

National Youth Social Action Survey 2019

Summary Report

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Ipsos MORI



#iwill

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The National Youth Social Action survey, conducted by Ipsos MORI, has run annually since 2014 to inform the #iwill campaign. The campaign aims to make meaningful social action part of everyday life for 10 to 20 year olds across the UK. This report provides the findings from the sixth wave of the survey, which consisted of 2,081 interviews with 10 to 20 year olds in their homes between October and November 2019; providing a nationally representative sample of young people across the UK.

Key findings

Young people were eager to make a difference in society; the vast majority cared about making the world a better place (88%); and believed they could make a difference (74%). This sense of agency¹ in relation to their community and the world is associated with higher levels of young people's participation in meaningful social action².

However, overall rates of participation in social action have decreased over the last five years, as have rates of meaningful social action. Participation in social action has dropped from 59% in 2015 to 53% in 2019, while participation in meaningful social action fell from 42% in 2015 to 36% in 2019. This year's findings also indicated an increase in the proportion of young people who stated there were 'few/no opportunities in my area' (19% in 2019, compared with 12% in 2018 and 4% in 2017).

Despite the gradual decrease in involvement of 10 to 20 year olds in social action since 2015³, this wave indicated an increase in the proportion of young people recognising the benefit to others (81% in 2019, compared with 75% in 2018).

Year-on-year the activity young people had most frequently participated in is 'fundraising or a sponsored event' (43% of young people in 2015-2018, 39% in 2019). The 2019 survey findings suggested an increase in campaigning/raising awareness activities: 12% of 10 to 20 year olds in 2019, compared with 8% in 2018 and 2017.

Involvement in social action was commonly embedded in existing institutions and places – schools, colleges, community – and social groups. Indeed, the most common motivating factors of participating in social action were 'If I could do it with my friends', as highlighted in previous waves of the research, followed by 'If I could do it at school, college, university or work'.

Half of young people who were involved in social action through their school or college said they were specifically asked to be involved by a teacher or member of school staff (52%). This was a noteworthy increase compared with the proportion of people who answered the same in 2018 (30%).

In 2019, the survey focused in particular on the role of the community in social action participation among young people. The findings indicated that young people who had taken part in meaningful social

¹ A series of statements relating to the positive impact a young person perceives they can make in terms of the world (Q16b), their local community, their school community and the environment (Q11) were included in the 2018 survey to understand further young people's perception of their ability to effect positive change.

² 'Meaningful social action' is defined as those who have: participated at least every few months over the last 12 months in social action, or been involved in a one-off activity lasting more than a day; and recognise that their activities had some benefit for both themselves and others.

³ Caution should be taken in interpreting differences over time as additional codes are included for respondents to select in 2016-2019 surveys.

action were more likely to feel a stronger sense of belonging in their communities and take a more active role in their community than those who didn't engage in meaningful social action.

Young people continued to demonstrate an appetite for social action; with almost half (46%) of 10 to 20 year olds classified as 'potential' participants and three in ten (29%) classified as 'committed' based on their previous and current involvement, as well as future intention to get involved. It is also worth noting that the proportion of those seemingly "indifferent" to social action marked a decrease of 9 percentage points since 2018 (from 24% in 2018 to 15% in 2019).

Learnings and recommendations

The annual National Youth Social Action survey found a consistent downward trend in young people participating in meaningful social action. This extended to those young people 'committed' to social action – from 35% in 2015⁴ to 29% in 2019 (please see Annex for the 2019 analysis of 'committed', 'potential' and 'reluctant' segments).

Nevertheless, there was an increase in the proportion of young people who stated it was important for them to try and make a difference in the world, and cared about contributing to make the world a better place. In 2019, 86% stated the former (compared with 83% in 2018), and almost nine in ten (88%) of young people the latter (compared with 82% in 2018).

This year's data also showed a decline in the amount of young people who did not participate because they were 'not interested' (24% in 2019, in comparison with 31% in 2018). However, this year's findings also indicated a significant increase in the proportion of young people who stated there are 'few/no opportunities in my area' (19% in 2019, compared with 12% in 2018 and 4% in 2017). This could indicate that despite there being more of an interest in participating, young people are not finding the opportunities to do so.

With regard to finding and engaging in social action, young people from rural areas were more likely to take part in meaningful social action than those living in urban areas (45% and 32% respectively). This was a reversal of the trend with regard to the urban / rural divide, as the 2014 survey found that "*younger groups, girls, those living in urban areas, young people from the most affluent families, and young people who state a religious affiliation all have higher rates of participation.*"⁵ It is important to take into consideration differences in participation by area/region when identifying areas for tailored communications and strategy on youth social action.

In 2019, younger girls (those aged 10-15) were still most engaged, had the strongest sense of agency and thought they could have a positive impact in the community. Indeed, young people who had taken part in meaningful social action were more likely to feel they could exercise their agency in relation to their community than any other group. Therefore, further research could be conducted to explore the link between young people's sense of agency in relation to their community and their engagement in meaningful social action.

⁴ <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/publication/6400-03/sri-youth-social-action-in-uk-2015.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/publication/1970-01/sri-ecf-youth-social-action-in-the-uk-2014.pdf>

Introduction

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Introduction

This report draws together the findings from the sixth wave of the National Youth Social Action survey, which was conducted across the UK by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the #iwill campaign and funded by the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

The National Youth Social Action survey was established in 2014 to understand the trends in young people's participation in social action across the UK. The survey plays a key role in informing the work of the #iwill partner organisations from across all sectors, which is geared towards achieving the collective goals of the #iwill campaign. To date, six waves of the survey have been conducted, with the most recent wave taking place between October and November 2019.

For the purposes of the campaign, social action covers a wide range of activities that help other people or the environment, such as fundraising, campaigning (excluding party political campaigning), tutoring/mentoring, and giving time to charity.

Background and objectives

The #iwill campaign, comprising over 1,000 organisations from across the UK, aims to make participation in social action the norm for young people aged 10 to 20. The campaign was launched in November 2013 under the patronage of HRH The Prince of Wales with cross-party support.

As well as raising participation levels for all young people, the #iwill campaign aims to increase the quality of opportunities available and close the socio-economic gap in participation. The National Youth Social Action Survey maps the landscape of youth social action across the UK and supports strategy development by providing evidence on the enablers and potential barriers to taking part.

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a nationally representative sample of 2,081 10 to 20 year olds, interviewed across the UK from 29 October to 18 November 2019⁶. Any differences reported are statistically significant (at the 95% confidence level)⁷, unless otherwise stated.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in respondents' homes by trained interviewers, who introduced the survey, gained parental consent for under-16s to participate, and administered the survey. A random location quota design was used in order to achieve a nationally representative sample. The survey took sampling points across the UK, with quotas set in each region to ensure regionally and nationally representative samples. Boost sampling was used to achieve a minimum number of interviews in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Data were weighted by age within gender, region, and the family socio-economic status. The weights were derived from 2011 census information from the Office for National Statistics. The effect of weighting is shown in the sample profile in the data tables.

⁶ Fieldwork for the first four waves of the survey was carried slightly earlier in September of each year.

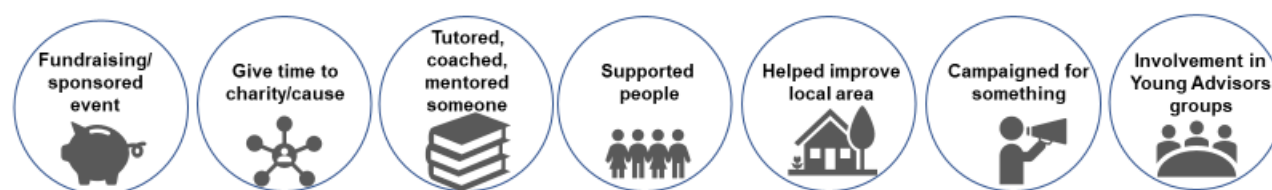
⁷ Refer to the Technical Report (supplied under a separate cover) for more explanation about the statistical reliability of the survey findings.

The Youth Social Action 2019 survey team cognitively tested several new⁸ and amended questions⁹, on topic areas such as participation in the local community. The aim of the cognitive testing was to test how respondents interpreted and understood the new questions and to ensure key terminology and concepts were well understood.

Defining Social Action

Throughout this report reference is made to young people who take part in social action. To identify those participating in social action, respondents were asked to indicate which of the following activities they had done in the past 12 months to help other people or the environment:

Figure 1.1: Social action activities¹⁰



Young people were also asked if they had donated money or goods within the past 12 months. Although this activity was not classified as social action under the #iwill definition, it was included to ensure that respondents did not miscode donations under other categories, such as fundraising. These responses are not categorised as social action in the report.

A key measure referenced in this report is 'meaningful social action'¹¹, which is based on the #iwill campaign's definition of 'meaningful social action' and encompasses those who had:

- Been involved in social action in the past 12 months
- Participated in social action at least every few months, or did a one-off activity lasting more than a day in the last 12 months
- Recognised both a benefit to themselves **and** others or the environment because of their social action

⁸ New questions added to the 2019 survey were Q3a and Q3b, Q8, Q9a(i), Q10a(i), Q17, Q18, Q19e, Q20

⁹ Amended questions include Q1, Q2c and Q3c.

¹⁰ Code 'Involvement in Young Advisors Group' was added in 2018.

¹¹ The meaningful social action definition in the survey was used as a proxy for 'high quality youth social action', namely social action activities that meet the 6 quality principles as per the following #iwill report: <https://www.iwill.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Generation-Change-6-Quality-Principles-Report.pdf>

Main findings

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Participation in Social Action

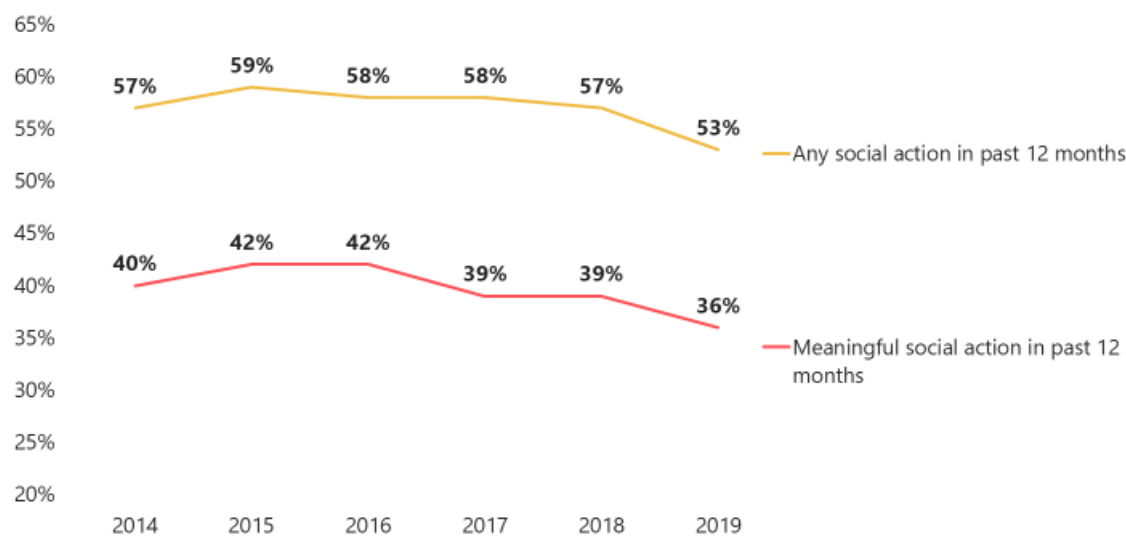
Rates of participation in social action

In 2019, 53% of 10 to 20 year olds participated in social action activities, indicating that levels of involvement in social action had been steadily decreasing since 2015¹² (59% in 2015, 58% in 2016 and 2017, and 57% in 2018).

The decrease in social action participation this year reflected lower levels of involvement in fundraising/sponsored events (from 43% in 2018 to 39% in 2019), supporting other people who aren't friends/relatives (from 23% in 2018 to 20% in 2019) and giving time to help a charity or cause (from 26% in 2018 to 23% in 2019). However, the 2019 survey findings suggested an increase in campaigning/raising awareness activities: 12% of 10 to 20 year olds in 2019, compared with 8% in 2018.

Similarly, the proportion of young people engaging in meaningful social action fell from 39% in 2017 and 2018 to 36% in 2019, which was consistent with the downward trend since 2015 (42% in 2015 and 2016).

Figure 1.2: Social action participation rates (2014-2019)



Base: All young people aged 10-20 2019 (2,081) 2018 (2,034) 2017 (2,030) 2016 (2,082); 2015 (2,021); 2014 (2,038)



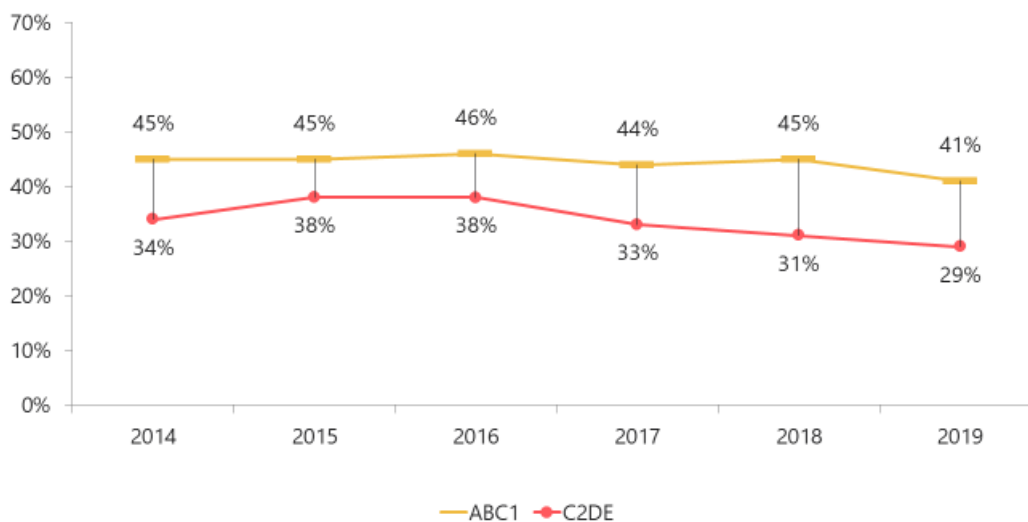
Who's taking part in meaningful social action?

In 2019, 36% of young people aged 10 to 20 participated in meaningful social action, a figure that was down from 39% in 2018. Variations within the meaningful social action participation rates included those of socio-economic grade, gender and area/region:

¹² Caution should be taken in interpreting differences over time as additional codes are included for respondents to select in the 2016-2019 surveys.

- Young people from the most **affluent backgrounds** were more likely to take part in 2019, compared with those from less affluent backgrounds (41% of those defined as ABC1, compared with 29% of those defined as C2DE). The socio-economic gap in meaningful social action participation, evidenced since the beginning of the research in 2014, had been slightly but not significantly reduced this year. Data from 2018 noted a difference of 14 percentage points (ABC1 45%, C2DE 31%), while 2019 data showed a discrepancy of 12 percentage points.

Figure 1.3: Meaningful social action participation rates per socio-economic grade (2014-2019)



Base: All young people aged 10-20 participating in meaningful social action in past 12 months. 2019 (739)
2018 (788) 2017 (794) 2016 (883); 2015 (850); 2014 (818)

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- **Girls** were more likely than boys to engage in meaningful social action (37% for girls, compared with 34% for boys in 2019), suggesting that the gap remains non-significant yet consistent with the findings from last year (in 2018: 40% for girls, 37% for boys). Similar to previous waves of this survey, it was primarily girls aged 10-15 that made up the figure of meaningful social action participation, with 40% of 10-15 year old girls taking part in meaningful social action, compared with 34% of boys in the same age group.
- Young people from **rural areas** were more likely to take part in meaningful social action than those living in urban areas (45% and 32% respectively). It is worth noting that this difference in participation by rurality was not apparent in findings from previous waves of the survey.

How young people participate in social action

As can be seen in the below table, the activities young people most frequently participated in, despite a decrease in each of them, were 'fundraising or a sponsored event' (39%), 'given time to help a charity or cause' (23%) and 'supported other people who aren't friends or relatives' (20%).

Table 1.1: How young people participate in social action (2014-2019)

<i>Multiple options young people could choose from</i>	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Donated money or goods	56%	60%	60%	53%	54%	59%
Done any fundraising/sponsored event	39%	43%	43%	43%	43%	40%
Given time to help a charity/cause	23%	26%	30%	31%	32%	30%
Supported other people - not friends/relatives	20%	23%	23%	27%	28%	25%
Helped improve your local area/environment	16%	16%	15%	15%	16%	14%
Tutored, coached or mentored anyone	15%	17%	18%	20%	21%	17%
Campaigned/raised awareness for something you believe in	12%	8%	8%	11%	10%	10%
Been involved in Young Advisors Groups	6%	6%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
None of these	29%	27%	26%	30%	29%	26%

Barriers and enablers in young people's participation

To identify both barriers and enablers, young people who had not been involved in any social action and those who had only donated money or goods, were asked for reasons why they had not participated in social action over the past 12 months and what would encourage them to take part in the future.

Barriers to social action

- For those who had not participated in social action in the past 12 months, the most common reasons given were 'it never occurred to me to take part' (mentioned by 32%) and 'my friends aren't doing this type of thing' (mentioned by 28%). A quarter of young people cited 'other factors' as a reason for not taking part (26%).
- This year's findings also indicated an increase in the proportion of young people who stated there were 'few/no opportunities in my area' (19% in 2019, compared with 12% in 2018 and 4% in 2017).
- 2019 data showed a decline in the amount of young people who did not participate because they were 'not interested' (24% in 2019, in comparison with 31% in 2018).
- 15% of young people who had not taken part in social action in the past 12 months stated that nothing would encourage them to participate/they were not interested. However, there was a gender difference, with boys aged 16 to 20 more likely to say 'nothing/not interested' (22%, compared with 14% of girls aged 16 to 20). The proportion of those seemingly "indifferent" to social action marked a decrease of 9 percentage points since 2018 (from 24% in 2018 to 15% in 2019).

Enablers to social action

- The two most common factors, which would motivate young people to participate in social action in the future, were 'if I could do it with my friends' (mentioned by 29%) and 'if I could do it at school/college/university/work' (mentioned by 19%). Both reasons were mentioned especially by young people aged 10 to 15; almost half of this younger age group selecting the former (46%), and a quarter of them the latter (27%).
- Other most common enablers were 'if it was closer to where I live' (14%) and 'if someone asked me to get involved' (11%).
- Mirroring the findings of previous waves of the survey, schools and colleges remained the key enabler of participation (54%). Half of young people who were involved in social action through their school/college said they were specifically asked to be involved by a teacher/member of school staff (52%); a noteworthy increase compared with the proportion of people who answered the same in 2018 (30%).

Focus on Community: Sense of Belonging and Community's Role in Meaningful Social Action

The sixth wave of the National Youth Social Action survey sought to further explore the role of community in social action participation by including additional questions on young people's agency¹³ and sense of belonging in relation to their local community. After schools, the local community was cited as the most common place for social action in the past 12 months (mentioned by 11%) and, in particular, for girls aged 16 to 20 (20%)¹⁴.

Young people's sense of agency in relation to their community

In 2019, young people were asked to consider the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements about their community and their own role in it. As shown in Table 1.2, those who had taken part in meaningful social action were more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statements than those who had participated infrequently over the past 12 months, those who had participated more than 12 months ago, and those who had never participated. These findings aligned with those from previous waves (2014-2018) of the survey, inasmuch as they suggested that young people who had taken part in meaningful social action demonstrated a higher agency in relation to their community than any other group.

Table 1.2: Statements on agency by type of activity

	All young people (aged 10-20)	Taken part in meaningful social action	Taken part in last 12 month	More than 12 months ago	Never
<i>Base size</i>	(2,081)	(739)	(1,104)	(415)	(535)
<i>How much do you agree/strongly agree...</i>					
I take an active role in my community	54%	80%	74%	37%	26%
I feel I belong in my community	78%	90%	88%	67%	67%
If young people decided to share their views on something happening in your local community, people would take them seriously	50%	67%	64%	32%	36%
<i>To what extent do you think you can have...</i>					
Positive impact on local community (a lot/a fair amount)	35%	59%	52%	19%	14%
Positive impact on your school community (a lot/a fair amount)	37%	57%	53%	19%	20%

¹³ A series of statements relating to the positive impact a young person perceives they can make in terms of the world (Q16b), their local community, their school community and the environment (Q11) were included in the 2018 survey to understand further young people's perception of their ability to effect positive change.

¹⁴ Note that this is based on a small sample size for girls 16-20 who take part in social action in their local community (N=44).

Young people's attitudes towards their role and involvement in their community also differed by socio-economic group, gender, frequency of feeling lonely and ethnicity:

- **Young people from affluent backgrounds (ABC1)** were more likely to strongly agree/agree with all statements than less affluent participants (C2DE). The widest variation in opinion relates to the perception of young people's ideas being taken seriously if young people decided to share them in their community (55% of those defined as ABC1, compared with 44% of those defined C2DE).
- **Girls aged 10 to 15** were more likely than their male peers to have a higher sense of agency with regard to their community; a higher proportion of girls felt that they could have a lot/a fair amount of positive impact on their local and school community than boys of the same age range (41% compared with 33% of boys aged 10 to 15, and 52% compared with 41% of boys 10 to 15, respectively). Similarly, a gender difference is found within the same age group (10 to 15 years old) in relation to their role in their community; girls are more likely to strongly agree/agree with the statement 'I take an active role in my community' (61%, compared with 51% of boys).
- **Young people who report 'never' feeling lonely** were more likely to strongly agree/agree with the statement 'I feel like I belong to my community' than those who report feeling lonely 'always/often' and 'sometimes' (82%, compared with 64% and 76% respectively).
- **Young people from BAME backgrounds** were more likely than young people who were white to feel like they belonged in their community (strongly agree/agree: 83%, compared with 77% of young white people).

Understanding how young people benefit from Social Action

Recognising the benefits of social action

The importance of promoting the benefits of social action as an enabler to increasing participation among those already involved (as well as those who are not yet involved, or who have limited involvement), were highlighted in previous waves of the survey. Despite the gradual decrease in involvement of 10 to 20 year olds in social action since 2015¹⁵, this wave indicated an increase in the proportion of young people recognising the benefit to others (81% in 2019, compared with 75% in 2018).

Young people who had taken part in meaningful social action in the past 12 months were more likely than those who had taken part in a one-off activity to recognise the benefits to themselves and others from participating in social action (personal benefits: 85%, compared with 61% one-off activity. Benefits to others: 88%, compared with 69% one-off activity). Furthermore, the vast majority of those taking part in meaningful social action by being involved in Young Advisors Groups¹⁶ perceived that they had benefited a lot/a fair amount themselves and others (93% recognised personal benefits, 91% recognised benefits to others/the environment).

There was also an increase in the proportion of young people who stated it was important for them to try and make a difference in the world, and cared about contributing to make the world a better place. In 2019, 86% of young people stated the former (compared with 83% in 2018), and almost nine in ten (88%) the latter (compared with 82% in 2018). It is worth-noting that young people who had taken part in meaningful social action were more likely than those who had taken part in a one-off activity to agree or strongly agree with the two statements ('It is important for me to try and make a difference in the world': meaningful social action 96%, one-off activity 88%. 'I care about contributing to make the world a better place': meaningful social action 97%, one-off activity 91%).

In the most recent wave of the research, a question was included that aimed to further explore the specific ways young people benefited from taking part in social action (see Figure 1.4). The most common benefit cited was 'increased self-confidence/self-esteem' (mentioned by 44%), closely followed by the statement 'improved communication skills' (42%). Other ways young people benefited included 'improved how you work as part of a team' (38%), 'helped to motivate others' and 'improved social skills' (both mentioned by 31%).

¹⁵ Caution should be taken in interpreting differences over time as additional codes are included for respondents to select in 2016-2019 surveys.

¹⁶ Code 'Involvement in Young Advisors Group' was added in 2018. In the 2019 survey, 116 respondents selected this code.

Figure 1.4: Ways in which young people benefitted from taking part in social action (2019)



Base: All young people aged 10-20 doing any social action activities in past 12 months (1030)



Young people aged 16 to 20 were more likely to report the top two ways of benefiting from social action than those aged 10 to 15; half of the older age group (16-20) stated that they benefitted from social action by increasing their self-confidence/self-esteem (50%) and improving their communication skills (51%), compared with 40% and 36% of their younger peers (10-15) who chose the respective statements.

In the 2019 study, a decrease was noted in the proportion of people who agreed that they got recognised for the difference they made by taking part in social action; from 60% in 2018 (and in 2017 and 2016) to 54% of young people. The latest findings also suggested that young people from affluent backgrounds are more likely to strongly agree/agree with the statement ‘I was recognised for the difference I made, for example through a ceremony, certificate or award’ than those from less affluent backgrounds (57% of ABC1s, compared with 48% of C2DEs).

Annex

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Annex: Understanding young people who are ‘Committed’, ‘Potential’ and ‘Reluctant’

Encouragingly, most young people (59%) felt that it was likely that they would participate in social action in the next 12 months, with 19% of these saying they ‘definitely will’. However, a quarter (25%) stated that they were not likely to take part.

Using this indicator, alongside current and previous reported involvement in social action, young people were classified into three groups for the purposes of this study: committed, potential and reluctant. These three groups were defined in collaboration with #iwill partners, to better target activity and strategy, and to support more young people to take part in social action. This analysis was first carried out on the 2016 data¹⁷.

Table 1.3: Groupings of young people based on current, previous and future social action participation

Reluctant: 25%	Potential: 46%	Committed: 29%
<p>Reluctant to engage in social action: This group are defined by the fact that they are unlikely to do social action in the next 12 months. The ‘Reluctant’ group includes those who are currently participating, but is dominated by those who have not participated in social action in the past 12 months. ‘Reluctant’ are more likely to say ‘It never occurred to me’ and ‘I am not interested’ when asked what prevented them from taking part in social activities in the past 12 months, compared with those defined as ‘potentials’.</p>	<p>Interested or uncertain about doing (more) social action: ‘Potentials’ are likely to do social action in the next 12 months, or don’t know if they will. It includes those who are currently doing social action as well as those who have never done so. Factors such as social action activities coinciding with activities they already do (e.g. sport) are more likely to have held this group back from taking part in the past 12 months, than those defined as ‘Reluctant.’ However, the main reason is that they don’t know how to get involved/ have not been asked.</p>	<p>Strong commitment to social action: This group has done meaningful social action in the past 12 months, has a history of participation prior to that, and are likely to do more social action next year. They are more likely to feel that both they and other people/ the environment have personally benefitted ‘a lot’ from the activities they have taken part in, compared with other groups.</p>

The proportion of young people classified as ‘reluctant’ and ‘committed’ has changed since 2016; reflecting the decline in young people who say they are likely to do activities to benefit other people or the environment in the next 12 months: In 2016, a third of young people (34%) were defined as ‘committed’, compared with 29% in 2018 and 2019. In contrast, the proportion of young people defined as ‘reluctant’ has increased from 17% in 2016 to 24% in 2018 and 25% in 2019.

¹⁷ The results of this analysis for 2016 can be viewed on the #iwill website: <https://www.iwill.org.uk/tag/research/>

Differences in characteristics of 'reluctant', 'committed' and 'potential' groups

Table 1.4 illustrates differences in the characteristics of young people classified as 'committed', 'potential' and 'reluctant', notably by gender, age and socio-demographic group.

Table 1.4: Profile of committed, potential and reluctant groups

% of characteristic within each group	Reluctant	Potential	Committed
<i>Base:</i>	(512)	(962)	(607)
Male	58%	49%	49%
Female	42%	51%	51%
Age 10-15	39%	57%	55%
Age 16-20	61%	43%	45%
More affluent (ABC1)	47%	55%	66%
Less affluent (C2DE)	53%	45%	34%
White	86%	85%	83%
BME	14%	15%	17%
Urban	77%	78%	69%
Rural	23%	22%	31%
Personal benefited from social action ('A lot')	17%	22%	44%
Other people/environment benefited from social action ('A lot')	19%	26%	45%
Positive impact on local community ('A lot')	2%	6%	19%
Positive impact on the environment ('A lot')	5%	13%	28%
I believe I can make a difference in the world ('Strongly agree')	9%	16%	33%

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