

# Co-op Foundation Future Communities Fund Round 2

## Theory of Development May 2025



Foundation

### Introduction

The [Future Communities Fund Round 2](#) 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 [Future Communities Collective](#) 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.

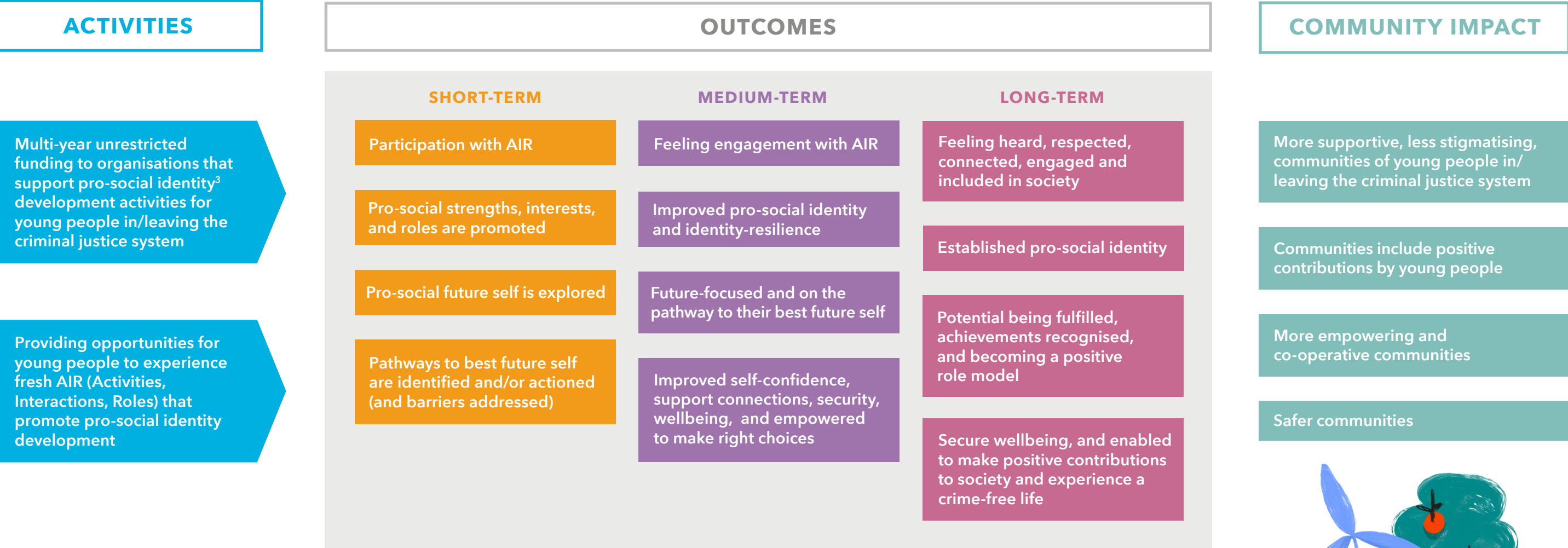
By embedding young people's voices in the process, the ToD is now a more effective, inclusive tool for driving change. We encourage other funders to adopt similar equitable approaches to co-creating their maps of change with the communities they want to support and prioritise unrestricted funding to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



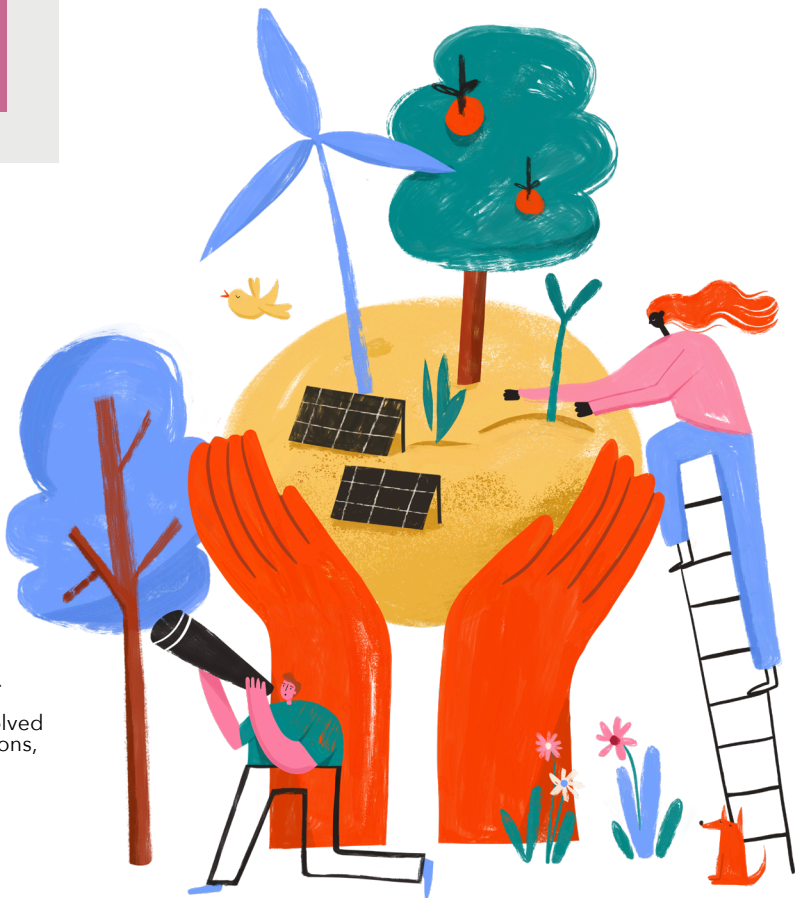


# 1. Theory of Development<sup>1</sup> for the young people<sup>2</sup> supported by the funded partners

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.

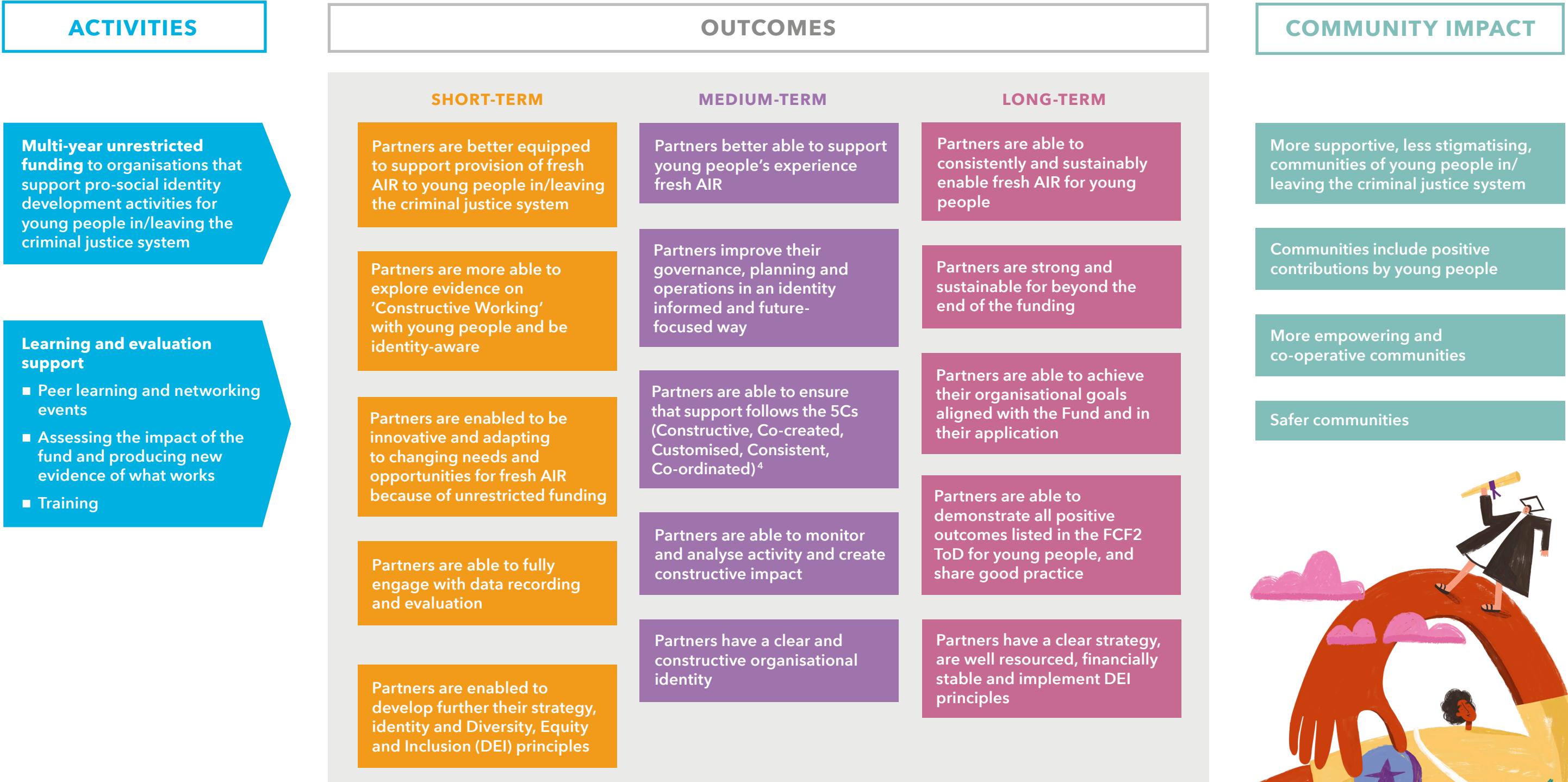


<sup>1</sup>“Theory of development” is the term we use for ‘theory of change’ - it is positive, constructive, non-stigmatising, and does not assume a negative starting-point.  
<sup>2</sup>“Young people” is used as shorthand for ‘young people ages 10-25 years old in/leaving the criminal justice system’.  
<sup>3</sup> 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, including relationships.





# 2. Theory of Development for the funded partners



<sup>4</sup> In the context of the 5 C's, 'constructive' relates to work that is focused on identity development/shift, is future oriented, strengths-based and motivating. 'Co-created' means developed with and for the young people, inclusive of the young people. 'Customised' means that each young person's identity journey is unique, recognising the importance of diversity. 'Consistent' means that a young person has stable relationships - relationships which aid change/pro social identity, with all professionals supporting an identity shift for the young person and sharing the same vision. 'Coordinated' occurs through effective casework and communication with other agencies - partnership working to achieve the above.