

# **YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION**

# **Embedding Social Action in Student Voice**

## About this resource

The aim of this resource is to provide guidance on embedding youth social action projects within student voice models by sharing best practice examples, case studies, research and links to supporting organisations. We hope you use this resource as a tool to empower students to take action and ownership of issues that are important to them. This resource can be used by staff or students to support working with student unions, student reps or any similar set-ups in colleges.

This resource has been created as part of the Association of Colleges Youth Social Action Programme (Phase Three) by the Regional Enrichment Coordinator. The programme was originally funded through the #iwill Pears fund in partnership with the Pears Foundation, #iwill and the National Lottery. The Pears have continued to support the programme by funding a further two phases.

Find out more about the Youth Social Action Programme (Phase 3)



## Bio



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Florence has been part of the Youth Social Action Programme since Phase One (2021-2023) and has been in a role dedicated to social action since 2021.

## Youth Social Action

### Definition

Youth social action refers to activities that you can do to make a positive difference to others or the environment.

There are lots of ways in which you can take practical action to make a positive difference. It can take place in a range of contexts and can mean formal or informal activities. These include volunteering, fundraising, campaigning or supporting peers.

### Principles

What does great youth social action look like? Research suggests that high quality activities will meet six principles including:

1. Be youth-led
2. Be challenging
3. Have social impact
4. Allow progression to other opportunities
5. Be embedded in a young person's life
6. Enable reflection about the value of the activity

*This definition and the principles come from [#iwill](#), who champion social action in the UK.*

The aim of social action is to empower young people to take action on issues that they care about and become active members of the community, so projects should be guided by them. Young people should build skills to take into the future to continue to act and create lasting habits.



# Case Study

## Leeds City College

### Members of Student Parliament (MSPs) and Students' Union

Leeds City College is a large FE college with approximately 8000 full time students. They use a community organising framework as part of their student voice model, which is used by other community organisers, including Citizens UK, Friends of the Earth and Community Organisers. The community organising model aims to empower students to take action on something they are passionate about and make meaningful change.

The MSPs are recruited in September, at the same time all students at the college complete 'Make your Mark', where they choose one issue that they think is most important on a ballot paper. From November, the MSPs come together on their campuses in weekly student council meetings with the Student Union Officers, and they work together to choose an issue as a focus, research the issue, speak to important people, and then spend a couple of months working on a social action project to address the issue.

#### Impact:

Approximately 100 different students from across departments engage every year. Last year, teams focused on issues around mental health and jobs and employment. They were able to gather listening from students on the impacts of mental health and hold meetings with the mental health team, who took on feedback and implemented key changes. Students also met with key staff, including principals from across the organisation and were able to have their voice heard.

*"Being a part of college parliament is great because it gives me the opportunity to help others in any way I can, which is something I've always wanted to do. The training has helped me feel comfortable around more people and bring myself out of my small circle of people."* - Creative Media student

*"I like helping people, and it gives me a purpose."* - Dance student

*"Getting new members to join college parliament and enabling the student voice was so rewarding. It made me rethink the way I communicate and strengthen my organisational skills."* - Adult ESOL student

# Notes on community organising

Definition of community organising: 'bringing people together to take action and make change on something that matters to them'. It makes a really effective structure for student voice and supports in empowering learners to action things they care about.

## Community organising is:

- Relational - builds relationships, everyone (staff and students) work as a team
- About building people power
- Working with people with power to make change



Community Organisers have produced a community organising framework which helps to build power and take action.

## Steps for running social action in student voice:

1

### Meet regularly and work coproductively

The group should meet weekly/fortnightly and make all decisions about their team and their project together.

## 2 Start with listening

Listening in a community organising context is often called a listening campaign and you can do multiple listening campaigns across the project, but it is important to start by understanding the student population and what they care about and the root causes of these issues. Collect student voice through votes, ballots, questionnaires. Staff can do lots of this to get the best reach and meet the college requirement to get student voice.

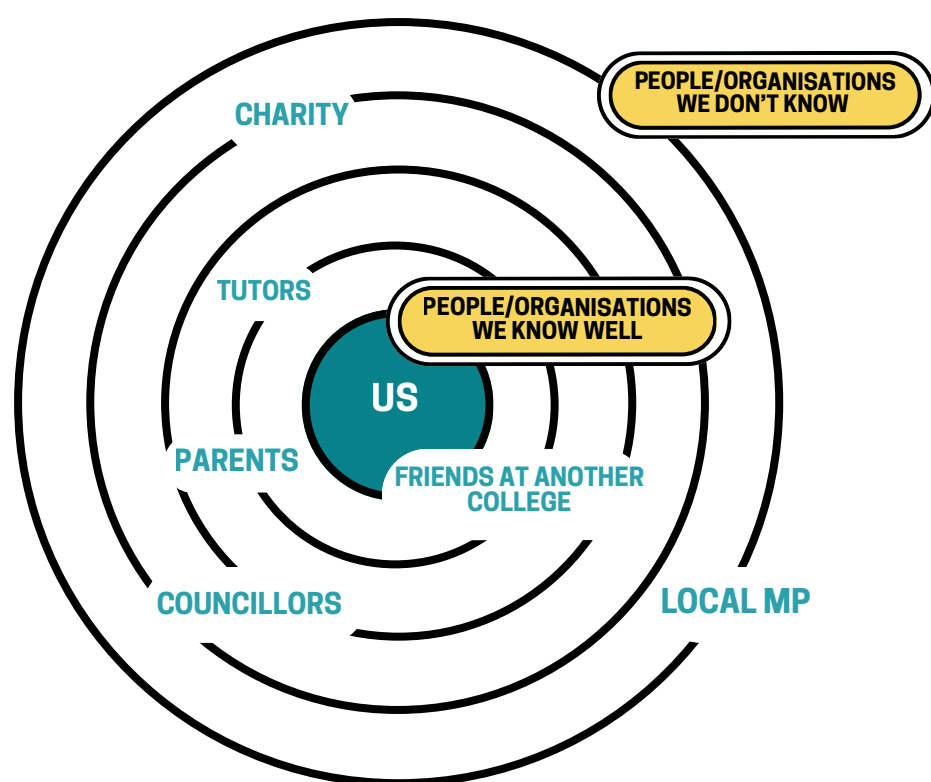
## 3 Pick an issue

Review the student voice and pick just one issue to start working on, your group will not be able to complete multiple high-quality actions in the time you have, plus you can feedback any other student voice to the relevant people.

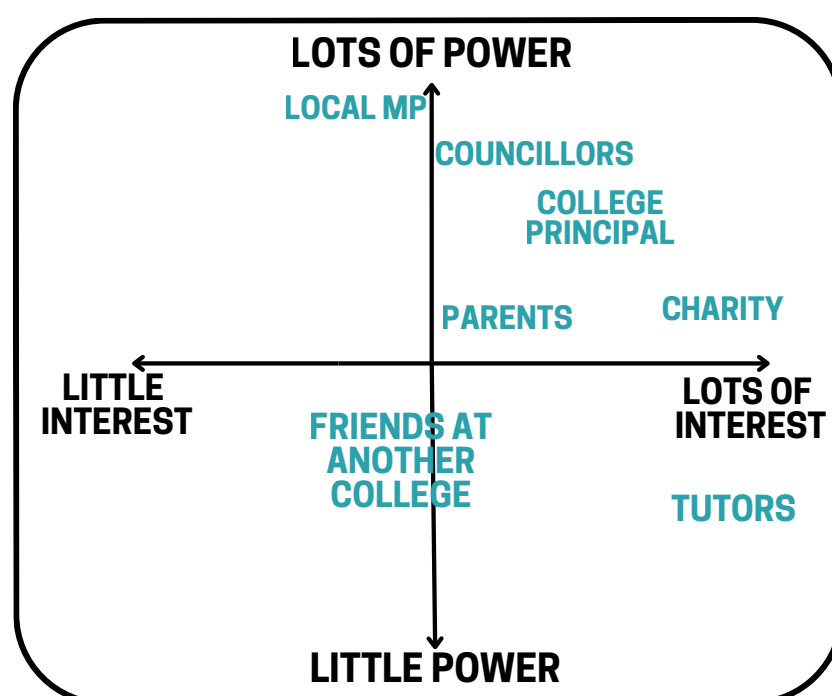
## 4 Research the issue

Find out more about the issue, do a community map and power map, then speak to some of the people on the maps - important people including college leaders and students - in more depth to find out what they know and think about the issue.

**Community mapping helps us to understand all the people related to an issue and how we are connected to them**



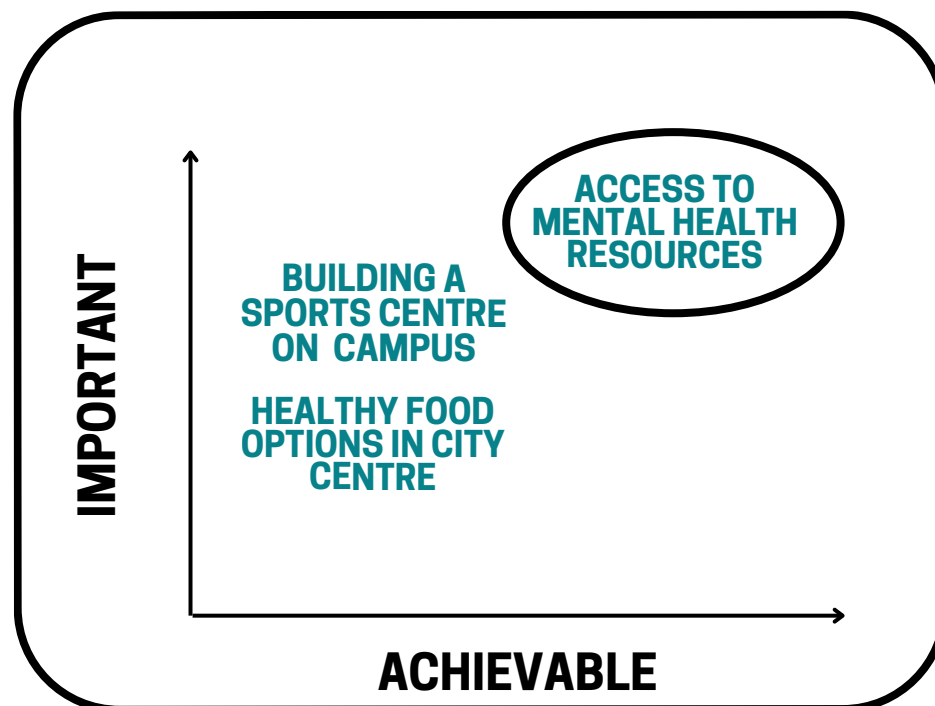
**Power mapping helps us understand more about the people involved and the power they hold. We can map who will support us and who might disagree with us, so we can make our project most effective.**



# 5

## Pick a priority

Discuss the outcomes of research and choose what you want to change. Use an important vs achievable graph to help the students decide.



# 6

## Set a goal

Decide on your action - this could be an intervention to directly address the issue, a campaign to people in power or it could involve working with a charity or community organisation. Consider what is challenging for your team but achievable in a couple of months. You can find social action case studies on the [AoC website](#). Create a goal together and make your goal SMART.

# 7

## Plan and prepare

Let the team decide their roles and their tasks and spend a few weeks working through the tasks together. Create a timeline with the team, but adapt plans as needed if things don't go to plan. Try and set target dates to avoid spending too long on tasks. Include any training and workshops in this time so the team feel equipped. This is the students' project so let them take ownership of the tasks and action.

# 8

## Act!

It's time for action! Create opportunities that stretch the students - you can use Learning Zones as a guide. Run your activity then make sure you gather impact and reflect.



## Top tips for running sessions

- Create a structure to run your meetings - high challenge and high support. Students do not yet have the knowledge to make change but will bring all the ideas and insight.
- Make sure everyone in the room (staff, students, SLT) is working at the same level and everyone makes decisions together.
- As a staff member, don't be afraid to use your knowledge on an issue or the structure to offer guidance and advice - the students don't know it all and they don't have to.
- Consider ways to work relationally - set the room out to aid conversation and do rounds or restorative questions at the start of any meeting.
- Work with organisations that know about the issue - they will have knowledge that will be helpful.
- Set out a timeline for delivery with key deadlines to avoid going over time.
- Reflect and gather feedback to understand impact.



## References

This resource draws on common community organising practices, including community mapping and power mapping, which are widely used across the field.

#iwill (no date) Youth Action: UK Youth Charity Empowering 10-25 Year Olds. [online] Available at: <https://www.iwill.org.uk/>

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