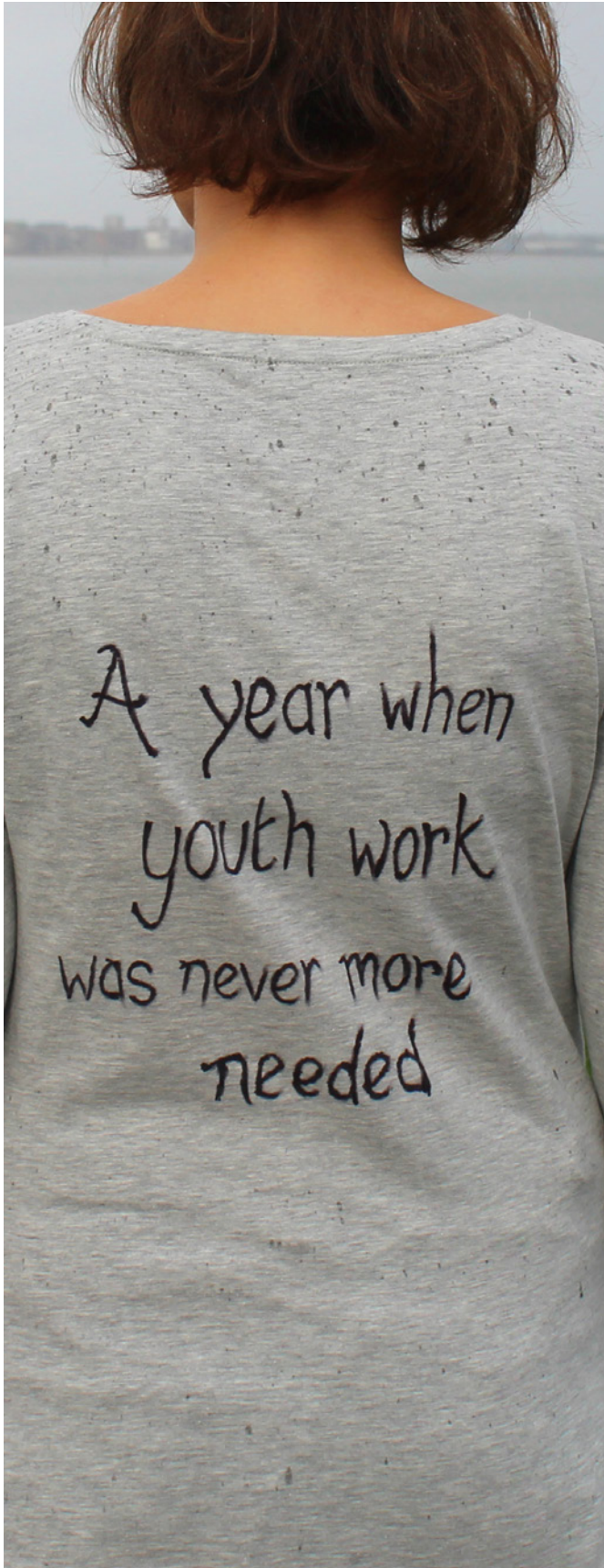


Scottish Parliament Election 2021

Resilient, Resourceful and Reimagined

A manifesto to support Scotland's
youth workers and young people



Introduction

Youth work is one of the most powerful community assets we have to help us create a better society in Scotland. It builds confidence and boosts educational attainment. It aids personal development and helps young people manage personal, social and formal relationships. It promotes volunteering, lowers youth offending rates and significantly reduces the likelihood of poor mental health.

The detrimental effects of COVID-19 on young people come at a time when budgets for youth work services have been shrinking overall every year. All of us in the youth work sector have been working together to find new ways of supporting young people. Increasingly issues with mental health, employability and learning loss will have a significant impact on our young people in the long-term. This is why we must invest in services that support and nurture this generation.

We are asking politicians and society to stand with us during this extraordinary time, to support the youth work sector. The actions we take now will be crucial. Young people deserve a commitment to the continuation and emboldening of the services that supported them before and during the pandemic.

Policy commitments

To secure a sustainable future for youth work and ensure growth for the sector, and guarantee support for all of Scotland's young people, national and local government need to commit to three key policy asks.

1.

A right for all young people to access youth work opportunities

Youth work has an important role to play in both supporting young people to understand and employ their rights, and in being a key provider of services for children and young people.

The statutory basis for youth work currently sits within the [Community Learning and Development \(CLD\) Regulations \(2013\)](#) which place a legal requirement on local authorities to secure the delivery of CLD in their area, working with other CLD providers and communities. [A guidance document for community planning 2021-24](#), sets out the expectations for local authorities and their partners. We want to see the CLD regulations strengthened to prevent cuts to youth work provision and ensure further investment.

We also want to consider how a maximal approach to incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law will ensure a right to youth work for all young people, ensuring universal and targeted youth work provision.

Articles 28 commits states to providing: *“different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, making them available and accessible to every child.”*



Article 29 states that: *“the education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.”*

Strengthening the statutory basis of youth work and supporting voluntary youth work providers, is critical to young people realising these rights.

2.

Investment in youth work services at national and local level



Research shows that investing in youth work leads to significant improvements in mental health and wellbeing. It provides positive interventions to help reduce youth offending, while it also increases educational attainment and leads to increased earnings later in life. Investment in youth work will always save money in the short, medium and long term.

We want Scotland to be the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up in. All young people, in every part of Scotland, should have access to high quality and effective youth work practice.

Investing in youth work is an investment in the future of young people and our local communities. If Scotland truly aspires to be 'the best place in the world to grow up' then youth work is an essential partner in making this happen. We need to ensure that funding is in place to deliver this for all our young people, including workforce development and support for volunteers.

We are asking all political parties to commit to increasing investment in the youth work sector at Scottish Government and local authority level.

3.

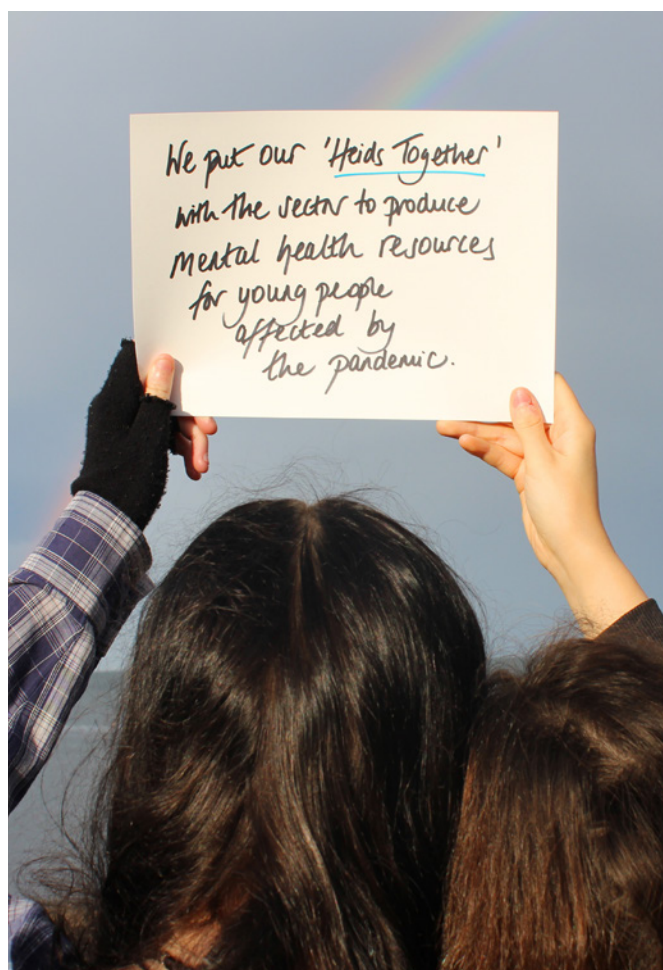
Formal recognition of the positive impact of youth work across public policy areas

Youth work in Scotland is deeply embedded within the national policy landscape. The sector makes a significant contribution on equality and inclusion, prevention, early intervention and improving outcomes for children and young people.

One of the key roles of youth work is to ensure the rights of children and young people are respected and enhanced. We believe all young people should be protected from the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 and this has to be reflected across policy areas.

Our Outcomes Model is founded on youth work practice, including the nature and purpose of youth work, youth work's National Occupational Standards, CLD competences, ethics and values. The model shows how youth work contributes to national outcomes, policies and strategy. This includes the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, the National Youth Work Strategy, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it right for every child.

We ask all parties to ensure that there is formal recognition of the positive impact of youth work across public policy areas by embedding youth work's contribution within the strategies and policies of Scottish Government and local authorities.



The evidence

Scotland's youth work sector has a strong evidence base for the positive impact of youth work on the lives of young people. This research ranges from academic research, sector and external consultation and surveys.



Why politicians need to listen to young people

In a recent consultation with over 1,000 young people about the future of youth work, this is what they said:

Direction of youth work in Scotland:

- 97% believe that youth work should be a right for young people in Scotland
- 97% feel there should be more youth work opportunities available to young people in Scotland
- 96% state there should be more funding for youth work
- 96% think young people in Scotland should have the right to be supported by skilled, competent youth workers who take account of their wellbeing

Overwhelmingly, those young people stated the main priorities should include:

- More funding
- More youth groups (available across all of Scotland)
- Focus on mental health and wellbeing

There needs to be proper investment in youth work to ensure there are the resources and experienced staff and volunteers available to support young people effectively and deliver high quality services.

Why investment is crucial for our young people

Numerous research studies into the impact of Universal Community-based Youth Work shows the majority of young people improve their health and wellbeing, educational outcomes and employment prospects.

Investing in youth work leads to better literacy, numeracy and language skills among young people.

Investing in youth work means supporting and enabling more young people into employment or training.

Research from Hall Aitken shows that investing in youth work leads to a significant reduction in mental health issues, youth offending and substance abuse, while it also increases educational attainment and leads to increased earnings later in life. This amounts to a significant contribution of at least £656 million and up to £2.2 billion every year to the Scottish economy.

The Scottish Youth Parliament's 'Youth Work and Me' survey found that youth work is important to young people because it provides opportunities, support, greater confidence and self-esteem, friendship, skills, a voice, access to non-formal education and independence.

UNISON asked respondents from the youth work sector how they felt cuts in youth services and other relevant services were having an impact on young people:

- 80% said they thought young people feel less empowered
- 71% said it was now harder for young people to stay in formal education
- 65% said young people were finding it harder to get jobs
- 77% reported increased mental health issues among young people, and a 70% rise in alcohol and substance abuse
- 83% reported increased crime and anti-social behaviour

Reports consistently show that as much as 40% of public service spending is on interventions that could have been avoided by prioritising a preventative approach.

Preventative spending can improve outcomes for people and communities and reduce demands on public services. Research shows that for every £1 invested in youth work, at least £7 of value is created.



Why youth workers and organisations need leadership from political parties

Unison's report 'Youth Services at Breaking Point' showed £11,147,600 cut in local authority youth service spending in Scotland 2016-19. The report shows the continued trend of youth work cuts across Scotland's local authorities.

YouthLink Scotland's own member survey from summer 2019 also shows a looming funding crisis in the sector. 70% of youth workers who responded said their budgets had decreased in the last three years, with 50% saying they had experienced severe cuts to funding.

Reducing youth work budgets results in increased pressure on statutory services like social care, mental health services, social work, the NHS, the police, the criminal justice system and education. Investing in youth work saves money.

[YouthLink Scotland's Sector Leader's Report](#) June 2020 suggested 70% of sector leaders believe there will be cuts to youth work services and budgets post Covid-19.

Scotland has around 70,000 volunteer youth workers, who clock up 13 million hours every year supporting our young people.

The recent [#LockdownLowdown](#) report showed many young people anxious about life post Covid-19 and the impact on their employment prospects and mental health.

It's not just the actions we take now as a society that will be crucial, young people deserve a commitment to the continuity of youth work services that support them.



YouthLink Scotland's members ask all political parties to deliver our three key asks. We represent over 100 youth work organisations, both voluntary and statutory. Find all our members [here](#)

#InvestInYouthWork

