process, it may be argued that having different options for application can overcome barriers in application processes and reach more young people.

"The application process was easy, and I got a lot of help. I normally wouldn't apply for things that have more than one page because I struggle with my reading and writing but being able to apply through phone call was really helpful and modern." – Young person, *Team London*

3.6 Mental health

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health has become an increasing consideration when engaging young people in youth social action.

Team London asserted that supporting young people's mental health during the pandemic was integral to ensuring young people continued with activities and services. As such, some groups paused social action projects for several weeks and used the time and space for the young people to talk about how they were feeling and seek support. Groups also built in regular wellbeing 'check-ins' into the delivery of projects and were able to offer one to one support and signposting where necessary. These appeared to increase attendance levels.

"The attendance numbers weren't great to begin with as everyone was finding their feet, however the numbers steadily improved and picked up after we conducted one to one welfare checks. This highlighted some of the issues young people were contending with by being at home 24/7 (lack of space, food poverty, boredom etc)." – Skyway, Team London

"Magpie Dance included end of session polls in every class, to ensure that participants enjoyed the activity and that they are feeling more positive after taking part (if they didn't record a positive response, they would hold an informal chat with the participant at the end of a session to make sure that they were okay)." – Magpie Dance, Team London

Indeed, the Short Warwick Edinburgh Survey showed that the statement "I've been feeling useful" showed the strongest overall improvement, with young people also stating that the projects gave them a sense of agency and purpose in a time when "they crucially needed to occupy their minds away from challenges of life in 2020". Compounded with data showcasing a potential link between

leading social action and feelings of optimism about the future, it was posited that young people may benefit from feeling like they have some power to create change and feel happier and more enthused as a result. *Team London* suggested that it may be this optimism that encourages young people to continue partaking in youth social action.

Although other match funders did not explicitly state their focus on mental health being a strategy for engagement, their consideration of it was still clear. *Sport England* highlighted how projects helped to alleviate boredom and more severe consequences of isolation like a deterioration of mental health. Similarly, *JLGB* aimed to not only provide children with entertainment and skills every evening, but to reduce the pressure of parents during lockdown and ‘give them a break’.

“The project addressed a need right now for young people to be engaged with each other, to support each other, to have a focus. A lot of provision has had to close down so this was an outlet for them.”
Project Lead, Sport England

“We aimed to have a positive impact on young people’s mental health, well-being and resilience during this time” – JLGB

Although the COVID-19 pandemic may be an unprecedented time, its effects on young people’s mental health and wellbeing will most likely last beyond the time of the pandemic. As such, mental health and trauma informed approaches should continue to be considered while reaching and engaging young people in youth social action. Considering that mental health problems are known to have disproportionately negative impact on the lives of young people who are already disadvantaged¹, a demographic that is already less likely to participate in youth social action, it is an especially important factor to consider in making youth social action inclusive for *all*.

4. How can we support quality Youth Social Action?

The Impact Accelerator, delivered by the Centre for Youth Impact, is an intensive process of impact support, challenge and development – 3 cohorts of grantee organisations will be supported in total. Learning from these organisations is being shared more widely to spread knowledge about improvement across the youth social action landscape. The full initial report for the third cohort can be found [here](#).

¹ Cowie, H., & Myers, C. A. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of children and young people. *Children & Society*, 35(1), 62-74.

Whilst the Impact Accelerator is our main source of understanding how we can support quality Youth Social Action, we gained some reflections from Match Funders' reports about what they think supports quality.

4.1 Relationships

Ormiston Academy Trust reported that establishing relationships with Academy colleagues was integral in embedding quality youth social action and enlisting more young people onto the programme. Similarly, *Sport England* noted that maintaining positive relationships with key partners enabled them to commence delivery as soon as it was safe to do so.

Team London reported that although key delivery partners had to halt activity with young people, relationships were maintained in the period and the time was used to prepare for quality youth social action. For example, Tender provided training for staff on trauma informed practice and staff wellbeing at three partner settings.

To note, with restrictions and increasing pressures from the pandemic partnership working and building relationships sometimes also proved to be difficult. Some match funders reported that there were challenges in connecting with other organisations as staff members were on furlough, delivery sites were closed, and organisations were facing the general impacts of the pandemic.

4.2 Flexible support

Team London realised that to support quality for their microgrant programme, whereby small grants were distributed directly to young people, it was important to be flexible in the types of support offered to young people. For example, whereas some young people needed more rigorous support throughout, others only asked for support when needed. Thus, although it was originally planned to provide check-ins at regular intervals when working with young people it may be beneficial to offer bespoke support.

4.3 Digital Delivery

Although digital delivery was considered a tool to have a wider reach in some cases, *Premier League Charitable Fund* noted that it was difficult to track 'meaningful engagement' for online delivery. This may indicate that there is still a way to go before we know what constitutes 'good quality' digital youth social action engagement. There are emerging indicators of what quality looks like online, with *Premier League Charitable Fund* noting that small groups work best for example, but unsurprisingly these are being learned about and defined in an ad hoc way.

5. Supporting youth social action providers to improve

5.1 Sharing learning

Dunhill Medical Trust are supporting grantees with their planning and preparation through a series of shared learning sessions. These were led by social action leads with other members of the delivery teams providing expertise as required. Establishing networks for youth social action providers to cross-pollinate learning and knowledge may be one way to support providers in delivering quality youth social action.

5.2 Capacity building

Team London allocated money to partnerships to support capacity building. It was envisaged that groups would identify skill gaps and seek training to upskill themselves accordingly. However, it became clear that partnerships lacked the capacity to dedicate time to progress the work. As such, the capacity building fund was deemed useful in sourcing additional support in helping partnerships gather evidence and pull together frameworks to support their models. Examples of how partnerships planned to spend the fund included:

- Mapping of youth social action across both boroughs to get a clear picture of the activity already taking place and start to build a stakeholder database.
- Editing of a film of young people talking about social action and what they want to see changed.
- Developing partnership, safeguarding and data protection agreements and practices
- Developing project research strategy and evaluation plan (with Trinity Laban research team)

Appendix 1. Summary of Evidence Plan Questions

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

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

What is youth social action?

- **Is there a useful typology of youth social action that can cover both the nature and aims of an activity?**
- **What kinds of youth social action have been supported through the #iwill Fund?**
- **What are common theories of change**

- Youth social action is a deliberately broad term, and new. One result is that some grantees do not understand what is meant by the terms 'social action' and 'youth-led'. This implies a need to promote a shared understanding of these terms for that delivery organisations can develop viable youth social action proposition for funding.
- The most common way in which young people are able to lead youth social action opportunities is by making decisions and choices within the programme. Some opportunities enable young people to apply directly for funding, take a lead in assessing funding applications or get involved in evaluation and research.
- Youth social action is best understood by considering a range of typologies that highlight different features of the practice.
- The Information Management System also allows us to build a (developing) picture of the opportunities being supported by the #iwill Fund.
- We believe that understanding Theories of Change across funds and delivery organisations will allow us to say more about the different functions and forms of youth social action.

What does youth social action do?

- **Which positive outcomes have been shown to be promoted by youth social action for young people, children and communities?**
- **Can we say there are types or features of youth social action which increase chances of outcomes?**
- **How can double benefit be managed?**

- In general, the evidence base for the impact of youth social action on young people's outcomes is in the early stages of development.
- Particular areas of confidence, however, are around employment skills and civic and political engagement, where evidence suggests that youth social action can be effective in promoting positive outcomes.
- We cannot conclude from the evidence to date that participation in youth social action improves attainment in educational assessments, although there is some evidence it can affect non-attainment outcomes such as teamwork and self-confidence.
- Early insights from opportunities supported by the #iwill Fund suggest that youth social action may be able to promote young people's wellbeing by helping young people to find meaning in their life and actions.
- The evidence base for the community benefit of youth social action is underdeveloped relative to other potential benefits.
- Our analysis of Match Funder reports to the #iwill Fund identifies three mechanisms through which youth social action programmes supported through the #iwill Fund aim to achieve outcomes for young people.
 - Young people have a safe yet challenging space in which to develop practical, vocational and socio-emotional skills.
 - Young people take self-directed action which gives them a sense of purpose that contributes to their wellbeing, self-concept and self-efficacy.
 - Young people have the opportunity to engage with different communities, increasing their knowledge of others and their sense of belonging.

How do we support youth social action for all?

- **How do we reach children and young people from backgrounds known to be less likely to participate?**
- **How do we engage children and young people younger than 14?**
- **How do we initiate youth social action in 'cold spots' (geographies/sectors/institutions), and how can youth social action activity be sustained?**
- **How do we support children and young people to transition between youth social action opportunities?**
- **What are the pros and cons of digital delivery for reaching *all* young people?**

- In 2018, 40% of young people (10-20 years old) from the most affluent backgrounds took part in some form of social action compared with 30% of the least affluent.
- The #iwill Fund has supported more youth social action opportunities in deprived postcodes than affluent ones.
- The most common engagement strategy the Match Funders report supporting is *targeted universalism*, which appears to be an effective way of reaching young people from lower socio-economic groups.
- Charitable funders and delivery organisations that seek to close the socio-economic gap must be conscious of the fact that it is due to self-reinforcing patterns of behaviour and therefore requires an intentional response that is implemented consistently and with sufficient resource.
- The #iwill Fund has supported a higher concentration of opportunities in urban area, particularly in London.
- **Reports from Match Funders have mentioned being able to engage and reach a wider range of young people, with digital delivery, including those living in rural and remote areas.**
- **Factors including digital exclusion and barriers to finding an uninterrupted space to access online sessions impede on accessing digital youth social action.**

How can we support quality youth social action?

- **What can we say about the strengths and weaknesses of youth social action providers in aggregate?**
- **What do we know about how to support youth social action providers to improve?**
- **How can digital delivery support the quality principles?**

- Shared quality improvement challenges for the field include managing and monitoring implementation fidelity, measuring impact and learning from this and sharing learning across the field.
- Organisations within the Impact Accelerator benefitted from support to integrate youth social action into their theory of change, and to define what is 'core' and 'flex' within their programmes.
- The #iwill Campaign quality principle of youth-led opportunities can be implemented at different levels. Funders with a commitment to supporting youth-led social action should consider how to adapt all of their processes to enable young people to be part of leadership and decision-making.