

## **Together (SACR) Membership Spotlight**

### **YouthLink Scotland**

#### **How long have you been a member of Together?**

We have been a member of Together (SACR) for 5 years

#### **Tell us about the work of your organisation in Scotland (e.g where, type of work, who works for you etc).**

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work in Scotland. Our strength lies in the diversity and dedication of our membership of over 120 voluntary and statutory youth work organisations across Scotland, spanning every local authority. We are the collective voice of youth work. We represent and advocate for the sector so that all young people can access high-quality youth work. We take our role as a rights-respecting and promoting practice organisation seriously. We believe in the power of youth work to transform the lives of young people for the better, helping to build a fairer society, free of discrimination, where young people have all the support they need to reach their full potential.

We want to help create a nation which genuinely values young people's contribution to society, where young people have the support and the tools they need to live whole and happy lives where children young people have a seat at the decision-making table and play a leading role in shaping the world we share.

Our Outcomes are that all young people have access to high-quality youth work, young people are supported by sustainable investment in youth work (supported by a workforce that is skilled and effective) and that the positive role of youth in achieving national outcomes and local priorities is acknowledged by our partners and reflected in local and national policy.

#### **What projects are you currently working on?**

The upcoming National Youth Work Strategy (2023-2028), which currently sits with Scottish Government awaiting publication, underwent significant co-production with 1000s of young people and youth workers to ensure that the priorities reflect the interests, knowledge, experience, expertise and skills of all youth work stakeholders to contribute towards a meaningful legacy to the year of young people 2018.

Scotland's Young People's Forest will be the first forest in Scotland that is co-designed, led and governed by young people. The mission of the project is to create and regenerate native Scottish forests, which are accessible to all. This will help promote and connect education, wildlife, and well-being. This project is a response to the climate emergency to demonstrate young people's passion, activism and commitment to nature, biodiversity, and the natural environment. We also support young people to make their views heard through Scotland's Young People's Forest panel. This is a group of 12 young people aged 11 – 25 and based across Scotland, in partnership with Young Scot to ensure young people are meaningfully engaged in codesigning this project.

As part of our on-going commitment to build research capacity within the youth work sector, our Youth-led research (through a train-the-trainers approach) supports youth workers and young people to develop the research skills and confidence to explore issues that matter to them. A current project is Imagine a Man where young people are researching positive masculinity in their communities.

We support delivery of YouthBank Scotland, an innovative grant making and empowerment initiative run by young people for young people. It builds on their skills and experiences to enable them to give cash for action, funding young people's ideas for the benefit of the wider community. Young people involved are supported to achieve three SCQF credit rated awards; Introduction to Grant Making, Developing Decision Making Skills and Developing Leadership Skills

We offer The Participative Democracy Certificate (PDC). This is a SCQF credit rated youth award developed by YouthLink Scotland for young people involved in decision making processes. It acknowledges and develops communication, decision-making and negotiation skills in the context of democratic engagement.

The Values and Ethics in Participatory Budgeting & Grant Making Qualification (PBQ) is a new SCQF credit Rated qualification created by YouthLink Scotland and key partners to ensure young people have the skills, knowledge and support to fully engage in local Participatory Budgeting opportunities and have a direct say in local funding decisions.

As the #iWill lead in Scotland, we encourage and empower young people to take action, make a difference and influence change within their communities. This includes the environment and broader society through activities such as volunteering, fundraising, mentoring, campaigning and activism.

### **How do you support children and families to learn about their rights?**

As part of a recent mapping exercise, we agreed to re-energise our commitment to helping educate the youth work sector to become more knowledgeable so the embodiment of rights is cascaded to children and families. The unique positioning of youth workers within the heart of our local communities makes this possible. When this is done effectively, we can connect rights-based participation more meaningfully with our policy and advocacy work. The relationship is reciprocal which is essential, so rights are explicit at every level of governance across the organisation and within the sector. As such, YouthLink Scotland will continue to discuss rights in all of our work and make rights explicit in every session we do alongside youth workers and young people.

As an example, YouthLink Scotland informs youth workers about children and young people's rights through our Learning for Sustainability (LfS) portfolio, weaving together global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences that support young people's development and understanding of the world around them. LfS is an

entitlement for all learners within the Curriculum for Excellence and aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and UNCRC, central to Scotland's national vision.

In our projects developing digital youth work, our ambition is that youth workers can support young people to navigate their increasingly digitalised life context and understand and exercise their rights in relation to technology and the online world. We deliver training for the sector to help young people to develop digital skills and literacies and to amplify their voices through online and digital creativity. An example of a digital project is Tek Care, a project to develop digital makerspaces co-created by and explicitly tailored for care-experienced young people. The project involves national youth work agencies, volunteers from the Scottish Tech Army and local authority. It aims to help young people with care experience develop digital skills and interests that will change realities for them now and in the future.

### **How can children and young people make their views heard to influence your work?**

We make the views of young people heard through youth work opportunities, including YouthLink Scotland's critical networks, local youth forums and pupil councils. A specific recent example is our work alongside youth workers to ensure that the views of young people are heard within education reform. Over 700 young people participating in youth work across Scotland told us how vital youth was to their learning and development. Youth workers and young people worked side by side to identify what needs to change in education to ensure youth work is a fundamental part of the education offer for all children and young people. This includes access to youth work where and when they need it, feeling safe, supported and included by those who support their learning and having their skills and achievements through youth work recognised alongside formal qualifications.

### **Does your organisation influence policy development on issues affecting children and young people? If so, please share an example.**

The organisation is committed to supporting, connecting and strengthening the youth work sector in Scotland. We aim to influence decision-makers so that local and national governments recognise and invest in youth work across a wide range of policy areas.

We achieve this by:

- Supporting the sector to demonstrate the impact and value of youth work
- Promoting a positive image of young people and youth work
- Undertaking active policy consultations and research that will contribute to a better understanding of the role of youth work and of the needs of young people in Scottish society
- Helping the sector to identify new sources of sustainable funding and make effective use of existing resources
- Representing the range of young people's views and interests of the sector to all political parties and all levels of government
- Encouraging more adults to volunteer or consider a career in youth work
- Providing information and support to the youth work sector and other partners
- Campaigning for equality of access to youth work for all young people

It is our members who make us who we are. It's through their skill, passion and dedication to Scotland's young people that we're able to advocate effectively for the youth work sector.

As just one example of high-level policy engagement YouthLink Scotland worked with youth work leaders to produce [youth work manifestos](#) for the recent local and national elections in Scotland. We asked politicians to commit to three key policy asks.

1. Make access to youth work opportunities a right for young people in Scotland
2. Increase investment in the youth work sector at a Scottish Government and local authority level
3. Formal recognition of youth work within the strategies and policies of Scottish Government and local authorities

As a result, we saw recognition of youth work contained within the party manifestos that followed. The important job now for us all with a stake in youth work is to hold politicians to account, so they deliver on the promises made to the young people which included investment in youth work.

### **What do you enjoy most about being a member of Together?**

Together (SACR) is undoubtedly one of the best membership engagement organisations in Scotland. The group provides accurate and timely information and is adept at leading children's rights campaigning in a way that brings organisations and young people with them. That is a fantastic achievement and a testament to a hardworking, knowledgeable, and supremely talented team. However, the most enjoyable feature about being a Together (SACR) member is the genuine feeling that we are part of something special. We are among a natural and growing movement to bring about positive cultural, legal, and political change to get the best for young people. This feeling is palpable from the organisations' communications, briefings, events and individual meetings with Together (SACR) staff and volunteer members.

### **How can other organisations or individuals get involved or support your work?**

Individuals and organisations can sign up for our fortnightly [e-youth work briefing](#) featuring news, training and events and policy consultations

We would encourage the use of the hashtags #YouthWorkChangesLives and #InvestInYouthWork on your social media channels as we continue to press for more investment in youth work and connected community infrastructure so Scotland truly is the best place for children and young people to grow up.

### **If your organisation was an animal what would it be and why?**

If YouthLink Scotland were an animal it would be a zebra. Why? Because zebras have excellent eyesight in the same way YouthLink Scotland needs to be alert to the needs of its members and continually scanning the policy and political horizon for opportunities and threats. Zebras are indeed prey for faster and stronger animals. However, they are intuitive with a range of other well honed senses. So, when food is

scarce for a zebra or the funding landscape is precarious for youth work, zebras and our organisation respond by drawing upon the many skills at our disposal. Most notably, our members are astute like the zebra, primed to neutralise any threat and use collective might to seize opportunities. The latter is perhaps the animal's most outstanding feature and something it has in common with the role of YouthLink Scotland. Zebras know how to work in the greater interest. They possess the same symbiotic relationship YouthLink Scotland has with its diverse membership, working in partnership with its own and other animals to protect and serve the interests of its community. In the case of Youthlink that Scotland, the protection and enhancement of the youth work sector!

**ENDS**

#### **EDITOR'S NOTES**

YouthLink Scotland's new brand and website will launch in March 2023.