

West Partnership Collaborative Enquiry - Youth Work and School Partnerships

Summary of Insights on Practice from Local Partnership Reviews

Introduction

YouthLink Scotland is working with the West Partnership Regional Improvement Collaborative to facilitate a practitioner enquiry that is youth workers and formal educators to review a range of established youth work and school partnerships in order to:

- consider common enablers of - and barriers to - effective collaboration that leads to improved outcomes for children and young people.
- agree how best to share learning and good practice more widely
- identify key opportunities for service improvement and make recommendations about how they should be addressed.

In late 2021, CLD Network Leads identified seven partnerships, each in a different local authority, to participate in the enquiry process. Practitioners came together for a launch event to clarify aims and objectives and co-design the proposed local review process. Between December 2021 and January 2022 teams in each locality met to agree on the scope of the partnership review in their context, and to agree roles and responsibilities. Feedback on each youth work and school partnership was then gathered from a range of stakeholders, with a particular focus on hearing directly from young people. Review conversations, informed by this feedback, were facilitated with each partner group between March and May 2022.

Details of each of the local review conversations were recorded and are available individually. This summary document draws together the common threads of all of these discussions. Views of young people are also reproduced in key sections of the report.

A range of connected materials have also been collated through the review conversations to inform the enquiry process going forward. These include:

1. short descriptions of each partnership
2. a summary of data evidencing positive outcomes for young people
3. a range of inputs direct from young people about the impact of youth work, including videos, transcribed interviews and individual stories of change.
4. examples of documented processes to support partnership working

Next steps are to share all of this information across the practitioner enquiry group and agree how they would like to use it to share insights and learning and / or work collaboratively to address some of the challenges and opportunities they have identified.

Participating Partnerships

Partnership	Scope of Review
East Dunbartonshire CLD and Kirkintilloch High School	Whole school provision
East Renfrewshire CLD and Barrhead High School	Whole school provision
Glasgow Life and Rosshall Academy	Whole school provision
Inverclyde CLD and Inverclyde Academy	Whole school provision
Renfrewshire Youth Services, Castlehead High School and West Primary School	EVOLVE programme
South Lanarkshire Youth Family and Community Learning Service and Stonelaw High School	Pathfinder programme
Working 4U, YSortit, West Dunbartonshire Education Team	Alternative Pathways programme

Similarities and Differences in the Partnership Approaches

Whilst the partnerships share certain characteristics in common, they vary widely in their focus, scope and structure:

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the partnerships are located in areas of high deprivation All offer targeted support to young people at risk of disengaging from education Youth work is seen as an integral part of the curriculum offer (although not all are school-based) All are considered successful in terms of positive outcomes for children and young people All co-design programmes with input from young people All offer opportunities to complete Youth Awards / other accredited qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longevity of the partnerships: the most established has been running for more than 20 years and the most recent just 12 months. Funding models: some are funded through central CLD budgets, others through central Education budgets, others are a hybrid of central funding augmented by SAC and PEF contributions, another is grant funded through Cashback. Age of the young people Number of young people supported per year Nature of youth work resource: some partnerships rely on full time youth work support based in school, others on part time posts, others take a more programmatic approach involving a team of youth workers with different skills and specialisms – one programme is deliberately disconnected from the school setting Location of support: may be home, school or community-based

It's clear that there is no single 'right' way of designing partnership working. What is important is that youth work support in and around schools responds to local needs, and in a sustainable way.

That said, all of these partnerships articulated clear and consistent messages about the contribution that youth work can make to the Curriculum for Excellence and the Scottish Attainment Challenge, as well as the barriers to and enablers of effective collaboration between youth work and formal education. These are summarised in the rest of this document.

Perspectives on the relationship between Youth Work, Curriculum for Excellence and the Scottish Attainment Challenge

Formal education partners across all of the settings agree that youth work and schools' partnerships play an important role in addressing the Scottish Attainment Challenge, enabling young people to overcome barriers to learning, nurturing their health and wellbeing and supporting literacy and numeracy:

"Youth work supports health and wellbeing across the board – the work helps young people manage their emotions and regulate their behaviour, but it is also fundamentally about helping young people to feel comfortable and happy in the school environment – if you're not happy, you can't learn effectively. Once we have happy young people, they can go on to excel." **Head Teacher, Kirkintilloch High School**

"Pathfinders is a needs-led intervention that recognises that in order to achieve equity, some young people and families need a tailored approach that identifies and recognises the multiple barriers they face to participation and full engagement in learning." **Deputy Head Teacher, Stonelaw High School**

Whilst support is often targeted, all partners highlight the very diverse range of needs across their cohorts of participants:

"Schools understand that youth work is not for targeting 'badly behaved' young people. We are looking at wider vulnerabilities and it is important that the work does not become stigmatised." **Youth Work Manager, Renfrewshire**

All partners recognise the importance of an evolving programme of support over the course of the Broad General Education Phase and the Senior Phase in Education. Primary to secondary school transition is also understood to be a particularly important focus, and more so than ever following the pandemic, since many young people have been adversely affected socially and academically by long periods of remote education.

Where partnerships are well-established, and the impact of this support has been measured over time, school teams are unequivocal about the impact of this kind of early intervention:

"There is a group of young men in school who have been supported from P5 onwards. All were identified as being at risk of disengaging due to multiple barriers to learning – all are going on to positive destinations. That's an outstanding achievement." **Head Teacher, Inverclyde Academy**

"The school includes young people who they know have the potential to achieve more when given targeted support – 7-8 weeks of this kind of support can have a huge impact – create the spark again for school." **Head Teacher, West Primary School**

A number of partnerships also highlighted the value of youth work in supporting the Curriculum for Excellence's four capacities and enabling schools to offer personalisation and choice.

"We recognise that school isn't a 'one size fits all model' – the partnership with youth work is seen as an integral part of mainstream education provision in the school." **Depute Head Teacher, Stonelaw High School, South Lanarkshire**

"Our curriculum rationale is very important. Cross-cutting themes are supported through the EVOLVE [youth work] programme" **Head Teacher, West Primary School, Renfrewshire**

“All of our [youth work] programmes are mapped to CfE experiences and outcomes.” **Senior CLD Worker, Youth Team, Inverclyde**

Partners acknowledge that Youth Work Awards offer a wider range of pathways to attainment – these are easily understood. However, some formal educators highlighted that approaches without formally accredited qualifications are less widely recognised as contributing to the delivery of the curriculum, and yet are valuable in their own right.

There is a feeling that there are ‘teachers who know’ that youth work is integral to the curriculum, because they work closely with youth work partners – and those who still underestimate its potential or see it as a bolt-on. Many partners highlighted the need to continue to share practice during in-service days and through CLPL in order to ensure that the youth work approach is more widely understood.

“How closely do your shared practices need to be shared? No matter how good your programme is, if [all teachers] were more aware, the referrals would work better. The better you understand it, the more likely you are to scoop up the young people most likely to benefit.” **Pathfinders Coordinator, South Lanarkshire**

Value of Youth Work and School Partnerships

“I don’t need to carry my worries from one class to another, [the youth worker] carries them for me.” **Young Person**

“I can’t imagine school without [the youth worker]. To begin with, I was so sad and frightened in school. [The youth worker] helped me to make friends and helped me with strategies for learning.” **Young Person**

“[The youth worker] sees us a lot, including at the weekend, so she knows us better” **Young Person**

Most partners articulate a strong sense of reciprocity in the value of the collaborative working between youth work and school.

“The value is a 2-way street – shared intelligence and information about young people and families is helpful.” **Youth Worker, Inverclyde**

“Having a close relationship with the school also supports other aspects of CLD strategy – e.g. gathering views from young people to support locality planning.” **Youth Work Manager, East Renfrewshire**

“Working in partnership [with youth work] we get ideas that we can bring into the classroom. We get feedback that we are prescriptive within formal education – so we look for ways to make more room for self-expression, adapting ideas from the youth work approach. Working in partnership with youth work also helps us to look outside the school to tap into what young people need and will engage with.” **Head Teacher, West Primary School, Renfrewshire**

“There are opportunities for skills sharing – for example a review of PSHE in 2019 and ongoing support for review/ self-evaluation” **Youth Work Manager, East Renfrewshire**

“Youth workers have more in-depth knowledge of key issues where school knowledge is ‘thinner’: mental health, sexual health; LGBT; the environment. [On these topics] youth workers are the expert in the room... SLT recognises there’s a wealth of knowledge that sits outside mainstream

education that teachers can tap into – for example youth awards – you just opened our eyes to a breadth of opportunities” **Head Teacher, Inverclyde Academy**

Influencing school culture and ethos

Formal educators recognise the role that youth workers play in helping to build a nurturing and inclusive culture in schools:

“We never have enough people who are just there for the children. But what the youth worker brings is not just time and focus, it’s an approach of nurture and support – the youth worker’s ability to build positive, trust relationships is exceptional.” **Head Teacher, Kirkintilloch High School**

“The pastoral care team in the school is brilliant, but they have limited capacity – Youth Work’s door is always open and their ability to signpost to other partners is also crucial.” **Depute Head Teacher, Rosshall Academy**

“Youth workers bring a different ethos and approach. The relationship is different. Boundaries are different. ‘Discipline’ and ‘behaviour management’ aren’t part of it, because it doesn’t take place in a really busy classroom environment” **Depute Head Teacher, Rosshall Academy**

Connecting school, home and community

Partners value the way that youth work helps to connect school, home and community to effectively support learner engagement and improve outcomes for young people:

“It’s helpful that youth workers can relate PSHE issues to what they see happening in the community.” **Depute Head Teacher, Barrhead High School**

“Youth work allows us to bridge the gap between home and school.” **Depute Head Teacher, Stonelaw High School**

“Youth work support can be offered to young people at home, in the community and in school, meeting young people where they are at” **Youth Worker, Rosshall Academy**

“Youth work brings flexibility – personalised approaches to nurture and learning loss – but they are also there in the evenings and during the holidays when there is still a need for the support.” **Involvement and Engagement Manager, West Dunbartonshire Council Education and Learning Team**

“[the youth worker] was able to work with the pupil within school and in the community. This was incredibly powerful as it meant the pupil could confide in [the youth worker] in the community setting about barriers for school. [The youth worker] then raised these in school and allowed us to remove the barriers for this learner” **Depute Head Teacher, Barrhead High School**

“The focus is on ‘the learning neighbourhood’ – how youth work connects school and wider community” **Youth Work Manager, Renfrewshire**

There is also a recognition in some of the partnerships that youth work can play a role in co-ordinating access to other vital support for young people and their families locally:

“The programme is helping to link services together...previously young people might have been missed or it would have been crisis point before accessing support” **CEO YSortit, West Dunbartonshire,**

“Pathfinder has paved the way for other partner services to become involved with families who were very reluctant to engage, and provided reassurance and practical support to help families attend crucial appointments.” **Children’s Services Researcher, South Lanarkshire**

Youth Work : A Unique Approach

Young people reported that:

- They trust youth workers to offer a safe, confidential space to talk about how they are feeling in the school setting
- The experience of youth work makes them feel valued
- They feel they are treated as young adults
- Young people notice that the youth work approach to learning means ‘everyone is involved’ and they have a chance to shape experiences and ‘control priorities’
- They understand that feeling relaxed and comfortable makes it easier to learn
- They feel youth workers tend to know them better than teachers – because they see them outside of school and sometimes know their families too.
- They recognise that the environment in which they learn with youth workers is different too: often one-to-one or in small groups, not ‘a big massive classroom’.

“I think a youth worker’s job is different from a teacher’s job. A teacher is there to guide you through education, but a youth worker, they like protect you, they are there for you more.”

“I feel like I can do stuff and learn at the same time. I think I learn better out of class because there’s more freedom and you get to be outside doing things.”

“I liked having a say in what I was doing – it made me more involved in the topic.”

“My youth worker takes more time to explain things, whereas a teacher tells me in the quickest time possible to get it over with. You help me understand things. I feel like you listen to me and ask my point of view.”

“Teachers put us on the spot sometimes but you would never really put us on the spot, you would like understand.”

“[The youth worker] is calm – doesn’t make me feel like I’m misbehaving.”

“Youth workers were patient as I learned.”

“I know they keep me in mind even when I leave their room and go to classes. I can always trust [the youth worker].”

“Having time just with [the youth worker] made me feel like I was part of a family”

“I knew that if something I shared made [the youth worker] think I was unsafe then they couldn’t keep it private -my safety was too important – but I knew everything else I wanted to be private, would be private. That was a big relief for me.”

“I never feel like a pest.”

“I am never made to feel stupid for worrying about something”

“We discuss things together and come up with a plan. You listen to us and ask our opinion. We might not always agree but we decide together.”

Formal education partners – and some other partners around the school – also acknowledge and value the unique pedagogy and the particular skills that youth workers bring to the learning environment:

“Youth workers listen, establish rapport, empathise...take time. But the additional piece is their empowering approach – the philosophy and values that sit behind the listening are the key to their difference- empowering, emancipatory, promoting inclusion, facilitating change...Youth workers are future oriented with young people and help young people not to be stuck in the past...they communicate with young people in a non-judgemental way which respects the young person’s identity, promotes connectedness and also fosters a sense of self efficacy.” **Children’s Services Researcher, South Lanarkshire**

“Youth workers bring a different ethos and approach. If a young person is angry, the youth worker can take the time to understand what’s behind that – there’s always a reason for that, but in the classroom, there isn’t generally time to unpick that.” **Depute Head Teacher , Rosshall Academy**

“What I appreciate is the calmness, the whole rounded approach to the child, the longer view of improvement and on children in the context of their family. Youth workers know that outcomes take longer to embed. The pace is different [from formal education]...teachers are focused on helping people over a fixed set of shorter-term hurdles.” **Head Teacher, Inverclyde Academy**

“Youth workers are approachable. They enable us to break down the inherent barriers that exist within homes through previous experiences with authority.” **Educational Psychologist, Inverclyde**

“[youth workers are] an invaluable addition to the team around the child.” **Children’s Services Practitioner, South Lanarkshire**

“[youth workers offer] real insight at a Child Protection meeting.” **Children’s Service Practitioner, South Lanarkshire**

“[youth workers contribute] sensitive responses, skilled assessments and management of risk in terms of mental health.” **Children’s Services Practitioner, South Lanarkshire**

“Youth workers try to understand the world from the young person’s perspective. Their vocation is to advocate for the young person – really listen to them. They take young people as they find them – not their baggage or their reputation. That relationship is key.” **CEO, YSortit, West Dunbartonshire**

“Youth workers develop young people’s sense of agency in their communities and in their own lives.” **Depute Head Teacher, East Renfrewshire**

Enablers of impactful collaboration

Leadership and prevailing school culture

As with all system change and organisational development, leadership is fundamental to the success of partnership working. Partners tell us that youth work can help to build a nurturing and collaborative school culture – but this works best where school leadership teams engage teaching staff in a whole-school vision that is congruent with this is, and take practical measures to signal strategic intent:

“It’s interesting, looking at the feedback from the young people, that they see such a distinction between their relationship with teachers and youth workers or the youth work approach and the

teaching approach. If we had a consistent culture of nurture that wouldn't be the case and young people shouldn't feel that difference."

"Successful partnerships with youth work depend on a nurturing school culture. [SLT] has worked hard to challenge relationships that are not nurturing....it's been a journey to change attitudes and culture"

Leadership that is genuinely open to trialling new approaches and that gives practitioners real freedom to learn experientially was also highlighted as an important enabler of new collaborations:

"What helped was that we felt that [senior] people had a real sense of confidence in our ability to run this so we weren't trying to second guess what people were looking for"

In terms of practice, YouthLink Scotland's Youth Work and Schools' Collaborative has identified eight characteristics of effective collaboration¹ that partners need to nurture:

- Mutual trust and respect
- Clear, agreed purpose and aims
- Shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and approaches
- Common professional language
- Sharing of skills, knowledge and experience
- Joint planning and evaluation of progress (shared accountability)
- Open, regular communication and review
- Youth voice is representative, heard and valued

These are, for the most part, aligned with the reflections of practitioners from the West Partnership who highlighted the following enablers of impactful partnership working through the recent review process:

Parity of esteem

Practitioners recognise that genuine parity of esteem is a cornerstone of effective partnership working – and that this shows up, not only in what is said, but in practical steps taken to signal that parity:

"It's about understanding the strengths of each service. Mutual respect has been really important. It's about helping young people see how they can get the best out of these relationships, building confidence to ask for help where they need it" **Youth Work Manager, Renfrewshire**

'Parents know that we educate our children as a team – we all have a bit to bring to the table' **Head Teacher, Inverclyde Academy**

"Having a dedicated space for youth work in the school means you feel part of the infrastructure – no one has a higher ranking than anyone else." **Youth Worker, Inverclyde**

"Next year, we plan to formalise youth work opportunities as a curricular offer – the current model is an extraction model. Next year, youth work will be timetabled in – it removes any conflict of interest and gives the work credence." **Head Teacher, Kirkintilloch High School**

Integrating youth work into wider collaborative structures and processes also helps to demonstrate genuine parity of esteem e.g.

- Youth work integrated into leadership forums with formal education
- Youth work integrated into 'Team around the Child' meetings
- Youth work informing school improvement planning (not simply responding to this)
- Youth work informing strategic locality planning

¹ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/7264/professional-learning-resource-ywpluss-st1.pdf>

- Youth work integrated into other multi-agency meetings – e.g. screening hub for pre-CAMHS referrals

Clarity of Purpose

Partnership works best when youth workers and formal educators can coalesce around the needs of young people and find shared purpose:

“There was a strong motivation to get it going because there was a clear need – people understood we just need to go for this and learn as we go. We knew it was a priority. We knew the resources were there and we needed to be creative with that” **CEO YSortit, West Dunbartonshire**

“Young people are the motivation. They need the support NOW. They were already disengaged. We had to not be scared of it.” **Youth Development Worker, West Dunbartonshire**

Joint planning, ongoing review and evaluation – ensuring young people’s views are heard

Beyond this shared motivation, all of the partnerships highlighted the importance of having a clear structure for setting priorities, planning and review. In particular:

- Joint planning process to define priorities and desired outcomes ahead of each new academic year – a clear structure and clear roles in this. Sometimes a designated steering group is useful
- A clear youth work ‘offer’, shaped with input from formal educators and young people (evolving, not a static menu of options)
- A formal service agreement to clarify roles, expectations and desired outcomes
- A clear, commonly understood referral process
- Ongoing collaborative evaluation – both of young people’s progress and of collaborative process

Strong relationships with school SLT, guidance and learning support teams are key

A number of practitioners reflected that the way that partnerships are initiated can support or undermine relationships from the outset:

“...As the Head Teacher, I was involved in the recruitment process for our youth worker – and so were the young people - you wouldn’t simply be ‘allocated’ a member of staff in the other parts of the school team. Why should youth work be any different?” **Head Teacher, Kirkintilloch High School**

Building relationships enables information to be shared effectively, and support to reach the young people who need it most:

“Youth workers work alongside the pastoral care team – they have an awareness of current and historical issues within families – it’s a joined-up process.” **Depute Head Teacher, Barrhead High School**

“The circle of trust between youth worker and school is vital – sharing intelligence and working towards shared aims. Young people need to understand this is a partnership too.” **Depute Head Teacher, Rosshall Academy**

“One of [the youth worker’s] strengths is her relationship with Principal Teachers, enabling a genuine partnership approach to identifying young people that can benefit and shaping the nature of the support that is offered.” **Head Teacher Kirkintilloch High School**

Barriers and Challenges

Practitioners consistently identified the following challenges in effective partnership development:

Funding

“We know we have to manage change – but if you really value a service, there has to be stability and continuity – these are children who don’t have stability and continuity outside school and they need that in school to thrive. I want to know it’s a 3-year offering, not something that could be pulled at any time.”

- All of the partnerships highlighted the lack of certainty about sustainable funding as a challenge in planning services
- They also recognised that funding structures influence the relationship between youth work and formal education partners. This can be a positive – for example, if schools are funding youth work support they are often more likely to engage in collaborative planning and evaluation, but it can also be a challenge if these relationships become very directive. A partnership approach to funding is more likely to support genuine co-design of services and parity of esteem.

Collaborative planning and evaluation of Youth Work support in the school context

- Time for collaborative planning of youth work programmes still proves difficult to ring fence.
- Most of the partnerships recognise that, whilst youth workers evaluate programmes, and outcomes are discussed anecdotally with school partners, they do not yet have a clear, manageable process for evaluating the impact of youth work and school partnerships in a joined-up way, particularly as youth workers often don’t have direct access to school tracking data relating to individual students. They also recognise it is a complex area, because young people’s progress is not linear, and *‘sometimes it is the small, harder to measure impacts that matter the most – how do we gather and share these in a meaningful way?’*
- Open, honest dialogue about what is and isn’t working is not always straightforward: *“There can sometimes be too much politeness when agencies come together to plan partnership work.”*

Gathering insight to inform service improvement

- Partnership work is incorporated in both school and CLD improvement plans, but opportunities to shape these plans together are often missed.

Patchy awareness of and buy-in to youth work partnerships across school communities

“We need to bridge gaps in the understanding of youth work. There’s so much going on in schools – the value of youth work is not always widely recognised beyond those staff that are most directly involved.”

- There are varying degrees of awareness and buy-in to partnerships with youth work at a whole-school level
- Partnership work is often still too dependent on a few individual relationships – this undermines the sustainability of partnerships when key staff move on.
- A number of the partnerships identified a need to further develop parents’ understanding of the role and contribution of youth work in the school setting.

Opportunities

Partners highlighted the following opportunities for partnership development and service improvement in the West:

- Raise the profile of the diversity of youth work and school partnerships in the West and the impact of these - with practitioners, parents and those who can influence funding decisions.
- Consider how young people can share their stories as part of this awareness-raising process:

“People who want to understand the impact of youth work in schools need more opportunities to meet young people who are benefiting from that – when you meet them in person, that’s when you really ‘get’ the value.

- Share insights from these recent local reviews with school teams and youth work practitioners more widely.
- Develop and share good practice in collaborative evaluation of youth work and school partnerships – including new/better ways to track young people’s wider learning and achievement and better ways to gather feedback from parents.

“We know we need a more joined up evaluation process – needs to take into account school tracking (attendance, time-keeping, engagement in class) as well as reporting from young people, parents and youth workers – but it needs to be realistic and manageable.”

- Build confidence and capacity to use data to understand and inform service improvement.
- Consider what a whole-school approach to embedding CLD into the curriculum would look like – e.g. Rosshall Academy are considering using the Place Standard tool as a way of building teachers’ awareness of the communities where they work, from the perspective of young people.
- Further widen access to youth work in the school context. Consider how youth work and schools can work together to offer young people ‘gateways’ to youth work earlier in their school careers, providing them with a wider support network and more diverse learning experiences. Young people feel strongly about this too:

“I think if I had access to [youth work support] in my earlier stages in school then I would probably still be in school right now.”

“It would have helped me a lot if I had a youth worker when I was younger, as I didn’t go into class because I had anxiety. I was dragged into school to sit with fidget toys and told to ‘try harder’. If I had a youth worker when I was younger it would have helped knowing someone was there for me. P7 affected me so much, which has then affected me in S1, S2 and S3. I wish someone had helped me back then.”

“It would have helped me more if we could have set up the EAL youth club earlier, as we get to socialise in the community and use English more.”

- Widen the partnership model in some contexts – to include third sector youth organisations, family learning and also health and social care.