Co-op Foundation Future Communities Fund Round 2 Theory of Development May 2025

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Foundation

Introduction

The <u>Future Communities Fund Round 2</u> has been developed by young people, for young people, with a particular focus on those who have been involved with the justice system. Over the course of a year, we collaborated with the <u>Future Communities Collective</u> and justice-experienced young people. We co-created a funding programme that supports organisations enabling young people involved in the justice system to re-engage with their communities. Guided by evidence and co-designed feedback, the fund aspires to bring meaningful, lasting change.

Why we designed the theory of development

To align with our values of transparency and evidence-based funding, we created the theory of development (ToD) to articulate how we expect positive change to occur as a result of the fund. This framework outlines the aspirations of the Future Communities Fund Round 2, our approach to facilitating change, and the types of organisations we aim to support. It also serves as a tool for measuring the fund's impact on young people and the organisations we partner with. Importantly, changing the name from "theory of change" to "theory of development" reflects a more positive, non-stigmatising perspective, emphasising growth and opportunity rather than assuming a negative starting point. By developing the ToD, we aim to make it easier for organisations to align their work with our aims and outcomes while also contributing to broader efforts to influence other funders. In particular, we hope to demonstrate how unrestricted funding can drive tangible change, building on our ongoing exploration of its impact, which began with IVAR's report in 2024 on approaches to assessing the impact of unrestricted funding.

How we co-created the theory of development

The ToD was co-designed with an academic and young people. Professor Neal Hazel conducted a scoping study to identify effective approaches for supporting justice-experienced young people. This evidence formed the foundation of the ToD. Between January and March 2025, four workshops were held with the Future Communities Collective to shape the framework collaboratively.

- Workshop 1: Introduced the ToD and findings from the scoping study, focusing on the concept of pro-social identity.
- Workshops 2 and 3: Introduced the young people's and the funded partners' ToD, seeking feedback on their language, whether the outcomes needed amendments, or any outcomes were missing and how they looked in practice.
- Workshop 4: Presented the revised version, explaining which suggestions were incorporated and why.

We also engaged justice-experienced young people through a partnership with Leaders Unlocked, in two additional workshops. The first session introduced the concept of a theory of change/development and the findings of the scoping study. The second session presented the Future Communities Fund Round 2 ToD for young people, encouraged participants to reflect on their own journeys, identify missing elements in the ToD, and provide examples of how the outcomes were relevant in practice.

How young people's input changed the theory of development

Young people's involvement significantly improved the ToD, making it more accessible, engaging, and reflective of their experiences. Key changes included:

- Simplified, inclusive, positive language and a visually engaging design.
- More explicit reference to mental health, wellbeing and meaningful community connections.
- Greater emphasis on young people's agency and positive contributions to society.
- A shift to the name "theory of development," emphasising constructive, forward-looking outcomes.

By embedding young people's voices in the process, the ToD is now a more effective, inclusive tool for driving change. We encourage other funders to adopt similar equitable approaches to co-creating their maps of change with the communities they want to support and prioritise unrestricted funding to address systemic challenges in the criminal justice system.



1. Theory of Development¹ for the young people² supported by the funded partners

The theory of development for young people and funded partners explains the outcomes we expect to emerge during the Future Communities Fund Round 2. The development between the activities, the outcomes and impact do not necessarily follow directly as individual rows; we recognise that real-world change is more complex and interconnected than a straightforward "if A, then B" pattern.

SHORT-TERM

Pro-social strengths, interests,

Pro-social future self is explored

Pathways to best future self

(and barriers addressed)

are identified and/or actioned

Participation with AIR

and roles are promoted

ACTIVITIES

Multi-year unrestricted funding to organisations that support pro-social identity³ development activities for young people in/leaving the criminal justice system

Providing opportunities for young people to experience fresh AIR (Activities, Interactions, Roles) that promote pro-social identity development

OUTCOMES

MEDIUM-TERM

Feeling engagement with AIR

Improved pro-social identity and identity-resilience

Future-focused and on the pathway to their best future self

Improved self-confidence, support connections, security, wellbeing, and empowered to make right choices

LONG-TERM

Feeling heard, respected, connected, engaged and included in society

Established pro-social identity

Potential being fulfilled, achievements recognised, and becoming a positive role model

Secure wellbeing, and enabled to make positive contributions to society and experience a crime-free life

COMMUNITY IMPACT

More supportive, less stigmatising, communities of young people in/ leaving the criminal justice system

Communities include positive contributions by young people

More empowering and co-operative communities

Safer communities



^{1&}quot;Theory of development" is the term we use for 'theory of change' - it is positive, constructive, non-stigmatising, and does not assume a negative starting-point.
2"Young people" is used as shorthand for 'young people ages 10-25 years old in/leaving the criminal justice system'.

3 Having a pro-social identity means young people see themselves as someone who will benefit other people or society as a whole and are less likely to get involved in negative or criminal activity. If a young person has a pro-social identity, they feel empowered to make the right choices in their behaviour and wider life decisions,



2. Theory of Development for the funded partners

ACTIVITIES

Multi-year unrestricted funding to organisations that support pro-social identity development activities for young people in/leaving the criminal justice system

Learning and evaluation support

- Peer learning and networking events
- Assessing the impact of the fund and producing new evidence of what works
- Training

OUTCOMES

SHORT-TERM

Partners are better equipped to support provision of fresh AIR to young people in/leaving the criminal justice system

Partners are more able to explore evidence on 'Constructive Working' with young people and be identity-aware

Partners are enabled to be innovative and adapting to changing needs and opportunities for fresh AIR because of unrestricted funding

Partners are able to fully engage with data recording and evaluation

Partners are enabled to develop further their strategy, identity and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) principles

MEDIUM-TERM

Partners better able to support young people's experience fresh AIR

Partners improve their governance, planning and operations in an identity informed and futurefocused way

Partners are able to ensure that support follows the 5Cs (Constructive, Co-created, Customised, Consistent, Co-ordinated)⁴

Partners are able to monitor and analyse activity and create constructive impact

Partners have a clear and constructive organisational identity

LONG-TERM

Partners are able to consistently and sustainably enable fresh AIR for young people

Partners are strong and sustainable for beyond the end of the funding

Partners are able to achieve their organisational goals aligned with the Fund and in their application

Partners are able to demonstrate all positive outcomes listed in the FCF2 ToD for young people, and share good practice

Partners have a clear strategy, are well resourced, financially stable and implement DEI principles

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