



Strategy Review 2022–2025

The journey towards youth-led change

Strategy Review 2022–2025

Contents

Summary	3
The strategy journey	4
2022–2025 strategy	6
Objective 1 Increasing civil society’s accountability to young people	8
Objective 2 Investing in young people to create change	11
Objective 3 Investing in better youth policy	17
Grant funding over time	20
Safeguarding and wellbeing	21

Methodology

This strategy review is based on:

- A desk-based literature review of reports, reviews and research commissioned or created by Blagrave over the course of this strategy period – these explored impacts of different funds and aspects of strategy delivery as well as making sense of the wider context
- A workshop with the staff team
- Interviews with the Chair of Trustees and CEO, a partner supported by Blagrave, and another external consultant who has worked with the organisation
- Quotes and case studies of partners who have been supported, provided by Blagrave

It was written for the Blagrave Trust by external consultants Natasha Adams and Joe Derry Hall.

Front cover photos:

Jemmar Samuels, Collective Punishment Campaign. Credit: Sawsan Bastawy
Young Wilders
Abdoul Lelo, Shou’Been
Youth-Led Change Day. Credit: Sarah Ali
Muslim Northern Women



Bronwen, Macy and Elliot created a weekly club for LGBTQ+ children in Bristol to have a place to belong

Summary

Over 250 partners, 4 years, many funds... This report is just a snapshot of Blaggrave's 2022–25 strategy. But it's a vital chance to reflect as they look to the future.

We set out to answer the question: did Blaggrave achieve what they aimed to do when they wrote their ambitious new strategy in 2022? They have much to be proud of, although reporting success precisely is a challenge, as they didn't set measurable objectives (something they are taking forward into future planning).

The evidence suggests they achieved most on their second objective – **investing in youth-led change** – which is where they have found their niche. They also had important wins in other areas of their work, and overall there are many things to celebrate including:

- Supporting **young people to lead more and more of the changes they want** in their lives
- Improving how they support partners – with **more flexible support, long-term unrestricted funding, relationships based on trust**
- Deepening understanding of **social justice and oppression** and helping **level the funding playing field** for marginalised young people
- Having **wider impacts on other funders** – who now value youth-led change more, listen and are more accountable to young people

They haven't got everything right:

- Not always reaching the **most marginalised** young people
- At times **failing to provide adequate support** to young people with lived experience
- Realising their approach to **policy influencing** wasn't the best way they could make change
- Missing out important issues in their strategy including **safeguarding** and **climate change**

But on these and more they've **kept learning lessons and improving** – involving young people with lived experience, inviting input, open to being challenged. Blaggrave are stronger for it, and most importantly they're better at supporting young changemakers.

Please read on for more. We hope you find this valuable.



Rehab, Cherif, Jamal and the Revoke Group have been dismantling the UK's cruel asylum housing system one hotel at a time. Credit: Sawsan Bastawy

The strategy journey

The period running up to this strategy was a huge time of change, including the **Covid -19 pandemic** and **Black Lives Matter**.

Inside Blagrove too, there was growing awareness of the need to **upend their existing power dynamics**.

In 2020 they launched Challenge and Change, their **first ever direct fund for young changemakers** – and were inundated by people applying.

During this time they also began to **radically change their governance** – bringing in young people with lived experience who hadn't been trustees before, revolutionising their Board.

2019

'Youth-Led Change in the UK' research leads to understanding the need and possibility of supporting young people directly

2020

Launch of the Opportunity Fund: a basic income for young activists, campaigners or social entrepreneurs
Launch of Challenge and Change

2021

Donation by Nineteen Eighty Nine Charitable Trust towards core work, significantly increasing capacity for grant-making



The strategy journey

2022

Eli Manderson Evans joins as Chief Executive bringing new perspective and focus

Challenge and Change second funding round

Challenge and Change and the Regional Programme become participatory – decisions made by the young people involved

Launch of Young People in Policy Influencing fund

First annual Youth-Led Change Day event

2023

Launch of Pathways Fund

Audit of climate-related work

2024

Policy Fund pauses

2025

Policy Fund closes

Regional Fund closes



In 2022, Blagrove started its new four-year strategy.

It was the next step in a deep transformation. Starting as a modest, general regional funder, Blagrove's come to focus on young adults.

It has become known for its **commitment to young people with lived experience** and their potential as changemakers.

2022–2025 strategy



“Blaggrave is unique, being youth-led, having young people at the helm. They’re not comparable to anyone else.

It’s a team of people who love young people, want them to be change makers.

They stand out, because they’re all so passionate and they do care.”

Nadine - Leaders Unlocked

Enabling young people to have a voice on education, policing, health and justice

Objective 1

Increasing civil society's accountability to young people

Civil society needs to listen better and be more accountable to young people.
How did Blagrove support partners and work with other funders to make this happen?

Regional roots

Blagrove continued their **Regional Programme** in the South East of England (where their founder lived) – providing 3 year unrestricted funding to youth organisations mainly in Berkshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Sussex and Wiltshire.

The Regional Programme aimed to support young people facing the greatest social injustices. But peer-led research commissioned in 2023 showed that by funding established organisations in wealthier areas, they weren't reaching some of the most marginalised young people.

In response they launched the **Challenge and Transform** fund to make grants supporting organisations led by and for people of colour.

After the racist, Islamophobic riots of 2024, Blagrove offered wellbeing grants to regional partners working with communities most affected, with minimal bureaucracy to get funding to them easily.

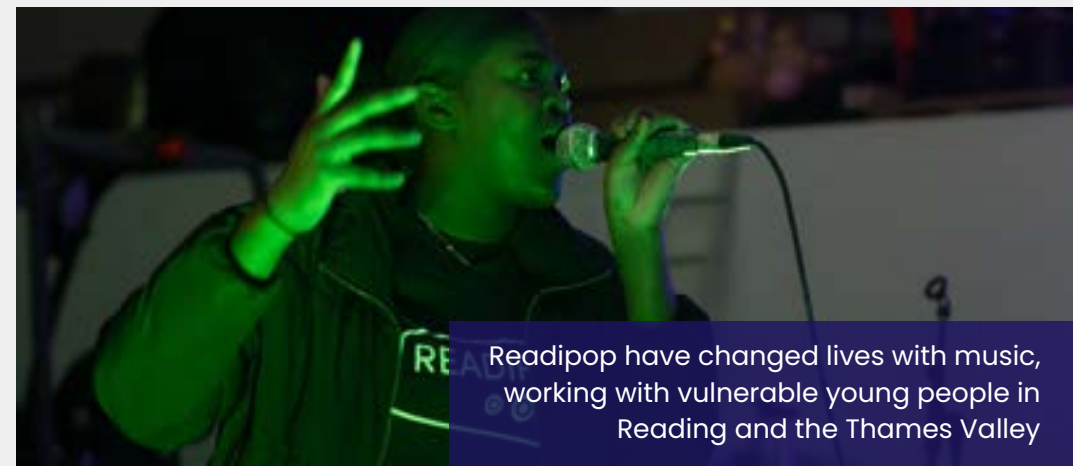
In 2025 they made the difficult decision to close the Regional Programme for new grants as they refocus work in their next strategy.

Who's really listening?

Even youth organisations may not really listen to young people. Working with Children in Need, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The National Lottery Community Fund and The Tudor Trust, Blagrove tried to tackle this.

From 2018–2024 the **Listening Fund** supported youth charities with over £2m to listen better to young people and find ways to be actively accountable – through boards, panels and more. There was also a big win with the funders involved transforming their own practices:

“Young people should be at the heart of decisions that impact them. But while we ask organisations we fund to listen to [their] views, we have done little of this ourselves. Working with others made us reflect on what we could do. We are only at the start but already we have learnt a lot.”
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation



Readipop have changed lives with music, working with vulnerable young people in Reading and the Thames Valley

Increasing civil society's accountability to young people

Key successes and lessons learnt

- Over the past several years Blaggrave came to realise that **the way they funded** was as important as what they funded.
- They improved how they supported partners through **long-term, unrestricted funding and relationships based on trust**. That included learning over time that they had to **get rid of as much bureaucracy as possible**.
- They had an impact on how their partners work with young people, by making it **part of funding criteria that partners must listen and respond to young people**.
- Similarly, the Listening Fund had a **big impact on other funders involved**, helping get them to listen better to young people. And it led to better collaboration across the sector.
- Through their Regional Programme they continued to support partners in the **South East of England**, the traditional geographical focus for Blaggrave's work.
- However, by continuing to fund only established organisations in the South East, they **didn't reach the most marginalised young people** who weren't accessing these services.



Team Domenica have supported young people with learning disabilities to be valued at work and thrive in the rest of their lives



**“ [Funders need to] think long-term...
Blaggrave has done a great job of setting the
standard here, especially with multi-year
support.**

**It means we can be strategic, think about
our goals properly, and deliver long-term
impact.”**

Motivez

Empowering underserved young people to access STEM jobs and make change

Objective 2

Investing in young people to create change

Lots of funders support youth organisations and policy work – Blagrove are one of the few who fund young people directly. They've found their niche doing this: it's how they've seen the greatest impact, and a wider effect on the sector.

Starting out

Challenge and Change provides direct funding for young people with lived experience to lead the changes they want. It's spanned activists, campaigners, organisers, social entrepreneurs and young people running services: Blagrove's understanding of changemaking has grown over time.

At every step they co-designed this fund with young people with lived experience. It's been informed by youth work and has come with a range of support. Blagrove have taken a lot of the risk, giving young changemakers space to thrive by not asking them to jump through lots of hoops along the way.

All of this has helped them improve equity in their funding – by 2025 two-thirds of young people who applied were from racially minoritised communities, over half identified as working class.

Scaling up

Blagrove heard repeatedly from young changemakers that there was a lack of longer-term funding for youth-led groups to scale after initial seed funding. In response they launched the **Pathways Fund**, which picked up where Challenge and Change left off.

They gave £10-30K of funding a year for up to three years to groups at a key point in their journey when they were ready to grow their impact and begin getting more established.

These youth-led groups have been driving solutions to issues they face and addressing root causes of oppression – changing dominant institutions and building alternatives. The young people leading them have been nurtured and developed to become civic leaders.

Radical Body Arts worked with a Derbyshire arts centre to create an exhibition centring four young disabled artists' work – leading to more venues keen to showcase it, involving more and more local disabled artists.

Our Streets Now's campaigning successfully won a change in the law, making public sexual harassment a crime. Alongside this, their schools programme has grown and grown in demand.



Ali Ghaderi and Babylon Migrants Project have used creative activities to help young refugees and asylum-seekers gain skills, confidence and support networks. Credit: Sawsan Bastawy

Objective 2

Investing in young people to create change

Key successes and lessons learnt

- Challenge and Change **influenced the sector to see the value of youth-led change** and grew Blagrave's own understanding of how to support this kind of work.
- They had an influence on **other funders' accountability to young people** too – helping shift them from listening to each other to listening to young people more.
- Although it had a positive influence on other funders, the **Opportunity Fund wasn't managed well**. It had too much of a one-size-fits-all approach and they learnt too late that young people campaigning from lived experience needed more and different support to social entrepreneurs.
- Blagrave responded to the needs of young people, creating the Pathways Fund as the next step in a **pipeline of support** following on from Challenge and Change.
- As a team, they have learnt a lot the past four years to get better at **supporting young people flexibly**. And they understand better the different roles that grant management, youth work, campaign and wellbeing support all play.
- They've also **expanded their definition of youth-led change** from activism to include campaigning, organising, community leadership and providing services, as they recognise all these activities can play an important role.
- Blagrave fund infrastructure – and increasingly they've **become the infrastructure**, like their annual **Youth-Led Change Day** bringing together young changemakers.



Youth-Led Change Day. Credit: Sarah Ali



“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

Producing challenging new performance art by and for young disabled people

Objective 2

Investing in young people to create change



“It’s so beautiful to see people come along who have never spoken about adoption in their life”

Shania-Sophia Dunbar – The Dunbar Project

An adoptee herself, Shania-Sophia Dunbar Ives started the Dunbar Project to flip the story around adoption and help adoptees heal.

Seeing the mental health crisis among adoptees during the pandemic, the group took action – educating adoptive parents to help them and their children heal, educating social workers and other professionals to understand better.

With Blaggrave’s support the project went further and created monthly workshops for adoptees with different and intersecting identities – race, sexuality, generational trauma and more.

Objective 2

Investing in young people to create change

Change on climate

Climate justice was a gap in Blgrave's thinking when they created their current strategy. It took young people pushing them on this issue to make them respond.

In 2023 Blgrave commissioned an external audit and based on this, they geared up to do more – at the time less than 4% of their funding was climate-related.

Through the **Climate Justice Accelerator** they've funded and supported four youth-led groups, with a focus on race, disability, LGBTQIA+, gender, and working class young people.

They also joined forces with The Ovo Foundation, The Energy Saving Trust Foundation, The Co-op Foundation and Impatience Earth to launch **Roots & Routes**. This fund brought together their combined resources, skills and knowledge to help youth-led and infrastructure organisations – based on nominations by young people.



Choked Up – Credit: Sawsan Bastawy

Forced to breathe dangerously polluted air on their way to school every day, friends Destiny Boka-Batesa, Nyeleti Brauer-Maxaieia and Anjali Raman-Middleton co-founded Choked Up: a campaign to end deadly air pollution in their communities.

Ignored by the existing youth climate movement or used for appearances, they did their own thing – and made national news.



“Blaggrave has all their principles really bang on.

They're bold, they encourage organisations to be bold too, and they hold strong social justice values that lean towards the more radical side of changemaking.

Anything radical we put out there isn't going to scare them — it's encouraged.”

Issy – Our Streets Now
Ending public sexual harassment in the UK

Objective 3

Investing in better youth policy

Blaggrave have been funding national policy work since 2018. Over the past four years they also wanted to learn: what's the best way to do this for the future?

Changing policy, changing approach

In 2022 Blaggrave launched the **Young People in Policy Influencing** fund as a learning inquiry, to identify the most effective ways to centre youth voice and leadership in policy influence. Ten organisations were funded for three years, aiming to redress power imbalances in how policy is made.

Their partners had some important policy wins including:

Challenging Behaviour Foundation made sure decision makers heard the views of young people with profound learning disabilities.

Become's Gone Too Far campaign fought to stop children in care being taken far away from family and community.

The learning inquiry had lessons for the sector – including how to support young people to draw on their own lived experience for system change, and the skills youth sector advocates need to develop to take forward policy change.

While they were very proud of what their partners achieved, Blaggrave came to realise they don't have the resources to fund sustained, long-term policy work at a national level. And they don't think working within a broken system, influencing non-youth-led organisations, is the right approach for them.

As a result they decided not to continue funding national policy work – instead funding young people directly as the best way they could support change.



Become have campaigned to stop children in care being taken far away from loved ones

Objective 3

Investing in better youth policy

Key successes and lessons learnt

- The partners Blagrave funded have had some **important policy wins** worthy of recognition.
- Blagrave showed they could have **more impact at a national level**, challenging and stretching themselves and growing their relationships in the sector.

However, they also came to some important realisations over the past four years:

- They **didn't have the resources to fund sustained, long-term national policy work** – e.g. follow-on funding for partners or even 6-7 year funding commitments.
- The existing approach – influencing policies of institutions not led by young people – ultimately didn't fit with how Blagrave came to see system change. They see **funding young people directly as the best way they can contribute to change.**

They asked partners they supported to help them learn along the way. This was incredibly valuable, but it had problems too:

- Among other important learnings, partners **challenged Blagrave's understanding of social justice and oppression**, which was crucial for their understanding of these issues.
- Involving partners in learning meant asking for more of their time and energy. Blagrave hadn't thought enough about what this would mean and **some organisations felt they were 'being extracted from'.**



Challenging Behaviour Foundation has made sure decision makers heard the views of young people with profound learning disabilities

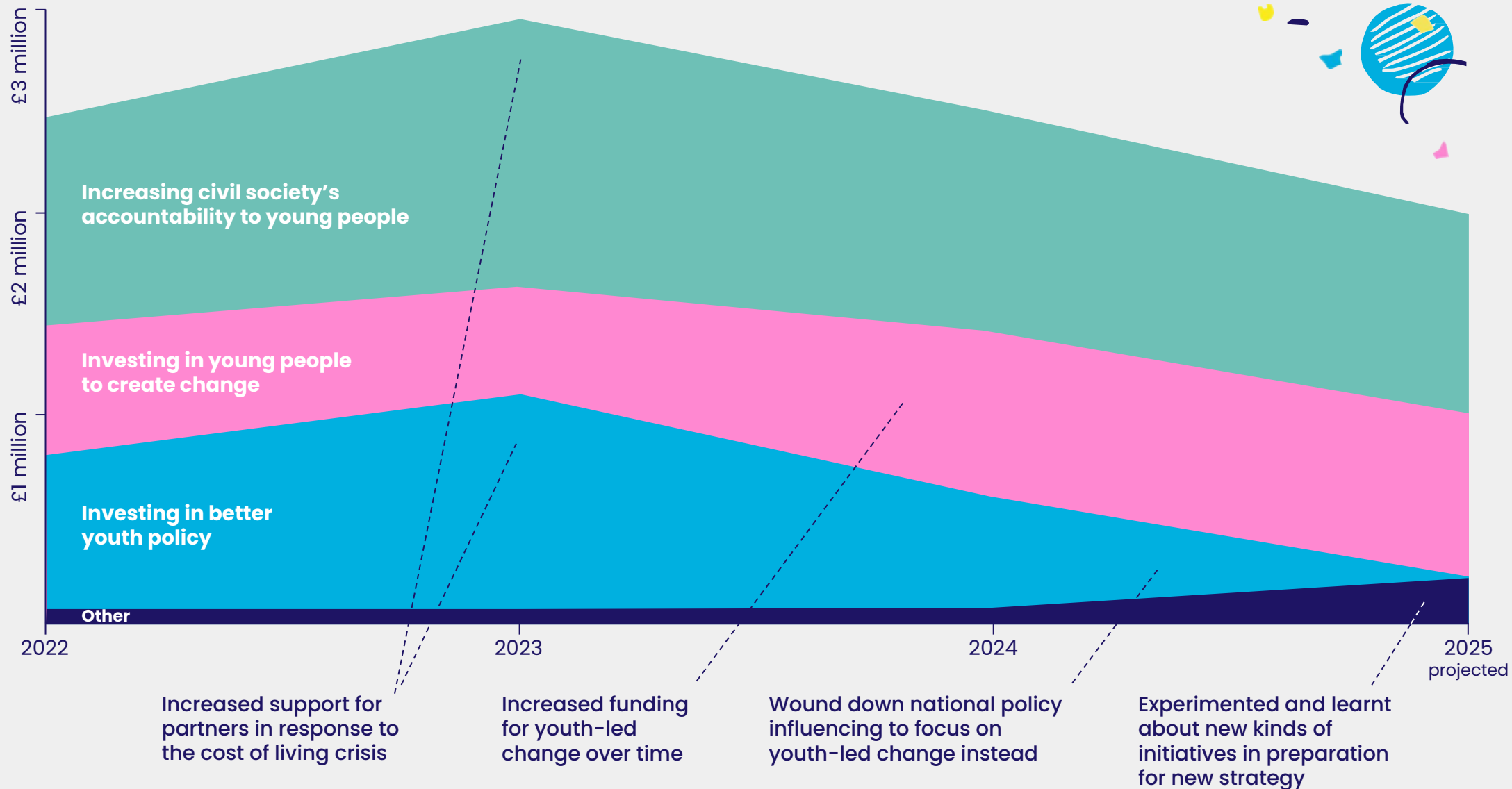
“Blaggrave is the first funder we’ve worked with that really communicates, and not just through one-to-ones, but by actively connecting the people they fund.

Who else does that? They’re ahead of the curve in how funding should work, and other funders should take note.”

Halo Collective

Creating a future without hair discrimination

Grant funding over time



Safeguarding and wellbeing

Working with young people has to mean support and care throughout. But this was left out of Blagrave's strategy.

When they started out on their current strategy they didn't have a strong understanding of their duty of care to the partners and young people they were working with. They also didn't have robust enough safeguarding procedures in place.

Over time Blagrave realised they weren't doing well enough and it was crucial they improve. So in 2023 they commissioned an external review of their safeguarding culture, systems and processes.

They have put in place many of the recommendations. The biggest change was setting up a Safeguarding Committee to **change their culture – and influence the wider sector** because they could see other funders needed to change too.

As well as safeguarding, Blagrave have come to see that care and support is a vital part of all their work.

One of their big realisations has been the need to offer **'wrap around' support for young people with lived experience** alongside funding.

This means all their partners now receive **dedicated funds for their wellbeing**. And they offer young people chances to **come together to support and learn** from each other.



“Building a culture of care, it has to be centred and resourced in everything we’re doing”

Eli Manderson Evans – Chief Executive, Blagrave Trust





Strategy Review 2022–2025

Copyright © 2025 The Blaggrave Trust
Registered Charity Number 1164021

The Blaggrave Trust

Toynbee Hall, 28 Commercial Street,
London E1 6LS

Website: www.blagravetrust.org

Blaggrave.
investing in
young people