



YouthLink Scotland response to Includem's Voices Report, focussing on families' experiences of poverty and what works in services

Due to YouthLink Scotland's role as the National agency for youth work and our key positioning alongside youth work practitioners and their important role in the lives of young people, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the findings and four interdependent recommendations of Includem's Voices report.

General comments

- Many of the issues echo the demands of youth work sector – particularly in relation to the need for investment and support for the youth work volunteer and paid workforce.
- The layout of the report is exceptionally clear.
- It is positive that focus is given to the participants voices.

Recommendation comments

Children, young people and family support services must take into account and mitigate the wider economic and social factors impacting wellbeing

We are seeing greater recognition of this in national policy. For example, the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) refresh is better acknowledging the need to address attainment within the wider context of poverty, including a holistic approach to supporting young people and families, as part of an improved whole-system approach.

Services should be built on relationship-based practice & working with the whole family where and when they need it

This reflects what we know about the effectiveness of a youth work approach. The relationships formed with a trusted adult are important to young people. YouthLink Scotland's report on the impact of youth work during the coronavirus pandemic¹ noted the negative impact when these crucial relationships were interrupted, as young

¹ [New report outlines impact of youth work during pandemic \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org)

people subsequently could not access face-to-face youth work. The youth work sector upskilled in terms of digital engagement during this time - acting as a lifeline for many

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young people². This compounded the need for continued investment in this area beyond a crisis footing³. However, the positive impact of engaging with whole families during the coronavirus pandemic was reflected in our food insecurities report⁴, where many of the youth work pilots worked alongside the young person within their family. Families commented positively on this approach. The points raised around stigma and choice resonate with our experience of the food insecurity pilot. Therefore, we would support further work to promote the need for a dignified approach to addressing food insecurity and poverty.

Addressing gaps in service provisions and greater partnership working are necessary to support families to overcome complex challenges

It is heartening to see the need to work in partnerships becoming more recognised. We view youth work practitioners as crucial community partners to help support families overcome complex challenges. Many of our youth work networks noted an upsurge in work with whole families (and parents in particular) during the coronavirus pandemic. However, the support offered by youth work practitioners must be utilised and recognised as standard.

Investment in & support of the workforce are critical to enable them to undertake this highly valuable and skilled work.

We agree with the point about continuity and commitment. This is also vitally important for youth workers supporting vulnerable young people. The short-term nature of many funding models can make this difficult to achieve. Perhaps, we need to promote a stronger youth/family voice around this matter to ensure continuity of support and continued investment. It is noteworthy that one of six key themes identified in the upcoming National Youth Work Strategy (NYWS) (2021-2026) is “*Funding and Investment*”. It is also of significance that during YouthLink Scotland’s recent extended equalities consultations on the NYWS themes with groups representing young people from across the protected characteristics that poverty and inequality was highlighted as a key barrier to participating in youth work activities. Tackling poverty and inequality must therefore remain on the agenda across public policy areas. As such, we are pleased to see the recommendations and committed tone contained within the VOICES report. We are keen to keep up the dialogue between YouthLink Scotland and those actively tackling poverty and inequality in Scotland as youth workers have a significant role to play in the process.

² [LGBT Youth Scotland | The Impact of Universal Youth Work \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/)

³ *ibid*

⁴ [YouthLink Scotland | Tackling food insecurity and poverty](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/)

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Contact: YouthLink Scotland, Policy & Research Manager, Kevin Kane,
kkane@youthlinkscotland.org

EDITOR'S NOTES