



Case Study: About Youth

About Youth is a dynamic and nimble youth work organisation that has just celebrated its first birthday. They are an active member of LAYC and Youth Scotland and receive Generation CashBack support for their pioneering youth-led project in the Calders in Wester Hailes, Edinburgh. The young people asked for a place where they would be able to use the internet, play computer games, take part in other games, listen to music, watch films, prepare food and eat together. As a result, every week this project welcomes locals aged 11 to 17 who gather in the Calder Community Flat as a space to meet safely indoors with peers to relax, socialise and take part in activities.

Here we speak to youth workers Alan Ross and Jon Smiles (pictured) about their co-production approach, the importance of strong relationships both within the youth group and the community, the value of the Generation CashBack (GCB) funding and their learning so far.

“Relationships are key... that’s the essence of what we’re doing here”



Safeguarding through strong relationships

“The fact that we’ve been around in the Caldera for as long as we have is definitely an important factor in terms of building up relationships. This group relies on both the relationships we’ve got with the young people and those with the rest of the community. These young people are speaking with us openly, about sexual health, about alcohol, that sort of thing. Obviously, there are things that come out that can raise concern around what’s happening.

Where we’re lucky - and that’s where you can’t underestimate the importance of community based organisations - is that we’ve got really good informal relationships with the police, social work and a lot of the key statutory agencies which means that we can check out things and speak with people without having to go immediately down formal routes that are going to have impacts on the young people.

Safe haven, safe space

If you live in a community like this, you’re under a stress all the time. In terms of the stuff that these kids see in the community outside, this place is a safe haven from that. If anything, one of the things that we are trying to achieve is stopping some

of that stuff becoming normalised in their own attitudes and lifestyles. Maybe that’s part of the reason they come here, for contact with people who believe in them, who encourage them to be aspirational and aim to achieve in their lives. They don’t all have that at home or in school.

You realise that young people really yearn for contact from the youth workers and often use those relationships in a therapeutic fashion. Sometimes, honestly, it’s like group therapy that goes on here, like a space where they can share and explore the types of difficulties and problems they are encountering in their lives and where they can work through their issues together in a way that’s safe and supported. That kind of personal growth supported through the group dynamic, that’s what’s really going on in a space like this.

Co-production

In coming here, the young people in this group feel like it’s somewhere they belong. Part of the reason that they feel so at home and comfortable in this particular project is because of that sense of shared ownership. They like coming here because we deliver projects with them, not on them - we let them decide what they want to do and it’s totally their choice.

Learning to share with others

Something we’ve benefitted from organisationally, is our young people developing our social media strategy. We’ve sat down and said ‘show us what snapchat is’, ‘do you think we could use this as an organisation to communicate with you guys?’ and taken their lead because people don’t stand about and look at posters on noticeboards anymore. We’ve got to constantly adapt and keep learning from young people.

When it comes to youth workers, our approach is: grow your own from within the community, for us that’s testament to believing in young people. There are some members of this group whom we’re already thinking, as soon as the time’s right, you should be on our board and informing what we do.

Impact of the funding

The GCB funding has made it easier for us to do this work, and has allowed us to access resources that are difficult to secure funding for. The Local Development Officer support has brought a lot of encouragement and helpful suggestions. Going forward, we’d like to learn more from the other organisations in this network, especially those from outside our community who we don’t naturally come into contact with.”

