



SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN THE YOUTH SECTOR

LEARNING FROM THE ENTERPRISE
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



YMCA
GEORGE WILLIAMS
COLLEGE

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Introduction



Bethia McNeil - CEO, YMCA George Williams College

"Social investment and social enterprise are not uncontested issues within the youth sector. Indeed, the pursuit of alternative sources of funding and the associated financial stability that youth organisations need cannot be separated from the devastating reductions in resource that the sector has experienced over the past decade.

There's more widespread agreement that social enterprise in particular has the potential to 'do good', but there has been little focus about how this works alongside an organisation's theory of change. At the same time, how charities are supported on the path to enterprise and investment has been heavily critiqued.

This research does not answer (or even ask) the question of whether youth organisations should be pursuing enterprise. Instead, it begins to shed light on what is needed by the organisations that do, and how enterprise might contribute to the quality of their provision for young people, and the impact it creates with and for them. This is the start of a conversation, and we look forward to learning more alongside the EDP partners."



Ana Van Bilsen Irias - Senior Programme Manager at the Access Foundation for Social Investment

"The Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) was set up to support charities and social enterprises to develop new enterprise models or grow existing ones. The programme, delivered over the last six years, helps organisations to think creatively and become more financially resilient through training, peer learning and financial support.

The programme has underlined how vital enterprise is to the resilience of charities and social enterprises and this research is an important step forward for the youth sector in sharing and embedding the knowledge developed as part of this work. We know that this work is rarely quick or easy – successfully exploring trading and enterprise is a medium to long-term journey – but a detailed exploration of the enterprise models that are successful in the youth sector will undoubtedly enable others to follow suit and establish their own model's tailored to their organisation's needs."

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Facts and figures

THE PROGRAMME

The Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) is a five-year programme, piloted in 2018 and funded by Access – The Foundation for Social Investment. Social Investment Business (SIB) is the grant partner for the programme.

YMCA George Williams College is the sector partner for the Youth strand of the EDP since 2019. One cohort of organisations was accepted in 2020 and another in 2021.

The EDP offers organisations 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.

THE ALUMNI NETWORK

The College currently manages the EDP Youth Alumni Network (which started in March 2022 and will end in March 2024), which focuses on the legacy of the programme, sharing knowledge with the wider sector, and avoiding a cliff-edge effect for EDP participants.

Alumni participate in cross-sector and peer-to-peer learning events, and receive bespoke training. The Alumni Network also presents further opportunities for research into social enterprise by both Access and EDP partners.

THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research by YMCA George Williams College is to explore the conditions that shape the youth sector's engagement with enterprise; the experiences of youth organisations who have engaged in entrepreneurial activities; and the relationship between these activities and impact for young people and communities.

We've also looked at the role of social enterprise in promoting equity and inclusion. These themes emerged from initial data, though it is anecdotal due to sample size. In general, we know a lot about the EDP organisations and, while their experience provide insights in social enterprise in the youth sector, more research is needed.

Our methodology includes a literature review of social enterprise activity in the youth sector; eight case studies of EDP organisations; interviews with EDP stakeholders and social enterprises operating in the youth sector; and data gathered by Access and SIB.

£26.81K

Average grant amount

22

Youth organisations supported through the programme

95%

of EDP organisations (Youth strand) say they'll continue to develop their trading project

Young people's stories



Calum, age 24, became aware of Bold and Brave, the shop Young Somerset opened in Taunton as part of their enterprise endeavour, in August 2021. He'd been out of work for five years and was experiencing depression. The Job Centre had found him opportunities, but they were not the right fit. Calum was caring for his mum, had loads of social anxiety, and didn't get out of the house.

"I didn't feel I had a purpose, and I didn't have a direction. I really struggled. Then the Job Centre recommended Bold and Brave. I gave the interview a shot. I was so happy to get a call back."

Calum really enjoyed learning to set up a shop and be in contact with suppliers though he was anxious to deal with customers at first. When we met him, he'd only been with the shop 8 months, but he told us: "I've come such a long way from how I was as a person and the shop has been such a key part of my development. I don't know where I'd be without the shop."

He's now also part of the Edventure programme and has a great relationship with Carole, the Shop Manager. "I'm confident I can do things. I just needed to be told that I can do these things. I love working at the shop and helping the young people who come here." Since the shop also operates as a co-working, arts, IT, and training space, Calum can socialise with people with the same values as him and help young people who are working towards their Retail Awards.



Rav Kumar, a young person that has taken part in many of The Screen Community's projects, is now assisting with the development of the organisation. He had the following to say:

"I found the Screen Community via recommendation. I'd never thought about filming and editing before, but it sounded interesting, so I thought I'd go along. I really enjoyed it, which I wasn't expecting at all! [...] I never had the opportunity to make a short film ever. It just wasn't part of my life. I did the short films workshop and it felt like it clicked. I got an instant passion for wanting to tell a story via camera.

It's given me a path in life. Before this I was absolutely lost. I didn't know where I wanted to go. I'd graduated and wasn't sure of where I was going. Now I know that film and TV is the path for me. It's been a great experience, and I'd recommend it to anyone."

Headlines



"The EDP has brought our enterprise project where it is and continues to influence where we're going. The EDP's resources, one-to-ones, and workshops, the learning programme and the conversations we've had with the EDP Manager – all of this has sharpened our offer and made it better. The EDP has been the best external resource because it's been encouraging, supportive and challenging." - Nik Harwood, CEO of Young Somerset

Head to the section most relevant to you:



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.

Enterprise's impact and limitations

FOR YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

KEY BARRIERS

- Resourcing enterprise (especially as youth organisations are already stretched)
- Initial capital is fairly critical

KEY ENABLERS

- Previous enterprise experience and in-house skills
- Enterprising organisational culture
- Flexibility from funders

MOTIVATIONS

- Financial resilience and independence
- Opportunity for enterprise activity to contribute to their social mission
- Increase social impact (reach and quality)

IMPACT ON ORGANISATION

- Sharpening organisational focus, confidence, and focus
- Raising organisational profile
- Appealing to funders and investors

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

SOCIAL IMPACT

- Social and emotional learning
- Employability pathways and social mobility for young people

EQUITY

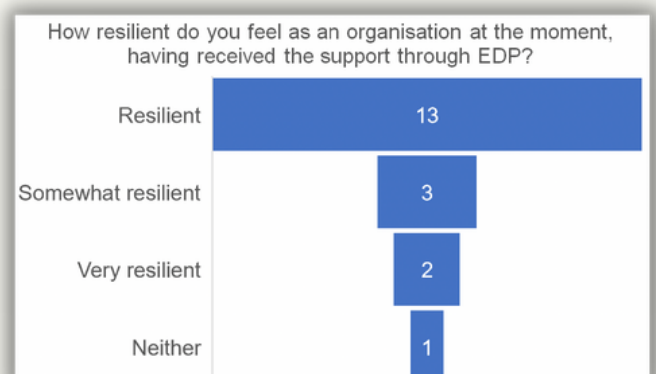
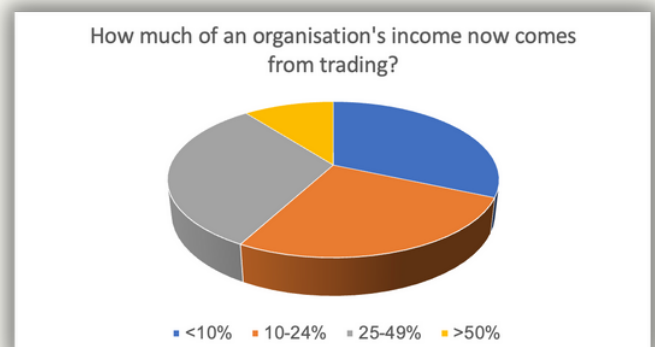
- Elevating young people's voices
- Supporting underrepresented, underserved groups of young people
- Increased knowledge of inclusion

THE EDP'S IMPACT

EDP ORGANISATIONS SPENT THEIR GRANT MONEY ON:

- Understanding trading models
- Business development and finance support
- Sales and marketing
- Staff time and consulting support

SOME FEEDBACK FROM EDP ORGANISATIONS:



Further reflections

1. IS ONE PARTICULAR TRADING OR BUSINESS APPROACH MORE IMPACTFUL THAN ANOTHER?

This research identified that whilst being mission-centric in enterprise delivery was a priority for all organisations, there were different approaches to the trading employed to achieve this. These approaches lend themselves to engaging young people in enterprise in different ways. Added to this, organisations were looking to sell to different markets, which likely has a bearing on the diffusion and depth of impact. Key questions remain around how exactly young people benefit from being engaged in enterprise in different ways, and if one approach is more beneficial than another.

2. IS THERE A TIPPING POINT IN TERMS OF THE SKILLS AND RESOURCING THAT THE SECTOR SHOULD BE WORKING TOWARDS?

The challenge of being adequately skilled and having the available resources to pursue enterprise development is a significant one, and not unique to the youth sector alone.

Growing the confidence and capacity of organisations appears to be beneficial for organisational health and functioning as a whole, not just in enterprise development. To varying degrees, the enterprise development process encouraged the building of more robust organisational systems, an interrogation of organisational focus and direction, and a push to be more innovative. These all feel like areas every organisation should seek to strengthen and improving the sector's ability to think in a more commercial way may positively support this. Having some existing experience or skills in enterprise development is helpful, and therefore, building the sector's starting point so less organisations are starting from ground zero, feels helpful. A key questions here seem to be, what is a helpful level of skill development (the 'tipping point'), that supports organisational health but doesn't force organisations down a commercial road they have no desire to follow?

Further reflections

3. TO WHAT EXTENT DOES ENTERPRISE CONTRIBUTE TO MORE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

Enterprise can play a role in supporting equitable work with young people and promote consideration and delivery of practice focused on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Participants have discussed the role of enterprise in supporting the social mobility of young people; supporting young people to have their voices heard; and supporting others to recognise the skills and value that young people bring. There is a need to unpick these findings further, particular in lieu of the fact that much of the enterprise activity captured by this research is still driven by grant funding. The picture is likely to be nuanced, of course, e.g., how much are outcomes related to the specific enterprise activity versus the space that enterprise creates for another process to happen.

But unpicking how these emerging outcomes relate to enterprise feel important nonetheless, to better understand the scope for enterprise activity in the youth sector, and how organisations can best be supported to achieve these outcomes.

Case study - Abianda

Abianda works with girls and young women affected by gangs and county lines, and the professionals who support them, to bring about a culture shift in the way services are delivered to these girls and young women. So, its EDP project – training and providing professional development programmes to the professionals who work with young women and girls – helps them to continue achieving their mission. Through the EDP, Abianda has designed accredited training modules and has developed its online training offer further.

“My hopes for our Enterprise activity are 1) bring about a culture shift in the ways professionals think and work with young women affected by gangs and county lines 2) increase financial resilience for Abianda 3) when we are fully resilient and start to generate surplus, directing that in any way we see fit.” - Abianda employee



Acknowledgements

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If you want to learn more about the EDP cohort and their enterprise development project, head to our Methodology section on [our website](#).

The Team



DR JO HICKMAN-DUNNE

Jo is Project Manager and lead for the College's work on youth voice. She is the main author of this report. Jo was instrumental in designing our research approach and gathering insights.



SOIZIC HAGÈGE

Soizic is the College's Enterprise Development Manager and leads the Youth strand of the Enterprise Development Programme. She is the co-author of this report and co-conducted case studies with Jo. She is also a Project Manager and Equity Specialist at the College.



BETHIA MCNEIL

Bethia is the College's Chief Executive, and has been with the Centre for Youth Impact - now part of YMCA George Williams College - since its launch in September 2014. She provided key feedback for this report, along with the introduction.



ANNA HAMILOS

Anna is the College's Head of Engagement. Anna provided guidance and feedback on the report's structure, along with advising on how to best share this knowledge with our network.



HANNAH WARSAME

Hannah is the College's Communications Manager and has designed this brief, along with advising our team on Communications and Marketing as it relates to this research.

We also want to thank Sope Otulana, who in her time as Director of Programmes provided important guidance on this research, and SIB for the pictures included in this report.