

PYOG

Grŵp Prif Swyddogion Ieuenctid Cymru
Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group

Youth crime prevention in Wales - what contribution can youth work make?

In recent times, the UK and Wales has seen the number of young people who have offended falling considerably. This is a very positive pattern which must be sustained via a contribution from a broad range of influences. Whilst Youth Offending Services¹ deserve recognition as being pre-eminent regarding engagement with young people who have entered the justice system, a great deal of diversionary work and broader preventative support for many young people who are at risk of involvement with the justice system is conducted by youth work in general and the Youth Service in particular.

Local authority Youth Services in Wales, who collectively engage over 100,000 young people per year across a 12 hour per day, 7 day per week and 50 week per year engagement profile, carries out work in a wide variety of settings which prevents young people getting involved in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour.

As an education provider, whilst youth work does not differ to formal education providers (e.g. schools, colleges etc.) in its central purpose i.e. that of building happy, well informed and fulfilled communities, it does in its approach, which is defined as non-formal/informal learning. Informal educators are the bedrock of democratic societies in being voluntary and community based: "*The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is an important means for making the 'lifelong learning for all' agenda a reality for all and, subsequently, for reshaping learning to better match the needs of the 21st century knowledge economies and open societies*" (OECD) <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/recognitionofnon-formalandinformallearning-home.htm>.

¹ Youth Offending Teams (YOT's) otherwise known as Youth Offending Services (YOS), which are multi-disciplinary teams of workers co-ordinated by local authorities and therefore separate from (but working closely with) the police and courts and are overseen by the Youth Justice Board (YJB). The make-up of YOT's is determined by Section 39 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which states that their statutory partners are made up of the local authority, police, probation service and health.

For all of us, informal (spontaneous, unplanned) learning goes on in our everyday lives when we engage in daily activities, conversations and other forms of communication. For some young people, this type of learning can be their only engagement in an educative process for a period of time as access to formal education becomes a challenge. For others, they just simply learn better through such methods e.g. via experiential learning.

Young people – assets to society

Whilst an increasing variety of agencies working with young people are recognising the value of engaging with and forming a relationship with a young person first and foremost, based on their individual characteristics and needs e.g. the *All Wales Youth Offending Strategy* (2013) states that "*Young people should be treated as children first and offenders second*", youth work has always done so. It could be argued that it may be somewhat more straight-forward to do so given the nature of the (voluntary) relationship and in less formal surroundings but the principle can be applied in all settings – such an approach can often provide the foundations for a more positive relationship.

A view of 'youth as a problem' continues to drive policy discussion in the UK, linking to notions of social exclusion and with certain groups of young people being seen in deficit, as a problem. The 'answer' to this behaviour is often to impose more control on the one hand and, on the other, to direct 'remedial' resources and interventions at those deemed to be in need. Whilst it is understood that limited public funding leads to greater potential for priority to be given to services which support the most disadvantaged, **open access youth services are valued by many young people as they remove stigma and can often be at least as effective as targeted services²**, often with young people moving between the two. **The Youth Service offers personal and social development opportunities via activities and programmes to young people aged 11-25, regardless of their background or ability.** These opportunities enable all young people to immerse themselves with and learn from other young people from different backgrounds and with different aspirations and interests – a learning process in itself.

In many respects, demands on each new generation seem to grow, with young people increasingly being required to adapt to modern/contemporary environments at a faster pace. They are becoming adults sooner e.g. puberty now commences a few years earlier than for previous generations with their childhood phase being shorter as a result. However, as well as being shaped by their environment, in the new digital age they also have huge **potential to shape it**. With an ageing population becoming more reliant on younger generations, **young people now,**

² <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmeduc/744/74406.htm#a5>

more than ever, should be seen as assets to society and communities and social policy needs to reflect this.

What is youth work?

Whilst there are a number of valued methods of engagement with young people under the umbrella term Youth Support Services, youth work (as delivered via the framework of the Youth Service) is open to all young people aged 11-25 with its key purpose being to: *"enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full Potential."* (Youth Work National Occupational Standards). Youth work has its own suite of National Occupational Standards, qualifications framework and, in Wales is further defined by [*Youth Work in Wales: Principles & Purposes*](#) with its 5 pillars or values of being **Educative; Expressive; Participative; Inclusive and Empowering**. It is an educative provision centered around personal and social development and based on voluntary engagement, delivered via informal and non-formal education approaches during the period of transition from childhood to adulthood.

Youth work is carried out in a variety of settings and through a number of methods, developing a wide range of personal and social (soft) skills, which underpin an individual's voice, influence and contribution to society. Examples of delivery include:

- Arts, drama and culture
- First aid
- Sports and physical activity
- Information, advice & guidance
- Counselling services
- Residentials
- After school clubs
- Citizenship
- Project work
- Duke of Edinburgh Award
- Sustainability
- Global citizenship
- Alternative curriculum programmes
- Health & Well-being

From April 2017 youth workers will be required to register with and be regulated by the [Education Workforce Council](#), conferring similar status to teachers, Further Education Lecturers and Work Based Learning Practitioners.

Prevention, early intervention and diversion - what is the Youth Service's role?

Though youth work did not develop to 'keep young people off the streets' or to provide amusement, youth services do act as an important preventative service, often keeping a young person from getting to a critical point where further interventions e.g. social services, housing, CAMHS, police etc. are required. **By working closely with a young person, helping them navigate through their difficulties and experiences, the need for such acute and expensive interventions is often avoided.**

There are well documented links between education and offending e.g. with half of 15-17 year olds entering youth offending institutions (YOIs) having the literacy or numeracy levels expected of a 7-11 year old. Around 40% of young people in under-18 YOIs have not been to school since they were aged 14, and nearly nine out of 10 have been excluded from school at some point. Crime prevention is a high priority in each of the Crime Reduction Plans of the four Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) in Wales, with one of the key methods for reducing and preventing crime being education.

To improve opportunities for developing positive mental health, young people need a strong emotional foundation, built on self-awareness, empathy, resilience and self-efficacy. Many of these traits are developed during a young person's time in formal education (schools/further and higher education) but, given that that they spend **around 85% of their waking time outside of formal education** (Professor Tim Brighouse *Education without failure*, The Royal Society of Arts Digital Journal, Autumn 2008), there are also numerous opportunities within communities and leisure time to do so.

Many "social competencies" are learnt by seeing and doing, by experiencing and failing as well as succeeding – the ability to cope with failure, to bounce back and learn from the experience (resilience). Youth work provides not only opportunities for young people aged 11-25 to build and re-build aspects of their lives, to reflect and evaluate but also provide learning programmes in their own right using different (but complementary) techniques in supportive environments which offers an alternative for young people and to seek to achieve their full potential.

However, many young people using youth services are already disengaged from mainstream services and are often vulnerable. Some are currently in the care of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) or social services, others perhaps need to be but do not have the motivation or ability to seek help. As well as assisting young people to become self-sufficient and interdependent, **youth workers are also competent advocates**, acting in the best interests of the young person whilst aiding the skills developments of that individual.

Being involved with young people between the ages of 11-25, **youth workers are often the only constant for a young person** engaging with specialist services such as *Independent Counselling Services*, YOT's and/or CAMHS – they can and do act as a broker of services as well as often being the only provision available at the exit point from such services.

The Youth Service has a strong history of working in partnership with other organisations. It is crucial that this continues, particularly at local level, both for the benefit of the young person but also to avoid duplication of effort e.g. a number of youth services have youth workers based in schools, primary health teams, YOT's etc. Close links between Youth Service and YOT's could include stepping up/down of young people into the most appropriate services; producing holistic interventions

which may require partnership delivery such as in relation to bureau approaches, where programmes of work identified could be carried out by youth workers.

How are youth workers contributing to young people's emotional well-being?

Together for Mental Health: A Strategy for Mental Health & Wellbeing in Wales, the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* and the *Social Services & Well-being Act (2014)* all provide a framework for collaborative working and opportunities for preventative services in particular to make an increased contribution to this important agenda. The PYOG has carried out a mapping exercise including the contribution of youth work to the *Future Generations Act*, much of which is relevant to the promotion of improved emotional well-being:

Goal	Examples of contribution
A prosperous Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Young people are able to take a leadership or supportive role through junior leader and peer education schemes. ➤ Youth Forums & Councils provide a platform for young people to express their views and gain acknowledgment. ➤ Development of wider employment skill sets e.g. communication, team work, inter-personal skills, leadership skills ➤ Young people encouraged to play a positive role in their communities ➤ Providing opportunities to participate, regardless of background ➤ Broadening horizons and raising aspirations by providing new and challenging experiences ➤ Developing employability skills which encourage young people's progression ➤ Youth Work in schools - promoting the engagement of young people ➤ Links with Communities First Action Plans
A resilient Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Self esteem, anti bullying projects. ➤ Confidence - raising activities with young people ➤ Individual, tailored support within schools for most vulnerable
A healthier Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Healthy eating programmes ➤ Time and location flexible sex and relationship Education ➤ (Condom) C-card scheme ➤ Substance misuse programmes ➤ Up-to-date and good quality information and advice
A more equal Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Promoting equality and diversity and challenging oppression is a central function of youth work

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Intergenerational work ➤ Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender information and awareness ➤ Disability awareness ➤ Combating and challenging hate crime/extremism ➤ Anti-discrimination practice ➤ Developing self-esteem and resilience ➤ Developing social inclusion ➤ Balance of targeted and open access provision ➤ Outreach/detached provision to offer equal opportunities for young people in "hard-to-reach" communities such as traveller communities, home schooled pupils etc.
A Wales of cohesive communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Learning "soft" skills and essential skills needed to sustain communities ➤ Gaining an understanding of mutual support and the needs of others ➤ Participation in positive activities ➤ Environmental improvement projects ➤ Duke of Edinburgh Award citizenship/volunteering
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Eisteddfodau, theatre workshops, youth exchanges ➤ Events held through the medium of Welsh, production of Welsh medium literature ➤ Delivery of youth work and training/learning opportunities through the medium of the Welsh language
A globally responsible Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Youth exchanges ➤ Global citizenship projects ➤ Cultural and identity awareness programmes ➤ Environment programmes ➤ Partnership work with organisations such as menter iaith

The Youth Service also assists in building capacity in the sector by delivering **support and a great deal of training** for individuals and organisations around subjects such as:

- Healthy relationships
- Sex Education
- Men's health
- UNCRC
- Women's health
- Self-esteem
- Body image
- Healthy eating
- Bullying
- Healthy lifestyles
- Smoking awareness
- Alcohol and substance misuse awareness
- Parenting
- Stress and relaxation
- Money management
- Employability
- Mind management

- Exam stress
- Anger management
- Sexuality & Gender dysphoria
- Online safety
- Assertiveness
- Prejudice & discrimination awareness

Through the new vulnerability assessment profiling (VAP) tools being used locally as part of the [Youth Engagement & Progression Frameworks](#), young people are increasingly being identified as presenting with mental health indicators, without having a diagnosis and falling short of CAMHS criteria. To assist these young people, wellbeing drop-in sessions are also widely available. These can often be multi-agency provisions designed to be one-stop-shops for young people to access a range of support, dependent on their needs. Open access youth provision, such as detached, street based and centre based youth work play an invaluable role in identifying and tracking young people who are often disengaged from mainstream education. Many of these young people also engage with youth work professionals outside of an educational context, which can be a valuable link to feed information into VAP tools within the YEPF.

Whilst arrangements differ across local authorities and across regions dependent on need, youth workers have a strong tradition in relation to links between them and health practitioners, with services co-located in some areas. The Youth Services in the Aneurin Bevan Health Board area have also developed a joint Health & Well-being toolkit for practitioners in conjunction with the Aneurin Bevan Public Health Team. The aim of the toolkit is to “...*provide practical guidelines for setting up and running health-related workshops for young people between 11 – 25 years of age, in informal settings.*” The toolkit includes clear guidance on how to use and deliver it in group settings and through one-to-one work, with the emotional health section focussing on the “Five ways to well-being” model - *Connect* (with the people around you); *Be Active*; *Take Notice* (be curious); *Keep Learning*; and *Give*.

The Youth Service also often has strong links with School Nurses, providing information and access to the C-Card scheme. School nurses also provide ‘drop-in’ services at local youth centres.

Youth work making a difference

Historically, the evidence base for the significance of social and emotional capabilities has been challenging, if not elusive e.g. there has been a lack of consensus around language and definitions. This can lead to a greater focus on ‘hard’ measurements such as qualifications and accreditation, which do not take into account progress in relation to health, well-being and other crucial personal/social traits. However, there are some effective tools for measuring young people’s well-being, a number of which are used at the beginning of a young person’s involvement with youth work and via periodical reviews.