

# UNDERSTANDING YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION



LONDON  
METROPOLITAN  
UNIVERSITY

CARES

Centre for Applied Research in  
Empowering Society

SUPPORTED BY

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## **Introduction**

This research on London's Youth Social Action Ecosystem was commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) Civil Society and Sports Unit's Youth team and was conducted by a research team from London Metropolitan University's Centre for Applied Research in Empowering Society (CARES).

CARES is the established research arm of the London Met Lab programme at London Metropolitan University. CARES supports the University's commitment to the sustainable development agenda by taking a multidisciplinary approach to tackling social problems. The aim of CARES is to challenge social injustices by using empowering models of engagement to address systems that produce inequalities. The Centre focuses on empowerment and community engagement, identifying opportunities to collaborate and co-design research into the challenges faced by Londoners, working closely with civic partners.

## **What is youth social action?**

The GLA defines youth social action as activities that young people can do to make a positive difference to others or their environment, such as getting involved in campaigning, volunteering, fundraising or advocacy. Youth social action refers to both formal and informal activities in which young people make a positive contribution to their local environment and communities.

Engaging in social action can have many positive benefits for young people including an increased awareness of local, regional, and national issues, development of skills and networks to support future career and personal goals, increased confidence, wellbeing, and mental resilience. Communities and organisations can also benefit from youth social action (#iwill Fund, 2023). However, misguided action as well and poor design of youth social programmes can prove damaging, increasing inequalities.

## **Research objectives**

The objectives of this research are three-fold:

1. To understand youth social action as a system within London.
2. To understand the factors that underpin youth social action.
3. To make recommendations to policy and programme makers to improve youth social action to harness its benefits.

This research will support the GLA Civil Society & Sport Unit's Youth team in taking a holistic approach to tackling the challenges that young Londoners face.

## Engaging young Londoners in Co-production

Participatory Learning Action (PLA) is an approach that actively engages members of a community to learning about the challenges that they face (Nelson, 2023, pp. 367–9). PLA, understood here as a form of co-production of knowledge, engages community members in activities, discussions, and reflections to share their knowledge and experiences, and understanding how they would tackle the issues that they face. PLA encourages collaboration and fosters a sense of ownership over solutions, ensuring that practice, programmes, and policy are relevant and appropriate.

This research was co-produced through a partnership between the London Met CARES research team and members of London's youth community (acknowledged as authors), allowing young people to analyse their own situation, and shape the design and delivery of the project.

To support the research objectives, a Young Changemakers Forum took place in July 2024 (for Londoners aged 16 to 25). Young people were engaged through focus groups, vox pop interviews, podcasting, dot voting, surveys, and group art activities to discuss youth social action. In addition, an interactive session with Key Stage 3 pupils at a London secondary school was held to understand youth social action from young people under 16 years old. An unstructured review of the published and

### Interviews

- Film crew – one to one interviews

### SURVEY

- Posters where there's one question written and 3-4 category options. The students have a sticker to place to mark ~~for~~ their ~~value~~ answer
- On a wall there will be a main question. People can answer anonymously on post it notes.

### ARTS

- Express your barrier through art (contest, e.g. gartic phone)
- Mural / big paper express themselves in group
- Add title / caption to art

### Video Diaries

- Small video of local area (pre event)
- Present videos on event day

Figures 1 and 2: Steering Group activity, Youth Social Action research project

grey literature formed the basis of a systems map of youth social action in London. The research team used a process of thematic analysis to assess the body of evidence and identify the conditions which underpin youth social action. The systems map was created using systems practice methodology. This involves creating narratives and feedback loops to look at a range of complex evidence and situate it within a holistic and long-term view.

Two analytical models were utilised to design and organise the systems map: (1) the socio-ecological model and (2) the COM-B model of behavioural change. The first helps us locate the different levels and contexts in which action is manifested, and the latter helps us understand individual behaviour according to motivation, capability and opportunity factors.

The socio-ecological model is a framework used to understand how one's behaviour is influenced by their micro (individual and interpersonal levels) and macro (institutional, community and policy levels) social ecologies (Oishi, 2014). This model helps position individuals within the broader eco-systems within which they develop and act.

The COM-B model for behaviour change represents a range of influences on young people's behaviour in relation to social action participation. The COM-B model frames behaviour as a result of the interaction between one's capability to perform a behaviour, the opportunity, and motivation to carry out that behaviour (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011). The COM-B model sits within an intervention development framework called the Behaviour Change Wheel.



Figure 3: Steering Group, Youth Social Action research project

## Youth social action as an eco-system

This report is to be read in unison with the online systems map which presents youth social action as an eco-system. The systems map can be accessed using the QR code below or at <https://londonmet-cares.kumu.io/youth-social-action-systems-map>



The systems map is based on a broad range of evidence including that from the GLA's own delivery partners. It is specific to London and the UK during the last decade and focuses on programmes that aim to give young people employment and educational opportunities. In addition, the systems map also uses evidence from a broader definition of youth social action, which is focussed on all 'youth-led activities where young people take an active role in their local communities to create positive change and improve their own futures.'

However, these definitions are incomplete. The best definition of youth social action would come from young people's and delivery partners' experience of it. As presented in the systems map, delivery partners have had challenges in bringing about a shared definition and lack a sense of being part of a coherent movement. This has been due to lead partners having limited time to be a part of communities of practice. Building on this would allow partners to develop a shared practice of social action and support the essential bi-lateral relationships needed, building a more coherent definition to support the development and evaluation of practices, policy, and programmes.



Figure 4: Steering Group activity, Youth Social Action research project

The way youth social action is defined can impact on inclusivity of youth social action initiatives, as working class and other underrepresented young people are most likely to take part in informal 'invisible forms of social action', such as supporting family members or taking part in faith-based community support. An inclusive definition would point towards expanding current programmes to intersect

## Barriers and facilitators to youth social action

The systems map identified several barriers and facilitators to youth social action across the domains of the socio-ecological model. The barriers and facilitators are presented in Table 1. The relationship between and influences on these barriers and facilitators are presented within the map itself.

**Table 1 – Barriers and facilitators to youth social action**

Barriers	Facilitators
<b>Individual Factors</b>	
Financial, time constraints and / or caring responsibilities preventing young people (especially from a working-class background) taking part	Strong sense of civic responsibility – motivation to contribute and help others
Over-representation of middle-class young people in social action	Engagement in social action from a young age
Unequal representation of young people from different ethnic backgrounds	Informal/Invisible forms of social action (within cultural and / or religious settings)
Language barriers	Inclination to be proactive, take initiative and lead
	Empathy and feeling passionate about issues affecting them (i.e., climate anxiety)



Figure 5: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum



Barriers	Facilitators
<b>Interpersonal influences</b>	
Friends not involved in social action	Ripple effect (peers influence peers)
Families not having a sense of civic identity	Sense of social entrepreneurship and leadership potential
Family breakdown	Role models and Influencers
Participation in social action for career benefits only	Family engagement in social action (especially when associated with fun)
Failure of social action initiatives to bring about behaviour change	Motivation to help others
Lack of knowledge and awareness of social action initiatives	
<b>Institutional - Schools</b>	
Social action not encouraged in secondary school	Participation in social action in schools
Schools restricting young people's voice	Programmes that encourage schools and delivery partners to invest in youth voice
Lack of resources in schools, especially in more deprived areas	Programmes that celebrate youth achievements through awards ceremonies and accreditation
Perception that participation in social action in schools can decrease working-class young people's academic achievements	Programmes that develop skills, experience and qualifications
Lack of teacher's time	



Figure 6: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

Barriers	Facilitators
<b>Institutional - Partnerships &amp; programme delivery</b>	
Poor communication of programmes and initiatives	Creation of safe spaces for young people
Programmes only reaching a small number of young people	Consistency of staff/adults working with groups of young people
Lack of time for communication and co-ordination of delivery partners	Young people having a sense of agency and ownership
Non-democratic processes and non-friendly interactions	Friendly and informal interactions
	High quality support from programme advisors
	Programmes that utilise existing community networks
	New forms of social action (e.g. in online spaces)
	Communities of Practice agreed with delivery partners
<b>Community</b>	
Segregated neighbourhoods	Engagement with new communities and people
Young people lacking a sense of belonging to the area	Programmes that take place on a community rather than school level and are less structured
Crime – Feeling unsafe in their area	Programmes that facilitate friendships, networks and a sense of belonging
Programmes that are not representative of community or certain groups	

Barriers	Facilitators
<b>Policy &amp; Programme design</b>	
Programmes not addressing issues affecting young people	Relevant programming (on issues young people care about)
Transactional, tokenistic and top-down engagement with young people	Policy makers engaging with young people
Lack of consistency and continuity in funding	Quality of service
Lack of co-ordination in approaches to embed youth voice in organisations	Place-based approach
Young people not in decision-making roles or on boards	Inclusion of invisible forms of social action
Social action emphasising one type of 'good citizen'	Youth-led programmes (young people involved in design and delivery)
Lack of access to technology restricts participation in online social action	Youth engagement platforms (e.g. GLA's Youth Conference, Youth Parliaments)
Negative effects of social media reducing young people's sense of agency	Programmes that are inclusive and intersectional
Feeling unsafe in online spaces	Programmes targeted at specific demographics
Lack of a clear definition of social action	Public recognition of the role of social action
Delivery partners needing further training, support and resources	Positive Ripple effect of GLA funding
Youth Social Action programmes as the only spaces young people feel their engagement matters	Projects that engage with youth platforms, such as popular social media sites, and/or encourage new forms (GLA youth website/radio)

with these invisible support networks.

## Conditions underpinning youth social action

The participatory research revealed that certain conditions must be in place for youth social action to take place and be effective. These themes underpin the relationships identified within all of the socio-ecological levels presented in the systems map, and influence the barriers and facilitators presented in Table 1. Therefore, these conditions need to be considered when planning policy and interventions to influence youth social action.

The main conditions underpinning youth social action participation are:

- Epistemic Privilege
- Voice
- Trust
- Agency
- Social Justice
- Relationships
- Sense of Belonging



Figure 7: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

## Epistemic privilege

Young people live and grow in a complex system. Often their reality is very different from that perceived by adults who have the power to influence their lives. Epistemic privilege refers to the idea that individuals have different access to knowledge and understanding based on their social, cultural, and economic contexts. For young people in London, the recognition of epistemic privilege by adults who influence their lives is crucial, as it shapes perspectives and opportunities in a diverse city. Understanding that their lived experiences, along with those of their peers from various backgrounds, influence how they perceive the world can foster empathy and collaboration. Emphasizing the importance of diverse viewpoints encourages young people to challenge dominant narratives and advocate for inclusivity in discussions that affect their lives. Furthermore, by acknowledging and leveraging their unique insights, young people can engage more deeply in social issues, promote social justice, and contribute to solving community challenges, thereby empowering

themselves and their peers in an increasingly complex society.

Young people feel like those in positions of power tend to disregard their views, that their voice does not count, and their lived experiences dismissed. "Voicelessness" undermines agency and the interests of young people. Young people are better positioned than their adult counterparts to understand their

"When youth advise youth, it feels like they are speaking from experience, rather than if an adult advises, it feels judgemental/scolding." – Post-it Note Activity, Young Changemakers Forum



Figure 8: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

own situation and seek solutions to issues that they face.

The epistemic privilege thesis, in the context of youth social action, suggests that young people, many of whom feel unheard and under-represented in a range of ways, are ideally situated to assess local problems that are important to them, and address barriers to making an impact on their own environment.

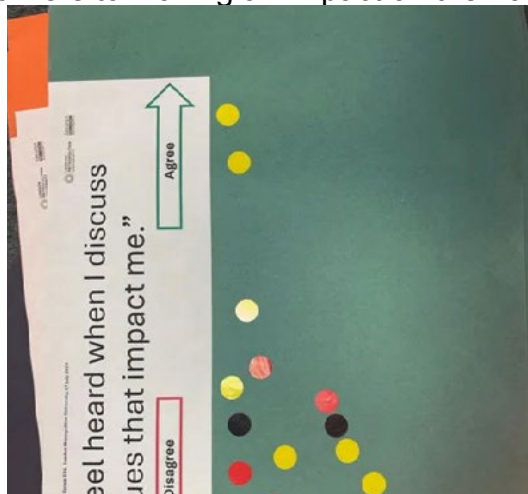


Figure 9: Dot Voting Activity, Under 16s Workshop for Secondary School Students

The things that young people go up against and the experiences they have are very different to what their adult counterparts might have. Young Londoners' "privileged access" to specific experiences, diverse as they may be, constitutes evidence of how best to affect positive change in their communities. Making the world of young people knowable and amplifying "youth voice," therefore, are not only an ethical obligation, but also a vehicle for achieving more impactful youth policies.



Figures 10 and 11: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

Many see social action as not for them and just for the privileged few. Engagement in social action only by those with privilege is damaging and can drive away those most likely to benefit from involvement increasing inequities.

## Voice

Young people want their voices heard. Young people want to be able to influence action on the social issues that are important to them, with meaningful involvement and the power to make change. However, they feel that decisions are made behind closed doors without their input. When their opinions are solicited, they are unsure about the impact of voicing them, hence, young people also want to see the impact of their voice, thus closing the feedback loop of engagement is crucial.



Figure 12: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

Social issues identified as important to young people in London at the time of publication (November 2024) are crime (particularly knife crime), the environment (particularly littering), feeling safe, the cost of living, poverty and social inequalities, employability, availability of opportunities for young people to get involved (community centres, youth clubs, apprenticeships etc), and mental health.

“But if you’re not up there in that field of work to directly talk to that power to make those changes...then you’re basically like a nobody regardless of how much you’re doing for the community.” – Vox Pop Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

Using employment as an example, the expectation of improving employability serves as a facilitator for youth participation in social action, although these opportunities are often seen as tied to political agendas and societal norms often excluding the voice of young people.

## Trust

Distrust is a significant barrier to youth social action, affecting all levels. At the individual level, young people express scepticism towards institutions due to past unfulfilled promises and lack of transparency. Decisions made behind closed doors and unshared outcomes fuel distrust.

Interpersonally, young people lack confidence in the government, believing that meaningful change can only come through peers, the local community, and other young people. At the community level, there is a broader sense of frustration with local organisations and youth social action initiatives, which are perceived as ineffective or mere tick box exercises.

Widespread distrust hinders collective action, as youth are reluctant to collaborate with entities they do not trust. Systemically, political corruption and social inequality further contribute to a pervasive distrust in larger institutions and governance structures. Addressing distrust at all these levels is crucial to fostering inclusive and active youth participation in social action, ensuring their voices are genuinely heard and valued.



Figure 13: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum



## Agency


Young people need personal agency to get involved in social action. They need to feel in control of their decisions and have the confidence and motivation to take action. Young people recognise and believe in their own agency, at the same time as expressing frustrations about the structural barriers that limit their influence. These include: a perceived lack of support and recognition from the institutions they interact with, perceptions of tokenism and that their involvement in youth social action does not lead to meaningful change, and the perceived personal cost of self-advocacy and networking. Whilst they acknowledge the complex and difficult context within which they live, they also emphasise the need to take action.




Youth-led activities provide a good platform for direct involvement and empowerment which gives young people a sense of agency and purpose. But at times, engaging in youth social action is perceived by some as a 'waste of time' if it does not comply with certain expectations around academic and career development, and if it does not lead to meaningful change.



Figure 14: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum





“I think we always say the same things, that we don’t feel like we’re valued or appreciated for the inputs that we have... I think there’s a lot of outreach but it feels like a tick box exercise rather than something that means something.” – Focus Group, Young Changemakers Forum




When youth social action is aligned with their aspirations and expectations, young people perceive, for example, schools as a motivator in terms of organising volunteering activities, communicating these, accrediting (Duke of Edinburgh Award for example), rewarding and celebrating achievements. They see formal recognition and validation of their contribution by institutions as enhancing their sense of personal agency.

However, manifesting one’s agency (by accessing opportunities for example) often involves hidden costs of self-advocacy and networking. A lack of established connections means they must work harder to create opportunities and have their voices heard.



“If you don’t have those connections then you have to work 10 times as hard to make those connections, so you have to go out and find those companies that actually want to listen to you at that age.” – Focus Group, Young Changemakers Forum



## Social justice

Inequalities and social injustice are a significant barrier to youth social action, affecting all levels of the socio-ecological model. Young people emphasise the importance of equality across social and demographic dimensions, believing that equal opportunities are essential for a happier, more peaceful society where human rights are protected.

“People need to have equal access to different jobs, so just because your parents were something doesn’t mean you have to do the same thing, you can go to uni and change your career.” – Focus Group, Young Changemakers Forum

“I feel like if the issues and problems are more known and spoken about that could make people realise that this needs to change.” – Podcast Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

On a personal level, many young people feel unsafe in the areas of London where they lived and travelled, largely due to concerns about crime, which hinders engagement in youth social action. Young people want to participate in initiatives addressing issues like knife crime to find positive resolutions.



Figure 15: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

Young people feel that organisations and policies do not offer enough opportunities to promote fair treatment and equitable distribution of benefits. Young people want more initiatives focused on social justice issues, from climate change to educational inequities. To support youth engagement, organisational and governmental groups should expand opportunities for young people to participate in youth-led social justice initiatives.

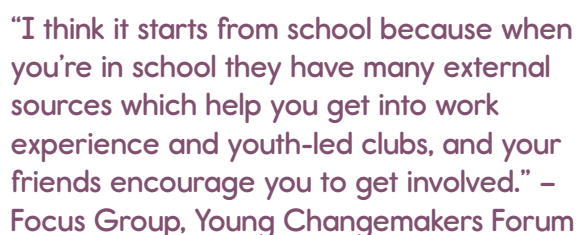
“I did this programme where we raised money and donated food to a local charity. We picked the charity ourselves because we wanted to help people directly, and we wouldn’t have been as motivated if someone else had picked for us.” – Focus Group, Young Changemakers Forum



Figure 16: Arts Activity, Under 16s Workshop for Secondary School Students

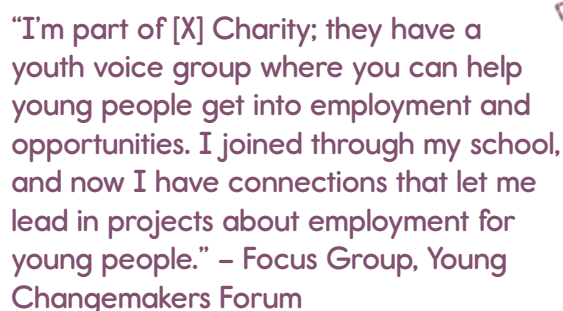
## Relationships

The relationships young people have (with family, friends, in their community or with professional networks) can influence involvement in social action across the socio-ecological levels. For example, friends and family can motivate and facilitate young person engagement in youth action. The influence of friends is more prominent for younger teens, who are less concerned with other factors such as employability.



“I think it starts from school because when you’re in school they have many external sources which help you get into work experience and youth-led clubs, and your friends encourage you to get involved.” – Focus Group, Young Changemakers Forum

All age groups express that involvement in youth social action, such as volunteering, provides an opportunity for social interaction and making friends outside of school and home.



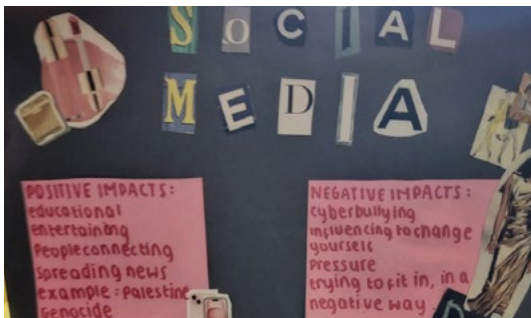
“I’m part of [X] Charity; they have a youth voice group where you can help young people get into employment and opportunities. I joined through my school, and now I have connections that let me lead in projects about employment for young people.” – Focus Group, Young Changemakers Forum

Some young people express that joining groups and volunteering can help facilitate a sense of belonging, especially if not from the local area. Peer-led activities are a facilitator of involvement in youth social action. Family, especially mothers, can encourage and help find opportunities.

Young people also develop relationships in the virtual space which too can influence social action. Digital spaces enable young people to raise awareness, find opportunities, and connect with others. But they also bring challenges in terms of verifying authenticity and in translating online engagement into real-world action.

"I think social media is good for meeting people and seeing different opinions, but there's also a lot of fake news, and that's a problem if you want to do something real about issues." – Focus Group, Young Changemakers Forum

"I think online can help, but if people don't do anything in real life, then what's the point? Like just because someone posted a black square doesn't mean they actually care." – Focus Group, Young Changemakers Forum



Not having a well-connected family or friends means that some young people lack the opportunities to access and build connections within professional networks. This is perceived as a barrier to youth social action participation because it adds the burden of a more self-driven approach to find ways and opportunities to engage.

Figure 17: Arts Activity, Under 16s Workshop for Secondary School Students

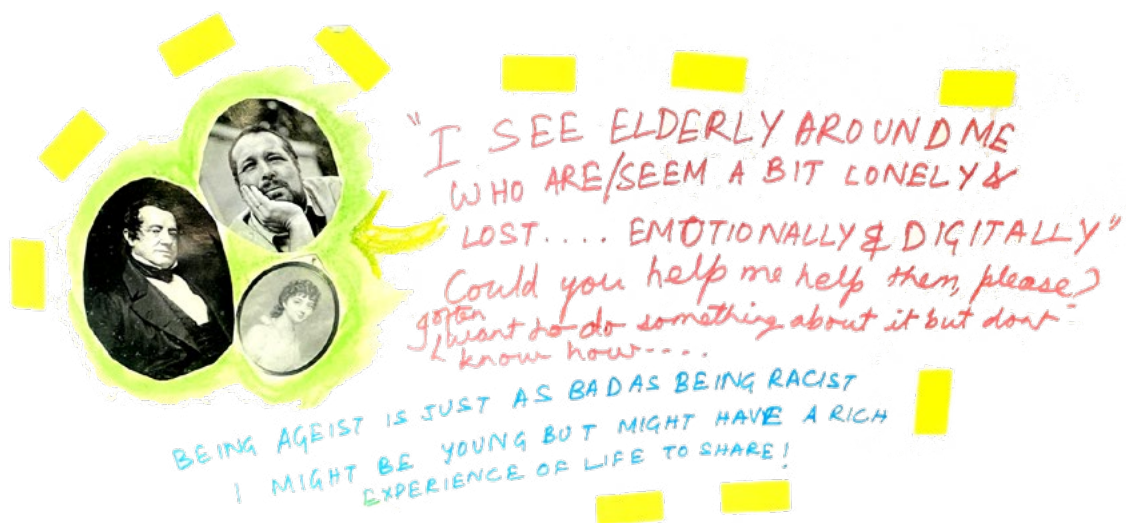



Figure 18: Arts Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

## Sense of belonging

When young people have an affinity to where they are from, a place that they identify with, they are more motivated to engage in youth social action. But this changes overtime. As young people move towards adulthood, they lose connections with their local community as their priorities change leading (potentially) to disengagement and a weaker inclination to participate in community initiatives.



“When I was younger, I was more connected because I had friends in my area... but now my friends are spread across London, so there’s less reason to stay involved.” – Podcast Activity, Young Changemakers Forum

Community connectedness is vital for young people in London, acting as a catalyst for youth social action participation, as it fosters a sense of belonging and support amidst the city's diverse and fast-paced environment. Strong community ties can enhance emotional well-being, providing young individuals with networks of friends, mentors, and resources that encourage personal growth and resilience. A strong sense of pride in a local identity can act as a motivator for young people to engage with local initiatives, youth clubs, and cultural activities. This not only enables them to develop social skills but also helps combat feelings of isolation, particularly in urban settings where loneliness may be prevalent.

Additionally, connectedness to a community cultivates a sense of responsibility and engagement, empowering young people to become active participants in shaping their neighbourhoods and addressing social issues, ultimately contributing to a more cohesive and vibrant city.

Young people feel that that local opportunities are scarce and poorly communicated, especially outside educational settings. The closure of community institutions, such as libraries and youth clubs, hinders youth engagement; this is outside of the control of young people; the impact of these closures on young people, they feel, is not considered by those in power. Policymakers must consider the broader impact of these decisions on young people's sense of belonging. Additionally, young people feel that these organisations and policies are focused on those under 18, leaving those over 18 disengaged. More initiatives are needed to support the engagement of over 18-year-olds.

## Factors Conditioning Youth Social Action

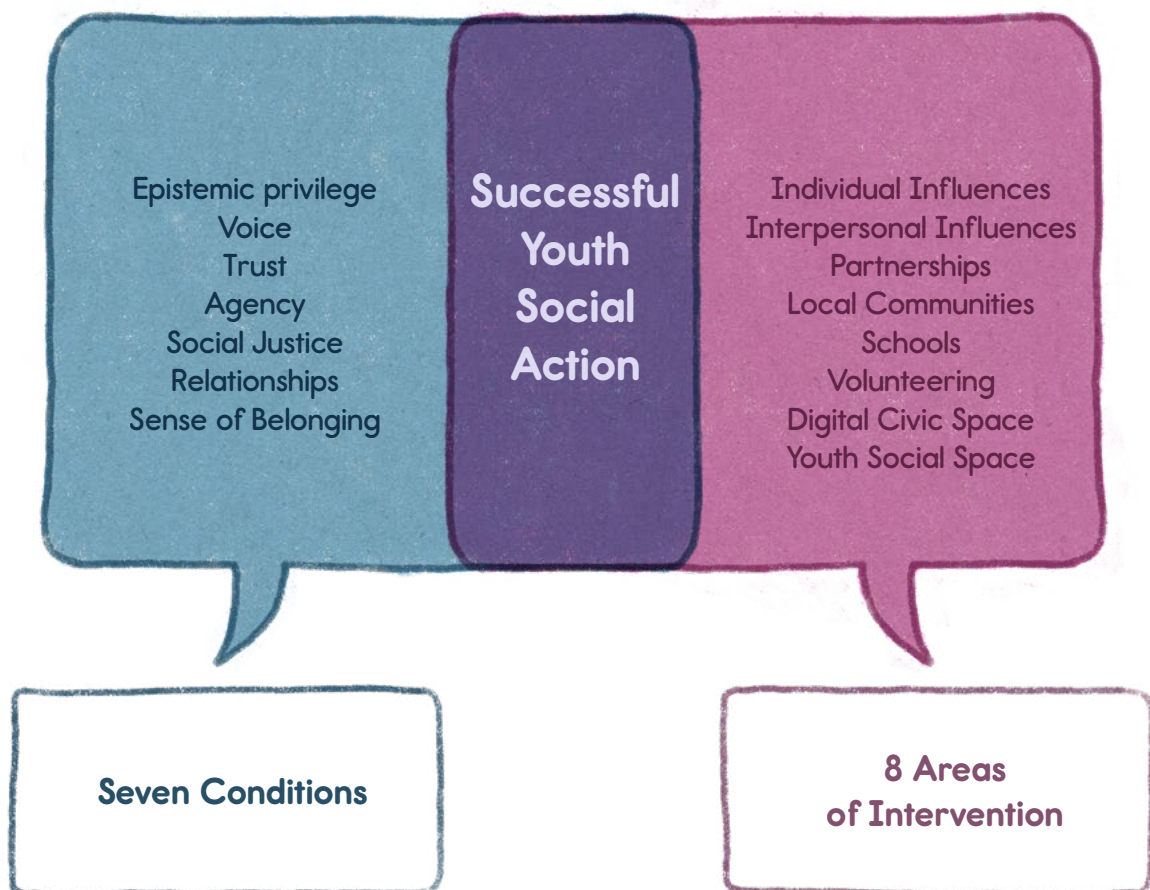


Figure 19: Infographic



## Conclusion and Recommendations

Being heard, having agency, social justice, mutual trust, supportive relationships, a sense of belonging, and confidence that those in power understand their complex lives are all important to young people and underpin youth social action and the positive benefits it can bring.

### What's Next?

This report and the systems map can be used together to support the design of policy and programmes for youth social action by taking the following steps:

- Identify the level of influence for the planned policy, programme, or intervention – individual, interpersonal, etc.
- Identify the areas from within the systems map from that level that you want to influence and consider the relationships that exist including the capability, opportunity, and motivation components (as seen through the eyes of the young person). The Behaviour Change Wheel offers a useful transition from evidence to programme design.<sup>1</sup>
- Consider how the conditions of Epistemic Privilege, Voice, Trust, Agency, Relationships, Social Justice, and Sense of Belonging, are met in relation to the chosen systems map component(s).

**Three recommendations** are made to be embedded within the design of all policy and programmes that impact young people.

- **Youth voice and presence in all programmes and policies** – all young people should have the opportunity to have meaningful involvement in the development and evaluation of policy and programmes that impact them, including those with an indirect impact.
- Those charged with programme and policy delivery **should include a 'Young Persons Impact Assessment' as part of ongoing evaluation** to confirm equality of the distribution of the opportunities and benefits of youth social action, and to ensure no unwanted harm is occurring (please see Annex).
- **Close the feedback loop** – we are recommending that young people are informed of the impact of their actions. Young people involved in social action need to be made aware of the impact of their actions.

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<sup>1</sup> A guide for local government and partners on how to use the Behaviour Change Wheel is available [here](#).

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## Annex

### Young Person Impact Assessment Framework

A Young Person Impact Assessment framework (YPIAF) should, in our view, be underpinned by the following:

1. Co-production of the framework itself with young people;
2. A set of clear principles underpinning the involvement of young people in the impact assessment process;
3. A coherent theory of change underpinning the impact assessment, including evaluation of the impact assessment framework on a regular basis.<sup>2</sup>

Engaging young people in developing a YPIAF would be an important step in embedding youth voice in decision making. Meaningful engagement and co-production require careful consideration of the following:

#### Clear principles underpinning young people's involvement

A starting point in formulating some of these principles could be the GLA's own social integration dimensions (equality, relationships, participation). Translated and expanded into principles of engagement, one could consider the following:

- Equality and equity – meaningful young people's engagement needs not only to include equal treatment of young people in the process of co-production (i.e., young people as equal partners), but also recognizing their specific needs and supporting their development. Barriers for effective and meaningful participation need to be considered and removed.
- Diversity of voices and inclusion – the co-production process needs to ensure diversity and inclusion to foster and strengthen meaningful relationships between young people and decision makers and amongst young people themselves.
- Transparency and accountability – the co-production process needs to set out a clear purpose, scope, course of action, outputs and expected outcomes. Decision makers should provide information about how the outputs of the co-production process were used and acknowledge the contribution of young people.
- Collaboration and Agency – the co-production process needs to foster a genuine collaboration between decision makers and young people by recognising their agency in the process.

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2      Guidance on how to create a Theory of Change is available [here](#).

- Ethical values and Integrity – the co-production process needs to be strongly anchored in the ethical standards of working with people (safeguarding) and guided by integrity.
- Adequate resourcing – the co-production process needs to be adequately resourced and supported by skilled independent facilitation.
- Transformative – the co-production process and involvement of young people in designing the YPIAF needs to focus on developing new skills and confidence for participants (this may involve additional training and capacity building).
- Youth friendly inclusive design – the co-production process needs to enable youth voice through creative innovative design of participatory interaction.

## **Youth Engagement Principles in a Young Person Impact Assessment Framework**

The principles underpinning the involvement of young people in the process of impact assessment need to be an output of the co-production process above. Some things to consider:

- Thick vs. thin participation – continuous engagement supports a more relational and meaningful relationship between decision makers and young people, whilst one off consultation exercises tend to be seen as extractive, transactional, elitist, and “a tick box exercise”.
- Integration vs. specialisation – there are plenty of pros and cons on whether public (youth) engagement should be part of a specialised service or integrated throughout an organisation. Integration requires the existence of clear principles, and a shared understanding of how engagement should be put in practice, as well as capacity building across policy units. Specialisation requires sponsorship and organisational buy-in along with good intra-organisational communication.

### **Theory of change and impact evaluation**

The co-production process needs to sit at the heart of a clear theory of change that underpins the GLA’s broader approach to embedding youth voice in policy and practice across all policy areas. Monitoring and evaluation are central to this and to the future implementation of the young person impact assessment.

## **Things to consider in the Young Person Impact Assessment Framework process**

Without pre-empting what a co-produced impact assessment framework might look like, the following points, linked to the underlying principles of youth social action as identified in this report, should be taken into consideration:

- Has there been sufficient planning and adequate resourcing allocated for the young people's impact assessment? (Social Justice)
- Have young people been meaningfully involved in the development, the delivery, and the ongoing evaluation? (Epistemic Privilege, Voice, Trust, Agency)
- Have young people been informed of the impact of their involvement? (Trust)
- Have inequalities been considered regarding a) the involvement process, and b) participant outcomes? (Social Justice, Relationships)
- How is the policy supporting young people's sense of belonging to London and their local communities? (Sense of belonging)
- Have exit routes for young people been considered?

## The GLA's lines of inquiry

In relation to the broad lines of enquiry, suggested by the GLA Civic Society and Sport Unit's Youth team, we outline below this report's contribution to answering them and what we believe the GLA should do next to fully answer them.

- Young Londoners participation in youth social action/volunteering and resulting connections with community – Our report findings and recommendations, together with the systems map address this line of enquiry comprehensively and further support decision making and intervention development in this space.
- Youth employment by demographic, primarily; ethnicity, age group, disability, gender and location – Our evidence review identifies that this is indeed an evidence gap. We can hypothesise from our qualitative understanding of youth social action and our learnings from the systems map that:
  - Youth social action decreases as young people move from their formative years towards adulthood, where paid employment becomes much more of a focus.
  - Black and ethnically diverse young people are less likely to take part in volunteering and broader social action, compared to white young people, thus affecting their employability prospects.
  - Young people who are struggling with immigration status and face barriers to participation (such as segregated neighbourhoods, lack of opportunity to gain English proficiency) have their employability prospects negatively affected.
  - Attitudes towards youth social action participation are largely influenced by the employability dimension of social action programmes.

However, most evidence reviewed is based on UK wide studies that present only fragmented demographic data. To fully answer this line of enquiry a complex quantitative study would be needed. This was out of scope for our proposal.

- Young Londoners engaging in active community citizenship by demographic, primarily; ethnicity, age group, disability, gender and location. What we have learned from the systems map in terms of young people's engagement in active community citizenship, allows us to hypothesise the following:
  - Social class is an important predictor of participation in formal youth social action. Tackling barriers to participation (such as financial and time constraints, language barriers and caring responsibilities) would increase civic engagement amongst working class young people.

- Young people from ethnic backgrounds and working class are more likely to take part in 'invisible' or unrecognised forms of social action, such as caring for relatives.
- Young girls' (working class background) motivation to participate in youth social action increases when this (social action) is part of a course requirement or leading to better employability prospects.
- Confidence is a strong determinant in whether or not girls take part in social action.
- Consistent relationships, presence of diverse role models and established bonds between young people, practitioners and school staff are important determinants for disability inclusion in social action.

Many of the barriers associated with being working class also intersect with other dimensions, such as ethnicity, disability, gender and sexuality, religion, and mental health. This is due to economic factors contributing to the compounding of demographic issues. However, more quantitative research is needed into specific demographic challenges and the barriers they cause, especially from a London and intersectional perspective. Therefore, a large London-based quantitative study is needed to better answer this.

- Environmental change, mental and physical health, social mobility (employment rates) and safe spaces by demographic, primarily; ethnicity, age group, disability, gender and location - The systems map, and our primary research confirm the importance of the environment (climate change, littering, green spaces) for young people. Similarly, the importance of safe spaces (both in the physical and digital sphere) for social action participation is vividly represented in the artwork and the narratives of young people. Our systems map and our report present empirical qualitative evidence on the links between mental health and social action participation, especially in relation to digital engagement. Our empirical findings present insights into social mobility, and the perceived barriers and enablers to enhancing employability prospects (type of connections, quality of relations, personal characteristics etc).

However, our study focused on the qualitative understanding of youth social action participation. It would take a carefully designed large quantitative study to further answer this line of enquiry.

- Active community citizenship within education, including voter registration amongst young people aged 18-24 - Our systems map shows the centrality of schools to youth social action in terms of promoting and delivering programmes and encouraging young people to take part. However, the disparity in resources, knowledge and skills retention in schools affects negatively young people participation and the perceived success and benefits around youth social action participation. We observed a gap in emphasis on voter registration and political awareness within existing youth social action programmes, alongside young people's recommendations to address this. The artwork suggests young people query their ability to influence political power structures, including voting. However, this area has not been a prominent theme emerging from participatory research. Our findings allow us to hypothesise that:
  - As the young people move from primary to secondary education, they begin to feel disempowered and lacking agency within schools. This affects negatively their motivation towards engaging in active citizenship.
  - Family and friends' behaviour towards voter registration and participation are strong determinants for young people's own voting behaviour.
  - Embedding targeted civic political education and voter registration initiatives into educational and community programmes will increase voter registration rates and political engagement among young people aged 18-24.
  - To fully answer this line of enquiry further qualitative and quantitative research is needed to support intervention development in this area.
  - Lone parent - specific data in relation to inequalities and social mobility. The systems map suggests that personal relationships impact on the engagement in social action. Lone parent households, isolation and family breakdown are often associated with a weaker sense of civic identity and less propensity to vote. This line of enquiry would need a more extensive mix-method study exploring inequalities and social mobility.



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