

**YOUTH-LED  
CHANGE**

# Vision for the Future of Youth-led Changemaking and Activism

# CONTENTS

<i>VISION &amp; PURPOSE</i> .....	<i>3</i>
<i>PROCESS &amp; CONTEXT</i> .....	<i>5</i>
<i>ASSUMPTIONS</i> .....	<i>10</i>
<i>THEORY OF CHANGE</i> .....	<i>12</i>
<i>DEFINITIONS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES</i> .....	<i>14</i>

# VISION

We envision a society where young people understand their own power and can hold systems to account. A society where young people are supported through strong intergenerational and peer networks, having access to resources, knowledge and developmental tools to inspire their changemaking journey.

---

# PURPOSE

As part of the legacy of Act for Change Fund (AFCF), Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation commissioned Chrisann Jarrett to develop a shared vision and Theory of Change to enable us and other funders to invest in youth-led change.

Creating the conditions for youth-led change making in the UK will take collaboration from a range of partners. We are keen to work with others and hear their views on how we can work together to support the sector.

We are committed to sharing our learning from funding in this space – take a look at the resources at [fundingyouthactivism.org.uk](https://fundingyouthactivism.org.uk)

---

# PROCESS

Working alongside Blagrave Trust, we engaged with stakeholders drawn from the AFCF panel members, grantees of AFCF, Blagrave Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation through a series of 10 convenings:

- **Group 1:** Youth-Led convenings  
(24 young activists)
- **Group 2:** Blended convenings  
(14 organisations and experts)
- **Group 3:** Intergenerational convenings  
(4 organisations, 5 panellists  
and 3 young activists)

The aim was to develop coherence about the vision for the future of youth-led changemaking and develop practical next steps for funders and organisations in how to deliver on that vision.

---

# *THIS VISION IS GUIDED BY THE ASSESSMENT THAT:*

- ➔ Young people engaging in changemaking and activism need to be better supported to achieve change. This requires the shifting of power and resources.
  - ➔ The socio-political and economic context is complex. The issues and systems young people are seeking to change require a long-term commitment from funders and organisations who must respond by working together to develop the infrastructure for youth-led changemaking in the UK.
  - ➔ To sustain these movements and retain the skills and talent of changemakers there must be clear leadership pathways for young people.
  - ➔ Young people with lived experience of injustice should play a crucial role in improving decision-making internally within organisations and grant-making institutions.
  - ➔ Funders are active participants in the movement to advancing youth-led activism.
-

# CONTEXT

Over the last few years, there is a recognition within society, the third sector and the funding community that young people should be seen as equal partners in change. This has led to increasing focus on the identification and bolstering of the field of youth-led changemaking in the UK. This is attributable to various factors which includes:

- **A strong track record created by young people in influencing change and leading movements.**
- **The repositioning of lived experience as a core component of social activism.**
- **Organisational acceptance that there are better outcomes when young people are engaged in decision making.**
- **Increasing commitment from change funders such as Trusts, Foundations and Philanthropists to invest in the field of youth-led changemaking.**

In the UK, we have witnessed young activists rising to the occasion and mobilising against injustices, calling for reform to attitudes and systems, in many cases yielding results despite having fewer resources and connections. The urgency of the climate resistance has inspired waves of social action around the UK. Throughout 2019, we saw thousands of young people engaged in monthly climate strikes echoing the urgency of action now.

The global pandemic created unprecedented challenges for society including leadership and governance challenges for the youth sector. Social movements have continued to grow however, as young people have evidenced their dynamism - protesting, writing petitions and speaking truth to power. Young people have responded to many crises, such as taking to the streets in the aftermath of the tragic death of Sarah

Everard, and secured wins as seen in Scotland where after a 20-year campaign led by women's rights activists, Scotland became the first country in the world to provide free and universal access to period products.

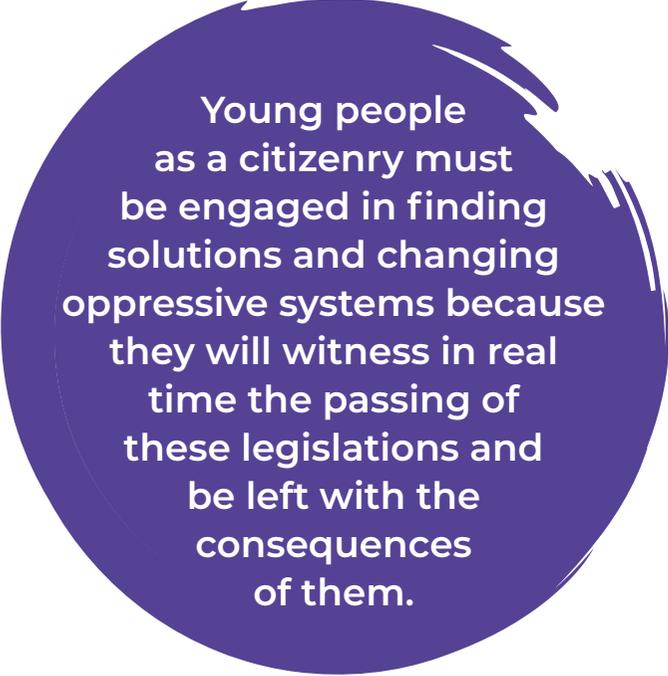
**2020 was a year of ground-breaking social unrest**

2020 was a year of ground-breaking social unrest. The killing of George Floyd was a catalyst, with over 210,00 people in 260 towns and cities across the UK holding protests, primarily organised by All Black Lives a youth-led campaign group. The protests, though less violent, were reminiscent of the civil unrest in 2011 after the killing of Mark Duggan by the police. This implies two things; the first is that there is still a lot of work to be done to address the historical and present racial injustices in the UK, and secondly it evidences that young people and oppressed communities are willing to lead the charge in solidarity with their allies.

## Finding solutions to oppressive systems

Amidst the hope and inspiration for youth-led changemaking, the political backdrop cannot be ignored. If the government proceed with changes to human rights by introducing a British Bill of Rights, this will impact access to justice for many from minoritised communities. This is further problematised by the Nationality and Borders Bill which will erode the rights of refugees and migrant communities and creates uncertainty around the permanence of citizenship for foreign born naturalised citizens who could have their citizenship stripped by the Home Secretary without rights to appeal.

In addition, the government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill will introduce anti-protest measures altering the rights of people and communities within our democratic society. It could be argued that once again, the third sector and activist organisations will be needed more than ever to 'fill the justice gap' left by government legislation, increasing the need for direct service provision and advocacy around human rights and representation of marginalised communities. The political landscape will make it increasingly difficult to influence systems change on a variety of campaign issues. Young people as a citizenry must be engaged in finding solutions and changing oppressive systems because they will witness in real time the passing of these legislations and be left with the consequences of them.



**Young people as a citizenry must be engaged in finding solutions and changing oppressive systems because they will witness in real time the passing of these legislations and be left with the consequences of them.**

## The empowerment of young people

The persisting imbalances within the funding space and the third sector equally must not be ignored.

After decades of investment into youth voice, development, and an overt focus on youth participation there needs to be a shift from participation to empowerment of young people. Historically, youth-led changemaking has been distanced from the rest of the changemaking and activism sector. Being developed by adults with young people primarily as beneficiaries has led to the co-opting of the term 'youth-led' where power is not always shared with young people, their involvement at times tokenised. The absence of leadership pathways also means that talent and skills are not retained within the sector as young people transition into adulthood and out of changemaking despite years of investment in their development.

Act for Change Fund unearthed a field of youth-led changemaking in the UK. Having funded 32 organisations since 2018, the learning from the Fund celebrates the resilience of organisations and young activists. For organisations, AFCF was described as 'a springboard for smaller organisations doing impactful work'. For this work to be sustained it requires increased resources and investment into the field of youth-led changemaking as well as a questioning of current modes of funding and working arrangements between youth focussed organisations and young activists.

The Theory of Change is an attempt to guide the development of youth-led infrastructure now and in the future. It proposes what is known as a 'triple bottom line sustainability framework', that has an issue, community and youth leadership development benefit.

**Act for Change Fund  
unearthed a field of youth-  
led changemaking in the UK  
... For organisations, AFCF was  
described as 'a springboard  
for smaller organisations  
doing impactful work'**

# ASSUMPTIONS

When developing coherence around the vision for the future we must acknowledge some underlying conditions. The Theory of Change presupposes the existence of certain resources and conditions for this vision to be a reality.

These include:

- Long-term commitment from aligned funders to invest in youth-led changemaking, including financial and non-financial support.
  - The development of a set of principles or values for engaging in youth-led changemaking.
  - The understanding that principles surrounding youth-led changemaking are malleable and that definitions are not meant to be prescriptive or limiting.
  - Strong evidence base on the actual and potential transformative impact of youth-led changemaking and activism.
  - Holistic financing of organisations with the capacity to support young people on their changemaking journey e.g., direct service needs provision, internal infrastructure to support micro-grants and incubation of changemaking projects as a minimum.
  - Availability of partners committed to the re-education of stakeholders to address constraints and limitations of the education system which conditions young people to conform and not challenge.
  - Availability of partners to commit to the process of co-production, learning, innovation and adaptation.
  - Young people having rights and entitlements that will enable them to be involved in changemaking.
  - Innovation amongst funders, young activists and organisations, and willingness to test new ways of working.
  - Clear lines of accountability directly to young people with lived experience of injustice.
-

# TERMINOLOGY

- ➔ **Inputs:** strategic interventions which will enable the process.
  - ➔ **Activities:** what will be done and /or services that will be provided to address the problems. These activities must be directed at achieving a desired outcomes and impact you want to achieve.
  - ➔ **Outcomes:** the changes you will see because of your activities. This might include improved capabilities and access amongst young people and other stakeholders (knowledge/skills, attitudes, behaviours).
  - ➔ **Impact:** what you intend to achieve that will contribute to the vision being realised (some impacts are directly attributable to your activities and outcomes whilst others might have an indirect association).
  - ➔ **Experts:** referring to infrastructure organisations, young activists, local councillors, politicians, civil servants and journalists amongst others.
-

# THEORY OF CHANGE

**VISION** We envision a society where young people understand their own power and can hold systems to account. A society where young people are supported through strong intergenerational and peer networks, having access to resources, knowledge and developmental tools to inspire their changemaking journey.

**IMPACT**

<p>Young people understand and use their <b>COLLECTIVE POWER</b> to influence.</p> <p>Young people can shape approaches and outcomes for both funders and organisations.</p>	<p>Young people have the <b>RESOURCES AND KNOWLEDGE</b> to effectively navigate their changemaking journey.</p>	<p>Young people are <b>EQUAL PARTNERS IN CHANGE</b> and are embedded in strong <b>INCLUSIVE NETWORKS</b>.</p>	<p>Young people are engaged in campaigning and activism <b>BUILDING THE POLITICAL POWER</b> to secure <b>SYSTEMIC CHANGE</b>.</p>
--	---	---	---

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR YOUTH-LED CHANGEMAKING IN THE UK IS DEVELOPED

**OUTCOMES**

<p>Increase in <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> for young people to <b>ENGAGE IN DECISION MAKING</b>.</p> <p><b>CLEARER PATHWAYS</b> for young people to transition into when engaged in activism and changemaking.</p>	<p><b>DEVELOPMENT IN THE CAPACITY</b> of young people to build movements through the <b>EFFECTIVE RE-DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES</b>.</p>	<p><b>POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS</b> of youth-led changemaking and increased <b>INTERGENERATIONAL COLLABORATIONS</b>.</p> <p>Greater understanding of emerging needs.</p>	<p>Improved <b>UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL CONTEXT</b> and <b>POLITICAL SYSTEMS</b> amongst young people who are able to strategically build campaigns and <b>INFLUENCE CHANGE</b> at a local, regional and national level.</p>
---	---	---	---

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR YOUTH-LED CHANGEMAKING IN THE UK IS DEVELOPED

**ACTIVITIES**

<p>1. <b>Structural changes to governance board and advisory committees</b> to include young people with lived experience.</p>	<p>1. <b>Knowledge essential for growth:</b> Learning materials, training, workshops and toolkits sharing best practice on youth-led change, activism, systems change and power.</p>	<p>1. <b>Funders and organisations acting as connectors,</b> platforming the work of young people.</p>	<p>1. <b>Greater insights</b> into new and different changemaking tools – to assist with external/issue-based campaigns and advocacy e.g.,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspiration from the continent.</li> <li>• Spaces to evaluate, prioritise and adapt ways of working in which the sector and young people can build the power to win.</li> </ul>
--	--	--	---

<p><b>ACTIVITIES</b> Continued</p>	<p>2. <b>Young people are integrated within organisational decision-making</b> to shape, instruct and apply for grant funding opportunities.</p> <p>3. <b>Job opportunities are created for young people</b> within organisations and trusts and foundations.</p> <p>4. <b>Direct funding to young people</b> without the need to be a constituted organisation.</p> <p>5. <b>Co-produced values for stakeholders working on youth-led changemaking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes young people, activists and key stakeholders, existing and new funders.</li> <li>• Assessment of internal biases and practices.</li> </ul> <p>6. <b>Exchange programmes</b> for young people to experience different contexts and ways of working.</p>	<p>2. <b>Availability of mental wellbeing support:</b> resources, counselling and therapy provision.</p> <p>3. <b>Micro-grants to young people:</b> Organisations are supported to develop and manage incubation of youth-led projects/campaigns e.g., ringfenced budget lines to support administration of micro-grants.</p> <p>4. Organisations creating a clear contribution policy to <b>renumerate young people for expertise and time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funders supporting where necessary through legal expertise.</li> </ul> <p>5. <b>Development of strong communications narratives</b> that can engage and mobilise young people wherever they are on their changemaking journey.</p> <p>6. <b>Creation of new/use of existing physical spaces</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For young people to convene and have ownership of spaces.</li> </ul>	<p>2. <b>Creation of collaborative convenings</b> where young activists, funders, organisations and experts work in adjacent spheres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning is captured.</li> <li>• Adapting an intersectional approach.</li> </ul> <p>3. <b>Mentoring and coaching programmes</b> focussed on individual development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth and adults.</li> <li>• Peer to peer.</li> </ul> <p>4. <b>Mapping exercise to identify and understand existing resources,</b> learning and ways that can be amplified.</p>	<p>2. <b>Creation of Cohorts</b> to critically analyse socio-political conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextualising change when working on social justice issues.</li> </ul> <p>3. <b>Increased collaboration on issues</b> so that young activists and organisations can build collective action and prevent duplication of work.</p> <p>4. <b>Connections with policy strategists, communications support, experts and thinktanks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing consultancy support and expertise so that campaigns and influencing strategies are developed.</li> </ul> <p>5. <b>Increasing political participation and representation of young people</b> in local and national government.</p>
--	--	--	--	---



**INFRASTRUCTURE** FOR YOUTH-LED CHANGEMAKING IN THE UK IS DEVELOPED

<p><b>INPUTS</b></p>	<p><b>Funders increasing financial investment in youth-led changemaking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligned funders working together and contributing to developing the field through long-term funding.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Promotion of holistic support packages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This includes financial and non-financial resources to build on learning and knowledge.</li> <li>• Willingness of funders to be more purposeful about funding new mental wellbeing approaches.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Collaboration and partnerships based on trust</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intergenerational and peer networks to facilitate and develop alliances.</li> </ul>	<p><b>License to try and test new ways of working</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible investments to promote inspiration, political education and navigation of systems.</li> </ul>
----------------------	--	---	--	---

# DEFINITIONS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The definitions we have used emerged from convening sessions with young people and experts. Our guiding principles are inspired by the input of experts and insights from the [Act for Change Fund](#).

Prior to investment into the field, there must be some clarity on the terminology of youth social action; youth-led change; youth activism and youth organising due to the tendency for these words to be used interchangeably. The definitions proposed below are not prescriptive but are intended to provide some boundaries for funders when choosing which areas they will prioritise for investment. The term 'youth' generally encompasses young people aged 14- 17 as well as young adults aged 18-25. However, this age range should not be used restrictively, especially as development of infrastructure for youth-led changemaking in the UK should ensure a pipeline and pathway for young people to engage in the field as they transition into adulthood.

As made clear in previous research by Paul Fenton<sup>1</sup> on Youth Activism, PHF's paper on Youth Engagement: Mapping the Landscape<sup>2</sup> and Chrisann Jarrett's Options Analysis Paper for AFCF, approaches to changemaking and activism are by nature non-linear and follow interrupted patterns. In addition, if funders continue to fund organisations, they must also accept that specific organisations have been developed with a certain mandate and have specialism on only some

aspects of the continuum. Finally, due to the direct service needs of some young people (especially those with lived experience) levels of engagement in changemaking may fluctuate. If activism is understood as 'bursts of energy' we must therefore advance a non-linear approach to youth-led engagement to facilitate a young person's journey. It is therefore crucial for funders and organisations to meet young people wherever they are at on their journey and build support around them.

**... crucial for funders and organisations to meet young people wherever they are at on their journey and build support around them.**

1. Paul Fenton's paper PHF Symposium 'Youth Activism, engagement and development of new civic learning spaces', July 2019

2. Youth Engagement: Mapping the Landscape by James Edleston, Feb 2018 (available on request)

TERMINOLOGY	KEY FEATURES
<p><b>Youth Social Action:</b> young people engaging in activities to make a positive difference to others or the environment such as fundraising, campaigning and volunteering. This can take place through formal or informal structures in a young person's household, local community or school and has a double benefit to the community and the individual young person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteering.</li> <li>• Non-political</li> <li>• Local.</li> <li>• Double-benefit to the community and the young person involved.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Youth-led change:</b> young people must be in positions where they can share power with others. A young person's involvement in decision making is crucial, they must initiate, direct, shape and be consulted in a meaningful way. Youth-led does not mean exclusively youth alone, it is not self-contained. It includes intergenerational connectivity and the facilitation of a young person's journey which can be supported by structures, accessible resources, expertise and input from peers and adults.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-prescriptive.</li> <li>• Inclusive decision making.</li> <li>• Lived experience.</li> <li>• Intergenerational facilitation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Youth activism:</b> Young people identifying a problem and solution(s). It is the process by which young people can take action or commit to set of actions to achieve social, political or economic transformation, including campaigning and advocacy. Activism requires the development of networks and co-ordination to influence change, address inequalities and discrimination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change focus – addresses injustices.</li> <li>• Development of networks and alliance.</li> <li>• Lived experience.</li> <li>• Political.</li> <li>• Intergenerational – strategic and engaging different thought leaders.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Youth organising:</b> Grounded in racial, gender, and economic justice, youth organising is the process of engaging young people in building power for systemic change. Proximity to the issues is key, so lived experience is essential. There is a focus on the development of individual young people as well as the cohort within the community, which requires an asset-based approach and the building of skills. Youth organising includes the opening of space for those affected by injustice to come together as a community to critically analyse power relations and allocate responsibility. Adults play a role in youth organising by acting as co-facilitators, administrators, or allies. This approach has a 'triple bottom line benefit', positively impacting the community involved, individual leadership development of young activists as well as the issues they are working to change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change focus – addresses injustices, advocating for systemic changes to the political, social and economic environment.</li> <li>• Critical analysis.</li> <li>• Education and knowledge sharing</li> <li>• Rooted in community engagement with community building at the core.</li> <li>• Lived experience.</li> <li>• Holistic development of young people.</li> <li>• Intergenerational – strategic interventions, support and facilitation.</li> <li>• Benefit to the community, individual and issue.</li> </ul>

# PRINCIPLES FOR YOUTH-LED CHANGE

These principles offer over-arching guidance on meaningful youth-led engagement and empowerment. They have been developed from analysing the intergenerational convenings and insights from the Act for Change Fund Final Reporting paper which assessed the cohort of 32 organisations, their approaches and key learnings. When combined, these principles provide a starting point for the hallmarks of authentic youth-led changemaking although organisations, young activists and funders may want to consider additional conditions depending on priorities and context of changemaking.

## 1. Quality opportunities for young people to lead change:

- Offering young people with lived experience opportunities to initiate, develop and implement change based on different models.
- Asset-based approach to youth-engagement and the deployment of skills.
- Appropriate remuneration demonstrating that expertise and time are valued.
- Non-prescriptive with in-built flexibility, meeting young people where they are at on their changemaking journey.
- Youth-led change sustained through investment in leadership development with clear pathways for progression from service user, volunteer to employee.
- Inclusion of wellbeing and mental health support to ensure young activists are safe and cared for, minimising re-traumatisation and burnout.

## 2. Intersectional working through change networks:

- Inclusive, anti-oppressive, purposeful spaces that are collectively owned and prioritise resources, knowledge sharing and the fostering of intentional relationships.
  - Focussed on developing the social capital of young people so that they can build the power to win by engaging and connecting with peers, allies and key stakeholders.
  - Connected to wider changemaking field to build strategic partnerships.
  - Facilitates intergenerational connectivity necessary for development through mentoring and coaching.
  - Appreciation for the multiple identities and interests of young activists.
-

### 3. Innovation culture:

- Nurture unconventional/radical approaches to changemaking and its application.
- Developing creative solutions to social justice and climate issues.
- Flexible approaches to monitoring and evaluation with impact frameworks that are responsive to the nature of changemaking and activism which does not follow a linear path.
- Young people are proactive and equipped to assess the political, economic and social environment, responding opportunistically with fewer decision-making barriers .
- Supported and facilitated by structures, expertise and input from young activists and adults.
- Supporting spaces to promote the inspiration that can drive innovation culture.

### 4. Critical thinking to create systems change:

- Understanding of the root causes of social injustices, developing strategic alliances to find solutions and address problems.
  - Young people acknowledging their power and identifying systems of power.
  - Investment in political education amongst young people improving understanding of politics and systems of influence.
  - Future leaders equipped with the tools to advance positive change.
  - Young people developing relationships with decision makers and being supported to take up political positions locally and nationally.
  - Movement narrative and campaigns created in partnership with young people with deep connections to communities impacted by social injustice.
-



**Chrisann Jarrett**

September 2022

For more resources about  
youth-led change, visit:

[www.fundingyouthactivism.org.uk](http://www.fundingyouthactivism.org.uk)