

## The National Youth Social Action Survey 2017 - Executive Summary

Step Up To Serve and the Office for Civil Society<sup>1</sup> commissioned Ipsos MORI to run the 2016 wave of the National Youth Social Action Survey. The study has been running alongside the #iwill campaign. This campaign, launched in 2013, aims to close the socioeconomic gap in social action participation amongst 10 to 20 year olds whilst increasing overall participation from 40% to 60% by 2020. For the purposes of the campaign, social action is defined as 'practical action in the service of others to create positive change' and covers a wide range of activities that help other people or the environment, such as fundraising, campaigning, tutoring/mentoring and giving time to charity.

This research has run annually since 2014, and the intention is for it to continue to capture estimates of the proportion of the UK's 10-20 year olds participating in social action until 2020. The same methodology has been used throughout to allow comparisons over time. Ipsos MORI surveyed 2,082 10-20 year olds in their homes from 2-16 September 2016. Data are weighted by age within gender, region and the family socio-economic status to reflect the known profile of the UK population.

### Key findings



**42%** of 10-20 year olds took part in **meaningful social action** in 2016

The #iwill campaign aims not just to increase participation rates, but also to ensure young people have opportunities to participate in *high quality* social action. As such, the key participation measure used in this study is 'meaningful social action': this refers to young people having felt that both they and others derived some benefit from the social action activity, as well as having participated in social action at least every few months over the past 12 months, or taken part in a one-off activity lasting more than a day. **Overall rates of participation in social action among 10-20 year olds in the UK have been stable over the three years of the survey series: in 2016 42% had taken part in meaningful social action**, which is statistically unchanged from the 40% recorded in 2014. In line with findings in previous years, 42% of young people have not participated in any social action in the past year, and 31% say they have never done social action.

The profile of young people who participate in social action is largely consistent with previous surveys in this series. Girls are more likely than boys to have taken part in meaningful social action in the past 12 months, for example, and white young people are more likely than those from ethnic minority groups to report taking part<sup>2</sup>. However, there has been some change: **young people living in rural areas are significantly more likely to have participated in meaningful social action in 2016 than in 2014** (up from 36% to 47%); and young people from the least affluent families are also more likely to take part now (up from 31% to 40% of those in socio-economic groups DE). This means that, **although young people from the most affluent families are still significantly more likely than those from less affluent backgrounds to have taken part in social action, the gap in participation between the**

<sup>1</sup> Due to the machinery of government Office for Civil Society now sits within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport having previously been part of Cabinet Office.

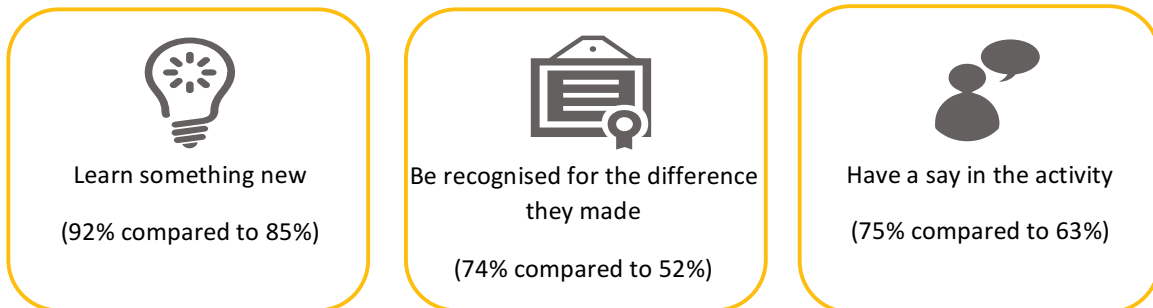
<sup>2</sup> A similar difference by ethnicity minority groups was also found in 2015, but not previously.

**most and least affluent has closed from 20 to 9 percentage points since 2014.** In 2016, 49% of those from socio-economic groups AB had participated in social action, compared with 40% from those in groups DE.

**In 2016, 25% of young people participated in meaningful social action at least once per month,** which is in line with the rate recorded in 2015 (23%). A significant minority of young people participate in social action but do not meet the criteria for 'meaningful' social action because they have participated infrequently: finding ways to encourage this group to increase their involvement could be a key way for the campaign to achieve its goals, and potentially for young people to experience a greater benefit from their involvement.

**A third (33%) of young people took part in social action programmes in the past year.** These include uniformed youth groups (17%), development programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award or the National Citizen Service (13%), and programmes run through charities (9%). The nature of this activity varies by age. Those aged 10-15 are more likely than those aged 16-20 to have been involved with a uniformed group (23% compared to 11%), whereas the older age group is more likely to have participated in development programmes (20% compared to 7% of 10-15 year olds). **The socio-economic gap is particularly evident when looking at participation in social action programmes<sup>3</sup>;** young people from affluent backgrounds are more likely than those from less affluent backgrounds to have been involved (42% ABC1 compared to 27% C2DE).

**Young people who have participated in social action programmes are more likely to agree with the quality indicator statements than those who have not participated in a programme.** Young people taking part in social action programmes are more likely to say they 'learnt something new' (92% compared to 85%), say they were recognised for the difference they had made (74% compared to 52%), and that they had a say in the activity (75% compared to 63%), than those not participating in a social action programme.



**Four in ten (41%) young people who had participated in social action in the past year had used the internet to assist with their social action in some way.** A quarter had shared their experiences (27%) or used the internet to search for activities (24%). Nearly two in ten had used the internet to track their progress (18%), and a similar proportion used the internet to participate in the (social action) activity (22%).

**Young people demonstrate a significant appetite for getting involved in social action: 34% of 10-20 year olds were classified as 'committed' to social action because of their previous and current involvement, as well as future appetite for involvement.**

<sup>3</sup> A social action programme is defined as participation in youth social action through a charity, a uniformed group, a development programme or full time volunteering. Young people were given relevant examples of these based on their location.

**Another 49% of 10-20 year olds were classified as 'potential' participants<sup>4</sup>**, and 17% were classified as 'reluctant' to participate because they are unlikely to participate in social action in the future.

**School, college and university remain the main routes for young people getting involved in social action:** 69% of 10-20 year olds got involved through these routes. Other frequently-cited routes into social action include family (21%) and friends (18%). In line with this, encouragement from teachers, parents and friends also appears to be important: those classified as most 'committed' to social action were more likely to report that parents (63%) and teachers (62%) had encouraged them, than those who are 'potential' participants (39% parents and 41% teachers) and those who are 'reluctant' to do social action (13% parents and 11% teachers).



**69%**  
got involved through school or college



**60%**  
were encouraged by their teachers

**The proportion of young people who felt that taking part in social action would help them to get a job steadily rises with the frequency of participation in social action.**

Overall, six in ten (62%) thought that social action would help them a great deal or a fair amount. A third (33%) of those who had never done social action thought it would be helpful in getting a job, but this rose to 88% of those who participate monthly. The proportion of young people who said they didn't know whether social action would help them with getting a job steadily increases among those who have been involved in social action the least, up to 33% of those who have never participated. These findings fit with a picture of limited awareness about social action, what its potential benefits may be, and how to get involved among a group of young people who have never accessed social action.

**Participation in social action is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and social capital.** The average life satisfaction score among those who had done meaningful social action in the past year was 8.6, compared with 8.1 among those who have never participated. This difference of 0.5 is consistent with the differences observed in previous years of the study, and is similar to the difference between permanent employees who are happy in their job and those who don't have a job and are seeking work. A few measures of social capital – including whether young people felt there would be someone there for them if they needed help, and whether there was a neighbour they could wait with if they had lost their keys – were also higher among participants than non-participants in social action. However, the survey data cannot tell us about the causal relationship between these associations (i.e. whether happier, better-connected people are more likely to do social action, or whether social action leads to increased happiness and better social connections). There were no relationships between the frequency of taking part in social action and life satisfaction, social capital, or recognition of other quality indicators (such as feeling recognised, or feeling the activity provided new learnings), nor between involvement in social action programmes and these factors.

## Conclusions

- **Young people who take part in social action appear to experience a range of benefits<sup>5</sup>, but these benefits are not always recognised by the young person. It**

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<sup>4</sup> A 'potential' participant is interested or uncertain about doing (more) social action. This includes those who say they are likely to do social action in the next 12 months, or don't know if they will participate. It includes those who are currently doing social action as well as those who have never participated.

**may be worthwhile promoting the likely benefits of social action to those already involved (as well as those who are not yet involved, or who have limited involvement), because the advantages may not always be clear to them.** One of the most common reasons that young people who had participated in some form of social action were not classified as doing 'meaningful' social action was because they did not recognise the benefit to them personally. Regular participants in social action were especially likely to feel that their involvement would benefit their future job chances, while those with no social action experience were much more likely either to say they 'didn't know' whether social action would help their job chances or that it would not.

- **The 'committed' group of young people are highly engaged with social action.** They are likely to participate in more social action in the future and say they are often made aware of other social action activities they can do when participating in activities. **Recognition of their commitment to social action may help retain their enthusiasm:** currently over a third (37%) reported they did not receive any formal recognition for the difference they made. **It may also be possible for the #iwill campaign to make greater use of this group to advocate for social action among their peers.**
- Encouragement is an important factor of commitment to social action. Almost all young people who are 'committed' to social action received some form of encouragement (96%), whereas less than a third (28%) of 'reluctant' young people received encouragement. **Schools and teachers can play an important role in getting young people motivated to participate in social action.**
- Young people who report starting to participate in social action at a younger age were more likely than those starting later to be classified as 'committed' to social action. **There may be some advantages to encouraging children younger than 10 to get involved in social action, in order to establish a habit of social action among the cohort of interest.**
- Some forms of social action are particularly likely to be accessed by regular rather than infrequent participants in social action. These include social action programmes and online forms of participation. It is not clear from the survey data why this is the case. It is possible that those young people who have social networks that promote social action are more likely to find out about these opportunities to take part. These types of **structured and online opportunities may be particularly useful for those who struggle to access social action opportunities, and promoting them among typically 'harder to reach' groups may help to widen participation in social action.**
- Schools, colleges and university remain key routes into social action for many. However, the majority (59%) of school-aged children (aged 11-15) have not participated in meaningful social action. **Exploring how schools could offer and promote social action more systematically could be a key way to increase participation rates,**

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<sup>5</sup> The 2016 survey asks young people whether they personally felt a benefit from the social action they took part in, as well as if they think social action will help their future job chances. Other studies have pointed to the link between wellbeing and social action; please see 'Introduction: Setting the Context' on page 8 for further details.

**especially as one of the key barriers to participation among 'potential' participants was a lack of awareness about how to get involved.**

- **Almost half of 10-20 year olds are interested in taking part in social action (49%)** even though they may not be regular participants in social action presently. A third of this group (33%) do not know if they will participate in social action in the next year. **Further signposting of activities and support from wider networks may encourage this group to participate more regularly.** Support from wider networks may also encourage more participation from the reluctant group; only a quarter of this group (28%) reported receiving any encouragement.