ESTABLISHING YOUTH VOICE

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Department for Culture, Media & Sport

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A note on authorship

This report was primarily drafted by Tom Burke, but draws on a participatory process and work led by Jo Hickman Dunne with Zunaira Mahmood. Together, with at points Tom Burke, they worked with a Young Evaluators Panel that shaped all aspects of the research project. Members of the Young Evaluators Panel were Alex van der Zyl, Amy Scott, Claire Muhlawako Madzura, Django Perks, Finlay Wyer, Harman Guraya, Kevin Hysenaj, Paige Keen and Rorey Scriven. The report is the output of a highly collaborative process with multiple contributors.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those who have shaped and steered this project. The report heavily - and explicitly - draws on the unique talents and views of a wide range of young people, practitioners and organisational leaders who attended workshops, shared evidence, took part in interviews or participated in focus groups.

We are particularly grateful to the Advisory Panel who reviewed earlier drafts of the findings.

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Across the course of the programme, we have been assisted by various colleagues across the youth sector. In no particular order, we are grateful to:

- Dame Julia Cleverdon for shaping the project and support with the data trawl;
- Holly Notcutt and the team at Volunteering Matters for support in reaching out through the #iwill Movement social media channels and sharing details of the project more widely;
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- Members of the #iwill Fund Impact Evaluation and Learning Contract Steering Group and of the #iwill Fund Match Funders Group who gave feedback on the project at various points of delivery.

How to guides

Six 'How to…' guides have been published alongside this report. The guides are based on learning generated through this evaluation, the views of young people engaged in the project and wider good practices.

Executive Summary

About Establishing Youth Voice

This is a summary of the final report from an evaluation of youth voice practices across three specific initiatives. The evaluation was commissioned by the National Lottery Community Fund and led by YMCA George Williams College. This summary, and the final report, are published alongside a series of six 'How to…' guides informed by the findings of the evaluation. All the project reports and guides can be found [here](#).

From 2021 to 2023, eight young evaluators worked with the evaluation team at the Centre for Youth Voice (part of YMCA George Williams College), to establish how youth voice is occurring in practice and the difference it makes across the three initiatives.

> Together, we sought to explore:
> 1. How has youth voice been happening in practice?
> 2. What has enabled or inhibited youth voice practice?
> 3. In what ways has youth voice practice impacted on: young people; funders; delivery organisations; communities?

Our evaluation focussed on three key initiatives for young people to be heard:

- **The #iwill Fund:** A £66 million joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that, together with a range of Match Funders, supports young people to access high quality social action opportunities.
- **The Young People in the Lead Advisory Panel:** Since 2020, 10 young people from a range of projects funded by The National Lottery Community Fund have steered and advised the organisation's broader work.
- **Youth Policy Development Group:** Since 2019, with support from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), up to 40 young people aged 16-25 from England have engaged with senior officials and Ministers from across Government.

What we did

We wanted to understand the stories that connect evidence from the three initiatives to likely outcomes and impacts. There have been multiple opportunities for practitioners, young people, academics and others to contribute to the evaluation:

- **Workshops:** to kick start the evaluation we consulted on the project design, key questions to explore and what types of outcomes to look for that may be associated with youth voice practice.
- **Data trawl:** we reviewed over 250 documents, such as monitoring and evaluation reports, and evidence submitted by practitioners and young people. We looked for what activities took place in different projects and programmes, any learning captured, and what outcomes and impacts were recorded.

- **Social inquiry:** we held 16 interviews and focus groups involving nearly 50 representatives from #iwill Fund Match Funders, delivery organisations and young people engaged across the three initiatives.
- **Advisory panel:** A group of 13 practitioners and researchers with expertise in youth voice met twice to check the quality and robustness of our emergent results.
- **Outcomes summit:** we ran a one-day workshop with 70 people from #iwill Fund Match Funders and delivery organisations, young people, academics and other youth voice practitioners. We all reviewed the emergent findings, giving views on strengths, weaknesses, and potential gaps.

What we found

How is youth voice happening in practice?

Looking at the evidence, especially from the data trawl, about activity in the #iwill Fund, we think that:

- **Youth voice activities happen across England:** there are opportunities for young people to participate across England, although some youth voice opportunities have a specifically regional focus.
- **Youth voice activities mainly target specific groups:** 77% of Match Funder programmes in the data trawl targeted young people from specific socio-demographic groups including socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, young people with special educational needs/additional support needs, disabled young people, those with poor mental health and young people from minoritised ethnic groups.
- **Groups and meetings are common activities:** young people are most commonly involved in youth voice opportunities through advisory groups, co-designing projects or leading programme development. The most common task young people participate in is attending meetings.
- **Digital engagement is increasing:** digital facilitation of youth voice practice has become a key mechanism since the pandemic, with 22% of youth voice activities in the data trawl taking place online.
- **Activities are led by specialist workers:** a youth worker or internal specialist often facilitates youth voice practice.
- **Support is available for young people involved:** young people are most commonly supported to participate in youth voice through wrap-around support. Many get access to training and specific support for that youth voice activity.
- **Learning is not always captured:** monitoring, evaluation and learning processes are patchy and underdeveloped in many organisations.
- **Some poor practices occur:** some youth voice activities may be happening in 'decorative' ways or through one-off opportunities with likely limited scope for influence.

What is enabling youth voice practice?

- **Long-term resourcing:** ensuring the right level of finances, protected staff time, and relationship building activities enables more meaningful youth voice activities and practices.
- **Quality relationships:** young people engaging in youth voice activities benefit from high quality socio-emotional support from a trusted practitioner over time, supporting their wider participation.
- **Linking with others in young people's lives:** those facilitating youth voice activities need to build strong links with other adults in young people's lives.
- **Having a menu of options:** enabling a wide range of opportunities to be involved and lead builds the accessibility of youth voice activities for young people.
- **Sharing success:** celebrating success and capturing learning contributes to building youth voice into everyone's consciousness and responsibility across an organisation.
- **Senior leaders backing youth voice:** funders' and delivery organisations' senior leadership support helps embed youth voice activities and ensure that their views are heard within the organisation.
- **Having young role models:** young people perceived that working alongside other young people, especially those with experience of youth social action, helps their engagement in youth voice activities.
- **Linking directly with decision-makers:** having direct contact with people in positions of influence and seeing the difference youth voice activities make encourages young people to get involved and stay involved.

What is inhibiting youth voice practices?

- **Negative perceptions of young people:** dominant and often negative views of young people in society impact support for youth voice activities. Where senior leaders or decision-makers don't value young people's views, they are not always heard.
- **Youth voice is tougher in generic organisations:** delivery organisations that are not youth-exclusive face greater barriers to undertaking youth voice activities.
- **Digital engagement can make relationship building harder:** digital participation is challenging in youth voice practice where it hinders/undermines relationship building.
- **Giving young people inaccessible information:** young people engaging in youth voice activities can often be expected to understand complex information, systems, processes or context, sometimes without sufficient support or guidance.
- **Lack of awareness of youth voice activities:** young people are often unaware of opportunities to be heard, or can lack access to training or support that would enable them to participate in youth voice activities effectively.
- **Lack of tailored support to those most intensively involved:** young people active in several groups face particular challenges with expectations of commitment, which they can find difficult to navigate.
- **Poor planning for young people finishing or completing youth voice activities:** young people can 'age out' and feel the ending of youth voice activities is poorer without positive progression to other opportunities.

- **Getting the right staff with the right skills:** practitioners recognise the need for capacity and skill development, and how staff turnover can impact projects and activities.

What difference are youth voice activities making?

For young people
- **Contributing to socio-emotional skills:** The mostly commonly identified impacts through the data trawl included young people engaged in youth voice having increased confidence in their capabilities (31% of data trawl sources), improved leadership skills (11%), strengthened peer relationships (8%), and improved teamwork (8%).
- **Stronger social connections:** many young people have increased external connections in the community or wider networks and have an increased sense of responsibility towards peers and/or the local community.
- **Gaining employability skills:** the most common employment outcome from youth voice activities is improved employability skills. Many young people have gained skills they can use for work and volunteering. Youth voice activities contributed to raised career aspirations and young people's view of their employment prospects.
- **Contributing to health:** more than half of data trawl items (55%) identified youth voice activities as contributing to young people's improved mental or physical wellbeing.

For funders
- **Greater understanding of young people's lives:** many funders better understand the issues in young people's lives and the value their funding can create.
- **Greater promotion of youth voice:** some funders are actively promoting youth voice, including with those that they fund, beyond youth social action.
- **Changing how funders work:** some funders have changed their processes to be more youth inclusive or are planning to in the future.
- **Continuing to grow youth voice activities:** when funders recognised the value of their youth voice work – for the young people they were working with and on the quality of their grant making – this encouraged them to invest further in this process.

For delivery organisations
- **More relevant programmes:** delivery organisations perceive that youth voice activities enable them to develop more relevant youth social action programmes. The process has often developed their staff skills.
- **More collaboration and celebration:** organisations feel that they are influencing their partners to consider incorporating youth voice in their work.

For communities
- **Stronger connections:** youth voice activities are perceived as contributing to strong connections between young people and their communities - both geographic and interest-based.

- **Increased profile of young people:** youth voice activities are perceived as raising the profile of young people within the wider community.

What next?

What are the implications of our findings?

Implications for policy makers
- **Youth voice matters:** youth voice plays a critical role for young people and the organisations that work with them. Policy makers play an equally critical role in supporting, enabling and embedding youth voice in cross-governmental policy making.
- **Building a workforce skilled:** We need to understand better the competencies, knowledge and skills that practitioners need to deliver high quality youth voice activity and what level of training or experience is proportionate for this. There is a role for policy makers in supporting and resourcing further research into the skills and needs of the sector to enable consistent high quality practice, and particularly to explore the equitable distribution of opportunities for both young people and practitioners.
- **Improving access to senior leaders and decision-makers:** policy makers and people in positions of influence should gain more direct access to young people, and in turn make themselves more accessible to listen and respond to young people's voices.

Implications for funders
- **Improve data collection:** The evidence base could be strengthened by improving data consistency, including by disaggregating data from those young people specifically involved in decision-making within programmes or projects. This would help us to better understand the direct and indirect impact of young people's voices in decision-making.
- **Align outsourced partners:** Further work is needed to explore the most effective collaboration model when engaging third-party organisations to support youth voice.
- **Continue to celebrate success:** Funder should ensure they amplify stories of change and that specific youth voice activities are clearly highlighted.

Implications for practitioners
- **Invest in relationships:** practitioners leading youth voice activities need the time, skills and capabilities, and suitable line management/supervision, so they can offer holistic support to young people.
- **Improve practices:** Different organisations undertake various forms of youth voice activities - such as running meetings or groups - differently. We need to learn better what creative and engaging sustainable delivery looks and feels like, especially when offered online.
- **Further embedding equity and inclusion:** A commitment to removing barriers is present in much of the youth voice practice but could be further improved. More data is still needed on the voices that we are *not* hearing, and why.

- **Improving progression from youth voice activities:** consider the end of young people's experiences early and scaffold further progression opportunities.
- **Better supporting those most actively involved:** There are opportunities for better ensuring cohesive support for young people who are involved in multiple youth voice opportunities, and strengthening the leadership skills development they receive.

Alongside the full report we have published six 'How to…' guides, each based on learning generated through this evaluation, the views of young people engaged in the project and wider good practices.

Introduction

This section provides the context for this report, defines our framing of 'youth voice' and youth social action, and gives background information about the initiatives that fell within the scope of this project.

About this report

This report presents insights and learning from an evaluation of youth voice practices and initiatives across the #iwill Fund (2016 - 2022), The National Lottery Community Fund Young People in the Lead (YPIL) advisory panel (2020 - 2022) and the DCMS Youth Policy Development Group (2021-22). The report shares learning from three key evaluation research questions, developed through a collaborative process with a group of Young Evaluators and stakeholders from across the youth sector:

1. How has youth voice been happening in practice in these initiatives?
2. What has enabled or inhibited youth voice practice in these initiatives?
3. In what ways has youth voice practice impacted on young people, funders, delivery organisations, and communities?

The report describes the impact of youth voice practices on:
- young people: the #iwill Fund focuses on those aged 10 - 20 years old. Some organisations will work with a broader age range;
- the #iwill Fund Match Funders: a collaborative group of 30 organisations that support youth social action programmes through funding and delivery;
- delivery organisations: organisations that design and/or deliver social action projects and activities with young people; and
- the communities in which social action projects are delivered. These may be geographic or communities of interest.

The National Lottery Community Fund (The Fund) commissioned the evaluation from YMCA George Williams College.[1] Staff met regularly with The Fund, and colleagues there commented upon the evaluation framework and helped to influence tools, decisions and final report.

Six 'How to…' guides have been published alongside this report. The guides are based on learning generated through this evaluation, the views of young people engaged in the project and wider good practices.

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[1] In 2022 the Centre for Youth Impact merged with YMCA George Williams College and developed three Centres of Expertise including the Centre for Youth Voice. For consistency, all references in the report are made to YMCA George Williams College.

Context: About "youth voice"

Youth work has always been concerned with understanding the views, wishes and perspectives of young people. There has been an increasing shift from these activities being at the discretion of individual practitioners and services to a broader expectation in law, policy, funding arrangements and codified professional practices[2]. This shift has been spurred on and further enhanced by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), ratified by the UK Government in 1991. The UNCRC guarantees every person under 18 the right to express views in all matters affecting them and for that view to be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity[3].

There is no universally agreed definition of "youth voice"[4]. The concept sits with definitions of youth participation[5] and broader concepts of engagement and "user voice". Most research - and practitioner training - focuses beyond a narrow conception of young people's freedom to express a view, to the broader enabling conditions that enable that view to be heard. Young people need[6]:
- accessible information to form views;
- opportunities they can voluntarily access to express those views if they wish;
- safe, inclusive, supportive and suitable spaces in which to express their views;
- people listening to these views;
- and to see these views influencing decisions as appropriate with feedback and accountability.

Throughout this project, we have based our considerations on, but equally not been limited by, the definition of youth voice used by the #iwill Fund:

> *"**The meaningful involvement of young people in decisions that affect them and that influence conditions of projects and programmes that they are involved in.**
> This includes involvement in the co-design of programmes and services, research and evaluation, decision-making on grants and strategy, and in organisational governance. In having the opportunity to have a say in decisions that affect them and actively shaping social action programmes that affect their lives, young people have an equal voice and seat around the table. Youth voice allows young people to bring their lived experiences and perspectives on enablers and barriers to social action."*

There is a growing evidence base of where and how young people are involved in decision-making in England. A 2022 survey of 269 organisations found strong support for young people to participate in decision-making[7]. These organisations suggested that young people participate in decision-making at

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[2] Willow, 2002; Oldfield and Fowler, 2004; Davey, Lea, Shaw & Burke, 2010; Burke, 2010; and Farthing 2012
[3] See UN Committee on the Rights of Child, 2009.
[4] Hickman Dunne, 2022
[5] Hart, 1992
[6] c.f. Lundy, 2007; Save the Children, 2021
[7] Hickman Dunne and Mahmood, 2022

a range of levels and decision-making processes, but that some barriers to universal, high-quality practice still remain:

- Significant opportunities exist in health/wellbeing organisations, youth services, and education;
- Primary methods used by organisations to enable young people to participate in decision-making include ongoing informal discussions, consultation sessions, surveys, and youth councils or forums;
- Younger children under 11 and, to a lesser extent, those in rural communities have fewer opportunities to be heard;
- Most responding organisations had a policy, dedicated staff, and funding for youth voice activity. However, they want more training in and support with evaluating participation and advocacy/lobbying skills; and
- Key barriers to supporting activities are insufficient resourcing and a lack of dedicated funding, challenges in measuring the impact, and wanting to improve practical support to young people to break down barriers to involvement.

A parallel review of 60 consultations and youth voice reports published between January 2020 to January 2022 in the UK[8] found that:

- Methods of capturing young people's views are predominantly quantitative, such as surveys and online polls;
- Most activities focus on teenagers, with children under ten years old less likely to be involved;
- Three-quarters of youth voice activities were 'place based' - either national or in a specific locality; and
- More than one in five youth voice activities were designed by or co-designed with young people.

Context: Youth voice in youth social action

The increasing emphasis on youth voice sits alongside the growth of youth social action – youth-led activities that have a 'double benefit' for young people and communities - in policy, funding and practice. Several Government-led reviews, such as the Russell Commission (2004) and the Youth Citizenship Commission (2009), championed young people having a role in influencing decisions about the activities they volunteer within and lead in the services of others.

In 2012, Dame Julia Cleverdon and Amanda Jordan OBE reviewed how government, business, and the voluntary and education sectors can work together to support young people to engage in social action between the ages of 10 and 20. They proposed all agencies "ensure that young people drive social action". A quality framework for youth social action situated "youth-led" as a key principle of effective practice[9].

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[8] Hickman Dunne, Mahmood and Burke, 2022
[9] Young Foundation et al, 2013

In response to the review, the #iwill campaign was founded in November 2013. This UK-wide initiative sought to increase participation in social action by young people aged 10–25.

Initially a time-bound, decade-long campaign with cross-party support, it has evolved into an enduring #iwill Movement - a collaboration of over 1000 organisations and 300 young #iwill Ambassadors from across the UK working to support youth social action. [10] 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 affecting their lives, communities, and broader society.

The campaign, and now the Movement, promotes six core principles of quality youth social action, including being youth-led, with great youth social action ensuring that it is "led, owned and shaped by young people's needs, Ideas and decision making".

Fig. 1. #iwill six principles of youth social action, including being youth-led
Over time, and across the #iwill Movement, there has been differing perspectives on 'youth social action' and challenges in creating a shared understanding[11]. The current definition of youth social action from the #iwill Fund Learning Hub is:

Youth-led activities that produce a benefit for communities as a result of the action, and for young people, as a result of taking part in the social action. Youth social action can be flexible in delivery and must involve at least one of three core mechanisms that improve the skills, well-

being or increasing knowledge of others and sense of belonging of a young person. These are:

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[10] Note, at the end of 2020 the #iwill Campaign became known as the #iwill Movement. The charity that had been founded to lead the campaign, Step up to Serve, dissolved. Volunteering Matters and UK Youth host an independent #iwill Coordination Hub to support the #iwill Movement until 2026. The #iwill Movement is UK wide whereas the #iwill Fund (the focus of this evaluation) only funds projects that are delivered in England**.**
[11] #iwill Fund Learning Hub, 2022

- *Young people have a safe yet challenging space in which to develop practical, vocational and socio-emotional skills.*
- *Young people take self-directed action which gives them a sense of purpose that contributes to their well-being, self-concept and/or self-efficacy.*
- *Young people have the opportunity to engage with different communities, increasing their knowledge of others and their sense of belonging.*

Context: The initiatives under review through this evaluation

This report draws on evidence drawn from reviews of youth voice practices and activities within three distinct initiatives. Each is distinct, with different focus areas, intended outcomes, scale and timeline of delivery.

The #iwill Fund

The #iwill Fund is 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.

The #iwill Fund brings together a group of organisations that all contribute funding to embed meaningful social action into the lives of young people in England. So far, the #iwill Fund estimates that over 600,000 young people will undertake social action opportunities with its support.

The #iwill Fund is administered by The Fund, with respect to its funding and the funding provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Fund collaborates with over 30 Match Funders who match this seed funding on a £1:£1 basis. #iwill Fund programmes have a different focus thematically (e.g., health and social care, sport, school food or the environment) or geographically (e.g., Virgin Money Foundation support in the North East). [12] In addition to joint funding, the Match Funders work together to ensure shared learning and mutual collaboration - including through the #iwill Fund Learning Hub.

Learn more about the initiative on [the National Lottery Community Fund website.](#)

The National Lottery Community Fund Young People in the Lead programme

The Fund is the largest funder of children and young people's activity across the UK. In 2020, it invested in a Young People in the Lead advisory panel - a group of ten young people from across projects it has funded. The panel has worked closely with The Fund's Head of Youth Voice to steer and advise the broader work of The Fund.

The Young People in the Lead panel meet monthly with the Head of Youth Voice and decide as a team what work to focus on and how it should be achieved. Panel members also receive support and guidance from Fund staff as part of a tailored training package to develop their skills and experience.

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[12] Note, the funders engaged in the #iwill Fund have changed over the period under review in this report. Details of current and previous members are available on the [National Lottery Community Fund website.](#)

The work of the panel and wider youth voice at The Fund has continued to evolve, with wider Youth Voice teams in England, Wales and Northern Ireland underpinned by a Youth Voice strategy[13]. In its new strategy, The Fund is committed to further increasing the involvement of civil society organisations and communities in shaping The Fund's work, alongside committing to fund projects that "help children and young people shape the decision that affect them and their communities"[14].

Learn more about the initiative on [the National Lottery Community Fund website.](#)

Youth Policy Development Group

Central Government has had various initiatives for youth voice. Over 20 years ago, the then Children and Young People's Unit led a programme - Learning to Listen - with each Government department creating an action plan for listening to young people[15]. This was reinvigorated by the UK Government Civil Society Strategy in 2018, committing to developing a Civil Society Youth Steering Group to oversee the development and implementation of policies affecting young people.

From 2019 to 2021, the group was facilitated and supported by the British Youth Council, working with The Mix, Youth Focus: North West, Youth Focus: North East and the Youth Work Unit in Yorkshire and Humber. Between 2021 and March 2023, Shout Out UK delivered the programme as part of DCMS' Youth Engagement Grant, with the group renamed as the Youth Policy Development Group (YPDG).

The YPDG brought together up to 40 young people aged 16-25 from across England to engage with senior officials and Ministers across Government Departments. Participants received training and support to engage. The activities of participants were accompanied by broader youth engagement through online polling, surveys and social media activity.

A recent evaluation examined the perceived impact of the programme alongside the UK Youth Parliament[16]. It found that Government policy makers believed that it acted as an important mechanism for promoting the voice of young people in policy decisions. The programme participants generally reported positive programme experiences, enjoying the activities on offer, and perceived personal, social, and vocational benefits from programme participation. The study found that the group has supported and informed local and national policy-making decisions across several areas.

From April 2023, the Youth Engagement Grant has been amalgamated into the UK Youth Parliament programme, delivered by the British Youth Council.

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[13] TNLCF, 2023a
[14] TNLCF 2023b
[15] CYPU 2002a, 2002b
[16] Smith et al, 2023

Methodology

This section of the report introduces the methodological approach to the evaluation. It outlines how the evaluation sought to achieve its aims alongside the strengths of the approach and delivery, and its inherent and acquired limitations. This learning should contextualise, and support interpretation of the Results Chart presented later in the report.

Approach: Collaborative Outcomes Reporting

This evaluation has adapted the _Collaborative Outcome Reporting_ approach tailored and designed for this specific project context, also known as "Participatory Performance Story Reporting". Dr Jess Dart has pioneered the technique as a participatory approach to impact evaluation.[17]

This participatory approach to impact evaluation presents evidence of how a programme or initiative has contributed to outcomes and impacts. As the name suggests, collaboration has been at the core of our method, developing links between activities and impacts that are reasonably accepted by a wide range of stakeholders[18]. YMCA George Williams College staff have worked in partnership with young people who are actively engaged in youth voice activities. Together we have explored and sought to understand the 'story' that links evidence from several lines of inquiry to outcomes and impacts across the initiatives under review. There have been multiple opportunities for practitioners, young people, academics with experience in youth voice, and stakeholders from all the initiatives included in the project to review our work.

The approach recognises that no single 'story' of the link between evidence and impacts can exist in relational work such as youth voice activities. This makes it a strong fit for the context of this evaluation. The three initiatives in scope (the #iwill Fund, the Young People in the Lead Panel, and the Youth Policy Development Group) include activities across multiple programmes led by different delivery organisations, over different periods, in diverse settings, and with differing levels of contact and engagement with young people, all of whom will be from diverse backgrounds. Through multiple rounds of discussion, scrutiny, and engagement, we worked towards key findings from multiple sources, explored the data more deeply, and discussed what 'stories' from the evidence credibly connect activities and practice to impacts.

The findings provide valuable insight into the difference youth voice initiatives can have on the quality of programmes and, ultimately, the lives of young people. The approach is not designed to determine an irrefutable causal link between practice and impacts but rather contributes to the existing evidence base by presenting a convincing case of plausible association between practices and activities and impacts. We aim to be transparent on what evidence, from which sources and with what limitations, have informed our understanding of likely results from the initiatives.

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[17] Dart and Mayne, 2005; Dart, 2008, Roughly and Dart, 2009
[18] Mayne, 2003

Young Evaluators Panel

Throughout this evaluation, YMCA George Williams College was keen to work alongside young people as partners in the research. To support this, a Young Evaluators Panel was recruited in late Summer 2021. We hoped to engage a diverse range of young people from across England, aged 14-18. We specifically sought to bring together people with the 'lived experience' of the activities under review – those who were actively involved in youth social action and who had personal experience of involvement in youth voice activities. Young people already actively involved in the #iwill Movement alongside YMCA George Williams College staff selected nine young people to join the Young Evaluators Panel (five young women; four young men).

The Panel met approximately four to six weekly online throughout the project's life. These meetings provided a space to steer the project – making decisions on events, activities and project management. Four residentials took place across the course of the project – this provided additional space for team-building activities, skills and knowledge development, designing or influencing data collection or analysis tools and for deciding the final results. Most of the group were actively involved in data collection through the Social Inquiry and co-facilitated the Outcomes Summit (see below). Beyond this, many represented YMCA George Williams College and the project at external events such as the Young Foundation peer research conference and the Children and Young People Now Evaluation conference.
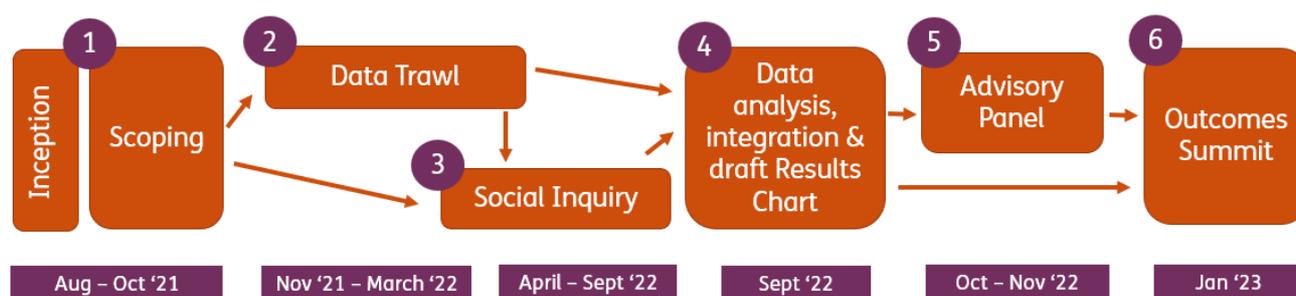
Our process

Fig 2. Summary of Collaborative Outcome Reporting approach in this evaluation

1) Inception and scoping (August - October 2021)

In August 2021, an inception workshop brought together 15 individuals representing funders, Match Funders and representatives from across the #iwill Movement and the wider youth sector. The initiation workshop introduced stakeholders to the project and provided space for them to input into project design, allow for a collective scoping of project parameters and outputs, and mapping of risks, assumptions, issues or dependencies relating to the project. With their feedback, the evaluation team developed a detailed delivery plan, including adding additional workshops and a 'testing' phase to the later data trawl.

Four scoping workshops with 52 participants were held in September 2021 (three via Zoom and one in-person). The workshops provided space for stakeholders from across the #iwill ecosystem to feed into the evaluation framework. Participants included 13 #iwill Fund Match Funders, nine Delivery Organisations, several young people involved in youth voice activities, individuals from across the #iwill Movement (co-ordinators, advisors, etc) and independent parties providing an external perspective.

The workshops directly informed the project, including:
- Adopting the current #iwill Fund definition of youth voice (but with critical insight into its meaning and limitations);
- Agreeing 'anticipated outcomes' of youth voice practice on young people, funders, Delivery Organisations and communities and wider systems, informing the coding framework used for the data trawl (see below); and
- Exploring and agreeing several changes to project design and activity to mitigate risks and assumptions.

2) Data Trawl (November 2021 - March 2022)

The data trawl was a process of collating and coding secondary data submitted by #iwill Fund Match Funders and delivery organisations relating to youth voice practice within their youth social action programmes and projects.

Conducted between November 2021 and March 2022, information was received from The National Lottery Community Fund and materials held by the #iwill Fund Learning Hub alongside direct submissions from Match Funders and Delivery Organisations via a dedicated data trawl portal created for the evaluation. Organisations could submit all forms of monitoring and evaluation work relevant to youth voice practices from the #iwill Fund projects and programmes, including:
- Mid- or end-point project monitoring reports;
- Written or visual case studies;
- External or internal evaluations;
- Individual testimonies; and
- Evidence generated by young people themselves.

The final data set contains 254 items representing 29 Match Funders (from a possible 33) and 42 Match Funder programmes. Staff analysed every item submitted against a coding framework developed with the Young Evaluators Panel in line with a coding protocol. The Framework included over 100 coding categories across ten domains. The evaluation team started by coding ten items together before undertaking spot checking of individual records. In addition, the Young Evaluators Panel also coded some data themselves and peer-reviewed the coding decisions of a random sample of data items. Further details on the data set and the analysis process are included in Annex 1.

In April 2022, the Young Evaluators Panel reviewed emergent findings from the data trawl and drew initial conclusions on meaning and how to interpret the results.

3) Social Inquiry (April - September 2022)

The Social Inquiry was a process of collating and analysing the views and experiences of those involved in the initiatives through interviews and focus groups.

The Young Evaluators Panel reviewed the data collected through the data trawl and linked to the overarching evaluation questions, decided to explore in more detail:

1. *How have young people practically and emotionally experienced youth voice activities?*
2. *To what extent do organisations understand what is needed to deliver youth voice activities well?*
3. *In what ways is change seen and experienced as a result of youth voice activity?*

The Young Evaluators Panel, supported by the evaluation team, led 16 interviews or focus groups throughout July and August 2022. Participants included Match Funders, Delivery Organisations and young people engaged in youth voice activities across the three initiatives in scope.

The interview and focus group transcripts were analysed thematically by five of the young evaluators at the August residential.

Table 1. Overview of Social Inquiry participants

Participant group	Number
Funder / Match Funder	9
Delivery Organisation	5
Young people	32
Engaged stakeholders	5
Total engaged	51

4) Draft Results Chart (September 2022)

The key themes identified from the Social Inquiry were integrated with the evidence collected through the data trawl and reviewed against the overall research questions for the evaluation. The emergent evidence of practices and activities was linked to likely outcomes and results. This "Results Chart" was reviewed by the evaluation and the Young Evaluators Panel to check for coherence and gaps.

5) Advisory Panel (October – November 2022)

During October and November 2022, an Advisory Panel of 13 members with expertise in youth voice practice, policy and research reviewed a draft of the Results Chart. Through two workshop sessions, the group assessed the quality of the evidence and provided an external and independent voice based on their collective expertise. The workshops provided space for determining the quality of the evidence collated in the results chart considering factors such as adequacy, bias, relevance, and credibility, and identified additional information required to provide more robust evidence of results and links between practices and impacts. The views expressed started to develop an understanding of the strength of evidence and led to further revision of the Results Chart.

6) Outcomes Summit (January 2023)

In January 2023, an Outcomes Summit brought together over 70 staff from Match Funders and Delivery Organisations, young people involved in youth voice projects and #iwill Fund programmes, academics and other youth voice practitioners. Together, they reviewed and engaged in our emergent findings, giving views on strengths, weaknesses, and gaps.

The full day event in Central London consisted of four sessions co-facilitated by members of the Young Evaluators Panel. Two sessions reviewed the data, and three data deep dives were around key topics considered important by the Advisory Panel. Participants could review the draft Results Chart and contribute to an enhanced set of findings that incorporated their valuable insights and perspectives. They also provided recommendations for developing good practice guidance.

Strengths, limitations, and learning

This section sets out the factors likely to have influenced the project and impact its findings. Any evaluation or research project has inherent and acquired boundaries and constraints – with transparency, you can interpret our results within a proper context and ensure that future research builds on our learning.

Collaborative and participatory approach harnessing experience and expertise
We have sought to create and maintain a genuinely collaborative and participatory process. Young people involved in the project, most notably the Young Evaluator Panel, have actively shaped and refined all data collection tools and analysis. The range of workshops and opportunities created for the project engaged several dozen practitioners and leaders from across and beyond the #iwill Fund and the wider #iwill Movement. We have benefited from a vast breadth of perspectives and a diverse range of experiences which, through facilitated discussions, could challenge or extend contributions. The results reflect an unparalleled range of experience and expertise into a structured set of findings and likely associations between practices and impacts.

Young Evaluators' leadership and engagement
The Young Evaluators Panel played a critical role in key decisions and had some involvement at all stages of the project. Inevitably, external events created barriers to their engagement. At launch in 2021, there remained some Covid-19 restrictions on activities. At various points of the project, both the evaluation team and young people have missed activities due to Covid-19.

Due to storms, one residential was cancelled at the last minute, and due to a national rail strike, the planned Outcomes Summit was postponed to January 2023. This pushed project activities into mock exam season and reduced youth attendance. Activity during school holidays, especially the Social Inquiry, clashed with Young Evaluators availability. Whilst every Young Evaluator conducted at least one interview, some did many more than others. A key member of the evaluation team left their role in early 2023, and the necessary shifting timelines meant that young people had less availability to volunteer their time and prioritised other commitments, such as school exams and, therefore, this final report has been more heavily shaped by the evaluation team than was originally intended.

While cumulatively these shifts in engagement impacted the level of power sharing and engagement with the Young Evaluators, the group remained heavily influential in the results and shaped all key findings.

Reflective practice

The evaluation approach was rooted in a belief that delivery of the project would be enriched by actively including the views of those with experience of youth voice activities in youth social action. Like all research, preconceived notions, assumptions, or personal beliefs may have influenced our interactions and decisions. These assumptions and beliefs have shaped what we asked, heard and understood, and how we analysed responses. We actively reflected on our biases and assumptions by regularly debriefing to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, ensuring multiple stakeholders could review the emergent findings at multiple stages and engaging an external Advisory Panel not involved in data collection to review results.

Breadth of organisations contributing and participating

Results from the data trawl bring together the most comprehensive mapping of youth voice practices and activities within youth social action projects in the #iwill Fund. The results highlight common themes in youth voice practices and activities across diverse settings, contexts, times and forms of provision. The data trawl was enriched by significant outreach to Match Funders and Delivery Organisations (detailed in Annex A).

The data presented represent the activities and outcomes within the #iwill Fund as surfaced through this evaluation project. It is not a representative sample of funded programmes, projects or opportunities, nor necessarily representative of the #iwill Fund overall. There was a low response from individual Match Funders and Delivery Organisations submitting specific evaluations to the data trawl: more than half of the data items submitted were monitoring reports written by Match Funders to The Fund. Match Funder monitoring reports were more likely to surface common learnings and outcomes across multiple Delivery Organisations, rather than focus on the experience or views of individual delivery organisations. Those areas of #iwill Fund activity that were under-represented in the data trawl were prioritised for inclusion in the Social Inquiry.

Purposive selection of organisations contributing and participating

Organisations submitting to the data Ttawl or participating in the Outcomes Summit were a self-selecting group, contacted or included as they were likely to be engaged in and strong advocates for youth voice activity. As such, there is a risk that the data trawl may have been less likely to capture poor practice or adverse outcomes that could be associated with youth voice practice. Many event participants were by definition committed to youth voice and have their own learnt or lived experiences of positive outcomes. In an attempt to mitigate this influence, we have specifically sought to provide opportunities for challenge of emergent results. Facilitation in workshops and data collection events aimed to create safe spaces for critical reflection to explore both strengths and the weaknesses of practices and any potentially negative outcomes. The Social Inquiry allowed a

further opportunity to dig deeper into areas of challenge potentially identified and consider additional evidence that verified – or indeed undermined - these themes.

Mapping secondary data

Most data items in the data trawl were not created for this evaluation. This was intentional. Drawing on secondary data reduced the burden on Match Funders and delivery organisations, and captured perspectives from those who may not have responded to other forms of purposeful but time-consuming data collection. It allowed us to use emergent evidence bases across multiple organisations and multiple timepoints to see common trends, and drew in data from those who may not have opted into a project focussed on youth voice, especially if it was perceived to require a significant amount of time or effort.

The data we analysed typically focused on designing and delivering youth social action opportunities and impacts rather than specifically the youth voice opportunities and impacts within it. It was not always possible to ascertain the specific youth voice activities undertaken within the youth social action opportunity. This has, however, provided insight into what has – or has not – been routinely captured in monitoring and evaluation practices.

Many of the outcomes or impacts identified through the data pertain to young people, and there is a limited focus on the Match Funders' and delivery organisations' own experiences and impacts. Similarly, many of the data items in the data trawl did not include information about community impacts and, if they did, were taken from the perspective of young people. There is much less data on the broader impact of youth voice on other community members from their own viewpoint.

The #iwill Fund Match Funders ran their funding programmes through a range of models. Some also acted as the delivery organisation, some developed a youth advisory board to input into the grant-making process, and others outsourced youth voice activities to intermediary organisations. This created ambiguity in some data items regarding whether youth voice activities occurred at a programme or project level.

The evaluation's collaborative nature has helped mitigate these inherent challenges with the data set. Stakeholders could interpret, contextualise, verify and question emergent results. Furthermore, this enriched our wider findings about the nature of current monitoring, evaluation and learning practices of youth voice practices and activities as features in the Results Chart.

Timing of the Social Inquiry

The Social Inquiry was limited by the availability of research participants during the planned timing of data collection over Summer 2022. Challenges included:
- Youth sector delivery organisations are often very busy during the summer and staff had limited capacity to engage in data collection. Groups of young people were not attending provision at regular times in order to participate in focus groups;

- Schools often delivered or were involved in youth social action projects. We were unable to reach staff and participants during the holidays; and
- Some projects we sought to contact had wrapped up many months before our contact. Key staff had left or young people no longer easily contactable.

The primary contact for reaching participants was through Match Funders—this required negotiation and overcoming hesitancy to create a further reporting or data collection burden for the organisation. As a result, most Delivery Organisations who participated in the Social Inquiry were also funders or had responded to the call for evidence.

Results

This section of the report brings together our key findings from the evaluation. Our results enhance our collective understanding of the nature of youth voice activities and the difference they make. This section includes the quantitative and qualitative data drawn from the data trawl, thematic analysis and quotes from the interviews and focus groups in the Social Inquiry, alongside the insight generated from meetings of the Young Evaluators Panel, Advisory Panel and the Outcomes Summit.

Please note:
- Where the results chart refers to a 'programme' this is the youth social action initiative, developed and funded by a Match Funder and delivered by a (range of) funded delivery organisations.
- Where the results chart refers to a 'project' this is an opportunity for a young person to engage in the youth social action initiative (programme, as above) at a particular site through a particular delivery organisation.
- Where the results chart refers to a 'project' this relates to common results from both Match Funder and delivery organisations; including common feedback from participatory workshops including representatives from both.
- Counts and percentages relate to the individual data trawl data items identified through the coding process as undertaking that specific activity or associated with those specific outcomes. Refer to our description of the project methodology and limitations for further details. Where the ability to code to that issue was particularly low, no percentages are presented, but those themes are included where it also arose in the Social Inquiry or workshop feedback.
- For brevity, not all evidence is presented. We have selected the most compelling evidence – often, this is the most common finding but also includes less frequently-appearing evidence that is viewed as insightful to the research questions.

Confidence of results

Given the collaborative approach to generating and presenting these findings, there is a different amount and quality of evidence for each finding. To build trust in the findings, we seek to clarify how our interpretations are grounded in the data and insight generated through the collaboration.

We have grouped each finding with a statement of our confidence in the evidence we have. Note, this relates **only** to the range of evidence collated and grouped to that finding and is **not** related to the importance of the finding. Many lower-evidenced findings are critical issues, and indicate a need for further data collection and research.

Findings are classified into three categories:

- **Higher confidence findings** are based on evidence from multiple data sources or the methods of the evaluation. This evidence has been seen in a high proportion of materials submitted in the data trawl, are from credible sources (e.g., more likely to be external evaluations or using empirical evidence) and explicitly relate to youth voice practice. The finding has been a common theme in multiple Social Inquiry data collection encounters from different types of participants. Emergent results would have been considered plausible, likely or have reflected the experiences of many of the Young Evaluations Panel, Advisory Panel or Outcomes Summit participants.

  HIGHER

- **Medium confidence findings** are based on evidence from fewer but more than one data source or the methods of the project. The evidence has been seen in some materials submitted in the data trawl (where the information was part of the coding framework) or raised through the Social Inquiry data collection encounters. It may have been seen as interesting or likely by members of the Young Evaluations Panel, Advisory Panel or Outcomes Summit participants.

  MEDIUM

- **Lower confidence findings** are based on evidence from very limited data sources or the methods of the project. They may have featured in a small proportion of materials submitted in the data trawl or in the Social Inquiry data collection encounters. Some members of the Young Evaluations Panel, Advisory Panel and Outcomes Summit participants may have also affirmed the emergent theme.

  LOWER

How has youth voice been happening in practice?

1. **There are opportunities for young people to participate across England, although some youth voice opportunities have a regional focus.** **HIGHER**

- 54% of programmes in the data trawl were England-wide. Some have a specific regional focus, with the most commonly targeted regions being London (10%), the North West (8%), and West Midlands (8%).
- Of the youth voice activities referenced, the most commonly occurring settings were in the community (25%) and in schools or colleges (17%). Workshop participants perceived these to most likely be local or regional in scope, with national programmes mainly including online activities and ad-hoc meetings. By their very nature, some youth voice activities were geographically restricted due to the programmes they were situated within. 10% of data items did not describe the setting.
- Many Match Funders and large-scale delivery organisations described youth voice activities that were national in focus and spanned whole programmes, with young people recruited from across the country.
- Young people in focus groups identified that opportunities are often centred on London or big cities, and they often had to go to these opportunities instead of the opportunities being local to them.
- Young people felt there were fewer opportunities in rural areas, particularly a lack of 'stepping stone' opportunities (e.g., fewer regional events that might progress to national engagement). For some young people who were most intensively involved in multiple youth voice activities, the travel to these opportunities was a challenge at times.
- Outcome summit participants noted the prevalence of national-level opportunities, especially among Match Funders. There are challenges in strengthening community connections for young people where youth voice is with a national organisation.

2. **Youth voice activities commonly seek to engage young people from specific socio-demographic groups, especially from disadvantaged groups.** **HIGHER**

- 77% of Match Funder programmes in the data trawl targeted young people from specific socio-demographic groups. The other 23% were open access with no specific target groups.
- The most commonly targeted group is young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (20% of all programmes in the data set).
- The second commonly targeted group is young people with special educational needs/additional support needs (8%) and a further 3% aimed to engage young people with disabilities.
- Other more frequently cited target groups (each 5% of the data) are young people with poor mental health, young people from minoritised ethnic groups, parents and families, and young people not in education, employment and training.

- While youth voice activities can be *targeted* to specific groups, in general, opportunities were open to young people based on their interests and experience.
- Organisations recognised a need to think laterally about how they can engage young people and constantly challenged themselves to do so even where they come up against barriers to engagement.
- There was some implicit evidence of relatively advantaged young people being involved in youth voice activities. For example, the reliance on digital could favour more advantaged young people, and raises the potential for digital exclusion. However, the evidence for this is weak and needs further exploration.

3. **Digital delivery of youth voice practice has become a key mechanism for delivery since the pandemic.**　**HIGHER**

- 22% of youth voice activities in the data trawl took place online. This transition to online delivery was likely recent, fuelled by necessity, with nearly half of projects changing delivery to online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. 32% of projects adapted the format of youth voice activities, and 14% changed the type of activity delivered.
- For some, Covid-19 had reduced the reach of activities (15%). More widely, online delivery had created a barrier to engagement for some projects, but it had increased reach for others.
- Reflecting this, both organisations and young people reflected on the barriers and opportunities that digital delivery had created. Both organisations and young people identified that online should not replace face-to-face youth voice activities entirely and that a hybrid approach was the best solution.
- Broadly, it was seen as positive, as it allowed young people to engage where otherwise they would not have been able to (e.g., due to having to travel). The majority of young people found that a hybrid approach with online work complemented by some face-to-face activity made it easier for them to commit, as it often meant a smaller time commitment without travel time, reduced or removed travel costs, and geography was less of a barrier. Young people could also meet more frequently.

> *"[We] need to pivot and think about how do we make this accessible in the digital space?"*
> *Match Funder*

> *"We want to make this environment as open and inclusive as young people as possible, we wouldn't have a six hour board meeting on Zoom for example".*
> *Match Funder*

4. **Young people are most commonly involved through advisory groups or by co-designing or leading programme development.**　**HIGHER**

- Across programmes and projects, young people are most commonly engaging in youth voice through the following:

- o Young people's advisory groups;
  - o Co-designing/leading programme development;
  - o Being members of decision-making bodies;
  - o Running or attending public meetings or events where they can share their views; and
  - o Creating media assets to share their views and ideas.
- The most common types of activity at Match Funder programme level are young people's advisory groups (25%), young people co-designing/leading programme development (16%), and young people being involved as members of decision-making bodies (16%).
- The most common types of activity at the Delivery Organisation project level are young people co-designing/leading project development and/or delivery (21%), young people's advisory groups (15%), public meetings/events where young people can share their views (13%), and young people involved in the creation of media assets (13%).
- Many of the activities undertaken by delivery organisations' individual projects were in support of these organisations developing their own youth social action project – whilst it was identified that these were often heavily facilitated/supported by adults, this was to ensure young people designed something realistic and safe.
- Youth voice activities often revolved around: deciding on the focus of the project, conducting research with community members, developing proposals, and managing the project in terms of budgets, creating action plans and delivering events.
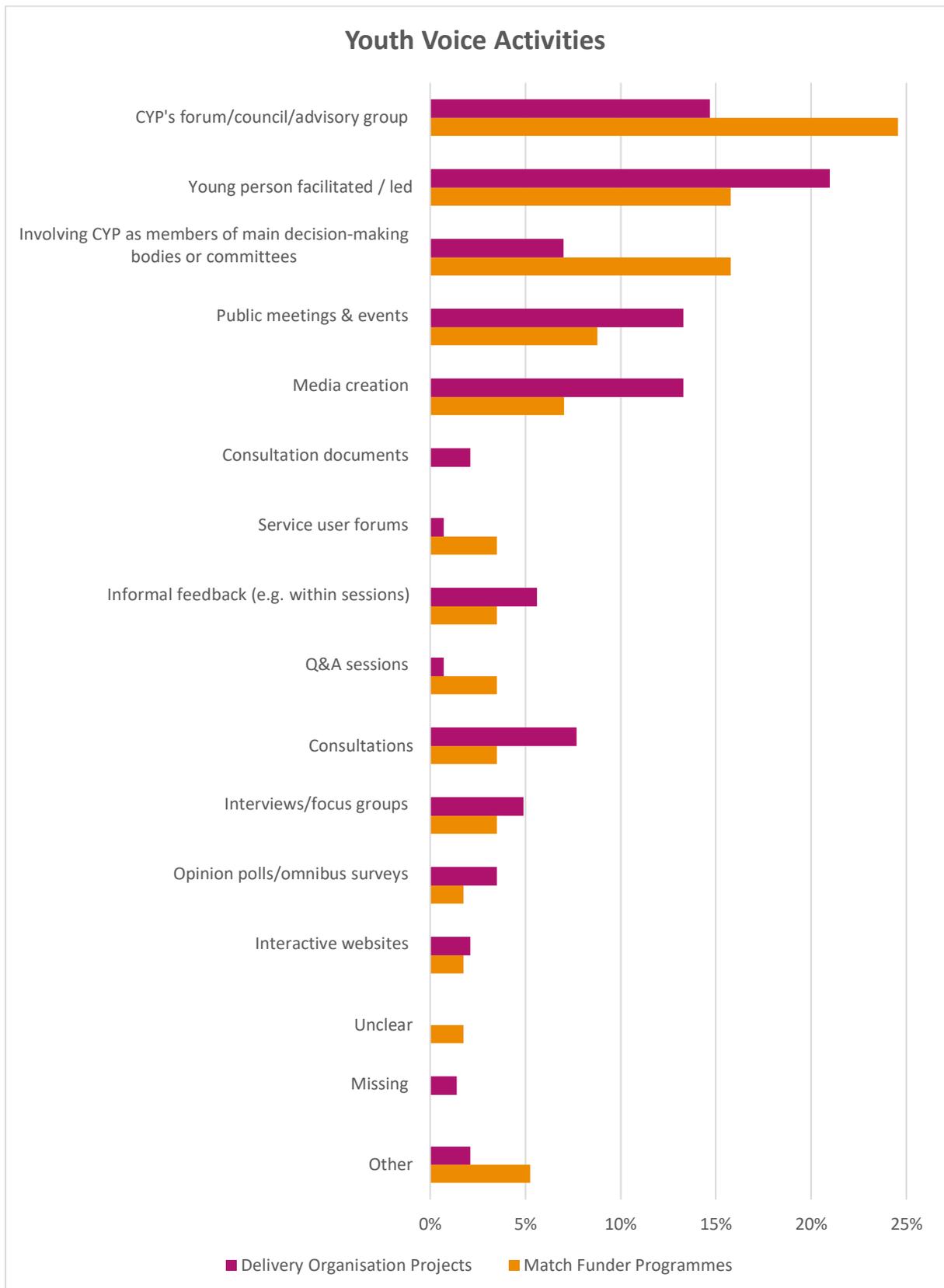
Youth Voice Activities

Activity	Delivery Organisation Projects	Match Funder Programmes

Fig 3. Percentage of data items identifying different youth voice activities within delivery organisations' projects and Match Funder programmes

5. **The most common task young people participate in is attending meetings.**

- Across programmes and projects, the most common tasks young people undertake as part of youth voice activities is attending meetings.

- The most common tasks young people undertake through youth voice activities at Match Funder programme level are attending meetings (e.g., programme management meetings) (14%), designing grants or assessing grant applications (14%), training other young people (including peer education and mentoring) (11%) or campaigning for change (11%). It is assumed that campaigning for change includes increasing youth social action activities through the #iwill Movement.

- The most common tasks young people undertake through youth voice activities at delivery organisation project level are attending meetings (e.g., project management meetings) (17%), campaigning for change (16%), training other young people (including peer education and mentoring) (16%) and organising events (15%).
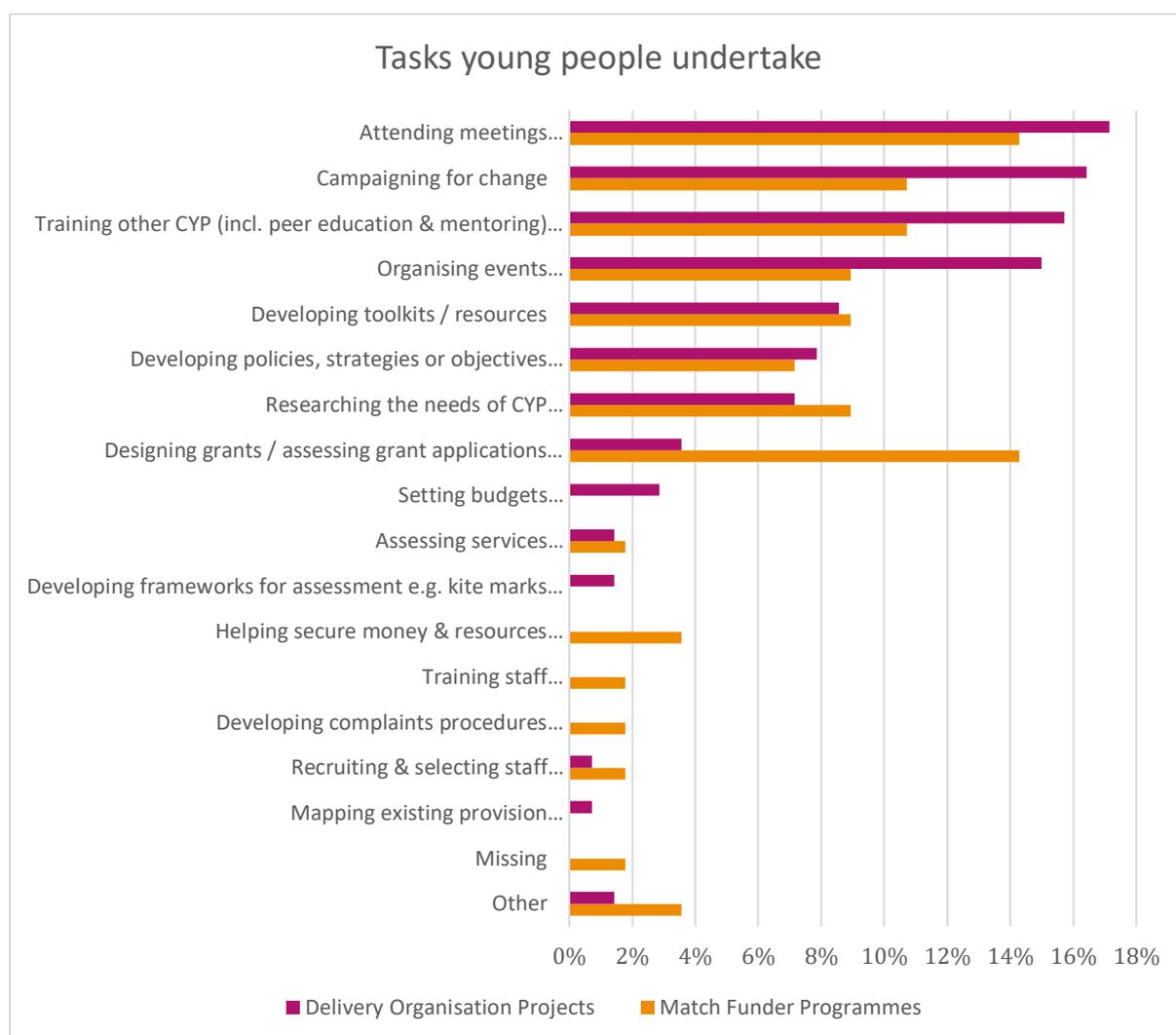

Fig 4. Percentage of data items identifying tasks young people undertake within their youth voice activities in delivery organisations' projects and Match Funder programmes

6. **A youth worker or internal specialist often facilitates youth voice activities.**

HIGHER

- Where information was available in the data trawl, it suggested that youth voice practice was most commonly facilitated by an internal specialist (37% of delivery organisation projects and 33% of Match Funders' programmes) or a youth worker (33% of delivery organisation projects and 22% of Match Funders' programmes).
- Organisations identified the importance of being trained in working with young people so that they are prepared to support young people appropriately.
- External specialists were commonly used by Match Funders (programme level) (44%) but significantly less frequently by delivery organisations (project level) (11%). Funders described that they did not always have the skills internally to confidently support youth voice and therefore outsourced this role. This may suggest recognition of their own limits of knowledge and skills but also the risks for youth voice to be 'added on' rather than invested in as a core skill set.

> *"Our [external] facilitator brings in a real wealth of experience of actually facilitating groups with younger people. But again, we've had to bring that in because we didn't have it internally… our direct experience and our skills around youth voice and participation were really quite limited."*
> *Match Funder*

> *"We [youth workers] are kind of like consultants or brokers where we…understand young people, we know the challenges and the issues, and they're willing to open up to us, but then we take all of that and transcribe it to those that might not necessarily know or work with young people on a day-to-day basis".*
> *Match Funder*

7. **Young people are most commonly supported to participate in youth voice through wrap-around support.**

HIGHER

- 28% of organisations that provided details on support and incentives stated they offered wrap-around support for young people to participate.
- Young people and organisations identified the importance of wrap-around support for youth voice to be delivered well. This often came in the form of building relationships with young people and finding ways to connect with them outside of the youth voice 'agenda', and tailoring work/sessions with young people to meet the needs of those who are participating.

> *"They're always there to support us. So we do feel supportive [to one another] but I think we all feel supported [too]. And if there's anything we need, we can always kind of go to them [youth workers]"*
> *Young person*

"We don't have, I think, the level of holistic supervision and support for young people that I would like".

Match Funder

- Both Match Funder programmes and delivery organisations projects provided a wide range of incentives to engage young people. Most commonly, these include group events, providing references or CV building activity. Delivery organisations were more likely to provide accreditation whereas Match Funders had some form of ceremony and provision of certificates. Very few reported using vouchers or payment to young people for their involvement.
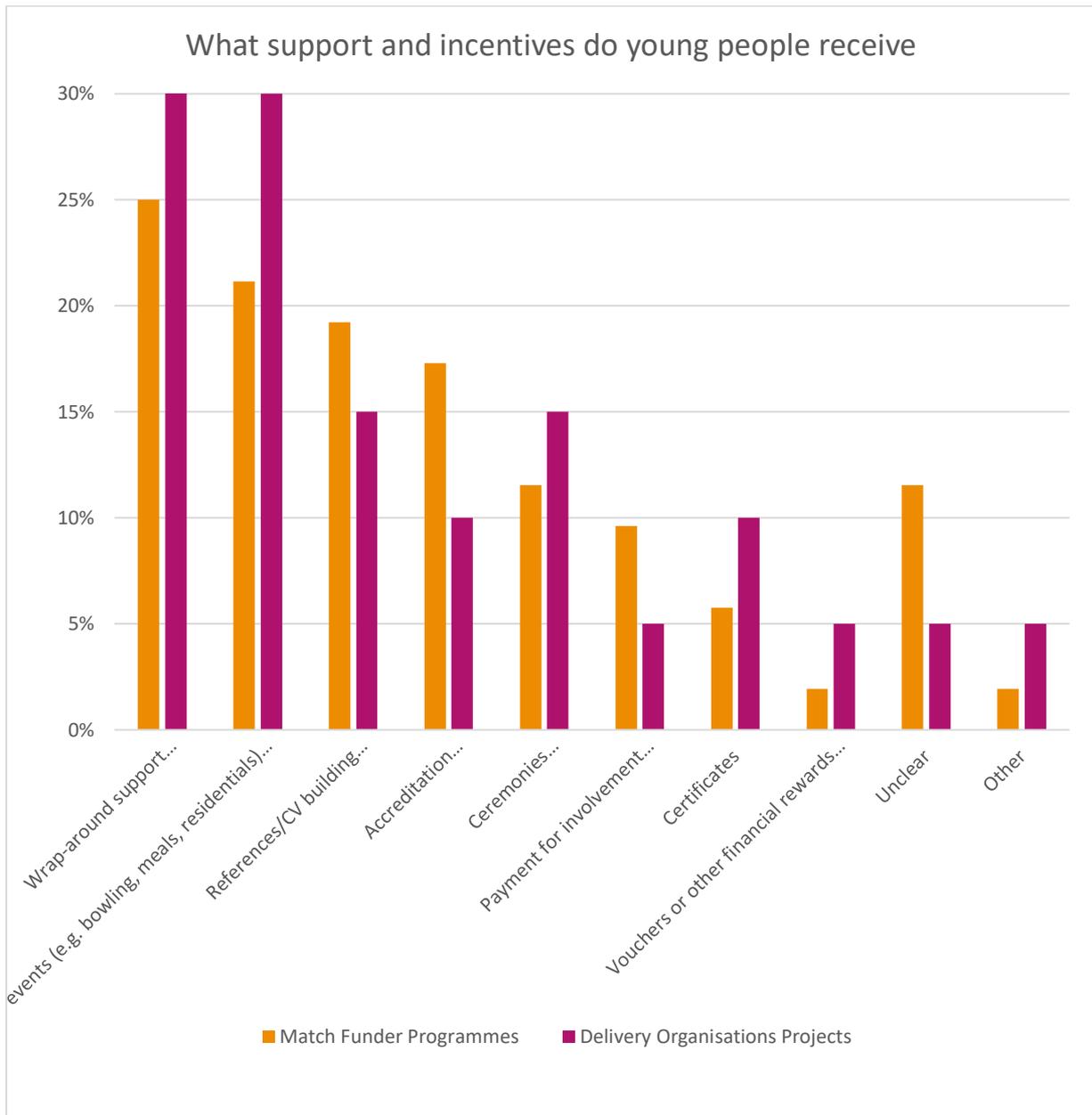
Fig 5. Percentage of data items identifying types of incentives and support within youth voice activities within delivery organisations' projects and Match Funder programmes

8. **Many youth voice activities specifically give young people training and wider support.**

- Across both Match Funders and delivery organisations, many youth voice activities seek to build young people's skills and knowledge so that they can actively engage and take on responsibilities.
- Young people are also offered a range of training and support to participate. This most commonly comes in the form of leadership training, information provision (e.g., about systems or structures), and having their own budget to control/receiving financial support to deliver a project.
- Training and support opportunities varied slightly between Match Funder programmes and delivery organisations' projects. At the Match Funder programme level, leadership training was most common (17%) along with information provision (17%). At delivery organisation project level, young people having their own budget to control / receiving financial support to deliver a project was most common (28%).
- Information provision was highlighted as a particularly important part of supporting young people to engage in youth voice, to ensure they were well equipped to make informed decisions.

> *"We run leadership training, safeguarding training and health and wellbeing training and healthy relationships training, and how to run games, the social action session to teach people the building blocks to make their own projects, etc. So, we do a lot to help people actively involved in the regular programmes."*
> *Delivery organisation*

> *"Training when we've been working stuff out, when we've been organising [events we had] …. lectures or workshops, that sort of training really helped".*
> *Young person*
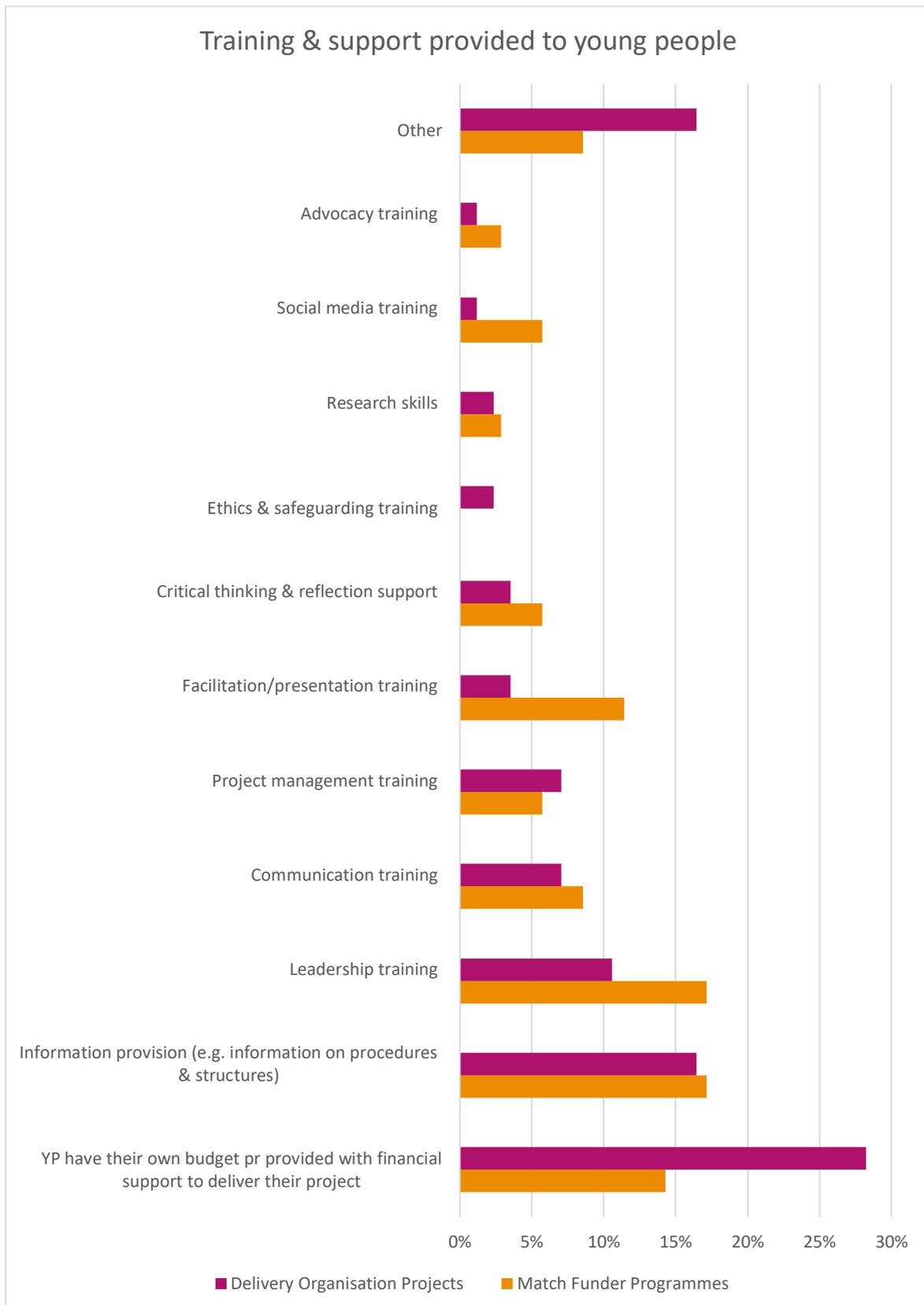
Fig 6. Percentage of data items identifying types of training and support within youth voice activities within delivery organisations' projects and Match Funder programmes

9. **Young people are keen to progress beyond their initial involvement. If offered, further progression opportunities tend to be within the same project/organisation.**

<div align="right">MEDIUM</div>

- Young people are often keen to do more youth voice activities and stay engaged.
- Progression opportunities for youth voice most often appear to have been created as new waves of youth social action have been funded and delivered, most commonly within the same organisation. This has happened, for example, through past cohorts of young people taking on leadership or mentoring roles with new cohorts of young people or who are recruited to engage in a new youth social action project or programme.
- As organisations embed youth voice, some have created other progression opportunities beyond youth social action projects. For example, they have integrated youth voice at a strategic/governance level, thus opening up progression opportunities for those previously involved.
- Some organisations were considerate about how they supported young people beyond their programme or project, for example, sign-posting opportunities for older young people to other organisations.
- It is important to note that data trawl data items had significant gaps in information on progression routes. Most insight was gained through the Social Inquiry and comments at workshops.

> *"We were a learning programme. So, we ran four cohorts of [programme]. By the end of the second cohort and into the third cohort, and the cohorts ran for about six months at a time with learning periods embedded in between of about two months each, our delivery partners or youth organisations, we were looking and focusing on legacy and sustainability, especially for the young people. We wanted to involve young people in this process."*
> *Match Funder*

> *"Transparent opportunities and processes are key, so that people know what they're signing up for. And also, anyone can apply for them".*
> *Delivery organisation*

10. **Monitoring, evaluation and learning processes and practices are patchy and underdeveloped.**

<div align="right">MEDIUM</div>

- Match Funders (programme level) and delivery organisations (project level) use a variety of ways to monitor and evaluate their youth voice practices. Common activities include seeking feedback from young people on their participation (17%), monitoring attendance/engagement (15%), collecting and analysing demographic data (14%), evaluating the impact of participation on young people involved (14%), evaluating the impact of participation on their organisation (13%), or commissioning independent external evaluation (13%).

- Efforts to evaluate youth voice practices are sometimes part of wider delivery work and the specific monitoring and evaluation of youth voice activities is not a focus.
- Many organisations reported setting aside time to gather formative feedback from young people to support their delivery – this was often part of tailoring youth voice practice to the needs of the young people they were working with.
- Some delivery organisations also gathered feedback from wider stakeholders e.g., teachers.
- Monitoring and evaluation were often not considered from the beginning, and learning wasn't always formally captured and shared across organisations. Some respondents noted how capturing summative feedback from young people to improve youth voice practice wasn't always planned and when attempted the young people had moved on or the opportunity missed, e.g., when working with young people through schools.
- Organisations often only retrospectively recognised that they needed to gather data e.g., socio-demographic characteristics of the young people they were working with to consider the representativeness of young people in their youth voice practice.
- Organisations identified that they may reflect on the process for themselves, but formally understanding the impact on young people felt more challenging to do and quantify, especially where the organisation does not traditionally work with young people and/or have direct relationships with them through youth voice activities.
- Linked to the lack of planning for learning, some practitioners shared challenges in gathering feedback from young people. Key issues included where the organisation didn't have a relationship with young people (e.g., if they recruit through schools) or where young people's engagement is sporadic and over a long time and difficult to 'go back' and ask for feedback.

11. Youth voice activities are mainly about traditionally defined 'youth issues'.　　　**LOWER**

- There was some evidence from the data trawl and Social Inquiry that youth voice activities are happening in relation to what adults define as 'youth issues' rather than creating space and freedom for young people to speak out on issues of their own choosing. In short, adults set the agenda and invite young people to express views on those issues. Some organisations recognised a need to be more adaptive to create accessible spaces for young people instead of expecting young people to fit into adult-led spaces.
- In workshops, it was noted that youth voice activities tended to focus on advisory and consultation roles compared to other forms of youth voice practice that support young people's activism or campaigning.
- There was some discussion at the Outcomes Summit and with other stakeholders of how the funding agenda impacts youth voice within #iwill. The focus areas of youth voice activities developed and facilitated by delivery organisations are often predetermined by applications to Match Funder programmes for project-based activities. While many of these focus areas will have been developed with or in response to young people's views, they may be different young people than those eventually involved, or the initial insight came a significant period of time

before the activities were facilitated by delivery organisations (due to time taken to apply for funding, receive and then recruit young people).

12. Some youth voice activities happen in 'decorative' ways or through one-off opportunities.

<div style="text-align:right">**LOWER**</div>

- A small number of the activities reviewed in the data trawl were very short-term. Upon investigation, this appeared to be certain Match Funders that gathered large quantities of youth voice data at one-day events. Both young people and other stakeholders reviewing the data were concerned about how much engagement and influence could be achieved through limited periods of involvement, especially in the context of a project or programme.
- During the Social Inquiry, young people pointed out that opportunities to 'have a seat at the table' were not always accessible to them. Examples included meetings during the school day, events with age restrictions that exclude those who would like to be involved, or the prior knowledge needed to make informed decisions was not shared appropriately. Some thought that this could be when decorative or tokenistic activities could occur.
- The Advisory Panel highlighted how access issues could be considered more widely - were these just not accessible for practical reasons or were they actually not useful to young people because they were not about the issues they wanted to discuss and be involved in? Further research is needed to understand how young people perceive access and the degree to which practical barriers and personal perspectives may impact access.

What has enabled or inhibited youth voice practice?

Enabled

13. Long-term resourcing (finances, protected staff time, relationship building activities) are needed to provide the right level of support to enable meaningful youth voice.

MEDIUM

- Youth voice work is often dictated by wider project timelines, which can make it challenging to meaningfully engage young people in a process when it needs to be implemented quickly.
- Similarly, the capacity to develop skills or deliver high-quality youth voice practice from start to finish is challenging if the process is squeezed or stretched by project timelines.
- Building relationships with young people is an important aspect of youth voice practice, which takes time and resources that are not always accounted for. It is not always possible to reach the 'tipping point' for youth voice, where organisations have both the skills and resource, and trusting relationships with young people.
- This work is resource intensive and cannot be delivered on a shoestring. There is often an underappreciation of the capacity and resources needed from start to finish.
- Organisations recognised that where they were doing this work for the first time, they needed to create resources to ensure it could be continued, e.g., creating templates and resources for online delivery.
- Data indicates resources are needed for young people and staff, although there is limited understanding of the quality of resources or minimum scale.
- Whilst this work needs someone to champion it, it was felt that it is important that it doesn't just rest with one person but is seen as everyone's responsibility. Care needs to be taken to build support structures up around youth voice activities in a sustainable way by for example dedicating more staff to this work.

> *"To build those relationships with them, show them how much you care, how much you trust them, how much you believe in them, that cannot be done overnight."*
> *Match Funder*

14. Young people engaging in youth voice activities benefit from high quality socio-emotional support from a trusted practitioner to enable their wider participation.

MEDIUM

- Organisations recognised that relationships (both between staff and young people, and between young people themselves) are key to successful youth voice practice and that adequate time needs to be invested in building them. They recognised the need to understand the young people they are working with and what they want from the process – both through collecting appropriate data and getting to know them – to ensure their needs are fully met. Taking time to

get to know each other and connect personally, and not simply 'diving into the agenda', made the experience much more enjoyable and empowering for young people.

- Often these relationships were held with one key adult, who could act as a broker or cheerleader for those young people. Without high-quality delivery all the way through, maintaining positive relationships with young people can be difficult.
- Providing space for 1:1 conversation and feedback, and offering the types of support that individual young people need, can help them to engage. This can vary greatly from providing a safe space to talk about their mental health to providing tools to create audio of large written documents for young people who are dyslexic.
- Conversely, when young people feel that they lack this support, it can put them off from engaging in youth voice activities and taking on responsibilities.
- Young people can have many roles in youth voice practice, and playing to their strengths can support them to stay engaged, enjoy it and be more successful. This requires building those relationships and listening to young people's expectations and ambitions.

> *"[You've] got to think of different types of ways of engaging young people through different roles. So not every young person wants to be a researcher, not every young person wants to be an advisor, not every young person wants to be consulted or fill out surveys. So therefore, you need all these different approaches on offer, to hear all the different voices, because not one way will work for every young person."*
> *Delivery Organisation*

15. Those delivering youth voice activities need to build strong links with other adults in young people's lives and help to manage any responsibilities taken on by young people.

MEDIUM

- Often youth voice work engages with other organisations and influential adults in a young person's life (e.g., parents, teachers in schools or other youth workers). Practitioners need to work with these organisations and individuals to support them to know how their actions can enable or inhibit a young person's engagement in youth voice activities.
- Organisations also found that they may need to manage their expectations of partner organisations where their interest, time and capacity to support youth voice activities were limited.
- Young people have busy lives and often have other commitments or things going on. They said it was important that adults were respectful and understanding of these to ensure that young people can engage in a way that is practical and sustainable for them.

> *"[Being] fully youth led, we need to factor in the other areas of the young person's life."*
> *Match Funder*

> *"Some young people may process slowly and giving young people the time to think about a response is beneficial, but teachers inhibit this process by providing answers rather than*

supporting – this links to the idea of teacher input and the relationship between the delivery staff and teaching staff".
        Delivery organisation

"Young people have control over the project; as the project develops the level of advice and logistics increases – the young people become more independent and responsible for this – the aim is to recognise that their actions have consequences."
        Delivery organisation

16. Developing a wide range of opportunities for involvement builds accessibility of youth voice activities to young people.   `MEDIUM`

- Where opportunities for young people to engage were diversified, for example creating opportunities for young people to engage anonymously, at a single time point, or in a different location, this increased the ability to engage those who are less likely to put themselves forward or find out about the opportunity organically.
- Organisations identified that to make their youth voice practice truly accessible they needed to think about how it could be adapted to engage different ages or young people with different needs.
- Young people recognised that they can have their voices heard through informal routes, and that there are many ways to influence that do not all have to be 'top tier'. Organisations should be mindful and encouraging of this.

    "If we want to ensure that young people have access to as many opportunities, we need to make sure that we remove any of those barriers to access."
        Match Funder

    "When it came to the programme, we did more research around what certain community groups were, [and] certain characteristics that we were hoping to engage with were aligned to the programme."
        Match Funder

17. Celebrating success and capturing learning contributes to building youth voice into everyone's consciousness and responsibility across an organisation.   `MEDIUM`

- Organisations recognised that if they didn't shout about the good work they were doing, it was much more likely to fizzle out – they needed to celebrate their successes and highlight the learning to make it more likely for the practice to be developed and continued internally.
- Organisations felt that having greater visibility of young people within their systems and structures would help to grow the profile of youth voice practice, demonstrate its value and increase buy-in.

- When organisations think about how they are doing 'more of what young people want' across all levels of an organisation it can stop the work from becoming siloed. This requires awareness raising and increased understanding across different roles and functions.

18. Organisations' senior leadership support helps embed youth voice activities and ensure that their views are heard within the organisation. MEDIUM

- Interviewees in the Social Inquiry highlighted that organisations need to have buy-in at all levels to be open to hearing what young people are saying, be prepared to act on it, and have the processes in place to support this.
- Whilst staff may be supportive of young people, often organisational processes (for example, a board member needing to sign off a decision) can prevent young people from having true decision-making power.

> *"[It's been] a bit more of a cultural thing of, if we want to do this, you want to do it meaningfully, and we want to do it well. And we want to make it not tokenistic. That almost has taken us a good couple of years to get to get everybody to that point of seeing the benefits, understanding the benefits, recognising the support that would need to be put in place to make it possible."*
> *Delivery organisation*

> *"I think the whole programme is helping to kind of change the conversation a bit, and then get youth voice more embedded."*
> *Match Funder*

19. Young people perceived working alongside other young people, especially those with experience who can role model engagement, helps their engagement in youth voice activities. LOWER

- Young people enjoyed working with other young people and working with those a bit older or who had more experience in youth voice activities was motivating and gave them something to aspire to.
- It was more important for young people to see other young people doing youth voice activities than hearing about its importance from adults.

20. Having direct contact with decision makers and seeing the difference youth voice activities make encourages young people to get involved and stay involved.

<div style="float:right">**LOWER**</div>

- Young people stated that where they felt that they were genuinely being listened to, that their opinions were valued, and that they were involved in decision-making was critical and positively impacts their experience.
- Young people valued being able to see a tangible outcome from their work and understand the impact they were having. They recognised that it was not always easy to see the impact they have made, but it is important for organisations to both communicate any consequences of young people's decisions on young people (so-called completing the feedback loop), and consider how they capture the wider impact of young people's work.
- Being able to talk directly to high-level influencers feels like it gives young people influence and is very motivating to get involved or to stay involved in youth voice activities.

Inhibited

21. Dominant negative views of young people in society impacts support for youth voice activities.

<div style="float:right">**MEDIUM**</div>

- It was perceived that many adults in positions of power do not always recognise the value of young people's views or appreciate the ways in which young people can challenge traditional thinking or decisions. Traditionally, adults do not give space over to young people to have power and control and do not trust young people to lead change.
- In addition, some young people do not always recognise how much they are capable of and can achieve when they are supported.
- Young people (and supporting adults) have found it difficult to get decision-makers to take the first step and 'be in the room' with young people. Young people need support to overcome ingrained societal perceptions of what it means to be young and not put limitations on themselves.
- It was recognised that young people are not used to making decisions and this can be challenging, especially if adults don't know how to ask or guide them effectively. Allowing enough time for young people to gain confidence and feel empowered to take decisions was seen as essential.
- Adults have been surprised at the extent to which young people can bring a new perspective to issues and challenge the status quo, and this can act as a positive feedback loop as adults then give more space to young people.

> *"[The young people we worked with] really made the adults step back and think, with some really simple obvious observations, that's actually far more adult than the adults in the*

rooms. So I think being present and having a voice in those spaces is quite a remarkable thing to have done."
    Match Funder

"We spent a lot of time briefing people helping young people to understand us and work with our ways of working and not really challenged ourselves to work differently at times."
    Match Funder

"When it comes to involving young people and passionately giving them power, we also need to think about our ways of working."
    Match Funder

22. Organisations that are not youth-exclusive face greater barriers to undertaking youth voice activities.   **MEDIUM**

- Where organisations (whether funders or delivery organisations) are not set up to work directly with young people, youth voice practices were more likely to be challenging or transient. They reported barriers in recruiting young people, creating sustainable opportunities or building meaningful relationships that lead to support youth voice practice.
- It can also be more difficult to get buy-in from others in the organisation to invest in the process. Practitioners in organisations that work with other groups in society find it difficult to justify the investment in resources to do this work with young people specifically.
- These organisations reported they struggled to find the right existing networks through which to engage young people; knowing where to start with communicating with young people.
- Organisations may be relying on external facilitators or gatekeepers, which makes it difficult to start and/or maintain the process themselves, and they do not have the internal skill set. Some of these organisations have also struggled to follow-up with young people where they have been engaged through an external facilitator, which has made closing the feedback loop challenging.

    "With our engagement, I think we relied very much on the kind of delivery partner to help us to tailor our kind of engagement to the young people."
        Policy Maker

    "[We were] leaning on the voluntary sector in order to reach people with lived experience."
        Match Funder

23. Digital participation is challenging in youth voice practice because it can hinder relationship building.   **LOWER**

- Earlier, it was noted that digital forms of participation appear to be growing and, in some situations, can create better access to engagement in youth voice activities.

- Barriers were also acknowledged, where young people experienced digital exclusion or were not comfortable/had difficulty engaging online. For many young people, online delivery made it more challenging to create and maintain personal interactions between staff and young people and for young people themselves to build relationships with each other.
- Young people also noted that if the opportunities are not easily accessible, they are much less likely to reach young people who are less likely to engage in the first place. It risks creating or exacerbating inequalities by making it harder for some groups to participate and easier for others.

24. **Young people engaging in youth voice activities are expected to understand complex information, systems, processes or context.**   **LOWER**

- Some young people reported being expected to understand a significant amount of information when involved in youth voice activities. They often had to 'get to grips' with jargon, new terminology and, especially those involved in governance roles, new domains of knowledge.
- Practitioners recognised a need to share information in an accessible way that supports young people to engage meaningfully. This can require extra resourcing and careful planning and care in the language used with young people. An appropriate induction process that adequately prepares young people and sets expectations is essential.

25. **Young people are often not aware of opportunities to be heard or can lack access to training or support that would enable them to take part in youth voice activities effectively.**   **LOWER**

- Young people reported that opportunities are not always easy to find, and all organisations need to be better at promoting their opportunities or taking them to young people.
- Tailored programmes with training and support are important to provide young people with the skills and technical knowledge they need to engage in youth voice activities.
- Sessions need to feel inclusive and easy to participate in. This includes thinking about timing, location, and cultural appropriateness. This was often most challenging when young people were engaged in adult spaces.
- Where young people require additional support, this needs to be catered for (e.g., if they are dyslexic and are required to read information for a meeting).

    "Transparent opportunities and processes are key, so that people know what they're signing up for. And also, anyone can apply for them".
        Delivery organisation

26. **Young people most intensively involved face particular challenges - with expectations on commitment that can be difficult to navigate.**   **LOWER**

- Young people noted that they sometimes struggle to fit youth voice activities in with other personal commitments, and there needed to be more acceptance of this. Young people involved

in multiple youth voice activities reported facing particular challenges and requiring those leading activities to be realistic and flexible on expectations for engagement.

- Young people valued good communication from the organisations they were working with to help keep them in the loop and make them feel in control.

27. Young people can 'age out' and feel the ending of youth voice activities is poorer without positive progression. | **LOWER**

- Young people who were getting older and had reached a predetermined age limit for engagement often wanted to stay engaged, especially when they had been very invested in the project. Some felt it was important for both delivery organisations and funders to consider how this could be facilitated, such as creating new opportunities for older young people.
- Conversely, the often drawn-out nature of projects can mean that young people don't see or recognise the impact they have had, and engagement can peter out towards the end as the projects wrap-up.

> *"The biggest learning is … if you want something to be gracefully led by young people, they need to be involved from start to finish. You know, from inception all the way to wrap up and I think the latter half tends to always fizzle out of not being able to see the final impact."*
> *Match Funder*

28. The support and skills needed in youth voice in youth social action are still underdeveloped. | **LOWER**

- Practitioners recognised that providing adequate support for young people is often contingent on their capacity and skill.
- Some recognise that when coming fresh to this work, there needs to be an investment in their skill development (e.g., safeguarding training, effective group work with young people).
- Organisations and young people noted that staff turn-over and capacity are a constant challenge to enabling organisations to reach a point at which this work is embedded and standard practice. Often it was linked to one person and risked being hindered when they leave.

> *"[You need to consider] do we have the necessary capacity and resources to be able to do [high quality youth voice]?"*
> *Match Funder*

How has youth voice practice impacted on young people, funders, delivery organisations and communities?

Young people

29. Youth voice activities contribute to young people's socio-emotional skills.

<div style="text-align:right">**HIGHER**</div>

- Youth voice activities are most likely to impact on young people's socio-emotional skills. The mostly commonly identified impacts through the data trawl were increased confidence in capabilities (31%), improved leadership skills (11%), strengthened peer relationships (8%), and improved teamwork (8%).
- Young people identified that realising their influence, or feeling like they were making a difference, had a positive impact on their self-esteem and helped them to understand their own skills and talents. Representing other people in their community gave them confidence. It felt very powerful to be able to share their stories.
- Organisations also identified that young people's expectations of themselves, and perceptions of their own abilities changed through engaging in youth voice activities.
- Young people had gained the confidence to go on and do more to have their voices heard about the issues that were important to them, e.g., attending events about climate change when that is an issue about which they are passionate.
- Young people identified new or strengthened relationships with their peers as a significant part of their experience of youth voice. This included creating new friendships, which had a positive effect on their mental health, and acted as a source of support during their youth voice projects/work.
- Young people found that meeting and networking with others was also very motivating and helped them to pursue their own ideas.
- Young people identified that through working on projects they developed an increased sense of independence and responsibility. Organisations also identified that supporting young people to make decisions with real consequences supported development of responsibility.

> *"What we've done as a team, young people can take these skills, and take this blueprint and sort of apply it to their lives and help themselves and I think that's what it's about. It's about giving them tools because we can help them as young people, but they've got to carry this through into adulthood."*
> *Match Funder*

> *"When we hear back from these young people about…how they've grown and the skills that they can identify that they've developed, I think, for me, that really is high quality social action, because you can see they and they understand that the impact it's had on them not only having enjoyed the project and seeing the outcomes, like for their community".*

Delivery organisation

"The training they have done at the beginning is effective… young people changed their own expectations of their own abilities – potentially higher self-esteem".
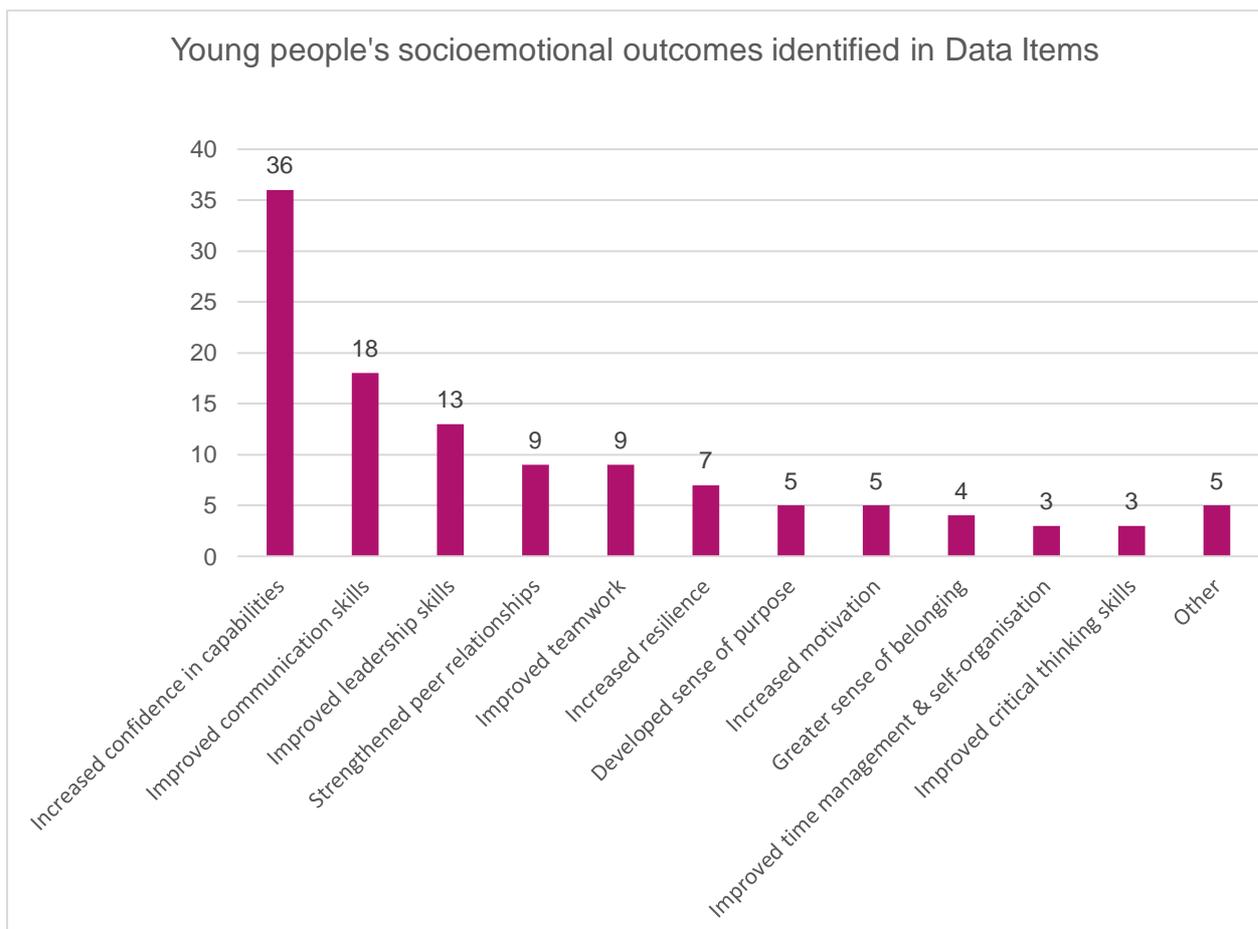*Delivery organisation*

"The day training sessions or half days, they are a massive part of our training, and help us develop those skills".
Young person

"[Being involved] helped me kind of gain confidence… to develop speaking to the public and in terms of people and coming together and making an idea and then then the idea into action".
Young person

Fig 7. Count of data items identifying socioemotional outcomes for young people engaged in youth voice activities within delivery organisations' projects and Match Funder programmes

30. Youth voice activities contribute to young people's social connections.   `HIGHER`

- The most common civic or societal outcomes identified were increased external connections/wider networks (33%), increased feeling of responsibility towards peers and/or local community (26%).

  "I met so many people who are some of my closest friends and I was able to step far outside my comfort zone connecting me with my identity".
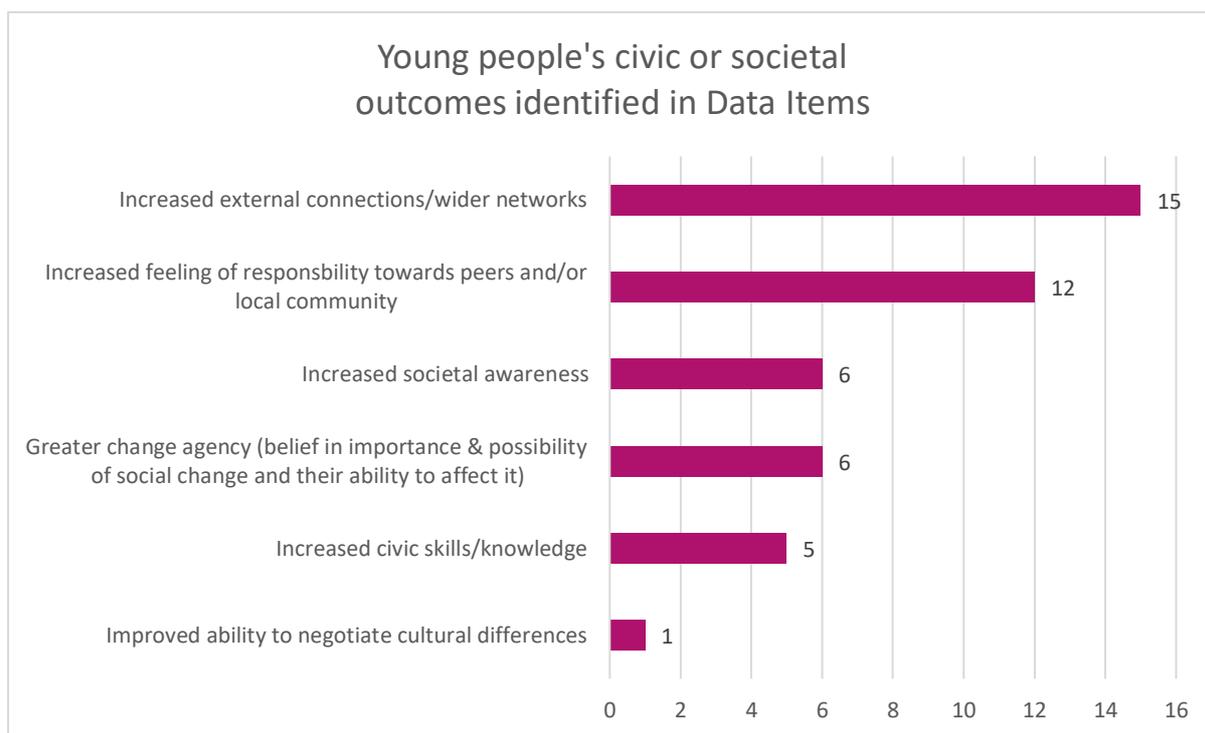   *Young person*

  "I have grown as a person and become more confident and feel that with this confidence I have managed to lead the younger generation".
      Young person

  "I learnt new skills and became more confident making friends along the way, developed myself and my skills, allowing me to become more confident and use these improved qualities in other volunteering schemes and life, as well as make good connections with people around the country".
      Young person

Young people's civic or societal outcomes identified in Data Items

Outcome	Count
Increased external connections/wider networks	15
Increased feeling of responsbility towards peers and/or local community	12
Increased societal awareness	6
Greater change agency (belief in importance & possibility of social change and their ability to affect it)	6
Increased civic skills/knowledge	5
Improved ability to negotiate cultural differences	1

Fig 8. Count of data items identifying civic and societal outcomes for young people engaged in youth voice activities within delivery organisations' projects and Match Funder programmes

31. Youth voice activities contribute to young people's employability skills. `HIGHER`

- The most common employment outcome from youth voice activities is improved employability skills (43%).
- Young people recognised that some skills they gained through youth voice activities could be transferable to other areas of life.
- Young people identified that where youth voice practice included tailored support or progression opportunities via work experience or employment, this particularly led to the development of transferable skills.

> *"The skills that we're learning…. like how to actually create a plan, if you want to incite a team, if you want to create a campaign, just learning those skills, I think are really useful for going out into the wider world as well and creating your own campaigns because I feel like that it's something that's truly missing from the education system as well, like you're not teaching young people how to take their future into their own hands."*
> *Young person*

> *"Some young people go onto leading projects and young people with special needs taught other young people with special needs – being empathetic and responding to the needs".*
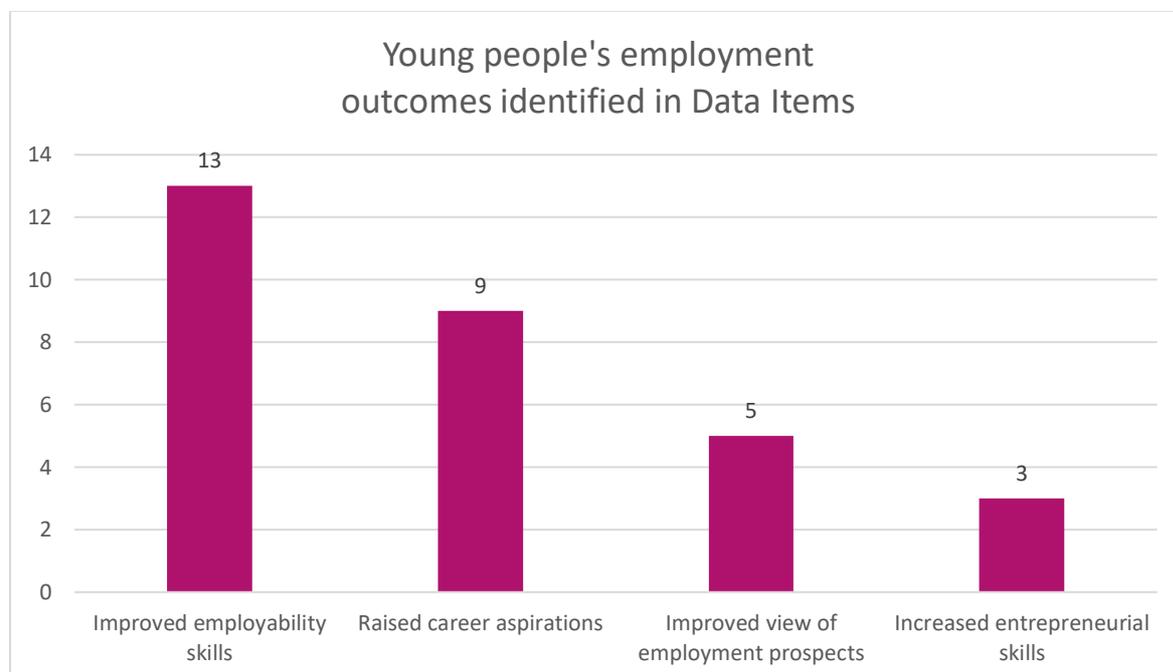> *Delivery organisation*

Fig 9. Count of data items identifying employment related outcomes for young people engaged in youth voice activities within delivery organisations' projects and Match Funder programmes

32. Youth voice activities contribute to young people's improved mental or physical wellbeing. `MEDIUM`

- The most common health and wellbeing outcome is improved mental or physical wellbeing (55%).
- As above, young people reported that new or strengthened relationships had a positive effect on their mental health.

Funders

33. Funders perceive their funding to be more impactful where it has been developed with young people.   HIGHER

- There were fewer identified outcomes for funders within the data trawl. Of those that listed outcomes, they focused on having a greater understanding of issues facing young people or the value of their funding to young people.
- It was identified that incorporating youth voice into funding practice has led to a greater diversity of voices in the funding and grant-making processes and funders having a greater understanding of the challenges facing young people and their lived experience.
- Funders reported that felt that their grant-making now better reflected what young people need, and young people's decisions genuinely shaped it.
- Where funds include criteria designed by young people, it will guarantee that applicants/grantees will be striving to demonstrate that they do things that young people have asked for.
- There was a realisation that there is a need for lived experience to be included at key-decision making levels to ensure decisions taken represented the views of those they are intended to benefit.
- Funders were prepared to take more risks in their grant-making where these were driven by young people's views – there was a recognition that young brought a fresh perspective on funding applications that adults couldn't always see.

> *"Rather than us assuming that, as adults, we can go out and have conversations with other adults and talk about young people and decide what's right for them… young people have told us themselves, actually, what we need in this local area in order to shape local priorities for the funding team. So, they're funding the right stuff. So that's very, very powerful."*
> *Match Funder*

> *"…more recently, the work [the young people we work with have] been doing in England to shape local funding priorities is hugely influential… young people have really helped informed what local priorities ought to be, because they're young people in those local areas saying these the needs of young people in our local areas."*
> *Match Funder*

"Really helped us identify priorities or what matters to young people, and therefore make sure the money has gone into the right place. And that's probably the most significant thing we can do: spend money in the right places."
> *Match Funder*

"We have changed the way we thought about how we fund things, because we really think it's not just okay, we're funding based on the evidence, but what's happening based on what young people are telling us".
> *Match Funder*

34. Some funders are actively promoting youth voice; including to those that they fund.

HIGHER

- Funders are sharing what they have learnt about participatory grant-making with others in their network – both other funders and grantees.
- Funders are encouraging others to incorporate youth voice practice by leading by example, sharing work publicly (both practice and impact).
- Funders are creating resources to share best practice around participatory grant-making.
- Funders are incorporating youth voice into fund criteria and therefore are funding more youth voice practice.
- Funders have the capacity to convene grantees working on youth voice practice to share and learn from their experiences.

"I would say any organisation that is working with or for young people should have young people integrated in their governance and their decision making authentically."
> *Match Funder*

"Already sharing some of the learning that I've got from working on this programme with young people and with other members of our organisation in other areas."
> *Match Funder*

"Key things that we've done... sought to influence ourselves, but also influence others".
> *Match Funder*

"Work with other funders, a lot of our young people sort of stand and deliver and do talks and different organisations talk about the work they've been doing... inspires and excites people, but we also sort of talk about how we've done it."
> *Match Funder*

"Really useful actually to pass on to other programmes across the fund, who want to involve more participatory grant making or community panels".
> *Match Funder*

35. Some funders have changed processes to be more youth inclusive or are planning to in the future.   `MEDIUM`

- Some funders identified that they had made changes to their application review processes to ensure that young people's views were taken into account, such as amending the scoring system so young people's score counted towards final decisions.
- Some funders recognised that if they want to make their decision-making processes more open to young people, they may need to adapt the resources they have/use.
- Some have been reflecting on current practices and were planning to change future rounds of funding to further embed youth voice.

> *"[Now] we're looking for evidence that young people have been involved in the design of your project. That influences the project, because they have to make sure people are designing the projects, otherwise, we're not going to give it money."*
> *Match Funder*

36. Initial investment in youth voice activities has grown due to perceived benefits.   `MEDIUM`

- Funders recognised the value of their youth voice work – for the young people they were working with and on the quality of their grant making – and this encouraged them to invest further in this process.
- Funders are looking at how they can involve young people in other ways beyond grant-making, e.g., in their comms activities.
- Co-designing funding programmes felt much more authentic as it genuinely helped to identify young people's priorities and put money in the right place. Funders wanted to continue this practice.

Delivery organisations

37. Delivery organisations perceive that youth voice activities enable them to develop more relevant youth social action programmes. `MEDIUM`

- Delivery organisations pointed to having a better understanding of young people's needs and being able to deliver services relevant to young people.
- Delivery organisations pointed to having improved staff skills to facilitate youth voice and developing resources to support delivery of their youth voice practice.
- Delivery organisations have pointed to increased collaboration with young people in their work.
- Through engaging in youth voice work in youth social action, delivery organisations have recognised that there are other areas in their organisations where young people can be involved in decision-making and are thinking about how they put this into practice / developing this work.

> *"And in our new strategy… We have several goals and drivers in the next few years we want to achieve but the number one wrap-around goal is making sure all those goals and drivers have young people at the heart of what we are and what we do in that sense. And the more that we do that, we seem to find that more people want to take part as well."*
>   *Delivery organisation*

38. Some delivery organisations are collaborating and sharing their youth voice activities. `LOWER`

- Organisations have created resources to share best practice around youth voice practice.
- Organisations feel that they are influencing their partner organisations to consider how they can incorporate youth voice in their work, through the youth voice approaches that they have adopted, particularly within their local communities.
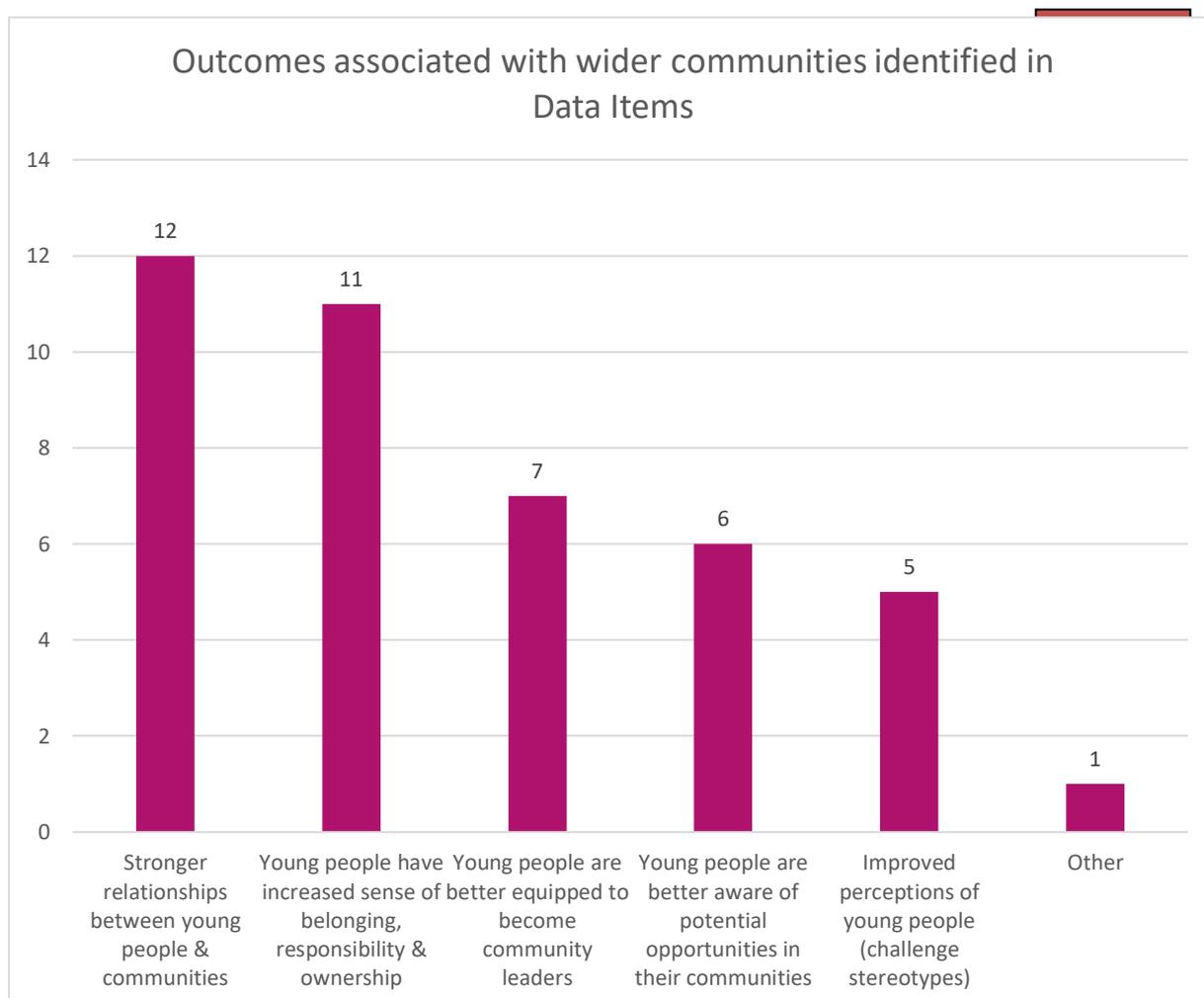
Communities

39. Youth voice activities are perceived as contributing to strong connections between young people and their communities (geographic and interest-based). `MEDIUM`

- The development of healthier communities was most commonly identified in data trawl items as being achieved through:
    - Stronger relationships between young people and communities (29%);
    - Young people having an increased sense of belonging, responsibility and ownership (27%);
    - Young people being better equipped to become community leaders (17%); and

- Young people being better aware of the potential opportunities in their communities (15%).
- Young people identified that delivering projects they had designed in their communities was empowering and gave them a sense of responsibility towards supporting community issues about which they were passionate.
- In some instances, young people's activities were credited as resulting in tangible outcomes for the benefit of others e.g., reports or toolkits had been shared with people in positions of power and perceived as being influential, changes to local services, and changes to the delivery of activities within the community.
- Whilst the specific impacts of youth social action designed and delivered by young people were often short lived, it did create relationships (e.g., with schools or colleges) that may support further social action.

Fig 10. Count of data items identifying outcomes for communities related to youth voice activities within delivery organisations' projects and Match Funder programmes

Outcomes associated with wider communities identified in Data Items

Category	Count
Stronger relationships between young people & communities	12
Young people have increased sense of belonging, responsibility & ownership	11
Young people are better equipped to become community leaders	7
Young people are better aware of potential opportunities in their communities	6
Improved perceptions of young people (challenge stereotypes)	5
Other	1

40. Youth voice activities are perceived as raising the profile of young people within the wider community.

- In some instances, families who engaged in the project could see the impact that their child was having in their community.
- Young people recognised that even if there was no immediate or direct impact as a result of their actions, there was a 'trickle-down effect' of raising the profile of young people.

> *"It's been very refreshing in terms of like, the wider impact…hearing young people being spoken about positively and not always like those young people always up to no good, you know, so I think that is always one of the benefits and that was one of the things that we were looking at… the double benefit of young people getting involved in social action was what impact were they making in their community"*
> *Match Funder*

Conclusions

The #iwill Fund has been a significant catalyst for exploring and developing the potential for youth voice and influence. Through the ethos and approach of the funding, and the resource it provided, new opportunities for young people to be heard about decisions which impact their lives have been created.

More often than not, youth voice activities have sought to engage young people with lived experiences of challenge, discrimination or disadvantage. For those who have been engaged, young people report a range of positive impacts. Youth voice activities are most likely associated with developing young people's confidence in their own capabilities and are these new skills and capabilities are likely to transfer with them to other areas of their lives. Many have developed wider practical skills and knowledge that they can apply in education or the transition to employment.

These young people have most often been working with youth workers or specialists with expertise in youth voice activities. In doing so, they have gained a wider range of support beyond "just" the platform to be heard. They have formed beneficial relationships with adults whom they trust and who demonstrate appropriate support.

Young people are most actively engaged with groups of peers - through meetings of committees, panels and boards - forming relationships and sometimes friendships that are likely to sustain more widely and enhance wider aspects of their lives. Together with their youth workers, they have navigated to digital activities and learnt - and continue to learn - how to connect digitally. Many have been heard on issues that directly affect their lives and those of their peers. A small minority are increasingly having influence strategically and in a wider range of spheres of life.

The #iwill Fund has helped to bolster our collective understanding of youth voice as being as much about a shift in the culture of an organisation rather than just a mechanism of related activities with young people's views and wishes expressed and captured. Youth voice practice is more likely to thrive when there is senior leadership engagement; appropriate and sustainable resourcing and where there is a variety of routes for involvement.

Practitioners need a varied toolbox of skills to enable and facilitate youth voice practice. They need to build supportive relationships with individual young people that recognise and help to navigate their unique life circumstances and the wider networks of adults and decision makers in their lives. Practitioners also need to actively and creatively offer engaging opportunities that bring peers together, especially connecting those with experience of engagement in youth voice activities to those newer to the opportunity. Practitioners need to simplify and communicate complex ideas and provide opportunities for learning and reflection. They need to advocate internally for the value of young people's views, celebrating the successes from youth voice opportunities and proving its value in practice, ensuring those in positions of power and influence connect to young people directly.

The culture change for an organisation – whether a funder or one in a delivery role - to truly embed youth voice goes beyond a commitment to resources and activities. It is about reshaping how those with positions of power and influence perceive and view young people. For those organisations that work with a wide variety of people (beyond those who are up to 25), this shift of culture change can be more challenging but remains a critical prerequisite for effective youth voice practice.

When done well, youth voice is making a difference beyond the young people directly participating. Organisations whose culture is being challenged and enhanced by the views of young people are becoming increasingly pro-participation. The more you do it, the more you're willing to share power and share learning with others.

A wide range of funders have gained new insights into the experiences of young people, and some have used this to influence their funding decisions (strategically and individually). They have started on a journey of being more youth inclusive and broadening the decisions on which young people are heard. Some are helping partners raise the bar regarding youth inclusion and youth voice practices, and together are critically reflecting and exchanging learning on what enables and inhibits the sharing of power with young people. Many perceive their funding as having a greater impact due to the ways in which young people have shaped its design and delivery.

Many delivery organisations have been able to grow spaces for young people to influence not only their own youth social action projects and journey, but to embed change within the wider organisation. Increasingly, depending on resources available and the lifecycle of grants, many collaborate and share learning from their activities.

The impact of funders and delivery organisations' youth voice activities on wider communities is less well understood. For some young people, they have gained a greater connection with community members - geographic or interest-based. More widely, as a minimum, it's likely to have raised the profile of young people - and the issues affecting their lives - within the wider community.

Across the #iwill Fund and more widely, the monitoring and evaluation of youth voice and its impacts is challenging. There is a lack of consistency in definitions, terminology and ways of describing what young people do, how they do it and the difference it makes. Monitoring and evaluation were often not considered from the beginning of project or programmes, and learning was not always formally captured and shared across organisations. While some may describe the activities where young people are heard and influence decision making; there is significantly less understanding of the outcomes for participants and even less data on the impact for organisations and wider communities. Commonly, there was little specific data captured or learning generated around youth voice elements of projects, especially where there is a wider youth social action intent.

Implications for policy

Youth voice matters

This evaluation has demonstrated the critical role that youth voice activities can play for funding decisions and the design and delivery of youth social action projects. It can never be a bolt-on but rather must be embedded within future policy and programme development.

Building a workforce skilled and able to lead effective youth voice activities

This evaluation has demonstrated the critical role that practitioners working with young people to be heard play in the process. While they come from a variety of disciplines and professional identities, perhaps unsurprisingly, young people see these relationships as critical to them and their ability to be heard. There are opportunities to better understand the competencies, knowledge and skills that these practitioners need to deliver high quality activity and what level of training or experience is proportionate.

Improving access to senior leaders and decision makers

More widely, greater attention should be played in how policy makers and people in positions of influence can gain direct access to young people. Evidence from this evaluation suggests that this is highly valued by young people and may support retention in youth voice activities. More widely, it's likely to be reinforcing of the benefits of investment in effective youth voice provision.

Implications for funders

Improving data collection

There is little consistency in how #iwill Fund programmes or projects describe or monitor their youth voice activities. Given the wide diversity of setting and projects, it is very difficult to ascertain with any confidence common learning or the comparative advantage of different activities with potential outcomes.

The evidence base could be strengthened by improving the consistency of data that captures which young people are engaged in youth social action more widely, and disaggregating those who are specifically involved in decision-making about the programme or project. Match Funder programmes and delivery organisations should align monitoring of youth voice practices and outcomes. Key priorities should include better capturing the 'double benefit' and, in particular, impact on organisations (funders and delivery organisations) and wider communities. Further work is needed to consider what data about youth voice activities is most useful and can be captured by organisations and with young people without creating significant burdens.

Aligning outsourced support

Many funders are working with other (mainly delivery) organisations to support their youth voice activities. There are many benefits of working with those with the necessary skills and expertise to deliver quality practice. However, further work is needed to ensure that the third-party provider

does not "own" the relationship with young people in a manner that inhibits future relationship building or influence within the funder. Further work is needed to explore what model of collaboration is most effective from proactive support and co-facilitation to fully outsourced, and the respective advantages and disadvantages of each model. Similarly, more research is needed to understand how third-party providers improve youth voice activities as a first step and whether, and if so how, this supports embedding youth voice strategically and in developing skills to facilitate it successfully internally within funding organisations.

Continuing to celebrate success

The power of stories of positive change with young people taking on leadership roles echoes through our findings. For young people, it shows role models and raises aspirations. For organisations, it shows senior leaders the benefits and potential impacts. For practitioners, where relatable, it can inspire practices and seed new forms of activities. The #iwill Movement has a number of mechanisms to share these stories - such as the Power of Youth Day. There are opportunities to amplify these stories of change better and ensure that the specific youth voice activities are clearly highlighted. Funders can play a key role in connecting delivery organisations and sharing effective practices supporting youth voice.

Implications for youth voice practitioners (in the funding community and delivery organisations)

Investing in high quality relationships with young people

Whether in funding or delivery organisations, those practitioners who are leading youth voice activities need the time, skills and capabilities to offer holistic and appropriate support to the young people they are working with and alongside. They require management able to offer appropriate supervision and systems for safe practice. Both Match Funders and delivery organisations should consider whether they have the required level of staff resourcing with appropriate skills to meet these needs.

Improving practice - in meetings, group work and digital activity

Some of the dominant forms of youth voice activities - such as running meetings or groups - are undertaken in very different ways by different organisations. In addition, existing practices have been challenged by the rapid transition to digital delivery precipitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Novel ways of working risk becoming new established norms without reflection on the effectiveness or sharing of what works. Wider work to better capture the lessons of transitioning these online and what creative and engaging sustainable delivery looks like.

Further embedding equity and inclusion

Many #iwill Fund Match Funders and delivery organisations stated that they were undertaking targeted programmes, and the most commonly targeted group is young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (20% of all programmes in the data set). This is behind

open access groups (at 23%). In addition, data was rarely granular enough to definitively show that those involved in the youth voice aspects of youth social action programmes were necessarily from these groups. It is possible - and some felt plausible - that young people from more advantaged groups would most likely be taking on these roles.

While improved data collection would be helpful, it's clear that practices of removing barriers are present in much of the practice but could be further improved. Many young people may never be reached through dominant recruitment methods, and the shift to digital engagement- especially amongst national programmes - provides opportunities and risks for inclusion that need careful navigation.

Improving progression from youth voice activities

Whether in Match Funders or Delivery Organisations, young people who have been involved can sometimes find the end of their experience to be less well-planned or less effective at supporting them to progress to other opportunities. In part, this reflects the time-limited nature of project funding and the lack of upfront planning of young people's exit or progression. There is a need to scaffold progression opportunities for young people beyond the youth voice activities with which they are initially involved.

Better supporting those most actively involved

There is a smaller cohort of young people with very high levels of engagement in youth voice activities - sometimes within a delivery organisation, within the #iwill Fund, within the wider #iwill Movement and the wider youth sector. There are opportunities for better ensuring cohesive support for these young people and centring the leadership skills development they receive.

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Technical Annex: the Data Trawl

The methodology section provides an overview of the data trawl that informed the findings. This annex provides further details on the process.

Sources of data

A dedicated webpage and submission portal was developed and tested with potential submitting organisations. This asked for limited key information on each data source. Each #iwill Fund Match Funder and delivery organisation agreed to a Data Sharing Agreement when submitting to the data trawl.

The trawl was promoted across the #iwill Movement via email, on the #iwill social media accounts with videos calling for submissions, by The National Lottery Community Fund to #iwill Fund Match Funders and through a range of targeted paid online advertising on LinkedIn and Twitter aimed at youth voice practitioners.

Bespoke materials were produced for young people who were actively involved in #iwill projects to 'self-report' their experiences. Similarly, Match Funders were provided with templates and guidance to share a case study of their youth voice practices at a programme level.

Data item submission sources

Publically sourced data 4%

From Typeform/email 43%

From TNLCF/Learning Hub 53%

Fig. 11: Sources of data item submissions

In addition, 255 organisations were contacted directly via email and/or Twitter (based upon previous engagement with #iwill Fund content). We also undertook a search of grey literature and academic databases for articles that referenced the #iwill Fund.

Data cleaning

Upon receipt, submitted data was given a data ID, and matched to a Match Funder Programme through a Programme ID previously shared by The Fund. It was then coded as either being 'A' level (about youth voice activities in a Delivery organisation project) or 'B' level (about youth voice activities at Match Funder programme level). 325 individual data items were submitted to the data trawl. 71 data items were not coded due to being duplicates, or not containing any relevant information about youth voice activities.

The final data set contains 254 data items representing 29 Match Funders (from a possible 33) and 42 Match Funder programmes. This trawl brought together data from different levels of activity across the #iwill Fund (see Fig 1).
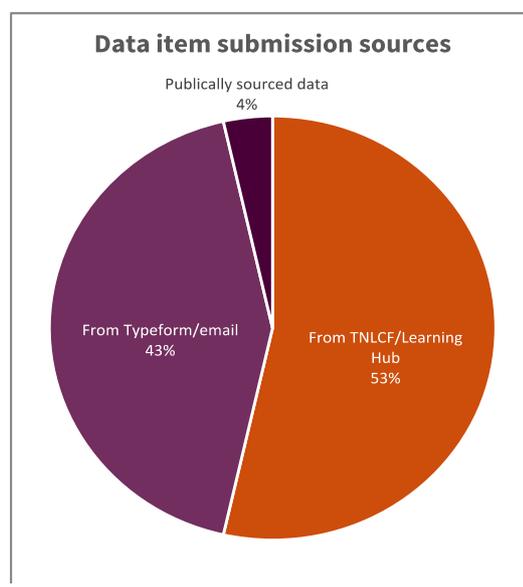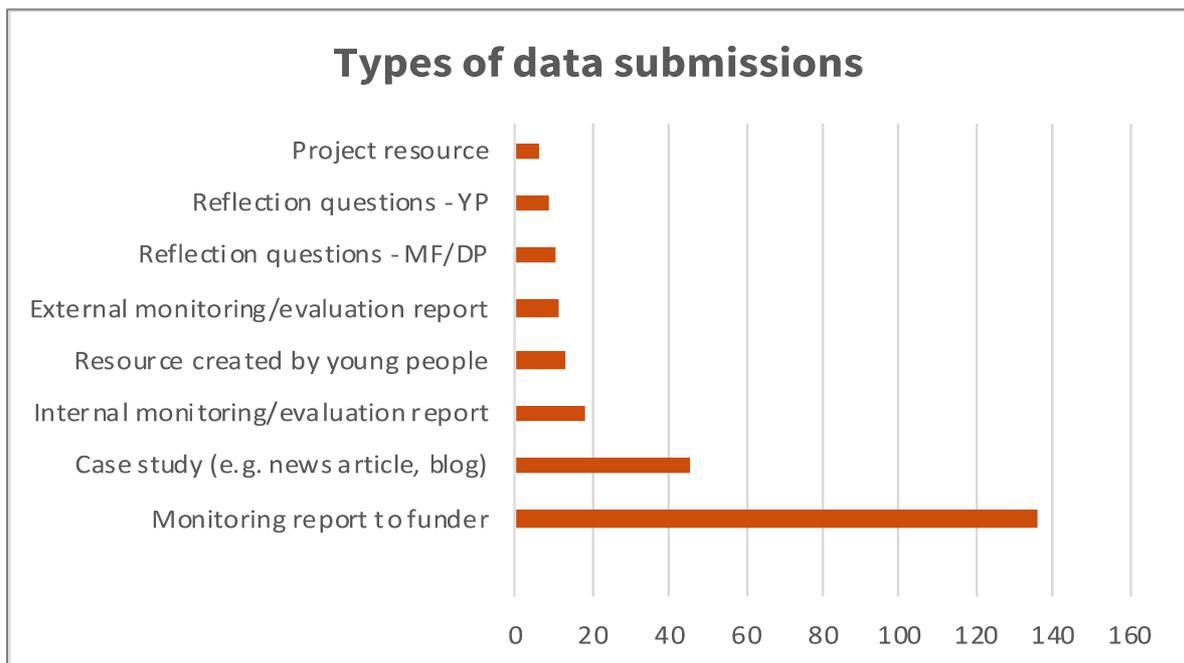
Fig 12. Levels of data in Data Trawl

Fig 13. Types of data submissions included in the Data Trawl

Data analysis

Every data item submitted was then analysed following the coding framework that was developed with the Young Evaluators Panel and in line with a coding protocol. The Coding Framework included 100 coding categories across 10 domains.

Domain	Indicative coding categories
Submitted data info	Information about the data item source, author, type, etc
Charity Commission info	Information was recorded where the organisation was registered with the Charity Commission on organisational income and number of volunteers. Given gaps in data this was not analysed in depth.
Programme info (Delivery section)	Type of Delivery Organisation and whether targeted or open access
Programme info (YSA section)	Predominate type of YSA the youth voice activities are situated within Experience of young people engaged Form of delivery – (e.g., face to face, online or hybrid)
Programme info (Youth Voice)	Types of youth voice activity
Youth Voice implementation	How young people are recruited or selected to participate Forms of training and support offered Tasks young people engage in Incentives to participate Rewarded and recognition
Research and evaluation of youth voice	Approaches to capturing monitoring data or learning
Noted impacts on young people	
Noted impacts on organisations	
Noted impacts on community	

The team started by coding ten items together; they then undertook spot checking of individual records. In addition, the Young Evaluators Panel also coded some data themselves and peer-reviewed the coding decisions of a random sample of data items.

At YMCA George Williams College, our vision is for a just and equitable society that invests in support for all young people to learn, grow, and explore their relationships with the world around them. Established in 1970, the College works to provide transformational support to practitioners, funders, and policy makers across the sector, to improve the quality and impact of provision and outcomes for children and young people across the UK. This support is characterised by safe spaces, high quality socio-emotional skill development opportunities, and relationships with trusted adults.

As part of its work, the College now hosts three Centres of Expertise. The Centre for Youth Voice at YMCA George Williams College advocates for and supports a stronger role for the voices of young people in evaluation and continuous quality improvement. Underpinned by the belief in participation of young people in the decisions that affect them, The Centre for Youth Voice develops and shares relational, structural, and practical approaches to embedding the voices of young people, and directly supporting them to develop their research and evaluation skills.

To find out more about our work, visit youthimpact.uk or follow us on Twitter and LinkedIn.

The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to £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.