

The Link

IMPACT AND INFLUENCE

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developed
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79%

improved
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and wellbeing

78%

overcame
barriers
to learning

61%

were more
engaged
in learning

The National Agency's CEO, Tim Frew, Talks Impact and Systemic Change



Impact evaluation; storytelling; quantitative and qualitative research; outcomes-focussed practice; logic modelling; piloting; theories of change; tests of change; contribution analysis; social impact measurement; big data; cost-benefit analysis; SROI; best value...

These are just some of the plethora of ways that we assess the impact of youth work on young people and the significant positive influence we have, especially with young people at the margins.

But how much critical reflection takes place? Not just by practitioners, but by the decision-makers and funders as to what is and isn't working well? We have observed recently in the review of our qualifications and education system that trust in the way we ascribe value has diminished somewhat, with concern that algorithms in the background were pre-determining individual outcomes.

This Link Magazine is all about the youth work sector's impact and influence. We know as a sector that measuring impact is a complex task, but a task we cannot shirk.

First and foremost, it's important that young people know for themselves what impact youth work has had

on them. It's their story, it's their journey, that is at the heart of youth work. We have a duty of care to handle these rich and individual stories within an ethical framework.

The National Outcomes and Skills Framework that the sector has developed should never be viewed as set of prescribed outcomes, but rather a framework of likely outcomes, skills, attributes, and capabilities enhanced, if the youth work pedagogy is sound.

Secondly, we must remember that the pedagogy, summed up in the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work Statement, and underpinned by broader CLD values and ethics, includes youth workers walking alongside young people in their learner journey. There is an objectivity and a critically reflective support that the youth worker offers as a trusted adult, that also has a place in the evaluative process, something decision-makers and funders must also pay heed too.

Thirdly, we must be mindful that having understood what young people are saying to us and then what youth workers report, we need to triangulate that evidence base with the data that comes from others.

What do public health, formal education, social work and youth justice say to us? What data do they hold about young people and our sector? Are they asking the right questions and are they sharing that data with us?

A final thought... Increasingly as we see a questioning of the validity of some of the hard measures of success we have accepted as the gold standard in young people's success, how might we foster a better understanding of the social and emotional attributes and capabilities which are inevitably harder to measure but have deeper meaning and longer lasting impact? I think if we can do that, we will be in a much stronger place to influence the kind of systemic change we need to ensure that youth work moves beyond the discretionary and into the mainstream.

Rachael Hatfield: A Personal Journey

When I look back to 2015 and to the girl who was struggling in school. She had no idea why a youth worker was encouraging her to go to the local youth forum after school as she had 'opinions that mattered'. I wish I could tell her to jump at the opportunity and not stall as it would be the best decision she would ever make.

That girl was me, my mental health wasn't good at all, and I wasn't a very social person. To anyone who reads this and has met me over recent years, you might be surprised to learn that there was a time when

presenting and facilitating absolutely petrified me to my core. Now, well now I can facilitate, present, and easily talk for Scotland (or at least the Highlands where I stay).

As I sit and reflect on the time since 2015, I think of the friendships I've made over the years and with people who I wouldn't have met if it wasn't for youth work. These friendships go far across the Highlands, up to Thurso and over to Skye but also across Scotland and even as far south as London and Birmingham. I also have a wealth of professional contacts who have been invaluable when I entered the more professional realm. Youth work opportunities gave me the chance to network with people I might never have been round the same table as in any other situation. Although, I've always had my youth workers close by if I needed them. Even now at 24, still find

myself reaching out and asking for their advice or guidance on matters that I need someone I trust to help me with.

The impact youth workers have had on me over the years is something I really don't know how to put into words. While I'm typing I think of a couple of youth workers who really stand out to me. I think of one who taught me the importance of relationship building and being opening minded about people, that when I meet someone in any context, it's a clean slate and take it from there. My mind also goes to a youth worker who taught me about redefining the norm and that young people can be part of projects where they develop a new norm just for them. The best thing about both those youth workers is that I don't know if they realised just how much I took from them both.

To round off, there's a lot I didn't write here but there's definitely a lot I could say. Youth work is essential in giving young people a chance to flourish and thrive, and I hope my little snapshot reflects that. If you take anything away from this, I hope it's that I am proof that youth work really does change lives.

Rachael Hatfield





Youth Work Education Recovery Fund: A National Picture of Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented challenges, disrupting the lives of young people across the globe. In Scotland, one initiative stood out for its impact — the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund.

The Youth Work Education Recovery Fund bridged the gap between youth work and formal education. It provided over 48,000 activity hours for school pupils, fostering a strong connection between these two essential components of youth development. The fund's reach extended across all 32 local authorities in Scotland, creating effective partnerships between youth work organisations, both statutory and third sector, and formal education.

Promoting Holistic Development

The projects funded by the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund were designed to support not just academic growth but the holistic development of young people. Many programmes incorporated elements of outdoor learning and creative arts, recognising

the value of diverse experiences in shaping young minds.

Each project aimed to deliver at least three of the following outcomes:

- Developing young people's skills, including interpersonal skills.
- Improving young people's physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Enabling young people to overcome barriers to learning.
- Increasing young people's engagement in learning.
- Improving school attendance.
- Recognising young people's wider achievement and attainment.
- Enhancing young people's literacy and numeracy.
- Building readiness for work.
- Securing positive destinations.

The Youth Work Approach

What makes the youth work approach so effective in engaging and re-engaging young people in learning? The answer lies in the ability of youth workers to build strong, authentic relationships. They create positive conditions for learning, where young people feel trusted, respected, and listened to. Parents and teachers also appreciate youth work organisations' flexible and inclusive approach to learning.

Challenges and Ongoing Support

While the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund demonstrated the potential for effective collaboration, it also highlighted the need for ongoing support. Collaborative working between youth work organisations, schools, and Community Learning and Development (CLD) partners yielded wide-ranging benefits but also presented significant challenges.

Continued investment and support across the system are essential to develop and consistently embed effective collaborative practice. This remains a focus in the national programme led by the Youth Work and Schools Partnership team at YouthLink Scotland. It aligns with the refreshed mission for the Scottish Attainment Challenge, recognising the vital role that youth work can play in education recovery and improving outcomes for all young people.

Scope and Positive Outcomes

The scope of the programme was impressive:

- Supported by £3 million in funding from the 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.
- Targeted support in areas of multiple deprivation.

The impact is equally impressive:

- 82% of participating young people developed their skills.
- 79% experienced improved physical health and wellbeing.
- 78% overcame barriers to learning.
- 61% were more engaged in learning.
- 37% achieved recognition of wider achievement and attainment.
- 96% improved their literacy and numeracy.
- 81% secured positive destinations.
- 55% showed improvements in school attendance.
- 35% developed their readiness for work.

The Youth Work Education Recovery Fund has not only helped young people recover from the challenges of the pandemic but has also demonstrated the power of collaboration and youth work in supporting our young people and providing a whole education approach.



"I was so determined to reach the goals I set myself — that feeling when I did was amazing. It's made me think differently about school and my choices going forward."

— Young Person



"To see his spark reignite — priceless."

— Parent



"Youth workers have skills — and huge insight from the relationships they build with young people in communities — to help us engage young people in learning."

— Teacher



"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



"This is magnificent. What a model for others if we get the chance to do this again."

— Highland Council

The Impact of Low-Level Mental Health in Schools: Dumfries & Galloway Council Youth Work Team

Navigating the challenges of adolescence is a universal experience, but for many young people, these years can be marred by mental health struggles.

In Dumfries & Galloway Council, the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project is pioneering an innovative approach that helps young people to understand and manage their mental health effectively. This project is a testament to the incredible impact that youth work, partnership working with educational psychology, and a person-centred approach can have on the well-being of young people.

The project is committed to delivering low-level mental health support to more than 500 young people annually across all 16 local authority secondary schools. It acts as a crucial first point of contact for young people and is often the bridge that connects them to more specialised support when necessary. By offering a unique blend of youth work principles, the project aims to help young people understand their emotions and develop coping strategies.

Dumfries & Galloway's Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project stands out as the first of its kind in Scotland, marking a collaborative effort between the council's youth work and educational psychology teams, schools, and the NHS. The youth information workers involved play a pivotal role in assisting young people in understanding their emotions, navigating distressing experiences, and developing effective coping strategies. By merging counselling skills with youth work expertise and values, the team creates a supportive and non-judgemental environment.

The impact of the project is unmistakable as young people achieve milestones they previously struggled with. Effective communication, collaboration, patience, encouragement, and, most importantly, youth

involvement in shaping the project have been instrumental in ensuring that services are tailored to meet the needs of the young people they support.

YouthLink Scotland, Northern Star and University of St Andrews were commissioned in 2022 to conduct an external, independent evaluation of the programme. The qualitative and statistical findings highlight the complex issues and challenges faced by young people and deterioration of their wellbeing that led to the need for this project. Issues included, difficulties at home or in relationships, caring responsibilities, substance abuse, low confidence and self-esteem, risk-taking behaviour, anger management issues, behaviour in school, bereavement, anxiety, stress, and low mood.

Through the qualitative analysis, the evaluation found that the impact of the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project on young people included:

- Developing skills for wellbeing — including learning how to open up and share feelings, self-awareness and learning coping strategies and tools.
 - Improving health and wellbeing — including increased confidence and self-esteem and feeling listened to.
 - Positive change — including improved relationships, improved attitudes about and attendance at school.
- The study found that these impacts on young people were achieved through:
- A youth work approach — including a relationship with a youth worker, young person-centred approach, regular, frequent, consistent contact, a safe space and active listening.
 - A counselling skills approach — including discussion and self-exploration, solution focused, coping strategies and healthy relationships.
- Wider impacts of the project included:
- Schools viewed the project as a really valuable part of the support they are able to offer young people.
 - A deep and mutually enhancing partnership between Education Psychology and Youth Work.
 - Alongside the qualitative analysis, the statistical analysis showed that it is possible that the project contributed to changes in the CAMHS referrals but this is difficult to determine within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery.

Quotes from young people involved:



"Having a familiar face is better than a stranger or someone you don't know well as it's easier to talk to them and be more open. Youth workers can help more than teachers and give advice. It being informal helps me feel relaxed and allows me to talk more."



"My attendance used to be below 60% before I got support from my youth worker. I never used to enjoy school, I would miss more than two days a week at school... Working with my youth worker motivated me to try harder, it made me feel a lot safer at school knowing that if I didn't want to turn up that day I had someone to speak to without being judged."



This research evidences the impact of the project and highlights the challenges facing many of our young people throughout Dumfries and Galloway. We have adopted a person-centred approach to supporting young people mental health and well-being and this findings reports demonstrates the effectiveness of the Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project model. [Cllr Richard Brodie — Chair of Education and Learning Committee, Dumfries & Galloway Council](#)

The Low-Level Mental Health in Schools Project is an excellent example of innovative partnership working between the Youth Work Service and Educational Psychology. This collaborative approach has ensured the success of the project throughout the implementation, delivery and monitoring phases. Dumfries and Galloway Council are immensely proud of the work undertaken by the Youth Information Workers across the secondary schools and wider Youth Work Team, and Lead Officers with oversight responsibility. [Cllr Ian Blake — Chair of Communities Committee, Dumfries & Galloway Council](#)

Shaping the future of youth work:

A manifesto for change



Despite the obvious hurdles, in 2021 all of Scotland's major political parties pledged their support for the youth work sector, committing to strengthening its provision. This achievement is evidence of our collective power through advocacy and the vital role that political influence plays in securing a better future for our young people.

Our journey in advocating for further investment in youth work took a significant step when the sector launched its manifesto in February 2021. "Resilient, Resourceful, and Reimagined" serves as a rallying call to all parties, both at local and national levels, urging immediate action to safeguard and invest in vital youth work services. This is especially crucial in mitigating the continued negative impacts of the pandemic on our young people.

This national manifesto was not shaped in isolation, it emerged through extensive consultations with our members and the wider youth work sector. This process involved direct consultations with YouthLink Scotland members, sector-wide surveys, engagement through our sector networks, and policy seminars. We engaged in consultations with Scotland's major political parties. We met with party leaders, key spokespeople, and policy teams to present our manifesto asks and the current state of the sector, supported by strong evidence of youth work's positive impact.

As we approached the Scottish Parliament election in May 2021 we secured policy commitments in every party's manifesto including a commitment from the SNP to increase investment in youth work and strengthen the statutory basis for youth work.

You can find all the party's commitments in Resilient, Resourceful, Reimagined... and Recognised

In 2023 we published "Invest In Young People Invest In Youth Work - What you can do to support our young people"

This manifesto for action lays out what national politicians and local councillors can do to ensure our youth work sector is properly supported and invested in. The new campaign resource also encourages action from people at grassroots level.

Yes, we do live in challenging times but by demonstrating our powerful and undeniable impact, continuing to speak as one voice and taking our influence to the corridors of Holyrood and beyond, we will make change for the youth work sector, and our young people.

The manifesto has three key asks:

1. A right for all young people to access youth work opportunities.
2. Investment in youth work services at national and local level.
3. Formal recognition of the positive impact of youth work across public policy areas.



Sarah Paterson, YouthLink Scotland's Public Affairs Manager, sheds light on the journey of our sector manifesto, from its conception to its pivotal role in influencing party policies.

Influence is a multifaceted concept, especially during economically challenging times, and we are no stranger to its complexities. At the heart of these complexities is the struggle to make our voices heard in an environment where government budgets are tightening, and powerful sector unions dominate the discord on cuts and investment.

At YouthLink Scotland, we know the crucial role of political influence in shaping policies that directly impact youth workers and the young people they support. Our approach as the national agency for youth work involves building strong relationships with

governments, politicians, and other stakeholders. It's not just a strategy, it's a deep commitment to raising awareness and creating real change for the youth work sector.

We know times are challenging, and in particular for our sector, we may indeed have one of the most difficult lobbying roles in the third sector, as there is currently no legal duty to provide youth services in Scotland. Then add in the dwindling landscape of investment for public services and education, and a cost-of-living crisis which hits young people disproportionately.

New Scots:

North Ayrshire CLD Team's Impact in Youth Work and Equality



Adapting to a new homeland after fleeing war and persecution can be a daunting journey, particularly for young refugees. Finding a sense of belonging and a supportive community becomes vital during such transitions. In North Ayrshire, the New Young Scots Team has emerged as a beacon of hope, actively promoting the value of youth work and helping young people as they arrive in Scotland engage with opportunities within their local community and beyond.

Creating Inclusive Spaces

The team's commitment extends to engaging with young women from Syria and Afghanistan and their families. This approach ensures that provision is not only understood but also supported by the families, breaking down potential cultural barriers that could hinder participation. The result has been the creation of several thriving girls-only groups, providing safe spaces for personal and collective growth.

An Empowering Achievement

The impact of the New Young Scots Team goes beyond providing activities. It has paved the way for remarkable achievements. One notable success story involves a young participant from Syria who became the first refugee to hold the position of Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP). This achievement has had a profound impact on the entire Syrian community, sparking meaningful discussions

about democratic processes and what it means to be a new Scot in North Ayrshire.

Zaid, one of the participants, shared their thoughts:



"I really enjoy the activities we do. It makes me very happy and excited to get new skills and new experiences. It is fun. It is better to get out and not sit at home. I learn new words and I feel very comfortable in the group."

Key Achievements and Contributions

Over the course of four years, the North Ayrshire Council CLD New Scots Team has achieved significant milestones:

- Establishment of two New Scots Duke of Edinburgh groups, including one exclusively for girls.
- Creation of the Swans group, a female-only refugee support group.
- Development of the Syrian/ Afghan girls' football club.
- Formation of the Nova Scotia football group, open to both boys and girls.
- Launch of New Scots badminton and volleyball clubs.
- Support for a Syrian young person to become a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament.
- Collaboration with Judo Scotland, KA Leisure, and Active Schools to deliver a New Scots judo club.
- Partnership with community arts groups for an art exhibition.
- Support for the refugee-led community group, offering youth and family activities.
- Assistance to the Ukrainian guest-led community group, providing youth and family activities.
- Collaboration with Y-Dance for the "Diverse Moves" project, catering to children and young people from the New Scots community.
- Partnership with Irvine Legacy Hub to provide New Scots opportunities for young people, including a boys-only group.

- Support for a homework club for New Scots in collaboration with NAC youth work modern apprentices and EAL colleagues.

- Implementation of an employability-specific youth group.

Promoting Equality and Inclusivity

The New Scots Team places a strong emphasis on promoting the principles of equality and inclusivity. They ensure that all youth work provisions offered by North Ayrshire Council and its partners align with the Equality Act. They actively support new Scots young people who face additional barriers, ensuring they have equal access to opportunities.

A Proud Endorsement

The team's impact has been nothing short of extraordinary. Their innovation, expertise, drive, and unwavering determination have transformed the lives of young refugees, empowering them to thrive in their new homeland. Their efforts have earned the endorsement and admiration of their colleagues and community, making them a true credit to the service.

North Ayrshire CLD New Scots Team's commitment to co-producing and co-delivering provisions with new Scots young people exemplifies the principles of inclusivity and participation. As they continue their mission to break down barriers and provide meaningful opportunities, they serve as an inspiring example for the entire youth work sector.

Who Cares? Scotland: Creating Connections

We understand that all children and young people require love, support, and fun to thrive, particularly Care Experienced Children and Young People. At Who Cares? Scotland, our strategic plan commits to creating more opportunities for connection, fun, and friendship. This summer, we organised over 80 events from May to August, bringing together around 600 people with care experience and supporters, fostering a sense of belonging.

To measure our impact, we employ robust monitoring and evaluation methods, including quantitative and qualitative measures and individual impact stories shared with stakeholders, such as members, volunteers, supporters, and funders.

One remarkable story emerges from our first post-COVID member's residential, the 'Summer Meetup.' We took 19 members aged 16+ to Bonaly Scout Centre in Edinburgh. Marcus*, one of the participants, hoped for a fun and social experience. Despite not knowing anyone in his room, he quickly bonded with roommates and other attendees, showcasing his Dobble skills.

Marcus cherished moments like pouring gunge on the First Minister, Humza Yousaf, after the Colour Run and participating in campfire entertainment, both as part



of the singing audience and as a stage performer. He felt that, alongside Josh, an Edinburgh Advocacy Worker, he played a key role in group activities.

Reflecting on the Summer Meet Up, Marcus expressed his delight at meeting new friends, having a good laugh, and thriving in a brilliant environment. He eagerly looks forward to future opportunities, emphasising the support and fun that make it worthwhile.

Additional feedback from the Summer Meetup included positive interactions with staff, fun events, and excellent food, providing time to bond with care families, meet new staff and peers, engage in activities like the Colour Run and talent shows, and share laughter. Participants found the camp enjoyable and supportive, fostering camaraderie and understanding among staff and young people.

Other feedback gathered at the Summer Meetup:



"Good chance to chat with staff I had not met yet. The events were fun and the food was on point. Thanks for inviting me and letting me chill and play games with other people."



"Spending time with my care family. Meeting new staff and young people. Good activities. Colour run. Campfire/ talent show. The laughter. Good scan."



"I found the Bonaly camp very fun and supporting each other, thank you to all the staff and young people for making the camp with so much banter and understanding each other. Thank you I have really enjoyed myself."

*Name has been changed to protect the identity of our member.



Lyra's Young Artists Programme: Nurturing Creativity & Impacting Lives

In the heart of Greater Craigmillar, south-east Edinburgh, amidst the profound challenges of poverty, racial and social inequality, there exists an extraordinary arts project that is making a remarkable impact on the lives of young people.

A Holistic Approach

Lyra's Young Artist Programme takes a holistic approach to youth development, bringing together young artists and arts professionals to collaborate on world-class projects and productions. What sets Lyra apart is its unwavering commitment to addressing individual needs and working closely with families.

Breaking Down Barriers

Everything offered by Lyra, from travel assistance to trips and even healthy snacks, is entirely free. By removing financial barriers, Lyra opens doors to a world of artistic possibilities for young people who might otherwise never have had the chance to explore their creative talents.

Building Positive Relationships

At the heart of Lyra's success is its team of dedicated engagement facilitators and youth arts workers who prioritise building positive relationships with every young person. The nurturing environment fosters a sense of belonging and encourages children to believe in their abilities, raising their self-esteem.

Their positive outcomes are a testament to the success of their model. Youth work in all its forms makes a positive impact:

- **Improved Self-Esteem:** 89% of children demonstrated improved self-esteem.
- **Raised Aspiration:** 91% of children demonstrated raised aspirations.
- **Enhanced Creative and Life-Long Skills:** 85% of children gained and improved creative and life-long skills.

A Vision for Equity

Lyra's vision goes beyond artistic expression; it aims to address a fundamental inequity. The organisation recognises that access to quality culture and arts should be a right, not a privilege, for all children. By focusing on overcoming this inequity in Greater Craigmillar and other disadvantaged communities, Lyra is not only nurturing creativity but also contributing to a more just society.

From Data to Decision Making



Kevin Kane, YouthLink Scotland's Policy and Research Manager talks about the interplay between research, evidence and policy influence.

YouthLink Scotland plays a critical role in encouraging groups to enhance their research capabilities and incorporate policy influence and the communication of impact into their work. We recognise that youth work activities can empower young people to develop their skills, enabling them to engage in meaningful social action, policy influence, and political participation. However, the challenge lies in how to do this while ensuring the delivery of essential youth work.

This year's National Youth Work Conference focuses on the impact and the imperative need for investment in youth work services across the country.



This comes at a time when we are grappling with the aftermath of COVID-19 and facing a cost-of-living crisis, which raises concerns about the future of the youth work sector. The seamless transition between research, impact, policy influence, and the consistent communication of the benefits of youth work within the current policy landscape is more critical than ever.

We understand that investment in youth work follows well-framed policies. The Scottish Parliament, with its flexibility and the presence of opposition parties, MSPs, and local councillors, can often secure concessions and significant wins. If youth work's impact is not adequately represented in

these influential spaces, other public policy matters will take precedence, and the chances of increased resources for our sector will decrease.

For organisations, it's essential to consider a well-defined policy influencing strategy as part of their core business, not just an add-on. We acknowledge the pressures organisations face to fulfil their primary goals, especially in precarious funding environments. Still, effective policy influence doesn't necessarily require extensive time and resources.

We've seen instances of organisations within the sector engaging with MSPs on various issues. For example, the youth work outdoor learning group has championed outdoor residential

learning experiences as part of Liz Smith MSP's proposed Bill on a young person's right to access quality residential experiences. YouthLink Scotland plays a pivotal role in amplifying the sector's voice and leveraging its strategic position between the government and the sector to encourage cooperation at the government level and urge our parliamentarians to do more.

Collective efforts have led to significant successes, such as the impactful changes to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which marked substantial support for care leavers. The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill, introduced to the Scottish Parliament in September 2020 and unanimously passed in

March 2021, demonstrates the progress made through a coordinated approach to influencing policy by uniting the children's and youth work sectors and involving young people.

Engaging in consultations offers organisations the opportunity to contribute to policy discussions and raise the profile of youth work with policy makers. Valuable consultation information is available on the websites, email updates, and newsletters of relevant member organisations, including the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, CLD Standards Council, YouthLink Scotland, and Together (SACR).

To shape and influence essential policy inquiries and legislation

as part of their work streams, organisations should nurture connections with Convenors and MSPs on committees most relevant to their work. Several opportunities exist for MSPs to ask oral questions, which can be done as part of weekly issue-based parliamentary work, including motions for debate and participation in First Minister's questions—each of these can be submitted in writing via an MSP.

Engaging with local councillors, MSPs, and MPs should be central to your organisation's policy influence strategy, with a deliberate focus on how individual elected representatives can support your organisation in recognising the positive impact of youth work services on the lives of young people in Scotland.

LGBT Youth Scotland:

Creating an Impact Framework



As youth workers, we are aware of the importance of gathering evidence of the impact that we make on the lives of Scotland's young people.

We need to evidence our impact to funders and other stakeholders. In addition, as reflective practitioners we need to understand if what we are delivering is working as well as it could be. However, it can be challenging to think about how best we can measure impact effectively and efficiently.

At LGBT Youth Scotland we have gone through a process of creating our own impact framework. We really hope that you can learn something from what we did and apply it on your context.

Step One: Understand Your Young People

Practicing data driven youth work means using all the evidence you have at your disposal to think with real intentionality about the impact you want to make on the lives of our young people. We used our Life in Scotland research to gain a richer understanding of the challenges facing LGBTQ+ young people. This helped us to understand the problems we were trying to solve. For example, the research clearly showed us that many LGBTQ+ young people face challenges with their mental health, and they hadn't been able to access appropriate sex and relationships education.

Step Two: Create Your Outcomes

Once we understood the problem we were trying to solve, we were able to decide what changes we were looking to make. An outcome sets out the change you want to see, and we based ours on the National Youth Work outcomes. We did this by using them as categories under which we set our own objectives.

For example, National Youth Work Outcome Five is "Young people consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control". Under this overarching outcome we set the objective "LGBTQ+ young people have more control over sex and sexual decision making".

Step Three: Set Clear Indicators

Indicators are the information that you will need to gather to show that you have been successful in achieving your outcomes. For example, to work out if we have been successful in ensuring that LGBTQ+ young people have more control over sex and sexual decision making, we need to know how many of our young people report increased confidence in making safer choices in their sexual relationships.

Step Four: Train Your Team

Before rolling out any new initiative, it is really important to make sure that your team are all on board and understand what they need to do. We ran a session as part of a development day where the team could learn more about outcomes and understand how to use them in practice. For example, they thought through each outcome and came up with examples of activities that they could run in their youth groups which would help us to work towards achieving it.

Step Five: Create Ways to Measure Your Indicators

We have had to think creatively about what methods we can use as evidence of the fantastic impact that we are making. Some examples are:

- An annual survey which goes out to all of our service users.
- Case studies that are created by staff across all teams.
- Youth worker observations.
- Feedback given after session about what young people have learned.

Step Six: Review

It is incredibly unusual to get something entirely right the first time! After one year in operation, we learned that we had too many outcomes, and that some of them were too complicated. Taking feedback from youth workers and young people, we refined the framework making it more user friendly and intuitive.

Transforming Lives and Communities: PEEK, Govan High School and Police Scotland



Speaking about their experience with Thrive, one young person said:



"I have learned about knife crime and how powerful crimes can be and how this can hurt not just myself but others"

Another young person stated,



"My goal when I started the project was to stop smoking and fighting. I have not been in any fights, and I also don't smoke now."

Inclusion and prevention are at the heart of PEEK's Thrive programme, which supports young people aged 12+ to support their relationships and connections, boost their health and wellbeing and improve their life chances.

In 2022, PEEK delivered an intervention project with Govan High School for young people who were not engaging with the school and were already known to Police Scotland.

Working in partnership with the school's leadership, PEEK planned and delivered a 16-week tailored programme. Using the Police Scotland database, the team looked

at the crimes most commonly committed in the area and designed workshops around knife crime, sectarianism, gambling, fire safety, gender-based violence, hate crime and substance misuse.

Additionally, the programme covered controlled aggression and discipline through boxing, problem-solving with the Army, and first aid, particularly in dealing with stab wounds. A visit to Cathcart Police Station added a real-world perspective to their learning.

A Partnership for Change

The success of this transformative project lies in the collaborative efforts of PEEK, Govan High School, and Police Scotland. The project aimed to reduce police interventions, improve school engagement, and provide young people with a path towards positive development.

Measurable Impact: Changing Lives, Statistics Speak Volumes

The impact of this initiative has been nothing short of remarkable which is clear from the statistics:

- 82% decrease in police intervention with the young people outside of school hours: This statistic indicates a substantial reduction in the young people's involvement in criminal and antisocial activities.
- 75% decrease in school 'referrals': Schools typically refer students for disciplinary actions or additional support when they display challenging behaviours. A 75% reduction in referrals indicates a significant improvement in the behaviour and engagement of the young people within the school environment.
- 55% increase in after school clubs attended: Participation in after school clubs is a positive indicator of increased engagement with school and community activities.

Family Transformations

The positive changes extended beyond the classroom. Parents also noticed the positive differences in their children. One parent said,



"There has been a dramatic change in my boy at home and when going out. We have a new boy now"

These outcomes highlight the programme's holistic approach to youth development, impacting not only the young people themselves but also their families and communities.

Recognition and Expansion

In 2022, PEEK received the Small Employer of the Year award at the Herald Employer Awards and the Building Inclusive Communities Award at the Herald Diversity Awards, the project also won the

Inclusion and Diversity category at the National Youth Work Awards 2023. The team at PEEK have now expanded their project and have lots more planned for the future.

A Model of Inclusion and Prevention

The PEEK, Govan High School, and Police Scotland collaboration is a shining example of how youth work can transform lives, prevent crime, and build stronger communities. By addressing the root causes of antisocial behaviour and providing opportunities for personal growth, this initiative is not only changing individual lives but also creating a brighter future for the entire community.

Empowering Through Relationships, Not Classrooms

There are no formal classrooms, just a partnership between young person and youth worker, and a space where they can develop and learn about themselves at their own pace with no fixed expectations.

Changing Lives, One Volunteer at a Time

Once the course is finished young people have the chance to volunteer across PEEK's many programmes, and this is the first step towards employment, taking on a training course, or deciding to go back to school.

Statistics Speak Volumes

The impact stats speak for themselves. Over the last 10 years:

- 76% remained in education.
- 37,000 hours of volunteering.
- 40% of PEEK's current staff were Thrive participants.

Transforming Lives and Communities: PEEK, Govan High School & Police Scotland is not just a success story; it's a testament to the power of collaboration, youth work, and the unwavering dedication to making a difference in the lives of young people and their communities.

The Future of Youth Work Research in Scotland



Youth work changes lives, we know this to be true, we hear and see this all of the time from youth workers and young people.

We also know the need to demonstrate its impact through ethical, robust research and evaluation. We understand the importance of building an evidence base, collecting both stories and statistics to tell the story of youth work and its power to transform lives.

Back in 2015, the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group

was formed after Edinburgh Youth Work Consortium, the University of Edinburgh and the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy came together with youth work sector representatives to develop a research agenda related to youth work. This process identified a need for a Youth Work Research Steering Group to drive forward a research programme.

This group brings together representatives from policy, practice and academia to the respond to the research needs of the sector.

The aims of the group are to identify and create opportunities:

- To critically examine the long-term impact of youth work on the lives and lifestyles of young people and the wider communities across Scotland.
- To identify what young people learn from participating in youth work provision.
- To gather data reflecting the broad outcomes of youth work as defined by young Scots.

As part of the 2015 process, the impact of universal youth work was identified as one of the top priorities for the sector. Initial funding was used to undertake an extensive literature review on the impact of universal youth work. The published findings pointed to the need for evidence

of the impact of youth work in Scotland. In response, members of the Research Steering Group employed a reflective, participatory research methodology developed by Dr Sue Cooper, called Transformative Evaluation. This methodology involves a reflective conversation between a young person and their youth worker where the young person shares personal reflections of significant changes in their life as a result of participating in universal youth work. The youth workers then adds their commentary and together they form the co-authored significant change stories at the heart of this research. Four studies have

now been completed across Scotland, in which 347 young people have shared the impact that universal youth work has had on their lives. We have found that universal youth work supports young people to:

- Increase their confidence, learn new skills, develop relationships, feel safe, valued and supported and improve their mental health and wellbeing.

We know through this research that youth work practitioners achieve these impacts through:

- Building long-term relationship, providing a safe space, being with trusted adults, providing opportunities, giving tailored support and so much more.

This research was never intended to sit on a shelf and not be read, these studies demonstrate impact, start conversations in and outwith the sector and influence decision makers. As an example, we know that the Edinburgh study:

- Helped to inform the local need within the current Edinburgh Youth and Children's Work Strategy.
- Helped to prioritise youth work as a programme of work within the 2023-2026 Edinburgh Children's Services Plan, giving youth work a prominence within the local Children's Services landscape.
- The research is currently being used to lobby for the protection of the CEC Third Party Grants to be invested in local community-based youth work organisations.

So, what next? We know as a Research Steering Group, that the evidence base developed so far is important and has been welcomed by the practice sector. However, we need to build on this work, identify new priorities, explore other methodologies, generate

statistical data as well as stories. The ultimate goal is to improve the lives of young Scots through developing new knowledge, encouraging critical thinking, reflection and practice development.

In 2023, the group completed another priority setting exercise with the youth work sector. So much has happened since the 2015 process — COVID-19, cost of living crisis, Brexit, to name just a few. This was an opportunity to hear the priorities for the sector now. From seven workshops conducted around the country, 52 potential topics were identified and prioritised based on urgency and importance. The key themes for investigation included, the role and purpose of youth work, mental health impacts, the role of youth work in schools, development of the profession and the inclusion of all young people.

We know that youth work changes lives, but we also know the increasing pressure on the sector to show its worth to funders, other sectors and policy makers. The prioritised questions arising from the consultation will help us a group shape our research agenda over the next 5 years. We will continue to look for opportunities for funding, students to support and the time and resources we as a group can give to help share the youth work story. A constant feature of our work to date has been the collaboration between the various organisations involved, including the youth work practice sector. We are keen to create opportunities for the sector to work with us to drive forward the research agenda.

Let's not shy away from testing new methodologies, utilising the talents of the sector and young people to share the impact of youth work.

Education and Skills: Strengthening the Position of Youth Work in a Transformed System

Youth workers have always been a vital part of helping young people understand their progress and accomplishments. This is a key aspect of good youth work practice, as is our ongoing effort to evaluate our work and improve its quality.

In our sector, we must continue to work on using data effectively and collaboratively to influence policies and ensure sustained investments in youth work.

Our Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programme has brought significant changes in how youth work is perceived, particularly in narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. On a local level, youth work teams are becoming more confident to collect data to show how youth work enhances well-being, readiness to learn, and educational outcomes.

Increasingly, schools and youth work teams are working together to measure impact so that they can build a more comprehensive understanding of what works and how to make improvements in the right places.

YouthLink Scotland is working closely with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to ensure that the contribution of youth work is better recognised and supported in local, regional, and national plans and reports. We also want the education system to acknowledge

and value the achievements and skills young people gain through community learning and collaborations with youth work.

The updated National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework is providing a common language that helps youth workers focus their impact evaluations with young people and school partners.

While we are good at collecting compelling stories from young people about how youth work changes their lives, we shouldn't underestimate the importance of statistical data. Quantitative data, collected in ways that respect youth work values and involve young people, is a powerful tool to advocate for investment in youth work.

Education and Skills: Strengthening the Position of Youth Work in a Transformed System

As we await the new National Youth Work Strategy, it is crucial for our sector to articulate our role and impact in important areas of public policy, such as those identified in the recent Programme for Government. We are uniquely positioned to amplify the voices of young people in driving change. For example, we recently enabled **700** young people to express their views as part of the National Discussion on Education Reform.

They stressed that the skills and achievements they gain through youth work are just as important as formal qualifications.

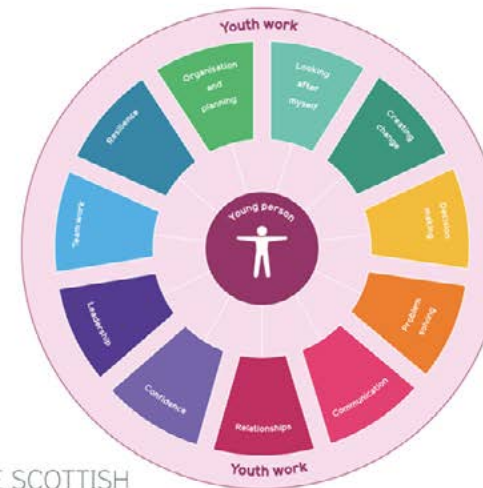
These young people provide invaluable data and insights for service improvement and system change. Here are the top lines from that consultation:

- Only 22% felt they were getting what they needed from education.
- 88% wanted the skills they learnt through youth work to be acknowledged alongside formal qualifications.
- 87% felt young people should have access to youth work in school.

The Scottish Government's programme for lifelong learning and skills reform offers a significant opportunity to transform the system and elevate youth work's role. Access to youth work is essential to implementing many recommendations and addressing the views and needs of young people who learn through youth work as part of their education.

We must continue to strengthen our collective voice and share both statistics and stories about our impact.

Positive Outcomes for Young People



- 94% improved their team working
- 91% improved their confidence
- 87% developed their communication skills
- 83% problem solving skills
- 81% were more practised in self-care
- 79% were building more positive relationships
- 66% of participating young people were demonstrating greater resilience



Youth work and school partnerships in the West Region have collated both quantitative and qualitative data to gauge impact. They are now testing a new dashboard tool to collate evidence using the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework.

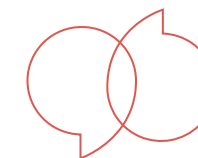


“Working in this way has allowed us to identify meaningful impacts that sometimes feel difficult to measure.”

— Depute Head Teacher

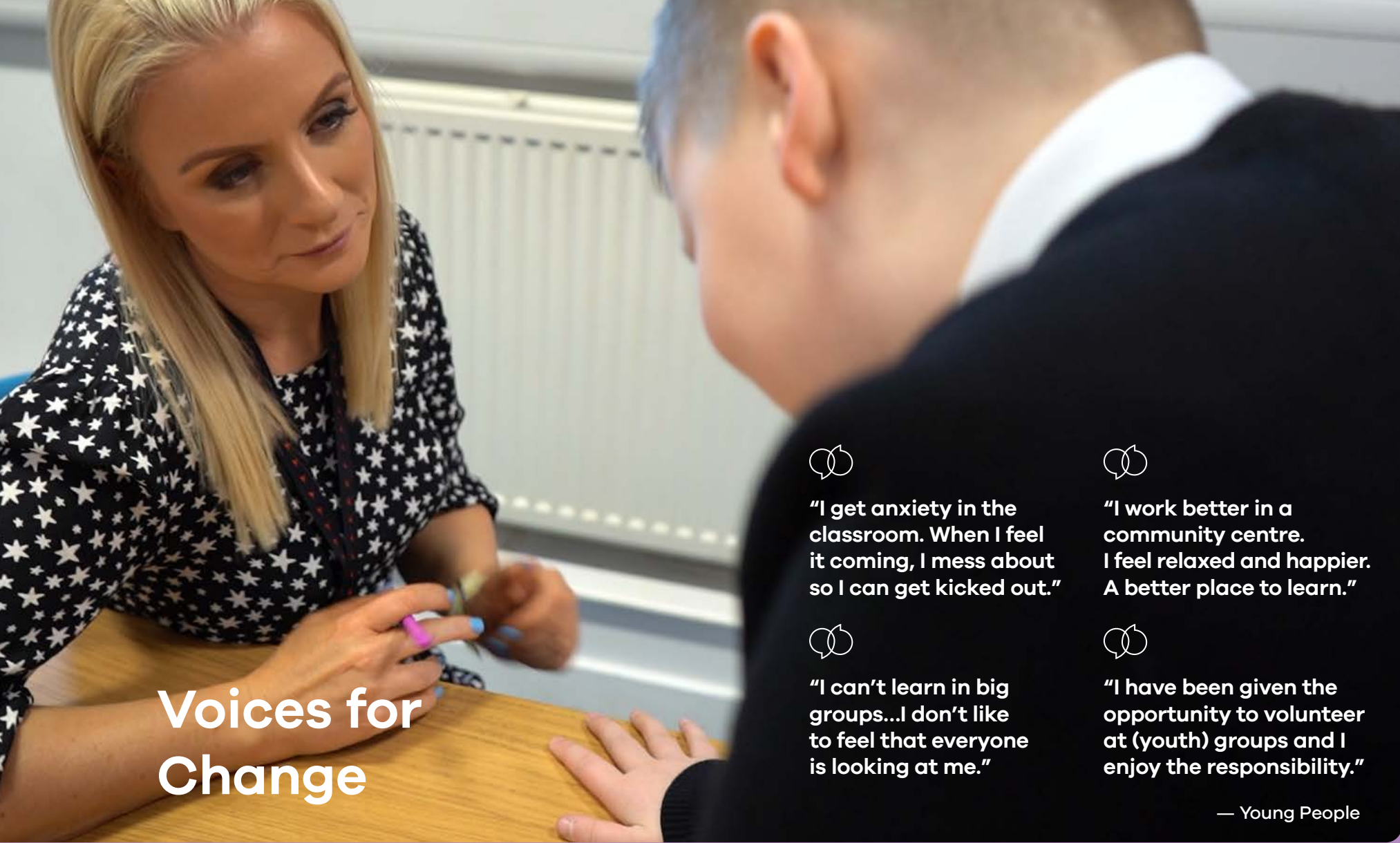


Dundee City Council have developed a set of digital resources to support quantitative and qualitative data-gathering at a programme level, structured around the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework.



“The outcomes and skills framework gives us a common language to explore the difference that youth work makes and creates a helpful focus for reflective learning conversations with young people.”

— Senior CLD Worker



Voices for Change



"I get anxiety in the classroom. When I feel it coming, I mess about so I can get kicked out."



"I can't learn in big groups...I don't like to feel that everyone is looking at me."



"I work better in a community centre. I feel relaxed and happier. A better place to learn."



"I have been given the opportunity to volunteer at (youth) groups and I enjoy the responsibility."

— Young People

Youth workers and the school senior leadership team reviewed the feedback and developed a joint action plan for the school session 2023-24 to address the issues raised. This collaborative approach has enabled them to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers to learning that local young people face, hear from those who do not typically participate in surveys and focus groups, reflect on young

people's insights, and create a clear plan of action for the next school year that aligns with school improvement objectives.

The City of Edinburgh Council's Education team is committed to continuing this approach in other parts of the city in 2023-24 to inform service design, working with LAYC, local youth work providers, and YouthLink Scotland.



"As a rights respecting school, we take Article 12 — the right to a voice seriously, but also realise that some of our most disengaged pupil voices can be more difficult to gather. This work in partnership with youth work teams has highlighted the importance of taking those extra steps to listen to all of our pupils and ensure barriers to their learning are removed."

— Ross Hunter, Head Teacher, Gracemount High School



"It is important to us that we hear from young people -themselves — what their barriers are to learning — so we can work alongside the school to resolve these in a way that benefits everyone. We have seen for some time how difficult the school learning environment can be for young people and we're really excited to be part of this project which will hopefully be the catalyst for change that is required to make education more accessible to all young people."

— Cat McMillan
Youth Work Practitioner, Canongate Youth

Youth Workers in Edinburgh have been leading a relational approach to data-gathering with young people to inform service improvement.

In 2022, The City of Edinburgh Council's Children's Services Partnership recognised the need to address reduced school engagement and attendance, intensified by the pandemic. Their aim was to improve school attendance and engagement. The Senior Leadership Team at Gracemount High School and representatives from three local

youth work teams collaborated to create an inquiry process facilitated by YouthLink Scotland's Youth Work and School Partnerships team.

Together, they engaged with young people who faced challenges in attending or participating in school but had established learning relationships with local youth work teams.

In one-on-one conversations, they explored the young people's perspectives on their learning experiences, family influences, and potential changes to enhance their school day.

In the context of this existing relationship, youth workers had a series of one-to-one conversations with young people to explore:

- Their view of themselves as learners.
- Family experiences and how young people think these impact on them as learners.
- Their perspectives on their experiences of learning in both school and youth work settings.
- Ideas for change that would positively impact on their learning experiences during the school day.

Some of the consistent themes that emerged from these discussions included:

- Challenges of the classroom environment for engagement in learning and the benefits of quieter spaces and more tailored support.
- The importance of relationships for learning (at home, in school, in the community).
- Differences in learning approaches in school and youth work settings.
- Anxiety as a barrier to engagement in school — due to impact on sleep patterns, social interactions, feelings about travel to and being in school.

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."



Imagine a Man: Influencing a Change of Culture

All three areas found that although boys and young men demonstrated a willingness to talk about their feelings, they found it difficult because of a lack of space or relevant people willing to create and facilitate these conversations. There was also a distinct lack of positive role models that boys and young men could identify with.

Growing up without these discussions and where antisocial behaviour is the cultural norm at home and in the community, is where things get much worse for boys and young men. In what has been termed a 'crisis of masculinity' the outcomes for men can be starkly in contrast to those of women.

- Men in deprived areas are 10 times more at risk of suicide than those in affluent areas.
- Suicide is the biggest killer of men under 45 in the UK.
- Three-quarters of all suicides are male.
- 43% of men admit to feeling worried or low.
- 10% of men admit to having suicidal thoughts.
- 89% of convictions for handling offensive weapons are men.
- 75% of the victims of violence are men.
- Boys have had worse exam results than girls for 30 years.
- Men make up 95% of the prison population.

These statistics show that men and boys are disproportionately affected by issues such as mental health, violence, and poverty, and that a new approach is needed to address harmful masculinity and promote positive role models and behaviours.

Rather than demonising boys and young men as "toxic," Imagine a Man is promoting positive masculinity as a way to give boys and young men a vision to believe in and a language to express themselves and their aspirations.

Imagine a Man is also calling on politicians, policymakers, and those in education to **reframe the narrative around masculinity** and to **teach positive masculinity in the curriculum**. The project also wants to see investment in dedicated funds for youth workers to work specifically with boys and young men in disadvantaged communities.

Imagine a Man is promoting positive masculinity as a way to give boys and young men a vision to believe in and a language to express themselves and their aspirations.

The programme, launched in 2023, has been produced by YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work, and is all about building positive masculinity with young people in the midst of what is being described as Scotland's 'crisis of masculinity'.

The launch of the programme and its comprehensive education resources follows on from research by No Knives, Better Lives which explored what it was like to be a boy or young man in Scotland today on three key themes:

- What are the stereotypes and expectations about being a boy or young man in Scotland?
- How prevalent is violence and risk-taking behaviour amongst boys and young men?
- What does an 'ideal' future look like for boys and young men in Scotland?

The results of the research from the first year of 'Imagine a Man' provided a broad breadth of understanding of what it was like to be a boy or a young man living in Scotland. The second year aimed at providing more depth to our understanding, with a particular emphasis on what exactly does 'positive masculinity' mean to young people.

Three youth groups based in Dundee, Glasgow and Shetland were supported to conduct research on what positive masculinity means in their schools and communities.

Imagine a Man: Influencing a Change of Culture



"This is an important subject, and young people really want to talk about it. Let's flip the toxic talk around masculinity to the positive. Doing more for boys and young men does not require us to abandon our ideal of gender equality; rather, it extends it. We need to give boys and young men a version of 'feminism' they can get behind, fill the current space that harmful influencers have stepped into, and make positive masculinity a 'thing'."

— Vicki Ridley,
Senior Development Officer,
YouthLink Scotland



"If we examine the evidence around men's mental health, attainment levels and suicide rates we can see that there is a 'crisis of masculinity'. Men are far more likely to be both the victims and perpetrators of violent acts and have poorer physical and mental health than women and poorer overall outcomes. Whatever we've been doing isn't working out for boys and young men. We need to try something different."

— Colin MacFarlane,
National Programme Manager,
YMCA Scotland and former footballer



"The Imagine a Man research and associated toolkit are an important step towards a more preventive approach which is designed in the longer term to contribute to reducing violence both in general and more specifically to women and girls. Reframing masculinity in a positive way is an inclusive approach which is designed to build on the progressive movement for greater equality for women, providing safe spaces to discuss what a positive Scottish man should aspire to be. Taking account of the gender specific developmental needs of boys in all aspects of policy and practice is a key part of improving outcomes for everyone."

— Sue Brookes,
Director of Strategy and Stakeholder Engagement
at the Scottish Prison Service and former
Governor of HMP & YOI Polmont



"You see nowadays, like see if you back down from a fight and that, social media and that that's going to be everywhere now, this guy didn't do this, this guy didn't do that. It will eventually come back to you in it, why didn't you fight?"

— The young men in HMP & YOI Polmont from the Imagine a Man research shared the huge societal pressure they felt to fight both in and outside of prison



"I think positive masculinity is having healthy friendships with other males and being strong and being able to support one another, to be able to show emotion and being a good role model for other young men growing up to support them with their mental health and how to grow up a respectful, happy man and not to let society criticise them and don't let anything stop them from achieving greatness."

— Young researchers from Royston Youth Action Glasgow, when asked to describe positive masculinity

The Young Women's Movement and NSPCC Scotland: Bold Girls Ken Campaign

Aimee's Story

In a bold move to address the critical issue of peer sexual abuse, a group of teenage girls from Perthshire launched the pioneering "Bold Girls Ken" campaign this year.

Nine young women aged 16-to-19 from Bertha Park High School, Crieff High School, and Perth College, are shaking up the conversation around consent education, both in-person and online.

It seeks to bring about positive change in school curriculums across Scotland, advocating for comprehensive and updated materials to provide a realistic education on consent. Ultimately, the campaign hopes for the introduction of appropriate and ongoing education on consent for every age group across Scotland.

Aimee Wallace is one of the campaigners who is hoping to bring about much needed change:

The Bold Girls Ken campaign is important because it aims to address peer sexual abuse, something which has devastating impacts for the survivors and by addressing peer sexual abuse in schools and colleges it can hopefully be prevented. The Bold Girls Ken campaign hopes that by educating young people what consent is, the shocking statistics will be reduced. By implementing a continued and appropriate education of consent, in sexual and non-sexual contexts, young people will hopefully grow up with a better understanding of consent in relationships and in day-to-day interactions with those around them. All young people should know that consent is an active agreement to an activity in which you are fully informed on, and that this agreement can be withdrawn at any time without any consequences. They should also be aware that there

are situations where someone cannot legally consent to a sexual activity. This includes being under the age of 16, being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, being asleep or unconscious, or not having the capacity or freedom to consent by choice. The Bold Girls Ken campaign wants young people to know that consent is enthusiastic, on-going, and informed.

Personally, I became involved in the Bold Girls Ken project because I believe this is such an important topic to bring awareness to. I am passionate about ending the stigma around issues like this one in order to make a real positive difference and I knew that campaigns like this one play a key role in changing the harmful social attitudes and behaviours that are responsible for issues like peer sexual abuse.

As a group we first met in October 2022, and after discussing our own observations of sexual education in schools, we recognised that each

of us had a very different understanding and experience. Even though we all attended schools within the same council area, our previous education on consent was limited and varied. We agreed that the conversations about consent during school and college were accompanied by a taboo and awkward atmosphere, an atmosphere that made it difficult to fully engage in the learning. We also strongly agreed that there was a lack of education about consent online and agreed that the technology we are surrounded by is rapidly developing but our curriculum is not. From this discovery, we developed the key aim that all young people should know what consent is on and offline and know how to get the support if they need it.

After many meetings developing and fine tuning our materials, we launched the campaign on the 19th of April 2023 at the Perth Art Gallery. In attendance were key individuals from organisations such as Police Scotland, Perth

and Kinross Council, teachers from different schools across Perth and Kinross, and other individuals who work with young people. As part of the launch, we spoke with multiple press organisations including the Courier, STV, BBC Scotland, and the Guardian in order to spread the important message of our campaign across Scotland. We have spoken to members of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to discuss our aim and hopes for the campaign. As a group, we also spoke with organisations who do crucial work to prevent sexual violence including Zero Tolerance Scotland, and RASAC, the local rape crisis centre. Through this work we'd like to bring an awareness of this issue to the forefront of current discussions, especially between those organisations and individuals who work with young people.

As a participant of the Bold Girls Ken campaign, I have been lucky enough to meet and work with individuals who

are likeminded and passionate about ending peer sexual abuse. This campaign has allowed me to feel a part of the positive change that this generation is undoubtedly bringing. From the skills and experience I have gained through the process of this campaign I have been able to pursue opportunities to be a part of further positive change in Scotland.

I hope this campaign can bring a positive impact on school curricula across Scotland, and that those who are able to, engage in updating their materials or introducing new materials to provide a realistic education on consent with the help of the Bold Girls Ken resources. The Bold Girls Ken campaign hopes to see an introduction of appropriate and ongoing education on consent for every age group across Scotland.

The Questionnaire and Beyond...

Mixing Methods to See the Real Impact of Digital Youth Work

In the Innovation Centre at Heart of Midlothian Football Club, young people engage with digital technologies and acquire valuable skills for the future.

Tanya Howden emphasises the significance of incorporating impact evaluation right from the start, using data to shape activities and deeply understand young people's responses.

Tynecastle football ground is situated in an area of Edinburgh where many young people are affected by poverty. This project aimed to leverage young people's interest in football to offer engaging digital clubs and activities directly related to their lives. They needed to ensure their approach was effective.

From the start, they sought ways to evaluate their work, both for reporting to funders and to understand its impact on young people. They needed a simple method for gathering meaningful data, including quantitative data based on record-keeping and questionnaires, and qualitative data based on young people's responses.

Gathering quantitative data allowed them to demonstrate the reach and relevance of the program, highlighting that many young people who joined were not already interested in digital skills.

They also uncovered preconceptions young people held about computing careers, allowing them to address these through their activities and clubs.

However, this quantitative data alone was insufficient to refine the topics and activities they offered or to understand the long-term impact on young people.

As part of the impact work, listening directly to young people, asking them what worked, and having open, reflective conversations were key. Debriefing at the end of each club session provided immediate feedback, helping the team improve each session. These practices were crucial in both youth work environments and formal education.

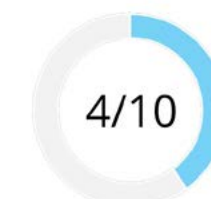
The new Outcomes and Skills Framework provided a structure for their work, allowing them to select relevant outcomes and skills for a digital youth work project and use them to evaluate impact.

For example, one key concept was "Ask three before me," encouraging problem-solving and collaboration.

Evaluation work revealed the positive impact of activities such as programming Marty the Robot and coding a Micro:bit, demonstrating the importance of informal learning in digital skills development.

The project at Heart of Midlothian highlights the difference informal learning can make in developing digital skills. While some young people have familiarity with phones and touch screens, they may lack keyboard and coding skills. Their work helps bridge the gap and shows the power of evaluation in refining their approach.

How to Build an Online Shop



Had never done any web programming before



Had never attended a code club before



Said they would attend another HMFC Digital Club

Before the club, 3 participants said they were not interested in digital/tech careers. After 7 weeks, **all** participants said they were interested in exploring digital/tech careers more.

Unlocking LGBTIQ+ Inclusion in Youth Work

The Rainbow Youth 2.0 (RY2.0) project is dedicated to providing accessible resources for youth workers to implement LGBTIQ+ inclusive practices effectively.

As the youth work landscape evolves towards greater inclusivity, RY2.0 recognises the need for practical tools, especially when youth workers lack a clear framework, comprehensive learning materials, and actionable guidance for LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

RY2.0 is an Erasmus+ project initiated by a partnership of four organisations: LEAP Sports (Scotland), Colectivo MosaiQ (Spain), Associazione Eufemia (Italy), and Sapinq (Slovakia). These organisations are collaboratively creating three essential LGBTIQ+ inclusion resources designed to go beyond geographic borders, catering to the needs of youth workers and educators across Europe and internationally.

The significance of fostering LGBTIQ+ inclusion in youth work is underscored by the belief that teaching young people inclusivity at a formative age will lead to inclusive adults. The three key resources offered by RY2.0 empower youth workers to self-assess their competence in working with LGBTIQ+ young people, learn about LGBTIQ+ inclusion, and put inclusive practices into action.

1. Competence Framework for LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Youth Work

This framework enables youth workers to evaluate their current practices for LGBTIQ+ inclusivity. It includes five core competences:

1. Essential Foundations of working with LGBTIQ+ young people.
2. Collaborating and communicating with important stakeholders.
3. Creating and maintaining an LGBTIQ+ inclusive environment.
4. Designing youth programs with LGBTIQ+ inclusivity.
5. Identifying when further support is needed.

2. Online Learning Academy: Self-Empowerment through Education

This comprehensive, self-paced course focuses on the 'Essential Foundations' competence and comprises six units. It covers terminology, identities, rights, intersectionality, addressing hate speech, and supporting LGBTIQ+ youth.

3. Manual for LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Youth Work: Navigating the Path to Inclusivity

This practical guide offers theoretical insights, ready-to-use activities, best practice examples, and strategies for promoting LGBTIQ+ inclusion in youth work.

The RY2.0 project strives to ensure that inclusivity becomes a tangible reality by offering these resources free of charge, promoting a safer and more accepting future for all young people. For updates, contact rainbow-youth@leapsports.org or visit <https://rainbowyouth.eu/>.



Glasgow Youth Health Service: Bridging Health and Well-Being through Youth Work

The Glasgow City Youth Health Service (YHS) is an exemplary model of how youth work can be seamlessly integrated into our health service, providing holistic support to young people aged 12-to-19.

This service, which operates across nine sites, bridges the gap between clinical and non-clinical support, underpinned by early intervention for the city's young people.

A Holistic Approach

The YHS operates from Monday to Thursday, in the evenings, for 50 weeks a year, ensuring accessibility for young people. The service offers both clinical and non-clinical support, and youth workers from Glasgow Life play a pivotal role in providing a welcoming and supportive environment. These youth workers are often the first point of contact for young people, helping them overcome initial anxieties and helping them to engage with the service.

Beyond Clinical Care

Glasgow Life's youth workers possess extensive knowledge

of existing services and projects, enabling them to refer young people to a range of opportunities. These opportunities include employability and volunteering through the Young Persons Guarantee offer, personal development and accreditation via The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and ensuring that young people take advantage of the free bus travel entitlement. YHS also offers support to parents and guardians, making referrals to Financial Inclusion specialists to ensure that families maximise their benefits and income entitlements.

Youth Health as a Priority

Youth health remains a key priority area in Glasgow, aligning with Glasgow's

Community Learning and Development Plan 2021-23. The demand for YHS remains consistent, with a 3% increase in referrals from 2022 to 2023. GPs continue to be the primary referral agency, underscoring the service's crucial role in early intervention.

Conclusion

By focusing on early intervention, building trust, and offering holistic support, YHS has become a vital resource in Glasgow's efforts to improve the well-being of its young people. This innovative approach serves as a testament to the power of youth work in bridging the gap between health services and young people, ultimately leading to healthier, more confident, and resilient young people in our communities.

IA's Inspiring Journey

IA engaged with YHS, coping with health issues affecting his mental health. Despite challenges, he has learned valuable coping strategies, developed discipline, and gained clarity about his job situation. His willingness to learn and adapt amidst challenges showcases the transformative power of the YHS.



The service provides so much care in many aspects of my life. I can speak to someone regardless of what problems I'm confronting. From health/mental health issues to jobs, I have found the right place to help me sort them out. The support I received has provided me confidence to deal with the difficulties.

Building bridges across divides: The Mark Scott Leadership for Life Award

In 1995, a tragic sectarian attack took the life of 16-year-old Mark Scott in Glasgow. Following this, the Mark Scott Foundation partnered with The Outward Bound Trust in 1998 to create the Mark Scott Leadership for Life Award, aimed at bridging divides among young people separated by socio-economic backgrounds, sectarianism, racism, or territorialism in our local communities.

The Award is a six-month programme which starts with a five-day Outward Bound residential course designed to develop young people's personal skills and attributes, such as confidence, determination and the ability to work with others. Young people who participate are in their final year of school and The Award helps them to prepare for their next step into higher education, training or employment and to make a positive contribution to their local communities. Since 1998, 3621 young people have participated and together they have completed 600 community projects benefitting over 30,000 community members. Outward Bound fundraise to cover all costs of the programme to ensure all young people can take part.

Outcomes

The programme's theory of change includes five stated outcomes with associated indicators to demonstrate these are being achieved. In essence the outcomes focus on two key areas:

- Personal and social development.
- Making a positive contribution to a just and caring society.

The key element to achieving these are the mix of young people who take part, the peer learning that takes place as a result, and the youth worker facilitated review and reflection on what they learn during the programme.

Since the first evaluation of the Award in 2004, we have consistently measured improvements in young people's confidence, interpersonal and leadership skills, their ability to work with others and in their social responsibility. In more

recent years we have analysed the data through the lens of the Scottish Attainment Challenge to understand what impact, if any, the programme has on young people from lower SIMD Deciles. This analysis has shown that participants from lower SIMD areas report increased outcomes in the areas of social confidence, taking responsibility, emotional control and aspiration when compared to their peers in SIMD 4-9. 50% of the young people who take part reside within SIMD Deciles 1-3.

Twelve months on, 79% of 2020-21 participants reported they have seen positive results from applying what they learnt during the Award and 86% reported they expect to continue seeing positive results from the Award into the future. The community projects have been shown to positively influence attitudes and heighten

young people's awareness and empathy towards different groups of society.

There is no doubt that the evaluation has contributed to the success and the sustainability of the programme. Find out more at: www.outwardbound.org.uk/the-mark-scott-leadership-for-life-the-award-our-impact.

Case Study: Adam, Award Participant

Adam grew up in one of the most deprived communities in Scotland but recognised the opportunities taking part in The Award presented. Seventeen years later Adam carefully articulates how much he gained from taking part, the impact it had on his life and community and how it has gone on to influence his life since.



"In 2005 when I first heard about the Mark Scott Leadership for Life Award. I remember feeling two distinct emotions. The first was — 'I need to do that' and the second was 'I'm terrified of doing that'. I was quite a shy teenager who had never really had much experience of stepping outside my comfort zone. I was really lucky to have some very supportive teachers at Hillpark Secondary in Glasgow who encouraged me to apply.

I was delighted to be accepted onto the programme and remember well heading off on the residential week. I enjoyed building relationships with the other groups from all across the city and from all different walks of life. The activities were challenging and really helped

us to build solid relationships with the other groups.

Our community project was one that I hope embraced the spirit of the Award. We partnered with two primary schools, one non-denominational and one Roman Catholic. We brought primary 5 children together from both schools to help build a local community garden in the Carnwadric area of the city — which was also coincidentally the area I grew up in. It was a great place to grow up, but an area with undoubted social challenges and divisions.

As a team we secured external funding for our project and managed to buy benches, trees and plants — and got the young people to work together in teams to design the garden and eventually help with the planting. It's a project I remain really proud of for what it sought to achieve, but also for the growth it brought to each of my team members who took part. The team spirit grown through our residential week was pivotal to our success.

The biggest lesson I learned from the whole experience is that good things come from stepping outside of your comfort zone. I've carried this with me ever since."



"Am I challenging myself to step outside my comfort zone?"

Nurturing Scotland's Future Workforce: The Prince's Trust and NHS Scotland Partnership

In periods of economic hardship and uncertainty, it is often young people who face the most significant challenges. A growing skills gap risks pushing young people further away from being able participants in Scotland's ambitions for inclusive growth.

The Prince's Trust believes a youth work approach to employability and skills development is critical to unlock the full potential of Scotland's young people, enabling them to contribute to wider societal challenges. Youth work enables us to reach the most vulnerable in our communities by equipping young people with the core skills, resilience, and adaptability they need to achieve their goals.



Whatever job you want to do, you can do it if you put your mind to it

Shannon Thomson, 23, from Dundee was struggling on benefits and caring for two little boys, but with help from the Prince's Trust she now has a career working in the NHS.

Due to being under the care/supervision of Action for Children since the age of 16, she has always lived independently. She is a single mum, and her second son was born prematurely and has long term health difficulties. While Shannon was on one of her visits to the hospital, she saw an advert on Facebook for the Princes Trust's Get into Healthcare programme and made an enquiry.

Shannon took part in the four-week long programme, which ran in partnership with NHS Tayside and Dundee & Angus College. Despite juggling multiple priorities, Shannon excelled and fully committed to the training. Her confidence grew and she was delighted to meet like-minded young people who shared a similar background. She was even able to share her own experiences of supporting her sons with other young people on the course.

Immediately after the course ended, Shannon applied for various roles within the NHS. Her caseworker at the Trust helped with the applications due to her having dyslexia and helped prepare for job interviews, as well as arranging financial support to pay for Childcare to allow her to attend the interviews.

Shannon successfully secured a role as a Healthcare Support Worker on the gynaecology ward at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee in July 2022. Unfortunately, due to Lyall's health declining and further lung issues Shannon could no longer commit to a full-time position. In order to look after her family and still pursue her dream of working in health care, Shannon secured a position with the Nursing Partnership. This allowed her to take care of her son and attend all his appointments without constantly having to take time off. As well as still allowing her to build on her own skills and earn a living wage.

Since then, Lyall's health has improved and Shannon has secured a position with the NHS as a Band 3 Healthcare Support Worker in the Paediatrics department, back at Ninewells Hospital.

Facing significant barriers to employment has been shown to have serious adverse effects on young people's mental health and wellbeing. Through our Youth Index research, we found that the overall wellbeing of 16–25-year-olds has flatlined, remaining at the lowest point in its fourteen-year history, with young people least happy and confident in their money and mental health. Youth work has the ability to address this by supporting young people into employment or education.

We aim to break down barriers to progression and equip the individual with attributes to succeed and move forwards into a positive outcome.

We work with employer partners to identify skills gaps and co-design solution-focused content to incorporate into our free employability programmes.

Our successful partnership with NHS Scotland, for example, and an extensive number of social care providers, has shown the benefits our approach can have in reaching underrepresented communities. The programme works to secure a more diverse workforce for the health and social care sector, while engaging young people from a range of backgrounds, demographics, and communities.

Only one in four NHS workers in Scotland are aged under 35 and 24% of all workers are due to retire in the next 10 years, spiking to almost 45% in key support services. Demands on the service have never been higher and, with more of us living longer, are set to increase. With such an aging workforce and increasing demand, getting young people into health and social care has never been more important.

In 2018, the Trust partnered with NHS Scotland with the aim to help tackle the recruitment challenge they face, supporting brilliant young people into not just jobs, but rewarding careers.

Since then, we have worked with 10 health boards, welcoming almost 1000 participants onto programmes, and supported over 400 young people into a career within the health service. These young people have faced significant adversity and barriers in their lives, but with The Prince's Trust at their side, they have developed the skills and confidence they need to realise their ambition.

Our work has evolved, responding to the changing needs of the health and social care sector and young people, however, our ambition remains the same — to recruit a passionate, sustainable, and

diverse workforce that unlocks the potential in Scotland's young people.

We know that effective youth work has the power to address the wide-ranging factors impacting poverty, inclusive economic growth, mental health and well-being, skills gaps, and future workforce development. Our partnership with NHS Scotland is a tangible example of this. By engaging young people from vulnerable backgrounds, we are using youth work to provide a solution to the growing recruitment challenge and ensuring greater societal representation across our health service.

The Prince's Trust's believes every young person should have the chance to succeed and we are passionate about realising the full potential of Scotland's youth. With partners like NHS Scotland, we can help create an inclusive and sustainable workforce, whilst showcasing the impact our younger generation can have on securing Scotland's wider societal and economic ambitions.

TD1 Youth Hub's Impact: A Decade of Transforming Young Lives

Since opening its doors in 2013, TD1 Youth Hub has been a pillar of support for the young people in Galashiels.

Over the past ten years, they've worked with over **2,000** young people, witnessing countless life-changing moments unfold. Often, these transformations occur after young people have left specific projects or initiatives, leaving them with profound memories of the positive impact TD1 has had on their lives.

While TD1 knew that their work had a positive impact on most young people, they wanted to prove that the effects of youth work can be long-lasting. In 2015, they secured funding from the Thinking Differently Programme,

a partnership of five grant-making foundations. This funding aimed to trial innovative interventions to tackle alcohol-related harm, and its success laid the foundation for their continued work.

One of the key takeaways from the 2017 evaluation by Arrivo Consultants was the power of TD1's approach in working with young people. Their success was attributed to several factors, including:

- **Working with young people's reality:** TD1 doesn't shy away from the challenges young people face; instead, they embrace and address them head-on.
- **Being a trusted source of real information:** Young people rely on TD1 for accurate and honest guidance, creating a bond of trust.
- **Working with the young person, not the issue:** TD1 prioritises the individual needs and aspirations of each young person, ensuring a personalised approach.
- **Relationships:** Building positive and lasting relationships is at the core of TD1's impact.
- **Creating positive peer groups:** TD1 fosters a sense of community among young people, empowering them to support each other.
- **Being a trusted organisation:** TD1's reputation as a reliable and supportive organisation is instrumental in their success.

Voices of Young People

To understand the real impact of TD1's work, they reached out to **50** young people aged **17 to 25** who had previously been regular users of their services. Even though most of these young people hadn't received TD1 input for three years, they willingly shared their experiences and insights through a survey conducted in January 2021.

The respondents' comments revealed the profound impact TD1 had on their lives.

- **100%** said TD1 made a positive difference to their lives.
- **100%** said they felt they had someone to trust and talk to as result of TD1.
- **100%** said things were better as a result of being involved.
- **75%** were in employment, education or training.
- **90%** said being involved made them more confident.
- **60%** said TD1 had made them consider risk.

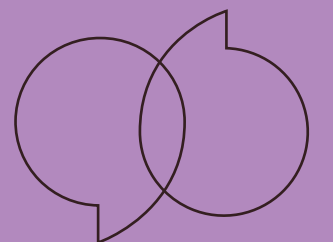
A Bright Future

Their greatest achievement, however, is that they are trusted. Three out of four young people at TD1 have been engaged for more than three years - illustrating the value of long-term relationship in trusted community-based youth work organisations.



"The most important thing about TD1 is that no matter what age I was, no matter what circumstances I was in, there was someone in TD1 who supported me, listened to me, guided me. I know that they have done this for thousands of young people over the last 10 years in Galashiels."

— Former young person aged 23



The Thrive Programme: Youth Work and Employability

In April 2022, Working4U, West Dunbartonshire Council's employability department, launched the 'Thrive' personal development programme, aimed at young people aged 16-to-24, and at the core of the programme is great youth work.

Thrive supports young people who face a range of barriers to employment. From lacking qualifications to grappling with mental health issues, low self-confidence, generational unemployment, and housing challenges, which means these young people often find themselves at a crossroads. The programme offers a life-line, guiding them towards their goals at their own pace.

Practical support that makes a difference

Thrive doesn't stop at words — it takes practical steps to empower its participants. From helping them open bank accounts and access Young Scot Cards and travel passes to boosting their overall health and well-being through gym memberships, the project gives these young people essential life skills. As they build their skills and work experience through volunteering and group work, they gain confidence and motivation to take on the world.

Volunteering as a path to growth

Volunteering plays a crucial role in the Thrive programme. Participants engage in activities such as assisting at local food and clothing banks and participating in community litter picks, all contributing to their achievement of the 10-hour Saltire Awards. Additionally, Thrive integrates Youth Scotland Awards, with every participant earning their Hi5 certificate.

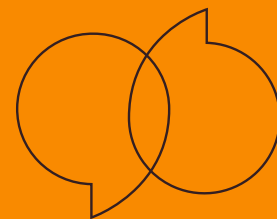
Impacting lives

Thrive has made a significant impact on the employability landscape. Young people have not only enjoyed their course experience but have also moved into positive destinations. An impressive **77%** of participants have moved into positive destinations, highlighting the programme's effectiveness.

As part of the journey Thrive continually reviews young people's progress. These reviews, aligned with the Employability Shared Measurement Framework, ensure that young people's voices are heard in service design. The reviews focus on key aspects like confidence, general motivation, and motivation to move into a positive destination. An impressive **100%** of young people said they had improved confidence and motivation as outcomes of their Thrive experience.



Kayla's Journey



Kayla's story is a testament to Thrive's impact. Initially referred to the programme by Skills Development Scotland, Kayla faced numerous barriers, including a lack of qualifications, no work experience, and low self-confidence. With the support of Thrive, she steadily built her confidence, created a CV and received essential technology to overcome digital barriers.

Thrive also helped Kayla to get her provisional license and worked with her to develop a Hi-5 Award. Her progress was remarkable, she not only attended group sessions but also volunteered at a local food bank, earning her a 10-hour Saltire Award.

As Kayla explored career possibilities, she expressed a keen interest in Health and Social Care. Thrive stepped in to help her apply for a college course, accompanying her to the interview to ease her anxiety. Kayla has since received a conditional offer to study the course, reflecting her newfound confidence and determination.

Kayla's journey, like many others in Thrive, has been marked by significant personal growth. She now feels more equipped and confident to pursue her dreams, all thanks to the support and routine provided by Thrive.

To learn more about the Thrive programme, visit [Thrive | West Dunbartonshire Council](https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/jobs-and-training/working4u/work/thrive/).

Edinburgh Young Carers: Reducing Isolation



"One in five children in Scotland could be classified as a young carer."



Rosie's Journey

Let us introduce you to Rosie, an 11-year-old who cares for her mum, dealing with physical and mental health issues and substance misuse. Rosie's journey with Edinburgh Young Carers began when her situation was flagged for additional support. Rosie gradually found her place in our groups and started making friends. Her teddy bear, once a constant companion, began to stay in her bag and, eventually, at home. Rosie attended every single group, demonstrating her growing confidence and sense of belonging.

Recognising her difficulty in articulating her emotions, we offered Rosie the opportunity to participate in therapeutic horse-riding sessions. Her first session was a breakthrough — she connected profoundly with her horse, Dennis, shedding tears of happiness she hadn't experienced in years.

Through youth work, we've witnessed young carers like Rosie blossom and rediscover their dreams. Edinburgh Young Carers is committed to nurturing hope,

building skills, and fostering a sense of belonging among these remarkable young people. Together, we work to ensure that they have the opportunities they deserve to thrive and fulfil their aspirations.

Jennifer Lewis, School Project Manager, and Laura Piunti, Drug and Alcohol Development Worker talk about fostering a sense of belonging.

It's a staggering statistic, one in five children in Scotland could be classified as a young carer. These children come from diverse backgrounds and carry an array of life experiences and challenges. Some are caring for parents dealing with physical and mental health issues, while others struggle with the impact of substance misuse within their families.

Identifying and Nurturing Young Carers

Our work begins by collaborating with schools and teachers to identify these often-hidden young carers. Some of the most challenging cases involve those impacted by the substance use of a loved one. Shame and stigma still cast

long shadows, causing families to hesitate in seeking external support. Nevertheless, their needs are very real, and our mission is to bridge that gap.

Youth Work's Transformative Impact

At Edinburgh Young Carers, we've harnessed the power of partnerships with local community organisations to offer life experiences that many of these young carers would otherwise miss out on. These experiences are designed to help them develop essential skills such as literacy, coordination, and confidence. Additionally, they provide a sense of belonging in the community, reducing isolation and loneliness.



To learn more about our work and the stories of young carers we support, visit EdinburghYoungCarers.org.uk

Scotland's Young People's Forest: Planting the Seeds of Change

The vision is to create the first forest in Scotland that is co-designed, led and governed by young people. It's the impact of youth work that makes this youth-led project a success.

Scotland's Young People's Forest aims to create and rejuvenate native Scottish forests, making them accessible to all as educational resources while combating climate and nature crises.

Collaborating with RSPB Scotland at Baron's Haugh nature reserve, we engage the Youth Leadership Panel and local young people in forestry and woodland management techniques.

The Youth Leadership Panel has co-designed these project ambitions:

Land Use:

To manage, regenerate, and rewild various land areas into forest sanctuaries.

Health and Wellbeing:

To establish outdoor spaces for people to reconnect with nature, promoting their health and wellbeing or sharing with others.

Native Wildlife:

Managing and restoring native wildlife to educate and reconnect people with native species.

Equality and Accessibility:

Creating inviting and accessible forested places for everyone.

Culture and Innovation:

Creating inspiring natural spaces for people to explore the interconnectedness of natural and cultural heritage through art and technology.

Young People:

Enabling and empowering other young people to address climate change and environmental concerns.

The project is supported by:

- YouthLink Scotland
- Young Scot
- The Woodland Trust
- Green Action Trust

Alongside founding partners like:

- Corra Foundation
- NatureScot
- Pears Foundation
- Scottish Enterprise
- Accenture
- Wood

Scotland's Young People's Forest isn't just about planting trees; it's about cultivating a future where young people lead in climate action and environmental stewardship.



"The project has given me confidence, communication skills, connections with like-minded peers, and immense personal value. It's been a lifeline for my mental health, offering a space to take action even when things seem overwhelming."

— Josie



"As young people, we aspire to make a positive, inclusive difference in the climate crisis. We aim to center marginalized voices and hold governments, corporations, and individuals accountable for inaction. Our mission extends beyond COP26, embedding climate consciousness in society at the grassroots level."

— Emma



"SYPF has transformed my life, offering opportunities, boosting my confidence, and enhancing my outgoing nature. It's our chance to make a difference; we're determined to manage this site and change the world."

— Finlay

Elgin Youth Development Group's Impactful Journey

Elgin Youth Development Group's (EYDG) understands that every young person embarks on a unique journey, facing distinct challenges and requirements. Their youth work approach is centred around building meaningful relationships that foster trust and openness. These relationships allow youth workers to understand each young person's specific issues and work with them to overcome their challenges.

They take very much a holistic approach to training, recognising that personal issues can affect young people's ability to engage and they adapt their support on a one-to-one basis with flexibility being key to their success.

Their flagship 16-week trainee programme serves as the initial stepping stone for most participants. During this period, trainees dedicate 12 hours a week to work at the Café, the Warehouse or the Inkwell, EYDG's training cafe and social enterprise. These placements allow young people to take on a variety of different roles, from catering and hospitality to facilities management, social media and administration.

The trainees undergo comprehensive training, which includes mastering customer interactions, barista skills, meal preparation, cleaning, and administrative tasks. They acquire valuable qualifications such as first aid and food hygiene, as well as ongoing support from youth work staff in putting together CVs, preparing for interviews and identifying job opportunities.

The Power of Qualitative Feedback

While statistics offer valuable insights, qualitative feedback often paints a more vivid picture of the journey a young person has travelled. Parents, carers, and users of EYDG's space have provided heartening testimonials. Comments like these really show the impact of the project on young people:



"What a difference in A since he joined you, he is happy to chat away to us now."



"B wouldn't have gone into a shop on their own before starting with you, now it isn't an issue."

The Statistics Tell the Tale

The impact of EYDG's programmes is undeniably impressive, and the statistics speak for themselves:

Over the past three years, the project has supported 56 young people and almost

all have gone onto education, employment or further training, that's quite a result:

- 22 gained employment.
- 11 embarked on college or university journeys.
- 2 continued further training and development.
- 10 transitioned to partner organizations for specialized support.
- 3 embraced voluntary roles.
- 5 are currently participating in further programmes with EYDG.
- 2 trainees, unfortunately, had to discontinue their placements due to ill-health.
- 1 trainee welcomed parenthood.
- Across various indicators gauging confidence before and after placements, an overall increase of 48% was observed.

Exceeding Expectations: A Path to Independence

Expectations are another key aspect measured. Trainees are asked to express their hopes for their time at EYDG, covering indicators such as independence, quality of life, relationships, making friends, prospects, and future plans. Impressively, 81% of trainees reported that EYDG met their expectations across all indicators, with 15% of trainees' expectations exceeded. The remaining 4% indicated that specific expectations related to work or further education were not met, primarily by trainees who left their placements prematurely.

Youth-led research:

Lessons from our youth-led evaluation of Community Based Mental Health Services in Scotland

Ensuring better support for children and young people affected by the mental health crisis in Scotland has been a priority for Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament in recent years.

In March 2021 one MSYP told the Scottish Cabinet at the Annual Cabinet Meeting with Children and Young people:



“The extent of this worry and the impact on mental health makes me worried for those young people around me. What can we do to help?”

MSYPs wanted to play a key role in addressing that.

In April 2022, SYP was asked by the Scottish Government to carry out an independent evaluation of the community-based supports and services that received Scottish Government funding. At the beginning of our independent evaluation, 230 services and supports had been introduced or expanded across 31 local authorities.

What we did

Our independent evaluation aimed to better understand service user experiences, involvement of children and young people in service design and delivery, and wider awareness of services funded by the Scottish Government’s community services fund.

A small group of MSYPs formed our Mental Health Investigations Team - Alannah, Amy, Felix, Kaydence, Millie, Sam, Ellie, Beau and Abbie. The team began by developing research aims and objectives and outlined their shared approach to engaging with children and young people. MSYPs then developed an Evaluation Framework and focus group session plans before moving onto the focus group period of the investigation.

The Mental Health Investigation Team then facilitated 11 focus groups and interviews with children, young people and parents and carers in six different local authorities across the country. As well as leading each session, MSYPs were supported to take notes and reflect on the sessions afterwards.

SYP staff supported MSYPs to conduct a thematic analysis of the survey and focus group findings. Core to this was training developed alongside Evaluation Support Scotland on coding and identifying key information in research that MSYPs took part in. They then categorised the responses into themes which formed the basis of the recommendations in the Independent evaluation of mental health and wellbeing community supports and services for 5–24-year-olds, their parents and carers Report.

What we found

MSYPs identified 13 key recommendations for Scottish Government to ensure a consistent level of support for children, young people, and their families across Scotland.

A few to highlight include:

- Ensure a rights-based approach is taken at all levels of design and delivery of community-based mental health services for children, young people, and their families.
- Address funding barriers as a priority to ensure community-based mental health services can continue delivering high quality support to more children, young people and their families when this support is needed, and for as long as it is needed.
- Increase support for specialist services to provide targeted and intersectional support for children, young people, and families.

Our impact

Our youth-led approach to research ensured a safe and supportive environment for children and young people to share their experiences, leading to a more accurate representation of the reality of community based mental health services in Scotland. However, it was also a positive development experience for the young people involved.



Additionally, one MSYP in the project team, Beau, was a part of #TeamScotlandUN and brought the recommendation for increased funding for community-based services directly to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva in February 2023. The Committee reflected Beau’s call in their Concluding Observations providing a powerful advocacy tool to ensure Government deliver this recommendation.

Lessons in the benefits of youth-led research

SYP’s experience of delivering youth-led research shows the benefits of the approach to improving the research and developing lifelong skills for the young people involved. MSYPs in the project reflected in a blog that:

“The fact that this process was youth-led allowed us as a team of young people to develop and learn so many valuable skills too, particularly concerning evaluating and reporting, which will be incredibly useful in other areas of our lives.”

While a time-consuming process, the rewards of delivering meaningful youth-led research significantly outweigh the challenges of delivering training and fitting research activities in amongst other parts of the busy life of a young person. In the words of the MSYPs involved:



“We have loved carrying out this project together and putting in the time and effort to form these recommendations and this report.”



“Taking part in this evaluation has really been such an interesting and enriching experience. We have learned so many valuable skills around evaluation and reporting! I also really enjoyed working with the Investigation Team as they all really got on well together. What surprised me most about this work is how much research we managed to carry out in such a short time frame. It was amazing!”

— Ellie MSYP



“It was important that young people took the lead in designing this review as this is a review by young people for young people. This evaluation has helped me improve my analysis skills as well as my interviewing skills. It has made me see how these reviews are run and what the Government looks for.”

— Felix MSYP

Creating lasting change for our young people

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