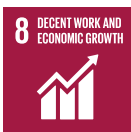




November 2023

Youth Social Action in Communities



Proudly supporting youth social action



Department for Culture, Media & Sport



UK COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

Challenges young people are experiencing

The 21st century has brought with it many challenges for young people in the UK.

Young people are having to navigate their way through the climate emergency, financial crises, advancement of social platforms and technological change, the aftermath of a global pandemic and international conflicts.

While opportunities have developed through digital innovations, bringing communities of all kinds together, social and geographical inequalities have also remained at the surface.

Issues like digital exclusion, food poverty and poor mental health are just some of the barriers affecting young people in the UK today.

Young People Matter

The national picture

- In 2018[1], research showed that one in five children provided some level of care for relatives, mostly of secondary school age.
- According to Action for Children[2], about three in ten children are currently living in low-income households, with 4.2 million children in the UK now living in poverty.
- During the pandemic, young people reported feeling a loss of motivation, increased levels of anxiety and loneliness, with 87% of young respondents saying they had felt isolated in the pandemic, according to a 2021 survey[3].
- Between 2017 and 2021[4], the proportion of children and young people with possible eating problems more than doubled, from 6.7% to 13.0%, in 11 to 16 year olds.
- Between 2018 and 2022, the number of children looked after in England rose 9% from 75,360 to 82,170.



Young voices at a community level

Youth social action involves activities such as campaigning, fundraising and volunteering, all of which enable young people to make a positive difference in their communities as well as develop their own confidence, skills and knowledge.

Activities can range from taking part in school peer-led groups, volunteering in social care settings, joining beach clean-ups, attending local council meetings, acting as a mentor for others, and much more!

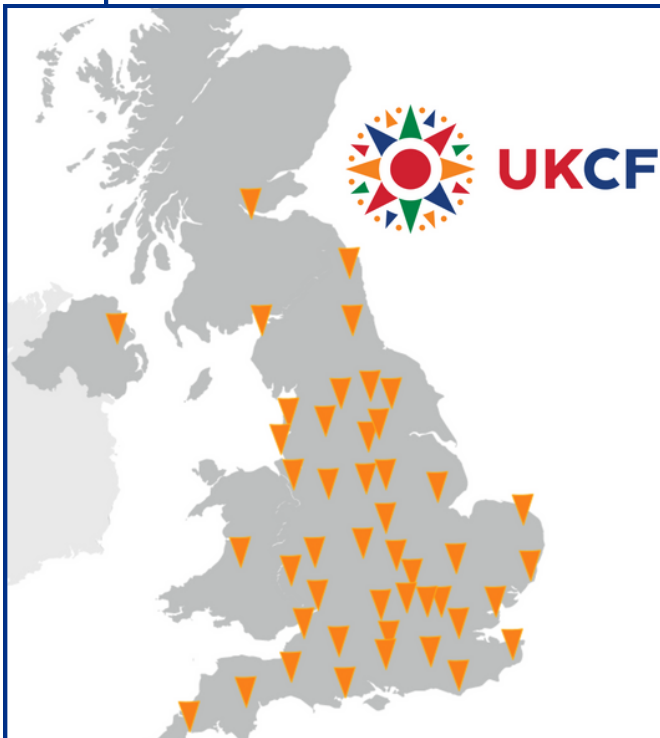
Small charities and voluntary organisations situated around the UK are often run by people in the community who have experienced the issues they are supporting. Many of these grassroots organisations work with – and are often led by – young people who want to create meaningful opportunities and make a difference to their communities.

The work of UK Community Foundations

There are community foundations working in all regions and nations throughout the UK, connecting those who want to give locally with causes that matter. This is done by providing place-based funding and resources to charities and voluntary organisations that enable them to continue important work of various types.

Altogether, there are 47 accredited community foundations in the UK Community Foundations (UKCF) network, and four additional overseas members, all dedicated to the places they serve. Collectively, community foundations have a reach into every postcode in the UK.

Donors, whether locally or nationally based, are able to use the expertise and connections of community foundations to effect local action on a national scale. They can do this by either working directly with their local community foundation or by partnering with UKCF which manages larger-scale programmes and network development.



What is the #iwill movement and #iwill Fund?

The #iwill movement is a collaboration of over 1000 cross-sector organisations and over 300 young ambassadors across the UK. They are united by a shared belief that all children and young people should be supported and empowered to make a positive difference on the issues that affect their lives, their communities and broader society.

The #iwill Fund is a part of the broader #iwill movement. It has been made possible thanks to a £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.

By bringing together funders from across different sectors and by making sure young people have a say in where the funding goes, the #iwill Fund is taking a collaborative approach. It is designed to give young people the chance to lead change and make a positive contribution to their communities.



- [1] <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/news/news-items/news/1718/child-carers.aspx>
- [2] <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/support-us/campaign-with-us/child-poverty/>
- [3] <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/355gyqcd/coronavirus-report-summer-2020-final.pdf>
- [4] <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

Collaborating to support youth social action

UKCF became a partner of the #iwill Fund in 2015, (then called the 'Youth Social Action Fund'). The match-funding pilot was launched in England to understand and learn more about how support for groups working in the field of youth social action can impact young people and their communities.

At the time, East England was shown to have the lowest youth social action rates in the UK, with only 25% social action from young people compared to a national rate of 40%. £255,000 was therefore directed towards communities in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

The aim was to increase the social participation of young people between 10 and 20 years old in East England from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The following year, through match funding, community foundations were able to distribute a further £255,000 to communities in the same region.

Over 120 organisations in total successfully ran youth social action projects through the pilot scheme.

In 2017, the #iwill Fund awarded UKCF with £2 million, followed by a further £2 million in 2018. Community foundations were able to raise the total amount to £7.9 million with match funding, thanks to the generosity of businesses, donors and local authorities.

This enabled 1,306 grants to be made to local charities and voluntary organisations throughout England. There was a high demand from community groups and charities either led by or working with young people, with more than twice the amount of fundable applications subscribing.

43 community foundations were involved in this round. 90% of young participants shared that they would like to take part in youth social action again.

Young Voices in Action

Project spotlight

Turtle Dove works with young women (between 14 and 24 years old) in Cambridge who may have experienced various issues such as economic deprivation, social isolation, mental health issues, housing and homelessness issues and a lack of educational attainment.

With funding, Turtle Dove was able to support 15 women to plan, deliver and review intergenerational social community events and workshops. From taking part in the projects, the young women reportedly improved their employability skills such as communication and problem solving, built their independence and gained valuable work experience.

This, in turn, reportedly improved the social inclusion and mental health of the older people involved in the activities.



#iwill Fund grantee:

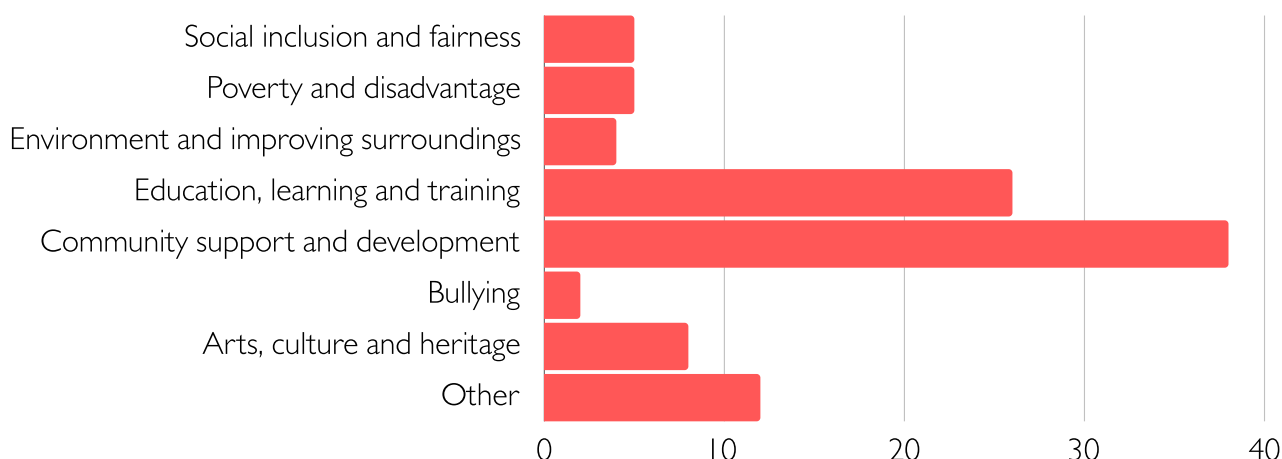
“Engaging young people in being part of their community and other social action themes have always been part of our youth work.

So, applying for #iwill funding was a natural next step to help us organise this and develop what we did with young people.”

In the 2019-2020 programme, with match funding a key factor to supporting communities far and wide, UK Community Foundations distributed over £3.6 million to 568 groups throughout England all engaged in youth social action.

Over 50,000 people were reported to have benefited from youth social action projects in 2019 and 2020!

Types of activities (percentage)



Projects included

Academic support | opportunities in sports volunteering for young persons with disabilities | building youth councils | improving relationships with older community members | environmental projects | youth club sessions | peer mentoring | organising community events | developing radio and broadcasting skills | marketing workshops involving zine publishing and publishing hubs | supporting young refugees and asylum seekers to work with older refugees | running leadership programmes | building gardening skills | running a youth café | running music events | volunteering at universities | volunteering at hospices.

#iwill Fund grantee:

“The young people thought of an area in the community they wanted to change - social or environmental. They then developed their own project focusing on the change they wanted to make.

They planned it, fundraised, marketed, promoted and presented their idea to a ‘Dragon’s Den’ style panel in order to gain a slice of the funding pot. And most importantly, they carried out their projects and saw the impact they made on their community.”

Project outcomes

Supporting community development and social inclusion | improving educational and employability skills | supporting physical and mental health | increasing engagement in arts and sports | raising awareness around tackling bullying, crime, domestic and sexual abuse | providing advice and inclusive activities for young people experiencing poverty or homelessness | supporting young carers and young persons with disabilities via training and acting against discrimination | protecting the environment within communities | having fun and making friends!

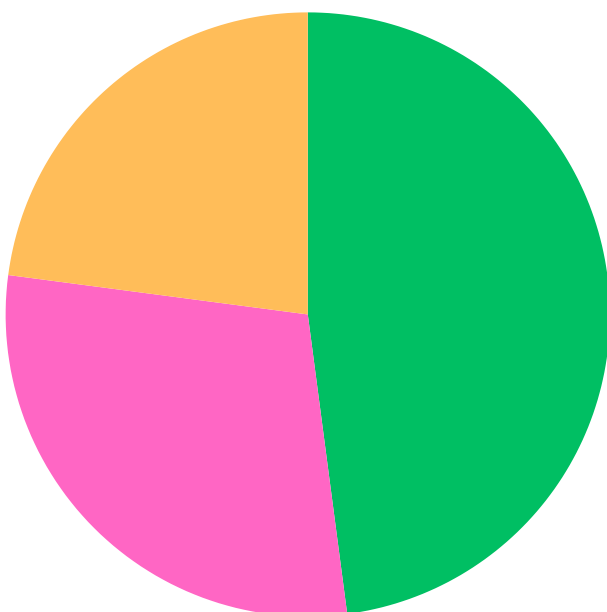
Project spotlight

Jason* was released from his college course after he failed to regularly attend his course. This was because he was affected by anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. The Mustard Tree Foundation, based in Reading, matched Jason with a mentor who supported him to attend its 'get involved' session.

Prior to this, Jason had communicated he wasn't ready for volunteering or even to continue in mentoring. However, after attending the social groups, his confidence and self-belief dramatically grew. He was inspired to the point of volunteering at a local charity shop. At the next social group, he shared his journey with his peers. **Name has been changed*

Age groups of young people taking part in 2019-2020

■ 10-14 year olds ■ 15-17 year olds
■ 18-20 year olds



Project spotlight

Staff at Leeds Community Foundation took a group of donors from Leeds to CATCH (a youth space run by young people) to engage with those delivering the services.

“The donors just loved it and were blown away. They could not believe the positive impact CATCH was having on these young people, who were really enthusiastic in showing off their work.

This engagement was a positive experience, having all of these business people come out to them and listen to their stories. The young people felt validated in their experiences by this method of engagement.”

What did young people say?

Supported groups fed back in a survey (593 responses) in 2019 on the difference grants made to young people. Here are some of the responses:

12-year-old service user:

"I gave a voice from the Traveller community and told MPs my experience from school. Hopefully it will help schools and teachers in the future make life at school better for Travellers."

16-year-old service user:

"I learned that I am able to talk in front of people without being judged."

11-year-old service user:

"I learned to be a better listener when listening to others, to make what we do better."



17-year-old service user:

"Hopefully it will stop young people becoming homeless in the future."

14-year-old service user:

"People learned new things and pushed their own boundaries."

17-year-old service user:

"I learned how to have a clear judgement when it comes to how someone expresses their own sexuality."

Creating meaningful opportunities to develop young community champions

UK Community Foundations remains an active #iwill Fund partner, continuing to support youth social action at a community level around the country with its 2022-2024 programme.

Participating community foundations have seen a huge impact at a local level, proving how place-based funding can help to empower young people in their communities. Environmental, socio-economic and health-related inequalities continue to affect young people all over the UK.

However, the participation levels of the fund, year after year, have proven there are champions in every community ready to tackle these challenges and take social action at an early age.

Many funded groups throughout the #iwill Fund programme have fed back that young people have gained a better understanding of the needs of their communities. This has resulted in some participants generating and implementing their own ideas to help others.

Young Champions of the Future

What groups had to say

“They started coming up with their own ideas as to how to help the community, as shown in them running the Pop Up Café to provide afternoon tea for people who had helped their community through the pandemic.”

“One young person was so inspired by the experience that they returned to college, having previously been NEET (not in education, employment or training). They are now at university studying film production, largely inspired by this project.”

“One of the young people that has been regularly volunteering since July (with his mum) has just got his first job. He was able to use his volunteering activities on his CV.”

“A young lad, who had been supported by us due to his county lines exploitation, gained support through the court system to the extent that the court recognised his case was severe modern slavery. He was acquitted and he trained as a mentor with us and now delivers sessions to young people about exploitation and county lines.”



Taking lessons into the future

Whether taking part in youth panels, school committees, community projects or volunteering opportunities, young people have a meaningful role to play in society's future. Here are some key learnings while UK Community Foundations continues to deliver the #iwill Fund:

#iwill movement:

“Organisations will benefit from your energy, ideas and capacity to create positive change. You have a different perspective that can shift their way of thinking and open up new ways of working.

Communities benefit when you feel valued, engaged and involved. It can create a greater sense of community and boost social cohesion and integration.”

1. Think beyond the fund's lifetime and support groups with long-term planning.

“This project has highlighted the need for future female only programmes in the area as unfortunately, many of these young participants have come from broken and disadvantaged backgrounds.” *#iwill Fund grantee*

2. Encourage the support of young people's families and networks to increase community advocacy.

“The project has made us think more about radical campaigning and how we amplify voices amongst young people.” *#iwill Fund grantee*

3. Be flexible and responsive to feedback in order to deliver a fund that allows for meaningful development.

“Increased empowerment amongst young people was achieved through the setting up of structures that could really kind of push the young people's point of view across and empower them to take things forward.” *Community foundation feedback*

4. Listen and involve young people from the beginning to the end. Don't simply 'prescribe' services and activities to them.

“[The programme] has helped our staff and volunteers to practice relinquishing control and consulting more closely with young people, establishing them as the experts on the project and developing their 'youth voice' and leadership skills.” *#iwill Fund grantee*

5. Take into account the social environment young people are experiencing – such as the pandemic, exams, wars, climate events, social inequality – that can significantly affect their mental health.

“There were challenges with digital exclusion, especially for some of the children that [grant applicants] were looking to support. Digital exclusion is particularly challenging in more rural areas where internet broadband is significantly less reliable.” *Community foundation feedback*

Thank you!

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youth social action



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Thank you to The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for investing seed money into the #iwill Fund and enabling funders like UKCF to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.

We are thrilled to be acting as a match funder – making the fund go even further – and will continue to evaluate and share learnings provided by participating communities.

We would also like to extend our thanks to:



All of the community foundations involved over the years, using their knowledge and place-based expertise to deliver successful programmes of support into the heart of their regions.



The community organisations and groups that play an integral role in improving youth social action in communities and putting young lives at the centre of their work.



The fantastic, driven, change-making young people who are making a difference in communities all over the UK.

To learn more about youth social action, visit www.iwill.org.uk.

To get in touch with UK Community Foundations about supporting important work in communities, please email Partnerships@ukcommunityfoundations.org

