What is

Change Lab is a social action programme developed in-house by **Sheffield Students' Union** to support students who want to run meaningful social action projects or campaigns with community organisations in the local area.

The purpose of Change Lab is to **link student action with the needs of the city**, ensuring students are focusing their projects and campaigns on issues that have been identified as a priority by our external city partners.
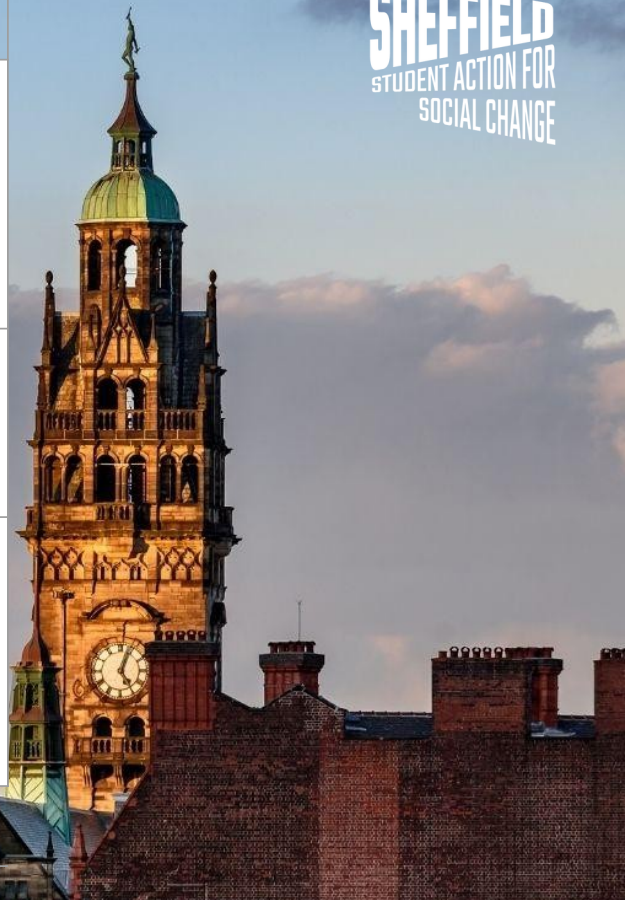
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1. Develop students' skills, passions and values around citizenship and community organising, as well as other transferable skills such as project management and partnership working.

2. Enhance student contribution to the city region, and further develop the civic role of the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Students' Union

3. Mobilise students to produce meaningful and lasting impact on key local issues
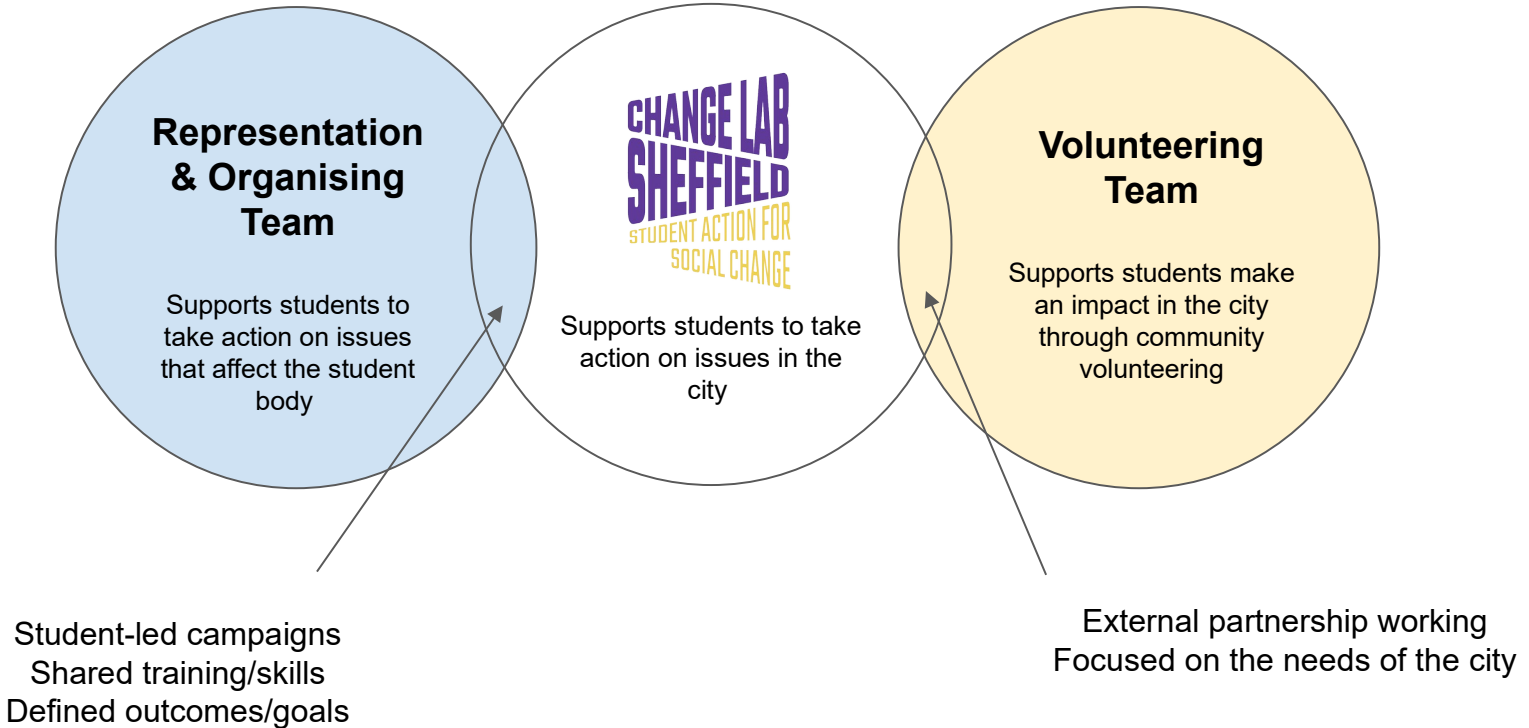
Personally Responsible Citizen	Participatory Citizen	Justice-Oriented Citizen
Acts responsibly in their community and volunteers in times of crisis	Active member of community organisations and organises community-led efforts	Critically assesses social, political and economic structures behind the causes and tries to campaign for systematic change
Contributes to a food bank	Organises a food poverty project	Explores why people in their community are hungry and looks for the root cause
To solve social problems citizens must be honest, responsible and law-abiding community members	To solve social problems citizens must actively participate and lead within community structures	To solve social problems citizens must debate and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of inequality

From: Westheimer and Kahne: 'The Politics of Educating for Democracy' (2004)

Where Change Lab sits within Sheffield SU

Representation & Organising Team

Supports students to take action on issues that affect the student body

CHANGE LAB SHEFFIELD
STUDENT ACTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Supports students to take action on issues in the city

Volunteering Team

Supports students make an impact in the city through community volunteering

Student-led campaigns
Shared training/skills
Defined outcomes/goals

External partnership working
Focused on the needs of the city

The Change Lab Journey

Students develop their skills and ideas to achieve social change

By linking with external organisations, students discover new ways of responding to social issues and grow a greater understanding of systematic change

Students organise their own social action projects in response

Develop

Do

Discover

CHANGE LAB SHEFFIELD

Sheffield Students' Union

Action Groups

1. **Food Insecurity** with **S6 Foodbank**

Transform the foodbank into a 'community hub' to help better support the mental health needs of food bank users.

2. **Digital Inclusion** with **Heeley Development Trust**

Create a series of informational videos about the importance of digital inclusion and get people excited about being online

3. **Sustainability** with **Plastic Free Sheffield**

To investigate whether Sheffield's hospitality industry is ready for a 'Reusable Revolution' to combat the use of single-use plastics

4. **Diversity and Inclusion** with **Chula Education**

Create a campaign to combat sexual harassment in educational settings

5. **Homelessness** with **Roundabout**

Set up "phone banks" in suitable places around Sheffield where people can donate their old electronics for Roundabout service users.

How it worked:

- Students apply for the Change Lab programme (no experience necessary)
- We run a 2 day induction training covering:
  - *An introduction to social change, partners present project briefs, systems thinking for social change, and campaign strategy training*
- Optional Changemaking 101 training programme (open to all students)

Students were supported through:
- Support through training and external speaker sessions
- Weekly drop-in sessions with the Change Lab Project Coordinator
- Project Coordinator attendance at Action Group meetings
- Project Coordinator input and advice in the Action Group WhatsApp chats
- Mentor Programme (available to Project Leaders)

Change Lab 23/24 Timeline

September	Partners and project briefs finalised; student recruitment opens
October	Induction day; students are presented with project briefs, project planning starts!
November	Action Group project/campaign delivery
December	Action Group project/campaign delivery
Christmas break: 15th December - 15th January	
January	Action Group project/campaign delivery; mid-term project review
February	Action Group project/campaign delivery
March	Action Group project/campaign delivery
April	Projects begin wrapping up, Easter Vacation period
May	Projects end; end-of-term project evaluation

Case study: Change Lab partnership with Roundabout

The project so far:

- Visited Roundabout's Homeless Prevention Service to meet with staff and learn more about the work the organisation does to prevent youth homelessness in South Yorkshire.
- Ordered their first 'phone bank' and had it installed at a suitable location in the SU building
- Designed and printed marketing materials to promote the phone banks
- Developed relationships with phone repair shops to fix any broken phones that are

Case study: Change Lab partnership with Chula

The project so far:

- Designed a consultation form to survey young people's experience of sexual harassment in educational settings
- In talks with the South Yorkshire Mayor to organise a round table with decision makers to present their campaign findings and raise awareness of the issue in Sheffield
- Organised an empowerment event to feedback on their research and bring together a network of feminist change-makers

Change Lab Class of 22/23:

89.5% of students felt that their skills and confidence in changemaking have grown as a result of their participation.

94.8% of students feel more engaged and /or passionate about changemaking and community organising

100% plan to keep on taking action on key issues in the future

84.2% of students either strongly agreed or agreed that they will have better future opportunities and careers prospects after taking part in Change Lab

79% believed their work was genuinely collaborative and that all group members played their part in progressing the project.

What did students find the most valuable?

1. The **professional connections** and experience they've gained

2. Working with a team of **like-minded students**

3. Developing a **better understanding** of the third sector

4. Feeling more **integrated** within Sheffield's wider community

5. The opportunity to work on projects that focus on creating effective social change

What were students' biggest worries or concerns?

1. Balancing Change Lab with their **academic workload**

2. **Confidence** in their own personal skills

3. The **time commitment**

"I was just worried about everyone being social campaigner extraordinaire and while some people definitely were it was just a really good, kind group of people wanting to do some good.

I was also worried about going out into the community as, you know, just a silly uni student but I think in general the partners and everyone in their sphere/project was really appreciative and supportive."

Project Leader
Food Insecurity Action Group

22/23 Lessons

Challenges:

Have to stay **flexible** to the ever-changing situation on the ground

Momentum can lapse if students can't point to quick wins or tangible achievements

Balancing the needs of the partner organisations with the needs of the students

Time!

Students would have benefitted from more **specific briefs** and/or **more support** from their partnership organisation

The **impact** of social action projects is objectively hard to measure in the short-term

Opportunities:

The focus on **local projects** helps to enhance students' sense of **belonging** to their university city and their commitment to bringing about local change

Increased opportunities for students to get **'hands on'** experience of their partnership organisation increases student engagement

The Action Group structure brings together **like-minded students** passionate about a cause, facilitating a sense of **group cohesion** and belonging

Students feel that their future opportunities and **employability** have improved as a result of taking part

Change Lab provides opportunities for student leaders to develop key **leadership skills**

Sheffield Students' Union

"In one word, how did participating in Change Lab make you feel?"

Discussion:

1.

The Utopian Vision

What could student social action programmes look like with unlimited resources?

2.

The Pared Back Version

What elements of Change Lab could be implemented in smaller SUs/with limited resources?

Thank you!

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