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# #iwill Fund Learning Hub Systems Workstream

Increasing Youth Social Action in Place

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## 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. 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 'Lab Storms' will be offered to Match Funders to enable a collaborative approach toward identifying common challenges, and to find and share actionable responses to them. The Lab Storms 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.

# Introduction

The Systems Mapping workstream was developed in response to the fact that many Match Funders are interested in developing new and sustainable ways to increase the number of youth social action opportunities available to young people. This depends, at least in part, on youth social action being integrated into, or collaborating with, existing settings and institutions.

Within the #iwill Fund Learning Hub, we are looking at how youth social action can be integrated into, or collaborate with, three 'systems' – education, place and the wider social action system.

**In doing this we are relying on existing research, the views of experts and delivery partners, and particularly the views of Match Funders.**

There are two aims of this work:

1. We are seeking to understand Match Funders' experiences of collaborating with these 'systems', and the barriers and enablers they have observed.
2. We then seek to go beyond this to develop 'responses' to these things. **Responses may be ways of funding and collaborating which increase the chances of success – or they may be 'big ideas' that could form the heart of a funding approach.**

These responses, and the work with funders that underlies them, can inform the ongoing development of proposals and decisions by the #iwill Fund Leadership Board and Match Funders. Beyond the Fund, we hope to reach other funders and delivery organisations which are also interested in the same aims: of increasing the number of youth social action opportunities in these systems in sustainable ways.

This report was written by Renaisi. The audiences for this, and all, Evidence Papers are the Leadership Board and Match Funders of the #iwill Fund, other funders interested in youth social action, delivery organisations, and researchers working in this space. We want this work to support their decision-making and their commissioning of further research.

In **'Process'** we describe the process we followed to (a) achieve a collective understanding of the barriers and enablers for youth social action in place and (b) co-produce a set of ideas in response to this understanding.

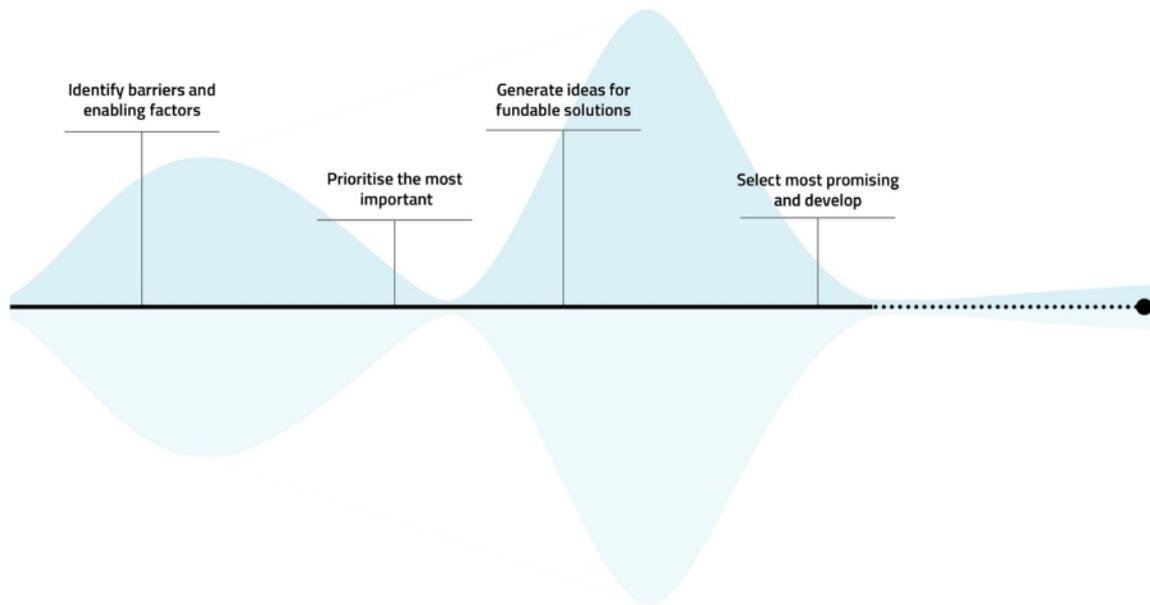
**'Why focus on place?'** provides some context, gives a brief rationale for our focus on the concept of place and lays out the assumptions about place and youth social action that we used to ground the work with Match Funders. **'Ways for funders to consider place'** highlights the different ways in which a funder could theoretically intervene in a place.

**'Conclusions'** pulls together our conclusions: highlighting three approaches that could be taken up as 'packages' of work for youth social action in place.

## Process

At the heart of this process were a pair of workshops facilitated by the Renaisi and Dartington Service Design Lab. These brought Match Funders together with experts and stakeholders in place-based activity and approaches and working in locally rooted ways. The first workshop identified and prioritised a long list of barriers and enablers to youth social action in the system. In the second session, attendees co-designed fundable responses to the picture that emerged in the first workshop. These can be found in the **'Ways for funders to consider place'** section of this report.

The process was guided by the 'double-diamond approach' depicted below.



Alongside #iwill Fund Match Funders, attendees were drawn from funders who had an interest in place and their local partners and practitioners. These included Young Manchester, Spirit of 2012, Virgin Money Foundation, UK Community Foundation, Cheshire Community Foundation, Clarion Housing, Wythenshawe Community Housing Group, Step Up to Serve, and The National Lottery Community Fund.

These workshops were supported by desk research into the wider contextual issues and other literature on place-based policy.

## Why focus on place?

### What do we mean by place?

**Place** is a fluid concept in policy, but in this document and associated conversations, it refers to the term that defines a geographically-bounded area such as a town, a neighbourhood, a city, a county, or a postcode. The boundaries of a place should be meaningful for the people living within them. Hackney is a place, Birkenhead is a place, Govan in Glasgow is a place, and so is Whitley Bay. As a result, places are nested and often overlapping, and so funders tend to use government administrative boundaries (ward, local authority areas, city regions) to make them more structured in the public and voluntary sectors.

Everything happens in a place, but it is only worth referencing place if that concept or definition is doing something to the work of the public or voluntary and community sector. If a service to support care leavers is commissioned in Birkenhead, and it delivers exactly the same service as is delivered in Knowsley, then it cannot be said to be using place in a useful or meaningful way. It is being delivered in a geography, but not paying attention to the place.

A community-led organisation, that grows from the interests and needs of local people and works with other things that are going on and connects to the future of that place, can be seen as being **place-based**. It is of that place, and you could not copy it simply to Knowsley from Wigan. The context of Wigan matters too much.

In this process, Renaisi argued that place-based can sometimes be too local for certain organisations and funders. They may care about an issue, think that considering and working with the assets of the place has an important role in helping achieve outcomes or change, but do not see themselves as place-based. We argue that these kinds of organisations should seek to be **place-informed**, learning how to work well with a place and local people, but not being fully place-based, as that does not fit their organisation's remit or mission. This is an important distinction to enable more organisations to consider how to use the concept of place in their work, without having to be geographically bounded themselves.

## The role of place for young people

Place matters in how policy makers think about supporting, encouraging and working with young people because place matters so much for the development of children and young people. An idea known as *ecological systems theory* was initially developed in the 1970s and has been amended and added to since then.<sup>1</sup> Its thesis is that to understand what influences the development and future life of people as they grow through childhood and young adulthood is not simple and that one must examine the variety of interrelated and complex environments that, both directly and indirectly, affect them.

This means that those who want to support young people should think about three immediate influences on them: the home, the school and the local community. Each of these is a 'microsystem', and the role of each on the child can be examined. Once those relationships are explored, it is important to examine how those three microsystems work together and interact. The theory calls this the 'mesosystem'.

This child focussed 'mesosystem' sits within a larger 'exosystem' of policy, media, government agencies and wider determinants of outcomes, such as local poverty levels. This 'exosystem' is where a lot of government policy tends to focus. Finally, outside of that is a 'macrosystem' that includes the wider culture and attitudes which shape how we act and behave in the other systems.

This can be seen diagrammatically below, and it highlights how the role of neighbourhood and place is a way into thinking about how the variety of influences on children and young people work and interact. The whole theory underlines the importance of that context to the lives of children and young people.

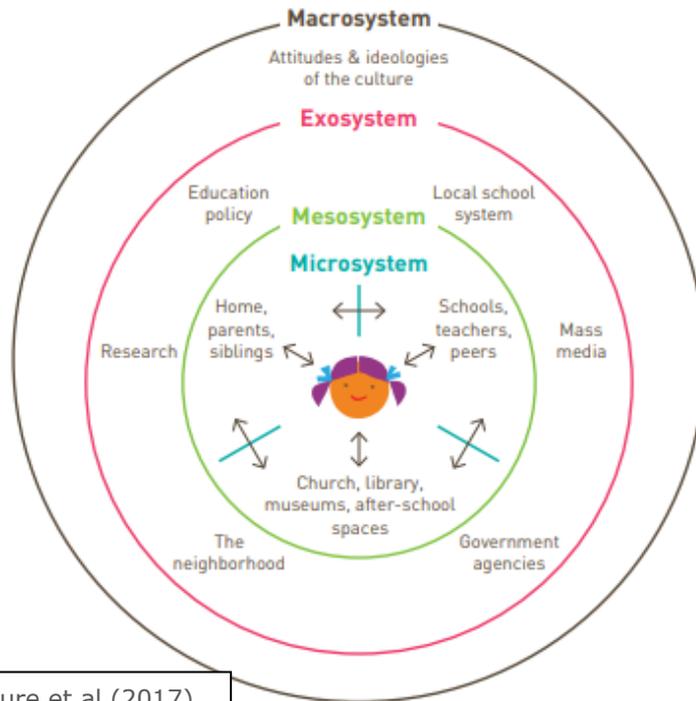


Diagram from McClure et al (2017)

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## The role of place for youth social action

96% of young people that participated in youth social action have family and/or friends that also take part.<sup>iii</sup> This incredibly clear statistic highlights the importance of thinking about the micro and meso-systems in the above *ecological systems theory* when thinking about youth social action. The place, whether it be the neighbourhood or the town, that a young person grows up in will be highly relevant for thinking about whether and how they take up youth social action.

It means, therefore, that there is justification for those funding and delivering youth social action to think hard about what is going on in that place, and how their work might be experienced by young people amidst the system that has such immediate relevance to their lives.

## Ways for funders to consider place

This stream of work was grounded in considering a type of place in which stakeholders felt it was hard to embed sustainable youth social action. It tried to understand why from a more systemic rather than project perspective. In the workshop, we looked at a large fictional town that had received some investment, but in which youth social action practice had not been sustained. The work with stakeholders on this issue helped us to define four broad ways to think about what funders could do next. As part of the first workshop, it was agreed to explore the issues relating to towns, and the interplay between the neighbourhood and local authority scales. This was seen as particularly important because it was the scales that were meaningful to young people and their mobility. This meant that we did not consider the issues at the city or regional level.

The typical approach to supporting social action is to provide resources to public or voluntary sector projects and programmes that deliver youth social action (see appendix 1). This project-based approach tends to focus on the efficacy of the programmes, and an attempt to measure what outcomes that programme achieves. In contrast, the place-based approaches that we are proposing focus on the quality of delivery within a wider context and system, and the ability of the provider to achieve youth social action outcomes with others in that system.

The workshops highlighted four different ways funders might want to work that are inspired by thinking about the role of place in youth social action:

### 1. Influencing the local service landscape

- a) Local voluntary and community sector infrastructure: looking beyond the standard providers and trying to build the strength of the local voluntary, community and education sectors. This is based on the premise that a stronger local sector will be more likely to sustain capacity in future. This could potentially take emphasis away from specific youth social action programmes, and so would need to appropriately balance wider sector support and a relevant youth social action focus.
- b) Local leadership and coordination: a lack of resource and/ or investment in local coordinating leadership (an organisation or individual to anchor and hold the ring for collaborative work) is seen in many places which leads to insufficient ownership of agendas, lack of buy-in from the wider community/ sector, and no individual or institution to support the sustaining of activity. Again, investment in leadership would need to seriously consider how it worked with young people.
- c) Wider local assets: thinking wider about the local assets in the community, including community buildings, social enterprises, and other local assets that could be supported or influenced to become spaces and lead agencies to facilitate youth social action.

### 2. Increasing knowledge of local people and needs for others

- a) Understanding local needs: focus on understanding, and research to genuinely understand local needs in a way that goes beyond what is typically done before starting youth social action activity. This would be done in partnership with the local community to ensure that it is led and owned by local people, including young people. It would only be of value if it was part of a longer-term investment by a funder or group of organisations, with the increased understanding being the first investment in a longer-term plan.

### 3. Developing and encouraging local economic development

- a) Opportunities for local young people: working with local employers to ensure that local young people feel that there are opportunities available for them to stay in the area in the longer term, develop skills and have a future and that there is some value in them investing time in their local area. Engaging employers locally will develop the local buy-in

in a way that is more likely to be sustained by the assets of the area. It was felt by workshop attendees that in some places it was the need for young people to find work that took them away and reduced their likelihood to engage in youth social action.

- b) Local social economy development: working with the local economy may not always be possible if employers are not invested in that place. There may be a need to invest and work with a much wider range of local economic stakeholders to rebuild the local social economy, through approaches such as community businesses, credit unions, social enterprises and cooperatives. This is a much longer-term approach but might be needed to rebuild the assets and economies that work for young people and the community in the longer term.

#### 4. Rethinking how a funder works

- a) Role of funders: if funders are going to work in a place-based or place-informed way, then there are important questions for them to consider in terms of what is attracting them to funding this place (this matters whether they're thinking about youth social action or another issue). Once they are clear about that, then it raises a range of challenges for funders to consider about what they want to do and how they want to work, especially in terms of how much ownership of the agenda they will give to local people. All of this begs questions of how to fund, how funding decisions are made, and how local the funder gets to the place (should the fund be based locally?). The National Lottery Community Fund has, for example, a 'people in the lead' strategic framework<sup>iv</sup>, which sets out that relationship for them.
- b) Approach to valuing change: working in this way will also raise questions of how funders value and fund approaches which might take longer to see outcomes, how they think about the value of longer-term systemic working, and how they demonstrate the value and business case of youth social action to a wider group of stakeholders. The rationale to fund this kind of approach is very different and more long term than is typical for many (but not all) programmatic funders, and this must be a part of how funders think about justifying approaches internally, before starting this work.

## Conclusions

Based on the above potential ways for funders to consider place, there are three packages of working that funders could pursue and look to flesh out which go with the strengths of a place-informed approach. There is no simple example of each of these already in practice, but each is followed by an approach that might provide some inspiration from different kinds of issues and approaches.

## Youth-focussed local leadership and change

*This approach is based on the premise that local leadership needs to be encouraged and engendered for places to build the sorts of sustainable infrastructure to support social action programmes, but that if there isn't a clear youth element to this leadership, then it can be harder to retrofit in later and harder to push towards youth social action programmes. It does not, however, see youth leadership as being disconnected from wider leadership, and so gives up some of the explicit focus on social action in the early stages to build that culture of youth voice into the local leadership of place, reducing the fragility of a standalone youth social action project. We believe that once leadership is established, a high-quality project needs to be funded to show the value and virtues of youth social action, and then integrated with wider activities.*



Steps to consider/ build a programme around:

- Begin by working with the local youth sector on youth-voice projects, to start the process of re-investing in local young people and developing ideas and passions from those young people
- Ensure that this is not done in isolation, and work with relevant local partners to connect the work to local leaders across the voluntary and other sectors, giving young people a sense of connection and relevance to place, and giving other partners a meaningful exposure to young people
- Identify and connect to/ support wider social action through the strength of the local young people and initiate or encourage a high-quality and exemplary youth social action project. This could be through bringing in an external agency, or through a local organisation depending on local interest and need
- Focus on articulating and celebrating the value of young people leading change locally, sharing key messages with the network that has been developed
- Build the reputation of the approach locally and influence others to do youth social action 'as standard' and as part of wider local leadership and change, embedding it sustainably in other local organisations and practice

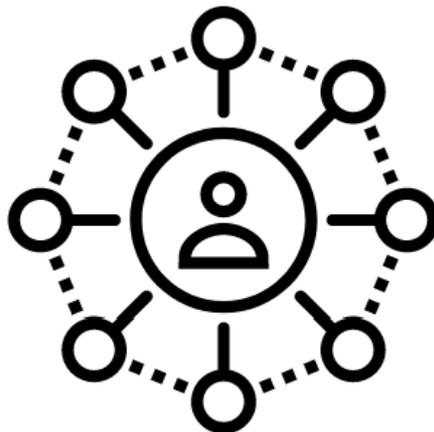
### **Inspiration: Place based social action**

The ten partnerships that have gained second-round funding (three more years) as part of the place based social action programme are examples of how to build local community plans in places. This model is not, in any of those ten areas, being specifically targeted at young people or explicitly focussing on using the assets of local young people. A funder could look for inspiration from this approach, but with a stronger youth presence.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/millions-invested-to-help-people-get-active-in-their-communities>

### **Networked institution building**

*This approach is about building the network between local organisations that can provide opportunities and incentives for young people in the longer term. This background role can seem a long way from delivery, but the 'hook' of resource and support to these organisations comes with a requirement for them to encourage young people into leadership roles in their organisation and for those young people to become a local leadership cohort. When connected to existing organisations/ approaches to youth social action, these young people can be champions for the approach in their own organisations, and for youth social action across their place. The network becomes the key vehicle that drives change in future, and it has young people at its heart. This is, to some degree, inspired by the work of Lankelly Chase in their system- focussed work. <sup>v</sup>*



Steps to consider/ build a programme around:

- Start by bringing together a partnership with both the local voluntary and education sectors and local employers who are interested in long-term change

- Invest in a focus on young people for all institutions, through routes including apprenticeships, leadership programmes, and perhaps small youth social action programmes
- Focus on developing a coalition of young people who are connected across the place, whilst strongly linked to their 'home' institutions, giving them support
- Build and develop connections between those institutions in a way that is wider than just being about young people, but which has young people at its heart
- Promote and encourage a stronger sense of the value of youth leadership and youth social action through the network and across the place, and enable them to build youth social action in the place rather than funding youth social action and then trying to recruit young people to it
- Use the network as the leader of activity, the source of momentum and key to stability, providing a route for young people to stay involved after they 'age-out' and a network that sustains involvement for more young people

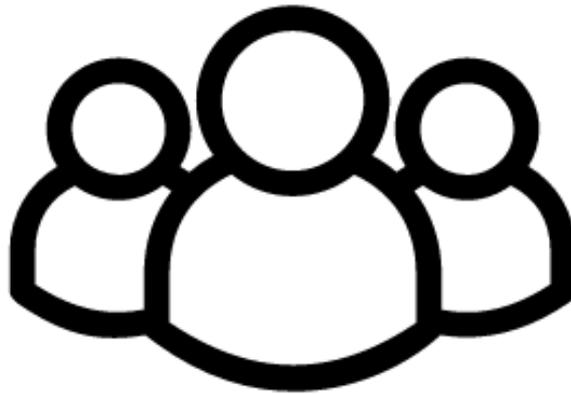
**Inspiration: Power to Change, Empowering Places Programme**

Power to Change is a time-limited, independent charitable trust that seeks to support the growth and development of community businesses in England. It does this through grant giving and targeted programmes. Its Empowering Places Programme looks to work with local 'catalysts' to grow and sustain a wider market of community businesses in a neighbourhood, with the hope of engendering longer term sustainability and resilience.

<https://www.powertochange.org.uk/get-support/programmes/empowering-places/>

## Youth social action led change

*The first two approaches are building from something wider than youth social action in the first instance and supporting a wider set of local infrastructure issues. If it is important to the funder to start with youth social action, then this approach is seen as a place-informed way to do that, situating youth social action at the centre of support in the area, and as part of a wider series of investments from different partners. It likely, therefore, starts with research and understanding, to pick a highly salient issue to become the symbol of change for investment and work in the place, and to connect youth social action to something that will have local traction. This approach is closer to more traditional place-based approaches to change.*



Steps to consider/ build a programme around:

- For youth social action to be the heart of the approach, requires a long-term plan for investment in the area to be established, potentially with a variety of partners
- A significant research and understanding piece of work is required to really understand local needs and assets, and this must be at least co-produced with the community, but ideally led and owned by the community and with significant youth ownership. A local organisation may need to hold/ manager this work
- An important local issue is selected through this process, and a significant youth social action programme of work becomes the first investment in the area as a result of it. Young people are, therefore, situated as being a key part of local change
- Wider local community infrastructure is invested in to ensure that other stakeholders are brought in to this youth social action led work, and it does not feel like it is a one off
- A clear plan is developed for longer-term sustainability from year one of the investment, even if the funding partnership is developed to last for multiple years
- Other funders are brought in to build on the work, ensuring the investment lasts multiple years, and allows time for sustainability

**Inspiration: Young People's Foundations**

The Young People's Foundation model was developed by John Lyon's Charity as a response to the pressure on the Children and Young People's sector. Whilst an exact copy of it would not work for this idea, the mechanism of developing a cross-sector partnership with young people at its heart could be given a social action and a young person focus. This lighter touch and cross-sector model is what is worth considering as a way to engage diverse partners whilst retaining a youth focus.

<http://jlc.london/jlc-extra/capacity-building/young-peoples-foundations/>

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## Appendix 1. Value of place for Youth Social Action

At the first workshop, we presented three initial approaches for how youth social action could benefit from thinking about place, but also a test of which a place-based or place-informed approach would have to pass at least one to be worth exploring.

### Place test:

for place to be an ambitious and useful concept, that might change both funder practice and local delivery, then it must focus on either interventions or approaches which:

- i) *maximise an outcome/impact of youth social action that is not currently being fully achieved, or*
- ii) *ensure a greater likelihood of sustaining youth social action into the future*

It **cannot be something which merely looks at increasing numbers of attendees**, as that is not significantly different from approaches already being explored.

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| <p><b>Approach 1</b><br/><i>Crowding into place</i></p>          | <p>This is a way of seeing a place as a local system, and investment should be about changing norms and expectations in that system. This approach uses the concept of place to reinforce and support how people think and work in that system.</p> <p>In this context, the aspiration would be to make a place an area where people think “youth social action is what we do here”. If this approach is successful, local norms are changed, and practices become adopted and reinforced in the system.</p>  |
| <p><b>Approach 2</b><br/><i>Place as the scale of impact</i></p> | <p>Funders may want to achieve a more rounded sense of impact, which thinks about the immediate impact of the activity, but also the secondary impacts (this is not about double-benefit). The secondary impacts are often to do with capacities or assets that are developed through the activity, such as relationships and networks or ideas and talents that could be used again locally. By building up the capacity of certain organisations and individuals in that area, the approach offers opportunities for those living and working within a place to do more things in future.</p> <p>This often occurs because place as a concept is one that people are drawn to, can relate to and are driven to improve or give back to. Assets, therefore, accrue and should be understood at that scale.</p> |
| <p><b>Approach 3</b><br/><i>Place as the scale of design</i></p> | <p>In this approach, place is considered the right scale to design the intervention because the context of the place is so important. In terms of youth social action, this is because the context of the young people and the local landscape changes the policy or programme so much, that youth social action should</p>   |

always be place-designed. By designing an intervention with young people or by devolving responsibility for design to them the intention is it will be better aligned to local needs and interests and in turn, lead to greater take up and impact.

This presents a challenge for replicability and requires careful consideration of the degree of control the funder is willing to relinquish. It is helpful to view this approach as a sliding scale of involvement from some tokenistic involvement at one end of the spectrum to total control over the design and delivery of an intervention at the other end, with the degree of funder control shifting relatively.

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<sup>i</sup> Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). Ecological systems theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Six theories of child development: Revised formulations and current issues* (pp. 187-249). London.

<sup>ii</sup> McClure, E. R., Guernsey, L., Clements, D. H., Bales, S. N., Nichols, J., Kendall-Taylor, N., & Levine, M. H. (2017). STEM starts early: Grounding science, technology, engineering, and math education in early childhood. New York: The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop.

<sup>iii</sup> Ipsos MORI (2017) *The National Youth Social Action Survey*

<sup>iv</sup> The National Lottery Community Fund Strategic Framework: <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/about/strategic-framework>

<sup>v</sup> Lankelly Chase, System Behaviours: <https://lankellychase.org.uk/our-approach/system-behaviours/>