



# MAKING CHANGE.

2024 - 2026

**BIG  
CHANGE.**

# WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Young people are growing up in a rapidly changing world. They face uncertain career paths, economic conditions that make milestones harder to reach, and a pace of change that can feel overwhelming rather than exciting.

But the systems meant to support them - education, mental health, youth services, and care - were built for a different era. Disconnected and under strain, they're no longer meeting the needs, hopes, or realities of young people today. As a result, many young people feel unprepared for the future and let down by institutions designed to help them thrive.

Young people feel unheard and excluded from decision-making power. **In 2025**, we asked more than **1,300 young people aged 16–28** across the UK how they feel about the challenges they face.

The findings paint a picture of a generation eager and ready to be part of the solution - but held back by rising inequality and economic insecurity, fragmented public services that don't join up around their needs, and a system where your background and postcode still determine your chances. Recognition alone won't fix it. That's why early-stage support matters more than ever. When we asked what would make the biggest difference, young people were clear.

## Here's what they told us:

# 55%

Better access to **mental health** and **emotional support**

# 54%

A greater say in **decisions** shaping their **future**

# 50%

An end to the **one-size-fits-all** education system

# 52%

Stronger **community connections** and **trusted relationships**



To create change, we find and back changemakers with early-stage ideas that have the potential to spark lasting change for all young people.

We provide opportunities for them to connect, learn, and act together as part of a purpose-driven community rethinking and reshaping the systems around young people.

[Read our latest strategy.](#)

# HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

Our impact starts with the leaders we support

We back leaders early, often before their ideas are proven, combining funding with the support of our community. We do this through:

1. Funding young leaders who are setting out on their journey to drive system change through the **Spark Awards**
2. A **Leaders for Big Change** referral programme supporting more experienced leaders
3. A collective funding approach, supporting leaders to come together in coordinated responses to create change across systems.



## IN 2025 WE BACKED

### 10 NEW LEADERS

with early-stage ideas through our **Spark Awards for young changemakers** and **Leaders for Big Change** programme, connecting them to a community of

### 70 ORGANISATIONS

and

### 83 PROJECTS

over

### 14 YEARS

We see how our model of early-stage support is creating lasting change and allowing leaders to grow and sustain over time by unlocking more support and being greater than the sum of their parts.



# From backing individuals to unlocking impact at scale

The leaders we back create change across interconnected areas such as education, mental health, justice, employment, youth voice, wellbeing, and more.

They reflect the complexity of the issues affecting young people. They work directly with young people and with communities,

supporting the adults around them, building evidence to inform policy and practice, and bringing people together to collaborate, address shared challenges, and increase collective impact.

[Click here](#) to see the organisations we've funded since 2014.

## £5.5M

Since **2014**, Big Change has invested **£5.5 million** in grant funding.

## £200M

Our investment has unlocked over **£200 million** in follow-on funding.

THAT'S **£40**  
**£1** FOR EVERY  
WE'VE PUT IN.

Our average  
**grant** is

## 66K

with **20%**  
of grants over

## 100K

At least **16 organisations**  
in our community now have  
annual incomes of over

»» **£1 million** ««

# A trust-based approach

We focus on building trust with the leaders we support; this takes time, and it means showing up where they work.

This trust-based approach to funding is essential where outputs and outcomes can't be predicted in advance. We invest in the process, time and relationships. As **Andrew Speight**, founder of **Emoco** and Big Education Challenge finalist, shares:

*“Big Change didn’t arrive with a fixed agenda or a prescriptive model. Instead, they asked the most important question: ‘What do you need to make this possible, and how can we help remove the barriers?’”*


*They didn’t just fund a project; they validated a vision. With their support, I was able to grow Emoco beyond one school.*

*What stands out even more is the community Big Change creates. It gives you a sense of belonging.”*

Whether we are putting out an open call to young leaders or seeking referrals for more experienced ones, those we back are united by being close to the problems they are solving. Many describe Big Change as “a lifeline” and a source of “freedom and trust,” reflecting the importance of our belief at the earliest stages.

We work closely with funders like **Virgin Unite** and **the Ferdinando & Luigi Innocenti Foundation** to shape our funding models, alongside partners and allies, including **The Strive Collective**, **the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)**, **the Young Foundation**, **Teach for All**, and leaders from organisations we’ve funded to draw on their insight and experience.





**IN 2025 WE BACKED **TEN**  
**LEADERS** WITH BOLD AND  
BRILLIANT IDEAS THAT  
ARE ENSURING **ALL YOUNG**  
**PEOPLE THRIVE.****

Read on to meet the 10 changemakers: 6 Spark Award Recipients,  
and 4 Leaders for Big Change Recipients.



Sound travels into places where reports cannot. Hip-Hop is a Trojan horse, it reaches young people systems were never designed for.

## Jaden is reimagining learning and belonging through sound system culture in London, Birmingham, Huddersfield, and Bristol

### THE SPARK:

After 15 years as a youth worker in South London, Jaden Osei-Bonsu was frustrated that traditional interventions weren't reaching the young people who needed them most. He began to look for ways to end this status quo.

### THE CHANGE:

He founded **Each One Teach One**, using Hip-Hop and sound system culture as tools for learning, identity, and connection, rooted in passing knowledge across generations. With Big Change's support, young people will co-design and build community-owned sound systems, gaining skills, ownership, and a shared sense of responsibility.

### THE IMPACT:

Jaden is working with young people who have been consistently failed by the systems around them, investing in new spaces which encourage knowledge exchange and last well beyond initial engagement.

## Yeukai is tackling the housing crisis among young people from migrant, refugee, and Black communities in London

### THE SPARK:

Yeukai Taruvinga knows firsthand that for many young people, homelessness isn't just about housing, it's about race, power, and exclusion.

### THE CHANGE:

Through her organisation **Active Horizons**, she's working with young people, housing professionals, and policymakers to co-design safe, dignified housing pathways.

### THE IMPACT:

A new system that prevents exclusion because they're shaped by lived experience and racial justice.



When young people design solutions rooted in their lived experience, we get to fix housing problems and systems.



We say 'it's okay not to be okay' but we're not giving young people the tools to cope. That has to change.

## Ella-Grace is advocating for early intervention for girls and young women struggling with mental health in Blackpool

### THE SPARK:

Ella-Grace was failed by the education system. She saw first-hand how the right support for young girls struggling comes after crisis hits. Girls in deprived communities in Blackpool are facing rising anxiety and isolation, while systems remain overstretched and reactive.

### THE CHANGE:

Ella-Grace's **Her-izons** embeds early, preventative support, co-creating a well-being curriculum with young people and working alongside schools, youth services, and the NHS.

### THE IMPACT:

A scalable model of early-intervention that will support girls before they reach breaking point.

## Ellie is reducing school non-attendance by moving from punishment to partnerships in Greater Manchester

### THE SPARK:

When she saw how punitive measures and scapegoating weren't helping the 1.6 million children persistently absent feel ready to return to school.

### THE CHANGE:

Ellie Costello's **Square Peg** replaces fines and court cases with trust, relationships, and listening. Working across schools and local authorities, she's rebuilding the connection between families and education.

### THE IMPACT:

Children want to return to school and feel a sense of belonging.



When we stop punishing families and start listening, we create the conditions for children to engage and thrive.

## Aiyana is creating peer-led support spaces for neurodivergent young people in London



Peer-led spaces aren't optional, they're how we build systems rooted in care.

### THE SPARK:

Mental health systems aren't set up to support neurodivergent+ young people especially those who are LGBTQ+, Black, or Asian.

### THE CHANGE:

At just 19, Aiyana Goodfellow launched **NEUROMANCERS**, the UK's first peer-led online support chat built by and for neurodivergent+ young people.

### THE IMPACT:

Young people have access to care that feels safe, relevant, and rooted in lived experience.

## Frances is using the arts to turn climate anxiety into action

### THE SPARK:

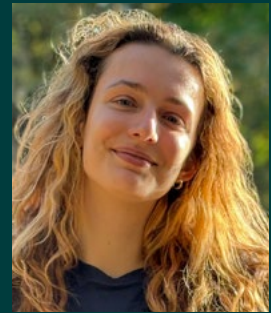
At school, Frances Fox saw how anxiety about climate change was stopping young people from taking action to end the crisis.

### THE CHANGE:

**Climate Courage** creates creative, peer-led spaces where young people transform anxiety into action through music, art, and storytelling.

### THE IMPACT:

Resilience, agency, and a generation equipped to take action and create change.



Climate strategies ignore mental health. We're changing that by turning anxiety into action.



We're not just consuming media, we're learning to shape it. That's how our voices get heard.

## Lily is leading the way for young people to challenge online misinformation across England

### THE SPARK:

As a young person, Lily Mott realised her generation was surrounded by misinformation online but they didn't have the tools to challenge it.

### THE CHANGE:

She's addressing this through **Be the Change Media Academy** which equips 13–25-year-olds to create ethical, impactful media through mentorship and real-world content creation.

### THE IMPACT:

Young people turn from being passive consumers of misleading online content to confident creators shaping the narrative.

## Oluferanmi is transforming underused spaces into study hubs for students living in overcrowded housing in London

### THE SPARK:

Oluferanmi Balogun had nowhere quiet to go to revise for her A-levels. She was often struggling to concentrate on a crowded sofa late at night. For many young people, there is no quiet place to study.

### THE CHANGE:

Her radical project, **Room Too** transforms underused spaces in London into dedicated study hubs, co-designed with young people.

### THE IMPACT:

All young people have access to space where they can focus, and the chance to succeed, regardless of circumstances.



The question wasn't if I'd study, it was where. Everyone deserves a space to dream beyond their circumstances.



**I had the degree, but no one would hire me. This gives young people the chance I didn't have.**

## Vijai is combining environmental responsibility with new pathways into work for young people in London

### THE SPARK:

Vijai witnessed how unemployment was rising for young people, with many facing the catch-22 of not getting interviews because they don't have experience.

### THE CHANGE:

**WEEE Renew** turns corporate e-waste into opportunity, training young people in IT repair, logistics, and digital skills through its IMPACT model.

### THE IMPACT:

New pathways to work giving young people real experience, real skills, real opportunities.

## Hamza is activating community power and providing youth-led political education in Manchester

### THE SPARK:

Muslim and Global Majority young people in Manchester face systemic exclusion, racism, and Islamophobia. Traditional spaces often leave young people feeling isolated and unheard.

### THE CHANGE:

Hamza Rana's **Muslim Social Justice Initiative** is building community power through its School of Community Power, combining political education, leadership, and collective action.

### THE IMPACT:

A new generation of leaders shaping change from the ground up.



**We don't need more resilience to harmful systems; we need the space to build something new.**



► **OUR COMMUNITY IS DRIVING  
LASTING CHANGE** ◀

Funding alone doesn't create systems change.  
The connections we make between leaders - across sectors,  
and experience - multiply impact in ways no single grant can.

# How our support is driving long term change

## We have supported leaders across more than one idea

Ed Fidoe founded both [Voice 21](#) and the [London Interdisciplinary School](#), which is transforming approaches to education.

Josh McAllister set up [Frontline](#), which trains 1 in 10 social care workers in the UK, and [Shift](#), a social change organisation. He's now an MP and the Minister for Children and Families.

We backed [Ruth Ibegbuna](#) when she founded [Reclaim](#), and then later when she founded [Rekindle](#).



## From a pilot in one school to changing national policy

In 2014, we were an early supporter of [Voice 21](#), as they piloted an oracy education programme in one school in East London.

A decade on, they now work with thousands of students in over 1,200 schools. Through their advocacy work and their Big Change-funded [Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group](#), Oracy has featured in cross-party education priorities, features in the 2026 Schools White Paper, and it is now inspected by Ofsted, giving it the same weight as numeracy and literacy.



Huge kudos and thanks to Big Change. Your foresight and bravery in backing oracy back then was the spark that enabled Voice 21 to ignite (and personally, helped me get my start there!). The APPG report you funded called for exactly the framework the Government has now introduced and your sustained support and championing of oracy helped make the small steps forward that result in big change!

**Beccy Earnshaw,**  
former CEO Voice 21

## Influencing sector-wide practice

We backed [Lighthouse Pedagogy Trust](#) in 2019 to ensure young people in care have the right to the same opportunities as everyone else – at home, school and in their communities.

They train practitioners who can build lasting relationships. Their work has been recognised in The Guardian, on BBC Radio 4 and in conversations with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

They have launched a graduate diploma programme to influence practice across the children's residential care sector.



At Lighthouse we believe that every child in care deserves the same opportunities as everyone else. Young people need a place to call home, they need great people around them and they need great opportunities in life.

Big Change backed us to create this when we were at a very early stage and that was an incredible thing to have.

**Emmanuel Akpan-Inwang**  
**Founder of The Lighthouse**  
**Pedagogy Trust**



## Space to connect

As a funder, we know how important it is to create space and time for leaders to rest, connect, and reflect. Across the year, we bring together intergenerational leaders through day and weekend retreats - creating space away from the pressures of day-to-day work to recharge, build real relationships, and form partnerships that extend well beyond the room.



When Big Change brings people together, it isn't about transactions or outcomes. It's about human connection, time with brilliant people each doing amazing work, and the energy that comes from sharing that space.

**Ali Durban MBE,**  
Co-founder of Gesher School.

## Space to collaborate

Building a community of leaders reduces isolation and accelerates progress. This is more important than ever at a time of global uncertainty and tightening funding environments. In **2025**, a connection we made between The Firefly Project and Voice 21 led to the launch of "Unspoken Stories", a new project that reached over 1,000 schools, helping young people develop the confidence to talk about their own mental health and grief, and giving teachers the tools and resources to facilitate those conversations.



A huge thank you to our funders Big Change, for making the introduction and all your support.

**Jenna Maudlin,**  
Founder of The Firefly Project.



# Space to influence

In early February 2026, we convened a roundtable with the Minister of State for School Standards, **Georgia Gould MP** and **Sarah Smith MP**. Our community gathered to provide thoughtful challenge and insight to the Schools White Paper - advocating for changes to the education system they've long been collectively calling for.

## The key shifts they called for:

- ✦ Schools that go beyond test scores and create learning experiences that are unmissable for every student.
- ✦ Schools that respond to young people's need for agency and belonging.
- ✦ Genuinely inclusive education for those with special educational needs and challenges at home.
- ✦ Schools connected to local services to deliver joined-up support.



Thank you Big Change for doing what you do best, connecting the leaders on the ground with the leaders delivering the policy.

**Aliyah Irabor York,**  
former Youth Consultant



It was enormously encouraging to hear the direction of travel and looking forward to grappling collectively with the devil in the details to build trust, community, place, purpose and agile, responsive systems which flex and thrive to support children, young people, their families and professionals to flourish, imagine and innovate.

There is always another way.  
We can do better. Together.

**Ellie Costello,**  
Founder, Square Peg

## What our changemakers tell us:



Being a Spark Awards recipient meant more than funding. It opened doors to a community of fellow changemakers doing brilliant things. Big Change has helped facilitate candid, nurturing conversations about challenges in a safe space.

**Frances Fox,**  
**Founder of Climate Live,**  
**Spark Awards recipient**



The Big Change learning and support programme has provided me with the time and space to consult and listen, allowing us to co-create a solution with young people and stakeholders. It has been inspiring to be a part of a cohort of changemakers who are facing similar challenges and the peer support has been invaluable in helping us to navigate them.

**Jonathan Harper,**  
**Founder of CanTeam**

[Click here](#) to see the diversity of organisations and projects in our community.

## What our funders and partners tell us:

Our experience in identifying early-stage leaders is valued by our funders to create lasting change. Building trust matters to us at every stage, and as **Paul Williams**, long-term Big Change funder, said:

*"I love how Big Change is accountable; every penny, even if put on a risky venture, is accounted for."*



One organisation that stood out was Big Change. Their ethos of seeing the potential in young people, and their commitment to long-term systems change felt like a natural fit. Our collaboration with Big Change is a reminder that when we trust young people and invest in their ideas, we don't just spark joy, we spark systems change.

**Andrea Cooper,**  
**Ferdinando & Luigi Innocenti**  
**Foundation**



It's exciting to see an organisation genuinely working hard to support changemakers and using such a brave model. This kind of funding creates the conditions for the radical shifts that we so badly need to start taking place.

**Eliza Reid Parks,**  
**Education Activist and Big Education**  
**Challenge Judge**

# We keep learning

Not every project we back lasts. As an early supporter of youth social action, we backed several organisations that have since closed, including Generation Change, The Challenge, and NCS.

But whilst these delivery mechanisms have ceased as the policy context has shifted, the work remains relevant. We continue to invest in projects which centre youth voices and support young people to find their purpose and have agency to make change in their communities.

## We will continue to:

- ✦ Back leaders early and support them throughout their journeys.
- ✦ Prioritise flexible, trust-based funding to enable meaningful, sustained impact.
- ✦ Create space, time, and support for leaders to deepen their practice and spark collective impact across an intergenerational community.
- ✦ Develop collective impact through a pilot fund that encourages and enables collective action by deepening relationships among multiple change-makers, resourcing capacity and time to make them greater than the sum of their parts.



The next chapter is about what becomes possible when we connect these game-changing leaders and organisations to each other and a meaningful support ecosystem - to learn from each other, and champion systemic shifts as a collective force.

**Essie North,**  
**CEO, Big Change**



# TOGETHER WE SPARK LASTING CHANGE

Thank you to all our supporters, volunteers, and trustees who make this work possible.

## JOIN US

We're funded by trusts, foundations, individuals, and strivers who bring their entrepreneurial spirit and vital funds to create long-term change.

To find out more about working with us drop our partnerships team a message at [partnerships@big-change.org](mailto:partnerships@big-change.org).



It's so important to collaborate with communities and partners, and especially young people.

We've got to listen, we've got to be curious, we've got to be brave, we've got to be open-minded.

**Holly Branson,**  
**Trustee and Co-founder Big Change,**  
**Chief Vision Officer at Virgin,**  
**Chair of Virgin Unite**

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size was 1,355 adults aged 16 to 28. Fieldwork was undertaken between 26th August – 1st September 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults.