

Youth Organising Movement Builders 2023

Blaggrave Trust Final Report

Overview

This report is to conclude our grant with the Blaggrave Trust for our Youth Organising Movement Builders. The grant ran from December 2022 to October 2023 to deliver the following:

- Mapping of field research paper
- Delivery of a 4 day residential
- Sharing the essence of discussions and learnings from the residential
- Sharing participants feedback
- Updating on post-residential take up of opportunities

Mapping of field research paper

This paper, written in March 2023, drew on existing research on the youth organising space, and mapped the youth organising movement ecology. This allowed us to understand the position of the Movement Builders Training in the wider context of the Youth Organising space and understand how this programme aligned with the needs of the Youth Movement. We were able to understand what the cohort should look like, and tailor the training content to meet those needs.

[The full report is available here](#)

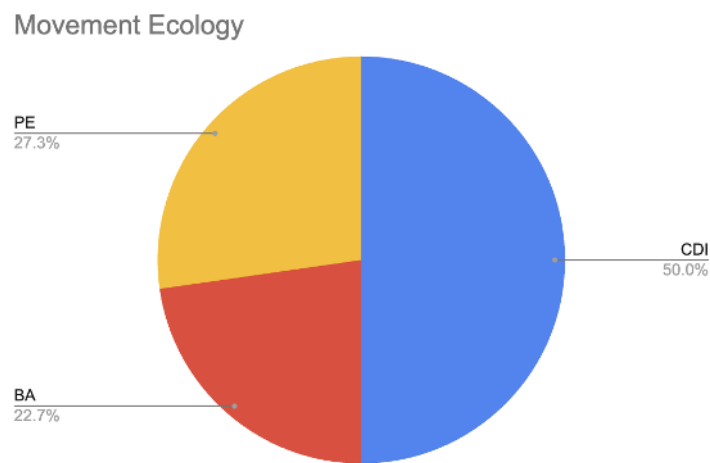
The Residential

From 27 - 31 July we brought together a cohort of 30 people working in youth organising and youth led-change on a range of social, environmental and economic justice struggles, to participate in Neon's Movement Builders Training Programme. This programme served a dual purpose: a) Supporting young organisers and leaders to develop a deeper analysis of how they can collectively create change, and b) embedding the skills and knowledge that young leaders need to deliver lasting social change and supporting them to flourish in the other movements they may move into or are part of.

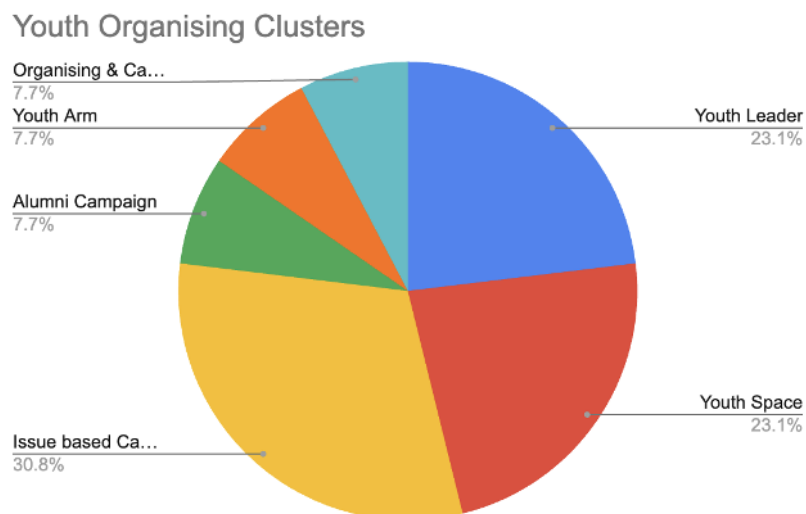
To encourage the involvement of those with marginalised identities, participants were provided with a significant stipend for their participation, and we spent extensive

preparation time networking and relationship-building with key organisations and leaders in the youth organising space.

This mapping and seedlist allowed us to build a picture of what a cohort that captures the richness of the youth organising landscape would look like. We wanted to bring together participants working in different parts of the movement ecology, bringing together organisations who were focused on ‘Building Alternatives’, ‘Personal Empowerment’ and ‘Challenging Dominant Institutions’. This breakdown within this movement ecology model was as follows:



Additionally, we sought out people from the youth organising space who did different types of work, bringing together issue-based campaigners, alumni campaigners, youth leaders, those working in youth spaces, those doing organising and capacity building, and those in youth arms of national organisations.



Understanding the range of experience people in the cohort brought meant we were able to tailor the content to those needs, adapting modules, bringing in relevant case studies and curating learning circles. It also meant we could mix up group activities to bring together people who worked in similar spaces, and have group activities for cross-movement learning.

Age

This Movement Builders was for the youth organising space, and as such we aimed to create a space that was youth-centred. We also, though, had people older than this age bracket in recognition of the value of intergenerational dialogue and cooperation, and the vital work that people do in solidarity or in partnership with youth organisers. Our selection process therefore aimed to balance the voices in the room, to ensure that we have young people in the space who were in a position to take the strategic learning from the programme back to their groups and organisations, and ensure any elders had thought about their role in the space, the potential power dynamics and how to manage that. Our cohort was almost entirely made up of young people under 30 - 54.5% were aged 18 - 24; 36.4% were aged 25 - 30; and 9% were aged 31+.

Demographics

NEON prioritises work with those at the sharpest end of structural oppression, seeking to lift up the voices of those with lived experience of the issues, and prioritise support for those who are less likely to be able to access support elsewhere.

Our cohort had an even split of people identifying as male, female, and either non-binary, genderqueer and agender. There were 10 different faiths represented in the room and 14 different racial identities 72% of the cohort were people of colour. A third of participants positively identified as having a disability; and 60% identified as being working class. A number of participants also had experience of the migration and care and systems,

Understanding the demographics of our participants allowed us to make the best use of our access calls to ensure each participant's needs were met. The access calls were an opportunity to facilitate conversation about what would allow them to physically, mentally and emotionally access the space, surface any concerns or questions, and understand how people were feeling about entering and participating in the residential. These calls allowed us to make a number of positive steps to

meeting those needs. This included actions like: ensuring there was a dedicated prayer room; ensuring the food and refreshments met cultural and sensory needs; providing printouts of the content for those that wanted; ensuring plentiful fidget toys and quiet breakout spaces; briefing all trainers and facilitators on each of the participants to make sure they understood the needs in the room and ways to respond. Throughout the weekend we actively checked in on whether needs were being met and made adjustments to respond to them, for example introducing a Black Caucus to the 'open space' session to meet a need for a specific Black space. Underpinning our approach to meeting the needs of the participants was a safeguarding policy designed in consultation with Blagrove.

Discussions and learnings from the residential

The weekend's programme facilitated a range of discussions, which highlighted a number of points for learning and reflection for the youth organising space more broadly, for the Movement Builders Training Programme, and for NEON's wider work and position in the movement. These conversations were extremely rich and wide-ranging. Below is a summary of reflections from different members of the programme delivery team and participants:

The role of international activism

Dhelia Snoussi, who was at the residential doing the mapping project, noted that there were a number of participants who drew inspiration from and were politicised by movements and events in the global south. Much of the international examples in the course curriculum is from a US context, e.g. Landback, Montgomery bus boycotts, the writer's strike, Camp Jened and the disability justice movement. A learning here for the course content is to draw on a wider range of examples, to counterbalance the US/UK focus.

Community Infrastructure and Shared Space

One of the biggest things that came up from the weekend was the lack of physical spaces. With a decade of cuts to youth services, a number of physical spaces have either closed, or organisations were in temporary spaces, for example Jahiem's Justice Centre, The Advocacy Academy, and Coco Collective. A number of young people were appropriating spaces from dominant institutions in which to do their organising, for example using student unions. This was a recurring theme in discussions, both at the residential and in our follow-up calls. Access to community

space is foundational for building relationships and creating the kinds of foundations movements need to take root. However, as Dhelia noted, when prompted to imagine the kinds of spaces people would want in their community, many were not sure or felt overwhelmed by the question.

There is scope here for some radical exploration, particularly by those who are committed to resourcing organising groups, and learnings to be gained from where groups have claimed or taken over community assets.

There is also learning here for NEON in terms of how we convene space, and ensuring that space is made not just for delivering content but for that relationship building to take place.

Intersectionality

Throughout the residential, and in follow-up calls, the intersectionality of issues that people are facing - which for the majority of people at the residential is sitting within their own experiences and identities - was remarked upon. For example, a number of participants shared that this was the first time they had been in a room with trans and non-binary people, and that this had greatly improved their abilities to have conversations 'back in their communities'.

This is a real testament to the kinds of cross-cultural, inclusive spaces that NEON convenes, and affirms our choice to centre culture and culture-building as part of the space and to name the kinds of cultures we want to create, and the work done by the delivery team and participants to co-create that culture and hold each other in that space. This allowed us to facilitate open dialogue about difficult dynamics that show up in movement spaces, for example the pervasive whiteness of climate justice spaces (which was examined by participants), and then support individual participants to think about how they show up in spaces, where they can make space for others and how to decentre themselves. On a few occasions our experienced facilitators had supportive conversations with participants to encourage them to think about the space they were taking up at the residential, encouraging them to occupy more supportive roles within group dynamics, rather than looking to lead in each instance.

- **Organisational Development**

Over the course of the residential, a number of conversations were situated not just in running effective campaigns and organising effectively, but also in strengthening

and building social movement organisations and the importance of movement generous leadership. A number of participants were making the connections between the ‘what’ of an organisation as being as important as the ‘how’.

These things are of course inherently linked, and many organisations move from NEON’s Movement Builders Training Programme and Transformative Organising Training Programme into our OrgBuilders Training, our year-long coaching programme which focuses on organisational and leadership development. It is NEON’s ability to provide support across all these areas that makes us unique in the UK movement building context.

Some of the organisations were independently using our ‘Running Successful Movement Organisations’ toolkits to great effect, and a number of the follow-up calls held specific requests for support in decentralising power and leadership and creating sustainable organisational structures.

There is a clear opportunity here for NEON for the next iteration of OrgBuilders to specifically engage some of the organisations that participated in this Movement Builders and provide that wrap-around support, and peer learning environment.

A challenge here is that many organisations, particularly grassroots community groups struggle to get the kind of sustained core funding that would allow them to develop their organisations and access the kind of peer support, coaching and mentoring that facilitates collective movement leadership development, which limits the potential impact of movement convenings and infrastructure funding,

The New Economy and the state

A number of participants broached conversations about explicitly ‘new economy’ ideas, with a growing interest in the economic underpinnings of structures that cause harm, and that being a connecting thread between movements.

Additionally, a reflection from one participant was that a uniting experience of the participants was of state violence, whether it was from within a specific community and policing context, at the hands of a hostile immigration system, or as a result of the criminalisation of direct action and protest.

This kind of shared experience and analysis prompts some useful points for reflection. Firstly, is the importance of movement spaces to practising collective care and for there to be access to healing spaces, to support recovery from these often

violent and violating experiences, for the health of the individuals themselves and the wider movement. This of course has to be something that goes beyond temporary movement spaces such as the residential, and is embedded in our ongoing organising and approaches to movement building.

Secondly, is how this shared experience can translate into shared analysis, and from there build out collective, cross-movement strategies. The principles of a New Economy, for example, are embedded within NEON's DNA, having been part of our work from the beginning, and as we intend to more explicitly frame this as we move into development of our next strategy. It is useful to reflect on the ways in which campaigners and organisers are already doing this, and the potential power of bringing people together across movement spaces with a focus on the underlying systems, instead of getting stuck in the usual power analyses.

Participant Feedback

Immediately following the residential, we sent out feedback forms, from which we had 76% response rate.

The first part of the form asked participants to rate how much the training helped them across 6 core areas. The majority of participants gave a score of 4 or 5 across all categories, as broken down below:

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being 'strongly disagree', 5 being 'strongly agree') to what extent did the training helped you:	Average score from all responses
1. Understand the characteristics that make social movements effective	4.36
2. Understand how social movements can create big systemic change	4.73
3. Reflect on your wider 'movement ecology'	4.36
4. Understand how you can make the biggest, most strategic contribution to your movement	4.00
5. Recognise the need for visioning within my group	4.73
6. Understand how to create a culture within your group or organisation that empowers its members	4.23

When asked which parts of the residential were most useful, responses were split across a number of aspects of the weekend.

- 14 responses named sessions and tools that helped them better understand the movement landscape and how it works, specifically Movement Ecology, Movement Lifecycles, trigger events, and exploring roles in the movement, both theoretically and through SWARM roles
- 13 responses named opportunities to learn from others. This included learning from historical events, e.g. in the Standing on the Shoulders of Giants session, and from the film 'Crip Camp', as well as valuing opportunities to learn from each other, e.g. in breakout sessions and learning circles, and when there were opportunities to connect with others in open space and from the same movement.
- 6 participants named valuing time to think through strategy, building strategic alliances, time for visioning and thinking about how wins happen.

In terms of what could have been improved, the biggest element that came through was in terms of time and space for connections, discussions and for rest.

- Seven participants commented on the need for longer breaks, explicit rest time, time for grounding practices such as yoga, or mentioned needing to take access breaks that meant they weren't present for bits of content
- Seven responses also named desiring more time being given to thinking about cross-movement collaboration or strategising within movement

Participants were generous in making specific suggestions of things that could have improved the weekend for them, and there is a lot of rich feedback that we can take forward for developing the programme for the future, as well as thinking about what we do to follow up with the cohort and offer continued support and resources.

"I understand and value the breadth of content given the array of organisations and movements represented in the room - however I would have valued some more structured time thinking about how we support each other within the movements, how our movements converge and what we can do going forward. This might look like some more discussion sessions or visioning in smaller groups."

Quotes from feedback forms:

"I've been drowning in my youth organising and this training felt like four days of hope. The workshop struck the perfect balance between informative and interactive. All the tips that were given felt directly applicable and often gave me that 'aha'

moment where everything finally clicked. The facilitators did a great job to engage everyone - there was a lot to learn from them just by example - while never pressuring us to participate more than we were comfortable. I enjoyed the training very much!”

“I spent the weekend soaking up the knowledge, questions and joy of different campaigners - and got some real perspective on my own work in the process. We explored the intersecting fights and fires young people are tending to and igniting around the UK - and how we work through and overcome the inevitable cycle that social movements face.”

“A training camp of young revolutionaries, overflowing with converging utopic visions. The training offers a strong insight on the architecture and mechanics of movements. The training camp helps you understand where you sit within the movement lifecycle, ecosystem and its history. The training also offers the opportunity to be introspective: to envision a new world and understand your superpower.”

“It was enlightening course that helped me to reflect on my current practice and those who am I working with in the context of the youth movement. I learnt from the trainers also from the young people. There was a rich diversity to the group that allowed deep conversations to happen”

These comments from participants really reflect the feeling from the team as to how successful this Movement Builders was. Whilst there is always space to improve things, the overall feeling from the weekend was that people left feeling energised and motivated, and that some really valuable relationships were built amongst the next generation of movement leaders.

Perhaps the thing that best sums up the weekend is [this video](#) that one of our participants made, which really captures the spirit and energy of the weekend.

Post residential take up of other Neon opportunities and the impact of the funding on the wider Neon network and Neon’s work

Follow up calls

Following the residential, we offered follow up calls to each participant to:

- Check in with each participant to see how they've been since the residential, how the learning was landing and if there were things that had been particularly helpful for their work
- Explore if there were things coming up where Neon was well placed to offer support or make connections
- Hear from participants what they thought Neon could do to help the group stay connected and strengthen the movement as a whole

We had just over 50% take up on the follow up calls, holding 1-2-1 conversations with 16 participants. These conversations were rich and enabled us to get a better understanding of the impact of the programme on participants and what might support them going forward.

From these calls:

- We referred participants to other programmes and picked up bits of ad hoc support, for example through our Help Desk coaching and through 1-1 Organising support
- We drew on those calls to inform the shape and content of our October convening.
- There are opportunities to create space for participants to share some of their knowledge and learning, for example in lunch and learn sessions, that could potentially facilitate
- There is a strong appetite for further opportunities to continue to connect and learn. These could be in person gatherings or shorter 'lunch and learn' online sessions

Post-residential event, 26th October 2023

Drawing on information from the feedback forms and the 1-2-1s, we knew that the area where people were most interested in further grounding was in the movement ecology framework, while there was also a lot of interest in learning about our Transformative Organising work and organising tools.

We also wanted to use this as an opportunity to bring more people together, beyond the original cohort, encouraging alumni to bring allies from their movements, so as to continue to widen and grow this movement space. We also revisited our initial mapping and seed-list to identify and invite participants from key organisations in the youth-space, such as Reclaim in Manchester and We Belong.

The event started with a shared extended lunch, to create time for participants to connect and bond in a relaxed environment. We invited Martha from the Civic Power Fund to share information about the launch of the Youth Alliance and opportunities for young people to get involved in this opportunity.

We then moved into some content delivery, re-visiting movement ecology and then allowing them to try a Transformative Organising tool referred to as 'cutting the issue', as a way of understanding how to focus their work on winnable issues, develop concrete organising asks and build their bases. This was received very well and a number of participants have already reached out to our Head of Organising to continue learning.

We had 37 participants at the event, 10 of whom were participants on the programme. Feedback on the day from participants was very positive, and showed that it was a successful event: participants really valued having the space to connect with each other, and found the content and tools useful. We have invited more concrete feedback in our follow up email, which will allow us to plan for future events. We will send over to Blagrove the feedback from the event when we have it.

How the funding has impacted NEON

This funding has been valuable to NEON in a number of different ways. In reflecting on the journey over the past year, there are a number of key aspects in which this funding and our partnership with Blagrove more broadly has been transformative.

- It's provided NEON with an opportunity to think differently about our movement building content and how we support movements. This is reflective of a wider move within NEON to move towards a less siloed 'issue focused' approach and engage a cohort of participants working across multiple fields and holding multiple identities. There are reflections that this is essential for working with young people, who are working across boundaries and facilitates working in a more holistic way.
- It's allowed us to actually focus on work with young people, and be explicit about this. There has perhaps been some nervousness to take up space in this part of the movement, and this has shown us that we can and should do more to support young people. This will likely impact our programming for next year, particularly for our Organising and OrgBuilders programmes.
- Blagrove has held us to our own higher standards on accountability processes, accessibility, safeguarding and anti-oppression. It's refreshing to work with a

funder who takes this seriously, and to be challenged to do better, for example with our selection processes and advisory panel.

- This has reaffirmed that culture building and care is absolutely essential to doing this work well. This makes it an expensive programme, as this requires time and thought to be able to do this properly and meaningfully, and encourages us to think more widely about how we resource these programmes and get investment and buy-in from funders.