

Benefits of youth work to current Government priorities: August 2021

Youth work provides vital support for young people and communities across many areas of their lives; this document looks in particular at the benefits that youth work offers to a range of current government priority areas.

"It's another space I choose to go to, another person you can talk to, it's access to opportunities I wouldn't have even known existed. It's boosted my confidence massively. It's like my second home."

Supporting education recovery

Young people who have access to trusted adults are more ambitious with their education expectations and goals due to the impact of positive role models. A recent evaluation of the EmpowHER programmeⁱⁱ which uses social action to raise confidence and overall wellbeing of young women found positive impacts on school performance. Research has shown that young people are more motivated to engage in education when they can benefit from outdoor learning opportunitiesⁱⁱⁱ and we welcome the work of the Children and nature programme^{iv} in supporting children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to have better access to nature. Our research with YoungMinds shows that teachers play a different role in young people's lives to youth workers because of the different expectations and relationship development in an informal education setting. Due to the voluntary participation and engagement that a youth work approach offers, youth workers are often seen as trusted adults by young people, bringing a different dynamic to the relationship than that of teachers.

- The Government's education recovery work should focus on opportunities to learn outside of school including via outdoor learning and youth work. Local authorities, youth organisations and education providers must be supported to work together to achieve this.

Boosting economic recovery and youth employment

Youth work and youth activities, including outdoor learning, has an important role in providing young people with the skills and relationships for life and work and a space to identify what they need to achieve their goals and overcome challenges^v. As the report Outside, Looking In^{vi} highlights, youth workers provide emotional support, social capital, and practical support to young people which support young people during employment and training as well as between jobs. Research shows that youth work provides support to young people to resolve problems concerning school work, or relationships enhancing their ability to make informed and positive choices in life^{vii}. Other research shows that the individual guidance offered by youth work helps young people to develop their self-mastery and referring them to social agencies (such as education programs or care institutions) that strengthen their connection with society^{viii}.

- Ensure youth work is available to all young people so they can benefit from support and skills development that will enable them to take advantage of education, training and employment opportunities in their area.

Levelling up the most vulnerable communities

A recent Dutch longitudinal study^{ix} highlighted the positive impact of youth work on socially vulnerable young people. Those who were recipients of youth work support for over six months had significantly more extensive support from their social network, participated more in society (such as volunteering), developed better social skills, and had more self-esteem. Moreover, those who had youth work support for over three years or more experienced more ownership and better future

prospects. The research also showed that more than a third of young people found additional support through the help of the youth worker, enabling early intervention for issues. The only way to break the cycle of poverty and improve opportunities in communities is through greater investment in social infrastructure as well as better collaboration between local services. UK Youth is part of the Hope Collective, a movement of hope for young people inspired by Damilola Taylor's legacy and with a vision to establish the change required to enable UK's most vulnerable communities to become free from poverty, violence and discrimination. Core to the collective's mission is the need to bring together leaders from across sectors with government and young people to explore long term solutions that engage communities in the social action required for real local level change.

- Youth workers are critical in ensuring that young people who aren't able to access support at school or home have a trusted space and to support them to identify and explore their next steps. As well as investing in youth services across the country, but especially in those areas where there is the greatest gaps in provision, we see it as vital that government **support a cross-sector, collaborative approach to supporting young people.**

Digital inclusivity

The pandemic has exacerbated the importance of digital connection and access to devices to be able to engage and connect with services and resources remotely outside out of school and shone a spotlight on the significant number of young people without such access^x.

- To enable more young people to have access to development opportunities, employment and training, the levelling up agenda should also support the **development of digital innovation to connect young people to opportunities.** A good example of this is Youth Card^{xi}, an app that connects young people to opportunities in their local area and enables providers to target specific demographics of young people in order to **increase reach and social mobility.**

Improving mental health and wellbeing

The Centre for Progressive Policy completed a cost benefit analysis in 2020 which found that investing in youth services **leads to a reduction in the number of young people who need to be referred to CAMHS, saving the taxpayer an estimated £4,814 per case^{xii}.**

Our upcoming report with Young Minds highlights the role that youth workers, as trusted adults can play in supporting young people where formal mental health support is not appropriate, but where some caring and considerate listening is a crucial intervention that prevents issues from escalating. McPherson, et al. (2014)^{xiii} found that children and adolescents reported fewer mental health challenges when they had a support network of high-quality relationships with peers and trusted adults outside of their immediate family. Many youth organisations are working with local health services to integrate mental health and wellbeing support into their delivery, for instance Young Somerset^{xiv} provide support from wellbeing practitioners who can help to identify wellbeing needs of young people early on and ensure they are supported before issues become significant.

- It is vital that there is a **long term workforce development strategy** to ensure better job security to develop effective relationships with young people and **training opportunities** so they can better identify poor mental, **respond effectively and signpost young people to suitable services.**

Tackling loneliness and isolation

We support the government's cross-department, cross-sector and whole society approach to the issue of loneliness^{xv} and believe it has never been more important to work to tackle this.

Local youth services play an important part in developing young people's **sense of connection to their communities** and as a means of building trusted relationships with adults and positive social networks with other young people. Youth organisations are a key part of the solution, our research from 2018 found that **67% of youth workers reported their youth organisation currently offers support for young people who feel lonely**^{xvi}. Our report^{xvii} this year highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the ability of youth services to remain open worsening young people's mental health and wellbeing.

- It is vital that these youth organisations are funded adequately so they can recover from the pandemic and **expand their services so they can meet the increasing demand from young people in their communities**.

Reducing knife crime and serious violence

We recognise that the issue of knife crime and violence in communities is complex with multiple causes. We support the need for services at a local, regional and national level to work together and approach serious violence through a public health lens. We are supporting the work of the Hope Collective^{xviii} to bring together leaders from across sectors with government and young people to create long term solutions and social change to serious violence. We call for the Government to recognise the role that youth work can play in the prevention and solution to serious violence. The Safer Lives Survey in the report of the Youth Violence Commission asked the question: 'If there was one thing you could change that you think would make young people safer, what would it be?' Over 2,200 young people responded, with the most popular response being **'the provision of more youth centres, sports clubs and other youth activities in their local areas'**.^{xix}

- Investing in youth workers and positive activities for young people, including outdoor learning opportunities is vital to **ensure that young people have safe spaces to go and have trusted adults to speak to in order to reduce the risks of being groomed and exploited**.

Tackling racial inequality

Youth work helps to **break down barriers between communities, supports the empowerment of individuals and helps to educate young people about discrimination and injustice**. A good example of the role that youth workers can play is evidenced by the work of Think Forward who have been running sessions to tackle racism as part of UK Youth's #YoungAndBlack campaign^{xx}. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on systemic inequalities that some groups of young people face which means they have been hit harder by the pandemic in terms of employment, health, education and other outcomes. It is vital that government does all it can to reverse these patterns. Youth work plays a vital role in helping young people to understand, promote and defend their rights and press for service providers to do the same. The UK Government will be next examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2022 and youth work is a critical service to delivering this.

- Ensure that all youth policies **undergo equality impact assessments** and that funding and mechanisms are in place to **remove barriers to access for young people**. In addition data should be collected on who is and isn't benefitting from youth services to ensure real-time **improvement of programmes and policies** that might be leaving behind or ignoring the needs of some young people.

Increasing social action and volunteering

Youth work is key to giving young people the space, support and confidence to have their voices heard on issues that matter to them and also to provide volunteering and social action opportunities. We know that young people want to take part in social action, 68%^{xxi} of them say they are likely to do so in the future. However, only 4 in 10 young people are currently participating in meaningful

social action – and participation rates have remained the same since 2014^{xxii}. Young people from lower-income backgrounds are less likely to take part in social action than their wealthier peers (51% in the wealthiest income brackets vs. 32% in the lowest income brackets), that means that they're not accessing the wide range of benefits that participation in social action can provide. It also means that their communities are not getting the full benefit of their talent, energy and ideas. There is also evidence that youth social action can boost social cohesion and integration^{xxiii}.

- In order to truly level up all areas in the UK, it is vital that communities are able to benefit from young people's energy and ideas to **contribute to positive change**. More opportunities should be made to **enable them to lead and support their communities** especially young people from low income and ethnic minority backgrounds.
- We encourage national Government, local authorities, businesses and those across all sectors to **sign the #iwill Power of Youth Charter**^{xxiv} and create an accompanying action plan to demonstrate how they are embedding, amplifying and championing the stories and voices of young people.

ⁱ Liv, a young person talking about her youth club Wigan Youth Zone and what it means to her

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ukyouth.org/what-we-do/programmes/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/englands-largest-outdoor-learning-project-reveals-children-more-motivated-to-learn-when-outside>

^{iv} Jointly managed by Defra, Natural England and the Department for Education: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

^v <https://backend.nya2.joltrouter.net/wp-content/uploads/1013-NYA-employment-report-Digital-Final-version-1.pdf>

^{vi} <https://backend.nya2.joltrouter.net/wp-content/uploads/1013-NYA-employment-report-Digital-Final-version-1.pdf>

^{vii} Manders & Metz, 2017; Core and added value of information & advice in youth work (referenced in this article [here](#))

^{viii} K. Koops, J. Metz, J. Sonneveld, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Amsterdam (2014), Because she believes in me. Research into individual guidance in youth work practice (referenced in this article [here](#))

^{ix} Sonneveld, J., Metz, J., Manders, W., Schalk, R., & Van Regenmortel, T. (under review). The contribution of professional youth work to the personal development and social participation of socially vulnerable youngsters: A Dutch longitudinal cohort study. (referenced in this article [here](#))

^x Ofcom estimates that around 9 per cent of UK children lack access to a laptop, desktop or tablet and that more than 880,000 children live in a household with only a mobile internet connection.

^{xi} <https://www.ukyouth.org/get-involved/youth-card/>

^{xii} <https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/the-business-case-for-investment-in-youth-services>

^{xiii} McPherson KE, Kerr S, McGee E, Morgan A, Cheater FM, McLean J, et al. (2014) "The association between social capital and mental health and behavioural problems in children and adolescents: an integrative systematic review" BMC Psychology, 2:1, page 7.

^{xiv} <https://www.youngsomerset.org.uk/what-is-wellbeing-support>

^{xv} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>

^{xvi} <https://www.ukyouth.org/2018/08/aplacetobelong/>

^{xvii} https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/UK-Youth-Fund-Report_1.pdf

^{xviii} <https://www.dayofhope.uk/hope-collective/>

^{xix} <https://nya.org.uk/2019/02/quality-youth-work-is-key-to-preventing-crisis-for-young-people-centrepoint/>

^{xx} <https://twitter.com/ThinkForwardUK/status/1409542721564463113>

^{xxi} <https://www.iwill.org.uk/about-us/youth-social-action>

^{xxii} <https://www.iwill.org.uk/about-us/youth-social-action>

^{xxiii} <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/24131/1/ServiceNation2020.pdf>

^{xxiv} <https://www.iwill.org.uk/poy-charter>