

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

HOW CAN CHARACTER BE DEVELOPED THROUGH YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION?

www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/youthsocialaction



Statement on Youth Social Action and Character Development

'Through a dedication to social action the character of young people and the communities they live in can be transformed.'

Youth social action is an effective and meaningful way to develop young people's character virtues.

Youth social action is practical action in the service of others to create positive change. It provides an important mechanism for young people to develop and express their character while benefiting others. It incorporates a range of activities – including volunteering for a charity, caring for someone in their community, providing peer support online, campaigning or fundraising for a specific cause – and can take place in both formal and informal settings. Social action should be challenging, youth-led (although often adult facilitated), socially impartial, progressive, embedded, and reflective. Young people's social action should not start from a deficit model: many young people are already active and engaged, and many more would be engaged if appropriate support and guidance were in place. Social action, therefore, should be celebrated for its *transformational* possibilities – both for young people and their communities – and should be acknowledged as a right of every young person.

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#iwill

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BUILDING CHARACTER THROUGH YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION

RESEARCH REPORT

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A HABIT OF SERVICE: THE FACTORS THAT SUSTAIN SERVICE IN YOUNG PEOPLE

RESEARCH REPORT

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Researching youth social action as an effective way to develop young people's character

The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has examined how youth social action, defined as practical action in the service of others to create positive change, can be an important mechanism for the development of young people's character. The research has further explored what a *habit of service* – where someone has taken part in service in the past 12 months and is very likely to continue participating in future – looks like in young people.

The partnership the Centre has established with the #iwill campaign has facilitated access to multiple and varied charities, young people, and policymakers seeking to explore the benefits of social action with young people.

For more information about the Jubilee Centre's research on youth social action and character please visit:

www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/youthsocialaction

PARTICIPANTS

Findings are drawn from empirical data gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with volunteers and providers of youth social action.

OVER

4,550



PARTICIPANTS IN THE LARGEST KNOWN STUDY OF ITS KIND

‘Developing these things in young people is where all of society benefits, because essentially you’re enabling them to be the best they can be.’

Youth social action provider



4,518

YOUNG PEOPLE SURVEYED

25

YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION PROVIDERS



200 YOUNG AMBASSADORS RECOGNISED FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

In consultation with many organisations across the youth, voluntary, education, business and faith communities, the #iwill campaign has identified a set of six principles which define quality youth social action.



CAMPAIGN'S SIX QUALITY PRINCIPLES

What does great youth social action look like?

Socially impactful

Have a clear intended benefit to a community, cause or social problem

Challenging

Stretching and ambitious as well as enjoyable and enabling

Youth-led

Led, owned and shaped by young people's needs, ideas and decision making

Reflective

Recognising contributions as well as valuing critical reflection and learning

Embedded

Accessible to all, and well integrated to existing pathways to become a habit for life

Progressive

Sustained, and providing links to other activities and opportunities

THE DOUBLE BENEFIT

Engaging in meaningful social action can have a recognised 'double benefit' to both the recipient of the social action and the individual undertaking it.

Youth social action can help develop a range of virtues in the young people taking part:

- 87% of youth social action providers interviewed said that developing young people's character was fundamental to their organisation's work
- Over half said it was their top priority



PERFORMANCE VIRTUES
eg, resilience, determination and teamwork



CIVIC VIRTUES
eg, service, citizenship and volunteering



MORAL VIRTUES
eg, honesty, trust and compassion



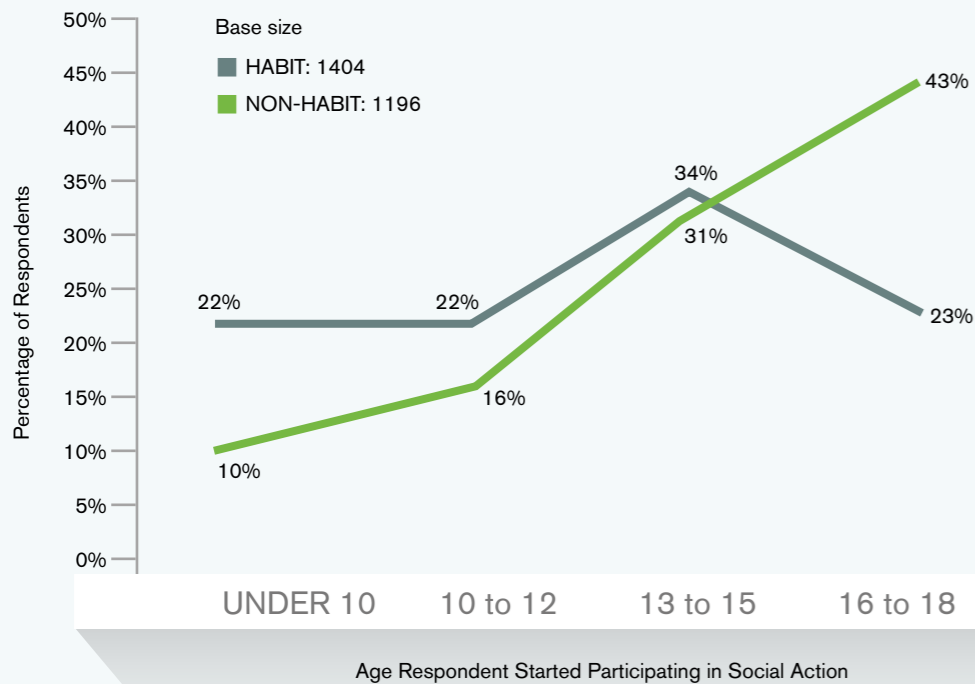
INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES
eg, curiosity, critical thinking and open-mindedness

A HABIT OF SERVICE

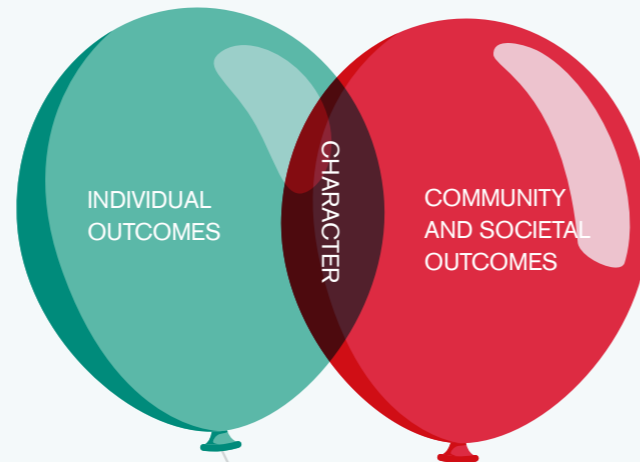
A person with a *habit of service* is someone who has taken part in service in the past 12 months and confirms they will definitely, or very likely, continue participating in the next 12 months.

The Jubilee Centre's research has found that those young people who were first involved in service under the age of 10 were more than two times more likely to have developed a habit of service than those who first participated after turning 16.

AGE YOUNG PEOPLE STARTED PARTICIPATING IN SERVICE



THE DOUBLE BENEFIT OF YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION



REFLECTING ON CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Those young people with a habit of service were more likely to:

- Feel more responsible for their actions
- Spend more time thinking about how they might do things differently in future
- Be better able to reflect on their own learning
- Feel they have a better understanding of their own abilities

47%

OF THOSE WHO HAD DEVELOPED A *HABIT OF SERVICE* FELT THEY HAD BENEFITED A GREAT DEAL FROM THEIR INVOLVEMENT; THIS IS COMPARED TO 22% OF THOSE WITHOUT A *HABIT OF SERVICE*.

SUPPORT FOR SERVICE

Those responsible for educating young people can help support their participation in service by:

- Promoting clubs or societies where young people can get involved in service
- Dedicating specific days to service activities or promotion
- Organising events young people can contribute to
- Communicating opportunities to participate in service to young people and sharing stories of others who have benefited from service
- Providing opportunities for young people to try out different types of service activities



RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutions and programmes should consider how they can play a role in supporting young people to continue participating in service through key transition points, facilitating a journey of service throughout a person's life.

Young people should be supported to reflect holistically on all the ways in which they develop character, including through social action.

Youth social action providers are encouraged to communicate their aim of developing moral virtues, which are important for both individual and societal flourishing.

YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD BE SUPPORTED TO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE THE TIME, SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE TO PARTICIPATE IN AND MAKE A *HABIT OF SERVICE*, PARTICULARLY THROUGH PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE TO THEM.



JOHN TEMPLETON
FOUNDATION

*This project was made possible
through the support of a grant from
the John Templeton Foundation.*

About the Jubilee Centre

The Jubilee Centre is a pioneering interdisciplinary research centre focussing on character, virtues and values in the interest of human flourishing. The Centre promotes a moral concept of character in order to explore the importance of virtue for public and professional life. The Centre is a leading informant on policy and practice in this area and through its extensive range of projects contributes to a renewal of character virtues in both individuals and societies.



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