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Fostering social innovation in youth: Learning from a youth social entrepreneurship initiative in Ireland

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Abstract

"Wave Change" was a youth social entrepreneurship initiative in Ireland, established to work directly with youth, aged 18-25, to develop the knowledge, skills, and networks they needed to drive social change. Reflecting on the success of the Wave Change initiative, this chapter outlines the value of adopting a mixture of learning approaches that facilitate structured learning, peer-to-peer learning, and project-based experiential learning. While the value of each of these individual learning approaches is outlined, the chapter demonstrates how operating together they create an environment to foster social innovation in youth, providing youth with the opportunity to acquire the requisite skill set to be engaged as architects of social change and to be part of a strong peer network of social entrepreneurs.

Keywords: youth social entrepreneurship, youth-led social innovation, peer-to-peer learning, structured learning, experiential learning

Introduction

In recent years, social innovation initiatives involving youth have emerged as a global phenomenon, eliciting interest from UNICEF and other organizations as a potential strategy in engaging youth and their communities. As an emerging field, research on best practices in youth social innovation is as of yet relatively weak. This chapter aims to contribute to building the evidence base, by distilling learning from a comprehensive evaluation study of a youth social entrepreneurship initiative in Ireland, known as "Wave Change."[1] It aims to establish what constitutes an enabling environment to foster social innovation and the requisite skill set in youth to engage them as social entrepreneurs. The Wave Change initiative was established to work directly with youth, aged 18–25, to develop the knowledge, skills, and networks they need to drive social change. It was launched as an initiative of Social Entrepreneurs Ireland in 2011 and was delivered during two ten-month cycles between November 2011 and October 2013. The delivery of Wave Change was extensively evaluated during this period by tracking its implementation and documenting the outcomes achieved. The evaluation, conducted by the authors of this chapter, found that Wave Change achieved the following outcomes. It provided the participants with in-depth knowledge and practical experience of project management and social innovation. It generated a strong, diverse network of social entrepreneurs and provided opportunities to the youth to apply their learning by implementing their ideas to drive social change.

The core focus of this chapter is to distil the learning on what contributed to Wave Change achieving these key outcomes. Following this introductory section, background information is

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[1] The Wave Change Evaluation Report is available at

http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/media/unescochildandfamilyresearchcentre/files/Wave-Change-Main-Report.pdf (accessed on 31 March 2017).

provided establishing the local context in Ireland for Wave Change at the time the initiative originated. This is followed by a review of the literature on youth-led social innovation, focusing on what are known to be the essential attributes of a program aimed at fostering social entrepreneurship among youth. The chapter then provides an overview of the Wave Change model of practice and the learning approaches underpinning this model, comprising structured learning, peer-to-peer learning, and project-based experiential learning. This is followed by an overview of the methodology employed to generate the qualitative data upon which the findings in this chapter are based. The findings presented, focus on the contribution of the blend of learning approaches to fostering social entrepreneurship in youth. They outline how these learning approaches strengthened the capacity of the Wave Change program participants (hereinafter the Wave Changers) to engage in social change, to form a strong peer network of social entrepreneurs and provided opportunities to the Wave Changers to apply their learning in practice. The chapter concludes by sharing the main lessons learned for similar programs, bringing to the fore the value of adopting a mixture of learning approaches, namely structured learning, peer-to-peer learning and project-based experiential learning.

The local context

The idea for Wave Change originated in and was funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies Ireland[2] in 2010. At the time, it was considered by Atlantic Philanthropies that there was a lack of programs to develop and test demonstrations of innovative youth civic engagement in Ireland. The idea of

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[2]   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.

demonstrating action was considered essential. Interest by Social Entrepreneurs Ireland in developing the program, a leading organization operating in the sector at the time, arose due to its work with social entrepreneurs and from a gap it identified in the youth work sector in Ireland. Social Entrepreneurs Ireland found that only a very small proportion of those who approached the organization were under 30 years of age. However, the organization was aware that many young people in Ireland, particularly in the 18–25 age group, were passionate about social change and involved in civic engagement activities through universities, colleges, not-for-profit organizations and on an individual basis. The organization was interested in broadening its reach by developing a tailored program to support youth to advance their ideas for social change.

While Wave Change was not modeled on an existing program, it drew on learning from similar programs and Social Entrepreneurs Ireland's experience of working with adult social innovators. In developing the Wave Change model of practice, the emphasis was on supporting youth to engage in social action and building their capacity in this regard. Wave Change was guided by the following mission statement: "Wave Change equips young social entrepreneurs in Ireland with the skills and networks they need to be effective, resilient and ethical change makers." The program targeted youth aged 18–25 from across Ireland. In the first year of the delivery of Wave Change, the threshold to be accepted into the program was relatively low. The program targeted all youth who had a passion for social change but were not necessarily active in the area. In the second year, the target group for Wave Change was significantly refined. It was a prerequisite of the program that the applicant had experience of taking action for social change and an idea ready to be implemented. The initiative was delivered through two consecutive ten-month programs, providing training, support, personal development and networking opportunities to two cohorts of youth, totaling 47 young people. Of these 47 young people, 27 were female, and 20 were male.

The average age of the Wave Changers was 23 years. The majority of the Wave Changers (n=29) had a third-level qualification, ranging from non-Degree to postgraduate Degree, with the remaining 18 having completed second level education at the time of their involvement in Wave Change.

Youth-led social innovation

Youth social entrepreneurship initiatives are central to programs designed to foster youth-led social innovation. These initiatives can be distinguished from the more traditional youth development and civic engagement programs in that it is the youth themselves that initiate the ideas and control the projects. Nevertheless, experienced adults retain an important role in mentoring and guiding youth (Innovations in Civic Participation, 2008; UNICEF, 2007). Gregory Dees is a founding father of social entrepreneurship education (Bornstein & Davis, 2010) and outlines his definition of social entrepreneurship, as follows:

> Social entrepreneurs play the role of change agents in the social sector, by adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value); recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission; engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning; acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand, and; exhibiting a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created. (Dees, 2001, p. 4)

The terms "social innovator" and "social entrepreneur" are often used interchangeably. Social innovation, however, has been described as encompassing both social enterprise initiatives and social entrepreneurship (McNeill, Reeder, & Rich, 2012; Social Enterprise Taskforce, 2010). The

difference between social entrepreneurship and social enterprises primarily lies in the diverging emphasis on intended outcomes. In social entrepreneurship, the focus is primarily on improving social outcomes, whereas in social enterprises the emphasis lies on income generation and the creation of jobs. Nevertheless, both are equally driven by social and/or environmental motives (Social Enterprise Taskforce, 2010; UNICEF, 2007).

A review of the literature reveals that programs designed to foster social entrepreneurship and social innovation among youth require several essential attributes as follows. Youth need to be provided with knowledge and opportunities to develop their skills and expertise to support them to advance their social change ideas (Berman & Mellon, 2012; Fletcher, 2015; UNICEF, 2007). Likewise, fostering an environment that promotes a peer network or community of like-minded change-makers should be a key feature of these programs (Berman & Mellon, 2012; UNICEF, 2007). However, Berman, and Mellon (2012) found that, while there are benefits for individuals to become part of a like-minded community, this can also have a negative effect on an individual's sense of efficacy. This is due to comparisons being made between individual achievements and the achievements of their fellow participants, particularly in the early stages of such a community being formed. Based on this evidence, Berman and Mellon (2012, p. 62) highlight the importance of supporting youth in a group environment so that they "utilize the experience to thrive rather than retreat."

Mentorship from experienced adults is also considered an essential attribute to engage youth as social innovators (Fletcher, 2015; UNICEF, 2007). The valuable role of a mentor in providing one-to-one support to young social change-makers was identified as a critical component of the Young Social Pioneers Initiative in Australia (Foundation for Young Australians, 2015). As part of this initiative, mentors act as confidants and sounding boards for the pioneers, as well

as helping them to develop their ideas, networks, and business skills. Similarly, a small-scale evaluation of a program delivered to aspiring young social entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom found that peer-to-peer learning, combined with learning from experts who have first-hand experience of operating in the field, contributed to the success of the delivery of the program (Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research, 2011).

Wehmeyer, Argan, and Hughes (1998), Finlay, Wray-Lake, and Flanagan (2010), and Zhu, Rooney, and Phillips (2016) highlight the need to provide youth with tangible opportunities for "learning by doing." According to Tracey and Philips (2007, p. 269), "experiential learning is a crucial component of entrepreneurial education." Jones and English (2004) suggest that a mixture of teaching that encourages experiential learning, project-based learning, problem-solving, and peer support evaluation works best to provide entrepreneurial skills and behaviors. Elsewhere, the provision of financial support to fund the transformation of ideas into action has been identified as an essential attribute of youth social entrepreneurship programs (UNICEF, 2007). The importance of equipping social entrepreneurs with financial literacy skills has also been emphasized (Heady, Rickey, & Ní Ogain, 2012) as well as the need to provide them with the expertise to negotiate the challenges of accessing funding (Berman & Mellon, 2012). It is considered important to support social entrepreneurs to demonstrate the impact of their projects, in a climate where funders demand more evidence of impact (Heady et al., 2012). Küttim, Kallaste, Venessar, and Kiis (2014) analysed 55,781 university students from 17 European countries who participated in the Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey regarding their entrepreneurial intentions directly after their entrepreneurial studies and five years later. They found that students were more interested in the provision of financial support and network and coaching opportunities than in

entreprenership lectures and seminars. This, the authors state, creates the need for education programs that are multi-faceted to produce successful young innovators (Küttim et al., 2014)

The Wave Change model of practice

The Wave Change model of practice consisted of five intensive program weekends as well as the following program components: practical skills workshops, external engagement activities, seed funding, and coaching/one-to-one support. Outside of the five program weekends, the Wave Changers were expected to apply their learning and progress their ideas or projects for social change independently, but supported by these additional components. A descriptor of each of the program components is set out in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

Programme weekends	Integral to the programme model and structured around a set of workshops, inspirational talks by invited speakers, master classes, skills share sessions and small group-based work with fellow Wave Changers, as well as time for personal reflection, planning and informal networking.
Practical skills workshops	Designed to offer specialised standalone training, for example, in the areas of pitching (selling an idea), fundraising, lobbying and communications. The workshops aimed to provide youth with the practical skills required to advance their projects and ideas for social change.
External engagement	Primarily focused on creating opportunities for the youth to be introduced to key and strategic influencers in the social and business fields and to attend and participate in events and conferences.
Seed funding	Designed to support the social change ideas and projects by investing financially in them, as well as, providing the Wave Changers with the experience of partaking in a funding process.
Coaching and support	One-to-one individual support through a formal structured coaching programme offered by professionals in the field in the first year of the delivery of the programme. Informal and semi-formal one-to-one support was delivered by members of the Wave Change staff team in the second year.

The Wave Change model of practice was grounded in a mixture of learning approaches comprising structured learning, peer-to-peer learning, and project-based experiential learning**.** Each of these learning approaches was facilitated by the different program components. Thus, the structured learning was facilitated by the series of program weekends, practical skills workshops and coaching. Peer-to-peer learning was facilitated by encouraging the youth to tap into the knowledge and experiences of their peers and to exchange feedback. This was encouraged on an informal basis and in more formal group settings during the program weekends. Particularly in the second year of the program, Wave Change sought to strike a balance between the youth relying on the program facilitators to acquire their learning and encouraging them to support, advise and learn from each other. Project-based experiential learning was only adopted in year two of the program. This was promoted by requiring the youth to apply their learning in the development and implementation of their social change ideas. This form of applied, experiential learning was viewed as the best way for the Wave Changers to embed their learning.

Methodology

The data presented in this chapter are drawn from the qualitative data collected in evaluating the Wave Change program running from November 2011 to September 2012 (year one) and November 2012 to September 2013 (year two). The data were collected from the youth partaking in the program (n=47)[3]. Ethical approval for the study was granted from the National University of Ireland Galway Research Ethics Committee.

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[3]   N=22 participants in year one and n=25 in year two.

The primary data sources presented in this chapter were gathered using reflective diaries and focus groups. The Wave Changers were asked to engage in self-reflection at the end of each of the five program weekends, guided by a set of reflective questions focused on how Wave Change supported them to engage in social action and facilitated a widening of their existing networks. A total of 46 diaries were returned in year one, comprising 29 written diary entries and 17 diaries returned either by video diary or WordPress. In year two, the Wave Changers used a standardized template for a written journal, which was sent to them by e-mail after each program weekend and returned electronically to the research team. A total of 71 written diary entries were gathered in this manner. In addition, during the fourth program weekend in year two, the evaluator met individually with the 19 Wave Changers who attended this program weekend to record a short video reflection on whether they were able to apply their learning from the Wave Change program. A total of four focus groups were carried out with the Wave Changers, with two held during the final program weekends in year one and year two. The purpose of the focus groups was to explore the participant's perspectives on the overall development and implementation of Wave Change as they graduated from the program. Fourteen participants attended the focus groups in year one and sixteen attended in year two. All the focus groups were recorded and transcribed in full.

The analysis undertaken and supportive software tools used to write up the process and findings took the following approach. The self-reflection diaries and the transcripts of the focus groups were imported to QSR NVivo software for coding to facilitate the identification of emergent themes for analysis. The data were manually coded and analysed under the various headings that reflected the key themes emerging from the research. A deductive schema was utilized to assemble the evidence on whether Wave Change was implemented as intended, what the ingredients to successful implementation were and the barriers and challenges arising during

implementation. Furthermore, an inductive approach enabled the presentation of additional themes emerging from the research.

Findings

As set out above, Wave Change was delivered via a mixture of learning approaches comprising structured learning, peer-to-peer learning, and project-based experiential learning. The value of these learning approaches in fostering social innovation is now explored.

The structured learning environment

The purpose of the structured input delivered by Wave Change was to provide the Wave Changers with education and training to further their knowledge and develop the requisite skill-set to progress their ideas for social change. The structured learning environment was primarily facilitated by the five intensive program weekends over a ten-month period. As detailed in Table 1, these program weekends were centered around workshops, inspirational talks by invited speakers, master classes, skills share sessions intended to share knowledge and skills among the Wave Changers, and small group-based work sessions.

The evaluation found that the structured learning environment significantly contributed to building the Wave Changers knowledge and capacity in the area of project management and social innovation. The data also revealed high levels of satisfaction among the Wave Changers regarding the delivery of the structured input. Overall, the participants placed a high value on the learning accrued from the practical and applied sessions incorporated into the program weekends. This was consistently reported in the self-reflection diaries and the focus groups. These sessions included workshops delivered on useful tools and resources to progress their projects and small group work sessions designed to brainstorm and problem-solve. These focused sessions were considered very

useful because of the opportunity they presented for learning. Following a session on how to map the stakeholders of relevance to progress their idea for social change, one Wave Changer reflected:

> I thought the stakeholder mapping exercise was of use as it did force me to think laterally about who I could bring into my ideas for change, and I came up with some creative results that I wouldn't have come up with if I'd just sat thinking about it quietly. (Self-reflection diary, year two)

Elsewhere, a Wave Changer reflected on how the structured components of the weekend were most valued.

> I feel that the weekend had some very important aspects and others were a little scattered and unnecessary. The activity at the end of the day, where we had group critiques on specific projects, was very beneficial for the individuals who presented their project. I feel these activities have more of an impact. (Self-reflection diary, year two)

While most of the education and skills training opportunities took place within the program weekend format, the Wave Changers were also offered the opportunity to attend standalone, specialized practical skills workshops outside the program weekends. These workshops focused on topics, such as pitching, creative writing, media training, fundraising, and lobbying, were facilitated by specialists in the above-mentioned fields. The facilitators sought to tailor the content to the Wave Changers and their projects for social change. The workshops were pragmatic in nature, whereby the participants were given an opportunity to apply the knowledge and learning

during the workshop through specific exercises and role-play. At the end of each workshop, follow-up action points were developed with the facilitator, designed to ensure the participants applied their learning. The Wave Changers placed a high value on these practical skills workshops delivered outside the program weekends. They reported that the workshops deepened their knowledge and understanding in the specific thematic areas covered and provided them with a set of practical skills, including pitching, lobbying, and fundraising, which they could use for their social change project. The small group nature of the workshops was perceived to have facilitated the learning, and the feedback offered to the participants from both the professionals delivering the workshop and their peers was regarded as highly beneficial.

I just feel the workshops were actually the best, developing your skills and these were skills that were very essential in developing your project. (Focus group, year two)

Everyone was buzzing about these workshops. (Focus group, year two)

The contribution of the program weekends and the practical skills workshops in improving the participant's communication and presentation skills also featured strongly in the self-reflection diaries. The Wave Changers reflected on how they learned to communicate a message effectively or to pitch their idea.

One of the most important things I learned this weekend was how to deliver simple and effective messages. He [facilitator of a communications workshop] also taught us about the ways messages can inspire people to take action. (Self-reflection diary, year two)

> I feel since my pitching class [workshop] … I now have the skill necessary to grab someone's attention and keep them interested in my pitch about my project. (Self-reflection diary, year two)

There was further evidence of the structured input contributing to the Wave Changers learning effective listening skills, improving their knowledge and grasp of different methods of communication (including presenting one's message through writing, using video/film and social media), acquiring public speaking skills and learning how to engage and interact effectively with the media. For example, as on Wave Changer reflected:

> He [facilitator of a workshop on social media tools for online campaigning] went through very practical skills that we would require when putting together a social media campaigning strategy, and also just when dealing with the media, coming at it from a social justice perspective. (Self-reflection diary, year one)

Providing opportunities for personal development was also a core aspect of the structured input delivered by Wave Change. The personal development workshops were intended to complement the program's focus on practical skills and project development, taking a holistic approach to fostering social innovation in youth. The workshops, delivered by professional personal development coaches, were focused on enhancing the Wave Changers sense of agency, self-awareness, and self-efficacy. There were high levels of satisfaction among the Wave Changers with this component of the program weekends, with some identifying the personal development sessions delivered in the second year of Wave Change as among the most valuable aspects of the program weekends. Many Wave Changers explained how they provided valuable time and space

for personal reflection, making them more conscious of themselves in terms of their own and other people's values, their relationships, how they interact with others and how they present themselves. Several spoke directly about developing a deepened understanding of themselves and their goals with regards to the social change journey. It was felt that the personal development workshops facilitated this self-awareness.

> I gained a lot from the personal development workshops. It allowed me to re-evaluate my values and how I can develop and use them moving forward. (Self-reflection diary, year one)

> I have again taken another step back due to this weekend, further away from my project to see the bigger picture … its sustainability and my own identity. (Self-reflection diary, year two)

Perhaps reflecting the diversity of the Wave Changers, not all aspects of the structured learning environment were positively perceived. However, the dissatisfaction that arose was related to scheduling and the content delivered as opposed to the structured mode of delivery. A common view shared by the Wave Changers was that the practical skills workshops should have been incorporated into the program weekends, given that they were committed to attending these weekends. In one of the focus groups, the workshop on pitching was mentioned by way of example.

Many wished to attend this workshop and believed it would have supported them to prepare for their seed funding pitch. However, they were unable to do so, explaining that they had other demands on their time. Hence, while participants had committed to attending the program weekends, it was difficult to also make time to attend the standalone workshops outside of these

weekends and, in particular, for those living in rural locations. A small number of Wave Changers also highlighted their expectation that the structured input would equip them with business and financial literacy skills. In year two, there was evidence that some of the Wave Changers were interested in developing their projects or ideas for social change into social enterprises to generate a living. Thus, the value was placed on acquiring business and financial literacy skills as well as knowledge on how to access funding. A common view expressed by the Wave Changers in year two was the expectation that there would have been more of a focus on acquiring these skills sets over the course of the program. Notwithstanding these scheduling and content specific issues that arose, the overall response to the value of structured input was positive.

An additional element of the structured input was formal opportunities for one-to-one coaching. However, the formal coaching program was only offered in the first year of Wave Change. To deliver this coaching program, Wave Change partnered with a European mentoring and coaching organization to engage ten experienced coaches to provide a minimum of four structured sessions to a small number of Wave Changers over a four to six-month period on a pro bono basis. Due to logistics concerning demand and supply and finding a suitable match between coaches and participants, a coach was not allocated to all Wave Changers. In the second year, the formal coaching aspect of the program was replaced by the one-to-one support offered on a semi-formal basis. The Wave Changers had the opportunity to speak individually with a member of the Wave Change staff team during or in between the program weekends to access support on specific aspects of their projects. The evaluation found that the formal opportunities for one-to-one coaching significantly contributed to building the capacity of the Wave Changers to advance their ideas for social change. The Wave Changers who participated in this aspect of the program in year one took significant value from the coaching opportunities, with one describing it as "massively

valuable," in terms of providing a guiding hand when acting on their ideas for social change and professional advice on overcoming challenges encountered. The absence of formal coaching opportunities in year two was notable and was something the participants in the second year perceived they would have benefited from.

> [T]he mentors [coaches], I was really excited for that. That would have been a massive benefit. (Focus group, year two)

Several of the program participants in year two said that they availed of the one-to-one support offered by members of the Wave Change staff team and found it very useful for project development and to have a personal check-in with the team members. Other program participants, however, expressed the view that they would have preferred more directional feedback and specialist advice on where to take their projects, as opposed to the informal conversations with the Wave Change staff members.

Peer-to-peer learning

The peer-to-peer learning approach was a unique dimension of the program, in that it valued the Wave Changers as knowledgeable contributors to their social entrepreneurial education and promoted a peer network of youth social entrepreneurs. The opportunities for the Wave Changers to learn from their fellow participants happened both informally and formally. Informal opportunities for peer-to-peer learning were facilitated by time being allocated during the program weekends for networking with their peers and through the Wave Changers' private Facebook group as well as other forms of social media, including Twitter and LinkedIn. Formal opportunities were facilitated by time being allocated for small group work sessions to brainstorm and exchange

feedback with their fellow participants on their ideas for social change as well as structured skills share sessions intended to share knowledge and skills among the Wave Changers during the program weekends.

It emerged strongly in the data that the Wave Changers valued these dedicated opportunities provided during the program weekends to engage, network and learn from their peers. Both cohorts of Wave Changers spoke extensively about the huge benefit of the program in terms of providing them with a support network of fellow participants also interested in the area of social change. Indeed, many felt that meeting "other Wave Changers" and being able to tap into them for support, advice, skills, and contacts and to work with them on social change issues was the most beneficial aspect of the Wave Change program. The data provided an insight into why these opportunities were so highly valued. The opportunities to learn about each other's projects or ideas, problem-solve on challenges and solutions and receive feedback and support were all highlighted.

> Plenty of small group work and informal chats led to a fruitful exchange of ideas. I lost count of the number of sentences which began with "How about …?" or "Could you …?" The range of actors in the group, the diversity of backgrounds and the creativity of ideas facilitated this and was perhaps the most enjoyable/useful feature of the Wave Change weekend. (Self-reflection diary, year two)

The findings also revealed that the program participants drew inspiration to engage in social change from their peers. Several of the diary reflections emphasized the inspiration they received from joining a group of "like-minded," "passionate," "enthusiastic," and "motivated" people. The program weekends were generally described positively in terms of creating an "inspiring

atmosphere" through the peer interaction and bonding with others on the program. During the early stages of the initiative, in particular, some of the participants explained that they no longer felt isolated or alone in their interest in pursuing social issues or social change ideas.

> 21 enthusiastic, motivated people in one room (22 including myself), all sharing the ultimate goal of achieving a positive social change in Ireland. This challenges one to step up to the play [sic] so to speak. I gained insight into their passions and problems they see in society, some of which I never gave much thought to. (Self-reflection diary, year one)

Regarding the informal opportunities for interaction, some of the participants highlighted the value of the residential program weekends held in rural locations, where all the participants stayed in the one location, offering more time for informal interaction.

As well as learning informally from each other in the small group work sessions over the course of the program weekends, a high value was also placed on the structured peer-to-peer skills-sharing sessions. In the first year, one of the program weekends was dedicated to workshops being primarily led and delivered by the program participants to share their knowledge and skills. In year two, while a workshop was facilitated by the Wave Change staff to enable the youth to learn what skills their fellow participants had during the first program weekend, there were no workshops delivered by the youth. The reflections of the Wave Changers in their diaries after these program weekends in year one and two indicated that these peer-to-peer skills-sharing sessions provided the Wave Changers with a significant opportunity for mutual learning.

I was skeptical before the weekend, wondering if it was even possible to learn anything new from our peers. But it turned out to be the most insightful and informative. (Self-reflection diary, year one)

As well as finding them [fellow Wave Changers] inspirational and motivational, it was useful to find out the various skills that each of them has … I imagine that I will make use of this information at some point, perhaps when I come to develop a website for my project. (Self-reflection diary, year two)

Peer-to-peer learning was also facilitated through the social media platforms. These were highlighted as important tools enabling the program participants to stay in contact with and support each other outside of the program weekends and to share information on upcoming events and relevant organizations.

We all got to know each other and then as soon as I came back home … we hooked up on Facebook, on LinkedIn, Twitter. We follow each other. And then I looked up some of the organizations that other group members recommended, and from here I've found so many other things in the last three days. (Self-reflection diary, year one)

Project-based learning approach

The project-based learning approach was a further dimension of the program. Its goal was to provide the Wave Changers with opportunities for experiential learning. While some of the Wave Changers in year one came to the program with an idea for social change, it was a prerequisite of the program in year two that the Wave Changers had an idea ready to be actioned. At the close of

the first year of the delivery of the program, the Wave Change staff team observed that working with those who have a clear idea for social change and could apply their learning to a project was a contributing factor to successfully giving the Wave Changers practical experience of project management and social innovation. This influenced the requirement in year two that all applicants to the program have an idea for social change that they were ready to work on.

The ideas that the Wave Changers brought to the program were wide-ranging. For example, Gary, a 25-year-old Wave Changer in year one, came to the program with an idea to present an alternative perspective of living in North Inner City Dublin. As someone who grew up in this area, the problem he encountered and wished to change was the very negative discourse that dominated any discussion about the area, which generally focused on issues such as addiction and anti-social behavior. Gary wanted to change this by highlighting the many advantages of the area and to shine a light on the positives and success stories of the North Inner City. He was of the view that this idea matters because a constant focus on the negative enforces a negative mindset. He wanted to present an alternative positive view of the area that was not just focused on disadvantage by establishing a community group to organize events that would celebrate the community and reinvigorate a spirit of unity in the area. Sheelan, a 21-year-old Wave Changer in year two, had a passion for social change based on promoting cultural diversity in Ireland. She was inspired to work on this idea due to the increasing level of diversity in Irish society. She observed that due to the complex political and religious status of the Middle East, there are currently no cultural events held for the people from these communities and therefore general knowledge about these cultures is very poor. To address this problem, Sheelan's idea for social change was to promote an appreciation of cultural diversity through the organization of cultural events and festivals, with the aim of furthering mutual respect and cooperation among people of different cultures.

The Wave Changers were expected to use the development and implementation of their social change project as a vehicle to apply their learning. In particular, they were encouraged to work on either piloting or developing their project over the summer period when there was a break in the delivery of the program weekends. This form of applied, experiential learning was viewed as the best way to embed their knowledge and skills acquired through the program. The evaluation established that this project-based learning model was an important vehicle for the Wave Changers to embed their learning. While some Wave Changers mentioned trialing the practical resources they received, for example, to identify their stakeholders and test their product viability, others spoke about how Wave Change provided them with the opportunity to apply their communication and presentation skills in practice. In year two, some reflected on the benefit of having the opportunity to present and speak about their project to their fellow participants.

> The numerous opportunities to explain my idea helped me to refine my "pitch" and improve my pitching skills in general. (Self-reflection diary, year two)

The program components available outside the program weekends provided further applied learning opportunities to the youth. The seed funding process provided opportunities for them to refine their communication and presentation skills by making an application, pitching their idea/project and participating in an interview. One observed that the allocation of seed funding was "sort of like getting training for money" (focus group, year two), in terms of providing the participants with experience of budget allocation and financial management. There was also long-term evidence of participants directly applying their learning to situations arising as they advanced their projects and ideas for social change after two years of participating in the program.

It [Wave Change] really opened your eyes … no matter who you may be meeting, it really grounded me with ideas of how to approach those meetings or what to say, what works or what angles to come from … I really learnt a lot about that, which actually really benefited me in meetings in the past few months with key stakeholders, councilors, youth work services, youth workers. (Video reflection, year two)

Discussion and conclusions

The development and delivery of the Wave Change initiative addressed the need, identified by the funders The Atlantic Philanthropies and the host organization Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, to provide support to promising social entrepreneurs in the 18–25 age group. As outlined earlier in this chapter, previous research established that programs aimed at fostering social entrepreneurship among youth require several essential attributes. These include: the provision of knowledge through education and training (Berman & Mellon, 2012; Fletcher, 2015; UNICEF, 2007); mentorship from experienced adults (Berman & Mellon, 2012; UNICEF, 2007); opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, combined with learning from experts who have first-hand experience of operating in the field (Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research, 2011); tangible opportunities for experiential learning (Finlay et al., 2010; Jones & English, 2004; Tracey & Philips, 2007; Wehmeyer et al., 1998; Zhu et al., 2016) and the provision of financial support (UNICEF, 2007). The learning from the evaluation of Wave Change contributes to the evidence base confirming these as essential attributes of youth social entrepreneurship programs.

Beyond identifying these as essential elements of programs aimed at engaging youth as architects of social change, this chapter evidences that a blend of approaches to learning can create

the optimum environment to deliver on each of these attributes. Together, the approaches to learning underpinning the Wave Change initiative played a unique and valuable role in fostering social entrepreneurship. They enabled the Wave Changers to acquire in-depth knowledge and the requisite skill set to be engaged as architects of social change, facilitated the formation of a strong, diverse peer network of social entrepreneurs and enabled the youth to apply their learning in practice by implementing their ideas to advance social change.

The structured learning approach, facilitated by the program weekends, the practical skills workshops and the formal opportunities for one-to-one coaching enabled the delivery of education and skills training for the Wave Changers focused on project management and social innovation. Some shortcomings were identified in terms of the scheduling of the structured input and the sessions' content, but the high levels of satisfaction among the Wave Changers in year one and year two, with the program weekends and the practical skills workshops, reveals the value the Wave Changers placed on this structured input. The one-to-one coaching offered to the Wave Changers proved to be an effective complement to the skills training. The absence of formal, one-to-one coaching opportunities in the second year of the program was notable and was something the Wave Changers perceived they would have benefited from. This reinforces the importance of achieving the appropriate balance between supporting the youth to be autonomous leaders and to take control of implementing their own ideas and projects for social change while scheduling time with experienced adults to provide individualized guidance and formal support to advance their projects.

The peer-to-peer learning approach was a significant dimension of the Wave Change program. It emerged strongly in the data that the opportunities provided to meet informally, brainstorm and exchange feedback during small group work sessions, particularly during the

program weekends, facilitated this learning. As well as learning informally from each other, the structured peer-to-peer skills-sharing sessions, which were a feature of year one, were also instrumental in this regard. The importance of valuing youth as knowledgeable contributors in social entrepreneurial education is a key lesson emerging from the research. Finally, the project-based approach to learning, adopted by Wave Change in year two, provided valuable opportunities for experiential learning and action-orientated problem-solving. The evaluation established that the project-based approach to learning was perceived by the Wave Changers to be an important vehicle for the youth to apply and embed what they were learning over the course of the program. Wave Change encouraged and supported the youth to directly utilize their learning in furthering their ideas for social change.

The Wave Change initiative as originally set up is no longer in operation. The program as delivered, comprising five program weekends, practical skills workshops delivered outside these weekends, a seed fund initiative, opportunities for external engagement and one to one coaching or informal or formal support, was resource intensive. A scaled down version of Wave Change is now in operation known as The Academy for Social Entrepreneurs.[4] While it is a scaled down version, the model of practice is similar and builds on the same approaches to learning trialed by Wave Change. This five-month program comprises five days of training and events in addition to ongoing learning group sessions with their fellow participants. To be eligible to apply all participants must have identified a social or environmental issue and have a new or better idea to solve it. They must be committed to advance their idea from exploration to action over the period of the program.

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[4]   See http://socialentrepreneurs.ie/awards/whoshouldapply/academy-2/

In conclusion, the Wave Change model of practice as delivered, enabled the program to achieve the intended goal of fostering social entrepreneurship in youth. The evaluation yielded important learning for the initiative as it entered a new phase, but equally, it generated learning for all programs focused on youth-led social innovation. It reinforces what the essential attributes of such programs are and what approaches to learning can deliver on each of these attributes. The three learning approaches underpinning the Wave change model of practice made a significant contribution to its success and equipped the Wave Changers with the skills and networks they needed to be effective, resilient and ethical change makers. While the analysis indicates the value of each of the learning approaches individually, it also demonstrates how they were mutually reinforcing. Thus, the structured components both created the context for effective peer support and learning, while providing the Wave Changers with the knowledge, skills, personal foundations and technical resources required for the development of their projects. Similarly, the overall educational value of the structured components was reinforced through a positive learning environment facilitated by the interactions of a committed group of peers and the application of their learning to real life, socially important action projects. The value of this blended learning environment reinforces the findings in earlier studies by Küttim et al. (2014) and Jones and English (2004) that educational programs that are multi-faceted are required to support successful young social innovators.

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