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#iwill Fund Learning Hub
Systems Workstream

Report on the first #iwill Fund Learning Hub LabStorms
The Centre for Youth Impact
August 2019

Introduction

LabStorms were adopted, within the #iwill Fund Learning Hub, in order to foster ongoing, deeper collaboration between Match Funders, in the belief that this will then enable a system of effective youth social action funding to be continued beyond 2023. Success for this workstream includes stronger, more enduring collaboration across funders, and a shared sense of common challenges and potential solutions.

In order to encourage these collaborative relationships to be formed, the Centre for Youth Impact is facilitating four 'LabStorms' as part of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. LabStorms will support the #iwill Fund Learning Hub's first strategic objective by enabling and encouraging Match Funders to collaborate to identify and address potentially common problems, which we believe will increase the effectiveness of their youth social action funding and wider support. By sharing insights across the sector, the LabStorms will also contribute to the Hub's second strategic objective of sharing learning, data and insights. Each LabStorm will create a dedicated space for the #iwill Fund Match Funders to come together in order to collaboratively frame and respond to a problem or challenge that they have identified as pressing to their work.

The first set of LabStorms was held on 17 June 2019. We would like to thank Bridget McGing and Viv Jackson for leading discussions, Sport England for hosting us, and all the Match Funders who participated on the day.

As LabStorms take place under Chatham House rules, the write-ups of the sessions included in this report cannot be attributed to any one person or organisation, nor should they be seen as representative of an 'average' or consensus view in the room. Instead, they should be understood as providing kernels of insight and reflection that exist within the Match Funder community. In the sections below, we first provide a summary of the discussions held on 17 June, before then highlighting what we believe to be the key insights generated from the discussion and identifying some potential opportunities for funders moving forwards.

What are LabStorms?

LabStorms are collaborative problem-solving sessions designed to help generate and explore actionable responses to challenges with which organisations are wrestling. They are an approach developed by [Feedback Labs](#), a US based consortium focused on identifying the best ways of using feedback to make programmes and institutions responsive to the needs of their constituents.

How do LabStorms work?

Conducted under Chatham House rules, LabStorms are designed to create space for deep discussions between stakeholders who value collective approaches to problem solving. Each LabStorm begins with an individual giving a 15-minute presentation that covers both their work in general and details of a specific challenge that they're facing, with which they would like support and guidance. The presenter sets out what they have tried so far, and two or three specific questions that they would like help with from the attendees. Then, via a group discussion, attendees work together to support the presenter in finding answers or responses to their challenge. This can range from offering specific advice or suggestions to asking open questions in order to help the presenter reframe their questions and find new insight. While the discussion remains confidential, the learning from each session is then written up and distributed for the wider community to benefit from.

How can I take part in future LabStorms?

The Centre for Youth Impact will facilitate four LabStorms as part of the #iwill Learning Hub. The remainder are provisionally scheduled to take place in December 2019, June 2020, and December 2020. If you would like to be involved in a future LabStorm, or if you wish to discuss any aspects of this report, please contact Bethia McNeil (bethia.mcneil@youthimpact.org.uk).

Discussion 1: Understanding and Communicating Community Benefit

Pears Foundation is an independent family foundation and a supporter and core funder of the #iwill campaign, as well as a Match Funder within the #iwill Fund. The Foundation has existing long-term funding partnerships with several youth social action organisations, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Girlguiding UK, the Scouts Association and Young Citizens. In 2018-19, Pears awarded approximately one-third of its funding to youth social action projects and organisations.

For the day's first LabStorm, Bridget McGing, Deputy Director at Pears Foundation, led a discussion on community benefit. This is a topic that has been pertinent to Pears' work for several years: it is also critical to the #iwill Fund community because of youth social action's "double-benefit". In order to explore how youth social action funders engage with this concept, the following question was used to frame the discussion:

> *How should we, as funders, support others to understand and communicate their community benefit?*

Three themes emerged from the LabStorm.

1. Finding the right balance between focusing on young people and understanding community benefit

Participants felt that across the #iwill Fund, there has arguably been a greater focus on the benefits of social action for young people than the effect of this action on the communities in which it takes place. It was suggested that is both a natural result of the #iwill campaign's focus on encouraging participation amongst young people, and that it is perhaps primarily 'youth-serving organisations' that are delivering the funded opportunities[1]. This also connects to a related concern that insufficient attention is being paid to opening up integrated social action opportunities to young people in general, as opposed to funding youth programmes that have a social action focus. The discussion also recognised that the wider funding climate and context tends to 'push' organisations towards emphasising impact on young people, and evaluating impact at an individual level feels more achievable.

For some participating in the LabStorm discussion, the limited understanding of community benefit echoed challenges raised about overseas volunteering, where there can often be a disconnect between the intentions of volunteers and the on the ground reality of the community in which volunteering occurs. Although young people are often closer to the communities in which their social action takes place, too great a focus on the experiences of only the young people can mean

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[1] Further work in 2019 by the #iwill Fund Learning Hub will assess the extent to which this is the case.

that insufficient attention is given to understanding both the experiences of the wider communities and how the impact of engaging with these communities effects the lives of the young people who participated.

Consequently, if funders are supporting activities or programmes where the double-benefit is a goal, they should consider whether they are supporting organisations and social action participants to have conversations with community members in order to understand what forms of social action they think would be beneficial for their community, and to articulate how the term 'community' is being used and understood. While this potential feedback loop with communities could be particularly valuable, especially as these communities may exist both before and beyond any youth social action programme, an important suggestion emerged from the LabStorm discussions. As empowering young people is often a core aspect of social action programmes, a balance needs to be struck between listening to the feedback from communities and amplifying young people's voices. There is more debate needed on whether it is the role of funders to encourage delivery organisations to strike this balance themselves or for funders to give equal emphasis to *all* aspects of social action across youth voice and community experience, and encourage delivery organisations to reflect and question this.

2. Funders need to communicate that they value community benefit

A second theme that emerged from the discussions was the extent to which funders have reflected on *how* they understand and value community benefit in their decision making, and *why*. It was felt that if funders value community benefit as a core aspect of youth social action, they need to be proactive in demonstrating this in their communications. A simple first step to achieving this could be to ask: do we, as funders, equally reflect on the impact of youth social action within communities as we do the impact it has on the lives of young people? Whilst an equal focus might not be a funder's aim, asking the question could be a good way to enable funders to consider the extent to which they currently communicate their interest in community benefit, and why they hold this interest.

An interesting secondary effect was also discussed: by emphasising their interest in community impact, funder communications may resonate with organisations that are not (or are comparatively less) youth-focussed, which could help to grow the youth social action community further. This could be significant because working with organisations that do not have a youth-focussed background may bring additional benefits. For example, these organisations may have expertise in understanding and catalysing community benefit that does not exist within the youth sector, or this may help to open up institutions and resources that are currently inaccessible to young people.

Building more open and constructive conversations around community benefit could help to define community benefit more clearly, and frame where and how youth social action is intended (or hoped) to affect change. The discussion explored whether there are particular 'types' of

community benefit, and indeed whether 'community development' might be a more meaningful term[2].

Another critical role that funders can play in their communications is acknowledging that youth social action can be experienced *negatively* by some (parts of) communities: acknowledging cases of 'disharmony' was seen as a critical part of supporting young people through quality social action opportunities. This open approach to communications is critical if we're to encourage organisations to step forward with stories of where young people and communities have not both or equally benefited from a social action activity, and to understand and enable the support needed in these circumstances. While it can be difficult to surface such tensions, if funders are to ensure that understanding community benefit becomes more of a shared enquiry, it is important that they are willing to listen to, and support, organisations in navigating these questions.

3. Communicating that they value community benefit does not mean funders (or delivery organisations) need to start measuring it

The final theme of this LabStorm highlighted that while funders can do more to communicate that they value community benefit, it is important that this does not automatically lead to increased demands about measurement being placed upon organisations. Research into understanding and articulating community benefit is still limited and given the potential number of externalities, it was acknowledged that measuring community benefit (let alone attributing any impact) is always likely to be challenging[3]. Consequently, the need for a greater focus on community benefit needs to be balanced with a low-stakes accountability approach, which focuses on understanding the processes organisations are using to frame and capture community feedback, and how delivery organisations are seeking to understand their particular contribution.

In the long-run, if sufficient resources are in place, this could lead to a more substantive evaluative approach, for example through local evaluation plans, but it was felt that funders should not be too ambitious, too quickly. As understanding their community impact is still a relatively new area of practice for many organisations, simply bringing community benefit into the conversation could be a productive place for funders to start. Indeed, just the process of asking questions related to community benefit might even uncover approaches to measurement or understanding that the funder may not have been aware of, which grantees may not have shared owing to their perceived focus being primarily on youth benefit. In turn, this should support a proportionate and realistic approach to the potential for youth social action to create community benefit, and a safer environment in which to talk about challenge and 'failure'.

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[2] A review of community benefit frameworks that have been used across different forms of social can be found here: https://www.youthimpact.uk/iwill-learninghubpublications/communitybenefit. This paper was published after the LabStorm, and consequently did not form part of conversations on the day.
[3] An exploration of some of the wider challenges in measuring community benefit can be found in a paper produced here: https://www.youthimpact.uk/iwill-learninghubpublications/communitybenefit.

Discussion 2: Developing a habit of social action

Our second discussion was led by Viv Jackson who is the Programme and Learning Manager for the Act for Change Fund, which is dedicated to providing resources for young people to challenge social injustice, to find ways of overcoming inequality, and to give voice to issues they are experiencing. The Fund is a joint initiative between the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) in partnership with the #iwill Fund. The Act for Change Fund has three high-level aims:

- More opportunities for young people with experience of disadvantage to lead social change
- A greater understanding of how youth-led social change impacts on young people and their communities (geographical or community of interest)
- Organisations supporting young people to lead social action change are in a more sustainable position.

The Act for Change Fund is concerned with how to help build the infrastructure that is needed to create a more socially just society and believes that while young people have the ambition to make changes in society, they are often deeply excluded and alienated from traditional political structures, as well as economic and social opportunities. Starting from a belief that the continued engagement of young people is a crucial part of creating this infrastructure, the second LabStorm focused on the following question:

What role should we, as funders, have in creating or supporting the structures that are needed to make social action a habit for life, for all young people?

The following three themes emerged from the discussion.

1. We need to understand how social action habits differ

A core element of this discussion focused on whether the commonly used definitions of "habit" in the youth social action community are equally relevant for all forms of social action and for all young people. For some participating in the discussion, too often young people's continued engagement in youth social action is understood in terms of a habit of *service*, where young people's social action activities are associated with ideas of duty and being 'in service' of others, which has led to a focus on, for example, the number of volunteering hours or funds raised. At the same time, there can be a belief that once young people have participated in these kinds of activities, they are likely to continue in participating in similar forms of social action in the future, that is, that participation begets habit, and that habit manifests in sustained engagement.

This belief is based upon an assumption that the skills, dispositions and sense of self developed through social action participation will lead to and sustain more social action in the future. However, if we challenge this assumption, several critical questions emerge. For example, if young

people form a habit with a particular type of social action, does this mean they're more likely to participate in other forms of social action or can habits also lead to barriers to different forms of engagement? Is habit always about visible behaviour or can it be about mindset or a sense of agency? Does 'habit' imply the kind of thoughtful and intentional engagement in social action that we would hope for amongst young people? Is habit always individual? What does collective or organisational habit look like?

The discussions also noted that young people should be asked what habit means and 'feels like' to them.

2. How do we create the conditions for habit formation to emerge?

A second aspect of this discussion focused on what financial, organisational, and staff resources are needed to help turn participation into a "habit", recognising the funders' role is to create the conditions in which change can occur, rather than trying to change young people themselves. Underpinning this issue was a question of whether habits are always structure and context dependent. This raises questions such as whether the same resources and approaches that encourage a habit to be formed in one type of social action produce the same effects in other forms of social action, and does habit formation require different types of support for different groups of young people? Regardless of resources, it was suggested that a good place to start is to ask young people for feedback on how resources are being used within organisations.

3. Does supporting young people to engage in campaigning activities require different forms of support to other social action activities?

When trying to understand the conditions needed to foster habit formation, the extent to which specific forms of support may be required to encourage young people to campaign was raised as particularly challenging. This question emerged because of a recognition that campaigning involves calls for change that go beyond increased levels of participation, and because activism can often be deeply connected to the young people's identities and the challenges they experience. However, identifying what support should include is complicated because it is hard to know what a "good" campaign looks and feels like. For example, the impetus for campaigns can emerge suddenly, making it hard to know when to start providing support; a campaign may fall short of its overall goal but still have successes that it wants and needs to celebrate, which can make evaluation complex; and local or small-scale campaigns can be just as, or even more, meaningful as national campaigns for some young people, which complicates the question of how and where funders should provide support. As many funders do not currently support such activities, next steps are likely to be experimental and tentative.

One particular factor that funders need to consider if they wish to encourage young people to campaign is the particular effect that taking part in campaigns can have on young people.

As campaigning for societal change can challenge perceptions of what "being a good citizen" looks like: it can be experienced by some communities as an act of defiance against societal norms that they support, rather than being a positive story of change. This can be challenging for young people, especially those who feel they have been excluded from society. Historically, this has been particularly true for young people who have faced discrimination because of their class, race, gender or sexuality, and this needs to be carefully factored in to attempts to address the socio-economic gap that has been identified in youth social action. These challenges should not deter funders from supporting this form of social action: however, it is important to consider whether appropriate support is in place for young people who are leading on campaigns for social change.

Key Insights and Opportunities

1. **Finding the right balance between focusing on young people and understanding community benefit.** Research for the #iwill campaign suggests that, alongside being socially impactful, being youth-led and being embedded in a young person's life are two key principles for ensuring that social action opportunities are of high quality. While these principles should not be undermined, funders who want to ensure that a double benefit is occurring need to also find ways to encourage grantees to discuss the intended impact of their work with communities in advance of projects, and to collect feedback from the communities in which youth social action is taking place. An insights paper from the first cohort of the Impact Accelerator, which is the focus of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub's Quality Practice workstream, found that community benefit was not a core element of many organisations' theories of change, so asking them to include this is an important starting point.

2. **Funders need to communicate that they value community benefit.** In order to reflect on the extent to which they want community benefit to be a key consideration in their funding, funders can start by reviewing their own communications. By demonstrating that they value and are interested in community benefit, funders can both send a signal to the wider youth social action sector about their priorities, and potentially connect to organisations that work in communities but do not typically work with young people, helping to grow and strengthen the social action community.

3. **Communicating that they value community benefit does not mean funders (or delivery organisations) need to start measuring it quantitatively**. As many organisations do not have a strong history of measuring community benefit, funders who wish to understand more about how youth social action programmes impact upon communities will need to explore low-stakes accountability approaches with their grantees and ensure that community benefit is a core element of their evaluation activity. As a starting point, one option could be to follow the Impact Management Project's approach to gathering stakeholder feedback, by asking grantees to identify the intended or unintended outcomes experienced by communities, and whether these experiences were positive or negative.

4. **We need to understand how social action habits differ**. While research from the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has helped to identify factors that can contribute towards creating a habit of *service*, there is a need for more research into 'biographies' of how young people develop a social action habit through being 'activated' (involved in campaigns, for example) and the extent to which habit formation differs across different forms of social action.

5. **We need to factor in young people's different background if the conditions for habit formation are to emerge.** The question of whether habit formation requires different types of support for groups of young people who have different socio-economic backgrounds was raised during the LabStorm. The National Youth Social Action Survey tells us that only 32% of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are currently taking part in social action, compared to 51% of young people from more affluent backgrounds. While understandings of what is needed to close this participation gap are emerging, very little is known about what is needed to help create a *habit* of participation in social action in young people from these

backgrounds. Consequently, funders who support grantees that work with young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds to participate in social action over multiple years have the potential to contribute significantly to these issues by encouraging grantees to share stories of the factors they have found to be important in creating a social action habit amongst these young people.

6. **Does supporting young people to engage in campaigning activities require different forms of support to other social action activities?** The 2018 National Youth Social Action Survey found that 8% of young people who participated in social action identified their action as campaigning for something that they believe in. We would expect that given this limited level of participation, it is likely that sources of support for young people as campaigners or activists are also limited. Therefore, if funders wish to encourage young people to take part in more campaigning activities, it is essential that they also ensure that there is appropriate support in place for this (currently) less common form of social action.

Feedback and Reflections

In order to understand how the Match Funders experienced the first set of the #iwill Fund Learning Hub LabStorms, we collected feedback both on the day and through a brief follow-up survey. We were pleased that when asked "How likely is it that you would recommend participating in a LabStorm to your peers?", where zero represented "extremely unlikely" and ten "extremely likely", the Match Funders responded with an average score of 8.9. Below we have summarised the overall themes from the feedback we collected into three subsections. This paper will also be followed up after six months to see the impact that going through this process has had on Match Funders.

LabStorms as a mechanism for discussion

From a process perspective, we were pleased to hear that Match Funders felt the sessions had a good structure and were well-facilitated, as these were two key elements that we had identified in advance as being crucial for the success of the LabStorms. It was also noted that by keeping the whole group together we were able to have a collective discussion, which is not possible in small breakout groups where it can be hard to follow the nuances of people's experiences. Finally, the group felt that holding two sessions in one day provided the right balance between depth and range of conversation.

The value of holding LabStorms

The most consistent aspect of the feedback that we collected was the value that participants felt the LabStorms generated in terms of creating a space that enabled open discussion.
This enabled conversations that both valued the different perspectives of different funders and captured shared insights. One attendee reflected that the LabStorm represented a way in which Match Funders could practice a low stakes accountability approach amongst themselves. This was seen as being particularly valuable because many of those taking part are currently exploring how to follow similar approaches with their grantees. The session provided a safe space to discuss questions they do not have a settled position on and sketch out potential approaches for their respective organisations with supportive peers.

Areas for improvement

A final aspect of the feedback was suggestions for improvements. Some Match Funders felt they would have benefited from additional information being sent in advance. While we would want the focus of the LabStorm process to remain in the room, we can certainly identify opportunities to address this concern in the future. A second suggestion was for additional time at the end of the day to reflect on and note down key actions, which we will prioritise in the future. Finally, a collective area for improvement was suggested by one attendee, who asked "How do we become more than the sum of our parts in influencing future practice?" We agree that this is an excellent question and believe that it could serve as a key discussion point at a future LabStorm if a participant was interested in leading a discussion.

Appendix 1: About the #iwill Fund Learning Hub

This is a report by the #iwill Fund Learning Hub. The #iwill Fund Learning Hub was commissioned to support, and build on, the activities of the #iwill Fund. It has two strategic objectives:

1. To inform the strategic and investment direction of the #iwill Fund. This will ensure that the Leadership Board and #iwill Fund delivery partners are able to target funds into the right areas, ages and approaches, where it is really needed.

2. To strengthen and connect the youth social action sector by enabling and facilitating the sharing of learning, data and insights across delivery partners, including what does and doesn't work, and sharing key insights and learning more broadly within the wider youth social action sector.

The Learning Hub has developed three workstreams which will support its objectives. This will allow us to support funders in making decisions about how to support youth social action now, and to capitalise on the evidence generated through the #iwill Fund to create a legacy of evidence to support funding and delivery in the future.

1) Systems

This work will develop our understanding of barriers and enablers in building and strengthening sustained youth social action. It will support the identification of emerging practice and the testing of potential new solutions as well as help guide investment decisions.

(a) Systems Mapping
Co-production workshops, supported by research briefings, will build the understanding of barriers to, and opportunities for, embedding and sustaining youth social action in three priority themes: education, place, and the relationship between youth social action and 'all ages' social action. Workshops are attended by Match Funders, invited grantees, and other invited stakeholders (Sept 2018 – Mar 2019).

(b) Funder Collaboration
A series of 'LabStorms' will be offered to Match Funders to enable a collaborative approach to identifying common challenges and finding and sharing actionable responses to them. The LabStorms will support Match Funders to fund as effectively as possible (April 2019 – April 2021).

2) Sector Evidence Plan

This work will build on our understanding of what youth social action achieves; how to reach under-served groups and how to sustain youth social action (Aug 2018 – ongoing). It will draw on

these four information sources to develop and evolve answers to key questions:

- Intra-fund evaluation aggregation
- Extra-fund research aggregation
- Match Funder returns to the #iwill Fund and data from Information Management System
- Results from other workstreams.

3) Quality Practice

This work will deepen our understanding of what it takes to deliver quality youth social action. It will illustrate how delivery organisations define 'double benefit' and how they attempt to both achieve and measure it. This work will support delivery organisations to improve their offer (September 2018 – ongoing). 'The Impact Accelerator', delivered by Generation Change, is an intensive process of impact support, challenge and development – up to 30 organisations will take part in this. Learning from these organisations will be shared more widely to spread knowledge about improvement across the youth social action landscape.