

**ROCKET  
SCIENCE**

**Partnership  
for Young  
London**

**Evaluation of the Greater  
London Authority's Youth  
Social Action Programmes,  
2022-24**

May 2024

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Dear Mayor of London,

The issue that I care most about is mental health and how often people are unable to find a safe space to release frustration, and then let it out onto others.

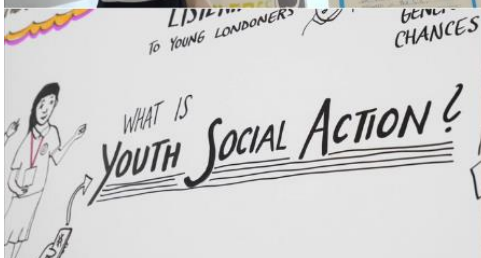
With the £400 I would build a well-being centre in our school where girls can go when overwhelmed. The money would be spent on equipment to create a welcoming environment, as well as teaching students and teachers on the importance of good mental health. This could be done through assemblies, bringing in speakers and teachers about coping with mental health. We would also train teachers and students how to deal with difficult situations.



Dear London,

Although the people of London have all the access to parks, they are not properly maintained. The grass grows to an enormous height, the equipment like swings and etc are left rusted and rusty, goalposts as of now are quite delicate / wobbly which makes it dangerous and there should be a water fountain for the public to drink.

I believe that children might have a hard time at home or children who can't afford to go to football clubs or etc - this is why they spend most of their time at their local park - it's not just that adults walk their dog and also jog! From now I love their local park, right?



Dear Mayor of London,

My name is Rajaa and I am from John Wood school. I am here to convince you to support homeless people who have to sleep with an empty stomach. They have to be hungry each and everyday. The rising cost of food makes it more expensive for them. Some parents do not even eat because they are caring for their children. Just imagine how children and entire families cannot eat!

It makes me furious and upset to see them asking for money just to afford food for themselves or their children. How would you feel if you were in their situations? There are also homeless children who might not go to school and make money for their family, it's not fair that they are not being educated!

If we get the £100, we could build homeless shelters or schools and make food banks or some apps where people donate money, foods or clothes, or they could build wells for countries in need.

metropolitan of England, is not taking



# 1. Executive Summary




Youth Social Action provides young people with opportunities to tackle societal issues while also developing important life skills. In the decade and more since London hosted the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Greater London Authority (GLA) has consistently invested in the legacy of civic volunteering and wider community engagement which were stimulated by the capital's staging the Games. Initially under the auspices of the GLA's *Team London* brand, a number of grant-funded programmes were designed to complement a range of high-profile national initiatives delivered by organisations such as #iwill, the National Citizens Service (NCS), and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, amongst others. These all sought to provide a 'double benefit' of engaging the individual participants and investing in local communities. Following the Covid 19 pandemic, the GLA re-positioned youth social action as a significant strand of the Mayor of London's [New Deal for Young People](#), focusing support on the recovery of those young Londoners and communities which have been most impacted by the pandemic and the subsequent cost of living crisis.

Three of these programmes, delivered during 2022-24, form the subject of this learning and evaluation report. [HeadStart Action](#) and [Young Ambassadors](#) are the main subjects of the evaluation, however learning was also captured from the [My London](#) programme. While the programmes differed in structure, in terms of how they were commissioned and the settings in which social action took place, they shared long-term aims which are captured in the GLA's Youth Social Action Theory of Change ([see Chapter 2](#)), not least to equip and empower young Londoners to shape a sustainable future for the city.

In order to assess the extent to which the programmes achieved these aims, the GLA commissioned Rocket Science and Partnership for Young London as its evaluation and learning partners. The GLA set [eight key research questions](#); two of these have formed the main focus of the evaluation:

1. How can the GLA best support the wider youth social action sector in London?
2. Where are the programmes aligned and how should the GLA build on this in the future?

To answer these questions Rocket Science consulted GLA staff, programme partners, delivery organisations and external stakeholders. Partnership for Young London trained a group of peer researchers, all of whom had graduated from the programmes, employing them in particular to amplify the voices of young people. These consultations have identified how youth social action programmes present young people with a range of opportunities. The Letters to London aspect of



Young Ambassadors, for example, saw more than 5,000 young people supported to send letters to the Mayor of London about an issue close to their heart, several of which received a personal response from the Mayor. The employability-support aspect of HeadStart Action saw 37 insight days delivered by eight different employers, giving more than 500 young people an understanding of the world of work and the opportunity to develop employability skills alongside corporate volunteers.

These opportunities provided a host of benefits, reinforcing the intended ‘double benefit’ of social action programmes. Young people developed socio-emotional skills, heightened confidence and improved communication. They also reported improved wellbeing. The post-programme survey for HeadStart Action, for example, evidenced significant increases in young people’s ability to express their views; greater comfort talking about mental health, and motivation to achieve their goals. At the same time, the places and spaces in which young people carried out their work also benefited. Indeed, a “triple benefit” was discernible in the programmes’ capacity building of the required infrastructure – both community organisations and school settings - which has been shown to provide essential support for activating young people and sustaining their engagement.

Project themes ranged from racial justice to the environment, with young people developing a sense of social responsibility which extended beyond the scope of the programme. For example, since completing Young Ambassadors, one participant having observed that her school insufficiently celebrated Black history and culture, successfully lobbied the school’s leadership to revise this by working alongside teachers on a new curriculum.

Despite the noted success of these three programmes, our research also identified that London’s youth social action sector is a fragmented space. Youth social action is taking place across the capital both ‘formally’ through funded groups and projects, but also ‘informally’ in many schools, youth clubs, faith groups and other settings. While the GLA’s funding enabled organisations delivering this work to come together for the first time, their continued collaboration outside these programmes remains limited in spite of participants’ almost universally commenting on the value of being part of a community of practice.

Youth social action stakeholders identified the need and an appetite for bringing together funders, councils and providers to bolster the capital’s youth social action offer, but there is currently no obvious or permanent infrastructure for doing so. Consequently, the lack of shared intelligence regarding delivery cold-spots, or what constitutes best practice in youth social action, severely

compromises the aim of supporting under-represented young Londoners and those who could benefit most.



Drawing on these findings, the report makes a series of recommendations based on the GLA’s four pillars which underpin its Youth Programme Strategy:

1. Amplifying youth voice
2. Convening and influencing
3. Resourcing and funding
4. Developing young Londoners

Our recommendations vary in their size, complexity and urgency and the full list is included in the [final section of this report](#). However, in returning to the key line of enquiry “How can the GLA best support the wider youth social action sector in London?” we identified four priority recommendations, one for each of the GLA’s pillars.

<b>Pillar</b>	<b>Amplifying youth voice</b>
<b>Recommendation</b>	Provide resources and training to schools and organisations to help them establish sustainable youth voice infrastructure such as boards/panels and specified roles.
<b>Pillar</b>	<b>Convening and influencing</b>
<b>Recommendation</b>	Convene both regional and national bodies delivering youth social action across London to collaborate on identifying cold spots, share data and learning, and provide additional support for funded groups and schools. This must include local authorities and London Councils which oversees and coordinates the boroughs’ youth offers in the capital.
<b>Pillar</b>	<b>Resourcing and Funding</b>
<b>Recommendation</b>	Create dedicated time and space for delivery partners on different programmes to come together in formalised and properly resourced ‘communities of practice’.
<b>Pillar</b>	<b>Developing young Londoners</b>
<b>Recommendation</b>	Map the paid work experience opportunities available to young people within the GLA and ensure this information is promoted and made easily accessible.

## 2. The GLA and Youth Social Action



### 2.1 Context

The Greater London Authority's Civil Society and Sport Team (formerly Team London) is responsible for the design and delivery of the Mayor of London's community sport, social action, civil society and volunteering programmes. During 2021-22, the team launched new rounds of a series of youth social action programmes as part of the Mayor's New Deal for Young People (NDYP). One of nine post-Covid 19 Recovery Missions, the NDYP has aimed to support young Londoners most impacted by the pandemic and to redress the widening social inequality in the capital. The team focused on creating synergy within its own youth social action initiatives, with complementary programmes and investment from other parts of the GLA family, as well as with other statutory and independent funders of social action in London.

#### **What is youth social action?**

"Youth social action refers to activities that young people can do to make a positive difference to others or their environment, such as getting involved in campaigning, volunteering, fundraising or advocacy. It may also be referred to as youth community action, or youth civic action."<sup>1</sup>

As one of the Civil Society and Sport Team's learning and evaluation partners, Rocket Science and Partnership for Young London have been privileged to collaborate with the GLA on its longer-term ambition to be the catalyst for a movement of Young Londoners who are "empowered through youth voice and equipped to shape the future of London, making the city a more sustainable, inclusive and safe place for all."

#### **Vision and mission**

"Our vision for the Youth Social Action programme is to empower under-represented young Londoners through youth voice, to become change-makers in their communities, tackling issues facing the city, such as the environment, social injustice, mental health, and safe spaces. Through skills development, positive action, partnerships and collaboration, and community engagement, our programmes will support young Londoners to gain the knowledge, skills and networks needed to create a more inclusive, resilient, and equitable city."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Greater London Authority, Youth Programme Strategy

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.2 Learning and Evaluation



Our independent observations and assessments have been both formative (ie supporting the Civil Society and Sport Team and its youth social action programmes’ continuous learning) as well as summative (ie producing this final impact evaluation). We deployed a range of research methods in order to address eight research questions posed by the GLA:

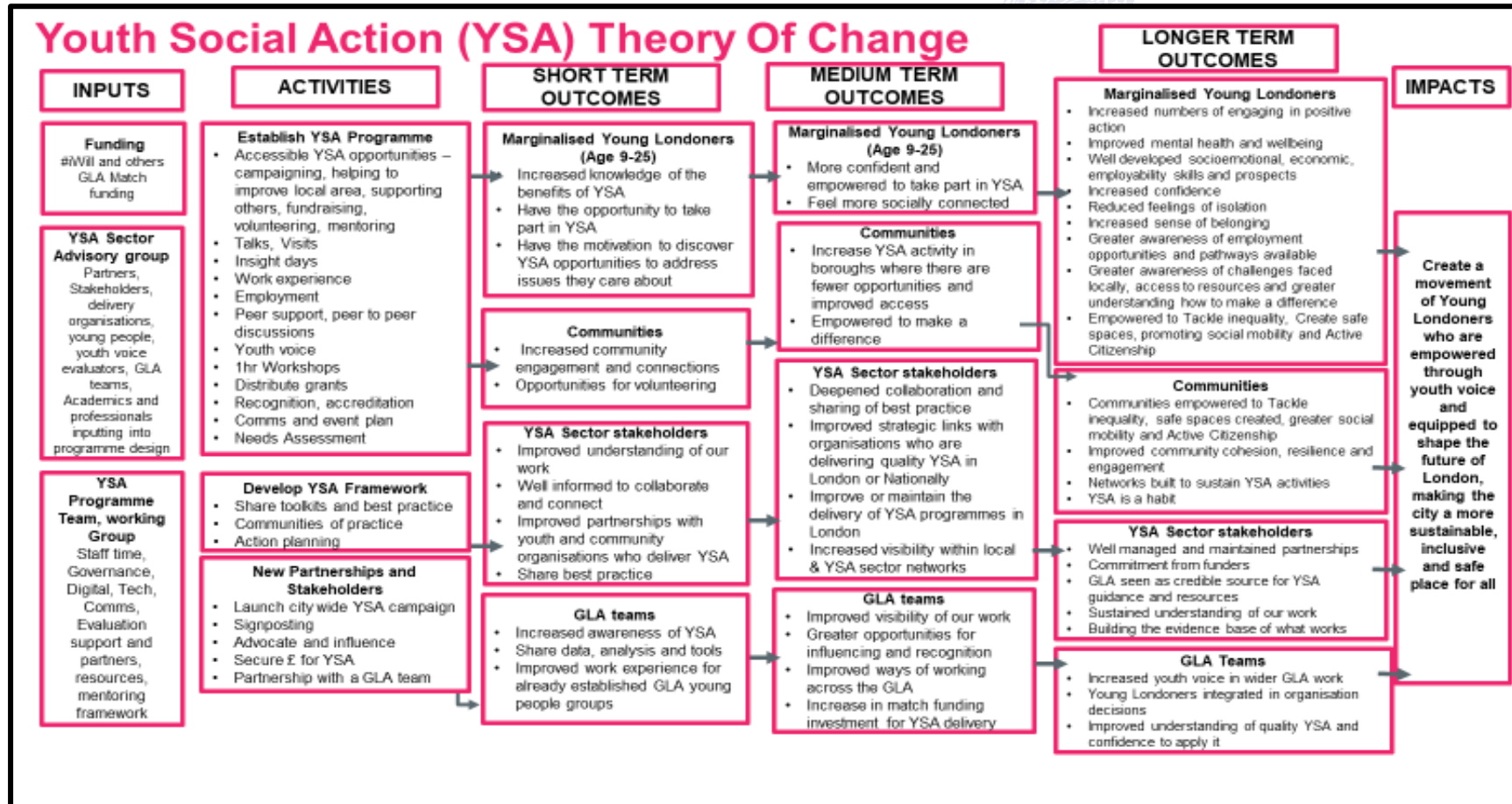
Research Questions	Methods:							
	Desk Research	Monitoring Data	Young People Surveys	Interviews/ Focus Groups (Young People)	Interviews/Focus Groups (Delivery Partners)	GLA Stakeholders	External Stakeholders	
1. How can the GLA best support the wider youth social action sector in London?								
2. What significant outcomes have come out of this phase from each project?								
3. Has the project/s led to young people feeling more confident and inspired?								
4. Which element of each project had the most tangible benefits for young people?								
5. Were there any elements of the social action activities which were ‘unsuccessful’?								
6. What worked? What was challenging, why, what could be improved?								
7. What impact did the funding have in achieving the desired aims and outcomes?								
8. Where are the programmes aligned and how do we use this in future?								

The most important of these are research questions 1 and 8. The findings in relation to questions 2–7, which emerged during the course of the programmes’ evaluation and are explored further in this final report, all feed into the overarching questions about the GLA’s role in supporting youth social action in London. Research questions 1 and 8 are also exercising the GLA at the moment given the recent Mayoral Elections and with a General Election due no later than early 2025.

The principal outputs from our work as learning partners have comprised:

- A live [GLA Youth Social Action data dashboard](#) – an interactive tool, updated on a quarterly basis which conveys the extent of the GLA’s investment in its three core youth social action programmes. There is potential to extend this to feature other GLA-funded youth/mentoring programmes under the New Deal for Young People and other programmes which contain a significant element of youth social action (eg School Super Zones).
- A **repository of tools** to support young people in their design and development of social action projects, these have been drawn primarily from HeadStart Action, Young Ambassadors and Design Lab, the precursor to My London, as well as external sources (eg #iwill; [Centre for Youth Impact](#)) and provide a legacy resource to support future youth social action initiatives.
- [Video animations](#) of the programmes’ social action co-produced with a group of trained peer researchers, giving voice to young Londoners, and showcasing the current programmes.
- **Interim (summer 2023) and final reports (spring 2024)** featuring both formative and summative lessons, evidenced on the basis of our triangulating data and information from i) young people; ii) delivery partners and iii) key partners and stakeholders, including employers.

- **Follow-ups with young people** 6 and 12 months after their involvement in social action. We plan to re-engage the programmes' peer researchers at these future milestones in order to assess the progress of those who took part in HeadStart Action and Young Ambassadors, 2022-24.

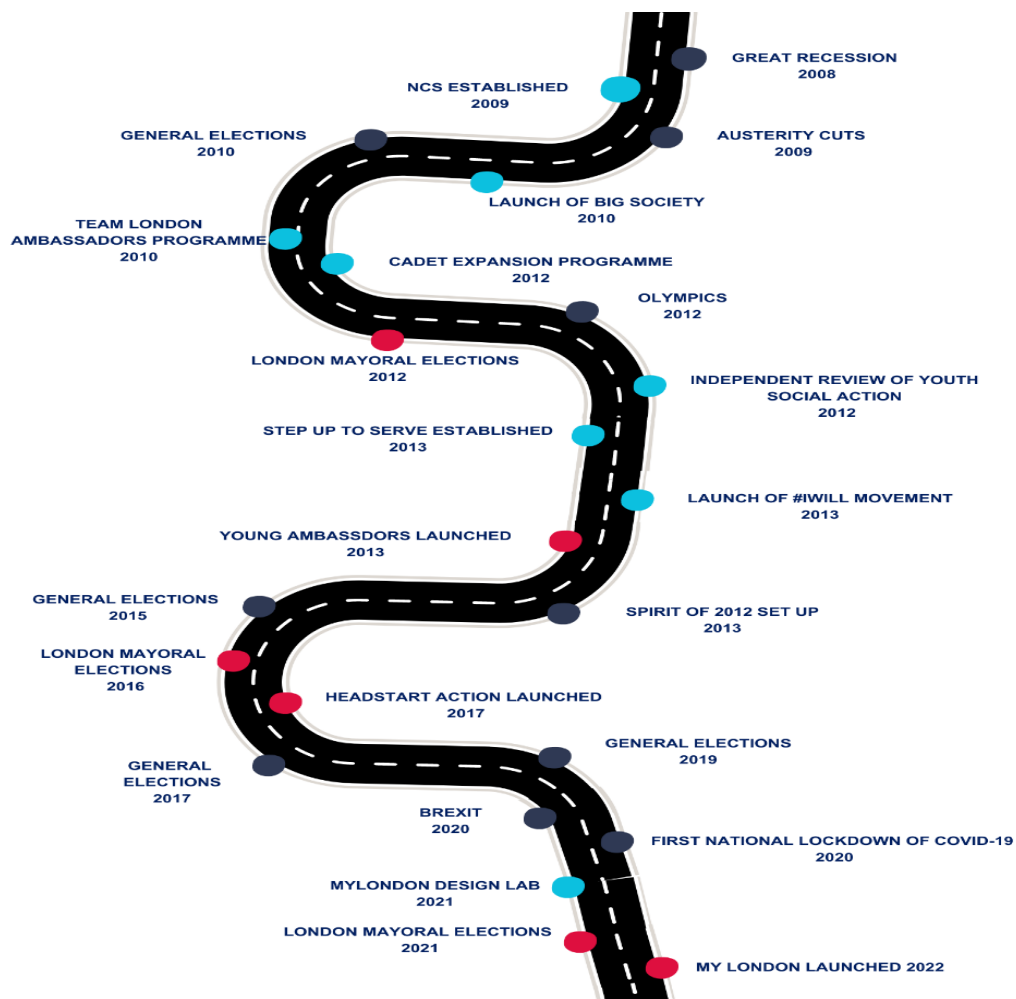




## 2.3 A recent potted history of YSA in London

In the decade and more since London hosted the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Greater London Authority has consistently invested in the legacy of civic volunteering and wider community engagement which had been stimulated by the capital's staging the Games. Initially under the auspices of the *Team London* brand, a number of GLA grant-funded programmes have complemented high-profile national initiatives such as Step Up To Serve (2013), #iwill, the National Citizen Service and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, amongst others.

These have all highlighted the importance of youth social action. In particular, the #iwill movement which was launched on the back of an independent review by Dame Julia Cleverdon and Amanda Jordan OBE, argued for a collaborative approach between government, business, and the voluntary sector in order to increase the participation of young people aged 10 to 20 in social activities which benefited their communities. The #iwill movement was initially coordinated by Step Up To Serve before transferring in 2021 to Volunteering Matters and UK Youth.

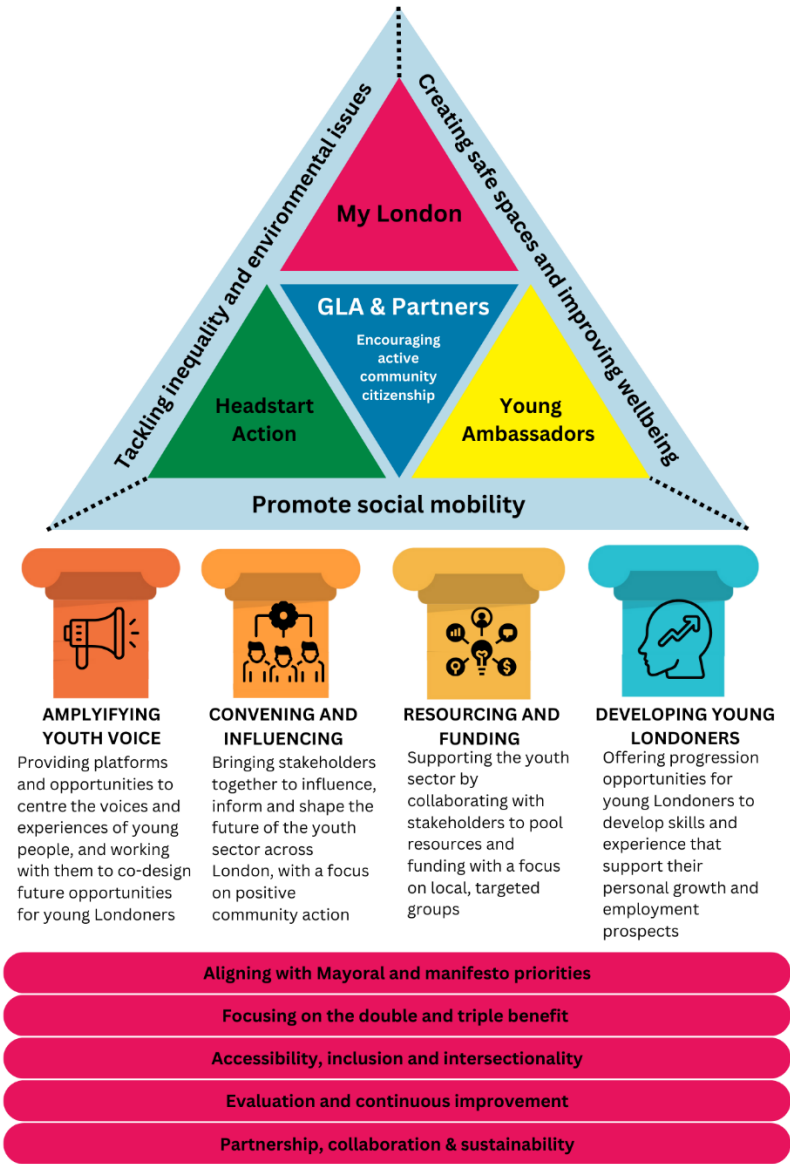


# 2.4 The GLA's Youth Programme Strategy, 2022-24



The GLA's Youth Programme Strategy, developed by the Civil Society and Sport Team, is based on a set of five 'foundations' and four 'pillars' which support the strategy's primary cross-cutting aim of encouraging active community citizenship among young Londoners. Three youth social action programmes, HeadStart Action, Young Ambassadors and My London each shared and contributed to the additional aims of tackling inequality and environmental issues; of creating safe spaces and improving wellbeing, and of promoting social mobility. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the efficacy of these programmes and inform future delivery of youth social action.

Figure 1: The GLA's strategic framework for delivering youth social action





## 2.5 Youth Social Action Programmes, 2022-24

### Aims

**1** Promote youth social action and encourage active community citizenship among young Londoners, with the goal of building stronger, more cohesive communities.

**2** Empower young Londoners to champion social equity and inclusion in their communities, become environmental stewards and to drive positive change.

**3** Encourage young Londoners to take an active role in their communities and support their mental health and wellbeing.

**4** Equip young Londoners with transferable skills that are in demand by employers and essential for the jobs of the future.

### Pillars

**AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICE**

Providing platforms and opportunities to centre the voices and experiences of young people, and working with them to co-design future opportunities for young Londoners

**CONVENING AND INFLUENCING**

Bringing stakeholders together to influence, inform and shape the future of the youth sector across London, with a focus on positive community action

**RESOURCING AND FUNDING**

Supporting the youth sector by collaborating with stakeholders to pool resources and funding with a focus on local, targeted groups

**DEVELOPING YOUNG LONDONERS**

Offering progression opportunities for young Londoners to develop skills and experience that support their personal growth and employment prospects

### Foundations

*Aligning with Mayoral and manifesto priorities*, ensuring the work remains politically relevant and meets the Mayor's agenda.

*Focusing on the double and triple benefit* of young people engaging in positive community action.

*Accessibility, inclusion, and intersectionality*, recognising the multiple identities of young Londoners and the multiple disadvantages they may experience.

*Evaluation and continuous improvement*

The GLA aim to evaluate the success of the programme by measuring the impacts in a variety of creative ways. This will help identify areas of improvement and ensure that the programme is achieving its objectives. Our goal is to continually improve the programme and make it more effective in empowering Young Londoners to create positive change in their communities.

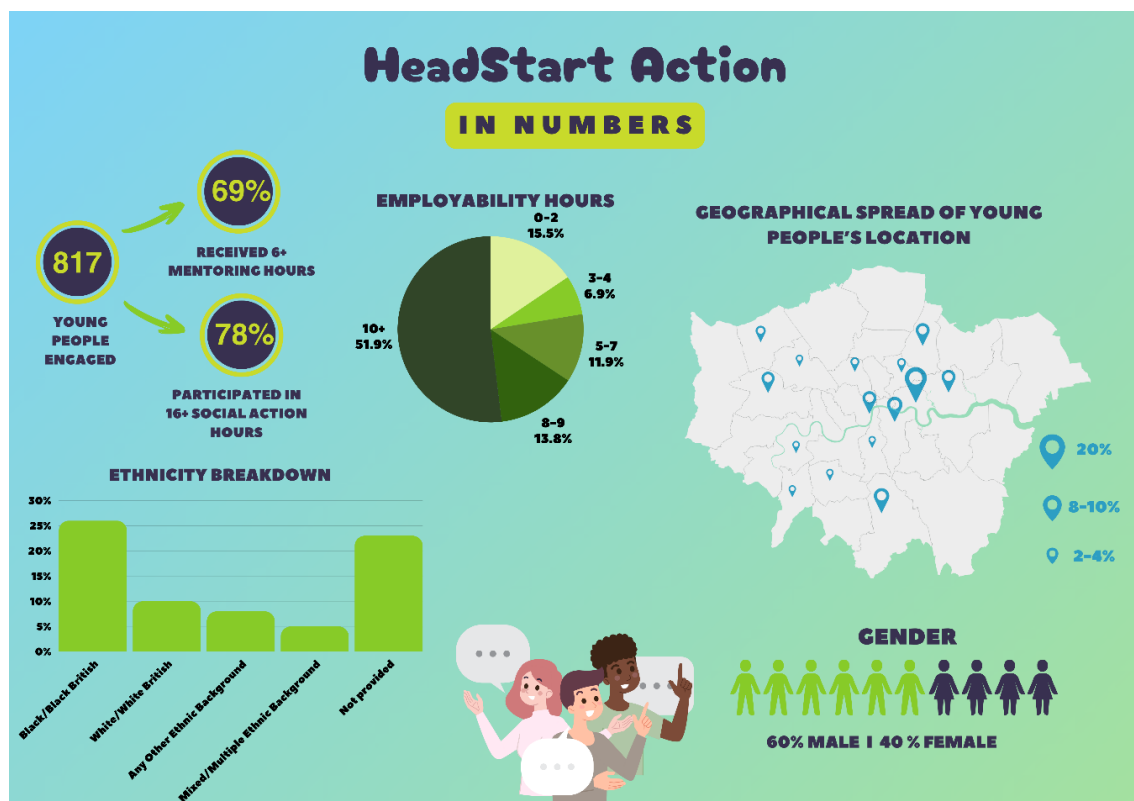
*Partnership, collaboration & sustainability*

The GLA aim to create a dynamic and collaborative ecosystem of youth social action in London, by partnering with local organisations, businesses, and youth and community groups. Our goal is to enable Young Londoners to connect, collaborate, and create impactful solutions for the key challenges facing their communities and the city as a whole.

## 2.6 HeadStart Action



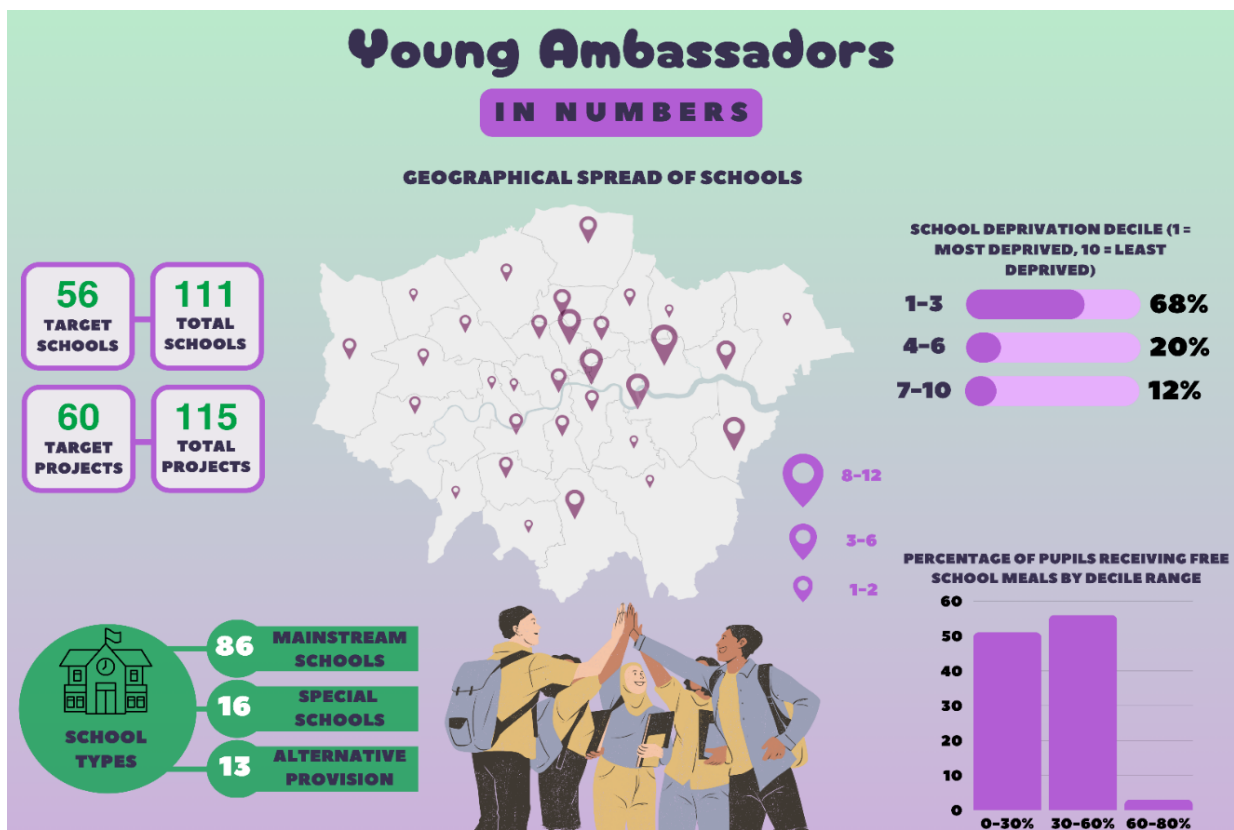
<b>Programme background</b>	HeadStart Action provided vulnerable young people aged 14-18 with mentoring (6 hours), social action (16 hours), and employability-skills opportunities to develop their confidence, skills, and experience to support them into employment.	
<b>Investment</b>	Up to £470,000 to two organisations to act as Lead Delivery Partners Up to £850,000 to 11 grassroots youth organisations	
<b>Lead Partner(s)</b>	London Youth (supported overall delivery) & Family Action (coordinated employability element)	
<b>Delivery organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gloves not Gunz</li> <li>• Leaders in Community</li> <li>• Project Zero</li> <li>• AlexZ Educational</li> <li>• Oxygen</li> <li>• The Wickers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• London Tigers</li> <li>• Streets of Growth</li> <li>• Kinetika Bloco</li> <li>• 2-3 Degrees</li> <li>• Newark Youth London</li> </ul>
<b>Targets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide 10+ hours of employability to 720 HeadStart Action participants</li> <li>• Provide employer, interview, and work opportunities to 360 young people</li> <li>• Capacity building support to embed the Mentoring Quality Framework</li> </ul>	
<b>Anticipated outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved social, emotional, and mental health</li> <li>• Improved relationships with employers</li> <li>• Reduction in risky behaviour</li> <li>• Improved educational attainment, including narrowing of the attainment gap for young Londoners from different backgrounds</li> <li>• Increased employment opportunities</li> </ul>	



## 2.7 Young Ambassadors



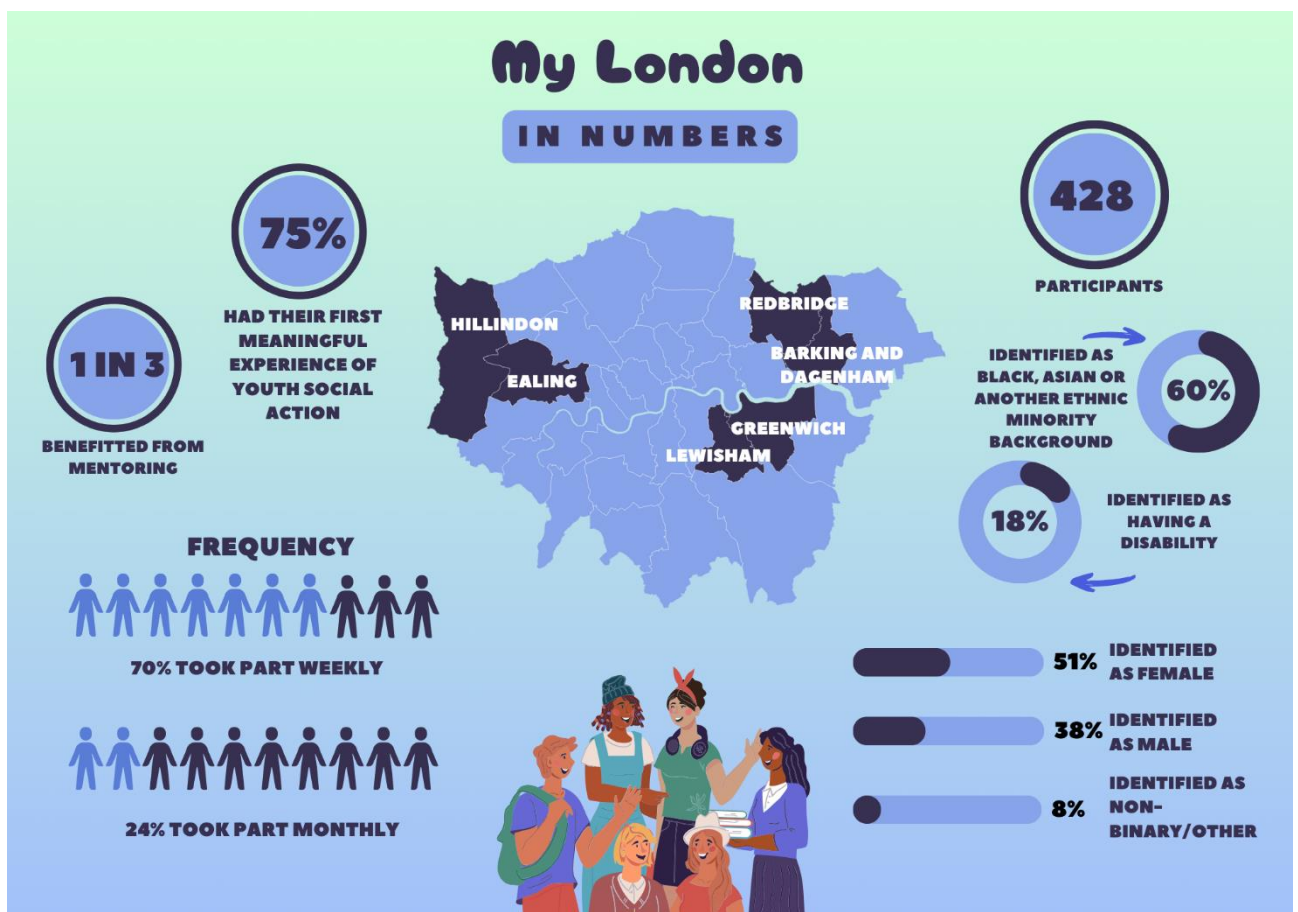
<b>Programme background</b>	Young Ambassadors engaged young people in social action through their schools via two streams of activity; one targeted primary schools, another Alternative Provision, Pupil Referral Units and schools with high levels of Special Educational Needs (SEND).
<b>Investment</b>	£306,000 for the two streams combined
<b>Lead Partner(s)</b>	Big Ideas and Volunteering Matters
<b>Delivery areas</b>	32 boroughs across North, South, East and West London
<b>Targets</b>	<p><b>Young Ambassadors Grants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 90+ grants distributed</li> <li>• 90+ social action projects</li> <li>• 2,700 young people engaged in social action, of which 75% were from primary schools serving areas of higher levels of deprivation</li> </ul> <p><b>Enhanced Young Ambassadors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for 32 Pupil Referral Units, Alternative Provision, and Special Educational Need schools</li> <li>• 250 young people engaged in social action</li> <li>• 32 social action projects</li> <li>• 32 small grants awarded</li> </ul>
<b>Anticipated outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people are supported to reach their potential</li> <li>• Increased community engagement</li> <li>• Increased social integration and participation</li> <li>• Self-confidence, wellbeing, and other socio-emotional skills development</li> </ul>



## 2.8 My London



<b>Programme background</b>	My London delivered youth social action projects via three cross-borough partnerships each of up to five local community organisations. These partnerships were identified through an analysis of indicators relating to deprivation, need and the strength of the youth sector.		
<b>Investment</b>	Up to £210,000 for each partnership		
<b>Delivery organisations</b>	<b>Barking &amp; Dagenham and Redbridge</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frenford Clubs (lead)</li> <li>• Barking and Dagenham Youth Dance</li> <li>• Muslimah Sports Association</li> <li>• Shpresa Programme</li> </ul>	<b>Ealing and Hillingdon</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ealing and Hounslow CVS (lead)</li> <li>• Hillingdon Autistic Care and Support</li> <li>• Spark! Charity</li> <li>• Each Counselling</li> <li>• Heston West Big Local</li> </ul>	<b>Greenwich and Lewisham</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lewisham Youth Theatre (lead)</li> <li>• Tramshed</li> <li>• Trinity Laban</li> <li>• Charlton Athletic Community Trust</li> <li>• Metro Charity</li> </ul>
<b>Anticipated outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase sustainable social action and volunteering opportunities for young people</li> <li>• Improve mental health outcomes for targeted groups of young people</li> <li>• Amplify youth voice in the paired boroughs</li> <li>• Support youth organisations to improve collaboration across the paired boroughs</li> </ul>		



## 3. Youth Social Action - programme design

### 3.1 Five foundations

The GLA's three youth social action programmes were established on the basis of five foundations, or guiding principles, as defined by the GLA's Civil Society and Sport Team. These provided a focus for our capturing some of the main challenges associated with the programmes' co-design and delivery.

#### Partnership, collaboration, and sustainability

*We aim to create a dynamic and collaborative ecosystem of youth social action in London, by partnering with local organisations, businesses, and youth and community groups.*

- Significant youth social action is happening across the capital. This comprises 'formal' activity supported by the GLA, as well as other provision in London promoted by national organisations such as #iwill (National Lottery Community Fund), the National Citizen Service (Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport) and longer-standing bodies such as the Scouts and Duke of Edinburgh Awards. A wide range of 'informal' less-heralded activity also happens in many schools, youth clubs and faith groups.
- Our mapping of the youth social action ecosystem in London highlights the variety and range of organisations which have a stake in enabling youth social action in the capital, from a core group most closely aligned with the work of the Civil Society and Sport Team, to regional and national infrastructure organisations, funding bodies and policy makers. (See Figure 2)
- Their collaboration tends to be thwarted by a lack of awareness and data sharing among the different funders of social action and across the myriad of partners which have a current or potential stake in its output and sustainability. Better coordination between national, regional and local stakeholders, including the use of web-based applications such as [360 Giving](#) (see Chapter 3.3) would enable more effective partnership working, help to identify and target cold-spots and more likely sustain social action projects beyond the lifetime of their initial programme funding.





## Evaluation and continuous improvement

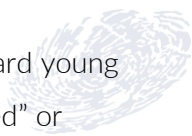
*We aim to evaluate the success of the programme, by measuring the impacts in a variety of creative ways. This will help us identify areas of improvement and ensure that the programme is achieving its objectives. Our goal is continually to improve the programme and make it more effective in empowering Young Londoners to create positive change in their communities*

- In spite of a decade of investment in the [#iwill](#) movement and the [National Citizen Service](#), youth social action continues to defy a commonly-held definition and widespread understanding. While some conflate it with volunteering and fundraising, others prefer to see youth social action as a purer form of community activism led by young people.
- The #iwill fund's [Learning Hub](#) notes that a clear and common understanding of youth social action is essential to determining high-quality programme design; without a clear and shared definition, it is difficult to support the measurement and evaluation of outcomes. This is born out in the learning from HeadStart Action and Young Ambassadors where both the programmes' lead organisations and delivery partners deployed wide ranging and inconsistent interpretations of social action which partly compromised the application of the programmes' Theory of Change.
- We detected a genuine thirst among the programmes' delivery partners to engage in "Communities of Practice" which provided opportunities to embed continuous learning and improvement in the design and delivery of Youth Social Action activity. However, this needs more explicitly to be a requirement of all programme partners which is included in their contract terms, prioritised, and properly resourced throughout.

## Accessibility, inclusion, and intersectionality

*Recognising the multiple identities of young Londoners and multiple disadvantages they may experience.*

- The latest iterations of the GLA's HeadStart Action (HSA) and Young Ambassadors, 2022-24, have seen both programmes sharpen their focus on the targeting of particularly vulnerable and under-represented young people; offering quality mentoring support alongside social action projects (HSA), and delivering an Enhanced Young Ambassadors' activity stream in Alternative Provision (AP), Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and schools with high numbers of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).
- Our learning paper on the targeting of under-represented young people commented on the additional programme design, time and investment which are required to meet this aim. This should include additional wrap-around services, financial assistance to cover the costs of participation, and engaging with parents/guardians or other trusted adults (teachers and youth workers) to



communicate the value of the young person's engaging in social action. We also heard young people talk about the negative connotations of their being targeted as “disadvantaged” or “marginalised”, suggesting that future programmes adopt more of an asset-based outlook and a deploy a more positive vocabulary.

- Ensuring the participation of young people with lived experience of the challenges which their peers and communities face can bring added value, authenticity, and purpose to Youth Social Action. However, it also reinforces the importance of programme leads and delivery organisations having access, or signposting, to additional wrap-around support and for young people who may have experienced trauma to feel safe and confident in discussing challenges and identifying potential solutions.

## Focusing on the double and triple benefit

*We aim to enable young Londoners to connect, collaborate, and create solutions to key challenges facing their communities and the city as a whole; ensuring the triple benefit of investing in effective youth social action for individuals, organisations, and places.*

- Proponents of Youth Social Action tend to cite the “double benefit” which can accrue from projects' delivering two sets of outcomes – for the young people who take part, as well as for communities, either places or interest groups, in which young people become active. An additional aspect of double benefit from the GLA's programmes has been the training and deployment of young people as paid peer researchers. This enabled us to listen to young voices which our evaluators may not otherwise have heard, and the peer researchers to acquire new tools, skills, and work experience.
- The GLA's Youth Social Action programmes have sought a “triple benefit”; by investing in a range of different community organisations and education settings, the programmes aim also to secure a legacy in the form of an infrastructure to support and sustain youth social action across London.
- The ambition of securing a triple benefit is highly dependent on the GLA's lead partners' (London Youth and Family Action; Volunteering Matters and Big Ideas) building the capacity, resources, and connectivity of their respective networks of delivery organisations, and for the latter to have the time and space in the course of delivering the programme to embed their learning.

## Aligning with Mayoral and manifesto priorities



*We aim to ensure our work remains politically relevant and meets the Mayor's agenda.*

From outside the GLA, it might appear straightforward for the Civil Society and Sport Team to identify and align its youth social action programmes with several Mayoral priorities. A mapping exercise undertaken by the Team focused on the following core policy areas and the relevant directorates' related programme activity:

- Skills and Employment
- MOPAC and the VRU
- Children and Young Londoners
- Environment and Public Health

The GLA's internal mapping, which was the subject of an interim learning paper, demonstrated where there are considerable crossovers and complementary agendas. However, with different teams seemingly preoccupied with their own programmes, there were only a few examples of practical collaboration,<sup>3</sup> joint convening and shared learning. These could have provided considerably more impetus to the Team's goal of creating a movement of empowered young Londoners to shape a future for the capital which is more sustainable, inclusive, and safe for all. This final evaluation has reflected on how, in future, the GLA collectively can best support youth social action in London. This will require a stronger alignment of different programmes which are contributing to the same Mayoral priorities and statutory responsibilities, as well as using the full resources of the GLA as an anchor institution, and not just its grant funding, in order to maximise the delivery and value of social outcomes.

### 3.2 The four Ps – partnership, people, projects, and place

The four Ps are critical elements in the design and delivery of Youth Social Action programmes. The following sections explore how each of these featured in the current programmes, and the extent to which they enabled their success.

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<sup>3</sup> The Civil Society and Sport Team secured additional funding contributions in the shape of £104,000 for Young Ambassadors' Champion Mental Health work and over £200,000 for Trees for London linked to Young Ambassador schools

Figure 3: The 4 Ps and their interdependency



### Partnership

Across the programmes, two examples of partnership working were particularly critical to success:

- Partnerships between funders and delivery partners
- Opportunities for collaboration and learning between delivery partners

Programme partners praised the GLA's support, flexibility and understanding of youth service delivery which helped project leads navigate several challenges. Within HeadStart Action this included being agile, responding to emerging needs and flexing the mentoring definition to include models which supported a greater number of young people, and allowing Family Action to diverge from a highly structured approach to employability sessions which was detrimental to attendance. Within Young Ambassadors, Volunteering Matters were enabled to deliver over the summer despite the initial focus on in-school, term-time delivery.

*"[Through the summer programme] we were reaching out to young people that would technically come under the specification of the programme, but for various reasons are not in school."*



Delivery partners also appreciated the space for collaboration and learning. Communities of practice, which brought together HeadStart Action partners, provided opportunities to share learning. Partners also highlighted the benefit of an external evaluator which encouraged and embedded processes of reflection while supporting the administration of monitoring tools and evaluation frameworks.

*"[Having a third-party evaluator] has allowed us all to take a step back and look at what we're doing and I think that's a really important part of any of these kind of programmes . . . that wouldn't have happened if there hadn't been a third-party to do that."*

HeadStart Action delivery lead



### Blockers

- There were some instances when GLA inflexibility was detrimental to delivery and quality. The delay starting HeadStart Action did not lead to a commensurate change in targets; lead partners and delivery organisations felt the quality of outcomes were compromised by their need to deliver to large cohorts of young people, reducing opportunity to build close relationships.
- Programme timelines were not initially aligned with school terms and lacked buffer periods. This made it a challenge to fit programmes around school structures.
- There was limited opportunity for programme leads to come together across all three GLA youth social action programmes which would have given more credence to the notion of being part of a London youth social action movement.
- The time commitment for working with an external evaluator was not built into contracts, creating additional demand and pressure on organisational capacity.



## Fixes



- Changes to project timelines should be reflected by recalibrating target outputs.
- The GLA should convene sounding boards of teachers, youth work practitioners and young people to consult these groups on programme design and anticipate what challenges may arise.
- The GLA should create dedicated time and space for lead delivery partners on different programmes to come together, network and share learnings.
- If an external evaluator is commissioned on a programme, the expected time commitment required from lead delivery partners to engage with them should be built into the contract .

## People

Skilled and passionate people lie at the heart of programme success. The following aspects were particularly important factors across the three youth social action programmes:

- Motivated individuals.
- Creating opportunities for collaboration.
- Staff consistency.

Motivated individuals were at the heart of programme delivery with young people and a key enabler for ensuring success. Several teachers on Young Ambassadors praised the energy, empathy and approachability of the programme's facilitators, and said they were key to getting young people not only engaging with the programme but also with the wider themes.

*"It's been really lovely to see so many of our young people who often don't engage in group discussions now engaging in them and interacting with each other in social areas. That for us is really special."*

School teacher, Young Ambassadors

Collaboration and relationship building happened at various levels and to different degrees. Within HeadStart Action, the Community of Practice events gave delivery organisations' staff the chance to come together and learn from each other. Some organisations, such as The Wickers and Oxygen, forged bi-lateral relationships which enabled the continuation of learning from each other's expertise and practice.

HeadStart Action benefited also from collaboration at a programme level. The commissioning design meant the two lead delivery partners, London Youth and Family Action, worked closely to ensure participants benefited as much from the social action as the employability support elements of the programme. Each organisation had one key member of staff who remained in post for the duration of the programme; this level of consistency enabled them to develop a strong working relationship and tackle challenges and problems as they arose. Likewise teachers on the Young Ambassadors programme also praised the consistency of the staff they worked with, especially when it came to communication.

*“The partnership with Family Action has been absolutely incredible – it’s been programme saving. The two organisations coming together and co-delivering shows [the joint delivery design] can work.”*

HeadStart Action delivery lead

*“The communication back and forth [with Volunteering Matters] went very well.”*

School teacher, Young Ambassadors



### Blockers

- The short-term nature of funding, the extent to which individuals are stretched, and the uncertainty around future contracts often leads people to burnout or move-on before projects finish. Within HeadStart Action three team members left over the course of the programme, taking with them key knowledge and relationships.



## Fixes



- Invest in resources and well-being support for third sector delivery partners.
- Prioritise long-term funding.
- Support and signpost commissioned groups so they can identify and bid for future funding opportunities well in advance of contract end dates.
- Collaborate with internal GLA stakeholders (and other London funders) to secure continued funding for delivery locations.
- Develop a better understanding of the relationships and priorities within localities and existing local networks. This ongoing 'relational' approach should be funded and measured to ensure a place-based approach to delivery.

## Projects

The three differently focused youth social action programmes have each supported a wide range of individual projects. Factors which were key to their success in activating young people include:

- Providing fun, inclusive and interactive activities.
- Building on existing bonds and trusts between young people, practitioners and school staff.
- Ensuring projects were relevant to young people's motivations and ambitions.

Creating fun environments ensured young people remained engaged in projects and were therefore more likely to secure positive outcomes. This was particularly the case in schools. Those who participated in Young Ambassadors identified the break from "typical" school work helped engage young people in delivery. Building conversations about social action around other activities such as sport, art or baking, proved particularly rewarding.

*"They were so positive. Sometimes presenters can be quite dry, but I loved that [Young Ambassadors] was fun. It has to be interactive."*

School teacher, Young Ambassadors

HeadStart Action successfully leveraged pre-existing relationships between practitioners and participants to support their journey through the programme. Running the programme via youth

clubs kept young people engaged; as did instances when students had pre-existing relationships with teachers. These relationships facilitated several positive impacts (see Chapter 4).



*“This has shown that this is a good way of bringing programmes like this to [the target demographics] who otherwise wouldn't engage in something like this, because there's that person there who they already know and trust. I think if you tried to do it without community partners, you just wouldn't get the level of engagement.”*

HeadStart Action lead delivery partner

Making social action tangible and relevant for young people was essential. One Young Ambassador said examples of other young changemakers, such as the education activist, Malala Yousafzai (see Chapter 4.1), inspired pupils, while other practitioners and teachers found building social action projects around local issues was key to sustaining young people's engagement and developing their sense of community.



### Blockers

- When youth organisations are required to recruit from outside their existing cohort projects lose the value and benefit which pre-existing relationships bring.
- Despite decades of delivery there is no uniform understanding of 'youth social action' or approach to educating teachers or practitioners about it; many practitioners and teachers had not come across it before engaging in the GLA programmes. This led to variation in what a 'successful' project looked like with some focused more on volunteering and fundraising than genuine social action focusing on young people as agents of change. This was further driven by the lack of alignment across the three programmes, with groups commissioning social action training from different providers.



## Fixes



- Ensure delivery sites have a thorough understanding of their existing cohort prior to commissioning so they do not need to recruit outside of this to reach delivery targets.
- Provide space and resources for standardised training on the meaning and definition of youth social action. This can be framed around the #iwill principles and commissioned externally but must include practical examples which are tangible for school and youth organisation staff.
- Build in time between commissioning cycles so projects can be built on previous learning and feedback to ensure designs are aligned with best practice.
- Align projects and outcomes with the Ofsted framework's personal development area and create greater links to school curriculum.

## Place

HeadStart Action, Young Ambassadors and My London have all, to varying degrees, taken a place-based approach in their design and delivery of youth social action projects:

- Young people identifying with a particular place – ie one or more of London's 32 boroughs, 150 district centres or a specific neighbourhood - helps instil a sense of community belonging and social responsibility.
- Participants are better able to focus on issues which they witness and in many cases experience first-hand on a day-to-day basis where they live or go to school, such as rough sleeping, local environmental degradation, or food poverty.
- Teachers and practitioners spoke of how a place focus helped to engage young people and sustain their participation by ensuring projects were relevant and delivered tangible outcomes.

Towns and cities outside London have recognised the potential of taking a place-based approach to coordinate and amplify youth social action. Other directly-elected Mayors – for example in Greater Manchester and Bristol – have championed social action programmes as a vehicle to engage young people and cultivate a sense of pride in their cities. In some respects, we are coming full circle as it was a Mayoral initiative in New York City in the early 2000s which gave birth to idea of "Cities of Service" concept and became the genesis for the GLA's Team London.



## Case study: Ipswich Social Mobility Alliance

Each of London's 32 boroughs has a population considerably larger than the size of Ipswich (140k) which was the original place-based pilot for **Volunteering Matters**. The town has poor social mobility; heavily Remain voting, it has a diverse population and is a hot bed of social action. Lacking a collective narrative, 35 organisations come together (Suffolk County and Ipswich Borough Councils; the Business Improvement District; Ipswich Town FC; university; cultural institutions etc.) in a "meeting of allies" to link the animation of youth social action to [Ipswich's 25-year strategy](#) for tackling social mobility.



### Blockers

- The place-based models of galvanising youth social action raise questions about their transferability to London. What is the optimum size and right identity with place in the capital?
- Youth organisations and schools are often unaware of other initiatives and programmes operating in their areas and lack the capacity to explore these. This undermines collaborative approaches to sharing resources and expertise.



### Fixes

- Exploit the opportunity to piggyback youth social action on emerging place-based infrastructure and networks, including London's Business Improvement Districts; the GLA-supported [London Anchor Institutions Network](#) and the growing awareness of corporate anchors (supermarkets like the Co-Op and big retailers like John Lewis).
- Recognise the importance of arts and culture as vehicles/media for activating places and young people's voices within local communities, including GLA initiatives like London Borough of Culture and Culture Seeds; the Arts Council is heavily involved in the partnership in Ipswich.

## 3.3 The GLA's pillars

Building on the foundations of its Youth Programme Strategy, the GLA identified the following pillars as integral to the delivery of effective social action initiatives. The evaluation has examined each of these to assess the extent to which the GLA's co-investment in three programmes, 2022-24, has

contributed to supporting a sustainable Youth Social Action infrastructure and the basis of a movement of empowered young Londoners.



Figure 4: The four pillars



### Amplifying youth voice

Several mechanisms within HeadStart Action and Young Ambassadors enabled the amplification of youth voice:

- Creating safe spaces for young people to express their ideas and feed into project design
- Providing platforms for young people to speak with stakeholders and policy makers
- Creating legacy infrastructure within schools and community organisations

Teachers, youth workers and practitioners said youth social action allowed young people to explore issues of interest. Creating safe spaces for young people to talk freely about any given topic was a key element. This was particularly effective in school settings where pupils valued the opportunity to explore and discuss non-school-related topics. Practitioners highlighted that engaging young people in social action conversations was challenging initially; for many it was the first time they were asked about their thoughts on society, however young people grew in confidence as projects progressed.



*“They struggled with it because they never even had the opportunity to think, wow, what would I do? What would I change? I think that enables the success of the programme because it then leads to so many amazing project ideas that arise from [those conversations].”*

Young Ambassador delivery lead

### Case study: Letters to London

The Letters to London strand of Young Ambassadors gave more than 5,000 young people the chance to write directly to the GLA and the Mayor about an issue close to them and asking for a small grant to help tackle it. School pupils received a 45 minute digital workshop on writing letters delivered by Big Ideas and subsequently sent these letters to City Hall. Each school that took part received a £400 grant to work towards a chosen issue, and nine young people received a direct, personal response from the Mayor.

Putting young people in front of policy makers was another facet flagged by delivery partners. This included demonstrating social action projects to GLA staff, pitching social action ideas to business CEOs, and [being invited to City Hall](#). Teachers and youth workers said the GLA’s clout and connections created platforms which impacted the young people involved (see Chapter 4).

*“The GLA creating an audience is so powerful. I hope there are more opportunities like this as the programme continues. For some students it can be life changing.”*

Young Ambassadors teacher

*“The young people want their voice to be heard, they’ve put 16 hours in, and to have people come who might make a difference it gives them a sense of purpose. That’s when you make an impact.”*

HeadStart Action practitioner

The youth social action programmes have also encouraged delivery partners to invest in youth voice infrastructure which will remain in place once the GLA-funded projects end.



## Case study: New roles for students

Eltham Hill school pupils wrote Letters to London as part of Young Ambassadors. Pupils received training on letter writing and then wrote short letters to the Mayor about an issue in their community and a request for a small grant to address it. Since Young Ambassadors, the school has developed permanent youth voice roles for pupils.



*“The programme was a good springboard for going on to thinking “we can do this on”. We’ve developed new leadership roles– school shop leaders, equality champions, and kindness champions.”*

## Case study: Social action youth panel



Gloves not Gunz joined HeadStart Action bringing experience of working with cohorts of NEET or nearly NEET young people. The organisation is integrating social action into the work of its youth panel because of its HSA engagement.

*“We’re going to try and run a social action project every quarter that the young people will decide themselves and help steer.”*



### Strengthening the pillar

Several building blocks would strengthen the amplifying youth voice pillar:

- Improve the GLA’s **visibility** – The GLA’s presence at events had a motivational impact on the young people present but only a small proportion of participants engaged directly with the GLA.
- Increase the GLA’s **accessibility** – Events and project visits were largely limited to weekdays, working hours, and City Hall. Hosting other events would increase the numbers able to attend.
- Enhance young people’s political **literacy** – The GLA can better mobilise its assets to help educate young people, practitioners, and teachers on political workings, focusing on young people’s engagement with politics, which would better direct social action projects.
- Ensure the **sustainability** of youth voice – There is a lack of GLA coordination in developing approaches to embedding youth voice. Resources and training for schools and organisations to establish young people boards and roles would develop sustainable youth voice infrastructure.

## Convening and influencing



The Civil Society and Sports Team used the GLA's influence and convening power to support the development of the HeadStart Action, Young Ambassadors and My London programmes, including:

- Convening spaces for youth organisations to come together and learn
- Networking across the GLA family to unlock further opportunities for commissioned projects
- Building on the pre-existing appetite for learning among the programmes' delivery partners

The nature of HeadStart Action and My London gave space for youth practitioners from different organisations to come together, collaborate on projects, and share learnings. Organisations delivering HeadStart Action said they found the Communities of Practice useful for understanding different approaches to the three core elements of the programme: social action, mentoring and employability.

*"I was so stuck with mentoring. We deliver music mentoring we just never really called it that before. [The other organisations] said you do mentoring everyday. [That made me realise], oh I can call that mentoring."*

HeadStart Action delivery organisation

The GLA programme lead for Young Ambassadors worked internally to secure additional funding opportunities for schools to deliver follow-up projects related to the environment and mental health. This helped maintain the momentum of social action in those schools, where it is often challenging to retain engagement after a project's funding comes to an end.



## Strengthening the pillar



There are three levels at which the GLA could convene further to strengthen the sector:

- Convening at a **policy level** – There are several regional and national bodies delivering youth social action across London, but there is little coordination of their work. Convening this group would help identify cold spots, promote collaboration, and help to share learning of what works.
- Convening at a **programme level** – Future programmes should build on the Community of Practice format built into HeadStart Action and include consultation periods to ensure topics covered are relevant and useful to attendees.
- Convening at an **internal level** – There are considerable opportunities for the youth social action team to link with and build upon other GLA programmes, however this currently lacks coherence and strategic coordination. For example, Family Action were not given access to the GLA’s business unit despite their requirement to recruit employers for employability activity.

## Resourcing and funding

The three programmes deployed different models of commissioning and funding. HeadStart Action, Young Ambassadors and My London all secured matched funding from #iwill. HeadStart Action commissioned two partners separately but with the expectation of their working together in order to connect youth social action projects (London Youth) with employability skills development and outcomes (Family Action). My London followed a “Design Lab” approach in which the GLA invited partnerships of 5 civil society organisations from three pairs of boroughs to spend time designing their respective My London programmes, but with minimal prescription or specification from the funder.

Young Ambassadors commissioned two delivery partners to deliver two parallel programme strands, one running in primary schools (Big Ideas) and the other in Alternative Provision and SEND schools (Volunteering Matters). From these different funding models, we identified:

- Challenges associated with the commissioning process within HeadStart Action
- The potential for greater application of data, such as 360 Giving, to map and identify youth social action being delivered by different funders across London. This can build on the work already underway at the GLA working with London Youth, NCS, Local Authority Leads and other teams mapping resources and programmes across London to share learning and distribute resources more effectively.



The commissioning process within HeadStart Action proved challenging for both lead delivery partners. The previous evaluation recommended splitting the social action and employability elements due to capacity and resourcing challenges faced in the previous iteration. While this iteration's lead delivery partners agreed the split was the correct decision, they said the commissioning structure created obstacles to delivering a seamless programme.

The partners bid for the two strands of the work without a view of what the other lead delivery partner's offer looked like, and therefore spent considerable time at the project inception stage understanding where responsibility lay in the different elements and how they would align processes. Family Action initially had no access to young people's data, and this created issues throughout the programme. Without knowing young people's ages Family Action prepared work experience opportunities which became redundant due to the young cohort.

*“Managing the contract really did affect the quality of the programme. There wasn't enough integration time so there was no opportunity for co-design in terms of how it would come together.”*

London Youth

*“Data protection problems went on for months. [The Family Action team] had to try and mitigate and manage that as best they could within the framework without actually being able to change the framework.”*

Family Action

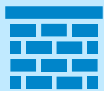
We spoke to 360 Giving about the potential of using GrantNav, an open data source of grant funding, to investigate and understand better the level and distribution of youth social action funding in London. Two alternative approaches could each produce more detailed information on the current funding of youth social action in the capital:

1. A 'bottom up' approach looking at the level of funding going to each of the 15 HeadStart Action projects - this would involve running a query for each of the HeadStart Action partners in the **Recipients** field of the [GrantNav database](#). As well as giving an understanding of the total level of funding for each of the projects, it would help identify funders operating in the space of youth social action.

2. A 'top down' approach looking at funding programmes supporting youth social action, which can be done by using searches on **Titles & Descriptions** for awards in London on GrantNav. There will be overlap, but including 'young people' instead of 'youth' will provide additional results:

- [youth+AND+social+action](#)
- [young+people+AND+social+action](#)

The latter approach is more straightforward and less time consuming to undertake. However, a couple of initial searches also quickly reveal the limitation of the data currently uploaded and held on 360 Giving. Key funders of youth social action in London, including both the Department of Digital Culture Media and Sport (funding the National Citizen Service in the capital) and the National Lottery Community Fund (grant funding #iwill) fail to provide any breakdown of their main awards to allow for meaningful analysis of where this funding is ending up, or whom it is benefiting. We recommend that the GLA uses its influence, citing its own submissions of the requisite detail of funding data to 360 Giving, in order to put pressure on its partners to follow its lead.



### Strengthening the pillar

Based on the above we recommend the following in future commissioning:

- When commissioning multiple partners to deliver a programme, clearly set-out their different roles and responsibilities for meeting particular requirements, such as data sharing, and provide a considerable buffer period to allow them to align processes before they are expected to begin delivery.
- Continue to develop the work underway with NCS, Local Authority Leads, 360 Giving and wider GLA teams on the funding of youth social action; building insight across programmes, identifying areas for resourcing and co-development, and collaboration on impact measurement.

## Developing Young Londoners

Two aspects to the pillar of developing young Londoners were present in all three youth social action programmes:

- Programme reach
- Providing wrap-around support



The three programmes reached a significant number of young people, and the development of relationships and networks were critical to achieving this. London Youth recruited organisations within their existing membership network to deliver the HeadStart Action programme, while Volunteering Matters spent a substantial amount of time building new relationships with schools owing to their lacking a previous footprint in London. This infrastructure helped the programme partners to manage ongoing delivery, support the recruitment of young people, and share other funding opportunities which sites could access. The two approaches offered different benefits and challenges:

**Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of recruitment approaches**

Network	Advantages	Disadvantages
Pre-existing membership network	Time efficient due to existing relationships and contact details	Organisations not within the network are 'locked out' of the programme, even if the young people they engage align with programme targets
New network	The net can be 'cast wide' to recruit organisations/ schools without being constrained to existing networks or relationships	It is a time and resource intensive process. Additionally, without a membership infrastructure in place relationships are built on a person-to-person basis, which can fall apart if an individual moves on.

*"We find that teaching staff moves on so quick. The delivery team goes into a school, and they speak to the teaching staff, take them through what the expectations are and what the programme is about... and then by the next week they are no longer there."*

Young Ambassadors lead delivery partner

The mentoring provided through HeadStart Action helped many young people navigate issues in their own lives, including experiences of poverty and racism. Delivery partners and organisations referenced the complex lives of the young people with whom they worked, observing that helping them to navigate personal challenges enabled young people to engage in community projects. This provided young people with support to tackle their own challenges while drawing on their lived experiences within their social action projects.

*"If the team just went in and asked, "If you were the Mayor of London, what would you change?", the young people would be like, "Why are you even asking that when I don't have anywhere to sleep or I don't have anything to eat?"*

Young Ambassador's delivery partner

Several HeadStart Action organisations praised the Mentoring Quality Framework and capacity building and established more formal mentoring opportunities as a result. The majority also said it improved their mentoring offer (see Figure 5). Mentors and trusted adults played a key role in supporting two young people from HeadStart Action and Young Ambassadors to join the evaluation team as peer researchers, overseen by Partnership for Young London. This opportunity provided a range of experiences and development opportunities (see case studies below).

*"We want the mentoring to be part of the organisation and to become masters at that. Maybe young people can also become mentors help out and relate to [others]."*

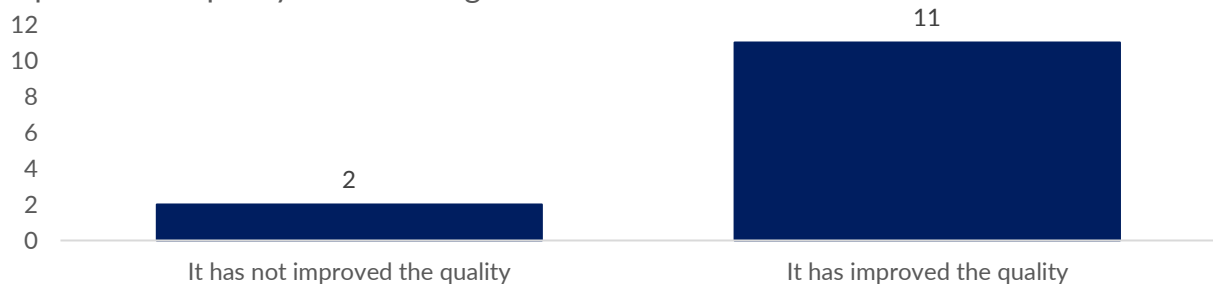
HeadStart Action delivery organisation

*"You have to work with their realities. Each coach needs to be consistent in attendance, to see how they can support them in school and outside of it. It's a lot of work to do."*

HeadStart Action delivery organisation

**Figure 5: MQF impact on quality of mentoring**

11 of 13 HeadStart Action staff members who used MQF said it improved the quality of mentoring



Source: Survey of 18 youth practitioners who delivered HeadStart Action



## Strengthening the pillar



Programmes like HeadStart Action and Young Ambassadors which target more disadvantaged young Londoners invariably require more wrap around support to enable participants to engage:

- **Recognise** the complexity of young people's lives – under-served young people face considerable challenges and additional barriers to participation in youth social action. Pre-onboarding and wrap-around support has been shown to enable their engagement.
- Build **capacity** in delivery organisations – The majority of HeadStart Action organisations which used the MQF said it improved the quality of their mentoring. However, several said they would appreciate continued support after completing the MQF in order to continue developing and sustaining their offers by engaging with networks of similar complementary organisations.
- Formalising and including peer research requirements during **commissioning** – Peer research is a powerful tool which provides young people with a range of skills. This also complements and reinforces one of the programmes' core foundations of evaluation and continuous improvement.

## Case study: Oscar's peer research journey

### ON-BOARDING AS A PEER RESEARCHER

Oscar was part of the enhanced young ambassadors programme in his school and his mentor encouraged him to apply to the peer research role. Oscar was then trained in peer-research and created a Mentimeter.

MAY 2023

JUNE 2023

### YSA EVENT

Oscar collected data at the Young People & Communities Conference through interviews and a mentimeter. This was also an opportunity for him to network with others.

### JOINED GLA PEER OUTREACH TEAM

Oscar was offered a number of opportunities after attending the conference, including a position on the Mayor of London's Peer Outreach Team as a youth representative.

Oscar had always wanted to pursue a career in the political sector, but was unsure of possible pathways. The peer research role provided access to a new network and different pathways into the sector.

JULY 2023

SEP 2023

### INSIGHT DAYS

Oscar attended HeadStart Action employability insight days as a peer researcher to collect data. This opportunity developed analysis skills and provided new experiences of work environments.

### HOSTED YOUTH EVENT

Oscar helped organise an event centred on empowering youth voice.

He continues to engage in other forms of social action and community development.

JAN 2024

## Case study: Nasir's peer research journey

### ON-BOARDING AS A PEER RESEARCHER

Nasir joined as a peer-researcher as he wanted to develop his confidence.

MAY 2023

He was also encourage to apply by his mentor at Westminster Tigers.

JUNE 2023

### YSA EVENT

Nasir developed interview questions as a part of his training conducted interviews at the Young People & Communities Conference.

He also networked and presented his work.

### INSIGHT DAYS

Nasir attended a HeadStart Action insight day to collect data. His previous experience of insight days enabled him to also take on a mentor role and support the new cohort.

SEP 2023

NOV 2023

### SECURED EMPLOYMENT

Nasir secured a paid role as a youth football coach in his local area. He attributed an increase in confidence that helped find and secure work to the employability sessions that he took part in as part of HeadStart Action.

Nasir also joined the Middlesex FA youth council, combining his personal interests with other forms of youth action.

### HOSTED YOUTH EVENT

Nasir participated in organising a cross-sector youth event focused on empowering youth voice.

He continues to engage in other forms of social action and community development.

JAN 2024

## 4. Programme outcomes and impact



The GLA set out four aims for its investment in Youth Social Action. The evaluation has drawn on evidence from the programmes' stakeholders, partners and participants to determine the extent to which each of these have been realised:

1. Encouraging active community citizenship
2. Tackling inequity and environmental issues
3. Creating safe spaces and improving wellbeing
4. Promoting social mobility

### 4.1 Encouraging active community citizenship

*“Our aim is to promote youth social action and encourage active community citizenship among young Londoners, with the goal of building stronger, more cohesive communities. We also seek to empower young people by educating them about the issues that affect their communities and providing opportunities to make a positive impact. Through these efforts, we aim to encourage active citizenship, democratic engagement, and inclusive community-building for a more resilient and equitable society.”*

Taking part in youth social action fostered **social awareness and responsibility** among young people, encouraging them to better understand the different ways in which they could affect social change in their communities. This was particularly notable in the programmes' targeting of young people with special educational needs (SEND) and those in Alternative Provision (AP). Teachers and youth workers said youth social action programmes **expanded young people's perceptions about their own community** and the world beyond the school:

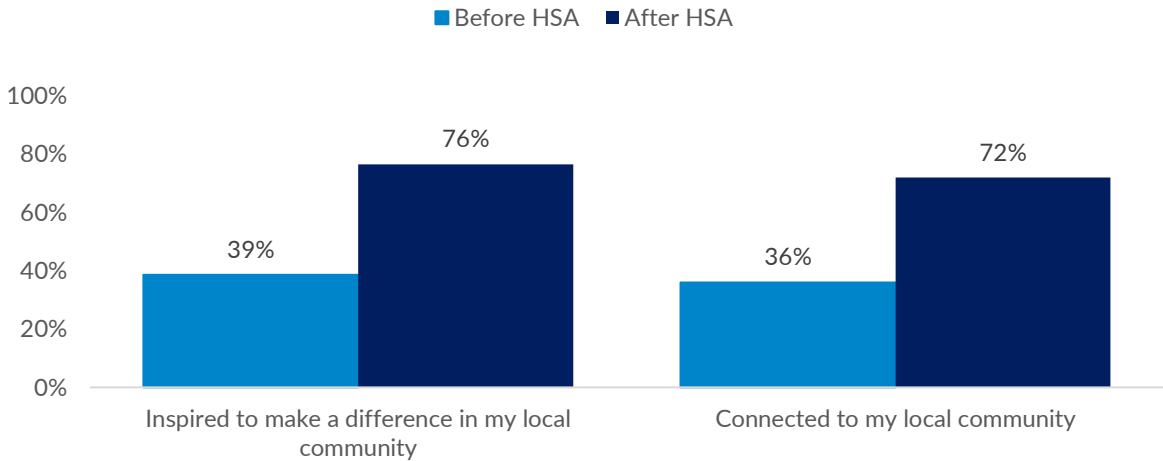
*“They start to have a stronger affiliation with local communities when they start to understand what communities mean. With worldwide concepts they don't necessarily see those changes and it's harder for them to identify with. But homelessness is something they see every day, on the way to school, on weekends and so they can identify and understand what it means.”*

Young Ambassador teacher

Figure 6: Perceptions of community before and after HeadStart Action



### HeadStart Action participants developed stronger bonds with their communities



Source: Survey of 329 young people who took part in HeadStart Action

A survey of 329 young people who participated in HeadStart Action found that providing opportunities for young people to engage in the local community cultivated a sense they could achieve change, whilst instilling them with a sense of social responsibility, empathy, and connection.

*“We looked at how old you had to be to make change and at inspirational characters throughout the world like Malala. They thought that you could only make meaningful change if you're an adult. But undertaking the workshops, they realised that anyone can make a change. It's about having that application and dedication in wanting to do it.”*

Young Ambassadors teacher

Youth social action also developed young people’s **critical thinking and problem-solving skills**, providing opportunities to think innovatively and creatively about how they address social issues and create positive change in their communities and schools. For example, young people from Osborne Eltham Hill school wanted to make the library more accessible to SEND students; another young person from St. Catherine’s Catholic School helped create a Black History programme study and integrate it in the school curriculum. Their initial involvement in community projects had a ripple effect, encouraging their activism at school and **influencing and inspiring their peers to get involved**. St Catherine’s is also now delivering a whole school approach to youth social action with a focus on poverty and mental health.



*“Successful highlights of our project were definitely in the event, we had a great turn up and we had a bunch of adults come up to us and commend us for this activity because there was something fun for the kids to do, they were able to do other activities which they wouldn't normally have. So we brought the community together and lot of young people and families were engaging with each other.”*

HeadStart Action participant

## Case study: Community citizenship in SEN school



Salma and Thomas both attend Garratt Park School, a special school for students with a wide range of educational needs. As part of their youth social action project, they created and helped distribute care packages for their local homeless community.

Both reported feeling more confident in helping others, and Salma said she felt more connected to the community. Teachers also commented that youth social action helped prepare pupils for life after school.

*“I felt like I was more connected to the person... that is less fortunate than me”*

Salma

*“It is important because it makes us think about other people who might be struggling. It makes us happy, improves our mental health, it's a life lesson.”*

Thomas

*“It started to get the young people to think about the local community. There's a world outside of the school, and eventually they are going to be part of it.”*

Teacher

## 4.2 Tackling inequity and environmental issues

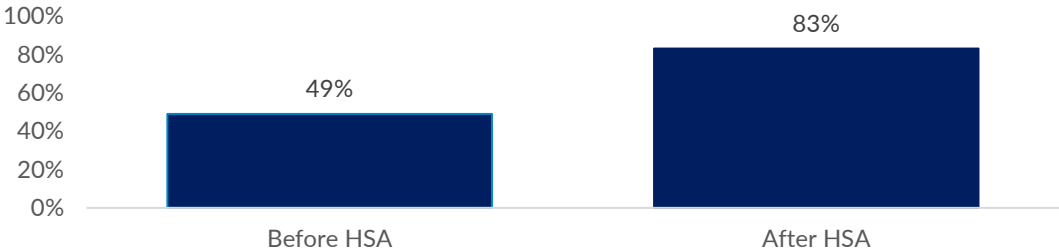
*“Our aim is to empower young Londoners to champion social equity and inclusion in their communities, become environmental stewards and drive positive change. We will equip them with the skills and knowledge to create platforms where their voices are heard to work towards a fairer, more equal society”*

Youth social action projects focused on diverse themes such as building stronger communities, improving mental health, advocating for racial justice and gender equality, and tackling poverty and

environmental issues (see Figures 8 and 9). Young people raised awareness of these themes within their school and local communities via presentations and celebration events, raised funds, and engaged in specific initiatives which addressed homelessness and rough sleeping. Young people felt considerably more confident and able to voice their opinions after participating in these activities (see Figure 7).

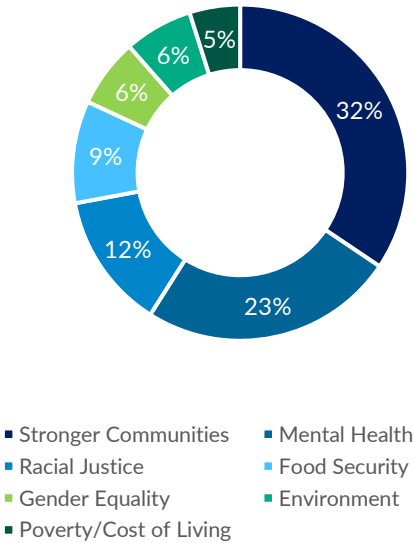
**Figure 7: HeadStart Action participant’s perception of their ability to voice their views and ideas**

HeadStart Action participants said they felt more able to voice their views, ideas and opinions following their involvement



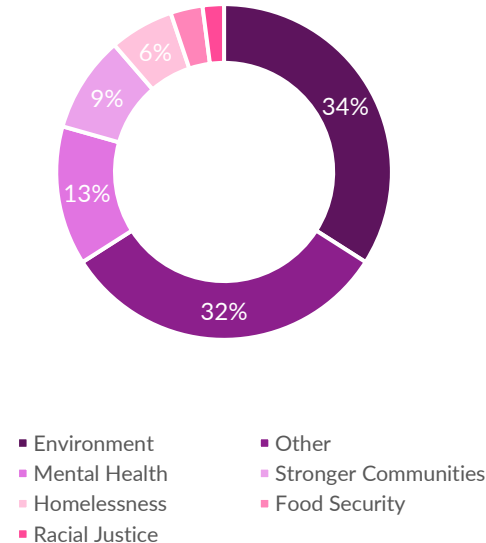
Source: Survey of 329 young people taking part in HeadStart Action

**Figure 8: HeadStart Action project themes**



Source: HeadStart Action monitoring data

**Figure 9: Young Ambassador project themes**



Source: Young Ambasadord monitoring data



Young people involved in Young Ambassadors at St. Catherine's Catholic School tackled environmental issues and local area improvements by expanding their vegetable cultivation efforts, distributing locally grown produce to the community, establishing plastic recycling schemes and building greenhouses out of recycled materials.

*"It empowered them to think they can actually do things. Many of those who took part were already eco warriors or anti-bullying mentors – but they are still a driving force for things in the school and brought people along with them. They made it cool to be involved in these things."*

Young Ambassadors teacher

Young people developed a strong sense of achievement through witnessing the direct outcomes of their social action projects. Staff said focusing on local, community issues, such as the prevalence of homelessness, gender inequality and the effects of climate change made social action **more relatable and easier to associate cause with effect.**

### Case study: Addressing lack of Black History in school curriculum



One Young Ambassadors' participant observed that Black history and culture were not celebrated or talked about in the school curriculum. Her initiative to address this gap involved assessing each school subject, devising a cross-curriculum study programme that included Black history, music and modern languages and lobbying the school leadership for change. The school recognised the value of the initiative and has now revised its curriculum.

*"She went off on her own, she decided we didn't celebrate Black history, so she measured every subject and put together a programme of study and did a curriculum of study for a week. She presented that in a head of department meeting, and it was approved off the back of that."*

Young Ambassadors teacher

### 4.3 Creating safe spaces and improving wellbeing

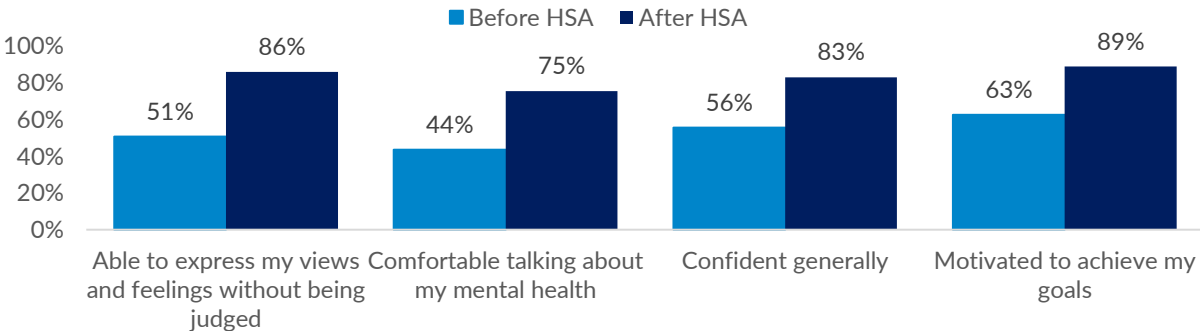


*“Our aim is to encourage young Londoners to take an active role in their communities and support their mental health and wellbeing, by creating safe spaces and engaging them in activities that contribute to building stronger, more connected communities, fostering a sense of purpose, achievement, belonging, and self-worth.”*

Young people said planned sessions and group activities contributed to increased confidence and self-esteem and enhanced mental and emotional wellbeing. They said participation also helped reduce shyness and nervousness in group settings. Young people who completed the HeadStart Action survey reported improvements in several wellbeing metrics (see Figure 10). These improvements were facilitated by the creation of safe spaces, where young people felt listened to by staff members and trusted adults who offered emotional support and an outlet for honest conversations.

**Figure 10: Wellbeing metrics before and after HeadStart Action participation**

HeadStart Action participants reported improvement in a number of wellbeing metrics



Source: Survey of 329 young people taking part in HeadStart Action

*“You’re welcomed with so much kindness, all of the staff have that innate sense of kindness, gratitude, they’re like your family, you feel comfortable to say stuff without being judged.”*

HeadStart Action participant

My London used the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) to track changes in young people's wellbeing. Participants felt slightly more optimistic about their future, were able to think more clearly, and felt more useful.

Teachers and youth workers said the programmes also represented a support network for young people. Trusted adults supported young people whilst offering them agency and this was regarded as an essential feature of the programme and its success among young people. It encouraged young people's personal growth while also challenging them to step outside of their comfort zone and develop their resilience and adaptability.

*"Everyone is supportive of me, they helped me to come out of my shell. It's helped me to meet more people just like me and grown my confidence."  
Young Ambassadors participant*

### Case study: Improved confidence and mental health



Beatrice joined the HeadStart Action programme through Streets of Growth. She has noticed significant improvements in her confidence which she attributed to taking part in social action activities and staff support. Since starting she has helped deliver the summer programmes and developed an understanding of the opportunities available to her.

*"I've built a lot of confidence within myself. I know I'm positive but not always, but I really enjoyed being able to help on the programme and for me it was like encouraging to be myself."*

## 4.4 Promoting social mobility

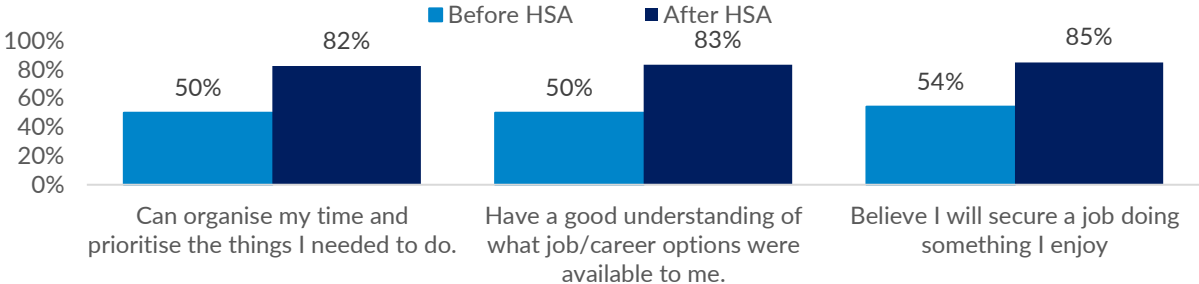
*"Our aim is to equip young Londoners with essential transferable skills, such as leadership, teamwork, and communication, that are in demand by employers and essential for the jobs of the future. By developing these skills, we will support Young Londoners in succeeding in education and employment, as well as encouraging them to engage in volunteering and social action activities."*

Young people were exposed to diverse experiences designed to equip them with the **tools needed to develop both their personal and professional skills**. Through HeadStart Action young people accessed work placements and help with CV writing, and subsequently reported an increase in their **determination and motivation**. Encounters with professionals and exposure to an office environment

via HeadStart Action insight days were seen as valuable rewards in themselves, and participants reported significant improvements in employability skills, knowledge, and aspirations (see Figure 11).

**Figure 9: Change in employment skills, understanding and aspiration before and after HeadStart Action**

HeadStart Action participants reported improvement in their employment skills, understanding and aspirations



Source: Survey of 329 young people taking part in HeadStart Action

*“You're obviously gonna do actual interviews, so [the mock interviews] gives you an insight into what type of questions they will ask and how to prepare for it.”*

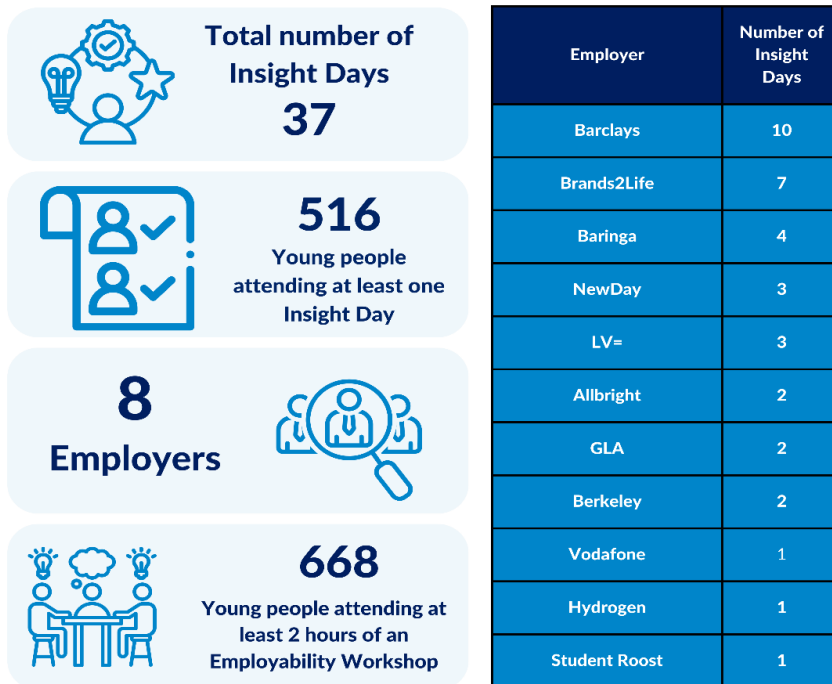
HeadStart Action participant

*“It will definitely have an impact on their future employability. For the young people who don't have networks and have not met employers, it really helps give them the confidence that they can do it.”*

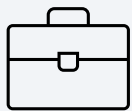
Employer



Figure 10: Insight day statistics



### Case study: Barclays Insight Day



Young people attending the Barclays insight day met employees, took part in icebreaker activities, sessions developing their inter-personal skills, and some mock interviews. Participants said the insight day developed their aptitude and confidence when speaking to employers. Receiving employers’ feedback on the mock interviews improved young people’s ability to present their thoughts concisely and identify areas of progress.

*“The biggest impact was the Barclays insight day. It’s helped us with our social skills, especially me. I feel more confident in approaching anyone that’s in the field of finance to find out more information.”*

*“This has helped me develop these skills. I’m more confident when approaching mentors and I’m more comfortable in the corporate environment. The mock interviews have helped me with feedback.”*


## 5. Recommendations



Throughout this evaluation we have identified different ways in which the GLA can continue to support the wider youth social action sector in London by building on and reinforcing the four pillars of its Youth Programme Strategy.

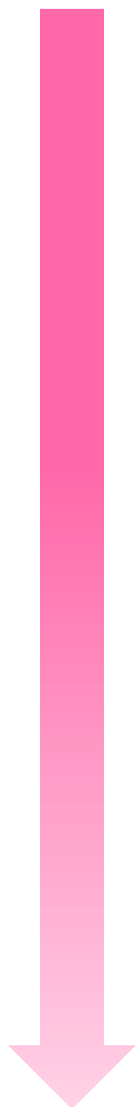
Highest priority

Convening and Influencing	Amplifying Youth Voice	Resourcing and Funding	Developing Young Londoners
Convene the regional and national bodies in order to agree a definition of youth social action across London; to collaborate on identifying cold spots, share data and learning, and provide additional support for funded groups and schools. This most include local authorities and London Councils which oversees and coordinates the boroughs' youth offers in the capital.	Provide resources and training to schools and organisations to help them establish sustainable youth voice infrastructure such as youth panels/boards and specified roles.	Create dedicated time and space for delivery partners on different programmes to come together in formalised and properly resourced 'communities of practice'.	Map the paid work experience opportunities available to young people within the GLA and ensure this information is promoted and made more easily accessible.
Develop a better understanding of localities, existing local networks, relationships and priorities to inform an ongoing place-based 'relational' approach which can be funded and measured.	Spend more time in front of young people in their places and spaces, such as schools and youth clubs, to give them an opportunity to present their ideas for change and engage directly with policymakers.	Convene a sounding board of teachers, youth-work practitioners and young people and consult these groups to co-design and test programmes and anticipate what challenges may arise.	Decouple the aim of "tackling inequality and environmental issues" to ensure both inequality and the environment are treated as the two distinct issues and challenges which they present.
Lobby internal teams and external partners to work with 360 Giving to input	Provide the space, resource, and expertise to educate teachers, practitioners, and	Build time into commissioned partners' contracts to cover engagement with external	Include pastoral support as part of youth social action programmes so young



<p>funding data. This would help identify and target cold-spots and sustain social action projects beyond the lifetime of their initial programme funding.</p>	<p>young people on London's government; who holds power, where and how to influence them.</p>	<p>evaluators when they are commissioned.</p>	<p>people are supported when drawing on lived experience of personal challenges to inform their projects</p>
<p>Dispense with negative language and deficit terminology such as "disadvantaged" and "marginalised"; invest in the development of an asset-based vocabulary for working with young people, and advocate for internal and external partners to use the same.</p>	<p>Feed into the ongoing review of peer research within the GLA, being conducted by the Community Engagement Team, to support the coordination and formalisation of a consistent GLA paid peer research offer.</p>	<p>Make the repository of social action tools and techniques created during this evaluation readily available to funded partners and more widely to youth social action practitioners</p>	<p>Continue to include employability skills and work experience opportunities within youth social action programmes. This requires careful consideration of those organisations best placed to deliver these; Business networks (eg ELBA) may be best placed to deliver work experience opportunities, while others deliver employability skills training</p>
<p>Convene internally to spotlight the youth social action team's programmes and identify other funding streams and GLA activities that could support commissioned organisations.</p>		<p>Collaborate with internal GLA stakeholders and other London funders to secure continued funding for delivery locations.</p>	<p>Engage the GLA's own young workforce as mentors for other young people interested in pathways into politics and civil society roles.</p>
<p>Convene events for young people away from City Hall (as well as within it) and in the evenings and at weekends to increase accessibility.</p>		<p>Recalibrate target outputs if programme timelines change.</p>	<p>Feed into the ongoing review of peer research within the GLA, being conducted by the Community Engagement Team, to support the coordination and</p>

Lowest priority



			formalisation of the GLA's paid peer research offer.
Work with other partners to align impact measurement so that data and insights from across social action projects can be measured more consistently and focused on tackling inequity		Support and signpost commissioned groups so they can identify and bid for future funding opportunities well in advance of contract end dates.	Investigate the potential of a London social action equivalent of Earthshot (with corporate sponsorship) to inspire young people's innovation and ideas.
Support partners (eg anchor organisations) to co-design and produce social action programmes which are better coordinated and embedded to complement community engagement, place-making and tackle local social and environment problems		Include consultation periods at the start of commissioned projects so groups can feed into programme design. This is especially important within programmes with multiple delivery partners and would provide opportunity to clarify roles and align processes.	
		Develop skills, expertise, and tools internally and externally to enable commissioned partners to collect outcomes aligned with the GLA team's Theory of Change alongside programme specific outputs.	
		Extend the data dashboard created within this evaluation to cover all GLA youth programmes which feature social action	

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