RSA
Action and Research Centre

Teenagency

How young people can create a better world

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Contents

About the project

This report is part of a research project led by the RSA in partnership with the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester and funded by the Templeton Religion Trust. It aims to explore the degree to which young people's sense of their own creativity does or does not influence their propensity to undertake activities intended to make a positive difference in their communities (social action).

About the RSA

Since 1754 the RSA has sought to unleash the human potential for enterprise and creativity. We have a strong history of finding new solutions to social challenges by acting on the very best ideas and rigorous research, drawing on the expertise of our networks and partners.

The current mission of the RSA is '21st century enlightenment; enriching society through ideas and action'. We believe that all human beings have creative capacities that, when understood and supported, can be mobilised to make the world a better place for all its citizens.

Central to the RSA's current work are the concepts of convening and change-making. The RSA has also developed a distinctive approach to change: 'Think like a system, act like an entrepreneur' which now runs through most of our projects. Our work combines rigorous research, innovative ideas and practical projects.

Acknowledgements

Foreword

When we talk about creativity at the RSA, we do so not just to describe the imaginative and expressive talents of those we think of as 'creative people' working in the 'creative industries', but to capture the idea that all of us, if given the opportunity, are capable of living creative lives in which we are able to shape our own futures. This is what we mean when we talk about "The Power to Create"; ensuring everyone has the skills, resources, opportunities and confidence to turn their ideas into reality.

It was with this ambition in mind that we came to this project: an enquiry into the mutually-reinforcing relationship between creative self-efficacy and youth social action.

What we found, through our polling and our focus groups, stands in stark contrast to many prevailing negative attitudes about young people, their motivations, beliefs and behaviours.

In communities the media might describe as being 'left behind', we found no evidence of powerlessness or resigned fatalism, but instead a palpable sense of agency and creative self-confidence. And in our conversations with young people, so often labelled narcissistic, selfish or lazy, we found a real concern for, and desire to help, others, and a determination to make the world a better place.

A key finding of this report is that the mutually-reinforcing relationship between social action and young people's creative self-confidence is most powerful when four conditions are met: first, when young people are allowed to identify the problem they want to address; second, when they are allowed to come up with their own solutions; third when they are able to lead the response to the problem; and fourth, when they are encouraged to reflect on the impact they achieved.

When these conditions are in place, we find that the activities benefit both the community and the young people themselves as they further develop the attitudes and skills needed to make a positive difference in the world. Our research finds that the opportunity to engage in the sort of social action that delivers this 'double benefit' are particularly important for young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not get the same chances for personal development in other parts of their lives.

However, we also find that there simply are not enough of these high-quality social action opportunities around. We are interested in how we can make more such opportunities available to young people, and to that end, the RSA and the University of Winchester's Centre for Real World Learning will be running a series of workshops throughout the autumn with young people and representatives from schools, government and the third sector. We are determined that all young people should get

the chance to engage in high-quality, double benefit social action. If you would like to help us, there is information at the end of this report about how to get in touch.

Julian Astle
Director of Education

Julian Astle is the RSA's director of education. Before joining the RSA, he worked for four years in No. 10 Downing Street, first as Deputy Director of the No. 10 Policy Unit, then as a senior adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg. Prior to that he was Director of CentreForum, a liberal public policy think tank. In addition, he has held a number of other political and policy advisory roles both in the UK and abroad where he focused on post-conflict reconstruction and democratisation.

Executive summary

In this research, we have sought to understand more about the motivation and perceived ability of young people to make a difference in their communities and how creative they see themselves as being. The opinions of young people aged 14-18 were also compared with those of adults.

Our key findings are:

- *Young people's participation in social action significantly outweighs adult perception*: 68 percent of young people have participated in volunteering or other forms of social action, but just five percent of adults think that young people today are very likely to do social action.

- *Some demographic groups are more likely to participate in social action than others*: young women are somewhat more likely to volunteer (74 percent) than young men (61 percent), and 73 percent of young people who identify as religious have taken part in social action compared with 65 percent of young people who do not consider themselves religious.

- *Young people today have a strong desire to help others but many do not feel like they can make a difference*: 84 percent of young people want to help others but only 52 percent believe that they can make a positive difference in their communities. Our focus groups found that some young people believe that their age and inexperience are limiting, but report building confidence in their ability to make a difference through participation.

- *Creative young people feel more confident that they can make a difference in their communities*: 61 percent of young people who describe themselves as a creative person believe that they can make a positive difference in their community, compared with 34 percent of young people who do not consider themselves creative.

- *We need to prioritise encouraging young people who do not see themselves as creative to take part in social action*: creative young people are also less likely to need the encouragement of others to participate in social action than non-creative peers, and they are more likely to get involved because they spotted an opportunity or were moved by something that happened to someone they know.

- *Young people from less affluent backgrounds especially need the encouragement of schools to participate*: young people from social grades C2DE are less likely to report having been encouraged by their parents to take part in social action, therefore the encouragement of school becomes particularly important if they are to experience the benefits of taking part in social action.

- *We need to provide more opportunities for young people to shape social action activities*: young people welcome the opportunity to shape the social action they participate in, but currently, less than a quarter (24 percent) of young people who have ever volunteered have had the chance to select the problem they want to solve. Social action that young people shape offers opportunities for personal development that are particularly important to young people from low socio-economic backgrounds who may not get these chances in other parts of their lives.

Methodology

Literature review:

The Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester undertook a literature review to explore connections between young people's creative self-efficacy and the likelihood of them taking part in social action.

The team adopted an integrative approach to the literature review, enabling them to review, critique and synthesise material in a robust way that allowed for new perspectives to be developed.

Starting with reference lists from the small number of studies explicitly exploring either creative self-efficacy or social action, 114 research items were identified for inclusion in the review. These were mostly journal articles, but reference was also made to any grey literature suggested to us by the project advisory group.

Polling:

The RSA commissioned an online YouGov survey of 582 children aged 14-18. Fieldwork was undertaken between 27 April and 3 May 2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB children aged 14-18. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc.

Figure 1: Gender of respondents

294   288

■ Male   ■ Female
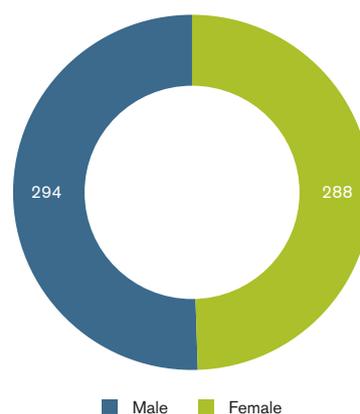
Figure 2: Social grade of parents of respondents

187
395

■ ABC1 ■ C2DE
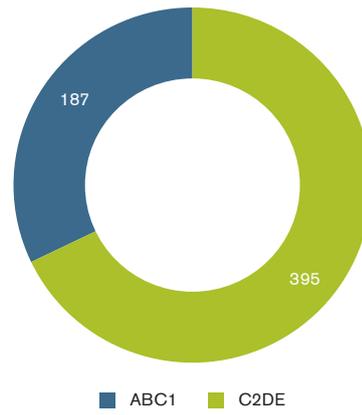
Figure 3: Age of respondents

106
142
112
119
103

■ 14 ■ 15 ■ 16 ■ 17 ■ 18
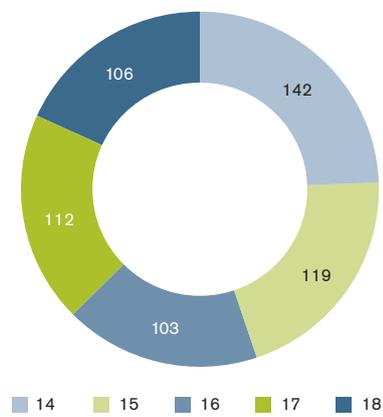
Figure 4: Regions of respondents

South   North   Midlands   East   London   Scotland   Wales

Teenagency: how young people can create a better world

The RSA commissioned an online YouGov survey of 2,013 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 26 and 27 April 2018. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc.

Figure 5: Gender of respondents

929

1084

■ Male ■ Female
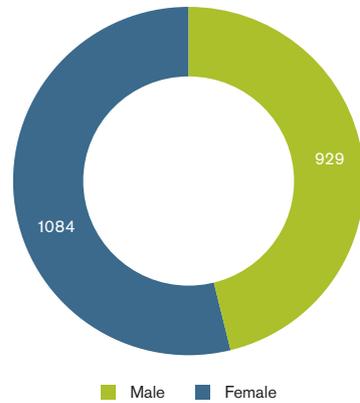
**Figure 6: Region of respondents**

South

North

Midlands

London

East

Figure 7: Social group of respondents

802

1211

■ ABC1 ■ C2DE
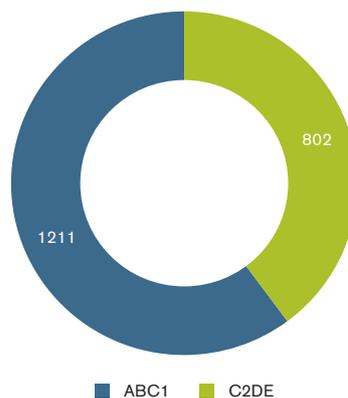
Figure 8: Age of respondents

55+	35–44	45–54	25–34
		18–24	
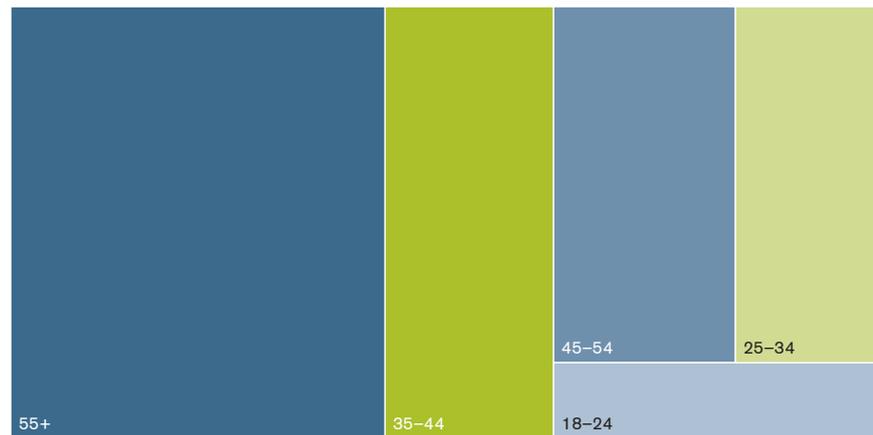
## Focus groups:

Three focus groups with a total of 24 adolescents aged 15-17 were conducted by the RSA and the Centre for Real World Learning between 10 May and 7 June 2018. These took place in three locations: Sheffield, Islington and Redditch.

The opportunity to participate in focus groups about extra-curricular activities was advertised through two schools and a charity engaged in delivering the National Citizen Service programme. Vouchers were offered as incentives for participation. Participants were self-selecting, although teachers and charity workers were briefed to encourage participation of a diverse range of students.

Both of the schools are mixed comprehensives with a similar proportion of male and female students. The first has around 29 percent of students with English as an additional language and the other has less than 10 percent (compared with a national average of 16.1 percent). Both have higher than average levels of students on Free School Meals (FSM): c. 60 percent and 40 percent respectively, compared with a national average of 29.1 percent.

The social action charity is open to any young person in Sheffield. Despite over 90 percent of the city's population being Caucasian, 65 percent of the young people who participate in the charity's programmes identify as being from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) backgrounds. The participants in their programmes are 56 percent female and 44 percent male.

There is an over-representation in our sample of female participants, participants who affiliate with a religion, participants of African descent and those in receipt of Free School Meals. We are cognisant of the resulting imbalances in our sample, and these should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings from the focus groups.

Figure 9: Gender of focus group participants

21%

79%

■ Male   ■ Female
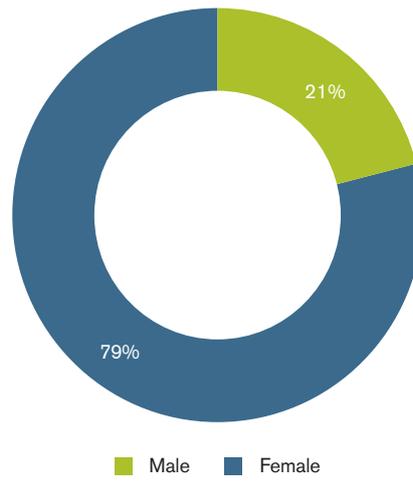
Figure 10: Proportion of focus group participants receiving FSM

4%

46%

50%

■ No   ■ Yes   ■ Don't know
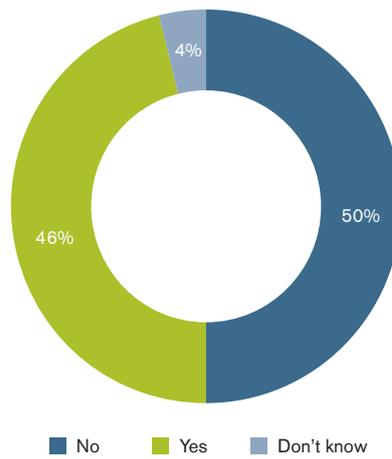
Figure 11: Ethnicity of focus group participants

Ethnicity	Count
African	9
White British	4
Caribbean	2
White and Black Caribbean	2
White and Asian	1
White and Black African	1
Pakistani	1
Arab	1
Any other ethnic background	1
Any other Asian background	1
Chinese	1
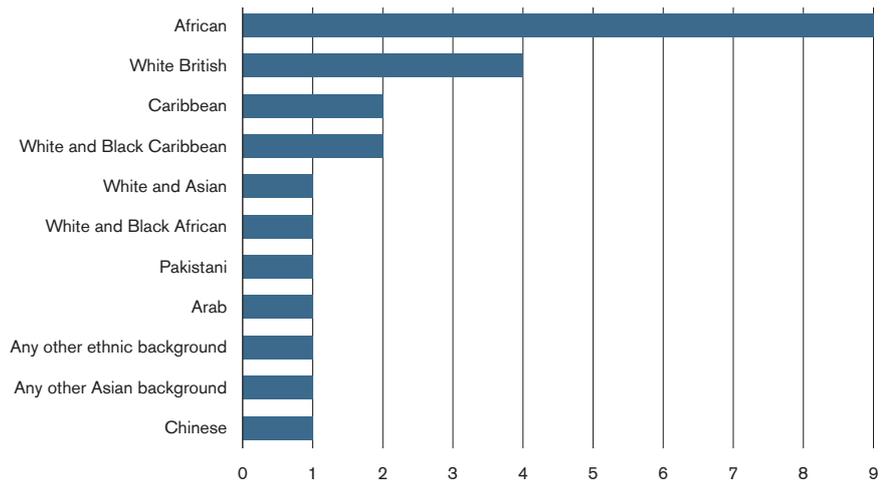
Figure 12: Religion of focus group participants

- Church of England — 8%
- Roman Catholic — 17%
- Pentecostal — 17%
- None — 25%
- Islam — 13%
- Hinduism — 4%
- Church of England/Anglican — 16%

Legend: Church of England, Church of England/Anglican, Hinduism, Islam, None, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic
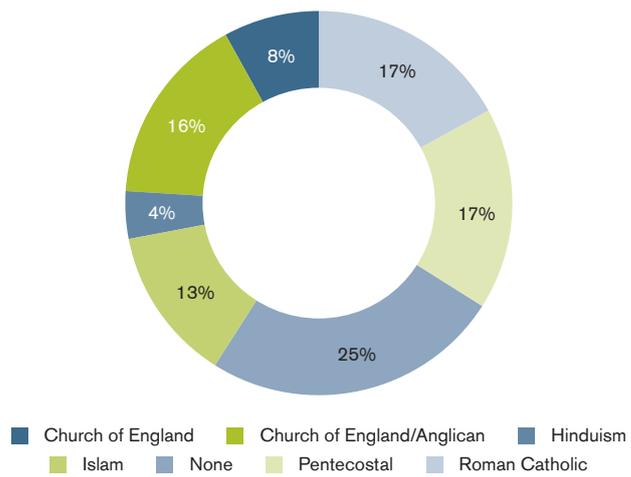
Section 1: Young people's participation in social action

Our research started by exploring the extent to which young people participate in social action. Our understanding of social action was influenced by the broad definition provided by Kirkman, Sanders & Emanuel (2015): "practical action in the service of others to create positive change".[1] In our polling of young people, and in our focus groups with them, we brought this definition to life with examples of the sorts of activities they might have participated in that we would classify as 'social action'. For the purposes of this study, we defined social action as 'taking part in activities such as fundraising, giving time to charity, campaigning for an issue, or taking part in mentoring or tutoring without being paid'.

We then compared what they told us about their participation with the perceptions that adults have of the likelihood of young people today to give back to their communities. We found significant disparities between the two; with adults believing adolescents to be significantly less likely to participate than is actually the case.

What young people tell us about their participation in social action

The RSA polled a representative sample of young people aged 14-18 to explore their propensity to do positive acts in their communities and the reasons behind their involvement, or lack thereof, in such activities.

We found that 68 percent of young people surveyed had participated in some form of volunteering or social action. We did not ask about the frequency of their participation, but a recent Ipsos MORI survey, commissioned by the iwill campaign, found that 58 percent of young people aged 10-20 had participated in some form of social action over the last year.[2]

Some of the young people responding to our survey may, of course, be participating in types of social action that require minimal time and energy, and where the impact is negligible, such as signing online petitions

1. Kirkman, E., Sanders, M., & Emanuel, N. (2015). Evaluating Youth Social Action, An Interim Report: Does participating in social action boost the skills young people need to succeed in adult life? Behavioural Insights Team. The Cabinet Office Centre for Social Action. Available at: www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/publications/evaluating-youth-social-action/ [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018].

2. Ipsos MORI. (2017). National Youth Social Action Survey 2017. iwill campaign. Available at: www.iwill.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YSA_infographic_web.pdf [Accessed 25 Jun. 2018].

or raising awareness of a charity via Facebook, though these were not explicitly referenced in our questions.[3]

Figure 13: Young people's prior participation in volunteering or other forms of social action

Yes, I have ■ No, I haven't ■ Don't know/can't recall
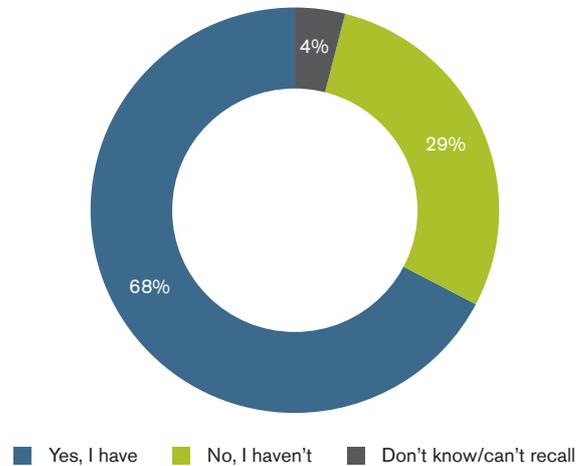
A subsequent question in the Ipsos MORI survey asked young people about their participation in regular activity that has benefit to both them (as participants) and the community they are looking to support; a type of social action that some refer to as 'double benefit'. The 2017 National Youth Action Survey found that 39 percent took part in social action of this nature.[4] We return to the question of double benefit social action in section five of this report.

This is still, undeniably, a significant proportion of young people and it is possible that young people may underreport social action participation under survey conditions owing to difficulties in recalling specific events or in understanding that it is not only formal volunteering opportunities that are in scope. In our focus groups, a number of young people reported never having done social action when first asked, but on further questioning in relation to specific activities – and having heard examples from their peers – they were able to name at least one activity. These included regularly looking after a neighbour's child unpaid and participating in a street protest against the use of animal fur in a high street retailer's clothing.

What adults believe about young people's participation in social action

Our survey of Britain's adult population demonstrates a significant underestimation of young people's likelihood to give back to their communities. Around half (49 percent) of all adult respondents, when prompted to think about teenagers living in the UK today, stated that they were 'not very likely' or 'not at all likely' to participate in volunteering and other forms of social action, despite the fact that, as our polling reveals, 68 percent of 14-18 year olds have done so. Just five percent of adults thought

3.   Birdwell, J. and Bani, M. (2018). Introducing Generation Citizen. London: Demos. Available at: www.demos.co.uk/files/Generation_Citizen_-_web.pdf?1392764120 [Accessed 25 Jun. 2018].
4.   Ipsos MORI. (2017). Op. cit.

that young people were very likely to engage in activities such as giving time to charity without being paid.

Figure 14: Adults' opinions on likelihood of teenagers to do volunteering and other forms of social action
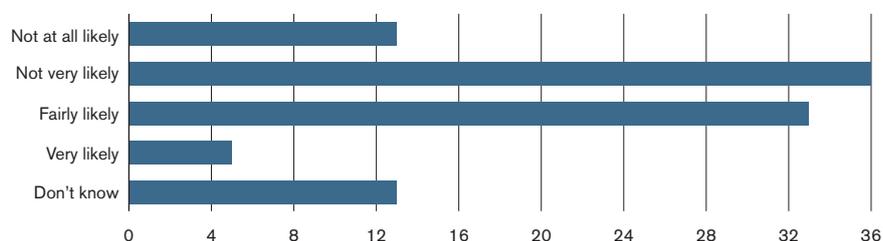

What is more, when asked to select adjectives from a list, 'selfish', 'lazy' and 'anti-social' were the most frequently selected words. Only four percent chose 'selfless' to describe young people today.

Figure 15: Terms adults selected to describe their impressions of young people today
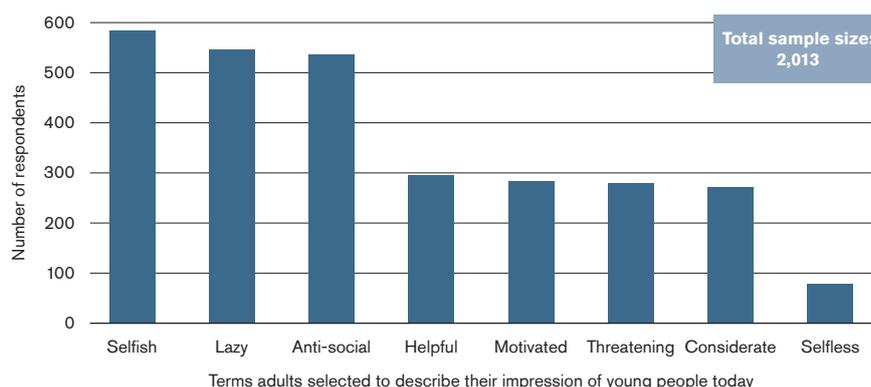
These findings contrast starkly with the findings of our research with young people. However, they could be explained by the negative stereotypes of young people that abound in the mainstream media. For example, evidence presented to the Leveson enquiry by a consortia of organisations representing and working with adolescents quoted research showing that 76 percent of press coverage of young people is negative.[5] Some researchers too have contributed to the stereotype, with a recent study claiming that from the early 2000s, there has been a "narcissism epidemic" among adolescents.[6]

Despite a body of research showing that a culture of giving back is alive and well among most young people in the UK, the results of our adult survey demonstrate a lack of belief in the positive intentions of young people. In the next section, we explore the potential detrimental effects on children and young people of this misconception.

5. Giner, S. and Jones, R. (2012). Submission to The Leveson Inquiry. Fair Press & Accessible PCC for Children and Young People. Available at: webarchive.nationalarchives. gov.uk/20140122183153/http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Submission-by-Youth-Media-Agency4.pdf [Accessed 25 Jun. 2018]
6. Twenge, J. and Campbell, W. (2014). The narcissism epidemic. New York: Atria Books.

Section 2: Young people's beliefs about their ability to effect positive change

Our research shows that we should not underestimate young people's empathy and selflessness, although they may underestimate their own abilities to harness these personal qualities to bring about positive change.

Young people want to help others

When asked to consider a series of statements that could be used to describe themselves, 84 percent of the representative sample of young people surveyed selected 'I want to help other people'. This was, in fact, the statement most young people most agreed with.

Figure 16: Adolescent self-perception
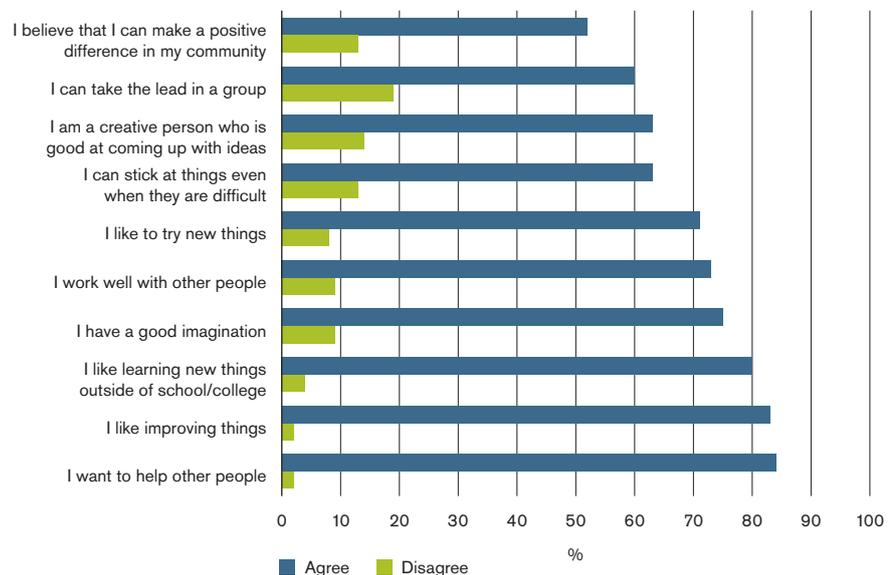
This chimes strongly with the evidence from focus groups conducted with young people aged 15-17.

> "If you can help someone, help someone."
>   *Focus group participant B10*

Young people spoke passionately about their desire to help others, in some cases explaining that this altruistic desire was reinforced by their own prior experience of being helped, bringing to mind the philosophy of 'paying it forward'.

> "If it's stuff that I've gone through or in the past that I've experienced that I then have the platform to help others [with what] they're going through and can help..."
> *Focus group participant L2 on why he mentors Year 11 students*

When asked about their future career aspirations, the young people also highlighted selfless motivations for their choices.

> "A lot of my career aspirations are key to trying to give back and support others."
> *Focus group participant L2*

> "I also put I want to help other people not in like the material sense that I want to become a doctor but I just find personally that like gratification. It's more like socially I wanna kind of help other people. But not materially."
> *Focus group participant L4*

There is evidence that adolescence is a key period for developing traits like empathy, brought about as young people develop a better understanding of the world and their place in it. Studies show that these prosocial dispositions "emerge by late childhood and are relatively stable into adulthood."[7] Research by Penner and others has found strong correlations between "other-oriented empathy" and the amount of time that an individual spends volunteering.[8] The explicit expression of empathetic, other-oriented or selfless motivations for future action/career plans is, perhaps, to be expected among a population who take part in social action. It could both lead to, and reinforce, the tendency to participate.

However, our polling has uncovered an empathy/self-efficacy gap. While many of the young people demonstrated personal qualities that are predictive of participation in volunteering, only around a half agreed with the statement 'I believe I can make a difference in my community'.

The empathy/self-efficacy gap
We explored this theme with young people in our focus groups to try to understand the reasons they don't feel that their actions will make a difference. One young person noted a lack of social and political power among ordinary young people that makes it hard to bring about change. He cited the example of Kim Kardashian whose celebrity helped her

7.   Eisenberg, N., Guthrie, I., Cumberland, A., Murphy, B., Shepard, S., Zhou, Q., & Carlo, G. (2002). Prosocial Development in Early Adulthood: A longitudinal study. Personality Processes and Individual Differences, 82(6), pp.993-1006.

8.   Penner, L. (2004). Volunteerism and Social Problems: Making things better or worse? Journal of Social Issues, 60(3), pp.645-666.

secure clemency for a death row prisoner and contrasted this with the many campaigners over the years who failed to secure the same outcome. A peer responded that it feels like young people are unable to bring about change as individuals but could do so as a collective.

A similar theme emerged in another focus group, in which the scale of the challenges facing the world's population seemed simply too great for some of the young participants to believe that they can make a meaningful contribution.

> "For me, it's definitely the war in Syria right now, which is something that I really wish I could do something [about], but I just feel like I can't! 'cause like, I just can't!"
> *Participant B4 on causes she really cares about*

This sense of impotence did not affect all our participants to the same extent. Some noted that you can make an important difference by working closely with one person and changing something concrete in their life, for example, regularly helping an elderly person with grocery shopping. Others noted that confidence in your ability to make a difference builds through the practice of engaging in social action and seeing the results of your efforts. In a later section of this report, we reflect on why some young people may feel more self-efficacious, or able to make a tangible difference, when it comes to social action.

Negative adult perceptions and the impact they may have on young people

As part of the polling that we commissioned via YouGov, we asked adults if they believe that young people today make a more or less positive contribution to society than they did a decade ago.

The results demonstrate that very low proportions (17 percent) of the adult population believe that young people today make a more positive contribution, and the percentage of positive responses is particularly low in older age groups.

Figure 17: Percentage of adults who believe teenagers today make a more positive contribution to society than in the past by age of respondent
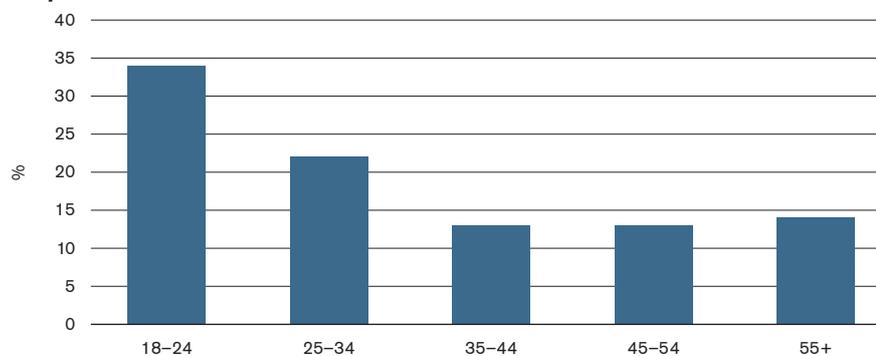
Negative adult perceptions of young people could contribute to low self-efficacy among these groups, owing to the phenomenon of "stereotype

threat" – a term coined by Steele and Aronson in their 1995 study of African American student performance in academic tests.[9] They find that pernicious stereotypes become internalised by the affected groups and lead them to conform to the beliefs others hold about them.

In this context, it is possible that if young people hear often enough that they do not make a positive contribution, they will start to believe this and play out that belief in their day-to-day lives. The impact of negative media stereotyping on young people's propensity to engage in social action was explored in polling conducted by the think tank Demos for its 'Generation Citizen' report. It revealed that "over half of the teenagers thought that negative media portrayals made them less active in their communities (58 percent)".[10] It is not inconceivable that negative attitudes of the adult population in general could have a similar effect on young people's belief in their ability to make a positive difference in their communities.

9. Steele, C. and Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69(5), pp.797-811.
10. Birdwell, J. and Bani, M. (2018). Op. cit

Section 3: The groups of young people more likely to engage in social action

We know that, despite adult perceptions, significant numbers of young people do give back to their communities via social action. However, we also know that some groups are more likely than others to do so.

There are a number of models that try to explain why some people engage in voluntary activities and others do not. These were explored in detail in the literature review undertaken by the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester for this study.[11] One of the most comprehensive frameworks comes from Penner, and it is around this model that we have structured our research and this report.[12]

Figure 18: Penner's schematic model of the decision to volunteer
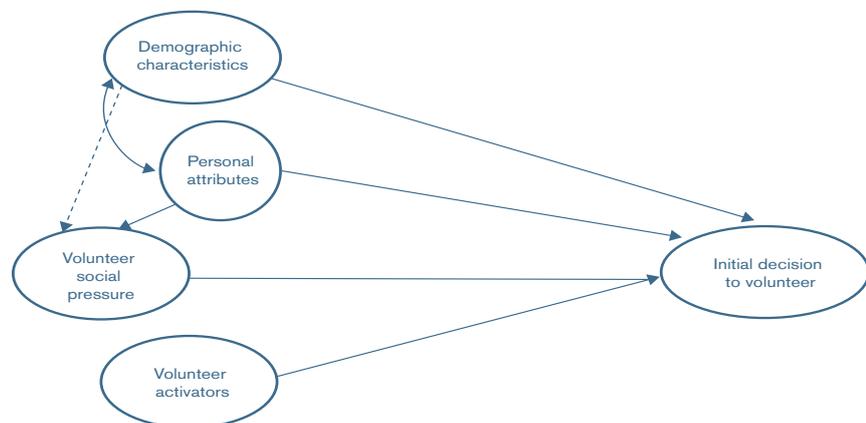
Penner's model highlights four antecedents of the decision to volunteer. In this section of the report, we explore three of these: demographic characteristics, social pressure and activators. We have added a subcategory of 'inhibitors' to the 'activator' category, in order to capture other parts of the research literature and findings from our research that do not neatly fit into the aforementioned three categories in Penner's model.

11. Spencer, E. and Lucas, B. (2018). Understanding the role of creative self-efficacy in youth social action – a literature review.
12. Penner, L. (2004). Volunteerism and Social Problems: Making things better or worse? Journal of Social Issues, 60(3), p. 648.

We return to the personal attributes category in detail in sections four and five of this report, on motivation and creativity, given the centrality of these factors to our study.

The influence of demographics on likelihood to participate in social action

We found that there are three demographic characteristics that seem to be of particular importance for predicting youth participation in social action: religion, gender and socio-economic background.

Religion

In their literature review for this project, Spencer and Lucas note that religion can be considered a demographic feature.[13] They cite the findings of the 2015 Youth Social Action Survey conducted by Ipsos MORI, which found a slight difference in rates of participation in social action between young people who identify as affiliated with a religion (45 percent) and those who do not (38 percent).[14]

The polling of adolescents conducted for this study found that those who identify as affiliating with a religion are around 10 percent more likely to participate in volunteering than those who affiliate with none.

Figure 19: Teenagers' prior participation in volunteering/social action by religious affiliation
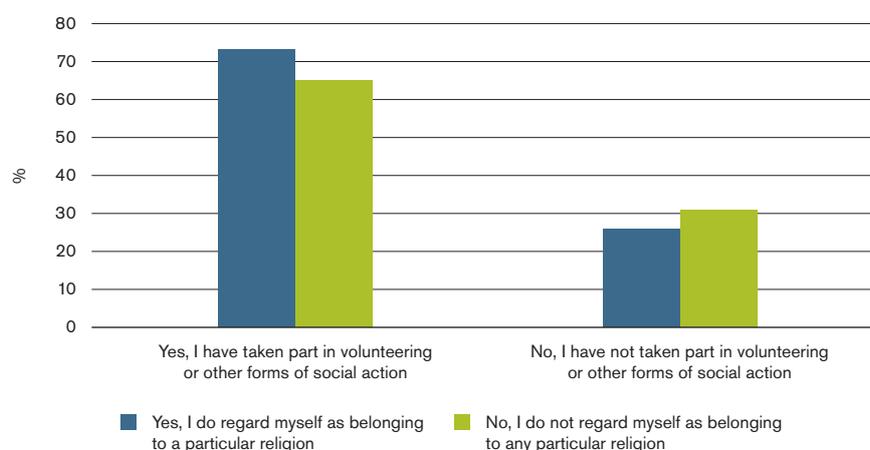
Spencer and Lucas argue that rather than thinking about religion solely as a demographic characteristic, we must recognise that religion is an influence across the other categories in Penner's model:

- **Personal attributes:** differing degrees of religiosity.
- **Social pressures:** from within the family and the wider religious community that stem from their religious beliefs.
- **Volunteer activators:** organisational structures and social connections that places of worship offer can provide opportunities for participation.[15]

13. Spencer, E. and Lucas, B. (2018). Op. cit.
14. Ipsos MORI. (2015). Youth Social Action in the UK - 2015: A face-to-face survey of 10-20 year olds in the UK. Cabinet Office. Available at: www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/publication/6400-03/sri-youth-social-action-in-uk-2015.pdf [Accessed 19 Mar. 2018]
15. Spencer, E. and Lucas, B. (2018). Op. cit.

They cite a body of research exploring the psychological development of sympathy and empathy through the practice of religion, bringing them to the conclusion that "sympathy and altruism, and the social action they lead to, cannot be isolated from the religion in which it can be argued they developed".[16]

The focus groups highlighted the significance of religion in explaining young people's engagement in social action, and reflected the complex nature of religion's influence on young people's attitudes and behaviour.

In terms of personal attributes, one participant explained that she thought religious people were more likely to participate because of a sense of duty to help others. In respect to social pressures, one participant spoke about coming from a "very religious family" and how he participated in social action alongside other members of his family. However, the most common theme that emerged when young people spoke about religion and social action falls under the 'activators' category.

A number of participants spoke about the role of their church or mosque in facilitating social action. For example, one young woman who regularly attends a Catholic church described the mentoring scheme that the church operates through which she is a mentor to a couple of younger churchgoers. A young male participant explained that, from time to time, his mosque picks a charity to support. They provide leaflets for worshippers to distribute to neighbours asking for donations towards the charity.

The religious institution didn't always select the focus of the social action. For example, one young woman told us about a time when she discovered another member of her church had been diagnosed with cancer. A group of parishioners got together to organise a fundraising event for a cancer charity that was supporting her. The church offered practical support to the group in organising the event and connected them with contacts within the church's network that could be of help.

> "I like the support that they give. So, like, you could take an idea to them and they support you with it and when they have the idea you'll, like, support them"
> *Focus group participant S4 on doing social action through church*

In this sense, the church's role was to provide support when a member came to them with ideas, rather than to lead the action.

Gender

Research consistently finds that women are more likely to participate in social action than men.[17] Similarly, female respondents to our national poll of teenagers were more likely to say that they had participated in social action (74 percent) than male respondents (61 percent).

16. Ibid.
17. Bennett & Parameshawarn. (2013). Briefing Paper 102: What factors predict volunteering among youths in the UK? TSRC. Birmingham; Marzana, Marta & Pozzi. (2012). Social Action in Young Adults: Voluntary and political engagement. Journal of adolescence. pp.497-507.

Figure 20: Teenagers' prior participation in volunteering or other forms of social action by gender
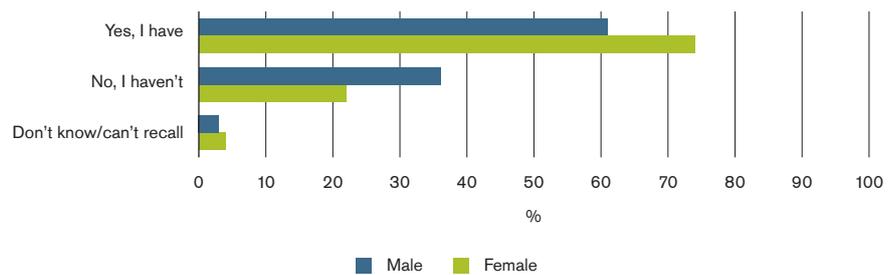
Birdwell, Birnie and Mehan note that the gaps in male and female participation are not that significant overall, but vary depending on the type of social action activity being considered, "with boys more likely to be involved with sport type voluntary activities and girls outnumbering boys in social service type activities".[18]

The literature offers two primary explanations for gender differences in social action participation. The first relates to inherent personality traits and the second to the way in which the genders are socialised.

Spencer and Lucas cite a number of studies that identify greater prosocial attitudes in females and point to a study by Caprara et al., which "finds that the personality trait 'agreeableness' – one of the 'Big 5' traits on which there is clear consensus – is significantly related to prosociality. The complex relationship is shown below".[19]

Figure 21: Caprara et al.'s (2012) diagrammatical representation of their theoretical model. Solid lines represent direct paths; dotted lines represent indirect paths
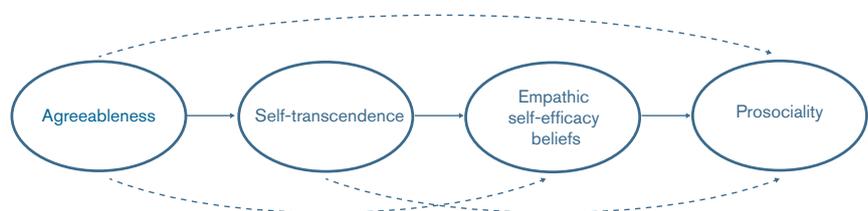
On the other hand, Cicognani et al. note that families can 'encourage' male and female adolescents in different ways based upon gender stereotypes that 'traditionally' point males towards autonomous behaviour and females towards caring roles,[20] many opportunities for which are presented by social action.

Certainly, male participants in our focus groups noted that when they were younger, there were concerns about being seen by other peers as "wet" for putting their hands up to participate in school-based charity

18. Birdwell, J., Birnie, R., & Mehan, R. (2013). The State of the Nation: Youth social action in the UK. London: Demos. Available at: www.demos.co.uk/files/Youth_Social_Action_in_the_UK_-_ver_3.pdf?1373620410, p.13 [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

19. Spencer, E. and Lucas, B. (2018). Op. cit.

20. Cicognani, E., Zani, B., Fournier, B., Gavray, C., & Born, M. (2012). Gender Differences in Youths' Political Engagement and Participation. The role of parents and of adolescents' social and civic participation. Journal of Adolescence, 35 (Special Issue: Political and Civic Engagement Development in Adolescence), pp.561-576.

initiatives. However, they said that the judgements of peers were less important as they became more "mature".

Nevertheless, as found by the literature review, differences in personality cannot be accounted for by the effect of socially-constructed stereotypes alone. Greater differences in personality between the sexes have been found in societies where much has been done to level the playing field (the Scandinavian countries being most notable).

It is worth noting that most of the participants in our focus groups were female. The difficulties we encountered in recruiting male participants, despite the persistent efforts of our school and charity partners, suggest that young men are less likely to put themselves forward for additional, after-school commitments, which may also explain their slightly lower levels of participation in social action.

We explored this issue with leaders of social action charities in our expert interviews. Jennie Butterworth, Chief Executive of Envision, observed that, "girls are more conscientious and more mature at this age and they are consequently more likely to turn up". She reported that Envision's sign-up rates are roughly 40 percent boys; 60 percent girls, and that boys are slightly more likely than girls to drop out of their programme.

Socio-economic background

A number of studies have shown that young people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are significantly less likely to participate in social action than their more affluent peers.

In 2018, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport commissioned an independent review into 'full-time' social action for young people aged 16-24. They defined this as social action for 16 hours per week or more over a period of at least six months, examples of which include the National Citizen Service (NCS) and International Citizen Service (ICS).

The review found that young people 'from the poorest backgrounds tend to be the least likely to access structured social action opportunities'.[21] It found that young people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are deterred when 'long hours of voluntary engagement are required from them and when they incur travel and subsistence costs'.[22]

A study by Cremin et al. into civic engagement among young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage found that there are many more such young people who are not civically engaged than are: one third of those surveyed stated that they regularly volunteer or help others, while two thirds stated that they did not.[23] This may be explained by the finding of a review of social action that there are fewer opportunities to 'serendipitously' access formal volunteering opportunities in disadvantaged

21. Holliday, S. (2018). Independent Review of Full-Time Social Action. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/679078/The_Steve_Holliday_Report.pdf [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]
22. Ibid.
23. Cremin, H., Harrison, T., Mason, C. and Warwick, P. (2010). Building voice, civic action and learning: Variation in levels of civic engagement amongst young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Available at: engaged.educ.cam.ac.uk/publications/Seminar percent202 percent20Listening percent20harder percent20paper percent20HC.pdf [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

communities.[24]

However, the research of Cremin et al., suggests that young people from disadvantaged communities may often be participating in types of social action that fall outside of formal definitions. Qualitative data that their team collected through focus groups suggests that almost all the young people they spoke to 'could be considered to be civically engaged at some level'.[25]

As such, Cremin et al. stress the need to redefine 'civic action' to encompass a much broader range of activities undertaken for the common good, 'in order to better reflect the preferences of all young people, especially those from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities'.[26] The authors also note that participation in family duties is important for some groups within these communities, and could be considered part of their civic duties,[27] though many would not consider this sort of activity to constitute social action.

Our survey results show that young people with parents from lower social grades were almost as likely as their wealthier counterparts to have participated in social action before. However, the results also revealed that even more young people from poorer backgrounds might give back to their communities if family and school encouraged them to – a theme we return to in the next sub-section.

Our focus groups revealed that the impact of social issues on the family, friends and neighbours of young people growing up in disadvantaged communities makes them even more likely to participate, compared with their richer counterparts for whom such social problems can seem remote.

> "And just our whole friendship group they've been really like exposed to those different things that make us feel like there's loads of issues around."
> *Focus group participant S1*

> "I don't know if it's the right word but what stops a lot of people is ignorance. Like some of my friends are…really great people, but if someone said that this is happening in the world, there's children who are starving and have to walk miles for water and high infant mortality rates and stuff, and I think they'd probably say in response 'but what's that got to do with me?...it's not my problem'."
> *Focus group participant B11*

The influence of social pressure on likelihood to participate in social action

Penner describes two different types of social pressure that may influence

24. Davies, J. (2017). Young People & Volunteering: A literature review. University of Strathclyde. Volunteer Scotland.
25. Cremin, H., Harrison, T., Mason, C. and Warwick, P. (2011). Engaging Practice: Engaging young citizens from disadvantaged communities, a good practice guide. Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education, p.6.
26. Ibid. p.6.
27. Ibid. p.22.

a person's likelihood to engage in voluntary activity. The first is "direct social pressure"; being asked by a family member, friend, member of your religious community or someone else you know. The second is "indirect social pressure"; an expectation that you feel others (or indeed, society at large) have of you.[28]

Of particular interest to this study is the social pressure of schools, parents or guardians and peers. As part of our national survey of teenagers, we asked those respondents who have ever taken part in social action what influenced them to get involved. 59 percent cited the encouragement of their schools, followed by that of their parents (36 percent), that of organisers of social action (22 percent) and of friends (20 percent), or some combination of these.

Figure 22: Factors influencing young people's participation in volunteering and social action
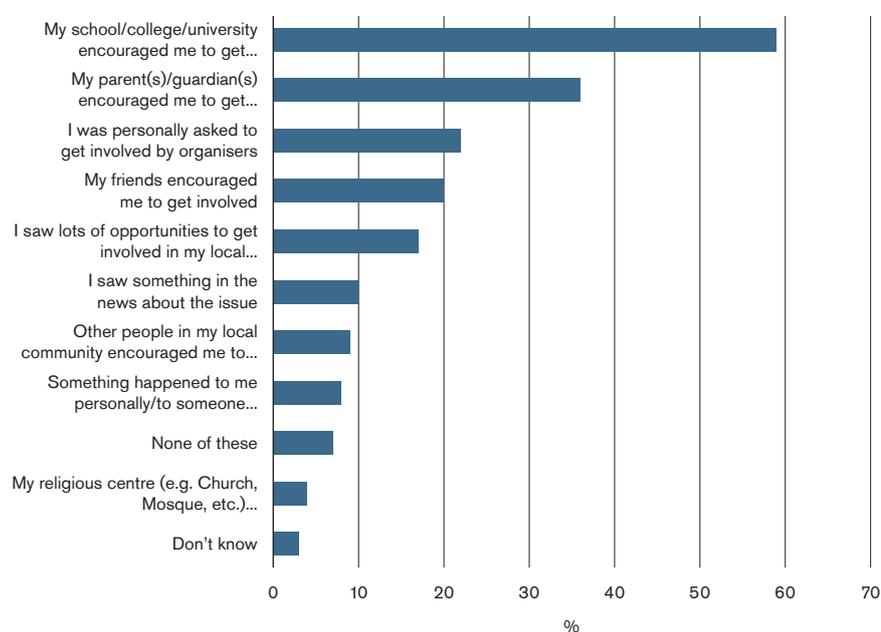
Schools

Studies have pointed to the influence of school culture and encouragement on young people's participation in social action. For example, research from the Jubilee Centre explored how young people come to develop a 'habit of service'; a commitment to continuing participation in social action following an initial experience. It found that young people with a habit of service 'have service embedded in their school/college/university environment'.[29]

Our polling found the encouragement of school to be the most important influence on young people's participation in social action. This tallies with the findings of our literature review, which revealed that school was

28.   Penner, L. (2004). Volunteerism and Social Problems: Making things better or worse? Journal of Social Issues, 60(3), pp. 645-666.

29.   Arthur, J., Harrison, T., Taylor-Collins, E., & Moller, F. (2017). A Habit of Service: The factors that sustain service in young people. Birmingham: The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. p.6. Available at: www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/Research%20 Reports/A_Habit_of_Service.pdf [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

a strong influence on participation. Indeed, a number of participants reported that they only, or mostly, participate through school.

> "I think the school influences fundraising and things like that a lot more than home life for me…we do a lot of fundraising as a school: we help the elderly at Christmas and deliver like Christmas hampers to them with food and stuff like that."
> *Focus group participant B5*

Many students spoke about how their school highlights the instrumental benefits of social action for enhancing personal statements and CVs when encouraging them to participate, and this seemed to be effective for some.

> "…in our school, we do something called Enrichment Week and basically you can pick what thing you want to do. So, like something you want to put on your CV sort of thing…"
> *Focus group participant S1*

> "…if it's something that school asks you to do, you assume that it's beneficial to you as an individual because it's something that you can put on your personal statement…"
> *Focus group participant L4*

However, some young people found themselves being compelled to participate by school.

> "With our school, it's more like you get told what you're doing."
> *Focus group participant S1*

This might have been off-putting at the outset, but there was consensus throughout the groups that they developed an interest in what they were doing once they started.

> "I suppose it can because it can open your eyes. If it's something that you never thought of doing and then you're doing it and you actually like it…"
> *Focus group participant B5 on being encouraged to participate by school*

Parents

The research literature reveals the important influence parents have on their children's participation in social action through 'modelling'; children whose parents participate in social action are more likely to participate themselves.[30]

Our focus groups and polling results also revealed that direct social pressure from parents was particularly influential; when parents ask you

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30.   Yates, M., & Youniss, J. (1996). A Developmental Perspective on Community Service in Adolescents. Social Development, 5(1), p.85-111. [accessed on 12 December: 2017]

to volunteer, it's hard to say no.

> "Yeah, I do it [looking after my neighbour's child] free of charge. This is something my mum wants me to do. And like at first, I was a bit...like...ah why do I have to do it? But then I literally went over and then the child is really quite nice and so I really have fun sometimes...."
>
> *Focus group participant L5*

> "I have an elderly neighbour who...my mum asked me to help with like carrying shopping or house chores or stuff like that. So, I go around there just basically whenever I'm free. I wouldn't do it as frequently but because through my mum, you know...that's making me have an incentive to do it. I found it more natural and like, feeling that I should do it."
>
> *Focus group participant L3*

However, our polling reveals that some groups of parents are more likely to encourage involvement than others. Those young people whose parents were from social grades ABC1 were significantly more likely to be encouraged by their parents than those from social grades C2DE. The difference is even greater when you compare the working status of parents; 53 percent of respondents whose parents/guardians work full time were influenced to get involved by the encouragement of parents/guardians, compared with just 30 percent of those whose parents are working part time, studying, unemployed, or not working.

Figure 23: My parent(s)/guardian(s) encouraged me to get involved by socioeconomic status
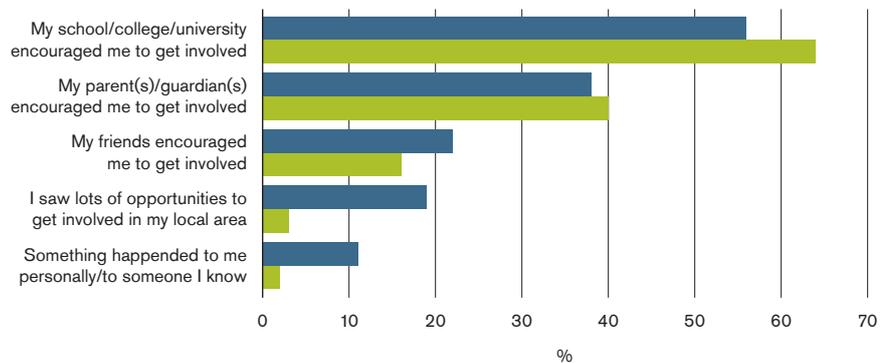

Figure 24: My parent(s)/guardian(s) encouraged me to get involved by working status

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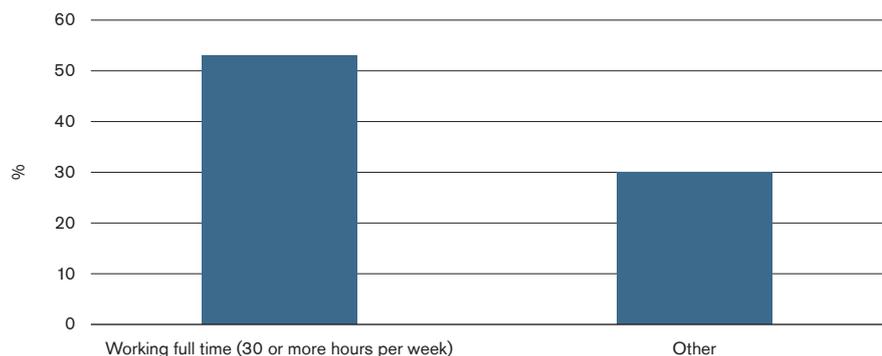
Friends

Several studies identify friends as having a significant influence on young people's participation in social action. In fact, the Jubilee Centre's research suggests that friends have a greater influence than parents.[31] Bennett and Parameshwaran also find that the greater number of close friends a young person has, the more likely they are to volunteer.[32]

While our polling results show friends to be a less significant influence than parents (20 percent vs. 36 percent), our focus groups revealed the importance of friendship groups to encouraging or discouraging participation in social action.

> "…if we're in a group and I were to say something then everyone would be like "yeah, yeah, support it, support it" and if I were to be in a different group they'd be like "no way. That's rubbish. Why would I do that?" So like, we all encourage each other."
> *Focus group participant S1*

> "I suppose it depends what kind of friends you have. I mean personally I would find it quite sweet that you're doing that. But if it was people that you didn't know you'd be like "oh well why are you doing that?"
> *Focus group participant B5*

Activators and inhibitors to participation in social action

Activators

In their literature review for this project, Spencer and Lucas draw on three studies by Penner, Brodie et al., and Davies to offer four categories of 'volunteer activator' i.e. things that activate people's desire to volunteer:[33]

- An emotional reaction, eg an angry reaction to a decision or response to a threat or need
- A personal life event, eg a relocation or change in family circumstance
- An external influence, eg a change in worldview or understanding, or a natural disaster
- Being asked

The last of these is a factor that we explored in the previous section on social pressure. Being asked by school and parents in particular seemed to have a strong influence on decision to participate in social action both for the young people we polled and those who participated in focus groups.

However, the other types of 'activator' seem to have been an influence for relatively few of our survey respondents who have ever participated in

31. Arthur, J., Harrison, T., Taylor-Collins, E., & Moller, F. (2017). Op. cit.
32. Bennett, M., & Parameshwaran, M. (2013). Briefing Paper 102: What factors predict volunteering among youths in the UK? University of Birmingham, Third Sector Research Centre. Birmingham: TSRC. Available at: www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/briefing-paper-102.pdf [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]
33. Spencer, E. and Lucas, B. (2018). Op. cit

social action: 17 percent saw opportunities in their local area, 10 percent saw something in the news about the issue and eight percent got involved because of something that happened to them or someone they knew.

Contrary to the findings of the representative survey, many of the focus group participants got involved in social action as a result of knowing someone affected by an issue. These young people were "triggered" by something that happened to either a family member, a close friend or a member of their religious community.

"I was in like an autism awareness project because I've got a twin brother and he's got autism. People know about it but they don't really know what it is, and I think like especially throughout high school I found myself having to kind of defend him quite a lot because he used to get picked on quite a lot."
Focus group participant B11

"…my cousin's got cerebral palsy and epilepsy… and I was in charge of the cakes and stuff, so I had to make them all and raise money so she could have a special garden."
Focus group participant B8

"…I did it for a Sickle Cell Anaemia charity because my friend got it. So, I did it for her…and we raised like 500 quid."
Focus group participant S3

"It wasn't just me but one of the women in my church was diagnosed with breast cancer. So, we joined with the Methodist Church…and we did like a BBQ and got a permit…to raise money for breast cancer research…we just wanted to do something to help others."
Focus group participant S13

"And I know a lot of children around the area that suffer from mental illnesses are involved in [CAMHS] and I'd like to go back not as someone who's being counselled but as a young ambassador to reassure people and say it's not that bad."
Focus group participant B10

Our polling results indicate that for one group of young people – those who consider themselves creative – the activator of having had something happen to them or knowing someone affected by an issue is more powerful. They are also more likely to get involved because they had spotted opportunities in their local area than those who do not see themselves as creative. Conversely, the group of self-reported creatives were less likely to be prompted to be involved by the encouragement of their school or parents. This suggests a greater tendency to think and act independently among young people who see themselves as creative.

Figure 25: Comparison of reasons to get involved in volunteering/ social action between creative and non-creative young people
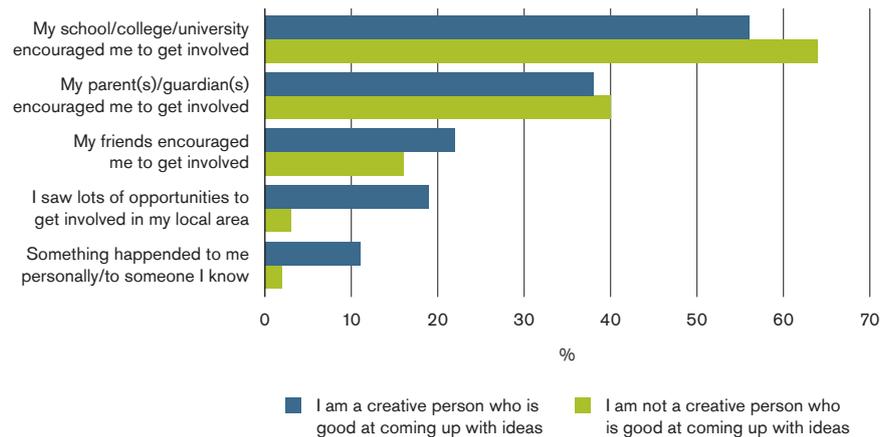
This link between creativity, knowing someone affected by an issue, and taking action is a fascinating one. As Spencer and Lucas note in their literature review for this project:

> "we know that true creativity – in terms of being able to piece together ideas to solve a problem – is only really possible if one has sufficient knowledge about the situation. Deep knowledge borne out of personal life events, combined with a recognition that they have something to offer (creative self-efficacy) perhaps makes a person more likely to participate within an area of social action that corresponds to a 'domain' of expertise".[34]

This is a theme we return to in section five of this report on the links between creativity and social action.

Inhibitors

While the Penner model does not specifically name 'inhibitors' to social action, the broader literature highlights some key barriers to young people's participation in social action. These are the inverse of the 'activators' that Penner identifies. The significance of these inhibitors varies from group to group, therefore they also relate to the demographic aspect of Penner's model.

In Davies' 2007 review of young people and volunteering, he notes that availability of time to spend on volunteering is a barrier that particularly affects young people.[35] In our national survey of young people, we asked those that had never taken part in social action what their reasons were. Lack of time was a barrier for around a third of non-participants.

34. Spencer, E. and Lucas, B. (2018). Op. cit.
35. Davies, J. (2017). Op. cit.

Figure 26: Teenagers' reasons for not participating in volunteering/ social action
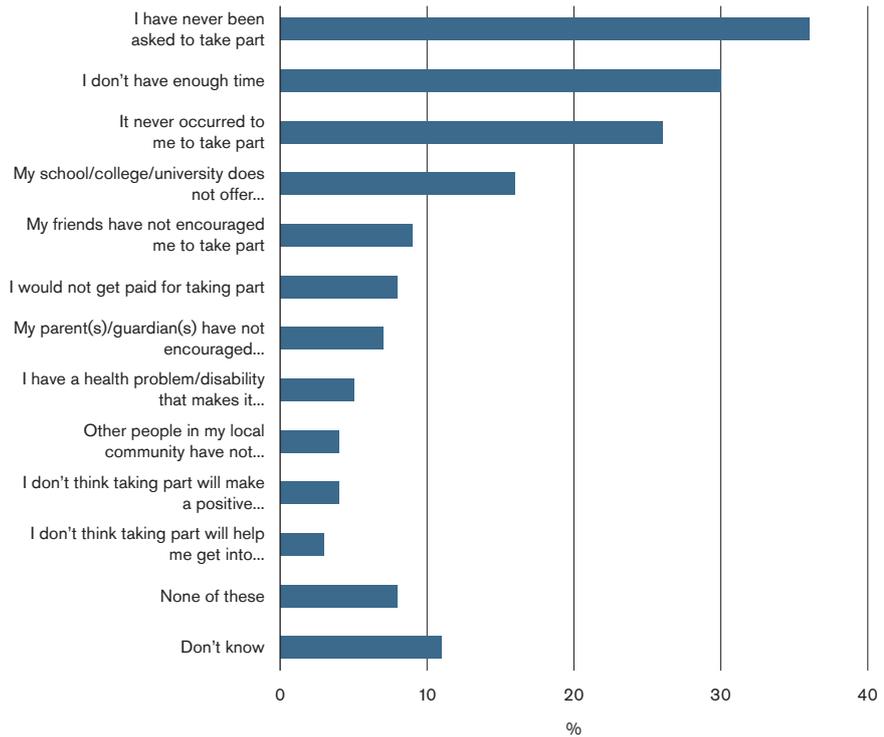
Davies notes that many young people struggle to manage competing demands on their time. Our focus group discussions seem to confirm this notion. At one school we visited, sixth formers had the opportunity to hear about a social action project when the team running it came in to present at an assembly. Despite his friends signing up, one young man chose not to due to the "huge time commitment" he thought it would require and the challenge of balancing this with independent study and other extra-curricular activities. This delicate balancing act also affected students in the other two focus groups we ran.

"I mean because of homework and coursework and dance."
Focus group participant B3 on why she doesn't participate in social action

While, overall, about a quarter (24 percent) of adults surveyed recognised that time constraints may be a barrier to young people's participation in social action, 44 percent of adults aged 18-24 recognised that this could be inhibiting for young people. This may reflect their own recent educational experiences and the rising pressure that school-aged children are under.[36]

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36.   National Union of Teachers. Exam Factories? The impact of accountability measures on children and young people. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/files/exam-factories.pdf [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

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Figure 27: Percentage of adults who believe young people don't participate in social action because they 'don't have enough time' by age group
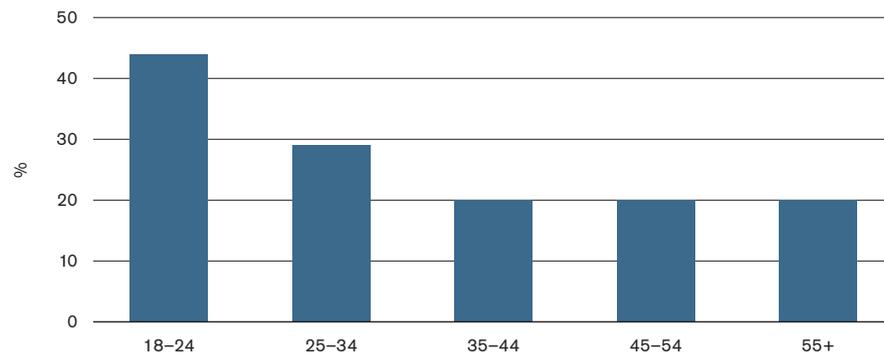
Davies also notes that young people may perceive the financial cost of participation in social action to be very high, for example the cost of travel.[37] Participants in one of our focus groups felt that the financial barrier was particularly significant when you wanted to initiate the social action yourself. For example, for young people inspired to fundraise for an issue, "you need a lot of money to start it off" including funding to cover the venue hire and refreshments. They spoke about the important role that both religious institutions and youth charities play in helping them access this "seed funding" to get ideas off the ground.

Citing Davies' work, Spencer and Lucas also note that 'youth can be a barrier to involvement in social action where organisations stipulate lower age limits for participation'.[38] This barrier was cited by young people in our focus groups, particularly in relation to (political) campaigning, which very few participants had been involved in yet; although some hoped to be in the future. As one participant explained:

> "I think it's slightly better to do in the future when I have more life experience because I think that it's kind of a bad image for the party if it's a fifteen-year-old guy coming to your house to tell you about paying your taxes. I think it's better if it's an older person who understands the issues…"
>
> *Focus group participant L4*

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37. Davies, J. (2017). Op. cit.
38. Spencer, E. and Lucas, B. (2018). Op. cit.

Section 4: Teenagers' motivations to give back

In the previous section, we looked at a range of external factors that affect young people's engagement in social action over which the young person has little to no control. These included demographic factors like social grade of their parents, the 'social pressure' of school, parents and friends and so-called 'activators', such as being asked to take part.

We know that some of these have strong predictive power for young people's engagement (or non-engagement) in social action. However, we also know that what happens within the hearts and minds of young people is significant when trying to understand why they may or may not do positive works in their communities.

As discussed in section two of this report, many young people are motivated by a set of values that adults might not typically equate with them. To recap, when asked to consider a series of statements that could be used to describe themselves, 84 percent of the representative sample of young people surveyed selected 'I want to help other people'. In contrast, a representative sample of UK adults most commonly selected 'selfish', 'lazy' and 'anti-social' as terms to describe young people today, with only four percent choosing 'selfless'.

In this section, we will explore in more detail the motivations of young people and the balance between self-interested motivations, such as boosting a CV, and other-interested motivations like trying to help other people.

Self-interested motivations

> "So when an opportunity like that arises, it's always in the back of your mind, like what can I add to my personal statement, what can I say to universities...so that's what brings us to volunteer."
> *Focus group participant L1*

Our national survey asked a representative sample of young people about the motivations behind their participation in social action. Within the nine options that we provided, a number represented 'self-interested' motivations:

- Gaining new skills/experiences
- Personal enjoyment
- Getting into college/university/getting a job
- Meeting new people

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These were less-commonly selected than the desire to help others (61 percent), although half of respondents did select the desire to gain new skills and experiences; 42 percent were motivated by personal enjoyment; a third thought it would help them get into college/university or to get a job.

Figure 28: Teenagers' motivations to get involved in volunteering or other forms of social action
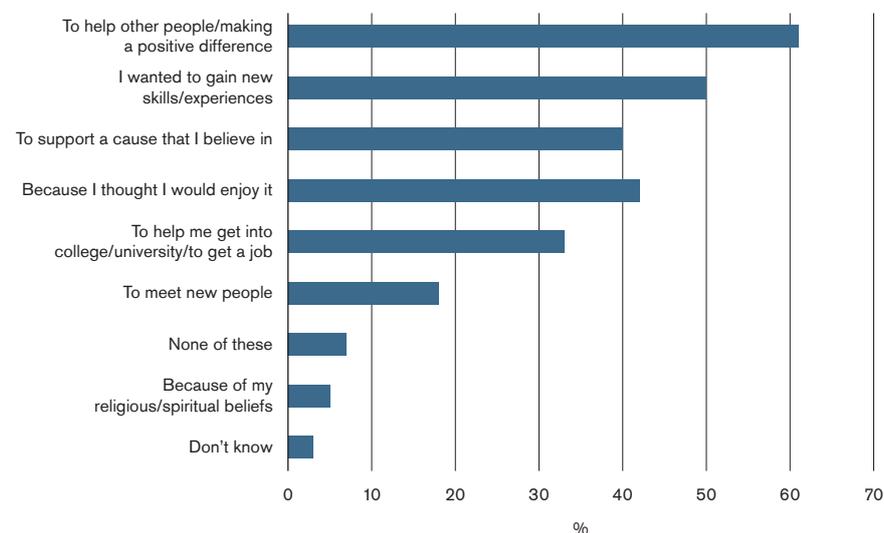
We explored this further in our focus groups. Interestingly, there was only one mention of skills-development across the focus groups, but many young people spoke about the benefits of social action for CVs and personal statements. As noted in the previous section on social pressures, many of them found that their school emphasised these benefits when encouraging them to take part.

In one focus group, all participants had taken part in the National Citizen Service programme. They noted that it has a lot of "clout" and "positive connotations", noting its similarity with programmes like Duke of Edinburgh that they had taken part in "just for the CV". However, they noted that the widespread nature of these programmes, and the high numbers of young people participating, meant that they no longer represent a unique selling point on a job, college or university application and that it has become more important to "go above and beyond the bare minimum".

> "Some people just try to do it just to say that they've done it. So, like for example, I went to an interview and, like, they say that like everyone's done NCS today that we've interviewed, whereas the difference between us and them is that actually we'll go over and beyond the bare minimum."
> *Focus group participant S1*

Our literature review picked up on this issue. Spencer and Lucas cite Holdsworth and Brewis' study of university-based volunteering, which similarly notes that the increased expectation for young people to volunteer might devalue the act of volunteering, but not just in the way that our focus group participants articulate (no longer standing out from the

crowd).[39] The authors go further, noting that the perceived expectation might "undermine the voluntary nature of these activities, and lead to resistance from some students".[40]

While young people may be beginning to question the value of social action participation for differentiating their applications to university, college and jobs, adults most commonly believe this is their primary motivation, with nearly 60 percent of the adults we surveyed selecting this option.

Figure 29: Adults' opinions on why teenagers do social action
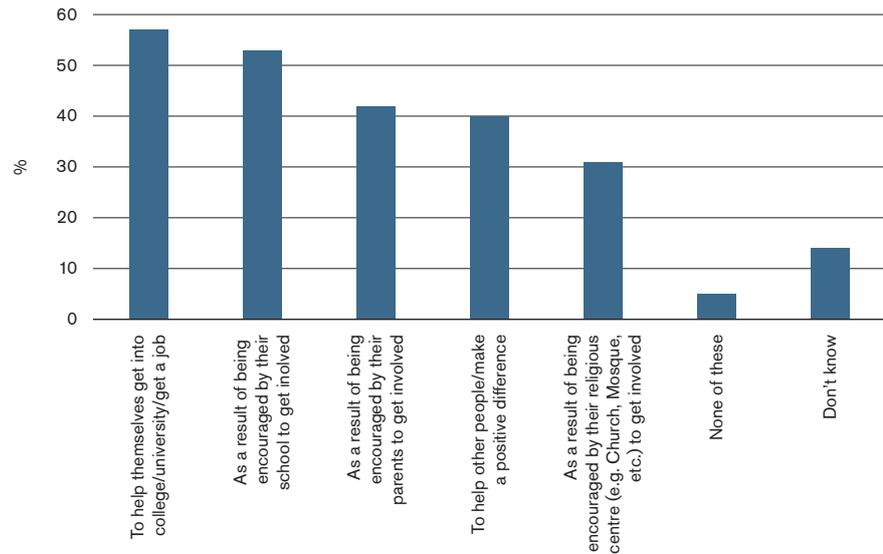
Interestingly, recent adolescents (aged 18-24) are significantly more likely to believe that this is the primary reason for participation than those over the age of 35. This may reflect their own recent experiences of feeling pressured by – and undertaking social action as a result of – university/employer expectations.

Figure 30: Percentage of adults who believe young people participate in social action 'to get into university or get a job' by age group
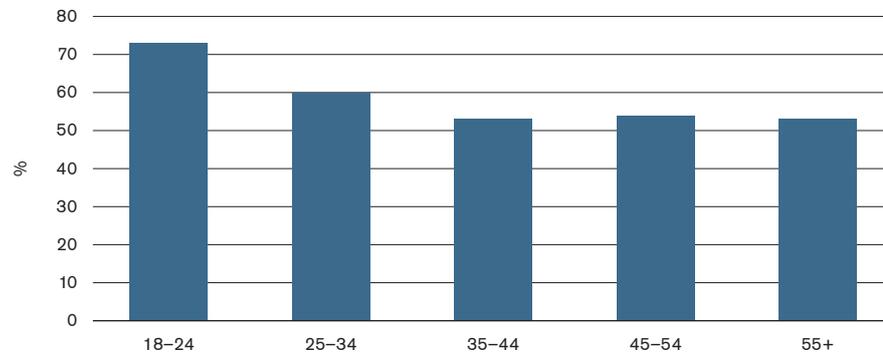
39. Holdsworth, C., & Brewis, G. (2014). Volunteering, Choice and Control: A case study of higher education student volunteering. Journal of Youth Studies, pp. 204-219.
40. Ibid.

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It could even indicate that our motivator category 'I wanted to gain new skills/experiences' may be masking an underlying instrumental reason for young people wanting to gain skills. Are they wanting new skills purely for the sense of satisfaction a new skill brings, or is there some sense in which those skills are desired for future benefit to college, university and job applications?

Certainly, Holdsworth and Brewis see this as a major motivator, arguing that the recent ratcheting up of the government's commitment to getting young people volunteering to respond to educational, labour market and welfare needs has led to a rise in voluntary action. They note that this may lead to resistance to participation from some young people.[41]

Other-interested motivations

Despite only 40 percent of adults believing that young people are motivated to do positive works in their communities by the desire to help others, 84 percent of young people surveyed said that a desire to help others was part of their motivation.

Some students in our focus groups spoke about how the desire to help others was a much more compelling motivation to participate in social action than the opportunity to add something to your CV.

> "Well, with the stuff that I've done be it like within school, it's never that I've been thinking I can add this to my personal statement because most of the time, it's not that I am looking for something that I can get gain from, it's more so trying to help others. So, if it's my teacher…asking me to help a young person who is like going through something or needing another student to speak to, I'm more just trying to help…"
> *Focus group participant L3*

Mixed motivations (the 'double benefit')

However, for most young people across our focus groups, they were seeking a 'double-benefit'. As Jennie Butterworth, Chief Executive of youth social action charity Envision puts it:

> "The double benefit is that the young person also gains something from it, as well as the community or cause."

While they might articulate the desire to help others as the primary motivation, or the reason for first participation, they were also seeking opportunities to develop skills or add something to their CV.

> "I wouldn't say the CV or personal statement is at the forefront of everything. I would say it is something that you, so when you first see something about helping a student you don't think straight away "oh I can put it on my CV". It's something that you think of giving your time to…so you apply to it, and then you think I could add that to my CV as well."
> *Focus group participant L1*

41. Ibid.

"It's beneficial for yourself as well as the others because people skills are developed as well."
*Focus group participant B5*

"And it won't just be like the motivation won't just be the means to an end, the motivation will be, the motivation would be to actually make an actual impact and not just for our own benefit."
Focus group participant S1

Our polling results reveal that this 'double-benefit' is of particular importance to young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. 55 percent of young people who have ever volunteered whose parents are from social grades C2DE got involved in social action opportunities to develop skills and gain new experiences, compared with just 39 percent of young people from more privileged backgrounds who – second only to helping people – most commonly cited 'because I thought I would enjoy it' as a motivation. It is likely that they have a greater range of opportunities to develop such skills, especially outside of school. Young people from low socio-economic backgrounds are also less likely to get involved for reasons of personal enjoyment than their wealthier peers.

Figure 31: Teenagers' motivations to participate in volunteering/ social action by parent/guardian's social grade
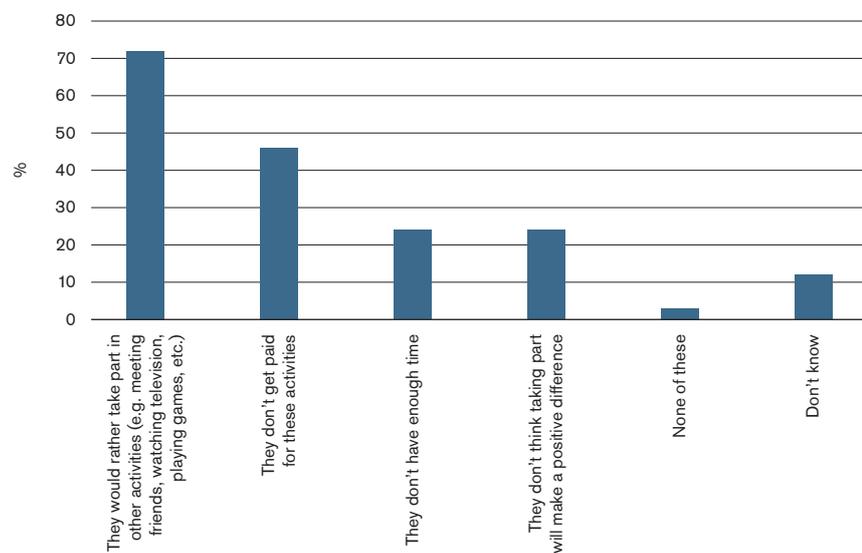
Social action programmes like Envision recognise the importance of skills development to the more disengaged young people that they primarily exist to serve. Their programme is explicit about its intentions to develop young people's skills in communication, teamwork and creativity and 50 percent of the marks awarded in their annual competition, which gives young people the opportunity to get recognition for their social action projects, are for skills development in these three areas.

Figure 32: Adults' opinions on reasons teenagers don't participate in volunteering and other forms of social action
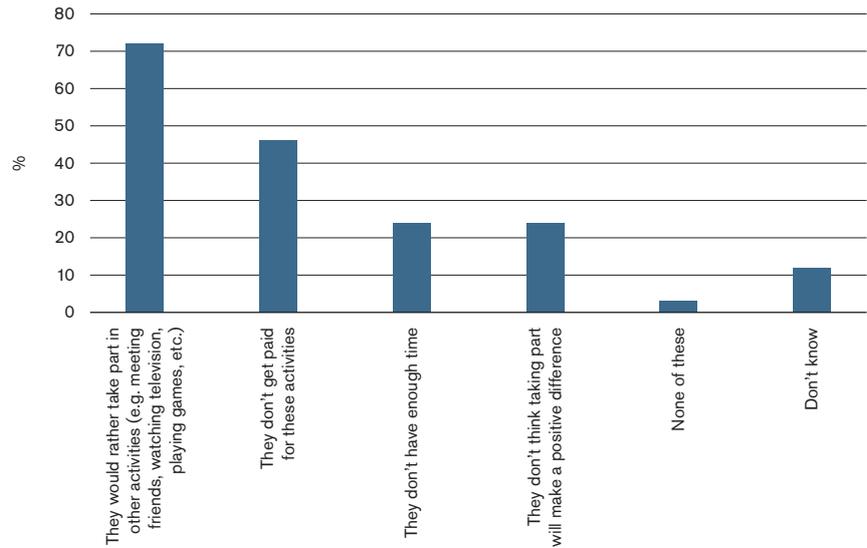
When we surveyed a representative sample of young people, we also explored the reasons why some people don't volunteer. Very few of them gave reasons related to personal motivation or lack thereof: not being paid (eight percent), not thinking it will make a difference (four percent), not thinking it will help them get a job or get into university/college (three percent). They were most likely to say that they weren't asked to take part (36 percent) or don't have time (30 percent). However, adults saw personal motivation as an important factor in explaining why some young people do not participate in social action. 72 percent of adults said that young people would rather be doing other things like watching television, meeting friends and gaming; and nearly 50 percent thought young people chose not to participate because they wouldn't be paid for their time.

Finally, we looked at personal attributes that might impact on young people's motivations to participate in social action. Here, it was necessary to segment the polling sample to the extent that the finding is not statistically significant. However, there is an indicator of a pattern around young people that consider themselves creative that might warrant further research.

Figure 33: Comparison of young people's motivations to get involved in volunteering/social action between creative and non-creative young people

Legend:
- ■ I am a creative person who is good at coming up with ideas
- ■ I am not a creative person who is good at coming up with ideas

Categories (top to bottom):
- To help other people/making a positive...
- To meet new people
- To support a cause that I believe in
- Because I thought I would enjoy it
- I wanted to gain new skills/experiences
- To help me get into college/university/to...
- Because of my religious/spiritual beliefs
- None of these
- Don't know

X-axis: % (0 to 70)
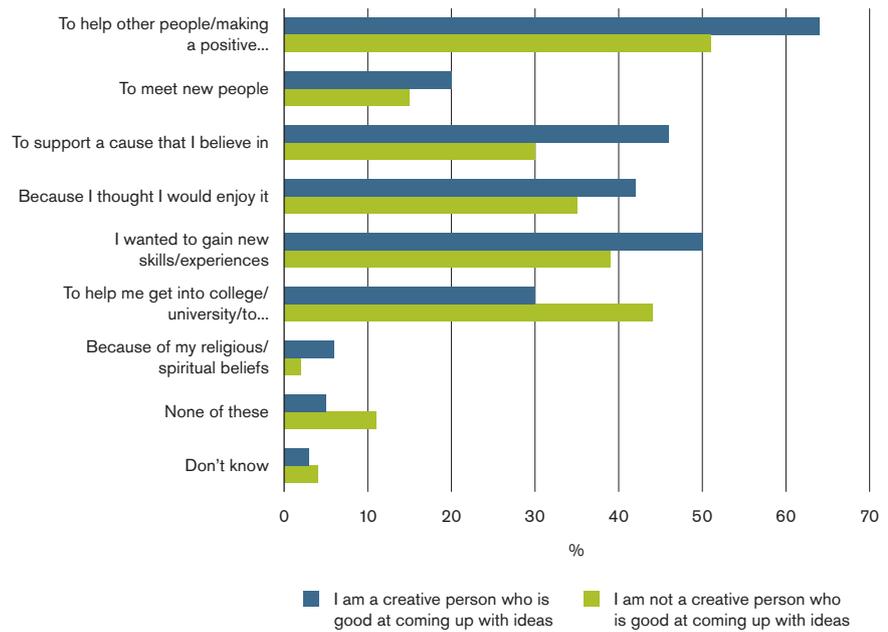
Young people who considered themselves 'a creative person who is good at coming up with ideas' were less likely to be motivated by boosting a CV or personal statement, and much more likely to be motivated by the opportunity to develop new skills and the chance to make a positive difference in the lives of others. In the next section of this report, we will further explore the relationship between creativity and social action.

Teenagency: how young people can create a better world

Section 5: What's creativity got to do with social action?

In the previous section, we started to explore the idea of social action that has a 'double benefit'. Our research indicates that creativity becomes a far more interesting and relevant personal characteristic to focus on when you think of this type of social action, especially when young people play a role in shaping the activity they do. We start by exploring what we mean by creativity and further defining and exemplifying the sort of social action that we are particularly interested in before exploring the links we have discovered between the two.

Defining creativity

Creativity is a complex phenomenon that has been the subject of much academic study, and for which definitions abound, but Spencer and Lucas draw attention to a useful definition from Kleibeuker et al. who state that creativity is "the ability to generate ideas, insights, and solutions that are both original and feasible".[42]

Spencer and Lucas go on to cite the work of Ronald Beghetto who argues that "creative ability is not alone sufficient to cause creative expression".[43] Beghetto states that creative expression "seems to be influenced by self-judgments of one's ability to generate novel and useful outcomes"[44] – what Tierney and Farmer refer to as an individual's 'creative self-efficacy'[45] (building on Bandura's concept of self-efficacy).[46] This concept is particularly useful to our work as we think about young people's perceived ability to apply their creativity to (social) action to achieve benefits for their communities.

We have sought to understand the extent to which young people saw themselves as creative and whether this made any difference to their propensity to engage in social action. In both focus groups and interviews, we asked them outright if they saw themselves as creative people. The discussions that ensued revealed the definitional complexity of the word and how it is understood differently from person to person.

42. Kleibeuker, S., De Dreu, C., & Crone, E. (2016). Creativity Development in Adolescence: Insight from behaviour, brain, and training studies. (B. Barbot, Ed.) New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 151, pp.73-84.

43. Beghetto, R. (2006). Creative Self-Efficacy: Correlates in middle and secondary students. Creativity Research Journal, 18(4), pp.447-457.

44. Ibid. p.50.

45. Tierney, P., & Farmer, S. (2002). Creative Self-Efficacy: Its potential antecedents and relationship to creative performance. Academy of Management Journal, 45(5), pp.1137-1148.

46. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-Efficacy: The exercise of control. New York: Freeman.

In anticipation of the confusion this might cause, we broke the concept of a creative person down into five more concrete traits that creative people tend to display, using the Centre for Real World Learning's five-dimensional model of creativity (see Figure 34) as our guide.[47] We then used the polling and focus groups to explore the degree to which the respondents associated with each trait.

Figure 34: Centre for Real World Learning's five-dimensional model of creativity
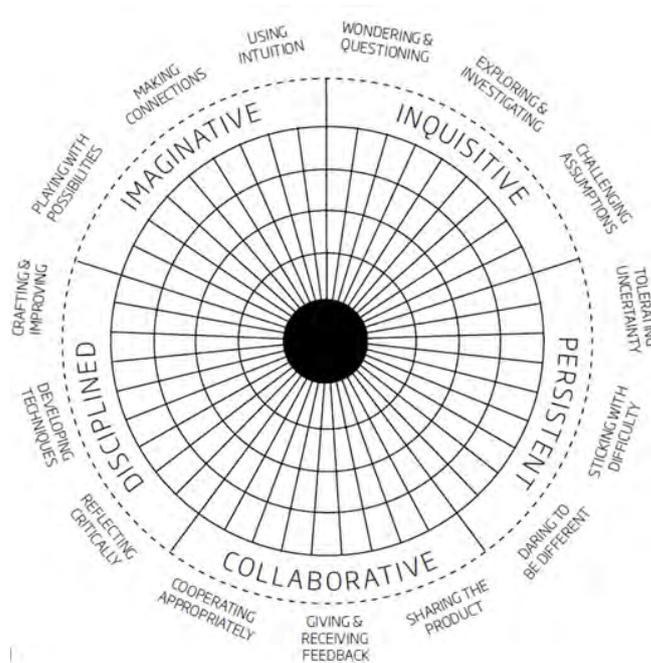
As Lucas and Spencer explain, the framework "was conceptualised taking into account the rich body of research into creativity. It specifically intended to draw on the field's understanding of the close relationship between 'creativity' and intelligence. In particular, regard was given to the way that both are learnable and, as such can be 'tracked' for improvement purposes – i.e. formative learning".[48]

Their model of creativity has five creative dispositions with three habits under each:

1. Inquisitive (wondering and questioning, exploring and investigating, challenging assumptions)
2. Persistent (sticking with difficulty, daring to be different, tolerating uncertainty)
3. Imaginative (playing with possibilities, making connections, using intuition)
4. Collaborative (sharing the product, giving and sharing feedback, cooperating appropriately)
5. Disciplined (developing techniques, reflecting critically, crafting and improving)

47. Lucas, B., G. Claxton and E. Spencer (2013), 'Progression in Student Creativity in School: First Steps Towards New Forms of Formative Assessments', OECD Education Working Papers, No. 86. Paris: OECD Publishing.
48. Spencer, E. and Lucas, B. (2018). Op. cit

We developed the following statements to encapsulate the five dimensions.

- **Inquisitive:** I like to try new things; I like learning new things outside school/college
- **Persistent:** I can stick at things even when they're difficult
- **Imaginative:** I have a good imagination
- **Collaborative:** I work well with other people
- **Disciplined:** I like improving things

We also developed a statement to test whether young people see themselves as creative, regardless of their understanding of the term:

- I am a creative person who is good at coming up with ideas

These appeared as items against a Likert scale in the polling alongside statements developed to reflect our interests in social action:

- I want to help other people
- I believe that I can make a positive difference in my community
- I can take the lead in a group

Young people's understanding of 'creativity'

In the focus groups, all 10 statements were presented to participants on cue cards and participants were asked to pick up to three that most represented them. They were then asked to discuss their choices with a partner who would suggest alternatives for them to consider.

In the focus groups, just under a third of focus group participants selected 'I am a creative person'. Most of these students also selection 'I have a good imagination', but there were no consistent patterns to the other statements they selected. Similarly, the polling results show that 91 percent of the young people who agreed with the statement 'I am a creative person' also agreed with 'I have a good imagination', compared with just 35 percent of those who did not see themselves as creative people. Young people who saw themselves as creative were also more likely to like to try new things or to like improving things than those who do not see themselves in that way, however the disparity is nowhere near as great (see Figure 35).

Figure 35: Percentage of young people who see themselves as creative who also agree with other statements in the creativity model, compared with responses of those who do not see themselves as creative

Legend:
- ■ I am a creative person who is good at coming up with ideas
- ■ I am not a creative person who is good at coming up with ideas

(x-axis categories: I have a good imagination; I like improving things; I like learning new things outside of school/college; I like to try new things; I work well with other people; I can stick at things even when they're difficult)
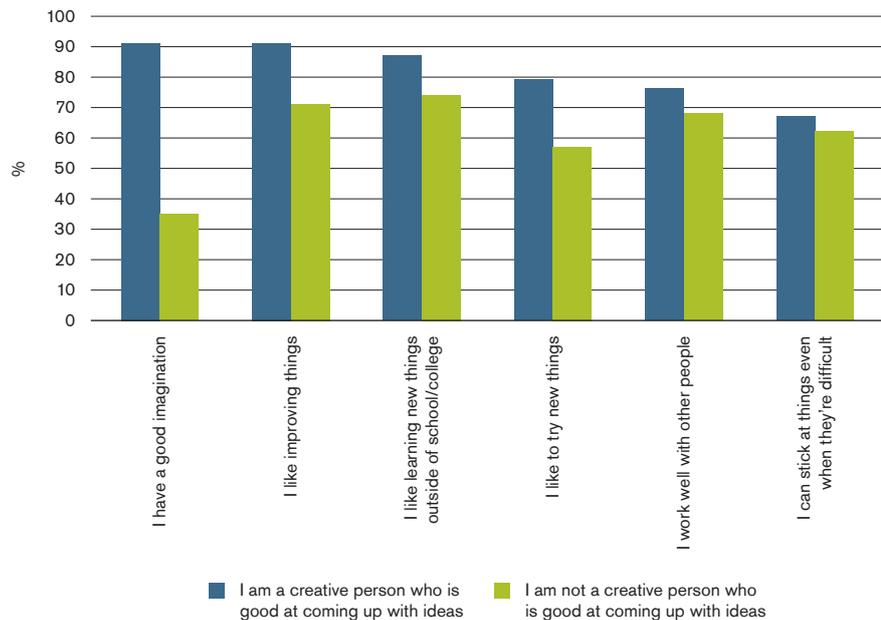
In the focus groups, we explored how students understood the word 'creativity'. Many of their responses related to divergent or abstract thinking, demonstrating a degree of conflation with the imagination.

> "So, like if it were in a group situation they're like talking about similar things and one person comes out with something crazy."
> *Focus group participant S1*

> "…you're not inside a box that you've got…you're different to other people in the way that you think about things."
> *Focus group participant S12*

One young person mentioned that creative people might be less fearful than their peers of trying things that their friends are not doing.

In one focus group, three participants had done the Envision programme and had come to understand the convergent aspect of creativity. They explained that they had learned through the programme that creativity is not about having an abstract idea, it is about building on existing concepts to develop something to meet the needs you've identified.

> "So, through Envision, we learnt that creativity is not just coming up with new ideas, it's more like improving things. So, building on ideas of other people. Not necessarily stealing them…just thinking of part of it and adding a little to your part of it. Just add a little spin. So, that's how we got to the social action project."
> *Focus group participant L1*

A possible link between creativity self-concept and social action

While creativity is a term that young people seem more likely to understand in terms of divergent thinking than convergent thinking, our early findings indicate that young people who self-identify as creative are significantly more likely to believe that they can make a difference in their communities (61 percent) than young people who do not see themselves as creative (34 percent).

Figure 36: Percentage of young people who believe they can make a positive difference in their community (comparison between young people who see themselves as creative and those who do not)
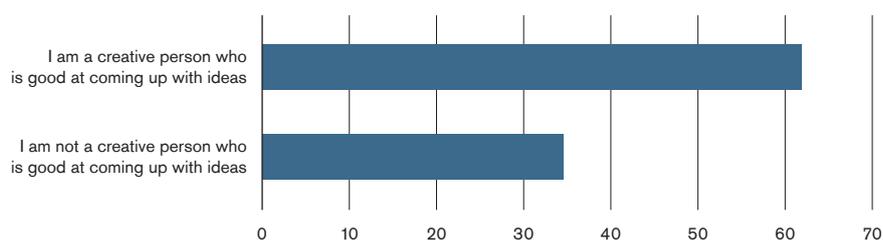
However, we recognise that seeing oneself as a creative person might be more relevant to some types of social action than others. For example, signing an online petition requires little creativity (or time). But might creativity become more relevant when it comes to those types of social action that are described variously as 'meaningful', 'youth-led' or 'double benefit'?

Defining high-quality social action

In trying to define the type of social action to which creativity is most closely linked, we sought expert advice from our advisory group. A term that surfaced in our initial discussions was 'meaningful'.

The term 'meaningful social action' seems to have first been used by Tony Gallagher HMI (National Lead Youth Strategy) when he noted that: "Ofsted is firm in its views that well-managed, meaningful social action has a very positive impact on children and young people".[49] He goes on to describe how the impact of social action is greater still in cases when the activity focuses on the personal development of the young people involved, including their Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development.

As Dr Tom Harrison of the Centre for Character Virtues at the University of Birmingham points out, however, there is a danger that the term 'meaningful' might imply that all types of social action that do not fit this definition are meaningless, which is highly subjective.

While the term itself may be misleading and unhelpful, Gallagher was seeking to capture an important idea – that youth social action can and

49. Gallagher, T. (2014). 'Meaningful social action - adding value to the curriculum An Ofsted perspective'. Available at: www.iwill.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/iwill_Ofsted.pdf [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

should be of benefit both to the community and to young people. This idea – of double benefit – features in the 'Quality Principles' for youth social action that were developed in 2013, ahead of the launch of the iwill campaign. This national campaign aims to increase the number of young people, aged 10 to 20, doing social action. Developed by the Cabinet Office, The Institute of Voluntary Research (IVAR) and the Young Foundation, with the input of an expert panel, it set out six principles that underpin high-quality activities:[50]

Figure 37: The six quality principles for youth social action

One of the principles reflects Gallagher's concept of 'meaningful' social action particularly closely:

> "Socially impactful: creating positive social change that is of benefit to the wider community as well as to the young people themselves."[51]

This idea of a benefit to both participant and society was also picked up by Gillian Smith of Step Up to Serve in an interview for this project:

> "The idea was that if quality was in place, double benefit would follow – benefit to both individual and community."

We explored this idea further with Jennie Butterworth, Chief Executive of Envision. She noted that to solve some pernicious problems facing society, the best solution may be a donation from a rich individual or the input of experts, rather than the input of a group of relatively inexperienced young people. This realisation had informed the development of the Envision programme from a social action programme that primarily aimed to have an impact on communities, to one that – while retaining this as an aim – placed an even greater emphasis on the development of

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50.   Ockenden, N., Unell, J., Donahue, K., & Mguni, N. (2013). Scoping a Quality Framework For Youth Social Action. Institute For Volunteering Research, The Young Foundation, The Campaign for Youth Social Action. Available at: youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Scoping-a-Quality-Framework-for-Youth-Social-Action-FINAL.pdf [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]
51.   Ibid.

young people's capacities and habits now, so that they might be able to make an even greater impact in the future.

With this in mind, Envision have ensured that their programme gives young people the chance both to select the social issue that they want to tackle, and to develop a solution to that problem. While they do so under the guidance of trained youth workers, the programme is effectively 'youth led': young people lead, own and shape the social action they undertake. The process that leads them to their solution is where creativity meets social action.

While there is no single term that perfectly encapsulates the types of social action we are most interested in, we were able to arrive, with the support of our advisory group, at four features of social action that reflect the ideas discussed here. We wanted to test the notion that social action that offered young people one or more of the following opportunities may have particularly strong links with creativity:

- Identifying problems they want to help solve
- Contributing to discussions/coming up with ideas about how to solve the issue
- Leading a team to solve the issue
- Reflecting about the activities they took part in and the difference they made

An example of such social action comes from Gagandeep Virdi, a student in Handsworth, who has written for the Envision website about the project he and his team-mates did as part of their social action programme. Gagandeep realised that many of his friends were ashamed to come from their local community. In order to both tackle the poverty experienced by many in the local area and increase the sense of community pride, Gagandeep's Envision team decided to involve the community in supporting a new food bank. Speaking in assemblies at local schools, they explained how poverty affects the community and introduced a food donation competition between schools.[52]

The donations received far surpassed the team's expectations and distributing it to food bank users allowed the team to see the impact of their project first hand:

"families came in with little kids and we knew that we'd really contributed towards something that's basically a lifeline for them."

For Gagandeep, the ability to take ownership of the project, identifying the issues that mattered to him and his friends and deciding how to tackle them, was a truly fulfilling experience. He explains that:

"the best part was that it was all us. Nobody told us what to do, or how to do it. […] it's given me self-belief that I can do new things. I think lots of people are held back because they don't believe in themselves."

52. Virdi, G. Our food bank mission. Envision. Available at: www.envision.org.uk/our-stories/students/our-food-bank-mission [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

However, our survey results show that few teenagers get the opportunity that Gagandeep and his colleagues had to shape the social action they are involved in, with less than a quarter reporting that they had the opportunity to choose the issue they were responding to.

Figure 38: Percentage of young people who had opportunities to shape the social action they were involved in
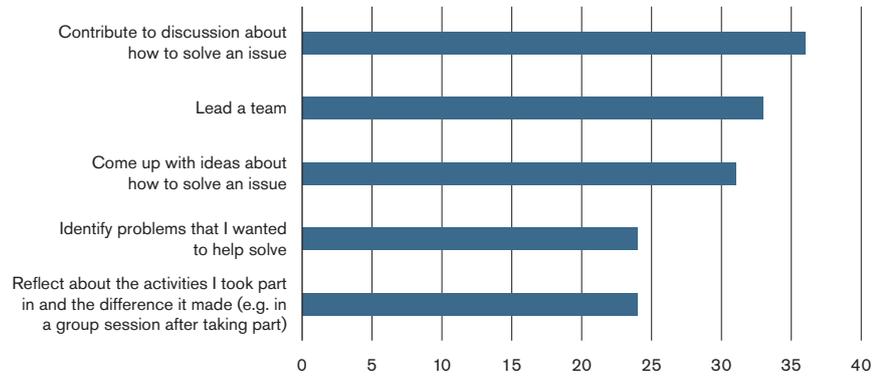
This does vary a little depending on where young people are based. The sample size becomes small when we begin to break down by region, but the results indicate some potential regional differences that merit further exploration. Teenagers in London were given a more significant role than those living elsewhere. For example, 40 percent of teenagers surveyed in London had the opportunity to identify the problems they wanted to solve, compared with only six percent in Wales. Similarly, 49 percent of teenagers who had participated in social action in London had the opportunity to lead a team, compared with only 22 percent in Wales.

Figure 39: Percentage of young people who had the opportunity to identify the problems they wanted to solve by region

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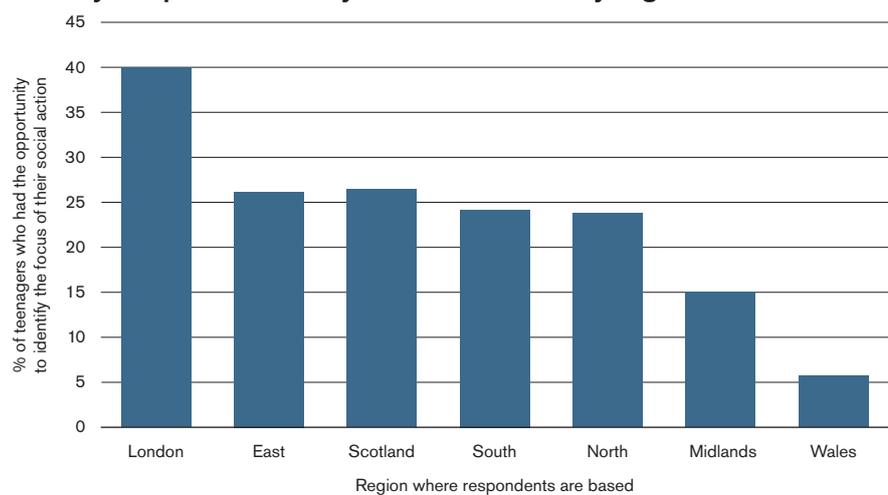
Figure 40: Percentage of young people that had the opportunity to lead a team as part of social action by region
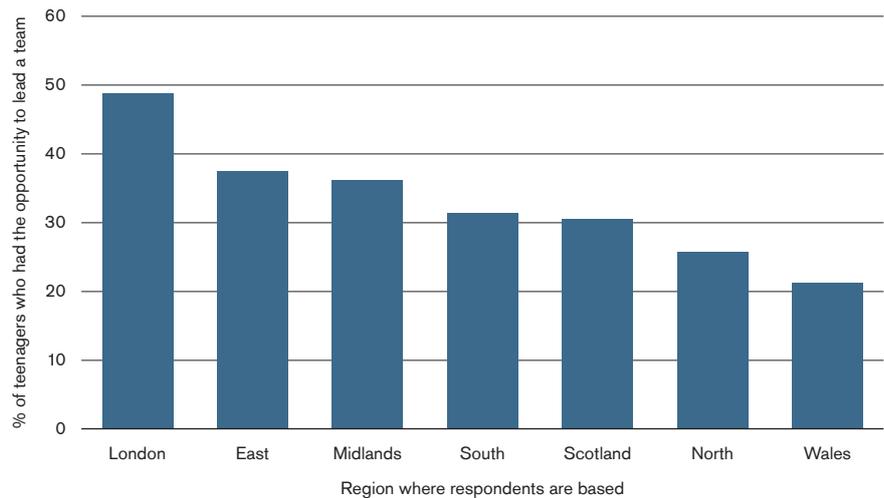
As a young person in one of our focus groups pointed out, the lack of opportunities to shape social action may actually put some young people off participating in the first place:

> "I think that everyone has an issue or there's going to be something that occurs to them or that resonates with them that they actually have a say that something should be changed or that something can be made better, but I think it's just about what's available…once you find what a young person or an individual actually truly cares about then I think a person is more engaged and more willing to actively take part in it."
>
> *Focus group participant L2*

Others suggested the opportunity to shape social action may also have the benefits of improving the quality of young people's contribution to the activity, and ultimately the impact of that activity.

> "When someone picks it for you, you're going along with their vision and so you aren't going to do it to the same quality as you would when you picked your own topic."
>
> *Focus group participant L2*

> "[When] you get to choose the issue you want to do specifically or find people that share the same passion for the cause, it will obviously make a bigger impact that way… You also get to direct it as well and take control of what you want to do and how you want to tackle it."
>
> *Focus group participant L3*

The case for offering these sorts of opportunities is further strengthened by the finding that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are particularly attracted to social action activities that give scope for personal development.

The link between high-quality social action and creativity

Among those polled in our national survey, the group of young people who consistently seem to be more likely to have had the opportunity to shape the social action they participated in, regardless of location or background, are young people who consider themselves to be creative. For example, twice as many creative young people had contributed to discussions about how to solve an issue as part of social action compared with their non-creative counterparts.

Figure 41: Percentage of young people who see themselves as creative who had the opportunity to shape the social action they were involved with (compared with young people who do not see themselves as creative)
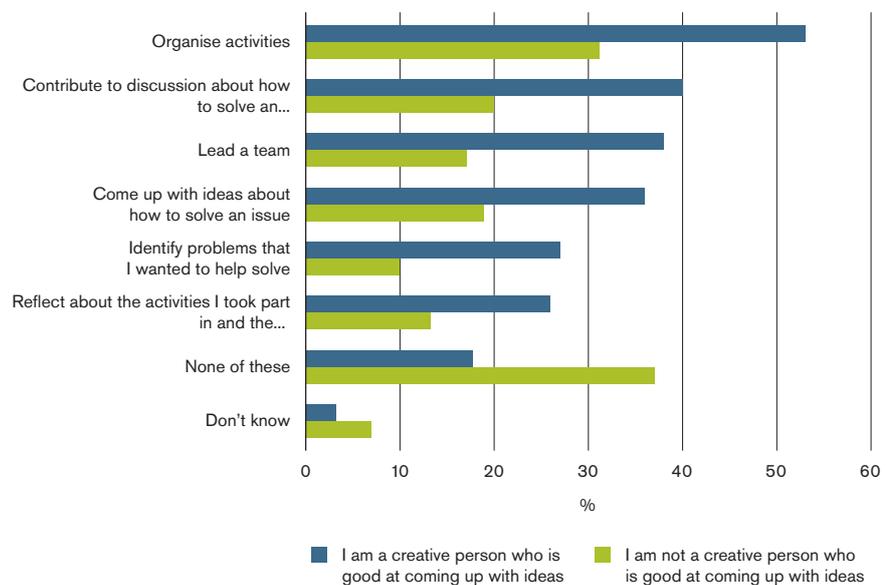
It is hard to know whether they sought out these opportunities as part of the social action as a result of being creative individuals or whether they became more creative as a result of having these opportunities. The focus groups revealed examples of both. A number of young people spoke about how they had become more creative through the process of participating in social action that offered scope for divergent and convergent thinking. There were also examples of creative young people coming to, and thriving in, social action where they had these opportunities.

"I am a creative person who is good at coming up with ideas, so even in Envision...we were at the stage of coming up with actual ideas for the project. Even some of them weren't as good as others but eventually some of my ideas became a reality."

Focus group participant L1

Regardless of where this virtuous cycle begins, it is clear that social action activities that offer scope for creative input are particularly motivating for young people. Indeed, offering these opportunities to shape social action may be the key to encouraging a 'habit of service' in children and young people. Envision's randomised control trial showed that young people who participated in the programme were 20 percent more likely to express a willingness to volunteer again than those in the control group.[53]

53. Kirkman, E., Sanders, M., Emanuel, N., Larkin, C. (2015). Evaluating Youth Social Action: Final Report. Cabinet Office and Behavioural Insights Team. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluating-youth-social-action [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

Section 6: What does all of this mean for getting more young people to do social action?

In 2010, then Prime Minister David Cameron announced his vision for a 'Big Society',

> "…where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities."[54]

The first of three strands that made up Cameron's vision for a 'Big Society' was social action, and increasing participation has been one of the primary vehicles for achieving this agenda from its inception, with a particular focus on youth participation. In 2011, a National Citizen Service for young people was announced,[55] and since that time, millions of pounds of government funding have been committed to increasing youth engagement in social action. This includes a national campaign, iwill, which aims – by 2020 – to increase by 50 percent the number of young people aged 10-20 participating in social action.[56] The projects evaluated as part of this work have demonstrated positive impacts on young people's empathy, co-operation and attitudes to education.[57]

Our research shows that to achieve the goal of increasing the number of young people engaging in social action, with all the benefits that would bring for them and the wider community, the most effective thing we can do is the simplest: ask them to take part.

54. Cameron, D. (2010). Big Society Speech. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/speeches/big-society-speech [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

55. Cabinet Office. (2011). Available at: www.gov.uk/government/news/pioneering-teenagers-to-help-build-the-big-society-national-citizen-service-now-recruiting [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

56. Begg, E. (2015). Available at: https://www.charityjob.co.uk/careeradvice/article/the-iwill-campaign-whats-it-all-about/ [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

57. Kirkman, E., Sanders, M., Emanuel, N., Larkin, C. (2015). Evaluating Youth Social Action: Final Report. Op. cit

Asking young people to take part

Our research shows that young people who have ever participated in social action are most likely to do so because they were encouraged by school (59 percent), parents or guardians (36 percent), organisers of social action projects (22 percent) or friends (20 percent). Never having being asked was the reason most commonly given by young people who haven't done social action for not taking part (36 percent of non-participants).

Schools play a particularly important role in encouraging participation for children and young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds whose parents are less likely to encourage them. Social action is increasingly recognised by Ofsted as being part of a rich curriculum that encourages Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development in children.[58] Parents also play a crucial role in encouraging and modelling involvement in social action, particularly for young people from more affluent backgrounds.

Being encouraged to take part by school or parents is particularly important for young people who do not consider themselves creative. These young people are less likely to spot an opportunity and pursue it, or be sufficiently confident and motivated to start something in response to an emergent problem or life event.

Providing support for young participants in social action

Interviewer 1: "Have you ever organised something like this on your own?"

Focus group participant S1: "No, you wouldn't know where to start!"

Focus group participant S7: "And it's expensive! Yeah, you need a lot of money to start it off, to…get the place and to…you had to buy the food… and yeah then there's the venue."

Asking or encouraging young people to take part is a start, but it is not sufficient to ensure participation. Young people also need some practical support to make a positive difference in their communities. The focus groups demonstrated that schools, youth charities and places of worship play important roles in this.

Our focus groups found that these facilitating organisations provided suggestions of charities and causes that young people could support, provided physical space for activities to take place in, provided 'seed' funding and connected young people with individuals and groups who provided the resources needed to get social action off the ground. Schools also set aside 'enrichment' time in which young people can participate in social action projects – crucial for a group who find time to be a major constraint on their ability to take part.

Schools, charities and places of worship also provide moral support, encouragement and guidance to help young people to stay engaged and make the greatest possible impact through their efforts. Given that

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58. Ofsted. (2016). How social action is being applied to good effect in a selection of schools and colleges. Available at: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/540766/How_social_action_is_being_applied_to_good_effect_in_a_selection_of_schools_and_colleges.pdf [Accessed 30 Jul. 2018]

creative young people are more likely to believe that they can make a difference, there may be specific approaches that support young people to build creative self-efficacy that could be applied to good works in their community. For example, focus group participants who had received specific instruction and guidance around how to be creative in the context of social action seemed to be more confident in their ability to make a difference.

Not all social action is equal

Encouraging and supporting young people to take part in any form of social action is not enough. High quality social action can offer young people the opportunity to develop important skills while making a difference in their communities: a double benefit.

The young people interviewed for this project welcome the opportunity to shape the social action they participate in from identifying the problem, to developing a solution and reflecting on the difference they make. They believe that social action that offers these opportunities may appeal to more young people, lead to higher quality contributions and, ultimately, make a greater impact.

However, few young people currently get the opportunity to shape the social action they participate in. Less than a quarter (24 percent) of young people who told us they had participated in social action had the chance to select the issue they were responding to. The personal development opportunities that these types of social action present are particularly important to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We must find ways to ensure that all young people are empowered to shape the activities they engage in to make a positive difference in their communities – the benefits to communities may be greater, and the impacts on young people, especially those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, could be huge.

Teenagency: how young people can create a better world

Section 7: What next?

The RSA and the Centre for Real World Learning are continuing to explore how to ensure that opportunities are provided for young people to get involved in the types of social action that are of maximum benefit to them.

We are inviting young people, teachers and school leaders, representatives of youth charities and faith communities, interested academics and researchers to be part of this conversation. If you would like to be part of workshops being run in autumn 2018, please write to sam.grinsted@rsa.org.uk to find out more.

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality. Through our ideas, research and 29,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured.

Recent RSA studies have explored the value of mission to schools and of evidence in arts and cultural learning. In each case, we have sought to shine a light on the nuance of the debates, and canvas views from across the education sector. Our goal is to explore the big challenges facing society today.

RSA
Action and Research Centre