Blagrave
investing in
young people

Pathways Fund

A Route for Youth Led Change to Flourish

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"The Pathways Fund was the first time we were given a chance to show we could manage money, plan, deliver, and grow. That chance should be the norm, not the exception."

Radical Body Arts

Photo credit: Radical Body Arts

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Pathways Fund was created by the Blagrave Trust to fill a critical gap in the funding landscape for youth-led and lived-experience-led organisations. This report shares the Fund's impact between 2022 and 2025 — what it achieved, what it learned, and what it has revealed about the future of youth-led change in the UK.

What is the Pathways Fund?

Launched publicly in 2023, the Pathways Fund provides core, flexible funding of £20,000–£30,000 per year for three years to youth-led groups across England. It supports organisations led by and for young people with lived experience of the issues they work to change — from racial and gender justice to climate action, disability inclusion, care reform, and criminal justice.

Alongside core funding, Pathways Fund offers a holistic support package including:

- Annual Wellbeing and Organisational Development budgets (£1,000 each).
- Quarterly reflective check-ins with a dedicated Youth Led Change Manager.
- Specialist safeguarding support and compliance training.
- Annual cohort meet-ups for shared learning and collaboration.
- Invites to Youth Led Change Days – national sector-wide gatherings to build wider networks and strengthen their practice and expertise.

Since its inception, Pathways Fund has supported 20 youth-led organisations, committing over £1.28 million in multi-year grants.

Impact

The Pathways Fund delivers a triple-line benefit: leadership development, tackling systemic injustice, and reshaping civil society.

Leadership Development

Across the cohort, the Pathways Fund has enabled young founders to transition from emerging changemakers to confident, strategic leaders.

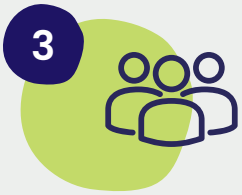
Multi-year, flexible investment allowed them to build governance, hire staff, and embed care into their organisational cultures. This new model of leadership — grounded in empathy, courage, and collaboration — demonstrates that lived experience is a form of expertise, not a barrier to professionalism.

Tackling Systemic Injustice

Every partner is addressing a form of structural inequality. Collectively, they are influencing systems, reshaping public narratives, and strengthening communities through four key approaches:

- Influencing culture, practices, policies and legislation — embedding equity into education, employment, justice, and environmental systems.
- Challenging and reframing public narratives — transforming how society understands race, gender, disability, care, and belonging.
- Providing spaces and services for communities — creating safe, accessible, and representative environments where institutions have failed.
- Supporting education and leadership development — equipping others with the knowledge, confidence, and tools to lead social change.

Together, these strategies have shown that youth-led, lived-experience leadership produces tangible, lasting change in both policy and culture.



Reshaping Civil Society

The Pathways Fund is helping to redefine who holds power in the social sector and how that power is exercised. Blagrave is supporting a growing pipeline of credible, community-rooted groups shaping the future of the sector, demonstrating that trust-based, multi-year funding can make civil society more inclusive, accountable, and representative.

Learning and Themes

From three years of working alongside partners, eight interconnected lessons have emerged — together offering a roadmap for how youth-led work can thrive.

1 The jump from project to organisation takes time

Multi-year, flexible funding is what enables growth. Moving from a collective to a structured organisation requires time to build systems, strategy, and governance. Administrative work is not secondary — it is the foundation for long-term impact.

2 Centre wellbeing and care

Care cannot be an afterthought. Dedicated Wellbeing Grants, accessible practices, and reflective check-ins reduced burnout and built organisational resilience.

3 Build flexibility into your grant processes

Flexibility and trust turn uncertainty into innovation. By reframing “failure” as learning, Pathways Fund gave partners the confidence to pivot, adapt timelines, and experiment without fear, deepening honesty and creativity.

4 Funding movement building requires a different approach

The wider sector continues to reward polish over authenticity. Youth-led and lived-experience-led groups still face barriers linked to charity status, track record, and scale. Many partners also described a culture of trend-driven funding, where attention and resources follow shifting government or social priorities rather than long-term need.

5 Invest in building trusting relationships

The Pathways Fund’s human approach, through consistent contact, open communication, and critical-friendship, built trust and confidence. This relationship-based model proved that how funders behave is as important as what they fund.

6 Impact looks different and reporting should reflect this

For youth-led work, success is measured in confidence, safety, belonging, and narrative change as much as in numbers. Pathways Fund demonstrated that trust and legitimacy are real indicators of impact.

7 Embed access and inclusion

True inclusion requires rethinking the systems of funding itself. That means investing in beyond grant support including outreach and pre-application support, learning spaces, organisational development support, and fiscal hosting options for unincorporated groups.

8 Funders must model the change they seek

The Pathways Fund experience shows that funders have a direct role in shaping the culture of civil society. Representation, flexibility, and co-creation within funding institutions are essential to ensure that young, lived-experience leaders are treated as equal partners, not beneficiaries.

Looking Forward

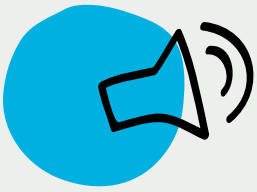
The Pathways Fund has evolved from pilot to proof of concept. Blagrave's goal is not simply to fund more youth-led organisations — but to **strengthen the ecosystem** that allows them to thrive, embedding care, flexibility, and shared power as standard practice across the sector.

Purpose

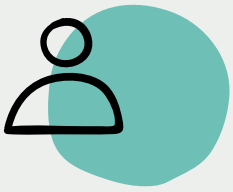
This report shares the learnings and ongoing legacy of the Pathways Fund, a three-year programme created by the Blagrave Trust to provide long-term, flexible support to youth-led groups tackling social injustice across England.

The report draws on direct insights from ten Pathways Fund partners, and reflects their experiences, their stories and their voices. Together, they represent a diverse cohort of youth-led work on racial justice, gender equity, climate action, disability accessibility in the arts, care experience, and reform of the criminal justice system.

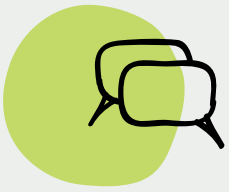
The purpose of this report is threefold:



To amplify the work of partners and evidence the impact of funding youth-led change.



To learn from partners' experiences of what worked, and where barriers remain, in building sustainable, lived-experience-led organisations.



To enable partners to share their experiences and influence funder practice.

The report has been written to honour partners' work while strengthening sector understanding of what youth-led funding can achieve.

Methodology

This report draws on a mixed qualitative research process designed to centre partner voices, lived experience, and co-produced learning. It combines:

In-depth interviews with ten Pathways Fund partners, conducted between May and November 2025. Each conversation explored the partners' journeys, growth, challenges, and experience of the programme.

Full transcript analysis to ensure all case studies and quotes are drawn verbatim from partners' own words, with minor editing only for clarity and flow.

Insights from previous grant reports and programme updates to the board.

Collaborative validation with draft profiles and essays were shared with partners for review and consent, ensuring accuracy, integrity and shared ownership of their stories.

The research and writing process followed Blagrave's commitment to participatory storytelling. It ensured youth-led partners were active collaborators, not just the subjects of study. All partners involved were also offered time with the Storyteller to produce their own comms outputs for their own platforms, creatively directed by them.

What is the Pathways Fund?

Photo credit: Young Justice Advisors

In a sector where youth-led organisations are often underfunded, overburdened, and asked to prove their worth for short-term support, the Pathways Fund set out to do something different.

Origins and Purpose

The Pathways Fund was born directly from the learning and momentum of Blagrave's Challenge and Change programme, a pilot that provided small grants to young people as individuals, collectives, and movements.

When the pilot concluded, several partners were demonstrating real, scalable impact but had nowhere to go next. There weren't many vehicles in the wider funding landscape that could offer multi-year, core funding to emerging youth-led groups that were neither "start-ups" nor yet "established."

In response, Blagrave chose to fund four groups from the Challenge and Change cohort with larger, three-year grants as a test case. The aim was to co-design a 'next-stage' model of support alongside these partners. After the first pilot year, Blagrave launched the Pathways Fund publicly in 2023, building on extensive learning sessions with the pilot partners and consultation with other youth leaders.

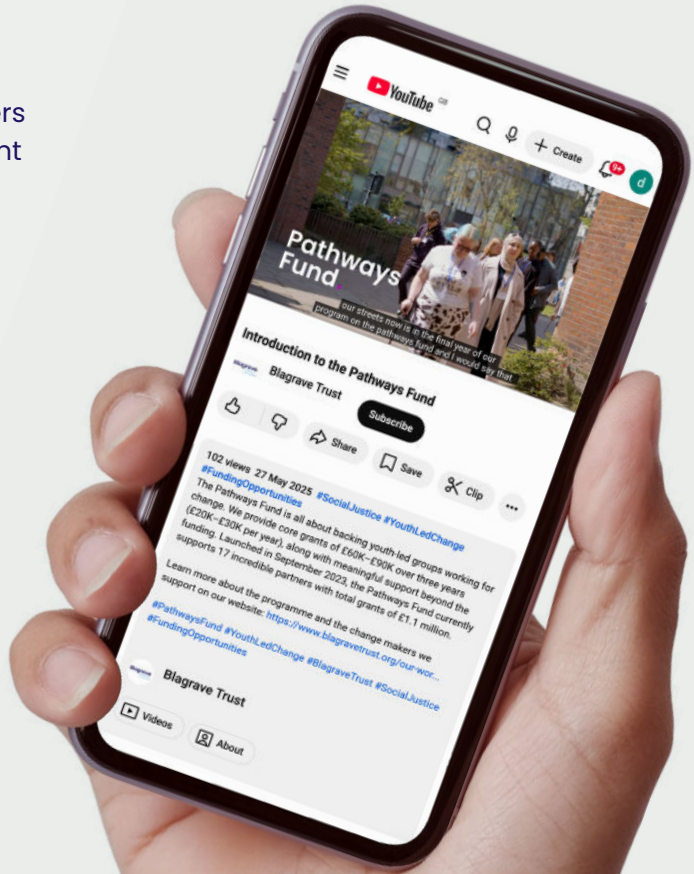
The feedback was clear: young changemakers needed stability, space, and support that went beyond money alone. The Pathways Fund was designed to meet that need, offering core, flexible funding of £20,000–£30,000 per year for three years, paired with a holistic support package that centred on wellbeing, organisational development, and fund management support.

Who It's For

The Pathways Fund was created for youth-led groups led by and for young people with lived experience of the injustices they are working to change. Many of these groups emerged from grassroots organising and collective action and were already delivering meaningful change in their communities.

They sit at what Blagrave describes as the "Grow" stage of the changemaker journey: organisations that have demonstrated impact, built credibility, and now need time, trust and multi-year investment to strengthen their infrastructure, expand their reach, and develop their leadership.

Across the cohorts, funded groups have worked on a wide range of issues, from racial justice and clean air to gender-based violence, disability rights, and youth justice reform.



Watch our YouTube video about the Pathways Fund

Why Youth-Led and Lived Experience Leadership Are Central

This ethos comes directly from the young people the programme was created to serve. During the design process for Challenge and Change, partners consistently raised the lack of funding for groups that were both youth-led and lived-experience-led, and especially those at the intersection of the two. The Pathways Fund carries this principle forward, recognising that lived experience is not a vulnerability to be mined, but a form of expertise and legitimacy in shaping solutions that work.

The Support Package

The Pathways Fund's design reflects the belief that supporting youth-led change should be relational, not simply transactional, and that the investment made should be supporting them as individuals as well as organisations. During the pilot year, Pathways Fund partners were initially treated like Blagrave's other policy or regional grant partners and offered core funding and annual check-ins. But through partner feedback, it became clear that a traditional "hands-off" trust-based model of grant management was not enough.

Blagrave responded by separating and expanding its support mechanisms, creating a bespoke Pathways Fund approach that now includes:

- Wellbeing Grants – to support mental health, rest and care within teams.
- Organisational Development Budgets – to fund training, planning, and external expertise.
- Quarterly Check-ins – regular reflective spaces with a dedicated grant manager.
- An annual Pathways Fund meet-up – for shared learning, connection, and solidarity.
- Safeguarding support - supporting groups to develop their own safeguarding policies, practice, and culture.
- Invites to Youth Led Change Days – national sector-wider gatherings to build wider networks and strengthen their practice and expertise.

Reach and Diversity

Since its public launch, the Pathways Fund has supported 20 youth-led organisations, committing over £1.28 million in core grants. The portfolio spans issues from racial and environmental justice to disability inclusion, gender equality, and youth rights.

The Strategic Role

The Pathways Fund now acts as a bridge between Blagrave's early-stage Challenge and Change programme and the long-term sustainability of youth-led organisations. It fills a crucial gap where many young groups stall: too established for pilot-stage micro-funding, yet still considered "risky" by mainstream or institutional funders.

For many partners, Pathways represents their first experience of multi-year, core funding — a rare opportunity to plan ahead, invest in infrastructure, and grow in a healthy, sustainable way.

Photo credit: Care Experience Movement

Stories of Impact

Avocados Impact

Building Belonging: How Avocados Impact Is Rewriting the Story for Care-Experienced People

View Story

Choked Up

Clean Air, Clear Voices: The Young Campaigners Taking Pollution Personally

View Story

The Care Experienced Movement

Nothing About Us Without Us: The Movement Reclaiming the Narrative

View Story

The Halo Collective

Roots of Change: How the Halo Collective Is Rewriting the Rules on Black Hair

View Story

Motivez

From Brixton to the Boardroom: How Motivez Is Changing the Face of STEM

View Story

Not A Trend

Redefining Education: How Not A Trend Is Transforming School Culture

View Story

Our Streets Now

Taking Back Public Space: The Youth Campaign Ending Sexual Harassment for Good

View Story

Radical Body Arts

Rewriting the Script: How Disabled Artists Are Taking Back the Stage

View Story

Young Justice Advisors

Voices from the System: the Young Advisors Changing Justice from the Inside

View Story

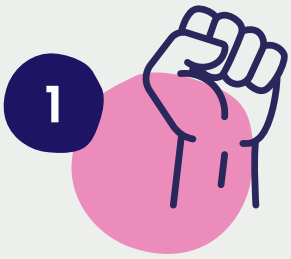
Muslim Northern Women

Building Power, Confronting Gendered Islamophobia: The Growth of Muslim Northern Women

View Story

Impact

The Pathways Fund delivers a triple-line benefit:



Leadership development

Equipping young lived-experience leaders to lead change in their communities.

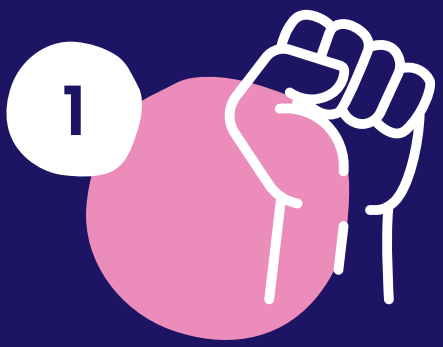
Tackling systemic injustice

Supporting new and innovative solutions that address the injustice faced by their community.

Reshaping civil society

Building a pipeline of credible youth-led organisations in the sector.

> By resourcing this critical stage, Pathways Fund ensures that promising youth-led work doesn't fizzle out through lack of stability — but instead grows, matures, and continues to drive systemic change.



Leadership Development

The Pathways Fund recognises that leadership takes many forms — and that old models no longer meet the challenges we face. By investing in young people with lived experience, fresh ideas, and the courage to challenge systems, Blagrave is helping to redefine what leadership looks like in civil society.

Across the Fund, young founders have grown into confident, strategic leaders — learning to manage teams, navigate governance, balance wellbeing, and lead from a place of care rather than performance. Many began feeling like outsiders; now they are respected voices in policy, local government, and their communities.

They describe moving from figuring things out alone to being part of a wider ecosystem of trust, accountability, and belief. Together, they are shaping a new kind of civic leadership rooted in empathy, courage, and lived experience.

1 **Leadership Development**

Partners involved with the report

Avocados Impact

Co-founders Rachael and Katie have grown a two-person idea into Devon's leading care-experienced organisation — moving from local community support to regional advocacy, shaping policy and rights for care-experienced people.

Care Experienced Movement

They've embedded collective leadership at every level, ensuring care-experienced people shape the organisation's vision, creative work, and policy influence from within.

Choked Up

They've transitioned from grassroots campaigners to credible advocates influencing clean air policy, collaborating with mayors and environmental coalitions.

The Halo Collective

They've evolved from a student campaign into a national movement led by young Black women driving cultural and legislative change on racial justice in education.

Motivez

The founders have grown from local organisers to social enterprise leaders, mentoring others and creating access to STEM and sustainability careers.

Muslim Northern Women

They've emerged as a bold, youth-led network amplifying Muslim women's leadership, growing from a campus project to an award-winning regional movement for equality and empowerment.

Not A Trend

The founders have developed from teenage activists into respected anti-racist educators, now training teachers and shaping inclusive school policies nationwide.

Our Streets Now

They've grown from a youth collective into a structured national campaign, leading law reform and education work to end public sexual harassment.

Radical Body Arts

They're redefining leadership through a disabled-led, care-centred model that demonstrates how accessibility and creativity can drive systemic change in the arts.

Young Justice Advisors

Through facilitation, advocacy, and co-design, members have built confidence as both leaders and collaborators. Their growth lies in redefining what credible leadership looks like inside systems that rarely listen to young people — turning lived experience into structural influence.

1 **Leadership Development**

Other cohort Partners

Account

They've developed a collective leadership model grounded in lived experience of policing and racial injustice. What began as a Hackney-based youth co-op is now a structured, cross-borough organisation with members leading governance, research, and strategy.

Babylon Migrants Project

They've built collective leadership among young refugees and migrants, expanding from one London base to two national hubs using arts and performance to celebrate identity and belonging.

Migrant Democracy Project

Emerging from grassroots organising, its young migrant leaders now run campaigns, lead training, and represent their peers in policy spaces. The team has built confidence navigating institutions of power, translating lived experience into informed, strategic advocacy for migrant justice and democratic reform.

OneWithTheVillage

Founder Abdoulaziz and his team have grown from running local youth events to leading neighbourhood-wide programmes that foster belonging and safety. Their leadership reflects lived experience — grounded, relational, and responsive — creating a model of youth-led community cohesion in areas affected by violence and division.

Skate Gals & Pals

Founder Maz has developed from a community organiser into an internationally recognised voice for inclusive sport, leading a thriving LGBTQIA+ and global majority skate movement.

Tag Agency

They've evolved from a creative youth collective into a professional platform for working-class Black artists, shaping a fairer, community-rooted creative industry.

Tackling Systemic Injustice

Every partner in the Pathways Fund is tackling a form of systemic injustice — from challenging racism in education and reforming the criminal justice system to addressing barriers for migrants and transforming access to the arts. Their shared goal is to redress deep inequalities. Grounded in lived experience, they understand these systems — their challenges, blind spots, and possibilities — from the inside out.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to justice. Each partner's strategy reflects the realities of their community, spanning four areas of change: influencing culture, practice, policy, and legislation; reframing public narratives; providing spaces and services for their communities; and building the leadership of others. Together, they are driving lasting systemic change across the Pathways Fund cohort.

2 **Tackling Systemic Injustice**

Influencing culture, practices, policies, and legislation

Across the Pathways Fund, partners are driving measurable changes in policy, practice, and public systems. Together, the below examples show how youth-led groups are influencing systems once closed to their voices.

Partners involved with the report

Avocados Impact

Avocados Impact helped secure recognition of care experience as a protected characteristic by Devon County Council — a landmark policy precedent for care-experienced people's rights in local government. The organisation's advocacy, rooted in lived experience, is reshaping how local authorities understand care experience as an equality issue, setting a model that others across the UK are beginning to follow.

The Halo Collective

The Halo Collective continues to drive institutional change through the Halo Code — the UK's first policy explicitly protecting students and staff from hair discrimination. Adopted by over 1,000 schools and workplaces nationwide, the Code is transforming national conversations on race, professionalism, and belonging, embedding cultural equity in education and employment.

Our Streets Now

Our Streets Now achieved one of the most significant legislative wins in recent years with the *Protection from Sex-Based Harassment Act (2023)*, which made public sexual harassment a criminal offence. Their campaigning has embedded gender-based violence prevention into UK law and shifted national understanding of safety, respect, and equality in public spaces.

Choked Up

Choked Up made air pollution a defining issue in the 2024 London Mayoral election. Working with clean-air coalitions, they organised the first-ever Clean Air Hustings, compelling candidates to address health inequalities. Their calls were reflected in the subsequent ULEZ expansion — marking a major milestone in youth-led environmental justice campaigning.

Young Justice Advisors

The Young Justice Advisors are transforming culture within the justice system through co-created Living Well Agreements between prison staff and residents. Their direct advisory work with HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice is embedding principles of respect, dignity, and care into everyday practice across prisons and youth justice settings.

Other cohort Partners

Migrant Democracy Project

The Migrant Democracy Project is advancing political representation for migrants through research, advocacy, and leadership development. With new organisational stability, the group has trained young migrants to stand for election and influenced debates on democratic reform, helping to ensure migrant voices are visible and active in shaping the UK's future.

2 **Tackling Systemic Injustice**

Challenging and reframing public narratives

Partners across the Pathways Fund are rewriting how communities, cultures, and issues are understood — transforming narratives that perpetuate exclusion or harm.

Partners involved with the report

Care Experienced Movement

The Care Experienced Movement is influencing how services and networks talk about care-experienced people, challenging outdated language and promoting inclusive, empowering terminology across the sector.

The Halo Collective

The Halo Collective is challenging the stigma around Black hair through storytelling and brand partnerships. Collaborating with companies like Grace and Green, they are raising awareness about hair health, hormonal changes, and identity — reframing Black hair as a source of pride, not prejudice.

Muslim Northern Women

Muslim Northern Women is tackling gendered Islamophobia through education, advocacy, and digital storytelling. Their journalism, research, and campaigns are reframing Muslim women in the North of England as leaders, shifting public narratives from marginalisation to empowerment.

Radical Body Arts

Radical Body Arts is leading national research into how disabled artists experience the arts sector. Through its Disability Data Drive, it's challenging how institutions commission, facilitate, and showcase disabled artists' work.

Other cohort Partners

Babylon Migrants Project

Babylon Migrants Project uses film, art, and performance to challenge stereotypes about refugees and asylum seekers. Through community exhibitions and public showcases, they build empathy and understanding, celebrating identity, belonging, and resistance.

Tag Agency

Tag Agency has shifted national conversations about youth and class through creative campaigns like *Spenny*, spotlighting the cost-of-living crisis while platforming joy and care within Black creative communities.

2 **Tackling Systemic Injustice**

Providing spaces and services for their communities

For many partners, tackling injustice starts with creating safe, accessible spaces for healing, connection, and community power.

Partners involved with the report

Avocados Impact

Avocados Impact operates a youth centre in Devon offering legal advice, mentoring, and community-building for care-experienced people. Their work provides access to legal support, community belonging, and longer-term stability.

Radical Body Arts

Radical Body Arts has developed accessible digital platforms and commissions for disabled artists to share work from home. Using livestreams and camera kits, they're breaking down barriers to artistic participation and visibility.

Other cohort Partners

Account

Account provides healing and education spaces for young people affected by policing and state violence. Through workshops and legal education, they ensure those most impacted are leading conversations on justice reform and community safety.

Babylon Migrants Project

Babylon Migrants Project runs creative hubs in London and Stoke-on-Trent, reaching over 1,800 young refugees and migrants. Through art, performance, and shared culture, they build solidarity and belonging across diverse communities.

OneWithTheVillage

OneWithTheVillage creates neutral spaces for young people in Brixton to connect across postcodes through its *Shou'Been* events — one-off gatherings centred on music, food, and activities that build trust and reduce tension. It also runs trips and respite for younger children, letting them explore beyond London.

Skate Gals & Pals

Skate Gals & Pals builds belonging through inclusive sport, offering weekly skate sessions, creative workshops, and wellbeing activities that centre joy and community for LGBTQIA+ and global majority participants.

2 **Tackling Systemic Injustice**

Supporting the education and leadership development of other young people and community members

Education remains one of the most powerful tools for systemic change, and Pathways partners are using it to equip others with the skills and confidence to lead.

Partners involved with the report

Choked Up

Choked Up leads on environmental education, running workshops and assemblies that link air quality, health, and justice. Their sessions inspire young environmental leaders to understand inequality in their own neighbourhoods and advocate for cleaner, safer communities.

Motivez

Motivez empowers underrepresented youth to access STEM and sustainability careers through its *Application Season* and *Sustainable London* programmes. Eighty-five percent of alumni secure placements at leading organisations while students design community-led climate solutions that connect innovation with social justice.

Muslim Northern Women

Muslim Northern Women is developing the next generation of Muslim women leaders through *Muslim Girls Finding Power* and *Building Power*. The programmes equip working-class Muslim girls with confidence, political education, and organising skills to lead campaigns and create change in their communities.

Not A Trend

Not A Trend transforms educational environments through anti-racism workshops for students and teachers. Combining creative exercises with critical reflection, they challenge systemic inequality and move schools beyond performative inclusion toward genuine anti-racist practice.

Our Streets Now

Our Streets Now runs nationwide training with schools, workplaces, and councils to tackle harassment and gender inequality. Teachers report that years later, students still advocate for better policies and safer spaces — evidence of the campaign's lasting impact on culture and confidence.

Young Justice Advisors

The Young Justice Advisors deliver peer-led learning in prisons focused on wellbeing and shared decision-making. Their approach has led to tangible outcomes — including residents achieving open-prison status and returning to co-facilitate sessions, embedding mutual respect and rehabilitation in practice.

2 **Tackling Systemic Injustice**

Other cohort Partners

Account

Account connects young people to the history and future of resistance to policing through outreach, political education, and collective organising. They equip those most affected by over-policing to understand their rights, document injustice, and become future leaders in movements for safety and accountability.

Migrant Democracy Project

The Migrant Democracy Project is building a new generation of civic leaders through its *MPower* programme. Participants develop campaigning and advocacy skills, with alumni now standing for election and serving as councillors — transforming lived experience of migration into democratic leadership.

Tag Agency

Tag Agency's *Irin Ajo* programme offers year-long mentoring and professional development for emerging Black working-class creatives. Participants gain industry experience, guidance, and networks, with many alumni progressing into paid roles within Tag's client base and the wider creative industries.

Photo credit: The Halo Collective

Reshaping Civil Society

The Pathways Fund is helping to reshape who holds power in civil society — and what that power looks like. By resourcing Black, brown, disabled, neurodivergent, care-experienced, and lived-experience-led youth organisations, Blagrave is building a pipeline of credible, community-rooted groups capable of leading lasting systemic change.

For too long, the social sector has reflected the same inequalities it claims to challenge. Leadership remains overwhelmingly white, middle class, and detached from the realities of the communities it serves. Youth-led and lived-experience-led organisations are too often excluded as they're considered too new, too political, or too "risky" for mainstream investment. The Pathways Fund exists to change that. It demonstrates how multi-year, trust-based funding can level the playing field, enabling those historically excluded from philanthropy to not only participate in the system but to reshape it from within.

By funding those closest to the issues, Blagrave is not only redistributing resources — it is redistributing legitimacy. The Pathways Fund recognises that lived experience is expertise, that proximity to injustice produces insight, and that genuine inclusion requires structural shifts, not token gestures. This approach is building a generation of leaders whose authority is grounded in community, not credentials, and whose strategies for change are shaped by care, collaboration, and courage.

Learning and Themes

Across the Pathways Fund, partners shared consistent lessons about what youth and lived-experience-led funding makes possible — and what still needs to change. The themes shown on the following pages reflect their collective learning over three years.

Photo credit: Our Streets Now

1 The jump from project to organisation takes time

Overview

Multi-year, flexible funding gave partners the time, trust, and legitimacy to pause, reflect, and build strong foundations. For many, it was the first opportunity to move beyond survival — to focus on sustainability, clarity, and care rather than constant delivery or scale.

Key Insights

- Building payroll systems, writing HR policies, and installing governance structures is demanding, unseen work that takes energy, learning and money.
- Traditional requirements often exclude emerging, youth and lived-experience-led groups, but the fiscal hosting has given many a safe and practical route to grow at their own pace.
- Having dedicated budgets for wellbeing and organisational development legitimised the partners investing time in training, reflection and rest that they may not have prioritised otherwise.
- Admin and compliance can feel overwhelming to small teams with limited capacity, especially in the first few years of incorporating.

Recommendations

Recognise governance and compliance as impact work, normalise fiscal hosting, and provide accessible setup templates for groups. Recognise slower, steadier growth as success, as well as faster growth.

2 Centre wellbeing and care

Overview

When care is built into funding design, it becomes the foundation for lasting impact. Pathways Fund partners described wellbeing support as life-changing. It was a practical tool that helped them sustain themselves, their teams and their purpose.

Key Insights

- The Wellbeing Grants enabled reflection, retreats, rest, joy, therapy, and recovery.
- Cohort meet ups provided spaces for collective care, peer reflection and cohort connections to occur, with most barriers to partner participation being removed.
- Their regular check-ins with Blagrave's Youth Led Change Manager felt like mentoring, not monitoring, and created a safe space for honesty.
- The emotional labour of being lived-experience led needs more recognition, as cohort burnout often stems from the double duty of opposing the very inequities many partners face on a daily basis.

Recommendations

Build wellbeing budgets into every grant and access budgets into programmes, let partners define what care looks like, treat recovery and reflection as part of impact, and maintain consistent, open communication with partners.

3 Build flexibility into your grant processes

Overview

Partners valued the way Blagrave normalised taking stock, reflecting on strategies and changing tact if appropriate. It supported groups to learn and grow authentically in real time.

Key Insights

- Being trusted to pivot or pause, without fear of being penalised with the removal of funding, created a sense of mental safety and security that partners appreciated.
- Lived-experience led groups communicated that Blagrave's understanding of the conflicting priorities they face while doing this work, be it studying, caring, part-time work, parenting etc., meant that they could engage in their work without shame or anxiety.
- They also communicated that the accommodations by Blagrave when it comes to the conflicting challenges they face, such as living with disabilities, medical conditions or neurodiversity had a real impact on their ability to deliver their work sustainably.
- The open and accommodating dialogue between partners and Blagrave about shifting plans, timelines and funding schedules strengthened the engagement with and outputs of the cohorts work.

Recommendations

Design reporting as dialogue, add flexibility clauses for access needs, and move forward or back grant instalments to meet the changing needs of groups.

4 Funding movement building requires a different approach

Overview

Partners talked about the ongoing challenges of bias, performative sector funding, and fighting for visibility of their issues and being seen as credible experts on those issues.

Key Insights

- Access to funding still depends on groups becoming formal structures or having a certain turnover, instead of being credible leaders and groups in their own right.
- Trend-driven funding for 'hot topic' issues undermines long-term movement building and change.
- Youth and lived-experience leaders are invited to speak on issues, but don't feel as though they are taken seriously.
- "Legitimacy" labour is real, such as branding and website development, becoming incorporated or charity status, and is often done by groups unpaid in order to be seen as viable for funding.
- Some partners worried that being outspoken or bold in their work and their communications can make them seem too risky for some funders.

Recommendations

End charity-status restrictions, fund the work it takes for groups to become legitimate, commit to long-term investment, co-create programme design, and value authenticity and lived-experience.

5 Invest in building trusting relationships

Overview

The Pathways Fund's relational approach turned funding into partnership. For many partners, consistent contact and care felt just as transformative as the grant itself.

Key Insights

- The quarterly check-ins built relational trust between Blagrave and partners, and built personal confidence among the cohort.
- Having one grant manager across three years reduced administrative and personal strain for the cohort, with partners valuing not having to re-explain themselves and their work.
- The coaching and wrap-around support from Blagrave brought vital, non-financial, value to the cohort.
- Partners valued having a space where they could both be honest and where they could receive honest feedback.

Recommendations

Maintain consistent contact, combine funding with mentoring and networks, communicate clearly about flexibility, and balance trust with critical friendship.

6 Impact looks different and reporting should reflect this

Overview

Partners want funders to look beyond numbers and policy when it comes to impact. They described impact within the community as often being relational, cultural, and emotional, as well as shifting the dial legally or politically.

Key Insights

- Building confidence, safety, and belonging are valid outcomes for community delivery.
- Creating narrative changes, such as mainstreaming the use of "public sexual harassment" as a term or ensuring service providers use inclusive language in their organisations is as important as the number of people reached by a programme.
- Heavy reporting requirements can take important time away from groups already struggling with capacity.
- Funders' willingness to reflect and learn alongside partners could model a healthier, more reciprocal version of impact measurement.

Recommendations

Adopt mixed-method evaluation, measure human connection and confidence building as impact, value narrative change, and include funder and partner learning as part of impact too.

7 Embed access and inclusion

Overview

True equity in youth funding means reshaping the system itself, from where money goes to how it's managed. Partners called for funding ecosystems that prioritise stability and access.

Key Insights

- Fund beyond London and invest time and resource in outreach and application support.
- Multi-year, unrestricted funding must become standard if real change is wanted.
- Accessibility is infrastructure — childcare, access budgets and flexible timelines are essential.
- Meetings must offer hybrid access for disabled and regional partners.
- Partners stressed that collaboration, not competition, fuels innovation and solidarity. Investing in networks and peer learning allows youth-led groups to learn and thrive collectively.

Recommendations

Extend unrestricted funding, embed access and hybrid participation, fund peer-learning spaces, adopt fiscal hosting, and share relational models across the sector.

8 Funders must model the change they seek

Overview

How funders behave shapes the culture of the sector. Partners saw the Pathways Fund not only as financial support but as proof that care, courage, and co-creation can be achieved.

Key Insights

- Relationships have an impact, and consistent human contact builds stability.
- Representation matters, so make sure to include young and lived-experience voices in funder decision-making.
- Co-creation and flexibility demonstrate genuine power-sharing, showing that funders and partners can learn together as equals.
- Not all support offered needs to be financial, with calls for mentoring, skill shares, work and events spaces and relationship building all suggested.
- Backing bold, justice-driven work sets new norms for the sector and shows what values-led funding looks like in practice

Recommendations

Make inclusion training a standard, speak directly with the groups you're funding about their needs, embed co-design in all phases, model bold, values-led practice, and create transparent feedback loops.

Message for Other Funders: Pathways partners share their thoughts

When speaking with each partner, they were given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences both outside of and within the funding sector. Below is an account of the challenges they've come up against, the inequity they've witnessed and the solutions they propose to ensure that youth-led change making can become the norm within civil society, rather than the exception.

Care Experienced Movement

"Don't just fund care-experienced work. Fund care-experienced people."

Trust us. Trust that we know what we're doing, and if we don't, trust that we'll come to you. Support has to go beyond chucking money at an organisation and hoping for the best. It means real backing, wellbeing support, sharing networks, and staying in conversation with us about what we need.

From a care-experienced perspective, funders really need to listen. Too often, we're only funded when it's politically relevant or part of a performative trend. The sector keeps saying it wants to support care-experienced work, but it ends up giving money to big, established organisations that aren't actually led by care-experienced people. That's a massive issue.

We're one of the only fully care-experienced-led orgs in the UK. Our whole team, our board, everyone has lived through the system. That gives us a kind of trust and shared understanding you can't fake. We don't need other people to speak on our behalf. We can do the work and we are doing the work, we just need funders to get behind that.

Please don't overlook grassroots orgs. Look beyond London. Make your funding reflect local needs. Offer childcare. Fund for five years, not just three. Introduce us to people in your networks. Share your platform. And most of all, talk to other funders. Blagrave is doing something right.

Avocados Impact

"Be flexible, be clear, and above all — believe in us early."

To funders, my message is simple: take a chance. Trust us.

Funders like Blagrave have shown what real partnership looks like — but too many others still treat youth-led or lived-experience-led organisations as "risky." We'll never forget when we applied for a small grant and were told, *"We fund risky organisations, but you're too risky."* That kind of feedback sticks. It felt personal. We remember thinking: *five years from now, you'll see how much we've achieved*. And here we are, having proved exactly that.

Early belief changes everything. When funders take informed risks — not blind ones — that's where innovation happens. It's how small groups grow into movements. But funders also need to think about *how* they communicate. Application forms are often packed with jargon — words like "turnover," "profit and loss," or "cash flow" that assume everyone speaks the same language. For people who are dyslexic, or who haven't worked in formal business settings, that language is a barrier. Just explaining what you mean in plain English would make funding so much more accessible.

And finally, remember that relationships matter more than paperwork. A conversation before a full application, a check-in mid-way through a project, or just being available when things shift — those moments of trust are what make change possible. So be flexible, be clear, and above all — believe in us early. We know what change looks like from the inside. We just need you to believe that we can make it happen.

Choked Up

"Be invested in the people doing the work, not just the campaign itself."

Most young people doing this work aren't doing it full-time. We've developed campaigns out of passion and that needs to be supported with care. When funders bring really strict deadlines and tight requirements, it makes it impossible to meet expectations. We just don't have the time or resources.

What we need is flexibility, and for funders to actually understand our position. Be invested in the people doing the work, not just the campaign itself. Know where we're coming from, understand our capacity and our backgrounds. That's what makes a successful funding relationship and successful campaigners.

Also, just keep listening to young people. We have needs that older funders may not always recognise, especially in the digital age. Things feel way more overwhelming than they should be, especially when you're working in. We're not really given space to switch off, and that creates its own complications.

There are also a lot of us living with hidden disabilities or chronic illnesses, and that's only gotten worse since the pandemic. That's not going away, it's just the reality we're in now. So it's about creating space, or at least keeping in mind that people might be dealing with a lot behind the scenes.

It's not about making everyone disclose everything, just knowing there's a safe space for conversations like that can be enough.

Halo Collective

"Leave organisations better off than when they came to you."

Blagrave really communicates, and not just through one-to-ones, but by actively connecting the people they fund. Who else does that? They're ahead of the curve in how funding should work, and other funders should take note.

If funders want to support youth-led organisations properly, multi-year funding has to become the norm. One year isn't long enough. Yes, you can deliver things in a year, but not structurally. Not sustainably. There's only so much change you can build, and even less you can prove.

Expecting a flood of deliverables in twelve months, while also being strict about how the money can be used, is a recipe for disaster. Funders need to offer flexibility, not just funding.

And the goal shouldn't be all about deliverables either. It should be to leave organisations better off than when they came to you.

Young Justice Advisors

"Minor things can mean a lot."

What's made the biggest difference is that we've been backed and trusted as the experts in the field. There wasn't pressure to prove ourselves or tick boxes for the sake of it. The funding gave us space to focus on what we're good at: building connections, listening, drawing things out of young people that nobody else sees. When you work in prisons, you need flexibility. You need to adapt on the day, respond to what's happening, and meet people where they're at. That's not something you can always predict on a spreadsheet. So having that trust and that flexibility is everything.

We've also seen the power of being able to offer something fully funded to prisons. It changes the dynamic. It lets us lead with the value of what we do, instead of having to convince people to buy in before they've seen it. That's how we've built momentum. That's how we've gone back into prisons again and again. What we've had with Pathways Fund has felt different. It's not just that they gave us money, it's that they cared too. They checked in. They understood that things change. And when our plans shifted, they stayed with us. That kind of support isn't just helpful, it's rare.

If funders want to support youth-led work in the justice system, we'd say: keep doing what Pathways did. Back young adults. Fund the work with flexibility and trust. Help us get through the door. And remember: the small things really matter. That's what helps us make a big difference.

Motivez

"Think long-term. Think together. Trust us."

There are three big things funders need to do more of: forward thinking, collaborative thinking, and trust.

First off, forward thinking. Blagrave has done a great job of setting the standard here, especially with multi-year support. Three, five, even ten-year commitments allow us to actually plan. It means we can be strategic, think about our goals properly, and deliver long-term impact. If funders aren't thinking that way, the work will stagnate.

Second off, collaborative thinking. Funders often ask us how we're involving the communities we serve in our programme design. But are funders doing the same with us? Are they involving youth-led organisations in shaping the solutions they're trying to offer with funding? Sometimes groups don't need cash, they need advice, or space, or infrastructure. But you won't know unless you ask and can be flexible enough to adapt what you can provide to organisations.

And thirdly, trust. Trust us not just to use resources well, but to be at the decision-making table with you. That's how you build an actual ecosystem, one where everyone learns from each other and builds something meaningful, long-lasting, and better for the next generation of changemakers. This isn't just about one group giving and one group taking, but in the process of collaborating, there can be learnings that everybody takes away from it.

Not A Trend

"Don't replicate what we're trying to dismantle."

Listen to young people. Really listen. Think about the young people and causes you want to support, and don't replicate the very systems they're trying to dismantle. That goes for your processes, your funding models, the way you assess risk, even how you measure success.

We've come up against so many bureaucratic processes. We've had to justify our capacity, our finances, our decisions, in ways that more established organisations often don't have to. A lot of the time we're expected to deliver like adults, but not often treated as adults when it comes to managing our time, our priorities and our finances.

What's been different, and appreciated, about Pathways is the trust. We've been treated as capable. Respected. Given space to lead. But more broadly in the sector, there's still this feeling of being pitted against each other. Organisations from the same communities, doing overlapping work, are forced to compete for tiny pots of funding. That creates division, and it's exhausting. Especially when a lot of that money comes from systems that caused harm in the first place.

We're still asking for scraps of what should already belong to our communities. And that's a hard thing to say, but it's true. If funders want to support real change, they need to stop reinforcing the hierarchies we're trying to break down. Let youth-led organisations collaborate. Fund the collective. Share decision-making. Build infrastructure that supports care and connection, not just outputs.

Our Streets Now

"Giving money is not automatically helpful, especially when you're doing it in the wrong way."

Bad grantmaking can do real harm. The more we've learned about fundraising this past year, the more frustrating it's become, especially watching organisations with no money being forced to pay more and more for specialist fundraisers, just to compete for smaller and smaller pots of money. You shouldn't need a highly experienced fundraiser to apply for a grant.

Funders should be clearer about who they're looking for, what the chances are, and what the priorities really are. Half the time you only have a Charity Commission page for support. And when funding is done badly, it doesn't just waste time, it can damage the organisations you're giving money to. When groups contort themselves to fit funders' priorities, they might not be doing the things that are right for them or for the community they are trying to serve.

Fundraising shouldn't just be about getting money out the door. It's about how you do it. And too often, the people with inherited wealth or big platforms are the ones deciding what the whole charity sector should focus on next. That power dynamic is unethical. So if there's one message: pay attention to how you're making decisions. Are you doing it with lived experience in the room? Are you actually listening to what people need? Because giving money is not automatically helpful, especially when you're doing it in the wrong way.

Radical Body Arts

"If you don't fund people who haven't been funded before, then you will keep regurgitating the same outcomes."

There's still a long way to go in making the sector accessible to youth-led, and especially disabled-youth-led, organisations. Too often, funders require a track record to access funding. But without funding, how can anyone build one? It's a self-fulfilling cycle that rewards those who already have resources, and excludes those trying to do something different, like we are.

The Pathways Fund was the first time we were given a chance to show we could manage money specifically to plan, deliver and grow. That chance should be the norm, not the exception.

Funders don't have to fix everything, but you do need to be aware: if you only fund people who've already been funded, then you will keep regurgitating the same outcomes.

Muslim Northern Women

"Funders need to take accountability and stop gatekeeping change."

Funders should come back to the communities they support and show us how they're going to be more accountable to us. Build an accountability mechanism that they'll actually stick to — and put money where their mouth is. That's not really happening right now. It's a big ask, but it shouldn't be, and that's exactly the problem.

A lot of the challenges we're facing, especially the rise in far-right rhetoric that is causing real harm to many marginalised communities, can only be tackled if we all collaborate more. And that includes funders. There's a really toxic culture in philanthropy of gatekeeping — of not sharing information about other funds or opportunities — and it has to stop.

We need more open funds, more flexible pots of money, and more opportunities for groups that aren't yet registered as charities. Funders have to stop using bureaucracy as an excuse not to support the communities that need it most. It is usually these groups driving the most needed change which truly shifts power, and more often than not, with the most limited of resources.

Looking Forward

Going forward, Pathways Fund's goal is to continue supporting youth-led and lived-experience organising in order to build on these civic, community, and systemic ripples. The ambition of Blagrave and the Pathways Fund isn't just to grow more organisations, it's to help strengthen the funding ecosystem that enables youth-led leadership to thrive. To do this, they want more funders to focus on how to best support youth-led change. As Blagrave's Youth Led Change Manager puts it:

"

Funders need to get behind youth-led change. The impact is clear: building leaders, tackling systemic change, and redefining the sector. There are so many incredible young people creating or wanting to create change in their communities, but not enough pathways to support them. Especially for those working from a place of lived experience and facing compounding forms of oppression, the structural barriers are immense. If we don't create the pathways for these leaders to continue to hone their practice, grow their impact, and build their collective power, the social sector will never be as transformative and impactful as it could be. We are committed to learn alongside our youth-led partners as our own understanding of how best to support this work strengthens."

Photo credit: Our Streets Now

Appendix

List of all Pathways Fund Partners

Account - Led by and for young people adversely impacted by policing interventions, Account Hackney provides spaces for healing, reflection, and political and legal education to challenge over-policing and promote community safety.

Avocados Impact - A care-experienced–led organisation in Devon providing independent rights advice, advocacy, and community for children in care and care leavers.

Babylon Migrants Project -Brings together facilitators and participants from refugee, migrant, and asylum-seeking backgrounds to create spaces for creativity, cultural exchange, and community belonging.

Care Experienced Movement - A national collective of care-experienced people working together as activists to shift power, improve wellbeing, and lead systemic change in how care is understood and governed.

Coventry Youth Activist – A local youth-led initiative in Coventry focused on empowering young activists to address social, environmental or civic issues in the city, offering training, community organising and opportunities for youth leadership.

Choked Up - A youth-led campaign founded by Black and Brown teens demanding clean air and environmental justice, pushing for stronger legislation to ensure everyone has the right to breathe clean air.

Disabled Students UK – A UK-based organisation committed to supporting students with disabilities in accessing and thriving in education, through advocacy, information, and rights-based support.

The Halo Collective - An alliance of organisations and individuals tackling hair discrimination and promoting the celebration of Black hair in schools, workplaces, and public life.

Migrant Democracy Project - Aims to close the democratic participation gap by supporting migrants to engage in civic life, vote in local elections, and influence the policies that affect them.

Motivez - A youth-led organisation on a mission to tackle global challenges through the next generation of STEM leaders, offering mentoring, employability training, and innovation events.

Muslim Northern Women - A youth-led collective of Muslim women and girls across Northern England working to challenge Islamophobia and create empowering spaces for leadership and self-expression.

Not A Trend - A youth-led education collective reimagining schools through anti-racist and decolonised practice, creating resources with teachers and young people to transform conduct, culture, and curriculum.

OneWithTheVillage - Supports young people and families in Lambeth through wellbeing programmes, mentoring, and access to socio-economic opportunities, with a focus on care, connection, and community strength.

Our Streets Now - A national campaign led by young women and people of marginalised genders working to end public sexual harassment through cultural change, education, and legislation.

Radical Body Arts - A disabled- and queer-led arts organisation producing radical new work by and for disabled artists, advocating for accessibility, care, and systemic change in the arts sector.

Skate Gals & Pals - A community collective supporting LGBTQIA+ people, people of colour, and those of marginalised genders through inclusive skate sessions that foster joy, safety, and belonging.

Tag Agency - Creates space and opportunity for young Black creatives to tell authentic stories of social change, joy, and care through creative production, media, and arts projects.

Transiliance – A community interest company working at the intersection of trans, non-binary and marginalised gender identities, providing empowerment, peer-support and advocacy services that centre lived experience.

Young Justice Advisors - A peer-led network of young adults with lived experience of the criminal justice system working with policymakers and agencies to improve practice and embed lived experience leadership.

Yucan - A lived experience–led organisation in East London supporting young carers through school-based programmes, mentoring, and awareness campaigns that centre self-care and empowerment.

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