

## **YouthLink Scotland submission to Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024**

### **YouthLink Scotland**

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work and the collective voice of the sector. We champion and advocate for the youth work sector so that all young people can access high-quality youth work. Our membership of voluntary and statutory youth work organisations and intermediaries, including every local authority, spans all of Scotland.

Our vision is a Scotland where young people realise their full potential through youth work.

### **No Knives, Better Lives**

[No Knives, Better Lives](#) works in partnership with practitioners and young people to understand and address the causes and drivers of youth violence using youth work and public health approaches. The programme is funded by the Scottish Government and has been running since 2009. It is run by YouthLink Scotland.

NKBL builds the capacity of practitioners and young people to take action to reduce youth violence in their communities through training, resources, and topic-specific work. The overall aims of the programme are to reduce weapon carrying by young people and thus reducing youth violence.

### **Youth Work in Scotland**

Youth work is an informal education practice that supports young people's social, emotional and educational development. It has three essential features:

- Young people choose to participate
- Youth work builds on young people's own lived experiences
- Youth work recognises the young person and youth worker as partners in the learning process

The youth work sector in Scotland has a workforce of 80,000 workers, 70,000 of which are volunteers. Collectively they reach over 350,000 young people annually.

### **Key Messages**

#### **1. Take a rights-based approach to youth violence**

A child's rights-based approach to youth violence involves, amongst others, placing children's participation and best interests at the heart of policy and practice.

In the most recent concluding observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended the UK *"adopt a child rights-based approach to addressing violence or other disturbances in schools, including by prohibiting the presence of*

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*police in schools and providing regular training for teachers on relevant guidance for addressing such disturbances in a child-sensitive manner.”<sup>1</sup>*

Children and young people must be involved in the solutions to youth violence at a local and national level.

### **2. Recognise complex needs of young people**

Research is beginning to show the impact of the fracturing of relationships and support for children and young people during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Nearly one in ten young people said they did not have a trusted adult they could speak to.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, family and peer support have a significant association with family affluence.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, the mental health and wellbeing crisis for young people means there are significant needs that must be addressed. In 2022, the HBSC survey recorded the lowest levels of happiness among girls since 1994.<sup>4</sup>

The cost of living crisis and child poverty serve to increase societal distress and could create the conditions for increased violence within communities.

### **3. Support young people to navigate social media positively**

*“It is not reasonable to design services to be compulsive and then reprimand children for being preoccupied with their phone.”* 5Rights Foundation, [Disrupted Childhood](#)

There is significant research on the use of social media, but not on the specific content accessed. Our current research with girls told of daily exposure to extreme violent and graphic content, including physical violence between young people, animal cruelty, and bullying.

Problematic social media use is associated with lower mental, school and social wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> HBSC Scotland 2022 study found almost one in seven (14%) adolescents reported problematic social media use, with girls more likely to report problematic social media use than boys.<sup>6</sup>

Harmful views about masculinity and their advocates have been amplified on social media with teachers and school staff reporting this has led to an increase in misogynistic views expressed by boys and young men in school.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#) (June 2023)

<sup>2</sup> [Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children \(HBSC\) Scotland National Report 2022](#) (June 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> [Behaviour in Scottish Schools: research report 2023](#)

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European Parliament passed a resolution in December 2023 on addictive design of online services and consumer protection to push for a review of EU legislation on addictive design and to advocate for ethical design by default, acknowledging that children and young people are more vulnerable to addictive features and to mental health symptoms.<sup>8</sup>

### **4. Increase youth work funding and provision**

Youth workers routinely work alongside the most marginalised in our society. Through engaging in youth work, young people are more resilient, optimistic for the future, consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.<sup>9</sup> Low-level mental health support by youth workers in schools has been shown to improve health and wellbeing, improve relationships and develop coping strategies.<sup>10</sup>

There is currently an urgent need for investment in the youth work sector. The demand for youth work is significantly outstripping the sector's ability to respond. Cuts to youth work budgets in both the voluntary and statutory sectors have resulted in increased pressure on other services such as mental health services, social work, the NHS, the police and the criminal justice system.

Recent briefing paper on violence reduction in Scotland pointed to the need for physical and digital safe spaces for young people.<sup>11</sup> Research conducted in 2020 showed a correlation between youth service budget cuts and increases in knife crime in England.<sup>12</sup>

Youth work in Scotland is a critical partner in preventing youth violence. All young people, and especially those who have been harmed or are at risk of causing harm, should have access to quality youth work provision. Increased investment is needed in the youth work sector to ensure this.

### **Case Studies**

#### **Girvan Youth Trust**

Friday Night Football is a partnership diversionary programme delivered between Girvan Youth Trust, Girvan Football Club, Active Girvan & Community Safety. The aim of it is to provide an activity for and build relationships with local young people which diverts them away from anti-social behaviour and other risk-taking behaviours. The programme was

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<sup>8</sup> European Parliament, [Report on addictive design of online services and consumer protection in the EU single market](#) (December 2023)

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the skills young people can develop through youth work, see the [Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework](#).

<sup>10</sup> YouthLink Scotland, [The Impact of Youth Work: Providing low-level mental health support in schools in Dumfries and Galloway](#) (November 2023)

<sup>11</sup> Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, [Safe Space: The Past and Present of Violence Reduction in Scotland](#) (January 2024)

<sup>12</sup> APPG on Knife Crime, [Securing a brighter future: The role of youth services in tackling knife crime](#) (2020)

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developed based on the interests of the young people and found through their engagement with the Youth Trust's detached youth workers.

Friday Night Football regularly sees over 30 young people participate in the session. Football is used as a tool to address issues such as violence, positive masculinity and sectarianism, as well as promoting positive wellbeing and an active lifestyle. The project has seen a 22% decrease in youth disorder on Friday evenings since the programme started.

### **Glasgow Girls Club**

'Strong Girls' is a transformative initiative for vulnerable young women, offering a safe space for workshops in skills development, creativity, and entrepreneurship since 2022. Empowering participants, the project builds resilience and community ties. Collaborating with frontline services, it tackles social isolation, low self-esteem, and economic challenges, often linked to offending. Tailored to diverse needs, the participant-centred programme merges creative expression with community partnerships to address complex issues, nurturing resilience and confidence.

### **East Renfrewshire Council**

East Renfrewshire Council's Community Learning and Development (CLD) team supports young people aged 11-25 through school and community programmes, emphasising prevention and early intervention. Services include detached youth work, group sessions targeting risk-taking behaviours and community clubs. Programmes address issues raised by young people and local data.

By fostering trusting relationships, the team empowers young people to explore and mitigate risks, leading to improved decision-making and reduced harm. Participants gain knowledge, skills, and autonomy in health, behaviour and safety. The initiatives promote pro-social activities, offering positive alternatives and a supportive environment for mental health. Ultimately, the programmes equip young people to navigate challenges and contribute positively to their community. The majority of young people who participate in the programmes report they are making better decisions and reducing risks to themselves and peers.

### **McDonalds – Y2K Dalkeith partnership [VIDEO](#)**

Children in Need have partnered with McDonalds across the UK to connect local restaurants with youth work services. Children in Need are supporting McDonald's to train every member of staff in basic youth work techniques alongside Contextual Safeguarding, and the ambition is to encourage other retailers to do the same, with McDonald's taking the lead. As part of the UK partnership, a grant has been given to fund 150 certificates in youth work over the next three years.

One example of an already successful partnership is with Y2K in Dalkeith, Midlothian. The partnership has resulted in a reduction in anti-social behaviour and opened up new employability pathways for young people.