

# Youth Social Action in Education



#iwill



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

[hello@stepuptoserve.org.uk](mailto:hello@stepuptoserve.org.uk)

## What is the #iwill Campaign? ◀

Young people aren't just the leaders of tomorrow. They have the energy, skills and ideas to change society and the environment for the better today. Yet too often society fails to listen to young people's views or recognise their ability to make a positive difference. Young people from less affluent backgrounds are also less likely to take part in social action than their wealthier peers.

All young people should be supported and empowered to be active and engaged citizens. That's why the #iwill campaign, comprised of over 900 organisations from across the UK, aims to make participation in social action the norm for young people aged 10 to 20. Social action activities include volunteering, peer support, campaigning or fundraising.



When young people take part in social action, everyone benefits. Young people benefit because they build their skills, character and wellbeing. Communities do too, because they are healthier, more cohesive and better integrated.



# The Role of Schools in Supporting Youth Social Action ◀

## Education is the key route to participation

Great education leaders know that education is about more than grades. Schools and colleges prepare students for life in modern Britain. That means equipping them to be active citizens both today and in the future.

Most young people get involved in social action through schools and colleges<sup>1</sup>. When they do, the majority take part because they want to get involved, not because they have to. From stimulating peer tutoring in the classroom, to partnering with local organisations to help their students make an impact or creating whole school activities to improve the local community; schools and colleges can support a wide variety of social action.

## What do teachers think?

Over the last three years, more and more primary and secondary school teachers indicate that they see social action as part of their school's culture and practice. However, fewer than a quarter say that the majority of their students take part regularly. Primary school teachers are also less likely to say social action is embedded into their school's culture – just 48% of primary school teachers believe it is compared with 73% of secondary school teachers in 2018<sup>2</sup>.



## Young people from lower-income backgrounds are less likely to participate

When polled, teachers that work in schools with a high proportion of low-income young people are less likely to say social action is a part of their school's culture & practice than those who teach more affluent students. Many young people from low-income backgrounds are not accessing the wide range of benefits that participation in social action can provide<sup>3</sup>.

## How can schools and colleges support youth social action?

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting social action in a school or college. It's also often most effective when developed by and aimed at the unique needs of the local community. In 2016, 100 school and college leaders identified four key ingredients that enable schools and colleges to embed social action<sup>4</sup>:

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### 1. Prioritise youth social action

- Put social action at the heart of the school or college's strategy and values. From the senior leadership team to the individual students, social action is valuable in and of itself, but also supports other key priorities. This includes academic attainment, parental engagement, student destinations and meeting Ofsted criteria.

### 2. Offer leadership opportunities for young people to lead their own social action

- This requires teachers asking young people their opinions and harnessing their passions to inspire and empower them to lead.

### 3. Work together to build strong partnerships with local and national organisation

- This can involve working with other local schools, charities and employers to access opportunities for students make a real world impact with their social action

### 4. Recognise and celebrate social action

- This includes showcasing role models and recognising social action that takes place in or outside of the school or college.

# Why Should Schools and Colleges Embrace Youth Social Action? ◀

This section outlines the wide range of benefits to involving students in social action:



## Students feel more connected to their schools and colleges

Results from the 2018 National Youth Social Action Survey show that compared to young people who don't take part in social action, those who do are more likely to feel that they belong at their school; that their ideas are taken seriously; and that they have the opportunity to shape school plans and projects<sup>5</sup>.



## Young people experience greater well-being

Results from the National Youth Social Action Survey have consistently shown links between social action and higher levels of wellbeing<sup>6</sup>. Students who do social action also have stronger personal networks. A youth social action programme tested by the Behavioural Insights Team also found that the young people involved reported reduced anxiety by over a fifth<sup>7</sup>.



## It transforms young people's characters

In 2016, evaluation conducted by the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) of several social action programmes found that young people who participated in high-quality opportunities saw robust improvements in character qualities including empathy, cooperation, resilience and problem-solving<sup>8</sup>. Evaluations undertaken by the EEF of both the Children's University<sup>9</sup> and Youth United<sup>10</sup> also support these findings.

***“By being actively involved in activities which make a difference to other people has totally transformed my outlook on life. I am committed to stepping up and volunteering to serve others so that we have a world where we are respectful, tolerant and compassionate.”***

**Rhiannon, Year 6 student**



## They develop the skills employers want

When surveyed in 2014, 85% of employers said that they prioritised character & attitude over academic results<sup>11</sup>. A survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development also reported that 67% of employers say candidates with social action experience show better employability skills<sup>12</sup>. 81% of young people participating in meaningful social action believe it will help them get a job in the future<sup>13</sup>.

***“Employers and universities take note of volunteering because it demonstrates a student’s dedication and they know that they will have already developed many of the skills required for work and further study.”***

**Una O’Kane, Careers Adviser**



## Youth social action can improve attainment

Research by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) shows that peer to peer tutoring has a positive impact on learning, equal to approximately five months’ progress<sup>14</sup>.

Evaluation of the work of the Children’s University shows social action activities can also have a positive impact on maths and reading in KS2<sup>15</sup>. Research completed in the United States also reveals that when social action was integrated into the curriculum there was a significant improvement in academic performance<sup>16</sup>.

***“Research within the school has shown that those students who engage in social action tend to achieve at least 1.5 grades higher at GCSE. The requirement of maturity, good time-management, self esteem and confidence that are developed through engagement in social action programmes directly impact upon academic performance.”***

**Rob Newsome OBE, Retired Headteacher**

# Get Involved in the #iwill Campaign! ◀

- Pledge to the campaign to show your commitment to youth social action in education
- Review your organisation, school or college's current youth engagement. Use examples from other leaders in your sector to shape how you could embed youth social action into your organisation, school or college. For example, what role can young people play in your decision-making? Could you open up more opportunities to younger age groups?
- Showcase and share best practice examples from your organisation, school or college. Communicate the benefits of youth social action in education to your networks!

For more information visit [www.iwill.org.uk](http://www.iwill.org.uk)  
or e-mail [hello@stepuptoserve.org.uk](mailto:hello@stepuptoserve.org.uk).

## Endnotes

1. Ipsos MORI (2018) National Youth Social Action Survey
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3. Ibid
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12. CIPD & YouGov (2015) Learning to Work Survey
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# 2019

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