



# SECTION THREE: THE ROLE OF ENTERPRISE IN EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



YMCA  
GEORGE WILLIAMS  
COLLEGE

**SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN THE  
YOUTH SECTOR**

LEARNING FROM THE ENTERPRISE  
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

DR JO HICKMAN DUNNE  
SOIZIC HAGÈGE

# Introduction



SOIZIC HAGÈGE, ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME MANAGER

When we decided to conduct case studies with EDP-participating organisations, we knew we had to ask questions around the topic of equity. Enterprise, though seemingly unrelated at times, is in fact deeply interlinked with equity issues, including but not limited to, which enterprise gets funded, mentored, and highlighted.

As we started talking about inclusion and equity with our EDP participants, we realised they had something to share around various aspects of equity. They also had particular stories to share around this topic and enterprise; these stories illustrate the specific ways in which engaging with enterprise has impacted these organisations' relationship with equity and equity-based learning.

For now, we don't have large banks of data to refer to, to illustrate the relationship between enterprise and equity. But not everything is captured in measures, so we've decided that the stories of these EDP participants deserve their own section in this research report.

The Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) is a five-year programme funded by Access – The Foundation for Social Investment. YMCA George Williams College has been the sector partner for the Youth strand of the EDP since 2019. The two cohorts of youth organisations accepted into the programme have received a co-designed, tailored grant package; financial consultancy support; a learning programme based on their needs; peer-to-peer sharing sessions, and a dedicated, accessible Programme Manager.

The organisations represented use a variety of business models, including shops and venue hire, selling training and consultancy, and supporting schools and local authorities. While enterprise is far from a cure-all or an uncontested method in the youth sector, these organisations' expertise can help better understand the needs of the sector surrounding enterprise, the impact of these models on young people and the organisations themselves, and how they can be best supported.

This section focuses on the potential relationship between enterprise and equity – we have only anecdotal evidence so far but still think this is a topic worth exploring and asking questions about. Here, we will explore how EDP participating organisations felt enterprise could help elevate young people's voices, support underrepresented and underserved groups, and increase their own knowledge of inclusion.

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# Equity and impact: elevating young people's voices

## INTRODUCTION

Whilst closely linked to social impact, equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are considered here alongside social impact. This is to acknowledge the important and necessary focus on EDI in enterprise development practice, and provide space to do justice to our learning about the role social enterprise can play in supporting equitable and empowering practices, with and for young people.

## ELEVATING YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

Perhaps most obviously, participants used their enterprise activity as an opportunity for young people to share and implement their own ideas within projects. For example, in one project young people co-designed the entire feasibility stage. Participants, particularly those seeking to trade through retail or consultancy, also reflected on their enterprise activity as an opportunity to raise awareness of the young people they work with, whether that be young people with Special Educational Needs, working class young people, or young people from minority backgrounds.

Participants saw great value in creating opportunities for young people to interact with more diverse groups of people in their community and develop their own experiences and skills. These activities have also given communities the opportunity to experience the value that young people can bring.

Enterprise was seen as an opportunity to make young people “more visible”, and “allow them to be authentically seen and heard, and be able to contribute to, and influence change”.

By using their enterprise activities to create

space for young people to share their stories and experiences, participants have seen that they are able to elevate young people's voices to the public arena, helping them to ‘shout louder’ in this space by providing the opportunity for skills development and experience. As one participant noted:

“A lot is being said right now about equality, freedom of press, and the truth of media – about the fact that everyone should have a voice. But it doesn't always follow through. [Through enterprise], we want to contribute to that being a reality for young people.”

Extending this, and linked to the ambition to develop young people's entrepreneurial skills, participants also aimed to support young people to have influence through developing their own ideas and pursuing their own projects. However, they recognised that work around youth voice is complex and evolving, and never finished. As one participant considered:

“We recognise that there will be some young people for whom this [business] doesn't work as a safe space. Young people have been included in designing [business] but in a years' time, the young people coming to [business] will be different. We need to keep being in conversation with them so they feel they belong in the [business] and that this is a space they can access.”

In some cases, participants also had to scale back their ambitions to have young people involved in enterprise design and delivery, for example where practically it was not something that young people could commit to, or where there was a danger of re-traumatising young people.



# Equity and impact: supporting underserved young people

## ELEVATING YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES -CONTINUED

Participants were always focused on keeping this work flexible, and supporting young people to be engaged in ways that worked for them.

For example, where young people were at risk of being re-traumatised, the participant's aim for young people to work face-to-face with enterprise clients shifted to establishing a system to ensure the programme of enterprise work was informed by young people.

Finally, thinking about the various ways young people might be able to be involved in enterprise design and delivery, was also an important part of participants' efforts to stop this work from being tokenistic or exploitative.

This comes back to the need participants expressed for enterprise to fulfil both social and economic aims. It was important for them that young people could genuinely have their voices heard and actively input into the enterprise process in ways that they wanted to.

## SUPPORTING UNDERREPRESENTED AND UNDERSERVED GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

For all of our participants, their enterprise was a way to further the work that they do with under-served groups of young people – whether young people were involved in design, delivery, or as a direct beneficiary.

There was seen to be multiple benefits to enterprise activity that allowed them to do this.

Firstly, it provided direct, additional opportunities, and resources to young people who need it most.

As one participant observed, “our [enterprise work] directly supports what we want to do in terms of supporting poorly-resourced young people – we want to be working with these young people more”.

This was felt to particularly be the case where organisations were providing opportunities for young people to develop their enterprise or employability skills. Secondly, participants saw their enterprise as a way of expanding young people's and society's notions of what opportunities and careers are accessible to them.

Whether that be the music or film industry, or the corporate world, enterprise activity aimed to instill confidence in young people that the skills and ideas they had made them worthy of being there, and educating the sector about the value of those skills and ideas.

Finally, participants saw enterprise as a means of providing an alternative route through education and training. Acknowledging that “school is not for everyone”, engaging with enterprise exposed young people to new challenges that they may not have experienced anywhere else.

As already observed, participants were keen to amplify education and employment opportunities through enterprise, and make these available to the underserved groups of young people they work with.

# Equity and impact: awareness of inclusion

## INCREASED AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF INCLUSION

Alongside partners feeling that enterprise was an opportunity for them to directly deliver more equitable work with young people, it has also provided a forum for some to think about the way they approach equality, diversity, and inclusion in their wider practice.

For example, one participant noticed challenging attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ communities in the groups who were engaging in their enterprise activity.

This prompted them to focus on how they could create a more inclusive space for LGBTQIA+ communities and resulted in the delivery of a series of workshops on challenging LGBTQIA+ stereotypes with the young people accessing their services.

Another participant noticed, in the training they deliver as part of their enterprise offer, there have been challenges around the language used and perception of the group of young people the training is related to:

“We need people to strike out their racial, or class assumptions about these young women as a starting point, because there isn’t a typical profile. And if we do work with more young women from a particular background in a particular borough, let’s think about why, about the systemic inequalities that have led to particular vulnerabilities and them dropping through the net.”

This participant is now working on facilitation (including in large Zoom meetings) that allows participants to learn, without giving them a

free pass to use harmful language, and in general, is embracing further training that can help emphasise inclusion for all in their enterprise offer, and their whole organisation.

Whilst examples like these are limited, they do highlight opportunities for future learning. In particular, this is around the heightened awareness that organisations may need to have around delivering and supporting inclusive practice if they are going to take their work to new audiences, as a result of enterprise activity.

# Other sections



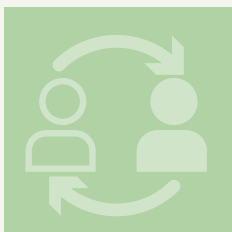
## 1. ENTERPRISE AND THE YOUTH SECTOR (FUNDERS-ORIENTED)

Here we'll cover the EDP participants' motivations for engaging with enterprise, barriers and enablers for enterprise development, and type of supports required, including grant funding and creating a community centred around enterprise in the youth sector. We especially recommend reading this section for funders.



## 2. IMPACT OF ENTERPRISE ON ORGANISATIONS & YOUNG PEOPLE

It takes time for enterprise to have a significant impact on youth organisations and young people, but EDP participants did identify emerging impacts, both expected and unexpected. This section is separated into two parts: first the enterprise of impact on young people, then on youth organisations engaged in enterprise activity.



## 3. POTENTIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EQUITY AND ENTERPRISE

Whilst gathering data on social impact, we learned more about the role social enterprise can play in supporting equitable and empowering practices with and for young people.



## 4. METHODOLOGY, EDP PROJECTS, AND THEORY OF CHANGE

If you want to learn more about our methodology and the each EDP organisation and their enterprise project, head to this section. You can also see the Theory of Change we've drafted from our research and will test in phase 2 of this research.