#iwill Fund Learning Hub
Quality Practice Workstream

Final Report on the Second Impact Accelerator Cohort
The Centre for Youth Impact
January 2021

Introduction

The Quality Practice workstream of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub seeks to identify strengths and areas for development in youth social action delivery, by supporting learning and improvement amongst delivery organisations, and sharing the resulting learning with funders and beyond. At the core of this workstream is a 12-month learning programme, developed by Generation Change and now delivered by the Centre for Youth Impact, called the Impact Accelerator. This scheme is undertaken by #iwill Fund grantees individually and as part of a peer cohort. The Impact Accelerator is structured around a self-assessment tool called the Confidence Framework. This was initially developed by the Dartington Service Design Lab, and has subsequently been iterated and refined by the Centre, for use within the Impact Accelerator. The self-assessment process sits alongside a package of training, consultancy and coaching to help organisations to use the tool to inform and drive improvement and learning.

By supporting delivery organisations to understand and improve their offer in this way, and by building their capacity to clarify and learn about their programme outcomes, this work will deepen our understanding of what it takes to deliver quality youth social action. This will also generate insights that can inform Match Funders' understanding of practice across different settings. Alongside, the Impact Accelerator aims to establish a strong community of practice amongst organisations offering youth social action opportunities, all of whom are using the Confidence Framework as a common self-assessment process to better understand and improve their impact.

The Quality Practice workstream intends to support three cohorts of organisations in total to undertake the process. The learning from each cohort will feed into two Quality Practice Insights Reports - one during the early stages to capture initial insights, and one produced at the end, once improvement work has been implemented. These reports will build on each other, with learning from each cohort feeding into the delivery and reports for the next. You can read the initial paper relating to the first cohort here, and our final report here.

This is the final insights paper for the second cohort, who commenced the Impact Accelerator in September 2019. This builds on an initial insights paper, published in March 2020, which you can read here. Since then, the work of all the participating organisations in this cohort has of course been significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 crisis. As we have set out below, over the past six months, our focus has been on being flexible and responsive in the way we have delivered a slimmed-down, adapted programme of support.
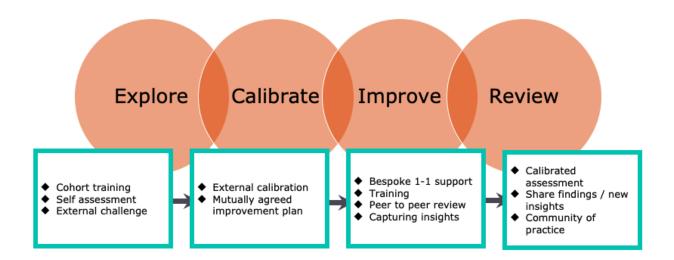
The Impact Accelerator Programme

The Impact Accelerator is an intensive, 12-month programme for organisations offering youth social action opportunities that are committed to getting (even) better at what they do. It is designed to work towards three core aims:

      i) to foster a culture of learning within programme delivery;

      ii) to build organisational capacity for evidence-led improvement; and

      iii) to establish a common approach to understanding and improving impact.

It is a cohort-based programme, with opportunities for organisations to share collective lessons, insights and good practice as they progress through the process. Whilst many participants can recognise the potential value of this aspect, in their final reports most organisations from the first cohort reflected that they had not felt that they had the capacity to make full use of the community. As such, we will be connecting relevant organisations from the current and past cohorts as and when there is clear benefit, demand, and capacity to do so.

The programme takes place over four key phases:

Explore	Calibrate	Improve	Review
◆ Cohort training ◆ Self assessment ◆ External challenge	◆ External calibration ◆ Mutually agreed improvement plan	◆ Bespoke 1-1 support ◆ Training ◆ Peer to peer review ◆ Capturing insights	◆ Calibrated assessment ◆ Share findings / new insights ◆ Community of practice

1) Explore

The common structure running through each of these phases is the Confidence Framework, which supports organisations to identify their strengths and weaknesses and prioritise their improvement goals. The process takes organisations through an initial self-assessment, which generates a 'heat-map' of the team's confidence across five key 'pillars': design, deliver, monitor, determine double benefit and sustain. This has now been developed for the third cohort, with more information on page 28.

To improve quality, increase impact and scale of Youth Social Action:						
Design	The YSA opportunity is logical and clearly articulated	Target populations are defined	Core structure and activities are clearly defined	Supporting materials have been created	Outcomes are clearly defined and measurable	The YSAO is supported by a Theory of Change linking these elements
Deliver	The YSAO is effectively and properly delivered to support young people to make a difference	Implementation of the YSAO is monitored	Delivery targets are set, and monitored.	The YSAO recruits the right staff	The YSAO supports and develops staff	Key stakeholders for delivery are known and engaged.
Monitor	Evidence is used to learn and adapt, as required	Outcomes are monitored, and acted upon	Target population enrolment is monitored, and acted upon	Attendance and attrition is monitored and acted upon	Young people are involved in shaping the YSAO	Learning is shared across the organisation
Determine double benefit	There is confidence that outcomes have improved	The theory of change of the YSAO is underpinned by research evidence	Evidence generated in other sites (organisations or locations) suggests the YSAO improves outcomes for YP	The organisation is able to effectively analyse and communicate its data	Evidence generated in the present site (organisation or location) suggests the YSAO improves outcomes for YP and/or communities	There is evidence in the present site of wider positive double benefit
Sustain	The YSAO provides value for money and is sustainable	There is evidence that YP value and are satisfied with the YSAO	There is evidence the YSAO is value for money	There is a compelling business case for replicating the YSAO	The YSAO is fully integrated into core business of the organisation	Delivery of the YSAO is sustainable

2) Calibrate

The participating team then gathers evidence as grounds for these confidence levels, which is 'calibrated' via a moderated review from two external 'coaches' (usually a member of staff from both Dartington and the Centre). This calibration is not a 'pass/fail' process: rather, it provides the organisation with a broader perspective, informed by external insight and expertise, on how others in the cohort have rated and evidenced their confidence levels, and indicates any areas where they may have over- or under-estimated the extent to which their practice is established within each of the five pillars.

3) Improve

The calibrated Confidence Framework then informs the production of a targeted improvement plan, which sets out specific objectives that the organisation is committed to achieving. This is undertaken with a combination of dedicated one-to-one support (usually with a member of staff from the Centre), as well as peer review and support from other members of the cohort.

Some of the objectives may be achievable within the 12-month timeframe of the Accelerator; others will be set out for the medium and long term. Crucially, the process as a whole is intended to support a cycle of continuous quality improvement – assess, plan and improve – which manifests across every aspect of participating organisations' work.

4) Review

The final phase sees the organisation review their progress against their improvement plan and identify next steps. This also provides a backdrop for a final 'improvement report', which combines a retrospective review of the process, and identifies next steps for the organisation in its continuous quality improvement cycle. As a cohort, organisations are also actively encouraged to share insights, learning and examples of effective practice that others can apply to their own context.

To what extent have we met the aims of the Impact Accelerator so far?

Below we add points specific to Cohort Two's experience through lockdown and into the first phase of recovery. These build on points included in the [Initial Insights Paper.](#)

i) Foster a culture of learning within youth programme delivery

- ***Learning and improvement work was significantly disrupted by lockdown***
  Circumstances for the majority of the Cohort Two participants through lockdown were such that achieving the improvement goals they had set for themselves in early 2020 was not possible. This was due to a combination of furlough, staff reallocation to crisis-response work, and the closing down of programme delivery. As described in more detail in "[Adaptation and Youth Social Action: The Impact of COVID-19](#)" (Dartington Service Design Lab, 2020), the disruption opened up some opportunities for innovation - digital channels for youth voice, for example. However, in most cases the pressure to adapt as quickly as possible limited the extent to which learning and improvement could be incorporated into service design and delivery.

- ***But a learning culture persisted – and improvement work has been picked up again***
  As delivery was adapted through lockdown, then started up again in the autumn, insights and lines of enquiry have been put into practice. In most cases, prior to lockdown in March, Cohort Two organisations had produced improvement plans, and in the process, brought together their teams around the evidence they had available about their work. In some cases, some improvement work – such as a reflective workshop to develop their theory of change – had also been completed. Four members of the cohort also attended introductory training delivered for Cohort Three, in September and October 2020, as part of re-engaging with the content. Review calls in October established that, for several of the organisations, they had partly drawn on this work as they adapted their work for online delivery during lockdown – and more so as delivery was able to restart from September onwards.

- ***Support for a sustainable learning culture within youth programme delivery will need to adapt, throughout and beyond the pandemic***
  The Impact Accelerator is an intense 12-month programme that requires sustained ability to commit and arguably some certainty over future delivery in order to plan for and make meaningful improvements (for example, developing theories of change based on assumptions about activities and contexts). It also requires consistent staff input, with regular contributions from the same individuals over time. The uncertainty and unpredictability of a global pandemic can seem to jeopardise, or even totally stall improvement efforts. However, this does not have to be the case, and quality improvement work in rapidly changing contexts is far from futile. Adapting to the situation with new approaches to programme delivery and youth engagement means learning and data-driven decision making is more important than ever. It also requires ever more careful consideration about where to prioritise already strained time and effort.

  We might need to adapt the content of support for developing a learning culture, for example by developing new training on how to implement specific design tools, such as rapid cycle testing and design patterns, using theories of change as a tool for reflection and planning, or how to make better use of 'real-time' data that both inform decision making about provision, and capture information about implementation of changes to provision.

  Adapting support might also mean changing the process. For some organisations it could become even more important to prioritise bringing delivery staff into ongoing learning and improvement processes in order to drive change more quickly 'on the ground' (further highlighting the value in getting the wider team involved with programmes such as the Impact Accelerator, beyond the project lead/s).

Adaptation will also be needed in how we think about cycles of improvement. In highly volatile times, committing to a year's programme may feel out of reach or low priority given the uncertainty about future states. Framing cycles of learning and reflection as much shorter and more tightly focused – even though we may still be asking for long-term commitment – is likely to align much more closely with the reality of delivery.

Practically, the pandemic also influences how improvement training and support is delivered. For Cohort Three, we have moved all programme training online, and key interactions such as improvement meetings are being held virtually. This has, on the whole, been successful and more efficient, for example reducing travel time and making use of shared online documents, as well as making it easier to bring other team members on board (including Youth Ambassadors at one participating organisation.)

We will continue refining the support model in light of the current context and will share further reflections on this in our final report for Cohort Three.

ii) Build organisational capacity for evidence-led improvement

- ***Despite the disruption, participants have increased their capacity and confidence***
  As summarised below, the majority of Cohort Two participants have been able to complete some aspects of their planned improvement work. Even in cases where aspects of plans have not been completed, participants have reported that the process of completing the Confidence Framework, improvement meetings and developing plans, has left them better equipped to collect and make better use of evidence as their projects and programmes restart through recovery.

- ***A focus on the fundamentals is key***
  Most Cohort Two organisations identified either developing or revisiting their theory of change as a key improvement priority. This provides the essential framework for organisations to understand what evidence they can and should be collecting, and in the experience of many of the participants, has allowed them to reframe and adjust their thinking about their work as a whole. For example:

  - Building a greater understanding of how operational areas such as staff and volunteer job descriptions, training, and ongoing support are related to programme design and implementation fidelity – for provision to be delivered as intended, as per a theory of change, staff or volunteers need to understand what that looks like (e.g., through

induction and ongoing supervisions) and why, and be appropriately supported to develop their skills;

- *Recognising that learning and evaluation efforts have tended to be more summative than formative, or focused on a particular element of the provision (for example, a final event) rather than the programme as a whole;*

- *Identifying blockers and points of friction within existing processes, such as relying on schools or community partners to share attendance data for young people; or*

- *Clarifying how particular communities are defined and targeted, and what that means for intended impact – for example, based on geography, culture, interest, or experience.*

In our initial report on Cohort Two, we shared a detailed overview of common improvement areas for the participating organisations (pp.21-22). Organisations each completed a template improvement plan, providing detail on the following areas:

Area of improvement (relating to specific areas on the Confidence Framework)	Why is this area important to the organisation? (Drawing on current context, e.g. programme offer, strategic reviews, funding, etc.)	What do you hope to achieve by focusing on this area?	What will you do to achieve this?	What support do you need from your research associate?	Key dates
Develop social action programme specific theory of change	*Current theory of change does not include community volunteering element – we want to better understand*	*Clearer understanding of what is core to our programme delivery and what can be flexed, to support with implementation*	*Bring together a team of staff from across the organisation (senior management, delivery staff, evaluation lead) for a*	*Theory of change workshop, feedback on new theory of change*	*Workshop to be scheduled for early March; team day mid April/youth panel meeting*

	and articulate how this part of the programme design supports our outcomes for young people participating	fidelity (making sure it is delivered as intended) and increase confidence in what we are seeking to achieve	theory of change workshop; present new theory of change at all team meeting/board meeting/with youth board for feedback; introduce theory of change to new staff inductions		mid May; board meeting early June

iii) Establish a common approach to understanding and improving impact

- ***Integration of the programme with the Centre's overall approach has supported an increased understanding of 'what good looks like'***
  The Centre's focus on quality of practice to support young people's social and emotional learning, and emphasis on acting on insights in a cycle of continuous improvement, has resonated with participants as the basis of a common approach, which applies across a wide range of contexts and types of provision.

- ***A foundation has been established – but there's more work to do to consolidate and implement common approaches***
  As detailed on page 28, the Centre has drawn on its broader work, and feedback from Cohort Two participants to significantly redesign the Confidence Framework, building it as an online process, emphasising the 'low stakes' approach, focused on building understanding of core concepts, and drawing out clear improvement priorities. This has potential to be used at a greater scale, as a light-touch, 'self-service' assessment which would increase the spread of shared approaches to learning, evaluation and continuous improvement.

The #iwill Fund Cohort Two - overview

Having begun their Impact Accelerator experience with a 'Cohort Retreat' in September 2019, the majority of organisations in Cohort Two progressed through the first two stages of the process – 'Explore' and 'Calibrate' – between October 2019 and February 2020. With improvement plans in place, they were about to embark on the third stage – 'Improve' – as lockdown began in March. As noted above, in most cases this meant significant disruption and diversion away from planned improvement work. Support was offered by the team at the Centre through this period to make whatever progress was feasible and meaningful.

Over the course of September, Cohort Two organisations were offered the opportunity to join online training sessions, along with Cohort Three organisations just beginning their improvement journey. This was to provide a 'refresher' of the core content of the programme, and allow them to reengage with their learning and improvement process. Through October and November, the Centre team then completed review calls with Cohort Two organisations.

Below is a summary of the youth social action provision delivered by each of the Cohort Two organisations, their improvement goals, any improvement work completed, and key points coming out of the review calls. One organisation is not included where we have not been able to re-establish contact since the first COVID-19 lockdown.

Stonewall	
Match Funder	Comic Relief
Programme Description	This project supports LGBT young people to engage in social action. Each young person participates in a campaigning residential where they design their campaign, and are then supported to deliver it within their community. The project ends with a youth summit where participants present the impact of their campaign to peers.
Improvement Goals	● Develop theory of change (ToC)

Proudly supporting
youth social action

#iwill

Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport

COMMUNITY
FUND

THE CENTRE
FOR YOUTH
IMPACT

	• Build framework to understand and capture double benefit • Develop a delivery manual for the project
Improvement Work	• ToC workshop (February 20), facilitated by Centre staff • Check-in call (May 20)
Review	• Project postponed due to lockdown, and key team members placed on furlough • Working towards delivery of online version of the residential programme • Confidence Framework helped to identify gaps in thinking – *"It made us realise how much stuff we were doing just because that's what we [always] did"* • Team drew on ToC work in adapting project to be delivered online – and prompted the team to develop 'mechanisms of change' for a separate schools-based programme • Internal restructuring of team and strategic review process underway, with new CEO in place: within this process, improvement work provides a good framework for review of youth programmes

First Give

Match Funder	Pears Foundation
Programme Description	This provides a fully resourced scheme of work to secondary schools that gets an entire year group engaging in social action. The programme consists of eight fully resourced lessons, three facilitated sessions and £1,000 prize money for local charities chosen and supported by students.

Improvement Goals	- Develop theory of change (ToC) - Review staff recruitment processes - Develop work on youth voice - Review and enhance monitoring of delivery
Improvement Work	- ToC workshop (August 20), facilitated by Centre staff - Specialist resource brought in to review existing data, model a sampling strategy, and re-design questionnaires - Youth Advisory Group established
Review	- Timing of ToC session in late August allowed for new team members (and those in new roles) to participate, and was timely and energising - Focus on 'mechanisms of change' particularly helpful to make learning simpler and easier to manage - Confidence Framework was very valuable exercise, highlighting areas for improvement and raising profile of learning work across the team - Ambition to establish a continuous learning cycle, rather than this experience being a 'one-off'

Volunteer It Yourself - VIY

Match Funder	Sport England
Programme Description	VIY challenges young people (who are typically unemployed and/or disengaged/excluded from mainstream education or training, or at risk of disengagement) to learn trade and building skills through helping to fix local grassroots sports clubs and facilities in need of essential repairs and improvements.

Proudly supporting
youth social action

#iwill

Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport

COMMUNITY
FUND

THE CENTRE
FOR YOUTH
IMPACT

Improvement Goals	- Develop unified organisational strategy - Review staff recruitment, support and development - Develop theory of change (ToC) - Develop work on youth voice - Review definitions of completion/attrition/retention
Improvement Work	- Completed strategy review for 2020-23 - refocus on core impact goals - Implemented new CRM and further developed evaluation processes/systems - Now recruiting for new 'Data and Impact Manager' role, and also considering senior role with focus on impact
Review	- Experience feels like "the start of a journey": it has raised the profile of learning across the team - Leadership intentions to engage more team members in next steps: which may include running an internal Confidence Framework process (using updated online form) - ToC refinement and simplification an outstanding improvement priority: ambition to establish a 'confident core'

Liverpool FC Foundation

Match Funder	Liverpool FC Foundation
Programme Description	This predominantly school-based social action programme works in both primary and secondary schools within the Liverpool City Region, supporting young people to identify key issues that they feel strongly about and empowering the participants to deliver youth led social action activities. The programme also offers community based social action opportunities via engagement with local youth and community organisations.
Improvement Goals	• Develop theory of change (ToC) • Refine and develop monitoring systems and processes • Produce updated handbook and supporting materials • Develop youth peer mentor network
Improvement Work	• ToC developed • Monitoring systems in place • Handbook and other materials produced
Review	• Extensive progress made, with the support of an external evaluation partner (Liverpool John Moores University) • ToC has potential to be further improved by adding in some of the design features (e.g. core and flex) that are clearly laid out in the professional manual and other documents • The framework, structures and processes are in place to effectively gather evidence across programmes, as it becomes possible to deliver more aspects of the programme

	• Lots of energy and efforts have focused on building on young people's feedback and the 'youth voice' aspect of the programme prior to taking part in the Impact Accelerator, so it was satisfying to see this come out as a particular area of confidence on the framework

Build Up Foundation

Match Funder	Comic Relief
Programme Description	Build Up is working with young people in six communities across London making decisions about their local area and shaping the future of their city. Six teams of young people will work with Build Up to design and build a permanent public or community space for their neighbourhood.
Improvement Goals	• Revisit and update theory of change (ToC) • Develop evaluation tools and system for collection • Develop stronger feedback loop for young people taking part in projects
Improvement Work	• ToC workshop (April 20), facilitated by Centre staff • Evaluation tools reviewed and updated • ToC review and development has helped to provide greater clarity on who they are working with; the team have spent time redefining this, and then articulating this to external 'clients'
Review	• Work will continue to focus on building the evaluation framework, and developing a longer-term offer for young people, as well as increasing leadership opportunities for younger age groups. This will tie into funding and commission applications

	- Black Lives Matter has also brought race more prominently into conversations - The team are driven to evidence changes that are happening, and ensuring young people's feedback is continuously (and visibly) informing project design - The programme at times included jargon that felt off putting for more junior staff members, and which required senior staff to get more involved than had been expected: *"For people who are less experienced, the complexity created some barriers"* - The process is now being led by a new member of staff with a particular interest in learning and evaluation *"It opens thought into new areas, which is good but can be harder on the mind!"*

Woodland Trust

Match Funder	Pears Foundation
Programme Description	Through this programme, young people will plan, design, and plant a 162 hectare woodland of more than 250,000 trees, ensuring the new woodland is a place that young people and the wider community can enjoy and feel a sense of ownership over.
Improvement Goals	- Fully define project offer - Develop first draft of theory of change (ToC) - Develop feedback tools and system for collection - Establish monitoring system and processes
Improvement Work	First draft of ToC in development

Proudly supporting
youth social action
#iwill | Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport | COMMUNITY FUND | THE CENTRE FOR YOUTH IMPACT

	• Developed a reframed 'youth forum' for online delivery, as feedback and engagement mechanism
Review	• Significant delays to delivery due to COVID-19 have limited the ability to make progress with improvement goals • Young volunteers only came into programme in October 2020, rather than June as planned • Internal ToC workshop due to delivered in January, engaging senior colleagues • This will contribute to the development of a new, organisation-wide youth strategy

JLGB

Match Funder	JLGB
Programme Description	eVOLve is JLGB's response to the ever-changing needs of young Jewish volunteers. For the first time, eVOLve brings together all key stakeholders from across the community to ensure that social action becomes more accessible and more rewarding for Jewish young people than ever before. The programme creates a volunteering journey that embraces Jewish young people aged 8-25, enabling them to fully engage in meaningful social action and become active citizens in their community.
Improvement Goals	• Develop and refine theory of change (ToC) • Develop fidelity monitoring system and processes • Review approach to community impact of campaigns

Improvement Work	- Key contact reassigned to work on emergency response work - COVID-19 response work has involved a fair amount of systematising programmes
Review	- In recent months, JLGB have been able to pick up a lot of the legacy of Impact Accelerator work, supported by a full strategic Senior Leadership Team and trustee board away day, and the convening of working groups to focus on a number of core priorities. In the first year, these will cover theory of change and financial sustainability – both of which were priorities set out in their improvement plan - Delivery fidelity has been tackled more 'on the ground' with new delivery systems and processes - The process felt useful as it demanded the attention of a lot of the organisation, which meant there was widespread reflection across the organisation - Whilst COVID-19 inevitably put a halt on things in March, it has since enabled more engagement from senior leadership and the team are feeling excited about what they can achieve in the future

4CT

Match Funder	Young Manchester
Programme Description	4CT leads the East Manchester Youth and Play Partnership, aiming to deliver a core programme of regular youth and play sessions equally distributed to ensure geographical coverage across the five identified wards of East Manchester. The partnership offers an integrated programme of social action within these sessions and access to a range of training, volunteering, campaigning and activities of benefit to the wider community.

Improvement Goals	• Theory of change to cover play work and youth work • Outcomes monitoring
Improvement Work	• Insufficient internal capacity to continue process due to COVID-19 response
Review	• 4CT works across a partnership of 12 organisations delivering youth and play work and as a multi-purpose charity, are also delivering other strands of work. On top of the challenge presented by COVID-19, this further impacted on the organisation's capacity to engage fully with the programme. This cohort has further clarified the 'conditions' that need to be in place in order for delivery organisations to benefit from the Impact Accelerator experience (for example, it can be difficult to support all organisations within a partnership to participate).

NHS – Imperial Health Charity

Match Funder	Pears Foundation
Programme Description	Working alongside the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, NHS Imperial Health Charity have developed an opportunity for 16 – 25 year olds to get involved and volunteer at Hammersmith and Charing Cross Hospitals. They offer two programmes a year - the Summer Programme and the Patient Engagement Volunteer Programme.
Improvement Goals	• Develop and refine theory of change (ToC) • Develop understanding and definition of communities served by Imperial

	• Increase feedback mechanisms and tools for young volunteers, staff and patients
Improvement Work	• Initial data gathering and internal analysis completed
Review	• Entire programme shut down with lockdown, scheduled to restart from January 21 • Key contact reassigned to work on emergency response, from March until early November • Picking up improvement plan, and initial data analysis, valuable as team considers options for re-engagement with young people, and recruiting new volunteers • Defining 'community' a key consideration, with new insights emerging through lockdown • Potential for developing virtual volunteering and/or support delivered in community sites (e.g., local dialysis units off-hospital grounds)

NHS – South London/Maudsley	
Match Funder	Pears Foundation
Programme Description	As part of their Youth Volunteering Programme, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust runs a CAMHS Mentoring Project. Young adults (aged 19-25) support current Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service users in a one-to-one befriending style relationship. Volunteers have the chance to develop their skills and understanding of the mental health sector, whilst giving crucial "peer support" to other young people from their community.

Proudly supporting
youth social action

#iwill   Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport   COMMUNITY
FUND   THE CENTRE
FOR YOUTH
IMPACT

Improvement Goals	- Develop first draft theory of change (ToC) - Complete stakeholder mapping - Establish database to integrate and scale current processes - Produce 'Coordinator's Guide' to manualise process
Improvement Work	ToC iterated and refined with coaching from Centre staff (Jan-April 20)
Review	- Delivery postponed through lockdown - Change of key staff member (volunteer coordinator) in July 20 - New coordinator in post September 20 – attended online refresher sessions - Initial priorities are to codify programme as it re-opens through Autumn - Database development being initiated

Just for Kids Law	
Match Funder	Esmée Fairbairn & Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Programme Description	The Schools Exclusion Campaign offers young people aged 14-24 with lived experience of school exclusion in London, a supported opportunity to elevate their voice and work in partnership with JfKL to create a steering group and campaign that will influence positive change and wider reform for all children and young people. With the encouragement of the Young People's Development Worker, the young people on the campaign form the steering group and are responsible for and lead the creation and direction of the School Exclusion Campaign. The young people

	are recognised and regarded as the experts by experience and as activists for their involvement.
Review	 ● Key member of staff left at end of 2019 ● Centre team re-engaged in April 20, secured agreement to 'reset' and bring Just for Kids Law into Cohort Three

Key learning and insights

Outputs

The findings in this report are based on reviewing the following forms of assessment:

- Self-assessed Confidence Frameworks for 12 organisations participating in the Impact Accelerator;
- Calibrated Confidence Frameworks for these same 12 organisations;
- Submitted evidence in support of each organisation's Confidence Framework scores;
- Case notes from each organisation's 1:1 meetings;
- Case notes from 11 improvement meetings with Research Associates;
- Completed improvement plans from 10 organisations;
- Case notes from three theory of change workshops;
- Case notes from eight review calls; and
- Feedback generated from staff and Associates working on the Impact Accelerator throughout the process.

Insights about practice

- Establishing a cycle of learning and improvement depends on leadership: leadership not in the sense of seniority, but *ownership* and *persistence.* Those organisations in Cohort Two that have, despite lockdown, been able to make some progress with their improvement plans, or are now in a position to pick up again on their improvement goals, are all characterised by

having individuals in their teams who have consistently championed and advocated for this work. For others, staff changes and other disruptions have made it practically impossible to maintain this momentum.

- Having 'good enough' data – and protecting time to look at and interpret it - is fundamental. Data collection and analysis is a thread that has run through our interactions with all of the Cohort Two organisations, and almost all organisations identified an improvement goal specifically related to data collection. While the starting point is commonly to look at improving systems – implementing a new database, for example – the greatest challenge is often establishing a consistent process for generating insights from data, and taking actions based on those insights. It is sometimes necessary for organisations to reflect on their motivations for having access to 'good enough' data – moving from a place of wanting to 'demonstrate impact', to thinking more critically about the systems and processes for collecting data, and the types of data that are collected.

- As noted in the initial insights paper, and related to the point above, an associated issue is that "*a common behaviour is for organisations to skip attendance and attrition data or feedback in favour of outcomes data (or to conflate them)".* The organisations in Cohort Two that are best placed to generate and act on insights are those who have been able to establish a strong foundation of user and engagement data, upon which they can build. The calibrations offer more detailed insight on areas of strength and confidence in different types of data collection and analysis:
    - o Organisations rated themselves as confident in data collection related to target populations, although this was often marked down through calibrations and discussion at improvement meetings. More can be done to promote the value of ongoing monitoring enrolment against target population, to encourage fidelity.
    - o Organisations were reasonably confident, and strong, in their use of attendance data, although this could be done more systematically. To develop this, we also need to promote the value of monitoring both enrolment and attendance data against the target population in order to inform decision making around referral pathways, programme promotion, screening, and eligibility.

Proudly supporting
youth social action

#iwill   Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport   COMMUNITY
FUND   THE CENTRE
FOR YOUTH
IMPACT

- o Where it was being collected, feedback data was one of the areas where organisations were strongest. Additional support in implementing feedback data to inform practice on an ongoing basis would be beneficial.
- o Organisations indicated less confidence in outcomes data, reflected by lower self-assessment and calibrated scores.

- It remains the case that the improvement needs of most organisations are fairly foundational – that is, the majority of organisations do not have a theory of change (or at least an up-to-date version). Where organisations do have a theory of change, there was a lack of confidence in how to develop and use this. As indicated above, support is needed to articulate some core elements of programme delivery, such as eligibility or targeting, or the central 'offer' to young people. More support is also needed with identifying logical connections between the different elements of an organisation's theory of change. This is the work that needs to inform developments in data gathering, defining outcomes and articulating impact – though these are often the areas that are uppermost in the minds of participating organisations at the start of the Impact Accelerator programme. In reality, setting improvement goals often involves taking several steps back from where organisations believe they were starting, and managing expectations carefully.

- Although the Impact Accelerator is a cohort-based programme, there has always been an emphasis on the individual goals and improvement journeys of participating organisations. This has informed programme design, and particularly the matching with a research associate or 'coach' to help individual organisations with their improvement plans. This cohort in particular has highlighted the similarity in the needs and aspirations of participating organisations, and whilst one to one coaching and support remains critical in catalysing progress, it is clear that there is further scope to bring group training and support into the Impact Accelerator programme of activity.

- Finally, the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 crisis should not be underestimated. As is the case across the youth sector as a whole, most organisations in Cohort Two are facing significant challenges in rebuilding and restarting their service delivery, in a context of reduced resources, and increases in the range and extent of support needs for young people.   The

capacity to engage in learning and improvement is constrained, at a point where it is critical for organisations to understand more about how they can and should respond to a radically changed environment. For many, learning and quality improvement represents a 'nice to have' rather than a critical element of the sector's response to the pandemic. Adaptation and Youth Social Action: The Impact of COVID-19 shares initial reflections on how the crisis has affected evaluation efforts and quality. We will be drawing on the findings from this report, and on our learning throughout the Impact Accelerator programme, to build our understanding of how best to support and prioritise quality improvement work throughout and beyond the COVID-19 crisis.

Insights about process

- 'Lower stakes accountability'[1] is more important than ever. Given the extent of the uncertainty and challenge for youth organisations, an enabling, coaching approach to providing capacity building support is essential. Several Cohort Two organisations noted through this process that the aspect they valued most was being supported to reflect together, as a team, in an environment that encouraged openness and curiosity, rather than whether or not they could 'prove their impact'. This also reinforces the need for the Impact Accelerator programme to be seen as just one step on an improvement journey, rather than an end in and of itself. This raises questions about how participating organisations can be supported to maintain their commitment to learning and improvement, and where they can be signposted to seek further support.

- Establishing and maintaining a culture of learning, which drives a cycle of continuous improvement, takes time, patience and support. **Organisational change** is a long-term and potentially fragile process, which can be strengthened by opportunities to connect with others working through similar challenges. Inviting practitioners from Cohort Two to join the introductory online sessions for Cohort Three, delivered in September 2020, established that

---

[1] This is a term drawn from the Youth Programme Quality intervention, a continuous quality improvement process currently being piloted across the UK by the Centre, with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund. Low stakes accountability means that teams are collectively accountable to each for identifying where and how they can improve, improvements are attainable, and resources and support are available (internally and externally) to achieve them.

they valued the opportunity to refresh their understanding of key concepts, and share their experiences with peers. Several past participants have expressed an interest in staying in contact with the Centre, and to take up any 'community offer' that could be made available. However, as noted later on in this report, our sense is that this community offer would need to have a clear purpose – for example, supporting with specific improvement priorities through group training. Cohort and community approaches can add value to the process by creating momentum and catalysing additional, peer supported improvement work, but it must be balanced with what is realistic and feasible within the current context.

Beyond the Impact Accelerator programme

"It doesn't feel like an end: it's the start of a journey"

As noted above, in most cases, Cohort Two organisations are facing a number of challenges and uncertainty, with many having already managed through significant changes to their service delivery and/or organisational structure. While, to say the least, a lot has changed since the beginning of the year when improvement plans were put in place, in review calls, many of the group were positive about the value of having gone through this process, and the continued relevance of the improvement priorities they identified.

"It was an opportunity to stop and think, having done a lot of doing, and critically assess what was working"

In this case, it was also noted that the process of gathering together the data and evidence accumulated through 'doing a lot of doing' provided a strong base of understanding from which to redesign their programme as it becomes possible to restart through recovery. Another organisation, whose provision is at an earlier stage, is now in a position to "get rid of the spreadsheets", and embark on building the database that will allow them to gather their data in a structured way, as their 'doing' can begin again in earnest.

Another aspect which has 'stuck' for some was the Centre's approach to Theories of Change, with a focus on 'mechanisms of change' (the feelings and experiences young people have while engaging in provision) as the key element that an organisation can control and assess:

"There's something very liberating about admitting that you can't know everything, and saying instead that 'this is what we do have control over and we can evaluate it'"

It was also noted by a couple of the organisations that this process had helped them to clarify the extent to which learning and improvement had to be a responsibility shared across the team. While having a 'champion' is crucial, bringing others into the process is crucial for sustainability:

"I went in thinking it was a 'me thing' - it was a moment in time and turned out it was more relevant to everyone else than it felt"

Finally, there was a particular recognition that learning from the process would influence broader development and strategy work, beyond the particular service which had been the focus for the Impact Accelerator:

"A new youth strategy for [the organisation] is going to be developed based on the learning from this project – the theory of change for the project will feed into the theory of change for youth work across [the organisation]"

"The Confidence Framework helped us to identify gaps in thinking, which will support a thorough strategic review of youth programmes"

The Impact Accelerator: Cohort Three and beyond

In our previous Initial Insights Paper, we identified three areas of development for the Impact Accelerator: bringing the Confidence Framework online, developing a community of practice, and providing greater consistency of external support.

Confidence Framework Online

Building on feedback from Cohort Two organisations – as well as the experience of Centre and Dartington staff in administering the process – we have now completely rebuilt the Confidence Framework.

Having previously been contained within an Excel spreadsheet, it has been reconfigured into a series of online forms: one for each of the five 'domains' of the Framework. The rationale for splitting the process into separate modules is to allow organisations greater flexibility, to complete one at a time, and pause and review between each, or to run through several at once. This was an aspiration pre-pandemic, but has been particularly valuable over the past 10 months.

We have also developed more specific guidance about the types of evidence that will be most useful and relevant to provide, and limited the total amount of evidence that can be submitted. This is in order to reduce the burden of completing the process, both for organisations and for calibration by the Centre team. The experience of Cohort One and Two organisations going through the process established that much of the evidence submitted was not directly relevant, and in some cases was spread over multiple documents, making it hard to navigate and identify key information.

Finally, we have refined the language and terminology used throughout the tool in response to feedback from participants about clarity, and accessibility for different members of staff joining the process. This refinement is complemented by revised introductory training (mentioned above, provided in September and October 2020 for the new Cohort Three and for returning Cohort Two participants), which better scaffolds the core programme principles and approaches, and ensures language is used more consistently across both the training and the Confidence Framework tool.

These new forms are 'in beta', and will be further refined in the light of feedback from Cohort Three organisations as they go through each domain. Thus far, the indications are that organisations are finding the process easy to follow, and the calibrations that have been completed have been more straightforward and streamlined. As noted above, the Centre is working towards implementing the Confidence Framework as a tool that could be used as a 'self-service' process for organisations, allowing for light touch support at a far greater scale than is possible within a programme such as the Impact Accelerator.

Confidence in community

The nature of the COVID-19 crisis has made it impractical to make progress in our ambitions to foster a community of practice, built around 'graduates' of the Impact Accelerator. It remains the case that any aspiration to draw together the collective continuous improvement experience, challenge and ambition for the sector needs to be reinforced by a combination of accountability, recognition, and access to resources.

What this could look like, in the midst of an ongoing crisis across the social sector as a whole, is unclear at this point. We have observed that, while the shift to online interactions by default has brought people into more contact with each other through conferences and training hosted on Zoom or Teams, it is still too early to determine how effective and durable these formats are for fostering meaningful exchange and peer support. By way of an example, we offered all 14 organisations attending training the opportunity to share contact details for a future informal Zoom 'coffee chat', and only four expressed interest. It has been more common for organisations to make specific requests to be connected with others, for example to share a role description for a dedicated impact and evaluation job role, or tools for ensuring implementation fidelity. It may be that the last ten months has created a sense of 'connection overload' due to the sheer amount of time spent in online meetings, and practitioners will become more discerning about these connections and what they can offer over time, rather than a sense of saturation at present.

With Cohort Three, we have introduced a new strand, focused on organisations' sharing what they are learning, as they go, within their own already established networks. We will be drawing together the learning from these sessions – paying particular attention to the delivery mode, whether online or in person, where and when possible in the future – in order to shape a future 'community offer'.

Consistency of support

Through the disruption of lockdown, it was only possible to deliver a limited amount of the improvement support planned for Cohort Two. This was largely delivered by Centre staff, rather than external associates, which provided greater consistency, but at times presented capacity issues.

In the light of this experience, the delivery model has now been redesigned for Cohort Three, to strike a balance between consistency in relationships and flexibility of capacity. Each organisation has a dedicated 'relationship manager', a member of the Centre's core team, who will be the first point of contact throughout the process. Support on core areas of improvement work will also be delivered by the Centre's core team. Alongside this, a pool of external associates will be used to support the organisations through particular stages of the process: calibrating confidence frameworks, improvement planning, and improvement work itself. This model will allow for central coordination and a consistent relationship throughout the process, and for associates with different specialisms to support organisations with particular improvement goals.

Next Steps

As well as making progress across these three strands, the Centre is actively engaged in the process of developing the Impact Accelerator programme as a model that can be a key part of the legacy of the #iwill Fund and the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. Key to this process will be to identify appropriate 'pathways' for organisations, with varying levels of support provided according to need and capacity.

Recommendations for Match Funders

As the Impact Accelerator moves through the delivery of the third and final cohort within the #iwill Fund Learning Hub, our aim is to support Match Funders to benefit from the collective experience and learning of both participant organisations and the Centre.

Of the recommendations from our previous insight report, the experience of working with Cohort Two indicates that the third – to **provide access to training in theory of change and other core concepts** – is the crucial contribution funders could make to support learning and improvement practice across youth organisations, along with **support for the long-term nature of the learning and improvement process to embed these concepts and ways of working**. This may involve resourcing delivery organisations to continue engaging in support and reflection, and funding an open, collective improvement offer for youth sector organisations.

Almost all Cohort Two organisations specifically reported the benefit of engaging with these fundamentals. As a self-selected group, who have volunteered their time and energy to engage in a deep process of reflection and learning, they also represent some of the most 'learning focused' organisations amongst their peers. Drawing on our broader experience of working with youth organisations across the sector in different contexts, there is a wide variation in understanding, skills and confidence in developing a theory of change, implementing an evaluation plan, and fostering a learning culture and a cycle of continuous improvement built on this foundation. Additional reflections on this topic can be found in the recent [#iwill Fund Learning Hub Evidence Workstream Data Review 3](#).

Providing resources and training in itself is, of course, no panacea. As noted above, organisational change takes time and patience, and concerted support and challenge – both internal and external – is required to establish a durable culture of learning. Our experience indicates that funders, acting together, could further support this process through adopting grant management processes that focus on **'learning indicators'**. This would involve asking questions like:

- When does your team come together to reflect, and what data do you look at to support that process?

- Can you describe something you learned from your data in the past six months?
- How have you acted on what you learned?

Importantly, this would need to be **instead** of other monitoring questions, rather than **as well as** – in order to avoid adding to overall reporting burdens. It would also be powerful for funders to apply such questions to their own work, to model the behaviours they wish to see manifest amongst their funded partners.