Improving Mental Health for Young People:
The Role of the Scottish Youth Work Sector

Background

Despite being a highly developed nation, Scotland has experienced a rise in mental health and well-being problems in recent years. Although positive mental health and well-being contribute to improved physical health, higher educational attainment, and many other factors contributing to improved quality of life, it is estimated that, currently, one in four individuals is facing mental health problems.

There is now an improved understanding of what mental health actually is, and it is no longer seen as a dichotomy of presence or absence of mental illness, but instead the existence of positive mental health as well. This shifting focus has resulted in mental health policy being looked at from a community-level perspective, in addition to more clinical individual treatment. The Scottish Government has acknowledged this, and in their National Mental Health Strategy, they have made a commitment to achieving parity between mental and physical health between 2017 and 2027. They seek to accomplish this through a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach.

Because of an increasing focus on prevention and early action, young people have specifically become an important target group. This is because it is understood that experiences early in the life course can have long-lasting impacts on an individual's mental health and well-being for the remainder of their lives, and therefore if they are addressed early, long-term negative consequences can be largely avoided.

Research Focus

The intent of my research was to better understand the role of the Scottish youth work sector in improving mental health and well-being for young people within the country. While there is reasonable agreement that sectors such as education and health contribute much to improving these aspects of young people's lives, it is less well understood to what extent the youth work sector is having impact.

I met with youth workers from six diverse youth work organizations within Scotland in order to discuss their experiences with these topics. From these, I wished to determine the extent of the youth work sector's involvement thus far. Additionally, I wanted to better understand the strengths of the sector in addressing these topics, as well as any areas that the sector could work on, so that organizations can be more effective in improving mental health and well-being for young people.

Findings

From my meetings with youth workers from across the sector, I determined that the sector has played a significant part in improving mental health and well-being for young people through two primary categories of work: individual support and systemic support.

Individual support has manifested in a variety of programs focused on the provision of knowledge, resources, and opportunities for young people. A number of organizations within the sector identified issue-based programs which were delivered either in-person or via technology. These programs provided informal learning on a number of topics, including resilience, suicide prevention, coping mechanisms, and countless other aspects of improving mental health and well-being. Additionally, youth workers provide direct support via drop-in sessions or online support, and young people are also given opportunities to meet in safe group environments with their peers, which has been proven to be extremely beneficial for improving mental health.

Systemic support has also been generated in a number of ways. Several youth workers I spoke with indicated that their organizations were doing work to decrease overall stigma of the concepts of mental health and well-being, in order to increase individuals' willingness to seek help. The sector also does a large amount of research on mental health topics and helps to advocate for young people's needs at the government level, primarily using working groups or direct feedback from the young people themselves.

Strengths of the sector

In my interviews with youth workers from across the sector, I identified a number of strengths that set them apart from other actors who addressing these topics.

Firstly, when looking at the work that the youth work sector puts forward, we can clearly see that one of their strengths is their adaptability. Because the nature of youth work entails that it is born out of the needs of young people, they are a vital part of the process of creating programs and projects. Listening to, and working with, young people, allows the sector to easily adapt to changing wants and needs, as well as ever-evolving methods of program delivery, such as social media or phone apps.

Additionally, organizations within the youth work sector do a great job of establishing cooperative partnerships with other organizations, other sectors, and the Scottish Government itself. The youth workers I spoke with indicated that the organizations they were working for were constantly seeking new opportunities to forge new relationships which could improve the quality of services delivered to young people.

Lastly, it was emphasized to me by the youth workers that the sector was effective at providing young people with long-term impact, which is extremely valuable when looking at personal and long-lasting topics such as mental health and well-being. Due to the sensitive nature of these topics, the close relationships that are formed between youth workers and their young people are deeply invaluable when working to improve mental health and well-being.

Areas of improvement

Clearly, the youth work sector has a significant role to play in the improvement of mental health and well-being of young people; however, if they would like to see this role strengthened moving forward, there were a number of areas which were indicated to me as needing further improvements.

Two of the areas in which the sector has been making strides already could benefit from increased focus: the use of technology in addressing young people's needs, and the inclusivity of services.

There is a clear focus on using technology to address young people's needs, as it is understood that this is an area where they are largely concentrating their free time. Though the sector is doing well to embrace this, and adapt their programs to this new medium, there does need to be careful consideration in how their programs manifest, so that they do not fall into the technology and media pitfalls which actually contribute to negative mental health. **Recommendation: Ensure effective reach of technology by continuously adapting to new methods, but maintain professionalism of information and avoid negative aspects of media which contribute to poor mental health.**

Inclusion, as well, has been a major focus of the sector, and several youth workers I spoke with indicated that their organizations were doing work to ensure inclusivity for those not receiving proper support. There is a deep need to maintain and increase this work, as there are still many groups of young people who are receiving insufficient support, and are even facing additional mental health problems due to exclusion. **Recommendation: Ensure that every youth worker is receiving proper training in inclusivity, to promote equality of services across Scotland.**

Additionally, the youth work sector has shown that they value long-term impact, which is deeply important for these topics. However, in order to maintain the sustainability of these programs and ensure sufficient resources for the creation of new programs, there needs to be improvements made in how they demonstrate their impact and value clearly. **Recommendation: Increase focus on presenting sustainable value to stakeholders, by having researchers from outside the sector conduct study on their work, or by finding a balance between impact statements from young people and quantitative data showing achievement of indicators**

Lastly, there needs to be greater cohesiveness of the partnerships which the sector is so effective at creating. Though they are increasingly working with other organizations and sectors to improve mental health and well-being for young people, there needs to be greater care taken to not replicate programs, thus causing competition between different members of the sector for resources **Recommendation: Promote cooperation between members of the sector to reduce program repetition, and to ensure a stronger position in the discussion on mental health and well-being for young people.**

Breaking the Stigma:
The Role of the Scottish Youth Work Sector in Improving Mental Health and Well-Being for Young People

Abstract

Scotland, as a "highly developed" nation, still experiences many problems with the mental health and well-being of its population, particularly for its young people. In order to address this, the Scottish government understands that a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach will be required. The purpose of this study is to better understand the role of the Scottish youth work sector in improving mental health and well-being for young people. By meeting with several key youth workers and reviewing the programs of many youth work organizations, I sought to gain a better understanding of the ways in which the sector was successfully promoting mental health and well-being, as well as the possibilities for further improvements. In my research, I found that the youth work sector was working to improve mental health and well-being for young people through direct support, as well as systemic. They had a number of programs which addressed various components of mental health and well-being, including promotion of positive mental health. I additionally found that they had many unique strengths, including adaptability, inclusivity, long-term impact, and extensive partnerships. There were also areas of improvement, including sustainability, cohesive representation, and improved inclusivity.

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Introduction

1.1 Research Context

This dissertation seeks to understand the role of the Scottish youth work sector in improving the mental health and well-being of young people in Scotland. The development world has shifted much of its focus from purely economic driven models of growth to a "human development" approach, in which development workers of all kinds have begun to more strongly consider many aspects of the lived human experience in attempting to increase levels of development. This includes level of education and quality of health. Health, in particular, is deeply tied to the overall level of development within a nation and has thus been made a priority in the policies and programs that governments set forth. Up until recently, health has been primarily understood as physical health, and development work has focused on decreasing levels of disease, illness and mortality (Fukuda-Parr, 2011). As such, mental health and well-being have not been adequately valued as important components of health that need to be addressed at a macro-level.

In recent decades, this has begun to change, and mental health and well-being are beginning to be understood as necessary components of what is referred to as "total health" (Barry, 2013, p. 355). This shift in understanding of what health is has led to increased involvement from international organizations, governments, and various other development actors to address the mental health and well-being needs of populations. Increased importance of mental health and well-being has also led to a greater understanding that even "highly developed" nations can experience public health problems, though they might have sufficient levels of physical health. Scotland is one of those nations. They have a reasonably high level of development, with its people experiencing levels of economic development, education, and health much better than their international counterparts (Hdr.undp.org, 2018).

Despite achieving high development in these areas, the people of Scotland continue to face many problems with mental health and well-being, several of which have even gotten worse in recent years. Research from the Scottish government has shown that 15% of adults in Scotland have low levels of well-being, and that 26% consume alcohol to dangerous levels. In the 2017 National Mental Health Strategy, the Scottish government estimated that two out of three people who could benefit from mental health services were not getting the assistance that they needed. To address these, and many other problems, they set out the goal of achieving parity between levels of physical and mental health within the nation (Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027, 2017, pp.4, 7).

Though mental health and well-being are important to address for all individuals, there is an increasing focus on targeting young people's needs. It is understood that experiences early in the life course can have lasting effects on the remainder of an individual's life and so it is important to push early intervention to prevent long-term problems (World Health Organization, 2013). This is especially important in Scotland, where mental health for adolescents, and particularly for young teenage girls, has been worsening over the years (Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027, 2017, p. 24). Development work centered on improving mental health and well-being, much like development of any kind, requires the work of numerous actors, and often several different sectors of a nation's economy will play a large role in the shaping of work put forward. The Scottish Government acknowledges this in their Mental Health Strategy and emphasizes in particular the importance of the third sector for providing services and developing research for the nation (Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027, 2017, p. 22).

1.2 Purpose and Intent

As it stands, research has already been done on various sectors in Scotland, including the education and health sectors, who have proven that they play a large role in improving mental health and well-being for young people. Less research has been produced, however, on the youth work sector in Scotland, whose primary goal is to improve the lives of young people in the nation through learning and development opportunities (Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work, 2019). Considering this, the purpose of my research was to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which the youth work sector is presently involved in the improvement of mental health and well-being for young people. In addition to understanding the current programs they have running, I wanted to identify any strengths that might be unique to the sector as they put forth development work on these topics, as well as conduct a critical examination of the areas in which the sector could make improvements, in order to enhance future contributions they make for improving mental health and well-being for young people.

This study was undertaken as a nine-week work-based placement between May and June of 2019 in partnership with YouthLink Scotland, who serves as the membership organization for 95 youth work organizations across Scotland. They are the national agency for youth work, and as such, as the collective voice of the sector. It is their job to represent the interests, policy and practice needs of the youth work sector to the Scottish Government, as well as various other stakeholders (YouthLinkScotland.org, 2019). With their assistance, I gathered and analyzed qualitative data from interviews with a diverse and representative selection of youth work organizations from within their member network. This dissertation presents that primary data alongside relevant

literature to ultimately try and answer the question of "what impact does the youth work sector have on improving mental health and well-being for young people in Scotland?"

1.3 Structure

Following this introduction (Chapter 1), this dissertation is laid out as follows. Chapter 2 consists of background context, which reviews literature relevant to this topic of study. Chapter 3 outlines my chosen methodology. Chapter 4 presents the research findings and subsequent analysis. Chapter 5 is the conclusion of my dissertation, with relevant recommendations. I have also included at the end of the dissertation the project diary which I kept during my placement with YouthLink Scotland, detailing my experiences during the research process.

Background Context:

2.1 Mental Health in the Development World

Scotland is considered to be a nation of very high human development, matching France's rank (24th) on the Human Development Index (HDI), when looked at apart from the rest of the United Kingdom. The HDI looks at a number of factors of human development, including wealth, health, and education of individuals within a nation, and then ranks them accordingly (Hdr.undp.org, 2018; Sirgy, Estes & Selian, 2017, p.153). Early development theory focused primarily on the economic growth of a nation, but this began to change when, in the eighties, Amartya Sen proposed that there should instead be focused on what he called "capabilities" (Sen, 2005). His work, and subsequent work done by Martha Nussbaum pushed for an emphasis on factors other than GDP or economic growth in the development world. This ultimately led to the creation of the HDI, which is one of the most well-established of all measurement systems used within development today (Glatzer & Kohl, 2017, pp. 423-424).

Health, as one of the three overarching indicators, has come to be seen as vitally important to the development of a nation, and in 1946, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined overall health as inclusive of mental well-being (Barry, 2013, pp. 355-356). Mental health and well-being are seen as forms of human capital, which is directly tied to the growth and development of nations (Keyes, 2013, p.3). This is because positive mental health and well-being are associated with improved physical health, higher educational attainment, greater employment and earnings, and a better quality of life, amongst other things (Barry, 2013, pp. 355; Keyes, 2013, pp. 4-5). Alternatively, ill mental health and well-being are considered to be extremely detrimental to a nation's development. Poor mental health is both a cause and consequence of several indicators of underdevelopment, including poverty, poor education, gender inequality, ill-health, violence and

numerous other challenges. Additionally, it can impede an individual's ability to work productively, realize their potential, and make contributions to their community (Mental Health and Development, United Nations).

There has been a growing recognition that mental health and well-being are some of the most neglected yet most essential development issues of our time, and if addressed, could vastly improve a number of internationally agreed-upon development goals. This has manifested primarily in the inclusion of mental health and well-being in the creation of international goals. In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were created, and resulted in a number of criticisms, including there being a distinct absence of mental health and well-being discussed. Subsequently, there was agreement that future goals would have to focus on these topics more seriously, and so when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced the MDGs in 2015, they made a point to include indicators pertaining to mental health and well-being. SDG 3, which was focused on increasing total health had an entire indicator (3.4) dedicated to the prevention of noncommunicable diseases (including mental illness), as well as the promotion of positive mental health and well-being (Lengfelder, 2017).

2.2 Mental Health and Well-Being in the Scottish Context

Despite an increasing international focus on mental health and well-being, the topics themselves are highly contested, as they are culturally, socially, and institutionally shaped within different societies. It is therefore important to remember that though a nation might be affluent or "developed" and experience high levels of physical health, this does not necessarily mean they will have similarly high levels of mental health and well-being for its people (Mathews, 20120, p.169). In a nation such as Scotland, which is otherwise "developed," we must understand the way

that they define mental health and well-being, in order to recognize any subsequent development work.

Mental health has been difficult to concretely define due to the broad spectrum it encompasses, but it is largely understood to be related to a person's conditions in terms of their psychological and emotional well-being. Mental health affects every aspect of an individual's life, including their actions, feelings, and thoughts, and it is impacted by both internal factors, such as genetics and brain chemistry, as well as external, such as life experiences and relationships. There has been a tendency to look at mental health merely in terms of presence or absence of mental illness, and thus mental health programs have primarily focused on treatment of illness or disorders. However, this is just one of the frameworks to look at when considering how to address mental health and well-being. The other, which is not becoming more widely accepted, is the practice of mental health promotion. Psychologist George Albee once said that because "no mass disease or disorder has ever been controlled or eliminated through individual treatment, the viable solution to handling mental health is mental health promotion." We are starting to understand that to improve the mental health of a nation, you cannot only treat the mental health problems of individuals, but must also promote positive mental health by way of enhancing psychosocial strengths, competencies, and resources of all (Keyes, 2013, pp.13-16).

Positive mental health encompasses various dimensions of subjective well-being, in addition to positive psychological and social functioning, and as such, well-being must also be understood. Well-being is a broader concept which relates to a person's state of being, including their levels of life satisfaction, sense of purpose, and ability to have control over their own life. It is important to include in the discussion of mental health, so as to not confine our understanding of it to solely mental illness and disorders. It encompasses a number of factors, including external

conditions such as income, social networks and health levels, as well as internal resources held by individuals, such as resilience, optimism and self-esteem (Lansford, 2018, pp. 3-4). Increasing subjective well-being and increasing positive mental health relates directly to better physical health, higher educational attainment, a longer lifespan, and many other developmental improvements. These benefits have led to governments understanding that there is a greater need for a comprehensive mental health approach, which includes strategies for building resilience, promoting positive mental health for all populations, reducing risk for individuals who have a higher chance of developing mental health problems, and of course, promoting recovery and well-being for people who are experiencing mental health disorders and illnesses (Barry, 2013, pp.356-358).

When looking globally, primary expenditures have been dedicated to treatment services, while preventative measures and promotion of positive mental health have received the least interest (Coskun, 2017). With increasing awareness of the different aspects of mental health and well-being, however, nations are beginning to realize that, while treatment of individuals is still deeply important, these topics need to be addressed at a community level as well, in order to keep problems from arising in the first place. Scotland, in particular, has made this more present in the policies and programs it has set out to address mental health and well-being. Mental health is considered to be one of the major public health challenges in the nation, with more than one in four people facing mental health problems. In response to this, the Scottish government has laid out a Mental Health Strategy for 2017-2027, which seek to prioritize mental health and well-being in Scotland. In the Strategy, they acknowledge that the term mental health refers to a continuum ranging from emotional well-being relating to happiness and sadness, to mental disorders such as

stress reactions, to mental illnesses such as schizophrenia (Mental Health Strategy, 2017, pp.2-10).

2.3 The Role of the Youth Work Sector

The Scottish Government's Strategy acknowledged that determinants of mental health and well-being span the social, economic, political, and environmental spheres, and set out 40 actions they wanted to focus on completing over the ten-year period (Mental Health Strategy, 2017, pp. 4). The increased awareness of mental health and well-being as community issues has led the Scottish Government to emphasize a multi-sectoral approach in addressing these topics, and have especially emphasized the importance of the third sector in supporting people, providing services, conducting research, and developing policies on mental health and well-being (Mental Health Strategy, 2017, p.22). This is especially true when looking at supporting mental health and well-being for young people within the country.

As a target group for mental health and well-being programs, young people are considered to be one of the most important groups to focus on. The mental health and well-being that an individual experiences in early life will have a large impact on mental health and well-being for the remainder of the life course, and the age group of twelve to twenty-four years old is especially important, as that's when many mental disorders tend to begin (Lansford, 2018, pp.1-3; Weare, 2017, p.114). To combat this, prevention and early action is vitally important. Low levels of mental health and well-being in young people can lead to a number of consequences, including increased crime, violence, educational failure, substance abuse, and countless others (Weare, 2017, p.114). Various tactics have been shown as conducive to improving mental health and well-being for young people, including the promotion of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-efficacy; the presence of secure attachment relationships and social connections; opportunity for self-expression; and a

focus on well-being which emphasizes the improvement of strengths and capacities (Lansford, 2018, p.6).

When looking specifically at this target group, the Scottish Government has already put many initiatives in place to assist them. The Children and Young People's Mental Health Task Force was set up to ensure the mental health needs of those under the age of twenty-five, as well as the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) policy, which is the national approach to improve more general outcomes for Scotland's young people (gov.scot, 2019). With these and other policies in place, many sectors in Scotland have been recognized as playing a significant part in contributing to the promotion of mental health and well-being for young people. While there has been much research done on universal services such as education and health systems in Scotland, the youth work sector has been much less studied.

The youth work sector in Scotland consists of a wide variety of organizations, programs and activities which are meant to make significant contributions to improving the lives and chances of young people, by providing them with opportunities for learning and development, while also allowing them to have safe environments and trusting relationships (Universal Youth Work, 2015). Youth work can take the form of clubs and groups where young people can safely meet, in target interventions for those with specific needs, and everything in between. It is extremely flexible in its delivery, but there is a requirement that any programs and activities are completely voluntary, and that they are born out of the needs of the young people (youthlinkscotland.org, 2019).

There has been broader research done on the sector, especially on its overall impact for young people. One report stated that youth work was a "fantastic value for money and social return on investment… that represents the ultimate preventative spread." The youth work sector focuses highly on preventing young people from becoming NEET: Not in Education, Employment or

Training. Having high levels of young people who are NEET costs the Scottish government greatly. It's estimated that the government loses 228 million GBP in lower taxes and insurance contributions, as well as 742 million GBP in unpaid tax and benefit costs per year (youthlinkscotland.org, 2019). Additionally, a 2016 report on the Social and Economic Value of Youth Work saw that the sector had up to a 7 GBP value for every 1 GBP cost, and had impacted, in that year, more than 450,000 people in Scotland (Social and Economic Value of Youth Work in Scotland, 2016, p.2). YouthLink Scotland's Annual Report from 2017-2018 showed that the sector contributed 656 million GBP to the Scottish economy in that year alone.

Much of the sector's work is focused on contemporary policy drivers such as poverty, school attainment, employability skills, and safe communities (YouthLink Scotland Annual Report, 2018). As the sector has shown success in so many aspects, and because mental health and well-being are becoming increasingly prevalent policy drivers in the Scottish Government, it leads us to consider what their role is in improving mental health and well-being for young people. We must recognize the youth work sector's position as a development actor and consider this when seeking to determine the impact they have at present, as well as the possibilities they have to create change moving forward.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research was carried out with the intent of better understanding the programs, policies, and goals of the Scottish youth work sector in addressing mental health and well-being for young people in Scotland. Additionally, I sought to identify the strengths that the sector has in addressing these topics, as well as areas that the sector could improve to promote greater change moving forward.

YouthLink Scotland, with whom I worked with, identified a need for increased research on the topics of mental health and well-being within the sector and assisted me in setting up the interviews and focus group I would need to conduct in order to obtain my primary data. I did not begin my research with a deep understanding of the Scottish youth work sector, nor the topics of mental health and well-being. I was instead drawn to the topic by my interest in total health as an aspect of human development, and my prior experiences with young people as vital target groups in development work. This allowed me to conduct my research from an "outsider's" perspective and speak with youth workers without preconceived notions of who they are or what they do. The qualitative data I obtained from the interviews, focus group, and corresponding review of organization materials would help me gain a deeper understanding not only of what is taking place in the sector, but also why that is, and what the sector will look like moving forward.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with five of YouthLink Scotland's 95 member organizations in order to better understand the opinions and experiences of youth workers on the topics of mental health and well-being programs. I created an interview topic guide

composed primarily of open-ended questions based off my initial review of literature and materials, in order to make sure I addressed all themes and questions of interest during the limited one-hour meetings (Brinkmann, 2013).

With the help of YouthLink Scotland, I was able to set up five interviews with a range of youth workers whose organizations vary in size, location, type, and purpose, amongst other factors. The five organizations were selected to be representative of the sector as a whole more broadly and for the sake of time, we sought out youth work organizations who had some expressed interest or involvement in mental health and well-being for young people. The use of information-oriented sampling helped me gather the most relevant information that I could during the limited time frame of my research (Brinkmann, 2013).

During my interviews, I met with a youth worker from a Community Learning Centre, which provides informal learning opportunities for members of their local community through many diverse programs (YW1). I met with a member of a national program whose primary focus was on mental health and well-being stigma and discrimination (YW2). I met with a member of one of the area councils of Scotland, which is their local government authority, and so takes care of a diverse range of programs for people living in a locality (YW3). Additionally, I met with youth workers from two different equalities organizations, both of which focused on different aspects of equality improvement for young people in Scotland (YW4, YW5). The diversity of these organizations is meant to be representative of YouthLink Scotland's membership network, although it cannot be considered entirely comprehensive.

Focus Group

In addition to holding interviews, I wanted to conduct a focus group using an adapted version of my topic guide to meet with other member organizations who might not be directly

involved in mental health or well-being programs for young people but might still be interested in the topics. This was with the intent of including a broader picture of the sector's opinions and experiences. Members were informed of the intent of the focus group, and they were able to sign up on a voluntary basis to stay behind after a YouthLink Scotland member event where they were already gathered.

In the end, the focus group did not go entirely according to plan. Due to its voluntary nature, as well as various other extenuating circumstances, only a couple of the organizations chose to stay behind after the member's event. Instead, we had a lively discussion between two youth work organizations and myself on the topics of mental health and well-being, and the youth work sector more broadly. I based this on an adapted combination of my interview and focus group topic guides. The two organizations that stayed after were a Community Learning Centre (YW1), and an arm's length organization, which is an independent organization used by a council area to carry out their services (YW6). Ultimately, though the focus group did not work out, the ideas and observations that were bounced between the two organizations served as extremely important for highlighting similarities and differences between organizations who might otherwise have very similar aims.

Review of Organizational Materials

In addition to the individual interviews and the group discussion, I also reviewed more in-depth the materials that these participant organizations had available, as well as materials from several other organizations who I did not have the ability to meet with. Because of the limited scope of time for conducting my research, this helped me to combine the experiences and opinions of the youth workers I met with, with a broader assessment of what the sector is doing more generally for the improvement of mental health and well-being for young people.

3.2 Data Analysis

After conducting and recording the interviews and discussion, I transcribed all of the dialogue using reconstructive transcription, in order to make the conversation clearer while maintaining the legitimacy of the content. This allowed me to move onto coding more easily, so that I could categorize the data. Both the recordings and the transcriptions are held in a secure online drive that only myself, and the research team at YouthLink Scotland have access to.

I used the qualitative coding software Nvivo to code the data from all of the transcriptions, in order to examine similarities and differences across cases, and identify the patterns which persisted amongst them. I coded based upon events, strategies, methods and various other aspects of interest, and from that I developed key themes which could be used to conduct deeper analysis. In doing this, I found it important to use grounded theory, an inductive strategy for theory development which allowed me to break down and reconceptualize data, codes and categories without prior theoretical frameworks (Brinkmann, 2013). I then conducted my analysis based on these themes, and relevant information from an array of literature to try and answer the question of youth work's impact on the topics of mental health and well-being.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Under the University of Edinburgh's standard ethical assessment, this study was considered a level 2, due to the potentially sensitive nature of discussions surrounding young people and mental health and well-being. Written consent was obtained from all participants of the interviews and discussion group. Anonymity was ensured throughout the research process, with the names of interviewees and discussion participants known only to myself and the research team at YouthLink Scotland, with whom I worked alongside to conduct this research. I emphasized to participants that in the research output, their identities would not be attached to any of the research,

nor exact quotes used in my findings or analysis. To mitigate any problems that might arise during the research process, I also emphasized that there were no risks to participating in either the interview or discussion, and it was voluntary in nature, so they were free to withdraw at any time of the process.

3.4 Limitations

Apart from the general sensitivity of the topics discussed, the primary limitation I faced during the research process was the quantity of participants who I could meet with during the short time frame of the project. The project took place over nine weeks, but much of that time was needed for preparations and subsequent analysis, so I only had a couple of weeks in which I could actually meet with the organizations. Problems did arise, as with the turnout of the focus group, but overall, I was able to gather a significant amount of data from the organizations that I met with, and by ensuring that they were representative of the diversity of the larger youth work sector, I feel that the small sample size is justified. However, further research on the impact of youth work sector could benefit from further organization involvement, in order to obtain greater breadth of opinion and experiences within the sector.

In understanding the limitations of this research, it is also important to acknowledge my own position during the research process. During my time as a researcher on this project, I was an "outsider" in terms of my knowledge of the youth work sector and the topics of mental health and well-being. However, despite this role of an "outsider," I was also working alongside YouthLink Scotland, an organization who works directly within the sector every day. Though it was important and deeply helpful for me to have their guidance during the research process, it was also important for me to maintain my independence as a non-member of the youth work sector, in order to provide critical examination of the topics, and to produce a research output which was unbiased in nature.

Findings and Analysis

During my meetings with the various youth workers, I sought to understand and find patterns in their opinions and experiences in order to determine what significant action was being taken by the sector to improve mental health and well-being for young people, as well as what areas they are doing especially well in, and any areas that have been noted as needing further work to improve the quality of service. The first section of this chapter will lay out my findings from the youth workers on what work is being done, and the subsequent two will analyze their experiences in order to determine how they successfully promote development, and how they could improve to increase their role and development capabilities moving forward.

4.1 What is Being Done by the Youth Work Sector?

In my interviews with youth workers from across the sector, I wanted to understand from their experiences to determine whether there was significant work being done. They each shared with me their organizations' focus and goals, as well as the programs that they had in place, whether related to mental health and well-being or not. From that I worked to find patterns in the work that is being done. I identified that there was, in fact, work being done by the sector if improve mental health and well-being for young people, and that it could be divided into two general categories: direct support of young people, and systemic support.

Direct support of young people

Of the six youth workers that I met with, five of them specifically discussed the use of issue-based programs when seeking to address mental health and well-being for their young people. In one organization, this manifested in workshops led by young people in order to increase both their knowledge and their confidence. Several other youth workers mentioned going into

schools to deliver informal learning workshops, often focused on the promotion of positive mental health. Many of the issue-based programs delivered by these organizations pertain to aspects of improving mental health such as identity acceptance, building resilience, teaching coping mechanisms for life stress, and increasing the confidence of young people.

When looking at young people, research has shown that their mental health is deeply affected by whether they have sufficient "protective factors." The effects of stress on mental health have been shown as less detrimental to those who have sufficient protective factors in place, including internal resources such as self-esteem, confidence, and resilience, as well as external factors, including social support and coping strategies. Coping strategies emphasize shifting young people away from dysfunctional coping methods such as withdrawal and avoidance, towards functional ones, such as seeking advice, accepting support, and making efforts to problem-solve. This external resource for improving mental health is affected by internal ones, including self-esteem. This with high self-esteem have a great feeling of control and will be more likely to adopt functional coping mechanisms when dealing with stressors in their lives (Dumont & Provost, 1999, pp.345-347).

Resilience, as well, appeared as an important focus in the issue-based programs that members of the youth work sector are putting forward. Resilience deals with the ability to resist being damaged by trauma, as well as the ability to recover from that trauma. It is similarly related to the resources that an individual has and is a composite of individual factors such as neural responses and cognitive abilities; social factors such as presence or absence of emotional or instrumental social support; and community, including economic, institutional, and ecological factors. Individual factors are largely dealt with on a clinical basis by medical professionals, while community factors can be far too systemic in nature for individual sectors to address, and thus the

youth work sector largely tackles the improvement of social factors when creating programs to improve individuals' resilience levels. This is an especially important topic for them to address, as resilience in earlier life is directly related to the ability that an adult has to overcome setbacks later in life (Harms, Brady, Wood & Silard, 2018, pp. 2-4).

One youth work organization I spoke with found a way to increase the reach of their issue-based programs by creating an online media campaign which focused specifically on increasing understanding of suicide and what individuals can do to assist themselves and others who are experiencing thoughts of suicidal ideation. After an initial blog post resulted in positive feedback, they kept the campaign going, continuously adding information and tips for those who need assistance in regard to suicidal thoughts. In a nation that is very focused on increasing the prevention of suicide, this is an extremely pertinent area for youth workers to focus on. Scotland saw a 15% increase in its suicide rate over the 2017-2018 period, and as a result it became a major topic in public health policy in the nation (Scotland's Suicide Prevention Action Plan, 2018). Research shows that increased information on suicide can help to keep young people from glorifying it and increase their tendency to seek help when needed. There have been studies which show that improvement in attitudes and knowledge on suicide can even lower the probability of self-reported suicide attempts (Bridge, Hanssens, & Santhanam, 2007, pp. 59-60).

In addition to addressing very specific topics such as building resilience or suicide prevention, the youth workers I spoke with noted many instances where they worked in programs which were focused on providing general information on mental health and well-being to young people. They emphasized the importance of getting accurate information out there on what mental health and well-being even mean, as well as clearly indicating the signs of poor mental health, and the various ways in which young people can seek assistance or work independently to promote

their own mental health. One youth worker I spoke with discussed the creation of a phone app in their area which makes mental health and well-being information easily accessible to young people, while another expressed wishes for a similar app to be created in their area in the near future. Yet another worker I spoke with discussed the creation of a Guided Self-Help resource, which uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) methods to allow young people to help themselves with their own mental health. CBT is often used as the first line of defense for a number of mental health problems, including depression, eating disorders, panic disorders, and self-harm, by working to change the way that individuals think and behave (Holmes, 2002, p.288). By putting out this kind of guide, the youth work sector is providing young people with more resources for dealing with their own mental health.

Aside from providing young people with education on mental health and well-being, one of the most frequent methods which came up in my discussion with the youth workers was the provision of direct support to young people. This is primarily done through the individual relationships that are created between young people and youth workers. Numerous youth workers I spoke with discussed the ways in which they provided support, including drop-in sessions, digital support for those without ease of access, and importantly, the enabling of young people to provide peer support to each other. The relationships that stem from these sorts of programs are deeply important for improving the mental health and well-being for young people, as having secure attachment relationships and social connections during adolescence can be one of the best predictors of well-being in adulthood (Lansford, 2018, p.4). For these to be truly beneficial relationships, they need to be supporting and trusting, and low in hostility and insecurity. These aspects of relationships provide young people with a greater buffer from negative events and

stressors in life, and they are instead encouraged to pursue goals and seek personal growth (Gable & Bromberg, 2018, p.3).

The last method of direct support which appeared in my discussions with youth workers was the provision of programs which were aimed specifically at improving well-being and promoting positive mental health. These included activities in which young people are given the opportunity for self-expression, can interact with nature, and importantly, can meet with their peers in a safe group atmosphere. While these may not appear to be directly related to the improvement of mental health, they are all quite important for promoting positive well-being, which contributed to improving mental health. Group activity, in particular, is seen as very important, as social isolation and loneliness are tied to many mental illnesses and it has been shown that individuals with rewarding social relationships have higher life satisfaction. Overall, the social domain of an individual is seen as a better predictor of well-being than any other domain in life (Gable & Bromber, 2018, p.2). The ability to meet in a safe group setting and make friends is deeply valuable to promoting an individual's positive mental health, and there have been studies done which show social support of this type can increase an individual's feeling of trust and support, thereby improving their mental state. One study in the UK showed that those who reported not having supportive friendships were twice as likely to have high scores on anxiety measures than those with those strong relationships (Leach, 2014, pp. 56-57).

Based on the youth workers I spoke with, it seems that, largely, the youth work sector is affecting change for young people's mental health and well-being in the way that they address many other issues within the sector: through informal learning, and the provision of resources that young people can draw upon when needed. Informal learning can be difficult to measure but is increasingly being valued for its ability to adapt and be flexible to the needs of those who are

learning. Additionally, the nature of the work means that it can have a much broader reach than formal learning, through the use of technology and by making itself more accessible to those who might otherwise be intimidated by more structured learning situations (Halliday-Wise & Beddie, 2009, pp. 4-7). This encouraging method of reaching and assisting young people, paired with resources provided, indicate that the sector is successfully increasing its focus on the improvement of mental health and well-being of young people, using methods which they have successfully addressed other youth work topics with.

Systemic support of young people

The youth workers I spoke with additionally outlined a number of components of youth work which assist in improving mental health and well-being for young people and take place at an organizational level. This is very important, as we have seen that mental health and well-being are not solely issues to be dealt with at the individual level but must also be looked at from a community or structural level. The broad level support that the youth work sector provides also shows that they are capable and should be valued as having a voice in decisions that are made by the government pertaining to mental health and well-being.

The youth workers that I spoke with emphasized that the youth work sector has a large part to play in the improvement of attitudes surrounding mental health, as well as general reduction of stigma surrounding mental health and well-being. Four of the six youth workers that I spoke with highlighted the work they do to promote an accurate depiction to the public of what mental health and well-being are. In particular, they focused on increasing understanding that mental health is not a dichotomy with mental illness on one side and absence of mental illness on the other. Instead it needs to be considered in terms of promotion of positive mental health as well. One youth worker I spoke with said their organizations did this through a number of campaigns which ranged from

walkathons to a series of videos on providing mental health support to your loved ones. Often, the stigma of mental health is the main obstacle to an individual seeking support, and so it is extremely important that it is addressed (Sartiorius, 2007).

Along with the improvement of understanding about mental health and well-being, the youth workers I spoke with discussed that the youth work plays a large role in advocating at the government level for young people's wants and needs in regard to these topics. One organization I spoke with mentioned that there is inequality between different groups of young people within the country, and therefore the primary focus of their organization is to improve inclusivity in government policies, so that disadvantaged groups are sufficiently included. Much of the advocacy coming from the youth work sector stems directly from what young people have voiced as important to them. In receiving direct feedback from young people, the youth work sector is then keeping in line with the primary requirement of youth work, which is that it stems from where young people are.

Closely related to the advocacy role they play, the youth workers I spoke with also mentioned that the sector does a fair amount of research which plays a part in improving mental health and well-being for young people. One organization I spoke with discussed a number of working groups in their area which spent time looking into the needs of young people in order to provide research outputs which could be used to produce more productive programs and activities. One example of this from their area was that the research which was produced was then used to create training materials to deliver to important adults in young people's lives, including youth workers, teachers, and even parents. These materials include information on mental health and well-being and provide support to those adults who are assisting young people who may be experiencing mental health difficulties.

Primarily research has manifested itself in issue-specific or area-specific ways, but larger piece of research which have come out of the sector culminated in the Year of Young People Report from 2018, which focused strongly on mental health and well-being as one of its important themes (Scottish Youth Parliament, 2018, p.8). The National Youth Work Strategy for 2014-2019 specifically discussed the importance of the youth work sector in conducting national research, and acknowledged that while there has been research conducted already, there will be greater need for it moving forward, as the youth work sector is increasingly recognized as a key player in improving mental health and well-being for young people in Scotland (National Youth Work Strategy, 2014, p.25).

Based on my meetings with youth workers and subsequent review of their programs, it is clear to me that the youth work sector is putting forth work at this time to improve mental health and well-being for young people. This manifested primarily in direct support of young people, through provision of accurate knowledge and quality resources surrounding mental health and well-being, as well as direct support and opportunities for promotion of positive mental health through group activity or self-expression. Additionally, they support young people at a systemic level through large scale research, de-stigmatization work, and representation of interests at the government level. In the next section, I will discuss my analysis of these various programs and youth worker's experiences to determine what strengths the sector has in addressing these topics, as compared to other sectors within Scotland.

4.2 How is the Youth Work Sector an Effective Development Actor?

As I reviewed my interviews with the various youth workers, I saw patterns emerging in regard to the areas in which the youth work sector was particularly effective at developing mental health and well-being for young people in Scotland. To be an effective development actor, there are a number of characteristics which organizations should focus on doing well. A number of these coincided with aspects of youth work which the youth workers I spoke with indicated were being done quite successfully. To be truly effective at increasing development in any area, an organization should have a sharp focus on who, what and how they are delivering assistance. Additionally, organizations should be able to work effectively with other stakeholders in order to prevent conflict or overlap in assistance being provided. Lastly, development should be sustainable in nature, and have a clear impact on those it is assisting.

Clarity of focus

One of the most important qualities of youth work that was emphasized to me throughout my research was that young people are absolutely vital in the entire process of creating programs, particularly those focused on mental health and well-being. As noted in YouthLink Scotland's Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work, the primary focus of any youth done is to directly benefit young people by contributing to their learning and development (Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work, 2019). Youth work is also meant to be voluntary and informal in nature, and therefore it must be constantly adjusted to what young people are seeking as outcomes and benefits. Several of the youth workers I spoke with emphasized the importance of consulting young people during every step of the process in order to ensure it is truly effective and relevant. One youth worker said:

"I always think it's better led by young people, because they're the ones affected

by it. I think if young people's voice is in it from the very beginning, it needs to be

co-design, co-production, co-deliver, everything needs to be led by young people,

in my opinion, with the support and guidance of professional staff, especially when

it comes to mental health, because you can't do that without these professionals

guiding the way with you." (YW3, personal communication, June 7)

Combining the needs that young people identify for themselves with professionals who can address those needs leads to programs which can effectively improve mental health and well-being for young people.

While other sectors can effectively improve mental health and well-being for young people as well, the youth work sector is unique in the way it gives young people the agency to express their own wants and needs. Agency is seen as vitally important for producing sustainable development, as it keeps development from overlooking the needs of individuals and producing a program that is not helpful or relevant to their target group (Newman & Dale, 2006, p.484). Agency is especially important due to its relation to the concept of resilience, which I have already identified as vital to improving mental health and well-being. Both agency and resilience focus on the refusal to passively accept one's fate, and to instead act to improve it (Frost & Hoggett, 2008, p.442). By including young people in the entirety of the process, youth workers are not only sticking close to the nature and purpose of youth work but are also constantly adapting to the wants and needs of their target group, which means they are being effective agents of development.

Another indicator of effective development is that it is inclusive in nature. The youth work sector is massively diverse, and if it seeks to be effective at improving mental health and well-being, then it must maintain inclusion for all groups who take part. Based on my interviews with

several youth workers, in particular those who worked for equalities organizations, inclusivity appears to be a priority, and especially with regard to mental health and well-being programs. One youth worker I spoke with emphasized positive changes which are happening in the sector, saying:

> "what we're starting to see is inclusive practice, where a young person should be able to access any service, and know that they would be fully met based on who they are, rather than fearing stigma, and what we're finding is… it's setting up a precedent for inclusion." (YW4, personal communication, May 21)

They also mentioned that inclusivity:

> "shouldn't feel difficult, and a lot of the challenges for other agencies is just about confidence and people being really fearful about getting it right, but in that fear, maybe not asking or not offering a really inclusive, a visibly inclusive service."
> (YW4, personal communication, May 21)

Inclusion is deeply important both in development, and for an individual's mental health and well-being. Inclusion in development makes sure that every individual has equal representation and assistance, and is highly relevant, as it emphasizes the need for development which is contextual and tailored to the needs of those it is assisting (Al-Adhami, 2011). Additionally, many individuals experience negative mental health related to exclusion, particularly those in minority groups, and thus, if youth work seeks to be an effective actor, they must promote inclusivity in all that they do (Morgan et al, 2007, p.477). The youth work sector has consistently proven its commitment to inclusivity, both in the present, and moving forward.

For development to be effective, it must be delivered in a way which works for those it is seeking to help. This requires it to be adaptable to changing technologies and delivery formats, which the youth workers I spoke with consistently emphasized the sector was doing. Technology,

in particular, is deeply important to utilize when working with young people because, as one youth worker I spoke with said, "they're digital natives; they expect to have information at their fingertips" (YW3, personal communication, June 7). Other sectors might use technology, as well, in the programs they carry out for young people, but because the youth work sector is highly adaptable and constantly gathering feedback from young people, they are able to keep up with the sometimes rapid shifts in technology that take place.

Several of the organizations I spoke with discussed the creation of apps and media campaigns which were created in order to reach young people in a way they are deeply accustomed to. Despite the commonly believed notion that technology is detrimental to a young person's well-being, there is now understanding that it is not necessarily technology itself that is negatively affecting them, but instead the ways in which technology is being used (Winchester, 2019, p.8). Because technology is going to remain a strong presence in the lives of young people for a long time, it is better then, that the youth work sector embraces this, and makes it into something that is useful to the promotion of improved mental health and well-being for young people, which is what they have been doing thus far.

Effective cooperation

In addition to having strong connections with the young people they are assisting, the youth work sector in Scotland is also very good about forging strong partnerships with other organizations, other sectors, and even the Scottish government itself. This is vitally important when trying to effectively bring about development. One youth worker I met with said that these partnerships are about:

"coming together and saying, well I can provide this, and I can provide that, and

that way you're covering more bases, because not one size fits all for young people.

You know, some might want to see a counselor, some absolutely not, some might

want access to an app, some might not, so we're really trying to cover as much as

we can, in hopes that there can be support before it gets to a stage where anyone

feels like they can't go to anyone."(YW1, personal communication, May 20)

These partnerships are important to maintain because if they are well done, there will be increased

resources and capacity to develop programs which can effectively make progress on issues of

mental health and well-being.

Because these concepts are seen as important to deal with on a macro-level, there is an

understanding that true change cannot be made without both the cooperation and the coordination

of various actors who focus on young people. Cooperation entails the planning and delivery of

common goals, while coordination focused on different activities which are delivered in harmony,

so that they do not conflict or overlap with each other (Chandy & Kharas, 2011, p.2) Many of the

youth workers I spoke with discussed how this was something their organizations were deeply

focused on, and were working to improve moving forward. It's this adaptability and constant

partnership that leads to the youth work sector being able to effectively create programs which

actually fit the wants and needs of their young people, without being overly repetitive, and offering

the same services as many other organizations or sectors. Often when it comes to development,

we find that this can be a problem, so by working together, the youth work sector and its partners

are actually ensuring that development is being carried out most effectively.

Lasting impact

Based on my meetings with youth workers, and review of the programs which exist to

address mental health and well-being, I also found that the youth work sector is particularly

effective in producing long-term impact in their programs. There is a tendency in the development

world to focus on showing sustainability of programs; however, when it comes to mental health and well-being, it is deeply important to make sure that individuals are receiving long-term support, as well. Many of the youth workers I spoke with emphasized that they came across many instances of young people's lives being deeply affected by the work that was put forth by youth workers. This was particularly manifested in the close, trustworthy relationships which were formed between young people and their youth workers. Strong relationships with adults have been seen as one of the most important factors in improving the mental health and well-being of a young person and is particularly important for making long-term impact. It is even believed that having relationships such as these which are secure during adolescence can be one of the best predictors of well-being in adult life (Lansford, 2018, p.8). One youth worker said when discussing mental health and well-being programs, that

> "the key important to any of that is the relationship they have… Youth work staff,
>
> you might be the only adult during that young person's day who's actually taking
>
> a genuine interest in how they are." (YW1, personal communication, June 13)

These relationships make young people comfortable to open up, which is deeply important in getting them to talk about sensitive issues, such as mental health and well-being. One other youth worker I spoke with said that "having that relationship; I think that's the strength, that's always going to be the strength in youth workers" (YW6, personal communication, June 13). All of the youth workers I spoke with understand this, and emphasized that ultimately, the purpose of youth work, and of improving mental health and well-being, is that it is long term, and that cannot be ignored in the creation of programs.

Despite the primary impact being on a deep, individual level, the youth workers I spoke to did understand the importance of demonstrating impact to other stakeholders in order to ensure

sustainability of their programs, and so they mentioned numerous systems they have in place to ensure the work they are doing is helpful and consistent. One youth worker said,

> "in terms of benchmarking, we have a performance information evaluation system that we use, so anyone that we engage with, it gets marked off under certain subjects. It'll be like youth work participation, health and well-being, all that kind of stuff. So, we can then go back and visit how many people did we engage with. But sometimes I think, numbers are good, but they don't tell the real story. You know, so that's why it's really important you're getting impact statements, and you're actually seeing differences and changes." (YW3, personal communication, June7)

They showed me that while they acknowledge the importance of demonstrating value, and that they are working to balance their self-representation between deep, individual impact, and broader impact which will secure them continued resources and support. It is a difficult balance, but one that many organizations have found success with thus far.

These aspects of youth work are what have made them successful thus far in addressing mental health and well-being for young people, and in many ways set them apart from other sectors which are doing the same. This indicated to me that they have a strong role to play, which needs to be adequately valued by other sectors, as well as the Scottish Government. If this happens, we will see the youth work sector more able to aid young people, and Scotland will see improved mental health and well-being for young people. In the next section, I will discuss the analysis of my findings in regard to area which the youth work sector can improve in order to strengthen their position as a development actor in these topics.

4.3 How could the youth work sector improve its role?

Though I have identified many ways that the youth work sector is successful at bringing about development, if they wish to see an increasing role in improving mental health and well-being for young people in Scotland, there are a number of aspects which they could focus on improving. During my interviews with the youth workers, I asked them to share with me their experiences within the sector, and to discuss areas that they thought needed to be enhanced moving forward. From those interviews, I was able to identify patterns in order to determine the areas which were most important to focus on to increase their ability to affect change. Many of the areas which were indicated are already being worked upon by the sector but need to be increased or done more effectively in order to solidify their position as a development actor in regard to mental health and well-being for young people.

Improved use of technology

As I indicated when discussing the strengths of the sector, it is deeply important for the youth work sector to have a strong presence in the areas where young people are the most active, in order to extend their reach as widely as possible. Currently, technology is one of those areas where young people are concentrating much of their time. The youth work sector is already doing a great bit in this area with apps and media campaigns which are centered around improving mental health and well-being. This is largely due to the sector's adaptability and their understanding that technology plays a large part in young people's lives and will continue to do so indefinitely. With that in mind, they need to continue to stay updated with current technologies and use them in a way that is both appealing to young people, but also clearly delivers on the goals to improve mental health and well-being.

One youth worker I spoke with said they wished for an app to be created in their area, that

is:

"not just about mental health, but it's about what young people can do. I think that

you can put young people out to different websites and whatever, but if we had like

almost like a one-stop shop that had activities, events, access to mental health,

access to GPs, access to sexual health, access to everything, and like, they can have

it on their phone, and they can be directed wherever they go." (YW3, personal

communication, June 7)

This kind of technology could be a game changer when it comes to assisting young people who cannot easily access in-person support, or do not feel comfortable doing so. However, with that in mind, the sector also needs to acknowledge that technology is not a silver bullet approach, and it cannot always solve problems which are more complex in nature. Sometimes mental health and well-being issues can occur from technology being used ineffectively, for example, the promotion of unhealthy body image ideals which can negatively affect an individual's self-esteem. The sector needs to continue to use technology but be very careful about the messages which they are presenting to young people.

The WHO has defined "mobile health" as the use of mobile and wireless technologies to support the achievement of health objectives. Mobile health has become more popular in recent years as it increases access to healthcare services and information, and as mental health and well-being are being more acknowledged as a part of total health, mobile health will begin to play a larger role in addressing those topics. They emphasize that technology needs to be used strategically, perhaps by providing mood tracking and other self-reporting mental health technologies, as well as others which promote healthy life decisions and help to manage life

stressors (Gaggioli & Riva, 203, pp. 141-145). The youth work sector needs to more strongly embrace that as an aspect of their technological reach, and ensure that they are maintaining a balance between promoting professional, accurate information pertaining to mental health and well-being, while avoiding the negative aspects of technology and media which can further contribute to poor mental health and well-being.

Promote further inclusivity

Inclusivity is an aspect of youth work which is already being done quite well but could be increased further to ensure all young people in Scotland have access to assistance for improving their mental health and well-being. Many of the youth workers I spoke with emphasized that inclusivity was absolutely necessary when improving mental health and well-being for young people, and that, in fact, many groups in Scotland face additional mental health problems due to lack of inclusivity in services. There is a strong relationship between social conditions such as those pertaining to inclusivity and mental health. Having inclusive social support is seen as particularly important when seeking to improve mental health and well-being for groups, especially those who may face problems that can come with exclusion, such as discrimination, violence or social isolation. Increasing inclusivity in all facets of youth work practice is deeply important if Scotland wants to improve mental health and well-being for all its young people (Chaturvedi, 2016, pp. 1-3).

There are many ways in which the youth work sector is already addressing this as important. One youth worker spoke about increasing inclusivity in their organizations through consultation groups, saying their members:

"come from a variety of backgrounds in terms of gender, age, whether they're in

school, or in education outwith school, or whether they are not in employment, and

various backgrounds as well. So maybe we have young people who are care-experienced, young people who are young carers, LGBT, we have some young Syrian refugees, so kind of more of our kind of seldom-heard young people, so we try our best to have them within that structure as well." (YW5, personal communication, May 23)

The other youth workers I spoke with, as well, discussed numerous mechanisms for increasing their inclusivity in the future, including having in-depth training for youth workers that includes inclusivity at the forefront, and also through increasing focus of programs on certain groups who may be lacking proper assistance, such as LGBTQ+ or ethnic minority groups. This focus in youth work needs to continue until inclusivity is just a natural part of every program that is set forth, and all youth workers are properly trained to provide inclusive services. This is especially important as development cannot truly be effective if it focuses only on one group of people, and leaves others ignored and unrepresented.

Demonstrate value and impact

One of the biggest aspects for the sector to improve upon, which I heard repeatedly, was the way in which the value and impact of youth work are demonstrated. There has been a shift in all development practice which has increased the need for sustainability of programs, and for proving the "value" of a project to stakeholders. Several of the youth workers I spoke with identified this as a problem within the larger youth work sector. Often, youth workers "know" what they are doing is helping young people but cannot so clearly depict that outside stakeholders, who do not have direct involvement in the programs.

The youth work sector has demonstrated via impact statements and stories that it does an incredible job at providing deep, long-lasting impact to the young people they are helping. This is

extremely important, especially when dealing with issues of mental health and well-being, which are deeply personal in nature. However, there is a need to demonstrate impact on a wider scale in order to maintain an influx of resources to actually keep programs going. Sustainable development has become increasingly important in recent years, and because of the long-term nature of youth work and mental health and well-being programs, it is especially important that the youth work sector is able to maintain the work that it is putting forth.

One youth worker I spoke with said that one of the major challenges of youth work is that it is often a "longitudinal study, so you're not going to get results next week, next year" (YW2, personal communication, May 22). In order to combat this, multiple youth workers I spoke with made suggestions which could benefit how youth work is viewed in terms of impact. One suggested that impact could be best shown by calculating the financial value of societal problems, and then comparatively measure that against the financial value that youth work service provides. They said:

> "If you could divert that money, and what were those young people before that got
>
> to an issue, you're going to save that, and not only that, here's the difference you're
>
> making to that person, and the impact in terms of that." (YW6, personal
>
> communication, June 13)

Another suggested that research needed to be conducted by outside actors, as "youth workers are terrible at saying what they are good at" (YW2, personal communication, May 22). Because of the proximity to projects which are being carried out, it can be difficult and time-consuming for youth workers to pause and step back to interpret the work they are doing in terms of broad-level value. This could be improved by having outside researchers who have greater capacity to conduct deep analysis come look at the programs that are being carried out. Whatever

method is chosen, it is clear that the sector needs to find some way to balance showing the consistency and reach of their work on mental health and well-being, without becoming impersonal or unfocused in their impact for young people. This will be difficult to achieve while also putting out good work but is important to strongly solidify their position as a development actor and remove the inaccurate idea that youth work is merely "playing pool and football on a Saturday" (YW2, personal communication, May 22).

Stronger coordination and cooperation

Alongside with the need to balance value with longer-term impact, there is a strong need in the youth sector to have improved coordination between the various members of the youth work sector and others they work closely with. Many of the youth workers I spoke with indicated that they had seen a need for more effective cooperation within the sector. One youth worker noted that there needed to be:

> "a consistent approach to some of the delivery of these things, and perhaps a little bit of a differential between the types of things that are delivered and an understanding of that, and hopefully that will come through a sort of strategy."
> (YW1, personal communication, May 20)

One emphasized the need for many diverse programs, saying "sometimes you feel like you're almost just scratching the surface, but I think the more you scratch, the more you see, and just something else opens up," but that in order to do that you need to try

> "not to replicate things that are happening, because I think that's something you've really got to watch for, that you don't have all these different agencies and departments fighting to deliver the same thing. It's about coming together and saying well I can provide this, and I can provide that, and that way you're covering

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more bases, because not one size fits all for young people." (YW3, personal communication, June 7)

By working together to form more cohesive relationships, we will see fewer areas of overlap, and this will reduce any conflict or competition that might come about from trying to deliver multiples of the same service for young people. In addition, this will help them increase their representation in the Scottish government, one of the primary stakeholders, as they will be putting forth a well-organized image of what the young people are needing at this time.

As the youth work sector moves forward in improving mental health and well-being for young people, it will need to focus on improving aspects such as utilization of technology and increased inclusivity, as well as clearer demonstration of impact and more cohesive sector partnership and representation. If they continue to improve these aspects of their work, they will continue to grow as a successful development actor for issues of mental health and well-being for young people.

Conclusion

As mental health and well-being continue to be pressing issues in Scotland, a multi-sectoral approach is going to become increasingly important. From my meetings with the six youth workers from diverse organizations across the sector, it is clear that the sector is and is going to continue to be a key player in improving those for young people. The patterns that I observed in my research indicated that the sector is, in fact, putting forth quality work at this time to assist young people. This manifests in individual support, such as provision of knowledge, resources, and opportunities for mental health promotion, as well as systemic support, including research, de-stigmatization, and representation at the government level.

As a sector, there were many strengths which helps them to stand out as a sector in terms of their role in improving mental health and well-being for young people. These include a willingness to adapt to the wants and needs of young people, as well as effectively using technology and promoting inclusivity. Additionally, they are working hard to increase partnerships with other organizations and the Scottish Government itself, and they do very well at outputting long-term impact for young people.

As the sector seeks to become a bigger player in the development game, there are things that they will want to focus on improving, as well. The youth workers I spoke with indicated a need to continue to improve the use of technology and to promote inclusivity in their work. Additionally, the sector will need to improve the way that they represent their value and impact in these areas to outside stakeholders, in order to sustain their work. Lastly, they will need to focus on making their partnerships stronger and more cohesive. By improving these things, the youth work sector will soon be viewed as not only important to the process of improving mental health and well-being for young people, but also absolutely necessary and indispensable.

In my limited time conducting this research, I tried to speak with those organizations who both had experience with working on mental health and well-being, and could represent different parts of the sector, in order to increase the generalizability of my findings. This allowed me to hear a wide variety of opinions and experiences, and from my data, I could determine patterns in what is being done to address mental health and well-being. It is clear to me that this is a deeply important area to continue researching, and the youth work sector could benefit from further study in order to further increase their voice on these topics. Future research would benefit from meeting with a greater amount of youth work organizations, in order to gain a wider breadth of knowledge.

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