Wave Change:
Final Evaluation Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Research Team and authors of this report:
Dr. Noreen Kearns, **Ms. Danielle Kennan** and **Dr. John Canavan** of the
UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Expert Advisor
Mark A. Brennan, Professor and UNESCO Chair in Rural Community, Leadership, and Youth
Development, The Pennsylvania State University, USA.

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Acknowledgements

The Research Team in NUI Galway would like to thank the two cohorts of youth who participated in the Wave Change Programme during 2012 and 2013 for taking part in this study and sharing their experiences with us.

Two key staff members of the Wave Change Programme Team – Director Lynda Stopford and Programme Manager Ffiona Rowland – deserve particular mention, since without their contribution and support throughout the evaluation period, this research would not have been possible.

The Research Team would also like to thank the Wave Change Steering Group and Board members who shared their views on the programme for the purposes of this study.

1. Introduction and Methodology

Wave Change works directly with youth who have a passion for social change to develop the knowledge, skills and networks they need to make a difference in Ireland. It was launched as a programme of Social Entrepreneurs Ireland (hereafter SEI) in 2011. Wave Change is delivered through an annual programme, providing training, support, development and networking opportunities to youth aged 18–25 from across Ireland. SEI, established in 2004, works with high-potential social entrepreneurs to enable them to maximise the potential impact of their ideas across the country through a combination of financial investment, direct support and celebration and communication of their achievements.

In collaboration with the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway), Wave Change is committed to knowledge generation and dissemination. This component of Wave Change is intended to generate learning that will guide the future of the initiative. It is further intended to feed into the evidence base on the implementation of youth civic action interventions and their value to young people, and to inform policy and practice at the national and international level. The evaluation covers a 2-year period, running from November 2011 to October 2013, which incorporates the first two cycles of the delivery of the Wave Change Programme. The *Interim Evaluation Report* (end of Year 1) and *Final Evaluation Report* (end of Year 2) are outputs of this commitment to knowledge generation.

For the purposes of this study, the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre is advised and supported in its research and evaluation activities by Professor Mark Brennan, who is an expert in the area of youth civic action and community development and who holds the UNESCO Chair in Rural Community, Leadership and Youth Development at Pennsylvania State University, USA.

Aims of the study

The aim of the evaluation, as set out in the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre Evaluation Plan (signed off by Wave Change in December 2011), is to examine the implementation and delivery of Wave Change (process evaluation), to generate learning to contribute to the ongoing development of the programme (formative evaluation) and to examine whether the initiative met its identified outcomes (outcomes evaluation). The objectives of the evaluation are:
1. to describe the Wave Change model;
2. to locate the initiative in the relevant theoretical literature;
3. to assess the implementation of Wave Change and generate learning for the programme;
4. to assess whether Wave Change met its intended outcomes;
5. to assess value for money.

Ethical approval was granted by the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee in February 2012.

Methodology

Data were collected from a wide range of participants in this evaluation process, including the two cohorts of participants in the Wave Change Programme (Wave Changers), the Wave Change Team (Director, Programme Manager, Programme Facilitator, Assistant Programme Facilitator (volunteer) and Programme Associate), the Wave Change Steering Group members and the programme funder (The Atlantic Philanthropies). The evaluation is a mixed-methods study, incorporating a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, including questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, diaries, case studies and observation. In the main, the evaluation is qualitative due to the small number of Wave Changers partaking in the programme during the period covered by this evaluation report (n=47). The methods used to address the objectives of the study and the response rates during the data collection period (November 2011 – October 2013) are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Data collection methods in Year 1 and Year 2

Method		Number sampled	Number participated	Response rate %
QUALITATIVE				
	Interviews			
	Year 1	8	8	100
	Year 2	12	12	100
	Reflective diaries (x5)			
	Year 1	22	46 (diaries)	42
	Year 2	25	71 (diaries)	57
	Video diary Year 2	25	19 (diaries)	76
	Focus groups			
	Year 1	22	14	64
	Year 2	25	16	64
	Case studies	6	4	67
	Observation	*n/a*	*n/a*	*n/a*
QUANTITATIVE				
	Recruitment and Bootcamp questionnaires (x2)			
	Year 1	50	50	100
	Year 2	42	42	100
	Baseline questionnaire	47	46	98
	Follow-up questionnaire	45	27	60
	Programme weekend questionnaires (x5)			
	Year 1	22	84 (questionnaires)	76
	Year 2	25	93 (questionnaires)	74
	Practical Skills workshop questionnaire	38	32	84
	Seed funding questionnaire	6	6	100
	Alumni questionnaire	22	17	77

Analysis

Process and Formative Study Analysis

The qualitative data sources (consisting of interviews, focus groups, field notes from the observation and the relevant questionnaires) were reviewed and analysed to assemble the evidence on whether Wave Change was implemented as intended, and what were the ingredients to successful implementation and the barriers and challenges arising during implementation. The data sources were manually coded and analysed under various headings that reflected the key themes emerging from the research.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires was input and analysed using Microsoft Excel.

Outcomes Study Analysis

To assess whether the programme contributed to its desired outcomes, the evaluation adopted a contribution analysis approach. In the context of programme evaluation, '*contribution analysis explores attribution through assessing the contribution a programme is making to observed results. It sets out to verify the theory of change behind the programme and, at the same time, takes into consideration other influencing factors*' (Mayne, 2008, p. 1). This approach recognises that it takes time to prove an impact (Kotvojs, 2006) and is therefore appropriate considering the evaluation timeframe. It does not seek to definitely prove impact, but acknowledges that there are other potentially influential contributing factors. In essence, it seeks to provide plausible evidence of how the programme is making a difference (Mayne, 1999).

In the current study, qualitative evidence was gathered and assessed, with the support of the qualitative data software package NVivo, to produce findings demonstrating whether the programme contributed to the intended outcomes. NVivo was used to code the self-reflection diaries, the video diaries and the relevant outcomes-focused data in the transcripts of the focus groups. This software facilitated the identification of emergent themes and enabled all stages of the analytical process to be transparent and traceable.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the quantitative data from the various questionnaires.

2. Literature and Model

Programmes designed specifically for youth in the area of social innovation and social entrepreneurship are said to be growing in popularity (Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2011). A large-scale quantitative study that measured the level and type of socially oriented entrepreneurial activity in the United Kingdom found that young people (aged 18–24) are more likely to be engaged in social entrepreneurial activity than any other age grouping (Harding, 2006). Despite this, however, there is a limited amount of literature or published evaluations in the area of youth social entrepreneurship.

In 2012, the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre produced a conceptual paper for Wave Change entitled *Understanding Youth Civic Engagement: Debates, Discourses and Lessons from Practice* (Brady *et al.*, 2012). The paper provides an overview of the theory and literature on youth civic engagement. It sets out:

- key definitions and typologies of youth civic engagement;
- underpinning discourses that create the rationale for youth civic engagement;
- the benefits of civic activity to individuals and their communities;
- the barriers and challenges in civically engaging youth;
- learning that can inform the development of civic engagement programmes and issues associated with effective programmes.

In addition, a brief summary is given of the literature specific to the context of youth social entrepreneurship and the model upon which the Wave Change initiative is based.

Youth Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is categorised as a form of civic engagement. As set out in the conceptual paper by Brady *et al.* (2012) mentioned above, civic engagement has been defined as 'individual or collective actions in which people participate to improve the well-being of communities or society in general, and which provide opportunities for reflection' (Innovations in Civic Participation, 2008). While youth civic engagement is an umbrella term for a wide variety of activities, social entrepreneurship has been classified as one form of youth civic engagement, along with activities such as community service and volunteering, advocacy and campaigning, and leadership training. In the Irish context, a social entrepreneur has been defined as 'someone who recognises a social problem and uses entrepreneurial principles to organise, create and manage a venture to make social change' (Forfás, 2007).

A review by UNICEF (2007) of existing social entrepreneurship programme models concluded that the following key supports are needed for youth social entrepreneurs:

- **Knowledge:** Providing training and technical assistance to help young people gain the skills and information necessary for their projects.
- **Networking:** Facilitating a network to enhance knowledge-sharing, collaboration and collective discovery, including by means of electronic platforms.
- **Mentorship:** Providing training, motivation and feedback.
- **Finance:** Funding to transform ideas into action.

Research published by several other authors writing on this issue has identified similar attributes necessary for supporting young social entrepreneurs (Harding, 2006; Foundation for Young Australians, 2010 and 2013; Berman and Mellon, 2012; Heady *et al.*, 2012).

Some of the most commonly reported positive outcomes of youth social entrepreneurship programmes are the contribution they make to enhancing the participants' self-confidence, strengthening their motivation and building their capacity to take action for social change (Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research, 2011; Gilbert *et al.*, 2011; Heady *et al.*, 2012; Foundation for Young Australians, 2013). The supportive environment these programmes create in the form of networks with like-minded peers is also a consistent outcome (Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research, 2011; Foundation for Young Australians, 2013). The opportunity to acquire knowledge and the relevant skill sets is another commonly cited positive outcome (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011; Foundation for Young Australians, 2013).

Various implementation challenges arising in delivering youth social entrepreneurship programmes have been documented in the relevant literature. Innovations in Civic Participation (2008), having reviewed a number of programmes in East Asia and the Pacific, identified the following challenges in delivering social entrepreneurship programmes: they are expensive to deliver and can only provide for a limited number of participants. It has also been found that, while there are benefits for individuals to become part of a like-minded community, this can have a negative effect on an individual's sense of efficacy. While not focusing specifically on the delivery of youth social entrepreneurship programmes, a report by Norman *et al.* (2013), reflecting on the importance of growth in the social innovation sector in Northern Ireland, identified a number of general challenges to growth in this sector:
- a lack of awareness and understanding of social innovation;
- the tough economic climate;
- access to funding;
- unwillingness to take risks;
- limited support, including mentoring, networking and training.

The Wave Change model

Details are presented here of how the Wave Change model evolved from the time the programme commenced in 2011 through to its completion in 2013. The core capacity-building programme model remained largely the same during the implementation phases, which ran for 8-month periods (February to September) during 2012 and 2013. Nonetheless, the experience of the first year intake enabled the Wave Change Team to make some refinements to the model for the second year intake. The key components of the programme model, as well as differences between Year 1 and Year 2, are highlighted in the discussion below.

The idea for Wave Change originated in The Atlantic Philanthropies Ireland[1] (AP) in 2010. At the time, the prevention and early intervention strand of the AP Children and Youth Programme was investing in the area of adolescents and early childhood, and, according to AP, was interested in delving further into the rubric of civic engagement and promoting youth voice. It was considered by AP that in Ireland there was a lack of programmes to 'develop and test demonstrations of innovative youth civic engagement'. The idea of 'demonstrating action' was considered key. Interest by Social Entrepreneurs Ireland (SEI) in developing the programme arose due to its work in the area of social

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[1] The Atlantic Philanthropies, founded in 1982 and operating in Ireland since the late 1980s, provides grants to advance opportunity and lasting change for those who are unfairly disadvantaged or vulnerable to life's circumstances. For further information, see http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org.

entrepreneurship and from a gap identified in the youth work sector in Ireland. SEI was aware of many young people, particularly in the 18–25 age group, who were passionate about social change and involved in civic engagement activities through universities, colleges, not-for-profit organisations and on an individual basis, and who had their own ideas that required support. It was this group that the Wave Change Programme was set up to target.

Wave Change is not modelled on an existing programme. The mission statement (2013) is as follows:
> 'Wave Change equips young social entrepreneurs in Ireland with the skills and networks they need to be effective, resilient and ethical change makers.'

As set out in the original programme design, it was proposed to deliver Wave Change through a number of linked activities:
- **Field development:** A web-based portal for connecting and networking both young people and adult allies from leading organisations that support youth civic action and social justice.
- **Youth civic action programme:** A 10-month programme of training, support, development and networking opportunities for young people aged 18–25. This skills-based, staged programme was intended to support a group of young people in areas such as social research, journalism and media, social entrepreneurship and advocacy.
- **Knowledge generation and dissemination:** The generation of learning to guide future improvements of the programme and to inform policy and practice regarding the development of youth civic engagement interventions.

The set of intended outcomes of the Wave Change Programme are as follows:
- Participants have strong, resilient personal foundations to lead on change now and in the future, including enhanced self-awareness, sense of agency, self-efficacy and well-being.
- Participants have in-depth knowledge and practical experience of project management and social innovation, which can be applied to any work on social change they carry out now and in the future.
- Participants are part of a strong, diverse network of social change-makers, aged 18–25 from across Ireland.
- In Year 1, two additional intended outcomes were:
    o The participants are inspired to engage in social change and make a difference.
    o The participants are provided with the opportunity to develop and implement ideas for social change.
- Having innovative, sustainable projects emerge from the programme was an additional bonus outcome identified for Year 2. It was categorised as a bonus outcome because social innovation by its very nature means that not all projects will be seen through to the end. The Wave Changers' projects were primarily intended as a vehicle to apply their learning.

Target group

Wave Change intended to recruit 25 Wave Changers in Year 1, and 25 in Year 2. Those targeted in Year 1 comprised young people aged 18–25 from across Ireland. Specific traits sought in Year 1 included innovation, a passion for social change, resourcefulness and ability to take opportunities, openness to peer-learning experiences and untapped capacity for resilience. The original intention, according to AP, was to have a diverse group of young people from different backgrounds and life experiences. However, during the roll-out of the programme, diverging views emerged among the funder, the Wave Change Team and the Steering Group regarding who was the intended target group in Year 1. It was unclear whether the programme was intended to target young people who would be inspired to engage in social action or to target those who were already civically active. This was significantly refined in Year 2, with a specific focus on selecting young people who were actively

engaged in social change and had an idea that was ready to be developed into a project or who already had a project at the implementation stage. A more definitive focus on 'high-potential' candidates with social entrepreneurship traits such as autonomy and leadership was also emphasised.

In terms of diversity, within the pool of potential candidates recruited in Year 1 and Year 2, it was the intention to target a diverse group of Wave Changers of a mixed profile. The Wave Change Team later established that diversity should be considered in terms of:
- educational background;
- employment status;
- ethnic origin;
- geographical diversity;
- diversity in area of interest (e.g., education, environment, mental health);
- representation of minority groups in Ireland (e.g., LGBT, Travellers, young carers).

Main components of the core Wave Change Programme

The Wave Change Programme is structured around a series of five programme weekends delivered over an 8-month period in 2012 and 2013. These weekends are integral to the programme and are designed to provide training, support, development and networking opportunities to Wave Changers to enable them to develop and implement their ideas for social change. This is facilitated through the delivery of workshops, master classes, inspirational talks delivered by invited speakers, skills share sessions and small group-based work with fellow Wave Changers, as well as time for personal reflection, planning and informal networking. A brief summary of each of the programme weekends during the evaluation period is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Overview of the focus of the programme weekends in 2012 and 2013

YEAR 1				
Feb. 2012 Weekend 1	**March 2012 Weekend 2**	**April 2012 Weekend 3**	**June 2012 Weekend 4**	**Sept. 2012 Weekend 5**
Setting the scene for the Wave Change learning journey.	Developing a shared vision, identifying and influencing key stakeholders and communications for social change.	Skills and learning Bootcamp focusing on two thematic strands: research and evaluation, or campaigning and activism.	Exchange of skills, talents, expertise and sharing of personal stories among the Wave Change participants.	The future post-Wave Change, with an emphasis on reflection and evaluation.
YEAR 2				
Feb. 2013 Weekend 1	**March 2013 Weekend 2**	**April 2013 Weekend 3**	**June 2013 Weekend 4**	**Sept. 2013 Weekend 5**
Project development focus: Setting the foundation – achieving visions for social change. **Personal development focus:** Self-awareness and goal-setting.	**Project development focus:** Ideation and creative entrepreneurship. **Personal development focus:** Managing and achieving your goals.	**Project development focus:** Failures, successes and pivots. **Personal development focus:** Bulldozing your barriers.	**Project development focus:** Team-building and project-planning. **Personal development focus:** Team-building.	**Project development focus:** Reflect, celebrate and the future. **Personal development focus:** Reflect, future visions and next steps.

Outside of the programme weekends, the Wave Changers are expected to lead on their own learning and progress their ideas or projects for social change, but supported by the following structures or inputs:

- **Practical Skills workshops:** Designed to offer specialised training, for example, in the areas of pitching (selling an idea), fundraising, lobbying and communications. They are intended to provide the Wave Changers with the practical skills required to progress their projects and ideas for social change.
- **External engagement:** This aspect of Wave Change is intended to create opportunities for the Wave Changers to be introduced to key and strategic influencers in the social and business fields, to attend and participate in events and conferences and to partake in site visits to organisations relevant to their project or ideas for social change.
- **Seed funding:** Designed to support the ideas and projects of the Wave Changers by investing financially in their projects, as well as providing them with the experience of partaking in a funding process.
- **Coaching and one-to-one support:** This component of Wave Change was intended to offer the Wave Changers one-to-one individual support through a formal structured coaching programme. This aspect of the programme was only implemented in Year 1. Informal and

semi-formal one-to-one support is also provided by the members of the Wave Change Team to the individual Wave Changers.

- **Internships:** Internships were an additional component of the programme model in Year 1. Wave Change sought to offer the Wave Changers the opportunity to undertake high-quality internships in social justice-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or in international organisations.

Learning model

In addition to the structured learning environment facilitated mainly by the programme weekends and the skills workshops, Wave Change placed a high importance on peer-to-peer learning. The programme sought to enable the Wave Changers to tap into the knowledge and experiences of their fellow-Wave Changers and to exchange feedback. This was facilitated on a one-to-one level and in group settings. Particularly in Year 2, the Wave Change Team sought to strike a balance between the Wave Changers relying on the Team and the programme to acquire their learning, and encouraging them to support, advise and learn from each other. In Year 2, another important development was the project-based pedagogical model adopted. All of the Wave Changers in Year 2 came to the programme with an idea for social change and were expected to apply their learning to the development and implementation of their social change project. This form of applied, experiential learning was viewed as the best way to develop practical skills

Field development

It was originally intended that Wave Change establish an outreach presence through engagement in activities beyond the delivery of the core programme. This was referred to in the model as the 'field development' component of the initiative. The purpose was to help develop the youth civic action sector in Ireland by connecting and networking both young people with an interest in youth civic action as well as practitioners, youth leaders and organisations (adult allies) operating in the field. One aspect of this was to take the form of an online presence through a website and social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter), which would provide young people aged 16–25 with access to up-to-date information on civic action opportunities in Ireland and opportunities to network with like-minded people. It was also the intention to provide a face-to-face outreach forum for those working and volunteering in organisations directly supporting young people in the field to come together to share ideas, experience, learning and best practice with each other. This would take the form of a Youth Civic Action Network (YCAN), which would hold workshops bi-annually to provide the opportunities for adult allies to connect, network and support each other in person and to share experiences and best practice.

Governance of Wave Change

The overall governance of Wave Change is the responsibility of the SEI Board of Directors. The Board delegated a number of its functions, primarily oversight of the implementation of Wave Change, to a Steering Group constituted by SEI. Operationally some of the core roles of the Steering Group include:
- providing recommendations and alternative solutions for the initiative and issues arising;
- reviewing budget and financial matters of Wave Change;
- ensuring an open two-way communication channel between Wave Change and other strategies or projects, and effective representation of Wave Change;

- identifying individuals, groups, networks and organisations with expertise in specific or specialised areas, and proposing their involvement in Wave Change as appropriate;
- advising on the best channels for dissemination of information;
- framing appropriate goals and milestones for the initiative and monitoring progress by the Wave Change Team in achieving these.

One of the roles of the Steering Group that evolved over time is the members' work as allies or ambassadors for the Wave Change Programme, whereby they forward on details of relevant events or use their contacts to request an opportunity for a participant to attend an external event. Outside of the Steering Group meetings, members of the group also provide advice and support on an individual basis to the Wave Change Team.

Another body associated with the governance of the Wave Change Programme was the Youth Advisory Group. In the very early stages of the initiative, it consisted of four young people aged 18–26 from across Ireland. They were recruited by word-of-mouth by the Wave Change Director in February 2011. Through regular meetings, they were directly involved in making inputs to specific aspects, including branding, on-line communications, policies and evaluation. However, as the roll-out of Wave Change progressed, the members of the Youth Advisory Group individually resigned. They were not replaced, but instead it was decided to tap into the ideas of the Wave Changers as required.

Assessing value for money

As part of this evaluation, the original intention was to conduct a value-for-money assessment focusing on the costs of delivering the programme in order to generate learning for other organisations interested in setting up a similar type of programme. In order to do this, a comparative approach was decided upon, whereby the evaluation would seek to access relevant financial data from similar programmes to compare with the costs of running Wave Change. The major costs of Wave Change were compared with those of a similar type of intervention – the Young Social Pioneers (YSP) programme established by The Foundation for Young Australians in 2009. The main findings of this assessment are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of the costs of the Wave Change and Young Social Pioneers Programmes

Intervention	Wave Change, Ireland Programme delivery costs for the period January 2012 – October 2013	Young Social Pioneers (YSP) Programme, Australia
Staffing costs	Average of 2 core staff per 25 participants	The staff:participant ratio was 1:18
Programme weekends costs • Speakers/facilitators/ contract staff • Venue, food, accommodation, travel for participants	€24,000 €34,000 A small number of external workshop providers offered their time pro bono.	The vast majority of speakers/ facilitators provided input on a pro-bono basis, with heavy reliance on the alumni. Programme participants at the live-in retreats and weekend skills workshops were provided with free travel, free accommodation and some free meals.
Seed funding	€28,000	There was no seed funding component in the YSP at the time of writing of this report.
External engagement	€1,400 Financial assistance was provided to facilitate the Wave Changers to attend events if required.	A similar strategic networking element of YSP did not have any associated costs.
Coaching/mentoring	Pro bono	Mentors offer their time pro bono, with some initial set-up costs each year.
Internships	€7,000	No internship component at the time of data collection.
Marketing, branding	€10,000	

3. Process and Formative Study Findings

The implementation of Wave Change is charted here, presenting the findings from the process and formative study. The findings are based on qualitative and quantitative data collected from the study participants during the 2-year evaluation period. The primary focus is on the delivery of the core Wave Change Programme. In addition, the outreach activities Wave Change engaged in beyond the delivery of the programme are described, with the aim of increasing its exposure and developing the youth civic action sector in Ireland through social media and face-to-face forums.

The Wave Change Programme

The findings on the recruitment and selection of potential Wave Change participants are based on interviews with the Wave Change Team, questionnaires completed by attendees of the recruitment weekend in Year 1 and the Bootcamp in Year 2, a focus group with the Wave Changers, observation, and documentary analysis.

Recruitment

The recruitment strategy used to target potential candidates for the programme was based primarily on word of mouth with existing connections and networks of SEI in Year 1. In Year 2, the recruitment strategy was more extensive and involved widespread contact with community, education and youth organisations, including targeted social media and networking approaches. A face-to-face process was involved in selecting the potential candidates, with three regional recruitment weekends held at the end of 2011 and beginning of 2012 for the Year 1 cohort, while a Bootcamp was held in Dublin in early 2013 for the Year 2 cohort. A total of 50 attended the recruitment weekends, while 43 attended the Bootcamp. An application form and interview process were used to make the final selection of Wave Change participants. Criteria for evaluating potential applicants were made more explicit in Year 2, with five core competencies identified:

- commitment to social change to date;
- their idea for social change and progress made so far;
- their overall readiness for the programme and ability to commit the time and energy it requires;
- team work and collaboration – their ability and potential to work constructively with others in the group and to share skills and networks;
- service leadership – their longer-term potential and aspiration to lead and influence positive change at the local, national or international level.

The Wave Change Team highlighted the importance of personal, one-to-one contact with potential candidates or relevant organisations in the recruitment phase, as well as social media. Recruitment to the programme was viewed by the Team as a full-time job which needed a long-term strategy. A number of challenges were identified, including:

- assessing potential candidates' level of commitment to social change;
- a lack of resources in the recruitment phase in terms of staff numbers and time needed;
- recruiting a sufficiently diverse group, with high numbers of Irish participants, living in Dublin and attending third-level education.

Profile of selected participants

In total, 47 people aged 18–25 were selected to be part of the Wave Change Programme in Year 1 and Year 2. In Year 1 there were 22 participants and in Year 2 there were 25. Two Wave Changers dropped out of the programme in the early stages of Year 2. Looking at the total number of participants selected across the two years, 27 were female and 20 were male. The average age of Wave Changers was 22.7 years. During the delivery of the programme, the majority of the Wave Changers (n=28, 60%) were living in Dublin, with the remainder spread out across other cities and towns in the Republic of Ireland. Just one participant was living in Northern Ireland. The vast majority of participants self-identified as Irish (n=39, 83%), with a small number describing themselves as being of mixed Irish heritage or from elsewhere, such as England, Africa and Afghanistan.

In terms of their level of education, most Wave Changers (n=29, 62%) had a third-level qualification, ranging from non-degree to postgraduate degree, with the remaining 18 (38%) having a second-level qualification at the time of their involvement in Wave Change. Many of the participants were currently either in full-time education (n=15, 32%) or full-time paid employment (n=13, 28%) whilst participating in Wave Change, and some were studying full-time and working part-time (n=8, 17%). A small number were starting a business (n=4, 8%) or unemployed (n=3, 6%). The current situation of the remainder of the Wave Changers included being involved in various activities such as part-time further education and taking a year out of college.

Programme weekends

The core programme involved the roll-out of a total of 10 residential programme weekends, which ran from February to September in 2012 and 2013. In general, the programme weekends were well attended, with approximately three-quarters of participants attending, the exception being the final weekend in both years. Overall, a high level of satisfaction was found among those who participated in and delivered the programme. There was a high level of satisfaction with the programme content, with the exception of the final weekend in Year 2. Specifically, the peer-to-peer support and learning element was highly valued, as was the skills-sharing session in weekend 4, Year 1.

Based on feedback and learning from Year 1, there was more of a focus on balancing practical and personal skills in Year 2. An effort was made to focus on applied learning and practical tools based on feedback from Wave Changers who reported being particularly interested in action-oriented sessions and practical focused workshops in order to apply the learning to their projects. To facilitate this, two designated people were recruited to work on the Wave Change Team: the Programme Facilitator had responsibility for practical skills training and the Programme Associate had responsibility for personal development sessions delivered during the programme weekends in Year 2. Tailored support for individuals at different stages of their projects was also generally sought by Wave Changers.

A number of challenges were identified by the Wave Change Team in terms of pitching and balancing the programme (in part arising from the diversity of ideas/project stages within the groups):
- creating a supportive safe environment, while also creating one in which opportunities for constructive challenge and critical discussion could be offered;
- having a high level of familiarity with the individual projects;
- keeping track of the projects and relevant activities of the Wave Changers in between the programme weekends;

- ensuring the content at programme weekends had a sufficient level of structure and detailed input, while also allowing unstructured time for recreation and reflection;
- striking an appropriate mix between the personal development and project development parts of the programme so that they are relevant to all;
- keeping the groups cohesive;
- providing intensive one-to-one support, while also promoting independence and autonomous leadership on the part of participants.

Practical skills workshops

Practical skills workshops, given by experts in the field, were mainly delivered within the programme weekends structure in Year 1, while in Year 2 they were provided as standalone additions available to participants on a self-nomination basis. Data gathered from attendees at the workshops indicated a high level of satisfaction with them, mentioning in particular the benefit of tailor-made, specialist, hands-on and small group components. Some problems identified by Wave Changers with the workshops included timing, scheduling and location issues, resulting in low numbers attending in Year 2.

External engagement

The vast majority of Wave Changers in Year 2 participated in external engagement activities, and almost half of the alumni (Year 1 participants) were also involved in these during Year 2. The participants generally viewed external engagement activities and thematic workshops as being of high value and contributing to personal development growth. Some participants, however, were dissatisfied with aspects of external engagement in terms of fairness regarding opportunities for this, and in terms of the lack of follow-up by the Wave Change Team with participants regarding external engagement during the programme weekends.

Seed funding

There were two rounds of seed funding planned for Year 1. However, due to the low number applying, only one round was held. There were significantly more applications and awards of seed funding in Year 2. The pitching process was formal and rigorous. Overall, there was a high level of satisfaction by members of the Wave Change Team and the judges with this process, and it was considered by them to be a worthwhile experiential learning experience for participants interested in social entrepreneurship. A very small number of Wave Changers in Year 1 were dissatisfied with the amount of funding on offer and the decision-making process involved, while in Year 2 some felt inadequately prepared for the pitching process and were critical of the corporate focus of the judging panel.

Coaching and one-to-one support

Formal coaching was provided by external experts to some Wave Change participants in Year 1 based on what the Wave Change Team considered to be a suitable match between participant and coach. Those who participated were very happy with this aspect of the programme. However, the coaching element was a lot more complex to implement than originally envisaged by the Wave Change Team. Several difficulties were encountered, including sourcing an adequate pool of coaches, getting a geographically dispersed pool of coaches and making suitable matches between interested candidates and coaches. Based on problems with sourcing coaches and making

appropriate matches, semi-formal one-to-one support systems based on the input of some members of the Wave Change Team were put in place for some Wave Changers. However, some of those on the Team highlighted difficulties with this in terms of lack of clarity around specific contractual remits and responsibilities, as well as physical distance issues regarding geographic locations based outside Ireland. A number of Wave Changers in Year 2 were disappointed that they did not have the opportunity to work with a coach and expressed their need for directional feedback and specialist input to move their projects forward. In contrast, the Wave Change Team referred to the change of ethos in Year 2 of the programme in terms of promoting more self-reliance and autonomous leadership on the part of participants.

Internships

Internships were only implemented in Year 1, with two Wave Changers participating in these. Internships were self-directed. The main challenge discussed by the Wave Change Team in relation to this aspect of the programme was the need for resources to pay participants and also capacity to supervise the internships to ensure they were appropriately managed.

Wave Change outreach

The intention of the outreach dimension of the Wave Change initiative was to enable connections, networks and information-sharing between interested parties and to increase the visibility of Wave Change. This was to take the form of an online presence to provide young people aged 16–25 with access to information on civic action opportunities in Ireland, opportunities to network and inspiration to engage in social change. It was also the intention to provide a forum for those working and volunteering in organisations directly supporting young people in the field to come together and share ideas, experience and learning. While Wave Change did engage in outreach via a customised website, Facebook page and Twitter account, and also established relationships with other organisations working in the sector, these intended activities were significantly scaled down over the course of the implementation period. The primary focus of the outreach became the creation of an information point for Wave Change, while the online presence development became a secondary priority of the Wave Change Team. The main reason given for this change was the intensity and workload involved in the delivery of the core capacity-building programme weekends, which were run for an 8-month period (February to September) in 2012 and 2013.

In general, relevant data indicate that the social media interfaces developed as part of the outreach aspect did not promote youth views and voices to any large extent, and their usage primarily peaked and worked well around the recruitment phases of the programme. Wave Changers were disappointed with the content of the official Wave Change website and offered to help the Team to improve this. Two specific sets of reasons were given for the difficulties encountered in developing this dimension: (a) the lack of resources in terms of staff, specialist expertise and time; and (b) the lack of clarity regarding the identity, purpose and value of this component of the initiative.

Outside of online engagement with individuals and similar organisations operating in the field, it was originally intended that Wave Change would develop a Youth Civic Action Network to connect and support organisations working in the field to each other and to act as a forum to share best practice. In terms of implementation, one workshop took place in May 2011 and involved the participation of approximately 30 representatives of organisations and young people leading various initiatives in the civic action field. Apart from this one workshop held in the very early stages of Wave Change, the Youth Civic Action Network did not proceed any further. Similar reasons to those associated with the development of an online presence were given by the Wave Change Team, i.e. lack of clarity of

purpose, and lack of time and resources to establish the Action Network. It was viewed as an aspect that may have potential as the initiative becomes more established and networks are built with a larger number of organisations.

4. Outcomes achieved

The Wave Change Programme is designed to develop the knowledge, skills and networks of 18–25-year-olds from across Ireland to support them to take action for social change. The findings on whether the Wave Change Programme contributed to achieving its desired outcomes are presented here. The five intended outcomes identified for the Wave Change Programme are that the programme participants:

- are inspired to engage in social change and make a difference;
- have strong, resilient personal foundations to lead on change now and in the future, including enhanced self-awareness, sense of agency, self-efficacy and well-being;
- have in-depth knowledge and practical experience of project management and social innovation, which can be applied to any work on social change they carry out now and in the future;
- are part of a strong, diverse network of social change-makers aged 18–25 across Ireland;
- are provided with the opportunity to develop and implement ideas for social change and that innovative, sustainable projects emerge from the programme.

While the data presented here were generated by mixed methods, the evidence is primarily based on the qualitative data informed by the self-reported experiences of the participants. The findings are drawn from a mixture of methods, including the Wave Changers' self-reflection diaries, focus groups, post-programme-weekend questionnaires and case studies. These qualitative data are supplemented by quantitative data gathered from baseline and follow-up questionnaires completed by the Wave Changers in Year 1 and Year 2, and a questionnaire completed by the Wave Change alumni (the Year 1 participants).

In the main, the quantitative data from baseline and follow-up surveys did not reveal any major differences among the participants in terms of the achievement of outcomes before and after Wave Change. However, there is a strong set of evidence from the qualitative data showing that the programme achieved its intended outcomes based on what participants reported through self-reflection diary entries, focus group discussions and case studies.

Outcome 1: Inspired to engage in social change and make a difference

This outcome was primarily intended for Year 1 participants, since a prerequisite for Year 2 participants was that they were already socially active prior to joining the initiative. However, the quantitative data show that both groups had a strong sense of social responsibility and were civically inspired to engage in social change and make a difference at the beginning of the programme. No significant difference was found in relation to levels of civic involvement and social responsibility by participants at the beginning and end of the programme. Qualitative data show that Wave Changers drew much inspiration from their peers and also from the programme content in terms of some of the guest and keynote speakers and the workshops.

Outcome 2: Personal foundations to lead on change

Core components of personal foundations were examined in terms of agency, self-awareness, self-efficacy and well-being. The quantitative data do not show any statistically significant difference in the Wave Changers' personal foundation skills from the beginning to the end of the programme. However, many participants qualitatively reported an enhanced set of personal skills as a result of engagement with peers, members of the Wave Change Team, skills learned and enhanced, and contacts made while participating in the programme. In terms of agency, Wave Changers referred to an enhanced sense of self-belief, inspiration and motivation to take social action based on their interaction with like-minded individuals on the programme and the empathetic, safe environment that Wave Change provided to discuss and help with participants' social change ideas and projects. Participants gained a greater sense of self-awareness across a broad range of facets, including: values, relationships, personal interactions, personal presentation, networks and supports, personal skills, goals and critical reflection. These skills were learned particularly through some of the personal development workshops and talks by keynote presenters. Participants discussed an enhanced sense of self-efficacy, having greater confidence and belief in their social change ambitions based on interaction with fellow-participants and others involved in the programme, new communication and presentation skills acquired, and external engagement activities. Finally, the programme made a positive contribution to participants' personal well-being in terms of the support they received and discussions and advice on self-care.

Outcome 3: In-depth knowledge and practical experience of project management and social innovation

The focus of analysis of this outcome is on the knowledge the Wave Changers acquired, as well as whether the programme contributed to providing them with practical experience of applying their learning. Both quantitative and qualitative data show that according to most participants, their project management skills were enhanced through the Wave Change Programme. In particular, practical skills in the areas of communication and presentation were enhanced in Year 1 and Year 2, while additional skills were acquired in the areas of project management and implementation, business and financial management in Year 2. While no quantitative data were gathered on social innovation, relevant qualitative data show that the programme provided opportunities for Wave Changers to enhance this skill through the facilitation of creative thinking, brainstorming, problem-solving, ideas and solutions generation.

Outcome 4: Strong, diverse network of social change-makers

While no statistically significant difference was found in the quantitative scores for participants' networks of supports, the qualitative data reveal that important peer and wider external networks were developed during the Wave Change Programme in Year 1 and Year 2. There is a large amount of qualitative data demonstrating the importance of the peer network for Wave Changers in terms of a community of like-minded people, mutual learning and help, friendship and social bonding. Diversity in terms of social change issues and projects, backgrounds and levels of experiences was also referred to by Wave Changers. A small number would have liked to see more diversity of background and thinking on the programme. The peer network continued to be beneficial after the participants completed the programme, as the alumni survey data indicate. A very small number of Wave Changers did not feel that the programme benefited them in terms of enhancing support networks.

While not an explicit outcome, the value of support received through the wider external network of contacts made by participants is also noteworthy. This was primarily facilitated through members of the Wave Change Team themselves and the contacts, skills training and expertise that they imparted to participants during the course of the programme.

Outcome 5: Opportunity to develop and implement ideas for social change

This was relevant to Year 1 participants, since many were at the 'ideas stage' when joining Wave Change. Most said they were provided with such an opportunity and reported on how their individual ideas had developed during the course of the programme. Several of the Wave Changers described developing their social change ideas into specific projects which they actively worked on during Wave Change. In Year 1, a group-based social change idea also developed into a project during the course of the programme. The alumni survey data reveal continuing progress on taking social action by Wave Changers after their completion of the programme.

Bonus Outcome: Emergence of innovative, sustainable projects

This was a bonus outcome relevant to Year 2 participants in particular, given their focus on specific projects (rather than ideas), but it was also relevant to some participants in Year 1 who made significant progress on advancing their projects. The four case studies featured in this study have been chosen to demonstrate how Wave Change facilitated the emergence of innovative, sustainable social change projects (see Appendix). This was done through a variety of means, including providing participants with opportunities for discussion, support, personal development and practical skills training, reflection, networking and engagement. One Wave Changer set up a local community action group to promote Inner City Dublin for its residents. Another established a team-based, experiential learning programme in second-level schools. A third participant launched a website dedicated to health and well-being for young people living away from home, with a particular focus on food nutrition. A fourth Wave Changer established a Middle Eastern and Central Asian community network to promote intercultural collaboration and integration. These cases show how participants progressed their ideas or projects, and highlight the significance of Wave Change in terms of helping participants to action these.

5. Discussion

This discussion draws together the main findings of the evaluation study on the implementation and delivery of Wave Change over the course of two years (2012–2013) and assesses whether the programme met its intended outcomes. In describing and assessing the initiative, this evaluation report draws on a set of triangulated data gathered from relevant documentary sources, as well as empirical data gathered through qualitative and quantitative methods.

The study found that the Wave Change initiative resulted in a range of positive individual and community-level benefits. In a similar manner to the much-discussed range of individual level psycho-social benefits in the relevant literature on youth development and civic engagement, participation in Wave Change was found to be associated with positive identity and development, enhanced self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, improved social, communication, leadership and critical thinking skills, and improved or wider levels of social support. At the community level, benefits were linked to helping the Wave Changers to implement novel solutions to a range of social issues, problems or inequalities which they brought to the programme or developed while participating in it. It has also provided youth leadership components, particularly in Year 2, through a focus on agency, personal responsibility and ownership.

The Wave Change model

Wave Change represents a novel service in Ireland designed to meet an identified gap by SEI in support of the cohort of youth aged 18–25 who are interested in changing Ireland and having their voices heard. In particular, those with ideas and projects addressing social issues or problems in Irish society were targeted, with the intention of supporting them and providing them with some of the necessary skills and networks to take action. An evolving or organic approach was taken with the Wave Change model whereby it was altered over the course of the development and implementation phases. Key inputs into such changes were the advice and input from the Steering Group, the findings of the Interim Evaluation Report and the experiential learning of the Wave Change Team.

The Wave Change model that was implemented over the course of the evaluation period centred on the Wave Change Programme component, made up of the following core inputs: programme weekends, external engagement, internships, seed funding, practical skills workshops, coaching and one-to one-support. This corresponds with the youth civic action programme outlined in the original Wave Change model that was designed to provide support, networking and training to Wave Change participants. The vast majority of resources in terms of personnel, time and finance were allocated to this component. The two other components of the original model were field development and knowledge generation and dissemination. The former was intended as an outreach tool consisting of a web-based portal to connect young people and also a networking platform for adult allies in the youth civic engagement and social justice fields. The purpose of the latter was to guide programme improvements and influence youth civic engagement policy and practice more broadly through programmatic learning from the Interim and Final Evaluation Reports conducted by NUI Galway.

Throughout the two years of programme implementation, by and large the core model remained the same as originally set out, and most aspects of the programme were implemented as intended. However, there were three noteworthy differences and changes. First, the target group changed – from those broadly interested in social change to those who had prior experience of taking action for

social change and who had a specific project to work on developing and implementing at the start of the Wave Change Programme. Second, diversity was originally framed in terms of recruiting youth to the programme from socially marginalised communities or disadvantaged young people experiencing adversity. However, the vast majority of attendees at the recruitment events and participating in Wave Change during both years were not from such backgrounds. Operationalisation of this concept was later revised to include a broader set of criteria. such as education, employment, ethnicity, geography, social issue/idea and minority group membership. Third, the learning and support ethos of Wave Change emphasised more peer learning and experiential learning in Year 2 compared to Year 1. Aspects of youth leadership and civic engagement were also promoted more in Year 2. This was evident in the shift towards promoting more independence, self-reliance and entrepreneurship among the programme participants, and more of a focus on taking action through the development and implementation of social change projects.

The Wave Change Programme

Key successes in implementation of programme

There was a high level of engagement in the programme by youth participants. It met a gap in providing a safe space for young people to pursue social change ideas and projects in an empathetic environment. Wave Changers were supported and up-skilled in the areas of civic engagement, social entrepreneurship and innovation. The programme content was based on a mix of personal and practical skills development. There was a strong focus on networking both with peers and external contacts. There were generally high levels of satisfaction with external engagement opportunities. The specialist workshops held outside the programme weekends were regarded very positively by those who attended. The coaching in Year 1 was viewed positively by those who participated and was an example of providing important opportunities for the development of youth–adult partnerships. The seed funding application process was an important experiential learning exercise for participants, with significantly more Wave Changers engaged in this in Year 2 compared to Year 1.

Main challenges in implementation of programme

The Wave Change Team were conscious of the need to find a suitable balance between personal development and project development aspects of the programme. Some participants would have liked the Wave Change Programme to have had more of an action orientation and focus on project development. Pitching the content of the sessions at the appropriate level, so that it was relevant to all Wave Changers and all could learn, was a challenge given the diversity of levels/stages of social change ideas or projects and prior experience/education/training backgrounds of participants. Providing an appropriate level of one-to-one support to meet participants' varying needs and stages of idea or project development, and also managing this support, was highlighted by members of the Wave Change Team as a challenge. Another rather onerous task for the Wave Change Team was monitoring participants' progress in between the programme weekends and following up with them on tasks and actions requiring completion.

A small number of Wave Changers referred to the issue of fairness and transparency regarding the provision of external engagement opportunities for participants. Matters that arose regarding seed funding were the timing of the application process in terms of stage of idea or project development and making the level of seed funding sufficiently attractive to participants so that they would make an application. Internships were minimally implemented, with just two in Year 1 and none in Year 2. The main reasons given were the need to fund these and the capacity and logistical issues involved in managing the process. Coaching also proved a complex aspect to implement, for reasons such as demand and supply, suitability/matching interested participants with available coaches, and Dublin

location. Not all interested participants in Year 1 were able to avail of these coaching opportunities. In Year 2, no formal coaching was provided to participants despite the intention to do so towards the end of the programme. Finally, an issue encountered during the final programme weekends in Year 1 and Year 2, and the specialised workshops held outside the programme weekends (particularly in Year 2), was low attendance levels. Regarding the final programme weekends, these were held during September, when many students are in transition phases (such as returning to college/university, completing third-level education and seeking employment or travelling abroad). Regarding the specialised workshops, the Dublin-based location of these and the time involved in travelling and attending were cited as difficulties for some Wave Changers.

Wave Change outreach

This component of Wave Change concerned the development of an online presence for the initiative through a website and social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter) and face-to-face engagement with similar organisations through the establishment of a Youth Civic Action Network (YCAN). The intended outcomes were to provide a web-based interactive platform to connect young people aged 16–25 to each other and to connect adult allies working in the areas of youth civic action and social justice across Ireland. Minimal progress was made in this outreach aspect of Wave Change. An online presence was established by the programme through the website and social networking sites, where information-sharing and communication took place between Wave Changers, alumni members, Wave Change Team members and the general public. However, usage of these platforms only took place at very limited times, with the exception of peaks in website visits and Facebook and Twitter usage concentrated at the recruitment phases, with significant declines thereafter. Moreover, these online modes were not widely used across the country, with the vast majority of users based in Dublin. From a visibility perspective, there was very limited profiling of the participants on the Wave Change website.

Apart from one workshop programme held in Dublin in May 2011, the Youth Civic Action Network was another outreach component that was not implemented as intended. Similar reasons were given by the Wave Change Team for this, such as lack of clarity of purpose and lack of time and resources to establish such a network. It was viewed as an aspect which may have potential as the initiative becomes more established and networks are built with a larger number of organisations. On this basis, it was the intention to focus on the Youth Civic Action Network in mid- to late 2012. However, this did not happen and no major developments occurred up to the end of the evaluation period.

Main challenges in implementation of Wave Change outreach

Some of the major barriers encountered by the Wave Change Team in establishing a functioning online presence and face-to-face engagement were the lack of resources and time, capacity and technical expertise, as well as the lack of clarity regarding the identity, purpose and value of this component of the programme. During implementation, this component became a secondary priority to the primary focus of the Team of establishing the core programme for two cohorts of youth in 2012 and 2013.

Contribution to desired outcomes

The five intended outcomes of Wave Change focused on providing participants with: (1) the inspiration to engage in social change and make a difference; (2) personal foundational skills to lead

on social change; (3) in-depth knowledge and practical experience of project management and social innovation; (4) a strong, diverse network of social change-makers; and (5) opportunities to develop and implement social change ideas or projects.

This evaluation concludes that Wave Change by and large has achieved its intended outcomes, with some minor exceptions. While the quantitative data do not generally reveal significant differences among participants in terms of most of the desired outcomes at the beginning and end of the programme, a large set of qualitative data shows positive progress on each of the five outcomes.

Outcome 1: The participants are inspired to engage in social change and make a difference

Wave Change provided an important context and supportive structure to reflect, problem-solve and come up with solutions and develop projects based on various social issues that the participants were interested in. On the whole, the qualitative research found that the Wave Changers in Year 1 were further inspired to engage in social change and make a difference based on their participation in the initiative. This inspiration came from their peers attending the programme and from the keynote speakers and workshop presenters who attended the programme weekends or held practical skills workshops or master classes.

The relevant quantitative data measured Wave Changers' levels of civic involvement and social responsibility at the start of the programme in Year 1 and Year 2. Cohorts in 2012 and 2013 were very similar in scoring themselves highly on both scales, indicating highly active and engaged participants when joining Wave Change. Furthermore, when levels of civic involvement and social responsibility were compared prior to and after participating in Wave Change, no statistically significant differences were found, although a small increase in civic involvement was found.

Outcome 2: Participants have strong, resilient personal foundations to lead on change now and in the future, including enhanced self-awareness, sense of agency, self-efficacy and well-being

A number of theoretical perspectives and constructs are relevant to this outcome, including the positive youth development approach, civic engagement and social justice. The qualitative data reveal strong evidence of higher perceived levels of personal skills and well-being based on participation in Wave Change. The primary vehicle by which these skills were imparted was via the programme weekends. During these residential weekends, Wave Changers described how through interaction with each other, the Wave Change Team, programme presenters and keynote or inspirational speakers, their personal foundational skills to lead on social change were strengthened. From a quantitative perspective, a number of different scales were used to measure changes at the beginning (Time 1) and end (Time 2) of the programme in terms of participants' personal foundations. No significant differences in self-awareness, agency and self-efficacy were found when data at Time 1 and Time 2 were compared.

Outcome 3: Participants have in-depth knowledge and practical experience of project management and social innovation, which can be applied to any work on social change they carry out now and in the future

The provision of relevant knowledge in the form of skills training to youth for their projects is one of the key ingredients of youth social entrepreneurship programmes (UNICEF, 2007). There is supportive evidence to indicate that Wave Change achieved this outcome. It did so based on the

positive contribution the initiative made to participants' communication and presentation skills, knowledge of project planning and implementation, and business and management skills. However, some caveats are relevant here. Project planning, implementation, business and management knowledge and skills were only focused on in the second year of the initiative. Also, there was a much stronger emphasis in Year 2 on applying learning in practice through the participants' implementing their social change projects. There is some qualitative evidence indicating that the initiative strengthened Wave Changers' social innovation abilities through a mixture of peer networking (in particular during the residential weekends), and specific workshops (in Year 2) on idea generation and solution formulation. No quantitative measure of social innovation was used in this study. The quantitative project management measure, developed by the Research Team for this evaluation, was used to assess changes in the skills of Wave Changers. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in participants' scores between Time 1 and Time 2, indicating improved project management skills acquired over the course of the programme.

Outcome 4: Participants are part of a strong, diverse network of social change-makers aged 18–25 from across Ireland

The importance of supportive social relationships for youth in the civic engagement and democratic participation fields is emphasised in the relevant literature. The qualitative data received from both cohorts show that the peer network of Wave Changers emerged as a very strong form of support, advice, skills and networks for participants. There were two elements to the peer network. At a practical level, participants helped, motivated, supported and encouraged each other to work on their social change ideas and projects. They advised each other and shared skills and contacts. In some cases, they formed small work groups, which were cited as particularly useful. At a social level, the bonding, friendship and relationships formed among the groups was a striking outcome, which could be traced over the course of the programme weekends in Year 1 and Year 2. In addition, an alumni network was formed by the first group of Wave Changers from Year 1 after their completion of the programme. In relation to diversity, the peer networks were found to be relatively diverse in the sense of the variety of social issues and projects that participants were pursing through Wave Change. However, diversity in terms of participants coming from disadvantaged backgrounds was not achieved by Wave Change, with most having a third-level qualification and continuing with study or employment when participating in the initiative. Some Wave Changers stated that they would have liked to see more diversity in ethnicity, minority groupings and ideological perspectives.

An additional benefit for participants were the valuable support networks acquired during the programme and provided by the Wave Change Team in personally supporting individuals and facilitating them with opportunities to meet with key contacts and visit relevant organisations in the social, business, voluntary and community sectors, as well as potential funders. Wave Changers were also given opportunities to attend events, seminars and conferences, both nationally and internationally, related to their social change areas of interest. In addition, improved networks of supports were achieved through the exposure of the participants to a wide set of key external contacts and guest speakers involved in the provision of skills-based training and in the delivery of keynote or specialist thematic sessions during the programme weekends. The quantitative data pertaining to this outcome show no statistical difference in terms of the Wave Changers' networks of support at the beginning and end of the programme.

Outcome 5: The participants are provided with the opportunity to develop and implement ideas for social change

The importance of experiential learning and action orientation is considered a core element of leadership and skills training in the civic engagement field. There was a great difference between the participants in terms of the stage of development of their ideas or projects for social change when joining Wave Change. Such differences meant they had varied experiences of turning their ideas and projects into action. In the main, there is evidence to indicate that the programme provided most Wave Changers with the opportunity to develop and implement their ideas for social change. A wide range of facets were attributed to this, including peer support, strengthened personal foundations, improved knowledge and skills, external networking, seed funding, internships and coaching opportunities.

Bonus Outcome: Innovative, sustainable projects emerge from the programme

Finally, it was considered a bonus if innovative, sustainable projects emerged from Wave Change. A selection of such projects is presented in the form of short case studies in the Appendix of this report. These demonstrate how certain social issues which the Wave Changers are passionate about, based on their own culture, background and lived experiences, have been turned into action-based projects.

6. Conclusion

The need for civic action programmes designed to support youth social entrepreneurship and innovation is increasingly being recognised and reflected in their growth in popularity. While it is a growing sector in Ireland, Wave Change was one of the first civic action initiatives to operate in the area. The delivery of the Wave Change Programme addressed the need, identified by the funders and Social Entrepreneurs Ireland (SEI), to support a cohort of youth in the 18–25 age group to act on their ideas for social change. While it was originally envisaged that Wave Change would generate opportunities for those most unlikely to acquire such support (namely, youth from marginalised communities or those who are themselves marginalised), Wave Change did not actively seek to target disadvantaged youth. Recruitment to the programme was focused on high potential young social entrepreneurs, irrespective of their background and life experiences. However, some allowance was made to include youth with high levels of personal insight into the social problems and challenges faced by youth in Ireland today.

As evidenced in this evaluation report, overall the Wave Change Programme model as implemented worked well. In line with guidance by UNICEF (2007) on key supports needed for young social entrepreneurs, it focused on the delivery of knowledge, networking, mentorship and finance in order to support participants to transform their ideas into action or to take their existing projects to a more advanced stage. Some core youth development components delivered by the initiative included support, growth and development opportunities, meeting needs, building capacity, self-identity and youth–adult partnerships. Some important youth leadership components, particularly focused on in Year 2 of the programme, emphasised agency, personal responsibility and ownership.

Wave Change was delivered via a mixture of learning models comprising structured learning, peer-to-peer learning and project-based experiential learning. The structured learning environment, facilitated in particular by the five programme weekends, enabled focused delivery of training, support and development opportunities for the Wave Changers. The personal development components complemented the programme's focus on idea generation and project development, taking a holistic approach to the support provided to the Wave Changers. A high value was placed on learning gained from the practical, applied sessions and the delivery of the practical skills workshops by experts in the field outside of the programme weekends. Furthermore, the peer-to-peer learning model was a unique dimension of the programme and worked very well. It emerged strongly in the data that the Wave Changers valued the opportunities provided to meet informally, brainstorm and exchange feedback with their fellow participants, particularly during the programme weekends. Emphasis was also placed on facilitating structured peer-to-peer skills-sharing sessions, which featured more prominently in Year 1.

The programme model, as delivered, enabled Wave Change to largely achieve its intended outcomes. Inspiration to engage in social change, enhanced self-awareness, sense of agency, self-efficacy and well-being, as well as improved knowledge and experience of project management and social innovation, were all common themes emerging from the self-reported experiences of the Wave Changers.

The support structures available outside the programme weekends were key aspects of the initiative (namely, the openings provided to engage with strategic people influential in the field, the opportunity to apply for seed funding to financially support their ideas and projects, and the coaching and one-to-one support offered). These inputs provided further applied learning and development opportunities to the Wave Changers, as well as additional support.

However, outside of the delivery of the core programme, limited progress was made by Wave Change in terms of developing an online presence and engaging in outreach activities via its website, Facebook page and Twitter, and the Youth Civic Action Network. It can be said that this component was ambitious, given the capacity and resources available to the Wave Change Team and the fact that, as a new programme, it was only embedding itself in the sector over the 2-year implementation period.

The value-for-money assessment of Wave Change, comparing it to a relatively similar programme in Australia, shows that such programmes are resource-intensive, requiring a high level of staffing and associated personnel given the intensity of inputs of skills development and supports required for participants. Moreover, staff need to have a high level of experience in the social entrepreneurial fields in order to meet participants' needs adequately.

The evaluative learning in this report is important given that youth social entrepreneurship is a relatively new but expanding field in Ireland. Research on similar programmes in Ireland and internationally should be encouraged so that a strong knowledge base will inform the future development and value of such programmes.

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Appendix: Wave Change Case Studies

Case Study 1

Demographic profile at the time of commencing Wave Change: Male, Irish, age 25, third-level education completed, lived in Dublin, in further education and part-time employment.

Gary's idea for social change when he joined Wave Change was to present an alternative perspective of living in North Inner City Dublin. As someone who grew up in this area, the problem he noticed and wished to change was the very negative picture that dominated any discussion about the area, focusing on issues such as addiction and anti-social behaviour. Gary wanted to change this by highlighting the many advantages of living in the North Inner City: 'My goal was to shine a light on the positives and success stories of the North Inner City.'

He explained that this idea matters because negativity and a constant focus on the negative enforces a negative mind-set. He wanted to get the message out that the majority of people in the area are making a great contribution to their society. His idea was to 'normalise' success and present an alternative positive view of the area which was more than just about disadvantage.

He explained that when he joined Wave Change, 'All I had were good intentions'. While participating in the programme, he successfully turned his social change idea into action by developing a community group of young people from the North Inner City. These were people who wanted to give back to their local community and were civically engaged in the area. The group was called LOCAL ('Looking On, Community, Aspiration and Leadership'). The 'Looking On' part was inspired by a gig held 30 years ago by U2, where they performed on the roof of a flat in Sheriff Street. Inspired by this, the group set about organising events that would celebrate the community and reinvigorate a spirit of unity and togetherness in the area. LOCAL was the vehicle through which public events were planned and developed. The first event organised by LOCAL was 'The Inner City's Got Talent', held in September 2012. This was a large-scale event supported by artists and Dublin City Council, and attended by over 2,000 local people. Other successful events included the 'Inner City Assembly', held in the Abbey Theatre, and a community gathering event in Mountjoy Square in 2013, both of which were well attended by people from the North Inner City.

He described the value of Wave Change in terms of providing a space in which to meet and discuss with like-minded peers what contribution they wanted to make to society and how this could be achieved. He said that the significance of Wave Change for him was that it 'got us to think about "why" and the best possible route to this. It gave us a bit of clarity of mind.'

Gary stated that Wave Change provided him with a set of tools to help him turn his idea into a real project. The learning on the programme is still guiding and helping him in continuing his social change work, two years later. He described these skills as 'how to get your message across, how to negotiate, how to convince people of your idea, how to build a structure, how to link in with others, how to manage your volunteers, how to develop a business plan. . . . The skills I picked up have been the starting point for a lot of things that have happened and will happen in the future.'

Since its inception, LOCAL has evolved and become an established network of young people who are actively involved in events and activities that contribute positively to their community. Gary has built up a strong support network of relevant contacts in order to progress his project. Members of LOCAL have networked and engaged with relevant contacts through joining several boards of local community groups and organisations, and being involved at a managerial level with several community-based projects. Gary has successfully fundraised for the various events and activities organised by LOCAL. In addition, Wave Change is an important support and friendship network for Gary and he continues to have regular contact with many of his fellow Wave Changers and also Wave Change staff: 'I still talk [to] 15 or 20 of the Wave Changers through social media or in person. I still link in and ask for advice from Wave Change. Wave Change hasn't stopped in that sense.'

PostScript: Gary's participation in the Trinity Access Programme and the Wave Change Programme were influencing factors in his strong interest in promoting youth social activism and social change. In May 2014, he ran as an Independent Community Candidate in the Local Election for Dublin's North Inner City. He was successfully elected and is now a member of Dublin City Council.

Case Study 2

Demographic profile at the time of commencing Wave Change: Female, Irish, age 25, second-level education completed and in full-time third-level education, lived in Killarney, Co. Kerry.

Jessie's social change area of interest is education and experiential learning. She explains that while education pedagogy emphasises the value of learning and teaching through group work, most learning in second-level education is individual-based sole learning, with very few opportunities to learn in a group or to do teamwork: 'When I was in secondary school, it was all individual, solo and rote learning. I found that when I had the opportunity to learn with my friends in groups, I learned much better . . . so my learning style was not individual-learning, but collaborative group learning.'

When Jessie went on to third-level education, she had a very different learning experience. She notes, 'it was often group-based learning', both in the institute of technology and in the university she attended. Therefore, one had to learn how to get on in a group, how to participate, to accept people, create a balance in the group, learn how to act and how not to act, among other things. She said this was difficult because she had not experienced or been taught this type of group- or team-based education in second-level education.

While participating in Wave Change, Jessie came up with an idea to address this issue and turned her idea into a project called 'Teen Tasks'. Teen Tasks takes young people through an experiential learning process which allows them to grow and learn through participation in team-building activities. They learn the art of decision-making, challenge themselves, work together as a team and eventually reflect on their experience in a collaborative group format. Her project was based on a gap she had found in particular in second-level education regarding group and team work. Jessie's idea was to introduce this group/team way of learning and working to secondary school students so that they would have this set of skills to draw upon when making the transition to third-level education. Her aim is that 'students leave school not just qualified, but with confidence, positive self-esteem and an awareness of their strengths'. She had had experience of group and team-based problem-solving and activities from her summer work in an adventure centre for the corporate sector.

In terms of the value of Wave Change, she highlighted the learning on the programme and how it influenced her, both in coming up with her social change idea and in developing it into a project which she went on to implement successfully. She said that she 'got lots of encouragement, mentoring and feedback' while on the programme. Wave Change instilled her with a sense of self-confidence and she acquired various new skills, such as not being afraid of taking risks, learning from mistakes and pitching for funding. She stressed the importance of the professional and peer support network she got through the programme: 'Support, funding, encouragement, motivation, praising – all the things you need to get on. They were excellent. I couldn't fault them, and I knew they were always at the other end of the phone. Not only did I have the people who ran Wave Change, but I also had the team [of peers] around me.'

Jessie successfully applied for and was awarded seed funding and used this to purchase equipment for her project. She also used the funding to create a logo, business cards and leaflets to market Teen Tasks: 'That gave me a huge boost, to be able to buy equipment and travel to schools to promote myself. I was on the dole, so it was a huge help.' She also got a partner on board to work jointly with her on the project. She said she would not have had the confidence to do this if she had not heard about the importance of 'sharing your workload' from keynote speakers in Wave Change.

Regarding implementing her project: based on her knowledge from working in an adventure centre, the skills she learned in Wave Change and the relevant equipment she purchased with the seed funding, Jessie has run a series of pilot team-building sessions in a number of secondary schools and youth groups throughout the

country. As well as using it in schools, Jessie states that Teen Tasks can be used as an ice-breaker and bonding exercise for groups of adults. She has also run sessions with teachers and adults working in the Arts sector. She explained that she mainly set up these sessions through word of mouth and that two Wave Changers got her work in the Limerick and Galway City Art Galleries with groups of young curators.

After completing Wave Change, Jessie did an internship with Wave Change, where her role was Assistant Facilitator for Year 2 of the programme. In her role as intern, she was responsible for the team-building activities, games and so on. She states that she also learned a lot in this capacity: 'I got mentoring, feedback and learned so much by being around other facilitators. The whole experience opened my eyes. I became so much more aware of the nuances of facilitation and my role as an educator. . . . Overall it changed my attitude to being educated and being an educator and how I like to learn and how I like to teach.'

She points out that Wave Change instilled her with personal and practical skills that benefited her when setting up Teen Tasks and that have continued to help her in her current teaching career. In the future, she hopes to take Teen Tasks to the next level, including more personal development and self-esteem facilitation and reflection within groups.

Case Study 3

Demographic profile at the time of commencing Wave Change: Female, Irish, age 24, third-level education completed, lived in Dublin, in part-time employment.
Project stage: Up and Running.

Avril's passion for social change is focused on improving food education for students and young people in Ireland. She was inspired to address this issue given the negative impact of poor nutrition. She decided action was necessary to try to address the problem on the basis of a gap that she identified in targeted healthy eating campaigns for young people in college. In order to address this problem, she has developed a website for students and young people called 'Better than Noodles', which consists of three sections: food, mental health and physical health.

Wave Change has been valuable in supporting and helping Avril in her social change journey by providing her with practical advice and support, up-skilling, financial help and extending her networks and contacts in the field. Participating in Wave Change came at an important juncture in her project because, as she states, 'My project is already established, but I was feeling uninspired and was about to give up on the whole idea because of little interest from my target audience.'

Initially, the major benefit of Wave Change for Avril was the non-judgemental advice and support offered towards changing some of her approach and taking her project forward. Another significant benefit was the positive outlook, confidence and motivation gained through discussing her project with fellow-Wave Changers. As Avril recalls: 'The interest I got within the group gave me a great ego boost and raised my self-esteem, and I realised I have so much more to give and [it] kind of affirmed within me that my idea is good and it will benefit people. . . . Now, I'm more proactive and much more proud of my project and want to make it the best I can. I'm looking at any problems I have and looking at them as a "challenge" rather than a "problem".'

Subsequent benefits of the Wave Change Programme for Avril's social change project were the provision of a 'safe environment' to ask for help and discuss problems encountered, learning about social entrepreneurship, personal development and widening her network and contacts. The practical sessions and workshops, delivered by the Programme Facilitator and providing useful tools and resources for the Wave Changers to progress their projects, were identified as being of significant value to Avril.

Since joining Wave Change, Avril has focused her project on developing the food section of the website, based on video demonstrations of how to shop for and cook healthy, affordable meals. She is getting professional advice and help regarding the input of the other two sections, which will contain information and links on the association between food and nutrition and mental and physical health.

Avril was successful in gaining Wave Change seed funding on two occasions. She has also been involved in making successful funding pitches to further develop her social change project to the O2 ThinkBig Fund and SEI Mini-Innovation Fund.

She has formed a large support network of relevant contacts who are assisting her in her endeavour. These include Student Union and Welfare Officers in third-level institutions; food and nutrition experts working in organisations such Safefood.eu, eatwell.ie and the Nutrition and Health Foundation; and staff working in Spunout.ie, a well-being and healthy living organisation designed to give young people information and advice. She has also become a Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution Ambassador for Dublin.

Case Study 4

Demographic profile at the time of commencing Wave Change: Female, Iranian-Irish, age 21, second-level education completed, in third-level education and part-time employment, lived in Dublin.

Sheelan's passion for social change is based on promoting cultural diversity in Ireland. She was inspired to work on this idea based on the increasing level of diversity in Irish society, with the 2011 Census showing that 12% of the population were immigrants who had come to work, live or study in Ireland. Sheelan explains that harnessing and managing this diversity for cultural integration is 'a key opportunity and a key challenge for everyone living in Ireland. . . . We need to foster mutual respect and cooperation among people of different cultures now in order to ensure that discrimination, racism, stereotyping and cultural misunderstandings towards different religious, ethnic or cultural backgrounds are avoided in the future.'

She points out that, over the past number of years, various persons in Dublin and members of Dublin City Council have been actively working towards integration in the city by organising various cultural festivals, such as Africa Week, Experience Japan, Chinese New Year and Diwali, among many others. However, she states that due to the complex political and religious status of the Middle East, there are currently no cultural events held for the people of these communities, and therefore general knowledge about these cultures is very poor.

In order to address this problem, Sheelan's idea for social change is to promote an appreciation of cultural diversity by organising cultural events, with the aim of 'fostering mutual respect and cooperation among people of different cultures and in doing so promote better understanding of each other and their cultures'. She explains that through cultural celebrations, barriers can be broken down and stereotypes tackled.

Wave Change has been of significant value to Sheelan in developing her idea into an actual project. Since joining the programme, she has successfully run her first event – the Nowruz, The Festival of Spring celebration – held in Dublin City Hall in March 2013. This was a pilot event to see if Middle Eastern and Central Asian communities can collaborate and work together and also to see if there is a need for such an event or community organisation currently in Ireland. The event proved to be a great success, demonstrating that there is both a need for this sort of community organisation and an interest in these cultures from the community at large. After organising the first event, Sheelan established the Bahar Foundation (Bahar meaning 'Spring'). This is an umbrella organisation under which Middle Eastern and Central Asian communities can work together on a range of cultural events in a non-religious and non-political environment, dedicated to celebrating and promoting the art and culture of their communities for the benefit of the community at large. These events include language classes, poetry evenings, movie nights, concerts and food festivals, to name but a few. As Sheelan recalls: 'Through the Wave Change Programme, I have been able to develop the skills I need to be a leader in my community and lead the establishment of the Bahar Foundation, and the success of the Nowruz celebration has been a reflection of my abilities in governance, management and operation of such events.'

Sheelan also highlights the value of the support network she acquired through Wave Change. Some of her fellow-Wave Changers from Years 1 and 2 were involved in her project. Based on her experience of setting up the pilot festival, she has also made some important networks and contacts through engagement with stakeholders from a range of ethnic communities (Iranian, Turkish, Kurdish, Baha'I, Afghan, Azeri and Kazakh), Dublin City Council, migrant-owned businesses, university departments, artists and cultural institutions such as the Chester Beatty Library.

Sheelan was successful in her pitch for seed funding to further develop the Bahar Foundation. This funding was primarily spent on establishing the organisation's identity, which includes its brand, website, social media page, promotional material and administrative costs. It has now been renamed Bahar – Centre for Intercultural Collaboration. She continues to work on this, with planning for Bahar's first official event (the second celebration of Nowruz), currently being organised.