

# The Co-op Foundation #iwill Fund: Year 1 report

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## 1 Introduction

### Co-op Foundation and the #iwill Fund

#iwill is a national campaign to promote social action among young people, set up by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The National Lottery Community Fund<sup>1</sup>. The Co-op Foundation is one of several organisations that have committed to matching a portion of the #iwill Fund to distribute among youth social action projects. A total of 42 projects have been funded through Version 2 of the #iwill Fund, grouped into three thematic strands:

- **School Transitions**, aimed at supporting young people's wellbeing in the transition from primary school to secondary school
- **Community Spaces**, aimed at helping young people to improve the design and use of community spaces
- **Bereavement Support**, aimed at providing young people with safe spaces and support to share their experience of bereavement

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<sup>1</sup> Larger font is available upon request.

## Co-op Foundation #iwill Fund evaluation

The Co-op Foundation commissioned IFF Research, an independent research and evaluation agency, to evaluate their matched #iwill Fund. As the Co-op Foundation's evaluation partner, IFF is helping to capture evidence to understand the impacts projects are having on young people and the wider community, identify what is working well and summarise key learnings for projects to consider implementing to bring about intended impacts. At the evaluation start, IFF worked with the Co-op Foundation and stakeholders representing the three project strands to set out the impacts the Co-op Foundation hopes its Fund will achieve. These impacts, along with how those impacts are expected to come about, were developed into a theory of change for each strand. See the appendix for the theories of change.

### Reading this summary

This report shares findings for the first year (March 2021 – March 2022) of funded project delivery in Year 1 (2021/22). It explores key successes, challenges and learnings from the projects' setup and beginning of delivery. Evidence captured in this summary is based on 42 grant manager interviews and six case studies involving project delivery staff and participating young people.

The next evaluation report will include more information on progress against outcomes.

## 2 Project set up and delivery

This section discusses what projects have learned from setting up and starting their project delivery, what approaches they have taken that have been particularly successful and what challenges they have experienced. Findings are from qualitative interviews with all 42 grant managers and six case studies.

### Setting up the project

Project setup typically involved getting the resources and relationships in place to deliver the project, including developing training materials, recruiting and training staff, identifying spaces to run their activities and engaging partner organisations like schools, businesses and community organisations.

### Successes

The following approaches were used successfully to set up projects and indicate lessons learned for future projects.

<p><b>Leveraging existing relationships with other organisations by using these contacts as sources of support helped get projects off the ground quickly</b></p>	<p>This was particularly evident among School Transitions projects, where organisations that already had strong links with one or more schools could swiftly build on that foundation to reach and engage high numbers of young people with their programme. For example, a School Transitions project had 50 schools signed up, many of whom had pre-existing relationships with the organisation that led the project. Whilst particularly evident among School Transitions projects, leveraging existing relationships was also important to the Community Spaces and Bereavement projects. For example, a Community Spaces project mentioned that through developing a good relationship with a couple of schools by regularly dropping in to meet teachers and students, they could now visit the school and talk to the students. For a Bereavement project, they used and adapted resources provided by the parent charity of which they are part.</p>
<p><b>Investing time to get buy-in from schools and head teachers.</b></p>	<p>Project leads understood the pressures and time demands on schools and teachers (particularly resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic) and recognised that they had to invest time upfront to get support from schools. A School Transitions project sought buy-in from some schools before putting a bid into the #iwill fund and felt that building this relationship early made the rest of the project much easier. They thought it was important to have the headteacher on board as they can “power the change” within the school and provide access to resources. Ensuring that the senior person championing the project remains consistent over time contributes to project success.</p>
<p><b>Recognising young people’s role in establishing the project and supporting them to ‘lobby’ for project space and resources.</b></p>	<p>It was easier for projects to set up when they had an existing space to host the project. A Bereavement project without an existing space engaged young people to help overcome this</p>

	<p>challenge; their young people “lobbied” the school when they had problems establishing contacts and buy-in from the school. Young people discussed the project with their teachers and negotiated access to school space and resources for the project.</p>
<p><b>Drawing from a pool of existing staff to resource the project helped get projects off the ground quickly and ensured smooth delivery later down the line by being able to bring in additional resources in crunch points.</b></p>	<p>Drawing from a pool of existing staff helped when social distancing restrictions were introduced and projects needed to adapt their design to be delivered online quickly, and when some young people taking part needed more one-to-one support than initially anticipated (e.g., because of anxiety with group work or mental health issues that exacerbated during the pandemic). Access to a pool of experienced staff was more likely for larger delivery organisations, which could draw upon additional staff as needed. However, one smaller project team said they dealt with the need to be flexible in their resourcing by having access to a pre-existing bank of freelancers. Most projects did not have any issues with resourcing and used existing networks for staffing and teams with previous experience running similar projects.</p>
<p><b>Providing project staff and volunteers with safeguarding training delivered by subject experts.</b></p>	<p>This was seen as particularly important among Bereavement projects. For example, a Bereavement project partnered with a grief charity that provided specific training, advice and expertise to the project lead about how she could talk to young people about bereavement, including a framework to help her understand how people respond to grief differently. Another project trained staff on various issues they may encounter during delivery, including how to have safe conversations about suicide with young people. One project retrained staff during the first year of the pandemic on how to deliver counselling via the telephone rather than face-to-face.</p>

**Maximising participation of young people in the project through established models of youth participation and young people steering groups to inform the project focus at setup.**

A Community Spaces project used the LUNDY model to ensure the participation of young people from the outset.<sup>2</sup> This academic model provides a way of understanding a child's right to participation by considering four key elements in project delivery: space, voice, audience and influence. Another Community Spaces project engaged groups of young people in the project's initial design before they began recruiting participants to help them identify the types of spaces they would want to reclaim and the types of activities they would like to run.

## Challenges

The Covid-19 pandemic presented a significant challenge to project setup and delivery. Projects often relied on partner organisations to set up or deliver activities or provide facilities. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was still being felt across a range of projects at the time of the interviews, and a few projects had not started delivery. These projects had been delayed, often because of a desire to hold back until the sessions could be run face-to-face.

Overall, projects were flexible and creative in responding to Covid-19 restrictions. For example, moving delivery of activities online, moving activities to outdoor venues or securing large spaces like school halls that allowed for social distancing. A Community Spaces project put up art exhibitions outside a venue instead of inside, and a Schools Transitions project ran virtual 'taster sessions' for Year 6s when the project could not deliver their activities face-to-face as planned. A School Transitions project developed risk assessments in line with Covid-19 restrictions to help the project go ahead and ensure all involved felt safe to do so.

The pandemic restrictions have continued to cause significant disruptions to project setup, which are presented below.

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<sup>2</sup> [Decision-making: children and young people's participation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot/Decision-making:childrenandyoungpeople'sparticipation)

<p><b>Delays in setup because of limited to no partnership capacity to engage with the project when needing to prioritise other work.</b></p>	<p>Projects had to act quickly once restrictions had eased to re-engage with their partners but often found themselves competing with their partners' other priorities and life generally being 'busier.' For example, schools prioritised exams and assessments over project engagement. Understandably during the Covid-19 pandemic, schools continued to be reluctant to have external parties onsite, and their stricter health and safety guidelines made it harder for projects to get into schools. Project teams needed to complete more rigorous risk assessment reports for schools to overcome this challenge.</p>
<p><b>In earlier phases of the pandemic, delays to delivery were often compounded by changes to set up plans. In contrast, later in the pandemic, a couple of projects had chosen to delay delivery until it was possible to meet face-to-face.</b></p>	<p>Earlier delays included where projects needed to find new partners because the intended collaborators could not take part anymore. Issues with accessing spaces for face-to-face activities because of social mixing and bubble restrictions, or community spaces and schools being closed, further delayed delivery. Some projects decided to reframe their project focus to be Covid-response related.</p>

Although most setup challenges resulted from the Covid-19 restrictions, the Bereavement projects encountered additional challenges:

<p><b>Identifying bereaved pupils who may benefit from the project.</b></p>	<p>Several schools did not have mechanisms to identify the relevant pupils for participating in a bereavement project.</p>
<p><b>Schools prioritising resolving other issues over supporting the bereavement project.</b></p>	<p>Several schools felt the bereavement project was less of a priority for them because they were focusing on other issues with their pupils, for example relating to behaviour and experiences of domestic violence at home.</p>
<p><b>Overcoming the stigma of offering bereavement projects in schools.</b></p>	<p>Project leads described how several schools reported a general culture where bereavement is not discussed, with pupils feeling that "if you need [support], you have failed". To overcome this,</p>

	<p>projects invested significant time in conversations with teachers to explain how bereavement support may help avoid behavioural problems among pupils later down the line.</p>
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### Case study: Comics Youth

Comics Youth runs creative projects that empower marginalised young people to harness their narratives and have their voices heard. Young people aged 13-24 worked together to reclaim community spaces and organise youth-led events across the Liverpool city centre with a focus on creating safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ young people. Activities have involved planning and organising an all-day music festival for LGBTQIA+ young people, commissioning artwork for the 'Safe Spaces Trail' in the city centre and a coffee and craft event for LGBTQIA+ young people.

#### Treating young people as professionals

One aspect of the project involved commissioning artwork from young people that could be used around the city in these safe spaces. The young creatives were given the skills to deliver and produce their artwork, which resulted in them stepping up to meet expectations and being paid for their work. They also benefitted from people noticing their work and getting credit for it, alongside feeling that they've had an impact on the space in their local community.

*"On other projects I've worked on, young people are spoken down to, whereas on ours, there's parity. We're open about budgets and what they've got ownership of."*

**Project lead**

#### Employing staff with lived experience

Staff members assigned to the project had direct personal experience in the LGBTQIA+ community. This meant that participants could develop more trusting relationships with staff as they had a mutual understanding.

*"The community of support and encouragement is amazing to see."* **Director**

Setting boundaries between staff and young people was necessary since some staff were close in age to the young people. Therapy sessions and wellbeing workshops were organised to address this, and the availability of hours at which staff could be contacted was restricted.

#### Building professional skills and confidence

Those participating developed a range of skills, including budgeting, event management, social media marketing and branding. Young people were given £5,000 to plan actual events, which involved adhering to a brief, liaising with venues and meeting deadlines. This helped to develop their professionalism and confidence in environments where they may not have previously felt comfortable in due to feeling othered by society. Over the course of the project, staff saw young people flourish and become more open to these experiences, as echoed by one young person:

*"The project is about flourishing from the margins of society" George\**

*\*names have been changed.*

## Recruiting young people

A key aim of Co-op Foundation's #iwill Fund is that the youth social action projects engage young people who are most in need. This includes having lived experience of the issue, being under-served, or being from a community that does not have its voice heard. Evidence from grant manager interviews suggests projects have largely been successful in achieving this within their target audiences.

## Successes

The following approaches were used successfully to recruit young people and indicate lessons learned for future projects.

<p><b>Using multiple channels to engage target young people, including advertising through social and local media and referrals from youth-focused organisations and schools.</b></p>	<p>It was felt that the recruitment needed to be almost considered as a marketing campaign. Advertisements to community and project organisations' Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts were employed effectively to recruit young people directly to projects.</p>
<p><b>Partnering with established community organisations or leaders with strong links to the target youth was effective, as were schools based in areas of deprivation and teachers who could identify those who would benefit most.</b></p>	<p>Indices of Multiple Deprivation or a proportion of pupils on free school meals were also used as criteria to identify communities with underserved young people.</p>



<p><b>Snowballing recruitment.</b></p>	<p>Using young people to reach out and promote the project to others who they felt would benefit and who would not necessarily be reached by existing recruitment channels was effective in recruiting young people to projects. For one project, this was in the form of 'champions'; for another project, they had 'young ambassadors'.</p>
<p><b>Incentivised attendance helped to encourage ongoing participation by removing barriers.</b></p>	<p>Providing lunches worked particularly well for young people from low-income backgrounds to get them on board with the project and keep continued attendance during the holidays when many did not have easy access to hot meals. Other projects offered to cover travel costs.</p>
<p><b>Not overloading the recruitment stage with long-term expectations.</b></p>	<p>Bereavement strand projects tailored the expectations they placed on their young people at the time of recruitment. One project felt that to mention the goal of the young person running peer group sessions at the end of the project would seem too daunting, and instead introduced the idea part-way through the series of sessions; at this point, a number of the young people were receptive to the idea.</p>
<p><b>Involving delivery staff with lived experience of the topic or previous experience of the target audience or project setting helped recruit young people.</b></p>	<p>Projects felt having staff with personal knowledge of the communities and their experiences in which they were trying to recruit helped to build trust with the young people.</p>
<p><b>Tailoring solutions based on individual needs assessments conducted at recruitment helped young people's engagement with projects.</b></p>	<p>A Community Spaces project contacted young people individually, either face-to-face or online, to reduce their anxiety around participation in the project. A similar personal approach was taken by a Bereavement project which kept all participants up to date with developments in the project from the point of recruitment to when the sessions started.</p>

<p><b>Online delivery methods allowed geographically dispersed young people to participate and meant that more young people with shared experience could benefit.</b></p>	<p>A Bereavement project observed that some of its participants came from rural areas where they did not know any other young people who had been bereaved. The lead felt that the young people benefitted greatly from the opportunity to connect with others who had been through the same experience.</p>
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## Challenges

We identified four key challenges to recruitment:

<p><b>Recruitment (and project delivery) online was challenging.</b></p>	<p>Because of the pandemic, projects could not recruit face-to-face, as many preferred. Project leads felt that recruiting young people exclusively through virtual methods had been challenging: some young people faced barriers to online access while others attending school remotely experienced 'screen fatigue'. Young people's initial willingness to engage with online activities waned as the project progressed. As a result, projects generally felt that take-up by young people was lower than it would have been otherwise.</p>
<p><b>Project delays made some recruited young people ineligible.</b></p>	<p>The delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic meant that some young people who had initially been recruited to participate became too old for the programme, so a new cohort had to be recruited. The long delay to the start of projects came with the added challenge of keeping the recruited young people engaged with the project before its start date. To overcome this and promote engagement, project coordinators provided regular email updates to the young people.</p>
<p><b>Young people were, at times, unsure of committing to a whole series of sessions.</b></p>	<p>Young people were sometimes interested in attending one session but wary of committing to a series of sessions up-front. This was a recurring theme across project strands and particularly common for projects covering sensitive subject</p>

	<p>matter like bereavement support or an LGBTQ+ project. However, project leads did feel that young people needed to attend each session to get the benefit and develop friendships. So, they needed to carefully balance an understanding of the (ideal) commitment required whilst being sensitive to the fact that attendance should be voluntary, mainly when dealing with sensitive topics such as bereavement. A successful approach for a bereavement project was that they did not mention the peer support element at project sign-up and introduced it to the young people once they had built up trust and confidence in the group.</p>
<p><b>Competing priorities on time and timetable clashes.</b></p>	<p>Some students in school-based projects had competing priorities, making it difficult to attend the #iwill sessions. For example, academic support was often scheduled for lunchtime, which clashed with the #iwill project sessions. For schools in the more deprived areas and where the projects were trying to reach underserved young people, there was also a higher level of behavioural issues reported by project leads, which again tended to require priority over programmes external to the school. One project reflected that in future projects, they will use their own office space to minimise disruption to project delivery rather than aiming to run the project from the school premises.</p>

### Case study: Let's Talk About Loss

Let's Talk About Loss runs meetups for young people aged 18-35 across the UK to talk about their experiences of grief. The #iwill funding has helped the project set up a youth board of 16-20yr olds to bridge the gap for those not eligible for youth services or who may not know about adult support. Its aims are for these bereaved young people to run a campaign to raise awareness and advocate for better youth bereavement support.

#### Targeted recruitment to reach the 'right' young people

Young people taking part feel strongly that the project has targeted an 'under-served' group, in that bereavement services are rarely aimed specifically at teenagers. The delivery lead described how the project had successfully reached target young people through social media platforms: Jenny\*, one of the participants, had been sent a link to a Facebook group by her sister.

### **Adapting approach to the needs of young people**

The project used different approaches to put young people at ease, given the sensitive topic, including communicating the content of sessions in advance to those taking part, acknowledging that it might be upsetting, and being clear that participants could take a break or leave whenever they wanted. Henry\* described feeling reassured by this:

*"This clear communication really takes away the anxiety about it: even if it is upsetting, you can prepare yourself for it." Henry\**

### **Partnership working**

Zoe\*, the founder of Let's Talk About Loss, spoke of partnering with another charity 'Grief Encounter' who share their expertise around grief and mental health. Pooling knowledge in this way helped to inform how they approached talking about grief with young people.

### **Increased confidence and stronger relationships**

Young people reported feeling part of a community and that they had formed relationships with people who shared their experiences. They also developed communication skills and confidence.

*"I am the only one of my friends to have experienced grief... it's isolating and lonely. So, it's lovely to come to a group of people who don't recoil when you mention the word, to realise you aren't the only one." Jenny\**

*"Hearing others feel comfortable to speak up has made me feel empowered to speak up as well." Amanpreet\**

Sessions have been running solely online due to pandemic limitations and the fact that the project was reaching individuals across the UK. Young people felt they had benefited from meeting online, but many felt that if they could meet in person, it would facilitate more meaningful connections. As of July 2021, the project planned to arrange a face-to-face meet-up when it became possible again to solidify the relationships built.

*\*names have been changed.*

## Delivering activities

Most projects had delivered some activities, other projects were still in the early stages of delivery, and a few had yet to start delivery at the time of reporting. Therefore, learnings around delivery focus on engaging young people in the projects and encouraging positive relationships with other participants and project staff.

## Successes

The following approaches were used successfully to deliver activities and indicate lessons learned for future projects.

<p><b>Allowing young people to take the lead was effective in maintaining their engagement and motivation.</b></p>	<p>In a Community Spaces project, young people had designed and led some of the green space activities themselves with little mentoring support from the project staff. The project lead reported high levels of enthusiasm from the young people for this approach. In a School Transitions project, the young people designed the primary school connection events because they had a better awareness of what younger pupils wanted from the experience, giving them ownership of this part of the project. Year 7s designed relationship-building activities based on topics they thought the incoming Year 6s would be concerned about, such as bullying.</p>
<p><b>Using different activities or settings unrelated to the key project aim helped to encourage communication and build trust with young people who found it difficult to engage.</b></p>	<p>Some projects used activities like arts and crafts to put young people at ease and encourage them to be more open about personal experiences. This meant they did not have to make eye contact with others while speaking. Others had run sessions in different environments, for example, outside of the school or away from a hospital setting, encouraging young people to feel more comfortable and speak more freely.</p>
<p><b>Creating an inclusive environment for young people.</b></p>	<p>Projects had sought to do this by posting inclusive subject matter on social media pages, adjusting scheduling and group sizes to suit young people who had difficulties in large groups, or using a welcoming and personalised one-to-one onboarding process. A Bereavement project</p>

	<p>ran specific workshops around different cultural interpretations of bereavement, which young people said helped them relate to and understand young people from different backgrounds.</p>
<p><b>Using features of online tools like web chat to facilitate engagement with young people with different learning styles or preferences, particularly those who may have been more nervous about taking part face-to-face.</b></p>	<p>Projects addressing sensitive subjects felt that online platforms which allow participants to switch off their video or to write their thoughts in the chat or on a virtual whiteboard offered young people some anonymity that helped build their confidence and engagement. A Community Spaces project's website and chat function was always "live", which meant that young people engaging with the project could easily access support whenever they needed it, whatever time of day. A different Community Spaces project switched from training young people to deliver green space projects in-person to online, which had worked well and will be continued. They adapted their existing face-to-face training programme, used the initial cohorts of young people to feedback on the materials, and made improvements for subsequent cohorts. The online training programme also led to more regular contact than the previous face-to-face approach as they decided to run sessions weekly.</p>
<p><b>Preparing young people ahead of the sessions.</b></p>	<p>Giving young people notice of session topics and reminding them of the project agreed terms of reference ahead of sessions helped some young people better prepare to engage with sessions.</p>
<p><b>Being relevant and using the right language.</b></p>	<p>One bereavement project felt it was important to consider the language used in the project and avoid using terms which were off-putting to young people. They felt that young people preferred it if issues were named and spoken about directly and made sure their advertising and activities avoided over-used terms like 'mindfulness' and instead named and spoke about techniques for coping with bereavement.</p>

<p><b>Providing wellbeing support to staff who experienced wellbeing concerns from delivering project activities, particularly where the topic was sensitive or where young people had complex needs.</b></p>	<p>For example, a Community Spaces project paid for therapy sessions and wellbeing workshops for all staff. In another Community Spaces project, experienced staff supervised each session delivered by a volunteer and were available by phone if the volunteer needed support. The supervisor also ran feedback calls with volunteers after the sessions.</p>
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## Challenges

While necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic, online delivery presented challenges to project delivery in three ways.

<p><b>Limited rapport between young people, and young people and project staff.</b></p>	<p>This was particularly the case for some groups of young people, for whom face-to-face activities were better suited to their learning styles. For example, a project working with young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) planned to move to face-to-face delivery when they could because online interactions limited how well young people could recognise and understand their peers' verbal and non-verbal cues.</p>
<p><b>Limited ability of project staff to notice signs related to safeguarding issues.</b></p>	<p>Online delivery made it more difficult for project staff to notice non-verbal signs when a young person struggled with a topic. Activity topics could bring up difficult feelings, and project staff were concerned about young people being left with these feelings at the end of an online activity. For a few projects, the safeguarding concerns in relation to online delivery were so great that they decided to delay delivery until Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed and activities could take place face-to-face.</p>
<p><b>Online delivery, when young people joined from home, limited how open and honest they felt they could be.</b></p>	<p>The presence of parents or guardians at home could limit a young person's sense of feeling free to contribute openly to activities discussing personal topics. As a result of these challenges with online delivery, some projects decided to</p>

	<p>postpone the delivery until the Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed and activities could take place face-to-face.</p>
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Other delivery challenges projects overcame included:

<p><b>Capturing young persons' images in film/video was not seen as culturally appropriate for some groups of young people.</b></p>	<p>A bereavement project successfully engaged young men from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Due to cultural reasons, the young people did not feel comfortable sharing their stories on camera as part of the project activities. They would, however, have been willing to share their stories in person. This project tried to adapt by finding alternative ways for these young men to be involved in the project activity, for example, by asking them to do a voiceover rather than appearing in person on the film.</p>
<p><b>Young people who had experienced bereavement needed more time before they were ready to take on peer support/it was not always appropriate for young people to offer peer support.</b></p>	<p>Projects adapted their delivery plan and timescales after projects started once they better understood the needs and preferences of young people. This included adding one-to-one support for young people on bereavement projects and offering more counselling sessions when it was felt that they were not yet ready to move on to other aspects of the project, such as peer support.</p>



**Projects had to adapt and be flexible throughout the project lifecycle continually.**

Adapting delivery was a natural part of the process of delivering #iwill projects and was often driven by operating in the Covid-19 pandemic. A Bereavement project regularly assessed the young people they were training as advocates because they were being hard hit by the circumstances of the pandemic. They needed to be careful that the young person could cope with talking about emotional distress with their peers and that they would know when there is a safeguarding issue they would have to report, like a child discussing suicidal feelings. When a Community Spaces project could not host in-person discussions in schools, the young people developed "feedback postcards" and distributed these to school classes for their peers to write what spaces they found challenging or safe. These postcards may feature in an exhibition.

Aside from pandemic challenges, projects had to adapt to overcome other issues, such as working around busy school/teacher timetables, responding to the specific needs/profiles of those participating in the activities, and working with smaller cohort groups (e.g., for School Transition projects that did not span different classes/year groups). For example, a Bereavement project recruited young people through schools and had to change its project scope. Initially, the project planned to get young people who had experienced bereavement to work with those who had not. However, as the school only put forward names of young people who had experienced bereavement, they changed their plan to just work with that group. The approach also evolved to put more focus on group support. In particular, young people shared their experiences and supported each other in a group, rather than one-to-one peer support, which helped to lessen the pressure and expectations on any individual taking part.

### Case study: PIE: Pursuing Individual Excellence

PIE: Pursuing Individual Excellence is an educational social enterprise that aims to support disadvantaged young people to develop life skills and plan for their future. The #iwill funding has helped PIE establish a School Transitions project to equip Year 7s and Year 8s to support primary Year 6s with their transition to secondary school. As part of the project, Year 7s and Year 8s plan transition days for the Year 6s in the summer term. There is a focus on promoting social action among the Year 7/8s with a focus on mental health and wellbeing initiatives.

#### **Involving delivery staff experienced in working in school settings**

Ella\*, the project lead, ensured that all staff selected to run the project were experienced in school-based projects; their expertise in working in educational settings and with teachers was described as 'crucial' to run the project effectively. In relation to the school staff facilitating the projects, Ella reflected that more junior staff were better placed to be involved as they tended to have more time to devote to the project within the school.

#### **Allowing young people to take the lead in developing activities**

Year 7s and Year 8s were given the opportunity to design activities in which the incoming Year 6s will participate on their transition days. This helped the young people develop empathy and think about what activities the Year 6s may enjoy, as well as reflective skills to think about what they may have liked when they were moving up to secondary school. Young people designed a range of activities, including an interactive treasure map, games and badges.

#### **Small group sizes helped the young people to develop their confidence**

Delivery staff fed back that running the project in small groups of 10 young people was effective, as it allowed young people to get to know their peers and develop

their sense of identity within the group. This was echoed by the young people who said they generally felt more confident speaking up in class and attributed this to the skills they had developed on the project (management and leadership).

*"I now feel confident to talk in front of a big group of people, I didn't before"*

**Edward\***

*"My teacher says I need to speak up more and participate more in lessons, and I think I'm doing that now... I think it's because I've been managing, taking charge..."*

**Ishmael\***

*\*names have been changed*

### 3 Strand-specific learnings

While many learnings apply to projects across the three strands, some are particularly pertinent to a specific strand or type of project.

**Making things as easy as possible for schools to take part** was a common theme for projects in this type of setting; this learning applies to all School Transitions projects and several Bereavement and Community Spaces projects. Given competing school priorities (particularly in the wake of the pandemic) and frequent logistical challenges of finding space to hold project activities, the following was crucial:

- Leveraging existing relationships with schools to get projects off the ground quickly.
- When forming new relationships, ensuring there is a senior level project champion at the school.
- Scheduling project activities at a time convenient to schools, e.g. avoiding lunchtime activities if academic support is offered at this time.
- For schools that struggle to accommodate in-person project activities, running the project activity off-site like at the delivery organisation.
- Recognising young people's role in establishing the project and supporting them to 'lobby' for project space and resources. This could include supporting young people to discuss the project with their teachers and negotiating access to school space and resources for the project.

**Reassuring participants upfront about what would be involved** in the project was a common theme for projects working with particularly sensitive topics, including all Bereavement projects and some Community Spaces projects. Young people could be

nervous about accessing bereavement support, reluctant about committing to a full programme of support, and intimidated at the prospect of delivering support to their peers. The following considerations helped overcome these challenges:

- Offering support in smaller group sizes.
- Reassuring young people about the commitment required while being clear that there is value in attending all sessions.
- Introducing the peer-to-peer support element at a later point, when young people have become more comfortable within the project setting.
- Recruiting staff with lived experience of the topic.
- Circulating information on the session content in advance to alleviate young people's anxiety.

**Ensuring project staff are best equipped to deal with the impact of delivering potentially emotionally difficult sessions** was a common lesson for many Bereavement and Community Spaces projects. This was particularly common among those projects who recruited staff with lived experience of the issue; while this was broadly a benefit, it increased the risk of staff feeling overwhelmed or upset. Lessons learned included:

- Prioritising staff safeguarding training at the start of the project and having wellbeing support for staff available throughout the project.
- Limiting hours of staff availability to young people and balancing this with young people being able to access support flexibly as needed.
- Partnering with other specialist safeguarding and wellbeing organisations to benefit from their existing resources, advice and guidance.

## 4 Conclusions and key learnings

This report discussed projects' setup and delivery journey in their first year of receiving #iwill funding. Projects were established in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, with social distancing restrictions greatly influencing their ability to deliver their intended plans to their original timescales. Most projects, though not all, have now set up and recruited young people, with many underway with delivering their social action projects.

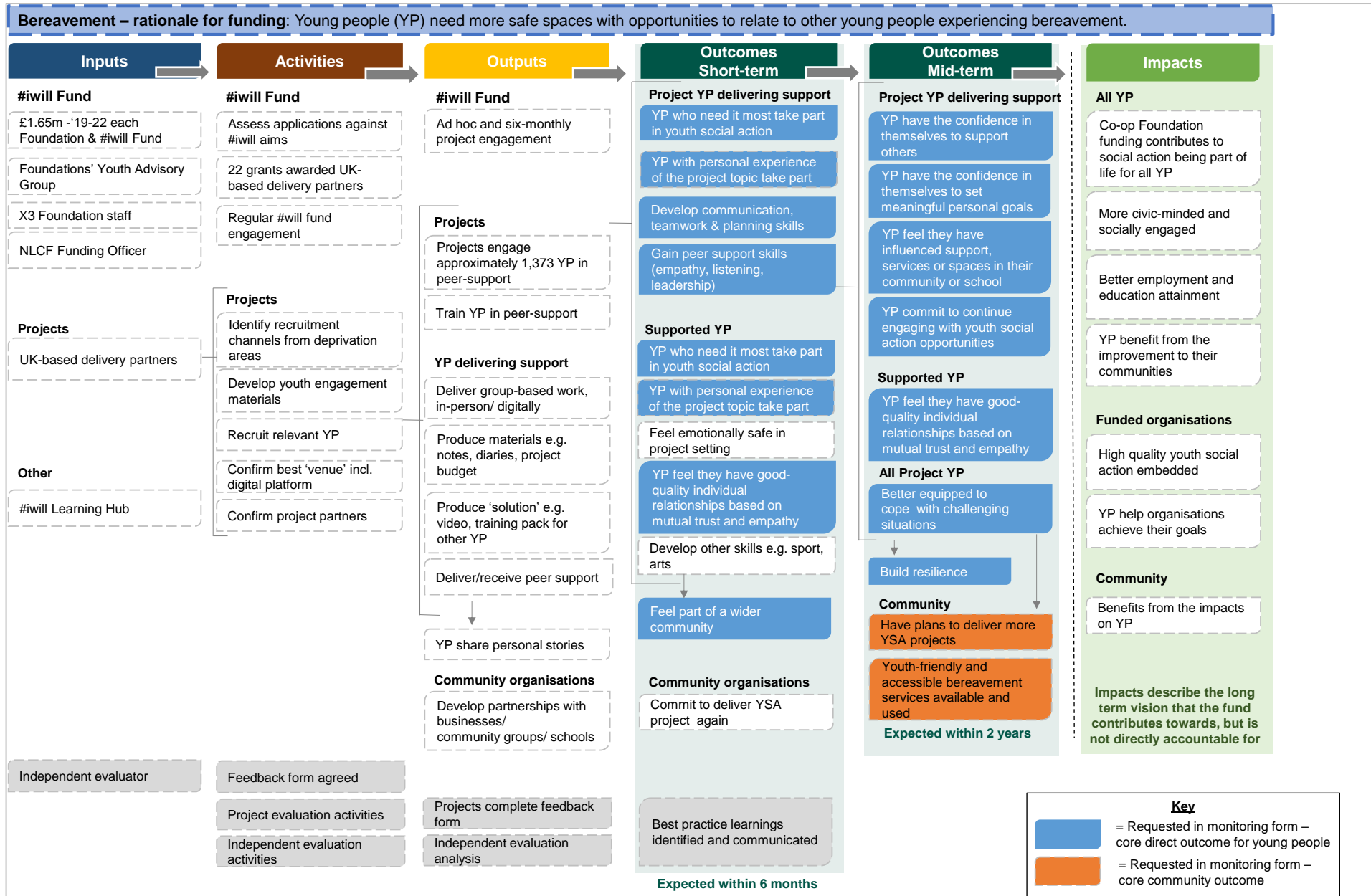
Key lessons for project setup and delivery that current and future projects may wish to consider include:

<b>Setup</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage existing relationships and networks where possible, and minimise the burden on these organisations by considering the timing and relevant individuals best placed to help. For partnership working with schools, busy periods such as the summer exam months must be avoided. Consider how project activities clash with other lunchtime/after-school activities that students may need to attend as part of receiving academic support. Non-teaching staff within schools may have more capacity to help with planning and setup, and having a nominated contact at each school will help facilitate the setup process.</li> <li>• Involve young people in project design to ensure project delivery and materials are appropriate and young people feel a stronger sense of project ownership.</li> <li>• Provide safeguarding training and support to staff around more sensitive issues, ideally facilitated by specialist external organisations or professionals where this knowledge is not available in the project team.</li> <li>• Recognise young people's role in establishing the project and supporting them to build their skills and abilities. For example, by supporting young people to develop ambassador skills, to help with securing space and resources to run the project</li> </ul>
<b>Recruitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use various channels to identify and recruit young people. For example, posting relevant content on relevant youth channels on Instagram and Tik Tok, and digital spaces where young people spend time, or by taking referrals from teachers in schools, leads in community organisations and participating young people to benefit from their knowledge as to who is most in need. This helps to ensure that as many young people are reached as possible (even during pandemic restrictions).</li> <li>• Consider recruiting through established community organisations or leaders to lend legitimacy to a new project, especially when trying to recruit underserved groups. As well as using well-known youth or community organisations, consider 'snowballing' from recruited young people to reach their peers.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit project staff with backgrounds and experience most relevant to the young people and/or approach and topic of the project.</li> <li>• Strike the right balance at the recruitment stage in terms of not being too daunting about the commitment required whilst equally being realistic about what commitment is expected. Consider introducing the concept of young people having a peer support role part-way through the project sessions.</li> <li>• Blend delivery approaches of online and face-to-face, where feasible, to help widen participation among young people more geographically dispersed and to facilitate engagement with young people with different learning styles or preferences. The use of online delivery could help reach young people living outside the target community, those who live in the target community but attend college or university elsewhere or those who travel for some of the projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Delivering activities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt delivery to different learning styles, offering options for young people to participate in ways most comfortable. This could be via breakout rooms or one-to-one sessions, providing support through websites and chat, and opportunities for face-to-face interaction. Be prepared to be flexible and adapt the sessions (format, content, number) to the cohort.</li> <li>• Allow and support young people to take the lead in designing project activities, promote a sense of ownership and build engagement with the project. For example, this could include helping young people think about activities they would like to participate in or what topics matter most to them.</li> <li>• Share session plans to young people in advance of sessions to help those who need time to consider the topic and prepare their thoughts, so they can feel better able to contribute to sessions.</li> <li>• Identify potentially sensitive or emotionally intense periods of project activity and provide proactive support around wellbeing to staff at these times.</li> <li>• Include different activities and settings unrelated to the key project aim to encourage communication and build trust with</li> </ul>

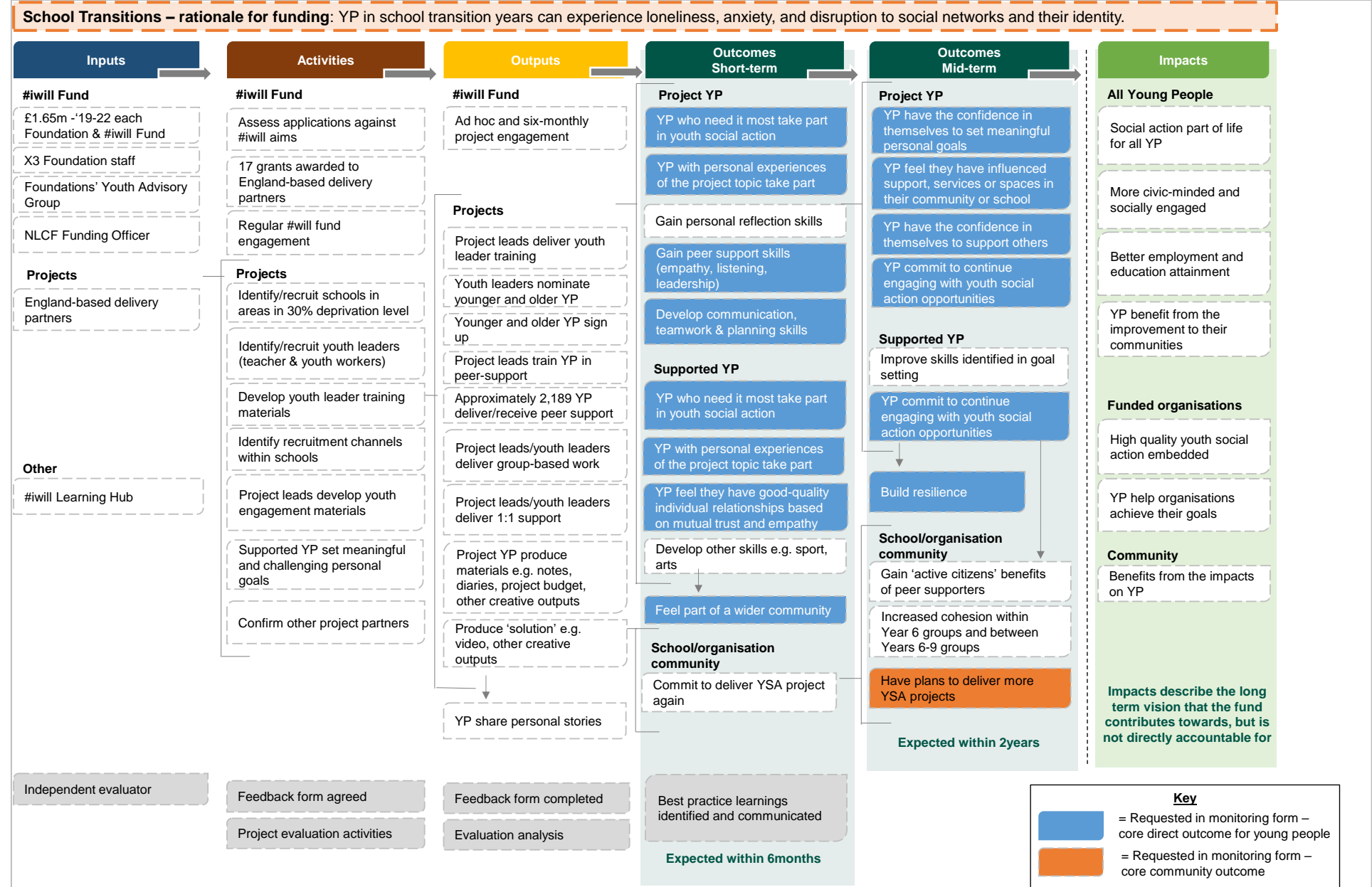
	<p>young people who find it difficult to engage. For example, arts and crafts activities and settings outside of a school or home environment.</p>
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## Appendix: Theory of Change – Bereavement strand





## Theory of Change – School Transitions strand



## Theory of Change – Community Spaces strand

