

EVALUATION REPORT

Peer Action Collective

Feasibility Study Report

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Mayambala

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About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we'll fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluation to find out what works. Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, young people deserve support grounded in the evidence. We'll build that knowledge through our various grant rounds and funding activities.

And just as important, is understanding children and young people's lives. Through our Youth Advisory Board and national network of peer researchers, we'll ensure they influence our work and we understand and are addressing their needs. But none of this will make a difference if all we do is produce reports that stay on a shelf.

Together, we need to look at the evidence and agree what works, then build a movement to make sure that young people get the very best support possible. Our strategy sets out how we'll do it. At its heart, it says that we will fund good work, find what works and work for change. You can read it [here](#).

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About the evaluator

Renaissi aims to empower people and strengthen communities by tackling the root causes of economic and social exclusion. We work with individuals experiencing social and economic disadvantage and with organisations across the social and private sectors to actively address these challenges. Renaissi uses research, evaluation and learning to drive change and create more inclusive communities.

Renaissi was commissioned during the feasibility phase of the Peer Action Collective (PAC) programme, funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, Co-op and #iwill, to lead the evaluation of the second iteration of the programme, PAC2, delivered between 2023 and 2025. As part of the initial scoping phase, Renaissi produced a short learning report capturing key insights from PAC1, delivered between 2021 and 2023. This report informed the design of the research, evaluation approach, and monitoring and evaluation framework for PAC2. Drawing on a review of existing documents, consultations with stakeholders and informal discussions with delivery partners at the PAC2 launch event, the learning report highlighted the successes and challenges of PAC1. It also identified key data requirements and provided recommendations for an effective monitoring and evaluation framework. These findings informed a set of principles to guide the design of PAC2's feasibility study, which included:

- **Streamlined communication:** Renaissi held regular meetings with the Youth Endowment Fund and The Young Foundation, established a dedicated email address and shared folders for resources, and provided follow-up communication for delivery partners, including question-and-answer sessions.
- **Clear and timely feedback:** Renaissi built feedback processes into all communications with the Youth Endowment Fund and The Young Foundation to support quick decision-making and ongoing development of the evaluation approach.
- **Involvement of delivery partners and young people:** Renaissi introduced itself as the monitoring and evaluation partner at national webinars and the in-person launch event. A youth panel was also created as a formal way for young people to provide feedback and shape the evaluation process.
- **Training and support for delivery partners:** Renaissi delivered two training sessions to explain the monitoring requirements for phase two. These were followed up with an email offering one-to-one support calls, detailed guidance documents and access to the presentation slides.

As part of the scoping work, Renaissi used learning from PAC1, gathered through document reviews and stakeholder interviews, to design a feasibility study for PAC2. The study was designed to be proportionate and deliverable within the available budget while still generating meaningful insight to inform the evaluation of PAC3. Renaissi worked closely with the Youth Endowment Fund and The Young Foundation to co-develop a monitoring and evaluation approach that met funder requirements, centred on young people's experiences and balanced robust data collection with a trauma-informed, low-burden process.

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Executive summary

The project

The Peer Action Collective (PAC) aims to create opportunities for children and young people to take an active role in preventing violence by doing research and taking action to improve their communities. Young people aged 16–24 who have been affected by violence take on two key roles: peer researcher and social action lead. Peer researchers conduct research with other children and young people to better understand violence in their areas, and social action leads use the insights to design and deliver projects that promote change and improve safety for children and young people. Examples of social action projects include creating films and toolkits, running workshops, leading awareness campaigns and engaging with decision-makers. Social action projects also involve changemakers – a voluntary role for children and young people aged between 10 and 24 to help with delivering social action. Peer researchers and social action leads receive training and payment for their work. PAC participants (who take part in the research and social action activities) are aged between 10 and 20.

There have been two rounds of the PAC programme. PAC2, the focus of this report, ran from March 2023 to September 2025 across seven regions in England and Wales: Lancashire, London, Midlands, Northeast England, Southwest England, Wales and Yorkshire. Each region delivered two research projects and several social action projects. Delivery was supported by 15 local delivery partners (either single organisations in one area or networks across multiple areas). Partners were responsible for recruitment, training, delivery and safeguarding. The Young Foundation was the national partner, responsible for overall coordination and delivery of the programme. Their role included facilitating national activities and providing training and support to those involved. PAC is co-funded by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport), and the Co-op Group.

The YEF funded a feasibility study of PAC2, which ran from March 2024 to June 2025. The study looked at whether the PAC model works in practice and how it could be further evaluated. It also explored the best way to design a future evaluation. A range of methods were used in the study, including interviews with a range of people: 34 with PAC researchers and social action leads, 46 with PAC participants and changemakers, seven with delivery partners, and 13 with external stakeholders (including community members and organisations working with PAC). Demographic monitoring data on PAC participants was collected, as well as data from observations of delivery partner meetings, PAC workshops, and monitoring and evaluation meetings. A stakeholder survey was conducted (generating 24 responses from three regions), and two surveys (one at the start and one at the end of the study) were conducted with young people in PAC roles. The pre-survey generated 83 responses from across seven regions, and the post-survey generated 43 responses from five regions. Of the 43 young people in PAC roles who responded to the post-survey, 35% were from White backgrounds, 30% from Black backgrounds, 16% from Asian backgrounds, 12% from Mixed backgrounds, 2% from any other ethnic background and 5% did not specify. As of April 2025 (when data for this report was captured), five months of PAC2 delivery remained and the programme had engaged 2,211 children and young people.

Key conclusions
PAC2 delivered youth-led work which reflected priorities identified by young people. Research covered topics such as education, trusted adults and positive activities, which informed social action projects, including a film, educational tools, workshops and awareness campaigns. Delivery across the seven areas varied, partly owing to intended flexibility within the PAC model and partly to establishing processes to support youth-led delivery.
A broad range of young people engaged in PAC2. Participation by Black, Asian and Minority ethnic young people exceeded the 30% target set. At the time of writing, recruitment targets for PAC roles and participants had been partially met (as PAC2 was still being delivered).
Young people generally enjoyed PAC activities, reporting that they built their confidence and research skills. Some young people felt that PAC was the first programme in which they had genuine influence. Delivery partners and external stakeholders felt that PAC increased young people's confidence, skills and readiness to engage with decision-makers.

Programme design and delivery could be improved by prioritising recruiting young people with experience of violence, co-developing targets with delivery partners and planning timelines more flexibly. Integrating robust, consistent data collection methods within delivery processes could help better assess PAC's reach.

The feasibility study found that PAC2 can be evaluated in ways that are both practical and consistent with its participatory ethos. Future evaluation should prioritise stakeholder- and community-level outcomes as the primary measure, aligning with PAC2's theory of change. Recommended approaches include system-mapping workshops, pre- and post-programme interviews, and stakeholder surveys to track shifts in attitudes, practices and policies.

Interpretation

PAC2 delivered youth-led work which reflected priorities identified by young people. Research covered topics such as education, trusted adults and positive activities, which informed social action projects, including a film, educational tools, workshops and awareness campaigns. PAC2 engaged stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally, including youth groups, councils, government and media. Delivery across the seven areas varied in intensity and structure, reflecting both the intended flexibility of the model (to adapt to local contexts) and the time needed to establish processes to support youth-led delivery, such as human resource systems and safeguarding processes. Some delivery partners noted that programme timelines and recruitment expectations were not always compatible with trust-based, trauma-informed ways of working. Where delivery partners had strong existing community links, this eased PAC recruitment, strengthened credibility and helped embed projects locally.

A broad range of young people engaged in PAC2. Participation by Black, Asian and Minority ethnic young people exceeded the 30% target set, while participation by disabled young people fell below the 15% target. Young people in PAC roles were mostly aged 16–18. The feasibility study concluded before the end of PAC2 delivery, so, as of April 2025, recruitment targets for PAC roles and participants had been partially met. With five months of delivery remaining, the programme had engaged 2,211 children and young people, including 80 peer researchers and social action leads, 1,764 research and social action participants, and 367 changemakers.

Young people generally enjoyed PAC activities, reporting that they built their confidence and research skills and that their contributions were acknowledged and acted upon. Some young people described PAC2 as the first programme in which their perspectives had a genuine influence. Delivery partners and external stakeholders perceived that PAC increased young people's confidence, skills and readiness to engage with decision-makers. They also observed that young people displayed ownership over the work, particularly where research findings were linked to social action. There were signs that PAC2 might influence delivery partners and stakeholders, including their perceptions of young people, the need to involve them in decision-making and the willingness to change organisational practices, such as by embedding youth voice.

Programme design and delivery could be improved by: prioritising the recruitment of young people with experience of violence, co-developing targets with delivery partners, planning timelines more flexibly, exploring how PAC roles could be combined to strengthen the research-action link and embedding the national survey more clearly in delivery. Incomplete and inconsistent demographic reporting limits how well PAC's reach can be assessed. More consistent data collection, integrated into delivery, could build a fuller picture.

The feasibility study found that PAC2 can be evaluated in ways that are both practical and consistent with its participatory ethos. Future evaluation should prioritise stakeholder and community-level outcomes as the primary outcome measure, aligning with PAC2's theory of change. Recommended approaches include system-mapping workshops, pre- and post-programme interviews and stakeholder surveys to track shifts in attitudes, practices and policies over time. Refining evaluation tools and processes, including stronger central coordination and earlier engagement with young people and delivery partners, could improve consistency and comparability across sites. Flexible data collection windows, proportionate support for delivery staff and the collection of demographic data from the outset could all improve future evaluation.

YEF is progressing to a pilot study of the third round of PAC which will pilot an approach to impact design. PAC3 will run from 2025 to 2028 across four regions in England.

Introduction

Background

Youth involvement in violence, as both victims and perpetrators, remains a complex and evolving issue across England and Wales. According to the Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF) *Children, Violence and Vulnerability 2024* survey, 16% of young people aged 13–17 reported experiencing violence in the preceding 12 months, while 15% said they had committed an act of violence (YEF, 2024a). In this context, violence is defined as “the use of force or threat of force against another person or people, for example, punching someone, threatening someone with a weapon, or mugging someone. This also includes sexual assault, which is when somebody intentionally touches someone in a sexual way without their consent” (YEF, 2024a, p.12).

The ways in which young people encounter violence are also changing. What once took place primarily in physical spaces, such as schools or neighbourhoods, is now increasingly occurring online. Around 70% of teenagers who responded to the survey reported seeing real-world violence, such as fights or assault, shared on social media (YEF, 2024a). This increased exposure can heighten awareness but also make violence feel more constant and harder to avoid. The growing presence of violent content online appears to be influencing how young people perceive risk and manage their day-to-day lives. In the YEF's 2024 survey, two-thirds said they worried about becoming victims themselves and over half reported changing their behaviour to avoid potential harm. For some, this fear is also affecting their well-being and impacting sleep, appetite and concentration in school (YEF, 2024a).

The experiences and impacts of youth violence are not felt equally. Certain groups of young people, including those from racially marginalised backgrounds, those from low-income households and those with care experience, face disproportionate exposure to violence and its consequences. Black children, for example, make up just 6% of 10–17-year-olds in England and Wales, yet in 2023/24, they accounted for 10% of arrests, 15% of stop-and-searches and 24% of the youth custody population (Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice, 2024). They are also six times more likely to be victims of homicide than children from other ethnic backgrounds (Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice, 2024). These disparities highlight the urgent need to address the structural inequalities that leave some young people far more exposed to harm than others.

The drivers of youth violence – affecting both those who perpetrate and those who are victims – are complex and deeply interconnected. Young people involved are often navigating multiple and overlapping disadvantages, including racism, economic hardship, instability at home, mental or physical ill-health and abuse. The *Children, Violence and Vulnerability 2024* report confirms that these vulnerabilities rarely occur in isolation; instead, they compound, placing some young people at much greater risk (YEF, 2024a). These are not individual or one-off challenges but rather systemic issues embedded in the structures and environments shaping their lives. Addressing youth violence, therefore, requires more than treating surface-level symptoms. It demands systemic change that targets the root conditions enabling harm to take hold and persist.

Recent work by the YEF reinforces the value of a systemic and place-based approach. Building on learning from early initiatives, such as the YEF Neighbourhood Fund, which tested different models of community engagement, the YEF explored how, where and when place-based strategies can improve outcomes for children at risk of violence. Their 2024 *Place-Based Approaches to Tackling Local Youth Violence* review

found that multi-agency, community-rooted strategies are particularly effective, especially when co-produced with young people and tailored to the unique context of each area (YEF, 2024b). This evidence underscores the urgent need to rethink how youth violence prevention is designed and delivered and reflects recent calls for greater co-production in youth policy – where young people are not simply consulted but actively involved in decisions that affect their lives (The Young Foundation, 2024b; GOV.UK, 2022).

This includes peer-led, community-based approaches which draw on local knowledge and create space for young people who are often excluded from traditional services. One such approach gaining traction is peer research, a model which trains young people to investigate issues in their own communities – using methods such as interviews, surveys and creative engagement to co-produce recommendations or actions. The homelessness charity Groundswell can be credited with much of the development of peer research practices in the UK since the 1990s (Groundswell, n.d). Over the past five years, organisations such as The Young Foundation (The Young Foundation, 2024a) and Poverty Alliance have helped formalise this work through practical tools, training programmes and structured frameworks (Poverty Alliance, 2021).

There is emerging evidence to support the value of peer research, including improving access to marginalised perspectives, generating richer insights and building young people’s skills and well-being. It has also been found to enhance young people’s sense of agency by positioning them as key decision-makers and active agents in the design and delivery of interventions (The Young Foundation, 2024b).

Alongside peer research, youth social action (YSA) is also evidenced in the literature as an effective approach for supporting positive outcomes for young people. The #iwill Campaign provides the following definition:

Youth social action refers to activities that young people do to make a positive difference to others or the environment. There are lots of ways in which young people 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. (#iwill, n.d.)

Though not explicitly emphasised in the above definition, the two elements commonly associated with YSA are (1) a mutual benefit, whereby projects benefit both communities and young people, and (2) the project is, at least to some extent, youth-led (#iwill Fund Learning Hub, 2023).

Launched in 2013, the #iwill Movement has been instrumental in the development of YSA in the UK. The movement came about through cross-party government consultation in 2012, with patronage from King Charles III (at the time, the Prince of Wales). The #iwill Fund is a joint initiative of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the National Lottery Community Fund. The fund works with a network of match funders to resource YSA projects across England, including BBC Children in Need, Sport England, The Diana Award and Sovereign Housing Association. Since its establishment, there has been a growing evidence base on the outcomes of YSA. Yet, owing partly to attribution challenges and the longer timeframes required, the evidence remains stronger for direct impacts on young people (e.g. National Youth Agency, 2022; SQW, 2024) than on communities.

Alongside the rise of peer research and YSA approaches in the UK, it is important to situate these developments within the wider context of youth sector funding. In research published in early 2025, YMCA found that between 2010/11 and 2023/24, there had been a 73% decline in local authority funding for youth services in England, representing a real-terms cut of £1.2 billion between 2010/11 and 2023/24 (YMCA England & Wales, 2025). This report estimated the loss of the equivalent of 1,662 full-time equivalent youth

workers in England in 2023/24, with 34% fewer youth workers in 2023/24 than in 2012/13 (YMCA England & Wales, 2025).

Through our evaluation and research partnerships, the Renaisi team works closely with the youth sector and has observed it facing multiple intersecting systemic pressures. These manifest through limited staff capacity, well-being challenges and high turnover, and the frequent closure and mergers of youth-serving organisations. This context is a key reason why, in this report, we emphasise a low-burden evaluation process – recognising the capacity constraints of youth organisations alongside other considerations.

This combination of peer research, participatory practice and youth-led social action was brought together and piloted through the first funding round of the Peer Action Collective (PAC).¹ While each of these approaches has been used separately, PAC represented a unique attempt to combine them into a single programme. However, this model has not yet been robustly evaluated. Given the scale of the challenge and the strength of the emerging evidence base, a feasibility study is now needed to explore how integrated peer-led participatory approaches, such as PAC, can be effectively implemented and rigorously evaluated.

As the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) partner, Renaisi has conducted this feasibility study to strengthen the evidence base for participatory and youth-led approaches. The research aims to understand not only whether these models work but also how they work, for whom and under what conditions they are most effective. This focus is particularly important for tackling the structural drivers of violence and improving long-term outcomes for the young people most affected. By evaluating this youth-led, participatory, place-based approach, this study seeks to generate vital insights into its potential, limitations and opportunities for building safer and fairer communities.

Intervention

Overview

The PAC is a five-year, youth-led programme that empowers young people across England and Wales to take an active role in tackling serious youth violence through peer research and evidence-informed social action. It is funded by the YEF, the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between the National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Co-op Group.

PAC is founded on the principle that young people are experts in their own experiences and builds on research which shows that when young people are meaningfully involved in decision-making, the solutions developed are more relevant, effective and sustainable. PAC engages those at risk of, or directly affected by, violence – supporting them to investigate the issues shaping their lives and to lead collective action in response. The programme combines peer research to generate insight, participatory practice to ensure young people lead the process and YSA to create tangible change. The integration of these approaches has rarely been evaluated at scale, making PAC an important opportunity to test its potential for impact.

¹ More information can be found on the Peer Action Collective website: <https://peeractioncollective.com/>

PAC is being delivered in three iterations between 2021 and 2028, aiming to engage 11,000 young people across England and Wales over seven years. Each iteration builds on the learning from the previous ones, refining the approach and evolving the model. These include:

- **PAC1 (2021–2023)** operated in 10 areas across England and Wales through networks of local delivery partners. Research topics were identified by local teams in response to community priorities, covering a wide range of issues linked to young people’s experiences of violence. Findings from this phase informed the programme’s national evidence base and highlighted opportunities to strengthen its design and delivery.
- **PAC2 (2023–2025)** is currently being delivered in seven areas and focuses on three themes identified by the YEF based on PAC1 learning: 1) positive activities, 2) trusted adults and 3) education. This phase aims to build a stronger link between peer research and social action while also testing how the model can influence local and national systems.
- **PAC3 (2025–2028)** will operate in four regions across England,² with research centred on policing, mental health and children’s services. It will carry forward the learning from the first two phases, continue to embed youth leadership and further develop PAC’s role as a national platform for evidence-informed, youth-led change. PAC3 will also focus on consolidating the programme’s long-term impact and sustainability.

This feasibility study focuses exclusively on PAC2, with the intention that its findings will inform the design and delivery of PAC3.

Programme partners and participants

Alongside its core funders, and working across seven regions in England and Wales, PAC2 is delivered through a network of partners, including young people, local delivery partners, a national partner and an M&E partner.

Young people

Young people are central to the delivery of the programme and can be involved in a variety of different ways. Each of the five roles – peer researcher, social action lead, changemaker, social action participant and research participant – has a defined purpose, time commitment and set of responsibilities, all linked to PAC’s two core components: peer research and social action. This structure positions young people at multiple points in the programme cycle, from identifying local issues through research to leading activities aimed at addressing them. The range of roles provides flexibility, enabling participation at levels that correspond to differing interests, availability and prior experience.

² Due to changes to the funding structure in PAC3, the programme will no longer operate in Wales.

Table 1. Overview of young people's roles and responsibilities

Role	Description
Peer researchers and social action leads (aged 16–20)	These are paid members of staff employed and managed by local delivery partners at the national living wage level. These roles are leadership positions within Peer Action Collective (PAC) and form the bridge between peer research and social action. Both roles require significant time commitments – on average, around 700 hours across a programme phase – but they can be adapted to suit individual strengths, interests and availability. Peer researchers design and deliver research projects to engage other young people in exploring the issues that matter most in their communities. Their work may include conducting interviews, running focus groups, facilitating workshops and supporting the delivery of the national survey (see the national partner subsection below). They receive training to build their skills and are supported in shaping the role around their interests while meeting the programme's goals. Social action leads focus on turning research insights into tangible change. By working alongside peer researchers from the outset, they gain a deep understanding of the evidence base and use this to develop and lead long-term social action projects. This can include planning campaigns, coordinating events and building partnerships to address the identified priorities. Like peer researchers, they also receive training and have the flexibility to tailor their approach to the needs of their communities. In PAC2, the target was to recruit 70 young people into peer researcher and social action lead roles.
Changemakers (aged 10–20)	Changemakers volunteer in long-term social action opportunities, working closely with social action leads. They received structured training in project management, public speaking and teamwork, ensuring the social action strand reflects a wide range of perspectives. In PAC2, the target was for 560 changemakers to each contribute at least 12 hours to planning and delivering projects.
Social action participants (aged 10–20)	Social action participants take part in short-term social action activities, contributing up to 10 hours. These activities, often community events or campaigns, are organised by changemakers and social action leads. In PAC2, the target was for 1,400 young people to participate in this way, helping to deliver projects and engage the wider community.
Research participants (aged 10–20)	Research participants take part in peer research activities led by peer researchers, including interviews, workshops, focus groups and the national survey conducted by The Young Foundation. In PAC2, the target was for 3,500 young people to take part in peer research and respond to the survey.

Local delivery partners

Across the seven PAC2 areas, young people are supported by local delivery partners or networks of partner organisations. These organisations are responsible for delivering the PAC2 programme in their region, ensuring that peer research and social action are meaningfully connected and that young people have the training, resources and support needed to succeed. Their responsibilities include:

- Programme delivery – Recruiting, retaining and managing young people across all PAC roles, including overseeing payments, safeguarding and ensuring high-quality training and support for both peer research and social action. Delivery partners are responsible for ensuring that these two components are meaningfully connected and aligned to the local context.
- Safeguarding – Implementing and maintaining robust safeguarding procedures to protect the safety, well-being and rights of all young people involved.
- Engagement and participation – Supporting regional engagement with PAC-wide initiatives, such as the national youth survey, PAC conferences and quarterly network meetings. This includes enabling young people to participate in national events and promoting cross-regional learning.
- Monitoring and reporting – Collecting and reporting demographic and engagement data across all PAC roles, submitting monthly monitoring updates, and contributing to quarterly reports for the funder. Delivery partners also support evaluation activities, including distributing surveys and arranging fieldwork visits in collaboration with the M&E partner.
- Consortium delivery – Where delivery is through a consortium, the lead organisation is responsible for managing the regional programme, coordinating with The Young Foundation on project planning, participating in PAC-wide meetings and events, and leading on funder reporting for the consortium.

National partner – The Young Foundation

As the national partner, The Young Foundation provides strategic leadership and coordination for the PAC network across England and Wales. They ensure consistency in delivery, maintain strong connections between regional teams and provide guidance and resources to maximise the programme's impact. Their responsibilities include:

- Monitoring and managing the progress of delivery partners and the wider network, providing ongoing support and guidance to help them meet targets
- Offering consistent guidance to young people and delivery partners throughout PAC projects, including facilitating PAC-wide networking opportunities and delivering both virtual and in-person training
- Acting as the primary point of contact for delivery partners, supporting the recruitment, training and management of young people involved in peer research and social action.
- Co-designing a national youth survey to complement qualitative peer research, with the aim of generating scalable impact across England and Wales
- Analysing and reporting on data collected from peer research across the PAC network

Programme activities and timelines

Figure 1. Summary timeline of PAC2 delivery



PAC2 followed an overarching delivery framework from February 2023 to September 2025. While timelines varied in some locations owing to local contexts and challenges (explored later in this report), each delivery partner broadly followed the same framework, with activities adapted in each region to suit local priorities. These activities included:

1. Partner recruitment

Up to seven delivery partners, along with a national partner (The Young Foundation), were recruited to deliver PAC2.

2. Recruitment of paid young people

Each delivery partner recruited at least 10 young people into peer researcher and social action lead roles. These roles carried responsibility for leading both research and social action activities.

3. Induction, training and pilot projects

Young people and delivery partners completed induction and training delivered by The Young Foundation.

- Delivery partner induction was delivered mainly online.
- Training for young people in peer research and social action was a mix of online and face-to-face sessions.
- A residential event was held in November 2023 to support the induction of young people into peer research and social action roles, helping them to embed within the programme. Following training, a short pilot research phase allowed young people to strengthen their research skills before starting the first major project.

4. The foundation project

The first project provided an opportunity to explore a selected research topic and deliver related social action.

- Each delivery partner focused on a single research question to ensure sufficient depth.
- Social action leads and delivery partners received support from The Young Foundation during planning to identify and engage key stakeholders, increasing the likelihood of successful delivery.
- Social action activities in this phase were designed in direct response to research findings. They ranged from awareness-raising campaigns and community events to advocacy work with local decision-makers. Activities reflected PAC's distinct approach to social action, including alignment with the #iwill principles, cooperative values and a focus on creating lasting impact.

5. The development project

The second project allowed teams to either:

- Explore a new priority within their chosen theme, reflecting emerging issues identified by young people or
- Deepen their inquiry into the same topic as the foundation project, building on existing findings to strengthen the evidence base.
- Social action activities in this phase built on earlier work, either expanding successful approaches or introducing new initiatives informed by the latest research. The focus was on strengthening impact, embedding change and ensuring sustainability beyond the programme period.

6. National activity

Local delivery was complemented by national strands of work, including the national youth survey designed by The Young Foundation and distributed by PAC delivery teams, as well as engagement with national stakeholders to increase the reach and influence of findings.

7. Conferences and learning events

Two national PAC conferences – held in November 2024 and July 2025 – showcased the achievements of young people and facilitated knowledge-sharing across the network. In addition, a dedicated learning event for delivery partners provided space for reflection, peer exchange and the sharing of good practice.

Key focus areas in PAC2 peer research

For PAC2, the YEF identified three priority research topics. These were based on findings from PAC1 and wider evidence about what works to prevent youth violence. The topics were selected to ensure that young people's insights could meaningfully contribute to existing gaps in knowledge and policy.

The three set topics were:

1. **Positive activities:** to explore how sport and other structured activities might protect young people from involvement in violence. This includes examining the role of positive peer relationships, opportunities to take safe risks and connections to wider services.
2. **Education:** to understand how education settings can better support children and young people to attend, engage and succeed in school while reducing their vulnerability to violence. This also includes investigating what high-quality provision looks like for those in alternative education.
3. **Trusted adults:** to examine how access to a consistent, supportive adult may help prevent or reduce young people's involvement in violence.

Each delivery partner team chose one of these topics to focus on. From there, young people led the development of specific research questions. Working in partnership with the YEF and The Young Foundation, they identified which aspects of the topic were most relevant to them and their local area. While the three broad topics were set nationally and could not be changed, young people had real control over how their chosen topic was explored – shaping the focus of the research, the methods used and the changes they hoped to influence as a result. In most cases, the second project built directly on the first, using earlier findings to build on research from their first project.

Reach and inclusive participation

A core aim of PAC is to ensure participation is inclusive, diverse and informed by the lived experiences of young people most affected by violence. The programme aims to work with those at risk of, or with direct experience of, violence, placing their perspectives at the centre of peer research and youth-led social action. PAC places particular emphasis on engaging young people from groups disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, including Black, Asian, and Minority ethnic³ communities. The programme recognises that addressing factors such as racism, inequality and marginalisation is essential to achieve sustained change.

To achieve this, PAC2 set targets for delivery partners in all regions to ensure a wide range of perspectives were represented across its network. Delivery partners in all regions were expected to design and implement recruitment strategies to meet the following targets:

- At least 30% of participants will be from Black, Asian, and Minority ethnic backgrounds.
- At least 15% will come from rural or non-urban areas.
- At least 8% will identify as disabled young people, including those with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and neurodiversity.

The programme also recognises the importance of including care-experienced young people, who are particularly vulnerable to harm and exclusion. While no formal target was set due to the complexity of engaging this group at scale, delivery partners were expected to proactively consider how they could include care-experienced young people in the delivery of both research and social action activities.

Research questions

Values underpinning the study

The PAC2 feasibility study was designed to assess two core areas:

1. The feasibility of implementing the PAC model
2. The feasibility of evaluating participatory, youth-led, place-based approaches to tackling youth violence

In addressing these areas, the study aimed to refine the programme's theory of change, identify contextual enablers and barriers to delivery, and capture learning to guide both the implementation and pilot evaluation of PAC3, the third and final phase of the programme. The intention was to generate insights that could strengthen the model, inform realistic evaluation approaches and ensure that learning from PAC2 was applied effectively in the next phase.

The feasibility study's scoping and delivery phases took place between March 2024 and June 2025. This period did not align with the programme's overall schedule (February 2023 to September 2025), as the study

³ The evaluation team acknowledges the limitations and contested nature of the term BAME, which can obscure the diversity of experiences within and between different ethnic groups. While alternative terminology may be more appropriate in other contexts, the term is used here to remain consistent with the language employed by the Youth Endowment Fund in describing the programme.

began after PAC2 was already in progress and concluded before the programme ended. Timing differences between the study and the programme, and their implications, are explored further in the limitations section of this report.

The study was designed in line with six values critical for effective engagement with communities and young people (see Figure 2). These included 1) minimising the burden on participants and delivery partners, 2) ensuring youth participation at all stages, 3) recognising real-world pressures, 4) using engaging methods, 5) applying trauma-informed practice and 6) maintaining a flexible design responsive to changing contexts and needs. These values shaped both the selection of study methods and the way in which the evaluation was planned and delivered, helping to ensure that the process was accessible, respectful and responsive to the needs of participants.

Figure 2. The values behind the design

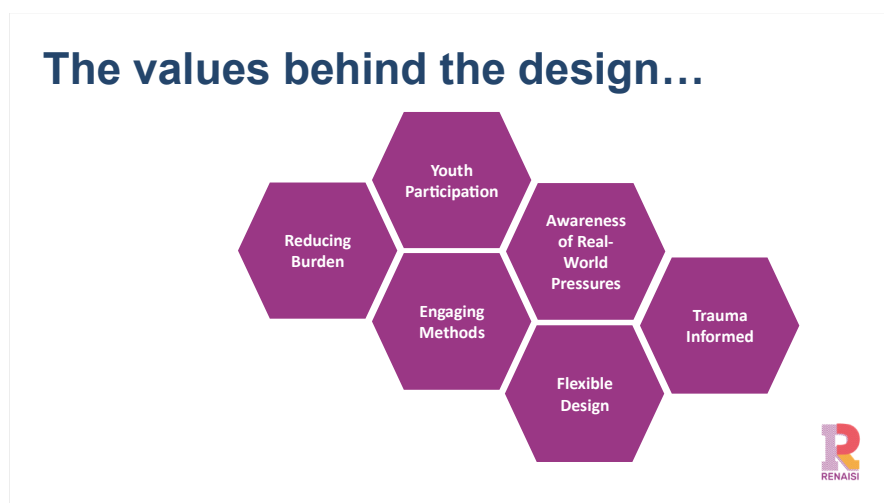


Image: slide from the delivery partner training session on M&E

Development of research questions

The evaluation questions were developed during the first six months of the feasibility implementation phase based on the original questions set out in the evaluation tender to ensure alignment with the desired evaluation approach for PAC2. Minor amendments were proposed and approved, primarily to strengthen their alignment with the commissioners' desired evaluation methods and guide the selection of appropriate fieldwork methods for data collection and analysis.

Feasibility phase – implementation process evaluation

Overall question: how is PAC being put into practice? How is it operating to achieve social change (i.e. policy and practice in local areas)? What are the factors that influence these processes?

Sub-questions:

- **Fidelity/adherence:** in what ways are the PAC activities being delivered as intended?
- **Dosage:** how much of the intended PAC activity has been delivered? Can a 'dosage' be identified for each area?
- **Quality:** in what ways do PAC activities reflect solutions to local issues identified by the peer researchers? How well are the different components of PAC being delivered?

- **Reach:** what is the rate of participation by peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers? What is the reach of stakeholders? Why might rates of participation differ across areas/groups of young people?
- **Responsiveness:** in what ways do actors/organisations within a local community engage with PAC activities conducted by peer researchers? Are there any national responses to the national reports and/or projects delivered as part of PAC?
- **Provider/implementer factors:** what is the perceived need for PAC amongst stakeholders? What are the perceived benefits of PAC amongst key stakeholders?
- **Implementation support system:** what strategies and practices are used to support the high-quality implementation of PAC? What might the barriers be to the high-quality implementation of PAC?

Feasibility phase – evaluation

Overall question: what is the recommended evaluation approach for the next phase of evaluating participative, youth-led, place-based approaches that builds the evidence base but remains feasible and appropriate for the level of development of the programme?

Sub-questions:

- **Outcomes:** what are some notable outcomes for participants and places during this phase of work?
- **Place:** is examining the community level possible in the next stage, and, if so, what should those outcomes be, and how will they be measured?
- **Outcomes:** what are the most suitable outcomes for the project to measure? What is the unit of analysis? What should the primary outcome of PAC be? Is data available/accessible? Are there any issues and potential solutions to enabling the collection of high-quality data?
- **Measurement:** what measures are the most reliable, valid and practical for assessing the potential impact of PAC?
- **Recruitment:** what are the appropriate recruitment strategies for the evaluation?
- **Retention:** what are the appropriate methods for improving retention in the evaluation?
- How can the PAC theory of change be developed and refined to best describe how PAC operates, as well as the intended output and outcomes of the programme?

Ethical review

In line with Renaisi's research ethics policy, projects where 'more than a minimal risk' has been identified require the completion of an ethics protocol. The evaluation team conducted an internal assessment to ensure that this research was conducted in a safe and ethical manner. Ethical approval was given by two reviewers, the project director and another senior member of staff (not involved in the project). The ethics protocol was reviewed at each stage of the project, if significant risks emerged or if the delivery model changed significantly.

The ethics protocol identified four vulnerabilities, which were factored into research design and processes:

1. **Age:** young people in the changemaker, social action participant and research participant roles may be younger than 16.
2. **Lived experiences of violence:** young people may have experiences of violence (lived or current/ongoing), potentially as both a victim and perpetrator; potential child sexual and/or criminal exploitation; and/or related trauma.

3. **Marginalisation:** groups of young people may be subject to marginalisation linked with racial, ethnic and cultural identities; disabilities; disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds; experience of the care system; and financial insecurity.
4. **Childhood experiences:** young people may have experienced/be experiencing adverse childhood experiences, other than or alongside experiences of violence linked with all other vulnerabilities, such as parental disability, caring responsibilities or poor living conditions (overcrowded households, risk of eviction/homelessness, malnutrition).

Recruiting participants

The evaluation team identified local delivery partners as having the most established and trusted relationships with young people participating in PAC2. As a result, engagement between Renaisi and research participants was often coordinated through these partners.

When sharing the sampling criteria, delivery staff were advised that it was important to include the voices of children and young people from particular backgrounds, especially those associated with a higher risk of involvement in violence. Delivery partners were asked to balance these demographic considerations with factors such as the safety and well-being of participants and to include individuals who might be quieter or less likely to volunteer. Guidance was also provided on avoiding bias, ensuring the sample did not consist solely of those with disproportionately positive experiences or strong relationships with staff.

Delivery partner staff consulted with their teams to identify potential participants for interviews. Prior to each interview, communication channels were established between the delivery staff, the participant and a member of the evaluation team. Young people gave permission for their contact details to be shared with the evaluation team before contact was made. The interview format, whether in person or online with a staff member present or alongside another young person from their PAC team, was agreed in advance. Any additional needs were identified and addressed in collaboration with the young person and delivery partner to support full participation in the research activities.

Obtaining informed consent

Voluntary and informed consent was sought at all stages of the research project. The process involved sharing an information sheet before each interview with participants. This document outlined the aims of the project, described any benefits and incentives or reimbursements, and identified potential risks associated with participation, including the possibility of distress or trauma triggers. The sheet outlined participants' ongoing right to informed consent and provided contact information for further enquiries, questions or complaints. Different versions of the information sheet were produced for different participant groups, including young people, delivery partners and stakeholders, to ensure information was accessible and relevant to participants' age, circumstances and needs.⁴

Informal drop-in calls were offered to answer any questions or address concerns prior to consent being given. Participants were informed of how their data would be used and stored, reminded of the anonymous

⁴ An example information sheet and consent form can be found in Appendix a, p. 118

and voluntary nature of their participation, and asked at the outset for permission to record interviews. The concept of ongoing consent was emphasised, with regular check-in points built into the discussion guide to ensure participants remained comfortable with their involvement and were able to reaffirm or withdraw their consent at any stage in the conversation.

For interviews with young people, consent forms were shared in advance to allow time for questions. Even when forms were signed beforehand, researchers revisited the consent process at the start of the interview to ensure that consent was informed and not the result of pressure from others, such as a key worker. For participants under 16, parental or guardian consent was obtained through an online form. If a young person was assessed as not meeting Gillick competence guidelines, to safeguard their welfare, they were not invited to participate in fieldwork. For participants over 16 who met the guidelines but required additional support to give informed consent, a trusted delivery staff member joined the process and co-facilitated discussions until both the staff member and researcher were confident that the participant understood what they were consenting to.

Data protection

Consent was obtained for all audio recordings and transcriptions used in this evaluation. Participants were informed of the purpose of the data collection – to support the evaluation of a programme funded by the YEF – via an accessible information sheet and privacy notice. These outlined what data would be collected, how it would be processed, who would have access and how long it would be retained. For in-person interviews, recording devices specifically designated for research purposes were used. Personal devices were not used. For remote interviews, secure digital platforms with privacy-focused settings were used. Where possible, audio and video were recorded separately.

The evaluation team used software with appropriate security features for data storage and analysis, including SharePoint, Microsoft Office, NVivo and Otter AI (an online transcription service). Participants had the option to opt out of audio recording and/or transcription. Where this occurred, written notes were taken instead or alternative engagement methods were explored for group activities. The transcription of interviews was handled using a combination of automated and manual methods, depending on participant consent.

Where consent was given, transcription was completed using Otter AI. The quality of these transcripts was reviewed by the researcher who conducted the interview, ensuring accuracy and correcting any errors or unclear sections. That same researcher then manually charted key findings shortly after the session to support timely and reflective analysis. Where participants did not consent to the use of Otter AI, the researcher transcribed the interview manually. In these cases, notes taken during or immediately after the interview were used to create accurate written records. Manual transcripts were also reviewed for completeness and were treated with the same level of care as automated transcriptions.

In all cases, transcripts were anonymised by removing or replacing identifying information, such as names, locations or organisations. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym or code, and only authorised members of the evaluation team had access to the original recordings and transcripts. All data was stored securely in accordance with Renaisi's data protection policy and in line with GDPR requirements.

Cloud-based storage and data management complied with our Data Protection Impact Assessment and the Joint Data Controller Agreement with the YEF, The Young Foundation and regional delivery partners. Data

security and retention were overseen by the project management team and followed Renaisi's Data Protection policy and procedures. Data will be stored for the duration of the five-year project delivery plan and retained until the end of the contract in 2028. Renaisi has maintained high standards of data quality, anonymity and confidentiality throughout. Data was pseudonymised where possible and only accessible to authorised personnel. No identifiable data was shared outside the evaluation team unless explicitly agreed upon with the participant.

Participant rights under UK GDPR – including the right to access, rectify, erase or restrict their data – were clearly communicated on the information sheet and at the beginning of any interview.

Project team/stakeholders

Sources of funding

- The YEF
- #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport)
- The Co-op Group

Delivery of the PAC was overseen by the YEF

- Colin Cliff: head of youth understanding
- Hollie Hartley: youth understanding manager
- Ellie Taylor: youth understanding manager
- Eimear North: evaluation manager

Delivery of the PAC supported by The Young Foundation

- Jem Hai: social action and survey support
- Amelia Clayton: research support
- Tate Gronow and Jessica Moore: communications support
- Philip Mullen and Isabella Pereira: programme support
- Ruth Stables: social action support
- Those who have worked on PAC but are no longer working at The Young Foundation
- Emma Newbury, Jenny Barke, Cristina Wilkinson Salamea and Al Mathers: programme support
- Sophie de Groot and Cheslea McDonagh: research support

Delivery of the PAC was coordinated by local delivery partners

Lancashire

- Inclusive North
- BwD Healthy Living
- Child Action Northwest

London

- McPin Foundation
- Peace Alliance

Midlands

- Bringing Hope

Northeast

- NE Youth
- Youth Focus Northeast

Southwest

- EFL in the Community
- Exeter City Supporters Trust
- Bristol City Robins Foundation

Wales

- Media Academy Cymru (MAC)

Yorkshire and the Humber

- EFL in the Community
- Bradford City FC Community Foundation
- Tigers Trust

The evaluation team led by Renaisi.

- Cathy Hearn: project director
- Ellie Young: project manager
- Francisca Mayambala: researcher
- Those who have worked on the evaluation but are no longer working at Renaisi:
- Dimitra Theodoropoulou: project manager
- Laura Dunbar, Annais Naylor-Guerrero and Peter Lau: researcher

Evaluation roles:

- Study design and planning: Cathy Herne , Dimitra Theodoropoulou Recruitment and data collection: Cathy Herne, Dimitra Theodoropoulou , Ellie Young, Laura Dunbar, Annais Naylor-Guerrero, Francisca Mayambala
- Quantitative analysis: Cathy Herne, Ellie Young, Peter Lau, Francisca Mayambala
- Qualitative analysis: Cathy Herne, Ellie Young, Francisca Mayambala
- Report-writing and dissemination: Cathy Herne, Ellie Young, Francisca Mayambala

Methods

Participant selection

The study engaged four distinct participant groups, considered in two parts:

1. Youth panel: a separate group established to support the design and delivery of the evaluation
2. Core participant categories: young people, delivery partners and community stakeholders

The sample size was developed in collaboration with staff at The Young Foundation and the YEF, following a trauma-informed and proportionate approach. This aimed to keep participation manageable for both young people and delivery partners while ensuring the findings were robust and representative of the wider PAC network. Practical factors, such as available time and evaluation resources, geographic coverage, existing levels of engagement and the need to capture a diversity of perspectives, also shaped the sample size.

Youth panel

The PAC2 youth panel was a paid opportunity for peer researchers and social action leads to help shape the design and delivery of this feasibility study, ensuring the youth voice was centred in this evaluation and supporting positive relationships with those in PAC roles. This group met online quarterly for two-hour sessions, providing a regular and structured space for collaboration and input. The panel provided a space for young people to contribute their lived experiences – both as young people and as PAC participants – to feed into various elements of the evaluation. For example, the youth panel took part in activities that included contributing to the design and later refinement of the PAC2 theory of change, informing the design of discussion guides, advising on participant recruitment and retention strategies, and participating in co-analysis sessions. The space was intentionally designed to cultivate trust and openness, with a focus on individual and group relationship building. On an ongoing basis, the evaluation team invited youth panel members to provide input on how to engage more sensitively with them, accounting for physical or psychological accessibility needs and identity characteristics, such as gender identity and racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Young people were recruited through delivery partners, who received guidance on how to talk about the youth panel and which young people to consider. Those who showed interest in the role were asked to fill out a simple online form and then take part in an informal conversation with a member of the evaluation team to ensure they understood the scope of the role and the commitments and to discuss next steps. While there were no set requirements beyond being a PAC peer researcher or social action lead, we actively sought to ensure a balance across PAC regions, demographic backgrounds, such as age, gender and ethnicity, and the two PAC roles.

To inform this process, the application form asked for age, gender and region. In line with our trauma-informed practice, we did not ask directly about potentially sensitive or stigmatising aspects of lived experience and ethnicity. Instead, applicants were invited to share their motivations for wanting to join the youth panel and the PAC programme, which enabled us to understand the breadth of lived experiences represented without requiring direct disclosure. Another consideration in selection was professional experience, which was explored during the informal chats and provided space for young people to talk about relevant skills or prior involvement in similar initiatives.

Following the application and informal conversations, the evaluation team discussed the candidates and identified members to invite, ensuring the final youth panel reflected a balance of regions, demographics, roles, lived experiences and professional backgrounds.

Young people

Young people across all five PAC roles were interviewed as part of this feasibility study. Participants were identified and recruited through a purposive sampling approach designed to reflect diversity across key demographics, including age, gender, cultural background, geography and additional needs, such as disabilities. The sample also sought variation in role-specific experience and levels of engagement with the PAC programme, from shorter- to longer-term involvement. In line with PAC's aim of engaging individuals with lived or witnessed experience of violence, as well as those at heightened risk of or disproportionately affected by youth violence, recruitment prioritised young people whose perspectives would help us understand how PAC operates in different contexts and for different communities, also alongside PAC's targets.

In summary, our research with young people in the five different PAC roles aimed to sample at least one participant from each of the following categories:

1. Age: below 13, 14–18 and 18 plus
2. Gender: nonbinary, girl/woman and boy/man
3. Cultural background: global majority backgrounds, such as young people from Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups
4. Place: rural and urban representation
5. Disabilities and additional needs, including neurodiversity
6. Lived or witnessed experience of violence

Recruitment for peer researchers, social action leads, changemakers, research participants and social action participants was carried out in close collaboration with delivery partners, who hold trusted relationships with young people. In line with a stated priority from the YEF as programme commissioner, sampling was co-designed with the evaluation youth panel to ensure sensitivity and inclusivity, with additional efforts made by delivery partner staff to reach young people who might be less likely to volunteer.

As with the wider evaluation, this study adopted a trauma-informed and proportionate approach to data collection. In agreement with the YEF, demographic information was not collected directly from any young people participating in the evaluation, as such questions could be perceived as intrusive or 'othering'. This was particularly important for participants under the age of 16, where avoiding unnecessary or potentially uncomfortable disclosure was a priority.

In addition, young people had already been asked to provide demographic information in order to take part in the PAC programme, and the evaluation team considered it unnecessary and potentially counterproductive to request this information again. Requesting this information again, particularly early in participants' involvement, may have reduced trust and limited their willingness to fully engage in the evaluation. Instead, we worked closely with delivery partners to ensure diversity within the sample while prioritising the comfort, safety and agency of the young people involved. Delivery partners were supported with clear guidance, including suggested wording to use when discussing the evaluation, to help ensure

participation felt safe, respectful and inclusive. In future studies, the evaluation team could consider how best to integrate consent for programme participation with consent for involvement in the evaluation.

All young people in the relevant roles were invited to complete the peer researcher and social action lead survey, the changemakers #iWill survey, and the demographic data collection. These surveys also included questions to gather demographic information but were also anonymous.

Delivery partners

Delivery partners are individuals in key implementation roles within the PAC programme. As part of the feasibility study, we conducted one interview in each delivery region. Delivery teams decided who would be the most appropriate person to interview, typically selecting someone who could provide an overview of local implementation. In delivery regions where there were multiple delivery partners, one representative was chosen to reflect the region's overall experience.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders were identified and recruited by delivery partners based on their influence within local or national systems targeted by PAC's social action work. These stakeholders included decision-makers and community leaders who could provide valuable insight into PAC's reach and impact. For the interviews, delivery partners were asked to identify two main stakeholder groups.

The first group comprised community-based stakeholders, such as youth group leaders, teachers or representatives from local charities or grassroots organisations. These individuals had strong connections to the local community and young people and could offer insight into community needs, local relationships and the everyday experiences of young people engaging with PAC.

The second group comprised statutory or decision-making stakeholders, including representatives from local councils, violence reduction units (VRUs), the police or other statutory bodies. These stakeholders provided perspectives on policy, funding, strategic priorities and the ways in which PAC activities align with or influence local and national systems.

For the stakeholder survey, delivery partners sent surveys to stakeholders following PAC events, using their discretion to determine which individuals should be invited to respond.

Settings and locations of data collection

Data collection took place across seven regions of programme delivery, encompassing both urban and rural locations. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, depending on the preferences of participants, accessibility considerations and the local context. Ahead of in-person fieldwork, the evaluation team consulted with delivery partner staff to ensure cultural and contextual sensitivities were understood and respected.

Where interviews were conducted online, secure, encrypted platforms were used in line with data protection requirements. In-person interviews occurred in familiar community settings or delivery partner venues, ensuring young people's comfort and psychological safety. Surveys were offered in both paper and online formats, enabling participants to choose the method that felt most accessible and convenient for them.

To ensure ethical and inclusive practice, where possible, the timing of fieldwork accounted for local events, school holidays and religious observances. A culturally responsive and relational approach underpinned all engagement. This included the use of research methods and tools, such as discussion guides, consent forms and survey materials, that were co-designed with the PAC youth panel to support accessibility, relevance and engagement for diverse groups of young people.

Theory of change

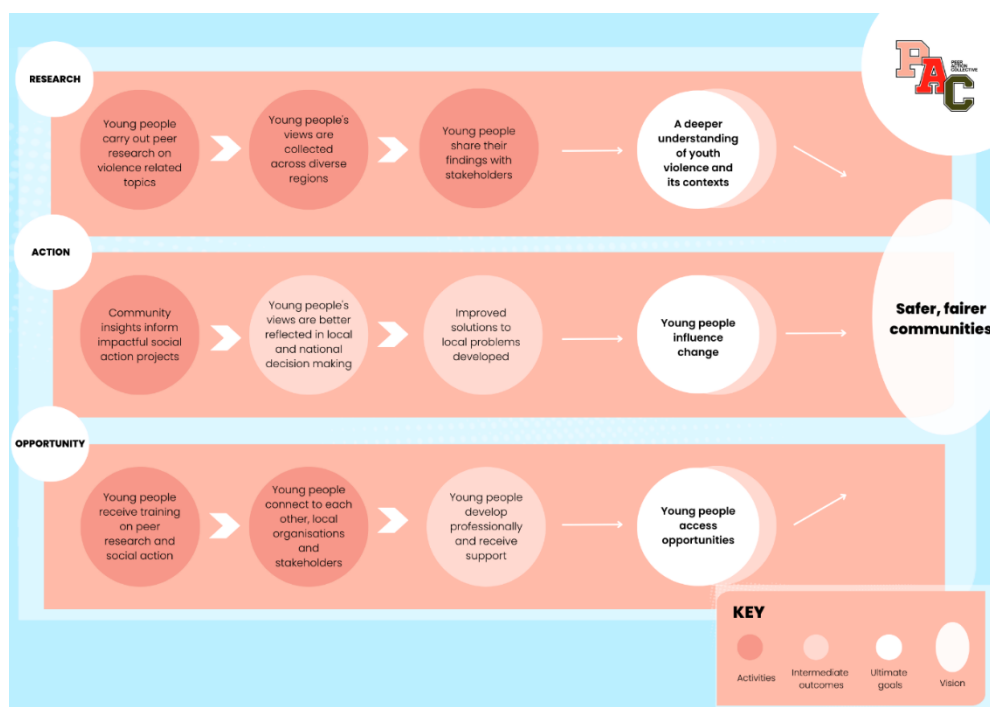
Development

At the end of PAC1, a high-level theory of change was developed as a starting point for programme planning. While no formal evaluation had yet been completed, this initial model helped articulate the programme's broad aims and pathways to impact.

The PAC1 model focused on three interconnected strands:

- Research: young people undertaking peer research to deepen understanding of youth violence
- Action: applying insights from research to influence decision-making and develop solutions
- Opportunity: building skills, networks and support to help young people access new opportunities

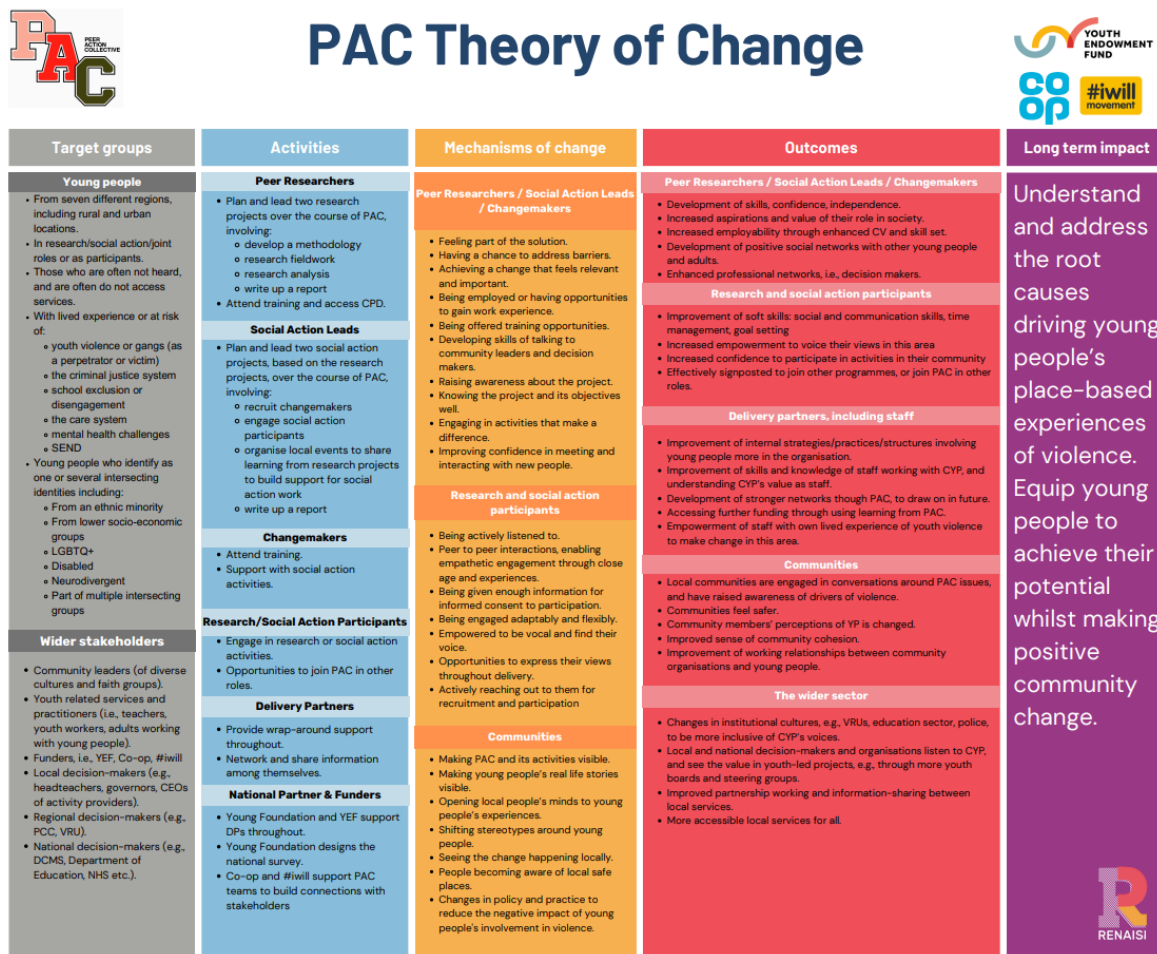
Figure 3. Peer Action Collective (PAC) 1 theory of change



At the start of PAC2, Renaisi led the process of reviewing and revising the theory of change. This included targeted consultations with key stakeholders such as the YEF, The Young Foundation and delivery partners. This process ensured the revised model reflected updated programme goals and the evolving needs of all groups involved in PAC.

The revision process included two co-design workshops. The first, with delivery partners, focused on agreeing on an impact statement, identifying key stakeholders and participant groups, mapping activities, and defining short, medium and long-term outcomes. The second, with members of the evaluation youth panel, explored the mechanisms of change and generated insights into how PAC creates impact in practice.

Figure 4. Peer Action Collective (PAC) 2 theory of change



The second version of the PAC theory of change, including both a diagram and an accompanying narrative document, was finalised in June 2024, drawing on the full set of stakeholder inputs.⁵

Updates to the model included a re-articulation of PAC's long-term impact, integrating stakeholders' perspectives on the complexity and ambition of the programme and clarifying how different types of activity contribute to outcomes over time. The mechanisms of change were updated to demonstrate more clearly how peer research, youth-led inquiry and social action connect to shorter- and longer-term outcomes.

As part of the feasibility study, the PAC2 theory of change was tested again with members of the youth panel. This session provided an opportunity to explore whether the model continued to reflect the programme's objectives, accurately described how activities lead to outcomes and captured the perspectives of young people involved in PAC. Panel members reviewed each section of the theory of change, offering feedback on the clarity of the impact statement, the links between activities and outcomes and the way outcomes were represented across different levels of change.

Their insights were considered alongside emerging findings from the feasibility study, creating a fuller picture of where the model was strong and where refinements were needed. This feedback informed a set of proposed revisions aimed at making the theory of change more precise, better aligned with the

⁵ The full PAC2 theory of change and accompanying narrative can be found in Appendix b, p.120.

experiences of participants and more useful for guiding both delivery and evaluation. These proposed changes are described later in this report and will be finalised before the launch of PAC3.

Data collection

Overview of methods and measures

A mixed-methods approach was used to assess the feasibility of PAC and the practicalities of evaluating participatory, youth-led, place-based approaches to tackling youth violence. In line with the YEF's guidance on delivering projects in a culturally sensitive, racially equitable and inclusive way, the Renaisi team accounted for the core considerations of culturally sensitive project delivery. In the research planning phase, two interconnected but distinct challenges were anticipated. The first was a specific equity and diversity challenge: building trust with young people and others experiencing marginalisation (whether on the basis of race, class, economic background or other factors). It is important to recognise that such individuals may have legitimate reasons to question the intentions of outsiders – including researchers – who may be perceived as holding authority. The second was the broader challenge of building trust with young participants more generally to ensure their voices were heard and respected throughout the process. To minimise risk, the evaluation team implemented several strategies:

- Researchers planned for research activities but maintained flexibility and reflexivity to adapt to the preferences of individual participants.
- A variety of engaging, fun and creative methods were offered to maximise engagement and benefit from the research activity. Sufficient time was held for these activities to ensure they did not feel rushed or stressful, aligning with trauma-informed principles.
- Participatory methods were prioritised, including opportunities for data co-generation and process co-design. Additional considerations were taken to ensure that 'all voices are heard' in each research activity, especially in group settings. The evaluation team was attentive to group dynamics and created alternative opportunities for quieter individuals to contribute.
- The evaluation team considered when it might be most appropriate to deliver research activities, considering cultural and religious observations alongside key milestones in academic years – such as exam periods.
- The evaluation team worked closely with delivery partners ahead of engagement to ensure our engagement was culturally, contextually and individually responsive.

Overview of data collection

The Renaisi team delivered a mixed-methods evaluation, drawing on qualitative and quantitative approaches. All data collection tools, including discussion guides, surveys and other instruments, were developed in consultation with the YEF, The Young Foundation, delivery partners and the PAC Youth Panel. This collaborative development process ensured that the tools were accessible, free from jargon and tailored to the needs and contexts of the intended participants. The tools were also designed in line with the study's core values, including being trauma-informed, proportionate and low burden, to respect young people's well-being, value their time and recognise their lived experiences.

Qualitative data collection

Qualitative data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. These were designed to capture in-depth insights from young people, delivery partners and other stakeholders.

Discussion guides were developed collaboratively, with input from youth panel members to ensure the language and framing resonated with participants. Sessions were facilitated using trauma-informed and participatory approaches, allowing for flexibility in discussion topics and pace to suit participants' needs.

Quantitative data collection

The main sources of quantitative data were surveys designed to capture key indicators linked to the theory of change and forms to gather monitoring data and understand the reach of young people involved in PAC. Validated survey instruments were not used for two main reasons. First, most validated scales were designed and validated on populations that are highly distinct from the young people engaged in PAC, and the study's small sample sizes do not allow for the possibility of statistically re-validating an instrument. Second, this decision aligned with the study's values of being trauma-informed, proportionate and low-burden. Many validated tools use technical or academic language that can be difficult for young people to understand, and their length (often 25-35 questions) can create an unnecessary burden – the evaluation team would have had to add a validated scale to a series of other questions that the evaluation team and funders were interested in exploring, creating an exceptionally high-burden tool.

Instead, new PAC-specific surveys were developed using plain, accessible language and concise question formats, drawing where possible on wording from Office for National Statistics (ONS) instruments. This approach aimed to make participation manageable, respect young people's time and support a positive research experience.

The survey development process involved:

- Using the theory of change to identify key intended outcomes to measure
- Working with the YEF and The Young Foundation to design questions aligned to these outcomes
- Ensuring the language and format reflected the study values of being trauma-informed, proportionate and low-burden
- Reviewing all drafts with the YEF and The Young Foundation to refine clarity, cultural relevance and age appropriateness.

Due to the timing and scope of the study, surveys were not formally tested with young people before use. Instead, they underwent a detailed review by the YEF and The Young Foundation, leading to refinements before fieldwork.

Table 2. Overview of qualitative data collection

Data source	Description	Number of interviews completed
Delivery partner interviews	Conducted between June 24 and July 24 to explore project set-up, recruitment, retention and the training of young people, as well as the foundational research project.	7 completed (<i>7 intended</i>) 1 per region
Peer researcher and social action lead interviews (Phase 1)	Conducted between July 24 and September 24 to explore recruitment, retention, training and the foundational research project.	21 interviews completed (<i>21 intended</i>) 2 peer researchers and 1 social action lead per region

Changemaker, research and social action participants (Phase 1)	Conducted between September 24 and December 24 to explore research and social action implementation and delivery.	21 interviews completed (<i>21 intended</i>) 2 changemakers, 2 research participants and 3 social action participants across 3 regions
Peer researcher and social action lead interviews (Phase 2)	Conducted between January 25 and April 25 to continue data collection with young people involved in PAC and to explore the feasibility of the evaluation.	13 interviews completed (<i>14 intended*</i>) 1 peer researcher and 1 social action lead from each region
Changemaker, research and social action participant interviews (Phase 2)	Conducted between January 25 and April 25 to continue data collection with young people involved in PAC and to explore the feasibility of the evaluation.	25 interviews completed (<i>28 intended*</i>) Approximately 2 changemakers, 2 research participants and 3 social action participants per region
Stakeholder interviews	Conducted between April 25 and May 25 to examine wider community engagement and systemic influence.	13 interviews completed (<i>14 intended*</i>) Approximately 2 per region.

**Differences between the intended and actual number of interviews in changes to data collection below.*

Table 3. Overview of quantitative data collection

Data source	Description	Response rates
Stakeholder survey	An online survey designed to understand stakeholders' experiences of meeting and/or working alongside young people involved in PAC. The survey aimed to generate insights into how PAC is contributing to social change in local areas. Delivery partners shared the survey with relevant stakeholders. ⁶	24 responses Respondents from the Northeast, Southwest, and Yorkshire and the Humber regions
Peer researcher and social action pre/post survey	An online survey designed to understand the experiences and outcomes of peer researchers and social action leads before and after their involvement in PAC. The survey aimed to track changes in areas such as confidence and skills, as well as to capture demographic information. ⁷	83 responses to pre-survey Respondents from all seven PAC regions 43 responses to the post survey. Respondents from the London, Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Humber, the Northeast and the Southwest regions

⁶ A copy of the stakeholder survey can be found in Appendix C, p. 159.

⁷ A copy of the pre and post peer researcher and social action lead survey can be found in Appendix D, p. 161.

#iwill survey	As part of the funding infrastructure for PAC, the #iwill Fund evaluation requires that young people heavily engaged in social action activities complete a survey using their platform. Changemakers completed this pre- and post-programme survey. The survey was designed to capture demographic information and measure changes in attitudes, skills, confidence and experiences between the start and end of their involvement in PAC. It also sought to gather reflections on the opportunities and challenges faced during their participation. Early feedback from the PAC teams indicated challenges in administering the survey and a low response rate, which meant it was not possible to use the data in the evaluation. This issue is explored further in the 'Changes to Data Collection' section below.	Data not included in the evaluation.
Research participant, social action participant and changemaker demographics reporting form	Delivery partners collected demographic information on young people participating in the programme, including age, gender, and ethnicity. This information was gathered through consent forms completed at the point of recruitment or when activities were taking place. For participants under the age of 16, parental or guardian consent was also required. All data was shared with Renaisi in line with consent agreements and data protection protocols.	This data was submitted to Renaisi on a quarterly basis. The most recent data was submitted in May 2025.
YEF Portal	Delivery partners reporting on the number of young people engaged in the programme across the different PAC roles (peer researchers, social action leads, changemakers, etc).	This data was submitted to YEF on a quarterly basis. The most recent data was submitted in May 2025.

Observational data collection

As part of the evaluation, Renaisi undertook a range of observational activities to provide a contextual understanding of PAC2. These observations were not used as formal data collection methods but served to build the evaluators' insight into programme delivery, the dynamics of partnership working and the lived experiences of young people and delivery teams.

Bi-weekly M&E meetings: the evaluation team attended regular online M&E meetings, held every two weeks. These meetings brought together members of the Renaisi, the YEF and The Young Foundation teams to review delivery progress, address emerging challenges and align on evaluation priorities. Where additional context was needed, extra meetings were arranged. This regular engagement helped the evaluation team stay informed and respond promptly to developments within the programme.

PAC celebration events: the evaluation team attended a PAC celebration event in November 2024. This event showcased the achievements of young people involved in peer research and social action and created opportunities to hear directly from participants, delivery staff and local stakeholders. In January 2025, the team attended a learning session hosted by The Young Foundation. Observing these events provided valuable insight into how programme outcomes were communicated and celebrated within the programme and helped the evaluation team build relationships with young people and delivery organisations.

PAC network meetings: quarterly PAC network meetings, facilitated online by The Young Foundation, brought together all delivery partners to share progress, learning and good practice. These meetings

included team updates, structured learning spaces and reflective discussions. Observation of these sessions provided valuable insight into the collaborative mechanisms at the heart of PAC and the role of the national partner in supporting and connecting regional delivery.

Youth panel engagement: as introduced earlier in the report, a central feature of the evaluation's participatory approach was ongoing engagement with the youth panel. The evaluation team facilitated eight online youth panel meetings, which provided dedicated spaces for young people to shape and influence the evaluation. In these sessions, panel members reviewed evaluation questions, gave feedback on data collection tools and contributed to the interpretation of early findings. This engagement ensured the evaluation remained youth-centred and embedded young people's voices not only as participants but as co-designers of the process.

Changes to data collection methods

The purpose of this evaluation was to design a low-burden and adaptive process that could respond flexibly to the evolving needs and challenges of delivery partners. From the outset, the evaluation team worked closely with delivery partners to co-develop and refine data collection tools, ensuring they were both practical to implement and aligned with programme objectives.

Throughout the delivery phase, several adaptations were made to data collection methods in response to feedback from both delivery partners and young people. One significant change involved the use of the #iwill survey portal – required by the #iwill Fund evaluation. Use of the portal was widely reported as difficult to navigate and time-consuming. Early feedback indicated that young people were not engaging with the platform as intended, resulting in incomplete demographic and outcome data. Although continued use of the portal was encouraged by both the YEF delivery team and the evaluation team, response rates remained too low for the data to be included in this evaluation.

In response, and to still obtain demographic data, the Renaisi team developed a simplified demographic reporting sheet to improve accessibility and ease of use. Delivery partners were asked to complete and submit these sheets directly, enabling the evaluation team to receive a demographic data set for changemakers.

To ensure that young people felt comfortable and engaged in the evaluation process, the format of qualitative data collection was also adapted. In many cases, interviews were conducted in small groups or in focus group-style settings. These groupings were typically arranged by PAC role, for example, bringing together peer researchers or social action participants. This peer-supported approach not only helped young people feel more at ease sharing their experiences but also supported richer discussions and allowed for the comparison of perspectives among participants with similar roles.

Some delivery partners requested flexibility in the scheduling and format of evaluation activities owing to local pressures and capacity constraints. In response, the evaluation team adjusted timelines and methods, for example, replacing in-person interviews with virtual sessions or accepting written, asynchronous responses from stakeholders in lieu of live interviews. These changes were made on a case-by-case basis in close dialogue with delivery teams to minimise disruption while still capturing meaningful and useful insights.

In the final phase of data collection, some activities fell short of their intended targets. In several instances, this was due to interviewees not attending sessions or requesting to reschedule, which could not always be

accommodated within the available time frame. Where interviews were cancelled, the evaluation team made multiple attempts to rearrange but ultimately prioritised maintaining analysis timelines. Despite this, the volume and quality of data collected were deemed sufficient to support robust findings.

Overall, these adaptations were designed to maintain the integrity and rigour of the evaluation while remaining sensitive to the practical realities faced by delivery partners. This collaborative and responsive approach helped to strengthen relationships between the evaluation team and partners and ensured that data collection processes remained inclusive, accurate and feasible within the context of ongoing programme delivery. An overview of the methods used for each data collection can be found below.

Table 4. Methods overview

Methods overview How is PAC being put into practice? How is it operating to achieve social change (i.e. policy and practice in local areas)? What are the factors that influence these processes?	Quantitative					Observations			Qualitative		
	YEF portal quarterly numbers	PR/SAL pre/post survey	#iwill portal	RP/SAP/change-maker form	Stakeholder survey	DP network meetings	PAC youth panel	Regular M&E meetings	YP interviews	DP interviews	Stakeholder interviews
Fidelity/adherence: in what ways are the peer action collective activities being delivered and as intended?	X							X			
Dosage: how much of the intended peer action collective activity has been delivered? Can a dosage be identified for each area?	X	X	X	X					X	X	
Quality: in what ways do peer action collective activities reflect solutions to local issues identified by the peer researchers? How well are the different components of PAC being delivered?						X	X	X	X	X	
Reach: what is the rate of participation by peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers?	X	X	X	X							
Responsiveness: in what ways do actors/organisations within a local community engage with PAC activities conducted by peer researchers? Are there any national responses to the national reports and/or projects delivered as part of PAC?					X	X			X	X	X
Provider/implementer factors: what is the perceived need for PAC amongst stakeholders? What are the perceived benefits of PAC amongst key stakeholders?					X	X					X

What is the reach of stakeholders too?											
Implementation support system: what strategies and practices are used to support high-quality implementation of PAC? What might the barriers be to high-quality implementation of PAC?						X	X		X	X	

Note: PAC = Peer Action Collective; YEF = Youth Endowment Fund; PR = Peer Researcher; SAL = Social Action Lead; RP = Research Participant; SAP = Social Action Participant; DP = Delivery Partner; YP = Young People; M&E =Monitoring and Evaluation

Table 5. Methods overview

Methods overview	Quantitative					Observations			Qualitative		
	YEF portal	PR/ SAL pre/post survey	#iwill portal/survey	RP/SAP/ change-maker form	Stakeholder survey	PAC network meetings	Youth Panel	Regular M&E meetings	YP interviews	DP interviews	Stakeholder interviews
What is the recommended evaluation approach for the next phase of evaluating participative, youth-led, place-based approaches that builds the evidence base but remains feasible and appropriate for the level of development of the programme?											
How can the PAC ToC be developed and refined to best describe how PAC operates, as well as the intended outputs and outcomes of the programme?	X							X			
Recruitment: what are the appropriate recruitment strategies for the evaluation?	X	X	X	X					X	X	
Retention: what are the appropriate methods for improving retention in the evaluation?						X	X	X	X	X	
Outcomes: what are the most suitable outcomes for the project to measure? What is	X	X	X	X	X						

the unit of analysis? What should the primary outcome of PAC be? Is data available/accessible? Are there any issues and potential solutions to enabling the collection of high-quality data?											
Measurement: what measures are the most reliable, valid and practical for assessing the potential impact of PAC?						X			X	X	X
Place: is examining the community level possible in the next stage, and, if so, what should those outcomes be, and how will they be measured?					X	X					X
Outcomes: what are some noted outcomes for participants and places during this phase of work?					X	X	X		X	x	

Note PAC = Peer Action Collective; YEF = Youth Endowment Fund; PR = Peer Researcher; SAL = Social Action Lead; RP = Research Participant; SAP = Social Action Participant; DP = Delivery Partner; YP = Young People; M&E =Monitoring and Evaluation

Analysis

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data was collected through interviews with young people, delivery partners and external stakeholders. The evaluation team applied a framework thematic analysis, using the two core aims of the feasibility study and its research questions as the primary structure while allowing flexibility to identify new themes emerging from the data. The analytical framework was developed by the Renaisi evaluation team, drawing on the research questions and PAC's theory of change.

Interview transcripts and notes were manually coded against this shared framework. Coding was undertaken by multiple team members to reduce bias and improve consistency. Summaries were then produced across cases within themes and sub-themes, enabling comparisons by participant type (for example, peer researchers, social action participants and delivery partners) and by delivery region. Particular attention was given to identifying barriers or unequal experiences affecting different groups of young people. This included, but was not limited to, factors related to ethnicity, gender, disability, socio-economic background and geography. The analysis considered themes such as motivation to join PAC, representation in PAC roles and whether the programme felt relevant and welcoming to young people from different backgrounds. All insights were based on participants' accounts and reflections; detailed demographic data was not collected for this evaluation.

Observational data from youth panel workshops, delivery partner network meetings and M&E meetings was not formally coded but were used to provide valuable context. These observations informed the interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative findings by situating them within the realities of delivery environments, relationships and organisational dynamics.

Quantitative analysis

Quantitative data included demographic monitoring returns from delivery partners and survey responses from young people. The Renaisi team conducted descriptive statistical analysis to examine participation patterns, reach and diversity across regions. Frequency counts, percentages and cross-tabulations were calculated to explore differences by role type, gender, ethnicity and geography.

The quantitative analysis addressed the study objective of assessing feasibility by examining the extent to which PAC engaged with the intended target groups, particularly young people from Black, Asian and Minority ethnic backgrounds, those with a disability, and those living in rural settings. Where possible, demographic data was used to interrogate or validate patterns emerging from the qualitative findings.

A limitation of the quantitative analysis was that data collection was still ongoing at the time of writing this report. Survey responses and demographic returns reflected data available as of May 2025, whereas the programme concluded in September 2025. Several parts of the quantitative data set were incomplete, which limited the extent of the analysis and cross-analysis that could be undertaken in this study. This is explained further in the limitations section of the study.

Triangulation and interpretation

Triangulation was built into the analysis process from the outset. We compared findings across:

- Methods (interviews, surveys, monitoring data, observational notes)

- Sources (young people in different roles, delivery partners, community stakeholders)
- Investigators (multiple evaluators contributing to coding and interpretation)

When inconsistencies arose between data sources, for example, differences between young people's reported experiences and delivery partners' accounts, the evaluation team revisited the raw data, sought additional context from observational notes and met with the national delivery partner, The Young Foundation, to clarify findings.

Co-analysis sessions

Two co-analysis workshops were held during the feasibility study. One with the youth panel and one with delivery partners. The purpose of these sessions was to test and refine emerging findings with the people most closely involved in the programme, ensuring that the interpretation reflected both lived experiences and delivery realities.

The first workshop, held with the PAC youth panel in October 2024, focused on reviewing findings from the early round of data collection, particularly those gathered from peer researchers and social action leads. The second workshop, in June 2025, brought together representatives from delivery partners across the network to discuss preliminary findings in small groups, explore local contextual factors and challenge interpretations where necessary. This process helped to further refine the analysis and ensure it reflected the realities of delivery in diverse settings.

Outputs from both sessions were documented and integrated into the main analytical framework. This collaborative approach strengthened the credibility of the findings, provided a check on evaluator bias and ensured that the analysis reflected multiple perspectives, including those of young people from a range of backgrounds and experiences.

Timeline

Table 6. Timeline of activities

Date	Activity
January–February 2024	Recruitment of the Peer Action Collective (PAC) youth panel: recruitment materials were distributed through delivery partners, and young people submitted applications through an online form, resulting in the selection of nine candidates for the PAC youth panel. Good representation of PAC regions, demographics (age and ethnicity), identity groups (gender and disability), and peer researcher and social action lead roles were factors considered when selecting youth panel members.
February 2024	Theory of change development workshop (delivery partners): a workshop was held to co-create part of the theory of change with delivery partners, focusing on desired outcomes and impact.
March 2024	First youth panel session: an introductory session was delivered, providing participants with an overview of the PAC evaluation, the youth panel and their role within it.

	Theory of change development workshop (with young people): young people were introduced to the concept of a theory of change, and the drafted version was sense-checked, with a portion of the theory of change co-created with the young people, focusing on the mechanisms of change.
May–June 2024	First stage of data collection for implementation process evaluation: interviews were conducted with delivery partners to assess the effectiveness of the processes related to recruitment, retention and training of young people in paid roles.
July 2024	Second youth panel session: participants shared their ideas on potential research topics, recruitment strategies and key considerations, which helped inform the evaluation team's plans for fieldwork.
July–August 2024	Second stage of data collection for implementation process evaluation: interviews were conducted with peer researchers and social action leads to understand the short-term outcomes of delivery, experiences with training, and the execution of research and social action activities.
November 2024	Third youth panel session: a co-analysis session was conducted, where young people coded transcripts to identify emerging themes and shared their findings with the evaluation team.
October–December 2024	Third stage of data collection for implementation process evaluation: interviews were conducted with changemakers and research participants to explore their experiences with training and participation in research and social action activities, aiming to understand the potential impact of these activities.
January–February 2025	First stage of data collection for feasibility phase evaluation: interviews were conducted with peer researchers, social action leads, changemakers, research participants and social action participants to explore how they engaged with PAC activities and the impact on their respective groups.
February 2025	Fourth youth panel session: the evaluation process was reviewed, and discussions were held about how the evaluation team could adapt working practices to improve the recruitment and retention of young people.
April 2025	Fifth youth panel session (review of the theory of change): the original theory of change was reviewed and sense-checked with young people to ensure it remained relevant and accurately reflected their current experiences and insights from PAC.
April–June 2025	Second stage of data collection for feasibility phase evaluation: interviews were conducted with stakeholders to explore PAC's community engagement efforts and its ability to influence social change.
June 2025	Co-analysis session with delivery partners: a co-analysis session with delivery partners was conducted to review the findings, validate their alignment with partners' experiences and identify areas for further improvement or exploration. Feasibility report submission.

Findings – participants

As outlined above, this feasibility study engaged three main groups of participants across the evaluation:

1. Young people in PAC roles – including peer researchers, social action leads, changemakers, social action participants and research participants
2. Delivery partners – staff coordinating and supporting PAC activities in each region
3. External stakeholders – community members, professionals and organisations that engaged with PAC and its young people

Sampling framework

Recruitment followed the agreed sampling framework, with interview participants drawn from across the seven PAC delivery regions. As outlined in the introduction, demographic data was not collected for the qualitative interviews. Instead of direct demographic monitoring, sampling agreements were shared with delivery partners. These agreements set out the balance of roles, experiences and backgrounds that the evaluation sought to capture and were accompanied by guidance on how to adhere to them in practice.

Delivery partners led the process of identifying and recruiting young people for interviews, drawing on their established, trusted relationships with participants. The evaluation team provided guidance and a sampling framework to ensure coverage across roles and regions, but decisions about who to approach were ultimately made by delivery partners. This approach recognised the sensitive nature of the subject matter and ensured that participation was both safe and ethical while remaining grounded in the values of trust and care that underpin the programme.

Demographics of survey respondents

Demographic data was only collected through the peer researchers' and social action leads' pre- and post-surveys. It was not collected as part of the qualitative interviews, in line with the approach described above. To protect participants' anonymity, this data is reported at the programme level only and has not been broken down by region.

Table 7. Age, gender and disability of peer researcher and social action lead pre-survey respondents

Demographic	Count
Age	
16	27
17	21
18	18
19	5
20	6
21	2
23	1
Not specified	3
Gender	
Women/girl	46
Man/boy	34
Non-binary	2
Not specified	1

Disability	
Yes	9
No	71
Not specified	3

Table 8. Ethnicity of peer researcher and social action lead post-survey respondents

Demographic	Count
Ethnicity	
White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	14
White – Irish	1
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – African	10
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – Caribbean	3
Asian/Asian British – Pakistani	4
Asian/Asian British – Indian	2
Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi	1
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups – White and Black African	2
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups – White and Black Caribbean	2
Any other mixed/multiple ethnic background	1
Any other ethnic background	1
Not specified	2

This data shows that survey respondents reflected a range of ages, genders, disability statuses and ethnic backgrounds. However, because demographic data was not collected for qualitative interviews and because post-survey response rates were low, these data sets should be interpreted as indicative rather than fully representative of all PAC participants.

Attrition

For the qualitative interviews, initial recruitment targets were met, and delivery partners supported the evaluation team to identify and engage young people across the programme. Some attrition occurred towards the later stages of the study, as a number of young people who had originally agreed to participate were unable to do so owing to competing commitments, changes in personal circumstances or reduced engagement as the programme concluded. Attrition was most evident towards the end of the evaluation period and during times of heightened participant activity. Where possible, the evaluation team sought to rearrange interviews to accommodate young people's availability, though due to timelines for completing the evaluation, it was not always possible to reschedule. In total, 100 interviews were completed out of 105 intended, maintaining coverage across roles and regions, though with a small shortfall in certain delivery areas.

In relation to the surveys, response rates were lower than anticipated, particularly at the post-programme stage. A total of 83 young people completed the pre-survey, 43 completed the post-survey and the stakeholder survey achieved 24 responses. This provided a useful base for understanding participant and stakeholder experiences, though the lower number of post-survey responses reduced the extent to which

changes over time could be measured with confidence. Delivery partners noted challenges in administering the surveys, including time pressures within sessions and varying levels of engagement, which contributed to the reduced completion rate.

Settings

Interviews were conducted across the seven regions of England and Wales where PAC was delivered. These took place either in community centres, youth centres or other spaces where delivery partners were already based. Using these familiar venues helped ensure accessibility for young people and made it easier for delivery partners to provide support. Delivery partners also ensured that appropriate safeguarding and ethical procedures were in place, such as the presence of trusted staff and flexibility to meet participants' needs.

In addition to in-person interviews, some data was collected online, by phone or asynchronously in written form, where young people chose to respond directly to interview questions rather than take part in a live session. These alternative modes increased accessibility and enabled wider participation, particularly for young people who faced time constraints or geographical barriers or who felt more comfortable writing than speaking.

The choice of setting and mode has implications for interpreting the findings. Collecting data in delivery partner spaces likely increased participants' comfort by building on existing trusted relationships but may also have influenced how openly some young people shared critical views if they were conscious of staff presence. Online, phone and written interviews provided flexibility and inclusion, though they sometimes limited conversational depth and opportunities for probing compared to in-person sessions. Overall, the settings reflect the realities of programme delivery and ensured that a broad range of young people could contribute, but findings should be interpreted with awareness of the potential influence of these contexts.

The surveys were administered separately via Microsoft Forms and completed online by young people across the programme.

Use of data across research questions

Evidence from both qualitative and quantitative participants – including interviews, young people's surveys and the stakeholder survey – contributed to addressing both overarching research questions. Findings are therefore drawn from the full data set, rather than being divided by question-specific participant numbers.

Findings – research question 1

Overarching question: how is PAC being put into practice? How is it operating to achieve social change (i.e. policy and practice in local areas)? What are the factors that influence these processes?

This evaluation explored research question 1 by examining the fidelity/adherence, dosage, quality reach, responsiveness and provider/implementation factors of the PAC programme. The following sub-questions guided the analysis of how PAC is being implemented, how it is contributing to social change, and which factors influence its operational delivery:

- **Fidelity/adherence:** in what ways are the PAC activities being delivered as intended?
 - **Dosage:** how much of the intended PAC activity has been delivered? Can a dosage be identified for each area?
 - **Quality:** in what ways do PAC activities reflect solutions to local issues identified by the peer researchers? How well are the different components of PAC being delivered?
 - **Reach:** what is the rate of participation by peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers? What is the reach of stakeholders? Why might rates of participation differ across areas/groups of young people?
 - **Responsiveness:** in what ways do actors/organisations within a local community engage with PAC activities conducted by peer researchers? Are there any national responses to the national reports and/or projects delivered as part of PAC?
 - **Provider/implementer factors:** what is the perceived need for PAC amongst stakeholders? What are the perceived benefits of PAC amongst key stakeholders?
 - **Implementation support system:** what strategies and practices are used to support high-quality implementation of PAC? What might the barriers be to high-quality implementation of PAC?
-
- **Fidelity/adherence:** in what ways are the PAC activities being delivered and are they being delivered as intended?

PAC is a national programme that empowers young people to lead change in their communities. Delivered across seven regions in England and Wales, PAC combines peer-led research, YSA and skills development to address the root causes and consequences of youth violence. For this evaluation, PAC activities are defined as the full delivery process, from recruiting and training young peer researchers to conducting research, analysing findings, and designing and delivering social action in response.

This evaluation finds that PAC has remained closely aligned with its original aims and principles. Youth leadership, lived experience and place-based working were consistently prioritised across all regions. While delivery partners had flexibility to adapt activities to suit local contexts, core components of the model – such as peer research, paid leadership roles and social action shaped by research findings – were clearly embedded throughout delivery.

This combination of consistency and flexibility suggests that PAC has achieved a strong level of fidelity to both its overall vision and delivery approach. Local adaptations did not compromise the programme's intent;

rather, they supported the core goal of meaningful, youth-led change that reflects and responds to community needs.

Youth-led research and action in practice

Youth leadership was a central feature of the programme's design and was clearly visible in the delivery of both the research and social action phases. Young people played an active role in shaping the programme in each region through their roles as peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers. During the research phase, they helped to develop research questions, selected and applied appropriate methods, and delivered various activities to support data collection, for example, interviews, focus groups, workshops and school visits. Many interviewees described taking a leading role in analysing and presenting findings. In the social action phase, teams of young people collaborated to set priorities, design responses to the issues identified in their research and deliver local projects that reflected the needs and interests of their peers.

A small number of peer researchers and social action leads reported not taking on a lead role, although this was largely attributed to a lack of confidence in speaking to stakeholders or hesitation about public-facing responsibilities. This should not be interpreted as a lack of youth leadership in the programme but rather as a reflection of varying confidence levels and personal readiness. These young people were still actively involved in shaping the research and action phases, often contributing behind the scenes through data analysis, report writing or planning activities, demonstrating that the programme remained youth-led in both principle and practice.

"Our role is basically to lead the research. We lead every stage in the project; we're still completing outreach to meet our target, but we're starting to analyse findings, starting to compile all of that".

– Peer researcher interview, Midlands

"They [delivery partners] never really tell us what to do. It's more like we tell them what to do. ... We have the power to do what we want, which opens a broader spectrum of ideas".

– Changemaker interview, London

Several peer researchers and social action leads reported that the programme felt different from other youth engagement programmes they had taken part in. Unlike previous experiences, where they were often consulted but decisions were largely guided by adults, PAC gave them a clear sense of ownership. They described it as something they were leading, not something being done to or for them.

"I've been involved in other youth projects, but nothing like PAC, nothing where we've actually been in charge".

– Social action lead interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

Youth leadership was consistently named as a strength of the programme. Both social action participants and research participants valued that PAC was designed and driven by young people, describing the peer-led structure as a source of credibility and engagement.

"I love the fact that it's basically in the hands of young people on the social action kind of side. ... We delivered the content ourselves to ourselves".

– Social action participant interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

Shaped by young people's lived or witnessed experiences of violence

PAC was designed to be shaped by young people's lived or witnessed experiences of violence. This intention manifested in practice in different ways across the network, reflecting different local contexts and accommodating variations in collective experiences of violence across communities.

Although this evaluation did not directly explore questions pertaining to lived experiences, interviews indicated that peer researchers and social action leads brought a spectrum of experiences to their roles, which have been categorised as:

- Direct experience of violence (as victim and/or perpetrator)
- Indirect experience of violence (violence impacting close family or friends as victim and/or perpetrators)
- Community experience of violence (indirect violence in the place they live or the groups they exist in, e.g. school)
- Wider risk linked to violence (experiencing poverty, exclusion or limited opportunities linked to broader structural inequalities)

These lived experiences were found to shape young people's motivations for joining the programme. Common motivations identified by research included wanting to address issues of violence they have experienced personally; wanting to address issues impacting their community directly; and wanting to address wider systemic issues, e.g. poverty, young people's access to support and future-focused goals. Analysis suggests that these motivations closely align with the spectrum of experience outlined above. Exploration of lived experience was not an explicit goal of this study; it was more of an emergent theme. Therefore, the distinction between different forms of lived experience and other motivations was not always clearly captured in the evaluation data. Further exploration of this in future studies could offer valuable insights into how varying motivations influence young people's roles, engagement and development within youth-led programmes like PAC.

Additionally, research found variation in the type of violence shaping young people's lived experiences. For example, in London and Birmingham, young people commonly referred to gang-related activity and knife crime when discussing lived or witnessed experiences of violence. In the Southwest, violence was more often associated with anti-social behaviour and public disorder. In other delivery locations, violence was described in broader terms, including school-based bullying, online threats and social exclusion.

"I know a lot of people who are affected by knife crime. These sorts of things can really affect people. I would say that's why I joined, to be honest".

– Peer researcher interview, London

These variations reflect PAC's flexibility in responding to the range of young people's lived experiences and demonstrate the importance of adopting a broad and inclusive definition of violence. Allowing space for local interpretation ensured that young people could explore and respond to the forms of harm most relevant to their own contexts.

Delivery partners were attentive to the importance of recruiting young people whose lives had been more significantly influenced by violence. However, owing to the need to meet recruitment targets and project

timelines, they needed to balance this with practical outreach and retention strategies. For example, due to the social marginalisation experienced by some young people likely to have lived experience relevant to the programme, more time is often needed to develop trusting relationships or adapt project delivery to ensure that it is sensitive and trauma-informed.

To an extent, the variations in youth lived experience reflect the breadth of perspectives PAC intentionally sought to engage. While lived experience of violence played a role for many, others were driven by a sense of responsibility to their communities or by personal goals. Although research observed some benefits for this mix of experience, given PAC's core objective of engaging young people who are at risk of, or directly affected by, violence, future iterations of the programme should prioritise lived or indirect experiences of violence. To do this, the programme could set a clearer definition of lived experience, providing a clear framework for delivery partners to pursue targeted recruitment.

Fidelity and flexibility of the delivery model

The PAC2 model was designed to be adaptable, offering a clear framework that could be shaped to suit different contexts. While key elements remained consistent – such as paid roles for peer researchers and social action leads, youth-led research and action, and a focus on the three overarching research themes – delivery partners adjusted their approaches based on local needs, organisational structures and the young people they worked with.

Fidelity to the PAC programme model was demonstrated across the network, with each delivery team recruiting young people into the five core roles: peer researchers, social action leads, changemakers, youth panel members and research/social action participants. In line with the programme's theory of change, all teams supported peer researchers in completing two research cycles and facilitated youth-led social action projects in two phases based on their findings.

Delivery partners adjusted their approaches based on local needs, organisational structures and the young people they worked with. For example, although the model defines the peer researcher and social action lead roles as distinct, many regions chose to combine responsibilities across the two. In London and Lancashire, delivery partners formally integrated the roles, creating unified positions known as PAC leads. Young people spoke positively about this approach, noting that combining research and social action experiences was a strength and helped create a smoother transition between the two phases. Additionally, some regions created roles specific to project needs and objectives. In the Midlands, core research and social action teams were split into sub-teams – such as content creation and social media – each responsible for specific actions of the project. Similarly, in London, one young person took on dedicated comms responsibilities on behalf of the team.

"It's been a benefit to then better inform social action because then you actually know what's going on. It's been really helpful for me as the social action lead to be involved in the research from the very beginning".

– Social action lead interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

Several delivery partners noted that the programme's flexibility allowed them to build on existing strengths and engage young people who might not have participated in a more rigid model. It also enabled teams to take a responsive approach, shaping the programme in ways that worked best for

their contexts. We expand on the range of strategies and practices used to support high-quality delivery in the Implementation section.

“One of the big draws for us was that PAC isn’t rigid. We could adapt the framework and use it alongside our local approaches”.

– Delivery partner interview, Wales

A detailed breakdown of how the PAC roles were delivered in practice and how this translated into dosage, engagement and quality is explored in later sections of this report.

Delays in delivery timelines

Aligning delivery activities with planned timelines proved challenging across the PAC network. Delivery partners faced a range of internal challenges that affected coordination and slowed progress, particularly in the early stages.

For many, PAC2 marked a new way of working: employing young people in formal roles and running peer-led research projects. This required new systems, including safeguarding protocols, human resource processes, administrative infrastructure and access to IT equipment. Staff with limited research experience needed additional time to learn methodologies, develop tools and navigate ethical approvals. As a result, delivery partners across the seven regions reported that early implementation was slower than anticipated, as teams focused on building these essential foundations.

“Because it’s young staff, we wanted to make sure we had the proper safeguarding processes in place. So certain things [activities] had to run simultaneously, and it took longer”.

– Delivery partner interview, Midlands

External factors also disrupted delivery timelines. Several delivery partners, particularly those whose PAC teams focused on education in areas such as London, the Northeast and Lancashire, faced difficulties recruiting participants and conducting research with schools, especially during school exam periods. As a result, their foundational research phase extended into the start of social action, delaying the recruitment of social action participants and changemakers. Partners affected by these delays noted that it had lasting effects on their delivery, leaving them in a constant state of catch-up throughout the programme.

The extended delivery period of PAC allowed scope for unexpected challenges to occur. Most notably, delivery partners across all regions emphasised that the 2024 summer riots had a major impact on PAC delivery across all regions. In some areas, activity was paused due to safety concerns and rising community tensions. Even in areas where violence didn’t occur, delivery partners stressed that the broader atmosphere of unrest had a profound effect on young people’s sense of safety and emotional well-being.

Changes in individual circumstances within PAC teams over the delivery period, such as unexpected life events or staff turnover, also limited the capacity to consistently adhere to timelines. As a result of these challenges, delivery often unfolded in a more fluid and iterative way than originally planned. This made recruitment into PAC roles less structured, with young people joining at different points rather than through fixed entry stages. Ultimately, recruitment became a responsive and ongoing process, shaped by delivery timelines, the nature of social action activities, and young people’s availability. The variation in recruitment numbers is explored further in the ‘Dosage’ section below.

- **Dosage:** how much of the intended PAC activity has been delivered? Can a dosage be identified for each area?

Variation in delivery partner progress towards youth engagement targets

One way of understanding dosage across the seven participating regions is the number of young people engaged across various roles. Engagement was tracked by delivery partners, who recorded participation using registration forms and attendance records across the five primary PAC roles: peer researchers, social action leads, changemakers, research participants and social action participants. This data was reported monthly to the evaluation team and shared with the YEF on a quarterly basis.

Table 9. Breakdown of participants by PAC role and delivery region

Region	Peer researchers/ social action leads	Changemakers	Social action participants	Research participants
Target numbers	10	80	200	150
Lancashire	10	42	77	109
London	18	108	92	151
Midlands	11	18	70	94
Northeast	10	32	143	157
Southwest	14	85	211	153
Wales	8	49	91	161
Yorkshire and the Humber	9	33	117	138

Note: data reflects the most recent figures available at the time of writing. Engagement numbers are as reported in April 2025. Final engagement number available in September 2025.

Across the network, delivery partners largely met or exceeded recruitment targets for peer researchers, social action leads and research participants, indicating that PAC achieved consistent dosage and met expectations for the research component of the programme. In contrast, the social action element showed greater variability – particularly for recruitment to the changemaker role. While some regions (such as London) exceeded their targets, others (such as Yorkshire and the Humber) faced more challenges in reaching expected numbers. Conclusions are drawn from data available at the time of writing, reflecting the progress of delivery partners as of April 2025. Given that delivery activity – particularly the social action strand – continues through to July 2025, this data should be considered an indicative measure of dosage rather than a final account of participation.

Delivery partners identified a range of operational and contextual reasons for variations in changemaker recruitment. In some regions, delays in the foundational and developmental research phases reduced the time available to plan and launch social action activities. In turn, this shortened the recruitment period for changemakers, which is a voluntary position. This combination of a short recruitment window and lack of financial incentive contributed to challenges with changemaker recruitment.

“We struggled with is changemakers because they wanted to get paid to do the voluntary work ... We put things in place instead of paid work, like CV support, to encourage them to get stuck in”.

– Social action lead interview, Midlands

The type and scale of social action activity also influenced the number of young people involved. In Lancashire, some teams co-produced creative projects, such as a board game, with a small group of young people, working closely together and committing more time to delivery. In contrast, London teams organised large public events, including the launch of a co-produced film. These larger-scale activities enabled them to engage a wider group of young people more quickly. Variations in the scale and format contributed to differences in the number of changemakers and the hours required for delivery, which were reflected in differing engagement and recruitment levels for changemakers across PAC teams.

Variation in intensity and structure

PAC was originally designed to operate as a single, overarching project within each of the seven regions. However, in practice, the structure and scope of delivery varied significantly across sites.

In some areas, delivery partners focused their activities at a borough or neighbourhood level. For instance, the London team, working in Haringey and Tottenham, focused their efforts on responding to community needs. In contrast, some regions, such as Yorkshire and the Humber and the Southwest, delivered across multiple cities, with Bradford and Hull covering the former and Bristol and Exeter in the latter.

Successful implementation of the PAC model led to diverging priorities and a non-uniform approach to delivery within some regions. While the programme anticipated a coordinated research project per region, PAC teams working across multiple sites often produced two distinct research reports and corresponding sets of social action activities. This made sense, given the differing demographics, geographies and local systems within each delivery area (for example, the differences between Bradford and Hull in the Northeast). These local variations significantly influenced research findings and, in turn, the local challenges social action looked to address.

Given this variation in delivery geographies and approaches, it is not possible to define a standardised or consistent dosage of PAC activity defined in terms of the number of research and social action activities across the network. While the programme maintained some common structures and roles, the number, scope and intensity of activities were shaped by the local context and the flexibility of the model.

Table 10 summarises how dosage varied across core activities.

Table 10. Overview of participation dosage across Peer Action Collective (PAC) activities

Key Activity	Dosage
Training	Training across the PAC network combined a structured core offer with flexibility to meet local needs. All peer researchers, social action leads and delivery partner staff received training from the national partner, The Young Foundation, delivered through online and in-person sessions, one-to-one check-ins, and a suite of practical tools and templates. Ongoing support was provided via email, phone, Teams calls and in-person visits. The training followed a two-stage model. In the introductory phase, all young people completed core training relating to safe, trauma-informed and ethical peer research. This included understanding safeguarding and data protection, designing research questions, conducting interviews and focus groups, and an introduction to PAC's approach to social action, including

	campaign design, goal setting and the use of research to inform change. In the second stage, most regions delivered project-specific training that built on the introductory phase. This included advanced skills, such as data analysis, report writing, stakeholder engagement and media-based campaigning. Many delivery partners supplemented these sessions with additional opportunities, such as communication and presentation training, team building, project management, youth work and mental health first aid. Some sites also brought in external experts to provide specialist input, particularly in areas such as data analysis or creative campaign delivery. While the core training offer was consistent across all sites, the level and type of support varied depending on each delivery partner's capacity and experience. Delivery partners with strong research backgrounds required less input, while those with less experience in research required more in-depth support. All sites except London reported the need for at least one round of additional or follow-up training. This often took the form of refresher sessions for young people transitioning from research to social action or targeted training to address emerging delivery challenges. Delivery partners generally agreed that a minimum threshold of training is required to ensure that young people are equipped to participate safely and effectively. Although the number of hours of training was not tracked consistently, all sites participated in the basic PAC training package, with many adding project-specific sessions and locally developed sessions. A more formal review of the amount of training provided and its relationship to the quality of youth participation would be a valuable focus for future evaluation.
Peer research	All regions completed two peer research projects and delivered accompanying social action initiatives. However, the number and format of research activities varied across regions. Each delivery partner began with a foundation project to explore a broad topic area, followed by a development project that examined a related theme in more depth. These research cycles then informed the design of social action activities that addressed the issues raised. Due to the flexible and youth-led nature of PAC, the number and structure of research activities differed between regions. Some teams conducted several smaller-scale sessions, such as interviews and workshops, while others focused on fewer but more in-depth engagements. There is no standardised or centralised data available on the exact number of research activities or interviews conducted per region, as teams were encouraged to adapt their methods in line with the needs and interests of local young people. Methods ranged from one-to-one interviews and focus groups to creative workshops and community-based discussions.
Social action	Social action delivery also varied across the PAC network in both type and scale. Some teams, such as those in London, delivered high-profile, one-off events, such as a co-produced film launched by young people. Others took a multi-phase approach, developing sustained campaigns, toolkits or school-based interventions. Activities included peer-designed educational tools, awareness campaigns using creative media and practical outputs, such as games or local resource maps. The evaluation did not systematically track the total number of social action projects or sessions delivered in each region. Instead, the focus was placed on understanding the quality, purpose and youth leadership underpinning these activities, factors that are explored in more depth in the following sections. However, tracking activity volume and frequency could be an area for further

	development in future evaluations, particularly to support comparison across regions and monitor consistency in delivery.
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We also observed variation in how core roles were implemented. Based on the peer researcher and social action lead post-programme survey, which was completed by 38 respondents, the average weekly hours committed varied between two and seven, and the duration of roles ranged from four to 24 months.

Challenges in using dosage as a measure of impact for youth-led place-based programmes

While the concept of dosage is a valuable evaluative tool in more standardised interventions – where it is feasible to use evaluative methods such as randomised controlled trials (RCTs) – it is less appropriate for participatory, place-based programmes.

Although RCTs or cluster randomisation might seem appropriate in theory, they are not feasible in practice for a programme like PAC. The number of viable clusters, such as communities or regions, is too small to generate sufficient statistical power. Furthermore, PAC was intentionally designed to be flexible and locally adapted. Each site co-produced its activities with young people in response to community needs, meaning there is no consistent or replicable ‘treatment’ to apply across sites. This variation, which is central to PAC’s theory of change, makes the kind of standardisation required for RCTs both methodologically inappropriate and logistically unviable.

In the context of PAC, delivery methods, such as peer-led research, co-designed social action and responsiveness to the local context, are not simply mechanisms for implementation; they are fundamental components of the intervention itself. These same challenges apply when attempting to use dosage as a primary measure of impact. Standardised metrics, such as hours attended or sessions completed, do not capture the diversity of roles young people take on, nor do they reflect the depth, intensity or meaning of their engagement. A peer researcher attending weekly sessions over several months, a changemaker delivering a single public campaign and a young person participating in one high-impact workshop may all experience valuable and transformative involvement, yet their engagement would be measured very differently using dosage alone. Attempts to standardise the programme design to make measurement easier could risk jeopardising the flexibility that is central to the programme’s design and one of its key strengths.

To better reflect the nature of the programme, this evaluation recommends shifting the focus from standardised measures of dosage alone towards assessing the quality and depth of engagement and youth leadership. Elements of dosage could still be explored in conjunction with these qualitative dimensions. For example, identifying a minimum range of training or support required by delivery partners, peer researchers and social action participants could help ensure a consistent standard of delivery across regions. These combined measures offer a more meaningful understanding of participation in a programme where variation is both expected and fundamental to its design.

- **Quality:** in what ways do PAC activities reflect solutions to local issues identified by the peer researchers? How well are the different components of PAC being delivered?

This evaluation finds evidence that PAC has enabled high-quality, youth-led work that closely reflects the priorities and needs identified by young people in their communities. The programme’s core components –

peer research and social action – proved particularly effective, enabling young people to lead inclusive, creative and purposeful activities aimed at influencing local systems and structures. The residential and training sessions provided valuable opportunities for connection and skill development, although experiences varied depending on differing expectations and needs. The national survey was identified as the most challenging element, with issues related to timing, alignment and meaningful engagement. Some delivery partners felt that the national survey, with its focus on meeting high recruitment targets but offering limited time for direct engagement with young people, was at odds with the programme’s core values. In particular, they felt it risked undermining the emphasis on authentic youth leadership and meaningful involvement by prioritising numbers over depth of participation.

Challenging timings and differing expectations about the purpose and structure of the residential contributed to mixed experiences among participants

The residential was described by many peer researchers and social action leads as a significant early touchpoint in the PAC programme. For some, it was their first introduction to the wider network and an initial opportunity to connect with others who shared similar values and motivations. Several participants emphasised the energy and sense of connection that came from meeting young people from different parts of the country. While the residencies were seen as useful, several felt they could be even more impactful with clearer expectations and better alignment of timelines – *particularly* in relation to the recruitment of young people.

“They explained the whole project to us and what would be happening. It was fun to get to know lots of other people”.

– Peer researcher interview, London

The format of the sessions was widely viewed as a strength. Breakout discussions and small group conversations created space for more open and personal dialogue. These settings enabled peer researchers and social action leads to explore PAC’s thematic areas – such as youth experiences of violence, education and relationships with trusted adults – in ways that felt meaningful and relevant to them. Exposure to a range of perspectives and lived experiences encouraged participants to reflect on their own assumptions and experiences, particularly in relation to youth violence. These conversations took place in a safe, facilitated environment which supported respectful dialogue and allowed for the exploration of complex and sensitive topics in a structured way.

“It gave them time to reflect on their own experiences and hear from others, which was powerful in itself”.

– Delivery partner interview, Northeast

Several delivery partners and young people raised concerns about the timing of the residential event. In some regions, peer researchers and social action leads attended this event within their first week of joining PAC before they had established relationships with their local teams or fully understood their roles. This made it more difficult for some young people to participate confidently and engage meaningfully. Delivery partners reflected that holding the residential early in young people’s employment made it feel more like a youth-group type activity rather than part of a professional role. This blurred boundaries and made it harder for delivery partner staff to reinforce expectations around professional accountability. Some staff and young

people suggested running the residential slightly later, once roles were clearer or providing a short induction beforehand to help set the right tone and balance relationship-building with setting a professional tone.

“It was within a week to get to know each other, understand PAC and then go straight into it [the residential]”.

– Peer researcher interview, Lancashire

“If I started my job and my first work action was basically to go on a residential, it does come across like you’re part of a youth group, and this can be unhelpful later on”.

– Delivery partner interview, Midlands

There were also mixed views on the content of the residential. While several valued the opportunity to hear about the national scope of PAC, several delivery partners felt that too much time was spent on high-level presentations, particularly from funders, and not enough on practical guidance or team-based activities. Peer researchers and social action leads echoed the need for more balance and said they would have appreciated more informal time to build relationships outside of structured sessions. While the residential helped spark initial connections, there was a clear desire for additional space to socialise, build trust and feel part of a team before starting local delivery.

“A lot of it was funderspeak. I don’t think the young people needed to know that”.

– Delivery partner interview, Southwest

“It would have been helpful to have a bit more time to build relationships outside of the formal PAC setting”.

– Peer Researcher Interview, London

Reports of mixed experiences suggest that participants had differing expectations about the residential’s purpose and activities. Some saw it as an opportunity for team building, while others expected practical skill development. In the future, clearer communication about whether the residential will be focused on knowledge-building, skills training, team bonding or a combination of these could help manage expectations.

Training was helpful in building foundational research and social action skills for both young people and delivery partners

Training in research and social action was a critical foundation for PAC delivery. For many peer researchers, social action leads and delivery partner staff, this was their first experience of formal research or structured social action. Sessions led by The Young Foundation were key to building the skills and confidence needed to deliver high-quality, youth-led work.

Interviewees found the programme’s phased structure effective in supporting learning over time. Starting with foundational training on core topics, such as ethics, consent and interview techniques, allowed young people to build essential knowledge at a manageable pace. Later sessions focused on applying this learning in practice, including the design and delivery of social action. This gradual approach was seen as an effective way to prevent overwhelm and support young people’s confidence and skill development.

“At the start, I didn’t know what research really meant, but the training helped me understand the basics and feel more confident”.

– Delivery partner interview, Southwest

“It was really good for sort of understanding what the project was about and maybe really like simple ways of doing research”.

– Peer researcher interview, London

Some peer researchers felt it could have been helpful to access additional, more advanced content later in the programme as their skills grew. They also felt that a stronger focus on creative and participatory methods would help them engage other young people more effectively. Others noted that there were gaps in the training regarding outreach and partnership working, which they felt needed to be filled to better prepare them to share findings and undertake the influencing elements of the role.

“I would have liked more training on doing outreach and understanding how to build relationships with stakeholders”.

– Social action lead interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

Young people and delivery partners experienced some challenges with the format and delivery of training. Peer researchers and social action teams noted that online sessions, although sometimes necessary, were often difficult to engage with – particularly when participants had their cameras off and opportunities for interaction were limited. Delivery partners said that timing was another barrier, with evening or Friday sessions affecting attendance and energy levels, especially for those managing school, college or other commitments. Similar challenges were experienced by delivery partners when engaging young people in research and social action activities.

Delivery partners provided additional training alongside the core research training. This supplemental training was tailored to young people’s needs and aligned with the focus of their projects. Examples included mental health first aid and the use of specialist equipment to deliver social action activities. Such training played an important role in enabling effective and safe programme delivery.

Young people valued this additional training, though the amount and type varied across regions. In some cases, it directly supported their ability to engage meaningfully with their chosen topics and respond to sensitive issues in a responsible way.

“[Mental health first aid training] helped us because our whole topic is on mental health and youth violence. So, being able to identify signs of distress, mental illness and all that stuff helps us so that we’re able to react accordingly because at the end of the day, we want to keep our participants safe and out of danger – that is one of our roles as well”.

– Changemaker interview, London

Peer research was delivered effectively and sensitively using a range of methodologies and taking care to create safe, supportive research environments

Peer researchers and social action leads faced common challenges during the early stages of their projects. These included recruiting participants, gaining consent, designing research tools and managing group dynamics – for example, facilitating groups where some participants were hesitant to speak and some were

easily distracted. Several peer researchers described these early obstacles as valuable learning moments or good challenges. They adapted their approaches and developed a better understanding of what worked in different settings.

“The whole team's kind of doing trial and error with specific things. When we go into school, some things may not work, then the next session will be like, ‘Let's try this instead’”.

– Peer researcher interview, Lancashire

“We learned how to adapt to the different types of groups. Some were really rowdy, so we learned how to adjust and still get what we needed”.

– Peer researcher interview, London

The foundational research project helped teams build core skills and explore broad topics. The second phase was more focused, allowing teams to refine their methods and concentrate on issues most relevant to their communities. This phase also introduced more participatory and creative approaches, including football sessions, youth-led workshops and visual tools to support engagement.

“Our first phase was about youth voice and how much influence students might have at schools. And from that research, one of the main findings was mental health. So, in the second phase, we're asking students about mental health and how it affects their [lives]”.

– Peer researcher interview, Lancashire

“We started to learn how to be around different people and what to do when you're in a group, how to capture everyone's attention without doing too much or too little”.

– Peer researcher interview, Midlands

Peer researchers emphasised the importance of making the research process inclusive and accessible. Many gave careful thought to how they could support participants to engage meaningfully, especially when discussing sensitive topics, working with peers from marginalised backgrounds or working in settings where trust in formal research was low. They viewed their role not just as data collectors but also as facilitators of safe, respectful and empowering conversations.

To support this, peer researchers used a range of strategies, such as sharing questions in advance to reduce anxiety, using creative prompts to encourage participation and adjusting their facilitation style based on group needs and dynamics. For example, the London team incorporated a game of football into a workshop setting to break the ice and build trust. This informal activity helped young people feel more comfortable and opened up space for deeper conversations about youth violence and mental health.

“[There are] different kinds of people in each school, in each class. We do different icebreakers for the first few weeks, build a good rapport, then we'll start introducing them to our topic slowly, like making them understand key words, and then we'll conduct a workshop with them”.

– Peer researcher interview, Midlands

Research participants responded positively to being interviewed by young people. They described the experience as relaxed, relatable and authentic. Many appreciated the non-judgmental atmosphere created by peer researchers, which made it easier to open up and share their views.

“It was a calm atmosphere. It was made very clear that there aren’t any wrong answers. You can say whatever, and you’re not going to be judged”.

– Research participant interview, Wales

“I think they can understand the things that we are saying – if it [were] an adult, I don’t think they would understand as much”.

– Research participant interview, Northeast

Some research participants noted they were unclear about the purpose of the research or how their data would be used. This may reflect the newness of the experience – both for participants unfamiliar with research settings and for peer researchers still developing confidence in communicating project aims. Where uncertainty remained, delivery partners often provided additional clarification or follow-up information to ensure participants understood the purpose of the research. To support clearer communication, future delivery could include simple briefing tools or structured guidance to help peer researchers explain the research purposes and processes more effectively.

“I didn’t really understand about the research until after the interview”.

– Research participant interview, Lancashire

Using peer research to shape and deliver locally relevant social action

Across PAC regions, social action was clearly grounded in the findings from peer research. Delivery teams emphasised that activities should be shaped by evidence collected by young people, not imposed externally or based on pre-existing plans.

Many PAC teams – particularly those developing toolkits, games or short films – embedded youth voices throughout the process. This included using peer research insights to shape content and involving young people directly in the testing, iteration and communication of the final outputs. In these cases, participation in the design process itself became a powerful form of social action, ensuring that the outputs reflected solutions to local issues identified by young people.

“We’ve tested it out in some groups, and then we’re trying it in schools. After that, our plan is to go over it, take notes and see how they feel about it”.

– Social action lead interview, Midlands

“We’re creating content based on what young people actually want to see. There’s a reason behind everything. We’re promoting awareness, not just posting for the sake of it”.

– Peer researcher interview, Southwest

Social action case studies

Table 11 details local issues identified through research and how PAC teams responded using social action.

Table 11. Case studies of social action projects across three Peer Action Collective (PAC) regions

Region	Social action case studies
London	In London, PAC research focused on youth violence, mental health and school support systems. Young people found that schools often responded to behavioural issues without considering underlying factors, such as mental health, home life difficulties or bullying. In response, the team launched XCLUDED, a campaign advocating for more personalised and holistic approaches to school discipline. Their social action included creative storytelling, public awareness campaigns, toolkits, a film production and a workshop series to facilitate meaningful conversations between young people and educators about behaviour policies and youth voices.
Lancashire	Lancashire's research centred on disciplinary practices within schools, highlighting that traditional models frequently ignored root causes of behavioural issues, such as mental health, stress and disengagement from education. In response to this, the team developed interactive board games and redesigned detention spaces and session plans, inviting young people to co-create restorative, supportive approaches. Alongside this, a wheel of fortune game was created, intended to be used in class to build better relationships between teachers and students. These resources were piloted in local schools as practical tools to both educate and advocate for systemic change.
Bradford	Research in Bradford identified key barriers to youth engagement in community activities: financial cost, safety concerns and peer pressure. To address these issues, the team co-created an interactive community map highlighting local services, opportunities and safe spaces. This map was distributed digitally and physically, improving visibility and access to youth-friendly resources across the community. The team also set up a youth voice group, in collaboration with First Buses, to give young people the opportunity to influence decisions about transport in their communities.

Systemic approach to social action

Many PAC teams developed social action projects that focused not only on immediate issues for young people, such as access to safe spaces or support from trusted adults, but also on influencing wider systems and driving longer-term structural change. These projects often sought to engage decision-makers, reshape institutional practices and challenge public narratives. Examples included youth-led toolkits for professionals, campaigns targeting school exclusion policies and creative media projects designed to shift attitudes about youth violence and mental health. Young people were motivated by a desire to create long-term impact. These projects often went beyond one-off interventions, instead intending to inform practice and shift attitudes.

“One toolkit is for professionals to show what good youth voice looks like. The other includes session plans for teaching about knife crime and drugs, things that have worked”.

– Social action lead interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

Several delivery partners attributed this focus on systemic outcomes to the guidance and support provided by The Young Foundation. As the national partner, The Young Foundation encouraged delivery teams to

think beyond individual-level change and supported them to design projects with wider, longer-term impact in mind. This included helping teams reflect on the theory of change, align with the #iwill principles of social action and consider how their work could influence policies, systems and public attitudes. Through structured planning sessions, regular network meetings and practical tools, The Young Foundation created space for delivery partners to explore what systemic change could look like in their local context and supported young people to frame their projects with this ambition.

Balancing scale and youth-led principles in the national survey

The national survey was introduced to build on the insights generated through local peer research by capturing a broader, more representative picture of young people's experiences across England and Wales. Designed to align with key themes identified during the Foundation Project, the survey aimed to complement regional findings and strengthen PAC's ability to speak to national trends. By linking local insights with national data, the survey was intended to support systemic influence and inform policy and practice beyond individual communities.

However, the national survey was also one of the most challenging elements of the programme to deliver. While its scale and ambition were widely recognised, many delivery partners struggled to implement it in a way that aligned with PAC's values and delivery model. The survey was created to reflect priorities from across the network, which required an extensive list of questions. These were identified as barriers to completion: the late rollout, high response targets, length of the survey and limited flexibility made meaningful youth engagement difficult. Some delivery partners felt that the focus on reach over depth conflicted with the trust-based, youth-led relationships they had spent months cultivating. The one-off nature of the interaction, combined with the lack of visible outcomes, also made it difficult to motivate young people to take part. The decision not to collect personally identifiable information reduced options for providing incentives, further limiting PAC teams' ability to motivate young people to engage.

Several delivery partners suggested that future iterations of the national survey should be more clearly embedded within the programme, both in terms of timing and purpose. They emphasised the value of co-designing the survey with young people from the outset and creating stronger links between data collection and action. This could help ensure that the survey not only supports PAC's national aims but also reflects the programme's core principles of meaningful youth involvement and local relevance.

- **Reach:** what is the rate of participation by peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers? Why might rates of participation differ across areas or groups of young people?

The following section examines the rate of participation by peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers and explores why participation rates may differ across areas or groups of young people. As outlined earlier in this report, a core aim of the programme was to reach a diverse range of young people. From the outset, delivery partners were encouraged to meet participation targets designed to ensure a diversity of perspectives, including:

- At least 30% of participants from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds
- At least 15% from rural or non-urban areas

- At least 8% identifying as disabled young people, including those with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and neurodiversity

While these targets were core to the programme's design and delivery and the evaluation sought to monitor and measure progress towards them, this evaluation was not a dedicated study into the racial equity of PAC. This decision reflects a commitment to honour the complexity of young people's lives, recognising that their experiences and opportunities are shaped by multiple intersecting factors, such as ethnicity, gender, disability, socio-economic background and geography. It also reflects the design of the PAC2 evaluation, which was intentionally developed to be trauma-informed. This approach prioritised creating safe, supportive and inclusive environments, reducing potential harm, reducing participant burden and avoiding practices that could inadvertently distress participants.

In this context, the evaluation focused on exploring participation and experience in a holistic manner rather than isolating or analysing a single demographic characteristic. The study, therefore, sought to capture a broad picture of engagement, acknowledging that identity is multi-dimensional and context-dependent and that racial equity must be considered alongside the intersecting realities of young people's lived experiences.

Demographic insights to date

Demographic monitoring was embedded into the feasibility study and integrated into PAC2 delivery to track participation across the five PAC roles, including peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers. Data was collected on core characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, gender, disability and region, to build a clearer picture of who was engaging with the programme. Categories for collecting demographic data were aligned with ONS classifications.⁸

For changemakers and social action participants, demographic data was reported on a quarterly basis. For research participants, demographic data was collected and reported at the end of the foundational and developmental research projects, with delivery partners submitting this information to The Young Foundation. Due to the timing of the study, demographic data is only available up to April 2025 for social action participants and changemakers and only from the first foundational research project for research participants. This gap in coverage means that data from later stages of delivery, including the developmental research projects and later social action activities, is not yet available. As a result, as of the point of writing, there are constraints on the evaluation team's ability to assess the overall reach of PAC, track changes in participant representation over time and understand why participation rates may differ between groups or regions.

Table 12 summarises the number of demographic records received compared to the total number of young people engaged in the programme up to April 2025.

⁸ ONS categories were used to align demographic data collection across the programme. The evaluation team recognises that some terms within the framework may be perceived as stigmatising.

Table 12. Count of young people engaged and demographics provided by role and region

Region	Changemakers		SAPs		RPs	
	YPs engaged	Demographics received	YPs engaged	Demographics received	YPs engaged	Demographics received
Lancashire	42	42	77	95	109	73
London	112	46	209	0	168	71
Midlands	40	26	84	65	94	81
Northeast	32	17	143	119	157	45
Southwest	85	59	211	182	153	75
Wales	49	38	91	91	161	89
Yorkshire and the Humber	37	37	117	115	138	77

SAP = Social Action Participant; RP = Research Participant, YPs = Young People

The differences between the demographic data set and total participation figures, even as of April 2025, cannot be explained by timing alone. Whilst some regions had provided up-to-date demographic information at the time of reporting (for example, Lancashire and Yorkshire and the Humber, where demographic returns closely matched participation figures), other regions showed significant gaps between the number of young people recorded as engaged and the demographic data received. This highlights variability in reporting completeness across delivery partners and regions.

Additional contributing factors included:

- Incomplete delivery partner reporting – some delivery partners did not submit full demographic returns for all young people they engaged. Delivery partners were managing high demands from both programme research and social action activities, which may have affected the completeness of submissions.
- Voluntary disclosure – some young people chose not to share personal demographic details.
- Activity scheduling – certain events, such as London’s social action film screening, took place around the same time as reporting deadlines, meaning the available data could not be processed in time. While participant numbers from these events were registered after the reporting period, they were not captured in the data set used for this analysis.

Peer researcher and social action lead demographic data was gathered through a pre-survey completed when participants first registered for the programme. This approach produced a relatively high completion rate – 83 responses, representing 93% of those who started in these roles – but several issues reduced the reliability of the data set. Early monitoring surveys used ethnicity categories that did not align with ONS categories, and participants were able to select multiple ethnicities. This made consistent tracking difficult and limited the potential for meaningful comparisons across regions.

A revised ethnicity question, aligned to ONS categories, was introduced in the post-survey. However, response rates for this question remained low at the time of reporting. A total of 43 post-survey responses had been received from five regions: London (16), Yorkshire and the Humber (10), Southwest (5), Lancashire (6) and the Northwest (5). An additional three responses contained incorrect survey identification numbers, which prevented pre- and post-survey comparisons for those participants.

Several factors can also explain why the response rates varied between regions and remained low, including the survey being conducted before the conclusion of the programme, its voluntary nature and the completion window taking place during a busy period of social action activities for peer researchers and social action leads.

Implications for pilot study

To address the issues identified in the collection of demographic data, future studies should ensure that demographic questions are designed and implemented in a way that captures complete, consistent and comparable information across all PAC roles. For peer researchers and social action leads, including the correct demographic questions in the pre-survey will mean that a large proportion of data is collected at the beginning of the programme. For other roles, collecting demographic information once programme activities have concluded will be equally important in building a complete data set.

Improving post-survey response rates will require careful attention to timing and process. Distributing surveys after the conclusion of activities will allow young people more space for reflection and reduce the competing demands that often occur during delivery. For example, delivery partners could integrate survey completion into the offboarding process with peer researchers and social action leads, which could increase response rates without detracting from programme delivery. In some cases, providing paper copies at in-person celebration events may also increase accessibility and encourage participation – though this would increase administrative burden on delivery organisations and the evaluation team.

Strengthening reporting tools and processes could also help. While co-design of evaluation tools with delivery staff was not possible in this study owing to time constraints (discussed earlier in this report), future studies may benefit from such a process. Working collaboratively on tool design and testing them in advance to ensure they are fit for purpose could help improve both the accuracy and consistency of reporting.

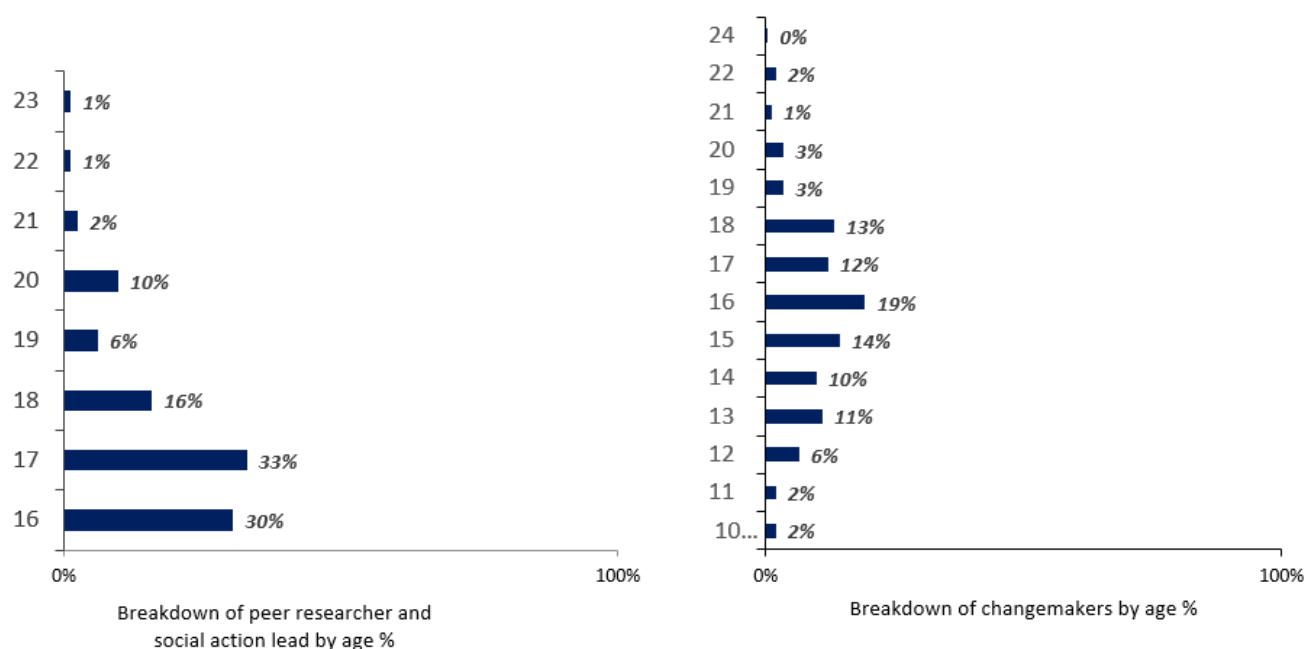
While, for reasons outlined in the introduction, this evaluation did not collect demographic data for young people involved in the evaluation activities, the team recognises that understanding how PAC engages and impacts different groups of young people is an important aspect of assessing the programme's effectiveness. The limited race and ethnicity data available in this feasibility study has made it difficult to explore participation and outcomes across demographic groups in depth. In future phases, demographic information could be collected as part of the evaluation process and, wherever possible, aligned with the demographic data gathered for participation in PAC. This approach would create a more joined-up and consistent data set, reduce duplication for participants and strengthen the reliability of analysis. Collecting this data comprehensively, consistently and in line with recognised standards from the outset would make it possible to analyse participation and outcomes through a race equity lens, as well as to explore how factors such as gender, disability and socio-economic background may influence young people's experiences and outcomes in PAC.

Reach of peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers

Due to the limited availability of complete data for each PAC role, this analysis focuses only on data for peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers. While the data set is incomplete, it is sufficient to provide indicative findings on participation. The results should therefore be interpreted as broad trends

rather than precise measurements. For age, gender and disability, pre-survey data for peer researchers and social action leads is used. For ethnicity, post-survey data from peer researchers and social action leads is used.

Figure 5. Age



Across the programme, peer researchers and social action leads were aged between 16 and 24, with participation concentrated at the younger end of this range. Sixteen-year-olds were the most frequently reported age, followed closely by 17- and 18-year-olds. This concentration reflects both the 16+ eligibility requirement for these positions and the substantial time commitment required to participate in the training, peer research and social action activities. It may also be influenced by the fact that those over 18 are often in further education and/or full-time employment, which can limit their availability.

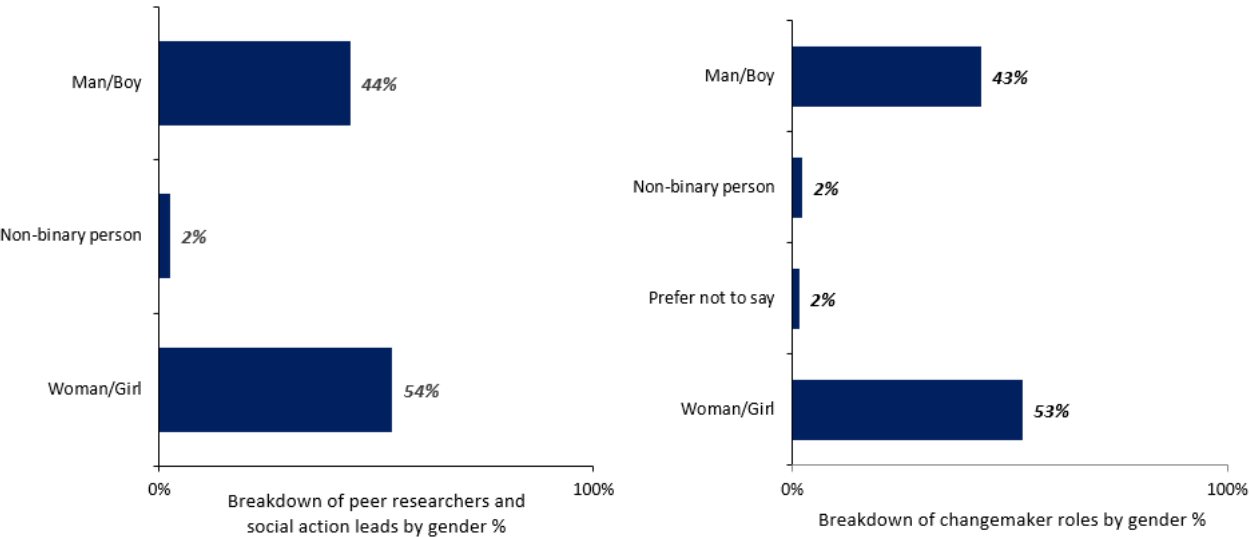
There were also regional variations in age profiles. In Yorkshire and the Humber (where delivery took place in Bradford and Hull), participants ranged from 16 to 23 years, indicating that recruitment included both younger and older eligible participants. By contrast, in the Northeast (where teams were based in Middlesbrough and Gateshead), peer researchers and social action leads were exclusively 16- and 17-year-olds.

Changemakers had a wider age profile, ranging from 10 to 24 years, with the largest single group aged around 16. This broader spread reflects the absence of a lower age restriction for this role and the more flexible time commitment required. At the programme level, the changemaker age distribution closely matched patterns within individual teams, suggesting consistency in recruitment practices for this role across the network.

Qualitative analysis indicates that delivery partners used a variety of recruitment strategies to engage peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers, including using local networks, making social media posts and creating posters. However, the evaluation did not capture systematic data on where or to whom these approaches were targeted. To strengthen the understanding of recruitment reach in future, the peer

researcher survey could include a question asking participants how they first found out about PAC. This would provide clearer evidence on which channels are most effective for engaging different age groups and could help refine recruitment strategies for the pilot phase.

Figure 6. Gender

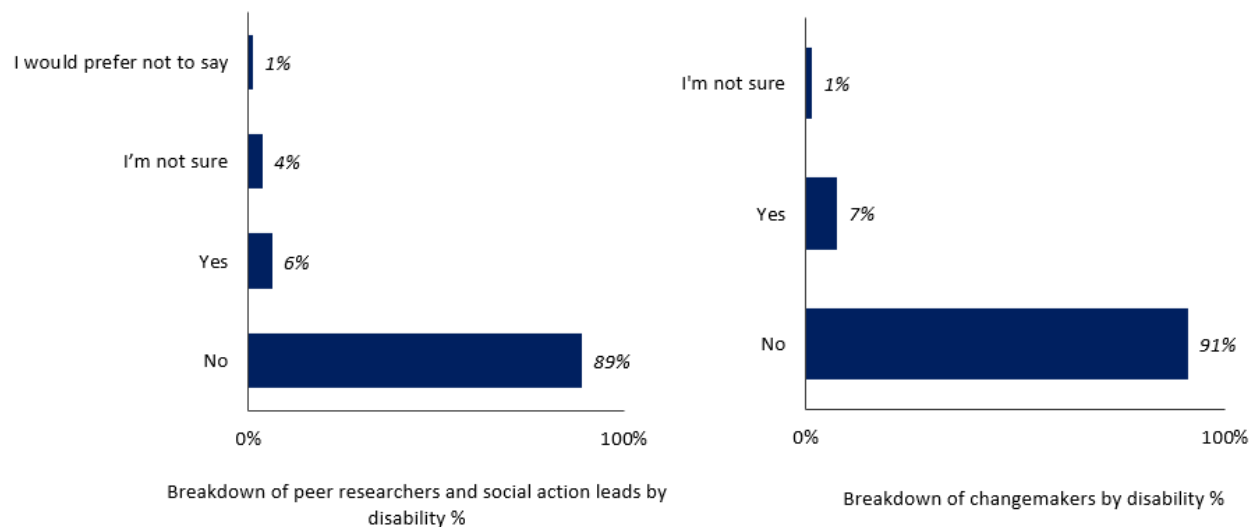


At the programme level, women/girls were slightly more likely than men/boys to take on peer researcher and social action lead roles. However, this trend was not consistent across all delivery regions, with notable variations in gender distribution. In the Midlands, for example, 67% of young people in these roles identified as women/girls and 33% as men/boys. In contrast, the Southwest showed a reversal of this pattern, with 36% identifying as women/girls and 64% as men/boys. Yorkshire and the Humber presented a more mixed profile: 53% identified as men/boys, 40% as women/girls and 7% as non-binary.

These differences may reflect a range of contextual factors, including local recruitment networks, the nature of community partnerships and the cultural or social norms influencing participation. For instance, in two regions where delivery partners were closely associated with local football clubs, more men/boys tended to take on peer researcher and social action lead roles, suggesting that the nature of partner organisations may have shaped engagement patterns. At the changemaker level, the gender balance was more closely aligned with the overall programme profile, with men/boys and women/girls participating in roughly equal proportions across most regions.

This feasibility study did not gather specific information on why these variations occurred, so it is not possible to determine the exact causes at this stage. However, future research during the pilot phase could investigate these patterns further by exploring the recruitment approaches, outreach materials and role descriptions used by different delivery partners, as well as any other factors that may influence who feels able and encouraged to participate.

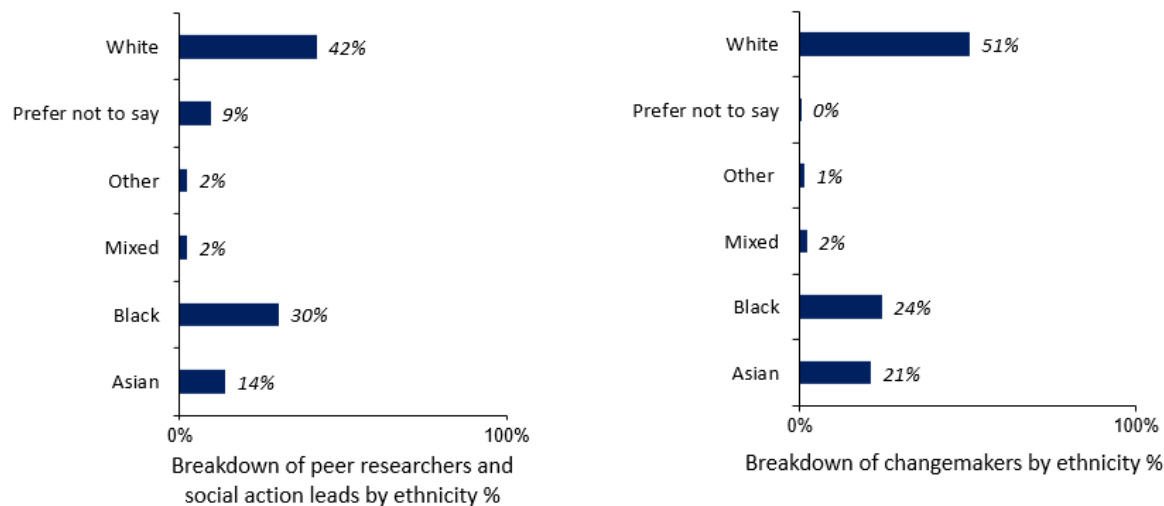
Figure 7. Disability



Across the PAC2 network, most peer researchers and social action leads reported not having a disability (93%), with 7% unsure. Among changemakers, 97% reported not having a disability, and 3% preferred not to say. While this data does not represent the entire cohort and should be interpreted with caution, the available figures indicate that participation from disabled young people remains low for these cohorts. If the wider programme target of 8% participation was achieved overall, these findings raise questions about why representation is lower in these specific roles.

Several factors may help to explain this underrepresentation, though the available data does not allow for a definitive conclusion. Interviews with young people and delivery partners suggested that recruitment often drew on schools, youth organisations and community groups, which may have had limited contact with disabled young people. In some cases, the programme or roles may not have been viewed as accessible or inclusive. Barriers could also have arisen from transport, the timing and location of activities, and the flexibility of roles. Certain activities, such as in-person peer research and social action events, may have been harder to take part in without appropriate adjustments.

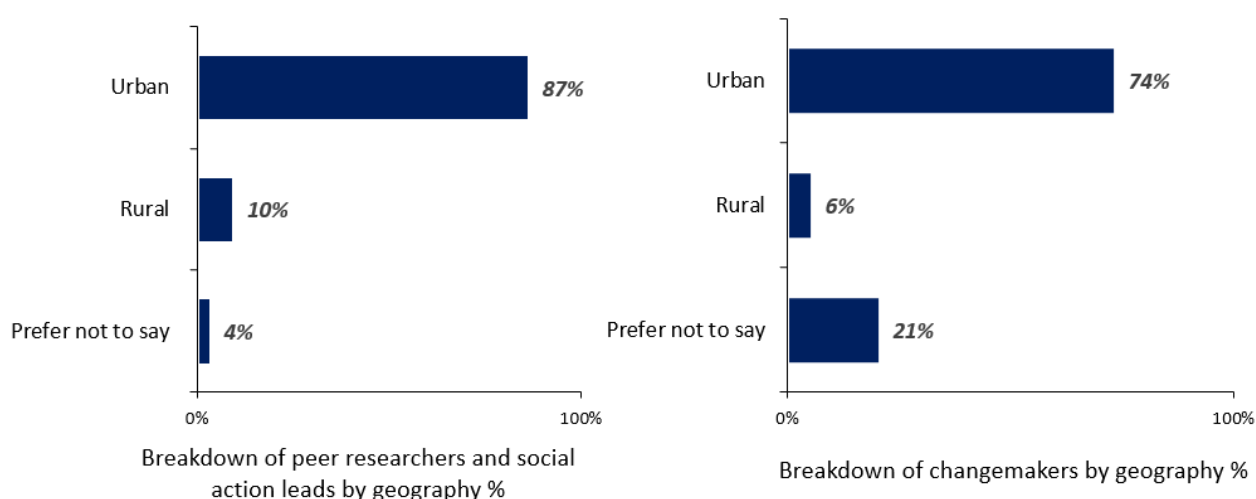
Figure 8. Race and ethnicity



Across both peer researcher/social action lead roles and changemaker roles, while the majority of young people who provided demographic information identified as White, there were high levels of racial and ethnic diversity. Close to half of the participants in these roles identified as Black, Mixed, Asian or Other ethnic backgrounds. While the data is not representative of the whole programme, it indicates that within these roles, PAC2 is exceeding its target of at least 30% of participants identifying as being from one of these groups.

Due to the limited ethnicity data available for peer researchers, it is not possible to provide a robust cross-regional comparison for this group. However, for changemakers, the data we do have shows clear regional differences. In London, just over 48% of the changemakers for whom we have demographic information identified as Black African. In Birmingham, 76% of the changemakers in the data received identified as Black Caribbean. In regions such as the Southwest, where local populations tend to be less ethnically diverse, the vast majority, 87%, identified as being White. These patterns suggest that while PAC2 is engaging young people in ways that reflect local demographics, fuller and more consistent data collection will be important to understand the equity of reach across all sites.

Figure 9. Geography



When considering the geographical spread of participants, the PAC2 target was for at least 15% representation from rural or non-urban areas. Among peer researchers and social action leads, rural representation reached 10%, with the majority (87%) based in urban areas. While the target was not fully met, this group came closer to the intended balance. For changemakers, the proportion was lower, with 6% identifying as living in rural areas, which still falls short of the target.

A notable feature of the changemaker data is that one-fifth (21%) selected 'prefer not to say' when asked about their location, which limits how much can be concluded about the overall geographical spread. This may reflect reluctance among young people to share potentially identifiable information, such as a postcode, particularly when engaging in a programme on sensitive issues like violence. Overall, participation was stronger in urban areas across both groups, while rural representation fell below the target, especially among changemakers. The level of missing responses also underlines the need to build confidence in sharing information and improve data completeness, alongside strengthening outreach to non-urban communities.

Variations in rates of participation

Participation rates among peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers varied across PAC2 regions, influenced by a mix of structural, contextual and delivery-related factors. Differences in recruitment pathways, community demographics and the strength of local partnerships affected not only who engaged but also when and how they got involved. For example, some regions had well-established youth networks or strong relationships with schools and community organisations, which helped support broader and more diverse recruitment. In contrast, other areas faced challenges such as lower outreach capacity and limited organisational infrastructure.

Cuts to youth services reduced the number of community organisations that staff could partner with to support recruitment or build relationships with young people. In Birmingham, the council's bankruptcy and significant reductions in youth services further limited the number of partners to draw from and restricted opportunities to reach young people. More broadly across the PAC network, localised disruptions, such as organisational restructures, funding pressures and the tight timeframes of programme delivery, also reduced the capacity of partners to dedicate time and resources to recruitment.

Our findings also suggest that practical barriers, such as school term times, exam periods, transport issues and competing responsibilities, such as part-time work or caring duties, shaped levels of participation. These constraints often varied by region and played a role in determining which young people were able to remain involved through the different phases of the programme.

As noted earlier in this report, full monitoring data had not yet been submitted at the time of reporting, and, therefore, these findings should be treated as indicative rather than comprehensive. Future studies would benefit from a closer look at how recruitment strategies and materials are used across regions, including how they are adapted to reflect the local context or target specific groups. This would help assess how demographic patterns of participation – particularly related to age, gender, disability and ethnicity – are shaped by programme design and delivery. While PAC appears to be engaging a broad cross-section of young people overall, these variations point to the importance of continued reflection on access and inclusion. A deeper understanding of who is engaging, who isn't, and why, will be essential for refining future delivery and ensuring the programme continues to reach and support diverse youth communities equitably across all regions.

- **Reach:** what is the reach of stakeholders?
- **Responsiveness:** in what ways do actors/organisations within a local community engage with PAC activities conducted by peer researchers? Are there any national responses to the national reports and/or projects delivered as part of PAC?

PAC teams built strong relationships with a wide range of stakeholders across local, regional and national levels. Local organisations were central to delivery, offering access to young people and supporting social action. While some teams achieved policy and practice influence, others focused on relationship-building to support long-term change. Despite successes, delivery teams did face challenges, such as difficulty engaging schools, limited follow-up from stakeholders and the impact of national political shifts, which, at times, hindered deeper or sustained engagement.

Reach, types of stakeholders and forms of engagement

PAC teams successfully engaged a wide range of stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels. The nature and depth of these relationships varied depending on the type of stakeholder, the specific activity and historic engagement. Stakeholders supported PAC in multiple ways, including by facilitating access to youth networks, attending events, collaborating on social action and contributing to research dissemination.

Local and community-based stakeholders – such as youth groups, schools and grassroots organisations – held an important and direct role in PAC delivery. They supported recruitment, hosted research and social action activities, and provided valuable insights into young people’s needs. For example, a charity in the Southwest gave PAC access to youth groups, enabling researchers to gather meaningful data on school-based support needs.

“We had access to a charity called Young Devon. One of the things they do is supply counselling support to young people. They gave us access to some of their little groups, and we were able to talk to young people, and they gave us a really clear insight into [the] support they needed within school, and that was really beneficial”.

– Social action lead interview, Southwest

Local and community-based stakeholders played a role in raising the profile of social action projects within their communities and mobilising support around young people’s change ideas. Young people reflected that stakeholders’ willingness to provide access to their own resources and networks depended on their level of support for the programme and its aims.

Local decision-makers who engaged with PAC included youth services, public health departments and local councils. These stakeholders were targets of social action awareness raising, attended dissemination and celebration events, took part in follow-up meetings, responded to research findings and contributed to planning or policy discussions with young people.

Regional stakeholders included police and crime commissioners, VRUs, combined authorities, a university, a rail provider and the London metropolitan police. These stakeholders participated by listening to research findings and collaborating on policy and practice development.

National stakeholders included the Department for Education, Ofcom, members of parliament and national media organisations, such as The Guardian, BBC and ITV. These stakeholders participated by amplifying research findings and contributing to awareness-raising efforts.

Stakeholder routes to engagement with PAC varied, but most engagement occurred through existing local relationships. Many stakeholders had already established connections with delivery partners, providing a direct pathway into the programme. In other cases, peer researchers and social action leads recruited new stakeholders during their research and social action activities. A smaller number, mainly national stakeholders, became involved after reaching out directly to the YEF or the Young Foundation following national media coverage or broader awareness-raising efforts.

Influencing regional and national policy and practice

In some cases, engagement work contributed to shifts in policy, culture and practice. However, several teams noted that the timing of the 2024 general election and the subsequent change in government affected

the level of engagement. Budget constraints and evolving national priorities made it more difficult to secure long-term commitments. While some decision-makers showed interest in PAC, their ability to act on it was often limited during this period of transition at a national level. However, activities delivered at a regional and local level were unaffected, continuing as expected after the election. For example, teams in the Northeast and Wales continued work with government bodies such as the Police Crime Commissioner, VRU and the Welsh Violence Prevention Unit.

Our analysis indicates that PAC teams who were involved in the first iteration of the programme, PAC1, tended to see more tangible shifts in policy and practice than those that were new in this round of the programme. Teams that were only involved in the second phase tended to focus their efforts more on relationship-building as a foundation for driving change in culture, policy and practice. A notable exception to this is London, where the delivery partner had strong existing relationships with decision-makers.

Table 13. Case studies of three regions' influence on policy and practice

Region	Examples of the Peer Action Collective's (PAC's) influence over policy and practice
Bradford	The Bradford team's research indicated that young people were unaware of cost-saving options for rail travel. They worked with Northern Rail to develop a communications campaign. They collaborated to produce a film that highlights the issue of unwanted sexual behaviour on national railways and provides practical advice on how to both prevent and respond to unwanted sexual behaviour. As part of the campaign, some young people attended the UK Parliament to bring attention to the issue among policymakers and to share their views on how to make support services more accessible to victims and witnesses of unwanted sexual behaviour. The Bradford team also organised a series of roundtable discussions with members of parliament, stakeholders and transport companies to share their concerns and solutions. By drawing on their research findings to launch the campaign and spark dialogue with stakeholders, the Bradford team secured free texts to British Transport Police for Three UK, O2, EE and Vodafone customers.
Northeast	The Northeast team has been working alongside Teesside University to share and embed the findings of their research and social action into the teacher education curriculum. The team fed into the Department for Education's curriculum review, which sought to assess the impact and effectiveness of current Personal, Social, Health & Education. The Northeast team seeks to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to build positive relationships with young people and improve their overall experience in school.
Wales	The Wales team co-produced a national strategic framework – named the Wales without Violence Framework – alongside the Wales Violence Prevention Unit. The team, in partnership with key stakeholders, consulted over 1,000 young people across the country to develop nine key strategies for eradicating violence against children and young people.

	Since then, the framework has influenced how people in Wales talk about children and young people. <i>“PAC were kind of instrumental in a kind of complete shift of how people in Wales speak about children and young people, like the terminology we use. So, through the development of the framework, children [and] young people [said] that they didn't like the term youth violence; they found it kind of stereotyping and quite dismissive”.</i> – Stakeholder interview, Wales
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Levels of engagement

Engagement levels varied across regions and by local context. These were shaped by local priorities, individual relationships and organisational capacity.

PAC teams had inconsistent experiences of engaging local authorities. For example, in the Northeast, PAC teams developed sustained relationships with local authorities, leading to a collaboration with Gateshead Council to launch a map to inform young people of where activities and support services are located in Newcastle. In contrast, the Bradford team faced challenges in establishing contact with the council. These differences were often shaped by pre-existing relationships, local political dynamics or varying levels of openness to youth-led work. In response, some teams focused their efforts on engaging stakeholders who were more open and willing to collaborate, allowing them to maintain momentum and build credibility through a more supportive partnership

Changemakers in London met with the Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby. The PAC Northeast team met with their local member of parliament and were then invited to present their findings and recommendations in parliament.

Across the PAC network, local community organisations were generally receptive to engaging with PAC, likely because they tended to already have commitments to listening to young people, with existing processes and structures for youth engagement.

“We have a strong ethos on giving young people a voice within our foundation, so I know already how important these types of projects are; what it has influenced is how well the young people have performed in their delivery of the ideas they have developed”.

– Stakeholder survey, Southwest

Peer researchers and social action leads noted that schools were challenging to engage with, particularly for research projects focusing on trusted adult relationships. This was often due to the limited capacity of school staff, navigating term times and exam periods, and the need to book engagement further in advance than with other organisations. The additional challenge of obtaining parental consent was another barrier to engaging schools in PAC activities.

Peer researchers and social action leads noted that there were sensitivities among school stakeholders around the topic of youth experiences of violence, and they were often hesitant to engage for this reason.

“No one really knows about the project. So, if you come in and say, ‘Let’s talk about young people and violence’, for teachers or adults, it’s not the nicest topic to talk about. It’s a bit of a risky topic, so I guess there’s a bit of resistance around that”.

– Social action lead interview, Lancashire

To support more meaningful school engagement in future phases, peer researchers and social action leads recommended starting conversations earlier to align with academic planning cycles. Building connections with key school staff, particularly those in pastoral or well-being roles, was viewed as critical, as they are often more open and better positioned to support conversations around challenging topics like youth violence.

More broadly, teams experienced some difficulty maintaining momentum with stakeholders after initial points of contact. While many stakeholders responded positively to PAC events and praised young people’s efforts, delivery teams often found it difficult to translate this initial interest into sustained collaboration.

“It got to stages where you get really good feedback from them when you’re in the stakeholder event, but then following up after they’re really, really bad with their replies”.

– Peer researcher interview, Lancashire

To strengthen ongoing engagement, PAC teams suggested being more intentional about securing clear commitments during early conversations, followed by timely and specific follow-up. Keeping communications focused, showing how stakeholder contributions inform real outcomes and providing clear next steps may help shift one-off interest into long-term involvement.

➤ **Provider/implementer factors:** what is the perceived need for PAC amongst stakeholders? What are the perceived benefits of PAC amongst key stakeholders?

Stakeholders identified a range of benefits arising from PAC, particularly for the young people involved. These included increased confidence, purpose and readiness to engage with decision-makers. These outcomes also influenced wider communities and contributed to shifting perceptions of young people’s capabilities and roles in shaping policy and practice.

Benefits that ripple out from young people

Most stakeholders articulated what they perceived to be the benefits of PAC in terms of outcomes for young people. Many described how the programme gave the young people involved a sense of purpose, direction and confidence.

“I have seen the positive impact that PAC has had on individuals. This has given them purpose and meaning and enabled a change in attitude in a positive way”.

– Stakeholder survey, Southwest

Several stakeholders also noted that this increased confidence and purpose had a ripple effect, influencing peers, families and communities. They observed young people in PAC modelling positive behaviours, sparking conversations and inspiring others to act or get involved. These outcomes for young people are explored in greater depth in the discussion of research question 2 below.

Shifting stakeholder perceptions of young people

Stakeholders described how their engagement with PAC helped enrich their understanding of young people's experiences and, in some cases, shift prior assumptions. This included, but was not limited to, their perspectives on young people's experiences of violence.

Of the 24 respondents to the stakeholder survey, 16 (67%) reported that meeting or working with PAC young people influenced their perceptions of young people either 'very much' or 'extremely'. However, while these responses suggest a positive shift in mindset, there was limited data on whether these changes translated into shifts in practice. This could be down to the time the study was conducted (i.e. before the conclusion of the programme) but also highlights the benefits of making this a focus point for future studies.

"From speaking to young people, I have a better understanding of what they are going through, what their worries are and what they need support with".

– Stakeholder survey, Southwest

"It has been eye-opening to witness young people advocate for change and be deeply engaged in local issues".

– Stakeholder survey, Yorkshire and the Humber

Among the eight respondents who reported limited or no change in perception (6 'moderately', 1 'a little' and 1 'not at all'), most explained that they were already working with young people in ways aligned with PAC's approach. For these stakeholders, PAC appeared to reinforce existing views rather than shift them.

"I have a positive perception of young people already, and this [PAC] didn't change it".

– Stakeholder survey, Southwest

These responses suggest that while PAC had a notable impact on some stakeholders, there was less of a shift among those who were already working with young people, for example, those in youth and community work or school leadership roles. In contrast, those who did report a shift tended to be stakeholders working in policing, education or civic leadership roles. This data is limited, as it only represents three out of the seven delivery regions, but it provides an indication of how stakeholder perceptions may have varied across different professional backgrounds.

Bringing youth voices into decision-making spaces

Stakeholders described how the programme helped young people access those with decision-making power and access the spaces where decisions were being made. Stakeholders described how the programme supported young people to enter these spaces feeling more prepared, confident and comfortable. As with the perceptions of young people, 16 (67%) stakeholder survey respondents reported that engaging with PAC had influenced them to think differently about involving young people in decision-making spaces. Again, those for whom perceptions did not change explained that they were already involving young people in decision-making and, therefore, felt that the programme confirmed rather than changed their perspectives.

Stakeholders did perceive some limitations around young people's influence on decision-makers, and, therefore, their ability to implement the wider social action change PAC teams were aiming to achieve. They reflected that in some cases, while young people's input was welcomed, it tended to be limited to

consultation on decisions rather than active involvement in shaping or designing solutions. The quote below reflects a stakeholder expectation that young people engage in a consultative – rather than a co-creative manner – with decision-makers.

“I am quite keen that I work with those young people to influence decisions, influence policy, to find out their thoughts on, you know, changes that we make, developments that we make, policy decisions that we're making”.

– Stakeholder interview, Midlands

Enabling continued youth engagement practices beyond PAC activities

Stakeholders described how access to PAC teams enabled them to extend and strengthen their youth engagement beyond the scope of the PAC programme. Following their initial engagement with PAC teams, some stakeholders continued to invite PAC young people to engage with them, seeking input to better align their services and practices with young people's experiences. This continued engagement took different forms across regions. Examples include PAC team members sitting on a panel to share their perspectives on educational environments, working with policymakers to re-evaluate stop-and-search approaches and providing input on statutory requirements for relationship and sexual education curricula.

“What we've really endeavoured to do is to listen to the voice of young people and also inform them of some of the decision-making processes that they should be involved in as young people on decisions around transport issues that affect them”.

– Stakeholder interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

Stakeholders described how relationships with PAC provided access to a trusted and diverse network of young people with whom they could collaborate and consult. This helped them hear from young people from a wider range of identity backgrounds than they had historically been able to. Stakeholders felt that this strengthened the quality and inclusivity of their youth engagement.

While this suggests that some devolution of power and increased youth influence may have occurred, decision-making authority largely remained with the organisations and institutions themselves. The extent to which these shifts in power persist beyond the life of the programme likely depends on stakeholders' willingness to continue engaging young people meaningfully outside of PAC. A further study exploring how stakeholders' perceptions of youth involvement in policy and service design may have shifted could help assess whether PAC has contributed to longer-term changes in organisational culture and power dynamics.

Strengthening youth engagement

Stakeholders recognised PAC as an example of best practice in meaningful youth engagement that went beyond traditional consultation. While compensating young people for their time is common in participatory projects, PAC's approach of employing young people as formal employees marked a significant shift. These roles came with clear responsibilities and influence, positioning young people as integral members of the project team rather than external contributors.

This structure was seen as critical in shifting power dynamics and ensuring that the youth voice was embedded at the heart of the programme. Stakeholders highlighted the value of this non-tokenistic approach, which treated young people as colleagues and leaders rather than occasional participants.

“The uniqueness of having paid roles is really important. So that I think when you're talking about influencing youth participation, youth voice, but in whatever space it is, mental health, police crime, whatever, having young people paid to do that role and having ... a job to do is super important”.

– Stakeholder interview, Northeast

Some described how their engagement with PAC teams encouraged them to strengthen their broader approaches to youth engagement, rethinking how they involve young people in shaping decisions and services. The PAC model challenged stakeholder assumptions around youth engagement and offered a clear model for youth leadership and co-production.

“They're supporting other professionals to recognise that actually gathering insight from young people isn't impossible. There are safe ways to do it, and they're always willing to support and to share their expertise”.

– Stakeholder interview, Southwest

“The great work they have put into designing the booklets shows their dedication and creativity. It has changed how I view the potential of youth involvement”.

– Stakeholder survey, Northeast

- **Implementation support system:** what strategies and practices are used to support high-quality implementation of PAC? What might the barriers be to the high-quality implementation of PAC?

Delivery partners with trusted community connections

The trusted relationships that delivery partners held with young people and wider stakeholders were foundational to PAC2's successful implementation. These relationships helped enable the successful implementation of the programme in two main ways.

1. They supported the recruitment and engagement of young people in PAC2 roles, particularly peer researchers and social action leads.
2. They resulted in connections with stakeholders to access community spaces and raise the profile and credibility of their projects. Where delivery partners had weaker existing relationships, this presented barriers to successful implementation.

Engaging young people through youth-focused organisations, such as schools, youth clubs and youth-serving charities, was an important element of delivering PAC research and social action projects. Delivery partners found it easier to access young people and community spaces when they had strong relationships and reputations with such institutions. In many cases, delivery partners were already delivering youth programmes prior to their engagement with PAC, which eased recruitment into PAC roles and boosted the engagement of young people in PAC activities.

“A lot of the people [participants] we knew already. We wanted to target them because we already knew they were involved [with the delivery partner] or at risk”.

– Social action lead interview, Southwest

"I've been in the foundation [delivery partner] since I was six. So, when I had the chance to volunteer and then turn into staff, I grabbed it because they helped me, so then maybe I can help someone else. That's how I look at it; I've come full circle, really".

– Changemaker interview, Southwest

In cases where delivery partners lacked such prior relationships, teams encountered challenges. Establishing new relationships often involved slow or inconsistent communication, with some organisations hesitant to engage with PAC teams as an unfamiliar group. These barriers led to delays in delivery and made the recruitment of participants – particularly for research activities – more difficult. Nonetheless, all PAC teams eventually met their recruitment targets.

"At first, getting into schools and youth clubs, trying to email, not getting anything back, made it hard to find young people for focus groups, but we still managed to get it done".

– Peer researcher interview, Lancashire

The existence of prior relationships between delivery organisations and both local community organisations and decision-makers was an enabler of successful delivery and wider reach. Peace Alliance in London was well-connected with decision-makers in the city. In Bradford and Birmingham, delivery organisations were already working alongside the stakeholder organisations they sought to engage: Northern Rail and the Police and Crime Commissioner, respectively.

"We've had a long relationship with Bradford City Community Foundation for a number of years, and that's obviously led on to a partnership with the Peer Action Collective".

– Stakeholder interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

In instances where organisations were already active within their communities or had established relationships with stakeholders, stakeholders reported that PAC still added distinct value. This value was not simply an extension of existing work but was seen as a unique contribution. Survey responses indicated that even experienced practitioners viewed PAC as a source of renewed energy, new perspectives and meaningful youth voice. As one stakeholder noted:

"I always believed in giving young people a platform, but this confirmed how impactful it can be".

– Stakeholder survey, Northeast

The dual role of delivery partner staff

Delivery partner staff played a dual role in supporting the young people engaged in PAC. On the one hand, they provided pastoral care and support typical of a youth worker role. On the other hand, PAC represented the first employment opportunity for most of the young people in paid roles, so delivery organisations also became the employers, and delivery staff became the managers of the young people entering the workplace for the first time. The balance struck by delivery organisation staff between these roles was an important enabler of continued engagement and project success for young people.

Delivery organisation staff reflected on the importance of dedicating time to preparing young people for employment. This included both practical help, such as obtaining identity documents or setting up a bank account, and mentoring, which supported young people in understanding working norms and professional culture. Delivery staff helped young people in paid roles develop their understanding of the professional

world. This included understanding communication norms, behaving appropriately with colleagues and external stakeholders, and maintaining a positive professional demeanour.

“It’s about helping them learn how to operate in a work setting, showing them how to manage time, send emails and ask for help when they need it”.

– Delivery partner interview, Midlands.

Delivery staff provided pastoral support for young people. This included investing time in building positive relationships and embedding social bonding activities into programme delivery. In line with the programme’s ambition to recruit young people with relevant lived experience, PAC engaged young people who were managing complex lives, making the need for strong pastoral support particularly important. Some young people came to the programme with historically negative experiences of working with public or social sector professionals or in professional contexts; several young people compared their relationships with delivery staff against these prior experiences, appreciating the flexibility and empathy of the delivery staff. These attributes encouraged the young people to stay committed to their roles in spite of life challenges.

“I love my organisation. This is like a family; it’s not like working at Tesco or Sainsbury’s. For me, personally, I’ve done so many things during this job that should get me fired, but they saw something in me; they aren’t in a place where they judge or look down on me”.

– Peer researcher interview, Midlands

“My life’s [not been] that great. We were homeless for a while, and whilst we were, the foundations were there every step of the way. Even if I go to the football session, sometimes I won’t even play football, and they’ll take me off to talk to me about it, and just that support of being able to talk to someone made me feel ten times better about everything”.

– Changemaker interview, Southwest

In cases where young people had not engaged with the delivery partner prior to their involvement in PAC, delivery partner staff made conscious efforts to build trust and belonging from the outset. This included induction days, team-building activities, social events and residentials, and they cultivated safe, informal spaces prior to the formal initiation of project work.

Most young people engaged in the programme were balancing other responsibilities, such as school or college. They valued how the delivery organisation staff adapted the programme to their capacity, which, in turn, helped sustain their engagement and participation.

“One thing that really surprised me was how well they accommodated ... our needs. They worked on our schedules rather than saying, ‘Oh, you have to do that. They can’t do it’. I’m so used to, like, being told what to do. But, they say, ‘You can do this if you want, but if you’re busy that day, it’s okay; we can do [it] another day’”.

– Peer researcher interview, Wales

Many young people emphasised the pastoral support offered by their delivery organisation, describing it as like home or family. They felt that this kind of trusting and supportive environment was an important enabler for success and development in their roles. The psychological safety that young people derived from their relationships with delivery organisations helped build their confidence to express themselves, ask for help

and develop the resilience to overcome personal and programme-related challenges. Staff often supported young people beyond the scope of the PAC programme in the form of career advice, signposting to services and one-to-one mentoring.

“For me, PAC very quickly became the safest space in my life. I’m queer, and so it was like when I came out and changed my name – I wasn’t necessarily treated like a normal person by everyone. Almost everything became to do with my identity. Delivery staff have a lot of experience working with people of different needs and identities. I was able to come into PAC from a fresh start, so everyone knew me how I wanted to be known. There was immediate accommodation and respect. So, it just became easier to feel safe here than anywhere else. There’s just so much brightness when things can be really hard”.

– Social action participant interview, [region redacted to protect anonymity]

Navigating challenges in team cohesion and decision-making

PAC delivery teams noted challenges around shared decision-making and team cohesion in the early stages of delivery. Delivery staff played an important role in supporting team members to overcome these challenges.

Peer researchers and social action leads pointed to several factors that sometimes led to tensions within teams due to differences between members. These included differences in background and identity – such as age, lived experience and cultural heritage – and variations in perceived commitment and external priorities. Tensions arose, for example, when team members felt that others’ contributions were uneven or when certain ideas were favoured over others.

“At the start, no one was really rocking with each other. We’re all at different ages, mixed genders. So, when I came into this workplace, some people deal with stuff so differently”.

– Peer researcher interview, Midlands

Challenges in collective decision-making manifested early on in project delivery, especially during the development of research questions. Teams faced difficulties reaching agreement on what topics to explore and in navigating the different kinds of lived experiences within the group. Additionally, balancing more dominant perspectives, those individuals exhibiting more confidence in sharing their views, and more dominant and passive personalities caused further difficulties. Balancing dominant and passive personalities was challenging, as some individuals were more confident in voicing their opinions than others. These difficulties were heightened in PAC teams working across two locations, where collective decision-making became more complex.

“Ten people have to agree on that one question, so we can move forward. If it doesn’t get agreed on, things are delayed. We couldn’t come up with a topic, and it was difficult because of lived experience in the room”.

– Peer researcher interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

Delivery partner staff played an important role in supporting PAC teams to navigate these challenges. To help build stronger relationships between young people, they ran team-building sessions, organised social activities and encouraged open dialogue around group dynamics and objectives. Delivery partner staff also offered practical strategies to help improve relationships and collaboration on PAC teams.

For example, some delivery partner staff supported the formation of smaller working groups or specialised roles, allowing different young people to own different elements of delivery based on their strengths and preferences – for example, fieldwork, analysis or output development. These steps helped improve communication, reduce tension and strengthen relationships within PAC teams. Over time, teams became more confident working together to navigate challenges, enabling more effective and inclusive delivery. Cross-network learning opportunities, both for delivery staff and young people in leadership roles, gave teams a chance to meet others, discuss common challenges and exchange ideas.

“I think as a team we’ve grown quite a lot because I think we went from like four people, five people not knowing each other at all, and now we’re really quite close, and it’s really quite nice to see”.

– Peer researcher interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

A systemic approach to stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders discussed the importance of PAC teams understanding the systems that they hoped to challenge and change, ensuring that they were engaging individuals and organisations with influence. All delivery partners were supported by The Young Foundation early in their engagement to map the systems within which they were working. In some regions, such as London, young people were provided with additional support to deepen their understanding of system structures and the potential routes to creating change. This helped teams to position their work within a broader context.

Delivery partners with little prior experience in systems thinking often needed additional support. This included help in forming partnerships with regional and national actors or using research outputs as tools to create influence.

Supporting a learning culture

Young people engaged in PAC roles felt that the development of a strong culture of learning was an enabler of high-quality research projects. Peer researchers described the iterative process by which they adapted their research practices in response to lessons learned during delivery. Peer researchers valued the opportunity to learn by doing, which helped them develop their understanding of what it takes to deliver a high-quality research project.

The flexibility and youth-led nature of PAC helped enable this culture of learning. The flexible structure allowed young people to make mistakes, and the youth-led structures created space for young people to develop new approaches. The two delivery phases of PAC were important for helping teams reflect, iterate upon and improve their approaches from the first phase to the next. In this context, mistakes were reframed as growth opportunities, supporting the development of knowledge and skills.

Meeting targets: numbers and demographics

As outlined earlier in the report, both delivery partner staff and young people in PAC teams faced challenges in meeting the programme’s targets around participation numbers and demographics. These targets, set at a national level, were designed to reflect the population-level reach expected by the YEF. However, both groups reflected that the tight timelines and fixed quotas often conflicted with the relational, trust-based approach at the heart of PAC.

Young people involved in peer research and outreach were expected to recruit research and social action participants from specific demographic groups, including those with particular lived experiences. While PAC teams indicated a commitment to making their research inclusive, they noted that this added pressure, particularly when working in communities where trust had to be built slowly. Reaching young people most affected by violence or marginalisation often required time, reassurance and multiple points of contact, which did not always align with the short recruitment windows. Delivery partners echoed these concerns, noting that the targets sometimes encouraged a focus on the number of young people involved in delivery over care. They also pointed out that national-level demographic benchmarks did not always reflect the makeup of their local areas, making compliance difficult and, at times, inappropriate. For example, teams highlighted that the demographics in the Southwest and Northeast were very different from those in London or the Midlands, yet the same targets were applied across all areas. Several delivery teams felt that rigid expectations risked compromising trauma-informed, youth-centred practice and could lead to tokenistic forms of engagement focused on meeting quotas rather than building trust.

To address this, delivery partners suggested adopting a more flexible, locally informed approach. Future iterations of the programme could benefit from co-developing participation targets with delivery teams, drawing on local demographic data and practitioners' experience. This would help ensure expectations are both realistic and aligned with ethical, inclusive engagement.

Findings – research question 2

Overall question: what is the recommended evaluation approach for the next phase of evaluating participative, youth-led, place-based approaches that builds the evidence base but remains feasible and appropriate for the level of development of the programme?

This evaluation team explored research question 2 by first examining outcomes for young people, delivery partners, and place- and community-level impacts and then considering the implications of these findings for the pilot phase evaluation of PAC3. The study then reviewed recruitment and retention strategies and proposed changes to the PAC2 theory of change. The following sub-questions guided the analysis of the recommended evaluation approach for the next phase of evaluating participative, youth-led, place-based programmes.

- **Outcomes:** what are some notable outcomes for participants and places during this phase of work?
- **Place:** is examining the community level possible in the next stage, and, if so, what should those outcomes be, and how will they be measured?
- **Outcomes:** what are the most suitable outcomes for the project to measure? What is the unit of analysis? What should the primary outcome of PAC be? Is data available/accessible? Are there any issues and potential solutions to enabling the collection of high-quality data?
- **Measurement:** what measures are the most reliable, valid and practical for assessing the potential impact of PAC?
- **Recruitment:** what are the appropriate recruitment strategies for the evaluation?
- **Retention:** what are the appropriate methods for improving retention in the evaluation?
- **Theory of change:** how can the PAC theory of change be developed and refined to best describe how PAC operates, as well as the intended output and outcomes of the programme?
- **Outcomes:** what are some notable outcomes for participants and places during this phase of work?

This feasibility study has identified a range of meaningful outcomes for those involved in PAC2, both for the young people participating in the programme and for delivery partners. In addition to these individual and organisational-level impacts, we also noticed some early signs of broader community-level or place-level changes, particularly around the increased use of youth-led and participatory practices and shifts in how stakeholders perceive the involvement of young people in decision-making. The findings presented below have directly informed our recommended evaluation approach and the proposed refinements to the PAC2 theory of change.

Outcomes for participants – individuals

Across our research, we found consistent evidence of positive outcomes for young people involved in PAC2. These outcomes broadly fell into two categories: practical skill development, such as communication,

professional skills and stakeholder engagement, and personal development, including increased confidence, improved well-being and a stronger sense of agency. Personal development often emerged as a result of practical experiences. As young people gained and applied new skills, they also became more confident, motivated and aware of their own potential. Peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers typically reported the most wide-ranging and sustained outcomes, particularly in areas such as gaining confidence, learning leadership skills and understanding how to influence change. Research and social action participants also experienced positive impacts, although these were often more targeted and related to specific activities or interactions.

As this was an exploratory study, outcomes for young people were still emerging and not clearly defined at the outset. Terms such as confidence, leadership and agency were used descriptively based on how young people articulated their experiences. The evaluation team determined that it would not be appropriate to retrospectively impose specific definitions on these terms. For the next iteration of the programme (PAC3), we recommend co-defining key outcome areas with the youth panel at the beginning of the project in reference to psychometric literature and broader academic sources. This approach would establish a shared understanding of intended outcomes and provide a stronger foundation for measuring change over time.

Increase in research and influencing skills

Peer researchers and social action leads reported developing strong foundational research skills. This included learning how to formulate relevant research questions; select appropriate methods, such as interviews, surveys or focus groups; and lead data collection activities. Participants also identified increased awareness of ethical considerations, including how to obtain informed consent, apply safeguarding principles and engage appropriately with diverse audiences.

Peer researchers and social action leads described outreach and influencing as important parts of their roles. These experiences gave them practical exposure to how to professionally engage with different decision-makers. Many reported that this led to stronger skills in public speaking and presenting complex ideas and concepts more clearly. Importantly, young people identify these experiences as key enablers for increased confidence.

“I’ve spoken to people from the council and even NHS staff. That was nerve-wracking at first, but I feel more confident now making our point and asking for what we want”.

– Changemaker interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

“I used to hate speaking in front of people. But now I’ve presented to people from the council and actually got feedback on our ideas – it made me feel like what we were saying mattered”.

– Peer researcher interview, Northeast

Increase in professional and project-based skills

Peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers frequently took on active roles in project management, and, through this, they developed a range of transferable skills that extended well beyond the immediate scope of their research or social action projects. Young people emphasised that PAC2 provided valuable experience of working in a professional environment and managing real project work.

“I didn’t realise I could actually plan a whole project. We had to manage our own time, make decisions, sort out the space, everything. It felt like a job”.

– Changemaker interview, Lancashire

Our research found that young people gained several professional and project-related skills, including:

- Project management
- Timekeeping and scheduling
- Risk assessment and health and safety planning
- Budgeting
- Formal writing for writing emails to stakeholders
- Logistics coordination for events or research

Professional development opportunities through PAC had a direct impact on young people’s future plans and career ambitions. One young person shared that PAC directly influenced their pathway and opened up new opportunities.

“I’m doing my Level 2 youth work accreditation now because of PAC. I wouldn’t have even thought about youth work as a career before this”.

– Social action lead interview, Wales

In addition, findings from the pre-and post-programme surveys suggest that PAC2 had a meaningful impact on young people’s confidence in their future pathways. In the post-survey, 43 peer researchers and social action leads responded to the statement: *‘The skills I developed through PAC will help me in my future career and/or education’*. The vast majority – 95% (41 out of 43 respondents) – agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This suggests that a significant number of young people felt their involvement in PAC supported the development of skills they could use in future study or employment.

Stronger teamwork skills

Young people identified teamwork as a key area of development through their involvement in PAC. For many, working in a professional setting with other young people was unfamiliar and initially challenging. They had to learn how to navigate different perspectives and make decisions together. Several peer researchers and social action leads reflected on early difficulties, particularly when agreeing on research questions. These challenges led them to try new approaches to collective decision-making, such as voting or rotating leadership roles. Through these experiences, they developed stronger teamwork skills and a better understanding of how to work effectively as a group.

“At first, we couldn’t agree on anything. But we learned to listen to each other and figure out what worked best for the group”.

– Peer researcher interview, London

Increased self-confidence

Feeling more confident was one of the most commonly reported outcomes for young people involved in PAC. Young people, delivery partners and stakeholders across all regions consistently identified this as a

key positive change. The extent and nature of that growth varied, depending on each young person's role in PAC2 and their confidence levels before starting. Experience in public speaking to both peers and stakeholders consistently emerged as the most significant factor in boosting young people's confidence. As previously noted, this was a central part of the peer researcher and social action lead roles. Presenting their work at events gave young people the chance to be heard and taken seriously, often marking a turning point in how they viewed their own capabilities in formal settings.

"A lot more people felt more confident because we did a whole dissemination event, and it was us doing the public speaking; it was us sharing our findings".

– Peer researcher interview, Lancashire

For some, this growth went beyond increased confidence and marked a deeper shift in how they saw themselves, their abilities and their sense of value. Being trusted to lead and contribute meaningfully helped them recognise their own potential. This shift also influenced how they thought about their future. Positive recognition from external audiences further reinforced this change, strengthening their sense of self-worth and belief in what they could achieve.

"I've grown so much as a person. I've grown in my confidence, my self-esteem and how I just perceive myself now because of PAC".

– Peer researcher interview, Wales

Among research and social action participants more broadly, increased confidence was also widely reported. This was often linked to engaging with peers outside their usual social circles. Many described feeling more at ease sharing their views with new people and connecting with young people from different cultural backgrounds.

"Ever since I started doing it, it's been really nice to meet such a wide variety of people. I've noticed a lot of growth within myself".

– Research participant interview, Lancashire

Increased knowledge of social issues and how to create change

Many young people involved in PAC reported a stronger understanding of the social issues their projects focused on, along with a deeper connection to their local communities. Topics such as youth involvement in violence, mental health and school exclusion became more visible, particularly to those without direct personal experience.

"I never really knew much about the issues PAC deals with, like violence [against] young people. These things never really occurred to me until being part of PAC".

– Research participant interview, Northeast

"It's definitely helped me understand social issues, like different types of mental health or disabilities, and how we can be more accessible".

– Social action participant interview, Lancashire

For some, this awareness led to perceived emotional development. Some peer researchers and social action leads said that listening to others' experiences helped them develop empathy and become more open to different perspectives, even when those views challenged their own.

"I think I've matured throughout the process. I've been able to be more empathetic. I've learned how to open up to other people's viewpoints, especially when it's something I'm really invested in".

– Peer researcher interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

Peer researchers and social action leads described a growing awareness of how change happens in their communities. They developed a more strategic understanding of the systems and decision-making processes that shape their local contexts. Through their involvement in PAC, they gained insight not only into how to engage stakeholders but also how to navigate barriers to change.

Several interviewees from one PAC team described an experience where a key stakeholder at their event openly challenged the value of their work. While the young people did not agree with the stakeholder's views, they recognised the experience as an important moment of learning. It helped them develop resilience and better understand how to respond to scepticism, particularly from those who may not see the value of youth-led approaches.

"It's made me think about how you actually change something, not just talk about it, but think about who's involved and what things [are] in place that make it harder".

– Peer researcher interview, Northeast

Commitment to future social action

Several young people expressed a desire to continue working in social action beyond the programme. Interviewees described a clear progression through PAC, first starting as research participants, becoming social action participants, then changemakers and in some cases, taking on leadership positions. The structure of PAC supported this journey by providing a pathway for ongoing involvement.

"After I participated in the research as being interviewed, I definitely was interested in what Bringing Hope was doing ... Then, when the opportunity came up for me to do an interview to become a social action lead, I definitely thought, 'Yeah, this is what I want to do'".

– Research participant interview, Midlands

"I went from being part of the research to social action, and now I'm doing more of the interviews. It's made me realise I want to stay involved for as long as I can".

– Changemaker interview, Lancashire

For peer researchers and social action leads, this commitment often extended beyond PAC activities. Many described ambitions to continue working in youth work, social justice or education, seeing their PAC experience as a foundation for long-term involvement in their communities and making a positive difference.

Friendships and belonging

Many young people reported that PAC supported their emotional well-being by helping them build friendships and develop a sense of belonging. This was especially evident among peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers who worked closely together over an extended period, often describing their relationships as being like a family.

Many young people said that PAC supported their emotional well-being by helping them make friends and feel a sense of belonging. This was especially true for peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers. They often worked together for long periods and described their groups as feeling like a family. Research and social action participants also said that making new friends was one of the best parts of the programme. These friendships were formed through shared activities, such as focus groups and social action projects.

“I would have never connected with these people [PAC team] on the outside if it wasn't for PAC”.

– Research participant interview, Midlands.

Young people often described these friendships as one of the most meaningful aspects of their involvement in PAC. In reflecting on what made these relationships important, many spoke about feeling more confident, more connected to others and more rooted in their local communities.

Outcomes for participants – delivery organisations

Current findings suggest that PAC has had a significant impact on delivery organisations. It has influenced how they work with young people, led to changes in day-to-day practice and helped form new relationships and strategic partnerships. Many delivery partners reported becoming more intentional and inclusive in their youth engagement, with co-production becoming more embedded. These outcomes varied across the network, shaped by factors such as organisational size, length of involvement (e.g. participation in PAC 1) and the local context.

Building staff skills and confidence in delivering youth-led research and social action projects

For delivery partners new to peer research or social action, PAC2 provided a valuable opportunity to build knowledge and confidence in designing and supporting youth-led approaches. Like the young people, delivery partner staff developed core skills in research ethics, safeguarding, data collection methods and how best to communicate and share findings. This capacity building around research and participatory practices was supported by ongoing guidance and support from The Young Foundation. It should be noted that in regions such as London, where delivery partners had research expertise already, this outcome was less prevalent (though for such delivery organisations, more sizeable outcomes were typically reported in the reach and influence of projects, which is explored elsewhere in this report).

“I’ve learned so much about supporting young people in research. I’d never delivered anything like this before; the facilitation, the way you train, it’s all new”.

– Delivery partner interview, Wales

“It’s been a learning curve. Even small things like documenting progress, understanding the ethics of research. That’s been massive for us”.

– Delivery partner interview, Yorkshire and the Humber

Delivery partners also reflected a shift in how they approached YSA. Some described how, through PAC, they moved from one-off intervention-based projects to viewing social action as an ongoing process and an opportunity to influence the local system. This change was evident in the types of social action activities being delivered, with several regions opting to create toolkits and resources to influence learning and best practices around their research findings.

“Social action is more embedded now; it’s not just a one-off thing. It’s longer-term”.

– Delivery partner interview, Northeast

Embedding youth leadership in organisational structures

Most delivery partners began this work with little or no prior experience of employing young people in paid roles. The introduction of peer researcher and social action lead positions represented a significant shift in practice, prompting organisations to reconsider how they engage with young people. Some strengthened safeguarding protocols, others introduced new systems for team check-ins and many adapted project management approaches to accommodate young people's varied schedules and commitments. In some cases, organisations also began to embed youth voice into wider areas of their work. In Bristol, for example, the PAC team supported the design of interview processes for new youth workers at the Robins Foundation – an example of how youth insight began to shape key decisions beyond the PAC project itself.

“This was the first time we set up a structure where young people were actually paid and leading things. That’s changed how we run other projects now”.

– Delivery partner interview, Northeast

Some delivery partners felt that this shift went beyond practical adjustments and instead encouraged deeper reflection on how they shared power with young people. Staff described a move away from leading projects themselves towards enabling young people to take ownership. One partner noted:

“The delivery organisation’s role becomes more about training and capacity building for young people”.

– Delivery partner interview, Southwest

This culture shift prompted organisations to reconsider their assumptions and methods, particularly around embedding youth voice and reaching young people who are often excluded from traditional youth engagement spaces. In some cases, these changes are now becoming part of ongoing delivery. For example, some are exploring how to continue to employ paid young people, while others have created shared decision-making spaces, such as advisory panels, building on relationships formed through PAC. Structures such as youth boards, co-design processes and paid leadership roles are being formalised, helping to carry forward the ethos of shared power beyond the end of PAC.

“It’s made us reflect on the kind of support we offer. We’re thinking differently now about how to embed youth voice, not just collect it”.

– Delivery partner interview, Wales

Expanding networks and partnerships

There is early evidence that PAC supported delivery staff to engage in new and sometimes unfamiliar forms of partnership working. This included liaising with members of parliament, working with media outlets, planning public events and supporting young people to participate in decision-making spaces. The extent and nature of this engagement often reflected the delivery organisation's existing experience and networks. PAC also helped delivery partners strengthen and expand their relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, including local councils, universities, community groups and youth-led organisations.

For example, in Bradford, where strong partnerships already existed, such as with Northern Rail, PAC activities were used to deepen and build on these relationships. In contrast, for teams such as those in the Midlands and Northeast, PAC created opportunities to form entirely new partnerships. For instance, these teams developed connections with local universities, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations, enabling new ways of working and expanding their community reach. These partnerships supported both the research and social action phases and, in some cases, opened the door to a longer-term collaboration. As described in the first section of this report, some young people were invited to consult on other projects or join youth panels, further extending the reach and influence of their work.

Some delivery partners indicated that through PAC, they felt part of a wider movement, benefitting from quarterly all-network meetings and informal cross-region collaboration. For example, the Bradford, Hull, Exeter and Bristol teams connected through their shared relationship with the EFL in the Community, discussing their approaches to social action. Dedicated delivery partner learning days, facilitated by The Young Foundation, were particularly valued as a space to build supportive relationships.

Looking ahead, delivery partners across regions have expressed uncertainty about the sustainability of PAC's impact on their organisations, particularly due to concerns about the economic landscape and future funding. Without continued financial support, several partners questioned their ability to maintain youth-led structures and retain paid roles for young people. They have noted that the wider local and national contexts, including cuts to youth services, shifting funding priorities and pressures on local authorities, have created challenging conditions for community organisations. This is especially true for those working to embed more participatory and youth-led approaches. The impact of such systemic shifts will be further explored as we examine place-level change.

Emerging outcomes for places

Findings from our research suggest that, to PAC stakeholders, place refers to both a sense of physical geography and the social, cultural and political environments that shape young people's lives. Through an analysis of PAC research, social action projects and stakeholder engagement, this evaluation team has identified the key local systems and settings where PAC activities aim to influence change.

- Schools and youth group settings
- Local councils and public services
- Regional bodies and combined authorities
- Corporate partners
- National spaces, such as government departments and media organisations

It's important to recognise that both the scale and pace of change differ across these settings. For example, a school may be able to adopt changes to policy and practice relatively quickly, whereas influencing a local authority or regional body often takes more time and sustained effort. The scale and pace of change in each delivery region are also shaped by wider local factors beyond the control of PAC delivery teams. These include local power dynamics, historical relationships, access to decision-makers and the distribution of local resources.

This evaluation team takes these contextual factors into account. While it is not possible to evaluate specific elements of change in each setting, early signs of impact can be identified by examining how stakeholders in these spaces have responded to PAC and how they perceive its value and relevance. Drawing on our analysis in section one, this evaluation team has identified the following emerging outcomes for places. These include:

Delivering benefits that ripple out from young people

- Young people's increased confidence and sense of purpose had a wider influence, positively impacting their peers, families and communities by modelling positive behaviours and inspiring others to act.

Shifting stakeholder perceptions of young people

- Stakeholders reported a deeper understanding of young people's lived experiences, which challenged stereotypes and shifted assumptions about their capabilities, insights and potential role in shaping policy and services.

Bringing youth voices into decision-making spaces

- PAC enabled young people to access decision-makers and contribute to spaces where policy is shaped. While this often began as a consultation, it increased young people's visibility and credibility among key stakeholders.

Enabling continued youth engagement practices beyond PAC activities

- Engagement with PAC prompted some stakeholders to adopt or enhance ongoing youth involvement practices, e.g. by inviting PAC peer researchers and social action leads to contribute to panels, reviews or advisory roles beyond the project's scope.

Strengthening youth engagement

- Stakeholders recognised PAC as a model for non-tokenistic, inclusive youth participation. The programme's structure – particularly paid roles, co-design methods and an emphasis on flexible involvement, training and accessible, youth-friendly spaces – demonstrated best practice in creating meaningful and inclusive opportunities for young people, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds.

- **Place:** is examining the community level possible in the next stage, and, if so, what should those outcomes be, and how will they be measured?
- **Outcomes:** what are the most suitable outcomes for the project to measure? What is the unit of analysis? What should the primary outcome of PAC be? Is data available/accessible?
- **Measurement:** what measures are the most reliable, valid and practical for assessing the potential impact of PAC?

Primary and secondary units of analysis

The feasibility study found the most consistent and well-evidenced outcomes across all examined groups and levels were among young people participating in PAC, particularly in areas such as their confidence, skills and sense of agency. There was also emerging evidence of change among delivery partners and local stakeholders, including shifts in how young people are perceived, increased participation of young people in decision-making spaces and, among some delivery partners, changes in internal policies and practice.

However, the evaluation findings highlight an important dynamic: whilst young people experienced significant positive outcomes, they generally did not hold the decision-making power or influence required to achieve systemic or structural change independently. That influence rested largely with local stakeholders and decision-makers – the individuals and institutions that young people sought to influence through their peer research and social action. These findings align with the PAC theory of change, which positions individual outcomes as important mechanisms within a broader system of change, recognising that these alone are not sufficient to create it.

Whilst this study has evidenced strong individual outcomes and initial shifts in stakeholder perceptions, future research should examine whether these shifts are sustained and result in longer-term changes in policy and practice at the local, regional and national levels. To assess whether PAC is achieving its intended long-term impact – equipping young people to reach their potential while contributing to positive community change – this evaluation team recommends that stakeholder- and community-level outcomes should be prioritised as the primary unit of analysis in future studies. Outcomes for young people and delivery partners should continue to be monitored as important secondary measures, recognising their roles as key enablers of wider change.

Stakeholder and community level outcomes

To understand PAC's influence on shifts in stakeholder perceptions and wider community impact, future studies should examine the following outcomes:

- Shifts in local attitudes towards young people
- Increases in local youth-led delivery and infrastructure
- Increases in the inclusion of youth voice in decision-making processes
- Improvements in the understanding of the structural drivers of youth violence and inequality

Additional outcome for future study

- Shifts in policies and practices informed by youth voice

The timing of this evaluation did not allow for the assessment of PAC's longer-term impact on policies and practices; such changes are likely to emerge beyond the programme and evaluation delivery period. To understand PAC's potential for lasting change, future research should examine not only whether the programme shifts narratives around young people but also whether these shifts lead to concrete changes in policy and practice. These outcomes are central to PAC's theory of change, which anticipates that youth-led activity can influence how local systems operate over time. Understanding this connection should be a priority for future research, as it will help test key assumptions and strengthen the evidence base for PAC's contribution to systemic change.

Measuring community- and stakeholder-level outcomes

In the feasibility study, PAC's stakeholder- and community-level outcomes were measured mainly through stakeholder feedback surveys and interviews towards the end of the evaluation. These methods provided valuable insights into stakeholder perceptions, but their timing, scope and design meant that engagement was limited and the evidence base was narrow. This was proportionate to the level of analysis required for the feasibility stage. As shifts in stakeholder perceptions and their influence on policy and practice are to be the primary unit of analysis for the pilot study, this evaluation team recommends considering the following measures.

System mapping

Findings from this study show that stakeholder engagement with PAC varied significantly between local contexts. The extent of involvement was shaped by factors such as historical relationships, existing tensions and, in some cases, the willingness of key individuals or organisations to participate. Recognising and accounting for these contextual differences is important. System mapping workshops at the start of the programme would provide the evaluation team with a structured way to understand local conditions and establish a clear baseline for assessing changes during the study. While system mapping activities were undertaken by The Young Foundation with delivery partners during the feasibility stage, embedding system mapping as a formal data collection method within the evaluation framework would increase the contextual understanding of the evaluation team and inform a deeper understanding of change.

Pre- and post-programme interviews

In the feasibility study, stakeholder interviews were conducted only at the end of the programme. While these provided valuable qualitative insights into how PAC work was perceived, the absence of baseline interviews limited our confidence in directly attributing any changes in stakeholder views to PAC activities. For the pilot phase, a pre-and post-participation interview approach should be adopted to enable evaluators to track shifts over time in stakeholder perceptions and their influence on policies and practice. Given PAC's broad research themes – including children's services, policing and mental health for PAC3 – and the varied types of stakeholders involved in each, a single sampling approach would be insufficient. Sampling strategies should be tailored to the specific research theme and adapted to the local context, recognising, as outlined above, that this can vary.

Stakeholder surveys

Surveys can provide a reliable and practical means of capturing quantitative evidence of changes in attitudes, behaviours and relationships over time. In the feasibility study, 24 stakeholder surveys were completed: two from Yorkshire and the Humber, eight from the Northeast, and 15 from the Southwest. Response rates varied considerably, with some regions achieving very high returns and others far lower. This variation may reflect differences in how delivery partners promoted the survey and, in some cases, whether it was distributed to all relevant stakeholders. Consistent distribution across delivery partners, combined with clear communication about the purpose and value of the survey, will be important for achieving a representative picture of stakeholder perspectives.

Literature review

There is value in situating PAC within the wider literature on place-based approaches and shifting stakeholder perceptions, particularly those concerned with community-level change. A targeted review would position PAC within the broader field of youth-led, community-focused initiatives and provide a framework for understanding the conditions needed to achieve long-term impact. This could be particularly important in clarifying how PAC's activities may contribute to sustained change, especially in complex local systems where outcomes develop over extended periods. Although a literature review was beyond the scope of the feasibility study evaluation, it would be a valuable addition to any future study, particularly given the relatively short timeframe of the programme, which may limit the ability to assess lasting impact directly.

Individual level outcomes

This evaluation team recommends exploring the following individual-level outcomes as important secondary units of analysis, representing key areas where the project can continue to build understanding and evidence:

- Improved confidence and sense of self
- Strengthened relationships and friendships
- Development of skills in:
 - Research and social action
 - Professional conduct and project delivery
 - Communication and presentation
- Increased civic and social awareness, including:
 - Ongoing commitment to social action
 - A deeper understanding of the social issues affecting participants' communities

Measuring young people's outcomes

When evaluating young people's outcomes in future studies, it will be important to match data collection methods with the nature and level of their involvement in the programme. Findings from this evaluation show that young people's roles within PAC shape both the type of insights they can provide and the methods they find most engaging. Approaches should therefore reflect the varying depth of their engagement and balance robust data collection with techniques that are accessible, relevant and enjoyable for participants.

Pre- and post-participation interviews

For peer researchers and social action leads, pre- and post-participation interviews should be used to measure changes in skills, confidence and perspectives over time. Through our research, young people indicated that they were more likely to engage meaningfully in these interviews when conducted in person. In the pilot phase, pre- and post-participation interviews could also be used to explore in greater depth which elements of PAC contributed most to any observed outcomes. This might include identifying specific activities or training sessions that built skills, opportunities that strengthened confidence or aspects of the programme that encouraged sustained involvement in social action. Such insights would not only deepen our understanding of PAC's impact but also help refine future delivery to focus on the features that participants find most valuable.

Participatory and visual methods

Across several interviews, young people expressed a clear preference for more creative and visual methods, both as a way of contributing to the evaluation and for showcasing what they had achieved. These preferences often reflected a discomfort with more traditional formats, such as structured interviews or written surveys, and a perception that such methods did not fully reflect the youth-led ethos of the programme. As one social action participant in Lancashire put it, *"This is a project for young people, so anything you make should also be for young people"*. Similarly, a changemaker from London reflected, *"Making a video worked really well for our project – if you could do something similar, I think that would work better"*.

In response to these insights, this evaluation proposes the exploratory use of video ethnography as a participatory method that could offer rich, first-hand accounts of the experiences and outcomes of young people involved in PAC. This approach has the potential to bring youth voices to life in a way that aligns with the programme's participatory ethos and communicates change in an accessible, engaging format.

While a full assessment of how video ethnography could be implemented safely and effectively was beyond the scope of this evaluation, the evaluation team, the YEF programme team, and The Young Foundation programme staff all recognise its potential value. Any future use of this method should be developed in close collaboration with delivery partners to ensure it fits within delivery contexts, meets safeguarding requirements and is practically feasible. Crucially, participation in video ethnography must always be voluntary and supported by alternative, accessible ways for young people to contribute if they do not wish to be recorded.

Survey data

While this evaluation team recognises the challenges encountered with survey data collection, difficulties such as low response rates were largely operational in nature, relating to timing, communication and data collection logistics. As outlined earlier in this report, these issues may have been influenced by the timing of survey distribution and the fact that the commissioning of the evaluation followed sequentially after the commissioning and initiation of PAC2 delivery. Future evaluations should allow longer timeframes for design and completion. Practical ways of improving response rates – such as consistent distribution across delivery partners, timely reminders and clear communication about the purpose and value of the surveys – were outlined in the first section of this report.

The continued use of pre- and post-participation surveys is recommended, particularly for capturing change over time among young people in defined roles, such as peer researchers and social action leads. These roles are typically engaged for a sustained period, making them well-suited to longitudinal measurement.

Whilst validated measures such as the General Self-Efficacy Scale or the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire could, in theory, be integrated into future evaluations, their use risks undermining the values that underpin this evaluation. As mentioned in the introduction, these instruments were developed and validated with populations very different from the young people engaged in PAC, and the small sample sizes involved mean it would not be possible to re-validate them in this context. Second, the decision reflected the study's commitment to being trauma-informed, proportionate and low-burden. Many validated tools are lengthy (often 25–35 questions) and use technical or academic language that can be difficult for young people to understand, and they would have to be added to the other questions that the evaluation team and funders are already interested in exploring.

Delivery partner outcomes

As outlined above, PAC has led to some emerging outcomes for delivery partner organisations. This evaluation team recommends that understanding and tracking these outcomes should form an important secondary unit of analysis. Based on our research, key outcomes for delivery partners include:

- Improved capabilities in sharing power with young people, often reflected in the development of associated policies, partnerships and processes
- Staff attitudinal shifts and professional growth in enabling youth participation
- Increased exposure within the youth sector
- New partnerships and stronger local networks
- Broader reach and engagement of young people

Measuring delivery partner outcomes

A key challenge noted was delivery partner capacity, and so the measures suggested below are intended to be proportionate and are designed to minimise additional burden while still generating meaningful evidence.

Interviews

During the feasibility study, delivery partners were interviewed at the beginning of the programme, which provided valuable insights but mainly captured reflections on implementation rather than documenting changes over time. This approach was limited in its ability to measure the full range of outcomes, including those more closely associated with social action activities. Therefore, in future studies, the evaluation could benefit from including two rounds of interviews to build a clearer understanding of how different PAC activities contribute to specific outcomes.

Observations and desk-based reviews

Being mindful of delivery partner capacity, the evaluation team recommends complementing interviews with targeted observations and desk-based reviews. Observations could take place during quarterly all-network meetings and, where feasible, during in-person visits to delivery partner teams. These

opportunities would allow evaluators to see practices in action, identify informal learning and understand how youth participation is embedded in local delivery. Desk-based reviews of organisational documents, such as policies, procedures, partnership agreements and strategic plans, could provide additional evidence of change over time, particularly in areas such as governance, partnership development and youth engagement practices, without drawing on the time and capacity of those organisations.

- **Outcomes:** Are there any issues and potential solutions to enabling the collection of high-quality data?
- **Recruitment:** what are the appropriate recruitment strategies for the evaluation
- **Retention:** what are the appropriate methods for improving retention in the evaluation?

Through our research with young people, delivery partners and stakeholders – as well as reflections drawn from the PAC feasibility study – we’ve identified a range of factors that influence the success of high-quality data collection. We begin by exploring key barriers that can affect data quality at different levels of the evaluation.

We then outline practical strategies for effective recruitment and retention. We take recruitment and retention together because they are closely linked, and mutually reinforcing the recruitment of the right participants in an inclusive, thoughtful way lays the foundation for ongoing engagement, while strong retention strategies ensure those voices remain present throughout the evaluation.

Barriers to high-quality data collection

While high-quality data collection is essential to understanding PAC’s impact, the feasibility study identified several barriers that vary between the qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data collection is most often affected by relationship-based factors, such as trust, timing and the depth of engagement with participants. Quantitative data collection tends to be influenced by consistency, completeness and response rates. Table 14 summarises the key risks to data quality at each outcome level and the mitigation strategies that will be used to address them.

Table 14. Data collection risks and mitigation strategies

Outcome level	Data collection risks	Mitigation
Individual	Varying levels of trust, interest and understanding among young people, which causes reluctance to engage with researchers they don’t know	Where possible, the research team will engage with young people in the induction phase and throughout programme delivery to build trust and increase the visibility of the evaluation. During the set-up phase, we will hold informal introductory sessions to improve understanding of the evaluation process, its objectives and young people’s roles. Throughout programme delivery, we will be proactive with building relationships by sharing bios of the research team, attending PAC

		events and connecting with prospective participants well in advance.
	Misalignment between evaluation timelines, young people's availability and programme delivery, which could affect our ability to capture the breadth of experiences throughout programme delivery	We will co-develop an evaluation timeline with young people and delivery partners, mapping key programme phases (e.g. social action, peer research) and known periods of limited availability (e.g. exams, holidays, community events). To accommodate differing schedules and local delivery rhythms, we will use flexible, rolling data collection windows. Regular check-ins with delivery partners will help us respond to changes and challenges, ensuring the evaluation remains aligned with delivery. We will also build buffer time into the plan to follow up with underrepresented voices or capture emerging experiences toward the end of the programme. A broad range of data collection methods (e.g. video diaries, video ethnography) will be used to reflect young people's needs and preferences. Approaches that allow for self-directed contributions will ensure we can capture diverse experiences throughout the programme – even when researchers are not present.
	Accessibility or inclusion challenges (e.g. literacy barriers or digital exclusion)	We will refrain from using a one-size-fits-all approach to data collection. Implementing a variety of methods will ensure the research is suited to different needs. We will ensure that materials are accessible and remain relevant to the evolving needs of young people. This will involve periodically piloting research materials with the youth panel to collect feedback and make amendments where necessary.
Delivery partners	Capacity constraints and competing priorities affecting their ability to collect monitoring data and support evaluation activities	We will work with delivery partners to build evaluation activities into delivery timelines from the outset and ensure their availability and capacity are respected throughout. This will also include mapping out capacity across delivery partners to identify where support is required and agree on effective ways of working. We will provide wraparound support through regular check-ins and flexible submission deadlines.
	Variation among delivery partners in understanding and confidence	We will deliver sessions for delivery staff on data collection expectations and processes to build capacity.

	around the data collection process, leading to inconsistencies in data	We will foster open, supportive relationships between the evaluation team and delivery partners to build their confidence in reaching out for support.
Place	Low response rates to surveys and interviews with stakeholders due to competing demands and evaluation fatigue	We will offer multiple engagement options (e.g. surveys, informal interviews) for key stakeholders and clearly communicate the purpose and value of their input for the programme and community.
	Difficulty identifying and engaging relevant community stakeholders, particularly for delivery partners with limited infrastructure (e.g. community networks or historical sector relationships) or places with limited networks	Early in the evaluation, we will work with delivery partners to map key local stakeholders, develop engagement strategies and identify potential challenges. We will leverage existing networks and events for data collection opportunities.
	Capturing unrepresentative or surface-level perceptions of the local area	We will cross-analyse quantitative data with deeper qualitative methods to broaden opportunities for people to share their experiences. We will ask young people and local partners to identify missing voices, remaining flexible to fill gaps where data is limited and tailor approaches for engaging unrepresented or underrepresented groups.

Recruitment and retention strategies

Centre young people's needs in the evaluation design and delivery

Involve young people in shaping the evaluation from the start: involving young people in early planning, such as in deciding how feedback is gathered, what methods feel appropriate and how the evaluation is explained, can help increase buy-in, trust and relevance. Youth panel members shared that they are more likely to take part when they feel they've had a role in shaping how the process works. Early youth participation also helps ensure the evaluation aligns with their interests, needs and capacities rather than being imposed later in the programme life cycle.

Hold an introductory session with delivery teams, including peer researchers and social action leads: while information sheets and consent forms were provided to all participants, peer researchers and social action leads sometimes reported feeling unclear about the evaluation's purpose and process. An introductory session with delivery teams could help support collective ownership and awareness. This session should clearly explain what the evaluation is, who is conducting it, what it aims to learn and how findings will be used.

"I'd do it if I knew what I was getting from it. Like, if it helped make change or if I got something for taking part".

– Peer researcher interview, Lancashire

Make evaluation activities accessible to young people: this includes offering practical support, such as travel reimbursements, food and mobile data, as well as emotional support when discussing difficult topics. Incentivising participation can also help. Where appropriate, vouchers should be provided for interviews or workshops. In longer-term or longitudinal studies, offering tiered incentives (e.g. increasing voucher amounts for completing all phases) can improve retention and demonstrate respect for their time and contributions.

Remain flexible in method and format: delivery sites operate at different speeds, and young people engage best in various ways, so flexibility is essential. This may require replacing one-to-one interviews with group discussions, using creative tools or integrating evaluation into existing PAC sessions.

Use creative and participatory methods in both collecting data and sharing findings: these methods are particularly useful for younger participants or those less confident with formal interviews.

Share evaluation findings in ways that feel authentic to young people: several delivery partners emphasised the importance of discussing with participants how they would like their stories of change to be communicated, whether through short videos, artwork, presentations or creative reports. For example, one project created a video that allowed young people to explain their journeys in their own words. Others used creative outputs, such as zines or community displays, to present findings to local audiences.

Work closely with delivery organisations

Work collaboratively with trusted delivery partners and recognise the demands on their capacity. Delivery partners are key to successful recruitment and retention because of the trust they hold with young people and their deep understanding of the local context. However, PAC delivery is often intensive, so evaluation planning needs to respect their time, giving plenty of notice, being flexible with timing and co-designing activities where possible. It's also important to support delivery partners in selecting a balanced sample of participants, including those with both positive and more challenging experiences, to ensure the evaluation captures a full and honest picture of impact.

“Delivery partners are key to getting young people involved. They already have that trust and can explain things in a way that makes sense”.

– Peer researcher interview, Wales

Embed evaluation within programme delivery

Align evaluation activities with the programme journey: when activities take place too long after delivery, young people may struggle to recall their experiences or feel less engaged in reflecting on them. Evaluation should be aligned with key programme milestones, such as the conclusion of the research phase or the completion of social action activities, to ensure relevance and accuracy.

Integrate consent processes: in the feasibility study, formal consent processes proved to be a barrier, especially when young people had already given consent multiple times during their PAC journeys (e.g. when moving between roles or participating in different activities). For under-16s, repeated parent/guardian consent requests disrupted engagement and confused participants. Where possible, evaluation consent should be built into the broader programme consent process. This helps reduce duplication and avoids young people feeling overburdened with paperwork.

- **Theory of change:** how can the PAC theory of change be developed and refined to best describe how PAC operates, as well as the intended output and outcomes of the programme?

Theory of change development

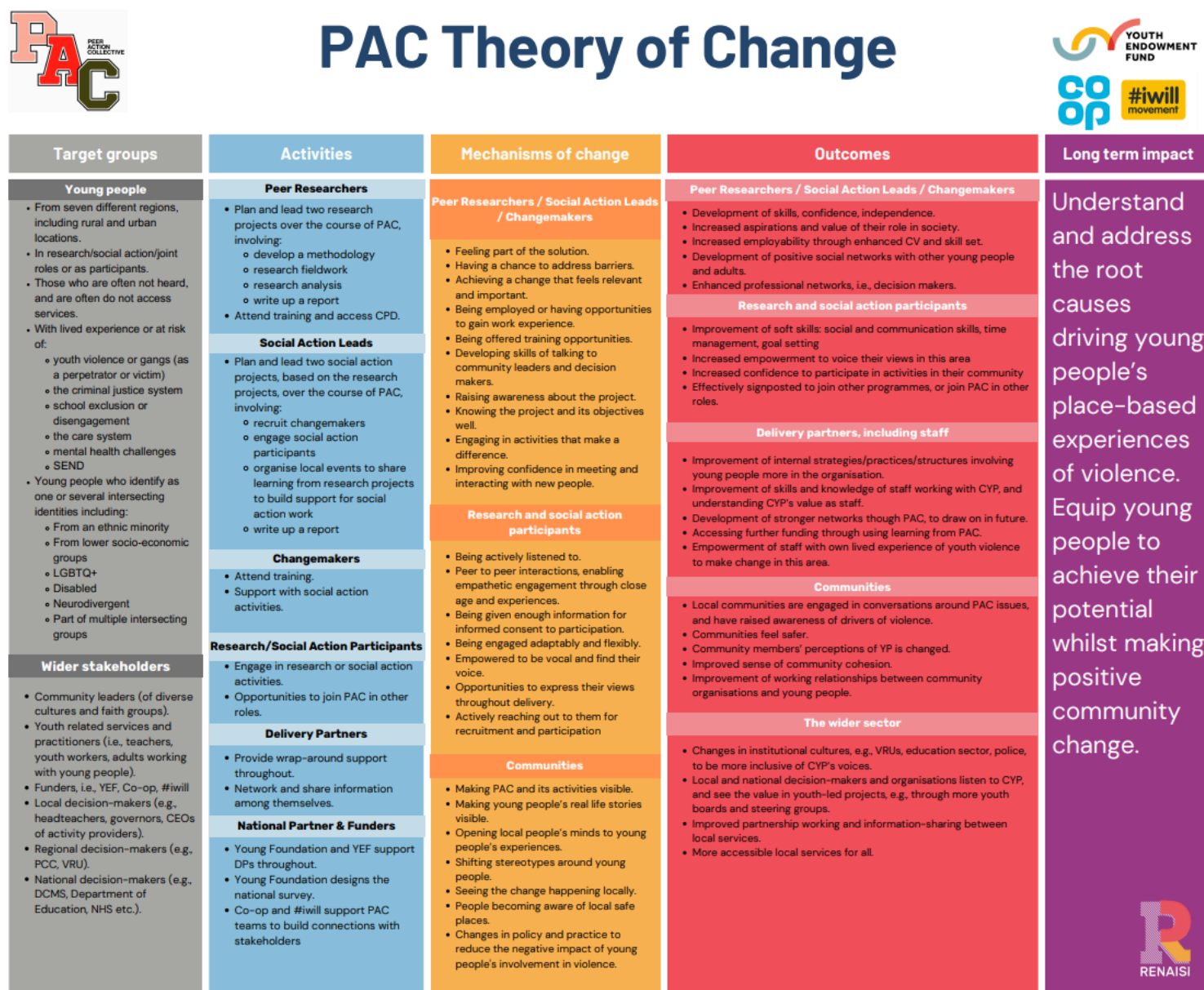
Drawing on the findings of the recent feasibility study and the valuable insights gathered through the participatory PAC youth panel held in April 2025, the evaluation team recommends a number of important revisions to the PAC2 theory of change. These updates are intended to ensure the theory of change remains fit for purpose as the programme moves into its third and final phase, reflecting both the evolving context and the lessons learned to date.

Changes to the funding and delivery structure in PAC3

Changes are being made to both the delivery model and the programme's funding arrangements. Moving forward, PAC will operate in four locations rather than the current seven, with delivery now only in England. This adjustment is a direct response to revised funding commitments, with future investment to be provided by the #iwill Fund and the YEF. The role and support delivered by The Young Foundation will remain the same.

The proposed revisions to the current theory of change are outlined in Figure 10, although the evaluation team recognises that these may not fully reflect the scale, resources and geographical reach of PAC3. As such, it will be important that any future iteration of the theory of change is co-developed with the delivery partners of PAC3 to ensure it accurately reflects the realities of delivery in this new context.

Figure 10. Proposed changes to the Peer Action Collective (PAC) theory of change



The feasibility study identified key activities, mechanisms for change and outcomes experienced by young people, delivery staff and key stakeholders during the delivery of the programme. Based on these findings, a set of proposed changes to the theory of change has been developed to ensure the model remains relevant to the way PAC operates and to the experiences across the programme.

For reference, the PAC2 theory of change diagram and narrative are included in *Appendix B*.

Activities

Peer researchers and social action leads

The feasibility study found that the roles of peer researchers and social action leads often followed an integrated structure rather than operating as two distinct roles, as originally envisioned in the theory of change. Young people in these positions took on a wide range of responsibilities, including delivering high-quality social action and research projects, facilitating inclusive spaces for meaningful youth engagement and contributing to the operational delivery of PAC. While there were some differences in activities between the two roles, the proposed changes include combining them into a single, integrated role and incorporating additional activities focused on stakeholder engagement.

Proposed combined role activities for peer researchers and social action leads:

- Plan and lead two research projects over the course of PAC, involving:
 - Designing and delivering the research cycle, including identifying methods, developing tools, conducting fieldwork and carrying out analysis
 - Recruiting and engaging research participants
 - Creating research outputs.
- Plan and lead two phases of social action projects based on the research findings, involving:
 - Recruiting and engaging changemakers and social action participants
 - Organising local events to share learning from the research projects and build support for social action work
 - Delivering social action outputs, including toolkits.
- Facilitate activities with children and young people, creating emotionally safe and inclusive spaces.
- Engage with decision-makers and key stakeholders to build connections and influence change.
- Develop and deliver public speaking and presentation activities, including representing PAC at events, sharing findings and inspiring wider audiences.
- Attend training delivered by delivery and national partners and access continuing professional development opportunities.

Changemakers

Findings indicate that changemakers provided valuable support to both research and social action activities. They contributed ideas, assisted with delivery and took on different tasks depending on project needs, playing a helpful role in ensuring projects ran smoothly.

Proposed activities for changemakers:

- Co-produce the design and delivery of social action activities and associated outputs.
- Provide practical support for the planning and delivery of research and social action projects.

- Attend training delivered by the delivery and the national partner and access continuing professional development opportunities.
- Recruit and engage social action participants.
- Develop and deliver public speaking and presentation activities, including representing PAC at events and sharing project outcomes
- Opportunity to join PAC in other roles

Research participants and social action participants

The feasibility study indicated that no changes were needed to the activities for research participants or social action participants in the theory of change. These activities should remain:

- Engage in research or social action activities.
- Opportunity to join PAC in other roles

Delivery partners

Findings from the feasibility study indicate that the current theory of change does not fully capture the breadth and depth of delivery partner contributions to the programme – particularly in relation to the coordination of activities required to sustain delivery. These activities include leading recruitment efforts, facilitating stakeholder engagement, creating learning opportunities and safeguarding the needs of young people both as employees and programme participants.

Proposed activities for delivery partners:

- Recruit peer researchers and social action leads.
- Adapt programme delivery to meet young people's needs, schedules and commitments.
- Provide training and learning opportunities for young people.
- Coordinate partnerships between key stakeholders and young people.
- Safeguard the emotional and physical well-being of young people and staff.
- Offer wrap-around support throughout the programme.
- Network and share information with other delivery partners to strengthen practice.

Local partners and wider communities

Findings also suggest that the current PAC theory of change does not fully recognise the role that local partners, networks and wider communities play in supporting the delivery of PAC. These stakeholders are important in enabling successful programme delivery by providing connections, visibility and additional support.

Proposed activities for local partners and wider communities:

- Engage in PAC research and social action activities.
- Connect PAC teams with relevant youth networks.
- Raise awareness and increase the visibility of young people's work within networks and the wider community.

Table 15. Mechanisms of change – leading to short-, medium- and long-term outcomes

Based on the evidence gathered through this feasibility study, the evaluation team proposes the following changes to the PAC2 theory of change:

Role	Mechanism of change	Short-term outcomes	Medium-term outcomes	Long-term outcomes
Peer researchers Social action leads Changemakers	Feeling part of the solution and being heard Discovering new skills and strengths Having opportunities to address barriers and influence change Participating in unique activities beyond their everyday experiences Building positive networks with peers and adults	Skill development (confidence, public speaking, research, project management) Improved sense of belonging and well-being Awareness of how community change happens	Increased aspirations, identity and sense of purpose Greater employability through skills, training and networking Stronger connections with decision-makers and professionals	Ongoing involvement in social justice and community work Sustained leadership and employment opportunities Enhanced resilience and contribution to social change
Research participants Social action participants	Being actively listened to and given opportunities to express their views Enjoying peer-to-peer interactions and support Engaging flexibly and giving informed consent Receiving signposting to other roles or programmes	Increased confidence and soft skills (communication, goal setting, time management) Improved well-being and sense of belonging	Progression into other Peer Action Collective (PAC) roles or programmes Greater awareness of social issues and empowerment to voice their views	Sustained commitment to social action Ongoing ability to influence and engage communities

Delivery partners	Receiving support and capacity-building from PAC and funders Having opportunities to engage in networks and peer learning Being exposed to youth-led approaches and evidence	Improved knowledge and skills (research ethics, safeguarding, youth participation) Increased confidence in supporting young people Stronger relationships with youth organisations	Organisational practice changed to include youth voices Development of stronger networks and evidence-informed approaches	Sustained delivery of youth-led projects Access to further funding and partnerships Policy and practice changes across organisations
Communities The wider sector	PAC and young people's voices being made visible Stakeholders and communities engaging directly with young people Relationships between young people, community groups and services being strengthened	Raised awareness of the drivers of youth violence and local safe places Increased visibility and credibility of youth in decision-making spaces Initial shifts in the perceptions of young people	Improved collaboration and networks across community groups, services and stakeholders Cultural shifts within institutions (e.g. schools, violence reduction units, police) to include youth voices Greater recognition of young people's value	Sustained policy and practice changes that reduce violence and improve youth outcomes Movement towards communities feeling safer and more connected The development of more youth-friendly, accessible services across sectors

Conclusion

Research question 1: how is PAC being put into practice? How is it operating to achieve social change (i.e. policy and practice in local areas)? What are the factors that influence these processes?

Table 16. Summary of the feasibility study findings

Research question	Finding
Fidelity/adherence: in what ways are the Peer Action Collective (PAC) activities being delivered as intended?	PAC delivery was largely consistent with the programme's intended model, with peer research, social action projects and paid youth leadership roles implemented across all regions. Young people were actively involved in both the research and action phases. Flexibility within the model enabled delivery partners to adapt activities to local contexts while retaining the programme's core principles. In some cases, peer research and social action roles were combined, which facilitated smoother transitions between phases and broadened participants' experience. Variation in delivery was mainly linked to logistical challenges rather than a departure from the model. Internal factors, such as establishing safeguarding processes and human resource systems, along with external factors, including school exam periods and the 2024 summer riots, affected recruitment and timelines. These challenges meant activities were sometimes delivered in a more fluid sequence than originally planned, but the core elements of the model were retained.
Dosage: how much of the intended PAC activity has been delivered? Can a dosage be identified for each area?	At the time of writing, PAC had broadly achieved intended levels of youth engagement across research-focused roles, with most regions meeting or exceeding targets for peer researchers, social action leads and research participants. Engagement in changemaker roles and social action activities was more uneven, with variation shaped by operational challenges, the voluntary nature of the role and the scale or type of activities delivered in each region. Delivery varied in both intensity and structure. Some regions focused on neighbourhood-level projects, while others worked across multiple cities, resulting in distinct research reports and social action campaigns. Training was delivered consistently through a national core offering by The Young Foundation, but additional sessions and follow-up support differed depending on partner capacity and local needs. This variation makes it difficult to capture dosage through standardised measures, such as hours delivered or participant counts. While these figures provide an indication of reach, they do not fully reflect the depth or quality of young people's participation. A fuller understanding of dosage in PAC could be gained by exploring both the scale of engagement and the qualitative dimensions of youth leadership, intensity of involvement and responsiveness to local contexts.
Quality: in what ways do PAC activities reflect solutions to local issues identified by the	PAC2 delivered youth-led work that reflected the priorities and needs that young people identified in their communities. Core components, such as peer research and social action, supported the design of inclusive and locally relevant

peer researchers? How well are the different components of PAC being delivered?	projects, while training and residential events provided opportunities for connection and skill development. Experiences of the residential events were mixed, with participants valuing opportunities to meet peers and share perspectives but raising challenges around timing, clarity of purpose and the balance between professional expectations and informal group activities. Training was widely regarded as useful for building confidence and research skills, although gaps were identified in areas such as outreach, partnership working and creative or participatory methods. Peer research was conducted effectively and sensitively, with young people adapting their approaches to engage diverse groups and ensure safe, supportive environments. Findings from this work directly informed social action projects, many of which sought to influence local systems and practices. Delivery partners also highlighted the role of national guidance in encouraging teams to consider systemic change alongside local activity. The national survey, however, presented significant challenges. Its late rollout, high response targets and limited flexibility created tensions with PAC's youth-led and participatory principles, with some delivery partners feeling it prioritised scale over depth of engagement.
Reach: what is the rate of participation by peer researchers, social action leads and changemakers? What is the reach of stakeholders? Why might rates of participation differ across areas/groups of young people?	At the time of writing, PAC2 had engaged a broad range of young people, although participation targets were not fully met. Peer researchers and social action leads were most often aged 16–18, while changemakers spanned a wider age range. At the programme level, women and girls were slightly more likely than men and boys to take on peer researcher and social action lead roles, although this varied across regions. Available data suggests that participation by Black, Asian, and Minority ethnic young people exceeded the 30% target, while participation by young people with disabilities was lower than the 15% target. Reach also varied across regions, shaped by differing recruitment pathways, the strength of local networks, school and exam timetables, transport barriers, and cuts to youth services. These factors help to explain why participation patterns looked different across regions, with some partners able to build on existing networks while others faced more structural barriers. The limitations of incomplete and inconsistent demographic reporting mean that the overall reach of PAC2 cannot be assessed with confidence. For the pilot study, stronger and more consistent data collection will be needed, with questions aligned to national standards, better integration of reporting into delivery processes and improved survey timing. These changes will help build a fuller picture of who is engaged, who is not and why and will ensure the programme continues to reach diverse groups of young people equitably.
Responsiveness: in what ways do actors/organisations within a local community engage with	PAC engaged a wide range of stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels. Local organisations and community groups were central to delivery, supporting recruitment, hosting activities and amplifying social action projects. Many teams built on existing relationships, which strengthened access and

PAC activities conducted by peer researchers? Are there any national responses to the national reports and/or projects delivered as part of PAC? What is the reach of stakeholders?	credibility, while others faced delays where new connections had to be established. Engagement extended to councils, youth services, police and crime commissioners, violence reduction units, universities, and national actors, such as members of parliament, government departments and media outlets. This work raised the profile of young people's voices and, in some regions, contributed to tangible shifts in policy and practice. Its influence was strongest where delivery partners had long-standing stakeholder relationships or had been involved in previous iterations of PAC, while newer teams focused more on building the foundations for future change. Challenges included difficulties engaging schools and maintaining follow-up with some stakeholders and the impact of national political shifts, which, at times, limited sustained collaboration.
Provider/implementer factors: what is the perceived need for PAC amongst stakeholders? What are the perceived benefits of PAC amongst key stakeholders?	Stakeholders reported that PAC addressed a clear need by increasing young people's confidence, skills and readiness to engage with decision-makers. These effects often extended beyond individual participants, influencing peers, families and communities and contributing to changes in how stakeholders understood young people's experiences of violence. PAC also contributed to strengthening youth engagement practices, broadening the range of youth voices involved and informing wider strategies for participation. Young people were given access to decision-making spaces; however, their involvement was more often consultative, providing input and feedback, rather than having the decision-making power to directly shape outcomes.
Implementation support system: what strategies and practices are used to support the high-quality implementation of PAC? What might the barriers be to the high-quality implementation of PAC?	High-quality implementation was supported by delivery partners' trusted community relationships, which eased recruitment into PAC roles, opened access to schools and youth spaces, and strengthened credibility with local stakeholders. These existing connections made it easier to engage young people and embed PAC projects in local contexts. Staff also played a dual role, combining pastoral care with professional guidance. For many young people, PAC was their first experience of paid work, so support extended beyond delivery to include mentoring on workplace expectations, confidence-building and practical help, such as setting up bank accounts. This blend of care and guidance sustained engagement and helped build transferable skills. Challenges included early difficulties with team cohesion and decision-making, as groups brought together young people of different ages, backgrounds and levels of experience. Delivery partners responded with team building, open dialogue and smaller working groups to allow young people to play to their strengths. Another barrier was the tension between participatory, youth-led approaches and the need to meet national research and demographic targets. Fixed quotas and short recruitment windows often conflicted with trust-based, trauma-informed practice, placing pressure on teams and sometimes limiting the depth of participation.

Research question 2: what is the recommended evaluation approach for the next phase of evaluating participative, youth-led, place-based approaches that builds the evidence base but remains feasible and appropriate for the level of development of the programme?

Table 17. Summary of findings

Research question	Finding
What are some notable outcomes for participants and places during this phase of work?	The feasibility study found that PAC delivers meaningful outcomes across the individual, organisational and community levels. Young people involved, especially peer researchers, social action leads, and changemakers, developed practical skills, confidence and a stronger sense of agency, and changemakers reported growth in leadership and influencing skills. The programme also enhanced teamwork, professional skills and knowledge of social issues, fostering commitment to ongoing social action and emotional well-being through friendships and belonging. For delivery organisations, PAC contributed to improved youth engagement practices, capacity-building in research and social action, and shifts towards co-production and youth leadership. Delivery partners expanded networks and strengthened stakeholder relationships, although concerns about sustaining funding and youth-led roles remain. At the community and place levels, PAC influenced local systems, such as schools, councils and regional bodies, with early signs of impact including shifting stakeholder perceptions and increasing youth participation in decision-making, although further study is needed to understand the longer-term impact of this on achieving social change.
Outcomes: what are the most suitable outcomes for the project to measure? What is the unit of analysis? What should the primary outcome of PAC be? Is data available/accessible? Are there any issues and potential solutions to enabling the collection of high-quality data? Measurement: what measures are the most reliable, valid and practical for assessing the potential impact of PAC? Place: is examining the community level possible in the next stage, and, if so, what	The feasibility study found that the most consistent and well-evidenced outcomes were at the individual level, particularly for young people directly involved in PAC. Reported changes included increased confidence, skills and sense of agency. There was also emerging evidence of outcomes for delivery partners and stakeholders, including shifts in perceptions of young people, greater youth involvement in decision-making spaces and some changes in organisational practices. However, young people's involvement was largely consultative rather than co-produced, meaning that decision-making power and influence over structural change remained with local stakeholders and institutions. This aligns with PAC's theory of change, which recognises that individual outcomes are important mechanisms for wider system change but are not sufficient on their own. Measuring systemic or community-level outcomes is complex and typically slow, given the social, cultural and political factors involved. The evaluation did not set fixed expectations for the timescales in which such change could be observed, acknowledging that sustained influence often requires multiple years. Early indications suggest that PAC is beginning to influence local systems

should those outcomes be, and how will they be measured?	by building youth confidence and purpose, which ripple out to peers, families and communities, and by prompting shifts in stakeholder perceptions and engagement with youth voice. To strengthen the evidence base, future evaluations should prioritise stakeholder- and community-level outcomes as the primary unit of analysis. Recommended approaches include system-mapping workshops, pre- and post-programme interviews and stakeholder surveys to track shifts in attitudes, practices and policies over time. At the same time, outcomes for young people and delivery partners should remain an important secondary focus, both to document their development and to understand how these outcomes enable broader systemic change.
Recruitment: what are the appropriate recruitment strategies for the evaluation? Retention: what are the appropriate methods for improving retention in the evaluation? Outcomes: Are there any issues and potential solutions to enabling the collection of high-quality data?	The feasibility study highlighted several risks to high-quality data collection, including challenges with trust and timing when engaging young people, accessibility barriers, and variations in delivery partner capacity. At the place level, low survey response rates and difficulties engaging stakeholders were also observed. To mitigate these issues, the evaluation team recommends early engagement with young people and delivery partners, flexible data collection windows, a variety of accessible and creative methods, and proportionate support for delivery staff. The recruitment and retention of participants were found to be closely linked: inclusive and transparent recruitment strategies built the foundations for ongoing engagement, while retention depended on making evaluation activities accessible, providing practical and emotional support, offering appropriate incentives, and aligning activities with programme milestones. Trusted delivery partners played a central role in both recruitment and retention, given their established relationships with young people and local networks. Embedding consent and evaluation activities more closely within programme delivery was also identified as a way to reduce burden and improve participation across the study life cycle.
How can the PAC theory of change be developed and refined to best describe how PAC operates, as well as the intended output and outcomes of the programme?	The proposed refinements to the PAC theory of change focus on better aligning it with outcomes identified in this evaluation, without requiring major changes to its overarching aims or mechanisms. At this stage, the refinements emphasise three key areas: • Evolving roles of young people: recognising that peer researchers and social action leads increasingly combine facilitation, inclusion-building and the creation of emotionally safe spaces • Expanded scope for changemakers and communities: highlighting the need to broaden changemaker activities and to give greater weight to the role of local communities in PAC delivery • Shifting responsibilities of delivery partners and stakeholders: acknowledging changes in recruitment, safeguarding, training and engagement, alongside community-level shifts, such as increased youth visibility and evolving stakeholder perceptions

	Further refinements are suggested across all levels of the framework to reflect outcome findings. The evaluation team recommends exploring these refinements collaboratively with delivery partners in PAC3 to ensure they are practical, grounded and responsive to delivery realities.
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Evaluator's judgement of intervention feasibility

This feasibility study found that the PAC2 intervention was delivered as intended and is well-prepared to progress to a pilot phase. Across the seven delivery regions, PAC2 delivered its two core activities – peer-led research and youth-led social action – in ways that were consistent with its founding values. Research teams and participants described how young people took active roles in shaping both research and social action, with outputs reflecting issues that young people themselves had prioritised. In interviews, participants often noted that their contributions were acknowledged and acted upon, with some describing PAC2 as the first programme in which they felt their perspectives had genuine influence. Delivery staff also observed that young people displayed a sense of ownership over the work, particularly in how research findings were directly linked to social action. These accounts suggest that the programme's intended focus on youth leadership was visible in practice and recognised by those involved.

Although sites differed in their research activities, social action projects and team structures, delivery partners and participants generally described these variations as context-specific adaptations rather than deviations from the model. In some areas, the roles of peer researcher and social action lead were merged, creating what staff referred to as a PAC lead, who supported young people in carrying findings directly into action. In other areas, the roles were kept separate, which young people said gave them opportunities to specialise and develop particular skills. A small number of sites also introduced additional roles, such as communications leads, in response to priorities identified locally. Despite these differences in structure and delivery, all sites employed young people in paid roles, completed two cycles of peer-led research and implemented two phases of social action. Overall, this suggests that observed variations reflected PAC2's participatory and place-based ethos rather than any loss of fidelity to the model.

While this variability supported flexibility and responsiveness, it also complicates efforts to define and measure quality in terms of dosage. For the pilot phase, it would be valuable to codify a minimum baseline that secures consistency across sites while preserving flexibility. This might include two youth-led research cycles (covering design, data collection, analysis and output); two phases of social action demonstrably linked to research findings, with at least one product or practice designed for sustainability (reflecting the systemic approaches to social action that several teams adopted); and the completion of core training supplemented by modules tailored to local needs. Establishing such a framework would create a shared standard while still allowing adaptation to local contexts, thereby supporting both fidelity and comparability.

Delivery partners emerged as central to PAC2's implementation feasibility. Acting simultaneously as employers, mentors and connectors, they provided the infrastructure required for recruitment, employment, safeguarding and pastoral support. Their existing relationships with young people, schools and community organisations were particularly valuable in establishing legitimacy and securing access to trusted spaces. Where such networks were weaker, recruitment still took place but required additional time and resource-intensive outreach. Partners also played a vital role in balancing the dual nature of PAC roles:

offering pastoral care and developmental support while upholding professional expectations around attendance and accountability. This balance was especially important given that many young people were undertaking paid roles for the first time.

Feasibility was shaped by both organisational capacity and the compressed timetable for delivery. Some partners were able to recruit quickly through established networks, while others encountered greater challenges, particularly in areas affected by cuts to youth provision or where community infrastructure was weaker. Across the network, delivery partners reflected that the short timeframe left little flexibility to address such pressures. The sequence from recruitment to training to the delivery of research and social action cycles was achievable, but unexpected difficulties, including delays in recruiting peer researchers, staff turnover and wider service cuts, had an immediate impact on momentum.

This evaluation team therefore found that PAC2 is feasible but that its feasibility is sensitive to timescales and organisational capacity. The model can be delivered successfully in a wide range of settings, but it requires sufficient lead-in time for recruitment and training, as well as flexibility to respond to contextual pressures. While this evaluation team recognises that pilot and trial phases often operate within fixed timeframes, our findings suggest that future iterations would benefit from longer preparatory periods. Allowing more time at the outset would strengthen the programme's resilience, reduce the risk of disruption from external factors and increase confidence in partners' ability to deliver the model consistently.

The phased design of PAC2 created opportunities for young people to build the skills they identified as being necessary to carry out their roles. In interviews, peer researchers and social action leads described gaining confidence in communication, research methods, teamwork and social action planning. Training and the residential were central to this process, although the study identified scope to refine both their timing and their content. Several delivery sites noted that the residential was scheduled too early, before peer researchers and social action leads had developed clarity about their roles or a strong sense of team identity. A stronger sequencing would place the residential after local induction, when young people are better prepared to benefit from skill-building and interactions with their peers.

In terms of training, peer researchers and social action leads reported that practical and in-person sessions were the most useful in preparing them to deliver PAC2. For the pilot phase, training and the residential may benefit from a greater emphasis on youth-led workshops, applied learning and team building while still retaining a two-stage structure (core induction followed by advanced or specialist modules). Delivery partners also suggested that a clearer mapping of training content to role responsibilities would help participants link learning to practice. Additional modules identified as being potentially valuable included outreach and partnerships, media and communications, trauma-informed facilitation, and advanced analysis.

The available demographic data suggests that PAC2 broadly reached a diverse cohort of young people in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. However, gaps in data collection and inconsistencies across sites limit the strength of this conclusion. Not all sites collected demographic data systematically, and some categories were incomplete or reported in different formats, making comparisons difficult. In addition, while PAC was designed to engage young people with lived experiences of violence, the evaluation could not assess this aim with confidence. The absence of a shared and inclusive recruitment framework meant that sites

adopted different approaches to identifying and engaging participants. Some partners reported uncertainty about how the concept of lived experience should be interpreted in practice, and there was reluctance to require direct disclosure from young people, given the risks of stigma and deterrence. While these concerns were valid, the result is that it is unclear whether the cohort as a whole reflected this central ambition of the model.

From a feasibility perspective, this highlights two key issues for the pilot. First, there is a need for stronger and more consistent demographic monitoring so that reach can be evidenced robustly across sites. Second, it is important to clarify recruitment definitions and expectations in ways that are inclusive and practical for delivery partners while avoiding processes that could create barriers to participation. Addressing these issues will be critical if PAC2 is to demonstrate that it is not only feasible in general but also feasible in reaching the specific groups it is designed to target.

Stakeholders consistently described PAC2 as an important and credible programme, and this external recognition is another critical element of feasibility. There was evidence that PAC had begun to shift local perceptions of young people's role in research and action, with partners and external stakeholders describing the model as distinctive in its ability to generate insights grounded in young people's lived realities. Stakeholders' buy-in had practical benefits during the feasibility phase: it helped delivery partners secure access to schools, services and civic spaces and gave the programme legitimacy in local systems. From a feasibility perspective, this is a key enabler. Without the cooperation of schools, youth services and civic institutions, PAC would have struggled to recruit young people or to translate research into meaningful action. The pilot phase will need to continue investing in these relationships, as stakeholder support is not just desirable but necessary for delivery at scale and for embedding the impact of young people's work in local systems. This is explored further when discussing outcomes below.

Overall, the evidence confirms that the PAC intervention is feasible and ready to progress to a pilot. The model has shown itself to be both adaptable and robust, maintaining fidelity to its core commitments while allowing flexibility for local adaptation. This evaluation team has identified a number of refinements that would strengthen delivery in a pilot phase, particularly in relation to training and residentials, role structures, recruitment, central support and monitoring. These adjustments do not call feasibility into question; rather, they are intended to enhance PAC's ability to deliver consistently, inclusively and at scale. With these improvements in place, PAC is well positioned to progress to a pilot that can test its potential to generate meaningful, youth-led, place-based change. A full set of recommendations for the pilot and future research is outlined in the section below

Evaluator's judgement of evaluation feasibility

This feasibility study has shown that PAC2 can be evaluated in ways that are both practical and consistent with its participatory ethos. The evidence indicates that youth-led, place-based programmes can be assessed through a mix of conventional and creative methods capable of capturing outcomes at the individual, organisational and community levels. The findings suggest that, for a pilot phase, stakeholder and community outcomes should be the primary unit of analysis. This aligns with PAC2's theory of change, which recognises individual outcomes for young people as important foundations and mechanisms of change but ultimately aims to influence policy and practice – shaping how decision makers engage with

young people, how decisions about violence prevention are made and how youth-led action becomes embedded within local systems.

At the individual level, young people reported clear shifts in confidence, teamwork, communication, civic awareness and professional development. These outcomes were most often linked to direct programme experiences, such as speaking publicly, leading initiatives or engaging with decision-makers. Such accounts confirm that PAC is capable of producing meaningful developmental outcomes for individual young people, which is important both for the programme's value and for demonstrating change in a pilot evaluation. However, broader constructs such as 'agency' or 'confidence' were not explicitly defined, and this created challenges for measurement. Without agreed definitions, it was difficult to assess whether and how these more complex outcomes had shifted. For a pilot, it will therefore be important to co-define these constructs with young people, ensuring that measures of success reflect their lived experience and priorities while also being clear and consistent enough to support systematic evaluation. This would strengthen feasibility by providing a firmer framework for assessing individual-level change in ways that are both meaningful to participants and credible for stakeholders.

At the organisational level, delivery partners described embedding youth voice more intentionally, adapting policies and practices, and extending networks. These changes suggest that PAC2 has the capacity to influence how organisations operate, particularly in how they engage with and respond to young people. From an evaluation perspective, this points to the feasibility of systematically capturing organisational outcomes, although the data gathered in this stage was limited. A pilot study could strengthen this by incorporating structured case studies that draw on interviews and observations, enabling a fuller account of how organisations evolve as a result of PAC2 involvement. At the same time, any evaluation design will need to remain mindful of organisational capacity: smaller delivery partners in particular may face challenges in dedicating staff time to data collection alongside programme delivery. Methods will therefore need to be proportionate and supportive, placing as little additional burden on partners as possible. One way forward could be to expand the use of observational approaches, which can capture the change in organisational policies and practices in real time without requiring extensive reporting from staff. This would not only ease pressure on delivery teams but also provide a richer understanding of how PAC influences organisational culture and ways of working.

At the community and stakeholder levels, early signs of influence were visible. Stakeholders in schools, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations reported more positive perceptions of young people and a greater willingness to engage with them in decision-making. From a feasibility perspective, this level of outcome is critical because young people, while central to PAC, do not necessarily hold the power to change policies, allocate resources or reshape institutional practices on their own. Their ability to create lasting impact depends on whether the institutions and decision-makers around them are prepared to act on their insights and support their initiatives. For this reason, stakeholder and community outcomes represent the most meaningful indicator of whether PAC can achieve its longer-term ambitions.

However, the evidence base at this stage was narrow, since stakeholder interviews were conducted only at the end of the programme and surveys had variable response rates across regions. This limited the ability to assess whether reported shifts represented deeper changes in practice or remained largely consultative. A pilot study would therefore need to strengthen measurement in this area through more systematic and

layered approaches. This could include establishing clear baselines before activity begins and conducting follow-up at multiple points, using pre- and post-interviews with key stakeholders to capture change over time. It could also include stakeholder surveys designed for consistency across sites and system mapping to track how young people's work connects to local decision-making structures, partnerships and resource flows. Together, these approaches would make it possible to identify not only whether perceptions are shifting but also whether these shifts translate into tangible changes in policy, practice and investment.

This feasibility study also highlighted issues in the evaluation tools themselves. Surveys and monitoring data provided useful insights but were inconsistently completed across sites, limiting comparability and reducing the strength of the evidence base. This variation highlighted the need for stronger central coordination in a pilot phase. A standardised template should be co-designed with delivery partners and used consistently across all sites, reducing the scope for local variation and ensuring that core information is gathered in a reliable and comparable way. This would also help reduce duplication and minimise the burden on delivery partners by making expectations clear and processes straightforward.

Although this feasibility study relied mainly on conventional surveys and interviews, future evaluations could benefit from integrating more creative and youth-centred methods. Approaches such as storytelling, reflective journals, visual methods or short video diaries were widely recognised as accessible and affirming ways for young people to express their experiences. Embedding these participatory tools alongside standardised measures from the outset of a pilot would generate richer evidence about individual and collective change while remaining consistent with PAC's ethos on being youth-led.

Overall, this feasibility study confirms that evaluating PAC is both possible and worthwhile, provided that the approach remains proportionate, participatory and youth-centred. The findings demonstrate that outcomes can be captured at the individual, organisational and community levels and highlight areas where tools and processes require refinement to ensure consistency and comparability across sites. With these adjustments, a pilot study would be well placed to test PAC's theory of change more fully and generate credible evidence on how it can shift stakeholder perceptions and influence wider policy and practice. A summary of recommendations for strengthening the evaluation design in future phases is provided in the future research section below.

Interpretation

The findings of this feasibility study suggest that PAC2 offers a promising and innovative approach to addressing youth violence by positioning young people as researchers, leaders and changemakers. This reflects a wider body of literature showing that participatory and youth-led approaches can enhance confidence, skills and agency while also contributing to broader shifts in practice and policy. Research has consistently emphasised the importance of recognising young people not only as beneficiaries of interventions but also as active contributors to social change, and PAC demonstrates how these principles can be operationalised within place-based contexts.

One of the key insights from this phase is how PAC2's design brings together reinforcing components. Paid leadership roles conferred recognition and legitimacy, aligning with evidence that valuing young people's contributions on equal terms with delivery partners and wider decision-makers in their communities can

build confidence, responsibility and aspiration. Peer research provided a structured way for young people to generate credible, locally grounded insights, which is consistent with literature on the value of peer-led inquiry in producing authentic knowledge. Youth-led social action translated these insights into tangible community initiatives, demonstrating how participatory approaches can strengthen civic engagement and reshape relationships between young people and their communities. Taken together, these elements illustrate PAC's theory of change in practice: enabling young people to grow personally, influence locally and work towards contributing to systemic impact.

The study also highlights challenges that mirror wider debates in youth participation research. Embedding equity and trauma-informed practice was central to PAC's design, echoing arguments that inclusive and sensitive approaches are essential for working with young people affected by violence. Yet, this also created constraints. Adopting a trauma-informed, low-burden evaluation approach helped protect participants but reduced the demographic data available to assess equity of reach. Similar challenges have been noted in other participatory studies, where efforts to minimise harm can reduce the completeness of data collected. While this feasibility study was not designed as an equity study, early findings – consistent with research showing the disproportionate impact of violence on marginalised groups, including racially minoritised young people, disabled young people and those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage – underline the need for future evaluations to integrate equity considerations more explicitly at every stage and to develop ethical ways of capturing sensitive demographic data.

Flexibility emerged as another double-edged feature. PAC's responsiveness to the local context reflects what the literature identifies as a strength of place-based and participatory models, which are most effective when adapted to community priorities. At the same time, this adaptability complicated comparison across sites and made it harder to generate consistent outcome data. Quantitative survey tools struggled to capture the depth and diversity of change, a challenge widely reported in participatory evaluation. This reinforces calls for mixed methods designs, combining standardised measures with creative and participatory tools, such as video ethnography or storytelling, which can generate insights into not only *whether* change happens but also *how* and *why*.

Finally, the interpretation of PAC's impact must be situated within a longer-term perspective. Short-term evaluations often capture attitudinal shifts but struggle to evidence institutional or systemic change, a pattern observed across many participatory programmes. In line with these findings, this study was able to demonstrate personal outcomes for young people and emerging stakeholder shifts but not sustained structural transformation. Longitudinal research that uses repeated measures over extended timeframes will, therefore, be essential to assessing whether early outcomes – such as stronger youth voice in decision-making or improved stakeholder perceptions – evolve into lasting systemic change.

In summary, the findings position PAC within a broader evidence base that demonstrates the value of youth-led and participatory approaches. PAC adds to this literature by showing how such approaches can be embedded within local systems, producing both individual benefits and the potential for wider influence. To fully test its theory of change, however, future evaluations must move beyond individual-level outcomes to assess its role in reshaping community systems, embedding equity and trauma-informed practice, and sustaining impact over time.

Limitations and lessons learned

This evaluation was subject to several limitations, particularly in relation to its timing, scope and the practical constraints of delivering evaluation activities alongside a complex, multi-site programme. As is common in studies of this nature, the evaluation was shaped by a fixed budget and timeframe. It was intentionally designed to be low-burden and adaptive, aiming to strike a balance between generating meaningful insights and ensuring that evaluation demands did not overwhelm delivery partners or young people. This approach supported strong participation and buy-in but inevitably meant that there were limitations in the number and scope of activities that could be delivered.

The timing of interview data collection was one limitation. The evaluation began in March 2024 with the development of a new theory of change, evaluation framework and data collection tools. However, by this stage, young people had already been recruited into peer researcher and social action lead roles, and early programme activities were underway. As a result, opportunities to capture baseline data or track early-stage outcomes were missed. Fieldwork interviews with young people did not begin until July 2024, almost a year after initial recruitment, which restricted the ability to understand how participation shaped development from the outset. Furthermore, the evaluation closed in June 2025, before the completion of PAC2 delivery in September 2025. This meant that interview data could not capture longer-term outcomes or post-programme progression, particularly in relation to sustained skills development, transitions into employment or education, and wider systemic impact.

Quantitative data collection also faced significant challenges. Demographic and monitoring tools were designed and rolled out at the same time as programme delivery, meaning that data was not consistently captured from the outset. This created gaps in the data set, particularly in relation to key demographic variables, such as age, gender, ethnicity and disability. Without robust and comprehensive demographic data, the evaluation was unable to examine how outcomes may have varied across different subgroups of young people, nor was it possible to carry out systematic comparisons between different roles (for example, peer researchers and changemakers) or across locations. The absence of consistent baseline measures further limited the ability to track change over time. As a result, the evaluation could not provide detailed evidence on differential outcomes or emerging patterns across the network – a key limitation in assessing the equity and inclusivity of PAC2.

The decision not to collect detailed demographic information from interview and focus group participants helped keep the process low-burden and youth-friendly, but it also meant the evaluation could not systematically explore in the interview data whether experiences or perspectives varied across subgroups. The data generated rich insights into young people's motivations, experiences and perceived outcomes, yet the absence of demographic linkage limited the ability to assess whether these views were more common among particular groups – for example, young women, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds or those entering the programme with different starting points in education or employment.

Delivery partner capacity also significantly shaped the evaluation process. Delivery staff were central to administering surveys, coordinating interviews and submitting monitoring data, alongside their core responsibilities for recruitment, training, safeguarding and ongoing youth support. These competing demands placed considerable pressure on already stretched teams, particularly during periods of intense

activity, such as recruitment drives or when social action projects were peaking. Several partners reported difficulty balancing programme delivery with evaluation requirements, which sometimes led to delays, incomplete data or variations in the quality of data submitted. This highlights a wider tension at the heart of youth programme evaluations: how to capture robust, high-quality evidence while maintaining a proportionate burden for delivery partners and participants. The evaluation design aimed to be low-burden and adaptive, but the trade-off was a data set that, while rich in certain areas, lacked consistency and comparability in others.

Future research and publications

The evaluation of PAC2 has highlighted a number of strengths in delivery and early outcomes, alongside important lessons for future phases of the programme and its evaluation. The recommendations presented below are intended to support both the refinement of PAC as an intervention and the strengthening of the evaluation design in future studies. These recommendations are based on feedback from young people, delivery partners and stakeholders, as well as reflections on the practical challenges and methodological limitations encountered during this feasibility study.

The recommendations are organised into two categories:

- Intervention recommendations, which focus on ways to enhance programme design and delivery to ensure PAC continues to be youth-led, inclusive and responsive to local contexts
- Evaluation recommendations, which address how future studies can be designed and implemented to capture richer data, enable more robust analysis and strengthen the evidence base on PAC's outcomes and impact

Together, these recommendations aim to ensure that PAC continues to deliver meaningful opportunities for young people while building stronger evidence about its contribution to individual, community and systemic change.

Intervention recommendations

- Build on the positive experiences of regions that integrated the peer researcher and social action lead roles, exploring how combining these responsibilities can strengthen continuity between research and social action.
- Prioritise the recruitment of young people with lived or indirect experience of violence, supported by a clear definition of lived experience and a framework for delivery partners to apply.
- Provide recruitment strategies and outreach materials that help delivery partners understand who is participating, who is not and why to ensure the programme continues to reach diverse youth communities equitably.
- Co-develop recruitment and participation targets with delivery partners, drawing on local demographic data and practitioner knowledge to ensure expectations are realistic and inclusive.
- Plan programme timelines more flexibly to allow for set-up, recruitment challenges and external factors while maintaining clarity on key milestones.
- Capture and share learning on how delivery partners built positive team dynamics (e.g. role integration, sub-teams, peer-led responsibilities) so that effective approaches can be replicated in future phases.

- Embed the national survey more clearly within programme delivery and ensure the timing and purpose are transparent to young people and delivery teams.

Evaluation recommendations

- Begin evaluation planning earlier in the programme cycle to allow for baseline data collection, the piloting of tools and deeper consultation with delivery partners.
- Use longer timeframes for evaluations, aligning study timelines with programme completion to allow for post-participation follow-up and the assessment of longer-term outcomes.
- Ensure the theory of change is revisited and co-developed with delivery partners for PAC3 so that it accurately reflects the realities of delivery, scale and context.
- Incorporate a literature review at the outset of future studies to strengthen the interpretation of findings and situate PAC within the wider evidence base.
- Integrate programme participation consent with evaluation consent to streamline processes and reduce duplication for young people.
- Collect demographic data consistently from the outset, aligning programme and evaluation data to create a complete and comparable data set across all PAC roles.
- Strengthen reporting tools and co-design them with delivery partners, testing in advance to ensure they are fit for purpose, practical and consistent across sites.
- Track activity, including peer research, social action and training, in a systematic way to support comparison across regions and monitor consistency in delivery.
- Include at least two rounds of interviews for delivery partners and stakeholders to capture change over time and link specific PAC activities to outcomes.
- Explore subgroup outcomes (e.g. by gender, ethnicity, disability, role type or location) through collecting stronger demographic data and larger sample sizes.
- Investigate recruitment processes during pilot phases (e.g. role descriptions, outreach materials) to understand factors influencing who participates.
- Consider innovative but proportionate methods (e.g. video ethnography) in close collaboration with delivery partners, ensuring voluntary participation and safeguarding.
- Build in methods to explore stakeholder- and community-level outcomes more systematically, recognising these as the primary unit of analysis in line with PAC's theory of change.
- Assess whether shifts in stakeholder perceptions of young people translate into changes in practice, policy or systems over time.
- Continue to monitor individual outcomes (skills, confidence, progression) as secondary measures, recognising their role in enabling wider systemic change.

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Appendices:

Appendix a: Peer researcher and social action lead information sheet and consent form



Participate in our research about the PAC programme




RENAISI-TSIP

- **Renaissi-TSIP** is an independent organisation that works with different charities, funders, and local authorities to help them understand the impact of their work and how they can improve what they do.
- **Renaissi-TSIP is working with the Youth Endowment Fund as PAC's monitoring and evaluation partner**, to understand what is working well and what could be improved about the PAC programme.

WHAT WILL THIS INVOLVE?

- A researcher will hold an **interview** with you which will take place **online** (e.g. on Zoom or Teams) or **in person**, at a **time most convenient for you**.
- We would like to find out about how PAC has been going so far, what's worked and what's been challenging.
- We would like to **make an audio recording** of the interview but we **can take notes** if you prefer.

WHY DO WE WANT TO SPEAK TO YOU?

- We are interested in hearing from Young People in every type of PAC role.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- **You do not have to participate** in the research, and you **do not have to answer every question**.
- You can **stop the interview** at any point or **take a break**.
- If something you say makes us think you or someone else is at **risk of immediate harm** or **has acted inappropriately** we will have to tell someone, to keep you or someone else safe.

YOUR RIGHT TO YOUR DATA

- You can ask to **access your data** at any point after participating.
- You can ask for your **data to be deleted** up to **2 weeks** after the interview. Please contact us as soon as possible if you have any concerns about your data being used.
- You can ask for us to **correct any incorrect information** you think we have about you.

HOW WILL WE USE YOUR DATA?



- All information will be **safely stored on Renaissi-TSIP's servers** (which are password protected) accessed by only Renaissi-TSIP staff, and **deleted at the end** of the evaluation.
- The interview recording will be transcribed using **Otter AI**.
- After all our interviews, we will **create a report or presentation**.
- We might use something you say in our report, but it will be **anonymous** - we won't use your name or your organisation name, and it will not be possible to identify you.
- The report will be made available online and may be **shared with other funders, partners and individuals involved in PAC**, and the wider sector. This will help to improve PAC and other similar programmes.

If you have any questions, please contact **Ellie Young** at E.Young@renaisi.com

Consent form



- I understand why a Renaissi-TSIP researcher wants to talk to me ☐
- I agree to speak to a Renaissi-TSIP researcher ☐
- I understand I don't have to take part and I can stop talking to the researcher or take a break at any point. ☐
- I agree that what I say will be audio recorded (optional) ☐
- I understand that the I can choose not to be audio recorded and have notes taken instead ☐
- I am happy for my data to be stored and transcribed by Otter AI (optional) ☐



- I understand how my information will be used. ☐
- I understand that information I give will be used to write a report or presentation. ☐
- I understand that no information that could be used to identify me will be shared with people outside of Renaissi-TSIP. ☐
- I understand that all information will be safely stored on Renaissi-TSIP's servers, accessed by only Renaissi-TSIP staff, and deleted at the end of the evaluation. ☐
- I understand that after the interview, I can still withdraw my consent for any information I gave to be used, up to 2 weeks after the interview. ☐
- I understand that I can ask to access any information held about me and can correct any incorrect information. ☐



- I understand that if I say something that suggests that someone else or myself is at risk of harm or has acted inappropriately, then the interviewer may have to share this with someone else. This is to keep you and/or others safe. ☐

Full name _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Appendix b: PAC2 theory of change diagram and narrative

PAC Theory of Change Narrative

This document outlines the Theory of Change (ToC) narrative for the Peer Action Collective (PAC) programme. It starts with a brief introduction to the programme and a short definition of ToC. It then presents how the revised ToC was developed and the resulting visual. After this, more we provide more information in narrative form, including presentation of target groups, inputs and activities. Finally, the Logic Model highlights the links between mechanisms of change and outcomes, all leading to the long-term impact.

About PAC



PAC is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Co-op. The PAC project aims to improve communities by using peer researchers to collect children and young people's views on issues related to violence and to develop young person led responses to these issues through social action projects. In its first round (PAC1), the programme's aimed impact was: through the Peer Action Collective young people are working to make their communities safer, fairer places to live.

In its second round (PAC2), the programme continues to aim to be:

A ground-breaking network of Peer Researchers, Social Action Leads and Changemakers. Young people with lived experience of violence find out what needs to happen to make their area a better place to live and turn these insights into action. From influencing school practises, to improving local mental health services, co-producing violence reduction strategies or supporting more young people into employment – together, they are ensuring that young voices respond to issues that directly affect them. (<https://peeractioncollective.com/our-mission/>)

PAC Monitoring & Evaluation



The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) has commissioned Renaisi as a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) partner for the PAC programme. The main M&E objective is to design and implement a 5-year programme monitoring and evaluation approach. The project will involve supporting key stakeholders to understand progress towards numerical targets for numbers of young people reached and the diversity of young people engaged as well as in-depth qualitative research to support a coherent contribution story.

This will be conducted through two phases. Firstly, the Feasibility phase which aims to understand the process and what the approach is leading to; during this phase we will be sharing learning throughout to continuously improve delivery. Secondly, a Pilot phase which aims to understand the difference PAC is making in individuals, alongside impact on delivery partner organisations, communities and wider stakeholders. For the evaluation we see the Feasibility phase as an opportunity to test the effectiveness of the programme, and the Pilot phase to test specific impacts of the programme in depth, to understand which parts of the process lead to which outcomes and why.

Aims of the M & E

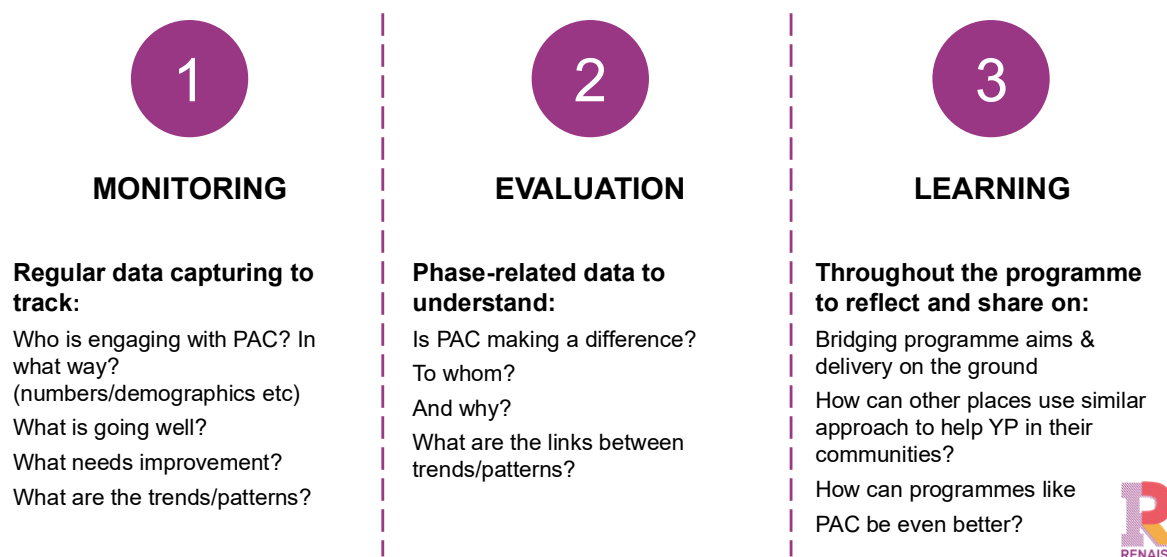


Figure 1: Renaisi presentation slide from the ToC workshops (February-March 2024)

What is a Theory of Change?

Developing a Theory of Change (ToC) is part of the Monitoring and Evaluation scope of the PAC programme. A ToC represents how an intervention (or series of interventions) is/are expected to produce change and why.

What is a theory of change?

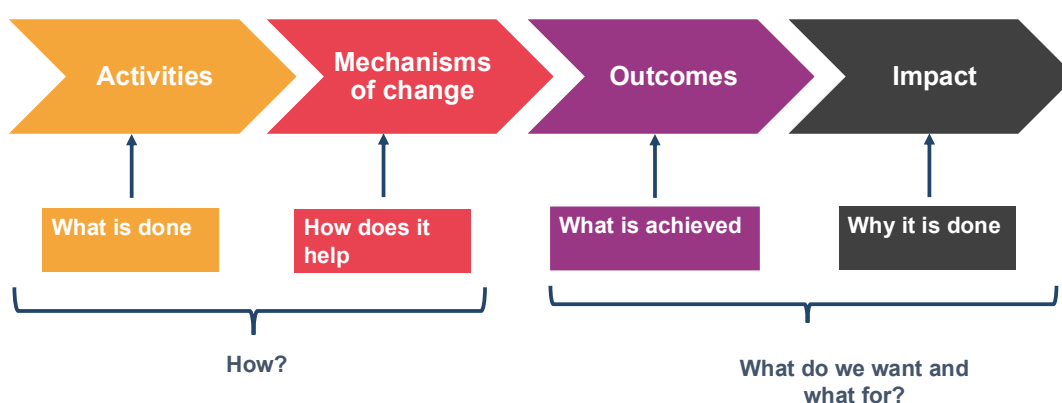


Figure 2: Renaisi presentation slide from the ToC workshops (February-March 2024)

How the PAC ToC was developed

Previous ToC

Below is the theory of change from the previous iteration of the programme (PAC1) which was used as the basis for reviewing and co-designing the theory of change for PAC2.

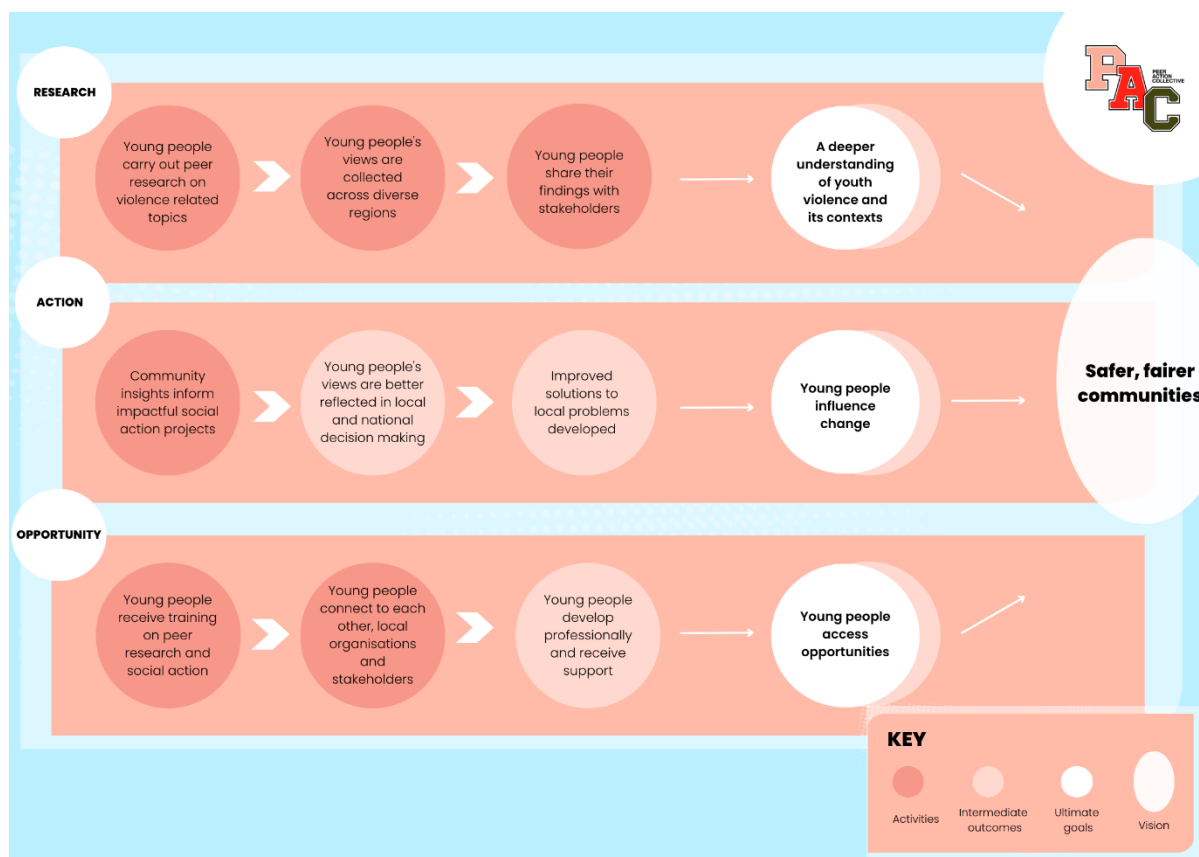


Figure 3: previous visual of PAC ToC

Workshops

We facilitated two workshops to review and co-design the ToC for PAC2. The first workshop aimed to facilitate the space for: 1) Co-creating parts of the Theory of Change with Delivery Partners representing every region involved in PAC, 2) Bringing their input and experiences into the conversation, to make sure the ToC is representative.

Specifically, the workshop focused on:

- Agreement on the Impact statement
- Mapping of the different target groups
- Mapping of the range of activities
- Identifying the outcomes (short/medium/long term)

The second workshop was with Young People, and it focused on Mechanisms of Change. The focus of the workshop was: 1) Understanding what change the Peer Action Collective is creating, and how through the young people's perspective, 2) Discussing these with them and bringing their voice in PAC as experts.

The ToC visual



PAC Theory of Change



Target groups	Activities	Mechanisms of change	Outcomes	Long term impact
Young people - From seven different regions, including rural and urban locations. - In research/social action/joint roles or as participants. - Those who are often not heard, and are often do not access services. - With lived experience or at risk of: - youth violence or gangs (as a perpetrator or victim) - the criminal justice system - school exclusion or disengagement - the care system - mental health challenges - SEND - Young people who identify as one or several intersecting identities including: - From an ethnic minority - From lower socio-economic groups - LGBTQ+ - Disabled - Neurodivergent - Part of multiple intersecting groups Wider stakeholders - Community leaders (of diverse cultures and faith groups). - Youth related services and practitioners (i.e., teachers, youth workers, adults working with young people). - Funders, i.e., YEF, Co-op, #iwill - Local decision-makers (e.g., headteachers, governors, CEOs of activity providers). - Regional decision-makers (e.g., PCC, VRU). - National decision-makers (e.g., DCMS, Department of Education, NHS etc.).	Peer Researchers - Plan and lead two research projects over the course of PAC, involving: - develop a methodology - research fieldwork - research analysis - write up a report - Attend training and access CPD. Social Action Leads - Plan and lead two social action projects, based on the research projects, over the course of PAC, involving: - recruit changemakers - engage social action participants - organise local events to share learning from research projects to build support for social action work - write up a report Changemakers - Attend training. - Support with social action activities. Research/Social Action Participants - Engage in research or social action activities. - Opportunities to join PAC in other roles. Delivery Partners - Provide wrap-around support throughout. - Network and share information among themselves. National Partner & Funders - Young Foundation and YEF support DPs throughout. - Young Foundation designs the national survey. - Co-op and #iwill support PAC teams to build connections with stakeholders	Peer Researchers / Social Action Leads / Changemakers - Feeling part of the solution. - Having a chance to address barriers. - Achieving a change that feels relevant and important. - Being employed or having opportunities to gain work experience. - Being offered training opportunities. - Developing skills of talking to community leaders and decision makers. - Raising awareness about the project. - Knowing the project and its objectives well. - Engaging in activities that make a difference. - Improving confidence in meeting and interacting with new people. Research and social action participants - Being actively listened to. - Peer to peer interactions, enabling empathetic engagement through close age and experiences. - Being given enough information for informed consent to participation. - Being engaged adaptably and flexibly. - Empowered to be vocal and find their voice. - Opportunities to express their views throughout delivery. - Actively reaching out to them for recruitment and participation Communities - Making PAC and its activities visible. - Making young people's real life stories visible. - Opening local people's minds to young people's experiences. - Shifting stereotypes around young people. - Seeing the change happening locally. - People becoming aware of local safe places. - Changes in policy and practice to reduce the negative impact of young people's involvement in violence.	Peer Researchers / Social Action Leads / Changemakers - Development of skills, confidence, independence. - Increased aspirations and value of their role in society. - Increased employability through enhanced CV and skill set. - Development of positive social networks with other young people and adults. - Enhanced professional networks, i.e., decision makers. Research and social action participants - Improvement of soft skills: social and communication skills, time management, goal setting - Increased empowerment to voice their views in this area - Increased confidence to participate in activities in their community - Effectively signposted to join other programmes, or join PAC in other roles. Delivery partners, including staff - Improvement of internal strategies/practices/structures involving young people more in the organisation. - Improvement of skills and knowledge of staff working with CYP, and understanding CYP's value as staff. - Development of stronger networks through PAC, to draw on in future. - Accessing further funding through using learning from PAC. - Empowerment of staff with own lived experience of youth violence to make change in this area. Communities - Local communities are engaged in conversations around PAC issues, and have raised awareness of drivers of violence. - Communities feel safer. - Community members' perceptions of YP is changed. - Improved sense of community cohesion. - Improved working relationships between community organisations and young people. The wider sector - Changes in institutional cultures, e.g., VRUs, education sector, police, to be more inclusive of CYP's voices. - Local and national decision-makers and organisations listen to CYP, and see the value in youth-led projects, e.g., through more youth boards and steering groups. - Improved partnership working and information-sharing between local services. - More accessible local services for all.	Understand and address the root causes driving young people's place-based experiences of violence. Equip young people to achieve their potential whilst making positive community change.

Figure 4: The revised PAC programme ToC visual

Target Groups

Young people

The PAC programme engages a range of young people from seven different regions, including rural and urban locations (London, Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber, Southwest, Wales, Northeast, Northwest). These young people participate in the programme in one of several roles as outlined below:

Peer Researchers (8+ per region) & Social Action Leads (2+ per region)

Long term roles - Peer Researchers will work on research projects with other young people with lived experience of youth violence they are researching. Social Action Leads will develop and lead the social action and change activities linked to the research issues and findings. They will be line managed by Delivery Partners and are paid roles.

Changemakers (40 per region across each research phase, or 280 across the course of the network)

Medium term - Young people involved in designing and carrying out social action on a voluntary basis, engaging in a minimum of 12 hours of project activity. They will receive a structured training to plan their projects drawing from research findings, as well as other soft skills to boost their employability such as public speaking and time management.

Research Participants (150 per region per research project)

Young people invited to take part in peer research.

Social Action Participants (200 per region per research project)

Short term (less than 10 hours) -Young people that get involved on a short-term basis of under 10 hours in projects designed by Social Action Leads and Changemakers.

The young participants' identity characteristics

Based on the exploration during the ToC workshops, the young people which PAC aims to target can be described as:

- Those who are often not heard, and often do not access services.
- With lived experience or at risk of:
 - violence or gangs (as a perpetrator or victim)
 - the criminal justice system
 - school exclusion or disengagement
 - the care system
 - mental health challenges
 - SEND
- Young people who identify as one or several intersecting identities including:
 - From an ethnic minority
 - From lower socio-economic groups
 - LGBTQ+
 - Disabled
 - Neurodivergent
 - Part of multiple intersecting groups

Wider stakeholders

Through research and social action activities (listed in the activities section), the PAC programme engages a range of wider stakeholders:

- Community leaders (of diverse cultures and faith groups).
- Youth related services and practitioners (e.g., teachers, youth workers, adults working with young people).
- Local decision-makers (e.g., headteachers, governors, CEOs of activity providers).
- Regional decision-makers (e.g., PCC, VRU).
- National decision-makers (e.g., DCMS, Department of Education, NHS etc.).

Some wider stakeholders also fulfil a role supporting the programme: Funders, i.e., YEF, Co-op, #iwill.

Activities

The activities integral to realizing the ultimate impact of the PAC program are hereby mapped for each target group.

Peer Researchers

- Plan and lead two research projects over the course of PAC, involving:
 - develop a methodology
 - research fieldwork

- research analysis
 - write up a report
- Attend training and access CPD.

Social Action Leads

- Plan and lead two social action projects, based on the research projects, over the course of PAC, involving:
 - recruit changemakers
 - engage social action participants
 - organise local events to share learning from research projects to build support for social action work
 - write up a report

Changemakers

- Attend training.
- Support with social action activities.

Research / Social Action Participants

- Engage in research or social action activities.
- Opportunities to join PAC in other roles.

Delivery Partners

- Provide wrap-around support throughout.
- Network and share information among themselves.

National Partners & Funders

- Young Foundation and YEF support DPs throughout.
- Young Foundation designs the national survey.
- Co-op and #iwill support PAC teams to build connections with stakeholders

Inputs

To deliver PAC activities across seven regional areas with Delivery Partners and young people (see above for number of young people engaged), the following resources are invested as inputs into the programme.

Funding - a further £7.5m investment in second round of PAC, from the Youth Endowment Fund, #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and Co-op.



Delivery Partners' support – the Young Foundation and YEF provide ongoing support for Delivery Partners across all stages of setting up and implementing, including recruitment and training, activities delivery. This is in the form of:

Young Foundation Support

- Monthly 1:1 meeting with Delivery Partner staff (minimum 1 hour)
- Quarterly whole network meetings (2-3 hours)
- Ad-hoc support via email/phone/teams meetings as required or requested by Delivery Partner
- Guidance documents and resources including templates for research, recruitment, and reporting
- Network wide celebration event – mid-way through phase
- Network wide final conference event – end of phase

YEF (and Match Funder) Support

- Quarterly review meetings with each Delivery Partner (contractual and budget focus)
- Ad-hoc email/phone/teams meeting support when requested by Delivery Partner
- Research Topic expert guidance – input from YEF staff, including knowledge leads, on the 3 focus topics of PAC research (Positive Activities, Presence in School, Trusted Adults)
- Live 'PAC Guide' guidance document with comprehensive descriptions and guidance of all core PAC delivery elements (co-produced with funders and young foundation)
- Delivery resources as needed including tech: phones and microphones, research transcription services
- Wider Funder network support opportunities, i.e. regional input from Co-op senior leaders, occasional learning sessions with #iwill network, local community Co-op Pioneer input, additional young person opportunities (joining funder boards, inputting into related funder projects etc)

Delivery Partner Staff Support

- Delivery Partners operate a range of staffing models to support young people. In general, there is a minimum of 2 FTE staff members for 10 employed young people.

Training

The Young Foundation and the Delivery Partners organise & facilitate training for the young people in paid roles (Peer Researchers and Social Action Leads). These include:

- 3 days residential for Peer Researchers and Social Action leads
- Monthly drop-in session for Peer Researchers and Social Action leads (optional)
- Monthly Peer Research training sessions (minimum 1 hr per month)
- Monthly Social Action training sessions (minimum 1 hr per month)
- Externally delivered training sessions for Changemakers per delivery partner (2 per Delivery Partner)

Mechanism of Change – leading to outcomes (short, medium and long-term)				
Who	Mechanisms of change	Short	Medium	Long
Peer Researchers / Social Action Leads / Changemakers	Feeling part of the solution.	Development of skills, confidence, independence.		Increased aspirations and value of their role in society.
	Having a chance to address barriers.			
	Achieving a change that feels relevant and important.			
	Engaging in activities that make a difference			
	Knowing the project and its objectives well.			
	Being employed or having opportunities to gain work experience.		Increased employability through enhanced CV and skill set.	
	Being offered training opportunities.			

	Developing skills of talking to community leaders and decision makers.	Development of positive social networks with other young people and adults.	Enhanced professional networks, i.e., decision makers.	
	Raising awareness about the project.			
	Improving confidence in meeting and interacting with new people.			
Research and social action participants	Being actively listened to.	Increased confidence to participate in activities in their community.		Increased empowerment to voice their views in this area
	Being given enough information for informed consent to participation.			
	Being engaged adaptably and flexibly.			
	Empowered to be vocal and find their voice.	Improvement of soft skills: social and communication skills, time management, goal setting		

	Peer to peer interactions, enabling empathetic engagement through close age and experiences.			
	Opportunities to express their views throughout delivery.			
	Actively reaching out to them for recruitment and participation		Effectively signposted to join other programmes, or join PAC in other roles. <i>This can then lead on to the short, medium and long-term goals seen above in the PR, SAL and Changemaker section.</i>	
Delivery partners, including staff	Staff and DPs are supported through the PAC network and funders to develop skills and knowledge around working with CYP and around addressing youth violence	Improvement of skills and knowledge of staff working with CYP, and understanding CYP's value as staff.	Empowerment of staff, with or without own lived experience of youth violence, to make change in this area.	Improvement of internal strategies/practices/structures involving young people more in the organisation.
				Accessing further funding through using learning from PAC.
	Staff and DPs attend the PAC network meetings and build relationships with other youth organisations		Development of stronger networks through PAC, to draw on in future.	
Communities	Making PAC and its activities visible.	Local communities are engaged in conversations around PAC issues, and have raised		

	Making young people's real life stories visible.	awareness of drivers of violence.		
	Opening local people's minds to young people's experiences.		Improvement of working relationships between community organisations and young people.	Community members' perceptions of YP is changed. Improved sense of community cohesion.
	Shifting stereotypes around young people.			
	Seeing the change happening locally.			
	People becoming aware of local safe places.			Communities feel safer.
	Changes in policy and practice to reduce the negative impact of young people's involvement in violence.			
The wider sector	Making PAC and its activities visible.		Changes in institutional cultures, e.g., VRUs, education sector, police, to be more inclusive of CYP's voices.	Local and national decision-makers and organisations listen to CYP, and see the value in youth-led projects, e.g., through more youth boards and steering groups.
	Making young people's real life stories visible.			
	Shifting stereotypes around young people.			

	Stakeholders engaging in PAC and connecting with each other.	Local services review ways of working together with new awareness on negative impact of young people's involvement in violence.	Improved partnership working and information-sharing between local services.	
	PAC activities raising decision-makers' awareness around youth safety and impact of youth violence			More accessible local services for all.

Long term impact

All the above outcomes, and through the suggested mechanisms of change, aim to lead to PAC's long-term impact to:

Understand and address the root causes driving young people's place-based experiences of violence.

Equip young people to achieve their potential whilst making positive community change.

This impact statement was co-designed with the involved stakeholders to reflect how PAC has evolved in its second round and its ultimate aspiration. As PAC objectives will continue to be evaluated throughout its life of 5 years and until 2028, the Theory of Change will function as a compass of change, for young people and communities, beyond the end of the programme.

Appendix c: PAC stakeholder survey

Renaissi-TSIP is working alongside the Youth Endowment Fund as the Peer Action Collective (PAC) monitoring and evaluation partner. We're interested in understanding your experience of meeting and/or working alongside young people from PAC to gain insights into how PAC is achieving social change in local areas.

You don't need any background knowledge of the PAC programme to complete this form and there are no right or wrong answers. This survey should take no longer than 5–10 minutes to complete.

How will the information be used?

We will summarise all the responses to the survey and share this in our evaluation report. Everything you share in this survey will stay anonymous. This means that nothing you tell us will be linked back to you as an individual. If you tell us something which makes us think you or someone else is at immediate risk of harm or suggests malpractice – then we might have to tell someone else to keep everyone safe.

The survey responses will be stored in secure filing systems and will only be accessed by Renaissi-TSIP employees directly involved in the project. All personal data will be destroyed two years after the end of the project (due to finish in 2028), unless you request your personal information to be destroyed before this point.

If you have any questions about the survey or evaluation, please talk to the person who told you about the survey, or you can contact Ellie Young (e.young@renaisi.com).

Consent

I give consent for the information provided below to be used in the PAC Monitoring & Evaluation. *

- Yes
- No

About you

1. What is your name?
(Open text)
2. What is your role and the name of your organisation?
(Open text)
3. Which region are you based in?
 - Wales
 - London
 - Midlands
 - Northeast
 - Lancashire
 - Southwest
 - Yorkshire & Humber

Engagement with the PAC programme

4. How often have you engaged with young people from the PAC programme?

- 1 time
 - 2–3 times
 - 3–4 times
 - 5 or more times
5. Please describe the type of engagement you've had with young people from the PAC programme (e.g. attending meetings and workshops, delivering activities together etc.)
(Open text)

Impact of working with young people

6. To what extent has meeting/working with young people influenced your perceptions of young people?

- Not at all
- A little
- Moderately
- Very much
- Extremely

6a. How so?

(Open text)

7. To what extent has meeting/working with young people influenced you to think differently about involving young people in decision-making processes?

- Not at all
- A little
- Moderately
- Very much
- Extremely

7a. How so?

(Open text)

8. What do you think are the opportunities & barriers that the Peer Action Collective (PAC) could face when influencing local policy and practice?
(Open text)

Appendix d: Peer researchers & social action leads – pre and post survey

Peer researchers & social action leads – pre-survey

About this survey

Why am I taking this survey?

These questions will help us understand the difference the Peer Action Collective (PAC) is making for young people who are taking part. Your answers will also help improve what PAC looks like in the future.

How will the information be used?

All responses will be summarised and shared with the organisations that support PAC. Everything you share will stay anonymous – nothing will be linked back to you individually.

What do I need to do?

This survey should take around 5–10 minutes. If you find any question difficult, you can skip it or come back later. You may also ask someone you trust to help you complete it.

Do I have a choice about taking the survey?

Yes. Taking part is voluntary. You can choose which questions to answer and can stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide not to complete the survey.

If you have any questions, please contact: Ellie Young (e.young@renaisi.com).

Organisations supporting PAC:

- **Funding partners:** Youth Endowment Fund, Co-op Group, #iwill Fund
- **National Partner:** The Young Foundation
- **Monitoring & Evaluation Partner:** Renaisi–TSIP

Section 1: Your Role in PAC

1. **Unique Survey Number**
(Ask the staff member who sent you the survey if you don't know this number.)
2. **What is your role in PAC?**
 - Peer Researcher
 - Social Action Lead
 - Both Peer Researcher & Social Action Lead
 - Undecided

Section 2: About You and Your Experience

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

3. I feel good about myself
 - Always
 - Sometimes
 - Hardly ever
 - Never
 - Don't know
4. I feel good about others in my life
 - Always
 - Sometimes
 - Hardly ever

- Never
- Don't know

5. I feel good about my future

- Always
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever
- Never
- Don't know

6. I believe there are opportunities in life for me (e.g. jobs, apprenticeships, college, university)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

7. I feel confident I have the skills I need to access the opportunities I want in life

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

8. I want to talk to people with the power to make changes (e.g. community leaders, police, teachers) about issues that are important to me

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

9. I feel confident talking to people in my local area about issues that are important to me

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

10. I feel confident talking to adults with decision-making power about issues that are important to me

- Strongly agree
- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

11. Before joining PAC, to what extent were you involved in activities to improve your local community?

- A great deal
- A fair amount
- Not very much
- None at all
- Don't know

Section 3: About you as a person

These questions will help us understand who is taking part in PAC. This will show whether the programme works differently for different groups of people. If you do not want to answer, you can skip.

12. **Age**

- Younger than 16
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- Older than 25

13. **Gender identity**

- Young woman/girl
- Young man/boy
- Non-binary person
- Unsure how to describe myself
- I would prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

14. **Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?**

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure
- I would prefer not to say

15. **Sexual orientation**

- Bisexual
- Gay or lesbian
- Straight/heterosexual
- Pansexual
- Asexual
- I don't know
- I would prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

16. **Ethnicity**

(Choose the option that best describes your ethnicity. If not listed, please specify under "Other.")

- White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- White – Irish
- White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background
- Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed – White and Black African
- Mixed – White and Asian
- Any other Mixed background
- Asian/Asian British – Indian
- Asian/Asian British – Pakistani
- Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi
- Asian/Asian British – Chinese
- Any other Asian background
- Black/Black British – African
- Black/Black British – Caribbean
- Any other Black background
- Arab
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

17. **Postcode**

(Please enter your postcode. This will help us understand the areas PAC is working in.)

18. **Occupation of your household's main earner when you were about 14**

- Modern professional/traditional professional (e.g. teacher, nurse, accountant, engineer, police sergeant, doctor)
- Senior/middle/junior manager or administrator (e.g. finance manager, retail manager, office manager, business owner)
- Clerical/intermediate (e.g. secretary, call centre agent, nursery nurse)
- Technical/craft (e.g. mechanic, plumber, electrician, train driver)
- Routine/semi-routine manual or service (e.g. postal worker, cleaner, labourer, sales assistant, bar staff)
- Long-term unemployed (more than 1 year)
- Small business owner (fewer than 25 employees)
- This question does not apply to me
- I don't know
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

19. Caring responsibilities

Are you currently or have you ever had caring responsibilities for someone else in your family?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure
- I would prefer not to say

20. Care experience

Are you currently, or have you ever been, in the care of people other than your birth parents?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure
- I would prefer not to say

21. Disability

Do you identify as disabled or as having a disability?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure
- I would prefer not to say

22. Health conditions lasting 12 months or more (Select all that apply)

- Deafness or partial hearing loss
- Blindness or partial sight loss
- Physical disability
- Mobility limitations
- Dexterity limitations
- Mental health condition
- Memory problems
- Neurodivergence (e.g. Autism, ADHD)
- Learning disability
- Learning difficulty (e.g. Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia)
- Long Covid
- Social or behavioural difficulty (e.g. associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder)
- None of the above
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify

Peer researchers & social action leads – post-survey

About this survey

Why am I taking this survey?

This survey is a follow-up to the one you completed when you first started your PAC role. It will help us understand the difference the Peer Action Collective (PAC) is making for young people and how we can improve the programme in the future.

How will the information be used?

All responses will be summarised and shared with the organisations that support PAC. Everything you share will remain anonymous – nothing will be linked back to you as an individual.

What do I need to do?

This survey should be completed after you have finished your Peer Researcher or Social Action Lead role. It should take no more than 5–10 minutes. If you find any question difficult, you can skip it or come back later. You can also ask someone you trust to help you complete it.

Do I have a choice about taking the survey?

Yes. Completing this survey is voluntary. You can choose which questions to answer and can stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide not to take part.

If you have any questions, please contact: Ellie Young (e.young@renaisi.com).

Organisations supporting PAC:

- **Funding Partners:** Youth Endowment Fund, Co-op Group, #iwill Fund
- **National Partner:** The Young Foundation
- **Monitoring & Evaluation Partner:** Renaisi–TSIP

Section 1: Your Role in PAC

1. Unique Survey Number

(Ask the staff member who sent you the survey if you don't know this number.)

2. What was your role in PAC?

- Peer Researcher
- Social Action Lead
- Both Peer Researcher & Social Action Lead
- Undecided

3. How many months have you been involved in PAC?

- Under 1 month
- 1 month
- 2 months
- 3 months
- 4 months
- 5 months
- 6 months
- 7 months
- 8 months
- 9 months
- 10 months
- 11 months
- 12 months

- Other (please specify)

4. On average, how many hours per week did you work on PAC?

- Under 1 hour
- 1 hour
- 2 hours
- 3 hours
- 4 hours
- 5 hours
- 6 hours
- 7 hours
- 7+ hours

5. Did you feel you had enough time to do your PAC work?

- I had more time than I needed
- I had a bit more time than I needed
- I had the right amount of time
- I could have used a bit more time
- I didn't have enough time

6. What is the primary reason for leaving your role?

- My PAC contract has ended
- I am starting full-time or part-time employment
- I am pursuing self-employment
- I am returning to further or higher education
- To help with my workload and stress
- I didn't feel supported in my role
- I am relocating away from the area
- A reason related to my physical/mental health
- A reason related to my family
- Other (please specify)

7. What are you planning to do after PAC?

(Open-text response)

Section 2: About Your Experience

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

8. I feel good about myself

- Always
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever
- Never
- Don't know

9. I feel good about others in my life

- Always
- Sometimes

- Hardly ever
- Never
- Don't know

10. I feel good about my future

- Always
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever
- Never
- Don't know

11. I believe there are opportunities in life for me (e.g. jobs, apprenticeships, college, university)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

12. I feel confident I have the skills I need to access the opportunities I want in life

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

13. The skills I developed through PAC will help me in my future career and/or education

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

14. I want to talk to people with the power to make changes about issues that are important to me (e.g. community leaders, police, teachers)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

15. I feel confident talking to people in my local area about issues that are important to me

- Strongly agree

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

16. I feel confident talking to adults with decision-making power about issues that are important to me

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

17. To what extent do you plan to stay involved in activities that improve your local community after your time with PAC?

- A great deal
- A fair amount
- Not very much
- None at all
- Don't know

Section 3: About You as a Person

We ask some questions about you to understand who is taking part in PAC. This will help us see if the experience works differently for different groups. You do not have to answer any question you don't feel comfortable with.

18. How would you describe your race or ethnicity?

(Choose the option that best describes you. If not listed, please specify under "Other.")

- White – English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- White – Irish
- White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background
- Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed – White and Black African
- Mixed – White and Asian
- Any other Mixed background
- Asian/Asian British – Indian
- Asian/Asian British – Pakistani
- Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi
- Asian/Asian British – Chinese
- Any other Asian background
- Black/Black British – African
- Black/Black British – Caribbean
- Any other Black background
- Arab
- Prefer not to say