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Foundation

Opportunity Fund Final Report



Cohort 2
Insights and
Reflections
across the
Programme

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Report compiled
and written by
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Introduction

The Opportunity Fund was an initiative jointly funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Blagrave Trust over 2020 to 2022.

It provided the equivalent of a part-time basic income, as well as support for project costs, for two cohorts of aspiring young activists, campaigners or social entrepreneurs. The programme aimed to test a model of direct funding and to nurture and support 25 young leaders' passion, ideas and expertise for social change alongside their need to earn a living over a period of 18 months. It sought to open up and extend opportunities for individuals with different experiences of structural and systemic injustice and inequality to engage in campaigning, influencing and social business activities in areas they cared for or felt passionate about.





Funding was provided for young activists and entrepreneurs; young people who either see themselves as campaigners or have defined interests in social change and who have taken some concrete steps to develop a campaign or social business (recognising the importance of social enterprise as a route by which some young people may choose (or need) to express their interests).

The fund also tested practical ways of achieving more equitable relationships between young leaders and those who support them, for example by encouraging the first cohort to have greater control over how the 2nd cohort is recruited, and by their involvement in the fund's development.

The Opportunity Fund's delivery elements consisted of:

- 18 months of income equivalent to 2 days a week at London living wage, paid directly to cohort members
- A £1k personal development budget
- Ongoing advice and support through an expert 'Agent' organisation
- Peer connections with cohort members
- Events to share and reflect on learning
- Additional skill and learning sessions co-ordinated through Agent organisations
- access to connections and networks offered through the two funders.



One programme element, enabling cohort members to experience being an ‘activist in residence’ at an organisation of choice, had to be dropped due to the impact of the pandemic. All the fund elements were identified through research with young activists conducted by InspireChilli over 2019 to 2020.

References to ‘Agents’ in the report refers to Launch It and Peer Power, the two organisations contracted to recruit and support cohort members over the Opportunity Fund. Launch It supported young activists interested in developing a business with social impact, while Peer Power supported young activists interested in leading a specific campaign.

The report, compiled by Colin Falconer of InspireChilli, is based on:

- results of a learning survey held with cohort members, together with reflective conversations to explore emerging insights
- qualitative interviews with representative staff from Launch It, Peer Power, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Blagrove trust
- comparisons with insights from prior learning reports on the programme (available on request from Blagrove Trust)

While the report focuses predominantly on the experiences of the Fund’s second cohort, it draws from this to make comments on the fund as a whole. Items presented in coloured boxes signpost comments that reflect on both cohorts to share reflections across the Fund. Text in bold font flags comments that are highlighted as key messages for further reflection.





Insights and reflections have been organised under 13 headings:

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> 01 What the Opportunity Fund is

In the direct words of Cohort 2, the Opportunity Fund experience can be summarised as:

‘a lifeline’; ‘game changing and transformational’; ‘the chance to experiment’. Such language captures the depth of personal impact achieved through the fund’s flexible approach that sought to offer up to 25 young leaders with access to a monthly allowance and expenditure grant, coupled with 1-1 support from an Agent organisation, peer connection and skills development opportunities, over an 18-month timescale, during which individuals pursued a social business or campaign opportunity of their choice.

> 02 Achievements Identified by Cohort 2

The Opportunity Fund enabled young leaders in Cohort 2 to progress transitions in their future employment pathways, make clear progress with project goals, develop personal skills, achieve social impacts, and experience some life changes. In the words of members:

- ‘I’ve **learnt so much through experimenting** that I will certainly carry into my career going forward’ (Launch It group).
- ‘It has helped me so much and really **positively impacted my life**’ (Peer Power group).

Achievements from the Launch It Cohort 2 group emphasised specific points of transition in people’s experience, such as:

- **Taking the risk to go self-employed, following my ideas and achieving goals.**
- Transforming [my business] into something I can continue to maintain in line with my wider career ambitions.

- Able to move from a full-time day job to part-time in order to focus on my business.
- Growing our business from an initial idea to **creating a wider and sustainable societal impact**.
- Being **able to test my idea & bringing the concept to life**.

In comparison, campaigners at Peer Power were more focused on sharing moments where they felt a significant personal achievement over the timescale:

- Having the **confidence** to conduct interviews with mental health professionals and people with lived experience of mental health.
- Helping to facilitate a workshop for staff at Her Majesty's Inspectorate Probation Manchester.
- My social media campaign, which I am very **proud** of.

This reflects that those on the campaign route were more likely to find it harder to see visible progress towards achieving their future goals, even though they were clearly achieving demonstrable successes to be proud of.

➤ 03 Goal Progress

All Cohort 2 members felt they made progress in both the Launch It and Peer Power groups. However, it is significant to note that **50% made excellent progress at Launch It compared with no one at Peer Power**; while two thirds made a fair amount of progress at Peer Power alongside 40% at Launch It; and a third made only some progress at Peer Power compared to just 10% at Launch It. As noted from Cohort 1, **campaigners assess that they make less progress than those focused on a social business**, which reflects the reality that campaign wins are likely to take longer to witness, whereas businesses can begin to see returns at an earlier stage.

Overall, looking across both Cohorts 1 and 2, it is clear that the **Opportunity Fund enabled all beneficiaries to make progress of significance to the individual, whether in terms of their personal development, their ability to experience some level of social impact, or advancements in career and life trajectories.** As noted in the Cohort 1 2021 report, it is important for young leaders that ‘the personal journey is more valued than just the end destination’. Considering the progress of both cohorts on the fund, everyone has proved able to develop a life of greater purpose – reflected in the **100% gaining increased aspirations for their life and work, the majority of which are connected with social purpose.**

➤ 04 **Sustaining progress beyond the Opportunity Fund**

50% of young leaders in the Cohort 2 group at Launch It agreed they would be able to sustain their business beyond the 18 months of the programme, with the majority of these strongly agreeing; but 50% disagreed due to uncertainties such as access to sustainable funding, rising external costs, and confidence in their future plan. At Peer Power, two thirds agreed they would be able to sustain their campaign, while one third neither agreed or disagreed, reflecting some of the uncertainties referenced above.

Across both cohorts, **58% of graduates felt ready to continue beyond the programme, with the reminder expressing uncertainties over financial sustainability.** Given the context of the pandemic and cost of living crisis, the fact that the majority felt greater confidence to sustain their focus is a positive achievement of the programme, though **more could be done to address challenges faced by anyone making a life or work transition over 2022.**



100% gaining increased aspirations for their life and work, the majority of which are connected with social purpose.



Individuals in the Cohort 2 groups were more likely to feel that the timescale for the programme was too short to achieve a sustainable outcome than expressed by Cohort 1:

- ‘18 months in business is not a long time and I still feel very much at the beginning of my journey.’
- ‘18 months hasn’t given me enough time to be able to sustain this myself’.
- ‘Another 6 months of the fund would really benefit me to being able to really get my business off the ground’.
- ‘I feel like maybe more time on the programme but otherwise I feel quite supported’.

In the words of one: ‘I know it will be difficult when the funding runs out as I will most likely have to pick up an extra shift at my day job each week to supplement income. This will slow down my progress having less time to focus on the business.’ Such feelings emphasise **how vital the monthly income has proved to free up time for young leaders to focus on their potential**, and consequently the challenge to sustain that space by having a viable income stream in place by the end of the timescale, particularly in the context of rising costs faced by Cohort 2. It is important to note here the strength of Launch It’s offer which does provide a further 6 months of support beyond the limits of the Opportunity Fund. **As emphasised by one of the Peer Power cohort 2 group, more ‘signposting to other funding opportunities’ would be helpful, perhaps as part of a guidance note from the Funders to share their knowledge.**

The conclusion reached in the Cohort 1 report to the timescale feels equally valid in the experience of Cohort 2; that, in an ideal world, **it would be best to offer a personalised timescale that could give more or less time pending on someone’s personal journey.** It is likely that some cohort members needed less financial support, while others needed more.

> 05 Personal and Social impact

As evidenced from Cohort 1, the Launch It group continued to demonstrate an impressive focus on social impact in their business models, emphasising the point made in the original research for the Opportunity Fund, that **social enterprise is an important outlet for some young people to be able to explore social purpose in their lives, for whom campaigning may feel more exclusive and remote**. In terms of significant changes, those on the Launch It cohort were more likely to reference social impacts such as:

- How many children I have been able to meet and help through my business.
- Publishing good stories [that influence others].
- **The social impact my business can have on the community** – providing 300 pottery workshops kits and running a virtual masterclass to a student accommodation provider.
- Connections in the local community.
- **Societal impact which has engaged with over one million teachers, children, and parents across the globe.**

In comparison, the campaign cohort at Peer Power referenced more personal achievements, such as: **'I feel like I am able to afford to live'**; and 'The Opportunity Fund has helped with my interpersonal and networking skills'. The potential for social impact was more identified by campaigners in terms of their future career pathways, such as: 'It's also providing me with a way to get more experience with working with children and young people, which is what I want to do in the future'; or **'I feel like I have the skills that would enable me to work in the charity sector in the future'**.

> 06 Most significant personal changes

The top three impacts on young leaders in the Launch It Cohort 2 group were **Career and Life Aspirations; Improved Quality of life; and Ability to Influence and Impact on others**. These are reflected in many of the statements below, suggesting how, in the words of one example, **'the package of support on offer has been game changing and transformational from both a personal and business perspective'**.

- Able to experience what it's like as being self-employed full time.
- Being able to work for myself gives me **a chance to make as much growth as possible** by committing myself full time.
- Able to move to my own studio. This shows my business has grown and how much I have grown as person. People now take me seriously as a business owner.
- **Increased flexibility and the chance to experiment – something I think is really vital, whatever the outcome.**
- I would never have been this far on in my business journey at this stage without the Opportunity Fund. I had recently graduated and was working full-time in a job that I found extremely unfulfilling and not at all in line with my career goals. I knew I wanted to start my business but was lacking in confidence and business acumen. The Opportunity Fund has been a lifeline for me and I've felt so supported through the mentorship of my Enterprise Manager as well as the funding. **The biggest change in my life has been actually starting my business and re-orientating myself towards my true passions.** I am now moving in the right direction and I am a lot happier overall.

- Full package of support on offer has been game changing and transformational from both a personal and business perspective. **As a result of being involved in the Opportunity Fund, we have been able to develop key skills and experience which has led to incredible growth.** Peer-to-peer support has created opportunities to reflect, share and learn from other like-minded entrepreneurs. Business support accessed through a series of bootcamps provided great insight into the ways of delivering a successful business while access to a mentor has been hugely significant in making better decisions, discussing ideas, and growing new networks.

The top impact in the Peer Power cohort 2 group was in ‘General Employability Skills’ which might reflect the interest referenced above for future career pathways. The only other distinctive pattern from the Peer Power cohort 2 group feedback was that ‘Ability to Overcome Challenges’ was less recognised as an impact, reflecting the nature of challenges faced by some campaigners.

Looking across both Cohorts 1 and 2, **the most significant impact from the Opportunity Fund has been on Aspirations for career and life and Ability to Influence and Impact on others.** This reflects the general ability of the fund to free up people to experiment with and experience their life in more positive ways.



> 07 Supports received by Cohort members

- **'the support I have gained from Launch It and the meet ups in London have really helped inspire and empower me.'**
- 'it has really opened doors for me. Peer Power have also been really great to work with'.

The most useful elements of the Opportunity Fund offer identified by young leaders in the Launch It cohort 2 group was the regular monthly income, the expenditure grant, and having 18 months to experience the programme (which, while felt to be too short by some, was still recognised as longer than traditional programme offers). **The focus of the monthly income was highly appreciated – as one noted, 'Having the payments monthly has been ideal – if they had been quarterly it would have been less manageable'**. The expenditure grant was also well used by the Launch It cohort, and was typically spent on specialist equipment linked with someone's business needs. **The significant difference between Cohort 2 groups was in the appreciation of the expenditure grant, which only a third at Peer Power strongly agreed with as a useful element of the support offer.** Compared with concrete spend on business equipment, campaigners use of the grant was more varied, from awareness raising to supporting future workshop participation. **As noted in feedback with Peer Power staff, the expenditure grant feels like it should have been an optional part of the offer for campaigners rather than something cohort members may have felt they were under pressure to find a use for to be successful.**

The least helpful elements of the offer proved to be the access to therapy support (due to it not being needed by everyone), the quality of accountancy support (criticised in some feedback across both cohorts as lacking personalisation and relevance), and the programme of workshops in specialist skill areas (due to differences in need/relevance).

In other words, the offer elements associated with specialist skills and support met a variety of different needs, which meant that they were not seen as useful by all members. **80% of Cohort 2 members were happy with cohort meet ups, the quality of 1-1 support, and access to mentors, with 70% strongly agreeing that these were useful. This suggests that the balance between the financial offer and the quality of personal support in place helped ensure a good overall experience for Cohort 2 members.**

Looking across both cohort experiences, it is reassuring that the strong valuing of staff support rose from 57% to 70% by Cohort 2, demonstrating that **both Agent organisations gained increase confidence at assisting cohort members with their goals and needs.**

> 08 Challenges faced by Cohort Members

Challenges ranged from the personal to the technical, with common experiences around maintaining motivation in the face of setbacks:

- Juggling different projects, maintaining motivation and solving strategy problems.
- I over-work myself and never say no to people.
- At times I have felt overwhelmed as I had never started a business before. I have also found it **challenging mentally trying to keep myself motivated and pushing forward** when sales were slow and getting knockbacks when approaching organisations to work with.

- The biggest challenge that I have faced is ‘burn out’ from my campaign as **sometimes it felt like there was no point to my campaign as things were not going to change.**
- Personal commitments to fulfilling our caring responsibilities unfortunately got in the way with the meet up dates.
- I did not realise until it was too late how important trademarking your brand is. As a result I am now having to rebrand.

In the face of these challenges, young leaders appreciated the importance of the support offer – including peer-to-peer support – along with financial assistance and space:

- the understanding from the Launch It team helped us to cope with and overcome that challenge through their continued support. Also, access to the monthly grant has been invaluable as it has reduced financial pressure and allowed us to concentrate on growing the business.
- I felt able to talk to the rest of the cohort and my manager who encouraged me to take some time to recover instead of just trying to power through.
- it’s been so helpful having people going through their business journeys around me [at a Launch It centre] and learning from each other.
- I have been able to take some time to myself and talk to my mentor who has been amazing.
- Deciding how to best use my grant has been challenging. Peer Power staff has been supporting me with this.



> 09 Additions to strengthen the Opportunity Fund approach

Suggested additions from Cohort 2 point towards an interest in greater connections within and beyond the Opportunity Fund, though the facilitation of this was undoubtedly restricted by the pandemic as well as the added complexity of Cohort 2 members residing in and outside of London. Across both cohorts, **the potential for signposting young leaders to other organisations and people was not fully capitalised on by funders and Agents**. Cohort 2 also benefitted from less funder-led meet ups than Cohort 1.

- More webinars would be good so that campaigners and social enterprises could stay more connected.
- I have felt less of a community with the Opportunity Fund cohort – maybe something like this could be facilitated next time?
- More meet ups with the funders.
- More events online as I live outside of London and found it difficult to travel during busy periods.
- A wider network of industry specialists to meet with.
- As a creative, it would have been really nice to do a meet-up or some kind of networking with other entrepreneurs also running creative businesses.
- Some sort of buddy/mentor programme with someone who has a similar business to you and has done the Opportunity Fund previously as a mentor. The Enterprise Managers are great but **sometimes it's good to speak to someone who has been through a similar experience**.

> 10 Experience of Agent Organisations

Insights on what the Opportunity Fund required from Agents to be successful was generally consistent across both Cohorts, including the need for:

- Flexing and evolving hybrid approaches and different models of support
- Benefiting from peer supports (in cohort 2) for recruitment and group meet ups
- Helping individuals with lived experience overcome any triggers from their impact focus
- Promoting both social impact and investment as a driver for engagement
- Embedding the opportunity within a broader offer so it is not a stand-alone programme

Insights from Peer Power covered three key themes:

A) GETTING THE RECRUITMENT RIGHT IS ESSENTIAL

The ability to assess readiness is a crucial factor in recruitment for an opportunity of this nature, in terms of young people's skills, wellbeing, clarity of goals, and current activity.

- **Most young leaders at Peer Power were already engaged in work or education, which in some cases limited ongoing engagement with the Opportunity Fund or led to drop out from the cohort.**
- Some young leaders at Peer Power were not really ready for the opportunity, either because they lacked the skills for it, had too many personal challenges to contend with, or were not advanced enough in being clear about their campaign. This is reflected in their drop outs across both Cohorts (two from cohort 1, and 3 from cohort 2, with 2 of these replaced).
- As predicted in the initial research for the programme, **some young people struggled to actually see themselves as campaigners** – they could visualise their campaign end goal but were not sure if they were the right person to lead the steps required to achieve that campaign. **Help to overcome 'imposture syndrome' is another important factor for supporting the recruitment of young campaigners.**

B) SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT IS CHALLENGING

The selection of the Agent partner has proved critical to success factors from the Opportunity Fund. In Peer Power's case, while they have worked well with a cohort with greater lived experience of social issues, they have sometimes been hampered by 4 factors:

- They lacked sufficient specialist expertise to support campaign activity.
- They were unable to embed the programme within existing resource or provision in a way that did not require additional funds to make it work.
- They experienced changes in staff which limited the transfer of learning, meaning some elements, such as the programme budget, remained confusing; and changes also impacted on the consistency of support, though support did improve in quality.
- Perhaps as a consequence to the above, Peer Power struggled at times to engage with the spirit of a learning pilot – such as ensuring the timely return of participant surveys, which made it hard to follow the full experience of their cohorts.

As well as dealing with the transition from online learning to face-to-face support as the pandemic ended, the Peer Power cohorts also experienced changes in lead staff, which required additional effort from the Peer Power team to support. The main staff lead for the programme changed three times, which, while not untypical for a charity of this nature, added to the resource pressures given the Opportunity Fund's limited funding for the Agent organisation. The delivery approach required over the pandemic also proved more costly to Peer Power staff time than original budget expectations has assumed. This, coupled with the challenge at Peer Power to fully integrate and embed the Opportunity fund within its provision in the same way that Launch It achieved at the outset, meant that staff were more likely to feel they had to find time for Opportunity Fund work within other funded priorities.

A better model for Peer Power – and future organisations of a similar nature – would be to **either partner with an external campaigning organisation to provide specialist support; or increase budget for the Agent to buy in this support.**



Ensuring young people have the time, financial resource and quality support to grow from is a reasonable ask for funders to factor into future programmes, if there is a genuine commitment to young people as leaders of their own lives, and the willingness to give them a 'chance to experiment... whatever the outcome'.



C) THE APPROACH HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE WIDER ORGANISATION

Positives from Peer Power’s involvement in the Opportunity Fund included:

- Increased focus on participant wellbeing in Peer Power programmes.
- A more structured approach to programme building has been developed.
- **There is more understanding on how campaigns are deeply rooted in people’s lived experience, recognising that this needs supporting as much as the campaign, including greater attention on self-care for both participants and staff.**
- Opportunities on social media for young partners to contribute to and showcase campaigns has helped to amplify their voice and also promote Peer Power’s.
- Investment in peer leads (graduates from cohort 1) to support others, with consequently more young leaders to draw from for Peer Power’s wider work. This is significant given **the ability of Opportunity Fund graduates to help role model that others with similar lived experiences can be campaigners.**

Insights from LAUNCH IT introduced an additional 3 themes

D) THE INCREASED FOCUS ON SOCIAL IMPACT AND ONLINE DELIVERY IS BENEFICIAL

- The greater push to focus on social outcomes has given some young leaders a different focus to their business, which proved effective. It has been embraced as source of inspiration and purpose. Indeed, **the majority of the Cohort 2 group achieved social impact on injustices they directly experienced in their lives, including homelessness, exclusion, mental health and wellbeing.** A number have been moved to set up their business as a Community Interest Company as a result.
- Learning from the experience above, **Launch It have now put a social impact clause into their lease agreements with all businesses renting space in their office centres.** As their CEO notes, ‘A social impact clause is something we now feel confident that we can manage’. This is a significant value-added impact from the programme.

- Due to the need to provide both cohorts greater online support over the pandemic, Launch It gained the confidence to shape a hybrid delivery model. This helped them successfully secure a major Community Renewal Fund programme with Enterprise Nation in London which is already being replicated in Birmingham.

E) FULLY EMBEDDING THE OPPORTUNITY FUND, WITH GREATER TIME & POWER TO DELIVER IT, STRENGTHENED THE QUALITY OF ITS EXPERIENCE

- Recruitment of the Cohort 2 group extended outside of London to other Launch It delivery areas in Dundee and Paisley, generating an impressive 450 expressions of interest. **Increased time to promote the programme beyond London demonstrated that there is genuine potential to reach more young people.**
- Launch It felt more in control of recruitment for Cohort 2, and consequently believed that those selected were more committed in terms of the demands of generating a viable business.
- Running a bootcamp for selected cohort members straight away proved a better approach to secure higher engagement levels at the outset than in Cohort 1. Support was set up for regular 1-1 meet ups every two weeks up to at least once a month, pending on needs.
- Launch It was able to accommodate this intensity by sharing the second cohort across 3 different staff members rather than just the single source of support offered for cohort 1. **The quality of 1-1 support, and benefit from mutual support between staff and peers, was vital to success. This was achievable because Launch It purposely integrated the Opportunity Fund within its existing offer**, enabling both cohorts to be included in their wider offer of business space, mentoring and development opportunities.

F) PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT REQUIRES CAREFUL BALANCE

- Launch It felt that they sometimes put too much pressure on getting feedback from cohort members, and recognised that people shouldn't be expected to keep offering feedback when they are actually trying to run their own business. However, the Launch It cohorts were far more willing to share feedback than those at Peer Power.
- Group meet ups were hard for those who were working as young carers, which put unfair pressure on them. **Some young people wanted more meet up opportunities and workshops, but others did not have the time for that, making it hard to keep the offer equitable across a cohort.**
- The Launch It and Peer Power cohorts did not really gel as a collective as they never found a common ground for training on experiences that resonated for both. Differences between the two cohorts were never balanced through a common theme such as exploring resilience in the face of set-backs.
- Launch It are actively engaged in considering how the Opportunity Fund approach could be managed for a larger group of young people, likely to require changes to the length of time offered for support, the amount available to invest in a person, or the ability to bespoke the programme offer around different personal needs, in order for increased numbers to be affordable. **The programme approach requires careful management to identify the optimum levels of investment to generate progression for different individuals.** Deeper analysis of this topic could explore whether some cohort members needed the full offer made available to them to reach a positive impact, and thus how this may be modelled differently through a smaller funding pot.
- Launch It recognised that their normal support agreement, which they flexed constantly around individual's changing circumstances, would be more effective if it was co-produced with young people at the outset, shaped around how they wished to be held accountable for their goals and engagement levels. This insight reflects how **Launch It have constantly sought to find the right balance to give young people greater autonomy over their decisions and actions, in line with the programme's intentions to share power.**

> 11 Insights on and from the Funders

Despite the genuine efforts made to tackle power relationships and create space for delivery partners and young leaders to experience greater agency, **intentions have not proved sufficient alone to remove the power dynamic of ‘The Funder v The Funded’.**

Appreciation was acknowledged for the efforts of both funders to offer a hands-off approach built on trust rather than compliance; but equally there were moments when it felt discernible that the power to influence and make decisions was still held by the Funders – from discussions over the size of the second cohort recruitment and reallocation of budget, to action on report recommendations and final wrap up of the programme. **It was symbolic that one of the first cohort flagged ‘[The opportunity Fund] can feel overwhelming that you have to be successful’ – partly due to the residual fear that the ‘no strings attached’ approach of the funders to outcomes was too good to be true.** Overcoming preconceptions about expectations required more purposeful, ongoing communications.

Both funders recognise that to tackle power relationships more effectively the programme should have invested in greater time at the outset to build trust, learn from each other, understand roles and responsibilities, establish mechanisms to counteract traditional power dynamics, co-produce more of the programme detail, and communicate with greater purpose that the embrace of personal outcomes was genuine. This includes not just more time between the funders, agents and learning partner as a collective group, but more time between the funders themselves to acknowledge and overcome the cultural differences in approach to grant management which produced some tensions over the programme.

The aspiration to change power dynamics on its own was not enough; there had to be more compensations built into the project management timescale to engage with the reality of power dynamics that are deeply felt and remain ingrained in interactions.

> 12 **Recommending the Opportunity Fund to others**

The Opportunity Fund achieved an impressive collective Net Promoter score of 77% from Cohort 2, registering a 6% increase from Cohort 1. This demonstrates that the overall programme experience was deemed to be excellent, and improved over time.

Comments addressed to the funders from Cohort 2 members included:

- Thank you for giving me the time and space to innovate and learn.
- Opportunities like this allow young entrepreneurs to develop so many important skills and knowledge to drive your business forward, **our comment is to keep offering these opportunities as they make a HUGE difference.**
- Thank you for giving me **the chance to incite positive systematic change for others.**
- This fund should be available for others in the future.



> 13 Concluding Comments

While the Opportunity Fund has encountered some limitations in its approach, exacerbated in part from the pandemic and the attempt to work across two different groups of young leaders which proved not entirely compatible, **the impact generated has been positively felt by the majority of those who benefited from the programme.** This is particularly true of the young leaders in the Launch It cohorts engaged in social businesses, for whom the focus of the fund has evidenced the best match; although young campaigners also experienced important impacts in their ability to achieve, influence and progress. In the spirit of the Fund's openness to learning, **it is worthy of note that both Agent organisations and Funders have taken inspiration from the programme into their wider work.**

The main positives from the programme include:

- 100% gained increased aspirations for their life and work.
- 82% felt able to influence and impact on others.
- A 74% Net Promoter Score overall.
- Learnings from the Opportunity Fund improved practice across all organisations.

The Opportunity Fund may not have proved itself as a discrete entity to be refunded, but its broad aims and offer elements can be judged to be replicable. **Ensuring young people have the time, financial resource and quality support to grow from is a reasonable ask for funders to factor into future programmes, if there is a genuine commitment to young people as leaders of their own lives, and the willingness to give them a 'chance to experiment... whatever the outcome'.** As a staff member at Peer Power states, 'The programme has changed cohort individuals – and some will go on to create systems change in the future'.

Some of the learning and expertise developed over the Opportunity Fund should be promoted more widely, particularly the use of direct grants for young people, and the delivery model at Launch It where the conditions to experiment and scale further looks secure. Communications on both these elements could be disseminated over 2023, whether in the form of blogs, a learning workshop, or other forms of sharing.

There are various wider opportunities to connect learning: from Covi's work with Power to Change on 'Young People's Social Impact Journeys', to the 'Vision for the Future of Youth-Led Changemaking and Activism' produced as a legacy from the Act for Change fund.

A limitation of the Opportunity Fund has been the lack of action taken to track impact on young leaders after leaving the programme (recommended in the 2021 report), which could produce powerful stories and learning points as well as emphasise the care expressed for personal outcomes likely to take longer to fully emerge than the end of funding allows for. This would address feedback from both funders that they felt less sure of 'the stories' from the programme. If some young leaders do go on to create future systems change, it would be a shame not to have made any effort to learn from that.

Further investment to track stories, support Launch It's replication plans, and ongoing work at Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Blagrave Trust to advance future investments in young people, will help add to the impacts achieved to evidence that the Opportunity Fund was a venture worth undertaking as a 'chance to experiment'.

If you want more information or would like to discuss any of the insights or programme learning further please contact:

info@phf.org.uk or grants@blagravetrust.org

21 November 2022