



**UKCF #iwill Fund
Evaluation Report
20.11.2024**

Proudly supporting
youth social action



Department
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Media & Sport



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Executive summary

UK Community Foundations (UKCF) has collaborated with the #iwill Fund since 2017 to deliver a UKCF initiative to empower young people by providing them with opportunities to lead and drive positive changes within their communities. The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to £66 million joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.

UKCF has acted as a match funder with its network of community foundations, match funding and awarding grants locally on behalf of the #iwill Fund. The third round of the UKCF's #iwill funding has significantly impacted numerous communities, supporting **186 projects** with a total of **£1,200,741.06** across 16 community foundations. These projects have reached nearly **18,000 beneficiaries**, primarily engaging young people aged 10–14 in meaningful social action. The funding has enabled diverse activities, such as youth advisory work, volunteering projects, campaigning, or helping to improve the local area or environment. Across the funded projects, many have been successful in attracting participants who might not usually engage in social action.

The youth social action projects, supported by the #iwill Fund through UKCF, have delivered significant outcomes for both young people and their communities:

Young people engaged in these initiatives have benefited from structured environments conducive to **skills development**, including employability skills and specific project competencies. They have **gained accreditations** through training programmes in a range of different areas, assumed **leadership** roles, and gained a deeper **understanding of societal and environmental issues**. These experiences have been particularly impactful for marginalised young people, helping them to develop independence, creating connections and supporting personal growth.

Moreover, the initiatives have measurably enhanced the **health and wellbeing** of participants. They have increased **self-confidence**, **self-esteem**, and **resilience**, facilitating personal development and positive community engagement. Inclusive practices have played a crucial role in supporting neurodiverse young people and those facing additional challenges, **reducing isolation** and promoting an improved understanding of their lived experiences within communities.

At the community level, the projects have driven positive change by creating more **beautiful public spaces**, providing opportunities for **intergenerational dialogue**, and **enriching communities' cultural life** through diverse contributions such as through performing arts and art installations. They have prioritised **inclusivity**, amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups and creating more inclusive community activities and services.

Despite facing initial engagement challenges and resource management complexities,

charities have demonstrated adaptability and resilience. They have intensified **outreach efforts, tailored programmes** to diverse participant needs, and formed **strategic partnerships** to sustain impact and promote long-term community engagement.

Community foundations, particularly those who had not been involved in a youth social action fund before, **valued the voice of young people** in decision-making processes, and reflected on their process in relation to applications and monitoring.

In conclusion, youth social action supported by UKCF's delivery of the #iwill Fund underscores the transformative power of youth-led social action in effecting meaningful societal change. It has not only had multiple positive outcomes for young people but also strengthened community bonds and committed funded charities to sustained youth-led approaches.

Introduction

UK Community Foundations (UKCF) has collaborated with the #iwill Fund since 2017 to deliver a UKCF initiative to empower young people by providing them with opportunities to lead and drive positive change within their communities. There are five main Investment Drivers of the #iwill Fund:

- ▶ *Create high quality opportunities.*
- ▶ *Focus on creating a habit for life.*
- ▶ *Reach young people who have not previously undertaken youth social action.*
- ▶ *Focus on sustainability of delivery and sustainability of the youth social action for the young person.*
- ▶ *Have youth voice within the funder/delivery organisations and the programme itself.*

Social action involves activities such as campaigning, fundraising, and volunteering, all of which enable participants to make a positive difference to their communities. The concept behind the #iwill movement is that social action develops the skills and knowledge of young people that employers look for, and focuses on the following six principles of Youth Social Action:

- ▶ *Youth Led – led, owned and shaped by young people's needs, ideas and decision making*
- ▶ *Reflective – recognising contributions as well as valuing critical reflection and learning*
- ▶ *Challenging – stretching and ambitious as well as enjoyable and enabling*
- ▶ *Socially impactful – have a clear and intended benefit to a community, cause or social problem*
- ▶ *Progressive – sustained, and providing links to other activities and opportunities*
- ▶ *Embedded – accessible to all, and well-integrated to existing pathways to become a habit for life*

The evaluation of the #iwill Fund was conducted by the UK-based inFocus Consultancy Ltd. (inFocus). inFocus originally engaged with UKCF on the evaluation of the #iwill Fund between 2019 and early 2022 (interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic) and was re-engaged by UKCF to evaluate the latest iteration of the funding programme between 2023 to 2024. This report explores the outcomes for young people and the wider community as a result of the funded activities, and links them back to the principles of Youth Social Action and Investment Drivers identified above.

Methodology

This report for the UKCF #iwill Fund was compiled with data from the following sources, utilising a [mixed method](#) approach:

- ▶ **Monitoring data** provided by charities running projects supported by the #iwill Fund. The data included details of target audiences, the challenges charities faced, and the outcomes of funded activities for charities, young people and the wider community.
- ▶ **Case study interviews with eight charities** reflecting on the projects they ran with support from the #iwill Fund.
- ▶ **Interviews with three community foundations** that were involved in distributing funds and supporting charities through the #iwill Fund.

This report reflects on the experience of the projects taking part in the programme between 2023 and 2024.

There are challenges and limitations to all evaluation approaches, to which this evaluation was no exception:



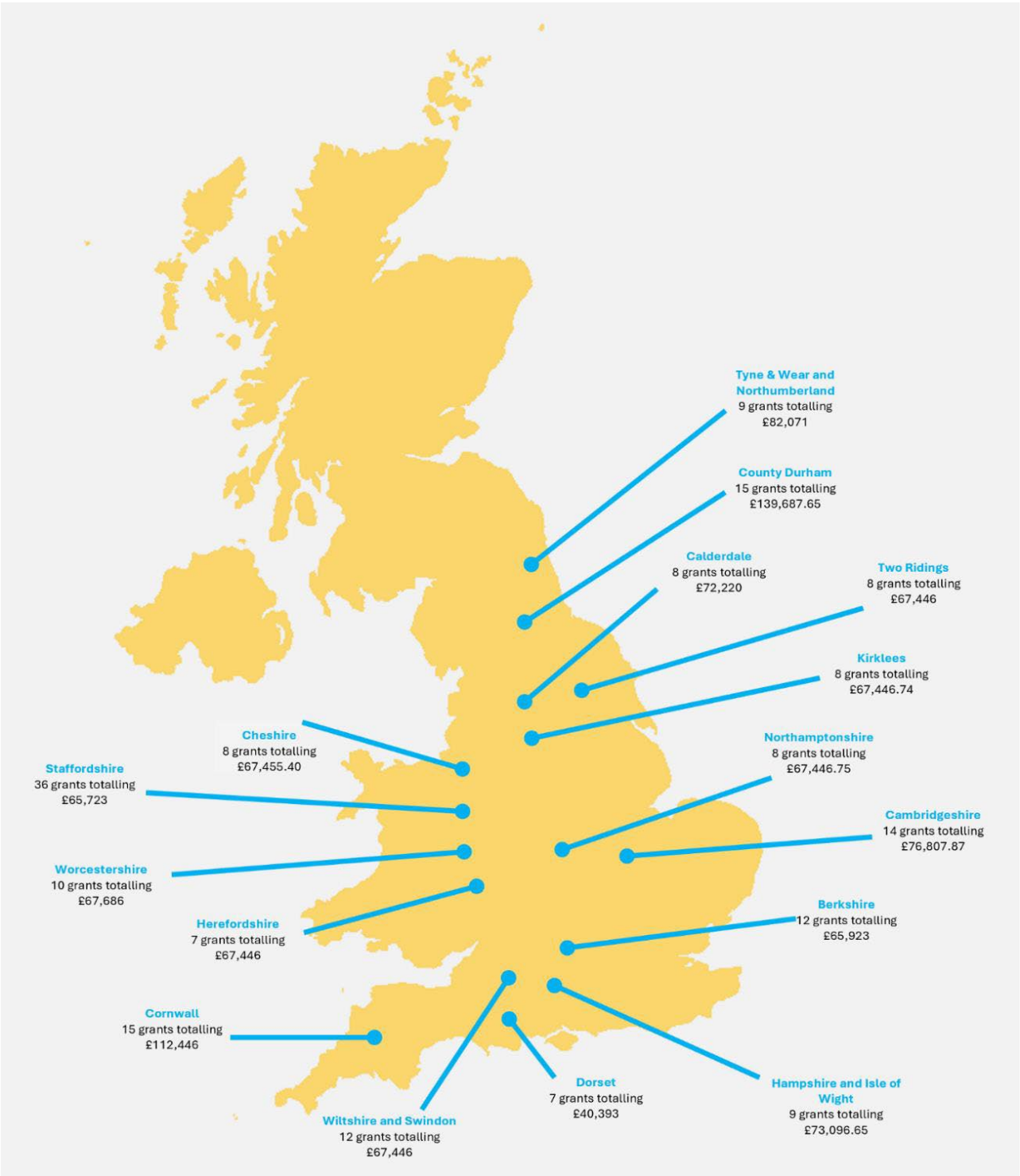
- ▶ In some cases, the evaluation reflected activities that were completed several months before the evaluation took place, leading to some respondents finding it challenging to recall the details of activities.
- ▶ The scope of the evaluation did not allow for inFocus to engage directly with the young people engaging in #iwill Fund activities. However, feedback from funded charities showed that most had clearly consulted young people at several stages of the projects, including the grant application and interview process.
- ▶ The evaluation largely relied on data supplied by projects, collected in a variety of different ways, and it was not possible to assess the quality of this data (although findings were compared against observations from community foundations as part of a mixed method approach).
- ▶ With no baseline for comparison, the evaluation relied heavily on qualitative data from monitoring forms and interviews for reporting on outcomes. It is therefore more challenging to generalise results across all 186 projects, although this was mitigated by large volumes of monitoring data and the benefit of open questions that helped to uncover a range of unintended outcomes.

Part 1 - Findings: Projects and activities

This section provides more details about the projects supported by the third round of the #iwill Fund including the levels of funding, types of activity, beneficiaries, and feedback from charities on the running of the fund.

Projects

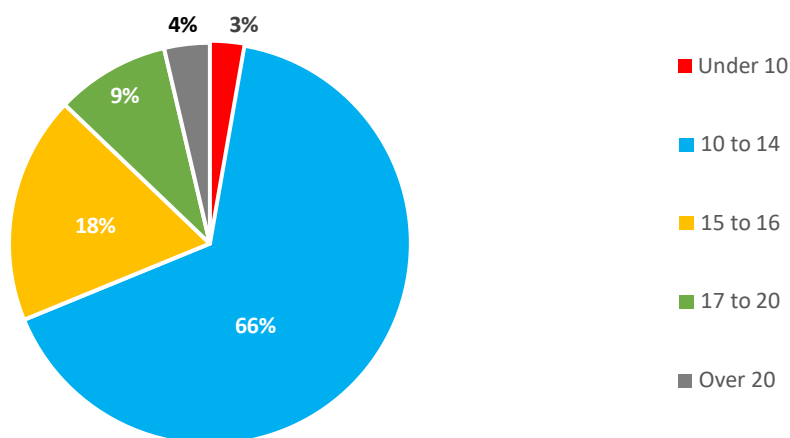
In total, the third round of #iwill awarded **£1,200,741.06** of funding to **186** projects, across **16** community foundations.



Beneficiaries

Charities supported through the fund (who completed the monitoring form) reported that they directly reached a total of **17,975 beneficiaries** (825 did not complete the opportunity) with participants on average taking part in activities across **50.5 hours**. The activities provided through the #iwill Fund engaged 69% of participants in meaningful youth social action for the first time, with 33% reporting to continue to engage after the funding period.

Primary Age Group of Project Participants



The most common age group involved in activities were young people between the ages of 10–14, with 72 projects (66%) focused on this age group. The numbers for Staffordshire and Wiltshire community foundations are not included in the chart due to the different categories used for reporting. Staffordshire and Wiltshire used the same categories of children aged 5–12 (13 projects in total, 32.5%) and teenagers/young people aged 13–18 (27 groups in total, 67.5%).

Activities were hosted in a range of delivery settings, with the two most common identified as local community buildings (hubs), and outreach within the community.

Of the 140 projects which provided monitoring forms, 122 (87%) reported that they succeeded in engaging those who might not usually participate in youth social action. The engagement of this group was conducted in diverse ways, including:

- ▶ **Diverse participation:** Many projects described emphasised the inclusion of those from diverse backgrounds and marginalised groups. Activities focused on providing platforms for all voices to be heard and promoting participation for youth with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, and those from various ethnic, cultural, socio-economic and religious backgrounds in social action projects.

“These young people are from deprived backgrounds, many of whom struggle to find their feet in a society which should be inclusive to all persons.” (Project staff)

- ▶ **Youth leadership and empowerment:** Activities were designed to develop the

leadership skills of participants, and empower young people to lead in planning, decision-making and implementation of the projects to promote ownership. Some projects also included mentoring elements to provide additional support for the young people throughout their engagement.

“Following a number of weeks of social learning, group development and building a range of leadership skills, young people created an action list that they wanted to tackle.” (Project staff)

- ▶ **Lived experience:** Some staff and volunteers involved in the individual projects have personal experience with specific challenges or barriers the young people were facing, for example mental health, which was used as a method to build a rapport.

“As the youth worker has a lot in common, she has built a good rapport with young people who are uncertain or have any doubts about social action. She has been able to reassure them, act as a role model and a mentor.” (Project staff)

- ▶ **Education and skill development:** Workshops and training sessions were delivered to provide young people with the skills they needed to take part in social action. The projects also aimed to educate participants on the importance and potential impact of social action, and the influence they could have on issues that mattered to them.

“Our workshops used a range of learning methods to introduce the concept of youth social action to young people in accessible ways, for example discussion, drawing, spoken word and performance. We ensured workshops were accessible, providing food and travel bursaries and making provision free at the point of access for all participants.” (Project staff)

- ▶ **Community engagement:** Charities supported community members and other partners working in the local area to build relationships with young people and others in the community.

“Our engagement strategy included delivering awareness raising events within year group assemblies in primary schools alongside holding small group workshops on school site with young people referred by school staff, supporting referrals by community partners including the police, and encouraging young people involved in our own boxing academy to engage.” (Project staff)

- ▶ **Social media:** Social media channels were used to promote opportunities to be involved in the project and share different milestones across the project activities.

“We reached out to the general public via social media posts which was moderately successful, alongside this we emailed our youth theatre participants and contacted local schools directly.” (Project staff)

- ▶ **Rewards:** Some projects used incentives such as certificates and awards to keep young people engaged.

“We also recognise the importance of providing incentives and rewards to encourage participation. We offered merchandise including hoodies, badges and other forms of recognition to young people who participated in social action projects, which helped to motivate them to continue engaging.” (Project staff)

Types of activities supported through the projects

To support the target audiences described above, projects delivered a range of activities including (but not exclusively) the following activity types described by charities in the monitoring forms:

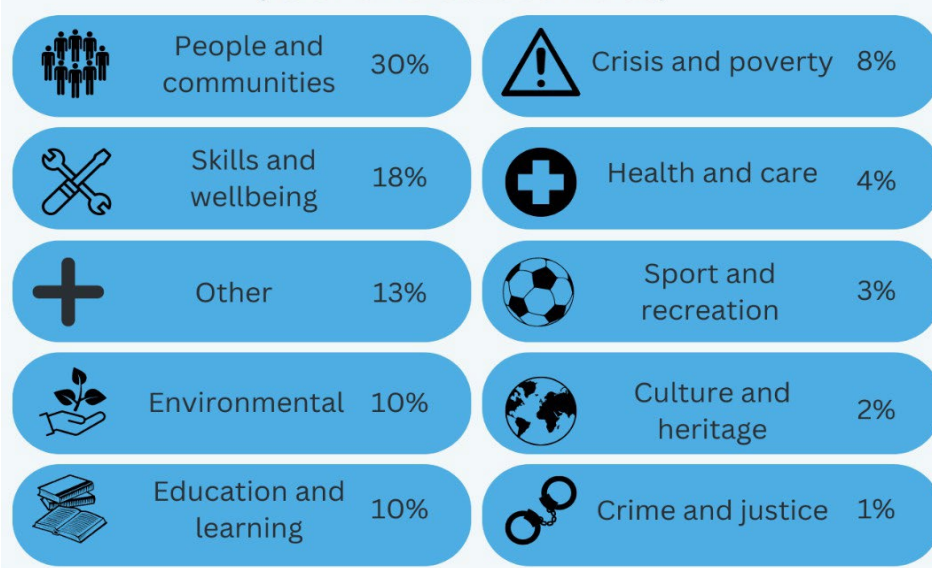
- ▶ **Youth advisory work** (18% of projects)
- ▶ **Volunteering** (18% of projects)
- ▶ **Campaigning** (16% of projects)
- ▶ **Tutoring/coaching/mentoring** (15% of projects)
- ▶ **Helping to improve the local area or environment** (12% of projects)
- ▶ **Supporting other people who aren't friends or relatives** (6% of projects)
- ▶ **Fundraising/sponsored event** (3% of projects)
- ▶ **Other** (13%, not specified)

Activities were further broken down by the cause that they were focused on (shown in this graphic).

People and communities were the most common cause in the monitoring form.

Activities broken down by cause

(% of overall activities)



Many projects took a youth-led approach in the planning and delivery of activities, which is one of the key Youth Social Action principles of the #iwill Fund. The table below presents the various types of youth-led activities hosted within charities, from a list provided on the monitoring forms, with one project highlighting “each participant was able to address and work with their individual key interests, discuss issues and subjects of their choice.” The most common type of youth-led activities was young people self-directing the projects, with 55 charities identifying with this. This was closely followed by young people being given choices and deciding what to do, with 44 projects taking this approach.

It should be noted that projects were only able to select one option in the monitoring form, selecting the primary way in which activities were youth led. As such, young people were likely to have been participating in multiple forms of youth-led activities (i.e. a higher number of projects with young people also involved in governance or informing strategy).

Youth-led activity	Number of projects	% of projects
Young people are self-directing activities	55	44%
Young people are given choices and decide what to do	44	35%
Young people are creating peer leadership roles	10	8%
Young people are providing a democratic voice	6	5%
Young people are informing strategy	5	4%
Training staff to facilitate youth leadership	4	3%
Young people are part of the governance	1	1%

Mini case study: KBSK Performing Arts CIC

KBSK Performing Arts CIC is a youth-based charity in Cornwall. The organisation originally focused on engaging young people through performing arts, but they have since expanded their service offerings through a wider range of programmes.

As part of the #iwill Fund, young people were encouraged to consider the needs of their local community and develop actionable ideas which they could implement. Through the funded activities, the organisation saw the values of involving young people in decision making and developed a Youth Board within their structure to have an input into other activities, linking back to one of the key Investment Drivers of the #iwill Fund.

For more information about **KBSK Performing Arts CIC**, see the Appendix.

Part 2 - Findings: Outcomes of the #iwill Fund

This section explores the outcomes for young people and the wider community because of the UKCF-managed #iwill Fund, as reported by charities and community foundations. The outcomes are linked back to the larger #iwill Fund principles of Youth Social Action and Investment Drivers, as outlined in the introduction of this report.

Outcomes for supported young people

Outcomes for young people covered the following key areas:

- ▶ Growth and skills development
- ▶ Improved health and wellbeing
- ▶ Social impact and sense of belonging

There were also some unexpected outcomes!

Personal growth and skills development

Focusing on the Youth Social Action principle ‘challenging’, the following themes provide evidence to how the #iwill Fund provided opportunities for young people to develop new skills and widen their knowledge.

Learning new skills: Across the youth social action projects funded by the #iwill Fund, young people acquired a wide range of **new skills** while in a safe environment. Some of these skills can broadly be categorised as ‘employability skills’. This includes organisational skills, teamwork, communication, project planning and problem solving. Others involved specific skills related to the local projects including video production, marketing, influencing and campaigning, gardening, and litter picking. Several charities reported that for their young people the projects were the beginning of a long-term interest, for example, in filmmaking, and gave them valuable practical experience.

“The young people worked alongside a professional filmmaker. As part of their hands-on workshops, they were introduced to different job roles in filmmaking, invited to interrogate those roles, and offered opportunities to try out relevant skills. This supports career development for those young people.” (Project staff)



Leadership development: Many projects focused on providing training and development opportunities for [young leaders and volunteers](#). Several charities offered accredited training programmes to develop leadership skills among young volunteers. Young people who had been trained to become young peer leaders were able to provide support and guidance to their peers in various activities, helping them build their confidence and transferable skills while making a positive impact.



["The impact of the grant on the young people has been truly remarkable. It's incredibly inspiring to see the young people stepping up as leaders and engaging others to show support. They have not only gained a deeper understanding of important topics like Pride, mental health and the environment, but they have also learned how to make a difference and help others."](#) (Project staff)

Increased understanding of issues: Many funded charities reported that young people [increased their understanding](#) of a wide range of social and environmental topics, some of them global, others more specific to their region: young people reported increased understanding of social action, climate change, cost-of-living crisis, homelessness, and hands-on community improvements strategies.

["This project enabled the young people participating to gain a better understanding of the social issues they were seeking to highlight as our content production resources/workshop sessions showed them how to research topics and produce well produced content."](#) (Project staff)

Mini case study: Durham Area Youth

Delivering services in six villages across Durham Conty, Durham Area Youth focuses on different issues relevant to young people. Through the #iwill Fund, young people developed and ran campaigns on Pride, mental health and the environment. The issues were identified by the group as topics that were important to them and their community. After taking part in workshops around the issues, the group shared their new knowledge with their peers, local schools and the local community.

For more information about **Durham Area Youth**, see the Appendix.

Improved educational attainment: Several funded charities reported that young people improved their **educational attainment** levels as a result of participating in the projects or returned to formal education after they had previously dropped out. Some charities provided personalised academic support, helping them achieve strong GCSE grades and progress to college/sixth form. One charity shared survey responses from young people involved in its projects, which showed that 77% felt they had made progress in their education and learning, while another organisation reported that through their training, participation in workshops, and collaboration with STEM professionals, young people developed valuable knowledge, and a deeper understanding of the subjects covered.

Enhanced life skills and preparation for adulthood:

Several funded charities focused on supporting the young people in developing **life skills**, particularly related to independence such as financial skills, healthy eating as well as sleeping habits, and **preparing them for adulthood**. One charity commented that the development of life skills will also have a deeper impact on local communities as the young people:

“They have been given stepping stones towards a responsible and environmentally conscious adulthood, one in which the sustainability of their daily practices is considered and actioned.” (Project staff)



Awareness of supportive independence: Several charities ran projects with young people who experience numerous additional barriers with regards to developing independence as they enter adulthood; for example, young people with disabilities. One charity recounted that:

“Through #iwill we were able to work alongside young people to reach their goals with opening their own bank accounts and having access to their own homes themselves. Even with the young people being at different stages in their lives, they were keen to inform us about two key themes that this supports: choice and control and supportive independence.” (Project staff)

Improved health and wellbeing

Increased confidence and self-esteem: There was consistent feedback across the data that the youth social action projects helped young people increase their **confidence and self-esteem**, while also helping them feel **more hopeful about their future prospects** due to the opportunities provided to them and the changes they experienced in themselves as a result.

Many young people fed back that they feel more comfortable in new environments and talking to unfamiliar people, they are proud to see their work publicly displayed or performed and felt they have overcome fears and anxieties through group support within the projects.

"A big difference this project has made is to the outlook of a handful of the young people who in turn have found new confidence and have taken on new roles in the community outside of the project [...]. These young people [...] are more confident in forming their own opinions and having a say when given the right platform. The young people we have included in these activities will go on to have a real positive influence as positive members of society as well as supporting other organisations and in their own careers." (Project staff)

One young person said that their increased confidence helped pave the way for potential future career paths:

"During my time with the youth forum I have been given the opportunity to explore new avenues of creativity and self-expression and I feel I have been heard and had the chance to share my ideas and my vision for how to make the community a safer place for young people. With the help of the youth workers, I feel involvement with the Bay Youth Project has enabled my confidence to grow and the volunteering opportunity working with the junior forum has further enhanced my confidence and triggered my interest in a youth work career. I am so pleased to be offered paid work." (Young person)

Some charities specifically supporting neurodiverse young people stressed how important the projects had been for them personally in building their confidence. For some neurodiverse youth or those facing other challenges, being part of inclusive groups created through the youth social action projects helped them gain confidence, make friends, and overcome anxieties around educational settings. A young person shared their experience of neurodiversity with other young people in schools and hopes that this will have helped them gain a better understanding:

"Because I shared my own experiences, I feel like the pupils have a better understanding of being neurodiverse and how it affects them – and hopefully made some friends along the way." (Young person)

Improved mental resilience and improved wellbeing: Many charities reported that for the young people involved in the youth social action projects a key outcome was **mental resilience and improved wellbeing** built through social connections, tailored support, and actions that led to visible positive changes within their communities. For many this has led to developing more positive future outlooks and seeing clearer pathways for their education and future careers. One charity explained that the young people supported:

"...They have built their confidence and resilience, and their belief in their own competence, through seeing what they have done reflected back at them.

Their social competence has improved, both in communicating with adults and with peers, and their sense of possibility and of a positive future has soared. [...] The young people credit their involvement in the community with finding a future path for themselves – seeing how they could help others, and seeing their contribution publicly recognised has been a significant factor in them moving on to education and training.” (Project staff)

In the feedback from young people, many reported feeling equipped with coping mechanisms and life skills that they feel will extend beyond the lifespan of the projects. Creative and emotional outlets such as art and performance played a significant role in many projects and provided outlets for young people to express themselves, their concerns, and emotions.

Increased social connections and reduced isolation: Other significant outcomes for many young people taking part in the funded projects centred around [increased social connections](#) and [reduced isolation](#). Many projects facilitated making new friends, widening social networks, and reducing isolation among young people. Many young people reported feeling valued and part of the community, especially where, previously, they had experienced significant exclusion based on their lived experience, for example disabilities, neurodiversity, or LGBTQ+ experience. One charity observed that:

“The main differences that this grant has made is around tackling loneliness and isolation – we hadn't realised how significant this was for the young people who engaged in this project. We saw a marked improvement in the confidence of the young people. Young people stated that they felt happier and that their self- esteem had improved.” (Project staff)

Mini case study: Drama Express

Drama Express, based in Cornwall, delivered arts-based workshops facilitated by professions to young people in the local area. The organisation reported that young people are often isolated in the area, however through the #iwill funded activities, Drama Express facilitated opportunities for participants to build social connections, which became a sustainable, lasting outcome.

For more information about **Drama Express**, see the Appendix.



Social impact and sense of belonging

Linking back to the ‘Socially Impactful’ principle of Youth Social Action, the following themes demonstrate the extent to which project activities had an intended benefit to a ‘community, cause or social problem’.

Greater empowerment and agency: The youth social action projects across the country supported by the #iwill Fund provided young people with the opportunity to develop stronger connections within their local communities and explore how they could have a positive impact through their projects. One of the most notable outcomes was the sense of **empowerment and agency** the projects created. The co-production and youth-led nature of activities empowered young people by giving them ownership over projects, enabling them to voice their ideas and concerns. This sense of agency was further reinforced through platforms that allowed them to communicate with community leaders and policymakers, making them feel heard and influential within their community.

Embedding social action in communities: Overall, the youth social action projects were also successful in **embedding social action** within communities. By enabling young people to identify and lead initiatives that addressed local issues, they were given a practical role in creating positive community changes. Activities such as community clean-ups, environmental projects, campaigns, and interactions with local stakeholders made social action tangible and directly impactful, enhancing their sense of community involvement and pride:

"This grant enabled the children to take a leadership role, find out more about river pollution and debate these issues on a wider platform, engaging with different agencies. These young people rarely have the opportunity to have a platform for their views and empowerment and leadership skills were improved. Engaging in a project focused on climate change and proactive action allowed the students to take on leadership roles and they began to believe in their ability to make a positive impact." (Project staff)

A sense of place and community ownership: The **sense of place and community ownership** among young people was significantly strengthened. The projects facilitated a stronger connection to local community facilities, creating a sense of ownership and pride. Engaging in meaningful community activities cultivated a sense of responsibility.

Young people reported increased confidence, improved public speaking skills, and a feeling that their voices matter. This participation enhanced their sense of identity and connection to the community, with many feeling they gained opportunities they might not have otherwise had, contributing to their personal growth. Some charities shared their observations that young people improved their own sense of belonging and therefore their interest to remain in the respective location as their future place to live and work, **"by feeling proud of what they co-created, exhibited and performed"** (Project staff). One charity delivering a youth volunteering project shared that:

“One striking observation has been the overwhelming joy our young volunteers expressed upon receiving their official volunteer uniforms, complete with their names embroidered and 'Volunteer' boldly emblazoned on the back. This simple act instilled a sense of pride and belonging.” (Project staff)

Mini case study: Treyla

Treyla is a youth and community project in Cornwall. The #iwill Fund focused on getting detached young people and adults engaged in their local community through hosting community events and activities.

The project developed a sense of belonging and community, through encouraging young people to become active participants in the local area. The activities also facilitated opportunities to build social connections through different community members, and made people see their local area in a positive way. For more information about Treyla, see the Appendix.

A lasting impact on participants' lives: Creating [lasting impact and legacy](#) was another critical outcome amongst the funded charities. There are signs that youth involvement is becoming a more integral part of community planning and decision-making processes, indicating a lasting impact. The positive reputation and role-modelling by involved young people is helping to sustain these projects over the long term. Additionally, as mentioned previously, some participants were inspired to pursue careers in related fields such as youth work, demonstrating the projects' impact on their future aspirations. One charity reported that:

“The project was designed to equip young people with the necessary skills and confidence to continue to produce and share their own creative content after the project funding ended. Creating a legacy of young people inspiring others to make positive change, and to become advocates within their communities. 71% of the participants said they felt confident making their own creative content and videos as a result of the project and 54% want to create more digital content/videos with us.” (Project staff)

The funded projects also played a crucial role in increasing visibility and shifting community perceptions of young people. The visible positive impact of youth-led projects has contributed to changing these perceptions, highlighting the capabilities of young people when given the opportunity to make meaningful contributions:

“Through the various projects completed to this point, community opinion of young people in the area is starting to change. With positive demonstrations of young people's passion and involvement in the community, there is a reputational shift starting to be seen; the celebration event held was the pinnacle of this, featuring inspirational press coverage.”
(Project staff)

Impact on the wider communities

The feedback and observations provided by funded charities highlight several key outcomes for the wider community from various projects:

Improved community spaces and environmental activism: Projects such as litter picking, gardening and other environmental activities led by young people improved the community's environment, creating cleaner and nicer spaces. This helped change the perception of young people in the community and showcased their positive contributions.

"The grant allowed the wider community to see young people making effort to look after their environment and community with cleaner and nicer community spaces – with the hope that perception on young people has improved." (Project staff)



Environmental activism Initiatives promoting environmental responsibility, including regular litter picks and eco-schemes had ripple effects beyond the immediate community:

"Young people participated in programme activities like 'postcards to the earth', committing to contributions towards a climate friendly world. This inspired young people to relate to both local and global communities."

(Project staff)

Intergenerational engagement: Many activities created connections between youth participants and their parents as well as community members of different ages, enhancing communication and understanding between generations. Events and joint activities facilitated intergenerational bonding.

"From inception to completion, this programme remained under the leadership and direction of the youth themselves. Moreover, it served as a bridge between LGBTQ+ youth and the older LGBTQ+ community members. As part of this project, we delved into queer histories by inviting local LGBTQ+ community members who have roots in Chester or reside in the area to share their stories

with the young participants. These sessions were a resounding success, ultimately forging an intergenerational connection within the LGBTQ+ community." (Project staff talking about young people organising an exhibition as part of Chester Pride)

Cultural contributions and access to cultural activities: Public exhibitions of artworks on social issues like climate change enriched the community's cultural life and inspired others to engage in creative and advocacy projects. Funded charities reported that, as a result of the activities and events organised by the young people, there was more participation and engagement of community members in these initiatives.

"While the immediate impact might not be overtly evident in the wider community, the skills acquired by the young participants and their teachers hold the potential for a cascading effect. As they share their newfound knowledge and enthusiasm with their families and immediate circles, a ripple effect of creativity and skill development may ensue. We have an aspiration to collaborate with schools in turning their newsletters into podcasts, which indicates a strategic effort to extend the benefits of the project to a broader audience. This approach aligns with Bodmin's mission to provide fair access to cultural activities and with our forward-looking plan for community engagement." (Project staff)

Mini case study: Bright Futures

Bright Futures, based in South Tyneside, focuses on empowering young women to address significant life challenges. The #iwill Fund was used to integrate social action into their existing services. One element focused on bridging generational gaps through engaging local elderly care homes to take part in activities with the young women. The project found benefits for both the young people who took part (increased empathy) and the residents of the elderly care homes involved.

For more information about Bright Futures, see the Appendix.



Social inclusion and representation: Many funded projects focused on ensuring representation for parts of the community that are often overlooked, unheard and misunderstood, for example neurodiverse and disabled individuals. Young people sharing their lived experience on these topics helped raise awareness of their needs and contributions and increase understanding, creating the potential for more inclusive community activities and services. In several instances, young people also became involved in conversations at local authority and regional levels, providing representation for young people as well as their local communities, for example, as part of the steering group with Thames Valley Police.

“Chatterbox members designed and developed a variety of interactive resources to support school staff teams to engage with neurodiverse young people in their schools. These included conversation cards, a Chit Chat box, and links to useful and informative websites.” (Project staff)

Mini case study: The Junction Function

The Junction Function, based in Tees Valley, supports children, young people and families with additional challenges. The organisation used the #iwill Fund for the Junction Heart, a strategic decision-making group providing an opportunity to have a voice in the charity and be involved in social action. The group shared a video about the cost of living, which they identified as a key issue which is relevant to the local community. The video was used to challenge the stigma of perceptions around poverty and raise awareness of the issues many families were facing.

For more information about The Junction Function, see the Appendix.



Community cohesion and reduction in anti-social behaviour: Many projects sought to address underlying causes of anti-social behaviour, helping young people understand the negative impact on their communities, equip them with different mechanisms to address negative emotions, and work with them to improve their communities. One outcome was a reduction in anti-social behaviour and improved relations between young people and different parts of the communities, as illustrated in the quote below.

Mini case study: YMCA Newcastle

YMCA Newcastle supports young people who do not feel safe in their local community, or who may experience anxiety. The #iwill Fund supported the project to host activities focused on safety and their local community, and included initiatives such as safety rocks, a social media campaign and hosting workshops with young people.

The project engaged the Violence Reduction Unit where discussions were facilitated around risky behaviours and illegal activities which could cause harm to the young people directly. The activities led to strengthened partnerships between YMCA Newcastle and the Violence Reduction Unit, and plans for future collaborations were made.

By the end of the activities, participants were able to understand strategies to challenge others, defuse conflicts and raise awareness about different issues which are important to them.

For more information about YMCA Newcastle, see the Appendix.

Health and wellbeing: Many activities and projects targeted topics such as social isolation, emotional wellbeing, and food poverty within local communities, which have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of community members and local support services. The funded initiatives led to tangible improvements in community members' quality of life. Various projects directly supported vulnerable groups, such as low-income families, by providing resources and free/affordable activities.

"We are a youth and community centre and offer a range of activities for all ages. Our Family Fun Days are run by our adult volunteers alongside our Youth Committee, this ensures that we integrate volunteers, and they learn to run events together. The events are targeted at our wider community and during the summer we were able to offer these low-cost activities with a free meal for children, benefiting over 300 families over two-family days! The young people can really see the impact of their social action and understand the difference it makes to struggling families who find the school holidays a challenge financially. The garden area is enjoyed by all our groups from babies to older people, therefore the work the young people put into growing produce was appreciated by everyone who uses the centre." (Project staff)

Unexpected outcomes

Reflecting on the #iwill Fund, charities reported both unexpected and more profound outcomes than anticipated.

Recruitment and engagement efforts faced initial challenges for several projects, but ultimately saw a surprisingly high number of young people participating, which led to an expansion of activities in many cases. The changes in young people's behaviour, skill development, and enthusiasm for projects exceeded expectations, resulting in a significant community impact, including broader community engagement, with young people taking on new roles in local events.

Furthermore, new partnerships with schools, universities, and community organisations were formed, enhancing services and support available to local communities, which could result in sustainability of delivery of activities (an Investment Driver of the #iwill Fund). Charities also adapted their strategies to better support young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and revised recruitment processes to be more inclusive.

"The fund has enabled facilitated conversation helping the young people understand the causes and consequences of ASB, leading to improved self-regulation and decision-making. This meant far less conflict has arisen between these young people and other people [...]. The young people led initiatives like a community car wash and plans for public sports facility enhancements, improving public spaces and helping to alter community perceptions about young people. The participants have evolved into role models for younger community members, showcasing responsibility and positive behaviour. These efforts have fostered a sense of pride and cohesion in the community. Local business owners and residents have noted the positive changes, appreciating the initiatives that put the youth in a constructive light. Furthermore, the project has cultivated a sustainable change in the youths' attitude towards their community role." (Project 'Staff)

Mini case study: Lyceum Theatre

The Lyceum Theatre engages the local community in Cheshire to increase the accessibility and appreciation of the arts. As part of the #iwill Fund, young people developed performances about social issues that were important to them (bullying and mental health).

As part of the project, the group reached out to local charities and organisations who work within the issues identified, to engage them in delivering workshops to the young people to increase their knowledge and understanding of the issues. Engaging other local charities led to strengthened partnerships with the Lyceum Theatre, and potential future collaboration opportunities.

For more information about Lyceum Theatre, see the Appendix.

Part 3 - Findings: Challenges experienced by funded projects and their adapted responses

The challenges encountered by the funded charities running youth social action projects were diverse, reflecting the complexity of engaging young people effectively while addressing various logistical, educational, and social barriers. This section provides a summary of the key challenges faced by the charities and how they approached them.

► Low initial uptake and engagement

Challenge: Attracting participation from young people in communities with no prior culture of youth voice was slow initially. Several charities mentioned struggling with this and having to rethink their approach initially, causing a delay in projects for some of them. Others struggled with the sustainability of engagement across the lifespan of the project.

Response: Many charities reported that they spent more time working on raising awareness and gaining traction through community outreach, emphasising the value of youth input and creating engaging sessions that integrated social and fun activities alongside project work. Some fed back that a combination of online engagement and physical events amplified their reach. Partnering with other local organisations and continuous communication via a number of different channels helped with sustaining engagement over the course of the project.

Projects consistently highlighted the importance of youth voice and choice in programme planning and decision making. Empowering young people to select activities or shape workshops not only increased engagement but also helped develop a sense of ownership and achievement.

“We’ve learned that engaging young people can sometimes be challenging in exactly the same way as engaging adults can be. Also, the reasons behind this realisation are equally complex and often require more transformational, long-term, and person-centred approaches. In addition, we’ve needed to understand that young people, for many reasons, may not always have the freedom to make decisions when it comes to their ability to participate. This is a challenge we need to work harder on – how do we make engagement possible for these young people.” (Project staff)

► Diverse cohort needs

Challenge: Several charities found themselves struggling with managing a diverse group of young people with varying maturity levels and educational needs, having to adapt their approach to cater for different needs.

Response: Depending on the projects, many reported adapting session structures and content delivery to accommodate different learning styles and maturity levels, ensuring all participants could engage meaningfully. The lengths of sessions were adjusted to ensure younger participants were not overwhelmed by the duration of focus required, and activities themselves were adapted, merging content activities with fun.



“Once the project had begun, the need to differentiate sessions became apparent. As the cohort are a diverse group, including those who have additional education needs and those with a wide range of maturity levels, different methods had to be employed to get across the often–complex subjects that were being covered such as the Right to be Heard, and community building development and funding applications. The structure and delivery of the sessions had to change over time in response to the young people’s reaction to them. It transpired that to retain the new members and to encourage a positive reputation of the forum and encourage new memberships, a more social and fun aspect needed to be added to the sessions.”

(Project staff)

► Behavioural challenges

Challenge: Dealing with challenging behaviours stemming from a multitude of factors had to be addressed by some charities in order to ensure a comfortable, safe, and productive environment for everybody.

Response: Strategies that charities employed were open and honest discussions with individuals or the group as a whole, providing positive role models (since many had experienced a lack of those in their lives), and a strength–based approach to address behavioural issues. Others also decided to increase the number of staff/staff time available to support and provide one–to–one guidance when necessary. Some charities also mentioned that a supporting factor was when the community was willing to give young people at risk of anti–social behaviour an opportunity to contribute to positive changes within the community. One charity had to take the difficult decision to exclude one particular young person due to their behaviour. They wanted to avoid excluding anybody from being able to participate and took this decision as a last resort, however, the project continued much more positively and productively afterwards.

“There have been behavioural challenges over the course of the project. With several young people having gone through Adverse Childhood Experiences and/or negative experiences in educational environments, challenging behaviour is an expected part of the work, but this is tackled through open discussion and positive role modelling and a strength–based approach rather than a deficit

approach, recognising unwanted behaviours as a form of expression. We made sure we had a higher staffing quota to make sure all young people were supported and could have a 1-1 conversation if required.” (Project staff)

► **Financial and resource management**

Challenge: Several projects faced financial challenges due to rising costs (for example salaries and living expenses) and exceeded budgets. Others experienced higher demand for the activities than expected or had to make more staff resources available to address specific project challenges (see previous point on behavioural challenges). For some, this had an impact on project duration or scope.

Response: Some charities described how they sought ‘creative solutions’ such as local sponsorship from businesses, applied for additional grants, requested donations or reallocated funds from other areas of their budgets to offset costs to ensure project sustainability.

“The amount that we spent on different elements of our budget changed during the course of the grant because of the increased cost of wages given the needs of the cost-of-living crisis and the increase in recommended wages from the Living Wage Foundation. This put pressure on our finances to ensure that we were able to deliver the work and buy resources that would allow the young people to fully design and develop their outdoor space in the way that they wanted to. In order to overcome this challenge, we developed a local sponsorship with a garden centre. This helped us to offset some of the resource costs and ensured that the young people still had access to plants, tools and other materials. This was a nice consequence of the project as well because it brought in local engagement and enthusiasm from the wider community.” (Project staff)

► **Time management and planning**

Challenge: Several charities mentioned struggling to meet project timelines and coordinating activities effectively. Some had to address staff turnover and logistical delays, others experienced delays in building local delivery partnerships and had to identify new partners within the project’s timeframe. This required additional time and caused delays. For some charities, the background and specific needs of the young people they were engaging in activities meant additional time was needed.

Response: Charities found different approaches to addressing the challenges they experienced. The majority reported having learned from initial setbacks around time management and planning, adjusting timelines for future projects to allow more lead-in time for setting up internal project logistics and resources as well as participant and stakeholder engagement, ensuring smoother project execution. For others, it means deciding to aim for a reduced number of young people engaged but being able to provide the required level of support.

"On reflection we would work with less young people, which can be a challenge when applying for grants. We appreciate grant holders want as many people as possible to be reached with the funds, but the reality for us is we need to complete focused, intense and personalised support which takes time. For example, completing Easy Read documents is very time consuming and our Staff Hours are high because of this, we invest voluntary hours into every project we develop (and happy to do so) and this helps the project happen effectively. Whilst we reached the numbers set out in our original application, we would reduce this next time; quality not quantity, which means we would need to make this very evident in our future funding applications." (Project staff)

► **External stakeholder engagement**

Challenge: Charities were struggling to engage with external stakeholders in several cases, especially when schools were involved. Challenges around timelines, staff capacity issues, budget issues (for example, transport) as well as the impact of poor teacher–pupil relationships were barriers the initiatives had to address. In some cases, teaching staff initially resisted the model of prioritising youth voices.

Response: Charities found ways to change their approach, for example by using direct outreach to young people at events and gatherings or talking to students at assemblies. They also took learnings away to include certain expenses in their project budgets knowing that schools were struggling to meet them and mentioned they would lengthen the timelines for projects to account for longer planning periods with schools.

"We attempted to launch the youth publishing competition at Easter to run through the summer and culminate at an award event in September, but despite marketing to schools directly we had very little engagement and thus couldn't run it as early as hoped. We then took feedback from our participants on the publishing club as to why they may not have been interested and they told us that they didn't have great relationships with their schoolteachers, so probably wouldn't have applied if the opportunity came via the school. So, to capture a broader range of participants, in September contacted schools and offered to run a few assemblies and talks in English lessons for free to 'fire up' the students to produce content and opened up the competition for young people to enter directly, so rather than it becoming an inter–school competition, it was essentially a youth publishing competition."

(Project staff)

An analysis of the feedback provided by the funded charities highlighted a range of other factors that supported the successful completion of project activities:

► **The 'power of partnerships**

Successful projects frequently involved partnerships with schools, community organisations, and local businesses. These collaborations helped expand reach, access

additional resources, and enhance the overall impact of their initiatives.

“This project grant has enabled us to build several strong partnerships with youth organisations, networks, colleges and schools. We are now in a strong position to grow these further beyond the life of the grant and move onto developing youth– led projects collaboratively, creating an established foundation for all future youth working.” (Project staff)

► **Reflection and adaptation**

Continuous reflection on project successes and challenges was evident across reports. Projects identified areas for improvement, such as more targeted training for volunteers, better communication strategies with schools, and more flexible scheduling to accommodate diverse participant needs.

“One of the most significant lessons learned is the importance of flexibility and adaptability in project management. The initiative faced unforeseen circumstances, such as the unexpected opportunity of a fully funded residential programme and the need to pivot our social media strategy due to lower than expected community engagement. These instances taught us that while it's crucial to have a well-planned and structured approach, being open to change and willing to adapt strategies in response to new information or challenges is equally important.” (Project staff)

► **Long-term engagement**

Charities emphasised the importance of sustained engagement with young people over time to embed learning and skills effectively. This approach not only deepened the impact of their interventions but also built ongoing relationships with participants and their communities. Several projects highlighted how traumatic a project ending can be for the young people involved due to their experiences and needs. They stressed the need to either implement soft endings or develop follow-on projects to build on the skills and confidence the young people have developed.

“Ultimately [...] our greatest lesson has been the realisation that we, as a community and county, need to up our game if we're going to truly improve the long-term support and opportunities we provide young people and, in turn, our ability to retain their talent long-term.” (Project staff)

Part 4 – Reflections and learnings of participating community foundations

The following section summarises the key learnings and reflections discovered through the community foundation interviews around their experience of the UKCF #iwill Fund.



Overall, community foundations did not report any negatives about the process of the #iwill Fund application. However, to reduce the amount of time spent on the application form, Community Foundation serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland asked interested applications to send a two-minute video explaining their project. The videos were then shortlisted by a panel, and those who were successful were asked to give a presentation. Presentations were held on a Saturday to provide an opportunity for young people to be involved and pitch their ideas. Organisations who were successful in the presentation were then asked to complete the full application form. The community foundation reported that they received positive feedback about the process and are looking to [replace application forms with videos and presentations](#) across their other funds.



Community foundations interviewed noted that they valued the role of youth voice throughout the process and included at least one young person on the application panel. It was found that young people provided an [“insightful perspective”](#) (Cornwall Community Foundation).



Community Foundation serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland found that some organisations were not spending grant money as expected. As part of the process, the community foundation [contacted grantees after the interim monitoring](#) to get an update and ensure they are spending the full grant amount.



Cornwall Community Foundation reflected on the benefit of visiting project activities in person to be able to talk to the groups and get an [“inside perspective of how they generated these ideas and how they were going to pursue them”](#). The interviewee noted that they had never been part of a fund related to social action, and visiting the projects provided a learning opportunity.



Community foundations reported that whilst the majority of projects were successful, activities around social action and advocacy were unlikely to be sustainable without continued funding. Those interviewed noted that many #iwill funded activities were additional to the organisation's normal programmes. Therefore projects should be encouraged to **embed elements of the social action activities into existing programmes**.



Community foundations appreciated the support provided from UKCF and reported that it was helpful to have **one point of contact** they could go to with any questions or doubts. They also noted the benefit of the guidance documents for projects and the community foundations which provided additional support for the application process. One suggested improvement for UKCF was to **reduce the number of identified target areas/outcomes** that community foundations need to match projects against, as it took a lot of time to match projects with the relevant area to ensure they met the criteria.

Conclusion and recommendations

This final section summarises the key activities, outcomes, reflections and learning of the UKCF #iwill Fund. It also outlines recommendations developed from feedback provided by grantee organisations, community foundations, and the evaluators' analysis of all data presented.

Overall, this report has found that the activities of the #iwill Fund provided by UKCF are positively linking back to the wider fund—principles of Youth Social Action, and also demonstrate examples of how the Investment Drivers are taking place.

Project information and activities

The UKCF #iwill Fund provided grantees to 186 projects across 16 community foundations. The types of activities delivered through the fund were diverse, with the top three categories being youth advisory work, volunteering, and campaigning. Although some projects had difficulties with engaging participants, a challenge which was also experienced in previous rounds of this fund, this year several strategies were implemented to increase the interest in activities. The main strategies which were found to be successful included delivering activities which empowered the participants and taught them different skills; involving individuals with lived experience; promotion on social media; engaging the local community in elements of the project; and providing rewards to the young people for taking part.



Recommendation: It is recommended that projects have an opportunity to share their best practice and experiences with each other in relation to the type of activities that have worked/have not worked, and different engagement strategies which could be implemented to increase the number of young people involved. This will help projects avoid pitfalls that others have experienced in the future and help to understand why something has or has not worked in certain contexts.

Outcomes for young people

The outcomes experienced by young people were reported by project staff and community foundations through interviews and monitoring forms. The amount of qualitative data provided, and number of examples used, demonstrates that the outcomes below took place across various projects. Moreover, the outcomes were found to be similar to previous rounds of the #iwill Fund through UKCF. For example, the previous reporting period found that increased personal skills including confidence and employability skills were a key outcome experienced by young people. Interviews and monitoring forms identified three key impact areas experienced by young people:

- Growth and skills development
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Social impact and sense of belonging

Findings from this round of the fund demonstrated that the youth social action projects supported by the #iwill Fund have provided young people with a [safe environment to develop a wide array of skills](#). The evidence presented also showed that the funded projects also [significantly helped improve the health and wellbeing of young participants](#). Young people become more comfortable in new environments, taken on new roles in the community, and overcome fears and anxieties with group support. These projects have not only facilitated personal development but have also helped develop a sense of belonging and purpose among participants.

The empowerment and agency derived from co-producing and leading projects allowed young people to voice their ideas and [engage meaningfully with their communities](#). Feedback from funded charities shows that, in many cases, the projects have created lasting legacies by [integrating youth involvement into community planning](#). The visibility and success of these youth-led initiatives have also begun to shift community perceptions, demonstrating the positive impact and potential of young people when given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully.



Recommendation: This evaluation did not look in detail into the sustainability of outcomes beyond the grant. It was evident from community foundation interviews that many activities related to social action would not be delivered beyond the grant period, therefore it is recommended that future monitoring includes gathering feedback on the needs of charities to continue delivering activities and support them with how to embed social action elements into their existing programming to continue building on the outcomes developed through this round of the #iwill Fund.

Outcomes for communities

The qualitative evidence presented in this report shows how the projects involved in the #iwill Fund through UKCF have significantly impacted communities by driving positive change.

Young people led initiatives that made their surroundings more beautiful and safer, and shifted community perceptions, highlighting their positive contributions. The projects provided opportunities for intergenerational engagement, bridging gaps between age groups and enhancing mutual understanding.

Social inclusion and representation were key achievements, ensuring that often overlooked groups, such as neurodiverse and disabled individuals, had their voices

heard. This raised awareness and promoted more inclusive community activities and services.



Recommendation: Youth Action projects should be encouraged to involve community members and organisations in youth-led activities to increase local buy-in for the project and promote the positive changes taking place.

Challenges and responses

The youth social action projects funded by the #iwill Fund were not without their challenges, including low initial engagement in communities new to youth involvement. The funded charities tackled this by **intensifying community outreach**, **emphasising youth input**, and **blending social activities with project work**. Adapting to diverse participant needs, such as varying maturity levels and educational backgrounds, required flexible session structures and content delivery.

Behavioural issues stemming from adverse childhood experiences were addressed through open discussions, positive role models, and increased staff support. Financial and resource management challenges were managed with creative solutions like local sponsorships and reallocating funds. Time management improved by adjusting timelines and focusing on quality engagement over quantity.

"In conclusion, the Youth Impact Initiative, supported by the #iwill Fund, has been a profound journey of growth, learning, and community engagement. The experiences gained have not only empowered young people and made tangible differences in their communities but have also provided essential insights into effective project management and implementation. Moving forward, these lessons will be invaluable in shaping more impactful, sustainable, and inclusive community initiatives." (Project staff)

Engaging external stakeholders, especially schools, required direct outreach and careful planning. Strong partnerships with schools, community groups, and businesses were crucial for project success. Continuous reflection and adaptation of strategies were key, alongside maintaining long-term engagement to deepen impact and build lasting relationships with young people and their communities.



Recommendation: The active responses from the projects in overcoming challenges they faced, and barriers experienced by the young people shows the importance for youth organisations to constantly reflect on their practices and gather regular feedback from participants to improve their services.

Reflections and learning for community foundations

Interviewed community foundations outlined the following key learnings and elements which should be embedded in other similar funding streams:

- ▶ Make application processes creative, for example allowing videos or presentations.
- ▶ Check in with projects after interim monitoring to discuss any queries or concerns.
- ▶ Engage young people in decision making processes.
- ▶ Where possible, visit projects in person to understand the purpose of the project and observe any impact taking place.
- ▶ Support projects in how they can make their activities sustainable beyond the grant period.

Appendix: Case studies

As part of the evaluation, inFocus conducted case study interviews with eight charities across Cornwall, the North East and County Durham. The case studies outline the activities that were funded through the #iwill Fund as well as the outcomes.

Bright Futures

About the organisation

Bright Futures is a registered charity in South Tyneside, dedicated to empowering young women up to the age of 25 by supporting them address significant life challenges. Their accredited programmes encompass group sessions and one-to-one support, delivered both formally in educational settings and informally through youth work. Key focus areas include gender stereotypes, healthy relationships, substance abuse, sexual health, and tackling issues like domestic abuse and exploitation. Their initiatives also cover personal safety, violence prevention, and various life skills such as coping strategies, online safety, and antenatal support, aiming to enable personal development and resilience among participants.



About the project

"We were trying to bridge gaps between generations in the community, bringing younger and older people together, whether it's sharing skills or identifying an issue that they're both passionate about and trying to address it together." (Bright Futures staff member)

The project, similar to others at Bright Futures, focuses on integrating social action principles into their services for young women. In this project funded by the #iwill Fund, they embedded these principles to bridge generational gaps in communities. Initiatives included collaborations like teaching knitting skills with local groups, creating mental health posters to address the subject of suicide, and advocating for improved school facilities for menstruating students.

"We had a group of young people who were really passionate about the lack of mental health services in the borough. They created mental health posters, which were shared across South Tyneside, particularly in areas that had been identified as hotspots for individuals committing suicide. It was positive messages from young people just to let people know that they weren't alone, that there is help out there. That project actually won an award and was recognised as being a really impactful award project." (Staff member)

They've also engaged young people in portrait projects with care homes, creating intergenerational connections empowering young people through practical, community-driven projects that address real-life challenges and help develop social cohesion:

“When it was National Portrait Day, the young children wrote their own poem, and they invited the residents who were able to travel to the venue where the children meet every week, and they recited the poems together and had teas and coffees, and it was really nice just to talk and to learn about one another. The young children have since had training through Newcastle Building Society and now they are identified as being dementia friends. So that's been really positive because they are so young.” (Staff member)

Outcomes from the project

Bright Futures has observed significant positive impact across multiple areas as a result of the #iwill Fund. The projects not only empowered young participants but also resonated positively within their families and the broader community. By engaging children from a very young age, Bright Futures has helped the young people develop skills and confidence while also contributing to stronger, more cohesive communities:



- ▶ **Empowerment and engagement:** The activities have empowered young people to take an active interest in community issues from a young age (some as young as four years old). They participated in activities like litter picking and advocating for better local facilities, demonstrating a strong sense of community responsibility and awareness of social and environmental issues impacting on their communities.
- ▶ **Intergenerational relationships:** Initiatives bridging different generations have been particularly impactful. For instance, collaborations with elderly care homes have not only benefited residents but also enriched the understanding and empathy of young participants.
- ▶ **Skills development:** Through these projects, young people gained practical skills that are valuable for their future, such as communication, teamwork, and project management. These experiences enhance their employability and career readiness.

“For girls, who are aged 14 or 16, it's about really giving them practical skills and experience so that it's supporting them when they go on to employment and when they're looking to further their careers. They've got great communication skills, but they don't always know how to articulate that. But I think when they're able to say, ‘actually we worked with different generations, we've spoken with local councilors, we've spoken to people in power, we've gained these skills’, I think when they've got something that they can speak about and they've got examples, it just obviously shows that they've really put the work in and that they do actually have an idea of what they're doing.” (Project staff)

- **Positive community change:** Feedback from families and the wider community highlights the positive changes these projects have brought, and the awareness of challenges experienced by individuals and families within the community. For Bright Futures it has been important to ensure that all activities are youth-led.

“[We make] sure that it's youth led because we know that if it's an issue that young women or young people are passionate about, we know that they're more likely to put the work in. The energy is different. They're much more creative. They really want to address that issue or that topic.” (Project staff)

Drama Express

About the organisation

Drama Express is an award-winning charity based in the West Country, working to provide children and young people with additional needs access to performing arts workshops and experiences. The organisation has over 30 members aged between 9–25 years who have a range of additional needs and disabilities. Drama Express describe their ethos as follows:



“Regardless of disability, everybody has a creative side to them, and that’s what we’ve found in empowering the young people.” (Drama Express staff member)

The organisation reported that the #iwill Fund matched their own ethos through the key elements of inclusion and empowerment, putting the voice of the young people at the core of their work.

The organisation has received #iwill funding before, and reported that the application process, communication and support was positive. They also appreciated a visit from one of the trustees of the Community Foundation serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland, as they were able to demonstrate the activities and potential impact in person.

“ We've brought together a lot of young people who have very limited choices to socialise and to meet their peer group, and the connection is through the drama. We do focus quite a lot on that, on the friendship side of things.

(Drama Express staff member)

About the project

As part of the #iwill Fund, Drama Express delivered a wide range of arts-based workshops facilitated by professionals with expertise in the arts including:

- ▶ Acting
- ▶ Circus skills
- ▶ Comedy
- ▶ Creative writing
- ▶ Dancing
- ▶ Mindfulness
- ▶ Singing



The children and young people then had the opportunity to perform their skills on stage as part of the ‘showcase sessions’ held every quarter.

Drama Express ensured that the venues and activities were accessible and inclusive to all participants. One way they did this was through engaging professionals who also had additional needs to inspire the young people by sharing their lived experiences. For example, an actress using a wheelchair spoke about stage positioning and techniques to face the audience.

Drama Express acknowledged that with future delivery of similar activities, they would deliver the sessions in smaller groups, as some young people may feel more confident and comfortable in groups of 6 –8 participants. The organisation also mentioned that smaller groups may help to support those with complex needs and provide more space for staff and facilitators to make specific adaptations on an individual level.

Outcomes from the project

The activities delivered through the #iwill Fund were a key factor in the charity being able to scale up their delivery and reach. Drama Express has increased its membership by 25% due to positive experiences being shared through word of mouth in the local communities where activities were delivered. The volunteer team also increased in size, with individuals coming from a range of backgrounds and bringing experience in performing arts or the care sector. The staff and volunteer team developed their knowledge and skills in making adaptations to ensure the needs of the young people were met and they could fully participate in the activities.

Building social connections was a key outcome of the project. Drama Express reported that Cornwall can be an isolated place to live in, and children and young people have limited opportunities to be involved in performing arts activities, particularly those with

additional needs. The staff and volunteers facilitated opportunities for the children and young people to build connections and friendships, which the organisation reported was “a great outcome [...] for young people who can feel very isolated and have very limited opportunities in the performing arts.” The friendships and connections built were reported to be long-term, as they have continued “outside and beyond the project”.

Within the local community, the organisation noted that people were “astounded at what the group can produce and the talent within the group”.

Drama Express staff reported that young people were empowered through the project activities: staff and volunteers worked with the young people to overcome different barriers and challenges they may have, to support individuals in finding out skills they have and those they would like to improve. As a result of the project activities, participants improved their confidence and skills in the performing arts.

Durham Area Youth

About the organisation

Durham Area Youth deliver services for young people aged 6 to 19 years across six villages in County Durham. The organisation focuses on a number of challenges that youths in the area may face including around mental health, alcohol/drugs and sexual relationships. The types of services differ across locations and age groups and involve structured meetings and work in the community.

Activities delivered through the organisation are youth-led, which was the main motivation for being involved in the #iwill Fund for a second year.



“ The thing I like about the #iwill Fund is, it allowed us to expand on more than just one project. It allowed us to deliver three projects. We tend to see young people get quite bored easily especially if we’re doing a year project, they lose interest. The good thing about #iwill is we were able to change it up ”

Staff member, Durham Area Youth

About the project

The young people wanted to run campaigns in the local villages, and decided on three main topics: Pride, mental health, and the environment.

Pride: A group of young people were very passionate about Pride and the subject of LGBTQ+. They were planning activities to raise awareness within the local community and get people interested in becoming involved in and fundraise for the event. The group, along with a member of staff, created a presentation which was then delivered in each of the local

villages. As a result of the presentation, around 30 young people attended Pride which involved parading with the organisation's banner, and hosting a stall, which shared information about the organisation's services and raised funds for next year's projects.

Mental health: Young people identified mental health as an important issue. Durham Area Youth currently works with partners and delivers training to participants to be mental health ambassadors in the community, however, the group wanted to do a piece of work around suicide awareness for young boys and men. As part of the #iwill Fund, the group created a video to “highlight the risks of young people who suffered through bullying through school” (staff member). The video also covered the topic of online bullying via social media and the impact on those affected by it. It concluded with the bullies stopping their actions due to seeing the impact of their words on others, and a final message about where to find support. The video has not yet been published to the general public; however, plans are being put in place to deliver the content to schools and youth provisions working with those aged 13 years and over.



The young people are arranging fundraisers so they can [collect rubbish/recycling in] every village we operate in, but also expand and get more of the community involved...They want to bring everybody together to keep our village clean.



Staff member, Durham Area Youth

Environment: The third campaign involved Durham University, who delivered a session with the young people about the environment and its importance. Group discussions were also held around recycling in the villages, and the different types of bins and their usages. Participants then went into a local community and collected rubbish/recycling. The group are now trying to expand the work into other local areas.

Outcomes from the project

Staff highlighted that young people were engaged and passionate in the project and the issues highlighted in the three campaign areas. As a result of their participation in the project, staff have observed that young people have an increase in knowledge and awareness in the following topics:

- ▶ Mental health
- ▶ Suicide awareness
- ▶ Pride
- ▶ Sexuality
- ▶ The environment and recycling

Participants then took their new knowledge into their communities and schools, talking with their peers and teachers. They reported being able to support friends who may be facing some of the struggles they discussed around mental health and sexuality.

“ We’ve had some young people that have said since they’ve been engaged in the project, they now have opened up in school and spoke to the councilors. ”

Staff member, Durham Area Youth

The project also developed leadership skills amongst the young people involved, encouraging them to make decisions and take a lead on planning the activities. Staff members reported that there were some commitment issues with young people not wanting to continue their role, therefore a key learning moving forwards is “**identifying leaders quite early and then following through**”. (Project staff)

The work from the campaigns has also had an impact on the organisation itself. Staff reflected on their approach to providing support to young people who want to discuss their mental health and any worries they may have. Durham Area Youth is planning to provide training for staff on how to address challenges around mental health and best approaches to supporting young people. The organisation has also installed the three campaign areas into their curriculum that they deliver each term.

“ Thanks to #iwill because without this we wouldn't have been able to deliver these projects. It's making a difference on a bigger scale such as young people want to be ambassadors, they want to make change, but they don't want to just make change for ”

Staff member, Durham Area Youth

KBSK Performing Arts CIC

About the organisation

KBSK Performing Arts is a youth-based charity based in Bodmin, Cornwall. When the organisation first started in 2018, its main focus was on using performing arts to engage with young people. Since then, the organisation has become a central hub for those aged 7–18 years to participate in a range of volunteer-led programmes.

As part of their first grant received by #iwill through Cornwall Community Foundation, KBSK Performing Arts were interested in using the fund to expand and broaden their existing programmes, which were previously trialed at a smaller scale.

About the project

The #iwill Fund enabled the organisation to host youth-led activities, giving young people the opportunity to consider the needs of their local community, and develop actionable ideas. KBSK Performing Arts highlighted that it gave participants “**the autonomy to come**



up with building an activity for the local community”, whilst being supported by volunteers and the organisation’s staff.



There were lots of people there to support the [young people] to test their ideas and their understanding and to support them with some logistical things, which were more challenging for them.

Staff member, KBSK Performing Arts CIC

Due to seeing the value of engaging young people in decision-making processes within the organisation, KBSK Performing Arts created a Youth Board within its structure. The involvement of the Youth Board supported the organisation in programme planning by gaining valuable insights shared by participants. Additionally, the organisation is now involving young people in decisions at the start of all projects, a new process, which has been implemented as a result of the learnings of the activities delivered through the #iwill Fund.

Project staff described the young people involved as very ambitious in their ideas, which required a high amount of capacity and resources from the staff members. Staff reported that more support would need to be in place for any similar programmes they deliver in the future.



Outcomes from the project

KBSK Performing Arts collected feedback and data to measure their impact through surveys with the participants and contacting local schools to understand if the young people demonstrated any changes in their school life as a result of their involvement of the programme.

Results from the surveys found that young people had increased confidence, motivation, and engagement through the programme. Similar findings were reported from school staff, who stated that “they had seen a difference in their engagement with school as well” (KBSK staff member). The organisation stressed that for the outcomes to be long-term, young people will need follow-up support and continued engagement in similar activities, not solely from KBSK but from other local organisations, too.

Staff observed that the programme also had a positive impact on the local community.



It was an eye opener for [local people] to see what positive change they can make in their local community. They were really impressed by the activities that the young people did.



Staff member, KBSK Performing Arts CIC

Before the activities delivered, KBSK Performing Arts found that local people “[had quite a negative perception of young people](#)” due to issues relating to crime or antisocial behaviour. After viewing the performances and learning of the activities of the programme, staff noticed a change in the local community about their perceptions of young people and saw the positive impact they could have.

Lyceum Theatre

About the organisation

Lyceum Theatre engages with the local community in Crewe, Cheshire, to enhance accessibility and appreciation of the arts. The organisation runs a number of programmes including youth sessions, workshops with local schools and a community choir.

Being the first year funded by the #iwill Fund, the organisation was motivated to show how the arts can be used for social development, beyond its purpose of entertainment. The Lyceum Theatre found that there are links between the skills developed through performing arts (e.g. being creative) and those promoted through social action. The charity, therefore, used young people’s engagement and interests in the arts as a hook to involve them in social action activities.



The organisation felt supported throughout the project by Cheshire Community Foundation, specifically with the application process as they were encouraged to apply for a larger grant in order to widen the potential impact.



I believe that the arts and culture have a big part in social action, it’s a great way for young people to use it as a way to express their thoughts, their opinions on the world, and issues that they care about in a creative and accessible way.

Project staff, Lyceum Theatre

About the project

The #iwill Fund supported the youth theatre groups across the junior company (8–13 age group), and senior company (14–18 age group) at Lyceum Theatre. Each of the groups were involved in developing a performance around a specific social issue chosen by the young people. The groups explored topics that they cared about within their community, and then devised, wrote and performed their own piece of theatre around the topic they chose – the junior group focused on bullying and the senior group on mental health.

As part of the project, the groups reached out to local charities and organisations working

in the chosen thematic areas to engage them in the work. The charities were then involved in delivering workshops with the two groups to develop their knowledge and understanding of social issues. Moreover, the project activities involved workshops from additional artists to develop other specific skills which would enhance young people's performance, for example poems and the spoken word.



The senior company's performance focused on the topic of 'mental health' and identified different issues through the central characters involved. The project staff highlighted:

"It was really powerful. They used physical theatre, they worked with a spoken word artists at the end of the performance, they did a joint spoken word poem, which ended it on a nice positive message. At the end, some parents were saying 'I've suffered from mental health most of my life' and it really resonated with them, and they could connect with the story".
(Project staff)

This performance was also used as an opportunity for funds to be raised for Vision, the mental health charity supporting the project through the delivery of workshops. Vision staff were also in attendance at the event, and audience members were signposted to the support they provide in the local community.

The project also featured in the local press, and Lyceum Theatre was nominated and awarded the Cheshire East Making a Difference in the Community Award 2023. A small group of young people from the performance were able to attend the ceremony to collect their award.

The junior company's play focused on bullying and followed the story of a new student who was influenced by others to become a bully, concluding with a mediation within the school. The messaging behind the performance was around conflict/issue resolution, what support should be provided to stop bullying, and how victims of bullying are affected.

The project was [externally evaluated](#), and the findings from the data collected by young people in the senior group showed that they particularly enjoyed the approach of developing pieces around social messaging. As a result of this, the senior company performed a play on neurodiversity in a National Festival. The #iwill Fund project activities have "influenced their (senior group) thinking now in terms of their ambition, and we could stretch ourselves even further and do something even more nuanced in terms of the issues that we pick to do, and the plays that we pick to do" (project staff). The young people in the junior company shared their enjoyment of having more autonomy than in regular sessions and being involved in the decision-making.

The Lyceum Theatre reported that they will take this into account when working with the junior company, and ensure they have opportunities to have a voice.

Outcomes from the project

As a result of word-of-mouth promotion in the local community, the groups have now doubled in size, increasing from two youth groups to four. A safe space was facilitated by the organisation for the young people to share relevant experiences they may have had related to the different social issues. An example of this was found with the junior company, who shared their experiences of bullying, and how it impacted them. The organisation noted that this was a helpful exercise to show the young people that they may have shared experiences with others in the group.

Other outcomes experienced by the young people, as found in the external evaluation included:

- ▶ Improved understanding and knowledge about social action leading to increased interest and participation in social action
- ▶ Improved youth voice
- ▶ Improve understanding about their chosen social action issue for the youth participants and audience attendees
- ▶ Increased interpersonal skills
- ▶ Improved aspirations for the future

As part of the project, participants also completed the Arts Award, a nationally recognised qualification.

The partnership with the mental health charity Vision has been strengthened and led to potential future collaboration opportunities. One example of this a recent joint funding application for a weekly group called 'Creative Connections', which will involve the theatre delivering creative activities, and Vision providing mental health practitioners as the support element.

The Junction Foundation

About the organisation

The Junction Foundation is a charity based in Tees Valley supporting children, young people (up to the age of 25 years) and families with additional challenges. It covers a very broad range of services, including youth employment, young carers, youth work, children and young people's mental health and emotional well-being and transport services. The charity is committed to holistic support for children, young people and families.



Many of the 3,500 children and young people supported annually by The Junction Foundation are either referred to due to a specific crisis or challenges that require a targeted approach. The challenge the charity is finding is that many children and young people, once their immediate crises are addressed, are not quite ready to join mainstream

services, for example, because the transition from support provided in one-to-one or small group environments to the local army cadets or a drama class is too big a step initially.

“We all know that life is complex, and it takes families sometimes generations to get into the situations that they're in. And it's not one thing, it's many things. And what vulnerable people really need is to be held, not shipped around different services.”

(Staff member at The Junction Foundation)

As a result, The Junction Foundation offers “a series of progression projects that are about really small, structured group work opportunities where young people gain the opportunity to develop those soft skills that will maintain the progress that they've made” (staff member). These activities revolve around building the children and young people's confidence and skills in public speaking, negotiation, and teamwork “because quite often young people who've been dealing with their specific issues will have lost or not had the same opportunities to develop those as other young people” (staff member).

About the project

The #iwill funding received by the Junction Foundation supported the Junction Heart, the charity's strategic decision making group made up of young people, providing them with an opportunity to participate in the charity and become involved in youth social action: “the young carers focus group, for example, might work on raising awareness of young carers with GP surgeries, [...] and what services need to do to be responsive to young carers who are in that transitional age group” (staff member).

Through the Junction Heart, young people help ensure that services are young people focused, and that events and activities organised are inclusive for all the children, young people and families who access services. The group organised open days, sat on interview panels, given a radio interview, was involved in fundraising activities and project development for a number of services and has carried out consultations with other children and young people, which helped inform The Junction's strategic plan.

Through this work on the Junction Heart, the charity identified the need to “have an award space within the calendar in light of all the negative publicity that was going around about young people during COVID, and we have kept that going year on year because [...] children and young people amaze us with their resilience. [Actually, there's a lot of strength there and there's a lot of triumph over adversity. If you give young people the chance and the choice, they quite often surprise you” (staff member).

Outcomes from the project

The project had several key outcomes for **the young people** involved:

Skill development: The project effectively blended the development of both soft and practical skills. Young people learned essential transferable skills such as public speaking, project planning, and community engagement. It also gave young people the chance to apply their skills in real-world scenarios, such as planning and executing fundraising activities for a local animal shelter.

Participating in the project also helped young people develop their leadership skills:

they were involved in every aspect of the project, from planning to execution.



- ▶ **Confidence building:** Participating in various activities, such as speaking at events or engaging in group discussions, helped build the young people's confidence. Even small steps, like contributing a single sentence or allowing filming over their shoulder, were significant achievements for some.
- ▶ **Community and social action:** By involving young people in meaningful activities that addressed real issues in their community, it created a sense of agency and responsibility. The project empowered young people by allowing them to take the lead and influence the direction of the project. They chose the focus, designed the research, and determined the content, leading to a sense of ownership and agency.
- ▶ **Encouraging independent thought and belief:** The project also supported the development of independent thought and belief, crucial for young people's personal growth. It provided alternative avenues for those who may not fit into traditional youth development programmes, ensuring inclusivity and broadening participation.
- ▶ **Representation of diverse voices:** The project ensured that a broad range of young people from different services were represented, providing a holistic view of the community's needs and experiences. This was crucial for understanding the interconnected nature of the issues they faced.
- ▶ **Continued engagement and project sustainability:** Even when unfunded, the young people remained engaged and motivated to continue their work, demonstrating the project's sustainability and the lasting impact it had on their lives. They utilised the skills learned to initiate new projects independently.

The project also had an impact on the **wider community**: the young people chose the cost-of-living crisis as a subject for a publicly shared video since they felt this issue was deeply impacting their community. The video played a key role in challenging the stigma surrounding poverty by conveying that many people are facing similar financial struggles, thereby normalising the conversation and reducing feelings of isolation among those affected. The video also raised awareness that poverty impacts not just the traditionally vulnerable but also working families, helping the community recognise that financial hardship can affect anyone. Additionally, it provided essential resources and

guidance on where to find support, crucial for families newly experiencing poverty. By highlighting these issues and encouraging open dialogue, the project strengthened community bonds, enabling a more supportive and inclusive environment where individuals felt more comfortable discussing their struggles and seeking help.

"Some of the video was aimed at challenging stigma around poverty and saying actually, in this local area, there's a lot of people who are in the same boat as you. This is what you should do if you need support." (Staff member at The Junction Foundation)

Trelya, Cornwall

About the organisation

Trelya is a youth and community project that has been operating for over 22 years. It provides comprehensive services to support individuals across all age ranges, starting from pre-birth to adulthood. The organisation is particularly focused on working with some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

Their key activities and programmes are focused on:



- ▶ **Early Years Support:** Trelya runs an outstanding Ofsted-rated early intervention setting, similar to a highly ratioed nursery, which is grant-funded. This programme supports the most vulnerable young children in the community.
- ▶ **Transition and School Support:** The organisation assists children in their transition to school and offers dedicated support as they progress into Reception and Year One. This includes running after-school clubs, helping parents with reading, and providing reading support directly to children.
- ▶ **Youth and Family Services:** At around age 8, children are transitioned to the youth and family team. This team works with young people and their families into their teens and sometimes up to age 25. Services include traditional youth work, advocacy with schools and social care, and home visits.
- ▶ **Adult Skills and Education Programme:** Trelya runs a programme called Gul for vulnerable adults, aiming to develop their skills, decision-making abilities, and move them positively forward in their lives, ideally towards employment or improved personal safety.
- ▶ **Community Cafe and Training Kitchen:** The organisation operates a community cafe and training kitchen, providing both a community service and training opportunities.



"We're a completely wrap around service. So, we wrap our service around the child, every caregiver with that child, and try to break that cycle."

Staff member at Trelya

About the project

The project focused on youth social action and aimed to address a sense of disconnect between young people, adults, and their community. It leveraged existing relationships and developed new ones to enhance the sense of place and community involvement among young people. By providing a range of engaging activities and opportunities, such as contributing to the development of a community café and participating in various educational and creative sessions, the project sought to foster motivation, aspiration, and positive engagement within the community. Over time, these activities helped build skills, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging, encouraging young people to become more active participants in their community.



"We had a seven-year-old who kept telling people, 'I work at Trelya now. I have a job at Trelya.' He was so proud, and he wanted an apron to take home and then to take to school to show his friends." (Staff member about a young person volunteering in the community café)

Outcomes from the project

The project created significant outcomes for both young people and the wider community. Over time, young people showed marked improvements in self-esteem and self-confidence. Initially, some older youths were unsure of their roles and would reluctantly engage, but within a year, they were actively involved in planning and volunteering for events, such as organising Christmas parties and raising funds for charities. This engagement not only helped them build leadership and organisational skills but also encouraged them to take part in broader social actions, like participating in "Take Back the Night" events against violence towards women.

Additionally, young people's involvement in the project had a ripple effect on the community, creating a sense of social connection. They became more motivated and began to see their place within their community positively. The project's dynamic and adaptive approach ensured that if an activity wasn't working, it was promptly adjusted to better fit the needs and interests of the participants. The approach helped mitigate any sense of loss or abandonment often experienced by these families, ensuring a smooth transition to other projects.

Furthermore, Trelya was invited to take part in a national project called "Attune," led by a professor at Leeds University, aimed at understanding children's experiences of trauma and its impact on their education. The young people's consistent participation in this project demonstrated their commitment and the project's success in empowering them to have a voice. This involvement could potentially lead to a trauma-informed resource toolkit being rolled out in secondary schools nationwide, showcasing the project's far-reaching impact.

"We weren't sure how their involvement in Attune was going to go, but actually they loved it. They really loved it, and they developed a real voice. Our young people were the most consistent in attendance. They were asking for it, they wanted to go." (Staff member)

YMCA Newcastle

About the organisation

Although part of the YMCA Federation, YMCA Newcastle is a small charity with a core focus on young people in the community. The organisation is based in Walker, which is in the top 2% on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The services delivered include youth work, services for older people as well as a group, and a toddler group. The charity is also involved in other community support including the distribution of food boxes for the local food bank.

The charity was seeking funding to support young people who reported to not feel safe in their local community and had insecurities and anxieties after the COVID-19 lockdown.



Having the Violence Reduction Unit and having the Police in and talking to these groups of young people, they genuinely weren't aware of the impact of some of their [anti- social] behaviours. Also, by involving them in this whole project about them feeling safe, we turned it on its head as well and said what's the impact on an older person



YMCA staff member

About the project

Young people were involved in the decision-making processes of the project from the conception and were also involved in the funding panel meeting to present the project idea was presented.

The activities of the fund focused on safety in the local community including:

- ▶ **Safety rocks:** young people painted rocks with words related to safety and explored ways to stay safe
- ▶ **Social media campaign:** the safety rocks were placed around local parks to be visible to the public. They then also became the focus of a social media campaign asking the local community to take a photo when they found a rock and encouraging them to move it to another location for someone else to find. The campaign also signposted to advice and guidance.
- ▶ **Workshops:** the young people were involved in a series of workshops, which involved having discussions about things they could do to make them feel safer. Other local stakeholders were also involved in these sessions, including the Violence Reduction Unit who discussed antisocial behaviour in the community. One staff member explained



“For example, one young man, he told us that he'd actually been assaulted by a group of young people and obviously that really affected him quite badly. But we talked about things like how to avoid confrontation and not engage. [I]f they did feel unsafe to go somewhere free like a shop or just somewhere public where there were other people around as well.”

- ▶ **Trip to Edinburgh:** young people also had the opportunity to be part of a trip to Edinburgh, which was the first time some of them had been on a train before. The trip provided young people with a chance to experience other areas.

In addition to themes of safety, the project staff facilitated discussions around illegal activities, which could cause harm to the participants, for example vaping.

Project staff reported that an element that worked particularly well in their activities was engaging young people from the LGBTQ+ community. They reported that some young people are part of this community and felt marginalised and vulnerable. Through the #iwill funded activities, the group were able to engage these individuals and open up discussions with the group.

Outcomes from the project

Young people experienced different positive changes as a result of their involvement in the project. Project staff observed increased engagement and contributions from young people in the workshops and sessions. They had deepened their understanding of risky behaviours and what they can do to feel safer in their local community. Young people also demonstrated increased confidence and were more open to speaking about their experiences towards the end of the project. Finally, project staff reported that by the end of the activities, participants were able to understand strategies to challenge others, defuse conflicts and raise awareness about different issues which are important to them.

The partnership with Northumbria Police and the Violence Reduction Unit strengthened through the course of the project, with the organisation receiving a small fund to collaborate on a further piece of work.

The organisation also had positive interactions with their social media engagement. The project and activities were promoted throughout the local community, including within the local school sessions, which are also delivered by staff.