

# **Valuing Young People: Delivery and outcomes of UK Youth's 'Youth Achievement Awards'**

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# What helps or hinders young people from making 'positive choices'?

**Situational factors**

**Relational factors**

**Personal factors**

**'Critical incidents' can affect people's lives in unpredictable ways**

# What do we mean by positive life choices?

- Avoidance of risky situations which may have negative outcomes
- Having the confidence to take risks that may have positive outcomes
- Making decisions within a supportive environment
- Choosing options which build foundations for the future

We are interested in finding out how YAAs contribute to positive life choices

# What is the problem?

- UK in the bottom third of rankings for 5 of 6 dimensions on UNICEF's child poverty and well-being report (2007)
- 340,000 school exclusions in 2007 in England, of which over 34,000 were permanent exclusions
- 1 out of 10 young people are classified as NEET (Ofsted, 2007)
- Youth services are not meeting individual young people's need and 'do not amount to a coherent modern system of support' (Youth Matters, 2005).

# Policy background

- *Every Child Matters* (2003) and *Youth Matters* (2005): delivering tailored and integrated services; need for innovative, alternative provision to meet needs of most disadvantaged
- *Back on Track* (2008): need for alternative educational provision for young people; development of a national standard for pupils in alternative provision

# Academic background

- Non-formal learning: range of activities outside statutory educational institutions geared towards learning in a planned and structured way (Colley, 2002)
- Fits well with professional ethos of youth work, emphasising young people's autonomy and voluntary participation (Philips, 1997)
- 3 Main elements: (Philips, 1997)
  - 1) *Build up relationships with youth people*
  - 2) *Relate to peer group and wider community*
  - 3) *Develop social awareness and citizenship*

# Aim of the research

- Support for YAA is widespread, but need for robust sociological evidence to demonstrate how YAAs work and how they benefit young people and practitioners
- Explore how the awards work on the ground and how best practice emerges in the many different contexts within which the awards are used
- Special attention for 'Drinkaware Challenge' and/or 'Financial Awareness Challenge'

# Methodology

- Meta-analysis of previous evaluation work
- Observation at YAA training sessions
- Observation at YAA moderating session
- Observation at YAA centres
- Interviews with young people at YAA centres
- Interviews with alumni of the YAA
- Interviews with staff delivering YAA
- Observation and interviews at YAA annual conference

# Main findings

- Young people feel more engaged and supported and are proud of the accreditation they achieve
- Increased confidence is a key outcome
  - “It’s good to get a certificate, if you go for a job then got something to show them. Work here is different to school: people here are not winding me up, got more time with staff and explain stuff. I do more work here than at school”*

# Main findings

- YAA brings real benefits to young people by increasing their life and employability skills and improving their social networks

*“I wouldn’t be a youth worker, if not done mentoring programme and had no accreditation for it, as when you go for interviews, you tick all the boxes”*
- YAA adds value to the work of practitioners

*“We’ve used YAA [platinum awards] as accreditation for our mentoring programme. The programme works better together with award, they compliment each other well”*

# Critical success factors

- YAAs provide accreditation for the valuable work of young people that may have otherwise remained unaccredited
- Flexibility of YAA: adjust to different situational, personal and relational factors
- Training prepared practitioners for local delivery
- Local support provided infrastructure for support and best practice sharing
- YAA enabled practitioners to secure funding for projects

# Critical success factors

- Structured approach based on planning and continuous contact between practitioners and young people
- Peer review of targets and challenges enabled young people to express their opinion and feedback on behaviour and performance

# Learning points

- Challenging to engage young people in portfolio writing: innovative support needed to tackle literacy problems, lack of concentration and self-discipline
- Local support varied considerably among youth centres and schools
- Moderation of portfolios at external meetings was inconsistent; lack of opportunity for exchange
- Constant struggle to acquire sufficient funding to sustain programme and activities

# Learning points

- Uncertainty about the academic value of the awards
- Incomplete records on YAA accreditation due to a lack of feedback from local agencies
- Peer review often applied ad-hoc on one-to-one basis
- Sensitivity to low levels of prior achievement and confidence of many young people on the awards
  - recognition that relatively limited changes in behaviour can represent significant 'triumphs' in development of young people

# Learning from each other

- Need for a 'learning organisation' around YAAs to ensure that best practise is recorded and shared between youth centres, schools and UK Youth

# Questions and Answers

Thank you for your attention!

- Questions and Answers?
- Discussion of two statements and feedback to researchers

# Discussion

- **Statement 1:**

*YAAs cannot work without the peer review process*

- **Statement 2:**

*YAAs encourage young people to re-engage with education*