

# Youth Organising Movement Builders Report - Mapping the Movement Ecology

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## About NEON

NEON offers hands-on support and training for campaigners, organisers, communications and operations teams working across social movements.

We support over 1,000 organisers and campaigners across the UK working on everything from anti-racism to environment and housing activism. We work together to accelerate social movements through training, relationship building, incubation, and infrastructure support.

## Movement Builders Programme - History & Context

Movement Builders is an intensive training course which we hold across the UK for organisers, campaigners and activists. The programme covers the fundamentals of social movements' theory, history and practice, as well as working with participants to create a shared language and method to develop their strategy and core movement "DNA". Movement Builders aims to help leaders build a deep understanding and commitment to the movement fundamentals of movement consciousness, appreciation and leadership as the foundations of strategic movement building. The programme aims to develop shared tools and language around social movements and movement building to enable more effective collaboration within movements. Movement Builders also supports the growth of deeper and more sustainable relationships across the movement ecology based on mutual respect, care and a desire to win together.

The movement building work at NEON has over the past five years, found and trained over 300 movement leaders across a range of issues, focusing primarily on our battleground areas of migrants rights, climate justice, housing, health and precarious work. The work has been high-impact; empowering a new generation of campaigners across fragmented movement spaces and teaching us all a lot about movement building best practice. It has never felt more urgent for us to apply these lessons to building stronger movements for justice: we collectively face a catastrophic climate emergency,

active threats to marginalised communities, and escalating inequality; crises connected by the economic, political and social systems which underpin them. NEON's vision is of a future beyond the intersecting structures and forces which combine to produce inequality, environmental destruction and individual and collective trauma on a mass scale. All movements need better cross-movement collaboration and cultures of coordination and movement-generous responses if we are to rise to the current moment.

## The Youth Organising Movement

At NEON we define a social movement as having four key elements:

- They are made up of **multiple groups doing different things**, all with different theories of change
- They **come together around a shared problem** and try to overcome it, even if their visions for the world are different
- **Different groups will use different tactics** within the movement to achieve their goal
- Their work creates **different legacies** which we can see in culture change, legislative change and within our own activist practices

Most social movements at their core have a clear problem they are trying to overcome, for example the Health Movement is trying to tackle health inequality and the Climate Justice Movement is trying to tackle climate collapse. However, the Youth Organising Movement doesn't explicitly coalesce around a shared problem. Many groups within this space may see youth justice or youth liberation as a core component of their theory of change, but the problems they are trying to tackle are often situated within other, more established, social movements for example XR Youth are very clearly part of the Climate Justice Movement.

When exploring how we understand social movements as part of the Movement Builders Programme, there may need to be some additional framing to support participants to understand that they are part of an issues based movement and a youth organising movement as defined by Chrisann Jarrett<sup>1</sup>, or vice versa.

Although there is a long history of young people organising around different issues such as anti-racism, schooling and education, workers rights and climate, where 'young people are able to organise and mobilise around a particular "IDEA" that generates a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/vision-for-the-future-of-youth-led-changemaking-and-activism/>

spark of civic engagement<sup>2</sup>, there is much less of an established Youth Organising Movement per se that delivers the ‘triple bottom line benefit’<sup>3</sup> of transforming the individual, the community and the issue.

This ‘triple bottom line benefit’ was outlined in Crissan Jarrett’s 2021 report ‘Funding Youth Activism’, which defines Youth Organising as follows:

*‘Grounded in racial, gender, and economic justice, youth organizing is the process of engaging young people in building power for systemic change while supporting their individual and collective development’.*<sup>4</sup>

She goes on to explore youth organising as a framework and mechanism for engaging young people and investing in youth leadership development, which provides recognition of young people as drivers of change who are seeking innovative solutions and providing the conditions for long term social change.

For each Movement Builders programme, we develop a seed list of organisations, groups and people to inform about the programme and encourage them to apply. During the outreach process that seed list is further developed. Our current seed list, prior to starting our outreach period has 116 groups, organisations and individuals drawn from contacts from Blagrove Trust, NEON and the Movement Builders Training Team.

To deepen our understanding of the types of groups and organisations within the youth organising space, and how they might relate to this movement or other movements, we mapped potential participants into a series of clusters.

These clusters are as follows:

- **Youth leaders** - young people either occupying a leadership role e.g. youth MP or leading on project or campaign that has some link to the youth organising space
- **Youth spaces** - physical provision with a progressive or radical approach to their work with young people
  - Eg. R.Y.S.E, The Winch, Rekindle
- **Alumni campaigns** - groups, organisations and campaigns that have been set up by young people having gone through some form of youth organising programme
  - Eg. Halo Collective, LatinXcluded, Pupil Power

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<sup>2</sup> <https://fundingyouthactivism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CHRISANN-REPORT.pdf>

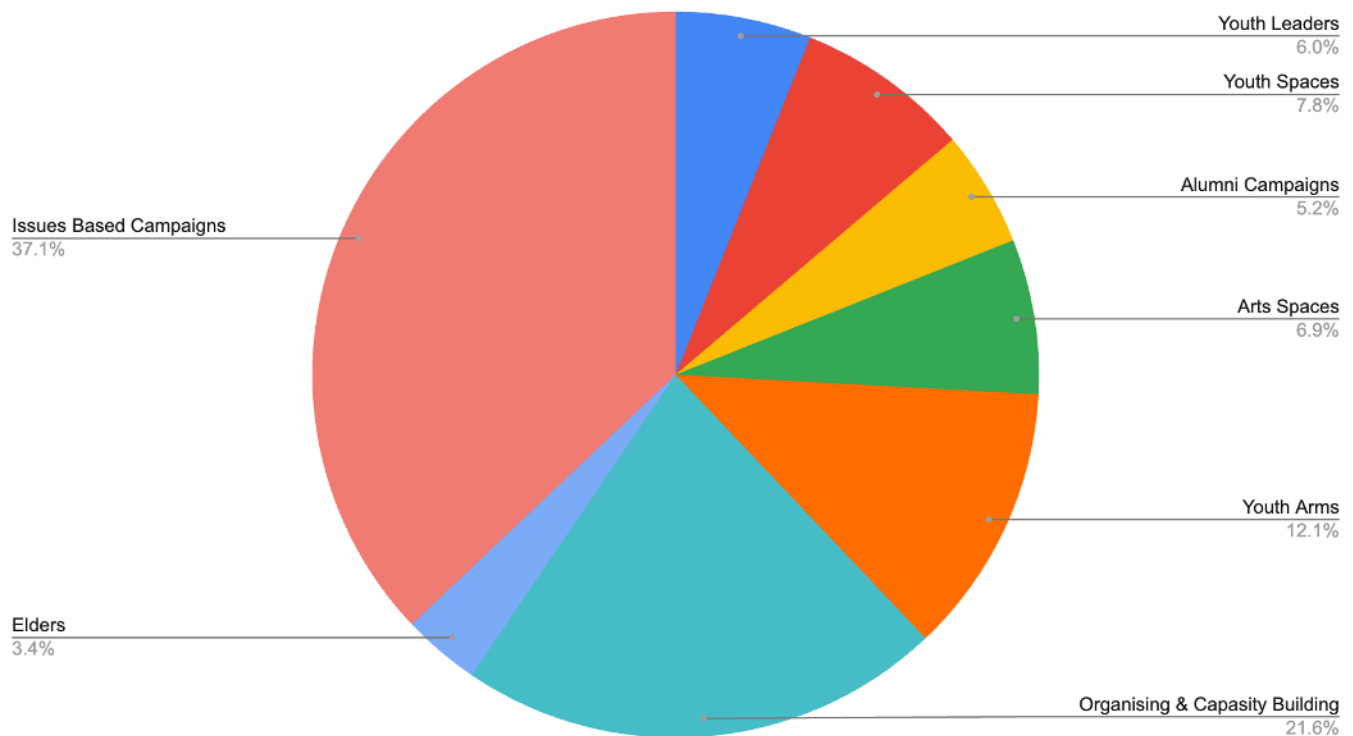
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/vision-for-the-future-of-youth-led-changemaking-and-activism/>

<sup>4</sup> As previous, P16

- **Arts spaces** - arts organisations providing specific programmes or schemes of work that provide some transformative element for the young people they work with
  - Eg. Company Three, The Big House, Comics Youth CIC
- **Youth arms** - existing movement organisations and groups that have dedicated programmes of work that are led or shaped by young people
  - Green new Deal UK, XR Youth, FLAME, Amnesty UK
- **Organising and Capacity Building** - groups and organisations that are dedicated to building Youth power in some way, generally led by skills, knowledge and capacity development of young people rather than issues based.
  - Eg. Advocacy Academy, Love and Justice, Take Back the Power, Young Trustees Movement
- **Elders** - actors within the movement who do not define as young people, but are regarded as leaders or key people
- **Issue based campaigns** - groups and organisations who work around the intersection of youth and a specific issue
  - Tribe Named Athari (fka BLM London), NUS, No More Exclusions, Young Minds

From our mapping, over one third people, groups and organisations are from issues based campaigns, with the next largest group drawn from organising and capacity building, followed by youth arms.

## Clusters



It is possible that people within the issues based campaigns groups may feel more attached to social movements that are related to the issues they are tackling, rather than the broader field of youth organising. This may have an impact on their ability or willingness to consider themselves as part of the wider youth organising field, but also impact on how they are able to engage with their other respective movements. As part of the application process, we have asked applicants to respond to the question *‘What social movements do you feel part of currently, and who else might you want to connect to to achieve your purpose?’*

Through the application process and during the Movement Builders programme we will be able to identify some of the ways the youth organising space is cutting across different movements, and where there are further opportunities to support groups within this space to connect to other groups coalescing around a shared problem.

Within the Issues Based Campaigns cluster, we further divided the groups and organisations thematically. These issues were were:

- Climate justice
- Racial justice
- Food/Land
- Education
- Migration
- Care experienced
- Political Participation
- Criminalisation
- Mental Health
- Miscellaneous

Lots of groups across the different clusters focused on one or more of these issues, and there was strong links with other intersecting issues, for example disability justice and trans and queer liberation. Within the Issues Based Campaigns groups the two issues with the most active groups were climate justice and education, but it is unclear from the initial mapping work how well connected or strategy aligned these groups are with one another across their shared problems.

Another area to further explore with applicants and participants to the programme is where and how young organisers and activists develop their skills. It's clear that a lot of this happens in a programmatic way through youth focused Organising and Capacity Building organisations such as Advocacy Academy and Reclaim, but how are youth activists and organisers developing their skills in the Youth Arms space for example? Are there particular youth centred pedagogical approaches these organisations are applying? Are young people developing the skills from being immersed in adult led/supported campaigns and skills development is secondary to participation within the campaigns and activity? How connected are the different clusters and is there cross movement learning from more of the youth centred organisations within some of the Issues Based/Youth Arm groups?

## **Movement Ecology**

We use the Movement Ecology<sup>5</sup> model to help groups within movements better understand the wider ecosystem of change making they exist within, and that they do not have to work in an isolated and siloed way.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://ayni.institute/movementecology/>

Beyond our organisations, there are many campaigns, movements, cultures, communities, and institutions that are trying to make change in their own ways. The dominant culture of isolation and individualism can confuse us into thinking that we are alone at the centre, rather than integrally connected to a network of changemakers with diverse theories of change. Ecology shows that diversity and mutualism - rather than monoculture and antagonism - are the conditions for strength and survival. If we saw our work ecologically, we would be more supported and more successful.

The metaphor of movement ecology is useful not only for appreciating different approaches to social change, but also for explicitly acknowledging our own individual biases toward a specific approach. The most successful examples of social movement triumphs, such as the Civil Rights movement were driven by a complex network of different groups and organisations each with different tactics and approaches to achieving the same goal.

When we work together across the different segments of the ecology, we can really start to drive change on our issue. However, often within movements different areas of the movement ecology are underdeveloped or under resourced, therefore developing a deeper understanding of social movements through this lens better informs us of where to place movement resources and act strategically.

The three core<sup>6</sup> areas of the Movement Ecology are:

### **Personal Empowerment**

This approach is focused on building the power and capacity of people at an individual level, for wider social change. This can include front-line service provision, training or personal development work, healing or restorative justice work, in so far as the work has a structural analysis at its core. This approach believes that when we are hurt and suffering, we are more likely to inflict hurt and suffering on the people and projects around us; conversely, when we heal these hurts and take a step toward personal liberation, wellness, or enlightenment, we are more capable of healing and supporting those around us.

Some examples of this are Advice UK, Training For Change and Navigate.

### **Challenging Dominant Institutions**

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<sup>6</sup> Some Movement Ecology models sub-divide these areas further, to include: Personal Empowerment, Service Provision, Building Alternatives, Structure Organising, Mass Mobilisation, and Inside Game

People doing this work believe that by challenging dominant institutions - such as governments and corporations - they can change life more significantly and for more people than by other means. Those working in this area might say, 'the dominant institutions in society have the biggest impact on our day to day lives, so we should prioritize changing them in order to make the biggest impact.'

Some examples of this type of work are campaigning and advocacy organisations, policy and think tanks, and many direct actions groups.

### **Building Alternatives**

Alternative institutions and cultures create change by experimenting with alternative ways of doing and being in the world: time banks, worker cooperatives, communes, alternative currencies are all examples. All of these push the boundaries of what is possible within our social landscape. Alternative institutions provide the material conditions for us to relate to each other in a way that is aligned with our deepest values, instead of values designed around capitalism. Part of this approach is that successful experiments not only foster the wellbeing of those who participate in them, but in some cases they prove the success of innovations and thereby lead the way toward broader changes in law and policy.

Some examples of this approach are Bristol Pound (and other alternative currencies), Alt Gen and DIY Cultures.

The definition we apply to youth organising currently taken from the Youth Led Change<sup>7</sup> report, with its focus on skills development and leadership development, implies that the youth organising space will likely be more weighted to the Personal Empowerment ecology space and less developed in Building Alternatives. The pipeline model of activist development to alumni campaigns also implies that in some areas there are strong intrinsic bonds between areas of Personal Empowerment and Challenging Dominant Institutions in a way that other social movements don't experience.

At the time of developing the seed list, 77 of the organisations on that list could be mapped against the Movement Ecology model.<sup>8</sup>

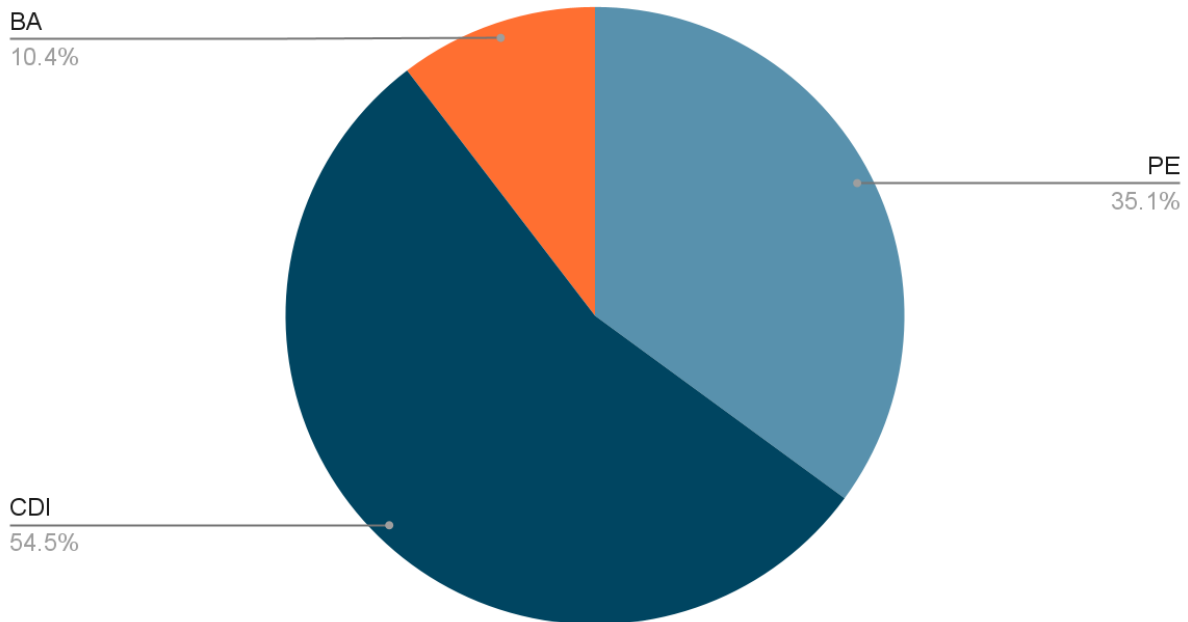
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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/vision-for-the-future-of-youth-led-changemaking-and-activism/>

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 2



## Youth Organising Movement Ecology Map



At the end of the outreach period once the seed list has been further developed we can build on this Movement Ecology map to see if any of the weighting across the movement changes, although it is clear from this initial mapping that the Building Alternatives space within the movement is limited.

Personal Empowerment and Challenging Dominant Institutions groups and organisations cut across a range of shared movement problems including policing, class and climate; however, for groups in the Building Alternative space, they are predominantly found in providing radical youth spaces or education provision.

During the Movement Builders programme we will further explore Movement Ecology within the context of the Youth Organising Space. This will help us develop more of an understanding what types of groups are currently needed within the movement space, how those groups are working together and explore opportunities and barriers to collaborative working.

## Reflections and considerations for the Movement Builders programme and support on ‘Youth-led social change: early recommendations for funders’<sup>9</sup>

The report generated twelve clear recommendations for funders considering funding youth led change. Many of these echoed recommendations made by ‘Youth-led change in the UK - understanding the landscape and synergies’, authored by Natasha Adams and Jim Coe in 2019.<sup>10</sup>

Five of these recommendations can be directly addressed in some way through the NEON Movement Builders programme and wrap around support. These are:

### Recommendation 2

**Network/Cohort creation to facilitate the development of alliances:** Community events and networking opportunities are a rich resource for organisations to learn from each other, find synergies and prevent duplication of work. Funders have access to broad portfolios of funded organisations in the sector and can assist with brokering relationships, collaborations and partnerships between organisations to accelerate the change.

Considerations for Movement Builders:

- How do we ensure different areas of the ecology are represented (and valued) as networks and cohorts are developed?
- How do we shift power to smaller organisations and young people within these networks?

### Recommendation 4

**Resources need to be deployed to enable movements not organisations:** Youth-led activism and social change does not take place in a vacuum, strategic collaborations with other change focused organisations must be facilitated. In addition, Young Activists have a broad affiliation not limited to one organisation, their shared identity and the complexities around intersectionality need to be considered so that they can be better connected with other young changemakers.

Considerations for Movement Builders:

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<sup>9</sup> <https://fundingyouthactivism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CHRISANN-REPORT.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>

<https://www.blagravetrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/youth-led-change-landscape-and-possibilities.pdf>

- How do we bring in leaders from participant orgs (especially young activists) into the wider NEON network and then connect them to other groups working in shared issues/areas of interest?
- How do we do this in a safe way that supports them to meaningfully participate in and lead organisations who don't have a youth-centred approach?

#### Recommendation 5

**Activism should be seen as bursts of energy that is not always best supported by funding through organisations:** activism can be spontaneous and reactive, young people wanting to respond to social issues creatively. Funding through organisations may not be the best way to support youth-led activism in the UK due to constraints organisations impose on the types of activism allowed. Funders and organisations need to think about how they can best support the ideas of young people through subgrants and by signposting funding opportunities that are not dependent on the young people having formal organisational structures.

Considerations for Movement Builders:

- How do we draw this point out when exploring movement legacy and movement lifecycles?
- Is there some further work we can do with funders thinking about the movement lifecycle and how to fund different types of work at different points?

#### Recommendation 9

**The 'Pipeline to Pathways' Problem needs to be fixed:** there is a pipeline of empowered young people but no clear pathway for young people to engage in activism within organisations and their communities. Investment in the youth voice and development of young people are crucial to develop the pipeline of empowered young people but strategic input is needed to help organisations identify and create opportunities for young people to lead social change. These pathways should not reduce a young person's involvement to membership of focus groups and sharing lived experience.

Considerations for Movement Builders:

- There is a strong argument here for supporting youth-centred organisations who focus more on supporting young people to become leaders or develop their own campaigns and projects to connect with the wider movements their issues and interests are situated in.

## Recommendation 12

**Acknowledgement that young people are leaders of now:** young people are to be recognised as leaders of ‘now’ and not ‘leaders of tomorrow’. The latter contributes to the gatekeeping of young people and can impact their participation in social change as adults act as assessors who decide the types of opportunities a young person can get involved in. Organisations and funders need to operate with urgency so that they are creating opportunities for young people to lead in the present and not solely focussed on developing young people for the future.

### Considerations for Movement Builders:

- Is there work we can facilitate with non youth-centred organisations to think about how they can re-address power imbalances within their organisations to be less prescriptive about the relationships they hold with young people within their organisations?

A notable point in the research identified that there has not been ‘enough space for higher-level strategic conversations that young people might not be able to contribute to just yet.’ Jarrett states that youth-led activism and social change is still emerging in the UK (p.7), therefore Movement Builders may provide a space within which to hold some of the initial more strategic conversations intergenerationally.

## Appendix 1 - Resources

This report drew on the existing research set out in the following reports:

- Natasha Adams and Jim Coe (2019) Youth-Led Change Landscape and Possibilities. Commissioned by the Blagrave Trust  
<https://www.blagravetrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/youth-led-change-landscape-and-possibilities.pdf>
- Crissann Jarrett (2021) Youth-led Social Change: Early Recommendations for Funders.  
<https://fundingyouthactivism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CHRISANN-REPORT.pdf>
- Crissann Jarrett (2022) The Future of Youth-Led Changmaking and Activism. Commissioned by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Esme Fairburn  
<https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/vision-for-the-future-of-youth-led-change-making-and-activism/>

The Movement Ecology knowledge shared in this report draws on content covered from Neon's Movement Building Training Programme, which in turn draws on the extensive work of the Ayni Institute in this area.

<https://ayni.institute/movementecology/>

The following organisations were approached to be consulted for this report:

- Reclaim
- Advocacy Academy
- The 4Front Project
- R.Y.S.E
- Grapevine
- Voices that Shake
- No More Exclusions
- NUS
- Young Minds
- Green New Deal Rising
- Ubele
- Comic Youth CIC
- Take Back the Power
- Flame
- Rekindle
- The New School
- Beyond Equality
- Friends of the Earth

## Appendix 2 - Breakdown of Organisations in the Movement Ecology

<p><b>Challenging Dominant Institutions</b></p>	<p>Amnesty UK  British Youth Council  Climate Ed  Elect Her  European Youth Forum  Friends of the Earth  Gendered Intelligence  Global Justice Now (Our Future Now)  Green New Deal UK  Hope for the Future  Just for Kids Law  National Society of Apprentices  National Union of Students  National Youth Agency  No More Exclusions  People &amp; Planet  Students Organising for Sustainability  Students' unions  Teach the Future  The Centre for Education and Youth  The Centre for Youth Impact</p>	<p>The Children's Society  The Manchester Centre for Youth Studies (Manchester Met)  The West Yorkshire Regional Youth Climate Committee  UK Citizens (Stand Up Stand Out)  UK Student Climate Network  UK Youth  UK Youth Climate Coalition  United Friends and Family  University of Sunderland Students' Union  We Belong  Who Cares Scotland  XR Youth  Young Minds  Young Trustees Movement  Young Womens Trust  Youth Access (Our Minds Our Future)  Youth Politics UK  Young People's Foundations Trust</p>
<p><b>Personal Empowerment</b></p>	<p>4 Front Project  84 Youth  Act Build Change  Colours Youth Network  Comics Youth CIC  Company Three  Coney  Grapevine  Healing Justice London  Just Like Us  Kids of Colour  MAP  Maslaha  Nijjor Manush</p>	<p>Polish Migrants Organise for Change  Reclaim  Restless Development  Take Back the Power  The Advocacy Academy  The Big House  The Foyer Federation  The Gap  The National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs  The Verbatim Formula  Ubele: Young Emerging Leaders Network  Voices that Shake</p>
<p><b>Building Alternatives</b></p>	<p>FLAME  Red Sunday School  Rekindle  Ryse</p>	<p>The Free Black University  The New School  The Warren  The Winch</p>