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#iwill Fund Learning Hub Evidence Workstream

Data Review 1

Dartington Service Design Lab

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Summary of Sector 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.

In this paper we review learning and evidence from within 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, which also draw on our previous papers summarising the external evidence base.

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?**

- 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.
- Youth social action is best understood by considering a range of typologies that highlight different features of the practice.
- An emerging ‘evidence-based’ typology is being developed from the #iwill Fund Information Management System, which helps us to be more precise with recommendations around outcomes and quality.
- The Information Management System also allows us to build a (developing) picture of the opportunities being supported by the #iwill Fund.

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?**

- 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.

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?**

- 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.

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?**
- 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.

Introduction

This is the first 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.

We will review 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 these stakeholders in the #iwill Fund – Match Funders, their evaluation partners, and the Leadership Board. By involving key stakeholders in setting the direction for the Evidence Plan workstream we hope to maximise the value of the learning generated through the #iwill Fund.

The #iwill Fund Learning Hub will regularly update our answers to the Strategic Evidence Plan questions over the course of the Fund. We anticipate that as more Match Funders complete evaluations of their projects, we will be able to identify more robust learning from the Fund. As this is the first data review paper, most programmes have not yet reached a point in their evaluations where they can share recorded information. This paper draws out emerging insights from the learning that has been generated so far, and situates it in the context of the wider evidence base for youth social action.

1. What is youth social action?

Evidence Plan Question(s)

- 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?**

- 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.
- Youth social action is best understood by considering a range of typologies that highlight different features of the practice.

- An emerging 'evidence-based' typology is being developed from the #iwill Fund Information Management System, which helps us to be more precise with recommendations around outcomes and quality.
- The Information Management System also allows us to build a (developing) picture of the opportunities being supported by the #iwill Fund.

1.1 What has the #iwill Fund funded?

The Information Management System allows us to paint an emerging picture of what has been funded. Volunteering (58% of funded opportunities) is the most common form of youth social action supported through the #iwill Fund, followed by tutoring, coaching or mentoring (18%) and helping to improve the local area (18%). Campaigning currently represents a small proportion of funded activity (5%) but this will increase as more opportunities are added to the Information Management System. Over two thirds (65%) of youth social action opportunities in the #iwill Fund portfolio are delivered in community settings while a quarter (25%) are delivered through schools.

The vast majority of #iwill-funded youth social action opportunities are directed towards a specific cause (88%) and the most popular causes are People & Communities (43%) and Education & Learning (42%).

It appears that most opportunities involve young people in leadership by giving choices to decide what to do (49%) at an operational level and rarely involve young people in strategy or governance (both representing less than 1% of #iwill funded opportunities).

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. Going forward, we will be matching specific funded opportunities to the 'types' we have identified using the Information Management System.

1.2 The need for a shared understanding

We have identified a theme across Match Funder reports that some potential 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.

The term '*social action*' is not widely understood by young people or adults. One Match Funder reported that, "Most of the young people and many of the adults supporting projects they work with don't understand 'social action' and how it relates to them. Projects have spent considerable time thinking about how best to describe their programme of activity. Many have minimised their use of the term 'social action'..."

Similarly, Match Funders have observed that there is little consensus on the meaning of *youth-led*. One Match Funder reported that organisation applying for funding often do not appreciate the level of youth leadership required for a programme to be authentically youth-led. "Applications showed varied interpretations of key terms although we had set out working understandings of 'change', 'youth-led', and 'lived experience'... Organisations who were rejected in the first round were often undertaking recognisably successful social action projects that were not substantially youth-led and/or did not articulate what changes young people want to make that relate to their own lived experience of injustice and inequality.

2. What does youth social action do?

Evidence Plan Question(s)

- 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?**

- 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 at this stage 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 actions.
- The evidence base for the community benefit of youth social action is underdeveloped relative to other potential benefits.

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 outcome categories listed above. Four reports from Match Funders are summarised below, which measure changes in outcomes for young people who took part in their funded programmes, and for communities. Some of these evaluations have been running for longer than others, which is reflected in the detail available at this time. These evaluations are predominantly concerning benefit for young people, as this is where the majority of Match Funder evaluations focus.

Outcomes for Young People	New evidence in the last quarter	Further questions to consider/points to note
Socio-emotional	<p>Spirit of 2012's evaluation (carried out by UK Youth) of the EmpowHER programme shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Young women & girls report improved mental wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ satisfied indicator: 0.35 effect size ○ worthwhile: 0.38 ○ happiness: 0.29 ○ anxiety: not significant □ Young women and girls' limiting perceptions of self and others were challenged <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ have a limiting perception of gender: 20% before, 11% after ○ have a limiting perception of own ability: 59% before, 33% after □ 50% of young women and girls report increased confidence and leadership skills 	<p>This evaluation uses a self-report pre-post survey method (n=143), with some validated measures and qualitative feedback.</p> <p>The indicator of mental wellbeing that was correlated specifically with youth social action was feeling that life is worthwhile. The programme specifically targets young people identified as having low self-esteem and wellbeing.</p> <p>This evaluation uses a self-report pre-post survey method (n=143), with some validated measures. Of seven statements young people reported the greatest increase in against the statement 'I've been feeling useful'.</p> <p>Outcomes were reported by individual #iwill Funded projects. Between a half and a third of the total number young people engaged by funded programmes were reported by projects to have improved against each other four outcomes.</p>
	<p>HAYN Volunteering Academy Evaluation shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Young people feel they learnt what their strengths are: 63% felt they know what they are good at a little and 38% felt they know what they are good at a lot □ Young people felt they learnt teamwork skills 38% said they felt their knowledge increased a little and 54% said their knowledge increased a lot □ Young people's felt their confidence increased 25% said a little and 44% said a lot <p>Quote:</p> <p><i>'Being an ambassador has really helped my confidence. I would never have spoken to people I didn't know before and now I am</i></p>	<p>Participants took part in a final evaluation workshop as part of the HAYN Volunteering Academy Community Ambassador Programme. Evaluation statements were developed through consultation with young people, reflecting on research completed by UK Youth and Centre for Youth Impact as well as the HACT wellbeing tool.</p>

	<p><i>happier to talk to new people. I travelled on a train for the first time and have taken part in assemblies’- 20Twenty Community Ambassador (March, Fenland)</i></p>	
	<p>Team London shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 63% young people reported improved wellbeing <input type="checkbox"/> 34% increased levels of trust <input type="checkbox"/> 55% improved thoughts and feelings 	<p>This evaluation uses a self-report pre-post survey method with some validated measures. Of seven statements young people reported the greatest increase in against the statement ‘I’ve been feeling useful’.</p>
	<p>Sport England shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Over 50% of young people reported their programme had positive impacts on aspects of mental wellbeing, individual development and social and community development outcomes. <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-post measures find small positive changes in these outcomes on average 	<p>This evaluation uses a self-report pre-post survey method. There is more information on Sport England’s evaluation methodology in their Volunteering Evaluation Toolkit.</p>
Civic-societal	<p>HAYN Volunteering Academy Evaluation shows: 67% of young people said their willingness to do more volunteering increased a lot after participating in the HAYN Volunteering Academy and 17% of young people said their willingness to do more volunteering increased a little.</p> <p>Quote: <i>“It’s the first time I’ve volunteered really, it’s never been my thing, but now I’m doing it I think it will be very good in the long run.” – ACIS housing Community Ambassador (Sheffield).</i></p>	<p>Participants took part in a final evaluation workshop as part of the HAYN Volunteering Academy Community Ambassadors Programme. Evaluation statements were developed through consultation with young people, reflecting on research completed by UK Youth and Centre for Youth Impact as well as the HACT wellbeing tool.</p>
Employment	<p>HAYN Volunteering Academy Evaluation shows: 89% of young people who participated in the Young Leaders strand felt they developed 7 out of 8 skills on the Peabody Employability and Life Success Evaluation Framework</p> <p>Likewise, 50% reported having a better idea of their future plans as a result of participating in the Community Ambassadors Programme. 29% seemed confused about their future. They felt this programme has opened the door to new opportunities and were quite young to figure out their future.</p>	
Education	<p>The evaluation of the HAYN Young Leaders Project shows:</p>	<p>This evaluation uses a self-reported pre-post survey method, without validated measures</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Positive change in attitude to education, motivation and specific skills <input type="checkbox"/> 250 young people received accredited awards <p><u>Quote</u></p> <p><i>“it’s been a good experience, and has allowed me to understand youth work and its benefits to young people, I have now enrolled in a youth work course at Wakefield college, and taken part in taster days” Katlin aged 15- The Youth Association Community Ambassadors Programme (Wakefield)</i></p>	
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Outcomes for Community	New evidence in the last quarter	Further questions to consider/points to note
Community Benefit	<p>The evaluation of the HAYN Young Leaders Project shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 74% of young people felt their social action had a lot (42%) or a fair amount (32%) of impact. 	
Societal Benefit	<p>Spirit of 2012’s evaluation (carried out by UK Youth) of the EmpowHER programme show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> improved feelings of social cohesion for participants (41% believe more strongly that they often meet people who are different to them; 38% believe more strongly that they want to help people who live near them). <input type="checkbox"/> qualitative data show some young women and girls meet different people in the community than usual during the programme, but not all. <input type="checkbox"/> an increase in young women and girls meeting different people is correlated with them perceiving that people in their community have benefitted from their social action project 	
Reflexive Benefit	No studies identified	
Organisational Benefit	<p>HAYN has funded over 24 grass roots organisations and 9 housing associations in new communities.</p> <p>Most funded organisations have achieved the First Steps UK Youth Quality Mark. This has been an opportunity to review their services, and be supported to improve their provision.</p>	

We can identify one emerging insight from these reports. **Youth social action appears to be able to promote young people’s wellbeing by helping young people to find meaning in their actions.** There is some evidence to suggest that youth social action programmes have helped young people’s mental wellbeing to improve (against validated measures). Opportunities funded by Spirit of 2012 and Team London have reported the greatest improvement in young people’s feelings that life is worthwhile and that they have felt useful.

We anticipate a lot more findings will be reported by Match Funders against socio-emotional and wellbeing outcomes for young people. Based on our analysis of Match Funder evaluation plans we expect there to be fewer findings against the other categories of young people’s outcomes, and across community benefit, and we would welcome newer Match Funders investigating the latter in particular.

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

Evidence Plan Question(s)

- 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?**

- 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.¹
- 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*², 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.

3.1 Background

¹ Knibbs, S. et al. (2019). *National Youth Social Action Survey 2018 Summary Report*. London: Ipsos MORI.

² Targeted universalism is an engagement approach that involves creating inclusive, universal youth social action opportunities in geographies and settings which have a higher concentration of young people from, for example, lower socio-economic groups.

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.

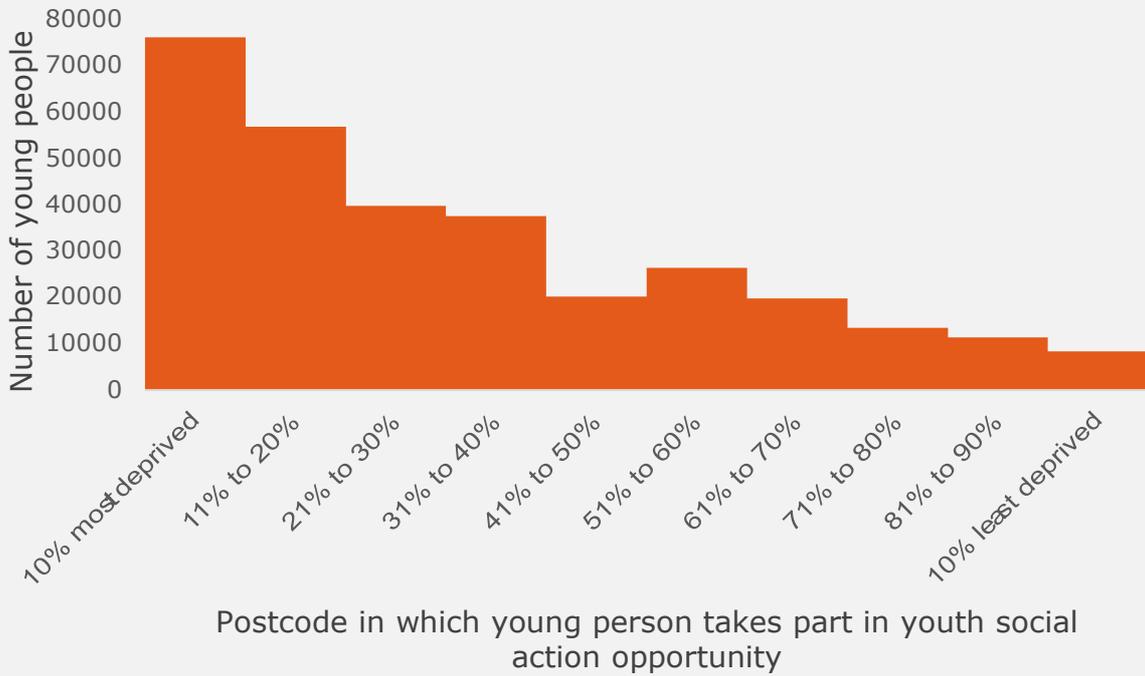
Alongside closing the socio-economic participation gap, the #iwill Fund aims to support younger children (less than 14 years of age) into social action. A mixed-methods study by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues found that young people with a habit of service – young people who repeatedly take part in social action – are likely to have first got involved in service before the age of 10.³ Enabling more children to take part in social action at an earlier age may be an effective strategy to increase the number of young people who repeatedly do social action. A habit of service may be a mechanism that ensures young people transition from one youth social action opportunity to the next.

3.2 Reach of the #iwill Fund: socio-economics and age

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 the UK.

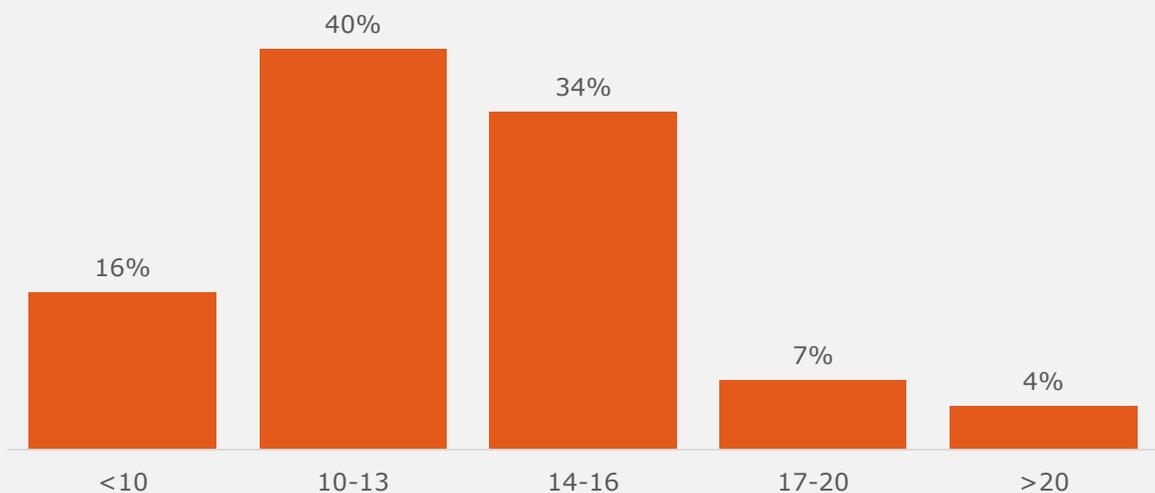
³ Arthur, J. et al (2017). *A Habit of Service: The factors that sustain service in young people*. Birmingham: The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues.

The #iwill Fund has supported more opportunities for YSA in deprived postcodes than affluent ones.



Just over half of the youth social action opportunities supported through the #iwill Fund have been for children younger than 14. However, the vast majority of opportunities supported through the Fund have been for children and young people of secondary school age (between 10 and 16 years old). In light of the Jubilee Centre’s finding that a habit of service is associated with first engaging in service before the age of 10, the #iwill Fund might seek to do more to provide engaging opportunities for children in primary schools.

Age distribution of participants in #iwill Fund opportunities



3.3 How are Match Funders and delivery partners engaging young people?

While several Match Funders have reported demographic information about the young people engaged in the youth social action opportunities they support, relatively few have yet documented in detail their strategies for engaging young people from lower socio-economic groups and others less likely to participate in social action.

The most common engagement strategy, where such strategies are reported, is **targeted universalism**. This approach involves creating inclusive youth social action opportunities in geographies and settings which have a higher concentration of young people from, for example, lower socio-economic groups. The data reported through the Information Management System and from Match Funders suggest that this strategy is effective in locating youth social action opportunities in more deprived areas.

Team London intentionally target their programme to schools in the most deprived postcodes in the city, as well as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Similarly, Pears Foundation have provided funding to make youth social action opportunities available in further education colleges, where young people from low-income backgrounds are disproportionately likely to attend. HAYN Volunteering Academy targets young people (through partnering with housing associations) that live in social housing, who are more likely to experience socio-economic disadvantage.

Our [previous paper](#) on this issue reported diverse approaches being taken by Match Funders to engage young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

4. How can we support quality youth social action?

Evidence Plan Question(s)

- 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?**
-
- 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.

4.1 Insights from the Impact Accelerator workstream

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 it. Learning from these organisations is being shared more widely to spread knowledge about improvement across the youth social action landscape.

The Impact Accelerator has worked closely with a small number of youth social action providers to date. A number of common strengths, weakness and challenges have been identified. While these common themes are based on a small sample of the youth social action field, the intense work completed during the Accelerator means these are in-depth insights that we are reasonably confident apply across the field. The full report from the first cohort can be found [here](#).

Common strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff roles are well-defined. Grantee organisations have good documentation for skills profiles, staff development and competencies.
Common weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence base for theories of change. Grantee organisations do not have strong evidence to support the mechanisms of change that may influence outcomes. <input type="checkbox"/> Internal learning and improvement. Many organisations confirmed that they were not adept at sharing learnings internally, and this is an area when cross-cohort learnings can and should be facilitated actively.
Areas of improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation fidelity. There is a need to support youth social action providers in understanding, managing and monitoring implementation fidelity, to ensure that programmes are delivered as designed, and that the mechanisms of change identified within a theory of change are being monitored. <input type="checkbox"/> Measuring impact. Grantee organisations share a common challenge of developing resource-appropriate ways of measuring young person benefit beyond self-report surveys. Measuring community benefit – and deciding <i>why</i> they are measuring it – is a further shared challenge. <input type="checkbox"/> Shared learning. Grantee organisations would appreciate and benefit from systematic way of sharing learning across the sector.

- **Change management** support is needed to help grantees implement organisational and programme improvements.

4.2 Improvement strategies: 'what helped'

External perspective

Participating organisations found it helpful to receive an external perspective on their programmes. This perspective was provided by the independent calibration of the programmes' self-assessment using the Confidence Framework as well as coaching from a Research Associate. More information on the role of the Confidence Framework and Research Associates can be found in the final report from the first Impact Accelerator cohort.

"The extra capacity provided by our Research Associate was really helpful; it built on work we had already done before internally, but allowed an external perspective to summarise and review it. External validation of the work also meant that people could take it a bit more seriously." **City Year**

Embedding youth social action into theories of change

Some organisations in the first Impact Accelerator cohort reported that their perspective on youth social action had changed through the process. They now understood youth social action as a means to achieve outcomes for young people. The organisations found it helpful to situate their youth social action opportunities within a theory of change for young people's outcomes.

"The thinking of how we see ourselves as a youth social action organisation has changed. Youth social action is now more inextricably linked to outcomes, rather than a stand-alone strand of work ... When we met with our Research Associate the philosophical positioning of youth social action within FBB was difficult to communicate, so it pushed our timescales back. However, with the help of our Research Associate, we have learnt that social action isn't an end in itself, but is a means to an end for our young people to develop a sense of self and agency over the world around them." **Football Beyond Borders**

Identifying core and flex

Youth social action opportunities need to be flexible in order to create space for young people to make decisions and lead the change they want to achieve. However, it is also important for programmes to articulate the core of their activity – the essential ingredients that make a difference for young people or communities. In the Impact Accelerator, organisations were supported to find the right balance by identifying the elements of their programmes which belong to the core, and which can be flexed according to different young people and contexts.

"We have created an 'active ingredients' review after work surveying and interviewing staff, along with reviewing volunteer feedback. We have also updated our 'Free/Fixed/Flex' mapping for the

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Active programmes. Overall, we have a better evidence base for demonstrating what is core to the programme and communicating this to staff.” **Student Hubs**