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# National Youth Social Action Survey 2017



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Department for  
Digital, Culture  
Media & Sport

# Young people remain ready to make a difference across society

**58%**  
took part in some form of social action in 2017

**68%**  
say they're likely to take part in future

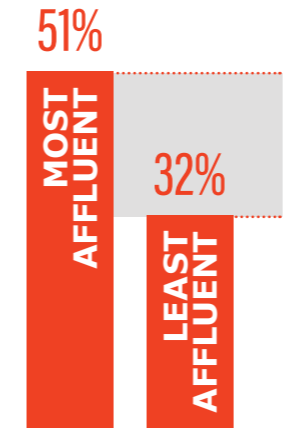
**39%**  
took part in meaningful social action

(This means they recognise the benefits to themselves and others and participate regularly throughout the year)

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## There continues to be a socio-economic gap in participation



Less affluent 16-20 year olds took part significantly less than in 2016

The appetite for social action remains strong: The majority of young people (58%) have taken part in some form of social action over the last 12 months, and 68% say they are likely to take part in the future.

However, only 39% take part in meaningful social action, which means they recognise the benefits to themselves and others and participate regularly throughout the year.<sup>1</sup> This is a slight decline from 2016 but relatively steady compared to all other years since the baseline survey in 2014.

There continues to be a gap in meaningful social action participation between the most and least affluent young people (51% vs 32%). Young people from less affluent backgrounds, particularly those aged 16-20, take part

significantly less than in 2016, contributing to the slight decline in participation overall in 2017.

This is important because those participating in meaningful social action are more likely to feel a range of benefits, reporting they do more sport and exercise, have higher life satisfaction and perceive that they have improved job prospects. This is in addition to the direct benefits to the people and environments young people are helping.

**PARTICIPANTS**  
**DO MORE SPORT AND EXERCISE,**  
**HAVE HIGHER LIFE SATISFACTION,**  
**AND IMPROVED JOB PROSPECTS.**



Embrace the appetite of young people to help solve our most pressing societal challenges



1. 'Meaningful social action' is defined as those who have: Participated at least every few months over the last 12 months, or done a one-off activity lasting more than a day; and recognise that their activities had some benefit for both themselves and others.

# Participation in meaningful social action brings a wealth of benefits for young people's health and wellbeing



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**8.4**  
out of 10 life satisfaction

**81%**  
agree it will help their future job chances

**61%**  
agree it encouraged them to do more exercise

Participation is associated with higher life satisfaction

8.4/10 7.8/10




- Over half of young people (61%) who took part in *meaningful social action* (recognising the benefits to themselves and others, and participating regularly throughout the year) in the past 12 months agree their involvement encouraged them to do more sport and exercise in their day-to-day life.
- Participation is also associated with higher life satisfaction: 8.4 out of 10 for those taking part in meaningful social action, vs 7.8 for those who have never participated – This difference is similar to the difference between adults who report 'fair' and those who report 'good' health<sup>2</sup>.
- 81% of young people participating in meaningful social action believe it will help them get a job in the future.


These personal benefits reported are in addition to other benefits to themselves, to beneficiaries or to the environment.

Young people who participate in high quality social action<sup>3</sup> are more likely to feel personal benefits.

Of those participating in any social action and who agree with all three quality statements included in the survey:

- 93% report medium-high to high levels of life satisfaction (compared with 85% of those participating in any social action who did not agree with all three quality statements)
- 87% agree social action will help their future job chances (compared with 52%)

 Focus on ensuring the quality of youth social action experiences, in line with the six principles of quality youth social action



2. Oguz, S., Merad, S., Snape, D (2013). Measuring National Well-being - What matters most to Personal Well-being? Office for National Statistics. [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766\\_312125.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_312125.pdf)  
3. 'High quality' is defined as young people who 'Definitely agree' or 'Tend to agree' with all three of the following statements when thinking about the social action they participated in in the last 12 months: 'I learned something new', 'I was recognised with the difference I made, for example, through a ceremony, certificate or award', 'I had a say in the activity'.

The majority of young people are participating in some form of social action, but of these, **1 in 3** does not experience the double benefit or participate regularly



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39%  
MEANINGFUL

Across all years of the survey a consistent proportion of young people participate in some form of social action, but do not recognise the double benefit and/or participate frequently.

Compared with those participating in meaningful social action (recognising the benefits to themselves and others, and participating regularly throughout the year), this group has a larger proportion of males (54% compared with 46% in the meaningful group), young people from lower socio-economic groups (44% vs. 37%) and 10-15 year olds (64% vs. 56%).

19%  
NOT  
MEANINGFUL

58%  
ANY SOCIAL  
ACTION

The vast majority (87%) of the 19% say they are likely to participate in social action again in the future.

- ▶ **15%** have not participated frequently **BUT** feel the double benefit
- ▶ **2%** have participated frequently **BUT** do not feel the double benefit
- ▶ **2%** have not participated frequently **AND** do not feel the double benefit

- Primarily because they enjoyed helping other people (54%) and money was raised for a good cause (39%)



Target the demographics of this group to increase the frequency of participation, and consider how to build on their motivations and the benefits to support them into a journey of meaningful social action.

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# Young people from less affluent backgrounds have the appetite to make a difference, but are missing out on the benefits of getting involved

## Barriers to taking part include:

Never occurred to them

Don't know how to get involved

Not enough time

But over half would like to take part in the future

A third would be encouraged to take part if they could do it with friends

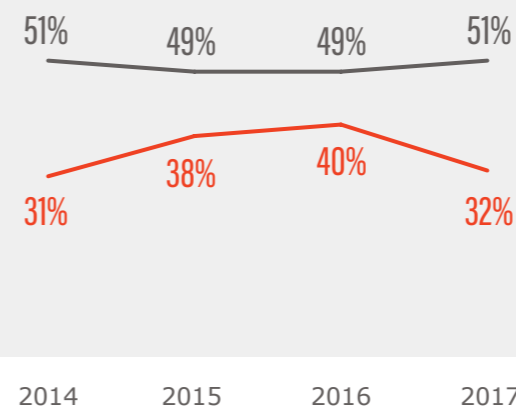
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Since 2014, there has been a persistent underlying gap in participation between most and least affluent young people<sup>4</sup>, with rates amongst the least affluent declining in 2017.

**MOST AFFLUENT**

**LEAST AFFLUENT**



However, while appetite to participate in the future is still lower amongst less affluent

young people, over half (58%) say they would like to take part in future.

Those from less affluent backgrounds cite a lack of interest and understanding as reasons for non-involvement.

- 33% do not have enough time.
- 25% are not interested.
- 24% never occurred to them.
- 18% don't know how to get involved/no-one asked me.

But a third (31%) would be encouraged to take part in social action if they could do it with their friends, and 19% if they had more information about it.



Consider new ways of engaging and motivating young people from less affluent backgrounds. In particular, through opportunities to participate with friends.

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4. 'Less affluent' young people are defined as those in social grade groups D and E. 'More affluent' young people are defined as those in social grade groups A and B.

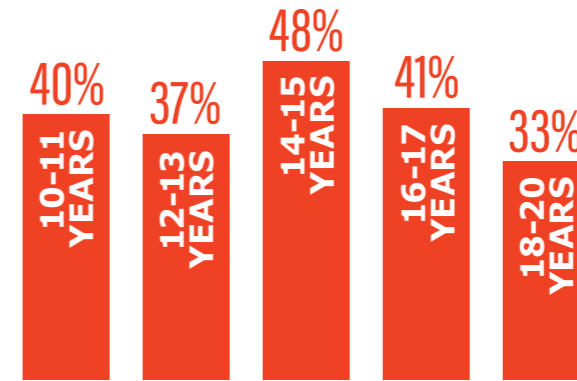
# Education, family and friends affect participation in meaningful social action

**96%**  
of young people who participated have family and/or friends that also take part



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## Participation in meaningful social action by age



There appear to be key transition points affecting young people's participation, with involvement in meaningful social action (recognising the benefits to themselves and others, and participating regularly throughout the year) dropping off post-primary school, post-GSCEs and after age 18.

Across all age groups, young people would be encouraged to do social action if their friends were doing it (37%)

- 10-15 year olds would like to do it at school (26%)
- 16-20 year olds would like more information about social action activities (28%)

Education is key to participation: School, college and university remain the most common ways to get involved in social action (69%)

Also important is the role modelling of friends and family - 96% of young people who have participated in meaningful social action have family and/or friends that also take part, compared with only 38% of those have never done social action.

 Focus on the role of family and friends in supporting the journey of social action through key transition points.





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