



#InvestInYouthWork

Youth Scotland submission to the Cross-Party Group
Children and Young People

February 2020



Youth Scotland would like to thank the Scottish Parliament's Cross-party Group Children and Young People and YouthLink Scotland for the opportunity to contribute towards this discussion.

Youth Scotland believes in changing lives through youth work. We are the national charity supporting the delivery of community-based youth work and the largest national youth work organisation in Scotland. Our range of projects and services support a network of over 1,450 youth groups running in diverse communities the length and breadth of Scotland, from small rural communities to large urban projects. These groups work with over 66,000 young people aged 8 – 25 years old. They are supported by more than 8,200 passionate and committed youth workers, of whom over 5,300 are volunteers. The common goal that we all share is better outcomes for young people. In this submission we would like to share our views on why community-based youth work is a vital offer that should be available to all young people and why **now is the time to #InvestInYouthWork**.

Universal youth work in Scotland

Research into the impact of youth work by Edinburgh and Plymouth Marjon Universities¹ showed youth work creates spaces and opportunities for young people to develop in ways that they would otherwise not have alone. Community-based youth work provides young people with the chance to be themselves, to learn about themselves, to grow, make friends, learn, form relationships and to have fun in their local community. Youth groups are safe spaces where youth workers get to know young people in their local communities over long periods of time. It is the holistic, long-term approach based on building relationships that lays the foundation for good youth work. The research also showed that youth worker's skills and knowledge are instrumental in supporting young people's development, taking account of the challenges in their backgrounds.

Universal youth groups provide fundamental informal local support networks for young people. They are a foundation for early intervention and prevention for a range of issues affecting young people from mental and physical health to education; to family and relationship difficulties; and the everyday challenges young people face as they grow up. However, we know that youth work in Scotland is experiencing significant challenges and this puts the very future of universal provision at risk and as such better outcomes for young people in communities across Scotland.

¹ Fyfe, I., Biggs, H., Hunter, S., McAteer, J. & Milne, D. (2018). 'The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Scotland'. University of Edinburgh, YouthLink Scotland (on behalf of the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group), and University of St. Mark and St. John (Plymouth MARJON). Edinburgh, YouthLink Scotland.

Loss of local support

Community-based youth groups have traditionally been supported (both financially and non), by experienced and skilled Community Learning and Development practitioners from local authority services. In the face of increasing budgetary constraints and as a non-statutory service, these services have been cutback, and in some cases withdrawn as a universal provision, across the country. This vital local knowledge, support and funding for youth groups and volunteers is growing ever scarcer. Because of the volunteer heart of what we do, continued cuts and austerity present a real threat that community-based youth work dwindles to an unrecoverable level.

At Youth Scotland, we have seen an increase in the number of community-based youth groups in recent years. While we welcome this, we know that a) it is not universal growth across the country, with increases in some areas and decreases in others; and b) it is in part fuelled by youth groups looking to Youth Scotland for support they previously received locally. These figures also hide the number of youth groups that have closed over this period due to loss of funding and support.

Loss of universal funding

Funding for youth work is increasingly targeted and often based on programmatic approaches e.g. programmes designed to deliver employability outcomes or work targeted at specific social groups. This funding helps youth groups do good work with certain groups young people across Scotland. However, targeting is not an exact science and, albeit well-intentioned, it leaves gaps where young people cannot access youth work support because they do not meet the funding criteria. All too often, targeting is based on a deficit approach where young people may not be e.g. 'disadvantaged enough' or 'failing enough in education'.

The gaps and risks

There is undoubtedly a need for targeted funding and provision. However, there is increasing evidence of the unintended consequences of targeting services solely based on need leading to poorer outcomes. This was highlighted in the recently published 'Hard Edges' report by Lankelly Chase and The Robertson Trust². Youth Scotland firmly believes in a 'universal plus targeted' approach to ensure that all young people can benefit from youth work. This is akin to the concept of 'proportionate universalism'³ identified in the 2010 Marmot Review of Health Inequalities. We want to ensure that

² Bramley, G. et al. (2019). *Hard Edges Scotland*. Heriot Watt University, I-Sphere, Lankelly Chase & The Robertson Trust.

³ Macdonald W, Beeston C, McCullough S. (2014). Proportionate Universalism and Health Inequalities. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland.

youth work is available to all young people, regardless of their circumstances, with the necessary additional support available for those who need it to be able to take part.

We know from delivering our projects and working with our member youth groups that:

- Targeting services based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) risks missing young people who are living in new-build housing developments. With a proportion of social housing in new developments, the post code which underpins SIMD may not differentiate between those young people who live in social housing and those who do not.
- With rates of 'in-work' poverty rising⁴ we know that young people experiencing the impacts of poverty is not reserved to areas which are considered disadvantaged. For example, in Falkirk while 1 in 5 children and young people are living in poverty, over half live in communities outwith the 15% highest areas of multiple deprivation⁵.
- Young people living in rural communities, which are often not considered deprived under SIMD, are disadvantaged in accessing targeted funding. However, this fails to account for the specific challenges that young people in rural communities face in accessing opportunities placing them at a disadvantage compared to their peers in urban communities.

Valuing and accrediting informal learning

Youth Work in Scotland has long recognised and celebrated young people's achievements and informal learning, with many youth work organisations supporting young people to gain nationally recognised and accredited awards. Indeed, Youth Scotland's Awards programme has recognised and accredited the achievements of young people with over 60,000 youth awards. Our awards are qualifications which are credit rated and levelled by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

Traditionally youth awards were seen as something that happened beyond the school gate, with limited, if any, links to formal education. Curriculum for Excellence challenged that, with innovative partnerships between school staff and youth work practitioners helping to break down barriers between formal and non-formal learning, contributing in particular to personal development and preparedness for post-school learning, work and life. Young people themselves are clear that it's not just school-led activity that should be recognised. The 2017 Education Governance: Next Steps report noted that *'children and young people have said that they want their schools and teachers to realise the*

⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/budget-2018-tackling-rising-tide-work-poverty>

⁵ Falkirk Children's Commission Integrated Children's Services Plan (2017-2020)

value of extra-curricular achievements in their education'. There is a growing opportunity for young people's community activities to be both a support to, and an expression of, their school based learning.

The Awards Network, the network of youth award providers in Scotland which is hosted by Youth Scotland, has demonstrated the growth of youth awards delivery in the past 12 years. What started as a network of 8 organisations has grown to 28, which collectively offer more than 60 different awards. In the past year alone 115,000 youth awards have been achieved by young people, evidencing their learning and achievements. Now more than ever, as we collectively seek to address Scotland's attainment gap, it is vital that the invaluable role of youth work is properly supported to enable young people to grow, develop and learn. Thereby enabling them to actively contribute to a prosperous and socially just Scotland.

Youth work as 'prevention'

We believe that these gaps can be overcome by ensuring that community-based youth work is available to young people from communities all over Scotland. The statistics from Falkirk are not unique and the impact of poverty is not experienced solely in those communities defined as disadvantaged.

We know that youth groups create safe spaces within which relationships between youth workers and young people create the opportunity to identify and address issues in young people's lives¹. For youth work to reach those young people at the sharpest end of need, it needs to exist universally and it needs to be supported appropriately. There must be investment in community-based youth work.

In doing so, this removes the stigma which can be experienced by young people accessing targeted support. Simultaneously, it can – where there are appropriately trained and skilled youth workers – help to identify those young people in need of additional support who are hidden or unknown to targeted services.

There is increasing evidence of the role that a 'Trusted Adult' can have in mitigating the effects of trauma in young people's lives and the positive benefit it has on their educational outcomes⁶. For many young people, their youth worker is that Trusted Adult because of the relationship they have developed over time. It is to them that they can turn to and trust that their worries and issues will be taken seriously. It is therefore essential that the space for universal youth work provision is protected and supported to grow to better understand and maximise the preventative benefits it can offer.

⁶ Whitehead R et al. (2019). *The relationship between a trusted adult and adolescent health and education outcomes*. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland.

#InvestInYouthWork

We want to see the support offered to community-based youth groups, youth workers and volunteers greatly enhanced. A fundamental tenet of community-based youth work is the concept of 'growing your own' which underpins a strengths-based community development approach. However, 'growing your own' needs a support structure. Many youth groups are too small to do this on their own and need support to meet quality standards and legislative requirements. They need this infrastructure support from organisations like Youth Scotland. Our experience tells us that there needs to be a flexible approach with training and support offered at times which make it accessible for volunteers and part-time staff, which is often evenings and weekends. Youth Scotland has built an accreditation pathway where we support people to gain basic youth work skills and meet the standards outlined in the National Youth Work Induction checklist, through to accredited youth work training and training for those leading and managing youth groups.

If we are to realise the potential of community-based youth work as a fundamental component of Scotland's 'prevention' agenda in improving young people's lives, then we need to provide:

- **Increased capacity/skills across the sector** – ensuring that youth workers in communities have the skills, knowledge and confidence to deliver high quality, safe, effective youth work experiences which enable young people to grow, regardless of their circumstances
- **Support to recruit, retain and develop** skills in volunteers
- **Funding to sustain and grow youth work in all our communities** – this investment will support the vast contribution which youth work makes towards a range of national agendas including:
 - Improving young people's mental and physical health and wellbeing;
 - Addressing poverty and tackling inequalities; and
 - Closing Scotland's Attainment Gap.

Youth Scotland's ambition is to grow the quality of community-based youth work and ultimately see this as an entitlement for all young people in Scotland to enable them to realise their potential. We support the campaign to #InvestInYouthWork and would call on the MSP Members of the Cross-party Group Children and Young People and their colleagues across Parliament to advocate for:

- **A return to pre-austerity levels of investment in youth work services; and**
- **Strengthening the statutory basis for youth work services**

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