SOCIAL ACTION:
A Guide

Social Action: A guide to the principles of Social Action, why it's important and how it can benefit individuals, communities, and society.
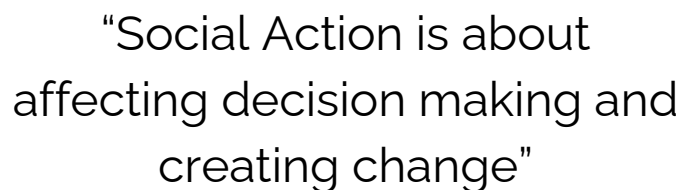
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WHAT IS SOCIAL ACTION?

"**Social action** is about community efforts and actions to improve society"

Social Action is an individual or group approach which aims to indentify issues in the community and take meaningful steps to make changes which tackle these issues.

> "Social Action is about affecting decision making and creating change"
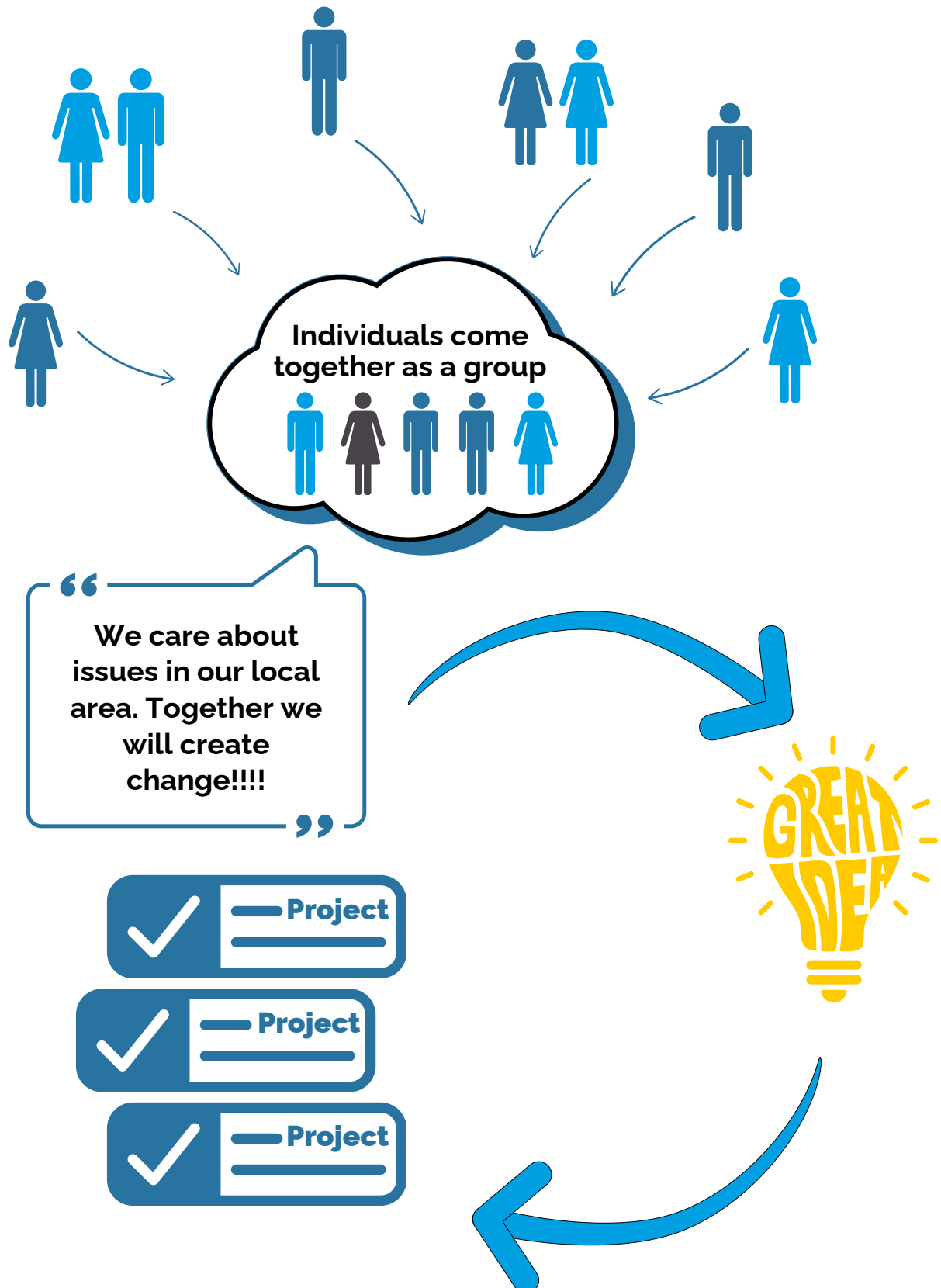
A Social Action project is a type of volunteering which benefits the local community; projects can focus on a specific area of interest to the group or be an issue that is common in their area. Social Action focuses on how individuals and groups come together to learn about their communities and how they can help challenge any issues or break down barriers that are causing difficulty.

Social action is about empowering people to develop new skills which enable them to change from an individual to a collective and take on social change.

Social Action puts the responsibility on the citizens and provides people with the tools and skills to follow a journey of uncovering and identifying issues that they believe are important. The projects completed in Social Action can be small or large, one off events, short term, long term, campaigns and everything in between.

Social Action is different to other volunteering because:

- The agenda is handed over to members of the community
- Workers and group members work in partnership
- All people involved are able to create social change through social action.

Individuals come together as a group

We care about issues in our local area. Together we will create change!!!!

GREAT IDEA

Project

Project

Project

TYPES OF SOCIAL ACTION

One off	Practical	Arts and Crafts	Community makeover
Short Term	Social Event	Musical	Confidence Building
Long Term	Campaign	Film Design	Raise Awareness
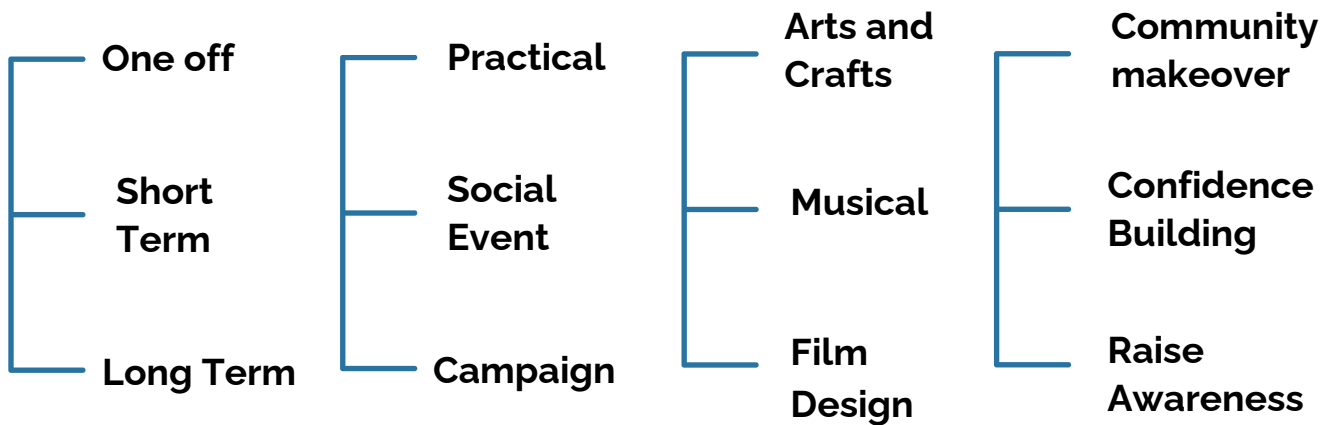
THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL ACTION

Good social action projects will:

- Educate and motivate people to take action
- Focus on solutions to address issues
- Involve the local community
- Meet an identified need
- Have a lasting impact
- Develop skills
- Improve the lives of volunteers and beneficiaries of the project
- Be enjoyable!

STEPS OF A SOCIAL ACTION PROJECT

By following these steps you and your group will be able to plan and deliver a social action project that is important to you and your community

1 **Learn about the community and identify the issues or barriers people might face**

- This may include finding out what is already being done to tackle the issues. Are there any needs not being met?
- Who is being impacted by the issue? What difficulties are they facing?

2 **Choose a specific issue to tackle**

3 **Work together as a team to assemble a wider range of support for others in the local community, residents, organisations etc.**

4 **Identify the strengths of the team and how their skills, values and interests can influence the project.**

5 **Choose a project and create a plan to complete it**

6 **Carry out the project**

7 **Evaluate the projects successes and future learning**

SOCIAL ACTION CYCLE

WHAT

WHY

REFLECTION

HOW

ACTION
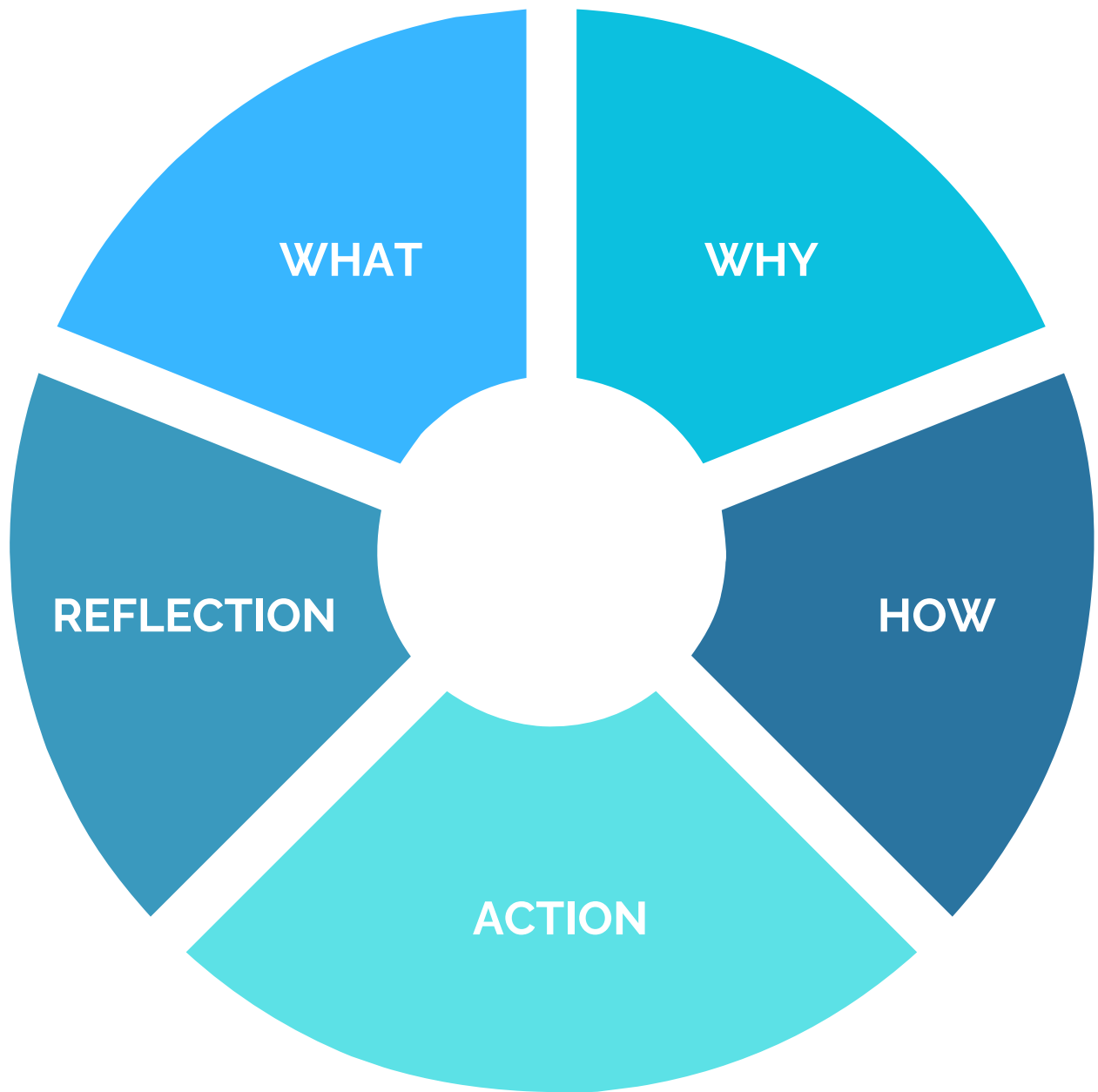
WHAT?

- What matters to you and your group?
- What are you interested in?
- What are your skills?
- What is happening in the community?
- What issues, barriers, and difficulties are people facing?
- What is the goal?

WHY?

- Why does the issue exist?
- Who is already tackling the issue?
- Can they help you?
- How can you help them?
- Why is this project important to the community?

HOW?

- How will the project improve an issue/ reduce difficulty or remove barriers?
- What do you need to do?
- How will you achieve your goal?

ACTION

- Put the plan into action
- What's working and what can be improved?
- Do you need to make any changes?
- Are you meeting your goals?

REFLECTION

- Reflection can happen at any point in the project
- What has the project taught you about the issues in your local area and what is being done to tackle it?
- What new skills have you developed or built on?
- How has the experience been ?
- What would you do differently next time?

TIPS AND PITFALLS

A successful Social Action Project should….

- Make an impact on the lives of people in the local area
- Be developed by you and your team
- Meet an identified need
- Have a lasting impact
- Be motivating
- Play to the strengths and interests of the team
- Challenge you
- Develop skills and knowledge
- Be achievable

Remember! It's usually best to complete a smaller social action project to the best of your ability than try and tackle a larger project and not be able to finish it!

Some things to consider……

Public Events: If you and your team decide to put on a public event, be cautious of relying on people to attend. It's usually best to take events to people. Find local groups or organisations and host your event there! You could also look at what events are going on locally and ask to deliver your project as part of that!

Legal Considerations: Does your project need any permissions, permits, or licenses? E.g. If you're distributing flyers or posters, you'll probably need to ask for permits or permissions from the local authority to do so.

Donations: If your project would benefit from donations, try contacting small, local businesses rather than larger companies as they can usually give an immediate response about whether they can make a donation. Large companies can be contacted for donations, but they usually need a written request to be submitted to their head office. So, if you take this route, make sure you have plenty of time to wait for a response!

Risk Assessments: Make sure you and your team complete relevant risk assessments where appropriate. It's crucial to make sure that you and the people your project is supporting are safe!

Consent: If you're taking photos or making a film, make sure you have the consent of the people involved. Similarly, if you're working with children or vulnerable adults on your project, you'll need consent! A simple form can be made up and given to people to sign for their consent.
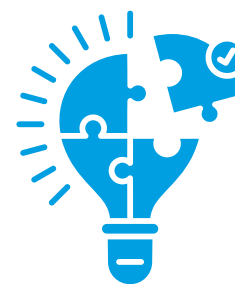
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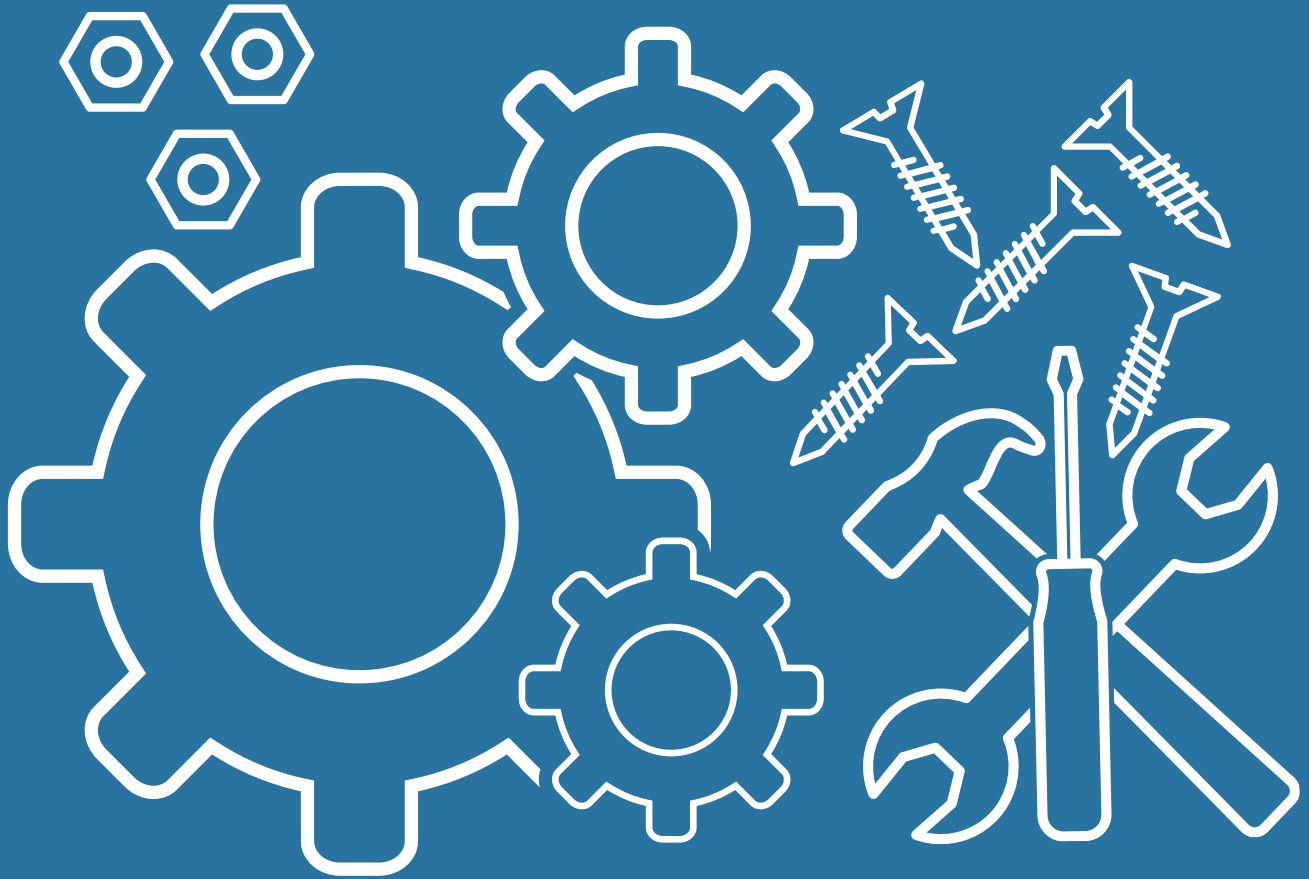
TOOLS FOR SOCIAL ACTION PLANNING

Use whichever tools work for you and your group. Use all, some or create your own! Some practical tools to work through to help the planning process

IDEAS GENERATION

Starting a Social Action project can seem daunting. It may appear that there too many options and areas to focus your social action project

Values Cards

You can find downloadable values cards online, for example, **https://www.thegoodproject.org/value-sort**, or develop a set of your own. Each member of the group chooses five value cards that are important to them. Discuss why you chose your five cards and why they are important to you.

As a group, select five value cards that are important to the whole group from the ones you have chosen individually. Discuss why these five are important to your group as a whole and why they might be important to a volunteering project.

Social Action Generator Game

Usually, social action projects are motivated by people coming together with a passion and ideas on how to make a difference. However, if you're unsure about what area you and your group are interested in, then it might be worth playing a few rounds of the Social Action Generator Game. This tool was developed by NCS (National Citizen Service) and will allow you to generate random social action project ideas and build on these as a group. Some examples of social action projects of the type which could be generated can be found at **https://wearencs.com/blog/all-social-action-you-could-want**

The Social Action Generator game uses sets of cards which you can create yourself. In the first set of cards, each card names a section of our communities, eg young people, older people, new parents, LGBTQ+ people. The next set lists barriers in society, eg social exclusion, poverty, discrimination, loneliness. The final set of cards lists action ideas for tackling the issue, eg community event, awareness raising, demonstration, fundraising, social event. Playing the game a few times can support your group to consider lots of different possible ways of tackling the issues.

CAMPAIGN BUILDING

An organisation called 'Do Something' produced this useful tool to break down ideas and figure out whether a potential project will be successful.

Choose your cause

Select from:

Animals	Bullying
Disasters	Environment
Discrimination	Health
Education	Homelessness
Poverty	Sex and Relationships
Disability	Young people
Mental Health	Older people

What's the problem?

Find some facts/statistics that highlight a particular problem with the cause. Think about using:

- Recent news articles
- Academic studies and reports
- Blogs and publications of charities and organisations working in the cause space
- Contacts at charities which work on that cause

Example:

Cause: Sex & Relationships

Problem facts:

a) 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience relationship abuse[1]

b) 81% of teenagers who do never look for support[2]

Sources:

1) Crime Survey for England and Wales, TNS BMRB, 2015

2) Tender Impact Report, 2011

What's the solution?

- Do some research on what can be helpful in tackling the problem
- Check out the work of specialist organisations to find out what tactics they use, and use them as a starting point to think about what your campaign should ask people to do.

Example

Solution fact:

Young people going through relationship abuse often find it easiest to confide in a friend.

Source: TEENAGE RELATIONSHIP ABUSE, Home Office/AVA,

Solution: Give young people info on how to spot the signs of unhealthy relationships and where to go for expert help, so they can look out for each other, and have the right information if someone confides in them.

What's the action?

Action types

Choose from:

- **Donate something** – example: a campaign to get people to donate new socks to homeless people
- **Face to face** – example: teaching an older person digital skills
- **Host an event** – example: organising a one-off film screening
- **Start something** – example: start a regular disabled-friendly sports club
- **Share something** – example: share a tip about how to overcome bullying
- **Improve a space** – example: organise a litter pick in your area
- **Make something** – example: make a birthday card for a child in a homeless shelter
- **Take a stand** – example: campaign against/raise awareness about dangerous children's fancy dress costumes being sold online.

Other things to think about

- What information or help will people need to carry out this action?
- What sort of photo could they take to prove that they've completed their action?
- Can they provide you with specific information to help measure their impact (amount of items collected, number of people helped etc.?

EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL ACTION PROJECTS

One team cleared out a disused allotment for Age UK North Tyneside. They then created a Dementia friendly area with raised beds, clear footpaths and sensory decorations.

A mindful colouring book was created by a team to raise awareness of mental health issues and promote wellbeing. Illustrations, activities and advice were created by the team to include in the book which was printed over 200 times and distributed throughout North Tyneside.

A film was created to document the issues that young homeless people face in North Tyneside. The film documented their experiences and offered advice, information and guidance.

An event was put on to showcase local talent, musicians and bands in aid of The Percy Hedley Foundation who were raising funds for a Hydrotherapy Pool.

A recycling project aimed to demonstate to local residents the benefits of recycling. A mural was created from reclaimed wood to be placed above recycling points and a fashion show was put on using clothes made from up-cycled materials.

Essential items such as toiletries and snacks were collected and put into packs which were donated to local foodbanks and charities that support homeless people and people in need.

Case study – The Red Box project

The Red Box Project was started in 2017 by three friends who were concerned about period poverty in their local area, where young people were missing out on their education due to being unable to afford sanitary products.

They decided to take action and contacted local secondary schools to see if the schools would be happy to accept donated supplies. Teachers confirmed that period poverty was an issue and the initiative started. The local group invited people across the country to take part, as it was an issue across the UK, and the campaign took off.

In 2019, the Red Box Project became partners with the Free Periods campaign and launched a legal challenge against Government. The challenge put forward that the Government was in breach of the Equality Act 2010 and was discriminating against gender due to not providing young people, who were in compulsory education, with access to sanitary products. The campaign was very successful in raising awareness of the issues, and in 2020, the Government rolled out a scheme which provides period products to all state-maintained schools and colleges.

Ensuring no young person misses out on their education because they have thei…

Ensuring no young person misses out on their education because they have their period

redboxproject.org /

DEFINING OUTCOMES

Defining outcomes is an important part of planning and delivering a social action project. Having clear outcomes can help make your project more effective for yourself, your team and the people your project is helping. Outcomes can also help identify how you might do things differently next time or further work that needs to happen in that area as a result of your project.

Your project might identify outcomes across several areas.
You should think about what outcomes/ goals you want to identify for yourself, but also what outcomes you'd like the team & project to achieve.

For example outcomes might affect:

YOU

YOUR GROUP

FAMILIES

COMMUNITIES

ORGANISATIONS

ENVIRONMENT

POLICY

SERVICES
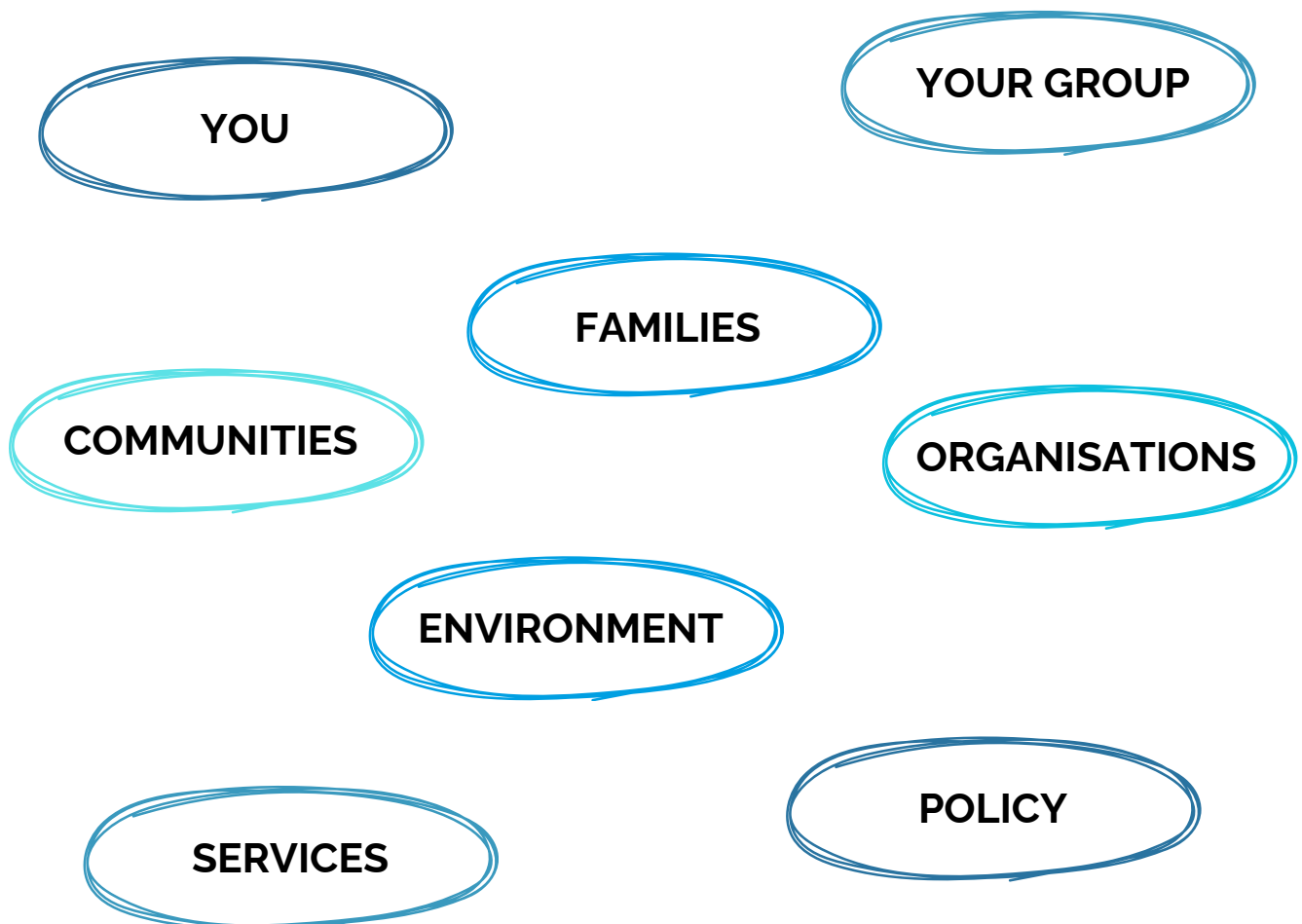
MEASURING OUTCOMES AND SETTING INDICATORS

Sometimes outcomes are easy to measure. These are referred to as 'hard outcomes' and might include things like 'Increased Participation' as you and your team can count how many people took part.

However, often the most important outcomes of a project are a bit more difficult to measure. These are known as 'soft outcomes' . These are likely to be factors such as 'increased confidence', 'better health' and 'improved wellbeing'. In order to measure 'soft outcomes' we can find something that would indicate that the outcome has been achieved.

First, take an outcome, i.e. 'Improved Confidence' Next, think about what achieving improved confidence might look like. These are known as potential indicators and are useful for finding out whether the outcome has been met.
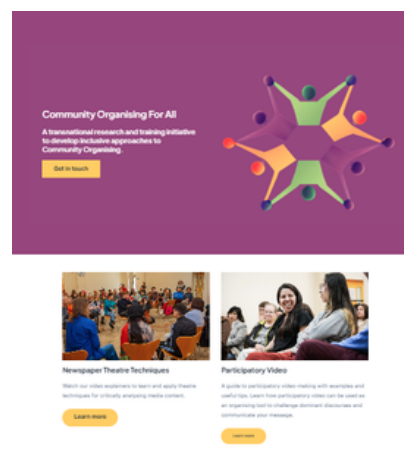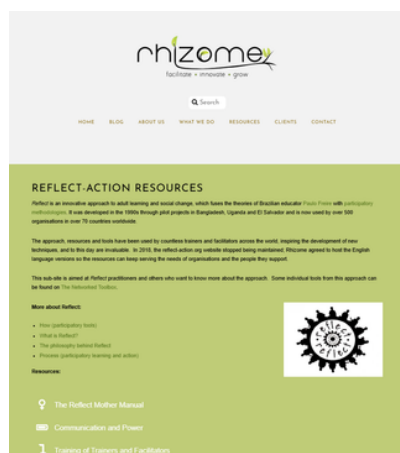
Feeling less nervous

Body language

Socialising more and interacting with others

Improved Confidence

Taking more responsibility

Sharing ideas and thoughts

Trying new things

NCS CREATED THE TOOL BELOW FOR PLANNING AND EVALUATING ACTIVITIES

8 Legacy

What skills will we learn from the project?
How can we continue this?
What difference have we made?

1 Community Involvement

Who have we spoken to?
What did they tell us?
Who will be helping us?

2 Resources

What equipment do we need?
Where will we get it from?
Do we need to make anything?

7 Success

How will we judge our success?
Who will give us feedback?
What evidence will we collect?

Our Idea

What problem are we trying to solve?
What are we going to do?
What difference are we going to make?

3 Money

How much will our project cost?
What are we spending our money on?
Are we getting anything for free?

6 Risks

What could go wrong?
How will we stop this from happening?
Are we confident our project is legal?

5 Roles

What tasks need to be completed?
How long will each task take?
Who is responsible for each task?

4 Publicity

How will we promote our project?
How will we share our success?
How will we document our project?

FOR MORE TOOLKITS USEFUL FOR SOCIAL ACTION, SEE:

- **REFLECT Action Toolkit** - https://rhizome.coop/reflect-action-org/ - participatory methodologies for deciding on taking action on community issues

- **Community Organising tools and resources** - https://cofaproject.org/

- **EmpowHER youth social action guide** - https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/EmpowHER-Social-Action-Resource.pdf

- **Youth Social Action Guide** - https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/01-How-to-Social-Action-Guide-.pdf

HOW TO MAKE SMART GOALS

It is important that everyone understands what is to be achieved during the project and what the end goal. As a result, every person involved in the social action project will understand what needs to be done and what their role is. The best way to define project goals is the S.M.A.R.T goal method. It covers everything required to achieve your ultimate goal.

S — Specific

State exactly what you want to achieve. Can you break a larger task down into smaller items?

M — Measurable

Establish clear definitions to help you measure if you're reaching your goal.

A — Action-Oriented

Describe your goals using action verbs, and outline the exact steps you will take to accomplish your goal.

R — Realistic

Give yourself the opportunity to succeed by setting goals you'll actually be able to accomplish. Be sure to consider obstacles you may need to overcome.

T — Time-Bound

How much time do you have to complete the task? Decide exactly when you'll start and finish your goal.

EISENHOWER'S URGENT AND IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE

Eisenhower's Urgent/Important Principle helps you think about your priorities, and determine which of your activities are important and which are, essentially, distractions.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important		
Not Important		

- **Important** activities have an outcome that leads to us achieving our goals, whether these are professional or personal.

- **Urgent** activities demand immediate attention, and are usually associated with achieving someone else's goals. They are often the ones we concentrate on and they demand attention because the consequences of not dealing with them are immediate.