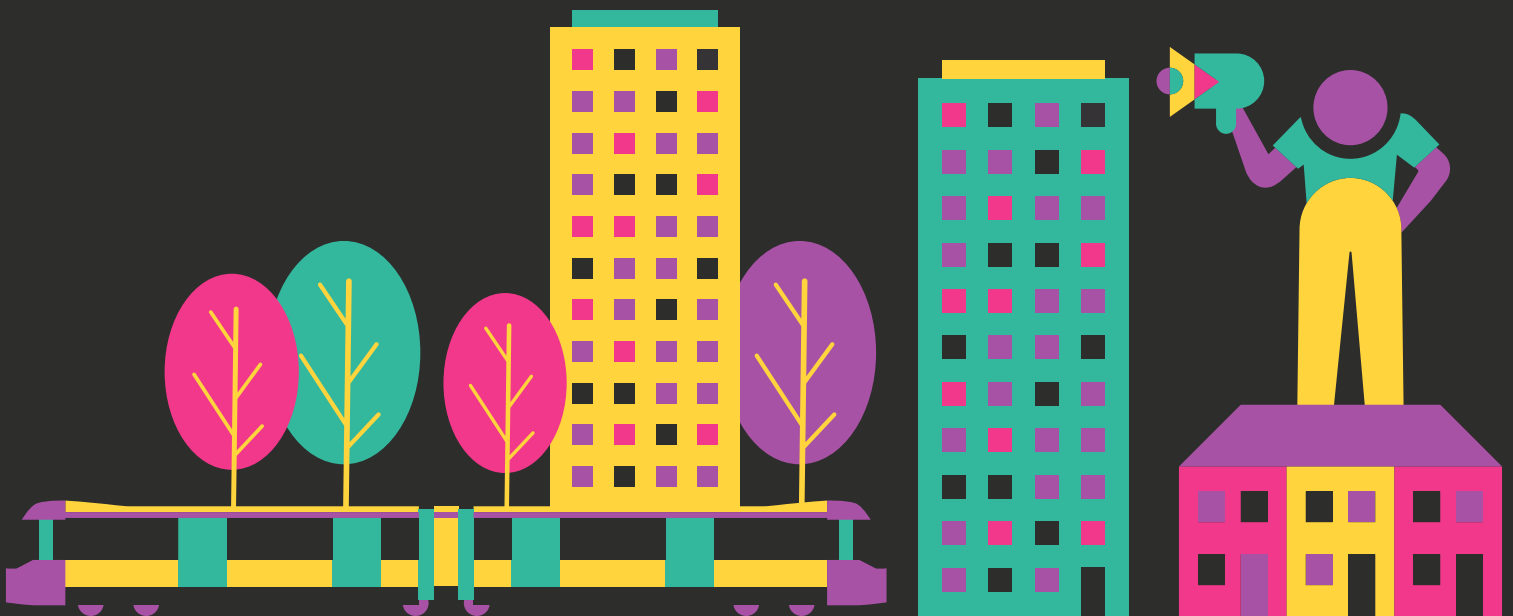




Sharing Power in a Place

An investigation into whether the socio-economic gap in youth social action participation has been reflected in Manchester and how we put power into its young people's hands



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Introduction

The Young Manchester Youth and Play Fund was designed to provide high quality universal open access youth and play provision for children and young people across Manchester. With investment from the #iwill Fund and match funding from Manchester City Council and Curious Minds, this funding also set out to embed outstanding opportunities for youth social action across this provision, creating a place where this is the norm for all - our City of Social Action.



We set out to build a strong foundation and platform of youth and play provision that would attract and enable continued growth and investment in our sector.

A total investment of £7.6 million was made through the Youth and Play Funds 2018–2022, placing children and young people’s voice and experience at the heart of service in communities across the city.

In our prospectus, we defined what we’re looking for when we say youth social action, stating that:



Youth social action refers to activities that young people do to make a positive difference to others or to their community. There are lots of ways in which young people can take action to make a positive difference. These could include but are not limited to:

- volunteering in their communities
- fundraising for local or global causes
- campaigning on issues that matter to them, like taking action on climate
- supporting peers
- getting involved in youth leadership”

This paper aims to explore:

- the benefit of youth social action to Manchester communities
- if the socio-economic gap in youth social action participation has been reflected in Manchester

We are investigating the hypothesis that:

Taking a place-based approach to resourcing and delivering youth social action opportunities can reduce the socio-economic gap in youth social action participation.

This report is complementary to **the existing evaluation of the Youth & Play Fund**, conducted by the Manchester Centre for Youth Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University.



Methodology

In support of our vision of a Manchester with outstanding opportunities for all children and young people, we have a membership offer to strengthen, connect and champion the incredible organisations and leaders of all ages. The results from our Annual Member Survey provided more context into the proportion of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds who take part in social action.

Out of the members that participated, almost half estimated that at least 81% of children and young people that they support to take part in youth social action are from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Desk-based analysis of the monitoring forms and data from both our Youth and Play Fund and the Annual Member Survey indicates that there is a need for an investigation into whether taking a place-based approach to resourcing and delivering youth social action opportunities can reduce the socio-economic gap in youth social action participation.

We met with youth workers, chief executive officers and practitioners working within the organisations and partnerships funded by the Youth & Play Fund.

This resulted in twelve 45-minute interviews, with 14 participants, to learn from those who best understand the methods that may be particularly effective, ineffective or even a deterrent to engaging young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. We also took this as an opportunity to fill in the gaps in our data regarding socio-economic background.

In our evaluation of our youth-led grantmaking, we reviewed young panellists’ evaluations of the process and met with the project manager to gain their feedback. This provided insight into how this process has adapted across the lifespan of Young Manchester and what young people benefit from the most.

We brought to light the impact of youth social action through a young person’s lens during our youth-led evaluations. An analysis of young people’s reflections and evaluations of their own social action projects allowed us to further understand the need for involving young people in the funding process.



The Wards of Manchester



The Wards of Manchester

To better aid an understanding of the city for those who live outside it, we have provided the wards of Manchester and defined where we mean when we refer to different parts of the city. We have also given more context into where the grantees of the Youth & Play Fund deliver:

Central Manchester

Longsight, Moss Side, Ardwick, Levenshulme, Rusholme, Hulme, Piccadilly, Deansgate

Young Manchester, 42nd Street, HOME and The Proud Trust are based in Central Manchester but deliver city-wide youth and play provision.

Central includes the A6 partnership working across Longsight, Levenshulme and Ardwick, and Moss Side Millennium Powerhouse.

North Manchester:

Harpurhey, Cheetham, Higher Blackley, Charlestown, Crumpsall, Moston

The North Partnership is based in and delivers youth and play provision in North Manchester.

East Manchester:

Clayton & Openshaw, Miles Platting & Newton Heath, Gorton & Abbey Hey, Ancoats & Beswick

The East Manchester Youth & Play Partnership is based in and delivers youth and play provision across East Manchester.

South Manchester:

Burnage, Whalley Range, Chorlton Park, Old Moat, Fallowfield, Didsbury East, Chorlton, Withington, Didsbury West

Community On Solid Ground, Old Moat Youth Outreach Project, Whalley Range Youth Opportunities Association and Barlow Moor Community Association are based in and deliver youth and play provision throughout South Manchester.

Wythenshawe

Sharston, Woodhouse Park, Baguley, Northenden, Brooklands

Wythenshawe Community Housing Group and Manchester Young Lives are based in Wythenshawe and work in partnership with other to deliver youth and play activities across the area.

Due to its shape, there are no parts of the city of Manchester that are referred to as the west. Manchester covers more land in latitude, North-to-South, than longitudinally, East-to-West, and what we refer to as the city centre or central Manchester is west of its true centre.

Section A:

Closing the Socio-Economic Gap in Manchester

Background

The National Youth Social Action survey has consistently shown that young people from lower-socio economic backgrounds are significantly less likely to be taking part in meaningful youth social action than their more affluent peers – ‘the socio-economic gap’. The latest findings, published in 2019, show that more affluent young people are 12% more likely to be taking part.

Our research for this report drew on the demographic data collected through the Youth and Play Fund, and sought to further build our understanding of the socio-economic background of those who participated in youth social action.

Through analysis of the monitoring reports and interviews with those funded, we’ve established that all social action opportunities recorded through the fund would be described as ‘meaningful’ (as defined in the National Youth Social Action survey). This means the young people:

- Participated in social action at least every few months, or did a one-off activity lasting more than a day in the last 12 months
- Recognised both a benefit to themselves and others or the environment because of their social action

Of the 12 organisations and partnerships that we interviewed, nine had collected data on the socio-economic background of their young people – most using Free School Meals or postcode data as a proxy. This revealed that 97% of the young people participating in social action were from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

This is not surprising, given the demographics of the areas the partnerships serve in Manchester, but suggests that if we wish to close the national socio-economic gap in social action participation, investing in embedding social action in place-based universal youth and play provision may be a solution.

In addition to data gaps on socio-economic participation, there were differences in the story being told by the sets of data and narrative reports provided by our grantees. Through quantitative data – numbers and figures, many reported that a low percentage of their young people took part in social action. Whereas, in qualitative data, through words, stories and case studies, they reported that many of their young people volunteered, led projects and had decision-making roles within their teams. This shows us that across the grantees, there were different interpretations of what classifies as youth social action – but why could this be?



‘Good youth work is social action’

– a practitioner working in South Manchester

When speaking to youth workers across Manchester, many said that their line of work is about ‘responding to local needs’. The term ‘youth work’ was often used but ‘youth social action’ wasn’t as common. Those who were early into their career were more likely to use the phrase ‘social action’ but generally, youth workers called their work what it is – youth work.

One practitioner who had a longer history in this line of work, was quite passionate about how interchangeable ‘youth work’ and ‘social action’ are in practice – ‘good youth work is social action’ they said. However, they claimed that the former feels really informal, almost playful, whereas, the latter has the connotation of something formal and that it can suggest that a piece of work must be quite structured and planned, or have a large impact in order to qualify. We feel that it’s likely that this connotation might be the cause of the underreporting of social action.

There is a great desire for more funders to recognise the value and strengths of youth voice that is embedded within more informal youth work.

Several youth workers expressed the difficulties in bidding for and winning funding due to how many funders focus on supporting new and thoroughly planned youth social action projects, rather than helping organisations maintain their current programmes and develop their ability to build their capacity for new projects through additional staff and in many cases, buildings. This supports our hypothesis that taking a place-based approach supports the engagement of young people where they are, like accessing their regular youth clubs.

Given that most of the organisations we fund both work and are based in deprived areas, it was no surprise to us that these were the opinions of those we interviewed. When the most important needs for your young people – being and feeling safe – aren't being met, it's difficult to give time to dedicated projects, especially when you're working in the same environment that is causing these issues.

There is a need for **'friendly funders like Young Manchester'** as one interviewee said – organisations who see the value and impact of social action beyond organised programmes and measurable indicators. Young Manchester strives to consistently be a friendly funder and we recommend that other funders do too.

'Young people are hungry to make a change where they live'

- a youth worker in the North Partnership

In Manchester, circumstances and pressures in young people's lives can lead them to make choices that can have a positive or negative impact on their community. The empowerment that comes from making a positive impact often develops an appetite for creating more change in both the young person's life and in their local community.

Many youth workers spoke about the benefits of finding social action opportunities for children. Getting young people involved in volunteering at an early age means that they are more likely to become a volunteer in adulthood – often, this is at the same youth centre that they grew up going to. Young people want to give back to the communities that helped them. Finding development opportunities, time for peer mentoring for example, can have a large influence on young people's outcomes.



In the A6 Partnership, having older youth lead sessions for younger youth increases their exposure to what volunteering looks like and makes it more likely for them to see themselves volunteering into later life.

Community On Solid Ground has many staff who are young-people-turned-youth-workers. Most benefitted from the organisation's programmes in Whalley Range as a child or young person and then returned, as an adult, to volunteer or work at Community on Solid Ground to give back to their community.

Place-based social action means that there is a 'buy-in' for young people from that particular place. They know the needs of the place that they live in and this could be as small-scale as the street that they live on or as large as their city. Young people have to care about what happens to their area because it has a direct effect on them.

There is so much value in having young people at the forefront of tackling issues that they contribute to. The embodied cultural capital – the knowledge gained from living, interacting and engaging with others within a place – of a young person working to improve their local community is much more valuable than that of an outsider. In our experience, that high level understanding of the needs of the community can help overcome the barriers to engagement. But in order to do that, there must be trust between the young people and the practitioners.

Young people who are given the freedom to shape their area often get to be a part of fixing the issues that they perpetuate. From street-based detached youth work, some of the most impactful social action can arise. There is power in **'finding opportunities for young people to take ownership of their community'** as a sessional youth worker said.

In one example of this, young people from North Manchester spoke to a detached youth worker about how their bikes were being stolen and shared that they were also stealing bikes. The resulting work was a campaign about bike safety led and shaped by young people closest to the problem.

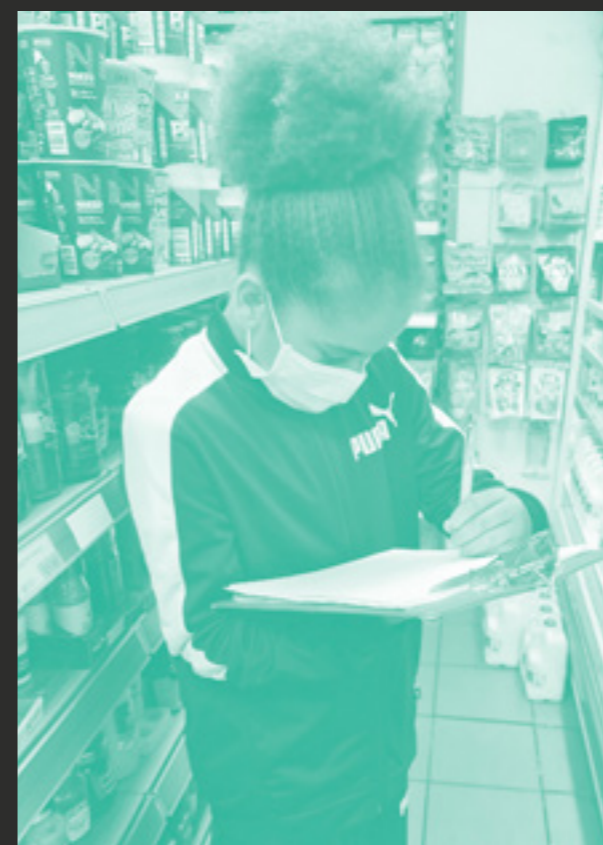
Barriers to engagement

In support of our vision of a Manchester with outstanding opportunities for all children and young people, we have a membership offer to strengthen, connect and champion the incredible organisations and leaders of all ages. The results from our Annual Member Survey provided more context into the proportion of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds who take part in social action.

Out of the members that participated (not all of whom were supported by the Young Manchester Youth & Play Fund), almost half estimated that at least 81% of children and young people that they support to take part in youth social action are from low socio-economic backgrounds. This shows that even outside of the organisations funded by the Youth & Play Fund, our members aim to bridge the socio-economic gap in youth social action participation.

Young people from low socio-economic backgrounds feel more pressure in their daily lives and often, take up adult responsibilities to manage competing needs. In order to meaningfully engage with these young people, we have to address the additional barriers. Otherwise, it is difficult to engage with young people who aren't self-selecting.

Our members have identified some of the additional challenges faced when engaging with young people from low socio-economic backgrounds:



Physical barriers:

- Using public transport costs money and time!
- A lack of any dedicated youth spaces in the community often means that young people heavily rely on youth spaces.
- Little to no access to opportunities in the city centre. This can make it difficult for young people to see themselves belonging in that community.
- Finding staff with the right experience to work with young people with additional needs
- Having the resources to meet the demand. Youth clubs are often reaching capacity and are forced to close their doors to any other young people wanting access to their provision.

Emotional barriers:

- Young people have bigger needs and more support outside the programmes. When their physiological needs aren't being met, e.g. consistently having food and shelter, their ability to engage with a project dwindles.
- Young people from deprived areas tend to have a lack of self-confidence and belief in one's ability to do good, that they can have an impact on their community.
- When under financial pressures, the 'right' balance between working life and volunteering can look very different for young people from deprived areas.
- Young people's confidence in taking public transport – especially as it can be quite difficult to travel between neighbouring wards given the lack of infrastructure outside Manchester City Centre.

Many of these are amplified when doing detached work because fewer factors are within the youth worker's control.

A few of our interviewees pointed out that during winter, delivering street-based detached youth work becomes increasingly difficult. This is often because there is less space available in youth centres as the need for hot meals and warm spaces rises in the colder weather. Meeting these community needs requires more staff and time so there is less capacity to do detached work and engage with the young people who are most excluded.

'Some young people find it really difficult to see themselves making a change because they can't make change in their own lives.'

- a youth worker in the A6 Partnership

Practical ways to engage with young people

How can place-based partnerships provide solutions?

Through our interviews, we have found some ways to overcome the barriers to engagement so that young people from low socio-economic backgrounds can participate in youth social action.

Be local:

- Work directly in local communities for local communities. The first step to having generational trust is visibility!
- Be aware of how the conditions your area affects your young people. For example, being in an area where there are very few street lights can make young people concerned about their safety and reduces the chance that they'll attend afternoon or evening provision.
- Strengthen partnerships with local organisations providing different services. This allows young people to get additional support for experts in their area.
- Share resources across your local partnerships. For example, the East Manchester Youth & Play Partnership shares vans and minibuses so that they can all take their young people on trips.



Be youth-led:

- Find opportunities for young people to take ownership of solutions to issues that their community faces. Create activities and programmes that appeal to the needs of the community.

- Find time to debrief with young people. This time for quick reflections soon after completing parts of their work allows them to more easily see the benefits of their social action.

- Engage and consult with young people so they can design programmes that they want to be a part of.

Be holistic:

- Provide meaningful opportunities for younger young people to get involved in social action. The A6 Partnership finds supporting older young people to lead sessions for younger young people to be really rewarding for both groups.

- Make your programmes accessible by arranging travel and providing hot food for attendees.

- Engage with families as young people do not exist in isolation. This allows you to better understand the barriers faced by each young person and work collaboratively with their legal guardians to overcome them.

- Find opportunities to have fun. Often, young people from deprived areas have less time to just be children. Give them that time.

'Place-based partnerships don't work in isolation.'

- a youth worker in the East Manchester Youth & Play Partnership

Across the city of Manchester, Youth workers operating are finding so much value in place-based partnerships. When faced with the lack of infrastructure in supporting young people from deprived areas to thrive, sharing resources and learning with organisations who understand, has unlocked access to opportunities.

Through place-based partnerships, we have a greater understanding of the assets that young people bring and the challenges that they face. This means that we're able to shape programmes and services that meet the needs of that community for young people. Working directly with these young people, through detached work, can provide further insight into what problems young people are facing and how they would like to overcome them.

A place-based partnership allows organisations to access young people through a stepping-stone approach, meeting young people where they are. We're able to refer young people who need additional support directly onto programmes to meet that need. We have more time to build relationships with parents and community leaders so we're not just working with young people in isolation.

Place-based partnerships also support the structure of the organisations within them. In South Manchester, staff are often shared between organisations to ensure that there is time to reach those who need the most help. This allows us to maintain the relationships between young people and trusted adults too.

When we say that place-based partnerships don't work in isolation, we mean that having infrastructure support is vital to keep partnerships going. Young Manchester has the privilege of being that support, by being the bridge between local organisations and national funding programmes in Manchester. This enables organisations to engage with and access this funding.



Section B:

Involving Young People in the Funding Process

Young Manchester commits to putting power into the hands of children and young people in Manchester. Towards the end of 2022, we boldly put this into practice with the appointment of a young person as our new co-CEO.

As a funder, we wanted to identify best practices when involving young people in the funding process. By sharing our learning, we aim to improve our methods of sharing power in funding and give space for other funders to do the same.

Part 1:

Youth-led Grant-making

Since Young Manchester started, young people have been increasingly involved in the grant-making process for funds. Since 2020, every funding decision made has been made in partnership with young people.



Timeline

Year	Active Fund(s)
2018	– Youth & Play Fund
2019	– Youth & Play Fund – Keeping Children and Young People Safe / Embedding YSA in Community Safety – Thrive – Mental Health Funding
2020	– Youth & Play Fund – Keeping Children and Young People Safe / Embedding YSA in Community Safety – Thrive – Mental Health Funding
2021	– Youth & Play Fund – Keeping Children and Young People Safe / Embedding YSA in Community Safety – City of Social Action Grants for Young People – COVID Recovery Fund – New Mental Health Fund
2022	– Youth & Play Fund – City of Social Action Grants for Young People – COVID Recovery Fund – New Mental Health Fund – Send Inclusive Activities Fund
2023	– City of Social Action Grants for Young People – New Mental Health Fund – Send Inclusive Activities Fund

All of these funds have youth voice embedded within them. In 2020, we began championing youth-led grantmaking processes to make sure that young people are at the centre of each fund. Since then, all our funds have been youth-led and we are regularly evaluating these processes to ensure we put power in the hands of young people.

This is the most up-to-date model we use in our youth-led grantmaking.



‘Learn and adapt as you go’

– **project manager at Young Manchester**

Here is what we’ve learned from young people and facilitators about embedding youth voice in our youth-led grantmaking:

Working with the right people:

- **Recognise the limitations of engaging with self-selecting young people.**
- **Engage with young people who do not usually take part in decision-making.**
- **Work in partnership with local organisations with the right expertise.**
- **Engage with young people’s lived experience. We did this through the SEND Inclusive Activities Fund and plan to do this more often!**
- **Avoid relying on the same young people across your grantmaking. It’s important that your young panellists are representative of those that the fund supports and that you call on young people with different levels of experience.**

Training and support:

- **Embed training, support and scaffolding throughout the process to help young people feel confident and informed before making decisions.**
- **Build trusted relationships with the young people you work with. Young people’s engagement is so much more meaningful when they have a trusted adult that they can lean on if needed.**
- **Paint a picture for your young people. In our experience, young panel members can be harsher critics than adults, so it’s often useful to provide context about our expectations as funders about costs and how far budgets can go.**

The process:

- **Build in flexibility so you can learn and adapt throughout the process.**
- **Develop feedback loops with your young people so they know that their thoughts are being listened to and acted upon.**
- **Advocate for accessibility in your choices. For example, we’ve asked for applicants to provide information in plain and accessible words, and limited word counts to make it more digestible for our young people.**
- **Ask young people what their appetite for involvement is. Don’t make assumptions about young people’s capacity for engaging with the grantmaking processes.**
- **Share power at every stage. From designing and choosing the criteria for funds to deciding**

which organisations receive the grants, young people want to be heard.

– **Pay young people for their time and expertise. If you would pay an adult professional for this work, don’t ask young people to volunteer.**

– **Don’t be afraid of taking risks!**

We’re all on a journey of embedding youth participation into our practice. The most important part is reflecting and sharing our learning across our partnerships and through our networks so we can all grow together.

Part 2:

Youth-led Evaluations

As part of this evaluation we sought to equip young people with the skills and resources to find out what the short and medium term impact their social action has had on the communities they hoped it would benefit.

Through our Young Evaluators grant, we aimed to:

- **Empower and equip young people to reflect on and evaluate the impact of their own social action projects.**
- **Discover the impact of youth social action on the young people that have taken part.**
- **Determine the impact of youth social action on the communities it intends to benefit.**

For organisations wanting to do the same, we recommend that you provide a toolkit using resources created by organisations throughout your network. The Centre for Youth Impact has lots of learning materials about doing evaluations with young people that are shared freely. Using their resources to develop a toolkit for our young evaluators is a great example of the value of working with organisations with expertise.

One challenge faced by the young evaluators was measuring the community benefit of their social action projects. Our measures of success are typically slow, which makes it difficult to measure in the short term. However, what was clear is that producing community benefit motivates young people to take part in youth social action.

Young people want to know what is happening in their local community and how it affects them. They want their voices to be heard and their feedback to be acted upon.

You can watch the [documentary](#) that Barlow Moor Community Association’s young people produced in a youth-led evaluation of their social action.

Conclusion

Interviewing those who understand what it's like delivering youth and play provision gave insight into the effective ways to engage with young people from deprived areas. Putting more power into communities should include trusting the local organisations' methods of delivery. The Young Manchester Youth and Play Fund has helped close the socio-economic gap in youth social action in Manchester. Our members attribute this to the partnerships that we support across the city.

Involving young people in the funding process requires flexibility and time for evaluation, and young people want to take ownership of their communities. We believe it's important to shape these opportunities with young people to ensure that the right support is available. Our partnerships have allowed us to reach the most excluded young people and get them involved in grant-making and evaluation. Equip young people with the skills, resources and support to feel confident and able to participate in the funding process.

Our solutions are found when we work in partnership with those who are closest to the problem.

Recommendations

From our research, this is our advice for organisations working to provide outstanding opportunities for youth social action in youth and play provision for children and young people, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds:

– Create space for learning and adapting

Be empowered to make bold decisions as you can share your learning and develop your practices.

– Value and appreciate play

Challenge yourself and those around you to invest into the need for children to simply be children.

– Build systems that support

Work collaboratively and lean on others' expertise whether you're working within partnerships or directly with young people.

– Share power at every stage

Amplify the voices of those who know their community the best.

All 14 interviewees, working across the city of Manchester, were highly in favour of place-based partnerships and supported our hypothesis. We encourage organisations to adopt place-based partnerships to help share power in their place.



About the Author

Claire Muhlawako Madzura is an 18-year-old changemaker based in Manchester.

She has been an ambassador for the #iwill Movement since 2019 and a beneficiary of #iwill-funded projects since she was a child. Claire has been evaluating how youth voice has been integrated in projects across the #iwill Fund with The Centre for Youth Impact, and how we can strengthen partnerships within the #iwill Power Of Youth Charter with the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR).

Claire hopes that this evaluation will encourage more organisations to commit to place-based partnerships and bring about more investment into the socio-economically deprived areas of her city.

Appendices

Appendix A: Annual Member Survey

The answers to these questions from our Annual Member Survey have been used to inform this report:

Please estimate the percentage of children and young people you support who are from low-socio economic backgrounds.

Why do you think young people take part in youth social action activities?

What do you do to overcome barriers & successfully engage these young people to take part in social action?

Appendix B: Interviews

These are the questions used in our interviews with the grantees of the Youth & Play Fund:

1. What were your favourite moments in planning or delivering the activities?
2. Can you estimate the number of young people who took part in social action?
3. Can you estimate the percentage of young people that took part in social action who are from low socio-economic backgrounds?
4. Which wards or areas of Manchester have you seen the most engagement from?
5. Are there any differences in engagement between wards or areas?
6. What have been the successes in engaging with young people from low socio-economic backgrounds in i) the recruitment phase? ii) participating across the project?
7. What were the challenges with working with young people from low socio-economic backgrounds in i) the recruitment phase? ii) participating across the project?
8. How were these challenges overcome?
9. What would you do better in the future?
10. Does working in a place-based partnership make it easier to engage with young people from low socio-economic backgrounds in youth social action?

Thank you to all the members who gave their time so that this report could be written:


- A6 Partnership (co-ordinated by M13 Youth Project)
- Barlow Moor Community Association
- Community on Solid Ground
- East Manchester Youth & Play Partnership (co-ordinated by 4CT)
- Groundwork
- HOME
- Moss Side Millennium Powerhouse
- North Partnership (co-ordinated by Manchester Youth Zone)
- Old Moat Youth Outreach Project
- The Proud Trust
- Wythenshawe Community Housing Group
- Whalley Range Youth Opportunities Association



City of Social Action

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