

Valuing youth work



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The National Youth Agency (NYA) is one of three Education Support organisations to receive funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government, under the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The Local Government Association (LG Association) has oversight of the NYA's work supported by this funding. The annual funding supports key areas of the NYA's work and promotes the role of local government and its partners in youth policy.



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Foreword



Baroness Ritchie

Chair, Local Government Association Children and Young People's Board

This report shows how councils are providing access to great youth work for local young people up and down the country. I am sure there are many other examples that could have been included. Reminding ourselves of the unique value of youth work is particularly important at this time when councils are facing unprecedented financial challenges.

The Children's Minister Tim Loughton has urged councils to think more imaginatively about the services they provide to young people, suggesting that a re-think of the local authority youth service offer is needed. It is clear that we will need to reshape existing provision. However, the Minister shares with us a belief in the vital importance of work with young people, noting that it is not a "luxury add-on". He is also clear about the central role of councils in shaping and steering the offer locally.

The case studies here demonstrate a willingness by councils to innovate and to work with local partners that will stand them in good stead in re-thinking their local offer for young people. The case studies provide evidence that engaging young people in decisions about the services that are provided for them is vital to effective public service reform. They emphasise the important role youth work plays in early intervention with young people who might otherwise require more intensive and costly public sector interventions later in life. Finally, they show the contribution it can make to a wide range of central and local government priorities, such as re-engaging young people in education and training and encouraging them to live healthy lives.



Fiona Blacke

Chief Executive, National Youth Agency

After a few years of growth, we know that massive public expenditure cuts and a consequent pulling back to the essential as opposed to the desirable are on the horizon. There is now a drive on councils to look at other means of delivering the youth offer and a search for cost effectiveness in every aspect of public service delivery. It feels inevitable that, even where councils continue to prioritise and fund services for young people, the structure for that delivery is going to change.

The emphasis will be on making a real difference to the outcomes and life chances of those young people who engage with the service, and demonstrating that investment now is making savings in acute and specialist services later on. It is apparent from the case studies in this document that providing access to excellent youth work makes a real impact on young people's lives.

At the NYA we are committed to ensuring that young people get access to this great youth work delivered by highly skilled and trained professionals because we know that great youth work changes lives and makes communities better places to live. We continue to put the voice of young people and the centrality of their role in shaping the local offer at the heart of everything we do and we will be working to lever as much resource as possible into local service delivery.

Introduction

This report sets out how councils are improving the lives of young people through their youth work offer. The case studies on the following pages demonstrate how youth work supports positive outcomes across a wide range of areas of young people's lives, including:

- Participating as active citizens in local democracy.
- (Re)engaging in education and learning.
- Making lives healthier.
- Improving access to learning.
- Strengthening information, advice and guidance.
- Supporting partnership working.
- Taking part in structured leisure time activities outside of the school environment.
- Staying out of the youth justice system.
- Playing an active part in their local communities.

Councils' role in making sure that appropriate services are in place is vitally important. They are ideally placed at the heart of local communities to shape the services available to young people and to understand how they are best delivered. Councils have long experience of working in partnership with other public sector agencies, with their local voluntary and community sector and with local employers.

What is youth work?

At its core, the aim of youth work is to support the personal and social development of young people through informal education. Its distinctive characteristics include the voluntary engagement of young people, young people's active involvement in developing provision, the use of informal education as the primary method of youth engagement, and an approach to provision that is responsive to young people's preferences.

For many young people a positive youth work experience can set them on the path to success, representing real value for money by addressing the issues faced by young people early and head on. Ofsted inspections of children's and young people's services have shown that youth work has a distinctive and important role in contributing to successful outcomes for young people¹.

Youth work builds social capital. Social capital describes the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values which arise from those networks. Higher levels of social capital are associated with better health, higher educational achievement, better employment outcomes and lower crime rates. This concept of social capital is fundamental to the Coalition Government's aspirations for a Big Society, to 'redistribute power from the state to society; from the centre to local communities, giving people the opportunity to take more control over their lives'.

Youth work has the potential to play a central role in achieving the Coalition Government's aspirations for young people's participation in education, employment and training. Youth workers play a key role in supporting young people who are outside of mainstream education to negotiate alternative routes of entry into learning and the labour market. Because youth workers' engagement is not bound by a timetable or a formal curriculum, they can support vulnerable young people through points of transition, at critical moments in their lives.

The value of youth work – case studies

The case studies over the following pages demonstrate the breadth and quality of the council youth offer. The first of these focuses on young people giving their time freely to get involved as active citizens in local decision-making to improve their communities. Engaging young people in making decisions about local services is key. Research from Ofsted² found that the highest performing youth services make young people's voice and influence a priority. It is vitally important that young people have such opportunities, as wise investment in youth engagement can bring many benefits to the council, local area and young people – and can help to save money. Research shows that accountability and legitimacy is increased amongst decision makers where young people are involved in public participation activities. Youth engagement supports young people to make better transitions into the labour market and encourages young people to vote in local and national elections. The future legitimacy of our democratic institutions depends on the active engagement of young people in their operation.

Devon: participating as active citizens in local democracy

Local participation and democracy is a strong part of a diverse local youth offer in Devon, which comprises four main elements: YouthBanks, Children in Care Council, membership of the UK Youth Parliament and the day-to-day local participation that occurs at every youth centre and project. This case study gives an overview of how these areas each provide an important development opportunity to young people in Devon using a youth work approach.

Devon Youth Service (DYS) has six YouthBanks operating across six geographical areas. YouthBanks are groups of young people who meet regularly to make decisions on grant applications from other young people and youth groups for projects that benefit their communities. Over the last three years the YouthBanks have been the decision makers presiding over the distribution and monitoring of over £2 million worth of services and resources for young people across Devon. There are over one hundred young people involved in the YouthBanks at any one time, from a range of backgrounds. Young people take on a big responsibility, but are supported by DYS youth workers and many take part in nationally accredited training provided by YouthBank UK.

Young people from the Devon YouthBanks are part of the Department for Education's National Young People's Advisory Group, contacted directly by the Department in relation to issues being faced by young people.

The Youth Parliament is a group of elected young people aged 11 to 18 that represent other young people locally. Elections supported by council youth workers take place in January every year. In 2010–11 the team is working on Things to Do, Disability, Political Education and Being Safe. Elections are organised in four geographical areas to help represent young people fairly. Five young people are elected in each area and supported by youth workers to meet up regularly and attend events. A county team meeting is held every six weeks and area team meetings once a month to work on area projects.

DYS and their partners work from over 80 buildings and run seven mobile vehicles. The pervading ethos of this work is to develop every available opportunity for young people to participate at all levels. Young people across the county negotiate programmes, run events, agree development plans for the centres, run members' committees, meet local councilors, form youth councils, decide on budgets, meet local police and engage with local residents' groups, giving their time voluntarily. DYS support children and young people in care and those who have left care through groups and activities. These include the Stand up, Speak Out! group, which some people call the Children in Care Council.

Divisional Youth Officer Kevin Henman believes strongly that the key to the effectiveness of the approach lies in its diversity: "It's not just one approach to participation that's important; young people need a variety of options available to interest them and keep them engaged. If options are limited, this limits young people's ability to engage. Because of this varied approach, more young people have reported improvements in confidence, negotiating and decision making skills, greater knowledge of their communities, better understanding of democratic processes, and an ability to appreciate others' opinions and circumstances. They have ensured that resources have ended up where they are most needed."

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The issue of young people being not in education, employment or training (NEET) is a considerable concern for local and central government as it affects young people's chances to fulfil their potential and achieve their ambitions. All young people benefit from engagement in meaningful activities like learning, work and volunteering. The NEET statistics for the first quarter of 2010 suggest that whilst more 16-year-olds appear to be continuing in education or training there are particular difficulties for 17 and 18-year-olds trying to (re) enter education, employment or training.

Recent research has found that the most successful schemes designed to re-engage with young people NEET recognised that young people who had dropped out often needed help to resolve personal and social problems before they could return. Young people responded to short, flexible, accredited programmes provided outside traditional places of education in informal settings such as youth clubs. Successful programmes were also typified by the close involvement of young people in developing, reviewing and revising programmes, ensuring they were matched to their needs.

An evaluation of the NYA managed Neighbourhood Support Fund³, a programme designed to re-engage hard-to-reach young people, found that the 'youth work relationship' between workers and young people, and attention to the personal social and emotional issues that impact on young people's lives, were the key to re-engaging with them. The evaluation found that over two-thirds of young people progressed on to positive outcomes and that they also gained skills which 'laid the foundations for future progression to mainstream provision'.

Councils are particularly well placed to understand the issues facing their young people and this next case study shows how this understanding can be turned into meaningful action, making use of youth work staff and their unique skill set. Youth work addresses the issues faced by young people early and head on.

Hounslow: engaging as young learners in education and training

Project 17 was set up by Hounslow Integrated Youth Support Service⁴ to work with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The project is particularly aimed at young people aged 17, who tended to slip through the net, whilst support for 16-year-olds leaving school was more readily available.

The project seeks to find and work with young people whose position is 'unknown' to the Connexions Service. Established in September 2008, the project is run by a part-time coordinator and three part-time staff, located within Hounslow's Detached Youth Work Team. Since the project was set up, staff have worked with almost two hundred young people, with 80 per cent engaging with the project and 42 per cent moving out of the NEET group. The project also works with young people identified through detached and centre-based work.

Youth workers start the process by a phone call followed by a visit to young people's homes, also taking information for parents and carers. The project has an agreement with Connexions that if a young person does not show any interest after three visits, they will be referred back for further support

through a Personal Adviser. Young people involved in Project 17 are linked with a dedicated youth worker. Priority is given to gaining the confidence of young people, so that they feel comfortable with the worker, who will then start to address the issues that have led the young person to becoming NEET. Youth workers talk to young people about their lives and what they would like to do, assess their needs and skills, help them build up their CV if needed, and find appropriate courses or training. Young people are also encouraged to get involved in positive activities such as music or sport, some of which are accredited.

Youth workers are ideally placed to put young people in touch with available options in the borough such as further education, Foundation Learning and a Young Apprenticeship scheme offering placements within council departments. They are also able to view young people's lives holistically and therefore can secure more specialist support, such as counselling or help with substance misuse where necessary. Maintaining continual contact through emails or visits, combined with up-to-date, relevant information also helps to increase young people's confidence to achieve their aspirations.

Head of IYSS Liz Hassock said: "This project is an excellent example of how IYSS can really have an impact on the lives of young people. This holistic approach has seen staff sharing their skills and their experience, truly working in partnership for the benefit of young people. An excellent achievement on behalf of the staff but also the commitment shown by the young people, once engaged – sticking with it has paid off for them in more ways than we could ever have imagined."

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Councils help coordinate the approach to healthy living locally, to ensure there are a range of methods to get messages across to different sections of the community, and to ensure residents have appropriate access to the services that will make a difference to their lives. Young people, particularly, are often reluctant to seek help from professionals and having a youth worker to provide vital advice and guidance can make all the difference.

There have always been links between health, youth work and concern around young people's health issues. In the last few years these have become central to a number of policy initiatives in both the health and youth work fields. Youth workers support young people by providing information and signposting a wide range of health services including mental health services (including CAMHS), sex and relationship information and staying healthy through exercise and eating well.

Rotherham: making young people's lives healthier

Funded by Rotherham Young People's Service, the Wath Young People's Centre aims to reach 25 per cent of young people aged 13 to 19 in the local area through a variety of sexual health provision ranging from open access to one-to-one specialist work.

Youth workers at the project are ideally placed to deal with the often sensitive issues around young people's health. The centre aims to create a safe and welcoming environment allied with a fully trained and consistent staff team who build strong and trusting relationships with the young people who attend.

Situated in an ex-mining area of north Rotherham, the centre is located on the campus of the Wath Comprehensive School. The centre was built in 2005 as an integrated youth facility within the school, funded by Rotherham Schools Private Finance Initiative. The centre is staffed by a senior youth worker along with community and support workers. It also houses a full-time Connexions Personal Adviser and sessional leaders.

The centre offers a number of activities and projects around health:

- The 'Healthy Lifestyles' accredited project works with young people at a local skate park through both centre-based and outreach work.
- The 'Baby Stop Think' project uses one-to-one sessions and group work to help young people consider the impact of being a young parent.
- Confidential services are offered at the centre through the 'Hardwear' campaign including condom distribution and a drop-in sexual health clinic.
- Services from other organisations are also provided including mental health support services from MIND and input from Know the Score drug project.
- At least two residentials are held each year which focus on current health issues for young people, underpinned by a confidentiality statement written by young people themselves.

Youth workers liaise with parents and a range of external services including CAMHS, Rotherham PCT,

local doctors' surgeries, and the Youth Offending Service. They also work in partnership with, and contribute to, Rotherham Healthy Schools' policies and practices. Youth workers facilitate dialogue between young people and health service providers to improve services and better align them with young people's needs.

Young people are actively involved in the running of the centre and in the planning, preparation and evaluation of activities. For example, they are involved in peer evaluation schemes which cover local health services, including the drop-in clinic at the centre. The centre has also contributed to the development of 'You're Welcome', a national quality criteria framework which seeks to ensure young people friendly health services, developed by the Department of Health.

Vicky Whitehead, Senior Worker says that "Through the young people's health focus group, they have helped to strengthen the provision in the centre and also had the opportunity to share good practice with other young people in the borough. I see this as a true start in early intervention."

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Learning opportunities, including and especially those that are available outside of the formal classroom environment, are very important to improve later life chances and positive transitions into the labour market, supporting young people as parents and as active and responsible citizens. Literacy and numeracy are core skills that all young people need to be able to successfully navigate the labour market and gain access to key services. Reading, in particular, can transform people's lives, helping them to improve their imagination, understanding and connections with others in the world. Councils provide a range of services that help young people access vital resources in their communities, opening up a whole range of other experiences and opportunities. Youth workers play a key role in supporting young people who are outside of mainstream education to negotiate alternative routes of entry into learning and the labour market. The role of youth workers can provide the link between young people and the opportunities that will enrich their lives in the future.

Plymouth: improving access to learning

HeadSpace is a dedicated library space designed by young people where they can read, meet and volunteer to help others in their spare time. The Out of the Box project at HeadSpace in Plymouth is run by the library service and aims to remove barriers to library use and make library services more relevant to young people. The aim of the Out of the Box project is to create opportunities to read for young people aged 14 to 19 who are disaffected or disengaged from formal education. Young people in youth work settings are encouraged to read more frequently and more widely. Key to the project is the involvement of youth workers who can help identify young people who will benefit most, encourage them to take up the opportunity and support continued engagement.

Out of the Box is a joint project between the National Youth Agency (NYA) and The Reading Agency (TRA), funded by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

The project aimed to get more young people aged 14 to 19 to use the library by organising a programme of sessions to encourage them to explore a variety of reading materials in different formats – especially those who were not readers. The project also aimed to engage young people in discussions about their reading and the issues/subjects of interest to them. Weekly workshops facilitated jointly by a youth worker and a librarian included sessions on music and lyrics, magazines, graphic novels, ballroom dancing and book buying. Creative activities were offered to help generate discussion including collage, quizzes, social networking, games, cooking and karaoke.

Feedback from young people has been very encouraging. In particular, two young people who were part of the group volunteered to help with reading activities at a session for a younger age group and support the delivery of both HeadSpace and Out of the Box sessions. Between April 2009 to March 2010, youth worker/librarian partnerships developed 18 projects across five regions in England involving some 336 young people.

Youth workers are ideally placed to partner libraries to engage young people in using library services and encouraging them to read more. Feedback from the projects makes it clear that their participation

resulted in an increase in library membership, library loans to young project participants and young people's use of libraries and facilities. There was a range of recorded and accredited outcomes⁵ (eg ASDAN, v⁶), and a number of young people sharing reading outside the project.

Youth workers were able to run structured sessions with young people as part of the HeadSpace programme, using established relationships with young people to encourage them to teamwork and take part in themed discussions about issues they care about in a safe environment. They were also able to organise and facilitate a wide range of creative activities to engage more young people and act as a 'hook' to introduce young people to reading materials.

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Good advice and guidance is an important part of an effective local youth offer. For any service designed for young people to be effective, young people first need to know it exists, why it might be useful to them and how to access it. Even the most well informed young people may not be aware of all of the services available to them to access in times of need. It is particularly important that the most disadvantaged young people have access to good quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) particularly if they have moved around a lot, and are not in touch with formal support services. As a facilitator of many local services, councils are in a unique position to provide an overview of the different services available to young people. Youth workers play a vital role in 'youth proofing' this information, advice and guidance to ensure it speaks to young people and that it is available at a time and place that suits them. They also help young people to access services over the longer term. The relationships of trust that build up between young people and youth workers are a key way in which the most disadvantaged young people access services that can significantly improve their lives.

Wirral: improving young people's information, advice and guidance (IAG)

Response, on the Wirral, provides a range of interventions to support young people aged 13 to 19 including substance and alcohol misuse services for young people at risk, and other specialist services such as housing advice and support, family mediation and welfare rights advice.

Response is the Youth Service's advice and counselling agency that works with a number of partners to deliver education workshops and other services for young people. Because the Youth Service is part of Children's Services, Response has good working relationships and a network of contacts with most of the 22 secondary schools in Wirral to deliver workshops around tackling substance misuse and other risk taking behaviour. It also runs workshops in schools aimed at preventing future homelessness, with evidence showing that this is having a positive impact on reducing youth homelessness in the area. Response has also teamed up with the Brook Advisory Service to deliver sessions in schools on issues such as homelessness, sexual health, drugs and alcohol.

Response uses a variety of creative approaches to engage young people. It has used peer education as a way of communicating the risks and realities of being young and homeless. Young people have been involved in producing DVDs which are used in workshops. Prop bags have also been effectively used in sessions around homelessness, containing a number of everyday items which provide clues as to the reason why individual young people might become homeless and enabling young people to explore factors pertaining to real cases. For the BiteSize Brook sessions, Response has created interactive games on topics which provide the facts and involve young people in group participation and discussion.

Drug and alcohol services within Response provide interventions such as case work and care planning, supportive one-to-one sessions, screening and early identification, alcohol drop-in service and IAG to young people who have attended Accident and Emergency.

Youth workers play a key role in supporting young people to address and seek help on a range of issues. Outreach work has an important role in targeting vulnerable, hard-to-reach groups. Sessions build on

what is local and real to young people. Response's work focuses on building meaningful relationships with young people, agencies and communities. Its workers relate well to young people and have a consistent presence in their lives.

Head of Response Pat Rice says: "Involvement with Response gives young people access to accurate, credible and relevant information as well as the opportunity to develop the personal skills, self-esteem and confidence needed to put information into practice. Our work enables young people to explore creatively how they make decisions and the impact this can have on themselves and the wider community. The importance of this type of work cannot be underestimated and has a huge impact on encouraging young people to live happily and healthily."

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Effective partnership working is a precondition for many of the case studies presented in this document. Councils are central to helping to instigate and sustain these partnerships.

Strong partnerships lead to more effective services for young people. This year's research from the NYA and CfBT⁷ into integrated youth support services highlighted the benefits for young people – an overwhelming majority of heads of services involved in the research felt that integrated services, built on such partnerships, had improved their offer to young people. Youth work itself is a partnership with young people. It encourages volunteering, leads to improved social capital and the development of better services. Engaging young people themselves in making decisions about the priorities for local services sits at its heart.

Hartlepool: supporting young people through partnership working

Hartlepool On Track (HOT) was developed as a collaboration between Hartlepool Borough Council and the Connexions Service in 2006. HOT takes a partnership approach to re-engaging young people aged 16 to 19 living in the regeneration area – particularly those who are NEET or at risk of becoming so – in education, employment and training opportunities. Targeted groups include looked-after young people, care leavers, black and minority ethnic groups, young parents, young carers, young drug and alcohol users and young offenders. It was originally funded through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and now has funding for 2009-11 from the Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

HOT is delivered through a partnership between the Youth Service and voluntary youth project B76. It works closely with a wide range of providers, including training providers such as Nacro, and the council's Connect2Work initiative which offers NEET young people three-month work placements and qualifications. There is also a borough-wide network of organisations from different sectors and providers working with NEET young people, which meets quarterly to share information and address local and national issues.

Young people are referred to HOT by a range of different local organisations including children's services, youth offending and health services, training organisations and voluntary and community sector providers. Young people involved in HOT develop individual progression plans with the workers, and the project seeks to find them placements in response to their individual needs. Placements on courses such as food hygiene, first aid, literacy and numeracy and gardening are available. Training providers interview young people immediately and then offer start dates. This enables workers to move young people on to positive destinations once they express an interest.

Youth workers help identify young people who could benefit from the project. The partnership arrangement means that one youth worker is based in Connexions and helps with referrals from other organisations. Youth workers also play an active role in recruiting young people, through home visits and developing relationships and building up trust. Those young people considered not ready for a placement are encouraged to attend a youth centre to start the process of re-engagement.

While partnership work may be easier in a geographically compact borough, Connexions Team Manager James Sinclair believes there is a real commitment across agencies to improve vulnerable young people's lives. He says: "The HOT project is a fantastic example of how integrated youth support services can work for young people nationwide."

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Access to structured leisure time activities is an important part of a well-rounded youth offer. Recent research carried out by the NYA⁸ on behalf of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) found evidence that young people's participation in structured leisure time activities helps their development of personal, social and emotional skills such as self-esteem, confidence, socialising and teamwork. This includes improved relationships between young people and their peers and other adults (particularly teachers and parents). A beneficial change in young people's relationships with other adults through their participation in positive activities can be transferred to academic learning and may lead to better outcomes.

Portsmouth: participating in positive activities

Rant Studio 1 in Portsmouth is run by the Integrated Youth Support Service and based at the Buckland Youth Activities Centre (BYAC) close to the centre of the city. Rant is a fully equipped recording studio and is open to young people aged 12 to 19 living in Portsmouth who are interested in music at any level.

Managed by a full-time Youth Development Worker, working with two part-time Music Youth Workers, the project works with a range of partners including Connexions, Youth Offending Teams, Barnardo's, and South Downs College. It works with between 25 and 30 young people each week. It offers an 'open door' policy to all young people but also works with young people referred from other agencies. The studio offers music-based activities including instrument tuition, DJ skills and various forms of music technology skills. It also helps young people to stage their own events.

Staff at the project work with young people on a one-to-one basis, helping them build their confidence and other personal development skills. On engaging with the project, young people are consulted to find out what they want to achieve creatively. They are encouraged to set their own goals, shape progress through their creativity and reflect on the music they produce. Young people are also responsible for making studio bookings and negotiating time slots to use the equipment. The project holds an event every couple of months and young people are encouraged to be proactive in setting up and running these events. Young people have used their work and experience at the project to fulfil sections of their Duke of Edinburgh's Award and gain places on college courses.

Youth workers at the project help young people to increase their confidence, self esteem and sense of worth through creative activities such as music. Music is an obvious draw and a common language shared by all young people. By asking them to reflect on the music they produce, youth workers can help young people make sense of life experiences. The project also acts as a 'bridge' to signpost young people to other agencies. As well as providing creative activities, the project works with young people on life skills such as CV writing, job hunting and offering general information and careers advice.

Youth Development Worker Paul Weston believes that engaging with the project offers young people a positive activity enabling them to experience creativity, ownership and expression. He says "one of the many reasons behind Rant Studio's success is its informal and holistic approach to music activity. By

not placing any academic restrictions on who can access the studio we draw an audience that would not normally engage in a musical activity and allow them the freedom to lead their own sessions and explore their creativity whilst being supported and guided by experienced music leaders.”

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To help young people fulfil their potential they need access to spaces and places where they are accepted and allowed to express themselves. Councils help provide access to such places and youth workers help allow the expression to be safe, constructive and appropriate. As the next and final case study demonstrates, relationships based on trust and inclusion help lead to better outcomes for individuals and communities. A more inclusive approach to young people so that they feel a part of their communities can reduce the burden on other services, such as policing, which saves money.

Birmingham: Conka Island – promoting youth inclusion

Kingstanding Youth Inclusion Project (YIP) and the local police force identified Conka Island as a 'hotspot' area during 2006. In 2007, the YIP moved into the area and work began to break down barriers bringing the residents and young people together. Police had been receiving complaints from the community about young people and anti-social behaviour, being called out regularly to move young people on. The police applied for a Dispersal Order for the Conka Island area. The YIP successfully negotiated a six month period of grace to work directly with the young people in the area and the Dispersal Order was put on hold.

Conka Island is an oval shaped grass area approximately 150 metres long and 75 metres wide surrounded by a road. Set in the middle of a large housing estate, the Island is a focus for the busy community with local shops, bus routes, a church, residential home for the elderly and a health centre all located here.

When the YIP moved to the Island, a consultation exercise was held to discuss the key issues for both young people and members of the community. Young people engaged with the project went into the community to ask other local young people for their views on facilities in the area and what they would like to see changed. Local residents were also asked about their concerns and suggested improvements. A number of key themes emerged: young people did not feel safe in the area and felt they had nowhere to go to meet and hang out with their friends. Their relationship with the police was also antagonistic. Residents and shopkeepers had a negative opinion of young people, but did acknowledge the general lack of organised activities for young people in the area.

As a result, a meeting took place between local young people and the police which led to an agreement that if young people on the island kept away from areas of concern, then they would not be moved on by the police. Young people also agreed to get involved with key local service providers to submit an application for Lottery funding for an improvement plan for Conka Island. Young people were able to influence plans for developing the space which included an all weather multi-use activity pitch, children's play area and sensory garden. Young people also sought to ensure the plans included elements for all age groups and users of the Island. Activities on Conka Island now include football sessions during the summer months organised by the YIP and the police, and environmental projects involving young people. Young people no longer congregate in the places that previously caused a nuisance and anti-social behaviour statistics in the area fell by 50 per cent between 2006-07 and 2007-08 and 90 per cent in 2009-10.

Recent developments, such as the erection of a boundary fence and construction of children's play area, have helped to ensure further improvements to the area. Young people are currently being consulted about the facilities that would work best for them.

The YIP involved young people in influencing a process of change for their local area. This gave them a sense of ownership and pride in their local community, which in turn led to a reduction in incidents of anti-social behaviour. All the people interviewed in the initial phase of the project were re-interviewed one year later. Residents and local businesses have seen a positive change, and police now work closely with the YIP and young people to continue the positive changes. Young people meet weekly to clean the area and the police join in with young people's activities.

Alison Holmes, Project Manager for the YIP, has found that "working with partners is key for bringing about change. Sending the same positive message to young people helps them feel part of the communities they live in – young people are the community!!"

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Conclusion

The contribution of youth work to young people's lives cannot be overestimated. The impact can be seen across services for young people: all young people benefit from access to high quality universal services but the most vulnerable young people experience additional benefits from targeted support, and through early intervention. Youth work builds emotional resilience and supports young people's decision making, placing them firmly in control of their present and their future. It plays a vital role in supporting young people to achieve their ambitions.

Good youth work is also central to improving and reforming local public services. It facilitates better access to services and prevents the need for the involvement of more intensive and expensive services further down the line. It supports a whole range of central and local government priorities, such as re-engaging young people in education and training, helping prepare them for the world of work and encouraging them to live healthy lives.

Looking ahead, the constraints of the current financial climate mean that youth services may need to be provided differently. This might mean a greater involvement of other parts of the local public sector, such as schools and colleges. It is likely to involve more partnership working with the voluntary and community sector and local employers. But, however services are provided, councils play a pivotal role in ensuring that young people have access to provision which meets their needs and supports them to reach their full potential.

References

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- 3 Supporting the hardest-to-reach young people: the contribution of the Neighbourhood Support Fund NFER, 2004. <http://www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RB535.pdf>
- 4 Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS) comprise various organisations working together in partnership to support young people in accessing services. The organisations working together in partnership can be different between different council areas.
- 5 Accredited outcomes are ways of recognising achievement through informal learning opportunities through the award of, for example, certificates. Some accredited outcomes can be combined to lead to further awards.
- 6 Two of a number of non-formal awards for young people. The NYA convenes the Network for Accrediting Young People's Achievement. For more information, visit www.nya.org.uk
- 7 *An investigation into the delivery of Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS) in England: Headline findings from quantitative data collection* (July 2010) CfBT and NYA. http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/2646_IYSS_web.pdf
- 8 *Increasing the engagement of young people in positive activities so as to achieve the ECM outcomes* (September 2010). <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/youth/default.aspx?themeid=5&accesstypeid=1>



About the National Youth Agency

The National Youth Agency works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support and improve services for young people. Our particular focus is on youth work and we believe strongly that by investing in young people's personal and social development, young people are better able to live more active and fulfilling lives.

Working with young people, we advocate for more youth-friendly services and policies. We have four themes:

- Developing quality standards in work with young people
- Supporting services for young people
- Developing the youth workforce
- Promoting positive public perceptions of young people.

We deliver our work through training and consultancy, campaigning, publishing and online communications. Through our activities we want to ensure that young people have a strong voice and positive influence in our society.

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