



YouthLink Scotland Policy Brief

Youth work and school-age childcare

Introduction

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We're a membership organisation, representing local, regional and national youth organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors. We champion the role and value of youth work and represent the interests and aspirations of our sector.

This briefing explains youth work's role in delivering the Scottish Government's vision for school-age childcare. In particular, it highlights how this contributes to closing the poverty-related attainment gap, improving family wellbeing and supporting more parents and carers to take up and sustain work and training. This is key to tackling child poverty and building a wellbeing economy.

What is youth work?

Youth work is a powerful, dynamic and versatile education practice that equips children and young people with the tools and support they need to reach their potential.

It's part of the wider professional practice of Community Learning and Development (CLD). As such, youth work is planned, delivered and evaluated by professionally qualified youth work/CLD practitioners, and other experienced practitioners, including volunteers, who hold a range of competency-based qualifications and skills to practice youth work.

Youth workers are based in the third sector and local authorities. The work is delivered across a variety of settings including youth centres, schools, colleges, outdoor education centres, or on the streets via outreach programmes and detached youth work. A diverse range of engagement tools and vehicles for learning are used to respond to the needs and priorities of children, young people, families and communities.

Youth work promotes the values of inclusion, mutual respect, equality and youth voice. It's about building relationships based on trust and shared understanding, and using the strength of these relationships to develop a person-centred and non-formal learning approach to the development of young people.

Youth work's focus is on the 11-25 year age group, but also includes early intervention programmes and provision which focuses on children under 11 years. This can include support for children starting school, providing primary to secondary transition support, after-school clubs and uniformed groups.

School-age childcare in Scotland

School-age childcare in Scotland is defined as a wide range of services that support families around the school day and during holidays¹. This includes youth work.

Youth work is crucial to achieving the vision of a high-quality, affordable and accessible system that tackles child poverty and contributes to building a wellbeing economy.

Youth work's role in building a future system of school age childcare

Youth work's role within the school-age childcare ecosystem includes delivering breakfast clubs, after-school provision and school holiday programmes. These opportunities are often free, or low cost, often available during evenings and weekends, when other services may be closed. Youth work's position within the learning community puts youth workers in a unique place to build relationships with young people and their families across school, home and community settings.

Many youth work organisations work holistically – building relationships with the whole family, enabling the provision of wider support. This is often particularly targeted at families on low income or those with protected characteristics. The focus on equity contributes to tackling poverty - raising attainment, supporting family wellbeing and enabling parents and carers to take up or sustain work, training and study. Case studies illustrating these impacts are provided in Appendix A.

Children's development improves and the poverty-related outcomes gap narrows

As a human rights-based practice, youth work offers opportunities for all young people, whilst making a unique contribution to those most in need of support, including targeted support for children, young people and families identified in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

Youth work supports children and young people's learning and development. Across a range of settings, youth work supports children and young people impacted by poverty to engage with learning and offers flexible and tailored options and pathways to develop and recognise skills and achievements.

There is robust evidence that youth work improves the readiness to learn, health and wellbeing and educational outcomes of children and young people. This is contributing to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge to close the poverty-related attainment gap².

In 2021, the £3 million Youth Work Education Recovery Fund enabled 64 youth work programmes across Scotland to provide opportunities for 17,904 young people. A total

¹ [School Age Childcare in Scotland Progress Report 2021 \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-age-childcare-in-scotland-progress-report-2021/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx)

² <https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/scottish-attainment-challenge/attainment-good-practice/#national-case-study-evaluation>

of 68% of participants were aged 10-14. The Fund was established by the Scottish Government to enable the sector to engage young people in some of the country's most vulnerable communities and support their educational, social and emotional recovery in the wake of the pandemic. The fund's [impact report](#) showed that:

- 82% of participating young people developed their skills
- 79% of participating young people experienced improved health and wellbeing
- 78% of participating young people overcame barriers to learning
- 61% of young people were more engaged in learning
- 37% of young people achieved recognition of wider achievement attainment e.g. youth awards
- Many opportunities provided vital support for young people transitioning from primary to secondary school

The impact report identified youth workers' ability to build trusted relationships and create positive and safe spaces for person-centred learning contributed to improved outcomes for children and young people. Additionally, it highlighted a number of additional positive outcomes for families. This included improved family wellbeing.

Family wellbeing improves

Parental engagement and family learning are often important aspects of youth work, particularly around periods of transition and in delivering targeted interventions. Families involved in the youth work education recovery fund projects commented on the positive impact of the social interactions and meaningful activities on their wellbeing:

"It's hard to ask for help and we were not doing very good, prices for gas and electricity are so high and I need to buy additional food as no breakfast clubs... the support allowed us to feel valued, cared for and less anxious."

"I'm finding it hard to find the words for you to understand how much your kindness saved my son, we both lost our jobs through this pandemic and Christmas was cancelled. I wanted to go to sleep and not wake up. [This youth project] was an amazing support to me and my family."

Food is generally embedded in youth work provision and plays a key role in family wellbeing and tackling poverty. A youth work approach to addressing food insecurity is non-stigmatised and generates a range of additional impacts, such as improved engagement in learning, health and wellbeing, skills development and increased attainment. The YouthLink Scotland (YLS) and Scottish Government food insecurity pilot evaluation report³ evidences these benefits – including the impact on wider family wellbeing and poverty. One of the projects was Falkirk's Summer Takeaway. Youth workers took a whole family approach to working with young people, providing opportunities for families to learn together. As a direct result of participating in the Summer Takeaway, families reported that they felt less isolated and had improved health and wellbeing. Young people reported that they mixed better with family/carers:

³ https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5659/food-insecurity-report_proofed.pdf

“Me and my brother are lot closer now because we have done this.”

“As a result of the Summer Takeaway, my family will do more together, we will sit down at the table and eat together and talk more.”

“I feel more confident as a parent. It was great to spend time with the family and having the time to do it.”

In particular, parents/carers reported that they developed the confidence to share skills and activities with their children. *“It’s something that has helped with my family. I have four kids who all do their own thing. Doing the Summer Takeaway activities has enabled us to realise that we all needed each other, more than we realised.”*

Parents' and carers' opportunities to take up or sustain work, training, and study increase

Youth work provision also provides families with the opportunity to access work and training. This includes providing flexible, meaningful opportunities that meet their childcare needs and also, where appropriate, delivering support for parents and carers to make the transition into work. Youth work extends to working with young people aged 25 – including young and single parents. A recent report from One Parent Families Scotland highlighted the challenges single parents face. This includes social isolation and access to suitable options for childcare⁴. Youth work has a vital role here.

Youth work plays a vital role in providing opportunities for children, young people and their families during school holiday periods. This can be a critical time to enable parents to sustain work, training or study. Youth work investment as part of the approach to Summer of Play (2021) provided important opportunities for children and young people to engage, improve their health and wellbeing and learn. The Summer of Play Youth Work Fund supported 325 youth work or youth arts summer activity programmes for young people aged between 8 and 25 years. This included transition programmes, outdoor learning and opportunities that addressed food insecurity.

25,214 young people directly benefitted from the fund. The youth work activities also contributed to ensuring there was choice, affordability and flexibility for families, within the school-age childcare offer locally, particularly for those impacted by poverty.

Youth work settings can have a huge role to play in supporting the childcare needs of parents/carers in their local area during holiday periods. Scout Adventures' Fordell Firs, for example, situated near Dunfermline, will deliver over 1,000 hours of out-of-school activity day provision this summer. There is no shortage of demand for further places with the availability of, and funding for, additional staffing being the main barrier to extending this provision.

⁴ <https://opfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Living-without-a-lifeline-full-report.pdf>

Challenges and opportunities

The Scottish Government's vision is for a system of high-quality, affordable and accessible childcare. A place-based approach is needed to meet the diverse needs of families, particularly those on low income. Youth work should be a key element of local partnership and national policy. This will ensure a range of provision is available locally, aligning with wider support for families most at risk of poverty.

A commitment was given by the Scottish Government to continued investment and support for the childcare sector in Scotland. Specific resources for youth work will be vital to maximise outcomes for families on low incomes. This will ensure youth work can continue to deliver vital services.

The Scottish Government's [evaluation](#) of the Summer of Play (2021) identified that future improvements for summer provision should include strengthening the offer for secondary school children. This is one area where youth work can play a key role.

We believe it will also be important to help families understand the range of provision available to support their childcare needs. Demonstrating parity across the services and sectors that comprise school-age provision is needed to help families make informed choices.

YouthLink Scotland will continue to work with Scottish Government to understand and support the role of youth work within the school-age childcare ecosystem and to further develop our system-wide evidence base about the approaches that can best support families on low incomes. We believe there are opportunities to generate learning from youth work approaches including transition support into secondary school, youth provision in rural and remote areas and youth work holiday programmes that embed measures to address food insecurity. Further collaboration with youth work will be key to tackling child poverty and building a wellbeing economy.

For more information please contact: Marielle Bruce, Youth Work and Schools Manager, mbruce@youthlink.scot

Appendix A

Case studies

Scouts Scotland Squirrels

The transition from nursery and other early years settings to school is a vital time for a child's development. Evidence shows that children who attend high-quality early years provision develop cognitive, linguistic and self-regulation skills, helping them be school-ready and creating a strong foundation for their future learning and development.

Scouts Scotland's Squirrels programme for four and five year olds recognises this, supporting Scottish children, and in particular those in areas of deprivation to develop skills for life and successfully navigate the transition to school.

As Squirrels, children learn and grow in a safe and supportive community setting, following a programme based on the Scouts' method and overseen by trained volunteers.

The curriculum - which is aligned to the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence - supports children to develop their emotional, communication and language skills, resilience, independence and readiness for school in both indoor and outdoor settings. It also aims to develop self-control, problem-solving, ability to focus, confidence to try new things and interactions with other children.

A successful pilot led Scouts Scotland to set up nine Squirrel groups (known as Dreys) in Dundee, Dunfermline, Kelty, Cowdenbeath, Stenhousemuir, Fordbank, Greenock, Craigalmond and Bridge of Allan. The majority of these first Dreys were in deprived areas. This focus was deliberate, recognising the value of early intervention in counter-acting the cumulative negative impact of poverty on health, social and educational outcomes throughout childhood that is already evident by age five⁵.

The early signs are encouraging, with evaluation of the pilot revealing that participation in Squirrels, even over a relatively short period of time, has a positive and sometimes transformative impact on childrens' development especially in the areas of communication, language and life skills.

Charmaine, the mother of Alexia, a 5-year-old in a pilot group, shared the positive impact being in Scouts has had.

"Alexia has loved coming to the meetings. She's learnt so many skills, like confidence, independence, and learning to tidy up after herself. During lockdown, she set up a tent in the living room and camped there for two nights."

⁵ <https://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2186/child-poverty-impact-inequalities-2018.pdf>

There are now almost 50 Squirrel Dreys in Scotland supporting more than 600 young people, but Scouts Scotland wants to do so much more. The ambition is to enrol 5,000 Squirrels by 2025 in particular targeting deprived communities where provision is needed most.

Investing further in vital volunteer-led provision like Squirrels will help more children to thrive at school and throughout their lives. It not only has the potential to contribute significantly in supporting Councils' early years provision as the "fragile"⁶ sector continues its recovery from the pandemic, but to make a long-term contribution as part of a holistic, cost-effective education offer.

The Western Isles CLD youth work service

In the Western Isles, CLD youth work delivers an afterschool club in the Cearns area every second Thursday during term time. This club is for children 8 and over and is delivered in partnership with the Hotspot Intervention Team (a community-led group). The Cearns is the largest housing estate in the Western Isles where fuel poverty and in-work poverty are prevalent. The cost-of-living crisis has made after-school clubs and youth work activities even more important. All after school activities are free of charge and food is an embedded element. The youth work approach to delivery ensures the provision is needs-led and non-stigmatised.

Citadel Youth Centre - Families Project

The Citadel has been running a Families Project for disadvantaged children aged 5 to 12 in Leith since 2014. Children who are socially isolated or who need extra support with socialising are referred by primary schools or social workers but families can also self-refer. All the children's groups and clubs have the same four child friendly aims – Try New Things, Make Friends, Play Nicely, Say How I Feel.

Children usually start in the Junior Support Group, which has high staff ratios and offers a supported introduction to out of school activities for younger children (5-7 year olds). The children also enjoy circle time with the group's monster puppets, who tell stories about their adventures in Monster School, which encourages the children to share their own experiences and feelings.

After a year in the Group, the children move on to Supported Places in the Junior Club (6-9 years) and the Inter Club (10-12 years). These clubs are open to any children in the community, but those on Supported Places get extra help to settle in, such as a volunteer buddy, an individual reward sheet or help with transport to and from the club. Children who are struggling in the club can also receive a period of 1:1 support from the Children's Worker.

⁶ <https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/news/early-learning-and-childcare-expansion-delivered-but-sector-fragile#:~:text=The%20Scottish%20Government%2C%20councils%20and,of%20the%20Covid%2D19%20pandemi>
c

Alongside out of school activities for children, the Citadel also offers support for their parents/carers. This includes a weekly Parents Drop In, which is a great source of peer support, as well as emotional and practical support from the Family Worker. There are also regular opportunities for parents/carers to enjoy activities with their children, including access to free tickets to football games, pantomimes and fringe shows, as well as the Citadel's own busy summer and Christmas family days.

During the Easter and summer holidays, the Citadel offers every child in the Families Project a free place in their playscheme, which includes trips out and activities for the whole family, while at Christmas, every family receives a free hamper of food and toys.

Here's what three Parents Drop-In members, who are all kinship carers, said about the Citadel:

"For me, it's all positive - they are so good with my grandson and they know what he needs to help him. What makes it special is the way they interact with the kids, they work with us to help them and they know them really well."

"It's been really beneficial for my grandson - he finds it hard to open up to me, but he talks to them and Citadel, I can say hand on heart they can't do enough for you."

"Before I came here I was feeling on my own - being part of the Citadel community is great, and the support of everyone here is amazing."

Jack Kane Centre

In Edinburgh, the Jack Kane Centre works in partnership with St Francis' Primary School and the City of Edinburgh Councils Wider Achievement Team implementing stimulating early educational interventions which aim to close the poverty attainment gap. Combatting the negative effects of low income and social exclusion whilst supporting and complimenting the school's curriculum, the EXCEL youth work team offer a wide and diverse range of programmes in order to address both the barriers and challenges which children and families experience. St Francis' Primary School Head Teacher values the role of the partnership in improving pupils' health and wellbeing, attainment and readiness to learn⁷.

Recognising that each child faces somewhat unique circumstances and that the barriers they face are multi-faceted and complex, the project offers a continuum of interactive support for individual children and groups across the primary 4-7 stages. The children who participate are currently care experienced or on the cusp of care, young carers or have current wellbeing concerns.

The diverse programme includes:

- After school health and wellbeing activities

⁷ <https://youtu.be/V4pGKUj7ikg>

- Personal and social development groupwork programmes such as P7 transition work to high school which takes place throughout the academic year alongside an enhanced transition package through the summer period.
- Holiday Matters programme which offers targeted support across each holiday period to combat any learning loss or breaks in routine.

Child: *'Thank you for making this magic happen. I know that sometimes holidays are hard and lonely but being in this group is the best thing ever not just for me but also for my mum'.*

Through participation and the relationships built by the youth work team, the children and their families have an even greater package of learning where they can access fun educational interventions that take place after school, during weekends and across all the holiday periods. Understanding that learning goes beyond the school gates and further into the wider learning community, the positive impact that youth work plays is further evidenced by the increased engagement of children, young people and their families in community-based programmes.

Teacher: *'The children seem a lot happier and more positive about themselves and their knowledge and understanding of their learning. They can motivate their progress and are improving how they regulate their own emotions. They continue a routine of getting themselves ready to go somewhere every day. It really helps with their social skills with their peers and communication with adults. They engage in lots of exciting activities with helps keep them focused and on track when they return to school. There is no major disruption for them during the holidays'.*

Teacher: *'One of the biggest challenges when returning to school or when reflecting on our holidays is that sometimes pupils are not able to give examples of many positive experiences outside school or at home. The programme allows the pupils to extend their experiences by reflecting, talking, learning and writing about them. The children can be proud of their achievements and have happy memories'.*

Parent: *'The children are learning valuable skills in a nurturing environment. They are surrounded by familiar peers and staff from school who know them well'.*

Jack Kane Centre - Inspiring Disabilities

"This group is a lifeline for me and my children".

The Jack Kane Centre has also noticed an increase in the number of families who have a child with a disability being forced to access food banks. Inequalities impact negatively on participation, impacting across health, social isolation, personal educational development and infringing on children's rights under the UNCRC.

In response, the Centre developed an Inspiring Disability group in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council's Wider Achievement Team. They support family well-being and tackle the barriers of poverty. It is unique in its delivery as it centres on a holistic all-family approach, for those children/young people who have additional support

needs and their family members. The provision centres on the child with a disability/ASL but then encourages the whole family to attend educational interventions by opening its doors every Saturday. The provision includes siblings, other family members as well as foster carers and brings an inclusive and participatory space which accommodates a wide range of educational, social and personal needs. Families socialise and enjoy activities together with feedback from group members describing that the service as a lifeline to feeling part of their community. The group has created a family network which has reduced feelings of social isolation and loneliness for the whole family.

Parent: "My son would never have went to school if it wasn't for this group, by attending it has helped my son go into school more, he has gained confidence and takes a lead role, he even comes to other centre based groups now and that would never have happened if it wasn't for here".

TD1 Youth Hub, Scottish Borders

TD1 Youth Hub works in partnership with its local high school, Galashiels Academy, and the seven feeder primary schools. In the six months leading up to the transitions of primary 7 to high school they work with small groups of young people, who the schools are aware are potentially impacted the most by poverty through their indicators and those who are particularly vulnerable and may need additional support in this transition. Part of this transition programme is about introducing them to other adults who they can contact or will be coming into contact with, to build up an early relationship, extended visits around the high school, visits to other community groups and projects, guiding young people in 'going down the town for lunch' about what is appropriate behaviour, etc and finally introducing them into TD1 Youth Hub and the services we provide.

The programme has been very successful with the young people who are particularly vulnerable and most at risk of having a disruptive start to high school, by building the relationship with them in the final 6 months of primary school it allows them to have a good understanding of their needs and build up a trusting relationship with them. Over the summer holidays that support will continue with TD1 Youth Hub providing summer holiday activities for those in transition to high school which allows them to keep regular check-ins with the young people and develop an understanding of their evolving needs and friendship groups over the summer holidays allowing youth workers to fully brief the high school about any potential issues or increased risks that developed over the summer holidays. It also allows TD1 Youth Hub to mix the young people with those from other primaries and some who are in S2-S3 so there are familiar faces upon starting high school in August and hopefully ensuring a better start to their high school life.

Govan Youth Information Project Holiday Programme

Govan Youth Information Project (GYIP) works with young people aged 5+ in a variety of settings – youth clubs, street work, school workshops, drop in and holiday

programmes. As an adaptive, flexible youth provider, they are well placed with local knowledge on how to best support children, families and young people impacted by poverty, including the current cost of living crisis.

GYIP's Holiday Programme has been running for 30 years and has established itself as an integral service during school holidays for children, young people and their families. Last year (2022) the organisation supported 552 young people during school holiday periods – the highest since the organisation was established. This reflects an increased demand for all their services this year. Additionally, they have responded to the needs of families, embedding free food into all their centre-based provision this year.

All provision is free. This allows them to target young people in poverty and provide a safe fun environment for them to learn and grow. Evaluation has demonstrated that the provision of food is assisting families with the cost of living crisis. Offering trips and visits to places families cannot afford, as well as bringing in additional support from wider partners, also helps them to tackle the impact of poverty.

The organisation secured funding through the Glasgow Children's Holiday Food Programme and other sources, enabling them to tackle food insecurity and alleviate other impacts of the cost of living crisis, such as providing vouchers for school clothing.

Parent: *"It's helped with childcare during the summer to allow me to work and get them out of the house interacting with children."*

Parent: *"Thank u so much to gyip it really has been a lifeline this summer with the cost of living feeding my 3 kids has been a struggle never mind being able with take them on trips I'm so grateful for all the staff and volunteers at gyip!"*

One Community Scotland Summer Hangout 2023

One Community Scotland offers help and support to families and young people who are settling into life in Scotland. Their mission is to support and provide young people and their families with mentoring, information, advice and guidance that will enhance their personal, social and economic development.

The Summer Hangout programme consists of two weeks of informal and formal sessions. They aim to empower skill sets by signposting young participants to the right opportunities, build self-confidence and stronger connections. Opportunities include CV and interviewing skills workshops, social enterprise, visits to employers and community spaces and guest speakers.