EMPOWHER
LEGACY

EmpowHER Legacy
Final Report

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Delivered by:

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UK YOUTH

SPIRIT OF 2012
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS

Contents

Executive Summary

EmpowHER is an approach to delivering youth-led social action that encourages young women and girls (YW&G+) to use their voices for positive change.

Originally running from 2018 to 2021, the EmpowHER programme sought to address the worryingly low levels of wellbeing amongst YW&G+ through inclusive, meaningful social action opportunities. The programme achieved statistically significant results, supporting YW&G+ to feel happier, more confident and inspired to make a difference.

EmpowHER Legacy explored if and how the EmpowHER model could be scaled to reach more young people and be embedded within more youth organisations. This programme worked with 52 youth organisations, offering varying levels of support and funding to understand what is needed to sustainably deliver EmpowHER, at scale.

Conclusions and Implications

EmpowHER is an effective model for improving outcomes of Young Women and Girls (YW&G+) that can and should be scaled and disseminated. Youth workers and youth organisations think highly of the EmpowHER model. Through support and delivery, youth workers have developed skills in facilitating youth social action and youth work more broadly. Youth organisations' participation in EmpowHER Legacy has led to positive changes in practice and sustainability outcomes.

Funding alone does not equal quality and impact - a package of wraparound support is needed to scale EmpowHER:
- **The EmpowHER toolkit** was seen as the key enabler to successful delivery, providing inspiration and practical materials, suitable for youth workers of differing experience.
- **Flexibility in the model** enabled youth workers to embed the model into existing practice and build on their existing skills and knowledge.
- **Youth worker training, peer learning spaces and 1-1 support from UK** Youth all enabled youth workers to gain confidence in delivering youth social action, work through delivery challenges and develop professionally.

More longer-term investment is needed in the youth sector and the workforce to underpin and embed models like EmpowHER. Youth workers improved their understanding and delivery of high quality youth social action the longer they delivered the programme. Equally, high staff turnover sees knowledge and expertise being lost. Government and infrastructure organisations have a key role to play in creating the conditions for models like EmpowHER to become embedded.

Youth organisations should be supported to develop partnerships to deliver and embed the EmpowHER model. This enhanced and bolstered delivery of EmpowHER by:

enriching delivery; providing new opportunities for YW&G+; meeting operational needs and improving referral pathways.

Project setup and evaluation design needs careful consideration when seeking to understand the optimal level of support that youth organisations require to deliver, embed and sustain models like EmpowHER. In particular: putting the right controls in place; adequately resourcing and communicating evaluation requirements; and by using standardised outcome or fidelity measures.

Introduction

This report presents learning from the EmpowHER Legacy programme, including an evaluation of outcomes for youth workers and youth organisations and findings relating to scaling and embedding the EmpowHER model. The overarching aim of this evaluation was to better understand what is effective in scaling best practice and this report makes recommendations for funders of youth work, youth sector infrastructure organisations and policy makers.

This report makes an important contribution to the debate around what works in effectively scaling and embedding sustainable youth work practice during a period of considerable strain for the youth sector. UK Youth also reflects on its own practice, considering challenges faced during the evaluation process and the limitations of our approach to programme and evaluation design on EmpowHER Legacy.

Why did we start EmpowHER?

EmpowHER was established to address the disproportionately low wellbeing among young women and girls in the UK.

Before establishing the programme, we knew:

Just one in four young women and girls (YW&G) between the ages of seven and 21 described themselves as "very happy" – down from 41% in 2009 (Girlguiding, 2017)

Girls were found to have higher depressive symptoms than boys their age and were twice as likely to self-harm, with the risk increasing for those from lower income households (Children's Society, 2018)

We now know that:

The two most underrepresented groups are young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. (DCMS, 2021)

Youth-led social action (YSA) has further benefits for young people and wider society: adults who are aware of youth social action view young people in a more positive light. They are more trusting of young people, more likely to think that young people are helping to make the world a better place and are more comfortable with young people in leadership roles. (nfpResearch, 2022)

Social action has been identified as a pathway to improve wellbeing: of 10,000 people surveyed by NCVO 77% reported that volunteering had improved their mental health. 77% of young people (aged 18 to 24) feel that volunteering helps them feel less isolated (NCVO, 2019)

However, many young people face barriers to participating in social action: barriers to participation in YSA are often lack of confidence or self-esteem, lack of opportunities, lack of resources, and lack of time. (DCMS, 2021)

EmpowHER therefore seeks to reach and make a difference for young women and girls experiencing low wellbeing who may face additional barriers to youth social action.

"EmpowHER has been an amazing experience for me. I always feel safe, heard, appreciated, and loved."

– young woman, Strand One

Definitions

- **Young women and girls (YW&G+)** – Although EmpowHER targets young women and girls specifically to address disproportionately low wellbeing among this group, we recognize these challenges also affect other marginalized genders. We use 'YW&G+' to include young people participating in the programme who may not identify as young women or girls.

- **Youth-led social action (YSA)** – activities run by young people that make a positive difference to others or the environment (#iwill Movement).

- **Partnership working** – two or more organisations collaborating for a period of time.

- **Scale** – the attempt to reach more people, for example through a particular project without significantly reducing impact (New Philanthropy Capital, 2014).

The attempt to reach more people will not necessarily require an increase in funds or a reduce in costs. However, for EmpowHER Legacy, scaling looked like reducing costs in order to work with around five times more organisations than each cohort of the original programme. By offering seed funding of only £2,000 to 40 of these youth organisations, we heard how this placed a strain on youth organisations. This is discussed in more detail in the report.

Scaling in practice: EmpowHER Legacy reached 52 youth organisations in a single round of funding, compared to the original EmpowHER programme which worked with around 10 organisations at a time.

- **Embed** – to integrate something (e.g. a delivery model or tool) into an organisation's or individual's practice so that it becomes part of 'business as usual'. Integrating new practice into an organisation or individual's activity comes with changes.

Embedding practice is an outcome often – and understandably – sought by funders setting up a programme. However, this can be challenging for delivery organisations for many reasons and must be properly enabled by funders and infrastructure organisations. Embedding practice becomes difficult if a programme is not properly delivered initially, or delivery organisations are not provided adequate funding (particularly for consistent, qualified staffing), training, time or flexibility to learn how to deliver a model to a high standard and adapt it for their specific context.

Embedding in practice: Embedding looked different for different EmpowHER delivery organisations and ranged from continuing to use the toolkit as standard practice to making the EmpowHER model part of their core offer.

- **Sustainable** – able to continue at the same rate or level of activity without any problems. (Collins Dictionary)

When we look for sustainable practice, we want to see that practice has continued – and will continue – in some form without overburdening an organisation or requiring them to reduce other activity. It should be possible without large changes to their operational requirements (e.g. income targets, staff numbers) or ways of working. Sustaining practice becomes difficult when a sector is chronically underfunded and facing workforce challenges, as a certain level of capacity is required to continue new practice beyond a funding window.

Sustainability in practice: Sustainability looked different for different people and organisations on EmpowHER. There are very few examples of delivery continuing at the same rate or intensity when support from UK Youth ended. This evaluation also looks at sustainable outcomes, for example where youth workers and YW&G+ built skills and confidence that they could take forward and sustain.

Programme Overview

The EmpowHER model

EmpowHER started back in 2018 to help young women and girls (YW&G+) lead change in their communities and build wellbeing by providing inclusive and meaningful social action opportunities. The programme was funded by Spirit of 2012 and the #iwill Fund and led by UK Youth in partnership the British Red Cross and Young Women's Trust. EmpowHER supported over 1,800 YW&G+ to give back and lead change in their local communities. Launched to mark the centenary of women's suffrage in the UK, the programme encouraged young women and girls to use their voices for positive change – just as their predecessors did 100 years ago.

The EmpowHER delivery model takes YW&G+ on a journey through social learning, social action and finally social leadership (see diagram below).
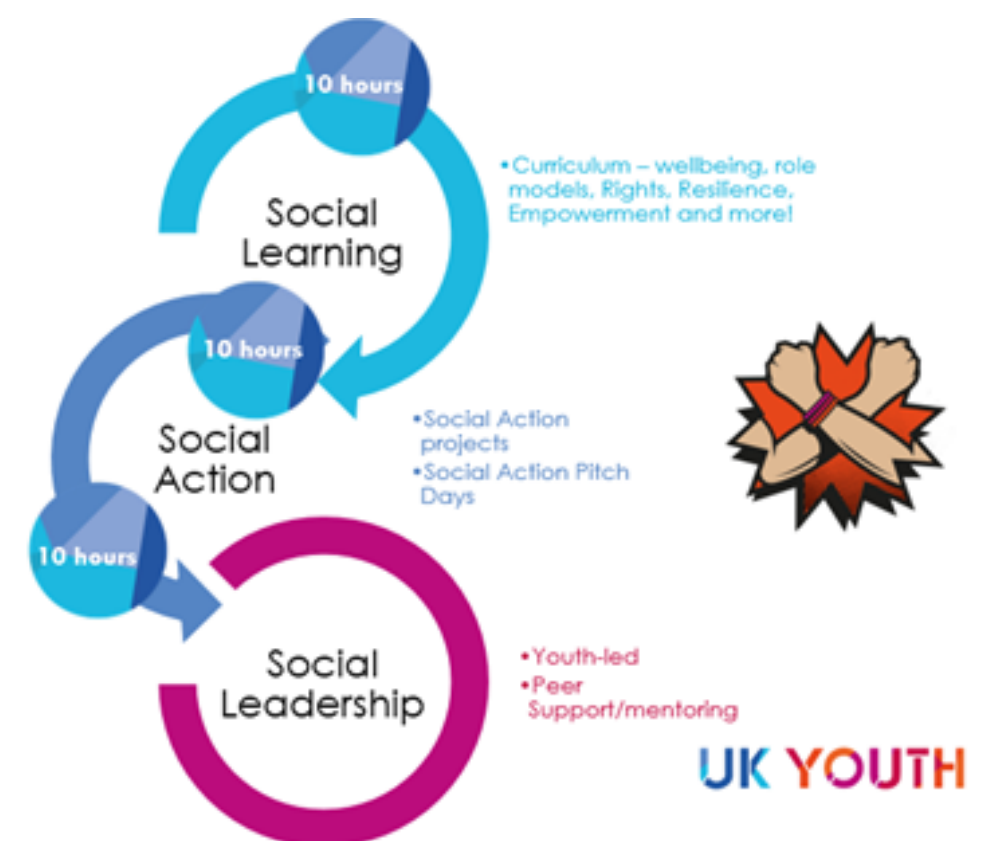

*Figure 1. Diagram of the EmpowHER delivery model*

YW&G+ who took part in EmpowHER experienced increased confidence, reduced limiting perceptions of themselves and started to build a habit of social action. After taking part in EmpowHER, statistically significant outcomes were measured, including increased happiness and confidence and high likelihood of continuing social action.
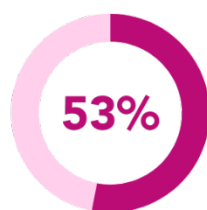
53%
of YW&G+ reported increased levels of happiness
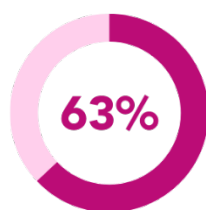
63%
of YW&G+ reported an increase in confidence
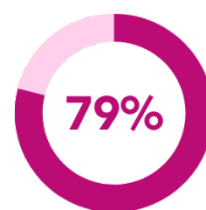
79%
of YW&G+ reported that they were "quite likely" or "very likely" to take part in volunteering in the next 12 months. (UK Youth, 2021b)

Building on the successful outcomes of the original EmpowHER programme, Spirit of 2012 funded UK Youth to conduct a research project to gather more learning. The research examined the strategic benefit for youth organisations of delivering youth social action (YSA) and the journey of young participants beyond initial engagement in YSA.

Spirit then funded EmpowHER Legacy, an initiative to scale and embed learning and best practice established by the original EmpowHER programme.

What is EmpowHER Legacy?

In June 2021, Spirit of 2012 awarded a further grant of £500,000 to UK Youth for the EmpowHER Legacy programme. The programme aimed to test different approaches to bringing high quality youth-led social action to youth organisations at scale and ultimately how to embed best practice into the sector.

The programme was designed with three distinct strands, with youth organisations assigned different levels of support from UK Youth and different amounts of funding. Support included:

- Funding – this ranged from £2,000 seed funding to £15,000 funding. An additional cost of living uplift in funding was provided to support delivery organisations facing increased running costs.

- Initial project training – offered to all participants. An informative induction, covering essential delivery information required to run the programme rather than a development session to improve or increase youth workers' skills.

- **Deep dive training** – offered to some participants. This was intensive, focused training aiming to develop youth worker skills and knowledge around specific topics to support and enhance the delivery of the programme. Topics included developing safe spaces, social action and sustaining programme activity.

- **EmpowHER Toolkit** – offered to all participants. A suite of delivery resources such as worksheets, session plans and links to websites and videos to support the delivery of social learning and social action plus tools to help partnership development and programme evaluation.

- **Project Officer support** – offered to different degrees depending on strand. The lowest level of support provided only minimal support via email, for example answering administrative queries, while the highest level provided regular check-in meetings, networking opportunities and project visits.

The specific differences between strands are set out in the table below and described in more detail in Appendix 2. The strands had differing expectations of delivery in proportion with the level of support and funding they received, ranging from delivering one social action project to delivering two full cohorts of EmpowHER (each involving 30 hours of engagement as per Figure 1 above). This design aimed to understand how the EmpowHER model could be scaled up and embedded in youth organisations.

	Strand 1A	Strand 1B	Strand 2	Strand 3
Number of organisations	20	20	6	6
Inputs				
Initial project training	✓	✓	✓	✓
Deep dive training		✓	✓	✓
Toolkit	✓	✓	✓	✓
Project Officer support	Minimal	Light	High	High
Funding	£2k	£2k	£10k	£15k
Cost of living uplift			£830	£1245
Minimum required outputs				
Social action projects	1	1	1	2
Hours of engagement	No minimum	No minimum	30 hours	60 hours
No. of organisations partnered with			1	2
Plan for model sustainability			✓	✓

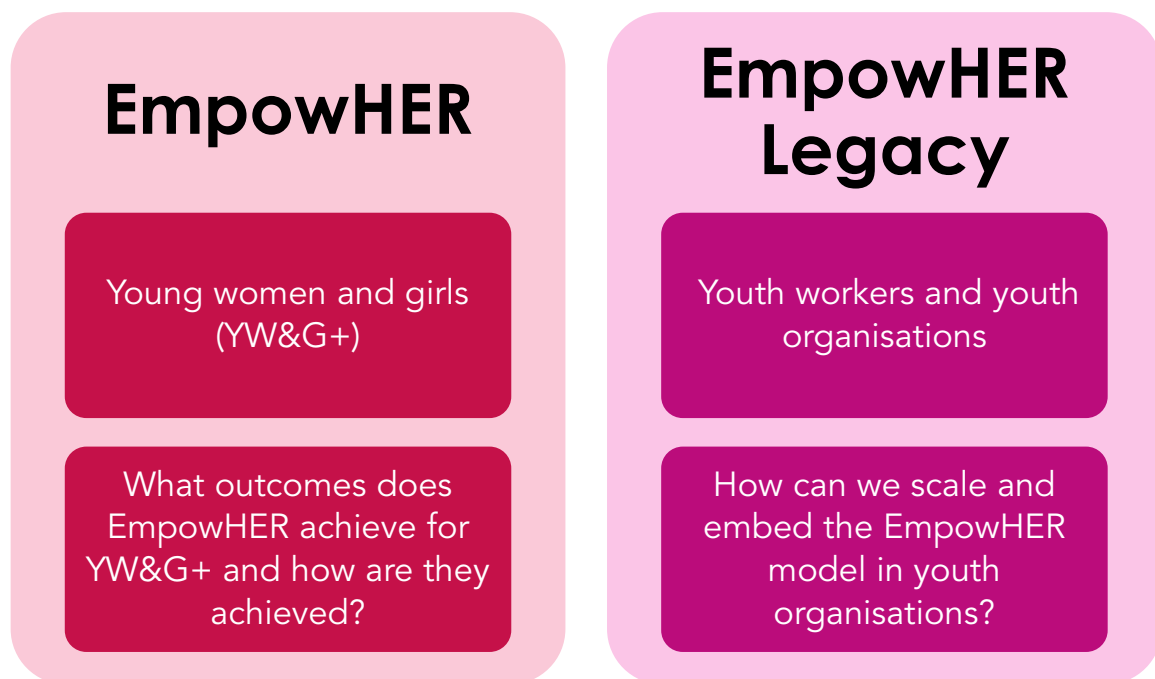*Table 1 Outline of EmpowHER Legacy strands*

To improve accessibility and inclusion on the programme, an £18,430 underspend from the first phase of EmpowHER was used for training for delivery partners, translation of the EmpowHER resources toolkit into different languages, installing an accessibility toolbar to

the website hosting the EmpowHER toolkit and providing an access fund to support YW&G+ facing barriers to participation.

Our approach to evaluation

The original EmpowHER evaluation looked in detail at outcomes for YW&G+ who took part. After three years of EmpowHER across four cohorts, we were satisfied that EmpowHER achieves strong outcomes for YW&G+. Our research project also considered the benefits of EmpowHER to youth organisations. This meant we could shift the focus of our evaluation for EmpowHER Legacy from the benefits of the programme itself to learning about how to scale and embed the EmpowHER model. This different focus complemented other learning and evaluation work on scaling and embedding YSA taking place across the sector such as the #iwill Fund (IFF Research, 2023; #iwill, 2019a) that does centre young people. The difference in focus for outcomes measurement and learning between the EmpowHER and EmpowHER Legacy evaluations is shown in the visual below.

EmpowHER

Young women and girls (YW&G+)

What outcomes does EmpowHER achieve for YW&G+ and how are they achieved?

EmpowHER Legacy

Youth workers and youth organisations

How can we scale and embed the EmpowHER model in youth organisations?

EmpowHER Legacy aimed to achieve the following outcomes:

- ✓ **Increased provision of high quality and inclusive social action opportunities;**
- ✓ **Increased partnership working with relevant organisations;**
- ✓ **Improved awareness within the community of youth organisations and the value of their work.**

Other outcomes were anticipated, including evidence of youth worker development, and these did emerge in the evaluation.

Evaluation methods and learning questions

The programme was evaluated using different methods throughout delivery to explore both programme outcomes and wider learning regarding scaling and embedding the EmpowHER model. Mixed methods, including surveys, interviews and focus groups were used to explore the experiences of youth workers and, to a lesser extent, of the young women and girls who took part. More detail on our methodology is provided in Appendix 1.

The evaluation sought to measure the programme's intended outcomes and to answer the following learning questions:

- **Learning Question 1:** Now that best practice has been established through previous EmpowHER cohorts, can we effectively scale the programme?

- **Learning Question 2:** When investing in youth organisations, what works to embed and scale sustainable projects?

- **Learning Question 3:** Does the scaling of EmpowHER lead to other outcomes for the youth sector?

- **Learning Question 4:** Do these additional outcomes enable social action projects to become embedded?

Profile of participating YW&G+ and youth organisations

EmpowHER Legacy was delivered in 9 regions in England: Greater London, Southwest, Southeast, North West, North East, East of England, West Midlands, East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber. Youth organisations delivering the programme ranged from very small or newly established organisations to those that were much larger and more established.

Youth workers couldn't stop talking about the amazing YW&G+ who took part in EmpowHER. Among these young people:

- **42%** were from racialised backgrounds
- **60%** were from low-income families
- **24%** had poor mental health.

This reflects the emphasis of EmpowHER delivery to reach YW&G+ who are less likely to have participated in youth social action.

Delivery

Delivery took place between November 2021 and March 2023 and involved 52 youth organisations with significant diversity in levels of annual income, staff numbers and youth work approaches.

Types of social action projects

There has been a huge variety of themes for the social action projects. Youth workers have reflected on how refreshing it has been for the young people to pursue a topic they are passionate about.

In terms of the most common themes, the first was violence against women and joint second were body image and environmental themed projects. These common themes provide insight into the most important issues for young women and girls today.

Violence against women and girls

Body image **Environment**

Examples of social action projects delivered on EmpowHER Legacy:

Educational campaign on knife violence. The group has involved the local football club and connected with UK-wide Knife Angel Campaign.

Setting up a community nature café that ran events for different communities, e.g. elderly people, parents with young children

Environmental action campaign targeting parents to switch off their engines when picking up children and young people from madrasas

Fundraising and coordinating donations for local homelessness charities

Types of partnerships developed

Youth organisations connected with a diverse range of organisations as partners to support the delivery of EmpowHER Legacy. The partnerships ranged from small community groups to much larger organisations such as the National Centre for Writing, Amnesty International and Women's Aid. Partners took different roles in supporting the project, from sharing knowledge and expertise to providing funding and support in kind.

Charities

often supported with social action expertise

provided local opportunities for social learning and social action

Community organisations

Local corporates

offered funding or support in kind

The majority of partnerships highlighted by youth organisations were local – community groups, collectives, local radio stations, councils and charities. A number of youth organisations worked with schools in different capacities, many as points of referral for YW&G+ or providing resources such as premises for EmpowHER sessions. The value of these partnerships was clear and is explored in more detail in the Key Findings section.

Training

All youth organisations were provided introductory programme training to kick off their delivery and those in Strands One B, Two and Three were also offered 'deep dive' training on social learning, social action, partnership working and sustainability. Throughout the delivery period, youth workers were invited to attend additional training workshops hosted by UK Youth for upskilling as well as network meetings to further connect delivery partners delivering on the programme.

Opportunities for young people

We provided opportunities for the YW&G+ in Strands Two and Three to pitch for their social action projects at EmpowHER Pitch days throughout the delivery window. The groups of YW&G+ presented their social action plans at Dragons' Den style events to request extra funding for their projects.

Case study

The [Boathouse Youth,](#) a Strand Three partner, delivered EmpowHER Legacy to two groups of YW&G+ girls aged 12–16. They delivered sessions on body image, sexual harassment, social media and puberty.

One group worked on an impressive [social action project](#), lobbying one of their partner schools for gender-targeted sex education lessons and free and accessible sanitary products in toilets. The YW&G+ have drafted and written a letter to their school asking for these changes: *"Following lengthy discussions with our youth workers we have found a common ground and interest surrounding puberty and periods. […] Our aim is that we can prevent humiliation by normalising puberty by having more open honest discussions with girls of our age to make them feel more comfortable about their changing bodies."*

The second group was concerned about safety in their area and decided to work on a campaign to bring awareness to safer streets, aiming to reduce the number of incidents relating to sexual harassment. One of the key partnerships was with Empowerment Charity, a Blackpool based organisation who make a long-term commitment to supporting local communities and improving the lives of others. The group protested safely around the Blackpool town centre. They held up their signs and chanted with

pride. The chants included *"What do we want? Safer Streets! When do want them? Now!"* and *"My body, My choice!"*. The energy after the march was incredible, the YW&G+ were immensely proud of themselves and having their voices heard!

To end the project, the YW&G+ were invited to talk at a local conference 'It Stops Here'. One participant created a [short video](#) which was played at the conference. They spoke about the journey they have been on with the EmpowHER programme and the impact this has had on them individually and as a group. The posters they created were also displayed at the conference and were then shared locally, at schools and colleges.

"The YW&G+ now feel more confident in talking about sexual harassment and have learnt where they go to report this as well as how to keep themselves safe. The experience of the march is one they will never forget. […] They are proud of what they have achieved and are delighted about their voices being displayed throughout the whole of Blackpool via the posters they have created." - youth worker, Boathouse Youth

Following the success of EmpowHER, the Safer Streets Campaign co-ordinator from Empowerment Charity was asked to speak with members of parliament about this project!

Key findings

Learning Question 1: Now that best practice has been established through previous EmpowHER cohorts, can we effectively scale the programme?

Learning Question 2: When investing in youth organisations, what works to embed and scale sustainable projects?

Outputs achieved through EmpowHER Legacy

- **746 YW&G+ took part** in youth social action, many for the first time.

- YW&G+ set up **79 new youth social action projects**.

- Youth workers provided **over 2800 hours of social learning and social action** for YW&G+.

- Participants' social action projects **reached an estimated 30,465 people**.

- Youth organisations **connected with 171 other organisations**.

> **For every £1 invested, EmpowHER Legacy delivered greater output than the original EmpowHER programme.**
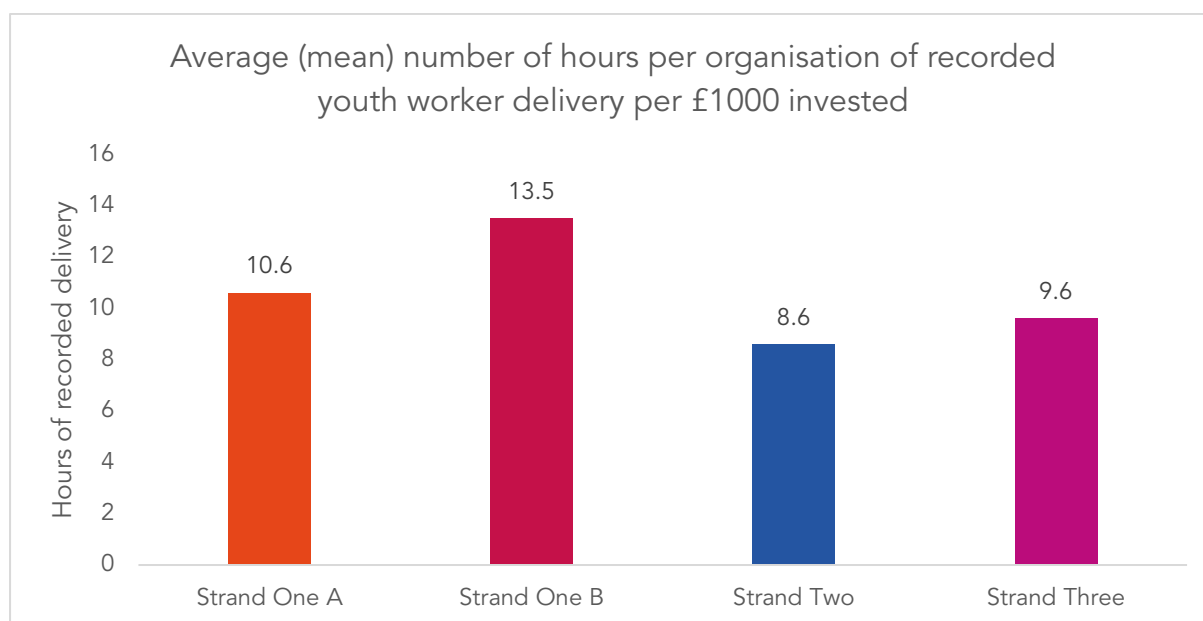>
> For example, the number of YW&G+ reached almost doubled on EmpowHER Legacy (an increase of 93%) and the number of YSA projects delivered increased by 78%.
>
> *This comparison is made on the basis of 'per £1 invested', which allows for the original EmpowHER programme having a total budget five times that of EmpowHER Legacy.*

Looking across the EmpowHER Legacy strands, the average number of delivery hours provided to YW&G+ was broadly similar when controlling for differences in funding. However, organisations in Strand One B provided the most delivery hours, on average, proportionate to the level of funding, as seen in the graph below. This indicates that lower levels of 'seed' funding may offer slightly greater value in terms of output (i.e. delivery

hours) but does not account for outcomes achieved, quality of delivery or experiences in delivery, which are covered elsewhere in this report.

Average (mean) number of hours per organisation of recorded youth worker delivery per £1000 invested

Strand	Hours
Strand One A	10.6
Strand One B	13.5
Strand Two	8.6
Strand Three	9.6

Hours of recorded delivery (y-axis, 0–16)

Outcomes achieved through EmpowHER Legacy

In this section we explore the outcomes achieved through EmpowHER Legacy, looking at the programme as a whole and comparing across the different delivery strands.

Our evaluation has shown that youth organisations and YW&G+ who took part in the EmpowHER Legacy programme have benefited from their involvement. Similar positive outcomes were evident across all strands, but were slightly more marked for organisations in Strands Two and Three. As described in more detail in this section, youth workers worked effectively with the YW&G+ and observed important benefits, including:

- young people's personal development
- improved understanding and delivery of high quality youth social action among youth workers and young people
- new partnerships and funding

Positive outcomes for YW&G+

Key finding: EmpowHER Legacy, delivered at scale, achieved the same positive outcomes for young women and girls as the original EmpowHER programme – increasing YW&G+'s confidence, sense of belonging and ongoing interest in social action.

The positive impact of the model on YW&G+ shone through in all touchpoints with youth workers and reflected the positive outcomes of the original EmpowHER cohorts. We have

triangulated data across a range of data collection methods (as adopted by youth organisations and reported to UK Youth) as well as focus groups and interviews conducted with youth workers.

"This group of participants all have varying degrees of mental health issues that affects their day-to-day living. Doing this programme has helped them explore their issues in a safe environment and the difference in them has been amazing. We have had a participant who came out of school due to bullying and became excluded from social gatherings. She has attended the programme and has thrived. She has taken an active part in sessions, really getting involved in activities and has carried out social action in her own time outside of the leader-led sessions."

Youth Worker, Strand Two

Increased self-acceptance, sense of belonging and confidence

Through analysis of data provided by youth workers through reports, interviews and focus groups, we found that the EmpowHER model enabled YW&G+ to progress and develop in a number of areas relating to their self-acceptance, sense of belonging and confidence. Negative self-perceptions and a lack of confidence and trust in other people were evident at the start of the programme, which were closely linked to their ability and confidence to engage.

In their final reports, youth workers shared that they saw improvements in the YW&G+'s ability to connect with people they didn't know and their interest in doing well at school increased. It was evident that YW&G+'s self-perception and self-acceptance improved over time, which enabled them to be more confident in interacting with peers and adults. As a result, it was easier to develop a sense of belonging. Further outcomes of engaging in YSA were an increase in YW&G+'s ability to identify and lead change, improved self-esteem and strengthened links to the community.

"I have gained more confidence to speak out in groups and to share the ideas I have." – young woman, Strand One

Developing social action-specific skills and awareness

Youth workers described how the EmpowHER resources broadened their young people's understanding of what social action could be and the value of it. One youth worker explained, "So the vast majority of [the YW&G+] have talked about social action or what they thought social action is, which is basically volunteering for like a Cancer Research charity shop on Saturday kind of thing. But this is much more meaningful." This wider scope therefore opened up the possibility of social action to the YW&G+'s creativity, allowing

them to see more things that they were interested in and making them more likely to seek out further opportunities.

The EmpowHER model's social learning and YSA activities enabled the YW&G+ to improve their understanding of social issues such as homelessness, body image and pollution. Programme delivery has inspired the YW&G+ to continue engaging in YSA outside of EmpowHER, aiming to improve their communities; therefore, we anticipate that there will be some level of legacy of YSA among participants.
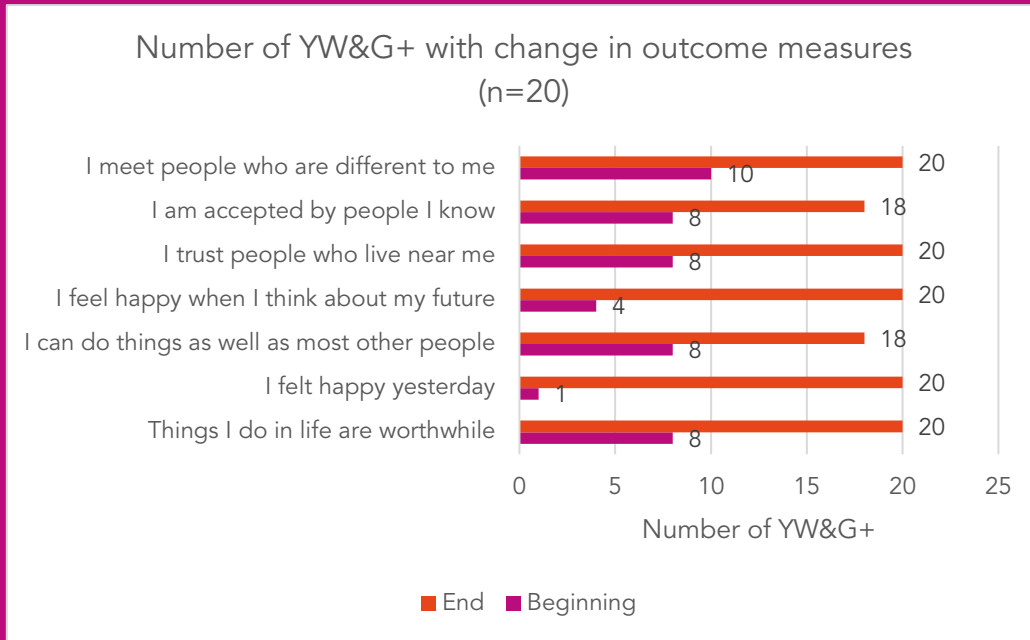
"The young women want to carry on using their voice to create change and help the younger generation. Some of the young women mentioned contacting other organisations and volunteering." – youth worker, Strand Three

Case study: data deep dive on a Strand Three organisation

We collected data using UK Youth's resources and complimented with ours such as observation. Most of our young people come from deprived areas. Because of experiences of racism and discrimination with their neighbours, most of our YW&G+ feel they can't trust people that live near them. Some YW&G+ are bullied at school and feel they are treated differently because they are refugees.

Number of YW&G+ with change in outcome measures (n=20)

Outcome measure	Beginning	End
I meet people who are different to me	10	20
I am accepted by people I know	8	18
I trust people who live near me	8	20
I feel happy when I think about my future	4	20
I can do things as well as most other people	8	18
I felt happy yesterday	1	20
Things I do in life are worthwhile	8	20

Number of YW&G+

■ End ■ Beginning

This organisation observed significant improvements in outcomes for their young women and girls across a mix of outcome measures, including those that considered wellbeing, self-acceptance and feelings of belonging.

The young women fed back their positive experience of social action. Of the 20 young women who took part in EmpowHER at this organisation:

- *20* enjoyed the social action they did during EmpowHER.

- *20* felt they had control over what the social action involved.

- *18* felt the social action helped them learn new things.

- *12* felt the social action helped people in their community.

One young person said "From this experience I would encourage anyone be part of this project because it has changed mine and my family's lives."

Positive outcomes for youth workers

Key findings:

- Youth workers' main area of development while delivering EmpowHER involved working in a more youth-led way and, therefore, more in line with youth work principles.
- Youth workers built knowledge and confidence in delivering youth social action, including those who had considered themselves experienced upon joining the programme.

Enjoyment and appreciation of EmpowHER

Youth workers loved EmpowHER! The main theme of feedback we received from youth workers who delivered EmpowHER was how much they and their young people loved it. We heard during interviews and focus groups how youth workers appreciated EmpowHER for its positive impact on young people, its flexibility and its opportunities for developing their practice. Youth workers told us how much they enjoyed delivery that was more youth-led and how they hoped to take this beyond social action. Youth workers were overwhelmingly interested in finding ways to deliver the EmpowHER model or elements of it beyond this round of funding, demonstrating how much they valued the programme.

> What helped you to feel confident to continue delivering EmpowHER beyond the programme?

> "I think it was the acceptance of the young people and how much they were loving having complete ownership. That they were the decision makers and that they were saying this is what we want to do, this is where it's going next. So that was the real thing that we loved about it."
> – youth worker, Strand Three

Youth worker learning and development

Working in a more youth-led way was not only an area of enjoyment for youth workers, but also an area of development. Even youth workers can often improve how youth-led their work is! For many youth workers, delivering EmpowHER Legacy provided the opportunity and impetus to increase how youth-led their provision is. Many felt that the programme design, particularly the toolkit resources, and the model's ethos of encouraging youth-led approaches supported them to step outside their comfort zone and give more ownership to the YW&G+. We found this was particularly true for youth workers who have not done

formal youth work training or qualifications and so are sometimes more accustomed to teacher/pupil dynamics. Developing their understanding of youth-led approaches and intending to run provision and their organisations in a more youth-led way beyond the programme was a key takeaway for many youth workers.

> *"going forward I'd like to consult more with young people before I decide on what projects I want to be involved with [...] if it means something to them and it's what they want, then I'm willing to do it. If it doesn't, then I'm not." – youth worker, Strand One A*

Knowledge of delivering social action was also a key area of development. While many youth workers told us that they were experienced in delivering social action prior to delivering EmpowHER, several noted that their understanding of what social action is had improved through their participation in the programme. This meant they were able to facilitate YW&G+ engaging in higher quality and genuinely youth-led social action.

Positive community outcomes

Key finding: YSA projects were most likely to impact the young women and girls' more immediate community (e.g. peers, school community) but also often facilitated young people and youth organisations to reach out to the wider community.

Increasing community awareness of each youth organisation and youth work as a whole was an intended outcome of the programme. We heard examples of delivery having an impact on communities beyond the youth organisation, whether they be immediate communities (parents, schools) or more far-reaching (general public, other community groups).

Impact on immediate communities

Youth workers are likely to be acutely aware of their young people's development – particularly when required to provide insights as part of a programme evaluation. However, feedback was also received from people beyond the programme, which reflects how substantial and observable the changes were in YW&G+'s confidence, behaviour and wellbeing.

We heard of emotive feedback from teachers and parents describing the incredible development they witnessed in their pupils or children.

> "We had a group of students that were very, very close to getting kicked out of school and who are on extra measures. [After EmpowHER] teachers and parents said their kids behaved a lot better, that they like taking part. There's been a lot less suspensions. Been a few more detentions, but that's because while they've been acting out it's been less severe." – youth worker, Strand Three

<u>Impact on the wider community</u>

"Because we're based in the community centre, we tend to do a lot of social action with, for the community centre [...] so [EmpowHER] kind of made us think about doing something outside of the community centre area [...] off the estate" – youth worker, Strand Two

EmpowHER Legacy delivery often took youth organisations and YW&G+ out into the wider community, particularly when delivering their YSA projects. Although it is difficult to measure the changes that took place in communities more widely, the feedback we received from the majority of the organisations regarding community outreach was positive. The diversity of the organisations involved in EmpowHER Legacy reached communities across England and raised social awareness on multiple issues, including domestic violence, mental health, body image, period stigma and the climate crisis. According to feedback from youth workers and quotes from YW&G+, we expect the legacy of EmpowHER to be felt in these wider communities.

Positive legacy outcomes

<u>Key findings:</u>

- YW&G+ were keen to continue participating in social action beyond the programme and were supported to do so.
- The majority of youth organisations were continuing to deliver elements of EmpowHER such as gender-targeted work and social learning and/or social action.

<u>For YW&G+</u>

Previous cycles of EmpowHER delivery and research found that YW&G+ are keen to continue participating in social action beyond the programme. This desire to continue social action was also seen through the evaluation of EmpowHER Legacy. Where next steps were made available to them, YW&G+ went on to set up EmpowHER sessions at their schools, stepped up as Young Leaders, started volunteering or started planning the next step for their social action project. There have also been examples of young people joining youth organisations as staff after taking part in EmpowHER. Youth workers emphasised the importance of building these pathways into programmes like EmpowHER so that young people can easily continue to build on their YSA experience.

<u>For youth organisations</u>

Through follow-up interviews with delivery organisations from the original EmpowHER programme (two years after delivery ended) and EmpowHER Legacy (three months after delivery ended), we found that the majority were continuing to deliver elements of EmpowHER. For many organisations, this looked like continuing gender-targeted work (discussed in more detail [later in the report](#)) and social learning and/or social action, often following a similar structure to the EmpowHER model. Youth workers reflected on how

much they had learnt through delivering EmpowHER as individuals and organisations, which has led to developing as an organisation and achieving further funding to deliver similar work for young people. In the few instances where youth organisations had not continued to deliver elements of EmpowHER, this was usually due to staff turnover or pressure to move onto the next funded programme. These themes are discussed in more detail later in this report.

Case study: Original EmpowHER delivery organisation

We were funded to deliver EmpowHER from 2018 to 2021. EmpowHER was very helpful for the organisation's development. Before delivering EmpowHER, we started as a sports organisation wanting to reach more YW&G+. The restricted, gender-targeted funding for EmpowHER was helpful for cementing this in our organisation. We now employ more female staff – we didn't even have a maternity policy before. Young women who took part in EmpowHER have now become staff members, partly because of leadership opportunities during the sessions.

EmpowHER has really driven forward our understanding of social action as a tool for personal development. We now use it in all our programmes. Using the language of social action has helped to attract funding, including from Comic Relief. This started with EmpowHER.

"In the same way that a football game is about building relationships, we see social action as the vehicle, not the purpose." – youth worker

What works to scale models like EmpowHER?

This section explores how UK Youth sought to scale the EmpowHER model and what UK Youth has learnt through delivering EmpowHER Legacy.

We compare data across strands, where it is robust and allows us to draw conclusions. Equally, youth workers explained which aspects of the model were most crucial to helping them to deliver high quality EmpowHER sessions to YW&G+. The toolkit was the standout element that youth workers credited for enabling them to successfully deliver the programme, regardless of assigned strand or prior experience.

The EmpowHER Toolkit

Key finding: The EmpowHER toolkit of delivery resources provides the inspiration, guidance, benchmarking and practical materials to facilitate youth workers at different levels of experience to deliver high quality youth social action.

The EmpowHER toolkit consistently emerged as a key enabler of youth workers' successful and enjoyable delivery of the model. The toolkit provides resources such as 'how to' guides, activity sheets and tips from previous delivery organisations. One youth worker described it as "like having cards up your sleeve". One organisation explained they would have been able to develop their own resources, but the toolkit meant they could jump straight into delivery, saving capacity to spend more time face to face with their young people. This comment reflected a feeling among many youth workers. From organisations of all types, the toolkit was identified as making their lives easier, by providing resources from which to easily pick and choose.

The toolkit was used in different ways by different youth workers and youth organisations. Some used it extremely flexibly as facilitation tools in open youth work sessions, while others used the resources to create detailed session plans for targeted work. For youth organisations with more experience of social action, the toolkit acted as a sense check that their delivery was 'on the right lines' of what was expected from them. For less experienced practitioners, volunteers and sessional staff, the toolkit gave them the confidence to run sessions. We heard how the toolkit provided vital "guidance", "step by step instructions" and "a foundation" for delivery.

> *"With the toolkit it was really, really helpful because initially we had our own ideas and we had to keep on reminding ourselves – Don't just introduce the topic and let [the YW&G+] just say 'OK yeah we'll go with that'. It was about building their confidence and I think that's probably the part of delivery where I've developed more, personally." – youth worker, Strand One*

As well as acting as a delivery tool, it emerged that the toolkit was having a deeper impact by influencing the development of youth workers' practice. Several youth workers noted that the toolkit guided them to follow a more youth-led approach, making space for their YW&G+ to explore the topics that interested them. This was true for organisations with more experience of social action as well as those who were newly delivering it.

Getting the funding right

Key findings:

- Receiving adequate funding sets up youth organisations to be able to deliver EmpowHER best practice by providing the means to pay for sufficient youth worker time and required resources.
- Low levels of 'seed funding' might be seen as providing a platform for organisations to leverage funding from elsewhere but the need to find additional resource appears to have sometimes shifted focus from delivery.

Youth organisations in the different strands received different levels of funding, from £2,000 'seed funding' to £15,000 investment. Many organisations in Strand One were able to deliver outstanding, high quality, youth social action, however this was often bolstered by using reserves or support from elsewhere.

Importantly, youth workers from Strand One were open about the challenges caused by limited funding (£2,000) to deliver the model. The youth sector is currently operating under immense financial and staffing pressures as detailed elsewhere in this report. Being required to deliver the model for so little money added to the pressures that youth organisations were experiencing, pushing them to depend on volunteers, subsidising their delivery using other funds and relying on partners to support with vital resources such as premises. The time spent on these actions to keep the programme running meant they had to spend less time actually delivering the programme, limiting their ability to follow best practice.

Capacity challenges are not limited to smaller organisations or to those who received only 'seed' funding via EmpowHER. One medium-sized delivery organisation in Strand Two (received £10k funding) explained that they weren't sure if they would be able to deliver EmpowHER until they received additional support from another funder to expand their staff team. This demonstrates the current precarity of the youth sector and the importance of both full cost recovery project funding and unrestricted grants.

While delivery organisations in Strands Two and Three, who received more funding (£10k and 15k respectively), felt that this level of funding was adequate, youth workers felt that this level of funding only covered 'basic' provision. Many chose to supplement this with other income, in order to offer the YW&G+ additional elements to the programme, such as day trips or small keepsakes. Youth workers felt these 'extras' were extremely important for

facilitating group cohesion and enhancing the programme experience, therefore developing stronger positive feelings towards YSA.

Youth worker training and peer learning

Key finding: It is important to provide quality, accessible training on all aspects of high quality delivery (e.g. social learning, social action and partnership working) alongside spaces for youth workers to share their learning among peers. This develops youth worker skills and confidence with delivering youth social action and grow youth worker networks, facilitating collaboration and sharing best practice.

Also key to scaling high quality delivery of EmpowHER was providing opportunities for youth workers to develop and increase their knowledge of relevant topics and practice. All youth workers received initial training on the programme model. Strands One B, Two and Three partners received further depth via three deep dive training days spread across the delivery period. These focused on 'Building safe spaces for social learning', 'Social Action' and 'Sustainability' . The sessions included a number of previous EmpowHER youth workers, alumni and ambassadors sharing their EmpowHER experiences and top tips for delivery.

Youth workers felt that the content provided in UK Youth EmpowHER training was very useful, with several sharing the training with coworkers or new staff. Youth workers favoured shorter online training (e.g. hour-long sessions) over the deep dive style of several hours and there was significant interest in face-to-face training as a supplement to online delivery. When attending training, youth workers especially valued the chance to share and discuss experiences and learning with peers from other organisations or from across the UK.
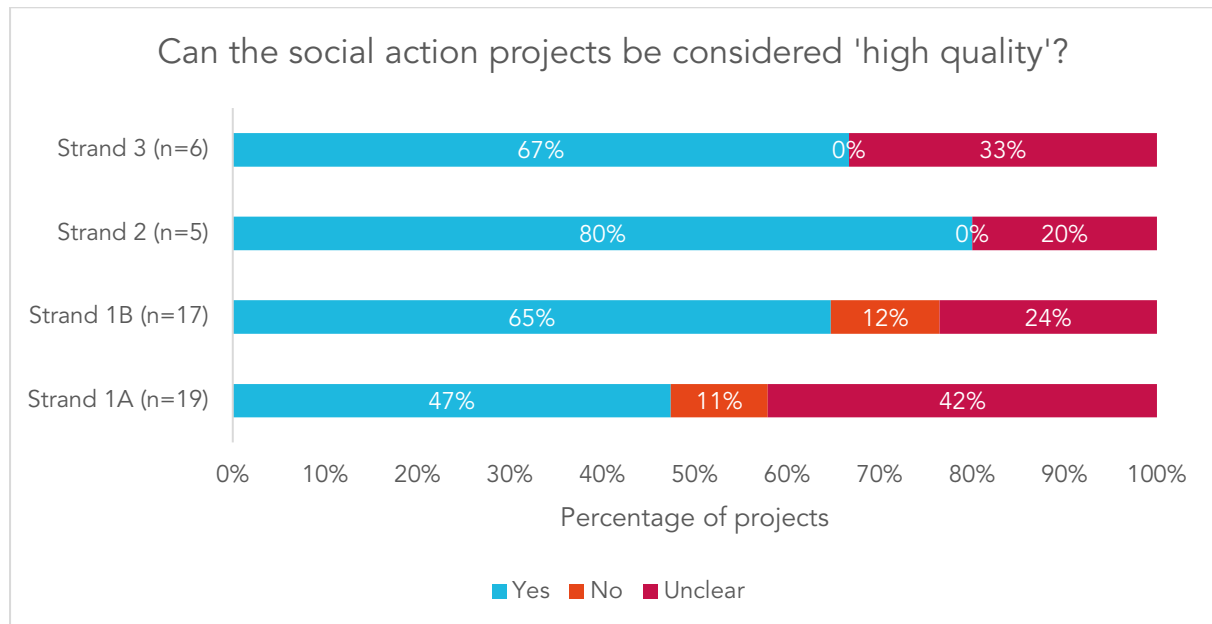
> *"I really enjoyed hearing how other organisations have used EmpowHER as a catalyst to deliver similar projects and finding out about their social action projects" - youth worker, Strand One*

As noted earlier in the report, it seems that youth workers with formal youth work qualifications are more likely to already be comfortable and confident delivering a more youth-led approach. It is difficult to comment conclusively on the impact of youth workers' qualifications on the quality of delivery. However, this would be a useful area of further research.

Comparison across Strands indicates that the lack of deep dive training on Strand One A – the key difference in treatment between Strand One A and One B – may have resulted in lower quality social action projects. Basic analysis of the youth social action projects reported to UK Youth identified that a lower proportion of Strand A projects could be considered 'high quality' as compared with Strand One B, as seen in the graph below. 'High quality' here is defined as identifiable adherence to the #iwill principles of high quality youth social action (#iwill, 2019b) in youth worker written reports. It is important to note that youth workers were not explicitly asked to outline how their projects had met these

principles in their reports. So, where evidence of adherence to the principles was not found, this may be due to a lack of information in some instances (included as 'unclear' in the graph below) rather than the project not meeting the principles in practice. Where projects were judged to not adhere to the #iwill principles, this was because of evidence to the contrary, for example details of the youth worker deciding the project topic.

Can the social action projects be considered 'high quality'?

Strand	Yes	No	Unclear
Strand 3 (n=6)	67%	0%	33%
Strand 2 (n=5)	80%	0%	20%
Strand 1B (n=17)	65%	12%	24%
Strand 1A (n=19)	47%	11%	42%

Percentage of projects

■ Yes ■ No ■ Unclear

To further investigate the possible impact of deep dive training, we looked at the baseline and endpoint results of a skills confidence survey completed by youth workers to make a comparison between strands. However, due to the low number of matched baseline and endpoint responses, we were unable to draw conclusions on this point.

1:1 support from UK Youth support staff

Key finding: Optional 1:1 support for youth workers from external project support staff with expertise in youth work provides reassurance, enables youth workers to work through delivery challenges and builds confidence when youth social action is a new experience.

Youth workers were full of praise for the support provided by UK Youth project support staff. The key role that these staff offered was answering questions and providing reassurance that youth workers were delivering the programme as expected. Youth workers particularly valued UK Youth Project Officers' deep understanding of youth work principles and issues currently facing the sector. UK Youth project support staff worked regionally, holding a nuanced understanding of both the EmpowHER model and the youth organisations' contexts. This proved particularly invaluable during key challenges for delivery, such as the disproportionate impact of Covid on one youth organisation or a youth

worker needing to take time off work due to personal circumstances. Youth workers also valued the support to stay on track, particularly regarding the monitoring and evaluation of delivery. While some of these areas of support could, in theory, be offered through a peer support network, the evaluators also see an important role for support from an infrastructure organisation, particularly at a time of extreme financial and staffing pressure for the sector.

Youth workers expressed some frustration with high turnover of project support staff. Although they explained they were always able to have their questions answered and found handovers to be effective, confusion over who to contact and repeatedly needing to build new relationships caused additional challenges for already stretched practitioners.

What works to embed sustainable projects?

Here, we build on other sections of this report to highlight other notable factors that contribute towards embedding sustainable youth social action projects.

Flexibility within the model

Key finding: Designing youth work delivery models with flexibility in delivery content and approach sets youth workers up to make the most of their expertise and facilitates youth-led delivery. In turn, this makes youth social action projects more relevant, engaging and meaningful to YW&G+.

The flexibility of the programme was often pulled out by youth workers as important for successful delivery. Youth workers emphasised that the flexibility of the programme regarding which topics they covered, when and for how long, meant that they were able to follow the interests of the YW&G+. In this way, the programme set up enabled more youth-led delivery. This kept young people engaged and ensured that the social learning topics and ultimately the social action project were meaningful to them. The flexibility of the model also allowed youth workers to adapt delivery to suit the needs of their youth organisation and young people.

Approaches to delivering EmpowHER varied hugely between youth organisations, ranging from unstructured open sessions to targeted sessions planned far in advance. This opportunity to design a bespoke programme supported the embedding of programme elements as youth workers and young people could observe which elements best met young people's needs and blended into existing provision. Youth workers also commented on how the level of flexibility allowed them to bring in more of their youth work expertise than is sometimes possible on more structured programmes. This flexibility and proximity to youth work principles facilitated embedding the model by complementing established ways of working.

> *"I believe I can make a positive change in my community, by inspiring others with new ideas and exciting projects of my own in the future." – girl, Strand Two*

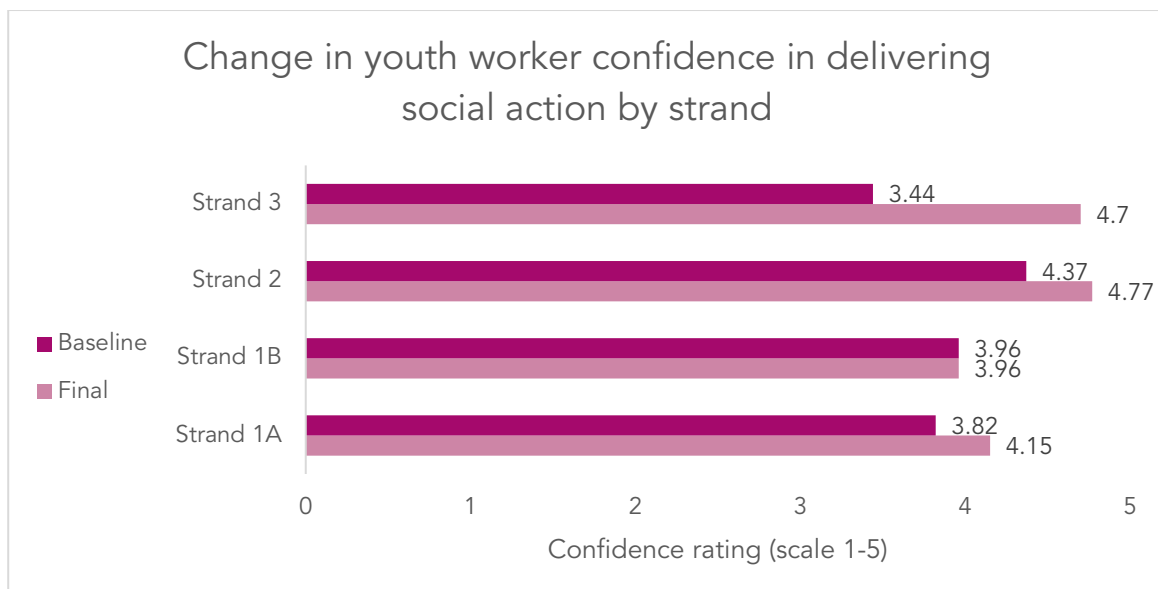## Allowing time and building on youth worker expertise

Key finding: Youth workers with prior experience of facilitating YSA were more able to 'hit the ground running' with EmpowHER, appeared to facilitate higher quality social action and were more confident in the model than youth workers with less prior experience.

Youth workers required to deliver two cohorts of EmpowHER felt more confident in their knowledge during the second round of delivery. This indicates that repeated delivery and allowing time to build on youth workers' expertise is key to embedding quality delivery at scale. Youth organisations' and youth workers' experience of delivering youth social action

appeared to have a marked difference on social action quality. UK Youth project staff noted that youth workers with experience of this type of provision were able to deliver the model effectively more quickly than those with less experience. This point also emerged during youth worker interviews and focus groups as youth workers who were new to social action or to EmpowHER's more purposeful, youth-led social action, explained that it took some time to get started with the programme and that they felt that they wanted to keep checking their delivery was 'on the right lines'.

The benefit of experience was also reflected through youth worker interviews with Strand Three organisations, who were required to deliver two cohorts of EmpowHER. These youth workers reflected on how they were more confident in their social action knowledge the second time around, allowing them to improve their delivery. We heard repeatedly from these organisations that delivering multiple cohorts of EmpowHER had allowed them to "hit the ground running" and that they had needed less 1:1 support from UK Youth when delivering their second cohort. This was also reflected in the youth worker survey, where on average youth workers delivering Strands Two and Three had larger positive changes between the beginning and end of delivery than Strand One organisations in confidence across measures for delivering social learning and social action and developing partnerships and sustainability plans.

The graph below, looking particularly at 'confidence in delivering social action' indicators, illustrates the greater change in confidence for Strand Three. However, it is worth noting the relatively small number of responses to this survey[1] – due to the small number of delivery organisations involved in Strands Two and Three (six per strand), engagement challenges and staff turnover, all of which is discussed in more detail later in this report.

Change in youth worker confidence in delivering social action by strand

Strand	Baseline	Final
Strand 3	3.44	4.7
Strand 2	4.37	4.77
Strand 1B	3.96	3.96
Strand 1A	3.82	4.15

Confidence rating (scale 1-5)

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[1] Number of baseline survey responses: Strand One A – 9, Strand One B – 16, Strand Two – 5, Strand Three – 5. Number of final survey responses: Strand One A – 12, Strand One B – 19, Strand Two – 5, Strand Three – 9.

Longer-term funding and delivery windows

Key finding: Longer-term funding (minimum two years) allows time for youth workers, youth organisations and young people to sustainably build their skills, confidence and relationships.

One of the most crucial elements for embedding the EmpowHER model is funding youth organisations over a longer period of time. Youth workers reflected on how much they had learnt and developed simply through the act of delivering the programme, demonstrating the value of longer-term funding to allow practitioners to build on their skills, confidence and partnerships.

> *"We have a better understanding of social action now so we can only imagine that the next time we do this we'll have a clearer idea of where we should be heading." – youth worker, Strand 3*

Longer-term funding also allows the YW&G+ to continue their engagement with the model, building on their own experience, skills and confidence. Youth workers raised many examples of young people who wanted to continue participating in social action beyond the delivery window. Some organisations were able to offer this through their own existing provision, such as youth councils or young leader initiatives, while others signposted young people to external opportunities.

Several youth workers expressed frustration with funder habits of funding one-off, time-bound projects instead of longer-term models that allow youth workers, youth organisations and young people to sustainably build their skills, confidence and experience of a particular area of work.

> *"So far it's been one of the best projects I've been able to work on. And I'm actually hoping there are more like that because the one thing that I dislike about the whole funding cycles is that they do end very quickly. […] But this is completely flexible and it, for me, I felt like it really made a meaningful change in a lot of their lives." – youth worker, Strand One A*

Related but slightly different is the importance of allowing a longer delivery window for more time to be taken delivering one round of the programme. As well as allowing skills and confidence to become embedded within youth workers, this would also provide space to work around unforeseen challenges that can have a significant impact on shorter projects and smaller youth organisations.

Learning Question 3: Does the scaling of EmpowHER lead to other outcomes for the youth sector?

Learning Question 4: Do these additional outcomes enable social action projects to become embedded?

Partnership working

EmpowHER Legacy identified partnership working as a potential enabler for youth organisations in supporting their delivery of EmpowHER, sustaining delivery beyond the lifetime of the programme and sustaining outcomes for the YW&G+ participating in it. Partnership development is also an outcome of EmpowHER Legacy, and supports social action projects to become embedded.

Key findings:

- A high proportion of youth organisations developed relationships with partners -or built on existing relationships - in some form. The majority of a small sample interviewed were maintaining these relationships beyond delivery of EmpowHER.

- Perspectives and experience regarding partnership working was varied. Larger, more established organisations were typically more comfortable with longer-term, more strategic partnership working while smaller organisations often worked more dynamically with other small, local partners, often to meet practical or operational needs.

- Strand One organisations developed partnerships to the same extent as organisations on the other Strands but Strand Two and Three organisations built more intensive partnerships to support operations and delivery, respectively.

- Partnership working achieved a number of benefits for youth organisations, including by enhancing delivery and the experience of YW&G+ through topic expert-led sessions and providing a more diverse range of opportunities.

- Requirements for partnership working and new partnership development need to be properly funded, or they can become a resource-sapping diversion from delivery with young people.

### Prior experience of partnership working and existing partnerships

Experience of – and attitudes towards – partnerships varied significantly across organisations, with many youth workers new to this way of working while many others were

very experienced. This huge variety in the baseline for experience and existing partnerships between youth organisations made it difficult to evaluate partnership working between strands. Through the analysis it became clear that organisations' prior experience and existing networks and partnerships were more important than support or funding through the programme.

For larger or more established youth organisations, partnership working is often part of 'business as usual', particularly with large local organisations and structures such as councils. Many smaller organisations are also very accustomed to working closely with other community organisations and so were able to call on these existing connections. This meant that many delivery organisations on EmpowHER Legacy connected with existing partners. Relying on existing contacts can be very effective – partnership working may be more efficient with established contacts and this is an important consideration when youth workers' capacity is constantly stretched incredibly thinly. However, it can also result in youth workers remaining in their comfort zone and not pursuing partnerships with new organisations, for example those that their young people may be more excited about.

Developing partnerships during EmpowHER Legacy

Through written reports and interviews, youth workers described how they developed partnerships during the programme. Even 'new' partnerships often came from existing links or networks. Many partnerships were the result of proximity, for example other organisations using the same premises.
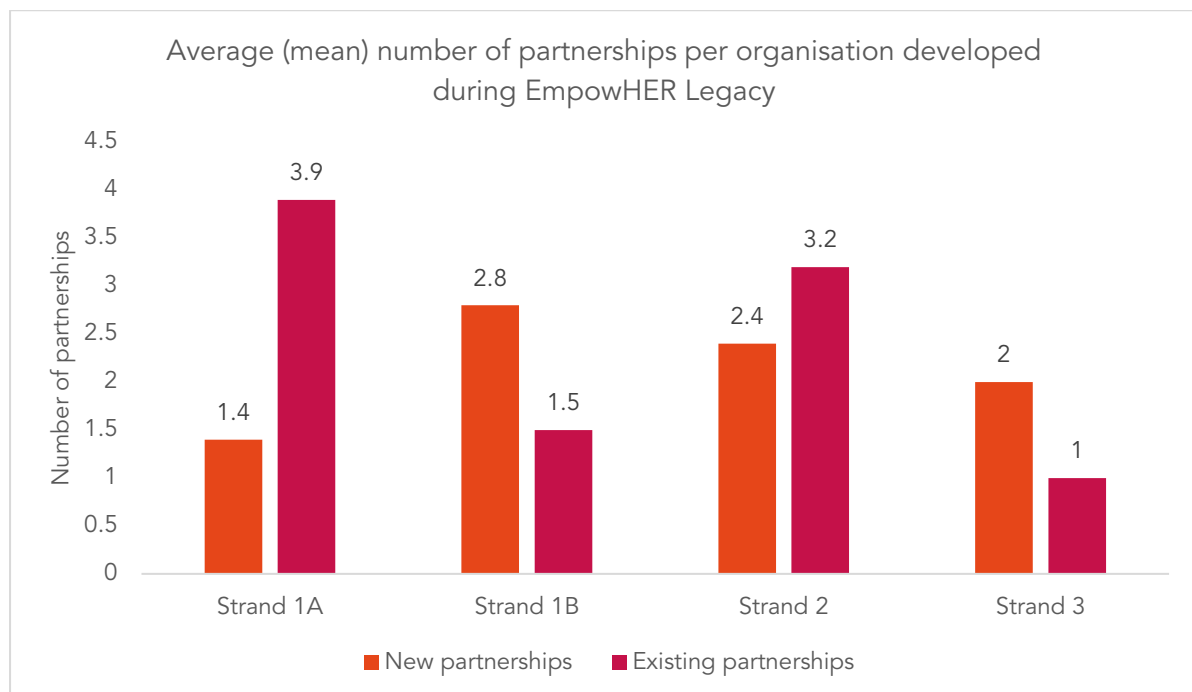
The graph above shows that Strand One organisations were able to develop new partnerships and build on existing partnerships to approximately the same extent as those

receiving more intensive support. However, these partnerships were seen as being 'lighter', less intensive relationships, as outlined in the following section.

There were examples of youth organisations who did not develop any new partnerships, even among Strands Two and Three who were required to do so. In their youth worker written reports, 10 Strand One youth organisations did not record any partnerships. A Strand Two organisation noted in their report that they had not developed any partnerships as this had become difficult since the Covid-19 pandemic. A youth worker from a Strand Three organisation explained that they had chosen not to pursue new partnerships as a "conscious decision to not overcomplicate things". The youth worker felt from experience that bringing in partners would make more sense when the programme was more embedded, as they could provide a coherent partnership 'offer' to other organisations and it would feel like more of a natural step in their development of the EmpowHER model.

Types of partnerships

As outlined above, delivery organisations' partnerships were largely formed with charities, local organisations/businesses and schools. From analysis of written reports, we know that these partners took on a variety of roles while supporting organisations delivering EmpowHER Legacy, but the most common were:

- Referral – referring YW&G+ to the programme;

- Delivery – supporting delivery; and

- Operational – offering operational support (e.g. premises) or additional funding.

The proportion of partners playing these roles differed according to strand. The most common type of partner according to strand was:

- Strand One – referral

- Strand Two – operational

- Strand Three – delivery

This suggests that more Strand One organisations held 'light' partnerships, that simply involved an organisation directing young people to join the EmpowHER programme or marketing the programme. Strand Three organisations were able to put more resource into developing partnerships that enhanced delivery, including external partners running sessions, bringing young people on site visits and providing opportunities for young people to get involved in the partner's own activities.

Several delivery organisations partnered with schools and education providers, largely as referral or operational partners, signposting YW&G+ to the programme or providing premises to run sessions. Beyond this, there were very few examples of cross-sector partnerships. These were only observed among Strand Three partners, two of whom connected with local police and the NHS.

Beyond a group of delivery organisations who form their own network, there was only one example of a delivery organisation partnering with another youth organisation.

A few youth organisations took a youth-led approach, equipping the YW&G+ to reach out to potential partners themselves. There was an indication from some youth workers of a desire to 'protect' young people from the challenges of reaching out to potential partners. One youth worker felt it would be "overwhelming" for the girls to develop partnerships themselves. Another explained that they used their organisation's existing partners so that the girls wouldn't have to send cold emails to potential partners. This suggests there is more work to be done to build youth workers' confidence in facilitating youth-led partnerships.

> Partnership working during EmpowHER Legacy was critical for one very small Strand One A youth organisation:
>
> "Our main partnerships, they're actually evolving from the work that we did [on EmpowHER Legacy]. There are more organisations taking an interest in what we're doing and they're including us in a few things going forward. One that particularly stood out was the offer of a community space. We've actually got access to a space. So that's been a really, really big one for us because with limited funding, it's anything that helps to actually be able to get something moving is always a bonus."
> – youth worker, Strand One A

Impactful and sustainable partnerships

The depth and impact of partnerships also differed significantly between organisations. Some youth workers took a light touch approach, bringing partner organisations on board for one-off sessions or to provide necessary resources. Other youth workers pursued longer-term partnerships, working together on the social action project itself.

Impact of partnerships:

- Increasing youth organisations' capacity by providing resources such as space in which to deliver sessions and funding or support in kind.

- Enhancing young people's experience of social action, by providing expert insights or sharing lived experience on issues such as homelessness, mental health concerns and the climate crisis.

- Developing YW&G+'s confidence and skills (e.g. Communication, public speaking) and interest in pursuing social action beyond the programme, where selecting and engaging with partners was youth-led.

- Reaching more and/or a more diverse pool of YW&G+ to join the programme.

- Providing clear pathways to further opportunities for young people to which youth workers could signpost.

- Developing youth workers' skills and confidence.

> *"All of the partnerships were more about us developing an audience for the girls to showcase and share their projects with, rather than it being a two-way partnership project. However, now that these connections have been made, we hope that we can continue to work together and dual-lead on projects." – youth worker, Strand One B*

The vast majority of youth organisations who developed new partnerships or contacts while delivering EmpowHER told us during follow-up interviews (three months to two years after completing the programme) that these links had been sustained beyond the delivery window, meaning they are still working with or in touch with these partners. Four of the five Strand Three organisations we spoke to had continued partnerships developed during EmpowHER Legacy - the highest proportion of any strand - however, no conclusion can be drawn from this small sample size.

<u>Resourcing partnership working</u>

As outlined above, links with other organisations enhanced delivery of social learning and social action. However, a clear theme emerged from youth workers that programmes requiring partnership working can miss the mark if there is inadequate funding and support for this additional work.

Of organisations who were well connected and for whom partnership working is their 'bread and butter', many were able to easily incorporate partners into their delivery. However, for smaller or less established organisations, partnership working required significantly more resource, both from youth workers and from young people. It is important to acknowledge that this is a separate skill set to youth work itself and that it takes additional resource on top of funded youth worker delivery hours. In this way, underfunded and unsupported requirements to undertake partnership working can harm efforts to embed best practice by stretching youth worker capacity too thinly and distracting from delivery with young people.

Embedding elements of EmpowHER into youth organisations' core offer

Key findings:

- For some organisations, participation in EmpowHER has helped them to articulate how they deliver YSA and build on this aspect of their provision. Some intend to continue delivering EmpowHER in its entirety, subject to adequate funding from other sources.

- A number of youth workers felt that they can secure additional funding by taking forward elements of EmpowHER particularly given the evidence of impact, UK Youth's brand and the profile it had given their organisation and YW&G+ in their community.

<u>Developing their offer</u>

We heard that the programme had 'formalised' organisations' social action delivery and provided them with the vocabulary to explain this area of their work. This clarity and new vocabulary is particularly valuable when seeking funding and had already led to opportunities to provide further YSA opportunities to young people.

Several delivery organisations told us that they would be adding to or developing their offer to young people as a result of their experience delivering the EmpowHER programme. One of the most common elements youth workers planned to add to their provision is incorporating gender-targeted work into their delivery after seeing the power of gender-targeted spaces for young people. This included offering sessions for boys and young men as well as for girls and young women. Several delivery organisations described a vocal interest from boys and young men in an equivalent of EmpowHER for them.

Also common was an intention to add more social learning and social action to their provision, with some youth organisations intending to essentially continue with the EmpowHER model in its entirety, dependent on funding and with some tweaks to suit their specific context and young people's needs. The enthusiasm to continue elements of EmpowHER indicates the extent of the model's impact on young people and youth organisations themselves.

<u>Seeking additional funding</u>

Several youth workers felt that the EmpowHER model had set them up well to seek further funding. They were confident that they would be able to secure funding for work that incorporated elements of EmpowHER. This was because they could provide evidence of the fantastic impact they had already achieved with the programme. At least one youth worker mentioned that they were confident that their local council would fund the programme given the local impact and profile the girls had achieved to date. The link to EmpowHER's profile and UK Youth's brand was also believed to help with unlocking funding and raising further awareness of their youth provision locally.

Investing in the youth sector and workforce to underpin models like EmpowHER

Key finding: To underpin models like EmpowHER, significant financial investment is needed to stabilise the youth sector and youth sector infrastructure organisations need to invest in the workforce.

Challenges facing the youth sector

It is important to acknowledge that youth organisations are facing many challenges that affect delivery. Over a decade of austerity has seen youth sector funding from local authorities cut by £1 billion, triggered the closure of over 1000 youth centres and provoked an exodus of thousands of trained youth workers from the profession ([YMCA, 2020](#)). The impact of Covid-19 was particularly significant early on in delivery but continues to be felt across the sector. This is now coupled with the cost-of-living crisis, which presents unprecedented challenges to youth organisations, impacting project plans and delivery. Youth workers are seeing higher demand for services as well as young people with much more complex and urgent needs at a time of unprecedented financial and resourcing pressures in the sector (UK Youth, 2023). Many youth organisations that delivered EmpowHER Legacy faced high turnover of youth work staff, causing the loss of institutional knowledge of delivering EmpowHER and youth social action. Some organisations experienced these challenges to such an extent that they struggled to deliver the programme.

Underpinning models like EmpowHER

Given this context, funders and infrastructure organisations like UK Youth should take responsibility for providing funding that is sufficient to pay for high quality delivery and allow full cost recovery for youth organisations. Many youth organisations in Strand One delivered outstanding, high quality, youth social action despite limited funding. But to achieve this, many of them subsidised delivery with their reserves, turned to other organisations for required funding or support in kind or relied on volunteers to prop up delivery. While these are not 'new' issues, working in this way is not conducive to embedding best practice and investment is needed in youth organisations and the workforce to underpin models like EmpowHER.

Gender-targeted provision

Key finding: In addition to the longer-term "legacy" outcomes detailed earlier in this report, gender-targeted delivery emerged as one of the key elements that was new for youth organisations and that they had found huge appetite for, prompting continuation of this approach beyond the programme. Some organisations were building gender-targeted sessions into their core offer and felt that EmpowHER had given them the knowledge, vocabulary and tools to do so.

During the evaluation, we heard overwhelming enthusiasm for the EmpowHER model. As described above, many youth workers and youth organisations who took part in EmpowHER Legacy are keen to continue delivering elements of the model. Gender-targeted delivery emerged as the key element that was new for youth organisations and that they had found huge appetite for. This generally meant providing separate sessions for young men and boys as well as young women and girls, in addition to mixed gender provision. Social learning and social action felt more familiar to youth workers than gender-

targeted work, but they felt that EmpowHER had provided the vocabulary, knowledge and tools that allowed them to explain, fund and deliver this work more easily.

Conversely, two organisations noted that, due to the gender-specific nature of EmpowHER, delivery had isolated boys and young men who attended their youth group and this made youth workers less likely to want to continue delivery. This was discussed during focus groups with youth workers, where it emerged that most had delivered sessions through targeted delivery rather than open sessions. This made EmpowHER sessions less visible for comparison, therefore going some way to preventing feelings of jealousy among boys and young men. Several organisations also sought to address this perceived imbalance by providing similar sessions for young men and boys as noted above.

Additional learning: Evaluation approach and programme design

Insights and learnings generated through the evaluation of EmpowHER Legacy guide youth social action programming and have clear implications for how best practice is scaled and embedded in future. However, this evaluation experienced limitations, partly related to the design of the programme and the evaluation methodology and partly related to issues experienced during delivery. UK Youth is keen to learn and build from these challenges in order to better evaluate how it scales and embeds quality youth provision in future.

Comparing across strands of EmpowHER Legacy

This evaluation sought to compare the efficacy of differing levels of support provided to youth organisations by allocating them to different strands of the programme. However, aspects of how the programme and evaluation were designed limited our ability to do this robustly.

Key findings:

- Design of the programme and evaluation led to limitations in the conclusions that can be drawn by comparing strands, partly due to small sample sizes on Strands Two and Three.
- The evaluation was not able to control or adjust for variables that changed during delivery, such as staff turnover at youth organisations and youth organisations securing top-up funding to bolster their delivery of EmpowHER.

Putting controls in place

Of the 52 organisations on the programme, the vast majority (40) were allocated to Strand One, meaning that sample sizes were small on Strands Two and Three (six organisations on

each of these strands). At the same time, Strand One organisations (who received a £2,000 grant) were not required to collect YW&G+'s outcomes data in any form and had less intensive reporting requirements. These factors led to an unbalanced dataset and a lack of comparable data across the strands, although additional qualitative insight was captured through focus groups and interviews with youth workers to supplement monitoring data.

This evaluation was not able to control for variables that changed during delivery of EmpowHER, such as youth organisations securing top-up funding or using reserves to support their delivery of EmpowHER. Equally, high staff turnover within youth organisations limited the analysis of the differential impact of different treatments across the strands. For example, when comparing youth worker knowledge or confidence across Strands 1A and 1B, where youth workers on Strand 1B had been offered additional deep dive training: changes in staffing are likely to have led to reductions in knowledge and confidence, which the evaluation was not able to control or adjust for.

Standardised measures of YW&G+ outcomes and/or fidelity to the EmpowHER model

Key findings:

- The evaluation allowed too much flexibility in how youth organisations were able to measure YW&G+'s outcomes, which led to data of varying quality that could not be aggregated and difficulties with comparing across the Strands.
- Given this flexibility, youth organisations employed a wide range of data collection methods, with a surprising number adopting observational methods, and appear to have increased the burden of evaluation beyond the level normally implemented by UK Youth.
- A measure of fidelity to the EmpowHER model was not in place which, given the lack of robust outcomes data, limited the evaluation's ability to compare the efficacy of support provided at different levels across the Strands.

This design of this evaluation included offering youth organisations a number of optional data collection tools and approaches, alongside training on how to use them, in order to give youth organisations flexibility in how they tracked outcomes for YW&G+. This approach sought to a) reduced the data collection burden on youth workers and b) better understand youth organisations' tendencies and preferences in the tools they default to when collecting outcomes data relating to YW&G+.

In practice, this approach did not seem to reduce the burden on youth workers, with many using far more methods and tools than UK Youth would have had in place had we been prescriptive. Some youth organisations used a variety of surveys, focus groups, interviews and observational methods which would have been resource-intensive. We are interested to see that observational methods -often seen by the youth sector as resource-intensive, intrusive or difficult to use in an unbiased way- were used by a number of the youth

organisations. This is useful learning for UK Youth and for the youth sector, as we take forward key data standardisation initiatives with other infrastructure organisations and funders.

Whilst this test and learn approach to data collection has generated valuable learning, the data collected and reported by youth organisations was, in practice, not of sufficient quality or consistency to allow for meaningful data analysis and comparison across the strands on EmpowHER Legacy, which limited our ability to draw firm conclusions in some areas.

Given that the EmpowHER model has already been shown to produce statistically significant outcomes for YW&Gs, a measure of fidelity to the EmpowHER model would also have adequately supported comparison of the efficacy of differing levels of support provided across the strands. This was not built into the evaluation framework at the outset - or, therefore, introduced to youth organisations as a requirement - and could not have been added with any rigour retrospectively, in the final months of programme delivery.

Engagement in the evaluation

Key findings:

- There was a lack of engagement from youth workers in some aspects of the evaluation, which is symptomatic of pressure on youth worker capacity. This resulted in small sample sizes for one of the surveys and limited data collected through some of the focus groups.
- Despite these challenges, UK Youth quickly pivoted approach in a number of areas of data collection to increase response rates, engagement, and minimise the burden on youth workers.

One of the key challenges during the course of this evaluation relates to issues facing the youth sector more broadly; namely pressure on youth worker capacity and high staff turnover. These factors led to low youth worker engagement with the evaluation at certain points and were observed as low response rate to the survey and extremely low attendance at the majority of focus groups, regardless of funding/support level. Equally, some youth workers sent a 'substitute' member of staff, who may not have been involved with the programme, to attend an evaluation session on their behalf. This meant focus group attendees were not always able to contribute to the discussion in detail.

Some youth workers found the evaluation process was overly burdensome and felt that information requests were duplicated or too repetitive throughout delivery.

In order to mitigate these pressures on youth workers, UK Youth took the following actions:

- Simplified the written report template and encouraged youth workers to submit midpoint reports with additions as a final report.

- Stopped deploying the survey after each Deep Dive training and instead moved to a pre- and post-intervention model.

- Introduced 1:1 interviews instead of focus groups, meaning the time commitment for youth workers was less, at a time that suited the individual youth worker and could be tacked onto a progress meeting with UK Youth to avoid multiple requests for youth worker time.

However, despite these mitigating actions, there were gaps in data due to youth workers not being able to participate in evaluation activities. This has limited our analysis in some areas, particularly that of quantitative data.

UK Youth also has the option to allow more budget and youth worker time for participation in the research elements of programmes like EmpowHER Legacy. However, this must be carefully balanced alongside maximising budget for delivery and the reality that youth organisations, during a cost of living crisis, are still likely to face capacity issues even where budget is specifically earmarked for engagement in evaluation activities.

Conclusions

1. **EmpowHER is an effective model**, improving outcomes for YW&G+ and reducing barriers to participation in social action. In its first three years, EmpowHER had a statistically significant impact on YW&G+, improving their levels of happiness and confidence and building habits of social action. Similar outcomes appear to have been achieved at scale through EmpowHER Legacy and the programme almost doubled the number of YW&G+ reached, per £1 invested.

2. **Youth workers think highly of EmpowHER** – they enjoyed delivering it, saw it make a difference for their YW&G+ and experienced professional development that will be felt beyond delivery. For example, youth workers developed:

   – Skills and desire to work in a more youth-led way

   – Knowledge and confidence in delivering youth social action

   – Confidence and skills to deliver more gender-targeted provision

3. **EmpowHER will have a legacy with the youth workers and youth organisations that delivered it.** This includes: staff using EmpowHER resources in detached work; increased youth worker skills and commitment to youth social action in general; and organisations using the EmpowHER evidence base and UK Youth's profile to secure future funding for the EmpowHER model in its entirety, or elements of it.

4. **A number of youth organisations delivered high quality youth social action, even on the lowest level of support and funding. However, youth work professionals identified issues with this level of support** and had to depend on their reserves, funding from other sources, volunteer capacity and support from partners to bolster delivery. While this evaluation cannot conclusively recommend a minimum level of funding to deliver EmpowHER, funding of £10,000-15,000 was seen by youth work professionals as adequate to cover 'basic' provision and delivery of the model.

5. **The EmpowHER toolkit was identified as the key enabler of successful delivery of EmpowHER.** The toolkit of delivery resources provided the inspiration, guidance, benchmarking and practical materials to facilitate youth workers at different levels of experience to deliver high quality youth social action.

6. **Beyond adequate funding and the toolkit, we identified a number of enablers to scaling and embedding the EmpowHER model:**

   - **Flexibility in the model**, allowing youth workers the freedom to choose sessions topics and when and how to deliver them rather than according to a set curriculum. Flexibility gave youth workers the space to bring in their youth work expertise, facilitates youth-led delivery and easier embedding of the model into existing practice.

   - **Youth worker training** – Quality, accessibility training on all aspects of high quality delivery (e.g. social learning, youth-led social action and partnership working) develops youth worker skills and confidence to deliver a model that

youth workers often find very different from previous social action experiences. Organisations that were not offered deep dive training appear to have delivered slightly lower quality YSA, on average.

- **Peer learning spaces** – Building youth worker networks, facilitating collaboration and providing spaces to share best practice and hear from those who have delivered EmpowHER before provides essential peer support and professional development that contributes to high quality delivery.

- **1:1 infrastructure support** - Optional 1:1 support for youth workers from external project support staff with expertise in youth work enables youth workers to work through delivery challenges and build confidence when youth social action is a new experience.

7. **The conditions for delivering the EmpowHER model become more embedded over time.** For example, youth workers improved their understanding and delivery of high quality youth social action the longer they delivered the programme. For example, the highest increases in youth workers' confidence in delivering YSA were seen on Strand Three, the only Strand required to deliver two subsequent cohorts of EmpowHER. Conversely, high staff turnover was a recurring challenge for youth organisations and sees knowledge being lost in the youth sector. **There is a need to invest in youth organisations' bottom line and the workforce to underpin and embed models like EmpowHER.** The government and youth sector infrastructure organisations are pivotal in these areas, respectively.

Equally, **it is recommended that funders and infrastructure organisations prioritise length of investment over the number of delivery organisations.** This approach enables best practice to take hold as youth workers build knowledge, skills and confidence over time.

8. **Supporting youth organisations to build new partnerships and develop existing ones enabled youth organisations to enhance delivery of the EmpowHER model** in the following ways:

- **Enriching delivery** – partnerships with organisations delivering social action themselves or who held expertise (and lived experience) in relevant topics enhanced delivery by offering more diverse sessions, trips and events and providing opportunities for young people to get involved in the partner's activities.

- **Developing YW&G+'s confidence and skills where partnerships were youth led.** When YW&G+ were given the opportunity to contribute to choosing and involving partners, youth workers observed increased confidence and improved skills in communication and public speaking.

- **Meeting operational needs** – some youth organisations held partnerships that filled operational or funding gaps, for example by providing premises for EmpowHER sessions to take place.

- **Referring and signposting young people** – the most common type of partner for youth organisations was those that directed young people to the programme or worked with the youth organisation to choose participants. This was the most common type of partnership for organisations receiving the lowest level of support (Strand One).

There were also several examples of youth organisations, even at the higher levels of funding, who did not develop any new partnerships, either through deliberate choice or due to challenges such as limited capacity or skills.

9. Youth organisations received differing levels of support on different programme Strands and comparison across these Strands was inconclusive in defining the minimum level of support required to scale. **Project setup and evaluation design needs careful consideration when seeking to understand the optimal level of support that youth organisations require to deliver, embed and sustain models like EmpowHER. In particular:**

- **Controls need to be in place** to adjust for variables such as high staff turnover (and the associated loss of youth worker skills and knowledge) and youth organisations bolstering delivery by securing additional funding or using reserves.

- **Adequate resourcing and communication of the evaluation requirements**, to allow youth workers to participate fully in programme-related research.

- **By using standardised outcomes measures and/or measures of fidelity to the model** – it is difficult to ascertain the quality of delivery (and compare between strands) without gathering primary data on either young people's outcomes or fidelity to the model.

Implications for the youth sector and UK Youth

Implications for the youth sector

- EmpowHER is a scalable model, which has legacy impact and can continue to be disseminated and scaled in future.

- Funding alone does not equal quality and impact – a range of resources (e.g. toolkits), and wrapround support (e.g. training and youth worker peer learning) must be combined with funding.

- The youth sector must focus on workforce development – EmpowHER highlights the need for us to provide higher quality CPD opportunities to support and retain great youth workers.

Implications for UK Youth's strategic direction

- There is value in prioritising longer-term investment over the number of organisations funded. Equally, Legacy outcomes (e.g. sustainable partnerships and leveraging additional funding) become more achievable once organisations have embedded a model.

- Focussing on workforce development creates the platform for models like EmpowHER to become embedded.

- Building evaluation capabilities and capacity is key to scaling impactful, sustainable models and standardising data in the youth sector is key.

- EmpowHER should be prioritised for further funding as a key element of UK Youth's youth social action programming.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix 1: Evaluation approach

The evaluation of the EmpowHER Legacy programme sought to understand how we might scale the EmpowHER model effectively and how it could be embedded and sustained in youth organisations. The evaluation engaged youth workers rather than young people due to the focus on youth work practice and implications for youth organisations. Previous evaluations of the original EmpowHER programme have focused on young people and measuring associated outcomes.

Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach. Data relating to programme outputs and outcomes was largely secondary data collected by youth organisations, while data on programme learning was collected by UK Youth.

Given our confidence in YW&G+'s outcomes on EmpowHER, we took a test and learn approach to outcomes measurement during EmpowHER Legacy. This looked like providing youth organisations the flexibility to measure their young people's outcomes using their own choice of methods and tools.

Data collection by UK Youth

The planned methodology involved gathering data from youth workers through:

- Written reports
- Survey
- Online semi-structured focus groups
- Structured interviews

Strand One organisations, who received a lower level of funding, had a reduced reporting requirement, only participating in endpoint evaluation and using a pared down report template. Strand 2 and 3 organisations were required to participate in evaluation activities at both the mid and endpoint of delivery and had a more detailed report template to complete.

Written report

This report primarily gathered quantitative data on reach and outputs with space for qualitative information (e.g. observations, feedback from YW&G+ and parents/teachers) on outputs and outcomes.

Survey

The survey focused on youth worker knowledge regarding social action and social learning and sought to measure any change in that knowledge during the programme.

Semi-structured focus groups and interviews

The original methodology indicated the use of focus groups to gather qualitative data from youth workers regarding their experience of the programme, particularly looking at key enablers for high quality delivery and embedding the model. Due to challenges outlined below, the majority of focus groups became or were replaced by 1-to-1 interviews. These were all conducted online to facilitate participation, due to geographical and time constraints.

Structured follow-up interview (additional)

An additional short, structured interview was added to the methodology to capture information about the influence of the EmpowHER model beyond the funding window. These interviews were conducted online with 10 youth organisations that delivered the original EmpowHER programme and 30 organisations that took part in EmpowHER Legacy, three months after they completed funded delivery.

Data collection by youth workers

All youth organisations were provided with a range of evaluation tools from UK Youth. Organisations in Strand One were free to use these tools as they wanted with no obligation of reporting beyond basic output data. Strands Two and Three were expected to provide some data on YW&G+'s outcomes, but were able to use any combination of tools they chose. Youth workers used a variety of evaluation tools, including surveys, interviews and focus groups. An interesting finding has been the proportionally high use of observation as an evaluation method. This has not featured heavily in UK Youth's programme evaluations to date, but is an approach we will consider including in the future.

Analysis

Qualitative data from reports, interviews and focus groups was analysed using thematic analysis. This method enabled us to explore commonalities and differences between the participants' experiences.

Quantitative data from the survey and reports were analysed using descriptive analysis given the simplicity of the data and the relatively small numbers of participating organisations.

Appendix 2: EmpowHER Legacy Delivery Strands

Strand One

At this level, 40 youth organisations received a comprehensive training package, as well as access to the [EmpowHER toolkit](#), evaluation tools and session plans. This strand has been split into two pathways with 20 partners in Strand One A receiving seed funding of £2000 and programme training and 20 delivery partners in Strand One B receiving the same with 3 additional UK Youth deep dive and networking sessions during 2022.

Core requirements

- Support a group of YW&G+ through at least 1 youth-led social action project (hours/length delivery partner's choice)
- Group size: 8-12 YW&G+ aged 10-20
- Delivery window: Dec 2021 – Dec 2022

Strand Two

Within this strand, six delivery partners delivered one cohort of EmpowHER, trialling session ideas and structures, and worked with the YW&G+ to identify and articulate the need in their local area. Throughout the delivery window, Strand Two partners completed a set of challenges and created a strategic and sustainability plan to help embed and sustain EmpowHER best practices within the youth organisation. Some of these best practices included creating social action opportunities for the YW&G+ and partnering with local organisations for funding/grants. UK Youth provided a complete training package, including access to the EmpowHER Toolkit, data resources and funding of £10,000.

Core requirements

- Group size: 8-12 YW&G+ aged 10-20
- Delivery window: Dec 2021 – March 2023
- Delivery of the EmpowHER model to one group of YW&G+, including 30 hours of engagement over a minimum of 12 weeks:
    - a minimum 10 hours social learning (based on but not limited to the EmpowHER Toolkit session plan topics available) including delivering 'Wellbeing' as a topic within social learning.
    - a minimum of 10 hours social action
    - the remaining 10 hours to be used as appropriate to each participant
- To support the YW&G+ to participate in social action pitch days to ask for additional funding for their social action projects.
- To develop a local partnership and a plan for embedding EmpowHER practice.

Strand Three

Six delivery partners completed a set of challenges and delivered two full cohorts of EmpowHER to at least 2 groups of 8-12 YW&G+. During the programme, each delivery partner sourced a local partner to provide expertise and social action and youth engagement opportunities. They then created a strategic and sustainability partnership plan to help embed and sustain EmpowHER best practices and build local partnerships. UK Youth provided a complete training package, including EmpowHER Toolkit, data resources and seed funding of £15,000 to each delivery partner.

Core requirements

- Group size: 8-12 YW&G+ aged 10-20
- Delivery window: Dec 2021 – March 2023
- Delivery of the EmpowHER model to two groups of YW&G+, including 30 hours of engagement over a minimum of 12 weeks as explained above
- To support the YW&G+ to participate in social action pitch days to ask for additional funding for their social action projects.
- To develop a local partnership and a plan for embedding EmpowHER practice.

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