



# Building a Youth-Led Fund

Learning and insights from the  
Challenge and Change Fund

May 2022

**CHALLENGE  
AND CHANGE**

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**This learning report was written and produced in partnership by:**



# Introduction

## Summary background and rationale

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**Young people have long been calling for greater agency and the ability to influence decisions that affect their lives.**

**History illuminates the capacity and courage of young people to drive positive change in the world, but for far too long their ideas have been restricted or constrained within the structures of the broader social sector. Power is often held by adult-led social purpose organisations – be they funders, charities, enterprises, or public bodies – that end up speaking on behalf of young people and controlling or containing their ideas about what change is needed and how to make it.**

Challenge and Change set out to address this by moving decision-making power and resources to young people. It was intended as a youth-led fund dedicated to supporting the limitless energy of young campaigners who are affected by injustices and working tirelessly across England to create positive change. The fund's charitable purpose is 'advancement of citizenship'<sup>1</sup>.

**“Challenge and Change is the institutions acknowledging that there is a problem and handing power back. The Third Sector is its own institution that should be aware of itself and try to change itself.”**

*Challenge and Change Young Advisor*

## **If not now, when? Taking a leap of faith during collisions of crisis**

Challenge and Change has been a fund designed by young changemakers, for

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<sup>1</sup> Under UK charity law, the charitable purpose of work must be defined and the regulatory body, the Charity Commission, lists 13 possible charitable purposes including 'advancement of citizenship and community development'

young changemakers.

The COVID pandemic, with its huge impact on young people's education and employment prospects, underlined the relevance and urgency of this work. And this came on the back of Brexit and rising social and political division, and alongside climate change protests and the rise of racial justice protests around the world, following the death of George Floyd. Once again, young people were bringing social, economic, and climate injustices to the consciousness of adults who had been (and continue to be) too slow to act, exposing ongoing issues of intergenerational and regional inequity.

Designed remotely by three young change makers with experience in campaigning work – Daze Aghaji, Chloe Deakin and Jovan Nepaul (Young Advisors) with design support from the Centre for Knowledge Equity (CfKE). The Blaggrave Trust (Blaggrave) took a lead role securing agreement and funding and supporting the implementation and delivery of the programme in collaboration with CfKE, with additional investment gratefully received from Zing and the Ellis Campbell Charitable Foundation.

## **Downing our tools to support young changemakers working on the hard edges of injustices**

In May 2020, Blaggrave's Trustees approved an investment of £80k to support young changemakers. 18–25 year olds would be able to apply for investments of £1k–£10k with the rest of the funding criteria set by the Young Advisors.

Initially, 20 young changemakers and their collectives were funded, but due to the quality and volume of applications received, Blaggrave made the decision to fund a further 10 by the end of 2020, bringing the total individuals and collectives funded to 30, with a total investment of £260,000.

The fund was intensively designed then delivered at pace, which meant taking risks, knowing we were not going to get everything right. Above all it meant taking a leap of faith that by handing power (decision-making and resources) over to young people, we could play a small part in supporting their potential to meet the moment with the urgent action needed for their communities.

**“This isn't just a drop in the ocean. It can create the ripple that makes the waves.”**

*Challenge and Change Young Advisor*

# This report

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## Why this report and why now?

Since the launch of Challenge and Change in 2020, many funders and social sector leads have reached out to Blagrove keen to understand the journey of the fund in its pilot year. This report has been produced by Blagrove and CfKE to share our learning with those working on, or interested in, supporting the development of youth-led funds.

This report seeks to capture both the deeper reflections that this fund has generated as well as some of the finer details of design, launch, implementation, and review. This includes honesty about what went well, what didn't, and where there are further questions to reflect on.

It represents our understanding at a moment in time as we continue to learn and evolve our work. We have tried our best to do justice to the multi-dimensional insights we have gathered during this initial pilot year, and the iterations of the fund as it evolved. The fund was a pilot, designed at pace and delivered at the height of a pandemic. Inevitably, this made the process messy and challenging at times. But out of the messiness and discomfort have come important moments of rich learning. It's been an inspiring if bumpy road, and insights from young people funded through the pilot continue to flow into Blagrove at pace!

Much of the learning has been in the doing - the 'how'. How this fund was designed, the initial and emerging processes, and the challenges these new processes and ways of working raised.

These are challenges that may be faced by any funder holding power because of its position, and treading the line of legal responsibilities, while seeking to remain authentic to the decisions and needs of young people.

**“We funded so much on this pilot that will change things on a small level and a bigger level. I hope ... more funders follow this example and change how they fund. Maybe becoming more grassroots themselves.”**

*Challenge and Change Young Advisor*

This report is made up of three parts:

**About the Fund** - In this section, we give a brief background to the Challenge and Change Fund, who was involved, what they did, and what we plan to do next.

**Key lessons** - In this section, we share our wider learning about the landscape of youth-led change and highlight some of the themes that adult-led organisations in particular will need to think about when working with young changemakers.

**Deeper dive into the design and delivery of the Fund** - In this section, we reflect on the different elements of the Challenge and Change funding programme and set out in detail how we went about things and what we have learnt from these experiences.

## **Producing the report**

Findings and Insights in this report have been informed by:

- Informal and formal feedback exchanges and discussions with the Young Advisors (YAs) who designed the fund.
- Data collated from Challenge and Change funded partners (from the application and check-ins with young people for example).
- Surveys, interviews, and group sessions with funded partners where they focused on their involvement with Challenge and Change, and it's fit with their wider experiences.
- Meetings held between Blaggrave and CfKE teams.

We have also included some specific quotes from young people in the body of the report. But it's important to be clear that, while this report integrates young peoples' perspectives and is heavily informed by them, it was not co-created with and alongside them. This was due to not having planned for learning work in advance with young people, largely due to the fast-paced nature of the programme. Our work with young people on Challenge and Change has highlighted the integral part that young people play in all elements of a programme and their desire to share learning to evolve and improve programmes they are involved in. Considering the evolution and development of the role for Young Advisors and young people we work with on programme design, decision-making and learning capture, is something that we are discussing with 2022's Young Advisors across Blaggrave programmes.

## **LEx leadership**

In the report, we describe young changemakers and leaders with lived experience as 'LEx Leaders'. LEx (Lived Experience) Leaders/hip was a term first crafted in 2017 by Baljeet Sandhu, and defined as:

*"Change-makers, innovators and leaders who have activated their lived expertise to inform, shape and lead their social purpose work (often in combination with their learned and practice experience) to directly benefit the communities they share those experiences with".<sup>2</sup>*

The [LEx Movement](#)<sup>3</sup> is a collective impact network of LEx leaders and LEx-led organisations, groups, and networks to connect, support and strengthen the capacity of Lived Experience Leaders to create systems-level change.

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<sup>2</sup> Lived Experience Leadership: Rebooting the DNA of Leadership, Sandhu, 2019 available at <https://knowledgeequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Lived-Experience-Leadership-Rebooting-the-DNA-of-Leadership-Report-.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://lexmovement.org>

# About the fund

## Young Advisors

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We recruited three Young Advisors (YAs) with experience of campaigning and social change work. They led on nearly all decisions about the initial design of the fund, including its name, the language used and all communications, the outreach approach, the application process, and accompanying guidelines for young people applying.

YAs had delegated responsibility to make final decisions on who was funded from a shortlist of 80 applications. Applying some basic initial criteria, Blaggrave sifted these from the 192 applications that were received from young people within the four-week limited application window of the fund. The YAs' final decisions were presented to Blaggrave's Board for information (and one of the YAs was also a Blaggrave trustee).

## Meet the Young Advisors and Designers of the Challenge and Change Pilot Fund



**Daze Aghaji**

**Chloe Deakin**

**Jovan Nepaul**

**“Challenge and Change was about people being systems changers.”**

*Challenge and Change Young Advisor*



# The impact young people can create and the value of funding them

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It is hard to do justice to the breadth of work that young people are engaged in, the flow of their work with its peaks and its troughs, and the changes that young people will bring about with one year's funding. It is also important to recognise that with grants ranging from £2k to £10k, and with cohorts funded amidst COVID lockdowns with all the associated challenges for young people that has created, many are just now completing their funded work. However, it is also vital to capture a sense of the excitement and potential as we follow and learn from their work and progress. Some are already achieving amazing things and doing so collaboratively and at an astonishing pace.

Specific examples of progress include:

## Highlighting the power of lived experience to inform and shape policy making and develop new research initiatives

Including:

- the development of guides written by and for young people in the criminal justice system to advocate for better policy,
- an anthology of stories from young migrants and the barriers they face with access to higher education, sharing the experiences of young asylum seekers with APPGs<sup>4</sup>,
- and space to carry out hundreds of conversations to develop new academic research strategies to centre the lived experiences of young care leavers to better understand their needs, rights, and entitlements.

**“It’s so hard to be heard as a young person ... To tell my story [but also] share the solutions and ideas that come from those stories and experiences”**

*Challenge and Changer*

## Building specialist support services to amplify understanding of the specific needs, rights, and entitlements of young people with lived experience of unjust systems

Including:

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<sup>4</sup> All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal cross-party groups run by and for Members of the Commons and Lords.

- legal advocacy services and safe spaces for care-experienced young people in Devon to break down the jargon, and interrogate the systems and processes that impact their lives,
- the development of innovative mental health services to support the rights of young Black trans communities across England,
- access to equipment for young disabled artists to enable inclusive performance opportunities for creatives – challenging the idea that it is necessary for people to be physically present at venues and events to create meaningful, impactful performances for mainstream audiences.

**“Raising awareness about rights and what quality of service young people are entitled to is a first step to supporting them to challenge and change things. Our online platform will help young people to access information and gain knowledge.”**

*Challenge and Changer*

**Challenging public and social sector thinking and deepening understanding around how everyone has potential that needs to be supported.**

Including:

- a national podcast to educate people and communities on the experiences of neurodiverse young people of colour,
- a publication and significant national media profile of a book ‘My Journey Home’ on a young person’s experiences of homelessness and mental health that has been distributed across the homeless sector and challenged perceptions of youth homelessness. Film rights have also recently been secured,
- national webinars across the Criminal Justice sector to amplify the unique and specific needs of young people impacted by the criminal justice system,
- a national performance attended by an audience of creative industry audiences that changed understanding of the potential for digital events to act as a powerful tool for access, and increased awareness of the disabled talent that often goes unseen and untapped because they are unable to leave the house,
- interviews with people’s experiences of local mental health services to support the development of an animation for a local authority and inform discussions with a local youth advisory service.

**“We’ve learned how to say no. This has been so empowering for us. To not allow mainstream organisations to expect us to join their panels and events for free without working closely with us and valuing our time and expertise... funding allowed us to run those events on our terms and allow our expertise to be heard”**

*Challenge and Changer*

**Building collaborations with local communities and mainstream institutions to scale the impact of project work funded.**

Many Challenge and Changers sought out collaborations on their terms, including through:

- collaborations between young and older activists,
- conversations to share performances of young people with lived experience of mental distress with large mainstream mental health charities,
- working with educational institutions to better understand the lived realities of marginalised Muslim communities, to shift bias and harmful perceptions of British Muslim culture,
- workshops in educational institutions to address the impact of xenophobia, racism and lack of Black history in mainstream education,
- developing local community conversations and collaborations with local artists to showcase the historical and architectural significance of derelict buildings in Birmingham, to encourage local communities to imaginatively reclaim these buildings and draw local authorities' attention to the derelict assets in their care.

**“We wanted young adults in the systems that often get overlooked to feel empowered and like they can have some sort of input into decisions that are made for them, rather than with them.”**

*Challenge and Changer*

**Young people’s additional progress and achievements made possible through Challenge and Change funding:**

- Challenging stereotypes and limitations imposed on young people by a sector that doesn’t provide any direct funding to them or invest in their potential to create change.
- Practical support and hope to young LEx communities who experience

oppression, challenging prejudice and lack of investment in their community and change-making strategies.

- Increasing funded opportunities for young LEx leaders and changemakers in the social sector to pay themselves, their colleagues and interviewees of projects, thereby recognising and acknowledging the value of their time, expertise and the social change work they are doing. This has been in contrast to so much unpaid work expected across the youth sector. Some Challenge and Changers went on to run workshops to highlight and challenge working practices of the social sector, and beyond to empower young people seeking employed or funded opportunities to take forward their work.
  - Establishing new Community Interest Companies (CICs) to further young people's work and leveraging significant on-going investment in those organisations – demonstrating both the potential impact of seed funding through initial grants and the ability of the young people to scale their work independently.
  - Development of websites, social media presence and platforms to grow web presence and campaigns, along with training materials, resources, toolkits, and handbooks for young changemakers and campaigners to advance their social justice dreams and missions.
  - Creation of youth peer-led and peer-run communities supporting each other's health and wellbeing and creating the space to explore social justice and campaigning work of young people and co-create social change including workshops attended by hundreds of young activists, including a 'movement school'.
  - Amplifying the pressing need for more inclusive and equitable social justice spaces that acknowledge and address safeguarding needs and the diverse needs of various LEx communities attending to issues such as age, gender, race, class, nationality, and disability. This has included running accessible workshops that value and acknowledge the needs of young LEx leaders and changemakers; providing access to digital equipment for those who are digitally deprived; access to information in different languages and diverse formats for young people with disabilities; accessible resources for young activists on how they can challenge local policymakers and build their own social justice campaigns.
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# Next steps and the future of Challenge and Change

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Blagrave's Trustees have committed to a further 3 years of funding for Challenge and Change under the charitable purpose of 'active citizenship'. We are clear that the fund should continue to work with young people activating their lived experience for social change who are early on in their change-making journey, but not completely new to change-making – emerging leaders. The fund will remain open to funding both individuals and collectives/movements, recognising that individuals are rarely, if ever working alone. We are delighted that Zing and Ellis Campbell Charitable Foundation are both willing to contribute further funds to this important work.

At the time of publication, a group of seven YAs have been meeting regularly as part of Challenge and Change and launched the next round of funding with applications closing on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022. In the coming weeks, they will be discussing the support package and onboarding of new Challenge and Changers (welcome day), as well as other elements of the programme. All YAs have the advantage of having been directly involved with the Challenge and Change pilot either as YAs who designed the first pilot (Jovan and Chloe) or having been Challenge and Change funded partners themselves. This will ensure that the next iteration(s) of the fund consistently holds the learning and vision of young changemakers at its centre. In addition, the two young people recruited to this programme as staff at Blagrave and CfKE will continue to lead and support the work, bringing their own lived, learned and practiced experience and energy to the on-going development of the funding programme. We are excited about the emerging and evolving collaboration between Blagrave and CfKE, which will be determined by Challenge and Change YAs and focus on supporting the ambitions and leadership of young changemakers who will drive the fund and its future.

Alongside Challenge and Change, Blagrave is actively engaging with key funders and other stakeholders, on the wider eco-system of youth led change. CfKE is doing the same to elevate the power of LEx-led change and supporting the ever evolving and growing network of young LEx leaders working in communities across the UK. How, collectively, can we ensure that young changemakers, wherever they are, whatever justice space they inhabit, and whatever their work, can access the support they need to pursue their dreams of a just and fair society for themselves, their peers, and their communities?

Challenge and Change is but one small part of what is needed to bring about wider change, but we hope that the learning contained within this report, can inspire us all to come together in service of the next generation of young leaders, who have in

many ways been let down by our own.

Challenge and Change continues to inform the broader work of Blagrove and CfKE. At CfKE it has informed the [Equity-Centred Investment Design work](#) with investment organisations committed to sharing power and resources with the communities they purport to serve. [Blagrove launched a new strategy in late 2021](#) with direct funding to young people as a core strand. It is playing an ongoing role co-creating learning spaces with young people involved in the fund and in our other programmes of work to ensure that their vision is central to the wider ecosystem of youth-led change as well as our organisational decision-making practices.

# Key Lessons

## Reflections on the wider learning from the programme to date

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### 1 We need to understand and manage risks, but not overstate them

**We assumed that the legal implications would be more complex than they were, but we were reassured by the framing and justification for the work by our charity lawyers.** They made a clear argument around 'advancement of citizenship and/or community development' as the charitable purpose, with public benefit arising from the impact of the young people's work on community and their own personal development, peers and society. This felt counter to the narrative in the funding community of the difficulty of funding un-constituted groups.

The risk mitigation measures employed at the advice of our charity lawyers (charity law training to all young people; changes to our Terms and Conditions; connection with young people throughout the work) were easily implementable. The training provided to young people during grant start-up was important in ensuring that young people themselves understood and could meet our legal requirements. And, our experience has been that funded partners have clearly taken public benefit, legality and charitable purpose seriously and made clear efforts to understand the parameters of the funding and their responsibilities. Given the constraints raised about funding non-charitable entities and individuals across the funding sector, this has been a critical and reassuring aspect of the programme.

**We have had to significantly increase our understanding of safeguarding as a funder.** Our thinking on safeguarding had largely been focused on how to create positive environments that enable young people (YAs) to succeed in their roles and how as a funder, you assess partners' safeguarding. We have had to grasp the wider implications of funding groups of young people who in most cases have no safeguarding policies, and whose work therefore falls under our own policy. This takes us into a far more operational role. To address this, we have had several team trainings (including some trustees) delivered since; clearly appointed safeguarding leads and officers in Blagrove; and an amended policy that is accessible by young people. Safeguarding training will be provided to all future Challenge and Changers, as part of our responsibility to those we fund, with on-going access to a

safeguarding expert should they need it.

**Whilst many funders might view this work as risky, for Blagrave and a culture and values that trusts and centres young people, this was not a major concern.** Our Board are very clear that they are open to us working more directly with young people, enabling deeper connection and proximity to the community we serve and transferring power and resource directly to them. Having young people represented on our Board who understand campaigning, clearly helps. The individual grants we made are small, the outcomes of the young people's work will vary hugely and for some, progress will be limited, but the emerging evidence of what has been achieved by the young people suggests that any risks we took have been vindicated. We have also been open to learning, and adapting, from the start, which helps in mitigating any risks as they arise.

## **2 Pace and equity are not always happy bedfellows**

**Blagrave under-estimated the sheer time and resources needed to do this work well.** Having not previously run callouts for proposals, nor worked with YAs in this way, the practical implications around capacity proved challenging for a small team. Working in the evenings with YAs, processing information for them quickly and in an accessible way that allows for strong decision making and working to fast deadlines took us out of our comfort zone. Despite the fast turnaround – applications were only open for a month – the fund generated 192 applications!

**Striking the balance between an accessible application, and one that provides sufficient detail for an assessment process, is not easy.** The simple, accessible application process designed by the YAs and sharing the fund through targeted instead of mainstream channels (as advised by them) was highly praised by successful applicants. However, the simplicity and breadth of the questions made it more challenging and time-consuming for the Blagrave team to sift applications and for YAs to select which 30 (of 80) applications to fund during the selection process.

**Managing scale requires an intentional approach that carefully considers the knock on affects to connected elements of an emerging programme.** In this case we increased the size of the cohort to be funded a few months in. The first funded cohort experienced a delay whilst they waited for the second cohort to be selected so that development activities could commence.

**Blagrave is a quick decision maker, but there is an inevitable tension between rapid speed of design and delivery and the painstaking work of building systems and processes that truly hand power over to young people.** But it is these spaces of challenge and discomfort that have led to critical insights that shaped the fund



in its pilot phase and continue to shape our work moving forward.

**"The thinking time is so crucial. And to have that time to think is super important."**

*Challenge and Changer*

### **3 We need to start from a sound understanding of the profile of young change makers, their right to drive change and to self-determination**

**This work has stretched our thinking about what is legitimate work to fund in this space and what success looks like.** We have seen that many of the young people are creating spaces for reflection and dialogue whether that be inter-generational, national or community-based. Seeding work that enables young people to work together and alongside others to reflect deeply on how they model the change they want to see may not feel like traditional notions of 'activism' but is of immense value and importance. Moving forwards, we want to continue to allow for the diversity of approaches that young people wish to bring to creating change and how they themselves define change and success.

**Young changemakers bring unique characteristics that complement, and must inform, broader social change work.** Young people in all their diversity demonstrate incredible resourcefulness and energy. We witnessed dynamism, fearlessness, and innovation at inspiring levels across funded partners. For example, in the way that young people have used small grants to launch crowdfunding campaigns and using alternative fundraising platforms, and the way in which partners have pivoted with speed during the pandemic to focus their campaign work. In one example, a funded partner provided 500 COVID study kits to disadvantaged young people in their community, which was not in their original plans.

**Language is key.** In designing the application, the YAs reflected on how the fund spoke to young people. They wanted to ensure that the fund was fluid and flexible, allowing young people to express their passions in a way that worked best for them to imagine and dream, and to explicitly value their thinking time. It was also important to allow those at the hard edges of injustice to express their dreams and social change story and not feel compelled to share their personal stories. Something YAs felt the youth and charity sector can often exploit. An approach that was highly praised by applicants.

**The focus on intersectional injustices across the applicants was a salient reminder of how the youth sector’s silos often lack relevance to young people with multiple and inter-connected identities, realities and experiences that can all feed into the discrimination and injustices they face.** Addressing intersectional injustices was a common theme for many young people who applied to the fund, particularly amongst young changemakers with lived experience. For example, young people of colour were working on the intersects of racial, gender and health inequities; others were working at the intersect of social care systems and access to justice, to name just two.

**Young people understand the need for systems change.** It was not uncommon to hear young changemakers talk about systems of oppression, working outside of the system, or reimagining systems that were failing young people in their applications. Work that starts in the heart of communities and may involve the co-creation of spaces and/or services – as opposed to say traditional forms of campaigning for policy reform or protest – can also be incredibly powerful and credible as a route into wider systems change and should be recognised as such. Systems change work is being deployed in many ways by young people. It is not for us to assume where these journeys may lead young people, nor place limitations of our own imaginations or funding parameters regarding what they can achieve. Challenge and Change has allowed for this flexibility of vision led by young people, and as the programme embeds and pressure to capture impact grows, we must hold on to that.

**Supporting young people effectively means stepping out of our adult-lens, and that requires time and space to reflect and act.** Challenge and Change moved us out of our traditional role as a funder and supporter, we began to understand the challenges that many amazing youth organisations and youth-led organisations face in their work to support young leaders and campaigners.

#### **4 We need to be better at understanding and centring lived experience and lived expertise<sup>5</sup>**

**The pilot fund was open to all young activists and campaigners, with a specific invitation to young LEx leaders, but learning from the pilot has shifted our understanding towards more explicitly focusing on young LEx changemakers.** Blaggrave and CfKE had anticipated that the fund would serve young people activating their lived experience to create social change, but one of the three YAs

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<sup>5</sup> A term crafted by Baljeet Sandhu in 2017 as part of her research on the Value of Lived Experience – ‘Knowledge, perspectives, insights, and understanding gathered through lived experience’. For further reference see, Value of Lived Experience in Social Change (Sandhu, 2017) and Lived Experience Leadership: Rebooting the DNA of Leadership (Sandhu, 2019) both available at <https://knowledgeequity.org/publications/>

raised some concerns around tokenising young people with lived experience, and so they designed the fund to allow all young activist groups and movements to apply. In fact, the vast majority of those the YAs went onto fund did bring lived experience and lived expertise to their social change work. And we have seen that the level of activity, profiles, and ideas of young LEx leaders involved in the pilot phase gives full confidence that we should not only embrace but invest in young changemakers who have lived experience of the social and economic injustices they are seeking to address in their social change work.

**Young people with lived experience of the social injustices they are addressing in their activism and campaign work are mobilising and working in collectives in their communities at a larger scale than Blagrove had realised.** They are out there, taking action, often with little, if any, resourcing.

**The profile of young changemakers is unique and varied and it is critical to understand this diversity to drive our own ideas and programmes of work.** For all Challenge and Changers, unjust and inequitable systems impact and shape their lives. There are young people who are angry with the unfair treatment of the planet and the people who inhabit it – they want to do something about it and not just be passive bystanders. There are also young people who are directly impacted by those unjust and inequitable systems in their personal lives – young change makers with lived experience e.g., young people subject to immigration control, young people in care and care leavers relying on social care systems, young people who have come into contact with the criminal justice system, young people with disabilities disadvantaged by the education systems. Young LEx leaders are often invisible to the mainstream youth sector, seen as subjects of their research, services or social action and youth leadership initiatives. For a better term – the unusual suspects. Challenge and Change has helped to flip the narrative.

**As funders, we need to better understand the LEx-led landscape.** Young LEx leaders are not often part of a ‘youth sector’ or a ‘youth-led’ sector. Many young LEx leaders are working with and alongside their Elders, for example, within and across the racial justice space. The lack of understanding of how young changemakers operate across broader social justice spaces is something that many Challenge and Changers were acutely aware of and feeds into a disconnect between a growing youth-led movement and the realities of young LEx leaders embedded in their communities. As we learn more about the youth-led change landscape we must pay closer attention to the whole eco-system, recognising that we run the risk of dividing communities if we only focus on e.g., youth sector organisations, failing to recognise the infrastructure support also needed for LEx-led organisations with young people in their communities passionate to connect and work alongside them and the communities they share lived experiences with.

## 5 Support provided needs to be responsive and carefully considered

**Self-determination was a key factor to the design of the fund and the support that followed.** The purpose has been to recognise, value and resource young LEx leaders directly through access to resource and support to drive forward their own initiatives.

**The details of the support on offer were intentionally not determined at the outset so that its design could be guided solely by the emerging needs of funded partners as expressed by them during grant onboarding.** The components of this optional support package included online masterclasses speaking to the needs young people articulated e.g., digital skills and running a campaign, and intergenerational knowledge exchanges with changemakers from networks across the LEx Movement. During grant onboarding, most funded partners clearly articulated a desire for additional support alongside their investments. Young people considered access to knowledge, networks, and resources key.

**"A lot of funds are quite specific, and some are quite fluid. And I think when you're starting out, you need it to be quite fluid"**

*Challenge and Changer*

**Flexible seed funding allows young LEx changemakers to develop and drive their ideas forward outside a limiting mainstream lens.** They understand the injustice issues they seek to tackle because they have experienced them and live(d) with them every day. With that understanding and expertise they have new and innovative social justice ideas. By providing small pots of unrestricted funds, Challenge and Change allowed young people to think, strategise, and pivot where necessary in response to external conditions. It also helped create space to build relationships and collaborations driven by them with profound impact.

**A bespoke support package alongside funding allows young LEx changemakers to dream, vision, value their individual and collective wellbeing, build connections and networks, and build understanding of tactics and strategies to support their work.** We know funding is not always the only thing young changemakers need. For example, we do have the power to connect, signpost and support entry points to more resource. You can never underestimate the role adult-led organisations have and the power we hold in providing targeted support, connections and agency for young people to take their work forward, and funding

and resource is a key aspect of providing young change makers with agency. Stepping aside and waiting to hear what Challenge and Changers wanted before we created layers of additional support was another risk we took as a funder.

**Building a fast-paced, real-time support package alongside the fund was not easy and there is a lot we have learnt about our role in this space and realities of delivering targeted support to meet the needs of young change makers.** However, what we have learned is that starting with bronze and not necessarily gold was an important part of our learning with Challenge and Changers. Recognising that individuals, those outside of London and young LEx leaders were keen to share the challenges they were facing in their work and highly valued access to knowledge, skills, resources, and connection to help take their work to the next level. We found that Challenge and Changers also had a healthy scepticism of this support – they wanted support on their terms, for their needs and therefore making the support optional was crucial. Challenge and Changers appreciated the space to choose and connect in when they needed.

**All young activists will likely need support in social justice work, but this support may look and feel different for different young people. The adult-lens of the sector – and its often well-intentioned, yet often misguided approach to understanding young people with lived experience – can unintentionally polarise and divide.** As all Challenge and Changers expressed, social justice work is hard, taxing and takes a lot out of you. For example, during our listening exercise with Challenge and Changers during grant-onboarding, individual and collective wellbeing was a factor for all. However, young LEx leaders expressed a deeper analysis of wellbeing needs, reflecting on the treatment of the mainstream of young LEx leaders, their lack of understanding of their lived realities, identities and multiple experiences of injustice, and the saviour complex model of support and platforming. For some, the youth leadership and youth development approaches of existing providers was valued, but many LEx leaders did not feel that this support addressed their unique understanding and needs as LEx leaders and how and who they work with in their LEx communities. Some had been scarred by their experiences of existing providers and feeling ‘used’ for their stories and work. Several young LEx Challenge and Changers have experienced youth-led and adult-led organisations in the social sector using their ‘stories’ and platforming them as their story alone when this was not the only change-making strategy they hold.

**The Young Advisors and Blagrove were clear that we needed to take a light touch approach to ‘reporting’ for Challenge and Change.** As a result, we developed a one-page document with some suggested questions that Challenge and Changers might want to answer in their final reports to us (with only 1 report required) in whatever way they felt best. This would allow us to understand what impact our funding was having and to help build the case for this work for our staff team, Board and our broader influencing work efforts. However, we quickly realised that flexibility

in tracking the impact of this work, capturing the social media activities of Challenge and Changers, checking in with them by phone, also asking them questions at the end of their grants was essential, particularly given the fast-paced and changing nature of their work. It has been great for some Challenge and Changers to arrange a conversation with us, where we take notes and share them back with them – particularly for example for Challenge and Changers who are neuro-diverse. We know that spaces to share, connect and learn together as a community of equals is as important as formal reporting and something we will be thinking through with YAs and young changemakers through the next cycles of Challenge and Change. We are keen to take the pressure of the young people and find better ways to share their impact stories.

**Learning, impact, and what success means to us may mean something different to young changemakers.** We need to create the space to learn what impact means, and how best to think about and assess effectiveness, from the lens of young people.

## **6 Adult-led organisations need to step into and understand our own power in the youth-led change landscape**

**From the start, Blagrave has been acutely aware of the power we hold as a funder.** We have worked hard to hold in balance the imperative to hand power and decisions to the young people involved, and the practical reality of distributing funds to young changemakers working at the hard edges of injustice quickly and efficiently.

**Sense-checking the power you hold as a funder throughout is vital.** The reality is that we are often making decisions to align with our internal needs e.g., staff changes, organisational deadlines etc. These decisions can have a knock-on effect for partners and collaborators, and it is important to plan, and allow space for reflection and adaption alongside all partners involved.

**Being confident about where we had knowledge to share, and where it was important not to be influencing decisions, was not always easy.** If anything, Blagrave in its passionate belief in young people, has learnt not to step back by default but also step into a role of ‘supported agency’<sup>6</sup>. This approach has informed our other funding programmes where we are deploying the learning from Challenge and Change, we are working alongside external facilitators, who hold the space for young people, allowing us to be clearer on how and where we bring expertise on grant-making to support young people’s understanding, while also

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<sup>6</sup> A term and approach crafted and developed by the Centre for Knowledge Equity in their equity-centred work with LEx communities and key stakeholders seeking to work equitably and meaningfully with communities and change-makers they purport to serve.

creating spaces that unify our expertise as equal partners.

**“It was pitched as a knowledge exchange rather than a mentor/mentee [relationship] ... the flexible idea of communicating and organising around our schedules.”**

*Challenge and Changer*

**Delegating power doesn't eliminate the need to give time to decision making and the implications arising.** The YAs made all the final decisions on who was funded, and whilst the whole organisation including the Board was committed to this, the YAs final choices and the implications of funding still required time for the Board to absorb and help us to be clearer about our commitment to a diverse range of social justice issues, including long-term structural issues such as disability or poverty, alongside funding issues that are perhaps more current and visible. Thinking this through in advance is important.

**We need to be continually holding ourselves to account as allies.** As resource-holders and adult-led organisations, we constantly need to do more to understand our own blind spots and power and recognise that we will not hold the expertise that young changemakers with lived experience, and their communities, hold. For allyship to exist, we need to know that there is a lot we do not know and need to learn. This also requires humility to revisit our own organisational strategies with new expertise and insights emerging from those directly impacted by unjust and inequitable systems that previous work has failed to uncover or identify.

**Having young people involved in Challenge and Change come into Blagrove to help us unpack and drive our future strategy has been a critical part of this work during the pilot year.** We have funded them for their support to us, recognising that they are educating us and providing us with their expertise as young people outside of their own initiatives to support our own work. Recognising and valuing this additional expertise and delineating it from Challenge and Changers' own projects and campaigns is important. It is why we are committed to the ongoing learning journey, where iterations and pivots will be necessary as we develop and grow Challenge and Change with young people and why we have invested a further three years into this work.

**This all suggests that as funders we would be wise not only to listen and learn but also to be willing to 'get out of the way' and be humble about what we have to offer as funders.** That means critically reflecting on how best to eliminate or minimise a 'gatekeeper' role, and how to ensure that organisational needs are subordinate to the focus on escalating and advancing the needs, ideas, and

innovations that young people have for their own activism and social justice work and the broader youth-led landscape

**The Young Advisors were aware of the power they held as decision makers in the process and the need to wield it sensitively.** YAs appreciated the equity-centred approach to the fund design process, which allowed them to understand how they could ground themselves in the task at hand. However, they were equally aware of the power dynamics and biases within their small cohort and the broader funding sector and felt that advanced training on understanding the broader funding landscape and additional training on anti-oppression work would have helped them even more. Following the fund launch, one YA who was a Blagrove Trustee, also beautifully and openly reflected on her own bias as a Trustee, the power dynamics this brought with that role and the information and understanding of the funding landscape as part of that role.

**“Next time maybe we should have a council of young people who represent as many parts of society as we can. To make those decisions”**

*Challenge and Change Young Advisor*

## **7 Specifically, adult-led organisations need to revisit our understanding and notions of how young changemakers can - and do - operate in an ever-evolving and fast-paced world**

**Young activists are driving the youth-led change space and we've not necessarily been paying attention or supporting them.** Challenge and Changers were not simply speaking out about injustices. They were organising, mobilising, and supporting other young activists. Many of the collectives and movements we supported were carrying out activities to support young people to speak out and challenge decisions that impacted their lives or that of the communities they were connected to. This included creating spaces for reflection and critique of their own approaches as well as those of traditional actors.

**"We didn't have a great grasp of the grant sector before, mainly because the grant sector is, like, pretty inaccessible."**

*Challenge and Changer*



**As adult-led organisations, we need to continuously challenge our own assumptions about what young people are capable of.** We will only do this by working closer to the grassroots, with partners that hold us to account and bring different expertise to bear, and by working alongside young people as equals.

**This work has real implications for the skills and experiences you have in-house.**

Both Blaggrave and CfKE recruited young changemakers to their staffing teams to support the emerging programme of work of the initiative. This included an active member of the LEx Movement at CfKE and a former youth worker in Blaggrave. The two roles started in March 2021. Their experience of youth work and project and services design has proved vital in their roles. More widely, Blaggrave's team composition is changing to support this kind of work better – we now have 3 out of 8 in the team that are under 25 and have started to bring in different skills such as facilitation, digital comms, and youth work. We already have strong lived experience on our Board but are also actively recruiting for greater diversity and lived expertise in our team. If, as funders, we wish to embrace new ways of working, then we will need to be open to new skills too.

**Over the course of the fund, we have witnessed the growth and scale of some of the young people's initiatives.**

Vehicles for young people's activism have included, for example, creation of charities, social enterprises or Community Interest Companies (CICs). We have witnessed new initiatives not only grow and go from strength to strength, but access significant other resources independently of us. Three Challenge and Changers have now set up CICs and leveraged in considerable additional resource, without any support from Blaggrave, for example – though our grant has been helpful in giving confidence to other funders to step up.

**There needs to be room for young changemakers to carry out their change-making activities in varying ways.**

Many young LEx changemakers and campaigners lack access to existing funding and support. Some may need assistance to increase their access to these sources, but others may not want this kind of support. Some young people will not wish to operate within the confines of an organisational structure or fit into these mainstream models of how to be constituted, and instead continue to operate outside formal structures, as individuals, collectives, and as part of wider social justice movements.

**Adult-led organisations have a responsibility to listen and act.**

As adult-led organisations we have a critical role to play. We have resources, connections, networks, and other assets and knowledge we can share with young people. Handing over power does not mean letting go and letting them do it alone. Actively listening to young people without any pre-determined agenda or assumptions and acting on what you hear is a key role and responsibility of adult-led organisations

to provide meaningful and equitable agency to young people.

**“I think we should have had more of a 101 of the funding world. I hadn’t realised how much this was a white, privileged space before I started this work”**

*Challenge and Change Young Advisor*

**A clear message from Challenge and Changers has been their desire to learn from and connect with their peers and each other.** Supporting connection between Challenge and Changers (and other young people in our networks) to share knowledge, build traction for their events and work, inspire each other has been a clear suggestion from one of our learning events and many conversations.

## **8 We need to be continually challenging assumptions and embracing the stretch!**

**Challenge and Change has stretched Blagrove in ways that were unanticipated.**

**Blagrove firmly believes in embracing this stretch to advance the organisation’s mission with young people.** This means learning and reflecting on an ongoing basis, even when uncomfortable.

**Handing over power to young people to design a fund is not only possible but is a powerful approach to addressing systemic injustices faced by young people.** Young people have the interest, drive, and ability to design a youth-led fund!

**Whilst this work takes funders into new territory, and that can be difficult, the rewards far outweigh the challenges.** Our overriding message from this work to other funders is to take the leap of faith inherent in youth-led change. That means learning from the experience of others (including through this report and ongoing learning) but also investing the time necessary to equitably and meaningfully work alongside young people who will help you to understand what to do and how.

**Learning and insights gathered through this pilot phase has progressed our understanding of youth-led change at a pace and scale unlike any other funding initiative.** It is hard not to conclude that this is largely because the learning is coming directly from young people themselves and that this proximity to lived experience and lived expertise is incredibly important for funders.

# Perspectives from Blaggrave and the Centre for Knowledge Equity

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This fund was launched during a pandemic and at a time where millions of young people from all backgrounds united around the world to speak out against racial inequities plaguing our society. If you work with young people, it is painfully obvious that so many now are growing up in systems that are not working for them. Yet many young people are far in advance when it comes to understanding that there is no social justice without environmental justice; the role of charity in society and the disconnect with campaigning for justice; and the fundamental importance of action over words. If we ignore young changemakers and campaigners - and the critical roles they can play across a whole range of areas - then we not only risk increasing intergenerational inequity, but we also lose the creativity and energy and challenge that we urgently need to address society's entrenched problems.

Challenge and Change has taken a bold, vital step towards a youth-led funding sector that moves power and resources directly to young people, rather than investing primarily in organisations that speak on their behalf or lead their ideas through a well-meaning adult lens.

## From a funder perspective:

- Challenge and Change has opened the door to a more radical and innovative approach to funding – where we reflect on how to support young leaders work across the country, build movements, develop the eco-system that connects them with their peers and other forms of knowledge and expertise. We still have plenty to learn in this adaptive and evolving programme of work but are excited to commit to a further 3 years of funding for young change makers.
- This work has signalled a significant psychological shift in Blaggrave's work. It is clear to us that so much of what we do in grant-making is constrained by existing notions of how and with whom funders should work. Additionally, we have long been aware that we are materially relatively inconsequential – due to our small size. This means that we must have the courage to be bold and fund differently if we are to make any kind of difference. And we need to be absolutely laser sharp in our understanding of who we are here to support and whose lives we are here to help change.
- The learning from Challenge and Change has had a significant impact on Blaggrave's wider work and the development of [our new strategy](#), not least in the role young people played in helping to co-produce parts of the strategy. We began deploying the learning from Challenge and Change very quickly in two

further programmes of work during 2021 – Restart Youth and The Listening Fund – and currently have 16 paid Young Advisors working alongside us, with a further cohort of six soon to be recruited. Whether through designing a programme of work, making decisions about who to fund, or actively using their lived expertise to create change, young people are inspiring us continuously to do more and go deeper.

### **From a delivery partner perspective:**

- CfKE has been inspired by what the young changemakers we've worked with on Challenge and Change have taught us and what they have been able to achieve. From the fund design of the YAs to the knowledge exchanges and masterclasses led by young LEx experts to the incredible work of the Challenge and Change funded partners themselves.
- The initial design and delivery of the fund has lived up to the ambition of being youth-led, and we are proud to have played a part in the pilot phase. The journey as a partner to a funder has not always been easy, but both Blagrove and CfKE have been travelling new terrain together. We have learned a lot through this partnership and what practices can be deployed to ensure equity of practice that also allows for learning to be captured and applied in real time whilst allowing space for accountability that centres the role and needs of young partners.
- For the fund to continue to be youth-led, its evolution also needs to be led by young people. In many ways this is even harder – now that the fund is established, it would be easy to slip back into the status-quo approach of funder-led decision-making that Challenge and Change sought to disrupt. The way this report has been written – largely by adults, informed by interviews with young people – is an example of how easy it is to stray from the path of ensuring that young people hold power and have agency over every aspect of a youth-led fund. Similarly, it is also important to ensure that young leaders do not run the risk of falling into inequity traps plaguing the adult-led social sector where young non-LEx leaders are placed in positions of power to speak on behalf of young LEx leaders.
- Following the launch of Challenge and Change, CfKE has reinvigorated its energy to help secure resource and support for young LEx leaders leading and driving the Young LEx Leaders Network of the LEx Movement. Movement work that has received little resource and investment. The learning shared above on the treatment, value, and role of lived experience shared by Challenge and Change funded partners has long been shared and explored by this young LEx community and we are excited about building a new and complementary

programme of work alongside Blagrove and Challenge and Change moving into the future. While also using this platform to elevate the work and profiles of young LEx leaders and changemakers who carry out their social purpose work across social justice spaces, and those working outside of the realms of activism, campaigning and policy influencing.

## **Key questions to explore in future work**

We continue to explore questions in future design iterations of the fund and in other areas of our work, including:

1. How can funders step aside and let young people lead a fund design and decision-making processes whilst maintaining sufficient oversight to fulfil their own legal responsibilities?
2. How can we facilitate space that allow young people to step into their imaginations, innovations and visions whilst supporting adult-led organisations to embrace those new realities and liberate themselves of structural and cultural barriers of the past and present to helping drive those youth-led visions forward?
3. How can we meaningfully and equitably involve young people in the design of the more 'downstream' aspects of a fund (e.g. reporting, learning and evaluation)?
4. What are the best ways to collaborate with young people for flexible and adaptive fund design and delivery work – that make expectations clear, while allowing the flexibility for honouring their time if things take longer than expected at the outset?
5. What role can adult-led organisations play in supporting the agency of young changemakers as they lead their social and systems change work? Who, how and what is needed to ensure that those roles equitably and meaningfully centre the work and ideas of young change makers?

# Deeper Dive into the Design and Delivery of the Fund

## Building partnerships to support the work

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### What we did

#### Design & delivery partner

From Blaggrave's point of view, the Centre for Knowledge Equity were a critical partner throughout the design phase, and it would not have been possible to advance the vision of the fund through its design without their expertise and input. Our shared commitment to elevating the agency of young people, was essential.

CfKE walked alongside Blaggrave every step of the way, deploying their expertise to design an equitable and well-thought-through fund alongside Young Advisors. The application process, language, visuals, website content and online application process were all significantly different to what our 'norm' looks like. CfKE also helped ensure that this was then shared through targeted outreach into grassroots communities of LEx Leaders across England through the LEx Movement. Blaggrave invited CfKE to step into a facilitation role with us to support YAs with the grant decision-making process.

CfKE have provided Blaggrave with encouragement, expertise, and challenge throughout. It has been a stark contrast to the bureaucracy, delays, and grit of other collaborations – and a hopeful reminder that where there is an aligned compass, a trusting partnership, and respectful acknowledgement of differentiated skills and levels of expertise, then you can achieve a huge amount in a short period of time.

Our aligned compass at inception and during the height of a global pandemic and UK Black Lives Matter protests:

- **URGENCY:** Young people are leading social change work/campaigns. How do we meet them where they are at this critical moment?
- **READINESS:** Historical and current Blagrove learning on youth-led change can be applied and put into practice, but there is much more to learn from young people.
- **STEP BACK:** Time to start the 'doing' and explore our power and responsibility in supporting youth-led change so that young people can have equitable and meaningful agency to drive that change.
- **STEP DOWN:** Time to hand over power to young people so that they are in the lead.
- **TRUST THE JOURNEY AND YOUNG PEOPLE:** Accept and step into complexity and uncertainty as part of the emergent and iterative approach that will be necessary for this evolving journey

Building a partnership with a social purpose organisation (CfKE) that challenged existing models deployed in the broader social sector helped push the boundaries of Blagrove's aspirations, assumptions, and role as a powerholder in the design of a new fund. CfKE brought skills and expertise, in particular its equity-centred design expertise, its Equity Diligence™ and 'Supported Agency' frameworks, and knowledge of systems change, learning and leadership development.

This partnership enabled us to deliver and implement the funding programme at speed, helping us to centre and support the needs of young people involved and capture learning as we went along, challenging us and holding us to account throughout. Whilst there is rightly plenty of challenge to the funding system externally, to have the confidence to actually do things radically differently and try new approaches, you need values-aligned partnerships and the generosity to walk alongside you, holding the balance of challenge and support as you go.

Partnering quickly with smaller funders willing to work in an open, fast, flexible and unbureaucratic way allowed us to respond to the obvious opportunity to fund more young people than originally anticipated. Zing and the Ellis Campbell Charitable Foundation, both provided immediate flexible funding to support the growth of the fund which we remain incredibly grateful for, modelling the trusting approach required for this kind of work, and confirming the importance of pre-existing relationships and aligned strategies.

## Legal advisors

Another specific and key feature of this work has been working with charity lawyers prior to the launch of the fund. This has been an essential investment to ensure that the work is compliant and always meets the charitable purpose. In this case, purpose relates to 'the advancement of citizenship or community development' and 'the relief of those in need because of youth, financial hardship, or other

disadvantage’.

Prior to fund design, we sought the advice of lawyers through scenario planning and received support from CfKE to explore additional scenarios and language used in describing legal considerations in ways they could be shared fully and clearly with YAs as they designed the criteria and parameters of the fund.

To support funded partners to understand and mitigate any risks associated with charity law, the lawyers joined an introductory webinar for all the successful applicants to hear from them directly about their campaigns. They then delivered a session specifically to explain the legal implications of their funding agreements and answer any questions. Later, this was followed up with a pro-bono webinar for some of the funded partners who were interested in learning more about the ramifications of setting up as a charity, CIC or social enterprise. Several Challenge and Changers have since registered as CICs.

## **What we learned**

### **Before you design**

We tested, explored, and deployed new approaches to partnership working and equity-centred design with young people during the design of the Challenge and Change fund to move us towards a ‘youth-led fund’.

Current and traditional ways of working with young people do not necessarily serve young changemakers well. Processes can often rely on a lead organisation pre-determining the design approach and, in some instances, the agenda or outcomes for a piece of work. We wanted to hand power to young people to lead and drive decision-making from inception. For that to happen effectively, we knew we would need to test and explore new approaches and practices as a funder.

Designing a youth-led fund requires much more than a focus on giving young people decision-making power over grant allocation. Traditional Participatory Grant-Making models can often focus largely on involving people and communities that the funds seek to support in the grant decision-making processes. We wanted young people to drive decision-making beyond grant selection. With the support of CfKE we felt confident that this was possible, stepping into new ways of working and using new frameworks and approaches to support that work. To truly hand over power to young people, they must hold decision-making power throughout – to design the purpose, focus, criteria, and strategy of the fund from inception – as well as being involved in decision-making about grant allocation.



## Communication and transparency

We learned that to hand power over to young people and meet them where they are in their change-making journeys, we need young people to help us understand how a fund needs to speak to them. Adult-led language and jargon does nothing to attract and gain trust of young changemakers who feel disconnected from the funding and youth sectors. This is especially true where change makers have experienced inequitable engagement and involvement practices in the past. Communication is key – from the way information is shaped, shared, and expressed at all stages.

CfKE developed a shared working document to help plot and ascertain the aspirations, ideas, must-haves, and must-nots for the Blaggrave team prior to fund design, which was shared with the YAs as they designed the fund. From a Blaggrave perspective, as a funder it is important to be transparent and clear about our own aspirations and assumptions. Through our work with young people, we were keen to create a space where they could say what they wanted outside of our own wants and needs. But there are some ‘red lines’ around what we can and cannot do as a funder, for example relating to charity law, and we must be transparent and clear about that as early on as possible.

## The design process

Through their equity-centred design approach, CfKE worked with the YAs to understand their learning and engagement styles. This involved co-creating processes to explore and share ideas and to reach consensus on key decisions. This included: planning design sessions with outlines of activities and agendas shared pre-sessions, summary records of discussions to lead into the next design cycle, sharing live working documents to allow thoughts to be shared by YAs following design sessions as further ideas emerged, and summary updates ahead of each session. It also meant creating the opportunity for YAs to share thoughts via 1:1 calls between sessions or via voice notes if that was the easier for them.

Early in the design sessions, the YAs agreed that they wanted to fund young changemakers working on the hard edges of injustice. Those who found it difficult to access funding for their ideas that fell ‘outside of the norm’ or young changemakers who had little access to funding, including those working in collectives and as individuals. They wanted passionate young changemakers to be seen and heard. To help the Young Advisors with thinking this through, CfKE shared their Equity Diligence™ framework, which included questions the YAs could pose themselves as they tried to think through who they meant by ‘young changemakers working on the hard edges of injustice’ and those ‘who had little access to funding’. They turned then again to the framework when they were deciding on how to design the application process so that it was accessible, equitable and inclusive to all.

## What can we improve?

The partnership agreement was initially limited to CfKE supporting Blagrove and YAs for a limited period with the fund design. However, we quickly realised the benefits of a much longer collaboration. We know that part of the success of this pilot year has been the flexible and emergent design approach we have taken with CfKE walking alongside us each step of the way, including the design of a bespoke support package for funded partners after the grant stage process.

An open dialogue across the partnership has been essential and we are grateful to the Blagrove Board for also understanding the value of learning and iteration and for approving cycles of funding for the evolving partnership along the way.

The design phase with the YAs would have benefited from even more clarity at an early stage about Blagrove's 'red lines'. This could have helped avoid raising expectations for YAs about how 'radical' the scope of the fund could be. For example, the YAs were initially keen to fund young people under the age of 16, recognising that there are also many young people under the age of 16 who are actively participating in campaigns and social justice movements in their communities. However, through the design sessions, the Blagrove team and the YAs discussed the clear risks and safeguarding issues that may arise if we funded young people under the age of 18 or 16 directly and the YAs agreed that this pilot phase needed to avoid additional roles and responsibilities that may need more time to cater to the needs of young people and children under 18/16. As a funder, Blagrove could have been clearer about this early on as we entered the design phase with the YAs. Setting the guardrails of design can help young people be better informed with the design of their fund, focus their creativity and ideas.

A tension here is that whilst Blagrove was completely committed to YAs making the final decisions, when you are embarking on something that is so new with a radical framing, you cannot always second guess the challenges that might arise along the way. But ensuring your culture is ready to embrace those uncertainties, pivot and move on is key to success.

# Recruiting young changemakers to design the Fund

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## What we did

Blagrove initially recruited four YAs to design the fund - Daze Aghaji, Chloe Deakin, Jovan Nepaul and Lavinya Stennett. There was an explicit focus on identifying YAs who had high levels of knowledge and experience in social change/purpose work as there was neither the time nor the capacity at Blagrove for a wider YA personal development and onboarding programme (which Blagrove has since deployed for other YA recruitment processes within Blagrove). Three YAs were known to Blagrove, one was recommended by a Blagrove partner. One was a Blagrove Trustee. Lavinya Stennett (Founder and CEO of The Black Curriculum) had to step back at an early stage due to the intensity and demand for her organisation's expertise following the rise of BLM protests, so the design of the fund was driven by the remaining three YAs. We have been inspired by the insights Lavinya shared early in the process and all that The Black Curriculum have achieved at pace over this last year. Blagrove provided YAs with Terms of Reference and a contract to enable them to be paid for their time and CfKE helped to make the language youth-friendly and accessible.

## What we learned

The timeline for fund design was very compressed. There was only one month between initial Trustee approval (20<sup>th</sup> May 2020) and the public launch of the fund (24<sup>th</sup> June 2020), with the recruitment of YAs and all design work taking place in this period, at a time of remote working and some staffing changes at Blagrove. This made it an extremely intense period of work for all concerned, with little time available for YA recruitment and induction.

CfKE's role in developing a design process and facilitating discussions that supported balanced decisions and inclusive conversations was vital. It helped ensure that Blagrove as a funder was not inadvertently exercising its power over the YAs involved and provided a container for consensus decision-making for the three YAs.

## What can we improve?

In future, we can do a better job of anticipating the resources required to execute a completely new idea like this. We need higher levels of resourcing to be able to do powerful, innovative work well with the attention to detail that is required.

Allowing more time and resource for the YA induction process in future would strengthen the programme. For example, one YA suggested training on anti-oppression practice would have been beneficial, as would bringing in experts in racial justice, disability rights, environment/climate catastrophe – acknowledging how some groups are marginalised differently to others. It would have been great to have had more time to tap into and access such resources.

In future, we will seek to recruit a minimum of six YAs to lead funds such as Challenge and Change, seeking out diversity of expertise, so there is sufficient and robust challenge and breadth of age, knowledge, experiences, and views. For example, there was one YA from a working-class background actively integrating and combining her lived expertise with her practised expertise in her social change work. The other YAs benefitted immensely from her grassroots work and understanding of young people working on the hard edges of intersectional injustices. Another YA was an experienced climate justice activist and the other YAs greatly benefitted from her insights on campaigns and approaches to radical activism. However, with only three YAs, it was understandable that biases would emerge during the selection process. For future rounds, open recruitment is one option for attracting a diverse range of YAs, making these opportunities open, equitable and inclusive to a wide range of young changemakers – especially young LEx leaders.

Blagrave has already applied the idea of working with YAs on two other programmes. This approach aims to provide a wider range of opinion, lived expertise, and more equitable decision making in those programmes. For example, Blagrave recruited 6 Young Advisors towards the end of 2020 to work on a new programme of work called Restart Youth. Blagrave has paid careful attention to the diversity of those YAs, the support and time required to induct them and therefore enable them to lead on the design and decision-making around that programme.

Among other learning, the YAs for that programme have challenged Blagrave to think more deeply about who their funded charities are reaching and how they are thinking about intersectionality. Likewise, Blagrave has recruited 10 YAs to work on the Listening Fund. Whilst this was already planned prior to Challenge and Change, it has significantly fed into the ongoing design principles and ways of working. The Listening Fund YAs have spent nearly 6 months working together in preparation for what is a 3-year commitment and a £600k designated budget for their work.

One aspect of all Blagrave work with YAs is the value of independent facilitators. If we are serious about handing power over to young people, then we also need to recognise that always being in the room as a funder and leading the work ourselves, even with the best will in the world, embeds a certain power dynamic. Removing ourselves from the conversation to allow young people to explore their own ideas is an important ingredient of this work. At the same time, providing clarity on 'red lines'

from the outset, and sharing relevant knowledge, also enables young people to set themselves up for success.

# Application process and reach

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## What we did

Young Advisors designed an application process that enabled young people to share their work and vision in a way that was light touch. The application asked four key questions and one optional additional question.

1. What positive change are you giving the world? In a short paragraph tell us what the future would be like if your vision became a reality, and what part do you play in that.
2. What made you want to pursue your idea or project?
3. Help us see the vision of your idea or project. Help us see and feel your passion and the injustice(s) you want to address – tell us your challenge and change story – using any medium you want e.g., words, video, photography, poetry, art – anything that you feel expresses your passion and work. E.g., What would happen to the world if your idea or project didn't succeed?
4. How much funding do you need (between £1 and £10k)?
5. Do you want us to talk to someone who will back your vision? (OPTIONAL). If you have someone you want us to talk to about you, your vision and work, then please let us know.

The application process provided lots of room for flexibility so that young applicants could share their social change story instead of focusing on their personal stories, which YAs felt was something that the youth sector has tended to encourage and expect. YAs wanted questions that allowed young applicants to share why and how they were taking forward their social change work. For one YA, it was important to ensure that young people were not forced into a trap of sharing their 'lived experiences' as a personal story, but instead to focus on how they used their lived experiences for positive change. Another was keen that all radical young activists struggling to access funding for their work were invited to apply.

**"I think actually even just the process of applying changed how we were viewing ourselves and what we were capable of, because it made us... realise the scale of what we could do."**

*Challenge and Changer*

YAs also considered it important that we should give examples of young people

who should apply and organisations that could not. Each question was accompanied by guidance, which was shared on the application platform of the Blagrave website. YAs agreed that the definition of Lived Experience Leadership as crafted and incorporated by the LEx movement (as cited above) should be shared in youth-friendly language e.g., care leavers who were activating their lived experiences to improve or challenge the care system.

Guidance also included a definition of adult-led youth sector organisations that would not be eligible for funding with guidance to reach out to the Blagrave team if they wanted further advice and guidance. Blagrave received several requests from adult-led youth sector organisations who were keen to support their youth-led projects and we gave advice accordingly.

Applicants were invited to submit a video or attach a written document, graphic or visual document to share their work and answer the questions YAs crafted. There was no requirement to submit a budget breakdown, as YAs felt that a focus on budgets for what were small amounts of funding could detract from young people's ideas and force them to focus on funder requirements. Based on their experience of campaign and social justice work, YAs also felt it was important to recognise that specific funding needs would not necessarily be known for some initiatives until the work had started. This would likely be particularly true for initiatives that had not received funding previously. Young people with accessibility needs were also invited to contact the dedicated Blagrave team for further support and guidance.

**"The process was a lot easier, looking at all the other [applications] we've had to do. And some of them we look at and go, 'Oh, that looks way too complicated'."**

*Challenge and Changer*

We aimed to reach young people across England. YAs were clear that they did not want a funder-led launch for the fund, because of concerns that could lead to adult-led or larger youth-led organisations populating the application pool, and lead to a high number of applications for a small investment pot. YAs wanted the fund to be advertised through their networks, the LEx Movement network and on Twitter (rather than through a big launch), to maximise the chances of it reaching 'unusual suspects'. Blagrave advertised Challenge and Change via their website and Twitter account, enabling it to reach the networks of Blagrave partners and friends supporting youth-led work. CfKE also shared the fund across its network of LEx leaders and the UK-wide LEx Movement.

YAs also felt that a Q&A section was important to allow young people to better

understand the criteria and reach of the fund. The Q&A section on the application platform of the Blagrave website was co-created by the YAs, Blagrave and CfKE, which was also informed and updated by questions posed by young people during the Q&A webinar designed by the YAs. For example, advice and guidance for young people in receipt of welfare benefits and those with restrictions on their immigration status was included (with signposting for further advice).

YAs designed and facilitated a webinar that potential young applicants were invited to join midway through the application window. This enabled YAs to make it clear to young people thinking of applying that Challenge and Change is a fund for young changemakers designed by youngchange makers and to answer their questions. About 60 people joined the webinar, and questions and answers that could not be covered in the 'live' Q&A were also shared on the Q&A section of the Challenge and Change application platform on the Blagrave platform.

## What we learned

The application process designed by YAs was both innovative for the sector and hugely appreciated by the young people who applied. Those who were successful in the process praised the ease and simplicity of the process, as well as its accessibility. One applicant applied through a verbal interview with Blagrave staff after requesting to do so due to their accessibility needs. Had this not been an option for them, this applicant would not have been able to apply.

### Who applied and who was funded?

- We received 192 applications from all areas of England.
- Within two weeks of the fund launch, over 1,400 site visits were made to the Blagrave website and just over 60 young people signed up to the initial webinar about accessing funding.
- The largest number of applications came in from Greater London (94 in total) and the West Midlands (31). The least number of applications came in from the North East (3) and East Midlands (1). But we received applications from across the country e.g., South East (19); South West (7); North West (13); East of England (8) showing that the reach expanded Blagrave's regional focus in the South East. Applications from the Midlands and the North were comparatively more likely to be funded and London applicants were less likely to be funded.
- 121 of the 192 applications received were from young people aged between 22-25 years (including 41 received from young people aged 25 at time of application). Older applicants were comparatively more likely to be funded.
- 110 of the 192 applications were received from young women, 51 from young men and 29 from those who had selected another gender identify or preferred not to say. The gender profile of funded applicants was similar to the profile of those



who applied.

- 17 of the 20 partners funded in the first cohort were university students. This raised questions for the Blgrave team about reach to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, we recognised that educational attainment itself is not necessarily a proxy for advantage. And we learned that if young change makers with lived experience of intersectional social and economic injustices do go to university, they are often the first to do so in their family and may continue to feel isolated from mainstream society and have little access to networks and other support groups. This was particularly so for young people with lived experience who applied to the fund as individuals. They were more likely to accept and attend some of the optional support package offerings.
- We know that there is more work to do in reaching young people from rural areas (the majority of applications were from cities and towns).
- Through the fund, investment was made available directly to young change makers mobilising in collectives/movements (with or without an organisation), and as individuals. Of the funded partners, 3 were from formalised organisations (2 charities and 1 CIC, and of those, two were run by adults). The rationale for these exceptions was as follows:
  - ⇒ Kent Refugee Action Network – the young people applying through KRAN, with English as a second language would likely not have been able to apply without KRAN. We were fully reassured that the young people had total control of the funding and plans and were convinced that having asylum seekers and refugees as part of the cohort was important.
  - ⇒ Rekindle – whilst this charity was born from the dreams of an adult charity founder and teacher, it has a fully youth led Board who applied to the fund
  - ⇒ Community Chaplain Association – CIC, was funded because the proposal was the vision of a young staff member within the organisation, with full autonomy for the work he was proposing in the criminal justice system.

For most of the amazing young people funded, Challenge and Change was the first grant they received.

You can see some of them [here](#) and further details of all the young changemakers who were selected for funding are set out in the 'About The Fund' section

The feedback we received from Challenge and Change funded partners, and the high volume of applications, suggests that the process designed by YAs succeeded in meeting young people where they are. We recognise too the need to continuously stretch our thinking about how a fund of this nature can go beyond existing networks to reach further and deeper.

**“Next time, we need to think about how we can reach communities that sit so far on the margin that we don’t even acknowledge them on an everyday basis.”**

*Challenge and Changer*

Young applicants demonstrated a creative and sophisticated focus on a huge range of issues including but not limited to racial injustice, disability rights, refugee and asylum issues, youth voice, criminal (in)justice, homelessness, youth violence, sexual exploitation, mental health, re-imagining the world, re-imagining the education system, living wage and employment rights, challenging the status quo, land and community space ownership and enterprise.

The focus on intersectional injustices across the applicants points to young people rejecting the sometimes de-humanising and unhelpful focus on singular aspects of their lives. A focus on unity, collective action, self-care, and collective healing were also prevalent across applications.

While we received many high-quality applications (despite the compressed timeline), we could have done more to achieve deeper and broader engagement with young people. YAs fed back that Challenge and Change could have done more to reach more marginalised communities, such as young people in rural areas.

**“[We need to be] constantly innovative about how we engage with people... having a conversation with ourselves about how we try to reach people, not the other way around.”**

*Challenge and Change Young Advisor*

At Blagrove, we feel that we did not necessarily strike the right balance between the accessibility of the application process and collecting enough information to support a smooth and equitable decision-making process. YAs did not wish to compel young people to share personal data they did not wish to share. But asking self-identifying questions about race, disability, class, level of education, etc. would have provided better analysis about who this fund was reaching. This would have better informed shortlisting as well as our thinking about how to extend reach for future iterations. Nevertheless, when we look at who was actually funded, it is clear that YAs were thoughtful in applying an equity lens in their decision making even in the absence of this basic demographic data.

We also found that the focus of application questions on what young people were 'passionate' about meant that the process only captured limited information on what the actual project or campaign was, making it harder to determine how applicants actually planned to use the money. This extended the time it took to process the high volume of applications we received.

While we were open to receiving applications in numerous ways and did indeed receive and shortlist many video applications, we were still aware that our process may have nonetheless advantaged young applicants with the strongest writing skills, for example those more likely to have accessed higher education, those with the most fluency in the language of 'radical activism', or those who had the most confidence in speaking to a camera.

## What can we improve?

While the outreach and application processes were generally very successful, Blagrove believes we can be more strategic in how we proactively advertise the programme to target young changemakers experiencing and tackling specific social issues and injustices. Having more lead-in time for the application process would also make it more likely we could reach the diversity of young people that we aspire to reach in the future.

We do not see Challenge and Change as a traditional participatory grant-making programme given its far more radical delegation of power, design and decisions at all stages to the young people - from fund design to selection process. However, supporting the grant selection process was hard for the Blagrove team given the unexpectedly high volume of applications, a pressured timeframe, the breadth of the decision-making criteria, and the relational approach we have taken in the past as a small funder.

The first round of Challenge and Change was a very open call to all young campaigners, encompassing many areas of social justice, lived experience and structural change relevant to young people's lives. The second round of the fund will focus on LEx change-makers.

Many funded partners praised the ease and simplicity of the application process and the way it signalled trust.

**"It was very much, 'the money is for your project ... it shows that we believe in your organisation and your work', rather than giving you a specific set of money for a really, really**

**limited specific purpose. It was much more open. And the money was like a feeling of validation when we got it"**

Challenge and Changer

Several partners highlighted the accessible nature of the application process, contrasting it with processes elsewhere that created major barriers to applying.

**"As a neurodivergent person ... I found it very accessible, very simple ... when it comes to people getting access to funding, application processes can be a massive barrier ... and in fact, the person who I spoke to was also disabled so we were able to connect on that level as well... I would encourage other funders to learn from Blaggrave's application process, because I think a lot of people face barriers to accessing resources like this, because they don't know the language."**

Challenge and Changer

# Selecting successful applicants

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## What we did

There were four stages to the selection process:

1. Blagrove staff assessed the 192 applications to reach a shortlist of 80, based on whether the work clearly led by young people, whether the work addressed social injustice, and whether the work aimed to achieve systemic / structural change.
2. The Blagrove team created a spreadsheet of the 80 shortlisted applications, which included a traffic light rating of how strong the applicants were across all the 3 criteria areas.
3. YAs reviewed the shortlisted applications with the Blagrove team, who assisted with gathering follow-up information from applicants if needed. Mid-way through this process, Blagrove and the YAs invited CfKE to provide additional facilitation support. These selection meetings took 12 hours in total across several meetings
4. YAs approved final selected applications. These were then presented to the Blagrove Board for their information and sign-off.

## What we learned

The most important thing we learned is that Young Advisors are capable of reaching hard decisions about which applications to fund in a high-ambiguity, time-pressured environment when they are appropriately supported by a team with technical expertise. That said, there are many things we learned we could have done better.

Blagrove had previously provided unrestricted funding through open grant-making, and so designing a fund from scratch was a new process. In practical terms, we massively underestimated the time needed to do justice to the selection process. This was partly because we didn't anticipate the high volume of applications, and partly because we didn't allow sufficient time to design a clear, straightforward decision-making process at the outset in a format that would help present the information from all the range of applications received. This translated into making a much bigger ask of YAs than we expected – of young changemakers who themselves are time pressed with busy lives. As a result, YAs had to spend many hours reviewing a large volume of shortlisted applications and holding multiple meetings either early in the mornings or late into the evening at a time where all YAs were available to make decisions together.

YAs reported that they spent considerably more time working on Challenge and Change than was anticipated in their contracts, (which they were of course paid for). The format in which information on applications was shared with YAs was also not as accessible and straightforward to navigate as it could have been if we had had more time. In practice, we were learning together, whereas we could have developed more guidance on decision-making ahead of time.

In addition, having only three YAs meant that the areas of expertise, interest and passion, and the perspectives on routes to systemic and structural change that they collectively brought, were inevitably somewhat limited, in the context of the breadth of scope of the fund.

There were conceptually several issues that we could have addressed and defined up-front, to make decision-making on applications easier, which Blagrove still needs to reflect on. These included (among many):

- The extent to which the fund aimed to support very early-stage work, or slightly more developed initiatives,
- Clarity about the relationship between lived experience, lived expertise, marginalisation, and driving systems change from this foundation,
- The stance of the fund on class, social mobility and access to higher education,
- Geographic and thematic 'balance' in the work that Blagrove is seeking to support, and
- Focus on activists and campaigners vs recognising and funding work that had a greater focus on using service delivery as a vehicle for systems change.

Since Challenge and Change, Blagrove has implemented a further two funding callouts, both of which have been successful in enabling us to reach further and to identify organisations outside of normal networks, and one of which was driven by YAs and their focus priorities. Significantly more capacity in the team has allowed for closer attention to implementation details.

## **What can we improve?**

There are clear trade-offs between doing things quickly and doing them as equitably as possible. We intentionally prioritised speed in the first iteration of Challenge and Change fund due to the pressing need to make funding available to young people as soon as possible. We learned a range of lessons about how moving quickly makes it harder to ensure clarity, ease and equity.

The broad nature of the fund made it harder to decide which applications to fund. In hindsight, it would have been better to clarify the intent of the fund - and how any contentious aspects of decision-making would be handled - more tightly at

the very start of the grant decision-making process. The process would also have benefited from written guidance and bespoke training for all involved, with the time and opportunity to iterate the process. In relation to this, there is a trade-off between how tightly defined processes are in guidance / training, and designed up-front by a funder, and the scope of the YAs to exert meaningful agency in defining how processes should work. Iterating processes and re-writing guidance so that they are truly led by young people takes considerable time.

Moving forward, we hope that the Young Advisors can set clear criteria for who they want to fund. While they will be equitably and meaningfully involved in making the decisions, the Blagrove team will take on more of the burden of work sifting applications with YAs and being 'grant-makers' as per our expertise and paid roles.

This is the model that we are employing with our other two programmes, Restart Youth and The Listening Fund. Here, the role of YAs is more about setting strategic direction and vision and holding the Blagrove team to account for delivery. YAs in these programmes are investing in planned time to reflect on design of work and to spend focused time together, for example in residentials and over full days. YAs are still absolutely involved in all final decision-making but Blagrove is clearer about the balance of how we take the burden of lengthy reading away from them, and where we need to take responsibility for clearer preparation that frees them up to make those decisions well. These ways of working have been discussed with YAs at all points and have emerged very much in collaboration with Blagrove. We are also providing detailed inputs on areas of social change work as they request, embarking on a process of 'collective discovery' - for example, decision making in complexity or systems change.

We have learnt that to do this powerful work well, we must be well resourced ourselves and find the right balance between process and creativity.

# Building an optional support offer

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## What we did

Delivering a package of support to Challenge and Change funded partners was not part of our initial plan. Although YAs shared their interest in connecting with Challenge and Change funded partners and sharing their connections and expertise, they did not raise - and were not expected or invited to design - a support package alongside the fund. However, early conversations between Challenge and Change funded partners from the first cohort and staff members at Blagrove and CfKE surfaced anxieties felt by funded partners to take forward their work in the best way possible (alongside the excitement of getting funding).

Key themes we captured during our listening and grant onboarding conversations:

- wellbeing, self-care, and personal development – for example some funded partners acutely felt the emotional toll of the work and the ‘emotional labour’ needed to navigate charity/social justice spaces that lack knowledge about the inequalities they face,
- a desire to be joined up with ‘mentors’ and people with similar lived experience who would be willing to listen and share their knowledge (isolation was a factor for many working outside of London),
- funded partners were keen to connect, support each other’s campaigns and share knowledge and experience. It was clear that there was a wealth of knowledge within the Challenge and Change funded community that could be harnessed, and some partners offered to facilitate sessions (if appropriate support could be provided),
- the need for more support with promoting their campaigns and linking up with useful contacts and organisations, whether through CfKE’s or Blagrove’s connections,
- specific knowledge/skills gaps, including legal entities/formal structures, accounting/financing, fundraising, and safeguarding (particularly for those working with under 18s).

As partners committed to active listening and committed to providing equitable and meaningful agency to young people, both Blagrove and CfKE did not believe it would be responsible to simply listen and do nothing to address the needs and anxieties that funded partners were surfacing and expressing. We recognised that there was more than capital that we could share with young changemakers to support their work – and we should also try to amalgamate our expertise at pace to address these emerging needs.



As a result, Blagrave and CfKE rapidly designed a support package in direct response to these emerging needs. Support was entirely optional for funded partners to participate in. The package comprised:

1. Masterclasses – A series of online sessions, exploring topics identified as skills gaps in check-ins with funded partners, including around systems leadership; the relationship between campaigning and policy influencing and advocacy; developing vision, mission and purpose; building healthy teams, collectives and collaborations; and digital marketing. These sessions were primarily delivered by LEx Leaders and allies of the LEx Movement.
2. Knowledge Exchanges – Building on their work with the LEx Movement, CfKE crafted an innovative inter-generational approach where funded partners were offered the opportunity to be matched with an experienced LEx leader who had specific insights into their field of work, to share insights and innovative ideas in four 1:1 sessions where both parties were positioned as learners – as equals in an exchange of wisdom
3. One-to-one calls – These calls served the dual purpose of providing individual support and understanding the needs of funded partners in terms of support and development, so informing the evolution of the adaptive support package.

As a partnership that was continuously learning and iterating throughout the process, Blagrave and CfKE each hired a dedicated young changemaker to our staff teams to deliver this support package in partnership, including a young LEx leader from the LEx Movement. With the rich learning coming from the funded partners from cohort one, the support package was implemented from the beginning of April 2021.

**“We have gained new skills from the training provided. This enabled us to understand and develop better communication and teamwork skills and was carried forward to provide digital training to an average of 5 young people per day.”**

*Challenge and Changer*

## **What we learned**

Uptake of the support package was mixed – the package we created wasn’t right for everyone. Roughly half of the cohort engaged with the masterclasses, and one

third opted into a knowledge exchange partnership. We learned that there are limits to how well we can meet a diverse group of young people's needs with little lead time to analyse, plan and communicate a support 'offer'. We focused on onboarding both cohorts and recruiting dedicated staff to deliver the support package before communicating about it to funded partners. This meant a gap of several months for many funded partners between joining the programme and hearing about the support package. It seems likely that more lead time and a clearer communications journey for funded partners would make for a support package more likely to meet young people where they are at, and higher uptake as a result.

Funded partners provided rich feedback, both on what they valued in the support package, and how we could make it more accessible and useful in the future. These ideas are informing the next iteration of the fund (see what we can improve).

Funded partners reported that opportunities to connect as a cohort were valuable, and they would have liked more opportunities to do this.

**"I would hope for stronger opportunities [to] build those relationships further, you know, but like, just hearing their ideas and hearing them speak ever so passionately about the work they do just invigorates my soul."**

*Challenge and Changer*

They also highlighted that they would be more likely to utilise a support package if communications were more personalised, and if there had been more clarity about support at the beginning of the programme.

## **What can we improve?**

Young people we have worked with have given us some answers here for the next iteration of the Challenge and Change fund. The new Challenge and Change YAs have also spent time this year reflecting on the support package for the next phase of Challenge and Change, and we have also benefited from other facilitated conversations with young campaigners as part of our wider work to invest in youth-led infrastructure and listen to what young people prioritise. Additionally, we will also be ensuring that the next cohort of Challenge and Changers also have the opportunity to feed into the funds iteration.

Some of the improvements we are planning include:

Blaggrave plans to run a welcome day at the beginning of the next Challenge and Change funded cohort with accommodation provided, so that new partners can connect with each other. We hope these connections will then continue organically through existing online platforms young people use. YAs have asked us to run a further day of connection 3-4 months in, to provide partners with the opportunity to connect and share progress. We will also be ensuring - as per recommendations from Challenge and Changers - that there is an ongoing platform for them to connect, with Slack being the medium that the YAs have recommended.

Funded partners and YAs also shared a range of creative ideas for how we can improve the support package, including:

- A 'welcome pack' for all that provides all the information about the fund and the support offer,
- Giving funded partners more control over the specifics of the support offer for their cohort at inception (instead of the partner organisations solely leading and deciding),
- Starting with a face-to-face residential/retreat to build bonds as a cohort, share experiences, absorb learning in seminars and ask questions,
- Create a bank of resources (including recordings of sessions) that funded partners can contribute to and access in their own time,
- Renaming 'masterclasses' to something less daunting and explain what they are more clearly and expanding the concept of these workshops to fortnightly connection spaces, that include a balance of inspiration and sharing with their peers, skills development, and connection

# Monitoring

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## What we did

During the design of the fund, the YAs were keen to understand Blaggrave's reporting and monitoring processes. Blaggrave, as with all our funded work, was keen to make this as flexible as possible. YAs agreed that reporting should be light touch during the fund design process. This would be, for example, through check-in calls, Tweets, and voice-notes. The flexible approach to reporting and monitoring was shared in the Q&A section of the application platform on the Blaggrave website.

Blaggrave also wanted to provide young people with maximum flexibility in how they received their funding. We used the Open Collective platform for those funded partners that wished to use it, as a mechanism for financial transparency and management. For all others, funding was provided directly to them along with the Terms and Conditions of funding.

At the beginning of their grant, Blaggrave provided all funded partners with a set of suggested learning questions to guide their end-of-grant reporting.

For several Challenge and Changers who've recently come to the end of their grant, but due to dyslexia or other personal issues were struggling to write up their learning, Blaggrave arranged a phone call to talk through the questions and type up their answers on their behalf.

Funded partners were required to report at the conclusion of their grant, except for grants over £5000, where an interim check-in and financial report was required, to release the remaining amount.

Suggested evaluation questions were designed by Blaggrave for focus primarily on learning:

1. Please describe what you did with this grant. We are hoping to understand how you spent the funding and if this differed from what you initially told us about in your application.
2. What have you challenged and changed?
3. What difference has your project made to you and/or the people you worked with?
4. Do you hope to continue this work? What are your plans for the future?
5. What positive changes do you think are yet to come as a result of your work?
6. Please tell us about any partnerships you formed or built on while carrying out your work.

7. Describe any difficulties, setbacks or challenges you experienced along the way. How did you navigate these?
8. How will your experience over the past year inform the way you work and what you do in future?
9. Has the process of securing this grant enabled you to successfully apply for funds from other sources or generate your own funds?
10. Please tell us anything else you would like us to know about your project that has not already been covered - e.g., were there any unexpected outcomes?

At the time of writing, reports are coming in – and where they haven't, with a few exceptions, the Blagrove team has an understanding of what progress they have made and where the young people are in their journey with us through wider role of young people in events, groups sessions, check-in's and knowledge exchanges.

## **What we learned**

The Open Collective platform was beneficial to Blagrove as a funder in terms of assuring financial management by the seven funded partners who used it. The perspectives of the young people that used it were mixed – some have reported finding it helpful, whereas others reported that they preferred to use other platforms instead. Blagrove will continue to offer Open Collective to Challenge and Changers, particularly for larger grants, as it removes the need for any financial reporting, but we will not stipulate it as a requirement to receive funding.

In terms of monitoring activities, many of the funded partners are active on social media, making it possible to follow their progress without requesting monitoring reports. However, this was not the case for all, and having young people on the CfKE and Blagrove teams checking in on progress and offering support has been an important part of learning, and assurance about the progress of the young people.

One area that has been confusing for the Challenge and Changers has been for them to understand the relationship between CfKE and Blagrove and who their points of contact should be and for what. CfKE developed strong relationships with some of the young people, for example through the knowledge exchange programme, and the lines between management of grant and wider aspects of the programme were not always clear to the young people.

## **What can we improve?**

In terms of reporting, we feel that the light reporting system we designed has worked well. We can actively engage with young people and follow them on social media etc. which goes a long way in providing us with reassurance about their work but having some form of final report is additionally useful. It meets Blagrove's own

information needs. And some of the young people have said that reporting has helped them in reflecting on the work and their achievements. In some cases, it has proved a vital discussion point about potential further funding. We are exploring further funding to several Challenge and Changers through our wider grants programme at the time of writing – their reports have been useful (including where we produced the report based on a check-in call) and some at least 3 Challenge and Changers have joined the whole Blagrove team informal meeting to share their work with us.

We are committed to talking to future partners at the welcome day about our expectations, so they are clearer about them from the outset. But we will also continue to explore creative ways to support information flow. For example, we are considering employing a young person – potentially one of our former Challenge and Changers – to capture partners' stories and journeys along the way. This would reduce the need for formal reporting and, if done well, could be a wonderful way of showcasing the ongoing work of the young people we are supporting.

# Safeguarding

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## What we did

Our previous focus prior to Challenge and Change like most funders, had been on assessing partners' safeguarding policies and processes. In developing this fund, we needed to incorporate the reality that we would be funding groups of young people who in most cases have no safeguarding policies and whose work therefore falls under our own policy. And in response, we therefore included safeguarding in our Terms and Conditions of funding with Challenge and Changers. That is, our Terms explained that safeguarding comes under our policy and process – and that by signing Challenge and Change funded partners agreed to adhere to our policy, and understand that, if there is a breach of safeguarding, they must let us know and follow our systems.

## What we learned

Whilst Challenge and Change funded partners agreed to adhere to our policy, and of course in turn Blaggrave must also safeguard them in all our interactions, we learnt that when you are funding young people directly the implications of this needed more thought and clarity, both internally but also for the young people themselves.

In particular, we had a responsibility to provide young people with some safeguarding training so that they understood their own responsibilities, as part of the developmental journey and to fulfil our own responsibilities. This need was also expressed by funded partners during the grant onboarding stage. It was also confirmed through working closely with an expert safeguarding trainer with strong experience working with young people with lived experience, that this funding is about giving agency to young people who are over 18. As a funder, if we identify that young people are facing challenges in their personal lives, we should offer support where we can, but not as a risk mitigation strategy, and being careful about both not raising expectations nor over-stepping our role or relationship with them.

## What can we improve?

Whilst Blaggrave's Terms and Conditions for Challenge and Change did ask partners to agree to adhere to Blaggrave's safeguarding policy, we have re-written the policy and our procedures to ensure that it is accessible to young people. We are also offering 'clean and clear' safeguarding training at the outset of our funding with them. This responds to many funded partners wishes – especially those working directly with young people under 18.

Blagrave has been working with a brilliant safeguarding trainer who is familiar with Challenge and Change and will support this work moving forward – the welcome day will include a 2 hour session on safeguarding, but the trainer will also be held on a retainer so that they can provide one on one support on safeguarding issues that come out throughout the young people’s grant periods. The welcome pack will include relevant information on safeguarding as well e.g. who to contact in Blagrave should there be a problem and link to our policy on our website.



# About the organisations involved

## The Blagrave Trust

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Blagrave has been evolving its work to centre young people at every level for some time, giving up power, seeking out relationships with young people doing amazing things, recruiting them to our Board, and developing programmes of work to challenge the way that young people are enabled to drive social change. For example, the Listening Fund and the development of the Young Trustees Movement, and a small but growing portfolio of work to include youth movements and organisations that are founded or led by young people themselves. Further details of Blagrave's journey can be found at ['Our Learning Journey: Three years on 2018-2021'](#).

As our direct relationships with young people grew, so too did our confidence and trust in what they are capable of. By 2019, our staff and Board were also clear that in addition to funding youth-focused service delivery organisations, Blagrave could also play a key role in influencing policy and funding initiatives that give young people a stake in society supporting their own social change efforts. Indeed, involvement of young people in our core decision-making enabled us to make bolder decisions, stretching our understanding of 'risk'. Couple that with the visible activity of young people speaking out about social and environmental injustices (Blagrave funded the Student Climate Movement in its infancy) outside of adult-led programmes, we were increasingly convinced that funding young people directly was an important missing piece in the eco-system of social change with enormous untapped potential.

Our staff team were keen to play a key role in this effort and defined the following aspirations to underpin the development of a new funding initiative to complement our other programmes of work:

- Young people affected by injustice experience greater agency and ability to influence the decisions and policies that affect them,
- We have challenged established dynamics in funding/charity sector, including by investing directly in young people (direct transfer of resources/power),
- We have tested new and different ways of supporting young people to develop

a voice and be heard,

- We (and the wider youth/funding sectors) have a deeper understanding of the options and effective routes to supporting young people who want to lead change.

As part of this journey, we were paying close attention to the work of the [LEx Movement](#)<sup>7</sup> and other significant voices in this space. Through our work we were also increasingly witnessing that young people actively creating change, are doing so on the back of their own lived experiences – direct, first-hand personal experience of social problems and/or injustice(s).

With the global pandemic and thousands of young people on the streets shouting for justice – we knew it was time to act and work with partners who we believed could help make our aspirations a reality.

Our values helping us to ground our approach and take this bold step:

- **Progressive:** willing to challenge the status quo in the pursuit of social justice
- **Collaborative:** partnering with others
- **Adaptive:** critically assessing our work and evolving in response to what we learn
- **Inclusive and equitable:** bringing diverse people together, to redress power imbalances
- **Responsible:** alert to any potential negative impacts of our work, always prioritising doing no harm
- **Transparent:** communicating openly and making our decisions and policies public and accessible
- **Trusting:** recognising and respecting the lived experience and expertise of those we work with

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<sup>7</sup> A UK-Wide collective impact network of over 1,000 LEx Leaders and LEx-led organisations connecting, supporting and strengthening the capacity of Lived Experience Leaders to create systems-level change and help all our communities thrive <https://lexmovement.org/>

# The Centre for Knowledge Equity

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## Centring change makers embedded in communities

The [Centre for Knowledge Equity](#) (CfKE) understands that the intractable social, economic, and environmental challenges of our time demand us to equitably and meaningfully unite all forms of knowledge – including lived, learned, and practice expertise (Knowledge Equity<sup>8</sup>) – to tackle unjust and inequitable systems and catalyse transformational change for the future of our people and planet.

The Centre was established following four years of imagination work with a coalition of Lived Experience Leaders (LEx Leaders) working across social justice/issue areas, sectors and industries who have long been integrating and combining their lived, learned and practiced expertise to improve the lives of the communities they share experiences with. United by their concerns over the challenges LEx leaders face in elevating their knowledge, wisdom, and leadership to create systems level change – and effectively advance the work of allies and partners’ working across the broader social good ecosystem.

The Centre is an active member, and host to the Lived Experience Leaders’ Movement ([LEx Movement](#)), - whose wisdom is a vital component of the Centre’s roadmap to a just and equitable future for all. A movement that includes hundreds of young LEx activists, changemakers and innovators across the UK activating their lived expertise to tackle the injustices faced by the communities they share experiences with.

The Centre operates as a radical operating mechanism to move knowledge equity into action by developing and reimagining frameworks for collaboration and other thought leadership to further equity-centred working practices. Working in partnership with LEx leaders, LEx-led organisations, and coalitions to generate innovative funding, research, learning, collaboration, and network development activities. The Centre stimulates systems change through moving these partnerships into pioneering collaborations with funders, academic institutions, government bodies, social purpose organisations and activist movements globally.

Through this work LEx Movement members have consistently reflected on three key observations from their collective work and experiences as social leaders. Firstly, LEx leaders have limited visibility in the mainstream that creates lack of opportunities and a vicious cycle of leaders embedded within communities being underserved,

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<sup>8</sup> Knowledge Equity is a key concept in social innovation and systems change that was developed in 2017 by Baljeet Sandhu during her time as a researcher and educator at Yale University

ignored, or marginalised by the mainstream. Secondly, a united understanding across social justice spaces that we must hand the baton on to the next generation and, as adults, we must make it easier for young people to lead than it has been for their predecessors. Thirdly, intergenerational learning and knowledge is vital to keep pace with an ever-evolving and fast-paced world.

Blaggrave's values and commitment to hand over decision-making power and resources to young people to design and lead an innovative new fund for young changemakers and campaigners were central to CfKE's decision to partner with Blaggrave during a global pandemic.

# Annex 1

## Meet the Challenge and Changers!

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The brief summary descriptions that follow are based on applications received from young people and what they were funded to do (rather than detailed individual progress updates)

### Organisations (founded by adults sharing power with young changemakers)

**Rekindle School** – a group of young people working with the founding Elders to bridge the divide between mainstream schools and disengaged pupils aged 13-16-year-olds, providing homework support, and mentoring for local young people focusing on BAME<sup>9</sup> and working-class communities.

**Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN)** – the KRAN Youth Forum, set up an online forum for young refugees and asylum seekers to access information, mutual support, collating case studies of good and bad practice related to housing and accommodation, highlighting areas of concern to service providers.

**Community Chaplaincy Association** – started by the UK's youngest Muslim Chaplain in prison settings (aged 25) a project to provide Mental Health training for Chaplains working in prisons and campaigning to make mental health training mandatory to help early identification of mental distress amongst prisoners.

### Collectives & Movements

**Avocados Academy** – set up by a care experienced young woman in Devon for children in care and care leavers. Among other things, they provide a legal advocacy service in partnership with University Law Clinics so young people can access information about their rights and entitlements and enable links to local authority care systems and online support groups.

**AIR UK (Against Institutional Racism UK)** – A grassroots campaign collective led by young people of colour to challenge systemic racism in the UK including creating space for conversations about institutional racism and to bring about policy reform whilst aiming to breathe new life into the fight against racism.

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<sup>9</sup> Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic – a term widely used by government departments, public bodies, and others across the UK when referring to ethnic minority groups.

**Black Trans Foundation** – Young, Black trans-led collective working in partnership with private, public, and not-for-profit sectors to offer access to information and mental health support to Black trans & non-binary people aged 16+ in the UK, from therapists who have relevant lived experience.

**Diaspora Dialogues For the Future** – led by a young woman of colour hosting people of colour-centred climate dialogues, working on environmental justice and sustainable transition, creating space for collaboration and networks.

**Divergent Thinking** – set up by neurodiverse young people to provide cognitive tools that empower young people to explore their imagination and become free creative thinkers. Providing a series of online workshops on social action and campaigning for young people who are neurodiverse: autistic, dyspraxic, dyslexic and those who think differently.

**Embracing Difference** – founded by a neurodiverse young woman of colour is creating podcasts and educational resources about neurodiversity including a website, creating spaces for neuro-diverse people to talk about issues they face when it comes to accessing education, employment opportunities, and services with a particular focus on arts spaces.

**The Diklo Collective** – exists to raise awareness of issues faced by Romani and Gypsy Roma traveller communities through their online social media presence and their zine. They also support Romani and Gypsy Roma traveller communities by providing care packages to those who need them, and creating jewellery from traditional scarfs, beads, to generate revenue and creating a space where Gypsy Roma Travellers can network.

**Crossroads** – a website and resources for young activists on anti-racism and social injustice including resources on issues like wellbeing. Supporting the infrastructure to enable people to enact change and supporting the creation of a legal advice platform.

**Interrupted** – are a group of young people with lived experience of the UK immigration system, challenging the system through writing an anthology, with a particular focus on those who struggle to access higher education due to their immigration status.

**It's OK** – To promote and protect the mental health of young people aged 15-25, building of a network of young people with experience of mental illness to challenge stigma and scope out campaigns for better mental health provision, and provide resources to support young people.

**Radical Restart** – Formed as a youth led response to the moment of collective crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic caused, Radical Restart are a youth collective working to articulate their generations struggles, build powerful campaigns and connect/learn alongside the emergent youth movements of the UK. Their current focus is on reform of the education system.

**Radical Body** – set up by two young people with lived experience to increase access to performing arts for disabled (housebound) audiences and performers. Using telepresence technology to participate alongside physically present performers with an aim to ‘destabilize the norm by creating art that is radical as their bodies are and expresses disabled perspectives on an often-inaccessible world’.

**RIP Stars** – a group of disabled young researchers using their own experiences, to argue for change for disabled young people. Funding to write a research report, develop a framework for practice and present evidence at the Education Select Committee Inquiry into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

**Sustain ED (formerly The Solidarity Library)** – an online resource hub for under resourced communities with information on different social justice issues, using funding to develop their fellowship programme and a scholarship database of rare opportunities and launch the ‘Knowledge Equity’ Seminar series

**The Classroom** – a collective of young people developing a research and performance project to platform the voices of minimum wage workers. Offering opportunities to participate in a publication and performance, ‘The Classroom’.

**UKII** – established following the death of George Floyd, a collective of young people campaigning for BAME history and British Empire teaching to be made mandatory in British schools and providing educational workshops.

**The Westbury Collective** – focused on creating community amongst artists, including a podcast on ‘the big ideas’ and an online zine and a series of live events showcasing young artists with a moral or political focus

**Windswept Workshops** – a local collective commissioning local photographers to capture abandoned community buildings and a night of community art activities discussing reclaiming community space.

**Young Justice Advisors** – are a group of young people with lived experience of the Criminal Justice System, creating a platform for other young adults in and with experience of, the justice system and working with a range of agencies to influence policy.

## Individuals

For safeguarding reasons, we have not named individuals that were funded, but outline the work that has been supported. All individuals supported were young LEx leaders.

Digital content to create and share Muslim stories in England, bringing people together and celebrating Muslim diversity and British Muslim culture to challenge bias in mainstream narratives.

A mental health animation project, documenting experiences of people of colour with mental health issues in St Helena's, Liverpool, shared with the local community, local council and mainstream mental health charities.

Elephant in the Room (stigma and mental health) and the Period Poverty Project (addressing stigmas towards reproductive health in female people of colour).

A young person of colour from Leeds building networks and resources of support to improve welfare and access to therapy for black trans people.

Funding to support the completion and publication of a book written by a young person with lived experience of homelessness to amplify the unique needs of young people facing or at risk of homeless.

Research on outcomes for young people in care collating positive education success of care-experienced people to influence social work training and research.