

#iwill

CHARACTER

Character is 'a set of personal traits that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct', and research with youth social action providers finds that **building character in young people** is a fundamental part of their work.¹ There is clear evidence that **social action has a positive impact on a young person's character**, detailed below, and some evidence showing that it has **an impact on beneficiary communities**. With increasing recognition of the importance of character preparing young people for life and work, further research is required to link character to longer-term outcomes for young people and assess which kinds of social action work best in building character.

IMPACT

Randomised control trials (RCTs)² of three social action providers found **significant impacts among participants** on a range of character strengths compared with control groups, such as:



The NCS 2014 Evaluation found across all programmes an improvement in participants' **confidence in leading and working with a team, meeting new people, getting along with people easily, and explaining their ideas clearly**.³

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE

Young people also recognise their own character development through social action:



84% of Duke of Edinburgh's Award participants said the Award **increased resilience and responsibility**.⁴



82-83% of Girlguides said their **confidence and leadership skills** increased.⁵



68% of volunteers in higher education **felt greater motivation and self-discipline** as a result of volunteering.⁶



74% of participants in London Youth's Get Ready programme reported **an average 26% positive change across all social and emotional capabilities**.⁷

GAPS IN THE RESEARCH

Further research in the following areas will help us to understand more about the link between character and youth social action:

- Whether/how the **6 principles of quality youth social action**⁸ lead to character outcomes. These principles are that social action is **embedded, progressive, youth-led, challenging, socially impactful and reflective**.
- Character's link to **longer-term outcomes** for young people.
- The use of standardised measures to determine 'what works': which kinds of social action have the greatest impact on character, in which contexts?



AMBASSADOR CASE STUDY



Alison Birch used to be quiet, but now she loves making her voice heard through social action. Involved in the NHS Shropshire Young Health Champions, she now celebrates the role of young people in decision-making processes. In doing so, not only has she improved local healthcare services in Shropshire, but she has gained a great deal of confidence. She believes her social action experiences have also developed character virtues such as citizenship, courage and problem-solving.

References

- ¹ Arthur, Harrison and Taylor. 2015. Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues. ['Building character through youth social action'](#).
- ² Kirkman, Sanders and Emanuel. 2015 Behavioral Insights Team. ['Evaluating Social Action, An Interim Report: Does Participating in Social Action Boost the Skills Young People Need to Succeed in Adult Life?'](#).
- ³ NCS, Ipsos MORI. [National Citizen Service 2014 Evaluation: Main report'](#).
- ⁴ Duke of Edinburgh's Award. 2010. PEARS Foundation. [The Impact of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award on Young People: A summary of research findings for stakeholders and local-decision makers.](#)
- ⁵ Girlguiding. 2013. 'Impact report 2012-2013'. [www.girlguiding.org.uk/pdf/ImpactReport2013.pdf](#) (accessed 3 Jul 2013).
- ⁶ Brevin, Russell and Holdsworth. 2010. vInspired and Institute for Volunteering Research. [Bursting the Bubble: Students, volunteering and the community](#) –Research Summary.
- ⁷ London Youth. 'Good Youth Work Works? Our learning from 2013/14' [londonyouth.org/about-us/resources/good-youth-work-works](#)
- ⁸ Cabinet Office, The Young Foundation and Institute of Voluntary Research [www.iwill.org.uk/about-us/principles](#)

Factsheet compiled by the #iwill Data and Quality Assurance steering group, and led by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham.