

Building Young People's Power: Different Approaches

Vivienne Jackson, Feb 2022

Organisations and young people create quality opportunities for young people to lead change based on different models.

In Act for Change Fund, we've seen different traditions, frameworks and practices to tackle social injustice that young people and organisations draw on when making change. Organisations and young people also synthesize blending and developing ideas and approaches.

Defining practice can impose an artificial neatness upon activities, but here are some broad pathways that evoke how Act for Change Fund saw young people work for change, that also evoke the better world or new systems they want to see:

- **Community organising** characterises organisations who set out with creating campaigns for wins, as well as building movements that start with young people's own experience, drawing on the theory and practice of community organising. Community organising can often lead to the most flamboyant and visible campaigns, and most measurable 'wins', as well as sustained, replicable movements based on collective relationships.
- **Coproduction** approaches are regularly linked to work around 'intransigent systems" (such as the criminal justice, social care, and mental health systems), where imagining different systems and reaching those with the power to change them can seem very far away. As highlighted in this [report around Mindset Shifts](#), different forms of changemaking (rather than campaigning) may at times be more effective when dealing with highly complex or technical issues of policy or practice, or issues perceived to be such.
- **Cultural transformers** activate young people's politics by embedding it in non-majority cultural practices and knowledge production alongside philosophies and alternative histories of injustice and changemaking. While these approaches may include direct campaigning, this work sets out to create an alternative world: to change the meanings and field of truth and history itself through particular lenses of justice. Art and the right to joy and wellbeing are a crucial part of this approach. Quality opportunities are viewed as a way to supercharge young radicals in their fields who will work outside of funded organisations and create change in wider institutions such as the media, the cultural industries, politics and business.

- **Rights-based approaches** are the overt starting point for some, although rights-based education is woven throughout this work. The starting point is holding adults to account through reference to rights and young people's abilities to activate them in existing social and political arenas. Organisations often leverage their own authority and power to support young people making change.
- **Movement building** is an aim of many organisations: to create a self-sustaining member body of support, action and changemaking led by young people. A clear priority here is the funding, recognition and payment of near peer leaders who develop training materials, pass on knowledge, and train the next cohort of changemaking young people who will take on the leadership mantle in turn.
- **Leadership** organisations invest in young people as leaders, endowing them with resources (political training, campaigning, connections, financial resources, networks) in order to either lead their own local campaigns and help organise young people in their communities, or to carry out their own individual campaigns or social action for change projects. This can be linked to the aspiration to develop a movement.
- **Speaking truth to power:** Some organisations work to lift up and centre young people's accounts of their lives, and how they want powerful systems to change. Organisations develop youth voice as a tool of political or social critique, with the recognition of injustice as a starting point, to create concrete change to unfair systems.