Essential and Transformational: **Investigating the Future of Voluntary Sector Youth Work in Scotland**

September 2025

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YouthLink Scotland

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

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1. Foreword

"I must admit to being a little jealous of the capacity of other industries to invest in futures thinking, often with a large R&D budget to spend on research. The education and charity sector in contrast spends very little of its squeezed budget on looking ahead, except maybe for some of our universities. That is why this report into the Future of Youth Work is so welcome and we are grateful to all the youth workers who contributed.

The futures challenge to the sector presented by insecure funding and rising demands due to rapid social change may be familiar, but they are not insurmountable. This report provides us with some new insights on how we might prioritise for the future, emphasising inclusive participation of young people and ways to boost the visibility and understanding of the sector. Worth reading."

YouthLink Scotland

Tim Frew
Chief Executive, YouthLink Scotland

I welcome this research report at a time of social change, uncertainty, and growing pressure on services. Its findings not only reflect the experiences of the youth work organisations involved but also offer a valuable tool for the wider sector to advocate for the impact and importance of youth work in local communities. As youth work is increasingly asked to do more with less, often by those with limited understanding of its value, this report provides a timely opportunity to influence, inform, and engage key stakeholders.

LAYC

Laurene Edgar
Director, Lothian Association of Youth Clubs (LAYC)

For decades, the youth work sector has played a vital role in supporting children and young people across Scotland, often delivering outcomes that are both profound and difficult to measure. From my own experience as a young person participating in youth work and now as a practitioner, I can personally testify to its real, life-changing impact. Despite funding uncertainties and a lack of long-term investment, youth workers continue to adapt, innovate, and meet increasing demands with unwavering commitment, despite challenges facing the sector. This insightful report calls for a deeper understanding of youth work's role and highlights the urgent need for sustained recognition and resourcing to ensure the sector can continue to support Scotland's young people effectively.

POLICE SCOTLAND
Keeping people safe
POILEAS ALBA

Robert Dallow
Youth Engagement Officer, Strategy, Insight and Engagement, Police Scotland

At Public Health Scotland (PHS) we advocate for a public health approach to prevention to help stop issues from happening in the first place. We recognise the vital role of youth work as an effective preventative approach to improving outcomes for our young people. Youth work meets young people where they're at - contributing to a holistic response to their needs, supporting positive experiences, and creating the conditions to improve physical, mental and social wellbeing in the longer term.

There is growing recognition from across the system that we are not working as effectively as we can to support the health and wellbeing of young people in Scotland. The research in this report is a timely reminder that we must ensure the contribution of youth work is recognised, resourced, and fully integrated as part of a systems wide response with other sectors including health, education and justice to ensure young people have the best chance to realise their full potential. This research tells us that we still have some way to go and PHS is committed to playing its part in supporting and advocating for the role and value of youth work in Scotland.

Public Health Scotland

Dr Megan Watson
Public Health Intelligence Lead (Early Years and Young People),
Public Health Scotland

2. Executive Summary

This research is a result of a partnership between YouthLink Scotland and the University of Edinburgh, on behalf of the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group. The research set out to gather insights to answer two research questions:

1. What are the future challenges for youth work?
2. How is youth work understood, recognised and valued across different professional sectors?

Using participatory research methods, four voluntary sector youth work organisations were selected to take part in the study – Girvan Youth Trust, Hot Chocolate Trust, Girlguiding Scotland and Muirhouse Youth Development Group. Four focus groups were also held with 18 stakeholder representatives from each of the four youth work organisations.

2.1. Key Findings

Future challenges for youth work

- Varying, competitive and short-term funding was the most significant challenge identified by youth work teams and stakeholders. The consequences of the current funding system for voluntary sector youth work include:
  - » Disruption to high quality practice,
  - » Significant pressure affecting staff wellbeing, and
  - » Restriction of the growth of youth work teams including the development of relationships with partners.
- Concern about trying to support young people who are facing increasingly complex mental health and wellbeing needs.
- A repeated concern expressed across the practice teams was that youth work is not seen as a professional service compared with other sectors that work with young people, such as teaching or social work.
- Lack of mental health support for youth workers.
- Stakeholders would like to see young people's direct involvement in decision making processes including in youth work programmes.
- Youth work teams and stakeholders discussed the importance of youth work providing a whole family approach and working with young people throughout their life course.
- A need to raise the profile of youth work to increase understanding and awareness across the wider community and among other services.

How youth work is understood, recognised and valued across different professional sectors

- Youth work teams overall, felt that youth work is not always well understood by other professional sectors and would like this to change.
- Youth work teams want stakeholders across sectors to value and recognise their role, including:
  - » Understanding the transformative potential of youth work,
  - » Seeing it as an essential service, and
  - » Acknowledging the full breadth and depth of the impact of youth work.
- All the stakeholders expressed a positive view about the role of youth work, the need to work in partnership and for youth work to have a seat at the table.
- Youth work teams would like the First Minister as well as other Government Ministers to understand what youth work is, how beneficial it is to young people and the contribution youth work makes to building communities, viewing it as essential and resourcing it sustainably.

3. Introduction by Dr Ian Fyfe

3.1. The context of youth work over the last 10 years

The past few years have been characterised by global changes and uncertainty that have left a mark on our local communities. The significant political and economic changes that characterised this period have ultimately impacted on the governance, policy priorities and funding of public services, including youth work. Since 2019 and the end of the 5-year period covered by the previous National Youth Work strategy[1], there has been a significant gap in the strategic direction of youth work in Scotland. This has resulted, amongst other things, in a perceived lack of connectedness with the goals of the Scottish Government. Despite an extensive programme of review, consultation and planning involving young people, practitioners and stakeholders, an updated document has not materialised. More recently, this strategic gap and the need for political support has been recognised with the proposal for a Youth Work Bill in Scotland. We await the outcome of this process.

This growing disconnect at political and policy level has impacted deeply. The research presented in this report based on engagement with practitioners from the voluntary sector captures commonly expressed feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. This is allied with perceptions of a lack of recognition of the essential role that youth work plays in supporting young people across Scotland. Looking back over the past 5 years, youth work practitioners have engaged with young people through the challenges and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing changes to local authority structures and service governance, and increasing competition for reduced levels of funding. In this everchanging and uncertain context, youth work has endured, albeit at times, in adversity.

The key features of this current context are not new. For decades, the youth work sector in Scotland has operated in a climate of financial uncertainty and cumulative constraints on resources. The common experience for many local projects and agencies has been an iterative reduction in direct funding from local authorities and an increasing reliance on alternative sources. Often, the funding secured to maintain essential core services is short-term and requires detailed reporting on the impact and outcomes resulting from the youth work intervention. In this discrete context, the likelihood is that the focus and priorities for available funding will continue to change. The funding landscape is perennially influenced by shifting political and policy imperatives. This in turn, requires youth workers to review and adjust their practice

1 youthlink.scot/policy-influence/policy/nyws/

focus, whilst also striving to sustain commitment in responding to emergent social issues and problems affecting young people, their families and wider communities. In recent times, what has dominated the challenges for many local practitioners has been growing levels of poverty, and the need to tailor the provision of essential services to meet the basic survival needs of those families affected the most.

3.2. So, what does the future hold in store for the youth work sector?

The distinctive professional role, purpose and identity of the modern-day youth work practitioner has attracted international coverage and commentary in academic research and literature. Youth work in Scotland has an established national profile and practice reputation as a core professional community-based educational service. Yet, all too often, the unique contribution of the youth work sector in supporting young Scots is not acknowledged to the same extent as other professional services, such as schooling and social work.

Somewhat ironically, against this backdrop the demands on youth work to engage in partnerships with other local services appears to have increased. The cumulative effect of funding restrictions and increasing expectations on the sector has resulted in a situation of providing more for less; whilst the frustrations of limited recognition remain. The professional relationships that youth work practitioners have are wide-ranging requiring engagement and communication with an array of stakeholders. Ensuring clarity of purpose appears to be a constant challenge as youth work practitioners navigate the often-complex boundaries that characterise partnership working. As a result, the youth work sector becomes increasingly diverse and the required skills-base for practitioners subsequently broadens.

In this context of uncertainty, there is a need to 'future-proof' the youth work sector to ensure important core work is sustained; and to ultimately ensure that young people continue to thrive in their personal and family lives, local neighbourhoods and wider Scottish society. Youth work plays a central role in supporting young Scots in their ongoing journey of discovery and development, the sector needs security of resources to continue to offer these opportunities. The research study presented in this report was a deliberate intervention at a time when there appears to be a need for a clearer understanding of future direction. We engaged with staff and volunteers for the voluntary youth work sector and stakeholders in order to examine their experiences, thoughts and aspirations with a view to inform the future of youth work.

The next section provides a brief description of the background to the project. This is followed by a summary of the research approach, methodology, and literature review, which then leads to a presentation of the findings. We conclude with some key messages arising from the data which point to recommendations for change


ROLE OF YOUTH WORK
Wish list
- Education
- NHS - (at different levels)
- Change relationship
- resourcing
Purpose of partnerships
> extend reach
> Financial/other support
> Strengthen networks
- Military fam

4. Background to the Research

In 2015, the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group[2] (SYWRSG) undertook a consultation with representatives from the youth work sector across Scotland. The purpose was to identify research priorities. Following the outcome of that event, members of SYWRSG crowd funded with the youth work sector to raise money to complete research which would add to the evidence base on the impact of youth work. Through this funding, the group conducted a study examining the impact of community-based universal youth work in Scotland[3]. The findings have been disseminated widely and used by academics, policy makers, and the sector to help raise the profile, shape the direction of practice and more generally, make the case for youth work in Scotland. This research project was also the catalyst for further studies, in Dumfries and Galloway[4], Edinburgh[5] and with LGBT Youth Scotland[6].

In 2023, the SYWRSG completed another consultation with youth work practitioners to find out what contemporary research topics and questions are priorities for the youth work sector and young people across Scotland. This consultation produced 10 research questions[7] for the SYWRSG in collaboration with the youth work sector, to focus on over the next 5 years.

Two topics which were identified in the consultation were:

- Future challenges for youth work
- How youth work is valued, recognised and understood across different professional sectors

Utilising the remaining crowd funded resources, the SYWRSG developed a research project focused on these topics. YouthLink Scotland and University of Edinburgh agreed to work together to lead on this research on behalf of the SYWRSG. This report presents and discusses the findings of this study.

2 youthlink.scot/our-networks/research-steering-group/

3 youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Impact-of-Universal-Youth-Work-in-Scotland.pdf

4 youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Impact-of-Universal-Youth-Work-in-Dumfries-and-Galloway.pdf

5 youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Impact-of-Universal-Youth-Work-in-Edinburgh.pdf

6 youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Impact-of-Digital-Youth-Work-with-LGBT-Youth-Scotland.pdf

7 youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Youth-work-prioritisation-workshop-summary-report.pdf

4.1. Setting the scene: understanding youth work and the current challenges

The context for this study is captured by Batsleer (2010)[8]

> 'Youth Work in the UK at the beginning of the twenty-first century occupies an ambivalent space; on the one hand appearing to be under threat and on the other hand being valued and in demand, on condition that it constantly reinvents itself … youth work seems to punch continually above its weight and to continually feel aggrieved at its lack of recognition.' (p.153)

To help map a vision for the future of youth work, it is important to set out the definitional terms that inform contemporary practice in Scotland and beyond. Despite the current policy gap in Scotland, youth work organisations and practitioners can continue to rely on specific points of reference that offer insight and support to the values, role and purpose that underpin service delivery.

The youth work sector in Scotland is well established across many local neighbourhoods and continues to extend its reach in terms of engaging with young people in ever-diversifying communities of interest. Commonly, youth work services provide safe physical and online spaces where young people come together with their friends and peers and engage with practitioners. This happens mainly during their own leisure time in a wide range of settings. The most recent youth work strategy for Scotland[9] recognised the breadth of potential offered by youth work, whereby:

> Diverse activities help young people gain confidence, develop important skills for life and achieve success but also to have fun, and engage with others as they progress through adolescence to adulthood. Workers develop trust and confidence in the young people in a non-judgemental and informal setting. (p.4)

In February 2024, an updated version of the Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work[10] in Scotland was published. This guiding document defines youth work as 'an informal, rights-based educational practice that supports young people's personal, social and educational development'. Central to this process is a trust-based, voluntary relationship forged between a youth work practitioner and a young person.

Across the workforce there is a stated commitment to being inclusive and striving for social justice, similar goals are reflected in the Youth Work National Occupational Standards[11]. Across the UK, youth work is steered by core values such as participation,

8 Batsleer, J., Davies, B., Popple, K., & Batsleer, J. (2010). Youth work prospects: back to the future?. In Youth work prospects: Back to the future? (pp. 153-165). SAGE Publications, Inc., doi.org/10.4135/9781526435873.n13

9 education.gov.scot/media/paoliikx/youth-work-strategy-181214.pdf

10 youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Statement-on-the-Nature-and-Purpose-of-Youth-Work.pdf

11 youthlink.scot/training-development/professional-frameworks/national-occupational-standards/

equity, diversity, inclusion and interdependence. Practice methods and approaches are primarily built on the premise that young people choose to participate, and the engagement begins with young people's lived experience, is person centred, and responsive to the respective needs of the young person, their wider relationships, community and culture.

Since the 1970s, youth work in Scotland has been acknowledged in policy terms as an educational practice, characterised by a discrete pedagogical approach that draws upon informal and non-formal practices. Often described as an empowering profession, a feature of learning has been raising young people's political awareness, developing their critical thinking, and supporting active participation and engagement in local communities and wider platforms focused on social change.

Academic commentary on youth work often acknowledges the international diversity that characterises modes of practice, and the values and principles that determine overarching objectives. A synthesis of contrasting historical and international definitions is offered by Cooper (2018)[12] who uncovers the common core of values and practices as:

1. a focus on young people's lives and their concerns;
2. attending to the social connection and the context of young people's lives;
3. positive regard and processes for working through supportive and friendly relationships;
4. a holistic approach to young people that includes commitment to:
    - i. informal education;
    - ii. an ethic of care and concern for the flourishing of young people;
    - iii. acilitation of youth participation, rights and social justice; acting with integrity.

The historical model of youth work in Scotland, and many other countries, emerged from a predominantly vocational and voluntary community-based practice (Smith 1988).[13] Over time, the sector has become increasingly professionalised. Underlying the professional practice of youth work in Scotland is a recognised code of ethics, Community Learning and Development (CLD) Competencies, common values, and pathways to professional qualifications approved by the CLD Standards Council for Scotland.

12 Cooper, T., (2018), Defining youth work: Exploring the boundaries, continuity and diversity of youth work practice. In P. Alldred, F. Cullen, K. Edwards & D. Fusco (Eds.), SAGE Handbook of Youth Work Practice (pp. 3-17). Sage. au.sagepub.com/en-gb/oce/the-sage-handbook-of-youth-work-practice/book245391#contents

13 Smith, M.K. (1988). Developing Youth Work: Informal Education, Mutual Aid and Popular Practice. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

However, across the broader landscape of professional community-based services, the place held by youth work can be an uncertain one. Williams and Richardson (2024)[14] suggest:

> it is due to the informal nature of youth work, that it has often been perceived as a 'lesser' field of practice and considered less professional. This is despite clear evidence of good youth work, such as early safeguarding disclosures and reductions in criminal behaviour.

For Corney et al. (2024)[15], the practice of professional youth work is not well understood outside the sector. Related to this, the issue of communicating what exactly youth workers do is a constant challenge in the design and delivery of services, particularly when collaborating with other professional practitioners and sectors.

In this somewhat conflicted space, youth work practitioners have been increasingly tasked to record and demonstrate the impact of their intervention on the lives and lifestyles of young people. Such demands are features of a growing managerial climate that is characterised by measurement and commodification of public services. This context raises further challenges. Pope (2016)[16], argues that for youth workers this emergent situation 'creates a state of flux, positioned amid funding uncertainties, service reorganisation and accountability agendas' (p.370). The net effect is increased pressure on the youth work sector to maintain responsive and relevant services that continue to effectively meet the everchanging needs of young people.

From this short review of literature and existing evidence, it is clear that youth work shapes the lives and lifestyles of young people and supports them as they navigate the respective pathways towards adulthood. The programmes of informal and non-formal learning provided by the youth work sector helps young people to develop knowledge, skills and values that support them in their future roles such as; partners, parents, workers, and active citizens.

However, the changing context for practice continues to throw up a myriad of challenges with practitioners tasked to maintain levels of services with reduced resources allied with expanded demands. Despite the longstanding role that youth work has played, there still appears to be a need to gain insight to how best we can 'future-proof' the youth work sector in Scotland. It is with this in mind that we embarked upon this current investigation.

14 Williams, S., Richardson, R. What Do JNC Youth Workers Conceive of as 'Professional Maturity' in Youth Work Practice. JAYS 7, 157–176 (2024). doi.org/10.1007/s43151-024-00114-5

15 Corney, T., Gorman, J., Woods, B., Benedict, N., & Law, A. (2024). 'Bridge-builders' and 'boundary spanners': a qualitative study of youth workers' perceptions of their roles and practices with vulnerable young people in school-based settings. International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 29(1). doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2024.2387080

16 Pope, P. (2016). '"Handing over our ethics?" Youth work conversations in times of austerity.' Ethics and Social Welfare, 10(4), 369–377. doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2016.1185795

5. Methodology

This research was conducted by YouthLink Scotland in partnership with the University of Edinburgh, on behalf of the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group.

Two questions were examined in this research:

1. What are the future challenges for youth work?
2. How is youth work understood, recognised and valued across different professional sectors?

The following methodology outlines the approach to addressing both questions.

5.1. Research question – what are the future challenges for youth work?

To explore the future challenges for youth work in Scotland, a participatory research methodology was used. This approach engaged youth workers as practitioner researchers to conduct focus groups with their staff teams or volunteers from across their respective organisation. This set up an opportunity to gather the reflective experiences and perspectives directly from their workplace colleagues. Through participation in the training and delivery of focus groups, it was envisaged that the practitioner researchers would also benefit from the professional development experience.

SAMPLING AND RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

A research call was distributed to the youth work sector inviting notes of interest from youth work organisations to take part in a participatory research project exploring future challenges for youth work.

The criteria for assessing applications were devised to ensure a mix of urban and rural communities, as well as identifying organisations with experience of delivering both universal and targeted youth work. Based on the criteria and strength of the applications we selected four organisations.

Each of the youth work organisations were provided with £500 to pay towards staff time to take part in the training and run the focus group.

OVERVIEW OF THE SELECTED YOUTH WORK ORGANISATIONS

Girvan Youth Trust (South Ayrshire)

Girvan Youth Trust (GYT) is a grassroots, community-based youth work charity based in a rural community in South Ayrshire. Their main aim is to enhance the quality of life for local young people in the Girvan and South Carrick area – an area which is comprised of one main town and eight surrounding villages. GYT wanted to be part of the research because being valued, recognised and understood by other sectors is something they deal with every day. They have also never taken part in a participatory research project before and wanted to help shape the research.

Hot Chocolate Trust (Dundee)

Hot Chocolate Trust (HCT) is a youth work organisation, based in Dundee city centre. It is open to all young people from secondary school age up to 21 years old. HCT applied to take part in the research to connect with a wider network of organisations and practitioners to explore youth work practice and context, especially after several years of changes and pressures. They also felt that being part of this project would provide inspiration and learning into their practice.

Muirhouse Youth Development Group (Edinburgh)

Muirhouse Youth Development Group (MYDG) describes itself as more than a youth work programme, they are a process of social change or a quiet 'revolution' empowering young people in the North of Edinburgh, identified as an area of deprivation. MYDG wanted to participate in the research to share their knowledge to help further the cause of youth work and the impact it has on young people's lives.

Girlguiding Scotland (National)

Girlguiding Scotland is Scotland's leading charity for girls and young women, and also supports more than 9,000 volunteers to deliver youth work directly in Scottish communities. They are organised into 27 counties covering all 32 local authorities and have a structured governance process that connects them with all 3,000 local units. Girlguiding Scotland applied to be part of the research as they would like to maintain an offer which is relevant to girls and young women in Scotland for the future. They were keen to learn from this research methodology and support the promotion of the outcomes.

PRACTITIONER RESEARCHER TRAINING

Youth workers from the selected youth work organisations (2 from each = 8 in total) were trained as practitioner researchers; primarily, in how to conduct focus groups. This online training included topics such as; research ethics, focus group methods and interviewing techniques. The practitioner researchers were provided with a focus group topic guide (see Appendix 2) which detailed the themes and questions to explore in order to ensure consistency across the focus groups. Part of the training concentrated on how these questions could be adapted to suit the needs of the participants in each locality.

FOCUS GROUPS

Once trained, the practitioner researchers conducted a focus group with their workplace colleagues in order to explore future challenges for youth work. In the case of Girlguiding Scotland, the focus group was undertaken with a selection of volunteers from across Scotland. This approach provided an opportunity to have a discussion on the challenges they are facing locally and more broadly across the youth work sector in Scotland.

With two members of staff facilitating the focus group, this ensured it was a familiar and safe space which helped the practitioners feel comfortable to share their experiences and be open and honest about the challenges they faced. The practitioner researchers recorded the focus group sessions and securely sent the audio files to the research team to arrange transcriptions.

CODING AND REFLECTION DAY

On the 28th November 2024, the practitioner researchers were invited to take part in a coding and reflection day planned and facilitated by the research team. The practitioner researchers were supported to draw out the key themes from the focus groups; providing an opportunity to learn from each other's experiences, discover where there are similar themes and highlight differences. The practitioners reflected on the emerging findings and provided ideas about what conclusions can be drawn and possible actions taken. The practitioner researchers recognised the value of participating in this coding process which offered an opportunity for professional development for the youth work teams through the process of research, critical thinking and reflective practice.

5.2. Research question – how is youth work understood, recognised and valued across different professional sectors?

ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Focus groups were held with stakeholder representatives from each of the four youth work organisations. The participating stakeholders were identified by the youth work teams as being crucial to the future of their organisation and included partners they are currently working with or would like to be working with. The purpose of the focus group discussion was to explore with the stakeholders their understanding of youth work and its recognition and value.

The focus groups were conducted by a research assistant from the University of Edinburgh (see Appendix 3 for stakeholder topic guide). For this stage of the study, it was decided that the focus groups should be conducted by someone independent of the respective organisation, rather than the practitioner researchers. The focus groups were held online; 18 stakeholders took part across the four sessions. They represented

a range of organisations including schools, local authorities, community councils, third sector organisations, local youth work organisations, charitable trusts, arts venues, funders and private sector organisations. The stakeholders also held a range of roles and positions with varied levels of seniority within their organisations. These included: deputy head teachers, officers, team leaders, treasurers, project workers, heads of service, managers, trustees, consultants and chief executives.

At the time of recruitment, there was no expectation for the chosen stakeholders to have previous knowledge of youth work, its affordances, or challenges. Upon conducting the four focus groups, however, the data collected confirmed that most of the participants were knowledgeable or had direct experience with youth work, either because they had attended youth work spaces in the past, were former youth workers, or currently working within youth work settings. This resulted in insights gathered from expert individuals that displayed a clear grasp and perspective on which gaps needed to be addressed through youth work in the future.

ANALYSIS OF THE STAKEHOLDER DATA

The research staff from the University of Edinburgh and YouthLink Scotland coded the data from the stakeholder focus groups. This data was combined with the youth workers focus group data and thematically analysed using both Excel and Miro (an online mind mapping platform).

5.3. Ethics

This research project received ethical approval from the School of Health in Social Science Research Ethics (reference 23-24-NUST036) at University of Edinburgh.

Participants in the focus groups were provided with an information sheet and asked to complete an online consent form held by the University of Edinburgh.


TO SAY
AMAZING
INVALUABLE
YOUNG PERSON'S RIGHT
ESSENTIAL
VALUABLE TOOL IN YPs LEARNER JOURNEY +BEYOND
GENERATIONAL TRUST
IMPACT ON ECONOMY
RECOGNITION
IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERS
IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH
NORMALISING
ACTION
CHALLENGES IN YOUTH WORK
> Premises – access – time – explore alternatives (empty shops)
> Recruitment + Retention (volunteers)
> Capacity – prioritising – availability – work in kind – Filling gaps – Staff wellbeing
– lack of time – not prioritised – easier to pay people – Flexibility – Compliance (safeguarding) – image
> Over-reaching
> Mission creep
> Maintaining autonomy – finding a collective voice
Stifling creativity

6. Findings

All the focus groups began with a discussion about what youth work is and its role and value in society from the perspectives of the practitioners and stakeholders (Appendix 2 and 3). The 2023 research priority consultation had identified that capturing the range of practice and diversity of understandings of youth work were important challenges for research. Subsequently, to address the two research questions we needed to first explore the commonalities and differences in how participants described youth work and its role and value.

The findings then move into a discussion around collaborative practice addressing the second research question before looking to the potential future of youth work and the risks and opportunities for youth work (research question 1). In the following sections we discuss the insights and findings that emerged from the focus groups, grouped by theme.

6.1. Youth work and its role and value in society

Youth work practice spans from small local projects through to national and uniformed organisations. The varied settings for practice include local authority youth work services, specific youth work organisations and others embedded in other organisations like schools and faith organisations, and professional youth workers and volunteers. Understanding the common attributes of youth work is important both internally for the sector to recognise the skills and value of youth work, but also externally to ensure other sectors gain a clearer understanding of youth work.

Within the practitioner focus groups we asked the following questions to explore the role of youth work:

1. Thinking about a newborn baby, what role do you think youth work should play in the different stages of their life?
2. Who is your service reaching? Who is not being reached and why?

Contrastingly, stakeholders were first asked the question: 'What do you think youth work is?' before being asked the same newborn baby question as the practitioners. If required the interviewer had a definition of youth work to hand for the stakeholders if a prompt for discussion was needed (Appendix 3). The newborn baby question was designed to provoke consideration of current and future practice, as well as focusing on the contribution to young people's lives at key ages and stages in their development.

WHAT IS YOUTH WORK?

During the focus group sessions, the stakeholders described youth work broadly as: supporting and guiding young people, giving them a voice, working with them in safe spaces and informal settings, with no defined start or end point, to support their personal, social, and educational development.

> "Youth work is whatever the young person needs that work to be. Sometimes it's colouring in, sometimes it's climbing mountains, sometimes it's sitting down for a chat, sometimes it's just listening." (Stakeholder, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

> "I think that's what's critical about the process of youth work, it starts at the place where young people are at and supports them on their own personal journey."
> (Stakeholder, Girlguiding Scotland)

Generally, the expressed understanding of the role and purpose of contemporary youth work in Scotland aligns closely with the current definitional terms. The stakeholders who took part in the focus group had significant knowledge and experience of youth work. Consequently, there is alignment between their perspectives and the features of youth work from the statement on the nature and purpose of youth work (Box 1).

Box 1. Nature and purpose of youth work

Youth work is an educational practice that contributes to youth people's learning and development. It is an inclusive and empowering approach where:

- The work must build from where young people are
- Young people and youth workers are recognised as partners in the learning process
- Young people choose to participate

– Youth work outcomes and skills framework

However, youth work teams overall, felt that youth work is not always well understood by other professional sectors. Importantly, they would ideally like this to change. The key messages that the youth workers would like others to understand is that youth work is an educational service, it can be a paid profession, it supports young people's learner journeys, it has a positive impact on young people's lives and stressing that it's not an "easy job".

> "I think they need understanding of it and I think a lot of folk don't because when you say youth work they think, 'ah that's an easy job. You're just in there playing with wains' and that's not what it's about at all [laughs], they haven't a clue."
> (Youth Worker, Girvan Youth Trust)

ROLE AND VALUE OF YOUTH WORK

As well as a lack of understanding of youth work, a common concern expressed in the focus groups by the practice teams was not feeling valued by other professional sectors, particularly schools. This is a challenge, as some of the participating youth workers work closely with schools and understand the need to expand this work to best support young people[17]. As one of the practitioners described:

> "We work heavily with the schools but the information that we should be gathering is probably a bit more because maybe it seems that we're not valued as much because you just get handed a kid as if you're like a babysitter."
>
> (Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

From the data, the following list summarises what the youth work teams want stakeholders across sectors to value and recognise in their role, including:

- Understanding the transformative potential of youth work
- Seeing it as an essential service
- Acknowledging the full breadth and depth of the impact of youth work

The practitioners connected this gap in understanding with the lack of funding for youth work, and the unrecognised long-term contribution that youth work makes to young people's lives within wider society.

> "There's the value that we put in just now, but when we look at the young people that we've worked with, so just in Girlguiding alone, when you look at where they are now, what they've achieved, the skills that they've got from being in Girlguiding, how much is that worth to the economy? You know, how much is that worth to the society that we're in?"
>
> (Youth Worker, Girlguiding Scotland)

> "I guess it's the value of community and just like building community trusts, having fun, having meaningful experiences that aren't necessarily easy to measure or quantify into something like an end product. So, I guess it's always a tension in finding funding and finding funders who are prepared to back that, but it's one of the most powerful things that happens."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

Perspectives on how youth work is valued were also discussed by some of the stakeholders. In one locality, there was an emphasis on the importance of youth work being recognised across all sectors. For stakeholders representing another organisation, it was stated that there should be more statutory recognition for the value of youth work. Furthermore, there was a suggestion by a stakeholder that there

17 Good practice examples of partnership working youthlink.scot/education-skills/scottish-attainment-challenge/attainment-good-practice/

might be an opportunity within ongoing Education Reform in Scotland to recognise the role youth work can play alongside formal education[18].

One of the youth work teams expressed their frustration at how a lack of value and understanding leads to youth work not being adequately resourced. Consequently, more than hearing the rhetoric, this team are looking for action from key partners, as demonstrated in the following interaction between the team:

> "I'd just like schools to recognise and to say more about, like, it's a valuable resource, but really I think you make a good point...about it's what they do. It's the follow up. It's easy to say [...] 'Oh, we're really progressive, youth work's helping, they're our main partner in the schools,' but aye, but what are you gonna do?"
>
> "Start by, like, not putting us in a cupboard under the stairs."
>
> (Youth Workers, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

As part of the data collection, the youth workers were invited to complete a mapping exercise to identify the range of partners and stakeholders with whom they currently or would like to work with. Table 1, outlines a summary of the responses. The italicised stakeholders appear in both lists, in large part because the youth work teams would like to be working with these partners more.

18 youthlink.scot/education-skills/education-reform/

Table 1. Current and desired partnerships

Current partners	Desired partners
Third sector organisations (4)	Local businesses and job centre (to support curriculum vitae (CV) development) (3)
Schools and colleges (3)	Youth work organisations (including sports and uniformed) (3)
Council (3)	Schools (including faith-based and village schools) (2)
Funders (3)	Police (to maintain a good relationship with them) (2)
Youth work organisations (3)	Community council (2)
Young people (2)	Health service (including mental health and sexual health) (2)
Parents/guardians (2)	Equalities led organisations (Asian networks, Black and Minority ethnic Community, Romany community) (2)
Police (2)	Social work (1)
Community council (1)	Families (including refugee and service) (1)
Psychologists (1)	Community spaces (including Church of Scotland, local authority buildings) (1)
City centre infrastructure (including management, taxi's, supermarkets) (1)	

Numbers in brackets are the number of focus groups (out of four) reporting that partner

This extensive list confirms the diversity of collaboration and partnerships already happening across the contemporary youth work sector. The support received by the various current partners was a consistent insight brought up by the practice teams, a support that ultimately lets youth work organisations deliver the best service for young people and reinforces the relationship that partners also benefit from. Partners have gained from the results of youth work as much as youth work benefits from the support of their current partners; more awareness of this mutually beneficial relationship would help establish contact with new partners and build new solid relationships. Commonly, across the partnerships there was a sense of reciprocal commitment between the youth work organisations and the stakeholders they work with.

"[...] Cause there's infinite work we could do, but I think the flip side of that is if [...] youth work as a whole is doing really, really impactful stuff with a tiny percent of the young people in Dundee and nothing with anybody else then I think that is a kind of, a really good challenge, but it's how that comes across in practice between that kind of big picture. And it's kind of hard cause funders can't be in the details of everything either so how we kind of frame those relationships and how we understand each other is really important, but I think [...] that thing of it not being about, like, 'oh one more for the books', it's actually about who's, who else can benefit from this and how can we get alongside and how can we bring in the voices that haven't been heard and make opportunities."

(Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

"[...] some business owners and people who would be hiring our young people to come and just be like, what do you actually want to see on CVs, what do you actually want to know, like, about these young people, cause some of them have no idea where to start and some of us haven't had a job that isn't youth work in years [laughs]."

(Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

From the youth workers' perspective, the relationship with local police officers could be improved upon. In particular, young people's level of trust and the consistency and nature of engagement by police officers in youth work spaces that is not solely focused on potential problems (for example, around Bonfire Night, to identify potential causes of disruption).

"Cause you're right, it gets to a point where if we were to introduce the police officers, it would just sever the trust that they have with us as well."

(Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

The stakeholders had different levels of engagement with the youth work teams. Some described daily interactions with youth workers, for example in the schools. Others worked for funders or at a strategic level within the organisation so had less direct engagement. Regardless of their level of engagement, all the stakeholders expressed a positive view about the role of youth work and the need to work in partnership.

Opportunities for partnership identified by the stakeholders included the chance to work with youth workers who are willing to put in the work to make change happen and are proactive when looking for opportunities.

It was the view of many stakeholders across the focus groups that partnerships should be formed ahead of time as a way to directly counteract the competitive nature of how funding is allocated within these spaces, and adopting a collaborative approach would allow for more support to be offered in the long term. As one of the stakeholders explained:

> "[...] partnership is the only game in town and we must all absolutely realise that. And if one waits to form a partnership until one needs a partnership, then one has many things but one does not have a partnership. A partnership should be formed, I think, in peacetime. It's important to get on a handshake with people who you are working with when you don't want anything from them and they don't particularly want anything from you because that then develops a relationship for when that that time comes, where, where support is needed [...]."
>
> (Stakeholder, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

When asked about the reasons why stakeholders engage with youth work, their answers were very similar. One of the most common answers was that they engage with youth work because there is a need for it, a need that formal education alone cannot cater to. Others mentioned that they do it because the work itself is rewarding, and connecting with young people and their community provides meaning in a way that cannot be replicated elsewhere, but it is a continuous effort, without the chance to 'switch off'. Because of this, many stakeholders argued that youth work is a vocation, and the work gets done efficiently because of the passion behind it.

> "[...] it kind of just pervades everything. I think that we do and that's what makes it a vocation, what makes this a vocational choice for youth workers to crack on with."
>
> (Stakeholder, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

6.2. Recognition of youth work across other professional sectors

The youth work practice teams were asked what they would like the stakeholders with whom they collaborated to say about youth work. A common finding was expressed frustration about stakeholders not seeing youth work as a journey for a young person, but rather seeing the outcomes for young people as a 'box to tick'. This practitioner explains:

> "Yeah, I think that's what stakeholders should look at more, is the journeys of young people, because, like, I could tick the box that that young person has a job, but they could be out of it the week after I've ticked that box. But they don't care that they're back out of the job, they just care that to them, I've been like, oh they've got this job, that's amazing. Like, yeah, they don't then care about the follow up and what happens after that, I suppose."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

Returning to the theme of the future of youth work, when asked how they would like youth work to interact with partners in twenty years' time, the youth workers unanimously saw the value of working with key stakeholders and forming partnerships in their communities. This did however present challenges. In particular, how as practitioners they often felt undervalued, unrecognised and not understood by key partners. This is reflected by the youth work practice teams when commenting on what they would like stakeholders to say about youth work. As one practitioner described:

> "I would like, like the stakeholders to just...it's hard cause you go to some, like, strategic meetings and you sit with the inspector and you sit, like, the education, and like, they're like, 'Oh, I really value the work that you do.' It's easy to say though, eh?"
>
> (Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

6.3. Recognition of youth work in the political and policy domains

At the National Youth Work Conference in 2023, the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group posed the question to delegates from across Scotland about 'what would you like Scotland's First Minister to say about youth work?' There were 156 responses to the question, many of which related to the First Minister valuing youth work, seeing it as essential and funding it properly. The research team decided to revisit this question as part of this study, as well as a follow up about what actions they would like the First Minister to take. Responses to this question provided some important data.

Similar to data collected from the stakeholders and partners, the youth work teams would like the First Minister as well as other Government Ministers to understand what youth work is, how beneficial it is to young people and the contribution youth work makes to building communities.

> "I guess that you'd also want... the First Minister, politicians, everybody else to recognise that youth work contributes to building communities in a wider sense as well. So, it brings people together."
>
> (Youth Worker, Girlguiding Scotland)

> "Going back a few years, I met the Education and Youth Work Minister, and he had no idea what youth work was cause all he ever did was...education."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

It was important to the youth work teams for the First Minister, on behalf of the Scottish Government, to say that youth work is "essential" (Hot Chocolate Trust, Girlguiding Scotland and Girvan Youth Trust). They also want them to confirm that it is an "equal profession to everyone else who works with teenagers" (Hot Chocolate Trust), that "it should be available and young people should have access to it" (Girvan Youth Trust), that it is "part of a village of support systems" (Hot Chocolate Trust) and that they value the "many, many hours that volunteers give" (Girlguiding Scotland).

> "I'd want the First Minister to be saying that youth work is not a [...] nice to have but that it's essential for all children. It's an equalities issue."
>
> (Youth Worker, Girlguiding Scotland)

As with the stakeholders, there was a view shared by the youth work teams that they need more than words from the First Minister, they need them and the Scottish Government to take action and properly resource youth work.

> "That it matters, that it's valuable, that it's something we're putting money and resources behind."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

The youth work teams shared lots of ideas about the actions that the First Minister and the Scottish Government could take to support youth work.

One practice team suggested that the First Minister take the time to visit their youth work organisations to better understand what they do. They also proposed that politicians should 'walk a mile in their shoes' before becoming Members of the Scottish Parliament.

> "They should be a youth worker for a year, before you become any politician, you should be a youth worker for a year. You should do work in that community."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

A suggestion by one youth work team was for the First Minster to involve young people in decision making at Government level.

> "I think as well, bringing the authentic voice of young people into parliament or government decisions."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)[19]

Connected with wanting the First Minister to understand and value youth work they would like to see them make youth work an essential service[20].

> "So, I think we should be an essential service."
>
> (Youth Worker, Girvan Youth Trust)

19 It should be noted that since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/), Scottish Government now carry out a children's rights risk assessment on decisions that impact on young people. They also have a formal process to engage with Scottish Youth Parliament and a programme of youth engagement contracts with Rural Youth Network.

20 In 2024 Scottish Labour MSP Martin Whitfield launched a public consultation on the Youth Work (Scotland) Bill which seeks to give young people aged 11-25 a legal right to access high quality youth work services - youthlink.scot/news/youth-work-scotland-bill/

6.4. Looking to the future: risks and opportunities

As the focus groups moved on to discussing the future of youth work, several risks and opportunities were identified and discussed.

FUNDING

A recurring theme in this study described as the most significant challenge, is a lack of funding. The impact of this was described in different ways.

Funding disrupting high quality practice

A lack of long-term reliable funding is impacting on their ability to build consistent work and provide salaries and stable employment for staff. A common view was that only small pots of money are available, and that this is affecting the development of their workforce.

> "One of the big things related to funding is long-term funding, reliable funding, so you can actually build long-term consistent work and salaries and possessions, rather than getting dribs and drabs of funding."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

The lack of consistent funding streams creates competitiveness among youth work organisations. Competition to secure the limited funding available, is something stakeholders brought up more than once. For practitioners, the system needs to adopt a 'bottom up' approach when deciding how to best allocate funds.

> "[...] to be able to ask at the start and they already know there's going to be money available would make a massive difference because you can do that, ask them and then come up with a plan and then go 'right, we're now going to look for funding' and that can take months and then you have to fit the criteria and therefore you have to then change what they originally thought."
>
> (Stakeholder, Hot Chocolate Trust)

In contrast, another organisation that relies on volunteers to deliver their youth work services, raised concerns centred more on a reluctance by some volunteers to ask parents/guardians to pay extra for activities. Added to this was anxiety about the level of support needed to support volunteers to fundraise in their community.

These findings point to more significant issues. Youth work organisations run the risk of becoming compliant, with those delivering youth work accepting the job insecurity to guarantee services go ahead. For many organisations job continuity cannot be guaranteed unless funding gets renewed[21]. Not all youth workers or those supporting

21 There is a Scottish Government initiative called the Fair Work Framework which youth work organisations are currently not able to meet fairworkconvention.scot/the-fair-work-framework/

youth work initiatives can accept these terms indefinitely. This causes issues with staff retention, which in turn disrupts the work done with young people, who would benefit from being able to rely on the same youth worker as they grow up. This scenario is described by one of the stakeholders:

> "[...] the biggest barrier to good quality youth work is the fact that if you don't have any [funding], if you don't know where your future is, and you go and you get the trust of a young person, and then you disappear from their life, you've actually potentially done them more damage than good. You know, by, by trust, entrusting them in the first place. They trusted you to help them, and then you disappear because your career or your job goes, you know."
>
> (Stakeholder, Girvan Youth Trust)

> "We're not going anywhere, hopefully, but then as an organisation, we find out in January what our funding is going to be from April next year. And if that's 80% of what we need or 60% of what we need then obviously, our capacity does reduce again. But I just think we are just so willing and eager to support the health and well-being. Art. Art is so powerful. [is moved to tears] [...] Oh, it's so powerful and you can make real changes."
>
> (Stakeholder, Hot Chocolate Trust)

The evidence confirms that the uncertainty and insecurity of funding directly undermines the key role and purpose of youth work practice in terms of building trust and meaningful relationships with young people. Moreover, the unwavering commitment of the organisations engaged in this study to maintain services with reduced resources, has placed increased demands on the workforce. The data from this study confirms that the current situation is not sustainable.

Funding mechanisms impacting on staff wellbeing

The constant demands of fundraising are placing significant pressure on teams and affecting the wellbeing of staff. In the following quote the youth worker is describing waking in the night thinking about ways to secure more funding and worrying about not being able to fund youth work activities. This practitioner describes the challenge:

> "It's becoming harder and harder. But the work that we're doing should be getting rewarded, and I think give a bit of respite to like having to constantly have that, be up at like quarter to three in the morning and think, right, I need to get this, as we were talking about this morning, need to get this in, or like [...] we've no got money for the pantomime, or we've no got money to go to ... next year. Do you know what I mean, like that's always going to be part of a youth worker's job is to find fundraising, I get that."
>
> (Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

This was also an issue identified by stakeholders, in particular, how they found it unfair that youth workers needed to identify and secure funding themselves.

"We know that they have to work so hard to find all the different funding streams and projects and things, and also raise money themselves to all the different projects they do [...]I think that the local community also needs to be aware about how much, how much they have to raise themselves and they're not funded by local authority very much."

(Stakeholder, Girvan Youth Trust)

Funding restricting growth and innovation

Due to the lack of funding, the respective youth work organisations are employing fewer staff. This in turn impacts on their ability to expand their youth work activities and restricts their ability to develop relationships with partners. As this youth worker explains:

"Over the past few years, we have a smaller team than we did at the start of that time period and that is due to funding, and obviously if we have more youth workers, we can build more relationships, do more youth work, but having to scale that back is challenging. Or actually trying not to scale it back as well."

(Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

Within all the focus groups the stakeholders also expressed concern about how restrictions in funding were limiting how they worked in partnership with youth work. From their perspective, the lack of funding in youth work leads to job insecurity and affects staff retention impacting on their ability to form partnerships with youth work teams. In other words, the same concerns were shared by the youth work organisations and the partners they work with.

Alternative funding mechanisms

Three of the youth work teams discussed the need for the First Minister and Scottish Government to fund youth work. One of the suggestions was youth work services being funded directly by the government or city councils, rather than indirectly, for example through the Pupil Equity Fund. This would help give more youth work organisations agency on how to invest the money.[22]

"I think Government and councils and things should be putting money into these things, much better."

(Youth Worker, Girvan Youth Trust)

22 gov.scot/publications/learning-life-report-independent-review-community-learning-development-cld/pages/3/

> "So, there's a value judgement there of like what is worthwhile and what's not, and what's adding to society and what's not, and at the moment it's about formal qualifications and it's about formal education, but actually what would the world look like if youth work was equally funded? What could that unleash in society?"
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

This was also shared by stakeholders, who expressed the need to fund youth work for young people and the rest of society.

> "So, I suppose the development I would like to see is that and this probably is a very big wish rather than anything else that more funding from wherever goes back into youth work, because it surely has to be one of the most important pieces of work in our society, and if we can get things right with youth and young people, then I think society will be a better place."
>
> (Stakeholder, Hot Chocolate Trust)

The data emerging from this study highlights the correlation between the need for funding in recognition of the unique role that youth work can play in responding directly to the needs of young people and building relationships with families that enable access to other community-based services.

GROWING EXPECTATIONS OF YOUTH WORK

An issue raised by one youth work organisation, was the expectations that were placed on them by other sectors.

> "The way that it's going and the more and more stuff that they want, they want youth work to do, youth workers to do more and more and yet we're not valued in the manner that we should be, but realistically they would want you to be available 24 hours a day because youth workers are the ones that have got the relationship with kids. I've had kids say to me at girls' group, 'Can you no be my social worker because I get on with you?'"
>
> (Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

This quote brings attention to the distinctive role that youth workers play, particularly in terms of the relationships they build with young people. The data also points to some of the complexities faced in the sector more broadly. The evidence suggests there is a perception that other sectors such as schools, local councils and the police put pressure on youth work; whilst at the same time, the youth work teams do not feel valued by these sectors. An example of such a scenario is shared by this practitioner:

> "The police came in and asked us to... get the young people to tell us areas where all the people are drug dealing. No...No, that's your job to find that out."
>
> (Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

In this case, the youth workers are viewed by the police as the gatekeepers to the young people. However, for the same practitioner they go on to share feelings of not being viewed as a valued partner who would be invited to professional, multi-agency meetings.

> "You don't get that information but then also you don't get asked to go to any of those child planning meetings, which probably as a youth worker, if you were to sit on the panel at that meeting, you could probably offer a whole other level to that young person, but we don't ever get included in that."
>
> (Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

In the experience of the youth work teams who participated in the research, it is clear that the professional approach and expertise that characterises youth work is not being recognised nor valued. As a result, there is frustration and resentment building amongst the practitioners towards other partner agencies.

From the stakeholder's perspective, there was agreement that youth work should have a seat at the table. One participant argued that the best opportunity is to have as many proactive partners round the table as needed, and more opportunities will emerge through the work as a consequence. In one of the localities, a stakeholder suggested partnerships with schools and police are needed to bring the community closer together and help form an ecosystem around a young person.

Responding to young people's health and wellbeing

One of the shared issues raised by the youth work teams was their concern about trying to support young people who are facing increasingly complex mental health and wellbeing needs. One team described their current collaboration with psychologists, but in doing so they expressed a desire to work more closely with mental health services in order to help young people access the support they need.

> "I think, ... mental health services. Sometimes I think it would be good to have... like a clearer way in or like a clearer idea what they can do to support young people so that we can support young people that access that. Cause that can be challenging."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

RECOGNITION OF THE PROFESSION OF YOUTH WORK

A repeated concern expressed across the practice teams was that youth work is not seen as a professional service compared with other sectors that work with young people, such as teaching or social work. One team discussed the need for youth work to become a professionally registered service to provide parity of esteem with other sectors[23].

23 It is important to note that Community Learning and Development (CLD) Standards Council Scotland is the body responsible for the registration of CLD practitioners, approving training courses and the continuing professional development of the sector workforce. More information can be found here - cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/

"What would you think about, like, a professional charter, like you have to be a registered youth worker? So like a teacher....

Social worker, a teacher, a doctor, they all have to be professionally registered. You have to have like a certain level of experience or whatever.

Yeah, like a...

To be registered.

That's a good idea.

Might be like a membership fee, like 20 quid for a year, but then that gives you a professional title and you are a member of a professional..."

(Youth Workers, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

Workforce Development

Youth workers are supporting young people who are facing more complex and challenging issues, particularly in the wake of the cost-of-living crisis and COVID-19. Ensuring that youth workers are equipped to support young people with these challenges was raised by a stakeholder:

"it's just about making sure we have enough of a workforce and that that workforce is skilled and knowledgeable to address, you know, contemporary and emerging challenges and topics, that we're, you know, the workforce is not on the back foot but the workforce really has the space to pioneer and innovate."

(Stakeholder, Girlguiding Scotland)

When reflecting on the future role of the youth worker, the youth work teams identified a list of skills that would be required. The required attributes of the contemporary youth work practitioner combine knowledge, skills and personal characteristics. These included:

- communication skills,
- adaptability,
- teamwork,
- flexibility,
- organisational skills,
- patience,
- resilience,
- experience working with young people,
- equipped to deal with young people's mental health and wellbeing issues,
- budget handling,
- child protection, safeguarding,
- and fun.

For the research participants, these skills were as important now as they would be in the future.

In addition to this profile of the ideal practitioner, there was also a strong feeling expressed around the need for more collaboration. Partnership working was seen as a key approach for the future, particularly if youth work is to sustain its influence and bring sectors closer together.

> " In ten years' time I think youth workers are going to have to have more influence, I think influence will be a key characteristic in how they work with partnerships... I think youth work actually does a better job than schools, than police. Youth work organisations are able to bring so many more partners to a table for young people than what schools or police or statutory service could ever imagine."
>
> (Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

To maintain and grow the workforce, youth workers cited the need to improve terms and conditions of employment for paid practitioners. Key to attracting youth workers in the future was providing permanent contracts, paying the living wage and opportunities to work towards qualifications for those starting out in the youth work sector. From the focus group discussions there was recognition that youth work practitioners need to hold relevant qualifications alongside required skills and experience. Opportunities for professional development are viewed as key to ensuring a trained workforce. One of the organisations confirmed:

> "It's essential that you're qualified to a certain academic level... and you work towards it, but like if we're talking about making youth work more professional, I'd like to see everybody work towards. I mean that doesn't mean to say that Johnny who's a volunteer and he comes in, he can work his way up to it, but when he gets to a certain level, you want to see that he's getting qualified. Because I think, like, there's a sense of achievement in that as well."
>
> (Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

The majority of the youth work workforce are volunteers, but in relation to the paid workforce to ensure the sector is attracting skilled, qualified and experienced youth workers in the future, they will need to be paid a 'good' wage. The youth work teams discussion of this connected with their views of not being seen as a valued profession and as such not receiving parity of salary with other professional sectors working with young people.

We invited the practitioners engaged in the study to look ahead 10 years and set the salary for a youth work practitioner. There was a suggestion that in 10 years time they should have the same salary as teachers. The views on annual salaries ranged from £35,000 to £50,000. However, the practitioners were also unsure whether these levels of salaries were realistic. In the focus group discussions, there was a tangible lack of confidence in seriously demanding an equivalent wage to other practitioners. When asked what they thought a professional youth worker should be paid, the responses included:

"YW: Well, I'm thinking ten year in the future so forty five to fifty...

YW: Thousand....

YW: thousand, an hour [all laugh]! No a year.

I: An hour [laughs].

YW: [laughs] Aye. £45,000-£50,000 a year"

(Youth Workers, Girvan Youth Trust)

Looking to the future, there appears to be a need for the sector to raise the bar in terms of expectations for the professional profile of youth work practitioners; to a point that reflects a comparable level of pay and conditions with other service providers.

LACK OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR YOUTH WORKERS

All of the youth work organisations discussed the pressures currently facing their staff teams, including; lack of funding, the burden to demonstrate impact, and the challenge of supporting young people's complex needs. Striking a balance across these competing demands was a constant source of stress for staff. Related to this the evidence points to common concern around the lack of mental health support for the staff, given these increasing pressures.

"I think some people might agree that the support for youth workers' mental health... ...isn't what I feel that it should be. It feels like it's something that's separated from your job, but a lot of the time it's triggered by your job. I don't feel like it's supported enough."

(Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

The growing demands on the youth work sector is keenly felt across the workforce. The challenging expectations on volunteers was specifically discussed in two ways by the youth work organisations.

Firstly, in smaller geographical areas, there is an expectation that youth work provision will be run by volunteers. This relates to the reduced funding and increasing demands on youth work provision.

"I think there is with a lot of smaller places, there's an expectation that these things are run by volunteers."

(Youth Worker, Girvan Youth Trust)

Secondly, youth work organisations who rely on volunteers discussed the challenges they face recruiting and retaining volunteers. This is part of a national trend with a significant drop in rates of adults volunteering in Scotland[24].

24 volunteerscotland.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/The-state-of-Scottish-volunteering-report.pdf

"I suppose we haven't really said too much about actually recruiting and retaining enough volunteers to run the units that we have, and also to open other new units in areas where there isn't really Guiding available for young people. So, I think we all know that that is a massive challenge, and I don't think, you know, it's going to change too much anytime soon, it's always, it always has been a challenge. I think it has only got more challenging over the last few years as well and will continue to be a challenge."

(Youth Worker, Girlguiding Scotland)

One team suggested that the kind of work that they are doing to support young people's mental health and wellbeing, should also exist for them.

"You almost need an adult version of what we're doing with some of the young people."

(Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

One of the questions for the stakeholders asked them to reflect on the role of youth work and their relationship with partners in twenty years' time. While some brought up a need to address challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and teaching how to best navigate digital spaces safely, most expressed a desire to see an established increase in young people's inclusion in decision making processes by the end of that time frame. From the data collected, a suggested approach to enhance engagement and inclusion is through nurturing youth participation.

Stakeholders were quite outspoken in suggesting that young people be more involved in the decision-making process within youth work programmes, with guidance from adult practitioners. This could turn into more engagement towards the services offered, especially from those young people who do not normally or easily engage with youth work. Stakeholders argued that such an approach encourages more direct involvement and would help youth work spaces feel more inclusive and help young people understand they can add value to the communities they live in.

"[...] we need young people to be aware that they have a part to play within our society. It's not...We don't wait until they turn 18 or 25 before we kind of involve them, I think it's really important that they have a value to everyday life and that their voice is important."

(Stakeholder, Hot Chocolate Trust)

"[...] all young people involved, not just certain groups of young people. Because I think sometimes, we're very bad at that as well, involving, say, [...] the well-behaved kids, the ones that will easily talk to you. [...] But I'm more concerned about the person that doesn't have the confidence to come forward. [...] that has maybe lots of different issues at home or, you know, just different issues, and their voice hasn't been heard and it's about them."

(Stakeholder, Hot Chocolate Trust)

A key finding emerging from the study is the importance of engaging with those young people who are less well represented as participants in youth work provision.

THE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH WORK: WHOLE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY APPROACHES

As an informal education practice, youth work supports young people, aged 11-25 years in a variety of settings in local communities. The youth work teams taking part in this research were based in Edinburgh, Dundee, South Ayrshire respectively, and various locations across Scotland in the case of Girlguiding Scotland. In the focus group discussions, all of the groups highlighted the importance of young people choosing to participate.

> "They've got the choice to come, they're no forced to come here, to school, like that, it's a choice if they want to come, do you know what I mean? All we can put on is the provision."
>
> (Youth Worker, Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

Despite the positive levels of engagement across the selected organisations, there were still young people that the practitioners felt they were failing to reach. For example, in Dundee, they discussed not engaging with young people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

> "I think we have always been majority white, so sometimes I think there is a question around should we be trying harder to reach groups, different EMA [Ethnic Minority Achievement] groups or people of colour...there's lots of complex reasons why individuals or different communities might choose not to engage as well."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

In terms of age range, apart from the Girlguides, all the participating organisations offered support to young people up to age 25 years (Girlguides provide a provision of the Rangers up to age 18 years), but the youth work teams were mainly working with under 18-year-olds.

A view shared by stakeholders from Hot Chocolate Trust was about the need for more places and spaces for youth work and ensuring these are accessible to young people.

> "And I think adding on to that there is places and spaces...I know that a lot of the community spaces, some of them have been kind of amalgamated and created these amazing places, and that's great, but it feels like there's now amalgamation so that people have to travel further or you know, it's just too difficult for them to kind of go to where places are."
>
> (Stakeholder, Hot Chocolate Trust)

As stated earlier, we invited the focus group participants to think about the role of youth workers in responding to the issues and needs across the life course from childhood to early adulthood. As the question was phrased around a newborn baby the focus groups tended to agree that youth work does not engage with such young children. However, despite recognising the engagement with and support to families, it is perhaps notable that the role of youth work in preparing young people for parenthood was not mentioned by the practitioners. Although, the practitioners did describe having worked with multiple generations of the same family, with parents who had engaged with the organisation when younger encouraging their children to engage with youth work.

Stakeholders, when asked the same question about the newborn baby, were in agreement towards concepts of working with and supporting young parents. However, most of the stakeholder groups suggested at least once that youth work spaces should be places where young people can learn about their own boundaries, where early intervention should happen, and where there is work put in towards building healthy relationships, sex education, and preventing unwanted pregnancies – as a way to make sure that there is 'little need' for youth work as the once young people become parents.

Interestingly, when thinking about the different stages of a young person's life, both the youth work teams and stakeholders discussed the importance of youth work providing a whole family approach. This ranged from some stakeholders expressing that youth work could be more proactive in signposting families to the services that are available to young people, through to providing more direct support to parents. This was also a view shared by the youth work teams who discussed the role that youth work practitioners could play in supporting parents/guardians.

> "It should be like youth work should almost be part of that village of people who help support and grow."
>
> (Youth Worker, Hot Chocolate Trust)

Working with young people through their life course appears to be a key factor in building and sustaining relationships with young people as they journey through the teenage years. A common idea discussed within the focus groups was the possibility of young people having a youth worker assigned to them and supporting them from childhood into young adulthood. Taking an early intervention approach to work with children under the age of 11 years was also identified by the youth workers as an important feature of current practice. Moving through adolescence, the role of youth work in supporting young people towards adulthood was identified in the data collected as significant. The Girlguiding practitioners for example, felt that youth work has an important role to play in supporting young people to develop independence from their parents/guardians and teaching them social and practical skills in a safe space.

RAISING THE PROFILE OF YOUTH WORK

The practitioners engaged in the research discussed ways in which they could increase understanding of youth work and "shouting louder". Suggestions for change included providing stakeholders and funders with newsletters outlining all the youth work activities. They also proposed providing more inputs in schools to teachers, for example at in-service days, to explain what youth workers do. Past experiences of delivering these inputs have been positive.

> "I think we need to ..., prioritise shouting louder about youth work and what we actually do."
> (Youth Worker, Girvan Youth Trust)

This was also a view expressed by stakeholders, who explain the importance of youth work raising its profile to increase understanding and awareness across the wider community and among other services. The priority for one stakeholder is:

> "I think the youth work sector raising its game in terms of its own profile, the impact it has and what it looks like to be involved, that'll increase awareness with funders, with parents, with employers, and increase an understanding beyond our own sector of what the impact of youth work has."
> (Stakeholder, Girlguiding Scotland)

Practitioners also identified other methods to engage with stakeholders. These ideas included inviting stakeholders to organised activities and engaging them in local activities. They also suggested inviting stakeholders, including potential funders, who may not understand youth work along to youth work sessions, so they can observe what practitioners do. As one participant explains:

> "You've got your funders who fund you but do they actually know everything that happens in here? I mean they're giving you money and going, 'there's the money to do whatever you're going to do'...It would be nice for them to come in and even some young people as well to even serve them, you know, or whatever. And then they could even get chatting to them and they can see the work that they're doing, that like what they're doing is beneficial."
> (Youth Worker, Girvan Youth Trust)

Creating such opportunities for funders and other stakeholders is important in developing knowledge and understanding of how youth work is engaging with and responding to the needs of young people.

6.5. Strengths and limitations of the study

A key strength of this research project was the collaborative approach that brought together academic researchers, practitioners and partner organisations. We used a participatory methodology to engage youth work practice teams to be active participants in the study. This served the following purposes:

- **Rich data** – By having practitioner researchers run focus groups with their staff teams rather than an independent researcher unknown to the team, we ensured that the teams were comfortable to share their perspectives. This in turn would help produce rich data.
- **Reflective discussion** – To provide an opportunity for the youth work teams to reflect on the challenges they are facing and to look to the future of youth work in Scotland.
- **Workforce development** – To train and support two members of each team to undertake the role of research practitioners through developing the tools and confidence needed to conduct focus groups with their staff teams. These skills could be used for future research and evaluation opportunities within their respective organisations.

This participatory approach guaranteed that youth workers were active members of the research team. However, as the focus groups were self-moderated by the practitioner researchers, this encouraged their close colleagues in the respective youth work practice settings to express somewhat unfiltered opinions. Had the focus group been conducted by a professional researcher unknown to the team, they perhaps would have censored their views. Instead, the transcripts highlight how comfortable they were, at times finishing each other's sentences and sharing honest reflections, perhaps at points forgetting that they were taking part in research that was being recorded. Consequently, at the report writing stage the research team carefully reflected on how to ethically and sensitively share the data. Decisions were taken about when it was appropriate to name the organisation as the source of some specific quotes to safeguard anonymity.

The report was shared with the practitioner researchers and youth work managers in each organisation before publication to ensure that they were comfortable with how the data was shared. As such, the findings presented in this report have the approval of the youth work teams who gave their time to the research.

As researchers, we acknowledge a potential limitation is the scale of this study; engaging with a relatively small number of youth work organisations from the voluntary sector. This has obvious implications for the potential generalisability of the findings. However, it is worth noting that while the qualitative nature of this study may not allow us to generalise our findings, the practitioners stakeholders interviewed in the focus groups have decades of direct experience within youth work spaces, an expertise that holds value and that should not be ignored if our aim is to improve youth work services and allow these organisations to thrive in the future.


Wish list
- Education (Schools in same location) - consistency
- NHS - (at different levels)
- Change relationship
- resourcing
Purpose of partnerships
> extend reach
> Financial/other support
> working with others aligned with yp
> Strengthen networks
- more understanding for Signposting
- Military families
- Yw is essential - everyone should have access to it
- Professional recognition / clarity of purpose
- Value volunteers (contribution in kind)
- Change the narrative around purpose of yw
- Quality vs Quantity

7. Conclusion

This qualitative study sought to address two research questions through focus groups with youth workers and stakeholders:

1. What are the future challenges for youth work?
2. How is youth work understood, recognised and valued across different professional sectors?

Looking to the future, the evidence arising from this research demonstrate the necessity of maintaining or expanding current levels of youth work provision in order to ensure that young people continue to thrive in their personal and family lives, local neighbourhoods, communities of interest and wider Scottish society. The data from the focus groups clearly described the essential contribution that youth work makes to the lives of young people in Scotland.

Youth work plays a central role in supporting young people with their ongoing journey of discovery and development; the sector needs security of resources to continue to offer these opportunities. Currently, practitioners regularly compete with other youth work organisations in applying for limited funding that is often project specific or thematic. This creates competition and disrupts the delivery of core practice, subsequently impacting on the wellbeing of staff and restricting growth and innovation within the sector. Existing evidence confirms that this is not a new finding, but from our study the situation is patently not sustainable.

The evidence from this study confirms that the uncertainty and insecurity of funding directly undermines the key role and purpose of youth work practice in terms of building trust and meaningful relationships with young people. The data points to the longstanding 'vocational' culture of youth work in Scotland as an enduring feature. However, this also leads to a pitfall. The unwavering commitment of the organisations engaged in this study to maintain services with reduced resources, has placed increased demands on the workforce, whatever the motivation. The data from this study confirms that the current situation is not sustainable.

A key finding is the importance of engaging with those young people who are less well represented as participants in youth work provision. In order for organisations and practitioners to do this effectively, they will need to have access to resources that will allow the continued expansion and targeting of services.

In relation to collaborative practice, some sectors selectively and intermittently interact with youth work. Such a piecemeal approach is not conducive to building and sustaining meaningful partnerships going forward. From the data, it is apparent there has been a growth in expectations placed on youth workers, especially in relation to young people's mental health, yet youth work is rarely included in the arenas where important decisions are taken about the young people with whom they work

closely. The discrete professional expertise that youth work practitioners bring to collaborations is often not being acknowledged nor utilised effectively.

Moreover, we repeatedly heard of the need for youth work to be recognised as a profession and given equal standing with other professional practitioners working with young people (e.g. teachers and social workers). In terms of workforce development, there is an obvious and urgent need for youth work to raise its profile and build better understanding with other sectors and stakeholders.

Parity of esteem and broader recognition was a key issue in the findings. Suggested changes in the future included a pressing need to support the wellbeing of youth workers and paying them adequately and appropriately as qualified and multi-skilled professional practitioners. Once more, the underlying requirement is access to funding streams that support realistic and competitive levels of salary alongside funded access to professional development opportunities.

A consistent message arising from the data is that youth workers are looking to feel valued. This will require action and moving beyond the rhetoric and promises that currently fall short of the changes needed.

This research highlights that youth work continues to be adaptable and able to pivot to support young people to face the challenges of the future. However, maintaining and developing services will require secure and guaranteed funding. The future of youth work in Scotland demands ongoing support from politicians, policy makers and funders. It is an essential service that is transforming the lives of Scotland's young people for the better.


WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
FM VIEW OF YOUTH
- A LOT OF SKILLS & QUALITIES
- FLEXIBLE & ADAPTABLE
- COLLABORATIVE
- NON-JUDGEMENTAL & INCLUSIVE
- GOOD COMMUNICATION & LISTENING
- GOOD ATTITUDE TO YOUNG PEOPLE
- ROLE MODEL
- AWARE OF YOUNG PEOPLES INTERESTS
- GOOD REACTING SKILLS
- LEARNING ATTITUDE - WILLING TO FAIL
- TIME KEEPING
- TECHNOLOGY & AI
- BUDGET MANAGEMENT & RESOURCES
- VARIETY OF QUALIFICATIONS → CPD
- VOCATION & VOLUNTEERS
- OPEN ENDED CONTRACT / LONGER SECURITY
- RELATABLE / LIVED EXPERIENCE
- CREDIBILITY
- SELF AWARENESS
£25-50k
in line with teachers

Appendices

Appendix 1: Research team

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For support with the development of this research, thanks to:

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Hot Chocolate Trust

Denise Spence
Girlguiding Scotland

Rachael Graham
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Special thanks to the youth work teams and stakeholders who took part in the focus groups.

Appendix 2: Youth worker focus group topic guide

INTRODUCTION

Explain why you are conducting a focus group

- Conducting a focus group on behalf of YouthLink Scotland, the national agency of youth work and University of Edinburgh.
- In 2023 the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group consulted with youth workers and young people across Scotland to find out what they think the research priorities for youth work research should be.
- One of the questions identified was - What are the future challenges for youth work?
- To explore this question, a participatory research approach has been used, where youth workers have been trained in how to run focus groups. This approach has been taken to support staff teams to have a reflective conversation about the challenges they're facing.
- There are 4 youth work organisations taking part across Scotland in total.

Details about their participation

- voluntary - both overall and in relation to any specific questions and discussions
- recording of discussion
- confidentiality, and how findings will be reported
- No names, nothing that could identify them individually, however the name of the teams will be publicly available.
- Recordings held on a secure server; only research team and transcribers have access to them.
- ask people to respect each other's views and confidentiality
- length –1 ½ hour. Will finish on time.

After the focus group

- The youth workers from each of the 4 youth work organisations will meet to discuss the key themes that came out of the discussion.
- The discussion will help to analyse what has been found across the 4 focus groups.
- Each youth work organisation has been asked to provide a list of key stakeholders who they currently work with or would like to engage more with. A Research Assistant from University of Edinburgh will invite the stakeholders to a focus group and will explore the research question 'How is youth work understood, recognised and valued across different professional sectors?'. The learning from this focus group as well as future challenges focus groups will be used to write a report and then to hold a youth work and stakeholder event where all 4 youth work organisations and stakeholders will be brought together online to hear the findings and have a reflective discussion.

- YouthLink Scotland and University of Edinburgh will use this learning to write a report which will be available for you to read and will be shared publicly e.g. on social media. No individual's names will be shared in this report, but the name of the youth work organisation will be shared.

Basic ground rules

- No right or wrong answers – just interested in your views and experiences
- Really want to hear from everybody so encourage people to come in when they want – only request that do not all talk at once (recording)
- We'll start with questions, but want you to talk to each other, not just to us.
- That said, there may be points where we need to interrupt or move the discussion on – not that we're not interested, we just need to make sure we cover everything and hear from everyone.
- Everybody has a right to their views and people's views may be different: feel free to disagree with other people whilst respecting their right to their views
- Helpful to have all mobile phones either off or on silent
- Do you have any questions?

1. Introductions
    - » Everyone will know each other, but to help ensure that individuals remain anonymous, please ask everyone to choose a nickname they would like to be known by. To help everyone remember the nicknames you could ask them to write it on a sticker.
2. Role of youth work
    - » Thinking about a newborn baby, what role do you think youth work should play in the different stages of their life? [does youth work currently play these roles? If not, what are the barriers?]
    - » Who is your service reaching? Who is not being reached and why?
3. Working with stakeholders/partners
    - » We are going to do a mapping exercise (using flipchart paper) about stakeholders – Please map which partners/stakeholders are you currently working with? Who do you want to be working with?
    - » What would you like stakeholders to say about youth work?
4. Workforce development
    - » Thinking about in 10 years' time, I would like you to write an advert to recruit a youth worker (think about what the role would look like, how much will they be paid, what essential and desirable criteria will they need to have?)
    - » Ask everyone to share their advert and facilitate a discussion about the similarities and differences, are these adverts different from what they would expect to see today?

5. First Minster's view of youth work

- » What would you like Scotland's First Minister to say about youth work?
- » What actions would you want them to take?

6. Challenges in youth work

- » Are there any challenges being faced in youth work that have not already been discussed?
- » How do you think youth work can overcome them?

7. Final thoughts and end

- » Anything they feel we've not covered that they want to add?
- » Bring discussion to a close, thank them and remind them that they will be individually anonymous in any reports.
- » Any questions about the research?

Appendix 3: Stakeholder focus group topic guide

INTRODUCTION

Explain why you are conducting a focus group

- You are a Research Assistant for University of Edinburgh and are conducting a focus group on behalf of YouthLink Scotland, the national agency of youth work and University of Edinburgh.
- In 2023 the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group consulted with youth workers and young people across Scotland to find out what they think the research priorities for youth work research should be.
- Two of the priority areas identified included:
    - » What are the future challenges for youth work?
    - » How is youth work understood, recognised and valued across different professional sectors?
- To explore these questions, 4 youth work organisations were identified to take part in the research. Youth workers were trained to conduct focus groups with their staff teams to explore future challenges for youth work. As part of these focus groups, the youth work teams were asked to identify stakeholders and key partners they are working with or would like to be working with. Your organisation has been identified, which is why you are being invited to take part in a focus group with a Research Assistant from University of Edinburgh. The focus group will explore how youth work is understood, recognised and valued. You don't need to have prior knowledge of youth work to take part.

DETAILS ABOUT THEIR PARTICIPATION

- voluntary - both overall and in relation to any specific questions and discussions
- recording of discussion
- confidentiality, and how findings will be reported
    - » No names, nothing that could identify them individually, however the name of the teams will be publicly available.
    - » Recordings held on a secure server; only research team and transcribers have access to them.
- ask people to respect each other's views and confidentiality
- length –1 ½ hour. Will finish on time.

AFTER THE FOCUS GROUP

- YouthLink Scotland and University of Edinburgh will use this learning to write a report which will be available for you to read and will be shared publicly e.g. on social media. No individual's names will be shared in this report, but the name of the youth work organisation will be shared.
- A youth work and stakeholder online event will also be held to share the findings, which everyone who has taken part in the research will be invited to.

BASIC GROUND RULES

- No right or wrong answers – just interested in your views and experiences
- Really want to hear from everybody so encourage people to come in when they want – only request that do not all talk at once (recording)
- We'll start with questions, but want you to talk to each other, not just to us.
- That said, there may be points where we need to interrupt or move the discussion on – not that we're not interested, we just need to make sure we cover everything and hear from everyone.
- Everybody has a right to their views and people's views may be different: feel free to disagree with other people whilst respecting their right to their views
- Helpful to have all mobile phones either off or on silent
- Do you have any questions?

1. Introductions
    - » To help ensure that individuals remain anonymous, please ask everyone to choose a nickname they would like to be known by. To help everyone remember the nicknames you could ask them to write it on a sticker.
    - » Ask everyone to share their job role and organisation.
2. Role of youth work
    - » What do you think youth work is?

If required here is a definition:

"Youth work is an informal education practice that supports young people's social, emotional and educational development. Youth work can be adapted across a variety of settings, and typically engages with young people within their local community.

This could be at youth clubs and youth centres, youth cafes, community groups, uniformed and voluntary organisations, or youth action and participation groups. You might also find youth work at youth counselling units, drug and alcohol projects, at outdoor education centres, or on the streets via outreach programmes and detached youth work.

Youth work can also take place in schools, where youth workers are embedded within the school staff team, working to ensure young people are supported to achieve the best educational outcomes through higher levels of engagement, attendance and attainment"

- Thinking about a newborn baby, what role do you think youth work should play in the different stages of their life? [does youth work currently play these roles? If not, what are the barriers?]

3. Working with stakeholders/partners

[This could be run as a mapping exercise]

» When do you interact with youth work and why?
» Are there any barriers to working with youth work?
» Can you see any opportunities?

4. Developments in youth work

» What changes/developments in youth work would you like to see?
» Thinking about in 20 years time what role would you like youth work to play and how will they work with partners?

5. Final thoughts and end

» Anything they feel we've not covered that they want to add?
» Bring discussion to a close, thank them and remind them that they will be individually anonymous in any reports.
» Any questions about the research?

YouthLink Scotland

#InvestInYouthWork

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