

YOUNG SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

LEARNING BY DOING

This paper presents the findings of a youth-led research project which explored how young social entrepreneurship is supported and nurtured by formal and informal education. It demonstrates that social entrepreneurship creates a space in society for young people to engage their creativity and passions to address social issues which directly affect their communities. We found this space is open to all whether they excel academically or not, and that they learn social entrepreneurship best by doing rather than being taught in a formal context.

RESEARCH FINDINGS SERIES

Young people are motivated to design and run social ventures which address problems which affect them and their communities directly.

INTRODUCTION

The mission of UnLtd, the Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs, is to reach out and unleash the energies of those individuals who can transform the world in which they live. Every year we support hundreds of young people who have passion, ideas and a can-do attitude to set up and run a social venture, with both financial and non-financial support.

This paper reports the findings of a research project undertaken by young researchers which explored the relationship between young social entrepreneurship and education, both formal (such as schools, colleges and universities) and informal (such as sports clubs, youth groups and voluntary work).

Successive years of research published by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) found that, for the adult population as a whole, social entrepreneurship is positively related to education levels. For example, the latest report found that graduates were almost six times more likely to be social entrepreneurs than those who left school early¹. Understanding whether particular educational experiences of young people increase their opportunities to become social entrepreneurs is important as we work to make the sector accessible to all.

Our findings suggest that young people are motivated to design and run social ventures which address the problems that directly affect them and their communities. We found that both those with and without a strong academic background made successful young social entrepreneurs; that social entrepreneurship is a vehicle for community action which is open to all young people. We also found that young people learned how to run their project through doing it rather than through being taught about it, and that informal educational contexts such as extra curricular activities, sports clubs, and voluntary work were most important in motivating them and supporting them to become social entrepreneurs.

THE RESEARCH

This project was conducted by 28 young researchers over an 18 month period during 2009 and 2010 and was facilitated and supervised by UnLtd staff. The first exploratory research phase asked what is unique about young social entrepreneurs and how they can best be supported to achieve their goals. The importance of education in shaping much of young people's experiences and opportunities became clear during the first phase. This directed the focus of the second phase which explored the relationship between education and social entrepreneurship and is reported here.

The young researchers participated in research training delivered by UnLtd which enabled them to:

- ★ Design the research tools, including a qualitative interview schedule and a quantitative survey.

- ★ Conduct the interviews with young social entrepreneurs.
- ★ Analyse both the qualitative and quantitative data to identify the findings.
- ★ Develop the recommendations which are presented in the policy paper associated with this report².

The findings reported here are based on data from:

- ★ 513 respondents to an online survey distributed to young people aged 16-25 and representative of the general population.
- ★ 20 semi-structured interviews with young social entrepreneurs who have run projects supported by UnLtd.

The questions asked explored the educational routes and influences by which research participants came to social entrepreneurship looking not only at their experiences within formal educational contexts such as schools, colleges and universities, but also those which we might regard as informal, such as youth and sports clubs, extra-curricular hobbies such as music and drama as well as volunteering. We were able to measure the importance of these influences in supporting social entrepreneurship and also young people's opinions about how opportunities might best be promoted and supported in the future. We also investigated the skills and knowledge that young social entrepreneurs developed through leading a social venture and how these complemented and contrasted with those learned in other contexts.

All data was analysed by UnLtd staff with young researchers during workshops and seminars and compiled later by UnLtd staff for publication. This publication explores the young researchers' findings and will be shared with a range of organisations, government bodies, and decision makers throughout 2010-11.

WHO ARE YOUNG SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS?

Young social entrepreneurs are active in communities across the UK and they come from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds. The young people we spoke to described how they had used their passions to engage their communities in developing solutions to real social problems. Their social ventures were diverse, and yet all were inspired and motivated to address community problems that they personally experienced. Examples include a community radio station to increase musical expression, an arts project reaching disadvantaged children and parents, a sports project addressing knife crime, musical events to promote community cohesion, teaching life skills through football, reducing gang activity through music and poetry and a furniture recycling scheme to reduce waste.

"Drugs are a big problem here, I've got friends who have gone to jail. I wanted to give young people something else to do, like I had...Now we get people coming over to us and saying 'this guy is taking drugs, can you help him'. Being that person in the community is how it has grown so big."

Ali, Burnley

Social entrepreneurs are not easy to define, but at UnLtd we understand them to be people with vision, drive, commitment and passion who want to change the world for the better.

An important milestone for the young researchers was identifying common characteristics of young social entrepreneurs participating in the research. These were 'an innovative person aged 16-25 who has led and acted upon a plan to address a social issue'. These characteristics demonstrate a young social entrepreneur's drive to go beyond seeing a problem in their community to acting on plans to solve it.

The young social entrepreneurs we interviewed described not only the positive community benefits of their projects but also the skills they both required and developed as leaders of social ventures. Because educational contexts shape much of a young person's life and experience, and because they are spaces in which skills and knowledge are learned, the young researchers chose to explore in more detail the relationship between education and social entrepreneurship.

YOUNG SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS OPEN AND DIVERSE

There are many routes into young social entrepreneurship

The young people we interviewed came to social entrepreneurship through a range of routes. Of the 20 interviews conducted, four explained how their school or university had either directed them to an opportunity or supported them practically once they had embarked on their venture. The remaining 16 found their project opportunity and support through other means, including sports and youth clubs, campaigning, faith and community groups, and in some instances via encouraging friends and relatives. This indicates that formal education is just one of the many means by which young social entrepreneurship can be promoted and supported.

Academic achievement and young social entrepreneurship

Our survey indicated there was no relationship between a young person's level of education and the likelihood of them being a social entrepreneur, a finding which remained constant when accounting for age.³ This finding contradicts those of other studies⁴ based on data gathered for the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), which records a strong positive relationship between education level and social entrepreneurship for the adult population as a whole. A range of reasons may account for these different findings. The analysis based on the GEM data does not analyse the data for young people separately from the rest of the adult population. If this data was analysed separately, their findings for young social entrepreneurs may mirror ours; completing such an analysis would enable us to test our findings.

We found no relationship between the education level of a young person and the likelihood of them becoming a social entrepreneur.

It might be that a factor which is not education but in some cases is *linked* to education is actually responsible for the difference between our findings and those based on the GEM. Two possibilities present themselves; firstly the type and extent of a person's networks may be causing the effect, with those who are well networked in their communities being more likely to become a social entrepreneur than those who are not. Whilst a young person's networks may only be partly influenced by their education level, older people's networks may be more strongly influenced by their education level.

A second possibility is that exposure to the concept of social entrepreneurship is the key variable. Social entrepreneurship as a concept, along with ethical trade and corporate social responsibility, is far more visible to young people today who will, whether they excel academically or not, receive some teaching on these subjects at school. Adults, who were educated before these concepts were widely taught in schools, may not identify with social entrepreneurship unless they encounter and seek out this information from elsewhere, and those from a more educated background might be more likely to do this.

Whilst it is possible that our findings show a pattern which is unique to young social entrepreneurs, we recognise that further research is required in this area to confirm this. If further research did corroborate this finding, it would suggest that all young people are as able to participate in social entrepreneurship as those who excel academically.

"(I did the social venture) because I wanted to get the business experience. I chose economics because of the fact that it is information about all business aspects - your accounting, finance and various other things. It was all geared towards that. I didn't expect to get to this overall social conscience as well."

Daniel, London

We also looked at whether there was a link between studying subjects which relate to social entrepreneurship, such as business or social science, and the likelihood of a young person becoming a social entrepreneur. Two of the social entrepreneurs we interviewed took business-related courses and one took a youth-work qualification. All three recognised that some of their course learning helped them to plan and run their social venture and that running their venture helped them to strengthen their academic knowledge.

A total of three out of the 20 social entrepreneurs does not suggest that subject-appropriate education is necessary for successful young social entrepreneurship. Rather, it indicates that young social entrepreneurship is open to those with any academic strengths or interests.

Not all young people's strengths and passions are best assessed and nurtured within a formal educational context. As we found no relationship between education

and social entrepreneurship we suggest that these findings may open up opportunities to people who are less academic. This is supported by our other findings, described opposite, which indicate that social entrepreneurship is learned through doing rather than through being taught; a learning style which suits some young people far better than the classroom environment. We should therefore actively work to both increase recognition for the skills acquired and demonstrated through social entrepreneurial activity, and keep the sector open, diverse and accessible to all.

YOUNG SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS LEARN BY DOING

How do young people learn to be social entrepreneurs?

The majority of young social entrepreneurs we interviewed identified the importance of formal education in providing them with crucial foundational skills in subjects like maths, languages, and history. And yet all those interviewed said that the skills they needed to run a social venture were learned through doing the project activities as they arose, rather than being taught at school, a process known as experiential learning or learning by doing.

“Learning from doing... It was that experience of being in a group and being in charge of something that really taught you what was going on and made you pick it up really quickly. If you didn't, then you weren't going to be part of it. You would just be with some people sitting about. There wasn't an organisation to carry us; therefore we had to (learn) fast.”

Emma, London

Furthermore, the majority of our interviewees (17 of the 20) participated in other activities which involve learning by doing, including informal educational activities such as sports, music, and youth clubs, as well as more responsible roles such as volunteering and internships. Our survey found a particularly strong association between the uptake of social entrepreneurship opportunities and internship opportunities, with young social entrepreneurs three times more likely to participate in an internship than young people generally⁵. All interviewees involved in learning by doing activities identified these as more important in nurturing skills for social entrepreneurship than formal educational contexts.

Whilst the associations between learning by doing activities and social entrepreneurship measured from the survey data cannot demonstrate a causal link, the interviews with young social entrepreneurs showed that in most instances participation in these activities predated and influenced their decision to become a social entrepreneur. Young social entrepreneurs also stressed how these activities had been more useful in providing the skills and networks they needed to fulfil their social ventures, compared to formal education. Demonstrating this relationship is useful in two ways. Firstly it indicates that young social entrepreneurs are active citizens in a range of contexts contributing widely to their communities. And secondly, opportunities which allow people to learn by doing are important stepping stones to young social entrepreneurship.

Interactive workshops and work placements with social entrepreneurs were identified by survey respondents as preferred ways to learn about social enterprise⁶, and internships were

particularly strongly associated with young social entrepreneurship. These approaches present routes by which the social enterprise sector and civil society organisations can attract young people to social entrepreneurship, thereby developing the next generation of social entrepreneurs.

Young social entrepreneurship as a form of education

As well as providing a different way of learning, young social entrepreneurs described how the experience of running a successful venture equipped them with different skills from those learned in formal education. The current economic context is one in which youth unemployment is rising and employers are critical of the skills of university and school leavers⁷. Whilst our research was concerned with explaining the means by which social entrepreneurship is learned as well as the skills needed in order to understand how to support growth of the sector, we also note that the skills gained by young social entrepreneurs are of considerable value in the marketplace as well as in the community. The following list includes all the skills and attributes mentioned by interviewees, the counts in brackets indicate the number of interviewees who cited the skill:

- ★ Persistence (9/20)
- ★ Team building and management (8/20)
- ★ Negotiation and communication (7/20)
- ★ Networking (4/20)
- ★ Organisation (4/20)
- ★ Business skills (4/20)
- ★ Time management (4/20)
- ★ Self confidence (4/20)
- ★ Project planning (3/20)
- ★ Leadership (2/20)
- ★ Project budgeting (2/20)

Young social entrepreneurs described how the experience of running a successful venture had required them to develop these skills and attributes and they anticipated using them for the rest of their life in a range of contexts, including other community work and employment.

“It took a lot of organisation, there was a huge amount to learn skills-wise, you had to learn how to mitigate people's tempers and arguments; it took a lot to learn how to sweet talk people into doing things for free.”

Emma, London

“I am running a not-for-profit sports club but I think I now have the skills to take that into the work place and run a for-profit small business, I think there is no difference between them, I'm definitely more business-minded because of being a social entrepreneur.”

Ben, Epsom

Social entrepreneurship offers a framework in which young people can learn key skills which are valuable for society and the economy and complement those learned in formal education.

Social entrepreneurship will grow among young people if we create an environment in our communities and educational institutions which nurtures it.

Despite the importance of these skills for employment and wider community engagement, five of our interviewees felt that their formal education institutions did not recognise social entrepreneurship as a valuable learning opportunity.

“We were all obsessed with getting a First—that was all we cared about. If we had wanted to go along to a (social action project), it didn’t feel like that was recognised; what mattered was the grades. I found that university didn’t recognise how you could apply (what you had learned to) projects and how (the projects) had merit in their own right.”

Gemma, London

We demonstrate here that social entrepreneurship offers a framework in which young people can learn key skills which are valuable for society and the economy and compliment those learned in formal education. These findings suggest that educational institutions could do more to recognise the value of social entrepreneurship in developing these skills and could have an important role to play in promoting social entrepreneurship opportunities. One possible way in which schools might integrate social entrepreneurship into student life is through uptake of the Social Enterprise Qualification, which is currently being piloted by RIO (realideas.org) and hopes to gain formal accreditation, and linking to the National Qualifications Credit Framework in the UK.⁸

YOUNG SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS ARE INSPIRED BY OTHERS

The importance of visible role models

The majority of the young social entrepreneurs we interviewed explained that as they saw other people, including family members, peers, teachers and individuals, participate actively in their communities they became inspired to do something themselves. As well as being the inspiration for becoming a young social entrepreneur, these individuals were in many cases described as key supports in helping them to develop the skills they needed to run their venture. This illustrates how young people want to make a positive change in their communities and are inspired to do so by visible role models, which raises the question of how and where such role models might be made visible.

Only three out of our 20 interviewees described a relationship with an inspiring individual at their educational institution which supported them in their social project. In these cases the support had been greatly valued, in the same way as the majority of interviewees valued support they had from individuals outside of formal education. Given the low number of interviewees supported by an educational institution, we asked survey respondents whether they felt such institutions

offered enough opportunities to start projects which address a social issue; 78% of respondents said they did not. When asked when these opportunities would have the most impact, 54% of respondents identified secondary school. This indicates that young people want more opportunities to engage in social entrepreneurship and identify school as the means by which they might hear about it.

“(At) the school I went to, the teachers were very supportive of everything I was doing... The support I had from them was fantastic. When I was setting up the club, I needed to use a meeting room, (and) they let me use a meeting room. Little things like that really helped me...”

Ben, Epsom

When considered together, the importance of visible role models and the desire of young people for more opportunities through school suggests that educational contexts are an obvious place for outreach work of both young social entrepreneurs themselves and other active members of the community.

**...WHEN YOU BELIEVE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP OPPORTUNITIES
WOULD HAVE THE MOST IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE**

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
PRIMARY SCHOOL	47	9.2
SECONDARY SCHOOL	279	54.4
HIGHER EDUCATION (POST SECONDARY EDUCATION)	101	19.7
FURTHER EDUCATION (UNIVERSITY, EQUIVALENT OR HIGHER)	43	8.4
SCHOOL SPONSORED EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES	11	2.1
OUTSIDE OF EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS	14	2.7
OTHER	2	0.4
NONE OF THE ABOVE	16	3.1
TOTAL	51	100.0

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that young social entrepreneurs draw on their passions and experience to make a positive impact on the world in which they live. Successful social entrepreneurship does not require high academic achievement and is learned as you go along. In running their ventures, young people gain new skills not usually gained within the formal educational context, skills which are valuable in the workplace, as well as develop their capabilities to be active and responsible citizens.

Social entrepreneurship will grow among young people if we create an environment in our communities and educational institutions which nurtures it. We believe increased recognition of young social entrepreneurship would lead to more opportunities for young people to learn about it in learning-by-doing contexts such as internships and work placements, as well as better employment opportunities for those that take up these opportunities. Young social entrepreneurship is a bottom-up solution to the social issues affecting our communities. Organised support and promotion by the social enterprise, youth and education sectors would provide a structure in which young social entrepreneurs can thrive.

END NOTES

¹ Levie, J. and Hart, M. (2009) Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: United Kingdom 2009 Monitoring Report. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. Harding, R. and Harding, D. (2008). Social Entrepreneurship in the UK. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.

² McDowall, H. and Micinski, N. (2010) Young Social Entrepreneurship: A Vehicle for Social Change and Skills Development. UnLtd: London.

³ In our survey with 513 respondents, the results of the chi-square test of independence of overall significance, accounting for age, showed that the proportions in the 5 categories of education did not differ significantly, $X(4) = 5.55$, exact $p = .24$, not significant.

⁴ The most recent being Levie and Hart (2009) Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: United Kingdom 2009 Monitoring Report. GEM. The 2009 GEM survey of the UK adult population uses a definition of social entrepreneurship which is comparable to that used here and indicates that education is positively associated with social entrepreneurial activity.

⁵ The proportions between those identified as social entrepreneurs or non-social entrepreneurs in relation to the proportions of internship completed (yes/no) were significantly different, $X(1) = 6.39$, exact $p = .02$, significant.

⁶ 60% of respondents identified workshops on social entrepreneurship concepts, and 58% of respondents identified work placements as their preferred means of learning about social entrepreneurship.

⁷ Ippr and Private Equity Foundation, August 2010, Prospect of becoming NEET rises by 40 per cent for those with A-levels, available at <http://www.privateequityfoundation.org/press/press-releases/prospect-of-becoming-neet-rises-by-40-per-cent-for-those-with-a-levels/> accessed 20/10/2010 REC, 5/7/2010, REC Youth Employment Taskforce report calls for urgent action to avoid a 'lost generation', available at <http://www.rec.uk.com/press/news/1140> accessed 12/09/2010.

⁸ RIO (2010) Social Enterprise Qualification (SEQ), available at <http://socialenterprisequalification.realideas.org/> accessed 18/10/2010.

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