



YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION AND THE SOCIOECONOMIC GAP

Youth social action brings positive benefits to society as well as to the individual's employability, character and wellbeing. As such, the #iwill campaign aims to **make social action part of life** for as many 10-20 year olds in the UK as possible by 2020, by increasing the number of high quality opportunities available, by ensuring social action is inclusive, and by helping young people develop a habit of social action. There is a 'moral imperative to ensure the opportunities to take part are available to all young people'¹, yet **research suggests that participation in social action is unequal**, particularly in socioeconomic terms. This paper summarises some of this evidence and suggests where further research would shed more light on this important area.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION?

Research on behalf of the #iwill campaign shows that in 2014 and 2015 there was a significant socioeconomic gap in participation in youth social action^{2,3}. In 2015:

- **49%** of young people from the **most affluent** (AB) backgrounds participated.
- **38%** of young people from the **least affluent** (DE) backgrounds participated.

Further research corroborates these findings, and socioeconomic background is historically **one of the strongest influences** on whether or not young people and adults participate in social action.



Time use diaries from 2000 shows that 9% of children aged 8-15 from least affluent backgrounds volunteered formally compared to 20% of children from most affluent backgrounds⁴.



Evidence also indicates that teachers who feel their school embeds youth social action tend to be from schools with fewer students eligible for free school meals⁵.

The **socioeconomic difference in participation persists among university students**⁶ and into **adulthood**⁷. Evidence from the USA suggests this is also the case for young people⁸ and adults⁹ outside the UK.



WHY MIGHT THIS DIFFERENCE EXIST?

Some examples of barriers identified for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds include:

• **Financial** costs, such as the cost of travel to and from social action activities^{10,11}.



• **Lack of time** – a third of 10-20 year olds not participating in social action in 2015 said it was because they did not have time³; further research on how young people do spend their time would add insight to this finding.



• A **lack of social and cultural capital** – developed through their networks, religious practice, visiting the theatre or museums, and discussing books at home¹².



• **Lack of role models**: Young people whose parents are not involved in volunteering are less likely to participate themselves¹³ – and we know that socioeconomic differences in participation exist among adults, too.



• **'Hidden inequalities'** within social action projects, such as social norms around who is the 'helper' and who is 'helped', and in projects involving social mixing where the ideas of those from more elite backgrounds are privileged over those from less advantaged backgrounds¹⁴.



• **Negative expectations** and attitudes towards young people from less affluent backgrounds of staff and volunteers running social action opportunities¹⁵.



GAPS IN THE RESEARCH

It is difficult to assess the barriers to participation by asking young people why they don't participate: social action is often considered a form of altruistic behaviour, and therefore people may be reluctant to explain their honest reasons for not participating. Studies which are more in-depth, explore young people's participation holistically – taking into account structural as well as individual reasons for not participating – and which use longitudinal data (taking place over a period of time rather than providing a 'snapshot'), such as the [Millennium Cohort Study](#) and [Understanding Society](#), are more likely to uncover the reasons why this socioeconomic difference exists. Further research in these areas is needed to understand this in greater depth.

AMBASSADOR CASE STUDY



Deborah Mansell grew up in a village with many challenges, where most people are in a poor economic situation. She wanted to inspire people to change things for the better, so a few years ago, she decided to do her Silver & Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Awards. For the social action element of this, she helped run a kids' club for 8-12 year olds in her village, which was really rewarding. It got her into helping with a Venture summer camp and Girlguiding, where she's now a volunteer trainee leader for Brownies.

- ¹ Marandos, R. (2015) Rania Marandos, Deputy CEO of Step up to Serve: How the #iwill campaign can help to close the socio-economic gap. Accessed (Accessed: 5 April 2016) www.faireducation.org.uk/news-and-features/2015/11/30/rania-marandos-deputy-ceo-of-step-up-to-serve-how-the-iwill-campaign-can-help-to-close-the-socio-economic-gap.
- ² Ipsos MORI, Cabinet Office. (2014) Youth social action in the UK – 2014: A face-to-face survey of 10-20 year olds in the UK. Available at: www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Publications/sri-ecf-youth-social-action-in-the-uk-2014.pdf (Accessed: 1 December 2014).
- ³ Ipsos MORI. (2015) Youth Social Action in the UK – 2015: A face-to-face survey of 10-20 year olds in the UK. Available at: www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Publications/sri-youth-social-action-in-uk-2015.pdf (Accessed: 1 December 2015).
- ⁴ Sarre, S. and Taring, R. (2010) 'The volunteering activities of children aged 8- 15', Voluntary Sector Review, 1 (3), pp. 293-307. doi:10.1332/204080510X538301.
- ⁵ NFER. (2016) Step Up To Serve March 2016 Teacher Voice Omnibus results. Accessed at: www.nfer.ac.uk (Accessed: 20 April 2016)
- ⁶ Brewis, G., Russell, J. and Holdsworth, C., vInspired Students. (2010) Bursting the Bubble: Students, Volunteering and the Community - Full Report. Available at: www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/Institute-of-Volunteering-Research/Migrated-esources/Documents/B/NCCPE_Bursting_the_Bubble_Final_Report.pdf (Accessed: 20 May 2015).
- ⁷ Cabinet Office, TNS BMRB. (2013) Giving Time and Money Excel tables for the 'Community Life Survey'. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-life-survey-2012-to-2013-findings (Accessed: 7 December 2015).
- ⁸ Atkins, R. and Hart, D. (2003) 'Neighbourhood, adults, and the development of civic identity in urban youth', Applied Developmental Science, 7 (3), pp. 156-164. Available at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_6 (Accessed: 29 June 2015).
- ⁹ Musick, M. A. and Wilson, J. (2008) Volunteers: A Social Profile. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- ¹⁰ Mason, C., Cremin, H., Warwick, P. and Harrison, T., EngagEd. (2010) Building voice, civic action and learning: Variation in levels of civic engagement amongst young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Available at engaged.educ.cam.ac.uk/publications/Seminar%20%20Listening%20harder%20paper%20HC.pdf (Accessed: 24 July 2015).
- ¹¹ Roker, D., Player, K. and Coleman, J. (1999) 'Young People's Voluntary and Campaigning Activities as Sources of Political Education', Oxford Review of Education, 25 (1/2), pp. 185-198. doi:10.2307/1050708.
- ¹² Bennett, M. and Parameshwaran, M., Third Sector Research Centre. (2013) What factors predict volunteering among youths in the UK? Available at: www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/briefing-paper-102.pdf (Accessed: 20 November 2015).
- ¹³ Andolina, M. W., Jenkins, K., Zukin, C. and Keeter, S. (2003) 'Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement', Political Science & Politics, 36 (2), pp. 275-280.
- ¹⁴ Eliasoph, N. (2011) Making Volunteers: Civic Life after Welfare's End. Available at: site.ebrary.com/lib/bham/reader.action?docID=10449971 (Accessed: 23 November 2014).
- ¹⁵ Dean, J. (2014) 'Recruiting young volunteers in an area of selective education: a qualitative case study', British Journal of Sociology of Education, pp. 1-19. doi:10.1080/01425692.2014.973016.