

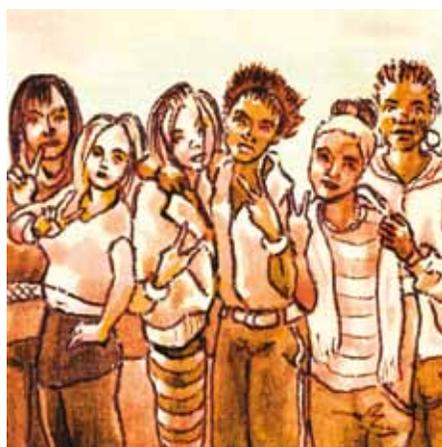


This is Youth Work: Stories from Practice

The book in brief



The In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW) campaign is a grassroots network of youth work practitioners and their supporters formed in 2009 to resist policies which were fundamentally changing the direction of youth work practice – in particular 30 years of Government emphases on statistical targets and targeting pre-labelled groups.



It sees these policies as:

- squeezing open access youth services in the face of these targeted agendas;
- replacing youth workers' focus on working with groups with an individualised case work approach working on rather than with young people;
- requiring accreditation and other outcomes which undermine the crucial processes for building supportive relationships;
- shifting from work on young people's terms to a focus on surveillance and policing.

IDYW sees the distinctive cornerstones of the youth work practice it is defending as:

- young people's voluntary participation;
- informal educational opportunities starting from young people's own concerns;
- mutually trusting and respectful relationships with and amongst young people;
- attending to the here-and-now of their lives as well as transitions to adult roles;
- recognising class, gender, race, sexuality, disability and faith as central issues for them;

- recognising the youth worker's own personality in fashioning a serious yet humorous, an improvisatory yet rehearsed educational practice.

IDYW set out to gather coalface stories to highlight these key features as well as illustrate their everyday contradictions, complexities and uncertainties. The resulting IDYW booklet and DVD have been completed against a backdrop of huge local government spending cuts to youth services and the real possibility that the youth service could be the first public service to disappear.

The government's only commitment to 'youth' is a 'national citizens' service' which an Education Select Committee Inquiry has declared it cannot support in its present form.

IDYW is committed to working closely with young people, voluntary organisations and the youth work trade unions in the struggle to defend youth work practice and services. At a time when the skills of youth workers have never been more needed IDYW and other allies want to ensure the dedicated work of youth workers is valued and appreciated and that young people do not lose the community projects and services so crucial to their quality of life and future.

The 12 stories featured:

Holding onto your dignity:

A youth club works proactively to support Black young people who are constantly being stopped and searched by the police.

On the boundary:

Over three years detached workers work with a young women's group whose chaotic relationships were giving them little stability and causing tensions in their community.

Creative improvisation:

A youth club responds to knife crime on an estate through a script writing and film project based on anonymous letters to club members from a young man in prison.

Pen and paper youth work:

During a youth club session, a young woman is 'counselled' via a series of written notes passed between her and the worker.

The power of graffiti:

Detached youth workers in a town centre 'hot spot' use a graffiti project to enable young people make their case for a drop-in.

Getting accredited:

A youth worker uses his skills within a Pupil Referral Unit to support an excluded pupil to get his qualifications.

Casual – or informal:

Standing at the club coffee bar, a youth worker offers a piece of information to a young man which helps set him on a very different career path.

Beyond aggression to eye contact...:

Workers in a city centre drop-in struggle to win the trust of a group of skinheads and challenge some of their values and behaviour.

Beyond stereotype and prejudice:

A youth worker sets about gaining the trust of a local traveller community to open the way for young women to come to the youth centre.

I wouldn't be the person I am today:

A young man explains why young people need youth clubs.

A modest journey in self-discovery:

Young people reflect on the impacts on them of a residential mentoring training weekend.

The youth centre as sanctuary:

A youth worker looks back on the role of a youth club at a time when he was a carer and struggling to find direction in his life.

These 'stories' illuminate 12 key features of youth work practice:

- **The young people**, though often coming with stigmatised and discriminatory labels, are treated as young people, for who they are, here, now and within their peer groups, including where appropriate being respected for their own positive embrace of those labels.
- **Setting** is often crucial – not just as physical but also as cultural and social space which is often, in subtle if never total ways, owned by the young people and which therefore they come to experience as safe.
- **Improvisation** within such a space – though bounded by commitments to consistency and reliability – enables youth workers to respond flexibly and creatively to young people's interests and concerns.
- **Young people's development** focused on strengths and potential, is throughout the central goal, requiring proactive but respectful challenges to them to go beyond their starting points.
- **Working within and through young people's groups** enables youth workers to offer both protection against potentially damaging group norms and opportunities to develop collective identities and group sharing.
- **Work with individuals** often flows directly from these group interactions, enabling young people to get personal support and to assert their individual identities more confidently and with increased social skill.
- **Trustworthy worker-young people relationships** emerge from these processes via complex forms of communication sustained over long periods and often dependent as much on what is understood as on what is actually said.
- **'Community'** provides a crucial context for much of the work – both its tensions and disharmonies and its supportive and nourishing qualities.
- **Professional and personal boundaries** are often (deliberately) blurred – for example to help win the trust of sceptical and unmotivated young people.
- **Activities**, though used as vehicles to enhance young people's personal and social skills, may also be or come to be valued in their own right for the individual and group achievements they make possible.
- **'Partnership working'** often demands hard work, especially to ensure youth work processes are safeguarded and that they work in young people's interest, particularly to help tip balances of power in their favour.
- **Management** can be supportive of a distinctively youth work practice but can also subvert or block it – while **funding** can suddenly simply disappear.



For further information visit www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk

