

# #Education Needs Youth Work because...

"My mind changed about the things I can and can't do. I'm not getting distracted so easily. It gave me a reason to get up and come to school."

Engagement

wellbeing

"It's a space to be open and honest without feeling like the odd man out or a burden. I'm with people who understand."

"I couldn't imagine a school without youth work. It actually blows my mind that some do not have it."

Widening pathways

"I love coming here and feeling like I am part of something special – doing something for local families as well as for the planet."

Attendance

"Youth workers believed in me when I didn't. I had no idea about my future and youth work changed that. I am now going to do a work placement and go back to school next year."

"I got more confident. That's important because, when you are confident, you start to do more things you've never tried before."

Skills

Engagement

"I like the chance to learn and experience things in a different way. If I choose what I learn, I will put my mind to it and do it until I succeed."

# Youth Work and School Partnerships

## A Review of the Impact of the SAC National Programme



The **Youth Work and Schools Partnership Programme** is one of the **Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC)** National Programmes, funded by Scottish Government to support targeted youth work approaches that build health and wellbeing, learner engagement and skills, leading to improved educational outcomes for young people impacted by poverty.



Since 2018, the team at YouthLink Scotland have been focused on:



Gathering evidence on the impact of targeted youth work delivered in partnership with schools.



Exploring what works and why.

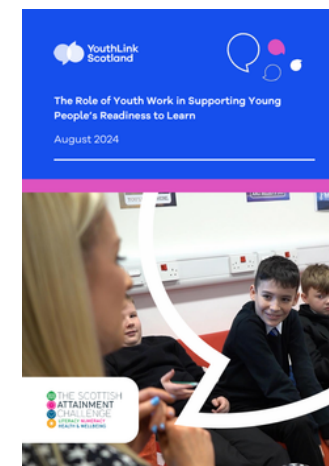
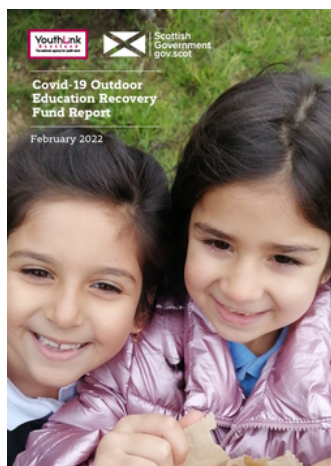
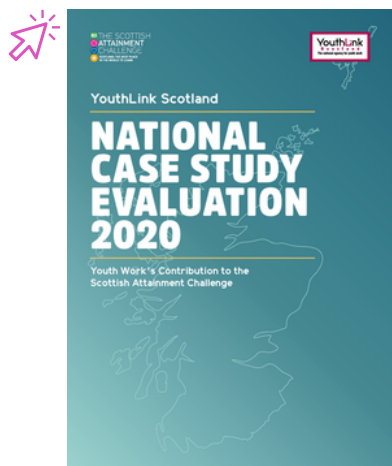


Supporting the development of effective partnerships between youth work and schools that meet the needs of young people.

As the Scottish Government publishes a full summative review of the Attainment Scotland Fund, this short report from YouthLink Scotland provides an overview of what has been achieved and learned through the Youth Work and Schools Partnership National Programme, and considers how we can continue to strengthen collaboration across the education system, so that all young people can access the support and educational opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

# Evidencing the impact of targeted youth work on educational outcomes

Since the SAC National Programme was launched, the YouthLink Scotland team has worked with youth workers, teachers and young people to evaluate the impact of youth work programmes offered in partnership with schools, involving more than **27,000 young people**, in **all 32 local authorities** across Scotland, demonstrating the vital role that youth work can play in addressing the poverty related attainment gap.



87%



 of young people experienced improved health and wellbeing.

2 out of 3



young people who had access to youth work became more engaged in learning as a result.

82%



of young people who had access to youth work developed new skills.

4 out of 5



young people who had access to youth work overcame barriers to learning.

# What works and why?

Research funded by the SAC National Programme, including action research and collaborative inquiries with youth workers, schools and young people, has enabled us to evidence how and why youth work so effectively complements formal education in supporting young people who are affected by poverty and other associated barriers to engagement in learning:

1

**Youth Work's relational approach supports young people's social and emotional wellbeing, as the foundation for successful learning.**

Youth workers meet young people where they are at, focusing on building trusted relationships and starting from each individual's strengths and interests. This enables young people to build confidence, resilience, emotional regulation and skills for learning.



2

**Youth work also supports young people to reengage in learning – in school and other contexts.**

As a result of their experiences in youth work, young people often have a greater sense of personal ownership of their next steps in learning, and clearer goals that they feel motivated to achieve. When young people build self-belief and stronger relationships to support their learning, they are more likely to seek out new learning experiences and see these through.



3

**The youth work approach offers young people opportunities to learn core skills that are relevant for life and work.**

[The National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework](#) provides a clear focus for setting and reviewing learning goals that feel relevant to young people. Youth workers start with young people's interests and motivations and move at their pace.



4

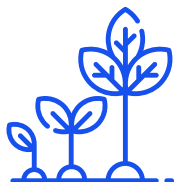
**Youth work offers young people a wider range of pathways for learning and achievement than can be offered in the classroom, providing more personalisation, choice and agency in learning.**


In youth work, young people enjoy opportunities to participate in practical, experiential learning in a range of contexts, including learning outdoors and volunteering in their communities. Young people value the opportunity that youth work gives them to shape their own learning.



A 2024 study of the role of youth work in building readiness to learn demonstrated that:

90%



 of young people with access to youth work support grew in confidence to participate in learning.

88%



of young people built stronger, more positive relationships that, in turn, enhanced their experience of learning with others.

86%



of young people were better able to contribute effectively as part of a group or team.

49%



of young people showed an improvement in school attendance.

46%



of young people showed an improvement in participation in the classroom when they had opportunities to learn in youth work alongside the formal curriculum.

83%



of young people were better able to regulate emotions following support in a youth work setting. >40% also showed improvement in their ability to regulate emotions in the classroom.

# Where and how can youth work make the most difference?

Working alongside youth workers, schools, families and young people, the SAC National Programme has gathered insights and evidence to demonstrate where, when and why targeted youth work interventions can make the most difference to educational outcomes for young people, whilst also positively addressing national issues such as school engagement and attendance, support for increasing numbers of young people with additional support needs and reports on the rising number of violent incidents in schools.

## 1 Engaging with at-risk young people through primary to secondary transitions.

Research shows that children from low-income families are almost twice as likely to experience a negative transition between primary and secondary school. Youth workers can offer continuity of support from primary into secondary school to young people at risk of experiencing a negative transition, supporting young people's health and wellbeing and readiness to learn.

90%



of young people participating feel more confident to participate in new learning opportunities and experiences.

[Papdale Primary School Orkney](#)

[Evolve Case Study](#)

[Natural Leaders Video](#)



## 2 Providing whole family support and tackling learning loss during the holidays.

Youth workers are skilled at building trusted relationships with young people and their families to identify and connect them with wider support and tackle other issues they may be facing. Youth work teams also offer targeted support to young people during the school holidays, helping to tackle learning loss, food insecurity, and supporting families to access other support services where needed.

83%



improved attendance in term 1 compared to the previous year.

[Lundavra Primary School](#)

[Tackling Food Insecurity 2020](#)

[FARE, Barrhead Case study](#)



### 3 Tailoring support for young people with a range of additional support needs.

As a rights-based practice, youth work has a strong focus on equity and inclusion. Youth workers support young people with a range of different additional support needs, helping to address rising levels of distressed behaviour in schools.

Youth workers, working in partnership with schools can offer safe, trusted spaces where young people can talk, reflect, and develop at their own pace. Through one-to-one support, group work, and informal learning, youth workers help young people to understand and manage emotions, build relationships with their peers and with a range of supportive adults.

**68%**



of participating young people became more resilient as a result of taking part in the programme.

[Outward Bound/  
Clued Up Case Study](#)

[Boroughmuir  
Case Study](#)

[We Matter  
evaluation](#)



### 4 Enabling young people to reach and sustain positive destinations.

Youth workers support disadvantaged young people who may face complex barriers to entering the labour market, providing targeted interventions across school, community and post school settings. They offer personalised learning experiences where young people can build skills and confidence, and they collaborate with other career service providers and with employers to offer wider opportunities, including work and volunteering experience, when young people are ready for these. Youth workers also provide practical and emotional support to young people, at critical transition points, and broader support with independent living, such as with housing and finances.

**100%**



of young people moved on to positive destinations.

[Moray Case  
Study](#)

[Scran Academy  
Case Study](#)

[Stirling case  
study](#)

[Youth Work  
Volunteering Report](#)



## Building capacity for effective collaboration

The SAC National Programme team has worked closely with local authorities, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and national agencies to build a shared understanding across the system of the role that youth work can play in tackling the poverty related attainment gap.



A national community of practice has been established – the Youth Work and Schools Collaborative. Together, members of this network have explored the value of partnership working and the hallmarks of effective partnership to inform training and capacity building approaches delivered nationally and locally.

The YouthLink Scotland team has developed [professional learning resources](#), often in partnership with Education Scotland. We have also facilitated action research projects with youth workers and teachers and hosted training and events where practitioners from across the system can plan and evaluate work together.

“The collaborative inquiry with YouthLink Scotland has helped us reflect as a [youth work and school] partnership on where we’re at. I think it’s made us more strategic in our approach, and it’s been great to share practice with colleagues from other local authorities across the West.”

**Depute Head Teacher**



“This work reignited interest locally in the value of youth work and school partnerships – helped us, alongside a wider group of local decision-makers, to see that if you get partnership working right it will really make a difference to outcomes for young people.”

**Youth Work Manager**



A key focus for capacity building has been supporting school and youth work teams to plan and evaluate their work together, so that they can set relevant measures of progress, and gather robust evidence of change. The team at YouthLink Scotland has developed and delivered training and resources to embed the [National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework](#) into collaborative practice and secured significant additional funding from the Robertson Trust to develop bespoke software that will make it easier to track and record progress with young people.



“Working this way has allowed us to identify meaningful measurements that sometimes feel tricky to measure.”

**Depute Head Teacher**



This facilitated approach to self-evaluation helped us show deep impact.”

**Youth Work Team Leader**



## Looking to the future

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A recent [consultation](#) affirms that the SAC National Programme has helped to widen access to youth work during the school day and improve the quality of partnership working in some parts of Scotland, but there is still more work to do to ensure that high-quality youth work and school partnerships are established across Scotland. Youth workers tell us that onward support from the team at YouthLink Scotland should focus on:

- Supporting strategic collaboration nationally and locally.
- Securing sustainable and secure funding for the youth work sector.
- Elevating youth voice - particularly the voices of young people whose needs are not currently being met in formal education.

- Facilitating engagement with national policy and drivers for improvement – demonstrating how youth work can support the reform that is needed in Scottish Education.
- Continuing to build the evidence base that demonstrates the role that youth work can play in tackling the poverty related attainment gap across the learner journey.
- Sharing and celebrating effective practice.



[The 2026 Youth Work Manifesto](#), developed in consultation with local authority and third sector youth work teams across Scotland, calls for the following actions to improve young people's educational experiences in and around school:

- Formalise partnerships between schools and youth work organisations to support wellbeing, engagement, attendance, educational outcomes and positive destinations.
- Investment to ensure all young people can access their right to youth work across the learner journey - in school, college and community.
- Support a whole-school approach to inclusion, with youth workers contributing to reducing exclusions and raising aspirations.
- Guarantee access to residential and outdoor learning as part of education, helping young people build independence, teamwork, and life skills.

