

SUPPORTING YOUTH WORK AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND

AUTUMN 2022

# The Link

**Tackling  
poverty:  
the power  
of youth work  
to change lives**



#YouthWorkChangesLives



# Introduction



“Prioritising Prevention, Reducing Inequalities and Promoting Equality” was the third key objective of Dr Campbell Christie’s report a decade ago. With child poverty on the increase it feels timely to revisit that report and recognise that although youth work has little ‘control’ over the economic and political forces that affect young people, we can and must seek ‘impact’ through our many and varied services to prevent and alleviate poverty and inequality in Scotland.

Youth workers are uniquely positioned at the heart of communities to meet young people and families where they are and offer dignified and relevant support onsite. Youth work is often a trusted partner with families, able to navigate some of the policy pitfalls and alert other agencies when young people are at risk of falling through the safety net.

Support and investment in youth work is vital to help deliver on local and national anti-poverty strategies and as a key driver in success for better mental health and wellbeing outcomes for all Scotland’s young people. The actions we take now are crucial. Young people deserve a commitment to the continuation and enhancement of the services that supported them during the coronavirus pandemic to maintain their wellbeing and enhance their future prospects.

Youth workers play a vital role in ensuring young people have equal access to services and that their voices on this issue are heard. Preventative services such as youth work are vital alongside child payment awards and welfare reforms. This is why this edition of the sector magazine explores youth work’s role in poverty reduction. It is a snapshot of some of the best practice across the sector. From my own knowledge and experience of grassroots youth work I have no doubt that a resilient, fully resourced youth work sector has a key role to play in preventing child poverty and I hope that you are motivated and encouraged by the articles in this magazine to consider what more you can do to that end.

**Tim Frew, CEO YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work**



# Ministerial Foreword

**Jamie Hepburn, MSP, Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training**

I was delighted to join you at the National Youth Work Conference in Glasgow. It was a fantastic opportunity for us to collectively explore how youth work plays such an integral role in the lives of our young people who are very sadly living in poverty in our communities. Currently around a quarter of all children in Scotland live in poverty. This is unacceptably high, and that is why this Government has declared a national mission to tackle child poverty.

We know that growing up in poverty is at the heart of so many challenges facing Scotland – experience of child poverty can affect attainment and future earnings, it is a key predictor of youth homelessness, and is a driver of health inequalities. Tackling child poverty is both the right and the smart thing to do. In March of this year the Scottish Government published ‘[Best Start, Bright Futures](#)’, our second tackling child poverty delivery plan. This sets out bold action to support families and lay the foundations for transformational change that will deliver the type of change needed to reach our statutory child poverty targets to be met by 2030.

Action includes support for parents to enter, progress and sustain employment, supported by childcare and transport systems that meet their needs, income maximisation, building on a comprehensive and expanding range of social security benefits with

advice and support to ensure people access all that they are entitled to, action on housing and homelessness, and efforts to support children living in poverty today to get the best start in life. Underpinning all of these actions is a focus on holistic family support – providing the right support, at the right time, for as long as it is needed, to help families and their children.

I am proud of the amazing work which practitioners deliver to support the needs of our young people and look forward to hearing more from you on what can be achieved collectively to help them build the confidence and skills to grow into young adults ready to face the world of education, work and overcome the challenges that poverty has brought into their lives. The work you do, along with the forthcoming national Youth Work Strategy will provide a strong basis to deliver the best services and support to improve chances of our young people in all aspects of their lives.



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# Youth work – a powerful lever in the drive against poverty

## YouthLink Scotland's Policy and Research Manager, Kevin Kane lays out the policy landscape for us, and it's all underpinned by young people's rights.

Poverty is a human rights issue because it violates several fundamental rights of a child. The right to development; the right to the best possible health; the right to an adequate standard of living; the right to education.

The intersection of rights-based issues means it can be challenging to address them in isolation – and just as challenging to build a clear picture of the whole.

[UNCRC Article 27](#) safeguards a child's right to a proper house, food and clothing, the lack of which would be a clear and obvious identifier of poverty. We know, however, that children and young people experiencing poverty are [far less likely to succeed through formal education pathways](#). To experience poverty, then, is to have your right to an education all but withdrawn.

This is precisely why a rights-based approach must be built upon a clear understanding of poverty, and be used as the foundation to develop new strategies to tackle its root causes and address immediate needs that arise as a result.

Youth work is a human-rights based practice. We now benefit from a growing bank of evidence that a dignified, youth work approach to addressing poverty works. It [boosts learner engagement, attendance, literacy](#) and the arrival at positive destinations – developing key skills that can help lift young people out of poverty.

We must therefore recognise youth work's untapped potential to act as a powerful lever in the drive against poverty in Scotland. Committing ourselves as a sector based around core values of rights enabling and

rights respecting should be the first step of that journey.

### Tackling child poverty

It is heartening to see Scottish Government acknowledge the crucial role of youth work in the [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](#) and take account of the role of the upcoming National Youth Work Strategy (2022-2027) at targeting support to those most in need.

*"We will also publish a new Youth Work Strategy focused on providing services to young people most in need. A renewed focus on delivering outcomes through youth work will help to alleviate poverty by ensuring young people have the support they need to make informed positive life choices that lead to a better future."*

It is through policy measures like these and with youth workers to the fore on the ground in local communities that we can tackle poverty (including the poverty-related attainment gap) and continue to support the health and wellbeing of our children and young people. However, we can all do more.

### Commitment from organisations

We must also demonstrate commitment as an organisation. This is why in 2022 YouthLink Scotland supported the Scottish Youth Parliament's (SYP) focus on a right to food in Scotland.

Targeting food inequality is a timely and hugely important vision identified by young people themselves, placing a legal responsibility on Scottish Government to end hunger in Scotland.

The link between food inequality and attainment is backed up by recent evidence, where our food insecurity pilot revealed that tackling food insecurity can directly [impact engagement, wellbeing and development](#) within the context of a school environment.

Alongside our support for SYP's focus on a right to food, we offered our support to the Good Food Nation Scotland Bill and sought assurances from Scottish Government that the upcoming National Youth Work Strategy will assist low-income families to access youth work.

We welcomed the ministerial commitment to make holiday

childcare provision available to all children from low-income families by 2023, urging them to start in 2022, by providing coordinated access to food, childcare and youth work activities during the school holidays.

Our organisation continues to press Scottish Government on the need to include youth work in education reform and renewal from the coronavirus pandemic.

### The future

The youth work approach meets young people where they are and assists them with their own journey. Youth work practitioners deliver a person-centred, whole family/ community approach, respecting the dignity of the individual seeking support and their broader personal development is considered throughout. The approach to poverty needs to be about relationships founded on trust and tailored to the needs of the individual and their life circumstances.

We believe the publication of the new National Youth Work Strategy can help focus our combined energies on alleviating poverty. It will contribute to breaking down barriers to support for our most marginalised communities and those young people experiencing poverty, or who find themselves in a precarious financial position resulting from the impacts of Covid-19.

Any future Scottish Government approach needs to consider what works and ensure there is investment to sustain the relationships, preventative approaches and crisis responding.

By apportioning proportionate resources to the youth work sector, Scottish Government can unlock huge potential in its efforts to tackle poverty in Scotland – making good their promise to ensure Scotland is the best place in the world for a young person to grow up.

**“ It is heartening to see Scottish Government acknowledge the crucial role of youth work ”**



# Dignity in Practice

**Poverty, food insecurity, social isolation and loneliness affects young people and older people in every community. Using an intergenerational approach can be an effective way to address these issues.**

Intergenerational work focuses upon the relationships which can happen when different generations are purposefully brought together. Through projects, activities, embedded in community or organisational programmes, and where opportunities are created for people who might not otherwise meet each other.

The benefits of intergenerational work for individuals, communities, workplaces and society in general, are immense and Generations Working Together supports the development and integration of intergenerational work across Scotland.

An intergenerational project should by definition be inclusive and mutually beneficial for all age groups, with activities providing an opportunity to build understanding and respect with generations. Intergenerational work fosters reciprocal learning between different generations and helps develop social capital and cohesion in our ageing societies, giving everyone the opportunity to build relationships that help to create a fairer society for all.

Pilmey Development Project, based in Leith, Edinburgh worked in partnership with Citadel Youth Centre to develop 'New Spin Fair Food Project. It delivers a unique and successful model of intergenerational work around dignified food-related issues, sharing values and skills with 50 older and younger people.

Activities had a focus on healthy cooking sessions, education around nutrition, cooking on a budget, as well as developing our own intergenerational version of the Nourish Scotland 'Dignity in Practice' tool. This was designed with the recommendations in Scottish Government's Food Poverty Report '[Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland](#)' (2016).

We developed 'Our Commitment to Dignity' charter, which states that together, we will work hard to make sure that everyone feels:

- **A sense of bonding**  
"It's a family, sitting around the table having a meal."
- **Able to take part in the community**  
"Everyone eating together, just like a huge family!"
- **Nourished and supported**  
"If anybody has a problem you can talk to them and they can help."
- **An ability to participate**  
"I feel relaxed and comfortable here."
- **Involved in decision-making**  
"It's great that everyone involved in planning activities."
- **Valued and able to contribute**  
"We do make a contribution, but it's not compulsory."

The intergenerational session and charter has had an extremely positive impact on participants and it's been an exceptionally moving experience to see the wonderful relationships that have developed around the social value of food. Younger and older people reported increased confidence, improved physical and mental health and wellbeing. Older people also felt less socially isolated and more valued members of the Leith community and all said they had improved understanding and have built stronger relationships.

As a result of this work we firmly believe that we can state that we are committed to restoring and promoting dignity in our intergenerational approach to food poverty.



# Overcoming additional barriers for LGBTI young people

**Here at LGBT Youth Scotland we think young people are amazing – they are our future carers, teachers and leaders and we want them to flourish and thrive. But we also know that one in four young people in Scotland will have grown up in relative poverty.**

The UNCRC says that every child has the right to a standard of living that allows them to develop physically, mentally, spiritually and socially. Poverty can mean children have a standard of living below this threshold.

LGBTI young people face additional barriers in education and employment and are consequently 5% more likely than their straight or cisgendered peers to experience poverty linked to unemployment, poor health or homelessness.

This is stark reading, but it's important to acknowledge that there is great work happening right across Scotland through a network of youth work agencies, cheering young people on and giving them the structure and support they need to achieve their full potential.

People often ask us 'why do LGBTI young people need specialist youth work?', and it's a good question. They are first and foremost young people after all. At LGBT Youth Scotland our youth work supports young people to identify the tools they need to overcome the additional barriers they face in life, education and work. As well as the building blocks of all youth work – making friends and feeling an empowering sense of belonging – we create spaces in person and online for young people to develop skills and competencies which can turn those earlier statistics around. 70% of young people who accessed our services last year said they then felt more optimistic about their future and 69% felt they had developed new skills.



We try to reach as many young people as possible using our digital youth work platform, which is accessed by young people right across Scotland.

From employment initiatives and agencies, to employers themselves to individual role-models who provide positive examples of an LGBT person in different sectors, our partners enable our young people to access ways to imagine themselves in a wide range of different roles and enact their own positive futures.

As a young person's organisation, we think the last word should always belong to a young person:

*"This opportunity with LGBT Youth Scotland has changed my life, both personally and professionally. I am now working in my first graduate role years after graduating, in an area I am really passionate about but thought I could only do in my spare time or as a hobby. Only a couple of months ago, I was working as a cleaner doing night shifts in a homophobic environment and was very limited socially as I'd only recently arrived in Edinburgh when lockdown happened. Now, I am working full time in a place where I feel supported and included as a member of the team, I love my job and have spare time after work to meet people and have a healthy routine."*





# Eradicating poverty is a matter of political will

**Peter Kelly, Director of the Poverty Alliance talks urgent policy change and the importance of utilising the transformative power of youth work to help drive that change.**



**“ Together, we can create a Scotland where equality of life chances and opportunity is a reality for our children and young people. ”**



The experiences we have when we're young set the context for the rest of our lives - and Scotland is often seen as a place where young people are supported to achieve their ambitions. The idea of the 'lad o' pairts' who can access education and learning to move into new employment or enterprise is ingrained in our culture.

That belief reflects an ideal that is widely shared - people believe in a just society where everyone has equality of life chances and opportunity.

But the truth is that we are far from that ideal.

Rates of child poverty in Scotland are slightly lower than other areas of the UK, but there are still more than 260,000 children officially recognised as living in poverty here. That's an incredible one in four and is a huge failure in the values of justice and compassion.

That gap in income is then reflected in a gap in school attainment. The Scottish Government has invested money and political capital in lessening that gap, but - as Audit Scotland found - the poverty-related attainment gap is still wide, and inequalities have been worsened by Covid-19.

Our own research into the attainment gap found a lack of robust evidence about interventions in schools. In terms of accessing higher education, the thing that really helps are bursaries, scholarships, and grants.

There is compelling evidence on the effectiveness of one-to-one tutoring, mentoring and careers education and guidance for children and young people living in poverty. However, our mapping of mentoring and tutoring provision for children and young people in Scotland found that the provision of free tutoring for young people living in poverty in Scotland is sparse and there are gaps in mentoring provision geographically.

Our review of evidence for the [Robertson Trust](#) found that youth work plays a key role in the provision of support to young people living in socioeconomic deprived areas. Young people spend roughly 85% of their time outside of school and there is clear evidence on the importance of engaging with community support organisations and youth work to reduce the poverty-attainment gap.

After leaving compulsory education, young people living in poverty are less likely to end up in positive destinations in employment, education, and training and more likely to be in precarious employment, and work that doesn't supply enough working hours.

The effect of this is clear. Young people aged 16-24 have one of the highest rates of poverty of all the age cohorts in Scotland - 28 per cent.

Part of the problem is that even when young people can find work, the UK Government says they don't need the same income as others. The National Minimum Wage for over-23s is £9.50 an hour. For those aged 18-20 it's £6.83 - for those under 18 it's a meagre £4.81

The Poverty Alliance's Living Wage Scotland team accredits employers who have made the voluntary choice of paying a fair day's wage for a hard day's work. That means all their employees above the age of 18 are paid at least £9.90 an hour, with an uprating due in September. This is the only wage rate that is independently calculated based on what people need to live on. That kind of boost in income can help give young workers the stability and security they need to build a future.

Eradicating poverty isn't impossible - it's simply a matter of political will. People need adequate incomes that are enough for them to live on. Our review on the poverty attainment gap found that a lack of money was the key barrier stopping children from low-income households being able to fully take part in education.

To address the root causes of the attainment gap, the Scottish Government must continue its commitment to end child poverty. No single policy on its own can eradicate child poverty but more action is needed to bolster incomes through the Scottish Child Payment and ensure that families get information about all the benefits they are entitled to in school and health settings.

In October, organisations across Scotland took part in #ChallengePoverty Week. They talked about how we can #TurnTheTide of poverty in Scotland, by cutting living costs, redesigning our economy and strengthening social security.

Together, we can create a Scotland where equality of life chances and opportunity is a reality for our children and young people.





# The role of youth work should never be underestimated

At 16, Eireann McAulay, was homeless, removed from chaotic family circumstances and expected to try and survive on her own in temporary accommodation. The former MSYP and Equalities Campaigner recounts how youth work was a lifeline during the most difficult time of her young life.

Some people might think that the phrase 'Youth Work Changes Lives' is overused or has become a bit of a cliché. But the reality is that the life changing, interventionist, and critical role youth work plays in children and young people's lives is underestimated. Its role in helping to mitigate the impacts of child poverty and inequality is undervalued, and very often its role in reducing inequity in Scotland is overlooked or not well understood.

Like so many young people across Scotland, youth work has played a powerful and important role in my life. It helped to open up opportunities to connect positively with my community and took me off the streets. It supported me to discover and utilise my voice, be part of activities and events that I otherwise would not



“ *...to empower me to use my experiences, energy, enthusiasm and activist spirit to fight for change* ”

have been involved with, meet new friends and crucially provide a space where I felt safe, supported, valued and a space and place where I could just be young and have fun.

Youth work and my own youth workers will always have a special place in my young life and transition. During my senior phase of school at 16 I found myself homeless, estranged and removed from my immediate family. At that time, I felt like my whole world was falling apart. Prior to that I hadn't had a good attendance rate and my engagement with education was sporadic.

I was living in temporary accommodation living independently and purely dependent on my Education Maintenance Allowance and Income Support. The only people I had were some of my school teachers and youth work. It was such a turbulent, uncertain and awful time where I was trying to balance being a young person and growing up. At the same time expected to live like a young adult in homeless temporary accommodation and having to face decisions so young about heating, eating and whether I was actually going to survive.

Having endured the pain of family drug misuse I was determined not to go down this route – but I would be lying if it were not tempting to slip down this road to keep afloat at a time when I felt quite hopeless as a young person.

Most of my friends would be turning up to school focussed on their exams, chatting about the weekend or thinking about holidays, proms or events. They were going home to be looked after, cared for by their families, when I was wondering what my next postcode might be. I worried if I could pay a bill or whether I could even complete my homework or study properly because I had no access to WiFi at the time.

But during such a horrendous and challenging time, it was the collaboration of a few teachers I was close with combined with very outstanding youth workers and a service I could lean on that helped me to overcome adversity. It provided me with spaces to keep me safe, happy, be and feel young. And critically to empower me to use my experiences, energy, enthusiasm and activist spirit to fight for change and help enhance the views and voices of young people – particularly those young people who have experienced multiple adversities.

Education was absolutely my golden ticket to helping me to where I am today and my passport, but it was youth work that helped give me hope, purpose, stability and belief in myself and that a better community and world for young people is possible. All young people have something to give to the world but sometimes they are just not valued, listened too, understood or the environment isn't right for them.

The scale of child poverty in Scotland is unacceptable, avoidable and is shameful in one of the wealthiest nations in the world. The Scottish Government has committed to making reducing child poverty one of their top missions. Poverty and the poverty-related attainment gap starts and continues well beyond the school gates. Education and schools alone will never and cannot solve poverty alone. The role services like youth work play in being champions for young people, helping to reach them and intervene should not be underestimated.

Youth work has such an important role to play in the fight to significantly reduce child poverty in Scotland and its role should be celebrated, invested in and recognised more.

“ *Youth work has such an important role to play in the fight to significantly reduce child poverty in Scotland and its role should be celebrated, invested in and recognised more.* ”



# The cost of the school day

**It is with youth work that we can reduce the cost of the school day according to the Child Poverty Action Group.**

Cost of the School Day is a national project that helps school communities understand and address the financial barriers pupils and families face when it comes to taking part at school.

The cost of sending your child to school and taking part in school activities can be a worry for many families. Whether it's the pressure to afford a school uniform, pay for a school trip or having spare money to take part in charity days, costs can stack up and mean that children living in poverty are left out and don't get the equitable learning experience that their friends do. We know that growing up in poverty can affect a young person's health, education and well-being. Children who can't take part in everything at school tell us they are embarrassed if they aren't the same as their friends.

Central to Cost of the School Day is hearing the lived experience of pupils and families. Pupils and families often hide the fact that something is a cost pressure and parents and carers often go without to make sure that their child can take part at school.

School communities that explore costs and work with their pupils and families to find solutions can reduce this pressure and ensure cost barriers to learning are removed. Poverty sensitive approaches range from schools making uniform policies more affordable by removing costly items, running free universal breakfast clubs, providing all resources in the classroom so no child is embarrassed if they don't have equipment, using Pupil Equity Funding to subsidise the cost of trips or fun learning activities and making sure families are supported

and receiving the benefits they are entitled to such as free school meals or a school clothing grant.

When it comes to reducing the cost of the school day for children and families, we need to use the expertise, skills and passion of the youth work sector. The refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge mission rightly recognises that schools can't tackle poverty and the poverty-related attainment gap on their own. Equal partnerships between schools, youth work and third sector partners are crucial to ensuring we reduce the impact poverty has on young people's learning and life chances.

With access to a wealth of enriching experiences, youth workers can support schools with alternative and supportive learning opportunities for pupils. The trusting relationships youth workers build with children, young people and families mean that they are perfectly placed to work with schools in talking with schools in talking about cost barriers and solutions. With in-depth knowledge about local community support, youth workers can help to boost family budgets by letting families and pupils know about what they are entitled to and how they can access it. The youth work sector can and must play a vital role in tackling poverty and reducing the cost of the school day.



**“** *I hope this influences a culture change – not to see learning in isolation – young people own their own learning – it doesn't belong to school or community.* **”**

**Youth Worker**

Youth Work Education Recovery Fund





# Confronting the stigma of poverty

Dumfries and Galloway Council's Youth Work Team have been providing essential wraparound support to tackle the barriers of poverty. Giving as many young people as possible opportunities with no judgement.

Throughout the region we have many examples of the support we offer young people without making them feel targeted or judged. The stigma of poverty is often a barrier in itself.

Our youth cafes, are ensuring young people are not only being fed but also upskilled to make food on a low budget. We have partnerships with schools where we take a trolley in and provide free food for breakfast. We provide trips and residential to all young people free of charge. These are just a few examples of the work that we have done to tackle poverty with young people aged 12-to-25.

As a service we strive on supporting young people on [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#), to ensure every young person has access to opportunities to thrive. The wrap around approach supports the Physiological Level on the Pyramid. We provide food and clothing in creative ways such as groups like youth cafes, young chefs and skills for living.

Food is provided at all sessions and often at the end all young people are given the opportunity to take any leftovers home, for those that we know are in poverty we try to give them more discreetly, so they do not feel targeted.

At Youth Beatz, which is a free youth festival, we provide a food donation station for the community to donate to local foodbanks. Youth workers provide education around poverty and have taken young people to foodbanks to reduce the stigma around them. We support young people with applications to local charities for fuel, food and clothing vouchers. We work with our poverty team in the council to provide one stop shops and winter warmers where people donate items that families can access for free, we include free haircuts and food as part of these days. During the holidays we donate Easter eggs, Christmas presents and food hampers to families we are supporting.

For the Safety Level of Maslow's Pyramid, we support students with free back to school goody bags and stationery packs for young people at college. We support young people who struggle to complete their free travel card applications. Every session has access to sanitary products and deodorants, on occasion these are also given to young people in packages to take home.

Throughout Covid-19 isolation packs were given to rural areas to provide food and personal items for those struggling to get to supermarkets. Support to get devices and Wi-Fi was a priority during the pandemic but we continue to support young people now who require it for work or school. We have a book swap in place for young people to be able to share books to revise and not have to pay for new ones.

Everything we provide for young people is free, and where rural locations make it difficult to take part, we provide transport as well.

## CASE STUDY

Dumfries and Galloway Council Youth Work Service is a regional team but is separated by area to ensure young people across the region are supported. Young people often attend multiple venues across the local area due to either moving home or transport available to venues.

A family from East Dumfries and Galloway were regular attendees at our flagship venue Oasis Youth Centre, with the eldest attending groups such as Parkour and our lunch clubs. After building relationships with staff, it was disclosed that the young person and their sibling were in kinship care with their auntie with eight of them living in the one household.

Throughout the past year, the Youth Work Team have been able to support this family to apply for funding for fuel cards, new clothing, and footwear. We have provided free trips for the young people and the family have continued to attend the one stop shops and winter warmers to get access to free clothing and haircuts.

Our Youth Work Service has provided food hampers throughout the year, not just at Christmas, and food is always given at the end of each group they attend to take home. We have provided support with personal hygiene items and worked with the eldest young person on budgeting for the food shop.

This young person has now been a young leader for six months as they want to provide support to other care experienced young people and give back to those who have helped them. Their sibling has also now signed up to be a young leader, they believe the help they have received would not have been there without his youth workers supporting him in a non-judgemental way. He wants to spread the work of youth work. The youngest cousin has also started accessing our junior groups and has already stated that he will be a youth worker because we always bring joy to his house.





# Innovative food insecurity pilot has significant impact on young people and families

**A report during the height of the pandemic shows the effectiveness of a youth work approach in tackling the learning loss associated with food insecurity, with 92% of young people involved reporting improved mental wellbeing.**

'Food Insecurity and Learning Loss' outlines findings from a pilot of six youth work programmes, funded by Scottish Government, as part of a YouthLink Scotland pilot project to help tackle food insecurity during the school summer holiday period of 2020.

Food insecurity ranges from worrying about running out of food, to actually running out of food and experiencing hunger due to lack of money or other resources.

University of Glasgow research into learning loss over the holidays for disadvantaged children highlights the divide:

*"Evidence for summer learning loss shows that during term-time, children across all income groups learn basic skills at similar rates; however, during the summer months, children from low income families fall weeks or months behind their middle and high income peers."*

Some of the key findings showed that almost 100% of young people had improved their family relationships. 94% were eating healthier food and cooking together.

Engagement with learning is one of the impacts of food insecurity for young people, but 80% of those involved in this innovative pilot project said they were actually looking forward to returning to school.

For many young people living with food poverty, they feel stigmatised by their circumstances. The pilot had a significant impact on young people's mental wellbeing with 92% saying they felt more positive about themselves and 94% reporting they had more confidence as a result.

The pilot involved youth work projects and services from: South Lanarkshire; East Ayrshire; Dundee; Moray; Scottish Borders and Falkirk. The innovative programme offered partnership opportunities for schools, and youth workers to demonstrate the impact of a youth work approach to tackling food insecurity and the associated impact on educational outcomes.

Each project was designed to:

- Deliver a dignified approach to food insecurity.

- Embed measures to tackle food insecurity within informal learning.
- Deliver learning opportunities tailored to the needs of the cohort, including preparing for transition and reducing learning loss.
- Take a holistic approach to supporting families affected by food insecurity; where possible and appropriate, engaging the whole family.

Commenting on the findings of the report, Marielle Bruce, YouthLink Scotland's Youth Work and Schools Partnerships Manager said:

*"Important learning about the unique position of youth work in the community has emerged. Youth work partners did not face the barriers to engagement with families that some education and social work partners encounter. Through contact about food and activities, they were able to identify and address hidden needs and make new connections with families who are struggling."*

The evaluation was conducted by The Lines Between, an Edinburgh-based social research agency.

*"The beauty of this was it was in the home, so the power had to be handed to the family. And then permission was given from the family. So it was much more of a collaborative thing between our service and the families than a normal event might be, where they feel as if they're an invitee and they're participating. They were actually running the show, you know. So it was really an empowerment tool to be able to do it in the home."*

Youth Worker, Falkirk

## CASE STUDY

**The seeds of change:**

**A summer of growth in Dundee's Community Garden**

Dundee City Council's CLD youth workers delivered a face-to-face programme in a community garden, where young people took part in engagement and learning activities centred around health and wellbeing. The food sessions focused on choice, learning and new experiences with sessions on cooking skills, nutrition and kitchen safety. Families also received basic equipment, recipes and ingredients to make meals to share at home.

Staff and young people described their time at the project and its impact.

**A sensitive, dignified approach to delivery**

*'I think obviously the rise in food bank referrals was through the roof and stuff like that, so I think this wasn't seen as... Like food banks sometimes people can attach shame or embarrassment, just things like that, and I think for this it was totally different, because the family is still getting fed, but they don't see it as a handout, because it's more like a project they're getting involved in, they're putting their time in.'* Referral partner

**The lived experience of food insecurity**

*'Without this some young people might not get fed, or their parents might not always be around to feed them.'* Young person

*'It felt... a warm feeling inside.'*

Young person, on being able to make dinner for their family because of their involvement in the project.

**The value of a youth work approach**

*'Within a school, they know they've been selected as a vulnerable group... there's always a level of stigma. Whereas... as soon as I get them out into the garden into the community centre, and we're just there, and a group of people playing pool, then we'll make some food and we'll sit down and eat it and things. When you're out in the wild or in the community setting, you're just a community group. Yeah, anywhere else the dynamic is totally different.'*

Youth worker

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# An inclusive DofE Award

Every year The Duke of Edinburgh Award inspires hundreds of young people, from all walks of life, to explore who they are, grow in confidence and develop valuable skills for life and work. At the very heart of their mission is making sure obstacles of inequality are removed.

We support and champion young people of all backgrounds and believe firmly in the imperative to make Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) more widely available and accessible, increasing the number and diversity of young people who can access the programme.

Any young person can do DofE, and achieving an award isn't a competition or about coming first. Each DofE journey is as individual as the young person taking it. Many activities that count towards your DofE can even be done from home or in the local community.

Hana who is pictured knitting as part of her skill section of her DofE Award – also joined a local action group as part of her DofE Award, where she researched what was needed within her local community. She then took action by litter picking and providing food boxes for struggling families – this is another

great example of DofE participants at the heart of the local community.

At DofE we provide training, support and resources to run the DofE with a wide range of youth organisations. We currently have funding in place, which our partners can apply for, to remove barriers to participation. Achieving a DofE Award can help level the playing field and offers possibility. It's a way of developing and recognising valuable skills for life and work, skills that often aren't learnt in the classroom. These skills can help propel young people, regardless of background, to achieve their potential and make confident and informed decisions about their future.

North Lanarkshire Council (NLC) is a Licensed Organisation of the DofE Award in Scotland, and one of their goals is to remove financial barriers to any young person who wishes to participate in DofE.

## The cost barrier North Lanarkshire case study

Following the breakdown of a previous foster placement, a 14-year-old girl was referred to CLD for respite in the Key Workers Hub. This young person had experienced several different foster placements and had stayed in children's houses since the age of four, due to her family's relationship with drugs and alcohol.

During the young person's time in the Hub, youth workers were able to chat to her about her interests and aspirations and discovered her strongly positive response to the outdoors and outdoor activities, an outlet she hadn't been able to explore before.

The DofE was suggested as a way to continue this engagement with the outdoors, using participation in three sections of the Award as an incentive to get involved in an expedition in the outdoors (an area she had clear interest in). She learnt a new skill, kickboxing, using funding acquired through CashBack to pay for the sessions and the clothes to participate in this every week for six months. Through the friendships she made and gaining confidence along the way, she joined the local youth forum where she spoke to other young people about her experiences in foster placements and children's homes, which was used as her volunteering section.

The NLC Youth Work Team was piloting a course called Living Life to the Full which looked at coping strategies for positive mental health. This young person participated in this for three months, completing her skills section.

In November 2020, she completed her DofE Expedition using local routes with financial support from NLC to cover travel costs. All expedition kit and food was supplied by NLC's outdoor store with additional funding from the NLC youth work budget for socks and food. As a result of this, this young person was able to complete their DofE, stating:

“ *The expedition was the best two days of my life. We got lost and we made hot dogs in the woods. I will never forget it.* ”

*“The DofE was a way for me to gain a qualification by taking part in things I really enjoyed. My youth worker told me this was available to me and was free to take part, I had never considered this before as I thought it was expensive and I needed special equipment to do the expedition. In my youth group I was signed up for an eDofE account and was given training on how to read maps, put up tents and cook outside on a trianguia, I had never heard of a trianguia, now I can use one with no bother! I was given boots and waterproofs and all my kit to take on expedition with me. My youth worker gave me food and snacks as my mum didn't have any extra money. If it wasn't free, I would never have been able to do this Award. Now I have something I can talk about in an interview, and I have made new friends because of this award.”*

Young Participant





# Supporting vulnerable families

**FARE Scotland** wish to tackle the effects of poverty and its symptoms. Their aim is to encourage people in the communities they serve to have a vision of a better life. One of the devastating impacts of poverty is poor mental health.



Mental health is something we all need to talk about, learn about and support. FARE Scotland are doing just that with trained members of staff based in Glasgow schools, supporting young people to learn more about mental health and the skills to support themselves and others. Mental health affects everyone in different ways, whether it's a young person suffering with anxiety or a parent with a mental health illness or crisis.

Inequalities such as lack of housing, home environment, food poverty and financial poverty can all have a detrimental impact on our young people. Poor mental health for parents and young people can create barriers to learning and have a huge bearing on daily life and well-being.

Natalie Miller, Family Liaison Officer at Smithycroft Secondary School identified that there was a need for mental health support within the school and established a group named Minds Matter.



The Minds Matter group has proven to be a very effective way in supporting young people with their mental health and wellbeing. Initially pre-Covid, the Minds Matter group ran weekly, with approximately 10 young people attending. Post-Covid the group was extended with two sessions running each week after school to meet demand of the volume of young people wanting to attend. Over the two days available to the young people there were approximately 28 young people who regularly attended each week. It was felt that by increasing the support, the school were able to meet the young people's mental health and wellbeing needs.

The sessions have been extremely helpful in supporting young people in numerous ways. The group itself is a safe space for young people to open up about their struggles and worries without fear of being judged. Natalie meets the young people with a positivity and support. Group numbers became slightly decreased after nine months because young people felt they had more control over their wellbeing and the skills they had learned in the Minds Matter group had helped them substantially.

Natalie, who started the group, decided to train and deliver sessions at SCQF Level 5 in Mental Health First Aid. The training was open to all pupils, age appropriate, who were keen on learning more about mental health and becoming Ambassadors for the school. These young people were trained on mental health issues and ways in which we can signpost and talk to young people in crisis. 15 young people completed their training in June.

Alongside the training in Mental Health First Aid, nine Smithycroft parents and carers also attended family learning sessions and successfully completed the qualification as well. FARE recognises the importance of improving the health and wellbeing of both young people and their families. We put a great emphasis on good mental health in the work we do, through informal conversations, training, on-to-one sessions and group work.

During sessions we have discussed topics such as healthy diet, exercise, relationships, communication and sleep hygiene. Our school staff not only deliver education and learning

opportunities but facilitate groups to help with social isolation, food poverty, employment support and family work. All our work with young people has a strong youth work approach.

*"With continued pressure on the NHS many services available to our young people are simply not there at the moment. FARE has been fundamental in bridging and scaffolding the support that is so vital to our young people. Natalie and her team are doing a sterling job in providing pupils with immediate and long-term support. This support extends to not only the needs of the pupils but their parents and carers, something that has been a lifeline to our most vulnerable families during unprecedented times. Without the outstanding work of the team at FARE our community and spirit would cease to exist. Thank you from the Pastoral Care team."*  
Miss Bilbao, Pastoral Care Teacher

*"Coming to group has made me feel better and I now understand myself better." - Female, 14.*

*"I have been struggling with my mental health due to my sexuality and gender identity, the mental health group lets me talk about my feelings in ways I can't talk to my parents." - Male, 14.*

*"I have been on the waiting list for CAMHS for two years, I don't know what I would have done without the group. Natalie helped me a lot, especially before my CAMHS appointment. I was very worried but we worked through coping strategies and ways that I could talk to them about my thoughts and feelings." - Female, 15.*





# Acting on poverty

Youth Scotland's recent report demonstrates how its programmes directly impact communities most affected by poverty and makes a tangible difference to the lives of young people and their families.

Scotland's communities have been faced with the impact of UK-wide austerity and cuts, the global COVID-19 pandemic and more recently the cost of living crisis. These factors are made starker yet when we recognise their impact on our young people, something we focused on in our new report [Acting on Poverty: how Youth Scotland's vital work supports the most affected communities](#)

Acting on Poverty explores the impact and views from some of those most affected by the financial crisis. A startling statistic is that around one in four children in Scotland are living in poverty and are faced with a lower life expectancy: 47 years for boys and 50 for girls, almost 20 years less than those born in higher income families.

The challenges our sector faces are real, but we also know that youth work fosters resilience and focuses on recovery. The amazing youth groups that make up our own membership and the wider sector are often born from local volunteers seeing a need and growing something with their young people. It's truly inspirational to see groups in some of the most affected communities come together and show us the way.

Additionally, as our report examines, not only are young people living in poverty, but they must also contend with the poverty-related attainment gap. Youth work and youth awards can also be key contributors to addressing the attainment gap, with 60% of our own awards going to young people in SIMD 1-5 areas and 31% to those in SIMD 1-2 areas. Youth awards can contribute to a sense of achievement and confidence and can be particularly useful for young people for whom formal education does not meet their learning style or needs, offering alternative pathways and accreditation.

We know it works - we know that universal, inclusive community-based youth work delivers - one needs only to read the research [The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Scotland](#) - a study commissioned by the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group. Young people uniformly reported that their local groups were fun, supportive, inclusive and safe environments. We also know the same universal youth work supports those affected by poverty, as Acting on Poverty demonstrates. As we conclude there, the youth work sector will continue



to provide crucial support for young people, families and communities that are struggling during the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The youth work sector is strongly placed to support Scotland's young people in these challenging times, but only if we acknowledge and resource them adequately. Since releasing our report, we have been delighted with the response from the youth work sector, the public sector and beyond. This is clearly a timely conversation and there are many willing to give voice to the challenges not just facing young people, but those who would work to make a difference in those same communities.

“ Outside of formal school settings, youth work plays a key role in the provision of support to young people living in socioeconomic deprived areas. Research with young people themselves conveys the need for better links to additional support to deal with personal and health issues. ”

**The Poverty Alliance Evidence Review,**  
into the Poverty-related  
Attainment Gap



# Action in challenging times

## The development of voluntary sector area youth HUBs in the Highlands after 100% cuts

Before Covid-19 wreaked global havoc, the Voluntary Youth Sector in Highland was already in financial crisis due to 100% budget cuts to local authority grants.

Youth Highland was responsible for supporting the Voluntary Youth Sector through this challenging time and ensuring that tackling poverty and inequality was at the forefront of youth work in the Highlands.

In January 2017 the Highland Voluntary Youth Network (VYN) was born. The VYN is a network of voluntary and third sector youth organisations and currently has more than 160 organisations actively involved.

Youth Highland facilitates four networking and strategy events annually. These events help build relationships and trust, increase understanding of regional and national policy and legislation, and enable maximum involvement in developing and realising shared ambitions for youth work.

Through consultation VYN representatives and young people identified the following three priority areas for improvement:

- **Improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people in Highland.**
- **Improve access to support services and learning opportunities for young people.**
- **Increase participation and amplify the voice of young people in local decision making.**

We have created a shared Improvement Plan for the Voluntary Youth Network. The plan is aligned to national outcome frameworks and underpinned by professional principles. It recognises the provision of universal community-based youth work provision as essential in enabling best outcomes for young people.

By increasing community responsibility for delivery of youth work, the shared plan can help reduce poverty and inequalities and improve opportunities for young people and the future of communities.

To successfully deliver these outcomes the plan focuses on improving community-based youth clubs and establishing an area Youth HUB as the youth work lead in each of the nine community partnership areas.

The HUBs provide easy access, locally run, safe spaces in communities. They offer young people choice and variety, access to competent trusted adults, opportunities to play and learn, access to specialist services and opportunities to lead and achieve.

There are currently nine area Youth HUBs. In more densely populated areas, there is more than one HUB. Seven of the HUBs are in communities on the SIMD.

The model has helped us to encourage managers and youth workers from the nine HUBs to attend CPD and training, offer peer support, share good practice and resources, carry out joint evaluation and work collectively on joint projects.

More has been achieved through the delivery of collaborative projects. We are able to prove best value through these projects and can evidence measurable outcomes including significant rises in attainment, creation of jobs, early intervention and youth led social action.



# Balintore

## After years of being provided for, communities provide for themselves: From clubs to HUBs

Balintore is a rural community based in Easter Ross, Highland. It is a tight knit and proud community, but identified on the SIMD as experiencing health inequalities, poor education and attainment and infrastructure challenges.

The village had a senior youth club running once a week by the public sector for over ten years. However, this service was withdrawn due to recruitment issues in 2021 and after limited delivery or support throughout the pandemic.

The Balintore community made the decision to take a courageous step for its young people.

The Balintore and District Residents Group (BDRG) is a member club of Youth Highland and have a long-standing history of delivering volunteer-led summer playschemes in the community.

As an emerging area youth HUB, the BDRG were awarded £3,000 to deliver a summer programme as part of the Highland Council's 'Summer of Hope' initiative, funded by Scottish Government.

The Summer of Hope project was the catalyst for change for youth work in Balintore.

The funding allowed BDRG to take on three local people as youth workers, providing morning and afternoon play sessions four days a week and two evening youth club sessions every week throughout the summer holidays. BDRG volunteers handed out pre-packed lunches to on average of 70 children and young people every weekday throughout the seven weeks.

This experience was a massive confidence boost. The community recognised that they were best placed to understand and respond to the needs of their own community and what could be achieved if they believed in themselves.

The BDRG committee worked hard to attract additional funding to keep on two youth workers and one sessional worker. They are all local young adults with lived experience and understanding of living and growing up in the village. Youth Highland have offered advice and support, training, and supervision to ensure growth and professional development.

The youth work programme has increased from one session per week to eight sessions per week. They now offer junior and senior sessions, awards sessions, sessions for young parents, events and special projects and outings. More than 170 children and young people are engaged in our youth work programmes.

There are a strong team of young leaders and lots of support from local people who can see the difference youth work is making.

Working to tackle the drivers of poverty for young people, youth work principles are enabling community capacity building, economic growth, positive impact on attainment, increased resources and engagement in local democracy.

**Balintore has realised the power of community.**





# A guarantee of support, training and hope for the future



In May 2021 North Lanarkshire Council's Community Learning and Development (CLD) service, in partnership with the Scottish Government's Young Person Guarantee, set out a plan to recruit 20 CLD Assistant Support Workers for a period of one year. The aim of the programme was to help young people aged between 16 and 24 develop their skills to prepare them for their future career aspirations and positive pathways.

The support workers worked across three of the core functions of CLD – Family Learning, Youth Work and Adult Learning for 20 hours per week. As well as paid employment, the staff had a robust training schedule which would not only equip them with the skills to carry out their role effectively, but also provided the opportunity to gain transferrable skills which would allow them to compete more favourably in the often competitive labour market at the end of their employment. The staff were also given the chance to work alongside partner agencies and the opportunity to have a CLD worker as a mentor.

This new and innovative learning offer provided by NLC set out and successfully reduced some of the inequalities that can arise from the attainment gap. It provided further opportunities to young people who have barriers to learning and participation.

The success of the programme is demonstrated by the 17 positive destinations that were achieved by the assistant support workers, 125 qualifications achieved, seven moving onto work within North Lanarkshire Council. Five have moved on to University, three are now in further education and six staff continuing to volunteer with CLD or local partner agencies.

The programme is running again this year for 15 further assistant support workers, providing a robust training and paid work experience that will enable the young people of North Lanarkshire to reach their full potential.



**CLD Assistant Support Worker**  
**Kai Etherington**

## What I was doing before the Youth Guarantee Programme?

Before the Youth Guarantee Programme, I was in college studying Community Involvement. I had lost a lot of confidence due to Covid-19 and lockdown affected this. Most of the learning was online. I lost a lot of motivation and wasn't quite sure what my next steps were. I struggled to get a job due to my loss of confidence and having never worked before. This also affected the whole house I live in financially.

## What has been my highlight?

Gaining a huge variety of qualifications and training. I have done 22 different courses and qualifications that I wouldn't have done if I wasn't in this programme. Finally, having my own money and being able to help out financially at home has made a huge impact on my life.

## What's next for me?

I have an unconditional offer to study Community Education at the University of the West of Scotland. I would not have considered university before this opportunity. I have been successful too in gaining a 10 hour position as a CLD Assistant Support Worker and also an acting up position as Support Worker both with NLC.

“ Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. ”

**Nelson Mandela**



# The power of digital youth work

Olivia Armstrong and Claire McGinley from YMCA Paisley are helping young people bridge the digital divide.

Digital poverty is an often overlooked consequence of poverty. With the level of necessity that technology now plays in everyday life, lack of access and data connectivity can be a vital component in keeping young people from reaching their full potential. The development of valuable skills for work and education can be supported by having access to technology and software, which may not be easily accessible to people living in poverty.

The [Local Child Poverty Action Report](#) for Renfrewshire shows that in 2021,

4,430 children were living in absolute low-income families and 5,299 children living in relative low-income families.

Paisley YMCA provides a safe, non-judgemental and inclusive space for young people to learn new skills, make friends and have fun. All our clubs are free to attend and we always make sure we have healthy snacks and a few treats at each session. In developing our digital youth work programmes, we make a significant effort to use free apps and software.

Many of our projects focus on building digital and STEM-based skills. We develop our projects with a strong focus on issues that young people tell us that they care about: mental health and wellbeing; bullying; gender-based violence and climate change.

A core principle of youth work is the belief that all young people deserve the same opportunities to learn and grow, which should not be hindered by poverty or social status. Many of our projects focus on coding, creativity and skills development with the help of our skilled and compassionate youth workers. We also create opportunities for young people to volunteer and assist in club activity, which gives them valuable experience they can add to their CV.

Equality in STEM and the digital world has become a core factor of our weekly club sessions and our passion will always lie in giving our young people both opportunities and access to our space to learn and express themselves. This is invaluable to both building their skills and their social development, which all young people deserve and we are proud to be a part of that journey.



## Paisley YMCA Case study

Briony is 15 and attends a local high school. She goes to school most days but because of things she has going on at home there are some days when she misses it. She has been attending Paisley YMCA clubs for over four years. She doesn't go to any other clubs, but has previously tried dancing and gymnastics, she liked them but they cost a lot of money. She first got involved with Paisley YMCA because it was within walking distance of her house and she had seen some posts on Instagram about a group for girls who were interested in STEM. She didn't know much about STEM or what it was but she was encouraged to go by her Grandpa.

She wanted to try the clubs because it looked like they were doing fun things with different types of technology, like making music, creating art and making games. Briony likes being

creative and loves to draw and listen to music. When she first started going to clubs at Paisley YMCA she just wanted a quiet space to make art and relax. Briony lives with her grandparents and she helps to look after them too, so coming to the Makerspace gives her a few hours to herself where she can have fun, relax and eat snacks. She likes it because she's not too far away from home if she wants to go back.

Briony enjoys the STEM Girls Group because the youth workers always encourage her love of drawing and compliment her on whatever piece of art she is working on. They tell her that being creative is an important skill and they show her how she can make digital art using free software. She has an idea that she would like to make digital art and find a way to sell it because people are always telling her how good it is.

Briony has gone on to become a Young Leader at Paisley YMCA and she likes to help other young people find out what they are good at. She loves the Makerspace because she says that nobody judges her, the youth workers are always nice and supportive and there's good snacks. She knows that if she's having a bad day that she can come along and feel however she wants to feel and that's ok. She never thought when she was younger that she would find herself working on a coding project if she was bored or looking for something to do, but now she has this amazing skill that she loves.



# Radical reform is needed to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap

**Marielle Bruce, Youth Work and Schools Manager for YouthLink Scotland sets out the opportunities and challenges that face us in the battle to reduce poverty and inequality.**



When it comes to education reform there is only one word, one approach, and that's radical.

As Scotland incorporates the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law, Education Reform presents an opportunity to create a system of education that better supports *"the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential"*.

▪ The [Fairer Scotland duty assessment for Scottish Attainment Challenge](#) is clear that poverty has a detrimental impact on young people's education:

*"Evidence shows that children and young people from lower-income households in Scotland do significantly worse at all levels of the education system than those from better-off homes."*

▪ A rights-based approach is the only way to achieve our vision for excellence and equity in education, where every child and young person can develop the knowledge, skills and attributes to reach their potential. This must include

access to youth work. This vision is why YouthLink Scotland and the Scottish Youth Work Leaders Forum are calling for significant reform.

- [Our vision for education](#) is that every child and young person can experience their right to an education which helps them to develop their personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential (UNCRC Article 29).
- We call for education reform to drive a transformed education system that seeks to address the purposes described in Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) through:
  - The creation of a renewed and shared vision for education which accords narrative privilege to youth workers, and drives the culture change needed to better recognise the sector's role in education.
  - New national agencies for Scottish education, as proposed by education reform, will more fully reflect and support the role of youth work within education.



- A curriculum which delivers a more equitable balance across all four capacities, settings and contexts for learning, and which promotes the development of skills alongside knowledge and understanding.
- An assessment and qualification system which supports progression in young people's learning across settings, better recognises and values the wider achievements of all learners and delivers parity of esteem across different qualifications and awards.
- Ensuring that young people's voices are consistently heard and valued, that they are genuinely involved in their learning, and encouraged to become critical thinkers.
- Youth work's role is valued within the post school education, research, and skills ecosystem in Scotland.

The national discussion on Scottish Education '[Let's Talk Scottish Education](#)' is an important step in ensuring that young people's voices are consistently heard and valued in education. Within this, they must be able to express their voice on the impact of youth work in education and what this should mean for a future education system.

Alongside education reform, the refreshed mission for the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), 2022-2026, is to tackle poverty by addressing the poverty-related attainment gap. To achieve this, the strategy places greater emphasis on the breadth of achievements and experiences and the importance of health and well-being to contribute to improved outcomes. This requires strengthened collaboration across education, including youth work and school partnerships.

Through its [SAC national programme](#), YouthLink Scotland supports sustainable, effective collaboration between youth work and formal education. This includes providing support, advice and guidance to promote equity and improve outcomes for learners. They have also developed resources and approaches to create a shared understanding across all practitioners

**“ When it comes to education reform there is only one word, one approach, and that's radical. ”**

regarding responsibility for closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Strategic collaboration across the education system is needed to ensure that effective decision-making takes place regarding impactful, sustainable approaches to improving outcomes for children and young people. We witnessed the impact of working as a collaborative learning community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The same

approach is needed to harness the potential power of youth work and school partnerships to accelerate progress toward tackling poverty through education.

If we get this right for every child, we can close the poverty-related attainment gap and achieve our collective commitment to eradicating child poverty.

## Youth Work Education Recovery Fund

The fund was established to enable the sector to engage young people in some of the country's most vulnerable communities and support their educational, social and emotional recovery in the wake of the pandemic.

### Scope of the programme:

- Supported by £3 million in funding from Scottish Government
- 64 funded programmes across Scotland
- More than 17,000 sessions and 49,000 activity hours provided for young people
- 17,904 young people participated
- Support was targeted in areas of multiple deprivation where young people and families have been most adversely affected by the pandemic

### Age of young people who participated:

- 68% aged 10–14
- 30% aged 15–19
- 2% aged 20–24

The impacts of the learning experiences offered by youth work organisations were very positive. Evidence gathered from young people, teachers, parents, youth workers and other partners over the course of the programme.

### Impact:

- 82% of participating young people developed their skills
- 79% of participating young people experienced improved health and wellbeing
- 78% of participating young people overcame barriers to learning
- 61% of young people were more engaged in learning
- 37% of young people achieved recognition of wider achievement attainment e.g. youth awards

You can read the full impact report [here](#)



# Not dropping the ball

## – an approach to gender-based violence

The “Yoda Principles”, Fear leads to anger, Anger leads to hate, Hate leads to suffering, that has never been more prevalent than today.

For so many people living on the margins of financial security, fear is constant. St. Paul's Youth Forum (SPYF), based in the North East of Glasgow, aims to support young people to learn and engage with one another and to alleviate the effects of poverty and disadvantage. Gang violence has been highly prevalent in the local area for many years, the project base was regularly being used as a first aid sanctuary for violent crime and incidents of abuse throughout the 2000s-2010s.

### Background

In 2016, we undertook a longitudinal study into youth crime reduction due to youth work. In the final analysis from Police Scotland's crime figures, SPYF worked with local police officers to find out that violent crimes had reduced from 116 crimes in 2006 to two crimes in 2016. The lack of violent crime in the local community did appear reduced, however during ongoing discussions with local people, youth work staff realised that one form of violence had gone unchallenged in the local area. And it was unseen due to the rise in technology and social media. It became apparent that Gender Based Violence (GBV) is highly prevalent in the lives of the young people SPYF encounter.

In Scotland there were 59,982 reported cases of Domestic Violence in 2014–15. 79% of these were female victims and male perpetrators. Women's Aid also shared that 1 in 5 children in the UK will have experienced domestic abuse by the time they are 18 years old. Prevalence is notably higher in areas of multiple deprivation.

### Approach

Tackling this issue required two different areas of approach. Firstly, to educate and support the youth workers, secondly to find ways to help young people. When training staff, we created several one-minute videos to explain some of the different topics, such as healthy relationships, consent and porn masculinity. We have provided suggestions of what tools, activities and resources have been useful to use through each part of the conversations with young people. We also held workshops led by experts like Linda Thompson of the Women's Support Project and Jackson Katz founder of MVP strategies.

In order to reach young people effectively we supported a group of peer educators to bring about change. This group have created a game which will enable dialogue in communities across the country; being supported in partnership with



other youth centres and schools, entitled 'Don't drop the ball – on Relationships!'. The peer-educators have also developed a 'training youth workers programme' which includes online modules and videos of seminars that have enabled change for and with children and young people on these specific issues – which are identified with the young people and local community.

workers and professionals in the field of GBV prevention work. This was enthusiastically received by health board staff, teachers and youth workers and is available to purchase, with or without training. Young people have to be at the heart of any change. We're lucky to be able to journey with some amazing young people as we learn together. Their ability to make the transformations in our community and beyond is exciting. The hope to challenge fear comes from them.

This game has been developed to be used as a tool to 'ice break' and establish a benchmark of knowledge and awareness with their peers before they start any activities around GBV prevention.

### So how does it work?

The group participants in the game will be prompted to (gently) throw/pass the ball to whoever they want in a circle, once caught the catcher will read out whatever 'question' their right thumb lands on, so on and so forth for whatever time allows. If the question at their right thumb has been asked, then use the left. The questions are made up of both domestic and international facts and statistics on Gender Based Violence which the group of peer educators have researched alongside youth

## Case Study

We first met Chloe and Leah as part of our Gender Based Violence Prevention Project in November 2019. Shy, giggly 14 year olds who were like most young women joining a group for the first time. Their leadership qualities were first recognised when the Scottish Peer Education Network delivered a session on what peer education is. They really engaged with everything as part of the session, all was exciting for the future but then Covid struck.

Members of the group naturally fell away during Covid, but Chloe and Leah's commitment and passion enabled them to stay engaged.

They were instrumental in creating our resource, 'Don't drop the ball – on Relationships!'. The ball creation came from recognising that it was important to have discussions with peers. This realisation for them came when we were about to hop on a coach as part of the summer activities, where they heard some of the younger boys discussing online gaming. Chloe and Leah not only understood GBV but had the confidence to be active bystanders. They engaged the boys in an informal education discussion about how the game the boys were

playing contributes towards violence against women and girls.

The ball now enables people to begin the difficult conversations and was created by the young people throwing a football with post it notes around, asking questions on difficult topics and also having a laugh.

Chloe and Leah attend a visit to Reykjavik as part of an Erasmus+ funded programme. It showcased to our young people that the issues that we are facing in the North East of Glasgow also exist in other places. By widening their perspective, they found solidarity with other peer educators in Iceland and have taken this learning and support back to our community.

We have seen the transformation in these young people, from those giggly girls into community leaders, making a vital change in our area and beyond. It was recently recognised by their school, who recognised their achievements with special awards for pupils who have gone the extra mile in school and the wider community. They continue to be part of the positive change in our area, teaching others about this challenging subject.





# Igniting the spark of learning

When it comes to measuring success in education, there should be no separation between achievement and attainment. We need to measure all the achievements of our young people. Jim Duffy from the Awards Network explains why youth awards are helping to address the poverty-related attainment gap.



In her foreword for the latest edition of *Amazing Things – the guide to youth awards in Scotland* Shirley Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills said that it helps to:

*“shine a spotlight on the power and versatility of Scotland’s youth work services... (that) provide opportunities for young people to engage in experiences that build confidence and resilience; improve skills and build the essential relationships that support positive outcomes and help address that poverty-related attainment gap.”*

Youth awards are enabling the youth work sector to make a critical contribution towards delivering the Scottish Government commitment to a broader recognition of children and young people’s achievements and attainment.

## The importance of extra-curricular activity

A significant body of evidence exists pointing to an association between poverty and lower levels of academic achievement and educational attainment.

Pathways from poverty through to the attainment gap in the Northern Alliance- an Initial Review captures much of this. A recurring theme is the mitigating effect provided by participation in out of school enrichment activities, such as sport and youth groups.

A Report for the UK Social Mobility Commission - An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills and Social Mobility similarly identified strong evidence of a link between extracurricular activities and educational outcomes.

Notwithstanding potentially significant equity issues, including affordability and geographic inequality of access, the Report concludes that access

to extra-curricular activities through school, youth work or otherwise, can deliver important benefits to participating young people.

## Recognition of Achievement

What youth awards add is a means to evidencing the learning and skills developed through extra-curricular activities, providing vehicles through which to recognise and accredit these.

Over recent years we have seen a welcome growth in the use of youth awards, across the youth work sector and increasingly in school settings too. Youth awards are a significant tool applicable across a range of educational settings in support of personal learning and skills development. They provide credible and tangible evidence of achievement.

More than half of the youth awards provided by Awards Network members are matched to the SCQF, delivering a formal qualification. For some young people a youth award may be their first recognised ‘qualification’, instilling

in them a self-belief in their ability to achieve and providing a spark that prompts them to re-engage in school or further learning.

Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training believes that awards: *“complement learning done in the classroom and offer the right recognition at the right time in the right way for many people.”*

## Effective collaboration

The Scottish Government Report Closing the poverty related attainment gap: A report of progress 2016-21 states that:

*“Recognition of wider achievement alongside attainment is a strength to take forward in supporting children and young people to achieve their full potential.”*

Reflecting on the youth work and school collaboration during the 2022 Scottish Learning Festival webinar, Denise Crawford, Head Teacher of

Inverclyde Academy described key ways in which youth work is helping address the poverty-related attainment gap in her school community:

- helping young people to overcome barriers to learning
- nurturing social emotional wellbeing
- providing flexible, tailored support
- creating diverse learning pathways through which young people can develop and recognise skills and achievements.

It’s hardly a surprise, that recent OECD reports and subsequent recommendations on education reform have all highlighted the value of awards and the need to recognise and value award achievement alongside academic qualifications.

Youth awards provide tried and tested means to addressing the poverty-related attainment gap. By improving attainment and equipping young people with critical employability skills, award participation and achievement can help open key routes out of poverty.

Awards enhance the value and impact of extra-curricular activity, which is widely acknowledged to mitigate the impact of poverty on young people’s attainment. There is however, an urgent need to address related inequalities that limit the opportunities for many young people to access award programmes and benefit from them. This requires all those involved in education, including Government, teachers, youth workers, wider CLD and other educators, to work in partnership and collaboration for the benefit of our young people.



# Handing out life jackets in the 'Perfect Storm'

**Daniel Stevens** of Capital City Partnership, an employability organisation tackling poverty and inequality, believes we need to work more closely together to harness resources and funding.

The phrase 'the perfect storm' was used heavily during the 2007-2008 financial crisis, alluding to the conditions that led to the collapse of the world economy, a storm made up of economic, political, social and societal problems that led to a complete financial crisis.

15 years later, I believe we are witnessing another 'perfect storm', but this time the gathering clouds are much darker, and are disproportionately affecting the well-being and prospects of our young people.

The first black cloud is well documented, the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the chief concerns for every parent during the pandemic was the impact lockdowns would have on the educational and social development of their children. The simple reality is that humans are social creatures, and for two years the pandemic meant we had to adapt how we interacted with others. This inevitably ties into the mental health crisis we are facing. According to the mental health charity

Young Minds one in six young people are identified as having a mental health issue, and 83% of young people said the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health.

When registering young people onto our employability service, the vast majority self-identify as struggling with some kind of mental health barrier (usually depression or anxiety). This shouldn't come as a surprise. As we came out of the pandemic you could sense a great deal of social anxiety in the air, such a long period of isolation was bound to have consequences particularly on developing minds.

Another concern is the narrow understanding we hold over the long-term impacts of unlimited access to the internet and in particular social media. Young people are constantly able to compare themselves to not just close friends and families, but the perfect versions of everyone they know as well as complete strangers that are displayed on various social

medias. This can create massive amounts of insecurity and anxiety, as young people feel they are 'behind' and not where they should be in life.

The feeling of 'being behind' is only further exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis. In the context of this crisis, the prospect of achieving some of the 'big' life goals is ever out of reach, goals such as buying a car, a house, getting married, going on holiday all can seem impossibly difficult as prices continue to increase yet wages remain stagnant.

Although I have not fully covered all the different elements making up this storm, the need to support our young people is hopefully clear. Organisations across the public, private and third sector must work together to ensure we are drawing on the funding pots and expertise we have available to best help the young people in our areas, and provide life jackets to those young people most at risk of drowning.



“ Youth work plays a significant part in ensuring children and young people can access their rights to good mental and physical health as well as their educational, social and recreational rights. It's particularly important to children and young people who experience disadvantage, including those living in poverty, young carers, disabled children and young people, LGBT and minority ethnic communities. ”

**Bruce Adamson,**  
Children and Young People's  
Commissioner





# Giving flight to opportunity

It takes courage and creativity to narrow the poverty-related attainment gap. In West Dunbartonshire the positive impact of youth work partnerships with schools has been put beyond question. Youth workers want to see more investment in this highly effective approach that's proving crucial for young people living through poverty.

West Dunbartonshire Council Working4U service aims to help people to overcome barriers to social and economic inclusion. The Youth Connections Team at Working4U has built a strong partnership with third sector youth work and formal education in order to help tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. School partners are clear that youth workers can help to engage young people in learning, and also build relationships with families so that poverty and disadvantage can be tackled more holistically.

In West Dunbartonshire, youth work support is offered in school as an effective early intervention strategy and more flexibly in the community to provide alternative educational pathways for young people who, for a range of complex reasons, consistently struggle to attend mainstream school.

Focused on early intervention, the **Student and Family Engagement (S&FE) Hub** within the Vale of Leven Academy has been designed as a one-stop-shop for all pupils and their families to help improve aspects of their school and home life. In the first instance, a S&FE Hub Youth Worker works individually with each young person, referred through the school's Pastoral Care Team.

Together, they discuss barriers to engagement as the young person perceives them, alongside concerns raised by the school, before co-designing a tailored learning programme. Taking the form of one-to-one support and group work with activities to provide mental health support, build confidence and opportunities for achievement and attainment. Alongside this work with young people, a S&FE Hub Family Support Worker works with parents and carers, who are also referred by the school, to provide financial and welfare advice, and opportunities to access learning opportunities and employability

support. A recent evaluation of the Hub provides clear evidence of positive impact in young people's mental health, sense of self-worth, engagement in learning and school attendance.

*"My pupils have improved in terms of attendance and health and wellbeing and they enjoy working with hub youth work staff."*

J.Milner,  
Principle Pastoral Care Teacher

The Alternative Pathway programme, piloted in 2022, offers home and community-based youth work support to young people who are struggling to attend mainstream school. Participants are paired with a youth worker who is their primary contact, and there is a careful process of trust-building through which a clear picture emerges of the challenges the young person is facing. Once the relationship is established, the youth worker and young person work together to identify and access wider support and learning opportunities. Some young people on the programme have engaged in group work, qualifications and accreditations, where this was not anticipated at the outset. And a wide range of options for achievement are being offered including 'interrupted learning' classes for qualifications in Maths, English and other academic subjects, and a 'Thrive' post-school programme leading to a modern apprenticeship and horticulture awards.

*"I've never liked school with all that's happened over the years. This isn't like school at all, it's better. I've always liked art but never thought I was good enough to get a qualification & I have, it really feels amazing."*  
Young Person

Over time, the **Alternative Pathway** programme is also helping to improve relationships with families. Parents express relief that the emphasis is on their child's learning rather than school attendance.

Youth work and formal education partners are clear about the value of partnership in making the most of local resources to support young people.

*"Youth work brings high quality, personalised approaches to nurture and learning loss – and they also offer flexibility, they are there in the evenings and during the holidays when there is still a need for the support."*

Gill Graham, Involvement and Engagement Officer, West Dunbartonshire Education Services

When considering the enablers of effective collaboration, partners highlight the importance of strategies and structures that enable joint planning. In West Dunbartonshire, youth work is integrated into wider community planning and partnership programmes, like those described here, and are regularly reviewed as part of the Local Authority's 'Nurture Delivery Improvement Group'. There is also a strong focus on robust joint evaluation.

Youth work and formal education partners also recognise that there is much more to do, and more investment needed.

*"If we had more resource there, that would be amazing. There's a growing demand for the Alternative Pathway programme, if more young people had accessible gateways to youth work sooner, fewer would get to the point of school refusal."*

Gillian Kirkwood, CEO, YSortit

It's clear that the best partnership approaches to education require both courage and creativity in response to need, and perhaps more than anything, genuine trust and strong communication on both sides:

*"We know it is a priority - we can't afford to be scared of it. Young people are the motivation. They were already disengaged and needed a different kind of support. What helped was that we felt that our partners shared our sense of urgency and had confidence in our ability to make this work – we've been able just go for this and learn together as we go."*

Billyjoe McLaughlin,  
Working 4U Team Leader,  
Youth Work





# The cost of living crisis through the lens of climate justice and youth work



Global energy demand, government economic and environmental policies and uncertainties caused by Russia's war on Ukraine have led to a significant increase in energy bills, highlighting the intimate link between the cost of living and climate crisis.

**Naomi Dixon, YouthLink Scotland's Development Officer for Learning for Sustainability** tells us youth workers are key to giving our young people a voice for their future.



We know from [research at IDS](#) that climate change cannot be separated from issues of poverty, sanitation, education, or food security; they are all interconnected. Disadvantaged and lower income groups of young people are likely ['to be the most negatively affected by climate change'](#) while contributing the least to it. The financial impact of the cost of living crisis on young people from lower income households will ultimately cause a ripple effect on their health and wellbeing as families choose between eating or heating their homes during the winter.

Concerns about these inequitable outcomes for different people and their vulnerability to the impact of climate change is often referred to as ['climate injustice'](#).

There are significant things we can do to tackle the climate and cost of living crises in tandem. Youth workers can ensure young people are not left behind and are empowered to have a voice.



## Support young people to access green jobs

The transformation that's needed to tackle climate change can be a chance to fix other economic injustices, including employability. A 'just transition' is the term that describes this need to move to ['a more sustainable economy in a way that's fair to everyone.'](#) Youth workers can and should be a part of supporting this just transition, encouraging young people into sustainable, high-quality jobs. Greenpeace has estimated that the UK government could help create [1.8 million jobs](#) by investing in a green economic recovery.

Improved careers education and support to help young people understand opportunities available to them in the green economy and embedding environmental knowledge as a core employability skill are a handful of ways to future-proof the

environment, economy and careers of young people. The ['Growing Green Careers'](#) report makes the case for supporting more entry-level pathways into green jobs across sectors and embraces the idea that every job 'has to be a green job'.

## Encourage young people to take action and understand the link between inequalities and climate change

As youth workers, you can support young people to take action to support disadvantaged communities to tackle the effects of climate change. It is important for young people to engage in what policy and decision makers are doing about these systemic issues. Talking with those in power, like writing to their MSPs or campaigning in their communities can have a huge impact. There are a range of [resources on our website](#) for inspiration, activities, and toolkits to use with youth groups around the themes of climate justice.

## Champion the need for green energy

Youth workers can raise awareness of the need to move towards a fairer, zero-carbon society. The sector can highlight how moving towards renewable, greener energy will make us less dependent on the skyrocketing cost of fossil fuels. Phasing out fossil fuels and investment in green energy measures is critical to keep warming as close to 1.5 degrees as possible, as well as [reducing our energy costs](#).

To avoid the worst effects of climate change, we have to work with all sectors to secure the best outcomes possible for young people, particularly those most severely impacted. Embedding concepts of climate justice and sustainability into youth work practice will help us avoid catastrophic climate change and will create a fairer and better future for young people living in poverty across Scotland.



# Informed, connected and empowered

## youth information that makes a real difference

**The Young Scot National Entitlement Card**  
is reducing the impact of poverty on the lives of young people.

Poverty prevents too many young people from making informed decisions, connecting with opportunities and being empowered to participate in society. During their journey into adulthood, it's these decisions and choices that will impact their future lives.

Young people living in poverty face challenges that those from our least deprived communities don't. They often must work harder to achieve their goals and get fewer opportunities to succeed.

The free smart-enabled Young Scot National Entitlement Card (Young Scot NEC) connects young people to services and opportunities such as school meals, smart building access and library services offered through local authorities, free and concessionary public transport funded by the Scottish Government and rewards and discounts through Young

Scot. Using their Young Scot NECs, young people can save money with in-person and online discounts at local and national outlets in Scotland and across Europe.

As part of our [#YSAAttain](#) programme, working in collaboration with the Scottish Government, local authorities, Transport Scotland, the Improvement Service and the National Entitlement Card Programme Office to close the attainment gap, we have developed innovative ways to use the Young Scot NEC and Young Scot services to help young people living in poverty.

We've been doing this by working with local authorities to deliver practical, local entitlements to young people. These include local information, travel tickets, out of school food provision, access to leisure and extra-curricular activities, and help to reduce the cost of the school day. These are all known



to improve health and wellbeing – drivers to improving attainment, reducing inequality, and challenging poverty. All young people in Scotland have access to the free [Young Scot NEC](#) and offering extra entitlements, which are accessed using the card, is a discreet and non-stigmatising way of supporting them.

We have received feedback from young people who have told us that this work has made a difference in their lives. It has supported them to feel confident, explore new opportunities and reconnect with family and friends. Young people's expertise, insight, creativity and sense of fairness are crucial, taking account of their lived experiences, aspirations, needs and circumstances.



“ Research from [Young Scot](#) shows 91% of young people have already been impacted by the recent cost of living increases in Scotland. ”

## Cost Crisis

Young Scot's new information hub provides a one-stop-shop for young people to access key financial information and support. It includes information about saving money and how young people can use their Young Scot NEC to access the hundreds of in-person and online discounts

such as money off exercise classes, cinema tickets and food shopping. It also links to Young Scot's [#AyeFeel](#) mental health and emotional wellbeing resources, and information on government welfare support and how to make a claim.

### Access to free bus travel

Each of the young parents we spoke to talked about the big difference that access to free bus travel makes in their lives.

The free bus travel also helps young people to maintain connections with family and friends, which are a vital part of a young parent's support network:

*“My family is really important to me and I like to spend time with them, the boys get to see family and their cousins which they love to play with. My family live on the outskirts of the city and we have to get two buses to visit them, which can be really expensive. The free travel helps me get them to nursery, especially when the weather is bad.”*

### Access to free meals at a local café

Along with access to free travel, the young people taking part in [#YSAAttain](#) in Dundee get free meals from a local café using their Young Scot NEC.

One of the young parents we spoke to highlighted the benefit this has had on their wellbeing and ability to connect with other young parents,

*“Me and the boys will often meet other young mums in the cafes before or after our group and we can chat, support each other and the kids can play and socialise together. We often use this to meet up, have some food and then take the kids to different places. I feel that my boys are not missing opportunities that they may have if I couldn't afford to take them too.”*

### Closing the attainment gap using the Young Scot National Entitlement Card

Through implementing the [#YSAAttain](#) programme, we ensure that young people can get support in a stigma-free way, as one young mum put it:

*“One of the things I really like about the scheme is that no-one needs to know why I have free bus fare and free meals, it is just on my Young Scot Card. It doesn't say that I am part of a project getting these because I can't always afford it. I don't have to explain myself. I don't feel the same shame or be embarrassed. The staff in the café are friendly they just accept the card, they have got to know us as Katie and the boys, and I feel that I am not judged. The free bus travel is just the same as other people who get free travel for lots of different reasons.”*



**Youth work plays a vital role in supporting the needs of young people whilst ensuring they have equal access to services and that their voices are heard.**

**To help tackle the poverty crisis we must secure:**

- 1.** | A right for all young people to access youth work opportunities
- 2.** | Investment in youth work services
- 3.** | Formal recognition of the positive impact of youth work across public policy areas

[Read more here](#)

**[www.youthlinkscotland.org](http://www.youthlinkscotland.org)**



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