

The Young People in Policymaking Fund

Learning from Year One
2022-2023

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1. Introduction

In spring 2022, Blgrave Trust launched the Young People in Policymaking fund, offering multi-year grants for charities and non-profit organisations in England that are supporting young people (aged 16-25) with experience of social injustice to be heard in policymaking processes. The fund was designed to take a deliberately broad definition of 'policy', encompassing the introduction and implementation of new legislation, government guidance and position papers, consultation processes, and funding decisions at both a national and local government level.

“We want to fund projects, campaigns and organisations that help young people influence policy that affects them, and so redress power imbalances in policymaking. We hope to fund work that builds accessible and inclusive structures for ensuring young people’s voices are heard and acted upon.” – Blgrave Trust

Learning is an important part of the Fund, and Common Futures was appointed as learning partner in summer 2022 to host a process of reflection and learning between the funded organisations, that would also generate shareable insights for other youth organisations, funders, and policy organisations.

When tendering for the learning partner role, Blgrave Trust outlined a number of learning questions for the programme.

1. What are partners doing (what models for creating change, what policy issues in focus, what policy outcomes being pursued)?
2. What are they learning about how young people can have policy impact, and what changes are they making to their work as a result?
3. How are young people being supported to influence?
4. How does this support affect their experiences of being involved in policymaking processes?
5. How useful is the funding: what level and type of funding is needed to support this work; how can we maximise the impact of our resources in years to come.

This report summarises insights from Year One, informed by the following learning activities carried out over the course of the year with the ten funded organisations:

- An **online introductory meeting** to introduce partners to each other and outline the learning aims for the programme.
- At least one **1-2-1 semi-structured interview** with each of the ten grantees, to understand project implementation and impact plans and updates, as well as the learning needs and preferences of each project.
- Three **in-person learning meetings** involving between one and three representatives from each partner organisation. In most cases this involved a representative responsible for general delivery of the project and in some cases also someone in a strategic leadership role at the organisation.
- At each cohort meeting, at least two hours were set aside for **action learning sets** to explore and share practice-based, policy, or personal challenges amongst the cohort. Action learning brings together small groups of participants to work together on individual problems, working together with a balance of support and challenge that enables each person to manage themselves and others more effectively. Participants were encouraged to try applying their new knowledge and insights in practice.
- We also conducting regular **online monitoring** of each partner organisation’s work, which included reading newsletters, social media feeds, and scanning their websites for updates about the project on a monthly basis.

Over the course of the year we have sought to gain an individual understanding of each project in order to compare and contrast different models and approaches on a collective basis. We have also gathered collective learnings and observations about the cohort as a whole. These learning insights are set out in subsequent chapters.

2. Types of project

Partners were selected for funding by Blagrave Trust on the basis of having a strong model for change and potential for impact on policy. These models vary in practice. The ten funded organisations can broadly be split into three categories:

Place-based 'youth work' organisations, aiming to support the young people they work with to strategically influence policy.

A number of the partners have long standing track records of providing direct support, social action pathways, and leadership development training for local young people. These include **Mancroft Advice Project** which provides advice, counselling, and social activities for young people in Norwich and Norfolk; **The Warren**, which provides creative activities, counselling, and employability skills and training for young people in Hull; and **RECLAIM** in Manchester, which works with young working class people through a range of leadership development initiatives and youth work programmes. **Leicestershire Cares**, although not a youth work organisation, delivers local employability and advice support for young people in Leicester.

These organisations have embedded Youth Voice practices and a history of supporting young people to formulate campaigns and get involved with activism around issues they care about. The funding is enabling them to take this work to the next level by focusing on how to effect policy change on specific issues, beyond raising awareness or campaigning more broadly for change. For example, **The Warren's** internal youth parliament had previously identified that suicides on bridges was an important local issue. It has therefore been engaging directly with Highways England on specific ways to instate preventative measures, such as suicide prevention training for architects and structural engineers.

Issues-led campaigning organisations, seeking to build the policy-influencing capacity and understanding of young people in their networks.

Some of the partners have defined campaigning and advocacy objectives which underpin their organisational mission. For example, **We Belong** is a youth-led organisation that campaigns for reform within the UK's immigration system on behalf of young migrants from Commonwealth countries; **4Front** is a youth-led movement challenging racial injustice, inequality, and systemic violence in the context of criminalisation, policing and prisons.

These organisations are using funding to mobilise and engage more young people at a grassroots level to create change both in their own lives and at a policy level. This includes through education and skills development, and by building alliances with other organisations or structures. For example, **4Front** has been delivering educational activities on issues such as joint enterprise, the gang matrix, gentrification, and the war on drugs, supporting young people to reflect on their own experiences in this context, and to join up these grassroots insights with strategic litigation designed to set legal precedents for change.

National service delivery and policy organisations, aiming to embed youth voice in their policy work.

A number of partners operate at a national level, providing services or leading direct policy work. These include **Become**, a national charity delivering advice, support, and coaching for children in care and young care leavers; **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation** which supports families and carers of people with severe learning disabilities; **POMOC** (Polish Migrants Organise for Change) which works to amplify the representation of Polish and Eastern European migrants in local and national democratic systems and processes; and **The Centre for Education and Youth** which conducts research, analysis, and policy work on issues relating to youth and education.

These organisations have a strong track record of policy influencing but this work has largely been initiated and led in the past by adult staff members. For many of these organisations, becoming more 'porous' and inclusive of the views and lived experiences of young people is a key objective. In practice this works in different ways - **The Centre for Education** and Youth's project has trained young people with experience of marginalisation to conduct peer research on how public and community services can be improved; **POMOC** has employed young people as community organisers in three locations; and **Become** has devised a campaign based on previous insights from young service users and is engaging with young people to deliver it.

3. Models for policy influence

The models for policy influence vary across the cohort, with organisations using one or more of these techniques for influence and impact:

Identifying existing policy structures and levers to embed young people's priorities

Many of the partners have started with an issue that has been identified by the young people they are working with, based on lived experiences. The organisation then seeks to find routes to influence on these issues that move beyond 'agenda setting' or raising awareness. **POMOC**, for example, has employed a young community organiser in Cambridge who, in consultation with other local young migrants, has decided to focus on housing and renting policy. The new Cambridge City Council Renters' Forum has been identified as a specific vehicle in which young migrants' perspectives can be acted on. **The Warren** took the issue of suicide on bridges raised by young people and has built a relationship with Highways England to look at preventative measures can be rolled out; it has also listened to young people's experiences of being failed by the education system and has translated this into the policy ask that every school in Hull recruit at least one Governor who identifies as having been failed by education. **4Front** engages in strategic litigation on behalf of some of the young people from the community – some of the cases originate from storytelling work or support clinics with young people, with an internal referral process for young people who want support to make a civil claim.

Brokering direct relationships between young people and policymakers

Direct relationships with policymakers are also an important route to policy influence. Some of the partners already hold relationships with policymakers and others have been undertaking specific outreach to build new relationships

based on young people's priorities. For example, **The Centre for Education and Youth** started with an open recruitment call to young people who self-identify as having experienced marginalisation on a range of issues, including experiences of care, mental health, adoption, homelessness, and the criminal justice system. While the young people conduct further research on these issues, CFEY has been conducting personal outreach to policymakers working in the areas which young people have identified. The young people and policymakers will be 'buddied' with a view to learning from each other and working together to develop ideas for local policy formulation and decision making. **The Warren** has been working to build relationships with individuals within Humberside Police Service so there are open channels of communication for young people to raise issues around sexual violence, stop-and-search, and mental health.

Ensuring accountability in the policy implementation process

Some of the partners are working in the context of time-specific policy windows and opportunities for change. Again, this goes beyond lobbying for change in line with a specific government consultation or policy window. Holding policymakers accountable and mobilising grassroots support to do so is a key focus. For example, **We Belong's** previous work helped influence new legislation in April 2022 reducing the 'route to settlement' process for young migrants who are fully integrated in the UK, from ten to five years. It is now focusing on ensuring these changes are widely understood and young migrants are aware of their rights and entitlements, working with service providers, migrant organisations, local authorities, community groups. **Become's** work centres on the influencing the implementation of the MacAlister Care Review, and holding national and local government to account in translating policy and legislative changes into better practice. The grant from Blagrove Trust has funded a new Campaigns Manager role who is supporting young people to engage with a new campaign, #GoneTooFar, which centres on the process around 'out of area' placements. The campaign calls for the Government to commit to stop children in care from being moved from the community, people, and places that matter to them, and to develop and publish national and local strategies to increase the supply of appropriate local placement options.

4. Working with young people and supporting them to have influence

Across the cohort there is a rich mix of the ways in which young people are engaged and supported on an individual and collective basis, and how the policy work sits alongside other support and capacity building.

A mix of collective and individual policy issues

In some cases, young people are supported to develop collective policy issues and priorities as a group. **RECLAIM**, for example, is working with two groups of young people in Leigh and Bolton, engaging them in weekly sessions to explore five key issues they would like to discuss in more detail. Each group subsequently chose one area that they to focus their policy work around.

In other projects, young people are engaged on an individual basis (as part of a cohort). **The Centre for Education and Youth** has trained 10 young people in East Sussex to formulate an individual research question and design the research tools they'll be using to investigate these. The research questions include access to transport for disabled young people, support available to young carers, the assessment and support for neurodivergent conditions, trans inclusivity, transitioning from youth to adult care, and young adopted people and the legal system.

There is a key role here for adult representatives with knowledge of different institutional practices and levers who are helping to 'translate' young people's priorities into clear and tangible policy aims and asks.

There is also a role for 'joining the dots' between the needs and priorities of different individuals and what this means for 'the system' as a whole. **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation**, working with young people with severe or profound and multiple learning disabilities, has been focusing on understanding

the specific learning and communication needs of young people in their existing educational or care settings. Over time, the project aims to create a multimedia manifesto evidencing through photo and film the things that are important to the young people taking part. This will be used to influence policy and share good practice on issues such as inclusive education, SEND reforms, and the transition to adult services.

Policy influencing as part of a holistic support approach

All of the partners have existing connections with young people experiencing social injustice or marginalisation, who are least likely to be heard in youth voice projects or conventional policy processes. However, centring on lived experience of injustice may mean that young people have suffered traumatic experiences which they do not want to publicly speak about for advocacy or awareness raising purposes, and therefore creating a safe and supportive environment also includes providing direct support and building resilience in a trauma-informed way.

For example, **4Front** provides therapeutic spaces to support the emotional needs of young people who have experienced violence or harm – for example from strip searches. Many of these young people may not want to engage in campaigning work or ‘go on the record’ about their experiences and there is a careful approach to helping them understand that if they wanted to, there are opportunities to contribute to larger changemaking activities. **Leicestershire Cares** has recruited five young service users to conduct peer research with other care-experienced young people on topics such as guardianship, support for care experienced young parents, and the quality of accommodation for young people in or leaving care. Alongside ensuring that young people can opt-in or opt-out of difficult conversations, it has processes in place whereby young people can also draw on support services or have 1-2-1 conversations if needed.

Providing ongoing support and resources is also important to help young people stay motivated, especially when policy change is a long process. Other activities like mentorship, coaching, and peer support groups,

Highly tailored engagement and communication

Effectively engaging with young people with lived experiences of injustice and marginalisation means recognising extra barriers and being adaptive in the engagement and communication styles deployed. Many of the partners have adopted highly tailored methods to engage them on their own terms. **The Challenging Behaviour Foundation** has spent six months understanding the different communication styles of non-verbal young people, through observations and engagement with caregivers. **RECLAIM** has used imagination practice to explore different policy issues with its groups of working class young people in Leigh and Bolton. Alongside its peer research training, **Leicestershire Cares** also delivered a series of creative sessions supporting young people to create a podcast as a way of exploring and articulating perspectives.

Employing young people to coordinate and coproduce activities

Some of the partners have employed young people as staff members or contractors to lead or coproduce the project. In these situations, the young people are not replacing adult professionals, but are being supported to develop their own skills, capacity and policy knowledge whilst mobilising their peers. For example, **Mancroft Advice Project** has employed young activists to coordinate activities with other young people in its Youth Activist Network. **POMOC** has used funding to employ three, part-time youth coordinators in different locations, alongside an experienced adult coordinator working one day per week. These young people have been tasked with researching the views of young migrants locally and organising engagement activities, as well as building relationships with local policymakers.

5. Common challenges and solutions

Through the 1-2-1 interviews and action learning sets¹ held over the course of the year, we have heard about a number of common challenges and issues faced by the partners in implementing and delivering their projects.

A unique blend of staffing skill sets

Each project is bridging youth engagement and policy influence and these are areas which require quite distinct skill sets. Existing staff and/or new hires aren't always ready-skilled to undertake both sides of this remit. In some cases, this has led to delays in recruiting the project lead as it is rare for people to have experience both of policy process and direct youth engagement. Some partners have a long-standing track record of youth work, but may have experienced a lack of internal policy expertise or confidence - the convention in many youth sector organisations is that policy influencing is a CEO-level remit. It is clear from our observations and conversations that the influencing approach taken by each project is highly dependent on the background of people on the team.

Reaching and retaining young people

The majority of partners were selected for funding by Blagrove Trust on the basis of holding strong existing relationships with young people, through existing youth voice groups or as service users. However, some have been setting up new projects which draw on their networks, but which require recruiting or assembling a new cohort of young people. Reaching young people who would benefit most from engagement has been raised as a challenge for some organisations - finding young people who haven't engaged before and those who have most to gain from participating in policy work. Recruiting young people with relevant experience and interests has led to time slippage for some projects.

Young people often have transient living, working, or educational circumstances which means they may not be able to engage in the full cycle of a project.

The importance of personal relationships with policymakers

Brokering or strengthening relationships with policymakers is an important component of many of the projects. Having both informal connections and a formal 'mandate' from decision-makers is seen as fundamental routes to impact. However, it also means that the success of projects is heavily reliant on specific individuals outside of the organisation and institutional churn can be a challenge and lead to setbacks as the relationship-building process has to start again if a contact person moves on. The nature of relationship-building work can also feel extractive - one partner likened their work to 'free consultancy' for a local institution who should be engaging more proactively and productively with young people as a matter of accountability.

Managing expectations and maintaining momentum amongst young people

A number of partners have emphasised the importance of managing young people's expectations about the change that can be achieved. Young people may find it hard to stay engaged when policy change happens in a multi-year cycle, and this may also affect their confidence to participate. Articulating bite-size achievements and celebrating 'quick wins' is important. This means breaking down policy goals into small, achievable steps that young people can work towards. By providing opportunities for young people to achieve and celebrate 'small' wins, they can feel a sense of accomplishment and stay motivated to continue the work. Integrating policy work with other support, capacity and leadership initiatives is also important to keeping young people engaged.

¹ The action learning sets are private, however after each set we have held short reflective sessions for each group to feedback on shared challenges.

Determining the roles and responsibilities of paid young people

Employing young people as paid staff has been a new model for some of the partners, who have previously engaged with young people as volunteers or participants. This changes the nature of the relationship and can mean different expectations of those young people in a way that can be difficult to navigate. The intention to pay young people is related to a number of objectives, including recognising and compensating the value of their input, addressing financial inequality and barriers to participation, and creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for young people to engage in policymaking. In practice, when young people are 'tasked' with a coordinating role, it can be difficult to navigate how much support or accountability is needed from 'adult' staff members.

6. Funding, resources, and the role of the funder

This final section contains reflections about how organisations are using the funding from the Blagrave Trust and what funder-led support or resources they have articulated as useful or required.

How partners are using the funding

Across the cohort, there is a fairly equal mix of organisations who have used Blagrave Trust funding to:

- **Establish new projects**, off the back of their past track record. These projects often have been focusing on recruitment of project coordinators and young participants, and/ or co-designing particular policy areas to focus on.
- **Extend previous work**, in order to continue to influence on a specific agenda or issue. These projects have existing relationships and delivery models in place and have been focusing on amplifying and expanding the remit or reach of existing projects, often by ensuring effective implementation or accountability of previous policy successes.

In the learning conversations, participants have been very positive about the flexible funding approach from Blagrave Trust. A few projects have experienced setbacks in recruitment of appropriately skilled staff to lead the project, and in recruiting and mobilising young participants – in these situations, a patient approach from the funder has been appreciated.

The learning programme

In terms of the learning programme itself, we have solicited and received feedback during or after each cohort meeting as well as via 1-2-1 conversations. The most pertinent insights are:

- **Action learning sets** have been very well-received and are especially valued by those who are piloting new approaches that blend youth engagement and policy influencing components. For individuals with strong experience in one but not both of these areas, learning about approaches taken by other organisations is genuinely useful and informative.
- **Meeting frequency and format** - Holding three in-person over the course of the year has generally been well-received and not too burdensome on capacity. The majority of participants have that meeting in-person is a positive experience as having time out of the office to reflect and take a step back on the day-to-day work is valued.
- **Catering for different levels of seniority and experience** has been a challenge, especially given the difference between projects 'in formation' and projects which are a natural extension of previous or core work. Staffing churn or redeployed responsibilities in some organisations has meant that there hasn't always been a consistency of individuals in the cohort and discussions must be inclusive for new participants, risking a degree of repetition for established members of the cohort.
- **Learning vs. Alliance building** – A couple of organisations have questioned whether funder-led support should be more tailored to their day-to-day work and specific policy agendas, as opposed to sharing general learnings about involving young people in policy. This may be especially true of organisations who have been funded to extend core work or existing campaigns with young people. Some issues-led organisations have suggested alliance-building around issues would benefit their work.

Annex A

About the funded organisations and their work

4 Front

4Front is a member-led youth organisation that supports young people who have experienced trauma, violence and racial injustice to create change in their own lives. 4Front provides direct support to young people through 1:1 casework, group workshops to build a sense of collective identity, healing and resilience, training opportunities to build members' skills and confidence to take action in their communities, and anti-oppression and liberation education that aims to build pride in cultural identity. Alongside this direct engagement with young people, 4Front campaigns to expose structural injustice at a national level and partners with others on strategic litigation work.

Funding from Blagrave Trust is being used to codify and scale this work helping young people to understand issues relating to joint enterprise, the gang matrix, gentrification, and the war on drugs, to 'own' their stories, and to join up these grassroots insights with strategic litigation designed to set legal precedents for change.

“Our legal empowerment work redresses the power imbalance that causes most 4Front members’ experiences of violence: racism in the criminal legal system. Our members also face struggles in other settings, including school, housing and social services. Our influencing work [is about] documenting young people’s experiences, uplifting those young people to take charge of their own stories, and supporting them to use these stories as a springboard to influence the public, policymaking and to launch legal challenges.”

<https://www.4frontproject.org/our-work>

Become

Become is a national charity for children in care and young care leavers. It delivers a care advice service, tailored 1:1 support and coaching for care-experienced young people, group workshops and drop-in sessions. Become's work includes shaping better policy for children in care and care leavers work through research reports on key policy issues, consultation responses, and campaigns. It is the secretariat for the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

Become's policy work in Year One centres on the influencing the implementation of the MacAlister Care Review, and holding national and local government to account in translating policy and legislative changes into better practice. The grant from Blagrave Trust has funded a new Campaigns Manager role who is supporting young people to engage with a new campaign, #GoneTooFar, which centres on the process around 'out of area' placements. The campaign calls for the Government to commit to stop children in care from being moved from the community, people, and places that matter to them, and to develop and publish national and local strategies to increase the supply of appropriate local placement options. Become has been recruiting young people to be part of the campaigning group and choose which tactics they would like to use in their area.

“This is a national issue facing local authorities across the country, yet despite recent proposals to improve the care system, there's still no national commitment or strategy to keep children close to the people and places that matter to them when it is in their best interest. Our new campaign #GoneTooFar seeks to keep children in care close to the people and places that matter to them – ensuring they have the love, stability, and security we all need to thrive.”

<https://becomecharity.org.uk/become-the-movement/our-campaigns/gone-too-far>

Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY)

The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) is a 'think and action tank' conducting research, analysis, and policy work on the youth and education sectors. It works with a range of partners to help organisations understand and grow their impact on children and young people, to co-design and deliver support and training for young people and adults who support them, and to communicate key issues faced by the education and youth sectors.

CfEY's **Young Experts Citizens** project has been funded by Blagrave Trust to pilot in East Sussex, alongside a concurrent pilot in Buckinghamshire. In Year One, the project has recruited and trained a cohort of young people to design and develop a peer research study on issues which link to their lived experience of marginalisation – these include experiences of care, mental health, adoption, homelessness, and the criminal justice system. In East Sussex, 10 young people have taken part in training sessions to formulate their research questions and design the research tools they'll be using to investigate these. The research questions include access to transport for disabled young people, support available to young carers, the assessment and support for neurodivergent conditions, trans inclusivity, transitioning from youth to adult care, and young adopted people and the legal system.

Following their research, young people will be 'buddied' with local policymakers in roles that link to their research topics, with a view to learning from each other and working together to develop mechanisms to integrate the insights from the Young Experts in local policy formulation and decision making.

<https://cfey.org/>

Leicestershire Cares (in partnership with the Learning and Work Institute)

Leicestershire Cares is a non-profit organisation which brokers partnerships between businesses, schools, local government and community groups in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. It works to enable the business sector to understand community needs, contribute to the growth of inclusive, safe communities and to support and inspire children and young people in their transition to the workplace. Its leaving care projects engage with care experienced young people to make successful transitions into independent living and education, employment and training.

The grant from Blagrave Trust is being used to work directly with care-experienced young people to shape the policy and campaigning work of the organisation. In Year One, Leicestershire Cares has recruited five young service users to take part in a 10-week peer research and learning programme. The programme comprises 5 bi-weekly sessions delivered by the Learning and Work Institute which support the cohort to create a campaign informed by peer research with other care-experienced young people on topics such as guardianship, support for care experienced young parents, and the quality of accommodation for young people in or leaving care. Additionally, 5 creative sessions delivered by Leicestershire Cares have supported the young people to create a podcast on the topic 'care experience as a protected characteristic'. Alongside direct work with the young people, Leicestershire Cares have been building relationships with local policy organisations and others working with children in care to explore how they can build partnerships and alliances to influence policy more broadly.

<https://www.leicestershirecares.co.uk/get-help/individuals/joining-joining/>

Mancroft Advice Project (MAP)

Mancroft Advice Project (MAP) provides information, support, advice, counselling and support for young people in Norwich and Norfolk. They do this through partnerships with schools, offering training and support to professionals, working with mental health services and promoting youth voices. MAP's Young Activist Network is a group of young activists aged 14-25 who live in Norwich and Norfolk who collaborate on local and national campaigning issues. Funding from Blagrave Trust is being used to employ young coordinators to convene different groups of young people to design campaigns based on their own experiences and circumstances.

<https://www.map.uk.net/here-you/activities-groups/young-activist-network>

Polish Migrants Organise for Change (POMOC)

Polish Migrants Organise for Change (POMOC) is a grassroots nonprofit that adopts creative collaboration and actionable solidarity between Polish women living in the UK and other migrant communities. They provide direct advice to Polish, Romanian, and Roma communities in the UK on immigration and settlement issues, support access to welfare, housing and health care services, and run political education and civic engagement projects to encourage democratic participation amongst Polish and Eastern European groups.

POMOC seeks to support structures in which young migrants can engage with policy issues affecting their lives, including regarding access to health, welfare and housing. The grant from Blagrave Trust has funded the recruitment of young project coordinators in three areas: Cambridge, Birmingham and Liverpool. These young coordinators have been mobilising other young people in their areas and defining a policy focus informed by their perspectives and priorities. In Cambridge, young migrants are being encouraged to participate in discussions to feed into the new Cambridge City Council Renters' Forum. In Birmingham the topical focus is environmental policy, and in Liverpool a general focus on housing including renting.

<https://www.pomoc.org.uk/about>

“Migrants are rarely included in policy discussions, even ones that impact their lives and sense of belonging in the UK. Young migrants are even less visible, exacerbating feelings of powerlessness and leading to withdrawal from civic and democratic participation. Too often, approaches to consultation remain tokenistic, rather than being rooted in community organising and pathways of communication between the local authorities and young people. We cannot achieve an ‘evidence-based’ immigration policy without embedding young migrant voices in policy making.”

RECLAIM

RECLAIM is a Manchester-based youth leadership and social change charity, using its experience and platform to support and amplify the voices of young working class people. RECLAIM works directly with young people, offering a range of leadership development initiatives and youth work programmes.

Over a number of years, RECLAIM has worked with young people in Leigh and Bolton to design campaigns around their social and economic priorities. Year One of the Blagrave Trust funding has gone towards recruiting new cohorts of young people in these two areas and engaging them in weekly sessions. The groups have used creative and imaginative discussion methods to explore five key issues they would like to discuss in more detail, and subsequently chose one area that they to focus their policy work around. The two cohorts of young people were brought together at the end of Year One to share their learnings and next steps.

<https://www.reclaim.org.uk/programmes>

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation focuses on improving the life opportunities and qualities of life for children, young people and adults with severe learning disabilities and supporting their families. Its work includes information and support work with families and carers; developing and sharing best practice in frontline work; and strategic influencing work to drive national and local change.

Historically the Challenging Behaviour Foundation has mainly worked with families and carers. The grant from Blagrave Trust is supporting direct engagement with young people with severe or profound and multiple learning disabilities through the **What Matters to Me** project. The project is working with young people aged 16-25 years across various settings in the South East of England, including a local children’s hospice/respite care centre and a post-16 education provider, as well as with individuals within their own homes. In Year One, the focus has been on building relationships with delivery partners and young people in their settings. to understand their communication styles and learning needs. Over time, the project aims to create a multimedia manifesto evidencing through photo and film the things that are important to the young people taking part. This will be used to influence policy and share good practice on issues such as inclusive education, SEND reforms, and the transition to adult services.

“Often, the experiences, preferences and views of young people with severe or complex needs are not always obtained, as it can be viewed as ‘too difficult’ if the young person has no or very limited verbal communication. With the What Matters to Me Project, we want to be able to demonstrate that adaptable approaches can be used to obtain the experiences, preferences and views of young people who have complex communication challenges and by evidencing this work we can drive change and influence policy at a local and national level.”

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/what-we-do/projects-and-research/what-matters-to-me-project/>

The Warren

The Warren Youth Project provides free support, guidance, education, counselling, employability, skills/training, and creative activities for young people aged 14-25 in Hull. All of its activities aim to support and empower young people with the life skills to make informed choices. In 2022 The Warren became an Arts Council NPO (National Portfolio Organisation).

The Warren is using their grant from Blagrove Trust to progress their existing work with young people from their internal youth parliament on three policy areas: a) Tackling suicide prevention on bridges in the local area by engaging with Highways England on pre-emptive approaches, b) Influencing Humberside Police Service to respond appropriately to young people on such issues as sexual violence, stop-and-search, and mental health; and c) Lobbying schools in Hull to recruit at least one Governor who identifies as having been failed by education (the 'Black Holes' project). In Year One, much of this work has involved developing interpersonal relationships with senior individuals in these services so that there are open channels of communication with which young people are able to engage.

<https://www.thewarren.org/>

We Belong

We Belong is a youth-led organisation that campaigns for the rights of young migrants from Commonwealth countries, advocates for reform within the UK's immigration system, and provides advice, support and leadership training directly to young migrants aged 16–25.

Since its inception, We Belong has worked to raise awareness amongst parliamentarians, educational institutions, and within communities of the hostile immigration environment and the ways in which limited settlement status impacts further integration, job prospects, educational attainment, and access to basic services. This work helped influence new legislation from April 2022 reducing the 'route to settlement' process for young migrants who are fully integrated in the UK, from ten to five years.

We Belong estimates that there are over 332,000 children and young people in the UK with precarious status who could benefit from this policy change, is working with service providers, migrant organisations, local authorities, community groups to ensure the changes are widely understood and young migrants are aware of their rights and entitlements. In Year One, We Belong designed and launched the #OutOfTheLoop campaign, calling on the Home Office to ensure all eligible young migrants are able to secure their permanent

status in the UK. This includes calling for a fee waiver for young migrants who have grown up in the UK and can't afford the cost of applying for permanent settlement status. Activities have included a letter signed by 48 young migrants, meetings between young people from the core group and their local MPs, and a series of gatherings for young people in Manchester and London to strategise on the campaign and share stories and experiences.

<https://www.webelong.org.uk/latest/we-belong-launches-out-loop-campaign-help-young-migrants-get-their-lives>

Annex B

The learning programme and role of the learning partner

A number of funders commission learning partners to support their grantees to capture and share learning. Learning programmes are increasingly seen as alternatives to a more formal top-down monitoring or evaluation process. Sharing learning and insights in real-time, rather than at the end of the funding programme, can provide direct benefits and upskilling for the individuals leading the funded projects, and therefore contribute to successful and effective project development and implementation.

In designing the learning activities for Year One, we took an iterative, participant-led approach. Design principles which informed the learning approach included:

- Being mindful of the **time and capacity constraints** of individuals and organisations to be involved, as well as the potential power dynamics between funders and grantees that can influence engagement in learning programmes. It should be noted that participation in the learning activities is **encouraged but not a mandatory condition** of the Blagrove Trust's grant to each organisation.
- Being **responsive and iterative to the changing priorities and needs of the partners** so that the learning activities are directly useful and relevant to the participants, with practical benefits for their organisational and personal development. Partners were asked in their grant application how they would contribute/ benefit from the learning cohort and what they wanted to understand and learn from others. We tested our proposed model and learning framework during 1:1 interviews and regular feedback on discussion content and format was solicited after each learning meeting.

Common Futures conducted the following learning activities over the course of Year One:

- An **online introductory meeting** to introduce partners to each other and outline the learning aims for the programme.
- At least one **1-2-1 semi-structured interview** with each of the ten grantees, to understand project implementation and impact plans and updates, as well as the learning needs and preferences of each project.
- Three **in-person learning meetings** involving between one and three representatives from each partner organisation. In most cases this involved a representative responsible for general delivery of the project and in some cases also someone in a strategic leadership role at the organisation.
- At each cohort meeting, at least two hours were set aside for **action learning sets** to explore and share practice-based, policy, or personal challenges amongst the cohort. Action learning brings together small groups of participants to work together on individual problems, working together with a balance of support and challenge that enables each person to manage themselves and others more effectively. Participants were encouraged to try applying their new knowledge and insights in practice.
- We also conducting regular **online monitoring** of each partner organisation's work, which included reading newsletters, social media feeds, and scanning their websites for updates about the project on a monthly basis.

We hope the learning insights are useful for:

- **Sharing best practice** with organisations working with young people and supporting them to influence policy;
- **Informing policy makers** who want to learn more about how to work alongside young people and the impact/ added value this can create;
- **Providing insights for funders** (including Blagrove Trust) who are interested funding and supporting targeted interventions and structure to support young people's influence on policy and address power imbalances in the policymaking process.

About Blgrave Trust

The Blgrave Trust works to bring lasting change to the lives of young people; investing in them as powerful forces for change and acting upon their right to be heard in pursuit of a fair and just society.

Blgrave has been practising a relational and trusting approach to partnership for many years – this continues to sit at the heart of how we fund. We treat our partners – young and old, grassroots and growing, or well-established charities - as equals. We approach those relationships in a spirit of humility, collaboration and mutual learning.

About Common Futures

Common Futures is a think-and-do tank specialising in participatory research and engagement which supports and strengthens young people's role in local and national public life.

We work directly with young people to share their experiences, build dialogue and public leadership skills, and codesign policies and services which improve their lives. We also support organisations and institutions to work more effectively with young people, respond to their perspectives and priorities, and share learning with others.