



How funders can effectively support

PLACE-BASED YOUTH FUNDING

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INTRODUCTION

Between May and December 2022, YMCA George Williams College worked alongside the Empowering Local Group as a research partner to explore the role of funders in place-based funding supporting young people and youth organisations.

This paper presents the findings of the research and provides nine recommendations, grounded in evidence, for funders (including larger national funders, and smaller local trusts and foundations) seeking to develop their approaches to place-based funding in the youth sector. We also present a theory of change to demonstrate how implementing these recommendations can lead to positive impact for youth sector organisations in their place-based work.

This research has adopted two of Renaisi's (Hitchin, 2021) five conceptions of place: place as the community and place as a system. These two conceptions are underpinned by a focus on sustaining relationships that engender systems change.





BACKGROUND

Empowering Local is a growing group of local, regional, and national funders and infrastructure organisations, committed to supporting place-based funding of the VCSE sector that meets the needs of children, young people, and communities.

Empowering Local commissioned this research to increase understanding of how funders can best support place-based approaches to funding youth provision.

THE RESEARCH TOOK PLACE BETWEEN MAY AND DECEMBER 2022, AND HAD TWO CORE AREAS OF FOCUS:

Impact: what is known about the role of funding/funders in place-based approaches/initiatives, and how this contributes to positive change

Process: what are the mechanisms and conditions (e.g., readiness) that make place-based funding effective? Focusing on embedding youth voice in decision-making and engagement with local, regional and national organisations

METHOD



PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH METHODS WERE USED TO EXPLORE PLACE-BASED FUNDING IN LINE WITH THE CORE AREAS OF FOCUS.

Desk-based review

We undertook a review of recent academic peer-reviewed literature, government-commissioned research, and reports of partner and community organisations ('grey literature'). Within this, we sought to identify the principles, values, systems, structures and/or practices that support the role of place-based funding in enabling positive change for young people. Information of relevance was highlighted and analysed alongside the primary data collected. 26 relevant research papers and reports were identified and reviewed.

Qualitative data collection

A series of interviews and focus groups were held with those with relevant experience and expertise, focussing on key providers of place-based funding, youth organisations in receipt of place-based funding streams, and young people who have been involved in decision-making on the distribution of funds. These focus groups and interviews sought to uncover experiences and challenging and enabling factors for the funders engaging in place-based funding. Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured with a core set of questions.

Case studies

Three in-depth case studies of place-based funding were developed. We identified three locations that have received targeted and specific place-based funding to understand what has (or hasn't) supported the delivery of the funding. Interviews were conducted with key members of the funding team involved in each case study to gain insights, and all those involved were asked for feedback on the written case studies prior to publication.


The qualitative data captured through all phases of the research underwent thematic analysis to identify themes in relation to the areas of focus.

THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For each theme that emerged through the research, we identified a relevant recommendation for funders seeking to develop their approaches to place-based funding in the youth sector. As such, the themes and recommendations are presented concurrently. It should be noted that the findings of this research will not be surprising for those who have experience working in the sector, whether in a funding or delivery role, what we found is likely to be familiar to many readers.

We suggest that the same themes and recommendations are emerging because, despite what is known about how funding mechanisms can best serve communities, these practices are not widespread or embedded, and many funders do not act according to these principles. We urge funders to take on board the recommendations about effective practice.

It should also be noted that much of the literature and many of the interview findings relate to place-based funding in general and are not specific to the youth sector. The research draws out findings specific to the youth sector as much as possible throughout this report.



The recommendations and information in this work will be familiar to many readers, it therefore aims to focus funder attention and make it relevant to work which focuses on impact with and for young people.

DEFINITIONS OF PLACE-BASED YOUTH WORK

We looked at a number of definitions of place-based funding, and interviewees highlighted some that particularly worked for them. Interviewees were keen that this research referenced existing definitions, rather than sought to redefine place-based funding.

As such, we have brought together two existing definitions referred to by Interviewees to help understand place-based work in the context of youth organisations.

We adopt two of Renaisi's five conceptions of place (Hitchin, 2021): place as the community and place as a system.

These two conceptions are underpinned by a focus on sustaining relationships that create systems change. Hitchin (2021) uses the definitions below to describe place as the community, and place as a system:

PLACE AS THE COMMUNITY IS:

“asset-based in its assumption, and creates geographies, ownership and decision making that are legible to local people”

PLACE AS A SYSTEM UNDERSTANDS THAT:

“change emerges from systems of relationships between institutions such as public services, charities, and the community. Places are ways to geographically bound and define the system that emerges from those relationships. That place needs to think about the whole system, not just the parts”

As such, a place is not only defined by a specific geography or community, but by local communities and the relationships between individuals and organisations.

THIS DESCRIPTION OF 'PLACE-BASED' LEADS US TO UNDERSTAND:

The heart of place-based funding is about the relationships between funders, places, and local people - place-based approaches are more than just a transactional relationship.

A funder that is based in and operates in Kent, for example, is not, by default, a place-based funder. Said funder could be based there and fund work there but work in a very transactional way, without holding or nurturing deeper relationships with grantees also operating in that place. Renaisi (2020) understands place-based systemic change as being defined in part by the building and development of relationships between people and organisations.

It is this focus on relationships that is at the heart of the understanding of place-based funding that has emerged from the research.

Therefore, we extend this to further define place-based youth work as a 'collective process' focused on a place that seeks to achieve outcomes that can only be achieved through bold and 'collaborative action' (The Corra Foundation, 2018).

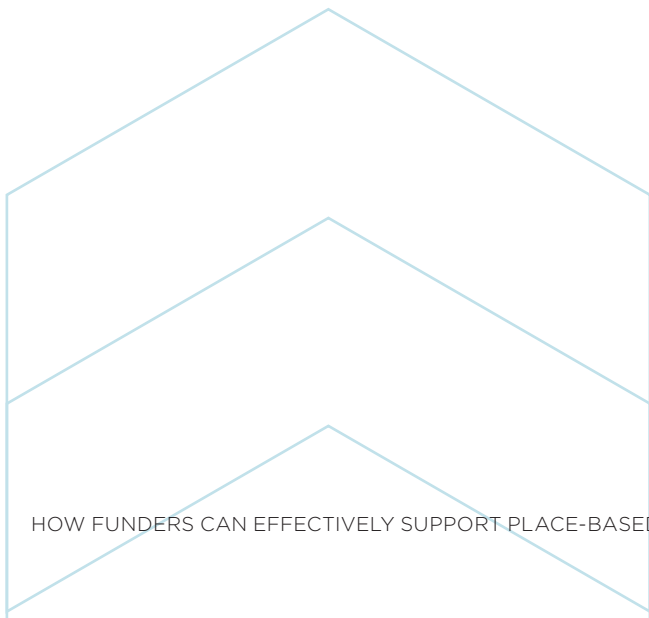
Informed by Renaisi's work (2020), we believe that place-based youth work is characterised by:

Duration: it is long-term in ambition and practice.

Focus: it is not limited to a single organisation or service, but rather a collective and interrelated practice.

Approach: it is engaged in building and developing relationships between people and organisations, it is flexible and responsive, and it explicitly engages in questions of complexity.

Scale: it is focussed on geographies that are coherent and understood by those who live in them, and to the systemic challenge.



OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the research, three distinct phases of funding emerged: *laying the groundwork*; *design and delivery*; *sustainability and embedding*. We use these as a structure for themes and recommendations. These are represented in Figure 1 below:

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Development grants
Build trusted relationships before you administer funds
Promote collaboration not competition

DESIGN & DELIVERY

Funders are accountable to places
Wrap around learning
Unrestricted, long-term funding
Proportionality

SUSTAINABILITY & EMBEDDING

Skills and capacity building
Embedding Youth Voice

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

The research highlights the importance of funders in ensuring that funds are administered to places and organisations that are ready to receive them. As such, the themes in this phase related to funders supporting this readiness. The National Lottery Community Fund (2018) goes as far as to describe the role of funders as “creating the conditions for impact rather than having a direct impact on the [place] itself”; this highlights the role of the funder in developing the ecosystem and enabling a community to thrive.

Development grants

Place-based funding should be designed to support an initial phase whereby smaller organisations can self-identify whether they require, or could benefit from, any upfront capacity development funding before becoming involved in a delivery partnership. Dedicated money within a funding envelope can support this. The literature identifies funders supporting places in terms of the social and physical infrastructure as key (Pritchard et al., 2019).

Funders can work proactively to involve and support smaller organisations and help them become more responsive to funding opportunities. At the moment, place-based funding does not inherently recognise power imbalances, so too often work is commissioned in an exclusionary way that privileges bigger organisations. For example, interviewees highlighted that place-based funding can be designed in ways that exclude smaller organisations who may not have the kind of governance in place the funder has predetermined is acceptable. Funding is often not taken up because the community lacks the resources, skills, confidence or capacity to apply, so funders should support the development of this infrastructure.

Development grants do not need to be large sums of money; seed funding can go a long way. It is more about setting up a community to receive funding and building community resilience (Laurence, 2021a).

“Development grants that help people in communities to shape their responses are really important – you can’t expect all communities to immediately be able to collaborate and mobilise to act.”

(Interviewee)

“Building community resilience should be among the first steps of community engagement and investment.”

(Renaissi, 2018)

“Smaller place-based organisations often don’t feel included in national place-based funding initiatives because they can’t write the kind of funding proposals that larger organisations can.”

(Interviewee)

RECOMMENDATION:

Dedicate resources to support communities to build infrastructure so more organisations working in a place have the capacity to seek and receive funding.



Build trusted relationships

The desk-based research and interviews both point to the importance of trust in enabling youth organisations and partnerships to work more effectively, especially in the context of longer-term funding.

It is important for funders to build relationships and partnerships amongst delivery organisations, service users and the local community (Renaissi, 2018). Funding should then be targeted via these relationships in local communities to ensure that funding is adding value and not complicating the situation.

An essential aspect of building trust is funders being accountable whilst also being flexible, and letting communities lead the direction of funding (Chicago Beyond, 2018). Pritchard et al. (2019) identify the significance of the role of funders in creating a 'psychological safe space' by working at a pace that builds and allows the development of trust. Renaissi (2018) describe partnerships that work best as ones where there is an alignment of values between partners built through effective relationships.

Where there is trust between a funder and a grantee, the funder can operate more flexibly due to the confidence of the organisation to use funds effectively and can trust that the organisation will use resources as they are needed in the local community.

This emphasis on distributing funds via trusted relationships comes back to the definition of place-based funding as being fundamentally about relationships. One possible mechanism for this is development grants whereby resources are allocated to support relationship building.

“Don’t lead with the money - take plenty of time for ‘reconnaissance’ and getting to know the area.”

(The National Lottery Community Fund, 2018)

“Without relationships, funders will struggle to reach and fund certain communities.”

(Interviewee)

“For some place is a means for relationships.”

(Interviewee)

RECOMMENDATION:

Take the time to build trusting relationships in places before administering funds.

Promote collaboration not competition

Funders should promote and invest in collaboration between organisations in the way they fund, as well as actively collaborating with other funders. Funders should try to understand upfront whether there is likely to be willingness or interest to collaborate and what that means in practice. Funders can play a role in bringing together local organisations rather than encouraging (even unintentionally) more competition. Funders should commit to co-design and collaboration to facilitate the development of local partnerships (Laurence, 2021b). Some organisations can be reluctant to partner with others because it can be seen to “dilute organisational identity”, but collaboration is critical in solving complex issues and maximises chances of success (Pritchard et al., 2019).

Funders should understand their place within the existing local ecosystem of funders, organisations and the community (Turner, 2017). Funders may play a role in supporting organisations to pool local resources, which can go a long way, rather than parachuting in large sums of funding managed nationally. Laurence (2021b) describes the role of funders as facilitators of the development of local partnerships.

In addition, interviewees highlighted that the interconnected nature of the issues facing young people mean that funding should be done holistically. It is better to focus on a community or system as a whole and ensuring integrated services rather than focussing on disadvantage at the level of the individual or the family (Moore and Fry, 2011). In the most disadvantaged areas,

individualised approaches are necessary to tackle a “complex web” of issues (McBride, 2018). The need to take a systemic approach to place-based youth work was further highlighted in the interviews. As Pritchard et al. (2019) write, acknowledging the multiple causes of a problem and the interconnectedness of issues requires them to be tackled from multiple angles, which should be done through linking up wider organisations and systems within an area.

“When smaller grassroots organisations compete, this can be driven by lack of funding, but also historical local fallouts or issues.”

(Interviewee)

“[Place-based system change] is not limited to a single organisation or service, but rather a collective and interrelated practice.”

(Hitchin, 2020)

“You need to take a system approach.”

(Interviewee)

“Place-based working should be about system change.”

(Interviewee)

“Each area has its own unique sets of challenges regarding the complex needs for young people in that area.”

(Interviewee)

RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure your funding mechanisms promote collaboration between organisations and identify opportunities to collaborate with other funders.



DESIGN & DELIVERY

The second phase of the funding cycle encompasses the way that funding mechanisms operate and how funds are delivered to organisations.

Funders are accountable to places

Place-based funding is effective in supporting youth work if it directly responds to community needs. Funding needs to consider different local contexts and funders should support community anchor organisations that have a better understanding of the local environment and relationships than the funder.

Organisations should not have to adapt to meet the requirements of the funder, the funder should adapt to the local context and situation. One interviewee described their approach to grant making as being done through “walking about”, understanding the environment and needs of the community. The benefit of this approach was reflected in the literature: Turner (2017) describes the importance of physically engaging with a place to understand the needs and the community.

Funders should not go into an area with their own agenda or preconceived ideas about what should be done or achieved, rather, they should have an open mind and talk to people about what is needed. Funders should be thinking about how they can best add value to a place in terms of funding and capacity (Laurence, 2021b) and should bend and adapt to local needs, rather than vice versa.

Establishing trusted relationships can allow funders to take more risks, enabling places to direct activities. Trusting communities to be experts needs to be balanced with accountability to places. Therefore, it should be noted that whilst communities may not have all the answers, a commitment to listen, and platform local expertise can lead to effective solutions whilst also empowering the community. Funders should also be clear about their level and length of involvement (Buckley, Cairns and Taylor, 2016); this helps to build trust.

The priorities of the community must be those adopted by funders: learning shows that successful programmes have been community-led (Renaisi, 2018). Funding should follow or be based on local strategy: where there are no strategies in place locally, funders should consider resourcing the process of generating such a strategy (Pritchard et al., 2019). As McBride (2018) writes: ‘[we] need to develop a localised, customised approach that pays attention to geographical diversity and different socioeconomic, political, and funding contexts. Local action should be connected with national and regional policy.’

“We spend a lot of time grant making by walking about – the needs of young people in Camden, Manchester or Harrow can be different.”

(Interviewee)

“Funding follows place-based strategy, and vice-versa.”

(Power to Change, 2021)

“Recognise that it is local communities, not funders, who often have the answers.”

(Interviewee)

RECOMMENDATION:

Listen and respond to the needs and hopes of the community; align funding to local strategy.

Wrap-around learning

This is about funders supporting learning and facilitating organisations to sustain work beyond the funding and/or support future iterations of funding (Renaisi, 2018). Laurence (2021b) describes the role of funders in promoting a learning culture, sharing insights and amplifying impact, even if this is not in a formal capacity.

Part of this is funders being willing to take risks and understand that not all projects will succeed straight away. Pritchard et al. (2019) describe the role of funders in building space for learning and reflection to be able to be responsive and adapt to what isn't working. One interviewee said that funders need to give themselves and the community time to be intentional and phase the process; the first phase being exploratory, and the second phase is where the learning can be implemented.

Wrap-around learning is also about appropriately capturing impact data and sharing that learning with a wider audience and using it to inform future phases of funding.

“Arrive gently and stay a while.”

(Interviewee)

“Close monitoring of and continuous learning and research from a comprehensive community-based approach will be important to ensure that the future roll-out of the model is fully effective.” (Centre for Community Child Health, 2011)

RECOMMENDATION:

Be willing to take risks and support a learning culture through a long-term presence.

“Recognise that it is local communities, not funders, who often have the answers.”





Unrestricted, long-term funding

Short-term funding is a mistake that is made over and over again in youth work. Funding needs to be long-term and flexible to allow organisations to adapt to changing circumstances and needs of young people.

McBride (2018) suggests five years as a minimum funding term; one interviewee cited an Inspiring Scotland report that recommends 10 years as a reasonable amount of time to help enable local change. Short-term funding for place-based work is not sustainable or impactful. One interviewee pointed to the harm that short-term funding can do in the context of the youth sector: not only is it less effective but short-term funding can have more negative than positive impact on services for young people. For example, if relationships are built between young people and practitioners, and then ended, this can lead to a loss of young people's trust in services and leave young people feeling abandoned or rejected. Longer grants also build capacity and allow organisations to respond to changing contexts (Pritchard et al., 2019).

The research also highlighted the importance of unrestricted funding as opposed to project-based funding that prioritises a funder's specific agenda over what young people, youth organisations and/or partnerships in a place have already identified as most important – both in terms of any theme or goals as well as delivery approach. Funders should both offer core funding to build resilience and sustainability, as well as provide opportunities for risk friendly funding for innovation, investment and asset-building (The National Lottery Community Fund, 2022).

“It can be 7-10 years before a place-based intervention can begin to demonstrate impact.”

(Renaisi, 2018)

“It takes time to build trusted relationships with young people – by the time relationships with young people have been cultivated, the funding ends.”

(Interviewee)

Recommendation: provide unrestricted, long-term funding opportunities.

Proportionality

This theme and recommendation is very simple; it is not realistic to expect smaller organisations or projects to be able to report on the same scale as larger organisations or projects. Requirements should be proportional to the size and capacity of the work.

“The Fund does not require partnerships to report consistently on outcome measures, and instead asks for some basic monitoring information and reflections from partnerships on their approaches and learning.”

(Renaisi, 2021)

“Encourage national funders to reduce unnecessary funding application burdens that disproportionately impact smaller organisations.”

(Interviewee)

RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure that reporting requirements are proportional to the capacity of organisations.

SUSTAINING & EMBEDDING

The final phase of the funding cycle relates to the sustainability of new provision, embedding new skills and expertise gained, and implementing learning. It is about the ongoing development of the local ecosystem and supporting it to thrive.

Skills and capacity building

Funders should seek to build capabilities within the system and, after helping lay the right groundwork and skills, trust the expertise of local actors and the process. The Greater London Authority and Local Trust are investing in skills and leadership programmes providing interesting examples of investing in people and connecting to a wider networks.

Capacity building is important; the more people try to come together the better, you cannot tackle big issues alone. Pritchard et al (2019) highlight the importance of funders supporting the skills, capacity and networks of communities so funding can have greater impact and change is more sustainable. Renaisi (2018) also argues that funders should take a role in facilitating organisations to sustain the work beyond initial funding periods through sustaining learning and support to embed approaches into practice.

An example of capacity building links back to the first recommendation around increasing readiness for funding through development grants to enable smaller organisations to be able to access funds in the same way as larger organisations. For more ideas about building capacity, we recommend reading the iWill Fund Learning Hub Impact Accelerator report (The Centre for Youth Impact, 2022); recommendation five is of particular relevance.

“...Investment in capacity building. This investment includes time and resources for communities as well as long-term capacity building of staff.”

(Centre for Community Child Health, 2011)

“Sustainability needs to be built in from the start.”

(Lankelly Chase, 2017)

“Key elements of place-based funding should be seeking to build capacity and leave a sustainable legacy.”

(Interviewee)

RECOMMENDATION:

Help build skills and capacity in the local ecosystem.



Embedding youth voice

Involving young people at the earliest point in setting strategy and investment priorities right through the grant making and evaluation processes is important. This should move beyond involvement to co-production; the young people we spoke to were very clear that they should play a crucial role in making decisions about how money is spent.

The research showed that there is a myriad of ways of bringing in youth voice, including having young inspectors, evaluators, commissioners, peer researchers, a young co-CEO, young staff and young board members. Consistently highlighted is the importance of empowering young people to take ownership of their involvement and feel like 'youth voice' is being done with, not 'done to', and of valuing young people's time through monetary or other reimbursements.

The process of building and embedding youth voice authentically into a program takes time, and it must be embedded from the beginning. From setting strategy and investment priorities through to grant making, it is essential to involve young people at every stage. Investment and time are required from funders in this process.

Some of the important points to consider in embedding youth voice are to:

- Value young people's time and participation – offer payment, full time opportunities and/or accreditation or formal apprenticeships
- Share power – involvement should not be tokenistic. One young person described a situation in which they had been involved in a decision-making process, and consulted on their views, but then found out that the funder had not taken on board young people's opinions. He described feeling "used".
- Create opportunities to hear everyone's voices – ensure that involvement and co-production mechanisms do not create hierarchies or structures that benefit some young people over others; youth board structures might

benefit more socially confident young people over others. Consider how to ensure that opportunities are accessible to those experiencing multiple barriers to access and/or participation.

- Ownership - ensure that young people have ownership of the work and feel youth voice is being done with them, not on them.
- Purpose - be clear about why you are engaging with young people, and what you are and are not asking them to do.
- Feedback - make sure that you follow up, so they know what decisions or changes have been made based on their input.

“You have to be willing to change – otherwise what is the point of youth engagement? Good practice is when you're willing to take risks, try things, potentially fail. Young people are going to suggest things that surprise us but we should be open to that.”

(Interviewee)

“...a fundamental shift in how funders design programmes... shift from seeing funding recipients as 'consumers' to viewing them as 'designers'.”

(Power to Change, 2021)

“It doesn't work when adults are fearful of giving power to young people, initiatives can look like inclusion but are actually highly managed and not fully participatory.”

(Interviewee)

“Be open to power sharing.”

(Young person - interviewee)

RECOMMENDATION:

Embed youth voice at all levels of decision-making.

The case studies in the main body of this report provide a range of examples of how funders can do this.

THEORY OF CHANGE



This theory of change is grounded in the recommendations, specifically the activities and mechanisms of change. We present this theory of change to demonstrate how adopting these recommendations can lead to positive impact for youth sector organisations implementing a place-based approach.

Funder activities	Mechanisms of change (the experience/approach leading to outcome)	Short-term outcomes - early changes to the environment that lays the groundwork partnership, collab, awareness	Intermediate outcomes, system changes to core institutions	Long-term outcomes - population level changes (young people/communities' benefit)	Aims
Offering development grants Time and resources spent relationship building Funding priorities align to local strategy or support the development of local strategy Facilitating learning and impact measurement Investment in skills and leadership at local level	Organisations can self-identify whether they require, or could benefit from, any upfront capacity development funding before becoming involved in a delivery partnership Trusting relationships between funder and grantee and funding targeted via relationships Adapting and responding to the local context Positive risk taking Capturing impact Sharing power with young people Relational funding	Smaller organisations have the infrastructure to apply for funding Communities lead the direction of funding Community groups working together more effectively Collaboration between funders, organisations and communities Funders are accountable to places Less hierarchical relationship between funders and grantees	Funding is more effectively used to respond to local need Funding is taken up by communities who need it Pooled funds are more effective in supporting change Shared learning More equal relationship between funders and grantees	Youth voice embedded at all levels The right ecosystem is in place to receive funding The funding communities receive meets local challenges and priorities Resilient communities Challenges are tackled at a system-level Learning and developing practice about what works (and doesn't work) Sustainable funding models	Place-based funding that enables young people's socio-emotional learning Young people's ability to be heard and influence policy and practice Thriving local ecosystems and happy, healthy communities

CASE STUDIES

These three case studies were selected to provide a range of examples in terms of location, mechanism of approach, and initiating body. They are all examples of independent funders or membership organisations working with local authorities and delivery organisations with co-production at the centre of their approach to supporting place-based youth work.

The key aim of these case studies was to establish how places developed and implemented their plan including what aspects or enabling conditions (local or structural) influenced their approach. We then assessed the extent to which the community contributed to the design and delivery of activities.

Those working for and with each area were interviewed to get a variety of perspectives that led to the development of the case study.

Connected Futures, Youth Futures Foundation

Youth Futures Foundation's Connected Futures is a place-based programme supporting young people's pathways into employment through local partnerships, with the aim of improving employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds.

The Connected Futures programme provides some interesting insights relating to what funders could do differently when developing place-based initiatives, to try and promote collaboration and prioritise the contribution of smaller local organisations at the same time.

Connected Futures emerged as a response to Youth Futures' systems mapping, exploring the key issues encountered by young people facing disadvantage or discrimination in accessing good work. Connected Futures ran an exploratory phase which involved systems mapping of the key issues faced by young people accessing employment support.

The systems mapping and development of an evidence base with young people facing disadvantage helped gauge the multiple structural factors functioning as barriers to young people accessing employment in their area.



A co-design funding approach

Connected Futures took a phased approach which was underpinned by two vital elements: flexibility in funding and co-production with young people and practitioners at each stage. The purpose of the first stage was to establish foundations for trust with local partners through consultation workshops with and by young people. These initial stages were used to understand the systems and processes that function as barriers to access and identify gaps in provision. Learning from the initial rounds was embedded, a key takeaway being the need for systemic change to tackle youth unemployment. This is because there was a diverse combination of factors that led to barriers for young people accessing employment.

Through a commitment to being open to being challenged with constant opportunities to bring in users, Connected Futures was able to 'create space' for collaboration and design. This provided the community with space to do what matters to them. This enabled an effective implementation stage underpinned by a strong understanding of what the needs of the community were.

The initial set-up period allowed Connected Futures to "bring people in" these being organisations embedded in the local area, community leaders and young people. Therefore, developing a shared story of the place and the needs of young people. A key aim of this programme was to ensure young people's involvement as early as possible in the process from initial exploratory research and evidence building right through to grant-assessing and shaping delivery. In doing so they were able to set a standard for young people's involvement and high-quality practice in co-production as a key element of not only the programmes they funded but also internal decision-making within their organisation.

“Genuine systems transformation is tricky; some improvement may be immediate but [you need to] invest long term to see long term impact.”

Recognise the value of developing a shared narrative that has community buy-in

This practice enabled partnerships to really understand where they fit into the bigger picture. The systems mapping involved a diverse set of stakeholders which included key 'communities' young people and organisations that support young people, who are now supported by this funding. The involvement of young people as peer researchers further enabled meaningful community engagement. This helped them understand the interconnected systems and processes that may be blockers and enablers to young people's access. Through the initial exploratory stage and systems mapping to identify authentic needs, they were able to invest in multiple ways to ensure young people's voices were heard in funding design. To further ensure they were including the voice of young people facing higher barriers they spent time supporting a core group of young people from marginalised backgrounds with lived experience to act as peer researchers to help shape their funding strategy, exemplifying "listening in the right place at the right time". Developing a shared narrative shaped by the community and beneficiaries enabled partnerships to locate themselves and 'where they fit in the bigger picture'.

Early involvement of key stakeholders to sustain learning

By involving young people with high barriers to participation early in the programme, Connected Futures was able to widen their reach and increase participation. The involvement of a young people's group, paid for their involvement, shaped high-level decisions across the programme with their recommendations having steered and impacted several final decisions. They also recognised best practice in having a core group of young people with the dedicated capacity to be involved across all stages from design right through to delivery. This is learning that they intend to embed in any future rounds of funding.

Connected Futures was able to ask the right questions, recognising that "each area has its own unique set of challenges regarding the complex needs of young people in that area". A significant point of discussion was asking how grantees planned to embed young people's involvement and voice into their delivery. Furthermore, there was a real consideration in ensuring their funding was accessible to those experiencing multiple disadvantages. This was through a commitment to direct funding to wider systems and integrated services over focusing on individual factors. A core element of their criteria required proposals to adopt a participatory approach, proposing multi-sectoral solutions. Additionally, there was a clear direction in selecting local partners that had a grounded understanding of community needs to ensure sustainability.

Connected Futures advised allowing time at each stage to embed intentional and authentic co-production and to allow relationships to develop.

Connected Futures demonstrates an authentically co-produced approach to funding place-based youth provision through addressing systemic barriers and identifying leverage points for system change. Through building relationships with organisations and communities, and trusting in the expertise of local actors, the programme was able to address the issues faced by young people regarding employment at a local, place-based level.

KEY LEARNING FROM CONNECTED FUTURES:

- Using a systemic approach to understand the interrelated issues influencing youth (un)employment
- Co-production with young people and practitioners at every stage of the funding process and ensuring that the voices of all (including those experiencing more disadvantages) were heard
- Initial exploratory research to develop a shared narrative - taking time to develop a shared story of place and the needs of young people
- Grantees required to adopt a cross sectoral approach to meeting need

“It’s about collaboration, partnership with local partners, and trusting their expertise and their judgement.”





Young Manchester

Young Manchester is a Young People's Foundation, and part of the YPF Trust network - a project initiated by place-based funder John Lyon's Charity. Young Manchester took a strategic alignment approach, pushing for investment towards integrated systems and process engaged through an eco-system of collaborative local partnerships. Youth voice is a key organisational motivator and sits at the heart of internal structures and processes.

Identify your place in the local context

Young Manchester was able to identify and align its organisational aims and locate itself firmly within the local funding context and recognise where it can support local organisations and structures to best serve the community. Being well embedded into the local infrastructures, the team saw an ideal opportunity to act as a "broker between national funding and central investments to ensure funding was strategic and [made] sense in an eco-system". Young Manchester was able to leverage its position as a locally embedded membership organisation, to push for a strategic alignment of funding to best serve communities. It was also able to utilise its unique position to advocate for funders trusting places to deliver locally.

Relational funding: trusting communities to lead funding

"It's about collaboration, partnership with local partners, and trusting their expertise and their judgement." Collaboration was effective when Young Manchester was able to manage the distribution of power and maintain openness and trust in relational funding. An embedded and sustainable funding approach is one that considers the multiple processes that young people go through and experience, therefore trusting a place to deliver funding in a way that supports holistic systems in young people's lives and being open to trusting the judgment of local partners to determine needs. As noted by the co-CEO of Young Manchester, "organisations that are embedded in communities know the issues of the community". Effective place-based youth work funding "starts with the young people and as early as possible and [recognising] how much power you are willing to give". Young Manchester's experience shows that funding that invests in existing processes or the setting up of infrastructure can be vital to sustainable initiatives.

It has been Young Manchester's experience that funders who are open to engaging early in complex areas and investing in the understanding and processes necessary to improve provision, are better able to deliver strategic funding. Therefore, funding to invest in existing processes or the setup of infrastructure whilst embedding community insight can be vital in ensuring that initiatives are sustainable.

Young Manchester's approach had a strong emphasis on building strong local partnerships based on equitable power dynamics. This involves sharing power with young people and doing so at multiple levels with young people's involvement not only in strategic alignment but also building the capacity in smaller organisations to embed youth voice in delivery. The ability to implement a partnership approach across grant-making activity, team level, and board level while reducing administrative burden on small organisations was an essential practice in supporting the people and the place. Young Manchester's processes are not only collaborative externally but have high quality youth voice practice internally through young people's involvement at governance level and team level.

Strong local structures support collaboration which in turn fosters innovation

Young Manchester identified the need for a more connected ecosystem within the local funding structure. Their experience shows the need for a holistic approach to addressing youth violence and the value in listening to young people who did not want another stand-alone initiative to address a community impacted by violence. They were able to support local providers that lacked resourcing, with #iwill funding to address the multiple barriers faced by young people impacted by youth violence. This strategic programme of work embedded multi-level change by engaging young people and communities in capacity building and shared outcomes.

Young Manchester notes the importance of funders supporting community anchor organisations that have a stronger understanding of the context and better relationships locally than funders. This can ensure meaningful engagement, where design is a collaborative process with the inclusion of local assets and insights. Such insights made Young Manchester better equipped to recognise that targeted initiatives were ineffective at serving young people and communities in a connected way. Stronger local partnerships not only provide young people with a strong sense of community and support but can also allow for scaffolded opportunities for progression. Thus 'place' can become a powerful forum for young people's development if you create the right culture, one that embeds young people's voice across key structures.

KEY LEARNING FROM YOUNG MANCHESTER:

- Embedding youth voice in the organisational structures and hierarchies
- Sharing power with young people and local communities
- Relational approach to funding based on trusting the expertise of local organisations
- Supporting local ecosystems to thrive through local partnerships
- Funding priorities based on listening to young people and local communities
- Reducing administrative burden on small organisations

Local Motion Enfield

Local Motion is a collective of funders with a vision to drive systems change across the sector using co-production methods. The funders involved aim to distribute power and place-based decision making to local communities through connecting and sharing learning between people, communities and organisations, and empowering local communities to take ownership of decisions that matter to them.

Enfield Voluntary Action (EVA) is a locally embedded infrastructure organisation responsible for managing Local Motion funding in Enfield. EVA leads the core group, a cross-sector group of representatives from the local area with a clear understanding of the challenges and needs of their community. The key aims of this group are to foster collaboration and co-production in order to facilitate systemic change. The underpinning rationale behind their approach is that 'place' offers a construct that can support complex interconnected and interdependent issues.

Explore collaborative ways of working in place with a strong VSCSE network to co-ordinate local resources

Local Motion Enfield is still in the early stages of engagement with places; however, its core group of community organisations highlighted the existing conditions and best practice which have enabled the set-up stage to be effective. The vision for Enfield is 'designing out poverty' through addressing homelessness, the East-West attainment group (through tackling youth unemployment), improving mental health and social isolation.



The youth unemployment initiative started with a peer-led research project to explore what matters to young people. In response to addressing education and enterprise Local Motion Enfield is undertaking a data gathering exercise to identify where support is needed by communities through co-production methods. These initial stages are a direct response to and informed by co-commissioned community research by the EVA which has identified needs within the community.

EVA as the coordinating structure between Local Motion and the community has aimed to create more collaborative decision-making structures by bringing people with diverse perspectives together with the aim to co-produce solutions underpinned by a commitment to sharing power. This two-year development phase, underlined by a commitment to develop and test collaborative local approaches, of a ten-year project will ensure a solid evidence base and rationale for their programmes.

EVA highlighted the need for "freedom and flexibility for communities at grass roots level... to formulate their own services". EVA also recognised that whilst 'communities know their needs better than us' and a place-based funding approach is an effective model to achieve systems-change, it takes time to see a cultural shift. Therefore, it is vital to fund conversations and engagement not just delivery.



Invest in relationships and utilise existing community assets

Legacy CIC is part of the VCS-led core group aiming for better outcomes for young people in the community with a focus on education, employment and enterprise. Legacy CIC has been leading on systems change work in the community, particularly in the areas of careers advice within the education system. In addition, Legacy CIC has been implementing innovative ways of supporting young people in their employment and enterprise journeys.

Legacy CIC emphasises the need for a systems-based approach to addressing young people's needs in the local community recognising that “as we co-produce and we network together; we can provide 360 provision... [so that] there is no revolving door and are able to engage them because of our connected networks”.

Legacy CIC values a collaborative approach as the key to ensuring effective place-based practice. “Through working in conjunction and not in isolation...we can produce programmes and services to give better outcomes for the service user”. Legacy CIC as a locally embedded organisation within Enfield also strongly encouraged the involvement of people with lived experience in decision-making and delivering. The programme in Edmonton, a hotspot for crime, poverty, homelessness and mental health was shaped by the engagement of young people locally, responding to young people's need for non-conventional routes into employment and enterprise.

Legacy CIC engaged local schools and young people which allowed them to design a programme that addressed young people's need for routes into entrepreneurship and employment. The three 'E' programme was directly shaped by the needs of young people in the local community with a strategic alignment to address youth unemployment in the area. An evaluation of the initial programme resulted in young people wanting to see an integrated network of organisations responding to multiple needs. This allowed Legacy CIC to collaborate in partnership with four other CICs in employment, family support and mental health and serious youth violence to successfully deliver the Education, Employment and Enterprise programme.

KEY LEARNING FROM LOCAL MOTION ENFIELD

- Driving systems change through co-production, redistributing power and decision making to local communities through fostering connection
- Led by a core group of community organisations who have a clear understanding of the challenges and needs of the community
- Identify local priorities through community research
- Flexibility in funding to test collaborative approach to address community needs
- Ten-year project in recognition of the time it takes to achieve cultural and systemic change
- Promote cross-sector collaboration between organisations to tackle intersecting issues of employment, family support, mental health and serious youth violence

CONCLUSION – CALL TO ACTION

The findings demonstrate an understanding of place-based youth work as grounded in relationships and collaboration between funders, organisations, and communities.

The recommendations, directly based on the emergent themes, reflect this relational approach.

Whilst the findings may not be a surprise to those familiar with the sector, they are nevertheless important as the report highlights that whilst some are operating in this way, there is still a way to go.

The theory of change shows the potential impact of the recommendations and working in a more relational way. We hope that this research will provide evidence to influence decision-making so that place-based youth funding can be more effective, to provide better quality services for children and young people.

BASED ON EACH RECOMMENDATION, WE HAVE A CALL TO ACTION; WHAT THE SECTOR NEEDS TO DO TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND DELIVER MORE EFFECTIVE PLACE-BASED FUNDING FOR THE YOUTH SECTOR:

1. Dedicate resources to support communities to build infrastructure so places have the capacity to receive funding.
2. Take the time and invest in building trusting relationships in places before administering funds.
3. Ensure your funding mechanisms promote collaboration between organisations and identify opportunities to collaborate with other funders.
4. Listen and respond to the needs of the community; align funding to local strategy.
5. Be willing to take risks and support a learning culture.
6. Provide unrestricted, long-term funding opportunities.
7. Ensure that reporting requirements are proportional to the capacity of organisations.
8. Help build skills and capacity in the local ecosystem.
9. Embed youth voice at all levels of decision-making.

We hope these recommendations can help enable wider discussions, offer guidance around which to build and promote effective place-based practices within the youth sector.

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ABOUT US



YMCA GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

At YMCA George Williams College, our vision is for a just and equitable society that invests in support for all young people to learn, grow, and explore their relationships with the world around them. This support is characterised by safe spaces, high quality socio-emotional skill development opportunities, and relationships with trusted adults.

As part of its work, the College now hosts three centres of expertise: the Centre for

Quality Practice, focusing on developing skilled practitioners who can deliver high quality youth provision; the Centre for Youth Impact, which supports organisations to evidence their impact and continually improve their youth provision and offer to young people and communities, and the Centre for Youth Voice, which advocates for and supports a stronger role for the voices of young people in evaluation and continuous quality improvement.