

## Joint Statement - Public Health Scotland and YouthLink Scotland – Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024

*Working together young people grow up safe, healthy and  
thriving*

**YouthLink Scotland** is the national agency for youth work and the collective voice for the sector. Our vision is a Scotland where young people realise their full potential through youth work.

**Public Health Scotland** is Scotland's national public health body, leading and supporting work across Scotland to prevent disease, prolong healthy life and promote health and wellbeing.

### **Our Statement**

This statement is a public commitment by YouthLink Scotland and Public Health Scotland to work together for the benefit of young people in Scotland.

Prioritising prevention in public services has long been an ambition in Scotland. As the Programme for Government outlines, prevention must be prioritised to break the cycle of poverty and eradicate child poverty.<sup>1</sup> Widening health inequalities as well as lasting and disproportionate impacts from COVID-19 make for a difficult landscape. Despite these significant challenges, by working in partnership, we can make significant and lasting improvements to young people's health.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2024) *Programme for Government 2024-25: Serving Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/programme-government-2024-25-serving-scotland/>

## Youth Work's Role in Young People's Health and Wellbeing

Youth work is an effective preventative approach to improving long-term health outcomes meeting young people's health and wellbeing needs through early intervention, preventing future ill health and reducing the need for crisis interventions.

As a relational and rights-respecting practice, youth work is uniquely positioned to support young people who are not engaging with public services. Youth work is proven to support young people to improve their health and wellbeing, increase confidence and realise potential.<sup>2</sup> It contributes to a holistic response to young peoples' needs, reducing risk taking behaviours and creating the conditions to improve physical and mental wellbeing in the longer term.

During Covid-19 lockdowns, youth work was shown to have positive benefits for reducing isolation and loneliness, improving mental wellbeing, and engaging whole family support.<sup>3</sup>

The impacts of youth work are felt beyond young people. It plays a crucial role in bringing communities together and as such, youth workers are uniquely positioned to enhance community responses and support to improve health and wellbeing of Scotland's communities. The recent CLD review highlighted the extensive benefits of youth work and the broader CLD sector in relation to health and wellbeing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> YouthLink Scotland (2020) *The Impact of Community Based Universal Youth Work in Dumfries and Galloway*. Available at: <https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/Impact-of-Universal-Youth-Work-in-Dumfries-and-Galloway.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> YouthLink Scotland (2022) *Youth work's role during and in recovery from COVID-19*. Available at: <https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/youthlink-scotland-youth-works-role-during-covid-19-final-report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2024) *Learning; For All. For Life. A report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD)*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/learning-life-report-independent-review-community-learning-development-cld/documents/>

## **Recognition of youth work at strategic level**

Public Health Scotland recognises the strategic importance of youth work in prevention and early intervention at a national and local level if we are to make progress on Scotland's national outcomes.

Ensuring the contribution of youth work is recognised, resourced and fully integrated as part of a systems wide response with other sectors such as health, education and justice will ensure that young people have the best chance to realise their full potential.

## **Prioritising and developing joint initiatives**

As national leaders, YouthLink Scotland and Public Health Scotland will work together on key priorities, using the best available research and evidence to influence the use of resources to deliver the greatest impact.

Working across our teams and networks such as the Scottish Prevention Hub, the Scottish Youth Work Leaders Forum and the Youth Work Health and Wellbeing Network, we will work together to strategically position the youth work sector as critical contributors to a Scotland where everyone thrives.

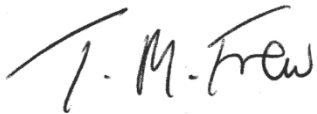
## **Utilising data to address needs of young people and improve services**

Public Health Scotland are the stewards of Scotland's healthcare data and YouthLink Scotland are leaders in youth-led research. Working together to understand our collective data will provide important insights into action that can be taken to improve services. We are committed to making sense of our data together with young people to ensure their voices are heard and respected on the issues that affect them

## **Working in partnership with the youth work sector**

As the national agency for youth work, YouthLink Scotland opens the doors to the youth work sector and all young people engaged in youth work. Through our relationship and joint working, we will strengthen the

connection of Public Health Scotland with Scotland's young people. We will encourage a public health approach to key challenges such as child poverty, youth violence, and physical and mental wellbeing. This will contribute to improving the health of communities and reducing health inequality in Scotland.



Tim Frew

Chief Executive, YouthLink Scotland



Paul Johnston

Chief Executive, Public Health Scotland