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Service and Youth Social Action: Reflections on Jubilee Centre Studies to Date

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Introduction

Over at least the last four decades there has been a great deal of policy, professional and academic interest in youth social action. The value and importance of youth social action are now often stated, and there is increasing recognition that (and whilst appreciating certain barriers) rather than being apathetic young people *are* motivated to engage in social action (see, for example, The Campaign for Youth Social Action, 2013; #iwill, 2019). In addition, there remains a large amount of academic interest in the educational processes, benefits and outcomes of social action (Nolas, 2014; Hogg, 2016; Body and Hogg, 2019). Since its inception, the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has demonstrated a strong commitment to youth social action, through both research projects and partnerships with leading organisations in the field (including Step up to Serve and WE Schools). The Centre's *Statement on Youth Social Action and Character Development*, published in 2014, commences with the following definition: 'Youth social action is practical action in the service of others to create positive change[1]' (p. 1). The reference to *in the service of others* is significant, and suggests that, properly understood, youth social action can be more than the undertaking of a given act (an act of volunteering or philanthropy, for example) and can involve a deeper meaning of service that signifies a commitment to attending to the needs of others, for the benefit of others[2].As the Centre concludes its *Transformative Britain* phase and is about to enter a fourth phase, *Celebration Britain,* which includes a new project titled *Civic Virtues Through Service to Others*, it is an appropriate time to reflect on the Centre's research on service and youth social action so far. Our aim in this paper is to bring together and review key findings and analysis from existing Centre studies that have examined service and youth social action, drawing on data from these studies, including data not previously published, to present and examine the insights and perceptions of youth social action providers and of youth engaged in social action.

Following this introduction, the paper comprises three main sections in each of which we explore a core theme pertinent to service and character. The first two themes are the *virtues prioritised by youth social action providers and young people engaged in social action* and the *factors that sustain social action*. In regard to the third theme, we focus on the "*double benefit*"

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[1] This definition was taken from the original definition of youth social action used by Step Up to Serve as part of the #iwill campaign. The current definition can be found at https://www.iwill.org.uk/about-us/youth-social-action.

[2] It is worth noting that in the 2019 #iwill impact report 7 forms of youth social action: volunteering, fundraising for a charity, being a mentor, tutor, leader or coach, being on a school council, helping out a neighbour who needs support, taking care of animals or the environment, and campaigning on an issue that you care about.

of youth social action as a way of conceptualising and bringing together the benefits of social action to the individual and those to the community (see, for example, The Campaign for Youth Social Action, 2013). Under each of the three themes we present key findings from Centre studies, and consider these in light of existing literature in the field. In the conclusion we highlight several significant questions in need of further conceptual and empirical exploration. Before proceeding to the analysis offered, it should be noted that while our intention in this paper is to focus on service in relation to youth social action, the notion of "service" has a deeper meaning and wider application that is not limited to this specific educational domain (as we also allude to in this paper, there are important definitional/conceptual challenges posed by the concept of service which we will attend to in separate work to this current paper).

Virtues prioritised by youth social action providers and young people engaged in social action

Existing Centre studies present a complex and somewhat mixed picture about which virtues are (or indeed are not) prioritised in the practical application of youth social action. Data reported in *Building Character Through Youth Social Action* (Arthur et al., 2015) included an analysis of the virtues prioritised by youth social action providers as reported in interviews, and the virtues developed through social action as prioritised and reported by young people themselves in focus groups. Thed data evidenced that while engagement in youth social action was *perceived* as developing a broad range of virtues, *in practice* providers (1) disagreed about which virtues to prioritise, (2) were not necessarily overt in teaching virtues, and (3) often did not focus specifically on moral virtues. Here, too, there was sometimes a difference between the virtues cited in communications and those spoken about by leaders of social action providers. 43% of interviewees cited *service* in their top three prioritised virtues or referred to service positively in conversation. When asked to select (from a list) the three most important virtues to develop through youth social action, one provider responded: 'Citizenship, leadership and service…. service and citizenship sort of go hand in hand with social action'. Conversely, and notably, 22% of interviewees said that they would *not* use 'service' and had strong reactions against it. One provider argued:

Service is a word I don't like by the way. I really don't like it. It implies that – first of

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all it takes away the volunteer element of it – service implies to me…you go into service, you become a servant. And therefore, you're doing what you're told to do and it implies something far away from what we want which is child-led or student-led. It goes against that somehow…And I just think it seems like it's kind of subservient, the word subservient, rather than actually taking action and being proactive and a leader, leading the stuff – rather than sort of sitting back and letting it happen to you, that's what it implies to me.

Despite these strong reactions, interviewees largely still agreed that the *basic premise* of service to others is important. This was exemplified by another provider's response, which recognised the value of the virtue itself while acknowledging the challenges of using it in practice:

Service absolutely is the core of what we're about, we just would never use the word. We talk about the creation of positive change, and people really chime with that, but that is service, so that's what we do.

Notably, the term service did not appear in the focus groups with young people, suggesting that service does not form part of the virtue vocabulary connected with their youth social action. In their interview, one provider elaborated on this, indicating that the word service was perceived negatively by young people as something only used by older generations:

Our young people had a really violent reaction to the word 'serve'…they really didn't like it. Now what's amazing, is I've just been to the graduation – those young people are just adorable in terms of what they want to do for their community, and I cannot believe – 10 months they've been busting a gut doing this really amazing stuff – now in my book, that's service, but they don't see it that way, and that language totally alienates them. And when we asked them about 'serve', they said service is something that you do in a shop, and they see service as being very servile – I wouldn't say this is across the board, but we did have quite a bit of discussion with them about it.

More broadly, differing ideas about the role of youth social action in developing character also emerged in the course of interviews. Some providers described themselves as offering merely a springboard for young people, exposing them to virtue language and allowing them to amalgamate various influences for themselves so that they would translate the experience naturally into service behaviours, as phrased in the following terms by one provider '[we] just empower young people, give them the values, and pop the community into the mix, and they will start working'. Other providers were clearer that they play an important role in stimulating reflection on virtues that leads to a desire to engage in virtuous behaviours and set goals related to service for later life. For example:

> So we get quite a lot of people who come out of our programmes and say 'I never thought of setting up a social enterprise or having a career in a charity or actually being a nurse', or whatever, and they've got a sense of what I call service (they wouldn't use that word) because they've thought about what they want to apply those competencies for, and that's for me, when it tips into something that's more about character.

However, some providers were hesitant to give too much credit to engagement in youth social action as a catalyst or learning experience. One interviewee suggested that rather than developing character, their programmes were chosen by those who already possessed many of the necessary virtues and were looking for an appropriate way to put these into action. In other words, youth social action was a forum for the expression rather than the development of virtues:

> I'm actually not sure youth social action develops any of it. Youth social action is the result. I think this is the mistake. Social action sees itself as the start…it's assuming they're not actually interested in it in the first place. Maybe they wanted to do it anyway? … Yeah, it encourages it, and provides a focus for it, but it didn't invent it – it was there already. It's capturing. And challenging the negative attitudes that were inhibiting it flourishing, not making it. It's rather like the role for social action is a new brand of fertilizer that can be put on the

soil that was there anyway. It's not a new kind of soil. It's not a new pot or something. Well maybe it's a new pot. But it's not the fundamental stuff.

As suggested above, these findings present a somewhat mixed picture so far as service is concerned. On one hand, there is general agreement that service is important and forms an inherent part of youth social action. On the other hand, youth social action providers and young people engaged in youth social action raised significant concerns regarding negative readings of service; particularly how service can be perceived as involving inequitable relationships more commensurate with "servitude" than with positive service to others. That they did so raises the questions of whether and how negative forms and connotations of service can be avoided[3].

This prompts some short reflections which may be helpful in thinking through the framing and delivery of youth social action projects in future, and in informing further research. That there is a prevalent concern that service necessarily involves subservience (and therefore a loss of autonomy or dignity) is perhaps unsurprising, given the emphasis in modern liberal democracies on individualism and self-sufficiency. However, the responses above suggest that some providers view this tension in usage of the word 'service' as somewhat insurmountable; they accept some young people held negative interpretations (and in some cases, express similar views) and deal with these simply by avoiding use of the term. It is undoubtedly important to encourage young people to think and act for themselves, and to ensure that their viewpoints are respected and given credence. Nevertheless, it may be incumbent on facilitators to use this as a chance to develop young people's understanding of service and other virtue terms, rather than to leave negative perceptions unchallenged.

Indeed, there could be fertile teaching opportunities for providers, allowing them to explore with young people what it means to live in community, to help and care for one another, and whether these actions add to or detract from individuals' dignity and flourishing. In other words, there are opportunities for active and open dialogue about how young people understand

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[3] We recognise, too, that this also raises questions about how service is/can be defined and whether service is, strictly speaking, a virtue. As noted in the introduction to this paper we will consider this conceptual question in separate papers.

themselves in relation to others, and how these understandings are (re)negotiated in their practical application. Making notions of service (including problematic notions) explicit may offer a chance to challenge inequitable conceptions of service - including assumptions about the social hierarchies involved. In this endeavour of cultivating a language of virtues and vices, providers can help young people to unpick their own discomfort with these terms, and to distinguish between concepts of humility and humiliation, and of service and servitude.

The tensions raised here around negative connotations of 'service' mirror wider themes explored in the academic literature, particularly with regard to gratitude. In his essay on gratitude and humility, Roberts (2016) elucidates the discomfort felt by some where they owe a 'debt' of gratitude to another person. This can be felt as a humiliation, an unkind reminder of one's lack of self-sufficiency, and can cause resentment due to the bond that is formed between benefactor and their beneficiary. This corresponds to one of the vices identified by Roberts that clashes directly with virtuous gratitude: that of *hyper-autonomy*, whereby one has such a strong sense of pride that to acknowledge the role of another in one's successes is felt to be degrading. The aversion to the concept of *being of service to others* highlighted in Centre studies appears to track a parallel path. The negative reactions to the term 'service' of the young people involved in these studies suggests that they perceive service to involve a kind of inequitable relationship between the benefactor and beneficiary (whether construed in terms of servitude or in terms of the helper and the helpless). Yet the relationships involved can be reframed by encouraging young people to consider whether and how they are in a position to offer service to others, what enables (or indeed constrains) them to be in such a position, and how positive forms of service can be forged. This incorporates reflection on how meaningful change through social action must start from an appreciation of the current situation. Important too, as Card (2016) points out, is that there is an element of 'moral luck' to being *able* to offer assistance to others or to support communities; that is, social action might be considered as a way of sharing advantages (whether given or earned) with others[4]. Understood in this way, young people can be encouraged to appreciate the virtue of humility, in the knowledge that their lives could have been quite different, and in recognition of the myriad of injustices that many people face.

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[4] Note here, however, that much of the wider literature on social action, volunteering and philanthropy focuses on exactly the reverse of the perceived relationship of "servitude". The field is replete with the contention that volunteering and philanthropy can reinforce power relations that place the beneficiaries of social action on a lower plain, with the benefactors as benevolent superiors. This is especially so where the relationship intersects with issues of race, nationality and colonialism.

In their analysis of the #iwill campaign and its six principles of quality youth social action, Lamb, Taylor-Collins and Silverglate (2019) affirm the importance of an 'embedded' programme of social action for this very reason. Young people undertaking quality social action can and should have a stake in the community they are helping. These researchers argue that from an Aristotelian perspective, individual goods cannot be understood apart from their communal contexts, as society can only flourish if the individuals within it do, and these individuals can only do so within a flourishing society. It is a symbiotic relationship, and thus – when youth social action is appropriately framed and enacted – neither party is degraded by being helped or being the helper. Froh, Bono and Emmons (2010) also found a mutually reinforcing relationship between gratitude and social integration, and explain that:

> Youth who are socially integrated want to use their unique strengths to give back to others and make the world better. Gratitude leads to more immediate and longer-term well-being in adolescents because it predicts social integration. Gratitude thus promotes both intrapersonal and interpersonal well-being. (p.153)

These ideas will be explored further later in this paper, with regard to the 'double benefit' of social action. It suffices here to note that encouraging young people to engage in social action with a mindset of humility and appreciation for the advantages they have can help them to understand structural inequalities and issues of social justice, and inspire them to feel more connected to those who will benefit from their service – whether individuals, or the community as a whole. In this way, service is no longer negative diminution of self, but a demonstration of reciprocity and social responsibility, a way of connecting with other members of the community.

Factors that sustain social action

As well as examining the virtues central to motivating youth social action, existing Centre studies have also sought to ascertain the core factors that *sustain* social action. The Centre's *A Habit of Service* (Arthur et al., 2017) report found that – based on self-reported intentions of

future action – the earlier young people start to get involved in service, the more likely it is that service becomes a habit. The study also found that friends are a more important influence on engaging in service than parents, though existing connections and ties were generally viewed as central. Similar to other studies on youth social action (for example, Body and Hogg, 2019), the *Habit of Service* report notes the importance of young people developing meaningful relationships with others through their social action. Such relationships nourish the appetite for continued service. For example, the report recounts the experiences of 'Alison' who spoke of how the support from others in the setting in which her social action occurred spurred her to continue:

> I've been really lucky to have like some really good connections… and people that are really rooting for me… when I speak to my friends a lot of them haven't really had that – obviously your parents and people like that – but it's quite nice to have people kind of separate from my normal kind of social group, who, yeah, they have been really, really supportive.

Another young person, 'Gerry', talked about the vital support provided by his grandparents as crucial for his own engagement in social action: 'I think my grandparents hated me cos they were constantly driving me around to different opportunities but they've seen the benefit…it was taking opportunities, but also it was having somebody believe in me and it was having somebody…just investing time for my development'. The *Habit of Service* study also pointed to a number of benefits of developing a habit of service, with participants who had made service into a habit being more likely to:

- be involved more frequently and in a wider range of service activities
- identify themselves more closely with exemplars of moral and civic virtues
- have parents/friends who are also involved in the same kinds of activities
- believe they have the time, skills, opportunity, and confidence to participate in service
- have service embedded in their school/college/university environment
- be able to reflect on their experience of service, and
- recognise that service brings benefits for themselves and others.

Further work in this area by Taylor-Collins *et al.* (2019) has demonstrated that there are several factors associated with a 'habit' of social action, including strong virtue understanding and identity. Their research showed that those habitually engaging in youth social action had greater familiarity and closer identification with all virtues - although particularly with moral and civic virtues - and were more likely to say that their friends would appreciate people possessing those virtues. According to this study, the typical habitual participant is female, has a strong belief that it is possible for her to participate in social action, and thinks that other people would say she is like a civic exemplar. This latter statement highlights the sometimes ambiguous relationship between initial motivations for service (i.e. why someone decides to engage) and the factors that sustain service (whether continued service in a given setting or additional forms of service by oneself and/or others).

Recourse to conceptual and empirical literature again paints a mixed picture in terms of (1) whether social action begets more social action and (2) whether initial motivations to engage in service (which in educational practices may not be choice) are reshaped through the engagement itself (for a recent overview, see Davies *et al.*, 2019). Some empirical studies of youth social action programmes in England over the last ten years have suggested, for instance, that instrumental reasons - most commonly those concerned with careers success - often form a core part of motivations for social action (see, for example, Keating *et al.*, 2010; Durrant *et al.*, 2012). In her essay on 'hope labour', Taylor-Collins (2019) speaks of the experience of girls from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who '…hope that their academic success, and all these experiences they accumulate, will help get them to university, which in turn will help them to get a job.' In this way, social action becomes 'another experience for young people to accumulate in the form of hope labour, while young people's futures are ever more precarious.' (Taylor-Collins, 2019: 10) This phenomenon of unpaid work experience, undertaken to meet the expectations of admissions departments and employers, divorces social action from its altruistic or community-minded roots, recasting it as merely another qualification to be gained – one that confers the symbolic power of charity (Dean, 2020a) as a supposed marker of the moral goodness of the applicant. Indeed, Taylor-Collins (2019) found that schools in her study engage in 'concerted cultivation' of students, organising their free time to be directed towards activities that will help their applications stand out. There are clearly a number of problems here, notably that introducing social action as a means to an end can create a transactional relationship (Body, Lau and Josephidou, 2020), in which students only choose to engage in service to others for the symbolic capital they will gain through the process, and neglect the

value of social action for the development of their community and their own character. When seen only (or largely) through the lens of *quid pro quo*, social action risks losing its virtuous nature and the social connectedness so important for sustaining social action (Body and Hogg, 2019).

We return to these thoughts in the next section where our attention moves to the "double benefit", though it is worth highlighting here Dean's (2020a) recent argument that it is impossible to escape the symbolic capital bestowed by acts of charity, including volunteering, and the fact that one might feel a 'warm glow' from having done something for the benefit of others does not negate the value of the action automatically. It becomes problematic only where the action is performed *solely* to gain symbolic capital (perhaps in order to gain status, adoration, or to reshape one's reputation following bad publicity). To apply this more specifically to youth social action, in the current context it may be impossible to escape the symbolic value of social action for the success of job and university applications. However, where such benefits are not the sole or even the primary factors that motivate and sustain social action, these need not necessarily be inimical to the development of character. Here it becomes obvious that the way in which social action is promoted and delivered to young people is paramount. Again, reflection plays a crucial role in good quality youth social action projects, as it assists the formation of intelligent habits, rather than mindless repetitions (Lamb *et al.*, 2019). Guided reflection sessions offer providers an opportunity to support young people to think about the reason that social action is needed and to ask them to focus on the kind of virtues required to navigate complex situations.

With all of this noted, it should not be assumed that young people will naturally only care about social action for the symbolic capital it gives them. Dean (2020b) highlights that while less likely to give to charity than older counterparts, 16-24-year-olds are more likely to volunteer, sign petitions and participate in public demonstrations and protests. He cites a report by Demos (Birdwell and Bani, 2014) which found that young people are not disengaged or lacking in compassion, and are in fact more interested in social issues than previous generations. This is not only true in the case of older teenagers and young adults; children as young as four have been shown to be capable of understanding charitable causes and choosing which they want to support, when assisted by adults to put their fundraising ideas into action (Body *et al.*, 2020). Given that Jubilee Centre research to date shows that starting to engage in social action under the age of 10 is associated with developing a habit of service, it is important to think more

deeply about how charitable opportunities are presented to younger children. Body *et al.* (2020) argue that we should use these opportunities to help children challenge and come to their own views of charity and associated virtues, rather than simply training them to be 'good citizens'. Character can be developed by allowing children to question, respond and be participants in rules and activities around charitable giving and community engagement. The researchers urge teachers and other facilitators to move away from encouraging transactional engagement and neutral consensus attitudes even at an early age, and instead nurturing children's voices within the debates and complexities of charity and giving (Body *et al.*, 2020).

The discussion here highlights the importance of forming *intelligent* habits. That is, in order to be sustainable and beneficial, a habit of social action must be underpinned by reliable motivators that are not just practical incentives, external drivers, or behavioural triggers. We contend that social action should be a discernibly different kind of activity, one of a virtuous nature. On such a view, social action is, at least in part, motivated and/or sustained by altruistic virtues such as compassion, kindness, gratitude, justice and so on. It remains a further question, of course, how these altruistic virtues connect with more individual and instrumental concerns.

The "Double Benefit"

A third theme of our analysis concentrates on a core principle of the Centre's research on youth social action to date – the "double benefit". When considering the double benefit, important aspects of the previous two themes come together to present a framework for thinking through various aspects of youth social action and the connection with virtues. In essence, the double benefit highlights and brings into relation the benefits of youth social action to the individual and the benefits to wider society (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1: An outcomes framework to capture the double benefit to both young people and their communities, which young people create through youth social action (taken from The Campaign for Youth Social Action, 2013: 7).

Benefits for the individual		Benefits for the community
Optimism	Communication	Can be wide-ranging, from civic participation, health, educational engagement to safer communities, sustainability, voting, resilience and employability.
	Creativity	
Determination	Confidence and Agency	
	Planning and Problem solving	
	Resilience, Grit	
Emotional Intelligence	Leadership	
	Relationships	
	Managing feelings, Self control	

The double benefit is constituted by the processes through which social action:

> develops a range of capacities in young people, while simultaneously building and enhancing the communities with which young people engage. The process is one through which young people connect with issues they feel passionately about and which affect others, bringing people from different backgrounds and communities together. In planning to have a positive impact on others and taking action, young people work collaboratively to make an important contribution to society while at the same time building their own self-worth and sense of belonging – capacities essential to human and societal flourishing. This double benefit is central to character development (Jubilee Centre, 2014: 2).

Centre studies evidence three important spectrums regarding how this double benefit plays out in practice. The first spectrum concerns the balance between the two sides of the benefit. In respect of this, the *Building Character Through Youth Social Action* (Arthur *et al.*, 2015) report highlights that some providers emphasise the benefits of social action to the individual to a greater extent than the benefits to wider society. In other words, and as the following extract

from an interviewee suggests, the two sides of the double benefit scale were not balanced equally: 'first and foremost, [social action] benefits the young person' (ibid. 12). Other respondents cast the relationship between the individual benefit and the societal benefit in more equitable and reciprocal terms. One young person, 'Gerry', described the process as follows:

> by helping others I'd actually helped myself… I think the biggest… reason why I've continued participating in social action is because of that positive experience and it's the fact that I was given responsibility…it was meaningful because I could see the benefit I was having both myself but also the impact I was having on my community. I've never been one for seeking rewards – the only rewards I see is…intrinsic things like it's just seeing people smiling having fun, and just hearing somebody that has been appreciated, and that's kind of the biggest motivation for me…this is something I really believe in, I'm loving what I'm doing. I really want to carry on doing it.

A similar stance was taken by 'Ed', who spoke about the way that his social action had given a greater sense of purpose to his life. Here, Ed explains how this purpose was directed towards helping others:

> It's just developed me so much as a person and I really honestly owe my life to…social action and it's given me purpose to do something with my life, and to do something that I care about, and…making something of my life where I make a difference to other people's lives too.

The second spectrum in the application of the double benefit concerns whether the societal benefit is directed at immediate or longer-term needs. Indeed, in the *Building Character Through Youth Social Action* study, some providers spoke of there being three benefits (what one interviewee referred to as a triple, rather than double, benefit), depicting two directions of focus in the societal benefits, 'referring to (often) immediate or short-term, (usually) micro benefits, and future, macro benefits (most closely associated with character)' (ibid. 13). These micro benefits refer, for example, to meeting immediate needs whereas, and in contrast, the macro benefits move beyond immediate concerns to longer-term, sustainable actions and

commitments. At least one provider spoke of these shorter and longer term benefits as being 'in tension'.

The third spectrum exists within the *individual* benefit side of the double benefit. As several Centre publications make clear, the individual benefit in social action is (or at least should be) focused on 'the building of one's own character' (Arthur *et al.*, 2017, p. 5). Yet, as highlighted previously, youth social action can be undertaken for more immediate, instrumental individual benefit. Here, David Brooks' (2015a; 2015b) distinction between "résumé" and "eulogy" virtues is relevant. Brooks' (201a5) distinction between the 'skills you bring to the marketplace' and 'the ones that are talked about at your funeral – whether you were kind, brave, honest or faithful… capable of deep love' is useful for reflecting on how engagement with service in educational settings can be framed (either separately or at the same time) as adding to the individual's economic capital (i.e. experiences and skills that make them more employable) and developing dispositions that are morally worthwhile[5]. Our point here is not that résumé virtues are unimportant but rather that they are of a different, more narrow, kind to eulogy virtues. We can see this distinction at play in the following reflections from 'Gerry'. Gerry elucidated that:

> I define meaningful social action as doing it for the benefit of others, and
> not the benefit of yourself. Doing it because you want to impact others and you
> want to give up your time to develop your community, develop your young
> people or just to be an asset to your community. It's not doing it because you're
> told to do it, it's doing it because you want to do it and you want to have an
> impact. Rather than actually being pushed to do something and you doing it
> for individualistic reasons or just to keep somebody else happy…

At the end of this extract we start to see how Gerry contrasted more communal benefits from those he considers as individualistic. This distinction became even more pronounced when Gerry was asked why some of his friends had not been involved in social action:

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[5] In drawing this distinction it should be noted that there is increasing recognition that economically valuable and valued dispositions include those that are morally worthwhile (such as honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, and humility), but the point here is whether the decision to engage in service is driven by individual, economically instrumental goals.

Probably because they don't see the benefit of it. Um, I probably think that's because they're…extrinsically motivated, they're motivated by money, finance, what they can show off to others, rather than actually doing things for the benefit of nothing really – apart from seeing others benefit from it. I think that's probably why they never got involved, because they've seen it as, it doesn't have an outcome.

Important, too, is the role that schools and other educational organisations play in dictating whether (and to what extent) the activities young people engage in are directed towards résumé and/or eulogy virtues. As one young person, 'Dan', explained his school 'did activities week, which…was more building yourself, not so much volunteering to help communities [or] building the double benefit'. Another, 'Colin', stated that:

From school you've got the…National Citizen Service…and the Duke of Edinburgh, and those sorts of things…I don't think they were ever really explained very well by the teachers…the thing I remember about them is saying, 'it'll be good for your CV!'…'it'll be really good for your CV, employers like it', okay why? 'It shows skills' – what skills? 'Very useful skills for your job', you know, so wasn't a particularly good sell I don't think… You know they didn't really talk about…the actual things that I would see as the benefits socially they were – they were too vague.

What comes through in such extracts is a sense in which providers of youth social action are mediating between different agendas (such as employability and character development) which place different levels of emphasis, and offer different readings of, the double benefit (though we recognise that there has been a closer connection between employability and character given the focus on the latter by a number of business organisations, including the CBI). The following provider noted that:

I think it's really easy for us to get driven down an employability agenda, and that this is about young people developing skills around employability, and I think that what we mustn't lose is a really important element of this campaign

which is about social justice. It's about young people building their social literacy and the way they interact with others, and their understanding of problems that people in the community are facing, and understanding solutions to problems. And that isn't always about you developing skills for you to get a job.

Moreover, which specific virtues are being developed may not, in practice, be fully clear given the competing educational agendas involved, and the wider difficulty of separating out specific virtues, and indeed types of virtue. Not least, it is not always the case that those involved in youth social action will explain the benefits using the specific language of virtues. Another young person interviewed in the Habits of Service project, 'Beth', spoke in more general terms about how youth social action develops character expressing that 'it builds you as a person, cos it improves your organisation, it makes you, very quickly think on your feet' Similarly, for 'Colin', involvement in social action:

certainly made me a lot more confident as well, made me actually realise I was good at solving these sorts of disputes… so it definitely helped in sort of conflict resolution…gave me a lot more understanding about just people in general and what people want, and made me a lot more interested in how people actually function as well… Yeah, and just, confidence and leadership type stuff as well. It definitely changed me a lot I think, yeah.

To summarise this section, there exist, then, three spectrums within the double benefit:

1. Balancing the benefits: Individual $\Longleftrightarrow$ Society
2. Directing the societal benefit: Immediate/short-term $\Longleftrightarrow$ Structural/long-term
3. Directing the individual benefit: Résumé virtues $\Longleftrightarrow$ Eulogy virtues

These three spectrums raise important questions about service in relation to youth social action, not least regarding the kind of individual and societal benefits that stem from service (and, indeed, different interpretations of service) and how the individual and societal benefits can be balanced harmoniously. More research is needed to investigate how, in practice, these

spectrums are balanced and negotiated by social action providers and by young people themselves. Of particular note and interest is the addition of a third benefit – that to organisations. This third benefit is identified in the #iwill impact report (2019: 3) which presents the benefits of youth social action as relating to individuals, communities and organisations. With regard to the latter the report states that 'organisations benefit from young people's energy, ideas and capacity to create positive change. They gain a different perspective that can shift their way of thinking and open up new ways of working'.

Conclusion

Youth social action can, and often does, provide a forum for the development of a number of prosocial attitudes and behaviours. Our focus in this paper has been on what existing Centre studies tell us about the connections between youth social action and the formation and expression of character. Drawing principally on data from interviews with social action providers and with young people themselves, the research presented here highlights the complex and varied way that character and virtues intertwine with the activities and experiences involved in youth social action. Rather than presenting clear connections the words of those directly involved convey a range of complex and, at times, ambiguous relations that remain central to social action. These include the precise virtues that social action requires and develops and, within these, the focus and importance afforded to individual and community benefits.

As we noted in the paper, social action providers and young people engaged in social action undertake their work in a context of varied and, at times, competing agendas and there is an important impression in the data that they seek to mediate these agendas while making sense of their own activities and experiences on a more personal level. More research is still needed regarding precisely how these agendas support, or constrain, youth character development. Moreover, as we have suggested in this paper, the concept of service is central to youth social action and yet some providers and young people interviewed in Centre studies have signified their wariness, or even dislike, of the concept. That there were different perceptions of the value of the concept of "service" also prompts further research and reflection, both empirical and conceptual – a task we will be engaging with as we enter the next stage of the Centre's work. This need for further research should necessarily involve all stakeholders, including young people. We end with the following contemplation from a social action provider, who

stated that 'I think there's a massive vacuum and I think people want to talk about character…it's a really unclear definition, but just having a debate about it is really good because it just gets the word out there. But I feel like it's a word that doesn't have much public currency, and because we all believe that, no-one uses it in a funding sense, they use it over a glass of wine – that's the problem'.

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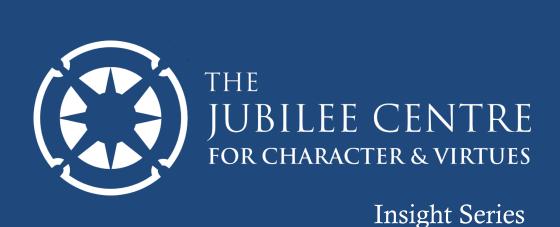
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