Giving Social Action a Voice:
Reframing Communication as Social Action

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FOREWORD

Communication is at the heart of what makes us human; the way we communicate with each other and the world around us often determines our feelings about ourselves and our place within society. Feeling valued, knowing you have been heard, is fundamental to the way you feel about yourself.

It feels like the world around us has created all sorts of structures and constructs in which communication can happen. You cannot not communicate. Everyone has something to say, but not everyone has the opportunity. At Fixers we set out to create new opportunities by dismantling the structures which society has created.

Social action is a key part of this journey.

However, the social action policy agenda feels focused on developing communication skills, such as the confidence to speak in public or use digital tools and is creating more structures to measure the traits associated with character and resilience. What happens when you shift the focus to enabling young people to find their voice and go on a creative journey, working within their own frameworks of meaning and trusting in them to be expert in their own experience? Should we be asking ourselves what happens if you take away the need to meet criteria and operate within the structures that society has created? Are we addressing the right issues?

We work with young people who often feel that their voice is overshadowed. They are not always necessarily equipped with the experience to engage with institutional structures. Social action schemes with an underpinning theory of change can hinder individual voices and the value of their narrative; voices can even be silenced.

This study makes, in our view, a critical contribution to the social action agenda in ensuring that the transformative nature of an individual experiencing their voice as 'value' remains at the forefront of their social action.

Through Fixers' unique model young people are able to use their individual experiences as a source of valid and valuable contributions to society. They set the agenda for change within their own framework of meaning and decide on what and how to deliver their personal narrative.

The model works with everyone and is particularly powerful with marginalised young people. The benefits of the approach reach across communities, the public purse, and individuals, generating:

1. community social capital; strengthening relationships within groups, improving connections across local organisations and connecting young people with individuals in positions of power; empathy creates more equitable relationships;
2. an almost six-fold return for every £1 invested(£5.89) in social and economic benefits;
3. 'soft' or non-cognitive skills which enhance employability.

Crucial to these findings is the role of institutional support and for those institutions to lessen their prescriptive grasp on social action, and instead value young people's voices and act as enablers to support them to set their own social action narratives, based on personal experience. This study also suggests that a voice as value approach has the potential to reinvigorate youth social action programme development to form part of a broader strategy that brings together institutions and young people in dialogue to address their social, civic, and personal needs. This is about genuinely putting young people in the lead.

Talking about voice as value, grasping it and working to enable it has many surprising benefits. It brings out the best in people and improves their life chances. It helps them to become certain of their identity and place and enables them to know who they are and the value they have to others. We look forward to engaging a wide range of institutions in a discussion about the potential of reframing communication as social action, as do the young people we work with.

Finally we would like to acknowledge the support of the Communities and Culture Network+ in providing the funding to be able to complete this paper. A thank you as well to Gemma and Lee for this report and to the Lottery Fund and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for their support of the Fixers programme.

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Fixers is a project of the Public Service Broadcasting Trust, leading the way in innovative and meaningful engagement with young people.

To date, there have been more than 18,000 young people aged 16 to 25 who have become Fixers across every postcode of the UK.

Fixers website

www.fixers.org.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent times the social action agenda has started to recognise young people's role as active citizens with the potential to drive social change in a constrained fiscal climate. This has been recognised in Government supported initiatives such as Step Up to Serve's #iwill campaign and the National Citizen Service (NCS). While these programmes offer a 'double benefit' both to individuals and wider society, the programmes' focus on skills development can mean that social action becomes a set of non-discursive, practical activities, which can leave the value of young people's voices side-lined.

This position paper was designed to contribute to the debate on youth social action by reframing communication about social issues as a transformational form of social action in itself. By extending the current perception of social action beyond its dominant definition, new priorities for the government's social action agenda are proposed. The focus is re-positioned towards the importance of helping young people to communicate effectively about issues important to them.

A mixed method approach was adopted: 100 young people were surveyed who had completed a project with Fixers.[1] Fixers was also used as the best practice example supplemented by findings from a previous independent evaluation of their activities.

The findings revealed that a voice as value approach, as adopted by Fixers, has the potential to reinvigorate youth social action by focusing on the potential for all young people to participate effectively in inspiring, formulating and helping to deliver social change, and particularly marginalised young people who are currently underrepresented in traditional social action programmes. The findings also highlight that policy change must start with institutional recognition of the importance of communication as a means of transformation, and institutional support for the meaningful development and expression of voice by young people.

To be adopted more widely however, a voice as value approach requires a policy commitment to evidence-based interventions. In order to achieve this, the following recommendations are made to encourage policymakers to:

1. acknowledge the powerful transformative role that communication can play in generating social change when properly facilitated and valued;
2. value the experiences of young people; recognising them as sources of expertise and insight for social change;
3. adopt a long-term strategy for youth social action that empowers young people to provide input into agendas for social change, rather than prescribing the environment or strategies for change;
4. embed diversity and inclusivity in youth social action so that the transformative potential of voice as value is available to as wide a group of people as possible.

[1] Fixers supports young people aged 16-25 to get their voices heard and valued on issues which are important to them. www.fixers.org.uk.

Giving Social Action a Voice: Reframing Communication as Social Action

1.0 Introduction

Over the past five years, the youth social action agenda has brought about a subtle shift in discussions about young people, away from seeing them as silent individuals on the receiving end of policy and towards greater emphasis of their role as active citizens. This shift has emerged in the context of austerity and increasing fiscal discipline: in 2010 the Coalition Government adopted a fiscal plan to reduce the national deficit, moving away from higher tax receipts, public sector borrowing for investment, and social security support towards public spending cuts and welfare reform. In this 'new age' of austerity, civil society needs to be strong linked with a political agenda to form a 'Big Society' by promoting social action (Slay & Penny, 2013).

While the notion of the 'Big Society' has dissipated, the social action agenda remains a government priority. Critical to its success is the Government's plan to mobilise over 60 per cent of young people[2] from all backgrounds to take part in high quality social action by 2020 (Birdwell, Scott & Reynolds, 2015). Step Up to Serve's #iwill campaign, the National Citizen Service (NCS) and the work of organisations aligned to Generation Change - a collective of social action enablers - are the designated vehicles to achieve this policy goal. In promoting the role of young people in civil society, the UK Government has recognised the importance of social action not only as a way of ensuring young people make a societal contribution, but also as a tool which provides the essential skills and abilities they need to become active citizens. Evaluation of programmes like the NCS and Step Up to Serve shows that they offer a 'double benefit': benefits to the individual in terms of their personal wellbeing and skills development, and benefit to society through tackling social issues (Birdwell, Scott & Reynolds, 2015). Moreover, The Big Lottery Fund has described its six year strategy as 'developing the skills of individuals and communities to take the lead in civil society, giving momentum to people, communities and practitioners with new approaches to thorny problems.' Their putting 'people in the lead' concept allows people in communities to be given the equipment and money they need to seize opportunities for themselves.

Particular emphasis has been placed on the development of employability skills and the sense of community cohesion, confidence and wellbeing that emerges when working in the service of others. To achieve these outcomes, government programmes can become prescriptive. For example, the #iwill campaign prioritises social action as 'practical action in the service of others that creates positive change', (see http://www.iwill.org.uk/about-us/), alongside a number of principles for the design of youth social action, namely: it has to be challenging, led by young people themselves, have a positive and measurable impact on society, include reflection, enable progression towards other opportunities, and be embedded across young people's life cycle (Birdwell, Scott & Reynolds, 2015).

These benefits and principles are important, but the policy logics that underpin them tend to construct social action as a means to an end for young people and prompt a search for outcomes that can be clearly identified and quantified. Such benefits also define social action as a non-discursive, practical activity; communication work is designed to publicise the 'action' so that others may be inspired to do the same. For example, the #iwill campaign provides a wide range of tools, templates and digital channels for participants to use in their communication efforts (see http://www.iwill.org.uk/resources/communications/).

[2] 12 per cent of the population of the UK comprises young people aged 16-24, which equates to around 7.4 million young people (ONS, 2014).

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the debate on youth social action by reframing communication about social issues as a transformational form of social action in itself, emphasising its intrinsic value as a locus of social change and means of personal development. By extending the current perception of social action beyond its dominant definition as a set of non-discursive, practical activities, we propose new priorities for the government's social action agenda focused on the importance of helping young people to communicate effectively about issues they think are important. In a world run by adults who do not always value the perspectives of young people, having the confidence, skills and self-esteem to make one's voice heard is essential, particularly for marginalised groups who are under-represented in existing social action programmes (Ipsos Mori, 2014). Using the Fixers model of engagement with young people as a case study, we demonstrate the parameters and cost-effectiveness of communicative social action, and highlight the benefits it can offer at a time when Government funding for public services and associated social policies is significantly constrained.

Context: The distribution and benefits of youth social action

The stereotype of a young person as a pleasure-seeking, self-interested individual is easily countered by the reality that many young people take on significant responsibilities as carers (an estimated 700,000 act as carers, according to Young Carers (2015), young leaders and community volunteers. Through such roles, and as they emerge into adulthood, they start to engage with a wide variety of individuals, authority figures and groups, in the context of formal and informal networks such as the family, peer group, schools, the police and judicial systems, health services and the labour market (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). At the same time, their lives can become less predictable, particularly in the transition to work. Current labour market statistics suggest that 653,000 young people are currently unemployed in the UK, a rate of 14.2 per cent (Dar, 2015), while 848,000 16-24 year olds are classified as NEETS (not currently in education, employment or training) (Delebarre, 2015). For those who are working, their situation is often precarious, typified by low paid, service sector work, and temporary, part-time and zero hour contracts (McKenna, 2015). The cost of such poor outcomes for young people is significant: recent calculations suggest that 'youth unemployment costs the exchequer £8.1 billion a year and the cost of crime is an additional £1 billion each year' (Slay & Penny, 2013: 21).

Youth social action takes place in this context, providing a wide range of benefits for both young people and society. Civic participation can heal neighbourhoods, especially where the wellbeing of young people has declined (Unicef, 2007), and it can address the impact of austerity, mitigating the effect of reduced social protections, public sector cuts to young people's services, and deepening inequalities and social discord (Hughes, Cooper, Gormally, & Rippingdale, 2014; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Youth social action programmes can also support young people into employment by developing employability skills and broadening their networks (Birdwell, Scott & Reynolds, 2015): a recent survey of 10-20 year olds taking part in youth social action in the UK found that one in five (21 per cent) had developed such new skills (Ipsos Mori, 2014). Some evidence also points to social action programmes prompting young people to consider careers where skill gaps exist in industries such as health and social care (Birdwell, Scott & Reynolds, 2015). This alleviates pressure on training and education budgets and reduces the reliance on formal or paid work experience for skills development, which may not be forthcoming in the context of austerity. Finally, there are strong correlations between social action and character attributes including empathy, problem solving, cooperation, grit and resilience, as well as a sense of community (Birdwell, Scott & Reynolds, 2015; Youth United, 2015).

These kinds of benefits are invaluable to young people in uncertain social and economic environments, but they are not evenly distributed. While 40% of 10-20 year olds in the UK participated in social action in 2014, younger age groups (10-15 year olds), females, more affluent families, urban residents, young people with a religious affiliation, and those in full-time education are all over-represented (Ipsos MORI, 2014: 4). Yet, faced with general societal pressure to achieve in a near saturated labour market, the ability to actively participate and bounce back from disappointment are, arguably, required life-tools for all young people. Research has found that non-cognitions (emotional and personality traits), of the kind developed through social action, are just as important as cognitions (numeracy and literacy) in a child's development to ensure resilience (Margo & Sodha, 2007). This has been recognised in the inclusion of character and resilience in the Minister for Children's portfolio (*Children & Young People Now*, 2015) as tools that provide young people with the ability and determination to succeed in education, training and in the workplace (Birdwell, Scott & Reynolds, 2015). However, for marginalised groups, who are faced with the most precarious living conditions and are in greatest need of such skills and abilities, access to social action and its attendant benefits appears to be compromised.

Communication as social action: The importance of valuing 'Voice'

One of the less visible, but most important benefits of social action is the act of giving young people an opportunity to have their voice heard in a society which has tended to view young people as 'outcasts', living 'wasted lives' (Hughes et al, 2014; Bauman, 2004). Through social action projects, young people have opportunities to communicate about events that they are involved with, simultaneously demonstrating their engagement and value to society, the media and policymakers. However, such communication tends to be focused on the action that is being taken to help other people, rather than on the lives or identities of the young people themselves. Even though being the focus of publicity can feel empowering, the context of the communication means that a young person's experiences and personal narrative can be overlooked. Moreover, young people who have not learned the ability to communicate in ways that society values may be overlooked by virtue of the stereotypes associated with their voice and identity (Coleman, 2013; Bourdieu, 1991). Thus, while young people may feature in the media and in policy discussions, their role remains instrumental: they illustrate the potential for young people to contribute to society, or achieve policy objectives. Their views on how society might change for the better are far less valued.

In fact, youth voice is most empowering when it is fostered in an environment created by young people themselves: research shows that the more young people actively participate in social action designed by them using their tools of communication, the more they want to engage and take charge of their own well-being (Coleman & Hagell, 2015). However, autonomy in the construction of social action is usually elusive, because few young people have sufficient knowledge of the institutional systems, processes and networks that structure engagement. For example, access to policymakers requires the ability to liaise with gatekeepers such as administrative staff in local and national government; initiating community change requires knowledge of and access to community leaders; and generating media coverage requires knowledge of how media institutions and their staff work. Therefore, while many young people are involved in citizenship activities, their role does not allow them to set the agenda. Instead, existing decision makers tend to construct the environment for young people's engagement. In the UK's NCS programme, for example, young people take part in a programme of pre-defined activities that culminate in a social project focused on their community. However, the emphasis is on making connections among the group of young people they work with, rather than being invited to dialogue with decision makers about society and how it is governed, based on their own experience (see http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/about-ncs).

These characteristics of communication in the context of social action can often leave young people feeling that their voice, while heard, was not listened to or valued, and may be one reason why research has repeatedly shown that even where they do participate in dialogue and debate, young people invariably feel ignored, misrepresented or neglected by policymakers, and are not convinced that their contributions are taken seriously (Couldry et al, 2007; LSE Enterprise, 2013, Coleman, 2008; Cammaerts et al., 2016). In other words, the mere act of speaking is insufficient for generating any genuine sense of empowerment among young people – those in power must also actively listen to and engage with the contributions they make (Bickford, 1996; Habermas, 1996).

The disconnect between social action and policy making may be overcome by creating an environment that is characterised by 'voice as value' (Couldry, 2010: 2) where young people's unique perspectives and narrations of the world are valued in the social and political systems that structure their lives. The principles of 'voice as value' recognise that the need to narrate the world from our own perspective, and the desire for the recognition that comes from societal acceptance of such narrations, are both part of what makes us human (Honneth, 1996; Couldry, 2010). If young people's narrations of the world around them are met by a genuine desire to listen on the part of those in power, then a reflexive dialogue may emerge about the way society is organised (Bickford, 1997). In the process, young people can develop the self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect that come from being recognised as a valued individual and citizen, with a genuine contribution to make to society (Honneth, 1996).

It is important to note that enacting voice is a risky business for the speaker, because it involves the representation of lived, embodied experience in order to prompt a reflexive dialogue with an audience about the way society is organised. While this kind of self-representation is inherently political, a means of delivering 'authentic accounts of individual 'ordinary people' in the context of power-laden social relations' (Thumim, 2012: 4), it also inheres the possibility of rejection because of the social hierarchies associated with different voices and identities that influence whose narratives are perceived as socially valuable (Coleman, 2013). The human drive to narrate notwithstanding, this may prompt a cautious approach among young people to communicating their ideas about how society could or should change, particularly if they come from marginalised groups. Consequently, they may sacrifice the opportunity to speak and be heard, and be left unable to realise benefits that result from such action.

The principles of voice as value reveal the weakness in most institutionalised programmes for youth social action; if we ask young people to engage in social action and thereby recognise their status as citizens, we must also value their perspective on society rather than asking them to accept existing norms, regardless of their experience. In this sense, social action is a two-way street, connecting policy makers and their priorities with young people and their desire for change. For this reason, we argue that policy makers should pay closer attention to fostering voice among young people in the UK, and supporting institutions to value the voices of young people such that there is 'a connection from [their] particular actions to a wider frame of political relevance' (Couldry, 2010: 144). Enacting voice can generate the confidence, self-esteem and self-respect that young people need if they are to become active members of society, but only as long as their voices are valued by institutions in their communities and across society as a whole.

Policy interventions are required because 'voice as value' needs key decision makers (head teachers, councillors, MPs for example) to be open to complex relationships with young people, characterised by genuine dialogue, mutual recognition, and sharing power. In traditional social action programmes, young people engage in activities or areas of action already prescribed by organisations for whom structuring activities, determining objectives and anticipating outcomes is essential for demonstrating accountability to funders. Under these conditions young people's voices

are constrained because the parameters for engagement are set by the institutionalised programme. The complex and rich relationships that characterise environments where young people's voices are genuinely valued, demand more organic conditions to grow young people's participation. If fostered carefully, tangible benefits can emerge: young people's relative freedom from institutional constraints, their appetite for new experiences, and their desire for new forms of knowledge mean that they share innovative insights and perspectives that can make the design and delivery of public services more effective.

Translating voice as value into practice: Fixers

The idea of voice as value is at the heart of Fixers' work with young people. Fixers is the public-facing brand of the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT). Through Fixers, PSBT supports young people (aged 16-25) to communicate about social issues that they want to change. The young people use their own experience to explain to their chosen audience why change is necessary. The campaigns they produce range from digital resources such as websites and short films, to posters and public events, and address a wide range of issues, from female genital mutilation and zero-hour contracts, to eating disorders and bullying.

Four distinctive features set Fixers apart from traditional social action programmes.

1. Fixers' flexible structure allows staff to go to where the young people live their lives. This helps to develop an open dialogue in a safe setting of their choosing, which encourages the relationship to grow on their terms.
2. Fixers is focused on opening up the possibility of voice to as many young people as possible, regardless of the inequalities they face, and ensures equality of resources on the ground. Recruitment of young people takes place not only in schools and universities, but also through grassroots community projects, pupil referral units, housing associations, homeless hostels, patient liaison boards, and by working closely with local authority key workers (Fixers are active in 98 per cent of local authority areas across the UK).
3. The work of Fixers transcends policy spheres and allows young people to set the agenda for change. No conditions are attached to the content or the structure of the campaign within the realms of legality. The only caveat is that young people make a difference to at least one other person as a result of their campaign.
4. Fixers regards the individual experiences of young people as a source of valid and valuable contributions to society. Their status as experts is based on their own unique experience in a particular area. They are not expected to speak on behalf of other young people, because everyone's experience is unique.
5. Fixers enable young people to create high quality communication tools. These tangible project outputs (animation, app, video or film, book, website, educational resource, poster) provide young people with credible means to engage with the structures and institutions surrounding them.

These principles produce Fixers' unique model. First, the diversity of Fixers participants is a direct result of the proactive and broad-based approach to recruitment aimed at overcoming common barriers to participation for marginalised groups. An analysis of a sample of fixers (n=2198) showed that over a third (31%) were from marginalised backgrounds, including the homeless, those in local authority care, young offenders, young carers, and those with a history of abuse. This diversity means the possibility of voice is available to a much more inclusive group of people than is the case for more traditional forms of social action.

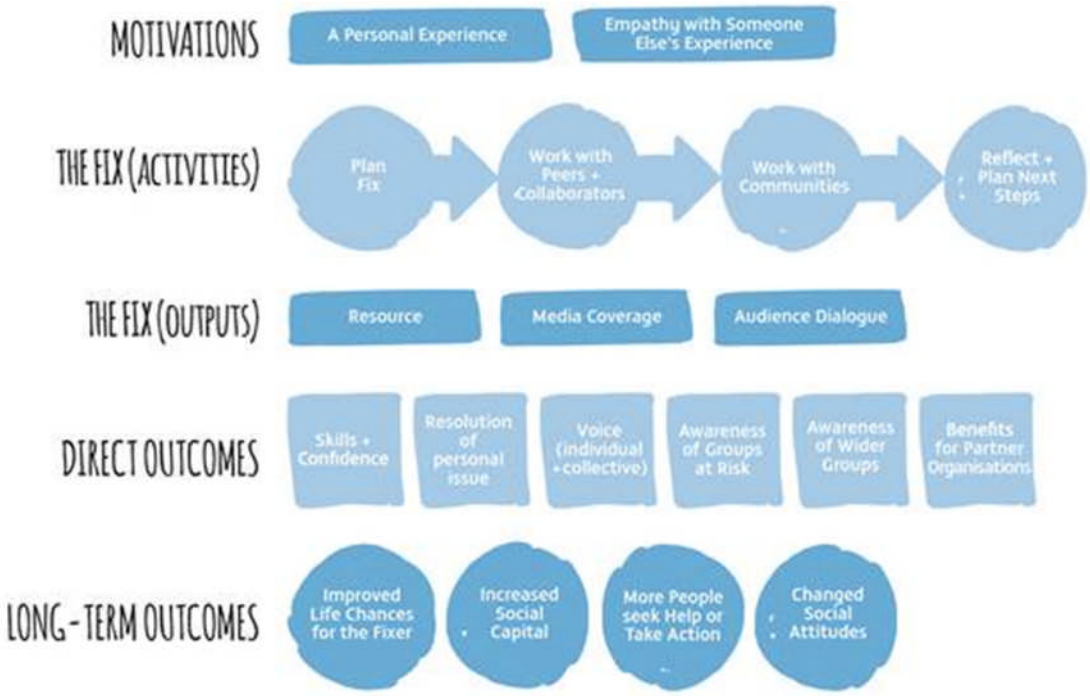
Second, and unlike traditional programmes, the fact that young people define the issue they want to address, how they want to address it, and who they want to communicate with, means that there is no formalised programme of social action or prescribed set of communication tools, objectives, and outcomes. Instead, support is provided for young people to develop their ideas, find an appropriate channel of communication, create the content for their campaign, decide on appropriate audiences and meet those audiences. The emphasis is on giving guidance rather than imposing solutions, and preserving the voice of the young person throughout the process.

Third, the Fixers process allows young people to build the skills associated with effective voice over time. It is unrealistic to expect young people to be able to speak powerfully and publicly about social issues and the potential for social change without first enabling them to explore their own ideas and convictions in a safe environment. With Fixers, young people engage in a layered approach to the development of voice, which begins with meeting their young person's coordinator several times to develop the narrative for their campaign. They then meet Fixers' creative team to translate that narrative into campaign content. These meetings take place over several months during which time they become confident and clear about their campaign messages. Because Fixers recognises their personal narratives as important and potentially transformational, the young people develop self-confidence and self-respect, and become more confident in the power of their own voice. The final layer of development is in the engagement with Fixers' online communication team and with the campaign launch. At this point, the campaign content provides a platform through which young people can articulate their narrative confidently to their chosen audiences. The face to face and digital interactions that their campaign prompts further reinforces the value attached to their voice, and increases the self-esteem they feel as members of society (Edwards, 2015).

Finally, Fixers campaigns are open-ended insofar as they depend on the young person's ongoing desire to continue speaking and driving change forward. While Fixers formal involvement stops after the campaign launch, many young people build on the connections they make and flourish as agents of change in their communities and beyond.

A comprehensive independent evaluation of fixers (Firetail, 2015) formulated a framework which depicts the impact of Fixers' work. Figure 1 illustrates the process that participants go through, from motivation to engage, through campaign development, to direct and long-term outcomes.

Figure 1: Fixers' impact framework



The young people that Fixers supports respond very positively to the Fixers approach (see appendix 1). They feel positive about audience responses to their campaign[3] because people understand their intended message and take it seriously. Both face-to-face feedback from the launches and online feedback are important. The autonomy they enjoy in developing their messages, content and audiences is important to their positive experience of developing voice and owning of their narrative through the campaign process. Over 80%[4] said the success of Fixers campaigns can be attributed not only to the approach that the organisation takes - investing trust and autonomy in young people - but also, crucially, to the personal conviction that underpins the campaigns. Young people draw on their own, often difficult life experiences to create their message, and this makes them passionate about helping others take action to avoid similar situations. Through their experience with Fixers, they come to recognise the potential for their voice to be a tool through which change can happen, and in this sense they use communication as a form of social action in and of itself. This is how young people start to feel their voices are valued.

The Fixers method, therefore, enables the 'voice as value' approach to flourish where young people's unique perspectives and narration of the world is valued in the social and political systems that structure their lives (Couldry, 2010; Edwards, 2015).

[3] See appendix 1 Q5, figure 6.
[4] See appendix 1 Q7, figure 8.

The different dimensions of the transformative 'voice as value' process experienced by young people undertaking a fixer project can be summarised as follows:

Before experiencing voice as value	**After experiencing voice as value**
Isolation *Feeling of being alone, poorly understood, remaining at home rather than going out*	Connection *Finding others who relate to or understand their experience; developing awareness and understanding of oneself and others; being heard and responded to*
Child / Dependence *Not trusted; being guided by others; having little agency*	Adult / Independence *Being recognized as expert and authoritative; capable of action; taking risks*
Inaction *Passive coping strategies; lacking confidence to change situations*	Action *Taking concrete steps towards change; experiencing a change in oneself and acting upon it*
Edge *Experience life at the margins of society; being judged as inferior / not 'normal'; being ignored*	Centre *Taking centre stage (sometimes literally); being the focus of positive attention; being a source of guidance and expertise*
Uncertainty *Of one's place in society; of others' opinions and judgments; of one's own identity; of the value of one's own experience to society*	Certainty *Of one's place in society; of others' opinions and judgments; of one's own identity; of the value of one's own experience to society*
Controlled *By a stigmatized situation; by the discourses associated with their situation; lacking options for change*	In control *Separating self-identity from the situation; exerting agency and choice; discovering and creating options for change*

The benefits of valuing voice

A series of analyses have identified three main categories of benefits associated with the Fixers approach: benefits to communities, benefits to the public purse, and benefits to participants.

A. Benefits to communities

The wide range of people involved in Fixers projects means that the model is effective in generating community social capital (Firetail, 2014). This includes 'bonding' social capital, strengthening the connections within groups, such as family members or members of the same ethnic group, as well as 'bridging' social capital, to improve connections across groups, for example, between community organisations, schools, business associations, and local councillors. In addition, the model helps develop 'linking' social capital (Portes, 1998) by connecting young people with individuals in positions of power (policy makers, teachers, councillors, MPs) and facilitating support for their cause from formal institutions. The potential for campaigns to contribute to improved community cohesion is reflected in the responses to a November 2015 survey of participants. Respondents felt their campaigns had enabled them to reflect more on their own and others' lives: they agreed or strongly agreed that the campaign helped them better understand others' lives (78%) and also learnt more about how other people saw them (66%).[5]

[5] See appendix 1 Q10, figure 11.

Evidence drawn from the same survey data highlights that 85 per cent of participants continue to communicate about their fix following the completion of the campaign, taking up new opportunities as they arise to work with the communities they seek to benefit. Thirty-two per cent of participants also reported that they remain engaged with the institutions they met through the fix to help them improve their practices, indicating a direct benefit for campaign partners of having the young people involved in their organisations during and after the campaign itself. In addition, over a third (34%)[6] of participants said that they were actively engaged in trying to solve a different community problem, following their original Fixers project. Thus, there are a number of unintended community benefits when young people take part in a Fixers campaign that arise from the relationships that participants start to build with new community organisations, institutions, and decision makers.

B. Benefits to the public purse

The approach adopted by Fixers to youth social action has the potential to deliver a significant return on investment. A cost-benefit analysis of 100 fixer projects carried out in November 2015 showed that for every £1 invested in a fixer campaign an almost six-fold return (£5.81) in social and economic benefits was generated by the project. These savings were comprised of a) 59 per cent of Fixers participants reporting that their fixer project helped them into education, employment or training, representing a potential cost saving to the Exchequer by reduced reliance on Job Seekers Allowance; b) 47 per cent of Fixers participants said they were in regular volunteering roles equivalent to a youth worker, making a potential cost saving to the Exchequer in terms of paying the average wage, per annum, of a youth worker engaged in public sector delivery; and c) 12 per cent of Fixers participants believed that their project had helped them to secure a place at university, making a potential gain to the UK economy of increased tax receipts for graduates compared to non-graduate earners.[7] It is important to note that the cost-benefit analysis is a work in progress and ongoing work to quantify community benefits is still required. At present the framework for attributing cost savings is limited largely to the skills agenda, which explains why community benefits are more difficult to ascertain.

C. Benefits to the participants

Finally, the Fixers approach, which emphasises valuing the voices of young people, delivers a wide range of benefits to the participants themselves (Firetail, 2014; see also appendix 1).

These benefits include helping them overcome a difficult personal issue by providing them with the emotional skills to face the issue and potentially 'find closure'; improved relationships with families and peer groups; and a greater sense of community cohesion. Young people develop confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, alongside new skills including communication skills, project planning, creative skills, media skills and networking (Firetail, 2014).

Communication skills include the ability to speak publicly, communicate with new people, and discuss difficult issues with institutions and senior figures in authority (e.g. the police, politicians). Such skills are essential 'soft' or non-cognitive skills that enhance employability.

[6] See appendix 1 Q11, figure 12.
[7] See appendix 1 Q13, figures 13, 14, and 15 and appendix 2 for the social return on investment framework.

Conclusions and recommendations

Traditional forms of youth social action provide a prescriptive set of tools and digital channels for young people to use in their communities. However, they fail to acknowledge the value of young people's experiences and narratives about the world, or their views on how society might be changed for the better. They tend to attract young people from a limited range of relatively privileged backgrounds, neglecting those who have most to say about the experience of being marginalised, and what needs to be done to improve their own and others' lives. Finally, they neglect the importance of communication itself as a locus of transformational change, particularly in a context where voice is valued. This paper has set out a missing link in this approach by suggesting that traditional social action treats communication as something that accompanies prescriptive tools; thus, devaluing its importance as a means in itself for social change. Therefore, in its current form traditional social action is unlikely to reach its full potential and be effective in the long-term to encourage young people, particularly those from marginalised groups, to be the agents of social change that the Government's current policy agenda aspires to.

A voice as value approach has the potential to reinvigorate youth social action by focusing on the potential for all young people to participate effectively in inspiring, formulating and helping to deliver social change, and particularly marginalised young people who are currently underrepresented in traditional social action programmes. Policy change must start with institutional recognition of the importance of communication as a means of transformation, and institutional support for the meaningful development and expression of voice by young people. Adopting a voice as value approach, policy and social action programme development would be part of a broader strategy which values young people's voices by entering into a dialogue that includes them as agents of change in the design and delivery of services in environments they help to create. Policymakers would prioritise extending their current programmes to include communication as a locus of social change and personal development.

Fixers' approach, which has voice as value at its heart, is already successful in its ability to work collaboratively with young people, valuing their experiences and narratives in order to address their social, civic and personal needs. Young people are able to set the agenda, deciding on what to communicate, how to communicate, and to whom they communicate. This inclusive approach, led by young people, positions them in conversations with policymakers and practitioners so they become their own agents to drive forward social change.

To be adopted more widely however, a voice as value approach requires a policy commitment to evidence-based interventions, challenging perceptions and professional approaches, and learning from best practice. In order to achieve this, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendation 1: Provide funding for communication-driven social action

Policy on youth social action should acknowledge the powerful transformative role that communication can play in generating social change when properly facilitated and valued, and include communication-driven projects in the types of youth social action funded by the Exchequer. This should involve cross-departmental funding commitments from areas including, but not exclusive to, Departments of Health and Education, Communities and Local Government, Justice, the Cabinet and Home Offices.

Recommendation 2: Value the experiences of young people

Policy should support the principles associated with voice as value. These comprise:

1. Grounding youth social action programmes in the realities of young people's lives;
2. Valuing young people's narrations of their experience as sources of expertise and insight for social change;
3. Requiring institutions working with young people to engage in open and not institutionally based dialogue that facilitates the integration of young people's perspectives into governance systems and processes.

Recommendation 3: Value voice

Policymakers should adopt a long-term strategy for youth social action that prioritises a voice as value approach. This means:

1. Empowering young people to provide input into agendas for social change, rather than prescribing the environment or strategies for change;
2. Guiding and supporting young people as they engage with organisations and institutions as part of their expression of voice;
3. Providing support for community organisations to include young people in their activities, for example, by funding training, placements and secondments.

Recommendation 4: Embed diversity and inclusivity

Policy must embed diversity and inclusivity in youth social action so that the transformative potential of voice as value is available to as wide a group of people as possible. This means:

1. Engaging effectively in areas of multiple deprivation to support more young people from less affluent backgrounds to develop their voice and gain recognition in their communities;
2. Moving beyond the traditional confines of educational institutions as the recruiting ground for young people and focus on other places where young people who experience multiple exclusion issues are found, such as grassroots community projects, pupil referral units, housing associations, and community organisations;
3. Employing experienced project workers as leaders of social action initiatives, who already have strong working relationships in marginalised communities;
4. Engaging young people from marginalised groups to set the agenda for change by developing social action projects that are meaningful to them in the context of their daily lives.

Appendix 1: Survey Findings, November 2015

The survey took place between November and December 2015 and was overseen and conducted by Fixers' Policy and Research Lead, Dr Gemma McKenna. The survey sample was collated using Fixers' internal database of 18,000 young people, aged 16-25 and registered as participants. An initial sample was randomly selected from the database and then purposively segmented to 266 young people who had completed a project in the last 6 months, 18 months and 3 years. The interviewers worked through the sample frame by geographical area to ensure representation across the UK. The young people were contacted by telephone and asked to take part in the survey. 95 took part in the survey via telephone and 5 by email following a telephone conversation about the project. 100 young people in total were interviewed.

In the following summary, all graphs represent a sample size of n=100 unless otherwise indicated.

Age and sex

Participants involved in the survey had a mean age of 17 at the time of project registration. 60 per cent of the survey population were female and 40 per cent were male.

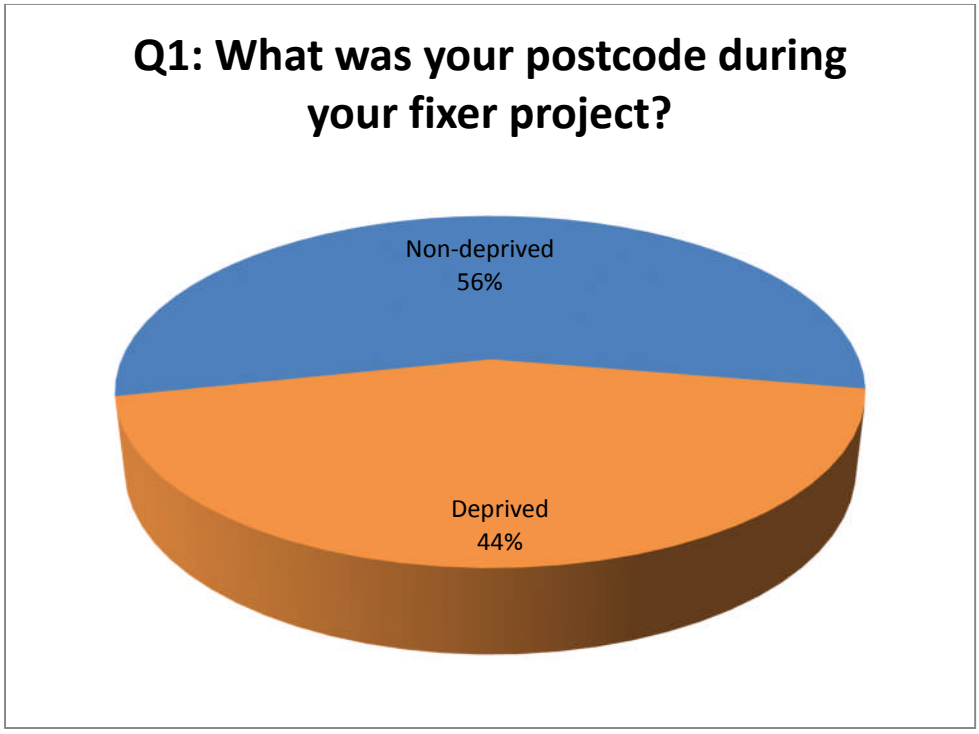
Q1. Inclusivity

Respondents were asked to provide the postcode of where they lived for the longest period of time during their fixer project. The postcodes were individually entered into each UK country deprivation mapper tool. In each tool seven domains of deprivation are combined to produce an overall index of Multiple Deprivation. The tools vary slightly in how the domains are measured, however, generally the deprivation domains include income; access to public services; education; housing; crime; employment; and health.[8]

Measured on the results of the participants surveyed (n=100) nearly half (44%) were from the top 20 per cent of areas of multiple deprivation across the UK (figure 2).

[8] Deprivation domains for **England**: income; employment; health; education, skills, and training; barriers to housing and services; crime; and living environment. Tool: http://apps.opendatacommunities.org/showcase/deprivation Deprivation domains for **Northern Ireland**: income; employment, health and disability; education, skills and training; proximity to services; living environment; crime and disorder. Tool: http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/InteractiveMaps/Deprivation/Deprivation%202010/LGD_Deprivation_Map/atlas.html Deprivation domains for **Scotland**: access (to public services); income; education; housing; crime; employment; health. Tool: http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD/SIMDPostcodeLookup/ScotlandPostcodeLookup Deprivation domains for **Wales**: income; employment; health; education; access to services; community safety; physical environment; housing. Tool: http://wimd.wales.gov.uk/?lang=en

Figure 2: Inclusivity



The findings show that groups currently underrepresented by traditional social action programmes have the capacity to engage with programmes like Fixers', that prioritise voice as value.

Q2. Campaign theme

Respondents' projects addressed a wide range of themes (Figure 3), categorised as follows:

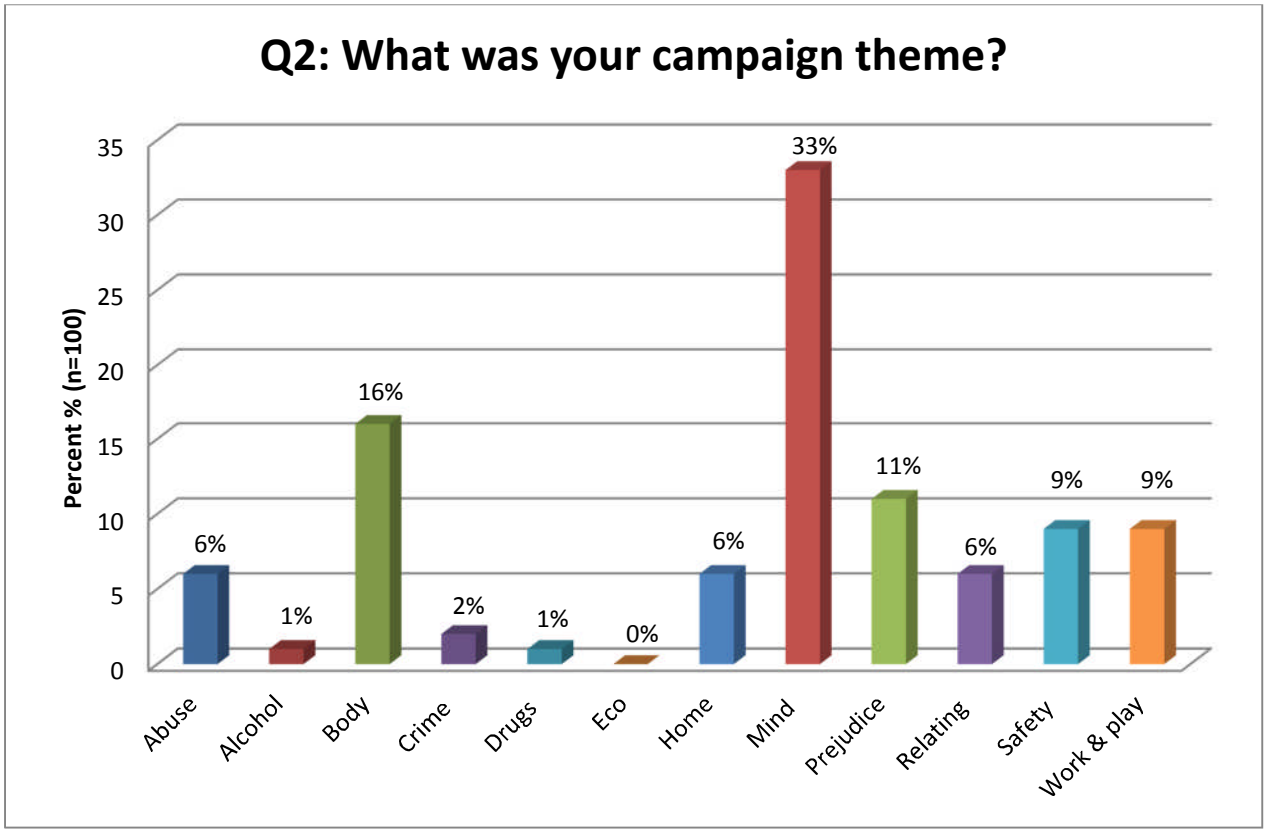
- Safety (e.g. road safety, human trafficking);
- Mind (e.g. eating disorders, self-harm);
- Home (e.g. homelessness, young carers);
- Relating (e.g. young parenthood, bereavement);
- Crime (e.g. knife crime, having a criminal record);
- Drugs (legal highs, addiction); Prejudice (e.g. stereotypes of young people, homophobia);
- Work and play (Unemployment, staying in education);
- Abuse (e.g. bullying, domestic violence);
- Body (Fitness, sexually transmitted infections);
- Alcohol (binge-drinking, addiction)

In reality many projects fall into more than one of these themes. For example, a project driven by a mental health issue (Mind) may include addressing the physical impacts of the condition (Body) and the stigma (Prejudice) experienced because of the mental health condition. The most common category was Mind, which one-third of respondents chose to address.[9]

[9] Since 2008 around 69 per cent of fixers' projects have focused on this theme. This trend can be further related to the prevalence of the state of children and young people's mental health in the UK. Recent figures suggest that as many as three children in every classroom has a diagnosable mental health condition and rates of depression and anxiety in teenagers has increased by 75 per cent in the last 25 years (Place2Be, 2015; McKenna, 2015).

Body issues were second most commonly addressed, while campaigns on drugs and alcohol were the least represented (2 per cent of projects overall). These findings challenge popular rhetoric about young people, who are often conveyed in the media as socially disengaged and avid users of drugs and alcohol (Devlin, 2006). Research shows that the false stereotyping of young people in the media and wider society can have a negative impact on their self-esteem and their future job prospects (Birdwell & Bani, 2015). The danger of such stereotyping is that it may mislead policymakers about the issues that really matter to young people, therefore skewing how policy is decided.

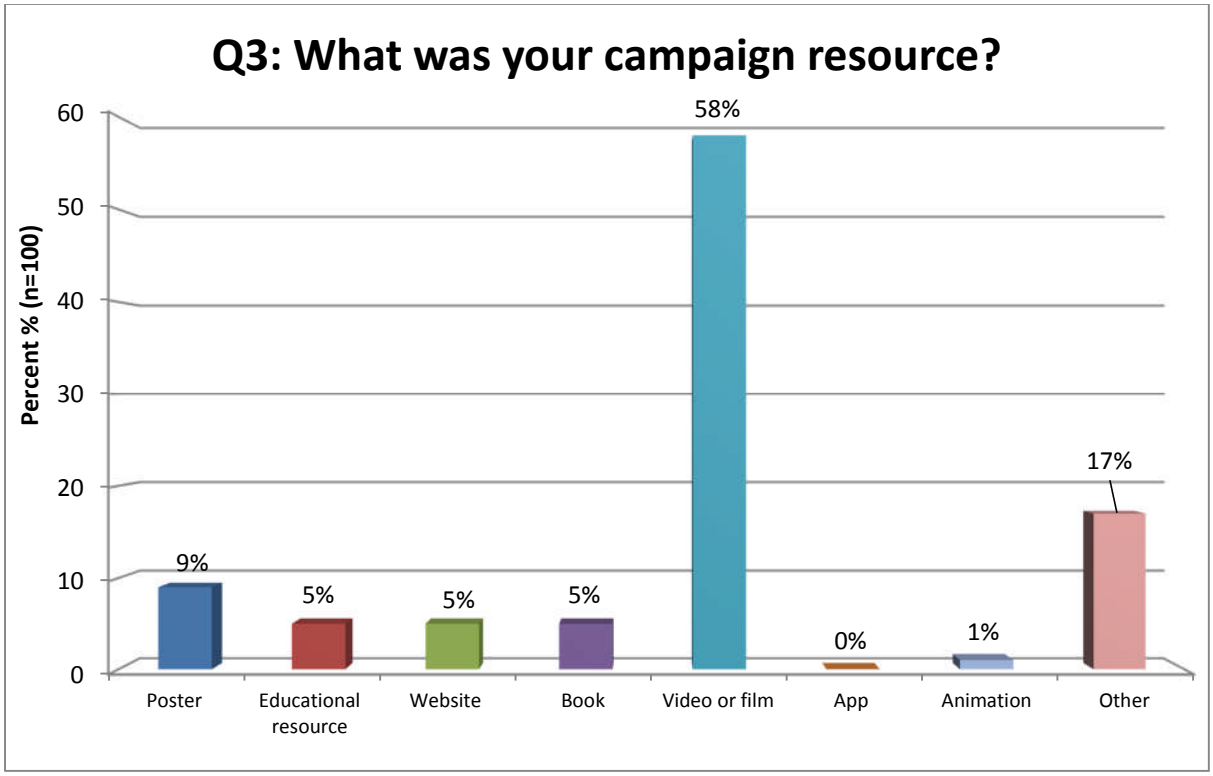
Figure 3: Campaign theme



Q3. Campaign resources

Each participant in a Fixers campaign is given the opportunity to choose and design a resource of their choice to carry their campaign message to their selected audiences. The resource choices are broad enough to ensure that there are a number of communication methods to choose from. The majority of participants used a film or video to share their campaign message, followed by posters. Educational, website or book resources were less popular tools. The animation resource was chosen by one participant in the sample and the app was not represented in this sample (figure 4).

Figure 4: Campaign resources

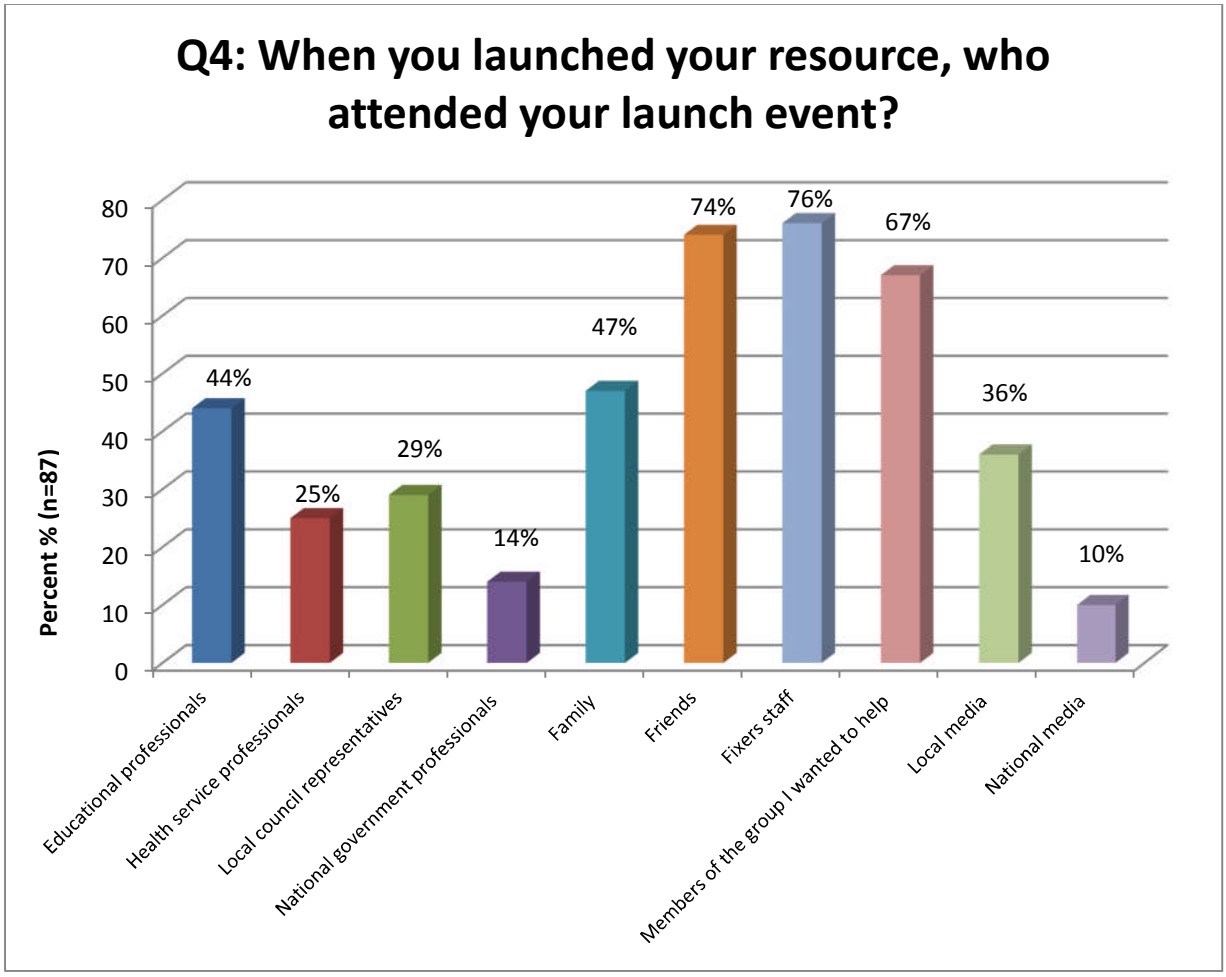


Research has found that young people's choice of media communication is significantly important to their process of self-socialisation. Indeed, resources where young people have the most control over the messaging are popular in youth culture. Young people favour mechanisms that best represent their individual preferences and personalities as opposed to those provided from socialising agents such as family, educational institutions, community, and the justice system (Arnett, 1995). Films offer a way to construct narratives and depict experiences in a way that is both faithful to the experience and preferences of the young person, and can engage a target audience effectively through storytelling, music and visual imagery. As such, many young participants choose films as their preferred medium.

Q4. Participant and stakeholder engagement at campaign launch

The participants were all asked which stakeholders attended their launch event or engaged online with their resource (figure 5). Apart from the Fixers team in attendance (usually the young person's coordinator (YPC) and occasionally also a member of the broadcast and communications team), support at the launch came from friends, members of the group that the participants were focused on helping, family, education professionals, local media representatives, from local councils, health services, national government and finally national media.

Figure 5: Participant and stakeholder engagement at campaign launch

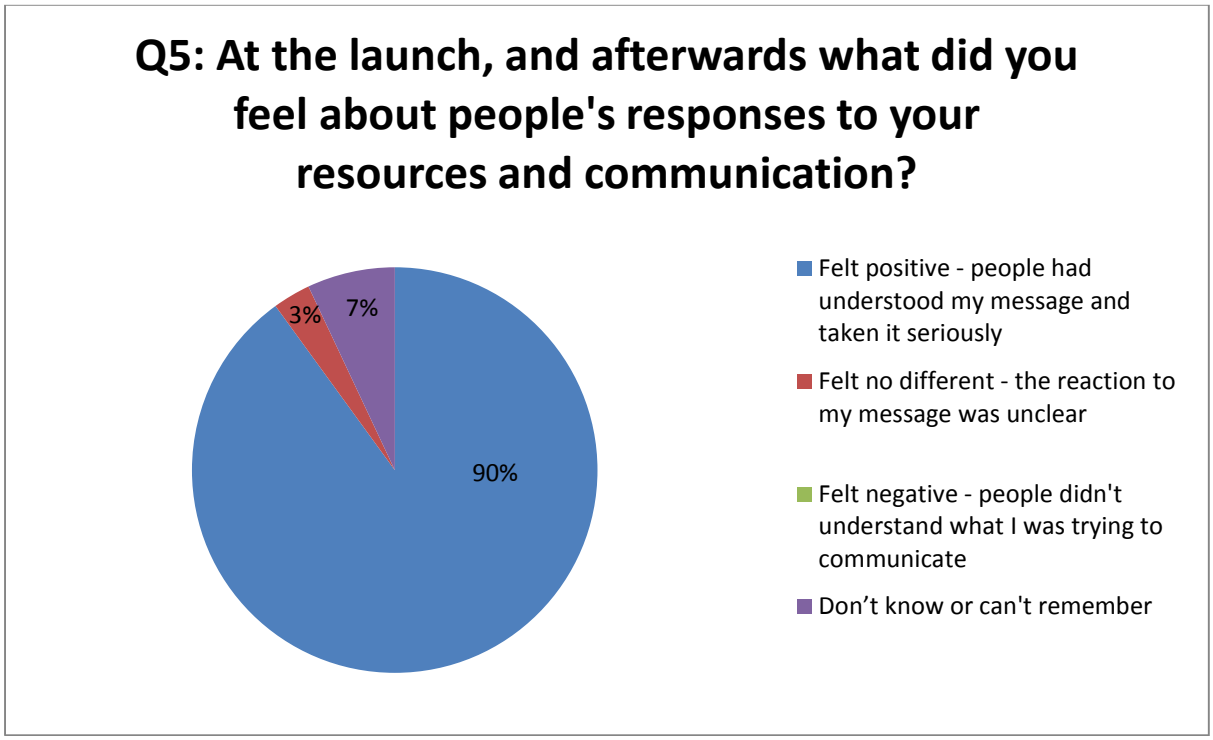


Closer analysis of the data highlights that the launch event is a pivotal part of the project process for young people to engage their chosen audience. The range of groups attending is broad, and can include politicians and the media alongside groups and individuals that are the focus of change. This demonstrates the power of Fixers' approach to build not only 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital for young people, but also 'linking' social capital (Portes, 1998), connecting them with hitherto inaccessible spheres of influence.

Q5. Participants' feelings about their communication

Participants felt overwhelmingly positive about the launch of their resource, and people's responses to their resources and communication.

Figure 6: Participants' feelings about their communication



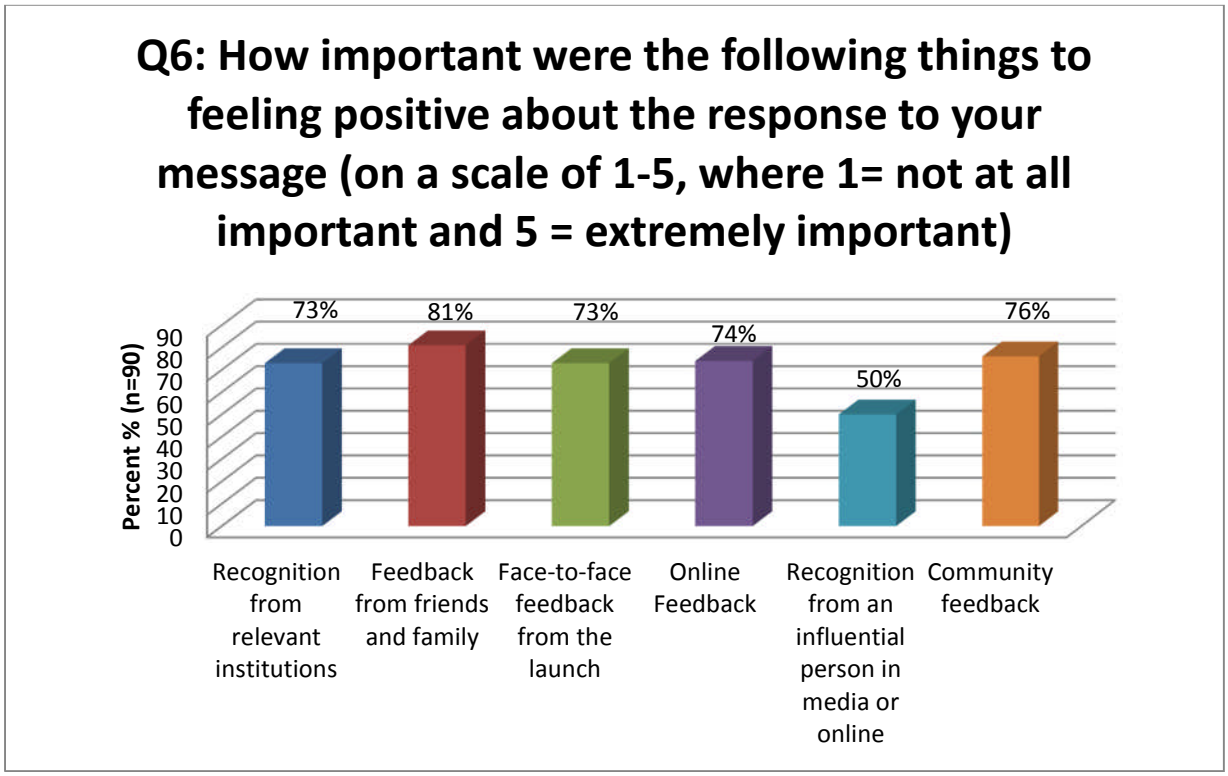
Ninety percent of respondents felt positive about their communication and believed that their message had been understood and taken seriously, suggesting that the voice as value approach has a positive effect on participants. The remaining respondents felt no different or were not sure how they felt after their launch. None of the respondents felt negative about their communication.

Q6. Important themes that constitute positive voice as value communication

Respondents who felt positively about their communication were asked to rate the importance of different types of feedback. Five out of six forms of feedback received an average score of 4 or above, with a slightly lower rating for recognition (3.5) from an influential person in the media or online (such as celebrity, MP, expert in the issue addressed).

The fact that most respondents rated all but one forms of feedback as important or extremely important reflects the fact that young people taking social action look to their close community and peers for affirmation, but also wish to have some kind of material effect on the issue they are trying to change. Feedback from relevant institutions, online and at the launch event helps to clarify how their message might make a difference to people beyond their immediate circle (figure 7).

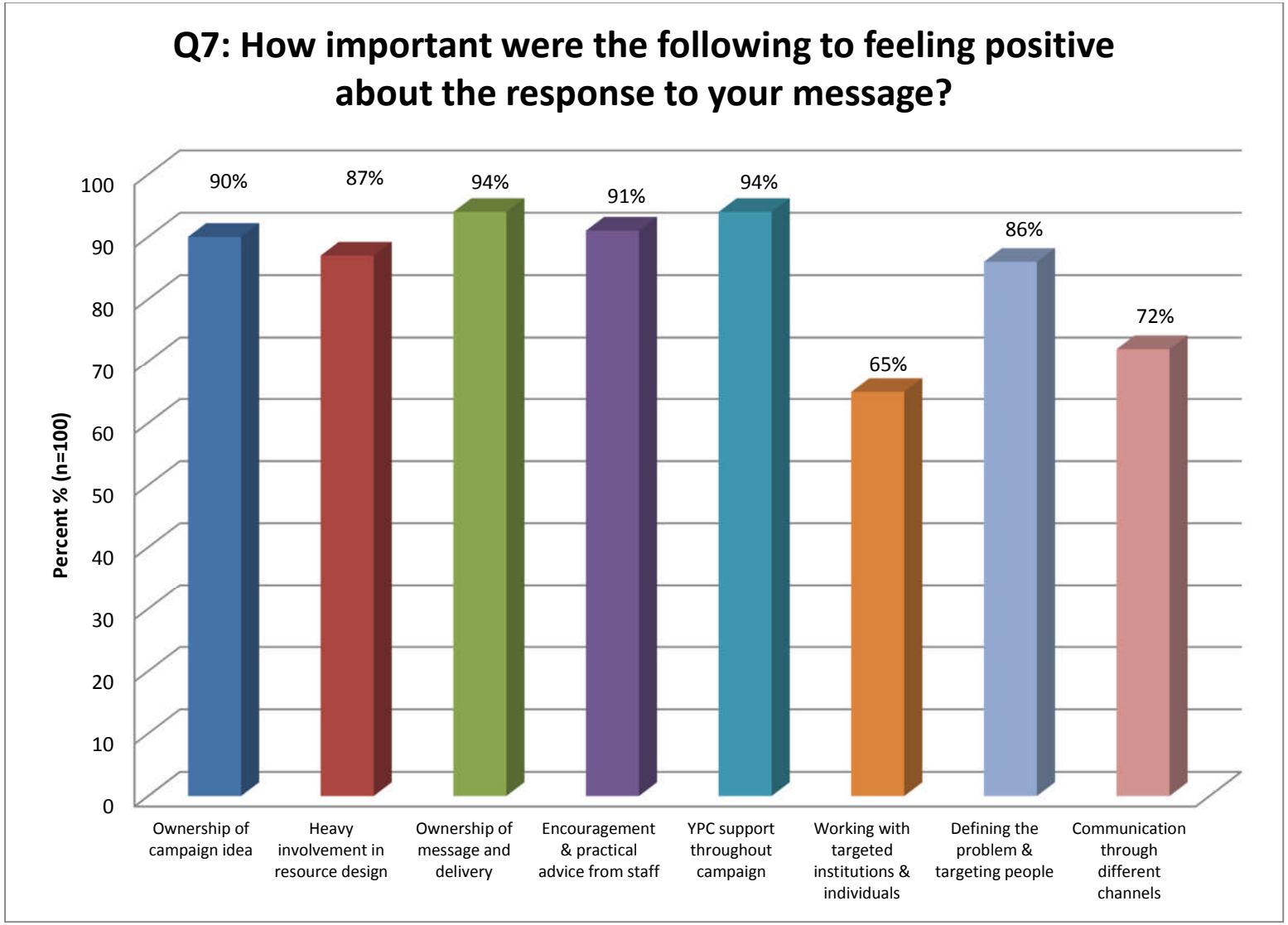
Figure 7: Important themes that constitute positive voice as value communication



Q7. Process

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of eight different aspects of the campaign process to their feelings about working with Fixers (figure 8). Seven out of eight aspects were rated important or extremely important, receiving an average score of 4 or above. The highest ratings were received for aspects reflecting the institutional support provided by Fixers, and their involvement in decisions about the campaign messages, content and audiences.

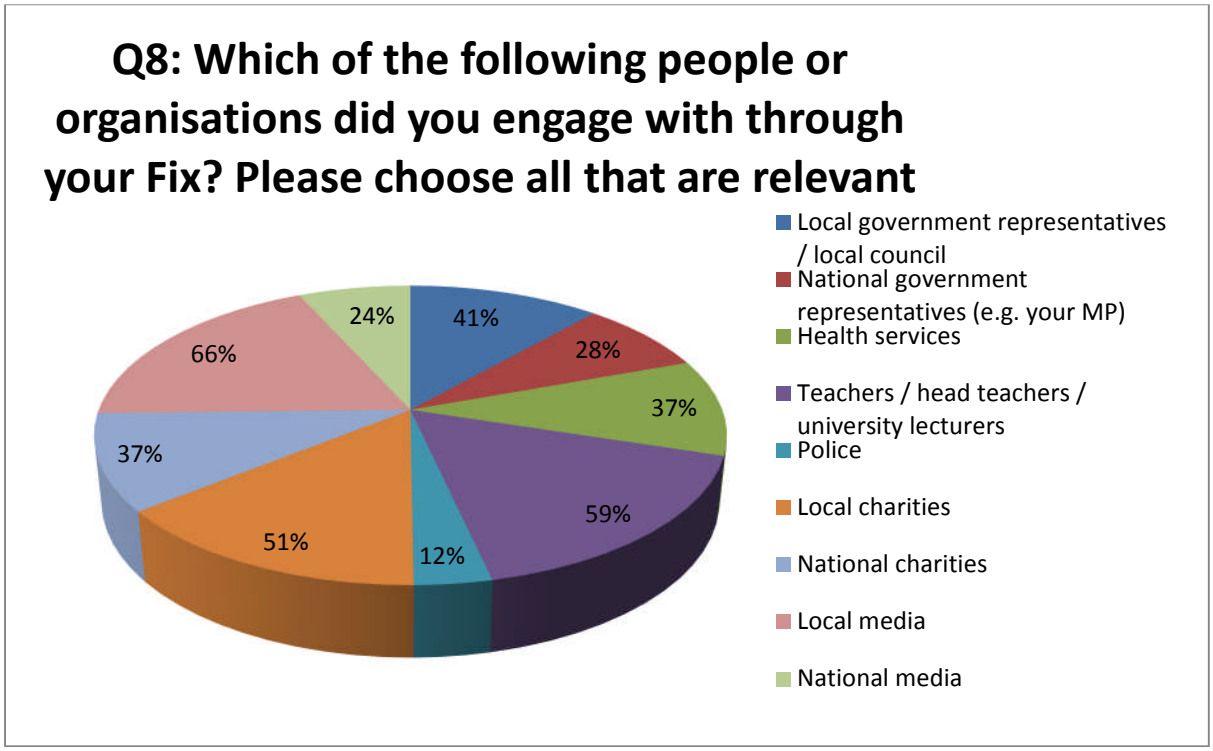
Figure 8: Process



Q8. Stakeholder engagement

To understand the extent to which 'linking' social capital is created through Fixers campaigns (Portes, 1998), respondents were asked which people and organisations they engaged with during the campaign. The findings show that a wide range of stakeholders can be involved in Fixers campaigns, including social institutions that can facilitate change: local council members, health service representatives, teachers and educational leaders, and politicians. However, local and national media representatives were the group that young people engaged with most regularly, with two-thirds of respondents saying they had engaged with local media and a further 24% engaging with national media (figure 9).

Figure 9: Stakeholder engagement

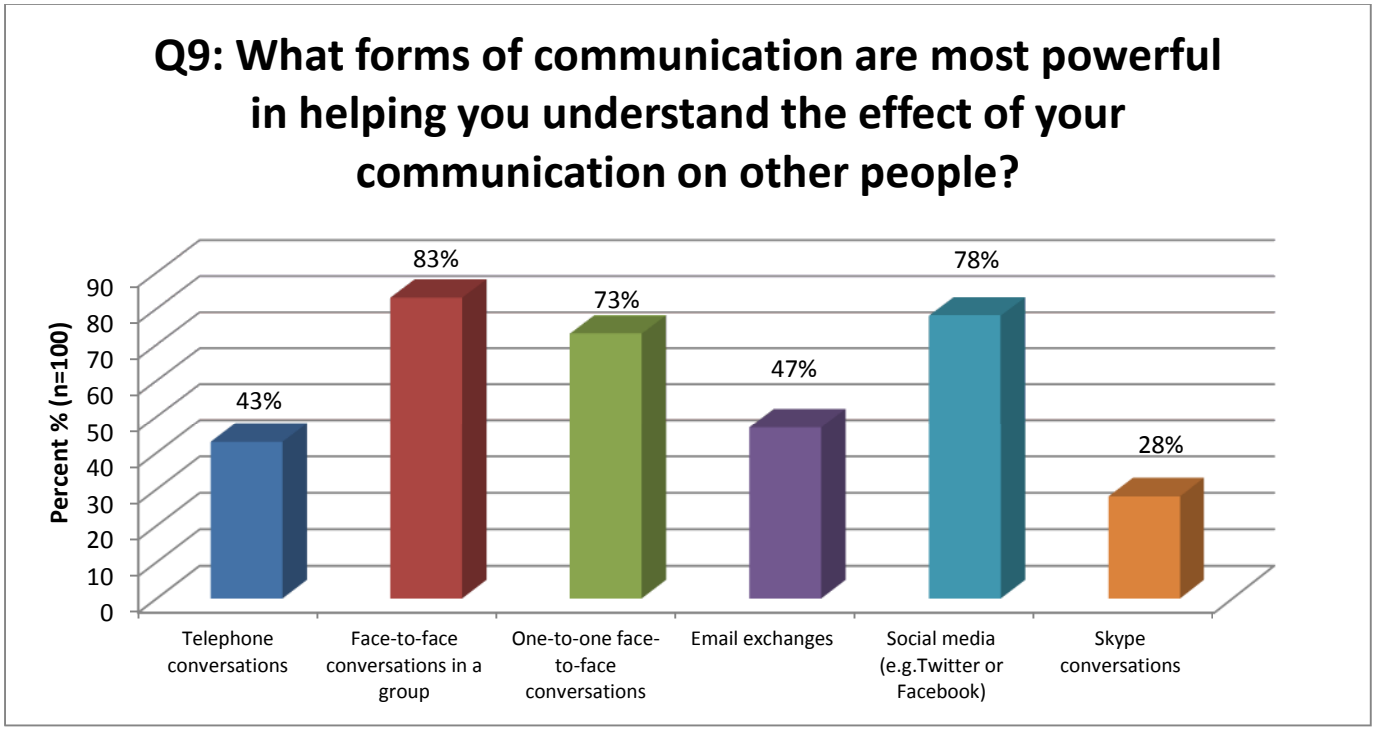


This reflects the continuing importance of the media as a means of both validating the young people's narratives through their symbolic status as institutions that communicate matters of public interest, and as a means of disseminating the campaign messages widely, alongside other, more direct media such as websites, events and social media channels. In addition, participants' engagement with educational representatives reflects the importance of schools and colleges as places where young people can create opportunities to communicate with their peers if given the right institutional support.

Q9. Communication forms

The Fixers approach lends itself to a variety of communication channels, and so respondents were asked which forms of communication they thought were most powerful in helping them to understand the effect of their communication on other people. The majority felt that having face-to-face conversations in a group setting was the most informative channel, closely followed by interacting with people over social media and one-to-one face-to-face conversations (figure 10). Less direct forms of communication were not as helpful.

Figure 10: Communication forms

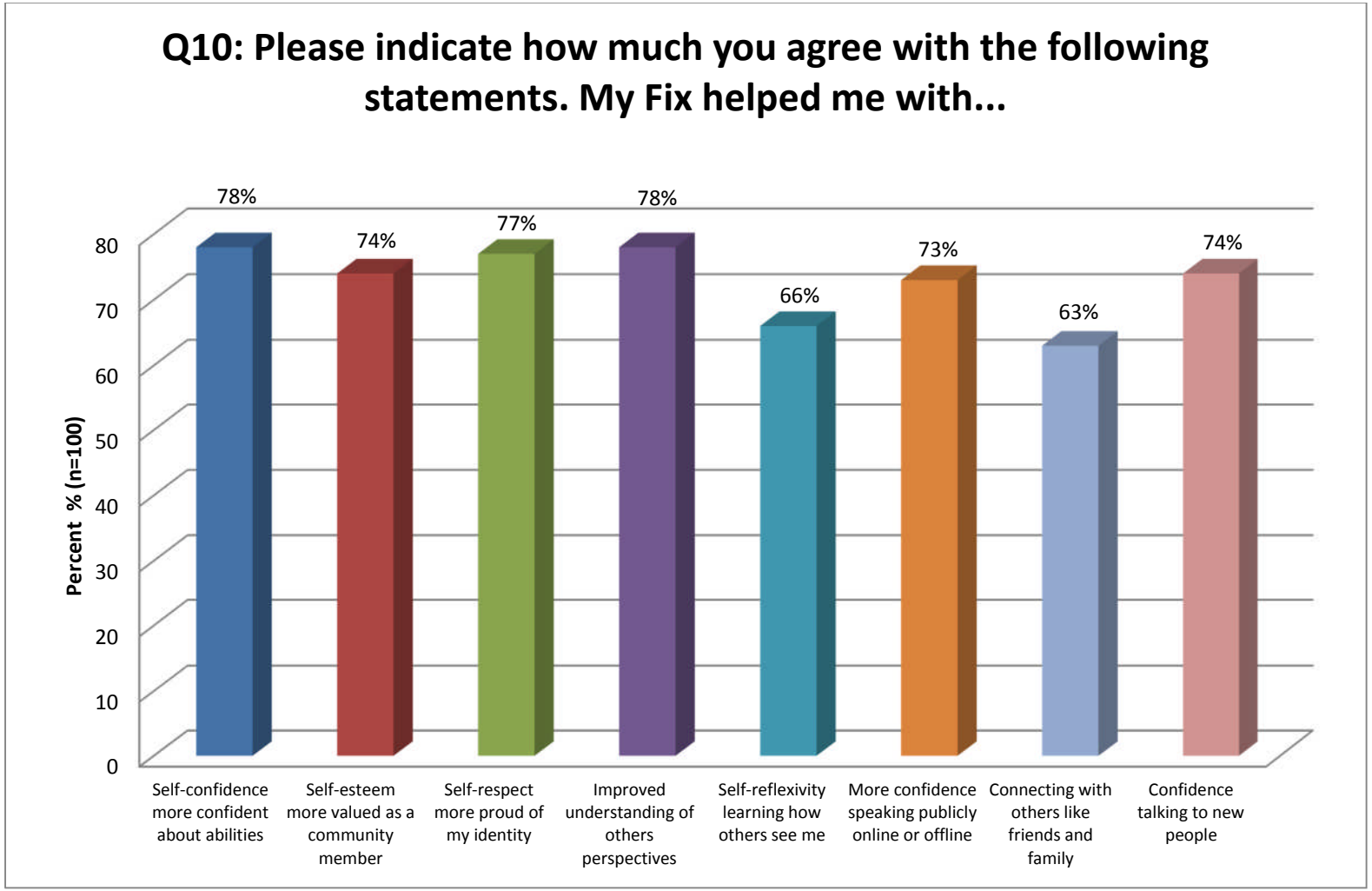


Some respondents spontaneously noted the importance of radio, leaflets and television broadcasts as channels that helped them understand the effect of their campaign.

Q10. Personal development

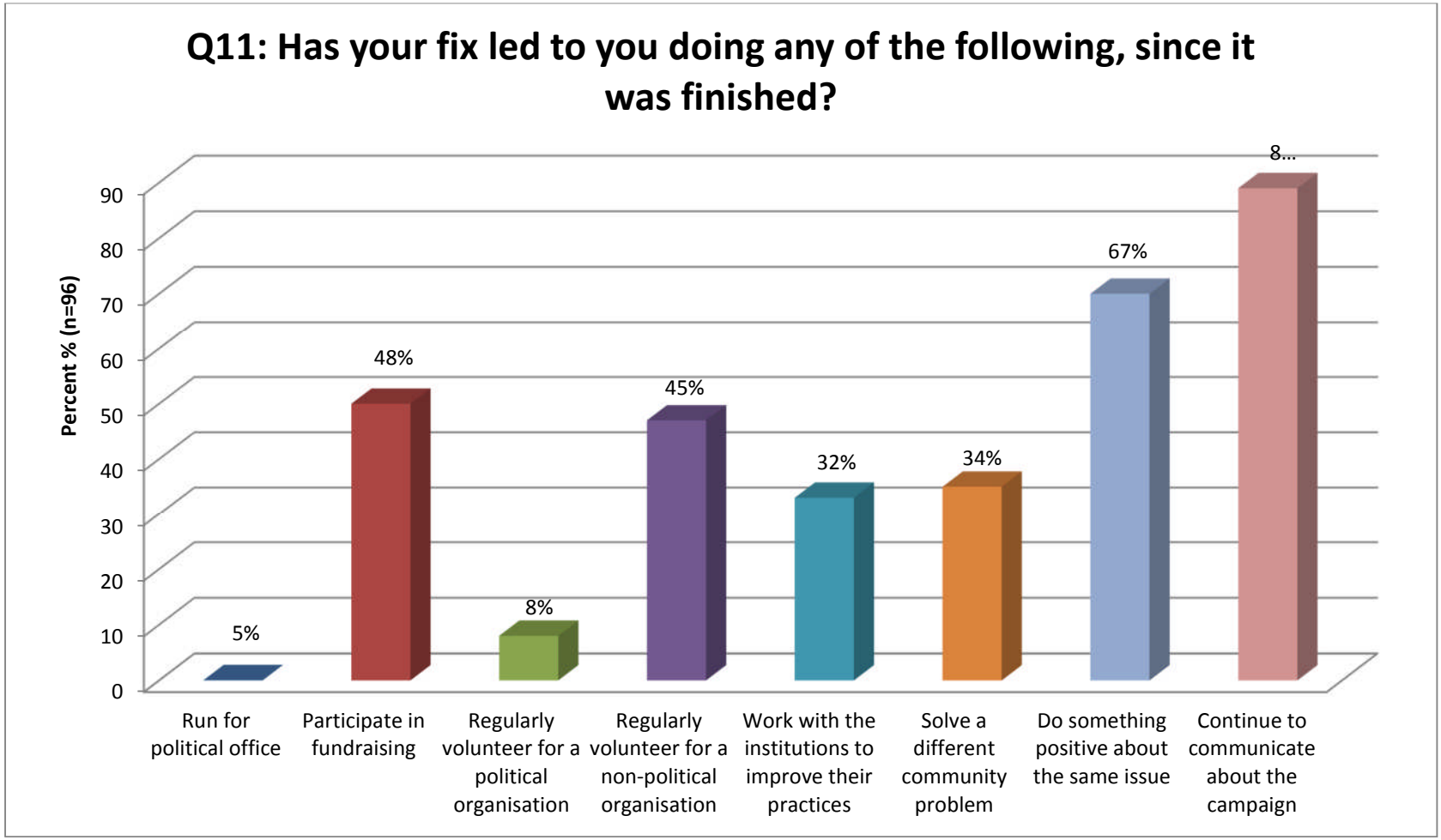
Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with statements about the personal development associated with their campaign (figure 11). The prompt before delivery of the statement was 'My fix helped me…'. The responses reflect the increased knowledge and confidence in oneself and one's connections with others that comes from a Fixers campaign, as well as the ability to communicate effectively to new audiences.

Figure 11: Personal development



Q11. Ongoing communication. Respondents were asked whether they had continued to take action following the end of their campaign. Eighty five per cent said that they had continued to communicate about their campaign, and almost 70% had done something positive about the same issue (see figure 12).

Figure 12: Ongoing communication

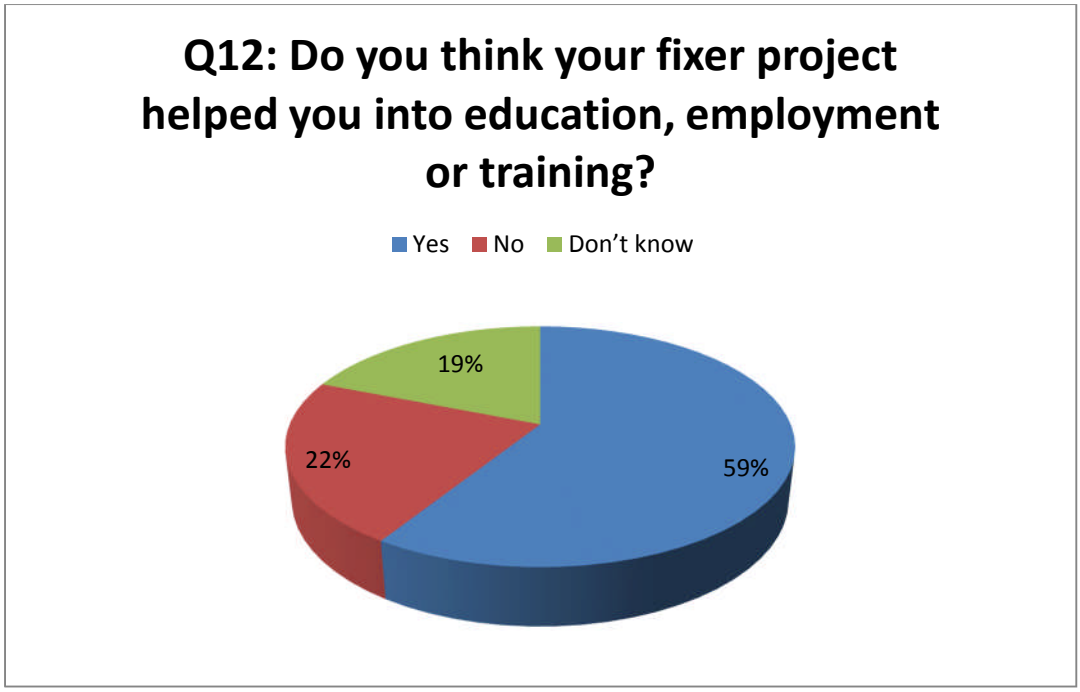


The responses also indicated a number of unintended community benefits from a Fixers campaign, that arise from the relationships that participants start to build with new community organisations, institutions, and decision makers. One-third of respondents said they remained engaged with the institutions they met through the fix to help them improve their practices, indicating a direct benefit from having young people involved with partner organisations. In addition, over a third (34%) of respondents said that they had tried to solve a different community problem, indicating the potential for longer-term engagement with social change.

Q12 and Q13. Access to employment and education

Respondents were asked whether they thought their project had helped them into education, employment or training. Fifty-nine percent said that it had (figure 13), either through securing regular volunteering roles or helping them secure a university place (figure 14). Many respondents also drew on their campaign as a tangible experience to demonstrate their skills and enhance their chances of employment by referencing it in various types of application for employment (figure 15).

Figure 13: Access to employment and education



When prompted to elaborate on how the campaign had supported the participant's directly, 47 per cent said they had secured regular volunteering roles and 12 per cent said (see figure 14) they believed their fixer project had helped them get their university place.

Figure 14: Access to employment and education

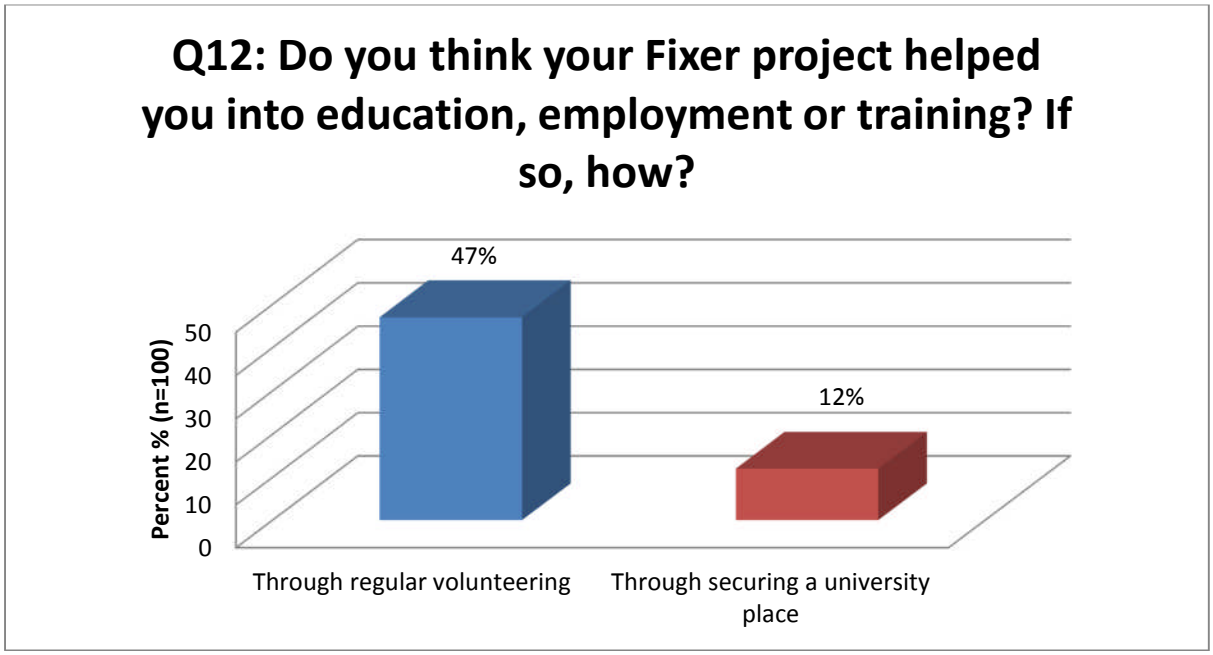
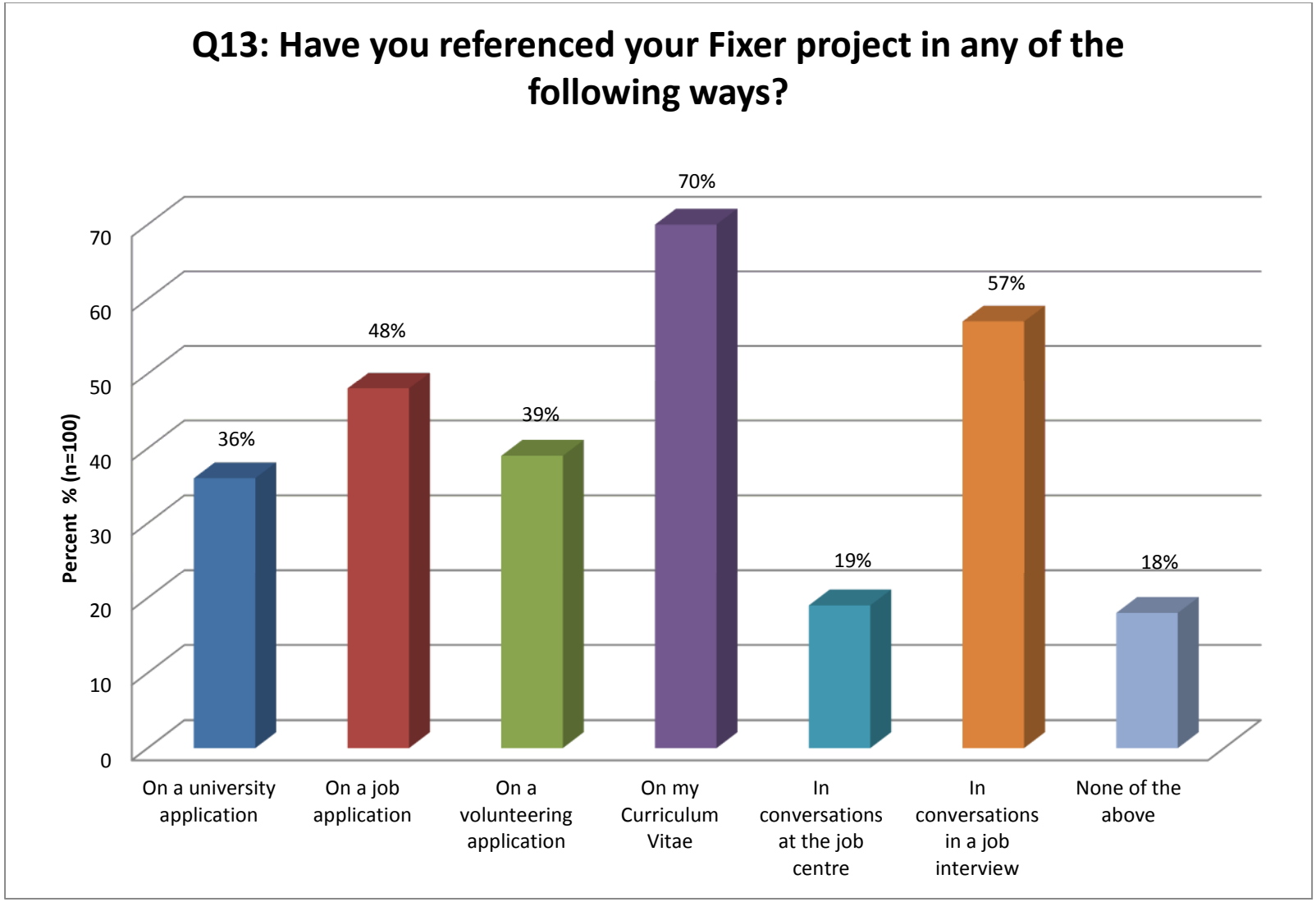


Figure 15: Voice as value to further young people's prospects



Appendix 2: Fixers: Social Return on Investment (SROI), November 2015.

The following SROI framework was constructed using the findings of the November 2015 survey and modelled on the Big Lottery's *A Guide to social return on investment*.[10]

Fixer cost-benefit analysis framework

To improve the life chances of young people by promoting fixer projects as a means of communicating

Inputs:

£4,950 per fixer project

Divided by 10 people on average on a project

= £495.00 per person

Outputs:

100 campaign resources and associated media support delivered over 12 months to 100 young people aged 16-25 and their audiences

Short-term outcomes:

Improved employability skills

Improved mental health and wellbeing

Long-term outcomes:

Reduced reliance on job seekers allowance

More young people volunteering

More young people in higher education

[10] file:///C:/Users/Gemma/Downloads/wellbeing_social_return_investment.pdf

Calculating the costs

Costs	Measurement	Valuation	Notes
Direct costs of the intervention - cost to the funder	Amount of grant funding provided for the project	**100 x £495 (excluding audience event) = £49,500**	This was used to cover costs including: staff wages (including national insurance), fixer engagement (registration, recruitment posters, website), travel and subsistence (staff only to the point of registering the fixer), and fixer expenses, resource creation (poster, educational resource, Website, book, film, app, animation) and team travel.
Direct costs of the intervention - other contributions	Amount of match funding and in kind contributions	£50 per resource launch for a total of 100 projects = **£5,000**	The spaces made available for audience events were free so the cost is calculated at the market value of hiring a community space according to the British Film Institute[11] with integrated projectors and technical support (where films were shown) multiplied by the number of project launches.

[11] http://www.bfi.org.uk/neighbourhoodcinema/how-much-does-it-cost-set-community-cinema

Direct costs of the intervention - other contributions	Amount of match funding and in kind contributions	£7,762 x 4 projects = **£31,048**	Calculated using the average ITV broadcast at 30sec spot unit cost[12] multiplied by 5 (2mins 30sec average air time) multiplied by the average number of projects that are broadcast in every 100 projects.
Direct costs of the intervention - other contributions	Amount of in kind contributions	£1,266 x 18 projects = **£22,788**	Calculated using the average regional news print article[13] unit (per half page) cost multiplied by the average number of projects in every 100 likely to receive regional press.
Direct costs of the intervention - other contributions	Amount of in kind contributions	£45 x 3 = **£135**	Calculated using *The Mirror* online rate card[14] per full page colour (where fixer stories feature most) multiplied by the average number of projects in every 100 likely to receive national online press.
Direct costs of the intervention - other contributions	Amount of in kind contributions	£2,500 x 5 = **£12,500**	Calculated using the average regional radio advertising unit[15] cost multiplied by the average number of fixers in every 100 likely to do regional radio.

[12] http://www.tvadvertising.co.uk/tv-advertising-costs; West Country https://www.itvmedia.co.uk/why-itv/west-country; Meridian https://www.itvmedia.co.uk/why-itv/meridian

[13] http://www.pressadvertising.co.uk/advertise

[14] http://www.trinitymirrorsolutions.co.uk/digital

[15] http://www.radioadvertising.co.uk/costs

Calculating the benefits

Benefits	Measurement	Valuation	Notes
Improved employability skills (i.e. self-confidence)	Using the questionnaire, 78%[16] reported that they had gained skills associated with enhanced employability as a direct result of their fixer project	100 x 78% x £4,266 = **£332,748**	Based on the cost of a single basic funding rate per full time student per year regardless of where and what (employability skills course for example) they study using the 16-19 funding formula[17] owing to the life of a fixer project being 12 months.
Improved self-esteem and increased interaction with new people and communities resulting in reduced isolation	Using the questionnaire, 74%[18] reported that their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing had been enhanced as a direct result of their fixer project	100 x 74% x £70 x 24 = **£124,320**	Based on the average age of the fixer involved in the survey being 17 years old and calculated by the average cost of treatment of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in the market place at 4 sessions per month in a 6 month period per person. Cost of CBT[19] in the absence of project intervention.
Reduced reliance on Job Seekers Allowance support	Using the questionnaire, 59%[20] of fixers reported that they were now in education, employment or training and attributed involvement in their fixer project to this outcome	100 x 59% x £57.25 x 4 x 9 = **£121,599**	Based on the cost of job seekers allowance benefit[21] paid to young people under 25 multiplied by 4 weekly cycle payments, multiplied by 9 months (maximum time prior to being moved on to the Government's Work Programme).[22]

[16] See appendix 1 Q10, figure 11.
[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/304728/Funding_Review_June_13_v4.pdf
[18] See appendix 1 Q10, figure 11.
[19] http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cognitive-behavioural-therapy/Pages/Introduction.aspx
[20] See appendix 1 Q12, figure 13.
[21] https://www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance/what-youll-get
[22] file:///C:/Users/Gemma/Downloads/SN06340%20(1).pdf

More young people volunteering	Using the questionnaire, 47%[23] of fixers believed that they were now regularly volunteering for third sector organisations in youth worker volunteer roles as a result of their fix	100 x 47% x £1,584 = **£74,448** £11.00 per hour x 12 (hours per month) x 12 (over one year)	This was costed using the median wage of a Youth Worker[24] as this occupation most closely resembled their volunteer role multiplied by average hours a volunteer works per four week period per year.[25]
More young people into Higher Education	Using the questionnaire, 12%[26] of fixers believed that their fixer project had helped them to secure a place at university	100 x 12% x £4,200 = **£50,400**	This was costed using Government figures which suggest that graduates earn more than non-graduates and the average wage of a graduate being £31,000[27]. Each graduate on this wage would contribute £4,200 in tax receipts per annum.[28]

[23] See appendix 1 Q12, figure 14.
[24] http://www.prospects.ac.uk/youth_worker_salary.htm
[25] http://timebank.org.uk/key-facts
[26] See appendix 1 Q12, figure 13.
[27] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/432873/BIS-15-304_graduate_labour_market_statistics-January_to_March_2015.pdf
[28] http://www.netsalarycalculator.co.uk/31000-after-tax/

Completing the analysis

The total costs of the intervention are calculated as **£120,971**

The total benefits of the project are **£703,515**

The cost benefit ratio for the project is therefore 5.81:1

In other words for every £1 invested, £5.81 worth of benefits was generated by the project

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In 2015, Fixers also published 'Voice as Value: A Powerful Tool for Transformational Change', supported by The Communities and Culture+ Network and the University of Leeds, which investigated the complexities of digital technology on young people's sense of voice and recognition, and of being able to make effective interventions in their communities.

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